

# *Research on the Application of Narrative Strategy in Film Creation*

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**Abstract:** Film is the latest among seven major arts and film art form was not basically formed until the 20th century. Its development process witnesses various technological revolutions that produce diverse art schools. For any art schools, they advocate to create films based on stories. This study analyzes different stages of film development from perspective of film history. It explains necessary skills of creating good stories or mastered by narrators, as well as narrates characteristics of a good story. Finally, it reveals problems of fiction and witticism in current Chinese film art, and proposes suggestions.

## **1. Introduction**

Chinese films demonstrate unique humanistic characteristics, in which massive story genres and spiritual values can be dug out. With huge audience base, films attract a considerable number of audiences, so film creators should try to diversify film types. Currently, films tend to be market-oriented, and this forces film investors to consider “box office”, one of the most important factors of script stage in early stage. A story is initially recorded with texts to keep ideas and officially created by shooting team in the end, which absorbs multi-round discussions of different people for many years, abandonment and reconstruction. In this process, to construct narrative strategies is particularly important. Specifically, an ideal narrative structure is the premise of telling film story, and it contributes rich spiritual enjoyment to audience.

## **2. Research on Film Development**

As mentioned previously, film is the latest among seven art forms, and its history evolves with iteration of technologies. It was used to record life at the earliest, but now, it becomes a rigorous art form. The development bears new explorations of art by human beings, and also appeases people spiritually who love images.

Generally, film develops through three stages. First, formation stage, which lasted from 1895 to 1927. At this stage, Edison, Lumiere and others shot short films in the United States and France respectively, and invented editing technology. Second, development stage, which was basically from 1927 to 1945.[1] This stage witnessed fast progress of film technology. Sound and color were created to richly show author’s intention. Third, mature stage, which started since 1945. This stage experienced the Second World War. Film technologies tended to be improved. Artists began to explore more film art forms, which produced many art schools, signifying mature film art. Table 1

shows several important narrative structures in screenplay creation.

Table 1 Several important narrative structures in screenplay creation

	<b>Narrative structure</b>	<b>Narrative method</b>
1	<b>Sequence</b>	Conventional narrative structure based on time, space and causality. It is common in most films.
2	<b>Narration interposed</b>	Different time flows are inserted in the process of film sequence.
3	<b>Flashback</b>	It narrates in the order from back to front, which is unusual, such as <i>Memento</i> [2].
4	<b>Causal linear structure</b>	Take causal relationship of story as narrative power; the story is dramatized in linear time, with a single narrative chain, and complete ending with interlocking plot structure and strict logic, such as <i>Stagecoach</i> [3], and <i>True Lies</i> [4].
5	<b>Multiline narration</b>	The film consists of many short stories, one of which connects with other stories in a period of time, such as <i>Crash</i> [5].
6	<b>Recalling narrative</b>	Cross narration of reality and memory according to memories of protagonist or non-protagonist, such as <i>RMS Titanic</i> [6], <i>Big Fish</i> [7] and <i>Citizen Kane</i> [8].
7	<b>Circular narrative</b>	The beginning and end of the film reflect each other, such as <i>Before the Rain</i> [9], and <i>Pulp Fiction</i> [10].
8	<b>Repetitive narrative</b>	There will be a repeated time point in whole film, and every story will start again at this time point, such as <i>Run Lola Run</i> [11], <i>Rashomon</i> [12] and <i>Hero</i> [13].

### 3. Attractive Stories and Good Narrators

An attractive story should convey an interesting theme, and be told by a good narrator through appropriate narrative methods. Through this way, audience will be lured to be promptly curious about and love the story. At the same time, they are willing to pay more time and energy to understand the story. Ideas and connotations that author wants to express can also be better conveyed.

What qualities should an attractive story and a good narrator possess?

First, clear story lines and good narrator. Story content should be clear and correct rather than that irrelevant plots are connected. It needs to help audience easily understand what the story is saying, main line, branch line, characters, and what information the plot aims to convey.

Second, novelty. An attractive story must be interesting and arouse curiosity of people. A story must reflect novel ideas; only in this way can it be more easily accepted by audience. When telling stories, narrator should create conflicts and reversals to stimulate audience psychologically and emotionally. Therefore, audience can be attracted to read more.

Third, attractive stories need to produce emotional resonance. In reality, everyone has his own story, which requires screenwriter to create films that resonate with the audience. More precisely, audience shall not be touched unless they share a personal resonance with characters in the story; they illusively believe “real existence” of plots. Such a story will be extensively spread, leaving deep impression to the audience. To some extent, this proves audience recognizes ideas and feelings conveyed by screenwriter, so they are willing to watch the film.

#### 4. Moderation in Fiction and Witticism Narration

In many film works, screenwriters adapt historical facts, hoping to produce better story tension and dramatic effect. This is understandable because most films are adapted. However, in films adapted in recent years, many screenwriters and producers dare not create historical films after considering factors such as high production standards, large investment amount and great creation difficulty. This creates opportunities for crews with less rigorous production quality, and unprofessional screenwriters. Gradually, there are fewer serious historical films, but they are in urgent need in market. Snuffing market opportunities, producers of historical idol dramas rush to historical film market, to obtain higher box office. With rough production, hasty creation, and less rigorous playwright, it is difficult to perfectly control elements of witticism and fiction.

In recent years, many historical films are created, especially those with rough production, but excellent works are rare. For example, in *Palace of Devotion*, it tells story of the Song Dynasty from 985 to 1033 under historical background of “rule of Xianping”. It vividly describes stories of ministers, politics, clans and diplomacy in the era of Emperor Zhenzong of the Song Dynasty[14]. *The Qin Empire*[15] discusses stories of Qin Emperor from birth to unification of whole country.

These works are created based on real historical records as underlying logic. Ideas and concepts are conveyed to audience through historical films. Therefore, in such films, it is necessary to focus on balance between historical facts and fictive elements. Story plot should not be taken so seriously, and instead, seriousness of historical facts must be highlighted.

First, a fictional story represents history from unique perspective of author. Meanwhile, it generally reflects people’s real life, so that people can have a deeper understanding of relationship between history and reality. Therefore, a historical story can be fictionalized, but fictitious elements should conform to basis of reality. This is just like flying a kite whose direction can be controlled by a thread. In other words, author needs to be able to keep relationship between stories and reality controllable, so as to enrich connotation of historical films. Although people feel story is fictive, they recognize real ideas and thoughts conveyed, not only true but also profound. Fictive stories with this effect are excellent stories that surpass historical facts.

Second, fictive element and witticism of stories should be original rather than randomly adapted. An attractive story must be created by an excellent screenwriter who usually raises higher standards for stories. Screenwriter is not only an artist but also a thinker. He blends in his own thoughts and feelings in adapted story, to sympathize with audience in thoughts and emotion. Accordingly, these thoughts and feelings can be correctly conveyed. The film *A Dream of the Youth*[16] highlights a theme from the beginning to the end, that is, “a group of young talents are fighting for the rejuvenation of China”. Only main idea of story and historical facts are balanced, ideology and drama will be fully displayed.

Third, story is an art form with great artistic charm. All plots in story can be edited by screenwriter, so story can be adapted in diverse versions. Fictive content is added to adapted story, in order to enable readers to re-examine story from the perspective of author. Directions, time points, and complexity of human nature carefully arranged by screenwriter can be accurately conveyed to the audience. After the story is invented, true feelings, psychological conflicts, conflicts of interest and other contents of characters in the story can be fully demonstrated. Hence, although story is made up, the audience truly and profoundly finds problems faced by characters. As story develops, audience reveals final mystery step by step through plot arrangement of screenwriter, thus showing character experience. Story theme is more strongly highlighted, and main ideas are sublimated and improved.

During story creation, fiction and witticism are inevitable contents. This is because stories, as artistry, have formed a set of narrative skills in development. These skills can be fully utilized to express author’s ideas more accurately and completely. In conclusion, when making up stories,

author should be bold in innovation, but at the same time, he/she needs to respect basic historical facts. Fiction assists in telling story, rather than rough fabrication that completely changes historical facts.

## 5. Conclusion

Literature and film are independent and mutually influential individuals. The adaptation of literary masterpieces makes the film and television works more brilliant, and the popularization of literary masterpieces is made possible by the popular broadcast of film and television works. Literature and film are complementary and mutually reinforcing. The narrative strategy is a key factor for the success of the film. An excellent narrative structure allows the audience to gain pleasure and satisfaction in the process of emotionally involving in the scenes, characters and emotions of the film, and in this way promotes the thinking and identification with the theme of the film, allowing audiences of different ages and backgrounds to find details and scenes that touch the soft parts of their hearts and complete the sublimation of the film.

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