

Strategic Thinking Based on the Creation Dilemma of Hong Kong TVB Criminal Investigation Drama

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Abstract: Hong Kong TVB criminal investigation drama is the golden representative drama genre of TVB TV dramas in the 1990s. It has formed a consistent genre paradigm in the process of gradual development. By watching TVB criminal investigation dramas, mainland audiences learn about the lives and culture of Hong Kong people, creating a common cultural memory for the entire Chinese-speaking community. Since the new century, TVB's criminal investigation dramas have experienced a problem of declining drama quality, which has not been resolved even after the co-production of "Go North". This article aims to provide narrative text strategies and ideas for TVB criminal investigation dramas facing the creative difficulties of the new era. The article first finds the crux of the gradual decline of TVB criminal investigation dramas, explores the reasons behind the decline, and analyzes the improvement methods in the text creation of the dramas based on the current cultural context.

1. Introduction

TVB dramas in the 1980s, it has gradually developed a complete and mature production line of drama series. Professional dramas are one of the representative drama types. In the early days, they mostly focused on professions such as police, lawyers, and doctors (Table 1). It was not until 1995 that professional dramas continued to be refined, especially by subdividing the police profession to make it highly professional. TVB criminal investigation dramas were born out of the professional drama genre and were defined as police officers from the Criminal Investigation Department of the Hong Kong police department. Investigation Department), as the protagonist, relies on criminal investigation techniques assisted by forensics, forensic medicine and other departments to catch criminals and solve cases through careful reasoning ^[1].

The 1990s, criminal investigation dramas became an important representative genre in the golden period of Hong Kong dramas. Hong Kong dramas sparked a craze in the mainland, not only dominating the Hong Kong TV industry but also affecting the media ecology of the entire Chinese community. Since the new century, the development of TVB criminal investigation dramas has been in decline due to the decline in screenwriters, actors, and production standards. After the co-production of "Going North" in 2017, it failed to fully adapt to the cultural ecology of the

mainland, leading to mixed reviews from the audience for co-productions in recent years.

Table 1: Overview of the development of TVB criminal investigation dramas

1. The 1990s : the golden decade		
Drama title	Year of broadcast	Remark
"Criminal Investigation Files" Volumes 1-4	1995-1999	Two milestones in TVB's criminal investigation drama Gold Medal Producer: Pan Jiade
"Forensic Records" Volume 1-2	1997-1999	
"Sister Tuoqiang"	1998	Classic IP
2. After 2000: Falling into cultural dilemmas such as downgrading of suspense levels, repetition of the same reasoning content, and copycat plagiarism.		
Drama title	Year of broadcast	Remark
"Sister Tuoqiang" Parts 2-4	2000-2004	Classic IP
"Detective Dongtuk"	year 2004	The protagonist is an alternative style detective
"Forensic Pioneer" Parts 1-3	2006-2011	Technology first
"Tongtian Qian Exploration"	2007	Supernatural + Detection
"Ancient Spirit Detective A and B"	2008-2009	
3. Around 2010: Many Hong Kong stars "left their nests and headed north" for the mainland, and TVB's film and television talent pool was severely impacted.		
Drama title	Year of broadcast	Remark
"Talk about love and stories"	year 2010	Talking about love is better than solving a crime
"Mind Reading Detective"	year 2010	Plagiarism incident
"Exploring Crossing the Boundary"	year 2010	Supernatural + Detection
"Apostle Walker 1"	Year 2014	Classic IP
4. 2017: The "Northbound" co-production was launched, but the "Hong Kong characteristics" were lost. It did not meet the audience's aesthetic expectations, and the reputation continued to decline.		
Drama title	Year of broadcast	Remark
"Apostle Walker 2"	2017	Produced by TVB and Tencent Video, 6.8 points
"Iron Detective"	2019	Produced by TVB and Tencent Video, 7.2 points
"Apostle Walker 3"	2020	Produced by TVB and Tencent Video, 6.3 points
"Forensic Pioneer 4"	2020	Produced by TVB, 5.1 points
"Sister Tuoqiang 2021"	2021	Produced by TVB and Tencent Video, 5.1 points
"Forensic Pioneer 5"	2022	Produced by TVB and Youku Video, 6.2 points

This article takes a representative and popular criminal investigation drama as a case study and analysis object, and unearths the aesthetic characteristics of the drama in terms of character design, genre patterns, etc. At the same time, TV narrative theory and genre theory are used as basic theories to analyze and summarize the typed narrative elements and narrative patterns in TVB

criminal investigation dramas, and then draw relevant conclusions.

2. Drama text development syndrome

When criminal investigation dramas are integrated into narrative activities, they mainly involve the phenomenon of crime and crime detection in social life. In order to appropriately reflect this phenomenon artistically, it is necessary to portray, observe and describe criminal activities and the detection process as accurately as possible. Beyond. During the long-term development process, TVB criminal investigation dramas have formed a market-tested narrative and character type model. However, in the later period, it was obvious that excessive borrowing and plagiarism from other works would seriously damage the narrative charm of this type of drama.

2.1 Composite narrative mode: "love + detection"

In Britain and Japan are all derived from the mystery literature of their own countries. Due to special historical reasons, Hong Kong lacks a long cultural heritage. TVB criminal investigation dramas lack the support of local literature and can only mix the strengths of other regions. The narrative mode is relatively fixed and simple. Based on the integration of Japanese reasoning style, it has gradually formed a classic "love + detection" composite mode.

Screenwriters in TVB criminal investigation dramas usually design more complex love relationships for the characters in the drama. The most commonly used classic method is to set up a "third party" in the relationship. at the same time, it effectively integrates love elements and bizarre cases, and the exciting plot satisfies the audience's curiosity and enhances the dramatic tension.

The second series of "Criminal Investigation Files" (1995), Lan Jiawen appeared as a police officer as Zhang Dayong's assistant. Lan Jiawen's direct and aggressive character made the relationship between Gao Jie and Dayong full of suspicion and became precarious. The complex emotions of a love triangle will cause intense conflicts between the characters, thus pushing the story forward. Towards the end of the series, Lan Jiawen was directly involved in a criminal case. After successfully interfering with Dayong Gao Jie, she was accused of setting fire to death in the UK. In the end of the case, Jiawen's brother confessed everything. These were all in order to protect his sister. After losing her brother, Jiawen also lost Dayong. She deceived Gao Jie and Dayong into a holiday house in the countryside and tried to set fire to them. At the last moment, she restored her memory, rescued them, and fled to Canada. Dayong and Gao Jie finally got together after going through all kinds of hardships (Figure 1).

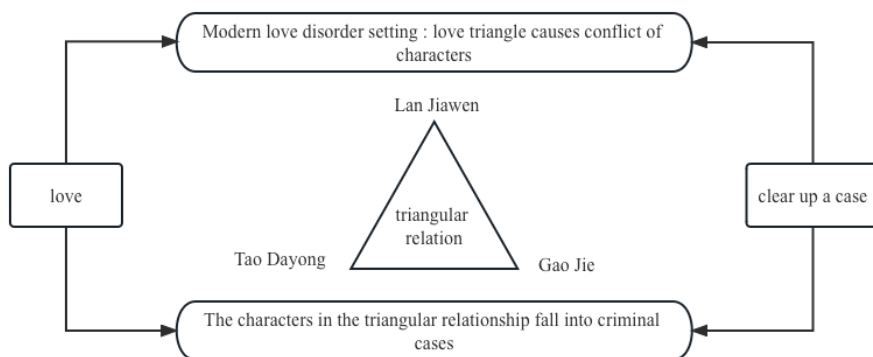


Figure 1: The closed-loop composite narrative mode of "Criminal Investigation Files II"

In the future, as TVB criminal investigation dramas continue to evolve with this complex type of elements, the audience will obviously find that the dramas lack rigorous reasoning and inject too

many emotional elements. This has violated the purpose of criminal investigation dramas, and the audience will not be overly exaggerated and unreal.

"Forensic Pioneer 4" (2020), the long-awaited return of the classic criminal investigation IP "Forensic" series after 9 years, has faced criticism from the audience. They argue that the protagonist lacks a distinctive personality, the characters' facial makeup is excessive, and the emotional storylines have become increasingly convoluted, leading to confusion and difficulty in distinguishing the main plot points. The most outrageous plot is undoubtedly that Shui Huiming, the director of the forensic department, and her dentist boyfriend Louis have been in love for many years and have been talking about marriage, but they eventually cheated on her best friend Elaine. Elaine tried to sabotage Shui Huiming and her boyfriend Louis by getting pregnant. The relationship between Louis. In the end, the triangle relationship ended with Louis being killed, and Shui Huiming almost became a suspect. Despite the drama's attempt to delve into the relationship between the three individuals involved in the case, following the familiar narrative formula, the use of "bestie memes" felt stale and lost its novelty. In the eyes of the audience, Shui Huiming's character and her actions seemed inexplicable. She left all inappropriate things to Elaine to do in the early stage, giving the other party a chance to intervene. Therefore, the progress of this triangle relationship was very unreasonable and difficult for the audience to believe.

The co-production drama "Forensic Pioneer 5" (2022) is even more suspected of putting the cart before the horse, injecting too many elements of youth idol dramas into the criminal investigation drama. The film crew cast veteran TVB star Bosco Bosco to ensure market testing and audience taste, but obviously the script was not consistent with the character he played. As an authoritative expert from the Forensic Department, he only appears in cases in the drama a handful of times. The scenes in the early stage are the emotional interaction with the policewoman Baoying: eating water from the water, flying a kite, even if it is a serious verification experiment, it is still a warm and sweet scene of the two of them making a fruit dafu in the baking room (Figure 2).

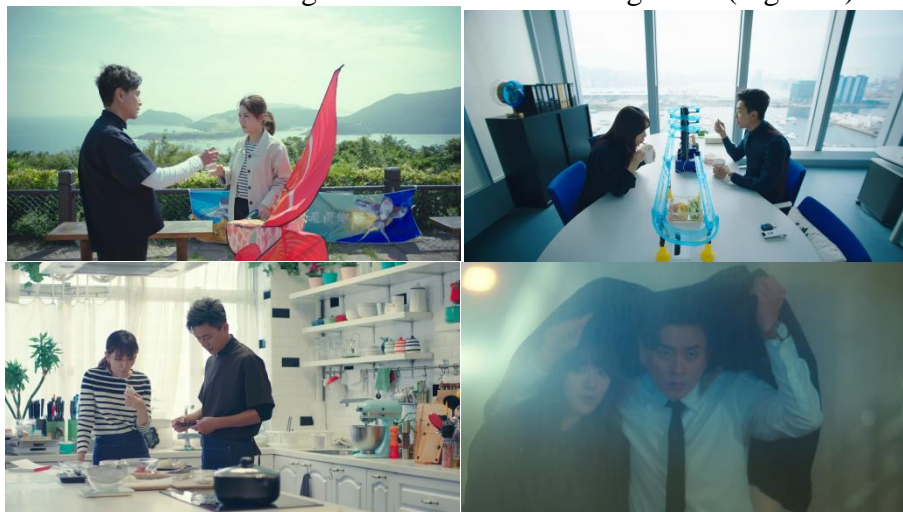


Figure 2: Emotional scenes in "Forensic Pioneer 5" that do not bear narrative tasks

2.2 Confronting character relationships

Among the narrative elements of the TVB criminal investigation drama genre, there is a pair of eternal and confrontational characters. One is the criminals, the evil force; the other is the anti-criminals, consisting of the police and other assisting forces. Unlike other types of TV dramas, the characters in criminal investigation dramas have clear social contracts. Anti-criminals are the protagonists in the drama. They not only have to fulfill the function of narrating a series of

anti-criminal activities, but also play the role of expressing the theme of the plot during the narrative process, that is, punishing evil, promoting good, and promoting the rule of law [2].

2.2.1 Anti-criminals

The detailed design of typed characters, the audience can generally experience the "hero complex" through the police protagonist. They have extraordinary wisdom and agility, are resourceful and courageous in front of criminals, have firm determination and fearless spirit (Figure 3). But at the same time, the protagonist's imperfections also moved the audience. Most of the protagonists in early TVB criminal investigation dramas were portrayed as very everyday: they would have conflicts with colleagues due to their stubbornness at work, make mistakes in judgment during the process of solving cases, and encounter difficulties in relationships. and frustration, indecisiveness in triangle relationships, etc. For instance, characters like Jiang Zishan in "Criminal Detective Files," Yu Zilang in "The Ancient Spirit," and Zeng Jiayuan in "Forensic Records." Their characters are not perfect, and they have small flaws similar to those of ordinary people. There are also bad habits and other designs, but they make the characters more vivid and three-dimensional, making the audience feel and deeply convinced.



Figure 3: The protagonist team of "Forensic Pioneer 1" appears

On the other hand, some current TVB criminal investigation dramas are as full of high-light filter feeling as some mainland idol dramas, and lack enough "human touch". It seems that the integration of high technology can quickly understand everything, and the characters' interpretation process is no longer needed. The characters become pretentious and even distorted, and the plot also becomes thin. In increasingly sophisticated laboratories, various evidences are displayed on ultra-clear touch screens, but the personalities of the protagonists and the small details of their lives cannot be shown, so that in the end, only water can be filled in the unit time of each episode (Figure 4).



Figure 4: The protagonist team of "Forensic Pioneer 4" appears

2.2.2 Offender

The activities of criminals are the starting point for criminal investigation tasks. The criminals in early TVB criminal investigation dramas had different identities, different experiences, and diversified criminal techniques and levels, which created the huge dramatic tension of criminal investigation dramas. The types of criminals are also diverse in design, but they all have the common characteristics of insidiousness, cruelty, cunning, and high IQ, which increases the

difficulty of criminal investigation and the quality of the entire drama.

In the past two years, "Forensic Pioneer" 4 and 5 have inevitably shown flattening and routine reversal of the case. The audience doesn't even need to carefully figure out the chain of evidence. By observing the criminal's very routine acting skills, and based on the changes in BGM and the number of close-ups in the series, they can easily determine the real culprit behind the scenes. The real culprit is usually solidified into the protagonist group. Or someone who is close to the wrongfully accused suspect. Although the criminals have different personalities, most of them have extreme thoughts and impulsively kill people. Few people have the desire to dig deeper into the motives behind them. The final conclusion of the case relies on influencing the murderer to discover his conscience or self-destruct.

3. Text reconstruction paths

For a long time, Hong Kong's television industry has placed emphasis on commerce and light on humanities, and on entertainment atmosphere and light on artistic effects, resulting in the production of TV series being like commodities on an industrial assembly line. TVB criminal investigation dramas have long drawn on classic cases from other countries in the reasoning and interpretation of cases, and they lack excellent cultural content that can be passed down and carried forward. The cultures of the two places have the same roots. If the creation of TVB criminal investigation dramas wants to fundamentally solve the desertification of creative resources, it should form a good interaction with the creation of mainland criminal investigation dramas, seek changes in content and form, and ultimately form a suspense that meets the audience's aesthetic expectations.

3.1 Purpose of criminal investigation drama: "Detection" > "Love"

The domestic criminal investigation drama "White Night" (2017) tells the story of a pair of twin brothers who swap identities day and night to pursue the murderer in order to redeem themselves and save each other. The drama adopts the "1+7" framework structure, among which "1" is the basic clue - the "2.13" family massacre case; "7" is the independent case story of the Guan brothers in the process of assisting the police station in handling the case. "White Night" was rated as a conscientious "drama" by the audience. It received a high score of 8.9 on Douban, not only because of the tightly coupled and meticulously reasoned plot, but also because the drama properly controlled the two elements of character love and case detection. The love element plays a relatively small role in the whole drama, mainly focusing on the emotional relationship between Guan Hongyu and Gao Yanan. Guan Hongyu and Gao Yanan met after the end of the third case. The emotional clues between the two not only serve the storyline, but also adjust the rhythm of the tense narrative, allowing the entire TV series to advance with relaxation (Figure 5).

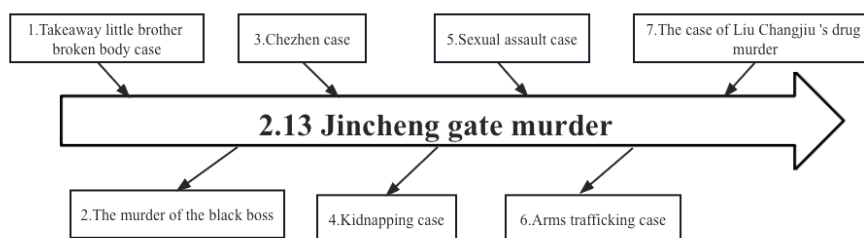


Figure 5: "White Night Chase" dual clue narrative: "1+7" plot framework

Criminal investigation dramas should avoid violating their original intention and purpose by

placing love in a higher position in the case. TVB criminal investigation dramas should also focus on balancing the inclusion of romance and detective elements in their storytelling. They should also pay attention to highlighting the opposition and interdependence between law enforcement and criminals, addressing individuals' spiritual crises, and shedding light on social system issues.

3.2 Enrich character inner design

Hitchcock once said: "The core of the audience's suspense is their concern for life, no matter what life is.

"Is destiny good or evil" [3]. Human nature is an eternal topic in excellent works. In order to express the rich and complex human nature of criminals and anti-criminals, an effective method is to internalize the dramatic conflict into the deep heart of the characters, rather than just focusing on the surface behavior of the characters.

"White Night Chase" is about the character setting. The superficial behavioral conflicts of the characters are weakened, but the deep-seated conflicts within the characters run through the entire play. The most interesting psychological conflict in the play is the conflict between Zhou Xun, the captain of the criminal investigation detachment, and Guan Hongfeng, the criminal investigation expert. The core of the conflict revolves around the mystery of the whereabouts of Guan Hongyu, the suspect in the "Miemen Case". Throughout the play, there were many communications between the two regarding Guan Hongyu's whereabouts. The conversation seemed light and indifferent, but in fact it was turbulent inside. However, this intense dramatic conflict did not develop into a physical conflict. And through the portrayal of the expressions between the two when talking, this inner conflict and dispute is vividly expressed [4].

Detective is the surface story of criminal investigation, but exploring people's psychological mirroring and the complex tangle of human nature is the deep core of a successful story. In the creation of characters in TVB criminal investigation dramas, whether they are anti-criminals or criminals, they should show the richness and changeability of human nature, and reveal various "schemings" in different scenes of the case.

3.3 Pay attention to real materials

For a long time, Hong Kong and the Mainland have had many different cultures and cognitions due to their respective characteristics in social environment and economic development. The creative themes of mainland criminal investigation dramas are generally about punishing evil and promoting good, portraits of heroes, patriotism and justice. They have a strong sense of social responsibility and have a certain social enlightenment function. In order to adapt to the vast mainland audience, TVB drama series cannot blindly construct criminal case cases, but should pay attention to the balance between commerciality and artistry, inherit the spirit of humanism, and pay more attention to real cases based on real society.

The criminal investigation drama "Detective" (2019) co-produced by TVB and Tencent has gained a good reputation compared to the "Forensic Pioneer" series co-produced at the same time. Although "suspense" and "action" are the consistent paradigms of TVB criminal investigation dramas that have been tested by the market, "Detective" has made a bold attempt to use real people and true events as its material. Behind the suspense and brain-burning, a lot of writing is spent on constructing the fate and emotions of the characters in the play. Wan Xihua, played by Hui Yinghong, is a very complex "tragic" character. On one side, she is strong and obsessed with power struggle, but on the other side, she is fragile, having lost her beloved son. Shang Dian is a typical representative of "iron detectives". He has strong work ability and perseverance in life. He bravely returned to the front line despite the torture of PTSD; but on the other hand, because of his work, he

failed to become a competent father and a worthy husband. It makes the audience feel sad. "The Detective" not only attracts the audience with its twists and turns and bizarre storyline, but also gives the audience a lot of real thoughts, making this drama different from previous TVB criminal investigation dramas and injecting more humanistic care.

4. Conclusion

Its development stages in different periods have shown different styles and characteristics, and have gained recognition from the audience and the market. However, it is also necessary to face up to the emergence of TVB criminal investigation dramas after the glorious period. The article focuses on exploring the impact of the current cultural context of Hong Kong the production of TVB criminal investigation dramas with more contemporary value, and concludes that it should form a good interaction with the mainland's excellent criminal investigation dramas in terms of creative concepts, and continuously sublimate the dramas. Only by focusing on the unity of commercial value and social value can TVB criminal investigation dramas stand proudly in Greater China and even the wider cultural circle of the world.

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