



Expression of Life and Emotions: Narrative Research on Family Ethics Drama in Rural Short Videos

—A Case Study of Douyin Blogger Xiaopinggaiya

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Abstract. Family-centeredness is an important concept in traditional Chinese cultural thought, and family ethics have been valued in artistic creations both past and present, both in China and abroad. With the development of social media, short videos have gradually become an important narrative form. Rural short video family ethics dramas have emerged as a branch of short video series, demonstrating how short videos embed narratives within rural family settings and influence the dissemination and self-narration of audiences. This study employs content analysis as the primary method, with narrative theory's whole-content analysis framework, focusing on revealing the unique narrative characteristics of short video family ethics dramas. It explores how these dramas construct rural family landscapes for dissemination on short video platforms, and the article found audiences achieve emotional resonance with the videos and other viewers through expressions of approval, sharing, anticipation, and opposition in the comments section.

Keywords: Rural Short Videos; Family Ethics Drama; Narrative Research.

1 Introduction

In the history of Chinese television drama development, there is a large number of TV dramas centered around family ethics narratives. Scholars refer to this type of TV drama as *family ethics drama*. Its characteristic is "a TV drama that focuses on the family as the main narrative scene, with relationships and emotional entanglements between family members and relatives as the main expression content, and aims to reveal the moral realm and cultural values exhibited by relevant characters in family life as the aesthetic goal."^[1] The broadcast of the TV drama *Kewang(Desire)* in 1990 marked the beginning of domestically produced family ethics dramas entering the public eye, it has become an important type of TV drama. In addition to dramatists, some experts and scholars have also joined related research. Chinese Family Ethics Drama starting from everyday family life, integrate and transform ethical and moral issues at the individual, familial, and societal levels, reflecting specific values of certain eras and playing an important role in shaping mainstream social values.

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Against the backdrop of the rural revitalization strategy, the construction of rural digital infrastructure has accelerated. And with the explosive growth of the self-media industry in recent years, short videos with rural themes have emerged on the internet, highlighting pastoral landscapes and embodying the urbanites' longing for a slow-paced life.^[2] In contrast, rural short video family ethics dramas utilize a narrative style centered around family life and rural settings to showcase the intergenerational conflicts and conflicts of interest arising from complex social issues in rural families in the new era, such as rural blind dates, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, conflicts between sisters-in-law, remarriage, second children, etc., attracting considerable attention on new media platforms. The institution of family is something that one cannot easily escape. At times it is almost impossible to get away from one's family, the ties, roots, responsibilities because they are always there even if one is no more physically connected to it.^[3] Therefore, attention to the countryside cannot be separated from a focus on rural families, analyzing the characteristics of rural families and their media presentation and dissemination effects on short videos has practical significance.

Fisher's narrative paradigm is based on rhetorical theory, believing that humans are naturally storytellers; From early cave paintings to folk tales and bedtime stories, humans value stories and use them to understand our world, warn of danger, and teach lessons. Stories are persuasive tools that can attract the audience's attention, evoke emotions, and strongly connect individuals with information.^[4] The narrative theory in communication studies aims to study and understand how stories (narratives) are constructed, disseminated, and understood. Through field observations on relevant videos on the Douyin short video platform, it was found that there are many short videos related to rural family ethics, among which there are accounts with extremely high numbers of followers, such as JiaojiaoLaoSaozi, Countryside Tingting Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law Daily Life, SibaoMamaYanzii, etc. Although the video content revolves around family ethics topics such as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, the content is too fragmented and lacks continuity in plot, so it can only be called family ethics sketches rather than family ethics dramas. Taking into account the above factors and considering the influence of videos, this study ultimately selected videos published by the blogger Xiaopinggaiya before 2024, excluding pure advertising shares and videos without complete storylines. A total of 26 short dramas containing 218 short videos were selected as research samples for qualitative analysis to explore what narrative characteristics rural short video family ethics dramas present and how they trigger emotional resonance among audiences.

2 Presentation of Life: Narrative Features of Rural Short Video Family Ethics Dramas

2.1 Narrative Subject: First-person Narrative Depicting Stories Adapted from Real Events in Existing Narrative Studies

In existing narrative research, the narrative subject generally includes two aspects: the author who controls and influences the narrative, and the storyteller within the text.^[5]

Rural short video family ethics dramas are generally centered around young women from rural areas, adapted from their real experiences or real-life stories submitted by fans. Currently, most rural short video family ethics dramas on Douyin are performed through one person playing multiple roles, where these rural women act as both directors and actors, playing a leading role in the production and construction of video content. In the specific narrative of the episodes, rural short video family ethics dramas mainly use the first-person narrative method. Through the study of the specific video titles in the sample set of a short drama collections (Table 1), it can be felt that the first-person narrative method can directly immerse the audience in the story, providing an immersive experience from the perspective of an ordinary individual. This narrative method not only enhances the credibility of the story but also better evokes the emotions of the audience.

Table 1. The series short video title of Not Enough

Short drama title	sequence number	video title
<i>Not Enough</i>	1	After ten years of courtship, today I got engaged.
	2	Boyfriend went to the bridal shop and directly said to choose the cheapest one, ignoring my opinion.
	3	Boyfriend's mother previously agreed to buy a house before marriage, but now she has changed her mind.
	4	We repeatedly compromised, but in exchange for the other party's intensified behavior.
	5	Then let's just break up nicely.
	6	Marriage is for happiness, and divorce is also.

2.2 Narrative Content: Focus on specific Rural Family Conflicts and Issues

Domestic family ethics dramas are based on traditional Chinese family ethics to unfold story conflicts. In order to gain the audience's psychological recognition, they often follow the narrative model of "crisis and emotional repair of blood or marital relationships".^[6] However, unlike domestically produced family ethics dramas, which mainly focus on harmony, cohesion, affinity, self-restraint, endurance, and altruism, rural short video family ethics dramas are more like *family problem dramas*. They focus on specific problems arising in rural families, with conflicts between family members as the main plot, and the endings often leave the audience with a sense of bad deeds getting their just deserts. From the word cloud of the video titles in the sample set (Figure 1), it can be seen that the relationships depicted in the videos mainly involve mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, marital relationships, parent-child relationships, and sister-in-law relationships, with mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships being particularly prominent. In addition, the events involved mainly include marriage, dowry giving, blind dates, etc., almost every short drama involves conflicts related to these characters and events. However, it is worth noting that the author's focus on these issues is not to negate marital and family relationships but to serve as a warning through

2.4 Narrative Scene: the Closure and Openness Of Rural Families

The rural setting serves as an externalized expression field for rural folklore, and rural short video family ethics dramas use the structure of rural families as the framework for their narrative. They not only closely adhere to the characteristics of daily rural life, with spatial changes aligning with the logical development of the plot but also possess anthropological and sociological value. As Fei Xiaotong stated, rural society is a ritual-oriented society, and "the maintenance of order in rural society is different from the maintenance of order in modern society." The narrative space of previous domestically produced family ethics dramas exhibited characteristics of closure, with the plot primarily unfolding in the household's living room, bedroom, and kitchen. However, rural families have both closed and open characteristics. The videos often depict main characters chatting outside the house. These small talk scenes not only serve as the main source of information for the audience but also play an important role in advancing the plot. Taking the short drama *Different Lives* as an example, Pingping's early romance was initially discovered by villagers, and it was only after enough gossip had spread in the village that Pingping's mother found out. The disobedience of the child, coupled with the village gossip, caused significant mental trauma to Pingping's mother. Subsequently, Pingping married early due to premarital pregnancy, and her childhood friend, Mengjie, who grew up with her, managed to get into a prestigious university under her mother's strict supervision. The drama does not depict Mengjie's life after growing up, but through the village gossip, it is evident that the two lead different lives. Similar displays of neighborly relationships are present in many other videos, showing that in rural life, neighborly relationships serve as an extension of family relationships.

3 Emotional Resonance: Decoding Emotional Comments from Sample Videos

Due to the time constraints, short videos excel in utilizing strong visual impact by constructing various frameworks, achieving emotional reinforcement, expansion, and polarization through mechanisms such as associative thinking, empathy, and resonance.^[8] Rural family ethics short videos focus on emotional narratives, fostering emotional resonance between content and audience. Additionally, through interactive comments, they express complex and rich meanings such as identity recognition and artistic self-expression. In this study, using Python web scraping tools, we collected comments from sample videos, obtaining a total of 217,395 comments. After removing advertisements, repetitive comments, and meaningless emoji comments, we retained 161,047 valid comments. These comments were imported into qualitative analysis software Nvivo11 and coded by two groups of four graduate students. Initially, each group carefully read and analyzed the comments, extracting keywords and creating sub-nodes. Then, consistent sub-nodes were merged, such as merging authenticity, expressing love, perceived warning significance, and empathy with roles into approval. The coding results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Third level coding table

Parent Node	Sub-node Free Node	Sub-node Free Node	Number of References
Approval	Authenticity	real, authentic, factual, real-life, genuine, vivid	25152
	affection	love Like, enjoyable, interesting, desire to act	20384
	warning significance	teaches, warn, protect oneself, enlightenment, broaden horizons, wisdom	7834
	empathy @	anger, indignation, regret, relief	10296
Sharing	act as an example	the experiences of me, relatives and friends	35783
Anticipation	Urge for updates	requesting and urging for updates	4352
	Propose plot requirements	reversal, not following If	5064
Opposition	Doubt	the story prototype, the blogger's motives, ending is too idealized	1924
	Negative feelings	Feeling oppressed while watching, afraid to enter into marriage	36

3.1 Approval: Resonance and Connection with Video Content

From Table 2, it can be calculated that comments expressing approval towards the video content account for 39.3% of the total comment sample, indicating that the audience strongly resonates with the rural life scenes and character images presented in the videos. This is mainly manifested in four aspects: approving authenticity, expressing love, perceiving the videos' warning significance, and empathizing with the characters. Comments praising the authenticity of the videos include phrases like "It's too real!" "The material is derived from real life, portrayed so well." and "This isn't just a video, it's my life!" Moreover, on the basis of authenticity, some comments express admiration for the blogger's performance and character portrayal, such as "College girls like me watch every day, like a pre-marriage internship," and "I'm from Xi'an. Can I play a character in an episode?" Such comments reflect an emotional resonance with the characters and scenarios depicted in the videos. Furthermore, many videos carry a moral lesson, and viewers acknowledge this by expressing educational significance, as seen in comments like "Don't delete this video, I want to show it to my daughter" and "Girls really shouldn't get pregnant before marriage!" This narrative style, employing a first-person perspective, effectively transmits emotions, drawing a large audience who feels anger, regret, and sympathy towards the characters. For instance, viewers commented, "The internet is really something; you can get enraged without leaving the house!" and "Finally divorced. Xiaojuan shouldn't look back anymore." This emotional expression not only resonates with the audience but also contributes to the blogger's continuous updates.

The expression of approval is significant for both the audience and content creators. The approval of the video's authenticity and empathy with the characters represent emotional resonance, endorsing the video's moral values. Expressing love serves as emotional fulfillment. From the comments, it can be observed that the audience's identities are not fixed. There are empathizers who are married and have children and also unmarried female college students attempting a pre-marriage internship. These short dramas gather different types of people into a common scenario, forming resonance through similar emotional experiences, accumulating emotional energy.

3.2 Sharing: Deeper Manifestations Based on Approval

Regarding sharing, comments in the overall sample account for 53.7%, with the predominant focus on simple @ mentions and viewers' personal narratives. These two types of comments are particularly prominent. Firstly, the development of short videos and live streams has led to the creation of a unique interactive ritual chain.^[9]Mentioning others in the comments promotes social interaction, fosters discussion, establishes connections, and enhances a sense of community and belonging. Within this same context, emotional energy is accumulated, making emotional resonance more tangible. Subsequently, some comments transition to personal narratives. These comments, often exceeding 50 words, narrate personal experiences or those of individuals known to the commenter, related to the content of the video. For example, in the short drama *Different Lives*, when the character Mengjie is scolded by her mother for covering up her friend Pingping's early romance, many viewers left comments like: "In middle school, my good friend would always use my name when looking for her dates. At first, her parents didn't mind, but as she started coming home later and later, her dad came over to my house. My mom was home at the time, and we haven't been in contact since then." Such personal narrative comments describe the commenter's own experiences or those of people they know, sharing life experiences and stories in the hope of resonating with and garnering support from other viewers. This not only enriches the content of the comments but also deepens social interaction and emotional connections among viewers.

3.3 Anticipation: Audience's Reverse Pressure on Content Production

Anticipation is a positive emotion typically associated with expectations and hopes for future events, experiences, or outcomes. This emotion often entails a desire or hope for a certain expected result or realization. In the rural family ethics short dramas portrayed by the blogger Xiaopinggaiya, despite the rapid pace of updates with new videos released every 2-3 days, viewers continue to express ongoing anticipation in the comments section. Not only do viewers urge for faster video production, but they also express their own requirements and suggestions regarding the plot development. Some commentators even express their expectations for specific character destinies, hoping for a satisfactory conclusion for the good characters and appropriate punishment for the antagonists. Emotional expressions are strong, with comments like "If this wicked mother-in-law doesn't get a tragic ending, I won't be able to continue watching. It makes

my heart ache!" "Can we have a sequel? I want to see the second daughter-in-law live a better life." "Please update quickly. I want to see how the eldest son turns the tables. The mother-in-law's tyranny needs to be addressed!" Although the story prototypes of these short dramas are based on real events, the blogger may modify and adjust the plot appropriately to better manage the account and meet the fans' demands. Consequently, these short dramas often end with a plotline of evil deeds receiving retribution, and the good persevering, satisfying viewers' desire for justice and fairness. In this process, the subjective and objective identities of the photographer and the subject are broken in the interaction, and the photographer becomes a participant in the event, thereby deepening the sense of presence.^[10]

3.4 Opposition: Expression of Skepticism and Negative Sentiments

Oppositional emotions account for 1.2% of the total comment sample, primarily comprising skeptical and negative comments. Although they represent a minority in the overall comment sample, the viewpoints of these viewers are still noteworthy. Skepticism manifests in three aspects: skepticism towards the story prototype, such as "Real life doesn't have such events." There is also skepticism towards the blogger's motives, with some believing that the blogger's storytelling is influenced by extreme feminist ideologies, as seen in comments like "Haven't you noticed? This author always writes a favorable ending for women, regardless of whether they are good or bad, but the endings for men are always unfavorable. She might be tailoring her stories heavily towards women due to feminist influences!" Additionally, some viewers reject the ending of the short dramas, believing that they overly romanticize the conclusion, deviating significantly from reality, as expressed in comments like "In reality, there aren't so many fairy-tale endings. Only a realistic ending can serve as a warning to women. If everything ends perfectly, it's better to watch fairy tales." Furthermore, some comments express dissatisfaction with the portrayal of the wicked mother-in-law character in the short dramas, causing fear of marriage among unmarried women viewers. As a result of prolonged immersion in the simulated environment created by social media, modern individuals' perception of the real world can be affected. Hence, some suggest, "Why not portray a beautiful life as well? Watching these is too depressing!" These expressions of negative sentiments serve as a means of emotional release and resonate with the video, achieving resonance on the same screen.

4 Conclusion

Family ethics-themed video works serve as a medium for presenting popular culture, reflecting and constructing reality, thus exerting significant influence on society and audiences. Today, depictions of family in films and television dramas have become increasingly diverse, attempting to surpass the traditional family image based on blood relations and heterogeneity. There is a growing trend in the portrayal of family in works of art.^[11] However, rural short video family ethics dramas still revolve around the core of the traditional family model. Their simple plots and lifelike content, coupled with

the use of dialects and unique narrative settings, have gradually made them an important branch of agricultural short video series. Through empathy, these dramas attract audiences, who express emotions of approval, sharing, anticipation, and opposition in the comments section. Whether positive or negative, these emotions find expression within this shared context, forming emotional communication among audiences and between audiences and creators, thus achieving identity recognition and emotional connection. Therefore, continued attention to rural family ethics short videos has already had and will continue to strengthen their impact on individual and collective emotions. Guiding the healthy development of this field is of great significance for promoting positive energy, fostering family virtues, and facilitating social harmony.

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