Growth Narratives and Characterization of Young Professionals in Television Drama

Wang Chenyu[1]*

[1] Jiujiang University, Jiangxi, Jiujiang 332005, China
* Correspondence: Jiujiang University, Jiangxi, Jiujiang 332005, China.

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Abstract: The growth of young professionals in television drama is reflected in their developing skills and in the choices they make when confronted with competing interests, workplace relationships, and professional responsibilities. This article examines Sun Yiqiu in The Ordinary Glory and Su Xiao in The Ideal City, focusing on their entry into new workplaces, setbacks on projects, and decisions to take responsibility. Sun's growth involves a shift from securing a foothold in the industry to collaborating with colleagues and taking responsibility for projects. Su's development involves applying her professional principles to wider questions about how costs and benefits are distributed within an organization. Both dramas use specific work tasks, relationships, and recurring objects to show how their characters' abilities and attitudes develop over time. These growth narratives gain credibility from the connection between choices and consequences. Professional growth becomes visible when characters' judgments are tested and their decisions come at a cost.

Keywords: workplace drama, young professionals, growth narratives, characterization

1. Introduction

Workplace dramas often mark stages in a character's career through hiring, a permanent appointment, or promotion. A change in job title shows that the character occupies a different position within the organization. To understand how the character has grown, viewers also need to see how they approach their work, handle disagreements, and respond to the consequences of their decisions. Television series can place characters in similar situations at different points in a story, allowing viewers to recognize changes by comparing their responses. Early actions, conversations, and relationships thus provide a basis for interpreting later developments (Mittell, 2015).

In *The Ordinary Glory*, Sun Yiqiu joins an investment firm as an intern with little relevant experience. In *The Ideal City*, Su Xiao already has experience in construction cost estimation when a professional setback forces her to look for a new job. Sun has to develop professional judgment, while Su has to

learn how to apply her existing judgment to a wider range of organizational problems. This article examines key workplace scenes in both series to explore how assignments, challenges, and decisions shape the portrayal of each character (Dai & Zhang, 2021; Fang, 2020).

2. Starting Points and Motivations for Growth

At the beginning of *The Ordinary Glory*, Sun enters a workplace where his background gives him few obvious advantages. His education and work experience fall short of what his colleagues expect from an intern at Jinchen Capital. In Episode 2, when asked to attend to Daniel, Sun uses his knowledge of Go to find a way to engage him. The scene establishes both a limitation and a strength. Sun has little experience in investment, yet he pays attention to how Daniel responds and finds an activity they can share despite a language barrier. The encounter gives Sun a chance to stay and learn. It also gives viewers an early indication of what he can bring to the workplace (Fang, 2020).

Su enters *The Ideal City* with an established professional conviction that cost estimates should reflect actual construction conditions. When she is held responsible in the aftermath of a construction accident, she loses her job, and her access to the professional credential she needs is also affected. After she returns to the industry, she finds that a well-founded judgment can become an organizational decision only after it passes through formal processes of sign-off, review, and approval. In realist television drama, the social setting helps shape the character's actions and the resistance those actions encounter (Chen, 2018). Sun's early challenge is to gain entry and earn trust. Su's is to make use of skills and principles she has already developed within an organization that controls when and how she can act on them (Dai & Zhang, 2021; Fang, 2020).

3. Professional Growth Through Work Assignments

The Ordinary Glory uses successive projects to show how Sun comes to understand his work. In Episode 34, Sun works with Gao Sicong and the project team to examine online reviews of a video game. At the investment committee meeting, Gao responds to questions about the game's online reputation. The project's approval gives weight to several kinds of work, from reviewing the evidence to coordinating with colleagues and explaining the findings to decision-makers. Sun then pursues a project of his own and earns the founder's confidence, but the project fails to pass the firm's risk review in Episode 35. Placing these two outcomes close together shows the different demands of investment work. Building a relationship with a potential partner is a meaningful achievement, while committing the firm to a project requires a further assessment of risk (Fang, 2020).

After the setback, Sun introduces the prospective partner to his colleague Lin Yuming and hands over the work. Episode 37 also shows Sun's disappointment when he learns that Lin is making progress. Both reactions matter to the characterization. Sun has invested time in the project and hoped to see it through himself, so the handover costs him a working relationship he helped build and a chance to prove what he can do. His disappointment makes the decision more revealing. He continues to act responsibly even when the progress of the project no longer benefits him directly (Fang, 2020).

In *The Ideal City*, the art museum bid puts Su's expertise to a practical test. After Tiancheng wins the bid, Wang Yang worries that the price is so low that the company could lose money. Su responds with a cost management plan that identifies ways to reduce material waste. Winning the bid initially looks like a success. The ensuing discussion changes what that success means, since the price is viable only if the proposed controls can be implemented during construction. Su has to explain her reasoning to the people who will bear the financial risk. The

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scene portrays expertise as the ability to make a judgment, defend it under questioning, and account for the conditions under which it can be put into practice (Dai & Zhang, 2021).

4. Characterization Through Workplace Relationships

Ensemble storytelling can reveal individual traits through differences and connections among characters. Disagreement, mutual support, and competing interests give viewers a basis for interpreting the protagonist's actions (Huang, 2022). In *The Ordinary Glory*, Wu Kezhi gradually comes to trust Sun and allows him to look for a project he can lead within their team's portfolio. That support gives Sun a real opportunity, while the firm's risk review and approval procedures still determine how far he can take it. Lin's eventual takeover of the project also shows how cooperation and competition can coexist between colleagues. Sun depends on others for access to opportunities, and he is responsible for the part of the work entrusted to him. The drama thus portrays him as a newcomer whose development takes place within the ordinary division of work in a team (Fang, 2020).

In *The Ideal City*, Su's interactions with managers change the questions she asks about her work. During the bidding process, Wang Yang is concerned with profit, and Su has to explain how the project's costs can be controlled. During the group's restructuring, she discovers that a manager at Tianhe is pressuring employees to resign in order to reduce the company's costs associated with layoffs. She later proposes a plan for employee share ownership. Her attention has broadened from the cost of a single construction project to who bears the costs of restructuring and who stands to benefit. Su continues to value clear rules, but she now considers how those rules affect people in different positions. Her professional principles deepen as she learns to recognize the interests and constraints of the people affected by organizational decisions (Dai & Zhang, 2021).

5. Objects and Scenes That Convey Professional Identity

The design and use of objects in film and television can connect a character's personality with their surroundings and actions (Sun & Zhao, 2012). In *The Ordinary Glory*, Go serves this purpose. Early in his internship, Sun uses the game to communicate with Daniel. In Episode 34, he discovers that a founder he is due to meet also plays Go, giving them a shared topic and a way to start the conversation. The recurring game connects Sun's earlier life to his new professional relationships. When the project subsequently fails to pass risk review, the limits of that personal skill become clear. Go can help Sun build rapport, while the investment itself still needs to withstand formal scrutiny (Fang, 2020).

In *The Ideal City*, the signature line on the bid and the later proposal for employee share ownership mark two stages in Su's professional development. During the art museum bidding process, Su helps calculate the costs, but Lu Zhengming has to apply his professional seal. A single line on the document brings together three distinct matters: who did the work, who holds the credential, and who is authorized to sign. Later, Su submits the share ownership proposal directly to the group's chair in an effort to shape an organizational decision. The two documents echo each other. Early in the series, she seeks formal recognition for her professional contribution. By the end, she can put forward a proposal that affects employees across the organization and accept scrutiny from those who have the authority to act on it. Through these documents, viewers can see how her position and responsibilities have changed (Dai & Zhang, 2021).

6. Credibility in Narratives of Professional Growth

The most convincing scenes in both series give viewers enough information to follow the relationship between a decision and its consequences. Earning a founder's trust gets Sun's project only as far as the firm's risk review. The way he handles the handover then gives viewers concrete grounds for seeing him as responsible. Su's low bid

and share ownership proposal also meet specific objections. The former raises questions about financial risk, and the latter affects the interests of shareholders and employees. In both dramas, viewers can see what the characters know, how they explain their judgments, and what happens after they act. Industry detail matters because it shapes the choices available to the characters and changes what happens next (Dai & Zhang, 2021; Fang, 2020). The series resolve their character arcs in different ways. In *The Ordinary Glory*, Sun acts responsibly while his own project is still stalled. His growth is visible before the outcome of his career is settled (Fang, 2020). *The Ideal City* resolves the group's power struggle and advances its reform in a short span near the end. This gives Su's story a dramatic conclusion and leaves relatively little time to show how competing interests are reconciled or how the proposal will work in practice. The earlier episode involving employees pressured to resign offers a more concrete account of why Su changes her understanding of the organization. By showing the effects of restructuring on employees, it gives her a clear reason to act. When a workplace drama depicts a character attempting institutional change, it can make that growth more credible by showing how a proposal takes shape, who challenges it, and how it gains support (Dai & Zhang, 2021).

Conclusion

Sun's and Su's growth can be seen in the responsibilities they come to assume. Sun begins by trying to secure a place at the firm. He learns to work with colleagues on shared assignments and to handle a handover even when it means giving up a project he cares about. Su begins by defending the principles of construction cost estimation. Over time, she also considers how decisions made within the organization affect employees' interests. Specific assignments make these changes visible, workplace relationships give rise to credible disagreements, and recurring objects connect earlier and later stages of each story. The depth of a workplace growth narrative depends on what the character can do under pressure, whose interests they learn to consider, and what they are willing to give up in taking responsibility for their choices.

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