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Sign Manipulations Adopted by the Producer, Scriptwriter and Director in Episodes White Deer Plain

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Abstract

This article aimed to study the sign manipulations by the producer, director and the scriptwriter in the White Deer Plain. The sign manipulations by the producer, director and the scriptwriter plays a very important role in the production of the whole TV series. It can be said that the sign manipulation by the director and the scriptwriter lays the core of the whole version of White Deer Plain TV series, which is related to the selection of actors, the development of the plot and the success or failure of the audience rating of the whole TV series. But here we have to mention a more important role is the project investment of the TV drama, the operation of the capital of the TV drama. In general, the sign manipulation in White Deer Plain of TV series starts from the producers and producers, followed by the screenwriters and directors participating in the second level of sign manipulation, and finally, the three-level sign manipulations at the actor level are presented in front of the audience. To be more specific, in the first level of sign manipulations, we can clearly see that sign manipulations exists before the production of the drama. The primary sign manipulations are decided by presenters and producers, so capital operation plays an important role in the shooting process of a TV play, which is related to the capital operation and quality of a TV play. The second level of sign manipulations are the participation of the scriptwriter and the director. The scriptwriter firstly sorts out and reconstructs the plot of the original work. The scriptwriter adapts and delete the plots in the novel with magical color and unsuitable for communication in the mass media, and on the basis of being faithful to the original works, the scriptwriter shows his own values into the positive plots that are preferred by contemporary audiences in the adapted scripts.

Keywords

producer, director and the scriptwriter; sign manipulations; *White Deer Plain*

Introduction

The corpus of this research was selected from the novel *White Deer Plain*, focusing on the inter-characteristics of various sign text modalities (fiction, TV lines and TV series), involving the interaction between sign text interpreters such as authors, scriptwriters, directors, actors, censors, post-producers, audiences, etc.. Sign manipulations were adopted in these processes. It can be said that these sign processes from linguistic signs to TV drama crossmedia and multimedia composite signs are typical sign text. It can be described that the classification of signs are various and the translation scope were wild. Therefore, the research about complexity of the sign process (semiosis) attracts author's interest.

White Deer Plain was a novel created by Chen Zhongshi, who was a famous contemporary Chinese writer. In 1997, this novel won the fourth Maodun Literature Award, which is the highest honor of literature award in China. It can be said that this novel was one of the important achievements in the creation of Chinese novels in the 1990s, and it could reflect the higher level of the novel art in that period. The influence of *White Deer Plain* was not limited to the literary world, but has been adapted into various art forms such as movies, TV dramas, dramas, dance dramas, and Qinqiang opera.

The sign manipulations by the producer, director and the scriptwriter played a very important role in the production of the whole TV series. It can be said that the sign manipulation by the director and the scriptwriter lays the core of the whole version of *White Deer Plain* TV series, which is related to the selection of actors, the development of the plot and the success or failure of the audience rating of the whole TV series. But here we have to mention a more important role is the project investment of the TV drama, the operation of the capital of the TV drama. In this study, the adapted TV series would be analyzed.

In order to make the TV plays recognized and loved by the audience, we must grasp the audience's psychological needs for the TV plays. In order to make the products eventually purchased by the TV drama broadcast organizations, we should fully understand the product characteristics of the TV plays and the market environment they are facing. Therefore, the producer of this TV play is also an important role that cannot be ignored. From signing the copyright with the author to the government's permission to shoot the version of *White Deer Plain* TV play, from the selection of directors and screenwriters to the selection of actors, the producer's sign manipulation is also worth exploring. In this article, firstly, sign manipulations at the producer level will be analyzed in detail. Then, sign manipulations at the screenwriter level will be analyzed. Finally, sign manipulations at the director level will be explored in detail.

Research Objectives

1. What are the sign manipulations adopted by the TV drama producer?
2. What are the sign manipulations adopted by the scriptwriter?
3. What are the sign manipulations adopted by the director?

Literature Review

What kind of role does a producer or producer play in a TV drama? Ai Qiuxing (2019) mentioned that the producer of a TV drama is usually the boss of the film's production company, who conducts preliminary research and analysis on the film market through the power of the company, so as to check the popular trend of the film market in the recent period, the preference of the audience, the popularity of stars and artists, and so on. And then deciding whether or not to produce the film project. Ai (2019) also mentioned that producer is the person in charge of a series of business activities such as planning, production and distribution of specific film and TV series projects on behalf of the producer. It can also be said that the project manager in the production process of film and television series, from the fund to the personnel and then to the sales, all are in charge of the producer. Producers start by finding the right script, then identify the director, the main actors and other staff, and then seek investment from investors or film companies before they begin to shoot the film and television series, including selecting the director, actors, cinematographers, composers, and so on, and working with them.

Zhang Xiaoqian (2020) mentioned that capital is money from the traditional perspective. However, economic capital plays an important role in the development of film culture. The spiritual cultural capital and social capital also have an imperceptible impact on the film culture. To be specific, the investors, the producers, the distributors, and the exhibitors raise a lot of economic capital for the investment, creation, promotion, and screening of a film in order to shoot high quality and connotation of the film works (Zhang, 2020; Ratmanov & Bashkuev, 2021).

Qiu Fei (2017) said that the scriptwriter refers to the person who creates the content of film and television works in the form of words. The most important thing a screenwriter can do is write a great screenplay, which can be original or can be adapted by purchasing the copyright of another writer. Original scriptwriter is the creator of the theme of a film and television work and the soul of the film characters.

Chen Jialin (2013), Chairman of the Working Committee of Chinese Drama Drama Directors, he said that It is the art of teleplay to use modern hi-tech audio-visual means to shoot the static text in the script into a vivid visual image. And the teleplay art needed by the various categories of art fully and effectively organized and mobilized, It is the director's job to complete all the artistic creation of a play under a unified overall grasp. If a TV drama is compared to a building, then the director is its engineering director. According to scholar Qiu Fei (2017), the director refers to the

organizer and leader of the creation and production of film and television works, and the general person in charge of the creation of literary images as visual images.

Scholars' definitions of producers, scriptwriters and directors and the work they do on a film, or a TV show have been well studied. However, no one has studied the role they play in the production process of TV series by means of semiotics. To be more specific, no one has studied the sign manipulations at the level of producers, scriptwriters and directors in the adaptation of a novel into a TV series. Therefore, this article studies this and fills the research gap (Reshetnikov et al., 2021; Reshetnikov & Tregubov, 2021).

Research Methodology

Phenomenological method would be used in the study. To be more specific, firstly, sampling and data collection by conducting observation and reading documents. Secondly, describe and write the experience of the phenomena of sign manipulations in semiotics field. Classify the data and examine the experiences beyond human awareness to achieve the data analysis.

Sign manipulations adopted by the TV drama producer

Ai (2019) mentioned that the producer is a key person in determining the success or failure of a project. He should combine and package the various parts of the project so that it can pass the approval of investors and the approval of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (Ai, 2019). During the creation of the TV series, there are two core characters running through the whole process. One is the producer of the TV series, who has been involved in the production for the longest time. They are responsible for the production management and artistic performance of a TV play. How their performance determines the success of a play. The producer is the organizer, manager and arbiter of the whole production process of a TV play (Liu, 2005).

In the case of *White Deer Plain*, the company that invested in the shooting of White Deer Plain is Xi'an Qujiang, Guangzhong Film and Television Production Co., Ltd, the chairman of the company and one of its TV series producers is Zhao An and Zhao Jun. The chief executive producer is Zhao Jun, the chief producer is Li Xiaobiao, the director is Liu Jin, the screenwriter is Shen Jie. Zhao An, chairman and producer of the film and television company, said that he planned to make a TV version of White Deer Plain about 15 years ago. But the TV version has been put on hold since it has not been approved by the government. In his book on the 15-year history of the TV series, Zhao An talks about the story of the choice in writers, directors and actors. Zhao An said that they visited all the famous Chinese scriptwriters. Everyone thinks that White Deer Plain is a famous book. Everyone wants to become famous by adapting a famous book, but no one is willing to adapt a famous book, because it is too difficult to adapt a famous book and it may be criticized after the adaptation. It is generally accepted

that classics are the hardest to adapt. Zhao An ask for screenwriter Shen Jie and suggested that the adaptation of White Deer Plain should not be too heavy but cater to the culture and aesthetics of the younger generation and add contemporary elements. He also mentioned that Shen Jie was under great pressure to accept the adaptation of the script. The chief executive producer Zhao Jun mentioned that why he chose the screenwriter Shen Jie, he said, they have been working together for about ten years before. Zhao wanted the TV version of White Deer Plain to be the best, so he needed someone who could handle such an epic genre. Later, Zhao adjusted his point of view, believing that Shaanxi also has many good scriptwriters, but he didn't think Shaanxi scriptwriters could be used, because local scriptwriters would be intoxicated with Shaanxi folk customs, which audiences might not like. He considered using a young screenwriter, hoping that his adaptation would resonate with the characters of White Deer Plain for China's post-80s or 90s generation. Therefore, producer wanted the scriptwriter to write a fashionable White Deer Plain, which expresses the lifestyle of the young generation in White Deer Plain. He said that such a turbulent period, and the current reform and opening up period of change can be interactive, interactive tone is that the grandparents' generation also lived a very wonderful life. He doesn't want the whole TV series to be too heavy, nor does he want to describe the show in shaanxi, which he wants is different and fashionable.

From this interview, it can be seen that Zhao an as an investor and producer in the process of shooting *White Deer Plain*. Sign manipulations reflected in the selection of screenwriters. He wants to use young writers. The other level of symbol manipulation is reflected in the setting of the tone of the whole TV series. He hopes to shoot the White Deer Plain that is acceptable to the young generation of audiences. Zhao An and Zhao Jun, chairman and director of the film and television company, have the right to choose between the writers and directors. It can be seen from Figure 1 that the capital operation behind film and television plays an important role in today's Chinese film and television industry.

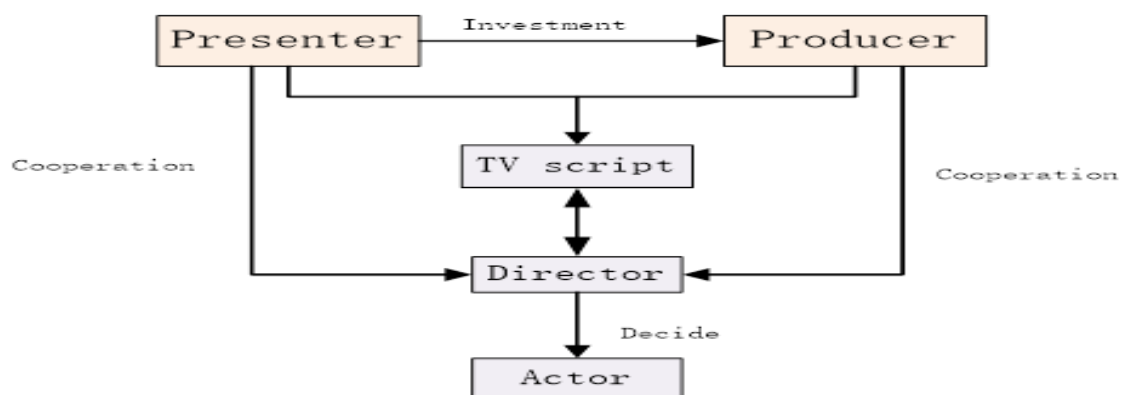


Figure 1: The relationship between the relevant people in the TV series of White Deer Plain

Sign manipulations adopted by the Scriptwriter

Zhang Fan (2019) writes that as for the text of TV series, the narrative length is relatively long, and its artistic function focuses on providing a way of entertainment. Generally, creators will not express too profound and complex themes through the art form of TV series. With the progress and development of time, according to the different levels of education of audiences, the creators generally choose the TV series as the artistic carrier to convey universal values and conform to the lifestyle of the people (Zhang, 2019). Therefore, we can see that the sign manipulation at the scriptwriter level is reflected in the modification of the original story plot and the reconstruction of the characters in the novel.

In the level of the sign manipulations in the plot. First of all, the scriptwriter changed the event of the Jiao Nong in the novel. Li Qian (2019) believes that TV dramas pay more attention to the reasonable construction of benevolence and justice, reflecting the profound reflection on traditional culture, which is of positive significance to the promotion of fine traditional culture to a certain extent.

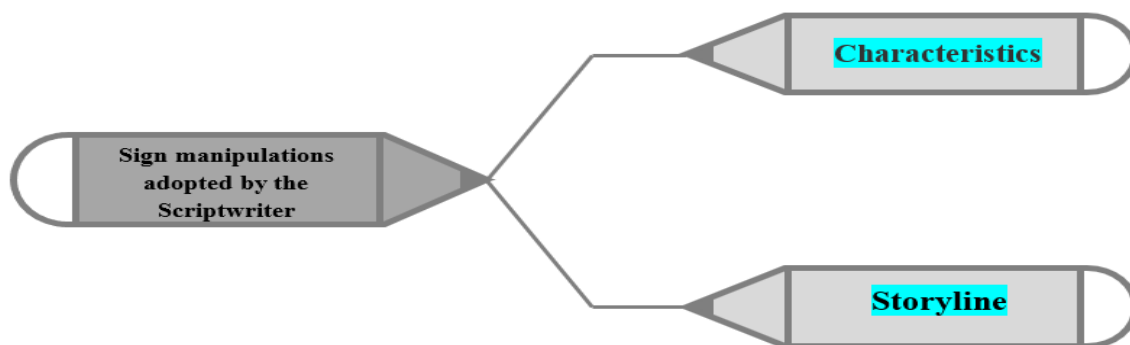


Figure 2: Sign manipulations adopted by the Scriptwriter

Scriptwriter's sign manipulations of characters. In the TV series of *White Deer Plain*, the scriptwriters create characters different from the original works by changing the plot. Bai Jiaxuan, for example, is a stubborn and rigid man in the novel. His role represents the patriarchal image in the feudal society at that time. However, in the interpretation and understanding of the screenwriter, Bai Jiaxuan in the script should highlight the character in line with the characteristics of the current era. The author writes Tian Xiao'e with many sexual descriptions in the original work, but the sex scenes have been cut due to Chinese policy restrictions. At the same time, Tian Xiao'e's disinhibited side has also been weakened. In the TV series, Tian Xiao'e has been adapted by the screenwriter to highlight the characteristics of tenderness and compassion, which makes the audience feels more understanding and sympathy for Tian Xiao'e's tragic story and reflect the situation on the Chinese women of that era. And it is also in line with the author's connotation of the role of Tian Xiao'e, that is,

the Times caused the tragedy of Tian Xiao'e.

When talking about the character adaptation of the novel, the writer Chen Zhongshi said that his favorite character is Bai Ling, because she serves as the symbolic role of the spirit of the White Deer on the *White Deer Plain*, and also represents the progressive new women of that era (Liu, 2017). The screenwriter also brought his own preferences and values to the adaptation of Bai Ling. Therefore, in the TV series of *White Deer Plain*, the audiences can see the lively and clever side of Bai Ling, as well as the reckless side of Bai Ling in the revolution, and the emotional entanglement between her and the two brothers of the Lu's family. The adaptation of the character of Bai Ling can appeal to the post-80s and post-90s audiences in China, because these young audiences can see the same spirit of devoting themselves to love and the country, and the character of Bai Ling is also a positive guide.

Shen Jie (Cai, 2017) has been mentioned in an interview that the most difficult character to adapt are Lu Zilin and Lu Zhaopeng. In the original novel, Lu Zilin's character is treacherous and cunning, and his incest and restless character leads him to have many illegitimate children in the original novel. The scriptwrits weaken the evil side of Lu Zilin's human nature in the adaptation and the manipulation of symbols, and Lu Zilin in the TV series is a bit humorous and smooth. "I tried to add something comedic to the fight between the two families, to turn him into a hateful and lovable person, to make the audience feel his selfishness and narrow-minded. At the same time, Lu Zilin is good at infighting, but the bottom line is that he cannot betray the white deer two generations of land, cannot betray his son." said by Shen Jie (Cai, 2017). It can be said that Lu Zilin is an extremely complex farmer with the characteristics of selfishness and cunning, but the complexity of the character requires the scriptwriting to show his rich personality characteristics. Therefore, in the process of adaptation, the scriptwriter thought that Lu Zilin was the most difficult character to interpret.

It can be seen that the sign manipulations at the level of screenwriter is reflected in the expansion and deletion of the characters' storylines. He added a large amount of display and description to Lu Zhaopeng, a figure representing the positive image of communism, which is also directly related to Chinese ideology. This part will be elaborated in Chapter 4. Another point worth confirming is that the screenwriter will adapt the characters according to the audience's preferences. This is also the embodiment of sign manipulations in the screenwriter-level.

In the novel, the relationship between Bai Xiaowen and Tian Xiao'e is in violation of traditional marriage ethics anyway, but in the adaptation of the TV series, several key plots were added, so that their relationship has the connotation of love and life continuation. To a certain extent, it conforms to the inherent requirements of human nature and the ethics of love. It not only reinforces the tragic fate of the characters, but also makes the audience more sympathetic and understanding of them.

In the TV series *White Deer Plain*, the added love plots mainly include when Lu Heiwa brought Tian Xiao'e home, he first met Bai Xiaowen, and Bai Xiaowen secretly liked Tian Xiao'e; During the great famine, Bai Xiaowen sent food to Tian Xiao'e; after Lu Heiwa escaped, the Kuomintang wanted to arrest Tian Xiao'e, and Bai Xiaowen took the risk to report her. The addition of these plots has greatly enriched the emotional drama between Bai Xiaowen and Tian Xiao'e.

Although Lu Zilin instructed and even forced Tian Xiao'e to seduce Bai Xiaowen in order to retaliate against Bai Jiaxuan, but with the foreshadowing of the aforementioned plot, Tian Xiao'e and Bai Xiaowen together are not only revenge, but also a little love. The news of Lu Heiwa's death brought Tian Xiao'e back to being single, which also made their relationship more in line with modern love ethics. As a result, this intensification of ethical narratives enriched the characters and at the same time allowed the audience to better understand and accept the relationship between them.

The TV drama version of *White Deer Plain* almost continues the fate and characteristics of the characters in the novel. Of course, the TV series and the novel are two completely different art forms. When translating the text language into a visual image, the director still made corresponding adjustments to the characters. In the TV series, female characters are added, and there is a sharp contrast between the female groups with distinct personalities, which deeply impressed the audience. It magnifies the opposition between the characters' relationships, exposes the character contrast, and increases the interest of the story. Of course, the revolutionary strengthening of Bai Ling, Bai Jiaxuan and Lu Zhaopeng in the TV series. To a certain extent, it is the compromise made by the director for the audience's daily aesthetic expectations and the TV drama market. Although the TV series did not fully present the characters of the original characters, compared with the original books, the TV series gave the audience a stronger sense of substitution.

Sign manipulations adopted by the director

The director is based on the script, with his own artistic creation, the use of sound and painting and other TV art means to finally complete the script text to the TV image of the TV work. The director's work includes revising the script before production, selecting actors and creative staff from various departments, mastering the style of all artistic treatment in production, and accurately positioning the music editing and dynamic effects in the post-production period (Liu, 2005). The director should have a full and accurate understanding of the plot and character of the film to ensure that the film produces the artistic effect it should have (Liu, 2005). The director should give full play to his artistic personality and creative potential in the production process of a TV play (Liu, 2005).

Chen Jialin (2013) said that the director's job to complete all the artistic creation of a play under a unified overall grasp. Huang Yan (2021) mentioned in his

thesis on the constitutive relationship between the director and the actors in "Actors please take their place" that the functions of the director are mainly embodied in three parts in the concrete presentation. The first is to select and adapt the script; the second is to select and guide the actors to perform; the third is to fully dispatch other functional departments such as service, photography, and recording to cooperate with the actors to complete the role modeling (Huang, 2021). During the filming of the TV series *White Deer Plain*, actress Qin Hailu once mentioned the relationship and state between the director and the actors, from which the shadow of sign manipulations can also be seen. Qin Hailu said that directors and actors are a process of mutual encouragement. It cannot be ruled out that TV, film, and drama are different from simple photography and painting. It is a manifestation of comprehensive art, so when they are integrated, each staff of the department may have to play their own opinions. Not only the director, the actors, but also the photography, art, and props sector, all of them will do a lot of work for a scene, express their opinions, and make the TV series well (Qin, 2017, pp.41, ct. from Drama crew of *White Deer Plain*, 2017).

The powerful actress Qin Hailu played the role of Xian Cao. In the interview, she talked about the advantages of the adaptation of the TV series *White Deer Plain* and the most impressive part of the script after the adaptation. Because he is a powerful actress and has very rich experience in acting, Qin Hailu also gave some suggestions when the director asked to delete some scenes and plots. For example, when the director wanted to delete Bai Ling and Lu Zhaopeng's play in Zishui County. Qin Hailu thought that this part could not be deleted. The director took into account the progress and difficulty of filming, but if this part of the play was deleted, then the entire play would be lost and incomplete. After she discussed it with the director, the director also felt that it should not be deleted. Therefore, the actor and actress' correct understanding of the script also affects the integrity of the TV series' story. In other words, it means that the sign manipulations at the actor level is not only the sign manipulations at the level of clothing, makeup, and acting, but also involves the sign manipulation at the actor and actress' ideological level.

Conclusion

In general, the sign manipulation in *White Deer Plain* of TV series starts from the producers and producers, followed by the screenwriters and directors participating in the second level of sign manipulation, and finally, the three-level sign manipulations at the actor level are presented in front of the audience. To be more specific, in the first level of sign manipulations, we can clearly see that sign manipulations exists before the production of the drama. The primary sign manipulations are decided by presenters and producers, so capital operation plays an important role in the shooting process of a TV play, which is related to the capital operation and quality of a TV play. The second level of sign manipulations are the participation of the scriptwriter and the

director. The scriptwriter firstly sorts out and reconstructs the plot of the original work. The scriptwriter adapts and delete the plots in the novel with magical color and unsuitable for communication in the mass media, and on the basis of being faithful to the original works, the scriptwriter shows his own values into the positive plots that are preferred by contemporary audiences in the adapted scripts.

It can be said that the explicit sign manipulations in the whole TV play is reflected in the above three levels. Through the shooting from the original work to the script and then to the TV series, can we understand the nature of sign manipulations after people’s subjective and objective influences in sign activities. As the subject of sign activities, man carries meaning and produces in the sign manipulations in the semiosis. In other words, sign manipulation is a human activity, and the subject and key of sign manipulation is human. From the perspective of project planning of *White Deer Plain*, shooting and screening of this TV drama, people’s symbolic activities are hierarchical and recursive.

To sum up, according to Peirce’s theory of semiotics, the first category of sign manipulation is the producer and producer, here, I want to call it Primary sign manipulation. To be more specific, initially, they manipulated the novel from the copyright to the approval of the project and then to the preparation of the follow-up TV series. Secondly, the second level of sign manipulation is called the secondary sign manipulation, which involves the sign manipulation of scriptwriters and directors. It can be said that the key of a TV drama is the adaptation of the script and the understanding of director and interpretation of the novel and the script on the basis of the public aesthetic level. Finally, the third level of sign manipulations is the tertiary sign manipulation. The tertiary sign manipulation takes place in the actor and actress, Actors and actresses interpret characters in novels and scripts through lines, body language, expressions and acting skills, thus creating the tertiary sign manipulation and endowing characters with new meanings in the novel and TV series.

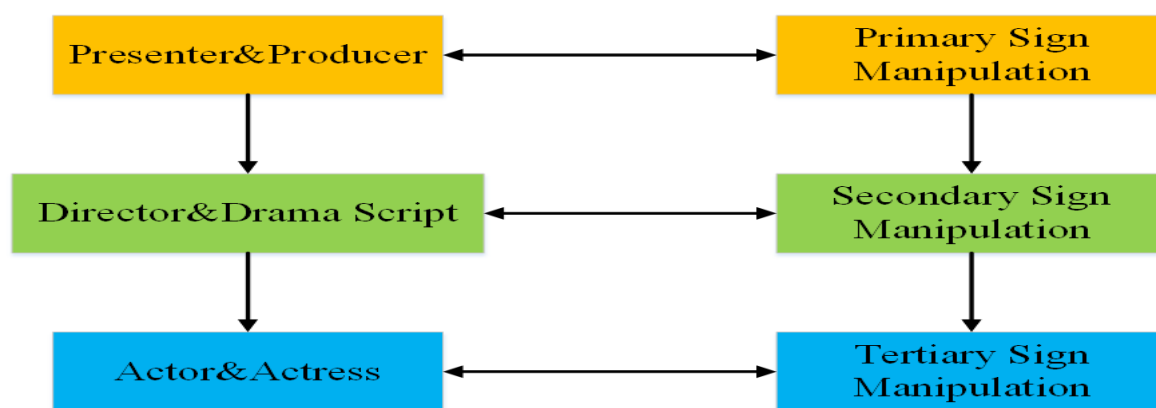


Figure 3: The relationship between the subject of sign manipulation in 3 levels in the TV series of *White Deer Plain*

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