

A Preliminary Study on the Innovative Narrative Mode of Traditional Evening Parties: Taking A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival by Henan Satellite TV as an example

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Abstract. Recent years has witnessed China's vigorous promotion of the excellent traditional Chinese culture. And major TV channels have launched numerous outstanding programs and works, among which the series of "Chinese Festivals" released by Henan Satellite TV has achieved "success across fields". Not only does it provide a good example for the re-creation and dissemination of traditional culture, but it also presents a new trend of inheriting, innovating and developing excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Henan Satellite TV, traditional culture, cultural code, narrative means, global communication.

1. Introduction

After the success of *A Night Banquet in the Tang Palace* in the Spring Festival Gala, Henan Satellite TV later launched a series of cultural shows about Chinese festivals such as *An Amazing Night of Qingming Festival* and *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival*, which injects new vitality into the excellent traditional Chinese culture and brings new enlightenment to the audiovisual innovation of the gala as well as the promotion of traditional culture. Taking *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival* as an example, this paper attempts to analyze its narrative practice from three perspectives, that is, cultural code, narrative means and global communication.

2. The Fusion of Traditional Cultural Code and National Image

As the deep cultural structure of a society, cultural code refers to the specific thinking tendency, value orientation and action mode of individuals living in the culture. Stuart Hall, a British scholar, believes that the shared cultural code is the reflection of national image and cultural identity, which provides us with a stable and continuous frame of meaning under the changing historical experience.

[1] In the evening party *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival*, traditional cultural symbols are integrated with national imagery, and play an important role in spatial integration and character shaping.

2.1 Program materials: excellent traditional Chinese culture and local characteristic culture of Henan

In the evening party *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival*, the program is mostly derived from traditional customs, skills and local culture of Henan, combining highly representative ethnic elements and cultural symbols into codes to form a unique aesthetic style. [2] Some people say, "The history of Henan is almost half of China's history; touching and stepping on it reminds people of the Spring and Autumn culture and Qin and Han dynasties. [3] In fact, Henan is the birthplace of Central Plain culture, and therefore Henan Satellite TV has always been inheriting and promoting traditional Chinese culture. From the drama program *Spring in the Pear Garden* launched in 1994 to the cultural programs such as *Chinese Spelling Hero* and *Idioms Hero* launched in recent years, they all reflect that the Henan Satellite TV has always been true to its original aspiration and the concept of advancing with the times, which also lays a foundation for the "success across fields" and "going viral" of the series of evening parties. Instead of instilling and piling up boring historical knowledge,

A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival innovates by integrating various “real objects” into the performance, providing the audience with an immersive experience. For example, *Fair Ladies* and *Dragon Boat Fete* merges *Beauties over Centuries*, *Dragon Boat Race in the Jinming Pool* and other ancient paintings into the performance, making cultural relics with national and local characteristics become the “spokesman” of traditional culture. Besides, with the dancer incarnating the “Goddess”, an underwater dance *Qi* draws on the artistic elements in the Flying Apsaras in Dunhuang Murals to create the spectacle of underwater dance, taking the audience into *Goddess of Luo River* by Cao Zhi. The interpretation of “dancing gracefully like a swan and agilely like a Chinese dragon” activates the classical poems and shows the audience the charm of excellent traditional culture. And in *The Seal of Tang*, its fusion of puppetry and dance allows the audience to enter the unique Chinese aesthetic world. During the Tang Dynasty when there were close exchanges with other countries, ambassadors from Japan brought back the *Song of Lanling King Going to the Battlefield* which the Japanese cherished as an orthodox piece of elegant music. This song enjoys both a stern atmosphere and a feeling of homesickness. It seems to be missing relatives far away from home, but in fact, it is a reminiscence of traditional skills. Also known as the puppet show, puppetry is the earliest drama with a performance function in Chinese history. The combination of puppetry and dance differs from the simple splicing of similar programs in that it establishes a new visual code system.^[4] The evening party emphasizes the innovation of symbolic expression mechanism, places national elements such as poems, songs, and music at the core of the symbolic system, and highlights the national style and appearance so that the traditional cultural symbols keep up with the times while retaining the national aesthetic characteristics, achieving the organic integration of tradition and modernity.

2.2 Program content: nationalization of content and expression dimensions

A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival is also innovative in content. The program attaches great importance to the nationalization of content and expression dimensions, and uses the typicality and stability of traditional cultural codes to combine and weave clothing, modeling, scenes and other symbols. That is how the show fully integrates national images, absorbs the current popular culture and aesthetic taste of teenagers, and activates the traditional cultural codes. Harold Innis puts in *The Bias of Communication* that both communication and communication media have biases, that is, oral bias, written bias, temporal bias and spatial bias.^[5] The nature of communication media often determines the bias of civilization in time or space. According to the above classification, the Flying Apsaras in Dunhuang Murals, as a carrier of culture, belongs to the time-biased medium that has a long retention time but is difficult to disseminate over long distances. As media with temporal bias require strong visual interpretation ability, effective communication can be realized only when communicators and receivers have basically the same cultural background and semantic space. However, the creativity of *Qi* by Henan Satellite TV lies in the commonality of contemporary media communication, so that viewers across the country can enjoy the “dynamic” Dunhuang murals. It is not simply the mechanized duplication of photos, but the artistic reproduction with “spiritual charm”. This reproduction also forms a collective memory in the minds of all audiences and becomes a symbolic element in the memory legacy of a group. Therefore, when audiences across the country watch the underwater dance *Qi* through various media channels, they are looking back on the history of their own nation in the common meaning space, and building up the imagination and memory of the nation’s long culture in the Internet era. For example, the program *Fair Ladies* originates in the long narrative poem of the same name written by Du Fu, a poet in the Tang Dynasty. The description of the life of the “fair ladies” expresses the accusation and rebuke of the arrogance of Yang Guifei and her siblings. The opening of the show was accompanied by the painting *Beauties over Centuries* by Qiu Ying of the Ming Dynasty, and the dancers wear the “Oblique Red” makeup of the Tang Dynasty -- they put on head ornaments, wipe oblique red, and point dimples, highly restoring the costumes of the ladies in the Tang Dynasty. In the use of props, a large number of traditional Chinese artifacts such as small-mouthed pointed-bottom bottles, lutes and puppet shows are incorporated to show the charm of national culture in all aspects.^[6] In addition, the program also features highly

recognizable traditional cultural images such as ink and wash paintings, traditional Chinese herbs and Chinese drums. It revitalizes historic buildings and scenes including the Longmen Grottoes, Yingtian Gate and Xianmen Mountain in Mianchi Lake, thus realizing cultural symbolization and enriching the audience's imagination and longing for the Great Tang Dynasty, which is in line with both the national culture and the aesthetic characteristics of the times.

3. Accurate Grasp of Narrative Perspective, Narrative Timing and Narrative Means

The pioneering work of China's television gala is the *Laughing Party* founded by Beijing TV station in about 1960 when the "evening party" referred to a gathering held in the evening with mainly cultural and entertainment programs. Up to now, most television parties simply organize drama, music, dance, sketch and other programs together to combine arts and entertainment with the help of hosts. In contrast, *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival* bears a series of atypical characteristics of an evening party. It has neither a host, nor a household celebrity guest, and each party lasts even less than an hour. The evening party breaks through the conventional pattern of the traditional gala with a unique narrative perspective, appropriate narrative timing and a combination of real and imaginary narrative means, realizing the innovative combination of Chinese excellent traditional culture and television literary gala.

3.1 Narrative perspective: The first perspective of the "net drama and net variety" model

The party innovatively adopts the form of "net drama and net variety" and successfully creates the image of the brand IP "Tang Sisters". The evening party takes the first view of the four "Tang sisters" as a parallel narrative perspective, and pulls out four rich and interesting story lines. Tang Xiaoyu, who is forbearing and bold, is the first to appear. She participates in the competition on the dock, through which the two programs *Qi* and *Dragon Boat Fete* are introduced to show the traditional customs of dragon boat racing and drinking realgar wine at Dragon Boat Festival. Then, with the melody of the lute, Tang Xiaocai comes to the stage. She excels in playing the lute and aspires to be a top musician. However, her father, also good at playing the lute, goes to the East with the Japanese envoys dispatched to the Tang Dynasty and never comes back. Her mother cannot accept it and does not allow her to play again. There are two lines, or two pairs of contradictions running through the story. One is the conflict between Xiaocai's love for music and her mother's misunderstanding, and the other is the contradiction between her father's firm and sincere patriotism and his longing for home and family. When the *Song of Lanling King Going to the Battlefield* is played, the performance is brought to a climax with the lute and the drums, the Nara Imperial Palace and the cliff waterfall mirroring each other. The third one is Tang Xiaoke, who travels north and south with unique skills. In *Zongzi and Noodles*, Tang Xiaoke watches juggling and tastes food in the street market, bringing the audience to enjoy the rich atmosphere of the Tang Dynasty. The last sister is Tang Xiaozhu who has superb medical skills. She is able to pick herbs in the mountains and make medicines all by herself. The song *Successor of Medical Sage* not only introduces the extensive and profound traditional Chinese medicine culture, but also presents to the audience the spirit of doctors who are dedicated to saving lives and helping the injured. In addition, in terms of character design, the four "Tang Sisters" are very different in personality, which shows national style and caters to contemporary aesthetic features. In terms of characterization, they are real and multidimensional, with courage and pursuit as well as rebellion and shortcomings. Their individuality and independence well fit the traits of character that young people today all pursue. The emerging model of "net drama and net variety" combines the artistry of traditional evening parties with the fun of variety shows and the narrativity of feature films, arousing the wide resonance of emerging groups in the Z era to a greater extent and conforming to the development trend of the times and the market.

3.2 Narrative timing: the rise of “Chinese trend” culture and the innovation of traditional festivals

The globalized cultural context has accelerated the penetration and integration between human civilizations and cultures. In the process of China’s integration into the world, traditional Chinese culture has encountered unprecedented impact. Western culture has invaded strongly, making traditional Chinese festivals less popular. And comments belittling or even completely denying Chinese culture have emerged in an endless stream. However, Chinese culture still has strong vitality and the Chinese people have not lost their cultural confidence. In the contact and exchange with Western culture, Chinese people are increasingly aware that only the culture born on the land of China, created and inherited by the Chinese people, and with Chinese characteristics and Chinese style is the root and soul that we can never leave. In recent years, the country has been vigorously promoting the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, setting off a “Chinese trend” aesthetic craze with both classical style and modern flavor. In fact, the popularity of the Chinese trend reflects the country’s attention to traditional culture and people’s improvement confidence in Chinese culture. Some of the young people in China, though showing a preference for Korean and Japanese culture, have realized that part of the culture of Japan and South Korea originated from ancient China. With a history of 5,000 years, China has its own cultural crystallization. Under the proposition of adhering to cultural self-confidence and promoting excellent traditional culture, Henan Satellite TV has seized the opportunity to highlight strong cultural self-awareness and national root-seeking consciousness in its program production. The program *Dragon Boat Fete* recreates the grand scene of people’s rituals on the eve of the Dragon Boat Festival. The camouflage on the actors’ faces is mysterious and thick, exuding wildness and tension. The scenery of the Yellow River and dark clouds switches back and forth in the picture, and the ritual dance full of masculinity is fused with acrobatics, presenting a strong sense of history and culture. Underlying this majestic atmosphere is the cultural heritage of five thousand years which shows a strong sense of ritual for the Dragon Boat Festival sacrifice and evokes the national emotional identity of the public.

In addition to conforming to the country’s efforts to develop traditional Chinese culture, Henan Satellite TV is also creative in creating series programs. The program team seizes the timing of the traditional 24 solar terms and traditional festivals in the creation of a series of evening parties, such as *A Wonderful Tour of Qingming Festival*, *A Wonderful Tour of Spring Equinox*, *A Wonderful Tour of Mid-Autumn Festival*, and *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival*. In each traditional festival and solar term, it retains the authenticity of the festival while constantly innovating the old. On the occasion of the Dragon Boat Festival in memory of Qu Yuan, the program creatively produces the underwater dance *Qi* which is as amazing as a chorus, and *Dragon Boat Fete* which is full of wildness and strength. What the party shows is not only the accumulation of cultural elements, but also an effective connection between history and the audience to realize the “resurrection” of culture. The interpretation of many programs is based on the timing of traditional solar terms and festivals, and is constantly in line with the network culture and popular culture to stimulate the audience’s sense of national identity.

3.3 Narrative means: the use of emerging technologies to empower the restoration of real historical space

In the context of the new media era, Henan Satellite TV actively introduces 3D, AR, 5G and other emerging technologies to make traditional cultural programs shine again with the addition of science and technology. In the *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival*, the program combines the comic form with the live-action shooting to explore the personal story of the “Tang Sisters” in the hyperspace context, enhancing the audience’s sense of scene and reality. For example, in the section on the dragon boat race, vivid and colorful cartoons are used to show the bustle of the market before the Dragon Boat Festival and the excitement of the people when they see the dragon boat race is about to start. In the section of Tang Xiaocai, cartoons are also used to popularize the foreign relations and the general cultural background of the Tang Dynasty, so that the audience can have a stronger

empathy with Tang Xiaocai's family after knowing the situation. And in the show *Qi*, the creative team relies on mature underwater photography technology, adopts time-space condensation shooting, and obtains the pictures with the perspective of instantaneous movement through the multi-camera array, ultimately achieving beautiful, gorgeous, multi-dimensional underwater visual effects. As Pen Lan said, "This kind of enhancement is not a rough combination, but a delicate and seamless integration." The empowerment of emerging technology intermingles rich virtual scenes and choreography, blends thick history with vivid reality, and multiplies the realism of actors in it, thus creating an immersive stage of *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival*.

4. Short Video Thinking and Integrated Media Platform to Achieve Global Communication

The pursuit of traditional TV programs for "success across fields" means that we have ushered in an era of digital aesthetics for variety shows, and short video variety shows have therefore come into being. The emergence of the short-video variety show is not only a beneficial practice for mainstream media to consciously respond to the call for media integration, but also a necessity for digital thinking. [7] While some TV stations and media adhere to the ideal concept of "presence" in traditional TV and still think that the TV viewing mode is located in a specific time and space, Henan Satellite TV has already taken advantage of digitalization and takes the lead over other platforms through the innovation in the communication channels and communication stages.

4.1 Communication channels: multi-dimensional media coordination to enhance communication

In the process of the gradual formation of the integrated media environment and the deepening of mobile Internet thinking, the short video has become the expressive text of the new era. [8] Given the current huge and complex online audience, the program team precisely positions the audience group from the beginning and fully takes into account the suitability of the media audience. It has shifted the communication mindset from TV stations to integrated media, and has changes the communication mechanism to give priority to new media platforms and mobile terminals, and then feed the TV stations and big screen terminals. The evening party continuously expands the media platform through the linkage of production and broadcast as well as large and small screens. In full compliance with the law of content production and communication under the current network ecological environment, it carefully designs a series of topics and aesthetic points suitable for dissemination on social platforms in the form of short videos, which are broadcast and reprinted on official platforms such as Elephant News and People's Daily. Furthermore, it achieves cross-screen interaction with the audience by presenting and sharing in various forms, including graphics and texts, audios and videos, comic strips and so on in the media ecological environment such as the WeChat Channels and the Client of the TV station. For example, Henan Satellite TV slices the single program of *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival* into multiple versions, such as the pure enjoyment version, the high rock version, the condensed version and the high-definition version, which is more convenient for mobile viewing and dissemination, fully catering to the fragmented and interesting needs of the audience nowadays. The party's transformation from a single TV platform to an Internet platform has already formed a "decentralized" communication pattern. This "decentralized" communication structure makes every user a node in the information transmission network, integrating program information reception, secondary production and dissemination. [9] Friends with common hobbies can gather together and interact with each other by liking, posting pop-ups and re-tweeting, participating in the expression, commenting, interpretation and re-dissemination of the content. This three-dimensional communication network, which integrates interpersonal, organizational and mass communication, further expands the scope and space of communication. At present, the single program *Fair Ladies* has more than 813,000 views and more than 61,000 likes on Bilibili, while the underwater program *Qi* has more than 25.68 million views and more than 193,000

likes on Weibo. Through the push of new media platforms, the party has successfully broken through the time and space restrictions and also makes the program form a long-tail effect after the broadcast, maintaining the popularity of the program for a long time. The broadcast volume continues to increase, and the guiding power and influence of the program keep growing.

4.2 Communication stages: Staged communication enhances user stickiness

Henan Satellite TV divides the communication stage of the evening party into three stages: early stage, middle stage and late stage. In the concept of “participatory culture” proposed by Jenkins, the Internet users will actively create media texts, disseminate media content and strengthen online interactions by establishing identity through certain relationships. ^[10] Through different stages of marketing, Henan Satellite TV builds a common space of meaning with viewers and achieves a strong sense of identity.

In the early warm-up stage, WeChat H5 pages, mini apps, Weibo @ and other ways are flexibly used to form a nationwide interactive atmosphere to increase the audience’s sense of experience and participation. Before the program was broadcast, the program team launched online topics such as “#Name Tang Sisters Together#” and “#Tang Sisters Where Are You#”, allowing the public to participate in part of the program creation. Only when traditional culture embraces the present and actively integrates into the aesthetic system of young people can cultural inheritance and innovation be truly realized. In addition, the program also actively guides the audience to consciously understand and explore traditional cultural stories, and encourages the audience to think and supplement the audio-visual content based on relevant books and materials as well as their own experience and common sense. For example, if the audience wants to have a full perception of the *Song of Lanling King Going to the Battlefield*, they need to first understand the background of foreign exchanges in the Tang Dynasty. That is how they can further interpret the profound connotations behind the *Song of Lanling King Going to the Battlefield* and the poem *Night Rain* by Bai Juyi.

The traditional media and new media platforms with great domestic influence enjoy many resources and strong strength, but they have not played a leading role in inheriting and promoting the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Instead, they continue to follow the “capital + star + traffic” way. The content of such programs is far from people’s real life, and the way of communication is rigid and conservative. In the middle stage of communication, the program actively contacted and cooperated with other platforms, which has formed a relatively complete all-media dissemination matrix. The evening party is relayed on multiple platforms including Weibo, the WeChat official account, Elephant News and China Media Group (CMG) Mobile, which transformed the communication relationship between the program and the audience from one-way and linear communication under the traditional large-screen mode to the two-way and non-linear communication under the multi-screen linkage mode.

In the later stage, the program group continues to create topics to sustain the popularity of the party and extend the life cycle of the program. First of all, the program team leaves new suspense about the story of the four “Tang Sisters” entering the palace at the end of the party, which arouses the audience’s expectations for “Tang Sisters’ Palace Journey” and brings a new wave of discussion. Secondly, Henan Satellite TV together with @Weibo Hot spots, @Weibo Bomeology, @Weibo Art, and @Henan Museum releases related topics like “# Hand-painted Contest on *A Wonderful Tour of Dragon Boat Festival*#”, “#HD Wallpaper of the *Wonderful Tour*#” to guide the audience to participate in the secondary processing and dissemination of the content. As Jenkins pointed out in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* that fans who actively participate in the construction of the textual meaning through the secondary creation of TV texts are not only the poachers of the text, but also the hunters. ^[11] The decentralized platform of social media provides audiences with more space to participate in text creation. Everyone can communicate and share in real-time. Not only do the audiences participate in the secondary processing and dissemination of the content, but they also promote the updating and creation of the original media content, forming a decentralized and explosive communication path.

5. Conclusion

Excellent traditional culture contains the deep spiritual pursuit and imprint of the Chinese nation. Culture should not only be exported, but also protected and inherited. At the time when popularity and entertainment are the top priority, Henan Satellite TV has braved to explore history and culture, to innovate and produce programs carefully. By integrating modern aesthetics and stories and endowing the characteristics of the new era, it adds vitality to the communication of traditional culture, and provides a beneficial reference for other satellite TV. Provincial media in China shoulder the important task of consolidating the main position of public opinion and serving as the main force of communication. They should have the courage to break the old and establish the new, and constantly promote the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture so that traditional culture can radiate new vitality in this era.

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