

A Study of the Aesthetic Characteristics in the Program of Chinese Poetry Competition

Na Gao ^{1, a}, Jiale Ruan ^{2, b}

¹School of literature and journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu 610064, China;

²School of literature and journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu 610064, China.

^askylargn@163.com, ^byindengyuxiao@sina.com

Abstract

The innovative cultural program "Chinese Poetry Competition" has started a national poetry carnival by its novel and easily accepted program design. Based on the characteristics of TV programs as well as the aesthetic characteristics and modern vision of Chinese Poetry Competition, this paper analyzed its road to success from the perspective of traditional culture.

Keywords

Poetry Competition, Aesthetic Characteristics, Participatory Features, Traditional Culture.

1. Introduction

Every historical period of human development will generate a corresponding cultural form. As a modern audio-visual art established on industry, film and TV series which has similar audio-visual forms appeared one after another, and they have almost the same artistic language and image laws in terms of motion pictures, electronic sound and montage techniques and so on. Any art is a reasonable representation of the material world and the emotional world by the creation subject according to aesthetic rules and principles of form, i.e., "a significant form" (Clive Bell). TV program, as one of the artistic forms, also has its unique structure and aesthetic characteristics by the light of nature.

China is a country of poetry, and the historical accumulation of verses, ditties, odes and songs (the four forms of poetry) has left great spiritual wealth for the Chinese descendants. As the old sayings go: "poetry is to express mind, song is a language to express mind, pitch should be tuned to the rhythm of songs, and rhythm should be harmonious with the five pentatonic scales; "poetry comes from aspiration"; "poetry is for people to express their ambition; it will be a poem if the ambition is embedded in heart and a song if it is expressed by language; an emotion is included in the poem and expressed in the language"; there is no doubt that all these expounded the artistic state where a poetry is used to express ego ideal, aspiration, and ambition, as well as thoughts and feelings to master the world. Aiming to appreciate Chinese poetry, look for cultural genes, and taste the beauty of life, the Chinese Poetry Competition strives to lead the public to review all the ancient and modern classic poems through competition and appreciation of Chinese poetry knowledge, to share the beauty and the interest of poetry; it encourages the public to draw from and be enlightened by the wisdom and feelings of the ancient and modern literati and political thinkers, as well as to obtain spirit consolation. "Entertainment is the super-ideology of all discourses on television." [1] Chinese Poetry Competition harbors both the connotation aesthetics of classical poetry and entertainment nature of television programs. Undoubtedly, exploring its ontological characteristics and summarizing its aesthetic rules are sure to bring benefits to the creation and development of current TV programs.

2. Ontological Characteristics

2.1 Inevitable Requirements of original TV Programs.

The transformation of TV programs from imitation forms to introduction of copyright is regarded as a constant standardization process of gearing to international conventions of Chinese TV programs. It is no secret that Jiangsu TV's program *If You Are the One* (imitated the American TV

program Take Me Out), Dragon TV's China's Got Talent (purchased the copyright of UK's Britain's Got Talent), Zhejiang TV's Running Man" (purchased the copyright of Korea's Running Man), and so on, have surely make reality shows reach an unprecedented climax. This vicious competition results in a serious problem of homogenization of TV programs; thus, the programs quickly lose their novelty and their broadcasting cycles are greatly shortened.

The launch of the Chinese Poetry Competition is based on the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese culture, and furthermore, it is a need of cultural development and innovation. Compared with other variety shows, this kind of programs is not flattering, ostentatious, fabricated without facts, or deliberately mystifying. The participants compete by their own strength without affectation in addition to simple introductions. It is cozy and enjoyable to watch such a program after busy days of work, and it is stress-free and interesting. In addition, the program itself has a foothold of carrying forward the studies of Chinese ancient civilization, looks back at China's splendid history and culture for over five thousand years; enables the public to draw nutritive and reasonable art design and form construction from the wisdom and feelings of the ancient and modern poets, writers, as well as people with lofty ideals. It is the inevitable choice of tele-viewer's "copyright aesthetics".

2.2 Novel and Accessible Program Design.

The quiz program has always been characterized by liveliness and entertainment, humor, and brings information or leisure and entertainment to the audiences through lively activities. The program design of the Chinese Poetry Competition (Season 2) has changed greatly by referencing the activity settings of the first season and other similar programs (for example, Who's Still Standing?). The program is divided into three sessions: the first session is an individual pursuit race when the contestant on the stage and the One-Hundred-Contestant Group off the stage respond at the same time; the number of people among the One-Hundred-Contestant Group who give the wrong answers will be counted as the points scored by the contestant on the stage. Each contestant will have 9 questions, and there are 5 contestants in each season; the one with the highest points will stay. The second session is Feihualing (a word game played in ancient China among literati) to compete for the offense challenge qualification. The one with the highest rate of right answers among the One-Hundred-Contestant Group off the stage and the winner in the first session take turns to quote poems. Each of them should quote one sentence in turn under the context of the given concept words, and the one who cannot continue to quote any more poems will lose. The third session is Confrontation Race when the defender and the offender vie to answer the given questions first, and the one who obtains five points first will win. Obviously, there are two highlights in this kind of programs: (1) Unique competition system structure---"inner circle fighting challenge", that is, the One-Hundred-Contestant Group members will be determined first through auditions, and these members will compete to become the winner of relevant episode. The one who fails to offend will return to the One-Hundred-Contestant Group. This circular competition system forms a flexible and interesting structure. For the offenders, every question is a double-edged sword. This is because the offender can beat more members in the One-Hundred-Contestant Group and gain more points if the question is difficult, but at the same time, the question might beat him. The offender may feel at ease to answer the easy questions, but he may also be unable to obtain enough offending points and weed himself out. (2) Interesting "Feihualing". Except for the points system, the new "Feihualing" session in the second season has greatly widened the horizon of today's young audiences: the commonly played game "Free Cell" in modern times already existed a long time ago in ancient China and it was so elegant. "Feihualing" is a real duel between two master-hands, and in the game, the challenger must utter a couplet verse in a very short time. It not only tests the contestants' poetry knowledge, but also their ability of instant reaction and psychological quality. Therefore, the program has strong sense of competition and high ornamental value.

What's more, the guests and the presenter also have profound cultural background, and their impromptu comments on the scene are refreshing. Dong Qing (a famous presenter in CCTV) acts as the presenter of Chinese Poetry Competition, and the guests consist of experts of professor levels who

have profound traditional culture accomplishments; their review and analysis of background, author, and content of poems as well as their interaction with the contestants are brilliant, reasonable and harmonious. In addition, the live audiences and audiences in front of the TV all have the chance to know what it is as well as the whys and wherefores, easily get involved, and enjoy.

Moreover, fine detail processing and good visual effects also come into the picture. The "China Poetry Competition" is featured in blue tone, combining traditional ancient style with Chinese characteristics. The visual atmosphere is grand and magnificent; detail processing (lens application, post-processing, etc.) are elegant and stylish. The program shows its own ingenuity even in stage lighting design, water stage is set up in the studio for the first time to allow the audience to taste the poetic life with the glistening water; audiences truly see the scene where there is painting in his poetry, and poetry in his painting. In terms of the background music, serene and remote ancient music is used, accompanied by the judge's explanation or on-site painting; all these make the audiences so delighted just like bathing in the spring wind, as well as relaxed and happy. One can get inspiration from the heart unconsciously.

3. Classic Aesthetics

3.1 All-people participated Poetry Carnival

As a mass medium of communication with great influences and mass character, the most obvious characteristic of television is participation. With the development of network technology and mobile phone client, the increasing participatory and interactive nature have become the unique aesthetic features of TV art. "The participatory nature of television art is first manifested in that it often emphasizes the scene and immediacy as a mass media, and strives to create an atmosphere of audience involvement through direct communication." [2] Precisely because of this, most TV programs invite a certain number of live audiences to participate in, and the performers will interact with live audiences from time to time to create an atmosphere of relaxation and activity. The state of the live audience watching the program, to a certain extent, represents that of those in front of the TV, the live audience intervention can generate the psychological intervention of those audiences sitting in front of a TV, thus allowing the off-site audience to actively participate in the program during watching.

After the broadcast of the China Poetry Competition (Season 2), it has won considerable audience ratings thanks to the program's unique structure. The 100 live members participate directly in the competition and answer the questions with the five contestants who are on the stage. Among the one hundred members, there are elderly man who are over seventy years of age, young girls, knowledgeable postgraduate students and doctor students, farmers who live on lands, as well as foreign citizens of Chinese origin and foreign friends. They gather at the poetry competition and make friends by the link of poetry. The one hundred members are ordinary people, have equal identity and soul communication; they for the most part represented wide variety of television viewers; they compete with the contestants on the stage while the audience competing with them, which thus greatly enhanced the sense of participation of television audiences as if the off-site audiences and the contestants on the stage are in a fierce intelligence competition.

As the program design and cultural appeal, the "Mass Poetry Carnival" requires the program to use poetry as the game content; participants make friends by and fight with each other by poems. Television is a more popular medium of art and communication than film, and thus should have more conventional contents. Bozeman proposed three commandments of television shows, and one of them is "Thou Shalt have No Prerequisites." [3] "Television is a nongraded curriculum and excludes no viewer for any reason, at any time." [4] In other words, TV programs should not have too much requirement on audience's knowledge, and its content should be accepted by the majority of the audience without any obstacles. It is a basis for TV programs to be understood by most of audiences as well as to attract audiences and enhance the participation of audiences. At first glance, the China Poetry Competition seems to deviate from the spread requirements of "popularization" of "universality" since it takes poetry as the contest content, however, it does not. The poetry of the Tang

and Song Dynasties selected in the show are mostly works included in the textbooks of Chinese primary and secondary schools and are frequently heard by many people. The poems selected are neither too common nor too strange, and most of the works are “within reach”. This greatly enhances audience participation, and help the program personnel to effectively control the accuracy of the answers as well. It is also a macro control of the game tempo, suspense set and program level. In addition, on the setting of question types, the program personnel also deliberately controlled difficulty. There are such question types as sentence-making, multiple choices, couplets, and crosswords; the difficulty of the questions is gradual, and more difficult questions are presented in the form of multiple-choice questions to allow contestants to analyze and obtain the answers from various angles, such as history and allusions.

3.2 Traditional Culture in Modern Vision

In the historical course of over one hundred years after the first Sino-Japanese War, China has successively experienced two nationwide thought movements: the "May Fourth Movement" and "Cultural Revolution". The deviated and even wrong thought movements have led to great damages to traditional Chinese culture, and the inheritance as well as development of traditional culture have suffered serious fracture. In addition, with the rapid development of economy since the reform and opening up policy, the highly material civilization has caused increasingly serious human alienation, and the pan-centralization of spiritual civilization has become obvious. Furthermore, with the influx of western culture in recent years, the heterogeneity of Chinese and western culture has made traditional culture increasingly evident, and the traditional culture is gradually revalued because it naturally fits the context of oriental culture. In particular, since the beginning of the 21st century, the general environment of global integration has proposed new requirements for the development of traditional national culture, and the state has put forward as well as carried out relevant policies concerning the construction of spiritual civilization; therefore, the national consciousness of Chinese people is awakened. Because of this, TV programs of traditional culture type have sprung up like mushrooms, and thus it undoubtedly makes sense to set off a craze. The hot broadcast of these TV programs which are full of traditional Chinese culture and rich modern elements can “dust off our memories”, and reawaken the pursuit of Chinese traditional cultural spirit in the heart of Chinese people. The wisdom and feelings of the ancient literati revealed between the lines of poems, "can also light up our lives today".

4. Conclusion

Thus, it can be seen from the successful experience of Chinese Poetry Competition in the matter of its audience rating that there is nothing wrong to draw from foreign creativities as well as methods, ideas, and thinking of program production, but only by cultivating local original mechanism can TV programs continue to develop and improve. The upgrade path from “copyright introduction” to “self-dependent innovation” can only be realized by awakening the “cultural consciousness, questioning the authority, being committed to originality, as well as striving to create a program form that both conforms to national appreciation and international common expression mode; after this, Chinese creativity, Chinese spirit, and Chinese culture can be marketed around the world.

References

- [1] Neil Postman: *Amusing Ourselves To Death* (China Citic Press, China 2015) p. 106.
- [2] Peng Jixiang: *Film & TV Aesthetics* (Peking University Press, China 2009) p. 262.
- [3] Neil Postman: *Amusing Ourselves To Death* (China Citic Press, China 2015) p. 175.
- [4] Neil Postman: *Amusing Ourselves To Death* (China Citic Press, China 2015) p. 176.