

# Study on the Way of Telling the Chinese Story to the Outside World by TV Documentaries in the New Era

Taking the Third Season of "Tales from Modern China" as an Example

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**Abstract**—How to talk about the Chinese story to the outside world is how to improve the external communication effect of the Chinese story and grasp the impact of overseas markets, politics and the overall environment on this issue. As an important medium for carrying Chinese stories, the TV documentary, in recent years, with the launch of the "Belt and Road Initiative" initiative and the deepening of international cooperation, has obtained certain achievements in the breakthrough of overseas markets, but the overall communication effect is still insufficient. The reason for this phenomenon lies in the misunderstanding of the overseas audience on the image of China. In other words, to tell the Chinese story well through the TV documentary, the core issue is to know what to say and how to say it. The key to breaking through the misunderstanding lies in grasping the story's own communication power and communication strategy, thus inciting the tilt of overseas markets.

**Keywords**—Chinese story; TV documentary; handles; dialogue

## I. INTRODUCTION

How to tell the Chinese story to outside world well has three meanings: what to say, who to say and how to say? "What" is meant by the content of the story? What is the Chinese story? What kind of Chinese story to be chosen? What story can be told? These considerations are the foundation and the core. It is necessary to grasp what to say before grasping the beginning of external communication. "Who" is referring to the channel of transmission, and by what means? What carrier is more suitable for Chinese stories? And how to talk is more like a question of communication strategy. From what angle? What should be combined with? Or how can it be digested by overseas audiences? How can it bear Chinese characteristics and China's self-confidence? Based on these three levels of understanding, the research will start from "what is Chinese story", then define the communication channels, explore the advantages of the TV documentary in telling the Chinese story, and finally extend to the specific case, which is called the third season of "Tales from Modern China" (Hereinafter referred to as "China 3"). Through the analysis of its theme, the choice of characters and narrative features, the study aims to explore the new thinking and new possibilities of TV documentary in new era in spreading the new Chinese voice and Chinese picture. At the same time, the way of cross-

cultural communication by contemporary records, documentary works will be groped for.

## II. THE CONNOTATION OF CHINESE STORY

In the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference held on August 19, 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that our country should conscientiously do a good job in external propaganda work, accelerate the innovation of external propaganda methods to tell the Chinese story well, spread the Chinese voice well, and interpret the Chinese characteristics. The new definition of the Chinese story has given new directions to China's new era of external communication, the realization of international barrier-free communication, and the establishment of a good image of the country. Later, the General Secretary repeatedly emphasized on various occasions that "Chinese story is the proposition of the times, and that telling the Chinese story well is a proposition of the times." When China is associated with a story, China is no longer a general China, and the story is no long a general story; the further sublimation of the connotation of the Chinese story points out the importance of the characteristics of the times. At the same time, the Party-based media and newspaper began to participate in the reporting and interpretation of the Chinese story, such as the poetic story telling of the Chinese story (People's Daily), multi-pronged telling of the Chinese story (Guangming Daily) to create a favorable public opinion atmosphere.

As the society gradually enters the Chinese story era, products, programs, events, etc. with Chinese stories as themes have sprung up, and many scholars and experts have begun to conduct specific research. Wen Songhui once pointed out that the Chinese story should be based on China's national conditions, conform to the characteristics of China, and follow the development of the times.<sup>1</sup> Zhu Lijia also believes that the Chinese story is essentially a socialist story and a story with different values from a neoliberal story.<sup>2</sup> Su Changhe, Wang Yiwei, etc. from more angles, elaborated on the Chinese story

<sup>1</sup> Wen Songhui. People's Network Review: "The Enlightenment of Xi Jinping Telling the Chinese Story Well" [EB/OL]. <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2015/0522/c1003-27043101.html>, 2015-05-22.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu Lijia. 2012 Can China's Discourse Power Rise? [J]. People's Forum, 2012 (01), 46-47.

and they argued that it's necessary to give the story with modernity and socialist ideology so as to gradually grasp the discourse power.<sup>34</sup> The contemporary Chinese story needs to seize new concepts, master new categories, interface new expressions and meet new challenges; it's wise to face the world to spread Chinese voices, finally enlarging China's "friends circle".<sup>5</sup> It can be seen that the Chinese story has its unique responsibility and burden. Due to the influence of China's cultural foundation and system, it doesn't mean that any story can be seen as a Chinese story. If classified, the themes of the stories are shown in "Table I" as follows:

TABLE I. THE THEME OF THE CHINESE STORY

Viewpoint	Theme
Historical vision	Traditional customs, cultural classics, historical heritage, spiritual heritage
National vision	Humanities and society, industrial strength, brand building, natural scenery
Global vision	Trade cooperation, international assistance, environmental farming, technological development

The Chinese story is a story that lies in history, the country, and global development. It has direct links with all walks of life, countries, nations, and social life. In the current international environment, the Chinese story has indeed become a proposition of the times, constantly interacting with China's image, hard power and soft power construction, promoting the confidence in our path, theoretical self-confidence, system self-confidence and cultural self-confidence, and the "going out" of Chinese story plays an extraordinary role. In the many carriers that spread the story of China to the outside world, the film and television works with its vivid, iconic and expressive images make the story more stereoscopic and impactful, so, it is an important way to tell the Chinese story well. And among film and television works, documentaries are often more favorable in cross-cultural communication.

### III. THE ADVANTAGE OF DOCUMENTARY CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

First of all, the documentary is a film and television product based on record of actual events and with intuitive film and television language as standard. Although it is also influenced by ideology and belief, it is relatively objectively fixed in form, style and production. The representation of concrete instead of abstraction is easy to get the understanding and recognition of the audience of different cultural backgrounds, and the "reach rate" of the story is higher.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, according to statistics, in 2012, China's documentary broadcast totaled 59,800 hours, and in 2016 it

rose to 77,600 hours, with a year-on-year increase of nearly 3%. In terms of investment ratio, the total investment of documentary in 2012 reached 1.3 billion and 3.47 billion in 2016.<sup>7</sup> The documentary has grown from a niche art category to a certain scale in China. In the past two years, China's documentary films have continued to show outstanding performance in overseas markets, frequently broadcasting at the international film and television festival. The North American box office of "Born in China" even exceeded the domestic box office, and the total overseas box office reached 15 million US dollars. On the whole, the attention and promotion of the documentary by the relevant departments has greatly increased the chances of excellent documentary output, and in line with the hot market in the overseas market, the possibility that the documentary will carry the Chinese story to the overseas market will continue to ferment.

However, considering the different forms of documentary, there are significant differences between TV documentaries and documentary films in terms of content, mode of communication, and shooting techniques. In response to the external dissemination of Chinese stories in the current international environment, TV documentaries are more dynamic:

#### A. Topic Selection

China still faces many misunderstandings and challenges in the international environment, and its many acts are negatively interpreted by foreign media and social organizations. If we continue to choose Chinese stories from a specific angle and perspective with unique China cultural customs rather than that of acceptable to the whole world, it is difficult to break through the existing situation and reconstruct the cognition of Western society to China, and even increase misunderstandings. Although China is vigorously promoting cultural self-confidence, cultural self-confidence is by no means a blind cultural arrogance, nor eyeless cultural inferiority, but a graceful and open big country mentality.<sup>8</sup> In other words, to get out of this dilemma, it is now more necessary to start from a global perspective and put forward a communicative theme story with a more bighearted attitude, telling China stories with temper of times towards the overseas public. For example, poverty alleviation is an international topic with characteristics of the times. The Chinese government and people have greater determination and ability than other countries to do a good job of contributing to the world in this proposition. In response, it is easy to tell the story to the rest of world.

Based on this, with TV as a representative of popular culture, TV documentaries tend to pay more attention to social development and user experience with more times temper.<sup>9</sup> Its

<sup>3</sup> Su Changhe. Speaking Chinese Stories Demanding the Use of Our Own Words [N]. Liberation Daily, 2016-05-24(13).

<sup>4</sup> Su Changhe. Speaking Chinese Stories Demanding the Use of Our Own Words [N]. Liberation Daily, 2016-05-24(13).

<sup>5</sup> Yang Zhenwu. Grasping the New Requirements of the Era of External Communication [J]. Chinese and Foreign Cultural Exchanges, 2015 (11), 84-87.

<sup>6</sup> Zhang Chengjun. Multiple Requirements: The Theme Strategy of Cross-cultural Communication in Chinese Documentary Films [J]. Television Research, 2014(07), 34-36.

<sup>7</sup> Hu Zhifeng. Overview of the Development of Chinese Film and Television Art Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China [J]. Modern Communication, 2018(01), 96-101.

<sup>8</sup> Hu Zhifeng. Strengthening Cultural Self-confidence, Well Telling the China Story — Learning and Understanding the Spirit of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party [EB/OL]. <http://www.71.cn/2017/1201/976066.shtml>, 2017-12-01.

<sup>9</sup> Liu Zhongbo. The Existence Way and Value Orientation of Current Documentary Films of Social Reality [J]. China TV, 2013(11), 64-68+1.

news attributes, artistic attributes and entertainment attributes make it possible to fully display the national conditions and the people's feelings. Not only the TV documentaries exquisitely refine the Chinese cultural treasures, but also it mobilizes the audience's thinking and keeps them having a lasting sense of pleasure.<sup>10</sup> Documentary films, as elite cultural products, tend to be more specific topics, such as events and figures that lead to thinking, or little-known behaviors, cultures; related to the director's personal pursuit, documentary films focus on thinking about human nature or criticizing reality.<sup>11</sup> Of course, it is not wise to rule out the importance of specific cultures, events, people, etc. in embodying Chinese characteristics. Yet, based on the current environment, the Chinese stories should be established in the times, have global perspective, and fully link history with development to provide contents that reflect mainstream values and audience expectations. From this point of view, the TV documentary is to the point; but this does not mean that the documentary film fails to depict the mainstream story. It is can be recognized that the attention to mainstream story is not so enough compared with TV documentary. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the relatively low acceptance of the mainstream film in overseas markets.

### *B. Capacity*

It is often difficult for record film to take the overall situation into account due to the limitation of time. The audiences often have insufficient understanding and even have misunderstanding of the story because lack of comprehension. For example, the TV version and the movie version of "Masters in Forbidden City" are different apparently in the overall narrative, historical explanation and character portrayal; the film version was once spit out without core theme, but just by lens cut and patchwork. In the documentary, even a complete process of cultural relics repair cannot be seen so that the value and connotation conveyed is greatly reduced. Although documentary films also have large-capacity works, such as the 8-hour documentary "Dead Souls", such works are more about artistic breakthroughs and social expressions, and few channels are willing to accept broadcasts.

### *C. Channel*

Obviously, the current media of TV works is more integrated, and multi-screen communication is a common state. Meanwhile, webcasting has become a core concern for the survival and development of TV programs.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the current TV documentary channel is more popular, more convenient, and bigger in coverage. With the popularization of timely interactive technologies such as the barrage, the relationship maintenance between TV works and the audience has also been updated. Despite in the impact, TV is still at a disadvantage compared to the screen, but how to let overseas audiences buy tickets into the theater to consume Chinese documentaries is still a challenge. Of course, as the screening

system of commercial cinemas in the western film and television market began to be segmented, documentary films gradually developed into specific screening channels, and the number of screens continued to increase, avoiding being squeezed into "cannon fodder" by "blockbuster" with relatively fixed viewing group.<sup>13</sup> But considering the issue and promotion, documentary film requires a long, systematic and strategic push before getting into the theater, which is a rather difficult task, demanding the overseas potential to be further tapped.

### *D. Market*

Referring to foreign documentary development, TV documentaries are more of mainstream. For example, BBC, Discovery and National Geographic are all famous for producing TV documentaries; overseas viewers are more recognized for TV documentaries. Due to the lower production costs of TV documentaries, more energy can be put into market cooperation to expand opportunities for overseas communication. Although it does face a decline in audience attention and a weaker artistic expression than the film, there is still much room for development in the current international intercultural communication environment, as evidenced by many practical results, such as:

- Yong Qing, deputy general manager of National Geographic China, said that the proportion of documentaries purchased from China is getting higher and higher. (People's Daily Overseas Edition, 2013-09-02, 07th Edition)
- The unit price of the program produced by the Documentary Channel is gradually equivalent to counterparts from some international famous documentary production organizations such as BBC and Discovery. (Guangming Daily, 2014-03-31, 14th edition)
- Chinese documentaries began to enter foreign core media, for example "A Bite of China" and "China's Mega Projects" have been broadcasted in national television stations such as Poland, France, Germany, and the United States with good feedback. (Wuzhou Communication Center, April 22, 2015)
- ...

## IV. REASONS FOR CHOOSING "CHINA 3"

The above mainly discusses the relationship and advantages between the documentary and the Chinese story in theory, but in the specific practice, due to the influence of language, cultural divide, channel possession and political and diplomatic factors, the overseas communication effect of domestic works will be affected to varying degrees. Hu Zhifeng and Yang Bin also summed up the four major problems facing the current Chinese story in the study of the dissemination of Chinese film and television works: "don't understand", "can't tell clearly", "fail to reach" and "fail to

<sup>10</sup> Wang Qi. TV Documentary: A Powerful Weapon to Shape the Image of the Country [J]. Press Circles, 2011(09), 39-42+46.

<sup>11</sup> Han Fei. Perspective of China's Documentary Film Market in 2016[J]. Media, 2017(06), 19-21.

<sup>12</sup> Gao Jian. The Current Situation, Motivation and Countermeasures of Multi-screen Communication in Film and Television Dramas [J]. Contemporary TV, 2012 (02), 66-67.

<sup>13</sup> Fan Jianing. Research on the Dilemma and Strategy of Chinese Documentary Internationalization [J]. Film Review, 2018(05), 60-62.

figure out deeply".<sup>14</sup> This is mainly because many works are unclear in the market position and lack of understanding of foreign cultural values or aesthetic tastes. For example, many works exported to foreign countries in recent years have been "improved" and "packaged" by overseas media: 12 episodes of the Forbidden City were adapted only into two episodes abroad, and a large amount of content was just a passing comment, such as "from the Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty"; "A Bite of China" was turned into a 3D documentary with a length of only two hours. It can be seen that presenting the Chinese story just from the perspective of China has the problems of ignoring international expression, lacking global thinking, and insufficient consideration of the content model of overseas documentaries and the taste of the audience. Many of our stories have indeed been spoken out, but not well-performed.

Based on this situation, the study selected a Chinese and foreign co-production TV documentary as an entry point to explore how to better promote the integration of Chinese characteristics and international vision. Rao Shuguang once suggested that co-production is an effective way for Chinese film and television to spread to the outside world. It can not only improve the overall level of Chinese film, but also boost Chinese culture to "launch out by leasing the ship".<sup>15</sup> With China becoming a treasure trove of documentary filming, the internationalization of documentary film production has become the norm. Many outstanding works, such as "This is China" co-produced by China and Russia, Chinese and British co-productions "Earth: One Amazing Day" have emerged, promoting exchanges and collisions between Chinese and foreign culture, deepening understanding and recognition. However, it is undeniable that how to master more discourse rights in the co-produced film is the key to telling the Chinese story well by co-production, rather than simply investing or turning a deaf ear to make the Chinese story a carrier of Western values. As a result, "China 3", co-filmed by Jiangsu Broadcasting and Television Station and the BBC entered the public view with the specific reasons as follows:

- As a work broadcasted in June 2017, its timeliness was relatively high, because it was more in line with the theme of the "new era". The works covered more than 200 countries and regions such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Africa. The number of overseas viewers exceeded 100 million, which was representative.
- Chinese side participated in the production of the program hugely. The staffing division reflects the international production paradigm to ensure more discourse power in the production and broadcasting, making the Chinese story telling more objective and neutral and avoiding the penetration of many potential

images. In this way, the sparks between Chinese-Western production ideas and innovation collision can be more evoked.

- The production of BBC documentary film is internationally representative and relatively mature. It can reflect the needs of the world documentary market to a certain extent and has reference value.

## V. DISCOVERY AND DISCUSSION

The study mainly focuses on the content of 6 episodes of "China 3" with a total of 138-minute long, and make records. It starts from what to say - the topic selection and character setting, to how to say - summarizing the overall production direction while further discussing the details and ideas in order to explore the inspiration of "China 3" to how Chinese TV documentaries can tell the Chinese story to the outside world well.

### A. Adding "Handles" to the Story to Make the Audience Powerful

"China 3" consists of 24 stories, which are developed according to regional logic in the stories of Central China, Northeast China, Northwest China, Southeast China and Southwest China. The overall topic gets rid of the expression of regional traditional characteristics only. For example, Shandong just means Confucius and the Forbidden City represents Beijing. The documentary focuses on the era temper and modernity of the topic, which is the highlight of this season, and also the embodiment of the "never knew" positioning. For example, when talking about the Northwest China, it takes the promotion of science and technology to poverty alleviation as an entry point, and on the Northeast China, it devotes to portraying the emerging industries brought by the cold climate, depicting a modern, fashionable and dynamic image of China.

TABLE II. "CHINA 3" TOPIC COMPOSITION

Selected Topic	Quantity / Proportion	Specific Cases
Technology and development	8/33%	High-speed rail, computer, photovoltaic power generation, internet, etc.
Culture and society	5/21%	Chinese cheongsam, food, local customs, online shopping, etc.
Environmental protection and farming	8/33%	Returning farmland to forests, energy, agriculture, animals, etc.
Special industry	3/13%	Auctioneer, network anchor, e-commerce, test driver, etc.

It can be seen from "Table II" that, in concrete narration, "China 3" attaches on technological development (33%) and environmental farming (33%). Such topics have obvious characteristics of globalization, so, they have a contact advantage in cross-cultural communication, and are easily noticed. Secondly, the cultural topic (21%), a component of Chinese characteristics, is the second most important part of cross-cultural communication. China is a country with a long history and Chinese culture is a treasure that Chinese people are proud of. It is of great significance to tell the story of

<sup>14</sup> Hu Zhifeng, Yang Bin. Communication Power: An Important Guarantee for the Improvement of Soft Power in China's Film and Television culture [J]. Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences), 2018(03), 140-147+193.

<sup>15</sup> Zheng Haiou. The Bottleneck Chinese Film Going out Rao Shuguang: There are Creative Problems [EB/OL]. <http://culture.people.com.cn/n/2015/0416/c87423-26853210.html>, 2015-04-16.



Chinese culture to develop national soft power and participate in international competition. Of course, some of the easily overlooked or controversial special industries (13%) also appear in the works. They reflect that while adding highlights to the show, there are still many easy-to-ignore, but distinctive Chinese stories are still waiting to be discovered. By co-production, due to cultural differences, this kind of topic that we may be used to or often feel too unpopular and ungrounded is likely to be a new key to narrowing the gap in cross-cultural communication. It is also a new understanding of the current TV program innovation breaking through inherent thinking.

In terms of how to say it, "China 3" jumps out of a relatively simple and fixed narrative framework, and takes a different approach. The "handle" allows the audience to easily extract the Chinese stories from the show and firmly grasp the Chinese characteristics in the story. The difference and connotation between "reciting" and "reciting well" are interpreted well.

1) A "handle" as the impression: In "China 3", the audience will not only see the latest world-leading technological developments of China, such as the high-speed

rail and the Sunway Taihu Light Supercomputer, showcasing the power and innovation force that China provides in the world development, focusing on the world achievements in the professional field, but also find that the Internet, as an important narrative component of the work, frequently intersperses in different topics such as culture, society, and environmental protection used as an entry point or background, such as information technology to make urban life smarter, online shopping to bring influences on clothes, food, shelter and transportation, and Big data application. Most of the story fragments in the works echoes with the Internet in the beginnings and endings, such as Chinese characters — electronic input and voice writing, farmers — e-commerce export. In other words, in the many stories told in "China 3", the Internet can be seen in far more than one story, or the Internet itself, as the "commonness" of certain Chinese stories, is just extracted by "China 3" to insert into different stories as a point view to create the same acceptance environment and cognitive channels for different stories.

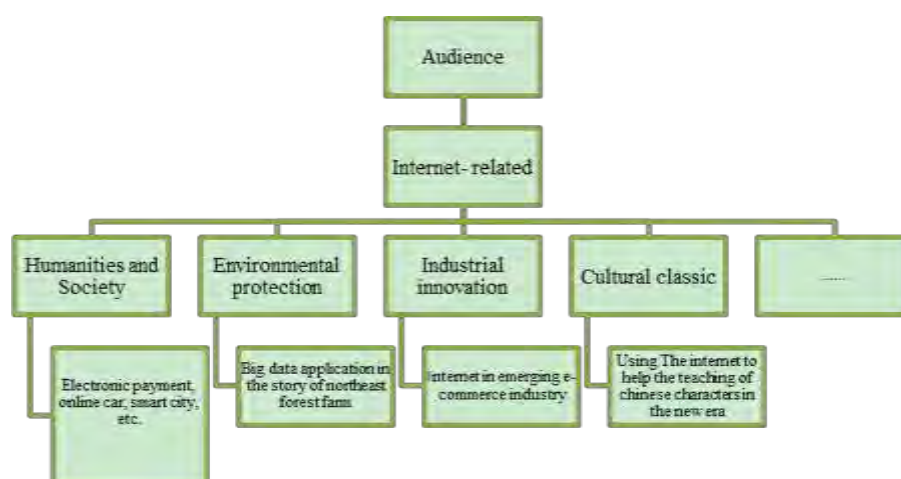


Fig. 1. The Internet as a "handle".

According to "Fig.1", the Internet is like a "handle". If the audience catch it, they can enjoy the Chinese stories with different characteristics; if there is no "handles", it is difficult to lift up the "package" of the full story and the a common cognitive starting point and memory ending point of the complicated Chinese story can't be found by audience. As a result, the question that "fails to narrate well" will gradually emerge, especially for stories with large "cultural discounts". From another perspective, the nature of the "handle" itself will also give the story a new cognitive change. For example, the scientific and technological attributes of the Internet have created the "illusion" that "China 3" has strong technology and the modern sense. Of course, the "handle" itself is also a story that allows viewers to see the interaction between the Internet and the economy, society, and life, from simply talking about network technology to how to tell China's Internet development well, thoroughly, and not monotonously. This kind of "handle" can be understood from the agenda setting as

well as from the advertising strategy: a certain element with "commonness" is constantly interspersed in the work, occupying the highest point of the audience's memory and understanding, and the impression is generated, just like the classic advertisement "blue bottle" of the Sanjing Pharmaceutical Company. Although the original features will be limited to a certain extent after the "handle" is added to the story, it is not difficult to see that this kind of "handle" is not supplemented abruptly, but a certain common feature of the story given by the times and it is the most direct response to "telling Chinese stories well is a proposition of the times"; the era temper is the powerful hand of cross-cultural communication of Chinese stories in the new times. The Internet is just one of them, and there are thousands of "handles" waiting to be discovered.

2) A "handle" as the attribute: Although "China 3" has paid a lot of attention to topics with global commonality and

strong public feelings, and has increased the level of contact with the audience, it is not difficult to find that some topics have problems of “too many words and tedious listening”, such as Chinese characters in cultural stories, high-speed rail in the science story. This seems to be out of the “never knew” position of “China 3”, and it is too mediocre. In fact, “China 3” reinforces the status of an unconventional or non-primary attribute by reorganizing the order of story attributes, and taking this as a “handle”, the narrative logic is reorganized centering on the new “force point”, effectively neutralizing this contradiction.

First of all, besides starting from history to development, for example, Chinese characters originate from hieroglyphics, the basic narrative logic of traditional Chinese culture story in “China 3” introduce the narrative logic from its popular/trend to the status quo. This measure adds new vision to those culture stories that have been “told too incisively and tediously” and exerts the same “enrich” role as the historical background. The former enriches historical understanding and the latter enriches modern understanding. For example, the story of Chinese cheongsam starts from the double line of history and fashion week and combines the different understandings of foreign designers and Chinese cheongsam artisans. It symbolizes the young people's new dress choices and new fashions to presents the traditional charm, era charm and international charm of cheongsam. The new and old alternation symbolizes the revival and innovation of tradition in the contemporary era, closely follows the trend of global cultural development, and builds a unique Chinese charm in the past and modern, traditional and popular cross-narration, so the tension is greatly enhanced.

In addition, the specific scientific and technological stories in “China 3” focus on the relation with life and interpret the humanistic significance of China's development of science and technology. In fact, it is true that the fundamentals of technological development are serving the people. For example, the high-speed rail carries the Chinese people's ardent yearning to go home; photovoltaic power generation provides assistance for poverty alleviation. At this point, “China 3” has surpassed many documentaries that discuss technology choices just in order to showcase technology and the audiences are directly exposed to the humanistic care of technological China. This narrative structure of humanistic science and technology is actually a reflection on how to tell the story of China in the moment. In addition to being able to attract the attention of overseas audiences, satisfy their curiosity, and provide content that they do not know, it must also eliminate misunderstandings and reconstruct an international image; only presenting the latest scientific and technological achievements, but neglecting the relationship with life will often make the documentary fall into the “trap” of creation so that the documentary not only cannot alleviate the “Chinese threat theory” and other erroneous remarks based on China's rapid development, but it is easy to offer opportunity to Western media to deepen negative characterization. From this point of view, the narrative logic of humanities and science in “China 3” tells the true meaning of Chinese science and technology stories and tells about China that never be known successfully.

3) A “handle” as target: Through the above discussion of the “handles” as impression and attributes in relative broad sense, the importance of “handles” for the documentary to tell Chinese story well is gradually highlighted, which can directly provide overseas audiences with key points to grasp the Chinese story and improve their memories and understandings of Chinese stories. In addition to the view of broad sense, more specific and targeted handles will re-structure the views of overseas audiences on relevant content, which is evident in the “China 3” environmental farming story.

First of all, with the exposure of smog and e-waste fields, Western countries continue to intentionally and falsely blame China's over-developed economy ignoring the environmental protection. Some media even attribute global ecological problems to China, exaggerating and fabricating China's deterioration of the global environment; the topic of environmental protection is an area in which China's external communication should be focused on, and it fits well with the “points of interest” of the current Western world and overseas audiences. In “China 3”, viewers can see many of China's thinking and responsibility on environmental issues. In addition to showing China's latest environmental protection actions, such as the afforestation in Northeast China and smart wind field, it is also good at portraying the attention of ordinary citizens on environmental protection. In particular, the individual contributions in many “major” environmental issues are highlighted, such as Xu Jianzha, a farmer devoting to banishing desertification, and Dai Jianjun, the owner of Longjing Caotang, who promotes green ingredients; taking the deeds of grassroots people as a “handle” and telling great truth with contes greatly matches with Western personal values, which has enabled overseas audiences to firmly think that the Chinese people's awareness of environmental protection is increasingly boosted.

In the farming related stories, “China 3” is also good at using “small” handles to narrow the distance between the audience and the story. The selected topic starts from “small angle” that is closely related to the Western industry and society, but it is long ignored or even forgotten. Yet, they can call the surprise of people. The impact of this way is more convincing to the audience than simply enumerating the results. For example, Starbucks, Nestle's coffee beans come from Pu'er in Yunnan, and the ice wine on the British Queen's table comes from the Black River. In fact, this more specific “handle” is the point that overlooked by Chinese TV practitioner due to cultural differences and they are discovered by Chinese-foreign co-productions on the basis of overseas perspectives, thus giving many Chinese stories a new vitality and jumping out of the past single, fixed narrative framework for some content; it not only grasps the story of the times with international vision and Chinese characteristics, but also effectively reduces the cultural cognition gap with interesting and meaty depiction of China never been known.

In addition, “China 3” introduces a number of exclusive resources that have never been reported, such as Asia's largest arctic-alpine driving test base, the auction house of the largest turn volume in Asia, the world's largest radio telescope nicknamed by “Chinese Tianyan”, etc. while satisfying the

curiosity of the audience, the “most” is regarded as the handle to let the audience seize China’s “newest”, “largest” and “strongest”, highlighting the “most” era charm of China.

In sum, through the summary of the “handle” strategy, it can help TV documentaries of different themes to be more organized and logical in content setting; whether it is to attract audience, improve memory or reduce “cultural discount”, the “handles” will be powerful helpers. Of course, once a “handle” is added to the story, its attributes may overwrite the original features of the story, hindering its essential connotation and spiritual transmission. However, considering the various difficulties faced by the Chinese story in cross-cultural communication, only by ensuring that one level of the story is accepted and recognized, can we further develop more complex and diverse representations and values; and that’s where the meaning of the “handle” lies in.

### B. Telling Chinese Confidence with “Conversation”

Characters have always been a key component of film and television production and the core elements of creation. Many film and television works often choose to portray characters to promote the development of the story; whether the characters are selected well, whether they are representative or vivid, will directly affect the integrity of the works.<sup>16</sup>In the documentary, the story is mainly told by the characters, and the characters are the main body of the story, so they have an important influence on the dissemination of the story.

TABLE III. CHARACTER COMPOSITION IN “CHINA 3”

Character	Feature	Quantity / Proportion (54)
Traditional craftsman	People digging out lotus root, carpenter, cook, etc.	21/38.88 %
Industry expert	Geology, spaceflight, information technology, etc.	22/40.74 %
Excellent Young man	Models, photographers, test drivers, etc.	11/20.38 %

1) *The original mind does not change and the craftsman talks with the expert:* As can be seen from Table 3, the main characters of “China 3” are composed of craftsmen (38.88%) and experts (40.74%). The industries involved range from traditional technical work to core R&D personnel, from train drivers to aerospace. The potential spiritual inheritance between the old and the new generation, and the contributions of the two generations together for China’s development can be felt. From concrete situation, in addition to improving the value and authority of the program by craftsmen/experts, the work focuses more on the construction of character clues between traditional skills and modern technology. Most of the stories in “China 3” are introduced from local artisans, such as the “grass pane method” of Xu Jianzha to control the sands, to the extension of desert management expert Zhang Kezhi to further explore the potential of grass pane, finally, the grass pane consolidating the contributions of two generations

successfully protects the safety of the desert section of the Baolan Railway. By portraying the areas in which two generations have been focused commonly and their hard work, which builds up the inner logic of stories, the dialogue between the two generations makes the emotions of the story clear and readable, causing a more direct psychological impact on the audience.

At the same time, the program combines the elaboration, carefulness, and expertise of traditional craftsmen with the interpretation of the latest Chinese manufacturing by modern experts, creating a bridge of communication between the craftsmen of great national power and the manufacturing of great national power. Considering that the reason why Germany manufacturing is known for the whole world lies in its pursuit and inheritance of excellence, in “China 3”, the audience can also know that contemporary China is constantly marching into the great and strong power of manufacturing by joint narration of traditional Chinese-made ingenuity and the professional of modern Chinese manufacturing. And many Chinese-made products have already taken off the “inferior quality” and “low-end” hats, even leading the world.

2) *Dialoguing with young people and telling young Chinese stories:* Young people account for 20.38% of “China 3”, which is the embodiment of the program’s attention to the young market. Considering the multi-cultural environment, these young people who have grown up with the impact of various new cultures and new technologies have more individuality, more attention and a higher cultural tolerance. In other words, some foreign young people are less prejudiced in understanding China and are more willing to accept Chinese culture and Chinese stories. Therefore, telling the story of the younger generation of Chinese is of great significance to contemporary cross-cultural communication. As far as the program is concerned, “China 3” still chooses to express the different Chinese in the eyes of young people in a dialogue manner, but the dialogue is slightly different compared to that of the above-mentioned craftsmen, because it has more sense of layering. First of all, it can be seen from the young people of the “China 3” dialogue that the program actually talks to some sunrise industries through young people, such as test drivers. This is an intrinsic logic of back and forth echoes: the vigor and vitality of China’s younger generation is used to reflect the brand-new motive force of China’s development, and the rapid progress of China’s young industry is used to reflected the hard work of Chinese young men. This not only expresses the positive attitude of young people, but also shows that the rapid growth of young industries cannot be separated from the contributions of young people; a number of new “modern craftsmen” have been active in different emerging fields, and a number of emerging fields have begun to go out of the country, allowing the Chinese stories to be young.

At the same time, “China 3” also enhances the interpretation of the Chinese culture heritage through dialogue with young people. For example, the reason why the railway photographer Wang Wei loves to take photo of trains lies in

<sup>16</sup> Wang Jing. The Role and Modeling Function of Characters in Film and TV Works [J]. Going Abroad and Employment, 2012(02), 89.

that he grows up in a railway family and his father is a train driver. The program expresses a unique heritage conception from the perspective of young Chinese in the era, and the spirit has a broad international vision and positive energy.

3) *Dialoguing with the host and strengthening personality expression of the program*: As the soul of the program, the host controls the rhythm and atmosphere of the program, and is the narrator and listener of the story in the program. Although the host is not visible in many TV documentaries, this does not mean that he/she is not important, and the sense of presence provided by him/her and creativity as an individual cannot be replaced. The hosts who participate in the filming of "China 3" have rich experience in Chinese documentary, ensuring that they can play more freely in the program, adding vividness to the program and getting closer to the audience. For example, Jing Lusi served as the host of BBC "Chinese New Year", and Cameron has been engaged in the production of programs about China all the year round with certain popularity. Meanwhile, "China 3" significantly improved the participation and freedom of the host, and the recognition was high. For example, Jason lamented that "China is an incredible country" when participating in the Chinese auction, and Jing showed child-like surprises when exploring wild camels; the true feelings as well as thinking and understanding can more effectively bring the flexibility of story expression. The main purpose and meaning of the program displayed the human nature more naturally and smoothly through the host's real and lively evaluation.

In general, it is the main narrative model of "China 3" that guides the plot development by the character expression, and makes characters full by plot designing. And "China 3" embodies the strengths and energies added by its characters using the dialogue as much as possible, which fully reflects the initiative of the characters in the recorded works, and provides a new reflection on the figure characterization of the Chinese documentary in the new era.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, "China 3" provides new reflections on the topic selection and character portrayal of TV external propaganda works, which makes the external dissemination of related records and documentary works have a broader space and possibilities. The problems and skills that need to be paid attention to in the cross-cultural communication of Chinese stories, for example, whether there is an international perspective, whether it is difficult to tell the stories, a "handle" in the theme expression, and a "dialogue" in character portrayal are interpreted well. On the translation problem in the Chinese story going out, "China 3" is less affected as a co-production film, and the translation is more authentic, which can effectively promote the smoothness of cultural interchange and communication. However, some of the stories in the works still lack of full expression, and in many cases, the contents are just depicted lightly. This is the inevitable problem of the theme and plot design, and the widespread problem of multi-topic record works. However, given the multi-faceted pressure China faces in international competition, in fact, the multi-

theme record works can exert more space and help the audience to understand China more. From this point of view, this defect may also be an advantage in cross-cultural communication to make up for the insufficient fullness of the story. At present, China needs to take the spirit, vitality and creativity of the nation as the foundation in its external communication, integrate it into the international atmosphere and the environment of the times as much as possible to show the charm of China, the efforts and the friendship of the Chinese to the world, thus promoting Chinese culture to go to the world arena. "China 3" has opened up a new path of innovation for the international dissemination of documentaries, and its experience is worthy of summarization and promotion.

With the limitations of this paper considered, because the study is specific to the case, only focusing on the TV documentary on the subject of humanities and society, but not other types of works, the relevant conclusions only apply to the relevant categories. At the same time, the research mainly analyzes the selection of the topic and the design of the character's work frame. If making analysis from the perspectives of picture, lens and discourse, there will be other new reflections. Because the research is based on the text level, there is a lack of empirical investigation of the communication path and audience attitude of "China 3" to know about the real communication effect, which will be the focus of the next research.

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