Narrative Integration of “Culture” and “Human” in Chinese Cultural TV Programs

Taking National Treasure as an Example*

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Abstract—As a breakthrough in Chinese cultural TV programs in the new era, National Treasure highlights the narrative integration of “human” and “culture” in the aspects of “human-oriented” narrative strategy and the consistency between the “star effect” of narrative subject and cultural core. It changes the narrative tendency of the related programs that pay too much attention to cultural “utensils”, and focuses on the “civilization”. The program also adopts the “Paternity Narrative” technique to show the story of “father generations” inheritance behind the cultural relics from ancient and contemporary perspectives, thus highlighting the spiritual dimension of the program and achieving good communication results. This exploration demonstrates the superiority and vitality of the narrative language of film and television in the cultural communication, and constructs the self-confidence posture of the program in the dissemination of traditional culture.

Keywords—National Treasure; cultural TV programs; “culture” and “human”; narrative integration; paternal narration

I. INTRODUCTION

TV works have become the new growth engine of Chinese cultural communication and the new highlight of TV programs. But under its prosperity, this kind of programs also have some flaws in narrative aspects, that is, focus on cultural utensils and material value of culture, ignoring human factors and the construction of cultural self-confidence. In particular, the programs lack the spirit of paternal inheritance of culture and innovation, with serious entertainment orientation and mutual imitation. But CCTV’s “National Treasure” has found a breakthrough in the sub-field of “cold” cultural relics programs, even boarded the 2018 CCTV Spring Festival Gala and got a good response. Researchers have paid more attention to the innovative ways of spreading Chinese culture, but have majorly focused on the effects of communication, educational significance, technological elements, and tourism effects and so on. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]

It can be seen that the narration of National Treasure is not a plain representation of cultural objects, or a fixed TV narrative routine, but a narrative integration of “culture” and “human” based on national emotions, paternal inheritance of culture and cultural consciousness. This kind of narrative integration excavates the spiritual core of “passing the torch” in cultural programs, and gets rid of the two tendencies of seriousness and entertainment of similar programs. This self-conscious narrative integration operation in the program is mainly manifested in the narrative strategy of “human-oriented” and consistency between the “star effect” of narrative subject and cultural core.

II. UTENSIL NARRATION AND ENTERTAINMENT TENDENCY OF CULTURAL TV PROGRAMS

A. The Rise of Cultural TV Programs on Cultural Relic

Since the 20th century, the film and television media has gradually become a new carrier for the inheritance and dissemination of traditional culture with its “sense of substitution” narrative perspective, multimodal narrative language, three-dimensional narrative subject and intuitive narrative appeal. Successful Chinese cultural TV programs include Lecture Room, The Chinese Poetry Conference, Letters Alive, Readers, Archives, The Chinese Restaurant, and other Western works represented by the “Chinese” documentary series filmed by the BBC.

With the increasing attention paid to the promotion of traditional culture in China, cultural TV programs focusing on cultural relics have also increased rapidly in recent years, such as Treasure Evaluation, National Treasure Archives and I Mend Cultural Relics in The Palace Museum of CCTV, World Collection of Beijing Satellite TV, Gate of China Henan of Henan Satellite TV and other programs have emerged, fully demonstrating the advantages and vitality of film and television carriers in the cultural reproduction and dissemination. These programs have made positive

explores in the narrative mode, but on the whole, they still show insufficient innovation, and do not highlight the “human” factor and spiritual dimension of traditional culture.

B. The Influence of Deconstruction Tendency Towards Chinese Traditional Culture and the Absence of “Paternal Narration” on Cultural TV Programs

The “paternal narrative” of cultural films and television works is to excavate the stories and inheritance spirits of the people behind the culture and arouse the worship of paternal achievement and the recognition of national culture by telling stories about the hard struggle of our parents, the sense of responsibility of the national culture and the passing the torch between father and children, in order to reach the goal of infecting and educating people. However, due to our comprehensive criticism of patriarchy, the traditional Chinese culture is often considered as “patriarchy” and “ignorance” and mercilessly deconstructed. Some scholars pointed out that the literary group of “new history and new ignorance” and mercilessly deconstructed. Some scholars pointed out that the literary group of “new history and new compilation” was “keen to deconstruct the origin of the nation's history and culture, and profusely showed the weak recognition of the current national cultural identity”[8], thus a narrative deconstruction attitude lacking cultural self-confidence. And the paternal narrative has gradually become a taboo topic in Chinese film and television narration, even showing a tendency of “fatherless narration”. Xihe Chen once pointed out that compared with the fifth generation; the sixth generation of mainland movies is more like “the generation of father-wiping” and “the art of its development” [9]. While in contrast, Western films and television works attach great importance to patriarchy narrative. Take the animation with more involved in the image of parents for example, American animation “usually constructs the image of the father as a positive force for growth and summon, and they constantly excavate the significance of the image of the father as a spiritual existence.”[10] “The pre-70s perspective (American father image) included an image of bumbling, irrelevance, and ineffectiveness when men were shown in a paternal nurturing role. That changed to an image of „mother substitute” in which men were potentially effective and emotional development of children.” [11]

This tendency to deconstruct traditional Chinese culture and the lack of "paternal narration" also appeared in the cultural programs. The stories about the struggle, responsibility and creation of "fathers" behind culture have been concealed, and the stories about the continuous inheritance of cultural genes between fathers and children have been avoided. Traditional culture thus has become the victim of criticizing patriarchy and ignorance. The related program emphasizes the presentation of culture in the contemporary era, emphasizes the material characteristic of culture, and seldom involves “people”. As far as Chinese traditional culture is concerned, this "human" mainly refers "father" in history, and the narration of traditional culture is more of a kind of paternal narration. These factors tragically seem to be related to "patriarchy", and need to be avoided as possible. Take the widely recognized Chinese cultural program A Bite of China as an example, the camera focuses more on the mother who cooks homemade dishes for her children in the kitchen, emphasizing the taste of a mother, while paying less attention to the increasingly common busy father figure in the kitchen in Chinese daily life, and neglecting the family privacy dishes culture is mainly inherited from father to children.

Take the recently rising cultural relics program as an example, major programs adopt the mode of “cultural relics + treasure appreciation” which is closely related to the monetary value of cultural relics, avoiding the value of “human” behind cultural relics. They cater to the public's aesthetic orientation by highlighting entertainment and low posture, with the sense of “amuse you”. Or they adopt the narrative mode of “cultural relics + documentaries”, focusing on the artifacts, highlighting the professionalism and seriousness, ignoring the vividness of the “human” behind the culture, and avoiding vulgar interpretation with a high attitude, also has the sense of "enjoying themselves alone". The former regards cultural relics as a kind of entertainment platform, “vulgar” but not “solemn”. The latter's cold television language is easy to cause the ordinary audience's psychological dispersion, “high” in content and “cold” in form. These narrative modes have thrown aside the point of “man” in the paternal narrative behind the cultural relics, and stick to the layer of utensils. At present, the two tendencies of “cold” and “entertaining” in cultural relics programs are actually the diffusion of Chinese cultural deconstruction and “fatherless narration” in TV programs, and has influenced the theme of "spreading and inheriting culture" of such programs.

Comparatively speaking, the Western television programs on Chinese culture represented by the documentary series “Chinese” filmed by the BBC have attracted worldwide attention because they capture “human” to show the culture, especially focusing on the paternal narration, that is, they are quite impressed with the cultural achievements of our parents and the spiritual significance of passing on torch. For example, The Chinese are Coming, China on Four Wheels, Are Our Kids Tough Enough?, and The Chinese New Year are all centered on “human” and tell about the business culture, traffic culture, education culture and festival culture accumulated in China. Taking the narration of one tradition “Dashuhu” in The Chinese New Year as an example, the program is not confined to the simple presentation of this dangerous technique. Instead, through a dialogue with a father as a technical heritage, supplemented by his calluses, wounds, love for his daughter's and other narrative symbols, focusing on the story of his fearless of hardship and danger, dedication to the family's skills. Among them, there is silent dedication, tenacious determination, but also his helplessness and hesitation in modern time as both the descendant and father, so that the program appears strong and powerful, attractive and moving. This "paternity" narrative mode makes the cultural utensils fade away, the cultural heritage consciousness and vitality have been promoted, and the spiritual core of “Human” in culture has been excavated.
C. The Narrative Core of Cultural TV Programs

“Human” is an important carrier and symbol of traditional culture. The story of man behind culture is also an important content of carrying forward traditional culture. As far as its essence and present mission are concerned, the current Chinese cultural TV programs are to tell the story about “human” in China, to show a true, vivid and comprehensive China by means of paternal narration, and to carry forward the self-confidence of Chinese traditional culture. Compared with lively entertainment programs, cultural programs tend to be “high-pitched” in content, but should be “acceptable” for the audience. Their narration needs more consideration of the audience's acceptance and interest, focusing on “human” to narrate, and fully demonstrate vitality of “culture” transmission from generation to generation, rather than restrict to material value. Under this consideration, the National Treasure has found a breakthrough in the field of “high cold” cultural relics.

III. BRINGING CULTURE TO THE AUDIENCE: A NARRATIVE STRATEGY BASED ON “HUMAN”

“Narrative strategy” is a concept often mentioned in the field of narratology. In the field of film and television, it should be regarded as a systematic grasp of “narrative subject, characters, events, plots, time, space, rhythm, structure and many other elements in the field of narration” [12]. As far as Chinese film and television are concerned, narrative strategies mainly focus on the technique, such as cross-media, multi-modality, space-time transformation, etc., while less attention is paid to the “human” dimension. In terms of narrative strategy, the National Treasure has changed the traditional cultural relics programs from “object-oriented” to “human-oriented”, and formed a solemn and cordial self-confidence resonance with audience from the three aspects: narrative object, narrative perspective and narrative language.

A. Audience Centered Narrative Perspective

According to Passy Rabbock, narrative perspective is the relationship between the narrator and the story, also known as “narrative focus”, “narrative posture”, “focus adjustment” [13]. With the emphasis on Chinese classical culture, many cultural programs have targeted the museum. Taking the famous Palace Museum at home and abroad as an example, CCTV alone has produced three programs: The Palace Museum (2005), I Mend Cultural Relics in The Palace Museum (2016) and National Treasure (2017). The documentary Palace Museum takes the camera as the narrative angle, objectively observes the cultural relics to unfold the traditional impression of the Palace Museum artifacts. I Mend Cultural Relics in The Palace Museum examined cultural relics through the perspective of the restorer, presenting a secondary creation of the traditional impression of the Palace Museum, and added many stories of “human”. The National Treasure is centered on a variety of audience perspectives, supplemented by the guardian's and museum director's perspectives, closely linked to the “human” story and the “human” spirit related to the cultural relics. There is not only the direct impression of objective description, but also the secondary processing brought by the “sense of substitution”, which forms a multi-level perceptual experience.

First of all, through the role of “Guardian”, we can perceive cultural relics from the perspective of nonprofessional audience. The program is not limited to the narrative mode of experts commenting on the spot, but let nonprofessional “guardians” enter the museum, three-dimensionally conveying their perception of cultural relics to the public. For example, in the second episode of the “Chimes of Zeng Hou Yi”, Gang Wang, who has more insight of cultural relics in the performing circle, was invited to visit the museum. His silent observation, scrupulous behaviors and worship eyes captured by the camera made the artistic power of cultural relics penetrate the screen.

Secondly, takes young audiences as the narration target. From the perspective of cultural inheritance and promotion, self-reconstruction of the younger generation is the center of construction of cultural self-confidence. At present, the audience of many cultural programs is on the older side, ignoring the characteristics of youth groups and cultural education is common. The audience of related programs is mostly old people. The light in the hall is bright and lack of change. The host mostly talks about the value of cultural relics on a couch or chair, with slow and calm narrative rhythm. The overall atmosphere lacks young feeling which can hardly attract young people. The National Treasure program has effectively attracted a considerable number of young audiences through the adoption of colorful stage that are more acceptable to young people, the invitation of young artists, the arrangement of young live audiences, the energetic narrative rhythm, the use of hot words on the Internet and other detailed settings. At the same time, the program adheres to the keynote of national history and culture education. When Yangqianxi Yi came on stage, “the main attack of the bullet curtain” was not the young star with millions of fans, but the story of Pan's family who vowed to defend the national treasure for generations. [14] The spirit of “human” behind the cultural relics transcended the popular artist himself and became the focus of attention of young audiences. The National Treasure even scored 9.9 points on Bilibili, with 15.109 million video-on-demand. [15]

Many scholars criticize the Chinese younger generation for not paying much attention to their own culture, obsessed with foreign culture, and their self-alienation in spirit with a tendency to break away from traditional culture. National Treasure, in its own exploration, seems to reveal one of the keys to the problem. That is, it is not the lack of attractiveness of traditional culture itself, but the lack of self-confidence and innovation in narrative strategies of Chinese TV programs on the cultures created by our ancestors. The programs could not bring the paternal inspiration and encouragement that young audiences yearn for, thus the cultural theme of the program is very difficult to get their recognition.
B. The Narrative Object Centers on the Story of “Human” Behind Culture

The subject, object and receiver of narration are three organic elements in the whole narrative chain. The object of narration is to describe “who” [16] or “what”. Although all cultural relics programs boast that cultural relics are the main narrative objects, while they just put cultural artifacts in front of the camera.

The program The Palace Museum adopts a passive way for the audience to observe cultural relics through the screen, the narrative object is the silent cultural relics, and what they see is the well accepted judgment, the solemn sense cultural relics thus aroused. I Mend Cultural Relics in The Palace Museum brought semi-active audience through the cultural relics restorer's working language to feel the cultural relics, the narration object is the restoration of cultural relics, the sense of intimacy to cultural relics is aroused.

The National Treasure presents a brand new narrative object, which is locked in the story of the man behind the cultural relics through the interpretation of the human and the audience’s perspectives. Audiences naturally have a solemn and cordial sense of cultural self-confidence. Tony Leung is a rememberer in the story of “Shigu”. His confessions stressing each word, his locked eyebrows, his staring eyes, and his decent actions all reveal Sima Guang's longing for his father, his guilt at his father's entreatment, and his worries about the future of Song Dynasty. The object contents of these paternal narratives like “Father”, “Inheritance” and “State Responsibility” are well presented. Stone drum and personal fate, family responsibilities, the future of the state are closely linked, all of which make people feel that the cultural relics heritage is tough. In the program, the narrative object includes both the historical legends and the present stories of cultural relics, forming a complete information chain. This choice of narrative object, whether it is “Ningbo's Thousands Workers’ Sedan Chair” or “Wang Xizhi’s Works Copied in Tang Dynasty” the artifact itself is hidden, and the story of “man” has been highlighted, thus reducing the seriousness and academic nature of the cultural relics, narrowing the distance between the narrative object and the audience, arousing people's cultural recognition. With the help of the program, the museum tour has also been quick hot. This is exactly what cultural program needs to achieve.

C. Inspiration

Under the combined force of these innovative narrative perspectives and objects, the audience not only interacts with the host and the guardian on the stage, but also drives the same inner fluctuation of the audience in front of the screen, forming the multi-level interactive effect of the reception end of the cultural relics, reflecting the “human-oriented” and “audience-oriented” narration behind the cultural relics.

While we should also notice that cultural programs should not only focus on what they want to disseminate and how they disseminate. The television circles should balance the dialectical relationship between entertainment and social responsibility. As far as cultural programs are concerned, we should give full consideration to what audiences want to accept, what they can accept, and how they want to accept. This shows the importance to the acceptance end under the cultural self-confidence.

IV. THE PROGRAM ECHOES THE CULTURE: CONSISTENCY BETWEEN NARRATIVE SUBJECT “STAR EFFECT” AND CULTURAL CORE

The narrative subject in the category of film narratology refers to the “storyteller”. Unlike traditional text narration, the narrative subject of TV programs is not always unique. It is generally a pluralistic subject composed of hosts, story tellers, program participants and interviewees. As for the orientation of the narrative subject, it is generally believed that “the audience imitates and conforms to the words and deeds of the stars”, so inviting the stars to act as the narrative subject can “shorten the distance between the column and the audience and dissolve the sense of separation between the two parties to the greatest extent” [17]. Whether it's a traditional entertainment variety show, a parent-child education program such as Where Are We Going, Dad? or a cultural program such as Letters Alive, it's very common to use “star effect” to promote programs. Comparatively speaking, National Treasure embodies self-determination in the “star effect” of the narrative subject, realizes the cultural consistency with the program character, and promotes the self-confidence of Chinese culture.

A. Independent Positioning of Host Style

As the center of the narrative subject, the positioning of the host is particularly important for a program aiming at “making cultural relics live”. Difei Yuan and Fangfang Liang believe that “the link between the host's language style and the audience's psychology must take into account its own factors, including appearance, personality characteristics, cultural connotation” [18]. Unlike ordinary entertainment hosts, cultural program hosts should not only be well-known and have rich hosting experience, but also modest stage manners, good reputation, certain cultural background, and humorous narrative style.

Guoli Zhang, the No. 001 interpreter of National Treasure, has accumulated a lot experience as one famous Chinese artist for many years. His decent image, rich hosting experience and humorous style meet the requirements of the program. He is more like an old father who tells his children the family stories. With his calm and magnetic father-like voice, he shows the audience the charm of Chinese traditional culture with self-modesty and self-confidence. National Treasure repeats the openings with: “such a fancy start, you can tell this is a show at its early stage. How young we are, that is, 5000 years or so”, which is full of paternal appeal. This kind of implicit language, especially the deliberate pause of Mr. Zhang after saying "how young we are" every time, like questioning and answering himself. This modest while confident narration mood is more like a typical Chinese father's pride in telling his family's glory to his children, which the common “fatherless narration” in Chinese film and TV could not reach. In the tenth episode, he joked about a pair of popular relics “Gou Jian’s Sword"
and “Fu Cha’s Spear” in the Hubei Museum, which not only showed the popularity of cultural relics among young audiences, but also led to a profound statement that “the value of cultural relics lies not only in the artifacts themselves, but also in the historical connotation behind them”. This spontaneous grasp of the host's connotation avoids the Korean-Japanese style of hip-hop, or the academic style, seems elegant and interesting, and opens a door for the promotion of the quality of the related programs.

B. Independent Grasp of the “Star Effect” of the Guardian of National Treasure

The guardian of the national treasure is another narrative subject creatively set by the program. They not only play the role of interaction with the host, but also shoulder the responsibility of historical relic’s story interpretation and personal perception. For a long time, influenced by the orientation of Western entertainment programs, many Chinese entertainment programs choose guest stars mainly according to their face and popularity, often neglecting the conformity of their image and style with program positioning. Sometimes the unobtrusive, arrogant, negative news of the stars are more popular among the program makers, which also brought a bad impact on the entire domestic television industry. The “high, solemn, elegant” Chinese cultural programs once appear the star with negative image and news will greatly reduce the program's position.

Unlike the ordinary variety shows, National Treasure does not merely pursue star's face and popularity in selecting the guardian star of state treasure, but focus on prudent, decent, aged, and male elements. In the grasp of age, the program used a large number of artists over 35 beyond the total proportion of three quarters. The program did not fall into the “gender correct” convention, that is been forced to invite guests to be gender even, but a large number of male guests, up to 76%, basically masculine male artists. They even invite one father-son partners, Guoqing Cai and Xuanzheng Cai, to promote the program's paternal narration. This pair of father and son, on the one hand, shows the father's earnest teaching and earnest expectations of children, on the other hand, the son's pride in his father's achievements, which is precisely the essence of Chinese traditional culture. Attaching importance to father's narrative identity shows the spiritual core of the program, and makes the young audience in front of the TV feel the touch. Not only that, but even other male guests emphasize their identities and perceptions as fathers or sons. In the third episode, for example, Guoli Zhang pointed out that fathers are always happy that their children are better than themselves. Because this is a paternal sense of accomplishment and pride on the “next generation is better”. This “paternity” as a narration identity constantly strengthens the color of “fathers”, “tradition” and “development” in the program narration, and promotes the appeal of traditional culture to the audience.

Furthermore, the guests invited also have a close cultural concord with the heritage. Beinning Sa, for example, was born in Hubei Province, where cultural relics were unearthed. He graduated from the legal profession thus suitable to be the guardian of the Qin Bamboo Slips found in Yumeng which recorded the legal system in Qin Dynasty. These self-conscious grasp on the narrative subject not only guarantees the prudent positioning of the program, reduces the risk of negative news, keeps the reputation of the program, but also conforms to the elegant and refined orientation of the program. National Treasure pours out a clean stream for the choice of star-guests in Chinese television programs.

C. Independent Selection of “Civilian Stars”

Unlike the present cultural programs in China, which majorly focus on inviting celebrities from the artistic circles and collecting circles as narrators, National Treasure invites 29 celebrity artists as guardians of national treasures, as well as 35 “civilian stars” including experts devoted themselves to cultural relic’s research and people in culture conservation. Inviting ordinary people to participate in the program recording is also a new narrative strategy in recent years. “On the one hand, it greatly increases the breadth and depth of television narrative, on the other hand, it makes the voice at the bottom expressed, naturally attracted a lot of attention and consumption from the grass-roots level” [19].

National Treasure does not present this civilian narration in the program as a plain method, it does not emphasizes their civilian identity, but the extraordinary stories behind their identity related to cultural relics, and their persistence as family or group. These “civilian stars” can be categorized into three categories: first, cultural relic’s experts and cultural workers, such as the narrator of Shigu in “story of today”, Mr. Liang Jinsheng from the family of cultural relic’s protection. His stories of fathers and grandfathers who braved the fire of war to protect the Shigu make it covered with the spiritual meaning of the family heritage. Secondly, the inheritors of cultural relics and crafts, such as Qinghui Wu, China's aviation engineer, the narrator of the third episode of “Moire Copper Prohibition”, have expressed the value of traditional crafts today. Thirdly, the collectors, such as An Lin, collector of folk cultural relics in the sixth program “Changsha Kiln Green Glaze Brown Poetry Kettle”. Their love and dedication to cultural relics is the best interpretation of cultural self-confidence, fully tapping their own “civilian star effect”, avoiding vulgar expression, highlighting the positive spiritual dimension of the program, and overcoming the limitations of the similar program characteristic “civilian identity existence”.

In addition, National Treasure also ingeniously invited nine civilian star teams, including heritage conservation and restoration team, volunteer service team, heritage technology team and culture inheritance team. Their narrative settings form a spiritual harmony with the meaningful lines in the ninth episode, “National Treasure can be regarded as valuable treasures, not only because of itself, but also because we can see the mark of an era through it, and the heroes behind it who can make it endure for thousands of years”.

In the era that Chinese culture been inherited and developed, Chinese cultural TV programs should be based on innovation and demonstrating cultural self-confidence. Cultural relics should not be regarded as silent artifacts.
hidden in museums, but narrative media capable of telling their own stories; culture should not be the object of amusement or self-admiration, but the achievements and continuous inheritance of their fathers. Another cultural program *If the National Treasure Can Talk* launched by CCTV in 2018 takes “Let the National Treasure Talk” as the theme, and highlights the “human” factor, all reflects the spread of this narrative integration in the field of cultural television programs.

V. CONCLUSION

China Central Television's *National Treasure* has made bold innovations in narrative strategies and narrative subjects, attaching importance to the cultural factors of “human”, paying attention to the characteristics of the audience, especially the younger generation, and attaching importance to the independent grasp of the “star effect” of the invited guests and cultural coherence. The audience's interest in Chinese cultural relics and their recognition of Chinese culture have been aroused within a limited narrative space, and the audience of the younger generation of Chinese cultural transmission has been nurtured, thus matching the cultural character of this program. This narrative fusion mode also adopts the paternal narrative technique which is rarely used in Chinese film and television circles, and successfully reflects the concern for the paternal culture items “fathers” “tradition” “inheritance” and “development” behind the cultural relics. It rises from the concern for cultural objects to the spiritual core of “people” behind culture, and achieving good cultural dissemination effect.

The success of *National Treasure* shows that cultural TV programs could be more interesting and meaningful by taking the audience's acceptance as the guide, innovation as the driving force, making full use of the multi-modal narrative techniques of television language and telling the story of “human”. The active exploration of *National Treasure* not only promotes the Chinese culture going out, but also has a wider significance for the spread and inheritance of traditional culture on TV media in the global environment.

REFERENCES