

# Observation on the Turn of Music Talent TV Show 3.0 in China

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## ABSTRACT

Music talent shows have always been an important type of Chinese TV programs. In the 3.0 era, TV programs are mainly about idol cultivation and subculture music. Hall's encoding / decoding theory provides theoretical explanations for the new ecology of program makers, players and audiences in the 3.0 era and the new landscape of consumer society. With the development of big data and new media, TV producers put the audience's position in front to bridge the gap brought by different meaning structures, and at the same time share the coding identity with the players and the audience to consolidate the interactive ritual chain. In the 3.0 era of musical TV talent show in China, subculture has gained space for expansion, advanced gender culture has gained the Promised Land for development, and capital has been realized by hot style. What needs to be paid attention to is the influence of "information cocoons" on teenagers as the main fan group.

*Keywords: music talent show, consumer society, audience, code, interactive ritual chain*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Music talent shows occupy half of China's TV variety shows, and have a profound impact on the development of Chinese reality TV programs and Chinese pop music for many years. With the development of network technology, the construction of all media platform and the change of transmission and reception mode, music talent shows are gradually moving towards the mass carnival of cultural consumption. The new ecology and consumption industrial chain composed of investors, program producers, players and audiences can be studied from the perspective of breaking through media barriers to think about the future strategic direction of China's reality TV programs.

## II. AUDIENCE PREPOSITION: FROM FLOW TO PICK

Tracing back to China's music TV talent shows, it can start from young singers TV Grand Prix on CCTV in 1984. However, its elitist line was hard to be copied by TV stations at the lower level, and there was a big gap in the field of hardware and software at that time. Therefore, it did not drive the development of music TV talent shows. It was in the summer of 2005 that music TV talent shows really ushered in phenomenal programs. In 2005, the number of short message votes of the top three players in "super girl singers" exceeded 8 million, and the insertion price of advertisement in the finals reached 112500 yuan / 15 seconds, which

exceeded the price of 110000 yuan / 15 seconds of CCTV's most expensive advertising period. [1] With the characteristics of grassroots, popularization and democratization, "super girl singers" opened Pandora's box in the 1.0 era of China's talent show with high popularity and high commercial value, and then triggered a blowout of national music talent shows. In the 1.0 era, there is no threshold for the audition of music talent shows. The judges are composed of professional music producers and music critics who have sharp points and sharp tongues. The results in the early stage of the competition are dominated by the judges, and the later stage is supplemented by public voting. Hundreds of millions of ordinary Chinese people's long-standing grassroots dream broke out at the beginning of the new century. However, after the carnival, due to the serious homogenization of music talent shows of various TV stations, some even fell into the mire of excessive entertainment for the sake of eye-catching, and the audience gradually suffered from aesthetic fatigue, and the overall music TV talent shows were gradually in the doldrums. With the dispute and discussion, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) successively promulgated the document "SARFT will strengthen the management of star shows on TV" in 2011 and 2013 [2] and "Notice on Doing a Good Job in the Programming and Recording of 2014 TV Channels" [3], strictly controlling the number and broadcasting time of singing programs. And music talent shows of major TV stations entered a period of calming down and optimization. To a certain extent, it has accelerated

the survival of the fittest of music talent shows. During this period, Zhejiang Satellite TV and Canxing co-produced "The Voice of China" stood out. The contestants of "The Voice of China" are unknown musicians or ordinary people who have a certain musical foundation selected in advance by the program group. With the guidance of professional tutors and the blessing of concert-level sound, the program broke away from the previous criticism of uneven good and bad, appreciation of the ugly and novelty. At this time, the music talent shows change into the "show" mode in which mentors and contestants work together, instead of selecting by the judges and audiences, and gradually enter the 2.0 era in which high-level musical skills competition is the core. "Chinese Idol" and "Sing My Song" are representative programs of this period. In the 2.0 era, audience's music literacy is getting higher and higher, and there are fewer and fewer high-quality and unknown players who have not been explored by the program. The music talent shows, whose core competitiveness is high-quality music experience, is declining.

Hall believes that the production and dissemination of TV discourse "meaning" can be divided into three stages. The first stage is the production of TV discourse "meaning", that is, the encoding stage. The code of making programs is conventional, but the dominant one is the preset preference and consciousness form of TV producers; the second stage is the "finished product" stage, that is, the completion state of TV works; the third stage is also the most important stage, that is, the decoding stage of the audience. [4] According to Hall's research, "meaning is not only "transmitted" by the transmitter, but also "produced" by the receiver. [5] However, due to the media characteristics, the traditional media can not realize the identification of the decoder's individual meaning structure and carry out targeted coding. Therefore, as far as the individual coder is concerned, there is always a deviation of meaning structure between the transmission and reception. Due to the asymmetry of the meaning structure between the coder and the decoder, there are many meaning gaps in the TV text, which provide opportunities for adversarial reading. [6] Therefore, Hall emphasizes that attention should be paid to the subjectivity and initiative of the audience. In the first two eras of music talent show, audience affected the performance of contestants to a certain extent, such as SMS voting. However, in the process of the program, audiences were mainly watching, and they were more convinced by the judges and tutors. The gap between meanings made the audience and the program show the characteristics of one-way following. The "gap" between the two made the relationship difficult to be stable and lasting.

With the development of new media represented by network and mobile intelligent terminal, the strong

position of traditional TV, newspaper and radio has been broken by all media platform. The development of big data also provides technical support to bridge the "gap" brought by different meaning structures. With the joint efforts of the two, the transmission pattern of TV programs has begun to undergo profound changes. Program producers are no longer limited to TV stations, and video websites such as iqiyi, Tencent and Youku are the representatives of related programs. Talent show players and audiences are concentrated in the "online generation of post-2000 and post-2005". Interactive mode uses microblog, movements, bullet screen and other network channels to replace the single on-site assistance. The competition no longer takes music skills as the evaluation standard and purpose, and music is only the carrier of players' display style. More attention is paid to the personalized symbols output by players. So far, the music talent show rooted in all media has opened the 3.0 era. The music talent shows in the 3.0 era are mainly divided into two categories. One is the talent raising show, such as "Idol Producer", "Produce 101" and "The Coming One". The other is "The Rap of China", "The Big Band" and "Instant Audio", which mainly display subculture elements. No matter what kind it is, audiences' participation and discourse power have been given unprecedented attention. In view of the changes in the audiences' communication initiative, Schramm uses a very appropriate metaphor — "cafeteria". He compares the information transmitted by the media to various dishes in the cafeteria. Audiences' participation in the communication process is like entering the cafeteria. They can select dishes and control the quantity by their own likes and dislikes. The control of capital on the audience is no longer based on "power" or "Holy Spirit", but on "consensus". In the process of media information dissemination, the audiences have got rid of the completely passive position and gradually began to control the rhythm and direction of the program. TV producers put the audience's position in front and set the agenda with the reference of "meaning structure 2" to reduce the audiences' confrontational decoding. When the program is broadcast, the producers can quickly decode the decoding behavior of the audiences relying on big data, and make the adjustment of the agenda in the next program. The players will set their own "set up" to satisfy their fantasies according to the audiences' likes and dislikes. The performance of the track will be decided by the audience's vote, the position in the team will be ranked according to the level of popularity in the competition, and the number of shots depends on the popularity. In the 3.0 era of music talent shows, the producers and judges of the program are invisible in the program. The audiences who could only pursue behind the political capital, economic capital and cultural capital have won the limited discourse right with the help of the media. They have obtained great satisfaction in the "empowerment" and enjoy the general superiority

of "creator" and "dreamer". In the process of initiative and passivity, production and consumption, resistance and discipline, audiences, program producers and players have dual and interchangeable identities in encoding and decoding. In the synchronization of behavior and continuity of ritual interaction, emotional sharing forms an interactive ritual chain.

### **III. CODERS AND DECODERS SHARE A FIXED INTERACTIVE RITUAL CHAIN**

#### *A. Virtual presence*

For rituals, participation in an action or event is the foundation. In Collins' view, the prerequisite for the chain of interactive rituals is the physical presence of the body. Media is information. Every new media will open up new ways of social life and behavior. In the Internet age, as an extension of human beings, media has expanded the time and space for audience to participate in the ceremony, and made up for the limitations of physical presence. The audience can choose the time and place to watch the program according to their own situation. They can also capture the views and emotions of other ceremony participants through bullet screen, comment area and other social platforms, so as to enhance the atmosphere of "common presence". All-media not only breaks the limitation of the time and space of information transmission, but also enriches the presentation form and communication channel of information, and constructs more ritual space that is different from the daily and personalization. The program group is linked with microblog, Microview, douyin, WeChat and other platforms to disseminate the pieces with strong transmission, and the gap between the fuzzy world and the material world is blurred. The producers of the program also produce additional derivative programs, such as "Produce 101" and "101 advanced practice room" and "101 dormitory diary", which provide rich scenes for the audience to understand the training and daily life of the players, and strengthen the audience's sense of immersion. The program attracts the audience to help the players through large-scale and multi scene ceremony. For example, "Youth 2" opened the "help list" in iqiyi and "PLMM popularity list" in QQ music.

In the 3.0 era, the interaction among program producers, players and audiences has evolved from the original information sharing to the ritual scene interaction. In the process of watching the live broadcast of the contestants every day and helping the players promote the list, the audience has realized the daily ritual, and then transformed into fans.

#### *B. Setting up barriers for outsiders*

Jenkins, a scholar, defined "fan" as a person who actively participates in business, entertainment or ball

games, worships or is infatuated with sports stars, movie stars or singers. [7] Fans are keen to name their group. The name of fans is the basic condition for fans to identify insiders and outsiders. The establishment of fans group makes all kinds of audiences form a new social loyalty subordination relationship cross the region, class, age and gender. As a producer with cultural identification and productivity, fans will make their own group logo, lamp board and team uniform, so that they can distinguish themselves from outsiders when they are in need of help. They will spontaneously establish independent network gathering places such as QQ group, WeChat group and microblog topic. Also, they take the original program as the symbol library, and make Internet meme, exclusive language and cyberword for communication. "In a capitalist society, assembly is a means by which the governed creates its own culture from the resources of the other." [8] Fans produce new texts through "collage" and "isomorphism" of "meaning structure 1", representing the productive practice of different ideologies into the original discourse field. This is the audience's resistance to the unilateral output of the program producers and players in the 3.0 era, which is conducive to the shaping of fans' community value and cultural memory. The new text encoded by fans will form a threshold for outsiders. The richer the new text is, the thicker the barrier between them and outsiders will be.

In the consumer society, consumers buy goods, and the grade or class implied by the media is an important factor for consumers to refer to. The main audience of 3.0 music talent show who were born after 2000 and 2005 grew up in the information age of material abundance, with high consumption desire and huge consumption potential. Under the influence of consumerism, fans in the 3.0 era are more keen on buying "the same item" brought by the contestants, and construct and express their fans' identity with the surrounding symbolic symbols, so as to obtain a "sense of membership". At the same time, the identity of the other party can be judged according to whether the other party consumes these symbols.

When fans expand their sense of alienation from outsiders through communication and consumption, the stronger the sense of "being like-minded" is, the more stable the coherence of conversation rhythm and the stability of communication field in interactive ceremony will be.

#### *C. Building a common focus*

"Fans" are scattered all over the world. In the virtual community, it is necessary to constantly create common situations and focus to attract and gather them. At the beginning of the program, most of the contestants are not well-known ordinary people, so they are not enough to become the focus. In order to attract the audience, the

program producers choose top idol as the "credibility avatar" as the "common focus" in the early stage of the program. The top idols quickly attract the public to believe the authority of the program and empathize with the program. With the advancement of the program, the contestants gradually have fans, and the producers and players will set new topics closely related to their performances, makeup, relationships, and even their private lives. Program producers and contestants use the fission communication of microblog to turn the new topics into the focus of fans' sharing and discussion.

Fiske believes that the pleasure of fans comes from three aspects: the pleasure of identification, the pleasure of reproduction, and the pleasure of production. [9] In the 3.0 era, fans are not satisfied with only participating in the "common focus" set by program producers and players, but they are willing to link "ceremony" with daily life to build a new focus. For example, Yang Chaochao's programmer fans held "Yang Chaoyue programming contest" to enhance its popularity in the science and technology circle.

With the collusion of the producers, players and fans, the internal common focus will be upgraded to a hot spots of wider range, which will attract more traffic. Finally, the players will be a new top.

#### *D. Sharing emotional experience*

The first three factors of interactive ritual chain point to the formation of collective consciousness through collective excitement. However, only by transforming consciousness into emotion and keeping a relatively consistent emotional rhythm and sharing emotional state among members can the group achieve stability and development.

With the development of Internet and the rise of otaku culture, the Internet generation is more willing to release their emotional needs in cyberspace. They transfer their expectations of dreams and their desire to be recognized to the music talent shows advocating competition and pursuing dreams. The audience active in cyberspace can integrate the excitement of common pursuit of stars into the emotional chain in the "pseudo" interpersonal relationship with the players and other fans, and then become an imaginary community, and obtain emotional satisfaction similar to the real social life. In the process of taking part in the cultivation of idols or pushing subculture to the public's view, fans gain the sense of achievement of growing up and succeeding together with the players. These feelings will become the motive force for the next interactive ceremony among producers, players and audiences.

## **IV. REFLECTION ON TURNING**

### *A. The fertile land of gender culture in advanced society*

People are born with physiological gender, but the gender tagging of a certain character or trait is mainly influenced by society and culture. With the diversification of information receiving channels and fragmentation of survival time and space, more and more social members, especially teenagers, obtain gender identity through mass media and complete their gender socialization. Harold Lasswell's "three social functions" of mass media in the "Structure and function of communication in society" and C-R Wright's "Four functions" all emphasize that mass media is not only the carrier of culture, but also a guide to social culture and structure. TV's keen monitoring power can directly and quickly reflect the current social gender culture dynamics. To a certain extent, its coordination function can resolve the contradictions in the process of shaping social gender culture by morality, culture and ideology.

From "super girl" to "idol trainee", the discussion about "watching and being watched" and "body consumption" in music TV shows has been going on. Both men and women are victims of the dualistic gender culture. In the consumer society, the discourse power of men, who once had the advantage of production, has been replaced by consumers. In order to fight for traffic and capital, TV programs are willing to provide diversified consumers with a stage to show and a microphone to speak. With the development of "she economy", women have become the vanguard and main force of advocating and practicing gender culture in advanced society. Their enthusiasm for voting on music talent TV shows in 3.0 era is a concentrated rebound after losing the right to speak for a long time. The feminization of popular male players and the aesthetic trend of female players are essentially women's refutation of male masculinity and feminine femininity in male-dominated society. For the female groups who have been suppressed by patriarchy for a long time, weakening the absolute binary opposition between men and women is the way to obtain fundamental freedom. Female co-star culture breaks the traditional imagination of gender relations with the help of television media, and impacts the mainstream discourse, opening up a happy land for the development of multiple gender identity.

### *B. The crisis of capital realization*

In the consumer society, consumption activities guide the direction of social activities, and consumption relationship is the main force to construct social relations. The author does not equate the audience's preposition in the 3.0 era with equal empowerment. The essence of audience preposition is a commercial conspiracy with audience demand as the core. And it is

activated by capital in the form of flow, and led by consumption, aiming at realizing the rapid realization of capital.

The capital takes the players as IP, layout and development of the whole industry ecological chain with competitions, meetings, surrounding products and endorsements as the main products, while the audience is the direct consumers. The capital sets up various channels and formulates detailed rules to make it clear to the audience that the more consumers spend for the players, the greater the right to promote the development of the competition narrative in the direction he wants. A feast of symbols and a carnival of consumption under the control of capital are in full swing. It seems that the audience is more involved in the meaning construction and deconstruction of "beauty". In fact, as Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" discusses, the public's recognition of the "beauty" constructed by power leaders such as commercial media will actually further strengthen the subject's control of the right of discourse of "beauty". [10]

"Driven by the motive of pursuing profits, capitalist industry always tries to control the cultural significance of commodities by making the cultural significance of commodities closely match the operation of financial economy as closely as possible." [11] Producers turn contestants into "merchandise". In order to attract traffic and ignite hot spots, the producers do not hesitate to achieve short-term benefits by selecting controversial contestants to participate in the competition, creating topics by dislocation editing, and over hyping people who are not in line with the actual situation. This is not only an encroachment on the future career of the players, but also a consumption of the program life cycle. The more popular a product is, the more likely it will be reproduced in the existing process of a cultural factory. When the cost of a product is lowered, the profit will be higher. Only by purchasing the copyright of a foreign program, the capital can have super high liquidity. However, this cannot hide the worries about the original development of Chinese reality TV behind the homogenization and standardization of competition system, contestants, editing techniques and marketing means of each program. The sustainable development of music talent show 3.0 also requires the program producers, players, audience and capital to break through the symptoms of single type, audio-visual spectacle and shallow thinking in the game of transmitting and receiving discourse power.

### *C. "Information cocoon" restricts people's free and all-round development*

In the new media era, with the rise of social media represented by microblog and WeChat, individual fans can easily find their own groups and connect them into a network group. Because of pursuing common idols,

the more intense the interaction within the circle is, the more information they can spread with each other, the more serious the homogenization of information types are, and the more single understanding and thinking is. Finally, it forms a closed "information cocoon".

Due to the single information source channel of "information cocoon", the fans mainly composed of young people tend to exaggerate the part of the event and ignore the whole picture and cause and effect of the event. The growth illusion of "overnight popularity", "dream coming true" and "people's attention" is easy to be over interpreted by fans. They enthusiastically invest in various consumption set by capital. Instead of identifying oneself and others through production activities, they become lost in the direction of self-identification in extreme values. In "The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind", Schiller once said that as long as people gather as a group, they will become extremely stupid and violent. In the information cocoon, it is easy for people to regard all the remarks that are contrary to their own opinions as the opposite. In addition to the "protection" of anonymity on the Internet and the prevalence of ethical nihilism, different groups of fans attack and discredit the players beyond the normal rationality. In the network violence, whether it is the fans who participate in scolding, human flesh, rumors, or those who are coerced into it, they will ultimately be victims of online violence. Being trapped in the "information cocoon" for a long time, people are immersed in the fast-food, entertainment oriented network and cultural commodities without depth and mode. People only stay at the level of feeling in real life and cannot reach the height and depth of rationality. They are difficult to make substantive response to the anxiety of the times, lose care for society and reality, and indulge in the closed world of individuals, which leads to the spiral of silence.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

China's music talent TV shows have changed from national carnival to skill competition to style oriented, reflecting the process of TV discourse inclining from producer to player and then to audience. In 3.0 era, the producers, contestants and audiences jointly construct and fix an interactive ritual chain to bridge the gap between encoding and decoding. In this turn, music talent TV shows are not only the stage of subculture display, but also the fertile land for the rapid breeding and dissemination of new subculture. It is worth noting that in this carnival, the coercion of capital to the players and the audience may ruin the sustainable development of the 3.0 era. The fans mainly composed of teenagers are easy to fall into the information cocoon, and are difficult to accurately position themselves, and lose their concern for reality in the ethical nihilism and non-deep cultural commodities.

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