

# Study on Dialect TV Programs and Audience's Cultural Psychological Identity

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## ABSTRACT

As a niche type of program, dialect TV programs can gain good recognition and audience rating for many reasons. From the perspective of TV programs' cultural and psychological care for the audience, this paper uses the theories of communication, psychology, sociology and other disciplines to discuss the care of dialect TV programs for people's spiritual needs of the audience such as spirit, culture, will, belief, ideal and other aspects as well as the value generated by such care. Dialect TV programs have unique and outstanding advantages in terms of audience emotion and cultural identity. To explore the relationship between dialect TV programs and audience's cultural psychology contributes to further thinking about the value creation and realization of TV programs.

*Keywords: dialect TV programs, emotional identity, cultural identity, value realization*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dialect is the identity of a group, the emotional support of the specific group and its cultural psychology of belonging. It is the instinctive response of dialect groups to maintain the latent consciousness of self-language, which may either be stronger or weaker, manifest or remain under cover. With the rapid development of China's social economy, the public awareness of rights has been increasing. Amid this, safeguarding the right of language is also a manifestation of the increasing public awareness. In the mid-2000s, there were calls to "defend Shanghainese", and in 2010 there were calls to "defend Cantonese". These voices come from the strong dialects of the economically developed regions. In recent years, the voice of "protecting dialects" and "protecting multiculturalism" has been rising. The "Cantonese support" incident in Guangzhou and Hong Kong in July 2010 was a manifestation of the fierce dispute between dialects and Mandarin. It shows people's anxiety and even rejection of the foreign language culture shock, and reflects the confrontation between mother tongue and foreign language, local culture and foreign culture. There are many reasons for people to maintain dialect, among which obtaining and satisfying the identity of cultural psychology is one of the key factors. The popularity of dialect TV shows expresses people's deep demands for dialect cultural identity, and reflects people's deep attachment and belonging to their mother tongue and its culture amid the multi-culture. As the symbol of regional culture, dialect is the spiritual sustenance of the people in a certain region and symbolizes the spiritual unity of a region. As is said, the

demand for dialects in today's society is mainly reflected in cultural values and even more in a psychological pursuit. In the current situation of diversification, dialect TV programs give dialects a place of discourse power and satisfy and embody the language rights of people in modern society. The attention of dialect TV programs to the cultural psychological identity of the audience emphasizes the dominant role of people in maintaining language.

The word "identity" comes from the Latin "identitas", meaning "identical". The meaning of universality is the identity between the two, or the consistency and coherence of the same thing in different time and space. As far as its connotation is concerned, identity includes conceptual identity and status identity. In terms of its nature, identity is divided into fact identity and value identity. Cognitive psychology points out that there are individual differences in the speed and angle of cognitive subjects' choice, grasp and integration of information, but this does not fundamentally eliminate the mutual understanding and recognition of "common experience" between different subjects and form a more basic judgment about general facts. In contrast, the identification of value facts is more difficult than the general facts.<sup>1</sup> The radio and television media are the mouthpieces of the Party and the state, carrying the voice and attitude of the government. Therefore, the identity of the media represents the identity of the country and the government to a certain extent. This is

<sup>1</sup> Yan Hui. Consensus and Identity: In the Perspective of Human Studies [J]. Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences), 2004 (4): 99-102+107.

also an important characteristic of the media which is different from other modes and channels of communication. The media convey government information and explain government actions to the public, promote mutual understanding and communication, and maintain social peace. Therefore, the media is an important subject in the manufacture and dissemination of identity. From the identity produced by the media, the public can obtain the information they need, get the authoritative identity certification, and then get affirmation and satisfaction. Such recognition is more likely to bring people more active social participation and active acquisition of relevant information, so as to promote smooth communication. A high degree of identification is conducive to the elimination of disputes and conflicts between different groups, conducive to social stability and national unity.

## II. THE EMOTIONAL IDENTITY GIVEN BY DIALECT TV PROGRAMS

In a period of social transformation and great changes in social structure, China's social transformation brings changes in social values, social psychology, lifestyle and many other aspects. With the continuous development of economy, the most significant and direct change is the change of life style, and the change of life style causes the change of social psychology. Common social psychology such as social sense of belonging, collective sense and idealism tend to weaken, while individual needs such as emotional communication, emotional catharsis and emotional support are constantly highlighted and strengthened. People's psychology and demands have become unprecedentedly realistic and rational, and people have also become emotional. First of all, the satisfaction of emotional demands is the main representation of social psychological changes. Due to the rapid development of economy, rapid changes of society, the strong impact of various cultures and the change of ideology, modern people are getting anxious, stressed and hesitated. The further emotional manifestation is the sharp increase in demand for emotional attachment, emotional comfort, emotional nostalgia and even emotional venting and emotional consumption. As Clive Bell has said, "Finding that emotional confidence, that belief in the absolute good — that makes life a meaningful and harmonious whole. Because aesthetic emotion is external to and beyond it, people can escape from life in it."<sup>2</sup> The second manifestation of social psychological change is the enhancement of social individual self-attention. The widening gap between the rich and the

poor makes the public generally pay attention to the development of individuals, and the yearning for success, the pursuit of fame and wealth, the importance of the right to know, the strengthening of the sense of self-protection and so on are all presented in concentration. Social problems are the main concern of TV programs. Social problems are not a single specific problem, but a concentrated reflection of a certain type of problem. To follow up and present social problems is not only a consideration of media's communication ability, but also a reflection of TV media's sense of responsibility.

Dialect TV programs have the value of emotional identification. Every regional dialect TV program has a fixed audience. According to a relevant survey, the age distribution of this group is relatively wide, with the majority of people between 25 and 55 years old, accounting for about 50% of the population, while the other 50% are people older than 55 years old. What dialect carries is the culture and memory of a land. No matter the audience who have left their hometown or the local audience, whenever they hear the dialect, they will involuntarily feel the affinity. The same news expressed in dialect can not only make local people feel closely related, but also make people feel the news closer to their own lives. Schramm's "a field of experience" emphasizes in particular that communication is the aggregation of two or more people due to symbols and experiences of common interest. This gathering process is the process of the construction and integration of the relationship between the communication parties. "In this relationship, symbols are shared, and although they cannot exactly mean the same thing to any of the participants, the result of this relationship is that understanding gets closer and closer as communication continues."<sup>3</sup> Influenced by the feudal patriarchal concepts for a long time, the Chinese people have a very strong regional concept. This kind of regional concept has various forms of expression, but the general characteristic is that in subjective evaluation, people tend to praise the region they belong to and reject the external things; in terms of emotion, they are close to people who belong to the same region and indifferent to those don't. People have strong cohesion and sense of responsibility only within their shared region, while being indifferent to those from other places. This regional concept is the special emotion to the local sound when reflected in the language. Just as the feelings expressed in the lines "I left home young. I return old; Speaking as then, but with hair grown thin (少小离家老大回, 乡音无改鬓毛衰)," since the regional emotion cannot be avoided, "local accent" in social life has been given a warm meaning. "Local accent" is actually a kind of emotional cognition

<sup>2</sup> Yang Chenghu. Research on the Motive Force and Factors of TV Program Innovation — The Fourth Part of Research on Chinese TV Program Innovation [J]. *Modern Communication*, 2012 (7): 50-57.

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Jingyun, Gao Guiwu. The Communication Study of Psychological Distance [J]. *Modern Communication*, 2011 (3): 47-51.

from the heart. The atmosphere created by dialect TV programs is like the trigger of regional emotion, which makes the audience spontaneously feel happy, amiable and even proud when they hear the local accent. The research of communication psychology shows that the audience is more likely to accept the existing information in their own fixed ideas, thoughts and memories, while they tend to be cautious or reject the information contrary to their own thoughts or experiences. If the content presented is familiar and understood by an individual or group of people, its appeal will be enhanced, and vice versa. If incompatibility of values is involved, the audience may reject it outright. It should be said that dialect TV programs are worthy of affirmation in the integration of content, form and audience's emotional dimension. This kind of integration is the basis for the positive interaction of communication activities and an effective way to spread local culture. From the perspective of communication, homogeneity contributes to the establishment of a harmonious imparting relationship. If two heterogeneous individuals communicate with each other, they will often have psychological discomfort or estrangement due to their different beliefs and ways of thinking. Therefore, shortening the psychological distance between transmitter and receiver plays an important role in promoting communication. The core and development of the theory of mass communication is to study how to effectively shorten the psychological distance between the communicator and the audience. Dialect TV programs' emotional identification of the audience expresses the media's spiritual support to the audience, which will bring the audience a kind of spiritual warmth, containing emotional support factors such as understanding/resonance, encouragement, affirmation/recognition, etc. Understanding/resonance means that the program makes the audience feel that their emotions and knowledge are understood and their spirit is not lonely. For example, the feeling of nostalgia for one's native land and hometown and the incomparable love for the local accent are general natural feelings. When the TV programs strengthen, render and artify such feelings, they provide an understanding and resonance of such feelings. The satisfaction of the audience will be further sublimated and they will obtain a higher level of enjoyment. Encouragement means that the program contains and transmits information that makes the audience feel happy and excited, so that the audience can be more certain about the correctness of their self-cognition and behavior. The general audience, in particular, often needs to obtain deterministic information to guide their behavior from the media. So many are often heard saying something like "people said this on TV..." It shows that people trust and depend on TV media to a certain extent. Affirmation/recognition expresses agreement with the idea or behavior of the audience.

Like understanding/resonance and encouragement, affirmation/approval gives the audience positive spiritual support and produces pleasant feelings. The emotional support brought by dialect TV programs to the audience has, to a certain extent, narrowed the psychological distance between them and the audience and enhanced the acceptability of program communication. Whether the program is accepted by the audience and the degree of acceptance is naturally one of the important reference factors to measure its communication value.

### **III. THE CULTURAL IDENTITY GIVEN BY DIALECT TV PROGRAMS**

Identity is a psychological activity of human beings. There are many kinds of identity, and cultural identity is, in essence, an individual's identification and sense of belonging to the group to which they belong. It is a person's psychological activity to identify which group they belong to and what characteristics the group has. This kind of psychological activity influences and dominates the individual to consciously safeguard the interests of the group and promote its development. Of course, the establishment of cultural identity is a relatively long and difficult process, which requires long-term contact and integration, and then a kind of identity authentication with obvious marks is naturally established. For example, the Chinese nation is the national identity established by 56 different ethnic groups based on the ties between members of the traditional culture and values of five thousand years of China, which is the individual's cultural orientation. Cultural identity is the representation of the sense of belonging and a kind of tendentious emotional acceptance. Cultural identity refers to the individual's dependence and sense of belonging to the culture and cultural group. Cultural identity is, first of all, cognition, that is, the understanding of the identity of one's own group. The second is the generation of emotion. That is, individuals identify themselves as belonging to a group, and have certain feelings and affection. The third is practice, that is, individuals will consciously and voluntarily participate in cultural activities. The three stages show progressive development. With the continuous progress of the society, more and more countries and nations realize the importance of maintaining their own unique culture. UNESCO defines culture as: culture is the complete complex of the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that reflect the characteristics of a society or a social group. Cultural identity is a social psychological process in which a nation maintains and innovates its own culture. It is also a constituent element of national soft power and a symbol of individual identity and belonging. "For a social community and a nation, culture is the only way for each nation to prove its existence and settle down. This cultural identity will

also be the core and foundation of the community. It gives us an identity and tells us who we are."<sup>4</sup> Cultural identity has the function of pooling national strength and is conducive to social harmony and stability.

Cultural identity is the spiritual ballast of individuals or group and the need of survival. The contemporary society gives different social strata different space for growth and development. Different social classes often have different, even very different, opportunities to be recognized. The differentiation of large-scale vulnerable groups makes the differentiation of social interests between different social classes more and more prominent. These include not only material benefits, but also spiritual and cultural benefits. This group lacks channels and opportunities to express their interests, and it is impossible to prevent their interests from being infringed and constantly encroached on. By contrast, powerful groups not only have more platforms and ways to express their interest needs, but also have strong awareness and ability to express themselves. At the same time, the mass media also customarily regard powerful groups as the focus of attention. On the contrary, the vulnerable groups have less access to the media and are less likely to use the media as a regular channel and platform for self-expression, because the media does not leave enough space for them to speak. Dialect TV programs involve all the cultural elements related to dialect, giving different cultural individuals space and channels to express their own cultural appeals. They pay attention to the spiritual and cultural interests of the disadvantaged groups, which are gradually marginalized by the powerful mainstream culture and reflect the cultural existence of the vulnerable groups, so that the appeals and consciousness of individuals and ethnic groups are paid attention to and respected. This is an inspiration to the large vulnerable group and to the culture they belong to. When one's own culture is noticed and recognized, the pride of an individual in society arises spontaneously. After the spiritual needs are met, the self-culture confidence and the consciousness of spontaneous protection and inheritance will be enhanced, which is conducive to the preservation of the country's multi-culture. The ecological theory of language emphasizes the absolute position of human beings in the preservation of language resources, because language resources are developed by human beings in the use of them, and language cannot exist without the subjective role of human beings. Mr. Chen Zhanqai divides the value of language resources into implicit value and explicit value. "The implicit value is the value of the language itself, which includes the language status, normative level, language history, culture carried in it, information, recorded documents and materials, etc.; explicit value is the concrete embodiment of the value

of language application, including the function of language social communication, user population, use field and application benefit. The implicit value of language resources should be reflected through the explicit value, while the value of all language resources generally appears gradually and slowly. Only after the language function, language status and language function undergo great changes, the resource value of some languages will appear quickly."<sup>5</sup> Language resources are available, irreplaceable and diversified, and they are cultural resources. Different from natural resources, language and cultural resources are part of human beings and come into being with human beings. Only through continuous development, protection, inheritance and utilization can they serve mankind. Therefore, dialect TV programs, to some extent, identify and stimulate the human initiative and enthusiasm for the conservation and utilization of language resources. In addition, cultural identity is a kind of status identity. For people in modern society, the desire for regional identity and status identity is a clear trend. Compared with information with a strong political flavor, ordinary people are more eager to get life relief, emotional communication, role recognition and self-identity affirmation from TV programs. The dialect with a long history and profound cultural heritage is now a distinction and an essential standard and link for local identity. In addition, the form and content of dialect TV programs are closely combined with local regional cultural characteristics, which can help local audiences better understand the TV context, interpret it more quickly, resonate with it more easily and get satisfaction. The appearance and popularity of dialect TV programs is in essence a new form of identity that must appear in modern society.

#### **IV. THE VALUE REALIZATION OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGICAL IDENTITY IN DIALECT TV PROGRAMS**

If the dialect TV program is regarded as the object of value and the audience as the subject of value, there must be a link between them, that is, the realization of value. Value is the natural and objective existence, and the relation between the objective physical existence and value transfer object is formed by combining the two. As far as TV programs are concerned, the process of communication is the process of realizing their value. In this process, as the object of value influence, how to implement communication is the most important or even the only controlling factor, men as the audience. Men is a free actor in a certain social relationship. They have the attributes of nature and society and is the unity of nature and society. Because of this, people will have the nature of the material needs and social nature of the

<sup>4</sup> Li Hongtu. Multi-cultural Identity in the Era of Globalization [J]. *Social Outlook*, 2004 (4): 8.

<sup>5</sup> Chen Zhanqai. *On Language Resources* [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2009.

spiritual needs. At the same time, due to the particularity of the social environment in which people live, their emotions, desires and demands all bear the traces of the society, namely, the sociality of demands. As a television program for the purpose of communication, it is inevitable to start from the characteristics and needs of people, show a certain tendency, and reflect the needs of a certain social, class, group of people. Of course, every TV program has its own features and orientation in addition to the common characteristics, but it is impossible to leave the prescriptive nature of audience demand. What it can present is the unique perspective and style of individuals. Therefore, to realize the value of TV communication activities, it is necessary to take the demand and desire of the value subject as the foothold and obtain scientific understanding of audience demand control through continuous communication practice.

What television communication meets are people's spiritual needs. As spiritual needs, they can be expressed as the need of interest and emotion, or the need of will, faith and ideal at a higher level. Interest and emotion seem to be a kind of individual psychological choice, but the essence is closely related to the whole society, is related to the demand trend of social groups, and is also constantly changing. The proximity and correspondence of these interests and emotions is the first level of the realization of television value. To meet the needs of the audience and pay attention to the way of communication has become the basic message of TV communication activities. As the higher level of spiritual needs, will, faith and ideal have abstract and metaphysical colors. The dictionary and psychology interpret them as: "will is the mental state produced by the decision to achieve a certain purpose, which is often expressed in words and actions" and "will is the mental process by which people consciously determine their purpose and governs their actions to achieve it"; "faith is what one thinks they can be sure of" and "faith is a deep and grounded belief in the principles and ideals by which one lives"; "an ideal is the imagination or hope of something in the future", and "an ideal is a tendency towards a goal that is both related to a goal and attainable in the future." The demand at this level is more like the demand of a social group, which makes TV communication activities rise to a higher level of responsibility and requirements. If the first level of demand is more reflected in the formal satisfaction, the second level of demand is reflected in the formation and promotion of ideology. That is, through TV communication activities, helping social groups to make value judgments, choose and determine the understanding and grasp of the law of social development, which is also a deeper thinking of TV communication activities. The value realization of TV communication activities can be judged from many angles, but satisfying the needs of the audience and the

society is an important criterion to judge its value realization.

In terms of content, the current TV programs in dialect mainly include news programs in dialect and entertainment programs in dialect. The news programs in dialect mainly focus on the news, such as "Aliutou Talking About News (《阿六头说新闻》)", "Baixiao Telling the News (《百晓讲新闻》)", "Acong Reading the News (《阿聪读报》)", "A Daily Glance at the News (《新闻日日睇》)", "What Laifa tells (《来发讲啥西》)" and "Let Me Tell You the News (《听我韶韶》)", etc. With a style utterly different from the structured, serious and orthodox previous form, these programs generally choose contents that are closely connected with people's daily life. Topics such as small household affairs, daily necessities, family disputes, and children's education can all become the contents of dialect TV news programs. These contents are the elements most close to the life of the common people, coupled with the interest of dialect expression, making the news programs which were originally traditional and have unified mode, become accessible and acceptable. This kind of humanistic documentary news makes the audience feel that watching the program is like watching their own life. The information provided by the program is what they need and care about, which is easy to resonate with the audience. There are many entertainment programs in dialect, such as literary programs in dialect, crosstalk pieces in dialect, etc., all the content of which are local elements that local people are familiar with and love. The value elements such as novelty, interest, proximity, documentary and human interest reflected in the content of dialect TV programs are all the embodiment of people's common psychological requirements and needs. In addition, broadcasting and hosting in dialect is an important symbol of dialect TV programs. The communication effect of the whole program also changed greatly due to the change of language. Mandarin is the official language of China, which gives people a solemn, serious and formal feeling. Dialect is the language of people's daily life, which brings people a natural, casual and kind feeling. Host, because of its special nature of work, often give a person a kind of lofty and unapproachable feeling. When the host communicates in dialect, the distance between them and the audience is shortened, and they seem to become a member of the common people, the elder sister, brother or uncle next door. In addition, dialect TV programs create and present a strong local "flavor". For example, the "Small Talk Every day (《天天山海经》)" takes Suzhou's unique Jiangnan Water Town as the background; the background of "Afu Telling the News (《阿福聊斋》)" is set with paintings, vases and wooden benches; "Aliutou Talking About News (《阿六头说新闻》)" is set in a storytelling scene; the hosts of "All in All" in blue calico, and the hosts of Hangzhou and Shaoxing

stations are in long gown. These local signs highlight the local flavor and bring the audience a sense of intimacy. The establishment of this kind of intimacy determines the stable position of dialect TV programs in audience viewing choice. In addition, with the injection of entertainment elements in dialect TV programs, especially the transformation from "entertainment elitism" to "entertainment popularization", ordinary audiences are introduced into the programs and become the protagonists of the programs, and their personal existence value is reflected. When the audience truly integrates with the host and the program for common entertainment, the original host image has changed greatly and a sense of affinity arises spontaneously.

## V. CONCLUSION

In a word, the influence of TV programs is huge, but it is invisible and soft at the same time. It starts from subtly changing people's concept and cognition, and then changes people's behavior and produces the behavioral results that meet the social needs. No matter what kind of ideological concept is to be spread by TV media, it can't be mandatory. Reasonable and effective guidance and enlightenment is needed through an open and democratic way. Therefore, the value judgment of TV programs needs to start from a higher level. The value judgment of dialect TV programs also needs to be based on a high level, give full play to the special functions of TV media and TV art, and constantly improve their prestige, influence and appeal. Hovland's persuasive effect theory holds that audiences are generally willing to accept the views held by people more prestigious than themselves in the relevant fields, "If the 'similar' communicator doesn't know more than the recipient, the communicator won't be persuasive. As McQuail said, 'What Groucho Marx meant is, he did not want to join a club in which a man like himself was involved, and the average man did not want to listen to the opinions of a man who talked about matters he knew no better than himself'"<sup>6</sup> This is the goal of dialect TV programs and all TV programs need to strive to achieve. Innovation and acceptance are the eternal pursuit of TV programs.

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