

Research on the Creative Techniques of "Reality Show" TV Programs

Taking the Construction of "Manliness" in "Fighting Men" as an Example

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, with the steadily increasing ratings of reality shows, reality shows with male as the main shooting object are particularly popular as one of the many genres. Although the shooting methods and themes of the programmes are different, the "manliness" of the guests is the core of this type of reality show. Therefore, how to construct "manliness" in the programme has become the primary problem to be solved by this type of programme. This article uses close reading of the text to summarize the construction of "manliness" in the reality show "Fighting Men" (《我们战斗吧》) from three aspects: the external manifestation of male characteristics, the intuitive embodiment of moral cultivation, and the self-expression in teamwork, thereby revealing the common characteristics of this kind of reality show.

Keywords: Reality show, "Fighting Men", Manliness.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the steadily increasing ratings of reality shows, reality shows with male as the main shooting object are particularly popular as one of the many genres. "Fighting Men" is a male outdoor experiential reality show jointly produced by Jiangsu TV and Purity Media. The production team of "Fighting Men" uses top foreign shooting teams to use film shooting techniques to make every programme a "Hollywood"-style "blockbuster". In terms of programme content, the production team invites Jing Boran, Wang Kai, Jam Hsiao, Jackson Wang, Yang Shuo and Bai Jingting; these male stars born in the 80s and 90s form the "team of male god". By completing a task assigned by mysterious men, they achieve self-transcendence and transformation and eventually grow into the true "male god". Here, regardless of the "team of male god" or "male god", popular speaking, it is an honorific name for outstanding male. In the show, the "team of male god" mainly refers to the team composed of these stars. The ultimate goal they want to pursue is to become a "male god", that is,

from an individual perspective, they need to set goals for themselves and also hope to be seen by the audience as a higher level goal beyond the aura of stars. If the "team of male god" is just a kind of "representation" of stardom, then "the male god in the real sense" is the "innerness" that these stars want to show, that is, their "manliness".

When it comes to the theory of "manliness", American scholar Harvey Claflin Mansfield, Jr. said: "Being confident in the face of danger is made up of many qualities that are considered to belong to men. Some qualities apply to all men, while others belong only to certain men — men with manliness. They are considered to be more or less men-specific, although not every one of them has the same degree. These elements of manliness make it exclusive to men".[1] French scholar Bourdieu believes that "Manliness is understood not only as reproductive, sexual and social ability, but also as the ability to fight or abuse (especially in revenge); however, manliness is above all a responsibility. Men are the opposite of women. Women's honor is essentially negative and can only

be defended or lost, and their morality is, in order, chastity and fidelity. And 'truly masculine' men will do their best to expand their honor and win honor and respect in the public sphere".[2] "The Hite Report On Male Sexuality" uses the research method of social survey to investigate "manliness" and finds that most men believe that "Manliness means strength, not overly emotional, but decisive".[3] And they also believe that the "manliness" of men should be established on the basis of being accepted by male groups, that is, "Manliness is the way men intersect with each other, which completely excludes women. It is measured by the respect that other men have towards you, identified and compared at the ego level".[4] These scholars define "manliness" from different perspectives. They jointly acknowledge that "manliness" is first of all male-specific and has obvious male characteristics; secondly, they think that "manliness" is a kind of "honor", which is manifested in the conscientiousness of the object, that is, the inner "virtue" of men; in the end, they believe that for men, there is nothing more "masculine" for men than being recognized in a male group. Therefore, when defining "manliness", it is needed to pay special attention to the external characteristics, moral cultivation and performance of men in male groups. It is not difficult to explain that reality shows with male groups as the main shooting object are so keen to show the spiritual qualities of male guests in the face of difficulties. "Fighting Men" is such a programme to show the "manliness" of the guests by "selling" to the audience. In the concrete construction of "manliness", the programme group has made sufficient preparation and thinking in terms of form and content, and directly marked its English name "Fighting Men" (namely, the men who are fighting) under the title of the programme — "我们战斗吧", showing that the core of this programme is to show the masculine charm of the guests.

2. THE EXTERNAL MANIFESTATION OF MALE CHARACTERISTICS

Different from the same type of reality shows on other TV stations, "Fighting Men" uses film production techniques to highlight the masculine charm of these performers in terms of lens language and characters setting. In terms of lens language, the programme group often uses medium close shots and close-ups to show the appearance and facial expressions of male guests when photographing guests, and intuitively highlight their

male image. In the first two minutes of the first episode, in order to visually create the personal charm of these male guests, in the arranged narrative paragraphs, the programme group shows the personal strengths and social identity of each male guest through three or four scenes. In this limited scenes, with the voiceover of the show, the audience can intuitively tell the looks and specialties of the guests. In this two-minute narrative paragraph, it is divided into three groups to show the personal charm of the guests in turn. In the first set of shot editing, small panoramas and close shots are mainly used to tell the audience who the guests participating in the programme are, what occasion they appear in, and what the guests are preparing to do; in the second set of shot editing, the medium close shots and close-ups are mainly used to show what the guests are doing; in the third set of shot editing, the main methods such as low-angle shot, high angle shot, and lap dissolve are applied to explain that the guests have successfully completed what they have done. In the connection of these three sets of scenes, the audience see Jing Boran with a handsome face and agile skills, Jackson Wang, who practices fencing and is young and energetic, Yang Shuo, who is burly and loves fighting, as well as Jam Hsiao, who has a persistent pursuit of music... It can be said that in the first two minutes of the show, the production team has explained the personal halo and honor of these guests, and hinted at their unique masculine charm. In order to complete more challenging tasks, the best in these male groups gather together and work together to achieve new glory.

In the task setting of each episode, the programme group continuously arranges challenges of varying difficulty for the participants in the programming of less than 80 minutes, intuitively presenting the audience with the audio-visual enjoyment of the "real people" in the reality show. The effect of this is conducive to capturing the first reaction of the participating guests when encountering difficulties, increasing the credibility of the programme and the affinity of the guests, and demonstrating their unusual physical prowess and volitional qualities. This kind of setting makes the show focus more on the difficulty of the performance of the action and the completion of the task while ignoring the emotional exchanges and inner expressions between the guest members. However, because the major premise of the programme is to apply the shooting method of "Hollywood blockbuster" and the "Hollywood blockbuster" in the usual sense itself focuses on fast

editing and audiovisual effects, the collective confession of the "team of male god" added in the last episode of the programme is to supplement the previous missing emotional experience. In addition, because the story of the show is set in an "overhead" historical background, which is similar to the sci-fi style of "Superman" saving the earth, from the posters, the appearance of each guest is very "tough". Although in terms of the external characteristics of the guests, the only one who is really "tough" is Yang Shuo, Bai Jingting and Jackson Wang have a more or less youthful breath, Jing Boran and Jam Hsiao follow the "sunshine-boy style", and Wang Kai represents the "intellectual style". These styles basically include the most popular idol types currently on the market. As Jing Boran said in the show, the idol burden he had built so hard disappeared instantly. However, in the show, the audience see another extraordinary Jing Boran — the one who keeps running, the one who bravely climbs despite the heights, and the one who helps his teammates to complete their tasks... While other members are completing tasks one by one, they show the audience a "self" that is different from the previous image, and this new "self" is the "masculine" man that the programme group wants to portray — "a man who prefers action to reflection".[5]

3. THE INTUITIVE EMBODIMENT OF MORAL CULTIVATION

Since "Fighting Men" is a reality show that "sells" the "manliness" of the participants, in addition to showing the "external beauty" of the male guests in the programme, reflecting the "inner beauty" of the guests is also the purpose of the programme group. Due to the limitation of the shooting techniques, each episode of the show only has a short length to show the personality characteristics of the male guests except for the routine tasks. The detailed portrayal of the guests' moral cultivation serves as another aspect of the performance of the guests' "manliness". In the specific display, the production team uses "mutual assistance" and "interaction" to show the moral cultivation and inner temperament of these six male guests. In terms of mutual assistance, the production team often sets rescue tasks when planning tasks, showing the spiritual qualities of the guests by rescuing key characters or rescuing a member. In these 13 episodes of the programme, a total of five rescue missions are set up, and in each rescue mission, the personal qualities of the participants are vividly portrayed. For example, in

the mission of "Rescue Dr. Jin" in the second episode, when facing the challenge of entering the shark pond, although Yang Shuo, Jam Hsiao and Bai Jingting all show concern and cunning when evading the mission, Yang Shuo takes the place of the nervous Bai Jingting when the final decision is made as to who will finally enter the pond. In Yang Shuo's words, "In fact, I think Xiaobai (Bai Jingting) is very kind, because when he heard that I had a heart attack, I actually knew he was scared, but he basically made his decision. To be honest, I am also scared. Wish me good luck". When he says this, the subtitles in front of the shot are "If you are a big brother, you should come forward". It can be said that this plot not only shows Yang Shuo's responsibilities as the eldest brother in the face of dangerous tasks, but also reflects Bai Jingting's respect and care for his elder brother as a junior. The inner temperament of the two people is clear at a glance. Such detailed portrayal vividly demonstrates the exemplary conduct and nobility of character of the guests, and also highlights the national character of "respecting the old and cherishing the young" in traditional Chinese culture.

If the mutual assistance between male guests shows more of a sense of responsibility and commitment as men, then the interaction between male guests and fans and average people participating in the recording of the show more creates an image of ordinary people who are free from the burden of "stars". This kind of interaction is more conducive to showing the approachable side of the stars, making the show look more real, and it also confirms the original intention of the experiential reality show — to "allow programme participants to get an experience different from their own daily lives, and record and present the experience process".[6] From the perspective of the audience, the participation of fans and average people makes the programme more close to life, shortens the distance between participating guests and ordinary people, and shows the guests' interpersonal skills and ideological and political behavior from different aspects. This kind of interactive activity is especially obvious when the "team of male god" performs the task of selling things together. From the analysis of the facial expressions of these guests, they think that this behavior of collecting money from fans is very "unseemly", but they must do this task. So the audience can see Jackson Wang with a solemn face when performing this task, Wang Kai who repeatedly asks the fans about their age to see if they have the consumption ability, and Jam Hsiao

who has more or less complaints and sells things at very low prices, and so on. Although this kind of buying and selling interaction is undesirable, for fans, it is equivalent to getting a face-to-face communication opportunity with their idols through this buying and selling method. Therefore, the price of the goods is not important to them. However, for the guests, charging their fans is itself a very immoral behavior, which undermines their commitment as men. What's interesting is that viewers sitting in front of the TV and watching the show on the Internet see the very "manly" side of these male guests, and they like these stars even more. And this effect is deliberately created by the programme group to serve as a foil to show the manliness of the male guests through such detailed display — being kind-hearted and daring to take responsibility.

4. THE SELF-EXPRESSION IN TEAMWORK

In "The Hite Report On Male Sexuality", in the survey of "manliness", it is found that most men think that men with "manliness" should participate in men's activities and become part of the group and be accepted by other men. Participating in the activity as a team is more conducive to showing the guests' personal masculinity. In the programme "Fighting Men", the production team mainly uses confrontation and competition to present the "manliness" of the guests in the team. In the link of showing confrontation, the program group mainly uses the way of setting up barriers for the "team of male god" to highlight the collective sense of honor of the participants. Because "honor combines a private environment with public beliefs, those who desire honor feel that they have the right to behave in a certain way. By claiming honor, they surpass the kind of mindless and unreasonable aggressiveness".[7] In the team, fighting against external pressure and resistance has become the primary problem to be solved by the "team of male god". This is reflected in their team song: "Let's fight. It's the same for anyone who does tasks. I am not afraid of difficulties. People who feel afraid can only be afraid. Let's fight. Just bite the bullet and keep fighting. Let the world see that we're prepared to fight the crisis. Let's fight. The mission is on my shoulders, and I will bear it when the sky falls down. A man should be exposed to wind and rain". Regardless of "wind and rain" or "the skies falling and the earth opening up", in the face of the test, as long as one is a man, he should stand in the forefront. Therefore, they work hard in the

collective task. For example, in the graduation assessment of "Collecting the Six Elements" in the twelfth episode, the "team of male god" cooperates with each other by learning from each other's strengths, and finally completes the test to obtain the qualifications to participate in the graduation ceremony. In addition, in the shared task of catching the book thief in the fourth episode, it can be seen that in the unified external battle, the "team of male god" applies their wisdom and beliefs to give their best effort and finally succeed. In order to highlight the spirit of solidarity and cooperation of the "team of male god", the programme group arranges for them with strong opponents. These opponents are above them both in mind and physical strength, but in the process of catching, the team members have carried forward the collective strength, successfully caught the book thief in the encirclement and suppression, and finally got the task clues. In this teamwork, different participants show different aspects. Jackson Wang, Bai Jingting, and Jam Hsiao stand out for their agility and physical skills; Wang Kai, Jing Boran, and Yang Shuo show their witty side. It can be seen that it is easier to produce a sense of honor and mission of individual males in teamwork.

In the link of showing competition, the program group uses the internal grouping of the "team of male god" to show the personal characteristics and masculine characteristics of the members. Through internal competition, it is more conducive for the audience to accept and agree with the "manliness" of a certain guest showing the responsibilities and obligations of an individual. In this kind of internal competition, the program group mainly allows different male members to partner and compete with each other through two or three groups. Of course, there are also ways to show the "manliness" of team members through competition for bodyguards like the ninth episode. This way of affirming personal value to show participants' "manliness" is more convincing, because "Manliness is a declaration of a person's value, because his value is not self-evident. Similarly, because the value needs to be declared, it also needs to be proved. After the declaration, one must fulfill his promise".[8] When accepting this kind of competitive task, the audience will find that the male guests have different attitudes towards the sense of honor and their different forms of pursuit, such as Jam Hsiao's persistence to winning or losing, Jing Boran's belief in "being garrulous", Jackson Wang's "being funny" and so on. Although the reality show doesn't rule out traces of

performance, in the competition with teammates, it is possible to see the true emotional expression of the participants and the degree to which they care about winning or losing, because offensiveness is also an essential link of forming "manliness". In this way, it is not difficult to explain that confrontations between teams and between individuals are more exciting than collective confrontations, since the audience can see a frantic Jam Hsiao who is recognized by his opponents, Jackson Wang who tries to express his opinions, Jing Boran who is confident but self-conceit and sophisticated, and Wang Kai who loves nagging and fails to control his laughter... In the competition between people, the nature of the guests is inspired by the situation they are in. Wang Kai said in an interview: "Reality shows are more difficult than acting, because you do something with a purpose in acting, you know what kind of role the character is, you know what kind of scene you're playing in this scene, and you go in with a mission and know how to act in a play. But as for the reality shows, there is no character setting or screenplay for you. Everything is based on what you hear, see, and think, and then reflect it truthfully. Now that I'm here, I shall show everyone my most real side".¹ Therefore, in this environment where it is necessary to prove whose ability is more prominent, what the participants actually show is their desire and expectation for victory and the desire to gain more recognition, that is, the manliness self-expression.

5. CONCLUSION

With the so booming Chinese reality TV market, reality shows with male guests as the main performance targets occupy a large share of the media market. Most of these shows focus on experience to show the true reactions and personal abilities of male guests in the face of specific situations in social life. Therefore, the audience will see the "situation setting" in "Go Fighting!", the "teenage years" in "Back To Youth" and the "heroic dream" in "Fighting Men"... These shows continuously convey the "manliness" of the guests to the audience through different performance content. However, the core of their construction is inseparable from the presentation of the appearance of the male guests, the inner description, and the performance in team and individual competition. For reality shows, this method is not only in line

with the production cycle of the filming team and the effects of the shows, but also helps to highlight the personal charm of the male guests to the greatest extent. However, it is precisely because too many shows are set up and arranged in this way, the innovation of the production team is only the replacement of the filming theme, which will inevitably cause the audience's aesthetic fatigue and the decline of the shows' interestingness. Therefore, in addition to highlighting the "manliness" of the guests, the production team must enrich the connotation of "manliness" and add their own understanding and recognition of "manliness" to make China's reality show more localized.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Ningning Wang.

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