

# On the Creation Techniques and Artistic Characteristics of Unit TV Dramas in Recent Years

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, unitary dramas have received widespread attention, and their contributions and efforts have been made to explore the new era of image expression in dramas. This paper takes the anti-epidemic drama "Together", the anti-poverty drama "Stone Blossoms" and the drama "Ideal Shines in China" and "Our New Era", which celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, as the objects of analysis, and from the aesthetic theory, the study concludes that unitary TV dramas usually use the creative techniques of scattering, sketching and group portraiture, which have the artistic characteristics of shaping beautiful characters in contradiction, showing beautiful spirit in typical and evoking beautiful emotion in resonance, and inspiring us to realize the unity of truthfulness and artistry, the unity of romanticism and realism, and the unity of society and the times in literary creation.

**Keywords:** Unit class TV series, Creative techniques, Artistic characteristics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the popular release of such melodramatic films as "My Country and I" and "My Hometown and I", which celebrate social development and national prosperity, has brought the drama genre back to the public eye. In fact, as early as the 1960s, the television drama series already appeared, and its biggest difference from the television series and serials is that each episode is a separate chapter in structure, and the plots are not connected to each other, but are under the same theme. The times are changing and developing, and different times present different styles and beauty of the times, and will affect the specific literary and artistic creative activities of the times. Yan Wei believes that "literature and art is a product of the times, while reflecting the times, eulogizing the times of a vivid carrier." [1] As an important part of literature and art, film and television works rightly assume the social responsibility of reflecting the times and reflecting reality. At present, the strong return of unitary TV dramas has injected a remedy for China's drama market, which is "blending long", and brought a refreshing sensory experience to the general audience. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the creation methods and artistic characteristics of unitary TV dramas by analyzing several representative unitary TV dramas

created around the theme of the times, such as the anti-epidemic drama "Together", the drama on poverty alleviation and attack, and the drama dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, "The Ideal Shines in China" and "Our New Era", and to We will try to summarize the common rules for the creation of unitary TV dramas, and provide inspiration and experience for future unitary TV works to better reflect the changes of the times and assume social responsibility.

## 2. THE CREATIVE METHOD OF UNIT TV SERIES

Due to its own characteristics, the creation of unitary dramas is distinguished from the common drama genres such as serials and series. Unit dramas generally use one or several episodes to form a story unit, and eventually present a complete theme in the form of multiple units as a whole. Although unit dramas tend to reveal the shortcomings of small-scale stories and poor story continuity in their creation, the advantages of clear story lines, strong independence between units and rich story variety also deeply appeal to viewers. Therefore, the creators of unit dramas should establish the creative consciousness of making use of their strengths and avoiding their weaknesses, break through the indoctrination and preaching style of communication,

and use the following three creative techniques to tell the story of the times and express the beauty of the times.

### **2.1. Scattered Creation**

In the creation of the unit drama, since the theme is not the plot but the theme throughout the play, the systematic narrative line is changed, resulting in it not being subject to the constraints and influence of the preceding and following episodes, and each unit is a new work, a new stage and a new space, just like scattering beans, showing the characteristics of scattered creation. "Together" is based on real people and stories from all walks of life during the fight against the new epidemic, including "The Turning Point of Life", "Vulcan Mountain", "Mask" and "My Name is Dalian" and other 10 units of stories, tells the story of ordinary people coming forward to participate in the national Wuhan epidemic, conveying the spirit of the Chinese people to work together and help each other in this "battle"; "Stone Blossom" is divided into 10 plot units, showing the story of grassroots poverty alleviation cadres, local people in need and other social poverty alleviation forces working together to overcome poverty; "Our New Era" is composed of 6 units, based on real-life characters, and tells the stories of young Communist Party members from different regions who have been working hard in different positions since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China; The "Faith Makes Great" uses 40 groups of characters and glittering stories from different periods to record the moving journey of the Chinese people over the past 100 years since the birth of the Communist Party of China, uniting and leading them to hold high the torch of ideals and faith and struggle endlessly to realize the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This multi-unit and scattered creation method is one of the characteristics of unit dramas. Each unit is an independent and scattered node in the overall narrative system, which is fused together to build the theme of "big writing". It is this scattered creation that allows the spirit of the times and the social landscape to be presented to the audience in multiple dimensions, levels and perspectives, increasing the audience's understanding and knowledge of the "road to come," the "road underfoot" and the "road to the future. The audience's understanding and knowledge of "the way they came," "the way under their feet" and "the way of the future.

### **2.2. Sketchy Creation**

Generally speaking, the creation structure of the unit drama requires that the plot stories of different units should be short, and the main story line should be presented to the audience as clearly and explicitly as possible in a shorthand way. It is worth noting that a short story does not mean a monotonous plot, but also the need to capture the audience's attention in the sequence, so that

they can psychologically immerse themselves in a specific story situation, thus obtaining an immersive aesthetic feeling. The short TV series "Ideals Shine on China", which has the major task of telling up to 40 stories, can easily fall into the trap of a long narrative, which leads to aesthetic fatigue and reduces the audience's acceptance of the main theme. Therefore, the creators boldly tried to make each episode about 30 minutes long, making the whole TV unit drama more short and concise with a "sketchy" character. Although the length of each episode is shorter than the standard length of domestic TV dramas, the work still completes the plot's sequence within the story structure of each episode through more elaborate drama content.

"Our New Era" focuses on grassroots young party members after the 18th National Congress, with three main highlights: eulogizing the new era, showing new youth, and telling new stories. Although the thematic focus is different from "Ideals Shine in China", the same approach is adopted in the creation of sketches. For example, the third unit of the play "detonation elite" through 10 seconds to wear six needles, mechanical arm clip tomatoes, digging pits to count soybeans, wearing 37 kg of detonation suit long run and other camera sketches, for the audience to unveil the mystery of the detonator, a true demonstration of the hardships and dangers of mine clearance work.

### **2.3. Group Image Creation**

The so-called group portrait, that is, the image of a group of characters shaped in a work of literature and art. The creation of unitary dramas should deal with the relationship between group image and solo image, which complement each other and are indispensable. If there are only monologues but no group images in a drama, it will deviate from the materialist view of history and ignore the power and contribution of the people. Thus, creators should pay attention to group creation, highlighting the charm of typical characters or individual character images in the group, deepening the audience's understanding and improving the communication effect. As far as unit dramas are concerned, there are two kinds of group images, one is the thematic group image and the other is the image of characters in a specific unit. "Together" successfully portrays a group of people such as medical team members from all over the world, military doctors who pledged not to retreat, ordinary citizens who are looking out for each other, builders who are actively involved in the Vulcan Mountain Hospital, and front-line public security and community cadres who are rooted in the grassroots, etc. At the same time, these images are fused together to create the image of people who are committed to fighting against the epidemic. Similarly, in the first unit of the poverty alleviation drama "Stone Blossoms", "The Green Mountains Live", Anjiaping Village is a poor village that has been

producing tea for generations. Wu Feifei, the secretary of poverty alleviation in the village, keenly grasped this characteristic industry and successfully used it. The innovative "1+1>2" model promotes and builds selenium-enriched tea brands, establishes tea farmers' cooperatives and develops online sales channels, and ultimately helps Anping Village get rid of poverty. This unit not only portrays and establishes the image of Wu Feifei as a cadre of poverty alleviation with firm belief and courage to act, but also creates the image of an industrious and kind Anjiaping villager. Although "Stone Blossoms" tells the stories of poverty alleviation in different poverty-stricken areas, the images of these poverty alleviation cadres and poverty alleviation people constitute a group image in the whole China's poverty alleviation cause.

### **3. THE ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UNIT CLASS TV SERIES**

One of the most distinctive commonalities of these unit dramas is that the characters chosen are real events. The creators seldom make artistic processing of the content of the events themselves, but more often impress the audience through the artistic effects contained in the real events and the real characters themselves.

#### ***3.1. The Character of Beauty is Shaped in the Contradiction***

Art comes from life, and life is essentially a collection of various contradictions. Both the characters in the unit drama and the characters in real life are tested by life, and only by overcoming difficulties and resolving contradictions can they be transformed and grow. The main character in the third unit of "The Medal of Lei Lei" is Lei Lei, a male chaperone of the Chinese women's judo team, who never has the chance to walk on the field and can only help the judo team members train silently off the field. Lei Lei also evolves from the initial excitement and thrill of entering the national team to the psychological loss and bitterness, but after some ideological struggle, he firmly commits himself to his ideals and actively participates in the training of the national team, and in his 16-year-long career as an escort, he accompanies the training of more than 20 Olympic and world champions and is dropped a total of 2.84 million times. The characters must be shaped in the conflict, otherwise the character image will be dry and godless. The monodrama sets up the plot by digging deeper into the contradictions in the characters' deeds, and follows the narrative path of raising problems and solving them to promote the plot, so as to enhance the drama's watchability and attract the audience's attention. The conflict is closely related to the narrative rhythm of the drama, and a series of compact and intense conflicts can accelerate the narrative rhythm of the drama. On the contrary, a loose and bland conflict will be narrated at a slower pace. Due to its own

characteristics, the unit drama generally adopts a faster narrative pace, thus requiring the creator to select the most prominent and representative conflicts in the narrative as much as possible, sublimating the theme and shaping the characters by transforming and overcoming them.

#### ***3.2. The Spirit of Beauty is Shown in the Typical.***

The essence of art is image thinking, and typicality is an important principle in the creation of image thinking. According to Russian aesthete Belinsky, "Typicality is a basic law of creation; without typicality, there is no creation".<sup>[2]</sup> The so-called typicality is the dialectical unity of the particular in the general and the general in the particular, which presents one person and many people at the same time. In other words, the typical shaping and creation is to use one person to show a whole series of people. For example, what kind of person is Wu Feifei, a poverty-alleviation cadre in "The Stone Blossoms"? He has to go through a painful choice between his family and poverty alleviation work, because he has been away for a long time to help the poor, he has no time to take care of his family, and he is afraid that his wife will divorce him, but in his heart, out of his responsibility and concern for the poor villagers, he knows that what he does is not a simple and tedious work, but a great cause, so he becomes a man of strong conviction. Wu Feifei is the typical one, who shows not only his own image as a poverty alleviation cadre, but a series of grassroots poverty alleviation cadres' struggle. In typical creation, besides realizing the unity of the particular and the general, we should also pay attention to the inner connection between typical characters and typical environment. As Engels said in his reply to Harkness, "In addition to the truthfulness of the details, it is necessary to reproduce the typical characters in the typical environment in a true manner."<sup>[3]</sup> The image presented by the typical character in the general social environment cannot be said to be typical enough; it is also necessary to realistically reproduce the typical environment that motivates the action of the characters in the play. In the unit "The Taste of Truth" of "Ideals Shine in China," the footage of students and teachers in a cafe heatedly discussing the crimes of Japanese imperialism and the weakness and corruption of the government recreates the scene of the nation's search for a way to save the country that pervaded Chinese society in the early 1920s. In this typical social environment where it is useless to seek Britain and France outside, and the government is incompetent inside, Chen Wangdao accepted Shao Lizi's entrustment and successfully translated the "Communist Manifesto", making theoretical preparations for the establishment of the Bolshevik Party in China. The unit not only selects Chen Wangdao as a typical representative of the early Marxists, but also combines the typical social environment of the time to show Chen Wangdao's patriotic spirit of saving the country while achieving a

perfect unity between the portrayal of the characters in the play and the presentation of the activity environment.

### ***3.3. The Emotion of Beauty is Triggered in the Empathy***

In many works of literature and art, emotion is always a creative tool that creators value and play with. Since ancient times, emotions such as love and hate have always appeared in literary and artistic works, largely because creators hold a view of universal humanism, believing that these emotions are eternal in any era. While this view is biased and ignores the differences between the expression of emotions in different eras, it illustrates the importance of emotions in literary creation. The reason why emotions can move people's hearts and cause resonance is because of empathy, that is, when people appreciate and watch literary and artistic works, they can put themselves in the situation of aesthetic objects or characters, and put their own feelings, thoughts, emotions, will and The activities are brought into the story, as if everything in the play is their own personal experience. Affected by this psychological illusion, people have some sympathy and resonance with the characters. Therefore, the creators of unit dramas need to work on the emotional aspect in order to make the empathy work and trigger resonance. In the unit "Prescription for Happiness" of "Our New Era", Shi Lan, a doctor, faces a major life decision. On one side is a big city with good living conditions, which metaphorically means a higher starting point in the future; on the other side is a small village with inconvenient living, which metaphorically means the companionship of kinship. In fact, in our daily life, we often encounter similar choice moments, whether to accompany our family, serve our hometown, or choose to make a better future for ourselves, so when the audience watches, they unconsciously replace themselves into the scenes in the drama, question their own inner choices, and finally reach emotional resonance with the characters in the story in a subtle way.

## **4. ENLIGHTENMENT BROUGHT BY UNIT TV SERIES**

In recent years, domestic unit dramas have won wide acclaim from the audience and have a great impact. The reason for this is that through artistic expression, the theme of the times and the image of the characters are highlighted in details, humanity and smallness, achieving the organic unity of art, life, popularization and humanization. Therefore, we have to learn and summarize the successful experience and inspiration for the creation of future unit dramas.

### ***4.1. The Unity of Authenticity and Artistry***

In order to achieve the requirement of authenticity, literary and artistic works need to imitate nature, imitate

life, and take the real life of real people as the source of creation or inspiration, which is often said that art comes from life. However, if literary and artistic works are only satisfied with copying life as it is, without organizing, upgrading and creating, they will fall into the trap of disorganized narrative. As Hegel says, "It [art] has to set aside together whatever of the phenomena does not correspond to the true concept of things, and only through this cleansing can it bring out the ideal."<sup>[4]</sup>In other words, art has to set aside the tedious and accidental things of real life, grasp the universality of things, and conceptualize or artisticize them. This harmonization of authenticity and artistry is particularly prominent in unit-type dramas. The four works in the unit category, "The Ideal Shines in China", "The Stone Blossoms", "Together" and "Our New Era", are all, without exception, selected from real-life or historical events, which have the power of authenticity and can replace subjective and rigid preaching, and give the audience a sense of trust psychologically. At the same time, through artistic processing and refinement, the creators then remove the occasional irrelevant things, making the narrative more compact and concise, so that the "ideal", "anti-epidemic", "poverty alleviation", "era", etc. in the work can be removed. The theme connotation of "ideal", "anti-epidemic", "poverty alleviation" and "era" is more prominent and easier to move and attract the audience.

### ***4.2. The Unity of Romanticism and Realism***

Romanticism and realism, as two methods of TV drama creation, have their own characteristics. For example, romanticism focuses on the subjective emotions and imagination of the creator, which is more subjective, while realism focuses on the real face of objective reality, which is more objective. However, the difference in characteristics does not mean that the two creative methods are opposed to each other and cannot be unified. On the contrary, the combination of the two approaches is more likely to reflect the spiritual essence that the creator wants to express. The most typical example is the unit "Guardianship" in "Ideals Shine in China", in which Zhang Renya gave his father, Zhang Jueqian, a group of precious Party documents to guard after the "April 12" counter-revolutionary coup, and Zhang Jueqian, in order to fulfill his son's request, hid the documents in Zhang Renya's mound and guarded them silently for more than twenty years, finally handing them over to the state unharmed. The scene of the reactionaries hunting and killing patriotic youths on the street in this unit reflects that the revolutionary cause was in crisis at that time. At the same time, Zhang Jueqian, who experienced this scene, seemed to see his son Zhang Renya's resolute eyes and fearless face in the crowd. He saw many progressive youths who gave their lives for the revolutionary cause; and he saw a Red China that would eventually come. The creator uses both realism to reflect social reality and romanticism to let Zhang Jueqian's father and son meet,

look at each other and talk to each other in different time and space, showing the theme that what Zhang Jueqian guards has long been not material documents but spiritual beliefs, effectively realizing the unity of subjective emotion and objective reflection.

### **4.3. The Unity of Social and Contemporary**

Any work of literature and art has a distinct social and contemporary character, because the creative activity of literature and art is not a biological activity, but a cultural activity under the influence of a certain society and culture. The creators of literature and art are social and historical beings, and are inevitably influenced by the factors of the era, nation and society to which they belong. The French aesthetician Dana regarded the era, environment and race as the three decisive factors of social culture. According to Danner, "no matter what the age, the ideal work is necessarily a microcosm of real life."<sup>[5]</sup>Homer's Epic and Plato's Ideal State epitomize real life in the ancient Greek period, and unitary TV dramas such as Ideals Shine on China and Together epitomize real life in the current period when China has achieved significant results in poverty eradication and the new crown epidemic has become the norm. If a work of literature and art cannot even accomplish the most basic task of reflecting society and reality, then it deserves to be called a work of literature and art.

So, how should literary works achieve the unity of both? First, the creators of TV dramas should observe the hearts and lives of modern people and discover people's feelings and functions, such as passion, perseverance, struggle and ideals, so that the dramas can become replicas reflecting these feelings and functions. Secondly, the creators of TV dramas should grasp the spirit of the times, that is, after more than 40 years of reform and opening up, the Chinese nation is in the era of ushering in national rejuvenation and the Chinese people are in the era of ushering in a happy life, thus TV dramas should express this positive and open, self-confident and conscious temperament of the times. Finally, the creators of TV dramas must not leave the specific social environment in which the specific storyline is set, because once the specific social environment is left, it is difficult to convince and accept the viewers of the behavior of the characters to make a certain key action, and it is difficult to reflect the era of the TV drama.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

All in all, through the summary and analysis of the anti-epidemic drama "Together", the drama on poverty

alleviation and attack "The Stone Blossoms" and the drama dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China "The Ideal Shines in China" and "Our New Era", we can conclude that the domestic unitary drama series fully expresses its own merits with the creative techniques of scattering, sketching and group portraits, and shows its unique artistic characteristics in the three pairs of relationships: conflict and character, typical and spiritual, emotion and resonance. This study has implications for the creation of future unitary TV dramas, that is, to create literary and artistic works worthy of the times, the society and the people, and to make contributions and efforts to the new era of image expression in TV dramas, it is necessary to realize the unity of truthfulness and artistry, the unity of romanticism and realism, and the unity of sociality and the times. Of course, there are some shortcomings in this study, for example, this paper mainly analyzes the texts of four representative unitary TV dramas, and the research method is relatively single, which makes the research conclusions inevitably subjective. Furthermore, since there are various types of unitary dramas, this paper focuses on unitary dramas that promote the main theme, which may not represent the overall situation of all types of unitary dramas. Therefore, in future research, a combination of qualitative and qualitative research can be conducted on such dramas, such as a combination of content analysis and textual analysis, to investigate multiple types of unitary dramas in a scientific and general way.

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