



The Inheritance and Innovation of Cultural Variety Shows

Taking the Third Season of “The Reader” as an Example

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Abstract. After more than 1,000 days and nights of accumulation, the third season of “The Reader” will return in full bloom in September 2021. The new season’s programs have been completely upgraded in terms of theme, guests, scenes, technology, etc., and also linked online and offline communication channels to expand the audience of cultural variety shows.

Keywords: Cultural variety shows · “The Reader” · The inheritance and innovation

1 Introduction

On September 18, 2021, the third season of “The Reader” finally returned in full bloom. The overall program still maintains the previous high-quality production level, and it received rave reviews once it was broadcast. Yan Jingming, vice-chairman of the Chinese Writers Association, evaluated it as a work of “keeping inheritance and innovation”. According to the ratings data, the Kuyun live broadcast of the first episode of the third season of “The Reader” received 1.09% of the attention and the highest was 1.24%, making it the No. 1 variety show among all channels in the same period [1]. After the program was broadcast, #7 brothers and sisters fulfilled a Beidou deputy chief designer##Zhang Guimei tearfully read a family letter to her parents# and other related topics were successively searched on Weibo, with a total reading volume of 1.46 billion, and netizens rushed to Commented: “The first issue of the third season of “The Reader” is too good to cry.”

2 Telling the Stories of the Characters of the Era Well and Conveying the Classic Humanistic Value

Telling stories of people of the times and conveying classic humanistic values is the main tone of the program “The Reader”. In the new season, the program still focuses on the emotional thread, digs out the rare, newsworthy and contemporary stories of the guests, and reads more classic texts of emotional dimension. Then, through the ritual process of “interview + reading aloud” in series, supplemented by means of space scenery,

lighting scheduling, dance design, props placement, music foil, etc., the audience and guests watching the program at the scene have emotional resonance, so as to achieve the effect of soothing people with the most sincere emotions and classic words.

2.1 Carefully Select Readers and Listen to the Sound of the Times

The third season of “The Reader” invited guests such as Yang Yuanxi, Zhang Guimei, Liu Cuiqing, Xu Donglin, and Mo Yan. They have different life experiences and emotional stories. For example, after joining the Beidou cause with thousands of Beidou people, Yang Yuanxi finally used science and technology to change the history of China’s Beidou being controlled by others for a long time, and realized a huge leap from being independent and controllable to leading the world; Zhang Guimei, the principal of Lijiang Huaping Girls’ Senior High School Dedicated to blocking intergenerational poverty through education, she did not see the last of her relatives; Liu Cuiqing persisted in training even though her body was suffering from illness, and finally won glory for the country in the Tokyo Olympics... These “extraordinary people” are doing “extraordinary people” things”, and established “extraordinary achievements”.

Listening to the various stories of these guests and thousands of offline “readers”, a picture of “epoch in miniature” can faintly emerge in my mind. As the program director Dong Qing said: “A person is very weak, TA is just a point, when many points come together, you will find that this is a face, a face of the times”. The face of this era reflects the great Chinese national spirit of patriotism, self-improvement, industriousness and bravery gradually formed by the Chinese sons and daughters in the course of social development. Now these excellent qualities are transmitted to the audience in the form of re-interpretation of TV art, giving them inspiration, courage to forge ahead, and strength to fight.

2.2 Reading Classic Texts Aloud to Convey Humanistic Values

In order to ensure the efficient output of the humanistic value of classic masterpieces, the program has established a literary advisory group, inviting Tie Ning, Wang Meng, Yu Qiuyu, Feng Jikai and others to check the output of the works. These people choose to read aloud texts according to two criteria: first, they focus on finding classic texts that are easy to understand and can resonate with the guests and the audience; second, the content of the text should be related to the current theme of the program and the life stories shared by the guests. After the comprehensive consideration of the classic literary works by the literary advisory group, the program finally selected 48 reading texts: Stephen Zweig’s “When the Stars of Humanity Shine”, Zhang Guimei’s “A Letter from Home”, Zhang Mei’s “Writing to the Future” “You”, Mo Yan’s “Transparent Carrot”, Ai Qing’s “Praise of Light”...

During the emotional reading process of the guests, the reading text will appear on the right side of the TV screen in the form of book pages, making the static classic text “move”. These classic literary works are performed by the readers on the stage, which can not only convey the humanistic value charm of literary works and nourish the hearts of the public who are eager for classic cultural infiltration; but also break the time and space boundaries of the three emotional dimensions of the author, the reader and the

audience, and instantly narrowed the psychological distance of each other. For example, reading aloud the text “A Letter from Home” is a letter written by Zhang Guimei to her deceased mother and father. Between the lines, there is nostalgia for the relatives and scenery in her hometown. At the end of this letter to the family, she said: “I will not be afraid of all difficulties and obstacles, and will fulfill my life promise with a hundredfold enthusiasm, serve the children and people in the mountains, and contribute everything to the education cause in the mountains!” This touching commitment and fearless heroic deeds touched countless netizens. Someone left a message: “Seeing Zhang Guimei’s deeds and listening to her read “A Letter from Home”, how can you not cry?”.

2.3 Rituals Connect Emotional Threads in Series to Realize Storytelling Expression

The third season of “The Reader” still connects the emotional main line by moving the two scene spaces of “interview + reading” to achieve the harmonious unity of the program’s vision and hearing. This emotional main line is mainly laid out from two levels: first, interviews with rare, news, and contemporary guests to capture the moving emotions flowing in the stories they share; second, to convey the readers of the times on the stage reimagining the emotional sensibilities of a classic. Take the speaker Cui Daozhi as an example, in order to identify a fingerprint that was only a quarter of a peanut 30 years ago, he worked continuously for nine days and nine nights until he fainted. While the audience felt sorry for Mr. Cui, they were also deeply moved by his love for the party and enthusiasm for his work. In the reading session, Cui Daozhi chose Ji Xianlin’s “Time”: “If you don’t do things that are useless, why should you spend your life?” “I feel like it’s a reminder of time for me to shine as much as possible in a limited amount of time,” he said.

3 Upgrade the Content and Form to Show the New Style of the Program

3.1 Program Content: From the Subject Word to the Proposition, a Time and Space Conversation Begins

The content of the third season of “The Reader” has been completely upgraded. It has changed from the original layout around the theme to an open-ended proposition that can awaken more people to think. These 12 life questions touch on the current social pain points, have their own discussion value and have great empathy ability. For example, can we change the world? Will you love TA for a long time? When are you not brave enough? Remember your childhood dreams? Against time, did you win? Who I am? If it is the minority, are you afraid? If you did it all over again, which choice would you change? 30, so what? Mom, are you happy? How beautiful are women? What will we be like in 20 years? [2] The program team strives to extend their tentacles to different audience groups, and lead them to start a heart-to-heart journey through the past, inquiring about the present, and imagining the future.

Different from the past, the third season of “The Reader” no longer introduces the theme through the host’s monologue, but presents it in the form of a note. Taking the

second episode of the program “Will you love him for a long time?” as an example, the program created a poetic and warm dialogue scene in an empty warehouse through the manipulation of lights and mirrors. Dong Qing and the guests confided their hearts in this environment, which naturally leads to the themes the show is about to explore. Such a novel way of expression has also been loved by the audience. After the broadcast of the program, the topic of “Arrived by the readers in the third season of the book” quickly became a hot search on Weibo, and some netizens commented: “The notes made in just a few minutes It has a movie-level blockbuster-like texture and an immersive atmosphere, which is great!”.

3.2 Program Form: Recreate the Scene to Create an Immersive On-Site Experience

The so-called “scenes” referred to the filming locations and sets [3]. As a positional orientation of a specific space, it also includes environmental characteristics related to space or behavior, as well as human behavior patterns and interaction patterns in this environment [4]. The key to terminal fusion in the convergent media era lies in the scene, while the key to media fusion depends on the scene reconstruction. With the rapid development of digital information technology, scene reconstruction has radiated new vitality, and it has also brought novel creative concepts and techniques to cultural variety shows. For example, the third season of “The Reader” uses 360° circular projection and virtual technology, supplemented by the placement of symbolic props, as well as bright or dark lighting arrangements, to construct a sense of atmosphere, art, and ritual. Constantly immersed in such a mimetic surreal space, the audience will have an immersive experience of presence, they will unconsciously mobilize the multi-dimensional senses of their bodies and resonate with the guests in terms of emotional cognition.

The scene reconstruction of the third season of “The Reader” is mainly reflected in two aspects: on the one hand, the two main scenes in the studio (“Interview + Reading” space) have been upgraded in terms of set, stage and technology. From the perspective of the interview space, the whole is still arranged as a living room, with sofas, coffee tables and porcelain tea sets with similar white tones, giving people a clean, comfortable and warm feeling. The addition of some home art decorations, such as the host’s photo, desk calendar, many different types of green plants, books, etc., add a touch of humanity and artistry to the interview space. In the reading space, european architectural elements are still used to support the overall stage structure, mainly highlighting the visual subjects such as the book wall, western-style opera hall, and annular auditorium. In addition, the 360° annular projection technology and the use of various scene props have created a dynamic image full of three-dimensional and layered that matches the content of the guests’ reading, giving the audience an immersive sense of personal presence.

On the other hand, the show host walked out of the studio and entered the space of the guests’ daily life. She became a listener of the guests’ stories, an observer of life and a recorder of emotions. For example, in the second episode of the program “Will you love TA for a long time?”, Dong Qing went to the place where “people’s hero” Zhang Dingyu often studied when he was young. This is a foreign language bookstore located on Zhongnan Road, Wuhan. Taking scenes and conducting interviews in this kind of daily space that is fully integrated into life can not only arouse the guests’ memories of the past

and capture their sincere emotions, but also establish a real, rich and three-dimensional image of the reader to empathize with the audience.

4 Linking Two Communication Channels, Online and Offline, to Break Through the Barriers of Circles

“The Reader” has been known as the “clear stream” of variety shows since its inception, and it was even hailed as the return of “top stream” after the third season of the program premiered. As a “phenomenal” cultural variety show, the great success of “The Reader” is inseparable from the promotion of communication and marketing strategies. After the national media premiere, it usually links online and offline communication channels to expand the audience of cultural variety shows.

4.1 Online: Create a Multimedia Communication Matrix and Open a New Way of Breaking the Circle

The third season of “The Reader” will continue to be broadcast on CCTV’s prime weekend time, making it possible for hundreds of millions of viewers to watch and participate in this gluttonous feast of reading aloud culture. After the national TV media premiere, it will also use mobile internet technology to create a multimedia communication matrix, and continue to expand the influence of program communication from three aspects: First, it mainly relies on national authoritative media such as People’s Daily, CCTV News, and CCTV, which aroused the heat of public opinion. For example, the official Weibo account of “CCTV News” once posted 7 videos about the new media live broadcast of the third season of “The Reader”, with more than one million broadcasts, reaching different users in a wider range, further expanding the influence of the program’s dissemination force.

Second, with the help of Weibo, WeChat, Tencent, Bilibili, Douyin and other new media platforms to widen the radius of program dissemination and expand the scope of dissemination. On the one hand, the program team follows the characteristics of the new media platform, which is short, flat, and fast, and cuts the interviews and readings of guests into fragments, and distributes them through multiple channels to reach more potential user groups on a large scale; on the other hand, it also plays a role in the new media platform. Taking the WeChat public account of “The Reader of CCTV Variety Show” as an example, in large-scale events and festivals such as the success of Quanzhou’s inscription on the World Heritage List, Valentine’s Day, Teacher’s Day, Mid-Autumn Festival, etc., the texts related to the third season of “The Reader” were respectively pushed. While playing a role in responding to hot issues, it strengthens and sublimates the proper status of this issue in the minds of users, and achieves the purpose of correctly guiding the mainstream values of society.

Third, launch two new media program formats “One Square Meter” and “Ten Thousand Kilometers”. The original intention of the program is “before reading aloud, your emotional area is one square meter. After reading aloud, your emotional volume is one cubic meter. When many people read aloud, the reading distance is 10,000 km” [5]. Among them, the 72-h live event “One Square Meter” has ended before the broadcast

of the third season of “The Reader”. According to statistics, during the three-day live broadcast time and the subsequent two weeks of opening, there were about 672 readers in Beijing, Wuhan, and Xiamen, the total number of multi-platform live broadcast data reached 15.736 million, and the total number of video playback was 61.095 million. Another outdoor semi-recorded large-scale cultural program, “10,000 km”, is planned to be launched after the feature film is broadcast to extend and strengthen offline brand promotion, paving the way for the program’s sustainable development in the future.

4.2 Offline: “Reading Booths” are Set Up in Many Places, and Everyone is a Reader

In order to bridge the distance between online and offline, “The Reader” has opened up an experiential offline communication channel. That is to set up “reading booths” in many places, and place a set of miniature and professional video and recording equipment in it, where each reader can read aloud his favorite classic text, which can be a poem, an article, or a letter that truly makes reading aloud into everyone’s life. This season’s “Reading Booth” has been completely upgraded on the basis of the original. It is made of transparent glass as a whole, with a warm wooden structure and a symmetrical roof design, which looks like an open book in appearance. At present, the reading booth activities have been reopened in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Kunming, and Zhengzhou. As a venue for offline communication activities, it has traveled to 28 cities and collected emotional stories of tens of thousands of reader. In this “small place” with an actual area of less than “one square meter”, people can truly feel the charm of reading aloud, tell their inner stories, and convey the sound of the times.

5 Conclusion

In recent years, a large number of excellent cultural variety shows such as “The Reader” and “Chinese Poetry Conference” have sprung up. In the current era of pan-entertainment and consumerism, the appearance of these programs seems to be a “clean stream”, which has played a role in cleaning people’s hearts. According to the successful experience of the broadcast of “The Reader”, the future creation of cultural variety shows should adhere to the concept of integrity and innovation, and make new upgrades in themes, guests, scenes, technology, communication channels, etc., to expand the scope of the show’s audience.

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