



# Dialogue Between the History and the Present

## Regarding Serenade of Peaceful Joy's Narrative Style, Aesthetic Claim, and Promotional Strategy

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**Abstract.** A costume drama *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* set in the Song Dynasty that was just produced by Dongyang Noon Sunshine has about 400 million invested in it. It was well-liked once it was released, but the respondent was different. The play actually employs unique narrative, aesthetic, and promotion strategies, and its strategy for cultural exporting merits the attention of domestic academic circles as well.

**Keywords:** Serenade of Peaceful Joy · Historical Intertextuality · TV Series · Cultural Exportation

## 1 Introduction

As a country with a 5,000-year history, China possesses infinite historical materials, leading to the success of Chinese costume Television programs. In recent years, the Chinese TV drama industry has seen a number of well-received costume TV productions, such as *Empresses in the Palace*, *Nirvana in Fire*, *A Dream of Splendor*, and *The Story of Minglan*. The cultural notion and spiritual essence that Chinese costume plays support, on the other hand, have not fully grown despite an increase in production investment in image texture. Numerous palace skirmishes, binary opposition, and zero-sum games are out of touch with Chinese history's authentic style and thus unable to accurately portray China's character and history. "Mutual Neighbourliness and Global Consensus on Governing" is one of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy's* most popular TV programs, which combines a distinctive narrative mode, visual appeal and marketing technique to promote this concept in contemporary society.

## 2 Serenade of Peaceful Joy's Innovation of Modern Costume Drama Creation

Post-modern historians in the new historicism believe that history is a kind of narrative rather than a concrete reality ever since post-inception. Modernism's Hayden White, a postmodern historian, believed that "What can you tell me about the "history" that

individuals have had? That is merely a fabrication.” [1]. According to post-modern historians, history is constructed as an imagined image of the past through narrative. Therefore, writing history is considered a form of fiction from a postmodernist standpoint. This understanding of history also affects contemporary cultural production, particularly the original concepts of dramas for film and television. Most of the popular TV dramas have been reduced to post-industrial assembly line reprocessing products, especially in the contemporary context of network literature + IP operation + Internet capital intervention. They frequently use original approaches that blend post-modern and modern mindsets with overlaying history and complex adaption. Typically, this section of movies and TV plays invents a fictional historical backdrop using a little bit of factual information and imagination. Through words, deeds, and the molding of service, this type of cinema and television drama reveals the “ancient implication” yet its spiritual center is modernity and even post-modernity.

In light of this, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, a costume drama and television film, adopts a unique strategy in an effort to faithfully and intensively recreate the classical elegance of the Zhao and Song dynasties. It is clear that presenting the visuals up to the temple or down to the street alters how the listener experiences *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*. If the postmodern historical drama uses “overhead history” as its narrative background, takes “rapid adaptation” among IP production, film adaptation, and target audience acceptance of online literature as its creative strategy, and uses flattening, wonders, and gamification as its aesthetic significance, it is clear that *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* follows diverse routes. It does not place a strong emphasis on the swift adaption between production, revision and audience, nor does it use “overhead history” as the historical context. Its classically-inclined aesthetic taste also differs significantly from the post-modernist spirit. In general, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* aims to alter the homogeneous and stereotypical assembly line production method of current domestic film and television dramas, try to replace the sense of games presented by “overhead history” with “official history” and try to replace the violent aesthetic with “sensory stimulation” with the aesthetic mode of “contemplation and mindfulness thus endowing film and television dramas with a profound experience of documents and spiritual level. In particular, the three facets of narration, aesthetics, and communication allow us to deepen on the peculiar creation mode, aesthetic appeal, accepting vision, and spiritual core of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*.

### 3 The Narrative Mode of Serenade of Peaceful Joy

#### 3.1 Taking Historical Intertextuality as Narrative Mode

The audience requires a rich, introspective “spiritual nutrient” in addition to sensory and mental stimulation. The “look of history” should also be seen to the audience in addition to the “coat of history”. A true dialogue between the artist and history is required if the audience is to experience the “appearance of history”, and this dialogue process is known as “historical intertextuality”. The TV show *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, however, exemplifies “historical intertextuality” in its use of storytelling techniques. Lina He, a scholar, is of the opinion that the film and television text *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* comprises “three historical tales”, encompassing individuals, dynasties, and the history

of Chinese culture. In the same visual context, there is a three-dimensional historical perception [2].

The historical context of Emperor Zhao Zhen of Renzong in the Northern Song Dynasty is the basis for the costume drama *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, which depicts a number of literary works by Song Renzong, Empress Cao, Princess Fukang, Empress Wen Cheng (Zhang), Liang Huaiji, Zhang Maoze, Han Qi, Lv Yijian, Yan Shu, Xia Song, Fan Zhongyan, Di Qing, Ouyang Xiu. The idea of “official history” that *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* conveys at the level of visual expression primarily hinges on two presentation modes: material landscape restoration and intangible landscape restoration. All historically significant expressive objects are restored as part of “material landscape restoration”, such as make-up, attire, furnishings, calligraphy, urban design, folk customs, and so forth, which can be displayed as images immediately on the screen. For instance, the design of the characters in the play is based on the royal portraits and historical records that have been passed down from one generation to the next during the Song Dynasty; regardless of how they dress or apply makeup, they all adhere to the Song History and Yu Fu Zhi records without inventing anything. The design of the furniture draws inspiration from Song Dynasty records of old paintings and writings and emphasises the “aesthetic interest of literati” symbolised by opulent furniture and Ru kiln porcelain.

There were numerous sequences in the play where characters painted books and painted pictures, depicting the historical figures of Cui Bai, Cai Xiang, Ouyang Xiu, and Wei Li. This was the height of ancient Chinese painting and calligraphy art. The term “intangible landscape restoration” refers to the presentation of immaterial items in historical records, including titles, official systems, and customs, as well as the portrayal of particular historical events, such as the conflict between biological mothers, the Qingli New Deal, the Song-Xia War, and the Jiayou two-year scientific investigation. Similar information can be found in the official history, which states that the emperor was reluctant to speak up during their face-to-face argument. Another illustration is the peculiar incident in which Beauty Zhang was pursued like a queen following his demise. *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* also contains a clear record stating that Zhang, an imperial concubine who was interested in books, was crowned queen and given the title Wen Cheng on the fourth day of the funeral rite. These illustrations suffice to demonstrate how meticulously *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* has adhered to historical truths. A virtual bridge of “intertextual interaction” between *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* and “historical facts” has been created by transforming the conclusive historical documents into exciting dramatic situations on the screen.

### 3.2 Taking Cavalier Perspective as Narrative Structure

Because *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* places a strong emphasis on intertextuality with “official history documents”, it uses more narrative techniques of fragmented perspective in order to maintain the plot’s rigour. The Male-Dominated or Female-Dominated Plays are typically the plot settings used in film and television dramas that adapt Internet literature. The majority of these movies and television dramas have “concentrated characters”, “compact plots”, and “clear main lines” in their stories. However, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*’s numerous characters, hazy plot, and ambiguous main line frequently give

people the impression that it is a “running account”. The narrative of “The Biography of the Official Records of the Historian” is typically comprised of “scattered” events rather than the logical deduction of events that have been prearranged, which is the main reason why the leadership creative team picked this “anti-genre” narrative notion. *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*’s principal goal is to fit all historical information into the 70-episode plot in order to give a comprehensive picture of Renzong’s reign; as a result, it inexorably shows several events that have nothing to do with the main plot. The story is occasionally told from the perspectives of officials and queens, of civil employees like Han Qi, Fu Bi, and Wen Yanbo, and occasionally from the perspectives of individuals like Su Shi and Su Zhe who only occasionally made an appearance. The emphasis of the plot also changes as the course of events.

### 3.3 Taking “Moderate Assumption” and “Collage Concentration” as Narrative Tactics

Although *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* attempted to integrate the plot with several authentic sources into a “hypertext” network, it largely embraced the tactics of “moderate assumption” and “collage concentration” instead of totally abandoning fiction. A fictional chapter might be Zhao Zhen, a new monarch, visiting the Imperial Tomb in an effort to identify Li Chenfei, his biological mother. When Li Chenfei was alive, according to historical documents, Zhao Zhen was unaware that his birth mother had a second child. It is clear that this passage is fictional. The eight kings were informed by Zhao Yuanyan that Li Chenfei had been murdered by Queen Mother Liu E, and Zhao Zhen immediately opened the casket for an examination. Soon after, Queen Mother Liu E passed away from illness. He discovered that Li Chenfei had been buried in the queen’s ceremony, protected by mercury, and had vivid remains. The prince of Yan informed Zhao Zhen that the emperor was born of Li Chenfei, but that Li Chenfei abruptly passed away after the Queen Mother Xian passed away. This account is quite compatible with historical data. She sobbed uncontrollably. She missed numerous days of court because she was so depressed. He travelled to the mausoleum of Fuyuan Hong while pursuing Chen Fei in the posthumous title of empress dowager, Zhuangyi. The casket was filled with mercury, so when I opened the lid, I saw that Chen Fei’s body was completely undamaged. His skin tone resembled that of a living person, and the details of his crown and attire were in keeping with the empress dowager’s persona. There was absolutely no indication of “death”. I honestly can’t believe what some people outside stated, Zhao Zhen sighed. Zhao Zhen started treating Liu’s family better after that. It is evident that Zhao Zhen was aware of Li Chenfei’s biological mother before Liu E passed away. It could only be the result of the creator’s “moderate guess” because there is no historical evidence for it. However, this layout will only serve to amplify the conflicts and regrets that exist in Zhao Zhen’s mind, hence strengthening the drama’s struggle. For instance, there is a hint of “moderate conjecture” in the plot of Princess Fukang and Liang Huaiji, which is noted in history as “the princess enjoys it”. Although the “love” between them is evidently a “well-founded” lie, the creative team purposefully plays up their attachment for one another.

By gathering and collecting historical materials, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* also enriches the narrative of the plot and the plot's struggle in addition to "moderate assumption." One of the most common instances is the passage in which Jiayou, Liu Ji, Su Shi, Ouyang Xiu, and others gathered and disputed during Jiayou's second year of his scientific examination. This passage condenses the events in the same scenario from Liu Ji's "When the sky and the earth first emerged, everything started to grow, and about then, hero just appear." Ouyang Xiu's "The speeding horse trampled a dog" and Su Shi's "deliberate when making a decision" all of which are bland and uncomplicated with no contrast. People feel immersed, comprehensive, and compact when they encounter the original fractured historical facts.

## 4 The Aesthetic Claim of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*

### 4.1 The Authentic of "Authentic" and "Confucian Ritualism"

In contrast to conventional court dramas including period clothes, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* declines to narrate court stories face-to-face. The monarch is not the official family, the queen is not a cruel monarch, and the eunuch is not a freak. Instead, they all appear to be regular people with regular family lives and normal pleasures and tragedies. For instance, Liang Huaiji and Princess Fukang were charged for having extramarital affairs. Zhao Zhen consoled her daughter first, then her son-in-law in the manner of an emperor. The procedure was followed in a manner similar to that of regular people handling family matters rather than a court with rigorous rules. In addition, "*Serenade of Peaceful Joy*" purposefully removed the characters' rank hierarchy at the same time. Instead of stressing the disparities in the characters' position with the sounds and acts of a surprise, three obeisances, and nine knocks, they can converse in a way that appears equal regardless of whether they are members of the official family, eunuchs, or public servants.

*Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, on the other hand, aims to convey Confucianism through visuals. Confucianism's essential values of "kindheartedness", "ethical paradigm", and "ambition" can be found in *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, according to a scholar [3]. To shape specific character, the modern interpretation of "ritual" is the most crucial." Ritual and music culture is not only a social and political ideal, but also an ethical principle and norm" [4], which also indicates that "ritual" is not only a norm of order that can be expressed through words, but also an individual's internal motivation. When *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* abandons the traditional and strict aspects of "ritual" culture, she expounds on the influence of "ritual" on Interpersonal societal nourishment from the standpoint of equitable treatment.

### 4.2 The Ingenuity of Production

Noon Sunshine Film and Television Company is the producer of the 400 million yuan-worth film *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*. With its position among China's top 10 TV drama production companies and ample investment protection, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* is quite creative in recapping the specifics of the rich Zhao and Song Dynasties. Interior decor, costumes, pavilions, and alleyways all have an antique ink painting feel to them.

All of them are intense, exquisite, and full of sense of the times, whether they are small or large like a document, a bowl of candy, an incense burner, or a bustling group play. Additionally, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* is extremely meticulous when it comes to line processing, adopting a style of line sharing that combines classical Chinese with common vernacular. As a result, the characters in the play appear rather old and exhibit a genuine elegance akin to classicism.

### 4.3 The Tranquility of Scholar Aesthetic

Although *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* depicts an affluent Renzong era, it does not simply highlight the opulence of the royal dynasty. Instead, it places more emphasis on developing a sort of “graceful and serene” aesthetic. Characters’ words and actions are frequently animated, softly spoken, solemn and unyielding, and always formal in this performance style. There is a Confucian temperament of “scholar-officials” in all official families, whether they be aunts, government servants, or military commanders. On the other side, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* also demonstrates the Song people’s appreciation of natural settings and romantic poetry. Yan Shu reads the Huanxi Sha Theme, for instance: With a glass of wine, a new song is appropriate, and Fan Zhongyan performs Autumn Thought, which features numerous images of suburban horses, bamboo forests, and chanting sounds. It is clear that its aesthetics are dualistic. It depicts the “grace” of Confucian Neo-Confucianism, which is located above the temple, on the one hand, and the “tranquilly” of poetry and the environment in which one was born on the other.

“Light aesthetics”, according to scholars Maohua Li and Zhongzhu Bao, are at the heart of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*’s aesthetics. According to the Laozi and Zhuangzi, the “Light aesthetics”, advocates championed by Laozi and Zhuangzi after years of interpretation, acquired spiritual consensus and so gained new energy in the Song Dynasty [5]. “Light” possesses a kind of aesthetic feeling of “budding” and is “sensation within odorless, the most intense and supreme sensation” [6].

### 4.4 The Spiritual Core of Mindfulness

The deeply introspective work *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* is surrounded by the “everything is gloomy” style of life. It backfires in the play whether it’s directed at the Emperor or Civilian, which ultimately results in the statement “meaning is impossible to be balanced”. The official works hard, but he never gets to see his mother, and the only son, “Most Xing Lai”, passed away at a young age. Princess Kang and Liang Huaiji are in love, but they are unable to wed due of their status. Despite being bright, Su Shunqin passed away young; Even Xia Song, the “traitor” in the drama, was unable to become prime minister in the end and was unable to remain coupled with Jia, a boyhood friend, for the rest of his life. Di Qing had exceptional martial arts, but he died in despair. It’s hard to be fair in the end isn’t a tragedy that nihilism advocates; rather, it’s a true life experience shared by people of all social classes that captures the utmost helplessness and despair of having a predetermined route in life.

## 5 The Promotion Strategy and Cultural Output of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*

### 5.1 The “Low Dissemination”

Data from April 20 indicate that *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*'s ratings for the first time were unsatisfactory. The ratings for episodes 23 and 24 on that day topped 3 percentage points, and the market share was over 10%. The audience rating for *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* was only 0.572 for the week of April 11–April 17 according to SARFT data, and its market share was barely about 2%. The rating of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* Douban decreased from 8.2 to 6.6 due to word of mouth. The score and audience size of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* have somewhat decreased when compared to *The Story of Minglan* which is also directed by Kaizhou Zhang and produced by Noon Sunshine and is also a historical drama of the Song Dynasty. This is primarily because of its slow rhythm and lack of dramatic “official narrative”. On the other hand, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* has received 5.04 billion broadcasts on Tencent's video platform, and its score is as high as 9.3. In the somewhat lagging online platform reputation, it can be seen that *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* has gained the favour of many “repeat clients.” In the age of new media, traditional TV media's influence and evaluation system are waning, while assessments of internet platforms exhibit “insincerity.” Additionally, the second half of the entire play is primarily comprised of inconsistencies, repeats of climaxes, and significantly increased visibility. As a result, the entire scenario depicts a “slow dissemination” cultural phenomena.

### 5.2 The “Rapid Popularity” Abroad

The biggest international streaming video site, YouTube, is simultaneously streaming live *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*. The first episode has reached as many as 120,000 people, and compared to the slow heat in China, it has already amassed about 10 million broadcasts on YouTube with dehydrated data. “This makes me desire for something I must have missed when I was young, charming beauty, with a touch of melancholy,” some abroad internet users exclaimed with emotion. It is clear that *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*'s “high sense” and “classicism” substantially meet the expectations of the international audience for classical Chinese culture. “Slow rhythm” is no longer a drawback thanks to strong characterization, rich image texture, engaging plot structure, and pessimistic romantic feeling.

### 5.3 The Exportation of “Mutual Neighbourliness and Global Consensus on Governing” National Image

Even though *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* is merely a TV show, it has more contemporary cultural, historical, and global perspectives. *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, on the other hand, emphasises on the personality and cultural attractiveness of ancient Chinese literati and officialdom in contrast to other works in China, such as palace dramas from the Qing and Ming dynasties, pre-Qin dramas, and overhead dramas. Scholar Yu Yingshi quoted Fan Zhongyan as saying, “From a historical perspective, we should pay greater attention

to the creation of the general perception that 'academics regard regulating the world as their own responsibility'. This is a brand-new development that will usher in a new era [7]. *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* portrays an open picture of "a long history and cultural civilization" and promotes the global political subject consciousness of "the world governs together and its neighbours are good friends", rather than highlighting national military prowess and emphasising the modern concept of nation-state. According to the historical goals of "the belt and road initiative" culture export and the current global political pattern of the epidemic, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* does not present an image of China as a rising power but rather as a large, responsible nation that "cares for the world and treats others peacefully." In the play, Zhao Zhen entertained Emperor Daozong of the Liao Dynasty and worked with Xixia to open the border market, which accurately reflects how China currently manages international relations. It emphasised that all nations are equal and all life is valuable, which is of great significance for projecting a positive image of China. It transformed the phrase "scholars regard governing the world as their own responsibility" into the lofty pattern "the state regards governing the world as its own responsibility."

The greatness of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* is a result of its delicate production, meticulous historical perspective, vivid characterization, exquisite aesthetics, profound spiritual, and national image full of contemporary consciousness. It serves as a highly positive point of reference for the current domestic costume TV series and offers a novel concept for the export of Chinese cultural capital.

## 6 Conclusion

Quality production, rigorous biography, vivid characters, elegant aesthetics, profound spiritual core and national image promotional strategies full of current consciousness are all factors in the success of *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*. A good impact on contemporary domestic traditional costume Television programs, and an uncommon approach for the foreign marketing of current Chinese cultural products: to produce a "official image" without drama, originality, or amusement. There are no regular narrative procedures like "court battle", "biography of emperors", and "detailing history" in *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, which is unlike traditional costume dramas. *Serenade of Peaceful Joy*, on the other hand, is founded on official history while also honoring the compassion of a global society committed to a shared future for all people. It conveys the Chinese traditional concept of "temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous" which reflects the contemporary interplay between China and the globe. Undoubtedly, foreign cultures will comprehend Chinese people's genuine thinking more objectively and fully, and recognize that "FuManchu" is merely western civilization for Chinese people.

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