

The Necessity to Reshape the Vitality of Video Arts in the New Period ----Reflections on the “Bosom-Clipping” Event of the TV Series the Empress of China

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ABSTRACT: In 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping noted in the Beijing Literary and Artistic Workers Forum that we “should make great efforts settling the issue of quality deficiency in cultural works”. Currently, the lack of high quality in the field of literary and artistic creation, particularly of cinematic and television works still remains hagridden. The dust and din of “bosom-clipping” case about TV series *the Empress of China* is filling the air and once again sounds the alarm. In the new period, we need reshape the cultural and artistic vitality and seek the sustainable developing way for Chinese cinematic and television arts.

KEYWORDS: video arts; vitality; the empress of China

In 2014, the TV series *the Empress of China* resumed broadcasting, with a steep change that almost all the shots of half-exposed bosom of secondary consorts were clipped out only remaining their head portraits known as close-up print, some of which were entirely deleted. This event aroused heated debate on the network, and each side sticks to their own arguments, reaching such a pitch as even reported in the foreign media. From the angle of marketing, bosom-clipping event does not affect the series broadcast at all, instead, this indirectly promotes the dissemination; but from the angle of video arts developing, the event involves many problems, such as the perfection of Chinese broadcasting reviewing mechanism, the public needs, and the effects on youth. Why could a TV series arouse so many social issues? When a problem is discussed, the fundamental cannot be ignored – the lifeblood supporting cinematic and television works to develop sustainably and healthily derives from the literary and cultural vitality.

In 2015, Chinese society has entered a historical period of comprehensive and rapid development, overall national strength constantly increasing, the Socialism with distinct Chinese characteristics becoming the focus of the world’s attention. Rapid economic development also needs the increase in cultural soft power. However, the present situation is that compared with its booming economy, China’s cultural development is lagging behind. China has been a culturally big country, yet not a big cultural exporter. Under such circumstances, in August, November, December 2013 and February 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping makes a series of

important speeches about Socialist cultural construction, and convenes the Literary and Artistic Workers Forum (LAWF) in Beijing in October 2014, stressing that arts should reshape the expectation of vitality. For a long period of time, there has been a worrying phenomenon of “Arts being the slave to the market”: literary and artistic works presenting plateaus but no peaks; cultural works prospering in quantity but lacking quality; plagiarism, imitation and stereotyping pervading creation. The bosom-clipping event is just one isolated example, but behind this the reflection is directed at the core of the national advocacy of literal and artistic thoughts in the new period – works need carry forward China’s core values, convey truth, righteousness and goodness, and transfer positive energy. In this regard, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) notes that the concentration of creation should strive to enhance the quality and produce masterpieces. And the government need exert themselves to perform the guiding and administrative obligations, and aggrandize policy support; while the authoring staff ought to reshape the cultural and artistic vitality, and compose more insightful, exquisite and virtuoso works.

1 SUCH VITALITY IS THE INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF MAO ZEDONG’S LITERARY AND ARTISTIC THOUGHTS

“The essence of Mao Zedong’s literary and artistic ideology is the artistic direction. Under particular

social conditions, it is mainly related to the existing status of society, specifically being the needs of the liberation of working people and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” [1] In the new period, General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speech in the LAW is the lineal descent to Mao Zedong’s, also stressing that “at the moment of gathering strength and reaching consensus, literature and art not only undertakes significant mission, its renaissance is also the important connotation of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” This shows that the present literary and artistic thoughts are the inheritance and logical development of Mao Zedong’s ideology, which is of long vitality and still instructive. Though the times consistently develop and progress, the core of Mao Zedong’s thoughts are still applicable to the needs of contemporary arts in China. For the literary and artistic orientation, there has been an illustration from scholars, “when the ideological tendency of works is opposite to the interests and needs of the people, it not only violates the correct literary direction, but also loses aesthetic before people, and loses the significance and value of the literature.” [2] Video arts’ development is inseparable from that of literature, so literary aesthetic at some level directly affects that of video arts. Shortly after the bosom-clipping event, the SARFT makes positive responses, announcing that they have received many complaints from the audience reflecting the unhealthy shots in this TV series unfavorable to the minors and other problems. On such ground, the SARFT imposes an amendment order according to the “needs of public interests” on this TV series already with Issuance License. Initially, a part of the audience takes a questioning attitude towards the overdue order after airing 17 episodes, mainly towards the SARFT’s examining standards. Leaving those discussions aside, exhibiting the glory of Tang Dynasty via TV platform is certainly an important channel to demonstrate the excellent traditional culture, but almost all actresses with large-scale baring still cannot clear the suspicion of showing off the flesh. Women’s dressing in Tang dynasty is affected by Huns’ style, really open and fashionable, but what does this prove? The costume, headdress, hair style and scenic props all embody the strength and attentiveness of the cast, and fully demonstrate the characteristics and traditional culture of the Chinese nation, but most contents lose their beauty due to the bosom-clipping. Whether it is the ulterior motive of the cast group or the SARFT being perfunctory, it just causes so much dissonance to emerge in a TV series that should have been excellent, whose key reason lies in ignoring the fundamental – what the vitality of video arts is. General Secretary Xi puts forward to reestablish such vitality, namely “endeavoring to produce more excellent works disseminating the contemporary Chinese values, embodying the spirit of Chinese

culture, reflecting the Chinese aesthetic pursuit, and being ideological, artistic and appreciatory; endeavoring to create inviting works, guiding people to discover the beauty of nature, beauty of life and the beauty of spirit.”

Without the thriving of Chinese culture, there won’t be the great revival of the Chinese nation. The creation of video works needs to fully reflect the great spiritual force of national revival; the creators are supposed to bear this as their mission and responsibility, persevere with the people-centered creating guidance, and strive to create more outstanding spiritual and cultural products worthy of the times – herein lies the vitality of video arts.

2 SUCH VITALITY IS AN IMPORTANT WAY OF SHAPING CHINA’S NATIONAL IMAGE

What constitutes the national image in the field of video arts? The state image is “a virtual imaginary text system constructed according to actual needs and imaginary logic” [3], which is established on an imagined community of the state and nation. This is mainly involving three important aspects in video works: the shaping of heroic characters; the establishment of national consciousness and identity; the construction of the national space discourse. Video arts possess a birthright of cultural dissemination that enables the audience to form a collective identity towards culture to a certain extent, which serves as a spiritual bond forming a stable spiritual power of inter-group communication and exchange. Therefore, the effective use of the platform of video arts is a critical approach of shaping national image, and disseminating excellent culture and carrying forward the national spirit. Regarding video arts, literature is the basis. Promoting the vitality of video arts requires starting with the script. For the playwright, a certain level of political responsibility and national emotion is necessary. Such playwright will concern with national affairs, for patriotism is a measure of mental personality, i.e. as his literary style is, so is he, accordingly, a betrayer to his country and nation is never able to create uplifting works; such playwright will concern with civil affairs, the more attention to the lower levels, the higher level of the mental horizon, herein lies the core of the vitality of literary works; such playwright will concern with current affairs, the concern with social reality produces works “to the ground” and cohesive.

With the current popularity of mass culture, along with increasingly obvious traces of marketing and commercial operations, patriotism and national spirit in Chinese video works is progressively generalized, given many impractical elements beyond the original connotation, resulting in loss of the weight of history and the pureness; as the portraying of

soldiers' spirits: "in the face of powerful enemies, the choice must be resolutely unsheathing the sword even with the knowledge of defeat. Even down, the corpse remains a mountain ridge." This kind of "sword-unsheathing spirit" embodies the character's (Li Yunlong) patriotism and national faith, but to provide more fascination for audiences, excessive emotional plots are added up, especially the bridge plot of revenge for Xiu Qin, properly illustrating the so-called "flying into a fury for his femme fatale", fully embodying the worldliness of the series. Such illustration of soldiers' spiritual world is different from the traditional way, merely providing richness but losing its purity, and poured into earthly spirit. In this cultural background, it is of great magnitude that General Secretary Xi Jinping puts forward the reestablishment of literary and artistic vitality. To render literature and arts undertake the responsibility for social progress, it must abandon the vulgarness of entertainment paramountcy and reshape the literary and artistic vitality, because the touching part of good and progressive artistic works lies not only in vividly reflecting the real life, but also in its capability of displaying the fashion times, in writing out a nation's hopes, in showing a country's future, and in refining a nation's spiritual character and eventually demonstrating the democratic and progressive image of the state. Another TV series *The Old Farmer*, synchronously broadcasted with *The Empress of China*, expresses the real Chinese rural life and the changing process of farmers' spiritual world over 60 years through the story about a land revolution. The scriptwriter Gao Mantang "has a sincere heart and genuinely cares about farmers' well-being, actively searching for the light of history yet without neglecting the abuses, pouring both height and warmth into the works." [4] The elaborate language, penetrating performances, fine scene combining both Eastern and Western aesthetic, literally exhibit the historical picture of 60 years' of Shandong farmers' work and life, showing their toughness, rusticity and hardworking spirit. This series enables the audience to understand the relationship between farmers and land in China, understand the Chinese farmers, and understand China. Isn't it the best embodiment of national image? Compared with *The Empress of China*, the historical dramas *the Kangxi Dynasty* and *Hanwu Emperor* embody much more national spirit and will of state than the former; relatively, the former is more like the fruit of amusing history determined by commercial interests.

3 SUCH VITALITY IS THE ROOT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF VIDEO ARTS

In the modern and contemporary time, in the

background of pluralistic cultures colliding and mixing, Chinese video arts have walked up a road of market-oriented management and operation. From the angle of social development and progress, it is an inevitable trend, but we should consistently remain sober-minded; taking the road of commercialization does not mean abandoning the spiritual connotation and artistic conception. Progress does not ostracize entertainment, nor resists the market, as there are many contemporary literary and artistic works gain both considerable profits and reputation. Commercial operation is not contradictory with relationship with the quality, but of a mutually promotable unity. Many works of the Oscar Awards winners are from Hollywood's commercial movie studios, from which we could tell that excellent works is not the boasting result of publicity, and that only hard quality is able to ensure the reputation, the popularity and the circulation.

In the new period, reshaping the vitality is the essence to ensure the sustainable development of video arts. It has been 110 years for Chinese video arts since the first native-produced movie in 1905, and the first homemade TV series in 1958. In the developing process of more than 100 years, what most impresses us is the works with deep reflection and understanding on life, mirroring human life and spiritual development. Only due to the resonance and communication with the content or characters of those TV series, can the audience leave deep impression in heart and keep them haunting. Even if those works depending on gimmicks, wisecracks, novelty, showing off the flesh and youthful faces to gain limelight could draw the public attention for a time, they eventually will not save from being forgotten. According to the official reflection, *the Empress of China* has been recognized by a wide audience after the bosom-clipping and resuming broadcast. Excluding the hyping elements of network, it at least suggests that people's pursuit of video arts focuses more on emotional communication and the spiritual inspiration and encouragement. In the new period, reestablishing the vitality of video arts requires all the artistic staff to firmly grasp the basic direction of arts serving the people and the society, deeply understand Socialist core values and the connotation of "China dream" of thought, plunge into grassroots, root in the people, concentrating on creation, abandon impetuosity, insist the belief of truth and service first, thoroughly demonstrate the national spirit of bravery, toughness and endeavor and the Chinese image of justice, democracy and righteousness through excellent video works.

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