

# Spiritual Salvation of Cultural Variety Shows in New Media Environment

## Taking *The Readers* as an Example

Desheng Wu

Institute of Information Spreading Engineering  
Changchun University of Technology  
Changchun, China

Shuang Liang

Institute of Information Spreading Engineering  
Changchun University of Technology  
Changchun, China

**Abstract**—With the development of spiritual civilization, the content of over-entertainment in variety shows is increasingly inconsistent with the real needs of the audience. The content of the program re-advocates to help the audience find "hope" that they really want in the deep heart, and to find the long-term and true "beauty" and "happiness". When entertainment programs lead to the "carnival" of the whole society, the emergence of cultural variety shows is helping to change the pan-entertainment market. This paper will choose the prominent representative of literature and art variety show *The Readers*, combining communication studies, media ecology, Confucian and Taoism thoughts, Bloch's utopia philosophy, and Neil Botman's point of view in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and comparing with the content production of purely entertaining programs, to analyze the spiritual salvation reflected in *The Readers*, and further sublimate the good reaction of the program.

**Keywords**—variety show; emotional resonance; spiritual salvation; *The Readers*; symposium on work in literary and artistic field

### I. INTRODUCTION

*The Readers* is a large-scale emotional program launched by CCTV. By the combination of personal growth, emotional expression, background story, and the good works of the world, it selects the beautiful words to read the value behind the text with a natural emotion. <sup>[1]</sup>This paper attempts to use this variety show as the original version to explore the changes of the variety show over the past few years due to the development of new media.

### II. FROM "UNBALANCED MEDIA ECOLOGY" TO "MEDIA ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION"

At present, China's media environment is characterized by excessive entertainment of variety shows, lack of meaning and value, serious homogeneity, severe waste of resources, too much emphasis on business interests, no understanding of the balance between social meaning and economy efficiency, inadequate supervision, weak examination, aggravation of disintermediation and unprofessional production.

#### A. Harmony and Moderation of Media Ecology

Shao Peiren's "media ecology" refers to the use of the views and methods of ecology to explore and explain the relationship among people, media, society and nature, as well as the science of the nature and law of the development and changes." <sup>[2]</sup>Media ecology takes the whole, green, interaction and balance as the focus of its research. Faced with the ongoing imbalance in the media ecology in our country, it aims to find a reasonable theoretical basis for our country's media ecology to achieve balance and civilization.

The media ecosystem stresses balance and harmony, requiring to correctly treat the relationship of the "human-media-society-nature" system. The entertainment programs that live in the media environment have the pressure of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. Nowadays, the media ecological environment has been artificially destroyed. *The Readers* is not a complete negation of entertainment-based variety programs, but rather makes the program meaningful. Meaningfulness does not mean that economic benefits are completely eliminated, but social benefits must be put first. The social benefits of *The Readers* are reflected in the production of program content, resonating with the text and audience, and conveying the true needs of the audience, rather than the inner impetuosity in the context of excessive entertainment, such as, Yao Chen's gratitude to the nanny, Liang Xiaosheng's desire to gain spiritual value in reading, and so on. While the program delivers emotions, there are also some host's sly humor and live interactions between the guests and the audience. The audience tends to applaud and stand up when they recognize. It can be described that be "harmony" and have sense of "proportion".

#### B. Avoiding Media Ecological Issues Such as "Disintermediation" and Homogenization

As a financial term, disintermediation refers to skipping the intermediate link and directly progress between the supply and demand sides. With the development of new media, program production can skip the professional media production and broadcast platform. This program form of direct broadcast is the "disintermediation" of the media. "Disintermediation" has made some people become producers, but because these programs do not have professional checks, the programs are

not professional enough, and many programs convey too much negative thoughts, resulting in a series of ecological problems. At present, in some short video platforms that have been completely rectified, such as “kuaiishou” and “volcanic video,” some videos that disseminate negative content about minors tend to have high click-through rates. For example, some minors have become parents, etc., which seriously pollute the audience's viewing environment. In addition, there is a series of homogenization problems in the variety market. For example, the parent-child variety show has become the main force of the TV shows for a period of time. From the earliest “Family Show”, “Dad, Where Are Going” “Dad came back” “The Second Birth” to network variety, such as “Let Go of My Baby” “Super Mom”, too many kinds of programs can easily lead to the aesthetic fatigue of the audience, and the waste of resources is serious. Excessive entertainment variety shows will inevitably lead to excessive entertainment. When entertainment programs and other categories of programs are out of balance, and too many entertainment programs occupy the media market, it is easy for the audience to choose entertainment programs one-sidedly. The broadcasting platform of *The Readers* is CCTV. Compared with many network homemade programs, the production process of CCTV programs is more careful. It needs to pass through multi-layer checks, have more professional production, and pay more attention to the carry forward the correct value orientation. The program is launched in the form of “reading + interviews”. The interviews will enable the audience to fully understand the background of the readers' choice. The form of reading is not limited to guests reading on the stage. The program group also set up reading booths in many cities across the country. These readers can also enter the TV screens through the editing of post-production workers, creating a new program format.

### III. FROM “UNORDERED CARNIVAL” TO “ORDERLY ESCAPE”

Bakhtin believes that carnival is a universal, free world, just like “a free life of square type”. If the word “carnival” is replaced by “new media,” it can be seen that the new media is a universal, free world. This kind of free but anonymous occasion completely overturns the orderly lifestyle. In this occasion, the production of programming is weakened, the meaning of the program content is dimmed, the language of the program is not logical, and even rough, the guests in the show laugh at each other and the audience evaluates the program in rough language, but what is the result of this? People seem to be awakening and they want to get out of this kind of strange and worthless circle. The public is picky, they need valuable program content, and they also need a variety show to bring them “joy” after the meal, which puts higher demands on the production of variety shows — “orderly escape”.

#### A. *The Confucian “Benevolence” and “Benevolence Is Beautiful”*

The author thinks that the mental stimulation in entertainment programs is short-lived and it needs to take into account the consequences after the nonsensical humor, so it is not spiritual salvation. For example, the rise of subtitle culture.

The barrage of subtitles in varieties is not strictly controlled, such as “XXX, get out!”, “Please XXX get out of the entertainment circle!” There will also be a case of fans fighting with each other, polluting the audience's viewing environment. The real spiritual salvation should be a sublimation of spiritual thought. This sublimation is to find spiritual resonance in the content of moderation and endless aftertaste. Confucianism advocates “benevolence” and “benevolence is beautiful”. Rational happiness is the real joy. The experience of “happiness” should be associated with the “moral” experience and the inner “benevolence” should be linked with “aesthetic”.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Only the happiness in the moral category can feel the long happiness and spiritual salvation. In the Confucian Analects · Liren, “Those who are without virtue cannot for long endure poverty and hardship, nor can they for long abide prosperity and enjoyment”. The production of variety shows can only achieve real spiritual redemption and real pleasure only by moral binding force. Today, in the blowout development of entertainment programs, *The Readers* uses exquisite words to read values behind the words with plain emotion, which makes it seem to have become the “clear stream” of the variety market.

#### B. *The Taoism of “Being Nature and Doing Nothing” and “The Great Beauty Is Silence”*

In order to allowing the programs to better rescue the human soul, it is necessary to further develop the quality of the program and the quality refers to “true”. Being true can be ordered and being not true means a mess. Taoism can explain this very well. Taoists put forward the thought of “being nature and doing nothing” and “the great beauty is silence.” Taoist thinks that the simple beauty of “heaven and earth has great beauty without speaking” is to relieve pleasure, utilitarian and selfish desires. Li Zehou and Liu Jigang put forward in the *History of Chinese Aesthetics* that beauty and truth are consistent, and everything beautiful should be true and unfalse.<sup>[5]</sup> Unlike other variety shows, which have a real image of chrono cross and reversing history, *The Readers* is a combination of personal growth, emotional experience, background stories and the masterpieces of the world. The characters in the show, the stories in the characters, the works brought by the characters, and the sentiments are real. This kind of reality is the key to open people's hearts. The variety shows with true beauty don't need a gorgeous stage to set off the beauty, and do not need guests to wear luxurious clothes. This beauty is a kind of spiritual beauty and the truth of real touch.

### IV. FROM “AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH” TO “BETTER DREAMS”

Neil Postman mentioned in the *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that it is this nature of television that determines that it must abandon its ideas to meet people's demand for visual pleasure to adapt to the development of the entertainment industry.<sup>[6]</sup> The characteristics of the new media make its thirst for consumption more distinctive. In an imitation market of pan-entertainment, the audience means the market. The “providing entertainment functions” of media itself and audience “media dependence problems” and other issues

mentioned in Wright's "Four Function Theory" together create the characteristics of the program. For example, the entertainment programs tend to be not profound, and the audiences always fail to think and the content is fragmented. If the program abandon teaching in entertainment, perhaps Neal Postman's theory "we will be destroyed by what we love" will really appear. At that time, "all public discourses in the real world (mainly take American books as an example in the book) will emerge in an entertainment manner and become a cultural spirit. Our politics, religion, news, sports, education, and business are willing to become appendages for entertainment".<sup>[6]</sup> *The Readers* hopes to provide audience with more thoughts, more calmness and more reality through the content of the program, which lead to the "hope" in the human minds and means the longing for the "possibility" of a good life. Also, it leads to a "better dream" that can be reached.

#### A. *Agenda Setting in the Surreal Environment and the Beautiful Dream*

In the current media environment, a surreal world has been created through the "simulacra". In this surreal world, what we think is about the surreal world. In this world, the media agenda has become more and more powerful. The content it spreads is like a "bullet" that shoots people and affects people's aesthetics. People's aesthetics have been deconstructed by the media and reconstructed. People are described as heroes who can fight monsters in the game. They have indulged in the hallucinatory feel and piquant feel that the game brings to them and become just and bloody. The purpose of *The Readers* is to let people return to the reality, but *The Readers* does not deny people's inner "hopes", it gives people a right incentive. Through the accessible agenda setting, *The Readers* tells the audience about the feelings of gratitude, homeland, and the spirit of fighting with difficulties sturdily, sublime the audience's spirit and lead the audience to the soul utopia. Bloch said that "Utopia is the idea of groups that have destroyed and broken down the existing society or are trying to break down the existing society, and is a better world, a better society in their dreams." "A vulgar dream without false hopes".<sup>[7]</sup> In the program of *The Readers*, we can see that after Yang Liwei ascended into space, the Chinese people's flying dream has been realized. This is a realization of the hope of all Chinese people, the realization of a better dream, and this emotional resonance of sharing the fate with the motherland, to the greatest extent, reflects the pride of being Chinese.

#### B. *Attach Importance to Form and Quality — Content Aesthetics*

Bloch believes that "the source of artistic skill is understood as the status of the quality and the ability to care for it".<sup>[8]</sup> Art should not be confined to the formal beauty, it should convey valuable content, the care for the current world, and the positive outlook for the future. Today's variety shows are mostly presented in the form of reality shows, which are characterized by "real", take "people" as the core, and take "show" as the form. How to present the intrinsic value of the show is what the current variety shows should consider. For example, the *Keep Running* program pays more attention to the forms of games. For the part of tearing the name brand, we cannot understand what information the program wants to

convey to the audience. What makes *The Readers* win lies in that it breaks through the fictional form of "show" and the flatulent form of the program, highlighting the "quality-content aesthetic" mentioned in the Utopia philosophy of Bloch, that is, focusing on the content, impressing people with reasonable and high quality program content. Through telling stories, *The Readers* conveys to the audience the Chinese people's spirits of self-improvement, heroic struggle and fortitude. Through the read of classic texts, *The Readers* has demonstrated the power of Chinese culture and eased the anxiety of the culture, as Mr. Liang Xiaosheng said in "The Readers": If there are only materials, it is survival; if there is spirit that is life.

#### V. *ADVOCACY AND SUGGESTIONS: FROM "EMOTIONAL STRANDED" TO "EMOTIONAL SUBLIMATION"*

In recent years, there have been a large number of variety shows being broadcast on television or the Internet. Most of them convey the spirit of entertainment and ignore the real inner world of the public. The games are not in keeping with people's hearts. In this era, emotions are ridiculed, exaggerated, despised, and emotions seem to be stranded.

"The Readers" as a large-scale cultural emotional program, appeared suddenly as "the blooming flowers blown by the spring breeze coming at night" and entered people's hearts as the spring rain which "wets things quietly". "The Readers" is an emotional comfort, it conveys an emotional sublimation and is a spiritual force. This has also become the production goal of some programs.

#### A. *"Human Centered" — Adhering to People-Oriented Creative Direction*

Xi Jinping, the general secretary, has emphasized at the symposium on literature and art work that socialist literature and art, in essence, are people's literature and art. To reflect the voices of the people, the literature and art must adhere to the fundamental direction of serving the people and socialism.<sup>[9]</sup>

This requires that the program should be set from the perspective of "human". First, programs should tally with audience's aesthetic demands. At present, more and more programs are produced by TV stations and networks, which give the audience a wider choice. The media should pay attention to the continuous innovation of programs to avoid homogenization, and the content of programs should keep up with the taste of the audience. This kind of follow-up taste is, based on value, to create programs worthy of the times, so as to intangibly guide audience, correctly guide people's aesthetic choices, and satisfy the audience's knowledge acquisition. The theory of "use and satisfaction" mentioned in the Communication Sciences is this meaning. Only by making the content produced by the media conform to the audience's taste can the media obtain the continuous attention of the audience. Second, programs should do well in the interaction between the media and the audience. The audience is not what they were in the past, and they no longer accept information passively, and hope that their opinions can also be accepted by the media. The people-centered target means that we should

pay attention to the interaction between the media and the people, making them “good friends” and communicate with each other in a friendly way. When the audience puts forward their own opinions, the media can change the content and form, or overall rhythm of the program by selecting the opinions. Third, programs must pay attention to the participation of the audience, and only making audience participating in the program can attract their attention. The program groups of *The Readers* set up reading kiosks throughout the country. Through their post-production, many audiences can also appear in the program, which makes more people virtually become guests of the program. *The Readers* lays emphasis on the interaction between the audience and guests, between the host and guests, and between the host, guests and audience, and enhances the audience’s participation in the scene through different forms. Fourth, programs should convey the common feelings, rather than the particular emotional needs of some individuals. The emotion conveyed by *The Readers* program is the reflection of individual’s shared emotion, namely, patriotism and observance of law, courtesy and honesty, solidarity and friendship, industrious and thrifty, dedication to the undertakings. This kind of emotion from the “people” is easy to resonate with the audience. The program with both entertainment and thought really achieves the purpose of “serving the people”.

#### B. “Feeling Conveyance” — Cultivating Cultural Confidence and Making Excellent Program Content

Comrade Xi Jinping has pointed out: we must be confident in our path, theory and system, as well as our culture ultimately.<sup>[10]</sup>

Develop cultural confidence and produce excellent Chinese programs. First of all, excellent programs should pay attention to carrying forward Chinese excellent culture and traditional culture. In modern society, the public has the most frequent contact with the media. Most media have created information under pleasure consumption, which makes netizens, especially young netizens, become new human beings under the media agenda. The so-called culture they are concerned about has not yet undergone the test of time, and seems to be weak in the face of traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, the media must take on their responsibilities, and transmit more excellent culture oriented information, so that the audience can be influenced by traditional culture. The literary works mentioned in *The Readers* program are all excellent works that have been tested by time, such as the *On My Modest Room*, which has been praised for many years.

Next, excellent programs should foster a sense of patriotism. Pan Jiluan, an academican of Chinese Academy of Sciences, has talked about his career as a students and his contribution to welding in *The Readers* program, and the purpose of his insistence on reading is to resist Japan and save China. He has read the *Report to the National People* with the renowned alumni of National Southwestern Associated University and Tsinghua University, reflecting the urgent situation in China at that time. The patriotic plots of contemporary youth are still rekindled in the discourse of the old generation, adding some precipitated feelings in impetuous society.

At present, although many variety shows with entertainment still make use of illogical language to make gimmicks, many programs have changed their way that relies on entertainment to obtain ratings. For example, the *Keep Running* program has sung folk songs in Yanan, and the *Up Idol* program has led guests to experience local customs and visit cultural heritage and scenic spots and historical sites in Shanxi. Variety shows have paid more and more attention to the combination of Chinese excellent traditional culture and contemporary culture.

Finally, make Chinese culture go global, and tell a good Chinese story. As a self-made arts program that conveys outstanding Chinese culture and traditional culture, *The Readers* program group has already reached the purchasing agreement of program pattern with French Huff Hubert Television Production Co., Ltd during Cannes Television Festival, and China variety culture programs can finally go abroad!

#### C. “Teaching Through Lively Activities” — Spreading Mainstream Values and Building the Right Program Orientation

Xi Jinping, the general secretary, has emphasized that we must regard the creation and production of outstanding works as a central link in the work of literature and art, and strive to create and produce more outstanding works that disseminate contemporary Chinese values, reflect the spirit of Chinese culture and the Chinese aesthetic pursuits, and organically unify thought, artistry and appreciation.<sup>[9]</sup>

At present, there are many variety shows in the market. Some good programs lead the socialist core value, however, other programs have serious homogenization phenomenon, lack innovation and have deflected value with excessive entertainment. For example, some programs use foul language to convey ideas, use network language to adapt traditional literature, confuse right and wrong of the history, use affairs to hype programs, vilify guests, do not respect the working people, and depreciate the disabled. The content of the program which deviates from the value created by the media has influenced the value and aesthetic judgment of the public. In particular, the adolescent’s ability to distinguish between right and wrong is still growing and developing, and they have not yet established mature values, so it is frequently found that parents have accused the media. The production of the program should promote the core values of socialism and let the correct values lead the program production and become a weathervane. The program that truly promotes mainstream values should pay attention to the following principles. The first is functional principle<sup>[11]</sup>, that is, the media surnamed Party. We should play our due responsibilities, do well the mouthpieces of the Party and the people, guide the mainstream value orientation, and lead the audience to receive education and to correct aesthetics. The second is element principle<sup>[11]</sup>. The elements in the program should be justified, and the program should not deliberately create elements to gain attention. The third is effect principle<sup>[11]</sup>. The effect of the program should face the reality and be aggressive. The fourth is total amount principle<sup>[11]</sup>. We must emphasize that the program lies in “quality” rather than “quantity”. Recently, the

State Administration of Radio, Film and Television has issued a new policy to increase the proportion of cultural variety shows. Therefore, program production should focus on innovation and meaning, reflect the true beauty, and disseminate mainstream values, to guide the correct program orientation, which seems to another affirmation of “The Reader”, and a warning to other types of variety shows.

*D. “Artistic Ideal” — Guiding Social Trends with Noble Literature and Art*

Most literary and art workers should be the pursuers and disseminators of the truth, good and beauty, and integrate the noble values and the beautiful emotions into their works, so as to guide the people to gather together to the noble morality and avoid cheap laughter, bottomless entertainment, and loose-principled garbage to fill with our lives.<sup>[12]</sup>

General Secretary Xi’s speech has pointed out the direction for the development of variety shows, and it has also become a striving goal for variety shows. Although the variety show is an entertainment for everyone at their leisure, it does not mean that “entertainment” must be placed in the supreme position. While bringing entertainment, a variety show should also convey its value, so that we can remove spiritual thoughts and inner vanity and achieve spiritual salvation. First of all, the variety shows themselves should attach importance to the grasp of “degree”, so that the good agenda setting of media can affect each audience, convey valuable and meaningful content to people, and deliver traditional Chinese virtue and aesthetics, as well as the content that is full of positive energy and meets the audience’s knowledge needs. Variety shows should not make people vulgar and irritable, but make people become real, good and beautiful, and become knowledgeable people. Next is the benign supervision of the government society. The audience should consciously check the program. Finally, we should attach importance to the role played by opinion leaders in program propaganda. For example, some programs should invite more excellent literary and art workers as guests. Opinion leaders will value the propaganda and guidance of noble culture works. Artists will give more explanation to the works of art for the audience on the public platform, so that they can understand and accept it. In this way, through the common sense of society, media and audiences’ excellent culture, this atmosphere influences the audiences’ selection for the enjoyment of shows and further forms a role to cultivate the whole society. In this way, we can optimize the literary market, purify the media market, provide better space for the media, and make more excellent programs wash people’s hearts.

## VI. CONCLUSION

As Dong Qing, a producer of *The Readers*, said, “It’s difficult for literary shows to survive, and I don’t think that the *Chinese Poetry Conference* and *The Readers* attracting attention marks the cultural program become popular, but at least it’s a vane. Today, under the dominance of entertainment programme, we can see another possibility.”<sup>[13]</sup> At present, the over-entertainment programs have been reduced and more valuable and meaningful cultural variety shows have emerged.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Baidu Baike: The Readers, [http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=nWS\\_r0LwzsNcqCNdbtJ52Wtc8nL2jlVumN6Nl3agqHOpQn8DAo8srC0JOCuSaSWXSlqGndvPOU7gvh88hJJIBOEnr3b0k1hXq1bO6eFnQY\\_Q5mPelEdTkUH9n6ZAAE\\_](http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=nWS_r0LwzsNcqCNdbtJ52Wtc8nL2jlVumN6Nl3agqHOpQn8DAo8srC0JOCuSaSWXSlqGndvPOU7gvh88hJJIBOEnr3b0k1hXq1bO6eFnQY_Q5mPelEdTkUH9n6ZAAE_)
- [2] Shao Peiren. New Perspective of Media Ecology Study — A Study of Media as a Green Ecology[J]. *Journal of Xuzhou Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2008, 134(1): 136-144.
- [3] Zeng Hong, Guo Siping. “Le”: The Chinese Subject Well-Being and the View of Happiness in China Tradition Culture[J]. *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, 2012, 44(7): 986-994.
- [4] Zhou Wei. From “Le” thought of Confucian School to Research on Happiness[J]. *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, 2013, (7): 34-37.
- [5] Wang Xiaoning. “Being Natural and True” — “Ture” Beautiful Realm in Zhuangzi. *Masterpiece Review*, 2016, (12): 38-42.
- [6] Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*[M]. Beijing: Citic Press Group, 2015.
- [7] Meng Hai. The Dreams of a Better Life — On Ernst Bloch’s Thought of Philosophy of the Future Hope [J]. *Seeking Truth*, 2006, 33(3): 33-39.
- [8] Jin Shoutie. Art and Utopia: On Ernst Bloch’s Conception of Art [J]. *Marxism and Reality*, 2010, (1): 117-125.
- [9] Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China: Xi Jinping presided over the symposium on art work and emphasized: Adhere to the people-centered creative orientation, [http://59.252.212.18/art/2014/12/14/art\\_679\\_4618.html](http://59.252.212.18/art/2014/12/14/art_679_4618.html). December 14, 2014.
- [10] People’s Network: cultural confidence: more basic, deep and lasting strength, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0705/c40531-28526067.html>. July 5, 2016.
- [11] PhoenixNet: The State Administration of Radio Film and Television: the television programs are over entertained and the masses have a strong reaction, [http://ent.ifeng.com/idolnews/special/xianyuling/zuixin/detail\\_2011\\_10/26/10167476\\_0.shtml](http://ent.ifeng.com/idolnews/special/xianyuling/zuixin/detail_2011_10/26/10167476_0.shtml).
- [12] People’s Network: Xi Jinping puts forward “three nos” that make you feel shame on China National Literature Figure and Artists Conference, <http://culture.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1209/c87423-28938850.html>, December 9, 2016.
- [13] Future Network: the first producer experience of Dongqing The Readers makes the public moved by words and convey the feelings by sound, [http://ent.k618.cn/ylzx/201702/t20170219\\_10365066.html](http://ent.k618.cn/ylzx/201702/t20170219_10365066.html). February 19, 2017.