

Integration, Observation, and Creation: A Three-Dimensional Path for Film and Television Education in Regional Universities in the New Media Era (Postprint)

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Abstract

Although the scale of film and television education in Chinese universities has continuously expanded and its educational levels have steadily improved since the late 1990s, problems and contradictions arising from the imbalance of educational resources and the lag in top-level design of film and television education at local universities have become increasingly prominent. Meanwhile, as the entire film and television industry has transitioned from television to the present mobile internet, the industry has undergone tremendous transformation driven by digital technology, with integration and innovation becoming the most crucial keywords in the sector. Against this backdrop, how should film and television education develop at local universities, which constitute the vast majority of higher education institutions? This paper proposes integration, observation, and creation as three-dimensional pathways for film and television education in the new media era, and elaborates on each dimension's objectives, content, and implementation strategies.

Full Text

Integration, Observation, and Creation: A Three-Dimensional Path for Film and Television Education in Local Universities in the New Media Era

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Abstract: Since the late 1990s, the scale and educational level of film and television education in Chinese universities have continued to expand. However,

problems and contradictions arising from the imbalance of educational resources and the lag in top-level design for local university film and television education have become increasingly prominent. Meanwhile, as the entire film and television industry has transitioned from television to today's mobile internet, the industry has undergone tremendous transformation driven by digital technology, making integration and innovation the most important keywords. Against this backdrop, how should film and television education develop in local universities, which constitute the vast majority of higher education institutions? This article proposes integration, observation, and creation as the three-dimensional approaches to film and television education in the new media era, and elaborates on the objectives, content, and implementation strategies for each dimension.

Keywords: new media era; local universities; film and television education; three-dimensional path; interdisciplinary development

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Film and television education can be divided into professional education and general education. According to the target orientation of film and television education in universities, professional education aims to cultivate specialized film and television talent and cultural workers, and its target audience is typically students majoring in drama, film and television studies, journalism and communication, and related disciplines. General education aims to cultivate artistic aesthetic literacy among students, and its target audience encompasses nearly all disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and engineering. With the development of new media, traditional film and television education has appeared somewhat at a loss when facing the "impact" of the new media era. The development of new media has enabled the rapid popularization of film and television general education. As Liu Haibo noted, "When the film industry is moving toward the masses and image media is becoming universal, cinema's sacred status is being challenged, and the altar of the film industry is being broken."

Since the late 1990s, the scale of film and television education in Chinese universities has continued to expand and its educational level has continuously improved. However, behind this development lies the problem of concerning quality in film and television talent cultivation. A reality that Chinese university film and television education needs to confront is that local universities, which constitute the vast majority of higher education institutions, cannot truly meet the quantitative and qualitative demands for film and television talent

required by the great development of the film and television industry. To date, only a handful of universities can cultivate elite talent for film and television production, and there is a particularly severe shortage of compound applied innovative talent. In the new media era, film and television education in local universities urgently needs to find new strategic approaches and implementation strategies. The authors believe that integration, observation, and creation can serve as three-dimensional approaches for film and television education in local universities in the new media era, allowing for the establishment of new objectives, content, and implementation strategies in each dimension.

On August 28, 2020, the Beijing International Film Festival • 27th College Student Film Festival International Film Academic Forum was held at the Yanqi Lake International Convention and Exhibition Center in Beijing. The theme of this forum was “Cooperation and Innovation: The New Pattern of International Film and Television Education.” The forum invited discipline leaders, experts, scholars, and deans from film and television schools at home and abroad to deliver keynote speeches on topics such as the current state of film and television education, discipline construction, talent cultivation, and trends in international cooperation. In his speech, Professor Huang Huilin, a senior professor at Beijing Normal University, explained the two dimensions of “knowledge” and “action” for the future development of university film and television education, emphasizing that both the construction of a distinctive theoretical system and the establishment of rich practical activities are indispensable. Professor Hu Zhifeng, Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee and Vice President of Beijing Film Academy, proposed a new direction focusing on humanity, scientificity, and innovation. Yin Hong, Director of the Teaching Guidance Committee for Drama and Film Studies of the Ministry of Education, Professor of the School of Journalism and Communication at Tsinghua University, and Dean of the Film Academy at Macau University of Science and Technology, stated that film and television education needs to face the supply-demand imbalance and homogenization phenomenon in talent cultivation and carry out reforms in the context of new liberal arts. Elizabeth Daley, Dean of the School of Cinema at the University of Southern California, advocated cultivating students’ artistic sense of mission through interdisciplinary cooperation and guiding them to create and present new media forms.

The above speeches by experts and scholars can be said to address the common contradictions or problems in current film and television education, particularly in local universities. So what are these common contradictions or problems? The authors believe that the common contradiction in current local university film and television education is the gap between the industry’s growing demand for compound talent and the unbalanced and insufficient development of university film and television education. In the new media era, changes in the ecology of the film and television industry have brought changes in talent demand. What the current industry lacks is not technically skilled personnel confined to one area, but rather creative cultural product talent who possess profound humanistic and artistic literacy, interdisciplinary professional theory, cross-media production

and communication skills, and can engage in high-quality image production and creation. Therefore, film and television education in local universities must first do a good job in top-level design at the “knowledge” level as proposed by Professor Huang Huilin, and construct a theoretical system. “Integration” is an effective path worth exploring and promoting—it is the interdisciplinary development path for film and television education in local universities, which can be specifically developed from two aspects: talent resources and curriculum resources.

1.1 Talent Resource Integration

Art studies originally belonged to the “Literature” category and was a first-level discipline alongside Chinese Language and Literature, Foreign Language and Literature, and Journalism and Communication Studies. In 2011, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council added Art Studies as the 13th discipline category in its newly revised “Catalogue of Disciplines for Degree Conferral and Talent Cultivation (2011),” with five first-level disciplines: Art Theory, Music and Dance Studies, Drama and Film Studies, Fine Arts, and Design Studies. Due to historical reasons, coupled with the inherently interdisciplinary nature of art disciplines, the faculty team of Drama and Film Studies, as an important branch under the Art Studies category, presents a diversified and differentiated disciplinary background. Currently, compared with Beijing Normal University, Communication University of China, and Central Academy of Drama, which have entered the “Double First-Class” discipline list, many local universities’ film and television education suffers from a scarcity of high-quality high-level talent that works in isolation and lacks team synergy. To do a good job in top-level design at the “knowledge” level, local university film and television education must first break down barriers between schools, colleges, and majors, and form teaching teams across schools, colleges, and disciplines based on teaching objectives and task orientation, thereby achieving true integration and sharing of talent resources. Online teaching platforms and curriculum resources in the new media era provide a realistic foundation and conditions for local universities to achieve talent resource integration through cross-school, cross-college, and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

1.2 Curriculum Resource Integration

University film and television education is divided into professional education and general education. For professional film and television education, due to its diverse, complex, and interdisciplinary nature, its curriculum resources should follow an integrated development path. For example, general foundational theoretical courses should be offered for all drama, film, and television discipline-related majors, including Film Art Philosophy, Film Aesthetics, Visual Anthropology, and Introduction to Film Art. There are also general professional courses for specific majors or directions—for instance, for journalism and communication majors, courses can be offered in communication basic theory,

media technology, and media design and creativity. Media technology courses and design and creativity courses should not only integrate in-class and out-of-class curriculum resources but also integrate on-campus and off-campus curriculum resources. On the one hand, they should design and effectively carry out problem-oriented and project-oriented autonomous collaborative learning; on the other hand, they should establish training bases with film and television media groups and related enterprises to expand practice platforms.

2. Observation: The Professional Entry Path for Local University Film and Television Education

More than 20 years ago, Professor Wang Xinyu of the Directing Department at Beijing Film Academy clearly stated in his book *Fundamentals of Film Directing* that in response to the question “How to realize the director’s dream,” directors can be trained and cultivated through education. Similarly, at Beijing Film Academy, there is a compulsory course for all departments that is warmly welcomed by students: “Film Analysis.” The main teacher of this course, Professor Su Mu, advocates watching more films, saying: “Watch more films, and familiarity will replace strangeness, making the lofty become approachable. A great film feels as if you made it yourself; it becomes your subconscious.” In fact, more than 20 years ago, we could only watch films through videotapes, and later through VCDs, when film sources were quite limited and students had no screening conditions of their own. Today, in the new media era, massive film and television resources and mobile new media terminals such as smartphones and tablets allow students to watch film and television works anytime and anywhere. For local university film and television education, facing the reality of relatively scarce professional and high-level talent, film observation is an effective way for students to approach masters and gain experience in cinematography, editing, screenwriting, directing, and the use of audiovisual language—it is the professional entry path for local university film and television education.

In 2006, the author offered a course for graduate students in film and television art direction: “Research on Television Documentary Creation.” Perplexed about the design and implementation of this course, the author emailed Professor Zhang Tongdao from the School of Art and Communication at Beijing Normal University for advice. Professor Zhang replied with two approaches, saying: To teach documentary creation, one must first lead students to observe classic documentary works and learn from masters; second, one must lead students to create documentaries and learn from practice. In fact, documentary resources were quite limited and difficult to obtain at that time. Professor Zhang personally arranged for his graduate student to burn a batch of documentary DVDs for me and brought them specially from Beijing to Rizhao. This incident greatly influenced and touched the author, and beyond the honor, it left deep gratitude toward Professor Zhang. Later, the author applied these two approaches proposed by Professor Zhang not only to the course “Research on Television Documentary Creation” but also to all media technology courses

and creative production courses. The author believes that all media technology courses or creative production courses must lead and drive every student to address “six core questions” (which the author calls the “Six-Question Method”): (1) What are others expressing? (2) How are they expressing it? (3) Why are they expressing it this way? (4) What do I want to express? (5) How do I want to express it? (6) Why do I want to express it this way? The first three questions must be solved through work observation and scene-by-scene analysis, while the last three are solved through shooting, editing, and comprehensive creative practice.

In fact, film and television work observation is hierarchical, and the author divides it into three levels.

2.1 Media Technology Level In media technology courses such as photography and cinematography, students’ film and television work observation revolves around three core questions: what to shoot, how to shoot it, and why shoot it this way. Similarly, in media technology courses such as film packaging and special effects and film editing, students’ film and television work observation revolves around three core questions: what to edit, how to edit it, and why edit it this way.

2.2 Screenwriting and Directing Level Film and television screenwriting and directing are quite different from general literary creation. In addition to solid literary skills, they require a good sense of audiovisual art, particularly montage thinking ability. This requires students, when observing and studying a large number of excellent film and television works, to not only stay at the media technology level but also pay attention to characters, scenes, dramatic action, conflicts, and the overall structure of the film, learning how they are designed and handled in the film and why they are designed and handled this way.

2.3 Film Style, Genre, Humanistic and Aesthetic Expression Level Film and television works have different forms and styles. Every outstanding director’s works have certain personalized or typified styles, unique humanistic discoveries, and aesthetic expressions. For example, in the course “Research on Television Documentary Creation,” through observing classic documentary works, students need not only to understand the diversity of documentaries and the core elements and differences of different types of documentaries but also to analyze and interpret them from humanistic and aesthetic perspectives, thereby achieving diverse aesthetic experiences of documentary’s realistic aesthetics, technical aesthetics, and dramatic aesthetics, and enhancing students’ aesthetic judgment of documentaries.

Therefore, film and television work observation is comprehensive, systematic, and hierarchical, requiring effective guidance for students. Professor Zhang Tongdao from the School of Art and Communication at Beijing Normal Uni-

versity proposed the “Full-Case Research Method” in 2011, which is worth learning from and promoting. The Full-Case Research Method treats a documentary as a dynamic process from concept to dissemination, divided into six stages: concept, project establishment, production model, audio-visual text, communication strategy, and communication effect. It integrates communication studies, management, cultural aesthetics, and marketing to construct an interdisciplinary research model.

3. Creation: The Professional Practice Path for Local University Film and Television Education

Film and television majors are highly practical, and their talent cultivation cannot be separated from studios, film sets, and project practice. For project-based practical teaching, its space should be open and must not be limited to closed classrooms or laboratories, and its time cannot be constrained by the 45- or 50-minute class period. However, currently, the vast majority of local university film and television education in China faces many problems, including low investment in practical teaching funds, substandard experimental equipment configuration, lack of practice space and high-level practical teachers, and unreasonable scheduling of experimental class hours (formatted into classroom teaching by institutional regulations), resulting in the overall low quality and level of local university film and television education. Therefore, practical teaching reform in local university film and television education is imperative, and the ultimate goal of reform is to adapt to global market demands and film and television industry application needs in the new media era, respect the laws of film and television education and teaching, strengthen practical education, and cultivate compound applied innovative talents. The specific reform paths vary among different local universities, and to date, there are mainly three approaches.

3.1 Joint Construction with Foreign Film Schools to Share Excellent Resources and Experience In 2014, Shanghai University cooperated with the Vancouver Film School in Canada to establish the Shanghai Vancouver Film Academy, becoming the first film academy in China to fully introduce North American film industry standards with all foreign teachers and English instruction. The academy aims to cultivate high-end artistic talent with creativity that meets international film production needs.

3.2 Collaboration with Film and Television Industry Groups to Explore the Integration of Industry, Academia, and Research In November 2016, the Shanghai Theatre Academy, Alibaba Pictures, and Fosun Group jointly established the “Shanghai Theatre Academy-Alibaba Film Academy,” proposing to “recruit top-tier faculty and management personnel globally, carry out in-depth innovation in its original educational model, and cultivate high-quality film and television industry talent who can adapt to global market demands and industry application needs,” and “through the integration of industry,

academia, and research, innovate the film talent cultivation system, continuously cultivate high-end film talent with excellent professional capabilities and a global perspective, and become the backbone of China's future film industry.”

3.3 Relying on Multi-party Resources to Establish Film and Television Studios or Workshops The School of Art and Communication at Beijing Normal University was the earliest institution in China to establish a “Documentary Studio.” As early as 2013, Professor Zhang pointed out in an interview that the low technical quality of student works and the lack of powerful audio-visual language fundamentally result from insufficiently professional current university courses, a lack of professional equipment, and neglect of practice. Film practice is highly practical and cannot rely solely on classroom teaching; it requires teaching methods similar to “workshops,” which are the same as the ancient master-apprentice system. Many things require on-site demonstration and practice and cannot be obtained by memorizing a few theories. Through guidance and explanation, students can experience for themselves and then internalize it into their own aesthetic experience. Only through this repeated training can students distinguish the quality of works, appreciate excellent works, and thereby improve their professional literacy.

Similarly, as early as 2011, the School of Journalism and Communication at Tsinghua University established the “Qingying Workshop,” mainly targeting students who had completed their sophomore year and were about to enter their junior year. During Tsinghua's unique five-week summer term, the course uses nearly 40 days to have students conduct fieldwork in specific areas and record ordinary people's lives through documentary filmmaking. During the filming process, according to the basic requirements of fieldwork, students must live with their subjects and try to deeply immerse themselves in each other's life culture and concepts within a short period.

In addition, in recent years, some media colleges have begun to establish or plan to establish film academies. In 2017, the Huace Film Academy of Zhejiang Media University officially enrolled students. Based on the talent cultivation philosophy of “internationalization, high-end orientation, and project orientation,” the academy integrates internet and new media resources, explores an integrated government-industry-academia-research talent cultivation model, adopts innovative talent cultivation programs, and focuses on cultivating applied high-end film and television professionals. It has also been reported that Shanxi Media University is planning and preparing to establish the Shanxi Film Academy.

The above-mentioned universities' reforms in film and television education have drawn on the successful experiences accumulated by professional schools at home and abroad, and their methods and measures for promoting creative practice in film and television education can serve as demonstrations and drivers for reforms in film and television education at some local universities with similar resources and conditions. However, for the vast majority of local university film and television education, due to inherent deficiencies in resources and conditions,

their path to specialized creative practice requires different approaches. The author proposes the following three suggestions.

3.3.1 Change Talent Introduction and Evaluation Mechanisms The faculty in local university film and television education have relatively single disciplinary backgrounds and lack high-level practical teachers. There is a significant gap with professional schools such as Beijing Film Academy, Communication University of China, and Central Academy of Drama. Many teachers engaged in creative course teaching lack professional creative practice experience and have not produced a single professional work of their own. Without a high-level practical teaching team, how can they lead and guide students in professional creative practice? Therefore, for many local universities, it is necessary to change talent introduction and evaluation mechanisms, break down barriers between schools, colleges, and majors, form high-level practical teaching teams across schools, colleges, and disciplines oriented by project tasks, and absorb and employ professionals with rich professional practice experience who are truly engaged in directing, screenwriting, cinematography, lighting, recording, and other frontline work into the mentor team.

3.3.2 Encourage School-Enterprise Cooperation and Strengthen Practical Training Local university film and television education should learn from the successful experiences of professional schools at home and abroad and follow the path of school-enterprise cooperation. On the one hand, schools can cultivate and deliver a large number of outstanding talents for enterprises, and in turn, enterprises provide schools with professional practice platforms and bases. In addition, schools can organize and carry out professional practice training for teachers or students in a planned manner, and enterprises' strong professional practice teams and extensive network resources can guarantee the quality and effectiveness of the training.

3.3.3 Promote the “Workshop” Teaching Method The “workshop” originated from the Bauhaus School in Europe, and its advocated educational philosophy is “equal emphasis on technology and art,” with the learning process resembling an “apprenticeship system in factories.” As mentioned earlier, the earliest institutions to carry out the “workshop” teaching method in comprehensive universities in China were the School of Art and Communication at Beijing Normal University and the School of Journalism and Communication at Tsinghua University. Their more than 10 years of “workshop” teaching experience and remarkable achievements are worth learning from and drawing upon.

In conclusion, in the new media era, facing the new demands of the global market and film and television industry applications, considering the actual and ideal conditions of local university film and television education in China, and drawing on the successful experiences of film and television professional schools at home and abroad, the ultimate goal should be centered on cultivating compound applied innovative talent, with integration, observation, and creation

serving as the three-dimensional professional cultivation path for local university film and television education in China.

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In the global media ecosystem constructed by digitalization and the internet, the roles of media producers, content consumers, and advertisers are no longer clear, and the boundaries between the three are gradually dissolving. Corporate marketing, advertising agencies, and public relations departments can directly establish online communication with audiences by designing certain activities. Meanwhile, media practitioners and television program production departments can also directly contact audiences and invite them to participate in program planning and production. At the same time, media content production has become a trans-regional activity. Outsourcing, distribution, and separation of production and broadcasting enable media organizations to integrate and reproduce cultural products from different regions on a global scale, thereby reducing production costs.

In addition to its important significance for people’s daily lives and the globalization of cultural production, another important reason for seriously studying convergence culture and the media industry is to examine its impact on today’s cultural economy. In the world media landscape, it can also be seen that cultural and creative industries tend to concentrate in certain major cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Los Angeles, New York, Vancouver, Milan, etc. This situation has led to more vigorous development of economic, cultural, and social activities in these major cities.

Therefore, the author believes that the role of media is not only a means of examining social life but can also reflect people’s media usage habits, their degree

of participation, and the meanings they derive from news, entertainment, and other program content. At the same time, media is also an important channel to help people understand the integration of economy and culture in urban spaces in the “post-industrial era.”

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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