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Innovation Directions for Television Cultural Programs in the Era of Media Convergence: A Case Study of “Shangxinle · Gugong” (Postprint)

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Abstract

In recent years, numerous television programs featuring traditional cultural characteristics have emerged in China's television media, among which the program “Shang Xin Le · Gu Gong” (New Arrivals from the Forbidden City) has garnered significant attention. Following its broadcast, the program achieved remarkable viewership ratings and social reputation. This television program not only possesses unique cultural connotations but also emphasizes cultural sentiment, securing favorable ratings and public acclaim, thereby reigniting the “Forbidden City craze.” In the era of media convergence, the production model of traditional television cultural programs has undergone corresponding transformations, gradually shifting toward an operation-centered production approach. Since its first season, “Shang Xin Le · Gu Gong” has rapidly disseminated the cultural connotations of the Beijing Forbidden City. This television project has achieved innovation in both content and form, attracting industry attention and becoming a subject of academic research. This television program provides innovative ideas for traditional cultural programs, enabling audiences to comprehend Forbidden City culture while watching traditional cultural programs, and facilitating enhanced development of television programs in the media convergence era. This paper takes “Shang Xin Le · Gu Gong” as a case study, focusing on investigating the innovative directions for television cultural programs in the era of media convergence.

Full Text

Title and Abstract

Title: Research on Innovation Directions of Television Culture Programs in the Media Convergence Era—A Case Study of *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City (Palace Museum, Beijing 100009)*

Abstract: In recent years, numerous television programs featuring traditional Chinese culture have emerged, among which *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* has attracted considerable attention. Following its broadcast, the program achieved remarkable ratings and social reputation. This television program not only possesses unique cultural connotations but also emphasizes cultural emotion, earning favorable viewership and public acclaim, and reigniting “Forbidden City fever.” In the converged media era, the production model of traditional television culture programs has correspondingly shifted, gradually transitioning toward an “operation-centered” approach. Since its first season, *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* has rapidly disseminated the cultural essence of the Beijing Palace Museum. This television project has achieved innovation in both content and form, drawing industry attention and academic research. The program provides creative insights for traditional culture programs, enabling audiences to understand Forbidden City culture while watching traditional cultural content and facilitating better development of television programs in the media convergence era. This paper takes *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* as a case study to examine the innovative directions for television culture programs in the converged media era.

Keywords: media convergence era; television culture programs; *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City*; innovation directions

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Introduction

In recent years, traditional Chinese culture has attracted increasing attention, and a phenomenon of cultural revival has emerged in television programming. In the globalized environment, as the trend of cultural resurgence gains momentum, some traditional television culture programs centered on traditional culture have seized opportunities and begun to receive widespread audience acclaim [1]. These traditional television culture programs align with the contemporary environment and the characteristics of the times; their content not only interprets the features of the era but also conforms to the developmental trends of youth culture, representing a successful path of innovation [3].

2. Bottlenecks Faced by Traditional Culture Programs in the Converged Media Era

2.1 Limitations in Program Scenes and Spaces

In the current converged media era, traditional variety shows are no longer confined to the narrow spaces of studios with the support of media technology, but are moving toward broader spaces. Consequently, in recent years, to cater to audience preferences, various youth-themed outdoor reality shows have emerged, creating a sense of realism and experiential engagement for viewers [4]. Previously, Chinese traditional culture programs primarily focused on cultural performances, conveying cultural emotions within studio settings. However, they often lacked interest and failed to provide satisfying experiential quality. In many cases, a series of modern elements in studios, such as scenery and stage design, tended to “dilute” cultural elements, resulting in poor broadcast effects and audience rejection.

2.2 Failure to Leverage Economic Potential

After broadcast, traditional culture programs struggle to generate economic benefits and thus cannot achieve sustainable development. Many such programs possess low economic value, serving merely as simple vehicles for cultural transmission during broadcast without fully considering market conditions for cultural resources or excavating more representative cultural assets. This results in poor audience reception and failure to obtain favorable economic returns [5].

2.3 Lack of Immersive Cultural Symbolism

The uniqueness of traditional culture lies in its historical characteristics, which are far removed from modern life. Even many historical and cultural research scholars struggle to clearly capture information from ancient contexts and cannot accurately position cultural symbols. Moreover, traditional culture possesses strong national characteristics and artistic qualities, giving it an intensely “highbrow” connotation that remains obscure and difficult to understand. Consequently, most Chinese cultural programs merely disseminate traditional cultural symbols superficially without in-depth research. They fail to integrate ancient and modern cultures from the perspective of contemporary progress, to grow alongside youth in producing traditional culture programs, or to achieve cultural fusion effects. This results in traditional culture lacking new missions and being unable to fulfill its value. Although some cultural programs strive to promote traditional Chinese culture and attempt to play a communicative role, inviting numerous idol stars as guests, they do not deeply cultivate youth-oriented cultural symbol transformation models, leading to a lack of immersive quality [6].

3. Overview of *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* and Its Innovative Strategies

In November 2018, *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* officially launched. This program, co-produced by Beijing Television and the Beijing Palace Museum, adhered to an “integrated” principle across content, technology, and channels, achieving cultural innovation. *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* employs an exploratory model that immerses audiences in the program, utilizing avant-garde narrative structures in its programming that align with youth sensibilities. The program has achieved results in industrial chain expansion and cross-border marketing [2].

3.1 Innovation in Program Format

To attract more audiences, traditional cultural television programs must construct a spiritual core for the media era to achieve stability, innovation, and breakthrough, rather than being constrained by traditional television screens. The uniqueness of *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* lies in its initiation of a “cultural exploration” model that presents Forbidden City culture through exploration, stimulating audience curiosity [7]. Compared with the magnificent three-dimensional indoor theater stage of *National Treasure*, *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* adopts on-location recording at the Palace Museum, shifting the program’s stage from monotonous studios to the authentic Beijing Palace Museum—this is its most appealing aspect. Many people lack access to all areas of the Forbidden City, but through this program, they can gain deeper understanding. Each phase of the program features special “storylines.” For instance, the first theme of Season 1 was designated as “Qianlong’s Secret Garden,” gradually unveiling the mysterious “Juanqin Studio” in the Forbidden City. In fact, many audiences have been influenced by ancient costume dramas and have heard stories about the Beijing Palace Museum, yet they do not know every detail. Therefore, this decryption-style program setup can captivate viewers. In this process, they follow the protagonists’ footsteps to explore the mysterious Forbidden City, even feeling as if they are physically present before their television screens.

During recording, the program employs the creative technique of “scene reconstruction” commonly used in documentaries. In the new program setup, guests are no longer storytellers or actors of Forbidden City tales but developers of Forbidden City cultural and creative products. They enter the Forbidden City as inquirers, just like every audience member in front of their television—this similarity in status makes viewers feel more intimate, narrowing the distance between audience and performers and making history feel less distant from modernity. This fusion of traditional and modern culture forms organically. For example, guests play historical figures from different periods in the program, deeply excavating character images to vividly present the original appearance of historical figures and events to audiences [8].

3.2 Emphasis on Marketing Effects

Traditional culture programs must generate economic benefits to achieve sustainable development. Rapid marketing can create greater economic value. In the new trend of media convergence, boundaries between different media and channels have become increasingly blurred, with interconnections and mutual cooperation enabling audiences to access more information and transforming programs into learning channels for viewers. On this foundation, traditional culture program production must progress with the times and develop corresponding marketing strategies tailored to different platforms [9].

In terms of rapid marketing promotion, *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* has made numerous attempts, particularly achieving fruitful results through cooperation with Toutiao. On the first day of broadcast, the program's television ratings ranked first nationwide, while its online popularity rapidly increased, achieving top rankings across all web platforms. In Toutiao App's "National Style" channel, the program specially customized a "Forbidden City Zone" to leverage the promotional effect of *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City*, regularly conducting interactive activities with audiences such as cultural voting and program theme contributions. Simultaneously, Toutiao App fully utilized Forbidden City elements to decorate its layout, interspersing various hidden interactive modules that could redirect to WeChat. Users could find these "mystery Easter eggs" by searching keywords, unlocking them through interesting animation effects to gain in-depth understanding of program content. Additionally, entering keywords such as "New Arrivals at the Forbidden City," "Forbidden City Cultural Creativity," "Forbidden City National Style," or "Innovative National Style" in Toutiao's search bar would trigger special Easter egg effects corresponding to four major channels within Toutiao: travel, national style, automotive, and technology. This novel and interesting format increases audience curiosity, attracting even ordinary App users to participate and continuously follow, gradually becoming loyal fans. This approach both promotes *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* and generates more clicks for the platform.

Furthermore, *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* received auxiliary promotion on other interactive platforms. On the first day of broadcast, discussions on the topic exceeded 2 million on Sina Weibo. The Taobao platform timely launched cultural and creative new products based on program characteristics, with single-day sales exceeding 5,000 sets during the "Double Eleven" shopping festival.

3.3 Content Innovation and Youth Appeal

Traditional culture programs must not stagnate but continuously explore new development pathways, create distinctive highlights, shape cultural brands, and enhance their influence [10]. The success of *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* stems from its youth-oriented production approach, perceiving popular elements and information within young demographics and infusing traditional culture with new vitality in the new era. Specifically, programs should reflect cultural

hot topics that concern young people; classic elements in programs should be packaged using modern and fashionable methods to attract youth attention; the robot Q&A module employed in the program represents the full utilization of modern technological achievements, combining technology with history and culture to bridge the distance between ancient and contemporary civilization, imbuing ancient culture with fashionable appeal.

Notably, *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* features numerous star guests, many of whom have previously played imperial roles in historical dramas, such as Puyi (the last emperor) and Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang. The program cleverly leverages this aspect, enabling star guests to naturally integrate into the program and relatively easily gain audience recognition. Additionally, program ratings can be secured through the fan bases of these stars.

Furthermore, the imperial cat “Luban” joins the program. “Luban” always appears at appropriate moments in the program, accompanied by anthropomorphized voices that display its elfish nature [11]. Shan Jixiang, former director of the Beijing Palace Museum, once stated that there are 200 cats in the Forbidden City, all considered colleagues, as their presence eliminates mice. This background makes Luban’s existence natural and intimate. Moreover, Luban serves as a professional “commentator,” eloquently explaining historical knowledge about ancient architecture and cultural relics, thereby facilitating cultural transmission while connecting program segments.

Conclusion

Through the above research, it is clear that in the converged media era, the television media ecology has undergone significant changes. In this communication environment, to maintain their advantages, television culture programs must grasp the media market, understand audience needs, fully leverage the advantages of media integration, and open up innovative development pathways through creative concepts. *New Arrivals at the Forbidden City* fully utilizes the converged media environment to enhance the modernity of Forbidden City elements. Based on the new era and combining more avant-garde integration concepts, it integrates platforms, content, and industrial chains, providing new ideas for traditional culture programs. To achieve breakthroughs, traditional culture programs must explore new development routes, genuinely highlight Chinese national culture from the source of cultural connotation, enhance identification, and seek a sense of belonging—this constitutes the effective cornerstone for sustainable development of traditional culture programs in the new media environment.

In specific program design, emphasis should be placed on selecting appropriate program formats and content, applying media convergence technology to fully leverage the advantages of different artistic carriers. Furthermore, as a cultural program, it must possess industrial ecological awareness, establish brand concepts, and build connections between different industries to improve economic

benefits.

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

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