

On New Thinking in Television Program Creation: Postprint

Authors: Li Yongjie

Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

New thinking in television program creation involves not only formal innovation, but also extracting the essence from tradition. While formal innovation can demonstrate direct effectiveness through ratings performance, extracting from tradition requires deep immersion into the artistic forms of television programs with Chinese characteristics, and creating television programs that conform to the rhythm and patterns of modern society and are well-received by audiences, based on the characteristics of Chinese viewers. Therefore, studying new thinking in television program creation plays an important role in identifying the sources of artistic inspiration for television program innovation.

Full Text

New Thinking in Television Program Creation

Abstract: New thinking in television program creation involves not only formal innovation but also excavating the essence from tradition. While formal innovation can demonstrate direct effects through ratings performance, excavating from tradition requires deep immersion in television art forms with Chinese characteristics. Based on the traits of Chinese audiences, programs should be crafted to align with modern social rhythms and patterns, creating content that audiences enjoy. Therefore, studying new thinking in television program creation plays a crucial role in guiding the sources of artistic inspiration for television innovation.

Keywords: television program; creation; innovation

CLC Number: G201

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2017)09-081-02

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2017.09.026

Author: Li Yongjie

With the improvement of television audiences' appreciation levels and changes in viewing habits, demands for television programs have grown increasingly higher. Only by employing new thinking in the creative process can television professionals ensure optimal communication effects.

1.1 Interview Programs as Representatives of Innovation

As a new form of audio-visual guidance in television programming, interview programs have led audiences toward a realm where “the words still ring in one's ears.” This breakthrough challenges the conventional Chinese television notion that visuals constitute the main body of a program while spoken language merely serves as accompaniment to enhance visual effects. It also reforms the profound influence that documentary master Ivens has long held over television documentaries in China, ushering in a new paradigm for Chinese television programming.

2.1 Accessibility and Approachability in Parallel

Accessibility and ease of understanding enable audiences to comprehend content without effort or misunderstanding. Clearly, discussing superficial issues that everyone already understands cannot capture audience attention, while content that is too profound and requires great effort to grasp easily fatigues viewers. Therefore, television programming must strive for a state of natural delivery for speakers and effortless comprehension for listeners. Simultaneously, television plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion; cold, preachy language patterns readily provoke audience aversion. Only through soft, approachable language that creates a pleasant atmosphere akin to intimate friends chatting can television effectively guide audiences to accept its viewpoints and artistic forms imperceptibly.

2.2 The Complementarity of Pleasant Audio and Situational Integration

The ancients said: “Literary grace and rhythm are the adornments of sound.” Therefore, sound rhythm reminiscent of pearls falling on a jade plate, along with the audience associations it evokes, represents a sophisticated expressive method where pleasant audio and situational integration merge in television art. “Long-lasting resonance” refers to how long sounds in television programs convey spaciousness, relaxation, tranquility, and leisure, while short, rapid sounds express intense joy and excitement. Naturally, attention must also be paid to variations in pitch, duration, and intensity, enabling pleasant audio to be unconsciously embraced by audiences from the heights of artistic form. Meanwhile, contextual environmental expression, or alignment with the environment, directly shapes the persuasive power and emotional impact of television programs.

3.1 Learning to Tell Stories

In daily life, skilled storytellers captivate their listeners regardless of the story, while unskilled narrators can make even the best tales dull. The American CBS flagship program “60 Minutes” has concluded from twenty years of experience that storytelling ability is essential. Under the premise of ensuring content authenticity, using narrative techniques to present news becomes the key to television success. The traditional approach has a beginning and end but proceeds in a flat, straightforward manner; narrative news, however, has a beginning and end but features ups and downs, twists and turns. For this type of news, audiences clearly care about both the process and the outcome, never finding it tedious. A progressively unfolding narrative structure naturally proves compelling.

Modern documentary programs tell stories of events as they happen—the process of occurrence is not merely a factual happening but also a real-life story that audiences enjoy. If storytelling becomes a traditional or thoughtless narrative form, the result is inevitably repetitive: a handshake shot at the beginning, a ribbon-cutting ceremony after switching scenes, and then a cut to somewhere else. This kind of content, lacking climax and substance, essentially reduces television professionals to mere transporters of real-life images onto the screen, devoid of creative intellectual labor.

The plot of modern documentary programs originates from the bits and pieces of real life, and the story itself possesses inherent logical structure. The process of gathering footage involves excavating conflicts and suspense within the narrative progression, making it both authentic and captivating. Therefore, to tell stories well, structural capability is a fundamental skill for journalists. Each program is like a building, with all visuals, graphics, sound effects, and hosts serving as construction materials—only with proper structure can the story flow smoothly and achieve depth. Program structures vary widely, including progressive structures, parallel structures, inverted pyramid structures, network structures, etc. Journalists must learn to construct orderly plots from chaotic states, requiring programs to achieve high unity between the unintentional, accidental nature of events and rigorous structural design. Those who master this will produce popular programs.

3.2 Quality News Requires Details

Footage should be shot in sequences that both establish the environment and capture details, covering all aspects comprehensively so that editors can craft complete, compelling segments from this material. The principle of “early start, late finish, no stopping in between” is crucial because the moments before official filming begins and after subjects think filming has ended contain abundant information. Often, it is these unguarded moments that most authentically reflect their true state. Naturally, during shooting, cameramen must never forget to turn on microphones to ensure good sound quality; without synchronous

audio effects, a documentary program's persuasive power would be severely diminished. In summary, modern documentary programs demand comprehensive qualities from cameramen, requiring them to shoot with intention. It is an inevitable trend that cameramen with good professional qualities and editing awareness will replace narrow-minded, craftsman-style cameramen.

The greatest characteristic of news is conciseness. Therefore, news writing also employs short sentences and simple vocabulary to achieve maximum information transmission in minimal time. However, conciseness does not mean simplicity, as news content is not merely information stacking but rather the excavation of factual details that strike directly at the heart. Only in this way can news achieve creative reconstruction without departing from factual conditions.

3.3 Interview as Both Form and Content

Previous documentary programs primarily employed one-way thinking, with visuals and narration existing as separate, disconnected elements. Modern documentary approaches treat journalists' participation, exchange, dialogue, and analysis as both form and content. Fresh, complete material in modern documentary programs stems from in-depth exchanges between journalists and subjects, incorporating the journalist's emotions and experiences throughout the event. On the premise of scientific grounding, this presents audiences with thought-provoking, philosophically meaningful news facts. Consequently, a journalist's depth of factual understanding, ability to grasp news details, and rigorous scientific attitude become critical to successful news interviews.

Without adequate preparation, documentary programs inevitably revert to one-way thinking, with visuals and narration remaining disconnected. For instance, some journalists demonstrate remarkable acumen in grasping details and key points on various issues—this quick-wittedness actually stems from extensive accumulated knowledge that spontaneously emerges in the field. Thorough preparation serves precisely to facilitate such bursts of insight. Whether interviewing celebrities or ordinary people, covering landmark events or everyday occurrences, journalists lacking preparation merely enter events in their capacity as reporters rather than with the mindset of thoughtful observers, inevitably resulting in dry, shallow, and insubstantial interviews.

3.4 Cameramen Should Possess Editing Awareness

In modern documentary programs, demands on camerawork have become increasingly stringent, encompassing both technical skills and professional qualities, with particular emphasis on the latter. Naturally, correct exposure and rigorous composition are minimum requirements. The cameraman essentially serves as the audience's eyes—an independent, quick-thinking outsider who moves through scenes, using the lens to capture the ever-changing life situations that viewers wish to see. In modern documentary programs, cameramen often assume half or even most of a director's responsibilities. Since events de-

velop forward unpredictably, and directors have no opportunity to consult with cameramen at fleeting moments on set, everything depends on the cameraman's on-site judgment and cultural literacy.

One of the main characteristics of modern documentary programs is their human-centered approach, replacing the previous object-centered methodology. However, people live in various environments, which serve as the most important symbols of human existence—the collision between individuals and their surroundings constitutes life itself. Therefore, cameramen are required to interview and film subjects within their environments whenever possible.

For camerawork, effectively utilizing environments to create atmosphere is essential. For ordinary people, the sudden presence of a camera in their lives induces either nervousness or excitement, often causing them to consciously or unconsciously act out an “ideal” role. To address this, cameramen typically apply psychological common sense: people's attention spans for constant states are limited, and beyond that threshold, most will ignore the camera's presence. By befriending subjects and keeping cameras around them for extended periods, journalists become integrated into their daily lives until subjects eventually forget the camera's existence. Those who handle this well produce popular programs.

3.5 On In-Depth News Reporting

In-depth reporting in television news is by no means about feigning profundity, nor is it a list of terrifying yet unsolvable problems, a display of technical jargon and unfamiliar concepts, or the unnecessary complication of simple issues. Some television professionals fall into the trap of casting themselves as wise saviors, believing that without presenting earth-shattering viewpoints or citing esoteric terminology, they cannot demonstrate their expertise and their programs lack “depth.” Consequently, they complicate what should be simple.

True in-depth reporting primarily involves the full presentation of news background, well-calibrated analysis, and accurate commentary on the essence of matters through phenomena and details.

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(Author's affiliation: Shanxi Lingshi Radio and Television Station)

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

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.