

The Presentation of History in Cultural and Museum Variety Shows from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics - A Case Study of National Treasure

Ruiqi Shi *

Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China

* Corresponding Author Email: shi_ruiqi@163.com

Abstract. In the era of the vigorous development of new media, how to rejuvenate historical culture has become an important issue that people continue to explore. Historical and cultural museum variety shows such as National Treasure have led the audience to appreciate the charm of traditional culture through innovative methods and achieved remarkable results. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, this paper deeply analyzes the program National Treasure, and explores its innovative strategies in catering to the "horizon of expectations" of the audience, presenting the "calling structure", and using defamiliarization narrative. The aim is to reveal how this program successfully combines traditional culture with modern aesthetics, stimulates the audience's desire to explore history, and makes the stories behind the cultural relics deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, providing useful reference for the creation of historical and cultural programs.

Keywords: Reception Aesthetics; National Treasure; Horizon of Expectations; Calling Structure; Defamiliarization Narrative

1. Introduction

In the current context of the rapid development of new media, the inheritance and development of historical culture face new opportunities and challenges. With the diversification of information dissemination methods, people's cultural consumption demands are increasing and showing diverse characteristics. People are eager to understand historical culture in novel and interesting ways and feel its profound heritage. As a widely influential historical and cultural museum variety show, National Treasure has successfully attracted the attention of a large number of audiences with its unique program planning and innovative forms of expression. This program has not only won many awards in China, such as winning the Best Quarterly TV Program Award at the 24th Shanghai TV Festival "Magnolia Award" Ceremony and being rated as the TV Innovation and Excellence Program of the State Administration of Radio and Television in 2018. It has also achieved excellent results on the international stage, reaching broadcast cooperation with the BBC World News Channel in the UK, the CNBC Channel in Italy, etc. in 2018 and 2019. The overseas audience has responded enthusiastically. Studying National Treasure from the perspective of reception aesthetics helps to deeply understand its internal mechanism of success and provides theoretical support and practical reference for the development of similar programs.

2. Overview of Reception Aesthetics Theory

2.1. The Rise and Development of Reception Aesthetics

Reception aesthetics was born in Germany in the 1960s. At that time, the limitations of only focusing on the text itself in traditional literary research became increasingly prominent. Before the 18th century, literary research mostly focused on the text. For example, Russian formalism was dedicated to the analysis of the language form of literary works, believing that literariness only exists in the language structure of the text; American new criticism emphasized "close reading" of the text, exploring the meaning of works from the semantic, grammatical, rhetorical and other aspects within the text; German text internal meaning theory was committed to exploring the deep meaning

contained in the text itself; French literary structuralism tried to reveal the essence of literature by analyzing the structure of the text. These schools all opposed paying attention to facts outside the text. However, with the continuous deepening of academic research, people gradually realized that literary history is not only composed of texts, and its actual existence is inseparable from the participation of readers. Reception aesthetics emerged as the times require, shifting the research focus from the text to the role of readers in the process of literary reception. Reception aesthetics believes that any work cannot show its value without communication with readers. There are essential differences between the text created by the author and the work received by the reader. The educational and entertainment functions of the work need to be demonstrated in the process of readers' reading. In this process, readers are not passive recipients but active, and are the key factors driving the continuous development of literary creation.

2.2. The Core Concepts of Reception Aesthetics

Reception aesthetics divides literary reception into two forms: social reception and individual reception. Social reception focuses on the influence of works at the social level, including the understanding and reactions of different social groups to works, as well as the dissemination and evolution of works in the social and cultural context; individual reception focuses on the understanding and perception of works by individual readers based on their unique life experiences, cultural qualities, aesthetic tastes and other factors. Among them, concepts such as the "horizon of expectations" and the "calling structure" are of great significance for understanding the relationship between works and readers. The "horizon of expectations" refers to the pre-existing psychological structure that readers have before reading a work, which is jointly formed by various factors such as readers' past life experiences, the education they have received, and the aesthetic preferences formed over a long period. In the process of reading, readers will unconsciously use their existing "horizon of expectations" to understand the work. When the content and emotions conveyed by the work are in line with the readers' "horizon of expectations", or can break through and exceed the readers' expectations, readers will have a strong resonance. The "calling structure" was proposed by Iser, referring to the uncertainty of works of art caused by blanks and negations, presenting an open structure. Among them, "blanks" refer to the parts that are not clearly stated in the text and need to be filled by readers through imagination; "gaps" refer to the breaks and incoherences between various meaning units in the text, prompting readers to connect and integrate meanings; "negations" are challenges to readers' existing concepts and expectations, stimulating readers to think and understand again. "Blanks", "gaps" and "negations" jointly form the "calling structure" of the text, guiding the communication process between the author and the recipient. Based on the blank points and uncertainties of the narrative, readers will exert their subjective initiative in the process of reading, fill and recreate the work, thus endowing the work with new meanings.

3. National Treasure's Catering to the "Horizon of Expectations" of the Audience

3.1. Selecting Cultural Relic Themes of Interest to the Audience

National Treasure carefully selects representative and attractive cultural relics. For example, the various glazed porcelain bottles collected in the Forbidden City are exquisite in craftsmanship, integrating a variety of glazes, demonstrating the peak level of ancient porcelain-making technology; A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains depicts the magnificent mountains and rivers of the Northern Song Dynasty with its grand composition, delicate brushstrokes and gorgeous colors, containing profound cultural connotations; the Golden Cup of Eternal Stability, as the special wine cup used by the emperors of the Qing Dynasty in the New Year's Day pen - opening ceremony, symbolizes the long - term stability of the country and has extremely high historical value and symbolic significance. These cultural relics themselves have extremely high historical and artistic value and are deeply loved

by the audience. They carry rich historical and cultural information, which can greatly stimulate the audience's curiosity and desire to explore. In daily life, although the audience has heard of these precious cultural relics, they lack the opportunity for in - depth understanding. The program presents these cultural relics to the audience, satisfying the audience's thirst for historical and cultural knowledge and highly conforming to the "horizon of expectations" of the audience for historical and cultural museum programs. Taking A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains as an example, the program not only shows the beautiful pictures of the painting but also deeply explores the creative story behind it, including the life experience of the painter Wang Ximeng and the bumpy inheritance process of this painting in history, enabling the audience to have a more comprehensive and in - depth understanding of this masterpiece and further satisfying the audience's expectations for the stories behind art treasures.

3.2. Adopting Diverse Narrative Modes

The program adopts various forms such as simulated theaters and expert analysis to vividly, vividly and comprehensively present the "past and present lives" of cultural relics to the audience. The simulated theater shows the historical stories behind the cultural relics in a dramatic way through the wonderful performances of actors, making the audience seem to travel through time and space and personally experience the charm of history. For example, when telling the past life story of the Goujian Sword of Yue, the simulated theater reproduces the tense situation of the struggle between Wu and Yue in the spring and Autumn Period and Goujian's tenacious spirit of enduring hardships through the vivid performances of the actors, allowing the audience to intuitively feel that magnificent history. Expert analysis provides the audience with professional knowledge interpretation, helping the audience better understand the value and historical background of cultural relics. Experts conduct in - depth analysis from multiple perspectives such as the production technology, historical origin and cultural connotation of cultural relics, enabling the audience to obtain accurate and authoritative information. This diverse narrative mode not only increases the enjoyable and ornamental value of the program but also meets the aesthetic needs of different audiences. For audiences who like story - telling, the form of the simulated theater can attract their attention and immerse them in wonderful historical stories; for audiences who are eager to acquire knowledge, the expert analysis part provides rich information to meet their thirst for knowledge. In this way, the program successfully caters to the diverse "horizon of expectations" of the audience.

3.3. Integrating Emotional Elements to Trigger Resonance

The program pays attention to excavating the emotional stories behind cultural relics and closely connects the cultural relics with the emotions of people. For example, when telling the "present life" story of a certain cultural relic, it will introduce the perseverance and dedication of cultural relic restorers, their love for cultural relics and their spirit of inheriting traditional culture. Taking Wang Jin, a clock restorer in the Forbidden City, as an example, the program details his concentration and perseverance in the process of restoring ancient clocks. His careful polishing of each part and strict control of each detail all stem from his love for the cultural relic restoration cause and his sense of responsibility for inheriting traditional culture. These emotional elements can deeply touch the hearts of the audience and trigger the audience's emotional resonance. While appreciating cultural relics, the audience can also feel the humanistic care contained therein, establishing a deep emotional connection between the audience and the program. The triggering of this emotional resonance further satisfies the "horizon of expectations" of the audience at the emotional level, making the audience more involved in watching the program. Many audiences, after watching the program, spontaneously develop respect for cultural relic restoration workers and also have a deeper understanding and reflection on the inheritance of traditional culture.

4. The Presentation of the "Calling Structure" in National Treasure

4.1. Blanks and Gaps in the Text

In the process of program narration, there are many blanks and gaps. For example, when telling the "past life" stories of cultural relics, due to the limitation of historical materials, some plots are not described in detail. When presenting these stories, the program will deliberately leave some blanks for the audience to imagine and fill in by themselves. For example, for the ancient usage scenarios of a certain cultural relic, only some pictures may be shown, and the audience can construct a more complete scenario according to their own understanding and imagination. Taking the Simuwu Ding as an example, when telling its past life story, due to the ambiguity of historical records, only some key links of the specific use process of the tripod in the sacrifice ceremony are shown. The audience can combine their understanding of ancient sacrifice culture to imagine the grand scene of the entire sacrifice ceremony, including the participants, the process of the ceremony, and the atmosphere at the scene. The existence of these blanks and gaps stimulates the audience's sense of participation, making the audience no longer passive recipients but actively participate in the meaning construction of the program. By filling in these blanks, the audience not only deepens their understanding of the program content but also obtains a unique aesthetic experience.

4.2. Guiding the Audience's Imagination and Recreation

The program guides the audience to imagine and recreate through methods such as setting suspense and asking questions. For example, some questions about cultural relics will be raised in the program, allowing the audience to find answers in the process of watching the program. Or at the key nodes of the story, suspense is left to attract the audience to continue watching. When telling the story of the Zeng Houyi Chime Bells, the program raises questions such as the specific musical pieces and playing methods of the chime bells in ancient music performances, arousing the curiosity of the audience and prompting them to more attentively find answers when watching the program. In the process of finding answers and cracking suspense, the audience will give full play to their imagination and recreate the program content. They may imagine the wonderful melody played by the chime bells according to their existing historical knowledge and their own understanding of music. This way of guiding the audience's imagination and recreation reflects the characteristics of the "calling structure", forming an active interaction between the audience and the program. The audience is no longer simply watching the program but having an in - depth dialogue with the program content through their own thinking and imagination.

4.3. Examples of the Audience's Participation in Meaning Construction

After watching the program, the audience shares their understanding and feelings of the program through social media and other platforms, and discusses and interprets the stories behind the cultural relics. Some audiences create relevant literary works, paintings, etc. based on the information presented in the program. For example, some audiences create poems and essays with the cultural relics in the program as the theme to express their perception of historical culture. One audience created a poem about the murals in Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes. Through beautiful verses, the poem depicts the Buddhist stories and artistic charm shown in the murals and expresses the praise for ancient art. There are also some audiences who use painting to depict the "past and present lives" of cultural relics in their minds. They vividly show the glory of cultural relics in ancient times and their inheritance in modern times with their brushes. These creative behaviors of the audience fully reflect that under the guidance of the "calling structure" of the program, they actively participate in the meaning construction of the program, endowing the program with new vitality. The feedback of the audience not only enriches the dissemination form of the program content but also forms a good cultural dissemination atmosphere, attracting more people to pay attention to historical culture.

5. The Defamiliarization Narrative of National Treasure

5.1. Breaking through Traditional Historical Narration

Traditional historical narration is often relatively serious and rigid, telling historical events in a linear way. National Treasure breaks this traditional narrative mode and adopts a more novel and unique narrative method. For example, the program cross - narrates the "past and present lives" of cultural relics. When telling the ancient stories of cultural relics, modern relevant content such as the discovery process of cultural relics and restoration work is inserted in a timely manner. Taking the Zeng Houyi Chime Bells as an example, when telling the glorious history of the chime bells as important ritual musical instruments in ancient times, the process of modern archaeologists discovering the chime bells and the arduous efforts of cultural relic restoration experts in restoring and researching the chime bells are interspersed. This narrative method breaks the audience's inherent perception of traditional historical narration and brings a sense of freshness. At the same time, the program also uses multiple perspectives to narrate, telling the stories of cultural relics from the perspectives of different people, enabling the audience to have a more comprehensive and in - depth understanding of the history behind the cultural relics. For example, when telling the story of the Terracotta Army in the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, the program not only introduces the excavation process and research results of the Terracotta Army from the perspective of archaeologists but also shows the accidental and dramatic nature of this great archaeological discovery from the perspective of local farmers who discovered the Terracotta Army, allowing the audience to feel the historical culture behind the Terracotta Army from multiple dimensions.

5.2. Increasing the Audience's Sense of Freshness and Curiosity

Defamiliarization narrative makes the audience full of freshness and curiosity when watching the program. Through a unique narrative method, the program presents the historical culture familiar to the audience in a brand - new appearance. For example, when telling the stories of cultural relics, suspense, reversal and other techniques are used to make the audience unexpected. When telling the story of the Fuhao Owl Zun, the program creates a mysterious atmosphere at the beginning. As the story progresses, the heroic deeds of the legendary woman Fuhao and the special symbolic meaning of the owl zun in ancient culture are gradually revealed. This plot reversal greatly attracts the attention of the audience. This sense of freshness and curiosity can attract the attention of the audience, making the audience more focused on watching the program. In the process of watching, the audience is constantly attracted by the novel elements in the program and wants to explore the development and ending of the story, thus improving the audience's attention and participation in the program. Many audiences, when watching the program, are unconsciously attracted by the suspense in the program and take the initiative to consult relevant materials to further understand the historical culture behind the cultural relics, forming a positive cultural exploration atmosphere.

5.3. The Effects and Influences of Defamiliarization Narrative

Defamiliarization narrative makes National Treasure stand out among many historical and cultural museum variety shows and achieves good communication effects. It has successfully attracted a large number of audiences, especially the attention of young audiences, making more people interested in historical culture. According to relevant data statistics, after the program was broadcast, the topic heat of National Treasure on social media continued to rise, attracting a large number of young audiences to participate in discussion and sharing. Many young people said that they have a new understanding and strong interest in historical culture through the program. At the same time, this narrative method also provides new ideas and methods for the dissemination of historical culture. Other similar programs can learn from the defamiliarization narrative experience of National Treasure, innovate program forms, improve the attractiveness and influence of the program, and thus better inherit and promote historical culture. Some local TV stations have launched historical and cultural programs, beginning to try to adopt similar narrative techniques. Through novel narrative methods, they show

the local historical and cultural heritage and have achieved good results, attracting more audiences to pay attention to local culture.

6. Conclusion

As a successful historical and cultural museum variety show, from the perspective of reception aesthetics, National Treasure has significant innovative strategies in catering to the "horizon of expectations" of the audience, presenting the "calling structure", and using defamiliarization narrative. By selecting cultural relic themes of interest to the audience, adopting diverse narrative modes and integrating emotional elements, the program has successfully catered to the "horizon of expectations" of the audience; through blanks and gaps in the text and guiding the audience's imagination and recreation, the program has presented an attractive "calling Structure"; through breaking through traditional historical narration, it has increased the audience's sense of freshness and curiosity, achieving defamiliarization narrative. These innovative strategies have not only enriched the audience's understanding of historical culture in terms of content but also brought a brand - new experience to the audience in terms of form, stimulating the audience's desire to explore historical culture and making the stories behind cultural relics deeply ingrained in people's hearts.

The successful experience of National Treasure provides valuable reference for the creation of historical and cultural programs. In the future, historical and cultural programs can further explore the theoretical connotations of reception aesthetics. For instance, they can conduct in - depth research on how different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and educational levels of the audience form their "horizon of expectations", and then design programs more targeted. In terms of program form innovation, in addition to the forms already adopted by National Treasure, new media technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can be further integrated. For example, through VR technology, the audience can be immersed in the historical environment related to cultural relics, such as the grand palaces where cultural relics were once placed, or the ancient workshops where they were produced, enhancing the audience's sense of presence and participation.

In terms of content, programs can continue to dig deeper into the cultural connotations behind cultural relics. For example, for some cultural relics with complex historical backgrounds, not only can the historical events directly related to them be presented, but also the broader social, economic, and cultural contexts at that time can be explored. This will enable the audience to have a more comprehensive and in - depth understanding of historical culture. Moreover, in the new media environment, historical and cultural programs should pay more attention to the interaction and feedback of the audience. By setting up online discussion forums, holding offline cultural events related to the program content, and other means, a closer connection can be established between the program and the audience, allowing the audience to feel that they are an important part of the dissemination of historical culture.

In conclusion, historical and cultural programs, with the help of the theoretical guidance of reception aesthetics and continuous innovation in form and content, have great potential to play a more important role in the inheritance and development of historical culture. They can not only meet the growing cultural needs of the people but also contribute to the promotion of cultural diversity and the enhancement of national cultural soft power.

References

- [1] National Treasure won the Best Quarterly TV Program Award at the 24th Shanghai TV Festival "Magnolia Award" Ceremony on June 15, 2018. On December 9, 2018, the second season of National Treasure was rated as the TV Innovation and Excellence Program of the State Administration of Radio and Television in 2018. Qiu Su. The Communication Strategies of the Cultural Variety Show National Treasure in the Context of Media Integration. *Audiovisual World*, 2023(4): 98 - 100.
- [2] In 2018 and 2019, National Treasure reached broadcast cooperation with the BBC World News Channel in the UK, the CNBC Channel in Italy, etc. The overseas audience responded enthusiastically after the

- program was broadcast. CCTV National Treasure: "National Treasure Overseas Promotion Comes to the Sixth Stop, Hello Italy!". <https://www.163.com/dy/article/EUMD0UKT0530OUM0.html>.
- [3] Guo Huizi. Research on the Innovation Strategies of China's Cultural and Museum TV Programs - Taking National Treasure and Newly Discovered in the Forbidden City as Examples. *West China Broadcasting TV*, 2022, 43(23): 1 - 3, 21.
- [4] Tong Qingyan, Qu Yiting. Chinese Narration in Forbidden City - themed Film and Television Works. *International Communication*, 2023(6): 28 - 38.
- [5] Wu Hanyi. Imagined Community: Cultural Programs Evoking Community Consciousness - Taking National Treasure as an Example. *Screen & World*, 2022(23): 8 - 10.
- [6] Feng Xuening, Huang Xinyuan. The Spatial Narrative Strategies of Cultural Heritage Variety Shows - Taking the Third Season of National Treasure as an Example. *TV Research*, 2022(12): 68 - 71.
- [7] Jauss, H. R., & Holub, R. C. (Trans. Zhou Ning, Jin Yuanpu). *Reception Aesthetics and Reception Theory*. Shenyang: Liaoning People's Publishing House, 1987.
- [8] Merigalli, F., & Feng Hanjin. On Literary Reception. *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, 1983(3): 107 - 112.
- [9] Guo Haipeng. How to Tell Chinese Stories Well in Fantasy Films from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics - Taking the Film Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms as an Example. *West China Broadcasting TV*, 2024, 45(1): 1 - 4.
- [10] Li Jing. The New Narrative Forms of Chinese Contemporary Films from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics. *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, 2018, 38(3): 240 - 246.
- [11] Zhao Yaning, Yi Huanyu. Exploring Zhao Benfu's Novel *A World Without Thieves* from the Perspectives of Reception Aesthetics and Reader - Response Theory. *Literature and Art Creation Today and in the Past*, 2024(4): 13 - 15.
- [12] Chen Yarong. Appreciation of Prose Poems from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics - Taking *Lotus Leaves and Mother* as an Example. *Masterpieces Review*, 2023(35): 176 - 178.
- [13] Li Yingyu, He Ying. Research on Trauma Films from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics - Taking *So Long, My Son* as an Example. *Artist*, 2023(12): 113 - 115.
- [14] He Jiawei. An Analysis of the Creation of *Journey to the West of the Universe* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics. *Movie Review*, 2023(16): 45 - 49.
- [15] Xu Keke. A Glimpse into the English Translation of Wang Wei's *Living in Retirement at the Foot of Mount Zhongnan* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics. *Literature and Art Creation Today and in the Past*, 2023(43): 113 - 115.
- [16] Xu Longyang, Zheng Xia. A Study on the Translation of Children's Literature from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics - Taking Ren Rongrong's Translation of *Charlotte's Web* as an Example. *Journal of Hebei Energy Institute of Vocation and Technology*, 2023, 23(4): 38 - 42.
- [17] Guo Haipeng. How to Tell Chinese Stories Well in Fantasy Films from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics - Taking the Film Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms as an Example. *West China Broadcasting TV*, 2024, 45(1): 1 - 4.
- [18] Zhu Xiaodong. The Dance Drama Art of *Only This Green* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics. *Literature and Art Creation Today and in the Past*, 2023(47): 112 - 114, 124.