

The Evolution of Television in China: From Mass Media to Segmented Audiences

Yufei Gong

Hong Kong Metropolitan University, Hong Kong, 999077, China
zpyufei2024@163.com

Abstract: This paper provides an in-depth study of the evolution of China's television industry, from the era of mass media to the period of marketization and diversification, to the period of digitalization and technological innovation, comprehensively exploring the characteristics and impacts of each development stage. In the era of mass media, television, as a medium for national ideology, was controlled by the government. Classic programs such as "A Dream of Red Mansions" and the Spring Festival Gala gave birth to the early glory of Chinese television. The period of marketization and diversification has witnessed the opening and diversification of the television industry. Classic cases such as "If You Are the One" demonstrate the promotion of content creation by market mechanisms. The period of digitalization and technological innovation has brought about high-tech applications. The popularization of technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality has promoted the intelligence of the TV industry and the production of high-quality content. Looking to the future, the paper points out that 5G technology, content innovation and integration with emerging technologies will become important trends in the TV industry. However, it also faces challenges such as the balance between content quality and diversity, the unification of technical standards, and social and cultural inheritance. To this end, it is recommended that the television industry focus on technological innovation, content depth and cultural inheritance, and actively respond to future opportunities and challenges to ensure the sustainable and healthy development of the industry.

Keywords: Evolution; Television; Mass Media

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

With China's booming economy and profound changes in its social structure, television as a major mass media tool has played a crucial role in Chinese society. The evolution of China's television industry has both reflected the course of socio-economic development and profoundly influenced the way the public consumes culture and acquires information. From the establishment of the first television station in the 1950s to the current wave of digitization and technological innovation, Chinese television has gone through several stages, from mass media to marketization and diversification, and then to the era of digitization and technological innovation.

In the era of mass media, Chinese television carries the mission of national propaganda, education and cultural inheritance, and is characterized by the dominance of grand narratives. With the dominance of state-owned media, the contents of TV programs were more guided by official ideology. For example, representative TV dramas such as Dream of Red Mansions became classics during this period, shaping the Chinese public's deep impression of traditional literature. Meanwhile, the 1984 Spring Festival Gala, with its unique and innovative format, became one of the representatives of the mass media era, demonstrating the prominence of Chinese television in cultural communication. With the advancement of economic reform, marketization and diversification have become the main theme of the development of the television industry. The types and production levels of TV programs have ushered in a diversified development, and entertainment programs such as "Non-Honesty Do Not Disturb" have achieved great success in the market, highlighting a brand new path for business models. At the same time, the rise of Internet platforms has given viewers more choices, and the rise of online video platforms such as Love Qiyi and Tencent Video has changed the traditional way of watching TV, leading the TV industry towards an era of digitization and technological innovation.

1.2 Purpose and significance of the study

The evolution of China's television industry is not only a witness to social change and technological progress, but also shapes the social and cultural landscape of Chinese society at a broad level. This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the journey of Chinese television from the era of mass media to marketization and diversification, and then to digitalization and technological innovation. Through a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the evolution of each stage, this study explores the role that the television media has played in Chinese society, and reveals its far-reaching impacts on society, culture and economy.

This study aims to systematize the historical trajectory of China's television development, digging deeper into the landmark events and important works of the mass media era, such as *Dream of Red Mansions* and the 1984 Spring Festival Gala, in order to comprehensively understand the role of the television media in the dissemination of the state's ideology at that time. By analyzing this period, we can better understand the values, cultural identities and mass entertainment needs of Chinese society at a specific historical moment.

Meanwhile, this study will also delve into the disruptive impact of emerging technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and VR/AR on the television industry in the era of digitalization and technological innovation. We will analyze how these technologies change the production, transmission, and consumption patterns of television content and provide viewers with a more personalized, interactive, and immersive viewing experience.

In summary, this study is not only a comprehensive review of the development process of China's television industry but also a profound analysis of the role played by television media in social, cultural, economic, and technological changes. Through this study, we hope to provide valuable reference and inspiration for the future development of China's television industry and new perspectives and ideas for understanding China's social and cultural changes.

2. Stages in the evolution of television in China

2.1 Mass media era

The era of mass media is the early stage of the development of China's television industry, marking the vigorous development of television media from scratch and from point to point. Since the establishment of China's first television station in 1958, television media began to spread nationwide, becoming an important platform for leading information transmission and cultural inheritance. Chinese television in this period was mainly dominated by state-owned media, and its content and form were to some extent guided by the government's ideology^[1].

In the age of mass media, the content of television media mainly focuses on political propaganda, social education and cultural inheritance, reflecting the state's control and guidance of information flow. One of the representative cases is the TV drama *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which has a wide audience base in the mass media era and has profoundly shaped Chinese people's perception of traditional literature^[2]. Through the wide dissemination of television media, Chinese television in this period successfully integrated cultural traditions into the lives of the general public and became an effective tool for shaping national identity.

Meanwhile, another landmark event of the mass media era was the 1984 Spring Festival Gala. With its unique and innovative format and spectacular performances, this annual gala became an annual event that viewers looked forward to, highlighting the new face of television as a popular cultural entertainment^[3]. The success of the Spring Festival Gala demonstrated that the television media not only played a role in the dissemination of political culture, but also gradually moved in the direction of being entertainment-oriented, meeting the growing demand of viewers for diversified programs.

2.2 Marketization and diversification

The period of marketization and diversification is an important stage in the development of China's television industry, the core feature of which is that under the impetus of economic reforms, the television industry has gradually realized the transition from being dominated by state-owned media to being dominated by market forces, thus presenting a more diversified and market-oriented character^[4]. During this period, the television industry began to gradually integrate into the market mechanism, ushering in

a rich diversification of contents and formats.

In the period of marketization and diversification, economic reforms have brought brand new opportunities to the television industry. The diversification of television program content has become the key to market competition^[5]. One of the representative cases is the success of the marriage program "Non-Honesty Do Not Disturb", which has become a classic in the history of Chinese television with its unique marriage mode and light-hearted and humorous program style, leading a wave of marriage programs. This not only pushed the TV industry towards entertainment and marketization, but also created conditions for the rise of various variety shows.

The rise of the Internet has further promoted the diversification of the television industry. With the rise of online video platforms such as Aiqiyi and Tencent Video, viewers were provided with more convenient ways to watch TV programs, which were no longer restricted to traditional broadcasting times and channels, but could be watched anytime and anywhere^[6]. During this period, the rise of original content became a major highlight of the development of the TV industry, providing viewers with more diversified and personalized choices.

2.3 Digitalization and technological innovation

With the rapid development of science and technology, China's television industry has entered an era of digitization and technological innovation, a period characterized by the widespread use of digital technology and the introduction of innovative technologies, which have revolutionized the way television is produced, disseminated and viewed^[7].

During the digitalization period, the popularity and rapid development of the Internet made it possible for television content to be widely disseminated through online video platforms, instead of being restricted to traditional broadcast channels. Platforms such as Aiqiyi and Tencent Video have become a new way for viewers to access TV programs, promoting the transition of the TV industry to digital media. During this period, TV production gradually realized HD, 4K, and even 8K picture quality with the help of digital technology, which greatly improved the visual experience of viewers.

In terms of technological innovation, the application of artificial intelligence has had a profound impact on the TV industry. In terms of program recommendations, major platforms use AI algorithms to make personalized recommendations by collecting users' viewing history and interests, making it easier for viewers to discover content that meets their preferences. In addition, the application of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies has brought new possibilities to the production and viewing experience of TV programs, injecting innovative momentum into the TV industry.

The introduction of a series of technologies has not only enhanced the visual and sensory experience of viewers, but also brought about profound changes to the production mode and business model of the TV industry. In the digital era, TV program production has become more reliant on advanced technical equipment and digital post-production processes, improving production efficiency and program quality. At the same time, technological innovation has also brought new possibilities for the advertising model, such as more targeted advertising through accurate user profiling and data analysis, which has promoted the further optimization of the TV advertising model.

3. Specific examples of the evolution of television in China

3.1 Representative cases of the mass media era

The mass media era was the early stage of China's television industry, full of political propaganda, cultural heritage and state ideological guidance. During this period, the production and dissemination of TV programs were mainly dominated by state-owned media, and their contents were strictly controlled by the government. However, it was during this period that some representative TV programs became classics in the history of Chinese television, profoundly influencing the audience culture of the time.

A landmark work is the TV series *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Premiered in 1987, it is an outstanding work in the history of Chinese television drama, created by Shanghai Film Studio. Based on the novel of the same name by Qing Dynasty writer Cao Xueqin, *Dream of Red Mansions* brings this literary classic to life through the medium of television. With a grand narrative, superb acting skills and magnificent scene display, the drama profoundly reveals the social style and human feelings of the Chinese feudal society, presenting a visual and cultural feast for the audience at that time. The success of *A Dream of*

Red Mansions not only established the status of Chinese television drama, but also made it possible to promote literary works through the medium of television, leading a wave of literary adaptations of television dramas.

Another representative example of a program that rose to prominence in the age of mass media is the 1984 Spring Festival Gala. The Spring Festival Gala became one of the classic programs in the history of Chinese television, and the annual gala during the Spring Festival became an important cultural event anticipated by viewers nationwide. The program stood out for its unique and innovative format, colorful cultural performances and infectious hosting style. Not only at that time, but even today, the Spring Festival Gala is still one of the most representative literary and artistic extravaganzas of Chinese television, carrying the emotional resonance of the people's reunion, and becoming a representative of Chinese television popular culture.

3.2 The case of the television industry in a period of marketization and diversification

During the period of marketization and diversification, China's TV industry has undergone profound changes, and a series of representative TV industry cases have risen, which not only reflect the gradual power of the market mechanism in the TV industry, but also highlight the impetus of diversified demands on content creation and industry structure.

Among them, the marriage program "Non-Honesty Do Not Disturb" has become a major highlight in the period of marketization and diversification. Launched by Jiangsu TV, the program attracted a large number of viewers with its unique matchmaking mode and humorous style of programming. By allowing singles to get to know each other on stage, the program succeeded in attracting viewers with its light-hearted atmosphere and became one of the most popular dating programs in the history of Chinese television. Not only did "Do Not Disturb" change the format of traditional matchmaking, it also achieved great success in terms of entertainment and commercialization, introducing more entertainment elements and business model innovations to the television industry.

On the other hand, the rise of Internet platforms also had a profound impact on the television industry during this period. Online video platforms such as Aiqiyi and Tencent Video enabled viewers to watch TV programs at any time and any place by providing a large amount of content. The promotion of original content became a highlight of this period, with original variety shows such as "China Hip Hop" by Aikiye successfully setting the trend and injecting new creative inspiration into traditional TV programs.

3.3 The case for technology in a period of digitization and technological innovation

During the period of digitization and technological innovation, China's TV industry experienced a huge technological leap, with digitization and innovative technologies at its core, driving a comprehensive upgrade in the way TV is produced, distributed and viewed. A series of technological cases became the highlights of China's TV industry during this period, bringing a qualitative leap from picture quality to experience.

First of all, the wide application of HD, 4K and 5G technologies is a notable feature of digitalization and technological innovation. The popularization of HDTV technology has enhanced the visual experience of viewers, while 4K technology has pushed the level of picture detail to a new height. The successful application of these technologies not only improves the production quality of TV programs, but also provides viewers with more stunning audiovisual enjoyment. With the gradual popularization of 5G technology, viewers will be able to enjoy high-speed and stable network environment at any time and any place, making online viewing a more convenient choice.

Second, the widespread application of artificial intelligence has brought about profound changes to the TV industry. In terms of content recommendation, major platforms use artificial intelligence algorithms to make personalized recommendations by collecting users' viewing history and interests, making it easier for viewers to find content that meets their preferences. This personalized recommendation model not only improves user experience, but also promotes users' deep engagement with TV content.

New display technologies have also injected innovation into the TV industry. The application of flexible display and OLED technology has made TV screens thinner, lighter and more flexible, providing designers with more creative possibilities. At the same time, the introduction of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology has made the TV viewing experience more immersive, injecting new vitality into the TV industry. Some innovative TV programs have begun to experiment with virtual reality

technology, allowing viewers to participate in a more immersive way.

4. Current status and future trends

4.1 Characteristics of the current Chinese television industry

The current Chinese television industry is characterized by pluralism, openness and digitization, deeply reflecting the rapid development of society, economy and science and technology. With the deepening of marketization and diversification, China's television industry has gradually shifted from the state-owned media-led stage in the past to one dominated by market forces. This shift has led to more diverse TV content, not only traditional TV dramas and variety shows, but also the emergence of a large amount of original content, web-exclusive dramas and the rise of short-video platforms, which have met the growing diversified needs of viewers. The drive for digitalization and technological innovation has made China's TV industry increasingly intelligent and highly technological. The wide application of advanced technologies such as HD, 4K, and 5G has enhanced viewers' audiovisual experience, making TV viewing a more realistic and richer form of entertainment. The application of artificial intelligence has not only changed the way content is recommended, but also brought efficiency and innovation in program production and post-production. In addition, the introduction of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies has provided a new way of interaction for TV program creation and viewing, expanding the creative boundaries of the TV industry.

4.2 Future trends and challenges

In the future, China's TV industry will face a series of new trends and challenges, and these factors will profoundly affect the development direction and pattern of the industry. With the gradual popularization of 5G technology, the TV industry will enter an era of higher speed and smoother viewing. The support of high-speed networks makes it possible to transmit content on a larger scale and with higher quality, further enhancing the viewing experience of viewers. This will also prompt the TV industry to pay more attention to content production and innovation to cater to viewers' expectations in terms of high-quality audiovisuals. The continuous advancement of AI will profoundly change the content recommendation, intelligent search, and user interaction experience in the TV industry. Personalized recommendation algorithms will more accurately understand user interests and provide viewers with programs that are more in line with their tastes. At the same time, the wide application of AI technology is also expected to improve the efficiency of intelligent production and post-processing of content, accelerating the pace of the TV industry in the field of technology and innovation.

In addition, with the increasing maturity of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies, the Chinese television industry will usher in a new era of immersive viewing experience. Viewers will no longer be limited to two-dimensional screens, but can immerse themselves in the program through VR devices, enjoying a more realistic and interactive visual feast. This new viewing mode will drive innovation and diversification of television content, bringing new growth points to the industry. At the same time, the deep integration of social media and television will also become an undeniable trend. While watching programs, viewers can participate in real-time discussions and share opinions, forming a strong network effect, further expanding the influence and dissemination scope of television programs. Faced with these opportunities and challenges, the Chinese television industry needs to continue to strengthen technological innovation, optimize content ecology, and improve user experience to adapt to rapidly changing market demands and maintain the industry's competitiveness and vitality.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the evolution of Chinese television

The evolution of Chinese television has gone through several stages, from the mass media era, the period of marketization and diversification to the period of digitization and technological innovation, each of which has left a deep mark on the industry's development. Overall, this evolution has demonstrated the brilliant achievements of China's TV industry as well as highlighted the challenges and changes it has faced. In the era of mass media, television was regarded as a communication tool of state ideology and was mainly dominated by state-owned media. Representative examples of this period, such

as the TV series *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the *Spring Festival Gala*, became classics in the history of Chinese television and profoundly influenced the audience culture at that time. During this period, television was used as a tool for political propaganda and cultural inheritance, reflecting the strong guiding power of the state over the television industry. The period of marketization and diversification marked the gradual shift of the television industry from State-led to market-led, with the market mechanism driving more diversified television content and the beginning of profound changes in the structure of the industry. Representative cases, such as the success of marriage programs like "Do Not Disturb" and the rise of Internet platforms, reflect the gradual opening and marketization of the TV industry. At the same time, however, marketization has brought about a series of problems, including the proliferation of low-quality content and the impact of commercialization pressures on content creation.

5.2 Outlook and recommendations for future television development

The future development of the TV industry will be affected by multiple factors, including technological innovation, audience demand and market competition. With the popularization and application of 5G technology, the TV industry will enter a more highly digitalized and intelligent era. This will provide a broader space for the production, dissemination and viewing of TV content and enhance the audience experience. Therefore, the TV industry should actively grasp the opportunities brought by 5G technology, promote the deep integration of HD, VR, AR and other technologies with the TV industry, and create more innovative and interactive content. Content innovation will be the key to the sustainable development of the television industry in the future. While meeting the diversified needs of viewers, we will focus on improving the quality and depth of content and promoting the emergence of more original works. Encourage cross-border cooperation and integrate elements of literature, science and technology, and art into TV creation to create programs with more cultural depth and contemporary characteristics. In addition, for issues of social concern, such as environmental protection and social welfare, the TV industry can also convey positive energy and guide social values through relevant programs.

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