

# China's Film and Television Industry and Contemporary Transformation of Chinese Outstanding Traditional Culture

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, the medium of film and television has been used as a platform for the presentation of Chinese outstanding traditional culture, and film and television works that highlight the aesthetic style and spiritual connotation of Chinese outstanding traditional culture have continued to emerge, so that the construction of national cultural undertakings and the cultural industry has been nourished abundantly. This paper takes the interactive logic of the evolution of traditional culture in film and television creation as a common fulcrum, and shows the innovative transformation of Chinese excellent traditional culture by the film and television media in the three aspects of connotation, discourse, and emotion. At the same time, it points out that the current film and television industry is unbalanced and inappropriate for the transformation and development of traditional culture, aiming at the future development of a balanced and symbiotic relationship between responsibility and business, reality and narrative, and the nation and the world. This paper aims to provide some inspiration and reference for the realistic creation and production of film and television works, as well as refining the spiritual and cultural elements and essence of Chinese civilisation.*

**Keywords:** *the media; Chinese outstanding traditional culture; Innovative transformation and development*

## 1. Introduction

In the past decade, as the medium of film and television has gradually become one of the cultural meals for the general public in China, China's film and television industry has been developing rapidly, and excellent film and television cultural works have emerged one after another. It fully demonstrates the charm of the excellent traditional Chinese culture and has become an important vehicle for telling a good Chinese story. The coupling of traditional culture and film and television media will become a booster for the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese outstanding traditional culture in the new era.

## 2. Common Pivot: The Interactive Logic of Film and Television Creation and Cultural Evolution

### 2.1. Cultural Needs: Endogenous Requirements for Cultural Evolution in the New Era

The Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture is a unique cultural identity with the characteristics of the Chinese people, which has been accumulated and deposited by the Chinese people over a long period of time, and has been constructed under the continuous evolution and intermingling of the Chinese civilization history and profound reflection. It condenses the crystallization of the wisdom of the people of our country through the generations, and is both the cultural genes and imprints of the children of China, as well as the root of the cultural self-confidence of the Chinese nation.

Although the excellent traditional Chinese culture is historical, inherited and stable, it is also developmental, open and progressive in the process of practice. In order to adapt to the historical development and progress of the times, traditional culture, like natural organisms, dynamically evolves and stitches together meanings in the shuttle flow of diverse cultural systems, showing the evolutionary qualities of imitation, agitation, growth and adaptation to the environment, which is what cultural anthropologists call "cultural evolution".<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, if traditional culture is to achieve "survival of the fittest" and effective dissemination at home and abroad, it must be combined with the basic principles of Marxism on the basis of absorbing local achievements and drawing on the experiences of others.

While culture adapts itself and transcends history, we should also see that young people, represented by “Generation Z”, have become the main force of cultural consumption in recent years. Their strong sense of value identification with Chinese culture makes it all the more important for us to dialectically combine the discourse modes and modes of communication preferred by contemporary youth for innovative transformation. Guided by consumer demand for traditional culture, it creates high-quality cultural products that blend traditional culture with modern elements to better meet the people's demand for culture in the new era and to provide useful inspiration for people's understanding and transformation of the world.

## ***2.2. Cultural Empowerment: Pushing the boundaries of film and television creation in the new era***

The film and television media are a product of the age of science and technology and civilization, which realizes the reproduction of daily life and social culture by means of film and television products, and its cultural dissemination is inherently closely related to cultural values.<sup>[2]</sup> As a booster for accelerating the socialist cultural power, film and television works are not only closely integrated with the people's spiritual and cultural needs and positioned at the core of cultural inheritance and dissemination, but also play a role in the contemporary transformation of traditional cultural resources through the internal and external perceptible elements of traditional culture and the revitalization and reproduction of its spirit. Contemporary film and television media, in addition to relying on science and technology, need to be adapted to the profound texture of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, so as to achieve the depth of the film and television text of complete expression. The coupling and interaction between the two is precisely the new form of cultural expression of the intrinsic elements of the excellent traditional Chinese culture through the medium of film and television.

Entering the 21st century, China's society, economy and culture are undergoing profound changes; globalization has brought new windows and new information, the Internet has brought new thinking and new perceptions, and marketisation has brought new opportunities and new relationships.<sup>[3]</sup> Countless western film and television works wrapped in their own strong cultural export and cultural colonization, not only bring great pressure to the Chinese film and television industry, but also the impact on the dissemination of Chinese excellent traditional culture. Based on this background, how China's film and television industry can win and develop in the wave of globalization, how to express the value of the text, how to incorporate the old into the new, how to link the past with the present, and how to promote the dissemination of the excellent traditional Chinese culture have become the challenges faced by film and television artists.

## **3. Synchronous Resonance: Innovative Transformation of Traditional Culture by Film and Television Media**

The medium of film and television should resonate with traditional culture. In film and television works, traditional culture mainly focuses on the three dimensions of connotation, discourse expression and emotion to dialectically integrate and innovate with contemporary values and concepts, so as to transform the contemporary significance and realistic direction of traditional culture in creative work.

### ***3.1. Connotation: De-contextualising the original and supplementing contemporary awareness***

The Italian historian Croce once proposed the proposition that “all history is contemporary history” and that our interpretation of history is influenced by contemporary consciousness and circumstances. As a matter of fact, traditional culture, as a product of specific historical conditions, is attached to the original context of feudalism, with certain limitations of the times, which requires the film and television media to “de-contextualize” traditional cultural resources in the process of promoting the spirit of traditional culture. Film and television creation involves both inheritance and abandonment, critically decoding, combing and condensing the spiritual essence of traditional culture, and modernizing the resources of traditional culture.<sup>[4]</sup> In this process, the criticisms of feudalism, such as the superiority of the ruler and the inferiority of the subject, the distinction between the first and the second person, and the three principles and the five virtues, should be eliminated and discarded. Positive and progressive elements such as the core Chinese cultural elements of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trust, the philosophical thinking of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, as well as ethical concerns, should be inherited and put into practice for the times.

For example, the costume dramas “Princess Agents” and “The Legend of Miyue” are very different

from the past image of the “three obediences and four virtues” of the virtuous wife and mother, but partially project the contemporary image of women's self-growth, inner emotions and self-efficacy achievements under the realistic dilemmas of the subjectivity level of the construction of the times. The female characters portrayed in the modern drama “Nothing But Thirty” and “All Is Well” embody a group video tribute to the spirit of self-reliance and self-improvement of women in the new era. In the field of variety shows, there is no lack of such quality works, such as cultural variety show “The Chinese Poetry Competition” broadcast for seven years and still maintain a good market reputation. It changes the traditional didactic form of ancient poetry culture, through the form of competitive and interactive studio competition. It leads a wide range of audiences to revisit the beauty of ancient poems, dig deep into the traditional cultural connotations behind the poems, and truly realize the slogan of “Appreciate Chinese Poetry, Seek Cultural Genes, Taste the Beauty of Life”. This programme enhances the audience's sense of cultural identity and national pride while shaping good contemporary social morality.

### ***3.2. Discourse: new mainstream expression through audio-visual technology***

Simply making the younger generation repeat the cultural interpretations of the older generation “can no longer move young people on a large scale and in a lasting way”.<sup>[5]</sup> Therefore, in terms of modes of discourse expression, platform scene construction and forms of expression, traditional culture should dialectically choose fashionable rhetoric familiar to the people's audience, and use contemporary audio-visual technology to enrich the possibilities and diversity of narratives. As early as in the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s, the craze for China's classical masterpieces spawned the creation of TV adaptations of the “Four Great Classical Masterpieces”—Journey to the West, A Dream in Red Mansions, Water Margins and The Romance of the Three Kingdoms. This batch of film and television adaptations of classical literary masterpieces has greatly brought the people closer to the classical literary works of China. As digital technology continues to break through and extend people's senses, the form of “film and television technology + traditional culture” is more and more vivid for value output. The dance drama “Tang Palace Banquet” created by Henan Radio and Television Station uses advanced VR technology and 5G technology to reproduce the scene of the Tang Palace Banquet, and the three-dimensional fullness of the ultimate presentation makes the audience feel as if they were there. Its innovative cultural landscape, rich in top-notch visual beauty, strongly inspires national cultural self-confidence.

Similarly, the film “The Wandering Earth II”, a landmark work in the rise of domestic sci-fi films, uses the latest science and technology to present a scene of sci-fi spectacle. In the film, Chinese astronauts are the first to join the team and the astronauts from all over the world to sacrifice themselves to detonate the moon, which embodies the idea of “the rise and fall of the world is the responsibility of everyone” and the idea of “cultivating oneself and aligning the family with the country” that is actively advocated by Confucianism. This idea touches the audience's innermost feelings of family and country, and through this plot, the family and country sentiment in the core of Chinese culture is innovatively transformed, revealing a strong sense of family and country identity and reflecting the high degree of value self-awareness of the countrymen.

### ***3.3. Emotions: imperceptible influence and connection of the emotions of the past and present***

The deep historical Chinese traditional culture is rich in philosophical thinking, humanism, indoctrination and moral concepts. However, in contemporary times, if it is still disseminated in the form of traditional runic texts, the distance between the general public and traditional culture will be further and further removed. Listening to stories, storytelling, and expressing with stories have become part of the evolution of human consciousness, and have almost become the “immediate needs” of the general public. Since tens of thousands of years ago, when our ancestors traced patterns on the walls of caves and rocks to record the stories of what had happened, storytelling has been part of the evolution of human consciousness. It has become a “necessity” for the general public, both ancient and modern. Therefore, the innovative transformation of the Chinese excellent traditional culture can be implicitly exposed in the storytelling and emotional narrative, and relying on the film and television media to extend and expand into the hearts and minds of the people, and promote the Chinese excellent traditional culture from the nation to the world.

For example, the film “Creation of the Gods I” retells the story of “Feudal Gods” with advanced film technology and contemporary interpretations, not only because it is the most suitable Chinese mythological epic to be adapted, but also because the spiritual power of the continuous Chinese culture

can be traced back to and inherited from it. In terms of ideology, the film conveys the concepts of Chinese traditional culture such as “Virtue is not worthy of the position, and will be punished by heaven” and “The world's love and sacrifice”, and effectively conveys the value concept of “the people are the most important”. It effectively conveys the value concept of “the people are the most important” and highlights the power of justice, kindness and emotion, while the contemporary audience can still be deeply touched by the cultural values of thousands of years ago. In the field of animation, in recent years, there has been a gradual increase in a series of high-quality domestic animation films, such as “Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child”, “I Am What I Am” and “Chang An”, which have fully demonstrated the long history and profound meaning of the excellent traditional Chinese culture through the use of Chinese traditional cultural elements. Take “Chang An” as an example, at the end of the film, the poet Li Bai went through trials and tribulations and shouted out the ancient famous line of “Ten thousand mountains a swift boat had passed”, which aroused the emotional resonance of countless viewers, and this kind of cultural identity originating from the bloodline is the powerful force that makes the Chinese nation everlasting.

#### **4. Prosperous Coexistence: Film and Television Media's Innovative Development Strategy for Traditional Culture**

##### ***4.1. Finding the balance: positioning cultural responsibility and commercial value***

Throughout the current high-speed development of film and television media production field, value-oriented deviation of the “pan-entertainment” padding works are endless, and many creators uphold the concept of “traffic supremacy, profit supremacy,” turning a blind eye to the responsibility of cultural values, which greatly affects the film and television media. This has greatly affected the construction of cultural ecology in the film and television media. At present, the real economic benefits of China's film and television industry and the social and cultural responsibilities it should assume have failed to reach a stable balance. But responding to the market and taking the initiative to take on cultural responsibility is not either this or that. Although film and television works are inevitably commercial and popular entertainment, if they are to truly satisfy the spiritual and cultural needs of present and future audiences, they must be detached from “fast-food” superficial sensory stimulation or superficial texts of curiosity. The only way to respect the audience's media literacy and cultural literacy is to do a good job with in-depth content and spiritually nourishing film and television productions. Therefore, film and television creators need to find the organic balance between cultural responsibility and commercial value and interests. This is not only an effective path to ease the frequent misalignment between mainstream values and the commercial market, but also a booster for the innovative development of outstanding traditional culture in film and television creation.

In recent years, many film and television productions have made new explorations in balancing cultural responsibility and commercial interests. For example, the narrative of the major revolutionary historical drama “The Age of Awakening” starts with the New Culture Movement, and through the perspectives of Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and other pioneering revolutionary figures, it comprehensively demonstrates the social conditions of China at that time when the mountains and rivers were shattered and the country was struggling to save the country, and writes about the road of awakening of the whole nation to save the country. The film has been well received upon release, achieving a double success in the market and reputation, which is attributed to the fact that the screenwriter and the director have always upheld the correct view of history and the creative principle of historical materialism when creating and presenting the film.

##### ***4.2. Based on Reality: Reflecting the Life of Contemporary People through Film and Television Creation***

Standing firmly on the people's position and adhering to the people-centered creative orientation is the only way for the prosperity of Chinese literature and art on the new journey. The people are the creators of history, as well as the source of creation, the main body of creation, expression and the appreciation of literary and artistic works.<sup>[6]</sup> Whether a film or television work is narrated in the past or in the future, the meaning behind the film or television work has to reach out to the different dimensions of contemporary life and culture. It reflects and creates the living conditions, realistic thoughts and inner desires of the contemporary people in a straightforward manner, and conveys the thoughts, feelings and wishes of the people and the times in an equal manner. Taking family dramas as an example, although the costume drama “The Story Of MingLan” is set in the Song Dynasty, it does

not take a grand narrative as its tone, but conveys the very philosophical spirit of traditional culture from the stories between the three-dimensional and full-bodied characters. It demonstrates the collective interests of society and the country as the supreme values, as well as the human qualities of generosity, self-reliance and bravery, which are in line with many aspects of the contemporary Chinese people's concepts of family life, personal growth, and emotional pursuits, and which resonate greatly with contemporary audiences, especially the female audience. In modern family dramas, the promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture is the strong undercurrent of the TV series "A Lifelong Journey". The film takes the five main streets of Guang Ren, Guang Yi, Guang Li, Guang Zhi and Guang Xin as its origin, implying the protagonist's adherence to and inheritance of the traditional Confucian culture of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trust". The first point is to give a new meaning to "self-improvement" with the concept of equal labour. The second point is the promotion of the concept of the pricelessness of truth and the unity of reason and law. The third point is the civilian and personalized expansion of benefiting mankind. The drama invisibly conveys the traditional culture and values of the Chinese nation, and writes about the sorrows and joys of people's lives by audio-visual means.

#### **4.3. Going Global: The Fusion of National Individuality and Human Commonality**

In the 1980s and 1990s, TV dramas adapted from classical literature, such as *Journey to the West* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, not only came into the domestic audience's view, but also achieved good social acclaim and market response in Japan, South Korea, Singapore and other East Asian countries. In the last decade, the choice of texts in Chinese film and television has attempted to focus on more universal issues and explore common human emotions, which has not only touched the domestic audience, but also constructed a storytelling expression of the spirit of traditional Chinese culture around the world. For example, the TV series "Nothing But Thirty", which explores the growth of women's marriage and self-worth, has landed in more than 100 countries and regions around the world, and has been broadcasted on more than 20 platforms such as YouTube, Viki, iTalkBB, etc., and in 2020, it won the No. 1 ratings for the same period in the Malayan West Astro bi-star channel. There is also the drama series "THE Longest Day In Chang'an", which showcases the great Tang Dynasty, distributed in more than 10 countries and regions, including the United States, Singapore and South Korea, and broadcast online on more than 10 platforms, including Amazon and YouTube, and has become the first Chinese-language drama purchased by an Australian mainstream television station. In addition, Disney purchased the overseas broadcasting rights for "A Lifelong Journey" within a month of the start of filming, and more and more excellent dramas that tell the story of China have aroused a wide range of repercussions and resonance overseas. These works not only show the beauty of China's landscapes and legends through the ages, but also draw on the similarities between civilizations in their choice of values. They not only let overseas audiences feel the traditional virtues of the Chinese people of hard work, kindness, resilience and bravery, but also subconsciously spread Chinese values, enhance the influence of Chinese culture, promote exchanges and mutual understanding among civilizations, and make Chinese outstanding traditions better known to the world.

## **5. Conclusions**

At present, high-quality cultural products with "film and television + excellent traditional Chinese culture" as the main mode of creation have gradually started to achieve a win-win situation in terms of reputation and market. The coupling of the two interacts in a more diversified manner in terms of form and content, which not only provides a communication carrier for the excellent traditional Chinese culture in line with the trend of the times, and gives cultural products the ability to be reproduced on a large scale and disseminated efficiently, but also provides the film and television media with a rich cultural treasure trove and a source of creativity. This shows the history and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation to a wider audience, subconsciously promotes the popular transmission of Chinese culture, and invariably makes the public consumers consciously become the purveyors of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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