

# Research on the Innovative Practice of CCTV Large-scale Cultural Program "The Reader"

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**Abstract:** *In this era of noisy and pompous media culture, the road to cultural dissemination is difficult. Both traditional television and the new internet platforms reek of Neil Bozeman's "Entertainment is Dead". In such an environment, many cultural programs launched by CCTV have taken up the important task of publicizing and promoting the connotation, emotion and spirit behind culture, and at the same time injected countless fresh cultural blood into this era. Then I will take "The Reader" as the research object, from the perspective of innovation of program content as well as innovation of program form, to analyze how this cultural program walks on its own way of success in this fast-paced environment.*

**Keywords:** *"The Reader", cultural programs, slow-paced, program innovation*

## 1. Introduction

In this age of information fast food, it seems that slow-paced things are becoming fewer and fewer, and the emergence of The Reader is like a warm current that warms everyone's heart. The Reader is a cultural program hosted and curated by Dong Qing, which aims to teach while striking at and inspiring people's hearts. The whole program has won the praise of countless viewers with its rather humanistic temperament, natural and elegant stage effects, and skillful storytelling methods<sup>[1]</sup>. From the start of the first season on February 18, 2017, to the end of the third season on December 25, 2020, when the "One Square Meter" special program will be held, this is a whole process of growth for "The Reader". In the process, "The Reader" has achieved circle-breaking communication while reaping far-reaching influence at home and abroad, with a high ratings of 0.976%, making it a model for cultural bibliographic model innovation. So how does this slow-paced cultural program manage to break the circle and still draw in a lot of fans at the same time? This question deserves to be explored further.

## 2. Innovation in program content

### 2.1. Promoting Chinese culture and fostering a bookish society

"Culture is a concept that includes a certain element of refinement and enhancement, a treasure trove that preserves what is known and considered to be the best university in every society"<sup>[2]</sup> and it is also the material and spiritual wealth that we, as human beings, have created together." Promoting Chinese culture and creating a bookish society" is not only the business of the book industry, but also the obligation of the TV industry.

Driven by the dual background of the country's comprehensive development of reading for all and the enhancement of the media's value-oriented ability, CCTV has actively exerted the advantages of the television media and carefully created the program "The Reader", which contributes its talent and power to increase the reading rate and interest of all people in reading. The Reader upholds the creative core of letting the excellent traditional Chinese culture be known and loved by more people, and letting more people understand the world's cultures, and transmits to the audience the truest, most touching and most useful things in the treasure box of human cultures through the way of teaching and enjoying, and at the same time, letting the audience enter into the culture, and then casting the society of books.

Bai Yansong once said, "The Long Reader is not only of extraordinary significance to Dong Qing, but also of great significance to China's TV audience and to the inheritance of culture." From the start of the first season on February 18, 2017 to the end of the third season of the "One Square Meter"

special program on December 25, 2020, the seemingly long but fleeting three years did not make "The Reader" fade, but rather made its blooming light more brilliant and eye-catching, and exuded a more intense smell of books. To this day, going back and watching this program still makes you feel a lot of things.

## ***2.2. Embodying humanistic care and arousing audience empathy***

### ***2.2.1. Program level***

Dong Qing once said in the first episode of *The Reader*, "The Reader aims to realize the guiding role of culture to infect, inspire and educate people. We want to show the emotions of real people with flesh and blood and move them to let the audience meet the great world." *The Reader* has neither complicated plots nor sensationalized drama, but rather delivers these intriguing words and emotions to the audience in a calm reading atmosphere and builds a literary paradise where the mind communicates with the heart.

The format of the three episodes of "The Reader" is to combine each person's own upbringing, their own experience of certain emotions, and many backstories with masterpieces of the past, and to use the most sincere and simple emotions to read aloud the exquisite Chinese words, thus allowing readers and the public to realize the long rhythm behind the words. When the readers bring their own life emotions into the program, the whole program becomes enriched with it; it is no longer a monotonous form, but represents a unique attitude. For example, in the second installment of *The Reader*, mother Tao Yanbing, in order to let her son Yang Naibin, who has lost his hearing, grow up like a healthy person and have a normal language environment, she eliminated all difficulties and insisted on letting her son Yang Naibin go to school to study, and during this period, the mother, Tao Yanbing, has been accompanying her son, Yang Naibin, to study, which accompanied her for a whole 16 years. In the son of Yang Nai Bin read Bing Xin's article "not why", although the articulation is not so clear, but the audience can still feel the deep love between the mother and son, Yang Nai Bin naturally exudes feelings are also touched countless viewers, and it is because of the existence of the spirit of humanism, which makes the audience can not help but resonate with the program emotionally.

### ***2.2.2. Facilitator level***

Zhang Chengzhi, the "Sage Warrior of Literature" who used the pen as a flag, once said, "There will always be respect for the human heart, humanity, and for the human being itself; there will always be the choice of the underclass, of the poor, of justice; there will always be the temperament of youth, of revolt, of freedom <sup>[3]</sup>." From this we can conclude that the civilian complex is undoubtedly the most important as far as the presenters themselves are concerned. We need to have compassion for the underdog, we need to understand and respect our audience, and we also need to relay the voice of the people in the process of hosting our programs.

As the host of "The Reader", Dong Qing has demonstrated her hosting skills and cultural heritage to the fullest, while at the same time integrating her true emotions and deep humanistic concern into every corner of the program. She respects the audience and listens to them carefully, communicating with them sincerely on all fronts. Dong Qing interviewed Mr. Xu Yuanchong, a professor at Peking University and a famous translator. Because Mr. Xu Yuanchong was already 96 years old at the time, Dong Qing chose to kneel down for the interview in order to show her respect. In the course of the interview, Dong Qing kept her eyes level with Mr. Xu Yuanchong or looked up at him, and listened carefully to his story about his dedication to the translation business. Dong Qing's seemingly small kneeling actually conveys the humanistic feelings of herself as well as the program.

## ***2.3. Accurate language to enhance the audience experience***

Professor Zhang Song once said this, "How the host's language skills directly affect the quality and level of the program. Unpleasant voice, slurred speech, unstandardized language, unintelligible speech, incoherent speech, unintelligible speech, are not even the minimum requirements are not met." If the host does not have good language skills to host the program, it will not only affect the audience's audio-visual experience of the program, but also reduce the quality and level of the program, and vice versa.

The host's language expression is presented through the host's voice and image art, which requires the host to give textual connotations to the emotions in the expression process. From the perspective of audible language, both the tone and speed of speech used by Dong Qing in hosting the program, as well

as the words and sentences are all very appropriate, while her language expression style in *The Reader* is plain and simple, with an accurate grasp of emotions, and often used in the form of interesting and easy dialogues to make the program atmosphere become more active, which by virtue of her many years of hosting experience will sublimate the hosting language into an art. He has sublimated the hosting language into an art with his years of hosting experience. From the audience's point of view, she presents a relatable language that greatly enhances the audience's experience. In the first installment of the second season of *The Reader*, "The Beginning", Jia Pingwa said, "I can only speak here in Shaanxi dialect, because I can't speak Mandarin. I used to excuse myself by saying, 'Mandarin is for ordinary people'." At this point, Dong Qing replied with a smile, "I finally realize why I am so common." Dong Qing made the interview atmosphere of the whole program lively by suppressing herself and raising others, and also by flirting and teasing.

#### ***2.4. Satisfying spiritual needs and stimulating the will to read***

##### ***2.4.1. Literary level***

In this era of short video popularity, most people are living in the virtual cyberspace, facing the cell phone screen every day seems to be easy and carefree, but in fact, deep down as well as the spiritual level of the empty to the extreme, which also makes them often fall into a certain period of time in the cultural anxiety.

From the point of view of "observation", the emergence of "The Reader" is more like a cultural supply station for this part of the population. While watching this program, the audience's own literary cultivation will also be affected by the subtle influence, through the cumulative viewing and learning, will slowly become a "three-dimensional person" full of literature inside, and will naturally fall in love with literature, love reading.

From the perspective of "reading", each episode of "The Reader" invites different guests to recite different literary masterpieces in each season, which is like an invisible book list, thus stimulating the audience's desire for cultural knowledge and their own passion for reading.

##### ***2.4.2. Emotional dimension***

On the set of the program, "The Reader" allows some guests to have a space and opportunity to talk about their personal experiences and express their private feelings, and it also allows the audience watching the program to have an indirect place for emotional support. For example, Mr. Xu Yuanchong recalled in the programme that "the first poem I translated in 1931 was Lin Huiyin's *Don't Throw It Away*. At that time, I translated this poem because I liked a female classmate, and later I gave it to that girl, but I never thought that I would receive a reply after half a century." After saying this, he read these two lines at the scene, "The same bright moon, the same mountain full of lights, only people do not see, dream-like hanging." By the time he finished reading, Mr. Xu Yuanchong's eyes were already filled with tears.

Outside of the program venue, the establishment of the reading booth allows everyone to have a platform to express their personal feelings. Whether you want to express your longing for your loved ones, or want to express your love for your lover, these emotions do not have to be buried in the bottom of your heart as in the past, but can be read aloud in a way that makes your emotions have a point of support to satisfy your own spiritual needs, which in turn stimulates the willingness to read.

### **3. Innovation format of the program**

#### ***3.1. Reorganization of readings and interviews***

Each episode of *The Reader* has a specific theme, and the entire program explores that theme. Each guest will complete an interview with the host before reading the text aloud. In the course of the interviews, the guests will share more or less personal experiences as well as interesting or very important people and events in order to gradually bring the audience into the scope of the theme of the issue. Once the interview portion was over the guests began reading from the literature.

I think the most important part is when each guest shares himself or herself, because it makes the viewer's heart inadvertently connect with the guest and the heart of the program, and their inner emotions can't help but flow along with it. This is also the purpose of "The Reader" to combine the two forms of "interview" and "reading" - to enable the audience to better understand the emotions that the

readers give to the works.

### ***3.2. Breaking through the limitations of one-way communication***

The third season of The Reader also created two new program formats - "One Square Meter" and "10,000 Kilometers". "One Square Meter" is a continuous seventy-two hour all-media reading booth live event, which was first launched in Beijing, Wuhan, and Xiamen, and is the first time that a slow-paced program is integrated with a cultural program by means of live broadcasting; "10,000 Kilometers" is a way to get us out of the confines of the booth.

To a certain extent, the form of the program has been changed from "one-way communication" to "two-way communication", a square meter reads the hearts of the world, so that everyone can become a reader, and everyone has a chance to express their inner feelings. At the same time, this two-way emotional communication makes the whole program's communication power as well as the communication effect greatly enhanced.

### ***3.3. Enhancement of the audiovisual atmosphere of the stage***

#### ***3.3.1. For program captioning***

As the reader reads, the subtitles are presented in the form of a "book" that is underlined and turned as the reader progresses. Such subtitle design is unique, which increases the immersive audio-visual atmosphere of the whole program, and also enhances the cultural transmission of the program, so that viewers can get a more comfortable program experience.

#### ***3.3.2. Music and choreography***

In terms of music, adding musical elements to the program at the right place can not only promote the vertical development of the program's communication field, but also better connect the program with the audience's emotions, thus triggering empathy. The Reader has adopted this approach. At the beginning of the program, the program will invite famous pianists such as Yundi Li and Wu Muye to perform live, making the program more immersive. At the end of the program, "The Reader" will also invite famous musicians, such as Kan Liwen and Hudev, to perform live music, which makes the sense of atmosphere of the whole program greatly enhanced.

In terms of choreography, before the opening of "The Reader", the lights above the main stage first present an immersive feeling of "stars shining brightly". With the appearance of Dong Qing, the lights above the stage move to give to the host. The overall design of the main stage is more oriented towards the European style, which gives people a solemn feeling and also lays a certain foundation for the tone of the program. The backdrop projected on the main stage was a bookstore, which in a way better rendered the atmosphere of reading as well as learning. From a reader's perspective, they can more quickly find the feel of the reading as well as the emotional tone; From the viewer's perspective, this allows for a more immersive program viewing as well as literary experience.

#### ***3.3.3. In terms of advertisement implantation***

Compared to some of the other programs, neither episode of The Reader has ever had an ad placement in the middle, but only a mention at the very beginning. The advertisements for the first and second seasons of "The Reader" will not only begin with Dong Qing's narration, but also feature the sponsor's merchandise and brand name in the background of the viewers, which will be used as a way of advertising throughout the first and second seasons of "The Reader". The ads for the third season of The Reader are in a similar format, and will appear in the form of a backdrop of Dong Qing's conversation with a guest at a reading booth, through which this one format will be used throughout the third season of The Reader. It could be argued that the ad placement has blended in with the basic character of the program. A small amount of advertisement implantation not only makes the viewers feel more comfortable while watching the program, but more importantly, it does not disturb or even interrupt the viewers' thinking and emotions, so that the viewers can go on a journey of purification of their own souls from the beginning to the end of the program.

## **4. Conclusion**

Some scholars have pointed out that "the squeeze of visual culture on textual culture has brought imperceptible negative effects to such programs." Indeed, in this fast-paced era, we seem to have

forgotten what "slow" is. Consuming a lot of time on short video products every day, no effort is spared in the pursuit of visual pleasure. Unbeknownst to me, my own ability to think deeply and rationally is diminishing. In "Death by Entertainment", everyone looks like they are having a good laugh, but they are actually empty inside. As Neil Bozeman wrote in Entertainment Kills: "The scary thing about Entertainment Kills is not the entertainment itself, but the fact that people are losing the ability to think seriously about social matters and make rational judgments, and that the cultural environment of frivolity has created a rational illiteracy of ignorance and fearlessness without even realizing it."<sup>[4]</sup> The existence of *The Reader*, then, makes it possible for people to slow down and be still, to observe the countless beautiful things in the world, and to feel the love that exists around them. At the same time, reading booths give today's men and women a chance to relax and talk about themselves. All of these spread the socialist core values in a silent way. In short, full of true feelings of the program to enter the audience's heart, there is a high degree of warmth, culture and thought of the program, in order to achieve the two benefits of the harvest, in order to win in the fierce competition in the media and embark on their own way to success.

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