

An Innovative Approach to the International Communication of Chinese Documentaries under the Threshold of Full Media

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Abstract: *This year marks the 10th anniversary of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, and as a key point to build on. Chinese documentaries carry the mission of reshaping China's international image and promoting Chinese culture to the world. The current task of Chinese documentaries is daunting and the road is bumpy. Both mainstream media and new and self-published media are constantly creating TV documentaries suitable for China in terms of content selection, presentation style and market expansion. This has re-established a solid foundation for future Chinese documentaries in the international market. This paper analyses the current development of Chinese documentaries in the all-media environment and looks forward to a new prospect of the innovative development of Chinese documentary international communication.*

Keywords: *All Media; Chinese; Documentary; International Communications*

1. Introduction

A documentary is a form of television programme that records true and objective facts. With the advent of the all-media era, Chinese documentaries are telling China's story to the world in a multi-dimensional and all-round way. At a time when TV programmes of all genres are paying dividends, documentaries are standing out as China's calling card and have a great responsibility and significance. By analysing the strengths and constraints of existing Chinese documentaries and looking at the new ecology of international documentaries, it will help Chinese documentaries to make a solid footprint in the international media market. In brief, in the future, Chinese documentaries will have to continue to innovate and think deeply in order to build up the image of China and spread Chinese culture, and to leave a precious image mark in an era of continuous progress.

2. Documentary Renaissance - A New Opportunity for Chinese Documentaries

2.1. "One Belt, One Road" builds the international stage for Chinese documentaries

Building on the "One Belt, One Road", China is constantly opening up new paths in international cooperation and enhancing the depth and breadth of its opening up to the outside world. With the proposal in place for ten years, the practical results show that China has been contributing indispensably to the promotion of global economic, political and cultural exchanges, and has continued to present a true and objective image of a great power to the world. With the progress of the times, the all-media era has injected new and surging blood into information dissemination. Various waves of micro-documentaries, short videos, vlogs, etc. have swept through the traditional media mainstream form of documentaries. Based on the development and innovation of technology, the web integration across the whole media camp has led to a change in the concept of documentary production and dissemination in traditional media.

Chinese documentaries are not only becoming a source of spiritual food for people, but also a bright window for China to spread its voice to the world. How to produce TV documentaries that can meet the requirements of the market as well as the needs of the audience has become an urgent challenge for the film industry today. In the era of full media, Chinese documentaries are taking full advantage of the significant strengths of various media to continuously broaden the path of comprehensive development of Chinese documentaries, which is more conducive to China's continued promotion of Chinese culture

to the world and global economic and cultural exchanges and mutual appreciation based on ten years of accumulation in the context of the Belt and Road.^[1]

In the context of "One Belt, One Road", the CCTV documentary uses documentary images to tell the world that China will continue to carry forward the essence of its national thinking, promote peace and stability with its neighbouring countries, and contribute Chinese wisdom and strength to the balance and stability of international relations. If Chinese documentaries are to establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with in the international media market, the Chinese documentary landscape must be reconfigured. We are gate-keeping the output in terms of the number, variety and subject matter of documentaries, following the footsteps of the times, relying on technological revival to make excellent works with contemporary expressiveness, and deepening the effective dissemination of the core content and values of documentaries.

2.2. The Challenges of Existing Documentaries in China

The cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese documentaries has become an important way for China to spread its international image and build cultural confidence abroad. As an effective way for countries around the world to understand Chinese culture, Chinese documentaries have witnessed the shadow of China's rise in the international community. Even if the current Chinese documentary embraces various types of cultural elements and the practice of all-media applications, many clues are gradually emerging in its development.

2.2.1. Technological lag and conceptual derailment of documentaries in an all-media environment

Big data, cloud computing, 5G, AI and other advanced media technologies are to a certain extent pushing the traditional audiovisual language, genre model and overall ecological landscape of documentaries. The changes in technology in the online social age have provided a richer source of material for the creation of documentaries, and the format of documentaries is constantly changing. The earliest recognized VR documentary on a global scale dates back to *Hungry Los Angeles*, which screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2012. The film is based on virtual technology and is a three-dimensional animation of news footage that could not be recorded on camera at the time, which is closer to a documentary image. Looking back at the country, the development of VR documentaries in China lags slightly behind the international scene, having only just taken off in 2015. China's first VR documentary is *Kindergarten in a Mountain Village*, which adopts a traditional linear narrative logic in the first person and is a little rusty in its use of innovative technology, emphasising "recording" rather than "interaction". The alienation between documentaries and the audience, which are mainly disseminated by traditional media, along with the deepening influence of all-media and integrated media on the dissemination of information, makes it seem that there is still much room for progress in terms of technical innovation and conceptual innovation in Chinese documentaries.

2.2.2. Reflections on the thematic content of the documentary

As a cross-cultural, multi-integrated form of image distribution, it is still a marginal, niche and narrowly broadcast output in the country. Due to its inherent shortcomings of low timeliness and huge amount of information, the documentary is relatively specialised in terms of genre, intention, content and value compared to other forms of programming. A thought-provoking reflection on what Chinese documentaries are when it comes to creating quality work. Is it a documentary made by Chinese people? Or is it a documentary set in China? In recent years, the professional media have continued to delve deeper into the path of documentary, drawing conclusions from their experience: The most important thing is to be able to tell a Chinese story to the world in a way that they will understand and be moved by. Through such a film, they can get a deeper and more realistic understanding of China, and a good documentary is one that achieves this. While China is on the road to modernisation, it has a long way to go to effectively promote the international dissemination of Chinese stories through the creation of documentaries.

3. Reconstructing the Environment - Deeper Reflections on the International Image of Chinese Documentaries

3.1. The scope of selection under international communication

At its core, documentary is about human-centred storytelling and establishing a direct dialogue between people and the real world. For the current issue of innovation and development of Chinese

documentaries, the main thing remains the expression of the core content. In today's society, Chinese documentaries are taking advantage of their own content to raise the aesthetic awareness and cultural awareness of the general audience, especially the young audience, to convey mainstream values and uphold media responsibility and quality.

The characteristics of the documentary genre should be highlighted, and the lifeline of the times should be firmly grasped to keep the main connotation in mind. Excellent documentaries should keep up with current social events, reflect humanistic concerns, and create works that conform to current mainstream values and meet social expectations in different contexts at different times. For example, documentaries of historical value focusing on the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the country, such as *We Are Walking on the Great Road and New China*, launched by the Central Broadcasting Station in 2019; Launched in 2020, "*The General Secretary commands this people's war*" and "*In Wuhan*" document the difficulties faced by China during special times, spread mainstream values, encourage the masses to hold on to their defences and give them spiritual solace; In 2021, the works such as "*Years of Mountains and Rivers*" and "*Dunhuang Sun and Moon for a New Day*" will be launched, closely following the main themes of the centenary of the founding of the party and the fight against poverty, giving full play to the power of the documentary "*National Album*"; Launched in 2022, "*Pilot*", "*My New Era and I*" features a comprehensive display of the magnificent new journey of the new era, highlighting the main theme, celebrating the 20th National Congress as well as reflecting the historic achievements of the Party and the country in the 18th Party Congress, and recording the precious memories of ordinary Chinese people walking with the country and the times.

When choosing a theme, it is important to consider the target audience beyond the domestic audience and look to the future and the world. The choice of subject matter was chosen with an eye to both the pulse of the times and the needs of our cultural communication, as well as to reveal a profound impact on the intellectual dimension of contemporary people. The main theme is not only the main theme of China, but also the main theme of the world, a topic of common concern to mankind, and "telling the story of China in the language of the world" is an important point for Chinese documentaries to be in line with international standards. In the era of globalisation, China has always been an indispensable and solid force in promoting the convergence of world civilisations and cultural exchanges, and it is all the more important for outstanding Chinese culture to be presented in an international perspective, relying on "image diplomacy" to enhance China's cultural soft power and strengthen China's influence in the international community.

3.2. Documentary Representation and Presentation

In 2019, the General Secretary stressed that promoting media integration and building a full range of media is an urgent issue at this stage. This requires the integration of traditional mainstream media with credibility, authority and discourse power, and new media platforms with high interactivity, timeliness and wide audience reach in a multimodal manner, thus creating a deeper all-media documentary communication pattern. At a time of rapid technological innovation, Chinese documentaries must be bold and innovative, and follow the technology to produce excellent works that meet the standards of the times. Chinese documentaries have made an attempt to integrate media communication with technological innovation. The large-scale epic documentary *Yuanmingyuan* restores history through three-dimensional modelling, using digital technology to recreate the whole historical process of Yuanmingyuan from its construction to its expansion and then its destruction. The reasonable use of CG technology with Chinese documentaries adds artistry and interest to the more intellectual themes, triggering emotional resonance in the audience without compromising authenticity and deepening the ideological value core of the film's message.

The diversification of distribution channels has also given audiences more viewing options, giving rise to a broader and more diverse distribution matrix for Chinese documentaries, such as micro-documentaries, self-produced documentaries by self-publishers, self-produced documentaries by online media, and so on. Whether it can meet the increasing aesthetic perception and spiritual needs of domestic audiences. Whether it can meet the expectations of international audiences for Chinese documentaries and the resonance of Chinese stories. The presentation of the Chinese documentary becomes the most obvious catalyst beyond the subject matter of the documentary.

3.3. The values currently carried by Chinese documentaries

Professor Downing has suggested that "the classicism of a documentary is a high summary of its

value presentation". A documentary carries communication value, cultural value, artistic value, social value and commercial value. In today's globalised world, documentaries are not only a way of satisfying people's psychological and spiritual needs and desire for knowledge in specialist areas, but also a way of achieving efficient and useful diplomacy for a country at an international level.

In the context of "One Belt, One Road", Chinese documentaries have become a diplomatic channel for international exchange due to their own cultural attributes and their documentary video characteristics, which play their unique communication value. This is both a result of the trend of the times and an inevitable requirement for the strategic development of our country. Today, with all media penetrating people's daily lives, every documentary can be a product of international communication, and its message and deeper connotations can serve as a postcard of China.

Cultural heritage is the soul of documentaries, and in the era of new media, documentaries will play a more thorough role in the heritage of our outstanding culture. Most of the documentaries disseminated by traditional media as mainstream media are mostly didactic and science-based, and the creators are unable to get timely and effective feedback, which has a delayed and limited effect on the culture they disseminate. Now, based on technological empowerment, cultural values are being made accessible to a large audience, bringing the film into the real emotional world of people. In addition, an excellent Chinese documentary must not only have substantial content to provoke deep thoughts in the audience, but also its unique artistic aesthetics. In terms of picture composition and audio-visual language, the film is exquisitely watchable and artistic without departing from authenticity, and "art without borders" gives full play to the opportunities for international dissemination of Chinese documentaries.

As one of the important products in the cultural industry chain, documentaries have the dual attributes of social and economic benefits. In today's cluttered information world, people receive mixed messages, and it is the social value of documentaries to guide positive public opinion and convey objective and correct values. In terms of the industrial landscape, Chinese documentaries have been gaining popularity in the market by using the all-media camp to "make content king" and "cultural excellence", which has led to the rising attention and investment in documentaries, as well as escalating the scale of Chinese documentaries and fierce competition.^[2]

4. Perspectives on the Future - Innovative Development of International Distribution of Chinese Documentaries

4.1. Strengthening the coordination and linkage of publicity and enhancing communication through platforms

At the International Sunshine Documentary Festival held in France in June 2019, CCTV Documentary Channel led a number of international cooperation and overseas promotion projects, which attracted wide attention from international mainstream platforms and many media at home and abroad. This has also inspired us to create quality work in the future: Firstly, we formulate long-term development strategies and industry plans, and develop key R&D projects and strategies. At the same time, it is reasonable to use the CGTN documentary channel to build a national platform. Secondly, a special fund has been set up in conjunction with the documentary communication strategy to increase funding. Thirdly, to create a professional team of talents and a market-oriented operation mechanism to promote the international dissemination of Chinese documentaries in a precise and efficient manner.

4.2. Increasing support policies and establishing industry standards

After the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) issued the *Judging Measures for Support Projects for Outstanding Domestic Documentary Films and Creative Talents*, it has continued to increase its policy support to enable healthy competition in Chinese documentary films, resulting in a vibrant documentary industry that will serve as a leading model for future documentaries. *The 2023 Notice of the General Office of the State Administration of Radio and Television on the Promotion of Domestic Documentaries* in 2023 sets out four criteria, providing effective requirements and advice for subsequent creators. Strengthen industry regulations for policy formulation and build a practical censorship system to promote the healthy development of Chinese documentaries in the all-media era.

4.3. Innovative industrial model, in line with international market orientation

The commercialisation and marketability of documentaries goes hand in hand with the cultural connotations of their communication, rationalising the transformation of the market landscape according to the main themes. Firstly, there is the wide range of commercial partnerships that can be used as peripheral merchandise to upgrade the chain, whether it be documentaries, footage, trailers, etc. The second is pan-IP development, for example, documentary IP can be used for animation, web series and variety shows. The shift in thinking in the international market has subtly influenced creators' perceptions, focusing not only on Chinese themes and stories, but also on the common concerns of human society, opening up a channel of emotional resonance with genuine dialogue, thus realising value recognition and presenting a credible, lovable and respectable image of China.^[3]

5. Conclusions

"One Belt, One Road" in the era of all media has provided favourable conditions and a solid guarantee for the healthy development of Chinese documentaries. Chinese documentaries will be able to take a firm cultural stance and value orientation in the intricate international horizon of the future, use exquisite artistic shots and profound cultural heritage to shape the image of China as a great nation, and use Chinese culture and Chinese stories to gather spiritual connotations to lead Chinese documentaries to the world.

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