

Construction of the Chinese Image Through Frame Theory

-- A Case Study of Chinese Variety Show "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road"

Yunxin Zhang*

College of Liberal Arts & Journalism, Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot 010000, Inner Mongolia, China

*2389941534@qq.com

ABSTRACT

"Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" transcends the conventional framework of official media in constructing the Chinese image. It shifts from a communication approach primarily focused on "self-construction" to prioritize "other-construction," while still incorporating "self-construction" in a secondary role. This shift presents a more diverse perspective of the Chinese image. Additionally, the presences of well-known actors and celebrities with a huge fan base also play important roles in international communication and the construction of the Chinese image. The show has received unanimous praise from audiences and has a wide-ranging overseas influence. It is broadcast across various social media platforms worldwide, achieving remarkable reach and impact. Upon investigation, it is observed that frame theory is mainly utilized in analyzing news events rather than variety shows. Therefore, this study adopts a case study method along with a text analysis method, employing a three-level analysis that categorizes frames into high, medium, and low levels, to analyze the Chinese variety show "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road." The research found that the program represents a successful transformation of travel variety shows, not only breaking the "homogenization" dilemma of variety shows but also broadening the international audience's understanding of China, playing a positive role in the construction of the Chinese image.

KEYWORDS

Frame Theory; Chinese Image; Variety Shows.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1974, Goffman first defined the concept of frame theory in his book *Frame Analysis*. It refers to "the psychological principles and subjective processes through which individuals organize events." He believed that frame theory is people's understanding and response to the current social reality. Specifically, people analyze and understand social events through frames, and assign them certain social significance. In his view, frames are an important means for individuals to transform social reality into subjective reality. In 1984, Adoni and Mane pointed out three levels of constructing a real society, namely objective reality, symbolic reality, and subjective reality. Building upon this, Chinese scholar Zang Guoren proposed a three-level framework analysis method, dividing the three levels of reality into high, medium, and low structures, corresponding to Adoni and Mane's three types of reality [1]. High-level reality is the reality from a macro perspective, used to describe objective facts existing outside individuals, usually constructing its authenticity at the thematic level; medium-level reality is the reality at the meso level, representing reality by identifying and constructing various

symbols and their combinations in the objective world; while low-level reality starts from a micro perspective, perceiving the reality hidden in various discourses and rhetoric through personal subjective viewpoints [2]. Understanding various realities at different levels is the core of the structure of frame theory. By comparing the interpretation of three types of reality and their three-level structures using the three-level analysis method, we can organize the presentation of the theme, content, and ideology of the show as well as its narrative style and audio-visual language, thereby exploring the program's dissemination path for the Chinese image and studying its construction logic.

2. HIGH-LEVEL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The high-level structure refers to the overarching significance of an event, namely the central or primary meaning of the issue, which can also be understood as the essence of a specific event. High-level structure analysis enables us to understand the overall content of the issue from a macro perspective and conduct a more specific analysis [3]. "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road " is a youth travel and exploration program featuring a brother-sister dynamic. The theme of the program is to lead the audience to appreciate the culture and charm of countries and regions along the "Belt and Road" through the form of travel and exploration. Moreover, it showcases the changes brought by Chinese wisdom, solutions, and strength to the countries along the route [4].

The fifth season of "Divas Hit the Road" distinguishes itself from its predecessors in several ways. Unlike the previous ones where the focus was primarily on the interaction between guests and travel experiences, this season integrates "learning" and "travel." During the 23-day journey, the program incorporates "compulsory courses," "elective courses," and "pop quizzes," providing guests with opportunities to delve deeper into the countries and cities along the "Belt and Road" and the influence of China in these places.

The program consists of 14 episodes, with an average duration of 93 minutes per episode. According to statistics, there are a total of three segments showcasing China's image from a technological perspective, totaling 55 minutes and 55 seconds. These segments introduce and demonstrate three technological advancements in China: the DWS automated sorting equipment for express delivery in Riyadh, the Haramain High Speed Railway spanning 450.28 kilometers in Saudi Arabia, constructed by China Railway 18th Bureau, and the Pelješac Bridge in Croatia, constructed by China. Additionally, there are five segments showcasing China's image from a cultural perspective, totaling 73 minutes and 53 seconds. These segments directly or indirectly depict China's etiquette, ethnic, artistic, festival, and culinary cultures. Among these, the highlight of the sixth episode was the performance on the ancient cruise ship by the "Divas Hit the Road" team. Qin Hailu showcased Chinese opera, Qin Lan presented traditional Chinese qipao, Xin Zhilei demonstrated China's Northeastern Quyi arts, Hu Xianxu performed Tianjin Crosstalk, Wang Anyu recited the article Shao Nian Zhong Guo Shuo by Liang Qichao, and the Uyghur girl Dilireba donned ethnic attire to perform Xinjiang dance, accompanied by melodious music and confident demeanor, captivating the audience. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin and six overseas Chinese embassies' accounts recommended "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" to the world. China's rich culture is presented through various media platforms in a relaxed and natural variety show format, perfectly showcasing on the global stage. The story of the elegant Icelandic grandmother in the 11th episode is also remarkable. Having visited China 38 times, she opened a private Chinese museum in her home in 2015. While introducing her home to everyone, she shared her experiences of visiting China when she was young, expressing her love for China without reservation. This episode, through the visiting approach and the story of the elderly grandmother who loves Chinese culture, introduces China to the audience and international friends. "Other-construction" is successfully achieved at this moment.

In addition to the aforementioned segments, there are many more that reflect Chinese culture, attitudes, and wisdom, but they are intertwined with the guests' speech, expressions, and life attitudes. In summary, from a high-level structural analysis perspective, it is undeniable that "Divas Hit the

Road: Silk Road" has successfully constructed the Chinese image. One can intuitively feel the warmth and strength of China, which is both admirable and adorable. Overall, there are slightly more segments showcasing "self-construction" than "other-construction." Although the approach may seem somewhat direct, it is relatively mild, resulting in high acceptance among the audience while watching.

3. MIDDLE-LEVEL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The middle-level structure is reflected in the narrative method, which provides a more detailed delineation of the composition of the subject. Zang Guoren summarized seven analysis dimensions, including main events, preceding events, history, outcomes, impacts, attribution, and evaluation. Narrative is a way of expressing things. From the perspective of theoretical research, narrative is to some extent a theoretical reproduction of research conclusions. From the perspective of video creation, differentiated narratives will be created through comparative, integrated, and repetitive expression methods to achieve the best communication effect. The middle-level narrative method can showcase the vibrant and diverse image of China in many ways and through various means.

3.1. Comparative Narrative: Highlighting Differences

Comparative narrative juxtaposes two distinctly different, contradictory, or opposing elements. In "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road," China is often compared with specific aspects or fields of other countries to emphasize their differences, shaping some social situations and cultural phenomena distinct from those of the host country to showcase cultural differences formed under different backgrounds. The program also adopts a comparative approach to narrate Chinese society. For instance, in the first episode, when the "Divas Hit the Road" team was delivering parcels in Saudi Arabia, the customers did not answer their phones, and when the guests attempted to knock on doors, they were stopped by locals because in Saudi Arabia, ringing the doorbell directly is considered very impolite. Locals attach great importance to privacy, and in more severe cases, they might even directly call the police. Although this segment lasts for less than two minutes and does not deeply explore the differences in behavioral habits such as "ringing the doorbell," the cultural differences between the two can be clearly felt from the guests' performances, communication, and audience feedback.

3.2. Integrated Narrative: Seeking Common Ground

The integrated narrative combines cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal elements acquired after the interaction of things. "He Er Wei Yi (合而为一)" is a traditional Chinese concept, which means to unify as one. The program, while highlighting differences, also seeks some common ground by connecting items from other countries with China through specific situations. After highlighting cultural differences, "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" shifts its focus to shaping commonalities. For example, in the 13th episode, the "Divas Hit the Road" team arrived in Iceland during the local "rotten food festival," where both sides brought out their "specialties" to see whose food had a stronger "rotten smell." Throughout the process of selection, tasting, and evaluation, both sides made grimaces and exclaimed, "It's too difficult, I can't eat anymore." The program tends towards entertainment expression, but in just a few minutes, both sides got to know and tried each other's "rotten food." The similar yet different "rotten food culture" attracted the audience's attention, broke down barriers, cleverly linked the two cultures, and built a cute and interesting bridge of friendship: towards the end of the episode, an Icelandic guy who tasted "Chinese rotten food" actively exchanged sweaters with Hu Xianxu, leaving contact information and becoming friends from different countries.

3.3. Repetitive Narrative: Deepening Impressions

The repetitive narrative relies on repeating related themes or events to achieve a specific effect. This is a fundamental rhetorical device. In "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road," the program team set up a "pop quiz" module, where they tested the knowledge learned during the "learning journey" and allocated play funds based on the test results. While the guests were memorizing knowledge points, we in front of the screen were constantly "reminded." Eventually, this knowledge naturally entered our brains, and the image of China was repeatedly sketched in our minds. In addition to this, the program team deliberately edited the guests' catchphrases, such as "完了" (wan le) and "栓Q (shuan Q)," and inserted them into trailers with rhythmic music to create a tense atmosphere, enhancing the program's appeal, retaining the audience, and increasing audience stickiness. On social media in China, "完了" (wan le) is an internet slang for some people, indicating something like "Uh-oh! Things have gone wrong." On the other hand, "栓Q" (shuan Q) sounds like "thank you" from English, but it's not genuinely expressing gratitude to someone. Instead, it conveys a sense of sarcasm and helplessness.

4. LOW-LEVEL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The low-level structure focuses on discourse analysis. In audio-visual texts, discourse analysis refers to examining the connections between different elements of audio-visual language within specific contexts, which often constrains the understanding of the objective world. Michel Foucault believed that "discourse" is the framework people use to understand the world, examine knowledge, and create meaning. Therefore, indirectly conveying various information through audio-visual language can more effectively showcase the image of China.

4.1. Content

In this season, the "Divas Hit the Road" production team took the theme of the "Silk Road." Unlike typical travel shows that showcase the daily lives and entertainment of numerous celebrities, the program shifted from the classic "self-guided tour" to an "educational travel" format, which brought a new dimension to the scope of travel. This innovative travel approach garnered a total view count of 340 million, highlighting a focus on communication and learning. The program introduced two major content modules: "compulsory courses" and "elective courses," integrating learning content into various travel activities and tasks. This allowed participants to experience the unique cultural heritage and history of the locales, exchange international friendships, and make new acquaintances. For example, in the first episode, guests were required to learn practical knowledge such as everyday Arabic phrases and etiquette before departing for Saudi Arabia. Despite the differences in language, culture, and history between the two countries, people from both nations actively learned each other's languages and voluntarily sought to understand each other's history, laying a solid foundation for mutual understanding and fostering a sense of China's warmth and friendliness.

4.2. Headlines

The titles set by the "Divas Hit the Road" production team are direct and clear. Even without watching the entire episode, one can understand the general situation of the current program through the titles alone. This increases the efficiency of communication and the liveliness of interaction, aligning with the characteristics of information dissemination in the new media era. For example, titles like "Divas Hit the Road: Snorkeling Adventure" and "Crazy Night Chatting" are straightforward and informative.

4.3. Music

The theme song and various background music of "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" are highly aligned with the program's tone and context. They enhance the viewing experience, with the eyes and thoughts of the audience following the visuals while being complemented by appropriate and comfortable music. This creates a pleasant atmosphere unique to the "Divas Hit the Road" team, immersing viewers in the show.

5. CONCLUSION

"Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" constructs the image of China across three different levels, each with its own emphasis. At the macro level, the program tends to portray a "hardcore" sense of China's national strength and cultural heritage. At the meso level, the narrative techniques of comparison, integration, and repetition make the image of China more three-dimensional, thereby increasing public acceptance. At the micro level, the unique audio-visual language compensates for the lack of meaning in the process of information transmission, breaking down barriers of borders and platforms, and providing a solid foundation for the dissemination of the Chinese image.

In conclusion, the variety show "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" has played a positive role in constructing the image of China. It presents Chinese culture and image in a relaxed and entertaining manner, bridging the information gap that exists in high-context communication and expanding the audience's understanding of China. "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" fills the gaps in the scope and thematic setting of similar variety shows, representing a successful transformation and highlighting the importance of "other-construction" in international communication. This study, based on the framework theory, focuses on the variety show "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" and uses case analysis and text analysis to examine its characteristics and advantages. However, there are still many shortcomings, such as insufficient depth of content, limited sample selection to variety shows, insufficient data volume and granularity, and lack of explanatory power. In the future, it is suggested to choose more representative news or artistic works, refine the data, and then analyze in-depth how various works narrate the Chinese story, present Chinese culture, and construct the Chinese image.

REFERENCES

- [1] Cheng, X. (2022). Research on the Construction of Chinese Image by "Foreign Celebrities with a huge fan base" from the Perspective of Frame Theory. *Voice Screen World*, (21), 106-108.
- [2] Zhou, Z. (2023). Content Analysis and Optimization Strategy of "Silver-Haired Celebrities with a huge fan base" Videos on Douyin under the Framework Theory (Doctoral dissertation, Communication University of China). DOI: 10.27483/d.cnki.gbjgc.2023.000157.
- [3] Xu, Z., & Xie, B. (2024). Analysis of Dramatic Paradigm and Image Transformation of TV Series "Flourish" from the Perspective of Frame Theory. *Contemporary TV*, (03), 92-96.
- [4] Wang, Y. (2024). Innovative Development of Cultural Tourism Variety Shows under the Background of "Belt and Road Initiative" - Taking "Divas Hit the Road: Silk Road" as an Example. *Audiovisual*, (03), 97-100.
- [5] Lin, X. (2024). Research on the Construction of "Guochao" Image in Mainstream Media from the Perspective of Frame Theory (Master's thesis, Liaoning University). DOI: 10.27209/d.cnki.glniu.2023.002328.
- [6] Huang, B. (2022). Analyzing the Popularity of Slow Travel Variety Shows from the Perspective of Communication Psychology-Taking China's First Batch of Slow Travel Variety Show "Divas Hit the Road" as an Example. *Journalism and Cultural Construction*, (15), 98-100.