

Research on “paradigm shift strategy” in the development of “British documentary”

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Abstract: British documentary has a long history, after World War II, BBC became the dominant force in the TV industry, and gradually formed a unique British production style in the production of TV documentary; However, with the intervention of documentary programs, the documentary gradually has the orientation of “entertaining” and “catering to the audience”, and has gradually replaced the traditional “social education” function.

At the same time, the traditional documentary is also facing many difficulties in the current new media era; However, the current British TV documentaries still find their own unique narrative coping strategies in the midst of numerous crises, and are compatible with the dual functions of “topic and depth”.

Key words: British TV documentary; Documentary programs; Multiple interactive trends

British documentaries have a long history in film and television programs, dating back to the early 20th century. Most of the early documentaries mainly showed real things and events, attempted to record and present real world events and scenes with film technology methods, and were produced by entertainment companies and broadcast by cinemas.

Against this background, in the 1930s, Britain began a “documentary film movement” proposed by John Grierson.

I. The “origin and context” of the development of “TV documentary” -- social significance

In this regard, Grierson was deeply influenced by Vertov’s theory of “film eyes”, so he believed that “everything performed with fictional stories and artificial scenery is the media misuse of film”, so the documentary must maintain its “authenticity” when shooting. For example, the famous film *Drift-net Fishing Boat* in 1929 has practiced Grierson’s film theory. This film not only truly reproduces the fishing life of fishermen in the North Sea, but also makes it have a wide range of social communication in the sublimation of art. At the same time, in the shooting and production, Grierson used the “symphonic montage technique” proposed by “Eisenstein” and “Pudovkin” to “reproduce the fisherman’s life”, and at the same time, it also imbibe the poetic beauty of “synchronization of rhythm and rhythm” for this quite Marine atmosphere scene.

Due to the success of the fishing boat in “*Drift-net Fishing Boat*”, Grierson also united around a group of artists who are keen on recording film, thus forming the famous British “documentary film movement”. This movement also marked the rise of documentary on the stage of world film history. After World War II, the BBC became the dominant force in the television industry and quickly became the main force of “documentary television”. Influenced by the “documentary film movement”, the main creative paradigm of these documentaries is still to “highlight the changes in the process of industrialization and urbanization in Britain”.

With the persistence of this production tradition, British TV documentaries finally ushered in the peak of development in the 1960s, such as *Panorama*, *Man Alive* and *Tonight*, which have left a profound imprint on the history of British TV. During this period, “observational documentary” became the mainstream of TV documentary, so all the production basis should be based on the occurrence of “facts”. Therefore, most British audiences regard “TV documentary” as a way to observe “modern social problems”, through which they can have a deep insight into the typical social problems existing at present. And the basic demands of audience watching movies also lie in “seeking truth”. Once the public finds that there are distorted “fictional events” in documentaries, it will cause negative communication effects.

II. The “diversion of entertainment” involved in “documentary programs” -- topic creation

In the 1970s, the progress of science and technology allowed more types of documentaries to be produced; At this time, the documentary production methods began to diversify, such as camera carrying, single shooting, interview, entertainment, closing close-up, and with the promotion of special effects appeared a lot of special effects technology and so on.

1. The operation pattern of “entertainment” and “market”

Until the 1990s, “documentary performance” and “documentary soap opera” began to appear in the UK and gradually became the mainstream of society. For example, “*Ten Years Younger*” launched by Channel4 was based on the theme of “beauty and appearance level”. Although this program was highly praised at the time, But it also created an atmosphere of “appearance anxiety” to a certain extent, which virtually became a marketing advertisement for cosmetics and big sales.

This kind of theme gradually introduces people into the trap of consumerism and entertainment culture by virtue of its low production price, and gradually deconstructs the authority of “traditional documentary” in the transformation of “entertainment paradigm”.

However, this trend did not stop there until the early 21st century, in the West, there appeared a kind of documentary program combining “social experiment” and “reality show”, such as “*Big Brother*” launched by the Dutch “Endmore Entertainment Company”. This program would invite a group of total strangers to live together in a room full of cameras and microphones, and record all their actions 24 hours a day, and the final edit would be broadcast on TV. During this time, the contestants will compete in a variety of competitions within

the playing time, and the one who remains will win a grand prize.

Due to the popularity of this form and the novel subject matter, it was widely adapted and launched simultaneously in Europe and the United States once it was put on the line at that time, and it seemed to form a “Big Brother trend”.

2. The boundary between “real” and “virtual” is blurred

In the summer of 2000, Channel4 in the United Kingdom also began to launch an adapted version of “Big Brother”, and created social attention by creating conflicts and topics. Although the addition of this “new production paradigm” was well received by the public in a short period of time, it also caused some negative effects: First, the addition of “entertainment” and “topicality” gradually weakened the “social meaning construction function” of TV documentaries, and replaced it with a kind of “new pop culture output” mixed with clouds and dragon; Secondly, the deliberately created “topicality” has gradually blurred the boundary between “fact” and “fiction”. As a result, the “seriousness” of documentaries is also challenged. At the same time, this atmosphere led to the emergence of a “mockumentary” form of comedy in the UK, such as the sitcom “The Office Laughing Cloud” directed by Ricky Gervais in July 2001. It was filmed as a “TV documentary” and broadcast to the world on BBC World Service, where it was well received at the time. As a fictionalized narrative form, “mockumentary has been moving between the two extremes of reality and fiction, gaining the audience’s trust by creating an illusion of reality”. However, at this time, the audience’s aesthetic trend has begun to change, they will not feel uncomfortable because of the “comedy” of “TV documentary”, and they can no longer tolerate the reset of “topic and assumption” to the “traditional documentary form”; At this time, the audience is more concerned about the “emotional value provision” of the TV program itself, that is, as long as the program itself can please the audience, it can achieve the improvement of the audience rating. However, this change in viewing demand also quietly breeds a negative orientation: First of all, in this situation, “consumer culture”, “entertainment spirit” and “offensive art” and other negative values began to take advantage of the opportunity, and put on the skin of “orthodox TV programs”, such as “provoke confrontation” and “create anxiety” in the form of distorting the negative values of the society. Secondly, the large-scale “generalization magic reform” and “interaction between truth and falsehood” have also damaged the overall “authenticity image” of the documentary to a certain extent. Therefore, the definition of “documentary” and “non-documentary” is more and more difficult at this time, because many TV programs with pre-set plots will exist in the form of “documentary”, and will not crown with the description of “pseudo-documentary”, which makes the living space of “traditional TV documentary” smaller and smaller.

III. The cross-border “new crisis” in the “new media era” -- media promotion

In view of the above, Tony Dumont, senior lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London, believes that TV documentaries are dying, but this argument is biased. As Peter Moore, senior managing editor of documentaries at Channel4, puts it: “The critically minded documentarians who apply their critical faculties to the genre itself are being so creative that they are keeping documentaries alive.”

1. The natural dimensions of ‘multiple storytelling’ and ‘puzzle setting’

In this regard, the BBC EARTH Channel documentary of BBC began to explore the new development path of traditional documentary gradually in the era of “the paradigm shift of entertainment”. First of all, BBC began to explore different kinds of themes and the possibility of multiple “cross-border narratives”, in order to achieve the dual combination of “social significance” and “topic creation”; At the same time, the production department also began to pay more and more attention to the change of film style, and achieve all-round upgrading in interpretation context, visual performance, music presentation, and other performances, in order to use the most popular form of cultural communication. In the field of natural science, “Planet Earth 2” in 2016, “Blue Planet 2” in 2017, and “Dynasty” in 2018 all achieved high ratings; And 2019’s Planet scored 9.3 on IMDB in a short period of time. From the perspective of narrative strategy, this science and education documentary makes full use of the “basic paradigm of conclusion and reasoning”. “The narrative structure is nested layer upon layer, and the characteristics of each planet are simply and clearly deduced; At the same time, it selectively designs, uses narrative time to divide narrative content, and uses multiple narrative languages to present profound scientific knowledge.” On this basis, the film emphasizes not the output of knowledge, but the “diversified inspiration” achieved by guiding the audience to think actively.

2. The social dimension of “media spectacle” and “focus topic”

At the same time, the BBC is also actively launching quality documentaries in the field of humanities and social sciences with great “social topics” and “academic depth” : for example, the 2015 documentary “Chinese Teachers in the UK” recorded a group of Chinese teachers who went to the UK to implement the social science experiment project of “Chinese education”. The film not only exposes the different educational concepts of Chinese teachers influenced by the authority cognition in the “cross-cultural environment”, but also exposes the conflict between Chinese and English. From the point of view of communication, the documentary is extremely representative because it creates a carefully crafted “media spectacle”. That is, “Through defamiliarization treatment of various shooting elements representing Chinese and Western cultures, a strong representation of cultural conflict is presented, thus strengthening the spectacle effect; At the same time, the dramatic performance in editing and narration further participated in the construction of this media spectacle “. Through the dissemination of this topic, the film quickly became the focus of discussion in various fields and gained a great reputation for a while; Audiences in both China and Britain began to think about “the nature of education” from different angles.

3. The dual consideration of “cultural connotation” and “topic creation”

To sum up, British documentaries have not fully merged with “entertainment” and “consumer culture” in the continuous engulfment, and give up the original traditional documentaries to create fine; On the contrary, in the past decade, the production platform led by the BBC has been launching a “diversified boutique launch” that takes into account both “cultural connotation” and “topic creation”. In this regard, it

can be found that both the cosmic theme of “Planet” and the educational theme of “Chinese Teacher in Britain” have adopted the structural scheme of highlighting “cultural representation” and creating “media wonders”.

First of all, this narrative strategy ensures the relatively objective presentation of the research process of “science and education” through the repeated paradigm of “logical inference” and “teaching experiment”. Whether it is the conjecture of the universe or the questioning of the education model, it can gradually guide the audience to take the initiative to think, and actively accept the content in a deep and hierarchical way from an “open perspective”. Secondly, both the “anthropomorphic interpretation of science” and the “narrative development of educational strategies” can gently expand the boring concepts of presenting “scientific terms” and “educational concepts” in an interesting form, which effectively combines “multiple narration” and “multiple inspiration” and avoids the transmission drawbacks of “single topic”

Epilogue

To sum up, the current British documentary production team has been very mature, not only completed its own paradigm change in two-way consideration and boutique creation, but also gradually realized its own unique “connotation construction”.

Although “entertainment” and “consumerism” have continued to have an impact on the development of documentaries, the British documentary production team still sticks to the path of creating high-quality products, and achieves a Jedi counterattack to survive in the gap of emerging documentaries.

Of course, with the multiple intervention of online documentaries, although the creation of British documentaries is still faced with many challenges from the Internet, the “multiple faces of network ecology” under the “paradigm shift” can still be used as the material of TV documentaries, which is also another “new opportunity” under the “crisis”.

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