

The narrative strategy of micro-documentary *If Treasure Can Talk* under the background of new media

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Abstract

If Treasure Could Talk is a TV documentary by CCTV Record Channel. Each 5-minute episode tells about a traditional Chinese cultural treasure. Based on the narrative strategy of micro-documentaries under the background of new media, this paper studies the narrative strategy from four aspects: narrative perspective, narrative theme, narrative structure and narrative language.

Keywords

New media, micro-documentary narrative strategy, *If Treasure Could Talk*.

1. Introduction

The advent of the short video era has impacted the production and distribution of documentaries. Micro-documentary is a new form of communication transformed by documentaries in the era of traditional media under the background of media integration. Micro-documentary inherits the advantages of authenticity and professionalism of traditional documentaries, while combining the characteristics of short video image forms in the era of new media, such as digitalization, interactivity, personalization, and time-space, and gradually develops to cater to the fragmented consumption and entertainment modes of the public [1]. Different from the previous TV information dissemination, the rapid development of video websites and the popularity of intelligent terminal devices have brought about a "second revolution" in the field of film and television. In recent years, the rise of online documentaries based on video platforms has reshaped the pattern of the documentary industry and become an important part of the entire industry. Among them, micro-documentaries have the characteristics of lightweight, simple, popular, contemporary, interactive, fragmented and multi-platform communication [2]. *If Treasure Could Talk* each episode is only 5 minutes long, indicating that the micro-documentary volume is small. The selection of materials in *Grandma Knows Best* is based on the daily life of the public, and the language used is also very civilian, indicating the popularity of micro-documentaries. The micro-documentary *From Chang 'an to Rome* released in 2020 conforms to the background of *The Times*, and carries forward the traditional Chinese culture, indicating that the micro-documentary is developed by combining *The Times* and the current environment and hot topics. This paper takes *If Treasure Could Talk* as an example to analyze its narrative strategy. *If Treasure Could Talk* is a TV documentary jointly implemented by the Chinese Propaganda Department, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and CCTV, and produced by the CCTV Record Channel. The film introduces the Chinese spirit, Chinese aesthetics and Chinese values behind the national treasure, and leads the audience to understand Chinese culture through each 5-minute episode about a cultural treasure.

2. Research Status

The advent of the short video era has triggered the development of micro-documentaries, and micro-documentaries have flourished. At present, scholars' research is divided into the

following dimensions. 1) The influence of new media on the creation of micro-documentaries. In the *Research on the Creation of micro-Documentaries in the New Media Era*, Lou Yuhang discusses the creation method of micro-documentaries in the new media era, and content is the key to video creation. For micro-documentaries, due to the limited time and space, the theme and quality of its content are more important. Therefore, the creation of micro-documentaries must be closely related to the theme and the video content should be novel and unique, to make the documentaries full of vitality and value, attract the attention of the audience, and create works with temperature and emotion [3]. Taking *The Great Craftsman* as the research object, Zhai Jingqian explored the influence of new media on its production and content and concluded that the influence of new media on the content of new media micro-documentary is mainly reflected in micro-narrative, single theme, visual presentation and diversified form innovation [4]. Wang Mengyao interpreted the influence of new media on the program conception, program text and program value realization of Chinese TV cultural and exposition programs in the *Content Construction and Value Realization of TV cultural and Exposition Programs from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics* [5]. 2) Narrative strategies of micro-documentaries under the background of new media. Different media have different narrative modes due to different creation tools and communication tools. A narrative is an important way for people to organize information and explain facts by using various media forms. From the perspective of audio-visual language, Qi Boyang analyzed the audio-visual language features of *If Treasure Could Talk*, such as the first-person narrative perspective, the cute rhetoric of cultural treasures personification, exquisite animation design, and music with great artistic appeal [6]. Long Junda analyzed the commentary from the first-person perspective of *If Treasure Could Speak* and believed that the combination of commentary, light, shadow, and sound made the emotional transmission more direct and shortened the distance between the messenger and the receiver. The fragmented and collage narrative language style is a typical feature of *If Treasure Could Speak* [7]. This paper finds that the research on the narrative strategy of micro-documentary focuses on a certain factor, but few literatures can put forward the paradigm of narrative strategy. Based on the research dimension proposed by relevant literatures, this paper takes *If Treasure Can Speak* as an example to study its narrative strategy more comprehensively.

3. The Narrative Strategy of *If Treasure Could Talk*

If Treasure Could Talk adopts short, concise and ingenious copy, which adapts the development of new media. The tone of the commentary of each episode is also different, and the picture and music of each frame also fit the aesthetic of contemporary young people, narrowing the distance with the audience. Looking at each section alone, it is a beautiful work of art, but it is a magnificent long scroll spanning five thousand years. Through the shooting of the documentary, the cultural treasures are brought to life. For micro-documentaries, the basic level is to analyze the narrative content, that is, "what the work presents", and the deeper level is to analyze the expression form of the narrative, that is, "how the work presents". This paper elaborates on four aspects: narrative perspective, narrative theme, narrative structure and narrative language.

3.1. Narrative Perspective

Narrative perspective also known as narrative focus, refers to the specific angle from which story content is observed and told in narrative language [8]. The narrative perspective of film and television works includes omniscient perspective, internal perspective, and external perspective. The omniscient perspective is the exploration of events from any angle, making the narrative clearer, but there is no suspense setting. In *If Treasure Could Talk*, the omniscient perspective is widely used to narrate and explain the present destination of each treasure. The omniscient perspective is not restricted by any conditions. The internal perspective is based on

the information about people or things in the micro-documentary, which can be anthropomorphized to deal with things, with a sense of substitution, and narrow the distance of the audience. The external perspective is to probe the event from the outside. For example, simultaneous voice, narration, recording, etc. The narrator explains things from an objective and impartial perspective.

If Treasures Could Talk attempts to make artifacts "talk" and let them tell their stories, which is a kind of anthropomorphism. If Treasure Could Talk the narrative form of anthropomorphism is a novel and important narrative technique, that is, the personification and characterization of cultural treasures, so that cultural treasures can tell stories from the perspective of the first person. Documentaries adhering to the principle of objectivity and rigor, look at everything from a didactic perspective, so they often deliberately avoid the narration of the first person, which has strong subjective color. This situation has changed in If Treasure Can Talk, which gives cultural treasures the ability to "talk", conveying cultural treasures knowledge and allowing the audience to feel the personality and characteristics of cultural treasures. The use of the internal perspective enables the narrator and the viewer to maintain the same angle as the characters in the story, and have the same degree of information exchange and acceptance, so it can easily bring the audience into the plot. In the first season of If Treasure Could Talk, the Changxin Lantern of the Western Han Dynasty was narrated from an internal perspective. The image of Changxin Lantern was a court woman of the Han Dynasty. Therefore, Changxin Lantern were personified as court women to tell the story of the Han Dynasty. In the Human Head Pot, the omniscient perspective is used to narrate. The narrator says that the Human Head Pot is the first human gaze and a poetic call: you come from the earth, your head slightly raised, as if looking up at the sky. The use of an omniscient perspective to explain, and increase the sense of cultural treasures, shows that the Human Head Pot's survival, reproduction played an important role. It makes people think about the meaning of life, the origin of humanity and deepens the theme. When introducing the Five Grottoes of Tanyao, the text says that "the Buddha statues in the Five Grottoes are the faces of the five emperors in the history of Northern Wei", "By carving, they emerge from a mountain." This is an omniscient perspective to introduce the audience to the original contents of the five caves and the process of their carving. Therefore, in the source of cultural treasures, creative historical background, and creative process. If The Treasure Can Speak with an omniscient perspective, it cannot be limited by the scope of subjective cognition, and the creator's thoughts can jump arbitrarily in time and space. In the 43 episodes of the first season, 28 discs are told from external perspectives and told from the perspective of professionals. It is worth mentioning that If Treasure could talk opening words of "This is..." Such expressions narrow the distance between history and today and dispel the audience's sense of mystery and alienation from the national treasure. The use of rhetorical questions at the same time, as if having a dialogue with the audience, increases the closeness and interactivity of the documentary.

3.2. Narrates the Theme

Each cultural treasure in If Treasures Could Talk is a coordinate of an era, marking the traces of Chinese civilization in historical time and space. The Human Head Pot produced between 6,000 and 6,500 years ago, presents human creation and social formation in the Neolithic Age, representing the initial self-gazing of human beings. Jiahu Bone Flute, derived from crane bones. It is the earliest wind instrument in the world. It is self-evident in promoting the process of human music culture. Visitors can see Chinese historical evolution, cultural treasures system and aesthetic taste, as well as the development vein and value concept of Chinese civilization. Nymph of the Luo River tells a beautiful love story. Flower Tree Golden-head dressed and gilded silver wine pot explain the exchange of goods, aesthetic exchange and ideological collision on the Silk Road during the Northern Zhou Dynasty and Tang Dynasty. Preface of the Orchid

Pavilion(ShenLong edition), six steeds of Zhao Mausoleum and Dunhuang frescoes depict traditional arts such as calligraphy, brocade and stone murals. Yellow River Iron Ox shows the ingenious design of ancient Chinese architecture. These cultural treasures contain profound historical allusions, and traditional art also carries the collective memory of the Chinese nation, the inheritance of civilization, humanity, and the change of artistic aesthetics, the relationship between man and nature, man and God shows the philosophy of life and the feelings of family and country.

3.3. Narrative Structure

If Treasure Could Talk uses block narrative structure and rambling narrative structure, and combines linear narrative structure with non-linear narrative structure to construct the basic narrative structure of micro-documentary.

3.3.1. Narrative Plot

1) The Block Structure Unites the Theme

Block structure is a common narrative structure of documentaries, which is widely used in the creation of documentaries. If Treasure Could Talk, each episode recounts an artifact, and each episode is an independent narrative. There is no causal relationship, no plot relationship. This is a modular nonlinear narrative structure. Therefore, the audience watches fragmentary through mobile terminals, breaking the disadvantages of the linear narrative structure of traditional documentaries. But each episode of If Treasure Talk documentary is sorted in chronological order, putting each episode together is a long scroll of history spanning. Therefore, the micro-documentary also forms a linear narrative structure, which makes the national treasure speak to form a whole, clearly showing the ancient Chinese civilization, and reducing the confusion and disorder of the audience's thinking and time when watching.

2) The Rambling Layout Highlights the Theme

The rambling style is that the creator takes the subjective idea as the clue, and talks about what comes to mind, without having to cover everything, nor need to have strong causal logic, reflecting the real and natural sense of the world as seen by his own eyes. In If Treasure Could Talk, each episode does not have a strong cause-and-effect relationship, but each episode has two core events and one ancillary event. The two core events are the historical background of the cultural relic is introduced, and then the image of the cultural relic is introduced. The ancillary event is to introduce the humanistic spirit of the historical dynasty. Different from the linear structure, which pursues the interlinking of beginning, development, climax and ending, the rambling structure weakens the dramatic contradiction and does not take the strong conflict as an element to promote the process of the story, but chooses a relatively plain narrative mode that is close to life. This narrative structure will make the audience feel intimate and natural.

3.3.2. Space-Time Construction

If National Treasure Could Talk is divided by the timeline. From the first quarter of the Upper ancient Neolithic Age, the second quarter of the Spring and Autumn Warring States and Qin and Han dynasties, all the way to the third quarter of the more prosperous Wei, Jin, Sui and Tang dynasties, narrating the human customs and social changes at that time. In the construction of time and space, time sequence and space jump are used, narration interposed and flashback are used. In the Changxin Lantern, the commentary from the modern to the ancient times, and then jump to the present. From explaining the scene of the discovery of Changxin lantern, it also describes the view and evaluation of people on Changxin Lantern today. King Goujian of Yue did not develop a brief introduction according to the development line of time but used narration interposed. It first told the sword, told the swordsman, and then inserted the historical story of the battle between Wu and Yue. In Pure Gauze Unlined Dress, the single

garment worn by models in modern society begins, and the ancient pure gauze unlined dress is related to each other. Such a leaping narrative space will make the audience feel very intimate and connect modern civilization with ancient civilization better.

Narrative space includes historical space and modern space, figurative space and abstract space. counting rod showed the specific materials of counting rod with the nine chapters on the mathematical art as the starting point. At this time, the space was in the museum, and then transferred the space to the classroom scene where people learn to counting rod, and then transferred the space to the scene of the application of counting rod in ancient times, and talked about the role of counting rod in ancient times. The transformation of space not only reduces the strangeness, but also highlights the influence of ancient things on people today, the evolution of ancient things, and the inheritance and development of ancient things and ideas by people today. It shows the historical value and the sense of The Times.

3.4. Narrative Language

3.4.1. Picture

The picture is an essential element in the narrative language. Through the expression of modern technology and the use of technology flow, the picture is more in line with the specific content and ideas to be expressed in the work. The picture production of *If Treasure could Talk* has the following characteristics.

1) Montage Collages Bring Culture to the Masses

In the 16th episode, when the clay figurines unearthed from Astana Tomb introduced itself as know-all, it used the document as the background of the picture. Then it superimposed various styles of text and multiple repeated images of the clay figurines unearthed from Astana Tomb, and the whole picture was dazzling. The narrative content is cultural treasure, while the concrete presentation is a parody of the cultural style and form of the subculture. Collage the pictures excavated at that time with the modern related pictures and combine them into new picture works, which is precisely in line with the young aesthetic and young circle culture. Through parody, genre boundaries are gradually eliminated, serious and heavy narrative traditions are abandoned, and public aesthetics and preferences are approached.

2) Digital Technology Enables Micro-documentaries

If Treasure could Talk uses modern digital technology to create a variety of animations, creating a cool atmosphere to attract the audience's attention. In the *Nymph of the Luo River*, the original static boat, willow trees, characters and other elements are made into dynamic cartoons, people seem to be looking at the painting, but also like watching the drama, the people in the painting vividly interpret their stories. In the *Preface of the Orchid Pavilion*(ShenLong edition) also adopted the form of animation and added big data technology. The main picture of the collection is a piece of white paper, on which the shadow of willow branches is projected. Big data algorithms are used to simulate the original calligraphy of Wang Xizhi, and also simulate the natural environment where ladybugs fly. The use of digital technology restores the creation scene of the *Preface of the Orchid Pavilion*. This natural and unadorned picture adds to the sense of the scene, taking the audience to the ninth year of Yonghe, with Wang Xizhi and his friends in the Kuaiji Mountain. Although the picture presented is simple, it enhances the narrative experience of the film, and brings strong emotional feelings. audience have become witnesses to the birth of the famous work. Digitalization makes cultural relics move from static to dynamic, which is more attractive to audiences who like visual impact and are used to fast-paced browsing.

3.4.2. Shots

As a means of artistic expression, shots affect narrative rhythm in micro-documentaries. Shots affect the speed and relaxation of narrative [9].

The rhythm of *If Treasure Could Talk* is a combination of shots and montage clips. The shots adopts the way of long shot and short shot crossing. For example, three shots are used at the beginning of the Tri-coloured camel carrying musicians on the back. A five-second close-up of the camel, a seven-second close-up of the camel orchestra, and a four-second panorama of the camel tomb. These three slow-speed shots cooperate with the slow rotation of cultural treasures in the picture, forming a slow narrative situation. The use of a long shot enables the audience to have a comprehensive understanding of the cultural treasures at the beginning, laying the foundation for the narrative. When describing other aspects of the camel tomb, the shot is significantly faster, and the length of the shots are only about two to three seconds. The staggered use of long and short shots brings the audience impact and reduces aesthetic fatigue. In the introduction of Hongshan Jade Dragon, the picture quickly clips various dragon images: nine dragon wall, and panlong pattern steps. Then transition to the dragon image in painting and porcelain. The dragon images from the jade pendant in the shape of a dragon of the Qing Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty dragon jade painting, and finally back to the Hongshan jade dragon. In the fast-moving montage clip, the audience followed the picture to complete a trace of the dragon culture, which also confirmed the important position of the dragon image in traditional culture. On the one hand, the processing of the shot and editing rhythm speeds up the speed of movement, which has a certain impact on the audience; On the other hand, it can promote the emotional expression of the narrative, cause the audience's emotional changes to a certain extent, and trigger the audience's thinking.

3.4.3. Sound

Sound is a symbol of narrative language. In *If a National Treasure Could Speak*, the use of sound often affects the audience's emotions and deepens the audience's impression of the content. The film uses a variety of music and pictures to cooperate, showing the collision and fusion of traditional and modern elements, making the content of the micro-documentary more interesting and more lively and modern style.

1) Use Rich Music and Sound Effects

For historical relics documentaries, the depth of history and deep thinking on cultural civilization can be expressed through sound effects, and the audience can have different feelings and cognition through sound changes [10]. As the cultural relics micro-documentary should express the content with profound cultural accumulation, the theme is solemn and the content is extensive, so the overall music style of *If Treasure can Talk* tends to be grand and elegant classical. However, each episode of *If Treasure Could Talk* tells a different cultural treasure, so each episode has a unique temperament and style under the big tone, and these diverse styles increase the appeal of *If Treasure could Talk*.

The brocade of animals and flowers uses rock music, and the instruments used are drums and percussion instruments. In the introduction of the patterns of the brocade, drums and various percussion instruments are added, and the picture uses modern game special effects to show the brocade, coupled with the active music of rock. It seems to set up a bridge between modern special effects technology and ancient textile technology, so that people can narrow the distance with ancient brocade in modern music. In *The Yellow River Iron Ox*, the picture is to introduce the role of the Yellow River Iron Ox. The musical instruments used are human voices and flutes. *The Yellow River Iron Ox* is an infrastructure project that has stood for thousands of years, and the remote sound made by human voices and flutes makes it seem that the wisdom of ancient people in building Bridges thousands of years ago still shines through the music. In the civet pattern lacquer dish, the music used is auto-tune remix-themed. It showing a modern music style that is not constrained and dares to challenge authority.

Music is the most direct expression of emotion, if the music changes little, the work is composed of large pieces of similar background music, and it is easy to make the audience feel tedious. If

Treasure Could Talk takes care to use a variety of music when describing different cultural relics, alternating with the theme soundtrack, adding to the richness and appeal of the work. Make the heavy historical elements become more life, younger, and feel that these national treasures come alive.

2) Use Infectious Sound Acting

Sound adds atmosphere, mood, and character [11]. The speed and intonation of dubbing will directly affect the overall presentation of narrative works. There are two kinds of dubbing in *If Treasure could Talk*, one is commentary dubbing, that is, narration in a broad sense. The other is the voice acting of virtual characters. The narration was completed by Yang Chen. He used a steady and even tone when describing objective historical facts of cultural relics, and his tone would adjust accordingly in some special situations. In the description of Nymph of the Luo Rive, the general tone of the commentary is light and low, like a dream whispered to others. When telling the situation of Huo Qubing's battle, the voice becomes helpless but passionate, bringing the audience to the outside of the fierce battle, witnessing Huo Qubing's glorious life. In *If Treasure Could Talk*, cultural treasures are personified and a certain storyline is added, so it is necessary to voice cultural treasures with different personality characteristics. The dubbing voice used by the Drum and rap pottery figurines to introduce his career and social living environment is cheerful and lively, with a little teasing tone, which matches the Drum and Rap Pottery Figurines's career. The dub of the dialogue between the Tang sword and the Han sword has quite a sense of mentoring. The Tang sword's voice speed is like that of a young man full of vigor, while the Han sword's voice is calm. The two roles can be accurately distinguished through different dub tones, showing the age gap between them. Therefore, the dubbing of *If Treasure Could Talk* fits the emotion, so that it can show a rich and appropriate meaning, immerse the audience in it, and deepen the sense of interaction with the audience.

3)The Use of Accurate and Reliable Actual Sound

Actual sound is the most important factor for a documentary to show authenticity in sound [12]. Reasonable use of actual sound can increase the credibility of documentary and make the content of documentary more three-dimensional.

In *Bianzhong of Marquis Yi of Zeng*, there is no narration, but the audio of *Bianzhong of Marquis Yi of Zeng* recorded in 1986 is completely used. The *Bianzhong* scenes presented in the work were taken in 2018, while the recording of the sounds is from 1986. The picture uses arrows to indicate the vocal parts of the *Bianzhong*, and the corresponding sounds sound at the same time, so that the audience can have the most intuitive understanding and feeling of the *Bianzhong* without more words. The sound of chime bells spans more than two thousand years of time and space, and the national treasure really "speaks".The modern people hear the call from the ancients through the actual sound. The picture and the actual sound complement each other. Perfectly aligned with the original intention and goals of *If Treasure Could Talk*.

3.4.4. Text

If Treasure Could Talk adopts literary commentary, which is different from the daily poetic aesthetic language to shape the image and explain the meaning. Defamiliarization language and metaphorical language are the textual features of his commentary.

1) The language of defamiliarization

If Treasure Could Talk describes cultural relics not from the external perspective of the third person, but from the perspective of cultural treasures themselves, giving people a sense of novelty that cultural treasures are introducing themselves, which is a kind of defamiliarization. In addition, the language expression of defamiliarization in *If Treasure Could Talk* is also reflected in the defamiliarization of semantics, grammar and context.

The first is semantic defamiliarization. In the episode of the intense pursuit of jade in Nanyue, intense is an adjective used to supplement the degree and state of pursuit. Pursuit is usually described by words such as fierce, and strong is usually used to describe something thick and strong such as smell or smoke. The intense and pursuit in this sentence are not conventional collocation, and this way of expression is detached from daily life, which quickly mobilizes the audience's senses and thinking, and makes the fanatical pursuit of jade in Nanyue appreciable. Then there is the defamiliarization of grammar. Two gazes are used in the Human Head Pot, the former as a verb and the latter as a noun. The head of the human head pot looks toward the sky, showing an upward posture, which is referred to by the author with the term initial gaze. Gazing has become a noun. Between the initial gaze and the head pot, the audience needs to decode and transform to understand the meaning expressed by the creator, and the two times of repetition of "gazing" in the sentence also adds some poetic beauty to the language. The second is the defamiliarization of context. In the Drum and rap pottery figurines, it express a person's sickly state, which is obviously sad and sentimental tone. This is one of the clay figures making fun of the other clay figure. The teasing dialogue has a cheerful emotional color. In this context, the words "suffering from spinal disease" and "unbalanced nutrition" have undergone obvious variations, and the derogatory words are used with praise, which is refreshing.

2) Metaphorical language

The use of metaphor in language is very common. The essence of metaphor is to transform something into something related to it through similarity [13]. There is a commentary: "At this moment, there is not a drop of wine in the pot, but it is full of an intoxicating era, the battle and the music are hidden, and the mulberry leaves are still growing silently. Two thousand years was a blue sea, and the mulberry fields on the pot were as thick as before." The body of the copper pot is used to record some scenes of aristocrats' life in the Warring States period, including the battle scene and the life picture of mulberry rearing silkworms. Seas change into mulberry fields and mulberry fields into seas is used as a metaphor for the great changes of things in the world and also implies the change of time. In this sentence, mulberry fields and mulberry leaves are combined into an image, a metaphor for the Chinese civilization that is still prosperous and strong after two thousand years, so it is described as "growing silently" and "flourishing as before", which also achieves the effect of pun. The image of the blue sea carries the original meaning of the word. Such clever use of metaphorical language builds a poetic language situation and makes the micro-documentary more aesthetic value.

4. Summary

If Treasure Could Talk has achieved excellent results, and the reputation has been achieved again, with a score of 9.9 on bilibili.com and 9.5 on Douban. The director has integrated multiple modern elements into cultural relics, such as Meng Meng Da , Angry Birds, envy, jealousy and love and other playful words into If Treasure Could Talk, which is an innovative attempt to make a micro-documentary about literature and history. It uses Internet words with strong modern flavor to arouse the interest of young audiences. If Treasure Could Talk, The deconstructive montage collages, the Animation, and a series of animation special effects fit the current popular elements, eliminate the distance between culture and the audience, subvert the traditional authoritative style of literature and history documentaries, and add a lively sense to the solemn documentaries. It can be seen that the creation of micro-documentaries needs to combine the aesthetic taste of current people, understand the preferences and needs of the audience, and take into account the dual attributes of entertainment and cultural education, to enable the inheritance and development of Chinese civilization.

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