

The Bridge Between Past and Present: An Exploration of the Cultural Guide Role of the Presenter in "China in the Classics"

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the CCTV cultural programme Classics of China, focusing on the multifaceted role of contemporary scholar-scholar assumed by presenter Sa Beining. Through a combined approach of textual analysis, case studies and audience feedback data, it systematically explores his function as a cultural guide in facilitating dialogue between past and present and serving as a bridge for cultural transmission. Research indicates that through his use of time-travel narratives, cultivation of emotional resonance, and modern reinterpretation of scholarly authority, Sa Beining has not only achieved the creative transformation and innovative expression of traditional culture within a contemporary context, but has also expanded the functional boundaries and expressive dimensions of presenters in cultural programming. This figure has successfully transformed the abstruse content of classical texts into universally relatable values that resonate with the public, thereby providing crucial theoretical reference points and viable paradigms for the role positioning and practical strategies of presenters in similar variety programmes.

KEYWORDS

Cultural enlightener; China in the classics; Host role; Dialogue through the ages; Cultural heritage

1 Introduction

In recent years, the "revival of domestic trends" and "cultural confidence" have become core elements of the national cultural strategy, with cultural variety programmes gradually evolving into important vehicles for disseminating China's outstanding traditional culture^[1]. China Media Group's documentary series China in Ancient Texts, employing a distinctive blend of theatrical and cinematic techniques, successfully transformed classical texts into an audiovisual narrative for audiences. The programme was honoured with the 27th Starlight Award for Television Arts and has generated significant societal impact. Throughout the programme, host Sa Beining traversed ancient and modern times as a 'contemporary scholar', fulfilling the traditional presenter's role of linking segments while also embodying multiple functions: cultural ambassador, emotional resonator, and value guide. His distinct persona as a 'cultural enlightener' shone through. This characterisation has contributed to the innovation of cultural dissemination mechanisms within the new media landscape, offering valuable insights for the role construction and functional expansion of presenters in similar programmes.

2 Programme Background and Character Positioning

2.1 Paradigms of Programme Innovation

Programme Structure: Classics of China employs a dual-stage layout of historical and contemporary settings to construct a platform for cross-temporal dialogue. Historical scenes are recreated through cinematic techniques to depict the birth of ancient texts, while contemporary settings employ augmented reality and other technologies to visually 'revive' classics such as the Book of Documents and The Book of Crafts. The juxtaposition of two distinct scenarios creates a striking contrast, fostering a dialogue between past and present on a technical level. This approach breaks away from conventional one-way communication, significantly enhancing immersive experiences and interactive engagement.

Narrative Logic: The programme adopts a dual-narrative structure combining dramatic presentation with scholarly interpretation. Through segments such as "Fu Sheng's Protection of the Classics" and "Song Yingxing's Transcendental Dialogue with Yuan Longping", it constructs a three-tiered value space linking ancient texts, sages of old, and contemporary figures. This framework positions classical works as bridges spanning the spiritual continuum between past and present. Emotionally resonant theatrical renditions imbue the content with warmth, while rigorous academic analysis provides scholarly underpinning. This approach avoids didacticism while countering excessive entertainment tendencies, effectively enhancing audience engagement while preserving cultural depth and intellectual substance.

2.2 Host Character Profile

Sai Beining has crafted the multifaceted persona of the 'contemporary scholar' within the programme, transcending the singular duties of traditional presenters. Through this composite role, he has forged a bridge connecting the past and present. As a storyteller transcending time and space, he adopts a first-person perspective, guiding audiences into an immersive journey through historical scenes where they personally experience pivotal events and the destinies of figures chronicled in ancient texts. Throughout the programme's progression, he assumed the role of both conductor and

catalyst. Mastering the overall tempo, he orchestrated the interaction between scholars and performers, ensuring the organic fusion of intellectual rigour and artistic expression. Simultaneously, he became the igniter of audience resonance, employing heartfelt language and infectious delivery to awaken collective memory and cultural identity. Through a complete dialogue process of "questioning—interpretation—distillation", he poses universal questions from a contemporary perspective. Through expert interpretations, he unveils the profound meanings within classical texts, achieving a spiritual elevation of values. This facilitates a cognitive leap from knowledge transmission to emotional resonance, propelling the presenter's evolution from a traditional 'information disseminator' to a 'problem solver'. The innovative role has significantly broadened the scope of presenters' performances and deepened their functional roles in cultural programmes, effectively enhancing the programmes' cultural dissemination efficacy and societal influence ^[2].

3 Practical Approaches for Cultural Mediators

3.1 Knowledge Decoding: The Modern Transformation of Classical Texts

With expert guidance from authoritative academic institutions such as the Chinese Academy of History, Sa Beining ensures that interpretations of core concepts in ancient texts like the *Book of Documents* are both precise and academically credible throughout the programme. By drawing upon richly detailed, dramatic historical narratives such as 'Yu the Great's control of the floods' and 'King Tang of Shang's revolution', he transformed abstract philosophical concepts like 'Heaven's movement is vigorous; the noble person strives ceaselessly' into tangible, relatable story contexts. The story-driven narrative approach significantly reduces the audience's comprehension difficulty, establishing an emotional bridge that connects past and present. This successfully achieves the popularisation of profound knowledge and the effective transmission of cultural significance.

3.2 Emotional Resonance: The Sentimental Bond Between Past and Present

Through empathetic language and carefully crafted interactions, the presenter effectively bridged the psychological distance with the audience, significantly enhancing emotional resonance ^[3]. In the pivotal segment depicting Sima Qian's dialogue with his father, Sa Beining's solemn portrayal of the 'millennia-old kowtow' ritual heightened the ceremony's solemnity and historical immersion, elevating the audience's shared understanding of the spirit of filial piety in Chinese historiography to unprecedented heights. Following the programme's broadcast, topics such as "Sai Beining's tearful moment" rapidly gained traction across social media platforms, amassing over 500 million views. This phenomenon serves as compelling evidence of the profound societal impact and dissemination efficacy achieved through the fusion of emotionally resonant storytelling with the presenter's distinctive delivery style.

3.3 Elevation of Values: Contemporary Applications of Traditional Wisdom

In the episode on *The Art of Agriculture*, the programme employs the profoundly symbolic imagery of "rice paddies shaking hands" to place the ancient scholar Song Yingxing and the contemporary "Father of Hybrid Rice" Yuan Longping within the same historical space. This vividly illustrates the profound continuity of China's agricultural wisdom from *The Art of Agriculture* to modern agronomy, powerfully demonstrating the intrinsic consistency of the scientific spirit across eras and its enduring relevance to the concerns of the people. Sai Beining, in his role as an enlightener, continually deepens the connection between history and contemporary reality throughout his narration. He guides viewers to draw wisdom and value guidance from ancient texts for navigating modern life, achieving a cognitive leap and value transmission from 'interpreting classical works' to 'illuminating present realities'.

4 Communication Effects and Implications of Role Innovation

4.1 Quantitative Analysis of Communication Effectiveness

The programme 'China in Ancient Texts' achieved remarkable dissemination results upon its broadcast, with an average viewership rating of 1.2%. It garnered an impressive 8.7 rating on Douban, standing out among similar programmes. It has become a new benchmark for cultural variety shows and a symbol of critical acclaim. Notably, the programme has successfully ignited young viewers' enthusiasm for reading traditional classics such as the *Book of Documents* and *Records of the Grand Historian*, prompting renewed attention to these canonical texts. Consequently, sales of the accompanying books have surged by a remarkable 300 per cent. This demonstrates how high-quality cultural content effectively drives tangible consumption, fostering a virtuous cycle between cultural dissemination and market response.

4.2 Theoretical Implications and Industry Value

Sai Beining's portrayal of the 'cultural guide' has successfully broken away from the traditional presenter's one-way delivery of information, establishing a three-dimensional communication framework that integrates dialogue, empathy and heritage. This innovation offers three key strategies for contemporary cultural programming. Firstly, the role of the presenter has become more multifaceted and functionally expanded, no longer confined to the role of a mere announcer but instead embodying multiple identities as narrator, interpreter, and emotional resonator ^[4]. Secondly, create immersive

and emotionally resonant narrative settings, employing dramatic performances and technological means to heighten the audience's sense of immersion. Thirdly, achieving the routine transmission of values and their modern transformation, thereby converting traditional concepts into wisdom that aligns with contemporary life. The integrated application of the aforementioned strategies has markedly elevated the programme's cultural depth and aesthetic value, effectively enhancing its communicative efficacy and societal resonance, thereby providing valuable insights for innovative approaches to cultural programming^[5].

The aforementioned communication outcomes and industry implications are primarily analysed from a media perspective. However, the core value of an outstanding cultural programme lies in its ability to transcend the confines of the screen and translate its broadcast influence into tangible educational outcomes. As communication theorist Marshall McLuhan posited in his notion that "the medium is the extension of man," the success of *China Through the Ages* and its presenters' character portrayals is reflected not only in viewing figures and public acclaim, but more profoundly in their multidimensional engagement with and revitalisation of educational spaces. The subsequent discussion systematically explores how 'cultural interpreters' continue to fulfil their inspirational role across diverse educational settings, deepening the transformation of cultural dissemination into educational practice.

5 The Educational Role of Cultural Enlighteners and the Shaping of Young People's Values

5.1 The Practice of Revitalising Classical Texts in Campus Education

Taking Hefei No. 9 High School's Sipailou Campus as an example, the institution has developed a three-dimensional educational framework centred on "audiovisual immersion – life dialogue – cultural decoding", utilising the television programme *Classics of China* as a teaching resource^[6]. Within this framework, teachers assume the guiding role of "cultural interpreters" as depicted in the programme. In the teaching practice of the *Book of Documents*, the "ancient-modern dialogue" between Sa Beining and Fu Sheng was transformed into a classroom experiment. Students worked in groups to simulate the decision-making process of "Yu the Great's flood control", utilising Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to recreate flood management strategies. This achieved an interdisciplinary integration of the concept that "the people are the foundation of the state" with modern hydrological science. This model demonstrates how the classical concept of 'investigating things to attain knowledge' is transformed into a tangible, actionable learning pathway. It successfully achieves the effective transition of the presenter's on-screen role into that of a teaching guide. Its associated course design was awarded first prize in the Ministry of Education's 'Outstanding Cases of Inheritance and Innovation in Chinese Traditional Culture'.

5.2 The Exemplary Effect of Family Education

Sa Beining's personal educational practice may be regarded as a tangible extension and personification of his on-screen role as an enlightener, forming a distinctive 'mobile classroom' paradigm. Whilst visiting the Shaanxi History Museum with his children, he guided them through the artefacts to comprehend the artisan spirit embodied in the concept of 'Heaven's Artistry Unveiling the Mysteries of Creation'. During an on-site lesson at the Yellow Crane Tower, he used the 'Record of the Yellow Crane Tower' as a starting point to elucidate the philosophical realm of 'forgetting both self and object'. This 'walking encyclopaedia' approach to education applies the programme's empathetic storytelling methods to parent-child interactions, sparking widespread discussion on social media about the 'Sa-style early education method'. Its educational maxim – 'Better for children to mature early than remain half-baked' – has been included in the White Paper on Family Education in China as a model case study.

5.3 The Radiating Influence of Social Education

The Classical Chinese Idioms Competition, a spin-off programme of *Classics of China*, has been successfully implemented at Lai'ka Township Central Primary School in Hotan County. This marks the successful extension of the 'Cultural Enlightenment' model from media platforms into the public sphere. Students performed skits depicting idioms such as 'dancing at the cock's crow' and 'the spirit bird filling the sea', achieving a transformative shift from mere 'knowledge memorisation' to the 'internalisation of values'. Following the broadcast of the CCTV *Sofres* statistics programme, active searches for classical texts such as *The Analects* and *The Book of Crafts* surged by 300%. Related publications maintained a top-three position on Dangdang's "Essential Reading for Young Adults" list for 12 consecutive weeks. Sa Beining's cross-cultural interpretation of the maxim "Establish others as you wish to be established" during the programme has been incorporated by UNESCO as a model teaching case for the "Global Dialogue of Civilisations". This fully demonstrates the profound social educational efficacy inherent in the role of a "cultural enlightener".

5.4 Innovation and Empowerment in Digital Education

The 'Digital Twin of Classical Texts' system, developed using augmented reality technology, represents an upgrade of the 'cultural enquirer' role within the technological dimension. It enables young people to immerse themselves in the experience of 'commenting on the *Book of Rites* alongside Zheng Xuan' through a mobile application. This system essentially embeds the presenter's guiding and explanatory functions within the human-machine interaction process, creating an ever-accessible 'digital question-answerer'. During its pilot implementation at a secondary school in

Hangzhou, the system enhanced students' historical learning efficiency by 40% and deepened their understanding of 'li' culture by 28% compared to traditional teaching methods. The concept of "digital avatars" proposed by Sa Beining during the programme has further catalysed the development of the "Classical Texts AI Tutor" initiative. Utilising voice interaction technology to deliver personalised interpretations of classical texts, this project has achieved a functional transition from human presenters to intelligent tutors. It has been extensively deployed in smart classrooms across Beijing, Shanghai and other locations ^[7].

6 Challenges and Future Prospects

6.1 Practical Challenges

The programme encountered several practical difficulties during implementation, with the core challenge lying in balancing academic rigour and the precision of classical texts' interpretation. This approach could enhance public resonance and dissemination while preventing excessive specialisation from hindering audience comprehension. Secondly, with the widespread adoption of visual presentation technologies, overreliance on cutting-edge tools such as AR and VR risks diluting cultural essence, leading to situations where form overshadows content and technology diminishes thematic depth. Therefore, striking a judicious balance across multiple dimensions—depth versus breadth, tradition versus modernity, technology versus content—has become the pivotal focus for the programme's ongoing refinement and pioneering endeavours. This demands heightened cultural acumen and media integration capabilities from the creative team.

6.2 Future Direction

Looking ahead, both the programme 'Classics of China' and the role of its presenter continue to possess considerable scope for development and untapped potential. Future efforts may focus on developing international communication channels, advancing the "Classics Translation" initiative, deepening collaboration with overseas sinologists, and achieving more cross-culturally adaptable interpretations and promotion of classics such as The Analects, thereby enhancing the global influence of China's outstanding traditional culture. Additionally, proactive development of digital cultural derivatives should be pursued, such as "digital collections of classical texts" and interactive platforms featuring "virtual scholars". By leveraging digital technology to establish a comprehensive cultural dissemination system integrating online and offline channels, we can achieve innovative utilisation of cultural resources, sustainable promotion, and effective engagement with younger audiences. This will further enhance the programme's vitality and broaden its reach.

7 Conclusion

Host Sa Beining assumes the role of 'cultural guide' in the programme 'Classics of China', successfully bridging the gap between ancient texts and contemporary audiences. This role transcends the traditional presenter's function of one-way communication, redefining the multifaceted model for hosts of cultural programmes. It highlights the profound value of the act of 'clarifying doubts' in cultural dissemination—namely, effectively bridging history and the present, knowledge and emotion, and scholarly expression with popular reception. Looking ahead, research may continue to explore the differentiated construction and functional realisation of the role of the 'enlightener' across diverse cultural contexts ^[8]. It may also investigate innovations in the forms, channels, and experiential dimensions of cultural dissemination supported by digital and intelligent technologies. This will provide sustained theoretical underpinnings and practical guidance for the creative transformation and innovative development of China's outstanding traditional culture.

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