

A Case Study of the Ritual Space Construction of the Chinese Festival Series Program

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Abstract

TV festival gala is one important form of ritual communication of traditional Chinese festivals. The Chinese Festival Series Program innovates the ritual construction path of the program while maintaining the sense of ritual of the traditional festival galas, making the Chinese Festival Series Program a representative work of Chinese festival galas in recent years. This study aims to explore the ritual space construction of the Chinese Festival Series Program. It adopted the case study approach by taking Chinese Festival Series Program as the research object, and analyzed the text of the programs mainly from the physical space, media space, narrative space and the associated space of history and reality. The analysis results demonstrated that breaking the single physical space and building diverse scenes can make the narrative more hierarchical, and allow the audiences to experience a more realistic program space. The addition of new technology also brings richness to the narrative space. The convenient interactivity of the new media platform creates an exclusive media interaction space for the audiences. Through the ritual space construction, the Chinese Festival Series Program associates the past space with the present space, allowing the audiences to develop memory-related activities in the ritual space.

Keywords: Chinese Festival Series Program, ritual space construction, physical space, media space, narrative space, associated space

1. Introduction

In early 2021, the Night Banquet in Tang Dynasty Palace, a five-minute dance performance featuring plump figures of Tang Dynasty females, garnered significant attention on Chinese social media platforms as part of the 2021 Henan TV Spring Festival Gala. Henan TV effectively utilized modern technologies such as 4K resolution, augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR) to present a virtual museum experience to the audience. The dancers, adorned in Tang Dynasty costumes, showcased the grandeur of the Tang Dynasty by staging a splendid banquet. Through skillful choreography, meticulous planning, and refined cultural aesthetics, Henan TV successfully captivated the hearts of the viewers. The Chinese Festival Series Program, focusing on seven traditional Chinese festivals including the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Qixi Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Chongyang Festival, integrates traditional culture with contemporary technology to portray the cultural significance of these festivals. To date, the series has aired 16 episodes.

Beginning with the Wonderful Lantern Festival Night in 2021, Henan TV shifted to real-life shooting locations, blending real and virtual spaces to achieve extraordinary communication effects. Subsequent programs like the Qingming Wonderful Tour, Dragon Boat Festival Wonderful Tour, Mid-Autumn Festival Wonderful Tour and Chongyang Wonderful Tour departed from the conventional linear studio expression, presenting a more diverse range of spatial scenes. The creators of Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program effectively employed spatial elements to advance the narrative process, introducing breakthroughs and innovations in the audiovisual space of cultural programs.

Consequently, they constructed a rich program space, expanded the audience's visual experience, and aligned with the concept of mobile scenes. Ultimately, the ritual space of the Chinese Festival Series Program was established, reinforcing the Chinese national community.

Rothenbuhler (1998) offered a comprehensive interpretation of ritual communication, defining it as the voluntary performance of behavior conforming to specific patterns to symbolically influence or participate in serious aspects of life. The Chinese Festival Series Program invoke a sense of solemn ritual in Chinese culture by reinterpreting traditional cultural symbols. Through the creation of ritual spaces within the programs, they evoke an atmosphere of authenticity and identity associated with ritual activities, fostering an immersive ritual interaction that enhances the emotional experience of the audience. Furthermore, Couldry (2003) described ritual space in mediated rituals as a complex social structure encompassing multiple occasions throughout the ritual process. It exhibited internal variations and was centered around an unequal focal point, manifesting locally through specific ritual categories. While traditional rituals often take place in physically distinct spaces, mediated rituals occurred within a novel space that accommodates diverse social domains. Time and space in media rituals underwent transformations and separations, yet the separation of physical space has not implied a separation of social interaction.

In the context of the Chinese Festival Series Program, the space wherein traditional Chinese festivals are mediated as rituals represents a multifaceted and intricate social structure and phenomenon. It incorporates various social spaces into the programs' own rituals through specific cultural models. Rituals unfold within this space, localizing traditional culture. The media organization becomes the central hub of the mediated society, characterized by its high concentration of symbols. Henan TV, serving as a high-quality cultural program production platform, constructs the ritual space of its programs and the production process of cultural symbols, significantly influencing the audiences' perception of traditional culture.

By delving into the cultural narratives underlying traditional Chinese festivals, Henan TV has transformed each festival, rich in history and culture, into a source of program creation. The series innovatively expresses the cultural symbols associated with traditional Chinese festivals. In 2021, Henan TV's Spring Festival Gala, Lantern Festival Program, and Qingming Festival Program garnered more than 5 billion, 3 billion, and 2.5 billion views, respectively, attracting attention from domestic and international media outlets. The immense influence of the Chinese Festival Series Program illustrates that Henan TV has forged a unique path in exploring innovative expressions of traditional culture while upholding the spirit of Chinese aesthetics, resulting in favorable market responses (Sun, 2021). Additionally, Zhang and Ouyang (2021) delved into the profound spirit of Chinese aesthetics underlying the Chinese Festival Series Program, arguing that it is through this spirit that the programs resonate deeply with the audiences. Gu and Zhang (2021) analyzed the Chinese Festival Series Program from the perspectives of trans-coding and the audiovisual field, concluding that the series undoubtedly revitalizes, reshapes, and reproduces the value of China's exceptional traditional culture.

However, most existing research on the Chinese Festival Series Program primarily focused on their content and cultural transmission, with limited exploration of their spatial construction. To address this gap, this paper examines the spatial construction of the Chinese Festival Series Program from four dimensions: physical space, media space, narrative space, and the associated space of history and reality. The study aims to expand the research scope of cultural television programs by focusing on Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program as the primary subject of analysis. Moreover, this paper integrates the ritual view of communication theory with the study of the Chinese Festival Series Program, offering a novel application of the theory through a spatial construction perspective.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Ritual View of Communication

The concept of communication as a ritual has been emphasized by Carey (1975) in his essay *A Cultural Approach to Communication*. According to Carey (1975), the primary function of ritual communication is to establish a shared ideology that enables individuals to express their beliefs, maintain emotional connections, and ensure social harmony and stability. Building on Carey's ideas, Goethals (1981) introduced the notion of TV rituals, suggesting that television utilizes ritualistic methods to imbue its content with a sense of sacredness. By employing ritualistic elements, TV rituals attribute surreal meanings to everyday experiences.

Scholars have further explored and classified the specific characteristics of TV rituals. Rubin (1984) proposed the concepts of ritualized TV and instrumental TV based on program formats. Ritualized TV refers to programming that fulfills the habitual need for entertainment, encompassing dating, leisure, entertainment, and economically practical shows. On the other hand, instrumental TV refers to the top-down, linear mode of communication where individuals choose to engage with television as an information source or a means of passing time.

Dayan and Katz (1994) introduced the concept of media rituals, specifically focusing on the phenomenon of media events. They described media events as extraordinary television moments that capture the attention and fascination of both national and international audiences, creating a festive atmosphere. Couldry (2003) contributed to the concept of media ritual by providing a comprehensive analysis and classification of various types of media rituals, particularly within the realm of television. He developed a critical model of media rituals and explored the underlying mechanisms and exercise of power within modern media rituals.

The study of ritual space has also been explored by scholars such as Innis (1949), who examined the spatio-temporal bias of media in his work *The Bias of Communication*. Innis (1949) categorized media into time-biased and space-biased forms. For instance, audiovisual media like radio and television have brought people closer in terms of communication space while extending the reach of communication on a vast scale. The future era of intelligent communication represents a progression and extension of the spatial bias in communication from audiovisual media.

With regard to the Chinese Festival Series Program, the fragmented nature of communication on the Internet has facilitated a breakthrough in the space of communication rituals, expanding its scope. These programs have successfully created and disseminated cultural symbols associated with traditional Chinese festivals, facilitating information transmission within the ritual space and forming the foundation for ritual construction. As audiences engage with these programs, they experience emotional resonance and transition from mere spectators to active participants, ultimately achieving a sense of identity at the individual, collective, and societal levels through dynamic ritual participation and interaction.

2.2 Ritual Space

The incorporation of space into narratology has been explored by scholars, and Long's *Spatial Narratology* provides a valuable perspective for understanding narrative space construction. Long (2015) introduced space as an essential element in narrative texts, which traditionally focus on the temporal dimension, such as novels, histories, and biographies. He also acknowledged narrative media, such as films, television, and animation, which emphasize both temporal and spatial dimensions (Long, 2015).

Long (2015) argued that narrative is a fundamental human impulse closely tied to time and space. Narratives unfold within specific spaces and times, as people strive to preserve certain moments in memory, counteracting forgetting and giving meaning to existence. Words, being linear narratives, primarily present the world in a temporal manner, making it challenging to convey space. However, human creativity transcends this limitation through *Andersstreben*, an aesthetic that seeks to break free from its own expressive properties and enter a state of media expression called *Andersstreben*.

Zoran (1984) also examined space horizontally. He suggested that in the horizontal dimension, spatial structure could be divided into total space, the complex of space, and the unit of space. Analyzing space reveals that scenes are one of the fundamental units of the spatial complex. A scene is a place on the topographical level, a zone of action on the chronotopical level, and a field of vision on the textual level (Zoran, 1984). In the Chinese Festival Series Program, realistic and visually appealing scenes are constructed within the zone of action, providing a space for actors to perform. Through the cultural symbols presented in the program, the audiences observe and interpret them, forming their own personal field of vision. This field of vision is closely tied to the program's content.

The field of vision is not a closed and complete system, but rather a natural and fluid process of transformation for the audience as they watch the program. The program's content does not restrict the audiences' perception. The concatenation of multiple scenes does not merely replicate space; instead, it constructs a complex of space comprising various elements of geography, space-time, and text. Measurable space refers to physical locations such as houses, mountains, rivers, and cities. The zone of action represents a space where multiple events can occur in the same place, as well as where a single event continues. It is the space where events take place. The field of vision encompasses the audiences' interpretation of the program's content (textual content) and their composite emotional response, influenced by personal memories. It is the space perceived by the audiences in the virtual world before their eyes, closely connected to the textual content.

Regarding ritualization, the audiences actively participate in space construction. In Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program, the audience contribute to the expression of program space through bullet comments and virtual communities. Simultaneously, Henan TV actively transfers online space to offline, expanding the offline space of the program and promoting the development of cultural and creative industries. In conclusion, a comprehensive understanding of the concept of ritual space, along with related theories, has inspired the authors. Drawing on the theoretical lens of ritual space, the author conducted a detailed exploration and research on the ritual space construction within Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program.

3. Methods

The study utilized a qualitative approach, specifically a case study design. Yin (2011) suggested that the case study approach is increasingly used in evaluations, and Creswell (2013) stated that it is an excellent technique when the researcher aims to gain insights into well-defined cases. In this study, a single case study design was employed, focusing on the Chinese Festival Series Program as the case. Video clips from the TV show served as the primary source of qualitative data. The researchers conducted repeated viewings and thorough analysis of the data using a textual analysis approach to explore the formation of ritual space paradigms in the Chinese Festival Series Program.

Textual analysis is a suitable method for describing the content, structure, and functions of messages contained in visual or recorded texts, including television programs (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). Communication researchers commonly use textual analysis to describe and interpret the characteristics of visual messages (Frey et al., 2000). The meanings conveyed in texts can be determined by analyzing the producer, consumer, and interpreter of the text (Lindkvist, 1981). Moreover, textual analysis can address broader questions about media, social movements, hegemonic processes (Lartha, 1999), as well as social practices and structures (McKee, 2003). Analyzing texts is crucial as they represent the physical, social, and mental worlds simultaneously (Halliday, 1978). Texts are multifunctional aspects of social practices, encompassing ways of acting, representing, and being (Fairclough, 2003). Potter (1996) highlighted that textual analysis allows researchers to view media texts, particularly television content, not merely as individual works, but as products of multiple creators who collaborate to convey messages.

This article used textual analysis to examine elements related to ritual space in the Chinese Festival Series Program, which allows researchers to gain insight into how the Chinese Festival Series Program construct and represent ritual space. This analysis provides greater insight into how the series depicts and interprets the cultural traditions, aesthetics and symbolism associated with Chinese festivals. It also reveals the creative choices made by the creators of the series in constructing ritual spaces and the impact of these choices on the overall meaning and experience of the series.

4. Results and Discussion

With the context of Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program, the study delves into the program's innovative approaches in constructing ritual space. One example is the Night Banquet in Tang Dynasty Palace episode, where the program integrates virtual and real spaces. The static cultural relics are transformed into the spatial background of the program, allowing the female characters from the Tang Dynasty Palace to traverse various locations such as the studio, stage, museum, lake, and palace. This integration provides audiences with the immersive experience of walking through an ancient painting scroll.

In the Wonderful Lantern Festival Night episode, the creators expand the shooting space beyond the studio to outdoor locations like Henan Provincial Museum, Luoyang Yingtian Gate, and Kaifeng Qingming Shanghe Garden. This expansion of space adds authenticity to the program and creates a connection between the physical environment and the festival theme. The Dragon Boat Festival Wonderful Tour episode introduces a new era of spatial expression. The program situates its space within historical contexts, achieving inter-textualization between historical and modern spaces. The integration of virtual and real spaces is realized throughout the forty-minute program. Spatial elements are utilized to drive the narrative process, leaving a lasting spatial impression on the audience after the performance. Overall, the researchers examined the construction of ritual space in the program from four dimensions: physical space, media space, narrative space, and the interconnected space between history and reality. These dimensions provide a comprehensive understanding of how the program innovates in creating immersive and meaningful spaces for ritual experiences.

4.1 Diverse Physical Space

Television art is fundamentally a narrative art form, as it presents real or fictional stories to audiences using audiovisual language (Lin, 2003). This multifaceted presentation creates unique social meanings for the viewers. Television has the flexibility to manipulate time and space according to the specific needs of the audience. It extends and reproduces reality, allowing for infinite expansion of narrative space similar to literature. It can freely manipulate time, delicately depict the events' entire process, and present a cohesive storyline (Huang, 2003). Despite the changes in spatial form, television still retains the characteristics of scene space.

In the case of Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program, the creators draw inspiration from traditional culture and explore the physical spaces associated with it, which carry specific historical significance. For example, after the successful premiere of Night Banquet in Tang Dynasty Palace at Henan TV's Spring Festival Gala, the production team relocated the recording to the Henan Provincial Museum for the Wonderful Lantern Festival Night episode. By incorporating historical artifacts and spaces into the program, the creators established a connection between traditional culture and the present, allowing the audiences to experience the richness of Chinese history and heritage. This

approach enhanced the authenticity and immersive quality of the ritual space constructed within the television program, further engaging the viewers in the narrative and cultural experience.



Figure 1. Night Banquet in Tang Dynasty Palace (Source: Communist Youth League of Henan, 2023)

Following the Wonderful Lantern Festival Night, the creative team of the Chinese Festival Series Program continued to explore new recording locations in Henan Province. This departure from traditional real spaces created a distinct form of ritual live space for the audiences. The program *Folding Fan Intellectuals* exemplifies the changes in recording locations within the gala. Dancers adorned in attire inspired by Northern Song Dynasty scholars, holding plain fans, delivered graceful performances in cultural sites such as Songyang Academy, Shaolin Temple, and Laojun Mountain in Henan Province. The dancers skillfully integrated their movements with the serene mountain surroundings, creating a harmonious blend of civilization and tranquility. Despite the audiences not physically being present in those locations, they were deeply moved by the rich cultural heritage depicted in the performances. The seamless combination of scenic beauty and dance added significant impact and resonance for the viewers. This observation resonates with Liu's (2021) perspective on the cultural innovative expression witnessed in the Night Banquet in Tang Dynasty Palace at Henan TV's Spring Festival Gala. The popularity of Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program extended beyond the television screen and had a significant impact on offline activities, particularly in promoting China's tourism industry. For example, *The Long Song of Yizhou* was filmed in Hami, Xinjiang. In this nearly five-minute program, it showcased the natural wonders of Hami Dahaidao, the *Populus euphratica* forest, Mingsha Mountain, and other scenic spots. The dancers' graceful movements were accompanied by joyful Muqam music, set against the backdrop of morning light and twilight. Many viewers expressed their desire to visit the locations featured in these beautiful programs. The Chinese Festival Series Program established a strong connection with offline tourist attractions, breaking away from traditional recording scenes and fostering a symbiotic relationship with the promotion of tourism experiences.



Figure 2. The Long Song of Yizhou (Source: Henan TV, 2023)

With the rise of the cultural industry, creative cultural products have emerged as emotionally engaging mediums in cultural production. Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program have successfully departed from the limitations of traditional festival galas, presenting carefully crafted portrayals of Tang Dynasty girls through programs like the Night Banquet in Tang Dynasty Palace at the 2021 Henan TV Spring Festival Gala. By deeply embedding the image of Tang Dynasty girls in the hearts of the audiences and seeking their consultation, the programs fostered a stronger sense of audience participation. Furthermore, Henan TV has collaborated with the Henan Provincial Museum and brands like Pop Mart to launch a range of cultural and creative products featuring the Tang Palace girl as the central image. Notably, the Girl in Tang Palace series of mystery boxes, which contain hidden images, has sparked a craze for collecting these images.

The online communication effects of the Chinese Festival Series Program have effectively expanded the offline space for its classic images, strengthening the connection between the programs and the audience in real-life scenarios and achieving enhanced communication outcomes. As Leng (2021) highlighted in his article on cultural consciousness and industrial rise, Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program exemplified the industrialization path of cultural TV programs. By vertically developing symbolic capital and advantageous resources and transforming cultural symbols into independent, cross-border cultural products, Henan TV created value and influence. Simultaneously, it explored a horizontally linked extension path, fostering two-way connections with user participation and the creative industry, catering to changing user aesthetics and cultural needs, and shaping a comprehensive cultural and creative industrial system that releases the dual effects of intersecting cultural and tourism industries.

In traditional festival galas, traditional culture often serves as a significant creative element. However, most festival galas have been traditionally recorded in studios, connecting absent audiences with the ritual site through media and creating a shared ritual space. This format often lacks diversity, and the live space of the media ritual remains confined to the indoor studio. Consequently, secondary communication surrounding these programs tends to be weak, resulting in limited audience recall. Moreover, the repetitive nature of the same program model year after year can lead to aesthetic fatigue among viewers. The Chinese Festival Series Program by Henan TV have broken free from the spatial limitations of traditional TV rituals. The programs cater to the aesthetic preferences of the audience, providing a fresh and engaging experience. The construction of diverse scenes enhanced the levels and contextual narrative of the programs, allowing audiences to immerse themselves in a more realistic program space. Henan TV's innovative approach to physical space in the construction of the Chinese Festival Series Program serves as an inspiration for the development of similar festive galas, opening up new possibilities for their construction.

4.2 *Instant Interactive Media Space*

The concept of media space refers to the participation of audiences in a shared activity or significant event through the transmission of symbols constructed by mass media. It involves interactions with others and forms a ritualistic cultural sharing process. This process naturalizes and legitimizes the authority and influence of mass media (Yu, 2010). The creation and dissemination of symbols, such as linguistic, environmental, and character symbols, in the Chinese Festival Series Program inspire audiences to actively participate in this cultural sharing process. As a result, the audience transforms from passive spectators to engaged participants, achieving emotional resonance and cultural identity, while also enhancing the authority and influence of the mass media, represented by Henan TV.

Media space interacts with the real social space in a two-way manner and serves as the main source for people to experience different physical and imaginary spaces. The media space reflects the real social space while dynamically constructing an imaginary social space. In the Chinese Festival Series Program, participants gather in ritual spaces of different festival themes, paying attention to the programs and the messages they convey, sharing the same emotional experiences, and constructing the media space through interactive behaviors. These interactive behaviors encompass instant interactions on TV, as well as interactions on online platforms and social media platforms, exhibiting diverse characteristics.

The ritual interaction in the Chinese Festival Series Program first manifests through on-site and off-site interactions on TV media. On-site interactions enrich the program content, create a ritual atmosphere of emotional communication and resonance, and bring the audience closer to the communicators. Off-site interactions require the audience to be present in front of the TV at a fixed time, focusing on the program wholeheartedly and experiencing the media ritual. However, traditional forms of information delivery often limited effective communication and emotional feedback from the audience. With the development of media integration, fragmented communication has provided audiences with more viewing options, no longer restricted by time and space constraints. Festival galas have also adopted new spatial expressions.

The Chinese Festival Series Program utilize online social platforms like Weibo, WeChat, TikTok, and Douban to deepen the interaction between the program and the audiences, as well as among the audience themselves. Different social media platforms have distinct styles, and the production team analyzes the specific characteristics of each platform to deliver content accurately and build an exclusive interactive space for the audience. For example, short video platforms like TikTok and Kuaishou emphasize entertainment and release videos in fragments, catering to the demand for fragmented information. Bilibili, on the other hand, focuses on community operation and supports content creators through decentralized traffic distribution.

The Chinese Festival Series Program predominantly target platforms for young generation like Bilibili to engage fans. By leveraging Bilibili and Weibo for joint distribution, the programs generate discussions across various dimensions, leading to high view counts and topic discussions. Weibo serves as a condensed representation of public opinions, allowing the programs to ferment content through key opinion leaders' discussions and transition from the official public opinion field to the private opinion field. This effectively encourages more audience participation in program interactions and enhances the sense of ritual in the media. This perspective aligns with Yan's (2018) view on mobile communication of cultural programs, where fragmented program content spreads widely through suitable applications like Weibo, Kuaishou, and Tiktok. Traditional cultural elements in cultural programs may lose some grandeur and seriousness in the fragmented space but gain a more personal experiential meaning in the fragmented content and reception space, enabling a mobile and accompanying way of meaning production.

In summary, the Chinese Festival Series Program not only build an exclusive media space for audience viewing but also create an exclusive interactive media space facilitated by new media's interactive features. In this space, audiences can directly interact in real-time on social media while receiving program content fragments, experiencing festival rituals without limitations of space and time.

4.3 *Storytelling Narrative Space*

The use of narrative space in online storytelling is crucial for creators in film, television, and other narrative media. It encompasses elements such as time, scene, character, action, and mood, and it is a dynamic system that allows audiences to engage with the story and even reconstruct their own imaginary story space. Narrative space helps build an emotional connection between the narrator, the content, and the receiver, enhancing the effectiveness of storytelling.

Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program depart from traditional approaches to festive galas and instead adopt the format of web series and web shows. They integrate traditional Chinese festivals into cultural stories, enabling audiences to deepen their understanding of traditional festival culture while watching the programs. For instance, the program 2023 Wonderful Lantern Festival Night took the Lantern Festival, a longstanding festive ritual, as the central

narrative thread. It portrayed scenes from different dynasties and showcased the vibrant atmosphere of prosperous life. The program opened with a celebratory and lively Grand Opera performance, providing a prologue for the fantastic journey that follows.

On the night of the Lantern Festival, a young girl named Tong Tong put on Virtual Reality (VR) glasses and embarked on a fantasy travel through time and space with her father in the metaverse. They arrive in the ancient town of Dangkou, Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, known for its picturesque scenery in the rainy south of the Yangtze River. Here, they witnessed the lantern-burning ceremony from the Han Dynasty, which represents the origin of the Lantern Festival and symbolizes hope for a smooth, safe, and healthy new year.

One of the program's segments, the dance performance Chinese Legend - Nuwa Patches the Sky, drew inspiration from the imagery of the Nuwa lantern. It presented a spectacular and magnificent audiovisual portrayal of the legendary story of Nuwa's creation of humans and her efforts to patch the holes in the sky. This dance performance offered another interpretation of Chinese myths. It conveyed the striving spirit of the Chinese nation for progress.

Through these narrative spaces, Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program provided audiences with immersive and creative experiences that foster a deeper appreciation for traditional festival culture. The combination of storytelling elements, such as storylines, music, subtitles, and specific shots, helped transport viewers into a preconceived imaginative state, facilitating the construction of meaning and connotation during the program's viewing.

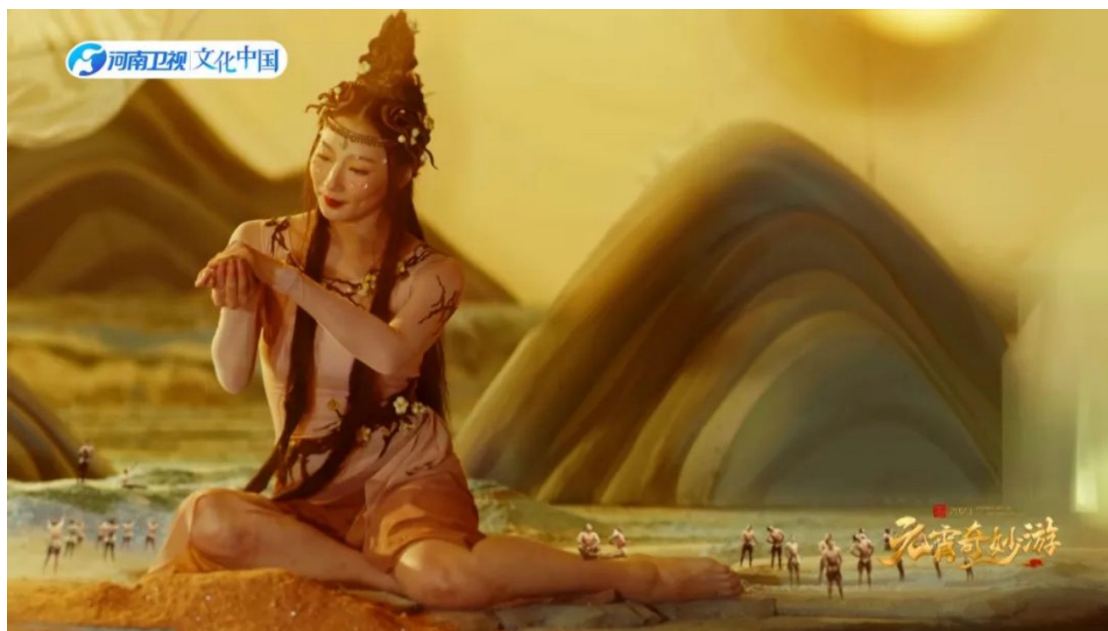


Figure 3. Chinese Legend - Nuwa Patches the Sky (Source: Henan TV, 2023)

Continuing the narrative, the program transitions to the lantern assembly in the Tang Dynasty. The dance performance titled All Nations Come to Great Tang Dynasty showcased various dance forms, including the Huxuan Dance, Luyao Dance, and Gongting Dance, portraying the diverse and inclusive nature of the Great Tang Dynasty with a touch of fantasy. As the dance unfolds, an original song titled The Lights are Waning accompanies the storytelling. The song is based on the theme of The Lantern Festival Night and is set to the tune of Green Jade Table by the Song Dynasty poet Xin Qiji. The two narratives run in parallel, creating a seamless storytelling experience.

This narrative approach immersed the audiences in the situations created by the program, allowing them to experience the charm of different festival rituals in different dynasties. The narrative transcended the constraints of time and space, providing a sense of presence for the audience. In the past, the sense of presence offered by traditional TV and early Internet media maintained a clear distinction between the real and the virtual. However, with the development of mobile media, the boundaries between the virtual and the real have blurred. Physical and virtual presence intertwine and blend in physical space, creating a mixed reality experience (Sun, 2015).

To stay distinctive, attractive, and competitive, TV programming must undergo constant reform (Castro & Cascajosa, 2020). Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program utilized modern high-tech video technology to break free from spatial constraints. Through a combination of live-action filming and post-production techniques, the program seamlessly integrated technology into its content. It incorporated the essence of traditional Chinese culture while infusing fashion elements, presenting a refreshing experience for the audience. The program leverages extended reality

(XR) virtual space expansion, AR virtual implantation, MR and other cutting-edge technologies. It also incorporated features such as 4K ultra-high definition and 5G communication to create diverse program formats, enrich the visual experience, and showcase the captivating allure of traditional culture.

For example, in the 2021 Qixi Wonderful Tour program, the dance performance Dragon Gate Vajra focused on portraying a man with extraordinary strength known as the Dragon Gate Vajra. The performance showcased the Dragon Gate musician and Feitian (flying celestial beings). To achieve a unique visual effect, the creative team used aerial cameras to film background materials at the Longmen Grottoes. These materials were later combined with 3D modeling and AR technology to present the dynamic and vivid art of carving. Notably, at the climax of the program, the creative team digitally colored the Fengxian Temple based on research findings from the Longmen Grottoes. This added new meanings and contexts to the cultural heritage, leaving a lasting impression on the audience.



Figure 4. Dragon Gate Vajra (Source: Li, 2021)

Xue (2022) further highlighted the spatial innovation of Henan TV. According to Xue (2022), Henan TV has overcome the limitations of time and space in traditional galas through live-action filming and virtual reality technology. By integrating performances with intangible cultural heritage sites, traditional paintings, and virtual time and space, Henan TV has achieved scenario integration and dance performances, transforming the gala into a captivating tour of Chinese culture and stories. The utilization of digital technology to create visual spectacles expands the possibilities of the gala space, providing a truly immersive experience.

The Chinese Festival Series Program created a digital virtual space by leveraging various new technologies, blending real and virtual scenes to build an entirely new space for the audiences. This spatial narrative technique played a significant role in the success of Henan TV's Chinese Festival Series Program. Yu (2021) argued that Henan TV breaks through conventional gala narratives by employing dynamic language and vibrant virtual technology, empowering communication through these means. The Chinese Festival Series Program have elevated special effects technology to the foundation of their audio-visual language.

Chinese TV programs are now entering an era of immersive experiences. Not only are theater spaces being redefined by live-action venues and scenic areas, but the documentary space of TV programs is also being reshaped by digital virtual space and live-action performance spaces. This evolution has resulted in a new spatial form for programs, allowing media professionals more opportunities for innovative content production and providing audiences with a more stunning audio-visual experience.

4.4 Associated Space of History and Reality

As Assmann (1988) argued, memory images are concrete in space and time, requiring both a physical manifestation and a temporal context to become real. Traditional Chinese festivals have served as crystallization points for collective memory, carrying cultural memories across different times and spaces. The Chinese Festival Series Program aim to connect history with the present, highlighting the temporal and spatial relationships between past events and current reality. The continuity of cultural memory is achieved through repeated rituals and the cyclical rhythm of traditional

Chinese festivals. These festivals serve as repositories of ancient memories while also accommodating the memories constructed by people today. Moreover, traditional Chinese festivals not only aim to reproduce folk customs and awaken memories but also carry important values that require exploration, renewal, and inheritance by contemporary individuals.

For example, the Mid-Autumn Festival represents homesickness and reunion. Programs showcase the journey of the virtual character Tang Xiaoyue through different periods of the festival, connecting past and present. In the Mid-Autumn Festival Wonderful Tour, there is a program called the Ink Dance of Mid-Autumn Note, which combines dance and calligraphy to present the calligraphy works of Wang Xianzhi, a descendant of the famous ancient calligrapher Wang Xizhi. This unique performance presents abstract elements as the main focus, portraying the dancer as ink and showcasing the beauty of Chinese calligraphy through dynamic body language and special effects. It serves as a reminder and an inheritance of Chinese calligraphy art, resonating with the theme of the Mid-Autumn Festival and creating a rich cultural atmosphere and sense of ritual. These narratives, cultural symbols, and artistic expressions collectively record the cultural traces and rituals accumulated over thousands of years.



Figure 5. Ink Dance of Mid-Autumn Note (Source: Henan Information Broadcast, 2021)

The program *Harmony* was meticulously filmed on location at Laojun Mountain in Luoyang, capturing the essence of the Chen Style Tai Chi Chuan. This martial art form served as a profound embodiment of the Chinese ideology centered around the concept of harmony. The program effectively conveyed the intrinsic spirit of balance, as reflected in the principles of harmony between intention and essence and harmony between essence and strength. Such principles resonate deeply with the longstanding values upheld by the Chinese people, rooted in their respect for the delicate interplay of opposing forces. By presenting these fundamental beliefs, the program *Harmony* illuminates the enduring significance of harmony in Chinese culture.

In essence, the cultural significance of the Mid-Autumn Festival remains unwavering and grows stronger with the passage of time. Through the captivating production *Mid-Autumn Festival Wonderful Tour*, viewers not only witness ancient folk customs that may no longer hold contemporary value but also inherit the timeless spiritual essence that resonates with the present and even the future. Themes such as reunion, family sentiment, and the value of harmony continue to hold profound meaning and relevance.

The Chinese Festival Series Program employed a spatial approach to encapsulate the essence of various festivals, effectively constructing a collective memory space that transcends time for all Chinese individuals. By showcasing a multitude of locations, cultural artifacts, depictions of people, and tantalizing cuisine, Henan TV's programs established a shared memory space that connects diverse groups associated with the Chinese nation, fostering remembrance and facilitating communication. This symbolic community forged between the group and the space endures even when physically separated from their original environments, thanks to the symbolic reconstruction of sacred sites, as proposed by Assmann (1988).

China boasts a rich cultural heritage, encompassing numerous historical cities and landmarks. Nonetheless, the cultural

significance and nuanced connotations of some of these sites have gradually diminished over generations, slipping into oblivion. The Chinese Festival Series Program by Henan TV endeavor to revive the ceremonial spaces of these rituals, enabling audiences, regardless of their physical locations, to construct a collective memory space within their minds while engaging with the program. In this immersive experience, individuals participate in a grand ceremony and contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage. Through visualizing traditional Chinese festival culture on screen, the program producers successfully construct a shared memory space intertwined with festival culture in the minds of their viewers. Consequently, a sense of community emerges, connecting the group to the awakened space and bridging the gap between the spaces of the past and the present, fostering a fertile ground for memory-related activities.

In summary, the Chinese Festival Series Program by Henan TV play a vital role in preserving and promoting Chinese cultural heritage. By spatializing festivals and constructing shared memory spaces, these programs facilitate remembrance, communication, and the perpetuation of cultural traditions. They serve as a catalyst for connecting individuals with the cultural heritage of China, fostering a collective sense of identity and appreciation for the enduring values embedded in festival celebrations.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Chinese Festival Series Program have successfully tapped into the rich cultural heritage of traditional Chinese festivals, utilizing innovative technologies and concepts to construct various dimensions of space. Through the incorporation of physical space, media space, narrative space, and the interplay between history and reality, these programs have seamlessly integrated history into the present and made rituals a part of everyday life. Furthermore, the utilization of live-action filming and cultural creative products has expanded the offline space and stimulated the growth of the culture and tourism industry.

In terms of narrative space, the Chinese Festival Series Program have departed from the conventional program format by adopting a storytelling approach. Through the use of virtual technology, they have provided audiences with an immersive sense of presence. By recreating historical spaces, engaging in dialogues between the past and the present, and reenacting mythical tales and legends, these programs have forged a unique media interaction space that resonates with the audience's own memory spaces. In doing so, they have reconstructed the ritual spaces associated with Chinese festivals, presenting audiences with an enhanced and ideal festival experience. Moreover, these programs have encouraged the audience to actively embrace their role in inheriting traditional culture while enjoying the program.

In summary, the Chinese Festival Series Program have demonstrated their ability to preserve and promote traditional Chinese culture. By creating immersive and engaging experiences, they have fostered a sense of belonging and cultural connection among audiences. Through the convergence of technology, storytelling, and ritual spaces, these programs have facilitated the transmission of cultural values and rituals to contemporary society. Additionally, the expansion of offline spaces and the promotion of cultural and tourism industries have contributed to the overall development and appreciation of Chinese culture. The Chinese Festival Series Program serve as a testament to the enduring significance and adaptability of traditional Chinese festivals in the modern era.

6. Limitations and Indications for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the ritual space construction of the Chinese Festival Series Program, there are limitations that should be considered. Firstly, due to the relative novelty and ongoing development of the series, there is limited existing literature available. Most existing studies focus on the operational aspects of the programs, such as content analysis and communication effects, while paying less attention to theoretical considerations. Thus, further research is needed to explore the theoretical dimensions and the connection between communication rituals and the development of cultural programs on television.

Secondly, this study only examines the texts of the Chinese Festival Series Program from 2021 to the 2023 Lantern Festival, resulting in a limited time span of three years. This temporal constraint restricts a comprehensive understanding of the series and its evolution over time. Future research could expand the scope by encompassing a longer period to capture the broader development and impact of the programs. Additionally, there is a need for interdisciplinary research that incorporates various fields such as media studies, cultural studies, anthropology, and communication theories. This interdisciplinary approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ritual space construction in the Chinese Festival Series Program and its broader implications. Furthermore, future studies could consider conducting audience research to investigate viewers' perceptions, experiences, and engagement with the programs. This would enhance the findings by incorporating audience perspectives and contributing to a more holistic understanding of the series' impact on cultural transmission and audience reception.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the ritual space construction of the Chinese Festival Series Program, it is important to acknowledge the limitations regarding the available literature, the selected time span,

and the potential for interdisciplinary and audience-focused research. Addressing these limitations in future studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of the series' significance and provide valuable academic support for researchers in this field.

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