

The Visual Aesthetic Value of Local Satellite TV Gala Programs: A Case Study of Traditional Festival Series Galas

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Abstract:

This paper examines the visual aesthetic value and socio-cultural impact of traditional festival gala series produced by local satellite TV stations. Since China Central Television (CCTV) first launched its Spring Festival Gala, such galas have undergone continuous innovation in both technical and artistic dimensions. However, as program content increasingly leans toward entertainment and commercialization, homogenization has become increasingly pronounced, leading to audience fatigue. Through analyzing successful cases of multiple festival galas, this paper systematically elaborates on their visual aesthetic value from aspects such as color application, lighting design, and stage art choreography. It further examines how satellite TV festival galas enhance regional cultural soft power by showcasing local cultural characteristics, promote the development of cultural tourism, and advance the inheritance and innovation of China's outstanding traditional culture.

Keywords:

Regional Satellite TV Gala, Visual Aesthetic Value, Traditional Culture

1. The Evolution of Traditional Festival Gala Series

In 1983, China Central Television (CCTV) hosted its inaugural Spring Festival Gala (hereafter referred to as “Spring Festival Gala”). At that time, television penetration in Chinese households was steadily increasing. The Spring Festival Gala broke the geographical constraints of traditional festive activities, effectively igniting the enthusiasm of a vast audience. The following year, the Spring Festival Gala continued with relatively conservative stage design, merely adding transparent floor tiles embedded with colored lights, resulting in limited visual variation. By 1993, LED displays were introduced to the Spring Festival Gala stage for the first time. During this phase, LED screens primarily served as tools for displaying program video images. In 1998, the gala relocated to Studio 1 of the Beijing Broadcasting Building. Its stage design incorporated traditional elements while featuring elevating and movable platforms, enhancing dynamic effects and visual impact. By 2005, LED screens had become a core stage design element across various gala events. These

screens could dynamically switch scenes and visuals based on program content, seamlessly integrating with performers' acts to significantly enhance the show's expressiveness and entertainment value. In 2012, the Spring Festival Gala stage underwent a structural transformation from its traditional circular layout to a T-shape. The floor incorporated elevating LED light blocks, while LED color screens were extensively installed around the stage perimeter and ceiling, collectively creating an immersive performance space with powerful visual impact. Since then, the Spring Festival Gala has continuously integrated cutting-edge technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), drone formation performances, and floating projection technology (flying screen technology), pushing the boundaries of stage art expression.[1]

Through technological innovation, the gala optimized the audience's audiovisual experience, enabling its content and highlights to achieve efficient dissemination and viral spread across internet platforms. However, the intensifying trends of mass entertainment and commercialization led to homogenization in the content of various gala programs. Despite far richer visual presentations than in the early Spring Festival Galas, overly commercialized program arrangements caused aesthetic fatigue among viewers.

The dance performance "Night Banquet in the Tang Palace" from Henan TV's 2021 Spring Festival Gala successfully "broke the mold," offering an innovative approach for variety shows. This series innovates by deeply exploring traditional cultural resources and focusing on modern expressions of heritage. Its costume design draws inspiration from Sui Dynasty musical dance figurines, recreating classic Tang Dynasty makeup styles (such as "slanted red" cheek makeup). The high-saturation red and green color palette creates a distinctive, recognizable visual effect amidst homogenized dance performances. The stage backdrop incorporates ancient calligraphy, paintings, and cultural relic elements, harmonizing with performers' costumes and the overall stage palette to construct a cohesive visual narrative space. Henan Satellite TV's programming model—combining "web dramas" with "web variety shows"—effectively enhances audience engagement and freshness, offering new approaches for modernizing the dissemination and expression of traditional culture. [2]

2. The Visual Aesthetic Value of Traditional Festival Series Galas

The visual presentation of traditional festival gala series serves as the core vehicle for their artistic impact. Its aesthetic value is primarily realized through the systematic construction of three elements: color application, lighting design, and stage art choreography. These three components work in concert to collectively serve thematic expression and emotional transmission.

2.1. Color Application

In contemporary stage design, color combinations and transitions have become crucial tools for creating atmospheric settings. As a core element of visual language, color conveys emotions, emphasizes themes, and shapes ambiance. Every component of stage visuals is inextricably linked to color application, which not only plays a pivotal role in narrative progression, visual enhancement, and emotional resonance but also directly influences the overall artistic impact of the performance. Scientific color combinations can construct specific emotional fields. For instance, warm tones

effectively stimulate audience enthusiasm and vitality, while cool tones create calm and soothing visual effects. [3]

Whether in festive celebrations, film and television productions, or variety shows, color serves as a vital visual symbolic language. Its judicious application significantly enhances visual expressiveness. Skillfully employing color relationships markedly boosts stage impact, thereby stimulating deeper aesthetic experiences and emotional resonance among audiences.

Take the 2022 CCTV Spring Festival Gala dance performance “Only This Azure Green” as an example. Inspired by the Song Dynasty painting “Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains,” the costumes primarily feature traditional “azure” and “green” tones, complemented by “yellow” as the background color. The palette emphasizes layering and gradient effects. The transition from deep to light shades of blue-green enhances visual impact, symbolizing the distance and interplay of reality and illusion in natural landscapes. The stage presentation unfolds like a scroll painting, conveying the refined elegance and charm of the Song Dynasty.

2.2. Lighting Design

As a core component of stage art, lighting design extends far beyond basic illumination. It evolves into a comprehensive visual language that shapes space, evokes emotion, and conveys cultural expression. This artistic practice rests upon the fundamental aesthetic categories of “representation” and “expression.” Through systematic control of elements like light positioning, color, intensity, and shadow movement, it transcends mere physical illumination to achieve an elevation into emotional communication.

“Representational” lighting language strives to simulate natural light effects, emphasizing visual realism and immersive contextuality. Through realistic light-and-shadow arrangements, logical projection principles, and color shifts aligned with temporal and spatial characteristics, it constructs credible stage environments that subtly guide audience emotions. This approach highlights lighting’s narrative function and objective attributes, serving plot progression and the visual externalization of character psychology.

In contrast, “expressive” lighting transcends physical realism, leaning toward subjective, symbolic, or even abstract expression. It employs highly saturated colors, unnatural light-and-shadow structures, dynamic beams, and rhythmic variations to shape emotional and psychological visual imagery. This language no longer merely “depicts” the environment but directly engages in thematic interpretation and meaning construction, becoming a lyrical medium capable of dialoguing with elements like music and movement.

In practical creation, successful stage lighting design often manifests as an organic unity of “representation” and “expression.” These two approaches are not mutually exclusive but dynamically harmonized across different performance contexts, forming multi-layered light-and-shadow narratives. Designers must start from the overall aesthetic concept of the performance, ensuring that lighting synergizes with visual and auditory elements like performance, music, costumes, and scenery to construct a unified visual symbol system. The 2020 CCTV Spring Festival Gala dance piece “Fisherman’s Song,” adapted from the dance drama “The Eternal Radio Wave,” employs a combination of movement and side-light “projection.” This technique renders the dance actions more vivid and layered within the interplay of light and

shadow. Such synchrony allows audiences to perceive the harmonious unity between dance and light, enhancing the fluidity of the stage space. [4]

In summary, stage lighting design is fundamentally a form of visual expression using light as its medium and space as its canvas. Its syntax lies in the organization of light and shadow, its rhetoric in the evocation of emotion, and its essence in the unified manifestation of artistic concepts through creative methods and visual outcomes.

2.3. Scenic Design

Scenic design constructs the stage space through visual elements, connecting the performance with the audience and enhancing the artistic expressiveness of the program. It primarily serves to extend the stage performance, heighten emotional resonance, define boundaries for the performance, and establish the environment where the plot unfolds. Through meticulous coordination of space, elements, rhythm, and lighting ratios, scenic design must also adapt to the demands of content expression, enabling it to accommodate diverse program scenarios. With the advancement of technology, technological integration has brought breakthroughs to stage design. Techniques like multimedia imaging, virtual reality, and 3D technology not only enable rapid scene transitions and blend reality with illusion but also heighten theatrical immersion and realism, significantly boosting visual impact. [5]

The 2022 Shaanxi Satellite TV Silk Road Spring Festival Gala, themed “The Road of Harmony,” featured LED screens inspired by the Silk Road. Their undulating design not only created a visually fluid aesthetic but also symbolized the route’s twists and extensions, representing cultural exchange and integration.

3. The Sociocultural Impact of Traditional Festival Series Galas

3.1. Enhancing Local Cultural Soft Power

Traditional festival gala series showcase diverse local cultural characteristics. Through modern media dissemination, they significantly elevate regional cultural soft power. By presenting unique festival customs and local traditions, these programs deepen residents’ understanding and pride in their cultural heritage. In 2021, Shanghai TV’s “Bright Moon in the East—Mid-Autumn Dream Night” utilized Shanghai’s iconic landmarks, sound symbols, and cultural motifs to create a gala imbued with regional cultural identity, deepening viewers’ connection to the city’s cultural heritage. Using the cityscape as its stage, the gala innovatively created 12 new moon-viewing landmarks in Shanghai. By incorporating the connotations of the character “杧” (meaning “bright”), it conveyed the emotional significance of reunion—both of the moon and of people—thereby elevating Shanghai’s cultural influence.

3.2. Fostering Cultural Tourism Development

Traditional festival gala series have become catalysts for cultural tourism development. Through modern audiovisual language and communication methods, they successfully “revitalize” traditional culture, infusing static tourism resources with dynamic, emotional appeal, and efficiently converting cultural value into economic value. The 2021 Henan gala program “Longmen Golden Warrior” utilized on-site filming and AR technology to create a solemn atmosphere, showcasing the historical and cultural significance of the Longmen Grottoes to audiences. Upon broadcast, it

attracted a significant influx of domestic and international tourists seeking to experience and explore the site, with visitor numbers increasing by 112.67% and 181.38% respectively compared to 2022, driving the local tourism economy.

3.3. Promoting and Innovating China's Outstanding Traditional Culture

While promoting traditional culture, the traditional festival gala series actively explores innovative approaches to meet modern societal needs. The 2022 Fujian Spring Festival Gala's song-and-dance performance "Battle of the Sea" broke free from conventional stage limitations. Using cinematic techniques, it narrated the story of Citong Port—China's 56th World Heritage site and the "Eastern World's Premier Port" during the Song and Yuan dynasties. The performance showcased Fujian's regional culture and maritime heritage, highlighting the spirit and contemporary vitality of its people.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

To better preserve and promote the spirit of the Red Flag Canal, digital technology can be leveraged to develop a management simulation game based on its construction process. By recreating the journey of building the canal, the game enables players to experience firsthand the hardships and challenges faced by the builders of that time, thereby deepening their understanding of and respect for the Red Flag Canal spirit.

Set against the historical backdrop of the canal's construction, the game allows players to take on various roles such as engineer, worker, or manager, each with specific tasks and responsibilities. It features a series of challenging missions, including solving construction issues, dealing with harsh weather conditions, and coordinating manpower and resources. All of these tasks are designed based on real-life situations encountered during the actual construction of the Red Flag Canal. Through virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, the game creates an immersive experience that makes players feel as if they are truly present at the construction site of the Red Flag Canal. With clear and specific goals and an instant feedback mechanism, the game filters out unnecessary information and fully engages the players, enabling them to focus intensely, enter a state of "flow," and become deeply immersed in the experience.

Red cultural spaces make use of existing revolutionary relics and historical materials to gamify the dissemination and education of red culture. Developing game-based projects that help visitors understand the social context and historical inevitability of the revolution's emergence is also one of the key approaches to creating immersive scene-based experiences.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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