



## A Study on the Educational and Entertaining Aspects of the Cultural Reality Show *"One Meal Across Millennium"*

Yifei Zhu

### Abstract

In recent years, cultural variety shows have evolved, with cultural experience reality shows becoming the focal point for innovation in this genre. This trend reflects the audience's desire to better understand and experience traditional culture, aligning with society's broader goals of preserving and passing on cultural heritage. These shows offer both entertainment and educational opportunities, while presenting traditional culture in an engaging way for younger audiences. Exploring the presentation methods and innovative strategies of such shows can help creators avoid repetitive formats and promote the healthy development of cultural variety programs. This paper focuses on the cultural experience reality show *"One Meal Across Millennium"*, which combines entertainment with education by showcasing culinary traditions, allowing viewers to learn about food culture while being entertained.

**Keywords:** cultural experience reality show, traditional culture, variety shows

## **I. Definition of Cultural Experience Reality Shows**

Cultural experience reality shows are defined as programs that focus on traditional culture, aiming to promote and celebrate it through real-life experiences and artistic processing. Participants are placed in specific scenarios and follow set rules to engage in unique cultural experiences, which are then objectively documented and artistically edited. This format combines education and entertainment, allowing audiences to learn about and experience the charm of traditional culture in an enjoyable way.

With the continuous development of society and the diversification of audience tastes, traditional variety shows are no longer sufficient to meet the modern audience's needs for both entertainment and cultural content. Viewers have grown tired of competitive and thrill-based programs, seeking instead new types of shows that blend entertainment with cultural depth. Cultural experience variety shows have been exploring innovations in both content and format, spreading traditional culture through audience-friendly methods, garnering widespread social attention. In 2013, the success of *The Chinese Character Dictation Contest* and *Chinese Character Hero* brought traditional culture into the spotlight. This trend continued with *The Reader* and *Letters Alive* in 2017, and from 2021 onwards, new cultural experience shows such as *Sounds of Life: Treasure Island*, *On Stage! Beijing Central Axis*, and *Shining! Chinese Civilization 2* emerged in large numbers.

While the range of topics in cultural experience reality shows has grown, many still focus heavily on regional culture. One notable example is the show *One Meal Across Millennium*, which aired every Friday evening on CCTV Variety Channel starting October 28, 2022. Using gourmet food as an entry point, the show explores the rich heritage and cultural significance behind Chinese cuisine, aiming to enhance cultural confidence. Through deconstructing and creatively reinterpreting traditional food culture, *One Meal Across Millennium* showcases the beauty of ancient Chinese cuisine, both in taste and presentation, while emphasizing the deeper emotional and cultural significance of food. This approach shifts the narrative of previous cultural shows, which often struggled to balance education and entertainment.

## **II. Challenges in Cultural Experience Reality Shows**

### **(1) Educational Challenges: Depth and Systematization of Knowledge Transfer**

While cultural experience reality shows appear to offer highbrow content and rich cultural knowledge, the information is often fragmented, making it difficult for viewers to grasp deep and systematic knowledge. Audiences may struggle to truly understand and internalize the cultural elements presented, especially for performance-based or craft-heavy traditions that require more contextual information. Although expert commentators may provide insights, these are often limited to

critiquing participants' performances, rather than offering in-depth cultural explanations. This results in a superficial understanding of culture, which may attract viewers in the short term but fails to leave a lasting impact due to the lack of comprehensive knowledge.

Both television and online media have social responsibility and educational functions when disseminating cultural knowledge. If audiences cannot understand a program, they may stop watching, and few will seek additional resources to fill the gaps. This limits the reach of such shows, particularly among viewers who are eager to learn more about culture.

## **(2) Entertainment Challenges: Balancing Program Design and Content**

Producers of cultural experience reality shows face the challenge of balancing audience demand for entertainment with the authenticity of cultural content. Some shows, in their pursuit of entertainment, may become overly commercialized, leading to shallow content that panders to market tastes, thereby undermining the true transmission of traditional culture. As a result, viewers may perceive the show as insincere, losing the authentic charm of traditional culture. Modern audiences often seek light entertainment and relaxation from variety shows, and thus cultural experience reality shows must strike a delicate balance between education and entertainment.

For instance, the third season of *Our Time Travel* faced mixed reviews, with some viewers criticizing the show for becoming too serious and focused on cultural content, losing its entertainment value. Other viewers felt the program lacked depth, particularly during certain game segments that seemed overly simplistic. This highlights the need for producers to explore more innovative content and production strategies that balance cultural depth with entertainment appeal.

## **III. Breaking New Ground in Cultural Experience Reality Shows**

### **(1) Short Drama Segments: A New Way to Combine Education and Entertainment**

*One Meal Across Millennium* uses short historical drama segments to recreate historical scenes from ancient texts like *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, helping viewers engage with traditional culture. By employing cinematic techniques, the show enhances viewer interest. For example, the first episode features a performance of the preparation of lychee jelly, with historical poetry and immersive set design, linking past and present through rotating sets. This approach adds a storytelling element to the show, making it more visually engaging and educational.

The show integrates modern technology, such as digital recreations of historical scenes, while participants, including professional chefs and guest hosts, engage in the recreation of ancient culinary practices. This format allows viewers to appreciate the process of mastering ancient recipes, providing both entertainment and a sense of accomplishment.

## **(2) Culinary Exploration: Combining Professional Skills with Cultural Transmission**

The show explores six culinary themes, each featuring three dishes from different historical periods. Chefs consult historical texts to ensure the most authentic recreation of these ancient dishes, guided by experts like Ho Chun-huan, a renowned chef who has worked with Taipei's National Palace Museum. Celebrity guests learn both the technical aspects of cooking and the deeper cultural significance behind the dishes. This immersive experience enhances viewers' understanding of traditional culture, providing emotional resonance and a deeper appreciation of cultural heritage.

## **(3) Highlighting Emotional Stories: Strengthening Audience Connection**

In addition to focusing on culinary techniques, the show also emphasizes the emotional stories of historical figures, allowing viewers to connect with traditional culture on a personal level. For instance, Taiwanese chef Ho Chun-huan shares her own cultural reflections, bridging the gap between her heritage in Taiwan and her ancestral roots in mainland China. By personalizing the cultural experience, the show creates a stronger emotional bond between the audience and traditional culture.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Cultural experience reality shows use the framework of variety shows to introduce modern, entertaining expressions of traditional culture, fostering emotional connections with younger audiences. By blending education with entertainment, these shows deepen viewers' understanding of cultural heritage while promoting its transmission. *One Meal Across Millennium* exemplifies this trend, providing a successful model that integrates educational content with engaging storytelling. This paper highlights the potential for future cultural experience reality shows to further develop this balance, ensuring both cultural depth and audience appeal.

By studying the success of *One Meal Across Millennium*, producers can gain valuable insights into how to better combine entertainment and education, ensuring that traditional culture continues to thrive in a modern entertainment landscape.

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