Ordinary people narratives in the tv shows everlasting classic

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ABSTRACT: Using the narrative approach, this study analyzes ordinary people social roles that contribute to the passing on moral values and good characters. Three narratives of recorded TV show “Everlasting Classic” were used as samples. These narratives described activities of a senior villager, a diaspora, young artists, an opera-singer superstar, and an international artist in performing arts that meant to deliver valuable messages about moral values and good characters written in the classic Chinese books and poems. These ordinary people social engagements in their communities have also inspired the local and international audience to engage in the same activities.

Keywords: narrative, ordinary people, China tv shows, everlasting classic

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper begins here with the Folk Verse of Han, Jiang Nan. Jiang Nan is in the lotus harvest season; Luscious lotus leaves cover the entire pond. Fishes swim cheerfully between the lotus leaves. Those fishes cheerfully move to the East; Those fishes cheerfully move to the West; Those fishes cheerfully move to the South; Those fishes cheerfully move to the North.

Jiang Nan is an area in China that historically presented the prosperous agricultural community around the Yangtze River (Cultural China, 2017). Now, the term Jiang Nan has been used to mean the area around South of Yangtze that includes famous cities such as Shanghai, Anqing, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Ningbo, and Zhenjiang. Carefully selected words and aesthetically used figurative language in the Jiang Nan Folk Verse describe the Han people who lived in China from 202 BC to 220 AD (Lewis, 2007). Using the metaphor of fishes that swim back and forth in the pond, the poet means to tell about the joy of Han people celebrating the harvest festival. The poet also uses lotus, in addition, to show the prosperity of this region. Recurring verses in the folk present the recurring joys of this session that people of Han would always be waited.

With its simplicity, the Folk verse displays people participation in a community activity, the social engagement. When people take part in the community events, their participations can sufficiently be identified as their social engagement (Zhang et al. 2011). The celebrating events certainly also convey the role of citizens and are related to the citizenship issues.

Ordinary people social engagement obviously can be traced using works of art and performance. In order to prove this argument, this study presents the narrative review of three videos from a Chinese TV show, “Everlasting Classic.” Celebrities sing the classing Chinese poems in a modern music arrangement, and they share their thoughts about Chinese customs and traditions in this show (CGTN, 2019). The show is a creative process of social re-engineering the classic into modern. Moreover, it is presenting performances and modern visual communication media to juxtapose efforts of citizens to pass down cultural values in non-conventional ways.

This study, thus, means to answer the following questions. First, what are social roles of ordinary citizens that can be identified with the narrative of “Everlasting Classic” shows used as samples of

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this study? Second, how the “Everlasting Classic” Program has been used by China as an effective media to pass on moral values? Third, what are social engagements and important civic issues that can be identified from the Chinese classic verses presented in the shows?

2 METHODS

The roles of ordinary people in this study were identified using qualitative narrative approach. The narratives were composed by converting the tv shows into written stories. The written stories were then thematically arranged according to the research questions. In the narratives, social roles of the ordinary people were described and explained as cases; it was then connected with the related theories.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *The narratives*

3.1.1 *Grandpa and youth chant the three-character classic*

Zhang Bulang Village, in Henan Province immediately became lively that day. Five stunning boys, members of a Chinese boy band, the Typhoon Teens came to visit Grandpa Zhang Xueli, a senior citizen of the village. The 117-year-old Grandpa Zhang welcomed the boys to his house with cheerfulness and a warm smile. Then, he showed them his birth certificate, recited the entire verses of the Three-Character Classic for the boys, and also showed his calligraphy skill by writing three characters: three, letter, and classic using brush and ink (CCTV, 2019).

The Hunan TV show, “Everlasting Classic” had made it possible for Grandpa Zhang to be aired in a live show without have to do a long-distance travel that may harm his health. During the live show, the TV’s host made a video call to Grandpa. Grandpa appeared on the screen, said hello to the program audience and answered the host questions. In the interview, Grandpa also mentioned other Chinese classic books that he had learned when he was a little. Those classics are the Confucian Analects, the Great Doctrine, and the Books of Mencius’ teachings. For Grandpa Zhang, the courage to get educated has no boundaries and becoming literate is a gateway for good education. Parts of the classic that are highly related to Grandpa Zhang’s good ways of learning are: When young, study; When grown up, perform; Influence the sovereign above; Benefit the people below; Diligence has merit; Play has no advantage; Guard against it; Exert your Strength (Yellow Bridge, 2003).

In the past, teachers and education scholars used various ways to teach literacy and the Three-Character Classic is one of the medias for literacy teaching. This text, that was written by Wang Yinglin, contains not less than 1200 characters, is a mandatory reading for primary school students and it is still being used right now. Because it is easy to understand and universally apply to education around the world, the principles of this teaching further have been adapted by many non-Chinese educations. The text has been translated as well into many languages, including but not limited to English, Spanish, Japanese, and Russia, as well as Indonesian Language.

3.1.2 *Two Chinese opera singers chant ode to the plum blossom*

For the 11-year-old Gabriel Wang, be able to perform on stage with his mentor, a veteran Chinese-Opera-Singer Li Shengsu, was a remarkable achievement and an unforgettable moment. Gabriel and Li deeply impressed the audience with their melodious high-pitched voice singing Ode to the Plum Blossom, a poem written by China’s founding father, Mao Zedong (Tay, 1966). Young Gabriel started to have the interest in Chinese Opera Singing when he was 3 years old. He admitted that his interest in singing was aroused through the time he saw and listened to his father practicing (CCTV, 2018).

Gabriel was born in Vancouver, Canada in 2007 and in 2017, he tried to achieve his dream of becoming a professional opera singer by returning to his ancestral-land China and participating in

a singing contest. His performance singing the opera attracted the talent recruiters, and soon after that he consistently appeared singing with many well-known singers on TV. As mentioned by his mentor Li Shengsu, for a diaspora of Chinese, at such a young age, be able to sing in Chinese Opera style, Gabriel is a very gifted child. According to Li, she really admires Gabriel for his proficiency in captivating difficult pronouncing words and rhythms as well as his wide range of knowledge about the history of Chinese Opera and Chinese literature.

Gabriel's talent and his charm in Chinese Opera Singing seems to match well with the beauty of spring and spirit of loving the country in the verses of the poem sang as the song with Li Shengsi in "Everlasting Classic." The following is a translation of the poem in English by Tay published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* in 1966. Ode to the Plum- to the tune Pu-suan-Tzu, Mao Zedong by revising Lu Yu's views in Plum Blossom: "Wind and rain send spring away, Drifting snow brings spring back. The cliff is hanging with thousand-foot ice, A blossom blooms elegant. Elegant but not vying for spring, She only ushers spring in. And when the whole mountainside is in bloom, She (the plum fruit) smiles in the gorge [in retirement]."

3.1.3 *A friend from Kazakhstan chants the thousand miles friendship*

Dimash Kudaibergen hailed from Kazakhstan and began singing in China in 2017. He performed initially in the Hunan TV's music program, "I'm The Singer" (Aiyok, 2017). That debut gave him more opportunities to appear in Chinese TV's programs such as Chinese Top Ten Music Awards in Shanghai and Top Chinese Music Award in Shenzhen. Dimash's performance in the Everlasting Classic, aired back after the long break during the pandemic outbreak in 2020, captivated the audience and became hot discussions, both in Chinese and International News. China News Channel, Global Time highlighted Dimash effortless hard work to prepare his singing in the show (Global Time, 2020). The Astana Times (Yergaliyeva, 2020) also quoted that Dimash successfully impressing people who came to the show with his high-pitched vocal range and his sang to a dombra (Kazak's traditional string instrument) accompaniment (CCTV, 2020).

The song that Dimash sang in Everlasting Classic entitled Thousands of Miles, A Common Dream is a lyric written by Kevin based on the Tang era poem, Farewell in Weicheng written by Zhang Jiuling "The ever-budding willows in farewells. The ever-growing clouds in sight. The ever-echoing birdsong in ears. The ever-haunting lovesickness in hearts. The farewell had put us on the gateway. On horse I left for the ferry, seeing you away. Together or apart, near or far. Sharing a heart, friends still we are. In my arms sleeps the moon. Casting velvety dreams to lane and road. The twittering swallow, please. Bestow spring jasmines to every household. Guests from the east and the west. Travelers from the north and the south. Beyond all the mountains and rivers. We are bonded by an angelic soul. Through effort common dreams loom. In every home spring will bloom." [Fandom Wiki, n.d]. Both Dimash singing of this song and Kevin's work on recomposing the verses have added nuances and emotions to the original poem. Their collaboration also shows that people from different countries are different and at the same time can develop friendship and have a common dream.

3.2 *Analysis of the narratives*

3.2.1 *Social roles and civic engagement*

The term "ordinary people" in this study is used to describe people that are not public officials, not take on leadership roles, and not serve in the military. Simply, they are civilians with various social roles. These ordinary people carry out their daily routines according to their respective professions. In these daily routines, they are capable, enthusiastic and qualified to govern their lives to inspire others (Welzel & Inglehart, 2008). Daily routines of these empowered civilians can be referred to as social responsibilities and civic engagement that have been extensively studied by researchers in the field of Civic Education.

Grandpa Zhang, as a senior citizen, shows the young people that age is not a restriction to take on social involvement. Typhoon Teens are the representation of grown ups who still learn to be responsible citizens. The event of these youths visiting Grandpa tells about respecting and loving

the elderly. Today, numbers of senior citizens in China have been increasing rapidly and some of them have encountered challenges related to personal and social empowerment (Lai & Ruan, 2020). The elderly and youth harmonious relationship is an important civic issue in China today. The harmonious relation has been proved supporting the senior citizens physical and psychological well-being (Tang et al. 2018).

Another important issue of citizenship in China is the overseas diasporas. The social role of Gabriel Wang as a Chinese diaspora here can become an ideal role model of hard work and enthusiasm for other Chinese children to develop their potential talents. His performance in the *Everlasting Classic* implicitly has a message about the importance of adoring and learning from the idol and inspiring others by becoming their idol. Gabriel's mentor, Li showed a good example of democratic education. Instead of just teaching and telling, she emphasized that youths like Gabriel need to be accompanied to pursue their careers. Many Chinese diasporas with professional talents like Gabriel have returned to China today to pursue their careers. The Chinese diasporas have benefited China in two ways: strengthening the country's domestic development and increasing the country's international geostrategic (Wang, n.d.). For the diaspora themselves, the opportunity to develop a career in China not only economically benefits them but also culturally pays off because they can embrace the connection between their identity to their ancestral Chinese background (Hutton, 2018).

The social role of Dimash is also very important to our globalized world today. He is a representation of world citizens who are willing to crossing the border of their countries to expand carriers. In addition, he is also carrying the message about continuous learning from other communities.

Activities of these people are very common and universally appear in our daily lives; However, not until TV programs or news featured them, the civic roles of ordinary people mostly go unnoticed. These people supposedly are not being in the position of unnoticeable in our societies. Less or more, ordinary citizens play important roles in carrying out the issues of civic and citizenship. When the living stories of ordinary people are portrayed as an entertainment program such as the "*Everlasting Classic*," messages about the social roles of citizens become easier to take on for other ordinary people. The message will somewhat influence the change of behavior and lifestyle of others. For that reason, Civic Education Scholars have to learn from journalists about the inclusion of writings as well as academic discussions about ordinary people in order to empower their positive and actions to influence many other ordinary people in order to take progressive actions that can benefiting the entire communities (Welzel & Inglehart, 2008).

It can be argued that scientific seminars, academic discussions, class lectures or lessons with the aim to instill good characters and moral values are less influential than the entertaining ways in achieving the same goal. The language that academics use to send the message is not as simple as the language of entertainment. Technical terms that academics used in textbooks, papers, and presentations frequently were not in the context that easy to understand by ordinary people (Plaven-Singray et al. 2017); Differently, the entertainment is using attractive ways, such as semiotics (signs and symbols) that are easy to see and simple terms, body language, and other visual designs to engage people to the show (Gaines, 2010). This is obviously a challenge to academics, especially in the field of Civic Education for finding a way to be as attractive as the entertainment or perhaps take this entertaining way into account when designing the educational programs.

3.2.2 *Creative entertainment as the media to pass on culture*

As an entertainment program, *The Everlasting Classic* creatively unveils the history, knowledge and moral values in the Chinese classical scriptures. It involves celebrities adapting verses in the scriptures, making adjustment for the purpose of creative expression, and singing the songs. Rearrangement for the purpose mentioned above enabling actualization of moral values and context of living in the past to current time without losing the important messages of the verses' writer. In addition, singers have opportunities to express the learning process of their creative arts preparation stages till the end of their performance. Occasionally, juries of the program and the host request the artists to perform their additional skills and their knowledge about history as well as values related to their performance.

The international artists and Chinese diasporas also take part in the Everlasting Classic. Their performance sends an important message that performance arts have universal values. Apart from being an entertainment, Everlasting Classic can help people to learn Chinese history, culture and values, as well as literature and performing arts. This program is also a place for artists to learn from one another, develop their friendship and strengthen the collaboration with performing together at one stage.

The Everlasting Classic performance-stage looks appealing; It has modern digital-visual design. Judges and audiences in the auditorium could vote for their favorite artists immediately from a hand-touch sensor that has been modeled as a heart and attached to their clothes before entering the performance studio. Viewers on the TV could follow and vote for their idols using the QR-code showed in the screen. Artificial lighting in the shape likes bamboo-blades is also used to show verses and other characters of people who are watching the show. The stage also has various movable decorations that can be rearranged to suit different performances. In addition, the artists also occasionally wear stunning ethnic outfits and brought traditional instruments to accompany their performance. The visual and art designs have rich semiotics (signs and symbols) that function effectively to accompany body languages of the artists and textual language of the verses to deliver entertaining and meaningful messages (Atoofi, 2015).

3.2.3 *Samples of social engagement and moral values embedded in Chinese classic*

The term “Classic” attached to Chinese books and poems indicates the long history of the scriptures. These scriptures stored important wisdom of the past that are still up-to-date to our societies today. Therefore, not very difficult to find our lives today connected to the living of people in the past that were documented in the texts. Chinese people in the era of Song, for example have been engaging in practicing the educational principles written in the Three-Character Classic. The Three-Character Classic consists of five important topics: 1) goodness of mankind and social relationships; 2) basic principles of Confucius’s thought; 3) history of China; 4) exemplary behavior; and 5) encouragement for learning. This text has great influence to the development of public education that can provide people with opportunity to learn regardless their social status in the society (Liu, 1985). The text is not only a literary resource, but it is first the source of Civic Education for Song’s people and later for the Chinese. Then, when it comes to the society where the text has significant influence, it has become the guide for good moral characters and roadmap for becoming responsible citizens.

The universal values of the moral teachings related to the narrative about Grandpa Zhang and the Typhoon Teens can be identified in the section about study and hard work. The verse stated that learning is the foundation for growth and must be accompanied by continuous practice till mastering the skills; A person who is successful in applying his learning outcomes to become a useful human being will benefit others for generations to come. Another verse emphasized the need to set limits of having fun in life; Do things as needed and avoid overdue-ness; Self-control and discipline are necessary for life. What do you think about these two verses? Do you agree that the moral teaching like this is very universal and can be found in most societies? Do you also agree that moral values are still very actual in guiding us in carrying out social responsibility and involvement in society?

Poems as a medium for communication have been used for many purposes, including persuasion, encouragement, and motivation (Trench, 1930). Mao Zedong certainly is not the only leader to use the poem to boost the spirit of civilians’ toughness and patriotism. Indonesia’s founding father, Soekarno also had used the poem entitled “*Aku Melihat Indonesia*” (Ahmad, 2020) with similar aim to Mao, making civilians proud of Indonesia. Both Mao and Soekarno have proved that poems are not only words and verses; poems are a very effective tool and strategy to influence “ordinary people” following their lead fighting the imperialists and to stand out as a free nation state (Hagemann, 2006). Literary scholars noticed that Mao’s poem was indeed the remake of Luo You’s poem with the same title but for a very different purpose. At the time Mao wrote this poem, 1961, China was in a very serious economic recession. Mao aims to awaken civil resilience and nationalism using the poem by illustrating the living conditions of China as the plum tree. Mao

wants people to see the crisis as the extreme weather that will be over. The resilience is similar to the toughest plump tree to face extreme weather. It will bloom and the nation will be back to glory if civilians hold strong together to face the crisis.

The last classic text to discuss here is a piece of work written during the Tang Dynasty, the golden era of literature in the history of ancient China. This poem is about friendship and the poet writes this for a friend who was leaving for a journey. Although the poem was primarily aimed for personal communication but this personal aim strongly connected to the experience of many people. Many people will be experiencing the time for setting apart and living people as well as the place they love. The journey will then remind people of distances and boundaries that can separate us physically but not mentally. Distances and boundaries cannot disconnect the feeling of acquaintance and the memory of times people spent together. Distances and boundaries are just a way to make human beings realize about hopes and dreams. Obviously, verses of this poem are about the living experiences of us wherever we are as human beings.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Using the narrative approach, this study revealed the social role of ordinary citizens, the function of the performance in conveying noble values and good characters, and the citizenship issues embedded in the classical books and poems. The social roles that can be identified are senior villagers, teenage artists, Chinese diasporas, Chinese opera song superstars, and international artists who are developing artistic careers in China. These people appear as main roles in the video recordings. Their stories captivate the audience interest, engage them to watch the show, and inspire them to do the similar social engagements. The visual design semiotics of stage and the broadcasting footage are two important factors to affect the effective messages meant to deliver to the audience in addition to the artist's performance. These physical features facilitated the persuasion simultaneously with the support of the media and the artists performances. Most importantly, classical Chinese books and poetry have universal values that can be connected with the lives of other peoples of other nations. These universal values include study hard, work hard, love and be loyal to the homeland, as well as appreciate friendship.

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