

## The evolution of Chinese mainstream TV series

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A poster of "My Chief and My Regiment" (sohu.com Photo)

TV screens in China this year have been bombarded with "mainstream" or tribute-style political and patriotic TV series. Unlike most previously released mainstream TV, which lost ground to popular overseas and commercially-produced local series, this year's shows have attracted a substantial number of viewers due to their diverse and interesting content, modern production techniques and more natural acting approach.

"My Chief and My Regiment," a mainstream series from Jiangsu Broadcasting Center (JSBC) that premiered in March, tells the story of the Chinese National Revolutionary Army in 1942 at the border of China and Myanmar. According to Liu Yuzhe, who is in charge of JSBC's TV series projects, "My Chief and My Regiment" topped the prime-time spot, with an audience rating of 2.128, a number rarely reached by previous mainstream TV.

Yu Zecheng (L) and his wife Cui Ping in popular spy series "Qianfu" ("Lurk") . (Xinhua Photo)

Another mainstream series, "Qianfu" ("Lurk"), about spy Yu Zecheng from the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics of the Military Council of the Kuomintang, not only topped the ratings, but earned the investor over 10 million yuan (US\$1.46 million) in profit. "Qianfu" is about Yu's experiences during the civil war between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang as well as a love story with his true love and wife.

"Chinese Band of Brothers," "A Fast-Changing World" and "My Brother's Name is Shunliu" are also very popular.

Previously, mainstream series were brimming with images of a hero who was tall, handsome, selfless, flawless and worldly. He was usually a brave, smart soldier in the Chinese Communist Party fighting the Japanese or Kuomintang. The characters and storylines were very similar and basic and gradually saw viewers choose other channels and programs to watch.

Mainstream series were used for political propaganda with characters often devoid of personality and despite heavy funding, the shows could not survive among a sophisticated audience, according to Yin Hong, a film and TV series expert from Tsinghua University.

Years of failing to attract viewers pushed directors, producers and scriptwriters to come up with a new formula.

True-to-life characters with varied and interesting personalities coupled with high-level production techniques have helped make many of this year's mainstream TV series a success. Alongside the changes in approach, the theme of mainstream series has also evolved to match societal changes.

**【1】 【2】**