From Ritual Dictation to Writing: A Study on the Cross-Media Narrative Characteristics of the Miao Heroic Epic *King Yalu*

LI Changting[a],*

[a]College of Chinese Language and Literature, Guizhou Minzu University, Guiyang, Guizhou, China.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

It is an evolutionary relationship from dictation to writing. As a way and classification of civilization expression, memory and inheritance, dictation and writing cross-media expression has a great impact on the dissemination and research of *King Yalu*. From the perspective of cross-media narrative, it investigates how the story text and narrative logic of *King Yalu* comes into being from ritual dictation to writing and how this realization influenced the dissemination and research of *King Yalu*, to better understand and grasp the background of multimedia convergence cross-media future work style and *King Yalu* studies.

Key words: Dictation and writing; *King Yalu*; Cross-media narrative; Narrative characteristics

1. INTRODUCTION

King Yalu is the first long heroic epic of Miao nationality, which is mainly sung in funeral activities. Its studies have been in full swing for the past 12 years since 2009, when it became a key project in the rescue project of Chinese folk cultural heritage and was listed as one of the major discoveries of Chinese culture by the Ministry of Culture in 2009. The first book series, *King Yalu*, edited by China Folk Literature and Art Association in 2011, mainly consists of epic and graphic parts to describe the early history of Yalu from the creation of the world to the forced migration subsequently.

However, there is no any cultural elements involved in the first book series, and deeply, many cultural structures remain to be studied. But it has brought it into the limelight and a lot of attention. A brief summary mainly includes several aspects of research: (1) Based on the study of anthropology (Cai, 2014-2020); (2) On the dissemination and inheritance of *King Yalu*, including the cultivation of Xinxin (dissemination and inheritance), English translation and research (Liu, 2020); (3) Studies based on cultural values, including its connotation (Tao, 2015), cultural implication (Shun, 2017), and cultural adjustment (Liu, 2020), mostly focus on the study of cultural value, which has received little attention from media.

Multimedia with digital information communication as the main body has a great impact on the carrier of traditional inheritance, and oral narration and written expressions are no exception. Grasping the different forms of expression of *King Yalu* is of great significance to its multi-media communication in the future. It mainly analyzes the characteristics of the epic narrative of the Miao heroic epic *King Yalu* from the expression of the cross-media narrative, and explores the change of the story text and narrative logic from the oral narration to the written text.

2. THE EXPRESSION WAYS OF CROSS-MEDIA NARRATIVE

In recent years, narratology gradually presents a multi-disciplinary and multi-media overall situation. Breaking through the characteristics of traditional text narrative, the vision gradually changed from text image to visual image. For example, static narration in picture books, dynamic

narration in movies, etc., even return to oral expression before the evolution of characters. Therefore, the analysis of the changes in the story text and narrative features of *King Yalu* in the media change from ritual dictation to text writing is of great reference significance to the research of cross-media narratology today. According to relevant literature reference, the expression of cross-media narration mainly includes the meaning, the change of text characteristics and the narrative logic.

2.1 Cross-Media Narrative

Cross-media narrative research overturns the traditional view that text is the main object of narrative research and turns its target to multi-disciplinary and different media. It gets rid of the limitation of the coexistence of the narrator and the described space and time. The concept and content of cross-media narrative are also redefined and examined.

The concept of cross-media narrative was first put forward by the American professor Henry Jenkins. It mainly refers to the expression, memory and inheritance of language narrative by integrated multimedia technology in the era of digital communication of information. Such as static visual image: picture books, comics; dynamic visual imagery: movies, TV, games; Different style novels, network storage and other forms of means. However, he also pointed out that cross-media narration should be based on a unified concept, that is, no matter what kind of media is used to adapt in whatever form, it should be based on the basic cognitive concepts and national forms of a culture (Duan, 2020). For example, the multi-modal foreign communication of Chinese solar term culture, the cross-media adaption of Chinese network literature *Douluo Dalu*, the *Legend of White Snake* and the "recreation" of *Legend of White Snake*, all needs to adapt them under the concept of Chinese national communication, inheritance and development as well as Chinese national identity.

2.2 Text Types of Cross-media Narrative

According to Herman, the current western cross-media narrative research mainly includes drama, film and picture book narration (Herman, 2007). At present, there is still a great controversy about whether drama belongs to the category of narrative. On the one hand, the definition of narrative is clearly based on the plot, and the other hand, drama is also based on the transmission of the story.

So the author thinks that drama can be included. Its text contains narrative narration and imitative narration, and its expressive function, form and cultural elements all shows the narrative function of drama. The second is the cinematic narrative. Film narrative has long existed in the study of narrative vision. Like the text narrative, it spreads stories through the display of different symbolic meaning. With the introduction of multimedia, many texts are gradually adapted cross-media. Its narrative style, characteristics, and logic have also made corresponding changes. The third is cartoon and picture book narrative,

which interprets and analyzes language symbols through non-verbal symbols, and realizes the conversion of narrative Chinese text image to visual image.

2.3 Cross-Media Narrative Logic

In the era of information digital communication, multimedia integration of narrative to become normal. Then what kind of cross-media narrative structure and narrative logic it has in the adaption of different media is a major evaluation standard in the feedback of its adaptation.

According to Bal, cross-media narrative logic has four main aspects (Bal, 1985): first, "reliance on the story". No matter what form of expression on the source text is, the adaptation and communication always rely on the reliance on the original text, that is, the adaptation revolves around the plot and expression of the source text. The second is "the demand of target readers", the target readers` adaptation of each text is productive. As a direct indicator of adaptation effect, reader parameters are the potential driving force for the development of cross-media narrative. The third is "the realization of media self-nature". The adaptation of different media is not a substitution relationship, but a fusion relationship. Through the performance and development needs of various media, cross-media narrative realizes the integration and growth of "self". The fourth is "aesthetic exploration". After the fusion of media narrative, it has become a brand new style with different ways of interpretation and cultural implication. Though a core story, combined with multimedia performance and expression, to meet the aesthetic needs of target readers, and explore new aesthetic and interpretation methods in the new text. The intertextuality of the medium text and the source text, the old aesthetics and the new culture constitute one kind of intertexuality in text narration.

2.4 Dictation and Writing

Cross-media narrative has gradually detached itself from the attention of text structure and realized the transformation from the text image to visual image and auditory image. Dictation and Writing, as a way of memories, inheritances, expressions and classifications, accounted for a large proportion in the early study of non-written means (Abott, 2008). Today, "dictation/written" still plays an important role in the early study of cross-media narratives.

As early as the 1930s, American scholars such as Parry made a systematic study of oral tradition and put forward the oral procedural theory which consists of three aspects: theory, story form and story type. But for a long time, written narration has been regarded as the expression of elite culture, while dictation has been ignored as traditional folk culture. However, the early research on it has laid a foundation for the development of the research on similar cross-media narratology. On the one hand, early storytelling, especially epic poetry, was

transmitted orally. This determines the influence and rules that it gradually evolves and forms. On the other hand, characters have their own independent and fixed forms, rules and meanings, which can be spread across time and space through written narration. In the gradual change of mode, the "dictation/written" relays change the lost stories and realize the memory of culture and the inheritance of civilization.

But the evolution from oral to written is not a substitution, but a relationship of succession and supplement. Characters break through the linguistic boundaries and transmission of oral mode. The story lies in the core of its plot, and its core emotional expression, national culture, and ideas may be changed appropriately according to the text type on the whole, but the whole is within a unified category.

3. THE CROSS-MEDIA NARRATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF *KING YALU*

King Yalu has been passed down orally among the people for thousands of years and has been written down. Unit its "discovery" in 2009, the Yalu culture kept collecting and sorting out the corresponding oral "text" and written the text records. It mainly analyzes the epic narrative characteristics of *King Yalu* from the two volumes of Miao epic narrative to textual cross-media narration, and explores the change of story text and narrative logic from ritual narration to written text.

3.1 Ritual Dictation and Writing of *King Yalu*

As the most primitive oral expression of human beings, epic is the direct reference of historical investigation and cultural research, and also the carrier form of civilization transmission. *King Yalu*, as the first epic of the Miao nationality, has a single function of ritual chanting and strict rules and taboos, and its previous transmission was only through oral transmission. After it was included in China`s intangible cultural heritage in 2010, it was gradually recorded by written media and published by many scholars, and realized the conversion from auditory image to visual image of text.

Its oral form was recorded in the Anthology Literature of *King Yalu*, which has not been edited by anyone since 2011. It has recorded the oral history of Yalu culture and consciousness of eight signers, also, included papers and reports on the collection and sorting process records, thinking about problems, funeral ceremonies, Miao culture and other descriptions. It mainly combs and records the Miao culture and the epic. The relatively complete text in 2012 Cao, et al compiled the *King Yalu* Book Series. Taking Yalu culture as the description object, under the guidance of anthropology, ethnology, folk literature and related theories, it explores the influence and significance of Yalu culture on the social life of Miao People.

Text records are of great significance to the Yalu culture and Miao society. Generally speaking, the written word is the record of a country`s history, while history is mainly recorded through folk oral transmission. The transformation of ritual dictation and writing in the epic *King Yalu* of Miao nationality shows this natural relationship.

3.2 The Cross-Media Narrative Characteristics of *King Yalu*

Since the 1990s, many narrative theorists have turned their attention to texts in different media forms. Study the expression and changes of text in different media forms such as film, TV, picture book and so on, and how to guide the development of the story structure and the audience embodiment.(Stokes, 2006) In view of this, it discusses the cross-media narrative characteristics of *King Yalu* from several aspects of cross-media narrative structure, content and perspective.

3.2.1 The Cross-Media Narrative Structure of *King Yalu*

Epic is one kind of folk narrative poetry, transmitted by dictation, belonging to rap literature. When ancient Greek scholars first used the word *epic*, it was combined with Homer`s epic. It mainly refers to the poem style that praises heroic adventure stories and great achievements, and it has a unique narrative structure. Western epics, mainly ancient Greek epics, generally use flashbacks to tell the story, from the eulogy of a hero to his birth date and historical review. Chinese epics, on the other hand, mainly use the chronological narrative method, from the hero`s birth to his growth to his deeds. It is led by the social chronological sequence and opened by the development of events.

Before *King Yalu*, there were three great epics of ethic heroes in China: *Gesar* by the Tibetan, *Manas* by the Kirgiz and *Jangar* by the Mongolian. "*Gesar*" mainly describes the extremely chaotic and tragic society in which Gesar was born, he has a special character and extraordinary talent. After his arrival, he was constantly persecuted, but he conquered the evils and ghosts through his own strength and the blessing of the gods, and then returned to heaven. From the perspective of story structure, the epic *Gesar* lengthwise summarizes two important histories of Tibetan social development through the heroic deeds of the characters. It belongs to the circular narrative structure. "*Manas*" mainly describes the Manas clan leading Kirgiz to resist the tyrannical national rule and exploitation and establish a free and happy country. It still describes the historical society of Kirgiz from the birth, growth and deeds of heroes, but each part of it has a relatively independent structure and belongs to a semi-circular narrative structure. "*Jangar*" mainly describes Jangar leading the Mongolian people to fight against the invading enemy. Compared with other epics, *Jangar* is relatively independent plot without a complete and unified story structure. It is composed of

the combination of different but parallel structures, and belongs to the bead narrative structure.

Different national epics have different narrative structures to their social and cultural development and ideological concepts. There are no epics of the Han nationality in China, but the epic narrative structure of the ethnic minorities is not unified. Different nationalities have different heroes and different narrative thinking. In the epic, the construction of narrative plots and the arrangement of characters will be different accordingly. According to Liu, epic narrative has a clear loop, which refers not to the overlapping and spiraling narrative mode within each chapter, but to the return of the whole structure(Liu, 2020). *King Yalu* has such a loop in the description of the creation of the world, the sun, the moon, the stars and the origin of all things, which are related to its service for folk activities.

The narrative structure of *King Yalu* is mainly based on the oriental "tree-shaped" narrative structure, with King Yalu as the main line. Through his creation, persecution by his brothers, war, forced migration, resistance, life and turn to the "Heavenly realm" level, the narrative structure of *King Yalu* is mainly based on the Oriental "tree-shaped" narrative structure. But at the same time, it also contains a longitudinal structure sequence. In the praise of its creation, there are such narrative structures as the beginning of the universe, the formation of the sun, the moon and the stars, the birth of all things, the separation of myths, cultural customs, and so on. It also has a tree-like longitudinal combined narrative structure. So, *King Yalu* actually contains two kinds of narrative structure: the first part is the creation of Yalu ancestor sequence, the social dimension multiple space cognitive level of perception and interpretation of creatures source, including grass made stretched out the heavens, the moon and stars, flowers and the like. Through such story sequence, it macro shows the cognitive origin of species, the relationship between man and natural thought. The second part focuses on the hero sequence of *King Yalu*, through the narrative structure of Yalu`s birth, productivity development, "Dragon Heart", persecution, war, national migration, resistance and other heroic deeds.

3.2.2 The Cross-Media Narrative Space of *King Yalu*

In the above summary, the narrative space of *Gesar* includes the celestial realm, the human realm and the lower earth realm, which is consistent with the mythological structure elements in the traditional Chinese culture. A large number of cultural elements in the national epic are the unique cognitive world constructed based on Chinese historical myths, thoughts, society, technology and other elements, including from the epochal era to some elements in the prediction and development of the real world and the prospect of future development. This is fully embodied in the epics of ethnic minorities in China. The same is true of *Manas* and *Jangar* epics, which incorporate multi-dimensional elements.

In the Miao heroic epic of *King Yalu*, the narrative space can be seen from a passage about "cutting down a horse". In the funeral ceremony of the Miao people, there is such a ceremony: go to the mountain to choose a tree. After more than ten minutes of "cutting down the tree" in front of the tree, the singer will cut down the tree and can not fall it to the ground. They were brought back and carefully planted as "coffin wood", and then the custom of "cutting the horse" was carried out on this tree, through a series of quaint and solemn ceremonies. Hopping the horse reminds future generations that King Yalu`s battles went through the test of death, just like this heroic and suffering steed. The scene of cruelty and bloodshed is enough to leave an indelible impression. At the same time, it can also carry the dead Miao people`s names and return to their native land through the Tongtian Tree(The way to heaven). The epic describes that the ancestors originally lived in another level of the world, where water came naturally and food was naturally ripe. However, the huge population pressure made some people come to this space, but after death, they would return to the original level of space through the Tongtian Tree, so the Miao people were not so terrible about the existence of death. It can be seen that there are also ideal dimension and human dimension in the epic of *King Yalu*. Compared with other national epics, there is a lack of underground dimension, which is formed by the bidirectional of two dimensions and the circular narrative space.

3.2.3 The Cross-Media Narrative Ways of *King Yalu*

From the summary above, *Gesar* constructs its basic text structure with the plot units of marriage and war, and presents a circular narrative mode through the celestial realm, descent, growth, heroic deeds and finally return to the celestial realm. *Manas* constructs its basic text structure with the plot units of family and war, and presents a semicircular narrative mode through births, growths, tests and careers. *Jangar* is different from the previous two in that there is no unified narrative of the complete plot. Through parallel independent plots, they are integrated to form a heroic epic. Belongs to the compound type juxtaposition story telling way. In terms of the form of narration, *King Yalu*, like folk narratives, is spread by word of mouth. Compared to the randomness of folk tales, the recitations of *King Yalu* are more sacred and solemn: the "death" scene are sung. The whole narrative structure of epic King Yalu is how to guide the spirits of the departed back to the ancestral site of the tribe. Epic narratives, however, because of the arbitrariness of the occasion, and when they are explored as folk literature, they are expressed as a kind of local knowledge, emphasizing the folk and national characteristics. (Cai, 2020) The narrative service of national epics is different.

In *King Yalu*, its narrative weight is large through research and analysis, but compared with other national epics, its plot is relatively simple, and its narrative

construction plot unit appears but is bot heavy. In contrast to *Gesar*, for example, he is born, has a special character and extraordinary talent to be persecuted, in their ability and the blessing of the gods against the disaster. It also takes the war unit as the plot structure, but *King Yalu*`s war plot is simple and not heavy, with only a few narrations. *King Yalu*`s narration of the war is constructed for the development of the plot after the epic, such as the migration, the birth of rituals, and the description and writing of the eulogy. Moreover, the structure and content of the war units are equally unevenly distributed. It is not described for the sake of description, but narrated for the sake of narrative and story transmission.

4. THE EXPRESSION WAYS OF *KING YALU* UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF THE NEW MEDIA

An oral epic narrated around the heroes of *King Yalu*, the early "text" of which is mainly remembered by a number of singers in the community. As the original oral expression of the Miao people, it provides an important basis for today`s understanding of ancient Miao culture, early life development, and the migration process,etc., and has become a resource and way to understand the Miao civilization. At the same time, *King Yalu* is a living epic, and many Miao areas are still living in the living conditions and primitive living scenes described in the epic.

The Yalu culture has attracted great attention since it was "discovered" in 2009. After the collation and collection of relevant information, the text appeared. "Ritual dictation/writing" has become the way of transmission, inheritance and memory of Yalu culture today. When it is passed down from oral to written, the original "text" of the singer`s memory is transformed into another procedure, experiencing a kind of "rebirth" or "re-creation". The spatial nature of the narrator and the narrated in the original dictation and the rebirth of images in the visual meaning in the written narration make the epic become a material resource for contemporary research, a historical document for historical investigation and a form of memory for the inheritance of civilization.

From the perspective of historical narrative, the dictation of the Miao epic *King Yalu* vividly conveys the content of the epic through is the presentation of history, time and occasion nested together. Its dictation is the presentation of history, the worship of ancestors, and the true display of national culture. Therefore, *King Yalu*`s dictation has an important influence and significance in the folk inheritance. Increased national cohesion, unity of the nation, so that the cultural inheritance can be sustained. The emergence of writing, the inheritance of *King Yalu*, increased the understanding and recognition of the Miao people by the whole people, and established the unique Miao cultural context in history and culture by linking the writing with national history. So that its history is selected by the words, rather than part of the oral folk culture general, was "eliminated" by the national history.

The emergence of the epic of *King Yalu* has changed the blank of oral history of *King Yalu*, changed the history of Miao people without heroic epic, increased the overall sense of identity of Miao people at home and abroad, which has multidisciplinary values. Multi-media with digital information communication as the main body has a great impact on the carrier of traditional inheritance, and oral and written expressions are no exception. Grasping the realization of different forms of expression of *King Yalu* is of great significance to its multi-media communication in the future. Based on the adaptation of epic can be realized, and the multi-modal memory and inheritance of culture can be realized.

5. CONCLUSION

As the carrier of memory and inheritance of the Miao heroic epic *King Yalu*, dictation once became marginalized from the center under the strict rules of the Miao singer, and the singer gradually faded away. However, after the memory "text" is transformed into written text, the characters are not limited by time and space, which makes the inheritance of the Miao heroic epic *King Yalu* gradually appears in the text sequence of the national "history" and become a part and resource of the inheritance of national historical civilization. At the same time, in the era of information multiple media fusion of digital transmission, multimedia technology for *King Yalu*`s memory and inheritance has injected be vitality, fill in the past a single oral image and a text image and visual image conversion, through its core stories in the media, appropriate oral to text records.

Under the cross-media integration narrative, the narrative mode of *King Yalu* from ritual dictation to written narration is not a single substitution and independence, but an integration. The realization of the narrative text and narrative logic from the "text" of oral memory to the text fully shows that based on the story plot, media adaptation is carried out through the combination of multimedia performance and narrative characteristics, and new aesthetic and interpretation methods are dug out in the new text. It is inter-tuxtual in narrative with the original text and its culture interpretation.

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