

The collision of tradition and modernity: the narrative transformation of Chinese literature in the new century

Yunxi Li

School of Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, China

Abstract. Chinese literature in the new century has undergone significant changes in narrative, with a fierce collision between traditional storytelling and modern concepts. This study deeply analyzes the reasons for the significant transformation of literature in the new century from three dimensions: narrative perspective, structure, and language, combined with contemporary typical works. Research has found that the fusion of multiple narrative perspectives breaks the limitations of traditional storytelling and endows literary works with more exciting levels; The intricate non-linear narrative structure and fragmented processing are more in line with the fast-paced and complex thinking of modern society; The modernization of traditional language adds brilliance to the expression of literary language. This study provides a new perspective for sorting out the development of Chinese literature in the new century, and plays a role in promoting the development of contemporary Chinese literary theory and creative practice.

Keywords: Chinese literature; Literary narrative transformation; Tradition and modernity; literary language.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

Since the beginning of the new century, Chinese society and culture have undergone unprecedented fundamental changes, with the wave of globalization sweeping in and information technology constantly advancing. These changes have profoundly influenced people's lifestyles, thinking patterns, and values. Chinese literature is a sharp reflection of Chinese social life, and during this period, it also presented an extremely rich and complex changing trend, with the transformation of literary narrative being particularly noteworthy. Traditional literary narrative has experienced thousands of years of vigorous development, forming relatively stable patterns and norms. However, the rapid changes in modern society have prompted literature to seek new ways of expression to meet the needs of the times. Literature is the recorder of social life, and the collision of tradition and modernity has triggered a series of profound changes in the field of literary narrative.

The in-depth study of the narrative transformation of Chinese literature in the new century has significant implications in various aspects. In terms of the long development of literary theory, enriching and improving the literary narrative theory system is conducive to the development of literature. By analyzing the substantial innovations in narrative perspective, structure, language, and other aspects of Chinese literary works since the new century, it can provide new research perspectives for literary theory research and promote the renewal and development of theory. In terms of literary creation practice, writers use innovative narrative methods to showcase contemporary social life and the human spiritual world, which can help broaden their thinking and create literary works with more contemporary characteristics and artistic value. Furthermore, from the perspective of national culture, the transformation of literary narrative is an important manifestation of the development and evolution of contemporary Chinese culture. Studying this phenomenon of change can help us gain insight into the characteristics of new culture in the new era, understand the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture in the modern context, and the influence and integration of Western foreign culture on local literature.

The turn of the millennium has marked a period of remarkable transition for Chinese society, characterized by the dual forces of intensifying global integration and revolutionary breakthroughs in digital technology. These paradigm shifts have precipitated fundamental alterations in collective

behavior, cognitive frameworks, and ethical orientations. Within this transformative context, Chinese literary expression has emerged as a particularly sensitive register of sociocultural metamorphosis, exhibiting multilayered adaptive responses - most conspicuously through its evolving narrative paradigms. While China's time-honored storytelling traditions, cultivated over millennia, maintain their structural integrity, the unprecedented velocity of contemporary social transformation necessitates corresponding innovations in literary representation. This dialectical encounter between established narrative conventions and emergent expressive demands has catalyzed significant reconfigurations in literary discourse.[1]

1.2 Research Status

At present, academic research on the narrative transformation of Chinese literature in the new century has achieved certain results. Some scholars focus on the transformation of narrative perspectives, as pointed out by scholar [Name 1]. The increasing use of multiple perspectives in new century literature breaks the limitations of traditional single perspectives, allowing works to present stories from multiple dimensions and enhance their sense of hierarchy and depth. In terms of narrative structure research, scholar [Name 2] believes that non-linear narrative structures have emerged in large numbers in literary works of the new century. This structure is more in line with the complex and ever-changing pace of modern society and people's fragmented ways of thinking, bringing new vitality to literary creation. Regarding the transformation of literary language, scholar [Name 3] mentioned that traditional literary language is showing a trend towards modernization and popularization in the new century, while the integration of emerging language forms such as internet language has injected new elements into literary language.

However, existing research still has shortcomings. On the one hand, most studies only start from a single narrative element, lacking comprehensive and systematic analysis of multiple dimensions such as narrative perspective, structure, and language, making it difficult to fully present the overall picture of the narrative transformation of Chinese literature in the new century. On the other hand, the research on the interaction mechanism between traditional and modern factors in the process of literary narrative transformation, as well as the deep cultural significance behind this transformation, is not deep enough and needs further exploration and discussion.[2]

1.3 Research Methods and Innovation Points

This study comprehensively utilizes various research methods such as text close reading, comparative analysis, and cultural research. By carefully reading a large number of representative literary works since the new century, we can deeply analyze their specific characteristics and innovations in narrative perspective, structure, language, and other aspects. By using comparative analysis, the unique features of the narrative transformation in new century literature are highlighted by comparing it with traditional literature and modern literature from different periods. Using cultural research methods, explore the underlying reasons and cultural significance behind narrative transformation from a cultural perspective.

The innovation of this study is mainly reflected in the following two aspects. One is the innovation of research perspective, breaking through the limitations of previous studies on single narrative elements, conducting comprehensive research from three dimensions: narrative perspective, structure, and language, and comprehensively and systematically revealing the internal logic and overall characteristics of the narrative transformation of Chinese literature in the new century. The second is the innovation of research content, which deeply explores the interaction mechanism between traditional and modern factors in the transformation of literary narration, as well as the contemporary social and cultural changes and changes in people's spiritual world reflected in this transformation, providing new ideas and perspectives for understanding the development of Chinese literature in the new century.[3]

2. The transformation of narrative perspective

2.1 Traditional narrative perspective and its limitations

In traditional Chinese literary narrative, the omniscient perspective has long dominated. The narrator from an omniscient perspective is like an omniscient and omnipresent 'God', able to discern the inner thoughts, behavioral motivations, and all past, present, and future events of all characters in the story. This narrative perspective has strong narrative control, which facilitates the narrator to comprehensively and systematically present the full picture of the story and construct a grand narrative structure. For example, in the classical novel "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", the narrator provides a comprehensive description of the complex political struggles, military conflicts, and the ups and downs of the destinies of numerous characters among the Wei, Shu, and Wu kingdoms from an omniscient perspective, allowing readers to have a clear understanding of the historical picture of the entire Three Kingdoms era.

However, the omniscient perspective also has obvious limitations. On the one hand, due to the absolute authority of the narrator, readers are often in a passive state of receiving information during the reading process, lacking independent exploration and thinking space for the story. The narrator presents all the information directly to the reader, limiting their imagination and sense of participation. On the other hand, the omniscient perspective to some extent weakens the authenticity and credibility of the story. In real life, people's understanding of things is often limited and one-sided, and there is a gap between the complete and comprehensive information presented by the omniscient perspective and people's actual cognitive experience, making it difficult for readers to generate a strong sense of immersion when reading.[4]

2.2 The Application of Multiple Perspectives in New Century Literature

In the new century, the use of multiple perspectives in Chinese literary works has become increasingly common, and this shift in narrative perspectives has brought new vitality and charm to literary creation. Multi perspective refers to the use of two or more narrative perspectives in a work, telling the story through the switching and interweaving of different perspectives. For example, Liu Cixin's science fiction novel "The Three Body Problem" cleverly employs multiple perspectives in the narrative process. In the novel, there are ordinary people's perspectives represented by Wang Miao. Through his observations, thoughts, and feelings, readers gradually understand the mysterious "Three Body" world and the crises faced by humanity on Earth; There are also key character perspectives represented by Ye Wenjie, showcasing her complex life experiences and profound reflections on the relationship between Earth civilization and extraterrestrial civilization; At the same time, an omniscient perspective was employed to provide macroscopic descriptions of the cosmic background and major interstellar events.

2.3 The advantages of multiple perspectives and their impact on the work

The application of multiple perspectives has endowed literary works of the new century with many advantages. Firstly, it greatly enhances the realism of the work. In real life, people's understanding of things is often limited by various factors such as their own identity, experience, and stance, and different people may have different views and understandings of the same event. The application of multiple perspectives simulates people's cognitive patterns in real life, and through the narration of different character perspectives, readers can feel the multidimensionality and complexity of the story, as if they were in a real life scene.[5]

3. Innovation in Narrative Structure

3.1 Characteristics of Traditional Narrative Structures

The narrative structure of traditional Chinese literature usually has strong linear characteristics, organizing stories according to the chronological order or logical sequence of event development. This narrative structure is clear and easy for readers to understand the ins and outs of the story. The common traditional narrative structure includes four parts: beginning, development, climax, and ending, which are closely connected and present a coherent and orderly development trend. For example, in the classic novel "Water Margin", the main plot revolves around the process of 108 heroes from Liangshan, including Song Jiang, who gathered together to rebel against the court. The story narrates their life experiences, reasons for going to Liangshan, and a series of activities in chronological order. From their initial personal experiences, to gradually gathering together to resist the court, to accepting surrender and fighting, to the final ending, the narrative structure of the entire story is rigorous and the hierarchy is clear.

The traditional narrative structure emphasizes the integrity and coherence of the story, pursues the starting, ending, and ending of the plot, and emphasizes the clarity of causal relationships. Under this structure, the fate of characters and the development of events in the story often have predictability, allowing readers to clearly grasp the direction of the story's development during the reading process. For example, in "Journey to the West", the story of Tang Monk and his disciples who went to the West to retrieve the scriptures, from departure, through ninety-eight and one difficulties, to finally obtaining the true scriptures and returning to the Eastern Tang Dynasty, each plot is closely set around the main line of retrieving the scriptures, with clear causal relationships before and after, making it easy for readers to understand the overall structure and development of the story.[6]

3.2 Nonlinear Narrative in New Century Literature

Chinese literature in the new century has shown a clear trend of innovation in narrative structure, with a large number of non-linear narrative structures emerging. Nonlinear narrative breaks the traditional linear narrative's chronological order and causal logic, using various methods such as recall, flashback, interlude, and multi line narrative to organize the story. For example, in Jin Yucheng's "Blooming Flowers", a unique non-linear narrative structure is employed. Fanhua "is set against the social backdrop of Shanghai in the 1960s and 1990s. Through the interweaving of multiple clues such as different time periods, social backgrounds, and storylines, the story segments of different characters are interwoven together to form a sharp contrast. The story is not narrated in a strict chronological order, but rather frequently switches between the past and present, immersing the author's thinking in the jumping plot and fragmented information while reading, sorting out the plot of the story on their own, and piecing together the complete character images and the entire process of the current social story development in their mind.

3.3 Fragmentation and the Effect of Multi line Narrative

The non-linear narrative technique injects a very novel form of artistic expression into contemporary literary creation through fragmented and interwoven narrative strategies. This narrative mode breaks down the originally coherent plot chain into several independent units. These narrative units appear to be in a discrete state on the surface, but in reality they imply tight logical connections that require basic comprehension skills when read. This unique narrative technique is highly artistic and can construct a subtle aesthetic mood, effectively mobilizing readers' enthusiasm and participation in solving puzzles. In the process of text reception, readers need to exert subjective initiative, organically reorganize scattered narrative elements, break them first and then integrate them, and ultimately complete the cognitive reconstruction of the overall work. This intellectually challenging reading experience not only enhances the interactivity of the text, but also endows the work with aesthetic space for multiple interpretations

The multi line narrative structure synchronously carries out multiple characters and plot threads, organically connecting the fate of characters and the development of events in different time and space according to the current social form, and constructing a three-dimensional and diverse narrative space network. These narrative clues maintain relative independence while forming a cohesive whole through intricate spatial network relationships, jointly advancing the deepening development of the narrative process. Multiple narrative threads sometimes intersect and overlap, and sometimes unfold in parallel. Through the perspectives and events of different characters, readers gradually piece together the complete story. This multi perspective narrative strategy not only expands the dimensions of the story's expression, but also deeply reveals the contradictions and struggles of human nature in extreme environments, and can more deeply reflect the current social situation, greatly enhancing the artistic tension and philosophical implications of the work.

4. The Changes in Literary Language

4.1 Characteristics of Traditional Literary Language

Traditional Chinese literary language has a profound cultural heritage and unique aesthetic characteristics. It focuses on the refinement and carving of words, pursuing the elegance, subtlety, and beauty of language. In ancient poetry, poets often used rich rhetorical devices, exquisite vocabulary choices, and rigorous rhythmic forms to create artistic conception and express emotions. For example, Wang Wei's landscape poetry, "After the new rain in the empty mountains, the weather is late in autumn. The bright moon shines among the pine trees, and the clear spring rocks flow up", in just twenty words, depicts a fresh, natural, ethereal and peaceful autumn night scene in the mountains through concise and beautiful language. The language is concise and implicit, and the artistic conception is profound and long-lasting, reflecting the high artistic expression of traditional literary language.

In ancient novels, traditional literary language also has distinct characteristics. Taking "Dream of the Red Chamber" as an example, its language is delicate and exquisite, elegant and gorgeous, and the portrayal of character images, scene descriptions, and emotional expressions are all extremely exquisite. Through personalized shaping of character language, such as Wang Xifeng's shrewdness and Lin Daiyu's intelligence and sensitivity, the character images are vividly portrayed on paper. At the same time, the novel extensively uses poetry, allusions, and other elements, adding cultural connotations and artistic charm to the work, showcasing the unique advantages of traditional literary language in narrative and lyrical aspects.

4.2 Modernization of Literary Language in the New Century

In the new century, there has been a significant modernization of Chinese literary language. On the one hand, traditional literary language, while maintaining its basic aesthetic characteristics, pays more attention to being close to real life and develops towards being easy to understand, concise and clear. Writers have reduced rare words and overly obscure expressions in their creations, making literary language easier for readers to understand and accept. For example, in Jia Pingwa's novel creation, his language style gradually shifted from the earlier elegant and poetic to simple and plain. In *Qin Opera*, he uses a large number of dialects and local languages with Shaanxi regional characteristics. At the same time, his language is concise and clear, and he vividly describes the scenes and characters of rural life, which makes the work have a strong flavor of life and regional cultural characteristics, and is closer to the reading habits of contemporary readers.

On the other hand, with the development of modern society and changes in people's ideological concepts, the expressive power of literary language has been greatly expanded. Writers pay more attention to using language to showcase new phenomena, problems, and the complex and ever-changing inner world of contemporary society. For example, in some novels that reflect urban life, writers use modern vocabulary and expressions to depict the hustle and bustle of the city, the coldness and alienation of interpersonal relationships, and the anxiety and confusion of modern people. In the

early works of Anne Baby (Qing Shan), such as "Farewell to Vivian", the language style is unique, full of delicate depictions of loneliness and isolated emotions in urban life, using a large number of modern imagery and vocabulary, such as "coffee", "bar", "internet", etc., to showcase the spiritual state of modern urbanites.

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