

Research on the Arrangement of Chapters inside Categories of a New Account of the Tales of the World

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Abstract: As for the arrangement of the biographical novel, A New Account of the Tales of the World, most researchers focus on the compilers, the compiling time and the internal logical relationship among the 36 categories. In fact, there are also some principles to follow in the arrangement of chapters within each category. The internal arrangement has four specific features: the overall arrangement of succession, the concept of “broken but continuous”, the principle of clustering arrangement and the stories unfold around main characters. The arrangement ideas are greatly influenced by historians’ concepts. Chapters in A New Account of the Tales of the World are seemingly loose and scattered, but with the help of these arrangement principles, we can find inner clues run over the whole book.

1. Introduction

A New Account of the Tales of the World is a biographical novel written by scholars under the organization of Yi-qing Liu in the Southern Song Dynasty. It has been handed down since its completion. Although some chapters were scattered, added or deleted in the process of spreading, the book basically preserves its original appearance. There are 36 men, or categories in A New Account of the Tales of the World. There have been many discussions about the arrangement of 36 categories. Researchers have found that the setting and arrangement of 36 categories are not arbitrary. There are indeed some internal bases for the arrangement; scholars have reach consensus on that issue. However, few researchers have discussed the arrangement of chapters inside the 36 categories. We believe that the arrangement of chapters inside categories is not arbitrary, either. There are certain layout principles to follow. This paper tries to make an analysis from this perspective.

The 36 categories of A New Account of the Tales of the World contain 1130 stories about characters’ words and deeds. The number of chapters varies by category. Each category is summarized by one word or two. The compilers of A New Account of the Tales of the World should find out figures’ words and deeds according to the meaning of categories, but the number of chapters in each category is not limited. Every person’s words and deeds, which are included in various categories, are often referred to as “Chapters” by later researchers. This term reflects the short and self-contained features of each story. These “chapters” are grouped into each category by the “natures of story”. Inside each category, the arrangement of chapters also follows some principles.

2. Overall Arrangement Based on Succession

Stories in A New Account of the Tales of the World generally began in the late Han Dynasty and ended in the Southern Dynasty and the Song Dynasty. For the compilers of the book, they could choose and arrange stories independently and intentionally at the beginning, but which chapters should be the end of the category was limited by the time which the compilers live.

Generally speaking, the 1130 stories in A New Account of the Tales of the World are arranged in the order of occurrence time. Specifically to the interior of each category, chapters are basically

arranged in this order. For example, the 47 chapters contained in the Category Morality can be roughly divided into four stages from chapter 1 to chapter 47: Late Han Dynasty (Chapter 1 - Chapter 9), Wei Dynasty (Chapter 10 - Chapter 16), Western Jin (Chapter 17 - Chapter 28), and Eastern Jin (Chapter 29 - Chapter 47).

It can be seen that, the compilers of *A New Account of the Tales of the World* deliberately arranged stories in accordance with the chronological sequence like ancient history books. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is first the official chronicle, followed by *The Commentary of Zuo*. Then the literary genre developed continuously. *A New Account of the Tales of the World* is recorded as “novel” in official and private catalogues such as *Sui Zhi*, *Old Tang Zhi*, *Chongwen General Catalogue*, *Junzhai Reading Record* and the *General Catalogue of the Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature*. However, in the Southern Dynasty, Xiao-biao Liang wrote annotations for *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, and pointed out mistakes in personnel records of this book by quoting books or following words, which shows that Xiao-biao Liang viewed *A New Account of the Tales of the World* from the viewpoint of historians. Similarly, Zhi-ji Liu in Tang Dynasty criticized scholars who adopted stories in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* when compiling the *Book of Jin*. He held that Yi-qing Liu’s book was full of lies while Xiao-biao Liang was correct. However, this also shows that the scholars who wrote the *Book of Jin* in Tang Dynasty realized the value of *A New Account of the Tales of the World* as a historical record. During the Wei, Jin and Six Dynasties, Chinese fiction was in the stage of mystery novels and tales of historic figures. It is conceivable that fictions were greatly influenced by history. *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, as a novel of historic figures, should not be done “intentionally”. Walking between the boundary of novel and history, *A New Account of the Tales of the World* may incline to history books. Zong-yi Ning said, “The fiction is history, or the collateral chapter of history. The idea has become a general understanding by literati in Wei and Jin Dynasties.” Therefore, within specific categories, it is possible for the compilers to organize various so-called “clumps of obsolete gossip” under the influence of the compiling methods of historians’ chronicles.

3. The Concept of “Broken but Continuous” Arrangement

Meng-chu Ling of Ming Dynasty said, “According to this, it inherits above information and does not say its name. With the feature of broken but continuous, the original meaning of *A New Account of the Tales of the World* should not be altered without authorization.” Ling’s phrase “broken but continuous” well explained the clever arrangement of chapters in the book. According to above discussion, chapters in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* are arranged in chronological order. But they are not simply arranged according to the time sequence; other narration skills are also used in the arrangement. The basic purpose is to make chapters in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* become an organic whole. For example, there are 66 chapters in *Generosity*, which can be divided into four stages: the end of Han Dynasty (Chapter 1 - Chapter 2), Wei Dynasty (Chapter 3 - Chapter 8), Western Jin (Chapter 9 - Chapter 22) and Eastern Jin (Chapter 23 - Chapter 66). The contents of characters in the Eastern Jin Dynasty clearly reflect the concept of “broken but continuous” arrangement. This paper tries to analyze the internal arrangement of chapters 23 to 37 in *Generosity* as one example.

At the beginning of the 23rd Chapter of the *Generosity*, Rui Si-ma, the first emperor of the Eastern Jin Dynasty was selecting the crown prince, which led to Dao Wang’s superiority over Xin Zhou. The 24th Chapter describes that Dao Wang wanted intermarriage with Wan Lu’s clan but being rejected, which shows a greatly different Dao Wang from Chapter 23. The author seemed to form a contrast. In the 25th Chapter, Hui Zhu-ge refused the request for intermarriage with Pou Xie, which also involved the marriage of scholar clans. The chapter should be a collateral chapter of Chapter 24. Chapters 26 and 27 recorded stories between bothers of Xin Zhou, which seems to have nothing to do with Chapter 25. But Chapter 25 is a collateral one; the character of Xin Zhou has already been explained in Chapter 23. Stories about Zhou in Chapter 26 and 27 can help readers to understand his decision in Chapter 23. In Chapter 28, Dun Wang protected his brother, Han Wang. Chapter 27 describes Song Zhou’s blaming of his brother Xin Zhou regardless of his illness. Both

chapters deal with the theme of brotherhood. Chapter 28 should be the attachment and comparison of Chapter 27. Chapters 29, 30 and 31 are about stories of Xin Zhou, and Chapter 29 can also be attached to Chapter 27 because Chapter 28 is a collateral chapter. In Chapters 31, 32 and 33, Dun Wang conquered the Stone City. Chapter 31 is “the attack”, Chapter 32 is “conquer” and Chapter 33 is “the failure”, which accurately describes the process of Dun Wang’s rebellion and his occupation of the Stone City. The three chapters are connected in one series, among which the Chapter 31 plays the role of connecting link between the preceding and the following. In Chapter 34, Jun Su rebelled to the Stone City, while in Chapter 33, Dun Wang rebelled to the Stone City. Both Dun Wang and Jun Su rebelled to the Stone City and Jun Su once rebelled against Dun Wang. The connection between the two stories is clear. Chapter 35 is the story of Ya Zhong. Meng-chu Ling commented the relationship between Chapter 35 and Chapter 34. For Chapter 34, Chapter 35 belongs to the collateral chapter, which also describes the story about Ya Zhong. In Chapter 36, Dao Wang settled the resentment between Qun Kong and Shu Kuang, which seems to have nothing to do with the preceding Chapter 35. But Chapter 36 begins with “at the time of Jun Su”, while Chapter 34 just records Jun Su’s rebellion. The connection between Chapter 36 and Chapter 34 can be seen. In Chapter 37, Dao Wang and others wanted to appoint Tan Kong as the administrator of Danyang. The chapter begins with “the problem of Zi-gao Su was settled”, which is closely related to “at the time of Jun Su” in Chapter 36.

From the above analysis, we find that the arrangement focuses on the connection of two successive chapters. In most cases, the latter chapter can be related to the former one; it seems that a few chapters have no connection with the previous chapters, but they can be connected with some chapters even before. When compiling, chapters involving the same person were arranged as close as possible. But some chapters are interrupted with stories and events of other people. These events usually have a common theme with stories in the previous or next chapters, and can explain the previous events from a positive or negative perspective. That phenomenon is called as the collateral chapter. Quite a few cases of collateral chapters are found in our survey. Due to the collateral phenomenon, chapters in the book are seemingly inconsistent and loose. But in fact, if we analyze them in depth, we will find that compilers intentionally linked different chapters. The existence of collateral chapter leads to the characteristics of oversteps, but each chapter can be connected with some previous chapters. In other words, the writer always laid a good foundation for latter chapters in front chapters. We call that feature as the “broken but continuous” arrangement concept.

4. The Layout Principle of Cluster Centralization

As mentioned before, basically speaking, chapters in each category of A New Account of the Tales of the World are arranged according to the time sequence. Besides that, there’s another phenomenon: the words and deeds related to the same person were arranged together. For example, Chapters 10 to 13 in Morality contain stories about Xin Hua; Chapters 12 to 15 of Politics are stories about Dao Wang; Chapters 25 to 27 of Appreciation contain affairs related to Wen Huan; Chapters 8 to 10 of Advice contain stories about Yan Wang and his wife. This principle of centralized arrangement stories of a central figure is widely used in the arrangement of chapters in A New Account of the Tales of the World. The method of arranging events involving a certain person together should be influenced by historians’ arrangement of events centered on characters. The centralized arrangement of affairs related to a central character, on one hand, can depict the image and personality of the central character from many angles; on the other hand, it facilitates readers to understand relevant personnel relations involving the central character in the series of stories.

In addition to the centralized arrangement centered on people, there is also centralized arrangement centered on similar events in A New Account of the Tales of the World. For example, Chapters 45 to 47 of Morality contain events about filial piety; Chapters 24 and 25 of Generosity contain stories about refusal to marriage; Chapters 2 to 6 of Willfulness and Indulgence contain matters about drinking. The centralized arrangement of the same kind of events is not uncommon in A New Account of the Tales of the World is, which can help readers to compare similar events. In fact, it is a further use of the concept of “natures of story” in the 36 categories. This concept also

comes from historical books. The “biographies” in Records of the Grand Historian, as well as books like Biographies of Assassins, Biographies of Rangers and Biographies of Courtiers all arrange similar events together so as to help readers to concentrate their perception, thinking and experience.

5. Stories Unfold around Main Characters

There are 1130 chapters in the 36 categories of A New Account of the Tales of the World. According to the statistics of Rui-zhi Ma in the English translation and annotation version, there are about 626 figures in the book. According to Wan-qi Zhang and Shang-ci Liu’s Personal Name Index of A New Account of the Tales of the World, which is attached to the book as an annotation, most characters appear less than 10 times (mostly only 1-2 times), only about 65 people appear more than 10 times (including 10 times). According to the number of presence, the top five characters are An Xie (114 times), Wen Huan (93 times), Dao Wang (86 times), Yi Liu (78 times) and Meng Wang (57 times). Lu Xun said A New Account of the Tales of the World was a “textbook of famous scholars in Wei and Jin Dynasties.” If there are many famous scholars, there must be their leaders. A New Account of the Tales of the World was written around leaders. The book describes stories happened in the five periods of late Han Dynasty, Wei Dynasty, Western Jin, Eastern Jin and early Liu Song Dynasty. In different periods, the leaders of famous scholars are naturally different. But generally speaking, the compilers focus on the two Jin Dynasties, especially the Eastern Jin Dynasty. One possible reason is that Yi-qing Liu and other compilers lived in the Liu Song Dynasty. The Eastern Jin Dynasty is close to their times. Stories happened in the former dynasty did not need further study, since people have known them very well. Therefore, in A New Account of the Tales of the World, most characters lived in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. According to the genealogy of A New Account of the Tales of the World characters compiled by Zao Wang of Song Dynasty, there are 26 families with genealogy, 26 families without genealogy and 19 monks. According to Rui-zhi Ma’s statistics, 607 characters in the book belong to different families. But family sizes and ranks are different. A normal family is by no means comparable to an aristocratic family. A New Account of the Tales of the World tells stories about characters from aristocratic families. Taking the families of Wang as an example, the book describes 81 people (including 3 females) with the surname of Wang. Of these 81 people, 46 were from the Wang family of Langya, Linyi; 22 were from the Wang family of Jinyang, Taiyuan. The two families are both old and well-known families. Among 81 characters with the surname of Wang, 68 people come from these two families. They appear in 665 chapters of 33 categories (no appear in Altflug, Amender and Dismissal). Therefore, most characters in A New Account of the Tales of the World come from the Jin Dynasty, especially from great families of the Eastern Jin Dynasty.

Although the numbers of chapters are different in categories, there are always some people who appear frequently. For example, in the 108 chapters of Speech, characters often appear are Wen Huan (9 times), Emperor Wendi of Jin Dynasty (8 times), Yun Liu (7 times), An Xie (7 times), Dao Wang (6 times), Xuan Huan (5 times), Rong Kong (4 times), Dun Zhi (4 times) and Liang Yu (4 times). All others figures appear less than three times. There is no need to mention the situation of other categories. Indeed, there always main characters who appear many times in each category.

Generally speaking, most figures in the book come from big families of the two Jin Dynasties, especially the Eastern Jin Dynasty; from a specific point of view, in each category, there are some figures appearing with higher frequencies. These people, who present in many chapters or appear with high frequencies, can be called as main characters. They play a central role in the whole book or in a specific category. Besides main characters, there are some other figures that play the role of supplement and can be called as supporting figures. The main characters and supporting figures constitute the biography system of A New Account of the Tales of the World. Such arrangement provides the book with a clear differentiation between the important and the insignificant. Therefore, whether in the whole book or in specific categories, the arrangement of stories in A New Account of the Tales of the World is not a parallel structure, but a net structure with distinct outline and details.

6. Conclusion

As for the internal arrangement of the biographical novel, *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, most researchers focus on the compilers, the compiling time and the internal logical relationship of the 36 categories. Little attention was paid to the organization and arrangement inside the 36 specific categories. Some people believe the internal contents are “fragmented gossip” without systems, which is actually the improper theory affected by the external form of the book. The compilation of *A New Account of the Tales of the World* is not only meaningful from the beginning to the end, but also ingenious in the arrangement of chapters inside categories.

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