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A brief discussion on pre narration in the narrative method of *Zuozhuan*

(3287 words)

摘要

作為一部較早的編年體史書，《左傳》在中國經學史、文學史乃至思想史上都佔據著不可忽視的重要研究地位。《左傳》敘事完備的特點也使得對《左傳》敘事方法的探究成為後來學術研究人員的主要研究方向之一。本文以《左傳》敘事方法之預敘為研究物件，從多個角度對預敘進行詮釋，以期能夠瞭解作者在其中體現出的史學知識與其思想傾向，深入探究其背後的深層文化內涵與意蘊。本文將從三個層面進行論述。

第一部分：預敘的類型。預敘在《左傳》的文本內容中有著豐富多樣的表現形式，經過整理歸納，本節將預敘大致分為三種類型：言語類預敘、神異類預敘、細節類預敘，進行分析論述。

第二部分：預敘的特徵。預敘的應用加強了《左傳》線性敘事結構之間的聯繫，預敘的本質特徵也在文本的具體應用中被彰顯出來，大致可歸納為：一、崇禮尚德的勸諫教導，二、天德合一的天命觀念，三、結合實際的結局判斷。

第三部分：預敘的研究價值。預敘的研究價值不僅體現在《左傳》敘事手法的文學性上，同時也體現在其作為歷史敘述的史學內涵，與從中體現出的古代社會人們對世界的認知水準上。本節將從文學、史學與哲學三個層面對其進行論述。

Chapter One - Preamble

As an earlier annalistic history book, *Zuozhuan* occupies an important research position that cannot be ignored in the history of classics, literature and thought in China. Its feature of complete narrative makes it become a model of ancient Chinese narrative literature, which has a profound impact on the narrative structure of subsequent Chinese works and provided more reference and ideas for later scholars in the study of Chinese narrative theory. Among them, the study of the narrative method of *Zuozhuan* is also one of the main research directions.

In the narrative method of *Zuozhuan*, pre narration occupies a large length, and its ‘Describe more things related to ghosts and gods, and predict the time of disasters and auspicious’ also becomes one of the distinctive characteristics. Therefore, in the current academia, the study of pre narration is still an important part of *Zuozhuan* that cannot be ignored. This essay will use *Zuozhuan* as a reference to explain the pre narration from a more comprehensive perspective, and hope to understand the writer’s historical knowledge and ideological tendencies in this narrative method, and to deeply explore the cultural connotations and implications. In order to provide some help for subsequent academic researchers.

Chapter Two - Types of pre narration

Pre narrative's ‘narrative time is earlier than the time when the event occurs’,¹ has ‘the directionality of time’, which is a kind of ‘certain psychological preparation for subsequent events’.² As Liu Xizai said in Art Introduction (藝概 Yi Gai): ‘Only if the pre narration can keep all the clues in my hands, then I can implement all the intricate changes.’³ Because of

¹ Dong Xiaoying 董小英, *Xushu xue* 敘述學 (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2001), p. 120.

² Hu Yamin 胡亞敏, *Xushi xue* 敘事學 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifandaxue chubanshe, 2004), p. 68.

³ Yuan Hui 袁暉 and Zong Yanhu 宗延虎, *Hanyu xiucixue shi* 漢語修辭學史 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1995), p. 313.

this flexible and changeable feature, pre narration has various forms of expression in the text of *Zuozhuan*. The content of this section will be classified into three aspects for easy discussion.

2.1 The speech type of pre narration

A common form of pre narration in *Zuozhuan* is the speech type of pre narration, which is usually proposed by some nobles, officials or wise men. These people have high wisdom and life experience, and have keen observation for national political policies, situation changes, and personal conduct and morality. They judge whether events or people are in line with the expected standards based on traditional Chinese etiquette, morals and other codes of conduct, and make judgments about its results and fate. Most predictions like this in *Zuozhuan* are fulfilled.

For example, the ending of Zhouxu in the fourth year of Duke Yin in *Zuozhuan*:

Duke Yin of Lu questioned Zhong Zhong, saying, “Will Zhouxu of Wei succeed?” “I have heard that a ruler can win the support of his people through virtue, but never heard of one doing so through violence,” replied the veteran official. “……Now Zhouxu relies on military force and is quite ready to resort to cruelty. As a result, relying on military force, he has obtained few followers, and while insisting on resorting to cruelty, he has made few allies. Surely, anyone whose followers turn against him and whose allies desert him will find it difficult to accomplish anything! Meanwhile, military force is like fire —— if it is not kept in check it will end by burning the user himself. Zhouxu murdered his sovereign and oppressed his people tyrannously. And now he makes no effort to practice true virtue but attempts to achieve success through violence. Surely, he is doomed to ruin!”⁴

Regarding Zhouxu who murdered his sovereign and usurped the throne, Zhongzhong, the minister, gave his own answer for Zhouxu's behaviour that unethical and against etiquette, and the ending of Zhouxu was just as he said: ‘In the ninth month the ruler of Wei dispatched Chou, a deputy prime minister, to supervise the execution of Zhouxu at Pu.’⁵

⁴ Hu Zhihui 胡志揮 and Chen kejiong 陳克炯, *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (英譯) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 21. In this reference, wherever the word ‘Zhouyu’ appears, it will be modified to ‘Zhouxu’, and will not be described in detail below.

⁵ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 23.

2.2 The supernatural type of pre narration

Most of the supernatural type of pre narration in *Zuozhuan* appear in the form of divination, celestial phenomena, dreams and so on with about 100 of them.⁶ People treat these mysterious phenomena as messages from heaven, link them with the results of reality, and artificially give them the authoritative status and power to dominate people's destinies, which shows the ancient Chinese people's worship and awe of nature, mystery and other inhuman forces. However, it is worth noting that although the supernatural pre narrative is more towards the mysterious direction of non-human domination, its content does not exist in isolation. If we connect it with the overall text content of *Zuozhuan*. It can be found that the pre narrative results are still based on human behaviour and responses, which contain the germination of people-oriented thinking.

For example, in the thirteenth year of Duke Zhao in *Zuozhuan*:

Previously, before King Ling had come to the throne he divined by the tortoise-shell, saying, 'May I be given the rule of this realm?' But the outcome was inauspicious. Greatly enraged, he threw aside the tortoise-shell and cursed Heaven: 'Since you refuse to render me even a small favor like this, I will take it myself!'⁷

However, the fundamental reason for its 'inauspicious' can be found in many previous content of *Zuozhuan*, which is the conduct of King Ling. For example:

In the Thirty-first year of Duke Xiang:

The Chief Minister does not present himself as becomes a person in his station, setting no proper standards for the people. Now, even if such a person is set above the people he will come to a bad end.⁸

In the first year of Duke Zhao:

⁶ Chen Hongchao 陳鴻超, *Zuozhuan shenmi yuyan yanjiu* 左傳神異預言研究, (Changchun: Jilin daxue shixue lilun ji shixue shi shuoshilunwen, 2013), p. 12. According to statistics from this reference, the total number of supernatural prophecies is about 103. Among them, divination accounts for the largest proportion, about 38, followed by celestial phenomena (21).

⁷ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 1181.

⁸ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 997.

Naturally he thinks that obtaining the throne by force and getting his own way by unrighteous means is the proper way to do things. But his dissoluteness and oppression will soon run their course.⁹

In the fourth year of Duke Zhao:

Zi Chan went to see Xiang Shu and said to him: "I am not troubled about the State of Chu. Its ruler is so arrogant and deaf to all remonstrance that he will not last more than ten years."¹⁰

It can be seen from the above speech pre narration that King Ling has disrespectful behaviour, so the divination predicted that he was "inauspicious". In the end, King Ling 'strangled himself at the residence of Yuyin Shenhai'.¹¹

2.3 The slight information type of pre narration

The slight information type of pre narration is a little less in *Zuozhuan* and is harder to find. Most of this type of pre narration appears before a historical event occurs, and is mostly a brief explanation of the reason for the event. These pre narrations do not vividly depict the characters' behaviour, nor describe the ups and downs of the story. They only objectively explain the facts and observe the event from an omniscient third-party angle until it occurs. Then the pre narration created close textual and logical connections with the event.

For example, in the first year of Duke Yin in *Zuozhuan*:

Duke Zhuang was born feet first, which frightened the lady very much. She nick named him Wusheng (meaning "born wide awake") and nursed a constant hatred for him thereafter. However, she doted on Shuduan and schemed to get him declared the heir to the throne of Zheng.¹²

If make the text is independent of the total *Zuozhuan*, it is only an objective description of the relationship between Duke Zhuang and his mother. However, if we connect it with the

⁹ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 1013.

¹⁰ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 1069.

¹¹ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 1177.

¹² Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 3.

following content, we can see that this is a pre narration of the later events that the Duke of Zheng overcame Shuduan at Yan.

The same example is found in the third year of Duke Yin:

Zhouxu, the son of Duke Zhuang's favorite concubine, was fond of martial arts. But, although he heard about this, Duke Zhuang failed to curb him……Then, Shi Que, a veteran official, advised the duke, saying: “It is generally acknowledged that if one loves his son he should teach him high standards of conduct and not lead him into error……It is on account of excessive doting on him……” But the duke took no heed of this advice.¹³

This paragraph is also a pre narration of the later article ‘In spring of the fourth year Zhouxu assassinated Duke Huan of Wei, and set himself up as the ruler.’¹⁴

Chapter Three - Characteristics of pre narration

As an annalistic history book, the narrative structure of *Zuo zhuan* is basically a linear narrative, which weakens the connection between the texts of *Zuo zhuan* and causes structural gaps and isolation in the development of historical events. While the pre narration can be seen as the writer's compensation and filling in the linear narrative structure. The explanation and description of the events and characters in the pre narration not only create potential logical connections between the texts, but also show the writer's comments and values on history in a deeper way. This section will briefly explore the essential characteristics of pre narration from three aspects.

3.1 The admonitions and teachings that respect etiquette and virtue

Wang Jingyu mentioned that for the author of *Zuo zhuan*:

history obviously meant more than just a listing of a succession of events. Among other things, it also meant an attempt to make connections among the various isolated events so

¹³ Hu Zhihui, *Zuo zhuan*, p. 17-19.

¹⁴ Hu Zhihui, *Zuo zhuan*, p. 19.

reported, to make some kind of sense and meaning out of an otherwise confusing and incoherent past.¹⁵

If we look at the Features of the pre narrative content in *Zuozhuan*, it can be found that they are all related to the etiquette and morality in traditional Chinese ethical concepts. From the rise and fall of countries, the victory or defeat of wars to the success or failure of personal destiny, these pre narratives all follow the same principle: if etiquette and morality are respected, things can be done, and if etiquette and morality are violated, disasters will inevitably occur.

Taking the first year in Duke Cheng as an example, after the conflict between the royal house of Zhou and the Rong tribe is made peace, Lord Kang of Liu wishes to take the opportunity to crush the Rong tribe. Shu Fu, a high official of Zhou in charge of internal affairs, advised, “Since it will not only violate the covenant, but also deceive a big state, you are sure to be defeated, You know, to violate a covenant is inauspicious, while to deceive a big state is unrighteous. Hence, neither gods nor men will help you in such a cause; how can you expect to win?” But Lord Kang of Liu turned a deaf ear to this advice, and finally ‘the Zhou army received a great defeat at Xuwushi.’¹⁶

In *Zuozhuan*, etiquette and virtue are the foundation and standard for measuring things. Therefore,

Before any ruler is assassinated, there will be a sign of less morality first; before any army is defeated, there will be a sign of disarray first; before any country is destroyed, there will be a sign of corruption first; before anyone is prominent, there will be a sign of extraordinary first. Before auspicious and inauspicious arrive, there will be corresponding signs.¹⁷

The fundamental purpose of these pre narrations is not simply the application of narrative methods, but is more focused on admonish and education.

3.2 The concept of destiny that Unify nature and morality

¹⁵ John C. Y. Wang 王靖宇, ‘Early Chinese Narrative: The Tso-Chuan As Example’ 從左傳看中國古代敘事作品, in *Chinese Narrative: Critical And Theoretical Essays* 中國敘事：批評與理論, ed. By Andrew H. Plaks and others (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 3-20 (p. 16).

¹⁶ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 531.

¹⁷ Zhu Xiuquan 祝秀權, ‘Zuozhuan xushi yishu santi’ 左傳敘事藝術三題, *Luoyang daxue xuebao* 洛陽大學學報, 1 (2002), 88-90 (p. 88-89).

In traditional Chinese culture, 'Heaven' has supreme authority. It measures the gains and losses caused by people's actions based on morality, and gives them corresponding messages. While people review their own behaviour by explaining these messages, correcting their mistakes, and trying their best to achieve the perfect state of the unity of morality and heaven. In *Zuozhuan*, 'Destiny' is usually shown through some strange phenomenon, divination results, dreams and so on, which their auspicious and inauspicious are related to whether people's actions comply with basic ethical and moral principles.

Take the result of divination as an example:

Earlier, when Duke Xian of Jin wished to take Lady Li Ji for his wife, he ordered his diviner to hold a tortoise-shell divination, The result was "inauspicious". Then the divination was conducted once more, this time using milfoil stalks, the answer was "luck".¹⁸

The court diviner advised him to follow the tortoise-shell divination results from the perspective of etiquette, but Duke Xian of Jin refused to accept it, which finally caused the Liji rebellion in the later period and the unrest of the country.

if we make a thorough inquiry into the text to find out the root cause, it can be found that the end of this historical event does not lie in the auspicious or inauspicious outcome of the initial divination, but in the ruler's neglect of etiquette and lack of moral cultivation. However, *Zuozhuan* uses such pre narrative methods to connect the past with reality in historical events, observes history through the narrative method of "Destiny", and shows the causal relationship between events, which not only shows the awe of "Heaven", also contains writer's understanding and interpretation of people and morality.

3.3 The Judgment of outcome based on the actual situation

Some of the pre narrations in "*Zuozhuan*" seem to lack persuasiveness, and do not closely relate to the actual situation of the event. But this perception is biased. Observing the length and

¹⁸ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 177.

content of the pre narrations in *Zuozhuan*, it can be found that these narratives have their basis and reasons. For example, the details of behaviours displayed by individuals, the personality and psychological characteristics behind sustained actions, or the verbal communication and coping measures shown in the relationship between both sides are all the foundation for the fulfilment of the pre narration.

For example, in the thirteenth year of Duke Huan in *Zuozhuan*:

In spring of the 13th year Quxia of Chu started an attack against the State of Luo , with Minister Dou Bobi seeing him off. On their way back DouBobi said to his driver, “The minister of war is sure to be defeated. While walking with toes lifted too high, one's determination to win will not be firm.”¹⁹

The pre narration here is based on the details of Quxia's behaviour of walking with his toes lifted too high, inferring that his heart is unstable, which easily causes the outcome that an army puffed up with pride is bound to lose. Finally, the fact turned out as Dou Bobi expected, ‘The minister of war committed suicide by hanging himself at Huanggu’,²⁰ the war failed, and the prediction came true.

Chapter Four - The research values of pre narration

As a common narrative method in the text of *Zuozhuan*, pre narration has an important role in the research field. From the inherent literariness of pre narration own as a narrative method, to the historical connotation reflected in the combination of pre narration and annalistic history text, and to the spiritual and cultural connotation displayed after it transcends genres, pre narration undoubtedly has its unique research value. Through the multiple studies of pre narration, we can also have a deeper understanding of *Zuozhuan* and its connotations.

4.1 Literary aspects

¹⁹ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 85.

²⁰ Hu Zhihui, *Zuozhuan*, p. 87.

Zuozhuan intersperses pre narration into the text through different expression forms, such as speech, divination, strange phenomena and so on. It breaks the original linear narrative structure of annalistic history text in *Zuozhuan* by jumping time, and reconstructs the logical chain between historical events, which makes the chapters of *Zuozhuan* have plot coherence. In terms of character creation, the pre narration uses a certain side description to comprehensively and three-dimensionally display the character's personality, behavioural habits and so on. At the same time, it displays the complicated inner world behind the character through some tiny details, making the characters' images more vivid, and no longer confined to a single and flat. In addition, starting from the *Zuozhuan*, the pre narration as a kind of narrative method began to be widely used in the historical literature of later generations, and is continuously inherited and learned by later historical recorders and compilers, which is even used in the later novels, dramas and other literature works.

Analyzing the narrative methods of *Zuozhuan* from a literary perspective and exploring the inner meaning of its historical narrative will also help later scholars understand and learn the deeper cultural connotations behind it.

4.2 Historiographic aspects

Although pre narration exists more as a literary narrative method, one thing that cannot be ignored is that *Zuozhuan* still is an annalistic history book. This also means that the pre narrative content in *Zuozhuan* not only includes its original literary characteristics, but also is a historical narrative with historical property and connotations. The author describes historical facts in the form of prophecies, which strengthen the causal relationship between events and provide historical lessons for future generations.

including the pre narration of *Zuozhuan* into the research context of traditional Chinese historiography can not only better observe the historical thinking shown in the pre narration

and explore its inner important historical and cultural value, but also broaden the scope of after academic research, and reexplain the research value of pre narration from a new angle.

4.3 philosophical aspects

In *Zuozhuan*, a part of the pre narrative content is a kind of describe of the supernatural phenomenon, which is mostly found in narrative forms such as divination, dreams, celestial phenomena and so on. In these pre narrations, there is always a subject with absolute authority and dominance that infers and measures the results of the pre narrations, which people call this subject is 'Destiny'. But what cannot be ignored is that, in addition to supernatural narrations, human affairs narrations occupy more length in *Zuozhuan*. In these pre narrations, the outcome of events depends on human behaviour and ethics. Even in some supernatural pre narrations, the final outcome of the event still depends on people's ethical and moral standards, and 'Destiny' only plays the role of a measuring standard. This also reflects the ability of people in society at that time to understand the world, humans themselves, and even the nature of things to a certain extent. People's understanding and exploration of self gradually replaced the interpretation of external forces.

Although the pre narration in *Zuozhuan* is still unable to completely escape the influence of supernatural power and shows it in the form of prophecy as a guideline for controlling the actions of people. It cannot be ignored that "Destiny" is no longer the only authority for mankind, individuals gradually participate in this process. Studying pre narratives is also helpful in understanding people's cognitive level of the world and their inner thinking logic at that time.

Chapter Five - Conclusion

As a large part of the narrative method of *Zuozhuan*, pre narration occupies an important research position in the research directions for later scholars. Taking pre narration as the

starting point of research is not only studying the literary features of *Zuozhuan*, but also deeply exploring its history and inner thoughts.

One thing that must be made clear is that *Zuozhuan* as an annalistic history book with a complete narrative, its characteristic of both history and literature has extremely important research value. studying *Zuozhuan* can not only treat it as a purely historical record text and focus on the research of historical level, but also should concentrate on the level of narrative art. Only if combining the two things can broaden the research horizons, and provides kinds of new and rich research perspective for research of *Zuozhuan*. Only in this way can we truly go deep into *Zuozhuan*, understand the historical and cultural connotations behind it, and develop a narrative theory with Chinese characteristics at the same time.

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