

Study on the Variant Pictograph of Dongba Script in Lijiang Area

Yin Zhou^{1,2}

¹Humanities College, Chongqing Jiaotong University, Chongqing, China

²Chinese History Postdoctoral Research Station, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

Email: zhouyin2008@126.com

How to cite this paper: Zhou, Y. (2018) Study on the Variant Pictograph of Dongba Script in Lijiang Area. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, 335-342.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2018.611025>

Received: August 10, 2018

Accepted: November 27, 2018

Published: November 30, 2018

Copyright © 2018 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Dongba scripture is an important pictograph, and the study of dongba script helps to study the origin and development of writing. Through Lijiang dongba scripture, we find there is a special way to create new script by the change of the script's shape, called variant pictographs. This article researches on the variant pictograph.

Keywords

Dongba Script, Variant Pictograph, Lijiang Area

1. Introduction

The Dongba script is the script used in religious activities by naxi's priest—dongba. Because dongba script is pictograph and is still in use, it is called the living fossil of human script. Lijiang is the main settlement of Naxi, located in northwest of Yunnan province. Lijiang dongba culture is prosperous on the history, and there have been many famous dongba, leaving a lot of beautifully decorated, elegant dongba manuscript [1]. See **Figure 1**. The American scholar Joseph Charles Francis Rock has been collecting Dongba manuscript in Lijiang region and is mainly kept in the Harvard-Yenching Institute [2].



Figure 1. Dongba manuscript.

Pictograph is the most important feature of Dongba script and the most important script-making method. We find there is a special way to create new script by the change of the script's shape, and we call it the variant pictogram [3]. This thesis will study on the variant pictogram.

The materials we use are from “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts” [4] and “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts” [5]. “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts” is the biggest collection of Dongba manuscripts until now, covering almost all areas of Lijiang Dongba manuscripts. And the materials quoted from the “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscript” will be marked the volume and the page, and “26.131” means the material comes from volume 26, page 131. The materials quoted from the “Naxi Dongba manuscripts collected by Harvard-Yenching Institute” will be marked the volume and the page, and “H4.476” means the material comes from volume 4, p. 476.

2. Pictograph and Variant Pictograph

2.1. Pictograph

Pictograph is the most important method of creating font in Dongba script. Dongba script records the language of Naxi, and in Naxi, Dongba script is known as [sər³³³ tɛə⁵⁵ lv³³ tɛə⁵⁵]. [sər³³] is “wood” in Naxi language, [tɛə⁵⁵] is “mark”, and [lv³³] is “stone”. It means dongba script is the mark of the wood and the stone. They consider that the user of dongba script writes wood when he sees the wood, and writes stone when he sees the stone. Dongba script mainly created the script through writing the shape of the object.

2.2. Variant Pictograph

Variant pictograph is named according to the regular pictograph. There are many pictographs in dongba scripts, which can change into another scripts by change the shape of the scripts, and the meaning it representing has the connection with the original ones. Variant pictograph is an important kind of script in dongba script.

3. Lijiang Region Region Variant Pictograph Examples

We investigate the Dongba manuscripts in the Lijiang area. Find that the dongba pictograph in Lijiang can express the meaning though the change of the shape of dongba script. For example, the change of fonts' direction, the break of the fonts, black color, and the variety of the movement.

3.1. The Change of Fonts' Direction

3.1.1. Village 26.113

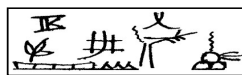


Figure 2. 26.113.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 2** is “Village god’s mark on the slope of the enemy’s residence is broken, and red barn at the end of the slope is collapsed. The big backing tree is broken, and the big backing stone cracks.”

Font **M** means “village”, and can be used to express the meaning of the “village god”, or “the mark of the village”. And we can see in **Figure 2**, **M** is used to express the meaning that “village god’s mark is broken”, through changing the direction of **M**, and forming a new font “**IB**”.

3.1.2. Fall Down

1) People fall down **人** 6.283—**𠂔** 23.16



Figure 3. 23.16.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 3** is “He dreams of falling down from the red hills. Dreaming that hairs scatter on the head, tears fill the eyes, and the white teeth in the mouth come off.”

Font **人** means “people”, and in **Figure 3** the direction of font **人** changes. The head of the **人** “people” changing the direction and turning downward, forms a new font **𠂔**. The new font **𠂔** is used here to express the meaning that people fall down.

2) Ghost falls down **𠂔** H1.381—**𠂔** 23.19



Figure 4. 23.19.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 4** is “The deer on the top of the cliff falls to death, becoming the ‘ben’ ghost.”





Font **𠂔** means “ghost”, and in **Figure 4**, the direction of **𠂔** changes. The head turns downward and forms a new font **𠂔**, expressing the meaning of “fall down”.

3.1.3. Torch **火**—**火** 23.13



Figure 5. 23.13.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 5** is “Light the torch at night, but the torch quenches.”

Font  means “torch”, but in **Figure 5**, it changes the direction, forming a new font . Here using  to express the meaning of “the torch quenches”. When the direction of the font  is towards the upside, it means the torch. When the direction is towards the downside, it means the torch quenched.

From the examples we analyzed, changing the direction in dongba script sometimes plays an important role in expressing the meaning.

3.2. The Break of the Fonts

3.2.1. Village — 26.110

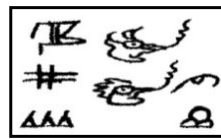





Figure 6. 26.110.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 6** is “village god’s mark on the slope of the ‘duan’ ghost and ‘xu’ ghost is broken, and red barn at the back of slope is collapsing. There is no sound of the dog around ‘duan’ ghost’s residence, and there is no sound of chicken around ‘xu’ ghost’s residence.”

The font  means “village” or “the mark of the village”. The font  twists here, and forms a new font , expressing “the village god’s mark is broken”.

3.2.2. Cypress 85.48— 37.26

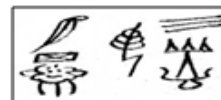




Figure 7. 37.26.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 7** is “The hand touches the boiling oil. Cypress incense breaks. The wind blows the oil lamp.” The font  means “cypress”.

Naxi people will use the cypress to make incense materials, called cypress incense. Here the body of the font  twists, expressing the cypress incense is broken.

3.2.3. Knife H4.236— 23.14

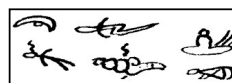





Figure 8. 23.14.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 8** is “The man has a nightmare. He dreams that the white iron knife in his hand is broken, Knee is bloody blurred, and the dark hat on his head is blown away by the wind.”

The font  means “knife”. In **Figure 8**, the font  is twisted, and forms a new font , expressing “the broken knife.”

3.2.4. Bone 59.68— H4.476

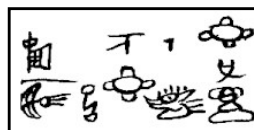





Figure 9. H4.476.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 9** is “The flying ghost interrupted the ghost bone. Praying for such a great power.”

The font  means “bone”. In **Figure 9**, the font  is twisted, and forms a new font , expressing “the broken bone.”




3.3. Remove One Part

3.3.1. Pig — 37.23



Figure 10. 37.23.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 10** is “du-sha-ao-tu” is killing the dog for doing witchcraft, and shu-mei-dong-pan is killing the pig for curse.”

The font  means “pig”, writing exactly the shape of the pig’s head. In **Figure 8**, the eyeball of the font  is removed, and forms a new font , expressing the meaning of “dead pig”.

3.3.2. Goat — 37.23; Dog — 37.23

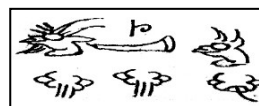










Figure 11. 37.6.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 11** is “Dry goat head, dry yak horn and dry dog head.”

The font  means “goat”, and font  means “dog”, writing the shapes of the goat’s head and dog’s head. In **Figure 11**, the eyeballs of the font

and font  is removed, forming new fonts  and , and expressing “dead goat” and “dead dog” respectively.

In dongba manuscript, in order to express the meaning needed, the priest dongba removes one part of the font of animal, forming a new font.  is the pig's head being removed the eyeball,  is the goat's head being removed the eyeball, and  is the dog's head being removed the eyeball, expressing the meaning that the animal is killed or dead.


3.4 Scribble the Black Color

3.4.1. Hawk — 88.185



Figure 12. 88.185.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 12** is “The bird and black hawk quarrels, fight, and got hatred.”

Hawk usually writes like , give prominence to its beak. In **Figure 12**, dongba scribbles the hawk body black, expressing the meaning of “black hawk”.

3.4.2. Bone 21.7— H1.380

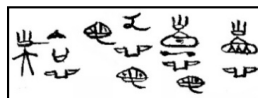




Figure 13. H1.380.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 13** is “black sound and black air change, turning a black bone ghost. Black bone ghost changes, turning out mi-ma-shen-deng.”

Font  means bone. In **Figure 12**, dongba scribbles the bone, and forms a new font, expressing the black bone.

3.5. Variety of the Movement

Dongba script is pictograph, and the font of “people” is just created by writing out the shape of people, forming the font . And after that, a series of fonts related to the movement of people created by changing of the shape of the font.

3.5.1. People —Left 23.41 Right 23.41

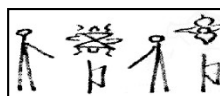


Figure 14. 23.41.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 14** is “the left side is yellow door, and the right side is green door.”

In order to express the meaning “right” and “left”, dongba creates the fonts 𠃉 “left” and 𠃊 “right”, by change the shape of font 天. The direction of the body represents the direction, 𠃉 express the left, and 𠃊 express the right.

3.5.2. People 天—Jump 𠃋 23.39



Figure 15. 23.39.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 15** is “Water does not flow. It swings, jumps, and backwards.”

The font 𠃋 “jump” forms though the change of the font 天.

3.5.3. People 天—Stand up 𠃌 37.13



Figure 16. 37.13.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 16** is “In the east, hatred fire of ge-luo haven’t burned up, and have already taken the hatred soul.”

The font 𠃌 “stand up” forms though the change of the font 天. And it means “light up, burn up”.

3.5.4. People 天—Shiver 𠃍 37.27

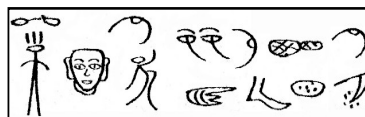





Figure 17. 37.27.

The meaning of the scripture in **Figure 17** is “Don’t let the ‘wa’ ghost touch the face. The eyes don’t look at the ‘wa’ ghost, and the hands don’t touch the ‘wa’ ghost, the legs don’t kick the ‘wa’ ghost.”

The font 𠃍 “shiver”, forms though the change of font 天. For the pronunciation of “shiver” is similar with “touch” in Naxi language, it is borrowed to represent the “touch”.

4. The Significance and Importance of Variant Pictograph

Variant pictograph is a special phenomenon existing in Dongba script. Through the study of the variant pictograph, we can understand the feature of Dongba script more comprehensive, and can help comprehend Dongba scripture deeper.

The study of the variant pictograph can also give a new point to study the creating of script. For example, the same phenomenon of variant pictograph is existing in Chinese ancient character. The font “片” comes from the font “木”. The ancient font of “木” is , created according to the shape of the tree. The ancient font of “片” is , just like the half part of the font , meaning cut the wood into two halves.

Fund

This article is sponsored by Chongqing Social Science Fund project (Item Number: 2015BS008); Chongqing Postdoctoral Special fund project (Item Number: Xm2017153). Chinese Postdoctoral Science Fund project (Item Number: 2016M602621).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Fang, G.Y. and He, Z.W. (2005) Word Spectrum of Naxi Pictograph. Yunnan Renming Press, Kunming, 42-44.
- [2] Li, L.C. (1984) The Mo-So Classic Collected in Library of Congress. In: Li, L.C., Ed., *The Theses of Mo-So Study*, Taiwan Palace Museum Press, Taiwan, 127-160.
- [3] Yui, S.S. (2008) A Summary of the Naxi Dongba Script's Six Scripts. In: Yui, S.S., Ed., *The Theses of Naxi Domba Character Study (the Second Series)*, Bashu Shushe Press, Chengdu, 12-37.
- [4] The Institute of Domba Culture (1999) The Collected Works of Naxi Domba Manuscripts. Yunnan Renmin Press, Kunming.
- [5] Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (2011) Naxi Dongba Manuscripts Collected by Harvard-Yenching Institute. China Social Sciences Press, Beijing.