



Study on the Associative Character of Dongba Script in Lijiang Area

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Abstract

Dongba script, which is in the early stages of writing, is an important pictograph, and the study of Dongba script helps to study the origin and development of writing. Through long-time researching on Dongba scripture in Lijiang area, we find that associative character in Dongba script is special. This article researches on the associative characters in Dongba script.

Subject Areas

Linguistics, Sociology

Keywords

Dongba Script, Associative Character, Lijiang Area

1. Introduction

Dongba script is 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, and there are nearly 1400 scripts in use. Lijiang, located in the northwest of Yunnan province, is the main settlement of Naxi. 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 had been collecting Dongba manuscripts in Lijiang region and those Dongba manuscripts are now mainly kept in the Harvard—Yenching Institute [2].

Pictograph is the most important feature of Dongba script and the most important script-making method. And when the Dongba has to express more



Figure 1. Dongba manuscript.

complicated meaning, they would use another method to create character, such as associative method, inactive method, and picot-phonetic method. Through long-time researching on Dongba scripture in Lijiang area, we find that associative character in Dongba script is special. This article researches on the associative characters in Dongba script.

The materials we use are from “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts” [3] and “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts” [4]. “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts” is the biggest collection of Dongba manuscripts until now, covering almost all areas of Lijiang Dongba manuscripts. The materials quoted from the “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscript” will be marked with the volume and the page, and “88.190” means that the material comes from volume 88, page 190. The materials quoted from the “Naxi Dongba manuscripts collected by Harvard—Yenching Institute” will be marked with the volume and the page, and “H4.250” means that the material comes from volume 4, page 250.

2. Interpretation Example of Dongba Scriptures in Lijiang Area

Dongba scriptures, which have been published with a translation, cannot be directly used as research materials in this paper. The published version includes the original content of Dongba scripture, international phonetic, corresponding translation, and Chinese translation, being called “four comparison version”. The four comparison version did not explain the origin and the evolution of every character.

The Dongba scripture and the Dongba character should be translated and analyzed character by character, which we call it “Zi Shi”. Through “Zi Shi”, we can make sure the original pronunciation and meaning, make sure the current pronunciation and meaning, and make sure the evolution of the characters. We will take the Dongba scripture “Awaken the Gods-Sacrifice Food” for example, to show the “Zi Shi”.

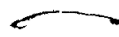
The Dongba scripture “Awaken the Gods-Sacrifice Food”, written by Donglu living in Qihe township, Lijiang city, is selected from “An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts”, Volume 85. See **Figure 2**.

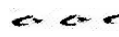



Figure 2. “Awaken the Gods-Sacrifice Food”.


ZiShi:

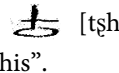
(1)

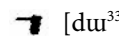
 [mur³³] “sky”.


 [ku²¹] “star”.

 [ha⁵⁵] “night”.


 [u³³] “good, kind”.

 [tʂh³³] “hang”, phonologically borrowed as demonstrative [tʂh³³] “this”.

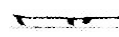
 [du³³] “one”.


 [ŋi³³] “sun”, meaning extended as “day time”.

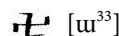
(2)

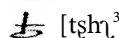
 [ŋi⁵⁵] “sun”, meaning extended as “time”.


 [tə³³] “wine glass”, graphic borrowed as position word [tə²¹] “up”.


 [dy²¹] “Ground”.

 [zy²¹] “star of zy”.

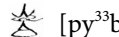
 [u³³] “good, kind”.

 [tʂh³³] “hand”, graphic borrowed as demonstrative [tʂh³³] “this”.

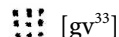
 [du³³] “one”.

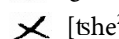
 [ŋi³³] “fish”, graphic borrowed as [ŋi³³] “day”.

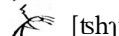
(3)


 [py³³bv²¹] Dongba, the priest of “naxi”.


 [lu⁵⁵] Geba character.


 [gv³³] “nine”.

 [tʂe²¹] “ten”, it reads as [tʂə²¹] here.

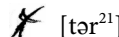
 [tʂh³³] “ghost of chu”.


 [iə²¹] “tobacco leaf”, graphic borrowed as “ghost of you”.

 [pv⁵⁵] “caldron”, graphic borrowed as [pv⁵⁵] “sent”.


 [ŋi³³] “two”, graphic borrowed as [ŋi³³] “time, day”.

(4)


 [tə²¹] “ghost of Dai”.

 [pv⁵⁵] “caldron”, graphic borrowed as [pv⁵⁵] “send”.


 [la³³] “tiger”, graphic borrowed as [la³³] “ghost of Lao”.

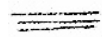
 [pv⁵⁵] “caldron”, graphic borrowed as [pv⁵⁵] “send”.


 [bu²¹] “Half liter”, graphic borrowed as [bu³³] “will”.

 [ŋi³³] “Sun”, meaning extended as [ŋi³³] “time, day”.

(5)


 [tei²¹] “cloud”.

 [hər³³] “wind”.


 [pv⁵⁵] “caldron”, graphic borrowed as [pv⁵⁵] “send”.


 [buu²¹ku⁵⁵] “waistband”, graphic borrowed as [bu³³] “will”.


 [tʂh³³] “hang”, graphic borrowed as demonstrative [tʂh³³] “this”.


 [ŋi³³] “sun”, meaning extended as “day time”.


(6)


 [phər²¹] “untie”, graphic borrowed as [phər²¹] “god of Pan”.


 [mu²¹] “dustpan”, graphic borrowed as [mu²¹] “soldier”.

 [ʂæ²¹] “god of shan”.


 [mu²¹] “soldier”.


 [tʂh³³] “hang”.


 [ua²¹] “five”. The two characters above read as [tʂh³³ua²¹], borrowing sound to express the meaning “all”.


 [me³³] “Female genitalia”, graphic borrowed as particle [me³³].


(7)

 [ga³³] “the god of victory”, also translated as “the god of Ga”.

 [u²¹] this is Geba character, and graphic borrowed as [u²¹] “the god of Wu”.


 [mu²¹] “dustpan”, graphic borrowed as [mu²¹] “soldier”.


 [tʂh³³] “hang”.

 [ua²¹] “five”. The two characters above read as [tʂh³³ua²¹], borrowing sound to express the meaning “all”.


 [me³³] “Female genitalia”, graphic borrowed as particle [me³³].


(8)


 [khv³³] “mow”, graphic borrowed as [khv⁵⁵] “night”.


 [i³³] “Mule or Hinny”.

 [du²¹] “big”, graphic borrowed as [du³³] “one”.


 [ɕy³³] “bracelet”, graphic borrowed as [ɕy²¹] “night”.


 [ha⁵⁵] “night”, meaning extended as “rest”.


 [i⁵⁵] “sleep”, meaning extended as “rest”.


 [se²¹] this is Geba character, and graphic borrowed as modal [se²¹].


(9)

 [so²¹] “big steelyard”.


 [ɕy³³] “bracelet”.


 [mur³³] “sky”.


 [s⁵⁵] “the basket of house god”.


 [tur³³] “rise”. The five characters above read as [so²¹ɕy²¹mur³³s⁵⁵tur³³], meaning “the second morning”.


(10)


 [py³³bv²¹] “Dongba, the priest of Naxi”.


 [nu³³] “heart”, graphic borrowed as a particle [nu³³].

 [hæ²¹] “golden”.

 [tə³³lər²¹] “boll made of Board”.

 [i²¹] “Egg leaked”.

 [s³³] “dice”. The two characters read as [i⁵⁵s³³], borrowing sound to express the meaning “awake”.

 [tsh²¹] “shoulder blade”, graphic borrowed as [tsh²¹] “come”.

Translation:

(1) when Fairy’s night and Starlight is beautiful, (2) when the life in the day-time and three stars in the night is good, (3) “Ligu” Dongba will send ninety “Chu” ghost away, (4) will send “Dai” ghost, “Lao” ghost, (5) “Cloud” ghost and “Wind” ghost away. (6) “Ligu” Dongba lets soldier of “Pan” god, “Shan” god, (7) “Ga” god and “Wu” god, (8) have a rest for one night. (9) This morning, (10) “Ligu” Dongba shakes yellow board boll, awaking the sleeping god.



3. Associative Character and Its Types

Associative character is composed of several characters or composed of characters and symbols. The meaning of associative character is composed by all the parts, and every part plays an indispensable role in expressing the meaning.


3.1. Dividing from the Similarities and Differences of Components

3.1.1. Associative Character with the Same Texts



This type of associative character can be divided into two kinds: one kind is composed by the same components, and the same direction; the other kind is composed of the same components, but the opposite position.



A.  H1.406 —  23.14

The characters above are associative characters. The first character is composed by two trees, expressing the meaning of “forest”. The second also assemble two plants, expressing the meaning of “forest”. This character is composed by the same components, and the same direction.

B. Hand in hand  88.190

The character is composed of two people. The two people each out their hands, expressing the meaning of “hand in hand”. This character is composed by the same components, but the opposite position.


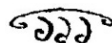
C. Fight  88.184 —  21.5



The first character is created by the shape of two people fighting with wooden sticks, expressing the meaning of “fight”; and the second character is more specific,  is ancestor called “Youladingrui”, and  is ghost of “du”, and in this character, ancestor called “Youladingrui” and ghost of “du” fight with the wooden sticks, expressing the meaning of “fight”.



This character is composed by the same components, but the opposite position.






3.1.2. Associative Character with the Different Texts



Associative character with the different texts, obviously, is composed by different texts.





A. Rain  H4.477—  37.11



The character is composed of character  “sky” and the  “rain”, the shape of rains falling from the sky, expressing the verb meaning of “rain”.




B. Crop  H1.410—  37.24



The first character is composed by  “earth” and  “wheat”, and the second character is composed by  “earth”,  “rice” and  “wheat”. These characters combine together, forming a new character, and expressing the meaning of “crop”.

C. Soldier  88.181—  88.182

The first character is composed of  and , the character shows “man takes the arms”, expressing the meaning of “soldier”. And the second character is composed by  and , the character also shows “man takes the arms”, expressing the meaning of “soldier”. Both of the characters hold the same style of expressing the meaning, except the body of the man is different.

D. Host family  H1.390—  54.120

The character is composed of  “house”,  “man” and  “woman”. The combination shows “a male and a female in the house”, expressing the meaning of “host family”. The second character is almost the same.

E. Cast iron  6.277—  6.281

The combined character shows a man carries the tools to cast iron, expressing the meaning of “cast iron”.

F. Make plow  6.278

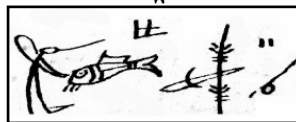
The combined character shows a man carries the tools to make plow, expressing the meaning of “make plow”.

3.2. Dividing from the Method That the Component Similarities and Differences of Components

3.2.1. The Style of “Hui Xing”

Two or more characters combine together, forming a new character, and expressing a new meaning. The meaning of the new forming character is composed by every component, and all the components take part in expressing the meaning with the iroriginal meaning, so we can deduce the meaning when we see the new forming character.

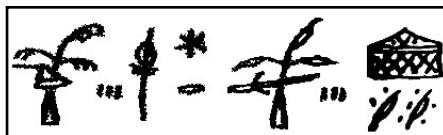
A. Chop  23.26—  26.119—  59.66



23.26

The translation of this scripture is “young people go fishing, and get ‘duo’ ghost of fish without fin; young people go chopping bamboo, and get ‘duo’ ghost of bamboo with two bifurcation”.

The new forming character 𩺰 “fish” is composed by “man” and “fish”; the new forming character 𩺱 “chop bamboo”, is composed by “knife” and “bamboo”.



26.119

The translation of this scripture is “chop three spruce trees, and make thousands of spears; chop three chestnuts, and make thousands of broadswords that wave like flying leaves”.

The new forming character 𩺲 is composed by “ax” and “spruce tree”, expressing the meaning of “chop”; 𩺳 is composed by “knife” and “chest nuts”, expressing the meaning of “chop”.



59.66

The translation of the scripture is “When chopping trees, don’t chop white trees, and chop black trees belonging to ghost; don’t chop the white silk bridge, chop the ghost’s trunk”.

The first “chop” use picto-phonetic character 𩺴, composed by 𩺲 and 𩺱. The second character use associative character 𩺵, composed by 𩺲 and 𩺱.

B. Drink 𩺶 88.190— 𩺷 6.277

The character looks like a picture that a man drinks from the cup with the straw, and there are drops around the straw, showing that the wine is flowing.

C. Burning incense 𩺸 21.4

The character is composed by 𩺹, 𩺺 and 𩺻. The character 𩺺 means “cypress branches”, which is usually used in sacrifice ceremony.

3.2.2. The Style of “Xing Yi”

The style of “Xing Yi” means that the character is composed by two parts. Compared with the style of “Hui Xing”, the way of the components take part in expressing the meaning is different in the style of “Xing Yi”. One component composed with the original meaning, and one component composed with the extended meaning at least.

Summer 𩺼 H4.250

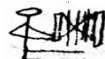

The character is composed by two parts, the first part 𠄎 and the second 𠄎. Character 𠄎 means “rain”, and character 𠄎 means “month”, forming the character of “𠄎” summer. And the original meaning of 𠄎 is “moon”, and “month” is the extended meaning.

But the style of “Xing Yi” is less in Lijiang Dongba script.

3.3. Dividing from the Nature of the Components



According to the nature of the components, we can divide associative character into two styles: one style is combined by characters, and the other is combined by character and pictogram symbol.

3.3.1. Character + Character

A. Weaving  88.187—  23.23


The character is composed by 𠄎 and 𠄎. 𠄎 means sitting people, and 𠄎 means linen. And the two characters combined into one new character, meaning weaving.

B. Ride  37.8—  23.31—  6.284

The first character means ride the horse, and the second character means ride the elephant. The two character above is composed by 𠄎 and the riding animals:  and . The third characters means the white bat ride the large fabulous bird. All of them, the meaning “ride” is expressed by subject, object and the position of the subject and object.



C. Shoot  6.294—  59.61—  59.62


Those three characters mean “shoot”, the first character is composed by the people, bow and the arrow. The second and the third composed by the bow and the arrow, expressing the meaning “shoot”.



D. Lean against  23.16






The character is composed by 𠄎 and 𠄎, expressing the meaning “lean against” by the subject 𠄎 leans against the broken tree 𠄎.

3.3.2. Character + Pictogram Symbol

A. Open  H4.255—  54.106

The character is composed by 𠄎 and 𠄎. 𠄎 means “door”, and 𠄎 is a pictogram symbol. The character can also write as  [F1006].

B.  6.278—  37.3





The character is composed by the  and .  means “knife”, and  is a pictogram symbol, expressing the meaning by using the knife chopping something, and the chopping object is already abstract from the specific object. And we can find character like  in the Dongba scripture, the chopping object is specific.

4. Characteristics of Lijiang's Associative Character

4.1. Large Quantity, and Great Majority Are Style of "Hui Xing"

There are many associative characters in Dongba characters, and the majority of which are "Hui Xing". "Hui Xing" is the basic style of associative characters.

4.2. Change Shape of Character According to the Text

It is a very common phenomenon to change the shapes of character according to the text. For example, the word "chop", now writes  on the whole, but there are specific shapes in the specific context. When it expresses the meaning of "chop the bamboo", it writes ; when it expresses the meaning of "chop the cedar", it writes ; when it expresses the meaning of "chop the black tree", it writes .

5. Conclusion

Dongba script is at an early stage of the development of the character and has important reference value for the formation and development of the character. The method of associative character is an important method of creating character in Dongba script, and it has two significances: for one hand, it helps to express the concept and word that the method of pictograph cannot express; for the other, the method of associative character reflects the psychology of the ancestors who create the character. Dongba scripture is the Memory of the World, and it is of great significance to carry out systematic research on Dongba script.

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Conflicts of Interest

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

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