# Similarities and Differences of the Narrative Structure of Western and Chinese Short Narratives

### Yujun Liu[1]

### ABSTRACT

The author chooses both Chinese and English short narratives as samples to analyze their narrative structures so as to testify one presupposition that Chinese people and western people are different in ways of thinking that can be reflected in the narrative structures of their writing. Twelve Chinese short narratives and ten English short narratives are listed from ancient to modern time in their chronological order. The author divides each sample into narrative units in the light of the theory of structuralist narratology and defines the relations between narrative units with different relation definitions according to the Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST). On this theoretical basis, the author illustrates all the diagrams of 22 samples with marked relation definitions, which are sorted out and rated so as to compare and contrast the logical relations in those Chinese and western narrative frameworks. The conclusion proves that the narrative frameworks of both English and Chinese short narratives are generally similar to each other in structure from ancient times except for a few differences in modern times. English short narratives tend to emphasize originality and individuality, as well as logical reasoning and linear order for westerners tend to be increasingly thinking for clarity and logical consistency since Socrates and Aristotle. Meanwhile, Chinese people tend to be thinking and writing in a spiral and complete circle echoing the traditional yin-and-yang principle and five-element principle until the "May 4th of 1918", during which Chinese opened their mind to accept westerner's science and democracy.

Keywords: Narrative Framework, Narrative Units, RST (Rhetorical Structure Theory), Short Narratives.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 A Presupposition：The mode of thinking of the English and the Chinese, different or similar?

Liu Xie, an ancient Chinese scholar, is a good spokesman for Chinese culture. In his famous *Intention and*

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[1] Foreign Languages School, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, Shandong, China. Cell Phone: 18661992936 E-mail: lyjlotus@126.com

*Ornament in Literature,* Liu Xie points out that literary works are created in accord with the natural laws of the universe. The sun, moon, rivers, plants, animals and human beings, which are depicted in literary works are in accord with the common logos (Logos is believed to be the transcendent reason or the rational principle expressed in words and things), although each has its specific characteristics.

For Aristotle, "…, art finishes the job where nature fails or imitates the missing parts."(Shirley Wood, 1997: 30) Accordingly, it is human beings who make the art pieces. And he also pointed out, "Since the objects of imitation are men in action, and these men must be either of a higher or a lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as more refined than in real life, or as worse, or as they are."(Zhang Zhongzai, 2002: p.35). Seemingly human beings are both the reproducers of the nature and one object of the imitation. Human beings are only one part of the nature.

In Liu Xie's opinion, human beings are only one small part of the universe, who are living in harmony with the nature. As most traditional Chinese writers, he believes that human beings cannot be separated from the universe, and they are one integrated entity. Zhang Fa, a Chinese scholar and the author of *Aesthetics and Cultural Spirit, Chinese and Western,* put forward an idea that western culture originates from geometry, from which the model of science comes. Later on, contemporary scientists and philosophers continued to present a series of paradigms to describe the universe. A philosopher, Parmenides took "being" as the noumenon of the universe. Aristotle used "substance" to substitute for "being", which determined the direction of the development of western culture. The world depicted by artists is made of substance and void. It seems that in westerners' mind, the two parts exist independently, and westerners' sense of culture is to take the existence of the world as a "form".

Then how do the Chinese observe the world? In his book, Zhang Fa concludes that the Chinese emphasize "wholeness". When they watch a building, the Chinese never forget its void part. For example, their windows and doors are delicately decorated and several bamboos are planted in their empty yard to produce a lively atmosphere. When they draw a picture of a body, they weird their last touch of the brush on the eyes, which brings in the most lifelike effect. When studying the universe, they never separate mankind from either heaven or earth. Early in ancient times, they found that the logo is the yin-and-yang principle in Taoism and the five-element principle. Over the time, whether in philosophy, medicine or literary works, the Chinese apply these natural principles consciously or unconsciously (Zhang Fa, 1997, p.34).

Zhang Fa comes to the conclusion that the differences between the Chinese traditional mode of thinking and the western one lie in three aspects: First, traditional Chinese tend to take the universe and mankind as a unity. Westerners seem to believe mankind can subdue nature and that human beings are different from the substantial universe. Second, Chinese tend to emphasize the content, but English tend to emphasize the form. The traditional Chinese believe that the composition of writings coincide with the yin-and–yang principle. Therefore, it permits an indirect description of the void part as the whole to produce a better effect than a substantial description does. Westerners, on the contrary, obey the rules of geometry, making their writings plain, simple and direct. Third, traditional Chinese tend to take the structure as a complete and cyclic one, while westerners a direct and linear one (Zhang Fa, 1997, ps.12-30).

Mr. Zhang Fa's viewpoints aroused my great interest. In order to prove the truthfulness of his conclusion, I will turn to the Rhetorical Structure Theory as the framework, and the English and Chinese short narratives as source materials. The truth is to be testified in the latter chapters.

## 1.2    A survey about the influence of traditional Chinese and western mode of thinking on their way of thinking

In *Aesthetics and Cultural Spirit, Chinese and Western,* Zhang Fa compares the distinction between the Chinese and English modes of thinking to the distinction between the brain and the computer. The

computer uses a binary system to operate its program, and it is linear. But the brain is organic and comprehensive. It uses the principle of complementary bipolarity, which is circular in thought. The operation of the computer is tangible, distinct and direct. This metaphor shows that the modes of thinking between westerners and Chinese are different. It follows that westerners' sense of culture tends to seek for linear development. Western works focus on originality, simplicity and directness. The characters in their works, usually seek for self-identity. However, Chinese tend to seek for unity and integration, and traditional Chinese narratives tend to have a complete circle in its narrative structure (Zhang Fa, 1997, p.196).

Take *The Dream of the Red Chamber* for an example. As a classic representative of traditional Chinese literature, it can best show the traditional Chinese sense of culture. The American sinologist Andrew II Plaks analyzes the structure of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. He generalized its structural features as complementary bipolarity and multiple periodicities. Complementary bipolarity is similar to the Chinese yin-and yang principle, the former of which is feminine and negative and the latter masculine and positive (see figure 1). Multiple periodicities are similar to the Chinese five-element principle, which consists of metal, wood, water, fire and earth (see figure 2).
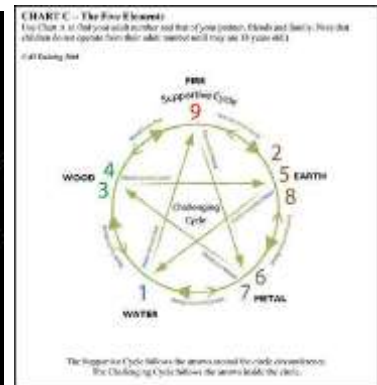


Figure 1[2]



Figure 2[3]

## 1.3    How do narrative frameworks perform to prove the similarities and differences of Chinese and westerners?

In *Codes: Language and Art,* Yu Jianzhong and Ye Shuxian take the main thread of the narrative in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is the love narrative of Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu. And the side thread is the history of Jia Mansion and Rong Mansion, which undergo a process from their heyday to their doomsday. In accord with the yin-and-yang principle, the two threads symbolize how happiness and sorrow, unity and departure, success and failure in human life switch with each other. There are also cycles of multiple periodicities. For instance, the clue of many chapters is the temporal order of the four seasons. Daiyu's short life represents a complete cycle of the spring, which corresponds with the element of wood. As she was born in the year of wood, she became sick and weak in the hot summer and was on the verge of death in autumn. This can be well explained by the mutual promotion and restraint among the five elements (Yu Jianzhong and Ye Shuxian, 1988: p.201).

In addition to the above principles, the characteristics of "unity of humanity and universe" can be reflected at the beginning of the work as well. At the beginning of *The Dream*, a stone tells the audience the background of the narrative. The previous existence of the characters and the potential cause and effect of the conflicts in the novel are expounded for the convenience of unfolding the vast scenes.

This may serve as an illustration to reveal the Chinese tendency to take the whole circumstance into consideration. Traditional Chinese novels usually begin with the background of the narrative, and end with a corresponding end to echo. And the characters and incidents function as the five elements of metal, wood, wood, fire and earth to interact with each other. This complicated and roundabout way of writing usually puzzles many foreigners.

Different from traditional Chinese writers, English writers emphasize individuality and originality. They

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[2]  See figure 1 on line link: http://search.myway.com/search/AJimage.jhtml?&searchfor=yin-and+yang+principle&n
[3]  See figure 2 on line link: http://search.myway.com/search/AJimage.jhtml?&searchfor=five+element+principle&n

tend to separate the part from the whole and spotlight self-identity. They omit the beginning and /or the end of the narratives to achieve a specific effect. And they start their narratives with a direct yet elaborate event. Furthermore, they finish narratives with a surprise ending, which remains open to the audience.

Why is there a difference? With this question in mind, we turned to *Essentials of Text Analysis* (Huang Guowen, 1988: 147) and found Labov's model of analysis on the casual conversation. Labov divided a fully-fledged narrative into six parts. The first part is an abstract, which gives the readers a brief introduction to the narrated narrative. The second is an orientation, which introduces the time, place, characters, and circumstances. The third is the complicated action, which is the development and climax of the narrative. The fourth is evaluation, which exists in any possible part of the narrative to express the writer's attitude or to arouse the reader's interest. The fifth is the result or resolution that ends the happening. The sixth is the coda, which echoes the theme. Among the six parts, coda is optional. Labov also points out that a fully-fledged narrative should consist of at least the first five parts. His statement coincides with the stereotyped writing mode of four steps in the composition of Chinese essays, which consist of introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition, and summing up.

The division reminds us of an idea: Are westerners' originality and individualism embodied by the incomplete narration? The abrupt elaboration of an accident or the surprising end of a narrative is simply the application of literary creation. By omitting the starting coda or abstract, the author kindle the readers' fancy and interest. This may contribute to the similarities and differences between the English and Chinese modes of thinking.

Then does the mode of thinking for English culture or Chinese culture remain the same in its narrative? Is there a transition in their modes of thinking? In *The Transformation of the Narrative Mode of Chinese Fictions,* Chen Pingyuan draws a conclusion that the fictions before the May 4th Movement in 1919 took the plot as the narrative structure. After 1919, the narrative mode changed into three: One is the traditional narrative taking the plot as the center of narration. The other two take the character and background as the center of narration respectively. After a statistical study, Mr. Chen concludes that 79% of literary works have broken through the traditional mode of narration. It follows that the creation of Chinese fiction has been greatly influenced by the west since the 1920's.

Enlightened by these reference books, we found it is feasible to choose short narratives as examples to analyze their structure, and have a comparison of both the English and Chinese people's mode of thinking?

The short narrative is the production of human thought in spite of its brevity, simplicity and uniqueness. Labov's model of analysis on the casual conversation shows that a fully-fledged narrative should consist of at least the first five parts. As a sub-genre of literature, the short narrative may serve as a complete reflection of human thought like a drop of seawater. Small as it is, all the elements of the ocean water can be found in it. Short as it is, all the features of human thinking can be reflected.

## 1.4　The adopted theoretical frameworks

In order to draw a scientific and objective conclusion from the study of the short narrative, we turn to the famous structuralists, Roland Barthes, Gerald Genette, Tzvetan Torodov, and A. J. Greimas, for the theoretical framework. They proposed the narratological approach in the study of novels. As Tzvetan Torodov puts it, language is the master pattern of all ideological systems. Now that human thought is the reflection of the structure of human language, the structuralists carry on their task to seek for structure.

How does one draw the conclusion in a detailed and scientific approach? The book entitled *Text—An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* can solve the problem. Its authors William C Mann and Sandra A. Thompson introduce the Rhetorical Structure Theory (Abbreviated as RST). It is feasible

to apply RST to analyzing the narrative structure of the short narrative. For the convenience of analysis, we divide each short narrative into several narrative units, define the relationships among them and find out the characteristics of their structure.

## 2.    Narrative frameworks of Short narratives, the reflection of the Western and Chinese philosophies?

A short narrative, though short in length and simple in structure, can also reflect the writer's thought which underlies its narrative structure. It is both a reflection of the colorful world and a production of human thought.

Although short in length (varying from 100 to 2,000 words), the short narrative runs fourth behind novels, poetry, and dramas as an important genre of literature. It shares the same elements as sea water contains and it can reflect all the colors of a rainbow. It offers us a glance at the various scenes of our world, unfolds the colorful pictures in each corner of our life, and carries on the mission to transmit our human civilization to the future generations.

As Charles stated in *Short Story Theories:* "The sense of form is the highest and last attribute of a creative writer." (May, 1987, p.107), the elaboration of the framework for short narratives is secondary to the unique thoughts in the writer's creation, and its distinctive narrative frameworks are more highly demanded. Therefore, the features of brevity, shortness and uniqueness demand the author's skills of narration with fewer plots, less time and space but leave more imagination for the readers to ponder.

Now that the narrative modes for short narratives are very important, and the plots of short narratives originate from probability or causality, demonstrating a sequence of casually related incidents. As the outcome of human thoughts, there must be a possibility that the narrative structures of short narratives can reveal the frameworks of the narration, from which we can tell the differences between the eastern and western philosophies underlying their frameworks.

Traditionally, the typical feature of the realistic short narrative plot can be diagrammed as follows:

It seems that Chinese writers share the above similar formula to construct a piece of writing as westerners, like Robert, stated in the above Diagram 1. This diagram coincides with the stereotyped writing mode of four steps in composing Chinese essays, consisting of an

CRISIS
(Turning point or climax)
∧
Exposition—complication(s)        falling action—resolution

Diagram 1, (Robert, 1990, p.23)

introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition, and summing up. As Charles put in *Short Story Theories*: "The only difference between modern short narrative technique and that of the Middle ages is a verbal one. The only development that can be traced is not an improvement in any distinctive essential of the art of narrative-telling, but merely a general development in the knowledge of words and the ability to use them." (May, 1987, p.57)
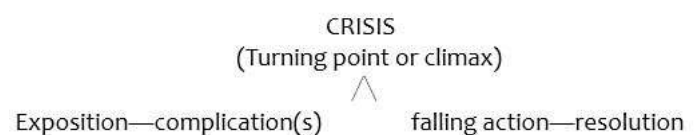
Admittedly, some modern short narratives still carry traditional elements of this formula, in which each incident contributes to the progression of the ordered arrangement of other incidents. In the countless literary works, it is common to find the formula for the fables, myths and allegories starting with "Long, long ago…", "There was once a…", "Once upon a time…", etc. The conflict or major occurrence is seldom highlighted at the beginning of the narration. But some modern short narratives have broken the conventional framework existing in most people's unconscious mind.

For the sake of highlighting individuality and originality, short narrative writers tend to separate some parts from the whole body of a short narrative to highlight the distinctive feature of their creations. For example, they may deliberately omit the beginning and /or the end of the narratives. They may start their narratives with an unexpected incident. Sometimes, they end narratives with a surprise ending,

which remains open for the audience to muse.

Take the beginning of Hemingway's short narratives as an illustration. "The Killers" by E. Hemingway begins with an action abruptly as follows:
*"The door of Henry's lunchroom opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter."*

Another short narrative "The Happy Life of Francis Macomber" also adopts an abrupt start. Its readers are easily carried away by the direct opening:
*"It was now lunchtime and they were all sitting under the double green fly of the dining tent pretending that nothing had happened".注释?*

The audience cannot help wondering: "Why did they pretend to do so?" And "What on earth has happened?" These introductory remarks bring in suspended questions to the readers and define an exciting atmosphere.

The above illustration elaborates how and why the creation kindles the readers' curiosity and interest, for instance, by omitting the starting coda so as to highlight dramatic accidents or the surprising end of a narrative. This may contribute to the westerners' originality and individualism, serving to stand out from the traditional way of writing.

If the framework of short narratives serves as a thread, which stitches the plots, the characters, and their dialogues as a whole body, there must be some rules governing the different narrative structures of short narratives. It enables the narrative to unfold the narrative units in different levels. The author aims to reveal the diagrams, which are outlined with the marked narrative units, and the underlying philosophies behind these diagrams.

## 3.    How to illustrate and analyze the frameworks of selected short narratives in their chronological order?

In accordance with the publish time, 10 English short narrative samples and 12 Chinese short narrative samples are selected here and listed in their chronological order. Among the ten English narratives, five belong to the genres of myth, legend, fable, parable and allegory respectively. The sixth one is a fairy tale written in 1729. The remaining four narratives belong to the following stages respectively:
1. The short-story proper: the first age (from 1804 to 1900)
2. The golden age: the second age (from 1875 to 1960)
3. The contemporary scene: the ongoing tradition (from 1909 to 1939)

Originally there was still a 4th stage— "The contemporary scene: Break with tradition"(Stone, 1976, p36). After a careful study, we found narratives in this stage are mostly about psychological description following stream of consciousness, and it is difficult to identify their narrative structure, so this stage is omitted.

Twelve Chinese short narratives are selected in their chronological order. The samples, which belong to the genres of myth, legend, fable, parable and allegory, are similar in their narrative mode and structure. As a result, only one myth is taken as a sample to represent others. The other short narratives are listed in the temporal order from the Spring and Autumn Period, to Qing Dynasty, and to contemporary era. Six of the Chinese novels have appeared before Qing Dynasty (the last dynasty in China); and the other six after the republic of China which is the new era of China, during which Chinese culture has been influenced by the western modern culture.

The reason I choose them in chronological order lies in comparing and contrasting the frameworks of the narratives in the time order may better demonstrate the development of the thinking both in China and the west.

### 3.1 The selected Chinese and English short narratives

Table 1: The list of Chinese short narratives:

| No. | Title | Word Number (approx) | Author | Dynasty or period | Time of occurrence |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 《天上人间》 "The Heaven on the Earth" | 3000 | Unknown | Unknown ancient time | Unknown due to the genre of a folk tale |
| 2 | 《曹刿论战》 "Caogui's Military Strategy" | 120 | 左丘明 Qiuming Zuo | The Spring-Autumn Period The warring States | 771 B.C.-206 B.C. |
| 3 | 《陈涉世家》 "Chen She, a Notable Leader" | 850 | 司马迁 Qian Sima | The Han Dynasty | 205 B.C.-A.D.220 |
| 4 | 《桃花源记》 "A Narrative on a Secluded Peach Blossom Yard" | 400 | 陶渊明 Tao Yuanming | The Northern and Southern Dynasty | 265-581 |
| 5 | 《柳子厚墓志铭》 "The Epitaph of Zihou Liu" | 1200 | 韩愈 Yu Han | The Dang Dynasty | 618-907 |
| 6 | 《俞伯牙摔琴谢知音》 "Two Bosom Friends on Music" | 7000 | 冯梦龙 Menglong Feng | The Ming Dynasty | 1368-1602 |
| 7 | 《连城壁丑集》 "Narratives of Lianchengbi II" | 5400 | 李渔 Yu Li | The Qing Dynasty | 1644-1911 |
| 8 | 《促织》 "The Cricket" | 1200 | 蒲松龄 Songling Pu | The Qing Dynasty | 1644-1911 |
| 9 | 《一件小事》 "An Incident" | 1000 | 鲁迅 Hsun Lu | The republic of China | 1912-1948 |
| 10 | 《楼上楼下》 "Upstairs and Downstairs" | 400 | 李玉泉 Yuquan Li | The People's Republic of China | 1949- |
| 11 | 《鞋》 A Pair of Shoes | 700 | 胡尔朴 Erpu Hu | Ibid | 1949- |
| 12 | 《关于申请一把铁壶的报告》 "A report to Apply for a new kettle" | 1000 | 许世杰 Shijie Xu | Ibid | 1949- |

Table 2: The list of the selected English short narratives

| No. | Title | Word Number (approx.) | Author or translator | Period | Time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | "The First Book of Moses, Called Genesis"(Chapter II) | 1,000 | Genesis | The Earliest Time | **Since 1314** |
| 2 | "Seneca Legend: The Origin of Narratives" | 2,700 | ? | | **Since 1314** |
| 3 | "The Fox and the Crow" | 300 | Aesop | | **500-600B.C.** |
| 4 | "The Narrative of the Bible"(Parable 5) Rewritten Version | 270 | Hendrik William Van Coon | | **?** |
| 5 | "The Pilgrim's Progress"(Excerpt) | 1,000 | John Banyan | | **1678** |
| 6 | "The Gift of Magi" | 2,300 | O. Henry | The Short-Narrative | **1906** |

| | | | Proper：the 1ˢᵗ Age(1804-1900) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | "The Boarding House" | 2,500 | James Joyce | The Golden Age | 1914 |
| 8 | "The Killers" | 4,600 | Ernest Hemingway | (1875-1960) | 1927 |
| 9 | "A Tree* A Rock * A Cloud" | 4,000 | Carson McCullers | The Contemporary Scene: The Ongoing | 1939 |
| **10** | **"The Shawl"** | **2,700** | **Cynthia Ozick** | Tradition (1917-1967) | **1980** |

## 3.2    The determination of narrative units

For the sake of a scientific and objective study of the short narrative, we turn to the structuralists, Roland Barthes, Gerald Genette, Tzvetan Torodov, and A. J. Greimas for the theoretical framework. They proposed the narratological approach in the study of novels. As Tzvetan Torodov puts it, language is the master pattern of all ideological systems. These structuralists have been carrying on their task to seek for the human thought, which is the reflection of the structure of human language.

During the 1960s and 1970s, French structuralist narratology pushed these linguistic analogies ahead further and established structuralist narratology. Major representative writers of works, like *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis* (1966) by Roland Barthes, *Narrative Discourse* (1972) by Gerald Genette and *Structural Anthropology* (1978) by Levi-Strauss, attempted to describe the deep structure of narrative works and enunciate the internal relations as a whole. They regarded the literary work as a specific linguistic text, and presented a narratological approach in the study of novels. For example, the French structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss, who can be regarded as the founder of the French structuralism, adopted binary analysis to analyze myths.

In their theories, an event can be defined as a process, which is a change or development that presupposes a succession in time or chronology. There are four types of the order of events: flashforward, flashback, homodiegesis, and heterodiegesis. Flashforward serves as a hint or expectation of prediction of upcoming events. Flashback is just the opposite. One kind of flashback is a direct record of events occurring in the past or going back from the present to the past. Homodiegesis is simultaneous with the actual event, but heterodiegesis informs of a different event which is related to the major event and happening during the narration of the major event. This can serve as one mechanism to divide the narrative units.

Another mechanism is function, a term proposed by Vladimir Propp, a Russian formalist. His famous study of the Russian fairy tale is basically an inventory of all and only the fundamental events (which he calls functions) that he identifies in his corpus, which comprises 115 Russian fairy tales. He asserted that both the number and sequence of the functions can be numbered. There are 31 functions. The first four functions of a full list of Propp's set of 31 key fairy tale-developing actions or functions are listed as follows:
1.      One of the members of a family absents himself from home.
2.      An introduction is addressed to the hero.
3.      The interdiction is violated.
4.      The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.

(Toolan, 1988, p.15)

Each of the above acts as a function, and the third and fourth ones can be regarded as a sequence together. Then how are the units divided?

Roland Barthes' *Introduction to the Structural analysis of Narrative* and Claude Bremond's "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities" in NO. 8 of *Communications* in 1966, both illustrate the determination of narrative units.

Barthes explained that for all the infinite variety of narratives, they share a basic structure which can be isolated and analyzed, no matter how much patience and formulation are required.

All narratives consist of a discourse which integrates a sequence of events of human interest into the unity of a single plot. "To understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the narrative, it is also to recognize its construction in 'storeys' to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative 'thread' on to an implicitly vertical axis; to read (or listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next". (Onega, 1996, p.48) And Barthes states that the theory of levels gives two types of relations: distributional (if the relations are situated on the same level) and integrational (if they are grasped from one level to the next). On this basis of his statement, the first task of analysis is to divide up the narrative and determine the segments of the narrative discourse of which meaning is the criterion of a unit. It is the functional nature of certain segments of the narrative that makes them units. Hence the name "functions" immediately attributed to these first units. The function is a unit of content, whose essence is "the seed that it sows in the narrative, planting an element that will come to fruition later—either on the same level or elsewhere, on another level." (Onega, 1996, p.53)
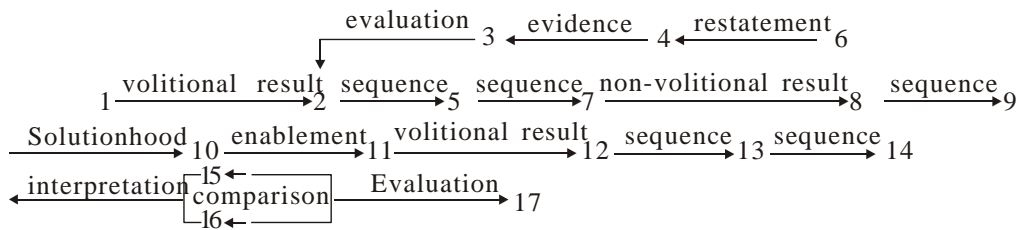
From the Russian Formalists, a unit has been regarded as any segment of the narrative, which can be seen as the term of a correlation. According to Barthes' viewpoint, functions will sometimes be represented by units higher than the sentence or groups of sentences with varying lengths, and sometimes by lower ones such as syntagma, words and even within words. Therefore, a narrative can be defined as a function of a small group of functions, which is referred to as a sequence by Bremond, for the convenience of seeking for the overall system of rules in the deep structure underlying each and every textual manifestation—whether existent or conceivable—on surface level. A sequence is a logical succession of nuclei bound together by a relation of satellites. It opens when one of its terms has no solitary antecedent and closes when another of its terms has no consequence. There comes the narrative unit which has a complete meaning in terms of the narrative functions in the sequence of a narrative. A paragraph may be composed of two or more independent narrative units. Sometimes several paragraphs may act as one narrative unit.

For the convenience of analysis, we divide each short narrative into several narrative units, define the relationships among them and outline the diagram featuring the characteristics of its structure. The detailed process of analysis and the Rhetorical Structure Theory will be illustrated in the next paragraph, with which we can analyze the English and Chinese short narratives and come to a relatively objective conclusion.

All the selected short narratives are divided into narrative units as follows. Take sample 6 as one example—"The Gift of the Magi". Its second unit is a scene, which shows how Della sobbed for her poverty. The first unit explains the direct reason for her sob. The relationship between these units is cause and effect. Unit 7 tells that Della's hair reminds her of something. Unit 9 is about how Della prepared to have her hair cut. These are sequences in chronological order.

At the same time, unit 7 explains the reason Della intended to have her hair cut in Unit 9. Unit 8 tell us about the couple's most precious possessions. It is a flashback of the events. Unit 11 is how happy Della was after she managed to buy the gold chain for Jim. Her fancy of Jim's happiness is a hint of Jim's unexpected response to her gift. There we can see Unit 11 is a Flashforward. From Unit 13, we know Della cooked supper and awaited her Jim. This minor incident happens during the whole process of the narrative, so it is hetero-diegesis. The sequence, which tells us how Della sold her hair and bought Jim a present and how the couple came to understand each other, parts of the plot which happens in a chronological or logical order. They are also homodiegesis which happen simultaneously with the actual event. On the whole, there are 18 units in sample 6. It is diagrammed as follows:

(Elaboration)

$$\text{1} \xrightarrow{\text{volitional result}} \text{2} \xrightarrow{\text{sequence}} \text{5} \xrightarrow{\text{sequence}} \text{7} \xrightarrow{\text{non-volitional result}} \text{8} \xrightarrow{\text{sequence}} \text{9}$$

with evaluation (3), evidence (4), restatement (6) above.

$$\text{Solutionhood} \to \text{10} \xrightarrow{\text{enablement}} \text{11} \xrightarrow{\text{volitional result}} \text{12} \xrightarrow{\text{sequence}} \text{13} \xrightarrow{\text{sequence}} \text{14}$$

interpretation ← 15, comparison ← 16, Evaluation → 17

All the other diagrams of selected Chinese and English short narratives with their defined relations are omitted in this paper.

## 3.3 Theories to illustrate the diagrams of each sample

How is the above diagram drawn? How are the names of the relations defined? The book entitled *Text—An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* helps to explain. Its co-authors William C. Mann and Sandra A. Thompson introduce the Rhetorical Structure Theory (Abbreviated as RST) like this:

RST identifies hierarchic structure in the text and describes the relations between the narrative units in the sequence of a text in functional terms. In the text generation program, W. C. Mann and S. A. Thompson find RST consists of two parts. One is the defined relations and the other is schema, which are closely related to each other. The relation definitions identify particular relationships that can hold between two portions in a text. In accordance with the relations, the schemas determine patterns in which a particular span of a text can be analyzed in terms of other spans. The analysis aims at defining the structure of an entire text in terms of the composition of schema relations.

Those relations are defined to hold between two non-overlapping text spans. Here they are named as nucleus and satellite, denoted by N and S respectively. A relation definition consists of four fields:
1. Constraints on N
2. Constraints on S
3. Constraints on the combination of N and S
4. The effect

Each field specifies particular judgements that the text analyst must make in building the RST structure. Mana and Thompson say that the analyst must have the knowledge of the context in which the text is written and share the cultural conventions of the writer and the expected readers. Every judgement must be plausible, which means all judgements of the readers' comprehension of the text are made on the basis of the text rather than the analyst's direct knowledge of the readers. For example, the definition of the Antithesis relation can be stated as follows: "It is plausible to the analyst that comprehending S and the incompatibility between N and S would increase R's positive regard for N(R=readers)". The other relations can be interpreted as follows:

"Background": the setting of a happening

"Circumstance": the condition of what has happened or will happen

"Comparison": two related parts that have similar characteristics or parallel situation

"Concession": a turn in the happenings of a narrative

"Condition": the terms enabling the actant to fulfill his task

"Contrast": a distinction between the related parts

"Elaboration": the description of a scene or the record of an action

"Enablement": the success after great efforts

"Evaluation": a remark to evaluate the end of an incident

"Evidence": a case supporting an idea or a proposition

"Interpretation": explanation for the happening

"Justification": the illustration to make an instance or a fact believable and truthful.

"Motivation": the potential impetus to do something

"Non-volitional cause": a power from outside urges the actant to do something, although he is reluctant or ignorant of the incident
"Non-volitional result": the objective consequence of the event
"Purpose": the actant's intention to do something
"Restatement": the repetition of the elaboration or any other relation definition
"Sequence": the continuous incidents happening one after another
"Solutionhood": the approach to solve the problem
"Summary": a brief conclusion of what is said or to be said
"Testification": the supporting fact as an evidence
"Volitional cause": the actant's reason to do something
"Volitional result": a consequence at the actant's will

(Mann, W. & S. Thompson, 1987, p.15)

These definitions will be used to show the way of thinking between English and Chinese writers when they create literary works. They will be employed to demonstrate the diagram of the short narratives so as to show the distinctions and similarities between western and Chinese way of thinking.

According to the statistics in this study, the relation definitions in the Chinese short narratives can be summarized as the following table 3.

Table 3: The number of relation definitions in the Chinese short narratives

| Order number of Samples | Total Number of defined relations | Number of chronological order | Number of logical order | Number of spatial order | Number of contrast | Number of background | Number of summarizing end |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 17 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| 3 | 7 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 5 | 12 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 13 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 7 | 11 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 8 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 9 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 10 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 6 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 | 15 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Table 4: The number of relation definitions in the Chinese short narratives

| Order number of Samples | Total Number of defined relations | Number of chronological order | Number of logical order | Number of spatial order | Number of contrast | Number of background | Number of summarizing end |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 13 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4 | 14 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 5 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 17 | 14 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 7 | 16 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 8 | 11 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 11 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 10 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

From table 3 and table 4, it follows that in the Chinese short narratives, among all the defined relations between the narrative units, the ratios of chronological order, logical order, spatial order, contrast, background, summarizing end relation account for 60%; 19%; 2%; 4%; 10%; and 6% respectively. Meanwhile, in the English short narratives, among all the defined relations between the narrative units, the ratios of chronological order, logical order, spatial order, contrast, background, summarizing end relation account for 67%; 16%; 5%; 1%; 5%; and 4% respectively.

For the convenience of analysis, we will list the ratios of chronological order, logical order, spatial order, background, summarizing end relation among all the narrative units both in Chinese and English short narratives in the following table 5.

Table 5: The ratios of relation definitions in the both English and Chinese short narratives

| Order number | Terms of defined relations | Ratio in Chinese short narratives | Ratio in English short narratives |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | chronological order | 52% | 48% |
| 2 | logical order | 39% | 61% |
| 3 | Contrast | 83% | 17% |
| 4 | Background | 62% | 38% |
| 5 | **summarizing end** | 77% | 23% |

From table 5, we can see that the ratio of chronological order relation in Chinese and English short narratives account for 52% and 48% respectively.

## 4. Conclusion: The differences and similarities in western and Chinese short narratives

After comparison and contrast, it's easy to find that relations of chronological order both in Chinese and English short narratives get the highest proportion, followed by logical order. The other relations both in Chinese and English short narratives account for less, especially the relations of spatial order in Chinese short narratives. Relations of background, summarizing end relations account for more in Chinese short narratives than those in English.

It seems that both Chinese and westerners learn to acknowledge, observe and describe the world in temporal order unconsciously. Time is the simplest and clearest "thread" for audiences from all walks to follow. Therefore, chronological order appears most frequently in short narratives. As Shenghuan Xu put in his article "On the transmutation of texts": "The sense of time is one of the earliest concepts formed in human minds. It has been a collective unconsciousness for humans from generation to generation, and an important framework for humans to acknowledge the world. Therefore, temporal order has been the primitive sequence for the texts human beings to perceive and describe the world." (Xu, 1996, p.197). Relation of logical order is another mechanism to develop thinking. From table 5 we can see the ratio of logical order relations is 61% in English short narratives; and 39% in Chinese, from which we find English short narratives focus more on logical relations.

From table 5, we can also see the contrast, background and summarizing end relations in Chinese short narratives account for more than those in English. These features help to echo with traditional Chinese philosophies of yin-and-yang principle and five-element-principle underlying traditional Chinese writings. "Chinese typical integrity lies in the balance between the opposite elements, and helps to reconcile the opposing elements like the harmony between yin and yang and the coexistence of five essential elements." (Zhang, 1997, p.71)

Among the selected English short narratives, there are five beginning with background relation, three of which were written before the 20th century, and two of which after 20th century. While there are eight beginning with background relation among the selected Chinese short narratives, six of which were written before 1912, and two of which were written after 1912.

Then does the mode of thinking for English culture or Chinese culture remain the same in its history? Is there a transition in their modes of thinking? In *The Transformation of the Narrative Mode of Chinese Fictions,* Chen Pingyuan draws a conclusion that the fictions before the May 4th Movement in 1919 took the plot as the narrative structure. After 1919, the narrative mode changed into three: One is the traditional narrative taking the plot as the center of narration. The other two take the character and background as the center of narration respectively. After a statistical study, Mr. Chen concludes that 79% of literary works have broken through the traditional mode of narration. It follows that the creation of Chinese fiction has been greatly influenced by the west since the 1920's.

Both Chinese novels and short narratives achieved similar transformation due to this influence. The modern short narratives, especially the English ones, tend to omit their beginning of "background" or summarizing end with devices of flashforward, flashback, homodiegesis or heterodiegesis, so as to achieve the effect of originality and individuality like the western writings.

In conclusion, the narrative frameworks both in Chinese and English short narratives tend to be similar in general, and they show their differences in modern time.

Firstly, both Chinese and English short narratives take more time order and logical order, but fewer spatial order.

Secondly, traditional Chinese and English short narratives have complete cycle of exposition, complication(s), falling action, and resolution, with the beginning (usually the background or circumstances of the narrative) echoing with the end (usually the summery or conclusion of the narrative).

Finally, we can see the differences come with modern creative and original writings, which break the traditional mode with direct opening to a climax or surprising ending. Modern Chinese short narratives turn from a dialect, complete cycle to a direct, simple and linear way. Chinese short narratives turn to be original and creative after May the fourth, 1918, which was a turning point in modern China.

The narrative structures of both English and Chinese short narratives are similar to each other in general despite a few differences in modern times. Their similarities lie in that they are mainly arranged in chronological and logical order but seldom in spatial order. Their traditional and complete patterns, with the ends of these narratives echoing with beginnings, all have the background or circumstance of what will happen as their beginning and take the summarizing parts as their ends. But modern writers come straight to the point or elaboration of happenings, which makes the plot s intricate and complex, and therefore spotlights their originality and individuality.

Their differences lie in that the Chinese works before the "May 4th of 1918" focus more on the completeness, and dialectical thought, which are the most obvious features of Chinese mode of thinking. Meanwhile, English short narratives emphasize originality and individuality, as well as logical reasoning and linear order for westerners have been increasingly thinking for clarity and logical consistency since Socrates and Aristotle. Meanwhile, Chinese people have been influenced by the traditional yin-and-yang principle until the "May 4th of 1918". But the modern westerners are deeply influenced by geometry and materialized philosophies. Westerners turned away from the humans' integrity with the universe to linear and logical reasoning earlier than Chinese people.

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