

Reflection of Ethnography Writing in "Expressing Crisis"

-- Reading and Thinking based on "Writing Culture"

Hui Lin

School of Ethnology and Sociology, Yunnan University, Kunming 650021, China

Abstract

The crisis of expression in anthropological circles in the middle of the 20th century made people lose confidence in the scientific and objective nature of ethnography. The publication of *Writing Culture: Poetics and politics of ethnography* (hereinafter referred to as *Writing Culture*) reflects deeply on the creation and research mode of traditional ethnography in its sharp language. Based on the reading and thinking of *Writing Culture*, this paper discusses the reflection and exploration of ethnographic writing in "Expressing Crisis".

Keywords

Expressing Crisis; Ethnographic Writing; Writing Culture; Literary Turn.

1. Introduction

In the history of anthropology, the establishment of traditional ethnography writing paradigm is closely related to the famous British anthropologist Malinowski. Due to the restriction of Evolutionism and other theories, the classical anthropologists before him tended to use historical documents, myths and legends from all over the world and "second-hand materials" provided by many travelers to create ethnography. They put together the cultural elements in different time and space to construct a macro history of human civilization.

However, Malinowski's field research method and ethnographic text writing "system science" can be said to be a kind of "betrayal" to classical anthropologists. The research system created by Malinowski had a very important influence on the later ethnographic writing, and almost became the "standard paradigm" of ethnographic writing at that time.

However, with the rise of "postmodernism" in the western ideological circles in the 1960s, and the comprehensive questioning of authoritarianism, scientism and structuralism, anthropologists represented by Malinowski have been seriously questioned and criticized for their "Scientificity" and "Authenticity". American anthropologist Clifford Geertz once pointed out that anthropologist's regard ethnography as "cultural science", which is questionable, because in the process of fieldwork and ethnography writing, anthropologists actually express their interpretation of society, culture and life through description. That is to say, although anthropologists may study the same culture or the same cultural phenomenon, they may have different interpretations of it, thus making the "knowledge" they provide relative.

The publication of *Writing Culture* reflects deeply on the creation and research mode of traditional ethnography with its sharp language. As Paul Rabinow said, fieldwork must be reconsidered, its historical context must be reconsidered; its stylistic constraints must be reconsidered; in view of its relationship with its colonial and imperial past, its existence and value must be reflected; its future must be reflected. Of course, at the same time, many anthropologists began to explore the future direction of ethnography writing: dialogue, multichannel, rhetorical consciousness, performance deduction and first-person narration, etc.

Therefore, this paper is based on the reading and thinking of *Writing Culture* to explore the reflection and exploration of ethnographic writing in "Expressing Crisis".

2. Reflection on Ethnographic Writing under the "Expressing Crisis"

2.1. Reflection on Ethnographic Identity and Cultural Identity

Identity: the historical product of the continuous development of society, is something conventionally created and maintained by the society in the process of reflection, that is, continuously absorbing events in the external world and incorporating them into the self-related and ongoing 'narrative'. Ethnographic identity and Cultural identity are formed in their own social and historical backgrounds by constantly incorporating various events into self-narration.

In my opinion, the core reason of ethnographic "Expression Crisis" lies in the contradiction between "Ethnographic identity " and "Cultural identity".

Ethnographic writing, also known as cultural writing, "is a special practice of characterizing the social reality in which others live. This representation is based on the researcher's own experience and the researcher's analysis in the context of specific fields". [1] It takes ethnographer, author, field investigation and writing as his or her behavior, and printed text (or audio products) as the presentation carrier Academic activities in which readers are the objects of acceptance. It was born in the western knowledge system, and it was the world that created the ethnographic identity.

No matter how far the ethnographers go to the field for investigation, their ethnography, from writing to publication to being read, commented and quoted, is completed in the body of their own identity, so as to verify a certain theory, reflect and reflect on their own culture, and produce the academic significance and value of common recognition. The system is self-contained, is not responsible for the object of study, and rarely has identity association with the object of study.

The object of ethnography: culture, refers to all kinds of matters concerning knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, custom, ability and habit enjoyed by the cultural subject, and it is the living world free from interference of the cultural subject. In the process of creation and inheritance, the main of culture forms its own identity to the group, and in the process of contact with other cultures, strengthens the identity within the group, so that culture becomes its own identity.

Ethnography is a qualitative study. "Ethnographic writing is a process of explaining the writing object and culture, so ethnographic writing is subjective", [2] although ethnographic scholars generally deny their ultimate right of interpretation of texts, and claim that their statements and explanations are only expedient in nature. However, in the process of writing, it is inevitable to set a basic hypothesis as the premise of one's own values, world outlook, ideology and research purpose to "reexplain" the work or sit down to abstract generalization. As a result, local voices have been incorporated into western, modern discourse.

Therefore, it can be said that the "Expression Crisis" of ethnography has nothing to do with the object of expression. The core root of the crisis is the identity crisis of its own discipline ideas and methods within the ethnographic identity system. The famous anthropological case "the dispute between Mead Freeman" is the best proof: Samoan women are not responsible for anthropologists under the western scientific system when they face their own cultural identity; at the same time, the concept of "seeking truth" in ethnography plays no role for them; while when the world is arguing about the right and wrong of Samoan ethnography, the Samoan literature is the best proof They are not affected by these arguments.

In *Writing Culture*, we can also see the difference between two different cultural identities from Tatal Asad criticism of Gellner. In his ethnography of the Berber people in Morocco, Gellner

described the "Iguramen" translated as "Saints". "The local belief is that they are selected by God. Moreover, God makes his choice manifest by endowing those whom he has selected with certain characteristics....." [3] However, Asad believes that Galena is "his too-fluent use of a religious vocabulary with strong, and perhaps irrelevant, Christian overtones must prompt doubts and questions at the point". [3] Gellner used the words and thinking of his own Christian culture to construct the religious culture of the Berber people. What the readers receive is no longer the real Berber culture.

2.2. Reflection on Ethnographic Text and Cultural Text in Literary Turn

The "Literary Turn" of anthropology is aimed at the writing practice of anthropology. To be exact, this term refers to the process in which anthropologists give the text a clear sense of literary fiction in the process of writing. "the coming of a literary consciousness of the ethnography promise to be somewhat more eventful..... leaving disciplinary debates to focus upon and problematize both the textual expression of knowledge and the career process that generates them. And in this literary treatment of ethnography more is at stake than the mere demystification of past dominant conventions of representation." [4]

First, we define and analyze these two concepts: Ethnographic Text is an academic work with words as its main carrier. It is an inanimate printed matter that can only rely on visual perception to make time static and space two-dimensional; while Cultural Text is a living matter with various legends, rituals, utensils and so on as the carrier, with time length and space dimension, and can be perceived by various organs.

In *Writing Culture*, almost every author pays attention to the literariness of the writing method of ethnography discourse. On the one hand, because of the limitations of language and characters, cultural texts belong to the free existence of cultural subjects. Once separated from the context space of their existence, their connotation may no longer exist; on the other hand, language and characters are also rhetorical, and rhetoric means subjectivity. In his article *Fieldwork in Common Place*, Pratt said: "it is possible to suggest that ethnographic writing is as trope-governed as any other discursive"[5]; therefore, it is impossible to describe culture objectively and scientifically.

James Clifford, in his *On Ethnographic Allegory* puts forward that "In what follow I treat ethnography itself as a performance em-plotted by powerful stories"[6] and emphasizes that the colleagues in these stories depicting real cultural events make additional, moral, ideological and even cosmological statements. The writing of ethnography is allegorical in content and form, which confirms that the characters in ethnography are indeed literary.

Marcus also pointed out clearly in his *Afterword: Ethnographic Writing and Anthropological Careers* that the mission of the Santa Fe seminar is "to introduce a literary consciousness to ethnographic practice by showing various ways in which ethnographers can be read and written..... They are more self-conscious than even before that they are writers who, as maturing professional, routinely the models of ethnography by which they were inducted into anthropology." [7]

Anthropology as Cultural Criticism: An Experimental Moment in the Human Science published in the same year as *Writing Culture* also gives a profound interpretation of the theme, style and the essence of "Literary Turn" of ethnography. It is pointed out in the book that modernist ethnography texts should emphasize the dialogue between the author and the subject of ethnography, or try to involve readers in the analysis work, and think that the dialogue between diverse and reasonable voices and ideas will become a new trend in the writing of modern ethnographic texts.

Since the literary proof of ethnographic description in *Writing Culture* and *Anthropology as Cultural Criticism*, many anthropologists have continued this dialogue, among which Clifford Geertz and Norman.K.Denzin are typical representatives. Just as Norman.K.Denzin said, the

description of each nation by the author of field ethnography should go beyond the traditional and objective way of writing, and write more experimental and empirical texts, including autobiography and performance-based media; express more emotions It's not scientific facts; at the same time, it also needs to be oriented to living experience, practice and multiple perspective writing.

But not all anthropologists agree with this "Literary Turn." So far as to say that boycott and still very strong, but it is not surprising, because of anthropology itself has long academic tradition, there are some exclusive and exclusivity of writing, literary tradition and deep embedding of anthropological writing, on some level, means that the anthropology to his opponent to make concessions.

The "Literary Turn" of ethnographic writing seems to have passed their "bottom line", and they worry that this rhetorical practice will reduce the credibility of anthropology as a serious knowledge. They also emphasize that anthropologists do not create texts to establish some kind of literary observation. So, it would be inappropriate for anthropologists to reflect on these literary questions rather than investigate the outside world.

3. Conclusion

The reflection on the writing style of ethnography in *Writing Culture* is, in the final analysis, a reflection on the narrative consciousness of ethnography and its strategies. The discussion of "Literary Turn" is just a question of the way ethnography is written. Throughout the book, *Writing Culture* does not propose a more scientific or "normative" writing paradigm, but advocates the anthropological researchers to make perceptual description of personal experience and emotion, and strengthen the use of literary rhetoric.

In fact, it seems to me that anthropological writing, or ethnographic writing, can never be an objective, scientific statement. The reflection on ethnographic writing under the "Expression Crisis" should be more of an anthropologist's two-way behavior and process of remolding "the other" and "the self" in the process of field investigation, in addition to the reflection on writing paradigm.

References

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