

Seeking academic value in folk documents

By ZHANG JIE

As more folk documents have been identified, their academic value has been gradually realized. Folk documents refer to textual materials formed during people's daily lives, which include many forms such as genealogy, inscriptions, contracts, letters and diaries. It covers social, economic, political, cultural and many other fields.

Zhang Si, a professor at the Faculty of History at Nankai University, said that the study of folk documents can illustrate the history of ordinary people. The role of ordinary people and their lives in history is by no means insignificant and dispensable. Historical research would be pale and powerless without the history of ordinary people.

Yang Hua, the director of the Center of Traditional Chinese Culture Studies at Wuhan University, said that folk documents in the Ming and Qing dynasties, including folk contracts, inscriptions and genealogy, are new materials for promoting ritual study in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Zhou Ya, an associate professor at the Research Center for Chinese Social History at Shanxi University, said that folk

documents have brought new historical materials, new perspectives and new discourse to historical research. Despite the fact that most folk documents have not been included in official archives, folk documents are actually a new form of material that can help researchers discover and cross-reference history. Not only that, folk documents are an important carrier of traditional Chinese culture, which reflects the national identity and temporal and spatial properties of Chinese culture.

The diversity, triviality and continuity of life in society have determined that folk documents have many types, large quantities and complex forms of information. Zhang said that folk documents have not been fully utilized by scholars in their past research. At the same time, due to the complexity of folk documents, there are many challenges in their identification and utilization. Therefore, we can try to institute a study of folk document history.

As an important type of folk document, inscriptions have become a focus of research in current academic circles. Scholars in the fields of history, folklore, anthropology and sociology have carefully studied the inscription literature. Wu Xin, a professor at the Canal Subject

Research College at Liaocheng University, said that inscriptions have certain limitations in writing format, purpose and content. Therefore, they should not be used alone as historical materials. Instead, they should be combined with other historical materials to form a chain of evidence.

As to existing problems in the usage of folk documents, the normative issue should be highlighted. Academic circles have published many folk documents, but their classification and arrangement is very different. Furthermore, as a kind of text that transcends time and space, past folk documents are quite different from the present in terms of writing, language expression and terminology. This often leads to misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Finally, the regional and individual nature of folk documents provides excellent materials for scholars to carry out regional and case studies with distinctive characteristics, Zhou said.

Zhang said that in order to better study folk documents, it is necessary to use field investigations and archaeological methods to verify and examine them, to understand their background and authorship and to study from the perspective of the author.

Zhou said that for better research, it is necessary to study folk documents from the perspective of philology. This means not only to examine the holistic and individual generation, development and extinction of folk documents vertically, but also to study their subject, form, content and value horizontally to fully reveal the story behind them. At the same time, a folk document database should be built to digitally process a large number of scattered, regional, and chaotic folk documents, to store them into the "cloud" and establish data relevance. This is an important direction to improve the level of research.

Considering many folk documents have not been paid attention to, the scope of folk document study should be expanded. Furthermore, the research on the folk documents of ethnic groups needs to be deepened, Yang added.



Folk documents have many forms, such as the genealogy in the above picture. Photo: FILE

<<FROM PAGE 1

China should work hand-in-hand with other countries, including Japan, to face challenges together and take a concrete first step toward building a community of shared future. Fukuda said that he fully agrees with China's concept of the community of shared future for mankind, and that sticking with this path will bring great benefits to the Chinese people and the people of the world.

Xie Fuzhan, president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), said that correctly understanding and accurately grasping the characteristics and direction of the current global changes is important for China's and Japan's compliance with historical trends, their domestic development, their bilateral relations and the safeguarding of world peace, development and stability.

"Changes unseen in a century" has profound historical and practical implications, which are reflected in the profound changes in the world economic and politi-

cal structure, the significant changes in global technology and industry, the tortuous evolution of international order and regulation, and the deep exploration of the concept of globalization and China's development path, Xie said.

As the world's second and third largest economies, China and Japan are faced with the common task of addressing new technologies and industrial revolutions, realizing self-transformation, and leading the development of the world economy. As beneficiaries of the current international order, China and Japan have broad interest in and common positions on maintaining such principles of international order as freedom, openness and multilateralism. As advocates of a new type of globalization, China and Japan have a similar understanding of and capacity for cooperation in exploring new models of global governance and coping with new issues. As major powers in East Asia, the two countries have an increasingly important histori-

cal responsibility for regional peace, stability and prosperity, Xie concluded.

Yutaka Yokoi, Japanese ambassador to China, said that Japan-China relations have also made a good start in the new Reiwa era of Japan. Since the beginning of this year, high-level visits, economic dialogues and local exchanges between Japan and China have made great progress. Third-party market cooperation has improved, and so has the tacit understanding between the two countries.

Japan expects that the Belt and Road will play a leading role and contribute to regional and world prosperity, Yokoi said. Japan-China relations have improved, but the international situation facing the two countries still has great uncertainty, including China-US trade negotiations, the situation on the Korean Peninsula and Brexit, Yokoi continued. The global economic and social environment requires attention from both sides.



History of Chinese Literature

By Pu Jiangqing
Beijing Publishing Group
August 2018

Exploring history of Chinese literature

By CHENG SUDONG

Pu Jiangqing (1904–57) was a famous expert in classical literature during the first half of the 20th century in China. His *History of Chinese Literature*, compiled by his daughter Pu Hanming and another editor Peng Shulin, mainly introduces the generation and development of Chinese literature, categorized by dynasties.

It is worth noting that in this book, the author discusses the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western literature and their developmental histories based on preserved texts of the early period. He takes the *Book of Changes* and *Book of Documents* as the opening of Chinese literature and puts forward the idea that "poetry comes first in Western history while prose comes first in China."

During his time, most scholars took ballads as the opening of Chinese literature. In the first chapter, he talks about the so-called early songs such as *Song of Qingyun*, but he points out with prudence that these songs were forged in the books of future generations. At the same time, he also argues that "*The Book of Songs* is not the beginning of Chinese literature. That's because according to this Western standard of division, literature had already appeared even before the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE), namely, the inscriptions." Faced with the fact that early Chinese literature was preserved within inscriptions on bones, tortoise shells and bronze objects, the author chooses to be loyal to the literature's materials. In this way, he tries to discuss the differences in the early forms of Chinese and Western literature and explain the internal causes of these differences.

The author's detailed analysis of the works such as *The Songs of Chu* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* provide an easy way for readers to access Chinese literary history. The author has a unique literary vision. For example, he believes that the most valuable prose in the *Book of Documents* was "Succession"; when talking about long narrative poems such as *The Peacock Flies to the Southeast*, he argues that this kind of narrative poem was influenced by the novel. When discussing the relationship between the Monkey King and Hanuman (a mythological figure of Hinduism), he carefully compares the similarities and differences between the two famous characters. He argues that the image of the Monkey King in *Journey to the West* may be influenced externally, but it is groundless to say that the Monkey King is born out of Hanuman.

Although *History of Chinese Literature* projects strong personal opinions, it also tries to provide readers with more academic perspectives. For example, when Pu elaborates on *The Nineteen Ancient Poems* as folk literature, he also calls attention to the different viewpoints of scholars such as Gu Zhi and You Guoen.