

Seminar probes unearthed documents

By ZHUYI

LANZHOU—A seminar on the study of bamboo and wooden slips and the language and writing system in unearthed documents was held in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, on August 7. Scholars conducted discussions on theories, research methods, the status quo, and prospects in the field.

Supplementing handed-down documents

“Inscriptions on oracle bones, bamboo and wooden slips in the Han (206 BCE–220) and Jin (265–420) dynasties, and Dunhuang documents are not merely excavated historical literature, but also supplements to handed-down documents,” said Zhang Defang, a research fellow from the Gansu Jiandu Museum. Unearthed literature in such forms as bamboo and wooden slips and Dunhuang documents record manifold information of ancient China regarding calendars, pharmacopoeia, historical geography, local conditions and customs, society and economy, politics and law, culture and education, science and technology, ethnic exchanges, and military defense. They open a window for later generations to understand the development of ancient society and the lives of ancient people, and provide historical research with supporting materials in political, economic, ideological, cultural, and military aspects. Unearthed documents greatly supplement descriptions of handed-down documents such as *Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian)* and *Hanshu (The Book of Han)*, thus possessing major historical and academic value.

According to Zhang Bojiang, director of the Institute of Linguistics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the study of language and writing systems that centers on oracle bone inscriptions, bronze inscriptions, bamboo and wooden slips, and other unearthed documents is

a basic discipline of philosophy and social sciences. It greatly expands the research space for language and writing systems. Spanning from traditional philology, phonology, and exegetics, to modern lexicology and grammar, many fields in the history of the Chinese language are influenced by the unique role played by unearthed document studies such as oracle bones, bamboo and wooden slips, and Dunhuang literature.

Compiling and collating

“Compiling and collating unearthed documents such as bamboo and wooden slips and Dunhuang documents is an extremely difficult research task,” said Zhu Jianjun, curator of Gansu Jiandu Museum. The complex contents of bamboo and wooden slips and other documents call for multidisciplinary research and compilation to restore historical and contextual truth. At the same time, it is necessary to leverage the latest cutting-edge technology to strengthen the digital collection of bamboo and wooden slips for better research, display, and utilization.

As a large number of unearthed documents have been compiled and published, thus forming a complete diachronic sequence, the study of the Chinese language and writing system has benefited from rich new materials. With unparalleled favorable conditions unavailable to predecessors, the study of the Chinese language and writing system has ushered in a new stage of development. According to Wang Guiyuan, director of the Wu Yuzhang Institute of Chinese Language and Characters at Renmin University of China, the continuous discovery, compilation, and publication of massive numbers of excavated documents such as bamboo and wooden slips and Dunhuang documents will definitely help people understand the Chinese language and writing system more systematically, deeply, and comprehensively. It is hoped this will pro-

mote the innovative development of linguistic theory and research methods.

Chinese language and writing system

The Chinese language and writing system are one of the most important signs of the Chinese nation and a critical carrier of Chinese history and culture. Greater efforts are needed to develop *juexue*, or “studies of lost knowledge” such as oracle bone studies, bamboo and wooden slips studies, and Dunhuang studies, in order to build a theoretical system of the Chinese language and writing system with distinctive Chinese features.

“Niche *juexue* contributes to constructing philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics,” said Han Gaonian, vice president of Northwest Normal University. Research of the Chinese language and writing system must break free from the constraints of Western theories and of excessive disciplinary subdivision. Interdisciplinary collaborative research should be strengthened between the discipline and historiography, archaeology, and studies of ancient Chinese texts, continuing the in-depth research of the Chinese language and writing system.

In November 2020, eight departments including the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Ministry of Education, and the State Language Commission, jointly launched a project for the inheritance and development of the ancient Chinese writing system and Chinese civilization, injecting strong developmental momentum into niche *juexue* such as bamboo and wooden slips and Dunhuang studies.

In Wang’s view, linguistic studies must put materials first. The only way for researching the Chinese language and characters lies in proceeding from Chinese materials themselves, through the interpretation of these documents discerning the development context and changing laws of the Chinese writing system, and forming our own theoretical system.

“Research of bamboo and wooden slips and linguistic research on unearthed documents are an integral part of basic disciplines,” said Zhao Changcai, a research fellow from the Institute of Linguistics at CASS. Enhanced efforts are called for to cultivate talent for *juexue* such as oracle bone studies and bamboo and wooden slips, and build broad academic platforms. This will attract more young scholars to be involved in research of ancient languages and writing systems, raising the innovation ability and academic influence of *juexue*.



A seminar on the Chinese language and writing system in unearthed documents was held in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, on August 7. Photo: NWNNU

<<FROM PAGE 1

cooperation. As the Belt and Road initiative is deeply integrated with the African Union’s 2063 Agenda, and the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is aligned with African countries’ development strategies, a global cooperation mechanism with extensive coverage, participation, and inclusiveness is taking shape.

China is the first developing country to meet the poverty eradication target set in the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, providing a reference model for African countries to carry out poverty reduction, said Rahamtalla Mohamed Osman Elnor, permanent representative of the African Union to China.

Since the FOCAC’s establishment, Chi-

na-Africa cooperation has made positive contributions to promoting sustainable development and improving people’s livelihoods in Africa. There is still a lot of room for cooperation between China and Africa in the future, he said.

Africa is rich in natural resources and has a large youth population, but the problem of poverty is prominent, he continued. The African Union has always been committed to seeking solutions to poverty. It has now proposed a series of plans, including the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, which have been included in the first ten-year plan of its Agenda 2063. In addition, Africa is also accelerating the construction of a free trade zone and improving Africa’s

economic and social conditions through integrated development.

The most urgent task for African countries is to learn from China’s experience and formulate development strategies based on their own realities, block the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and achieve the goal of poverty alleviation, said Antonio Serifo Embalo, Guinea-Bissau’s ambassador to China.

He added that while China is committed to eradicating its own poverty, it has provided assistance and support within its capacity to other developing countries, including African countries. China has been actively carrying out South-South cooperation and promoting the high-quality development of China-Africa joint construction of the Belt and Road.



A Study of Articles and Stylistics in Late Ancient China

By Wu Chengxue
Guangdong Higher Education Press
October 2020

Stylistic features in late ancient China

By HOU TIJIAN

A Study of Articles and Stylistics in Late Ancient China, authored by Wu Chengxue, a professor from the Department of Chinese at Sun Yat-sen University, focuses on the essay composition theory and stylistics of the Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties.

Wu conducts an in-depth investigation on such issues as articles, literary genres, stylistics, classic studies, and academic history in late ancient China. He advocates returning to the contexts of ancient Chinese literary styles and articles to understand Chinese literature. Particularly, he does pioneering research on the role and status played by literary anthologies, large-scale reference books, and bibliography in the classic shaping and interpretation of Chinese literature and in the academic history of Chinese literature. These will promote studies of Chinese literary classics and the history of literary criticism.

When it comes to the stylistic significance of anthology compilation in the Song, Ming, and Qing era, the author highlights different focuses due to their differences in total anthology stock and different concepts of literary genres. The Song Dynasty was an era in which new literary styles were flourishing and “classical” literary styles at that time also enjoyed an unprecedented prosperity. Clarifying relationships between the Song concept of “classical literature” and anthology compilation can reveal the unique characteristics of Chinese stylistics at a critical turning point from a macroscopic view.

Regarding literary anthologies in the Ming Dynasty, the author focuses on three books that were created during the early, middle, and late Ming era respectively. While representative of each period, these books tend to highlight the Ming anthologies’ new stylistic characteristic of “establishing and distinguishing literary genres from massive works that were already produced.”

In terms of the Qing anthologies, Wu selects *Guwen Cileizuan*, literally *The Classified Compilation of Ancient Articles*. He analyzes the academic traditions of the criticism form of “table of contents,” the advantages and disadvantages of “classified compilation,” and “not including historical biography.” As an important method of literary criticism, anthology compilation underwent multi-dimensional morphological evolution in the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties, becoming a window for observing the evolution of literary criticism concepts in late ancient China.

There are abundant forms and carriers of ancient Chinese literary criticism. In addition to literary anthologies and reference books that have attracted much attention, there are theoretical monographs such as remarks on poets and poetry, *ci* poetry, and essays, as well as individual articles such as prefaces and postscripts, letters, and monographs. The book specifically examines three special criticism forms: commentary, contents, and *xuti* (expository preface), revealing their significance on literary criticism history and stylistics.

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