

Original Research Article

On Archival Significance of Dialects in Literary Works

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ABSTRACT

The study of dialects in literary works has always focus on the literary and linguistic significance, while the dialects used in literary works can also be of archival significance in cultural anthropology. From the perspective of archival science, this paper tries to illustrate the archival significance of dialects in literary works, and it concludes that dialects in literary works are of archival significance in that they provide evidence and information of social culture, supporting materials in researches of writers and effective historical materials and data in researches of regional and contemporary culture. This archival function of dialect used in literary works is of archival significance to Chinese history, literary history, folklore and anthropological research.

Introduction

As an important field of literature research, literature language has been given great attention in academic researches. The relationship between literature and language is defined by carrier theory (also called instrumental theory), ontology (also called ideological theory), object theory, poetics, cage theory (Gao, 2006,2013; Wang, 2003; Tong, 1999; Fu, 2007).Humboldt insisted on the significance of language to literature, holding that a language represents the national spirit, and the national spirit is reflected in the national language. Xiong Yan (2013: 120) believes that literature is an art of language. As an inevitable way of literature expression, language embodies the liveliness of literature. The use of dialects in literary works is a norm in literature writing, especially in novels of Ming and Qing dynasties in China. There is a natural academic connection between dialects and ancient vernacular novels (Pan, 2008, p. 112). This article intends to explain the archival significance of dialect use in literary works from the perspective of archive.

Review on Studies of Literature and Dialect

On the relationship between literature and dialects, Meng Zhaochen (2004: 127) believes that dialects are the mother of novels, and there are no vernacular novels without dialects being widely used in vast areas. From the perspective of literature language, there are at least three functions of dialects to novels. First, as a part of realistic description, dialects help to reproduce the original language environment and the relationship between characters; Second, dialects help to show the characters' individuality in language expression, thus showing the characters' identity, personality, social background and other background information; Third, dialects have been continuously tried and refined to enrich the literary vocabulary of novels (Liu, 2008, p. 119).The study of literature and dialects in academic fields can be roughly divided into two main contents, one is the study of dialect novels, the other is the study of dialect problems in literary works.

The so-called dialect novels refer to novels written in dialect.In the history of Chinese literature, Wu dialect novels and Beijing dialect novels are among the most popular ones. Zhao Zhizhong (1998, p. 35) pointed out that written in Beijing dialect, the

Beijing-language style novels reflected the social life, local conditions and customs of Beijingers, expressing their aesthetic concepts and artistic tastes. For example, early Beijing dialect novels such as *Heroes of Young Chinese*, *Small Amount* and *Chun A's Family* show the ups and downs of Manchu culture and the spiritual struggles of Manchu children in the late Qing Dynasty and the period of the Republic of China. The rise of Wu novels such as *He Dian*, *Stories of the Flowers in Shanghai* and *Nine-tailed Fish* indicated the cultural prosperity centers in cities in the southern part of China in the middle and late Qing Dynasty. On the other hand, contemporary novels such as *Ma Qiao Dictionary*, *Lenin's Kisses*, *Sandalwood Death* and *Qin Qiang* embodied the thought of "cultural roots" among Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s and 1990s.

The study of dialects through literary works is relatively abundant. With the study of literary works, scholars have investigated the authors' birthplaces, language styles, the origin and evolution of dialectic vocabulary, etc. Zhang Yulai (2010) investigated the social use of mandarin in Ming and Qing dynasties with the study of novels of Ming and Qing dynasties. Zhang Zhenyu et al. (2012) examined the evolution and use of dialectic adverbs in Ming and Qing dynasties. Zhou Zhifeng (2004) explored the origin and significance of slang in novels such as *Dreams in the Red Mansion*, *Story of Stones*, *Journey to the West*, *Marriage to Awake the World*, *Biography of Flying Dragon*, and *Three Treasure Eunuchs in the West*. Zhang Yuping (2004) and Meng Zhaolian (2005) reviewed the dialect research in *Chin Ping Mei*. Zhang Chunquan (2011) studied the catchwords, idioms and dialect words in *Dreams in the Red Mansion*. Wang Yi (2002) proved the fact that Jianghuai dialect is abundant in novels of Ming and Qing dynasties.

In short, dialectic vocabulary and their dialect expressions in vernacular novels are not only the research objects in the study of novel history, but also the valuable historical materials for examining social culture, especially folk culture and regional culture. The study of dialectic use in novels is of not only literary and linguistic significance, but also of archival significance in cultural anthropology.

Archives in Chinese Literature Records

During the Yin and Shang dynasties, the slavery societies in China, the archives were called "CANON BOOKS" (典册 Dian Ce), while in the Western Zhou dynasty, "ZHONG" (中 zhong) or "ZHI ZHONG" (治中 zhizhong), in the Qin and Han dynasties, "ANCIENT BOOKS" (典籍 dianji), "PICTURE BOOKS" (图书 tushu) or "BOOKS" (书 shu). After the Han and Wei dynasties, the archives were called "COPYWRITING" (文案 wenan) or "LITERARY BOOKS" (文书 wenshu). It was not until the Tang and Song dynasties that the names of "FILES" (案卷 anjuan) or "DOCUMENTS" (文卷 wenjuan) appeared. The word "档案 dangan" (archives) appeared first in the late Qing dynasty and the early Republic of China.

In modern China, Chen Zhaogui and others defined in *Fundamentals of Archives Management* (2005) that archives are records of data, information and knowledge in various forms and carriers that are directly formed by social organizations or individuals in social activities and kept for future reference. Feng Huiling et al. defined archives in *An Introduction to Archival Science* (2006) as solidified information directly formed by social organizations or individuals in past social practice activities with clear and definite original recording function. Article 2 of the 1986 *Archives Law of the People's Republic of China* stipulates: "The archives referred to in this Law refer to various historical records of different forms, such as characters, images, audio and video, that are directly formed by past and present state agencies, social organizations and individuals engaged in political, military, economic, scientific, technological, cultural, religious and other activities and are of reserve value to the state and society" (cited in Wang: 2009, pp. 7-8).

To sum up, archives are valuable historical documents recorded in physical forms, such as text, images or audio-visual forms, which are worth preserving for future reference. The ways and means of recording archives and the types of carriers are complex and varied, such as genealogy, alliance, accounting, calendar, system, imperial edict, letters patent, orders, titles, memorials, forms, signatures, orders, consultations, submissions, indications and forms. There are laws, declarations, regulations, articles of association, decisions, decisions, notices, circulars, orders, reports, minutes of meetings, treaties, contracts, agreements, manuscripts, diaries, letters, certificates, books and materials, etc. all are archives. The function of archives is to preserve historical records so as to inherit the past cultural heritage and continue human civilization. Therefore, archives have three characteristics: recordability, originality and value (Wang, 2009, p. 10).

The archives preserve the original records of human social practice activities and objectively record the degree of human civilization in a certain field. Therefore, they are regarded as “human memory” and “human ladder”. Archives have inestimable documentary value for research work and literature review. Literary works, as a kind of language arts, are valuable and worth keeping files. At the same time, the language in which the text is written, as well as the folk culture and social culture behind the language, are also archival materials. Then, from the perspective of archival science, of what archival significance are dialects in literary works?

Archival Significance of Dialects in literary works

As an art of language, Chinese literary works vividly reflects the objective reality, expresses the writer’s spiritual world, reproduces the social life in a certain period and a certain region, and also represents the art and wisdom of a nation.

From the perspective of archival science, dialects in literary works are of archival significance in that they provide evidence and information of social culture. The use of dialects in literary works provides an original reference corpus for textual research on dialect sources or dialect vocabulary. Judging from the existing literature, many scholars prefer Ming and Qing novels as corpus when studying Ming and Qing dialects. Linguists usually use dialects in literary works to verify the status and characteristics of the language of the works (Zhang:2004), and also explore the attribution of dialects in literary works, the sources and changes of dialect vocabulary (Zhou, 2004; Zhang, 2012; Meng, 2005; Lei, 2005), or investigate the use of certain dialects in Ming and Qing novels (Wang:2007; Zhang:2011), investigates the social use of Mandarin in Ming and Qing dynasties through novels (Zhang:2010). To sum up, as part of the realistic description, dialects help to reproduce the original language situation (Liu:2008). From the perspective of archival science, dialect use in literary works has the archival function of providing evidence and information.

Dialects in literary works are of archival significance in providing supporting materials in researches of writers. Dialects are often used as an important basis to investigate writers’ background in the study of ancient novels (Liu: 2008: 108). Literary researchers examine the writers’ identities or birthplaces by studying the dialects in his works (Zhang: 2004; Pan:2008)) and others use literary works to examine the writers’ language styles. For example, Zhao Shuli’s novel language is praised as “making irreplaceable contributions to mother tongue literature”. Pan Jianguo (2008, pp. 112-113) analyzed the four major origins of dialects in vernacular novels: the ones originated from the regional dialect components contained in conversation or mandarin; the ones from the natural outpouring of the local accent of the writer; the ones derived from storytelling performance; the ones originated from the intentional use of novel writers. In other words, regional cultures are the spiritual home for writers, which provides a certain amount of language resources for the writer and affects the writers’ choices of novel language (Sun, 2004). Therefore, dialects in literary works can provide evidence for the researches of writers.

Dialects in literary works are also of the archival significance in providing effective historical materials and data in researches of regional and contemporary culture. The local culture, customs and human feelings conveyed through dialects are the spiritual lifeblood of the novel (Meng, 2004). Literature is a reflection of social life. The dialects used in literary works undoubtedly record the cultural characteristics of an era and a region. Luo Changpei pointed out that language materials can help to track the dates of cultural factors. Changes of language always lag behind the changes of culture. Sometimes, when the cultural factors have long changed, its metamorphosis is still preserved in the language (quoted Luo shenyi 2009, p. 317). For example, through the language of *Chin Ping Mei*, the customs of Shandong Province in northern China will be learned, and analysis of the language of *Dreams in the Red Mansion* and *Heroes of Young Chinese* enables readers to understand the living habits and customs of Manchu minority group in Qing Dynasty. As the carrier of culture in literary works, dialectic proverbs contain corresponding folk culture and ideological thinking.

Conclusion

Archives not only record the achievements of the social practice activities of people, but also record the process of the achievements and people’s, the experiences and lessons in material production activities and spiritual production activities. It is of high intellectual value to study the development rules of relevant affairs and to inherit rich historical heritage (Wang Xiangming 2009, p. 16). The use of dialects in literary works has archival characteristics in that it provides reference and data for the research of Chinese history and literature history, and that it provides original data for the research fields such as folklore and cultural anthropology due to the inherent attachment of cultural information to languages.

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