

**On the Combination of “The Textual Research on Historical Documents” and “The Comparative Study of Historical Data”
——and a Discussion on “The Law of Quan-ma and Gui-mei” in Chinese Language Studies**

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Abstract: In Chinese language studies, both “The Textual Research on Historical Documents” and “The Comparative Study of Historical Data” are traditional in methodology and they both deserve being treasured, passed on, and further developed. It will certainly do harm to the development of academic research if any of the two methods is given unreasonable priority. The author claims that the best or one of the best methodologies of the historical study of Chinese language is the combination of the two, hence a new interpretation of “The Double-proof Method”. Meanwhile, this essay is also an attempt to put forward “The Law of Quan-ma and Gui-mei” in Chinese language studies, in which the author believes that it is not advisable to either treat Gui-mei as Quan-ma or vice versa in linguistic research. It is crucial for us to respect always the language facts first, which is considered the very soul of linguistics.

Key words: the history of Chinese language; methodology; The Textual Research on Historical Documents; The Comparative Study of Historical Data; Double-proof method; the Law of Quan-ma and Gui-mei.

0. Introduction

In academic research, appropriate methodology is always a must. And a diversity of methods is actually employed. Studies of the history of Chinese language, a well-developed subject with a long history, depends also upon varied research approaches. Among all possible research methods adopted in this field, the author here argues that the best approach to studies of the history is a combination of “The Textual Research on Historical Documents” and “The Comparative Study of Historical Data”. And “The Law of Quan-ma and Gui-mei” in the history of Chinese language is worth serious attention. It is not

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advisable to either treat Gui-me as Quan-ma or treat Quan-ma as Gui-me in linguistic research. It is crucial for us to respect the language facts first, which is the very soul of linguistics. Nevertheless, the author does not intend to marginalize or even reject any other research methods, and on the contrary, believes that any method can be useful and accepted if applicable.

1. The textual research on historical documents (“the textual approach”)

“The Textual Approach” has proved effective in diachronic studies concerning nearly all subjects of the humanities in China. Scholars may have very good reasons to consider it the most powerful approach. Why do we think so? Here is a comment made by a well-known contemporary Chinese scholar, Ren Jiyu, “The history of China enjoys a rather privileged status in world history since no other country has such a long and continuous history of more than five millennia as China does. Other ancient countries like Egypt, Greece and Rome could be very proud of themselves as world centres in the old days. But sadly, their glory did not last to the present day. The Chinese history, originating from both the Yellow River valley and Yangtze River valley, is quite an exception indeed. When teaching world history in schools, the Chinese part will surely be very time-consuming while the American history will certainly be comparatively short and simple. It is quite reasonable to think of learning American history in one year’s time at most. Otherwise, you will have to go back to their forefathers in the European continent for earlier stories.”(Ren Jiyu, 2002)

Our forefathers are well known for their good tradition of maintaining historical cultural records, which makes Chinese academic research rather unique. Therefore, we are not at all surprised at discovering an abundance of historical documents which started from antiquity three millennia ago. Another celebrated present-day Chinese scholar, Mr. Ji Xianlin, once pointed out^①, “The literature in Sanskrit is one that exceeds others including ancient Greek and Latin greatly in number and size, yet it fails to compete with that in Chinese.” Generations of Chinese men of letters knew only too well how to make good use of this valuable cultural legacy, and they on the other hand made great contributions to it by producing a huge amount of literature in the study of this legacy. A recent publication by Yunnan People’s Publishing House in 2001 titled “A Collection of Textual Criticism of Chinese History and Literature in the 20th Century” gives a detailed description of those famous scholars and their works, which includes altogether more than 160 essays on textual research in characters well beyond 3.5 million. Among those outstanding figures are Miao Quansun, Sun Yirang, Zhang Binlin, Wang Guowei and many others. It is fair to say

^① See *Encyclopedia Sinica — the Volume of Linguistics* (1988:75). Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House.

that textual research in conventional Chinese linguistics is quite fruitful. And by this academic tradition of thousands of years Chinese scholars have always aimed at seeking the truth. What has been achieved till now really proves this point. Lucky enough, our Chinese scholars have long been benefiting from those numerous historical documents passed down by previous generations. Unearthed historical documents are often seen in large amounts, among which the bamboo slips of the ancient State of Chu found in Guodian, the bamboo slip books in the time of Warring States kept at Shanghai Museum, and the twenty thousand bamboo slips in the Qin Dynasty discovered in the ancient city of Liye in western Hunan Province are most valuable and important for studies of the history of ancient Chinese language. We have to make it clear that historical documents here in this paper refer inclusively to the literature both handed down and unearthed. When we talk about the research methods adopted for the studies of the history of Chinese language, we Chinese scholars should no doubt think highly of “The Textual Research on Historical Documents”. In the study of the history of Chinese language, with its literature of such an enormous amount and size, we will certainly be scorned as “betraying our ancestors” if we do not take great advantage of this great treasury of our historical documents.

The history of Chinese language, as its name denotes, refers to a subject which takes theoretically all historical periods of the Chinese language as its research objects. Not only studies of the prehistoric time and the primitive stage, but also the reconstruction of the primitive linguistic form are all necessary and important. However, they are just parts of the history of the Chinese language. Broadly speaking, the diachronic description of the Chinese language should include comprehensively the ancient times, middle ancient times, age of ancient antiquity and modern times, and each specific period of time should be treated as equally important. Also, the study of any specific historical period however important can not be considered as the entire history. When we research the written history of the Chinese language, no matter which period it is, it is surely necessary for us to make full use of the vast accumulation of ancient literature and the continuously unearthed historical documents. Even if you are studying prehistoric language, you still have to rely greatly on ancient literature, especially those from ancient times. All historical documents, if not forgeries, can be fully trusted and support your academic research in many ways.^② Take *Yan Shi Jia Xun* (颜氏家训, The Admonitions of the Yan's Family) as an example. This famous ancient work is virtually a book on comparative studies of culture, and it is examined and regarded as a serious academic writing, in which there are certain faithful accounts of the features of languages or dialects in certain areas and their usages in the later

^② If we can identify the publishing date of those ancient books of dubious authenticity, they can still be used as references when we have related historical studies.

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part of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. It is firmly believed and trusted by Chinese scholars. In the chapter *Yin Ci* of this book, the author Yan Zhitui states:

“The natural environment in southern China is very comfortable and pleasant. The southern dialects sound very clear and melodious and people there usually speak in a rather hurried manner. Their pronunciation of words, however, is not smooth and rich, which leaves the hearer an impression of shallow and vulgar talk. In the northern part of China, mighty and imposing mountain peaks are often seen, and naturally, local people there speak slowly with deep and raucous voices. The northern dialects sound simple and natural, in which many ancient Chinese terms are still preserved. Nevertheless, the pronunciation of those officials in the south is much nicer than their northern counterparts while the grass roots in the north talk much more melodiously than their southern compatriots do. You may still judge easily from the southerners’ accents their social status by only a few minutes’ talk even if they change their normal clothes. But, the situation is very different in the north. It is very hard to recognize people’s social status even if you have overheard them behind the wall for a whole day. The southern dialects are to some extent influenced by the Wu dialect and the northern people speak also dialects with some foreign ingredients. Both of the two linguistic scenarios have their own defects or shortcomings, which will be further illustrated here. Just to mention a few minor mistakes in their pronunciation, the southerners pronounce ‘[d z -]’(the classical consonants in Chinese characters 钱 and 贱)’ as ‘[z -]’(the classical consonants in Chinese characters 涎 and 羨)’ and ‘[ʒ -]’(the classical consonants in Chinese characters 石 and 是)’ as ‘[dʒ -]’(the classical consonants in Chinese characters 射 and 舐)’. As to people living in the north, they pronounce ‘[-i o]’(the classical vowels in Chinese characters 庶 and 如)’ as ‘[-iu]’(the classical vowels in Chinese characters 戍 and 儒)’, ‘[-ie]’(the classical vowel in Chinese character 紫)’ as ‘[-i]’(the classical vowel in Chinese character 姊)’ and ‘[-ɐp]’(the classical vowel in Chinese character 洽)’ as ‘[-ap]’(the classical vowel in Chinese character 狎)’.^③

These kinds of pronunciation mistakes can be frequently found in both the southern and northern dialects.”

This passage has been frequently quoted, and terms like “Nanren(Southerners), Beiren (Notherners) and their confused pronunciations of certain words” do set many scholars thinking. We can obviously see the great influence of historical documents upon scholars. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the study of linguistic usage, such as the

^③ The description of certain Chinese characters’ classical pronunciation is based on the information provided in Guo Xiliang (1986).

so-called “vulgarism of southerners” speech and the “archaisms of northerners” speech. Perhaps this inattention is because the lexical study of Chinese language in middle ancient times had not been thorough enough so as to give elaborative description of regional differences.

Actually, to describe in detail the regional differences in pronunciation of Chinese is an arduous task for scholars in the study of the Chinese language. Yan’s (date) words, about the linguistic scenario of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, are significant: “The southern dialects are to some extent influenced by the Wu dialect and the northern people speak also dialects with some foreign ingredients. Both of the two linguistic scenarios have their own defects or shortcomings, which will not be further illustrated here.” What a chaotic situation for the Chinese language at that time! As for those minor confusions in daily pronunciation, the situation is even worse! It is not difficult to understand why the standard form of Chinese language in the third century was broken and then re-formed in three hundred years’ time and, in the sixth century, became divided into two branches – the Northern branch centred in Luoyang, and the Southern branch centred in Jiankang (present-day Nanjing). The turmoil of successive years of war in more than twenty decades is certainly the main reason. Unfortunately, Yan did not mention clearly the factors responsible for the situation of Chinese language and left us with only “no further illustrations”. Although he analyzed in his book the chaotic situation of the Chinese language, it is too simple a description to be adequate. Hence, the eternal enigma he left us! This is what the author named “Yan’s linguistic enigma”. (Lu Guoyao, 2002, 2003) Faced with such a historical enigma, we Chinese scholars should devote ourselves fully to solving the mystery of middle ancient Chinese language. It will contribute much to the studies of the history of the Chinese language and its various dialects. And in the process of this academic development, historical documents will undoubtedly play a great role!

In studies of the history of Chinese language, “The Textual Research on Historical Documents” can be very helpful on the level of fine detail. Here is one more case in point to illustrate this. In Taizhou dialect, which is considered the eastern branch of Tongtai dialects in Jianghuai Official Language, “二(er), 儿(er), 耳(er)” should be pronounced as [ɛ̃] or [ə̃]. However, it was not true a hundred years ago, which is different from what is now believed by the locals. They were all pronounced as [zɿ] more than a century ago. Then how can we form a reasonable judgment? The historical documents should be the only reliable resort. According to *Li Shi Yin Jian* (李氏音鉴, A Pronouncing Dictionary) written by Li Ruzhen, a scholar of Daxing in the Province of Zhili in the Qing Dynasty, “The Chinese character 儿(er) in ancient times is pronounced as ‘ri’. However, in recent history of Chinese dialects, it is pronounced as ‘yi’ and in the Wu dialect, it is pronounced as ‘ni’. The only exception is the Tai dialect, in which the character is pronounced as its

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ancient sound ‘ri’’. And earlier, before Li’s study, in most dialects of the official Chinese language, the characters such as “儿(er), 二(er)” had already been pronounced as [ɤ]. Li tried to describe it as [i] and he also pointed out that the pronunciation of Taizhou dialect is quite different and unique. Thus we can see easily that the pronunciation was [ɹ]. Later in *Zi Yin Ji Yi Tong Kao* (字音集义通考, A Dictionary of Words’ Pronunciation and Meaning) written by “The Owner of Huaishuxuan” in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province of the Qing Dynasty, “儿(er)”, “二(er)” and “而(er)” were categorized as words in the division of “er” instead of that of “zhi”. This shows that their pronunciation had been changed into [ɤ] or [ə]. Li’s book was printed in the year 1810 while *Zi Yin Ji Yi Tong Kao* was published in Emperor Tongzhi’s time (1862-1874), so the pronunciation of [ɤ] or [ə] appeared sometime in between. We have only to base our study on the investigation of those historical documents found in order to determine the time of shifts of pronunciation in such a short period of time. (Lu Guoyao, 2001:306-307) This is rather unique and can never be replaced by other research methods.

2. The comparative study of historical data (“comparative approach”)

As mentioned above, the “Textual Research on Historical Documents” is very effective. Then, is it enough for linguists to rely only on this method in their studies of the history of Chinese language? Definitely not! For no single research method is perfect and omnipotent. If one language does not have its written form and accordingly there will be no historical documents to study, it is impractical to take a textual approach in studies of its history. The “Textual Research on Historical Documents” under this circumstance will be useless. And we have to resort to the “Comparative Study of Historical Data” instead. Although many languages do have their written forms, a comparative study of historical data would still be necessary when studying the history of the period before any written records. Even under the case of studying the history when there are already some historical records, the existing historical documents cannot be supposed to describe the linguistic facts perfectly and completely. So, we have to make a comparative study of historical data. The objective of the “Comparative Study” is to investigate certain languages and prove their kinship with other languages by way of making comparisons across those related modern languages or dialects and finally rebuild the primitive form of their mother tongue or mother dialect.

The “Comparative Study of Historical Data” actually originated from the West and it was a traditional paradigm of studying Indo-European languages. It started to be used in the 18th century and flourished in the 19th century. This is a valuable contribution made by western scholars to studies of the history of world languages, which of course, should be treasured, passed on, and further developed by scholars in China. The author of this paper has made an intensive study of *Yan Shi Jia Xun* and attempted to solve part of the linguistic

mystery he described for us there. Yan mentioned clearly that “The southern dialects are to some extent influenced by the Wu dialect” in his writing, which is very enlightening indeed. We should therefore use “the comparative study” to explore the similarities among modern Wu dialect, Tongtai dialect and Gan dialect. And based on these investigations, we further studied the situation of language contact and the mutual influences between the Tongtai dialect and Wu dialect in the sixth century. And finally, a hypothesis is put forward.

The “Comparative Approach” as one of the research methods in linguistic studies has its own shortcomings. As J. Vendryes wrote in his book *Language: A Linguistic Introduction to History*, the comparative approach is not always powerful. When taking this approach, the linguistic development is usually considered perfectly regular, continuous and normal. Although this approach is history-oriented, it in fact pays no attention at all to the complexity and diversity of historical facts. As a result, scholars using comparative methods only make use of those theoretical data and presume that there is a simplified version of linguistic history with certain rules of cause and effect. He later mentioned that some people believe the unique feature of this approach lies in that the restoration of the prehistory of language has to be based on pure linguistic facts only, without mentioning other social or cultural factors. But if no real historical facts are discovered, it is not safe to determine the family relationship between certain languages (Vendryes, 1992:338) . Similarly, in the Volume of Linguistics of *Encyclopedia Sinica*, the disadvantages of the “Comparative Study of Historical Data” has also been stressed. That is,

“We can hardly manage to describe the mother tongue if we fail to find any possible features there existing in its derivatives. The ‘Comparative Study’ should be based on hard evidence. What is more, it is nearly impossible to make a judgment on whether certain linguistic features belong to the primitive mother tongue or its derivatives that have already undergone a considerable series of modifications. Last but not the least, the ‘Comparative approach’ focuses more on the historical developments of languages while neglecting the mutual influences among languages. It has long been taken for granted that there is no difference in those linguistic derivatives originating from the same primitive mother language..... Today, it is generally considered too ideal if we take the Indo-European languages as a strictly uniform language family with absolutely no disparity in linguistic features among its family members.”

On this issue, the author would like to offer some more comments. If we believe that the linguistic form of “Yayan” before the Qin Dynasty is a standard form of Chinese language, then there must have been a long history of standard Chinese language for more than two thousand years. But, how about those standard language forms used in different dynasties in history? How about the basic dialect? Have they changed and in what way? These

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important questions should be seriously examined and the “Comparative approach” will not help much in this case. We have to rely on the historical documents and the “Textual approach”. In studies of the history of Chinese language, not much attention has been paid to the study of the standard form of the Chinese language, which is a very important research subject. There are many issues waiting to be touched upon and thoroughly investigated. For instance, How to describe the linguistic situations of Pre-Qin and Han periods? What is the linguistic scenario of the Northern and Southern Dynasties like? Is the standard form of the Chinese language in the Tang Dynasty based on the Chang’an dialect? How can we understand the emergence of the official Chinese language in the Ming and Qing Dynasties if the standard form of the Chinese language in the Song Dynasty takes the Pei-Luo dialect as the standard form? Is the official Chinese language in the Ming and Qing Dynasties based on Nanjing dialect or Beijing dialect? etc. It is correct to say that the significance of the study of standard form is quite universal in world languages. And it is even more necessary and vital in studies of Chinese language, which has undergone long and complicated historical evolution. A typical feature of the history of Chinese language proves to be the complicated situations of various linguistic shifts of basic dialects. However, sadly, our Chinese scholars have not achieved much in this area because of the possible difficulties in the study and little interest in it as well. And it is the right time for us to offer our efforts now.

Mr. Xu Tongqiang in his book *Historical linguistics* stated, “The comparative approach itself has serious defects and limitations.” He continued, “it is almost impossible to be certain when the restored primitive language really emerged since we lack adequate hard evidence. The situation of language development is very complicated. And languages belonging to the same language group or family do have mutual influences and sometimes they become rather similar and sometimes they become quite different. As a result, we can only deal with the situation of language divergence by way of the comparative approach, which depends greatly on both the quality and quantity of the historical data.”(Xu Tongqiang, 1991:99) What he mentioned here about the quality and quantity of the historical data is very important and exactly to the point. How to best use reliable data is very crucial. Personally, the author thinks we should search for all possible data and make full use of them. The quality and quantity is truly the key to the effective use of the comparative approach. Of course, when taking the textual approach in linguistic studies, the quality and quantity of historical documents should also be taken as the key factor. Thus it is necessary to conclude that any approach to studies of the history of Chinese language must draw support from adequate and reliable historical literature or data.

3. A combination of these two research methods

There has long been a misunderstanding that we have first of all to clear up. That is, more than a few scholars in the study of Chinese linguistics hold that the textual approach is a rather old-fashioned research paradigm originating from our academic forefathers while the comparative approach is a rather new research method introduced from the West. And accordingly it is believed that the latter is better than the former. However, it is widely known that the comparative approach had already grown out of date in linguistic studies in the 20th century. Actually, it is reasonable to say that both approaches are rather old fashioned as far as their history is concerned. Nevertheless, we still think highly of them both since they can be helpful in many cases respectively. As a matter of fact, both the approaches are very practical in diachronic studies of social sciences. And we should judge their value only by their practicality. This is what we often quote as “Practice is the only criterion of truth.” Or in our case, the saying should be modified as “Practice is the only criterion of methodology”. Having been used for thousands of years in studies of the history of Chinese language, both of the methods did make significant contributions to Chinese linguistics.

The “Comparative study of historical data” and the “Textual studies of historical documents” are both effective in studies of Chinese language and they are not contradictory. It will be most helpful if we combine them. In some cases, the textual approach may be a better choice. However, in other cases, the comparative approach may be more reasonable. Yue Fei, a famous ancient general, once commented, “The successful applications of military strategies depend on how flexibly you use them”. Actually, he himself in the battlefield applied flexible strategies and refused to be dogmatic. We Chinese scholars should learn from him and be flexible in employing academic research methods. Here is a very good example. In 1915, Wang Guowei, in his book named *San Dai Di Li Xiao Ji* (三代地理小记), proposed a new approach to Chinese linguistic studies, namely the so-called “Double-proof method”.^④ By applying this method, he meant to combine the “newly discovered evidence” and the “existing literature”. And he did achieve much in his studies of the ancient history in Yin-Shang Period, which is well-known in the research field of Chinese studies. So, we here emphasize the combination of the two approaches, which can also be considered as a new approach just like Wang’s “Double-proof method”. It is a “Double-proof method” used in studies of the history of Chinese language. As we all know, some scholars of historical comparative linguistics did criticize those who believed in the textual approach or those philologists in Europe. Those historical comparative linguists were very proud of their academic achievements and mentioned that

^④ It is generally acknowledged that Wang Guowei (1994) is the first scholar who put forward the “Double-proof Method”. Actually, according to Prof. Zhou Xunchu, this research method was first known to the world in 1915.

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the comparative approach was the only effective method for linguists at that time. (Meillet, 1992:11) Actually, if we probe into academic history, it is not difficult to find out that whenever a new academic school emerged, the followers are sure to criticize their previous counterparts in order to establish their own school. And it seems that both sides are indeed contradictory and they can not exist under the same roof. Nevertheless, after a certain period of time, dramatically, the once heated criticism would turn out to be much less fierce or even become mild. When both approaches are getting old-fashioned, scholars of the two different schools may probably calm down and rethink their disputes in a more reasonable way. Luckily, the combination of the advantages of both sides would be the happy result. Scholars nowadays may be very objective and they are willing to learn from each other. And this will surely bring much improvement in academic studies. The author of this paper once tried to combine the textual approach and the comparative approach in his essay “Yan’s linguistic enigma and its trial interpretation” and aimed at investigating the linguistic facts of Tong dialect and the possible influence from the Wu dialect in the period of the Southern Dynasty.

The historical comparative linguistics thrived in the 19th century and it began to cool off in the 20th century. Nowadays, if we still follow the convention and are stubbornly biased against our academic predecessors, then it is rather ridiculous. We shall not underestimate the role of the “Textual Research on Historical Documents” in studies of Chinese language. The study of Chinese language is now considered of both national and international significance. As one of the major human languages, Chinese certainly shares linguistic commonalities with other language varieties. However, on the other hand, it is a national language which belongs to the Chinese people and it boasts much specialty, which is different from the subjects like physics, mathematics and computer science. Just as we mentioned at the very beginning of this paper, Chinese language enjoys a gloriously long history and it is extremely rich in historical documents. Chinese scholars with great academic competence in dealing with historical literature should adopt with perfect assurance the textual approach to the study of the history of Chinese language. Meanwhile, we should not exclude the possibility of introducing other research methods. To be more specific, we should take both the textual approach and the comparative approach as the treasured academic legacy left by our forefathers in this world. What we must do is to take advantage of both approaches and try to integrate the textual approach with the comparative approach in our research projects. This is the only way to make great achievements in the field of Chinese historical linguistics. China is undoubtedly the centre of Chinese studies. Both Chinese and foreign scholars should learn from and respect each other; only in this way can we propel Chinese studies as a whole forward globally.

Besides, it is necessary for us to discuss the methodological issue concerning the study

of the history of Chinese language in the broad context of the history of Chinese culture. If we take a panoramic view of the history of Chinese culture or the history of Chinese academic research, it is easy to see that we have always been active in introducing foreign things or notions when they are considered beneficial to us. On the other hand, we will also notice the fact that foreign things or notions can survive only by being integrated into the Chinese culture. Let us look at what happened in the history of Chinese Buddhism. In middle ancient time, different schools of Buddhism were introduced one by one into China. Chinese believers then started to establish their own schools of Buddhism. Among those pioneers, Xuanzang was the most famous one. He had been in India for 17 years learning Buddhism and came back to establish a new school of Buddhism named Ci'en School (慈恩宗) (also called Faxiang School (法相宗) or Weishi School (唯识宗)). At that time, Xuanzang had a very good reputation as a translator as well as a preacher. Nevertheless, his new school of Buddhism did not last long though he himself was an erudite and diligent scholar in Buddhism and greatly respected by the then emperors in the Tang Dynasty. The reason is that his new school of Buddhism was entirely an imitation of Indian Buddhism and he did not manage to integrate his borrowing into the Chinese society. Just as Lu Hui mentioned, "The Ci'en School was the one closest to its Indian origin in the Sui and Tang Dynasties." Guo Peng also stated, "The Weishi School was basically a copy of its Indian origin. Although Xuanzang had established the school of Buddhism named Weishi School with the support from the royal family and the school itself was found all the rage at the beginning, the influence of the school established by both Xuanzang and Kuiji was soon waning. And therefore, this school was the second religious school that was just as short-lived as the Sanlun School in the history of Chinese Buddhism. The story of the Weishi School proves that any religion or religious school should always be rooted in real life, out of which they will soon wither away no matter how highly their believers think of them" (Guo Peng, 1993:234). The situation of the religious school established by Huineng (638-713) was an entirely different story. What Huineng established was a school of Buddhism named Zen, which enjoys a long history of more than one thousand years and plays a major role in the history of Chinese Buddhism. What is more, it has also had great influence upon many countries in East Asia. Guo commented, "The translating of Buddhist scriptures is a sort of transplantation while establishing religious schools is a matter of reformation. The process of establishing schools of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty was actually a process of religious reformation. Chinese monks and scholars of Buddhism at that time devoted themselves to making the exotic religion more suitable for Chinese believers. Those religious schools that made successful domestication of Buddhism certainly survived easily. Zen is quite a successful example. On the contrary, they soon disappeared, such as the Sanlun School and the Weishi School" (Guo Peng, 1993:235). To

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learn from history, when we try to adopt the comparative approach to the history of Chinese language, we should combine this borrowed method with our traditional native approach, namely the textual approach, and integrate them. The author himself was such a practitioner when writing the essay “*Yan’s Linguistic Enigma and its Trial Interpretation*” within a period of 17 months.(Lu Guoyao, 2002, 2003)

4. The law of quan-ma and gui-me

Discussing the research methodology, the author proposes that there is actually a Law of Quan-ma and Gui-me[®] in studies of Chinese language. The important ancient Chinese book “*Han Fei Zi: Wai Chu Shuo*” tells an interesting story. In the story, the Duke of Qi asked his private portraitist, “What do you think is the most difficult thing to draw?” The portraitist replied, “Quan (the dog) and ma (the horse).” Then, the duke went on, “What is the easiest thing to draw?” The portraitist replied, “Gui (the ghost) and mei (the spirit). Since everybody knows well what dogs or horses look like and people frequently see them in their daily life, it is very hard for a painter to generalize their features and best present them on paper. As for ghosts or spirits, they are not concrete things that exist and people never see them in real life, so it is actually the easiest to draw them out of your imagination.” The situation of modern Chinese is like quan-ma (dogs and horses) while the history of Chinese language is something like gui-me (ghosts and spirits). The author’s specialization is the history of the Chinese language, but he has to admit that the object for his investigation is Gui-me. It is fair to say that in the history of Chinese language, the latest part is most familiar to us like Quan-ma (dogs and horses) while the earliest period is most strange to us like Gui-me (ghosts and spirits), such as the parts of ancient times or even prehistoric times. The author is convinced that the law of Quan-ma and Gui-me inferred from the ancient Chinese anecdote two thousand years ago would undoubtedly and easily be accepted by those who understand the Chinese language. The author has read many essays about the archeological findings in the areas from Huaihe River to Zhejiang province. He has also read some books on the history of Wu during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). The author’s impression is that he may soon be convinced by the first essay available because it is reasonable enough. Then he meets with another piece of writing about the same issue, and also finds it quite convincing in many respects. However, when the author finishes many different essays on the same topic, he can be somewhat puzzled since they are all partially persuasive and not one hundred percent trustworthy. They can virtually be considered as things like Gui-me (the ghost), in which case they can

[®] When creating this terminology, the author himself consulted Mr.Lin Dehong, a professor of philosophy on its appropriateness and got his approval.

possibly be both imaginatively true and false at the same time. Nevertheless, the author hereby claims seriously that he is not a nihilist and he does not at all intend to appeal for the abolishment of the studies of the ancient history or prehistory of Chinese language. In fact, the author once spent much time on various archeological reports about the history of Neolithic Age in order to investigate the history of ancient Wu and its local dialect there. People attempting at the academic truth will certainly probe into the ancient history or prehistory of Chinese language, which should be encouraged. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind the law of Quan-ma and Gui-mei proposed here in this paper. For example, in “Yan’s Linguistic Enigma and its Trial Interpretation”, the author pointed out that in modern Wu dialect, Tongtai dialect and Gan dialect, the rhymes in ancient Chinese words such as “谈(Tan), 覃(Tan), 寒(Han), 桓(Huan)” are actually used interchangeably. The truth is universally acknowledged since we can easily get hard evidence from the spoken dialect of millions of living locals. And this can be considered as something like Quan-ma. According to this mere fact, we may conclude that the Tongtai dialect 1500 years ago was influenced by Wu dialect. But, the author here would like to consider it as a hypothesis instead of a conclusion. Although in official history there was indeed a man called Yan Zhitui during the time of Liang-Qi-Zhou-Sui, and there was also indeed an ancient book *Yan Shi Jia Xun*, it is nevertheless a dangerous thing to conclude that this linguistic phenomenon did exist one millennium ago in the spoken dialect of millions of people in the Yangze River delta (with today’s southeastern part of central Jiangsu province included). And the linguistic situation of “being influenced by people from the area of Wu and Yue” is also difficult to be proved. It is always a plot designed in science fiction that people may revive and repeat the life and society of ancient times. However, sadly, it can never be true in real life. In this case, what scholars in the study of ancient languages can do is actually only to raise various hypotheses but not to restore the facts. Practically speaking, the more ancient the history is, the more hypothetical the research is, hence the characteristics of Gui-mei (ghost and spirits).

5. Two unhealthy trends in Chinese language studies

Finally, the author has to further indicate that in Chinese language studies, the phenomenon of treating Gui-mei as Quan-ma and treating Quan-ma as Gui-mei does exist. What does the author mean here exactly? The fact is that in some works on the ancient Chinese language, the writers boldly hold that their conclusions are simply the undeniable historical facts. This is what the author called “to treat Gui-mei as Quan-ma”. On the other hand, according to some well-trusted experts on modern Chinese grammar, some treaties, especially those overseas publications, though fairly lengthy, unfortunately and shamefully, are seldom seen to have much reliable or credible linguistic evidence. For an instance, even

On the Combination of “The Textual Research on Historical Documents” and “The Comparative Study of Historical Data”——and a Discussion on “The Law of Quan-ma and Gui-me” in Chinese Language Studies

those Chinese sentences used as examples in their academic writings are actually not at all authentic or natural. They are just dogs drawn as ghosts, aren't they? Faced with the diversity of the academic field in present day China, it is reasonable for us to follow those right conclusions while correcting those irrational ideas. It is quite sensible to have different scholars or academic schools contend with each other in order to promote academic prosperity. Chinese scholars should undoubtedly involve themselves actively in presenting their original ideas or creative thoughts when meeting with their foreign counterparts.^⑥ They must dare to make their own comments or even criticism in various research fields, especially in studies of Chinese language since we stay in the centre of this academic field. It is true that we had been academically isolated from the outside world for 17 years and also had once deserted research work for one decade, which resulted in irredeemable losses. However, luckily, we have already been revived for more than 26 years. Nowadays, Chinese linguistics as a whole has been on its way to the academic renaissance. The world has seen numerous Chinese scholars probing into the very facts of Chinese language and its long history. And considerable achievements have been made there. In the coming future, we should make more and qualified contributions to the international studies of Chinese language.

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^⑥ Mr. Zhu Dexi once pointed out that “the main drawback of American Linguistics is its stressing linguistic theories at the expense of examining linguistic facts” (Please refer to *Studies of the Chinese Language*, 2002. No.4.) His argument sets a good example for us.