

FOLK ADAGE IN THE BIJI OF TANG DYNASTY

Abstract

“Biji” (笔记) or literati miscellaneous notes in this paper is referred to a sort of writings or miscellany covering a wide array of themes and subjects included in various descriptions such as anecdotes, tales, notes and criticism. The miscellaneous contents and vast vocabulary of biji have provided plentiful and valuable resources for numerous areas of Chinese studies, such as history, literature, laws and regulations, animals and plants, common beliefs, and custom.

Written in classical Chinese enriched with vernacular expressions, slangs, dialectic expressions, loan words and so on, Tang biji written by the literati forms a rich and valuable corpus for studying the lexis of the Tang dynasty (618-907) and middle ancient Chinese. This paper, with the use of literary works and dictionaries as references, gives a lexical elaboration and analysis on certain “folk adages” (俗语) used in the representative Tang biji, such as Fēng Yǎn’s Fēng Shì Wén Jiàn Jì (封演《封氏闻见记》), Lǐ Kuāngyì’s Zī Xiá Jí (李匡义《资暇集》), Duàn Chéngshì’s Yǒu Yáng Zá Zǔ (段成式《酉阳杂俎》), and Sū è’s Sū Shì Yǎn Yì (苏鹗《苏氏演义》).

Nowadays there are still differences in stating the definition, components and characteristics of folk adage. In this paper, focus is put on those popular sayings marked with the word “sú” (俗), such as “sú yǔ” (俗語), “sú yuē” (俗曰), “sú yún” (俗云), and “sú yán” (俗言). Firstly, with reference to the examples founded in Tang biji, the paper examines and clarifies the characteristics of folk adage including its form and meaning, and then comments on the definition and coverage of folk adage with a comparative analysis on “proverb” (諺語). With related to the meaning of folk adage, a sociocultural review on the reflection of common ideas and beliefs of the people of Tang and pre-Tang periods is also made. Secondly, examples are also taken to show their functions and significance in lexicography, which include serving as first textual evidences, supplementing entries and explanations, advancing the earliest textual evidence, and supplementing textual evidences in dictionary entries. Lastly, the paper concludes with the contribution of such lingual material to the compilation and revision of dictionaries and to the study of the evolvement of folk adage.

Keywords: folk adage, biji, literati miscellaneous notes, Tang dynasty

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