



The Significance and Value of Research on the Hakka Dialect Documents in Meizhou in the Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republic of China

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Abstract. At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, there emerged a number of important literature materials on the study of modern Chinese dialects. Among them, there are also quite a lot of literatures that take the Hakka in Meizhou, Guangdong as the stronghold of Hakka as the record or research object. From the four categories of dialect dictionaries researched and compiled by local scholars, foreign Meizhou dialect documents, dialect documents, and contract documents, this paper introduces their different styles in the records of dialect words, and expounds that these historical documents have important reference value for the study of Chinese dialects and regional culture today.

Keywords: The late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China · Meizhou · Hakka dialect · Historical documents

1 Introduction

Hakka people are mainly distributed in Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Taiwan and other places. Due to natural conditions and clan concepts, they have formed their own special living area and developed a unique dialect system. Hakka ancestors were called “ke” because of their migration in history, and Hakka became the only Chinese dialect that is not named after a place name. The records of the Hakka dialect language probably began in the middle and late Qing Dynasty, and the early documents preserved at present include two types in China and foreign countries. The author of this paper classifies the documents in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China with the Hakka dialect in Meizhou, Guangdong, the base of the Hakka as the record or research object, briefly introduces the characteristics of these documents, and re-examines the significance and value of these historical documents from the perspective of linguistics.

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2 Types of Hakka Dialect Documents in Meizhou in the Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China

2.1 Dialect Dictionaries Compiled by Local Scholars

The dialect dictionaries mentioned here refer to the extensive dictionaries compiled in the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, with the Hakka dialect centered on Lingnan Meixian as the object of investigation. 1. The “Kehua Benzi” (1907 edition) edited by Yang Gonghuan during Guangxu period includes five chapters including “Kehua Double Characters”, “Kehua Reduplication Characters” and “Kehua Single Characters”, etc. The book contains more than 1,400 dialect words, including monosyllabic, double-syllabic and polysyllabic characters. [1] 2. “Sanzhou Dialects outside Lingwai” compiled by Zhang Taiyan (included at the end of the volume of “New Dialects”, first published in the Guangxu period, and later included in “Series of Zhang” in 1919 edition), mainly explains and supplements the omissions of Yang Gonghuan’s two books, and supplemented and corrected 63 words in Hakka dialect. [2] 3. The “Hakka Dialect” (1932 edition) compiled by Luo Huiyun in the early years of the Republic of China. The book is classified strictly and scientifically, including the interpretation of words, interpretation of sentences, interpretation of relatives, interpretation of diet, interpretation of sky, interpretation of earth and other categories, a total of 12 volumes, including nearly 1000 words [3].

2.2 Literature of Hakka Dialect in Meizhou Outside the Territory

After 1840, Western missionaries came to China’s Hakka areas one after another to carry out missionary missions, and created a precedent for the study of Hakka dialects. Although the purpose of writing at that time was not from the perspective of language science, it objectively left precious historical documents and reference materials for people to study the Hakka dialect of Meizhou more than 100 years ago. Compared with the Hakka dialect literature compiled by local scholars and scholars of the same period, these foreign dialect literatures are more outstanding in quantity and quality. At present, scholars studying these documents mainly focus on the Bible, dictionaries, and textbooks for learning Chinese. Among them, the main works for the compilation of the Hakka dialect in Meizhou are: 1. “Hakka Lesebuch” series of textbooks written by G. Kilpper of the Swiss Basel Mission, which have both Chinese characters and Roman characters, are rich in content, including literacy enlightenment textbooks, medical textbooks and supporting dictionaries. [4] The Chinese version of the “Hakka Lesebuch” consists of six volumes. The cover of each volume has the title of the Chinese and German texts, and the editor is marked as “Edited by the Christian Basel Mission” and the publication time is: the first volume was published in April 1929, the second volume was published in August 1929; the third volume was published in October 1929; the fourth to sixth volumes were published in 1930. The book has a total of 1027 pages, and the number of lessons and page numbers in each volume follows the numbering of the previous volume. 2. The Chinese character book “MEDIZINISCHES HAKKA LESEBUCH”, there is a total of 19 texts in one volume. The cover is marked with Chinese characters and German names, and marked “Edited by Deji Hospital of Meixian County” and the

publication time “June 1931”. G. Kilpper wrote the preface and commentary for its preface. The contents of the texts are all related to medical and health care, including the health conditions in Meixian County at that time, common diseases, doctor-patient dialogues, and introduction to the daily work of the hospital. 3. “An English-Chinese Dictionary in the vernacular of the Hakka People in the Canton Province”, written by Donald Maclver of the English Presbyterian Church, was published in the American Presbyterian Mission Press in Shanghai in 1905. In the preface, Maclver mentioned that the dictionary he compiled reflected the dialect of the northeastern Hakka area, which was different from the dictionary compiled by the Basel missionaries that reflected the dialect of the southwestern Hakka area. [5] In 1926, another missionary, M.C. Mackenzie, supplemented and rearranged the above-mentioned dictionary and published “A Chinese-English Dictionary: Hakka-dialect as spoken in Kwang-Tung Province”. According to the phonetic features described in the dictionary, it can be found that the dialect areas it describes are Meixian, Xingning, Pingyuannian, Jiaoling, Wuhua and Dapu. [6] Because the Hakka dialect dictionary compiled by these missionaries more scientifically and systematically recorded the local Hakka dialect characters, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and other issues at that time, it has important reference value. In recent years, the excavation, arrangement and research of foreign Chinese dialect literature has become a focus and hotspot of Chinese linguistics.

2.3 Local Chronicle Documents

The compilation of local chronicles in this period played an important role. One chapter in the local chronicles records the local dialect conditions, which well preserved and presented the local language at that time for people. The writers of these materials are generally local scholars. Although they are not specialized linguists, they have recorded the language characteristics of the region more accurately by virtue of their good dialect and native language, especially in the recording of items such as vocabulary and grammatical sentences, which provides a more authentic corpus for later scholars to study. In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, the local Hakka dialects were recorded in the Meizhou dialect: 1. “The Grotto Sign” (1882 edition) compiled by Huang Xiangtie, a local historian at Jiaoling in the early Jiaqing period, is a privately edited local chronicle. It takes a new approach based on the categories set in traditional chronicles, and creates a dialect volume, which collects, organizes, and examines 450 dialect words including nouns, verbs, and adjectives. [7] 2. Wen Zhonghe’s “Jiaying Zhouzhi-Dialect” (one volume, namely “Jiaying Dialect Records”, 1898 edition) of Guangxu listed nearly 300 Hakka dialect words on the basis of the book “The Grotto Sign”, has the prototype of the study of Hakka dialects [8].

2.4 Contract Documents Literature

Contract documents have a long history in China and are a kind of important special documents. Their content has a strong regional nature, involving the local economy, culture, law, religion, customs and other fields at that time, being an important historical material for studying regional culture. From the perspective of linguistic research, the use of language and characters presented in the documents, the implicit regional language

characteristics, are also quite valuable materials for the study of language historical comparison and diachronic evolution. In the past ten years, there has been a “blowout” golden age of contract document records since the Song and Yuan dynasties nationwide. Important records include Huizhou documents, with a total of more than 1 million pieces; Guizhou Qingshuijiang documents, with a total of about 500,000 pieces; Fujian contract documents, about 300,000 pieces; and Zhejiang contract documents, about 200,000 pieces in total. The amount of the above materials is abundant. In contrast, the collection of Hakka contract documents in Meizhou is relatively weak. At present, the following two types can be seen: 1. “Guangdong Meizhou Documents” by Cao Shuji and Chen Zhiping (in the first series of “Hakka Rare Documents Series”, Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2019), a total of about 6,600 contract documents were collected from the five counties of Xingning, Meixian, Dapu, Pingyuan and Jiaoling in Meizhou. [9] 2. Luo Zhihuan and Li Longqian’s “Compilation of Guangdong Land Contract Documents in the Qing Dynasty” (QiLu Press 2014) compiled a total of 54 contract documents in Meixian and Xingning in Meizhou area. According to the content, the two batches of contract documents can be divided into seven categories: land purchase, servitude, lease, loan, division, contract and commercial paper. [10] The bibliographic materials that have been published so far are summarized as having the following characteristics: 1. Document units are established by document holders, and the original classification is respected. 2. The contract content is classified and edited, and at the same time, it is divided into stages according to the text age, including photocopying the original, interpretation, sentence segmentation, correction and annotation. 3. In recent years, there have been bibliographic materials that only photocopied the original contract documents in black and white or in color, which brings certain difficulties in interpretation to the language workers who study the documents. Therefore, research from the perspective of linguistics is complementary to research from other disciplines such as economics, culture, and law, because the correct interpretation of the contents of the document is the premise, which provides an important foundation for the development of research in various disciplines.

3 Linguistic Characteristics of Hakka Dialects in Meizhou in the Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China

3.1 Dialect Dictionaries Written by Local Literati and Scholars

The language characteristics of this kind of literature material are as follows: First, the Chinese Traditional Minor Study” is used as the theoretical basis. For example, the “Fanqie” method is commonly used for phonetic transcription, and the traditional rhyme book is used as the basis for the proof of pronunciation, and the documents of earlier periods and the use cases of dialects of the same period are added as supporting materials. Taking Yang Gonghuan’s book “Kehua Benzi” as an example, its notable feature is that the medieval Chinese system represented by “Guang Yun” is used as the criterion for examining the Hakka dialect and local language. It traces the ancient scriptures, histories, ci, and rhyme books to study the inheritance relationship and development and changes between ancient Chinese and Hakka dialects word by word. “Kehua Benzi” is

a dictionary of local dialects. When Yang Gonghuan recorded the local dialect words at that time, he paid more attention to the words used. In order to analyze the etymology, he basically followed the standard of combining sound, meaning and literature source for textual research. In terms of phonetics, the phonetic transcription of entries adopts the Fanqie method. Starting from the present pronunciation, various rhyme books such as “Guang Yun”, “Ji Yun”, “Zhi Zhang Tu”, “Qie Yun Table” and so on are checked. If it is inconsistent with the Fanqie, then people can the method of sound training to seek the relationship between ancient and modern sounds, supplemented by the homophones of the state dialect to make phonetic; If the sound and meaning are consistent, then people can check the use cases in the literature as auxiliary evidence. Second, people can use homophones in the native language, and use the same pronunciation in the native language, and the rhyme words as the categories of upper spellings and lower spellings, etc. The pronunciation of these authentic Zhou dialects helps today to more comprehensively summarize the pronunciation of the Hakka dialect in Jiaying Prefecture (Meizhou) in the late Qing Dynasty a century ago. Thirdly, it includes quite distinctive words in the Hakka dialect of Meizhou at that time, such as the overlapping form of Hakka dialect words, which reflects the way of word formation. It is also a valuable part of dialect lexical research. After Yang Gonghuan, Luo Huiyun’s “Hakka Dialect” supplemented the lack of rough classification of entries in Yang’s book, and the style was more scientific.

3.2 Documents Compiled by Foreigners

Chinese dialect documents written by Westerners are mainly characterized by the scientific nature of Roman phonetics, far exceeding the dictionaries and documents written by traditional methods in the same period, and have a deeper impact and greater role in language research. Using Roman characters to analyze Chinese characters and dialect characters is more intuitive, especially for today’s scholars, and can more accurately capture the phonetic appearance of dialects at one time and one place more than a hundred years ago. Luo Changpei published “The Contributions of the Jesuits in Phonology” in 1930, and called the phonetic scheme of “The Miracle of Western Characters”¹ compiled by the Western Jesuit Matteo Ricci and “Western Ru Er Mu Zi”² compiled by Nicolas Trigault. “Li-Kin Program”, and made a high evaluation: “The first is to use Roman characters to analyze the phonemes of Chinese characters, so that Fanqie method, which has always been regarded as complicated, becomes something simple; the second is to use Roman characters to indicate the pronunciation of words, so that the general pronunciation at that time can still be inferred; Third, it opened up a new way for the study of

¹ The Jesuits Matteo Ricci and Luo Mingjian who came to China in the late Ming Dynasty compiled the “Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary” in Guangdong, China from 1583 to 1588. This is the first Chinese-Western dictionary in existence, and the earliest attempt to spell Chinese in the Roman alphabet (also known as the “Latin alphabet”). In 1605, Matteo Ricci added Romanized Pinyin to four Chinese characters and officially published them, called “The Miracle of Western Characters”.

² In 1626, Trigault published “Xi Ru Er Mu Zi”, which faithfully described the Mandarin pronunciation in use at that time in Roman characters.

Chinese phonology, which greatly influenced the phonology scholars at that time, such as Fang Yizhi, Yang Xuanqi, Liu Xianting, etc.” [11] It can be seen that the phonetic method of Roman characters adopted by Westerners in China is of great significance to today’s phonology, linguistics and Chinese dialectology.

3.3 Local Chronicle Documents

The dialect phonetics, vocabulary and grammar entries recorded in the local chronicle documents are limited in number, but most of them are compiled by local people, so the corpus collection is more authentic. The categories of dialect materials in the local chronicle are simple, and the entries are frequently used daily words, which are highly readable. Taking Huang Zhao’s “Shiku Yi Zheng” as an example, two volumes of the nine volumes of the book are used to compile 450 commonly used words in the Jiaoling Hakka dialect of Meizhou. The categories include verbs, nouns, adjectives, buildings, etc. The main format of the entry is “A said B”, A is the interpretation, B is the dialect word, followed by the pronunciation, and annotated documentary evidence. The format of the regulations is concise and easy to understand, which is in line with the nature of local chronicles as “historical records describing local conditions”. Huang’s incisive records of Hakka dialects enable readers to understand the meaning of the text and present valuable local historical information.

3.4 Contract Documents

Contract documents have a strong regional color and are also important materials for the study of local culture. Because the content involves the special nature of commercial transactions, the language characteristics are often more inclined than the other three types of historical materials, such as the high frequency of quantifiers, and the obvious regional characteristics of the use of “number + quantity”; The documents include various types of commercial activities of the people at that time, and are also reflected in the use of language, and the style and format are relatively fixed, and the frequency of use of proprietary terms is high. In addition, as one of the representative documents of local cultural materials, the corpus of contract documents hides unique characters such as dialect common characters and difficult characters.

4 Research Significance and Value

4.1 Local Dialect Dictionaries and Local Chronicles

Local dialect dictionaries and local chronicles document the early Hakka dialect words from the perspective of native speakers of the local dialect, and the language records are authentic and credible. Their literature value is reflected in at least three aspects: Hakka dialect vocabulary, Hakka dialect pronunciation, Hakka history and culture. In the textual research and interpretation, they mainly follow the traditional exegesis principles and textual research methods, citing scriptures and classics, and providing many examples of the source of ancient books and documents. In the aspect of phonetic recording and

analysis, the phonological theory of the ancients is also fully utilized, which is convenient for summarizing the phonetic characteristics of the Hakka dialect today, and further illustrating that there is a certain connection between the Hakka dialect and the medieval and even the ancient sounds. What they talk about, such as the origin, distribution, and customs of Hakka, is an important window for people to review and understand the history and culture of Hakka.

4.2 Foreign Dictionaries and Reading Literature

Foreign dictionaries and reading documents have direct reference and application value for the study of Chinese dialects in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and related fields, and also have important value for linguistic research. First, the modern Chinese recorded and described in foreign Chinese dialect literature is an important corpus for the study of Chinese dialect phonetics, vocabulary and grammar from the late Ming Dynasty to the Republic of China, and it complements the dialect literature written by local scholars. Second, foreign Chinese dialect literature includes pure pinyin version, pinyin and Chinese character comparison version, and pure Chinese character version. Among them, the use of Chinese characters, as well as the understanding process and level of Westerners' understanding of Chinese characters, have reference value for further expanding the study of traditional Chinese common characters. Third, foreign dictionaries and reading books are textbooks for propaganda and education for people in various dialect areas, or for cultural education for children. The concept, style and content of its compilation have the nature of international Chinese textbooks, and are worthy of reference for teaching Chinese as a foreign language and Chinese education.

4.3 Contract Documents Literature

Some achievements have been made in the related fields of contract document research, but the following problems still exist in the previous research: First, the results obtained by studying contract documents using linguistic methods are still far from enough compared with other disciplines such as history. Second, there are few treatises on the dialects of regional contract documents from the perspective of linguistics. At present, such studies are often based on examples, with a narrow scope and insufficient research depth. Third, from the perspective of linguistics, the results of studying the lexical system of Meizhou contract documents in eastern Guangdong are still blank. The significance and value of studying contract documents in the Hakka area of Meizhou is reflected in the following aspects: First, the language of Meizhou contract documents in Guangdong was clearly formed, and there were no text problems caused by copying and printing, avoiding the infiltration of language elements in future generations, and ensuring the authenticity of the language. Second, the main body of the document has the characteristics of colloquial, popular, and regional characteristics, which can provide a strong basis for tracing the origin of dialect words, and also play a unique value for the theory and method of dialect and common language research. Third, the study of the vocabulary of contract documents is the fundamental guarantee for accurately understanding the documents and maximizing the value of the documents. Due to the particularity of

their nature, accurate interpretation of documents is helpful for the research of other related disciplines.

5 Conclusion

The author takes the linguistic phenomena in the literature and materials in the Hakka area of Meizhou in the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China as the research object, and draws on the methods of philology, phonology, exegesis, and dialectology. By sorting out and comparing research and interpretation, this paper explores the overall appearance and characteristics of Hakka dialect phonetics, vocabulary and grammar in the written documents of the Hakka base camp Meizhou area during this period in order to build a database of Hakka historical documents, make up for the lack of Hakka dialect research, and solve the problem of material search and retrieval in the process of historical language research, providing important material support and technical support for Hakka dialect and historical language research, and maximizing the linguistic research of Meizhou Hakka dialect literature and materials, and the preservation, development and inheritance of Meizhou Hakka dialect historical literature.

Authors' Contributions. This paper is independently completed by Jianya Zhang.

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