

Pronouns Study in China

Taking a Research on Pronouns in Excavated Materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty as an Example

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Abstract—Nowadays, with large number of underground materials discovered, the grammatical study in excavated materials has attracted more attention of scholars. This article, based on the differences of time periods and literatures, reviews the studies in China according to pronouns in excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty from four aspects: pronouns study of oracle of Yin Ruins, pronouns study of inscriptions on bronzes of Zhou Dynasty, pronouns study of excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty as well as comprehensive pronouns study of different time periods and literatures mentioned above. On this foundation, the article points out limitations of current study. Meanwhile, the article especially indicates that it will be of great theoretical significance to establish a more real origin and development of Chinese pronouns that accord with history if we thoroughly utilize excavated materials and use them to see Chinese pronouns in the diachronic development of different time periods of whole Pre-Qin Dynasty.

Keywords—pronouns study; oracle of Yin Ruins; inscriptions on bronzes of Zhou Dynasty; excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty

I. INTRODUCTION

Pronouns study is an important component in grammar research. *Ma Shi Wen Ton* is the first systematic work about Chinese grammar in China. Before the book was born, there were ancient Chinese scholars doing research on Chinese pronouns. After *Ma Shi Wen Ton* was written, plenty of scholars have did research on Chinese pronouns. Taking the study of ancient Chinese pronouns as an example, papers and monographs emerge in large numbers.

For example, there are works relating to pronouns study of ancient Chinese, like *Ancient Chinese Grammar: Address Pronouns* written by Fagao Zhou (published by Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica in Taiwan, 1959), *Ancient Chinese Outline* written by Bingjun Zhou (published by Hunan Education Press, 1981), *Ancient Chinese Grammar* written by Zuofeng Li (published by The Commercial Press, 2004), *Word Class Study of Yan Zi Chun Qiu* written by Zhenwu Yao (published by Henan University Press, 2005), *Function Word Dictionary of Ancient Chinese* written by Leshi He (published by Language Publishing

House, 2006) (Note: Mr. Leshi He mentioned in the explanatory note that strictly speaking, not exactly all the words joining in the dictionary are function words, like pronouns and indefinite numerals so as to provide much convenience to readers reading ancient books), *Word Class Study of Spring-Autumn of Lü* written by Guoguang Yin (published by The Commercial Press, 2008), *Ancient Chinese Grammar* written by Yujin Zhang (published by Guangdong Higher Education Press, 2010) and *The First personal Pronoun Study of Pre-Qin Chinese* written by Hong Zhu (doctoral dissertation of Nankai University, 2010).

Another example, there are works relating to developing pronouns study of ancient Chinese, like *History of the Chinese Language* written by Li Wang (published by Chinese Publishing House, 1980), *Summary of Chinese Grammar History* written by Yunzhong Pan (published by Zhongzhou Calligraphy Association, 1982), *Outline of Chinese Grammar History* written by Cunzhi Shi (published by East China Normal University Press, 1986), *Concise History of Chinese Language* (Volume II) written by Xi Xiang (published by Higher Education Press, 1993), *Ancient Chinese Grammar and Its Development* written by Bojun Yang and Leshi He (published by Language Publishing House, 2001) and the *Study of the Chinese Historical Grammar* written by Bo Hong (published by The Commercial Press, 2010).

With regard to the study of ancient Chinese pronouns, papers and works using historical documents as corpora have always been a lot. However, papers and works using excavated materials as corpora have been relatively less. Some corpora used in the works mentioned above slightly utilize excavated materials. But for researchers, since materials were limited at that time and the need to study pronouns of handed-down documents as well as the universal purpose of writing, corpora use handed-down documents more often.

China, a country with an ancient civilization, abounds in ancient literature. Ancient literatures that we see nowadays belong to handed-down documents, which mostly spread after a long time before the discovery of underground documental materials. For instance, *Zuo Zhuan*, *Guoyu*,

Stratagems of the Warring States, The Analects of Confucius, Guan Zi, The Words of Mencius, Mo Zi, Lao Zi, Chuang-tzu, Xun Zi, Spring-Autumn of Lü, Han Feizi, The Songs of Chu, Yan Zi Chun Qiu are handed-down documents that spread from ancient Eastern Zhou Dynasty of the Warring States more than two thousand years ago (Note: Eastern Zhou Dynasty of ancient China was divided into Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period). However, works like *The Book of Changes* and *The Book of Songs* handed down from earlier Spring and Autumn Period of Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou.

Once upon a century, plenty of ancient documental materials discovered from subsurface constantly, such as oracles, bronze inscriptions, silk bamboo slips and Dunhuang manuscripts. These documental materials underneath from underground are called excavated documents. Excavated document is opposite to handed-down document. Excavated document, the same as 'meantime information', has a strong authenticity of document because it has been hidden underground without spreading over a long period. Thus, it veritably keeps its appearance at that time. Hence, in the case of grammar study of ancient Chinese, this kind of corpus has greater scientific value than handed-down document that hard to keep its original language and may not have clear era and region.

Since the beginning of this century in China, the largest number of massive precious excavated documents belongs to excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty. Excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty date back to oracle of Yin Ruins, then inscriptions on bronzes of Shang Dynasty, Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn of Eastern Zhou. After that, it had developed from enormous bamboo silks, inscriptions on bronzes and jade text of the Warring States of Eastern Zhou and Qin Dynasty.

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON PRONOUNS IN EXCAVATED MATERIALS OF PRE-QIN DYNASTY

We highlight research achievements which are related to pronouns based on excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty in recent China and achieved by predecessors. According to diverse time periods and literatures, we will review the research from the following four aspects:

A. Works Referring to Pronouns Study of Oracle of Yin Ruins

Research achievements in this respect mainly are *The Grammar Study of The Oracle-bone Inscriptions of Yin Ruins* by Xiechu Guan (Language Institute of Chinese Academy of Sciences, 1953), *Oracle Inscriptions of Yin Ruins* by Mengjia Chen (Science Press, 1956), *The Exploration of Function Words of Oracle* by Cheng Zhao (Chinese Ancient Scripts Research Association, 1984), *Oracle Syntax* by Yujin Zhang (Xuelin Press, 2001), *Research on Classic Words of Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Yin Ruins* by Fengbin Yang (Huacheng Press, 2003) and *Inscriptions Grammar of Yin Ruins* by Xi Li (Shanxi Normal University Press, 2004).

B. Works Referring to Pronouns Study of Inscriptions on Bronzes of Zhou Dynasty

In fact, Zhou Dynasty includes Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou, which also contains Spring and Autumn and the Warring States. For the sake of telling, we introduce the pronouns study of inscriptions on bronzes of Zhou Dynasty here. Achievements in this area are *Grammar Study on Inscriptions on Bronzes of Western Zhou* by Xiechu Guan (The Commercial Press, 1981), *Grammar Study on Chinese Language of Western Zhou* by Yujin Zhang (The Commercial Press, 2004), *Chinese Pronouns Study on Western Zhou* by Yujin Zhang (Chinese Publishing House, 2006).

In addition, there are doctoral dissertations do research on function words like *Study on Function Words on Inscriptions on Bronzes of Western Zhou* by Huarong Liang (doctoral dissertation of Sichuan University, 2005) and *Study on Classic Words on Inscriptions on Bronzes of Zhou Dynasty (Function Words Part)* by Zhenyu Wu (doctoral dissertation of Jilin University, 2006). However, since Chinese traditional linguistics, especially some influential works of function words studies in classical Chinese puts pronouns on function words, in order to take care of tradition, two authors place pronouns in function words to inspect and study. Eventually, there are also master theses referring to pronouns study of inscriptions on bronzes of Zhou Dynasty, including *Chinese Characters study on inscriptions on bronzes of the Warring States* by Cuicui Liu (master thesis of East China Normal University, 2010).

C. Works Referring to Pronouns Study of Excavated Materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty

Excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty can be divided into bamboo slips used in the Qin Dynasty, bamboo slips and silks used in the Chu Dynasty, bronze script of the Warring States and several excavated materials of the Warring States (Note: bronze script of the Warring States has been introduced in the second type of inscriptions on bronzes of Zhou Dynasty). Research achievements refer to pronouns in this term quite a few, like *The Grammar Study of Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips* by Desheng Wei (Capital Normal University Press, 2000), *Grammar Research on Excavated Materials of the Warring States* by Shoujin Zhou (Beijing University Press, 2005), *The Vocabulary Study of Baoshan Chu Slips* by Ying Wang (Xiamen University Press, 2008), *Grammar Study of Bamboo Slips in the Chu Dynasty of the Warring States* by Mingxiao Li (Wuhan University Press, 2010) and *A Research on Function words in Excavated Materials of the Warring States* by Yujin Zhang (People's Publishing House, 2011). Among these works, although the research object is function word in Yujin Zhang *A Research on Function words in Excavated Materials of the Warring States* (People's Publishing House, 2011), some multi-category words mentioned have both usages of function words and pronouns such as '此', '斯', '然', '若' and so on. The articles also discuss that structural particles '之' and '其' are rooted in pronouns and character '焉(安)' is a special demonstrative pronoun, a demonstrative pronoun and

modal particle or preposition as well as pronoun. Moreover, the essay shows ideas on whether characters ‘者’ and ‘所’ are pronouns or auxiliary words.

Besides, there are also theses and dissertations relating to pronouns study in excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty, such as *Pronoun Research on Bamboo Slips Used in the Qin Dynasty* written by Wei Hu (master thesis of South China Normal University, 2005), *Language Study of Baoshan Chu Slips* by Bo Liu (master thesis of Beijing Normal University, 2005), *Grammar Study of Guodian Chu Slips* by Yuemin Deng (doctoral dissertation of Sichuan University, 2006), *Vocabulary Study of Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips* by Hong Yang (master thesis of East China Normal University, 2008), *Grammar Study of Longgang Qin Bamboo Slips* by Changhua Xiong (master thesis of Southwestern University, 2010), *Vocabulary Systematic Study of Fangmatan* by Huiye Bao (master thesis of East China Normal University, 2013) and so on.

D. Works Referring to Pronouns Study of Comprehensive Pronouns Study of Different Time Periods and Literatures Mentioned Above

Temporarily, we could only seek out one master thesis on works referring to pronouns study of comprehensive pronouns study of different time periods and literatures mentioned above, and that is *The first Personal Pronoun of Excavated Materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty* written by Jingwen Liu (master thesis of South China Normal University, 2003).

Moreover, the introduction part of this article also mentioned that some works relating to pronouns study of ancient Chinese and developing pronouns study of ancient Chinese slightly utilize pronouns study of different time periods and literatures. However, it usually uses a small amount of excavated materials. However, due to the need of researchers limited materials, researches to pronouns of handed-down documents and universal purpose of writing, more handed-down documents are used in corpora instead of completely making use of excavated materials. For instance, it is Yunzhong Pan *Summary of Chinese Grammar History* (published by Zhongzhou Calligraphy Association, 1982) mentioned in the introduction part that talks about the development of personal pronoun, using examples of oracle in Shang Dynasty and inscriptions on bronzes of Zhou Dynasty and yet literatures in the Warring States are all handed-down documents.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can see that with large number underground materials discovered, researches on pronouns in excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty have drawn much attention from scholars. Among the materials, works studying pronouns of excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty as well as theses and dissertations account for most, while comprehensive pronouns study of different time periods and literatures mentioned above and fully used excavated materials are extremely rare.

Related research achievements in this research field made by predecessors have laid a perfect foundation. However, we should also see that there are limitations on previous studies.

Initially, even though works studying pronouns of excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty as well as theses and dissertations account for most of the percentage, excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty are much more abundant than materials in other time periods actually. Besides, owing to in the domestic China situation, excavated materials corpora of the Warring States already published are inscriptions on bronzes of the Warring States, scripts from bamboo slips of the Warring States (like Wulipai bamboo slips of Chu, Angtian Lake bamboo slips of Chu, Yang Jia Wan bamboo slips of Chu, Xinyang bamboo slips of Chu, Wang Mountain bamboo slips of Chu, Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng bamboo slips, Jiu Dian bamboo slips of Chu, Bao Mountain bamboo slips of Chu, Guo Dian bamboo slips of Chu, Shanghai Museum bamboo slips of Chu, Xincai bamboo slips of Chu, bamboo slips in Chinese University of Hong Kong, Tian Xing Guan bamboo slips of Qin, tsinghua bamboo slips, Shuihudi bamboo slips of Qin, Shuihudi bamboo tablets of Qin, Qingchuan bamboo tablets of Qin, Fangma Beach bamboo slips of Qin, Yue Shan bamboo tablets of Qin, Longgang bamboo slips of Qin, Choujiatai bamboo slips of Qin, Liye bamboo slips of Qin and Yuelu Academy bamboo slips of Qin), books copied on silk of the Warring States (like book copied on silk of the Warring States in Changsha bullet Library) and jade text of the Warring States (including Yin jade marginal inscription of Qin, Xing Qi jade inscription, jade Huang admonitions carved on a stone, Shou Qiu lithoglyph, ten Qin kingdom inscribed steles and the engravings on Mount Yi). It can be seen that previous relevant researches on pronouns in excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty were too far to broaden their reaches these whole precious corpora. Moreover, plenty of summaries and further researches of pronouns system in literature books of the valuable corpora still remain virtually deserted.

Second, it is research achievements which are related to pronouns based on excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty in recent China and achieved by predecessors mentioned above that actually quite a few achievements do not exhaustively utilize relevant excavated materials owing to the limited materials at that time. For example, *Grammar Study of Bamboo Slips in the Chu Dynasty of the Warring States* by Mingxiao Li (Wuhan University Press, 2010) mentioned above takes materials of *Shanghai Museum Bamboo Slips of Chu* in the Warring States Period. However, because the limited materials that the author could only saw *Shanghai Museum Bamboo Slips of Chu* (Book 1-Book 7), he did not take *Shanghai Museum Bamboo Slips of Chu* (Book 8 and Book 9) which are mature in explanations nowadays into account. We cannot blame the predecessors with doubt and because of the time, some has not been announced and some has been published yet hard to recognize. Thus, there is necessarily a lag issue of used study materials.

Third, last but not least, based on the current situation which exhausted systematical research on pronouns in literature books of various periods of excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty, it lacks achievements of periodical descriptions of pronouns of various periods of excavated materials systematically by using a unified theoretical framework. Besides, it also lacks diachronic comparison and evolution research that rest this systematical periodical description. (Note: periodical description, namely ‘synchronic description’, is opposite to the concept of ‘diachronic comparison’. Periodical description of pronouns is comprehensively and systematically demonstrates a real appearance of pronouns system of an age. Taking Chinese in Pre-Qin Period as an example, there could have periodical description of pronouns in Shang Dynasty, periodical description of pronouns in Western Zhou, periodical description of pronouns in Spring and Autumn Period and periodical description of pronouns in the Warring States.) As has been said above, works referring to pronouns study of comprehensive pronouns study of different time periods and literatures mentioned above are so rare that one master thesis could be found currently. Hence, it is of great theoretical significance to establish a more real origin and development of Chinese pronouns that accord with history and more reliable Chinese history study if we focus on the long process of Chinese historical development and thoroughly utilize excavated materials. Moreover, based on the current situation which exhausted systematical research and systematical periodical description on pronouns in literature books of various periods of excavated materials of Pre-Qin Dynasty, we ought to make longitudinal diachronic comparison with the Shang oracle, Zhou inscriptions on bronzes, excavated materials of the Warring States and Qin Dynasty and any other period and see Chinese pronouns in the diachronic development of different time periods of whole Pre-Qin Dynasty.

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