

# A Retrospect and Prospect of the Researches on Adjectives in Unearthed Literatures of the Warring States Period

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**Abstract**—The adjectives of ancient Chinese have always been the focused attention of scholars, but the related researches mainly focused on handed-down literatures, and paid little attention to unearthed literatures which are closer to the original appearance of Chinese language. Therefore, this article has reviewed the researches referring to adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period, affirms achievements of the researches and points out shortages from the content, material, method and result for four aspects. And on this foundation, it has prospected the future researches of the adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period.

**Keywords**—*unearthed literatures; Warring States; adjectives*

## I. INTRODUCTION

China attached much significance to promote Chinese traditional cultures in recent times. Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly talked about ancient Chinese characters and unearthed literatures on different occasions, and the collation of Chinese ancient books and records project has been clearly put forward in the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2016-2020).

There have been a large number of unearthed literatures excavated and collated in China, of which the content of

literatures in the Warring States period are considerable and rich, involving politics, economy, ideology, culture, history, philosophy, calendar and so on, in recent years, especially since 1970s,. These unearthed literatures not only provides a rich materials for language research, but also lays the foundation for researches of history, culture, philosophy and other disciplines. Because of some advantages, for example, not being spread and tampered with, time and region are clear, being able to maintain the original appearance of language. Therefore, the unearthed literatures is becoming an important field in language research and attracting more and more attention from scholars in domestic or oversea countries. It is a new trend to study ancient Chinese by using the unearthed literatures.

The adjective, with complex and interesting usage, is an important and numerous categories of notional words in Chinese. Therefore it has always been a concern of scholars. The Warring States period, is the connection link of the Spring and Autumn period and the Qin and Han Dynasties, plays an important role in the development history of ancient Chinese. And there are many language changes occurred in this period. For these reasons, to study adjectives in the Warring States period is of great value and significance for the discussion of adjective system evolution and the construction of Chinese language history.

## II. A RETROSPECT OF THE RESEARCHES ON ADJECTIVES IN UNEARTHED LITERATURES OF THE WARRING STATES PERIOD

According to statistics, there are twenty-four works involving the issue of adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period, and there are only three grammar monographic studies directly took this issue as subject, which are *The Research on Adjectives in Bronze Inscriptions of the Western and Eastern Zhou Dynasties* (Huachen Fu, 2009), *The Research on Adjectives in Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips* (Dengqiao Li, 2010) and *The Research on Grammatical Functions of Adjectives in 'The Warring States Bamboo Slips Kept in Tsinghua University (Volume One)'* (Xiangnan Fang, 2012). Most of the works are papers except for two monographs, which are *The Grammar Study of 'Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips'* (Desheng Wei, 2000) and *The Vocabulary Study of Baoshan Chu Bamboo Slips* (Ying Wang, 2008). There has been no comprehensive and systematic research on adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period so far.

According to different materials used by researchers, we will review the researches from three aspects as follow.

### A. *Researches on Adjectives in the Bamboo Slips of Qin State*

The Grammar Study of 'Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips' (Desheng Wei, 2000) is the first monograph comprehensively describing the grammatical problems of Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips in China. The problem of word formations, function words, syntactic structures and expression characteristics are discussed, and each chapter of the monograph involved the research of adjective.

In addition, there are also some papers referring to adjectives, which are *A Research on Compound Words in Shuihudi Qin Bamboo Slips* (Xixing Lu, 2004), *The Vocabulary and Grammar Study of 'Longgang Qin Bamboo Slips'* (Tian Wang, 2007), *The Vocabulary Study of 'Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips'* (Hong Yang, 2008), *The Grammar Study of 'Longgang Qin Bamboo Slips'* (Changhua Xiong, 2010), *The Reorganize and Research of Qin Bamboo Slips Kept in Yuelu Academy (Volume One and Two)* (Fang Ma, 2013), *The Character and Vocabulary Study of 'Qin Bamboo Slips Kept in Yuelu Academy (Volume Three)'* (Hao Jiang, 2015), *The Study of Polysyllabic Words in Legal Documents of Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips* (Mingru Liu, 2016).

### B. *Researches on Adjectives in the Bamboo Slips and Silks of Chu State*

The paper *The Research on Adjectives in Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips* (Dengqiao Li, 2010) mainly discusses adjectives classification and grammatical functions, and their features in word formation and syntactic function. However, it just use exemplifications, without exhaustive quantitative analysis.

Another paper *The Research on Grammatical Functions of Adjectives in 'The Warring States Bamboo Slips Kept in*

*Tsinghua University (Volume One)'* (Xiangnan Fang, 2012) explores the grammatical functions of adjectives in *The Warring States Bamboo Slips Kept in Tsinghua University (Volume One)*, and exhaustively counts and analyzes the examples of various grammatical functions.

The *Vocabulary Study of Baoshan Chu Bamboo Slips* (Ying Wang, 2008) is a monograph written on the basis of the doctoral dissertation of Wang Ying. It comprehensively studies the vocabulary of Baoshan Chu Bamboo Slips, and has enlightened significance to vocabulary study of unearthed literatures. The chapter three classifies and lists all the twenty eight adjectives in Baoshan Chu Bamboo Slips, besides, analyzes their meanings and counts their frequencies.

There are also some other researches referring to adjectives, such as *The Language Study of Baoshan Chu Bamboo Slips* (Bo Liu, 2005), *Grammar Reading Notes of Shanghai Museum Bamboo Slips (One or Two Letters)* (Shoujin Zhou, 2006), *The Study of Word Classes in 'Lao Zi' of Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips* (Danping Long, 2008), *A Research on the Notional Words in Xincai Chu Bamboo Slips* (Ping Yu, 2010), *The Vocabulary Study of Xincai Geling Chu Bamboo Slips* (Ling Ding, 2011), *The Study of Word Classes in 'The Warring States Bamboo Slips Kept in Tsinghua University (Volume One)'* (Hongxia Li, 2012), *The morphology study of Chu Silks Manuscript* (Wei Wei, 2013), *The Study of Word Classes in poems belong to Chu Ci of Shanghai Museum Bamboo Slips (Volume eight)-and compare with Qu Yuan's poems* (Zhishun Zhong, 2013), *A Study of Several Grammatical Phenomena in Baoshan and Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips* (Yumei Chen, 2013), *The Research on the reduplicated words in Bamboo Slips of the Warring States Period* (Haichao Ren, 2013).

### C. *Researches on Adjectives in Bronze Inscriptions of the Warring States Period*

The doctoral dissertation *The Research on Adjectives in Bronze Inscriptions of the Western and Eastern Zhou Dynasties* (Huachen Fu, 2009) makes a thorough and systematic study of adjectives of Bronze Inscriptions in the Western and Eastern Zhou Dynasties, and analyzes adjectives characteristics and diachronic developments situation in three different periods, which are the Western Zhou Dynasty, the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, and the thorough and systematic study even traces back to the oracle bones inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty, exploring the development of it. Additionally, the end of the dissertation is attached by diachronic distribution tables with interpretations of some adjectives. Furthermore, some studies of adjectives explanations, examples and grammatical functions can be found in every chapter. Another two dissertations *The Vocabulary Study of Bronze Inscriptions in the Warring States Period* (Cuicui Liu, 2010) and *A Syntactic Study on the Bronze Inscriptions in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period* (Chunni Liang, 2010) also referring to adjectives.

### III. THE LIMITATIONS OF PREVIOUS RESEARCHES

In section two mentioned above, we have briefly reviewed the researches on adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States Period. It can be seen that predecessors have carried on beneficial exploration and made a lot of achievements in this research field, and it has laid a good foundation for further study.

From the aspect of research materials, unearthed literatures in the Warring States Period are closer to the original appearance of Chinese language, so the conclusions are generally more believable. From the aspect of research methods, most of the researches employed the method of exhaustive quantitative analysis instead of the earlier exemplification. Moreover, it had great importance of this kind of tedious and precise statistic work, and also laid an essential foundation for the future research.

But at the meanwhile, we should be also cognizant of some limitations in previous researches.

Firstly, in aspect of research content, the previous researches are fragmentary and unsystematic, the scope and depth of researches need to be strengthened and heighten. Recently, there are not specialist exploring the adjective of unearthed literatures in the Warring States Period as a single item and studying it systematically. Most of the researches discuss adjectives incidentally when studying the language of some unearthed literatures in the Warring States period. The weak way is just list adjectives by category, and then discuss their meanings and grammatical functions in a sentence. It lack of detailed description and systematic analysis, especially synchronic and diachronic comparisons.

Secondly, the exploring study scope needs to be stretched in aspect of research materials. The researches referring to adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period are mainly focusing on several kinds such as the Bamboo Slips of the Qin Dynasty unearth at Shuihudi, Baoshan Bamboo Stripes of Chu state and Guodian Chu bamboo slips, but lots of new literatures still have not been studied, especially the adjective of unearthed literatures in the Warring States Period utterly have not been used.

Thirdly, the research methods should be renovated and diversified. Most of the previous researches use traditional methods but less use new theoretical methods. In addition to exemplification, quantitative analysis and comparative methods, In other words, the research methods lack of innovation to reference the foreign linguistic theories and methods which are suitable for studying Chinese grammar.

Last but not the least; owing to the complexity and diversification, it's hard to unify the research achievements. The level of previous researches is uneven, and their opinions are quite different on some issues. Because unearthed literatures are severely damaged and difficult to understand, the definition standard, classification standard and research method of adjective are quite different. Those create the complexity to the research of the adjective of unearthed literatures in the Warring States Period. Generally, different scholar depends on the same materials, and the conclusions are quite different, even for contradictory. So

what the conclusions are more believable, that must be explored by finding new material, the scientific definition standard and appealing the new method in the future.

To sum up, the research on adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period still needs to be strengthened and heighten.

### IV. THE PROSPECT OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Here would state some superficial views on how to carry out the research of adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period in the future from seven aspects as follow:

#### *A. Make Full Use of Previous Achievements of Predecessors, and Discard the Dross at the Same Time*

In addition to the researches mentioned above, it is important to utilize the researches on word interpretations, sentence explanations, contents of unearthed literatures and adjectives in handed-down literatures in the Warring States period and so on. After utterly master the relevant research achievements and the research status of issues can be well understood. Then we can propose the creating sentiments and avoid the repeating of research.

#### *B. Construct a Comprehensive and Reliable Corpus on the Basis of Collecting and Collating Unearthed Literatures in the Warring States Period*

With regard to the corpus of unearthed literatures in Warring States period, the monograph *A Research on Function Words in Excavated Materials of the Warring States* (Yujin Zhang, 2011) had carried out detailed and incisive discussion, it is possible to supplement the newly published unearthed literatures on the basis of the monograph such as *Liye Qin Bamboo Slips*, *Qin Bamboo Slips Kept in Yuelu Academy*, *The Warring States Bamboo Slips Kept in Tsinghua University*. Integrating the researches and explanations of others school thought, in our utter power, overcoming the difficulties from unearthed literatures. On the basic of deeply studying and analyzing the original corpus, we should earn the redeeming feature or share our opinion to ensure the reliability accuracy of the original corpus.

#### *C. Set a Scientific and Reasonable Definition Standard of Adjective*

Adjective is one of the special categories of notional words in Chinese and there has been a considerable debate on whether adjective in Chinese is an independent category. Some scholars regarded it as a kind of verbs or completely merged it with verb. The boundaries of adjective, noun, verb, and adverb in Chinese are not clear. To make clear the differences and relations between these word classes and correctly, identify all the adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period is the foundation and difficulty of grammar study, so it is necessary to establish a relatively reasonable and scientific definition standard of adjective that most scholars accept.

#### *D. Establish a Reasonable Classification Standard of Adjective*

To subdivide adjectives is helpful for the further understanding of complexity of adjectives and the better explanation of grammar laws, so it should classify adjectives with explicit purpose and standard, and consciously discuss the features of different categories of adjectives in terms of grammatical function, meaning and so on.

#### *E. Carry Out a Comprehensive and Systematic Research on Adjectives of Unearthed Literatures in the Warring States Period from Microcosmic to Macroscopic*

The research should be carried out with both microscopic and macroscopic perspectives, it means that the microscopic research should be carried out with a global view and the macroscopic research should be based on microscopic research. It can carry out the microscopic research first, study and analyze the corpus word by word carefully to find out all the adjectives. And next count the quantities and frequencies of them exhaustively, and discuss the meaning, classification, distribution, grammatical function, pragmatic function, semantic direction, flexible usage, valence, etc. Generalize macroscopically these base on careful and comprehensive microscopic research, it can depict the comprehensive feature of adjective system of unearthed literatures in Warring States period.

#### *F. Combine Synchronic Research with Diachronic Research*

On the one hand, it needs to have a comprehensive mastery of adjective system in the Warring States period through synchronic research. And it can compare usage features of adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period in different regions and types, and compare adjectives of unearthed literatures with of handed-down literatures in the Warring States period on the basis of a systematic description of the basic appearance of adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period. And it shows the regional and stylistic features of adjectives. Combining the authenticity of unearthed literatures with the diversity of handed-down literatures, the similarities and differences of the use of adjectives between unearthed literatures and handed-down literatures in Warring State period are compared, and analyze the reasons. Now, the research achievement of the adjective literatures in Warring States period are abundant, for example Zuo's Commentary, The Analects of Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Mozi, Zhuangzi, HanFeizi, Lv's Commentary of History and Intrigues of the Warring States. We can utilize the professional research works of adjective from them. Take unearthed literatures as basic corpus and handed-down literatures as an aid, so that it would have a more comprehensive understanding of true appearance system about adjectives in the Warring States period, and make more reliable conclusions.

On the other hand, carry out essential diachronic research. Put the adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period into the long river of Chinese historical development, and compare it with the adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Shang Dynasty, Western Zhou

Dynasty, the Spring and Autumn Period and the Western Han Dynasty, it is in order to investigate its origin and development dynamically, and reveal the venation, law and reasons of development and evolvement. It has great theoretical reference value to the construction of a reliable Chinese grammar history, especially of Chinese adjectives.

#### *G. Study and Apply New Theories and Methods of Linguistics while Applying Traditional Linguistic Theories*

To apply modern linguistics theories and methods scientifically, and solve practical problem effectively according to the language features of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period, such as the contemporary research methods of notional words, transformational analysis, semantic feature analysis, valence analysis, discourse analysis, cognitive grammar theory.

### V. CONCLUSION

Overall, the research on adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States Period has made some achievements, but there still with a great research space. It would have good theoretical and practical values to comply the research with the new trend of ancient Chinese grammar, fully make use of several unearthed literatures in the Warring States period, carry out research on adjectives of unearthed literatures in the Warring States period from microscopic to macroscopic and with the combination of synchronic and diachronic research.

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