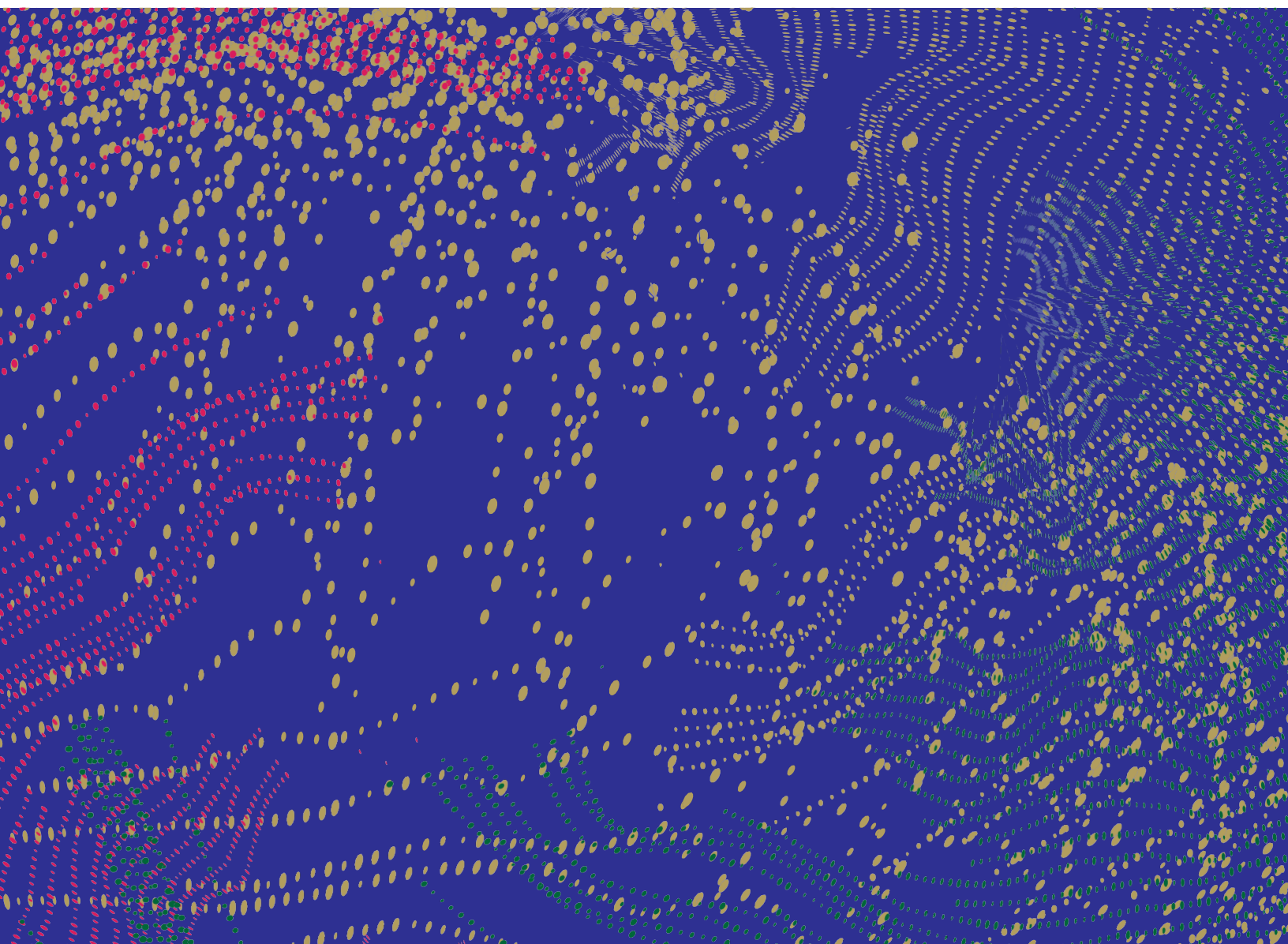


The World Humanities Report

Historical Chinese Grammar and Usage

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Historical Chinese Grammar and Usage

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A Brief Overview of Research before 1990

The publication of Ma Jianzhong's *Ma shi wentong* [Basic principles for writing clearly and coherently by Mister Ma] in 1898 brought the first monograph on Chinese grammar that was truly written by a Chinese national in China; it also marked the birth of historical Chinese grammar. By the 1980s, there were original accomplishments in the area of research on Chinese historical grammar and vocabulary usage, and a group of eminent scholars and important scholarly findings emerged. Some of the outstanding figures and writings in the field of Chinese historical grammar and usage are the 1922 *Guowen fa caochuang* [A sketch of Chinese grammar] by Chen Chengze;¹ Yang Shuda's *Gaodeng guowenfa* [Advanced grammar of the national language], published in 1930; the already-mentioned Li Jinxi's *Xinzhu Guoyu yufa*; Lǚ Shuxiang's *Zhongguo wenfa yaolǚ* [Basic principles of Chinese spoken grammar; published in 1942–44]; Zhang Xiang's *Shi Ci Qu yu cihui shi* [Glossary of the vocabulary of poetry, *ci* song lyric, and *qu* art song] that came out posthumously in 1953; the 1959 *Dunhuang bianwen ziyi tongshi* [Glosses of the meaning of words in the Dunhuang *bianwen* transformation texts] by Jiang Lihong; Wang Li's *Hanyu shigao* [Brief history of the Chinese language] from 1957–58; *Yinxu jiagu keci de yufa yanjiu* [Grammar of the oracle bone inscriptions found in Anyang (city of Yinshang)] and *Xi Zhou jinwen yufa yanjiu* [The grammar of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions] by Guan Xiechu, published in 1953 and 1981, respectively; Xiang Xi's *Jianming Hanyu shi* [A concise history of the Chinese language] from 1993; Yang Bojun and He Leshi's 1992 *Gu Hanyu yufa jiqi fazhan* [Archaic Chinese grammar and its development]; as well as important articles by Wang Li, Lǚ Shuxiang, Ding Shengshu, Jiang Lihong, Guan Xiechu, He Leshi, Guo Xiliang, Xiang Xi, Zhang Yongyan, Liu Jian, and Guo Zaiyi. Their

¹ The author uses the term *guowen* [national language] for modern Chinese.

contributions to the study of historical Chinese grammar and usage laid a foundation for later studies.

The efforts of several generations of scholars helped to determine a system and framework for research on historical grammar and usage that have been steadily refined. A system and framework for research that gives equal weight to lexical and syntactic aspects, with a fully developed word typology, taking the linguistic materials pertaining to speech as its subject, using both description and interpretive methods to follow the thread of development and change in empty particles and meaningful syntactic patterns has been established.

Periodization of the history of Chinese language has gained a certain level of acceptance. Study of historical Chinese grammar and usage necessarily involves the question of how to mark phases in the history of Chinese language, and the academic community engaged in discussion and debate in the 1980s. At present, the mainstream view concurs on division of the history of the Chinese language into four periods: before the Western Han (220 BCE) is archaic Chinese; the Eastern Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties (including the Sui) is Middle Chinese; from the Tang and Five Dynasties through the Mid-Qing is early modern Chinese; and from late Qing to the present is modern Chinese.² Each of these broad historical phases can be subdivided into numerous stages. On the basis of this periodization of Chinese language history, we have gradually set aside vague generalizations across history and place and put growing importance on constructing a view of the transformative processes in historical Chinese grammar and usage through in-depth investigation of phenomena in each of the historical phases of grammar and usage, in order to reveal the rules of transformation and forces of development.

Since establishing a periodization for Chinese language history and deepening our understanding of historical syntax and vocabulary usage, growing importance has been placed on discovery of linguistic materials, as well as appraisal of the time period of linguistic materials and their authenticity. There have been swift advances in expanding the scope of linguistic materials from each of these time periods and their application. Using new linguistic material to study historical Chinese syntax has yielded momentous results.

² Periodization for the early modern period in literature and language is much debated. Some characterize the Mongol Yuan dynasty rule and the Ming dynasty as early modern, and others find literary expression of somatic experience and grammatical features presaging later transformation in the Northern Song.—Trans.

The new materials include textual sources that have been reevaluated and reexamined, as well as unearthed texts that archeologists have discovered in the past few decades.

The value of archaeological findings such as oracle bones, bronze inscriptions from the Zhou dynasties (1046–772 BCE and 771–256 BCE), and excavated texts on bamboo and silk dating to the Warring States (475–221 BCE), Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), and Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) are granted increasing importance for the study of Chinese grammar and usage. Some examples are the bamboo slips from the Shuihudi Qin dynasty tomb,³ Han dynasty bamboo slips from Yinque Mountain,⁴ Han dynasty texts written on wood and bamboo strips from Juyan Lake basin in Inner Mongolia (Gashuun Nuur, in Mongolian), medical texts and prescriptions on bamboo slips from Wuwei,⁵ the Chu bamboo slips from Warring States period in the Shanghai Museum, the Chu bamboo slips in the collection at Tsinghua University, Bao Shan Chu records on bamboo slips, the Chu bamboo slips from Guo Dian, Dunhuang *biamwen* transformation texts,⁶ and records from Turfan. Since Middle Chinese was recognized as a category in the periodization of the Chinese language, Middle Period translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese have drawn unprecedented attention.⁷ The value of these textual sources for studies of Middle Chinese as well as later patterns in early modern Chinese grammar and usage is

³ Bamboo slips (called *jian*, *jiandu*, or *zhujian*) were the earliest medium for Chinese texts, and specimen vary in length from 5 inches to 20 inches—many of them partial slips. Classic texts were written on slips of uniform length, approximately 16 1/3 inches (41.5 cm). The texts found at Shuihudi (present-day Hubei Province) in the grave of an administrator ca. 217 BCE contain Qin laws and administrative records, also known as the Yunmeng Annals, and yielded important findings for mathematics and historiography.—Trans.

⁴ Bamboo slips unearthed on Yinque Mountain, in Linyi, Shandong Province, were in two graves dating to 140/132 BCE and 118 BCE. One grave believed to be that of a military officer contained 4,924 bamboo slips with parts of known texts on military strategy and divination; the second grave held 32 strips with a calendar dating to 134 CE.

⁵ The bamboo slips excavated in present-day Wuwei (Liangzhou), Gansu Province, are the earliest records of medical practice and prescriptions, dating before Eastern Han (25–220 CE).—Trans.

⁶ *Biamwen*, literally “transformation texts,” were used to spread Buddhist teachings in performance mixing song and speech and in illustrations some believe were shows the audience as performers sang. Materials dating from the seventh to tenth centuries were found in Dunhuang, a center for Buddhist learning and a military outpost, which was strategically located on the Silk Road.—Trans.

⁷ The Middle Period (100–1500 CE) was a time of transformation, both in terms of territorial expansion, following Tang dynasty conquests, and intellectual and socioeconomic dynamism of the Song dynasty. It is called the Middle Period, since it is neither at the formative beginning of the imperial period nor at the end.—Trans.

increasingly marked. Investigations into linguistic materials, including Chan (or “Zen”) Buddhist sayings [*yulu*] from the Tang (618–906 CE) and Song dynasties (960–1279 CE), Song dynasty Neo-Confucian “recorded conversations” [*yulu*], and the *Sanchao beimeng huibian* [A chronicle of war and peace with the Liao under three emperors of the Song dynasty], which records the essentials of negotiations with the Liao (Jin) court during the Northern and Southern Song (960–1127 CE and 1127–1279 CE), and the storytelling text for all the modes (*zhugongdiao*, a form that alternates song and speech) *Liu Zhiyuan zhugongdiao* [Ballad of the Hidden Dragon, the story of the founder of the Eastern Han] have served as a catalyst.⁸ Scholars have delved into these sources as a means to understand Tang and Song dynasties and early modern historical grammar and usage. In addition, the use of linguistic material in works such as vernacular literary sources from the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368 CE), Song- and Yuan dynasty short stories in *huaben* [storyteller script] style, and *nanxi* [Southern-style drama] were a major impetus for studies of Song and Yuan period and early modern Chinese grammar and word usage. Discovery of a number of vernacular novels from the Ming (1368–1644 CE) and Qing dynasties (1645–1911 CE) and conversation books written and edited for foreigners to study Chinese, such as *Lao Qida* [Old Cathayan, or “Old Khitan”],⁹ *Piao tong shi* [Simple communication],¹⁰ *Xunshi pinghua* [Vernacular tales to instruct the world],¹¹ *Guanhua zhinan* [A guide to the official language (Mandarin)],¹² and *Yanjing fu hua* [Yanjing women’s conversations]¹³ added considerable new linguistic material

⁸ Xu Mengxin, *Sanchao beimeng huibian* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987); *Liu Zhiyuan zhugongdiao* is available in English as *Ballad of the Hidden Dragon*, translated and with an introduction by Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova and James I. Crump (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

⁹ *Lao Qida* is a textbook for Koreans learning Chinese, first printed in the Koryō period (ca. thirteenth century). Several versions circulated from the fourteenth century on. Wang Weihui, ed., *Chaoxian shidai Hanyu jiaoke shu congkan* [Reprints of Korean-era texts for teaching Chinese] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005).

¹⁰ Choe Sejin, *Piao tong shi*. Reprinted as part of the Kyujanggak Collection, series 3, Language Materials (Seoul: Taehakkyo Kyujanggak, 2004).

¹¹ Li Bian, *Xunshi pinghua* (published as *Hyunse p’yŏnghwa*, Seoul: T’aehaksa, 1998). The novel, written in literary language, was discovered in Korea.

¹² Wu Qitai, *Guanhua zhinan* (Tokyo: Yang Long tailang, 1884; Shanghai: Mei hua shuju, 1900).

¹³ The nineteenth-century textbook *Yanjing fu hua* was intended for women studying Chinese, discovered in Japan. See Jiang Lansheng, “‘Yanjing fu hua’ suo fanying de Qingmo Beijing hua tese” [The features of Beijing local language reflected in the late-Qing “Yanjing women’s conversations”]. *Yuwen yanjiu*, no. 4 (1994): 15–19.

for the study of the late stage of early modern Chinese grammar and usage from the Ming–Qing period.

Diverse Research Perspectives and Innovation in Research Methods

For a considerable length of time after the publication of Ma Jianzhong's *Ma shi wentong* in 1898, studies of Chinese historical grammar used a vague notion of ancient Chinese that encompassed all time periods. After the founding of New China in 1949, and especially in the three decades after 1990, scholars began to explore new perspectives and applied new methodologies to the study of historical Chinese grammar and usage.

Various methods for linguistic research have appeared and opened up new ground: periodization that takes one particular time period as a focus for study, or thematic studies that center on a certain grammatical phenomenon or syntactic patterns; research on grammar and usage taking a particular source or several textual sources from one time period as focus; comparative studies considering a classic that has been passed down in conjunction with archeological texts; and comparative study of local textual materials and Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras. These new research perspectives have gone beyond the limits of existing models and have significantly broadened the outlook of Chinese historical grammar and usage.

Advances in the field of Chinese historical grammar and usage are inseparable from innovation in theoretical methods. From the 1950s to the 1980s, studies of historical grammar and usage in mainland China primarily relied on structural linguistics theory and its application, which led to unprecedented new findings in differentiating word categories and investigating the function of syntax. In the past thirty years, many new types of theory and methodology from international linguistics have been introduced and imported to the Chinese mainland, including theories of formalist grammar, valence or valency (which counts the number and type of words controlled by the predicate), the functionalist-oriented theory of cognitive grammar, lexical diffusion theory, theories of lexical semantics, semantic field theory, the notion of grammaticalization, construction grammar theory (abbreviated as CxG), theory and methods of language typology, discourse mapping theory and methods, and language contact theory, among others. Chinese scholars have become increasingly familiar with the theoretical ground and have successfully applied these theories to their studies of Chinese historical linguistics and usage.

It is particularly important and rewarding that scholars in China ground themselves in practice and combine the theories of Western linguists with their own innovations, so that they have been able to more thoroughly reveal the impetus and workings behind the transformation and development of Chinese grammar and have also proposed some important theoretical views.

Some examples are: pointing out and then interpreting parallel emptying, semantic mutuality,¹⁴ lexicalization of cross-level non-phrase structures,¹⁵ grammaticalization leading to weakening pronunciation or phonetic change, and supernormal collocation and semantic surplus as causes of grammaticalization. The theoretical considerations and innovation of these studies of Chinese grammar and usage not only contributed striking facts about Chinese to general linguistics—they also greatly enriched ordinary linguistic theory.

Research on Archaic Chinese Grammar and Usage

Periodization and studies focused on individual works or themes are the main output in research on Chinese historical grammar and usage, and they draw on the linguistic materials that are their objects of study, research perspectives, and the direction of research.¹⁶ Representative studies centered on a core of linguistic material in classics transmitted from the archaic period include Guan Xiechu's *Zuozhuan jufa yanjiu* [Semantics in the *Zuo Commentaries*] and He Leshi, *Zuozhuan xuci yanjiu* [Function words in the *Zuo Commentaries*].¹⁷ Some of the representative studies of excavated materials include Shen Pei, *Yinxu Jiagu buci yuxu yanjiu* [Word order in oracle bones and prophecies from the Shang ruins at Anyang], and Zhang Yujin, *Jiagu buci yufa yanjiu* [The grammar of

¹⁴ “Semantic mutuality” refers to change in the meaning of a word by analogy, or by its use in similar sentences, such as *mu* (mother) and *ru* (breast, lactating), as distinct from semantic extension, or through associative thinking, where new meaning of a word is generated in the context of phrases.—Trans.

¹⁵ An example of lexicalization of non-phrase structures is “Say. . .” NP/VP [*de hua*], where the expression can take several phrases as referent.—Trans.

¹⁶ The archaic period technically refers to the time before written records. In Chinese history that is the Xia dynasty (2070–1600 BCE). W. A. Dobson defines archaic Chinese as the language of the eleventh to third centuries BCE. In this chapter, sources from the Yin-Shang (1600–1046 CE), Zhou (ca. 1100–256 BCE), and Warring States period (778–456 BCE) are considered to contain a core of archaic materials.—Trans.

¹⁷ Guan Xiechu, *Zuozhuan jufa yanjiu* (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994); He Leshi, *Zuozhuan xuci yanjiu* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2004).

oracle bones and prophecies].¹⁸ These monograph-length studies of grammar established a foundation for further comparative studies and periodization of historical grammar, as well as a comprehensive history of grammar.

Since modern Chinese does not modulate to reflect mode, the grammatical role of “function words” (*xuci*, literally “empty words”—as opposed to content words) is especially pronounced in grammar. The study of function words in ancient Chinese has always been a major research topic. For the past thirty years, investigation and analysis of various categories of function words in ancient Chinese (adverbial words, prepositions, conjunctions, expressive words, and explanations, among others) have led to swift progress in building a systematic understanding of the operations of function words, as well as inquiry into cases involving the main function words. New findings are constantly being generated for some other important grammatical phenomena and syntactical patterns in Chinese language history, such as the question of how judgment sentences and the copula *shi* [is] came into being, the issue of passive formulations, the issue of linked verb formulations, and issues of causative structures and causative style.

Research on Archaic Chinese Grammar

From the 1990s onward, as research gradually advanced, the place of the Middle Period was established in Chinese language history and the value of studies of Middle Chinese became evident, particularly the emphasis on Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras from the Middle Period and new excavations led to a dramatic reversal in the lag in research on Middle Chinese grammar and usage. Additionally, the perspective of language contact has proved to be a highlight of thirty years of research, using cross comparison of Sanskrit and Chinese as a means to study the grammar and vocabulary usage of Middle Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras to produce truly remarkable findings.

Important findings on Middle Chinese grammar and usage have been published, including Jiang Lansheng, *Wei Jin Nanbei chao xiaoshuo ciyu huishi* [A lexicon for fiction of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties]; the edited volume by Cao Guangshun and Sharon Yu (Yu Hsiao-jung, also written Yu Xiaorong), *Zhongguo Hanyu yufa shi yanjiu* [A History of Middle Chinese

¹⁸ Shen Pei, *Yinxu jiagu buci yuxu yanjiu* (Chongqing: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001; first published as a dissertation, Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1992); Zhang Yujin, *Jiagu buci yufa yanjiu* (Guangdong: Guangzhou gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002).

grammar]; Zhu Qingzhi, *Fo dian yu zhonggu Hanyu cihui yanjiu* [Buddhist scripture and Middle Chinese vocabulary]; and Zhu Guanming, *Mohe seng qilü qingtai dongci yanjiu* [Modal verbs in the Mahasangha-vinaya].¹⁹

By now, research on Middle Chinese grammar and usage is regarded as a major component of historical Chinese linguistics and an expanding area of a new field.

Research on Early Modern Chinese Grammar and Usage

The rapid development and major breakthroughs in the study of early modern Chinese grammar and usage actually began fairly late, in the late 1980s. Focusing their studies on vernacular literary materials dating from the Tang and Five Dynasties through mid-Qing that reflected speech to varying degrees, scholars distinguished the early modern period in Chinese language and established early modern Chinese as a field of study. This represented a major development in research on Chinese historical linguistics and vocabulary usage.

For the past thirty years, there has been an unprecedented level of activity in early modern Chinese grammar and usage research that has yielded increasingly thorough knowledge of the value and significance of vernacular language materials of the various historical stages in early modern Chinese. Moreover, the findings of research in the subfields of word typology, studies of sentence type and sentence form, the evolution of the grammar and semantics of function words, the multiple grammatical functions of signs of appearance, spoken usage of early modern Chinese, the evolution of frequently used vocabulary and, related to this, how dictionaries of frequently used vocabulary were composed and edited are extremely promising.

Liu Jian, Jiang Lansheng, Bai Weiguo, and Cao Guangshun coauthored *Jindai Hanyu xuci yanjiu* [A study of early modern Chinese function words], and Wu Fuxiang published *Dunhuang bianwen yufa yanjiu* [Studies of grammar in the Dunhuang *bianwen* transformation texts].²⁰ The three-volume phrase dictionary organized by time period not only put into practice the notion of

¹⁹ Jiang Lansheng, *Wei Jin Nanbei chao xiaoshuo ciyu huishi* (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 1988); Cao Guangshun and Sharon Yu, eds., *Zhonggu Hanyu yufa shi yanjiu* (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2006); Zhu Qingzhi, *Fo dian yu zhonggu Hanyu cihui yanjiu* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2002); Zhu Guanming, *Mohe seng qilü qingtai dongci yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2008).

²⁰ Liu Jian et al., *Jindai Hanyu xuci yanjiu* (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 1992); Wu Fuxiang, *Dunhuang bianwen yufa yanjiu* (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1996).

historical vocabulary but also sought to use the perspective of historical grammar. Bai Weiguo's edited volumes *Baihua xiaoshuo yuyan cidian* [Dictionary of vernacular fiction language use] and *Jindai Hanyu cidian* [A dictionary of early modern Chinese] aimed to show the pattern of evolution in Chinese vocabulary usage from Tang and the Five Dynasties to the Mid-Qing and are notably inclusive and systematic.²¹

The Yuan dynasty and Qing dynasty were governed by the Mongols and Manchu, who were speakers of Northern Altaic languages, and thus the Chinese and Mongolian languages, and then Manchurian, were in a state of morphological blending. At the same time, there was close interaction between China and the Korean Peninsula. Language blending had a certain degree of influence on change in Chinese grammar and vocabulary. Investigation of the process of interaction between the languages of Yuan, Ming, and Qing period Northern Altaic language families (in particular Mongolian, Korean, and Manchurian) and Chinese and research exploring the influence and consequences of external contact and morphological blending on Chinese grammar and vocabulary usage have major significance for studies of early modern Chinese. Over the past thirty years, research of Chinese grammar and usage in a state of morphological contact during the Yuan and Qing dynasties has gradually opened up and arrived at major findings. In this research area, representative scholars are Jiang Lansheng, Li Chongxing, Zu Shengli, and Zhang Meilan.

Important textual materials that reflect the spoken language of various time periods eventually led to monograph-length studies of grammar and vocabulary usage after the 1990s. By now, a number of monographs on the grammar of a single book have already been published. Some of them describe and analyze word usage and syntactical phenomena in a single book, while others put more weight on thorough investigation of a particular theme in a book. Publication of studies of grammar and usage within a single work has laid a solid foundation for composing the history of early modern Chinese grammar in the future.

In recent years several major research works that have theoretical depth and represent the future of the discipline have been published. These include Jiang Shaoyu and Cao Guangshun's edited volume *Jindai Hanyu yufa shi yanjiu zongshu* [An overview of studies of the history of early modern Chinese grammar]; Jiang Shaoyu, *Jindai Hanyu yanjiu gaiyao* [Summary of research on early

²¹ Bai Weiguo, *Baihua xiaoshuo yuyan cidian* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2011); Bai Weiguo et al., *Jindai Hanyu cidian* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2015).

modern Chinese]; and Jiang Lansheng, *Jindai Hanyu tanyuan* [The sources of early modern Chinese];²² among others.

Translated from the Chinese by Kathryn Lowry

²² Jiang Shaoyu and Cao Guangshun, eds., *Jindai Hanyu yufa shi yanjiu zongshu* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005); Jiang Shaoyu, *Jindai Hanyu yanjiu gaiyao* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005); Jiang Shaoyu, *Hanyu lishi cihui xue gaiyao* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2016); Jiang Lansheng, *Jindai Hanyu tanyuan* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2000); Jiang Lansheng, *Jindai Hanyu yanjiu xinlun* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2008; expanded ed., 2013).

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