

Cultural Origin of Folkloric Terms in Central Hebei Dialects

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Abstract

As an important part of dialect vocabulary, folk words contain rich regional culture in the transmission from generation to generation, known as the “living fossil” for regional culture research. Based on field research and the existing dialect records, folk songs and other documentary materials, this paper takes the folk words reflecting marriage customs in Central Hebei dialect as the research object to explore the regional culture contained and the origin and evolution of these folk words through synchronic description and literature review.

Keywords

Central Hebei Dialect, Folkloric Terms, Cultural Source Tracing

As the carrier of regional culture, dialects have developed unique features in phonetics, vocabulary, grammar and other aspects in the evolution over the centuries, and have passed down the cultural customs accumulated by generations through daily communication of common people. Dialects in Hebei include Mandarin and Jin dialects (Hou, 2002). In terms of geographical characteristics, Central Hebei is dominated by plains, where most of the counties and cities speak Mandarin dialect, and some counties and cities speak Jin dialect, with phonology varying a lot. In counties and cities of the Jin dialect-speaking area, entering tone is contained; in Mandarin dialect-speaking area, residents speak in different tones; in most dialect spots, the falling tone is divided into yin and yang rhymes in tone sandhi; and in some dialect spots, the even tone is divided into yin and yang rhymes. In short, phonetic forms differ a lot in this region, making the recording form of folk words in various dialects slightly different. The similar natural geographical environment endows Central Hebei region with common characteristics in marriage and other living customs which have been pre-

served and passed on in dialect folk words. As Zhou Zhenhe and You Rujie (2006) pointed out, “Generally speaking, people who speak the same dialect have some similarities in their social life and customs”. This paper selects some folk words that record marriage customs in the Central Hebei dialect as the research object, and on the basis of extensive field research, county records, dialect records, folk songs, nursery rhymes and other documentary materials of counties and cities to explore the historical origins of various folk phenomena.

The word “Ti Qin” (a match-making) is commonly used in the Central Hebei dialect, which generally refers to the male asking a matchmaker to go to his lover’s home to make a proposal. However, there are some other similar words in different dialect spots, for example, in Rongcheng County and Xushui County of Baoding, local residents say “Shuo Qin”; in Tang County and Shunping County of Baoding, as well as Jinzhou County, Zhengding County, Pingshan County and other places of Shijiazhuang, local residents say “Bao Mei”; and in some dialect spots in Shijiazhuang, Hengshui and Baoding, “Shuo Xi Fu” is used for the situation where a man proposes, and “Shuo Po Jia” for the situation where a woman proposes. They only use different words to express the same custom. The custom of “Ti Qin” is derived from the ancient etiquettes of “Na Cai” (formal proposal), “Wen Ming” (birthday matching) and “Na Ji” (confirmation of the compatibility), that is, the male’s parents selects a marriage partner for their son, and then ask the matchmaker to go to the female’s home to make a proposal. In ancient times, “well-matched marriage” is pursued, and now a saying expressing the same meaning, “men dui men, hu dui hu, huolakouzi dui zhalan”, is still popular among folk people. For modern people, this statement is still reasonable to some extent. The so-called well-matched marriage emphasizes the equality of the two original families of the couple in terms of economy, education and cultivation, so that the couple may have similar values and their marriage may be more stable. In ancient times, “Da Yan” (a kind of wild goose) is the best choice for the gifts brought by matchmakers to make a proposal. In traditional Chinese culture, Da Yan symbolizes the harmonious love between the husband and wife. In addition, Da Yan migrates according to the seasons every year, and they fly in an orderly manner during migration, which alludes to the mutual loyalty and trustworthiness of men and women in marriage. According to relevant county records, during the Republic of China, most of the proposal gifts in Baoding were domestic geese, which should be the continuation of the ancient custom of giving dayan for proposal. The folk songs popular in Central Hebei also vividly record the scene of proposing by matchmakers. For example:

Hongluobo gen-er xiang you zha, shei gei laonv shuo pojia, shuo dao na-er? Shuo dao hongcheng laoli jia, daping daguan dapixiang chahu, chawan dui dagang. Duanzixie, yibai shuang, hai you yishuang mei zuo shang, kule qi tian qi houshang. Carrot were fried, who can act as a matchmaker for my daughter? To whom she will marry? To a man named Li living in Hongcheng. We have prepared bottles and pots, large suitcase and teapots, tea bowls and large jars. My

daughter requires a hundred pairs of satin shoes, but the matchmaker only brought ninety-nine pairs, so my daughter cried for seven days and nights (Excerpts from Xiongxian Folk Song “Talking About My Husband’s Family” (Editorial Committee of Three Collected Works of Folk Literature in Baoding, 1987).

According to the folk customs of Central Hebei, matchmakers need to bring satin shoes to propose a girl. Although the hundred pairs of satin shoes in the folk song are exaggerated, the folk custom of using shoes to symbolize the marriage has been around for a long time. Here the word “shoes” (in Chinese, the pronunciation is *xie*) is homophonic with “harmony” (*xie* in Chinese), so it represent harmony. Shoes are often used a metaphor for marriage in traditional literature. For example, Li Shangyin, a poet of Tang Dynasty (618 - 907 A.D.) wrote in his poem *Thirty-two Rhymes for Shuyan’s Hut*: *Dai jinliangxieshou, dui ruochuangxiaxie* (Now we work together and rest together, just like a pair of shoes under the bed, not separated from each other). Here the “pair of shoes under the bed” is a metaphor for the couple in happy marriage. In addition, novels written in the Ming and Qing dynasties also have plots that use shoes to predict marriage. In the above ballad, the matchmaker brought ninety-nine pairs of shoes, still one pair short, and the older leftover woman does not make a concession. The playful and exaggerated words reveal the plain folk customs.

“Kai Lian” is the first thing women in the Central Hebei region do on their wedding day. It refers to the behavior that brides use thread to clean up the fine hair on the face and the redundant hair on the temples before the wedding ceremony. After Kai Lian, their hair will be combed into a bun, marking the transformation of their status. Kai Lian was originally a way of beautifying one’s face. In ancient times, there were no various beauty products like those in modern society, so ancient people can only improve their looks by removing unwanted hair to keep their face smooth. It is said that Emperor Yang of Sui Dynasty (581 - 618 A.D.) took a fancy to a folk woman and planned to marry her. But this woman already had her sweetheart, in order to avoid the marriage to Emperor Yang, she asked someone remove the unwanted hair on her face and temples, and then sat on a palanquin with the seat in the shape of a lotus and went to her sweetheart’s home. The official sent by Emperor Yang saw the smooth face of the woman in the palanquin and thought she was a goddess, and immediately reported to Emperor Yang. Emperor Yang thus had to give up marrying her. Of course, this story is just a folklore that expresses people’s good wishes. Nevertheless, the story also shows indirectly that the custom of Kai Lian has a long history at least from the Sui Dynasty. Nowadays, with the emergence of various beauty cosmetics, people can pursue beautiful appearance in many ways, so the custom of “Kai Lian” disappeared in the marriage ceremony in Central Hebei region, even only remains in the memories of the older generation.

In Central Hebei, “Zhao Hun Xie” (finding wedding shoes) is an indispensable part on the wedding day. On that day, the bride usually sits barefoot on the

bed and waits for the groom to find the hidden wedding shoes and put them on the bride's feet. Here the shoes symbolize the harmony and happiness of the couple in their future life, just like the meaning of the matchmaker bringing shoes when making a proposal. This custom can also be found in ancient classics. *Shuo Yuan: Xiuwen* written by Liu Xiang records that: When taking the bride home, it is a tradition to bring gifts to the bride and her parents. The feudal princes need to bring two pairs of Ju (shoes made of hemp and kudzu) and a piece of Cong (jade article), and officials and ordinary people need carry two pairs of shoes and salted pork. After the bride's mother got the two pairs of shoes, she will help the bride put one pair on, and then urge her daughter: After arriving at your husband's home, you should take care of your parents-in-law, and obey your husband's words, put your whole heart in your family, and do not come home casually. According to the words above, we can see that in the Pre-Qin period, people of different statuses should bring different gifts on the day of taking bride home: The feudal princes need to bring two pairs of shoes made of hemp and kudzu and a piece of Cong (a kind of jade, and in Chinese, it indicates that the bride should be obedient to the groom). "Ju" is the name of shoes in ancient China. The Qingdafu or ordinary people should bring two pairs of shoes and preserved meat to the bride's mother, and the bride's mother will choose one pair of shoes for her daughter. At the same time, the mother will urge her daughter to take care of her parents-in-law. "Zhao Hun Xie" in central Hebei is also a continuation of this custom. Compared with ancient red tapes, the relevant ceremonies of marriage customs in modern society are more concise but contain corresponding etiquette significance.

In ancient times, the Yan State and Zhao State both had territories in Hebei, and the custom of "Ku Jia" (crying marriage) in central Hebei has also been preserved. "Ku Jia" means that before getting on the palanquin, the bride will hug her mother and burst into tears, indicating that she is reluctant to leave her mother. As to this custom, there is a folk story: in ancient times, a daughter lived with her mother in central Hebei who depended on each other, and they depended on each other for survival. Later the daughter was going to marry a man and move to a distant place. When the groom came to the bride's home, the daughter couldn't help but cry when she saw her haggard mother. Then a passing immortal pointed to the tears on the daughter's face, and the tears turned into golden beans. Her mother thus can lead a better life, so she was relieved to marry. Since then, crying marriage has become popular. Ancient customs and legends contain the idea of being filial and grateful to our parents. Perhaps with the changes of the times and the development of the economy, even if you marry far away, you can contact your parents in a very convenient way, so such custom becomes a mere formality. In addition, we can also find the evidence of crying marriage in the folk songs that are spread in Baoding. For example:

Guinv shang jiao niang xinhuang, ba-zhe jiaogan zhufu yichang; Jinri dao-le pojia qu, ni chidian shuijiao zao qichuang, shuxi-daban zai chufang, zaochen

xian da liangpiao xilianshui, yihou ni zai tian zuofan de tang, zuofan buzhi zuo shenme, shang fang wenwen pomuniang, zuofan buzhi mi ruanying, xiaoshou nienie, qianwan buyao yong zui chang, tiao cai buzhi xian he dan, xiaoshou zhua yan xi pinliang. Chifan xian gei gonggong cheng yiwan, zai yiwan digei pomuniang, jianle dagu jiao jiejie, jianle xiaogu jiao guniang. Dabo genqian shao shuohua, lao gonggong genqian mo zhangkuang. My daughter has already on the palanquin, but I still feel flustered so I grabbed the palanquin pole and told her: today you will go to your husband's home, you should go to bed late and get up early, freshen up and dress up before leaving your room. Remember you should first prepare water for washing in the morning, and then make breakfast. If you don't know what to eat, you should ask your mother-in-law; if you don't know whether the rice is cooked, use your hands to press a grain of rice instead of tasting; if you don't know whether the dishes are salty, you should add salt carefully. After cooking, you should first serve the rice to your father-in-law, and then your mother-in-law. When meeting the sisters of your husband, don't forget call them in an appropriate way. Behave well before your father-in-law and his brothers! (Excerpt from Quyang Folk Song "Charge" (Editorial Committee of Three Collected Works of Folk Literature in Baoding, 1987)).

This ballad is written in the tone of a new bride's mother who instructs her soon-to-be wife daughter to be diligent and polite in her husband's home. If the daughter marries far away, the mother must be reluctant, "Guinvshangjiaoniangxinhuang, ba-zhejiaoganzhufuyichang", the word "xinhuang" (feeling flustered) here shows the bitterness of being not reluctant to get her daughter married. These words and instructions are the same as those in *Shuo Yuan* "After arriving at your husband's home, you should take care of your parents-in-law, and obey your husband's words." The custom of crying marriage can probably be traced back to the Warring States period (475 - 221 B.C.), when the daughter of Empress Wei of the Zhao State married the Emperor of the Yan State. When Empress Wei saw off her daughter, she "held her daughter's heel, burst into tears, and wished her daughter would not return" (quoted from the *Stratagems of the Warring States: The Zhao State*). With the gradual disappearance of the custom of crying marriage in many places, the custom of eating "Li NiangMian" (noodles, indicating that the bride will leave her mother) before the bride leaves home has gradually formed in Baoding, Shijiazhuang, Hengshui and other places. Generally, before the bride leaves home, the bride's mother has to cook noodles for her daughter to send her daughter off and wish her daughter have a happy marriage.

According to traditional customs, the word "Hui Men" in central Hebei refers to the bride returning to her mother's home with her husband, carrying gifts, on the third day of or three days after the wedding. On the day the newlyweds return to the bride mother's home, the bride's family will arrange a "Hui Men Yan" (a banquet) to entertain the new son-in-law. In central Hebei, newlyweds should return to the bride mother's home on the second day of the Lunar New

Year in the first year (in some places, on the third day of the Lunar New Year) to pay New Year's greetings to the parents. Since then, it becomes a custom that on the second day of the Lunar New Year, couples will return to the bride mother's home to pay New Year's greetings. These customs have also been preserved in detail in the folk songs popular in central Hebei.

Danian chuyi tou yitian, guo-le chuer dao chusan. Xiao liangkou, qiao daban, daishang nianhuo yu gaodian, ganzhe maolu lehaha de qu bainian. He de jiu, xi de yan, niangao dai-le yi da lan. Biandoujiao chuan man jia, bei-zhe baofu shang niangjia. Die chulai, bao baofu, niang chulai, bao wawa, saozhi chulai ba hua la: Jintian meimei ni biezou, zanmen ge rou qu da jiu. After the first two days of the Lunar New Year, the couple puts on new clothes, carries special purchases for the Spring Festival, pastries, wine, cigarettes, rice cakes, lentil horns, and baggages, and rides the donkey to pay a New Year visit to the wife's home. When they arrive, the wife's father comes out to take the baggage, her mother comes out to hold the baby, and the sister-in-law comes out and pulls the words: "dear, please stay here today, let's buy meat and wine together." (Excerpt from Baoding West Folk Song "Returning Home" (Editorial Committee of Three Collected Works of Folk Literature in Baoding, 1987)).

In central Hebei, when the couple return to the bride mother's home, they must bring some gifts. So the wife in the folk song brings special purchases for the Spring Festival and pastries and goes home with her husband to pay New Year's greetings to her parents. From the original custom of returning at the third day of the wedding to the current one of returning at the second or third day of the Lunar New Year, the evolution not only preserves the traditions but also conveys the strong family love.

The custom of "Hui Men" has a long history, and now people living in some southern provinces in China and overseas Chinese give "Hui Men" a new expression, "GuiNing", symbolizing safe and sound conditions. Some people believe that the word "GuiNing" originates from the homonym of "GuiNv" (alternative name for daughter in Chinese), because the pronunciation of "GuiNing" is the same as that of "guining" in the Jiaodong dialect. This statement is debatable. According to research, as early as the Qin Dynasty (221 - 207 B.C.), "Hui Men" was called "GuiNing", the original "Gui" (returning) means that a woman is married, and "Ning" means safety and peace, so calling the act of returning to the bride mother's home "GuiNing" contains the pray of the bride for her parents' safe and sound conditions. The word "GuiNing" appears many times in such classics as *The Book of Songs* and *Legend of Spring and Autumn Century by ZuoQiuming*. "I can't distinguish whether the clothes need washing, but after the work I will go home to visit my parent." (quoted from *The Book of Songs: Zhou Nan, Ge Tan*), with the annotation made by Zhu Xi of Song Dynasty (960 - 1279 A.D.) in his *Collection of Commentaries of Poetry* that "Ning means safety and peace." That is to say, after marrying, bride will visit her parent to ask about their conditions and pray for their health. In *The Nape* by GuiYouguang in

Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644 A.D.) writes: “Returning from a visit to her family, she told me her younger sister wanted to know, what is that passageway we hear your house has?” It can be seen that in the Ming Dynasty, the word “GuiNing” was still widely used. Although “GuiNing” was replaced by the word “Hui Men” in the central Hebei dialect, the concern and blessing of the married daughter to her parents was retained.

The folk words of the central Hebei dialect record the real living conditions of ordinary people in this region. Although this paper only selects several folk words that record the diet and marriage customs, we can have a whole picture of the customs in this region. Being simple and good, and pursuing harmony and tranquility are the cultural genes contained in ancient folk customs. From the thorough analysis and exploration of the origins of traditional customs, it can be seen that the evolution of each custom from ancient times to the present can be regarded as a tribute to traditional culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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