

SUNDRIES/ANECDOTES AND CITIES OF CHINA IN THE MIDDLE-AGE

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ABSTRACT

Sundries and anecdotes are the literature style originated from the Middle-Age of China. It is characterized by stories mixed with reality, fiction and ego-expressions of the authors.

Tang and Song dynasties of China were the booming period for Sundries/Anecdotes. This was due largely to the establishment of the imperial civil service examination of these two dynasties.

Although, authenticity of the event and characters in Sundries/Anecdotes have been usually questioned, they essentially include numerous information for the reality. The events and the characters were portrayed far more interesting and specific in Sundries/Anecdotes than in the history books. They reflect various aspect of urban development of China in the Middle-Age and, are important resource for us to study the urban society of China.

Key Words: China, Middle-Age, sundries/anecdotes.

INTRODUCTION

Tang and Song dynasties were the important periods for the development of the Sundries/Anecdotes. Transformation of both Tang and Song, China has been the one of the hot research subjects in Chinese history. Evolution of the city has been also an interesting research topic for Tang and Song.

Sundries/Anecdotes provide lots of information of the history. Evolution of Sundries/Anecdotes gives us more information about Tang and Song Dynasties.

Historians divide Sundries/Anecdotes into three categories, **1.** Trifles **2.** Anecdotal and **3.** Epigrams. More writers participated in writing Sundries/Anecdotes after Tang and Song. Although, lots of stories were written with distortion and stories of ghosts, their useful historical information still valuable.

In general, Sundries/Anecdotes are one of the old style of the novel. All above three are included in the general category of novel. As a result of the city cultural development of Song, novels, combined with story telling, gradually became virtual figures with complete stories to evolve as a modern literary genre.

1. Examples of Stories from Sundries/Anecdotes

There are some examples that Sundries/Anecdotes enriched information about the society of cities in the ancient China.

The First Story

According to “Bibliography of li Wa”, there were two funeral homes in Chang An, the capital city of Tang Dynasty, they all sell merchandize and provided service for funeral. Two homes always had competitions showing their products and playing their funeral music. The funeral home at east had better products and the one at west had better funeral singers.

At Tang, the officials were selected by national examinations. As the capital city, a lot of candidates of officials gathered in Chang An attending the examination. There was one candidate from a rich family, Zheng, supported by his family for his exam. But Zheng did not study for his exam, instead, he fell in love with a prostitute, Li Wa and spent all his money on her. Without any money, Zheng wandered on street and found by the owner of the funeral home at the west. The owner saved him and trained him as a funeral singer. The owner of the funeral home at the east happened to hear that Zheng had a beautiful voice. He gave Zheng 20, 000 dollars in secret and asked him to sing for his funeral home. One day, there was a big competition between two funeral homes, thousands of people came to street to watch. Zheng, as a representative for the east, won the competition. The west lost the 50, 000 dollars and lost the reputation.

The Second Story:

The longest one of the Sundries/Anecdotes about tradesmen of the city. The story was about a poor guy, Dou Yi, from once a rich family, went to the capital city and made good connections with his relatives in power. He was smart and worked hard to make his fortune from virtually no money. He finally became very rich and a well-known businessman.

《四库全书总目·子部·小说家类》“序言”

《太平广记》卷四八四，中华书局1961年版，第3985-3991页。

《太平广记》卷二四三，第1877页。

The Third Story

It was about the largest temple, Daxiangguo temple, located at Kaifeng, the capital city of North Song Dynasty. The temple was on the downtown Kaifeng near Bian river. It had large area with 64 courtyards, 10 famous historical scenes.

It was a very important national temple and became a largest trade center in Kaifeng. The Daxiangguo temple was large enough to hold 10, 000 people for trade. The markets opened 5 times a month on 1, 8, 15, 18, and 28 the hundred thousands merchandizes were traded there, including food, family supplies, animals, Jewelries, weapons, female cosmetic products, medicine, and books. The monks and nuns of the temple also made some handcrafts and traded in the market.

(Fig. 1)

【宋】王得臣：《塵史》卷下，上海古籍出版社，1986年；

【宋】王楙：《燕翼诒谋录》卷二，上海古籍出版社，1986年；

【宋】孟元老撰，邓之诚注《东京梦华录》，中华书局，1982年。

【宋】吴自牧：《梦粱录》，中华书局，1985年。

2. Discussion

The first story, the literatures consider it as a love story, because Zheng and Li happily got together after hard times. Zheng was saved on the street by Li, passed the national exams and appointed an official at the end of the story. Li left her career as a prostitute and became a noble lady due to her husband's social status. From historic point of view, we can obtain information about cities of the time from this story.

1. The trade broke the restrictions on certain areas of the city. Chang An, as the capital city, was clearly divided into 4 areas: residence of the Royal family, office, trade, and residence of general population. In general, the trade activities could only take place in the trade area. But from the story, we find that the trade greatly supported by the government took place in a huge courtyard right out-site of the wall to separate the Royal residential area. It indicates that trade had taken place in areas and less restriction for development. This is a clear indication for a transform of the city.

2. Li was a free prostitute not only provided her service to the royal family and the official but to the public. This was a big change from previous time, as prostitutes only served Royal families and officials. This freedom was also for artists and handicraftsmen who only worked for Royal family and officials previously. This change provided the better opportunity to develop business in the cities.

The second one, as a good example, from one businessman, to change some old-fashioned believes. Businessmen intended to purchase land after making good accumulation of the capitals due to the characteristics of economy and the political society of ancient China. But Dou, a country man, many years doing business in Chang An, including wood logs, hotels, jewelry, broker, investor, banker, paid no interests in purchasing any land.

There were similar stories, for example, a businessman, Luo, became rich due to his manure picking up service. People suggested that he gave up this business for its bad reputation. But he became poor after he followed that advice and had to take back the business to regain his fortune. In summary, those businessmen relied their living with city and had no connections to the land and country anymore.

From Dou's story, we can find that how Dou committed briberies to the government officials for political success of the children of the businessmen. These all took place at the later stage of Tang. Compare to the early period of Tang, the social status of the businessmen had a significant improvement. There was another story from Sundries/Anecdotes, a successful businessman, Wang, from the early period of Tang, had many personal connections with government officials, but still no political power himself.

The later period of Tang, the social and political status of many rich businessmen had greatly improved through using money to buy crown.

The third story tell us that business was much more prosperous during Song than during Tang, and not less than any other following dynasties of China. The books "The dreams of East Capital city" and "The dreams of Liang" written by the authors of the same period, described the booming business of Da Xiangguo temple, was only a small part of the whole city. There were several trading markets located at populated areas, Street market, Bridge market, night market, and Tile market inside and outside of the city. The type of the commodities had also changed accordingly. The expensive consumer goods still processed a certain proportion, but the daily supplies for the general public, such as tea, food, China, etc., became important targets of the business. The markets similar to Da Xiang Guo, combined trading, entertainment and religion, was a typical market of China in the old age. This tradition has continued until present time. For examples, Mule/Horse market of Wutai mountain, Shanxi, Temple market of Dongyue, Shandong, supported by the government, are all booming at present. (**Fig. 2**)

3. Summaries

Three stories were all related to the booming business of the city. Development of the city promoted the following changes of the cities in the middle age.

1) Changes from closed market (separate market and residential areas) to open market in the city.

Tang was the peak period for the closed city system in ancient China characterized by restricting activities of the city residents in walls, the doors of the walls opened and closed at the set time. Development of commodity economy broke through these restrictions. The residents of the city gradually had more trading with outsiders. Some were small business, such as selling fast food or sea food. Sundries/Anecdotes had recorded lots of these business activities. There were also some large business activities, such as the story above “Li Wa, described business marketing and competition of two big funeral homes. Due to this change, the city structure of North Song were quite different from that of Kaifeng, Tang.

2) To promote changes of population structure

Qin Shihuang, the first emperor of China, built a country with centralized power. The residents of the city were mainly formed by Royal families, noble families, officials, army and population to provide service to them. General population, businessmen and handicraftsmen most lived in the edge regions or out-site of the city. With development of city business, the city life became more and more dependent on the markets. The restriction to the city population was also affected. Lots of businessmen and countrymen moved to the city, activated city market and enriched commodities of the city. They, at the mean time, promoted the new needs of the city population, such as entertainment and services.

The population in the big cities were all kinds of mixtures, including businessman from outside of the city and other countries, artists, labors, dispatchers, candidates of the national exam, officials, visitors and army officials on civic duty. Dou, a visitor from the country, became a successful businessman after years of hard work. He, after his success, seek positions as government officials for the children of other businessmen.

3) Changes of the government

Tang restricted trading markets to the certain areas of the city. Song Dynasty had changed to having markets every street in the city and no curfew. The business had been promoted this way a lot. In order to adapt the development of the market, government had done the several changes:

(1) Goods for Royal family, government, and army were no longer redeployed all the time but bought from the market as well At the middle and later Tang, the pointed officials would procured some goods, such as food for the Royal families. Although, not all goods were purchased this way, the proportion was gradually increased.

(2) The government set up some offices joining the competition of the market, such as sections for medicine, hotels, house rental and food industry. Those were new from the past.

Sundries/Anecdotes provide essential historical information to study the city at middle age of China. Some are obvious false stories, but they did reflect the society of the city, and the experience and thinking of the authors of that period.

Sundries/Sanecdotes have not been studied intensively for its importance in the past. This article will provide examples to show how the urban market, businessman, and urban females were described in the sundries and anecdotes, and try to encourage conducting more studies.

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