Abstract

The story of Mengjiangnu (孟姜女) has always been a well-loved Chinese folk tale by all. However, the study of Chinese folk tales was neglected by scholars in the past. Compared with classic literature such as poems and philosophical texts, folk tales had not been held in high regard by scholars and researchers until the beginning of the 20th century.

This thesis has three main objectives. Firstly, it analyses the evolution of the story of Mengjiangnu, presenting an overview on the various stages of development through time. Secondly, it examines the social and historical backgrounds related to the story. Finally, it attempts a character study, based on a modern edition of the story written by Zhang Henshui.

The study shows that the story of Mengjiangnu had been enriched throughout the various stages of evolution. With each stage, details were added to the storyline and the characters became more colourful. In ancient China, various forms of literature and performing arts were employed as tools to present the story to the public. As a result, this folk tale has been translated through time and space, across China and into the present day.