

A Study of Ethnic Communications, Exchanges and Fusions in the Legend of the Great Wall in Gansu

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Abstract: The Great Wall is the crystallization of the spiritual and material civilization of the Chinese nation, and the legends passed down inside and outside the Great Wall contain the splendid culture created by all Chinese nationalities, which has a very rich connotation. The Chinese nation is a unified multi-ethnic country, and in the historical process of national unity, there have been splits, mergers, fusions and finally unification, and many themes of ethnic conflicts and national unity in this process can be found in the Great Wall legends. This paper analyzes the Great Wall legend which reflected the conditions of national interaction, exchanges and integration between ethnic groups inside and outside the Great Wall in different periods.

1. Introduction

The Great Wall is a symbol of the Chinese nation, and this great ancient structure has been built from the period of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States to the end of the Ming Dynasty, and was completed through the efforts of several dynasties in China. The Great Wall is the crystallization of the spiritual and material civilization of the Chinese nation, and the legends passed down inside and outside the Great Wall contain the splendid culture created by all Chinese nationalities, which has a very rich connotation. The Chinese nation is a unified multi-ethnic country, and in the historical process of national unity, there have been splits, mergers, fusions and finally unification, and many themes of ethnic conflicts and national unity in this process can be found in the Great Wall legends. The interpretation to the content of legends helps us to deeply understand conditions of ethnic communications, exchanges and fusions between ethnic groups inside and outside the Great Wall, and further understand the profound connotation of Chinese civilization, which has unparalleled inclusiveness and absorptive capacity.

2. Overview and History of the Great Wall in Gansu

The Great Wall built by successive dynasties in Gansu is at least six in number, including the Great Wall of Wei in the Warring States, the Great Wall of Qin in the Warring States, the Great Wall of Qin, the Great Wall of Han, the Great Wall of Sui and the Great Wall of Ming ^[1]. Some historical

materials and biographies still preserve information about the details of constructing the Great Wall through the ages, such as *Records of the Grand Historian - the Annals of Qin*, which states that Chu and Wei bordered with Qin, and Wei built the Great Wall from Zheng County northward to Shang County along the Luo River. According to *The Book of Sui - the Annals of Gaozu*, Hu people in Fen Zhou were sent to build the Great Wall for just 20 days and then stopped, Emperor Wen of Sui built the Great Wall to defend against the invasion of Turkic and Khitan. After thousands of years, some of the Great Wall sites are no longer available for verification. At present, two Great Wall sites that preserved completely in Gansu are the Han Great Wall and the Ming Great Wall.

The Han Great Wall is also called the "Great Wall of the Hexi Corridor" because it is mainly located in the Hexi Corridor area. According to the *Records of the Grand Historian - Da Yuan Biography* contains that it began to build in Han Dynasty, starting from west side of Lingju. Its first stop is Jiuquan County, then connect to the northwest country. In 121 B.C., the Phylactery General Huo Qubing led an expedition to Longxi and defeated the Xiongnu to regain Hexi, and Emperor Wu Di set up Wuwei and Jiuquan counties in Hexi area for the first time. In 115 B.C., Emperor Wu Di ordered Zhang Qian to make a mission to the West Regions, and as the war between Han and Xiongnu shifted to the northwest, the construction of the Great Wall was gradually extended to the west. In 111 B.C., the Western Han Dynasty completed the construction of two more counties, Zhangye and Dunhuang. This shows that the construction of the Great Wall during the Han Dynasty was not only necessary for military defense, but also for the development of the Western Regions.

The Ming Great Wall, which stretches from Jiayuguan in the west to Shanhaiguan in the east, is about 5,000 kilometers long, also known as the "Great Wall of Five Thousand Kilometers". The construction of the Ming Great Wall took more than 200 years, and the project was even more extensive, not only replacing the earthen construction with brick, but also adding cities, forts, gates, passes and entrances, forming a complete defense system. The Ming Great Wall in Gansu is the best preserved, with its ruins starting from Jiayuguan in the west, passing through Jiuquan, Zhangye, Minqin, Wuwei, Gulang and Jingtai, and extending southward along the Yellow River and entering the territory of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region at Heishan Narrows. In the sparsely populated Gobi region, the existence of the Great Wall guaranteed a stable life for the people at that time and fended off the invasion of the Mongolian and the Jurchen nobles.

In general, the Great Wall was built to meet the needs of military defense, but the object of defense varied from dynasty to dynasty. The Han Great Wall was built to expel the Xiongnu, the Sui Dynasty to defend against the Turkic and Khitan invasions, and the Ming Dynasty to protect the stability of the Central Plains from invasions of Mongolian and Jurchen people. The construction of the Great Wall geographically divided the Han people and the nomadic people of the north into two parts, forming two completely different frontiers, north and south. However, while treating the Great Wall as the geographical dividing line between the North and the South, it was also the intersection of two cultures, and "the mutual contact and spread of both north and south cultures began at the foot of the Great Wall^[2]." The phrase "Loved ones inside and outside the Great Wall" reflects the interaction and exchange of various ethnic groups at that time. The legends circulating inside and outside the Great Wall also reflect the historical process of turning war into peace, cultural exchange between ethnic groups, and gradually moving toward national unity, and is very important materials for learning and studying the culture of the Great Wall.

There are 33 legends of the Great Wall in Gansu^[3]. These legends may not represent history, but they can naturally make the narrators and listeners of the legends believe that the heroic figures guarding the border brought a stable and peaceful life to the people, and that the people of various nationalities lived in peace and harmony at the foot of the Great Wall. Legends give historical dimensions and humanistic connotations to the life of experience, which is what makes them meaningful. Interpreting these legends in relation to each other, we will know that the Great Wall

carries the history and rich cultural connotation of the development of the Chinese nation^[4].

3. Status of research on the Great Wall legends

There are many legends circulating around the Great Wall, and the Great Wall legends are an important part of the Great Wall culture. According to the content of the Great Wall legends, they can be divided into three main categories, including legends of Great Wall relics, legends of Great Wall construction and legends of Great Wall characters. These three types of legends are mainly in the form of single stories, mostly describing the origin, characteristics and names of the Great Wall passes, such as "Shanghai Pass", "Yumen Pass", etc.; because of the difficulties in building the Great Wall and the unavailability of human resources, they are often accomplished by the power of the gods and Buddhas when it's beyond human reach, and thus some legends such as "Transporting stones in Ice Road", "Erlang carrying mountain catches the Sun", "Zhang Guolao Repairing the Border", etc. are circulated; there are also some legends of historical figures who resisted foreign enemy, and these characters have long been heroes in the hearts of the people and endowed with mythology, like Hua Mulan, Yang Jiajun, Qi Meirong, Qi Jiguang, etc.. Based on historical figures and rich imagination of the people, these legends have been passed down orally till now, showing the vitality and appeal of oral art.

Secondly, the theme of "Lady Meng Jiang Crying on the Great Wall" is an important part of the study of Great Wall legends. Gu Jiegang's study of the legend of Lady Meng Jiang is a milestone in the academic history of folk literature. Mr. Gu regarded the legend of Meng Jiangnu as an independent system and explored its laws of change in the process of historical evolution, thus creating a new paradigm of folk literature research, the historical evolution method. After this, a group of scholars also began to pay attention to and study the legend of Lady Meng Jiang, such as Jia Zhi's "Research on the Story of Lady Meng Jiang," Duan Baolin's "The Evolution and Circulation of the Legend of Lady Meng Jiang," and Kuang Fu's "A Brief Discussion on the Generation and Development of the Story of Lady Meng Jiang. In general, the story of Lady Meng Jiang weeping at the Great Wall reflects the grievances of the people who suffered from the servitude in building the Great Wall at that time, and the longing for tranquility and peace, as a result of families separated by years of war.

In recent years, research on the Great Wall legends has paid more attention to the fusion of various ethnic groups along the Great Wall in the course of historical evolution, especially the economic, cultural, military, and political interaction, exchange and integration between the Han and other ethnic groups. For example, the monikers generated during the circulation of ancient history and legends can be regarded as signs of space-time consciousness of the inherited groups and objects of community identity, providing a theoretical perspective for understanding the construction of the beginning stages of the Chinese national community^[5]. The Great Wall was built over thousands of years and is a symbol of the history of the Chinese nation, and the term "the Great Wall" has an irreplaceable cultural value for the Chinese community. The construction of the Great Wall passed through different provinces, and the Great Wall culture and legends with regional characteristic have been passed down. The Great Wall built in the Warring States, Qin, Sui, Song and Ming dynasties is located in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, and legends such as Junzijin, the Tea Horse Market, and Rooster Crows in Three Provinces are passed down at the foot of the Great Wall. Interpreting these legends and the Great Wall culture, we can find that Ordos region is a typical area where the farming culture and nomadic culture are intertwined, a part of the grassland Silk Road that must be passed through, a focal point of ethnic integration, and a place where the pluralistic national conditions are concentrated. The main purpose of the Ming Great Wall was to defend Mongolia from the south, however, the Mongolian and Chinese peoples in the Ordos region have

long been engaged in cultural and economic interactions at the foot of the Ming Great Wall, and even some towns specializing in trade have gradually formed, with frequent interaction between the people of the Central Plains and the frontier.

In general, the Great Wall legends are very rich in content, and scholars have collected and organized a large number of oral legends, and the compiled and published folk literature has provided valuable historical value of textual materials for the study of the Great Wall culture. The Chinese nation is a unified multi-ethnic country, and in the historical process of national unification, there have been splits, mergers and fusions, and finally towards unification, and many themes of ethnic conflicts and national unity in this process can be found in the Great Wall legends. At present, there are relatively few studies on this theme, and if it can be interpreted in the context of a specific geographical region, it will have significant meaning for understanding the unparalleled inclusiveness and absorptive capacity of Chinese civilization.

4. The Great Wall legends in Gansu

4.1 Caiqi Fortress

There is an ancient castle, named Caiqi Fortress on the Great Wall about 100 kilometers southwest of the Minqin County, Gansu Province^{[6]385}. There is a legend about the origin of Caiqi Fortress in the local area. It is said that thousands of years ago, this place was a good place for farming and herding with beautiful mountains and rivers and moderate climate. Many people from the central plains started farming here and settled down, so the place slowly flourished. The Xiongnu people in the north know this place and often sent troops to invade, seize cattle and sheep, property, food, so that people cannot live in peace. Later, a young man named Cai, who was a master of pen and sword, volunteered to go to the capital to ask for troops. The emperor made him General Zhen Yuan, allowing him to recruit troops and horses to guard his hometown. After returning to his hometown, General Cai built a barracks and a beacon pier in the city, and trained troops in the barracks all the time, later, he led 800 soldiers to defeat 3,000 Xiongnu soldiers. From then on, the Xiongnu did not dare to commit any more crimes, and the area was stable for many years. After the death of General Cai in his old age, the flag of Cai was placed on the pier of Cai flag forever, flying with the wind. People then called this castle Caiqi Fortress, until now.

This place name legend tells the origin of "Caiqi Fortress", in fact, the legend also contains the history of the Chinese immigrants from central plains. At the end of the Qin Dynasty, Xiongnu occupied the southern part of Heitao area, and the Han Dynasty faced a territorial conflict with Xiongnu at the beginning of its establishment. According to *Records of the Grand Historian - Biography of Xiongnu*, Xiongnu had no entry into the fortress and the Han had no exit from the fortress, indicating that by the Han Dynasty, the Han people of the Central Plains and the nomads (Xiongnu) in the north had their own areas of activity, and it was the Great Wall that served as a dividing line between them. A line of defense was built between the Han nation and the surrounding minority groups, especially the Xiongnu in the north, creating an isolation from each other and no communicating. The *Book of Han Dynasty - Biography of Xiongnu* records that Chanyu said "the south of the Great Wall belongs to the Son of Heaven, the north of the Great Wall belongs to Chanyu, the violation of the fort would be reported to the government, and the surrendered shall not be accepted.

In the Western Han Dynasty, with the growing strength of the state and military, Emperor Wu of Han built the Great Wall on a large scale to fight against Xiongnu. After the Han Dynasty regained Hexi area in 121 B.C., the construction of the Great Wall was extended to the west, and the "four counties of Hexi" were established one by one. In order to enrich the border reserve in Hexi corridor, the Han Dynasty accompanied the construction of the Great Wall with the relegation of people to

garrison the border and open up wasteland and grow food grain. According to *The Book of Later Han Dynasty - Biography of Xiongnu*, After Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty defeated Xiongnu in the north of the desert, built barriers, pavilions and flint, built outer cities, and set up garrisons to guard them. The scene described in the legend of Caiqi fortress, "many people from the central plains opened up the wasteland and established their families here, so the place slowly flourished", is a true depiction of the large-scale migration of people from the central plains to the cantonment along the Great Wall, and the places along the Great Wall gradually formed the settlements of Han people, and the Great Wall gradually changed from a military line of defense to a boundary between the north and the south. The Han people living at the foot of the Great Wall and the minority groups in the north lived in the same area for a long time, and they naturally interacted and exchanged in their common production life, and gradually coalesced together. During the Han Dynasty, for the sake of trade, "mutual markets" were set up at the border crossings along the Great Wall to further promote the interaction between the peoples of the north and the south.

4.2 Female General Qi Meirong

There is a story of a female general and the Mongolian people made a truce, happening in the small town on the hill directly south of Jiayuguan Nanmao Laiquan Fort. The southern mountain passes of the Qilian Mountains were repeatedly attacked by the Mongolians, and Su state had no peace, so a female general named Qi Meirong was sent to guard the southern mountain area without any other choice. It is said that this female general was so heroic and talented, both civil and military, and she was famous in Hexi area. Once, the Mongol leader led a thousand knights straight to the South Mountain, Qi Meirong calmly dressed up in battle, and Mongol general was captured alive on horseback after a few rounds. The leader thought that he would die for sure, but General Qi treated him with courtesy and set up a feast to talk with him. General Qi said, "We are all Chinese people, we should live in harmony with each other for the sake of righteousness, why do you repeatedly invade? If you have difficulties in herding, you can settle in the area of Hongquan, southwest of the pass. As long as you do not come to the mainland to invasive again, I will let you go." The Mongol general was quite moved, and he knew that the area around South Hongquan was rich in water and grass, so he agreed to do so. Both sides stopped the war and withdrew their troops. From then on, the Mongols grazed outside the pass of the Hongquan area, and lived in peace and harmony with the Han people.

In this legend, General Qi Meirong hosted a feast for the Mongol general and asked this question: "We are all Chinese people, we should live in harmony with each other for the sake of righteousness, why do you repeatedly invade? If you have difficulties in herding, you can settle in the area of Hongquan, southwest of the pass. As long as you do not come to the mainland to invasive again, I will let you go." During the Han Dynasty, the Great Wall was not only a boundary for defense, but also gradually became a line of cultural intersection between the northern and southern people, which was agreed to some extent by both sides. The repeated wars between the Han and northern peoples boiled down to a struggle between the farming people of the central plains and the nomadic people of the north. This struggle had not only political and military factors but also economic and cultural aspects.

The large differences in geography caused a long and fierce struggle between the farming people of the central plains and the nomadic people of the north. Wang Changling, a border poet of the Tang Dynasty, wrote in "Two Songs from the Army", "At nightfall, I was facing the great wilderness, and worrying about my return in the cold wind. There are ten thousand miles of desert, where do the birds stay." It can be seen that the natural geography north of the Great Wall is not suitable for farming, making the economic life of nomads relatively unstable. "The relationship

between nomadic and agrarian cultures in ancient China was based on economic complementary [6]." This economic complementary was of three kinds, the main elements of which were tribute trade, mutual market trade, and warfare. The nomads in the north traded horses, cattle, sheep, and dairy products with the Han for grain, clothing, tea, and other supplies to ensure their daily needs. When the normal tribute and mutual market could not be carried out and the economic needs of the nomads in the north could not be met it would lead to war as an abnormal form of complementary, which precisely reflects the economic and cultural unity of the historical farming and nomadic peoples.

Throughout China's thousands of years of history, despite the close relationship between farming and nomadic people, the conflict between them has never been well resolved. This was the case during the Han Dynasty, and by the Song Dynasty, the inhabitants of the city were still subject to repeated incursions by the Mongols. The female general Qi Meirong proposed a truce and placed the Mongol tribes in the fertile area of Hongquan, southwest of the pass. Because the Mongolian nomads on the Loess Plateau are mainly pastoralists, the two sides were able to live in harmony and peace naturally by solving the need for nomadic animal husbandry. The years of wars inside and outside the Great Wall made the people unhappy and their families broken. People longed for a peaceful and stable life, and they orally extolled heroic figures like the female general Qi Meirong, who brought peaceful coexistence between ethnics and a stable life for the ordinary people, which became a beautiful story for a time.

4.3 Wind Bells and Camel Bells

Jiayuguan Pass, from west to east, has three towers built in turn. Each tower is three stories high, with wind chimes hanging in all four corners of each flying eaves, a total of thirty-six. In the windy and sandy Silk Road, messengers and merchants who traveled long distances could identify the direction of travel and estimate the distance from the pass according to the bells. During the Ming Dynasty, the court only levied taxes on foreigners entering and leaving the Jiayuguan Pass, and there were no restrictions on entry and exit for Han and other ethnic groups inside and outside the pass as long as their identities were verified. In the Qing Dynasty, the regulations were changed so that all people, regardless of their ethnicity, paid a "passing tariff" of 120 coins to enter or leave the pass. The poor people always mingled with the camel caravan of merchants to avoid the passing tariff. However, in windy weather, the wind chimes on the city tower sounded the same as the camel bells, making people confused about the authenticity. There was a Uyghur lad who was in business with a Han inside the pass. His mother had been living on the grassland outside the pass by herding sheep. Someone in the camel caravan sent a message to the young man that his mother was sick and asked him to come home to visit. The young man was so worried that he couldn't pay the "passing tariff" with the money he had left to buy food, so he thought he could blend in with the camel caravan and leave the pass. In the evening, the young man looked for the sound and found that the wind chimes were tinkling on the city tower. He waited for several days without seeing any camel caravan. Finally, with the help of an old man, he flew through the pass and was reunited with his dying mother.

Jiayuguan was the westernmost end of the Great Wall of the Ming Dynasty, one of the main passes on the Silk Road to and from the Central Plains, and a symbol of the West's entry into the Central Plains from Western Regions. In the *History of Ming Dynasty - Western Regions*, the coordinates of the Jiayuguan Pass are used when describing the orientation of the Western Regions, for example, the geographical location of Hami is "800 kilometers east to Jiayuguan, the land of Han Iwu [7]." From the middle of the Ming dynasty, the Tufan repeatedly harassed Jiayuguan, and after the deterioration of relations between the Ming dynasty and the Tufan, Jiayuguan became a

stronghold against ethnic groups outside the pass. This geographical and ethnic boundary formed after the Ming boundary was moved from Hami to Jiayuguan also reflected the Ming policy of "distinguishing between Chinese and foreigners", and Jiayuguan thus became an ethnic barrier^[8].

In the Qing dynasty, Lin Zexu was exiled to Xinjiang for destruction of opium, and when he passed through Jiayuguan, he said, "The strict pass is a hundred-foot border between the east and the west, and ten thousand miles of conscripts are stationed in front of the pass. The pass would close right after soldier get out the city, the tears wet the clothes when they look back to the direction of central plains." Out of the pass means leaving the homeland, people can't help having tears of sorrow. In the eyes of the literati, the Jiayuguan walls were a sign of entering the Central Plains or leaving one's homeland. In fact, in the Qing Dynasty, the system of leaving and entering the pass became more strict. The Qing dynasty set up a strict inspection system at the Jiayuguan Pass, which deepened the alienation of people from central plains to the West Region. "The Jiayuguan Pass was opened at 7 am and closed at 5 pm daily, and those who entered the pass still performed cross-examination, while those who left the pass listened to their journey^[9]." The strict inspection system for those entering and leaving the pass hindered ethnic integration and made the Jiayuguan pass more of "a hub between China and the West". In the second half of the 19th century, the number of people entering the Western region gradually increased, and the alienation of the ethnic groups inside the pass from the minorities outside the pass slowly weakened. By the end of the Qing Dynasty (1884), Xinjiang was established as a province, and the integration of ethnic groups inside and outside the Great Wall was achieved, so that the Jiayuguan Pass, which was "a strict pass of 100 feet", could no longer bear the reputation. This explains the historical reason behind the legend that during the Ming Dynasty, Han Chinese and other nationalities did not pay "tariff" when they left the pass, but during the Qing Dynasty, all nationalities paid "passing tariff".

From the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty, Han and ethnic minorities were divided, integrated, and finally united for about 500 years. Many of the interaction and exchange between ethnic groups during this historical process are related to the Great Wall, and will certainly be reflected in the Great Wall legend.

5. The transformation of legends and the connotation of the Great Wall in Gansu

After Qin Shihuang unified China, he implemented the policy of "the same rules for vehicles, the same texts for books, the same measures for gauges, and the same customs for people". In order to ensure the stability of the people's life during the Qin dynasty, Qin Shihuang built the Great Wall on the foundation of the Qin Great Wall built during the Warring States period and "renovated" it in order to resist the invasion of minority groups in the northwest. The main purpose of the Great Wall was to serve as a geographical barrier and military facility. As mentioned earlier, the south of the Great Wall belongs to the Son of Heaven, the north of the Great Wall belongs to Chanyu, the violation of the fort would be reported to the government, and the surrendered shall not be accepted. In other words, during this period, the Great Wall was used as a geographical dividing line to separate the peoples of the north and the south.

By the Han Dynasty, garrisoning and cantonment caused a large number of Han Chinese to migrate from the Central Plains to the area around the present-day Hexi Corridor and settle along the inner side of the wall. Out of economic and livelihood needs, Han and ethnic minorities inside and outside the Great Wall began to interact. The Han traded grain, cloth and tea for cattle, sheep, horses and dairy products from the ethnic minorities, thus forming a "mutual market" trade. At that time, there are "pass markets" at the first-line passes on the Great Wall, and according to *Records of the Grand Historian - Biography of Xiongnu*, Xiongnu under Chanyu were all pro-Han and traveled under the Great Wall, which indicates that the interactions between ethnic groups inside and outside

the Great Wall were more frequent. The economic interaction inevitably brought about the exchange and dissemination of the two cultures from the north and the south and enhanced cultural identity. Thus, the Great Wall of the Han Dynasty was much more than a military barrier; the collision of two cultures at the foot of the Great Wall made it a line of intersection between Han and minority cultures.

Since the Han Dynasty, the struggle between Han and minority groups along and beyond the Great Wall has been uninterrupted until the outbreak of the An-Shi Rebellion, the Tubo army moved south to invade and occupy the Helong region. The Tang dynasty's power was declining rapidly, and spatial perceptions also shifted from the early Tang Dynasty's Chinese-Foreigner family to a different one, which is that Chinese and foreigners are different, viewing the An-shi Rebellion as a rebellion of the Rong Di against China. This situation had been continued into the Ming and Qing dynasties, the harshness of the department and entry is the embodiment of the "Chinese and foreigners are different" ethnic policy. As relations between the Ming and Qing dynasties and the Tubo continued to deteriorate, the Jiayuguan became a barrier between nations. It was not until the end of the Qing Dynasty, when the number of people entering and leaving the West Region was increasing and the late Qing Dynasty established a province in Xinjiang, that the integration of Han Chinese and ethnic minorities inside and outside the Great Wall was achieved.

Conflict and unity among ethnic groups has always been one of the themes of the Great Wall legends. Before the unification of the various ethnic groups, the Chinese nation experienced splitting, merging, integrating and finally unification. This historical process reflects the unparalleled inclusiveness and absorptive capacity of Chinese civilization. Today, we no longer see the Great Wall as a military barrier or a line of intersection of cultures, but as a symbol of the Chinese nation and a great project forged by millions of Chinese people.

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