

A Study on Traditional Villages and Towns in Lintan County, Gannan Prefecture

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Abstract: *The human history of Lintan County in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture can be traced back to 4000 years ago. It has undergone the historical erosion of the Neolithic Age, Xia and Zhou, Tang, Northern Song, and Ming dynasties, and is also a fusion zone of Tuyuhun King, Tubo King, and Han ethnic culture, forming a traditional culture with local characteristics. In Gannan Prefecture, there is a relatively special type of culture mainly composed of Han, Hui, and Tibetan culture. Through field research, the author visited the traditional conservation villages and towns in Lintan County, and preliminarily constructed the characteristics of the area from its characteristics (site selection, layout, form, etc.) and the characteristics of traditional building construction (courtyard composition, residential functions). The reasons for its formation, including military defense, agricultural natural resources, and watershed traffic arteries and other factors, were analyzed.*

Keywords: *Gannan Prefecture, Lintan County, Traditional villages and buildings*

1. Introduction

In early February 2023, the research team conducted a one week survey of traditional villages and towns in Lintan County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The research route starts from Lanzhou to Zhanqihe Village, Shimen Township, Lintan County — Lixin Village and Mogou Village in Wangqi Town — Taozhou Weicheng in Xincheng Town — Chenghou Village — Hongbaozi Village in Liushun Town — Qianjiazhai Village in Changchuan Township — Guzhan Village in Guzhan Town — County seat of Lintan County. Before the research, the literature materials on the history, geography, traditional villages, architecture, and cultural relics protection of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture were sorted out. In the field research, the author visited and selected representative residential buildings for evaluation and mapping, formed the traditional village environment in Lintan County, drew typical residential courtyard drawings, and classified and sorted out electronic archives.

2. Overview of Lintan County

Lintan County (formerly known as Taozhou) is located in the eastern part of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province, bordering Min County to the east, Kangle and Weiyuan counties to the north, and Zhuoni County to the southwest on both sides. The county has jurisdiction over 11 towns, 5 townships, and 141 administrative villages, covering an area of 1557.68 square kilometers. It is located in a mountainous and hilly area with an altitude of 2209-3926 meters. In 2020, the total population of the county was 127400 people (the seventh population census), there are 17 ethnic groups in total, including Han, Hui, Tibetan, Mongols, Uygur, Miao, Zhuang, Manchu, Tujia, Dongxiang, Tu, Salar, Nu, Baoan, Yugu, Jing and Jinuo, of which the Han accounts for 70.57% of the total population. The Hui ethnic group accounts for 16.93% of the total population. The Tibetan ethnic group accounts for 12.39% of the population (sixth population census).

The county implements a combination of agriculture as the main production method, supplemented by animal husbandry and forestry, and belongs to a high-altitude agricultural county in Gansu Province. The main crops cultivated include barley, beans, potato, and rapeseed. In recent years, the planting area of Tibetan traditional Chinese medicine and plateau summer vegetables has also been continuously expanding. The livestock industry is implementing the strategy of "complementary agriculture and animal husbandry", actively developing commodity animal husbandry in agricultural areas, with a focus on cow and sheep industry bases, and a total of 176600 heads of various livestock in stock.

2.1. Historical Evolution of Lintan County

Archaeological discoveries from Xincheng, Longyuan, Chenqi, Shimen, and other places in Lintan County show that during the Neolithic period 4000 years ago, the local area had already flourished and produced Qijia culture, Xindian culture, and Yangshao culture. Xia, Shang, and Zhou designated China as the Kyushu period and belonged to the territory of Yongzhou. During the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, it was occupied by the Qiang people. Qin is located in Lintao County, Longxi County (not known as Lintao County today). It is called Lintao County in Han Dynasty. During the late period of the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (from Yongchu to Yongxia), it was occupied by Tuyuhun. In the fifth year of the Sui Dynasty's Daye reign (609 AD), four prefectures were established after pacifying Tuyuhun. In the first year of Tang Zhenguan (628 AD), due to the formation of mountains and rivers, the country was ordered to merge into ten provinces, belonging to Taozhou, Longyou Road. During the An Shi Rebellion, there were several twists and turns before abandoning it and falling into Tibet. In March of the 13th year of the Tianbao era (754 AD), the governor of Longyou and Hexi, Ge Shuhan, defeated the Tubo Empire and regained the Nine Quds of Heyuan. Later, Tubo was captured again, and it was not until the restoration of Longyou in Dazhong. During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, Tubo was weak and often sent envoys to pay tribute to Later Tang, thus it became the property of Later Tang.

In the early Northern Song Dynasty, the Lintan area was occupied by the Tubo Masha (also known as the Muzheng) GuSiluo regime, and was called Lintao. It was later trapped in Jin Dynasty. In the twelfth year of Jiading (1219), it was acquired by Mongolian soldiers. During the Yuan Dynasty, it belonged to Hezhou Road. In January of the fourth year of the Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty (1371), it was under the jurisdiction of Hezhou Wei, and the old city was established as a military and civilian residence in Taozhou. In the twelfth year of the Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty (1379), General Mu Ying led his army on a westward expedition and built a city in the new city. It is still relatively well preserved, known as the Taozhou Acropolis. In the 13th year of the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty (1748), the Taozhou Department was under the jurisdiction of Gongchang Prefecture, Gansu Province. In the second year of the Republic of China (1913), Lintan County was reestablished.

In August 1936, the Long March of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army passed through Lintan. After the Red Army captured Lintan from four sides, the Soviet government was established in the Xincheng area. The Red Army advanced in two directions, east and north. In June 1953, the county was relocated from the new city to the old city. In November of the same year, Lintan County was transferred to Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (hereinafter referred to as Gannan Prefecture).

2.2. Geographical and Climatic Characteristics of Lintan County

Lintan County is located in the transitional intersection zone between the Loess Plateau and the Qinghai Tibet Plateau, with a terrain that is high in the west and low in the east, forming a landform characterized by high mountains, hills, and deep valleys. There is a significant difference in height. The climate belongs to the high-altitude cold region. Most areas in the southwest of Gannan have more precipitation, with unclear four seasons and large temperature differences. Compared to other counties and districts, Lintan County is relatively dry, with more precipitation in the northeast and less in the southwest. It has the characteristics of a high-altitude climate where spring and autumn are connected, with slow warming in spring, fast cooling in autumn, dry and wet in winter, and cold but not cold. The annual average temperature is 3.2 °C; The annual precipitation ranges from 383.2 to 668.2 millimeters, with 2314 hours of sunshine.

The main rivers within the territory include the Tao River and Yangsha River basins that run through the southern part of the county, and the Beiyemu River basin that runs through Yeliguan. The water resources are relatively abundant, with an exploitable capacity of 172800 kilowatts. Currently, there are Qingshishan Hydropower Station, Luertai Hydropower Station, and Dushanzi Hydropower Station, with less than 10% of the development capacity. As of 2010, there are non-metallic mineral resources such as limestone, gypsum stone, granite, mineral water, and antimony, gold, etc. in Lintan County. The storage capacity of gypsum stone is abundant, and it is a first-class gypsum ore with an average ore grade of over 98%.

2.3. Social Culture of Lintan County

2.3.1. History and Culture

Lintan County has a history of being close to the mainland and belongs to the Han region. It is a mixed residential area of Han Tibetan and Han Hui, and a transitional area of the Tibetan region. It is a border fortress located along the Tang Dynasty ancient road, covering the northern part of Hehuang, controlling Fanrong in the west, and connecting Longyou in the east. It is one of the four major tea and horse companies. After the opening of the Taoyang ancient road, it drove commercial trade, material exchange, and market formation, making Lintan County a commodity distribution center for Longyou and a hub for Han Tibetan trade.

The ancient pottery unearthed from the Mogou site in Chenqi Township shows that Yangshao culture is active in the local area. The frog shaped patterned painted pottery unearthed at the Diaoping Site and the cultural relics and ancient building structures unearthed at the Pipa Village Site in Xinbao Township reflect the characteristics of Majiayao Culture and Qijia Culture. All of them confirm that the ancestors of Taozhou demonstrated their ancient and unique regional culture with high intelligence and strong artistic expression 5000 years ago.

The Western Han Dynasty migrated disaster victims to Taozhou, bringing advanced production technology and cultural arts from the Central Plains. From the ruins of the ancient Battle of Niutou City and the unearthed cultural relics from the ancient city village, it can be seen that during the Western Jin Dynasty, when Tuyuhun occupied the old city, defense was the main focus. The main city was built with walls, and there was a watchtower outside the city, similar to the role of a Tibetan defense tower. Believing in Buddhism, the first temple in Lintan was built, and Buddhist culture spread in Taozhou from then on.

During the reign of Tang Tianbao, Li Sheng and Li Su in Lintan were famous generals of the Tang Dynasty, who were known as "border generals and towered over the Western Regions". Cen Shen, the great poet of the frontier fortress, visited Taozhou twice and wrote famous works such as "Farewell to the Fourth Day of Lintao Guesthouse"; Poets Du Fu and Gao Shi have also written wonderful poems such as "Gifts to Brother Shu Kaifu Han" and "Congratulations to Brother Shu Dafu for Breaking Nine Songs". During this period, there were a gathering of people in Lintan and a scene of cultural prosperity. It is rumored that the name of Lintan County was established in the Tang Dynasty due to its proximity to the water pool.

During the Ming Dynasty, Muying led his army on a westward expedition and immigrants migrated to this place to build the Taozhou Acropolis. So far, Lintan County has preserved the headgear, hairstyle, and clothing with the Jianghuai style that were passed down here at that time. The temple fair culture of Taozhou, such as running dry boats and eighteen dragon gods entering the city, has also evolved through activities such as the Jiangnan Dragon God Competition.

After the mid to late Qing Dynasty, dozens of individual businesses appeared in both new and old cities, and to this day, there are still distribution centers in Taozhou commercial centers.

2.3.2. Folk Culture

Every year, there are 10000 people pulling ropes in the Yuanxiao (Filled round balls made of glutinous rice-flour for Lantern Festival) at Chengguan, Lintan County. This traditional sport tug of war has a history of more than 600 years. It has been awarded the National Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Guinness World Records of Shanghai for its more than 10000 participants. At the same time, Han Tibetan farmers in various townships in Lintan have the custom of kneading face lanterns, which include several types of auspicious lanterns, lunar lanterns, and zodiac lanterns. Light the lamp first for growth and then for youth, and show respect for the guests before oneself. During the Dragon Boat Festival, the Dragon God Competition in Taozhou Acropolis and the folk temple fairs throughout the county have enriched folk life.

2.3.3. Red Culture

In 1936, the Red Fourth Front Army held the famous "Taozhou Conference" here, establishing the first Soviet regime in Gannan Prefecture. Currently, Xincheng retains intact Soviet government sites and is an important patriotic education base to commemorate revolutionary martyrs and history.

2.3.4. Ethnic Culture

There are Lintan Muslim Upper Temple, Huasi Temple, Nansi Temple and Xiaonan Temple, Xisi

Temple, etc. in the county seat of Lintan County. The upper temple has a 7-story minaret, 27 meters high, which is rare in the northwest. There is also one Christian Church, one Buddhist and Taoist temple, and a Farmers' Cultural Palace. There is evidence that only the language family of Lintan in Gannan Prefecture belongs to the Central Plains Mandarin region. [1] In 1960, the Han ethnic group was still dominant, but by 2000, due to mixed marriages among different ethnic groups, the Tibetan population had reached 90%. [2] Forming a gathering place for the integration of diverse ethnic cultures.

3. Characteristics of Traditional Villages in Lintan County

Among 141 administrative villages in 5 townships and 11 towns of Lintan, there are currently 6 national level traditional villages, including Lixin Village and Mogou Village in Wangqi Town, Taozhou Weicheng in Xincheng Town, Hongbaozi Village in Liushun Town, Qianjiashai Village in Changchuan Township, and Guzhan Village in Guzhan Town.

3.1. Traditional Villages

Shimen Township is located in the central eastern part of Lintan County, in the high mountain valley area, facing two mountains from north to south. The eastern boundary of the village is the tributary of the Tao River, and the highway (S326) forms a dual water resource drive along the Tao River. Along the way, villages have formed a new appearance through construction, with most of them facing the river valley, crossing the road, or built at the foot of the mountain, forming a clustered village form.

Wangqi Town is located in the eastern boundary of Lintan County, belonging to the high mountain area. The slopes in Lixin Village and Mogou Village are relatively large, forming a zigzag road with main roads. Courtyards and houses are built along the slope, forming a stepped village feature. The Mogou Site (including tombs) is located on the platform on the southwest bank of the Taohe River, 300 meters northwest of Mogou Village and at the border with Minxian County. It is home to prehistoric cultures such as Yangshao, Majiayao, Qijia, and Siwa, as well as remains from the Song Dynasty. It is currently the largest central settlement discovered in the upper reaches of the Taohe River during the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Xincheng is located in the central part of Lintan County. The mountainous terrain is undulating, high in the north and low in the south. Xincheng was originally the Taozhou Weicheng. In the early Ming Dynasty, the Taozhou Weicheng was located in the old Taobao. In the twelfth year of the Hongwu reign (1379), after taking Taozhou, Xincheng was built in the north of Taozhou and in the south of Donglongshan, setting up the Xincheng Weicheng. The new city is built due to the mountainous terrain, with a height in the northeast and a height in the southwest. The perimeter of the city is over 5400 meters, with a wall height of 11 meters (southern city), a wall base width of 7.92 meters, and a closed top of 6.6 meters. The city walls on the east, west, and south sides are straight, and are built along the mountains in the northeast and northwest. The original moat was 5 meters deep and 4 meters wide. There are 16 horse faces and 9 corner piers on the city wall. There are watchtowers built on the city wall, with city gates on all sides. The east, west, and north gates house the Wengcheng. There is a new Chenghuang Temple in the city, with a courtyard. It is currently the most intact Ming Dynasty ancient city in Gansu Province. Outside the city to the north are Dashishan (Duoshan) and other mountains. To the southwest of the city is Yandun Mountain, to the southeast is Renshou Mountain (Dunpo Mountain), to the southeast is Purple Crab Mountain (Leizu Mountain, Dingjia Mountain), and to the south is Honghua Mountain, all of which are remnants of the middle branch of Xixie Mountain. The Acropolis is surrounded by four mountains. There are still remnants of the beacon tower ruins in the northwest and northeast mountains, which are provincial-level cultural relics protection units. The layout of the streets in the city is basically still present. The Chenghuang Temple on the North Street is located on the central platform of the Acropolis, facing south from north. Its axis is symmetrical. It is 51 meters long from east to west and 130 meters long from south to north. The existing main hall, east and west verandas, mountain gate towers and east and west corridors are Qing Dynasty buildings. It used to be the official residence of Tubo leaders in the Northern Song Dynasty. In the Yuan Dynasty, it was the residence of Kublai Khan, the Emperor Shizu of the Yuan Dynasty, when he went south to capture Dali. It was changed to Chenghuang Temple in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Zhu De, Xu Xiangqian, and Li Xiannian led the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army to conquer the new city and establish the Lintan Soviet government. In 1943, the Great Uprising of Farmers and Herdsmen of various ethnic groups in Gannan, led by Living Buddhas Lebafo and Wang Zhongjia in Zhuoni Shuimochuan, also broke out here. Some residential buildings in the city are well preserved and have distinct characteristics.

Liushun Town is located in a valley area, with a terrain of high in the north and low in the south. Hongbaozi Village is a provincial-level cultural relic protection unit, founded in the 13th year of the Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty (380 AD). It was built by Liu Gui, a hereditary hundred households from Taozhou, as a camp for recruiting and defending troops, managing garrisons, and collecting grain and grass affairs. In the 25th year of the Hongwu reign (1392), Liu Gui was injured and passed away during the Southern Expedition with the army. His son Liu Shun inherited the position of "Hundred households under the management of the left garrison of Taozhou", and the place was officially named Liu Shunchuan. The center of the village is surrounded by a rammed earth city wall in a square shape, and there is a modern lamp mountain tower built on the city gate. The former residence of Qing Dynasty Liu Gui in the north of the village has been preserved as a rammed earth courtyard, while other Liu's courtyards have been renovated along with most of the village's residential areas.

Qianjiazhai Village in Changchuan Township is a provincial-level cultural relic protection unit. The terrain is relatively open, and the original city is enclosed in a rectangular shape. Covering an area of 14500 square meters, there are existing South Gate and West Gate. The castle walls are made of compacted loess, with a foundation width of about 7.5 meters, a residual height of 7 meters, a top width of 8 meters, and a compacted layer thickness of 0.1-0.15 meters. The Qianjiazhai Fortress was built by Ming Dynasty general Min Dayong when he came to Tao with Mu Ying. As Min Dayong was from Nanjing, a Hui ethnic group, there is one Qianjiazhai Mosque in the Qianjiazhai Fortress. Many villages use gray brick splicing or brick carving decoration.

Guzhan Town is located in the western region of Lintan County, bordering Azitan Township in Zhuoni County in both the west and north. The terrain is high in the northwest and low in the southeast, forming a mountainous valley area. The Niutou City Site is located 500 meters northwest of Guzhan Village. The city is built on a mountain and surrounded by rivers, with an irregular quadrilateral layout. It connects the inner and outer cities to the south and north. The perimeter is 910 meters, the south wall is 40 meters long and narrow, and the north wall is 240 meters wide. It looks like a cow's head, so it is called "Niutou City" or "Yangtou City". The outer city is 127 meters long from north to south, 250 meters wide from east to west, and has a circumference of 744 meters. The walls are well preserved, with a base width of 7 meters, a residual height of 5-7 meters, and a compacted layer thickness of 0.1-0.15 meters. Both the inner and outer city gates face north, with a width of 3.5 meters. There are corner piers, horse faces, and gate piers in the inner and outer cities. There is a 20 meter wide and 5-6 meter deep moat outside the northern wall of the outer city. There is a beacon tower in the northeast corner, and a square earth platform with a bottom side length of 29 meters and a height of about 5 meters is located 300 meters northwest, called the Dianjiang Platform. The city site is well preserved and has important value for studying the history of urban construction and the history of Jin and Tang dynasties.

Among the surveyed village and city sites, mountainous village and city sites are the main ones, with over 50% of housing construction entities located on complex mountainous landforms. The construction coverage area may have cross sections with an average slope of ≥ 5 degrees (1x1km) and a maximum vertical cutting depth of $>25\text{m}$ (2x2km). (The maximum cutting depth refers to the relative height between the lowest point of the valley bottom and the highest point at the top of the canyon. The minimum cutting depth refers to the relative height between the lowest point of the valley bottom and the lowest point at the top of the canyon.)

3.2. Traditional Residential Buildings

Village houses in Lintan County are tailored to local conditions. Built along the mountain, it is mostly a pit courtyard, or the first floor is dark and enclosed as a storage room for livestock, and the second floor is open and bright, making the first floor roof a sundeck for use. The main house stands on a pedestal with five to seven rooms, with a central hall in the middle, adjacent to a living room or a kang, followed by a kitchen. For those with earbuds, the main room is concave inward, forming a front porch, which is the transitional space between the courtyard and the main room. For those without earbuds, the rooms should be arranged in a row. The main structure of residential buildings is civil engineering, with wooden beams and columns bearing the load. The walls are compacted with soil, and there are branches in the middle to form a network to strengthen the toughness of the walls. The roof is continued to use rafters and purlins, with wooden boards or adobe spacing in the middle. Originally, it was mostly a flat roof with a sundeck, but now it is mostly a sloping roof after repair. Due to the abundant seasonal rainfall in some areas, the slope of the roof is increased compared to other parts of Gansu.

In flat terrain, most residential buildings are in the form of three courtyard houses, with fewer forming four courtyard houses with inverted seats. Generally, large households may have them. The main gates

of the courtyard are oriented uniformly, with two gates. The center of the first gate is often used for vehicles, horses, and livestock, and the side doors are generally slightly smaller and more resilient to pass through. Its decoration represents the symbol of economic and social status. During the survey, only one place has three arch of wooden architecture decorations.

4. Factors affecting the formation of villages

4.1. Military Strategic Defense Requirements

There are more than 100 traditional villages in Lintan, including more than 30 defensive military strongholds. The territory belongs to the defense between the ethnic boundaries between the Xiongnu and Tuyuhun, Tuyuhun and Tubo, Tubo and Tang, as well as the defense of internal stability and joint defense between villages and towns. So a system of military strategy and defensive settlements has been formed. Both Lixin and Mogou villages in Wangqi Town can see the defensive city walls outside the village, and Xincheng also preserves the town's city gates, walls, and beacon towers. Goods and materials can be transported by carriage to the city walls. Due to the fact that the defense structure is mainly made of rammed soil, and the arches of the city gate are built with bricks, although they have been weathered and eroded for a long time, the part of the city gate is relatively well preserved. It is common practice to set up an urn at the city gate, set up trenches outside the city, and add corner towers at some corners.

4.2. Geographical distribution of agricultural resources

The villages in Lintan County, which mainly focus on agriculture, are suitable for regional agricultural and industrial development conditions, such as differences in land resources, animal and plant resources, lighting and temperature, which directly determine the existence of the village, its size, area, population capacity, and development limit. Some villages are located in mountainous and valley areas, with significant terrain height differences and vertical zonal distribution of climate and species. Therefore, trees and grassland bark are common distribution characteristics in this area, providing not only the primary and secondary structural materials for building construction, but also the local style in terms of exterior wall morphology. Lixin Village is a typical terrace and terrace built southward, forming a natural defense barrier against mountains and water.

4.3. Rivers and ancient roads must pass through for transportation

The water system in Lintan County is mainly composed of the Taohe River Basin and its branches. It is recorded that it was influenced by the Tang and Tibetan ancient roads and tea horse roads. During the exchange of Tibetan tea horses, horse transportation was carried out by water or land, and complete facilities such as shops and post stations were formed along the way to replace labor. Commerce led to the formation of the embryonic form of some villages.

5. Conclusion

Traditional villages and towns in Lintan County, Gannan Prefecture have a cultural carrier with certain regional characteristics influenced by diverse ethnic groups, long history, and multiple practical factors. It has historical value for studying the military and village construction history of northwest border defense. Some existing preserved sites are still affected by natural and other factors, and further research and measures for key and reasonable protection need to be accelerated.

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