

# An overview of the historical research on the “Taihang eight defiles”

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**Abstract:** The “Taihang eight defiles” have been documented for a thousand years and have been the main route for trade and cultural exchange in the Jin-Hebei-Yu region due to their dangerous and crucial geographical location. “Taihang eight defiles” have been studied in modern times for over thirty years, but it was not until the early twenty-first century that they received the attention of various academic teams, with subsequent research teams opening up new directions in historical geography and historical and cultural studies. However, compared with the more mature research on ancient roads at home and abroad, the research results on the “Taihang eight defiles” still need to be expanded and deepened.

**Keywords:** Taihang eight defiles; history and culture; military culture; trade culture

## 1. Introduction

The “Taihang eight defiles” are the eight roads that cross the Taihang Mountains, and they run into each other between the valleys of the Taihang Mountains, with a dangerous geographical location, mostly naturally formed or artificially slightly excavated military roads and trade channels. Because of the special geographical location, the “Taihang eight defiles” has been valued by the rulers of successive Chinese dynasties, but also the Central Plains area of the military must compete, along the construction of a large number of military passes, forts. Throughout the ages, the “Taihang eight defiles” have always played an important role in buffering and connecting the Xia and Shang Dynasties, the Taihang eight defiles were an important channel to communicate with the core areas of civilisation, the Han and Sui Dynasties were strategic routes for rulers to control the situation in the Central Plains and Shanxi, the Taihang eight defiles after the Tang Dynasty were also important nodes of the Tea Road, which also became the present-day railway and The eight passages from north to south were the Jundu defile, the Puyin defile, the Feihu defile, the Jing defile, the Busan defile, the Bai defile, the Defile of Taihang and the Zhiguan defile.

## 2. Overview of research

In the 1990s, the domestic scholar Professor Wang Shangyi published a paper entitled “Regurgitation of the Taihang eight defiles and its historical changes”, which combined the historical events of the eight defiles with the systematic introduction of the geographical location of each defile, so that we have a preliminary knowledge of the “Eight Defiles of Taihang”. The article is the first of its kind, and has since opened the door to the study of the “Taihang eight defiles”. Subsequent scholars began to “Taihang eight defiles” as a link, combined with geography, archaeology, sociology, history, tourism, architecture, landscape science, planning and other disciplines, gradually showing a new trend of multidisciplinary participation. So far, the academic research results on the history and culture of “Taihang eight defiles” can be roughly divided into historical geography research, historical and cultural research.

## 3. Historical and geographical research

“Taihang eight defiles” are very complex, both in terms of topography and administrative history. The reason for this is that the Taihang Mountains stretch for thousands of miles, with hundreds of interconnected mountains, thousands of peaks and deep gullies. Numerous streams cut through the Taihang Mountains. From the south to the north, there are the Qin, Dan, Zhang, Filter, Tang and Sangan

rivers, which form many gorges through the Taihang Mountains. Most importantly, it is an important node linking Henan, Hebei and Shanxi. For thousands of years, the rulers of the various dynasties and the people who travelled there determined the different historical roles played by the routes in different periods of history. The origin and specific geographic location of each defile line, how they performed at various stages of history, and what functions they played in addition to, have been highly controversial and worth exploring in the study of “Taihang eight defiles”.

### 3.1. The formation of the Eight Passes

The first of “Taihang eight defiles”, the southern most of the eight defiles, is also known as the Zhiguan defiled, and was first recorded in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, starting at Jiyuan in the south and at Wakiqu in the north. The History of Chinese Transport has a description of the location of the southernmost the Zhiguan defile “From here it passes northwestward through Zhiguan into the Taihang Mountains, passing through a narrow orifice in the middle of the faulted mountains and ending in the county of Wakiqu in Shanxi Province.” The Zhiguan defile was a necessary route for mutual exchange and resource transportation between the southern Jin region and the Luoyang basin. The Zhiguan defileV roughly runs from the southeastern part of the small basin of Jiangxian in the Fenmo basin into the mountains at Lengkou, through Henglingguan into the small basin of Wakiqu, southeastward to Gaolou, then through present-day Changzhong, Huafeng, Yingyan, Pupa, Shaoyuan, Wangya, southward to Mengjin across the river, that is, into the Luoyang basin, and currently Wakiqu and Jiangxian have been confirmed as the main body of the The Passage of the End of the Road<sup>[1]</sup>.

The Defile of Taihang is the second defile of “Taihang eight defiles”, The Defile of Taihang opened in when there is no definite, but it is proved that the Shang and Zhou period has been formed, the starting point of The Defile of Taihang in Qinyang City, Jiaozuo City, Henan Province, northward to reach the town of Jin Miao Pu, Zechou County, Jincheng City, Shanxi Province. The summer, Shang and Zhou periods of the Taihang defile formed a strategic channel north of the Central Plains, but also salt transport lines, after the Sui had many large-scale renovation of fortifications along the line, the Ming and Qing dynasties Jin business development and prosperity, the main function of the line and the transformation to the post road. There are three The Defile of Taihang lines, one is the Changping line: from the village of Changping in Qinyang to the village of Dagou in Zechou, Shanxi. The second is the kiln head line: before the step kiln, north kiln head village, Bantou Ling, small mouth village, stop the car village, and finally with the Taihang defile the main road convergence. The third is the Danhe Road , which runs from Boai County in the south, via Shibanche and Yanchang, to Jinmiaopu in the northwest, and finally merges with the main The Defile of Taihang. It has been a current topic of controversy as to whether the Danhe Road is a branch of the The Defile of Taihang.

The Bai defile is located in the White Deer Mountains<sup>[2]</sup>, and because it is close to Mengmen Mountain, it is also called “Mengmen Defile”, “the country of Yin Zhou, left Mengmen, right Taihang” shows that in the Yin and Shang dynasties the White Defile Ancient Road has been created. The Bai defile ancient road route south from Hui County, Henan Province, thin wall town, northwest through Mengmen Pass , Pingdian, to Shanxi Province, Lingchuan, and in Gaoping and The Defile of Taihang<sup>[3]</sup>. Some researchers have also pointed out that the White Defile Ancient Road does not only refer to a single road, but is a general term for multiple roads on both sides of the Yuhe Gorge. The Bai defile is one of the major transportation roads to communicate with the south of Jin and northwest of Henan, and can cross the Yellow River south to attack Bianliang and Zhengzhou via the Bai Defile , and can go to Heze and Damingfu in Shandong in the east, and to Anyang and Handan in the north, which is a dangerous place to advance and retreat<sup>[4]</sup>. At the same time, the White Pass ancient road was also an important commercial route, through which merchants in ancient times carried goods through Shanxi and the Central Plains for commercial exchanges.

It is not known when the Busan defile was formed, but it has been confirmed that it became an important traffic route during the Spring and Autumn period. The Busan defile was named because it was close to the upper source of the Busan River, where the water springs boiled, and the “Busan defile” included two defiles, starting in the Hanshan District of Handan City, Hebei Province, and finally reaching Shangdang. According to the magistrate county, Shibu county and Licheng county records: "the south side of the Busan defile human line branch line Ming Jiajing period route for: from Busou to the west over the Yangjiao shop, two forks to Ganquan after turning to the northeast line, through the East and West Da village, Shigang, Shibu county, Chishi village to Liaocheng after turning southwest over Yuanquan, Hongjing township, Guxian into the territory of Licheng<sup>[5]</sup>.

Also known as the Jing defile, it runs east-west across Hebei's Jingfu County, and its history can be traced back to as early as the Western Zhou Dynasty when King Mu of Zhou passed through Jingfu during his western tour, thus opening up the Jing defile<sup>[6]</sup>. During the Qin dynasty, the ancient route of the well defile was developed as the main route from Shanxi to Hebei through the Taihang Mountains in ancient times. After the establishment of the national postal network in the Qin and Han dynasties, the ancient route of the well defile was gradually used as a post road. The route of the ancient route of the well defile has been modified several times and is divided into two channels, north and south, the south channel via Touquan, Ha'an, Shang'an, Dongtianmen, Weishui, Changgang, Hengkou, Beizhangcun, Haoxihe, Dongyoling, Hedong via Nanguan, Zhujiatong, Banqiao, Changshengkou, Xiaolongwo, Walnut Garden to Pingding County, Shanxi, out of Guguan is about 100 miles long; the north channel via Pingwang, Weizhou, Qingshiling, Zhaochunpu, Tiandu, Hengjian, Fenghuangling, Shiqiaotou to Nanguan and the south channel The northern route was merged with the southern route<sup>[7]</sup>, and subsequent studies subdivided the route into southeast, northeast, southwest, and northwest branches.

The history of the Puyin defile can be traced back to the Han Dynasty when it was known as the Qu Reverse, and was renamed Puyin during the reign of Emperor Zhang of the Han Dynasty because it was "ugly to its name". It begins in the town of Yizhou in Yixian County, Hebei Province, and then follows the national highway through the township of Angezhuang, following the eighteenth plate to the town of Zijingguan, the highest township in the county, and then crosses the Taihang Mountains along the Moyuan section of the Jinyuan Railway to reach Moyuan County, Hebei Province<sup>[8]</sup>. The relationship between the Puyin defile and the Feihu defile is more special, as they are connected at the beginning and end, and the Great Wall sites from the Warring States period, Yuan and Ming dynasties are also distributed along the route, and the emperors of each period also strengthened the repair of the Great Wall and the passes along the route.

The date of its formation is not known, but it can be inferred from the relevant historical records that it was already formed during the Warring States period at the latest, and generally speaking the Feihu defile refers to the road between the mountain valleys from Luangyuan County to Weixian County in Hebei<sup>[9]</sup>. Historically, the Feihu defile ature of trade, tourism and cultural routes; in a broad sense, the Feihu defile refers to the road leading to various places via the Feihu defile, and in a narrow sense, the Feihu defile refers to the road between Luanyuan County and Weixian County in Hebei Province, which is more than 70 kilometres between the mountains and gorges.

Also known as "Guan Gou" and Jun Du Guan, the origin of the Jun Du defile is later, with the earliest record of the Jun Du defile dating from the time of Emperor Guangwu of the Later Han Dynasty. The Jun Du defile stretched all the way to Beijing Changping and other places, and it played the role of the last line of defence in Beijing. It was the last line of defence in Beijing, from the Xianbei offensive' in the Eastern Han Dynasty to the defence of the Ming and Qing Dynasties against the Mongolian tribes' northern expedition, which was achieved by taking advantage of the geographical advantages of the Jun Du defile. In the broad sense of the term, the Jun Du defile starts from the south entrance of Beijing Changping and goes northwest, passing through Juyongguan, Shuiguan Great Wall, and Badaling Great Wall out of Badaling Pass; in the narrow sense, the Jun Du defile starts from the town of Nankou in Beijing Changping District and goes north to Badaling Pass, a valley with a length of about 20 kilometres<sup>[10]</sup>.

### ***3.2. Spatial connection and division of the route***

When the road connects cultural and geographical areas it has the significance of a line, and because of its geographical location, "Taihang eight defiles" can be divided into two major parts: the four southern defiles and the four northern defiles. Zhang Zuqun uses a historical and spatial perspective to study the functions and attributes of the four southern and northern defiles as different spatial links in different historical periods, pointing out that before the An Shi Rebellion of the Tang Dynasty, the spatial links were mainly to the southern defiles. The southern four defiles were the main passages connecting Jin and Henan through the southern Taihang Mountains and were formed earlier, consisting of the Zhiguan defile, the Taihang defile, the Bai defile and the Busou defile in the southern Taihang Mountains. After the Song Dynasty's Jingkang Rebellion, the spatial connection was dominated by the four northern defiles. The northern four defiles consisted of the defiles of Jing, Puyin, Feihu and Jundu, which were military routes connecting Jin, Hebei and Mongolia, and were formed relatively late<sup>[11]</sup>.

Some university teams have achieved remarkable results in the division of the routes: Cui Xiang's

team from Shandong University of Architecture divided the ancient roads traversing with the Taihang Mountains into three tiers: carriage roads, camel transport roads and footpaths, and the conditions of the tiers were defined through the conditions of the roads themselves (flat and wide or rugged and narrow) and the way of transport passage; Qiu He'nan's team took the specific Puyin defile route as the object of study, combining the defile roads. The team from Northwestern University, Ma Wei's team believes that during the Northern Song Dynasty, the Jing, Taihang and Busou defiles all served the purpose of transporting troops and goods in and out of the city. The team of Ma Wei from Northwestern University has concluded that the Jing and Taihang defiles all functioned as transportation routes for the movement of troops and supplies during the Northern Song period, and were able to form stable transport routes with the major passes along the route.

#### **4. Historical and Cultural Studies**

The Loess Plateau and the North China Plain to the east and west of the Taihang Mountains are among the birthplaces of Chinese civilisation. "Taihang eight defiles" are at the axis of Chinese civilisation, they are also the hub of cultural exchange and dissemination for several provinces and cities, and have an extremely important influence on the creation, continuation and development of China. In the intangible historical and cultural time, there are countless historical facts and legends, poems and literary songs, famous personalities and verified wars that took place here in relation to the "Taihang eight defiles".

##### **4.1. Military history research**

The capital cities of the dynasties before the Tang Dynasty were mostly Chang'an and Luoyang, while the "Taihang eight defiles" were the ancient crossroads between the three provinces of Jin, Hebei and Henan, along which a large number of passes, forts and great walls were built. Shu Ping, Wang Jiaojing and Zhao Zihao have combined their research with historical books to prove that the ancient defile route provided the impetus for the military development of the Jin-Hebei region. Gao Bing's 'An Examination of the Transportation around Guangyang County during the Qin and Han Periods' analyses and examines the existence and paths of the Feihu and Jundu defiles during the Qin and Han periods, and briefly discusses their importance to the stability of the frontier<sup>[12]</sup>. In order to effectively control the Central Plains and consolidate their ruling position, the rulers combined the geographical advantages of the "Taihang eight defiles" with the construction of many passes and forts to increase the overall defensive "Read the Chronicle of Military Affairs of Juyongguan" to reflect the importance of Juyongguan along the "Jundu defile" in the defense system, there is a description that says: "on the danger of Juyong terrain, the ancients have discussed it endlessly in books; Therefore, the rulers of successive generations attached great importance to the Juyong Pass; the Juyong antennae were listed with the peaks, and ten thousand miles of golden soup were fixed on the nine sides<sup>[13]</sup>."

##### **4.2. Study of trade and commerce culture**

After the Song dynasty, the capital of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties moved to Beijing, the political status of the southern four defiles changed, and the military defensive attributes gradually shifted to the northern four defiles<sup>[14]</sup>. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Jin merchants were active, and this ancient road between the mountains was an important option for the Jin merchant road spanning the east and west sides of the Taihang Mountains. The eight defiles of Taihang were important nodes of the ancient Chinese Wanli Tea Road, where the tea purchased by the Jin merchants from Fujian crossed the Taihang Mountains and Inner Mongolia and was eventually sent to Russia<sup>[15]</sup>. The South Four Defiles gradually became a passage for people's migration, cultural exchange and trade activities, and the rise of trade and migration and other activities promoted the spread of culture around the ancient road, bringing opportunities for cultural integration and development among the Taihang region. Professor Hao Ping's team at Shanxi University studied the ancient fortress culture of the Taihang Mountains region to investigate its complex context of generation, noting that it is a cultural complex that combines farming, imperial, official, commercial and defensive cultures. In ancient China, Guan Yu was given the divine title of god of wealth, and the development of trade routes led to the construction of a large number of Guandi temples in the area, and eventually the belief in Guandi spread outwards to the surrounding areas along these routes. At the same time, people along the routes seized the opportunity to raise large numbers of livestock for the transportation of goods such as tea and salt, and horse shops and inns along the routes once again sprang up. The area of the "Taihang

eight defiles” River also had many distinctive folk and cultural activities, and the article 'A Study of the Historical and Military Geography of the East River Road of the Northern Song Dynasty' divides Shanxi into four regions according to differences in human geography and cultural customs, and studies the trend of martial customs in this area decreasing from the border to the interior<sup>[16]</sup>. These rich folklore activities come from the intermingling of these local characteristics of history and culture, and all factors together also create the unique and highly characteristic regional culture of this area.

## 5. Summary

### 5.1. Inadequate research

On the whole, the research of “Taihang eight defiles” is still in the stage of continuous experimentation and exploration, and the research results are yet to be improved in terms of both depth and width, with many papers staying at a superficial level of introduction, and fewer research papers digging and thinking in depth. At the same time, the research team mainly comes from universities, and the research objects chosen are too concentrated and more degree theses, with limited research depth.

In terms of historical-geographical research, specifically on the identification and delineation of each defile path, the progress is uneven. The examination of the path of the ancient route of the defile has been clarified to each of its lines, and even expanded to include trade routes, transport routes, nodal landscape routes, etc., according to the historical role of each branch in the division of research, and progress has clearly been at the forefront. The research results of the Busan defile and Taihang eight defile routes are still in a huge research gap. “Taihang eight defiles” in the level of historical and cultural research is also insufficient, “Taihang eight defiles” along the route has a rich and brilliant culture, such as trade culture, military culture, folk culture, religious culture, tea ceremony culture, Guandi culture, pass culture, Confucian culture, ancient fortress culture, etc., are relying on this mountain defiles spread to form, culture in the process of dissemination between the exchange and collision may be a new culture will be generated. However, at this stage, the research still stays in isolation to study a certain type of culture or a certain type of culture, and there is too little research on the exchange and change of culture and the excavation of the cultural connotation itself.

### 5.2. Research characteristics

Domestic research on “Taihang eight defiles” has been more than thirty years, the scholars of the 1990s in the study has not yet appeared “Taihang eight defiles” this systematic concept, the concept is generally “defiles” “Taihang ancient road” The concept was generally “defiles”, “Taihang Ancient Road”, “Feihu Defile” and so on, and their research areas were all limited to the examination of the history and cultural relics on the route of a certain defile. It was not until 1998 when Professor Wang Shangyi published the article “Regurgitation of the Eight Taihang Defiles and their Historical Changes” that the concept of “Taihang eight defiles” was gradually accepted by scholars and experts, and some people began to shift their research positions to the “Taihang eight defiles”, but most of the results during this period In April 2009, the “China Cultural Heritage Protection Forum” was held, and a number of cultural routes in China were included in the reserve list for the protection of world cultural heritage, which set off a wave of research on cultural routes in China, and in 2012 Zhang Zuqun In 2012, Professor Zhang Zuqun's “Analysis of the Cultural Heritage Characteristics of the Eight Taihang Defiles” applied the concept of “cultural routes” to “Taihang eight defiles”, pushing the research on “Taihang eight defiles” to a new stage, and from the statistics of the current research results, a number of new research results have emerged. In terms of research methods, they have evolved from the initial documentary and field research methods to quantitative and interdisciplinary research methods, which can be combined with various software for analysis. The research field is also becoming broader, with disciplines such as architecture, tourism and planning joining the research team, and the research trend is becoming clearer, showing a new situation of multidisciplinary participation and integrated use.

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