

# The Development and Changes of the Descendants of the Jurchen Tribe in Qishan, Shaanxi from the Perspective of Ethnology

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## ABSTRACT

There is a branch of the Jurchen tribe in Qishan, Shaanxi. To this day, inscriptions have been preserved in the village's ancestral hall, recording the lineage of the ancestors and proving the origin of this descendant. In addition, the customs that followed are the legacy of the memory of their ancestors. After hundreds of years of development and change, the Wanyan clan descendants of the Jurchens were integrated into the Han Chinese population. Based on field research, this paper analyses the development and changes of the Jurchen Wanyan descendants from an ethnological perspective.

**Keywords:** *Qishan, Wanyan descendants, Jurchen, Development.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are Jurchen descendants in Xima village, Pucun town, Qishan county, Shaanxi province. This place is not far from Qishan Mountain in the north and is close to the east-west Qishan-Fufeng road, which has been used by traders throughout history. Nearby is Yidian, the ancient postal station from the Song dynasty to the Qing dynasty. At present, there are more than 300 households and more than 1200 people in the village, divided into the Wangshang group (a group is a unit in a village) and the Wangxia group. They are basically the descendants of the Wanyan clan of the Jurchen tribe.

The development and changes of the descendants of the Qishan Jurchens can be studied from the perspective of ethnology. As for the related research on the descendants of the Qishan Jurchen people, Yang Fuxue conducted textual research on the inscriptions of the Wanyan lineage, authenticated the inscriptions and historical documents, conducted textual research on the genealogy and official positions of the 11 generations of the Wanyan clan recorded in the inscriptions of the lineage, and discussed the activities of the Wanyan descendants in the northwestern region during the Yuan and Ming dynasties. [1] He Xiaoyan, a graduate student at the

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, conducted a social survey of the Qishan Wanyan descendants' village. The survey is only available in the online electronic version and has not been published. [2] Although a number of studies have been carried out, there is still a need for further research on this group of people from an ethnological point of view.

## 2. ORIGIN OF THE WANYAN CLAN

The Jurchen tribe originated in northeastern China and evolved from the Heishui Mohe people of the Tang dynasty. [3] Historical records indicate that the Jurchen tribe was active in the northeastern region. In the later confrontation with the Qhitans, the Jin dynasty, founded by the Jurchen tribes, defeated the Liao dynasty and became a national political power opposing the Song dynasty. It is hard to imagine that the cradle of Chinese civilisation, Qishan, has descendants of the Jurchen tribe. A surviving inscription indicates that it is a branch of the Jurchen Wanyan clan. As far as we know, the villages with such ancient tribal descendants in China are not only Qishan's Xima village. Evidence of this Jurchen descendant can be found in the ancestral lineage inscriptions, ancestral temples, a high tomb outside the village, and the tombstone. Some ancient customs

have also survived, such as the ethnic traditions of sacrifice, marriage, firearm making, and so on.

Fieldwork has revealed that an ancestral temple of the Wanyan clan is currently preserved in the Wangxia group. There is a stone tablet recording the Wanyan lineage in the ancestral hall. The ancestral hall is located in a small, dilapidated courtyard in the east of the village. Upon entering, you will see the stone tablet that records the Wanyan lineage. The "History of Jin" reads: "Wanyan, the Han surname is Wang". [4] The inscription on the stone reads "Hong Wu bestowed the surname Wang, and when he died he returned to his original surname", which also confirms what later generations have said. When they were born their surname was Wang, and when they died it was Wanyan. Zhu Yuanzhang gave many surnames to ethnic minorities, and it was during this period that the fourth-generation ancestor of the Qishan Wanyan clan, Yexian Timur, was also given the surname Wang [5]. During the Yuan Zhizheng period (1341-1368), the Wanyan clan first settled in Anwangtun in this county (now Lingnanyao in Pucun Town). After the fall of the Yuan dynasty, the Wanyan descendants also submitted to Zhu Ming and were given the surname Wang. [6]

The inscription lists a total of 160 people in eleven generations, including a marquis, 16 marshals, a deputy commander, a stong-dpon and a commander. When did this descendant of Wanyan from Qishan come here? According to the inscription, the first generation of Wanyan guarded the Guanxi and set up a command post in Ximazhuang, the second generation Wanyan Xilijiladai Marshal guarded Minzhou, the third generation Wanyan Wulanhadai Marshal guarded the Sichuan Weimao Pacification Bureau, the fourth generation Wanyan Yexian Timur Marshal also guarded Minzhou. All this happened from the beginning of the Yuan dynasty to the beginning of the Ming dynasty. [7] It is possible that the first ancestors of Wanyan lived in the late Jin dynasty and early Yuan dynasty. As for why they lived here, it may be related to the southern invasion of the Jin at that time.

### **3. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RELICS**

By interviewing the relevant personnel in the village, we also gained knowledge about the historical relics currently preserved in the village. Wang A (male, 75 years old, retired high school teacher), because of his educational background, what he said about ancestor worship customs should be relatively reliable. Before the Cultural Revolution,

each of the Wangshang and Wangxia groups had a temple, but unfortunately the temple of the former was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In the past, ancestor worship included not only ancestor tablets, but also portraits of the Wangxia group's own ancestors, which were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. What was particularly surprising was that the old man mentioned a sacrificial activity before the founding of New China, in which not only the descendants of Wanyan in Wangshang and the Wangxia group from Qishan participated, but also a group of Wanyan people from Jingchuan, Gansu. This seems to link the descendants of this Wanyan from Jingchuan, Gansu and Qishan.

The old man also told a story about the Wanyan in Wangxia group that had been passed down from generation to generation. In the past, on the first day of the first month of every year, people from Wangshang and Wangxia would pay tribute to their ancient ancestors, and people from Jingchuan in Gansu would also come to join in the worship. One year, when the descendants of the Wanyan from Jingchuan arrived at Wangxia, it was already dark. They deliberately played a trick and told the people of Wangshang and Wangxia that they should come to keep vigil for the ancient ancestors at night, and that the people of Wangshang and Wangxia could go back to rest. As a result, the Jingchuan people secretly took away the ancestral boxes and other things in the ancestral hall during the night. From then on, the two sides naturally went their separate ways and stopped communicating with each other.

Regarding the various customs of marriage, singing, drumming and setting off firecrackers, the authors learned something from the story told by old man Wang B (male, 65 years old, former village cadre). Many customs were preserved before the founding of New China and are now almost impossible to restore. Wanyan village in Qishan has different characteristics from the surrounding Han villages in terms of marriage. Girls from the Wangshang and Wangxia groups can marry in other villages, except for those from surrounding villages with the surname Ling. There are no special requirements for men. According to the old man, the ancestor of this village with the original surname of Ling was once the messenger of the Wanyan ancestors of Wangshang and Wangxia. Because of their low status, Wanyan people do not marry girls to them. As for people from other villages whose surname is Wang, they can marry whomever they like. Because people in Wangshang, Wangxia and other people with the surname Wang are not from the same ancestors. Widows in the village are allowed to

remarry, and there are no special restrictions. However, she is not allowed to take or adopt a son-in-law. If someone has no children, only adoption is allowed. After the founding of New China, the village allows son-in-laws to be recruited, but the recruited son-in-law must change his surname to Wang.

When it comes to opera singing, the elders have some thoughts about the play "Yue Fei vs. Jin Wushu", and a small number of people are not willing to listen to this play because of its historical background. The melody of the drums during the opera is different from other villages. The melodies played by the Wangshang and Wangxia groups are more urgent, faster and more powerful than those of other villages, and have a special drumbeat rhythm. It is said that when soldiers on the battlefield hear this melody, it is like a war drum beating, and they immediately gain morale and charge forward bravely. What's more interesting is that the villagers still play this tune on drums during holidays and festivals.

The Wangxia group also has something that other villages do not - a firearm similar to a pistol. In the past, firecrackers were fired during Chinese New Year, temple festivals and parades. There is also a type of cannon that has been passed down from generation to generation, called the "Pushing Army Cannon". Compared to ordinary cannons, this type of cannon not only has a larger muzzle, but also has strong firepower and a very powerful force. The circulation of these firearms also distinguishes these people from the neighbouring Han Chinese. These weapons reflect the historical tradition of the descendants of Qishan Wanyan. [8]

#### **4. THE DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION OF THE WANYAN INTO THE HAN CHINESE ENVIRONMENT**

The marriage records of the Wanyan ancestors recorded in the inscriptions show that for the first four generations they intermarried with women of other ethnic groups with non-Han surnames. These surnames were probably Jurchen, Qhitan or Mongol, and after the fifth generation they differed from the first four generations, who all married with Han surnames. This can also be explained by the fact that during the development process from the Yuan dynasty to the early 15th century of the Ming dynasty, which lasted about 150 years, the descendants of Wanyan gradually integrated into the Han Chinese population. As a result, their Jurchen way of life weakened, and until modern society there was little

significant difference between them and the Han-surnamed population. It is only through ancestral inscriptions and lineages, as well as certain traditional customs, that the differences with the surrounding Han people are reflected.

Judging by the pattern of population development in Wanyan village over the past few hundred years, there are basically no outsiders who have started families in the village. The elders interviewed stressed that apart from the recruitment of sons-in-law, which would bring some outsiders to live here, no other families with different surnames have moved into the village. This shows that the Wanyan clan has maintained a relatively pure family lineage and environment for hundreds of years. What's particularly interesting is that when asked if they would be willing to change their current surname from Wang to Wanyan, they simply refused; when asked if they would be willing to change their Han identity to ethnic minority, everyone was relatively indifferent. The interviewees made it clear that they did not want to be ethnic minorities.

In stark contrast, the people of Wanyan Donggou and Wanyan Xigou in Jingchuan county, Gansu Province show a different attitude. Apart from the fact that they have retained the Wanyan surname, there is little hard evidence that this Wanyan clan has retained the Wanyan identity. However, these people are keen to regain their minority identity. In Wanyan village, the old people in their 80s and the young people in their teens all have strong demands. [9]But now this group of people no longer has the common characteristics of ethnicity in terms of historical origins, production methods, language, culture, customs and psychological identity.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper finds that the descendants of Qishan Wanyan are slowly integrating into the Han Chinese population. However, the people of the Wangshang and Wangxia groups still retain some of the customs of their Jurchen ancestors. This reflects the complexity of the tribe's evolution.

In general, the development of ancient tribes is linked to many factors. Among them, population, power, surrounding peoples and cultures are the most influential factors. If we want to preserve the Jurchen culture today, the authorities must take some measures. In this way, there is hope that some of the Jurchen culture can be preserved, restored and passed on to the next generation.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Yong Liu completed the writing of the main text.  
Yidayati Yanitake contributed to the writing and editing of the text.

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