

# The Investigation and Analysis of Village Remains in Jinzhong Prefecture of Shanxi Province, China

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**Abstract**— Shanxi Province is a province with a long history in China. The historical characteristics of Jinzhong Prefecture in Shaanxi Province are very prominent. This research has done a lot of field research and analysis, and has analyzed a large number of documents. The formation and characteristics of villages in Jinzhong Prefecture are summarized. But the remains of many areas have not been systematically discovered and analyzed. This study found that the reasons for the formation of villages are natural, cultural, traffic and economic reasons. It mainly includes water, mountain, and developed business culture during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. By analyzing the evolution characteristics of each period, the characteristics and remains of the existing villages are explained in detail. These types of relics mainly include courtyards, fortresses, and Exchange shops. This study can provide systematic guidance on the protection of future village remains.

**Keywords**—Jinzhong Prefecture, village, features, remains.

## I. INTRODUCTION

NATURAL ecology, geographic location, large-scale migration of population, victory or failure in the war are the important historical factors for Shanxi Province. These factors are also the formation of the cultural and ecological characteristics and these factors make the culture of Jinzhong Prefecture present a state of diversity and hybridity, thus forming a cultural tradition with more survival advantages, and promoting a variety of educational beliefs in ancient villages and towns in Jinzhong Prefecture. The emergence and development of folk culture in ancient villages and towns in Jinzhong Prefecture is the result of the comprehensive effect of natural and social fields. The effect includes the adaptation and feedback of folk culture, and the coupling between folk custom and nature (Fig. 1).

## II. THE BACKGROUND OF ANCIENT VILLAGES AND TOWNS IN JINZHONG PREFECTURE

### A. The Influence of the Natural Geographical Elements

The core concept of Braudel's "long time" theory is a long-term connection [1]. It is mainly the intrinsic link between the geographical environment and social structure of a certain region such as mountains, oceans, plains, islands, geography, nature and social organizations. These are all formed over a long period of time. And it is something that will not change greatly in a short period of time. Under the guidance of this theory, we can find that the formation and evolution of villages

are greatly influenced by the surrounding geographical environment. This geographical landscape has long existed steadily, affecting the space of the surrounding villages as a whole.

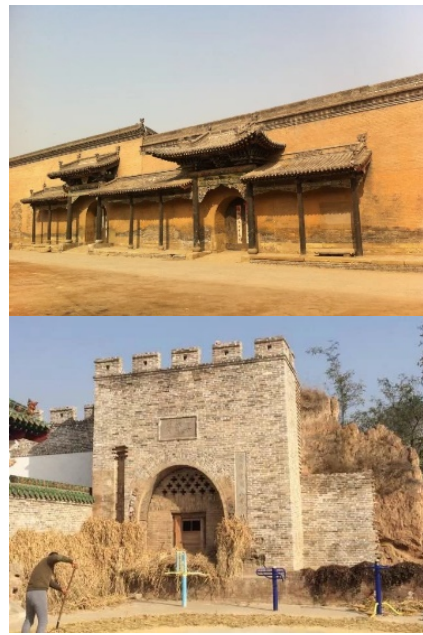


Fig. 1 Common sight in Jinzhong villages

In the early and middle Pleistocene and Holocene, the Taiyuan Basin in the middle reaches of the Fenhe River was basically covered by lakes. The river of thousands of streams and tributaries was directly injected into the lakes. With the shrinkage of the lake, the main stream of the middle reaches flowed from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the Northern and Southern Dynasties. The middle reaches has been along the western Taiyuan Mountains, across Qingxu County, and then along the current Ciyao River, Wenyu River south to Yitang. Historical documents record that the Taiyuan basin in the pre Qin period was a water country in the lakes and swamps. The largest lake is the Zhaoyuqi Lake, which covers hundreds of miles in the north. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, sediment was divided into many small lakes. The Great Lakes of Chao Yu died during the Yuan Dynasty. Historically, silt and mud formed the fertile soil of today, leaving behind plain villages along the Fenhe River that depended on agriculture for their livelihood [2].

The complexity and diversity of geographical landforms directly affect the layout of villages in Jinzhong Prefecture.

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Some villages were dominated by a flat-lying family compound. Some villages were consisted of cave-style courtyards built on hillsides. Some villages were consisted of steep fortress-style buildings. The evolution of lakes and rivers has become the most important intervention factor in the development of ancient villages in Jinzhong Prefecture, which directly witnesses the value of existing ancient sites and the evolution history and relationship of villages in different geographical environments. It can be said that the mountains and hills adjacent to the lakes were the birthplace of the villages in Jinzhong Prefecture before the Ming Dynasty. The vast lakes gave birth to the rich and prosperous Taiyuan basin from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the present (Fig. 2).

#### *B. The Influence of the Human Geography Elements*

The industries in Jinzhong Prefecture were based on farming, supplemented by commerce and handicrafts. This industrial structure ensures the formation and development of folklore, art and commerce with local characteristics. The formation of this living state is the result of the intersection of various causes in history, and also promoted the flourishing of public cultural activities such as theatres, temples and so on. As early as the

late Neolithic age, Jinzhong Prefecture has distributed many settlements of human production. Entering the historical era, with the change of dynasties and political and economic system, the ancient villages and towns in the Jinzhong Prefecture have undergone constant social changes and reconstruction, and gradually developed and expanded. The influence of farming civilization promoted the worship of rainwater by villagers in Jinzhong Prefecture, which resulted in the worship of dragon, the worship of land and the fear of insect pests (Fig. 3). The Fenhe River is prone to flood disasters in summer and the nearby ancient villages and towns have formed a belief in the God of the River and its tributaries. For example, the Wuli Street of Jingsheng Town in Lingshi County rises from Sanguan Temple in the East and Guandi Temple in the west. Along the street, there are social shrines, small rivers flowing around the town, middle rivers and south rivers, and there are Houtu Temple and Longwang Temple. The worship of these spiritual temples reflects the cultural connection between the production and life of the people in Jinzhong Prefecture and the heaven, earth, water and life.

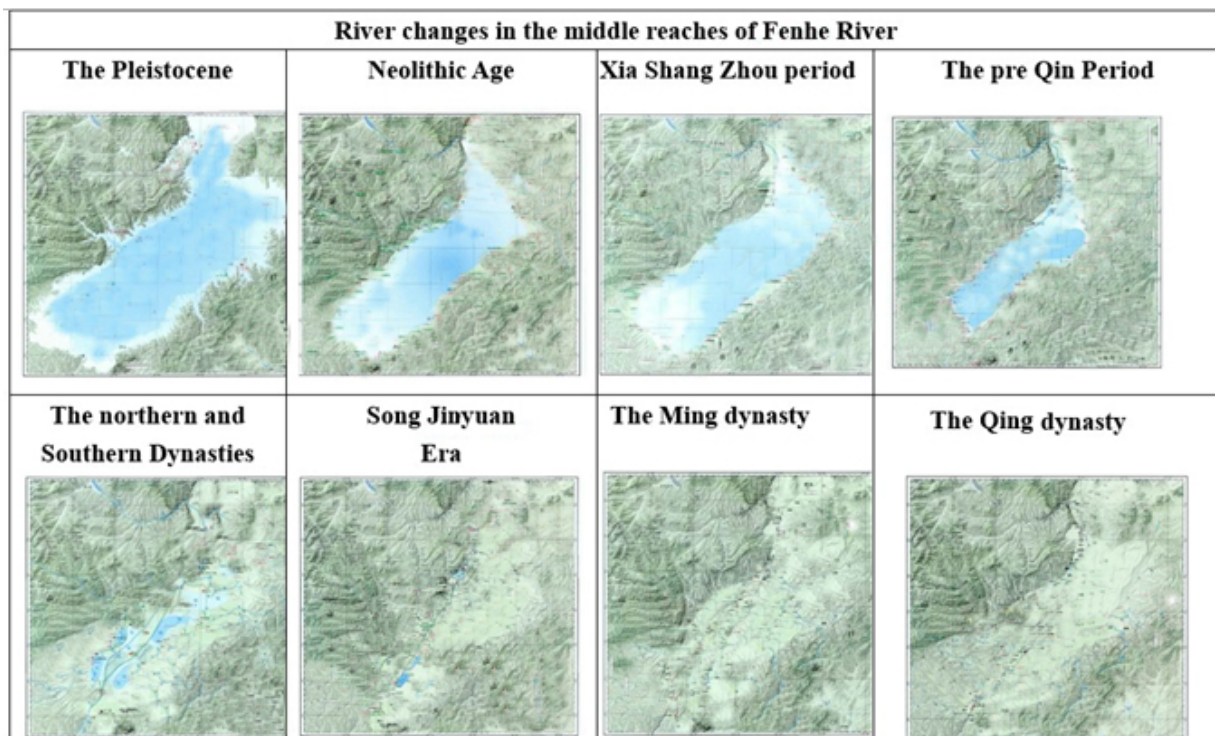


Fig. 2 River changes in the middle reaches of Fenhe River

#### *C. The Impact of Regional Traffic*

The traffic here during the Ming and Qing Dynasties has laid a foundation for the economic exchanges between regions, increased the regional links and information exchanges. Especially the roads between Shanxi provinces and other provinces promoted the economic development of Jinzhong

Prefecture. In the Ming Dynasty, a complete network of post routes was basically formed throughout the country. There were ten important post stations in Shanxi Province (Fig. 4). After Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi, Huguang and Shaanxi, the number of post stations ranked sixth in the country. Apart from commercial road, the official road was also the important traffic arteries in Qing Dynasty. Official road was mainly used by the



officials.

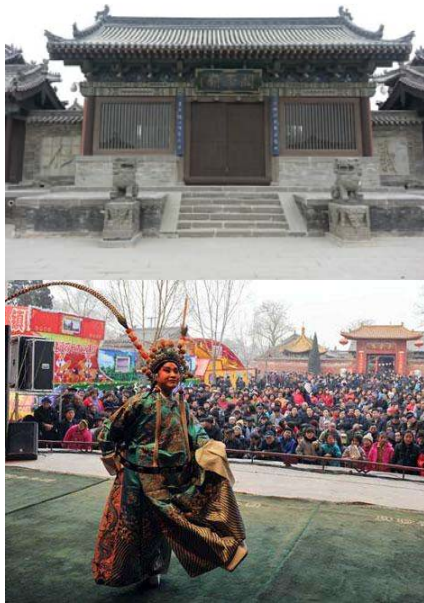


Fig. 3 Guan Yu Temple and drama in village

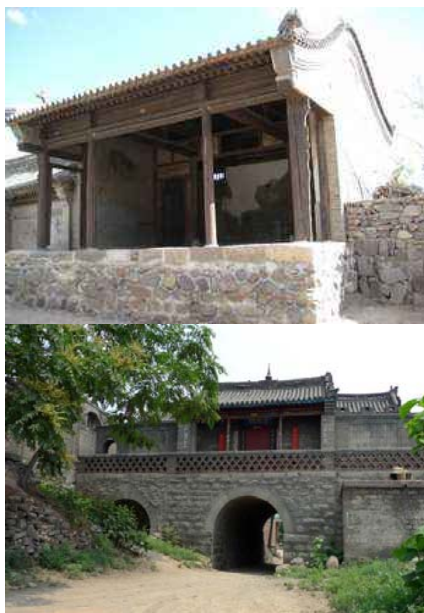


Fig. 4 Post stations

#### *D. The Impact of Commodity Economy Elements*

The Ming and Qing Dynasties were the period of rapid commercial development here. The historical process of the gradual evolution of the Jinzhong Prefecture has affected the status quo of the village. In very limited land, many people cannot get a lot of income from agriculture and can only become a businessman. Business activities here had developed rapidly as soon as they were launched. After Qing Dynasty, the business routes had expanded based on the traffic routes. Large

number of merchants relied their business on the routes. In the past, the merchants in the Jinzhong Prefecture were a huge group. They started business in the Ming Dynasty, and flourished in the Qing Dynasty. They did business with others at home and abroad. Their business had gone south to the area in Jiangnan provinces and Southeast Asia, and north to Mongolia's Kulun, Kobdo and Russia's Chaktu, Moscow, Siberia. Their business had gone west to Gansu, Xinjiang, and east to Shandong, Korea, Japan. Especially the tea trade with Mongolia and Russia has formed a 'Tea Road' from Wuyi Mountain in Fujian Province, through Jiangxi, Hubei, Henan and Shanxi, and then to Inner Mongolia, Mongolia and Russia. The merchants in the Jinzhong Prefecture created a glorious achievement in the history of China's finance and trade. The main distribution areas in Jinzhong Prefecture are 6 counties, namely Yuci, Taigu, Qixian, Pingyao, Jiexiu and Lingshi. Villages meanwhile were gradually developed into commercial-service-oriented [3]. Thanks to the good business environment, the villagers also gradually grew from poor to the wealthy celebrities [4]. The well-off merchants in Jinzhong Prefecture began to flourish the family courtyard, and the villages on the commercial road developed rapidly.

### III. DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION OF ANCIENT VILLAGES AND TOWNS IN JINZHONG PREFECTURE

#### *A. Ancient Times: One of the Cradles of Farming Civilization*

In the late Neolithic period, the Fenhe River was the main stream in Jinzhong Prefecture. There were many human production and living settlements in the Jinzhong Prefecture. Primitive agriculture flourished day by day, which laid a solid foundation for the evolution of settlements to villages and towns. Entering the historical era, with the change of dynasties, the ancient villages and towns in Jinzhong Prefecture have gradually developed and expanded. About 100 thousand years ago, there were already relatively primitive populations and villages on both sides of the Fenhe River. At present, the earliest late Neolithic remains found in Jinzhong Prefecture are more than 4000 years B.C. The remaining period of the next stage is roughly the same as that of the Yangshao culture in the Central Plains. The representative sites are Fenyang County, Jia Zhuang village and Xinghuacun village. In the Xia Dynasty, Jinzhong Prefecture had developed a relatively complete water conservancy ditch and irrigation system, which played an important role in water and soil conservation. From traditional agriculture in ancient times to intensive farming in contemporary times, people in Jinzhong Prefecture have accumulated the similar and different diversified agricultural knowledge. These knowledge included soil properties, fertilization, moisture conservation, drought resistance, etc. They have increased grain production, enriched food varieties and provided material basis for the formation of grain culture.

#### *B. Yuan and Ming Period: Cultural Diversity and Shanxi Merchants Rising*

The Ming Dynasty was an important period for the rise of Shanxi merchants. Among the various ranks of Shanxi merchants, the representative commercial gang was the

powerful and well-known Pingyang merchants and Zelu merchants. Merchants in Jinzhong Prefecture are still in the process of growing up, and their popularity was second only to that of the merchants in Datong. In the Ming Dynasty, the historical background of the growth of the Jinzhong merchants was consistent with the Shanxi merchants [5]. In the late Ming Dynasty (roughly from the Ming Zhengde period to the Wanli period), the merchant in Jinzhong Prefecture gradually grew into a new force. Liao, Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties witnessed the change of political power between ethnic minorities and the Han nationality, the further deepening of ethnic integration, the continuous prosperity of the urban economy, and the concern of the underlying culture. Kublai Khan (ancestor of Yuan Dynasty) established the Yuan Dynasty, Shandong and Shanxi as the "abdomen" of the land, stationed a large number of Mongolian troops to rule. At this time, the economic and cultural technology in North China has developed considerably.

#### *C. The Period of the Republic of China: Declining Regions*

In the late Qing Dynasty, great changes took place in China. With the constant occurrence of war, traditional commerce and agriculture have been severely destroyed. Although Shanxi province was located in the central part of the Second World War, the aggressor still waged war here. As an important war base in the enemy's rear area, the Japanese carried out a mad sweep of the ancient villages and towns in Jinzhong Prefecture. Subsequently, many businesses and courtyards also declined. Because of technical constraints and economic problems, villages are also gradually lagging behind. Jinzhong has lost its bustling past from that time.

### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF MATERIAL FORM UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL FORM IN ANCIENT VILLAGES AND TOWNS IN JINZHONG PREFECTURE

#### *A. The Courtyard Culture under the Influence of Ritual Thought*

The courtyard dwellings in Jinzhong Prefecture are the products of the specific period, region and economic conditions formed under the influence of Shanxi merchants' culture. They are the residential forms under the commercial background of Ming and Qing Dynasties. The forms combined with the local unique climatic environment, local customs, folk customs and other factors. The courtyard complex reflects the social, economic and cultural conditions of that time from one side. It is one of the most distinctive forms of residential buildings in Shanxi province [6].

In the cultural background of Confucianism, China has formed a family as the focus of social life. Family life is the first social life in that time. Therefore, the residential mode with family and family as the unit has been produced. The residential cultural spirit with the characteristics of rural drinking, rural learning, rural dwelling and rural spirit has been derived from this mode. The rural spirit has become the core of this spirit. Nostalgia is the feeling of homesickness when people leave

home. It is a phenomenon after the development of residential culture to a certain stage. Shanxi merchants who succeeded in foreign business could not give up their attachment to their hometown. When they returned home with rich clothes and brocade, they eventually chose to build houses in the hot soil of their hometown. Although the courtyard building is large-scale and complex in function, the activities of all the people were arranged in an orderly manner. The relationship between the superiority and inferiority of family members were vividly displayed in the building. The buildings were the concentrated embodiment of ancient Chinese ritual culture (Fig. 5). The unique Jinzhong Prefecture courtyard, with its regular architectural style and local characteristics, shows the unique charm of Jinzhong Prefecture courtyard culture.

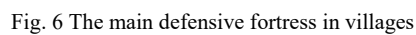
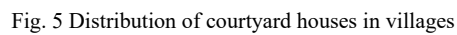
#### *B. Settlement Culture under the Influence of Wars in the Past Dynasties*

The evolution of the ancient battlefield in Shanxi Province was mainly concentrated in the south of Shanxi Province, the middle of Shanxi Province and in the middle reaches of Fenhe River. The ancient wars were mainly between the princes of the Central Plains. The medieval wars were mainly the battles between the nomadic peoples of the north, crossing the south of the Great Wall, taking advantage of the neutral barrier of the central dynasty.

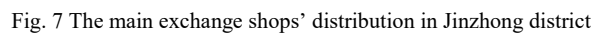
Defence is the main functional feature of villages in the Jinzhong Prefecture. There are many villages in the Jinzhong Prefecture that were once the main places of war. Many tall walls, fortresses, castles, etc. are proof of these defense functions. These remains are now the main village features, recording the history of the village. These can be found in many places in the Jinzhong Prefecture (Fig. 6).

#### *C. Transport Culture under the Influence of International Trade: Business Culture under Traffic Conditions*

In the Qing Dynasty, an important trade route had been formed in Shanxi Province. That was the Tea-Business Road. Shanxi merchants gathered all kinds of goods and materials along the Huguang and Jianghuai districts to Hankou and Zhoukou by water transport. And then they transported them to Taigu and Qixian by Kaifeng, Qinyang, Zezhou, Lu'an, Zihong by the land transportation. Finally, they subcontracted them for further north transportation in Jinzhong Prefecture. After transit here, they went out of Yanmenguan Mountain, through Xinzhou to Yuanping. And then they went out of Yanmenguan, Shanyin County Huanghualiang bypass. Their final destination in China was Naturalization City. After that, they started international trade. The material route from Naturalization City to Mongolia was from naturalized Baotou, Ningxia, Lanzhou, Dunhuang, Daoyeqiang. Perhaps they would go to Talbahatai from naturalized Kulun, Uliyasu, Kobdo, Hami, Urumqi. The route was to go eastward through Zhangjiakou, Yiduolun, Qihar, Hulunbeier, and then through Kulun, Qiaktu, Yikuz. Finally, they went to Siberia from Moscow to Petersburg and entered the European market.







Exchange shop (ancient bank) was an important credit institution at the end of feudal society in China. It was born in the Qing Dynasty. The fundamental reason for the shop development in Jinzhong Prefecture was commercial development and convenient transportation. The number of exchange shops grew from 11 to 28 in Jinzhong Prefecture during the late Qing Dynasty. Besides the famous towns like Pingyao, Qixian and Taigu, other commercial gangs were crowded in. With the increase of total number and semicolon, the business of depositing and exchanging bills were developing greatly. There had been an unprecedented profit. The merchants in Jinzhong Prefecture had enjoyed an all-embracing business scope and seized the forerunner of finance (Fig. 7).

Through investigation and analysis, it can be found that there are many historical sites in the ancient villages in the Jinzhong Prefecture. It can be said that it is a huge asset of Chinese history. The study hopes to discover the formation of these ancient villages. These are prerequisites for further protection of these remains. The research and protection of the remains must begin after an overall systematic analysis. Otherwise the protection work is fragmented and unsystematic. Of course, the future will require a lot of work and discoveries.

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