

# Controversy about the native place of chin-shihes: A Glimpse of Gansu Education in Ming and Qing Dynasties from the Perspective of History

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**Abstract:**

During the Ming and Qing dynasties when the imperial examination system was prosperous, no matter the number or rank of chin-shihes, there was a big gap between Gansu and Jiangsu, Zhejiang and other educationally developed places, its education level was relatively backward. Under the historical conditions of relatively backward local education, not only in order to show their political achievements and spread fame, but also to promote the development and to change the backward situation of local education, the local chroniclers with relatively low educational level, they were far-fetched and included historical figures not related to the local into the local chronicles. Therefore, the controversy about the native place of chin-shihes emerged.

**Keywords:** *Native place, Gansu education, Yu Zhongwen, Wang Fan*

## 1. A Textual Research on the native place of chin-shihes Recorded in the local chronicles of Wushan County and Min County

### 1.1 A textual research on the address of on Yu Zhongwen's native place of chin-shih in Liao Dynasty

Wushan County, is located in the southeast of Gansu Province and northwest of Tianshui City, is one of the important birthplaces of Chinese civilization. As far back as 38,000 years ago, human began to live here. Xinxing County was established in the fifth year of Zhongping in the Eastern Han Dynasty(188 A.D.), Ningyuan County was established in Song Dynasty and Wushan County was renamed in the third year of the Republic of China (1914 A.D.). After reading the local chronicles of Wushan County, Yu Zhongwen, an important minister of Liao and Jin Dynasties, as the first chin-shih in Wushan history, seems to be nothing inappropriate. However, according to his "Wuzhou Ningyuan" native place and the date of birth and death, comparing the records of *History of Jin Dynasty* and local chronicles of Wushan County, it can be known that Yu Zhongwen is definitely not a Wushan person, let alone the first chin-shih of Wushan County.

According to the remnant version of *Local Chronicles of Ningyuan County* in the Wanli Period of the Ming Dynasty, Yu Zhongwen states that he could write poetry when he was seven years old and could compose when he was ten years old, also he could recite a lot of sentences every day. He studied hard and was admitted to chin-shih. He had

been an official until Bachelor of Hanlinchengzhi and his posthumous name is "Wenzheng". At the same time, he also won the honorary title of "Puguogong". The Wenying Town in Wushan County got its name because of Yu Zhongwen. *Manuscripts of the Local Chronicles of Wushan County* during the Republic of China also showed that he was born very smart, he would write poetry when he was seven years old and would compose when he was ten years old and recited a lot of sentences every day. He studied hard and was admitted to chin-shih. He had served as an official in many places and is famous for his integrity and ability. He had been an official until Bachelor of Hanlinchengzhi and his posthumous name is "Wenzheng". He also won the honorary title of "Tejin" and "Puguogong". The Wenying Town in Wushan County was named after him. He was enshrined as a saint in a local temple to receive sacrifices. This book also says that his tomb is in the Jiaojia Canyon, six miles west of Wushan City.

As far this person, *History of Jin Dynasty* states that his courtesy name is "Zhifu" and he is from Wuzhou Ningyuan. He can write poetry at the age of seven and can be a literary at the age of ten, recite a thousand words a day and studies hard. After he was admitted to chin-shih, he had served as an official in many places and was famous for his integrity and ability. He was recommended because of his excellent morals and talents. His answers to the emperor's questions about governance strategies were also outstanding. He was promoted to record the emperor's words and deeds also compile the country's history. After several promotions, he became Taichangshaoqing. A prime minister was demoted, he went to send him off alone. Some people said that he and the prime minister were in the same group, so he resigned and went home on the grounds of supporting his relatives. After a long time, the

emperor ordered to revert to his official position. The prime minister recommended him to rank first in moral quality, temporarily serving as the post in charge of drafting the edict and was later appointed as Zhongshusheren. Put down the rebellion of the ethnic minority Baixi and was appointed as the Privy Councilor, concurrently as the Bachelor of Hanlin, at the same time, as an academician who explained the scriptures and history to the emperor, he served as a Bachelor of Hanlinshijiang. He died at the age of fifty-five and his posthumous name is "Wenzheng". And was awarded the honorary title of Zhongshuling in the seventh year of Tianhui. In the second year of Zhenglong, he was re-awarded as "Tejin" and "Puguogong".

As we all know, Wushan in Gansu was called Ningyuan in ancient times, but does the "Wuzhou Ningyuan" mentioned here means Wushan in Gansu. *History of Jin Dynasty* showed that Yu Zhongwen died at the age of fifty-five and it also showed that in May of the seventh year of Tianfu, Zuo Qigong, Yu Zhongwen, Cao Yongyi and Kang Gongbi went to Guangning together, passing Pingzhou on the way and Zhang Jue sent someone to kill them in the chestnut forest. Based on this calculation, he was born in the fifth year of Xianyong, Emperor Daozong of the Liao Dynasty (1069 A.D.). Because Yu Zhongwen was a person who entered the Jin Dynasty from the Liao Dynasty, his native place should be Wuzhou Ningyuan in the Liao Dynasty. *History of Liao Dynasty* showed that Wuzhou was established at the end of the Tang Dynasty and was rebuilt in the ninth year of Chongxi, Emperor Xizong of the Liao Dynasty (1040 A.D.). At this time, Ningyuan belonged to Shenwu County under the jurisdiction of Wuzhou. *History of Jin Dynasty* also showed that Wuzhou has a Ningyuan county. Therefore, the establishment of Ningyuan in Wuzhou during the Liao and Jin Dynasties did not change much.

Coincidentally, during this period, Wushan in Gansu was also named Ningyuan, but belonged to the Song Dynasty. *History of the Song Dynasty* showed that the three counties of Longxi, Yongning and Ningyuan under the jurisdiction of Gongzhou, of which Yongning County and Ningyuan County were upgraded from Yongning Fortress and Ningyuan Fortress respectively in the third year of Chongning, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty (1104 A.D.). Ningyuan County in Gongzhou belongs to the Jin Dynasty and has been in the Emperor Taizong of the Jin Dynasty in the ninth year of Tianhui (1031 A.D.). According to *History of Jin Dynasty* records, at that time, the Jin government appointed A Libu as the commander of the army on the left, together with Wanyan Zongbi who commanded the army on the right, pacify the armies of Gong, Tao, He, Xining, Lan and Kuo states, etc. As well as cities and fortresses such as Laibin, Dingyuan, Hezheng, Ganyu, Ningtao and Anlong, etc. More than 40 barracks of ethnic minorities and Han nationality such as towns and castles, as well as many Han nationality officials, soldiers, people and chieftain of ethnic minorities, Jingyuan and Xihe places have been pacified.

Yu Zhongwen was born in the fifth year of Xianyong, Emperor Daozong of the Liao Dynasty (1069 A.D.) and

died in the seventh year of Tianfu, Emperor Taizu of the Jin Dynasty (1123 A.D.), he lived 55 years. However, Ningyuan in Gongzhou originally belonged to the Song government. It was upgraded to a county in the third year of Chongning of Song Huizong (1104 A.D.) and it was classified as Jin government in the ninth year of Tianhui of Jin Taizong (1131 A.D.). At this time, it was 63 years away from the year when Yu Zhongwen was born, in other words, the fifth year of Xianyong in Liao Dynasty (1069 A.D.), even if it was 9 years away from the year when he was death, that is in the seventh year of Tianfu in Jin Dynasty (1123 A.D.). Yu Zhongwen, who was originally born in the Liao Dynasty, but his birthplace is Ningyuan county which later it belongs to the Jin Dynasty, is this appropriate?

In addition, after a careful comparison of the records of Yu Zhongwen between *History of Jin Dynasty* and the local chronicles of Wushan County, we can know that it is not difficult to distinguish which one is true and which is false. Compared with the original text of *History of Jin Dynasty*, it is obvious that this record in the local chronicles of Wushan County is purely a very simple sentence excerpt, not only is the language lacking logic, but the punctuation marks are also very vague, which creates unavoidable errors. Therefore, Yu Zhongwen is definitely not a Wushan person, let alone the first chin-shih of Wushan County. The address of his native place where is "Wuzhou Ningyuan", should be near Wuzhai County and Shenchi County in Shanxi Province.

### ***1.2 A Textual Research on the Wang Fan's Native place in Ming Dynasty and the chin-shihes Recorded in the local chronicles of Min County***

The remnant version of *Local Chronicles of Ningyuan County* in the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty showed that Wang Fan was the first juren in a single subject during the Chenghua period, that is, the guimao year of the lunar calendar, he was admitted to chin-shih in the Jiachen Year of the Lunar Calendar and had been an official until Canzheng. Wang fan is Wang Sheng's son. *Manuscripts of the Local Chronicles of Wushan County* during the Republic of China also showed that his tomb is in the three miles east of Wushan City. Nevertheless, among the chin-shihes recording in *Local Chronicles of Minzhou* in the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty, there was also a person named Wang Fan.

Minzhou, now known as Min County, it is located in the south of Gansu Province, southwest of Dingxi City, borders Zhang County and Wushan County in the northeast. Because of its remote location, adjacent to ethnic minority places, poor land and inconvenient transportation, there were very few people in Minzhou who had passed the examination of chin-shihes. Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, including Zhang Jin, Wang Duo, Zhang Qian, Liu Shilun, Yu Ao and Zhu Yi from the Ming Dynasty and Guo Chengjun, Guo Chengwei, Yin Shicai and Wu Duogui

from the Qing Dynasty were recorded in the history books, there were only 10.

Zhang Jin, whose ancestral home was in Taikang of Henan and military native place was in Minzhouwei of Shaanxi, was admitted to the 42nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the fifth year of Chenghua in Ming Dynasty (1469 A.D.). Wang Duo, whose ancestral home was in Baoding of Shaanxi and military native place was in Minzhouwei of Shaanxi, was admitted to the 74nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the twenty-third year of Chenghua in Ming Dynasty (1487 A.D.). Zhang Qian, he is Zhang Jin's eldest son and was admitted to the 12nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the ninth year of Hongzhi in Ming Dynasty (1496 A.D.). Liu Shilun, whose ancestral home was in Huairan of Shaanxi and military native place was in Minzhouwei of Shaanxi, was admitted to the 73nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the twelfth year of Zhengde in Ming Dynasty (1517 A.D.). Yu Ao, whose ancestral home was in Bozhou of Zhili and military native place was in Minzhouwei of Shaanxi, was admitted to the 98nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the sixteenth year of Zhengde in Ming Dynasty (1521 A.D.). Zhu Yi, whose military native place was in Minzhouwei of Shaanxi and was admitted to the 67nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the second year of Wanli in Ming Dynasty (1574 A.D.).

*Records of People in the Past in Chronicles of Minzhou Homeland* stated that only the Guo brothers and Yin Shicai in recent years were admitted as chin-shihes in the Qing Dynasty. The Guo brothers were from Minzhou of Shaanxi, their elder brother was called Guo Chengjun, who was admitted to the 93nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the tenth year of Qianlong in Qing Dynasty (1745 A.D.) and his younger brother Guo Chengwei, who was admitted to the 142nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the twenty second-third year of Qianlong in Qing Dynasty (1757 A.D.). Yin Shicai, his native place in Minzhou of Gansu and he was admitted to the 130nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the sixteenth year of Guangxu in Qing Dynasty (1890 A.D.). Wu Duogui, *Local Chronicles of Minzhou* in the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty showed that he was admitted to martial chin-shih during the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty, that is in Dingwei year of the lunar calendar (1667 A.D.) and he was served as a Youji general in Jiezhou. *Sequel to Local Chronicles of Jiezhou* also has the same record. Therefore, there was no doubt that he was admitted to the martial chin-shih with the native place of Minzhouwei.

There are many records in *Local Chronicles of Minzhou* in the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty about the chin-shihes of MinzhouWei in Ming Dynasty, such as Zhang Jin, Wang Duo, Zhang Qian, Yu Ao and Liu Shilun, their deeds were also included in the *Prestigious Officials chapter* of this book, Liu Shilun's literary works were also included in the *literary chapters* of this book. But, this book about Wang Fan's deeds only shows that he was a chin-shih in the Hongzhi period of the Ming Dynasty and once held the official position of Canzheng, its record is actually limited. Why is Wang Fan, who once served as a government officials and not inferior to others, but the record in this book is so rough? As a matter of fact, his

native place is Ningyuan of Shaanxi.

Not only the remnant version of *Local Chronicles of Ningyuan County* in the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty and *Manuscripts of the Local Chronicles of Wushan County* during the Republic of China showed that his native place is Ningyuan of Shaanxi, but also *Index of inscriptions by chin-shih in Ming and Qing Dynasties* showed that Wang Fan's military native place was in Ningyuan of Shaanxi, he was admitted to the 20nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the twentieth year of Chenghua in Ming Dynasty (1484 A.D.).

Therefore, Wang Fan's native place in Ming Dynasty must be Ningyuan of Shaanxi, should be Wushan County in Gansu Province.

## **2. The education level in Gansu during the Ming and Qing dynasties and the reasons for the controversy about the native place of chin-shihes**

In the Ming dynasty, people who passed the examination of chin-shihes in Minzhou Wei included Zhang Jin, Wang Duo, Zhang Qian, Liu Shilun, Yu Ao and Zhu Yi. In the Qing Dynasty, people who passed the examination of chin-shihes in Minzhou, included Guo Chengjun, Guo Chengwei, Yin Shicai and martial chin-shih Wu Duogui, there were ten people in Ming and Qing dynasties. Combined with historical records such as *local chronicles of Minzhou, Sequel to Local Chronicles of Jiezhou, Index of inscriptions by chin-shih in Ming and Qing Dynasties* and other historical books, the chin-shihes of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Minzhou, it basically showed the following characteristics.

First of all, in the Ming Dynasty, all the chin-shihes in Minzhouwei had two native places, they all had the background of well-educated places. In the Ming dynasty, the chin-shih such as Zhang Jin, Wang Duo, Zhang Qian, Liu Shilun, Yu Ao and Zhu Yi in Minzhou Wei, their military native place were both in Minzhouwei of Shaanxi. However, Zhang Jin and his eldest son Zhang Qian, their ancestral home was in Taikang of Henan, Wang Duo's ancestral home was in Baoding of Shaanxi, Liu Shilun's ancestral home was in Huairan of Shaanxi, Yu Ao's ancestral home was in Bozhou of Zhili, Zhu Yi, although we don't know his ancestral home, but it can be inferred from his military native place in Minzhouwei of Shaanxi.

Secondly, the chin-shihes in Minzhou whose rankings are lower overall in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Among the chin-shihes in Minzhou in the Ming and Qing dynasties, Zhang Jin, was the 42nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the fifth year of Chenghua in Ming Dynasty and he was the first, his eldest son Zhang Qian was the 12nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the ninth year of Hongzhi in Ming Dynasty and he was the best. Zhang Jin once held the position of Zuo Shilang of the Criminal Department, therefore, his eldest son Zhang Qian worshipped Li Dongyang as his teacher. The rankings of the rest people were at the bottom of the second or even the third.

Thirdly, in the Ming and Qing dynasties, there was a special trend of kinship among the chin-shihes in Minzhou. Among the chin-shihes in Minzhou in the Ming and Qing dynasties, Zhang Jin was the 42nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the fifth year of Chenghua and Zhang Qian was the 12nd chin-shih of second-ranking in the ninth year of Hongzhi in Ming Dynasty, they were father and son. Guo Chengjun was the 93rd chin-shih of third-ranking in the tenth year of Qianlong and Guo Chengwei was the 142nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the twenty second-third year of Qianlong in Qing Dynasty, they were brothers. These 4 people accounted for 40% of the total number of the chin-shihes in Minzhou in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The last, in the Qing Dynasty, the localization trend of the chin-shihes appeared in Minzhou. Among the chin-shihes in Minzhou in the Qing Dynasty, Wu Duogui was the martial chin-shih in Kangxi Period of Qing Dynasty, Guo Chengjun was the 93rd chin-shih of third-ranking in the tenth year of Qianlong and Guo Chengwei was the 142nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the twenty second-third year of Qianlong in Qing Dynasty, Yin Shicai was the 130nd chin-shih of third-ranking in the sixteenth year of Guangxu in Qing Dynasty, their native place is in Minzhou of Shaanxi or Gansu.

As we all know, chin-shih is the highest level of the imperial examination of a person who has passed the final level of the central government examination under the imperial examination system. In the Ming and Qing dynasties when the imperial examination system was prosperous, the number and rank of the chin-shihes in Minzhou were far from those in Jiangsu and Zhejiang where education was developed. This showed that its education level was backward. From the Ming to the Qing dynasty, still very limited local chin-shihes such as Wu Duogui, Guo Chengjun, Guo Chengwei and Yin Shicai appeared in Minzhou, its backward education level remained unchanged. As far as the number of chin-shihes was concerned, even if the number of chin-shihes in each session was continuously increased in the Qing Dynasty, this situation has not changed but worsened. The remote location, adjacent to ethnic minority places, poor land and inconvenient transportation should be the main reasons.

According to related research, the number of chin-shihes in Gansu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties was 161 and 292 respectively, the total number of the two dynasties is 453. In the Ming Dynasty, there were 6 chin-shihes in Minzhou, accounts for 3.7% of the total chin-shihes in Gansu, 4 chin-shihes in the Qing Dynasty, accounts for 1.3% of the total chin-shihes in Gansu and 10 chin-shihes in Ming and Qing dynasties, accounts for about 2.2% of the total chin-shihes in Gansu and including the martial chin-shih Wu Duogui. Undoubtedly, when imperial examination system flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties, no matter the number or rank of chin-shihes, Minzhou is not the only place, there was a big gap between Gansu and Jiangsu, Zhejiang and other places with developed education, the education level there is still relatively backward.

Under the historical conditions of relatively backward

education level, the records about the native place of Yu Zhongwen in the Liao Dynasty, Wang Fan in the Ming Dynasty in local chronicles of Wushan county and Min county showed a large deviation. The native place of Yu Zhongwen in the Liao Dynasty was "Wuzhou Ningyuan", not Gongzhou Ningyuan. The Ming Dynasty Wang Fan was born in Ningyuan of Shaanxi, didn't have any relationship with Minzhou. Although Yu Zhongwen was lived in the Liao and Jin dynasties, wrongly record his native place as Gongzhou Ningyuan of *Local Chronicles of Ning Yuan County* and was compiled during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty when the atmosphere of revising aspirations prevailed. In the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty, this atmosphere did not decline. Therefore, *Local Chronicles of Minzhou* in the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty mistakenly stated that the native place of Wang Fan was Minzhou of Shaanxi. Then, why did the local chronicles of Wushan county and Min county such a record appear? In addition to the objective reasons such as information obstruction and material confusion, the intention of the editors of the local chronicles, is that subjective reasons played a decisive role.

Because of the backwardness of local education, local governors and local gentry, who worked as the main force in the compilation of local chronicles, not only in order to show their political achievements and spread fame, but also to encourage students to study hard and obtain fame, thereby to promote the development of local education and to change the backward situation of local education, they were far-fetched and included historical figures not related to the local into the local chronicles, so that the readers didn't know who they were or not even believed it was true, the controversy about the native place of chin-shihes emerged. Moreover, as the local gentry who actually controlled the compilation of the local chronicles, their cultural level was also a reflection of the local educational level.

### 3. Conclusion

The imperial examination system flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties. No matter the number of chin-shihes or the rank of chin-shihes, there was a big gap between Gansu and Jiangsu, Zhejiang and other educationally developed places, its education level was relatively backward. Under the historical conditions of relatively backward local education, the records in the local chronicles of Wushan county and Min county in Gansu regarding the native place of chin-shih Yu Zhongwen in the Liao Dynasty and chin-shih Wang Fan in the Ming Dynasty showed considerable deviation. The native place of chin-shih Yu Zhongwen in the Liao Dynasty was Wuzhou Ningyuan, not Gongzhou Ningyuan and the native place of chin-shih Wang Fan in the Ming Dynasty was Ningyuan of Shaanxi, not the Minzhou bordering it. The reason why was that the local chroniclers with relatively low educational level, not only in order to show their political achievements and spread fame, but also to promote the development of local education, thereby to

change the backward situation of local education, They did not hesitate to include historical figures that were originally unrelated to the local chronicles, the controversy about the native place of chin-shihes emerged.

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