

From Geographical to Bloodline: Clan Genealogy Research of New Village Records in Northwest Shanxi - Taking the Village Records of Hequ County in Shanxi Province as an Example

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Abstract

This study examines the newly compiled village annals of Hequ County in Northwest Shanxi Province through archival analysis and field research. The findings reveal a notable phenomenon: the incorporation of genealogical records into local chronicles. As both historical documentation and living records of family lineage, these genealogies serve dual purposes in Hequ County—functioning as residential records for specific villages or clan branches, while also documenting mixed populations of different families. Unlike traditional family histories, village annals specifically record the demographic and social conditions within defined administrative boundaries, reflecting geographical relationships. They provide a more comprehensive and systematic account of economic, political, cultural, and social developments. Through this scholarly analysis, the paper explores the distinctive features of newly compiled village annals in Northwest Shanxi, examines the integration of village chronicles with clan genealogies, and discusses their broader significance.

Keywords

Northwest Shanxi, new village annals, genealogy

1. Introduction

The compilation of historical records, local chronicles, and family genealogies represents a distinctive traditional culture of the Chinese nation, deeply rooted and enduringly rich. Regarding the relationship between national history, regional chronicles, and clan genealogies, Qing scholar Zhang Xuecheng [1] made a clear distinction: “There exists a history of the entire realm, a history of a nation, a history of a family, and a history of an individual. Biographies and chronicles constitute a person’s history; family genealogies represent a family’s history; county and prefectural records form a nation’s history; while comprehensive records of an entire dynasty constitute the history of the entire realm”. However, in specific historical and regional contexts, these distinctions were not always so rigid. As Wu Caimao’s [2] study “Both Genealogy and Chronicle: The Chronicleization of the Long Clans Genealogy in Southwest Chinas Tusi Society” demonstrates, the Qing Dynasty’s Long Clan Genealogy exhibited a notable Chronicleization phenomenon.

This genealogy not only traced the lineage of the Long family but also incorporated extensive content typically found in local chronicles. For instance, Volume II includes sections on “mountains and rivers, villages, population and grain, historical changes, customs, bridges, local products, and dialects”.

In the mid-1980s, influenced by the ethos of the new era, a groundbreaking phenomenon emerged where villagers began compiling village chronicles. The integration of village chronicles and family genealogies first took shape in Jinhua, Zhejiang Province. In Guanchuan Village, Xiangzhu Town, Yongkang County, Zhejiang, locals innovatively combined family genealogies with village chronicles, creating the “Guanchuan Village Chronicle” [3] where the genealogical section accounted for over half of the content. Beyond the main Hu Clan Genealogy, the “Genealogical Records of Other Clans in Guanchuan” documented the lineage of villagers from other surnames. A key method in compiling new village chronicles was “incorporating genealogies into the chronicle,” as seen in works like the “Xietian Village Chronicle” [4] and “Panshan Village Chronicle” [5]. Another approach involved adding “Villager Registers,” similar to household registration records, which tabulated basic information of each household in the village chronicle, as exemplified by the “Dongguan Village Chronicle” [6] in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. These chronicles collectively demonstrate the trend of integrating genealogical records into village histories.

Current research on the relationship between local chronicles and genealogies remains limited. Cai Jintao’s [7] article “Should We Compile Village Chronicles or Continue Genealogies? A Research Topic Worth Exploring in Local Chronicles Studies” proposes replacing genealogical compilation with village chronicle compilation. This approach aligns better with China’s national conditions and contemporary characteristics compared to traditional genealogical practices. The article explores the content and structure of village chronicles, preliminarily concluding that they generally encompass 15 categories: administrative jurisdiction, geographical environment, surname origins, family lineages, population changes, biographies of notable figures, honors and merits, infrastructure, land ownership, production development, cultural and educational health services, social welfare, customs and traditions, anecdotes, and literary records [8]. The chronicle begins with historical genealogical prefaces and a list of compilers, while concluding with a chronology of major events and compilation notes [9]. Subsequent sections are organized into chapters and sections based on local conditions. The article emphasizes the importance of village chronicle compilation but does not further explore the relationship between village chronicles and genealogies. Ding Huiyi’s [8] article “A Chronicle for Common People: A Review of the Tao Family Chronicles in Qingcun Town, Fengxian District” primarily discusses how the Tao Family Chronicles breaks traditional chronicle formats. It examines the books structural framework, compilation planning, data collection methods, preservation formats and contents, fund utilization, and distribution models. The application of comprehensive methods including maps, photographs, illustrations, charts, records, and transmission. This article focuses on highlighting the innovative aspects of “Taocun Annals”. Dai Jiazhen’s [9] “Innovations in Baisha Village Annals Regarding Surnames, Family Records, and Population Documentation—Also Discussing the Integration Path Between Village Annals and Genealogies” compares the similarities and differences between genealogies and village annals, exploring their integration. The author argues that “whether its genealogies or village annals, the emphasis on documentation should evolve with the times and make adjustments. While not suggesting village annals replace genealogies, they should at least incorporate the essence of genealogies to enrich village annals. The gradual integration of village annals and genealogies is entirely feasible, and village annals can fully accommodate genealogical lineage records while offering new dimensions.” Yi Jienan and Ren Guorui’s [10] “On the Modern Transition from Family Genealogy Compilation to Community and Administrative Village Annals” discusses the traditions and functional significance of genealogy compilation, explores pathways for creative transformation and innovative development of village annals and community annals, and proposes basic compilation strategies. All the aforementioned articles mention local chronicles and genealogies, reflecting the genealogization of local chronicles, though the authors do not explicitly state this concept. Moreover, most studies on the genealogization of local chronicles remain descriptive rather than in-depth research. The key difference between this article and the aforementioned studies lies in its focus on...This paper discusses the clan genealogy of the village chronicles in northwest Shanxi Province and its significance under the background of the Ming Dynasty.

2. Background of the Migration in Hequ County

2.1 The Westward Migration

Jin Northwest primarily refers to the northwestern frontier of Shanxi Province, situated at the eastern edge of the Loess Plateau and the confluence where the Yellow River flows into Shanxi. It borders Fugu County in Shaanxi Province and Zhungeer Banner in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region across the Yellow River. Hequ County is the most representative area in this region. This area belongs to the Loess Plateau hilly zone, characterized by uneven terrain, crisscrossing gullies, and a landscape dominated by ridges and hills. Vegetation is sparse, and soil erosion is severe. Despite being at the confluence of the Yellow River into Shanxi, the region has historically had extremely limited utilization of Yellow River water due to significant elevation differences and underdeveloped technology. From a climatic perspective, Jin Northwest falls within the temperate arid and semi-arid zone, with low precipitation and a short frost-free period. According to weather statistics from the 1940s and 1950s, the annual average precipitation here is approximately 425 millimeters, often accompanied by natural disasters, with drought being the most severe, as reflected in the saying “nine out of ten years are droughts.” The main food crops in Jin Northwest are cold-resistant and drought-tolerant millet, oats, and soybeans.

This region has been a strategic stronghold contested by military strategists since ancient times, serving as a pivotal frontier stronghold. The “Hequ County Annals” [11] records its territorial boundaries: “The county’s Hebao Camp, formerly known as Huigou Camp, was established during the Ming Xuande period. In the 29th year of the Qianlong reign, the surrounding area was expanded by three li and eight bu, with brick walls reaching 36 chi in height. The southern gate was added, merging the east and west gates into a triple gate, each topped with a tower. To the west lies the Yellow River, one of its nine bends, while mountains surround it in all directions. The roads to Baode Prefecture and the five villages of Qilin and Pian Pass are perilous. The county’s name derives from its location at the rivers winding bend. During the 12th year of Duke Wens reign in the Spring and Autumn Period, the Qin and Jin armies clashed at Hequ, establishing Yongji and Hezhen.” The strategic importance of northwestern Shanxi grew even more significant during the Ming Dynasty. In the early Ming era, the Northern Yuan retreated to southern desert regions, and frequent cavalry raids from the south became a major threat to the Ming Empire. Emperor Taizu of Ming prioritized defense in this area, implementing extensive border reforms and strict fortifications. Over a century from the Hongwu period (1368-1398) to the Zhengde era (1515), the Great Wall was continuously reinforced, with Pian Pass alone forming a formidable military frontier. A local saying goes: “Bronze Pian Pass, iron Ningwu, cast as an ancient fortress.” Historically, it was described as “three strategic barriers and a key stronghold.” Additionally, this region became a primary battleground for Han Chinese and ethnic minority conflicts. With the Qing governments land reclamation policies and the influx of immigrants through the Western Pass, it emerged as the forefront of interaction between Han Chinese and Mongols. The ancient ferry at Hequ Western Pass stands as a testament to this historical crossroads. It is an important traffic route to Inner Mongolia and an important distribution center of the north and south goods.

An old Shanxi folk saying goes: “Hequ guards Baode Prefecture, nine out of ten years no harvest; men journey beyond the pass, women dig bitter herbs.” Since the Ming Dynasty, the passes along the Great Wall have been called “Kou” (pass). Zhangjiakou in Hebei was known as “Dongkou” (East Pass), while the western passes like Youyus Shahu Pass, Hequ ancient ferry, and Pianguans Shuiquan Hongmen Pass became collectively called “Xikou” (West Pass). “Zou Xikou” thus became a metaphor for Shanxi people leaving their homes to enter the vast Mongolian grasslands. Those from northwest Shanxi typically reached Inner Mongolia via water or land routes—the water route mainly through Hequ ancient ferry at Xikou, while the land route crossed the Great Wall into the Houtao and Daqing Mountain regions.

2.2 Industrial Mining Resettlement

Hequ County boasts abundant mineral resources, with preliminary exploration identifying 18 types across 6 categories of significant reserves. The coal reserves alone amount to 12 billion tons, distributed over 400 square kilometers. In 2014, the county launched a strategic plan to consolidate and develop “Five Major Bases and Ten Mining Areas.” The existing 27 mines were streamlined into 17 operational units, including: Shangyuquan Coal Mine (Phase I: 3-6 million tons/year) operated by Luneng Electric Coal, Huangbai Coal Mine (Phase II: 10 million tons/year), Shaping Coal Mine (5 million tons/year) by Jinshen, Ciyao Gou Coal

Mine (2.4 million tons/year), Yangpoquan Coal Mine (1.2 million tons/year) by Hualu, Liangjiaqi Coal Mine (450,000 tons/year) by Aoda, and 11 local private mines (reduced to 3 million tons/year), collectively achieving a production capacity of 30 million tons/year [12]. By 2021, the coal industry had grown substantially, with key projects including the Shanxi Shenda Liangjiaqi Coal Mine (3 million tons/year), Shanxi Shenda Hui an Coal Industry Co., Ltd. (1.5 million tons/year), Shanxi Zhongwei Jutian Coal Transportation Co., Ltd. (3-5 million tons/year), and Taoyuan Huachuan Coal Washing Plant (1 million tons/year). All coal was transported to Luneng Power Plant, coal gangue power plants, and distributed nationwide via the Zhunshuo Railway. Jiuxian Town stood out as the richest coal resource area, with proven reserves reaching 4 billion tons. The towns economy thrived, becoming one of Xinzhou's first "100-million-yuan towns" as early as 1996. In 2014, the county Party committee and government...The government has decided to develop two industrial parks: the "Old County Coal Logistics Park" and the "Old County Shanmei Coal-Electricity-Aluminum Circular Industrial Park". Currently, four coal mines—Shanmei Old County Open-pit Mine, Jinshen Shaping Mine, Jinneng Maogou Mine, and Shenda Daqiaogou Mine—are engaged in both open-pit and modern underground mining, demonstrating significant potential for socio-economic development [13].

In recent years, the expansion of Hequ Coal Industry mining operations has forced villages within the county to relocate. After demolition, no centralized resettlement sites were established, leaving villagers to purchase homes independently. Most chose to settle in the county town, beginning their journey of "leaving their homeland." In traditional rural communities, the bond between farmers and the land, along with the social ties formed through this connection, remains a cornerstone of daily life and community dynamics. Neighborhood interactions also form vital components of social support networks. "Kinship and geographical ties remain the only familiar relationships villagers can leverage," they say [14]. The relocation has profoundly disrupted these ties, severing families from their ancestral lands and their original social fabric, thrusting them into an unfamiliar environment.

In addition to the two reasons mentioned above, some villagers have migrated voluntarily, which can be further divided into intra-provincial and inter-provincial migrations. In short, the migration background has profoundly influenced the compilation of village chronicles in Hequ County, as detailed below.

3. Compilation of New Village Annals in Hequ County and Its Genealogization

Water has its source, trees have their roots, a nation has its history, and a village has its chronicles. Historical records document the changes of the world, while local chronicles narrate the evolution of customs. Both serve as bridges to connect the past with the future. This paper explores these themes through the examples of the "Shangtan Shui Village Chronicle," "Shanzhai Village Chronicle," "Yingdimao Village Chronicle," and "Fanjialiang Village Chronicle" in Hequ County.

From the perspective of compiling village chronicles, there are two main aspects. The first is "compiling chronicles under village peril." Fanjialiang Village, Shangtanshui Village, and Yindingmao Village underwent relocation due to industrial mining impacts. The preface of "Fanjialiang Village Chronicle" [15] mentions: "Fanjialiang Village has abundant underground coal reserves with high-quality coal distributed across multiple layers. To ensure efficient mining and resource conservation, following the national policy of replacing small mines with large ones, the county introduced foreign investment in 2008 to consolidate small coal mines into large-scale operations. In 2009, the Shibaiqi Coal Mine in Fanjialiang Village was integrated by Shanxi Coal Marketing Group and planned for open-pit mining. In several decades, the current appearance of Fanjialiang Village will disappear, transforming into an entirely different landscape. By 2017, when the relocation was completed, most village houses and courtyards had been leveled, with some no longer retaining their original appearance. To preserve fragments of history for future generations and society, we document and study Fanjialiang's past, present, and future. We explore how our ancestors toiled through generations, witnessing countless social changes and government transitions. This encourages descendants to strive harder and forge a better, happier future." The summary of "Shangtanshui Village Chronicle" [16] states: "Shangtanshui Village is rich in underground resources, including iron and sulfur mines. Its premium coal is renowned far and wide, with springs gushing from every crevice, echoing the saying coal and water." The proverb "carb and water" (referring to coal and water) now finds its essence in the unprecedented transformation of Shangtan. Underground coal mining has been replaced by open-pit

operations, with gullies leveled and land consolidated into vast plains, erasing the once vibrant mountainous landscapes into memory. In the preface to “The Chronicles of Yingdimao Village” [17], author Du Ruijing reflects: “While history is often written in prosperous times, this books true purpose lies in documenting the villages perilous future. Witnessing the places where I spent my childhood vanish or fade away, I was deeply moved and resolved to compile this village chronicle.”

The second principle is “Tracing Ancestral Roots”. The Hequ County migration has a long history. The “Shangtan Shui Village Annals” records: “For centuries, Tan Shui villagers routinely migrated beyond the riverbanks to earn money through felt production. Through dynastic changes and prolonged dispersal, clan members settled in eighteen counties (cities) and sixty-four villages across Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Inner Mongolia provinces, with a total population of 3,800-4,000” [17]. The massive migration spanning Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Inner Mongolia over millennia, involving thousands of miles of travel and tracing lineage, presented an extraordinarily challenging task. Yet the clan successfully completed this monumental project. The editor reflects: “Years of fieldwork perfectly capture the essence of one Wang surname, unbreakable bonds.” The warm greetings from hometown relatives are heartwarming. Most are descendants of earlier generations who migrated, some only remembering the inherited Du Jia (a village name) without knowing the original. Yet ancestral reunification remains their deepest aspiration. Through my interactions, many returned multiple times to embrace the ancient cypress symbolizing the Wang clans spirit, experience local customs, and clarify generational relationships [16]. The “Shanzhai Village Annals” comprises two volumes: one documenting village history and notable figures, the other tracing genealogical roots. With rich content and extensive coverage, it strives to encompass every household and every generation.” A flicker of light and a trace of shadow. This allows the local soil and water to trace their origins and reveal the local customs, while enabling thousands of descendants to distinguish between generations and distances [18]. The text provides detailed records of the villager migrations caused by the Westward Migration (Zou Xikou). Beyond documenting the Westward Migration in the genealogical records, a dedicated chapter titled The Long Journey to the West (depicting the migration routes and arduous journey of the two tribes) further elaborates on the narrative.

The village meticulously traces its history back hundreds or even thousands of years. For instance, the “Shanzhai Village Annals” records its origins in the Han Dynasty, stating: “According to the Daoguang-era “Hequ County Annals”, Shanzhai Village was originally called Taizi Village. It is said to share historical ties with neighboring Wenwupo and Taizidian, with roots dating back over two millennia. This area once served as a post station, forming a vital transportation hub connecting Central Plains with northern ethnic groups. The name Shanzhai derives from Shan Xiongxin (Shan Tong), who established a fortress here to raise horses.” The “Yingdimao Village Annals” traces its history to the Song-Yuan period, noting: “While the exact founding date remains unclear, the villages name originates from its clay-rich soil. Initially called Zhaoxian Village, it was later renamed Yingdimao due to the hard clay deposits. The villages formation began during the Song-Yuan era, as recorded in the “County Annals” from the Qing Shunzhi period” [17]. The “Shangtanshui Village Annals” recounts its history during the Qing Kangxi era: “Ancestral records indicate the Wang clan originated from Datong. In the early Kangxi period, two brothers from Datong traveled to Hequ with felt-making skills. After a brief stay in Yangmanliang, they settled in Baxingshu (a place name for Shangtanshui), purchasing land and digging earthen caves for settlement. Within years, the Wang clan expanded significantly” [16]. The Wang clan gradually withdrew from the area after acquiring most of the land under their surname, leaving the Wang family as the sole inhabitants. During the Qianlong reign, the village was named Tan Shui (Coal Water) after its two local resources: coal and water. Years later, during the Tongzhi reign, it was renamed Shang Tan Shui (Upper Coal Water), a name that has endured to this day. The Fanjialiang Village Annals traces the villages history back to the Daoguang era (1801-1851). The four-volume Hequ County Annals compiled by Magistrate Cao Chunxiao during Daoguangs fifty-year reign (1801-1851) did not even mention Fanjialiang Village. From the Daoguang era (1831-1851) to the present day (2017), spanning over 180 years, it is evident that Fanjialiang Village has existed for a relatively short period.

Villages like Danzhai, which are clearly documented in county annals, can trace their origins through these records. However, for settlements such as Yindingmao, Shangtanshui, and Fanjialiang, their detailed historical accounts primarily rely on genealogies. For instance, the Bai family migrated to Yindingmao during the Yuan Dynasty, while the Du family settled there in the early Hongwu era of the Ming Dynasty to

establish ceramic production. This migration has spanned dozens of generations, though incomplete records prevent full documentation of all lineages. Current records identify the Bai family's founding ancestor as Bai Jia Suo. The genealogical section of Shangtanshuis village annals states: "As the saying goes: No ancestors compile genealogies, no descendants know history. Compiling family histories aims to clarify lineage and maintain order. By preserving ancestral traditions, we ensure continuity, uphold clan rules, and foster prosperity through generations." For the Wang clan of Shangtanshui, compiling a family history is both their first attempt and a shared aspiration. Yet, with over 360 years of history since their founding, writing village records and continuing genealogies proves challenging. The only surviving written references—ancient tombstones and "ancestral inscriptions"—have been lost, leaving no tangible materials for reference. Compilation efforts now rely on elders oral accounts and stories passed down through generations, requiring meticulous verification. Through door-to-door visits and extensive research, they seek corroborating evidence to authentically reconstruct historical narratives.

From the origin of the compilation of the village chronicles and the tracing of the village history, we can see the tendency of the genealogy of the village chronicles. The village chronicles not only document the geographical environment, administrative divisions, natural and cultural landscapes, political, economic, and social affairs of the village, but also record the ancestors heroic deeds of founding the nation and their family precepts of virtue and perseverance. Moreover, the genealogical records of surnames are particularly detailed, occupying over half of the entire chronicle.

In village chronicles, integrating genealogical records into local histories represents a concrete manifestation of clan-based content organization. Both family genealogies and village chronicles serve as primary historical documentation, sharing certain temporal and spatial dimensions in their narratives. However, these two forms exhibit fundamental differences: First, genealogies cover broader geographical scopes than village chronicles. Genealogies define their spatial scope by family settlements, which may span a single village, multiple villages, or even cross administrative boundaries, while village chronicles focus on specific villages (natural or administrative units). Second, their narrative subjects differ. Genealogies emphasize bloodline connections, documenting the history and current status of families sharing the same surname and lineage, whereas village chronicles prioritize geographical ties, focusing on the historical and contemporary conditions of local villagers. In this regard, genealogies are rooted in blood relations, emphasizing lineage, generational cycles, social governance, and notable figures, while village chronicles are grounded in geographical ties, emphasizing villagers and the economic development and social transformations of a village. The village chronicles of Hequ County have successfully integrated genealogical records, incorporating the genealogical records of all surnames within the village into the chronicles. This integration breaks through the familial bloodline limitations of genealogies while simultaneously transcending the geographical boundaries of village chronicles through the inclusion of genealogical records. This is evident from the Shangtan Shui Village Chronicle alone, which meticulously documents the current status of Wang family members residing in Hequ County, Shanxi Province: Original hometown of Shangtan Shui Village. Nearly a thousand people still reside in the area, with various branches of the clan present. The current Wang family in Luan Village mainly consists of descendants of Wang Cheng, a descendant of Wang Zhaoyuan from the Fourth Branch. The Dawang family in Luan Village includes two branches: one descended from Wang Nao, a descendant of Wang Zhaoyu from the Third Branch, and another from Wang Egou, a descendant of Wang Zhaoyuan from the Fourth Branch. The Baidao branch belongs to the "Old Second Branch" of the Honggebu lineage, represented by Wang Mao. Villages such as Jingyugou, Yindingmao, Shitizi, and Wuhuacheng also have small ethnic communities. The current Yaozhuang branch in Baode County belongs to the Youfangyuan lineage. According to the "Wang Family Genealogy" compiled by Wang Wenliang, their ancestor Wang Zongyan and his two brothers relocated to Yaozhuang during the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty. Although the original residents have left, their household registration remains unchanged, and they continued to pay taxes to Hequ during the late Qing period (commonly known as "Wan Yinliang"). The current Kelan County branch belongs to the "Sixth Branch" of the Wang Zhaoxian lineage, with descendants of Wang Shiwei. The Wang family in Magu County, Fugu County, Shaanxi Province, including those in Dahuo Luan and Houyaoziwan, belongs to the "First Branch" of the Wang Zhaolan lineage, with descendants of four brothers: Wang Youcai, Wang Xicai, Wang Jincan, and Wang Laicai. They migrated during the severe drought of the fifth year of the Xianfeng era in Shanxi. The current Inner Mongolian branch is diverse in composition, with a large population scattered across central Inner Mongolia, particularly in the Hetao Plain where Wang family members can be found

everywhere. The Xiaoshetai Wang Lin Gou branch belongs to the Youfangyuan lineage. According to the “Genealogy” compiled by Wang Wenbin...The genealogy records that “Wang Yan” was the fourth in the family line. In 1786 (the 32nd year of Emperor Qianlongs reign), he moved to Baotou. His grandson Wang Lincha later settled in Xiaoshetai Wanglin Valley, naming the village after Wang Lin. The Ma Chi branch of Baotou descends from Wang Qiancai (Wang Genwa), a great-grandson of Wang Yan. According to Wang Xias compiled “Genealogical Table of Wang Genwa,” Wang Genwa went to Ma Chi in 1860 (the 10th year of Emperor Xianfengs reign) to recruit laborers. He married and had eight sons, with the sixth son dying young while the other seven prospered, forming the largest clan in Ma Chi today with nearly a thousand members. They belong to the Youfangyuan branch. The Wulanji branch descends from Wang Shixiao, a descendant of Wang Qi from the Fourth Gate. The Ma Yingchang area, Heshun Village, and Xueguo Village in Zhongtans Heiliuzi all belong to the “Fourth Gate” lineage of Wang Sibao. Wang Chundandan and the Xiyu Fang Wang clan belong to the “Fifth Gate” lineage of Wang Chun and Wang Youchun. The Xiyu Fang and Fanjia Gedu Wang clan belong to the Youfangyuan lineage. The Dongwanzi and Shabuqi Wang clans in Urad Banner belong to the “Fourth Gate” lineage of Wang Zhaolan, with descendants Wang Sanmaohong and Wang Genbao. The Erpazi area has “Fifth Gate” lineage descendants Wang Wucun (a descendant of Wang Zhaokui) and “Second Gate” lineage descendants Wang Yinhong (a descendant of Wang Zhaoxiu). The Wayaotan and Huanchao Gedian clans belong to the Youfangyuan lineage. The Wang clans residing in Dashetai, Erhengong, Hongmin, Xishaliang, and Quangangbulong all belong to the “Fourth Gate” lineage. Wang Zhaoyuans descendants are descendants of Wang Zhaoyuan. Clan members of the Wang surname reside in Linhe, Shanba, Wuyuan, Wuhai, Zhongqi, Houqi, Hohhot, Dongsheng, and Daqi, with a widespread distribution. Those not connected to him may still be numerous [16].

The inclusion of family genealogies in village chronicles marks a significant breakthrough and a standout feature of these records. Genealogical entries demonstrate the chronicles close connection with villagers and their daily lives, representing a novel application of the principle of winning through details in village chronicles.

4. The Significance of New Village Records in Hequ County

Village chronicles stand out among other historical records for their vivid and concrete nature. What makes them most striking is their authenticity—close to life, detailed, and vibrant. From economic and political affairs to daily production and living, from local customs to folk traditions, and from cultural heritage to notable figures, their accounts remain deeply rooted in villagers realities, presenting concrete imagery that exudes a strong rural charm. The preserved ancient architecture, time-honored customs, and intangible cultural heritage passed down through oral traditions hold immense value. For understanding society, they serve as a unique historical window; for compiling county annals, they provide reliable supplementary materials; and for farmer education, they offer an engaging and accessible textbook. What we now consider commonplace daily life records in village chronicles may well become the “treasures” anthropologists and historians dream of. Moreover, their genealogical nature has already played and continues to play a significant role in tracing ancestral roots and visiting relatives. Take urban residents in China as an example: most can still trace their ancestors back several generations to find farming roots. Even when tracing beyond that, the enduring rural traditions and strong community atmosphere make it easy to detect traces of peasant customs and ways of thinking in their descendants.

4.1 The Re-discovery of Traditional Culture in the Village

Undeniably, compiling village chronicles is the best carrier to preserve the political, economic, cultural and social data of villages.

The chronicles meticulously document everything from origins to the day of completion, tracing every detail of historical events. They preserve invaluable records on meteorology, natural disasters, mineral resources, agricultural products, and water management systems. These records maintain balanced documentation of both merits and flaws, ensuring authenticity and objectivity. Preserving historical relics through excavation serves as a crucial foundation for village chronicles to preserve history, inform governance, and address contemporary needs. By chronicling local cultural heritage, these records showcase the material prosperity and spiritual vitality of the region—a principle they steadfastly uphold. The

inclusiveness of village chronicles makes their culture a distinctive feature, strength, and charm of regional traditions. “Customs vary within ten miles, and practices differ across a hundred,” as the saying goes. Village chronicles reveal spatial variations in rural lifestyles, with distinct local characteristics reflected in housing. In Hequ mountainous countryside, earthen caves serve as warm shelters, maintaining comfortable temperatures year-round. These caves feature heated brick beds (kang) and charcoal furnaces, where fire breathes through the earth while smoke ducts connect to the roof. The furnaces ingeniously create airflow without fans or fans, achieving natural ventilation. The dual-stove system, known as front and rear pots, facilitates cooking. Hard-soil earthen caves measure 10 feet in height and width, with depths reaching 20 feet, while looser soil versions are typically 9 feet high and wide, 15 feet deep, requiring wooden pillars, arch beams, and three horizontal logs to form a roof arch [17]. The regions culinary traditions are equally remarkable. Sour rice, a signature dish of Hequ, is said to be...Sour rice originated in the Northern Song Dynasty. When Liao troops invaded, civilians fled to remote mountains to escape the war. Sometimes they would discard soaked rice, but upon returning days later, they couldn’t bear to throw it away and resorted to cooking porridge. The resulting dish, with its yogurt-like flavor, golden texture, and heat-clearing properties, inspired the creation of sour soup. By soaking rice in the soup at temperatures above 15 C for 4-8 hours, they prepared sour porridge. The version made as congee was called “sour congee,” while the rice grains extracted from the soup were termed “sour rice.” During summer, this became the staple of daily meals. In Hequ, every household kept a “Jiang (sour) rice jar” on their stoves, a cherished tradition passed down through generations. This innovation by Hequ locals, who primarily consume millet, reflects their deep connection to the regions natural environment and cultural heritage. From a folkloric perspective, dialects naturally emerge in rural areas. The “Yingdimao Village Annals” includes a dedicated section on local dialects, with examples like: “Baisi” (friend), “Shage” (task completed), “Keshijie” (everywhere), “Bumenggu” (unexpected), “Buqian” (not good), and “Gaiti” (blanket) [17]. Lukanzi (stomach), Fengqi (common cold), Dingmengzi (sudden), Famao (temper tantrums), Ximeiyan (face washing), Boqianggu (neck), Shenshou (body posture), Ganlu (dining), Yangji (begging), Kexi (beauty), Xuechi (free-riding), Chouguai (troublemaking), Shaoqi (inciting others), Toushou (firstborn child), Yunchangjian (past), Nahanhuan (that place), Zhidandan (this spot) [17]. While we cannot definitively conclude that linguistic spatial differences are solely caused by natural environments, it is certain that environmental factors reinforce these variations and contribute to the long-term preservation of dialects. Literature and art are closely intertwined with language. The forms of artistic creation depend on regional cultural traditions. For instance, Hequs local operas “Errentai” and “Shanqu er” reflect this. Since literary works often originate from real-life experiences, they inevitably carry distinct local characteristics. In rural areas, the rich historical and cultural heritage not only preserves numerous ancient sites but also preserves countless legends and stories, along with countless literary works and artworks left by scholars. These resources facilitate the rediscovery of traditional culture.

4.2 Reconstruction of Rural Collective Memory

Collective memory constitutes a shared historical legacy of a community, requiring specific mediums for transmission. Village chronicles serve as carriers of both village history and villagers personal histories, while also preserving collective memories and emotional bonds. “Whether modern village chronicles or traditional genealogies, they all exist as textual representations of collective memory” [19]. Against the backdrop of large-scale rural resettlement in Hequ County, some villages face the prospect of complete demolition, with villagers scattered across different locations, making the compilation of village chronicles an urgent necessity. “The places where I spent my childhood, now witnessing their disappearance or imminent extinction, filled me with profound nostalgia, inspiring the idea of compiling a village chronicle. Mr. Du Dangju and Mr. Du Naichan from our village, who served in public office for years with integrity and dedication to the people, strongly recommended the capable Du Shuancai to organize the project. Through the diligent efforts of virtuous villagers like Du Guicai, Shuitian, and Pengfei, this vision was ultimately realized” [17]. The compilation of village chronicles thus became one of the primary methods for reconstructing collective memory, which in turn helps rebuild a sense of identity. As Halbwachs [20] observed, we preserve memories of various periods in our lives, which continually reappear. Through these memories, our sense of identity endures through a continuous connection. While villagers memories and village entities may fade, the written texts remain. Without these texts, once the elderly bearers of the past depart, all memories of the past will vanish. Indeed, by transforming mental memories into written records,

we preserve the past as enduring history. When ancestral legacies are passed down through generations, they enable us to learn from the past and foster cultural confidence among villagers. As documented in the “Yingdimao Village Annals”: “In this prosperous era, descendants of all clans in Yingdimao have compiled genealogies and village records, tracing their roots, honoring ancestors, uniting kin, and clarifying familial bonds. These efforts aim to cultivate filial piety and virtue. The newly compiled village annals now provide verifiable records of Yingdimao’s history and each clans lineage. Future generations should strive to uphold the ancestral virtues of Yingdimaos clans and strengthen their families. By compiling these records and organizing valuable village materials, we can summarize historical lessons and better unite the community, promoting righteousness and driving collective progress” [17].

By compiling village chronicles and conducting interviews with villagers, we help them recall the origins of their village, the migrations of their clansmen, and notable historical figures. Through these chronicles, we reconstruct the villages historical evolution, cultural traditions, values, and significant events, rekindling villagers memories of their community. In this way, history becomes a vital source of village identity, shaping the shared vision of people living together in reality. As expressed in the preface to “The Chronicles of Shanzhai Village”: “The content of a village chronicle is finite, but its power is boundless. It will undoubtedly become a precious resource for understanding the past, cherishing the present, and envisioning the future. It will also demonstrate infinite vitality, to be passed down and celebrated by generations of Shanzhai descendants, shining forever” [18].

4.3 It Is the Practice of Everyone Entering the Village Records

The newly compiled village chronicles of Hequ County have achieved a historic transformation by integrating genealogical records into local histories, shifting from compiling family lineages to documenting the collective heritage of villagers. This evolution is reflected in the “Commoner Genealogy” section, where every household and individual is included, transforming the chronicles into living family histories. The Shanzhai Village Chronicle outlines its genealogy compilation principles: “Respect historical accuracy while addressing contemporary relevance. Adopting a people-centered approach, we begin with renowned ancestors, striving to include every household and individual without omission, ensuring complete documentation of every branch and lineage. For relatives living abroad, we include them in the genealogy according to generational connections and branch order. Those without generational records are arranged separately. Upholding gender equality, we note the marital partners of daughters and specify their natal locations when documenting marriages. The chronicles comprise three main sections: a genealogical table, a relational diagram, and detailed generational records. The genealogical table lists all descendants of the renowned Wang clan members, each name accompanied by page numbers for reference. The relational diagram clarifies hierarchical relationships within branches. The generational records detail an individuals family position, birth order, parent-child relationships, marital status, and reproductive history” [18]. The newly compiled chronicles actively engage villagers in collaborative compilation. The village publicly solicited family histories or small genealogies from all residents, including those who had relocated. The “Shanzhai Village Annals” records: “During the compilation of the genealogy, branches of the Wang clan—particularly the Yongli Wang family of Zhunqi, the Weishi and Husheng Wang families, and the Jixian Wang family of Linhe—provided strong support by actively assisting in collecting materials from Inner Mongolia and generously donating funds” [18]. The newly revised annals, while preserving traditional genealogical practices, included women in the records, achieving gender parity. Wang Zhengwei noted: “The inclusion of ones own and relatives names in the annals fosters villagers pride and sense of ownership, encouraging active participation in data collection and financial support.” The “Shanzhai Village Annals” features a dedicated donation merit board, where donors contributing over 5,000 yuan receive a family portrait displayed at the front of their records [21].

The compilation of the new village chronicle, where everyone contributes to the record, is a process of collective emotional expression and life-sharing. When people collectively recall their past lives, they are constructing a shared cultural and meaningful world. Through written records, this collective endeavor is materialized in a solemn and sacred form, ensuring the continuity and development of these meanings, spirits, and cultures. It comforts the lonely, bewildered, and anxious hearts of generations navigating modernization, while integrating, enriching, and fulfilling their fragmented spiritual worlds [22]. Villagers document their

history, and contemporaries record their own, ultimately forming an extensive contemporary memory database.

5. Conclusion

The genealogical integration in Hequ County's newly compiled village annals marks a breakthrough from geographical to kinship-based perspectives. While village annals inherently reflect geographical ties, the innovative approach of incorporating genealogical records extends kinship connections into these geographical frameworks. Against the backdrop of Hequ County's population migration, the genealogies now include clan members who relocated to other regions, thereby transcending the traditional geographical boundaries of village annals. Furthermore, this integration does not focus on a single family's lineage but encompasses all clans within the village, forming a "unified genealogy of commoners" that breaks the familial kinship limitations of traditional genealogies. This genealogical innovation in the newly compiled annals represents both a significant advancement and a distinctive feature of village records, with profound implications. Firstly, it comprehensively documents the villages geographical environment, natural and cultural landscapes, political and economic conditions, social development, as well as the heroic deeds of ancestors who pioneered and served their homeland, along with their moral teachings and family rules emphasizing virtue and perseverance. This helps revive traditional village culture. Secondly, the newly compiled annals transform villagers' collective memories into textual records, reconstructing rural collective memory. Even if the physical village disappears and its residents pass away, future generations can still draw lessons from these annals. Lastly, the integration of genealogies into the annals provides both local villagers and outsiders the opportunity to participate in their compilation, achieving... The book of both men and women is the practice of everyone entering the village chronicle in the true sense.

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Conflicts of Interest

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