



## Brief Study on Main Ferries in Gansu Section of the Yellow River in Han Dynasty

Tianye Li

Lanzhou University, Lanzhou City 730000, Gansu Province, China

**Abstract:** Ferry serves as an important element of traffic. The Yellow River Ferry in Gansu Province and the north-south traffic routes from Chang'an to Hexi during Han Dynasty corresponds with each other but also are divided into north and south ways. Beidao ferry is mainly a cable bridge crossing while the north line of the south road is mainly Zhengbojin, Qingshijin and Shichengjin, and the south line of the south route is the ferry of Heguan county. The ferry on the north line of North Road and South Road blocks the traffic to or from Qinghai to Hexi so the two ferries in the north and south played a crucial part in the management of the northwest frontier during Han Dynasty. Exploring the original setting reasons and sites of each ferry on the Yellow River is conducive to the gradual restoration of the silk Road traffic routes, landway and waterway transportation hubs, promoting the exploration and protection of the transport historical and cultural heritage at the intersection of the Yellow River and Silk Road, and then enhance the connotation of cultural tourism.

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**\*Corresponding author:** Tianye Li, 1078908399@qq.com

During Han dynasty, on the original basis of the scattered, mainly folk traffic in the Longyou area, the official started to open up, integrate and constantly operated the routes from east to west, and gradually constituted a traffic network from Chang'an to Hexi. It is generally agreed that route had two main trunk roads. As a natural geographical barrier, the Yellow

River plays an important role on the course of two traffic routes. In Gansu, the Yellow River often passes through long and narrow gorge, so the current is swift and full of turbulence, therefore the locations of ferries were heavily influenced by natural geographical factors and were mostly concentrated in several basins in present Gansu province. These ferries, corresponding to the traffic routes, are also divided into two roads. The major ferry in the northern road suppose to be Suoqiao ferry. There were Zhengbojin, Qingshijin and Shichengjin etc on the northern line in the southern road, and the southern line helded the ferry guarded by Heguan County of Han dynasty. Later, due to the changes in the watercourses of the Yellow River and its tributaries, and the increase or decrease of water volume under the influence of climate, the above-mentioned ferries have become very obscure. Scholars have made many research on them, but there are still problems such as misnomers and confusion with ferries of post-Han era, which need to be further analysed.

### 1 The Northern Road ferries

In Han dynasty, the route of the northern road to the west of the river is shown in the Juyan Mileage Compendium. Although the exact passage of the section from Gaoping to Old Aowei is missing from this sketch, the road suggests that it requires crossing the Yellow River and that there must have been a crossing point. Liu Zaicong's analysis of Han dynasty sites in Jingyuan, Baiyin, and Jingtai restored the route and indicated that the river crossing from Gaoping to Aowei was near present Jingtai.

Suoqiao and the Wufu Valley Basin are two of the more suitable locations for ferry crossings within

Jingtai. Suoqiao is located in the northern section of the Red Mountain Gorge, with fast flowing water, higher banks, poorer conditions and less carrying capacity. The Wufu Valley is about 12km north of Suoqiao, and the Yellow River in this area lies between the Red Mountain Gorge and the Black Mountain Gorge, with a gentle current and suitable for large ferries. The county seat of Aowei in Han Dynasty is the ancient city of Diaogou, east of the present town of Luyang in Jingtai County<sup>[1]</sup>. In terms of transportation, there was a road to the county seat of Aowei from either the Suoqiao or the Wufu township ferry.

The Red Mountain Gorge is the longest gorge in the Yellow River and is divided into two sections, the north and the south, with the cable bridge located in the northern gorge (also known as the Lower Gorge), which joins the Yangwu Lower Gorge. It was here that He Lian Bobo took advantage of the nature and block the road, defeating the reckless Tu Fa Nu Tan. Some scholars believe that the Yangwu Lower Gorge is a large temple crossing at the mouth of the Black Mountain Gorge<sup>[2]</sup>. However, this does not correspond to the "lower" of Yangwu Gorge, and is therefore inaccurate. On the west bank of the Suoqiao there are a large number of sites along the slopes and terraces, and on the north side of the terrace of the terrace on the third terrace there is a remnant of a Han dynasty beacon, which is surrounded by a dockyard of about 30 metres in length and width, with remnants of bricks and broken tiles in iron blue from Han dynasty scattered around the yard, and a stone bar of about 70×35×18 cm in length<sup>[3]</sup>. This proves that the crossing was already developed and used during Han Dynasty.

Liuman mentions the ferry crossing at Wufu Township as Aowei north ferry during the Eastern Jin Dynasty<sup>[4]</sup>.

Before He Lian Bobo defeated the Tu Fa Nu Tan at Yangwu Ha Gorge, his subordinate given an advice to him that cross from Wenwei to the north, go to Wanhudui, block the water and form a camp to control enemy's throat. The Wenwei Beidu should be read as Aowei Beidu. And the Wanhudui, was north of the Yellow River, so Jiao Lang's proposed plan was not to cross the river, but to travel northeast along the river to intercept Helian's army in the Zhongwei area as it returned to the capital. However, this suggestion was not accepted by Tu Fa Nu Tang,

who chose to pursue He Lian Bobo and was defeated by him at Yangwu Lower Gorge (Suoqiao). The word "crossing" is not a verb, but the name of a crossing point, it refers to the Wufu Township ferry. There are no sites from Han and Jin dynasties in the area of the ferry in Wufu Township, which, as can be seen from historical sources, flourished after the setting up of Wulanjin and Wulanguan in the Western Wei and Northern Zhou dynasties, and was abandoned in the early Song dynasty after the fall of the Party, and was not officially used again. It was abandoned in the early Song Dynasty after the fall of the Dangxiang, and was never used again by the officials. The Suoqiao ferry, however, can still be found in Ming and Qing historical and geographical documents. Li Bingcheng mentions that if one crossed the river via the ferry in Wufu Township, one would have to travel an additional ten kilometres to the north before crossing the river, and after crossing the river, one would have to cross several loess beams and travel an additional ten kilometres to the south-east<sup>[3]</sup>. The Juyan Mileage Compendium is a post road from Chang'an to the west of the river in Han Dynasty, and the post road must have been convenient and fast, and the Suoqiao ferry was about 20 kilometres less than the Wufu ferry, so there is a high chance that the Suoqiao ferry would have been preferred in Han Dynasty.

## 2 Ferries on the Northern Route of the Southern Road

Most scholars believe that during Han dynasty, Jinchengguan was the main ferry point on the northern route of the Southern Road to the west of the river. But most of the historical data from Han dynasty to the Northern and Southern Dynasties is recorded as Zhengbojin, Shichengjin and Qingshijin, not Jinchengjin. Jinchengjin was located near Zhongshan Bridge in present Lanzhou, while Jincheng in Han dynasty was located in Xigu. And during Han dynasty the Yellow River was more southerly in the Chengguan district of Lanzhou than it is now. Therefore, the author believes that the main crossing point of the South Road into the western part of the river should have been near present Xigu during Han dynasty.

In addition, Huang Jianzhong also mentions that there were four ferries in this area during Han Dynasty, namely the Zhongjia River ferry, the

Xincheng River ferry, the Bapan River ferry and the Xiaosigou ferry<sup>[5]</sup>.

Regarding the ferries in Jincheng County during Han period, there are different accounts, in which the names vary, but judging from the locations described, some of them actually refer to the same crossing. Zhengbojin, Shichengjin and Qingshijin refer to crossings that overlap with some of the above. As Zhengbojin is the mouth of the Jianshui River, and Jianshui is the present Zhuanglang River. Therefore, Zhengbojin should be the mouth of the Huangshui River, and the same as Bapan ferry. Regarding Shichengjin and Qingshijin, the controversy among scholars mainly focuses on which is the mouth of the Huangshui River and which is the mouth of the Zhuanglang River.

Qing Shijin is in the area of the Zhiyang county, which is in the valley between the Zhuanglang River and the Xianshui River, so Qing Shijin should be the mouth of the Zhuanglang River. The village of Qing Shi, where Qing Shizui ferry is located on the south bank of the Zhuanglang River, is the Qing Shi Chuan Zhuang described by Zhou Xiwu, and there are a number of locations named after Qing Shi, such as Qing Shi Guan and Qing Shi Tai, which must be related to the ancient Qing Shi Jin. Therefore, Qing Shijin should be the crossing on the south bank of the Zhuanglang River, i.e. Qing Shizui ferry. And Shichengjin is the mouth of Huangshui into the river, that is, the small temple ditch ferry. Zhou Xiwu's judgment in the Ninghai Journal is wrong.

### 3 Ferries on the Southern Route of the Southern Road

Due to material limitations, records of the crossing of the Yellow River to Qinghai in the Helong region are not clear. However, during the reign of Emperor Xuan of Han Dynasty, the central dynasty set up the Heguan County in Jincheng County to guard the river crossing. The mountain was already recorded in the Classic of Mountains And Seas and the Yugong as being in the 'Qiangzhong of the Seaside. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, scholars believed it to be in Heguan County, Jincheng County, and during the Tang Dynasty it was divided into large and small Jishi. The location of Jishi differed from one stage to another. The Jishi in Heguan County, Jincheng County, is the Jishi Mountain in present-day Linxia,

which stretches from Tumenguan and Malonggou Guantan in the south to the mouth of the Yellow River at Jishi Mountain in the north. To the east of the gate is the site of an ancient city in the village of Kangdiao which stood on the high bank of the Yellow River and choked the eastern mouth of the Jishi Gorge. The ancient city site contains a large number of Han tiles. Wei Jinxian and Li Bingcheng believed that the former site of the Heguan County<sup>[6-7]</sup>. One mile west of the city, in the place now known as Dadunzhuang, was originally a large mound platform, which Chen Shouzhong believes to have been a Han dynasty beacon<sup>[8]</sup>. In Han dynasty, Heguan County not only had the task of guarding the Yellow River crossing, but was also under constant threat from the Qiang. Although there is no clear record of the crossing at Heguan County during Han dynasty, the records of this crossing are becoming clearer as a result of the confusion between the various regimes in Wei and Jin dynasties. At the same time, the records of the surrounding city sites also help to determine the location of this ferry.

What later generations call Linjin ferry is the same as the one held by the Heguan county in Han dynasty, it was located in the ancient city of Kangdiao. The ancient city of Kangdiao is located at the mouth of the lower gorge of the Jishi Gorge, where the river is straight and the current is smooth, making it very favourable for the setting up of a ferry. This ferry is known as the Upper Ferry of the Yellow River. The importance of this ferry gradually diminished in the Sui and Tang dynasties, and was replaced by the Fenglin Pass crossing.

### 4 Conclusion

Serving as key nodes in Silk Road, ferries of the Yellow River in Gansu connected Hexi region and Longyou area, in this section, these ferries were also important hubs for water and land transport. During Han dynasty, the central government opened and controlled these ferries one after another for the purpose of operating the north-western region. These ferries carried a variety of military, political activities and trade among different ethnic groups, further more, played an indispensable role in the development and management of the north-western borderlands of Han Dynasty, as well as in the development of contacts with the western regions. The location and

importance of some ferries changed because of the changing political situation and the military needs. By clarifying the reasons for the establishment of these ferries and their specific addresses, clarifying the changes of their names, and exploring their periodical characteristics and related historical events, we could explore the transportation situation in the Hexi-Longyou area during Han dynasty and restore the traffic routes, transportation hubs along the Yellow River in Gansu. At the same time, in order to promote the exploration and protection of the historical and cultural heritage of traffic routes existing in Yellow River Basin and the Silk Road, increasing the richness of cultural tourism elements is undoubtedly one of the concrete measures to pursue high-quality development of the Yellow River Basin.

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