

Study on the Local Origin of the Yunxi Qixi Festival

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Abstract

Based on the literature of the Yunxi Qixi Festival, this paper studied on its local origin in order to clarify the pseudo-propositional characteristics of origin place of the Qixi Festival and the true propositional characteristics of the national popularity of the Qixi Festival. By means of a literature study, a hypothesis was raised that the Qixi Festival and the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl were developed separately at first, and then the two merged, and finally formed today's form. The materials of the Yunxi Qixi Festival were untrue, and they were constructed by today's people, which were obviously suspected of intentionally establishing the natural and cultural landscape of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl. These natural and cultural landscapes constructed by today's people could not be said to had been built by the ancients, otherwise there were deception. There was nothing bad about the natural and cultural landscape built by people, which showed that Yunxi people loved the Qixi Festival more.

Keywords: the Yunxi Qixi Festival, intangible cultural heritage, local origin, the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl

1. Introduction

The Yunxi Qixi Festival was a new national intangible cultural heritage project declared by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China in 2006 based on the expanded project of the Qixi Festival, and was recognized as one of the fourth batch of folklore expanded projects of national intangible cultural heritage in 2014. From Table 1, it was found that the application area or unit of the new project was the Ministry of Culture, indicating that the Qixi Festival as a folk custom was popular in China. The new and expanded projects of the Qixi Festival were not only the inclusiveness relationship, but also the relationship between development and inheritance, and the relationship between commonality and individuality. Because the Qixi Festival had been applied for as an intangible cultural heritage by different regions, the debate on the origin place of the Qixi Festival had been extremely intense. Based on the literature of the Yunxi Qixi Festival, this paper studied on its local origin in order to clarify the pseudo-propositional characteristics of origin place of the Qixi Festival and the true propositional characteristics of the national popularity of the Qixi Festival.

Table 1. The distribution of the Qixi Festival as a national intangible cultural heritage in China

Publication time	type	Declare the region or unit	Protective units
2006 (first batch)	new project	Ministry of Culture	Ministry of Culture
2008 (2nd batch)	expanded project	Xihe County, Gansu Province	Xihe County Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center
2011 (3rd batch)	expanded project	Wenling City, Zhejiang Province	Wenling City Cultural Center
2011 (3rd batch)	expanded project	Tianhe District, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province	Guangzhou Tianhe District Cultural Center
2014 (4th batch)	expanded project	Yunxi County, Hubei Province	Yunxi County Qixi Cultural Heritage Center

2. The Relationship Between the Qixi Festival and the Legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl

At present, the Qixi Festival is advocated by some scholars and merchants as China's Valentine's Day, but they do not know that this is caused by a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Qixi Festival and the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl. In fact, the Qixi Festival and the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl were developed separately at first, and then the two merged, and finally formed today's form.

2.1 Name Study on Qixi Festival

The Qixi Festival refers to the festival activities on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month (17:00-19:00 Beijing time). In response to the emergence of the term the Qixi Festival, the traditional view inferred that the Qixi Festival originated in the early years of the Western Han Dynasty based on three aspects of documentary materials. The first aspect of the material was *Xijing Zhaji*. There were two records. Firstly, the court ladies of the Han Dynasty often had a ceremony on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month. They passed a thread through a seven-hole needle on the Kaijin Town to express their wish for dexterity. This ceremony had been followed since then. Secondly, Mrs. Qi's maid, Jia Peilan, later became the wife of Duan Ru, a Fufeng person..... Until the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, the court ladies of the Han Dynasty walked to Baizi Pond, and played the magnificent music. At the end of the music, the women of the court tied silk strands of five colours to each other, known as connected ribbons, to express their friendship and love for each other (Cheng Lin & Cheng Zhangcan, 1995, p. 17). These two materials were regarded as the source of the Qixi Festival and identified as the early years of the Western Han Dynasty. The second aspect of the material was *Jingchu Seasonal Chronicles* and *Bowuzhi*, which has: "the night of the seventh day of the seventh lunar month was the meeting night of Cowherd and Weaver Girl." "It's night, and the women of the family passed a thread through a seven-hole needle. Or with gold and silver stones as needles, putting fruits and melons on the tribute table in the courtyard to beg for smart and handy, If there were spiders making webs on the melons, it meant that their wishes would come true. According to the records of *The Legend of the Kings Passed Down from Generation to Generation*, In the early years of the Western Han Dynasty, an Empress Dowager surnamed Dou, when she was young, she was bald and not liked by her family. On the night of the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, everyone looked at Vega outdoors, but she were not allowed to go out (Zhang Hua, 2016, p. 160). These two materials seemed to prove that there were customs of begging and watching Vega on the seventh day of the seventh month in the early Han Dynasty. However, the previous materials were not credible, and there was a suspicion that later scholars had fabricated these materials. The earliest materials that shows that in the Eastern Han Dynasty, there was the Qixi Festival, but it was not a festival on begging for smart and handy. From the relevant content of *Xijing Zhaji*, which was written in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, we can conclude that the Eastern Jin Dynasty designated the seventh day of the seventh lunar month as the Qiqiao Festival. From *Jingchu Seasonal Chronicles*, which was written in the Liang Dynasty of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, it can be found that on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, there were beggars and worship on Vega. Subsequent descriptions of Qixi Festival are not credible, and there were fabricated suspicions, such as King Huai of Chu's first creating Qixi Festival recorded Luo Xin's *The Source of Things* in the Ming Dynasty.

2.2 Story Change of the Legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl

Most scholars believed that the origin of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl originated from the worship of the stars, and there were some records in *Book of Songs*, "Vega move their position seven times a day. Though it moves its position seven times, it does not weave a pattern in the cloth, and Star Cowherd is bright, and cannot drive up the carriage." (Jin Qihua, 1984, p. 505) We believed that this sentence did not explain the origin of the Legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl, and the reason was that until the Western Han Dynasty, Star Cowherd did not refer to α Altair we now call, but to the Ox Constellation of China's Twenty-eight Star Constellations, which can be confirmed from *Historical Record* written in the Western Han Dynasty (Sima Qian, 2014, p. 505). According to Sima Qian's expression, it could be seen that Vega and the Ox Constellation were not separated by the Milky Way in the Han Dynasty, although the Ox Constellation and α Altair were on the east bank of the Milky Way, but it was not on the Milky Way shore. According to records in *Book of Songs*, Vega did not weave and the Ox Constellation did not pull cows, to satirise the Kings of Zhou and their officials for their vain and inaction, and not to show that Vega and the Ox Constellation were husband and wife.

The Shuihudi Qin Dynasty Daybook manuscripts had recorded that cowherd married weaver girl. This sentence was believed by some researchers to be the material of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl during the Warring States period. We thought that cowherd and weaver girl aren't Cowherd and Weaver Girl, cowherd and weaver girl are just ordinary cowherd and weaver girl.

There wasn't the legend of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl in the early years of the Western Han Dynasty

according to *Huainanzi*. In the *Huainanzi* it was recorded that the Weaver Girl was a good wife, not that she was the wife of the Cowherd. At the same time, the magpies formed a bridge across the Milky Way, not for reuniting the Weaver Girl and the Cowherd, but for the Weaver Girl crossing the Milky Way. In fact, these records were only graphic representations of astrological orientations, they were not representations of the legend of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl.

Until the late Eastern Han Dynasty, Cui Shi's *Simin Yueling* clarified the identities of Cowherd and Weaver Girl. This could be regarded as an indirect origin of the Legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl, and there was a main storyline of the meeting of Cowherd and Weaver Girl in the sky. Through Cui Shi's records, it could be seen that the setting of the Cowherd in the late Eastern Han Dynasty was still a fairy, not a cowherd in the world that was circulated later. This showed that at this time, the expression of personification triggered by the stars became a love story between Cowherd and Weaver Girl.

Zhang Hua's *Bowuzhi* in the Western Jin Dynasty recorded the imagination of the people at that time about the life of the gods and goddesses. In addition, the idea, which the River of Heaven is connected to the sea, and the sea is a medium of communication between the heavenly realm and the human realm, and that there were also women weavers in the heavenly realm and their husbands who pull cows. The assertion that the heavenly river was connected to the sea provided a legal basis for the marriage of man and goddesses, but this basis was not used immediately (Zhang Hua, 2016, p. 40).

During the Qi and Liang period of the Southern Dynasty, Yin Yun recorded in his *Novels* the cause of the separation of Cowherd and Weaver Girl after falling in love, "Weaver Girl lived on the east bank of the Tianhe River, and she was Jade Emperor's granddaughter. She used to weave hard every day and led to very haggard. Jade Emperor sympathised with her and promised to marry her to Cowherd on the west bank of the Tianhe River. After the marriage of Cowherd and Weaver Girl, Weaver Girl didn't want to weave. Jade Emperor was angry and ordered to return to the west bank of the Tianhe River, and made an annual meeting for them." Therefore, we could conclude that until the period of the North and South Dynasties the main characters were still a god and a goddess for their love.

In the Tang Dynasty, strange stories were prevalent and rich in imagination. There was a legend called *Guo Han* in Zhang Jian's work *Monster Collection*, in which Weaver Girl was described very different from the image in people's cognition. This story told that Weaver Girl was unfaithful to love and secretly dated Guo Han. Although Weaver Girl in this legend had an annual Qixi appointment with Cowherd, she didn't care about Cowherd's sadness about their love and yearned for a free and easy life on earth, so she came to meet the talented Guo Han every night. This story embodied the idea that ordinary person wanted to get a fairy wife.

Taiping Yulan in the Song Dynasty recorded, "Cowherd borrowed 20,000 pennies as a dowry for marrying Weaver Girl from Jade Emperor, but he did not return it for a long time, so he was expelled and locked in a prison cell." In this book, Cowherd was very different from people's impressions now, and Cowherd's mistake was the main reason for their separation from Weaver Girl. This story was closely related to the production system and feudal etiquette system at that time, reflecting the real society.

New Carved Picture Album of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl in the Ming Dynasty was the earliest existing novella with the theme of Cowherd and Weaver Girl in China, which was quite imaginative. In this story, Cowherd was the star god, and Weaver Girl was Jade Emperor's daughter. Jade Emperor appreciated Cowherd and Weaver Girl's hard work and let them get married. But the two abandoned farming and weaving because of too much affection after marriage, and Jade Emperor was angry and separated them. Cowherd and Weaver Girl realized their mistake, and with the help of other immortals, they were finally allowed to meet on Qixi Festival.

At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, there was the current story of Cowherd and Weaver Girl, which was a reprocessing of the story of the Tang Dynasty and reflected a kind of citizen psychology. This version of the story was known throughout the country for the spread of local operas, among which the staging of the Peking opera *Tianhe Pei* was the most, which was created in the Guangxu period at the request of the Empress Dowager Cixi on the Qixi Festival. Subsequently, during the Republic of China, various operas created this Qixi Festival, which made this legend popular throughout the country. Therefore, the direct origin of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl was the drama creation of the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, which lowering the status of God and raising the status of man, and some of the plots were also too far off the beaten track and only served to satisfy the viewer's curiosity.

From the changes of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl, we found that the indirect origin of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl was the relevant record of *Simin Yueling* in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, and it was a love story between two immortals until the Qing Dynasty, and the story itself was simple. However, In the Tang

Dynasty, there were some legends about Weaving Girl's lack of respect for women's morals, which showed that the common people always hope for the best, so that they could realize need of their own personal psychology. This personal psychology was closely related to the degree of open-mindedness of society. The emergence of the present form of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl during the late Qing and Republic of China was related to the society's tolerance and understanding of secular culture.

2.3 The Fusion of the Qixi Festival and the Legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl

The worship of numbers had existed among the Chinese since Wang Mang's reign. The folk regarded the first day of the first lunar month, the second day of the second lunar month, the third day of the third lunar month, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, the sixth day of the sixth lunar month, the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, and the ninth day of the ninth lunar month as auspicious days, and they were also days of channeling the gods. At the same time, the seventh day of the seventh lunar month was the birthday of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, and it was also the meeting date between Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty and Queen Mother of the West. Therefore, the Qixi Festival had gradually become a more important festival for the ancients. From the above-mentioned changes in the name of the Qixi Festival and the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl, we could find that until the late Eastern Han Dynasty, the customs of the Qixi Festival had nothing to do with begging for smart and handy, but had an indirect relationship with the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the Qixi Festival was related to beg for smart and handy, but it had nothing to do with the worship of the Weaver Girl, and the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl was similar to that of the Eastern Han Dynasty. To the Liang Dynasty of the Northern and Southern Dynasties the Qixi Festival was related to the worship of begging for smart and handy and the Weaver Girl (see the Vega), and the protagonists of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl were still two gods, but the reason analyses for the meeting were increased. This period should be the fusion between the Qixi Festival and the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl through the worship of the Weaver Girl. It was not until the end of the Qing Dynasty that the Qixi Festival formed the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl that we had today, only more than a hundred years, thanks to the spread of drama.

3. The Traceability, Construction and Evaluation of the Yunxi Qixi Festival

There were two bases for the traceability of the Yunxi Qixi Festival: one was two famous rivers - the Han River and the Tianhe River. An important scene in the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl was the Han River neighborhood. The Milky Way in the sky, which is also known as Han, Yunhan, Tianhan, and Xinghan. This led the Japan mythological scholar Seihiko Izushi (1896-1942) in the first half of the 20th century to believe that the ancient Chinese thought that there was firstly the Han River on the earth, and that there was secondly the Milky Way in the sky, and the reason why the Han River was chosen as the counterpart of the Milky Way on the earth (Bi Xuefei, 2011, p. 41). Proponents of the Yunxi Qixi Festival believed that Hehan referred to the local Han River and its tributary called by the Tianhe River. But as everyone knows, the appearance of the name of Tianhe in Yunxi was officially appeared in the Ming Dynasty, because in the first year of Emperor Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty recorded in *Huguang Tongzhi*. "Tianhe, in the west of the county, It flows out of Huming Valley and along the high mountains all the way to the Han River, and from a distance it looks like it's flowing down from the sky, so it's called the Tianhe River." There is no Tianhe in Yunxi in the literature before. In addition, the term "Hehan" could not be understood as Tianhe River and the Han River. There was a view in ancient China that Hehan referred to the Yellow River and the Han River. It depended on the context, Wang Chong's *Treatise on Hierarchy* said, "There were many authors in the Han dynasty, and the doctrines of authors like Sima Qian and Yang Xiong were as vast and profound as the Han River and the Yellow River, while the doctrines of other authors were as shallow and simple as the Jing River and the Wei River." Here, Hehan referred to the Yellow River and the Han River, which were as broad and profound as the Han River, while the "Hehan is clear and shallow" certainly didn't not refer to the Yellow River and the Han River, but only to the Milky Way, because the Milky Way looked clear and shallow on a summer night. Therefore, no matter how you interpreted it, you could not interpret Hehan as the Tianhe River and the Han River, and obviously this interpretation was a kind of collateral interpretation of modern people. However, according to the other names of Hehan (Milky Way), Han, Yunhan, Tianhan and Xinghan, we could know that Hehan corresponded to the Han River on the ground, and Izushi Masahiko had indeed brought a new understanding to the academic community. Therefore, Wuhan scholar Cheng Junyi believed that the Yotou Bay of the Han River (Figure 1) on the border between the Dongxihu District and Qiaokou District of Wuhan was the source of the Qixi Festival, because the local legend recorded that the Yoke Bay is the ox yoke thrown by Cowherd, and The name of a place near the Yoke Bay was called Yadu which means magpies help cross the Han River. Obviously, this was also the result of folklore.



Figure 1. Yotou Bay of the Han River

The second was the natural landscape. In the application materials of the Qixi Festival, it was believed that there were many natural landscapes closely related to the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl and the Qixi Festival on the banks of the Tianhe River in the county, such as the Zhuan Jing Strange Stone, Weaver Girl Cave, Stone Father, Stone Mother and so on (Pan Lusheng & Qiu Yunhua, 2017, p. 5). However, any record about Zhuan Jing Strange Stone could not be read in *Huguang Tongzhi*. In *Yunxi County Chronicles* (Figure 2) published in the 25th year of the Republic of China, any record about the Weaver Girl wasn't found, and there was a suspicion of attaching a legend to Weaver Girl. Although there was the rock peak like old man (Figure 3) in the picture page of *Yunxi County Chronicles* published in the reign of Emperor Tongzhi in the Qing Dynasty, there was only the Chinese character for "Stone Man"(Figure 4) in its map, indicating that this strange stone was only recorded in the reign of Emperor Tongzhi, and there is no legend about it being Stone Father, Stone Mother, and this rock peak like old man only appeared in the county chronicles of the reign of Emperor Tongzhi, and did not appear in the county chronicles of the Republic of China, indicating that it was not highly circulated among the people, but it was recognized by the people who compiled the county chronicles at that time during the reign of the Emperor Tongzhi. To sum up, the compilation material of the natural landscape of the Yunxi Qixi Festival didn't prove that Qixi Festival originated in Yunxi.

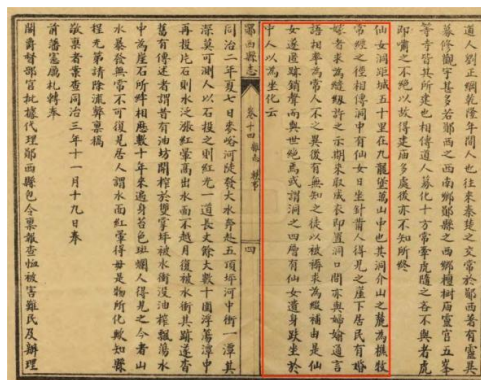


Figure 2. The story of fairies in the Yunxi County Chronicles published in the 25th year of the Republic of China



Figure 3. the rock peak like old man in the picture page of *Yunxi County Chronicles* published in the reign of Emperor Tongzhi in the Qing Dynasty

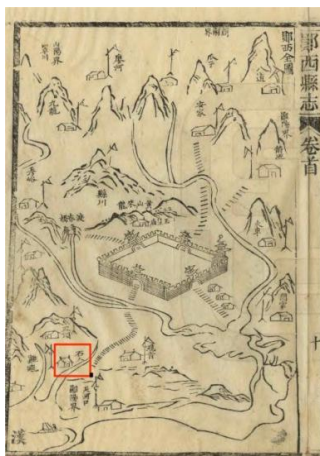


Figure 4. The Chinese character for “Stone Man” in map of *Yunxi County Chronicles* published in the reign of Emperor Tongzhi in the Qing Dynasty

The materials of the Yunxi Qixi Festival were untrue, and they were constructed by today's people, which were obviously suspected of intentionally establishing the natural and cultural landscape of the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl. These natural and cultural landscapes constructed by today's people could not be said to had been built by the ancients, otherwise there were deception. There was nothing bad about the natural and cultural landscape built by today's people, which showed that today's Yunxi people loved the Qixi Festival more.

4. Conclusion

The Yunxi Qixi Festival was a new national intangible cultural heritage project declared by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China in 2006 based on the expanded project of the Qixi Festival. Because the Qixi Festival had been applied for as an intangible cultural heritage by different regions, the debate on the origin place of the Qixi Festival had been extremely intense. The Qixi Festival and the legend of Cowherd and Weaver Girl were developed separately at first, and then the two merged, and finally formed today's form. The materials of the Yunxi Qixi Festival were untrue, and they were constructed by today's people, however this cultural construct had an epochal significance, it could increase our national self-confidence and centripetal force, we should endeavour to construct this textile culture with the idea of cultural construction.

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