

The New Situation of the Tang Empire's Ethnic Relations During the Anshi Rebellion and the Contradictions in Du Fu's Poems

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ABSTRACT

The Anshi rebellion was the key period of the Tang Dynasty from prosperity to decline. The integration and invasion of internal and foreign nationalities in the frontier made the Tang Dynasty present a different situation from the past. In Du Fu's poems, in-depth detail realism can become an important reference for us to understand the historical truth. Realistic literature and major political events in history are intertwined. Based on the contradictory images of other ethnic groups in the poet Du Fu's poems, this paper further explores the reasons for the contradictory writing of the poet, so as to achieve a better understanding of Du Fu's mentality during the Anshi Rebellion. Through the analysis of other national images in Du Fu's poems during the Anshi rebellion, this paper holds that Du Fu's heart is very complex in the face of the new situation of imperial national relations in this period. This complexity and contradiction will also help us to further explore Du Fu's own national view and population exchange in the future Tang Dynasty. This paper will contribute to Du Fu's research from a cross-cultural perspective, hoping to provide a new research perspective and enlightening conclusions.

Keywords: *Du Fu, Ethnic Relations, the Anshi Rebellion.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Anshi Rebellion was the key to the Tang Empire's transition from prosperity to decline. At the same time, this period was also a period when other ethnic groups within the empire or on the empire's borders were actively participating in imperial politics, wars, etc. There were a series of new situations after the Anshi Rebellion in the Tang Dynasty. A large number of ethnic minority forces participated in the rebellious army or the army to suppress the rebellion, and rebuilt diplomatic relations with non-Han major countries.

Du Fu is a great poet in Tang Dynasty, and occupies an important position in Chinese poetry. He was born in an official and literary family in 712 AD. His life was full of ups and downs, and his whereabouts covered most of the Empire. He himself also witnessed the Anshi rebellion of the Tang Empire from prosperity to decline. After a long period of illness and hunger, the poor poet finally died in southern China in his 59th year, and the cause of his death is also controversial. As a great poet of realism in ancient China, Du Fu's poetry has very important realistic significance and certain historical

value, which makes it possible to connect the poet's literary expression with the historical background. During the Anshi Rebellion period, the contradiction of the actual situation affected Du Fu to a certain extent.

On the one hand, he was quite disgusted with the fact that the people on the border of the Tang Empire participated in the war in the center of the empire. Whether it is the Anlushan rebel group that is trying to overthrow the Tang Dynasty rule or the supporting troops such as the Huihe and Anxi people, the poets have never forgotten to mark their identities as foreigners, "The rebellion of the Hu people in the east has not yet subsided, this is why I gnashed my teeth as a courtier" [1]; "Recently, I heard that these foreign invaders were repelled three hundred miles" [1]; "Who can save the perilous royal family, these invading Hu people march as fast as ghosts" [1]. In addition, the poet used a lot of derogatory words in his poems to describe other ethnic groups that participated in the political activities of the Tang Empire. For example, when describing the Huihe cavalry who came to rescue the Tang Empire, the poet described them like this: "A cold gale (Huihe cavalry) swept from the northwest, and the Huihe army came

along with misery and misfortune” [1], and thought that “in order to eliminate the evil of the empire, we put up with the fact that these items are used for the time being” [1], treated people other than the main ethnic Han as objects. It can be seen that Du Fu himself has a certain degree of disgust towards other ethnic groups in the empire. Chen believed that “in the works written in the early days after the Anshi Rebellion, the words reprimanding the Hu people have become quite common” [2], “Du Fu has the most vivid description and the most decisive attitude towards this aspect” [2].

However, on the other hand, it is worth noting that Du Fu’s poems seem to contain verses opposite to his hostile attitude towards other ethnic groups, which suggests a contradiction in the poet’s attitude. When the poet heard in 756 that the royal family of the Tubo regime (located in Tibet) requested to marry the royal family members of the Tang empire and help the Tang empire fight the Anlushan rebels together, the poet said with emotion that “the long distance separated the two countries and caused resentment, we are willing to accept this condition to get a happy friendship” [1]. For the Tang Dynasty general, Ge Shuhan, history records that he was not a Han person [3], but Du Fu praised him and his men for “the strong lads in the north are all agile” [1]. In the Huihe army that was devalued by the poets mentioned above, the poets also wrote poems to praise their strong offensive, “the vanguards rushing in front were covered with bloodstains. They rode forward fast, carrying swords, and the wind blew through the horsehair” [1].

From this point of view, there is a certain contradiction in the writing of the non-subject (non-Han) ethnic groups in or around the Tang Empire in Du Fu’s poems during the Anshi Rebellion and a short period after that. This paper hopes to explain the contradictions in the great poet Du Fu’s attitude towards other ethnicity and further analyze the reasons based on the image of non-Han ethnic minorities in or around the empire during the Anshi Rebellion in Du Fu’s poems so as to explore the Du Fu’s inner thought.

2. REASONS FOR DU FU’S REJECTION OF OTHER NON-HAN ETHNIC GROUPS

2.1. Soldiers participating in the Anshi Rebellion

Du Fu’s allegiance to the Tang empire and his firm Confucian beliefs made it difficult to tolerate local rebellions. However, the rebel army leader, An Lushan, and the later Shi Siming were both ethnic minorities in the north and their army contains many frontier ethnic groups [3][4][5]. This fact might explain why Du Fu’s poems devalued the border ethnic groups in the northern part of the empire (especially the northeast) because this depreciation points to the fact that they participated in the rebellion against the Tang Empire. Even though a large number of Han people still participated in the rebel army.

However, the poet seems to have deliberately weakened this point, directly marking the rebels with a consistent label to convey his hatred of them, “He seems to have captured the ultimate source of chaos and disaster” [2]. When describing the approach of the rebels to Chang’an, the poet wrote, “the nobles of high officials flee from the tall mansions to avoid the invading Hu people” [1]; when the rebels from the northeast occupied a large tract of land in the eastern part of the empire, the poet sighed helplessly, “the stench of these Jie and Hu tribes is all over the world, and I look back at the past full of helplessness and confusion” [1]; and when his city was surrounded by rebels, he wrote, “what is more, I am trapped in the dust raised by these Hu people, and when I come back, I am afraid I will have gray hair” [1].

Another example is when he saw the scene of the rebels’ victory, “these savages returned, their arrows were covered with blood, and they sang songs of foreigners and drank in the street market” [1], it highlights the ugly and cruel image of the intruder. There are many similar examples. They all embody Du Fu’s anger towards the Anshi rebellion. It can be considered that a large number of poems in Du Fu’s poems that hate and belittle other ethnic groups point to the invading rebel forces.

2.2. the intentional difference between Chinese (Hua) and foreign nationalities (Yi)

As an important concept in the history of Chinese thought, “the intentional difference between Chinese (Hua) and foreign nationalities (Yi)” cannot be ignored. Guan believes this includes three levels: geographical, pedigree, and cultural differences [6]. Generally speaking, this is a conscious distinction between the tribes in the Yellow River Basin (later expanded to the whole of China) and the surrounding ethnic groups in Chinese thought, and they have different performances and focus on different periods [7]. This kind of thinking is mainly reflected in the literati who believe in Confucianism, including Du Fu.

The Anshi Rebellion, in which ethnic minorities in the northeast participated in a large number, further boosted the prejudice of the literati in the mid-Tang Dynasty with this concept towards imperial minorities and frontier ethnic groups. Du Fu was influenced by this concept, which made the Han people and other residents of the empire on an unequal status in many of his poems. When the poet wrote that An Lushan led the army to rebellion, he thought it was “on the sacred homeland of Emperor Gaozu, such a dog-like and sheep-like person appeared on the land of the Tang Empire” [1]; when the surrounding ethnic groups were involved in the political vortex of the Anshi Rebellion to varying degrees, Du Fu lamented that “the official residents of the empire (Hua) are mixed with the surrounding barbarians, and the world and the universe suddenly become smelly” [1]. Even for

ethnic groups on the empire's frontiers or abroad that did not participate in the rebellion, the poet's subjective concept is still apparent. For example, when mentioning that the Tibetan leader (called Zanju) in Tibet sent envoys to make a marriage request with the Tang royal family, the poet described it like this: "It seems that recently I heard that Zanju came to ask for marriage with the royal family, the fact that the uncle and nephew re-established a friendly relationship should not be rejected" [1].

2.3. Killing and destruction

Du Fu was concerned about the suffering of the people and opposed war and killing. During the Anshi Rebellion, the population of the Tang Dynasty suffered heavy losses [8]. The destruction of the Tang Empire's cities and population caused by the rebellious empire's frontier ethnic minorities and other countries' armies who came to rescue is intolerable and infuriating in Du Fu's eyes. Therefore, the appearance of many verses that reject non-Han nationality reflects Du Fu's resentment towards this behavior. The massive destruction by the rebels made the village, "full of white human bones under the smoke produced by burning" [1]. An Lushan himself treats the army and the people of the occupying area very cruel, "He executed the envoy Zhang Jieran and massacred 10,000 surrendered officials and soldiers" [9]. Even if Huihe came to rescue the Tang Empire, they still carried out barbaric acts within the empire. According to the record, "After the defeat of Luoyang, Huihe looted in the town hall for three days and seized a large amount of property" [10], "Huihe entered Luoyang and killed tens of thousands of people. Over the past few months, the survivors can only use paper as clothing" [9], "Huihe originally planned to raid the capital Chang'an, until the royal family members of the Tang Dynasty knelt in front of general's horse and asked him to give up" [9].

Du Fu once admired the bravery of the Huihe soldiers and was pleased that they helped the Tang Empire restore territory. However, he also criticized them in his poem that "bees and poisonous insects carry poisonous stings after all" [1], and also expressed the meaning of "the fewer Huihe people in the empire, the better" [11], the destruction of the population and economy of the Tang Empire caused by Huihe may be the reason for the poet's dissatisfaction.

2.4. Take advantage of the chaos to invade

The Anshi Rebellion caused many Tang dynasty troops to move eastward, coupled with the weakening of the country's economy and population due to the war, which made the empire unable to govern the northwest border and caused other ethnic groups' forces to take advantage of the chaos to invade. The most representative one is the Tubo attack on the northwest of the Tang

Empire after the Anshi Rebellion; the Tang Empire and Tubo had wars before. Du Fu also mentioned the war between the two countries in his poem. "Have you ever seen that in the vast land of Qinghai, the bones of the dead army have been buried since ancient times." [1]. But the two countries are getting back together, but the poet did not express their favor in the poem, and still called Tubo "Rong Di of the West" in the poem [1].

In addition to the factors of the poet's conservative national outlook and national prejudice, the author believes that Tubo's invasion of the northwestern frontier of the Tang Dynasty also affected the poet. Because the war to quell the rebellion consumed many troops stationed in the northwest, when Tubo attacked the western part of the empire, the generals stationed here made fierce resistance. However, the Tubo army still broke through Longyou, blocked the Hexi, isolated the Western Regions, and directly approached Chang'an. In the end, they attacked directly into the capital of the empire and carried out large-scale destruction, which lasted "fifteen days" [12]. Therefore, it is not difficult for us to explain why the poet angrily mocks in the poem: "the grasslands and deserts of the northern part of the empire were again strewn with wolves" [1]; "whose hands are Qinghai now falling into" [1].

3. REASONS FOR DU FU'S ACCEPTANCE AND TOLERANCE OF NON-HAN ETHNIC GROUPS

3.1. Military role

To a certain extent, the poet Du Fu adopted an accepting attitude to the various ethnic groups that participated in the political activities of the Tang Empire during the Anshi Rebellion. One important reason is that they provided crucial support for defeating the rebellious An Lushan and Shi Siming army. Many of them belonged to nomads, so they should have more advantages in the tactics of riding and shooting than the infantry of the Tang Empire. In fact, in the poet's early works, he admired the more advanced fighting forces outside the empire, such as good warhorses: "Their ears are as sharp as sharpened bamboo tubes, and the wind whistle between their four hooves when they run up" [1].

During the Anshi Rebellion, even with a relatively conservative view of the nation, Du Fu still accepted these forces who came to loyalty to the empire: "Their king is willing to help us put down the rebellion, and the customs of their country are good at riding horses and advancing" [1]; "The emperor's army rode countless excellent warhorses, and Huihe people ate much meat and were full of courage to defeat the rebels" [1]; "God's proud descendants come from the north. They love to eat meat, and no one can compete with courage" [1].

In addition to the powerful combat power used to put down the rebellion, other ethnic groups living on the frontiers of the empire also sent a considerable number of troops, “tens of thousands of cavalry galloped to rescue the empire” [1], “In the latter poem, Du Fu mentioned that the Huihe army came from the northwest to help the empire in its revival. He heard that this army includes 5,000 soldiers and 10,000 horses” [9]. In addition to the significant role of Huihe, ethnic groups such as Tubo also participated in helping the empire deal with the Anshi Rebellion.

3.2. Contact and understand

Before the Anshi Rebellion, the Tang dynasty had frequent contacts with ethnic minorities and cultures outside the empire, whether the folks or the ruling upper class [5]. Du Fu is in such a big-time background, and it is inevitable for Du Fu to have a deeper understanding of the cultures and lifestyles of other ethnic groups or nations, which plays an essential role in bringing the poets closer to them and avoiding excessive prejudice.

We can also see from the poet’s poems that the depth of his understanding of the nations in other empires is still relatively objective, even if he is a staunch Han-centrist. He also accepted and participated in the open and diverse society of the Tang Empire to a certain extent. After the Anshi Rebellion broke out, various ethnic groups on the border poured into the empire in various ways. It is impossible for the poet not to have met, talked, and interacted with them. When we sort out the whereabouts of the poet, we can also find that he has passed through the settlements of many other ethnic groups. We hope to have more in-depth research and understanding of this point of view in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

The Anshi rebellion was a turning point from prosperity to decline in the Tang Dynasty, which had a significant impact on the Tang Dynasty, which was embodied in many aspects, such as politics, economy, local and central administrative relations and so on. During this period, the ethnic policy of the Tang Dynasty also changed a lot. Du Fu is one of the most familiar great poets in China. The “poetic history” characteristics of his poems help us to further explore the changes of ethnic relations faced by the Tang Dynasty during the Anshi rebellion. Through the analysis of literary texts, this paper attempts to outline the changes of national policy and the concrete embodiment of the great poet’s attitude towards national issues in this special period. This paper focuses on Du Fu’s internal contradiction at that time, and analyzes the causes of this contradiction.

Through the analysis of the national contradictions described in Du Fu’s poems, this paper further discusses the poet’s contradictory psychology in his creation, in

order to better understand Du Fu’s mentality in the Anshi rebellion. Through the analysis of other national images in Du Fu’s poems during the Anshi rebellion, we can draw a preliminary conclusion that Du Fu’s heart is very complex in the face of the new situation of imperial national relations in this period. This complexity and contradiction will help us to further explore Du Fu’s own national view and population exchange in the future Tang Dynasty. This paper will further study this topic in the future. This paper will help to provide a new perspective for the historical research of national integration, and provide a new direction and inspiration for Du Fu’s research.

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