

Historical and Geographic Analysis of the Architectural Features and Defense Efficiency of the Northern Border Defense Walls in the Liao Dynasty

Xiaozhen Chang

The National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the architectural characteristics and defense efficiency of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty, in order to fill the research gaps in related fields and provide historical reference for the construction of modern border defense system and the protection of cultural heritage. In this article, the site selection and layout, building materials and construction technology, and characteristic building elements of the northern border wall of Liao Dynasty were comprehensively analyzed by using the method of multidisciplinary cross-integration. The article also assesses its military defense system, economic and social impact and actual defense effectiveness. The northern border wall of the Liao Dynasty formed a strict defense network with its ingenious site selection layout, superb architectural skills and profound cultural connotation. It effectively resisted the invasion of foreign enemies, maintained the border security, and promoted the development of border economy and social stability. The city wall embodies the wisdom of state governance and the height of military strategy in Liao Dynasty, and has become an important carrier of national exchange and cultural inheritance. This article reveals the unique value and significance of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty, and also provides enlightenment and reference for modern frontier defense and cultural heritage protection.

Keywords

Liao Dynasty; Border wall; Architectural features; Defense effectiveness; Cultural heritage protection.

1. Introduction

Liao Dynasty was an important northern minority regime in the history of China [1]. Its existence has enriched the diversity of Chinese civilization and profoundly influenced the political pattern in East Asia [2]. In its northern frontier, the Liao Dynasty built a series of solid and ingenious border walls in order to resist foreign intrusion and safeguard national security [3]. These city walls are the physical barriers of military defense, but also the concentrated expression of the Liao Dynasty's national governance wisdom, military strategy and architectural skills [4]. Studying the architectural features and defensive effectiveness of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty can fill the gaps in related fields and deepen our understanding of military, political, economic and cultural aspects of Liao Dynasty [5]. This can also provide valuable historical reference and enlightenment for the construction of modern frontier defense system and the protection of cultural heritage [6]. Through this research, the purpose of this article is to reveal how the Liao Dynasty realized its complicated process of spatial control, national integration and national identity through the material carrier of the city wall, so as to enrich the research connotation of historical geography and military history in China and even the world.

In recent years, with the rapid development of historical geography, archaeology and architecture, the research on Liao Dynasty and its border walls has gradually increased, and a series of important achievements have been made [7]. Scholars initially outlined the general outline of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty from the perspectives of archaeological discovery, historical documents and architectural technology analysis. However, the existing research mostly focuses on the discussion of a single site or a local area, and lacks in-depth analysis of the overall layout, defense system and comprehensive efficiency of the border walls in Liao Dynasty under the historical and geographical background. The internal relationship between the architectural characteristics of the city wall and its defense effectiveness and the role of the city wall in the governance of the Liao Dynasty still need to be further explored and explained.

Based on the above, this article focuses on the northern border areas of Liao Dynasty, especially those city wall sites with important strategic position in history, such as the Great Wall of Liao Dynasty. The time range is limited to the Liao Dynasty (907-1125) to ensure the era specificity of the study. The purpose of this study is to integrate the previous research results, fill the research gap, and contribute a new perspective to the study of the northern border wall of Liao Dynasty through comprehensive and systematic analysis.

2. The Architectural Features of The Northern Border Walls of the Liao Dynasty

The site selection of the border wall in the north of Liao Dynasty fully demonstrated the ancient people's profound understanding and ingenious use of the natural geographical environment. Most of the city walls are built according to the mountain or meander along the river, which not only reduces the engineering quantity, but also enhances the defense effect. At key nodes, such as valleys and estuaries, the city walls will be specially reinforced, forming a dangerous trend of "and while one man guards it, ten thousand cannot force it". In terms of layout, the walls of Liao Dynasty pay attention to the construction of the overall defense system: the main line walls are endless, supplemented by auxiliary facilities such as passes, beacon towers and camps, forming a strict defense network. This layout not only facilitates the rapid transmission of information, but also ensures the flexible mobilization of troops. It embodies the high wisdom of Liao Dynasty's military strategy.

The building materials of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty are rich and varied. It has both earth and stone from local materials and bricks from afar, which reflects the ability of material allocation and transportation at that time. The structural technology of Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty is shown in Table 1:

In terms of structural technology, the foundation of the city wall is dug deep into the hard soil layer to ensure stability. The wall is rammed by layers, with gravel, vegetation and so on between each layer, which not only enhances the firmness of the wall, but also improves its seismic capacity. The wall of Liao dynasty also skillfully used the design of "horse face", that is, it protruded outward at intervals outside the wall to form a shooting platform. This not only broadens the defensive horizon, but also facilitates the defenders to attack the invading enemy from the side. This design was unique at that time.

Table 1. Detailed Construction Techniques of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty

Construction Part	Specific Description
Foundation Treatment	Deep excavation to the solid soil layer to ensure the overall stability of the wall
Main Wall Materials	Locally sourced: Earth and stone
	Long-distance transport: Bricks and tiles (reflecting material allocation and long-distance transport capabilities)
Wall Construction Technique	Layered ramming, with each layer:
	Mixed with crushed stone to enhance structural strength
	Embedded with vegetation to improve earthquake resistance
Distinctive Defense Design	"Horse-face" Design
	Location: Protruding outward at regular intervals along the outer side of the wall
	Function: Forms a shooting platform, expanding the defensive visibility for the guards
	Tactical Advantage: Facilitates side attacks on invading enemies, enhancing defensive effectiveness

The Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty is not only practical, but also contains rich cultural connotation and artistic value. As the throat of the city wall, the city gate is designed to be both magnificent and exquisite. It has a defensive function, and is often decorated with carvings and colored paintings, showing the majesty of the royal family and the national customs. As the key to information transmission, beacon towers have reasonable layout and different shapes, some towering into the sky and some hiding in the mountains. This is not only convenient for observing the enemy's situation, but also a beautiful landscape in the frontier. The design of defensive tower and urn on the city wall perfectly integrates defensive wisdom with architectural aesthetics. This enhanced the actual combat capability of the city wall, and enriched its cultural connotation, making the northern border wall of Liao Dynasty a treasure in ancient military architecture in China.

3. Assessment of defense effectiveness of Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty

3.1. Military defense system

The Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty was an important part of the national defense system at that time. Its military effectiveness is particularly remarkable. This city wall does not exist in isolation, but is closely connected with the defense facilities such as passes, beacon towers and camps carefully arranged along the line to jointly build a multi-level and three-dimensional defense network. This design can effectively block the direct invasion of foreign enemies, and also make full use of the rapid information transmission function of the beacon tower to ensure that the frontier military intelligence can be immediately fed back to the central government. In this way, the rapid mobilization and strategic deployment of troops can be realized. This efficient and flexible defense mechanism greatly enhanced the defense capability of the Liao frontier.

In actual combat, the robustness of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty has been fully verified. The city wall itself is made of durable materials, and the clever design of

horse face and gate tower provides an extremely favorable defensive position for the defenders. Faced with such a strong defense line, it is often difficult for the enemy to break through, and even in some cases, he can only look at the city and sigh. In addition, the city wall also played a great psychological deterrent role. Its majestic posture seems to announce the power and inviolability of the Liao Dynasty to potential invaders. This psychological shock also prevented the war to some extent and laid a solid foundation for the long-term stability of the Liao frontier.

3.2. Economic and social impact

The construction and maintenance of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty has had a far-reaching impact on the local and even the whole country's economy and society, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Economic and Social Impacts of the Construction and Maintenance of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty

Impact Area	Specific Manifestations
Economic Development	Promotion of Material Exchange and Trade: Wall construction stimulates the allocation and transportation of materials in surrounding areas
	Increased Labor Demand: Large numbers of laborers involved in construction promote employment and income growth
Technological Advancement	Enhancement of Construction Skills: Wall construction drives innovation and development in construction techniques and material usage
	Military Defense Technology Innovation: Designs such as the "horse-face" improve military defensive capabilities
Social Stability	Strengthened Border Security: The wall effectively resists foreign invasions, maintaining border stability and national security
	Improved Social Order: The construction and maintenance of the wall contribute to local governance and public tranquility
Cultural Inheritance	Preservation of Historical Relics: The wall becomes an important carrier and witness of the Liao Dynasty's history and culture
	Enhanced National Pride: As a national symbol, the wall strengthens cultural identity and pride among the people
Regional Development	Development of Border Areas: Wall construction promotes the development and economic growth of border regions
	Tourism Resource Development: The wall, as a tourist attraction, attracts visitors and drives the development of the tourism industry

The construction of the city wall needs a lot of labor and materials. This has promoted the development of resources, handicrafts and commerce in the border areas, provided employment opportunities for local residents and enhanced the economic vitality of the border areas. Furthermore, as an important guarantee of national security, the city wall has created favorable conditions for the stability and prosperity of the frontier society, attracted more people to settle down, promoted the exchanges and integration between ethnic groups, and deepened the ties between the frontier and the mainland. The city wall has also become an important carrier of frontier culture. Its architectural style, carving art, etc. all reflect the cultural characteristics and aesthetic pursuit of Liao Dynasty, which has a far-reaching impact on later generations.

3.3. Analysis of defense effectiveness

Judging from the actual defense effect, the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty has played a decisive role in many battles against foreign invasion. Whenever a foreign enemy attacks, the city wall becomes an indestructible barrier, effectively stopping the enemy's offensive pace. In fierce battles again and again, the city wall, with its solid structure and ingenious layout, provided strong defensive support for the defenders, making it difficult for the enemy to cross this line of defense. As shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Actual Defensive Effects of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty

Invading Force	Defensive Effect
Northern Nomadic Tribes	Successfully defended, preventing the enemy from crossing the wall and protecting the interior's safety
Enemy State's Army	The wall effectively blocked the enemy's attack and, in conjunction with defending troops, repelled the invaders
Border Skirmishers	The wall served as a defensive line, rapidly rallying defending troops and quelling the border conflict
Multinational Allied Forces	Although partially damaged, the wall held firm overall, buying time for reinforcements to arrive
Unknown Armed Forces	The wall's early warning system functioned, promptly detecting and repelling the invaders

However, the defensive effectiveness of the city wall is not absolute. Its actual effect is often influenced by many complicated factors, including the strength comparison between the enemy and ourselves, the operational efficiency of the command system, the morale and combat effectiveness of soldiers, etc. For example: the comparison of enemy forces, the efficiency of the command system, the morale and combat effectiveness of soldiers, etc. Therefore, when evaluating the defensive effectiveness of city walls, it is necessary to comprehensively consider various factors and objectively analyze their functions and limitations in actual wars. Generally speaking, the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty made great contributions to the national security and border stability of Liao Dynasty with its unique architectural features and defense system.

4. Conclusions

Through an in-depth analysis of the architectural features and defense effectiveness of the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty, this study reveals the outstanding wisdom and extraordinary achievements of the Liao Dynasty in frontier defense. The site selection and layout of the city wall ingeniously integrated the natural and geographical conditions, the building materials and construction technology showed the superb technological level at that time, and the characteristic architectural elements endowed the city wall with profound cultural connotation and artistic value. In the military defense system, the city wall, the pass, the beacon tower and other facilities support each other, forming a strict defense network, effectively resisting foreign invasion and maintaining border security. The construction of the city wall has also promoted the economic development and social stability in the border areas, and deepened the exchanges and integration between ethnic groups. On the whole, the Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty is not only a masterpiece of military defense, but also an important symbol of the governance wisdom and cultural heritage of Liao Dynasty. The Northern Border Defense Wall of the Liao Dynasty is a witness of history and a bridge connecting the past and the future. Its research value and practical significance are

immeasurable. The future research should pay more attention to interdisciplinary cooperation, and combine the knowledge and technology of archaeology, history, architecture, geographic information system and other fields to conduct a more in-depth and detailed investigation and analysis of the city wall. Furthermore, we can reproduce the original appearance and defense system of the city wall through modern scientific and technological means, and provide a more intuitive and scientific basis for the study of frontier defense in Liao Dynasty.

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