

## *Original Paper*

# A Study on the Historical Context and Digital Future of Rewi Alley and the International Communication of Gansu Culture

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper deeply discusses the historical origin of Rewi Alley and the international communication of Gansu culture, and analyzes its historical influence on the international communication of Gansu culture. At the same time, combined with the characteristics of the digital age, this paper analyzes the present situation and challenges of the international communication of Gansu culture, draws enlightenment from Rewi Alley's historical experience, and provides suggestions for the international communication of Gansu culture in the digital age. It is expected to be beneficial for promoting Gansu culture to the world better and enhancing its international popularity.*

### ***Keywords***

*Rewi Alley, Gansu culture, international communication, historical context, digital future*

## **1. Introduction**

Under the background of globalization, the international communication of culture has become more and more important. As an important province in China, Gansu is rich in historical and cultural resources. Rewi Alley, a famous social activist in New Zealand, has a deep relationship with Gansu, and his experience in Gansu has had a far-reaching impact on the international spread of Gansu culture. With the rapid development of digital technology, how to use digital technology to better spread Gansu culture in the new era has become an urgent problem to be solved. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to study the historical context and digital future of the international communication of Rewi Alley and Gansu culture. On the one hand, by reviewing Rewi Alley's historical contribution in Gansu, we can better inherit and carry forward his spirit, and at the same time, we can dig deep into the connotation and value of Gansu culture. On the other hand, combining with the characteristics of the digital age, exploring new ways and methods of international communication of Gansu culture will help to enhance the international popularity and influence of Gansu culture and promote cultural exchange and integration.

## 2. The Historical Origin of Rewi Alley and the International Communication of Gansu Culture

As the main body of China's international communication, Rewi Alley is a combination of internationalist fighter, founder of the Bailie School and external communicator of Chinese culture. He participated in China's revolution and construction and knew the reality of China's development. Besides, he was familiar with Chinese culture and informed of the social, political and cultural situations of other countries. He carried out international public opinion work in various forms such as writing, translation, visits, education, etc., and spread the content of China's society, politics, economy, culture, education and other aspects, which opened channels for people all over the world to know about China and played an important role in China's international communication. He spent 10 years in Gansu, made great contributions to the local economic and social development of Gansu, and left precious wealth to the Gansu people.

### 2.1 Rewi Alley's Main Experience in Gansu

In the 1940s, Rewi Alley came to Shandan, Gansu, China, and founded Shandan Bailie School. This school has not only trained a large number of practical technical personnel for the local area but has also become an important position for spreading Gansu culture. At that time, the Bailie School attracted nearly 30 foreign teachers from eight countries, as well as many overseas tourists, foreign experts and even missions from Dunhuang, a famous Silk Road city, which made Shandan in the western inland gain a relatively high reputation in the world. Under the words and deeds of these teachers and technicians, Chinese students have learned about the outside world while mastering technology, and outstanding students have also been recommended to go overseas for further study, which has promoted the exchange between Gansu culture and the international community to a certain extent.

In teaching, Rewi Alley combines Western advanced technical education with Chinese traditional cultural education. For example, the curriculum includes not only practical courses such as industrial technology and agricultural technology, but also humanities courses such as Chinese history, culture and art. While learning professional skills, students also have an in-depth understanding of Gansu's regional culture and Chinese traditional culture. Rewi Alley also organized students to carry out various practical activities, so that they could personally experience the natural scenery and folk customs of Gansu. In practice, students learned how to use local resources for production and creation, and at the same time, they had a deeper understanding of Gansu culture. Moreover, Rewi Alley organized students to collect and sort out folk stories, legends and folk songs in Gansu. These folk cultural works not only enrich students' extracurricular life, but also contribute to the inheritance and dissemination of Gansu culture. Through word of mouth and written records from the students, these folk cultures have been preserved and spread to the wider region. After graduation, some of these students stayed in the local area to continue to contribute to the construction of their hometown, while others went to all parts of the country and even the world, becoming disseminators of Gansu culture.

Rewi Alley is one of China's top ten international friends. He spent 10 years of his life in Shandan. In his autobiography, he wrote, "The most satisfying period in my life was undoubtedly those days with rural

youth in Shandan, Gansu.” During his life in Gansu, Rewi Alley established deep feelings with the local people. He had an in-depth understanding of Gansu’s folk culture, historical traditions and social life, and actively participated in various local activities. He worked with farmers to understand their production and living conditions, communicated with craftsmen and learned their skills. What’s more, he had discussions with scholars and studied the history and culture of Gansu.

Rewi Alley is also very interested in Gansu folk tales, legends and folk songs. He collected and sorted out a large quantity of folk cultural materials and spread them all over the world. For example, he translated Gansu folk tales into English and published them internationally, so that more people could know about Gansu culture. He also encouraged students to learn and inherit folk culture, and trained a group of talents with folk cultural literacy.

## *2.2 Rewi Alley’s Way of Spreading Gansu Culture*

Rewi Alley devoted his life to promoting exchanges and cooperation between China and the world, and his spirit inspired future generations to continue to work hard for the international spread of Gansu culture. His selfless dedication and innovative spirit have become an example for Gansu cultural communicators. Many people influenced by Alley inherited his spirit and continued to contribute to the international spread of Gansu culture.

### *2.2.1 Educational Communication: Cultivating Students’ Cognition and Communication Awareness of Gansu Culture through Schools*

Shandan Bailie School has become an important position for the spread of Gansu culture. Through education, Rewi Alley let students know the rich connotation and unique value of Gansu culture. The curriculum of the school incorporated the history, culture, art and other contents of Gansu, so that students could feel the charm of Gansu culture in their study.

For example, in history class, teachers talked about the historical changes and cultural heritage of Gansu, so that students could understand the important position and role of Gansu in the Silk Road. In Chinese class, students learned folk tales, legends and poems of Gansu to improve their literary literacy and cultural identity. In the art class, students learned the folk arts and traditional crafts of Gansu, and cultivated their aesthetic ability and creativity.

In addition, the school also organized students to participate in various social practice activities, so that they could experience the culture and life of Gansu for themselves. For example, students visited historical and cultural sites such as Mogao Caves and Maijishan Grottoes to feel the artistic charm of Gansu; They participated in rural labor and folk activities, and learned about Gansu’s folk culture and social life.

### *2.2.2 Writing: Introducing Gansu’s Local Customs, History and Culture to the World*

Rewi Alley wrote nearly 70 books in his life, many of which were about China. By writing articles and memoirs, he showed the world the beautiful scenery, long history and rich culture of China.

In *Record of Chinese Experiences*, he described the natural scenery and folk customs of Gansu in detail, which made readers feel the unique charm of Gansu. Rewi Alley also wrote many touching articles in

praise of Shandan, and in the 1950s he wrote *Memory of Shandan* and *Shandan, Creative Educational Exploration*, which were published in Christchurch, New Zealand. In *Memory of Shandan*, he recalled his life experience in Shandan and his deep feelings with the local people, and let the world know about the history and culture of Shandan, a small county. When he returned to Shandan, he also wrote poems such as *Back to Shandan* and *Shandan Renaissance*, which eulogised the new changes in the development of Shandan and expressed his nostalgia for the people of Shandan.

Rewi Alley's works have had a wide influence in the world, attracting many readers' attention and interest in Gansu. His words are vivid and infectious, which makes readers feel as if they were there and feel the beauty and charm of Gansu.

### 2.2.3 Donation of Cultural Relics: Showing the Charm of Gansu Culture with Cultural Relics as the Carrier

In his later years, Rewi Alley donated more than 4,000 precious cultural relics from his lifelong collection to Shandan. These cultural relics cover various historical periods and different cultural fields, and are important carriers of Gansu culture. Through these cultural relics, the world can better understand Gansu's rich historical and cultural heritage and unique cultural charm. For example, some ancient ceramic vessels, bronzes, paintings and calligraphy works, etc. show Gansu's artistic achievements and cultural characteristics in different historical periods. Some folk handicrafts, such as paper-cutting, embroidery, weaving, etc., reflect the industriousness and wisdom of the Gansu people.

The donation of cultural relics not only enriches Shandan's cultural resources, but also provides an important material basis for the international spread of Gansu culture. Many scholars and tourists from home and abroad come to Shandan to visit these cultural relics and learn about the history and culture of Gansu.

### 2.2.4 Building a Bridge for International Exchanges: Promoting Exchanges and Cooperation between Gansu and Other Countries

In 1984, at the initiative of Rewi Alley, Gansu Province established a sister province-city relationship with Christchurch, New Zealand. This initiative has built a bridge for cultural, educational and economic exchanges and cooperation between Gansu, New Zealand and even the world.

Since then, Gansu and New Zealand have carried out a series of exchange activities in the fields of culture, education and tourism. The two sides send art groups to each other to perform to show their respective cultural characteristics. Students and teachers on both sides are entitled to the exchange and study to promote the development of education. Through these exchange activities, Gansu culture has been widely spread internationally, and at the same time, the friendly relations between Gansu and other countries have been promoted.

### 3. Rewi Alley's Historical Influence on the International Communication of Gansu Culture

#### 3.1 Improve Gansu's International Popularity

Rewi Alley's activities made the world know Gansu, a province in northwest China. His works, speeches and donations of cultural relics have attracted the attention of many international people to Gansu. His works such as *Record of Chinese Experience* and *Memory of Shandan* have been widely spread internationally, allowing more people to know about Gansu's natural scenery, history and culture. His donated cultural relics have also been exhibited in exhibitions at home and abroad, attracting widespread attention. In addition, Shandan Bailie School founded by him has attracted teachers and students from different countries, who have spread Gansu culture to all parts of the world in their studies and lives.

#### 3.2 Cultivate Talents with International Vision

Shandan Bailie School has trained a group of talents with international vision and cultural literacy. These students have been exposed to the cultures and educational concepts of different countries in their studies, which has broadened their horizons and increased their knowledge. After graduation, some of them worked in enterprises and institutions at home and abroad and became communicators of Gansu culture; Some continued their studies and made contributions to Gansu's cultural and educational undertakings. For example, some students actively publicized Gansu's cultural and tourism resources while studying and working abroad, attracting many international tourists to Gansu for sightseeing.

#### 3.3 Promoting Cultural Exchanges and Integration

The international culture brought by Rewi Alley exchanges and integrates with the local culture of Gansu. During his life in Gansu, he introduced Western advanced technology and cultural ideas into the local area, and at the same time, he deeply understood and spread the traditional culture of Gansu. In Shandan Peili School, students not only learned Western industrial technology and scientific knowledge, but also learned Gansu folk art and traditional culture. This cultural exchange and integration enriches the connotation of Gansu culture, and also provides new ideas and methods for the international dissemination of Gansu culture.

### 4. Current Situation and Challenges of International Communication of Gansu Culture in the Digital Age

#### 4.1 Current Situation

Gansu, located in the northwest of China, is one of the important birthplaces of Chinese civilization. Since the ancient Silk Road, Gansu culture has attracted the attention of the world with its unique charm. In the long history, Gansu's Dunhuang culture, Silk Road culture and Buddhist culture have continuously spread to all parts of the world. With the rapid development of digital technology, the international communication of Gansu culture has also begun to rely on the power of digital technology. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies are used to create digital cultural exhibitions and tourism experience projects, so that the audience can experience the history, culture and natural scenery of Gansu. Some museums and cultural sites in Gansu have also begun to use digital technology to protect and

display cultural relics. Through three-dimensional scanning, digital modeling and other technologies, cultural relics are digitized to realize the permanent preservation and online display of cultural relics. At the same time, multimedia technology is used to add words, pictures, audio, video and other information to cultural relics, so that the audience can better understand the historical background and cultural value of cultural relics.

In addition, social media and online platforms have become important channels for the international dissemination of Gansu culture. Cultural institutions and tourism enterprises in Gansu have opened accounts on social media to publish information about Gansu culture and tourism, attracting a great many fans' attention. The Gansu Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism published Gansu's tourist attractions, folk culture, food and other content on Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, Tik Tok and other platforms, attracting much praise and comments from netizens. Some cultural celebrities and tourists in Gansu also shared their experiences and feelings in Gansu on social media, which played a positive role in promoting the spread of Gansu culture.

#### *4.2 Challenges*

Although digital technology provides more channels for the international dissemination of Gansu culture, there is a lack of effective integration and optimization among these channels. Different cultural institutions, tourism enterprises, etc. are fighting independently, and there is no joint force. For example, although some museums, cultural sites, etc. use digital technology to display cultural relics, they lack linkage with other channels, resulting in a limited number of audiences. Although some social media accounts have published a large amount of Gansu cultural and tourism information, the content quality is uneven, lacking systematicness and professionalism.

At present, the digital content innovation of Gansu culture is insufficient to meet the needs of the international market. Some digital cultural exhibitions and tourism experience projects are single in form, lacking interactivity and interest; Some content on social media lacks creativity and struggles to attract the attention of the audience. Some VR exhibitions simply digitally display cultural relics, without combining stories, games and other elements, which makes the audience feel boring. Some video content on social media simply shoots tourist attractions, without in-depth excavation and creative planning, which is difficult to resonate with the audience.

The international communication of Gansu culture needs personnel with professional knowledge and skills, including talents in language translation, cultural planning and marketing. However, at present, Gansu is relatively short of talents in this field, which restricts the international spread of Gansu culture. Different countries and regions have great cultural differences, and language barriers also bring certain difficulties to the international spread of Gansu culture. How to cross-cultural differences and language barriers and spread Gansu culture in a way that is easy to understand and accept by international audiences is an urgent problem to be solved.

## 5. The Enlightenment of Rewi Alley's Historical Experience to the International Communication of Gansu Culture in the Digital Age

### 5.1 Using Digital Technology to Inherit the Spirit of Rewi Alley

Technologies like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other technologies could be applied to build Rewi Alley Digital Memorial Hall. Through three-dimensional modeling, panoramic shooting and other means, Rewi Alley's life scenes and work achievements in Gansu can be realistically restored, so that the audience can visit in a remote immersion and learn about Rewi Alley's life story and spiritual connotation. For example, the audience can walk freely in the memorial hall and watch the exhibits at home through VR devices, as if they were there, and can also get detailed text, pictures or voice explanations by clicking on the exhibits. At the same time, the memorial hall can set up interactive links to allow the audience to participate in activities such as answering questions and leaving messages, so as to enhance the audience's sense of participation and experience.

A series of digital culture courses could be developed based on Rewi Alley's experience, works and ideas advocated by him. These courses can cover Rewi Alley's internationalist spirit, educational thought, understanding of Chinese culture, etc., and are aimed at different age groups and audiences. For example, online courses for primary and secondary school students can be developed, and the story of Rewi Alley can be told through animation, games and other forms, so as to cultivate students' international vision and cultural literacy. Online lectures for adults can also be developed, and experts and scholars can be invited to deeply interpret Rewi Alley's thoughts and spirit, so as to provide theoretical support for the international spread of Gansu culture.

### 5.2 Learning from Historical Communication Methods and Innovating Digital Communication Strategies

Just as Rewi Alley wrote books to create digital content, it's necessary to use words, pictures, audio, video and other forms to create digital content about Gansu culture, such as e-books, documentaries, short videos, etc. For example, a documentary about Gansu's Silk Road culture can be made to show Gansu's important position and role in the Silk Road through on-the-spot shooting and expert interviews. Besides, a series of short videos about Gansu folk culture can be presented to show Gansu folk customs and traditional culture through vivid and interesting stories and pictures.

The way of Rewi Alley's cultural relics donation to display digital cultural relics gives good implications for using digital technology in the process of collecting, sorting out and displaying the cultural relics in Gansu, so that more people can appreciate the beauty of cultural relics in Gansu. For example, the Digital Museum of Gansu Cultural Relics can be set up, and high-definition pictures and 3D models of Gansu cultural relics can be released to the world through the Internet, so that audiences can enjoy Gansu cultural relics online. AR technology can also be used to combine cultural relics with real scenes, so that the audience can see the virtual display of cultural relics through mobile phones and other devices when visiting scenic spots, thus enhancing the audience's visiting experience.

### *5.3 Cultivating International Communication Personnel Adapted to the Digital Age*

Rewi Alley's educational philosophy indicates that it is of great significance to pay attention to cultivating students' practical ability and innovative spirit, so that students can master the knowledge, skills and approaches of digital technology and international communication in their studies. The international communication majors can be offered in colleges and universities, and courses such as digital technology, cultural planning and marketing can be set up to cultivate students' professional quality. Students can also participate in the international communication project of Gansu culture through internship and practice, so as to improve their practical ability. At the same time, strengthen cooperation with international universities and institutions, carry out teacher-student exchanges, academic research and other activities, and broaden students' international horizons.

### *5.4 Strengthening International Cooperation and Expanding Digital Communication Channels*

Based on the international exchanges set up by Rewi Alley, we will further strengthen international cooperation and expand digital communication channels. It is expected to establish cooperative relations with international cultural institutions, tourism enterprises, social media platforms, etc. to jointly promote Gansu culture. For example, we can cooperate with international museums, art galleries and other cultural institutions to hold Gansu cultural exhibitions and exchange activities. We can also cooperate with international tourism enterprises to develop cultural tourism routes in Gansu and attract international tourists to visit Gansu. At the same time, international social media platforms are good choices to publish relevant information about Gansu culture and tourism, and enhance the international popularity of Gansu culture.

## **6. Conclusion**

Rewi Alley has a profound historical origin with the international spread of Gansu culture. He founded Shandan Bailie School in Gansu, wrote books, donated cultural relics, built international exchange bridges, etc., and made great contributions to the international spread of Gansu culture. His activities have enhanced Gansu's international popularity, cultivated talents with international vision, and promoted cultural exchanges and integration. In the digital age, the international communication of Gansu culture is facing new opportunities and challenges. Digital technology provides more channels and means for the international communication of Gansu culture, but it also brings some problems, such as the integration and optimization of communication channels, digital content innovation, shortage of international communication talents, cultural differences and language barriers. In order to better promote the international communication of Gansu culture, we need to learn from Rewi Alley's historical experience, use digital technology to inherit his spirit, innovate digital communication strategies, cultivate international communication talents adapted to the digital age, strengthen international cooperation and expand digital communication channels. At the same time, we also need to constantly explore and innovate, combine the characteristics and advantages of Gansu culture, and formulate a more

effective international communication strategy, so that Gansu culture can bloom more brilliantly internationally.

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