Conceptual Analysis of the Tea-Horse Road as Cultural Route -- A Case Study of Jingmai Mountain in Pu’er, Yunnan Province

Yiqing Zou

Research Center for Heritage Conservation and Urban-rural Development, Tsinghua Tongheng Urban Planning & Design Institute, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Email address: zouyq00@126.com

To cite this article:

Received: April 10, 2023; Accepted: May 17, 2023; Published: May 18, 2023

Abstract: Based on field investigations, historical research and the integration of existing research achievements of relevant disciplines, this paper frames the Tea-Horse Road as a “cultural route” as specified by the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes. The paper argues that the Tea-Horse Road is in essence a land transportation network in Asia shaped by the demand for material and cultural exchange among different ethnic groups and regions in western China. The development of the Tea-Horse Road had linked China with Southeast Asia and South Asia, a process in which tea played an active and decisive role. The paper first illustrates the distribution and history of the Tea-Horse Road in Yunnan, arguing that its layout was predominantly influenced by non-official trade. Then the paper shifts the focus to Jingmai Mountain, expounding on the migration and tea plantation history of the indigenous Dai and Blang people with evidence from several angles; it also establishes the demand for tea and the tea trading and transportation routes as the decisive factors for the development of Jingmai tea mountain, as evidenced by the formation and evolution of the old tea forests. As evidence by the religious buildings and relics, Tea-Horse Road served as the conduit for the introduction of religion, culture, technology and tools into Jingmai Mountain. In conclusion, the author argues that the concept of the Tea-Horse Road provides a broader perspective and important historical clues to understand the heritage values of Jingmai Mountain, which in turn furthers understanding the Tea-Horse Road as a “cultural route”.

Keywords: Tea-Horse Road, Jingmai Mountain, Cultural Route

1 Introduction

1.1. What Is Tea-Horse Road

From July to September 1990, a group of six scholars, including Jihong Mu, Baoya Chen, Yongtao Xu, Xiaosong Wang, Lin Li and Xu Li, traversed and investigated the ancient roads located in the Hengduan Mountains across Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet. “The investigation reveals that tea is the most important commodity that connects these ancient horse caravan routes, where horse is the most critical means of transport. That’s why we decided to name these ancient routes ‘Tea-Horse Road’ [1].” The ideation of the “Tea-Horse Road” garnered considerable attention and generated a great deal of research and discussion endeavors. Scholars who examine from the perspective of sociology and linguistics define the Tea-Horse Road as a conduit for cultural transmission and exchange in the world’s most ethnically diverse and complex cultural sphere spanning across Yunnan, Sichuan, Tibet, Southeast Asia and India” [2]. It is argued that the Tea-Horse Road “vividly demonstrates the characteristics of the flow of goods in the Tibetan-Yi Corridor” and “the two modes of interaction, ‘ritual’ and ‘military’, between different ethnicities” [3]. Among these studies, a prevalent view holds that the Tea-Horse Road is a transportation network emerging from salt trade routes and non-official roads, boosted by the flourishing tea and horse trade. In contrast, other scholars who propose that the Tea-Horse Road is “the transportation network established by the central government to facilitate the trade of tea produced in
agricultural areas with horses in pastoral regions” [4] focused their studies on the official tea-horse trade route in Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai, which lasted from the prevalence of tea drinking in the Tubo (Tibetan Regime) in late Tang Dynasty to the abolition of the tea-horse market in the late Qing Dynasty [5]. The geographical area, specific routes, commodities, and scope of influence studied in association with the Tea-Horse Road vary with scholars due to their different academic background, area of research and scope of investigation. In 2010, after more than twenty years of academic exploration and research of this most-talked-about topic, the Pu’er Consensus on the Conservation of the Tea-Horse Road Cultural Heritage was published in Pu’er, Yunnan, followed by the Ya’an Consensus on the Tea-Horse Road released in Ya’an, Sichuan in 2011. In 2013, the inclusion of the Tea-Horse Road in the seventh batch of National Priority Protected Sites (NPPS) put it under the administration of China’s Cultural Relics Conservation and Management System. The NPPS application process also transformed the Tea-Horse Road from a concept to a cultural heritage. In its NPPS introduction, the Tea-Horse Road is described as “an important trade passageway linking the Han people, Tibetan people and other ethnic minorities that can be dated back to the Tang and Song dynasties. With tea and horse as the main commodities transported by horse caravans, it is a critical linear cultural heritage which carries unique historical and cultural values in Southeast China. The vast network of the Tea-Horse Road extends across Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Tibet and Gansu, among other provinces, and the section in Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan has been rated as a National Priority Protected Site” [6]. This description not only speaks volume about the views on the Tea-Horse Road among the cultural heritage conservation practitioners at that time, but also testifies to the influence of research in related disciplines on the concept of the Tea-Horse Road as a cultural heritage.

1.2. Objectives

In 2016, the National Cultural Heritage Administration launched the project of “Research on the Management Status of the Tea-Horse Road in Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan and the Corresponding Protection Measures”. The project taskforce studied the remnant cultural relics along the Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan section which were listed as NPPS and established a whole picture of the conservation across this region. Suggestions on management strategies and conservation of the Tea-Horse Road were formulated accordingly. Guided by the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes and UNESCO’s the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the taskforce, by taking the findings of historical and archaeological research into account, examined the distribution and development stages of the Tea-Horse Road from multiple perspectives such as the tea-horse trade market and the policy of leveraging tea as a tool for border governance. The taskforce agrees with the previous linguistical, sociological and anthropological scholars on their interpretation of the cultural significance of the Tea-Horse Road and respects the intention of the six scholars who conceptualized the Tea-Horse Road in the first place. During the field study of the remnant cultural heritage and review of literature, the taskforce conducted a thorough analysis of the factors that affected the formation of the Tea-Horse Road. On this basis, the taskforce has reached the following conclusions.

The Tea-Horse Road is not a historical concept since there is no physical road bearing this name in history. It is a cultural concept proposed by later scholars. Just like the concept of “Silk Road” formulated by Ferdinand Paul Wilhelm Richthofen to refer to the trade routes that stretched across the Eurasian continent, the Tea-Horse Road is also an academically distillation and summary of historical facts. The research paradigm of the Tea-Horse Road is still under development.

The Tea-Horse Road is, in essence, a land transportation network that spans across Asia, expanding with the growing demands for goods and cultural exchanges between different ethnic groups and regions in West China. “Land transportation” is only natural because the natural geographical conditions of West China make water transportation difficult in most areas. “Network” is fitting because a multi-tiered road network, composed of roads of different scales that reach and connect all cities and villages, had formed in the aforementioned region after evolution over more than a millennium. It comprises thoroughfares built by the government and trails connecting towns and villages blazed by private caravans, winding through far-flung areas like capillaries sustaining the lives there. Apart from horse, other pack animals like cattle, yaks, mules, donkeys, and camels were also used for labor. Human labor was also common in places, such as porters in Sichuan. Thus, it can be concluded that horse caravan was not the only organized mode of transport in the Tea-Horse Road.

Figure 1. Tea porters in Sichuan, 1910.

Photographer: Edwin J. Dingle
(Source: Online Archive of University of California)

The Tea-Horse Road crisscrosses the first and second step
of China’s terrain, passing through the intersection of agrarian and nomadic areas, connecting regions with demands for exchange of complementary natural products, including necessities like salt, grain, medicinal herbs, daily commodities such as tea, furs, metals, and important military supplies such as horses. Although the Tea-Horse Road is named after tea and horse, its history is longer than the tea-horse trade market and its influence also extends beyond the confines of tea and horse trade. The ancient paths in West China that make up the Tea-Horse Road can be traced back to the Qin and Han Dynasty. By the Tang Dynasty, an extensive transportation network was already up and running. The tea-horse trade market in Song Dynasty was merely a spin-off of the network. In addition, tea-horse trade is not the only factor that shaped the formation and transformation of the Tea-Horse Road in different stages; politics, military, economy, and diplomatic relations also have exerted a considerable influence on its complex evolution.

Tea from Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou, the most time-honored tea producing region in Southwest China, gained great popularity among the nomadic ethnic groups in West China, whose horses were important military supplies in the cold weapon eras and indispensable strategic goods for the regimes established in the Central Plains. In 728 AD, the 16th year of Emperor Xuanzong’s reign, “Tubo proposed to deliver horses in Chiling and trade with tea in Gansongling”. Feng’s Notes (Fengshi Wenjian) recorded that “merchants from Huihu entered the border to trade their good horses for tea in market”, indicating that tea-horse trade between the nomads in the West Regions and the agrarians in the Central Plains was already prevalent in the Tang Dynasty. In the seventh year of the Xining reign period in the Northern Song Dynasty (1074 AD), designated tea stores sprung up in Sichuan. Prefectures in the northwest also joined the tea-horse trade market. The expansion of tea-trade market, introduction of the policy of leveraging tea as an instrument for border administration, the prevalence of tea drinking and the spread of tea culture provided a great boost to tea trade. In return, tea as a highly profitable commodity promoted the goods exchange between the agrarians and nomads, which further strengthened the connection between the inland and the borderland. Therefore, it is fitting to name this land transportation network after the two most typical commodities—tea and horse.

Having said so, the Tea-Horse Road serves more than tea and horse transportation; the list of materials shipped through these paths is endless. This means our research should also take a broader view. Ancient roads and the trading activities they sustained still existed after the abolition of the tea-horse market policy. Undoubtedly, changes also occurred: routes shifted, and tea trade was no longer overseen by the government but organized by private businessmen. Therefore, the time frame set in the Tea-Horse Road research should not be determined by the promulgation or abolition of the tea-horse market policy; otherwise, it may render historical research biased and fragmented, and undermine the interpretation and understanding of the whole historical context.

West China is where the Tea-Horse Road spans across and played a vital role: it stretches across the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Sichuan Basin, and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, passing through the Himalayas, the Hengduan Mountains, the Yangtze River (known as the Jinsha River in Yunnan), the Lancang River (known as the Mekong River in Southeast Asia), the Salween River (known as the Nu River in Yunnan), linking East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and other countries. Therefore, the historical and cultural influence of the Tea-Horse Road goes far and wide, beyond the territory of China. When studying West China, there are two points worth noting. First, historical research should not be constrained by the current administrative division since the integration of the western region into the centralized rule went through a very long process. Second, this region not only has its own indigenous and ethnic cultures; it is also influenced by, and in turn, changing the culture of the mainland and South and Southeast Asia. It serves as a buffer and link between China and other regions. The examination of its influence and significance should be conducted in a larger spatial context. Research shows that the Tea-Horse Road is connected to the Maritime Silk Road to the southeast (Yunnan-Guizhou-Guangxi-Guangdong) and south (Yunnan-Vietnam), linked with the Silk Road to the north (Sichuan-Shaanxi-Gansu-Qinghai-Xinjiang) and west (Tibet-India-Afghanistan), making it a transnational land passage in Asia, and the linkage with the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road integrated the Tea-Horse Road into the global network of economic and cultural exchanges. It can even be argued that the formation of the transportation network of the Tea-Horse Road mirrors the process of globalization, during which tea played an undisputedly active and decisive role.

1.3. Cognition of Tea-Horse Road

In summary, the taskforce proposes the following views on the Tea-Horse Road: it flourished in the Tang and Song dynasty, was still active in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, declining and giving way to modern transportation in Republic of China. It covers eight provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, i.e., Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Chongqing, Tibet, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai, connecting a variety of ethnic groups such as the Han, Tibetan, Yi and Hui peoples. As an extension and link of the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road, it is a transnational land transportation network in Asia. The formation of the Tea-Horse Road was shaped by both natural and human factors—the harsh natural conditions of the areas where it passed through make its routes extremely extensive, while the forces of the state and the localities interacted in two directions (top-down and inside-out), exhibited mainly in official tea-horse trade market and private business, which strengthened the ties between the inland where the culture of the Han people dominated and the borderland where ethnic minorities gathered. From the domestic perspective, the Tea-Horse Road witnessed how the central governments of different dynasties strengthened governance of the southwestern
Yiqing Zou: Conceptual Analysis of the Tea-Horse Road as Cultural Route -- A Case Study of Jingmai Mountain in Pu’er, Yunnan Province

region, and how the ethnic minorities in this region absorbed the Chinese culture and integrated into the united and multi-ethnic fabric of the Chinese nation [10]. At the global level, the Tea-Horse Road is an important cultural conduit for the Chinese civilization to bond with other ethnic groups and countries in South and Southeast Asia, forming a “cohesive zone” of Oriental Civilizations [11].

2. The Tea-Horse Road in Yunnan

The research taskforce painstakingly identified and drew the Map of the Tea-Horse Road and the Map of the Tea-Horse Road in Yunnan. As shown by Figure 3, the trunk routes of the Tea-Horse Road in Yunnan form a “+” structure. The main routes are as follows: the Yunnan-Tibet route extending from Xishuangbanna in the south of Yunnan northward to Pu’er, Dali, Lijiang and Diqing in Tibet, which has two branches, one is the Yunnan-Western Tibet branch from Shigu Town, Lijiang to Weixi County, Diqing, then Nujiang and then Chayu; the other is the Lincang-Dali branch from Lincang to Dali, Lijiang and Diqing in Tibet. Another route is the Sichuan-Yunnan Route from Sichuan, via Guizhou, to eastern Yunnan, and another is the Yunnan-Guizhou Route from Zhaotong to Qujing and Kunming. There was also the Myanmar-Yunnan route from Kunming to Chuxiong and Dali and then Myanmar via Baoshan or Dehong, leading to Southeast Asia or South Asia. The Southern Song Dynasty purchased horses from the Dali State as a means of pacification. The horses in the southwest traveled from Yunnan, through Guizhou, to Hengshanzhai in Guangxi, the place of trading[3], not in exchange for tea but books, textiles and ceramics, among others, from the inland. During the reign of Emperor Kangxi in the Qing Dynasty, Wu Sangui, the Pingxi Prince, prepared a lot of weapons and horses to launch a rebellion, and he “traded tea for horses in five markets under the prefecture (Beisheng Prefecture, today’s Yongsheng, Lijiang)” with Dalai Lama and GanduTaiji[4], but not for long. Therefore, it can be seen that Yunnan was not the main region for the tea-horse trade in Song and Ming Dynasties. The opening of the roads and routes in Yunnan was not closely related to the official tea-horse market.

Figure 2. Map of the Tea-Horse Road (drawn by Yimei Zhang, He Li).
The Yunnan-Tibet Route was the main route that took Yunnan tea to Tibet. The opening of the route, though, was not solely attributable to tea trade. In the Tang Dynasty, Tubo, the Nanzhao State in Yunnan and the Tang Dynasty of the Central Plains had frequent trials of strength and on-and-off relationships between them. At that time, there was already a passageway between Yunnan and Tibet. With hostile natural environment, unfavorable political dynamics, and insufficient tea output in Yunnan, large-scale tea trading had not existed yet, but tea from South Yunnan was already distributed and sold to the Erhai area. Given that the present-day Diqing of Yunnan, Aba and Ganzi of Sichuan and Changdu (Chambo) of the Tibet Region are all regions dominated by the Kham Tibetan culture, the “Western Regions” as in historical records “the drinking of Pu Tea in Western Regions started in the Tang Dynasty” might refer to the Kham region. The Yuan Dynasty ruled Tibet and Yunnan as one entity and set up courier stations extensively, which improved transportation within Yunnan and also strengthened connection between Yunnan and Tibet, laying the physical foundation for Yunnan tea to be transported into Tibet in the Ming Dynasty. During the Ming Dynasty, the tea produced in Yunnan was referred to as “Pu’er tea” and its output and sales volume both far exceeded the previous quantities. As of now, most of the historical records and physical evidence on the flow of Yunnan tea into Tibet were from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China. The Yunnan-Tibet Route across the Hengduan Mountains was tough and perilous, limiting the amount of tea that could be carried. However, people in Tibetan-inhabited areas gradually developed an acquired taste for Yunnan, and “the huge profit of tea trade that is a several fold increase over profit of other commodities” lured merchants in Diqing, Lijiang and Dali of Yunnan to engage in the tea trade as well; appreciative of the importance and value of tea, temples and aristocrats in Tibet largely bought tea from merchants from Yunnan or, went directly to Yunnan for procurement when they had the financial means. Therefore, it can be seen that trade of tea, the Yunnan commodity most in demand in Tibet, was not the only but certainly the main driver behind the opening of the Yunnan-Tibet Route. The Yunnan-Tibet Route extended southward to the major tea-producing areas of Yunnan such
as Pu’er, Lincang and Xishuangbanna, with the trunk being the segment in Xishuangbanna and Pu’er in Inner Lancang River and the branch being the segment in Lincang in Outer Lancang River. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the British government gradually established its rule of India and Burma, exiting the border via the south or west of Yunnan before traveling by road, ship and train in Burma was less time-consuming and less costly than the Yunnan-Tibet route across the Hengduan Mountains. Thus during the Republic of China, Yunnan tea merchants opened a new tea transportation route overseas from Yunnan to Tibet through Burma and India [12].

The Sichuan-Yunnan Route has, since ancient times, been the main route that links Yunnan with the Central Plains through Sichuan. It can be traced back to Wuchi Road or Lingguan Road opened during the Qin and Han Dynasty. The Sichuan-Yunnan Route had an eastern and a western branch. The Yunnan-Guizhou Route could be traced back to the official road that took shape in the early Ming Dynasty and it had a northern and southern branch. The eastern branch of the Sichuan-Yunnan Route was the major conduit for distributing and selling Yunnan tea to other parts of the mainland, as reflected by the historical records “Yunnan tea was already distributed nationwide in the early Qing Dynasty, equally famous as Mengding, Wuyi, Liu’an and Longjing Tea”[5]. The Tuo Cha (domed-shaped tea cake) sold to as far as Jiangnan (south of the Yangtze River) was mistakenly associated with the Tuo River in Sichuan by people in the coastal provinces because it was transported from Sichuan to Jiangnan. As a matter of fact, Tuo Cha was from Yunnan and “Tuo” was derived from a homophone in the Yunnan dialect, meaning “a small piece”. In the Qing Dynasty, Pu’er tea was presented to the imperial court as tribute. It was first taken to Mengla County, Xishuangbanna, then Simao in Pu’er and then Kunming, then it, through the Yunnan-Guizhou Route, arrived at Guizhou, a transit before it traveled through the mainland and eventually arrived at Beijing, the capital city. The popularity of Pu’er tea among overseas Chinese accounted for the opening of a trade route that moved tea from Pu’er or Honghe in Yunnan to Vietnam and then reached Hong Kong and Southeast Asia by sea. This trade route was connected with the Maritime Silk Road. Considering the “Haijin” (sea ban) policy implemented during the Ming and Qing Dynasty, it was opened probably later than the middle of the 19th century. This eastbound route also showed that Yunnan tea was not merely sold to Tibet to its west. The Yunnan-Burma Route had been the passageway spanning dynasties that linked the Central Plains and the southwest border areas of China with Southeast Asia and South Asia. It dated back to the Han Dynasty[6]. But it was not an official route. The Han Dynasty set up Yongchang County but its governor was merely a figurehead without substantial power, which did not allow much optimism about the opening and maintenance of official roads. Subsequently Yongchang County was under the rule of Nanzhao and Dali State. The Yuan Dynasty “conquered the tribes that did not surrender to its rule west of Yongchang such as Tengyue, Pubiao, Achang and Jinchii”. That was when the Central Government established its rule in this place and set up official courier stations, which existed until the end of the Qing Dynasty. During the Republic of China, the Dian-Burma Road (the highway linking Yunnan and Burma) and the Hump Aerial Route enabled one to travel by car or by plane or other means of modern transportation. That speaks volumes about the strategic importance of the Yunnan-Burma Route, which was not the main conduit for tea trade, though, as it was only used as a shortcut for tea traders to Tibet since the end of the Qing Dynasty.

In summary, the materials transported and the way of organization on the Tea-Horse Road in Yunnan featured predominantly trade of tea by non-official horse caravans, which was sold to the mainland, Tibet and overseas concurrently. This was jointly shaped by the special geographical location, geopolitical environment and prevalent type of produce of Yunnan. If the Tea-Horse Road was defined by the official tea-horse market, then the main time-honored routes that had been up and running for a long time in Yunnan would not fit the description. However, such a “narrow” definition of the Tea-Horse Road was not adopted by the taskforce considering the objective situation that relevant heritages in Yunnan had been incorporated into the Tea-Horse Road as a National Priority Protected Site, out of respect for the six scholars that first proposed the concept, and in line with the tenet upheld for cultural route.

3. Tea Industry Development of Jingmai Mountain and the Tea-Horse Road

The middle and lower reaches of the Lancang River are the main tea-producing areas in Yunnan. In the Qing Dynasty, the “Six Major Tea Mountains”[9] were selected, all of which were located in Inner Lancang River; in contemporary times, the “New Six Major Tea Mountains”[10] were selected, all in Outer Lancang River. Tea quality does not necessarily differ between Inner and Outer Lancang River[11]. The “Six Major Tea Mountains” rose to fame earlier and became the main producing areas of tribute tea[12] because they were in Inner Lancang River and their tea did not have to cross the Lancang River, a great convenience in the ancient times. Ranked among the “New Six Major Tea Mountains”, Jingmai Mountain is located in Huimin Town, Lancang County, Pu’er City, i.e., within Outer Lancang River and not a tribute tea provider in the Qing Dynasty. Currently historical records on the tea industry development in Jingmai Mountain are very scant. Information is mostly obtained from oral accounts and existing cultural relics and heritage. For example, the Book of the Southern Barbarians (Manshu) written by Fan Chuo stated that “tea is produced in Yinsheng City”. However, it only indicates that tea was produced in the area under the jurisdiction of Yinsheng Jiedu[13] (a regional military governor) during the Nanzhao State period, but it is not sufficient to conclude that Jingmai Mountain must have produced tea in the Tang Dynasty. Currently there are about
1,208 hectares of cultivated old tea forests in Jingmai Mountain. The tea plantation history and the settlement and development history of the indigenous peoples are closely and directly intertwined. There are 5 ethnic groups living in Jingmai Mountain: the Blang and Dai are the indigenous people while the Aini, Wa and Han people were latecomers\(^1\). The Blang and Dai are the aborigines of Yunnan that have been living in Baoshan, Lincang, Dehong, Pu’er and Xishuangbanna in western and southern Yunnan for a long time\(^2\). As to when the indigenous peoples settled down in Jingmai Mountain, which people first carried out development activities in Jingmai Mountain, which people first mastered tea tree domestication and cultivation techniques, opinions and views are divided among the Dai people of Jingmai Village, the Blang people of Mangjing Village and experts and scholars, and no conclusion can be drawn yet.

That the Dai people of Jingmai Mountain migrated from Dehong has been ascertained but not the specific time of arrival. As for the migration history of the Blang people, according to the oral accounts of Guowen Su of the Mangjing Village, the Blang people first lived around present-day Kunming, and then migrated to areas around Dehong after failure in the first war of ethnicities in Yunnan, and further migrated to the present-day areas of Menghai, Lancang and Menglian along the borders of Myanmar after the second war of ethnicities in Yunnan\(^3\). The time points of these two migrations were not specified in the legends of the Blang people.

According to official records in The Records of the Grand Historian, the Emperor Wu of Han “in the second year of Yuanfeng (BC 109), dispatched troops to the Bashu region (present-day Sichuan and Chongqing). The King of Dian fled to the southwestern areas inhabited by the barbarians, and the whole Kingdom of Dian surrendered and submitted to the officials from the Han Dynasty”; Treatise on the Southwestern Barbarians, The Book of the Later Han documented that in the 18\(^{th}\) year of the Jianwu Reign of the Han Dynasty, “Emperor Hongwu sent Youde Fu, Duke of Xiping as his deputies, on a mission to conquer Yunnan, and they did; … in the 21\(^{th}\) year of the Hongwu Reign (1388 AD), rebellion broke out among the barbarians, and Ying Mu, the Duke of Xiping, dispatched commander-in-chief Cheng Feng to crush the rebellion, and the barbarians collapsed.” According to the recollections of Nankang, a senior of Mangjing Village, he, as the descendant of the headman at Mangjing Village, is of the 28\(^{th}\) generation in the family lineage. With his son and his grandchildren factored in, there are altogether 30 generations in his family lineage. Assuming that the generation time is 25 years, then 750 years has passed since the existence of his oldest ancestor. Based on this, it can be inferred that the Blang people of Mangjing Village arrived at Jingmai Mountain in around the 13\(^{th}\) century. The Yunnan Archaeology Institute conducted archaeological excavations in Jingmai Mountain and found a spot in the tea gardens on the mountain ridge nearly 3 km south of Jingmai Dazhai, locally known as “the Xianren Tomb”, and reckoned that it was a tomb from the Yuan Dynasty\(^4\). Neither the Dai nor the Blang people in Jingmai Mountain knew about the origin of the Xianren Tomb, from which it can be inferred that the tomb was not relics of their ancestors and that their ancestors arrived at Jingmai Mountain later than the Yuan Dynasty. The author conducted research of the Blang people in Myanmar and learned that they migrated to Myanmar in around the 13\(^{th}\) century, which was concurrent with the march of the Yuan armies into Yunnan. The Merit Tablet of the Dai people, now placed in a Blang cultural center in Mangjing Village, Jingmai Mountain, stated that “In Year 377 of the Dai calendar (1016 AD), the Great Abbot led monks and other people to build the Buddhist Temple”\(^5\). The prevalent religion in Jingmai Mountain was Theravada Buddhism, which, according to the Comprehensive History of Buddhism in Yunnan, spread to Yunnan in the 14\(^{th}\) century\(^6\). Therefore, further corroboration is needed before the time carved on the tablet can be interpreted as the starting time point for human activities in the Jingmai Mountain. In summary, the author reckons that it was around the 13\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) century that the Blang people arrived in Jingmai Mountain and started to plant tea trees, rather than the earlier 8\(^{th}\) century or 11\(^{th}\) century.

Regarding which of the Dai and Blang people mastered the tea plantation techniques earlier, historical records are hard to come by. Currently the traditional tea-producing regions in Yunnan include counties under prefectures and municipalities such as Pu’er, Xishuangbanna and Lincang, and tea-planting peoples including indigenous peoples such as Dai, Blang, De’ang and Jinuo as well as ethnicities that migrated to and settled down in the province such as Han, Lahu and Hani. The production mode and lifestyle of an ethnicity are not merely attributable to the production techniques already mastered by it or its customary lifestyle, but can be changed as the conditions change. The perfect case in point is that the rice-planting Hani people and the hunting Lahu people, after migrating to and settling down in a place favorable to tea plantation, now make a living from...
phenomenon that merits in-depth investigation and thinking. 

In pastoral areas, the promotion of the tea-horse road in Yunnan was concurrent. That was not merely a coincidence. The top-down tea-drinking fad was shaped by administrative affiliation and the location of the tea-producing areas and consumer markets. To run the country, the ruler needed roads to link with the ruled for smooth implementation of government policies and orders. Stimulated by consumer demands for Pu’er tea, horse caravans owned by tea houses in place of provenance also operated between Lancang County, where Jingmai Mountain is located, and other places in South Yunnan.

According to the Jurisdiction of Jingmai Mountain recorded by the History of Pacification Commission Office in Menglian, the Jinghong Chieftain married his daughter to the Menglian Chieftain with Jingmai Mountain as a dowry. The administration of Shangxiayun, Fofang, Qianliu, Jingmai County and evidence that the Pu’er tea designation certainly helped Yunnan tea rise to fame nationwide, which remains well-known till now. Jingmai Mountain, an obscure tea mountain in Outer Lancang River back then, directly benefited from the tea industry development and the expansion of the Tea-Horse Road in Yunnan.

The road network of the Tea-Horse Road’s Yunnan section was shaped by administrative affiliation and the location of the tea-producing areas and consumer markets. To run the country, the ruler needed roads to link with the ruled for smooth implementation of government policies and orders. Stimulated by consumer demands for Pu’er tea, horse caravans owned by tea houses in place of provenance also operated between Lancang County, where Jingmai Mountain is located, and other places in South Yunnan.

According to the Jurisdiction of Jingmai Mountain recorded by the History of Pacification Commission Office in Menglian, the Jinghong Chieftain married his daughter to the Menglian Chieftain with Jingmai Mountain as a dowry. The administration of Shangxiayun, Fofang, Qianliu, Jingmai Mountain was thus handed over to the Menglian Chieftain. This description of administrative subordination of Jingmai Mountain is consistent with The Mangjing Blang People and Their Tea authored by Guowen Su, which said that according to the Chronicles of the Blang People, in the 115th years of the Dai calendar, the Banna Dai King, Menglian Dai King, and Kyongtung Dai King gathered in ‘Lai Shan Meng’ (now Luomeng Mountain in Nuofu) and held an alliance meeting”, where they agreed to “divide the Blang tribes into three management units”, of which “one unit was the Blang Mountain in Jingmai, renamed as ‘Wangnong’, placed under the ruling of the Menglian Dai King”, “from then on, the tribal chiefs of Mangjing Blang Mountain were appointed by the Menglian Dai King, and the tribute tea paid by these tribes was submitted to the Menglian Dai King instead of the Banna Dai King.”

Similar records can be found in the Chronicles of Menghai County. During the field study in Menghai County, more than one local said to the author that Jingmai Mountain used to be a part of Kengtung. Unfortunately, the aforementioned documents had no record of the specific time as when the Blang tribes in Mangjing were placed under the jurisdiction of Menglian. The Banna Dai King in the folklore was the Cheli Chieftain. According to the History of the Ming Dynasty, “Cheli, the ancient Chanli, used to be a den of barbarians and thugs, cut off from China. Emperor Shizhu of Yuan... conquered this place, set Saliliu Military and Civilian...
General Administration,... in the 15th year of Emperor Hongwu’s reign, Manchang and Daokan surrendered. The Cheli Military and Civilian Administration was established... in the 17th year, it was reorganized as the Military and Civilian Pacification Commission Office. Records of the Mulianlu Military and Civil Administration were missing in the History of the Yuan Dynasty, but according to the History of Pacification Commission Office in Menglian, when the Mongolian army invaded in 1254, a group of officials and citizens headed by Prince Hanbafa fled from Dehong to Menglian in south. As documented by the History of the Ming Dynasty, “Menglian Governor Office (formerly known as Luchuan Pingmian Office, later renamed as Mengding Prefectural Authority) was established in April in the fourth year of Emperor Yongle’s reign.” Therefore, it is undoubted that the handover of administration of Jingmai Mountain to the Menglian Chieftain occurred no earlier than the Yuan Dynasty. It is likely that the record of the 115th year of the Dai calendar (754 AD) in the Chronicle of the Blang People is inaccurate.

From the perspective of administrative affiliation, it becomes understandable why the ancient roads in Lancang County led south to Menghai and Kengtung, west to Menglian and Myanmar, and north across the Shuangjiang River to Fengqing in Lincang. In Lancang, there is a road connected with Pu’er City, stretching from Huimin Town in Jingmai Mountain, through Jiujiang Town, Fazhanhe Town, Nuozadu Town, across the Lancang River to Simao District in Pu’er City, which was the distribution center of Pu’er tea in the Qing Dynasty. It is very likely that this road was constructed for tea trade, not for state governance, indicating that the road network in the tea mountains in Outer Lancang River as represented by the Jingmai Mountain and their surrounding areas was shaped by two forces: private tea business and state governance. In contrast, the road network in Southwest Yunnan within Outer Lancang River, which was ruled by the Chieftain regime until the Republic of China, depended more on local authorities and communities than the central government, which is very common in the borderland in Southwest China. Therefore, the taskforce concludes that the Tea-Horse Road is the product of the interactions between the state and local, government and society. Confining research to the official roads will result in gaps in history, lead to insufficient understanding, and compromise the analysis of the value of Jingmai Mountain as a World Heritage.

The influence of the Tea-Horse Road on the growth of Yunnan’s tea industry and the whole region’s social, economic, and cultural development is a topic well worth studying. In the case of Jingmai Mountain, it was not a tribute tea-producing area. Neither was it a stop of the main tea trade routes, i.e., the Yunnan-Tibet Route and its branches. The section of the Tea-Horse Road connected to the Jingmai Mountain was merely a trail. However, the size of tea trade here sustained thousands of hectares of tea forests, indicating that the business grew stably for a very long time. The Tea-Horse Road not only brought about tea trade which tea farmers lived on, but also facilitated the spread of religious culture, technology, tools, and other daily necessities.

Figure 4. The routes of the Tea-Horse Road in Lancang County (drawn by Yimei Zhang).
One of the most important foreign cultures disseminated by the Tea-Horse Road is the Theravada Buddhism, spreading from Kengtung in Myanmar to Jinghong in Xishuangbanna before being introduced to Menghai in around the 14th century. Between 1493 and 1513 in the Ming Dynasty, the Menglian Chieftain visited Myanmar to invite prestigious monks to lecture on Buddhism teachings. Later, Theravada Buddhism spread from Menglian to Jingmai Mountain, where it was fused with the Dai and Blang culture as well as the local tea-producing lifestyle, forming a distinctive indigenous ethnical culture in Jingmai Mountain. In the past, all the 9 villages in the Property Area had Buddhist temples. The Sadi Tomb and Sadi Well in the Manggeng Village in Jingmai were in memory of a monk called Sadi, who was the first Buddhist missionary in Jingmai Mountain and built the first Buddhism pagoda and temple.

Traces of the architectural style in Xishuangbanna and Menglian can be found in the religious and residential buildings in Jingmai Mountain, which was rendered in a simpler fashion, reflecting the economic stage of the mountainous area and the aesthetics of the dwellers. The Octagonal Pagoda in Manghong Village, which can be dated back to Qing Dynasty, was built by Han craftsmen from Tonghai and Yuxi in East Yunnan. Although this pagoda presents the style of Han Buddhism in appearance, Buddha statues in the style of Theravada Buddhism can be found on the façade, as well as carvings of the instruments of the Eight Taoist Immortals and traditional Han folk patterns of carp jumping over the dragon gate and deer (wealth) [17]. These cultural relics have witnessed the impact of the economic and cultural exchanges between Jingmai Mountain and the outside world through the Tea-Horse Road.
4. Conclusion

The research on the formation process of the heritage value of Jingmai Mountain, be it tracing back to the time of arrival and settlement of the indigenous people, the tea industry evolution or the roots of the cultural value, needs to be put in the context of a broader research background to establish an overarching and integrated research framework. This is because of both the heritage type of Jingmai Mountain as a tea landscape and the intricate connection between its heritage value formation and the Tea-Horse Road. The taskforce seeks to gain a better conceptual understanding of the Tea-Horse Road in the context of the Cultural Route, with the hope that the case of Jingmai Mountain amid the Tea-Horse Road network in Yunnan could shed light on the Cultural Route in a more intuitive way. That is why “the Cultural Route recognizes and emphasizes the value of all of its elements as substantive parts of a whole. It also helps to illustrate the contemporary social conception of cultural heritage values as a resource for sustainable social and economic development.”

According to the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes, “it must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time”. This shows that the research of cultural routes is not limited to routes and roads themselves but aims at obtaining and understanding clues of historical development through routes and roads. The clues will, in turn, lead us to find out cultural impact of continuous exchanges between different regions and different cultural groups and the cultural heritage that serves as the bearer and witness of the cultural impact so that they can be studied and protected with greater intensity. That is why the taskforce included into the spatial scope of the Tea-Horse Road the entire eight provinces and municipalities of western China reflecting the trading of materials between agricultural and pastoral areas and the cultural exchange of different ethnic groups, and took into account the influence of several factors such as history, geography, ethnicity and religion. The impact of these cultural exchanges and integration is beyond the scope of China’s boundaries. To fully appreciate and understand the impact and significance of the cultural route of the Tea-Horse Road, one needs to put it in the context of Asia. Such a perspective directly influences the Jingmai Mountain case study and the conceptual analysis of the Tea-Horse Road. This is a case in point about the meaning of conserving and studying cultural routes as a new heritage concept, cultural route entails shift from the previous approach of seeing heritage as static and stand-alone to a new thinking that dynamically studies a series of heritage grouped together under a certain theme in a larger spatial and temporal scope; under this new approach, the emphasis is not placed on the value of any individual heritage but the distinctive value exhibited and illustrated by the series of heritages overall as historical bearers and witnesses. In this way, cultural routes change our perspective and way of examining history, and also expand the types of cultural heritage.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Researcher Xu Li and Professor Hua Sun for accepting the interviews of the taskforce and Dr. Haichao Yang and Mr. Jinlong He archaeological leader for discussing the ethnicities and history of Jingmai Mountain with me on multiple occasions and sharing their insights and research outcomes on the Tea-Horse Road. I also deeply appreciate the work of Yimei Zhang, a member of the taskforce, in sorting out the history and drawing maps of the Tea-Horse Road.

References

show its grace and to exert control in unobtrusive ways."

Western states who had horses in abundance. This is the way for Song Dynasty to
Xu, Nanping, Changning, Jie and He, there were marks for trade with other
Zhi): "Since the southward migration, in the eight places of Wen and Li, Zhen,

2 Records of Tea Drinking by Xu Tan in the Ming Dynasty: "Tea is very popular
in the Western Regions and Tubo because tea can improve the digestion of raw
meat and relieve the heat of highland barley. These green leaves from mountains
are very important to the national economy."

3 History of Song: On Foods and Other Articles of Commerce (Songshi Shihuo
Zhi): "Since the southward migration, in the eight places of Wen and Li, Zhen,
Xu, Nanping, Changning, Jie and He, there were markets for trade with other
western states who had horses in abundance. This is the way for Song Dynasty to
show its grace and to exert control in unobtrusive ways."

4 Brief Chronicle of Yunnan (Diannan Zhi) compiled by Tinghui Li of the Qing
Dynasty

5 Chronicles of Yunnan (The Book of Barbarians) (Yunnan Zhi/Manshu) by Chao
Fan of the Tang Dynasty: "Tea is produced in various mountains of Yincheng City
and its processing methods are simple. The barbarians in the small Dai state of
Mengshe boil tea with chili, ginger and Cinnamomum tamala and drink it."

6 Local Chronicles of Yunnan (Dianhai Yuheng Zhi) by Cui Tan of the Qing
Dynasty: "Pu’er used to be under the jurisdiction of Pu’er Prefecture, and the
Western Regions started to drink Pu’er tea since the Tang Dynasty. People of the
Song Dynasty did not know and still traded horses for tea in Guilin. This suited
Yunnan well for it lacked horses.” It is necessary to point out that for Yunnan,
"Western Regions” did not simply refer to Tibet but broadly encapsulated all the
states to its west.

7 Dian Lue by Zhaozhi Xie of the Ming Dynasty: “All the general public drank
Pu Tea, which was in the form of tea cake after steaming. The tea smelled of grass
and tasted barely better than plain water.”

8 Physics Knowledge: Foods (Wuli Xiaoshi Yinshi Le) by Yizhi Fang of the
Ming Dynasty: “The Pu’er tea was in the form of tea cake after steaming. It was
bought in the markets of the Western Regions. It significantly improves
digestion and is as well-known as the Liu’an Tea.” On Pu’er Tea (Xianhua Pu’er
Cha) by Guoyu Fang: “Since the early Qing Dynasty, Pu’er tea has been sold in
large amounts nationwide and it is now deemed the equal to Mendeng, Wuyi,
Liu’er and Longjing tea.”

9 Records of the Grand Historian: Account of the Southwestern Barbarians by
Maqian Si of the Han Dynasty

10 Yunnan Provincial Chronicles (Yunnan Tongzhi) compiled during the reign of
Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty listed the “Six Major Tea Mountains”,
i.e., Youle, Gedeng, Yibang, Mangshi, Manzhuang and Mansa.

11 The “New Six Major Tea Mountains” circulated in the Pu’er tea market of
Yunnan only recently. There are different versions about which six mountains it
refers to exactly. One version lists Namuo, Biang, Mengzhe, Mengsong, Bada
and Jingmai, all in Menghai County, Xishuangbanna Prefecture except Jingmai
Mountain. The area under jurisdiction is Ailao Mountain and the middle and downstream
reaches of Lancang River, including today’s Pu’er, Xishuangbanna and the vast
majority of Lincang.

12 Currently the most sought-after and the most expensive Pu’er tea varieties are
Bingdao Tea from Shuangjiang County, Lincang City and Banzhang Tea from
Menghai County, Xishuangbanna Prefecture, both in Outer Lancang River.

13 Chronicles of Yunnan during Daoguang (Daoguang Yunnan Zhichao) of the
Qing Dynasty: “The Six Major Tea Mountains were under the jurisdiction of
Tubian in Yibang 150 km away in the southwest and the tea was offered to the
imperial court as tribute.” Yibang is the present-day Mengla County of
Xishuangbanna Prefecture.

14 The area under jurisdiction is Ailao Mountain and the middle and downstream
reaches of Lancang River, including today’s Pu’er, Xishuangbanna and the vast
majority of Lincang.

15 According to interviews with villagers, the Aini people (a branch of the Hani
people) living in Longbeng Village arrived at Jingmai Mountain in the early Qing
Dynasty; the Wa people living in Nanza Village migrated from Ximeng in the
Qing Dynasty; the Han people in Laojiufang Village settled down in Jingmai
Mountain in the 1940s. The Dai people living in Bangai Village of Jingmai
Mountain, according to villagers, are “water Dai” people that have mastered the
rice-cultivating techniques and migrated from Menglian to Jingmai Mountain.

16 Chronicles of Yunnan (Yunnan Zhi) by Ying Li of the Yuan Dynasty.

17 Given that the Blang people has an oral language but no written language, it
is untenable that the tablet with Dai writing could be used as evidence that the Dai
people arrived in Jingmai Mountain earlier.

18 On Pu’er Tea by Guoyu Fang, and History and Ethnic Relationships Revealed
by Tea Ancestor Stories in Jingmai Mountain by Haichao Yang.

19 Based on the author’s interview with the President of the Myanmar Blang Tea
Association.

20 Records of the Unity (Revised) (Chongxiu Yitong Zhi) of the Qing Dynasty:
“In the seventh year of the Yongzheng Reign, the local chieftains were abolished
and replaced by direct central administration. The Pu’er Prefecture was set up to
administer the six bannas (administrative units) of Simao, Puteng, Zhengdong,
Mengwu, the six major tea mountains and Ganlanba previously under the Cheli
 Pacification Commission; the other six bannas in Outer Lancang River remained
under the jurisdiction of Cheli Pacification Commission.”

21 Juanxue Yongqian Yuan, a poem by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty:
“The unique Pu’er tea is of the best quality like heavenly dew; even the sage of
tea Lu Yu would be impressed and beyond words.”

22 The administration of Menglian Pacification Commission Office was handed
over from Mendeng Prefecture (now Gengma County in Lincang City) to
Shunning Prefecture (now Fengqing County in Lancang City).

23 Lancang County was designated as a border sub-prefecture directly under the
provincial government in the 14th year of Emperor Guangxu’s reign in the Qing
Dynasty (1888), under the jurisdiction of Yinan Dao. The seat of Yinan Dao
administration was in Pu’er County (now Ninger County).

24 There are six existing Buddhism temples.

25 The ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes.