

Ancient Tea-Horse Road and Caravan Culture

From the Perspective of the Caravan Courier Route from Gongshan of Nujiang to Chavalon of Tibet

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Abstract—Located in the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang in the southwestern border of China, the mountain is high the river is rapid. One of the world's highest Tea-Horse Road has been walking for thousands of years. It starts from Gongshan in Nujiang Prefecture, passes through Bingzhongluo or N'Mai River, and goes to Tibet Chavalon. The caravans braved the wind and dew, with the mountain mule and horse in Yunnan as the main driving force carrying tea, souvenirs and other materials, with people and horses step by step to in dangerous mountain road between the Tibetan area and the Nu Jiang. The circulation of economic materials not only deepened the political, economic and cultural exchanges between the various regions along the way, but also formed a unique caravan culture.

Keywords—*Tea-Horse Road; caravan culture; grand canyon of Nu Jiang; Yunnan Tibet courier route*

I. INTRODUCTION

As the popularity of tourism keeps on increasing, new attractions and routes have been developed. First, Shangri-La has been promoted as a very popular attraction. Then it was the turn of the Tea-Horse Road. The ancient Tea-Horse Road, after being rendered by modern people, has become the destination of tourists. In recent years, with the broadcast of several TV series about the ancient Tea Horse Road and the vigorous hype of the media, people are already very familiar with the words "tea horse road" and "caravan", but everyone has a different understanding of it. This article discusses one of the branch lines of the Ancient Tea Horse Road: it starts from Gongshan in Nujiang Prefecture, to the Dulong River, or passes through Bingzhongluo to Chavalon of Tibet.

I was born in Bingzhongluo town of Derung-Nu Autonomous County Gongshan in the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang (known as the Bingzhongluo District Office at that time, "Bingzhongluo" is a Tibetan language, meaning Tibetan villages). My childhood is full of the ringing of the horses' bell and the pedaling of the hooves, so now I will feel extraordinarily friendly as soon as he sees everything related to the horse. The caravan is the most common transportation tool in the life of the canyon. It is like the car which is the most popular transportation tool in the city. The expensive mules and horses are like Mercedes-Benz and BMW, and the cheaper mules and horses are jeep and mini-car. Most of the impressions of mule and horse are brave, heroic, and the like,

just like war horses. However, on a large piece of land in southwestern Yunnan, the mules and horses seem to have deviated from their usual duties. They are not used as human mounts to take people to various places, or as the main driving force of the carriage, but as the force of direct load carrying. Because of the geological features of the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang, local people can only use human or Malay to transport goods. This is a test and intimidation of nature to human beings. However, it is almost impossible for people, who come to visit the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang to see the mighty caravan anymore, and it can't be understood the caravan career of this Tea-Horse Road that had been walking in the canyon for thousands of years.

Many scholars have realized the important value of the caravan culture and the Tea-Horse Road. It reflects the history, ethnicity, culture, folklore, transportation, and economy and other aspects. Although the research on the "Tea-Horse Road" has gradually matured, most scholars have studied and investigated the two main routes of the Tea-Horse Road (the Sichuan-Tibet line and the Yunnan-Tibet line), there are countless large and small branch lines scattered in all corners along the way of these two main lines. Therefore, I believe that there are still many shortcomings in the study of the Tea-Horse Road and the caravan culture. So far, it has only solved a basic problem. People have been studying the Silk Road for more than a hundred years, while the study of the Tea-Horse Road has just begun. In the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang, which I am familiar with, there is a Tea-Horse Road that has existed for thousands of years and has the highest terrain in the world.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE GRAND CANYON OF NU JIANG

Although the Nu Jiang is an international river, it is not well known in China. Where is it distributed? Where is its destination? Most people are not very clear about this. The reason may be that it is flowing in the border of Yunnan, in the mountains and valleys, and the traffic there is very inconvenient, so people are not familiar with it. The Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang was followed by people after entering the 21st century. This is mainly due to the following two events. One is that the Nu Jiang becomes part of the world's natural heritage of the Three Parallel Rivers, and the other is the

controversy caused by the development of the hydropower resources of the Nu Jiang.

Known as the "Third Grand Canyon in the world" and the "Oriental Grand Canyon", the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang is located in the Hengduan Mountains between Yunnan and Tibet in the southwest of China. The Nujiang of the Lisu Autonomous Prefecture is located in the northwestern part of Yunnan Province, bordering Tibet in the north, neighboring Myanmar in the west, and connecting Diqing, Lijiang, Dali and Baoshan in the east and south. Nujiang Prefecture is a multi-ethnic settlement. It is home to 12 ethnic groups including Lisu, Nu, Dulong, Pumi, Bai and Tibetan. It is the minority autonomous prefecture with the highest proportion of ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province.

The Nu Jiang originated from Tanggula Mountain in Qinghai Province. Because the river upstream of the Nu Jiang is dark black, it is called black river in the earliest geographical work, "Yu Gong". The Tibetan language is called "Naqu" and means "Black River". It passed through the Zayü County of Tibet and entered the Derung-Nu Autonomous County Gongshan in the Nujiang of the Lisu Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province, and then entered Myanmar, which was renamed Salween.

Since this article is based on the routes and caravans from Gongshan to Dulong River, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the Dulong River. The Dulong River originated in Chayu County, Tibet, and flowed from the Dibri area into the territory of Gongshan Dulong Nationality Autonomous County. It was called the Dulong River after converging with the Ma Biluo River in Gongshan. Then it flows into Myanmar and is called the Irrawaddy River. Due to the high mountains and between China and Myanmar, the Dulong River Basin is a place where humans know very little for a long time. Gaoligong Mountain is closed in winter with heavy snow, making it a place to be isolated. The Dulong people living in the Dulong River Valley are among the least ethnic groups in China. They still retain many of the most primitive traditional customs, such as the "Kakyu Wow" Festival of the Dulong, and the Dulong Lady.

The blockade of the mountains and the blockade of the rapid rivers have closed the way for the people of the canyon to communicate with each other. Long-term solitude and self-sufficiency have formed a life, customs, culture, beliefs and psychology with the characteristics of the canyon.

III. THE ORIGIN OF TEA-HORSE ROAD

The formation of the Tea-Horse Road is inseparable from the Tibetans' love for tea. Tibetans live in the alpine, anoxic, and dry Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Their diets are mainly carp, beef and mutton, and lack vegetables. The tea is rich in vitamins, trace elements and other ingredients, has the functions of cleaning heat, detoxification, greasy, moisturizing and so on, and can make up for the deficiency in the diet. Therefore, Tibetans have an inevitable demand for tea. The Tibetan area does not produce tea, but Yunnan, which is adjacent to it, is a place rich in tea. For thousands of years, the tea produced in Yunnan has been continuously imported into Tibetan areas, which can fully meet the needs of Tibetans. The

local products of Tibetan areas have also been transported to the Mainland along with the trade of tea for transportation, making up for the lack of the mainland. Therefore, a traffic line dominated by tea trade was opened up under the hard work of the caravan.

The sheer natural conditions in the southwestern part of China make the water navigation a distant dream, and the mountain road is steep and tortuous, and it is impossible to drive the vehicle at all, so it is only suitable for the carriage transportation of the caravan. This is also the difference between the Tea-Horse Road and other road. This is a road that is stepped on by the feet of humans and horses, paved with the flesh and blood of the body of life. As the name suggests, the focus of the "Tea-Horse Road" is on the "Road". Only those who follow the caravan or walk through the caravan can truly appreciate the charm of the Tea-Horse Road. The unusually sinister conditions of survival and long journeys have created the adventurous spirit of the caravans. This kind of adventure is not just a desperate attempt to take life and property, but also requires a series of virtues such as extraordinary courage, tenacity, courage and wisdom, and intimate cooperation.

Of course, the caravans are adventurous to walk the ancient Tea-Horse Road, in order to survive, also in order to develop. As a result, the caravans did not hesitate to fight against the harsh natural environment at the expense of life, over the mountains and rivers, and worked tirelessly to supply and demand all year round, forming a unique sight of the caravan transportation. It is these thousands of horsemen who often leave their hometowns and suffer from difficulties, from one valley to another, from one village to another, step by step out of a mountain road. Finally, it has become the life artery of communication between different places and has become the connecting link of the Southwest. In fact, as early as the Song Dynasty, the tea-horse trade has become a major event between the Han and the Tibetan. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the tea-horse trade had an unprecedented development; in the later period of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, this ancient road became the only international channel behind the southwestern China. Uncountable supplies are circulated through the caravan. Due to the large amount of exchange of economic materials on the ramp, it will inevitably bring about the spread and mutual influence of other cultures. Moreover, due to the extremely special "carrier" of the "Caravan" marching on the Tea-Horse Road, the Tea-Horse Road gradually formed a political, economic and cultural link connecting various regions along the way.

The special geological features affect the lifestyle of the Nujiang people, but they also shape the civilization of the canyon nation. To the east of the canyon is the Biluo Snow Mountain, to the west is the Gaoligong Mountain, and the green Nu Jiang flows between these two mountains. The only road is nestled on the river. Since the roads connected the north with the outside world have not been repaired, all incoming vehicles can only go back according to the way they came. Therefore, the two sides of the canyon have become the preferred place for local people to live. The people of all ethnic groups live mainly around the canyon, and the towns and villages are also built along the canyon. There are also many

ethnic groups living in the depths of the mountains, and their lives and travel are relatively difficult.

In the my memory, when I was a child, I often went with my father to take two days to go from Bingzhongluo Town to Gongshan County to attend a meeting or purchase daily necessities. In fact, this is not a thing for the locals; this kind of road is stepped out in the mighty mountains. While many roads hover over the steep cliffs, even in some dangerous places, where we need to use our hands and feet, and in order to prevent weeds and bugs from getting stuck or bites on the road, we must also wear leggings before walking. Because the slope of the mountain is very large, when walking on the narrow trail, we must not only mention the anti-slip, but also be careful to avoid falling off the loose stone, for at this time some people may be farming in the field, accidentally it is possible to cause the tragedy of falling stone.

Widening the original trail to about three or four feet, it can become a courier route for the caravans. Compared with the trails, the caravan's courier route is already a broad road in the eyes of the canyons, but it is still extremely thrilling. On the courier route leading to the Dulong River or to Chavalon of Tibet, if they encounter bad weather or a mudslide, it will be difficult for the caravan to move forward. Sometimes it will take our two days to cross the mountain roads from Bingzhongluo Township to Gongshan County. This kind of mountain road is much more dangerous than that people imagine. In the past, the mountain road from Gongshan to Bingzhongluo was not only a trail, but also a courier route for the caravans. Therefore, when we went back and forth between Gongshan and Bingzhongluo, we often met the caravans that transport tea and daily necessities in the county. The speed of the caravan is far worse than us, because they rely on endurance and perseverance. Every time the caravan take a rest and cook their dinner, the Tibetan uncle who rushes to the horse will warmly greet us to drink a bowl of steaming butter tea, and eat the fragrant zanba.

IV. THE CARAVAN COURIER ROUTE FROM GONGSHAN OF NUJIANG PASSING THROUGH BINGZHONGLUO TO CHAVALON OF TIBET

As a material and cultural exchange channel that can be compared with the Silk Road, the Tea-Horse Road has already been recorded in the annals of China and the world. With the improvement of modern road traffic conditions, the Silk Road has become a historical record; but the long-lasting Tea-Horse Road has not disappeared. On the rugged mountain road from Gongshan to Dulong River or Chavalon of Tibet, the volume and number of caravans are far less than before, but they still resound the ringing of the horses' bell and the pedaling of the hooves.

Transporting goods with mule and horse is a transportation feature in northwestern Yunnan, which is still widely seen in the Nujiang area, but the caravan passing through Bingzhongluo is very different. From the small county town Gongshan in Nujiang, to Chavalon of Tibet, it is a caravan courier route that has been walking for thousands of years. Since I was a child, I have often encountered caravans on country roads, sometimes dozens of horses, sometimes about a

hundred. Now, the majestic caravans that is still vivid in my mind. The mules and horses here are not tall, nor as chic as the European horses in people's mind. They are just mountain horses in Yunnan. Although they are not very strong, they are very good at walking on plateaus and mountain roads. They are resistant to weight, easy to teach, and not particular about food.

Because of living in Bingzhongluo, I can see the caravan almost all year round, especially in the past, mainly in the winter before the snowfall and the spring before the rainy season. The caravans have to transport the necessities of life into Tibetan areas before the road closure. On both sides of the Bingzhongluo Road, there are rare fertile soils in the Nujiang Gorge area. In the past, many crops were planted, and a golden rapeseed and rice fragrant scene can often be seen. However, since many caravans come here every spring, and these farmland almost become their pastures, the villagers feel that it is not worthwhile to plant crops, and they will not grow rape after the autumn harvest. The Bingzhongluo people are so modest, uncontested, and polite. Because of this, they are not willing to argue with the powerful horse-riding people. As a result, they must suffer a little economic loss. At the same time, this also highlights and contrasts the personality of the caravan.

The road from Bingzhongluo Township to Dulongjiang, or to Chavalon of Tibet is even more sinister, because this road is, after all, walking through the deep valleys of the mountains. Because the mountain road is sinister, if the horse falls down the cliff, it will fall into pieces. On this courier route, we will see the horses tire out or fall down from time to time. On the courier route where it seems that the end point is not seen, people will build a simple house on the steep slope of the land, and the horseman calls it a "life-saving house." If they encounter a blizzard, or can't reach the settlement before dark, the caravan can spend the night in such a station.

V. CARAVAN LIFE ON THE YUNNAN TIBET COURIER ROUTE

The caravan is indeed not something that ordinary people can do. Imagining this kind of life that runs all the way, sleeps in the wind, faces all danger, and suffers all difficulty, and this kind of work that fights with the heavens, the earth, the people, and the animals, if they can farm or do small business at home, who will choose to be a caravan? But the person who can do this job must be someone. This work requires people to be hard working, physically and personally strong, and well-adapted.

Caravans usually need to prepare all the necessary outdoor items, such as plastic sheets, tents, umbrellas, and rubber shoes, staple foods, cooking utensils, defensive and wood cutting tools, and spirits for warming. This is similar to the field supplies used today for adventure travel, but it is more comprehensive and complex. Like a parent of the mule and horse, the horse-rider is also required to prepare rain-proof and cold-proof plastic sheets, blankets and supplementary feed for the animals. They need to inspect and repair the horseshoe, then put the cage on the horse mouth, and then they can set off. Each caravan has a leading head horse or mule, which is required to be physically strong and well trained. This horse

was wearing a red dragonfly, a small round mirror, or a red cloth embroidered with a pattern, and a large brass bell around its neck, which led the caravan with great might. The horse-riders will also be divided according to qualifications, abilities, experience, etc. The leader is called Maguotou, and some places also call him "Master", which is responsible for the decision-making of important matters on the way, such as goods, camping, distress, encounters, disputes, etc. The master must be a person who is familiar with road conditions, business conditions, folk customs, and is good at dealing with various people, determined and resolute. In addition, there are people who are responsible for food and accommodation, horse supplies and other security services. Other horse-riders also have different responsibilities. Of course, the horse-rider must not only work hard, be diligent, but also have a team spirit.

The journey from Gongshan to Bingzhongluo is more than 50 kilometers. The road has been built here, but it is not the real road that people see in the city. It is just a stone path that is widened on the basis of the footpath. In the past, when we went to Gongshan and Bingzhongluo, it was common to encounter landslides and mudslides. However, the mountain road from Bingzhongluo to Chavalon of Tibet is even more difficult. When it encounters rainy weather, the rugged mountain road will be very slippery, and it is difficult for the horse and mule to move forward. Frequent rolling stones and mudslides will bury the people and horses into the canyon at any time. During this difficult long-distance trek, the caravan gradually explored some places where they could rest their camps. They would cook, stay, and replenish the horses there. However, if there is a sudden change in the weather, the road is not good, or the horse is sick, and they cannot get to these "horse stations" before dark, they can only unload the goods and camp on the way. As for whether to tie the animal up, or to let it graze near, it can only be determined by the surrounding environment. Camping in the open air is a real common thing in the life of a caravan. At this point, the first thing they need to do is to choose a place where they can set up a tent, tie the rainproof and waterproof shed to the tree with a rope; then find some dry branches in the surrounding woods and ignite a temporary fire pit, so that they can boil water, cook dinner, and soak the drenched clothes. Whether it is wind and rain, or there are beasts screaming, accompanied by the smell of rice, the horse-riding people at this time will show a high-pitched voice, and there will be beautiful songs from time to time in the valley. Of course, the caravan's meals are inseparable from the peppers, and the drinks are also indispensable to the white wine, which is an ancient secret recipe against the cold. Before going to sleep, the horse-rider should also count the horses and bring the horses that are far away back.

It was very cruel when the caravan was in the rain. The horses and mules with heavy weights are very likely to get sick and tired when walking in heavy rain. Because of the excessive physical exertion, they can easily slip on the steep stone road and fall into the canyon. In some low-lying dirt roads, the accumulated water loosens the soil and forms an invisible mud pit. Once the horse and mule pass through it, they will fall into it and get out of it. At this time, the horse-riders need to work together to push them out. For some horses

and mules with too much physical exertion, no matter how to drive and spur them, they will not move forward. Horsemen can only unload the goods, feed them some corn to see if they can gradually recover their physical strength. For those horses and mules that are really unable to follow the walk, the horsemen can only keep them in the middle of the wilderness, and then find them when they return, but some have never been found. If unfortunately encountering mudslides and rolling stones on the way, it is easy to cause casualties for people and horses at the caravan. For the dead horses and mules, the horse-riding people can only discard them on the spot, and shed tears sadly, and some horse-riders even hold a brief undead ritual. After a tired day in the muddy water, when the caravan finally arrived at the campsite and unloaded the cargo, the horse's back showed a piece of skin that had been worn away, revealing blood-stained fur. From time to time, they turned back and licked the wound, and they poured on the muddy ground and kept rolling, and then they screamed. Such a scene is heartbreaking and it is all moving!

VI. CONCLUSION

How many horses have walked through this Tea-Horse Road in the past thousands of years? Nowadays people have no way to count this number. What they transport are not only tea, mountain goods and herbs, but also culture, civilization, folklore and friendship.

This ancient road running through Yunnan and Tibet has not been widened with the changes of the times; at present, the road from Bingzhongluo to Qiunatong has been repaired, but at this time, can we allow the caravan to race with the car? Can we still hear the sound of horse bells and horseshoes on the Tea-Horse Road?

People have always regarded the caravan culture and the Tea-Horse Road as the literary art and the subject of film and television with great charm and value. Documentary works such as "The Last Caravan" and "Dram" let more people know about the Tea-Horse Road. However, it is just knew, it will never let people truly understand the connotation of the caravan culture. Regardless of film and television productions or tourism, they can only show the important value of the Tea-Horse Road and the caravan culture from the side. For this cultural phenomenon that lasts for thousands of years, its comprehensive value is no less than a national or world-class cultural relic! Now, with the improvement of traffic conditions, the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang has been opened to traffic from Gongshan to Bingzhongluo and Qiunatong. However, because the local road conditions are still difficult and the snow and rain are extremely bad, sometimes the vehicles are unable to pass. Under such circumstances, it is still only possible to transport the required materials to the Dulong River or Tibet by the caravan. It can be seen that the natural limitations of the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang have caused the living conditions here. Therefore, the author believes that no matter how the traffic conditions improve in the future, the Zone of Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang can only liberate part of the human and animal power, and it is unlikely that it could be completely liberated.

With the improvement of modern traffic conditions, what changes will happen to the Courier Routes and caravans in the Grand Canyon of Nu Jiang? This will directly affect the survival of cultural phenomena that have lasted for thousands of years. We hope that the courier route and the caravan from Bingzhongluo to Dulongjiang or to Chavalon of Tibet will live forever, but not be an immortal historical relic! Even if it no longer carries the necessities of material life, it exists only as a living totem showing historical culture and national culture!

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