

Analysis of Cultural Heritage Attribute of Tang-Tubo Ancient Road

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Abstract: In contemporary times, cultural heritage research places a growing emphasis on understanding the intrinsic cultural qualities of heritage, with the comprehension of its value becoming a core focus, and the attribute analysis of cultural heritage is an important basis for studying the value of cultural heritage. The Tang-Tubo Ancient Road, a vital segment of the southern Silk Road, has historically served as a bridge for interethnic interaction, economic exchange, and cross-cultural integration. This study applies a literature-based research approach, focusing on the evolution of the "cultural route" concept and its criteria for attribute identification. It examines the nature of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road as a cultural route from three perspectives: temporal-spatial attributes, cross-cultural attributes, and functional attributes.

Keywords: Tang-Tubo Ancient Road; Cultural Route; Heritage Attribute

1. Introduction

The ancient Tang-Tubo Road is an important part of the southern road network of the Silk Road, and it is a typical witness to the formation and development of the pluralistic and integrated pattern of the Chinese nation. In recent years, the study of the ancient Tang-Tubo road has become one of the key contents of academic research. Research has concentrated on the investigation and study of the cultural heritage resources of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road [1], its historical and cultural context [2], and the preservation of its cultural heritage [3], with considerable attention given to its tourism value [4]. This study examines the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road from the perspective of cultural routes, analyzing its nature through the temporal-spatial attributes, cross-cultural attributes, and functional attributes as defined by the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention and the Charter on

Cultural Routes. By examining the elements of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage and the natural landscapes along the route, and relating them to the culture of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road, this study aims to restore and articulate the cultural characteristics of the route.

2. Formation and Fundamental Elements of the Cultural Routes Concept

2.1 Formation and Fundamental Elements of the Cultural Routes Concept

Before the 1990s, this concept was in its infancy. In 1964, under the European Cultural Convention, the Council of Europe proposed "cultural journeys", marking the initial emergence of this idea. By 1987, the European Ministers of Culture officially launched the "Cultural Routes Program", designating the Santiago de Compostela route as Europe's first cultural route. At this stage, there was some awareness within international heritage circles, although it was mostly confined to Europe and focused primarily on tourism, with limited recognition of the heritage attributes [5].

Post-1990s, the concept began to develop more fully. In 1994, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) held a thematic meeting in Madrid, Spain, titled "Routes as Part of Our Cultural Heritage." The expert report resulting from this meeting formally introduced the concept of "cultural routes", breaking through the traditional framework of European regional heritage and cultural tourism. In 1998, ICOMOS convened another meeting in Tenerife, Spain, establishing the International Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes, which highlighted the importance of legislative protection and regional cooperation for cultural routes. Subsequently, in 1999, at a conference held in Ibiza, Spain, titled Approaches, Definitions, and Operations Related to Cultural Routes, the significant role of natural geographical environments in shaping cultural routes was explicitly emphasized. Additionally, the conference proposed that the heritage elements

of cultural routes comprise both tangible and intangible components. Since then, the concept of cultural routes has gained widespread recognition in the field of international cultural heritage conservation,

Since 2000, the concept of cultural routes has truly taken shape. In 2003, the Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes convened in Madrid to draft the Guidelines for Action, which were later revised by the World Heritage Committee, categorizing cultural routes as a type of heritage route. In 2005, during the 15th General Assembly of the ICOMOS, a draft of the Charter on Cultural Routes was adopted, incorporating cultural routes among four types of classified heritage. This progression was formalized in 2008 when the 16th General Assembly officially ratified the Charter, marking a milestone where cultural routes were recognized as "a new qualitative approach within the cultural heritage preservation framework"[6]. The concept of cultural routes has since been fully embraced by the global cultural heritage conservation community.

Examining the rise and development of the cultural routes concept and protection awareness reveals that protecting these routes involves considering not only the paths themselves but also the natural environment, social context, historical events, and cultural milieu that influenced their formation. This shift represents a progression from "monument preservation" to a broader "cultural heritage protection" mindset.

2.2 Fundamental Characteristics and Criteria for Identifying Cultural Routes

The authoritative documents outlining the concept of cultural routes are the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention and the Charter on Cultural Routes.

According to the Operational Guidelines, a cultural route is defined as "a terrestrial, aquatic, or mixed pathway whose outline and features are determined by its own specific, historical dynamic and function. It represents human exchanges over time, showcasing multidimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge, and values within and between regions and countries, thereby fostering cultural interaction across time and space, expressed through tangible and intangible heritage."

The Charter on Cultural Routes further describes a cultural route as a path of communication, which can be land-based, water-based, or take other forms, defined by its unique dynamics and

historical functions, serving a specific purpose. It must meet the following criteria: 1. It must arise from and reflect the interactions among people, facilitating multidimensional, continuous exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge, and values across significant historical periods and between nations, regions, and continents. 2. It should promote the integrated development of the influenced cultures, mirrored in both tangible and intangible heritage. 3. It must be part of a complete dynamic system where the "historical relationships" and "cultural resources" created by the route are interconnected.

Both documents interpret the definition and connotations of cultural routes from the perspective of heritage attributes, reflecting the exploration and normative guidance of the global heritage protection system in this field [7]. From the definitions and explanations provided in these two documents, it is evident that cultural routes possess three fundamental characteristics--Linear Structure Characteristic: They generally exhibit a linear structure with extensive geographic scope, large spatial span, and long temporal coverage; Cultural Process and Diversity Characteristic: They embody themes of human civilization activities, supporting migration and interaction across different cultural or subcultural regions; Dynamic Functionality Characteristic: The "cultural resources" and "historical relationships" fostered by the route form a dynamic system that promotes overall regional development along the route.

To determine whether a route qualifies as a cultural route, it can be evaluated based on its basic characteristics: spatial-temporal attributes, cross-cultural attributes, and functional attributes:

Spatial-temporal Attributes: Does the route span a significant timeframe and influence the existing cultures in the regions it traverses? Does it extend over a considerable distance with identifiable geographic boundaries and recognizable environmental contexts?

Cross-cultural Attributes: Does the route serve as a conduit for cultural diffusion between regions, facilitating dynamic social, economic, political, and cultural exchanges among different cultural groups and witnessing intercultural interactions?

Functional Attributes: Does the route function primarily as a transportation link while also driving migration and cultural exchange? Is it a spontaneous initiative by people, or is it purposefully promoted by governments or individuals, involving the transmission of religious

beliefs and commercial exchanges, and impacting social development along the route?

3. Understanding the Cultural Heritage Nature of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road

The criteria for identifying cultural routes emphasize their cultural impact on their locales and their contributions to cross-cultural dissemination. They reflect unique phenomena of human migration and exchange, achieved through routes with specific and concrete purposes that facilitate the movement of people and materials. To understand the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road from the perspective of a cultural route, one must analyze its temporal-spatial characteristics, cross-cultural attributes, and functional attributes. This involves clarifying the Route's unique objectives as a cultural route and the associated human migration and exchange activities, along with the resultant cultural impacts.

3.1 Temporal-Spatial Attributes of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road

The Tang-Tubo Ancient Road has been an essential route from the Central Plains of China to Qinghai, Xizang, and further to Nepal and India since the Tang Dynasty. It developed progressively through the political, economic, military, and cultural interactions between the Tang Dynasty and the Tubo regime in ancient China, evolving through three distinct periods. The first period marks the embryonic stage of the Route. The primary route was established and solidified during Princess Wencheng's journey to Tubo for her marriage alliance in 641 A D, along with the southern extension through Tubo eastward military expansions. During the second period, the formation stage, the route continued to evolve, particularly through the southern extension until Princess Jincheng's journey to Tubo in 710 A D. The third period, the stage of deepened development, saw the main route still in use as an official path. In 781 A D, the Tubo extended their control to Guazhou and Shazhou up to Dunhuang, completing the northern extension of the Route. By 821 A D, the Tang-Tubo alliances, marked by the "Changqing Alliance", solidified the Route's development, establishing it as a crucial corridor for inter-ethnic communication and integration in subsequent eras.

The spatial structure of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road is a network consisting of a main route and two subsidiary southern and northern routes. Historical documents such as the New Book of

Tang and Old Book of Tang indicate that the main route consists of an eastern section (within Tang territory) and a western section (within Tubo territory) separated by Shancheng of Tang (now Xining in Qinghai), marked by documented official pathways. This route includes significant cultural heritage elements like the statues of Tubo kings, the inscriptions of the Lingyan Temple Record, the commemorative stele of Geshu Han, Tubo cliff carvings, and the Potala Palace. Parts of the main route overlap with the Silk Road, making the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road an integral component of it. The northern route largely follows the Qinhai route from Xining to Dunhuang, while the southern route extends from Lhasa through eastern Xizang to the border regions of Sichuan, Qinghai, and Xizang.

The Tang-Tubo Ancient Road is a well-defined transportation route. It stretches from Chang'an (now Xi'an in Shaanxi) to Luoxie (now Lhasa in Xizang), serving as a vital channel for interaction between the Tang Dynasty and the Tubo regime, and as an international corridor connecting inland China to Nepal and India. Spanning over 3,000 kilometers and crossing modern-day provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Xizang, this ancient route traverses diverse natural landscapes, including the Guanzhong Plain, the Huangshui Valley, and the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau. The pathway is marked by clear start and end points, a cohesive spatial structure, identifiable waystations, and distinct scenic boundaries, all of which affirm its temporal and spatial characteristics, making it a prominent cultural route.

3.2 Cross-Cultural Attributes of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road

In a sense, the history of world culture is the history of intercultural exchange. The activities facilitated by the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road, such as military campaigns, human migrations, and trade exchanges, encouraged dialogues of interaction and integration between agrarian and nomadic civilizations. Before the 17th century, human history was largely defined by the exchanges and collisions of these two cultural systems. The Tang Dynasty, in particular, was an era of significant fusion between nomadic and agrarian cultures, fostering exchanges and interactions along the route between the nomadic civilizations and the agrarian societies of the Central Plains.

The Tang-Tubo Ancient Road played a profound

role in enabling the exchange, mutual learning, and symbiosis of different civilizations. The diverse interactions through this corridor inevitably facilitated cultural transmission. For instance, since the reign of Songtsen Gampo of the Tubo regime, Tubo adopted Central Plains attire and frequently sent noble youths to study at the Imperial Academy in Chang'an. Tubo astronomy and calendrical systems gradually aligned with those of the Central Plains. Music celebrated in the Tang Dynasty, such as Music of King Qin Breaking up the Enemy's Front, became popular in Tubo. Conversely, Tubo culture permeated the daily lives of the Central Plains, with polo, introduced by Tubo, becoming immensely popular in Chang'an. Tubo women's trends, including adorned foreheads and wearing beads and jewels, set fashion standards for Tang women. As historical dialogues deepened, various aspects of material culture—fashion, cuisine, architecture—and spiritual culture—religion, music, art, aesthetics—intermingled and spread among the ethnic groups. This continuous exchange resulted in a vibrant synthesis of nomadic and agrarian cultures, creating a multidimensional framework for cross-regional cultural dissemination.

3.3 Functional Attributes of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road

The primary functional attribute of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road is its role as a transportation route. Serving as a central axis of both the Northern and Southern Silk Roads, it connected the Tubo Plateau with the Central Plains, as well as Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The Tang-Tubo Ancient Road comprised a network of one main route and two secondary routes. Along the main route were post stations such as Mawei Post and Tingzitou, which facilitated the replenishment of resources for officials and merchants while also providing trade and rest stops for emissaries and traders. It was an ideal transportation route linking the Tang Empire with the Tubo regime.

Beyond its transportation function, the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road supported political exchanges between the Tang Dynasty and the Tubo regime. During the over 200 years of Tang-Tubo relations, envoys frequently traveled along the Route for purposes such as tributes, alliances, treaties, intermarriages, mourning ceremonies, diplomatic condolences, conferrals of titles, petitions, reciprocations, and peace negotiations. Historical

records indicate that since the first Tubo envoy was dispatched to the Tang Empire in the 8th year of Emperor Taizong's Zhenguan reign (634 AD), there were more than 200 diplomatic missions over two centuries. Of these, Tang emissaries visited Tubo 66 times, while Tubo envoys visited Tang Dynasty 125 times. Notable instances include the Tubo envoy Xila's mission to Tang in the 18th year of Emperor Xuanzong's Kaiyuan reign (730 AD), followed by Tang envoys Huangfu Weiming and Cui Lin's diplomatic visits to Tubo. Similarly, in the 1st year of Emperor Muzong's Changqing reign (821 AD), the Tubo envoy Naluo traveled to Chang'an for an alliance meeting with Tang Prime Minister Cui Zhi, while Tang envoy Liu Yuanding held a treaty meeting with the Tubo king Chirebajin in Lhasa.

The formation and development of the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road significantly facilitated extensive economic trade between the Tang Dynasty and the Tubo regime, enriching the material lives of various ethnic groups. Notably, the rise of the "Tea-Horse Trade" played a crucial role in boosting the agrarian and pastoral economies, as well as improving the production and living structures in both agricultural and pastoral regions. Statistics reveal that during the early Tang Dynasty, the Tea and Horse Market at Riyue Mountain resulted in the acquisition of 490,000 horses and 300,000 cattle, partially fulfilling the Tang Dynasty's need for warhorses and draught oxen in agriculture. Conversely, the Tubo regime obtained nearly 40 million jin of tea and over 100,000 bolts of fabric. This widespread trade interaction accelerated economic development in both regions [8].

The Tang-Tubo Ancient Road fostered cultural exchange and dissemination, particularly the spread of Buddhist culture. Princess Wencheng brought over 300 Buddhist scriptures, architectural techniques for constructing temples, and monastic regulations, leading to the establishment of Jokhang Temple, Ramoche Temple, and twelve other monasteries. These contributions laid the foundation for Buddhism in Tubo. Additionally, monks accompanied Princess Wencheng to Tubo, participating in activities such as translating scriptures. Princess Jincheng's marriage to Tubo king further enhanced the influence of Han Chinese Buddhism on Tubo, introducing customs and traditions that revered Buddhist practices. The Route also facilitated travel for Tang monks journeying to India in search of Buddhist teachings. Early pilgrims to India received financial support,

care, and escort services from Princess Wencheng during their travels through Tubo. Similarly, Tubo sent numerous delegations to the Central Plains to procure Buddhist scriptures and invite eminent Han monks to Tubo for scripture translation and the propagation of Buddhist teachings.

Analyzing the Tang-Tubo Ancient Road from its spatial-temporal, cross-cultural, and functional attributes reveals its heritage significance. As a linear space, the Route served as a crucial conduit for the migration, mobility, and integration of nomadic and agrarian groups. This aligns with the defining characteristics of cultural routes, marking it as a vital transregional cultural corridor.

4. Conclusion

The Tang-Tubo Cultural Route has played a crucial role in fostering interactions and cultural exchanges among the ethnicities along its path, enhancing the dialogue and interaction between nomadic and Central Plains agrarian civilizations. It has facilitated the exchange and mutual learning between different cultural spheres, and has been an essential conduit for political engagement and economic trade between the Tang Dynasty and Tubo regime, particularly in the dissemination of Buddhist culture. It serves as a well-defined cultural, economic, and transportation corridor.

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