

Commentary on Yunnan Railway Culture Construction

Ruxi Shi

Yunnan Normal University, Kunming, China

Abstract. "If you want to be rich, build roads first". Traffic culture is an important part that cannot be ignored in Chinese local culture. Yunnan province is located in the southwest border area, surrounded by mountains as well as intricate traffic lines. On this basis, the cultural exchanges between various regions of Yunnan also depend more on the railway lines, which makes the railway culture of Yunnan province become a topic worth discussing. This paper will start from the historical background of Yunnan railway culture, discussing the current situation of Yunnan railway culture construction, and the future path of it.

Keywords: Yunnan railway culture construction; Historical background; Current situation; Future path.

1. Introduction

In Chinese local culture, transportation culture has been playing a crucial role. And as for a mountainous region, the implement of traffic routes and the development of traffic culture is well related to the blossom of the provincial economy, society and most importantly, the cultural development. From the Tea-horse Ancient Road to the Burma Road, and then to the richness of the railway line, the transportation culture of Yunnan has always shown its vigorous vitality in the distance connecting the mountains and sea.

Among the branches of transportation culture, Yunnan railway culture is the one of the most closely related to the local, and Yunnan railway culture has also become a hot topic nowadays. In recent years, there have been more and more discussions about Yunnan railway culture, and the relevant policies have also become more and more abundant. In August 2020, the China National Railway Group issued the outline to put forward the programmatic slogan of "Traffic arteries, railway first", which made the development of Yunnan railway culture get solid support in the New Era. Based on the above background, this paper will take "Yunnan Railway culture" as the object, with brief commentary on the historical background, current situation, giving the point of future path of its construction eventually. The purpose of this paper is to obtain the understanding of the overall development of Yunnan railway culture through the discussions, and to put forward some relevant suggestions.

Followings are the solid content.

2. The historical background of Yunnan railway culture

2.1 The origin and historical development of Yunnan transportation culture

2.1.1 Origin

On the account of remote geographical location, Yunnan was often ignored by feudal dynasties in its history. In addition, ethnic minorities live here were often joked as "wilderness" by those in the Central Plains. In this context, the transportation construction in Yunnan province has developed relatively slowly since ancient times, and the starting time of the transportation culture is generally slightly later than that in the Central Plains.

Before the Qin and Han Dynasties, Yunnan didn't get the attention and support of the dynasty, and the transportation construction was almost in a state of "zero". At that time, the ancestors of Yunnan mostly lived in places without interacted roads and which widely covered by primeval forests and thorns. In this stage, due to the extreme lack of specific transportation, the development of transportation culture has lost the necessary carrier of its origin, and it is difficult to get substantial

development in the original society of Yunnan. However, this primitive traffic state was soon changed. In Qin Dynasty, Qin Shi Huang implanted a policy called the "Great Unification". Therefore, although Yunnan was still in the historical position of "barbarian land", it gradually began to get the attention of the Central Plains. On this basis, Yunnan traffic construction has got required policy and other conditions to move forward. Although such conditions are not sufficient, they objectively provide support for the overall starting of Yunnan transportation.

In addition, Yunnan's self-development of the traffic road also played a part. In 286BC, Zhuang Qiao entered Yunnan, which was a historic event for the development of Yunnan culture. After Zhuang entered Yunnan, he not only encouraged the ancestors of Yunnan to maintain a relatively peaceful social relations among the tribes, but also brought the Central Plains culture to Yunnan. It can be said that Zhuang's entry enabled the first collision and integration between Yunnan and Central Plains. Since then, the ancestors of Yunnan have had higher requirements for the living conditions, especially for the satisfaction of material life. And for this, there is a saying describing the origin of Yunnan traffic culture, "barefoot and hazel spine".

Tang Fanchuo recorded in *Yunnan Annals*, "At that time, barefoot could confront hazel thorns; barefooted men and women could run like cheetahs with an extreme speed" [1]. With continuous cultural integration between Central Plains and Yunnan, Yunnan's primitive society has developed to a certain extent, and the growth of the ancestors' demand for materials has also increased. In order to obtain the material information of their own or tribes, the ancestors of Yunnan province, who was surrounded by forests and thorns began to try to trek out on foot. Such a trek was first led by the leaders of the tribe, and later more and more people joined in the "outward" movement. Eventually, some places that are often trampled or passed formed paths as nature changes. Just as Lu Xun once said in his works, "There is no road in the world, more people walk, sometimes it also become a road", the origin of Yunnan traffic culture also has the same patterns. And those roads "stepped" out by the feet of the ancestors, became the embryonic form of Yunnan traffic lines. Later, with the enrichment and improvement of production and living tools, people dug out one ancient road after another with axes, forming the carrier of Yunnan transportation culture and contributing to the rise of it.

2.1.2 Historical development

In the development process of Yunnan ancient transportation culture, the layout of 2 routes has been taken as the core of its progress.

One is about the historical transport development, which aims at improving the infrastructure of "ancient routes". On the whole, this portion of Yunnan transportation culture and its history is composed of three segments, namely: Five-foot Road, Shu-Hindu Road and Tea-horse Ancient Road.

1) Five-foot Road

It is the earliest programme accelerating Yunnan transportation cultural progress, directed by the Central Dynasty. After Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of Qin, conquered and unified six main rival states, the management and construction of boundaries received attention from feudal sovereigns. Yunnan, a wild place located in the Southwest frontier at that time, attracted the attention of Qin Shi Huang. In order to better govern Yunnan, the Emperor Qin Shihuang chose to start with building roads so that he appointed Li Bing as the director to construct the first transportation route in Yunnan. Due to the topographic inequality, this kind of route was only five feet in width. Therefore, it was named as Five-foot Road after all. The completion of Five-foot Road has not only opened up the national communication and cultural integration between border areas of Yunnan and the Central Plains Dynasty, but also enabled the regional culture along the route to obtain a good carrier of cultural exchange. At the same time, as the road passed across the territory of Shu and Chu, which made Jingchu, Bashu, Central Plains' information effectively exchanged and integrated, stimulating transportation cultural development in Yunnan, thus the Five-foot Road Culture has also formed.

2) Shu-Hindu Road

Taking Shu as the starting point and Hindu (that is, ancient India) as the end, Shu-Hindu Road helped to form a traffic and cultural artery between China and South Asia. Shu-Hindu Road mainly

takes Central Plains Culture as a core content in the process of cultural output, and takes transportation routes as the carrier to promote the cultural exchange among South Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Plains. This is the peak period in the historical development process for Yunnan's transportation culture and even the whole cultural history. During this period, the ancient traffic roads in Yunnan played an intermediary role in culture communication, which is also the carrier for Central Plains and Southwest frontiers as well as South Asia and Southeast Asia. From then, the ancient transportation culture of Yunnan was further prospered and bloomed.

3) Tea-horse Ancient Road

The construction of the Tea-horse Ancient Road made the culture of "ancient routes" become core representative of Yunnan's transportation culture. In history, the Tea-horse Ancient Road was not a separate traffic line, but an extremely huge transportation system, which attached great significance and profound cultural values to Yunnan's ancient culture. It can be said that in the history of Yunnan's transportation culture, the Tea-horse Ancient Road has been more than a traffic line with economic or political benefits. Specifically, it has been a route with numerous spiritual as well as civilized heritage. While playing its role in trade, the ancient road also shows the implication of horse gang culture to people: bravery, hardworking, diligence and simplicity, reflecting the core spirits of Yunnan's transportation culture. Yunnan University's researcher Mu Jihong once commented that the Tea-horse Ancient Road is a road of civilization, communication, migration, religion and peace. This kind of summery also pointed out the indispensable role played by the Tea-horse Ancient Road.

The other line is the historical development context of "railway culture", which is also essential in the history of Yunnan's construction of transportation culture, will be discussed in the next part.

2.2 The historical development of Yunnan railway culture

The infrastructure construction of railway have provided an important guarantee for Yunnan railway culture. And the infrastructure system mainly consists of 2 routes -- Yunnan-Vietnam Railway and Chengdu-Kunming Railway, also a milestone in Yunnan railway's cultural progress. Generally, the development context of Yunnan railway culture perfectly records the soaring process of Yunnan traffic construction. It can be said that Yunnan railway culture is the culture that carries the hardships of people's struggle with showing a deep and cherished cultural connotation.

For example, Yunnan-Vietnam railway is the best evidence proving that "The history of Yunnan railway culture is a history of blood and tears". According to materials, the construction of the Yunnan-Vietnam railway was a measure directed by French imperialists for colonization. During its construction, the workers had to face and endure the extremely harsh conditions. The whole project didn't follow the humanitarian principles, reflecting the brutal imperialist and cruel exploitation toward Chinese people especially those in Yunnan. It is recorded that in the first year of this project, 1904, more than 5,000 workers were dead. And by 1907, more than 25,000 workers had been starved or frozen to death.

Referring to these records, we could tell that Yunnan railway culture mainly reflects the confrontation and the final overwhelming victory between the tenacious patriotism and exploited imperialism. In my view, this is also the most obvious difference between Yunnan railway culture and other transportation cultures. Railway culture not only shows the achievements of industrialization in science and technology. Besides, the process of Yunnan railway culture has a highly correlation with Yunnan's history, which reminds us of the positive of industrial civilization, and at the same time, push people to think back on the "side effect" like human loss through this process. When we look back on the history of Yunnan-Vietnam railway, we could notice the energy brought by its progress, in the meantime, we could also tell the negative impacts caused by "oppression", "exploitation", "dark" and "hegemony", thus to rethink the risks and insufficiency we need to ward off in future development. Such thing isn't what other cultures could barely get. Compared with ancient times, Yunnan railway culture is more reflective, more inherited and have better prospect in its cultural development. It also has profound impact on the overall development of Yunnan. Conclusively, from the completion of the Yunnan-Vietnam railway to the proposal "to enhance transportation, railway

first",the railway culture has indeed shown its vigorous vitality in the historical process, and reflected its own unique cultural value as well.

3. The current situation of Yunnan railway culture construction

With basically sorting out the background of Yunnan railway culture,the preliminary exploration of the reality and survival status of it could be made.In order to have a more detailed but profound comprehension of the current situation of Yunnan railway cultural construction,this issue should be discussed under the principles of functional values.

First,the traffic value should be a starting point for making judgments on its situation.In my opinion, there are two objective evaluation criteria:one is the completion in the construction of traffic net,the other is the policy supportive degree for enhancing the value of Yunnan traffic culture.On above 2 criteria,Yunnan Railway have already entered a "high-speed era" in 2016, and officially entered the stage of completed national railway network.In Yunnan,government have set up a railway net with "four vertical and four horizontal" as the backbone[4].The construction and improvement of the railway network correspondingly makes the railway culture have a more stable development platform,and promotes the further integration of Yunnan railway culture and the railway traffic value.And for policy support,in 2020,Yunnan province has made a new strategic deployment for Yunnan railway and its culture under the background of "One Belt and One Road",which is an essential part for Yunnan to give full play to its inherent transportation cultural value in the future.To sum up,when taking traffic value as the sole criterion,it can be concluded that the current situation of Yunnan railway culture is considerable.

Secondly, taking the cultural value as the criterion, we could draw some conclusions in another way. Primarily, with protection, the cultural value of Yunnan railway has been basically preserved. At present, a large number of French-style constructions still remain along the rail, and lots of signs have preserved so-called French characters. However, these objects offer solid basis for the inheritance of railway cultural connotation to a certain extent. Plus, museums aiming at railway's cultural protection have also emerged, promoting the dissemination of railway culture in multiple ways. Though we could see some achievements in preserving cultural value,there are still inefficiencies,especially for the cultural annotation and transmission.These problems mostly caused by old-fashioned developing mode. At present, Yunnan railway culture still stays in the relatively primary development mode of "culture + tourism". That is, for example, to build a specific railway line for sightseeing and tourism, dreaming for value growth. This kind of measure often pays more attention to the economic growth rather than social benefit, which ignores the real essence of railway's civilized value.It also cannot make Yunnan railway culture show its charm in the development of modernization. In addition, there are also problems such as rigid protection consciousness. Taking Yunnan-Vietnam railway as an example, the important part of Yunnan railway culture, was included in China's first batch of industrial heritage protection list in 2018.Sadly, no effective combination of development and protection has been achieved. This is mainly reflected in the development process of the cultural industry -- first, the exploitation of the existing cultural and creative products associated with railway culture is still stuck in primary stage with making products of daily necessities like key chains, ceramic ornaments, children's toys and other low-cost and low-creative product;next,the way of protecting the railway culture is too single,only using simple way of exhibition or displays as the core to achieve concession on cultural heritage protection.Sadly,some of exhibitions were actually hard to attract the relevant audience,which hasn't achieved the role of deep excavation of railway culture.Plus,the inefficiency in museum's interpretation has definitely done harm to the universal and integrated value of railway culture.Above all,there are still many difficulties for Yunnan railway culture's current construction.

To sum up, when discussing the current situation of Yunnan railway culture construction,we should know the good side in the process of its evolution but also pay attention to the inefficiency

and dilemma. Then, according to these cognition, we could put up forward solutions for a better prospect.

4. The future path of Yunnan railway cultural construction

4.1 Create meaningful and diversified cultural heritage routes

Yunnan Railway is an important "linear heritage" in Yunnan cultural history[5]. As a quite complex and diversified cultural system, Yunnan railway culture should effectively use the transportation lines to connect regional cultures and form the linkage effect counting on diversified implements. At the same time, the railway line should be used to connect the cultural heritage sites with the heritage's buffer zones along the way to create more complete and distinctive cultural values.

It could refer to Jianshui Ancient Town. In the development of its cultural tourism industry, the government effectively took the advantage of railways around the town for connecting adjacent areas to create special views as well as integrated benefits. Moreover, resulted from meter-gauge connection, the formation of a complete tourist line and perfect Yunnan railway culture interpretation system have made individuals attain more comprehensive understandings of Yunnan railway culture and accurately grasp the profound connotation of it.

4.2 Gathering the whole society to focus on protecting Intangible Cultural Heritage correlated with Yunnan railway culture

The cultural protection couldn't make headway by single person. The process of protection requires the participation of the whole society even the whole nations [6]. For Yunnan railway culture, mobilizing the whole society to protect it means to guarantee the integration during protecting process, which aims at protecting the materials or solid infrastructures along the way and also reserving the authentic value implied in the intangible cultural heritage correlated with railway culture. In a word, when gathering the whole society for preservation, material and spiritual values should be treated equally.

In my view, to gain better achievements, we may generate from two aspects. First, from the railway culture itself, we could continuously explore the spiritual meanings of Yunnan railway culture, and give full play to the role of innovation so that its spiritual values and cultural industry development could be deeply integrated in new ways. Rather than conventional products' innovation, the elements related to railway culture could also be used to develop "Internet+" industries like filming, games even NFT products. In this way, railway culture can be "regenerated" with a more modern and popular style, attracting people especially the young ages to devote themselves to protecting and developing Yunnan railway culture. Besides, to enhance social forces is also crucial. The key is to improve the awareness of protection among public. To achieve this situation, new media such as short videos, virtual reality and other new publicity methods should be fully utilized to enable the audience's will to protect the railway culture on their own initiatives, and finally participate in the protection process to reinforce the construction of its culture.

5. Conclusions

Through the preliminary commentary on the historical background and cultural construction status of Yunnan railway culture, it is clear that the development context of Yunnan railway culture is tortuous and complex, and the current situation of Yunnan railway culture should be thought in 2 parts-positive and negative. On this basis, the suggestions for the future paths of Yunnan railway culture were finally obtained. First is to create meaningful and diversified cultural heritage lines, second is to gather social forces to focus on protecting intangible cultural heritage correlated with Yunnan railway culture.

Hoping to see better results in Yunnan railway's cultural construction in the near future.

Acknowledgements

When writing this essay, I continuously think back on those old days living near by an old-fashioned railway station, missing the childhood I have already lost. The railway in Yunnan reminds me of the ‘growth’ of my loved ones, materials, time and cultural abundance. As I grown up, I finally noticed that the culture of transportation like Yunnan railway continuously create an implicit bond among people living here, making culture more diversified, abundant, vigorous and soft. Meanwhile, it reminds me that to protect the construction of Yunnan railway culture is to protect the essence of Yunnan’s magnificent essence in history.

It’s appreciated that our ancestors have constructed this special rail line and left us with such valuable heritage. It’s also appreciated that many scholars have put tons of effort in the construction of Yunnan railway culture, which provided me a lot favor to complete this essay.

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