

Reviving the “Century Artery”: An Insightful Study Decoding the Historical Glory and Contemporary Value of the Great Tea Road

Chun Zhang¹ Haifei Yuan²

¹ Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China

² Anglia Ruskin University, UK

²Corresponding author. Email: 1044339217@qq.com.

ABSTRACT

Theoretical and Practical Achievements of Hubei and the Great Tea Road Studies offers a comprehensive reinterpretation of the Great Tea Road through a global historical and interdisciplinary lens. Centering on Hubei Province — especially Hankou as the “thoroughfare of nine provinces” — the book reconstructs its pivotal role in transcontinental trade and cultural exchange. Based on rich archival evidence, it portrays Hankou as a hub of tea production, refinement, and branding that transformed local commerce into a driving force of early globalization. The study extends beyond history to engage with contemporary issues such as the UNESCO heritage nomination, cross-border collaboration, and sustainable cultural revitalization. It also explores broader themes including the Tea Road’s connection to the Belt and Road Initiative, its contribution to Chinese national integration, and its enduring function as a vehicle of cultural soft power. Through its multidimensional approach—combining historical analysis, theoretical innovation, and pragmatic insight—the book bridges past and present, demonstrating how the spirit of openness and civilizational dialogue embodied in the Tea Road continues to inspire China’s cultural confidence and international engagement today.

Keywords: *The Great Tea Road, Century Artery, Cultural revitalization, Eastern Tea Port.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the grand narrative of civilizational encounters across the Eurasian continent, when the camel bells of the Silk Road gradually faded into the desert winds, another transcontinental legend—rooted not in silk or porcelain, but in the verdant leaves of tea—began to flourish. Between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, this remarkable trade route wove together the destinies of East and West, carrying with it not only a commodity but a culture—a distilled essence of agrarian wisdom, aesthetic refinement, and philosophical reflection nurtured in the misty hills

of China. Stretching over 13,000 kilometers and thriving for nearly three centuries, the Great Tea Road linked the tea-producing area of Wuyi Mountain in Fujian with the imperial courts of St. Petersburg. Along this long and winding route, caravans transported not just goods but ideas, rituals, and tastes, forming an economic lifeline and a cultural artery that ran parallel to the Silk Road, and together they illuminated the shared history of human connectivity. As one of the great “century arteries,” the Great Tea Road profoundly influenced the early modern world, shaping intercultural understanding through the universal language of tea. Now, as the caravan trails lie silent beneath the dust of time, the challenge before scholars and policymakers alike is how to reawaken the historical vitality and contemporary relevance of this ancient route. This is not merely an act of remembrance but an endeavor of cultural rejuvenation, demanding both academic rigor and creative vision. Against this historical and

Authors’ Introduction:

ZHANG Chun, Professor, Wuhan University of Science and Technology. Research interests: Cross-cultural Studies, the Great Tea Road Studies.

Email: chunzhang1011@163.com

YUAN Haifei, Corresponding Author, Anglia Ruskin University, U.K., Research interests: Cultural Economics and Art Market Studies. Email: 1044339217@qq.com.

intellectual backdrop emerges *Theoretical and Practical Achievements of Hubei and the Great Tea Road Studies*, authored by Wang Sixuan and her team. As a landmark outcome of a Major Project of the National Social Science Fund of China, this book represents far more than a historical reconstruction—it is a scholarly synthesis that combines regional insight, national consciousness, and global foresight. Through its multidimensional framework—integrating history, culture, trade, and diplomacy—the study restores the Great Tea Road’s forgotten splendor while envisioning its contemporary revival within today’s global cultural landscape. Imbued with the quiet elegance of tea culture and the intellectual clarity of academic inquiry, Wang’s study stands as both a tribute to the enduring spirit of the Great Tea Road and a timely call to rethink China’s role in the evolving dialogue of civilizations. By bridging past and present, the book invites readers to rediscover how a tea leaf—transformed by fire, water, and human hands—once connected mountains and empires, and how it may again inspire a new journey of mutual understanding and cultural renewal.

2. STRATEGIC POSITIONING WITHIN A GRAND HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE: HUBEI--THE UNDISPUTED “TRADE HEART” AND VALUE ENGINE OF THE GREAT TEA ROAD

One of the most remarkable scholarly contributions of this book lies in its precise historical positioning of Hubei Province within the grand narrative of the Great Tea Road, achieved through a global historical lens. From the very opening chapters, the authors employ a broad and eloquent historical brushstroke to map the geographical expanse and temporal depth of this transcontinental trade artery. Originating in the misty Wuyi Mountains of Fujian in southern China, the Tea Road passed through Jiangxi and Hunan, traversed the entire province of Hubei, and then stretched northward across Henan, Shanxi, and Hebei, before cutting through the vast Mongolian Plateau and the boundless Siberian steppes, finally reaching Moscow—the political and economic heart of Russia—and St. Petersburg, its cultural capital. More than a mere route for transporting commodities, this was a “civilizational corridor,” a pathway where political diplomacy, cultural interaction, commercial exchange, ethnic migration, and religious dissemination converged over nearly

three centuries. Within this epic chain of transcontinental exchange, Hankou—long celebrated as the “thoroughfare of nine provinces” (九省通衢)—emerges as the undeniable heart of the trade network: vibrant, inventive, and strategically indispensable. Positioned at the crossroads of north–south and east–west routes, Hankou not only functioned as the logistical hub of the tea trade but also became a catalyst of cultural circulation, infusing the Tea Road with a unique dynamism that shaped its historical trajectory. The authors’ meticulous reconstruction demonstrates that Hubei, and Hankou in particular, did not merely serve as a passive transit point; rather, it played an active and creative role in mediating between the agrarian tea-producing regions of southern China and the commercial and industrial centers of the Eurasian continent. In this sense, Hubei was both the artery and the heartbeat of the Great Tea Road—a vital intermediary space where geography, economy, and culture met in productive tension. What makes the book particularly compelling is its integration of regional history into a global context. The authors skillfully weave Hubei’s story into the wider fabric of Eurasian exchange, thereby illuminating how local agency shaped, and was shaped by, global processes. Through the lens of global history, the Great Tea Road ceases to be a peripheral trade route and instead becomes a powerful testimony to early modern globalization, one through which not only tea but also technologies, languages, artistic motifs, and systems of belief were disseminated. The book demonstrates how the Tea Road anticipated many of the features now associated with modern global connectivity: long-distance supply chains, multi-ethnic cooperation, and cultural hybridization. The authors’ attention to the civilizational implications of the Tea Road adds a profound humanistic dimension to their analysis. Tea, in this narrative, is not merely a commodity but a symbol of encounter—an object carrying the philosophical, aesthetic, and moral sensibilities of Chinese civilization. As it traveled across mountains and steppes, tea became a medium of cultural translation and negotiation, fostering mutual curiosity between East and West. Along the route, merchants, monks, and diplomats acted as intermediaries, transmitting not only goods but also ideas about nature, harmony, and hospitality, making the Tea Road a precursor to the modern Silk Road spirit of connectivity and shared prosperity. The treatment of Hubei’s position on this route further reveals its historical complexity as both hinterland and frontier. On one hand, its fertile river valleys and advanced water transport system

provided the infrastructural foundation for sustained trade; on the other, its openness to migration and innovation made it a melting pot of languages, beliefs, and crafts. Hankou's urban culture, marked by its guild halls, markets, and tea houses, embodied a cosmopolitan ethos reflecting the province's role as a mediator between regional economies and global networks. Archival evidence and missionary accounts show that Hubei was not merely on the route but central to the formation of the Tea Road as an integrated system of circulation. Ultimately, by positioning Hubei within the macro-narrative of the Great Tea Road, the book expands our understanding of how local histories contribute to global civilization and invites reflection on how objects such as tea can serve simultaneously as material commodities and carriers of meaning, linking distant peoples through taste, ritual, and imagination. In recovering the transnational significance of Hubei's tea heritage, the authors restore a missing chapter in the story of global trade and underscore the enduring vitality of Chinese cultural agency in shaping world history.

Immersed in an ocean of historical materials, the authors undertook meticulous archival excavations, drawing upon local gazetteers, customs records, merchants' journals, trade ledgers, missionary reports, and foreign travelers' accounts. Through rigorous textual analysis and evidence-based interpretation, they vividly reconstruct the flourishing panorama of Hankou during the late Qing Dynasty, when, as the saying went, "ten miles of sails and masts lined up in the town, and the tea of all provinces gathered in Hankou." By carefully cross-referencing diverse sources, the authors restore the vibrant pulse of Hankou's commercial and cultural life, transforming statistical data and fragmented anecdotes into a vivid historical tableau. Their reconstruction allows readers to visualize the convergence of riverboats, the multilingual buzz of merchants haggling over prices, and the aromatic blend of teas from every corner of the empire. The book offers a detailed and persuasive exposition of how Hankou's unique geographical endowment—strategically situated at the confluence of the Yangtze and Han Rivers—and its integrated network of waterways and land routes enabled it to become the ultimate aggregation hub for teas from China's major production regions: Wuyi in Fujian, Ninghong in Jiangxi, Anhua in Hunan, Qimen in Anhui, and Yihong in southern Hubei. These flows of goods created a dynamic logistical system in which river ports, workshops, and market guilds collectively sustained one of the most complex

commodity networks in late imperial China. What occurred in Hankou, however, went far beyond the simple transshipment of raw tea. Here, the tea underwent a sophisticated series of refinement, sorting, blending, steaming, pressing, and branding—transformative processes that elevated it into a high-value export commodity carefully tailored to the preferences of international markets. The authors emphasize that the tea trade represented not only a process of material transformation but also one of cultural translation. In Hankou's warehouses and factories, Chinese artisans adapted their craft to the expectations of Russian merchants and the consumption habits of distant European buyers. Through innovations in packaging, labeling, and standardization, Hankou's producers effectively redefined the global perception of Chinese tea, projecting an image of reliability, refinement, and cultural authenticity. This ability to merge artisanal knowledge with commercial intelligence exemplifies what might be called "proto-industrial globalization"—a stage in which regional manufacturing responded directly to global demand while retaining its cultural particularities. Notably, iconic brands such as the "Chuan" (川) Brick Tea emerged from this sophisticated system of value-added processing, embodying a combination of craftsmanship, commerce, and cross-cultural adaptation. The authors trace how brick tea, compressed for ease of transportation and preservation, became an essential export to the vast Russian market, where it was consumed not only as a beverage but as a daily necessity woven into social rituals from Siberia to Central Asia. In this sense, the success of Hankou's tea industry was inseparable from its capacity to understand and participate in the global circulation of tastes, technologies, and symbolic meanings. The book's analytical strength lies precisely in revealing how a local manufacturing process could be embedded in a global semiotic network, transforming tea into a carrier of identity, prestige, and intercultural connection. This multifunctional mechanism of aggregation, refinement, and value enhancement distinguished Hankou from other nodes along the Great Tea Road, transforming it from a mere logistical waypoint into what might be described as the "value-creation center" and "supply chain command hub" of the entire transcontinental network. Unlike other trading cities that simply facilitated export, Hankou integrated production, branding, and distribution into a coherent economic ecosystem. The authors convincingly argue that this early model of vertical integration anticipated modern forms of industrial

clustering and global supply chain management. The book further emphasizes that Wuhan—the modern successor of historical Hankou—remains today the city with the richest and most concentrated heritage of the Tea Road era, preserving Russian merchant buildings, brick-tea factories, warehouses, docks, and residences that testify to its past prosperity and cosmopolitan spirit. Among these vestiges, a particularly striking relic stands out: a historic photograph preserved in the Jiangnan Customs Museum, bearing inscriptions in six languages—English, French, German, Russian, and others—proclaiming “Hankou, the Largest Tea Port in China.” This image, both silent and eloquent, functions as a visual epitome of the transnational order that once animated the city. Its multilingual text crystallizes the intersection of commerce, technology, and identity, while its aesthetic composition—ships anchored along the river, the bustling docks, the distant silhouettes of warehouses—captures the spirit of an age when Hankou stood as the beating heart of a global tea civilization. As the authors observe, this photograph, though static, encapsulates the fluidity of exchange and the hybridity of culture that defined the Great Tea Road. It serves as a material witness not merely to economic prosperity but to the broader dialogue between civilizations, reminding contemporary readers that trade, at its deepest level, has always been a form of cultural communication.

Through rigorous theoretical analysis and rich empirical evidence, the book systematically constructs an academic discourse system that defines Hubei as the “core hub” of the Tea Road. Drawing on perspectives from economic geography, logistics network theory, and comparative advantage theory, the authors provide a nuanced interpretation of how Hubei’s geographical position evolved into an irreplaceable source of economic power and control. This recognition of Hubei’s centrality is not a gesture of regional self-assertion, but rather the outcome of meticulous historiographical research and carefully reasoned analysis. It offers both the scholarly community and the general public a critical analytical lens through which to understand the internal operating mechanisms, multi-layered trade networks, and sustaining vitality that underpinned the Tea Road’s nearly three centuries of historical endurance. It is precisely this unshakable historical role—combined with its contemporary responsibility in cultural revitalization—that justifies Hubei’s leadership in coordinating the eight provinces and regions along

the route in the joint endeavor to nominate the Tea Road for inscription on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List. In this sense, the publication of *Theoretical and Practical Achievements of Hubei and the Great Tea Road Studies* stands as a comprehensive, systematic, and solid academic endorsement of Hubei’s leadership and historical responsibility. It provides the intellectual foundations and theoretical legitimacy for the province’s pivotal role in both preserving the heritage and reinvigorating the living legacy of this transcontinental “Century Artery.”

3. PIONEERING AND INTEGRATING THEORETICAL FRONTIERS: CONSTRUCTING A FRAMEWORK OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON AND GLOBAL VISION

At the level of theoretical construction and academic innovation, this book demonstrates both intellectual ambition and a strong consciousness of paradigm transformation. Its theoretical pursuit is not a mere synthesis of existing research, but rather a profound reconfiguration and upgrading of the analytical paradigm through which the Tea Road has traditionally been studied.

Among the most striking theoretical contributions of the book is its innovative incorporation of the Japanese tea culture system into the discourse on the Tea Road, employing it as a critical reference point for in-depth comparative study. This perspective significantly expands both the geographical scope and intellectual imagination of the Tea Road research. For a long time, constrained by historical sources and limited scholarly vision, studies of the Tea Road have largely focused on the China–Mongolia–Russia corridor, accurately mapping its geographic spine but inadvertently narrowing the recognition of its global impact. In reality, the transmission and exchange of tea culture worldwide constitute a far more complex, multidimensional, interactive, and tension-laden network. Although the Japanese tea ceremony traces its origins to the Zen rituals and literati tea practices of Tang and Song dynasties, over the subsequent centuries it deeply assimilated native Zen philosophy, the aesthetics, and codified ritual practices, ultimately forming a cultural and philosophical system with distinctive core principles: harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility. Incorporating this major branch of tea culture into

the study generates at least two profound and positive scholarly effects:

First, the book establishes a deeply insightful and highly instructive cross-cultural comparative perspective. By meticulously contrasting the “large-scale commercial export” of Chinese tea to the Russia–Mongolia corridor via the Tea Road with the “profound cultural transplantation” of tea to Japan, the study offers a penetrating reflection on how Chinese tea culture was received, adapted, and localized within different civilizational contexts. The Tea Road primarily carried tea as a bulk daily commodity, and its impact was manifested in the everyday consumption habits, social practices, and even economic structures across the vast Eurasian interior. In contrast, the tea transmitted to Japan emphasized the tea ceremony as an integrated system of cultural rituals, aesthetic standards, philosophical ideas, and lifestyle practices. This striking juxtaposition not only enriches the theoretical framework and case repertoire of global tea culture dissemination studies, but also clarifies the distinct historical character and scope of influence of the Tea Road as a commercial artery fundamentally driven by tangible economic trade.

Second, this perspective greatly expands the regional boundaries and radiative scope of influence in the study of the Tea Road. It subtly suggests that the civilizational exchanges carried by tea may have generated far broader and more intricate ripple effects and network structures than those depicted in conventional linear narratives. As a “cultural artery,” the Tea Road’s influence was never unidirectional; the cultural symbols, economic vitality, and technological knowledge it transmitted reverberated throughout East Asia and beyond, together composing a magnificent movement within the early process of globalization. This bold academic endeavor, which breaks through traditional regional confinements, endows the book’s theoretical framework with greater international scope, dialogic depth, and epistemic openness, thereby opening up a new academic frontier—a realm rich with potential and new growth points for future studies of the Tea Road.

In addition, the book’s theoretical exploration extends widely to grand thematic dimensions, encompassing not only the intrinsic alignment of the Tea Road with the Belt and Road Initiative but also its historical significance in the early processes of globalization, its dynamic role in facilitating the consolidation and integration of the Chinese national community, and the complex interplay

between shifting geopolitical and economic configurations that shaped its flourishing and decline across centuries. It further situates the Tea Road as a crucial conduit of China’s cultural soft power, a transnational network through which material exchange evolved into civilizational dialogue and cultural circulation. What makes this exploration particularly compelling is its integration of diverse disciplinary perspectives—ranging from history, anthropology, and economics to international relations and communication studies—thereby creating a multidimensional, layered, and conceptually vibrant research paradigm. The authors skillfully connect macro-historical narratives with micro-level case studies, revealing how local practices, regional identities, and cross-cultural interactions converged to form a living system of global connectivity long before the modern age of globalization. Through this synthesis of temporal depth and spatial reach, the book establishes a richly textured and intellectually coherent framework for understanding the Tea Road not as a static heritage symbol, but as a dynamic organism that continues to inspire discussions of economic interdependence, cultural coexistence, and shared human destiny in the contemporary world.

4. THE PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOOK: SYNERGISTIC ADVANCEMENT OF HERITAGE NOMINATION, INDUSTRY, AND CULTURAL TOURISM

The ultimate vitality of outstanding scholarly research lies in its capacity to illuminate contemporary realities, guide the future, and serve society. In this sense, one of the central values of this book resides in its deep engagement with the present and its pragmatic exploration of the Tea Road’s UNESCO heritage nomination, cultural preservation, and industrial transformation. Rather than treating history as a closed narrative, the authors view it as a dynamic continuum linking the past with the future. They approach the Great Tea Road not merely as an object of historical inquiry but as a living cultural system that continues to generate economic vitality, social meaning, and intercultural resonance in the twenty-first century. This perspective enables the study to transcend the boundaries of historical research and to integrate heritage studies, cultural policy, and regional development into an interdisciplinary framework. Drawing on fieldwork and policy documentation,

the authors dedicate substantial portions of the book to summarizing the progress of the UNESCO World Heritage nomination process, the establishment of collaborative mechanisms among China, Russia, and Mongolia, and the surveying of tangible and intangible cultural assets along the route. Their analysis reveals not only achievements but also the institutional complexities and technical challenges embedded in the nomination process. They discuss how the Tea Road, stretching across diverse ecological zones and political borders, presents difficulties in unifying administrative systems, conservation standards, and heritage narratives. The authors' nuanced discussion demonstrates how global heritage discourse interacts with local identities and national interests, contributing to debates about the localization of UNESCO norms in non-Western contexts.

Importantly, the book goes beyond descriptive documentation to propose how heritage protection can be aligned with sustainable development and cultural revitalization. The authors emphasize that the preservation of historical routes like the Great Tea Road must be accompanied by innovative modes of renewal, such as the integration of cultural tourism, tea industry upgrading, ecological protection, and digital storytelling. Through concrete cases in Hubei and other nodes, they illustrate how heritage sites can become engines of local prosperity, supporting creative industries, community participation, and international cultural exchange. In doing so, they highlight the need to balance authenticity with accessibility, preservation with innovation, and economic growth with cultural integrity. Their approach reflects a forward-looking understanding of heritage as a "living resource" rather than a static relic, capable of inspiring new forms of social creativity and intercultural understanding. By anchoring the discussion in the design of future activation and sustainable strategies, the book not only contributes to cultural heritage studies but also embodies a strong sense of social responsibility and humanistic concern. The authors argue that revitalizing the Tea Road should go beyond physical restoration or economic branding to recover the moral and aesthetic ideals embedded in tea culture—its harmony, moderation, and respect for coexistence. In this regard, their work resonates with global movements toward "heritage for humanity," in which the preservation of the past becomes a means of cultivating shared values and fostering intercultural empathy. By situating the Tea Road within this broader humanistic vision, the authors transform a regional

historical study into a dialogue with world civilization, demonstrating how scholarship can illuminate pathways toward a more culturally sustainable and spiritually enriched future.

At the level of practical investigation, the book's in-depth case studies of specific tea varieties and trade routes, such as the Yihong Tea Road, are particularly commendable. Historically, Yihong Gongfu tea, produced in Hubei's western mountainous regions in Yichang and Enshi, was prized for its tight, slender leaves, lustrous dark color, and rich aroma and flavor, making it one of the most popular tea varieties exported to Russia. The authors meticulously trace this microcosmic trade chain—from tea cultivation and primary processing in the western Hubei highlands, through human- and mule-powered transport along ancient courier routes, and via the Qingjiang River or overland networks converging at the Hankou tea port, before embarking on its northbound, multi-thousand-kilometer journey. This careful reconstruction provides a solid, vivid, and richly detailed exemplar, endowing the macro narrative of the Tea Road with tangible substance, warmth, and lived texture. Such work not only faithfully restores the historical reality, but also furnishes indisputable material evidence—including extant ancient tea gardens, remnants of old paths, and historic tea factory buildings—and a robust chain of documentary evidence, greatly reinforcing Hubei's central role within the overall narrative of the Tea Road and enhancing both its persuasive power and evocative resonance.

Even more valuable is that the authors do not treat the heritage nomination as an isolated cultural event aimed solely at preservation, but rather situate it within the strategic framework of the contemporary Belt and Road Initiative and China's promotion of high-level opening-up, offering a systematic and forward-looking perspective. The book insightfully demonstrates that the contemporary value of the Tea Road extends far beyond nostalgia or static conservation; its significance lies in how it can creatively serve today's high-quality economic, social, and cultural development. The Tea Road represents a transnational golden cultural tourism route with immense development potential, capable of attracting global visitors to retrace the trade path and experience multicultural exchanges spanning East and West. It serves as an intangible link integrating cultural resources across provinces, overcoming administrative barriers, and promoting coordinated regional economic development. It is a

natural cultural bridge advancing the synergy between the Yangtze River Economic Belt strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative, and a cultural platform for telling China's story, disseminating China's outstanding traditional culture, and facilitating deep exchanges and people-to-people connections among China, Mongolia, Russia, and even Europe. The book's forward-looking and actionable proposals—including the creation of tea-tourism integrated characteristic towns, establishment of specialized high-end think tanks, development of cultural and creative products, and construction of digital heritage archives—provide valuable guidance and practical pathways for local governments, cultural tourism planners, industry operators, and relevant enterprises. In doing so, it exemplifies the rare and commendable qualities of rigorous academic research: applying scholarship to societal practice and informing governance and education.

5. MISSION, RESPONSIBILITY, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS: INFUSING THE “CENTURY ARTERY” WITH NEW ERA VITALITY

A holistic reading of the book reveals a profound sense of scholarly mission, cultural consciousness, and measured rationality embodied by the research team led by Wang Sixuan. Beyond systematically reviewing the Tea Road's illustrious historical legacy and recent academic developments, the work also displays commendable theoretical courage by confronting, with rare candor and depth, the complex challenges and latent structural issues that continue to shape Tea Road studies and the heritage nomination process. The authors point out that China, Mongolia, and Russia still need to strengthen multilateral communication and coordination on nomination procedures, technical standards, and heritage value interpretation; the vast number and diversity of sites, coupled with uneven preservation conditions, present significant financial, technological, and managerial pressures on integrated protection; the transformation of academic achievements into practical outcomes—whether in heritage management, cultural industries, or educational dissemination—remains an ongoing task requiring clearer pathways and institutional support; and among the broader public, particularly the younger generation, there persists a perceptible gap between knowledge, recognition, and affective identification with the Tea Road's cultural significance.

Yet these challenges are articulated not as lamentations but as a diagnostic exercise grounded in intellectual honesty and constructive foresight. By identifying problems with empirical precision and analytical restraint, the authors lay a foundation for more sustainable, evidence-based, and internationally collaborative strategies. This critical awareness demonstrates a research ethos that balances idealism with pragmatism—an approach that transforms academic inquiry into a dynamic process of reflection and renewal. The team's capacity to engage with reality without losing sight of vision exemplifies the best of contemporary Chinese humanities scholarship, where rigorous analysis serves as both a moral responsibility and a cultural mission to ensure that the Tea Road continues to evolve as a living symbol of shared human heritage.

We look forward with great anticipation that, with the formal publication and wide dissemination of this book, it will fulfill the authors' heartfelt expectations: to further enrich, deepen, and even innovate the theoretical research framework of the Great Tea Road at the scholarly level, and to effectively propel the heritage nomination process to new heights in practice. It should become an indispensable reference for all who care about or participate in the Tea Road's heritage efforts, providing a continuous supply of theoretical tools and intellectual support for improving practical plans, resolving coordination challenges, and innovating conservation and utilization models. At the same time, the book ought to serve as a high-quality, high-level platform for academic exchange and dialogue both domestically and internationally, as well as a catalyst for ideas, stimulating deeper discussions and cross-disciplinary collaborations on cutting-edge topics such as cross-cultural trade history, linear cultural heritage preservation, cultural route tourism, and global historical processes. Beyond academia, it should function as an authoritative and engaging historical and cultural guide for the broader public, attracting wider societal engagement, commercial investment, and grassroots wisdom in the protection, revitalization, and value reconstruction of this ancient trade route, thereby jointly reinforcing the foundation of cultural confidence.

6. CONCLUSION: BRIDGING PAST AND FUTURE, REINVIGORATING THE “CENTURY ARTERY” IN THE NEW ERA

Theoretical and Practical Achievements of Hubei and the Great Tea Road Studies presents, through its broad global-historical perspective, rigorous historical scholarship, innovative theoretical insights, profound engagement with contemporary realities, and pragmatic exploration of implementation pathways, a clear, vivid, multidimensional, and logically coherent panorama of the Tea Road. The book persuasively demonstrates that the Tea Road is far more than an ancient trade route lying dormant among historical documents and remote relics. Rather, it is a living civilizational artery whose historical logic and cultural spirit continue to inform the present and shape the imagination of the future. Its enduring ethos—openness and inclusiveness, civilizational dialogue, mutual benefit, and resilience—embodies a worldview that transcends time and geography. These values resonate deeply with China’s contemporary vision of building “a community with a shared future for mankind,” while harmonizing with the core principles of the Belt and Road Initiative, such as connectivity, cooperation, and mutual learning among civilizations. In this way, the Tea Road becomes not only a historical object of study but also a symbolic bridge linking the wisdom of the past with the aspirations of the new era.

By situating the Great Tea Road within the broader narrative of global history and cultural interaction, the authors transform it into a model for rethinking the relationship between heritage and modernization, tradition and innovation. They reveal how the spirit of the Tea Road—rooted in centuries of exchange and coexistence—offers valuable insight for addressing contemporary global challenges such as cultural fragmentation, economic inequality, and ecological imbalance. Through this lens, the book positions the Tea Road as both a metaphor and a practical paradigm for intercultural understanding and sustainable development. Its argument thus achieves a remarkable intellectual resonance: history becomes a source of inspiration, and scholarship becomes an act of cultural reawakening that bridges civilizations across time and space.

Historically, Hubei’s tea traveled the world along this “Century Artery,” giving rise to the enduring legend of the “Eastern Tea Port.” Today,

the intellectual strength embodied in this book seeks to revive that artery—once a vital conduit shaping global interactions—by reigniting its cultural, economic, and scholarly lifeblood so that it may pulse once more with renewed vigor in the new century. By systematically affirming Hubei’s role as a pivotal hub, the work consolidates both the historical legitimacy and strategic leverage essential for the ongoing heritage nomination process. Its introduction of a cross-cultural comparative framework enhances the research’s theoretical depth and its resonance within international discourse, while its multidimensional exploration of practical implementation builds a robust bridge connecting the region’s luminous past with its envisioned future.

More importantly, the book transcends the boundaries of academic inquiry. It reimagines the Tea Road not as a relic of commerce, but as a living, evolving symbol of dialogue between civilizations—a shared legacy capable of inspiring new forms of global cooperation. Through rigorous documentation, forward-looking interpretation, and cultural empathy, it highlights how the wisdom of history can inform the creative energies of the present. As the nomination of the Great Tea Road progresses and China’s broader cultural renaissance gains momentum, this work’s intellectual and social influence will undoubtedly deepen, ensuring that the cultural artery of tea continues to flow—linking memory and modernity, heritage and innovation, the local and the global.

REFERENCES

- [1] George van Driem. The tale of tea: a comprehensive history of tea from prehistoric times to the present day[M]. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2019:444.
- [2] Li, Mingwu, The Rise and Fall of China-Russia Great Tea Road and the Change of Routes: Process Analysis and Contemporary Inspiration[J]. Tea Correspondence, 2020(2).
- [3] Liu, Zaiqi, Hubei and the Great Tea Road[M]. People Press, 2018.10.