Mapping the Tea Horse Road **2016-03-07**

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The ancient Tea Horse Road (*chamagudao* 茶马古道) was one of the world's highest and most precipitous ancient roads, and was a trade route mainly through Yunnan, Sichuan and Tibet, stretched across Bhutan and Sikkim, Nepal and India, and then reached Western Asia and even the Red Sea coast in Western Africa. In ancient times, people in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces exchanged tea for horses or medicines with people in Tibet. The tea, the medicine and the other materials were transported by caravans (*mabang* 马帮), and thus the pathway was called the Tea Horse Road, which was first named by Mu Jihong in 1990 when he and other five people first explored it.

The ancient Tea Horse Road was an enormous network of trails which grew up between Yunnan, Sichuan and Tibet in the long historical period. Generally speaking, it was divided into two major roads: Sichuan-Tibet Tea Horse Road and Yunnan-Tibet Tea Horse Road. The Sichuan-Tibet Tea Horse Road appeared in the Tang Dynasty, starting from Ya'an (雅安) to Lhasa (拉薩) via Luding (瀘定), Kangding (康定), Litang (理塘), Markam (芒康) and Chamdo (昌都), extending to the outside countries of Nepal, Burma and India. The Yunnan-Tibet Tea Horse Road was formed roughly in the late part of the 6th century, it began from Pu'er (普洱) to Lhasa, crossing Dali (大理), Lijiang (麗江), and Shangri-La (香格里拉), continuing to Nepal, Burma and India. In addition, the Qinghai-Tibet road was also the main pathway to transport the tea to Tibet from the inland areas in the Tang and Song Dynasties.

The whole network of the ancient Tea Horse Road is an ongoing project, and this is only a map which was linked by the remaining points of ancient Tea Horse Road found by people today, analysis and map by Wang Xiaohong (Sichuan University), under the supervision of Wang Hongsu and Merrick Lex Berman.

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