

# CURRENT SITUATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ANCIENT YUNNAN'S SALT CULTURAL RESOURCES

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**Abstract:** Ancient Yunnan's salt cultural resources are the treasures created and left by various ethnic groups with their lives and wisdoms in Yunnan. The present paper made an overall collection of the existing resources of salt culture in Yunnan, providing a vision for the increasingly more people who love Yunnan's cultures and hoping more and more people of like mind to jointly unearth this tremendous historical and cultural jade in Yunnan. The intact ancient towns, ancient salt wells, temples, ancient salt horse trails and historical literatures that were thrived in connection with salt seem to present us with a brilliant jewel necklace connecting Yunnan's salt ancient towns with salt horse trails, which concentrates the course of ancient development in Yunnan and expects us to savor and explore!

**Keywords:** ancient Yunnan's salt cultural resources, distribution, depth, development and conception

## PREFACE:

Yunnan boasts rich natural resources of animals, plants, minerals, etc. and plentiful ethnic historical cultural heritages have also been formed in the development history of various ethnic people, for instance, a well-known ancient city in Lijiang. In the long river of historical development in Yunnan, the discovery of salt and the development of salt wells have played an important role and we can prove it by studying the existing ancient salt cultural resources in Yunnan. This study has drawn attention of some experts in and out of the province and there are some relevant monographic achievements frequently published, for instance, the monographic study on the salt industry in Heijiang, Yunnan. The present paper intended to make an overall collection of the existing resources of salt culture in Yunnan, providing a vision for the increasingly more people who love Yunnan's cultures and hoping more and more people of like mind to jointly unearth this tremendous historical and cultural jade in Yunnan. Since the author has limited collection of data, the paper is bound to be

unavoidably shallow.

## I. DISTRIBUTIONS AND FEATURES OF ANCIENT YUNNAN'S SALT CULTURAL RESOURCES

Opening the treasure of ancient Yunnan's salt culture, what we can directly see now is the intact ancient towns, ancient salt wells, temples, ancient salt horse trails and historical literatures that were thrived in connection with salt.

### I) Yunnan's ancient salt towns and salt wells

The existing towns of ancient salt production that are kept intact are mainly distributed as follows:

#### 1. Heijiang town in Lufeng County

Heijiang Town, which is one of the three provincial-level historical and cultural famous towns in Yunnan released in the first batch in 1995, is located in northwest Lufeng county and 41.5 km away from the downtown. In ancient times, Heijiang was one of several

large-scale salt production places in Yunnan. Since the commencement of digging well and boiling salt at the beginning of the Eastern Han Dynasty, an economically prosperous ancient town with highly developed multi-element cultures and scenic spots and historical interests has been formed in over 2000 years. Heijing, a historical record very durable to read, is called the social living fossil of Ming and Qing dynasties.

## **2. Shiyang town in Dayao County**

Shiyang town, which is one of the three provincial-level historical and cultural famous towns in Yunnan released in the first batch in 1995, is located in west Dayao county and 35 km away from the downtown.

Lying silently in the meandering mountain ranges, Shiyang town has an over 2000 years history of salt production. It rose and fell with salt. A historical witness consists of the salt wells of Han Dynasty, 3 ancient salt-making chicken coop stoves and about 50 barrel boilers. The brine evaporating shelter of 100m long, 40m wide and 20m high, which has experienced wind and rain about 30 years, is still considered the largest bamboo salt-making device in China.

## **3. Nuodeng village in Yunlong county**

As a famous historical and cultural village in Yunnan, Nuodeng is located in Yunlong county at the southern end of the world natural heritage—Three Rivers Parallel Running Scenic Resort and 160 km away from Dali in east. In 110 BC Hanwu Emperor set up “Bisu County” in Nuodeng to develop salt production and the headquarters of “Five Wells Salt Tax Department”, one of the four departments in Yunnan in Ming dynasty was established here, forming a Nuodeng-based “salt (tea) and horse trail” radiating eastward to Dali, southward to Baoshan, westward to Tengchong and Myanmar and northward to Lijiang and Tibet.

Nuodeng, which is the most ancient name of the village remaining unchanged in Yunnan, is the earliest economic place of strategic importance for Bai ethnic group, where many ancient buildings were built in Ming and Qing dynasties such as temple structure, salt wells, salt administrative bureau, salt tax department, horse paths, streets and lanes, salt horse trails, etc., which is the living teaching material to verify the ancient salt economic

prosperity in Yunnan as well as the cultural education and development in Ming and Qing dynasties.

The village and town consisting 8 ancient salt wells including Nuodeng village was called “*Qulongbajing*” in Yunlong county.

## **4. Shaxi ancient town in Jianchuan county**

Shaxi town is located in southwest Jianchuan county and 30 km away from the downtown. Sideng Street in Shaxi Ancient Town was not only a well-known ancient marketplace, but also a unique ancient night fair. It rose and fell with the salt well development of Bai ethnic group in ancient times. On the other side of a mountain of Shaxi is Misha salt well which was mined in Tang and Song dynasties. In Jiangwei village 5 km away from Sideng Street is the former site of the Duangs’ salt affairs *yamen* (government office in feudal China) in Qing dynasty. Starting from Shaxi and walking 15 km westward along the salt horse trail, you may arrive in Mapingguan, which was the only way of salt horse trail in ancient times, where a checkpoint was established to collect salt tax. A small Mapingguan in the jungle has rich ancient cultural heritages including temple, stage, etc.

## **II) Salt ancestral temples in yunnan**

The two existing salt temples are Yanlong Ancestral Temple in Zhenqingguan, Kunming and Yanlong Ancestral Temple in Qiaohou town, Eryuan county, Dali prefecture.

### **1. Yanlong Ancestral Temple in Kunming**

Yanlong Ancestral Temple is located at Tuodong Road in the downtown of Kunming. It was built as the site of salt businessmen’s trade association with their joint investments in Yunnan in 1881 (the seventh year of Guangxu Emperor in Qing dynasty). It was also the site of salt trade in the period of the Republic of China (1912—1949), so Tuodong Road was called “Salt Trade Street” in history. In order to pray for the prosperity of salt business, the salt businessmen enshrined and worshiped the Yellow Emperor (China’s salt production commenced when the Yellow Emperor sent his minister Sushasi to boil sea salt in Jiaozhou Bay, Shandong) in the main hall.

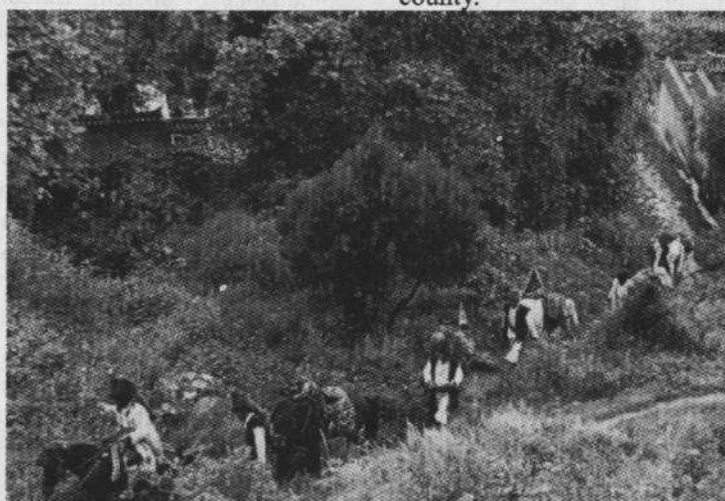
Built along the central line of Yanlong Ancestral Temple are the main hall, front hall



and stage. The ancient stage, which has a style of the stages in Jiangxi and Zhejiang, has a higher value of cultural relic and art and such delicate pattern of wood carving on the stage is rarely seen among the ancient buildings in Kunming.

## 2. Yanlong Ancestral Temple in Qiaohou

Yanlong Ancestral Temple is located in Qiaohou town, Eryuan county, Dali prefecture and 72 km away from the downtown. "Yanlong Ancestral Temple" is a temple by the salt mine in Qiaohou. In the main hall of the temple is "Salt Grand Father" and "Salt Grand Mother" and engraved on the nearby pillars is the couplet of "Salt is the uttermost among hundred flavors in kitchen" and "Delicious food is owed to the king of salt stone". By the side of the main hall is another room, in which the statue of the Dragon King is worshiped. The local people think that brine is the saliva of the Dragon King, so worshipping the Dragon King is naturally to pray for "big opening of his saliva of the Dragon King" with more salt source. It can be seen that the local people worship the god of salt so much.



Starting from Qiaohou salt mine, this salt horse trail was divided into two routes: one route could reach westward to Changxin, Baishi, etc. in Yunlong county and another route could reach southward to Baoshan and the like via Yangbi. Although it had been eroded by wind and rain for hundreds of years, some sceneries left in Liantie town, Eryuan county can still be identified.

## 2. Salt horse trail in Nujiang prefecture

The development of salt mine in Nujiang

## III) Salt horse trail

Since the road and railway were developed so late in Yunnan, the transport of goods relied on "carry on the back by people and horses" in those days, so many salt horse trails were shaped for the transport of table salt. Up till now the scenery left on the salt horse trail seems to let people hear the passing sound of horses. Apart from the above salt horse trails in Yunlong and Jianchuan county, several typical ruins on the salt horse trail can be given as follows:

### 1. Salt horse trail in Eryuan county

Qiaohou salt mine has produced table salt since ancient times. Mining in large scale from Qing dynasty, it continuously supplied salt for northwest Yunnan and sold far to the neighborhood provinces and Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar. In order to send out the salt from Qiaohou salt mine and bring back the necessities like tea, the merchants' caravan active on "Bonan Ancient Trail" broke an ancient branch line—salt horse trail between the Luoping Mountain and the Heihui River in current Eryuan county.

prefecture has a history of 160 years. The earliest salt mine in Nujiang is the salt mine opened in Lajing town, Lanping county in 1843. Since the "nearby four counties" (Lushi, Fugong, Gongshan and the former Bijiang county) in Nujiang prefecture had no table salt, the table salt was transported in from Lanping and the inland. Since there was no single kilometer of road in Nujiang prefecture up till the early 1950s of the last century, the table salt for the people of the "nearby four counties" was brought in on the back by people and horses from the salt horse trail.

There are many salt horse trails in Nujiang prefecture such as Yunnan-Tibet, Liuku-Baoshan and Gongshan-Liuku horse trail, but the earliest and most efficient is Bijiang-Yingpan horse trail, which starts from Yingpan town, Lanping county, passes the Yanlu Mountain, crosses the Biluo Snow Mountain and reaches Zhiziluo town of the former Bijiang county in Nujiang prefecture with a total length of 120 km and travel to and fro journey of 3-4 days. It was the vital passage from Nujiang prefecture to the inland. Since it passes the Yanlu Mountain and the Biluo Snow Mountain, crosses the Lancang River and several stream falls and primitive forests, this ancient trail is geologically and strategically important.

### 3. Within Yuanjiang county

In those years of poor transport, the downtown of Yuanjiang county had a geographical advantage, where the ancient horse trail from Simao Pu'er northward to Eshan—Yuxi—capital city Kunming and southeastward to Shiping, Jianshui, Mengzi and Gejiu separated, so it naturally became the transfer place for the terminal circulation of Mohei rock salt and table salt became the bulk goods in Yuanjiang business and trade, bringing a big source of treasure.

### IV) Historical documents

Before Ming and Qing dynasties, the historical data on the salt of Yunnan were found in the historical books and records such as *Hanshu*, *Huayangguozhi*, *Houhanshu*, *Yunnan Annals* and *The Travels of Marco Polo*. In Tang and Song dynasties, Yunnan was under the rule of the separatist regime—Nanzhao Dali Kingdom (748~1250 AD). Since the rulers were the aristocrat serf owners of Bai ethnic group who had no written words, so no historical data were left over. After Yuan dynasty, especially in Ming and Qing dynasties, the special records and local prefecture and county annals on the salt wells of Yunnan gradually became more available, which was in agreement with the fact that the salt of Yunnan entered a greater development period in the late Ming and Qing dynasties. These special and relevant literatures on the ancient Yunnan's salt provide us with the valuable cultural and historical data on the study of Yunnan's salt culture.

## II. LONGITUDINAL DEPTH OF YUNNAN'S SALT CULTURAL RESOURCES

Apart from the above representative and visual material objects, what deeper connotations can the rich heritage of Yunnan's salt culture radiate? This is a question worth discussing in depth. Considering the train of thought from some experts and scholars, some in-depth discussions are proposed in the following aspects:

### I) Relationship between the ancient Yunnan's salt resources and the appearance of Yuanmou apes

Yunnan is one of the human birthplaces, where not only the fossil of the directly-related ancestors of human beings—*Ramapithecus*, but the fossil of Yuanmou apes before 1.7 million years was discovered, which lengthened the history of Chinese ancestors by almost a million years. According to the opinions of scholars, the application of fire and salt was indispensable for the development of human bodies, so Yuanmou apes naturally proved the abundance of ancient Yunnan's salt springs. We think since the animals had an instinct of sucking salt in the plenty of folklores, the higher grade animal in the evolution chain—anthropoid were naturally familiar with salt. Of course, this is just an inference.

### II) The status and function of ancient Yunnan's salt paper money in the economic and trade history of ancient Yunnan

Yunnan was rich in rock salt, but from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rock salt was mostly monopolized by the local authorities, so it was not easy for broad masses of ethnic groups to buy salt—special and indispensable food in daily life. Therefore, salt became a special commodity, which was not only a sort of consumer goods, but also a sort of ordinary equivalent. As a result, it naturally became paper money with the official seal and publicly circulated as "salt paper money" in some areas with relatively poor transport in Yunnan.

At the end of Ming dynasty and at the beginning of Qing dynasty, due to the increasingly socioeconomic development and the political uniform of Chinese nation, Yunnan's shell money gradually retired from its long historical stage, the salt paper money



and square hole copper coins were simultaneously applied instead, while the ethnic groups preferred the salt paper money. The salt paper money was still used in Lancang Lahu nationality area and Ximeng and Cangyuan Wa nationality areas even in the 1930s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **III) The influence of ancient Yunnan's salt development on the ancient socioeconomic and cultural development of Yunnan**

Along on the main route of ancient Yunnan's salt development, we might see the limelight of the ancient economic development in Yunnan, from the salt-making technology (chiseling well, collecting brine, frying and boiling salt making, etc.) to the transport and sales of salt (purchase, tax collection, transport and sales) and salt administration. The existing Yunnan's salt cultural resources undoubtedly are a living fossil of ancient Yunnan's economic history; the architecture, temple, school and folk custom kept in a Yunnan's salt ancient town are more than a living cultural history and a religious history; from the works of Yunnan's ancient scholars related to salt we can see a vivid social and living history.

### **IV) Relationship between the rise and fall of salt horse trail and the ancient road development**

The salt horse trail consisted of the main part of transport in ancient Yunnan. It was not only the horse trail and business path, but also the military route. The salt horse trail has provided the important source material to study the transport history of ancient Yunnan.

### **V) Relationship between Yunnan's ancient economy and ancient political and military affairs**

The control over the salt resources might determine the rise of a primitive tribe or a slavery country, influencing the relationship between the ruling and the submitting to ruling as well as the loyalty between the feudal lords and the central government. Struggling for the interest of salt was an important factor in the conflicts among the primitive tribes and in the ancient wars.

## **III. DEVELOPMENT AND CONCEPTION OF YUNNAN'S SALT CULTURAL RESOURCES**

As for the ancient Yunnan's salt cultural heritage, we should further enhance the study on the in-depth connotation on the basis of positive protection and let this ancient jade

emit its due luster. Currently, a good beginning has been made for this work in the main aspects as follows:

— Regulations of Yunnan Province on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Famous City, Town and Street were put into force on January 1, 2008. The ancient towns such as Heijing, Shiyang, Nuodeng and Shaxi have been protected and developed;

Heijing town was entitled as state-level historical and cultural famous town in 2005, appraised as ten famous towns of Yunnan province in 2006 and approved as state AAA scenic spot in 2007.

Shiyang ancient town was named as one of the three historical and cultural famous towns of Yunnan province in the first batch of nominations in 1995 and Confucius Temple inside the town is the provincial-level unit for the protection of historical relics.

In 2001, together with 4 historical and cultural architectural heritages including Beijing Great Wall Cultural Landscape, Shaxi was listed into the 2002 Protection List of 101 World Memorial Architectural Heritages and in 2002 Shaxi town was named as the provincial-level historical and cultural famous town.

In 2002 Nuodeng village was announced as "Provincial-level historical and cultural famous village" by the People's Government of Yunnan Province. On June 9, 2007, Nuodeng village of Nuodeng town in Yunlong county was awarded the title of Chinese historical and cultural famous village at the plate granting ceremony of the third batch of Chinese historical and cultural towns (villages).

— The experts and scholars of the institutions of higher learning in Yunnan are always filled with enthusiasm in their monographic studies on the ancient Yunnan's salt history and we have kept reading their papers; the followings are some of them:

Fang Guoyu, *The Rise and Fall of Lianran (Anning) Salt Wells*;

Dong Xianqing, *Reform and Changes of Salt Production Places in Yunnan*;

Lin Wenxun, *Nuodeng Village: A Story of A Salt Well Village's History and Culture*;

Li Zhengxiang, *Yunnan's Salt and Socioeconomic Development before Yuan Dynasty*;

Li Xingfu, *The Rise and Fall of Heijing Salt Industry*

Zhao Xiaoping, *Probe on the Circulation of Yunnan's Salt Paper Money in*

History;

— Historical Essay of Yunnan's Salt jointly compiled by the former Yunnan Salt Industry General Company of Yunnan Salt & Salt Chemical Co., Ltd. and Chenggong Municipal Salt History Museum with Huang Peilin and Zhong Changjiu as chief editors has drawn the detailed systematic veins of Yunnan's salt history and made a positive probe on the special cultural phenomenon of Yunnan's salt.

As for the colorful ancient Yunnan's salt cultural heritage, our studies seem to be scattered and slow. We shall take the study on ancient Yunnan's salt culture as a new horizon to systematically, deeply and consistently study Yunnan's ancient cultures and make positive contributions to prospering the academic research on Yunnan's ancient history and cultures and to serving the socioeconomic and cultural construction of Yunnan province. In order to achieve this goal, some suggestions are raised as follows:

1. Advise Yunnan Salt Association to mobilize all the social forces to prepare and establish a Yunnan's salt cultural research society, based on which a Yunnan's salt cultural study platform can be established to coordinate all the social forces to jointly study and discuss the cultural features contained in Yunnan's salt culture;
2. The research society shall try to obtain the support of cultural departments, the financial aid of enterprises and the participation of experts to conduct a thorough investigation on the existing Yunnan's salt cultural resources in batch and district, master the detailed resource distributions, positively introduce the special salt cultural resources of Yunnan, attract masses of salt cultural lovers to jointly probe the ancient Yunnan's salt culture and promote the study on Yunnan's salt culture;

3. Organize the experts to discuss the connotation and feature of Yunnan's salt culture, compile the study and development plan of Yunnan's salt culture and promote the research work of salt culture with purpose, plan and effectiveness;

4. Positively develop and utilize ancient Yunnan's salt cultural resources, develop the unique theme tourism and health preservation and leisure industry;

5. Probe the tendency of salt industry with the study on salt culture, including the direction and opportunity of salt industrial development, to serve the salt modernization;

6. Encourage various seminars on the salt culture and serve the harmonious development of socioeconomic and culture.

Ancient Yunnan's salt cultural resources are the treasures created and left by various ethnic groups with their lives and wisdoms in Yunnan. What has presented us is a brilliant jewel necklace connecting Yunnan's ancient salt towns with salt horse trails, which concentrates the course of ancient development in Yunnan and expects us to savor and explore!

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