

## **Whiter than Snow - Birth and Influence of the Huai Salt Culture**

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### **Abstract**

Spanning the ancient Huai River from south to north, extending from the estuary of the Yangtze River northward to Ganyu County, the Huai area is one of the oldest production areas of sea salt in China. “Huai Salt brings the highest benefit to China”. Thanks to the prosperity of Huai Salt, a unique culture of Huai Salt has come into being in its production area and sales area.

As the lifeblood of China, Huai Salt boasts a long history of culture. Since GUAN Zhong began to administer mountains and seas in the Spring and Autumn Period (771 to 476 BC), a system of monopoly of salt has been in effect. Most of the emperors in the past dynasties regarded the salt industry as a treasure, which could support their armies and empires. Salt tax became a national pillar and the salt administration penetrated every aspect of national economy and people's livelihood. The Culture of Huai Salt emerged in the production area of Huai and was spread to the sales areas of Huai Salt via transit lines, influencing all aspects of Chinese society with its unique phenomenon of cultural ecology.

From the perspective of system generation, cultural routes and cultural ecology, this thesis studies the emergence of the Circle of Huai Salt Culture and the extensive influence of Huai Salt Culture, reveals the interaction between its system and culture and the economy and society, and proves that Huai Salt Culture boasts a unique resource value and legacy value, as a valuable cultural

heritage of human beings.

Salt, essence of the sea and origin of all flavors, deeply penetrates humanity and society. As one inseparable part in China's 5,000-year long history, the salt culture had played a significant role in shaping the societal, economic, cultural and military features in ancient China. Zuo Shuzhen, an expert on salt administration in the Republican period, stated in his work, A History of Salt Administration in China: "The world's salt industry started in China. China's salt industry has the longest history, which stemmed all the way back to the reign of Emperor ShenNong. A man called SUSHI first boiled sea water to get salt. He was regarded the founder of salt-making, and his method passed along to later generations." Salterns in the salt marshes in the Huaihe River region are the most time-honored producers of sea salt in China. Described as "Huai Salt reaped the largest profit of all", the prosperity of Huai Salt gave birth to a very unique Huai Salt Culture thriving in its production and sales areas.

## 1. Concept of the Huai Salt Culture

Culture is a generalization of all the positive results gained in production, consumption and management. The Huai Salt Culture, likewise, reflects all the achievements created and accumulated by the salt-making people, salt merchants and salt officials in their work and life, pivoting on Huai Salt production, transport, sales, tax levy and smuggling activities in a vast area over time. The Huai Salt Culture is a comprehensive concept that entails historical, geographical, generalized and multi-dimensional ideas which can be both material and spiritual, tangible and intangible, and which represent both the past and present, the Culture per se and its derivatives.

## 2. Birth of the Huai Salt Culture

The development of Huai Salt is clearly recorded in history books. It was mentioned for the first time in the record of Lord King LIU Bi of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE - CE 24). The salt industry then scaled up in the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), began to rise up in the mid-Tang Dynasty (618-907), (persons relevant were financial reformists DIWU Qi and LIU Yan), flourished in the Song and Yuan Dynasties (960-1368), prospered in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), reached its peak in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), transformed during the Republican period (1912-1949), rejuvenated since the founding of New China, and was further promoted in the new era. The Huai Salt Culture, interdependent on the salt industry, had too been making progress in a long span of 2,000 years. As a unique and professional cultural phenomenon, the Huai Salt Culture burgeoned in the Western Han Dynasty, initially developed in the Song and Tang Dynasties, ramped up in the Ming Dynasty, reached its maturity in the Qing Dynasty, continued its legacy after New China was founded and gained growing momentum in the new era. Its birth and growth, answering the call of times, required several prerequisites, both subjective and objective, and attributed to multiple elements of temporal, geographical, political, military and random causes. The visible part of the Huai Salt Culture consists of its gigantic scale, quality commodity, well-known brand, prominent contributions and a leading position; while the invisible part is composed of the elegant personality of its people, trustworthy business integrity, meticulous transport and sales services, as well as its profound influence in the society. Classical books on the Huai Salt Culture, including A Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District and Jiangsu

Province Salt Industry Chronicles are intensive presentations of the material and moral achievements of the Huai Salt Culture. The Huai merchant consortium, which was formed and cemented during the late Ming to Qing Dynasty, sent a loud signal that the Huai Salt Culture had come to its prime time.

### 3. Contents of the Huai Salt Culture

#### (1) Culture of Systems

Minister GUAN Zhong of Kingdom Qi during the Spring and Autumn period (BCE 770-476) proposed that the State should take control of salt, iron and other important natural resources including mountains, forests and lakes. Ever since his idea was adopted, the salt industry had always been under the monopoly of the State, playing a part in a controlled commodity economy. The law stipulated that the State owned all the salt resources, and designated special government agencies to exploit salt resources according to set plans. The only exception was a short span of 130 years in the Sui and early Tang Dynasties when no tax was levied at all. The monopoly system or the taxation system on salt did not show much of substantial difference either in the Huai Salt area or other salt-producing areas across the country. Minister CAI Jing of the Northern Song Dynasty created a method to issue salt certificates, which had been thriving for over 800 years through the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties. The salt certificates were value bills which could be claimed at the salt authority as long as salt merchants paid grains or taxes according to the law. They served at the same time as duty-paid certificates, vouchers for drawing salt from salterns,

and credentials to transport salt on fixed routes and to sell salt at designated markets. To guarantee the compliance of the salt merchants, the salt certificates were complemented by a series of systems including sampling examination of salt packets, verification of salt certificates, shipment check, handing in salt certificates for cancellation, salt tax report and evaluation of officials and merchants, as well as punitive measures for violation of the law.

The legal status of Huai Salt was particularly highlighted during the 300-year long reign of the Ming Dynasty. Firstly, Huai Salt was regarded the national paradigm to extend the practice of salt certificates to all other salt-making areas across the country. In A History of China's Salt Industry's appendix is a copy of salt certificate used in the Liangzhe salt-producing district during the Ming Dynasty, on which was printed the full text of the Ten Regulations on Salt Certificates by the Imperial Court that used Huai Salt as model. It said how Lianghuai transport authority should manage the production, procurement, transport, sales and anti-smuggling of Huai Salt, and what kind of punishment (even death penalty) would be executed if anyone violated the law or was engaged in salt smuggling. Secondly, the Law on Salt Convoy which dominated in the late Ming and Qing Dynasties to early Republican period, was initiated in Lianghuai District and later promoted nationwide, emphasizing the State's monopoly on salt transport and sales.

The Huai Salt system as a national standard-setting model during the Ming and Qing Dynasties was also recorded in the antique classics. It was stated in A Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District in the reign of Emperor Qian Long that the salt law prevailed in Lianghuai District set the benchmark for the salt laws across the country.

## (2) Salt Merchants Culture

Huai merchants enjoyed the best reputation of all in the business circle in the late Ming and Qing Dynasties. The form of Huai merchant consortium symbolized the maturity of the Huai Salt Culture. Due to the reform on salt law in the late Ming Dynasty, salt merchants who used to be organized to deliver grain to the frontier garrisons were divided into “frontier merchants” who paid grain to get salt certificates, “inland merchants” who draw salt from salterns using salt certificates, and “water merchants” who sold salt at ports. Subsequently, salt merchants moved with capital from the frontier region to inland areas, since they were no longer required to deliver grain to the frontier garrisons, but to pay silver currency instead to the Lianghuai transport authority to get their salt certificates. Salt merchants operated at south Huaihe River region conglomerated in Yangzhou, while those operated at north Huaihe River region lived together in Huai’an.

Huai merchants were sharp-witted in nature; they were visionary and decisive. Since salt was so significant that it fell under strict control by the government, Huai merchants kept a close watch on salt policy (price policy in particular) by leveraging their good social skills to deal with government officials. Their relationship with salt administrators was once so close that they might have a say in the salt policy-making process in their heyday. In the Qing Dynasty, Huai merchants valued their honor and social rank so much that they always stood ready to support the State. They would feel shameful if they were outperformed by others in this sense. Compliment from the Emperor and conferment of a rank of nobility or an official title were regarded the highest honor of all. Huai merchants were always among the first to respond to the call of the Imperial Court once

the Treasury fell short for military manoeuvres or major constructions of water conservancy. Each time they would compete with one other to donate at least 10,000 taels of silver, sometimes as much as one to two million taels of silver to the government. While at other times, Huai merchants were generous contributors to charity. They would not hesitate to donate whatever they could to help the famine refugees, rescue the shipwrecks, build schools, adopt orphans, set up elderly care centers, build lifeboats, roads, and bridges, offer medicines or coffins to the needed, help in weddings or funerals, pay debts or taxes for others, and redeem the sold property and children for the impoverished.

According to the estimate by SONGYingxing in his An Unofficial Discussion on Salt Administration, the total asset owned by Qin (Shaanxi), Jin (Shanxi) and Hui (Huizhou) merchants altogether was a bit over 30 million taels of silver, which was much dwarfed by that owned by Huai merchants. As for Huai merchants, those who were financially solid possessed over 10 million taels of silver each; next to them were those who had at least one million taels of silver each; and those who owned less than one million taels of silver were called “petite merchants”. There were about some one hundred households of rich people from Shanxi and Huixi who did business in the Huaihe River region, whose assets accumulated to 70-80 million taels of silver. According to An Authentic Record of Emperor GaoZong of the Qing Dynasty, the Ministry of Revenue in the year 1772 (when the Qing Dynasty was in its heyday) had altogether only 78 million taels of silver in reserve, which could easily be outnumbered by the financially powerful Huai merchants who indeed were “richer than a King”.

The Huai merchants as a group were very gentlemen like in style, equipped with both talent and virtue. Their benevolence and righteousness were widely witnessed as they always stood ready to serve the country, organized civil groups to make friends with celebrities, printed and collected classic books, built academies and schools, bought calligraphies and paintings from the impoverished talents, advocated and supported development of opera and hosted charitable events. Statistics in A Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District revealed that during a period of 134 years from 1671-1804, Huai merchants donated 39.8222 million taels of silver and 351,000 dans of grain (1 dan is about 62.5 kg) to meet military needs. Huai merchants made great contributions to the consolidation of the imperial regime and social stability in the Qing Dynasty.

### (3) Garden Culture

Someone in the Qing Dynasty once commented on places of interest in southeast China and said, “Hangzhou outstands in lakes and hills, Suzhou in markets and shops, and Yangzhou in gardens and pavilions. These three places stand like the three legs of a tripod and are neck and neck.” In the Notes of the Geyuan Garden, LIU Fenggao wrote, “Guangling boasts the best gardens and is well known for them in southeast China. An official (of the Qing Dynasty) inherited the tradition and settled down in a garden. He planted trees and flowers according to the four seasons and worked, feasted and did all kinds of activities there.” Located on the waterside north of the Yangtze River, Yangzhou was near to the place of production of Taihu Stones in southern part of the Yangtze River. The land was spacious and vacant along the Baozhanghe River. Moreover, salt merchants usually had the luxury of time and money to satiate their good taste of art. Out of these



reasons, Yangzhou had a tradition of digging earth to make lakes and piling up earth to make hills and thereafter building gardens since the Tang Dynasty. There used to be a saying that “there are less horse-drawn carriages than ships, and gardens as many as houses.” Emperors (of the Qing Dynasty) used to make inspection trips to the south. This ignited the passion of salt merchants to build scenic spots and preparing themselves for emperors’ arrival. The prime time for Yangzhou gardens was between the year 1785 to 1805 during the Qing Dynasty. In its heyday, there were Twenty-four Scenes well-known in Yangzhou, including the Piling Stones, the Winding Water in Xiyuan Garden, the Great View on Hong Bridge, Yechun Poetry Society, Spring Willows on the Long Embankment, Breeze-blown Lotus Fragrance, the Building with Colored Glaze by the Water, the Building of Four Bridges in Misty Rain, the Moon over Chuntai Terrace, and the White Pagoda under Clouds in a Fine Day. Yangzhou gardens, in the Qing Dynasty, were large in size, great in number, delicate in structure, diverse in function and unique in style. As salt merchants could afford the land, building materials, master designers and constructors, their gardens could be built with high standards and attract popularity. Back then, a galaxy of master architects for piling artificial hills was gathered in Yangzhou and Huai’an. The flourish of gardens had driven development of many other trades. Gardens could not do without trees and flowers, so the trade of trees and flowers prospered. Trees and flowers needed trimming, cultivation, maintenance and renewal, so jobs were created and the environment was improved to become greener. Couplets needed to be composed and inscribed for gardens, so poetry and calligraphy developed. The furnishing and decoration of gardens pushed carpentry and carving techniques to improve. The

construction and maintenance of gardens relied on great wealth, so the fate of a garden was closely bonded with the rise and fall of a salt merchant. A great number of Yangzhou gardens was left behind to this day, such as Hunan Provincial Guild Hall, Geyuan Garden, Geyuan Garden, Wang's Little Garden, Heyuan Garden, Salt Merchant Lu's Residence, to name but a few.

#### (4) Food Culture

Located on the Jianghuai Plain, Huaiyang region is endowed with four distinctive seasons, interconnected rivers and lakes, flourishing agriculture and rich aquatic products. It is known as a "land of fish and rice". Possessed of great wealth, salt merchants valued cuisine a great deal. In their opinions, cuisine was more of a display of personal identity and family prestige, or even a tool of making acquaintance with the powerful and the noble, chasing fame and collecting wealth than merely a necessity for subsistence and satisfaction of the appetite. According to the Records of Yangzhou in the Reign of Emperor Kang Xi, "In the area north of the Yangtze River, Yangzhou boasts the best delicacies. For a banquet, tables are carpeted with dishes, while female dancers dance to the music. You can find delicacies of various kinds on a feast, which costs a fortune." On large tables, delicacies from land and sea were individually served by maids, and money was spent like running water for a feast. During a time of national peace and order, people tended to live a lavish life, and salt merchants were in the vanguard. There was a widespread saying, which was, "While water is packed in the wrapper in the morning, skin is covered with water in the evening", to describe this affluent life style. Wrapper-packed water implies having steamed dumplings filled with minced meat and gravy, and water-covered skin refers to taking a bath in a

common bathing pool. A great number of salt merchants used to spread delicacies of various kinds over a table for each single meal. Among them, especially worth mentioning is the large variety of Yangzhou snacks. In salt tycoons' families, "family cooks", who were professional and deft cooks, were employed. Salt merchants and salt officials were not only gourmets, but also cooking artists. WU Kai, who was a salt merchant, invented "pastry with clam", and "sweetened pastry with meat", and "Yulianchui Alcohol" were also his creation. TONG Lian, a salt official, "cooks the best in Hanshang". TONG Yuejian, a salt merchant, recorded Huaiyang dishes in detail and composed the Collection of Mixing Ingredients in a Cooking Vessel. Salt merchants also used the opportunity of traveling here and there to learn from and draw upon cuisine of other places and imitated those dishes when they returned home. There are six features in the food culture of salt merchants: grand scale, elegant surroundings, exquisite tableware, fresh and novel food, exotic ingredients, female dancers and music adding to the fun. KONG Shangren (1648 - 1718), a poet and playwright, recorded a banquet which was hosted by a high-ranking official of Yangzhou and in which he participated in the poem A Banquet with Performances in Weiyang (i.e., Yangzhou). This lavish style of dinner exerted an influence on both the Imperial Court and the common people in Lianghuai District, and even in the whole country, and Huaiyang Cuisine with a distinct mark of the food culture of Huai merchants gradually came into being.

#### (5) Opera Culture

The hundreds of local operas throughout ages of a dozen of representative schools merged and emerged to become Peking Opera, the quintessence of Chinese culture, during the reign of

Emperor Jia Qing and Emperor Dao Guang of the Qing Dynasty. In bringing Peking Opera into being, historic contributions were made by salt merchants in Lianghuai District. The Department of Transport in Lianghuai District used to finance theatrical troupes for full-scale operas all the year round. Most of the salt tycoons used to support “family troupes” according to their financial capacity, both for amusing themselves, and for entertaining visiting officials and guests. The opera could add to the fun at dinner, and free hosts and guests from sitting around when a dinner was being expected. The first theatrical troupe was established and financially supported by salt merchant XU Shangzhi. Later on, other salt merchants like HUANG Yuande, ZHANG Da’an, WANG Qiyuan, CHENG Qiande, HONG Chongshi and JIANG Chun also had theatrical troupes established one after another. The troupes established and supported by XU Shangzhi, HONG Chongshi and JIANG Chun were called Laoxu Troupe, Dahong Troupe and Deyin Troupe, respectively. HUANG Yingtai, a general merchant of salt, used to own all of the theatrical troupes with two or three hundred performers and staff. It costed a fortune to support such a number of performers and staff throughout the year, and only salt tycoons in Yangzhou could afford it. In the year 1790, to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Emperor Qian Long’s birth, the Sanqing Troupe with an Erhuang Tone performer GAO Langting as the principal player were called up by the Imperial Court to put on a performance in Beijing. Thereafter, Sixi Troupe, Hechun Troupe and Chuntai Troupe were also summoned and went to Beijing in succession. It was known to history as “Anhui Troupes into the Capital” as these four above-mentioned troupes were “Anhui Troupes”. It was a significant milestone in the history of Chinese opera. These Four Great Anhui Troupes

kept on putting on performances in Beijing. Through cooperation, exchanges and integration with Hubei-originated Han Tone players in Beijing, their opera evolved and gave birth to Peking Opera, a representative genre of Chinese opera, during the reign of Emperor Jia Qing and Emperor Dao Guang of the Qing Dynasty. Peking Opera, the quintessence of Chinese art, was born out of local Chinese operas of various kinds and grew up to become mature. In the process, Huai merchants made important contributions to its incubation and birth.

#### (6) Academic Culture

Affluent financial assets were a spur to quality education. As early as in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), HU Yuan (983 - 1059) of Guangling (present Taizhou) was known to all as an educator. His educational theory exerted a great influence on the salt region of Lianghuai District and even the educational circles of the whole country. In the Ming Dynasty, WANG Gen (1483 - 1541), a salt worker-turned philosopher, emerged. He used to be a salt worker in Anfengchang of Huainan and didn't have the opportunity to read the Great Learning and the Analects of Confucius until in his forties and fifties. He then took WANG Shouren, an accomplished philosopher of the Ming Dynasty, as his teacher, yet constantly disapproved of his teaching theory. He persisted in giving lectures to his followers, including woodcutters, pottery makers and salt workers, till the last days of his life. The proposition he proposed, "Tao was in the everyday life of the ordinary people", played a positive role in the history of ancient Chinese thought. Thereby, he became the founder of "Taizhou School" of philosophy in the Ming Dynasty.

Salt merchants in Lianghuai District tended to favor culture and education during the Ming and

Qing Dynasties after getting rich. Huai merchants developed Yangzhou into a cultural and educational center of southeast China. By virtue of salt merchants' financial power, Yangzhou Academy of Classical Learning was restored and renovated at a fast pace in the Qing Dynasty after a decline at the end of the Ming Dynasty. In A Chorography of Academies of Classical Learning in Jiangsu, LIU Yizheng wrote, "The profits of salt in Lianghuai District topped the country, and these profits were used to finance academies. Therefore, the academies in Yangzhou were equally matched with those in the capital city of Jiangning Province. Among them, the three academies of Anding, Meihua and Guangling were the most well-known. People both inside and outside the province were allowed to study there." In the 30 salterns in Lianghuai District, academies of classical learning and community schools were also established to provide education to the children of salt workers. They were mostly funded by salt merchants and the Department of Transport for Salt. Salt merchants were affluent, and they hired first-class scholars to manage academies in Yangzhou, so men of letters and artists were gathered in this place, and cultural activities were brought to the peak in a short time. Thanks to the emphasis on education by salt merchants and salt officials, a galaxy of outstanding people came forward in Yangzhou and Huai'an during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. During the 273 years between 1371 and 1643, there were 106 metropolitan graduates and 133 provincial graduates among salt merchants in Lianghuai District. During the 157 years between 1646 and 1802, there were 139 metropolitan graduates and 208 provincial graduates. Yangzhou and Huai'an became well-known places of developed culture throughout the country. Scholars gathered in Yangzhou learned from each

other by exchanging views and formed the Yangzhou School, a famous academic community in the Qing Dynasty.

Huai Salt community took the lead in composed chorography in the country. In the Song Dynasty, CHEN Ye composed A Record of Boiling Seawater in Tongzhou, which served as a pioneer and example for the Picture of Stewing Waves written by CHEN Chun, a salt official in Xiashachang of Liangzhe District in the Yuan Dynasty. During the 400 or so years between Emperor Hong Zhi's reign of the Ming Dynasty and Emperor Guang Xu's reign of the Qing Dynasty, Lianghuai District formulated or amended regulations and records of salt for seven times, which was a great event in the history of ancient Chinese salt culture.

#### (7) The Huai Salt Literature

Salt merchants in Lianghuai District admired and advocated Confucianism. Apart from learning Confucian classics and writing poems and essays, they attached great importance to education by showing respect to teachers and receiving scholars with great courtesy. As a result, the Huai'an and Yangzhou region became the important cultural center in southeast China during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, a magnet to scholars far and wide.

The prosperity of the Huai Salt Literature could be attributed to Qing Emperors' tours to the south, especially when the prominent in the world of letters assumed office in Yangzhou. The first to mention was WANG Shizhen (1634-1711), born in Xincheng, Shandong Province, an advanced scholar (Jinshi, a graduate who passed the triennial court exam) during Emperor Shun Zhi's reign and served as tuiguan, an official responsible for criminal cases in Yangzhou's jurisdiction. He highlighted the "spirit" of poetry and portrayed the scenery in his poems as if he was painting. He

enjoyed a high reputation and became the next leading figure in the poetic circle after QIAN Qianyi, with a lot of disciples coming to learn from him. According to the Collection of Yangzhou Painted Boats, "He performed his official duties in the daytime and met with poets at night." In 1664 (the third year of Emperor Kang Xi's reign), he organized the poets' gathering called the "ritual on Hong Bridge" in Yangzhou, which attracted many renowned poets. He personally prosed 40 jueju (a poem of four lines) to liven things up. This gathering of poets was so influential that it was later listed as one of the major events in the cultural history of the Qing Dynasty and a symbol of the cultural prosperity in Yangzhou. WANG thus was regarded a model for salt officials served in Yangzhou afterwards. The second one was LU Jianzeng (1690 - 1768), born in Dezhou, Shandong Province, an advanced scholar during Emperor Kang Xi's reign and served as the salt comptroller of Lianghuai District for two terms. Taught and guided by WANG Shizhen and TIAN Wen, he was also famous for composing poems. He valued talents regardless of their economic status and humbled himself in making friends with the poor but talented poets. He admired the literary virtue of SU Shi (a famous poet in the Song Dynasty) and built a pavilion in SU's name inside his official residence to discuss poems with poets. By getting acquainted with nearly ten thousand scholars and poets around the country, he gained reputation for hosting literary events in regions south of the Yangtze River.

The major genre of the Huai Salt Literature is inscriptional prose. Works recorded in A Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District during the reign of Emperor Jia Jing include: Record of the East Garden in Zhenzhou by OUYANG Xiu, Record of Zhang Family's Ancestral Temple by FAN Zhongyan, Tablet Inscription by Salt Comptroller by HE Mengchun, Record of Chayuan in Shigang, Record of Chayuan in Dongtai, and Record of Zhongxiao Academy in



Shigang by CUI Tong, Record of Patrol Division of Mt. Xiulang by LIN Hui, Record of Reinforcing Fan Gong Dike by ZHANG Zan, and etc. Poetry is very representative in the Huai Salt Literature. Classical works include: Wife of Salt Merchants by BAI Juyi in the Tang Dynasty, Record of the Compass by WEN Tianxiang in the Song Dynasty, The Journey of Salt Merchants by YANG Weizhen in the Yuan Dynasty, Yu Zhong Chang by SHEN Menglin in the Ming Dynasty, Twenty Poems About Salt by XIE Yuanhuai in the Qing Dynasty, and Song of Salt-cooking Men by XU Zonggan, to list but a few. There were few novels themed at Huai Salt and Huai merchants, but many novels did refer to Huai Salt and Huai merchants in contents. The landscape in Lianyungang was vividly described in the Journey to the West written by WU Cheng'en. As mentioned in Chapter One "The Divine Root Conceives and the Spring Breaks Forth, As the Heart's Nature Is Cultivated, the Great Way Arises" He saw humans by the coast, fishing, hunting geese, gathering clams, and extracting salt."—actual life scene of salt-producing people in north Huaihe River. A village named Guanli located in the southern foot of Yuantai Mountain in Lianyungang was mentioned in LUO Guanzhong's Romance of the Three Kingdoms, which remained a salt-producing village by the sea till the 18<sup>th</sup> century. SHI Nai'an, the author of Water Margin, was once the military counsellor for ZHANG Shicheng, the leader of the uprising of salt-producing people at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. He wrote the book based on the folklores of heroes with the uprising as the main clue. The Scholars was an excellent satiric novel written by WU Jingzi which told some stories about salt merchants in Lianghuai District. LI Ruzhen, the author of Flowers in the Mirror, followed his brother who served as tax collector and lived in the salt tax office in Banbu Town of Huaibei and Caoyan Town of Huainan. The exotic sceneries of the sea, the living environment of salt field and the extravagant lifestyle of salt merchants became the inspiration of

his novels. With the financial support from his brother, he finally completed *Flowers in the Mirror*. CAO Xueqin, the author of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, was born in a salt merchant's family. His grandfather CAO Yin and great uncle LI Xu served as government salt superintendents during Emperor Kang Xi's reign in the Qing Dynasty.

#### (8) The Huaiyang Arts

The Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou is the name for a group of eight Chinese painters active in the 18<sup>th</sup> century representing the school of art in the Huaiyang region during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, including WANG Shishen (1686-1759), HUANG Shen (1687-1768), JIN Nong (1687-1764), GAO Xiang (1688-1753), LI Shan (1686-1756), ZHENG Xie (1693-1765), LI FangYing (1696-1755) and LUO Pin (1733-1799). They took flowers, landscapes and humans as major subjects and followed no set form of painting. They were all good at prosing, calligraphy and seal cutting, stressing on the integration of poetry, calligraphy and painting. They were known as the Eight Eccentrics for rejecting the orthodox ideas of painting. They became famous in Yangzhou because of the advantageous conditions for cultivating the market of calligraphy and painting. Firstly, Huai merchants were wealthy and valued talents. HUA Yan, JIN Nong, and WANG Shishen were received with great courtesy by the MA brothers; HUANG Shen was received by the LI family; CHEN Zhuan was supported by the salt merchants including the XIANG family, CHENG Mengxing and JIANG Chun throughout his life. Secondly, Huai merchants valued culture. With high academic and artistic attainments, Huai merchants understood and appreciated arts. Thirdly, Huai merchants needed to decorate their gardens and make friends with scholars inside the gardens. The gardens were the places where salt merchants hosted banquets to treat scholars and where the Eight Eccentrics created and produced works. There were records of LI Mian, LUO Pin, and

GAO Xiang writing poems at those gardens. Fourthly, the salt officials in Lianghuai District honored worthy men of letters. ZHENG Xie was appreciated by the salt comptroller LU Jianzeng, while the "ritual on Hong Bridge" was an important way for salt officials to social with scholars. Fifthly, Lianghuai District boasted a developed market economy and advanced ideas on commodity. In Yangzhou, the Eight Eccentrics could sell their calligraphy and paintings with tag price without being criticized of being "money chasers". Huai merchants' passion and investment in calligraphy and painting fueled the development of the art market in Yangzhou. The high price and large demand attracted many scholars, supported the livelihood of painters and nurtured the art development in that region.

#### 4. The Essence of the Huai Salt Culture

The essence of the Huai Salt Culture can be analyzed and measured from multiple aspects including the relationship between the Huai Salt and Huai merchant, salt taxes and profits, serving the country and helping the people, as well as the salt industry and the society.

LI Bai, a famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, wrote that "the Wu salt is as beautiful as a flower and as white as snow" in praise of the quality of the Huai Salt. According to The Summary of the Salt History quoted by A Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District during the reign of Emperor GuangXu, "The salt of Huainan that is boiled on plates tastes the best among all types of salt in the world." According to ZHANG Jian (the top scholar during Emperor Guang Xu's reign in the Qing Dynasty), "The salt in Huainan has the best quality, the salt in Sichuan takes the second place, and the salt in eastern Zhejiang Province ranks the third." (ZHANG Jizi's Opinions on Salt) According to LU Jianying's report (viceroys of Liangjiang District responsible for salt management) to Emperor DaoGuang, "The color and taste of Liang salt in Huainan is the finest under heaven,

unparalleled by the salt in Fujian, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Sichuan Province. (A Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District during the reign of Emperor Guang Xu)

As for the contribution of Huai Salt to national finance, "The taxation on the salt industry in Lianghuai District accounted for half of the national revenue while the profit and loss of the salt industry was crucial to the national economy and people's livelihood." (The Inscriptional Records of the Salt Institute by LI Fayuan in the Qing Dynasty) "Salt administration is crucial to people's livelihood just like fire, water and grain, while the salt administration in Lianghuai District tops the world." (The prologue of Rectified Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District by Emperor Yong Zheng)

The philosophy behind the citations above is the "Spirit of Huai Salt", the "Style of Confucian Merchants", and the "Manner of Huai Merchants", which is, to take the lead and strive for excellence. Since DIWU Qi created Wu salt in the mid-Tang Dynasty, the salt in Lianghuai District represented by Hailingjian, Yanchengjian and Lianshuichang had been leading the national salt industry in quality and quantity. The same is true for the formulation of salt legislation, the compilation of salt chorography, the construction of gardens, the taxation, and the pursuit of Confucianism. "The salt comptroller in Lianghuai District tops the six salt comptrollers across the country." (Record of Re-dredging the Canal by QUE Ming Shi) Other salt districts all took Huai Salt as the model. "The Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District sets the benchmark for the salt industry in China." (The prologue of A Chorography of Salt Industry in Lianghuai District in Emperor Qian Long's reign) While the demeanor of salt merchants in Huaiyang region set the example in the business world around China. The temperament and customs of Huai merchants influenced not only the eastern region under the jurisdiction of Yangzhou and Huai'an, but also

the traditional sales area of Huai Salt and the whole nation.

## 5. Cultural Influence

As the Huai Salt Culture exerted influence through its production, transportation and distribution, the term “Huai Salt Cultural Circle” came into being in ethnology. The production and distribution of sea salt nurtured coastal towns and cities and sped up their development. Since people within the production area of salt along the Huaihe River depended their living on the neighboring sea and salt-making, salt industry became the pillar one. Other sectors thrived on salt industry, creating economic returns and boosting social progress through services to salt production, transportation, and distribution.

Strict salt laws and regulations on selling were established to guard against malpractices before sophisticated salt administrations were accordingly placed in salt production areas. The trading of large amount of salt brought tremendous business opportunities for various sectors and thus, economic and social prosperities within the salt production area. Construction industry, housing rental services, real estate sector, and intermediary agencies developed as salt administration needed offices and salt agents, rented premises to stay. Catering and hotel industry were booming as a large number of salt merchants came from different places. The trading of salt in large amount nurtured private banks, pawnshops, broker services, transport and shipment industry. To satisfy salt merchants, especially those who lived extravagant life, industries, shops and services of various kinds thrived, including culinary industry, the trading of daily necessities and imported goods, jewelry shops, tailor shops, barber shops, bathhouses, performances and plays, gambling houses, pleasure quarters, antique shops, art stores, consulting services, even fortune-telling.

Other services from matchmaking, wedding and burial ceremony, child delivery, private school education, travel services to mail services, armed escort and guard services, temple building and maintenance, and appeal and arbitration services were also derived to meet people's need.

Under ripple effects as such, the commercial, transportation, and service sector all thrived. Towns and cities started to take shape in the mid-Tang Dynasty when DIWU Qi and LIU Yan set up salt-regulatory bodies in source areas of salt, entered crucial stage of development in the Yuan Dynasty when superintendents of salt production were appointed in replacement of salt supervisors, expanded and grew in the 550 year-long Ming and Qing Dynasties before organic counties, townships, and villages were ultimately established in the Republican period and during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

In the 2000 year-long history starting from the Han and Tang Dynasty, there were a number of major cities and districts thrived and prospered through running or regulating the distribution of Huai Salt, including the city of Yangzhou, Huai'an, Taizhou, Yancheng, and Nantong as well as Haizhou District of Jiangsu Province and Hankou District of Hubei Province.

The prosperity of some small and medium-sized cities such as Guazhou, Yizheng, and Shi'eryu was in close relation with salt transportation. The day that marked the first salt transport in large quantities of each year was considered a big festival as residents all rushed to riverside to see the weighing and transport of salt under the supervision of the salt administrator.

Cities and towns like Lianshui (Huai'an branch of Lianghuai salt transport authority) and Dongtai (Taizhou branch of Lianghuai salt transport authority) developed due to the stationary of government department of salt transportation. The development of Dafeng District was closely

related to the demolition of salt-making stoves and land cultivation.

The imprint of the Huai Salt Culture could be found in the development trajectory of all the cities mentioned above. Lives and social ethos in Provinces like Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Anhui, and Henan, having been the sales destination for 950 years from the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, were more or less influenced by the Huai Salt Culture. Evidence could be found in Zhuzhici--ancient folk songs created by scholars depicting local customs and people's life. The Huai Salt Culture has become part of these local cultures, which evolved and were passed on through time.

## 6. Conclusion

Huai merchants always stood out among businessmen of their times. Those Huai merchants engaged in salt production and distribution differ from other businessmen in that their consideration on people's needs and the salt taxation required to sustain country's mechanism went before their own interests. Huai merchants should give to and gain from the society and work with the State for win-win results, placing the need of the country and its people on top of everything. This was the principle that salt merchants in Lianghuai District always uphold. The positive image of Huai merchants and the importance of the Huai Salt Culture in commerce-based ancient civilization should be highlighted.

In the long history of China's feudal society, whenever disasters, natural or man-made, befell the country and its people, Huai merchants were the first ones to be thought of and resorted to for help. They proved themselves to be the ones that the country and the people could rely on and trust.

The culture of Huai Salt and Huai merchants was passed on for more than 2000 years starting from the Han and Tang Dynasty, weakened at times but never died. It was a never-ceasing song sung through time.

Huai Salt and Huai merchants were always the leader in China's salt industry, be it in old days when production and supply must be guaranteed for the stability and prosperity of the society and the people or in modern times when absorption of overcapacity, adaptation to market economy, and supply of new and better salt products were required. In most of the time, Huai Salt and Huai merchants acted as the pioneer and major force for China's salt industry and therefore, could be regarded as a beacon followed whose lights we could trace back to the beginning of salt industry and paradigms that marked the progress of China's salt industry which, by studying, we could understand the history.

Alongside the Slender West Lake of Yangzhou, former residence of Huai merchants has long been witnessing visitors come and go. Sculptures of Huai merchants along the canal of the ancient town of Hexia in Huai'an attracted tourists from all over the country. The exhibits in Yancheng Museum reminded people of historical events and figures in salt industry. Stories of salt transport and cultivation were still told in Dafeng. The dock for salt weighing remained at the riverside in Taizhou. The imprint that the great entrepreneur ZHANG Jian had left could still be discovered at the coastal side of Lv'si in Nantong. There is no one in Dongtai that doesn't know the three Ministers who used to serve as salt administrators—YAN Shu, LVYijian, and FANZhongyan in the Song Dynasty nor one in Chaoyang unaware of salt producers' revolution. The time-honored Huai Salt Culture, rich in content and profound in influence, cannot and will not be forgotten.

Huai'an, due to its large storage and production volume of quality rock salt, is taking the lead in



well and rock salt industry and building itself into a new salt center of the 21<sup>st</sup> century China. The song of Huai Salt and Huai merchants' spirit, old and young, is still sung today.

Jiangsu Province Salt Industry Group Co., Ltd inherits the culture of Huai Salt and Huai merchants. Its main businesses include the production and sales of salt products and chemical products, trade, health products development, transportation and real economy investment. The total asset value registered RMB 17 billion. The annual output of salt and chemical salt products reached six million tons and sales volume of cooking salt, one million tons. The company provides safe cooking salt to more than 200 million people. Its corporate credit level was rated AA+, the highest among all salt industries at provincial-level.

The Group has a state-level enterprise technology center. The core technology of its synchronized production of salt, alkali, and calcium was granted with patent for innovation and has won the National Award of Science and Technology as well as the first prize of science and technology award of China National Light Industry Council. In 2012, the trade mark of Huai Salt was recognized as a well-known trade mark in China. The company has been listed among the top 100 companies in China's light industry and the top 50 companies in China's light industry and food industry for many years running. Brands such as Jingshen and Jiangsu Salt under the company's umbrella were famous trademarks in Jiangsu.