

Birth and Influence of the Huai Salt Culture

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1. Concept of the Huai Salt Culture

- 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.

2.Birth of the Huai Salt Culture

- 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.

3.Contents of the Huai Salt Culture

(1) 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. 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.

(2) 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.

3. Contents of the Huai Salt Culture

(3) Garden Culture

- 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.

(4) The Huaiyang Arts

- The Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou is the name for a group of eight Chinese painters active in the 18th century representing the school of art in the Huaiyang region during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. They became famous in Yangzhou because of the advantageous conditions for cultivating the market of calligraphy and painting.

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.
- 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.

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.
- 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.
- 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 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.



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Thanks!