

## Mainland Scenery VII

Salt Wells and Fields of Mangkang County, situated in the Changdu region in the southeast of the Tibet Autonomous Region, adjacent to Nord Yunnan Plateau, is an important relay station of the Ancient Tea Horse Road (Cha Ma Gu Dao) which gave access to the Tibetan Area from Yunnan in the ancient times. According to historical record, the activity of brine evaporation started during the Tang Dynasty where the craft of manual brine evaporation has sustained and is still practiced today. Salt wells and fields are distributed in the east and west coast of the Lancang River.

The salt fields are pillared in wooden canopies. Depending on the terrain where wood is used for pillars, a salt field is formed in a square-like bedding tamped with soil.

In the olden days, salt workers needed to carry a wooden bucket with an approximate of 50 cattles of salt water on their back and went down to the brine wells along the Lancang River to collect salt water and then clambered up to the water storage ponds in the heights where the content could be dried and intensified. The content was then poured onto the bedding in the salt fields. If there was ample sunshine, salt could be formed after 3 to 5 days. If the weather was gloomy and rainy, it could take 10 days or even half a month to collect the harvest.

On the east coast of the Lancang River, salt fields in the Naxi ethnic towns are built along the slopes of the mountain making the scenery a first-tier beauty of stilt houses. Although the delivery of brine has now been replaced by electric water pumps, salt-bed tiling, salt brushing, salt packing and salt delivery to the mountain requires demanding manual labor. Occasionally, hinnies are seen to carry goods up and down along the mountain path.

On the west coast of the Lancang River, the salt fields in Jiada village are built along the surfaces of dirt roads to the intervals between the gentle slopes by the riverside. Hundreds of salt fields of different shapes and sizes are interlocking atop one another within such a narrow strip. Since each small set of salt field may not belong to the same villager, they will be exchanged so as to integrate territories. As the soil of Jiada village is inclined to a red shading, salt on the tamped salt fields will slightly appear pink after brine evaporation; therefore, it is known as “Peach Blossom Salt”. On the other side, salt on the salt fields in the Naxi ethnic towns appear white after evaporation. This shows the relation between the color of salts and the local soil.

I visited Jiada village in 2017 and chatted with a young villager. He had just delivered a meal by scooter to his mother who was working in a salt field. Since the work pace follows sunlight, the assiduous mothers are already accustomed to it. The foreign merchants will drive directly to the roadside and the harvested salt will be packed and carted away upon payment.

In the past, the most direct and only means for the east and the west to interact was the wooden bridge of iron chain. It has been used since the era of Ancient Tea Horse Road where only walkers and caravans of horses were permitted to cross over. There are now cement bridges for vehicles. Overlooking the valley, road engineering is everywhere and massive constructions are being advanced. A whole new picture is yet to come.

Salt Wells and Fields of Mangkang County has already been listed as the 7<sup>th</sup> Batch of Major Historical and Cultural Sites Protected at the National Level in the form of official announcement on May 3 in 2013.

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