Development of Farmland by Han Chinese Immigrants in the Shiping Basin in Yunnan Province in the Ming and Qing Periods: Focusing on Irrigation Projects by Government and the Increase in the Number of Successful Applicants for Imperial Examination

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This article deals with the opening up of agricultural land by Han immigrants in Shiping county, Honghe region, and their settlement into the surrounding area in Shiping during the Ming and Qing period (1386 A.D.-1911 A.D.). The settlement of Han people in Yunnan began at the end of the 14th century, and their inflow reached a peak in latter half of the 18th century.

When discussing the history of the immigrants in Yunnan, many historians note the inflow of Han Chinese from places outside Yunnan. Here, I present the new idea that the immigrant activity originated in the local society of Yunnan.

By the end of the 14th century, Ming Dynasty expanded into the south-western part of China and established military colonies in the surrounding area at strategic points. Some of them who were Han people settled in the Shiping basin, and began to reclaim the land under regional government leadership, when the regional government applied some kinds of irrigation technique to cultivate new fields, and built dikes and dredged the mud to control flood. Around the lakeside areas where the water is abundant, they performed drainage construction, and on the flat land where water is short, then built reservoirs for irrigation. The success of this increased production capacity, and the subsequent population increase caused people to immigrate from Shiping to other areas.

In addition to such work, the regional government established many kinds of schools with the income that they got from opening up new agricultural land. Subsequently many private schools were established around the Shiping basin. These private schools turned out many talented people, and a number of them passed the examination for government officials (Keju). In particular, by the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, a one-fifth of the candidates who passed the examination in Yunnan were from Shiping county. As the number of successful candidates increased, their fame rose in the southern part of Yunnan. As a result, they were invited to work as teacher at schools in other areas surrounding Shiping. They built up a network mainly on the shared territorial bonding, and supported migration activities.

In this article I emphasize the importance of immigrant activity which originated in the local society of Yunnan.

Key words: Paddy field, irrigation, Ming and Qing periods, Yunnan Province, Han Chinese immigrants