

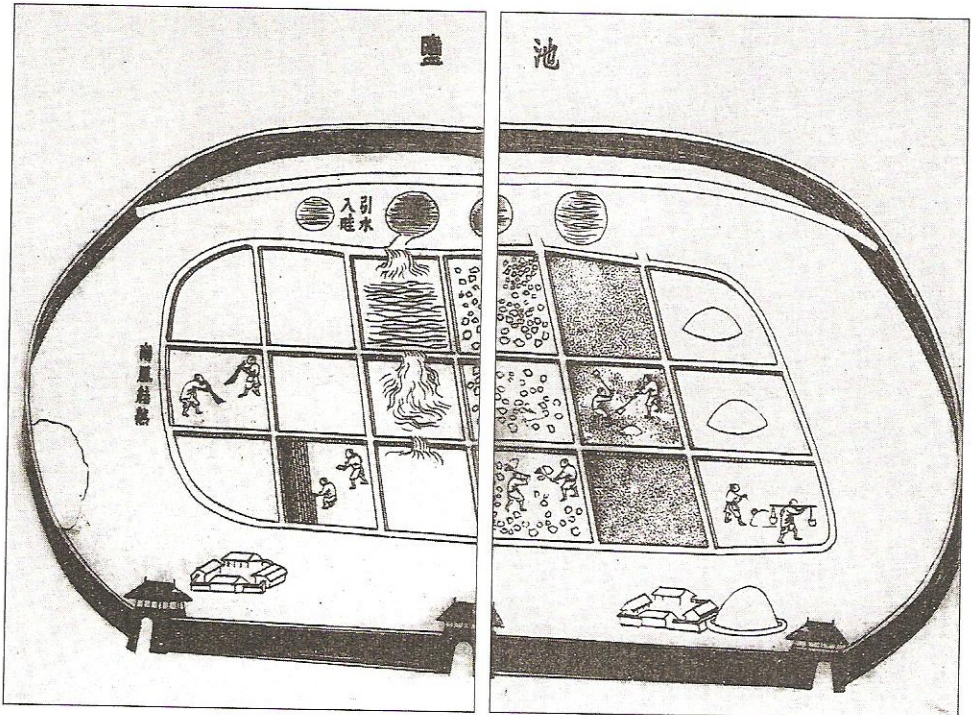
VISUAL SOURCES

Salt Mining

During the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) the Chinese were predominately an agricultural people. They grew wheat and millet in northern China and rice mostly in the south. Early Han rulers did much to enhance the economy by draining swamps, damming streams, and building irrigation canals. During the Han the population grew substantially, as did the cities, while trade flourished. All this was possible due to an extended period of peace and, especially, because of the advent of centralized government. But centralized government costs money which comes, largely, from taxes. One of the many schemes the government devised to raise money was to nationalize the salt industry in 120 B.C. For the next two millennia salt taxes would be a critical revenue source for Chinese governments. This illustration, from the late Ming period, depicts the mining of salt as it was during the Han.

Consider: Why salt would be a good commodity for taxes; how salt mining relates to the advantages and disadvantages of a centralized government.

Photo 3-1



SOURCE: Popperfoto/Archive Photos.