

Original Paper

A Study on the Ancient Lu State and the Origin of Chinese

Agrarian Civilization:

A Textual Research Centered on the Pre-Qin Fang State of

Lushui, Chaling, Hunan

Jinxing Gu¹, Lixin Duan², & Fudong Ding³

¹ Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, China

Email: 2214027498@qq.com

² Chaling County Zaoshi Middle School, Zhuzhou, China

³ Chaling County Bureau of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Zhuzhou, China

Received: June 12, 2026

Accepted: July 28, 2026

Online Published: August 4, 2026

doi:10.22158/assc.v8n4p78

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v8n4p78>

Abstract

China's agrarian civilization features an integrated pluralistic framework formed by two parallel farming traditions: dryland cultivation along the Yellow River and rice farming along the Yangtze River. The ancient Lu State of Lushui in Chaling, Hunan, served as a core region where the clans of Emperor Yan Shennong established a mature farming system and accomplished cultural innovation after migrating southward. Historical records including Hunan Provincial Records, Records of Unusual Events, and Yuanhe Genealogy of Surnames explicitly document that the Yellow Emperor enfeoffed Yuwang (Cenlu), the last descendant of Emperor Yan, in the mountainous Lushui area of Chaling to establish the ancient regional state of Lu. Carbonized rice relics unearthed at the Duling'ao Site prove that the artificial domestication of wild rice had been realized here as early as 7,000 years ago. A Brief Study on Chaling, Hometown of Shennong by Ding, F. D., & Zhou, Z. Y., as well as On Emperor Yan Shennong by Duan, L. X., systematically sort out the migration routes of the seventeen generations of Shennong and conduct comprehensive textual research on historical facts regarding Yuwang's fiefdom. Another work by Duan, L. X., Emperor Yan the Tea Ancestor: A Detailed Account of Tea in Chaling, fully demonstrates the origin of tea ancestor culture that "China's thousand-year tea culture originated in Chaling". Drawing on existing research findings by Ding, F. D., Duan, L. X. and other scholars, this paper comprehensively investigates the establishment, geographical environment, agrarian civilization

system, historical relics and contemporary cultural value of the ancient Lu State through four categories of evidence: local chronicles, archaeological remains, and living folk heritage. It supplements the origin narrative of rice-farming civilization in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, and provides archaeological evidence of an ancient regional state in eastern Hunan for research on the pluralistic integrated origin of Chinese civilization.

Keywords

Ancient Lu State, Lushui of Chaling, Emperor Yan Shennong, Rice-farming Civilization, Genesis of Agrarian Culture

1. Introduction

The *I Ching*, Xici Part II records that “After the demise of Paoxi, Shennong rose to power. He cut wood to make plowshares and bent wood to fashion plow handles, demonstrating the utility of ploughing and weeding to all people under heaven.” This established the documentary consensus that Shennong is the primogenitor of agrarian civilization. For a long time, academic research on Emperor Yan Shennong culture has centered on the Jiangshui River in Baoji of the Yellow River Basin and Lieshan in Suizhou, Hubei Province, mostly focusing on dryland millet cultivation and the origin of early clans, while lacking systematic analysis of the value of civilizational integration embodied by the Ancient Lu State in Chaling, eastern Hunan, where the clans migrated southward.

The Shennong lineage spanned seventeen generations and ruled the realm for 520 years. Yuwang, the last descendant of Shennong, was enfeoffed by the Yellow Emperor in the mountainous Lushui area of Chaling, where the Ancient Lu State was founded—the earliest enfeoffed regional state with verifiable historical records in Hunan. Building on scattered historical records from prior scholars, Ding, F. D. and Duan, L. X. conducted systematic textual research, specifically resolving long-standing academic disputes over Shennong’s activity locations. They proposed a three-stage framework for Shennong’s migration and development: “originating in Baoji, flourishing in Suizhou, and reaching full maturity in the Ancient Lu State of Chaling”, addressing the limitation of unilateral regional origin tracing in existing academia (Ding & Zhou, 2024; Duan, 2022).

Carbonized cultivated rice dating back 6,500 to 7,000 years unearthed at the Duling’ao Daxi Cultural Site in Chaling shares identical genes with local wild rice, proving this area was a pivotal zone for the artificial domestication of rice. After sorting out Daxi Cultural relics across eastern Hunan, the Hunan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology confirmed that Chaling constituted a core hub for the development of rice agriculture in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River (Xi & Chen, 1999). Centered on Luling Ridge and Lushui, the Ancient Lu State covered the Shangfang and Xiafang basins, extending its influence across Qingshui and Huju. More than sixty relics associated with Shennong have survived here, alongside the unique Lushui dialect, the Temple of Shennong, a complete set of creation legends, and three signature local agricultural products of Chaling (ginger, garlic and angelica dahurica), forming an intact living inheritance system of agrarian civilization. Based on field

investigations and successive local chronicles of Chaling, *Emperor Yan the Tea Ancestor: A Detailed Account of Tea in Chaling* compiles first-hand folk data, providing localized documentary evidence for the origin of tea culture within the Ancient Lu State (Duan, 2023).

At present, numerous regions compete for the title of “Hometown of Shennong”, yet each only preserves fragmented traces of Shennong’s civilization: Baoji is the birthplace of the Jiang clan and the cradle of millet farming; Suizhou served as an early settlement for slash-and-burn agriculture of the Lieshan Clan. Only the Ancient Lu State in Chaling retains complete relics embodying all innovations attributed to Shennong, covering agriculture, traditional medicine, trade, calendars, Yi learning and tea culture. On the basis of previous research, this paper integrates *A Brief Study on Chaling, Hometown of Shennong* by Ding, F. D., two monographs on Shennong culture by Duan, L. X., successive Hunan local chronicles, archaeological reports from Zhuzhou, ancient texts including *Records of Unusual Events*, and conducts comprehensive collation and textual research. It clarifies the internal connection between the Ancient Lu State and the genesis of Chinese agrarian civilization, reconstructs the formation process of rice-farming civilization in the middle Yangtze River, and improves the origin framework of Chinese civilization featuring “millet cultivation in the north and rice farming in the south, alongside the integration of Yan and Huang tribes”.

2. Institutional Evolution, Geographical Foundation of the Ancient Lu State and the Southward Migration of the Shennong Clan

2.1 Textual Research on the Ancient Lu State: Yuwang Enfeoffed at Lu—The First Enfeoffed Regional State in Hunan

The Ancient Lu State is also recorded as “Lu State” (路国) or “Lu State” (潞国) in ancient texts; the Chinese characters 露, 路 and 潞 are interchangeable. Its core territory covers the area around Luling Ridge, Lushui, Yaolu Town, Chaling County, Zhuzhou today. Multiple official histories, local chronicles and contemporary regional research monographs corroborate the historical fact of its enfeoffment in remote antiquity:

First, *Hunan Provincial Records*, Volume 90, Section 1 on Enfeoffment states: “The Yellow Emperor enfeoffed Yuwang of the Yan Emperor lineage at Lu, namely the mountainous Lushui area of Chaling, marking the earliest fiefdom of feudal lords in Hunan (Li & Yu, 2009).” This explicitly records that the Yellow Emperor granted the Lushui Mountain area of Chaling to Yuwang, making it Hunan’s earliest noble fief.

Second, *Records of Unusual Events* · Post Annals IV · Chantong Annals by Luo, M. of the Southern Song Dynasty notes: “The Yellow Emperor enfeoffed Cenlu at Lu and upheld sacrificial rites for the Yan Emperor in Chen.” Its self-annotation reads: “Lu, also written as Lu (露), refers to present-day Lushui of Chaling Military Prefecture (Luo, 2018).” Cenlu is another name for Yuwang, the last ruler of the Shennong lineage. The Yellow Emperor enfeoffed him here to guard the mausoleums of Shennong ancestors and sustain sacrificial rituals of the Jiang clan, rather than merely exile him.

Third, *On Emperor Yan Shennong* conducts dual verification through field surveys and ancient documents to reconstruct the complete migration trail of Yuwang. Driven away by Chiyou while residing at Kongsang, Yuwang was spared the extinction of the Jiang clan's sacrificial system after the Yellow Emperor subdued Chiyou. The Yellow Emperor selected the mountainous Luling Ridge in eastern Hunan as his fief: the terrain here is enclosed by mountains and rivers with fertile soil and abundant water, suitable for the Shennong clan to continue agrarian production, while bearing the ritual function of safeguarding the mausoleum precinct of Emperor Yan (Duan, 2022). By cross-referencing *Brief Historical Records of Xunfei*, *Yuanhe Genealogy of Surnames* and the Old Chaling Prefecture Records, the monograph confirms that the Ancient Lu State served as a permanent fiefdom for Yuwang's clan, not merely a transient stopover.

Fourth, *Yuanhe Genealogy of Surnames* records: "The Yellow Emperor enfeoffed Yuwang's collateral sons at Lu." The entire Yuwang clan migrated southward, and collateral branches were enfeoffed at Lu, forming a stable community of the regional state.

Ancient local chronicles provide further evidence: "Luling Ridge lies by Lushui in present-day Chaling Prefecture, where the initial enfeoffment took place." Administratively, the Ancient Lu State fell under the jurisdiction of ancient Changsha in remote antiquity. Its territory centered on Gongyanlong, Shentang, Shenbei and Shenxiang at the foot of Luling Ridge, with two intermontane basins as core production and residential zones, whose influence gradually extended to the whole of Chaling.

In the 4th year of the Jiading reign of the Song Dynasty (1211), three townships of Chaling—Changping, Xiayang and Kangle—were separated to establish Ling County, which was renamed Yanling County in 1994. The Mausoleum of Emperor Yan originally belonged to the territory of the Ancient Lu State, forming an inclusive geographical relationship: the Ancient Lu State was where Shennong founded his livelihood in life, while the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan at Luyuan Slope was his final burial site.

The Tongzhi-era Chaling Prefecture Records records: "There is a Lushui burial plot in Chaling Township. Legend has it that Emperor Yan was first proposed to be buried here, yet the site was deemed inauspicious, so he was interred at Luyuan instead. An ancient pit still exists in Lushui, known locally as the 'Son of Heaven's Mound'." A dedicated chapter in *On Emperor Yan Shennong* supplements research on the ritual distinction between the "Son of Heaven's Mound" in Lushui and the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan at Luyuan Slope on the basis of previous local chronicles. It points out that the Lushui mound was a preliminary burial candidate, while Luyuan Slope became the official mausoleum. Both sites fell within the ancient Chaling territory of the Ancient Lu State; the geographical and cultural integrity was only split after Ling County was separated from Chaling in the Song Dynasty (Duan, 2022).



Figure 1. Stone Stele Marking the Location of the Ancient Lu State (Photo provided by Ding, F. D.)

2.2 Unique Agrarian Geographical Conditions of the Ancient Lu State

After migrating southward for thousands of li, the Shennong clan settled in the Luling Basin as their core habitat thanks to three distinctive natural geographical advantages that perfectly matched the developmental needs of early agrarian civilizations.

First, abundant karst caves for communal settlement. The Luling Mountain area is dotted with natural underground karst caves, whose living conditions closely resemble those of Lishan in Hubei, the ancestral settlement of the clan. These caves sheltered the clan from wind, rain and wild beasts, providing stable dwellings for the migrating tribe. Primitive carved characters and patterns still remain at the entrance of the Ancient Shennong Cave to this day. Ding, F. D. and Duan, L. X. conducted field investigations at the cave in Lushui, documenting relics of ancient residents inside and oral legends of tribal settlement passed down for generations, which verify that karst caves served as long-term prehistoric settlements.

Second, enclosed mountainous terrain for safety. Surrounded by mountains on all sides, the Ancient Lu State formed a closed basin that was hard for external tribes to invade and easy for internal governance. In an era rife with tribal conflicts in remote antiquity, this terrain guaranteed a secure environment for sustained and stable agricultural development.

Third, water and soil conditions ideal for rice cultivation. The territory boasts extensive river valleys crisscrossed by the Lushui and Chashui water systems, featuring abundant water supplies, fertile soil and widespread wetlands. It was suitable for wild rice gathering, artificial rice domestication and the cultivation of various grains, making it a rare integrated prehistoric settlement in the middle Yangtze River that combined habitation, defense and farming. Based on Duan, L. X.'s field surveys and geographical hydrological research, the wetland system of the Luling Basin constituted the core natural foundation that enabled Shennong's domestication of wild rice—a natural condition absent from the dry farmlands of northern China (Duan, 2022).

2.3 Migration Route of the Shennong Clan and Its Settlement in the Ancient Lu State

The ancestral Shennong clan first inhabited the Qingjiang River Basin in Baoji, Shaanxi, between 12,000 and 8,000 years ago. The clan relied mainly on fishing, hunting and sheep herding, alongside millet cultivation. The clan adopted the surname Jiang, a character combining the radicals for “woman” and “sheep”, in reflection of its matrilineal society (Huangfu, 2022).

As the clan expanded, it split into two branches. One traveled east along the Wei and Yellow Rivers to establish a capital in Huaiyang, Henan; the other passed through the Jing and Dan Rivers to reach Lishan in Suizhou, Hubei, where the Lieshan Clan emerged and pioneered slash-and-burn primitive agriculture. Shennong then became the sovereign of all tribes, with territory stretching “south to Jiaozhi, north to Youdu, east to Yanggu, and west to Sanwei”.

Through systematic textual research, *On Emperor Yan Shennong* divides the seventeen generations of Shennong into three developmental stages. The first stage centers on the Jiangshui River in Baoji, the birthplace of the Jiang clan and the cradle of early dryland farming. The second stage is Lishan in Suizhou, where the Lieshan Clan expanded slash-and-burn agriculture. The third stage is the Ancient Lu State in Chaling, where Yuwang, the last Shennong ruler, integrated all agricultural technologies and systematically created innovations in rice farming, herbal medicine, tea drinking, calendars and Yi learning—marking the culmination of Shennong civilization.

After seventeen generations of Shennong rule, central plains wars and invasions by Chiyu deprived Yuwang’s clan of its territories in the central plains. After defeating Chiyu, the Yellow Emperor instituted a ritual system of separate sacrificial ceremonies for northern and southern lineages. He enfeoffed Yuwang at Luling in Chaling, ordering him to lead eight ministers and his clansmen on a thousand-li southern migration to found the Ancient Lu State. The mission was to guard the mausoleums of Shennong ancestors and sustain sacrificial rituals for farming. From then on, the core of Shennong civilization shifted from the Yellow River and Jiangnan regions to the Ancient Lu State in eastern Hunan, launching the systematic formation of rice-farming civilization along the Yangtze River.

3. The Ancient Lu State as the Core Site for Systematic Creation of Chinese Agrarian Civilization

Unlike Baoji in the north, where only millet cultivation was developed, and Suizhou, where merely early slash-and-burn agriculture took shape, the Ancient Lu State, building upon the domestication of rice 7,000 years ago, accomplished thirteen complete cultural innovations covering agricultural production, farm tool upgrading, clothing, food, housing and transportation, trade and calendars, herbal medicine and ritual music, spiritual Yi learning, and food processing. These innovations formed an integrated system of Chinese agrarian civilization, making this region the culminating hub of agrarian culture. Drawing on prior archaeological and textual research, this paper sorts out and analyzes each of the thirteen cultural innovations one by one.

3.1 Rice-Farming System: Domestication of Wild Rice and Innovation of Farming Tools

Rice cultivation represents the Ancient Lu State’s most pivotal contribution to Chinese agrarian

civilization. Native wild rice growing in the wetland of Yaoshui Lake in Chaling supplied primitive seed sources for ancient residents. Through long-term selective breeding, the Shennong clan successfully domesticated wild rice into stable cultivated rice. A large quantity of carbonized rice grains preserved in burnt soil at the Duling'ao Site have been identified by rice specialists as a hybrid strain between indica and japonica rice with a high degree of artificial domestication. These are among China's earliest well-developed cultivated rice specimens, proving that large-scale rice farming had taken root here 7,000 years ago (Zhang, & Xi, 2000).

The Hunan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology conducted comparative research on multiple Neolithic sites across eastern Hunan, confirming that the rice-farming relics at the Duling'ao Site serve as a typical example of early artificially cultivated rice in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River (Xi, & Chen, 1999). During field investigations, Ding, F. D. documented the persistent growth of wild rice in Yaoshui Lake Wetland to this day. By comparing it with the genetic traits of archaeological carbonized rice, he provided supplementary evidence for the local domestication lineage of native rice strains. His monograph also describes the scientific evaluation process that designated Duling'ao of Chaling as "the birthplace of China's earliest rice" and Yaoshui Lake Wetland as a "National Wild Rice Reserve" (Ding, & Zhou, 2024).

Supporting farming tools emerged alongside rice cultivation: Shennong bent timber from mountain forests to fashion lei and si, the core tillage implements for paddy fields. Local buffaloes and yellow cattle were domesticated as draft animals, greatly boosting land reclamation efficiency. A systematic cultivation scheme for five staple grains was formulated, alongside technologies for paddy rotation and wetland reclamation, laying the foundation for southern rice agriculture. While the Yellow River Basin in the north centered on dryland millet cultivation, the rice-farming system of the Ancient Lu State filled the paddy agriculture sector of Chinese agrarian civilization, forming the dual agrarian pattern of "millet in the north and rice in the south".

3.2 Civilization of Clothing, Food and Dwelling: Linen Textiles, Pottery and Platform-Base Housing

Stable grain yields from farming enabled the Ancient Lu State to satisfy the fundamental survival needs of its residents in tandem.

First, linen textile clothing. Ancient residents discovered wild hemp fibers in mountain areas, spinning them into threads and weaving linen cloth to sew garments and skirts. This put an end to the primitive practice of covering the body only with animal hides or going naked, pioneering textile civilization.

Second, pottery firing. Utilizing local clay resources, the clan produced pottery jars, mortars and tripods for grain storage, grain steaming and wine fermentation, solving challenges in food processing and preservation and sustaining settled agricultural life.

Third, elevated platform housing near paddy fields. Early residents had long lived in karst caves, which lay far from paddy fields and created inconvenient commutes for farm work. Adapting to local terrain, Shennong directed the construction of rammed-earth houses on high ground beside water paddies, inventing waterside dwellings built on earthen platforms that integrated agricultural production and

permanent settlement. Remains of early platform-based buildings have also been unearthed at the Duling'ao Site (Duan, 2022).

3.3 Primitive Commerce, Weaponry, Ritual-Music and Calendar Systems

Surplus agricultural products gave birth to supporting social institutions and spiritual civilization:

1. Markets Held at Noon for Primitive Barter

A rural market was built at Shenxiang Yard, a densely populated settlement. Trading was scheduled to open at high noon, where residents bartered grain, herbal medicines, linen cloth and pottery. This constituted the embryonic form of commodity trading in ancient China.

2. Creation of Bows and Arrows for Farming Protection and Hunting

Curved bows and arrows were invented to boost fishing and hunting yields. Meanwhile, they deterred neighboring tribes, safeguarding farmlands and settlements, and drove advances in prehistoric weapon-making technology.

3. Five-String Zither and Ritual-Music Civilization

Shennong crafted a six-foot-five-inch five-string zither from paulownia wood, using animal tail hair as strings. He established the pentatonic scale consisting of Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi and Yu, enriching the spiritual life of ancient residents and originating China's ritual and music culture.

4. Agricultural Calendar System

Through long-term observation of seasonal phenology and lunar waxing and waning cycles, a calendar standard was formulated: thirty days made one month, and twelve months formed one year. This precisely guided the timing of sowing, harvesting, fishing and hunting, constructing a temporal order for agrarian civilization.

3.4 Civilizations of Traditional Medicine, Tea and Grain Brewing (Livelihood Innovations Derived from Farming)

Agricultural exploitation boosted the utilization of plant resources, spawning three livelihood civilizations: herbal medicine, tea drinking and grain brewing. The discussion on tea culture draws on specialized research findings from *Emperor Yan the Tea Ancestor: A Detailed Account of Tea in Chaling*.

First, tasting hundreds of herbs to establish the herbal materia medica system.

Shennong traveled across Luling Ridge and Tianzi Mountain, personally testing medicinal plants. On a single day, he suffered poisoning up to seventy-two times, relying on local tea leaves to detoxify himself. He identified more than 360 medicinal herbs in total, which Warring States scholars later compiled into *Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica*—China's first pharmaceutical classic that laid the foundation for traditional Chinese herbal medicine.

Relics such as the Herb-Washing Pond and Medicinal Furrows remain in the Ancient Lu State. Local ginger, garlic and angelica dahurica are collectively known as the "Three Treasures of Chaling". All three medicinal crops were identified and domesticated by Shennong in remote antiquity and are now national geographical indication products. Ding, F. D. and Duan, L. X. conducted field research on the

medicinal furrows and herb-washing pond relics, sorting out generational folk customs of herb planting and picking to verify the local inheritance of Shennong's medical culture (Ding & Zhou, 2024; Duan, 2023).

Second, discovery of tea's detoxifying and drinking value.

When Shennong was poisoned after tasting herbs at Sanjian Ridge of Tiantang Mountain, he accidentally discovered tea's detoxifying effect and later promoted boiled tea for daily consumption. Wild tea trees grow all over Chaling, the only ancient county in China named after "tea", with the proposition that "China's thousand-year tea culture originated in Chaling".

Special research in *Emperor Yan the Tea Ancestor: A Detailed Account of Tea in Chaling* systematically matches the record "Tea as a beverage originated with Shennong" in *The Chinese Classic of Tea* with local historical facts of Chaling (Chen & Yang, 2011). It argues that Chaling is the original birthplace where Shennong first discovered and utilized tea, distinguishing it from other regions that only hold later sacrificial rituals for the Tea Ancestor without authentic prehistoric tea heritage. The monograph records abundant ancient folk tea-boiling customs and historical tea documents of Chaling, proving that the tradition of tea drinking has continued unbroken from remote antiquity to the present. It clearly states: "Chaling is the only county nationwide named after Shennong's discovery of tea. Tea shares the same origin with farming and herbal medicine, and the Ancient Lu State stands as the native birthplace of China's tea civilization." (Duan, 2023)

Third, pioneering grain wine brewing technology.

Ancient residents observed natural fruit fermentation in stone mortars inside caves and drew inspiration from this phenomenon. Using grain and pottery as base materials, they mixed herbs such as smartweed to make yeast and invented the brewing craft, which later evolved into Chaling Winter Wine. The brewing industry reveres Shennong as its founding patron.

3.5 *Lianshan Yi—The Cognition System of Man and Nature Rooted in Agrarian Civilization*

Building on Fuxi's innate Eight Trigrams, Shennong deduced and reformed the system against the mountainous farming backdrop of the Ancient Lu State, expanding single trigrams into sixty-four hexagrams to create *Lianshan Yi*, the foremost of the three ancient prehistoric divination texts collectively known as the "Three Yi".

Lianshan Yi opens with the Gen trigram (Mountain), fitting the enclosed basin farming terrain of the Ancient Lu State. It took mountains, rivers, clouds, rain, seasonal farming timelines and the growth of flora and fauna as observational evidence to predict celestial phenomena and guide cultivation, hunting, fishing and sacrificial ceremonies. It constructed a cognitive logic of harmony between humanity and nature for agrarian civilization, serving as the foundational text of China's Yin-Yang and Five Elements traditional philosophy.

Based on prior Yi learning research, *On Emperor Yan Shennong* supplements textual research on the compatibility between *Lianshan Yi* and mountain rice agriculture in southern China. It points out that its core astronomical observation system entirely derives from farming practices in the Ancient Lu

State, differentiating it from *Guizang Yi* and *Zhou Yi*, which were deduced from the flat plains of northern China (Duan, 2022).

4. Physical Remains and Living Cultural Inheritance of Shennong's Agrarian Civilization in the Ancient Lu State

The agrarian innovations created thousands of years ago in the Ancient Lu State have not faded away with the passage of time. Instead, six complete categories of inheritance carriers survive: underground archaeological relics, above-ground cultural sites, place-name living fossils, folk customs and dialects, and sacrificial architectures. Together they form a verifiable and tangible evidence system of agrarian civilization. Monographs authored by Ding, F. D., Duan, L. X. and other scholars are enriched with abundant field survey data to document living culture, making up for the scarcity of records in ancient books.

4.1 Clusters of Above-Ground Sites and Remains

More than sixty relics associated with Shennong scatter around Luling Ridge in Lushui, including the Ancient Shennong Cave, the Son of Heaven's Pit, Sanhe Platform, Shennong's Bridge, Stone Rice Sieve, two Herb-Washing Ponds, Medicinal Furrows, Crown Prince's Tomb, Prayer Platform, Red Pine Altar, Five-Thunder Pond and so on. Among them, the "Son of Heaven's Mound" was the preliminary burial site chosen for Shennong, confirming the historical status of the Ancient Lu State as the core territory of the Shennong clan. Various medicinal furrows and herb-washing ponds fully reconstruct the production scenes where Shennong tasted herbs and grew medicinal plants. *A Brief Study on Chaling, Hometown of Shennong* incorporates on-site photos of all relics and oral folk historical materials. Through field surveys, it verifies the correspondence between the spatial layout of relics and the zoning of prehistoric production and daily living areas (Ding & Zhou, 2024).

4.2 Living Fossil Place Names and Dialect Remains

A great many place names in the core territory of the Ancient Lu State feature the character "Shen" (Shennong): Shentang, Shenbei, Shenxiang, Shenqian. These names have been passed down through generations, serving as written living evidence of the long-term settlement of the Shennong clan. The local Lushui Dialect stands independent of the two major dialect systems of Hunanese and Gan, retaining a large number of prehistoric agrarian vocabulary and primitive pronunciations. It is a living legacy of the ancient Shennong tribal language that preserves linguistic memories of prehistoric agrarian society. Duan, L. X. has collected Lushui dialect vocabulary over a long period, comparing prehistoric Chinese words related to farming, sericulture, tea and medicinal herbs. He supplements the research on linguistic features of the Ancient Lu State in remote antiquity with dialectal evidence (Duan, 2022).

4.3 Folk Customs, Legends and Sacrificial Buildings

First, folk creation legends. Dozens of complete agrarian legends have been handed down orally, such as Shennong stealing grain seeds, domesticating Chinese yam, Shennong building bridges, the origin of

chicken-shaped dumplings, and the origin of the La Sacrifice. These fully record the origins of rice farming, poultry domestication and sacrificial rituals.

Second, fertility folk customs. The prehistoric history of domesticating poultry and livestock gave rise to the local tradition of giving children humble animal-style nicknames, embodying the agrarian society's wish for safe and prosperous population growth.

Third, sacrifices at the Temple of Shennong. The Temple of Shennong preserved in Lushui is the only folk temple dedicated to Shennong remaining in Hunan Province. Constructed by people of successive dynasties to commemorate Shennong's meritorious contributions to agriculture, it has sustained sacrificial traditions for thousands of years and stands as a material carrier of agrarian faith (Ding & Zhou, 2024).



Figure 2. Temple of Shennong (Photo provided by Ding, F. D.)

4.4 Analysis of the Spatial Relationship Between the Ancient Lu State and the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan

Scholars often confuse the Ancient Lu State with the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan in Yanling County. Three monographs, namely *On Emperor Yan Shennong*, *A Brief Study on Chaling, Hometown of Shennong* and *Emperor Yan the Tea Ancestor: A Detailed Account of Tea in Chaling*, integrate local chronicles and field survey data to supplement textual research on their geographical and ritual relations, clarifying their inclusive relationship of “place of lifetime undertakings—final burial site”.

1. Spatial Evolution

Before the 4th year of the Jiading reign of the Song Dynasty, the entire territory of present-day Yanling County belonged to the Ancient Lu State of Chaling. Ling County was separated and established as an independent administrative region only afterwards, with a county history of merely 800 years, while the agrarian civilization of the Ancient Lu State stretches back more than 7,000 years.

2. Functional Differentiation

The Ancient Lu State served as the core residential and production hub where Shennong Yuwang settled for a long time and accomplished all innovations of agrarian civilization. The Mausoleum of Emperor Yan at Luyuan Slope was selected as the burial site after Shennong passed away on Tiantang Mountain from accidentally consuming heartbreak grass. The numerous underground water veins in the karst caves of the Ancient Lu State rendered them unsuitable for interment, so this auspicious alternative site was chosen through divination.

3. Ritual Logic

The Yellow Emperor enfeoffed Yuwang at Luling Ridge with the core duty of guarding the mausoleum precincts of Shennong's ancestors. The Ancient Lu State functioned as the clan's central venue for sacrificial rites, whereas the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan was the final resting place. Together, they form an integrated spatial system of Shennong culture.

5. The Positioning of the Ancient Lu State in the Origin of Chinese Agrarian Civilization and Regional Comparative Analysis

5.1 Regional Division of Shennong Culture from the Perspective of Pluralistic Integration

Cultural relics related to Shennong survive in many regions across China, each preserving fragmented segments of Shennong's civilization from different developmental stages. A dedicated chapter in *On Emperor Yan Shennong* conducts comparative research on Shennong cultural zones nationwide, confirming that the Ancient Lu State is the sole site where all cultural achievements of Shennong reached full maturity (Duan, 2022).

1. Baoji, Shaanxi: The birthplace of the Jiang clan of Shennong and the cradle of dryland millet cultivation along the Yellow River Basin, corresponding to the early fishing, hunting and nomadic phase of the Shennong clan.
2. Lishan in Suizhou, Hubei: The activity zone of the Lieshan Clan and the birthplace of primitive slash-and-burn agriculture, corresponding to the middle expansion period of the Shennong clan.
3. Gaoping, Shanxi: Home to sacrificial sites and Five Grains Temples dedicated to Shennong, which are merely commemorative cultural carriers built in later generations without archaeological evidence of systematic agrarian innovations.
4. The Ancient Lu State in Chaling, Hunan: The enfeoffed settlement of Yuwang, the last ruler of the Shennong lineage. It bears relics of mature rice farming dating back 7,000 years and fully preserves a complete set of agrarian innovations covering agriculture, herbal medicine, commerce, calendars, Yi learning and tea culture, marking the stage when Shennong's agrarian civilization took its definitive shape.

The Yellow River Basin laid the foundation for northern dryland farming, while the Ancient Lu State realized the systematic construction of rice-farming civilization along the Yangtze River. Complementing each other, the two regions jointly constitute the dual northern and southern origins of

Chinese agrarian civilization, verifying the pluralistic and integrated origin characteristics of Chinese civilization. Duan, L. X. points out that existing studies on Shennong culture in various regions mostly focus on isolated individual deeds while overlooking the complete developmental context of Shennong civilization. The thirteen comprehensive cultural innovations preserved in the Ancient Lu State serve as the core academic marker distinguishing it from other regions, and this viewpoint provides the fundamental research basis for the regional comparative analysis in this paper (Duan, 2022).

5.2 Historical Value of the Agrarian Civilization of the Ancient Lu State

First, it completes the origin chain of rice-farming civilization. Carbonized rice remains at the Duling'ao Site prove artificial rice cultivation existed in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River 7,000 years ago. This fills in the full developmental context of southern paddy agriculture and overturns the one-sided view that agrarian civilization originated solely along the Yellow River (Xi & Chen, 1999).

Second, it preserves an integrated complete system of Shennong civilization. Other regions only retain scattered records of isolated deeds of Shennong, whereas the Ancient Lu State conserves the full spectrum of his innovations covering grain production, farm tools, clothing and housing, trade, herbal medicine, ritual music, philosophy, tea drinking and grain brewing. It restores the comprehensive image of Shennong as “the ancestor of all trades” (Duan, 2022).

Third, it furnishes tangible evidence of enfeoffment of ancient regional states. Cross-verified by multiple documents including *Hunan Provincial Records* and *Records of Unusual Events*, the enfeoffment of Yuwang by the Yellow Emperor at Lu confirms this as the earliest ancient feudal regional state in Hunan, supplementing historical materials concerning the integration of the Yan and Huang tribes and the ritual system of tribal enfeoffment in remote antiquity.

Fourth, living cultural inheritance sustains the cultural origins of civilization. Place names, dialects, folk customs, the Temple of Shennong and geographically distinctive local specialties have passed down culture continuously for thousands of years, offering original resources for contemporary inheritance of agrarian culture and cultural tourism development.

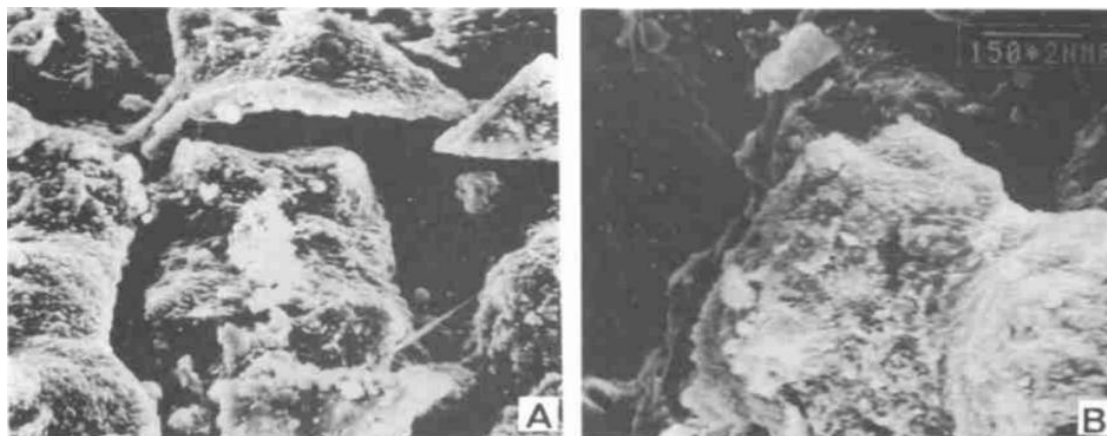


Figure 3. Double-peaked papilla fragments of ancient rice unearthed at the Duling'ao Site in Chaling[7]

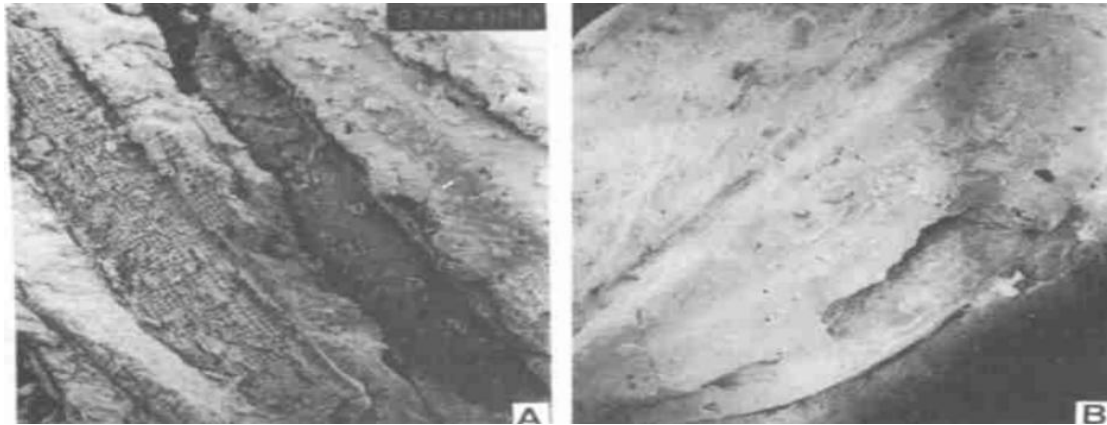


Figure 4. Rice impressions preserved in burnt soil at the Duling'ao Site, Chaling[7]

6. Existing Problems and Contemporary Enlightenments of the Inheritance of Agrarian Culture in the Ancient Lu State

6.1 Shortcomings in Current Cultural Excavation

1. Regional cultural competition obscures the core value of the Ancient Lu State. Baoji and Suizhou have long promoted themselves as the hometowns of Shennong, while the academic positioning of the Ancient Lu State as the culminating birthplace of Shennong's agrarian civilization has not been sufficiently publicized, bringing risks that its cultural brand of "Hometown of Shennong" may fade into obscurity. Drawing on years of historical research experience, Duan, L. X. repeatedly appeals in his works that academia should recognize the unique status of the Ancient Lu State as the consummate cradle of Shennong civilization, and prevent the single-origin narrative from overshadowing the contributions of Yangtze rice farming[2].

2. Insufficient depth of archaeological excavation. Research on rice-farming relics at the Duling'ao Site remains limited. Systematic archaeological excavation and inscription interpretation of sites including the Ancient Shennong Cave, medicinal furrows and the Son of Heaven's Mound have not been fully carried out. Existing archaeological materials only appear in partial brief reports without comprehensive sorting at the provincial level.

3. Fragmented collation of historical documents. Local chronicles, folk legends and ancient classics have not formed a unified textual research system. Although Duan, L. X.'s two monographs have completed basic collation and verification, joint cross-regional textual research is still lacking.

6.2 Enlightenments on Inheritance and Development Paths

First, strengthen collaborative research combining documents and archaeology. Integrate *Records of Unusual Events*, *Hunan Provincial Records*, archaeological reports of the Duling'ao Site, local ancient chronicles, field survey materials, and research findings on Daxi Culture rice relics across Hunan Province to build a complete academic system for Shennong's agrarian civilization of the Ancient Lu State.

Second, coordinate Chaling, Yanling and Anren Counties to build an integrated Shennong cultural

circle. Distinguish the cultural positioning of “the Ancient Lu State, the place where Shennong established his agrarian undertakings” and “the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan, his final burial site” to realize differentiated and coordinated development. Refer to the coordinated cultural development framework for Chaling and Yanling proposed through tea history research in *Emperor Yan the Tea Ancestor: A Detailed Account of Tea in Chaling*[8], and combine the development history of Chinese tea drinking recorded in *The Chinese Classic of Tea* to improve the national communication system for Chaling’s Tea Ancestor culture[9].

Third, revitalize intangible agrarian cultural heritage resources. Rely on the Three Treasures of Chaling, Tea Ancestor culture, the Lushui dialect and Shennong sacrificial folk customs to develop research and study systems featuring rice farming, traditional Chinese medicine and tea culture, so as to realize the contemporary transformation of prehistoric agrarian civilization.

Fourth, promote cross-regional academic exchanges. Carry out comparative textual research on northern and southern agrarian civilizations with Shennong cultural research institutions in Baoji and Suizhou. Combined with archaeological discoveries of northern millet and southern rice cultivation, establish the Ancient Lu State’s status as the origin of China’s rice-farming civilization.

7. Conclusion

The ancient Lu State at Lushui in prehistoric Chaling was an ancient regional state enfeoffed by the Yellow Emperor to Yuwang, the last Yan Emperor. Endowed with unique geographical advantages including an enclosed mountain basin, karst cave dwellings and abundant water and soil resources, it evolved into the core site where the Yan Emperor Shennong clan systematically constructed Chinese agrarian civilization after migrating southward.

Remains of artificially cultivated rice dating back 7,000 years unearthed at the Duling’ao Site prove that this region was a pivotal birthplace of rice-farming civilization in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. Within the Ancient Lu State, thirteen complete cultural innovations took shape, including rice domestication, the invention of lei and si ploughs and draft cattle, linen textile garments, pottery making, primitive marketplaces, an agricultural calendar, Shennong’s herbal materia medica, tea culture, grain brewing, and the compilation of *Lianshan Yi*. These achievements complete the full developmental lineage of southern paddy agrarian civilization, complementing the dryland farming culture of the Yellow River Basin.

This paper establishes a complete developmental trajectory of Shennong: “Origin in Baoji—Expansion in Suizhou—Culmination in the Ancient Lu State”. Supported by specialized historical research such as *Emperor Yan the Tea Ancestor: A Detailed Account of Tea in Chaling*, together with handed-down records in *The Chinese Classic of Tea*, this study independently confirms the unique status of the Ancient Lu State as the native birthplace of Chinese tea civilization, filling gaps in local research on Shennong culture.

Unlike Baoji, Suizhou and other early activity zones of Shennong, the Ancient Lu State represents the

mature and consummate stage of Shennong's agrarian civilization. Multi-layered carriers of cultural inheritance survive here, consisting of above-ground relics, place-name living fossils, dialects, folk customs and sacrificial architectures. The Ancient Lu State and the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan in Yanling jointly form an integrated Shennong cultural space defined by "the land of lifetime undertakings and the final resting place after death", which bears witness to the ancient ritual traditions of the integration of Yan and Huang tribes and the enfeoffment of clans to guard ancestral mausoleums. Synthesizing the previous research findings of Ding, F. D. and Duan, L. X., this paper conducts cross-verification and comprehensive textual analysis using ancient classics, local chronicles and archaeological materials. Within the research framework of the pluralistic and integrated origins of Chinese civilization, it clarifies the irreplaceable historical value of the Ancient Lu State.

Future efforts should deepen archaeological excavations, textual research on ancient documents and cross-regional collaborative studies. Drawing on comprehensive provincial archaeological findings of Daxi Culture, scholars shall systematically explore and revitalize the inherited Shennong agrarian culture of the Ancient Lu State. This will vividly unfold the genesis landscape of Chinese agrarian civilization with dual origins of "millet cultivation in the north and rice farming in the south", and safeguard the cultural landmark representing the source of rice-farming civilization in the middle Yangtze River.

References

- Chen, Z. M., & Yang, Y. J. (2011). *The Chinese classic of tea*. Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Publishing House.
- Ding, F. D., & Zhou, Z. Y. (2024). *A brief study on Chaling, hometown of Shennong*. Zhuzhou: Chaling Shennong Culture Research Association.
- Duan, L. X. (2022). *On Emperor Yan Shennong*. Zhuzhou: Zhuzhou Shennong Culture Research Association.
- Duan, L. X. (2023). *Emperor Yan the tea ancestor: A detailed account of tea in Chaling*. Chaling: Federation of Literary and Art Circles of Chaling County.
- Huangfu, M. (2020). *Records of emperors* (Song dynasty collated ed.). Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Li, H. Z., & Yu, L. (2009). *Hunan provincial records* (Guangxu revised ed.). Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House.
- Luo, M. (2018). *Records of unusual events* (Complete Library of the Four Treasuries ed.). Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House.
- Xi, D. H., & Chen, X. H. (1999). Brief excavation report of the Neolithic Duling'ao site. In *Collected papers of Hunan archaeology: Volume 1* (pp. 39-50). Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House.
- Zhang, W. X., & Xi, D. H. (2000). Study on rice grain impressions in burnt soil from the Duling'ao site. *Chinese Journal of Rice Science*, 3(03), 161-166.