
The Early Táng Era *'Records of the Local Customs of Ērhǎi'*

An Annotated Translation of the 648 CE 《西洱河风土记》

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2024

The Yúnnán Papers

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1 Introduction

When at the beginning of the seventh century Lǐ Yuān 李渊 defeated the Suí dynasty 隋朝 and proclaimed the Táng dynasty 唐朝, not only began one of China's most illustrious cultural periods, but also a renewed expansion of the Chinese empire that brought it in contact with alien people – not only – in its south-west.⁽¹⁾

In the 22nd year of Zhēnguān 贞观, i.e. in 648 during reign of the second Táng emperor Tàizōng 太宗, Xīzhōu 巂州 area command was established in present-day southern Sìchuān, serving as a frontier post to further expand the empire into territories that had last been under Chinese rule during the Hàn dynasty 汉朝.

From Xīzhōu the right general Liáng Jiàn fāng 梁建方 was sent out in an expedition against the Sōngwài Mán 松外蛮, a tribal group in the region of present-day south-western Sìchuān and north-western Yúnnán.⁽²⁾

After conquering the Sōngwài Mán, Liáng Jiàn fāng continued his expedition pushing further south-west into an area known to the Chinese as Xī ěr Hé 西洱河, which refers to Lake Ěrhǎi 洱海 in the west of present-day Yúnnán.⁽³⁾

Liáng Jiàn fāng compiled a report titled “*Records of the Local Customs of Ěrhǎi*” 《西洱河风土记》,⁽⁴⁾ giving us the earliest extant first-hand account of the people and customs in the Ěrhǎi area which was to rise as a regional power called Nánzhào 南诏 a mere century later.

Chinese academic circles have not paid much attention to this document, as Lín Chāomín 林超民 points out, undeservedly.⁽⁵⁾ He states that

even though the text of the 《西洱河风土记》 is not long, it provides us with extremely valuable historical material to study the societal situation of the *Bái Mán* in the Ěrhǎi region at the beginning of the Táng dynasty.⁽⁶⁾

The eminent local historian Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 also stressed the importance of this text for the study of history of Nánzhào.⁽⁷⁾

⁽¹⁾ Lewis (2009).

⁽²⁾ This expedition is mentioned in a number of later records, such as the 《旧唐书》, the 《新唐书》 and the 《资治通鉴》. For the historical background and the motivation for this expedition see Backus (1981), pp. 17–21. While from a Chinese perspective the expedition appears a journey through a wilderness, the archeological record shows that the whole region had been settled by stratified societies with extensive networks linking them, see Hein (2013).

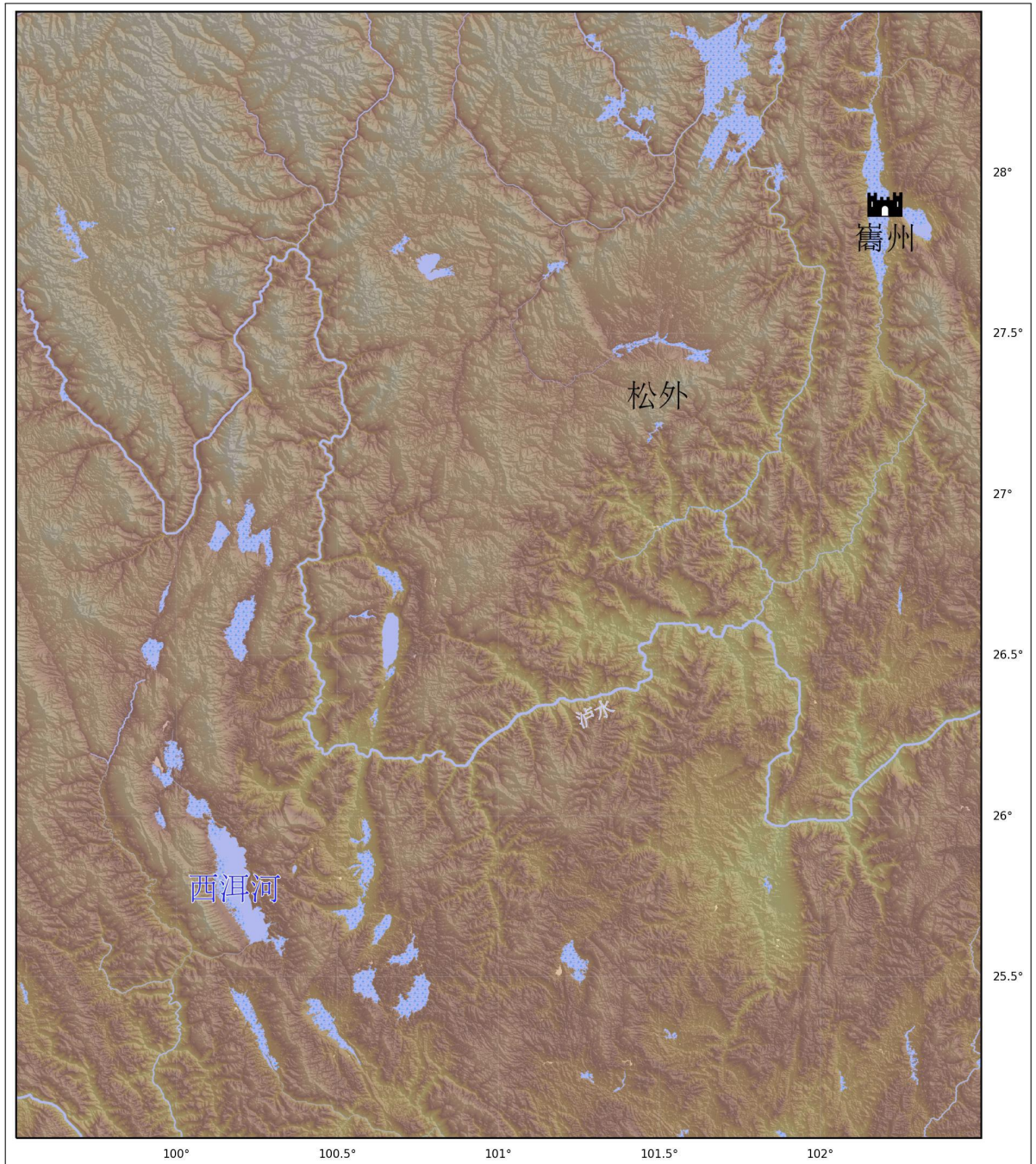
⁽³⁾ Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1987), p. 555: ‘西洱河即今之洱海，其初盖名洱河。’

⁽⁴⁾ I decided to substitute Ěrhǎi 洱海 for Xī ěr Hé 西洱河 in my translation of the title as this term will be more familiar to western readers.

⁽⁵⁾ Lín Chāomín 林超民 (1982). This article remains until today the only one in the Chinese academic repository <https://kns.cnki.net> with the words ‘西洱河风土记’ in its title, see <https://kns.cnki.net/kns8/defaultresult/index>.

⁽⁶⁾ ‘《西洱河风土记》的文字虽然不多，却为我们研究唐代初期洱海地区白蛮的社会情况提供了极宝贵的材料。’ Lín Chāomín 林超民 (1982).

⁽⁷⁾ Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1962).



Map 1:
Map of 西洱河 and 嵩州

2 About this Translation

The original text of the 《西洱河风土记》 is lost, but Liáng Jiàn fāng 梁建方's report was, with various modifications, copied into Chinese history works, such as the 《新唐书》,⁽⁸⁾ the 《通典》, the 《文献通考》 and the 《资治通鉴》, allowing a reconstruction from the various text fragments.

The text translated here is taken from the reconstruction published as a critical edition in the multi-volume 《云南史料丛刊》.⁽⁹⁾ That text is accompanied by an introduction by Fāng Guó yú 方国瑜 and an afterword by Lín Chāo mǐn 林超民 clarifying the historical background and the transmission history of the text. The critical edition points out the various differences between the extant versions of the text.

The text is also contained in several books, such as Zhào Hóng chāng 赵鸿昌 (1994), pp. 20–21 and Zhāng Chāng shān 张昌山 (2014), pp. 198–199; an electronic version of the text with annotations of unknown authorship is available at <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/1eecebe4076c66137ee06196b.html>.

Some parts of this text have been translated in other works, such as in Backus (1981), and Bryson (2017), but I am not aware of any complete translation.

3 Annotated Translation

The first part of the 《西洱河风土记》 describes the region of Xiě Hé 西洱河 as at a considerable distance from Xīzhōu 嵩州, a Táng 唐 military district established not much earlier,⁽¹⁰⁾ noting its many tribes were not unified, lacked an overall leader and were of roughly equal strength, with no tribe submitting to another.⁽¹¹⁾

其西洱河从嵩州西千五百里，其地有数十百部落。大者五六百户，小者二三百户。

无大君长。
有数十姓，以杨、李、赵、董为名家。

Xiě Hé lies one thousand five hundred *lǐ* west of Xīzhōu, in the region are **many dozens of tribes**. The large ones have five to six hundred households, the small ones two to three hundred households.

There is no **great chieftain**.

They have dozens of names, among them Yáng, Lǐ, Zhào and Dǒng are eminent families.

梁建方 5

r2: many dozens of tribes] The Chinese expression is 'several ten hundreds', a number that does not exist. I think this means that there were more than he could count. Duàn Dǐngzhōu 段鼎周 (1994) also considers it an approximate number.

r5: great chieftain] meaning a chieftain higher or more powerful than all others.

⁽⁸⁾ It is not contained in the 《旧唐书》.

⁽⁹⁾ Fāng Guó yú 方国瑜 (1998), vol. 2, pp. 216–221. The provenance of the reconstructed text, the introduction and the afterword is unclear.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A district called Xīzhōu was first established in the 4th year of Wǔdé, i.e. 621, undergoing some changes in the following years, in the 22nd year of Zhēnguān a military district was established to govern the Sōngwài Mán 松外蛮. For more details on the history of government administration, see Zhōu Zhènè 周振鹤 (2012), pp. 1254–1255.

⁽¹¹⁾ Backus (1981), p. 55 translates part of this section, taken from the 《资治通鉴》, as 'Each occupied a single region. The greatest of them had six hundred families, while the smallest had two or three hundred. There was no overall leader, nor was there any shared unity.'

各据山川，不相役属。

They live scattered in the mountains and valleys, they do not submit to each other.

The second part then describes the language and customs of the local population as very similar to the Hàn and reporting that the people themselves claimed to be descendants of Zhuāng Qiāo 庄蹻, the kingdom of Chǔ 楚国 general who proclaimed himself king of the kingdom of Diān 滇国 during the Warring States 战国 period.

The text here makes clear references to passages in the 《史记》 where Simǎ Qiān 司马迁 states:⁽¹²⁾

始楚威王时，使将军庄蹻将兵循江上，略巴、黔中以西。庄蹻者，故楚庄王苗裔也。蹻至滇池，地方三百里，旁平地，肥饶数千里，以兵威定属楚。欲归报，会秦击夺楚巴、黔中郡，道塞不通，因还，以其众王滇，变服，从其俗，以长之。

In earlier times, when King Wei ruled the state of Chu (339-328 BC), he sent his general Zhuang Qiao to lead army along the upper reaches of the Yangtze River and invade Ba, Shu, Qianzhong, and the regions to the west. (Zhuang Qiao was a descendant of King Zhuang, a former ruler of Chu.) Zhuang Qiao advanced as far as Lake Dian, a body of water 300 li in circumference, surrounded by several thousand li of rich flatland. Having used his military might to subdue the region and bring it under the rule of Chu, he started back to Chu to report his success when the armies of Qin attacked Chu and seized the provinces of Ba and Qianzhong, cutting off his way. Unable to get through to Chu, he returned to Lake Dian and with the men under his command made himself ruler of Dian, adopting native dress, following the customs of the people, and acting as their chief.

In the text of the 《西洱河风土记》:⁽¹³⁾

自云其先本汉人。
有城郭、村邑、弓矢、矛鋌。

They themselves say they were originally Hàn people.
They have walled towns and villages, bows and arrows, **lances and daggers**.

言语虽小讹舛，大略与中夏同。有文字。
颇解阴阳历数。

Even though there are small errors in their language generally it is the same as in China. They use [Chinese] characters.
They largely understand Yīn and Yáng and how to calculate the calendar.

梁建方 15

自夜郎，滇池以西，皆云庄蹻之余

From Yèláng and Diānchí to the west, they all say they are descend-

[18: 役属] This expression is used in the 《史记》 - 南越列传, which has the sentence ‘佗因此以兵威邊，財物賂遺閩越、西甌、駱，役屬焉，东西万余里。’ Watson (1993), p. 209 translates this as ‘Zhao Tuo began once more to threaten the border with his forces. He sent gifts and bribes to the chiefs of Minyue, Western Ou, and Luoluo, persuading them to submit to his authority, until the region under his control extended over 10,000 li from east to west.’

[25-26: lances and daggers] The two characters used here *máo* 矛 and *chán* 鋌 mean a longer and a shorter spear, lance or dagger respectively. I am not familiar with weaponry from that period, so there might be a better translation.

(12) Translation by Watson, see Watson (1993), pp. 253-254.

(13) Parts of the following section are also translated in Bryson (2017), p. 29.

种也。

ants of Zhuāng Qiāo.

The text then continues to describe agriculture, including the important sericulture, and animal husbandry, again noting significant similarities to the practices in China.

其土有稻、麦、粟、豆。种获与中夏同。

They plant paddy rice, wheat, millet and beans. Their way of planting and harvesting is the same as in China.

而以十二月为岁首。

They use the twelfth month as the beginning of the year.

梁建方 21

菜则葱、韭、蒜、菁。果则桃、梅、李、柰。

Of vegetables there are scallions, leek, garlic and chives. Of fruits there are peaches, Chinese plums, plums and crab-apples.

有丝、麻、蚕织之事，出纁、绢、丝、布、麻，幅广七寸以下。染色有绯帛。

They have silk and hemp, engage in silkworm rearing and weaving, they produce rough silk, strong silk, fine silk, cloth and hemp. **The width [of the product] is seven *cùn* or less.** As for dye colour they have dark red silk.

梁建方 26

早蚕以正月生、二月熟。

The early silk worms are born **in the first month** and hatch **in the second month**.

畜有牛、马、猪、羊、鸡、犬。

Of livestock there are cows, horses, pigs, goats, chicken and dogs.

Eating, drinking and transport.

饭用竹筥，转之而啖。

For rice they use bamboo baskets, they roll the rice between their fingers and eat it.

梁建方 31

羹用象杯，形若鸡彝。

For soup they use elephant cups shaped like chicken vessels.

有船无车。

They have boats, but no carts.

Clothing and hair styles.

男子以毡皮为帔，女子绝布为裙衫，仍披毡皮之帔。

The men use felt or hides as capes, the women tailor cloth to use as skirts and also drape felt or hides over their shoulders.

梁建方 36

头髻有发，一盘而成，形如髻。

They tie their hair into a knot in one twist, in the shape of a coil.

男女皆跣。

Men and women go barefoot.

/24: 纁、绢、丝] These characters describe different qualities of silk.

/25: 布、麻] These characters probably mean different qualities of hemp cloth.

/33: 象杯] This might be a reference to elephant shaped drinking cups in three colour glaze 三彩象式杯 that were popular during the Táng period, see <http://www.sxhm.com/index.php?ac=article&at=read&did=13264>

r39-40: The width [of the product] is seven *cùn* or less] The term *cùn* 寸 is often translated as 'inch', but historically the *cùn* was significantly shorter than it is considered today, around 23mm, see Keightley (1995). In relics from the earlier kingdom of Diān 滇国 period excavated at Shízhài Shān 石寨山 women are shown using backstrap looms, see Féng Hànji 冯汉骥 (1961), which result in such a narrow strips of cloth. Tools for such use have been excavated at Lǐjiā Shān 李家山, see Zhāng Zēngqí 张增祺 and Wáng Dàdào 王大道 (1975), p. 126.

r42: in the first month] of the lunar calendar, i.e. late January to February

r42-43: in the second month] late February to March

r51: They tie their hair into a knot in one twist, in the shape of a coil.] This refers to women only, as the characters used here denote female hairstyles.

The section on funerary customs describes a funeral following ancient Chinese burial customs as described in the classic text 《礼仪》.⁽¹⁴⁾

While this is in contrast to the burial customs of Nánzhào, tombs from the Hàn dynasty have been unearthed in the Ērhǎi region.

至于死丧哭泣棺郭袭敛，无不毕备。

When it comes to death and burial the wailing, the inner and the outer coffin, the corpse dressing and the placing of the corpse in the coffin: everything required is there.

三年之内，穿地坎殡于舍侧，上作小屋。

In the first three years they dig a hole, place the coffin on the side of a room and build a small house on top.

梁建方 45

三年而后出而葬之，蠹蚌封棺，令其耐湿。家富者杀马牛祭祀，亲戚毕会，皆牛酒助焉，多者至数百人。

After three years they take the coffin out for burial. They use shells of snails to entomb the coffin, so it can endure the damp. Rich households sacrifice horses and cows, their relatives all attend the gathering, they assist with cows and wine for the feast, at large ones many hundreds attend.

梁建方 50

父母死皆衰布衣，不澡。远者至四五年，近者二三年，然后即吉。

When the parents die, they all wear garments made from coarse hemp and do not wash. The longer ones last for up to four or five years, the shorter ones two or three years, then they take part in auspicious events.

其被人杀者，丧主以麻结发而黑其面，衣裳不缉。

In case of those who were murdered the eldest son uses hemp to tie his hair and blacks his face. The clothes are unhemmed.

Marriage customs. The text notes that marriages within the same family are not taboo, this could be a reference to the practice of cross-cousin marriage.

梁建方 55

唯服内不废婚嫁。娶妻不避同姓。

The mourning period does not affect weddings. When they take a wife, they do not avoid the same family name.

富室娶嫁，金银各数十两，马牛羊皆数十头，酒数十瓶。

When a rich household takes a wife or marries off a daughter, several dozen *liǎng* of silver and gold, dozens of horses, cows and goats

[39: 棺郭] These two characters stand for the inner and outer coffin respectively.

[42: 穿地坎] The 《礼仪》 has the sentence ‘甸人掘坎于阶间，少西。’ which Steele (1917), p. 49 translates as ‘The farm-hands dig a pit between the steps and a little to the west.’ He notes that ‘Into which the things used at the lesser dressing were thrown.’, Steele (1917), p. 224. So the hole mentioned here is not for the burial of the corpse.

[42: 殡] This character is used in the 《淮南子·要略》 as ‘故治三年之丧，殡文王于两楹之间，以俟远方’ It also occurs a number of times in the 《礼记·檀弓上》，e.g. ‘子思曰：“丧三日而殡，凡附于身者，必诚必信，勿之有悔焉耳矣。三月而葬，凡附于棺者，必诚必信，勿之有悔焉耳矣。丧三年以为极，亡则弗之忘矣。故君子有终身之忧，而无一朝之患。故忌日不乐。’ Legge (1885), p. 124 translates this as ‘Sze-sze said, ‘On the third day of mourning, when the body is put into the coffin, (a son) should exercise sincerity and good faith in regard to everything that is placed with it, so that there shall be no occasion for repentance. In the third month when the body is interred, he should do the same in regard to everything that is placed with the coffin in the grave, and for the same reason. Three years are considered as the extreme limit of mourning; but though (his parents) are out of sight, a son does not forget them.’

[50: 即吉] Many dictionaries translate this as ‘to take off the mourning garments’, I think it means after that period people are allowed to take part in auspicious events 吉 again, thus implying that mourning garments are not worn any more.

(14) For a translation of the 《礼仪》 regarding funerary customs see Steele (1917), p. 49. For a contextual analysis of Chinese funerary customs see Cook (2006).

女之所贲金银，将徙亦称是。

婿不迎亲，女至其家，亦有拜谒尊卑之礼。

Penal code.

其俗有盗窃、杀人、淫秽之事，酋长即立一长木，为击鼓警从，共会其下。

强盗者，众共杀之，若贼家富强，但烧其屋，夺其田业而已，不至于死。

穿窬盗者，九倍征赋。

处女孀妻，淫佚不坐，其夫而淫，男女俱死。

不跨有夫女子之衣。

若奸淫之人，其族强者，输金银请和，妻则弃之。

其两杀者死，家族即报复，力不能敌则援其部落举兵相攻之。

and tens of vats of wine are given.

As to the female side sending gold and silver, **she moves and it is considered appropriate.**

The groom does not go to collect the bride, the bride arrives at his home, bringing gifts to pay respect to old and young.

梁建方 61

According to their customs in the event of robbery, murder or adultery the chieftain sets up a wooden pole and beats a drum to alert the people, everyone then assembles under the pole.

Robbers are killed by the masses. If a thief's household is wealthy, they only burn his house and take his land, nothing more, they do not kill him.

Those who climb over walls to steal, must pay nine times compensation.

For **unmarried women and widows** licentious behaviour is not punished, but when they have a husband and commit adultery, man and woman are put to death.

It is not permitted to touch a married woman's clothes.

For those that commit adultery, if their tribe is strong, they send gold and silver asking for reconciliation, the wife is then abandoned.

If one kills another, then their clan will avenge them, but if their strength is insufficient then their tribe calls the troops to attack them.

梁建方 66

梁建方 71

梁建方 76

梁建方 81

4 Acknowledgements

Thanks to 刘衍衍 for helpful comments on a draft version of this translation.

5 Glossary

l60: 女之所贲金银，将徙亦称是] In the 《新唐书》 this passage is written as 富室娶妻，纳金银牛羊酒，女所贲亦如之。

l79: 两杀] In the related text of the 《文献通考》 it reads: '凡相杀必报，力不能则其部助之。'; which can be translated as 'All murderers will be avenged, if their strength is insufficient, their tribe will assist them.'

r74-75: she moves and it is considered appropriate.] The meaning of this passage is unclear. The version of the 《新唐书》 suggests it should be translated as 'the female side gives just as much'.

r86: unmarried women and widows] A more literal translation is 'virgins and widows'.

- Bái Mán** 白蛮: Bái Mán, tribal classification during the Táng dynasty, the Bái Mán were the considered closer to Chinese culture than the Wū 乌 Mán – see page 5, 12
- Chǔ** 楚: important state before the Qín Cháo 秦朝, in present-day Húběi 湖北 –
- Chǔ Guó** 楚国: kingdom of Chǔ, ancient Chinese state before the Qin dynasty, 704–223BCE – see page 8, 12
- Diān** 滇: one of the earliest polities known to China in present-day Yúnnán, later also a geographical term for the region – see page *see* 滇国
- Diānchí** 滇池: Lake Dian, large lake in the center of Yúnnán, south of present-day Kūnmíng 昆明 – see page 8, 12
- Diān Guó** 滇国: kingdom of Diān, historic polity in Yunnan, centered around Diānchí, flourishing at the time of the Hàn dynasty – see pages 8, 9, 12
- Dūdūfǔ** 都督府: area command, ‘Táng dynasty military jurisdiction and/or its headquarters’, see Hucker (1985), 7314 – see page 5, 12
- Ērhǎi** 洱海: Lake Ērhǎi, highland lake in western Yúnnán with the center of Nánzhào on its western side. It was also called Xīěr 西洱, Xīěr Hé – see pages 5, 10, 12
- Hàn Cháo** 汉朝: Hàn dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 202 BCE–220 – see pages 5, 10, 12
- Hàn** 汉: Hàn, main ethnic group of China, also name of early dynasty – see page 8, 12
- Húběi** 湖北: Chinese province –
- Jiāngjūn** 将军: general, ‘throughout history the most common term for the commander of a substantial body of troops, whether a regular officer of the standing army or the ad hoc commander of a special force organized for a campaign; occurs with many kinds of prefixes’, see Hucker (1985), 694 – see page 5, 12
- Jiùtáng Shū** 《旧唐书》: ‘*Old History of the Táng*’, major Chinese history work about the Táng dynasty – see pages 5, 7, 12
- Kūnmíng** 昆明市: Kūnmíng, present-day capital of Yúnnán, founded as second capital of Nánzhào – see page 12, *see* 拓东
- Lǐjiā Shān** 李家山: important grave site of the Diān Guó 滇国 period, *see* Zhāng Zēngqí 张增祺 and Wáng Dàdào 王大道 (1975) – see page 9
- Lǐ Shìmín** 李世民: name of Táng emperor Tàizōng –
- Lǐ Yuān** 李渊: founder of the Táng dynasty, ruled 618–626 – see page 5
- Liáng Jiànfāng** 梁建方: Táng dynasty general, author of the 《西洱河风土记》, a report about his expedition to the Ērhǎi region in 648 – see page 5, 7
- Nánzhào** 南诏: southern zhào, regional power with its center on Ērhǎi during the 8th and 9th centuries – see pages 5, 10, 12
- Qín Cháo** 秦朝: Qín dynasty, – see page 12
- Shízhài Shān** 石寨山: Shízhài hill, hill on the eastern side of Diānchí 滇池 where Diān Guó 滇国 graves have been found – see page 9, 12
- Shǐjì** 《史记》: ‘*Records of the Historian*’, – see page 8, 12
- Sīmǎ Qiān** 司马迁: Hàn dynasty historian, author of the 《史记》 – see page 8
- Sìchuān** 四川: Chinese province – see page 5

- Sōngwài Mán** 松外蛮: tribal group in south-west Sìchuān and north-west Yúnán, conquered in 648 by Liángjiàn fāng 梁建方 – see page 5, 7
- Suí Cháo** 隋朝: Suí dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 581–618 – see page 5, 13
- Tàizōng** 太宗: Second Táng dynasty emperor Lǐ Shì mǐn 李世 民, ruled 626–649 – see page 5
- Táng Cháo** 唐朝: Táng dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 618–907 – see page 5, 13
- Táng** 唐: Táng, Chinese dynasty contemporary with Nánzhào, 618–907 – see pages 5, 7, 9, 13
- Tángtài zōng** 唐太宗: Táng emperor Tàizōng, Second Táng dynasty emperor Lǐ Shì mǐn 李世 民, ruled 626–649 – see page 13
- Tuòdōng** 拓东: eastern capital of Nánzhào –
- Wǔdé** 武德: reign period of Táng dynasty emperor Gāozǔ 高祖, 618–626 – see page 7
- Xīchāng** 西昌: –
- Xǐěr** 西洱: shorter form of Xǐěr Hé, a reference to Ěrhǎi –
- Xǐěr Hé** 西洱河: Xiěr River, historic name for Ěrhǎi, now in use for the river that flows out of the lake – see pages 5, 7, 13
- Xǐěr Hé Fēngtǔ Jì** 《西洱河风土记》: ‘*Records of the Local Customs of Ěrhǎi*’, one of the earliest records of the Ěrhǎi region, compiled in 648 – see pages 5, 7, 8, 13
- Xīzhōu** 巂州: Xīzhōu, a prefecture at present-day Xīchāng 西昌 – see pages 5, 7, 13
- Xīn Táng Shū** 《新唐书》: ‘*New History of the Táng*’, major Chinese history work about the Táng dynasty – see pages 5, 7, 11, 13
- Yèláng** 夜郎: ancient powerful political entity in the region of present-day Guìzhōu – see page 8
- Yīnyáng** 阴阳: Yīn and Yáng, key concept of Chinese philosophy – see page 8, 13
- Yòu** 右: right, part of titles, senior to 左 – see page 5, 13
- Yúnnán** 云南: at the time of the Táng dynasty the name for the geographic region south of its Jiannan district – see page 5
- Zhànguó** 战国: Warring States, Warring States period, the time before the Qin dynasty, 475–221 BCE – see page 8, 13
- zhào** 诏: *zhào*, term for a local ruler or his realm – see page 13
- Zhēnguān** 贞观: reign period of Tángtài zōng, 627–649 – see page 5, 7
- Zhuāng Qiāo** 庄躋: Chǔ 楚 general who became king of Diān[napi] during the Warring States period – see page 8, 9
- Zīzhì Tōngjiàn** 《资治通鉴》: ‘*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*’, – see pages 5, 7, 13

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