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## Anchors of Stability: Place-Names in Early China

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# Anchors of Stability: Place-Names in Early China

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**Abstract:** The use of place-names in China predates its written history, which extends back at least 3,500 years. While the basic principles of toponym formation in ancient China are similar to those in other cultures around the world, early in its history a process took place that led to a standardization of the practices by which place-names were formulated. The central argument in this essay is that the essential features of place-name nomenclature in China were already in place before the Qin unification in 221 BCE.

提要: 在中國使用地名的歷史要早於其使用書面語的歷史。該歷史至少可以追溯到 3,500 年前。儘管中國古代地名形成的基本原理與世界其他文化中的地名相似，但在其歷史的早期卻有一個發展過程。該過程導致地名制定的規範化。本文的中心論點是，古代中國地名的基本特徵早在西元前 221 年秦統一之前就已經存在。

**Keywords:** *diming* 地名 (place-names), oracle-bone inscriptions, *Shijing* 詩經, “Tribute to Yu” (Yugong 禹貢), Fangma tan 放馬灘 maps, Mawang dui 馬王堆 maps

“In the distant past, then, the land was without names.”<sup>1</sup>

— George R. Stewart (1895–1980)

“The poet’s eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
and, as imagination bodies forth  
the forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
a local habitation and a name.”<sup>2</sup>

— William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

先王之跡既遠，地名又數改易，是以采獲舊聞，考跡『詩』『書』。推表山川，以綴『禹貢』、『周官』、『春秋』，下及戰國、秦、漢焉。

“Not only are the vestiges of ancient kings lodged in the remote past, but place-names have also been changed and altered several times since. Thus, I have retrieved and gathered old knowledge on this matter and investigated vestiges in the *Poetry* [*Canon*] and *Documents* [*Canon*]. By careful study of the names of mountains and rivers therein one can make connections between places mentioned in the ‘Tribute of Yu,’ *Officers of the Zhou*, and *Spring and Autumn*, which have been transmitted down since the Warring States, Qin, and Han.”<sup>3</sup>

— Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE)

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<sup>1</sup> George R. Stewart, *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States* (New York: Random House, 1945), 4.

<sup>2</sup> “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Act V, Scene 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Documents on the Han) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 28*shang*.1542–43.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

We begin with an anecdote recorded by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–c. 597), a government official who served several different states during the late Six Dynasties period (220–581),<sup>4</sup> one of which was the Northern Qi (Bei Qi 北齊; 550–577). Yan’s account is drawn from a text he completed in 577 about his own family’s history titled *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (Family instructions for the Yan clan). “Ruler of the Qi” (Qizhu 齊主) refers to Emperor Wenxuan (Wenxuan di 文宣帝; or Gao Yang 高洋), who reigned from 550 to 559. Bing county (Bingzhou 並州) corresponds to the general area around modern Taiyuan 太原 in Shanxi.

吾嘗從齊主幸並州，自井陘關入上艾縣，東數十里獵閭村。後百官受馬糧在晉陽東百餘里，亢仇城側。並不識二所本是何地，博求古今，皆未能曉。及檢《字林》、《韻集》，乃知獵閭是舊躡[躡]<sup>5</sup>餘聚，亢仇舊是段勲[段勲]亭，悉屬上艾。時太原王劭欲撰《鄉邑記注》，因此二名聞之，大喜。

I once accompanied the Ruler of Qi on a royal visit to Bing county. From Well Gap Pass (Jingxing guan)<sup>6</sup> we passed into Shang’ai town.<sup>7</sup> Several tens of *li* to the east of there is Hunter Gate Village (Lielü cun). Later, when the Hundred Officers (that is, officials of the Northern Qi government) provided provender to their horses near Kangchou City, a

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4 China scholars writing in English cannot agree on a name for the period following the collapse of the Han in 220 and the founding of the Sui dynasty in 581. Some call it the “Early Medieval” or “Early Imperial” period, while others prefer “Age of Disunion.” Scholars in China employ yet another designation: “Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties” (Wei Jin Nanbei chao 魏晉南北朝). I prefer the simpler term “Six Dynasties” (Liuchao 六朝) and will use it throughout this essay.

5 Chinese text cited in this communication will sometimes include Chinese characters in brackets. These are alternate, written forms for the preceding character.

6 This mountain passageway is located west of Jingxing 井陘 (literally, “Well Gap”) town (*xian* 縣), in the southwestern part of Hebei bordering Shanxi. It functioned as a strategic passageway through the Taihang 太行 mountain range into north China.

7 During the Western or Former Han (206 BCE–25 CE), Shang’ai town fell under the jurisdiction of Bing county.

hundred some *li* east of Jinyang [town], none of them knew the location of these two places (that is, Hunter Gate Village and Kangchou City). Extensive checking in books both ancient and modern all failed to identify them. Not until I consulted the *Zilin* (Forest of Chinese characters) and *Yunji* (Collected rhymes) did I realize that Hunter Gate is the former Lieyu Settlement, and Kangchou is the former [site of the] Manqiu Pavilion.<sup>8</sup> Both fell under the jurisdiction of Shang'ai. At that time, Wang Shao (550–c. 610)<sup>9</sup> of Taiyuan planned to compile *Xiangyi jizhu* (Notes and glosses on hamlets and villages [around Taiyuan]), and so he was greatly pleased when I told him about these two names.<sup>10</sup>

Wang Shao's concern about the origin and meaning of place-names (*diming* 地名)<sup>11</sup> reflects a heightened interest in *dili* 地理, or the “configurations (*li*) of the earth (*di*),”<sup>12</sup> that first emerged in the

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8 The *Zilin* 字林 (Forest of Chinese characters), compiled by Lü Chen 呂忱 c. 350, and *Yunji* 韻集 (Collected rhymes), compiled by his younger brother Lü Jing 呂靜, were authoritative dictionaries in wide circulation during the Six Dynasties, and regarded as especially useful in providing glosses on uncommon Chinese characters and obscure names. Except for quoted fragments that have survived in other texts, however, both works are now lost.

9 Wang Shao, a native of Jinyang 晉陽 (modern Taiyuan), was a Sui dynasty (581–618) historian known for his profound erudition. For his official biography see Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), ed., *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 69.1601–10. For a summary biography in English, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature, A Reference Guide: Part Two* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1226–28.

10 My translation of this passage is based on that of Su-yü Teng (Deng Siyu 鄧嗣禹; 1906–1988), with some minor modifications, which appears in his *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan (Yen-shih chia-hsün): An Annotated Translation of the Classic by Yen Chih-t'ui (531–c. 597)* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 80–81.

11 Throughout this essay I use the terms *diming*, place-name, and toponym interchangeably to refer to names that are coined specifically to denote reference to a place or geographic entity.

12 The term *dili* is first used in the *Xici* 繫辭 commentary (second century BCE) on the *Yijing* 易經 (Changes canon), where it is employed as a counterpart of the term *tianwen* 天文, or “patterns of the Heavens”: “[The sage, in accordance with the *Yijing*,] looks up to observe the patterns of the Heavens; looks down to examine the configurations of the Earth” (仰以觀于天文，俯以察於地理). *Yijing tongzhu* 易經通注 (*Siku quanshu* ed.), 7.11b. Note: the Chinese character *li* 理 carries the semantic classifier (or “radical”) for “jade” (玉) because it originally meant “to dress (that is, to arrange in proper order by

Eastern or Later Han (25–220 CE) and thrived in the centuries following its collapse.<sup>13</sup> Certainly one major inspiration for enhanced interest in *dili* was the influence of the “Dili zhi” 地理志 (Bibliographic

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carving and polishing) a piece of jade” (理，治也). See Xu Shen 許慎 (30–124 CE), *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), 12*shang*. Cf. the *Shuowen jiezi*, 185*shang*, definition of *wen*: “*Wen* means marked with interlocking and patterned lines” (文，錯畫也).

The “Jiaosi zhi 郊祀志” (Monograph on suburban sacrifices) in the *Hanshu* relates the following: “The sun, moon, and stars (*sanguang* 三光; literally, “Three Luminaries”) form the patterns of the Heavens; the mountains and rivers form the configurations of the Earth” (三光，天文也。山川，地理也). *Hanshu*, 25*xia*.1266.

Two key points emerge from these references to *dili* in the *Xici* commentary and the *Hanshu* chapter on suburban sacrifices. First, *dili* of the Earth mirrors a counterpart of spatial organization in the Heavens called *tianwen*. The fundamental purpose of these complementary systems is to organize space into “patterns and configurations” (*wen* and *li*) that establish *order* in both the celestial and terrestrial (or secular) worlds. Second, the two, core topographical elements that comprise *dili*, or the “configurations of the Earth,” are *mountains* and *rivers*. Indeed, as we shall see in the discussions to follow, many of China’s earliest *diming* seem to have been first conferred upon “mountains and rivers,” and the names they bear function as primary geographical reference points in the ordering of space in ancient China. One additional and important point here: probably the most important study written in English concerning the historical construction of ordering human space in ancient China is Mark David Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). One important theme that runs throughout Lewis’s book is this: the idea of “space” in ancient China was conceived and organized through a series of complementary opposites or juxtapositions: center vs. periphery, inner vs. outer, superior vs. inferior, and so on. While Professor Lewis’s superb study offers great insight into how space was conceived, formulated, and organized in early China, the importance of place-names in this process is not given as much attention as it deserves. One purpose of this essay is to fill, at least partially, some of the space in this gap.

Finally, it might also be mentioned here that it was not until the late Qing period (1644–1911) that the word *dili* acquired its modern meaning of “geography.” And, although it is still sometimes used in reference to the nature and relative arrangement of places and physical features on the earth’s surface, it now more commonly refers to the *science* of studying the description, distribution, and interaction of the diverse physical, biological, and cultural features of the land (in modern Chinese, “geography” as a branch of learning is now often called *dili xue* 地理學; literally, “study of the earth’s configurations”).

<sup>13</sup> Despite the significant breakthroughs in map making introduced by Pei Xiu 裴秀 (224–271), who produced the first historical map that indicated changes in place-names, and the considerable evidence (mainly, the titles of books now lost) in various sources, especially the bibliographic monographs in various dynastic histories dating from the Six Dynasties and the “Jingji zhi” 經籍志 (Bibliographic monograph on canonical and non-canonical texts) in the *Suishu*, little scholarly attention has been given to the surge in *dili* interest in the Eastern or Later Han to the Tang (618–907). This is primarily because most of these works are now lost. Still, judging from the extant writings of Han scholars like Ying Shao 應劭 (d. c.

monograph on the configurations of the earth) chapter in the *Hanshu* (I shall have more to say below about this important geographical treatise). The same concern is also apparent in numerous works dating from the late and post-Han eras, including lexicographical works such as the *Zilin* and *Yunji* (mentioned by Yan Zhitui), as well as several important dictionaries, most prominently the *Erya* 爾雅, parts of which probably date from the third century BCE;<sup>14</sup> China's oldest comprehensive dictionary, the *Shuowen jiezi* (Talks on single-constituent characters and explanations of multi-constituent characters), another influential dictionary, presented to the throne in 121 CE; and the *Shiming* 釋名 (Explanation of names), compiled c. 200 CE (?). All these works, and no doubt many others now lost, include commentary and glosses on the origin and meanings of place-names.

Another expression of special interest in *dili* was the emergence and florescence — between the first and fifth centuries CE — of a prose form later called *diji* 地記 (Accounts of places), which in English is sometimes rendered as “geographical monographs” or “locality writings.”<sup>15</sup> These texts are

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204), Yuan Kang 袁康 (fl. late first century CE), and others, clearly one of their scholarly priorities was the etymology of place-names. To cite just two examples, Ying Shao, in his *Hanshu jijie yinyi* 漢書集解音義 (Collected glosses on the phonology and meaning [of terms] in the *Han Documents*), glosses 160 place-names in Ban Gu's “Dili zhi,” while the third and eighth chapters of Yuan Kang's *Yuejue shu* 越絕書 (Documents on the distinctness of Yue) provide extensive information on over 200 place-names in the southern states of Wu 吳 and Yue 越. On the latter text, see Olivia Milburn, trans., *The Glory of Yue: An Annotated Translation of the Yuejue shu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), esp. Chapter 3, “The Record of the Lands of Wu” (Ji Wudi zhuan 記吳地傳), 91–121, and Chapter 10, “The Record of the Lands of Yue” (Jidi zhuan 記地傳), 221–44. On the latter chapter, see also Milburn's informative essay “A Virtual City: The ‘Record of the Lands of Yue’ and the Founding of Shaoxing,” *Oriens Extremus* 46 (2007): 117–46.

<sup>14</sup> See Bernhard Karlgren, “The Early History of the *Chou Li* and *Tso Chuan* Texts,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 3 (1931): 1–59 (see esp. 44–54).

<sup>15</sup> As far as I know, no one has written (in any language) a detailed account of the rise and development of *ji* 記 as an independent form of prose writing, or of *diji* (also known as *dizhi* 地志) as a sub-variety of *ji* writing, which first flourished during the Six Dynasties. A useful overview of Six Dynasties *diji* can be found in David Jonathan Felt, “Patterns of the Earth: Writing Geography in Early Medieval China” (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2014), 72–122. Also informative is Andrew Chittick's “The Development of Local Writing in Early Medieval China,” in *Early Medieval China* 9 (2003): 35–70. On *ji* writing during the Tang, see He Li 何李, “Tangdai jiti wen yanjiu” 唐代記體文研究 (Ph.D. dissertation, East China Normal University, 2010). Another form of location-specific writing that emerged in the post-Han period (or even earlier) is the *tujing* 圖經. *Tujing* texts known by title and dating from the pre-Tang period survive only in fragmentary form, but from what

among China’s earliest monographs concerning places identified by name.<sup>16</sup> Although the content of extant *diji* texts varies considerably — for instance, while most deal with towns or cities, others consider places on the provincial or even national level. Still others deal with local and regional geography or topography such as notable mountains and prominent rivers, as well as local products and customs. Some describe anomalies, along with alien lands beyond China’s borders, and even strange beasts and animals. One of the most important aspects of *diji* texts is that they prioritize and organize units of defined space, and they do so through a central, organizing reference system based on place-names. By the seventh century, when Wei Zheng compiled the “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 (Bibliographic monograph on arts and letters) of the *Suishu*, 136 *diji* or “geographical monograph” titles were listed therein under the general category of *di* 地.<sup>17</sup> Although these texts seem to have enjoyed wide circulation during the Six Dynasties, unfortunately most are now lost.<sup>18</sup>

Other important and detailed works about place(s) compiled during the post-Han era include the *Huayang guo zhi* 華陽國志 (Monograph on the lands south of [Mount] Hua; compiled in the fourth century), *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Commentary on the *Waterways Treatise*; compiled in the early sixth century), and the *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (Accounts of the Buddhist Monastic Complexes of

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information is available it seems clear that production of *tujing* texts during the Six Dynasties was yet another expression of interest in generating knowledge at the *local* level. The most detailed study available of early *tujing* texts appears in a two-part article by Hua Linfu 華林甫, “Sui Tang ‘*Tujing*’ jikao (shang)” 隋唐《圖經》輯考(上), *Guoli Zhengzhi daxue lishi xuebao* 國立政治大學歷史學報 27 (Mar. 2007): 141–213; and “Sui Tang ‘*Tujing*’ jikao (xia)” 隋唐《圖經》輯考(下), *Guoli Zhengzhi daxue lishi xuebao* 28 (Nov. 2007): 1–91.

<sup>16</sup> I should mention that chapters three and ten in the *Yuejue shu* (for details, see n.13 above), compiled during the Eastern Han, could easily have functioned as independent treatises or *diji* monographs on individual places; specifically, the physical layout of the capital of Wu (modern Suzhou) on the one hand, and the entire Yue region on the other.

<sup>17</sup> *Suishu*, 33.982–87. Although Wei Zheng’s bibliographic monograph in the *Suishu* does not treat geographical works written in the *ji* 記 form as an independent genre of writing (they are subsumed under the general heading “*Dili*”), some of his predecessors did. For instance, when the noted bibliophile Ren Fang 任昉 (459–507) compiled an expanded version of the late fifth-century work *Dili shu* 地理書, he chose a new title: *Diji* 地記. Unfortunately, Ren Fang’s massive anthology (252 *juan*) of *diji* writing was already lost by the Song dynasty (960–1279).

<sup>18</sup> Only nine of the 136 titles survive. The rest are either in fragmentary condition or lost.

Luoyang; completed in 547)<sup>19</sup> — all of which have survived and are often mined by China scholars. Beginning with the bibliographic monograph in the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Former documents on the Tang; completed in 945), however, these and similar works (now lost) about place were usually no longer subsumed under the category of “history” (*shi* 史) or “miscellaneous histories” (*zashi* 雜史), but instead regarded as an independent, identifiable prose form (*diji*) that fell under the general category of *dili*.<sup>20</sup>

The Yan Zhitui anecdote that began this communication also reveals what is an essential feature of Chinese place-names: they often changed over time.<sup>21</sup> Yan had never heard of Hunter Gate Village or Kangchou City because they were old names that had gone out of use. Alternate written forms of *diming*, as evident in these same two toponyms, also produced confusion because when written forms of Chinese characters vary, pronunciation and meaning can, and often do, change as well. Given China's long, continuous history, one can only imagine how many *diming*, especially those referencing places of a more local nature, have come, gone, and are now lost forever.

In his “Bibliographic Monograph on the Configurations of the Earth” Ban Gu lists over 4,500 individual place-names<sup>22</sup> and, without question, this is *the* most important and influential geographical work of the imperial era. Almost without exception, scholars who work in the field of historical geography acknowledge that Ban's monograph established the practice of including a dedicated chapter

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19 There are two complete translations of the *Luoyang qielan ji* available in English: W. J. F. Jenner, trans., *Memories of Loyang: Yang Hsüan-chih and the Lost Capital, 493–534* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Yi-t'ung Wang (Wang Yitong 王伊同), trans., *An Account of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

20 The *Shuijing zhu* and *Luoyang qielan ji* are both cataloged in the *Jiu Tangshu* under “Dili.” See Liu Xu 劉洵 (887–946) et al., eds., *Jiu Tangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 46.2012 and 46.2014, respectively. For reasons that are not clear, the editors decided to classify the *Huayang guo zhi* under “Zashi” instead of “Dili.” See *Jiu Tangshu*, 46.1992.

21 On the phenomenon of one place having different names, simultaneously and over time, see the comments in Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual, Fifth Edition* (Privately published and distributed on Amazon, 2018), 253–54. As documented by Wilkinson, 253, Table 51, in its claimed history of approximately three-thousand years, the city of Beijing has had over twenty different official designations, along with numerous additional literary, alternative, and abbreviated names.

22 Hua Linfu 華林甫, *Zhongguo diming xue yuanliu* 中國地名學淵流 (Changsha: Hunan renmin, 2002), 1–6.

on *dili* in the later dynastic histories and, along with *diji* and related textual sources about place, functioned as one important forerunner of the local, regional, and comprehensive gazetteer.<sup>23</sup>

One additional observation before moving to the next section: beginning in the Later Han period and extending through the Six Dynasties era (that is, from the first to the sixth centuries CE), the use of place-names in China already had a history of at least 1,500 years and probably much longer than that. The remarkable scholarly interest in *dili* and *diming* throughout this period was arguably, in part at least, a response to the long-standing practice of place-naming. Even in the sixth century CE, as reported by Yan Zhitui, sometimes one came across old place names like Hunter Gate and Kangzhou that could not be identified, even after consulting “books both ancient and modern.” There seems to be no question that a paucity of information on the old toponyms inspired the compilers of the *Erya*, *Shuowen jiezi*, and *Shiming* to include glosses on them. It most certainly encouraged Wang Shao to compile his treatise on local place-names around Taiyuan. Moreover, it is certainly no surprise that when, during the Jin 晉 period (265–420), Jingxiang Fan 京相璠 (third century?) produced China’s first toponym dictionary, the *Chunqiu tu diming* 春秋土地名 (Place-names of lands during the Spring and Autumn [period]),<sup>24</sup> his subject matter was old place-names dating from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE (that is, the Spring and Autumn era). In other words, these are *diming* from remote antiquity — the locations of which scholars of the Six Dynasties period oftentimes could not identify.

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23 For just one recent expression of this view, see Ao Wang (Wang Ao 王傲), *Spatial Imaginaries in Mid-Tang China: Geography, Cartography, and Literature* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2018), 35.

24 Authorship of the *Chunqiu tu diming* (also known as *Chunqiu diming* 春秋地名) is usually attributed to Jingxiang Fan, though some sources identify it as jointly written by “Jiangxiang and others.” See *Suishu*, 32.932. The text seems to have been lost by the Song period, though numerous lines from it are quoted and thus preserved by Li Daoyuan in the *Shuijing zhu*. Little is known about Jingxiang Fan except that some sources identify him as a “follower” (*menke* 門客) of the famous Jin dynasty cartographer Pei Xiu. For a useful summation of what is known about Jingxiang Fan, see Liu Shengjia 劉盛佳, “Jindai jiechu de dili xuejia — Jingxiang Fan” 晉代傑出的地理學家 — 京相璠, *Ziran kexue shi yanjiu* 自然科學史研究 6.1 (1987): 58–65.

## PROVENANCE

No one knows for sure when toponyms were first used in China, but the practice certainly predates written history. *Homo sapiens* first left Africa some 70,000 years ago and began resettling around the globe, and by about 8,000 BCE every habitable continent on the planet was populated with humans. Once a group or tribe frequented or settled in a given area, those residents needed a mutually understandable, spoken reference system to indicate specific, notable land and water locations in that environment so as to distinguish them from other places, eventuating in the need for place-names. Furthermore, as is often the case in many cultures around the world, China included, the nature of the land itself often determined the formation of the moniker it received. For instance, a great, muddy waterway, colored by loess silt, not surprisingly came to be called the “Yellow River” (Huanghe 黄河),<sup>25</sup> while a lofty, majestic peak in Shandong was (and still is) designated “Mighty Mountain” (Taishan 泰山).<sup>26</sup> Smaller, more local or “lesser” places, inspired similar, landscape- and water-related names. For instance, a cavern where a great, striped beast was once seen by villagers could easily inspire a tag like “Tiger Cave,” while a creek with a rocky bottom might suggest an appellation like “Stony Brook.”

We know that in China the practice of naming places predates the historical record because toponyms are already prominent in the earliest-known form of writing there: the oracle-bone inscriptions (*jiagu wen* 甲骨文) that date from the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–c. 1046 BCE).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it

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25 In the “Tribute to Yu” chapter of the *Shujing*, which dates from the Warring States period, what we now know today as the “Yellow River” is simply called “the River” (He 河). The earliest occurrence I have found of the term Huanghe, or “Yellow River,” appears in the *Hanshu*, 16.527.

26 The origin of the name “Taishan” is obscure. According to tradition, it had several earlier names, including Shanjiao 山脚 and Daishan 岱山, before Mengzi 孟子 (or Mencius) recorded the line made famous by Confucius after scaling the mountain: “When I ascend Mighty Mountain it diminishes the rest of the world” (登太[泰]山而小天下). Chinese Text Project ed. (<https://ctext.org/mengzi/jin-xin-i>; accessed 21 July 2020), no. 24.

27 The standard source in English on the oracle bones and their inscriptions is David N. Keightley (1932–2017), *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Note: the names Shang 商 and Zhou 周, which we know today as dynastic titles, were in fact drawn from places that the rulers and people of those eras regarded as their homeland or cultic centers. See the remarks on this in Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, fifth edition, 756. There are several examples of this same practice in later Chinese history. For instance, after

is certain that by the middle of the second millennium BCE, which is when experts generally date the oracle bone inscriptions, several of the essential structural and linguistic components of Chinese place-names were already established.

Of the approximately 4,700 individual oracle-bone glyphs<sup>28</sup> that have been deciphered by scholars, more than 500 of them have been identified as place-names.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, many of these toponyms relate to mountains, hills, plains, and waterways: specifically, sites along the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River Valley, that is, the lands over which the ancient Shang kings ruled. Furthermore, as is the case with most place-names used in China throughout the imperial era (and in other cultures around the world, for that matter), many *diming* on the oracle bones are comprised of two glyphs: a specific and a generic. The generic element functions as a suffix. Among the most common Shang dynasty generics are “mountain” (*shan* 山) and other land- and water-related terms such as “foot of a mountain” (*lu* 麓), “food-producing land” (*tu* 土),<sup>30</sup> “river” (*shui* 水), and “river/water source” (*quan* 泉). To form a place-name, a specialized descriptor (the modern term is *zhuanming* 專名) or specific, functioning as a prefix, is placed in front of the generic. For example, the Shang place-name Qishan 蕲山, which is formed by adding the generic-suffix for “mountain” (*shan*) to the prefix-descriptor *qi*, was probably so called because of an abundance of angelica (*qi* 蕲 or *qiai* 蕲艾; *Angelica sinensis*) that grew on its slopes. River names, as in Huanshui 洹水, follow the same structural formula.<sup>31</sup> In fact, with few

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the formidable military commander Zhao Kuangying 趙匡胤 (927–976; r. 960–976) vanquished the Later Zhou regime in 960 and established a new dynasty, he chose for it the name “Song” 宋 from Song county (Songzhou 宋州; modern Shangqiu 商丘, Henan), where he had formerly served as Regional Military Commissioner (*jiedu shi* 節度使) under the Later Zhou.

28 “Glyph” is used here in the sense of an inscribed or written symbol. In the case of the oracle-bone inscriptions, most of these glyphs are pictographs.

29 Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (1911–1966), *Yinxu buci zongshu* 殷墟蔔辭縱述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 249. For a useful introduction to place-names mentioned in oracle bone inscriptions, see Hua Linfu, *Zhongguo diming xue yuanliu*, 1–6.

30 Cf. the definition of *tu* 土 in the *Shuowen jiezi*, 286shang: “Tu is land where things grow out of the ground” (土, 地之吐生物者也).

31 “Huan River” on the oracle-bone inscriptions refers to a waterway in Henan, also known as the Anyang 安陽 River. The ancient city of Yin 殷, located on the south bank of the Huan River, was the site of the last Shang capital. This same site also marks the place where inscribed oracle bones were first discovered in 1899.

exceptions, most subsequent place-names used throughout the imperial era follow this same pattern to formulate a *diming*. Deciphered oracle-bone inscriptions also reveal that, as was also customary in later historical periods, a familiar, two-character place-name could be abbreviated by dropping the generic tag. Thus, Qishan 蘄山 could be shortened to Qi 蘄, Taishan 泰山 could be abbreviated as Tai 泰, and so on. Similarly, the generic *shui* is often dropped in major river names, resulting in one-character designations such as Mi 泌, Luo 洛, Ru 汝, and Huai 淮. Other common Shang period generic-suffixes include *qiu* 丘 (“earthen mound” or “hill”), *tian* 田 (“hunting area”; the meaning “cultivated land” for *tian* came later), *shan* 墡 (“uncultivated land”), and *bi* 鄙 (“borderland”).<sup>32</sup>

Numerical and some directional prefixes are also employed in Shang place-names, as in Sanhu 三戶, or “Three Households,” and Nanmen 南門, or “South Gate.” Additional directional-locational prefixes include *dong* 東 (east), *xi* 西 (west), *bei* 北 (north), *shang* 上 (upper), *xia* 下 (lower), *wai* 外 (outer), and *nei* 內 (inner). For instance, during the Spring and Autumn period (771– c. 476 BCE) in the state of Jin there was a city named Nanqu 南屈 (north of modern Ji 吉 *xian* in Shanxi). Later, a new city in the northern part of the state was given the name Beiqu 北屈.<sup>33</sup> And in the state of Song 宋 there was a town named “Inner Huang” (Neihuang 內黃) and another called “Outer Huang” (Waihuang 外黃). Directional prefixes, then, were already in common use well before the Qin unification, and were adopted to differentiate toponyms using the same generic suffix. One related problem, which would not be resolved until later during the Han and thereafter, was that different places shared the same name. To cite just two examples, during the Warring States era there were no less than four different locations

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<sup>32</sup> Note: many place-names dating from the dawn of Chinese history that comprise a specific + generic survive today. One fascinating example is Bengbu 蚌埠 (alternately written 蚌埠 or 蚌埔; sometimes also known by the name Zhucheng 珠城, or “Pearl City”) in Anhui. Long ago, where the Huai River flows through northern Anhui, its course slowed and its water ran clear, producing an abundance of aquatic life. These conditions were found to be ideal for establishing a freshwater pearl fishery. Someone thus coined the name Bengbu, or “Oyster Wharf.” The city bearing that same name survives today and hosts a population of almost four million people.

<sup>33</sup> The use of *qu* 屈 as a generic element in place-names was not common. In Nanqu and Beiqu, it is used to mean cities that demarcated the northern and southern “borders” or “boundaries” (*jiang* 疆) of the state of Jin. See Wei Zhao’s 韋昭 (204–273) commentary on this in the *Guoyu* 國語 (*Siku quanshu* ed.), 7.11b.

known by the name “Anyang” 安陽:<sup>34</sup> two in the state of Zhao 趙, one in Qin, and still another in Song, while the states of Zhou 周, Qi 齊, and Cao 曹 all hosted places called “South Mountain” (Nanshan 南山). Place-names comprised of more “auspicious” character components such as Anping 安平 and Pingyang 平陽, were also common. Given the favorable connotations of words like *an* 安 (“stable,” “secure”) and *ping* 平 (“peaceful”), their recurrence in place-names is not surprising (approximate counterparts in English might be toponyms that include components such as “green,” “spring,” “park,” “happy,” and so on). Thus, such “propitious” linguistic components, along with others such as *da* 大 (“great”), *xin* 新 (“new”), and *ning* 寧 (“tranquil”), to name just three examples, today still maintain a distinct presence in Chinese place-names.

Aside from Shang dynasty generic tags that relate to physical land and water entities in the Yellow River Valley, there is a second type of suffix — equally important — that refers either to *human settlements* (in modern Chinese, such places are called *jumin dian* 居民點, or “residential areas”) or *man-made landscape features*. These tags are important because they are used to designate places that are (at least nominally) under government administration and control. These form the second general category of place-names, which I call “government-administrative” toponyms. Under the Shang, cities settled and organized for political, administrative, and related purposes were designated by adding the generic tag *yi* 邑, as in Shangyi 商邑, or “Shang City.”<sup>35</sup> There were also place-names for smaller units of human organization. Modest-size villages, for example, were labeled by the generic tag *tun* 屯, as in Niantun 廿屯 (“Twenty Villages”). And there was even a specific generic name for lofty mounds of earth piled up to serve as redoubts or defensive barriers, which during the Shang were called *jing* 京.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The word *yang* 陽, as used as a common suffix in Chinese toponyms, is discussed later in this essay.

<sup>35</sup> Kwang-chih Chang (Zhang Guangzhi 張光直; 1931–2001) has convincingly demonstrated that “Shang City” served as capital for the first three rulers of Shang, and that the designation *Shang* 商 actually meant “the *place* (I have added italics for emphasis here) where ancestors were worshipped.” See his “On the Meaning of *Shang* in the Shang Dynasty,” *Early China* 20 (1995): 69–77.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Shuowen jiezi*, 111*shang*: “*Jing* means a sheer, lofty hill that is man-made” 京, 人所為絕高丘也). The earliest gloss I have found in which *jing* is used to mean “capital city” appears in the *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan* 春秋公羊傳 (date of written composition uncertain; perhaps late Warring States period?); specifically, the entry concerning the ninth year of Duke Huan’s reign (桓公九年; that is, 703 BCE), where the meaning of the term *jingshi* 京師 is explained: “What does *jingshi* mean? It

Examples include Qijing 企京 (“Anticipation Redoubt”), Yijing 義京 (“Principled Redoubt”), and Fanjing 凡京 (“Mundane Redoubt”).<sup>37</sup> The designations for areas or regions along the frontier borders of Shang, traditionally regarded as enemy territory, carry the suffix *fang* 方. Some bear imaginative and disparaging names. Here are some examples: Ruquan 如犬方 (literally, the “Dog-like [people] region”), Guifang 鬼方 (“Ghost-like [people] region”), and “Region of the Barbarian [People]” (Yifang 夷方).<sup>38</sup> In a fascinating example of historical irony, one of these Shang “enemy zones,” called the “Zhou Region” (Zhoufang 周方), eventually rose up, extinguished the Shang, and then created a new dynasty (Zhou) that lasted for almost a millennium.

### EARLY TEXTUAL SOURCES

Textual sources dating from the pre-Qin era constitute an important source of information on early place-name formation.<sup>39</sup> Among these many works, two are especially noteworthy. The first is the

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means ‘the place where Son of Heaven resides.’ What does *jing* mean? *Jing* means ‘massive.’ What does *shi* mean? *Shi* means ‘the multitudes of people.’ When speaking about the place where the Son of Heaven resides, one must employ rhetoric that is profuse and grandiose.” (京師者何? 天子之居也。京者何? 大也。師者何? 眾也。天子之居必以眾大之辭言之). He Xiu 何休 (129–182), commentator, and Xu Yan 徐彥 (Tang dynasty), sub-commentator, *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏 (*Siku quanshu* ed.), 5.9a.

<sup>37</sup> My English translations of the three barriers or redoubts mentioned here are tentative.

<sup>38</sup> Xu Zhaokui 徐兆奎 and Han Guanghui 韓光輝, *Zhongguo diming shihua* 中國地名史話 (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo, 2016), 15–16.

<sup>39</sup> I hasten to point out that there are certainly non-textual sources of the pre-Qin period that also document place-names. Just two examples would be toponyms inscribed on Shang and Zhou bronzes and the place-names that appear on various forms of “hard” currency — such as the round coins minted by Qin; the so-called spade money (*bu[bo]bi* 布[鑄]幣) produced in Zhao 趙, Han 韓, and Wei 魏; and the gold squares minted by Chu. Square gold coins in Chu bore the inscription “Yingyuan” 郢爰, the first Chinese character of which designated the Chu capital at Ying (modern Hubei); the second *yuan* 爰 component indicated the coin’s denomination. These inscriptions do not offer much in the way of new information on toponyms that goes beyond what has already been described and what will be covered later in this essay, so they will not be discussed.

Of course, there are many additional textual sources dating in whole or in part from the pre-Qin period, and most of these works record place-names. Two prominent examples are the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (Treatise on mountains and seas)

*Shijing* 詩經 (*Poetry Canon*; also known in English as the *Book of Songs*, *Book of Odes*, and *Poetry Classic*), China’s earliest poetry anthology. The 305 verses anthologized therein include a rich assortment of Zhou dynasty place-names. Because the *Shijing* poems were composed at different times and collected from various sources, dating the individual verses is extremely difficult. Most experts agree, however, that the collection includes works composed between the eleventh and seventh centuries BCE.

The importance of *diming* in the *Poetry Canon* was already recognized in the Song dynasty when Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296) produced his six-chapter monograph *Shi dili kao* 詩地理考 (Investigation into configurations of the earth in the *Poetry [Canon]*).<sup>40</sup> Throughout the various dynasties since the Song and into the modern era, many studies and commentaries on the *Shijing* have been produced, some of which include exegesis on deciphering the meaning and especially identifying the modern location of place-names mentioned in the collection.<sup>41</sup>

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and *Chuci* 楚辭 (Songs of Chu; the verses therein date from early third century BCE to early second century CE). The *Shanhai jing* is a work of mythic geography and hence many of the over 500 mountain and 300 river names mentioned therein have mythological and religious associations that cannot be matched to historical places. While some of the *diming* mentioned in the *Shanhai jing* follow the naming conventions we have discussed in the oracle bone inscriptions, such as Huaijiang shan 槐江山 (“Sophora Tree River Mountain”) and Chishui 赤水 (“Red River”), many others are fanciful and quite imaginative. Three examples are Zhaoyao shan 招搖山 (“Show-Off-to-All Mountain”), Buzhou shan 不周山 (“Uncertainties Mountain”), and Qianlai shan 錢來山 (“Money-Source Mountain”). Few if any place-names devised and used during the imperial era resemble such creative monikers. Place-names mentioned in the *Chuci*, such as Kunlun 崑崙, the cosmic mount and home of Xiwang mu 西王母, or “Queen Mother of the West,” Danqiu 丹丘 (“Cinnabar Hill”), and Yanggu 陽谷 (“Sunshine Valley”) (all of these places are mentioned in the Yuanyou 遠遊, or “Distant Roaming” poem in the *Chuci*) are similarly drawn from early mythology and religious traditions. While study of such place-names might yield useful information about folk and worship practices in ancient China, the more fanciful of these designations did not have any notable influence on toponym formation in the pre- and post-Qin eras.

<sup>40</sup> For a handy modern edition of this work, see Wang Yinglin, *Shikao; Shi dili kao* 詩考; 詩地理考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Useful available studies include Gui Wencan’s 桂文燦 *Maoshi shidi* 毛詩釋地 (Guangzhou: Guangdong Guomin daxue, 1947); Li Chendong 李辰冬, *Shijing yanjiu fangfa lun* 詩經研究方法論 (Taipei: Shuiniu, 1978); and Yang Tao 楊濤, “*Shijing diming kaolue*” 詩經地名考略 (Master’s thesis, Hebei University, 2011). Especially useful for exegesis of *Shijing* place-names is the *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 詩三家義集疏 (Assembled sub-commentaries on the glosses by the three commentators to the *Shi[jing]*), compiled by Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1918). A convenient modern edition of this work was published in Changsha in 2011 by Yuelu shushe 嶽麓書社.

As was the case with oracle-bone place-names, most *diming* in the *Poetry Canon* reference major mountains/hills (*shan*) and water sources (*shui*), especially notable rivers. Therein one can find a rich array of generic suffixes that appear for the first time in Chinese toponymic history, all of which relate to the topography of territory ruled by Zhou. Especially notable in this regard are the steep-sided loess plateaus in northwest China (generally, the area in and around modern Shaanxi), where Zhou rulers first (that is, before they conquered the Shang c. 1046 BCE) sited their capitals. These plateaus are referenced in toponyms by the generic-suffix *yuan* 原 [塬]. Here is an example, culled from the opening lines of the verse “Cotton” (Mian 緜 [棉]; *Maoshi* no. 237):

周原膻膻， The Zhou Plain is fresh and fertile,  
 堇荼如飴。 Where violets and sow thistle taste sweet as dumplings.<sup>42</sup>

“Zhou Plain” references the so-called Huangtu yuan 黃土原, or “Loess Plain,” in Shaanxi (south of modern Qishan 岐山 *xian* and north of the Weihe 渭河, or Wei River), where the great leader of the Zhou clan during Shang rule, King Tai of Zhou (Zhou Taiwang 周太王), once located his capital. Two additional examples are found in the poem “Duke Liu” (Gong Liu 公劉; *Maoshi* no. 250):

篤公劉， Of generous devotion to the people was Duke Liu,  
 于胥斯原。 He had surveyed the plain [where he was settled].  
 ...  
 陟則在巘， He ascended to the hill-tops;  
 復降在原。 He descended again to the plains.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Based on the translation of James Legge et al., with changes, in *The Chinese Classics: The She King or The Book of Poetry* (rpt., Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 438. Note: both *jin* 堇 (*Ranunculus sceleratus*, also known as *kujin* 苦堇) and *tu* 荼 (*Sonchus oleraceus*), rendered here as “violets” and “sow thistle” respectively, are bitter-tasting plants used for culinary and medicinal purposes. The point here is that soil on the Zhou Plain is so rich that even astringent plants that grow there taste sweet.

<sup>43</sup> Legge, 485 (*Maoshi* no. 250).

The “plains” mentioned in these lines are situated in and around modern Xunyi 枸邑 *xian* in central Shaanxi. The most notable “plain” cited in the *Shijing*, however, is the Zhongyuan 中原, or “Central Plain,” which historians have traditionally regarded as the birthplace of Chinese civilization. “Central” refers to the lower reaches of the Yellow River Valley in modern Henan where Shang kings ruled before their kingdom was conquered by Zhou. Here is how the anonymous author of the poem “Auspicious Day” (Jiri 吉日) describes it:

瞻彼中原， I gaze at Central Plain in the distance;  
其祁孔有。 It is so rich in abundance.<sup>44</sup>

“River-” and “mountain-” generics on the oracle bones also appear (or are implied in abbreviated forms) with regularity in *Poetry Canon*. One example is the landform suffix *qiu* 丘, which is mentioned several times. Specifically, it refers to hillocks or mounds of earth with unique shapes, which are indicated by an adjective prefix. One well-known example occurs in the poem “Wanqiu” 宛丘, where the prefix *wan* indicates a concave-shaped earthen mound:

子之湯[蕩]兮, How unsettled you seem,  
宛丘之上。 There on top of Concave Mound.<sup>45</sup>

Another example occurs in the following couplet, where we encounter the toponym *maoqiu* 旄丘. The reference in this name is to a “sloping” (*mao*) hill or mound; that is, one that is higher in front and lower in the rear:

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44 Legge, 292 (*Maoshi* no. 291), with changes.

45 Legge, 205 (*Maoshi* no. 136), with changes. The Mao commentary on the *Shijing* glosses *wanqiu* as follows: “[Earthen landforms] elevated on four sides and depressed in the center are called ‘concave mounds’” (四方高中央下曰宛丘). *Maoshi zhushu* 毛詩注疏 (*Siku quanshu* ed.), 12.1b. My reading of Wanqiu as a proper noun follows that of most traditional commentators, who understand it as referring to the capital city of the state of Chen 陳 during the Spring and Autumn period. On this reading, see Yang Tao, “*Shijing* diming luekao,” 11–14. As far as I know, this attribution is not corroborated in any primary source.

旄丘之葛兮，           The kudzu on that sloping mound:  
何誕[延]之結。       How long are its vines!<sup>46</sup>

These examples suffice to illustrate that by the Zhou period generic suffixes used in Chinese place-names were already quite sophisticated and precise. Consider the generic tag *qiu*, just mentioned. The authoritative lexicon *Erya*, parts of which some experts date to the third century BCE,<sup>47</sup> includes over twenty glosses on different-shaped *qiu*. For instance, an earthen hill shaped like a chariot was understandably called a *shengqiu* 乘丘, or “chariot mound,” while one that faced a road was designated a *wuqiu* 梧丘, or “parasol tree mound.”<sup>48</sup> Mounds that had a water source in front were called *shengqiu* 滄丘, while those with a water source behind them were known as *juqiu* 沮丘.<sup>49</sup>

Other *Shijing* examples of increasingly precise naming practices are also evident in a new assortment of naturally formed landform and water/river-related generics that appear for the first time in Chinese textual sources. Examples of the former include *fu* 阜 (tall earthen mound), *ling* 陵 (an even larger mound of earth), *yan* 巘 (hilltop, summit, peak), *gang* 岡 (the ridge of a hill), and *zhou* 洲 (island in a river suitable for human habitation). New water-related generics also reflect similar sophistication:

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46 Legge, 59 (*Maoshi* no. 37), with changes. The commentary in the *Maoshi zhushu*, 3.51b, defines *maoqiu* as a mound that is “high in front and low in the back” (前高後下曰旄丘). Note: The climbing plant *ge* 葛 or *shange* 山葛, the common English name for which is “kudzu,” derives from the Japanese name for the East Asian arrowwood plant (*Pueraria montana* var. *lobata*), which is sometimes called the “Japanese arrowwood” or “Chinese arrowwood.”

47 Bernhard Karlgren, “The Early History of the *Chou Li* and *Tso Chuan* Texts,” 49. On dating the *Erya*, I follow the comments in W. South Coblin, “Erh ya” 爾雅, in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China; Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 94–99.

48 Presumably, these mounds were so called because parasol trees (*wutong* 梧桐) were planted along roads they faced.

49 *Erya* (*Institute of Chinese Studies [ICS] Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series* 逐字索引叢刊 ed.; at <https://ctext.org/er-ya/shi-qiu>), no. 16 (accessed on July 10, 2020): “When water emerges from in front it is called a *sheng* mound; when water emerges from behind it is called a *ju* mound; when water emerges from the right it is called a *zheng* mound; and when water emerges from the left it is called a *ying* mound” (水出其前滄丘，水出其後沮丘，水出其右正丘，水出其左營丘).

*jian* 澗 (running mountain stream), *zhao* 沼 (small pool of water), *ze* 澤 (the edge or shoreline around a body of water), *si* 汜 (an oxbow-shaped lake), and *tuo* 沱 (a tributary of the Yangzi, or Changjiang).

Place-names with positional (left, right, upper, lower, and so on) and/or directional (north, south, east, west) prefixes, such as Shangong 上宮 (“Upper Palace”) and Beimen 北門 (“North Gate”), are also common in the *Shijing*. One of the more fascinating and enigmatic poem title/place-names therein is Nanshan 南山, or “South Mountain” (*Maoshi* no. 101). This toponym, which appears in the anthology no fewer than ten times, has inspired different identifications because — as mentioned earlier — more general, directional place-names like “South Mountain” lack specificity (“south” of what?). To cite just one example, based on information culled from the *Commentary on the Waterways Treatise*, the modern scholar Li Chendong notes that an area of Henan during the Zhou was known as Nanyang 南陽. He further surmises that the only peaks near Nanyang are those of the Taihang Mountains. Thus, he concludes that “South Mountain” in the *Shijing* must refer to the Taihang Mountain Range.<sup>50</sup> While this sort of exegesis might help modern readers to better understand place-names in the *Poetry Canon*, identifying the precise modern location of more generalized toponyms like “South Mountain” is a difficult, if not impossible, task. In Li Chendong’s case, he seems unwilling to consider the possibility that the various “Nanshan” references in the *Shijing* might refer to different mountains of that same name. But whether convincing or not, Li’s argument indirectly raises an important point regarding place-naming during the Zhou period: for the first time in Chinese toponymic history we see the graph *yang* 陽 used in place-names to indicate the *southern*, or “sunny” side of a mountain, as in *Maoshi* no. 19:

殷其雷， “Boom” cracks the thunder,  
在南山之陽。 On the sunny side of South Mountain.<sup>51</sup>

and to the “sunny” or *northern* bank of a river, as in:

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<sup>50</sup> Li Chendong, *Shijing yanjiu fangfa lun*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> Legge, 29 (*Maoshi* no. 19), with changes.

我送舅氏， I see off my uncle,  
 曰至渭陽。 To the northern bank of the River Wei.<sup>52</sup>

Later, *yang* will become a common generic suffix in place-names, as in Yueyang 嶽陽 (literally, “south of the Nanyue 南嶽,” or Southern Marchmount) in Hunan and Luoyang 洛陽 (literally, “north of the Luo River”) in Henan, and is still preserved in these and numerous other place-names in China today. Readers who know Chinese might reasonably expect to see *yin* 陰 (dark), the antonym of *yang* (sunny), used in *Shijing* place-names, in such cases referring to the *north* side of a mountain and the *south* side of a river,<sup>53</sup> but it does not and the reason for its exclusion is uncertain.<sup>54</sup>

The second important repository of Zhou place-names is the “Yugong” 禹貢 (Tribute of Yu) chapter in the *Shujing* 書經 (Documents canon; sometimes known in English translation as the *Book of Documents* or *Classic of History*; alternate title: *Shangshu* 尚書, or Exalted documents). This text, which includes documentary records relating to events in high antiquity like the *Shijing*, is included among the traditional Five Canonical Texts of Confucianism. Many scholars date the “Tribute of Yu” to the

<sup>52</sup> Legge, 203 (*Maoshi* no. 134), with changes.

<sup>53</sup> *Shuowen jiezi*, 304xia: “*Yin* refers to the north side of a mountain and the south side of a river” (陰，山之北水之南也).

<sup>54</sup> The earliest use of *yin* as a location-directional suffix in a *diming* I have found is Shanyin 山陰 (modern Shaoxing 紹興, Zhejiang), which was established as a *xian* by Qin in 222 BCE. *Shiji*, 6.234. Shanyin was one of twenty-six towns that fell under the jurisdiction of Guiji commandery 會稽郡 and was so named because of its location *north* of the Guiji Mountains outside Shaoxing. Although there are a few well-known cities with long histories in China today that include *yin* in their names (Jiangyin 江陰 in Jiangsu and Huayin 華陰 in Shaanxi are two examples), throughout Chinese history, place-names that use *yin* as a suffix are far fewer than those employing *yang*. According to one modern source, in China today there are about 100 place-names that include *yang* as a suffix, while there are only around 10 that employ *yin*. See [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_574dfic01017lrq.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_574dfic01017lrq.html) (accessed on June 17, 2020). If we assume that these same figures also reflect a similar preponderance for the *yang* suffix in *diming* throughout the imperial era — and this seems to be the case — then what would explain this preference? First, and perhaps most important, in China, as in other places in the Northern Hemisphere, sunlight comes mainly from the south, and thus the south face of a mountain or the north bank of a river will receive more direct sunlight than the opposite side. This preference might also be explained by the favorable meanings of *yang* (sun, light, superior, active, male, and so on), especially when compared with its binary opposite *yin* (moon, dark, inferior, passive, female, and so on).

Warring States period (fifth century–256 BCE). It is a relatively brief document — about 1,100 Chinese characters in all — and mentions only approximately 100 place-names. At the same time, however, these toponyms reveal new ideas and practices about the act of place-naming. First, and most important, the “Tribute of Yu” chapter provides the first, empire-wide organizational structure of China’s geography.<sup>55</sup> The source of this administrative format is traced (in the “Yugong”) to remote antiquity, when Yu the Great (Dayu 大禹) subjugated the deluge of floods that inundated China and then divided his entire realm into nine, territorial divisions or administrative regions. The characteristic products of those regions are also described, along with the names of major waterways. These regions bore individual names and were identified by the generic-suffix *zhou* 州.<sup>56</sup> Some of the individual names of the Nine Regions (Jiuzhou 九州) can be traced to notable physical landmarks and/or directional locations. For instance, the Yan 兗 in Yanzhou 兗州 (modern southwestern Shandong) is taken from a river of that name, while the Jing 荆 in Jingzhou 荊州 (modern Hubei) derives from a mountain with the same moniker. Qingzhou 青州 (the area around modern Qingzhou City in Shandong) was so called because the color *qing* 青 (here indicating blue) is associated with the direction east, while Yongzhou 雍州 (modern Shaanxi, most of Gansu, and a portion of Qinghai) was adopted from an ancient city of that name in the state of Qin. Other *zhou*, or regions, bore prefixes that supposedly describe the characteristics or traits of the people who reside there. For instance, according to a commentary to the *Erya*: “The energy in the Huaihai region is extensive and relaxed; the natural disposition of its people is calm and gentle. Thus, it is called Xu 徐 [‘gentle’]” (淮海間[間]其氣寬舒，稟性安徐，故曰徐).<sup>57</sup>

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55 A useful source in English on the importance of the “Yugong” in Chinese history is Shih Hsiang-lin, “*Shang shu* 尚書 (Hallowed writings of antiquity),” in Knechtges and Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, Vol. 2, 814–30.

56 The word *zhou* 州, translated here as “region,” appears to have been drawn from the cognate *zhou* 洲 which, as mentioned earlier, originally indicated a habitable island in a river. According to the *Shuowen jiezi*, 239xia: “[Islands] in water that can host human habitation are called *zhou*. They are surrounded by water on all sides. [The character *zhou*] derives from the semantic elements of ‘double river.’ Long ago, when Yao encountered the great deluge, his people occupied high ground in the rivers. Sometimes these [places] were [collectively] called the ‘Nine Regions’” (州，水中可居曰州。周繞其旁，從重川。昔堯遭洪水，民居水中高土，或曰九州).

57 My source for this line, which is quoted in numerous texts, is a Song work attributed to Mao Huang 毛晃 (*jinshi* 1151) titled

And, in the case of Jizhou 冀州, the graph *ji* was selected because: “Its land could be dangerous or amiable. This was the site where the thearch-king made his capital. When there was disorder, it was hoped there would be order; when there was weakness, it was hoped there would be strength; when there was famine, it was hoped there would be abundance” (其地有險有易，帝王所都，亂則冀治，弱則冀強，荒則冀豐).<sup>58</sup> And finally, Yuzhou 豫州 (roughly, modern Henan and part of northern Hubei) was supposedly called “Yu” 豫 because: “The sites of the Capital City and Eastern Metropolis are always stable and pleasing” (京師東都所在，常安豫也).<sup>59</sup> Now, although we must acknowledge that most toponyms surviving from the pre-Qin period relate directly or indirectly to natural features of the landscape, the practice of assigning what are usually attributes associated with *human behavior* (the “temperament” of a person; to be “hopeful” for some favorable change in a bad situation; for the people of a place to be “calm and gentle”) begins in the “Tribute to Yu” chapter of the *Shujing*. The importance of this development cannot be overstated. The naming process for places in China that began as *simple* coded names (specific prefix + general suffix) designating distinct, geographical features of the (often) local landscape, now has moved into a new direction and one that would evolve into a more *complex* practice whereby *diming* reflect human interaction with landscape over larger areas of space and time, especially as it relates to social and political organization and rule. And again, not surprisingly, many of the names devised for the “Jiuzhou” during the Zhou remain in use today.<sup>60</sup>

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*Yugong zhinan* 禹貢指南 (*Siku quanshu* ed.), 1.15b. Cf. the following gloss in the *Shiming* (Chinese Text Project ed.; <https://ctext.org/shi-ming/shi-zhou-guo>), entry no. 2: “Xu’ means ‘relaxed’; means the local air is ‘relaxed and gentle’ (徐舒也。土氣舒緩也).

<sup>58</sup> *Shiming* (Chinese Text Project; <https://ctext.org/shi-ming/shi-zhou-guo>), entry no. 10 (accessed on July 11, 2020).

<sup>59</sup> *Shiming* (Chinese Text Project; <https://ctext.org/shi-ming/shi-zhou-guo>), entry no. 5 (accessed on July 11, 2020).

<sup>60</sup> For instance, the names of numerous modern Chinese cities preserve names from the Jiuzhou. Just three examples are: Qingzhou 青州 (Shandong), Yangzhou 揚州 (Jiangsu), and Xuzhou 徐州 (also Jiangsu). Also, some of the old Jiuzhou names are used today as one-character designations for modern province names. For instance, Ji 冀 refers to Hebei, while Yu 豫 designates Henan.

## PLACE-NAMES ON THE FANGMA TAN AND MAWANG DUI MAPS

A third and key pre-Qin source on place-names is maps; specifically, two sets of ancient maps, both of which provide valuable information on *diming* available nowhere else.<sup>61</sup> The first is a set of seven maps drawn in black ink on pine boards, discovered in 1986 in a tomb originally located in the ancient State of Qin. Some archeologists date these maps to 239 BCE,<sup>62</sup> which makes them China's oldest-known maps. The burial site where they were excavated is situated in an area now called Fangma tan, in the general vicinity of Tianshui 天水 City, eastern Gansu. Several Qin burial sites have been excavated at Fangma tan. Our main interest is the seven maps discovered in Tomb No. 1.

Several modern scholars have recognized that in the history of Chinese cartography the Fangma tan maps from Tomb No. 1 reveal that a sophisticated system of accurate map making — with symbols and utilitarian value — was already in place well before the Qin unification.<sup>63</sup> The central organizing principle of these maps is three river systems in and around what is now Tianshui City, though some prominent forest resources are also noted. Less understood and studied, however, has been the value of the fifty different toponyms on the Fangma tan maps.<sup>64</sup> Unlike modern maps, some place-names on the

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61 Color photographs of the original Fangma tan and Mawang dui maps (discussed below), with accompanying modern ink-line drawn reproductions for each map, are provided in Cao Wanru 曹婉如 (1922–1996) et al., eds., *Zhongguo gudai ditu ji: Zhanguo—Yuan* 中國古代地圖集: 戰國—元 (accompanying English title: *An Atlas of Ancient Maps in China: From the Warring States Period to the Yuan Dynasty, 476 B.C.–A.D. 1368*) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990).

62 He Shuangquan 何雙全, “Gansu Tianshui Fangma tan Zhanguo Qin Hanmu de fajue” 甘肅天水放馬灘戰國秦漢墓的發掘” and “Tianshui Fangma tan Qinmu chutu ditu chutan” 天水放馬灘秦墓出土地圖初探; both articles are in *Wenwu* 2 (1989): 1–11 and 12–22, respectively. See also Zhang Xiugui 張修桂, “Dangqian kaogu suojian zuizao de ditu” 當前考古所見最早的地圖, *Lishi dili* 歷史地理 10 (1992): 141–61, and “Tianshui ‘Fangma tan ditu’ de huizhi niandai” 天水《放馬灘地圖》的繪製年代, *Fudan xuebao* 復旦學報 (1991.1): 44–48.

63 The best source in English on early Chinese cartography is Cordell Yee's (Yu Dingguo 余定國) various chapters in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography, Vol. 2. Bk. 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See esp. Chapter 3, “Reinterpreting Traditional Chinese Geographical Maps,” 35–46, where Yee discusses the main features of the Fangma tan and Mawang dui maps.

64 In all, I count 61 *diming* on the Fangma tan maps from Tomb No. 1. When repeated place-names are discounted, 50 different toponyms remain. These numbers match Hua Linfu's count. See his *Zhongguo diming xue yuanliu*, 25.

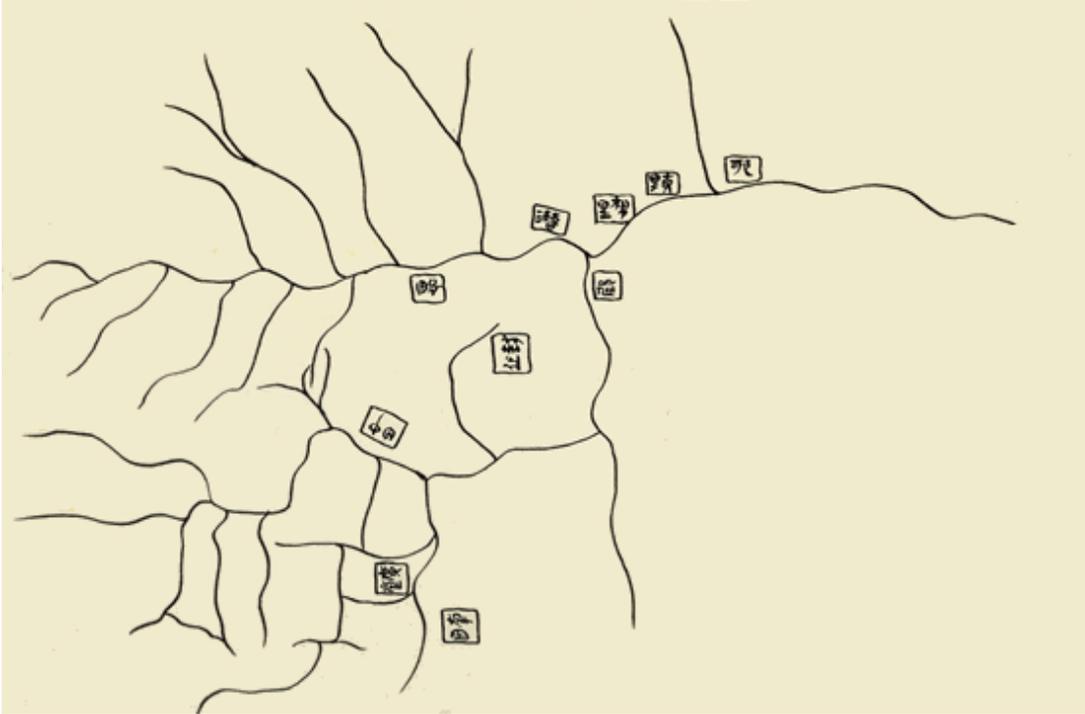
Fangma tan maps are placed inside square frames, some larger than others, to indicate administrative importance (more on this below). Rivers, roads (marked with the generic *dao* 道), water systems, and forest resources are also indicated.<sup>65</sup> Map no. 4 (of the seven Fangma tan maps) is essentially an administrative map of Guiqiu 邽[邽]丘 town. Note that the larger, square-bracketed place-name in the center of the map designates the town, so-called probably because it was situated on a *qiu*, or hill. The other six maps found in the tomb represent sections of the territory depicted on Map no. 4.



Map 4 unearthed in the No. 1 tomb

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<sup>65</sup> Map no. 3 even includes the mileage to forests and timber information.



Ink-line sketch of the map above. Source: Cao Wanru et al., *Zhongguo gudai ditu ji*.

At the outset it should be acknowledged that many of the toponyms that appear on the Fangmatan maps reflect naming practices that have already been discussed. For instance, names with directional prefixes are prominent. Examples include Shangyang 上楊 (Upper Poplar) and Xiayang 下楊 (Lower Poplar), and Shanglin 上臨 (Upper Lookout) and Xialin 下臨 (Lower Lookout). The practice of sometimes dropping generic suffixes is also evident. For instance, “Upper Poplar” and “Lower Poplar,” just mentioned, are in fact names of valleys, but the common generic for valleys (*gu* 谷) is dropped. Another example occurs on Map no. 6: “Upper Bimo” (Shang Bimo 上辟磨) and “Lower Bimo” (Xia Bimo 下辟磨) carry no generic suffix, but these may also be names of valleys.<sup>66</sup> There are even some examples when a toponym may appear to be a standard descriptor prefix + generic suffix combination, but a *second* generic suffix is left off. A case in point is Kugu 苦谷 (“Bitter Valley”) on Map no. 6, which is the name of a river. Although common in place-names during the imperial period, the suffix *gu* (“valley”) has not appeared frequently in the sources that have been considered so far in this

<sup>66</sup> The meaning of *Bimo* 辟磨 in these place names is uncertain. It seems possible the name is a transliteration (or sound approximation) of a local, non-Chinese place-name.

communication. But it is found (or is implied) nine times on the Fangma tan maps, and this is yet another example of how the topography of a given area affects the assignment of place-names. A term related to *gu*, seen for the first time as a toponym suffix, and appearing nine times on the Fangma tan maps, is *xi* 谿. Although *xi* can be used to mean “valley” or “gorge” (in other words, it can function as a synonym for *gu*), on the Fangma tan maps *xi* is probably used in the sense of the definition provided in the *Erya*: (“[Streams] that flow out of mountains and into rivers are called *xi*.” (水注川曰溪).<sup>67</sup> And finally, two villages indicated by the suffix *li* are included on the maps: Yangli 陽里 and Zhenli 真里.<sup>68</sup>

The Fangma tan maps also reveal what at first seems to be a rather unusual cartographic practice: the omission of mountain names. While various river and stream names are well documented on the maps, only one mountain name is noted, called Guxi shan 故西山. Since the Maiji Mountain Range (Maiji shan 麥積山) runs directly through the area now called Fangma tan, a fair question, then, is this: what explains the general absence of mountain names on the seven maps from Tomb No. 1? As it turns out, the primary purpose of the maps was to document the administrative area overseen by Guiqiu town as it relates to the Wei River and its tributaries in that region (a simple visual inspection of the maps reveals this to be the case). Hence the emphasis on identifying river locations rather than mountain names. Similarly, only one mountain pass is indicated, and it bears a generic suffix not seen before: Yangfu bi 楊夫閉 (“Mr. Yang’s Pass”). Why *bi* is used as a generic for “mountain pass” (later in Chinese history, “mountain passes” are almost always indicated by the generic *guan* 關 which, like *bi*, means “closed off”) is uncertain. *Bi* was never subsequently used as a common suffix in Chinese place-names.<sup>69</sup>

Keeping in mind that many Chinese place-names in use today — especially those bearing *zhou* and *xian* suffixes — have long histories that go back thousands of years, it may at first seem unusual that none of the fifty different place names on the Fangma tan maps survive today. Furthermore, among those fifty place-names, only one — Guiqiu *xian*, can be corroborated by historical sources.<sup>70</sup> This town

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67 *Erya* (Chinese Text Project ed.), “Shishui” 釋水, no. 38 (accessed on July 22, 2020).

68 There are seven additional village names on the maps, all of which drop the *li* suffix.

69 Since *bi* only appears once on the Fangma tan maps, it seems possible that *bi* 閉 could be a scribal error for *guan* 關.

70 The history of Guiqiu *xian* (sometimes abbreviated as Gui *xian*) goes back to 688 BCE, when Duke Wu of Qin (Qin Wugong

name, as already mentioned, appears in the very center of Map no. 4 and is written in Chinese characters that are larger than all other toponyms on the map. The administrative suffix *xian* is left off, but clearly this refers to the local government center and focus of the maps. All other place-names on the maps are written in smaller characters to indicate their subordinate position to the town. Thus, a unique quality of the Fangma tan maps is they graphically reveal what a town looked like in the State of Qin before unification. The essential *local* nature of these maps further explains why only one out the fifty *diming* on the maps can be historically verified with any certainty. Thus, by the time the maps were excavated more than 2,200 years later, virtually all the local names had either been replaced by new ones or had disappeared altogether.

One additional observation: on Map No. 2 we find the name Guangtang shi 廣堂史, which appears to be a place-name based on an *architectural* feature; namely, a *guantang* 廣堂, or “spacious hall.” This the earliest example I have found that uses a building designation as a place-name. Of course, later in Chinese history different types of structures, such as *lou* 樓 (tower), *ge* 閣 (belvedere), *tai* 臺 (terrace), and *ting* 亭 (pavilion), were often used in names for sightseeing and historically significant destinations. In this case, since under the Zhou, *shi* 史 (literally, “scribe”) was used as a title for administrative officials, then *guantang* in this line would seem to be the name of a local government building that was headed by a *shi*, or “scribe.” Also note the mountain pass mentioned earlier that bears the name Yangshi bi, which may have been named after a local administrator with the surname “Yang.”

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秦武公) seized the territory thereabouts from the Rong 戎, a non-Chinese border region people. It should be mentioned, however, that there are at least two other single-character names on the maps that appear to be settlement designations. The first is Di 邸, which is marked southeast of Gui town; the other is Xi 西, which may be the former name or an abbreviation of Longxi 隴西 commandery, established later under Qin. “Di” may be an abbreviation of “Didao” 邸道, which later (also under Qin) was established as a *xian* in Longxi commandery. *Shiji*, 5.182. The ethnonym “Rong” appears on Shang oracle bone inscriptions, where it is used as a general term to designate people living beyond Shang territory. During the Zhou, *rong* and related terms such as *di* 狄 and *man* 蠻 were similarly employed to designate “barbarian” people of the border regions and beyond. Note: during Qin, a second Gui (or Guiqiu) *xian* was established in the general area around modern Weinan 渭南 City in Shaanxi. In order to distinguish the old Gui *xian* from the second, newer one established by Qin, the older town was called “Former (Shang 上) Gui *xian*,” and the newer one was called “Later (Xia 下) Gui *xian*.” Cf. Ying Shao’s commentary in the *Shiji*, 28*shang*.1544: “Duke Wu of Qin subdued the Rong [people] in Gui and established ‘Upper Gui.’ Thus, a ‘lower’ was added [to the second Gui *xian*]” (秦武公伐邽戎，置有上邽，故加下).

Later in Chinese toponymic history, office titles (*guanming* 官名) once held by prominent officials were sometimes adopted as place-names.<sup>71</sup>

A second set of maps — three in number and drawn on silk — were unearthed in Tomb No. 3 in 1973 at Mawang dui, an archeological site outside Changsha in modern Hunan.<sup>72</sup> Although these maps date from 168 BCE, thus postdating the fall of Qin by just over fifty years, still it seems reasonable to assume that most, if not all, of the toponyms they document were in use before the advent of the imperial era in 221 BCE. The first of the three maps is a topographical map that depicts mountains, rivers, villages, and roads in the kingdom of Changsha 長沙 (roughly, northern Guangdong, northeastern Guangxi, and southern Hunan); the second is a military or garrison map, which shows portions of the area on the topographical map, along with military fortifications and related facilities; the third is a city map that shows the walls and streets of Linxiang 臨湘 town (modern Changsha).<sup>73</sup> Toponyms on these maps referencing mountains and rivers follow the same linguistic formula used in Zhou sources described earlier. With just a few exceptions, mountain and river names consist of descriptor-prefix + the generic-suffix *shan* or *shui*. Examples of the former include Yuanshan 垣山 (“Enclosure Mountain”), Sheshan 蛇山 (“Snake Mountain”), and Paoshan 袍山 (“Long Robe Mountain”). One mountain name, Shen[Cen?]shan 參山 (“Jagged? Mountain”), seems to be drawn from a river of that same name, which is not unusual in Zhou place-names. Waterway designations follow the same grammatical structure. Examples include Lengshui 冷水 (“Cold River”), Yingshui 營水 (“Garrison? River”), and Leishui 壘水

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<sup>71</sup> An example of this practice can be found in the works of Li Bai 李白 (701–762). In 758, while traveling to a new office assignment, the Tang poet took it upon himself to rename a local body of water in Mianzhou 沔州 (modern Wuhan). Li Bai found the lake’s local name, “South Lake” (Nanhu 南湖), too generic and thereby unacceptable and so renamed it “Court Gentleman Lake” (Langguan hu 郎官湖) in honor of his friend Zhang Wei 張謂 (*jinsshi* 743), who had previously held the office “Court Gentleman.” For details, see my *Jade Mountains & Cinnabar Pools: The History of Travel Literature in Imperial China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 67–68.

<sup>72</sup> A useful on-line source for the Mawang dui maps is <http://socks-studio.com/2014/03/02/the-three-mawangdui-maps-early-chinese-cartography/> (accessed on July 29, 2020).

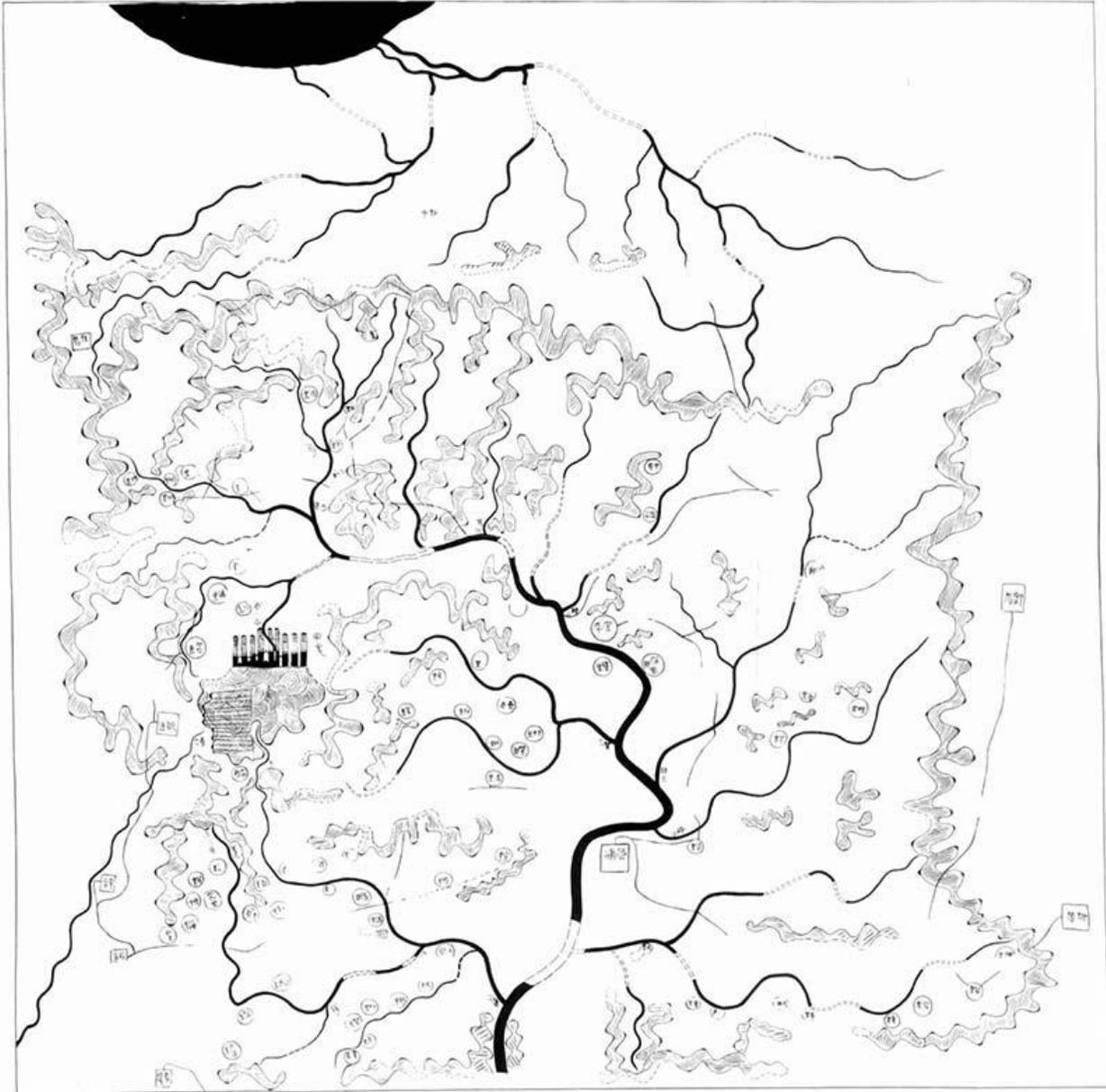
<sup>73</sup> Note: this is one of the earliest uses of *lin* 臨 (“to look down upon such-and-such place or geographic entity”; “to overlook”) as a verbal prefix in a place-name, which in this case literally means “to overlook the Xiang River.” Linxiang *xian* was created by Qin in 222 BCE (or soon thereafter) to serve as the administrative center of Changsha commandery. For details see Harvard China Historical GIS [http://47.114.119.106/tgaz/placename/hvd\\_41714](http://47.114.119.106/tgaz/placename/hvd_41714) (accessed on August 29, 2020)

("Rampart? River"). The headwater of a river is designated by the generic *yuan* 源. Thus, the source of the Cold River is identified as Lengshui yuan 冷水源.

Along with mountain and river designations, names for local towns dominate the toponyms listed on the Mawang dui maps. Many of these *xian* names, like Nanping 南平 ("Southern Peace"), bear names with auspicious connotations. Others, however, carry suffixes not mentioned in our earlier discussions. One of these is the rather enigmatic *xian* name Hedao 龕道. The suffix *dao* here indicates a road, likely referring to the route that leads to that town.



The Mawangdui topographic (*dixing ditu* 地形地圖) or “Relief” map in color, which depicts the Changsha administrative region during the Han and highlights landforms, rivers, roads, passages, and various other relief features. The horizontal and vertical “grid lines” indicate where the original map had been folded into squares. Source: <http://socks-studio.com/2014/03/02/the-three-mawangdui-maps-early-chinese-cartography/> (accessed on July 29, 2020)



A modern, redrawn version of the Mawangdui topographic or "relief" map. Note the nine vertical bars in the west-central portion of the map, which represent the various peaks of Jiuyi Shan 九疑[巖]山 ("Nine Doubts Mountains") in southern Hunan. Source: <http://socks-studio.com/2014/03/02/the-three-mawangdui-maps-early-chinese-cartography/> (accessed 29 July 2020)

Assuming that *he* 齧 is the correct written form for this *xian* name, use of a verb like *he* — meaning “to bite” or “gnaw” — in a place-name is unusual, to say the least.<sup>74</sup> Town names on the Mawang dui maps that employ the *yang* 陽 suffix, however, such as Guanyang 觀陽, Guiyang 桂陽, and Taoyang 桃陽, are plentiful. One district, Yingpu 營浦, carries the generic-suffix *pu* 浦, which here and in later Chinese place-names designates the confluence of a tributary and river.

The names and accompanying suffixes on the military map also reflect variation and innovation. With just one exception — a military route designated “Arrow Road” (Jiandao 箭道), all the *diming* on the garrison map specify defensive, military installations. One example is Radiant Mountain Bank (Zhaoshan feng 昭山封). Note that the generic-suffix *feng* 封 is used to indicate fortified banks of earth. Barrier fortifications are indicated by the suffix *zhang* 障, as in Snake Rampart (Shezhang 蛇障). The suffix *gou* 鉤 (literally, “hook”), as in the toponym Jiagou 甲鉤, might indicate a bastion or bulwark round (*yuan* 圓) in shape or one designed in the shape of a trident spear (*ji* 戟).<sup>75</sup> Two other suffixes, *ying* 英 and *you* 攸, as in Jiaying 甲英 and Jiayou 甲攸, are difficult to interpret. Among the various installation names on the military map, the one that is most prominent in later toponymic history is *jun* 軍, or “army.” On the Mawang dui military map, we also find the two-character suffix *weijun* 尉軍 (“military headquarters”) and *wei biejun* 尉別軍 (“auxiliary military headquarters”). Both are used in reference military camps in the capital cities (*du* 都) of Zhou 周 and Xu 徐. In later Chinese history, *jun* will continue to be used in numerous military office titles and organization names.

By far, what most distinguishes the nature of the Mawang dui maps as “local” is the ubiquitous presence of “village” (*li* 里) names.<sup>76</sup> By my count, over ninety different village names appear on the

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74 Given the apparent unsuitability of the word *he* in this town name, it seems possible this is also a transliteration of a local, non-Chinese place-name.

75 The prefix *jia* may mean something like “armored,” referring to the defensive equipage worn by troops stationed there.

76 According to the *Shuowen jiezi*, 170xia, *li* 裏 [裡] refers to inner clothing (衣內也; outer clothing was called *biao* 表). The cognate *li* 里 seems to have been adapted from 裏 [裡] and was used in the more general sense of “inner” or “enclosed area.” Hence, the *Shuowen jiezi*, 290xia, defines 里 as follows: “*Li* means to take up residence” [in a particular place] (里, 居也). Cf. *Erya*, “Shiyan” 釋言, no. 155: “*Li* means ‘a residential compound’” (里, 邑也). The translation “residential compound,” like many of the Chinese-English translations in this essay, is drawn from Paul W. Kroll et al., comps., *A Student's Dictionary*

maps (the characters in some of these names are blurred and thus not recognizable).<sup>77</sup> Village toponym prefixes, however, reflect a wide field of variation and innovation. Some, like Qiuli 秋里 (“Autumn Village”), Huoli 穫里 (“Harvest Village”), and Shili 石里 (“Rocky Village”) are common names and not remarkable in any way. Others, like Jiabei 甲卑, for the modern reader defy comprehension because the literal meaning of this combination of characters (“first in baseness/vulgarity”?) would seem to be inappropriate as a place-name, unless perhaps it had been coined by a conquering army. Another baffling example is a village named Buyu jun 不於君 (“does not belong to the ruler?”).

Now, as a general rule, throughout Chinese history the names of emperors, their ancestors, and related terms have been considered taboo and thus avoided in place-names.<sup>78</sup> One apparent exception to this rule, however, appears among the local names on the Mawang dui maps: a village named after legendary Chinese emperor Di Shun 帝舜, or “Thearch Shun,” who supposedly ruled over China during the third millennium BCE. The village name, which likely pre-dates the Qin conquest, suggests that names related to the five mythological rulers of remote antiquity (that is, before the Xia dynasty), were not regarded as taboo with respect to place-names. Other examples are easy to find. For instance, “Yellow Mountain” in Anhui supposedly draws its name from the legendary Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝). Another well-known place-name, the famous city of Hangzhou, is connected — in a rather fanciful etymology — to the mythical sage king Da Yu. Traditionally, the story runs like this: throughout much of the imperial era the toponym Yuhang 餘杭 was long thought to be the original name for the

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*of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 262. Units of territorial administration under the Han followed those established by Qin. Thus, below towns were districts (*xiang* 鄉), precincts (*ting*), and villages in descending order of size. Villages nominally consisted of one hundred households.

<sup>77</sup> My count of “over 90” is based on a listing of village names provided here: [https://www.babelstone.co.uk/China/Mawang\\_duiMaps.html](https://www.babelstone.co.uk/China/Mawang_duiMaps.html) (accessed on June 26, 2020). During the Zhou period, five neighborhoods (*bi* 比), each with five families, constituted a *li*, or village. These numbers referred to areas inside the Royal Domain. The areas covered by the Mawang dui maps were certainly outside the Royal Domain (Wangji 王畿), so the figures provided here are tentative.

<sup>78</sup> The practice of taboo names (*biwei* 避違) as they relate to toponyms can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn period, when the names of two mountains in Shandong, Jushan 具山 and Aoshan 敖山, were changed to Xiangshan 鄉山 because “*ju*” and “*ao*” were part of the first names of Duke Xian (Xiangong 獻公) and Duke Wu (Wugong 武公) in Lu. See Li Deqing, *Zhongguo lishi diming biwei kao*, 119. It was not until the Six Dynasties period, however, that the practice of observing taboo names began in earnest.

city that later came to be known as Hangzhou. This association is based on the assumption that Yuhang 餘航 was a lexicographical corruption of Yuhang 禹航, referring to the ferry that Dayu crossed on his way to a famous meeting with his lords at Guiji 會稽.<sup>79</sup> This etymology is now regarded as a folk tale. I cite it only to illustrate that place-names related to sage emperors persisted throughout the imperial era, and the earliest occurrence of this practice is on the Mawang dui maps.

It should also be noted that one village — and this is the earliest occurrence of this practice I have seen — seems to have been named after a person: Shenjun li 深君里 (“Master Shen Village”). “Shēn” 深 is not a common Chinese surname (I suspect 深 here might be a scribal error for Shěn 沈, which is a familiar family name), but *jun* would seem to indicate the reference here is to some distinguished local person. Another village designation, Xuli 徐里, may have been named for a family surnamed Xu, though this is not certain. Finally, perhaps the most unusual among all the village names on the Mawang dui maps is one that bears the prefix *sha* 殺 (literally, “to kill”).<sup>80</sup> One can only imagine why a place-namer would select such a word.

#### SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS

In 211 BCE Qin abolished the old Zhou feudal model of government organization and reorganized its new empire into an entirely new geography-based administrative system comprised of thirty-six *jun*, or commanderies,<sup>81</sup> administratively under which were about one thousand *xian*, or towns. The importance, influence, and ubiquitous presence of *jun* and, to a much greater extent, *xian*, in subsequent Chinese government-administrative history is well documented. But more importantly in

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79 On the legendary meeting between Great Yu and his feudal lords at Guiji, see my essay “會稽: Guaiji? Guiji? Huiji? Kuaiji? Some Remarks on an Ancient Chinese Place-Name,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 237 (Apr. 2013): esp. 6, n. 5.

80 The second Chinese character in this place-name is not decipherable on the map.

81 There is considerable disagreement among scholars, both traditional and modern, about the actual number of commanderies established by Qin, but this issue is not relevant to the discussion here and so will not be considered. Note: on the use of *jun*, or commandery, as an administrative unit in the southern reaches of the Qin and Western Han empires and the names they were assigned, see Olivia Milburn, “Envisaging the Empire: Administrative Nomenclature and the Bureaucratic Worldview in Early Imperial China,” *OMNES: The Journal of Multicultural Society* 5.1 (2014): 76–113.

the context of this essay, it is essential to note again that the designations of Qin's new commanderies, as we have seen, were in fact drawn from earlier *diming*. Some were adopted from former Zhou dynasty *state* names, such as Xu 徐, and *city* names, such as Ye 葉 (a Spring and Autumn period metropolis in the ancient state of Chu that was located south of modern Ye 葉 *xian* in Henan); others were related to geographical-directional names, such as Liaodong 遼東, Hanzhong 漢中, and Beidi 北地; and still others drew their names from natural topographical features, especially mountains and rivers, such as Guiji 會稽 (mountains outside of modern Shaoxing in Zhejiang) and Sanchuan 三川 (referring collectively to the Yellow, Luo 洛, and Yi 伊 Rivers). These three categories of place-names — that is, old state and city names, geographic-directional names, and mountain and river names — *constitute the essential core foundation of Chinese toponyms and this name base lasted throughout the imperial period*. Furthermore, the influence of Qin commandery designations is still detectable in modern place-names. In addition to Ye *xian* in Henan (just cited), perhaps a more familiar example is Taiyuan (literally, “great plain”), the capital and largest city in modern Shanxi province, which was the name of one of the thirty-six commanderies established by Qin. And, as we have seen, under the jurisdiction of Qin's new administrative commanderies were placed approximately one thousand *xian*, the names of which in many cases can also be traced back to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. One example was mentioned earlier (see n. 70 above): the Qin town of Xia Gui (Shaanxi), which today still carries that same name, but now is classified as a *zhen* 鎮, or village. This leads to yet another essential point: the most distinctive and defining feature of Chinese place-names is that the process of naming, renaming, abandoning, and sometimes even reviving former toponyms *has been continuous in China for almost four thousand years*. And, it seems worth mentioning that for *diming* in China that date *before* the Qin unification, there seems to have been little or no “outside” impact — meaning influence from non-Chinese people living in borderlands and regions beyond those peripheries — on the act of place-naming in China.<sup>82</sup> In other words, in contradistinction to countries with much shorter histories, such

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<sup>82</sup> This situation, of course, later changed as China's territory expanded into areas where non-Chinese people were living and had already coined indigenous names for local places. How these exonyms became sinicized is a fascinating subject, but not much work has been published in this area. An exception to this statement is two informative essays by Olivia Milburn. The first is her “A Virtual City,” where Milburn notes (123) the difficulty of dealing with old, non-Chinese place-names and the Chinese characters they eventually were assigned, which in fact are transliterations of foreign toponyms. In her examples,

as the United States, where place-names derive from many different cultures and languages, the core practices of naming places in China began, at least, as an indigenous endeavor. The constituent elements of those practices are supremely evident in the place-names we have discussed on the oracle bone inscriptions, in the *Shijing* poems and “Yugong” chapter of the *Shujing*, and those preserved on the Fangma tan and Mawang dui maps. Thus, there is strong evidence to prove political/administrative continuity from the Zhou to the Qin. One might further argue that these same core naming practices persisted, without major interruption, throughout the remainder of imperial period, which helps to explain, partially at least, the longevity of Chinese culture and civilization.

It is fascinating to observe that these naming practices, established in the pre-Qin period, came under direct attack after Wang Mang 王莽 (c. 45 BCE.–23 CE) seized the Han dynasty throne and established himself as emperor in 9 CE. In a bold move that has never been repeated since, Wang immediately took action to change hundreds, if not thousands, of then-current place-names. He especially favored coining new names (for old places) that included the words *zhi* 治 (“in good order”; “well-governed”), *an* 安 (“secure”), *ning* 寧 (“tranquil”), *ping* 平 (“peaceful”), and *shun* 順 (“compliant”),

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some *diming* that appear in the *Yuejue shu*, such as Ruoye 若耶 and Guzhong 姑中, are clearly transliterations of place-names derived from the language of the Yue 越 people in the south. The second essay is her “Envisaging the Empire,” 76–113. This article is especially informative because Milburn demonstrates (80) that the southern commanderies of the Qin bore names that indicate that they were intentionally being exoticized. Just one example is Guilin 桂林, or “Cassia Grove commandery,” “chosen for its association with the wealth and exotic products that would flow to the Qin court from the southernmost reaches of the empire” (88). Some southern commandery names, established by Han and inhabited by non-Chinese peoples, even bore designations associated with ancient sage-kings, so-named to establish a positive, sinicizing link between Han culture and southern, indigenous people. Milburn also reveals that some place-names for northern border regions carried “positive and uplifting” connotations, thereby indicating a Han desire for those regions to remain non-threatening in the future (91). One example she cites is Dunhuang 敦煌, a toponym that derives from the Scythian word *dawan*, meaning “mountain range” (91). But these border area names, whether associated with sage kings of antiquity (Great Yu and Guiji commandery, for instance) or exotic in nature, were deliberately fashioned in order to distinguish these places as conquered peripheral lands and thus distinct from the core heartland of the empire. For another example of a well-known Chinese place-name that is probably of non-Chinese origin, see my “Where Are the Moth-Eyebrows? On the Origin of the Toponym ‘Emeishan’ 峨嵋山,” *Han-hsüeh yen-chiu* 漢學研究 12.1 (June 1994): 335–48. And finally, for examples of modern efforts to sinicize Zhuang 壯 place-names in Guangxi, see Fahui Wang, Guanxiang Wang, John Hartmann, and Wei Luo, “Sinification of Zhuang place names in Guangxi, China: a GIS-based spatial analysis approach,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 37.2 (2012): 317–33.

no doubt to reflect favorably on the legitimacy and anticipated longevity of his “Xin 新” dynasty. He also changed place-names so that they would include other “favorable” words such as *shan* 善 (“good”), *mei* 美 (“beautiful”; “praiseworthy”; “commendable”), *xin* 信 (“loyal”), *mu* 睦 (“harmonious”), and *chang* 昌 (“glorious”). He even substituted individual characters in place-names with antonyms, such as changing *qu* 曲 (crooked, bent) to *zhi* 直 (straight), and *wu* 無 (to lack) to *you* 有 (to possess), again to produce favorable or positive connotations. To cite a few examples, Henan jun 河南郡 (“South of the [Yellow] River commandery”) under Wang Mang became Bao zhongxin xiang 保忠信鄉 (“Borough that Ensures Loyalty and Trust”); Yanmen jun 雁門郡 (“Goose Gate commandery”) was changed to Zhendi jun 填狄郡 (“Pacify-the-Dog-Like-Tribes commandery”). No fewer than twelve of that last-mentioned commandery’s fourteen *xian* names were also altered to include the verb *zhen* 填[鎮], which means “pacify,” “restrain,” “put down.” As indicated by these changes, Wang Mang’s new names for border regions were especially brazen. Although use of Chinese pejorative designations of “barbarian,” such as *yi* 夷, *man* 蠻, and *rong* 戎, can be traced back to the Warring States period, Wang Mang was fond of adding specifier-prefixes to their names that carried meanings such as *zhen* (to pacify), *wei* 威 (to overpower), and *yan* 厭 (to restrain), all to suggest he controlled the border regions. Finally, Wang Mang altered hundreds of toponyms so they would include the *suffix ting* 亭, or “precinct.” For instance, Qiantang 錢塘 (a *xian* just outside Hangzhou) became Quanting 泉亭; Chaisang 柴桑 became Jiujiang ting 九江亭. According to Wang Mang’s official biography in the *Hanshu*: “Three hundred and sixty commanderies and towns were designated as ‘precincts’ so as to accord with the language of the Mandate of Heaven as conveyed by portents” (郡縣以亭為名者 三百六十，以應符命文也).<sup>83</sup> As far as I can determine, this was the first and only time in Chinese history an emperor changed *diming* on a large scale in order to help legitimize his reign. And yet, despite these massive efforts, judging from the place-names listed in Ban Gu’s “Dili zhi,” the vast majority of Wang Mang’s place-name changes were abandoned after his short-lived dynasty collapsed and Han rule was restored. The original names were essentially all reestablished. Furthermore, judging from the glosses that Ban Gu provides for about sixty place-names in his “Dili zhi” chapter, as well as notes to approximately 165 place-names therein provided later by the well-known commentator Ying Shao 應邵 (c. 140–before 204), the restoration of

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<sup>83</sup> *Hanshu*, 99zhong.4136.

place-names following Wang Mang's demise both preserve and reflect the three essential categories of ancient Chinese *diming* identified earlier.<sup>84</sup>

But what about this trio of fundamental naming practices? Their origins are, for the most part, quite clear. As for their longevity, that fact is unassailable. But from a utilitarian perspective, what else, if anything, did place-naming and place-names “do”? Did place-names help in the administration of the Han and subsequent dynastic empires? Surely, they did. One can only imagine how it would have been possible to gather census data and levy and collect taxes without an organized, clearly defined (by name) *system* of local and regional government administration. Did place-names promote local identity? There is no question here either. Just one expression of the enhanced importance of “local identity,” especially in later Chinese imperial history, is the proliferation of local gazetteer production, in the Song and especially Ming (1368–1644) and Qing periods.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, surely one reason *diji* monographs proliferated in the Six Dynasties was to promote local pride and identity. The authors of those texts were in large part native sons who compiled their *ji* or “accounts” as private individuals, not while under government sponsorship or mandate. They praised, sometimes even glorified, their home regions and usually sought to enhance the prestige of local “worthies” and their families, highlight the outstanding qualities of local customs and traditions, and perhaps above all else stress the high moral and cultural character of their birthplace.<sup>86</sup> Admittedly, these more general and broad-based questions about what place-names “do” are difficult and complex, and this probably explains why few scholars have attempted

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84 Ying Shao's contributions to the study of *diming* are also evident in his *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (Comprehensive explanations of the customs and mores), where he not only provides detailed glosses on the Five Marchmounts (Wuyue 五嶽) and the Four Rivers (Sidu 四瀆), but also provides explanations of almost twenty generic suffixes. Many of these, such as *lu* 麓, *jing* 京, *ling* 陵, and *qiu* 丘, have already been discussed in this essay. Several others, all related to water sources, such as *hang* 沆 (a dried-up lake in which there is no salt), *pei* 沛 (places with abundant plant life where birds and animals shelter and hide), and *xu* 洫 (water channels between fields, built every 10 *li* 里, 8 *chi* 尺 wide, 8 *chi* deep) reflect the detail and precision with which generic-suffixes to place-names were formulated.

85 On local motivations and initiatives that produced gazetteers during the later imperial period, see Joseph Dennis, *Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), esp. 64–114.

86 The ideas expressed here about promoting local pride and identity in *diji* are drawn mainly from Chittick, “The Development of Local Writing in Early Medieval China.”

to tackle them. Admittedly, in the case of this essay, any attempt to provide even some tentative or preliminary answers would take us far beyond the space limitations of a journal article. Nevertheless, I have one observation about place-names in pre-modern China that is worth sharing here. My hope is that on the one hand it will underscore what heretofore has been the neglected yet critically important role of place-names in Chinese history; at the same time, I also hope that it might serve to inspire some new interest in toponymic research on ancient Chinese *diming*.<sup>87</sup> My observation is inspired by the following comment, made recently by Peter K. Bol:

We live in the present, but the organization of spaces and places in which we live changes over time; taken in aggregate the social organization of space is remarkably unstable. Places are created but they disappear. Places have names, but those names are not constant, and they are not singular. Named places have locations, but those locations do not stay fixed and the territory they encompass can expand and it can shrink.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> The most detailed source in English on Chinese *diming* — ancient, modern, and contemporary — is the chapter on “Toponyms” in Endymion Wilkinson’s *Chinese History: A New Manual, Fifth Edition*, 227–60. The most useful survey in Chinese is Hua Linfu’s *Zhongguo diming xue yuanliu*, upon which I have drawn heavily in preparing this essay. By far the most handy, on-line searchable database for tracing the administrative history of individual Chinese place-names during the period 221 BCE to 1911 is China Historical Geographic Information System (or GIS), which is available here: <http://chgis.fas.harvard.edu/>. Academic journal articles on Chinese toponyms worth consulting include the following: Joseph Earle Spencer, “Chinese Place Names and the Appreciation of Geographic Realities,” *Geographical Review* 31.1 (Jan. 1941): 79–94; Wolfram Eberhard, “Preliminary Note on Place Names in Medieval China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 74.2 (Apr.-June 1954): 71–74; Henry Serruys, “Place Names along China’s Northern Frontier,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45.2 (1982): 271–83; J. Michael Farmer, “What’s in a Name? On the Appellative ‘Shu’ in Early Medieval Chinese Historiography,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121.1 (Jan.-Mar. 2001): 44–59; and my two essays mentioned earlier: “Where Are the Moth-Eyebrows?” and “會稽: Guaiji? Guiji? Huiji? Kuaiji? Some Remarks on an Ancient Chinese Place-Name.”

<sup>88</sup> “Preface,” *Placing Names: Enriching and Integrating Gazetteers*, ed. Humphrey Southall, Merrick Lex Berman, and Ruth Mostern (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), vii.

Professor Bol is certainly correct to observe that the human organization of place and space changes over time, especially during longer periods of continuous history in places where the physical dimensions of territory or empire expand over time. This is certainly the case in China. In this communication I have attempted to demonstrate that place-names often change and for a host of different reasons, and on that point, I also agree with Professor Bol. I disagree, however, that places “disappear” (perhaps he means “place-names” disappear, as we saw with the various local names on the Fangma tan maps?). In any case, the physical places themselves do not vanish. Guiqiu *xian*, or Fangma tan, is still where it was 2,200 years ago. Often, they acquire new or alternate names. So yes, Bol is right about place-names usually not being “singular.” My point is that throughout the long course of Chinese history, place-names could and were collected and organized into a unity to serve administrative-political, social, and economic purposes (as already mentioned, the collection of census data and taxes, essential to the growth and prosperity of every imperial dynasty in Chinese history, was based on, and organized into, a coherent system of local and regional places distinguished by *diming*). These same utilitarian functions are detectable, I contend, in every geographical treatise included in the dynastic histories produced since the Han. And I would further argue that the same system of organization is also manifest in Cui Naifu 崔乃夫, chief ed., *Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo diming da cidian* 中華人民共和國地名大詞典 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1999), the most comprehensive one-country collection of place-names ever published, which organizes 180,000 separate entries on, or related to, *diming*, into a unified whole.

Now, although Professor Bol’s main point seems to be that places and place-names in China have always been in a state of change, his observation seems to suggest that this fluid state of affairs somehow created a degree of instability in the organization of places and spaces. To follow this line of reasoning, however, seems to obscure some of the more important *functions* that place-names served in Chinese history. One of these functions, perhaps the most important of all, is abundantly evident in Ban Gu’s “Dili zhi.” Of course, the thousands of place-names in Ban’s catalog provide a wealth of information on individual locations. But to fully understand the importance and influence of his seminal treatise one must also understand that influential scholars like Ban Gu and presumably his contemporaries “saw” the world — that is, the “space” of the Chinese world, or “Tianxia” 天下, as they understood it — as a *collection* of individual places, which could be identified by name and then

organized and cataloged in such a way as to form a geographical, political, and social *unity*. In other words, the collection and classification of individual place-names provides a structural unity to *dili*, or the "configurations of the earth." The basic or foundational element in this structure is toponyms. Thus, place-names do not destabilize place and space; they define them in certain terms. And even when the name of a place changes, or its territory is expanded or reassigned to a new administrative hierarchy, it always is assigned or assumes a new name, which will then recalibrate and restabilize the unity of *dili*. Above all else, then, place-names provide identifiable references (that is, name designations) that can unite the empire (or Tianxia) and bring coherence to the world. The ancient Chinese, like the Greeks of antiquity, saw the world as a collection of named places, not as abstract space. As a result, early in Chinese history, after the development of the Chinese *written* language, there were essentially two ways to describe and represent the world: one was *visual*, through diagrams, illustrations, and maps (*tu* 圖); the other was *textual* (that is, describing the world and places in it by means of a written description). Employment of either form or both, as in later *tujing* and gazetteers, yields greater spatial understanding of the physical world as well as human movement and activity within the "configurations of the earth." Place-names are the anchors of those configurations.

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