
The ‘*Chronicles of Yǒngchāng Commandery*’

An Annotated Translation of the 《永昌郡传》

LUDWIG M BRINCKMANN

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The Yúnnán Papers

This text is part of a series of translations of historical Chinese texts concerning Yúnnán.

This series does not aim to present any new research but to allow an English-speaking audience to better understand Yúnnán’s history and culture through original texts. The texts are heavily annotated, giving geographical, historical and cultural background information and references to contemporary academic discussions.

The texts in this series are currently in draft and undergoing revision. Those translations that have reached a certain state of maturity can be found on my website at

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ludwigbrinckmann@gmail.com.

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1 Introduction

The ‘*Chronicles of Yǒngchāng Commandery*’ 《永昌郡传》 is a lost text thought to have been compiled during the Jin dynasty 晋朝, 266–420, detailing the human geography of seven commanderies (*jùn* 郡) in the region of Yúnnán, then called Nánzhōng 南中. The text only survives as fragments in other historic texts, particularly the Sòng dynasty ‘*Readings of the Tàipíng Era*’ 《太平御览》.

Little is known about the original text, its author or time, but the introduction to the text in the 《云南史料丛刊》 notes that – as the text mentions commanderies established after 225 CE but not those established in 303 CE – it must have been written in this period.⁽¹⁾ The level of detail suggests its author was either a local or an officer stationed in Nánzhōng, however it must also be noted that some passages are nothing but fantastic hearsay, quite possibly copied from earlier texts.

During the Qīng dynasty, the scholar Wáng Mó 王谟, *1731–†1817, compiled a work called ‘*Geographical Compilations from the Hàn to Táng Dynasties*’ 《汉唐地理书钞》 which first included a reconstructed version of the text.⁽²⁾ Wáng Mó 王谟 placed the section on Yǒngchāng Commandery 永昌郡 at the front, maybe because of its title. However, as that work did contain a number of errors and lacked attribution of its sources, Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 reedited the text for his 1979 book on lost texts about ancient Yúnnán, 《云南古佚书钞》, adding several passages, critical notes as well as attributions.⁽³⁾

2 About the Translations

As mentioned above, the original text does not survive and the text has been reconstructed from quotations in other works. My translation is based on the revised edition of Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1979) in Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1996), pp. 15–19, which includes eight characters that were purged from the 1979 edition for being racially offensive. The characters in question have been marked in the text. I have decided not to include the comments by Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 as they merely add value as a critical edition, but I have occasionally used these comments to add clarifications to my English translation. The text is also included in the 《云南史料丛刊》,⁽⁴⁾ which adds a helpful introduction by Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜.⁽⁵⁾

I am not aware of an English translation.

3 Annotated Translation

The text introduces seven districts in the region south of present-day Sichuān 四川, which at the time were collectively referred to as Nánzhōng 南中. The region, while explored during the time of Hàn emperor Wǔ 汉武帝 and Eastern Hàn emperor Míng 东汉明帝, saw a military excursion from Shǔ 蜀 in 225 CE by Zhūgé Liàng 诸葛亮, who established the commanderies described in the text.

⁽¹⁾ Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1998), vol. 1, p. 188.

⁽²⁾ This work was republished in as Wáng Mó 王谟 (1961), the ‘*Chronicles of Yǒngchāng Commandery*’ 《永昌郡传》 can be found at Wáng Mó 王谟 (1961), pp. 375–377.

⁽³⁾ Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1979), a new, revised edition of the work was published as Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1996).

⁽⁴⁾ Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1998), vol. 1, pp. 188–191.

⁽⁵⁾ However, there are important differences in the texts, such as in the order of the passages.

3.1 Shūshí Commandery 《朱提郡》

The text, as Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 compiled it, begins with Shūshí 朱提,⁽⁶⁾ the region of present-day Zhāotōng 昭通 in the north-east of Yúnnán. Reference point for the distances mentioned in the text is the Chinese administrative town of Jiānwèi 犍为, today a county in Sìchuān's Lèshān 乐山.

朱提郡，在犍为南千八百里。治朱提县。川中纵广五六十里。	Shūshí Commandery lies one thousand eight hundred <i>lǐ</i> south of Jiānwèi. The administration is in Shūshí county. From the middle of the basin, it spreads broad and long for fifty to sixty <i>lǐ</i> .
永昌郡传 5 有大泉池水，燹名千顷池。又有龙池，以灌溉种稻。与犍道接，时多猿，群取鸣啸于行人径次，声聒人耳。	There is a large spring and a lake, which the <i>Bó</i> call Qiānqǐng Lake . There is also a dragon pool, which is used to irrigate rice paddies. Adjacent to the <i>Bó</i> Road live many monkeys. Groups of monkeys converge and make loud cries where travellers pass, unpleasant for the men.
永昌郡传 10 夷分布山谷间，食肉衣皮。虽有人形，禽兽其心。言语服饰不与华同。	The <i>Yí</i> live scattered in the mountains and valleys, they eat meat and wear animal skins. Even though they are human in appearance, in their hearts they are animals. Their language and attire are different from the Chinese.
有堂狼山，山多毒草。盛夏之月，飞鸟过之，不能得去。	There is Tángláng Mountain with many poisonous weeds in the mountains, in the midsommer months birds crossing it cannot pass through.

3.2 Jiànníng Commandery 《建宁郡》

The next region, Jiànníng 建宁, is today's Qūjìng 曲靖.

建宁郡，朱提之东南六百里。土气和适。盛夏之月，热不郁述。猛冬时，寒不惨慄。建宁郡葬夷置积薪之上，火以燔之。烟气正上，则大杀牛羊，共相劳贺作乐。若遇风，烟气旁邪，尔万悲哭也。	Jiànníng Commandery lies six hundred <i>lǐ</i> south-east of Shūshí. Its climate is pleasant and suitable. During the summer months the heat is not stifling and in the fiercest winters it is not bitterly cold. In Jiànníng commandery, the <i>Yí</i> bury their dead by erecting funeral pyres and placing them on top, lighting a fire to burn them. If the smoke goes up straight, they kill many cows and goats, and all join together in celebration. But if wind deflects the smoke they wail and cry.
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[9–10: 虽有人形，禽兽其心] Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1979), p. 15 omitted these eight characters which he considered of-fensive, in the 1996 edition, these characters were restored. These characters are also included in the Wáng Mó 王谟 (1961), p. 376 edition.

r 4: Qiānqǐng Lake] the name means one thousand *qǐng* lake, for its size, for its location see Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1987), p. 150.

r 10–11: Even though they are human in appearance, in their hearts they are animals.] This is the offending passage that Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1979), p. 15 eliminated in the first edition.

r 13: Tángláng Mountain] a mountain range in today's Dōngchūān 东川 region, see Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1987), p. 196.

(6) The pronunciation as Shūshí is taken from the 《古代汉语词典》(2002), p. 2043.

3.3 Zāngkē Commandery 《牂柯郡》

The region of Zāngkē 牂柯, today's north-western Guizhōu 贵州.

<p>牂柯郡，在建宁东北千二百里。处所险峻，率皆高山而少平地。</p>	<p>Zāngkē Commandery lies one thousand two hundred <i>lǐ</i> north-east of Jiànníng. The land is dangerous, all mountains and very few plains.</p>	<p>永昌郡传 25</p>
<p>僚民喜食人，以为至珍美；不自食其种类也，怨仇乃相害食耳。</p>	<p>The Liáo people like to eat human flesh which they consider a delicacy. They do not eat their own kind, only their enemies and those who have harmed them.</p>	
<p>能水中潜行，行数十里。能水底持刀，刺捕取鱼。其人以口嚼食，并以鼻饮水。</p>	<p>They can dive underwater for more than ten <i>lǐ</i>. They can hold knives at the bottom of the water, using them to spear fish. They eat their food with their mouth and drink through the nose.</p>	<p>永昌郡传 30</p>
<p>死人有棺，其葬，竖棺埋之。</p>	<p>For their dead they make coffins, which they inter vertically.</p>	

3.4 Xīngǔ Commandery 《兴古郡》

Xīngǔ Commandery was established in 225 CE in what is today the Wénshān 文山 region.

<p>兴古郡，在建宁南八百里。郡领九县。纵经千里，皆瘴气。</p>	<p>Xīngǔ Commandery lies eight hundred <i>lǐ</i> south of Jiànníng, the commandery administers nine counties. It spans one thousand <i>lǐ</i>, there are misasmas everywhere.</p>	<p>永昌郡传 35</p>
<p>蒜、谷、鸡、豚、鱼、酒不可食，食啖皆病人。</p>	<p>Garlic, grains, fowl, pigs, fish and wine cannot be consumed, as eating them makes people ill.</p>	
<p>郡北三百里有盘江，广数百步，深十馀丈，此江有毒瘴。</p>	<p>Three hundred <i>lǐ</i> north of the commandery is the Pán River, which is several hundred <i>bù</i> wide and more than ten <i>zhàng</i> deep, in the river are poisonous miasmas.</p>	<p>永昌郡传 40</p>
<p>九县之人，皆号曰鸠民，言语、嗜欲不与人同。鸠民咸以三尺布，用割作两襜，不复加针缕之功也；广头着前，狭头着后，不盖其形，与裸身无异。</p>	<p>The people of the nine counties are all called <i>Jiū</i> people, their language and mores are all unlike humans. The <i>Jiū</i> people use cloth three <i>chǐ</i> long, cutting it into two strips without sewing, the broad part worn in front, the narrow end to the back, not covering their bodies just like they are naked.</p>	<p>永昌郡传 45</p>

3.5 Yuèxī Commandery 《越巂郡》

Yuèxī Commandery administers the region of present-day Xīchāng 西昌 in southern Sìchuān.

<p>越巂郡，在建宁西北千七百里。治邛都县。</p>	<p>Yuèxī Commandery lies one thousand seven hundred <i>lǐ</i> north-west of Jiànníng, its administration is in Qióng Dū county.</p>	
<p>自建宁高山相连，至川中平地，东西南北八千馀里。</p>	<p>From Jiànníng high mountains extend to the plains of Sìchuān, from east to west and north to south over eight thousand <i>lǐ</i>.</p>	<p>永昌郡传 50</p>

[27–28: 僚民喜食人，以为至珍美；不自食其种类也，怨仇乃相害食耳。] While Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1979) redacted an earlier passage, this passage about cannibalism was not removed.

郡特好桑蚕，宜黍，稷、麻、稻、粱。

The commandery is particularly suitable for silk worms, and for growing broomcorn millet, millet, hemp, wet rice, and sorghum.

3.6 Yúnnán Commandery 《云南郡》

Yúnnán Commandery lies on the large plain of present-day Xiángyún 祥云.

云南郡在建宁南四十五里，治云南县。

Yúnnán Commandery lies **forty-five ǐ south of Jiànníng**, its administration is in Yúnnán county.

永昌郡传 55

亦多夷濮，分布山野，千、五百人女大小蹲踞道侧，皆持数种器械，时寇钞，为郡邑之害。

There are many *Yí* and *Pú*, scattered in the wild mountains. A thousand or five hundred men and women of all ages squat by the roads, carrying all sorts of weapons to occasionally rob and plunder, threatening towns and villages.

3.7 Yǒngchāng Commandery 《永昌郡》

Last, as most distant from Chinese settlements, comes Yǒngchāng 永昌, the commandery founded in 69 CE by Eastern Hàn emperor Míng 东汉明帝.

永昌郡，在云南西七百里。

Yǒngchāng Commandery lies seven hundred ǐ to the south-west of Yúnnán.

都东北八十里有泸仓津，此津有部气。

Eighty ǐ northwest of the capital is **Lúcāng crossing**, which is known for its miasmas.

往以三月渡之，行者六十人皆悉闷乱。毒气中物则有声；中树木，枝则折；中人，则令奄然青烂也。

In the past when sixty men tried to cross in the third month, they all experienced trouble. When the poisonous miasma makes contact with things it makes a sound; when it affects trees, their branches break, when it affects people, they turn green and fester.

永昌郡传 65

The following passage about humans with tails, while obviously fantastic, might be based on the 'History of the Later Hàn Dynasty' 《后汉书》, which contains a passage on people in the region wearing clothing with tails.

郡西南千五百里微外有尾濮。尾若龟形，长三、四寸。欲坐，则先穿地空，以安其尾。若邂逅误折尾，便死。

One thousand five hundred ǐ south-west beyond the borders of the commandery are the *Pú* with tails. Their tails resemble those of turtles and are three or four *cùn* long. If they want to sit down, they first dig a hole in the ground and then sit on their tails. If they accidentally break their tail, they die.

男女长，各随宜野会，无有嫁娶。犹知识母，不复别父。俗云，贫老相食，则此濮也。古人所说，非目见也。

When men and women are grown up they informally gather in the wild, they do not have formal marriage. They know their mothers, but do not know their fathers. It is said that the old offer to be eaten,

r53: forty-five ǐ south of Jiànníng] Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1996) notes that this is not possible and suggests that there is a copying error in the text.

r6: Lúncāng crossing] I think this refers to the Lánkāng River 澜沧江 crossing.

this refers to the *Pú*. This is what the ancients have said, I have not
seen this personally. 永昌郡传 75

4 Glossary

- Bǎoshān** 保山: present-day important city, the historic Yǒngchāng 永昌 – see page see 永昌
- Bó** 爨: ancient tribal group in Yúnnán – see page 6
- Bódào** 爨道: *Bó* Road, historic name for the road from Sìchuān into Yúnnán, via present-day Qūjìng 曲靖 – see page 6, 9
- Dàlǐ** 大理: –
- Dōngchuān** 东川: eastern part of Jiànnán – see page 6
- Dōng Hàn** 东汉: Eastern Hàn, Chinese dynasty, 25–220 – see page 9
- Dōnghàn Míngdì** 东汉明帝: Eastern Hàn emperor Míng, Dōng Hàn 东汉 emperor, 58–75 – see pages 5, 8, 9
- Ērhǎi** 洱海: Lake Ērhǎi, highland lake in western Yúnnán with the center of Nánzhào on its western side. It was also called Xīěr 西洱, Xīěr Hé – see page 9
- Guìzhōu** 贵州: province in south-west China – see page 7
- Hàn Cháo** 汉朝: Hàn dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 202 BCE–220 – see page 9
- Hàn** 汉: Hàn, main ethnic group of China, also name of early dynasty – see pages 5, 8, 9
- Hàntáng Dìlǐ Shūchāo** 《汉唐地理书钞》: ‘*Geographical Compilations from the Hàn to Táng Dynasties*’, compilation of geographical texts by Wáng Mò 王谟 – see page 5, 9
- Hàn Wǔdì** 汉武帝: Hàn emperor Wǔ, Hàn dynasty emperor Wǔ, 140–87 BCE – see page 5, 9
- Hòu Hàn** 后汉: later Hàn dynasty, second period of the Hàn dynasty –
- Hòuhàn Shū** 《后汉书》: ‘*History of the Later Hàn Dynasty*’, classic historical text, one of the twenty-four official histories of China – see page 8
- Jiānwèi** 犍为: – see page 6
- Jiànnán** 剑南: Táng dynasty commandery in present-day Sìchuān –
- Jiànníng** 建宁: an early administrative district in present-day eastern Yúnnán – see pages 6–8
- Jiànníng commandery** 建宁郡: Jiànníng commandery, commandery established by Zhūgé Liàng 诸葛亮 in 225 CE, present-day Qūjìng 曲靖 – see page 6, 9
- Jìn Cháo** 晋朝: Jìn dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 266–420 – see page 5, 9
- Jiū Mín** 鸠民: *Jiū* people, ancient tribal group – see page 7, 9
- Jùn** 郡: commandery, historic administrative area, term in use before the Táng, ‘a standard unit of territorial administration normally incorporating and coordinating several Districts (hsien)’, see Hucker (1985), 1731 – see pages 5–9
- Láncāng river** 澜沧江: Láncāng River, major river in Yúnnán, the Mekong – see page 8, 9
- Lèshān** 乐山: district in southern Sìchuān – see page 6
- Liáo** 僚: name for ancient tribal group – see page 7
- Lúcāng Jīn** 泸仓津: Lú cāng crossing, river crossing in Yǒngchāng 永昌 – see page 8, 9

- Mán** 蛮: historically a generic term for non-Chinese people in the southwest –
- Nánzhào** 南诏: southern *zhào*, regional power with its center on Ērhǎi during the 8th and 9th centuries – see page 9
- Nánzhōng** 南中: ‘most common name for the southwest region (Yunnan, Guizhou, and southern Sichuan) prior to the Tang dynasty’, Herman (2009) – see page 5
- Pánjiāng** 盘江: Pán River, important river in eastern Yúnnán – see page 7, 10
- Pú** 濮: tribal group – see page 8
- Qiānqǐng lake** 千顷池: Qiānqǐng Lake, a lake in the Zhāotōng 昭通 region, see Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1987), p. 150 – see page 6, 10
- Qīng dynasty** 清朝: Qīng dynasty, last dynasty of imperial China, 1644–1912 BCE – see page 5, 10
- Qióng Dū** 邛都: Qióng district, tribal region in present-day southern Sìchuān – see page 7, 10
- Qūjìng** 曲靖: – see page 6
- Sān Guó** 三国: Three Kingdoms, period after the Dōng Hàn 东汉, with three powers dominating China, 220–280 – see page 10
- Shǔ** 蜀: name of a state during the Warring States period, later used to refer to the western part of present-day Sìchuān – see page 5
- Shǔ Guó** 蜀国: state of Shǔ, one of the states of the Sān Guó 三国, later also used as a term for present-day Sìchuān – see page 10
- Shūshí** 朱提: historic place name for what is now the north-east of Yúnnán, pronounced Shūshí, see 《古代汉语词典》 (2002), p. 2043 – see page 6
- Sìchuān** 四川: Chinese province – see pages 5–7
- Sòng Cháo** 宋朝: Sòng dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 960–1279 – see page 5, 10
- Tàipíng Yùlǎn** 《太平御览》: ‘*Readings of the Tàipíng Era*’, Sòng dynasty encyclopedia – see page 5, 10
- Táng Cháo** 唐朝: Táng dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 618–907 – see page 10
- Táng** 唐: Táng, Chinese dynasty contemporary with Nánzhào, 618–907 – see page 10
- Tángláng Shān** 堂狼山: Tángláng Mountain, mountain range in eastern Yúnnán, Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1987), p. 196 – see page 6, 10
- Wáng Mò** 王谟: Qīng dynasty scholar, compiled the 《汉唐地理书钞》 – see page 5
- Wénshān** 文山: – see page 7
- Xīchāng** 西昌: administrative center in southern Sìchuān – see page 7
- Xīěr** 西洱: shorter form of Xīěr Hé, a reference to Ērhǎi –
- Xīěr Hé** 西洱河: Xīěr River, historic name for Ērhǎi, now in use for the river that flows out of the lake – see page 10
- Xiàn** 县: county, administrative unit – see pages 6, 7, 10
- Xiángyún** 祥云: – see page 8
- Xīngǔ** 兴古郡: Xīngǔ commandery, commandery established by Zhūgé Liàng 诸葛亮 in 225 CE in southern Yúnnán – see page 7, 10
- Yí** 夷: one of the collective terms for non-Chinese people in the south-west – see page 6, 8, see 蛮

- Yǒngchāng** 永昌: present-day Bǎoshān 保山, a Chinese outpost founded in 69, see Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1953) – see page 8
- Yǒngchāng commandery** 永昌郡: Yǒngchāng Commandery, present-day Bǎoshān 保山, a Chinese outpost founded in 69, see Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1953) – see pages 5, 8, 10
- Yǒngchāng Jùn Chuán** 《永昌郡传》: ‘*Chronicles of Yǒngchāng Commandery*’, early local gazetteer, lost text, partially reconstructed in Wáng Shūwǔ 王叔武 (1979) – see page 5, 11
- Yuèxījùn** 越巂郡: Yuèxī commandery, – see page 7, 11
- Yúnnán** 云南: at the time of the Táng dynasty the name for the geographic region south of its Jiannan district – see pages 5, 6, 8
- Yúnnán commandery** 云南郡: Yúnnán commandery, commandery in the Yúnnányì 云南驿 plain – see page 8, 11
- Yúnnán county** 云南县: Yúnnán county, – see page 8, 11
- Yúnnányì** 云南驿: important caravan station, three stages before Dàlǐ 大理 (⊕ 25.39N 100.69E) –
- Zānggē** 牂牁: the region of present-day Guìzhōu –
- Zāngkē** 牂柯: variant writing of Zānggē 牂牁 – see page 7, see 牂牁
- Zāngkē commandery** 牂柯郡: Zāngkē commandery, commandery in north-western Guìzhōu 贵州 – see page 7, 11
- Zhāotōng** 昭通: – see page 6
- zhào** 诏: *zhào*, term for a local ruler or his realm – see page 11
- Zhūgé Liàng** 诸葛亮: historic and legendary official of Shǔ 蜀, see Crespigny (2007), p. 1172 – see page 5
- Shūshí commandery** 朱提郡: Shūshí commandery, administrative region in north-eastern Yúnnán – see page 6, 11

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