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The *Patterned Guidelines of Shazhou* (*Shazhou tujing*) and geographical practices in Tang China

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Abstract

This article is a case study of how geographical knowledge was practiced in China before the age of print. The *Shazhou tujing*, or *Patterned Guidelines of Shazhou*, represents the earliest material evidence of "patterned guidelines" (*tujing*), a geographical genre which is believed to have paved the way to "local gazetteers" (*difang zhi*), the most important genre for our knowledge of the history and geography of late imperial China. By focusing on a manuscript copy that reproduces Chapter 3 of the *Shazhou tujing*, this article probes how geographical knowledge was produced at the local level, and how such a manuscript could serve as an instrument for knowing and using a locality in an imperial context.

KEYWORDS

China, Dunhuang, geography, manuscripts, practical knowledge

1 | INTRODUCTION

In June 1900, a soldier-turned-Daoist-abbot named Wang Yuanlu 王圓籙 (1850?–1931) accidentally unsealed what is now known as cave 17 at the Buddhist site of Mogao 莫高, near Dunhuang 敦煌, western China. The cave contained thousands of manuscripts, dating from as early as the 5th century up until the 11th, when the cave was most probably sealed. Word of the discovery soon spread, and expeditions were launched. After visits by officials and scholars such as Yan Dong 延棟 in 1900, Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 (1849–1917) in 1903, and Aurel Stein (1862–1943) in 1907, Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) spent three intense weeks in the winter of 1908 in cave 17 skimming through thousands of documents. He selected approximately 6,000 manuscripts written in Old Tibetan, Sanskrit, Tocharian, Sogdian, Khotanese, Uyghur, and Chinese, and bought them from Wang Yuanlu for a sum of 500 silver taels. Together with other

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manuscripts now scattered in various locations around the world, they have provided scholars with hitherto unknown information on the history, religion, medicine, and economy of medieval China and central Asia.¹

Among the 10,000 “Stein” documents now located at the British Library and the 6,000 “Pelliot” manuscripts from the Bibliothèque nationale de France are copies of several versions and chapters of a document from the 7th–8th centuries, the *Shazhou tujing* 沙州圖經, or *Patterned Guidelines of Shazhou*. These are the oldest known manuscripts in Chinese that deal with local geography in the form of a non-figurative written account.² By focusing on a copy of Chapter 3 of the *Shazhou tujing* known as “Pelliot chinois 2005” (hereafter, P.2005), I examine in this paper how this manuscript copy can illuminate the history and development of Chinese geographical practices before the age of print.³ In particular, I explore what it entailed to produce geographical documents at the local level before the Song dynasty (960–1279) and subsequent efforts at standardization, as exemplified through the emergence of local gazetteers and imperial geographies. In addition to elements dealing with the production of geographical knowledge, I provide hypotheses regarding what readers and users could do with such geographical documents.

The region of Shazhou/Dunhuang has garnered exponential scholarly attention over the course of the long 20th century. Various studies on local sites and documents attest to its importance as a cultural crossroads—as demonstrated by the number of languages used in the recovered manuscripts—but also as a repository of Chinese knowledge.⁴ The *Shazhou tujing* was produced at a particular moment in the area's history: it had originally been controlled by the Tang, but that period was followed by almost a century of Tibetan rule, and during the 8th century was marked by continuous warfare between Uyghurs and Tibetans.⁵ The most recent events mentioned in the manuscript date to the end of the 7th and 8th centuries, with many focusing on the reign of empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690–705).

When examining geographical documents such as the *Shazhou tujing*, modern scholarship has usually taken one of two approaches. First, it has examined topographical locations with philological methods pertaining to the field of historical geography. Second, it has sought, rather positivistically, to situate geographical genres on a cumulative scale of knowledge that aims to yield improved works over time and, eventually, the establishment of geography as science. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of studies revolving around the literary value of geographical writings.⁶ As for the chapters of the *Shazhou tujing* that came into Pelliot's possession, the scholar Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866–1940) was the first to transcribe them, when Pelliot visited him in 1909 in Beijing. Pelliot then returned to Paris and published an article on the *Shazhou tujing* in 1916. Various critical editions have been published since then.⁷

How can a Dunhuang manuscript describing a Central Asian borderland prefecture be useful in reshaping our understanding of the development of geographical knowledge in premodern China? The period between the Eastern Han (25–220) and Tang (618–907) dynasties witnessed the birth and development of “local” or “locality writings” (*fangzhi* 方志). These “local writings” are known through recovered and reconstructed quotations, or *fragments*.⁸ This corpus comprises more than 400 known titles, defined mainly by their local scope. However, many more were probably produced, but were lost over the course of time.⁹ With a total of 90 geographically—and, to a certain extent,

¹See, for instance, Gernet (1956); Tang & Lu (1986); Kalinowski (2003); Despeux (2010); Galambos (2013); Rong (2013).

²On the recently discovered 3rd–2nd century BCE bamboo slips from the Middle Yangzi area that display distances between byways and riverways, see section 6 of this paper below.

³*Shazhou tujing* 沙州圖經 [Ch. 3], P.2005, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Pelliot Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France (hereafter, BnF).

⁴Trombert (2005, p. 12).

⁵The area described in the *Shazhou tujing* was named Guazhou in 619, Western Shazhou in 622, renamed Shazhou in 633, Dunhuang commandery in 742, Shazhou again in 758, and Shazhou military commandery in 766. It was under Tibetan rule from 781 to 851, when it was recovered by Zhang Yichao 張義潮. For an historical account of medieval Dunhuang, see Rong (2013, pp. 19–49).

⁶Hua (2007a); Huang (1993); Feng (2018); A. Wang (2018); Hargett (2018). Hua (2007a) and Hua (2007b) are important studies of the *tujing* genre and of the shortcomings of modern and contemporary attempts by scholars such as Wang Mo 王謨, Chen Yunrong 陳運溶, Zhang Guogan 張國淦, and Liu Weiyl 劉緯毅.

⁷Pelliot (1908, pp. 519–520) contains the earliest testimony of the importance of the *Shazhou tujing*, and Pelliot (1916) is the first study based on P.2005.

Critical editions of P.2005 include: Ikeda (1975, pp. 56–84); Tang & Lu (1986, pp. 1–23); Luo (1909/1985, pp. 15–73); Zheng (1989, pp. 5–33); Z. Wang (1993, pp. 109–141); Z. Li (1998, pp. 11–131); Hua (2007b, pp. 39–59); Cang (2014, pp. 168–185). Recently, Sun Yingying (2017) completed a PhD dissertation on P.2005, in which she focuses on the materiality of the manuscript as well as on the evolving content of patterned guidelines. Drège (2000, p. 262) and Sun (2017, pp. 121–179) have translated the document into French and English, respectively. Digitized versions of the Dunhuang manuscripts of the Pelliot collection, including P.2005 and related chapters, are available on the BnF's Gallica website (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8301563c>). My analysis will be based on Ikeda On's (1975) and Li Zhengyu's (1998) critical editions.

⁸I consider fragments both as objects (usually manuscripts) and as texts, citations that are unintentionally incomplete in case of material damage, or intentionally incomplete when quoted by later authors or compilers (Most, 2009).

⁹M. Wang (1778/1961); Zhang (1936/1962); Liu (1997); Chittick (2003); C. Li (2015). On documents lost before the age of print, see Drège (1991).

temporally—identified documents, the easily recognizable subgenre of “patterned guidelines” (*tujing* 圖經) amounts to almost one quarter of the total number of the transmitted local writings. With regard to the history of geographical knowledge, they are considered as the forebears of “local gazetteers” (*difang zhi* 地方志), the single most important genre for our knowledge of the local history and geography of the second millennium of the Chinese empire.

By geographical “genre” and “subgenre,” I refer to historical actors’ categories as displayed by the official classification of historical knowledge. During the Tang, works falling under the geographical (*dili* 地理) genre of writing could be further divided into subgenres according to the period during which they were compiled and their terminologies and titles: most of the documents that were located in the imperial library were “accounts” (*ji* 記), “treatises” (*zhi* 志), “maps” (*tu* 圖), “traditions” (*zhuan* 傳), “illustrated treatises” (*tuzhi* 圖志), and “patterned guidelines” (*tujing*).¹⁰ Some scholars have suggested that *tujing*, *tujì* 圖記 and *tuzhì* 圖志 were interchangeable suffixes referring to identical works: local treatises with maps.¹¹ Without overemphasizing the importance of the titles’ terminology—several titles were given retrospectively and some titles can indeed be found under different suffixes—I contend that there are differences between these subgenres of geographical writings with regard to their period of production, their content, and their geographical scope.

Temporal discontinuities among subgenres suggest that “accounts” (*ji*) and “treatises” (*zhi*) were mostly produced during the period of the Northern and Southern dynasties. Then, between the Sui dynasty (581–618) and the period of the Five Dynasties (907–960), patterned guidelines became the foremost subgenre of geographical writing. Finally, local gazetteers gradually replaced patterned guidelines during the Song, and became the predominant genre throughout late imperial times.¹² Whether “illustrated” (by a *tu* 圖) or not, the “accounts” and “treatises” written between the Han and Tang dynasties were mainly concerned with ethnographic accounts and contained elements pertaining to cultural history, such as local customs and practices as well as records of oddities. This does not mean that such elements were not found in later patterned guidelines, but rather that they were a prominent component of “accounts” and “treatises” and a minor one of patterned guidelines, which tended to be systematic instructions on how to best administer localities. Furthermore, most ethnographic accounts were produced in specific regions of the territory, mainly the south, and especially the Middle Yangzi area; conversely, patterned guidelines were produced more evenly in localities all across the realm. As for the differences between “illustrated treatises” and “patterned guidelines,” the former number significantly fewer than the latter. That was because the “illustrated treatises” were imperial geographies, large scale compilations of regional and local documents—including patterned guidelines—that were meant to describe the empire in its entirety, such as the *Illustrated Treatises of the Counties and Prefectures of the Yuanhe Era* (*Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志).¹³

The 90 extant patterned guidelines are made up of approximately 350–400 surviving quotations, providing a representative amount of textual material to reconstruct developments in geographical knowledge during that period.¹⁴ However, most of the transmitted quotations of Han–Tang patterned guidelines reflect the concerns and strategies of Song compilers, rather than those of the original Han–Tang authors. Consider standard entries in Song encyclopedias such as the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (*Encyclopedia of the Taiping Era Read by the Emperor*) and the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (*Vast Records from the Taiping Era*), both of which explicitly quote from patterned guidelines: the former only quotes bare topographical descriptions of a place, while the latter selects excerpts of “strange accounts” (*zhiguai* 志怪). The reception of these quotations by commentators of the second millennium of the empire displays a binary and limited vision of the content of patterned guidelines, and, moreover, completely overlooks their structure.¹⁵

By comparing unaltered extant content from manuscript copies with transmitted quotations, however, it is possible to bridge the gap between what was transmitted and what was omitted. Indeed, examining the *Shazhou tujing* shows what was deemed worth mentioning in and quoting from a *tujing* and what was not. It also becomes possible to complete information regarding what was transmitted in space—from the locality to the capital—and what was

¹⁰See, for instance, the bibliographical chapter of the *Book of Sui* (*Sui shu* 隋書): Wei (656/1973, Ch. 33, pp. 982–988); and Blitstein (2019, p. 339).

¹¹Huang (1993, p. 147); Hargett (1996, p. 409).

¹²Huang (1993, p. 153).

¹³Liu, Zheng, & Liu (2016).

¹⁴Hua (2007a).

¹⁵F. Li (982/1960; 978/1981).

transmitted in time—from one repository to another. Thus, I use the *Shazhou tujing* on an “empirical” basis to reconstruct the layout, structure, and content of patterned guidelines. I first examine the layout of P.2005. I then outline its structure and explain how its content is mostly a product of local knowledge. Lastly, I turn to the question of how this utilitarian document facilitated geographical practices, namely movement. But before that, it is necessary to unlock the meaning of “patterned guidelines” (*tujing*).

2 | TERMINOLOGY

What are patterned guidelines? Or, rather, why do I choose to translate *tujing* as “patterned guidelines”? One of the most common misconceptions of the nature of *tujing* is evident from its translation as “map-classic,” or similar translations that promote the idea of the “map” governing the document.¹⁶ Both terms, “map” and “classic,” are problematic renditions of *tu* 圖 and *jing* 經, respectively.

Jing is usually translated as “classic” (for canonical texts) or “scripture” (for religious texts). Yuan Ke 袁珂 (1916–2001) suggests that in the context of ancient geographical writings, the *jing* in the title of the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (*Itineraries of the Mountains and the Seas*) could not mean “classic,” but rather “itinerary,” “trajectory,” or “guideline,” since *jing* bears the idea of a spatial progression (as in *jingli* 經歷).¹⁷ This interpretation can also be applied to other geographical works that have the *jing* component in their title. The anonymous 3rd century CE *Shuijing* 水經 (usually translated as *Water Classic*) is merely a list of major rivers and their basic courses, and certainly not a “classic.” The same can be said of the *xingjing* 星經 (“itineraries of the stars”) genre from the Han period. Beyond the obvious correlation between astronomical and geographical knowledge as exemplified in official dynastic histories and monographs, *xingjing* and *tujing* have striking similarities in how they put forth questions of motion and trajectories, whether those concern the stars (*xingjing*) or earthly routes (*tujing*).¹⁸ In spite of these elements, translating *jing* as “itinerary” in the context of *tujing* seems too restrictive: *tujing* certainly contained a wealth of topographic itineraries along rivers, across mountains and between postal stations, but they also contained topical entries which do not indicate motion or trajectory. Therefore, I suggest using “guidelines” to translate *jing*, because this term encompasses the geographical, encyclopedic, and utilitarian aspects that coexist in such documents.¹⁹

Turning to *tu* 圖, Francesca Bray has thought of *tu* as “templates for action.”²⁰ As I show in this paper, this framing seems particularly well adapted to the way I understand not only *tu* but also *tujing* as a whole. *Jing* and *tu* are related to each other and do not function independently in this context. Whether one decides to translate *tu* as “chart,” “map,” “illustration,” “diagram,” “pattern,” or “organized principle,” it must be understood in conjunction with the other component of the title. Yet I argue that in premodern geographical documents the graphic, non-verbal representation embedded in the meaning of *tu* was less important than one would expect.²¹ No maps for the period under scrutiny here have survived. Additionally, early maps did not prioritise accuracy, tending instead to simplify movement in space into an almost abstract form.²²

Moreover, I suggest, for the following reasons, that the *tu* component of a *tujing* might very well mean that it was not a map: (a) as I show below, the content of the *Shazhou tujing* indicates that it was possible to “navigate” on the ground without maps using textual descriptions alone; (b) as no clear reference to the presence of graphic elements can be found, patterned guidelines probably evolved from an earlier form, that did contain “maps” but

¹⁶Will (1992, p. 7); Huang (1993, p. 137); Bol (2004, p. 7); Hu (2003, p. 163); Mostern (2011, p. 75); F. Lin (2017, p. 10); Felt (2017, p. 379); A. Wang (2018, p. 51); Feng (2018, p. 174), to name a few. For translations that stress the opposite perspective, where the written elements govern the document, see Reiter (1990, p. 316): “gazetteers” with maps, “illustrating” texts; Lien (2009, p. 21): “guides, with maps”; Milburn, (2015, p. 5): “illustrated guides”; Wen (2017, p. 41): “illustrated geography”; and Sun (2017, p. 20): “illustrated records.”

¹⁷Yuan (1980). Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (2003) also translates *jing* as “itineraries.”

¹⁸Many thanks to Daniel Morgan for pointing out these similarities.

¹⁹Jörg Hüsemann (2017, p. 11) uses “guidelines” (“leitfaden”).

²⁰Bray (2007, pp. 2, 4).

²¹Karine Chemla also considers *tu* as a visual aide of secondary importance. See Chemla & Guo (2004, pp. 999–1000).

²²Olberding (2016, p. 23).

certainly lost this component over time while keeping the “original” terminology; (c) there are, in other Tang documents, instances showing that patterned guidelines were studied or produced alongside “maps” (*ditu* 地圖).²³ Furthermore, Wolfgang Behr explains *tu* as related to “positioning” and “ordering,” making it an element that is organized, situated, and located.²⁴ Thus, I choose to translate *tujing* 圖經 as “patterned guidelines” rather than “map-classics” because a “pattern” reflects the carefully ordered aspect of a *tujing*, and also because these documents were not “classics” but dynamic materials meant to be used empirically.

3 | MATERIAL ASPECTS OF P.2005: HISTORY AND LAYOUT OF THE MANUSCRIPT COPY

The known Dunhuang local writings can all be traced to the *Shazhou tujing* 沙州圖經 from the early Tang (650–750).²⁵ The manuscript copies of the *Shazhou tujing* refer to historical events that occurred at the earliest during the Han and at the latest between the reigns of Tang emperors Gaozong 高宗 (650–683) and Xuanzong 玄宗 (712–755). Shazhou, or Sha prefecture, comprised the counties (*xian* 縣) of Dunhuang and Shouchang 壽昌, as well as Shouchang’s garrisons (*zhen* 鎮), Shicheng 石城 and Boxian 播仙.

Manuscript copy P.2005 was produced on a 935 cm long paper scroll, divided into 22 folios of similar heights (27.3–28.6 cm). According to Jacques Gernet and Wu Chi-yu, the supple and smooth paper is of superior quality. The text was written in black ink and the characters were in general very well drawn. The copy suffered from humidity over time and traces of grease are now apparent. The bottom right part of the first folio is now damaged.²⁶

It seems likely that it was the work of a copyist, either a local clerk under the authority of the highest ranked official at the prefectural level, or a professional copyist from a workshop in the capital, Chang’an.²⁷ There are several scribal mistakes, which were not always corrected, indicating that it was probably not an officially commissioned manuscript copy. In such cases, additional characters were added in a smaller size, below a character, or in the margin, indicating that the text was reread and revised by someone with additional knowledge, as discussed below.

The layout of the document has two striking features. The first is the presence, in all manuscript copies of the *Shazhou tujing*, of a clear indentation (see Figure 1). The second is the presence of a very wide upper margin. How can these phenomena be explained? The practice of indentation was common in official documents such as requests and official letters.²⁸ These indented headers may also have looked familiar to a medieval user of dictionaries. However, they seem to be unprevalent in manuscripts containing written accounts of events. Thus, the presence of such strong indentation would classify the *Shazhou tujing* as a technical document—although it gives ample room to anecdotes and storytelling in general.

These numerous indentations allow both the author and the reader to hierarchize different sections of a document. In the case of the *Shazhou tujing*, they aid in distributing entries such as those on waterways, canals, and postal stations. Subsections containing the number of elements that will be described for each entry are placed at a three-

²³L. Li (738/1992, Ch. 5, pp. 161–162); Ouyang (1060/1997, Ch. 46, p. 1198); P. Wang (960s/1978, Ch. 15, p. 254); Dong (1819/1987, Ch. 651, p. 6607b). Moreover, in the context of mathematical practices, Karine Chemla (2010) has shown that the meaning and use of *tu* changed from the 3rd to the 14th century.

²⁴Behr (2007, pp. 110, 125).

²⁵The other manuscript copies are the *Shazhou Yizhou dizhi* 沙州伊州地志 (S.367, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Stein Collection, British Library, London, UK [hereafter, BL]; “S.367”), with 86 surviving lines, and dated to 885; the *Shazhou zhi* 沙州志 (S.788, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Stein Collection, BL; “S.788”), with 16 surviving lines; the *Shouchang xian ding* 壽昌縣地境 (in the collection of Qi Zihou 祁子厚, reproduced in Tang & Lu (1986), with 41 surviving lines, and dated to 945; the *Shazhou Guiyijun tujing liechao* 沙州歸義軍圖經路抄 (P.2691, which used to be known as *Shazhou cheng tujing* 沙州城土境, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Pelliot Collection, BnF; “P.2691”), with 41 surviving lines; and the *Dunhuang lu* 敦煌錄 (S.5448, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Stein Collection, BL; “S.5448”), a codex with 80 surviving lines. To these could be added the *Xizhou tujing* 西州圖經 (P.2009, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Pelliot Collection, BnF; “P.2009”), with 50 surviving lines—another *tujing*, albeit not on Dunhuang (it describes the area of Turfan); and the *Xitian lu jing* 西天路境 (S.383, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Stein Collection, BL) with 19 lines on the Western Regions. Three other geographical texts, describing the entire realm, were also found in cave 17. See Tang & Lu (1986, pp. 39–78); Zheng (1989); Z. Wang (1993); Lien (2009, p. 21); Rong (2013, p. 378). All Pelliot documents are available on the BnF’s Gallica website, while all Stein documents, with the exception of S.2593v², are available on the International Dunhuang Project website (idp.bluk).

²⁶For extensive codicological details (taboo characters, quality of paper), see Gernet & Wu (1970, pp. 3–4) and Sun (2017, pp. 33–64). I base these descriptions on their scholarship since I was not granted access to the manuscript copies held at the BnF.

²⁷There is evidence of copyists commissioned to copy Buddhist texts at the capital (Drège, 1991, pp. 85–86), and of later local writings circulating in central China (Rong, 2013, p. 379).

²⁸Venture & Drège (2014, p. 334).

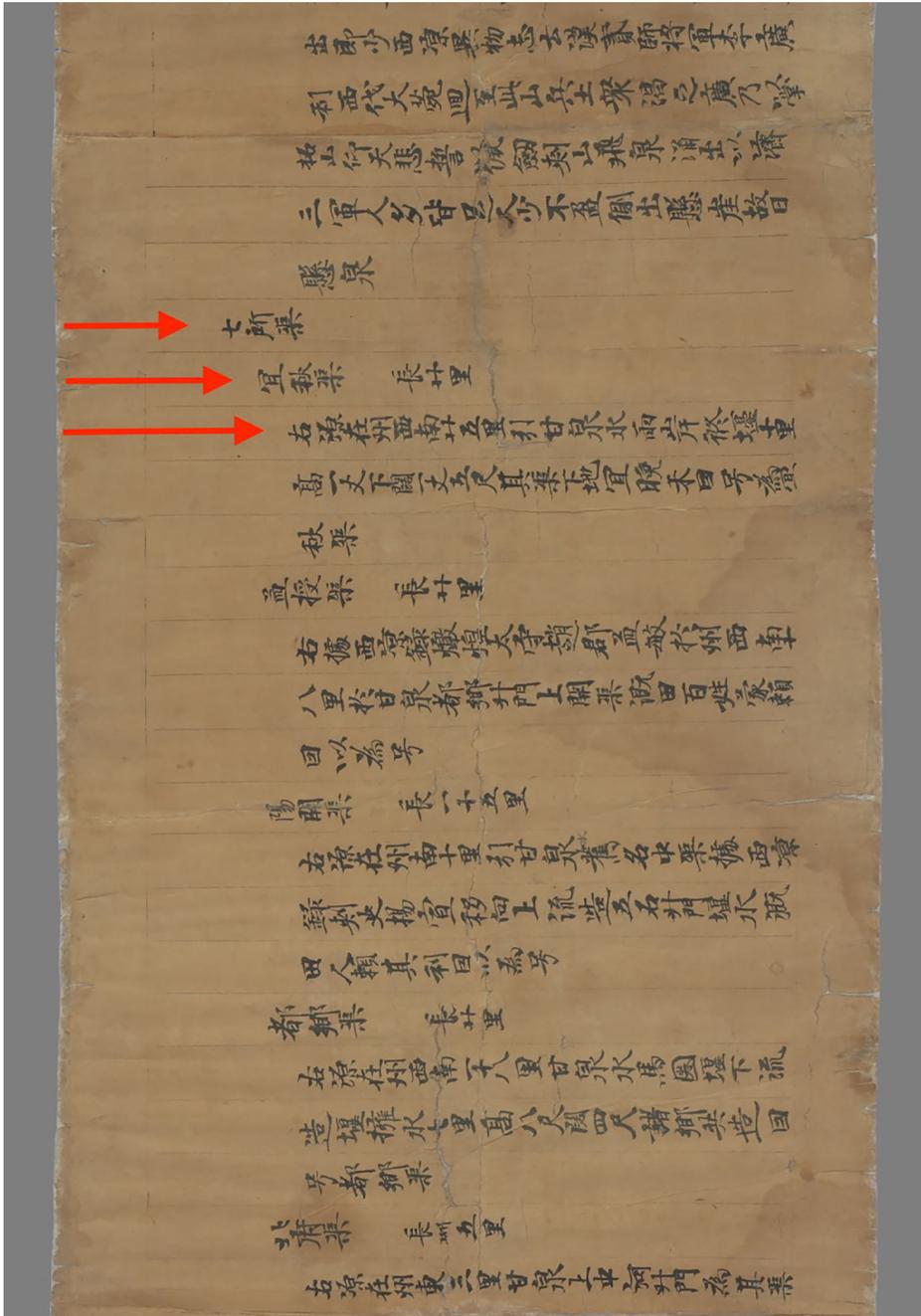


FIGURE 1 P.2005 (fol. 3). Red arrows show the various levels of indentation [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

to-four blank character distance from the top of the page. Then, after another one-to-two blank character indentation towards the bottom, each of these elements is presented in a narrative form.

Since the manuscript is incomplete and since no indication is given, it is difficult to determine what was on the upper margin, or if there was anything on it in the first place. There could be several material explanations for such a wide upper margin being left blank: (a) the copyist needed more space precisely because he was copying from another manuscript, and thus placed his paper scroll below the original; (b) there were supplementary headers (although the first lines of Chapter 1 as displayed in S.2593v^o seem to contradict this, see section 4 below); (c) blanks were left on purpose in order to add other elements at a later stage, such as visuals or commentaries; (d) in an economic context with a shortage of quality paper, the use of “more” paper than necessary could suggest that it was an important copy—such as an official document intended to be sent to the court, although it was probably never sent given the mistakes it contained—or that the person who had it copied had sufficient means to overlook the reproduction cost.²⁹ At any rate, these blanks are unique and were presumably intentional. Since this technique of systematically indenting a narrative is unprecedented in earlier manuscripts, the *Shazhou tujing* is the earliest extant example. This aspect alone challenges preconceptions regarding the organizing principles of premodern geographical documents, the beginnings of the standardization of geographical knowledge, and the practical dimensions of its usage.

This indentation is particularly obvious in the following entry, which displays three different levels (see also above, Figure 1, 6th to 10th column from the right):

I. 50 七所渠

I. 51 宜(宜)秋 渠長廿里

I. 52 右源在州西南廿五里，引甘泉水。兩岸修(修)堰十里，

I. 53 高一丈，下闊一丈五尺。其渠下地宜(宜)晚禾，曰(因)号爲宜

I. 54 秋渠。

Seven canals

Yiqiu canal Length: 20 li

[The canal] on the right originates 25 li southwest of [the seat of] the prefecture, where it draws from the Ganquan river. On both banks weirs were built on a distance of 10 li. [The weirs] are 1 zhang high, and have a 1 zhang 5 chi wide base. The ground next to the canal is suitable for late rice. That is why the canal was named Yiqiu, “Suitable Autumn.”³⁰

The example of the Yiqiu canal shows that the standard structure is defined by headers and subheaders that display names and provide initial mentions of distances worth knowing. The header is followed by the canal's location of origin and the hydraulic constructions linked to the entry, which are displayed with their own measurements. The entry ends with an etymological explanation relating to the name of the place under consideration—such etymologies were common in toponymic practices. The layout is a visual aide and the characters are equally important “signs” and “visual expressions of knowledge.”³¹ Together, they help the reader to identify faster and better the information sought; they function in the same manner as the styles and the navigation pane in a modern Word document. The *Shazhou tujing* is a written account, but it is encapsulated in a technical document that has a strong and easily recognizable structure. It is this very structure that helps the intended audience to navigate through the text. As Lin Kaishi 林開世 argues for later documents, it derives its efficacy and authority from its form (*xingshi* 形式).³² The practical consequence for users of *tujing* is the facilitation of the actual navigation in the physical space.

²⁹Sun (2017, pp. 39–42).

³⁰All translations are my own. Measures under the Tang correspond to these approximate equivalents: 1 chi 尺 = 30 cm; 1 bu 步 = 5 chi = 180 cm; 1 zhang 丈 = 10 chi = 300 cm; 1 li 里 = 360 bu = 650 m. “Late rice” is planted between March and June, and harvested in October.

³¹Drucker (2014, p. 8, *passim*).

³²K. Lin (2007, p. 2).

4 | STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT

Beside the layout, the structure of the Dunhuang manuscripts shows how geographical knowledge was organized. I begin with a brief examination of S.2593v^o, the only fragment of the *Shazhou tujing* held by the British Library.³³ It consists of the first six lines of the first chapter of the *Shazhou tujing*. Despite their fragmentary nature, these lines are extremely valuable in understanding the overall structure governing the document:

- I. 01 沙洲圖經卷第一
 I. 02 第一州 第二 第三 第四燉煌縣 第五壽昌縣
 I. 03 沙州下。屬涼州都督府管。
 I. 04 右沙州者，古瓜州地。其地平川，多沙鹵。人以耕稼
 I. 05 為業。草木略與東華夏同，其木無猗(椅)·桐·梓·漆·
 I. 06 栝·栢(柏)

Patterned Guidelines of Shazhou, Chapter 1

Chapter 1: prefecture; Chapter 2[: prefecture;] Chapter 3[: prefecture;] Chapter 4: Dunhuang county; Chapter 5: Shouchang county

Sha prefecture [is a level] C [prefecture].³⁴ It falls under the [administrative] jurisdiction of the Liangzhou area command.

[As depicted on the] right, Shazhou is located on the ancient territory of Guazhou. Its land is vast and flat, and the soil contains much sand and salt. The people till and sow it for a living. Plants are somewhat similar to those found in Eastern China. Trees do not include idesia, paulownia, catalpa, lacquer tree, juniper, or cypress.

These lines from the very beginning of Chapter 1 provide a general table of contents, which displays how the usual type of information that could be found in a *tujing* was classified. Before going any further, it is necessary to present what is in the manuscript copies that we have:

Chapter 1, on Shazhou 沙州: S.2593v^o, held at the British Library. Only six lines of text survive, from the beginning of the manuscript. It presents the administrative toponyms, the characteristics of the soil—that is, whether or not it is suitable for agriculture—and the types of trees, with an assessment of which trees grow in Shazhou in comparison with the traditional types of trees that are supposed to be found throughout the realm.

Chapter 2, on Shazhou 沙州: Manuscript missing.

Chapter 3, on Shazhou 沙州: Two manuscript copies, P.2005 (beginning missing, 513 lines) and P.2695 (beginning missing, 79 lines), both held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.³⁵ P.2005 is an almost complete manuscript. These 513 surviving lines are important as they represent one third of the total part of the *Shazhou tujing* that focuses on the prefectural seat, and thus the only testimony of the unaltered layout, structure, and content of a *tujing*. Although a small part of the beginning is missing (the bottom half of the first folio, a total of 120 characters), it starts off with the section on rivers. More specifically, it must have started with the course of river Ganquan 甘泉, since that is the main waterway flowing in and out of Shazhou, and since the second header, “Canals,” starts with canals located on the Ganquan. The first 12 lines begin with depictions of surrounding flora and fauna. A total of four rivers (*shui* 水) are described, followed by seven canals (*qu* 渠), one moat (*haoqian* 壕塹), three marshes (*ze* 澤), two dikes (*yan* 堰), one ancient dam (*gudi* 古堤), one ceremonial hall (*dian* 殿), several salt pans (*xianlu* 鹹鹵) and three salt ponds (*xian chishui* 鹹池水), one oasis (*po* 泊), 19 abandoned postal stations (*yi* 驛), a prefectural school (*zhouxue* 州學), a county school (*xianxue* 縣學), a medical school (*yixue* 醫學), two altars (*tan* 壇), four shrines for deities (*shen* 神), one “oddity” (*yiguai* 異怪), two temples (*miao* 廟), one tomb (*zhong* 塚), three halls for conducting royal affairs (*tang* 堂), one trench (*tuhe* 土河), four ancient

³³*Shazhou tujing* 沙州圖經 [Ch. 1], S.2593v^o, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Stein Collection, BL (“S.2593v^o”). Reproduced in Ikeda (1975, pp. 55–56); Tang & Lu (1986, p. 1); Li, Z. 李正宇. (1998, p. 3).

³⁴So named in the Tang system because it had less than 10,000 households.

³⁵*Shazhou tujing* 沙州圖經 [Ch. 3], P.2695, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Pelliot Collection, BnF.

fortresses (*gucheng* 古城), a description of “Zhang Zhi’s ink pond” (*Zhang Zhi mochi* 張芝墨池), a list of 19 entries that the prefecture does not possess, 20 propitious omens (*xiangrui* 祥瑞), and finally one folk song (*geyao* 歌謠).

Chapter 4, on Dunhuang county 敦煌縣: Manuscript missing.

Chapter 5, on Shouchang county 壽昌縣: P.5034, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, 181 lines survive.³⁶ Although the manuscript is badly preserved with many missing characters, it remains possible to identify the following entries: two (or more) Buddhist monasteries (*si* 寺), one stupa (*kan* 龕), one county school (*xianxue* 縣學), one altar (*tan* 壇), four mountains (*shan* 山), two marshes (*ze* 澤), two springs (*quan* 泉), one lake (*haishui* 海水), two canals (*qu* 渠), two gills (*jian* 澗), two ancient passes (*guan* 關), two(?) ancient fortified walls (*gucheng* 古城), the Shicheng garrison, one monastery (*si* 寺), six roads (*daolu* 道路), four abandoned fortresses (*gucheng* 古城), one watchtower (*ting* 亭), and one Zoroastrian temple (*xianshe* 祆舍).

The list of what was transmitted should provide a clearer picture of what was lost from most of Chapter 1 and Chapters 2 and 4. Comparing manuscript versions of a *tujing*—here the *Shazhou tujing*—with transmitted quotations allows the identification of discrepancies in terms of content circulation, reuse, and loss. As I mentioned in the introduction, it shows what was deemed worth mentioning from a *tujing* and what was not, in the eyes of later observers and compilers of encyclopedias. Another way of understanding what was lost, and what the entire structure could have been, is to compare what we have with what is usually given as a standard thematic structure for late imperial “local gazetteers” (*difang zhi*). From the comparison of a typical list of entries from a Song dynasty local gazetteer with the extant elements of the *Shazhou tujing*, and keeping in mind the order in which the geographical information is presented, the missing entries in Chapters 1 and 2 could correspond to the following: historical administrative changes (*yan’ge* 沿革), the seat of government (*guanya* 官衙), borders and territories (*jiangyu* 疆域), population records (*hukou* 戶口), roads (*daolu* 道路), mountains (*shan* 山), and beacon-fire watchtowers (*feng* 烽).³⁷ As for Chapter 4, it probably displayed similar entries as those found in Chapter 5, which focuses on an administrative entity of the same size.

However, comparing the organizational principles of patterned guidelines with local gazetteers entails historical shortcuts and speculations based on the adaptation of previous models. A more consistent and fruitful method is to cross-reference what is known from the structure of the *Shazhou tujing* with the elements that are included in the other local manuscripts from Dunhuang, as well as in the *Xizhou tujing* (P.2009), which describes Xizhou 西州 (Turfan), situated west of Shazhou. The structure of these manuscripts logically overlaps with that of the *Shazhou tujing*, as it is the earliest local writing from Dunhuang. However, the *Shazhou zhi* (S.788) and the *Dunhuang lu* (S.5448) provide additional information not found in the *Shazhou tujing*: the *Shazhou zhi* has entries on forts (*bao* 堡) and fences (*zha* 柵), and the *Dunhuang lu* describes the caves of Mogao (Mogao ku 莫高窟).³⁸

Two elements pertaining to the structural features of P.2005 make me think that patterned guidelines such as the ones found in Dunhuang belonged to a genre of geographical documents that was highly codified in Tang times, and probably earlier. After the entry on “Zhang Zhi’s ink pond”—which could be an interpolation ordered by the prefect Liu Wukui 李無虧 (fl. second half of the 7th century)—the reader is presented with a list of 19 elements such as “military colonies” or “local worthies” that should be accounted for in a regular *tujing*.³⁹ The list is followed by a statement: “None of the types of entries described on the right exist in the current prefecture.”⁴⁰ Although they do not supplement any content, these entries are listed nonetheless. This might be because these elements once existed in Dunhuang, and were thus part of the locality’s history. But I think it is more likely that these are entries a reader would expect to find in any Tang-dynasty *tujing*. The same hypothesis is applicable to the case of postal stations, which will be examined below: they are mentioned, despite having been abandoned between the time they were

³⁶*Shazhou tujing* 沙州圖經 [Ch. 5], P.5034, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Pelliot Collection, BnF.

³⁷Will (1992, pp. 18–22); Hargett (1996, pp. 414–415); Bol (2001, p. 45); Dennis (2015, p. 30). See also Ikeda On’s hypotheses (Ikeda, 1975, p. 38).

³⁸For a study and translation of S.5448 (*Dunhuang lu*), see Giles (1914).

³⁹These 19 elements are listed from l. 366–371: overseeing pastors (*jianmu* 監牧), bridled prefectures (*jimi zhou* 羈縻州), Changjiang, Yellow, Huai, and Ji Rivers (*Jiang, He, Huai, Ji* 江河淮濟), water reservoirs (*haigou* 海溝), embankments (*bei* 陂), palaces (*gong* 宮), cities/city walls of commanderies and counties (*junxian cheng* 郡縣城), passes and fords (*guanqian jinji* 關隴津濟), immortals of the sacred mountains and rivers (*yuedu* 岳瀆), iron (*tie* 鐵), stelae (*beijie* 碑碣), important figures (*mingren* 名人), loyal ministers and filial children (*zhongchen xiaozi* 忠臣孝子), virtuous widows and exemplary women (*jiefu lienü* 節婦列女), military camps (*yinglei* 營壘), mausolea (*lingmu* 陵墓), belvederes, postal stations and mines (*taixie youting kuangku* 臺榭御亭鑛窟), imperial country retreats (*diwang youxing* 帝王遊幸), military colonies where famous ministers and generals stationed (*ming chen jiang suozhi tuntian* 名臣將所至屯田). On Li Wukui’s probable interpolation, see Sun (2017, pp. 197–198).

⁴⁰“右當縣州並無前件色” (P.2005, l. 371).

erected and when they were recorded in the *Shazhou tujing*. These lists of elements are undoubtedly structural features of patterned guidelines, at least during the Tang, and they also speak of and define what patterned guidelines were: structured documents whose content was constantly evolving.

5 | LOCAL ACTORS AND THE PRODUCTION OF GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

By moving from the structure to the content, it is apparent that P.2005 is organized around thematic lines or itineraries (roads, rivers), and points or markers (temples, schools). Within the structural framework of the entries listed in the previous section, P.2005 in fact revolves around historical actors who are often mentioned in conjunction with relevant sources, and more importantly, with regard to geographical practices and to how they impact the evolution of the locality. If this is such a core aspect of the *Shazhou tujing*, how are these actors and practices conveyed? When describing the deeds of historical actors, written accounts (local records, standard histories) and oral history (hearsay, legends) are, although different in nature, only invoked if their content provides useful information to understand the described item. As it addresses issues of sources, actors, and practices, the following example encapsulates most of the elements that explain what a *tujing* is:

- I. 55 孟授渠 長廿里
 I. 56 右據西涼錄，燉煌太守趙郡益(孟)敏，於(於)州西南十八里，於(於)甘泉都鄉升(斗)門上，開渠溉田。百姓蒙賴(賴)
 I. 57 八里，於(於)甘泉都鄉升(斗)門上，開渠溉田。百姓蒙賴(賴)
 I. 58 巨(因)以為号。

Mengshou canal length: 20 li

According to the *Records of the Western Liang*, [the canal] on the right corresponds to the canal that was opened up to irrigate the cultivated fields by the governor of Dunhuang, Meng Min from Zhao commandery (Hebei). It is located eighteen li southwest of the prefecture, at the gate of the weir by the Douxiang [canal], on the Ganquan river. Commoners received its benefits, and that is why [the canal] was named ["Mengshou", Bestowed by Meng].

The Western Liang ruled over the area of Dunhuang from 400 to 421. The *Xi Liang lu* 西涼錄 (*Records of the Western Liang*) was part of the *Shiliu guo chunqiu* 十六國春秋 (*Spring and Autumns of the Sixteen States*). These historical annals were lost after the Song, although quotations survive in various encyclopedias. The *Xi Liang lu* is by far the most quoted source in the *Shazhou tujing*.⁴¹ As a local history of the area dating to turbulent and little-known times, it provided firsthand material to the author of the *Shazhou tujing*. Moreover, a key feature of early medieval geographical documents was the extensive use of local or regional accounts describing various aspects of a place.⁴² Thus, the scribal practice of quoting a local history such as the *Xi Liang lu* situates the *Shazhou tujing* within a clear tradition of geographical writings, while making it a repository of local knowledge.

P.2005 mentions more than 50 historical actors, many of whom are not recorded in other historical documents. There are of course some famous Han generals (Li Guangli 李廣利, d. 88 BCE) as well as local kings (Li Gao 李嵩, 351–417) of the Sixteen States period (304–439) whose names and actions are common knowledge. Yet most of the other local actors' names mentioned here, including Meng Min 孟敏 above, were not transmitted via the official historiography. Of course, there is nothing surprising about local actors disappearing from official writings. Their names were transmitted through other means, however, and often private ones, including patterned guidelines or

⁴¹The *Xi Liang lu* is explicitly quoted 17 times, the *Han shu* and the *Ruiying tu* three, other parts of the *Shiliu guo chunqiu* two times, and the *Wei shu* once.

⁴²Hüsemann (2017, pp. 163–165).

epigraphic testimonies, which were expressions of the power of the locality. What is striking here is that beyond their mere mention, they are the central actors in the *tujing*. I consider that this is one of the specific ways of creating a sense of belonging to a place. By recording how exclusively local actors engineered a locality through their actions, authors of patterned guidelines produced knowledge that is embodied in and made possible by the very medium they use. This performative aspect is reinforced by the fact that actors and authors can be the same person, as the next example will show.

A prominent local actor, prefect Li Wukui was an important figure whose local deeds went unnoticed in the official historiography. However, he is mentioned nine times in P.2005, and is portrayed as a paragon of official benevolence. As Sun Yingying argues, he was probably the author of one or more versions of the *Shazhou tujing*.⁴³ That his deeds are presented in an overly favourable manner is not my primary concern here. What matters in terms of geographical information is that the various administrative practices he was responsible of—building a weir to irrigate fields, relocating three postal stations for the benefit of travellers, and reporting four propitious omens, including one he attributes the discovery to a commoner—have agency over the place, through Li Wukui's actions.

The *Shazhou tujing* is, I argue, a fruitful entry point to reassess important questions pertaining to the production of bureaucratic knowledge in a premodern imperial context. Specifically, it sheds light on the “points of intersection between the central government and local societies,” and on the transmission of “local information to central government officials.”⁴⁴ In other words, it shows how the local informs the imperial in terms of knowledge formation. The manuscript copies of the *Shazhou tujing* provide practical solutions for understanding, at a specific local level (a frontier prefecture) and at a particular moment in history (the Tang), the relationship between imperial and local processes of decision-making.⁴⁵ Regardless of the type of entry one chooses to examine, the *Shazhou tujing* is concerned with what was done locally, by whom, and how what was done affected the locality. The following example illustrates this point by recalling an event that occurred during the reign of Wu Zetian:

I. 157 刺(刺)史陳玄

I. 158 珪, 為中間逗(迂)曲奏請, 奉證聖元年十二月卅日

I. 159 勅置

Because the road between [these two stations] was winding, Prefect Chen Xuangui submitted a requested; he received, by imperial decree of the 30th day of the second month of the first year of the Zhengsheng era (695), authorization to establish [Hengjian station].

One of many similar examples taken from P.2005, this entry on the establishment of a postal station exemplifies how imperial decisions could originate from local initiatives for change. Knowledge and impulse for political, administrative, and social change stem from actors at the local level.⁴⁶ At first glance, the information provided to the reader appears to be a history of the local construction of canals, moats, weirs, and dams. But it actually is a history of how those works should matter to someone in charge of acting upon the locality, in terms of management, usage, and maintenance. When actors are mentioned, it is usually for their actions: how they solve problems relating to the water supply, food preservation, transportation, and so on. This type of practical information was useful for future officials, who would be inspired by the deeds of Chen Xuangui, Li Wukui, and their likes, and also for literati searching for other material.⁴⁷

⁴³After a careful examination of the historical references contained in the folk songs that appear at the end of Chapter 3, Sun Yingying attributes the authorship of the songs to Li Wukui, and therefore considers Li Wukui as a potential compiler of the *Shazhou tujing*: Sun (2017, pp. 227–229).

⁴⁴Dennis (2015, p. 3).

⁴⁵Lamouroux (2002); De Weerd (2016).

⁴⁶On the prominent role played by local officials during the Tang, see Twitchett (1957, p. 36; 1960, p. 182).

⁴⁷See the example of Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) who, prior to his arrival in the empire's deep south, hoped to anticipate the wonderful landscapes of the region by learning about them in a *tujing*: Feng (2018, p. 176).

Generally speaking, the document conveys an implicit opposition between exceptional individuals (nobility, kings, and officials) and unidentified commoners.⁴⁸ In fact, commoners do appear here and there in the *Shazhou tujing*, as they played quite an important part in the construction of the locality. Some did it implicitly, others more explicitly. There are four instances of commoners (*baixing* 百姓) explicitly discussed, all in the section on omens: in 666, Yan Hongshuang 嚴洪爽 obtained a propitious stone in a temple, and in 671 Wang Huichang 王會昌 managed to capture a white sparrow; Yin Sijian 陰嗣鑿 observed a multicoloured bird and Yin Shouzhong 陰守忠 saw a white wolf, both in 691.⁴⁹ Because these propitious events allegedly had an influence at the imperial level, their names were recorded. But even when commoners remained anonymous, they played an active role in the construction of the place, as cause, consequence, or both: the sustainability of their agricultural practices forced civil and military officials to engage in hydraulic works; they were displaced in times of conflicts and such relocations modified borders; they also participated in the legitimation of a ruler, Wu Zetian, through auspicious omens and the composition of a song glorifying her actions.⁵⁰

In technical documents, practices are usually described because they explain how to make things work at the local level. In the political and social context of the first millennium of the Chinese empire, this is usually linked to the empirical functioning of an administrative unit. In P.2005, two related categories and subcategories of technical information emerge: matters of livelihood (agriculture, irrigation) and protection (civil, military, ritual). In each case, the reader, whether an official or a member of the local elite, is provided with verified and reliable information that will help him avoid (past) mistakes, and thus waste as little time as possible when it is time to make decisions. For instance, descriptions of commoners building dams and sluices to irrigate the surrounding cultivated fields empirically show how irrigation leads to agriculture. These are followed by descriptions of seasonal variations and their impact on the river and the soil.⁵¹ Salt production and extraction is facilitated by comparisons between ponds with regard to salt quality.⁵²

As for ritual matters, ancestral temples, altars, shrines, schools, accounts of the strange, and records of propitious omens all have a specific function. P.2005 provides guidelines to assist in performing rituals at the appropriate time and location. Ritual- or architecture-related peculiarities are mentioned because one needs to know about them: the placement of relics (such as tablets, *zhu* 主) are indicated both to facilitate access to them and to use them efficiently; temples are listed as repositories of local worthies, whose actions are recorded in their post-mortem inscriptions.⁵³ Lastly, the 20 omens listed towards the end of P.2005 are all precisely located. They are not simply mentioned as having happened at some point in time. They are written down in conjunction with a location: by the side of a mountain, by the banks of a river, inside a ceremonial hall, and so on. Whether concerned with sources, past events, or local actors, each element that appears in patterned guidelines confirms that these documents were produced in order to fill a gap about knowledge on localities.

6 | ON THE GROUND: GEOGRAPHICAL PRACTICES

Having illustrated how the reader could situate himself and move within the document, I now show how readers could proceed empirically with it. Obviously, the question of movement is important, but it is not the only one addressed by

⁴⁸Min 民 appears quite ironically as *ren* 人, because *min* was part of the personal name of Li Shimin, the founder of the Tang dynasty, and thus tabooed in contemporary writings.

⁴⁹P.2005 (l. 372–470). Caution should be applied when considering these persons as “commoners,” at least the Yins. Other evidence suggests that the Yin clan of Dunhuang was rather powerful, especially during the reign of Wu Zetian: Yin Sijian and Yin Shouzhong both held important civil and military titles. See P.2625 [Manuscript describing the important families of Dunhuang], Dunhuang Manuscripts, Pelliot Collection, BnF, and Rong (2013, pp. 35–36).

⁵⁰The compilation of the song is attributed to commoners, although their participation in this matter may have been pure fiction. Similar literary *topoi* regarding the Bailang songs under the Han come to mind. Usage of commoners by political supporters of Wu Zetian such as Li Wukui seems like a more convincing reason than unequivocal and respectful acceptance of Wu Zetian's new rule.

⁵¹P.2005 (l. 19–23, 31).

⁵²P.2005 (l. 127–145).

⁵³See, for instance, Meng Min 孟敏 (l. 282) and Kan Yin 龔胤 (l. 287).

a *tujing*. Not all users of patterned guidelines consulted them for empirical reasons. Some literati read them to gain knowledge about unfamiliar places before discovering them physically (see Han Yu's example above), or to supplement their empirical experience after a visit. Others used them for their encyclopedic value without any intention of travelling. My focus here is on the usage of patterned guidelines as “utilitarian” documents. As such, they include information on mobility and anything else that newly appointed officials or literate travellers could use to gain rapid and practical knowledge about unfamiliar places, in a reliable and standardized format that such users could expect in any jurisdiction across the empire. As such, I focus on how motion was conveyed through measures and associated markers in P.2005.

Measurements are social and referred to because of their commensurability, meaning that they can be represented and assessed by groups—authors, readers, and users of geographical documents—according to shared standards. This applies to P.2005 in the case of distances between two points, as well as for the dimensions of various buildings (temples, halls) or landmarks (mountains, lakes). The consequence was that literate people could work their way through Shazhou equally well whether they were from the capital or the southernmost part of the realm.

In order to understand how a Tang-era user of the *Shazhou tujing* could orient himself in a border area such as Shazhou, I take the example of postal stations (*yi* 驛) as a case study. Postal stations were essential to communication and transportation, especially in frontier territory.⁵⁴ There are 19 stations mentioned in P.2005. Although all were already abandoned by the time the final manuscript copy of the *Shazhou tujing* was produced, they are nonetheless described in great detail. All were located east of the seat of the prefecture. The following are, by order of presentation, the last three (numbers 17, 18, and 19; see Figure 2):

I. 226 无窮驛

I. 227 右在州東一百里，在无窮山置。西去其頭驛卅

I. 228 五里，東去空谷驛卅里。唐永淳二年，奏移就

I. 229 北行，其驛遂廢。

Wuqiong station

[The station described on the] right is located 100 *li* east of the [seat of the] prefecture, and it was established by Wuqiong mountain. West, Qitou station is 35 *li* away, and east Konggu station is 30 *li* away. During the second year of the Yongchun era (683), a request to relocate it to a northern route was submitted, and the station was subsequently abandoned.

I. 230 空谷驛

I. 231 右去州東一百卅里，在空谷山南置。西去无窮

I. 232 驛卅里，東去黃谷驛卅里。爲同前移道，其

I. 233 驛遂廢。

Konggu station

[The station described on the] right is located 130 *li* east of the prefecture, south of Konggu mountain. West, Wuqiong station is 30 *li* away, and east, Huanggu station is 40 *li* away. Following the aforementioned reason to relocate the road [northward], the station was subsequently abandoned.

[folio break]

I. 234 黃谷驛

I. 235 右去州東一百七十里，東去魚泉驛廿五里。爲

I. 236 同前移道，其驛遂廢。

Huanggu station

[The station described on the] right is located 170 *li* east of the prefecture, and further east Yuquan station is 25 *li* away. Following the aforementioned reason to relocate the road [northward], the station was subsequently abandoned.

⁵⁴See Giele (2003) for Han times, and Yan (1986) for the Tang.

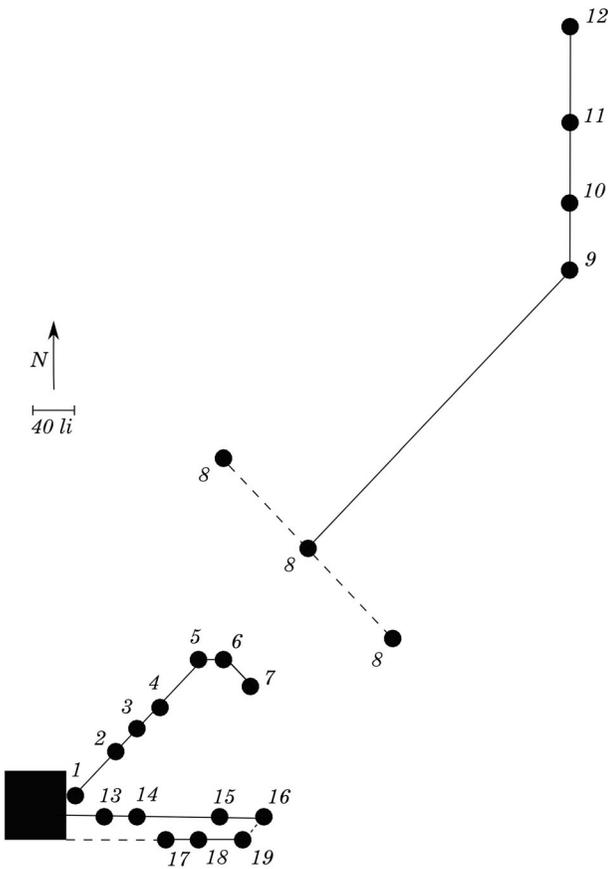


FIGURE 2 Schematic map of the location of the 19 postal stations; the black square corresponds to the prefectural seat of Shazhou

These entries describe the timeframe and reasons for the abandonment of stations. Located on the “southern” route linking Shazhou to Guazhou, these three stations were abandoned in 683, following the relocation of the route along a safer itinerary. They were replaced by stations 13–16. Yet, it was not long before that second “southern” route was also abandoned: in 691, Li Wukui requested to replace it with a “northern” route (stations 1–7) that was less winding and less prone to banditry (Figure 2). However, the main information regarding postal stations concerns distances and their practical value. Stations are mentioned for their commensurability, which is reinforced by their relational value. These measures make sense to the user as long as they can be followed from point to point, along an itinerary that can easily be traced and surveyed empirically. Furthermore, the 19 postal stations are organized in four geographical and temporal sequences, each comprised of three to seven stations (see Figure 2). Indeed, it is much easier to follow an itinerary with short and regular intervals, such as forts, postal stations, and mountains, rather than a straight line with only points at the beginning and end, and the total distance between the two. Finally, the distances presented in P.2005 are relative; they must be understood in relation to the other distances within one of the four identified sequences of stations.⁵⁵

All these mentions of distances imply movement, or the physical motion of a person or document across the topography and between places.⁵⁶ Yet what aides to movement were available in Tang China? The first solutions that might come to mind are the map and the compass. These two instruments were already attested then and they were probably used on other occasions, but it is unlikely that they were employed in this context. Maps were not

⁵⁵P.2005 (l. 1–7, 8–12, 13–16, 17–19).

⁵⁶Documents certainly travelled as much as people did, and often more: Loewe (1967, pp. 39–45).

FIGURE 3 Guangxian postal station (number 8). From Z. Li (1998, unpaginated plate) [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



practical tools: they could be rather bulky, and one often needed a table to examine them.⁵⁷ The exception are attestations in early imperial military usage. However, medieval geographical practices, in China and elsewhere, suggest that textual information was far more important to the user than cartographic representations.⁵⁸ Compasses were also rather impractical instruments, at least until the maritime development of the magnetic compass in the Song dynasty.

I suggest that the essential information needed to travel between places was given in a different kind of instrument, namely patterned guidelines. They displayed cardinal directions and distances that were both relative and short, which, together with natural or man-made points and markers, facilitated the visual identification of places. The image of Guangxian station (Figure 3), still standing high in a desert environment, shows that the aforementioned criteria would suffice to identify the next postal station located tens of kilometres from it.

The positions of postal stations provide information on a relational regime of distances that is set according to three criteria: (a) cardinal directions, (b) the establishment of the prefectural seat as a reference point and origin, and (c) the distances from one station to the next. The application of all these three criteria must be feasible from a practical point of view.

Such a utilitarian display of geographical information was not unprecedented. Distances were commonly described in this manner, at the *local* level. There are examples, from as early as the 3rd century BCE, of local archives in the Middle Yangzi area (modern Hunan and Hubei) indicating point-to-point distances between localities.⁵⁹ However, the combination of the layout, structure, and content of an almost complete manuscript copy such as P.2005 shows that patterned guidelines were most likely already codified by the Tang period, and probably earlier. Furthermore, medieval *tujing* were instruments for geographical practices that created knowledge from and about localities. The documents' layout and structure made them tools, and their content, through descriptions of actors and practices, helped to create a sense of place.

7 | CONCLUSION: LOCAL ARCHIVES FOR ACTION

In this article, we have examined the value of Tang-*tujing* as practical guidelines, by focusing on: (a) the utilitarian value and empirical implications of the layout and structure of P.2005, mainly in terms of motion, and (b) how these documents were produced by local actors to supplement knowledge about a locality. They certainly had

⁵⁷Huang (1993, p. 137); Lien (2009, p. 22).

⁵⁸Medieval Arab travelers, navigators, or pilgrims did not use maps; they possessed other means of orientation, that were considered more useful than maps. See Ducène (2017, p. 69).

⁵⁹See, for instance, the so-called "Daoli shu" 道里書, Collection of bamboo slips (Ch. 4), Peking University collection of Qin documents, Beijing, China, which displays point-to-point distances between river and land routes: the slips are presented in the form of "X place and X place are at an X li distance." See Beijing Daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo (2014, pp. 33–36), and Xin (2013, pp. 177–178). The Liye 里耶 documents also provide similar sets of road distances, from Qianling 遷陵 to neighbouring localities: Yates (2013, p. 297). I am grateful to Robin Yates for pointing me to these documents.

other functions. As part of a wider spectrum of documents that were produced in various localities of the Chinese ecumene between the Han and the Tang, their use depended on regional and political contexts. They were also important repositories of local information. Yet they were not supposed to be kept forever, as they had to be updated at regular intervals, like modern travelogues and guidebooks.⁶⁰ Patterned guidelines were cumulative documents, evolving archives that were meant to be used empirically, but also to be consulted by authors and compilers of empire-wide gazetteers and geographies—or of any other official work—who would find relevant information in them, while specific parts of their content (such as that relating to schools, temples, and city walls) were then reused, either in empire-wide geographical repositories that tended to be general gazetteers, or in thematic parts of general encyclopedias.⁶¹

How did patterned guidelines become local repositories of practical knowledge? The accumulation of temporal layers of ordinary practices constructs a place, and the layout and structure of the document facilitate it. The *Shazhou tujing* thus appears as the reproducible original material of all subsequent Dunhuang local writings and gazetteers: of the other seven local documents found in the Dunhuang library cave, four are actually updated versions of the earlier *Shazhou tujing*.⁶² This makes a *tujing* a collaborative document that could be and had to be updated regularly. As a sub-genre of geographical writing, patterned guidelines were composite documents. They were intended to supplement information on given localities, as they recorded all information about a place one ought to know, even when some of that information—see the empty entries and the abandoned stations above—could not be found in the surveyed location.

This paper was intended as an aide to navigate through a document whose goal was ultimately to help its readers navigate in space. The manuscript copies of the *Shazhou tujing* explain the actual layout of patterned guidelines and provide a fuller image of their content. Moreover, P.2005 exemplifies the utilitarian value of the geographical information a Tang user could find in a *tujing*, and thus relates, to a certain extent, to the concept of “common sense geography” recently developed in the context of the ancient Mediterranean.⁶³ Finally, they confirm that *tujing* were not only the precursors of local gazetteers, but also evolving repositories of knowledge for both local and empire-wide geographies and geographers, and, indeed, “templates for action.”

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⁶⁰Every 3 years before 780, and every 5 years thereafter. See P. Wang (961/2006, Ch. 59, pp. 1032–1033).

⁶¹Du (2012).

⁶²*Shazhou Yizhou dizhi* (S.367); *Shazhou zhi* (S.788); *Shouchang xian dijing* (in Qi Zihou's collection); *Shazhou Guiyijun tujing lüechao* (P.2691); *Dunhuang lu* (S.5448); *Xizhou tujing* (P.2009); *Xingping xian dizhi* 興平縣地志 (S.6014, Dunhuang Manuscripts, Stein Collection, BL).

⁶³Geus & Thiering (2014).

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