

# HEAVENLY KHAN

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A Biography of  
Emperor Tang Taizong  
(Li Shimin)

Victor Cunrui Xiong

Airiti Press

In memory of  
Brigid Keogh (1909–2007)  
educator, philanthropist, and missionary

# HEAVENLY KHAN

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## Author's Note

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who made the writing of this book possible.

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The Burnham-Macmillan Endowment of the History Department, Western Michigan University, provided funding to defray the cost associated with the production of the book.

Lastly, my wife, Xiaoqing Li, gave me constant support and encouragement.

This book is a historical fiction. But it is essentially based on traditional historical sources. Although challenged by modern scholars in a few areas, these sources are highly reliable. Readers interested in the history of the period in question are referred to the modern studies in the Bibliography.

During Sui-Tang times, the Chinese had no concept of minutes or weeks. Traditionally, a day was divided into 12 instead of 24 sections. Nonetheless, I use such temporal terms as “minutes,” “hours,” and “weeks” for the benefit of the reader.

The traditional Chinese calendar was a lunisolar calendar and was approximately one month behind the Julian-Gregorian Calendar. In this book, I normally use Julian-Gregorian Calendar dates. When Chinese dates are given, they are expressed in ordinal numbers (e.g.: the 1st day of the 2nd month).

The traditional Chinese way of counting age regards a person at birth as one year old and adds one more year on the first New Year's Day. Thus, an age recorded in a traditional source is one to almost two years older than the real age. In this book, I convert recorded ages to approximate real ages by deducting one year.

In Western literature, China is sometimes referred to as the “Middle Kingdom” (*zhongguo*). To avoid confusion with its use associated with Ancient Egypt, I replace it with the “Central Kingdom.”



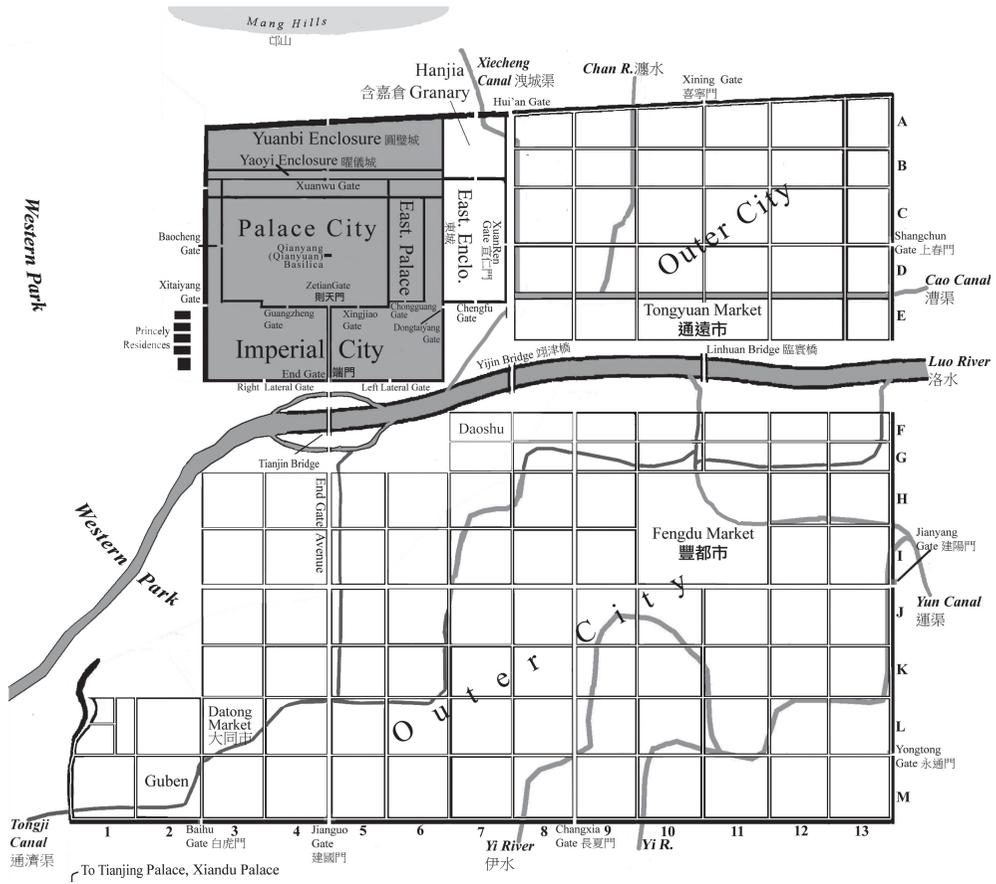
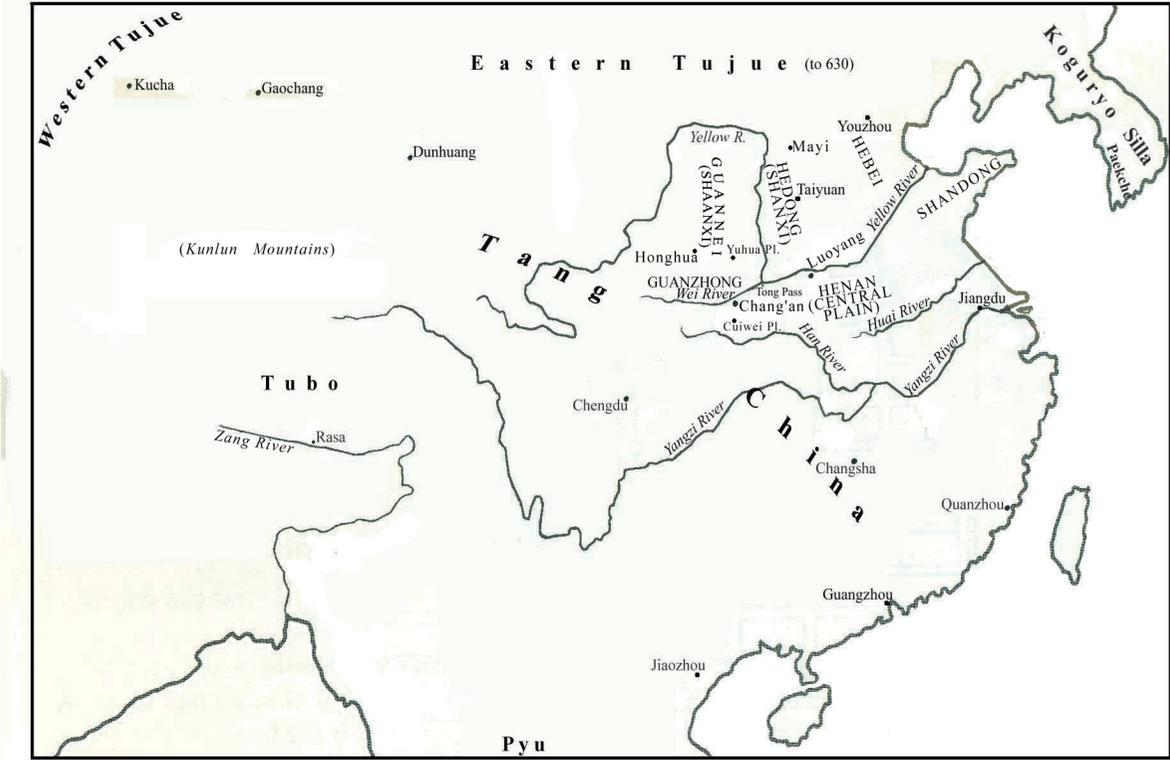


Fig. 2. Sui Luoyang



Map 1. Tang China in the Early Seventh Century

## Part I. Quest for the Throne

(613–626)

### 1. The War of Daye 9

One morning in late March, Daye 9 (613), the Emperor Yang, a soft-skinned man in his 40s, was speaking to a gathering of leading civil officials and top military commanders in the assembly hall of the Daye Basilica in Luoyang the Eastern Capital. He was sitting on a yellow silk throne beneath an ornate yellow baldachin. The throne was positioned atop a marble dais above two flights of stairs at the northern end of the commodious hall.

In a stately but factual tone, He spoke about, among other things, the widespread drought in the North, especially in Shandong, which had given rise to insurgency, and berated His generals for failure to stamp it out. Pausing briefly He continued in a raised voice, “Now about the Koguryō. They are inferior barbarians. Still, they have managed to humiliate our superior state—the Great Sui. If we so desire, we can pull up the Eastern Sea and remove Mount Tai, to say nothing of crushing these small-time bandits. We must launch another war against them.”

The audience listened in awe.

“This time,” He resumed, “I will lead in person.”

Silence gripped the hall for a while before a high-pitched, feeble voice from the audience said: “Your Majesty, in my humble opinion, the Koguryō bandits are not strong enough to withstand another assault by our mighty army.” With an emaciated face and tall stature the speaker Yuwen Shu carried himself with a military bearing despite his advanced age of over 70. As one of the key commanding officers in the War of Daye 8 (612), Yuwen had been brought back to Luoyang in chains after it had ended in ignominious defeat for the Sui. Only recently had he been reinstated by the Emperor.

“Your Majesty,” Yuwen Shu continued, “it would be hard to imagine that any foreign power would be foolish enough to challenge the might of the Sui with its more than 1 million men under arms. Least of all little Koguryō, a country the size of a Sui Commandery with a tiny military.”

“We concur,” several in the crowd said.

Others remained silent except for an elderly-looking man of stout physique, who said, “However, our Central Kingdom has yet to fully recover from the War of Daye 8. Furthermore, one does not shoot a rat with a bow of a thousand pounds. How can the sovereign of our country, one of ten thousand chariots, condescend to fight such a pitiful enemy in person?”

“I appreciate your frankness and loyalty, Mr. Guo Rong. But My plan is to bring an overwhelming force to bear against Koguryō, and awe her into submission without much of an engagement.”

Addressing the entire audience, the Emperor asked, almost rhetorically, “I suppose there is no more objection?”

When no one spoke a word, He continued, “Very well, preparations for the Daye-9 War against Koguryō are now underway.”

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The Koguryō were an ancient Korean people. They founded their first state in 37 BCE. By the time of the late Sui, Koguryō had become by far the most dominant power of the Three Kingdoms of Korea (the other two being Silla and Paekche), with a territory that took up much of Manchuria and most of the Korean Peninsula.

In antiquity, after the Zhou conquest of the Shang around 1045 BCE, a member of the Shang royal family, Jizi (Kija), was enfeoffed in north Korea. Almost 1000 years later, Emperor Wu of the Western Han set up four Commanderies in the Korean Peninsula and southern Manchuria in 108 BCE. These records provided a ready rationale for later Chinese sovereigns to engage in aggressive action.

Oftentimes, however, the invading sovereign was actuated by more immediate reasons. When the Emperor Yang Jian (Yang Guang’s father) launched the disastrous first Sui invasion in 598, He wanted to rein in the defiant Koguryō sovereign, who had attempted to form an alliance with the nomadic Tujue, an act regarded as a threat to the Sui Empire’s security. When the Emperor Yang Guang launched the Daye-8 (612) and Daye-9 (613) Wars, He was driven by an ambition to surpass His father.

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Resting on top of a hill, the parallelogram-shaped Liaodong City (Liaoyang, Liaoning), a strategic outpost in west Koguryō, was circumvallated with a ring of tall walls and a massive moat. It had a total of four gatetowers, each of which was fronted by a much taller watchtower. With hills and mountains to its north and east and rolling fields and woodlands to its south and west, this strongly fortified fortress-city seemed impregnable.

But the Emperor Yang Guang was not daunted. Having just arrived at the Liaodong front, He was determined to execute the invasion plan adopted at Luoyang one month earlier. To maximize His chances of success, He had mobilized a large expeditionary army comprised of three columns. The first column, placed under His direct command, had as its immediate target Liaodong City itself. The second column—the main force led by His top generals Yuwen Shu and Yang Yichen—was to march east across the Yalu River. The third column, comprised of naval forces, was to cross the sea from the Shandong Peninsula to land in the suburbs of Pyongyang. The second and third columns would then launch a joint attack on that city.

As the battle for Liaodong City—the first major engagement in the Daye-9 War—began in earnest, the Emperor launched a day-and-night assault from four directions. A whole range of missile weapons and siege devices were deployed, including arbalests, catapults, mangonels, battering rams, and scaling ladders. Even sapping was attempted; but it was soon abandoned for lack of progress—the protective moat was simply too deep.

For 23 days the Koguryō defenders held their ground.

Under the protection of archers, thousands of Sui conscripted laborers and construction soldiers began to frantically raise an earthwork close to the city wall. Despite constant enemy harassment, the “Long Ridge”—30-foot wide and as high as the city wall—was erected in two days with more than a million sacks of soil. Meanwhile half a dozen “Eight-wheelers”—mobile assault towers on wheels rising above the city wall—were slowly hauled to the front.

With crack archers deployed on the Long Ridge and the Eight-wheelers providing cover, the Sui forces launched another round of attacks early the next morning. By the late afternoon, the city defenders began to show signs of weakening, as the Sui commandos were storming one of the four city gates and breaching the city wall in two places.

Then, unexpectedly, the attack stalled, and came to a halt—the field commanders had just received an urgent edict to abandon the entire operation.

On the night of July 20, the Sui forces beat a disorderly retreat, leaving behind a mountain of materiel. Campaign tents and bunkers that had not been dismantled stood eerily still, silhouetted against glowing campfires scattered across the field.

The Emperor’s decision to withdraw had not been made lightly. It was prompted by a secret dispatch from the interior concerning an armed revolt in the Central Plain. The leader of the revolt was Yang Xuangan, then President of the Board of Rites, who had been in charge of storing grain in

Liyang (near Xunxian, north Henan, southeast of Anyang) and transporting it to the Koguryŏ front. His rebellious action had cut off much of the grain supply to the invading Sui forces, and posed an imminent threat to the Eastern Capital—Luoyang, in the heart of the Central Plain. Even worse, scores of sons of senior court officials and military commanders had joined him. This had left the Emperor no other choice.

The sudden departure of the Sui army left the beleaguered Koguryŏ defenders puzzled. For fear that a trap might await them, they did not give chase until two days later. By then the Emperor's main force was already deep inside Sui territory. It was near the Liao River that the pursuing Koguryŏ forces caught up with the rear of the Sui army and launched an assault, killing a couple of thousands, mostly of the weak and feeble.

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At the start of the Daye-9 War, almost the entire top brass of the army and all the leading court officials, regardless of rank or status, had gone north to Hebei or Liaodong (with the exception of a naval force that had left for Shandong). Duke of Tang Li Yuan, a most privileged member of the ruling elite, was among them. Now that the War was over, he joined hundreds of thousands of Sui officers and men in moving south, in the direction of Luoyang.

At 47, Li Yuan was already in the autumn of his life, but was in excellent physical form, which clearly distinguished him from most of his similar-age compeers often plagued by a variety of chronic ailments. Nonetheless, the screeching of the wooden wheels of ox-carts and horse-drawn carriages, and the thudding of hooves racked his nerves; and the continuous jolting of his own mount upset his stomach. More seriously, he was constantly oppressed by a sense of melancholy. The pervasive low troop morale did not help; and a recent personal mishap had left him in a deep state of depression. During the War, his beautiful Xianbei wife, Ms. Dou, who had born him four sons and a daughter and whom he loved and respected, had followed him all the way to Zhuo Commandery (north Hebei). But due to the harsh conditions of war, she had contracted a disease and succumbed at age 44.

At the start of the War, Li Yuan had been assigned to Huaiyuan Garrison (based in Liaozhong, Liaoning) to manage the flow of grain to the front. Now the War had ended abruptly and Luoyang was under attack, Li Yuan was unsure of what lay in wait for him once the long trek south was over.

The uncertainty of the journey was eventually resolved by the unexpected arrival of an Imperial envoy, who announced: Li Yuan was to go west to Honghua Commandery (based in Qingyang, Gansu) to take up appointment as its Commander with the responsibility to supervise the civil and military affairs of 13 northwestern Commanderies including Honghua. Li Yuan's appointment, although a provincial one in a remote area, was quite important, and gave him reason to look forward to a career full of challenge, responsibility, and reward.

Traditionally, a Commandery (*jun*) had been the intermediate-level local government lower than a Prefecture (*zhou*) and higher than a County (*xian*). Under the first Sui sovereign, this intermediate level was abolished. Only Prefectures (*zhou*) and Counties (*xian*) remained. But under the second sovereign Yang Guang, all "Prefectures" were renamed as "Commanderies." Thus in terms of power and prestige, a Commandery Governor now was the same as a Prefect under the previous reign.

## 2. Yang Xuangan

While growing up in Daxing City as a “noble brat,” Yang Xuangan was surrounded by power and privilege. His father Yang Su, until his death in 606, was the highest-ranking officer at court. His Yang clan, though not directly related to the royal house, acquired so much power that even the Emperor felt threatened and expressed His desire for its elimination. In fact, the Emperor’s threat was one of the main reasons why Yang Xuangan had started his rebellion.

Having raised a large army, Yang Xuangan now needed a viable strategic plan to carry on the fight against the mighty Sui Empire. He consulted Li Mi, a fellow nobleman in his early 30s who had just arrived from Guanzhong. Li Mi was a magnanimous and charismatic character, and most importantly, a talented strategist.

“I have three strategies for you,” Li Mi said, his eyes sparkling with excitement. “The first and best strategy: move north into Ji (based in Beijing) to launch with the Koguryō a two-pronged attack against the Sui main force, while using our rich grain supply to win over enemy officers and soldiers. We can prevail in less than 10 days in the North. Then we will be able to launch a southern expedition to conquer all under Heaven.

“The second strategy: make a bee-line for Guanzhong (the Wei River valley in south Shaanxi) to take the capital Daxing City (Xi’an, Shaanxi). While there we can rely on the surrounding natural barriers for protection and easily invade and dominate the Central Plain in the east. Of all the key regions in the realm, Guanzhong, no doubt, is of the greatest strategic importance.

“The third and least effective strategy: capture the Eastern Capital (Luoyang) nearby and use it as a military stronghold against the Sui forces. It will not guarantee a long-term success, because the Luoyang area is not really defensible.”

Pausing to contemplate his options for a long while, Yang Xuangan responded, “In fact, your last strategy—to capture Luoyang—is the best one for me. Since the close relatives of the senior court officials all live in Luoyang, its fall will be a devastating blow to enemy morale.”

Having thus made up his mind, Yang Xuangan moved south to lay siege to the Eastern Capital. While his troops were still forming a circle around the city, he ordered a general assault. His men soon penetrated the Outer City and started attacking the Palace City (or the Palace-Imperial City) in the northwest quadrant of Luoyang, still firmly in Sui hands.

But the arrival of Sui reinforcements took Yang Xuangan by surprise, who was forced to abandon the attack and retreat west.

It was then that he decided to adopt Li Mi's second strategy: advance on Guanzhong. But it was too late. Constantly pursued by hostile forces, his army suffered horrendous casualties and disintegrated along the way.

Yang Xuangan himself, seriously wounded, was now accompanied by only one man, his younger brother. Both had lost their chargers, and were fleeing on foot. In a small township east of the Tong Pass, thirsty and exhausted, the Yang brothers took refuge in an abandoned farm cottage.

"Dear Younger Brother," Yang Xuangan said gruffly as he lay listlessly on a pallet, "I want you to do me a favor."

"Yes, Elder Brother?"

"Kill...me!"

The younger brother, who had always obeyed his elder brother, asked, in stupefaction, "Why?"

"I don't want to be insulted in a public execution."

The younger brother sat wordless for a while until he heard the thudding of hooves, growing louder by the moment. He hefted his broadsword to deliver the *coup de grace* before turning it on himself.

When the Sui pursuers found the Yang brothers weltering in blood, the elder one was already dead and the younger one barely alive. They brought both back to Luoyang. The younger Yang was beheaded in public, and the corpse of Yang Xuangan was carried to the city's main market, Fengdu, where it was ceremoniously "fifthed," that is, pulled apart by five horses going in five directions. His body parts were then chopped up, burned, and scattered.

By then a nationwide campaign had been underway to hunt down Yang Xuangan's followers. The law-enforcers taking their cue from the Emperor cast a wide web to capture as many accomplices and sympathizers as they could.

As this reign of terror spread, most court officials began to feel the heat. Li Yuan was no exception. But people around him knew that he had no need to worry, being the Emperor's maternal first cousin (their mothers were blood sisters). Besides, one of his nieces Lady Wang was a favored Imperial concubine. Since Li Yuan had never been close to Yang Xuangan in the first place, it was almost impossible to charge him with culpability by association, a fanciful crime that had brought down many an official. Moreover, his recent appointment seemed to confirm the Emperor's trust.

A man of gregarious temperament, Li Yuan had made many friends, mostly officials and local luminaries. But cautious by nature, Li Yuan did not want to make a wrong move and arouse His Majesty's suspicion. So when in

the company of friends and acquaintances, he always refrained from voicing his views on court politics.

In summer, when the Emperor moved into His favorite summer resort, the Fenyang Palace north of Taiyuan (southwest of present-day Taiyuan, Shanxi), He requested key local officials in the region including Li Yuan to come for a semi-formal gathering. Li Yuan, still recovering from a recent illness, was too weak to make the journey. So he sent a message to His Majesty to apologize for his reluctant absence.

Several days later, Li received a secret message from the Fenyang sent by Lady Wang, which described the Emperor's reaction. As expected He was displeased with Li Yuan's absence. But, instead of flying into a rage, He simply asked: "So that uncle of yours can't come because of illness? Oh, is he going to die?"

The fact that His Majesty used the much-tabooed d-word did not seem to bode well. For days, Li Yuan was tormented by the fear of arousing Imperial suspicion. He then made a crucial decision: he would stop granting audiences to fellow officials and local big shots. From then on, he whiled away his time in the company of young female courtesans, who were his drinking companions, conversation partners, entertainers, and bedmates.

### 3. Li Min and Li Hun

Among the few senior officers allowed to stay behind in the Two Capitals (Daxing City and Luoyang) during the Daye-9 War was Acting General-in-chief of the Encampment Guard Li Min. His main responsibility was to safeguard Daxing, particularly its Palace City. The fact that he was appointed to this vital post had much to do with his intimate connections with the Yang Imperial house. His granduncle Li Mu was a founding elder of the Sui, whose backing of Yang Jian—Yang Guang’s father—was crucial for the successful founding of the dynasty. His father, as Commander of Youzhou Command in the northeast, had laid down his life defending the Empire against a Tujue raid. To show His gratitude, the Emperor Yang Jian brought the young Li Min, then known in his family by his pet name “Hong,” into the Palace, where he was raised until majority.

In the 6th year of Kaihuang (Inaugural Sovereign) (586), when Li Min was about 20, the Emperor issued an unusual rescript that scandalized Daxing’s noble society: All marriageable young noblemen were to take part in a contest to compete for the hand of Yuwen Êying, His favorite granddaughter. The mastermind behind the rescript was little Êying herself. At the ripe age of 12, Êying was the hottest catch in Daxing. She had resisted the “normal” way of spouse selection—matchmaking—which would allow the grownups to choose a man of power on her behalf, and instead insisted on having a hand in picking her own helpmate.

Êying was the only daughter of Yang Lihua and the Emperor Xuan (Yuwen Yun) of the Northern Zhou. Under the Northern Zhou prior to the Sui, Êying’s maternal grandfather Yang Jian was a top-ranking court official. After ascending the throne in 578, Yuwen Yun (Êying’s father) began to exhibit increasingly bizarre behavior. He threatened to execute Yang Jian (Êying’s grandfather) and repeatedly abused Yang Lihua (Êying’s mother). One of the most serious grudges Yuwen Yun held against His wife was perhaps her inability to produce an heir. After Yuwen Yun passed away in His 20s, Yang Jian seized the throne and founded His own Sui dynasty (581).

Charming, clever, and strong-willed, little Êying was pampered beyond reason by her mother and grandpa. And it did not take long for her naïve idea to win the nod of both. But many self-proclaimed adherents of Confucianism at court opposed it. Not only did the idea have no precedent, it ran counter to the fundamental principle of Confucian ritual propriety, they argued. But all to no avail. Yang Jian had nothing but contempt for the bookish Confucians.

On the day of the contest, young men from some of the best families in Daxing flocked to the suburban Hongsheng (Royal Sage) Palace where the princessling and her mother resided. In a basilica courtyard, one by one they

showcased their artistic and martial skills. All this while the princessling watched surreptitiously from behind the thick dark window curtains of the basilica. Eventually, out of more than 100 suitors, Êying chose Li Min, which won her mother's instant approval. Although a member of the elite Swordsmen Guard, Li held no official rank. But Êying was attracted to him because he was a good singer and a good dancer, and a master of such essential martial skills as archery, horse-riding, and weight-lifting. Besides, he had strikingly good looks and graceful manners.

After the wedding Li Min moved into the Hongsheng Palace. It would be a few years before he was allowed to share the same bed with Êying. But as the husband of the Emperor Yang Jian's favorite granddaughter, he immediately basked in Imperial favors. The Emperor granted him one of the highest prestige titles, the "Pillar of State," with a fief of 1,000 households (at the insistence of Êying's mother) to match. Upon ascending the throne, the Emperor Yang Guang continued to treat him well, increasing his fief to 5,000 households and promoting him to a top position in the prestigious Encampment Guard. During the Yang Xuangan Rebellion, Li Min had the city walls of Daxing thoroughly examined and repaired. It impressed Yang Guang so much that He appointed him Chief of the Directorate for the Palace Buildings (*jiangzuo jian*), the top central government agency in charge of court construction projects.

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Beside Li Min there was another notable member of the Li clan who had been allowed to stay behind: his uncle General-in-chief of the Courageous Guard Li Hun. This good-looking man in his late 30s was noted especially for his beautiful whiskers and mustache. Not nearly as well connected as his nephew, Li Hun was nonetheless much richer. However, initially, he had been cut off from the family fortune, being the 10th son of the famous Li Mu. After Li Mu died in 586, his ducal title and dukedom went to one of his grandsons, whose father, Li Mu's eldest son, had died early. When the grandson himself died in the early 600s, Li Hun saw his opportunity. No one in the Li clan was nearly as qualified as he to inherit the title and dukedom, or so he thought. But he still had to convince the Emperor Yang Jian, who would make the ultimate decision in this matter. One person who could help was Yuwen Shu, his brother-in-law, known for his close ties to Crown Prince Yang Guang.

"Could you ask the Crown Prince to put in a good word for me with the Emperor?" Li Hun asked imploringly. "You helped him get appointed as heir apparent. He owes you."

“I’m not sure if the Emperor will listen,” Yuwen Shu said irresolutely.

“Yes, He will,” averred Li Hun. “Nobody can have the ear of the Emperor like the Crown Prince.”

Sensing his brother-in-law’s reluctance, Li Hun made him a generous offer, saying, “If you can help me obtain my father’s fiefdom, I’ll go 50-50 with you on its revenue every year.”

“All right, I’ll see what I can do,” Yuwen Shu said begrudgingly.

In less than a month, an Imperial edict was issued that appointed Li Hun as the successor of his father’s ducal title and dukedom. Li Hun was pleasantly surprised to find that the dukedom was an enormous wealth generator. Reveling in his newfound riches, Li Hun seemed to have forgotten the offer he had made to Yuwen Shu, whose good offices were crucial in gaining the Imperial approval. On several occasions, Yuwen Shu discreetly reminded his brother-in-law of his promise. Each time Li Hun assured his benefactor that he would still make good on his offer, but never got round to actually doing it.

#### 4. Peach Plum Master

After the Yang Xuangan Revolt of 613, the political situation of the Empire greatly deteriorated. From the northeast to the northwest, from Guanzhong to Shandong, from the Central Plain to the Yangzi valley, the fire of rebellion was raging. The Emperor Yang Guang, who had succeeded His father Yang Jian in 604, was loath to hear reports of rebellion. But even He had awakened to the reality that government efforts at suppression had been by and large ineffectual. In the North, each of the more than half a dozen major rebel leaders commanded a force in excess of 100,000 and some of them had the support of the redoubtable Tujue further to the north. Recently, armed rebels were even sighted in the suburbs of Luoyang where the Emperor resided.

As worry about security increasingly occupied His attention, the Emperor began to take a greater interest in various auspicious and inauspicious omens, particularly one that took the form of an enigmatic ditty, which had been making the rounds in the streets of Luoyang:

*Peach Plum Master!  
As the sovereign circles around Yangzhou,  
He tosses and turns in the garden.  
Stop talking nonsense! Who says so?*

The Emperor had it sent to An Qieluo, one of a small group of elite theurgists hand-picked by the court to provide exclusive service to the throne. An Qieluo lived in “Daoshu,” a residential Ward in Luoyang that exclusively housed the royal occultists. There were a total of 103 Wards inside the city. Each was like a mini-city, enclosed by four walls and regulated by curfew. But Daoshu was the only one guarded by Palace guardsmen and off-limits to ordinary city inhabitants. For the theurgists living inside, contact with the outside world was strictly forbidden. The Emperor was afraid that, should their magic power lose its exclusivity, it would stop working.

The theurgist An Qieluo was the best among them. He divined the future with a variety of techniques: Yin-Yang and Five Phases, tortoise-viewing, astrology, *Yijing*, *chen*-prognostication, and such like. Prior to the Daye-9 invasion of Koguryō, the Emperor had consulted him. Mr. An then observed the erratic movement of Mars in the third month that had overshadowed the sun in Tail (Wei) and Winnower (Ji) Stellar Lodges (*xiu*). Both Lodges had Yan (in the northeast) as their “Allotted Field” on earth. So he predicted a major conflict in the Yan area, but was ambiguous about the

outcome. However, that was enough to convince the Emperor of his prophetic power.

The appearance of the Luoyang ditty could not have been more timely. There had been a recent solar eclipse that took place in Well (Jing) and Ghost (Gui) Stellar Lodges. Both Lodges shared the same Allotted Field on earth—Qin—where were located the main capital, Daxing, and the ancestral home of the Yang Imperial house. In the correlative cosmology of ancient China, the 28 celestial regions known as the Stellar Lodges (or Mansions) were scattered along the Zodiac and the celestial equator, and were matched with various provinces on earth known as “Allotted Fields.” Celestial events that took place in the Lodges would have a direct impact on their corresponding Fields down below and on people closely identified with them, and contrariwise.

Obviously, the recent solar event suggested that someone was posing a threat to the throne in Daxing. And the ditty provided the crucial corroborative evidence. So far efforts to reveal its full meaning, however, had not been very satisfying. While the second and third lines suggested that the Emperor would end up in the South (Yangzhou) where He would fall in a garden inside the Palace, the first and last lines seemed little more than prattle. By deploying the *chen*-prognostication technique, which foretold the future through interpreting enigmatic texts or sayings, An Qieluo soon came up with a different reading. Therewith he went rushing to the Palace and was immediately granted an audience. When he entered the Imperial study inside the Daye Basilica, the Emperor had been waiting.

“So you’ve got something interesting?” the Emperor asked, at once impatient and expectant. “It’d better be good.”

An Qieluo replied, “Yes, Your Majesty. I think I have deciphered the ditty. In the first line, *Tao li zi* (Peach Plum Master), the character *tao* (peach) means ‘Taotang,’ the name of Yao (the first of the Three Sovereigns in far antiquity); the characters *li* and *zi* together point to a certain Master Li. The whole ditty suggests that a man of extraordinary leadership ability from the Li clan will overthrow the throne.”

The Emperor was stunned, and asked, “Are there any countermeasures?”

“The only way to counter it is to exterminate *all* the males of the Li clan regardless of age.”

“That is impossible.” The so-called Li clan was one of the largest surname groups, with many clans, lineages, branches, and households.

Having sent the theurgist away, the Emperor asked his most trusted adviser Yuwen Shu, “What do you think of An’s work?”

“Well, it sounds plausible,” answered Yuwen. “But I can help Your Majesty find out more about it.”

“How about Li Yuan?”

“He does have the physiognomy of a king. But...”

“But what?”

“He is your cousin.”

“Yes. But sons will kill fathers, and brothers will kill each other when the throne is at stake.”

“Indeed. Should I keep a close watch on him, Your Majesty?”

“Yes. But don’t disturb him yet.”

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About a month later, the Emperor received the much-awaited confidential report from Honghua sent by a court agent who had secretly investigated Li Yuan’s activities. It turned out that Li had spent most of his days with young women of ill-repute, and neglected government business. Clearly he was blameworthy, but there was no sign of his involvement in a conspiracy. The Emperor was at once relieved and disappointed. Relieved that His cousin was not scheming against Him; disappointed that the throne-challenger was still at large.

Just as the memories of the unpleasant ditty were beginning to fade, the Emperor received another secret report, which read,

*It is an open secret that His Majesty has been concerned with chen-prognostications lately. One of them is about Emperor Wen (Yang Jian), who dreamt about the old city of Chang’an (located to the immediate northwest of Daxing) being inundated by a deluge (hong). Li Min, whose pet name happens to be Hong, seems to be a match for the prognostication. After the “Peach Plum Master” ditty had begun to spread, it caught Li Min’s attention. He and his supporters subsequently formed a secret clique with the aim of making him King in response to the ditty.*

Intrigued, the Emperor called in its author, Yuwen Shu, for questioning. “Are you sure about this? Li Min—Êying’s husband?”

“Absolutely, Your Majesty,” answered Yuwen Shu.

“Who else?”

“Li Hun.”

“Your own brother-in-law?” the Emperor asked, beyond belief.

“For me, your subject, loyalty to the throne always trumps family ties. I do not enjoy doing this at all. But here is an exposé letter by Êying herself.”

The Emperor took the letter from Yuwen Shu, and started reading,

*...In a conspirators' meeting, Li Hun said to Li Min [her own husband], "You are the answer to the chen-prognostication, and must be the next Son of Heaven. Our current Emperor is a warmonger and has caused much grief to all under Heaven. If He starts another Koguryō War, you and I can use the opportunity to launch an uprising against the Sui. Together we can immediately raise an army of 50,000, and members of our Li clan can serve as commanders..."*

At the end of the letter was the unmistakable seal of the princessling. Visibly shaken, the Emperor held Yuwen Shu's hand and said, "Had it not been for you, Shu, the rule of the Imperial house would have been subverted."

Immediately thereafter, an edict was issued whereby Li Min and Li Hun were summarily executed, as were all male members in the Three Clans of the two Lis—those in their father's generation, their own generation, and their sons' generation. Between the two Li houses, a total of 32 men lost their lives while more distant relatives and dependent women were banished to the far south for life.

Li Min's wife, Êying, as the Emperor's niece, was allowed to live in Daxing. But, with the death of her husband, she sank into a slough of despond. She bitterly regretted that she had allowed her seal to be affixed to the long document presented by Yuwen Shu, which had virtually become her husband's death warrant. A few months later, she received an Imperial rescript ordering her to end her own life. She willingly obliged by drinking poisoned wine.

## 5. The Vicegerent of Taiyuan

The Peach Plum Master ditty scandal finally subsided. Li Yuan was appointed in quick succession to two crucial positions, Grand Commissioner of Pacification of Taiyuan Circle (*anfu dashi*) and Vicegerent (*liushou*) of Taiyuan in early Daye 13 (617). The latter appointment in particular allowed him to exercise authority as the top civil and military leader of a vast region that included Shanxi and its surrounding areas on behalf of the Emperor. With its north merging into the Mongolian steppes, the mountainous Shanxi held the key to the security of the Two Capitals, Daxing and Luoyang. To assist in Li Yuan's administrative duties and to keep an eye on his activities, the Emperor appointed two of His men, Wang Wei and Gao Junya, as Deputy Vicegerents.

By then China was embroiled in a total civil war and the Emperor had settled permanently in the Southern city of Jiangdu (Yangzhou) in the lower Yangzi River valley where the situation was less desperate.

The North was plagued with numerous anti-government groups and bands of robbers and outlaws. Shanxi, as one of the main Northern regions, was seriously affected. One group of banditti posed an immediate threat to the Vicegerent's government in Taiyuan. These were the 20,000 troops from neighboring Hebei sent by Wei Dao'er (nicknamed "Flyer across the . . .

## Glossary-Index

Key figures are highlighted in bold.

### PRONUNCIATION

a = a as in **father**

c = zz as in **pizza**

ch = ch as in **china**

e or ê = olo as in **colonel** without the *r* sound (except after i , u or ü, y)

e (after i , u or ü, y) = e as in **red**

e.g.: Ye \yeh\, Xue \shüeh\

er = er as in **dinner** (Am.)

i = ee as in **deed** (except after sibilants: c, ch, s, shi, z, zh)

i (after sibilants: c, ch, s, shi, z, zh) = the vowelized sound of the consonant

e.g.: Li Zhi \lee jih\ (“jih” as in **lodge**), Yuchi \yü-chih\ (“chih” not “chee”)

j = g as in **gee**

o = o as in **foreign**

q = ch as in **cheese** (approx.)

u = oo as in **food** (except after j, q, x)

u (after j, q, x) = ü (Ger. umlaut)

e.g.: Qu\chü\ (not “choo”)

ü = ü (Ger. umlaut)

x = ch as in **ich** (Ger.), or *sh* as in **sheep** (approx.)

e.g.: Xiyu \shee-yü\

z = ds as in words

zh = j, as in **Joe** (approx.)

Abraham (fl. 635): archdeacon of a group of Nestorians visiting China.

An Qieluo \an chyeh-luo\ (“chyeh” is pronounced [chee’yeh]): Sui occultist.

*Analects* (*Lunyu* \loon-yü\): collection of sayings by Confucius and his disciples and accounts of them.

Ancestral Temple: place where the imperial ancestors were worshipped.

*Annals of the Thirty States*: history by Xiao Fangdeng \sheeao fang-dêng\ (Liang).

Anshi \an-shih\ City (SE of Haicheng, Liaoning).

Anterior Basilica: largest hall in the Weiyang Palace, Han Chang’an.

*Art of War of Grand Duke Jiang* \jeeang\ : ancient work on warfare allegedly transmitted through Zhang Liang of the Western Han.

Arunasva: Magadha king (r. 647–648).

Ashina She'er \a-shih-na shê-er\ (604–655): Tang-Tujue general.

Avalokiteśvara (“ś” = “sh”); Guanyin: Bodhisattva known for his compassion.

Ba: Tang Prefecture (seat: Bazhong, Sichuan).

Baibi: Sui place SE of Xinjiang, Shanxi.

Baiyan City: Koguryō city SE of Dengta, Liaoning.

Ban Gu (32–92 CE): Eastern Han historian.

Bashang: place in the southeastern suburb of Chang’an.

Battle of Jingxing \jeeng-sheeng\ (204 BCE).

Bayegu (Bayīrqu): nomadic people in Mongolia.

Beisha City: Koguryō-Tang city (in Dalian, Liaoning).

*Benevolent King’s Prajnaparamita Sutra*: Buddhist sutra about the Buddha’s dialogue with a king representing other kings on how to protect their countries.

Bin: Tang Prefecture (seat: NW of Xi’an, Shaanxi).

Bo: Tang Prefecture (seat: Bozhou [Bozhou, Anhui]).

Board (*bu*): see “Six Boards.”

Board of Rites (*libu* \lee-boo\): one of the Six Boards.

Bodhiruci (fl. 6th c. CE): Buddhist monk from north India.

Bokhara (the state of An): based in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.

*Book of the Han (Hanshu)*: Western Han history by Ban Gu.

*Book of the Later Han (Hou Han shu)*: Eastern Han history by Fan Ye (398–445).

*Book of the Song (Songshu)*: Liu-Song history by Shen Yue \shen yüeh\ (441–513).

Breaking through the Enemy Array (*Pozhen yue*): Li Shimin’s signature music.

Buddha City: city north of Jimsar, Xinjiang.

Caishu \tsai-shoo\ (late 11th c. BCE): W. Zhou noble; brother of the Duke of Zhou.

Cen Wenben (595–645): Tang top official under Li Shimin.

Central Plain: Henan.

Chai Shao (d. 638): Li Shimin’s brother-in-law.

Chancellery: one of the three top-echelon decision-making bodies. It was headed by two Presidents.

Chang He \chang hê\ (fl. 626): Tang commandant.

Chang'an (Han): Han capital northwest of Sui-Tang Chang'an.

Chang'an (Sui-Tang): Tang capital; renamed from Daxing City.

Chang'an County: one of the two urban Counties of Chang'an.

Changle, Princess of; Li Lizhi: first daughter of Li Shimin and Ms. Zhangsun.

Chen (557–589): last of the Southern Dynasties, annexed by the Sui (cap.: Jankang [Nanjing]).

Chen Dade \chen da-dê\ (fl. 641): Tang official.

Chen, Last Sovereign of (r. 582–589): last Chen sovereign.

Cheng Gongying \chêng gong-yeeng\ (d. 646): occultist; executed.

Cheng, Emperor (51–7 BCE; r. 33–7 BCE): Western Han sovereign.

Cheng Zhijie \chêng jih-jyeh\ (“jyeh” is pronounced [jee'yeh]); Cheng Yaojin (589–665): general under Li Shimin.

Cheng'en \chêng-en\ Basilica: hall in the Eastern Palace, Chang'an.

Chengtian Gate: southern main entrance to the Palace City. It functioned as an important basilica.

*chen*-prognostication: divinatory technique based on enigmatic texts and sayings.

Chenxin \chen-sheen\; Heart Pleaser (d. 643): young entertainer; Li Chengqian's friend.

Chief Administrator (*zhangshi* \jang-shih\): the executive officer under a Prince.

Chief Minister (*xiang* \sheang\): one of the decision-makers at the highest level.

Chousang: place near Lingbao, Henan.

**Chu Suiliang** (596–658 or 597–659): top Tang official under Li Shimin and Li Zhi; calligrapher.

Chunqiu \choon-cheeo\; see Spring and Autumn.

Ci'en \tsih-en\ Monastery (Loving Grace Mon.): Buddhist monastery built by Li Zhi (Gaozong) in Chang'an.

Cijian \tsih-jian\; place west of Luoyang.

Circle (*dao*): administrative and territorial division comprised of a number of Prefectures and Commanderies. First ad hoc in nature, it became permanent under the Tang.

*Classic of Filial Piety*: minor Confucian classic.

Commandant (*zhonglang jiang* \jong-lang jeeang\): middle-ranking officer.

Commandery (*jun* \jün\): administrative and territorial division higher than the County and lower than the Prefecture (*zhou*). Abolished in the early Sui, it was later revived under Emperor Yang as a substitute for the term “Prefecture.”

*Comprehensive Gazetteer* (*Kuodi zhi* \kuo-dee jih\): book on geography by Li Tai and others.

Council of Ephesus (431): ecumenical council of Christian bishops that condemned Nestorianism.

County (*xian* \sheean\): administrative and territorial division lower than a Commandery (*jun*) or Prefecture (*zhou*).

Court for Agriculture: one of the Nine Courts.

Court for Tributaries (*honglu si* \hong-loo sih\): one of the Nine Courts.

Court of Judicial Review (*dali si* \da-lee sih\): one of the Nine Courts.

Court of State Sacrifices (*taichang si* \tai-chang sih\): one of the Nine Courts.

Court of the National Granaries (*sinong si* \sih-nong sih\): one of the Nine Courts.

Court of Weaponry and Regalia (*weiwei*): one of the Nine Courts.

Cui Renshi \tsuee ren-shih\ (fl. 648): Tang official.

Cuiwei \tsuee-wei\ Palace (Jadeite Tenuity P.): summer resort south Chang'an. . .

Yang Guang: see Emperor Yang.

Yang Jian: see Emperor Wen.

Yang Lihua: Emperor Wen of Sui's daughter; Emperor Xuan's wife; Yuwen Êying's mother.

Yang Su (d. 606): Sui leading general; father of Yang Xuangan.

Yang Tong (d. 619; r. 618–619): grandson of Emperor Yang of Sui (Yang Guang); Prince of Yue; set up by Wang Shichong as Emperor.

Yang Wengan (d. 624): Tang official; rebelled against Li Yuan (624).

Yang Xuangan \yang shüan-gan\ (d. 613): Sui official; rebel leader; son of Yang Su.

Yang Yichen (d. 617): Sui top general.

Yang Yin (d. 560): Northern Qi top official.

Yang You (605–619; r. 617–618): Emperor Gong of Sui; grandson of Emperor Yang (Yang Guang); Prince of Dai.

**Yang, Emperor** (Yangdi; né Yang Guang) (569–618; r. 604–618): second Sui sovereign. The dynasty collapsed on His watch.

Yangzhou \yang-jou\: Jiangdu.

Yanqi \yan-chee\ (Qarasahr) (cap.: near Yanqi, Xinjiang): oasis state.

Yao Junsu \yao jün-soo\: Sui general; subordinate to Qutu Tong.

Yao: legendary good sovereign of far antiquity.

Ye \yeh\ (SW of Linzhang, Hebei): capital of the Northern Qi.

Yehu \yeh-hoo\ Khan (Qaghan), Si Yehu (d. 632): leader of Western Tujue.

Yi Prefecture (seat: Yizhou [Chengdu, Sichuan]).

Yin Ashu: Consort Yin's father.

Yin Kaishan (d. 622): Tang general under Li Shimin.

Yin Shishi \yeen shih-shih\ (d. 617): Sui general.

**Yin, Virtuous Consort** (fl. 620s): Li Yuan's consort; opponent of Li Shimin.

Ying Prefecture (seat: in Liaoyang, Liaoning).

Yining \yee-neeng\ (Righteous Peace): reign period (617–618).

Yiqiu Palace \yee-cheeoo\ : small palace inside the Eastern Palace.

*Yisi* \yee-sih\ *Divination*: book on divination by Li Chunfeng.

Yiwu (cap.: Yiwu [Hami, Xinjiang]): oasis state west of the Jade Gate Pass.

*Yogācārabhūmi-sāstra*: Buddhist treatise on the 17 stages leading to nirvana; translated by Xuanzang and others.

You Prefecture (seat: Youzhou [Beijing]).

Youzhou \you-jou\ (in Beijing): seat of You Prefecture in north Hebei; known as Zhuo Commandery under Emperor Yang.

Yu Shiji \yü shih-jee\ (d. 618): top official under Emperor Yang of Sui; brother Yu Shinan.

**Yu Shinan** \yü shih-nan\ (558–638): Tang official, calligrapher; Li Shimin's literary friend.

**Yu Zhining** \yü jih-neeng\ (588–665): highest-ranking Tang official in charge of edifying Li Chengqian.

Yuan, Emperor (r. 552–555): Liang sovereign.

**Yuchi Jingde** \yü-chih jeeng-dê\ (585–658): Li Shimin's general; played a key role in the Xuanwu Gate Incident.

Yuhua \yü-hua\ Palace (Jade Flower P.) (north of Chang'an in the Phoenix Valley, Yuhua Mountains): originally called Renzhi; enlarged and renamed under Li Shimin.

Yuwen Êying \yü-wen ê-yeeng\ (574–613): Emperor Wen of Sui's granddaughter; daughter of Northern Zhou Emperor Xuan and Yang Lihua.

**Yuwen Shiji** \yü-wen shih-jee\ (d. 642): senior official of the Sui and Tang (from 619); son of Yuwen Shu.

Yuwen Shu \yü-wen shoo\ (d. 616): Sui top general, father of Yuwen Shiji.

Yuwen Ying (d. 624): Tang official.

Zang \dzang\, King (Pojang) (d. 682; r. 642–668): Koguryö King.

Zhang Baozang \jang bao-dzang\ (fl. 636): Tang physician.

**Zhang, Fair Lady** (fl. 620s): Li Yuan's favorite consort; opponent of Li Shimin; Li Jiancheng's lover.

Zhang Gongjin (584–632): general under Li Shimin.

Zhang Jian \jang jeean\ (591–650): Tang general; official.

Zhang Junyi \jang jün-yee\ (d. 645): Tang officer.

**Zhang Liang** \jang leeang\ (d. 646): Tang top general, official under Li Shimin; executed.

Zhang Qian \jang cheean\: Western Han emissary sent by Emperor Wu in the late 2nd BCE century to Central Asia.

Zhang Sizheng \jang sih-jêng\ (d. 643): Li Chengqian's underling.

Zhang Xuansu \jang shüan-soo\ (d. 664): Tang remonstrator; Li Chengqian's mentor.

Zhangnan \jang-nan\ (near Wucheng, Shandong).

Zhangqiu Zituo \jang-cheeoo dzih-tuo\: Northern Qi Confucian; executed for attack on Buddhism.

**Zhangsun** \jang-soon\, **Empress** (601–636): wife of Li Shimin; sister of Zhangsun Wuji; adopted daughter of Gao Shilian.

**Zhangsun Wuji** \jang-soon woo-jee\, (d. 659): leading politician under Li Shimin; elder brother of Empress Zhangsun; adopted son of Gao Shilian.

Zhangye \jang-yeh\ (in central Gansu).

Zhao Yuankai (fl. 638): Tang official.

Zhaoling \jao-leeng\ (140 *li* west of Chang'an): Li Shimin's tomb park. Empress Zhangsun and Li's close associates were buried there.

Zheng \jêng\ and Wey, sound of: decadent music (Zheng and Wey were two Spring and Autumn states in the Central Plain).

Zheng Renji \jêng ren-jee\: Sui official.

Zhenguan \jen-guan\ (Honorable Outlook): reign period (627–649).

Zhezhi \jê-jih\ City (NE of Jungchuan, Gansu): base of Xue Rengao when he was defeated (618).

Zhishi \jih-shih\ (600–637): Buddhist monk.

Zhishi Sili \jih-shih sih-lee\ (fl. 620s–640s): Tang general; initially Tujue officer under Xieli.

Zhiyong \jih-yong\ (fl. Chen–Sui): calligrapher.

Zhòu \jou\: last king of the Shang dynasty; one of the worst rulers in history.

Zhuang \juang\ of Chu, King (r. 613–591 BCE): sovereign of the state of Chu.

Zhuang, Master (Zhuangzi \juang-dzih\ (c. 369–286 BCE): Warring States Daoist philosopher.

Zhuangyan \juang-yan\ Monastery: one of the two largest Buddhist monasteries in Chang'an.

Zhubi \joo-bee\, Mount (SW of Liaoyang, Liaoning).

Zhuo \juo\ (seat: Jixian [Beijing]): Sui Commandery in north Hebei.