PART TWO

LINEAGE AND RELIGION ON THE PUTIAN PLAINS: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON STONE INSCRIPTIONS

by Zheng Zhenman
translated by Kenneth Dean
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Introduction

The Putian plain is situated on the Xinghua bay in the middle of the Fujian coast in Southeast China. The total area of the irrigated plain is 464 sq. km., making it the third largest coastal plain in Fujian. According to geological investigations, the Putian plain was originally under some 30 meters of seawater. The original coastline was formed by the Nangshan mountain to the north, the Jiuhua and Guishan mountains to the west, and the Hugong and Wuhou mountains to the south, all of which together formed a C shaped coastline. The Mulan river, which originates in the higher mountains of central Fujian, and the Yanshou and Qiulu rivers, wind their ways into the Putian plain from the north and the west, and then flow into the sea. Over centuries leading up to the Tang dynasty, these rivers had deposited silt which was pushed into a thin but fertile crescent-shaped alluvial plain by the actions of the sea. Putian is first mentioned in historical sources in 564, when the region was known as Pukou “蒲口”, implying the mouth of a river covered with abundant reeds. Another early name for the region was “蒲田” or “plain of reeds”. In the Tang, the name was simplified to Putian, eliminating the reference to water plants.

From Chen Guangda 2 (568) to Sui Kaihuang 9 (589), the administrative center of Putian was twice established, but each time it was allowed to collapse. In Tang Wude 6 (623), once more Putian district was divided off from Nanan district of Qingyuan 清源 commandery. This new administrative region closely matches the current shape of the greater Putian area. Subsequently, this region was further subdivided into Putian district, Xianyou district, and Xinghua district. In

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1 This is a translation of Zheng Zhenman, Putian pingyuan de zongzu yu zongjiao: yi beiming wei zhongxin de jieshi (Lineage and religion on the Putian plain: an explanation centered on stone inscriptions), Lishi renleixue xuekan (History and Anthropology) 4.1 (2003): 1–49.