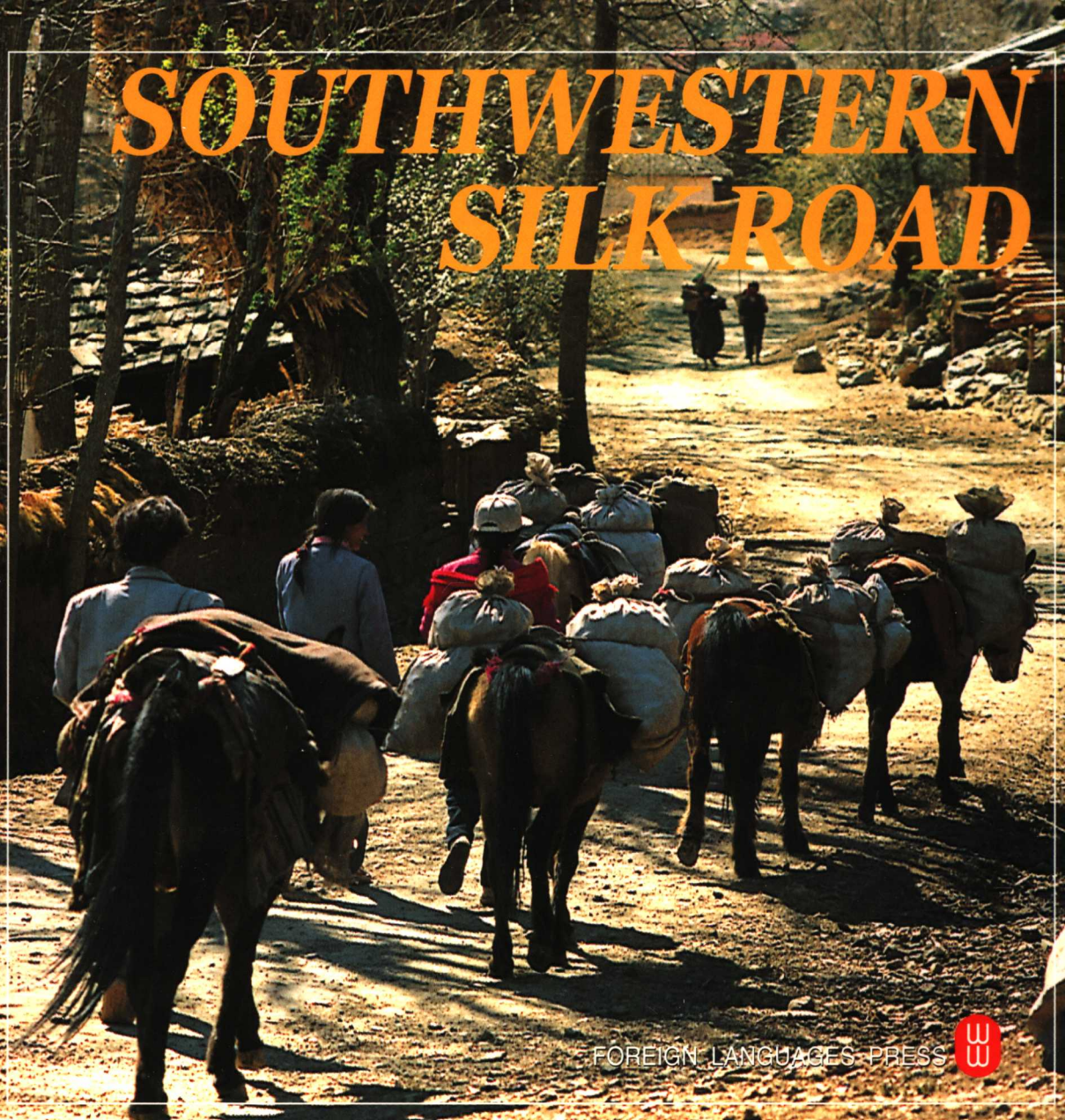




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《中华风物》编辑委员会

顾问: 蔡名照 赵常谦 黄友义 刘质彬

主编: 肖晓明

编委: 肖晓明 李振国 田 辉 呼宝珉 房永明 胡开敏

崔黎丽 兰佩瑾

图 文: 鲁忠民

责任编辑: 王 志

翻 译: 郁 苓 顾文同 陈平

设 计: 王 志

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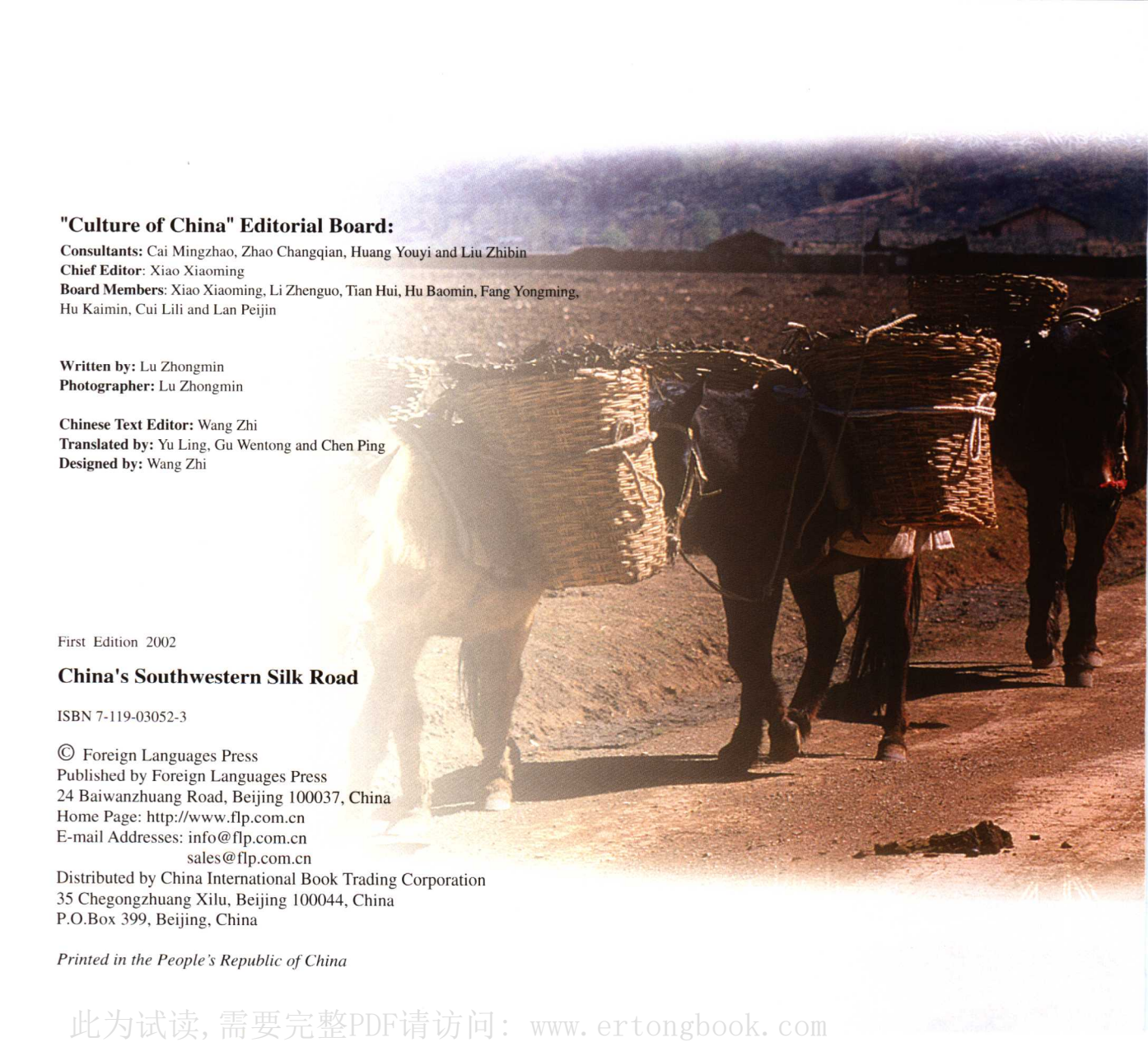
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Written by: Lu Zhongmin

Photographer: Lu Zhongmin

Chinese Text Editor: Wang Zhi

Translated by: Yu Ling, Gu Wentong and Chen Ping

Designed by: Wang Zhi

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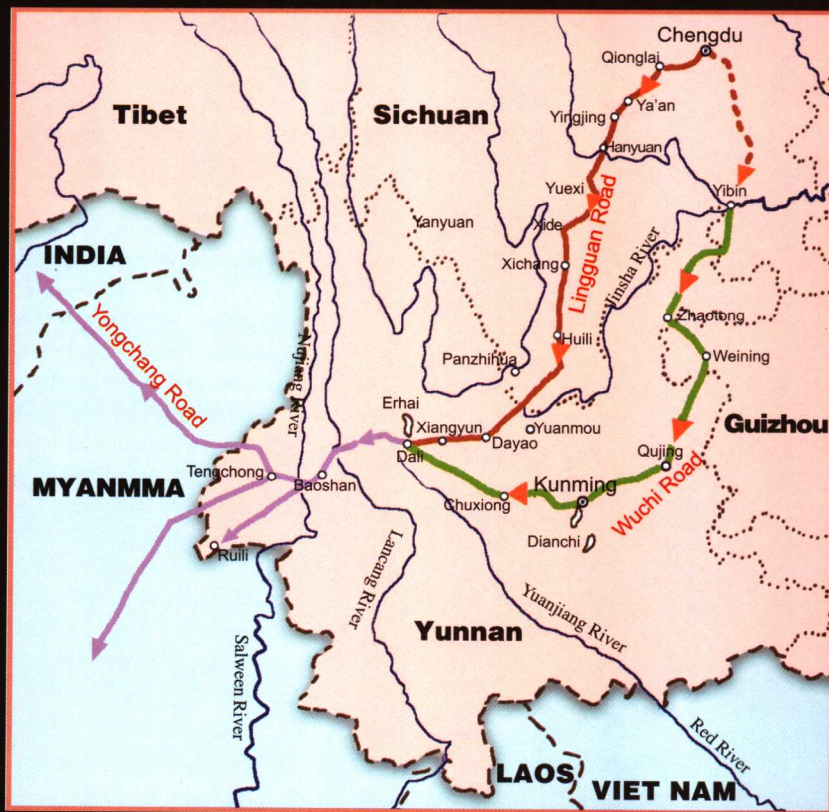
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China's Southwestern Silk Road



The Route of China's Southwestern Silk Road

The Southwestern Silk Road was called the Shu (Sichuan)- Shendu (India) Road in ancient times. Starting from Chengdu and ending in India, it consisted of the Lingguan Road, Wuchi Road and Yongchang Road.



- Lingguan Road: Chengdu (anciently named Shudu, same below), Qionglai (Linqiong), Ya'an (Qingyi), Yingjing (Yandao), Hanyuan(Zhaidu), Xichang (Qiongdu), Dayao (Qingling) in Yunnan Province, Dali (Yeyu)
- Wuchi Road: Chengdu, Yibin (Bodao), Zhaotong (Zhuti), Weining in Guizhou Province (in the State of Yelang in ancient times), Qujing (Weixian), Kunming (Dianchi), Chuxiong, Dali
- Yongchang Road: Dali, Yongping (Bonan), Baoshan (Yongchang), Tengchong (Tengyue), Myanmar, India

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Preface

Over 2,000 years ago, China began to conduct transactions with other civilized countries through trade in commodities such as silk, colored glaze, gold, pottery and gems. As silk was the major and the most typical commodity for export, the thoroughfare linking China with the Western world for cultural and economic communication was referred to by contemporary scholars as the "Silk Road."

The Northern Silk Road, which was opened in the 2nd century BC, started at the ancient capital of the Han Dynasty, which is now known as Xi'an, and traversed westward through the loess plateau in present-day Shaanxi and Gansu provinces, to enter the Hexi (Gansu) Corridor and the Taklimakan in the present-day Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The road then crossed the Pamirs, and went through Central and Western Asia to reach the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

The opening of the Southwestern Silk Road was earlier than that of the Northern Silk Road. As early as before the 4th century BC, there were trade caravans on the rugged roads in southwest of China. In 122 BC when

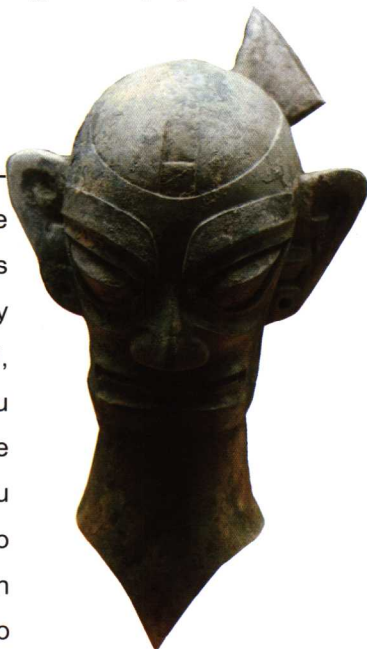
the great explorer Zhang Qian of the Han Dynasty returned to Chang'an (Xi'an) after his mission to the western regions, he immediately reported to Emperor Wudi that he had seen in Daxia (present-day northern Afghanistan) cloth and bamboo goods from Sichuan. He found out that these items had been transported from India, so he realized that Sichuan had long since been connected to India by road. Compared with the northwestern route to the kingdoms of the western regions, this was shorter and safer, and would be a more convenient route from China to India. For the next 2,000 years, the official post road of each dynasty and in modern times highways and railways followed this route.

The Southwestern Silk Road and the Bashu Civilization

Present-day Sichuan Province was occupied by the ancient states of Ba and Shu, and so it is also called



Human faces in bronze, unearthed from Sanxingdui in Guanghan City, Sichuan, showing exaggerated sculpting art.



Bashu. Before the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), the area of Ba covered parts of the present-day Sichuan, Shaanxi, Hubei, and Hunan, with Jiangzhou (now Chongqing) as the center. The State of Shu reached the north to Shaanxi and southern Gansu, and the south to Yunnan and northern Guizhou, with its center on the Chengdu Plain.

In July and August of 1986, two ancient sacrificial pits were respectively discovered at Sanxingdui in Sichuan, in which were found over 1,000 gold and bronze wares and other precious historical relics, indicating great achievement made during the period from 2700 to 900 BC. Scholars believe that Sichuan is a separate source of Chinese civilization.

Figure of an acrobat, Han Dynasty



In ancient times, Sichuan was regarded as a land of abundance, blessed with a favorable climate, fertile land, rich resources and people of outstanding talent. As early as 2,500 years ago, Li Bing and his son constructed the Dujiang Weir, the oldest and most famous irrigation network in China. It is still in use to this day. The development of water conservancy enabled Sichuan to become the most prosperous

region in China early in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). The State of Qin became more powerful partly because of its development in Sichuan, which enabled it to conquer the other six states and unified the whole of China. In the following Three Kingdoms Period, the State of Shu led by Liu Bei, the weakest among the three, was able to fend off the states of Wu and Wei for decades as it was based in the Sichuan area.

Sichuan is the birthplace of silk, and Sichuan brocade became well known as early as in the Han Dynasty. This is also the place where tea was first planted and appreciated in China. Sichuan was also the center for well salt production and one of the leading metallurgical centers in China. Moreover, it was the first place in the world where people utilized natural gas. Culturally, it was the birthplace of Taoism, and has the greatest number of large statues of Buddha compared with other provinces and produced the great men of letters Yang Xiong and Sima Xiangru in



Illustrations of Well Salt Production, unearthed in Pixian County, Sichuan, Han Dynasty.

the the Han Dynasty. The poets Li Bai and Du Fu found much inspiration in the scenery of Sichuan.

The well-developed culture, commerce, and science and technology in the Bashu area made it a natural part of the commercial highway known as the Silk Road.

Rough Tracks Become a Busy Highway

The center of the Bashu civilization was in the Sichuan Basin, which covers over 200,000 sq km. The

bottom of the basin is 300~600 m above sea level, surrounded in all directions by lofty mountains of 1,000~3,000 m above sea level. There is not one flat road stretching out of the basin. A famous line in a poem by Li Bai goes: "It is as difficult to negotiate the dangerously high and steep paths of Sichuan as it is to climb up to the sky." But the mountains couldn't block the way to the outside world. According to archaeological findings, as early as in the Shang Dynasty (1600-1100 BC), the people of Bashu made contact with the people of the Central Plain. In the Western Han Dynasty, a plank road, known as the Golden Ox Road, was constructed along cliffs to reach the other centers of Chinese civilization.

The major communication routes to and from the Bashu Basin are as follows: To the east, the Yangtze River, the biggest in China, affords navigation to the sea. The present-day Sichuan-Shaanxi highway and the Baoji-Chengdu railway follow the route of the ancient Golden Ox Road. To the west, a road has connected Bashu with Tibet built since the Tang Dynasty, now called the Sichuan-Tibet Highway. To the south, there were two routes: One was the Wuchi Road



The kings of Shu, Wangdi Duyu and Congdi Bieling. Their tombs are in the Wangcong Ancestral Temple in Pixian County.

(named so because the road was five-chi or some 166 cm wide) from Yibin to Yunnan; the other was the Lingguan Road from Xichang to Yunnan, two trunk lines of the Southwestern Silk Road.

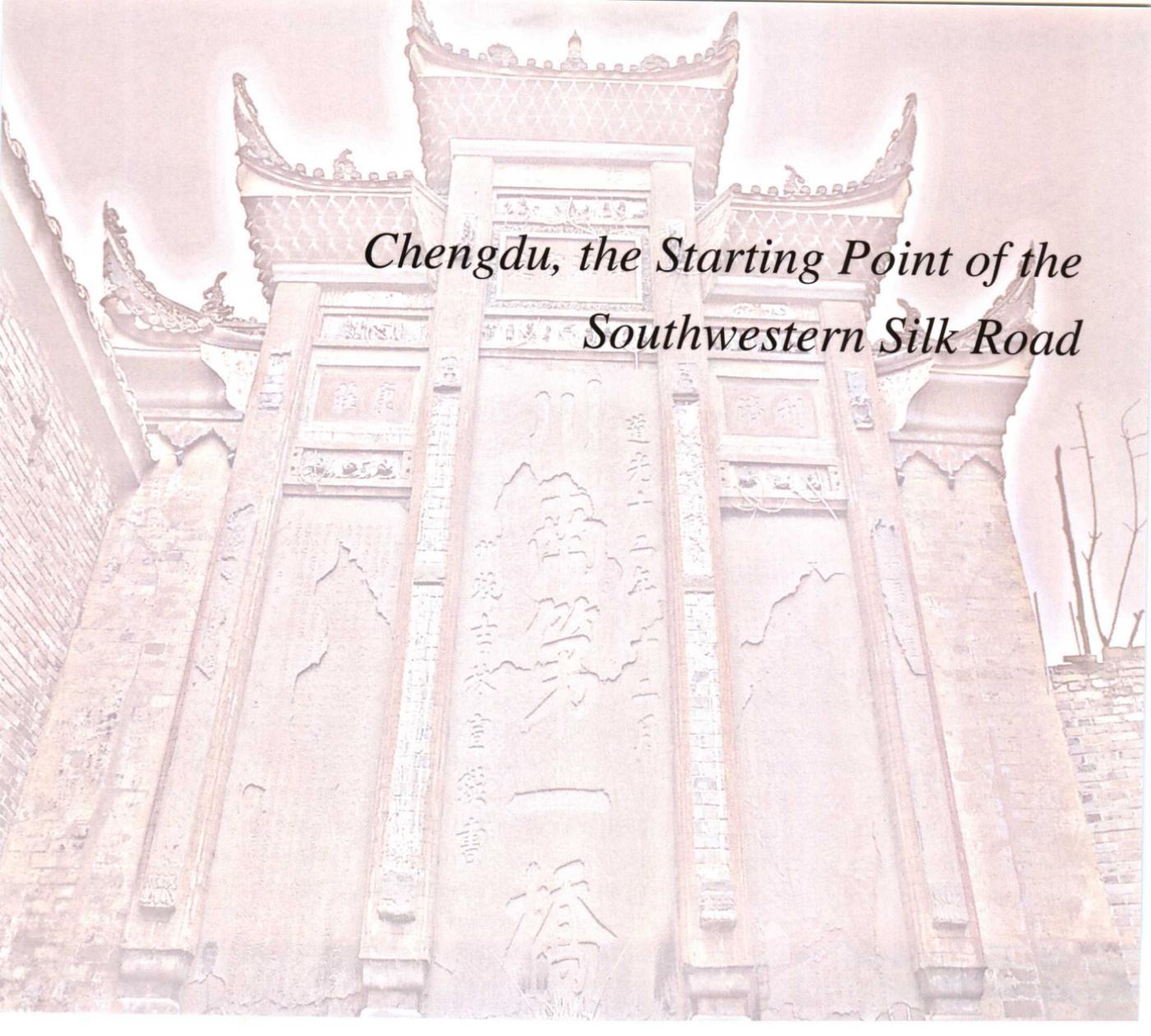
The Southwestern Silk Road went through the Sichuan Basin, across the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, the Jinsha, Jialing and Lancang rivers, the Qionglai Mountains and the grand canyon of the Hengduan Range... All these places have had a mysterious appeal for centuries, being known variously as "land of abundance," and as a region where a multitude of exotic ethnic groups live.



The Anlan Bridge at the Dujiang Weir has a length of 500 m, making it the longest ancient chain bridge extant in China.



Baiheliang at Fuling is a curiosity of the Yangtze River. Every year, when the Yangtze water rises it is submerged. When the water ebbs it is two meters above the water. There are 174 inscriptions on it written by celebrities in the course of the 1,200 years since the Tang Dynasty.



*Chengdu, the Starting Point of the
Southwestern Silk Road*

Chengdu, the Starting Point of the Southwestern Silk Road

Prosperous as the starting point of the Southwestern Silk Road in the past, Chengdu is now a modern metropolis and the capital city of Sichuan Province. It covers almost the whole of the Chengdu Plain, with an area of 12,456 sq km and a population of 9.6 million. Due to its central position in southwestern transportation, Chengdu has easy access to other parts of the country by water, land and air. The intimidating rough, hard roads of Sichuan became history long ago.

About 2,300 years ago, the ninth king of ancient Shu moved his capital from Pixian County to where Chengdu now stands, and named it Chengdu (meaning "become the capital"). In 316 BC, after General Zhang Yi of the State of Qin conquered Bashu, tens of thousands of people from Qin were moved to the Sichuan area. City walls and a moat were added to Chengdu, imitating Xianyang, the capital of Qin. With the unification of China by the Qin Shi Huang (First Emperor of the Qin), Chengdu was put under the control of Shu Prefecture. After the Han Dynasty, several small states were established in the Chengdu area, one after the other, the most famous one being

the State of Shu in the Three Kingdoms Period. In recent years, the sites of five ancient cities dating back 5,000 years have been discovered in counties of Pixian and Xindu, and near the Dujiang Weir, not far from Chengdu. They shed new light on the history of Sichuan. As a famous historical and cultural city, Chengdu has many ancient streets and lanes. There are also many cultural relics in and outside the old city proper, such as Zhuge Liang's Memorial Hall, Du Fu's Memorial Hall, Wang Jian's Tomb and the Qingyang Palace, each giving testimony to the city's glorious past.

Sericulture was first developed in this area. In fact, the name Shu itself means "wild silkworm." The state is said to have been founded by Can (meaning "silkworm") Cong and Yu Fu over 4,000 years ago. This is mentioned in the poem *The Sichuan Road* by Li Bai: "Long ago Can Cong and Yu Fu founded the Kingdom of Shu." Leizu, the wife of the Yellow Emperor and purportedly the inventor of silkworm raising, was said to be a native of Sichuan. There were once many temples to the Cocoon God in Sichuan, with special rites for worshipping the Horse-head Goddess — a deity with

*Demonstrating the Qing Dynasty
hualou loom.*





Exquisite silk woven using the hualou loom.

Sichuan embroidery is one the four famous embroidery schools in China.