"Godly Worm" and the "Literati Prism" of Chinese Sources

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This essay is a case study of the inherent gentry bias of traditional Chinese sources, which tends to condition modern readers to view ancient East Asia through a "literati prism." Using medieval onomastic data, the essay demonstrates the distorting effects caused by this prism, as well as the enigmas it engenders. In addition, the essay highlights a long-ignored legacy of early medieval nomadic conquests of northern China—the vulgarization of Chinese high culture.

INTRODUCTION

While archeological findings have played an increasingly important role in the past century or so, not the least in supplying many of the onomastic data used in this study, traditional Chinese literature still represents the leading primary source in Sinology and related studies. This is not only due to the enormity of its volume, but can also be more consequentially attributed to the simple fact that, as far as received primary sources are concerned, for a long time the educated Confucian gentry monopolized almost all genres of writing, not the least historiography, in East Asia. The inherent gentry bias of traditional written sources, though long recognized, still permeates much of modern scholarship. More often than not, we are looking at China's past through a "literati prism."

This "literati prism" has a particularly distorting effect for times when the Confucian elite lost socio-political domination. Early medieval northern China under various "Barbarian" rulers was a case in point. A few years ago, it took me quite some effort to convince several well-versed scholars that the perennial *negative* connotation associated with the proud ethnonym Han 漢 was an unacknowledged legacy of the lowly socio-political status of the Han people, especially the Confucian literati, during the Northern Dynasties. Small wonder that the Yuan dynasty gentry author Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, who experienced a similar humiliating environment himself, first pointed out this long-forgotten fact.[1]

For the early medieval period, one should not ignore Daoist and Buddhist sources. However, firstly there were few influential contemporary Daoist writings, and Daoist authors tended to be cut from the same cloth as the Confucian literati. Or, in the words of Arthur Wright, "neo-Taoist colloquies continued to be a major pastime of the upper class."[2] So much so that, in the winter of 554, after declaring martial law and just days before his capital Jiangling 江陵 fell to a Western Wei 西魏 expedition army, the Southern Liang 梁 emperor Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (r. 552–54) was still giving lectures on *Daodejing* 道德經, with courtiers all attending in military uniforms.[3] Earlier, the Daoist master Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), founder of the Supreme Clarity (Shangqing 上清) school of Daoism and author and/or com-

I am indebted to Scott Pearce and Victor Mair for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this essay. I also acknowledge the pertinent critique, corrections, and suggestions of the three reviewers, especially that of the third, which helped improve and enhance the structure and presentation of this work significantly.

1. *Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 8.104.
2. *Studies in Chinese Buddhism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 12.
3. Sima Guang 司馬光 et al., *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 165.5117–18.

piler of several early Daoist texts, was so deeply involved with the Confucian-dominated southern court that he was awarded the epithet "grand councilor who resides in the mountains" 山中宰相.[4] The famous Wang clan of Langye 琅琊 that produced the legendary calligrapher father-son duo Wang Xizhi 王羲之 and Wang Xianzhi 王獻之, yet was also closely associated with the Daoist Celestial Masters Sect (Tianshi dao 天師道), is another good example. Furthermore, Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 has pointed out that *zhi* 之, widely used in personal names borne by the Confucian elite, seemingly violating the familial naming taboo, reflected Daoist beliefs.[5]

Secondly, although Buddhist literature, again as Arthur Wright has pointed out,[6] did sometimes provide an alternative perspective not quite consistent with that of the mainstream Confucian elite, received Buddhist literature was still heavily dominated by "intellectual Buddhists" who largely came from the same educated social classes as the Confucian literati. Or, as Timothy Barrett summarized,[7] "Chinese Buddhist sources primarily give a picture of Buddhism as a literary phenomenon worthy of the attention of a highly literate audience," thus containing precious little information about less educated believers. The best example is *bianwen* 變文, "transformation texts." Before the early twentieth-century chance discovery of this important genre of writings, which apparently played a critical role in medieval popular Buddhism in China, nobody even knew of its existence, since it is absent from all traditional written sources, both secular *and* Buddhist.

An important development lost by the literati prism through which we commonly view the Northern Dynasties was the vulgarization, if not debasement, of Chinese high culture. This was similar to what transpired during the Mongol Yuan dynasty, yet was much less recognized. With the fall of the gentry-dominated Western Jin 晉 court and the court-approved Confucian Canon inscribed in stone earlier (both at Luoyang 洛陽),[8] Chinese writing lost its unifying authority and standard. The phenomenon is most prominent in inscriptional sources, of which over ninety percent are from the north.[9] By one account, on some inscriptions nearly half of the Chinese characters written could be labeled erroneous.[10] While the resulting orthographical chaos has become an extensive subject of scholarship, among all contemporary authors only Yan Zhitui 顏之推, who grew up in the gentry-dominated south and moved to the north first as a captured prisoner of war, characterized the rampant vulgarization of Chinese writing in the "Barbarian"-dominated north, "much inferior to that south of the Yangtze" 猥拙甚於江南, as the unfortunate result of political disasters (北朝喪亂之餘).[11] Earlier, as recorded in *Wei shu* 魏書, the official history of the Northern Wei dynasty founded by the formerly nomadic group Tuoba 拓跋, a literati courtier Jiang Shi 江式 in a

4. *Zizhi tongjian* 157.4872.

5. Chen Yinke, "Tianshidao yu binhai diyu zhi guanxi 天師道與濱海地域之關係," in his *Jinmingguan conggao chubian* 金明館叢稿初編 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), 1–46.

6. "Sui Yang-ti: Personality and Stereotype," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, ed. Arthur Wright (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1960), 47–76, 48.

7. "The Origin of the Term *pien-wen*: An Alternative Hypothesis," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser. 3 (1992): 241–46.

8. The "Stone Canon" was first erected by the imperial Eastern Han government in 175–183, then supplemented in 241 by the Wei 魏 court during the Three Kingdoms era.

9. According to the statistics given by Lu Mingjun 陸明君, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao bei biezi yanjiu* 魏晉南北朝碑別字研究 (Beijing: Wenhua yichu chubanshe, 2009), 30, of a total of 536 surviving tomb inscriptions of the era, 481 (90%) belong to the Northern dynasties. For the other varieties, especially the huge number of religious dedications and sutras, the volume of southern samples is miniscule.

10. Ibid., 7–8.

11. Wang Liqi 王利器, annot., *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 7.575.

memorial to the throne in 514, while carefully inserting a positive spin on the phenomenon, bitterly complained that many newly coined popular characters, dismissed as "vulgar characters" (*suzi* 俗字) by Yan Zhitui, violated the orthography set by "ancient Confucian classics,[12] the great *zhuan* 大篆 script of Shi Zhou 史籀, the *Shuowen* 說文 dictionary by Xu Shen 許慎, and the Stone Canon 石經."[13]

Incidentally, the fate of the Stone Canon cited here clearly demonstrates a direct relationship between the loss of an orthographical standard and "Barbarian" rule. Though glossing over the considerable additions during the Three Kingdoms era,[14] *Wei shu* aptly underscores the most important function of the Stone Canon, as recalled by the Confucian literati under the Tuoba rule: "Back during the Han era, the Stone Canon in Three Scripts was erected at the National University. When students could not write characters properly, they often sought corrections therewith" 昔漢世造三字石經於太學，學者文字不正，多往質焉.[15]

When the Western Jin capital Luoyang was sacked by troops of the Former Zhao 前趙 polity[16] established in 310 by the Xiongnu 匈奴 chieftain Liu Yuan 劉淵 (d. 310), the National University was burned down, but the Stone Canon steles, though damaged, stood or fell in situ. It was the Tuoba Wei nobles and officials who pillaged these tablets for other uses, especially for building Buddhist temples, causing irreversible losses and devastation of the collection.[17] Even more revealingly, the Confucian literati courtier Zheng Daozhao 鄭道昭, chancellor of the National University 國子祭酒, in a passionate memorial to the throne appealed for the restoration of this national standard for Confucian learning. The request was rejected by none other than Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (Yuan Hong 元宏, r. 471–99), the most "Sinophilic" Tuoba monarch, who moved the Northern Wei capital to Luoyang and initiated wholesale Sinification reforms.[18] The emperor was probably mindful of the hundreds of "new characters" (*xin zi* 新字) that the Tuoba court had created and promulgated since 425.[19] The destruction of the Confucian orthographic standard constitutes a sharp contrast to the extravagant undertakings, both official and private, in erecting Buddhist statues and monuments in which "vulgar" characters proliferated.

Commenting on an earlier version of this essay, Scott Pearce suggested an intriguing possibility of relating the Northern Wei's officially sanctioned coinage of numerous "vulgar

12. "孔氏古書," likely referring to the books written in pre-Qin scripts allegedly retrieved from inside the walls of Confucius' old residence in the early Western Han dynasty. See *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 53.2414.

13. *Wei shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 91.1963. The enormous political pressure on Confucian literati not to ruffle the ethnic feathers of their nomadic masters is also reflected in an earlier story about Cui Hao 崔浩, another Han minister at the Tuoba court. An accomplished calligrapher, Cui was frequently asked to write the popular *Jijiu zhang* 急就章 (also called *Jijiu pian*, "Quick-learning chapter"), a textbook for learning Chinese characters. Cui would always change the made-up personal name Hanqiang 漢強, "(may) the Han be strong," to Daiqiang 代強, Dai being the original dynastic name of the Tuoba polity (*Wei shu* 35.827–28). Despite such precautions and enormous contributions to the Tuoba state as a military strategist, Cui and several entire related clans were cruelly executed in 450 due to the "scandalous slander" of Tuoba forefathers in a "national history" Cui had authored. See *Wei shu* 35.826, or for a more complete and less restrained account, *Zizhi tongjian* 125.3941–43.

14. The original Han dynasty Xiping Stone Canon 熹平石經 was erected in 175 and inscribed only with the *lishu* 隸書 script. The Stone Canon in Three Scripts usually refers to the Zhengshi Stone canon 正始石經, completed in 241, that included *xiao zhuan* 小篆 "small seal script" and *guwen* 古文 "ancient script."

15. *Wei shu* 55.1220.

16. At the time known as the State of Han 漢國.

17. Li Daoyuan 酈道元, *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 16.334; *Wei shu* 83b.1819; *Bei shi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 44.1620; *Zizhi tongjian* 148.4639.

18. *Wei shu* 52.1240–41.

19. *Wei shu* 4a.70; *Bei shi* 2.42.

characters" to the Tuoba rulers' reported attempts in creating their own "national language" 國語. This indeed can be further linked to the more successful efforts by the Khitan and Jurchen rulers of the Liao 遼 and Jin 金 dynasties, respectively, in creating the writing scripts for their "national languages,"[20] and the even more impressive creation of the sophisticated Tangut script, all more or less based on the Chinese script. Then in the Yuan dynasty, the Mongol court's forceful decision to discard the age-old classical Chinese, the epitome of Chinese high culture, adopting instead the "vulgar" colloquial Chinese as the official administration language for the Han population, was accompanied by the introduction of the famous 'Phags-pa script, the "National Script" intended for all languages in the empire, but used primarily for the Mongol "national language."[21] While this is too major a subject to be elaborated in this short essay, the least we can say is that the literati prism constitutes a major obstacle to the study of this fascinating subject, exemplified by the total oblivion of any concrete records on the Tuoba's "national language."

"VULGAR CHARACTERS" AND CHINESE ONOMASTICS

In his memorial Jiang Shi cited and interpreted four examples of these "vulgar characters," three of which have survived to posterity:[22] 𠔃 by combining two characters, literally "clever speech," to replace *bian* 辯 "debate"; 𡳞 by pairing two characters meaning "small rabbit" to replace *nou* 鼆, "young rabbit";[23] and 蠶 by stacking up two characters presumably meaning "godly worm" to replace *can* 蠶 "silkworm." This research note will focus on the last two cases.

The above seemingly rational interpretations missed the critical factor: the religio-cultural environment in which these vulgarized characters emerged.[24] A major driving force behind the "vulgar characters" was simplification. This applies to the first two characters cited above, and numerous other examples, especially those used to replace characters with many strokes such as *shou* 壽, "longevity"; *ling* 靈, "daemon, spirit"; and *shuang* 雙, "couple, duo."[25] It is worth noting the role played by the "reduced-stroke characters" (*jianzi* 減字) in the development of the Khitan and Jurchen scripts.[26]

Another fact is that the foremost, if not nearly all, attestations of these "vulgar characters," including the three "stacked-up" ones cited in *Wei shu*, are found among contemporary onomastics, which underwent a sea change during that period. In a recent joint work, we have named this change "Iranization of Chinese nomenclature," represented by the introduction and spread of theophoric names and the related notion of "personal gods," guardian dei-

20. For the relationship between Chinese "vulgar characters" and the development of the Khitan and Jurchen scripts, see, e.g., Lu Xixing 陸錫興, "Gu qinpu jianzi yu qita minzu wenzi de chuangzhi" 古琴譜減字與其他民族文字的創制, in *Zhongguo wenzi yanjiu* 中國文字研究, vol. 22 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2015), 226–37.

21. See, e.g., Victor H. Mair, "Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (1994): 707–51.

22. *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 5.576–77.

23. One of the anonymous reviewers raised the point that an earlier popular Baina 百衲 edition of *Wei shu* has *xiao'er* 小兒 "small child," instead of "small rabbit" here, which makes little textual sense. The latest emended edition of *Wei shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), which, as the 1974 edition, used the Baina edition as its "prototype" 底本, but incorporated all corrections and new material accumulated over forty years, has nonetheless kept the "small rabbit" reading here (91.2128).

24. See Mair, "Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia."

25. See, e.g., Mao Yuanming 毛遠明, *Han Wei Liuchao beike yiti zidian* 漢魏六朝碑刻異體字典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 548–49, 817, 831.

26. See, e.g., Lu Xixing, "Gu qinpu jianzi."

ties who were regarded to be responsible for personal well-being.[27] In another recent paper, I demonstrated how a group of "ugly" personal names actually represented such guardian gods related to one's birth year.[28] In addition to the five cases cited in that paper, five more "ugly" names I have identified since, for which the bearers' birth year can be determined, reconfirm my conclusion.[29]

We digress to discuss what constituted the Sinitic onomasticon of the time, as it provides an apt case of gentry bias, showing a large gap between the elite and the lower classes. In a nutshell, it consisted of all forms of given names. In traditional written sources from premodern China, a person, mostly male but many an educated female too, bore three types of given names: a formal name *ming* 名, a more respectful style name *zi* 字, and often various epithets *hao* 號 or *biehao* 別號, sort of high-brow pen names. Occasionally, we also learn the person's childhood name *xiaoming* 小名 or *xiaozi* 小字. This general pattern was somewhat disrupted in the early medieval era by the appearance on the socio-political stage of many "Barbarian" and other alien figures, whose native appellation was often taken as one of the above given names. But for the Sinitic elite and educated Han people, the old pattern held.

According to the Tangong 檀弓 chapter of *Liji* 禮記 (Book of rites), part of the Confucian canon during the Han dynasty, the formal name and style name are assigned in the following manner: "The formal name is given during infancy, and the style name is assigned when reaching adulthood [i.e., at 20 *sui* 歲]" 幼名，冠字.[30] Here is the astonishing fact revealed by inscriptional and other archeological data: unlike the great majority of Chinese personalities found in traditional literature and modern references, in the medieval period, and likely in much of the entire premodern era, the uneducated majority of the Chinese population actually possessed neither a formal name nor a style name, much less a fancy epithet. All these commoners carried were just their childhood names, likely given at birth. In addition, contrary to the stipulation by the *Book of Rites* cited above, even children of educated gentry families were not given their formal names, often called *guanming* 官名, "official name," until they were nearing adulthood.[31] Following are two revealing examples. The epitaph of a gentleman named Lu Shui 盧淣, dated 757, says:

27. A theophoric personal name contains the name of a deity in whose protection and care the name-bearer is entrusted. It was prevalent in the ancient Near East, as can be seen in all old onomasticons from Mesopotamia and Egypt to Greece. For a brief introduction to its relationship with the personal god, see Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), 147–64. See also Sanping Chen and Victor H. Mair, "A 'Black Cult' in Early Medieval China: Iranian-Zoroastrian Influence in the Northern Dynasties," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 27 (2017): 201–24.

28. "Were 'Ugly Slaves' in Medieval China Really Ugly?" *JAOS* 136 (2016): 117–23.

29. These are the Northern Dynasties official Tian Sheng 田盛 with the style name Chouxing 醜興, born in 457 (丁酉) (*AF* 168); the long-lived Northern Qi official Lu Zhong 路眾 with the style name Erchou 貳醜, born in 461 (辛丑) (*QQ* 82); the Sui dynasty official Chang Chounu 常醜奴, born in 521 (辛丑) (*QS* 217); the Tang dynasty gentleman Shi Shanfa 史善法 with the style name Chouren 醜仁, born in 629 (乙丑) (Zhao Liguang 趙力光 comp., *Xi'an Beilin bowuguan xincang muzhi huibian* 西安碑林博物館新藏墓誌彙編, 3 vols. [Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2007], 272); and the Tang dynasty youngster Tang Choujin 唐醜謹, born in 853 (癸酉) (Zhongguo wenwu yanjiusuo 中國文物研究所 et al., comps., *Xin Zhongguo chutu muzhi: Shaanxi er* 新中國出土墓誌陝西貳 Part 2 [Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003], 260).

30. Sun Xidan 孫希旦, annot., *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 8.207. It also gives the classical interpretation of *you* 幼, "small," here: "three months after birth."

31. Modern Chinese dictionaries based on traditional literature only trace the term *guanming* to an obscure Song dynasty source. See, e.g., Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風 et al., *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1989), 3:1381. Yet in inscriptional data it appeared no later than the high Tang era, as shown below.

> He is survived by three sons. . . . They are listed by their respective childhood name because their official names have not yet been determined.
> 嗣子三人 . . . 官名未定, 各以小字而稱之. (*QTZ* 241–42)

The epitaph of a youngster surnamed Zheng, dated 850, states:

> This son of Zheng . . . yet to have an official name had the childhood name Kuilang.
> 鄭子 . . . 未有官名, 小字隗郎. (*QTZ* 379)

Another tomb inscription (*LY* 519) demonstrates that girls of the gentry class were only given a childhood name, not a formal given name, during their childhood.

The fact that the majority of ordinary Chinese did not bear formal given names was to my knowledge first observed by the perceptive Qing 清 dynasty scholar Yu Yue 俞樾. He cited a handwritten note in a private clan genealogy claiming that Yuan 元 dynasty regulations forbade commoners without official positions to bear formal names. After agreeing with the existence of such an official rule, Yu commented that it cannot be found in the official Yuan history, but that it probably existed since the Song 宋 dynasty.[32]

The early medieval evidence that I presented above extends Yu's observation regarding the Yuan society to a general public phenomenon in premodern China: unless a person was to receive an education in preparation for officialdom, there was little practical need for him (much less for her) to bear other names than that given after birth. That is why the official name *guanming* was also called *xueming* 學名 "schooling name."[33] Yu's commentary is valuable as it helps to show how these low-brow yet pervasive social phenomena seldom reflected in traditional written sources tended to reveal themselves during and after foreign conquests which suppressed and disrupted the social status and functions of the Confucian elite. In addition, onomastic data from archeological finds and inscriptional sources that lean heavily towards the non-elite, such as those uncovered at Dunhuang and Turfan as well as the dedicatory inscriptions in northern China, would thus prove to be not quite consistent with traditional sources. In addition, from the limited number of individuals for which we know both the childhood name and the formal given name,[34] there was no apparent relation between the two, in sharp contrast to the well-established relation between formal name and style name.[35]

The fact that most souls of the Sinitic world only carried a childhood name has its complications with regard to inscriptional data utilized by the current study, particularly because the highly normative and often stylish medieval tomb epitaph usually required the inclusion of both the formal given name and the style name of the deceased. Given the increased social mobility of the era, many a personality with only his/her childhood or non-Sinitic original name rose to a status worthy of an epitaph. This original name usually became the listed formal name, leaving the indication of the style name to various options. In addition to repeating the given name as the style name, or the space awkwardly left blank, a creative

32. *Chunzaitang suibi* 春在堂隨筆 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe 2001), 6.64–65.

33. Luo Zhufeng, *Hanyu da cidian*, 3:1381.

34. E.g., the founder of the Southern Song dynasty Liu Yu 劉裕 (356–422) had a childhood name Jinu 寄奴; the famous Southern dynasties poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433, note Xie's theophoric given name, meaning "daemon's fortune) had a childhood name Ke'er 客兒; Wei Shou 魏收 (505–572), the author of *Wei shu*, had a childhood name Fozhu 佛助.

35. This relationship is a feature of Sinitic high culture going back all the way to Confucius' time. It has become an important tool for studying Chinese onomastics and linguistics, as exemplified by the superb treatise on names in the Spring and Autumn era by the Qing dynasty scholar Wang Yinzhi 王引之, "Chunqiu mingzi jiegu 春秋名字解詁," chapters 22–23 of his *Jingyi shuwen* 經義述聞 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 857–945.

method was to break up the original name into two parts to serve as the formal and style names respectively. For example, the common name Senghu 僧護 "Sangha-protected," could be separated into a formal name Seng 僧 and a style name Hu 護 (*QTZ* 6). Another popular personal name, Pusa 菩薩, "bodhisattva," was broken into a formal name Pu 菩 and a style name Sa 薩 (*HB* 1104–5). A Central Asian immigrant, apparently carrying a popular Iranian name Shāpūr (Middle Persian Shābuhr),[36] "king's son, prince," was given a formal name Sha 沙 and a style name Boluo 鉢羅 instead (*HB* 1304). Another example, a Sogdian immigrant, received a formal name Shewu 射勿 and a style name Panto 槃陀.[37] Luckily the epitaph of a Sogdian with the same clan name Shi 史, likely representing their original city-state Kish in Central Asia, contained a segment inscribed in Sogdian that cited a personal name δrymtβntk/ Žēmatvande, which according to Yutaka Yoshida was, if not the same 射勿槃陀, at least a namesake.[38] Nicholas Sims-Williams further interprets the Sogdian name as "slave of Demetra."[39] The deity Demetra/Demeter, representing the eleventh month of the Sogdian and Bactrian calendars, was originally the Greek goddess of agriculture, which makes this a case of Sino-Greco-Sogdian cultural fusion in the medieval Chinese onomasticon, adding a Hellenistic touch to the Iranization of Chinese nomenclature.

YOUNG RABBIT AND GODLY WORM

As mentioned earlier, "vulgar characters" tended to appear in contemporary onomastics of the lower classes. They would thus reveal things unfamiliar from traditional literature. The memorial cited by the Northern Wei courtier Jiang Shi provides two such examples.

First, the onomastic use of the "vulgar character" *nou* 㹴 "small rabbit," with a rather rare pronunciation in Chinese, was very popular. We know names such as Nouren 㹴仁, "Rabbit's benevolence"; Nouzi 㹴子, "Rabbit's son"; Nouxiang 㹴香, "Rabbit's girl"; and Nouzhu 㹴珠, "Rabbit's pearl[-like daughter]."[40] We also have a hypocorism, Anou 阿㹴.[41] There is little doubt that these names were part of the early medieval fad of zoological names related to the twelve-animal cycle to mark the birth year of the name-bearer. Puzzlingly, the usage seems to indicate a deliberate avoidance of directly using the character *tu* 兔, "rabbit," which appeared rarely in personal names. This was in sharp contrast to the two animals with the worst images in Chinese written sources: the dog and the pig. Personal names figuring *gou* 狗/苟 and *zhu*/*tun* 豬/肫 in positive theophoric context are numerous nonetheless.[42] The

36. Phillipe Gignoux, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, vol. 2, fasc. 2: *Noms propres sassanides en moyen-perse épigraphique* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 161.

37. Luo Feng 羅豐, *Guyuan nanjiao Sui Tang mudi* 固原南郊隋唐墓地 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), 17.

38. Yoshida Yutaka 吉田豊, "The Sogdian Version of the New Xi'an Inscription," *Les Sogdiens en Chine*, ed. Étienne de la Vaissière and Éric Trombert (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2005), 57–72; Pavel Lurje, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, vol 2: *Mitteliranische Personennamen*, fasc 8: *Personal Names in Sogdian Texts* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 181.

39. Nicholas Sims-Williams and François de Blois, "The Bactrian Calendar," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, New Series 10 (1996), *Studies in Honor of Vladimir A. Livshits*, 149–65.

40. Here *xiang* 香 and *zhu* 珠 are among some ten popular suffixes, meaning "daughter, girl," used in Chinese theophoric names, such as Shenxiang 神香 (*HW* 7.112), "god's girl"; Faxiang 法香 (*QW* 500), "Dharma's girl"; Sengxiang 僧香 (*TLF* 7.76), "Sangha's girl"; Shenzhu 神珠 (*QW* 518), "god's daughter"; Tanzhu 曇珠 (*QW* 633), "Dharma's daughter." They likely represent "gentrified" translations of the medieval Iranian theophoric suffix *-duxt*, "daughter."

41. *BP* 93; *LX* 25.284; 25.484; 26.19; 26.170; 26.418; 26.508; etc.

42. Such as Gouren 苟仁 (*TLF* 6.550), "Dog's benevolence"; Goude 苟德 (*DH* 2.356), "Dog's virtue/ favor"; Jingou 金苟 (*DH* 1.194), "Gold dog"; Zhuren 豬仁 (*TLF* 7.52), "Pig's benevolence"; Zhuguang 豬光 (*DH* 4.52), "Pig's light"; Zhuxin 豬信(*DH* 2.436), "Pig's trust." Another example is the name of the eunuch slave Li Zhu'er

avoidance of *tu* in personal names gets more surprising with the highly positive and laudatory image of the rabbit in Chinese written literature: the legendary *yutu* 玉兔 "jade rabbit" was said to reside on the beloved moon, a romantic icon for so many men of letters in Chinese history, and the white rabbit, which was rare in China before the import of the domesticated type in late Ming dynasty, was considered an auspicious omen.[43] A recent study of the rabbit's historical image in China, both secular and sacred, had nothing negative to report but that rabbits also served as a meat source.[44] The reason for this avoidance contrary to the rabbit's excellent reputation in written sources remains an enigma.[45]

The second example is the "godly worm" character 蠶. The "silkworm" interpretations in *Wei shu* have been copied almost verbatim by all Chinese dictionaries, starting with *Yupian* 玉篇, or at least its Song dynasty edition, without any re-examination.[46] Indeed, to an educated Confucian literatus, Jiang Shi's explanation seemed to make perfect sense. It was apparently based on firstly a presumed equivalence between *shen* 神 "god," and *tian* 天 "heaven," the latter approximating parts of the top component of the character 蠶, and secondly that the character 虫, with the correct pronunciation *hui* and the original meaning of "reptile," was emerging in the same vulgarization process as a simplified variant of *chong* 蟲 "worm."[47] In short, by this line of logic the "godly worm" can be regarded as a precursor to the modern simplified character 蚕.

However, given that almost all known "vulgar characters" represented some sort of simplification in terms of the number of strokes, why do we here see the replacement of the character 天 by the more complex character 神? Such complexification probably led the dictionary *Longkan shoujing* 龍龕手鏡 (compiled by the Khitan Liao 遼 dynasty Buddhist monk Xingjun 行均 and predating the Song dynasty edition of *Yupian* by sixteen years) to classify the character as "archaic" 古,[48] a qualification that seems hardly appropriate for this early medieval neologism. All other early dictionaries that I have consulted stuck with the "vulgar" characterization, among them *Xinxiu leiyin yinzheng qunji yupian* 新修絫音引證群籍玉篇 (compiled by the Jurchen Jin 金 dynasty scholar Xing Zhun 邢準), which is known to have preserved *all* characters contained in the Tang dynasty edition of *Yupian*,[49]

李豬兒, "Pig's child," who joined the patricide plot against the famous Tang rebellion leader An Lushan 安祿山 (*JTS* 200a.5371). To my knowledge, the only zodiac animal that was never used to directly name people is *hou* 猴, "monkey," an interesting cultural taboo.

43. Sightings of white rabbits were recorded by all official histories from the Later Han to the Tang; see, e.g., *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 1b.62; *JTS* 11.289; *XTS* 195.5590; *Wei shu* 112b.2942–46; *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 27.837–39.

44. Chen Lianshan 陳連山, "Shisu de tuzi yu shensheng de tuzi: Dui Zhongguo chuantong wenhua zhong tuzi xingxiang de kaocha" 世俗的兔子與神聖的兔子—對中國傳統文化中兔子形象的考察, *Minsu yanjiu* 2011.3: 23–32.

45. A possible, if tenuous explanation could be that *tu* was a nickname for *luantong* 孌童, "homosexual male prostitute, young 'male concubine'," a usage not attested before the late eighteenth century. See Shen Qifeng 沈起鳳, *Xieduo* 諧鐸, rpt. *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀, vol. 21 (Yangzhou: Guangling guji keyinshe, 1983), 1.5; Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Zi buyu* 子不語 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), 19.370.

46. Hu Jixuan 胡吉宣, annot., *Yupian jiaoshi* 玉篇校釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 25.5041.

47. Up to the authoritative Qing dynasty dictionary *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典, first published in 1716 (rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1985), this vulgarized form of 蟲 was never accepted by the gentry (*Kangxi zidian*, 1200, calls such an interpretation a "gross falsehood" 大謬), with the character 虫 always retaining the pronunciation *hui* and the primary meaning "snake."

48. Goryeo 高麗 edition (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 2.219.

49. Preface dated 1188. Rpt. Xuxiu Siku quanshu 續修四庫全書, vol. 229 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), 25.208.

or the slightly later *Wuyin leiju sisheng pianhai* 五音類聚四聲篇海.[50] In my opinion, the component 神 can only be attributed to a need for deification. Yet we have virtually no evidence of the silkworm being deified to become an object of worship in that period, or any time in Chinese history—the silkworm's close association with the humiliating punishment by castration (see below) notwithstanding. In other words, we do not see any raison d'être for such a substitution.

The sole attestation of the "godly worm" being used to refer to the silkworm is the inscription "Ningchansi sanji Futu bei" 凝禪寺三級浮圖, commemorating the construction of a Buddhist temple in 539 in modern Hebei province,[51] commissioned by a large group of people headed by a local Zhao Rong 趙融, who had jointly financed its construction. The inscription, which uses the character under discussion, was elegantly written in classical Chinese, evidently the work of a highly educated literati author. Intriguingly, the same character appeared two more times in the long list of donors attached to the inscription, a "coincidence" that likely prompted the literati author to use the character in the verse-like introduction resembling the rhapsody (*fu* 賦) genre. Due to damages to the inscription, we cannot tell the two full personal names. The characters that are left appear like two given names: 蠶休, "godly worm's grace," and 蠶道, "godly worm's Way."[52]

These two names, in addition to their obvious theophoric halo, lead to the biggest obstacle to the "silkworm" interpretation: to my best knowledge, among the tens of thousands of personal names in both traditional literature and archeological findings of the era, there is not a single case of the onomastic use of the character *can* 蠶. Given that *canshi* 蠶室, "silkworm chamber," was where those condemned to castration (including the father of Chinese historiography, Sima Qian 司馬遷) were sent to recuperate after the procedure, the character's absence in Chinese onomastics should not come as a big surprise.

A reviewer has objected to my reading of the two personal names above, insisting on the traditional interpretation that the character 蠶 here represented a surname instead. While complete agreement in this respect may be hard to reach,[53] the surname reading is equally, if not more conspicuously difficult to reconcile with the "silkworm" interpretation. Given the societal obsession with familial lineage and the enormous amount of onomastic sources it has engendered, one can state with an even bigger certainty that the standard character 蠶 *never* appeared as a surname in medieval China. Meanwhile, my alternative interpretation of this "godly worm" character definitely allows it to be used as surname, as will be shown below.

There is indeed at least one more attestation of the "godly worm" personal name: 張蠶兒, "godly worm's child," in a Northern Qi inscription dated 571.[54] Together with the two names cited above, we see familiar patterns of popular Chinese theophoric names. As such, the "godly worm" character is no more than a deified version of 虫, pronounced *hui*, meaning "snake."[55] What the literati prism fails to reflect here is the convergence of two social

50. Compiled by the father-son duo Han Xiaoyan 韓孝彥 and Hao Daozhao 韓道昭 and first published ca. 1212. A Ming dynasty edition is available online from Kyoto University Library. See https://edb.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/exhibit/k64/image/5/k64s0465.html.

51. See, e.g., *QW* 66–70 and *LX* 23.340–52.

52. In addition to its fundamental role in Daoism, the character *dao* 道 was also heavily used in early Chinese Buddhism, almost as an alternative to *fa* 法, "Dharma," so much so that the term *daoren* 道人 frequently referred to Buddhist priests and monks, and had entered the Turco-Mongol world (*toyin*) in this sense. See, e.g., Sir Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-thirteenth-century Turkish* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 569.

53. The use of 蠶 as a surname was already questioned by Qing dynasty scholars. See, e.g., *CS* 2.48b.

54. See the rubbing in *BT* 25. The name is unsurprisingly mistranscribed as 張神蟲 by *QQ* (275).

55. Xu Shen in his monumental etymological dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, cited by *Wei shu* above, interpreted the character 虫 as a pictograph of the snake. See Duan Yucai 段玉裁, annot., *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1992), 663.

phenomena: first, a cultural taboo on directly using the character *she* 蛇, "snake," in personal names, and second, the deification of the twelve-animal cycle to use them as divinities in theophoric names. The "vulgar character" 蟮 thus reflected no more than the snake's newly acquired godly status to those less educated commoners born in the year of the snake. The name 蟮兒 in fact had numerous contemporary parallels without the "godly" component but with unmistakable theophoric interpretations nonetheless: Hui'er 虫兒, "Snake's child"; Huizi/Zihui 虫子/子虫, "Snake's son"; Huiji 虫姬, "Snake's girl"; Huiren 虫仁, "Snake's benevolence"; Dehui 德虫, reversed form of "Snake's virtue/favor"; and Minhui 愍虫, reversed form of "Snake's mercy/love."[56]

A related case distorted by the literati prism is the name Mei Chong'er 梅蟲兒, of an upstart and, according to the official histories, wicked courtier in the Confucian-dominated Southern Qi Dynasty.[57] In addition to the parallel names cited above, three of Mei's four fellow villains listed in *Nan shi* bore theophoric names too, namely Ru Fazhen 茹法珍, "Dharma's treasure"; Zhu Lingyong 祝靈勇, "daemon's bravery"; and Yu Lingyun 俞靈韻, "daemon's charm."[58] In revealing contrast, the northern source *Wei shu*, while echoing the southern gentry's claim that Mei was a crook, correctly named him Hui'er 虫兒, likely because the same name was too popular in the north to mistake.[59] The persisting legacy of the gentry bias is that many modern Chinese books continue to mistranscribe this naming character as 蟲, including the very case of 蟮兒 and numerous other names cited above. The latest such name I could locate belonged to the second son of the Later Liang 後梁 courtier Wu Cun'e 吳存鍔 (d. 917), Wu Huizi 吳虫子, whose name was again mistranscribed to 蟲子 in a recent collection.[60]

Returning to the interpretation of the character 蟮 as a surname, in contrast to the absolute absence of a surname 蠶, the surname 蛇/虵 is attested repeatedly in medieval China,[61] and there were at least two double-surnames containing the character, namely Sheqiu 蛇丘 and Shezhi 虵蛭.[62]

THE HISTORICAL IMAGE OF THE SNAKE IN CHINA

A reviewer has raised a stimulating counterargument to my attribution of the rarely broken taboo on directly naming people *she* 蛇 in medieval China[63] to the widespread repugnant

56. *BP* 9; Li Song 李淞, *Chang'an yishu yu zongjiao wenming* 長安藝術與宗教文明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 427; *DH* 1.229; *HW* 7.183; *LX* 26.170; *SY* 2.15a; 2.17b; *QQ* 224; Wu Gang 吳鋼, comp., *Quan Tang wen buyi* 全唐文補遺 vol. 7 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2000), 218; *QW* 453; etc. Several sources mistranscribed the character 虫 as 蟲. My readings are based on rubbings or photos.

57. *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 77.1933 et passim.

58. Ibid., 47.1182.

59. *Wei shu* 59.1317; 98.2170. A similar case is the hypocorism Chongniang 蟲娘 (*XTS* 83.3660), given to the youngest daughter (Princess Shou'an 壽安) of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–56). The story seems to have come from an earlier source, Duan Chengshi's 段成式 (d. 863) *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 1.2. Based on the limited information available, she was likely of similar age to that of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (born in 726 or 727; r. 762–79), the most senior (by primogeniture) grandson of Emperor Xuanzong, thus born in 729 (己巳). See below on another hypocorism, 大虫婆, directly attested in Tang inscriptional data.

60. Zhou Agen 周阿根, comp. and annot., *Wudai muzhi huikao* 五代墓誌匯考 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2012), 74. My reading 虫子 is based on the rubbing of the epitaph. The name can only represent a childhood name; thus the boy was likely born in 909 (乙巳), the closest snake year, given that his married elder brother already had a formal name, Yanlu 延魯.

61. See, e.g., *Zizhi tongjian* 109.3458 and 117.3697.

62. Lin Bao 林寶, *Yuanhe xingzuan* 元和姓纂 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 5.580; Yu Naiyong 余迺永, *Xinjiao huzhu Songben Guangyun* 新校互注宋本廣韻 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2008), 3.308.

63. Other than the "snake-slave" cited below, I found one rare exception, Yushe 玉虵 (*LX* 24.224), "Jade snake."

cultural image of the snake by pointing out that—unlike in the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament or in Aesop's fable about the farmer and the viper—in ancient China the snake in fact enjoyed a rather respectful cultural image. This perceptive point helps reveal another substantial difference between China's high and popular cultures.

The snake is widely considered a partial yet important origin of the dragon in East Asia, based on solid evidence, not the least the half-snake bodies of China's "Adam and Eve"—Fuxi 伏羲 and Nüwa 女媧—and such early sayings as "the snake morphed into a dragon" 蛇化為龍.[64] The dragon played an unsurpassed role in Chinese mythology as an icon of celestial power and auspice, exemplified, inter alia, by a Sinitic version of the annunciation regarding the godly provenance of the founding emperor of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦.[65] The closely associated snake thus shared some of the positive image of the dragon, mostly in Chinese high culture.

However, to the lower classes, the farmers and laborers toiling on the land and the woods, imperial fortunes would hardly figure in their dreams, whereas snakes, especially the venomous ones, posed real and serious danger, leading to natural fear as well as repugnance. As will be stressed below, Xu Shen ascribed the origin of the character *ta* 他/它 as the third-person pronoun to a well-wishing greeting "nothing (bad) happening?" 無它乎 that originally meant "no snake (attacks)?"—reflecting a deep fear of the reptile.[66] Medieval popular writings repeatedly used the snake as a metaphor for viciousness and calamity. For instance, a Northern Wei colophon to a Buddhist sutra, dated 527, contains the passage: "One has witnessed and experienced warring anarchies, with disasters and evils taking place constantly, as if large serpents were ferociously spitting venoms across thousands of miles" 矚遭離亂，災夭橫發，長蛇竟熾，萬里含毒 (*BN* 189). The word *changshe* 長蛇 as a metaphor for viciousness and greed goes back to as early as *Zuozhuan* 左傳.[67] Apart from such popular negative metaphors as *sheshi* 蛇豕, "snakes and pigs," and *sheshi choulei* 蛇豕醜類, "ugly species like the snake and the pig,"[68] the snake was further lumped together with the *xie* 蝎, "scorpion," to form the binome *shexie* 蛇蝎 as a metaphor for cruelty and viciousness. It was, for instance, frequently used in Xuanzang's 玄奘 translations of Buddhist sutras.[69] *Shexie xinchang* 蛇蝎心腸, "(having) a heart like that of snakes and scorpions," has since become a popular idiom. The word *sishe* 四蛇 "four (venomous) snakes," imported from Buddhism,[70] became a standard allusion to misfortune in medieval inscriptional sources.[71] The strongest evidence for the snake's negative reputation in contemporary consciousness is the famous manifesto denouncing Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 written by Luo Binwang 駱賓王 on behalf of Xu Jingye 徐敬業, a Tang aristocrat who revolted under the pretext of restoring the rightful imperial house. In this masterpiece of propaganda, Luo Bingwang accused Empress Wu of "having the heart of a (venomous) snake and the nature of a wolf"

64. Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 49.1983. This passage appears to have originated with the co-author of the *Shiji*, Mr. Chu 褚先生.

65. Ibid., 8.341.

66. *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 678.

67. Du Yu 杜預, *Chunqiu jingzhuan jijie* 春秋經傳集解 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 27.1630.

68. *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 63.1502 and 85.1900.

69. *Daboreboluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*), T05, 128.700a, T06, 333.707a, etc.

70. *Daboniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*), T12, 23.499c, *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, T53, 78.866c, etc.

71. Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 and Zhao Chao 趙超, comp., *Tangdai muzhi huibian xuji* 唐代墓誌彙編續集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), 1042, *BP* 91, 92, etc.

虺蜴為心，豺狼成性,"[72] a biting example of using elegant literary language to tap into the popular abhorrence of the snake. Small wonder that this public denunciation even won grudging admiration of the politically astute Empress Wu herself, who had earlier changed the surname of her deposed and murdered predecessor from Wang 王 to Mang 蟒, "python, large snake," as an ultimate insult and humiliation.[73]

The above discussion helps explain the rarity of directly naming people *she*, "snake," especially in contrast to the huge number of personal names containing the character *long* 龍, "dragon," in medieval China. Therefore, the original *dizhi* 地支, "earthly branch," sign *si* 巳, corresponding to the snake, provided an alternative option for those born in a snake year, especially to the educated gentry class. Thus we find the following theophoric names: Sinu 巳奴, "Si's slave"; Sixing 巳興, "Si rises/prospers"; Silong 巳隆, "Si prospers"; and Siyan 巳衍, "Si multiplies."[74] Solid proof is found in the tomb inscription of a Tang dynasty gentleman Yang Xian 楊獻,[75] whose given name, meaning "offering," was elegantly paired with the style name Zhensi 貞巳 "loyal to Si." He died on April 11, 720 at age 65 *sui*. By my revised formula, he was indeed born in a snake year (657 丁巳).[76]

The need to highlight the guardian deity for those born in the snake year led to another group of theophoric personal names using *ta* 他 (early medieval pronunciation *t*^{h}*a*),[77] otherwise the standard third-person pronoun in Chinese. This is because 他 and *ta*/*tuo* 它 were interchangeable homophones, either as the third-person pronoun or in other functions.[78] But the latter character, again according to Xu Shen,[79] was yet another pictograph of the snake and represented the very original form of 蛇 (early medieval pronunciation *zia*), with or without the 虫 component. As cited earlier, Xu further intimated that even the character's role as a third-person pronoun had evolved from the "snake" connotation. This is corroborated by the exhaustive listing by Mao Yuanming: in the entire era from the Han dynasties up to the Sui 隋 reunification, the character 蛇 in contemporary inscriptional texts was *always* written as 虵, differing from 他 only by the component to the left.[80] Thus in addition to a deified snake 蟺, we have also an anthropomorphized one in the following names: Ta'er 他兒, "Ta's child"; Tanü 他女, "Ta's daughter"; Tasheng/Tade 他生/他得, "Ta-begotten"; Tamin 他民, "Ta's people"; Tanu 他奴, "Ta's slave"; Taren 他仁, "Ta's benevolence"; Tagui 他貴, "Ta (is) precious/noble" as well as the hypocorism Ata 阿他.[81] In view of *ta*'s 他 morphological

72. *Luocheng ji* 駱丞集 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 1.26. See also the citation and translation by Richard Guisso, "The Reigns of the Empress Wu, Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung (684–712)," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, *Sui and Tang China*, *586–906*, pt. 1, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), 295.

73. *Zizhi tongjian* 203.6424 and 200.6294.

74. *DH* 1.117; Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 et al., comps., *Xinhuo Tulufan chutu wenxian* 新獲吐魯番出土文獻, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 131, 136, 140, and 142.

75. Hu Ji 胡戟 et al., comps., *Da Tang Xishi bowuguan cang muzhi* 大唐西市博物館藏墓誌, 3 vols. (Beijing: Beijing Univ. Press, 2012), 399.

76. "'Age Inflation and Deflation' in Medieval China," *JAOS* 133 (2013): 527–33.

77. Based on Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese*, *Late Middle Chinese*, *and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1990), supplemented by Zhou Jiwen 周季文 and Xie Houfang 謝後芳, *Dunhuang Tufan Han-Zang duiyin zihui* 敦煌吐蕃漢藏對音字匯 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2006).

78. Say, the toponym Tuoshan/Tashan 它山/他山, nowadays only used in the popular idiom *tashanzhishi* 他山之石 "the stone from Mount Tuo/Ta," originally a verse from *Shijing* 詩經 and now a metaphor for drawing on other people's strength or advantages.

79. *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 678.

80. *Han Wei Liuchao yiti zidian*, 778.

81. *BP* 76; *BZ* 22.396a; *CS* 4.513b; *JTS* 142.3868; *LX* 24.313, 25.390, 26.343, 26.480; *QQ* 224, 233, 300; *QS* 377, 386; *QW* 679; *QZ* 74, 100; Wang Yun 汪鋆, *Shi'eryan zhai jinshi guoyanlu* 十二硯齋金石過眼錄, rpt.

role as a third-person pronoun, the "child/daughter" and "slave" names alone may still be classified as plausible opprobrious ones, similar to Mainu 買奴, "bought slave," and Jinu 寄奴, "slave-on-loan." But the other Ta-names, especially the "precious/noble" one, disprove this option. The theophoric nature of this "precious/noble" format is amply shown by such names as Shengui 神貴, "god (is) precious/noble"; Fugui 伏貴, "the Buddha (is) precious/noble"; and Fagui 法貴, "the Dharma (is) precious/noble."[82] As additional evidence, forms without the human component (也, early medieval pronunciation *ya*) as Yeren 也仁, Yenu 也奴, Yenü 也女, Yehe 也和, and Aye 阿也 are also attested.[83]

My interpretation of the above *ta*-group of given names is supported first by the name Shenu 虵奴, "slave/servant of the snake," found in Turfan, around the era of Empress Wu Zetian (*TLF* 7.446). The fact that the name-bearer was a slave likely has contributed to this rare direct onomastic use of 虵. This example, involuntary as it may be, is a good hint for what the component 也 in other names represented. Then we have at least one solid case: that of the Tuoba prince Yuan Ta 元他,[84] a grandson of the founding emperor of the Northern Wei dynasty Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪 (r. 386–409). His biography in *Wei shu* records that Yuan Ta died in the twelfth year of Taihe 太和 (488) at age 73 *sui*.[85] By my revised formula, he was born in 417, a snake year (丁巳).

More evidence is found in the Northern Song 宋 dynasty, when the once popular fad of zoological personal names had largely faded, at least among the elite. It comes from none other than the family of the great historian Sima Guang 司馬光, whose masterpiece chronicle *Zizhi tongjian* is cited repeatedly by the current study. Guang's father, also a well-educated and successful Confucian scholar-official, had the rather rare given name Chi 池. Though Chi's biography in the official dynastic history *Song shi* 宋史 contains neither his year of death nor age at death, a Ming dynasty chronological biography of his son Guang fortunately recorded both based on an inscription extant at the time.[86] Accordingly, Sima Chi passed away on the *guiwei* 癸未 (eighth) day in the twelfth lunar month of the first year of Qingli 慶曆 (or January 2, 1042 according to the Julian calendar), at age 62 *sui*. Therefore, Chi was born in 981, a snake year (辛巳), revealing what the critical component 也 of his name signified. This is also an example of how the literati prism "gentrifies" a popular tradition.

Back to earlier times, given that most preserved tomb inscriptions belonged to the educated gentry, and that zoological names—aside from childhood names—tended to be found only among commoners and lower social strata, I have yet to identify a bearer of a *hui*-name whose birth year can be accurately inferred. But the thesis that such a name represented birth in a snake year is strongly supported by a number of cases. The first is a married gentry woman of the Tang period, née Wu 吳, who died and was buried in 867.[87] Her tomb inscription, written by the bereaved husband, says that the survivors included a daughter nicknamed Dahuipo 大虫婆 who was "still at nursery age" 年方幼稚. Here the character *po* 婆, literally

Lidai beizhi congshu, vol. 12 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), 7.370b; *SY* 2.17a; *XTS* 123.5948; and Duan Songling 段松苓 comp., *Yidu jinshiji* 益都金石記, rpt. *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編, vol. 20 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1982), 1.14816b.

82. *QW* 68, 74, 456.

83. *BN* 181; *LX* 25.343; *QQ* 224; *QW* 496, 616; Shi Anchang 施安昌, *Huotan yu jisi niaoshen: Zhongguo gudai Xianjiao meishu kaogu shouji* 火壇與祭司鳥神：中國古代祆教美術考古手記 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2004), 164 and 174.

84. His given name is also written using the variant character *tuo* 佗. See *Zizhi tongjian* 136.4262.

85. *Wei shu* 16.391.

86. Ma Luan 馬巒, *Sima Guang nianpu* 司馬光年譜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 1.316.

87. Mao Yangguang 毛陽光 and Yu Fuwei 余扶危, comps., *Luoyang liusan Tangdai muzhi huibian* 洛陽流散唐代墓誌彙編, 2 vols. (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2013), 630–31.

"old lady," was an endearing epithet for a young daughter.[88] A contention here is that 大虫 might be misunderstood as 大蟲, "tiger," by the less educated. In this case, the closest tiger year and snake year were 858 戊寅 and 861 辛巳. The former as the birth year of the "big snake lady" would make her 10 *sui* on her mother's death, just one or two years shy of being considered for marriage, hardly fitting the "nursery age" description.[89] The snake year 861 would thus be a much better fit as her birth year.

For additional evidence, first observe that, as exemplified by the case of Sima Chi, the educated gentry tended to avoid "blunt" animal-cycle personal names, whether figuring the animal or the corresponding earthly branch. They would often mask such names by adding to or removing components from the pertinent character. I have many confirmed examples, too numerous to be individually cited, proving the use of *xiang* 祥/詳 and even *mei* 美[90] for *yang* 羊, "sheep"; *tun* 屯 for *tun* 肫, "pig"; and *gai* 該 for *hai* 亥, the earthly branch sign for pig. The use of "ugly," *chou* 醜, to substitute for *you* 酉, which I have studied before, can be regarded as a vulgar form of the same script play.[91]

Along those lines, the gentry-naming *rong* 融, "harmonious," was an attractive replacement for 虫. Indeed, I have identified at least four such cases. The first is the last child-emperor, Xiao Baorong 蕭寶融, of the Southern Qi, who was murdered in 502 at the age of 15 *sui* by his remote clansman Xiao Yan 蕭衍, founding emperor of the succeeding Liang dynasty.[92] Using my revised formula, Baorong was thus born in 489, a snake year (己巳). Further strengthening this case, his brother Baoyin 寶寅/寶夤, the last character being a variant of *yin* 寅, also had a theophoric name marking his birth year. This elder and luckier brother, hunted by Xiao Yan's executioners, barely escaped to Northern Wei territories in 501 at age 16 *sui*, confirming a tiger birth year (486 丙寅).[93] Remarkably, the identical pattern was repeated by another pair of brothers, Gao Baoyin 高保寅 and Baorong 保融, from a warlord family of the Five Dynasties era. While Baoyin's birth year cannot be definitely determined, it is well attested that *yin* is calendric.[94] Based on his biography, Baorong was born in 921, a snake year (辛巳).[95] Moreover, the tomb inscription of a Northern Qi official named Pei Rong 裴融 confirms that he was born in the same snake year (489) as the last emperor of the Southern Qi (*AF* 264). The final case is the famous Tang general Yuchi Jingde 尉遲敬德 (585–658), a legendary hero in both official history and folklore, commonly known by his style name Jingde. He played a critical role in the Xuanwu Gate 玄武門 coup d'état in 626 by killing the then crown prince and securing the enthronement of his patron, the second Tang emperor Li Shimin 李世民 (r. 626–49). Starting with a Northern

88. As shown by three interrelated tomb inscriptions for a Tang dynasty couple Lu Hui 盧繪 et ux, née Li 李; see Zhao Wencheng 趙文成 et al., comps., *Xinchu Tang muzhi baizhong* 新出唐墓誌百種 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe, 2010), 282 and 284; and *QTZ* 373, in which a young daughter of theirs was alternatively called Liupo 劉婆, Liuniang 劉娘, and Liunü 劉女.

89. Numerous Tang tomb inscriptions show that girls started to be married off at the ages of 11 and 12 *sui*. See, e.g., Yao Ping 姚平, *Tangdai funü de shengming licheng* 唐代婦女的生命歷程 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), 8, 10–11.

90. The character 美 can also be considered a variant of *gao* 羔, "lamb." Zhao Tingmei 趙廷美 (original name Kuangmei 匡美, 947–984), younger brother of the first two emperors of the Northern Song dynasty, is an apt example. Another interesting case is Song Xiang 宋庠, principal graduate 狀元 of the national civil service examination in 1024 and a contemporary of Sima Chi. Xiang can be shown to have been born in the sheep year 995 (乙未).

91. "Were 'Ugly Slaves' in Medieval China Really Ugly?" (above n. 28).

92. *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 8.114.

93. *Wei shu* 59.1313.

94. We can cite the noted Ming dynasty painter Tang Yin 唐寅 (style name Bohu 伯虎, 1470–1524) and the world-class ping-pong player Xu Yinsheng 徐寅生 (b. 1938), among many other cases.

95. *Song shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1977), 483.13952 and 483.13955.

Song dynasty source, Jingde's given name has usually been given as Gong 恭 (*XTS* 89.3752). However, his tomb was discovered in 1971, and its inscription clearly listed his given name as Rong 融, matching the fact that he was born in a snake year (乙巳).[96] By the way, the family name Yuchi indicated that Jingde's forefathers came from either a western Xianbei 鮮卑 tribe or the Central Asian city-state of Khotan,[97] another reminder of a multi-ethnic and multicultural medieval China.

96. Wu Gang 吳鋼 et al., comps., *Sui Tang Wudai muzhi huibian Shaanxi juan* 隋唐五代墓誌彙編陝西卷, vol. 3 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1991), 50.

97. Yao Weiyuan 姚薇元, *Beichao huxing kao* 北朝胡姓考 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1958), 189–98. Recently, Xin Wen, "What's in a Surname? Central Asian Participation in the Culture of Naming of Medieval China," *Tang Studies* 34 (2016): 73–98, argued that there was no direct relationship between the Xianbei tribal name and the royal house of Khotan.

ABBREVIATIONS

AF: Jia Zhenlin 賈振林. *Wenhua Anfeng* 文化安豐. Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2011.

BN: Wang Su 王素 and Li Fang 李方, comps. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao Dunhuang wenxian biannian* 魏晉南北朝敦煌文獻編年. Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1997.

BP: Yan Juanying 顏娟英, comp. *Beichao Fojiao shike tuopian baipin* 北朝佛教石刻拓片百品. Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 2008. (Digitized at http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/ko/I and cited by inscription numbers.)

BT: Beijing tushuguan jinshi zu 北京圖書館金石組, comp. *Beijing Tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike tuoben huibian* 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本匯編, vol. 8. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1989.

BZ: Lu Zengxiang 陸增祥, comp. and annot. *Baqiongshi jinshi buzheng* 八瓊室金石補正. Rpt. *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑誌叢書, vols. 9–11. Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998.

CS: Shen Tao 沈濤, comp. *Changshan zhenshi zhi* 常山貞石志. Rpt. *Lidai beizhi congshu*, vol. 12. Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998.

DH: Tang Gen'ou 唐耕耦 and Lu Hongji 陸宏基, comps., *Dunhuang shehui jingji wenxian zhenji shilu* 敦煌社會經濟文獻真跡釋錄, vols. 1–5. Beijing: various publishers, 1986–1990.

HB: Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 and Zhao Chao 趙超, comps. *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992.

HW: Mao Yuanming 毛遠明, comp. and annot. *Han Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu* 漢魏六朝碑刻校注. 10 vols. Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2008.

JTS: Jiu Tang shu 舊唐書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.

LX: *Lu Xun da quanji: Xueshu bian* 魯迅大全集：學術編, vols. 23–26. Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2011.

QQ/*QZ*: Han Lizhou 韓理洲, comp. *Quan Bei Qi Bei Zhou wen buyi* 全北齊北周文補遺. Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2008. (different pagination)

QS: Han Lizhou, comp. *Quan Sui wen buyi* 全隋文補遺. Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2004.

QTZ: Wu Gang 吳鋼, comp. *Quan Tang wen buyi: Qian Tang zhizhai xincang zhuanji* 全唐文補遺：千唐誌齋新藏專輯. Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2006.

QW: Han Lizhou, comp. *Quan Bei Wei Dong Wei Xi Wei wen buyi* 全北魏東魏西魏文補遺 Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe 2010.

SY: Hu Pinzhi 胡聘之, comp. *Shanyou shike congbian* 山右石刻叢編. Rpt. Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1988.

TLF: Tang Changru 唐長孺 et al., comps. *Tulufan chutu wenshu* 吐魯番出土文書, vols. 1–10. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1981–91.

XTS: Xin Tang shu 新唐書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.