

The Five Types of Name: A New Methodology for Interpreting Zhou Dynasty Naming Practices

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Abstract

When a child was born into a family of the ruling elite in Zhou dynasty China (1056-475 BCE), much of its name was already fixed by its position within the patrilinear clan. However, a considerable variety of personal names are recorded in bronze inscriptions and in ancient historical texts. There are a number of discussions of the rules and prohibitions affecting the choice of personal name in ancient China, which are found in books of ritual, and also in the *Zuo Zhuan* and *Lun Heng*. These rules defined the five appropriate types of given name; those that are the result of predetermination, those that have righteous connotations, those that are derived from some physical sign, those that are borrowed from an object, and those which are suggested by a similarity. However, it is clear that these rules were often ignored, for many historical examples are known where the choice of personal name contravened these regulations. In this paper an alternative methodology for understanding the choice of personal names is proposed, based on the surviving stories detailing the ways in which names were actually selected.

In the alternative theory proposed in this paper, personal names in ancient

Manuscript received on: April 10, 2006, Manuscript approved on: October 4, 2006.

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China fell into one of two main groups. The first is names chosen by apparently outside agency: in a dream (where the dreamer was usually the mother) or as a result of a divination ordered by the father. The second is names which commemorated important events in the history of the nation or which recorded an event of great personal significance to one or other of the child's parents. Using this new methodology, the significance of Zhou dynasty personal names can be interpreted in a different light.

Keywords: Zhou dynasty, naming practices, *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳, dreams, divination

1. Introduction

When a child was born into a family of the ruling elite in Zhou dynasty China (1056-475 BCE), much of its name was already fixed. Every child was born into a kin group bound by the same clan name, which defined the patrilineal line and which would impose certain restraints on the child throughout its life. Social status was determined by clan affiliation, and in a society that practised strict clan exogamy, marriages served to align particular lineages generation after generation.¹ In addition to membership of a clan, the new baby also belonged to a particular family. The family name that the child bore was a precise indicator of its position within the extended family. The baby's family name would indicate that child's position as a member of a main lineage or a junior branch, which would in turn define that individual's future ritual relationship with the spirits of his ancestors, and his duties and obligations to other living members of the family.²

In addition to the clan and family name that were already fixed at birth, a

1 See Yoshimoto Michimasa 吉本道雅, "Shunjū Shinha Kō 春秋晉霸考," *Shirin* 史林 76.3 (1993): 91.

2 See Li Xuanbo 李玄伯, *Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Xinyan* 中國古代社會新研 (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1988), p. 42.

baby born into the Zhou ruling elite (the only social group of that era for whom information about naming practices were recorded) would acquire a number of other designations during life and after death. These names would include the baby's personal name, its *zi* 字 or style name, and possibly a title or posthumous title. The personal names, styles and titles of many individuals who lived during the Zhou dynasty have been preserved both in bronze inscriptions and in historical texts such as the *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳 Zuo's Tradition) and the *Shi Ji* (史記 Records of the Grand Historian).

In this article, the process by which personal names were chosen for children during the Zhou dynasty will be considered. First, contemporary accounts of the rules governing parental choice of names will be considered. There are a number of texts in which such rules were recorded and also discussions of the way in which these prohibitions affected parental choice of names. In these ancient accounts of the proper way for parents to choose personal names for their children, five types of names were considered suitable, and a number of guidelines were laid down. In the second part of this paper, stories from ancient historical texts about the processes by which names were actually chosen will be considered.

Although there are only a comparatively small number of stories recording the way in which a name was chosen for a baby in Zhou China, these tales are of great importance for determining the way in which names were selected in practice. The application of the rules described in ancient texts can only be speculative, since the stories recording deliberation about name choice indicate very different priorities. Through analysis of the only surviving detailed accounts of the way in which names were selected, I have developed a new methodology for understanding the choice of personal names during the Zhou dynasty. Almost all stories about name choice concern one of just three families: the Shusun 叔孫 branch of the ruling house of Lu 魯, the main lineage of the ruling house of Zheng 鄭, and the Quwo 曲沃 branch of the ruling house of Jin 晉. As will be seen, all of these stories concern the naming of children born in

the early eighth and late seventh centuries BCE. It is my contention that these stories are all derived from a single text, used as a source by the compilers of the *Zuo Zhuan*.

2. Rules and Prohibitions

From the beginning of the Zhou dynasty, the personal names of members of the royal house and other aristocratic families were recorded in great detail. For example, the first Zhou monarch, King Wen 周文王 (r. 1099/1056-1050 BCE), and his principal wife, Tai Si 太姒, had ten sons. Their oldest son was named Kao 考 (Filial). Their second son, the future King Wu 周武王 (r. 1049/1045-1043 BCE) was named Fa 發 (Prosperous). The third, the founder of the ruling family of Guan 管 was named Xian 鮮 (Fresh). The future Duke of Zhou was named Dan 旦 (Dawn). The fifth, who founded the ruling family of Cai 蔡 was named Du 度 (Measure). The sixth, the founder of the state of Cao 曹 was named Zhenduo 振鐸 (Tolling Bell). The seventh who founded the state of Cheng 成 was named Wu 武 (Warrior). The eighth, the founder of the state of Huo 霍 was named Chu 處 (Place). The ninth who founded the ruling family of Wei 衛 was named Feng 封 (Boundary Marker). Finally, the founder of the ruling family of Ran 冉 was named Zai 載 (Conveyance).³ King Wen of Zhou had a number of children by other women, but this group of sons and their descendants was to form the foundation of the ruling class in the Zhou confederacy.⁴ All the given names of the sons of King Wen and his principal wife were recorded, making this the most detailed list available of the naming practices within a single generation of one family. However, in no case was the reason for the choice of a particular given name recorded. Although some of the

3 See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi Ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, [1959] 1964), 35: 1563. Henceforward *Shi Ji*.

4 See Zhao Guangxian 趙光賢, *Zhoudai Shehui Bianxi* 周代社會辨析 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1980), p. 111.

names are suggestive, any interpretation can only be speculative.

The most important account of the rules by which the personal name of a new baby was chosen during the Zhou dynasty is found in the *Zuo Zhuan*. This account of the rules and prohibitions governing the choice of a name has dominated later discussions of this issue, both in ancient times and in modern scholarship on the subject.⁵ The background to this account of Zhou dynasty naming practice is as follows: In the sixth year of the reign of Lord Huan of Lu 魯桓公 (r. 711-694 BCE), on Dingmao 丁卯 day in the ninth lunar month (corresponding to 5th October 706 BCE in the Western calendar), his principal wife, a daughter of the ruling family of Qi 齊, gave birth to a son. This event was the cause of great celebration in the capital, and a Tailao 太牢 sacrifice was held, at which an ox, a sheep and a pig were killed. Then came the day for naming the baby (usually held around three months after the birth), a ceremony at which both parents of the new-born were important participants.⁶ Lord Huan of Lu took his responsibility for naming his son seriously, for he consulted a grandee of the state of Lu, Shen Xu 申繻, on how to choose a suitable name. Shen Xu described to his lord the process by which a name should be chosen for the new arrival, and classified appropriate names according to a five-part division:

There are five [types of] given name; there are those that are the result of predetermination, those that have righteous connotations, those that are derived from some physical sign, those that are borrowed [from an object], and those which are suggested by a similarity. When a child is named after a sign at birth, it is predetermination; when the baby is named after a virtue, it has righteous connotations; when a child is called after some similarity in appearance, then it is a physical sign; when the name is taken from an object, it is called borrowing; when it is taken from the father, it is called similarity.

You cannot use the name of a state, an official title, a mountain or river name,

5 See for example Ji Xiuqin 籍秀琴, *Zhongguo Renming Tanxi* 中國人名探析 (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Chubanshe, 1993), pp. 15-20.

6 See Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Yi Li Zhengyi* 儀禮正義 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1990), p. 369 [Sangfu 喪服].

illnesses, domesticated animals, utensils or sacrificial vessels as the name [of a child]. Zhou people observe a name taboo when serving the spirits [of the dead]; a name [borne by the living] is taboo after death. Therefore to name a baby after a state is to do away with that [state's] name; to name a baby after an official title is to do away with that post; to use the name of a mountain or river would do away with that feature; to use the name of a domestic beast would mean they could not be used for sacrifice; to use the name of a utensil or ceremonial item would do away with the proper rituals. Because of Marquis Xi 晉僖公 (r. 840-823 BCE), Jin had to dispense with the title of Situ 司徒 (Minister of Education);⁷ because of Duke Wu 宋武公 (r. 765-748 BCE) Song can no longer have a Sikong 司空 (Minister of Works),⁸ our own former lords Xian 魯獻公 and Wu 魯武公 (r. 825-816 BCE) have done away with two mountain names.⁹ This is the reason why such great things cannot be used to name a child.¹⁰

During the Eastern Han dynasty (CE 25-220), in the “Jeishu” (詰術 Investigating Skills) chapter of the *Lun Heng* (論衡 Doctrines Weighed), the author Wang Chong 王充 (CE 27-c.100) commented on this passage of the *Zuo Zhuan*. He cited various examples from Chinese history which he believed to be examples of these five kinds of appropriate naming practice. As an example of *xin* 信 or predetermination, he cited the case Ji You 季友, a Prime Minister of the state of Lu, who was born with a mark on his hand reading *You* (Friend).¹¹

7 Marquis Xi of Jin had the given name of Situ, as a result of which after his death the title of this office had to be changed to Zhongjun 中軍 in this state.

8 Duke Wu of Song had the given name of Sikong, which meant that in this state the title of this office had to be changed to Sicheng 司城.

9 Lord Xian of Lu had the given name of Ju 具, and Lord Wu the name of Ao 敖. They were named after two mountains in what is now Mengyin county 蒙陰縣 in Shandong province. After their deaths, these two names became taboo, so the mountains were renamed. These events were also mentioned in the *Guo Yu*; see Shanghai Shifan Daxue Guji Zhenglizu 上海師範大學古籍整理組, *Guo Yu* 國語 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1978), p. 487 [*Jin Yu* 晉語 9].

10 Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan Zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981), pp. 115-117 [Huan 6]. Henceforward *Zuo Zhuan*.

11 This story was given a number of times in ancient texts; see for example *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 263-264 [Min 2]; p. 1520 [Zhao 32], and *Shi Ji*, 33: 1533-1534.

As examples of *yi* 義 or righteous connotations, Wang Chong cited the examples of Kings Wen and Wu of Zhou, whose personal names were highly auspicious. King Wen of Zhou was named Chang 昌 (Splendid) and his son's name meant "prosperous." As examples of *xiang* 象 or physical signs, he quoted the case of Confucius, who had the given name Qiu 丘 (Mound), since he was said to have been born with a caul.¹² As an example of *jia* 假 or naming children after objects or living things, Wang Chong quoted the case of Lord Zhao of Song 宋昭公 (r. 619-611 BCE) who had the given name of Chujiu 杵臼 (Pestle and Mortar).¹³ It is however not at all clear that these names were actually chosen according to the principles laid down by Shen Xu in that passage of the *Zuo Zhuan*, particularly since some of these examples cited predated this formulation of naming rules by many centuries. Although every surviving account of Zhou dynasty naming practices used the same terminology as that found in the *Zuo Zhuan*, it is possible that this is merely the earliest surviving account of a much older set of rules governing the choice of a baby's name.

As described above, in addition to his explanation of the five acceptable ways to choose the name of a child, Shen Xu also laid down a series of prohibitions. He argued that due to the importance of name taboos in Zhou society, it was inappropriate to call children by certain kinds of name.¹⁴ However these principles were clearly by no means universally accepted, as he himself recounted various instances in which the names of mountains and official titles needed to be changed to take account of name taboos. His prohibition on the

12 An alternative explanation is that Confucius was named after the mound at which his mother prayed for a son; see Lionel M. Jensen, "The Genesis of Kongzi in Ancient Narrative: The Figurative as Historical," in Thomas Wilson ed., *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Society, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 196.

13 See Beijing Daxue Lishixi *Lun Heng Zhushi Xiaozu* 北京大學歷史系論衡注釋小組, *Lun Heng Zhushi* 論衡注釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), pp. 1424-1425 [Ji Shu Pian].

14 For a discussion of the importance of name taboos in Zhou society; see Michel Soymié, "Observations sur les Caractères Interdits en Chine," *Journal Asiatique* 278.3/4 (1990): 378-379.

use of states' names was also not generally observed, for during the Spring and Autumn period it is known that a number of rulers had personal names which were also the names of contemporary states or kingdoms. For example Lord Xuan of Wei 衛宣公 (r. 718-700 BCE) had the given name Jin 晉, Lord Cheng of Wei 衛成公 (r. 634-600 BCE) had the given name Zheng 鄭, Lord Ding of Lu 魯定公 (r. 509-495 BCE) was called Song 宋, and Lord Hui of Chen 陳惠公 (r. 533-506 BCE) was named Wu 吳. It has therefore been suggested that the prohibition on using the name of a state as a given name was only intended to apply to the name of one's own native state. Likewise it seems that during the Zhou dynasty people also were not supposed to use the names of diseases, utensils or ceremonial equipment as personal names. However these rules also seem to have been broken: for example, the name of a domestic animal was used for naming the son of a minister of Lu, Shusun Muzi 叔孫穆子, a child who was given the personal name of Niu 牛 (Ox).¹⁵

The account given of Lord Huan's discussions with Shen Xu is the fullest description to have been recorded of the principles that supposedly lay behind Zhou practice in naming a baby. All subsequent accounts of the rules used during the Zhou dynasty found in ancient texts seem to have been drawn from this, or perhaps from the same source. For example according to the "Qu Li" (曲禮 Ritual Minutiae) chapter in the *Li Ji* (禮記 Records of Ritual) certain types of name were frowned on during the Zhou dynasty:

When naming a child, do not use [the name of] countries, astronomical features, diseases or mountains and rivers.¹⁶

This account of prohibitions differs from that found in the *Zuo Zhuan* only in the inclusion of astronomical features. In spite of this, as with the guidelines laid down by Shen Xu, several feudal lords of the Spring and Autumn period are known to have had personal names of this kind. Thus Lord Zhuang of Cai 蔡莊

15 See *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 1256-1257 [Zhao 4].

16 Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Li Ji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1990), p. 37 [Qu Li].

公 (r. 645-612 BCE) had the given name Jiawu 甲午 (Day Thirty-one according to the stem and branches system), and Lord Xi of Lu 魯僖公 (r. 659-627 BCE) had the given name Shen 申 (Ninth Jupiter Station).¹⁷ The “Neize” (內則 Inner Regulations) chapter of the *Li Ji* recapped the list given in the “Qu Li” section of the text, stating that it was unsuitable to name a baby after astronomical entities, states or diseases.¹⁸ However there is no evidence that these prohibitions had any effect at all upon the naming practices of the ruling elite.

Although Shen Xu gave an apparently comprehensive account of the way that given names were chosen, scholars have found numerous examples where these prohibitions were clearly not followed. In spite of this and other less comprehensive lists given in ancient texts on ritual, there is no evidence that these suggestions and prohibitions were actually followed by parents seeking suitable given names for their children. There are a number of accounts in ancient Chinese historical texts of the ways in which parents chose the given name of their children during the Zhou dynasty, and these stories suggest other beliefs and motivations were at work. Actual accounts of how parents chose their children’s names fall roughly into two categories, names suggested by outside agencies (such as dreams and divinations), and names that commemorated the personal history of either one of the child’s parents.

3. Dreaming or Divining a Name

When Shen Xu listed the five ways of choosing a name for a baby, the first that he mentioned was predetermination. This has traditionally been interpreted

17 In the case of Shen, Lord Xi of Lu, it is also possible that he was called after the state of Shen, in what is now Henan 河南 province.

18 See Kong Yingda, *Li Ji Zhengyi*, p. 535 [Neize]. The *Li Ji* was a text compiled over a long period of time by many different authors; see Jeffrey Riegel, “Li chi,” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993. “Early China Special Monograph Series,” 2), p. 293. It is therefore significant that very much the same prohibitions appeared in two different chapters.

to refer to the occasions where the name of the baby appeared as a physical sign upon its body,¹⁹ also known as *ziming* 自名 (self-naming).²⁰ There are a number of stories of this kind recorded in texts such as the *Zuo Zhuan* and *Shi Ji*. In each case the birth of the child with a sign upon its skin was the validation of a particular choice of name rather than the beginning of the process. The child's name was first revealed to its mother in a dream, and then confirmed by a physical sign apparent once the child was born.

The earliest account (in terms of the antiquity of the events described) of the name of a baby being revealed in a dream is the story which described the naming of the founder of the state of Jin. Tang Shu Yu 唐叔虞 was a younger son of King Wu of Zhou and his principal wife, Lady Yi Jiang 邑姜, and therefore full-brother to the future King Cheng of Zhou 周成王 (r. 1042/1035-1006 BCE). The name Yu was revealed to the child's mother in a dream:

At the time when King Wu and Shu Yu's mother met, she dreamed that Heaven said to King Wu: "I command this woman to have a son, and his name shall be Yu 虞 (Consideration), and I will give him [the lands of] Tang." When she gave birth to a son, there was a mark on his hand that read: "Yu." Therefore, they followed the command and named him Yu.²¹

In this instance, a woman dreamt of the future greatness of her unborn child, and the validity of her dream was subsequently "proved" by the mark on her son's hand. At that time, Tang was not yet part of the Zhou confederacy,

19 In one case, a baby was said to have been born with its future title inscribed on its skin. Zhongzi 仲子, the daughter of Lord Wu of Song 宋武公 (r. 765-748 BCE), was supposedly born with the characters Lu Furen 魯夫人 (Principal Wife of [the Lord of] Lu) on the palm of her hand. She later married Lord Hui of Lu 魯惠公 (r. 768-723 BCE), and was the mother of Lord Huan; see *Zuo Zhuan*, 3-4 [Yin 1]. This story is discussed in Chen Pan 陳槃, *Chunqiu Dashibiao Lieguo Juexing ji Cunmiebiao Zhuanyi* 春秋大事表列國爵姓及存滅表讓異 (Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo, 1969), 1: 20a.

20 See Li Zongtong 李宗侗, *Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Shi* 中國古代社會史 (Taipei: Zhonghua Wenhua Chubanshe, 1954), p. 180.

21 *Shi Ji*, 39: 1635.

however during the early years of the reign of King Cheng these lands were conquered by the Duke of Zhou. King Cheng subsequently enfeoffed his younger brother with this territory, thus completely fulfilling the prophecy. Stories like this have occasionally been cited as examples of predetermination: where the name is confirmed by an unusual configuration of lines on the palm of the baby's hand. However, in such cases the appearance of the marks was a confirmation of the name already chosen by the ancestors or the gods and revealed in a dream. There are a number of other known cases where names were conferred on the unborn by deities, where the mother-to-be also reportedly dreamt of a visitation by a spirit or god. These stories lacked the confirmation of a physical sign afterwards, but are otherwise very similar in form and content to the tale of the naming of Tang Shu Yu described above. It is therefore clear that the preliminary dream was the most important factor for revealing the child's name, and the confirming physical signs were not necessary.

As an example of this, in 649 BCE, a concubine of Lord Wen of Zheng 鄭文公 (r. 672-628 BCE) dreamt that a spirit appeared to her to prophesy that her son would bring greatness to her husband's state:

Lord Wen of Zheng had a concubine of humble origins, Lady Ji of [the Southern] Yan, who dreamed that a heavenly messenger gave her an orchid, and said: "I am Botiao 伯儵. I am your ancestor. By this sign will you have a son. The orchid will be fragrant [throughout] the state, so men will serve and love him." After this, Lord Wen came to see her; he gave her an orchid, and slept with her. She demurred, saying: "Your concubine is unworthy. Should I be fortunate enough to have a son, I will not be believed [when I say that someone as humble as I am could attract the attention of my lord]. Can I dare to prove it by this orchid?" The lord said: "You may." She gave birth to Lord Mu 鄭穆公 (r. 627-606 BCE) and he was named Lan 蘭 (Orchid).²²

A very similar version of this story appeared in the *Shi Ji* chapter on the Hereditary House of Zheng.²³ Although Lord Wen had sons by other more

22 *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 672-674 [Xuan 3].

23 See *Shi Ji*, 42: 1765.

senior wives, Lan was eventually appointed his official Heir Apparent, and so in due course became the ruler of the state of Zheng, thus fulfilling the prophecy that had been revealed to his mother in a dream. Interestingly, in this story the ancestral spirit chose the name before his descendant was even pregnant. Lan, Lord Mu of Zheng, was said to have felt some sort of mystic connection to the plant that he was named after, for according to the *Zuo Zhuan*, he believed that his life was dependant on that of the orchid. Therefore when the plant was cut down, Lord Mu also died.²⁴

In all but one of the accounts of a baby being named as a result of a prophetic dream, the dreamer was the mother. It is possible that by couching her request for a particular name in this indirect way, a woman (especially if of humble origins) was more likely to achieve her wish. The most confused example of a story about a child being named as a result of a prophetic dream is that which describes the naming of the future Lord Ling of Wei 衛靈公 (r. 534-493 BCE). According to the *Zuo Zhuan*, Lord Xiang of Wei 衛襄公 (r. 543-535 BCE) had no children with his principal wife, but a concubine, Zhou E 媯始, had borne him a son Mengzhi 孟摯. A number of Wei dignitaries were said to have had prophetic dreams around the time that she became pregnant with her second child:

Kong Chengzi 孔成子 (a Minister of Wei) dreamt that Kang Shu 康叔 said to him: “Establish Yuan 元 (First) and I will make Luo’s grandson Yu 圉 (Kong Chengzi’s son) and Historiographer Gou 苟 (the son of Historiographer Chao) serve as his ministers.” Historiographer Chao also dreamt that Kang Shu said to him: “I am going to command that your son Gou and Kong Chengzi’s great-grandson Yu will be ministers to Yuan.” Historiographer Chao went to see Kong Chengzi and told him about his dream, and their dreams tallied... Zhou E gave birth to a son, and he was named Yuan.²⁵

This story was followed by the tale of a subsequent divination which Lord

24 See *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 675 [Xuan 3].

25 *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 1297-1298 [Zhao 7].

Xiang ordered to determine which of his two sons by Zhou E he should appoint as his Heir Apparent. His older son Mengzhi was a cripple, but took precedence over his younger brother Yuan because Zhou ruling families practised primogeniture. The divination, described in the *Zuo Zhuan* in the greatest detail, was performed by Historiographer Chao. It caused some confusion, since the advice was to appoint the “First.” Such an instruction was highly ambiguous, since Mengzhi was the first son, but Yuan’s name meant “First.” This divination was eventually interpreted as meaning that they should appoint Yuan, who in due course became Lord Ling.²⁶

The version of this story given in the *Shi Ji* has been transformed from this earlier account. As a result, it is remarkably similar to the tale of the naming of Lord Mu of Zheng described above. However in this story, the mother of the future Lord Ling of Wei is said to have been entirely ignorant of the identity of the ancestral spirit that named her child:

Lord Xiang had a concubine of humble origins, but he favoured her and she became pregnant, and she dreamt that a man said to her: “I am Kang Shu, and I command that your child will be sure to have (ie. inherit) Wei, and you should name your child Yuan.” The concubine thought this strange, and so she asked Kong Chengzi about it. Chengzi said: “Kang Shu was the founding ancestor of Wei.” When she gave birth to her child, it was a son, and so she told Lord Xiang about it. Lord Xiang said: “This has been laid down by Heaven.” They named him Yuan. Lord Xiang’s principal wife did not have any children, therefore Yuan was made the heir, and he became Lord Ling.²⁷

As with other stories of this kind, Lord Xiang of Wei did not need a physical sign to convince him of the importance of the name revealed in a dream. The story of the naming of Yuan, Lord Ling of Wei, altered a great deal between the versions recorded in the *Zuo Zhuan* and the *Shi Ji*. The aim of the changes seems to have been to bring this story into line with other tales of pregnant

26 See *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 1297 [Zhao 7].

27 *Shi Ji*, 37: 1598.

women receiving intimations from the gods or ancestors that their unborn child would be great, or a saviour of the nation. It is possible that this story was invented to explain the reasons for Yuan's appointment as Heir Apparent, when he was not of suitably noble birth on his mother's side, which would normally have completely disbarred him from the succession,²⁸ and had older male siblings.

The story of the naming of Lord Ling of Wei is interesting, since the version of this tale found in the *Zuo Zhuan* combined the two main outside agencies used to choose a baby's name: dreaming and divination. There are a number of ancient accounts where children were named purely as a result of divinations. The first example of this naming practice comes from the state of Lu, where a name was being chosen by divination for the youngest son of Lord Huan and his wife, Lady Wen Jiang 文姜, identified in the *Shi Ji* as a daughter of the feudal lord of Chen.²⁹ The name selected by the diviner, You 友 meaning "friend," was subsequently reinforced by the appearance of this character on the new-born baby's hand. As mentioned above, this story was cited by Wang Chong in the *Lun Heng* as an example of predetermination:

When Cheng Ji 成季 was about to be born, Lord Huan asked the father of Diviner Chuqiu 楚丘 to make a divination about it [using an oracle bone]. He said: "It is a son, and his name is You. He will stand at his lord's right hand, and take his place between the two state altars, and he will be a support to the ruling house. When the House of Ji is destroyed, Lu will not flourish." Then he divined it with milfoil, and met with the hexagram Dayou 大有 (14: "Great Possession") going to the hexagram Qian 乾 (1: "The Heavenly Principle").

28 Feudal lords covenanted a number of times during the Spring and Autumn period that they would not accept the elevation of the son of a concubine to the position and honours of legitimate children. This was an attempt to prevent fathers from raising their favourite children born to mothers of plebeian origins to the position of Taizi 太子 (Heir Apparent) which would ensure their eventual succession, in favour of sons of noble birth on both sides of the family; see Li Zongtong, *Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Shi*, p. 155.

29 See *Shi Ji*, 33: 1533.

He said: “He will return to the same level as his father. He will be respected as if he were in the lord’s place.” When he was born, there was a mark on his hand that read “You,” and so they named him according to that.³⁰

In this case divination fulfilled a very similar role to that of dreaming in the previous examples. The name was revealed to the parent prior to the birth of the child, and the appropriateness of this particular name was confirmed by the appearance of a sign on the baby’s hand. The important distinction was that usually names were revealed in dreams to the mother, and through divination to the father. The naming of Ji You 季友 is the only known occasion where a given name chosen through divination was supported by a physical sign. As with names revealed in dreams, this validation was not normally necessary, as can be seen when the twin children of Lord Hui of Jin 晉惠公 (r. 650-637 BCE) had their given names chosen as a result of a divination performed before they were even born:

When Lord Hui [of Jin] was in exile in Liang, the Earl of Liang gave him [his daughter] in marriage. Lady Ying of Liang became pregnant, but she carried her baby beyond full term. Diviner Father Zhao and his son made a divination about it. His son said: “She will give birth to a boy and a girl.” Zhao said: “That is so. The boy will become a servant and the girl a concubine.” Therefore [Lord Hui] named the boy Yu 圉 (Groom)³¹ and the girl Qie 妾 (Concubine). When Yu went to be a hostage in the west [in Qin], Qie became a concubine.³²

Lord Hui, whose given name was Yiwu 夷吾, was a younger son of Lord Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (r. 676-651 BCE). Lord Xian was regarded with some disfavour by his peers, for having forced his oldest son and heir to commit

30 *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 263-264 [Min 2]. An alternative version of this story stated that when Wen Jiang realised she was pregnant, she consulted a diviner, and received the immensely favourable verdict; see *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 1520 [Zhao 32].

31 Although the divination merely stated that the child would become a servant, when the baby was named he was called after a particularly low-grade occupation; see Li Zongtong 李宗侗, “Chunqiu Shidai Shehui de Biantong 春秋時代社會的變動,” *Wenshizhe Xuebao* 文史哲學報, 22 (1973): 263.

32 *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 372-373 [Xi 17].

suicide, and driven a number of his other children into exile. The future Lord Hui, as was mentioned in the passage above, went into exile in Liang, his mother's native state, so his wife would therefore also have been his cousin. The terms of the divination would have caused considerable shock; it should have been unthinkable for members of a ruling house in the Zhou confederacy, a kinsman of the king, to assume such lowly roles as groom and concubine, both of which implied humble origins and very low social status.³³ The aim of naming the two babies after their supposed future social status was to turn their luck, to ensure that by bearing these names they would not have to undertake these low-class professions. As it happens, in spite of the unfavourable divination, the male twin Yu never became a groom. In due course he succeeded his father as Lord Huai of Jin 晉懷公 (r. 635 BCE). However he was murdered soon after his accession by order of his uncle by marriage, Lord Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659-621 BCE), as part of a coup-d'état, which successfully installed his uncle the Honourable Chonger 晉公子重耳 as the second Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 635-628 BCE).

In the two examples where a child was named after a divination had been performed, the term used to describe the divination technique was *bu* 卜 (divination by cracking a bone or shell). This ancient technique for communicating with the gods was developed many centuries earlier, under the Shang dynasty. It was also used then for divination during pregnancy, to consult the deities on the sex of the unborn infant, and whether the mother would survive the birth.³⁴ This divination technique was still popular during the Zhou dynasty, and was regularly used by ruling families, with the assistance of professional court diviners. It would seem likely that when parents asked for a divination

33 It has been argued that this kind of story showed that no one was exempt from the upheavals of the Spring and Autumn period; see Cho-yun Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility 722-222 BC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 14.

34 See Edward L. Shaughnessy, *I Ching: The Classic of Changes* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996) p. 3, for the description of a series of divinations on the sex of an unborn child, and the chances of survival of the mother.

about the future of an unborn child, they believed that they were in some way communicating with the spirits.³⁵ This method of naming a baby is therefore closely related to that of dreaming the name, since in each case the name was allocated before birth by some outside supernatural agency, and might be confirmed after the baby was born by some mysterious sign upon its body.

4. Commemorative Naming: Great Events and Personal Histories

In addition to the stories about children receiving their given names at the behest of ancestral spirits or deities, or as a result of divinations, there were also tales told of babies who were named in commemoration of contemporary events. The feudal lords of Zhou China might naturally wish to name children after events of particular significance to the states they ruled. According to the *Zuo Zhuan*, eight generations after Tang Shu Yu, his descendant Lord Mu of Jin 晉穆公 (r. 811-785 BCE) was responsible for naming two of his sons after important events in the history of the state of Jin. The reasoning behind this choice of given name is very clearly described:

In the fourth year of the reign of Lord Mu (808 BCE), he married a lady from the Jiang family in Qi, and made her his principal wife. In the seventh year (802 BCE), he attacked the Tiao (a tribe of the Rong nomadic people). [In the same year] his Heir Apparent Chou 雋 (Enemy) was born. In the tenth year (799 BCE), he attacked Qianmu, and was successful. His younger son was born [the same year], and he named him Chengshi 成師 (Victorious Army). Shi Fu, a man of Jin, said: “The way that your lordship has named your sons is quite unorthodox! The Heir Apparent is called Chou, and Chou means enemy. Your younger son is called Chengshi, and a victorious army is a great name, he is the one who will complete it. A name comes from fate; things come

35 Not all accounts of divinations on the birth of a child resulted in a name being chosen, sometimes they were performed to discover the baby's future; see for example *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 222-224 [Zhuang 22].

from what is settled. Now the names of your legitimate and commoner sons encroach upon each other. After this, how can Jin avoid being caught up in rebellion?”³⁶

As described here, circumstances occasionally resulted in younger sons having apparently more auspicious names than their older siblings. In this case there is no evidence that name choice reflected a difference in parental interest and affection. Chou, the future first Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 780-746 BCE), was to have a distinguished career as a great Zhou loyalist, supporting King Ping of Zhou 周平王 (r. 770-720 BCE). King Ping’s “Wen Hou zhi Ming” (文侯之命 Charge to Marquis Wen), listing the gifts with which he was rewarded, can be found in the *Shu Jing* (書經 Book of Documents).³⁷ Lord Wen’s rule does not seem to have been troubled by his younger brother. In the reign of Lord Wen’s son, Lord Zhao of Jin 晉昭公 (r. 745-740 BCE), Chengshi was given the fief of Quwo; he was then aged fifty-eight. This was a significant grant of land; the city of Quwo was at that time supposedly larger than the Jin capital of Yi 翼. From this base, Chengshi’s grandson, Lord Wu of Quwo 曲沃武公 (r. 715-677 BCE) would launch a usurpation of the title of Marquis of Jin, which ended in 679 BCE when he successfully dispossessed the main line of the family, the descendants of Chou.

In 616 BCE, a tribe of the Di 狄 nomadic people attacked Qi and then turned against the state of Lu. At this time, the people of the Zhou confederacy had an extremely ambivalent attitude towards the nomads, fear and hatred alternating with respect for their strength and toughness. The

36 *Shi Ji*, 39: 1637. This passage is apparently derived from the account given in the *Zuo Zhuan* of the reasons for the enmity between the main branch of the Marquisate of Jin, and the junior branch enfeoffed at Quwo 曲沃; see *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 91-92 [Huan 2].

37 See Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Shang Shu Zhengyi* 尚書正義 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1990), pp. 306-308 [Wen Hou zhi Ming]. This charge was addressed respectfully to Father Yi 義 (Righteous). It has been suggested that this auspicious word, rather than his personal name, was used in order to create a better sounding address. See Qu Wanli 屈萬里, *Shu Yong Lun Xue Ji* 書備論學集 (Taipei: Kaiming Shudian, 1969), p. 103.

general in command of the Lu forces, having defeated the Di in battle, chose to commemorate his enemies by naming his sons after the great warriors he had seen killed:

On Jiawu 甲午 day in the tenth month in the winter, [the forces of Lu] defeated the Di at Xian 鹹, and captured Qiaoru 僑如 of the Chang Di 長狄 people.³⁸ Fufu Zhongsheng 富父終甥 stabbed him in the throat with a spear, and killed him. They buried his head at the Ziju 子駒 gate [of the outer wall of the Lu capital]. [Shusun Dechen 叔孫得臣, the Lu general] named [his son, who had the style-name] Xuanbo 宣伯 after him.³⁹

Fufu Zhongsheng was one of the men who stood on the general's chariot, and so Shusun Dechen had seen the man killed before his eyes. It seems that Qiaoru was not the only member of the Chang Di people who died on this occasion. The general was said to have named two other sons after Chang Di warriors killed at Xian. His second son Bao 豹 (Leopard), also known as Shusun Muzi 叔孫穆子, was named after another enemy fighter, as was his son Hui 虺 (Viper). Hui was also known by the name of Shusun Zhaobo 叔孫昭伯, or by his style Dai 帶.⁴⁰ These given names reflected Shusun Dechen's own personal experience, as he had commanded the Lu army at the battle of Xian at which these three Chang Di warriors died. But these names also commemorated an important event in the history of the state of Lu, turning away a major invasion by the nomadic peoples of the north.

Children were sometimes named after great events of the day that affected the destinies of nations, but on other occasions the reasons for the name were

38 Some scholars consider that Qiaoru was the name of this particular branch of the Chang Di people, rather than the name of an individual; see Shu Dagang 舒大剛, *Chunqiu Shaoshu Minzu Fenbu Yanjiu* 春秋少數民族分布研究 (Taipei: Wenjin Chubanshe, 1994), pp. 48-49. The internal organization and differentiation between the various nomadic peoples of ancient China such as the Di were very poorly recorded in Zhou Chinese texts, and there was clearly considerable confusion in the *Zuo Zhuan* between the names of tribal leaders and the names of their people.

39 *Zuo Zhuan*, pp. 581-582 [Wen 11].

40 See *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 1171 [Xiang 30].

entirely personal to the parents. In the very first year that the history of the Zhou confederacy was recorded by the *Chunqiu* (春秋 Spring and Autumn Annals) and the *Zuo Zhuan*, a baby son was named for a distressing event that would overshadow much of his life:

Lord Wu of Zheng 鄭武公 (r. 770-744 BCE) married in Shen, and [his principal wife] was called Lady Wu Jiang 武姜, who gave birth to Lord Zhuang 鄭莊公 (r. 743-703 BCE) and Gong Shu Duan 共叔段 (Hammer).⁴¹ Lord Zhuang was born in the breach position, which distressed Lady Jiang, and so he was named Wusheng 寤生 (Breach Birth). This was the reason why she hated him, but she loved Gong Shu Duan, and wanted to establish him [as his father's Heir Apparent].⁴²

According to the *Shi Ji*, Lord Wu of Zheng married his wife in 761 BCE which was the tenth year of his reign, their oldest son was born in 757 BCE, the fourteenth year of his father's reign, and Duan three years after that in 754 BCE.⁴³ Lord Zhuang therefore succeeded to the title in his early teens, caught in an extremely difficult family situation, which had begun with the pain and distress he caused his mother at his birth. His mother encouraged her younger son to rebel against his authority even though Lord Zhuang had generously enfeoffed him with the lands of Jing 京, an important grant within the borders of Zheng. In the end their relationship broke down to the point where Lord Zhuang swore that he would never see his mother again. Although they were eventually reconciled, much of Lord Zhuang's life was overshadowed by the circumstances of his birth, commemorated in his name. In this case, it would seem likely that the given name was chosen by the mother, commemorating the process of a difficult birth. The inauspicious connotations of the name were thoroughly borne out by the way in which Wusheng was treated by his mother.

41 Commentators dispute the meaning of Gong in this name; some say that it was a posthumous title, others that he lived in a place called Gong. Shu indicated the child's position in the family by birth order, and Duan was his given name.

42 *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 10 [Yin 1].

43 See *Shi Ji*, 42: 1759.

As mentioned above, the naming of the son of Lord Huan of Lu is recorded in considerable detail in the *Zuo Zhuan*, not least because it drew forth a long disquisition from Shen Xu on the proper choice of a name. In the end, it is clear that Lord Huan chose a name based on a coincidence in the relationship between himself and his newborn son, rather than in accordance with the rules set out by his minister:

Lord [Huan of Lu] said: “This birth was on the same day as mine, so I shall name him Tong 同 (Same).”⁴⁴

This story is usually regarded as the only known example of *lei* 類 (similarity) where a father named a child after some similarity between their circumstances. It would perhaps be more useful to regard it as one of a series of examples found in the history of the Zhou dynasty, where a baby was named in a personal commemoration by one or other of its parents.

In 662 BCE, a child named Pan 般 (Turn Around) was killed as a result of court intrigues over the succession in the state of Lu. The character used to name this child was possibly used instead of the character Pan 盤 (Basin), these two characters being interchangeable in ancient texts.⁴⁵ Although this was not explicitly stated, the name suggests that he was called after an event of great significance to his mother, the wife of Lord Zhuang of Lu 魯莊公 (r. 693-662 BCE):

[Lord Zhuang] built a terrace, which overlooked [the home of the] Zhang family, and he saw Lady Meng Ren 孟任, and followed her. She shut the door [on him]. He spoke of making her his principal wife, and she agreed to it, cutting her arm to make a blood-covenant with the lord. She gave birth to Zi Pan 子般.⁴⁶

It is not absolutely clear if this is an example of a child being named after

44 *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 117 [Huan 6].

45 See Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, [1957] 1987), pp. 67-68.

46 *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 253 [Zhuang 32].

a matter of great personal importance to his mother, but it is likely that Pan was named to commemorate the covenant made between his parents. The final example of naming a child to commemorate a personal history was mentioned in the *Zuo Zhuan*, in the account of the year 547 BCE, though it described events that happened some time earlier. This tale is unique, for it is the only known account describing the naming of a baby girl in Zhou dynasty China. It is also unusual, for the name was not chosen by either parent, nor did it make any reference to their personal histories, but instead commemorated a major event at the start of the child's life:

The Minister of Education Rui 芮 in the state of Song had a daughter, and [she was born] red and hairy, so he abandoned her below a dike. A female slave from the household of Lady Ji Gong (wife of Lord Gong of Song 宋共公, r. 588-576 BCE) found her and took her in [to the palace], and named her Qi 棄 (Abandoned).⁴⁷

Although this account is expressed as an account of a child being abandoned, it is likely that this is a highly simplistic reading, not least because in a case of true abandonment the identity of the baby's natal family would not be known. However these events have usually been interpreted in the light of later Warring States era legislation on the legality of abandoning infants whose appearance was abnormal or deformed.⁴⁸ The unique status of this story makes this event extremely difficult to interpret, but it is clear that the baby's name commemorated an event of great personal importance in the life of this child.

5. Conclusion

The reasons for the choice of particular given names was only ever recorded for a very small group of persons born into the elite ruling class in Zhou China.

47 *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 1117 [Xiang 26].

48 See for example Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 111.

What is more, these naming stories were not evenly distributed, but tended to record the name choices within particular lineages. Three family groups had their naming practices recorded in particular detail, the Shusun branch of the ruling family of Lu, the main lineage of the ruling house of Zheng, and the Quwo branch of the ruling family of Jin. Therefore, stories about the circumstances in which given names were selected were told of Lord Huan of Lu's oldest son Tong, Lord Zhuang of Lu, his sons Pan and You, and the descendants of his third son Shu, the three sons of Shusun Dechen who were named after enemy warriors, that is Qiaoru, Bao and Hui. Shusun Dechen was Lord Huan of Lu's great-grandson.⁴⁹ Lord Huan of Lu's mother was also said to have been born with her future title written on her hand. In the case of the ruling family of Zheng, tales about the selection of given names were told about Lord Zhuang and his great-grandson Lan, Lord Ling. As for the Quwo branch of the ruling family of Jin, stories about the choice of given names were recorded for the founder of the dynasty, Tang Shu Yu, two of his descendants in the ninth generation, Chou, Lord Wen of Jin and Chengshi, Lord of Quwo, and Yu and Qie, twins descended from Chengshi in the fifth generation.

It is striking that the majority of the tales about the naming of a baby were not only confined to three main lineages, but also just described the methods by which given names were chosen in the early eighth and late seventh centuries BCE. It would seem likely therefore that these stories were all derived from one text used as a source by the compilers of the *Zuo Zhuan*. There are three exceptions to this pattern. The first is the story of the naming of Tang Shu Yu, which although from one of the lineages whose naming practices were recorded, is supposedly an account of a much earlier naming than any of the others. The second exception to this pattern is the story of the naming of Lord Ling of Wei, which comes from a different state, and is nearly a century later than any of the other tales. It is perhaps relevant to note that the story of the naming of Lord

49 The family tree of the lords of Lu is described in considerable detail in Li Zongtong, *Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Shi*, p. 193.

Ling is known in mutually irreconcilable versions. The third and final exception is the story of the naming of a baby girl in the state of Song. This is an extremely unusual story, being both much later than other known tales of Zhou naming practices, from a different lineage, and concerning a female child.

There seems to have been a considerable gap between theory and practice in the choosing of children's given names in ancient China. In theory, many types of names were unsuitable for use, yet on occasion they were chosen by parents when naming a baby. Although Shen Xu laid out a careful system for selecting appropriate names, there is no evidence that it was in regular use. In practice, when the process by which a name was chosen was explained, the given name was either in some way predetermined, either by a dream or a divination, before the baby was born, or it was chosen as a result of some historical event or the personal experience of either one of the parents. Both parents seem to have been involved in the selection of a name; in some cases the given name of the baby was recorded as having been chosen by the mother, in other cases it was the father. However, the paucity of the records, and the clear association of tales about the naming of babies with particular lineages, means that it would be dangerous to extrapolate these practices into a wider theory of the naming practices of the Zhou aristocracy.

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名有五：周代命名習慣新探

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摘 要

在中國周代社會裡，貴族家庭孩子出生的時候，小孩的名字已經差不多決定了。古代中國是一個父系社會，名字表示每個人跟大宗的關係。周代青銅器銘文以及歷史和哲學文獻保存許多名字。在《禮記》、《儀禮》、《左傳》與《論衡》中也有一些與命名習慣的規矩和禁令有關的討論。依照這些規矩，只有五種適宜的命名方法：信（據天生的情況來命名）、義（以祥瑞的名字期望被命名者建立德業）、象（以相類似的事物來命名）、假（借物名為人名）、類（父母親以孩子與自己類似的某個方面命名）。然而，這些規矩和禁令經常被封建貴族忽視。在這篇論文中，我以古代與命名方式相關的故事來探究周代命名習慣，提出瞭解當時人名選擇的新方法。

根據我的研究，周代社會的命名習慣主要可分為兩種，一、夢見一個名字（夢者大概都是母親），或者卜筮一個名字（令卜者都是父親）；二、選擇名字以紀念國家大事或者父母親生活裡的大事。藉由這個新方法，我們對周代的命名習慣可以得到不同的理解。

關鍵詞：周代、命名習慣、左傳、夢、卜筮

收稿日期：2006年4月10日，通過刊登日期：2006年10月4日。

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