

*Research Note***Names and Titles in Eastern Zhou Texts****Yuri Pines***Nankai University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

Recently, the Anglophone world has been blessed with a series of new professional translations of early Chinese texts into English. These translations are a great step forward in terms of clarity and accuracy. And yet at times they perpetuate old problems, such as inaccurate renderings of personal appellations familiar from the Lu 魯 canonical *Springs and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) and its ancient commentaries. Take the example of a famous Jin leader, Zhi Bo 知伯 (or 智伯, d. 453 BCE). Time and again he is rendered as either “Earl Zhi” or “the Earl of Zhi,” whereas his nemesis, Zhao Xiangzi 趙襄子, is rendered “Viscount Xiang of Zhao.”¹ And when the same Zhi Bo (meaning “Zhi the Elder”) is rendered “Zhi Bo, named Yao” 知伯瑤 – some translators mistake this to mean two different persons.² These inaccuracies are reproduced in a great variety of secondary studies.

There are two main reasons for this confusion: naming patterns of Zhou 周 nobles varied greatly, and certain Chinese appellations do not lend themselves to a single English translation. In what follows, I offer some clarifications that may be helpful to future translators. I also hope to demonstrate that understanding naming patterns can be of importance for studies of early Chinese history, thought, and even literature.

¹ See, e.g., John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, trans., *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 269, 345, 582; idem, *Mozi* 墨子: *A Study and Translation of the Ethical and Political Writings* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, Univ. of California, 2013), 54, 179, 370; John Major et al., trans., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010), 406, 425, 444, et saepe.

² See, e.g., Ian Johnston, trans., *Mozi: A Complete Translation* (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 2010), 19 (where he translates Zhi Boyao) versus 179.

Due to limited space, I cannot address etymological issues or the historical evolution of appellations but focus instead on their usage during the Springs and Autumns period (770-453 BCE) as reflected and discussed in countless texts from the Warring States period (453-221 BCE) on.

The “Five Ranks” Terminology

Nothing is more confusing in appellations than the terms associated with so-called five ranks, namely *gong* 公 (“duke”), *hou* 侯 (“marquis”), *bo* 伯 (“earl”), *zi* 子 (“viscount”), and *nan* 男 (“baron”). The origin and evolution of the five-ranks system have been discussed in an excellent study by Li Feng and will not be addressed here anew.³ Nor shall I quibble with whether or not the European aristocratic terms are appropriate translations of the Chinese five ranks; suffice it say that these may serve as a reasonable heuristic convention.⁴ What matters to me is that most of the terms used for the rank designations also have multiple additional meanings to be recognized.

Of the five rank designations, two – *hou* and *nan* – do not pose problems. *Hou* almost invariably refers to a high-ranked regional lord (not incidentally the term “regional lords” [*zhuhou* 諸侯] means “many *hou*”).⁵ This title was applied to the rulers of the oldest and most prestigious Zhou polities, such as Jin 晉, Qi 齊, Lu, or Wei 衛, while the rare term *nan* appears in the *Annals* only for the rulers of Xu 許 and Su 宿. In contrast, *gong*, *bo*, and *zi* are much more challenging.

³ Li Feng, “Transmitting Antiquity: The Origin and Paradigmization of the ‘Five Ranks,’” in *Perceptions of Antiquity in Chinese Civilization*, ed. Dieter Kuhn and Helga Stahl (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 2008), 103-34.

⁴ The European system of ranks as equivalent to Chinese titles was adopted in Japan following the Meiji restoration (except that Japan opted to use “prince” instead of “duke” and “count” instead of “earl”). Many alternatives have been proposed by other translators, most notably by Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg in their translation of *Zuozhuan* (*Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals”* [Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2016]), though these alternatives do not solve the problems of polysemy either.

⁵ Li Feng (“Transmitting Antiquity, 112, n. 19) notices the relation between *hou* and “archery target” (see also Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* [Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai’i Press, 2007], 279), and opines that *hou* originally were military commanders stationed in the newly conquered Zhou eastern territories.

Gong is the single most prestigious term in Zhou aristocratic terminology. In early bronze inscriptions it could refer to a patriarch, i.e., deified founder of the lineage. It was also the designation of chief executives in the Zhou government, most famously the Duke of Zhou 周公 and the Duke of Shao 召公.⁶ Among the regional lords, only rulers of the state of Song 宋, the descendants of the Shang 商 ruling house, bore this title. Yet *gong* was also a common posthumous title for a ruler of any rank, in which case the translation “duke” would be misleading (and the neutral “lord” preferable).⁷ *Gong* was also used as a polite designation of “our lord,” as is evident from the *Lu Annals* and *Zuozhuan* 左傳, both of which invariably use *gong* as a designation of a Lu ruler. In not a few states, most notably Qin 秦 but also much lesser polities, rulers were similarly “upgraded” to the *gong* title in bronze inscriptions, although precise patterns of when and why this was done are not clear.⁸ In all these cases, “lord” is the better fit; “duke,” on the other hand, would be appropriate for the chief executives of Zhou and the regional governors of Chu 楚 who were formally elevated to *gong* following the adoption of the royal title *wang* 王 by the Chu rulers.

Bo is much more complicated. As an “earl” rank it was applied to the rulers of second-tier polities (from the Western Zhou point of view), most notably Zheng 鄭, Cao 曹, and Qin. Yet more frequently, *bo* referred to one’s birth sequence, meaning “the elder” (as in the case of Zhi Bo). In this case, it may be more reasonable to transliterate rather than translate, because the designation of birth sequence was often integrated

⁶) For the evolution of *gong* and its usage in kinship and non-kinship contexts, see Teng Xingjian 騰興建, “Cong qincheng dao zuncheng: Shang Zhou shiqi ‘gong’ chengwei de yanbian” 從親稱到尊稱：商周時期‘公’稱謂的演變, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 2020.6: 5-15.

⁷) The dividing line between the posthumous designation *gong* and *hou* is not entirely clear; for instance in *Xinian* 繫年, a bamboo manuscript from the Tsinghua University collection, one of the Wei rulers is posthumously named *hou* whereas the rest are uniformly rendered *gong*. See Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2020), 166. In the *Annals*, *hou* is applied posthumously only to one of the rulers of Cai 蔡.

⁸) For the Qin inscriptions, see Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), 59-105. For an example from a lesser state, see the inscription by a mid-seventh century BCE ruler of the state of Zeng 曾/Sui 隨 named Qiu 求. Note that most other rulers of Zeng continued to refer to themselves as *hou*. For Qiu’s inscription, see Guo Changjiang 郭長江 et al., “Zeng Gong Qiu bianzhong mingwen chubu shidu” 曾公求編鐘銘文初步釋讀, *Jiangnan kaogu* 江漢考古 2020.1: 3-31.

with one's personal name (*ming* 名), appellative (*zi* 字), or posthumous name (*shi* 諡). In addition, *bo* was a title of a regional overlord; hence, King Wen of Zhou's 周文王 (d. ca. 1047 BCE) position under the Shang dynasty, Xibo 西伯, should be translated "overlord of the West," not "Earl of the West."⁹

Zi is the most confusing of all. In the five-rank system this term ("viscount") originally referred to the rulers of the polities on the fringes of the Zhou oikumene – from the kings of Chu, Wu 吳, and Yue 越 (whose royal title was not recognized by the Lu *Annals*) to the leaders of tiny polities associated with the Yi 夷 ethnicity, such as Zhu 邾, Xu 徐, Ju 莒, and so forth.¹⁰ In the meaning of a "son" it could be applied to the rulers of higher ranks specifically during the time between their predecessor's death and burial;¹¹ in this meaning it is also frequent in bronze inscriptions.¹² Yet much more often, *zi* served as a common polite designation of men (rarely women) of noble status,¹³ be it posthumously (as in Zhao Xiangzi) or as a prefix to a living person's appellative (as with the famous Zheng statesman Zichan 子產);¹⁴ and for persons of exceptionally high rank, such as a ruler's sons or chief ministers, it could be added after the personal name.¹⁵ In all these cases the best solution is simply to

⁹) Note that *bo*, "overlord," and *ba* 霸, "hegemon," are cognates (Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary*, 169).

¹⁰) Li Feng, "Transmitting Antiquity," 114 and 119. The "otherness" was not a single factor though. Thus, the rulers of Teng 滕, the Zhou clansmen identified in the Lord Yin 隱公 section of the *Annals* as *hou*, later are rendered *zi*.

¹¹) See e.g., *Zuo zhuan*, Xi 9.1.

¹²) See more in Wei Peng 魏芃, "Xizhou Chunqiu shiqi 'wudeng juecheng' yanjiu" 西周春秋時期"五等爵稱"研究 (Ph.D. diss., Nankai Univ. 2012), 167-206. For a series of interesting inferences about parallels between Chinese *zi* and Indo-European "thane," see *The Selected Works of Peter A. Boodberg*, comp. Alvin P. Cohen (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), 215-16.

¹³) In one of the weirdest speculations I ever read, Lionel M. Jensen averred that the recurrence of the character *zi* in the appellatives of Confucius's disciples (e.g., Zilu 子路, Zigong 子貢, etc.) has a symbolic meaning of "signaling a state of mourning" ("Wise Man of the Wilds: Fatherlessness, Fertility, and the Mythic Exemplar, Kongzi," *Early China* 20 [1995]: 435). By this logic, the entire state of Zheng, where adding *zi* before one's appellative was the norm, should be considered a huge mourning club.

¹⁴) That *zi* was a prefix to one's appellative and not its integral part can be demonstrated, for instance, from *Xinian* where the same Chu person is once named Duke of Shen, Ziyi 申公子儀 (section 6), and once Duke of Shen, Yi 申公儀 (section 8).

¹⁵) For instance, *Xinian* 10 refers to Ducal Son Yong 公子雍 of Jin as Yongzi 雍子. See more in Xiong Xianpin 熊賢品, *Zhanguo wangnian wenti yanjiu* 戰國王年問題研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2017), 148-49.

transliterate. Alternatively, *zi* can be added to one's surname as a polite designation, in which case the term "Sir" is perhaps the most appropriate.¹⁶ Finally, to add to the confusion, *Zi* was a Shang royal clan name, and as such was added to the names of elite females from the Song ruling lineage, including many spouses of the lords of Lu. In these cases, for sure, only transliteration works.

Confusions and Subtleties in Personal Appellations

In the introduction to their *Zuozhuan* translation, Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg noted that "many persons in the *Annals* and *Zuozhuan* have two or more names, so that the reader is often left overwhelmed, if not completely bewildered. ... It is not unusual in *Zuozhuan* for a single person to be called by four or five names, and one of the major characters, the Jin minister Fan Hui 范會, is called by nine names."¹⁷ Most confusing to later readers, many individuals possessed two (or, rarely, three) lineage names (*shi* 氏): when a branch lineage adopted a new name its leaders could also be rendered by the earlier lineage name (e.g. the aforementioned Zhi Bo named Yao is incidentally called Xun Yao 荀瑤, according to his lineage's earlier name, Xun).¹⁸

Aside from a usual lineage + personal name, a person in *Zuozhuan* can be referred to by a posthumous name (applied to rulers and members of high-ranking noble lineages), an appellative, a birth sequence designation (*bo* or *meng* 孟 – "the elder"; *zhong* 仲 – "second-born"; *shu* 叔 – "younger"; and *ji* 季 – "the youngest"), in addition to polite appellations such as *zi* 子, discussed above, or *fu* 父 (literally "father" but more appropriately meaning "uncle," applied to senior statesmen). Each of these segments can be combined with another; for instance, Confucius is often known as Zhongni 仲尼 (*zhong* as birth sequence designation,

¹⁶ This polite "Sir" was added to the names of the Warring States-period philosophers, eventually acquiring a meaning of "philosopher" or, better, "master" in the imperial-era bibliographic classifications.

¹⁷ *Zuo Tradition*, xxxii-xxxiii.

¹⁸ Note that clan names (*xing* 姓) are used in *Zuozhuan* exclusively for females (which is understandable in light of the strict rules of clan exogamy). For the eventual merger of *xing* and *shi* under the Han dynasty (from which period onward, *xing* should be translated as "surname") see Yan Xia 雁俠, *Zhongguo zaoqi xing shi zhidu yanjiu* 中國早期姓氏制度研究 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1996).

ni as appellative), but he is also called Nifu 尼父, “Uncle Ni.”¹⁹ Despite their bewildering variety, the usage of different appellations is not haphazard. For instance, referring to a leading minister by his posthumous name is common in the states of Lu, Wei, Jin, and Qi, but never in Chu or in Zheng, where a person is referred to either by his appellative or personal name. Whether or not these differences reflect habits of local scribes or more substantial cultural conventions remains to be studied.

The publication of the new *Zuozhuan* translation is a great blessing because the authors did their best to order naming patterns; their “personal name index” (pp. 2053-2147) should be the first place to consult for a Springs and Autumns-period name. Many traditional and modern scholars – including commentators of early texts – were less fortunate and produced manifold inaccuracies in their treatment of personal appellations. One of the funniest examples of this mess is a recently published manuscript from the Tsinghua University collection, named by the editors *Liang chen* 良臣 (Good Ministers). This short text, which lists famous rulers and their model ministers from the Yellow Thearch 黃帝, Yao 堯, and Shun 舜 down to Lord Ai of Lu 魯哀公 (r. 494-468 BCE), contains an inconceivable number of such mistakes. For instance, among the model ministers of King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (d. ca. 1042 BCE) we encounter both Lord Shi 君奭 and the Duke of Shao 召公, who were actually the same person. Later, among the ministers of Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636-628 BCE), we encounter not just Zifan 子犯 but also Jiufan 咎犯, which is another designation of the same famous minister, Hu Yan 狐偃.²⁰ It may be some consolation for us to realize that navigating among different names of a single person was a challenging task already for Warring States-period writers.

In certain cases, confusions of ancient authors can provide hints about the reliability of their story. Take for instance Zhi Bo, with whom we started. A series of anecdotes about him in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, retold in many other sources, present Zhi Bo as the eliminator of the Fan 范 and Zhonghang 中行 lineages. However, the Fan and Zhonghang lineages were eliminated in 490 BCE by a coalition of Jin ministerial lineages, one of the partners in which was one Zhi the Elder (Zhi Bo) by the

¹⁹ *Zuozhuan*, Ai 16.3.

²⁰ Jiu 咎 in Jiufan stands for *jiu* 舅 (“maternal uncle”). Hu Yan was a maternal uncle of Lord Wen of Jin. For more examples, see Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed*, 90-91.

name Li 躒, or, possibly, his son Zhi Jia 知甲. The other Zhi Bo, who was killed in 453 BCE by Zhao Xiangzi, was Zhi Jia's son, Yao, who played no role in the downfall of the Fan and Zhonghang lineages. The confusion between different Zhi the Elders suggests that the stories may have come from a hearsay tradition or somebody's imagination.²¹

At times, conversely, the author's careful usage of naming patterns can hint at a subtle irony that easily eschews modern readers. The chapter "Robber Zhi" 盜跖 of *Zhuangzi* 莊子, one of the most brilliant satiric pieces in the history of Chinese literature, starts as follows: "Confucius was a friend of Liuxia Ji; Liuxia Ji's younger brother was known as Robber Zhi" 孔子與柳下季爲友。柳下季之弟名曰盜跖。²² This short statement contains various intentional absurdities. First, Confucius could not have been a friend of Liuxia Ji, who died more than sixty years before Confucius' birth. Second, it was even more ridiculous to turn Liuxia Ji, "the most harmonious of the sages" (聖之和者)²³ into the brother of a notorious villain, Robber Zhi. But Zhuangzi's irony becomes even clearer when we consider that the "Ji" of Liuxia Ji was not his name, but a birth sequence designation, meaning "the youngest brother." Thus, by definition, Liuxia Ji could not have any younger brother at all – and this clarifies beyond doubt that the authors purposefully tell a fairy tale, perhaps to ridicule the brazen resort to imagined historical accounts by other Warring States-period thinkers. Those who ignore the irony in the story of Liuxia Ji's younger brother miss an essential part of *Zhuangzi's* message. In sum, paying attention to naming conventions may be rewarding not just to historians but to all students of early China.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant No. 568/19).

²¹) See sections 1-4 from "Zhao ce 趙策 1" of *Zhanguo ce* (18.1-4). Sima Qian 司馬遷, in an attempt to resolve the problem, created a double elimination of the Fan and Zhonghang lineages (the second taking place in 458 BCE); see *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 39.1685. It is rather improbable that the same two lineages were extinguished twice or that their lands were divided over thirty years after their expulsion.

²²) Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 776 ("Dao Zhi" 盜跖).

²³) *Mengzi* 10.1.