An Examination of the Liye No. 8-461 'Wooden Tablet of Nomenclature Changes' and Its Implications for the Traditional View of the First Emperor's (259–210 BCE) 'Unification of Script'

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ABSTRACT

The Liye excavation, commenced in 2002, yielded a significant document: the No. 8-461 'wooden tablet of nomenclature changes' (*gengming fang* 更名方) from the Qin unification era. With 54 entries outlining the nomenclature changes, it complicates the traditional view of the First Emperor's 'unification of Chinese script.' This paper examines this earliest direct evidence pertaining to the writing standardisation project, focusing on terminology analysis and deciphering previously puzzling entries. This study also evaluates the effectiveness of the language reform by analysing character frequency in contemporaneous documents. It also contextualizes this artefact's significance within the broader historical context of the newly established ruling order in the Qin Empire.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, archaeologists excavated a Qin 秦 Dynasty (221–207 BCE) county-level city site (28.7° N, 109.3° E) at the modern Liye 里耶鎮, Longshan 龍山 county in northwestern Hunan Province, and discovered more than 38,000 pieces of wood slips and tablets, most of which came from a

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disused well.[1] These texts show various aspects of the county-level administration, and the day-to-day management of a newly conquered area, including the earliest extant household registers. Two of the five planned volumes of these archives have been published, along with annotated transcriptions. A great deal of research has been done which has begun to alter many of our earlier comprehensions of the Qin society.[2] Notable among these documents is a very special wooden tablet designated as 8-461, measuring 27.4 cm in length, 12.5 cm in width, and 0.6 cm in thickness. Local archaeologists reconstructed this document by piecing together six fragments, yet the top right portion remains missing.[3] The front of this tablet is divided into two rows, each is inscribed with characters written in the style of the 'small seal script' (*xiaozhuan* 小篆). Its content primarily focuses on elucidating the standard use of characters, appellations and titles of the Qin Dynasty, and is therefore named by You Yi-fei 游逸飛 as the 'wooden tablet of nomenclature changes' (*gengming fang* 更名方).[4]

Although scholars hold different opinions regarding the function and nature of this wooden tablet, most of them agree that the entries on standard use of characters and terms derived from official regulations of the Qin court.[5] Hu Pingsheng 胡平生, one of the earliest researchers on this document, proposed that this tablet is likely a compilation of 'orthographic standards' for the use of the county clerks and scribes since many of the local scribes and officials who grew up in this Chu 楚 culture-influenced area were unacquainted with the Qin writing system and official terminologies. Consequently, they were required to enhance their comprehension of the newly standardised characters and vocabularies upon assuming positions within the Qin administration (Hu 2009: 24). Recently, Anthony Barbieri-Low (2022: 98) has persuasively argued that this document served as an 'aide-mémoire' for a working scribe, who might have consulted a variety of official documents related to language reform to clarify ambiguities in legal and administrative documents that were central to their work. Through the continued efforts of previous scholars, we can now identify 54 phrases from this reconstructed wooden tablet.[6] What makes this tablet particularly significant is that the Liye documents are generally dated between 222 to 210 BCE,

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[1] For introductions to the excavation of this archaeological site and overview of its discoveries, see Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (eds.) 2006: 5–12, 179. See also Yates 2012-13.

[2] See Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (eds.) 2012, 2017, and Chen Wei *et al.* (eds.) 2012, 2018.

[3] The earlier identification number of this tablet 8-455 was an archaeological number, which was changed in later publications. For a detailed introduction to this tablet, see Zhang Chunlong and Long Jingsha 2009: 11–15.

[4] See You Yi-fei 2013, Chen Kanli 2014. Another common name of this document is '*tong wenzi fang* 同文字方' or 'character unification tablet' (Tian 2018), although *gengming fang* is now more widely accepted by scholars. Anthony J. Barbieri-Low (2022: 92) designates this document as 'language reform board'.

[5] For a brief summary of these different opinions, see Zhang and Qin 2019: 147.

[6] Notably, there are inscriptions on the reverse, which reads: '[I] dare to report it, 98' 敢言之，九十八. The phrase 'dare to report,' commonly found in official documents as a formulaic clause, usually signifies the hierarchical relationship between the speaker/sender and addressee/recipient, typically from a subordinate to a superior. For an elaborate discussion of the rhetoric of 'daring' in early China, see Nylan and Wilson 2022: 75–142. Another point of inquiry is whether the figure '98' represents the total count of phrases. The anonymous reviewer persuasively argues that the missing part of the tablet could not have included additional 44 entries. Therefore, if the numeral '98' indeed denotes the total number of entries, it suggests the existence of another tablet. Alternatively, the markings on the reverse side might merely be doodles or inscribed by another person after this document was discarded, therefore bearing no connection to the inscriptions on the front. See also Barbieri-Low 2022: 92.

placing these documents within the first decade following the Qin unification.[7] In other words, the *gengming fang* provides contemporaneous and the most direct evidence to the First Emperor's language reform initiative, offering an exceptional opportunity to observe the methodologies and impact of the Qin unification of writing.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES OF THE QIN 'UNIFICATION OF CHINESE WRITING'

The unification of writing has been widely recognized as one of the enduring cultural legacies left by the short-lived Qin Dynasty, but the extant documents regarding this policy are excessively brief, making it difficult for later historians to understand its specific details.[8] For example, 'The Annals of the First Emperor of Qin' ('Qin shihuang benji' 秦始皇本紀) chapter of the *Shiji* 史記 records:

> 分天下以為三十六郡……更名民曰'黔首'……一法度衡石丈尺。車同軌，書同文字。
> [The First Emperor] divided All-under-heaven into thirty-six commanderies (…) He changed the name of the populace from *min* to 'the black-headed' (…) He standardised the measurements of weight, capacity, and length. Carts all had the same axle width, and writings all had the same script.[9]

'*Shutong wenzi*' in other chapters of *Shiji* is also phrased as '*tongshu wenzi*' 同書文字 ('to write in uniform script'), '*tong tianxia shu*' 同天下書 ('to unify the script under the heaven').[10] Embedded in standard histories and textbooks ever since, this prevalent account of the standardisation of writing by the First Emperor constitutes an essential component of the 'Great Unification' project in Chinese history. Yet, such narratives often reinforce the impression that the core objective of this endeavor was the 'unification of script,' portraying it as a conclusive achievement orchestrated by the authority of one individual. In doing so, it obscures the intricate dynamics inherent in the development of the Chinese writing system. Almost three hundred years later, Xu Shen 許慎 (30?–124?) in the postface (*xu* 敘) to his lexicographic text *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (compiled in approx. 100 CE), explained what was exactly 'unified' (Xu 2012: 315-1):

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[7] Recently, scholars have narrowed down the timeframe for the Qin unification of writing to be between the seventh month and the thirteenth-day of the eight month of the year 221 BCE, using excavated manuscripts with specific chronological information on them. See Wang and Li 2021. The year 222 BCE marks the establishment of the Liye county administration by the Qin. To date, no documents from the Liye archive postdating 210 BCE have been published. However, archaeologists have discovered additional wells in Liye, which may potentially contain documents dating beyond 210 BCE.

[8] See Bodde 1938/1967: 159–161, Zhu and Qiu 1973: 2–7, Twichett and Fairbank (eds.) 1986: 56–57.

[9] *Shiji* 6.239. In classical Chinese, *wen* 文 and *zi* 字 denotes two primary categories of characters: *wen* refers to single-component characters, while *zi* signifies composite characters. In this paper, my use of the terms 'graph,' 'script,' 'character' and 'writing' generally follows Qiu Xigui and Wiliam G. Boltz. Specifically, I use 'character' as a language symbol that combines phonetic, semantic and visual dimensions. The term 'graph' is employed to denote the written form of a character. 'Script' is used in a dual capacity: 1) it refers to the system of written symbols used to convey the sounds and words of a language, and 2) the style of writing, in certain context. 'Writing' is conceived in the broader sense of recording language into a visible form, thus serving as a counterpart to 'speech.' For a thorough exploration of these concepts, refer to the works of Qiu 2000: 13–15 and Boltz 1994: 1–9, supplemented by insights from Richter 2007: 175–179 and Wilkinson 2013: 32–35.

[10] *Shiji* 6.245, *Shiji* 15.757.

秦始皇帝初兼天下，丞相李斯乃奏同之，罷其不與秦文合者……皆取史籀大篆，或頗省改，所謂小篆者也。

When the First Emperor of Qin for the first time united all under the heaven, the Chancellor[11] Li Si submitted a proposal to unify [the script] and to abolish those deviating from the Qin script (…) All of them adopted the 'large seal script' from the *Chapters of Shi Zhou* 史籀, although they sometimes simplified and altered the graphic forms to a considerable extent. This is what came to be called the 'small seal script.'

In other words, Xu Shen posited that the First Emperor of Qin adopted the small seal script as the new standard to unify the scripts used in the former six states. These historical narratives tend to focus on the elimination of regional variants and standardisation of character forms. On the other hand, due to the scarcity of written records, historical interpretations of the actual effectiveness of the Qin unification policy vary greatly. Some assert its success, claiming it instituted a lasting linguistic unity, while others regard it as a fundamentally flawed and unsuccessful policy.[12]

Since the 1970s, widespread archaeological excavations have unearthed a wealth of bamboo and wooden slips, along with silk manuscripts from the Warring States, Qin, and Han periods. These discoveries have furnished scholars with a significant corpus of contemporaneous texts, expanding the scope of research beyond traditional stone stele inscriptions, such as the inscriptions on Mount. Tai 泰 and Mount. Langya 瑯琊.[13] This has enabled modern scholars to delve into the substantive effects and the implications of the Qin unification of writing. With their continued endeavours, we have come to understand that the impact of this 'unification' extends beyond the mere substitution of archaic and regional scripts with the newly standardised small seal script and elimination of variants. Moreover, scholars found that starting from the late Warring States period, the more simplified 'clerical script' (*lishu* 隸書) had already been used more widely than the small seal script, especially in the utilitarian texts such as divinatory records and local administrative documents (Chen 2003: 598). Recently, scholars also realize that the initiative to standardise character forms had already commenced during the Warring States period. For example, Xiao Yunxiao's examination of eleven texts from the Tsinghua manuscript collection reveals a significant level of orthographic uniformity that had been achieved in the Warring States Chu manuscripts.[14]

Regarding the Qin unification of characters, the most significant point of contention lies in the question of whether the 'unification' predominantly involved standardizing script and graphic forms or standardising the use of words. Zhang Biao 張標 (1986: 39–43) argues that the '*wen* 文' in '書同文' has a dual meaning: first, it denotes the graphic form of a character in a writing

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[11] According to editors of the Liye Qin manuscripts, Li Si was the 'Superintendent of State Visits' (*dian ke* 典客) of Qin at the time, not the Chancellor. See Hunansheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (eds.) 2012, 'Preface,' 5. Special thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this article for pointing this out.

[12] Zhu and Qiu 1973: 2–7, Barnard 1978: 192–194, 199, Galambos 2004: 210–202, Zhou 2012: 243–261. Discussions on the efficacy of Qin unification policy were at times swayed by political currents. For example, during the 'Critique of Confucius and Praise of the First Emperor' movement in the 1970s in China, numerous articles lauding the accomplishments of Qin's unification of written language emerged. When such a political climate concluded, a counterforce often gave rise to opinions that were entirely contrary to it. See Xi 1990: 117–121, Chen 2003: 589.

[13] For a complete translation and comprehensive analysis of the Qin stone stele inscriptions, see Kern 2000.

[14] See Xiao 2023: 926–949. For the discussion of regional writing habits before the Qin unification, see also Venture 2009: 943–957.

system, and second, it refers to the written symbol of a word (*ci* 詞). Thus, he interprets the unification of writing as the standardised practice where a specific word is consistently written using a particular character form, while using a different character form, even if it is homophonous or phonetically similar, is deemed non-standard. Chen Chao-jung 陳昭容 (2003: 624) summarized these two aspects of standardisation as

1) regulation of the graphic form of characters (*zheng zixing* 正字形), and

2) rectification of the associations between the graphs and words/meaning (*zheng yongzi* 正用字).

She contends that the regulation of graphic forms was successful, while the effectiveness of the rectification of the relationship between graphs and their corresponding meanings was rather limited. Based on his interpretation of the *gengming fang*, Tian Wei 田煒 (2018: 411) expanded on Chen Chao-jung's observation by adding a third dimension, which is the standardisation of proper nouns, appellations and titles (*zheng yongyu* 正用語). Tian further classified the 54 standards inscribed in the *gengming fang* into these three categories. The following section will select examples from each category for case studies and examine the effectiveness of the regulations in the recently discovered texts.

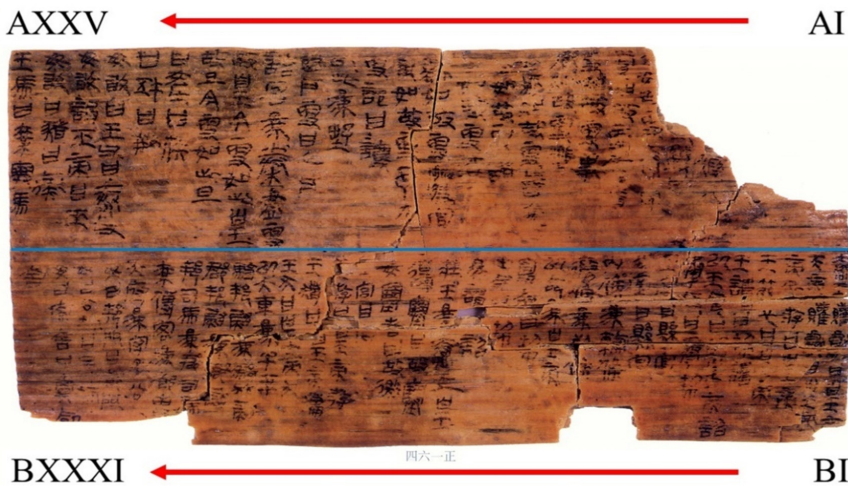## UNDERSTANDING THE QIN NOMENCLATURE CHANGES WITH THE *GENGMING FANG* 更名方 DOCUMENT

Fig. 1. The Liye 8-461 'Tablet of Nomenclature Changes' (*gengming fang* 更名方)[15]

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[15] Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (eds.) 2012: 14. In this paper, I follow Tian Wei's transcription and his numbering system for these entries, which was built upon Chen Wei *et al.*'s (2012) transcription. Tian (2018: 410–411) further enhanced this with his own reconstruction of several additional graphs. When examining solely the content, the entries do not present a clear sequential order for reading. However, the entries in the two columns at the bottom left corner of the tablet, labeled as BXIII '毋曰客舍, 曰冥飲' ('Do not refer to it as a "guest house," but as … [house]') and BXXXII '舍', appear to require consecutive reading to form a complete sentence. This indicates that the intended reading order is from right to left, which also aligns with standard reading habits of this time.

Although the *gengming fang* may have functioned as a guide for standard language, its terminologies exhibit a lack of strict uniformity. This may suggest that its content was excerpted from various official documents and decrees.[16] Consequently, different entries and phrases adhere to different grammatical structures. Nonetheless, entries written in adjacent positions often have a certain grammatical or content-related connection.[17] Based on this connection, the entries in the *gengming fang* can be categorized into the following 11 groups:

1. X remains unchanged, change Y (X如故, 更Y): covering 11 entries, from AIII to AXIII.[18]
2. Change X to be Y (更X曰Y): 1 entry, AXIV.
3. Use this graph as [the standard form for the word] {X} (以此爲X) : 1 entry, AXV (Wang and Li 2021: 7).
4. X is now changed to be Y (X更曰Y): 1 entry, AXVI.
5. All officials with a character *qin* 秦 in their names are required to make a name change (諸官爲秦盡更). : 1 entry, AXVII.
6. The old graphic form X is now changed to be Y (故X今更如此Y): 2 entries, AXVIII, AXIX.
7. [Z is now separately replaced by] X and Y (曰X曰Y): 2 entries, AXX, AXXI.
8. Dare not use X, use Y instead (毋敢曰X, 曰Y): 3 entries, AXXII to AXXIV.
9. X is now changed to be Y (X曰Y): 19 entries, AXXV, BI to BIX, BXIII to BXV, BXVII to BXXII.
10. X is now changed to be Y (X爲Y): 10 entries, BX to BXII, BXVI, BXXIII to BXXVIII.
11. There will be no X, use Y instead (毋曰X, 曰Y): 3 entries, BXXIX to BXXXI.[19]

This categorization of 11 groups is principally determined by the differences in terminologies and grammatical formulas observed across each entry. Some of these groups can be combined from the perspective of modern language norms and pragmatic principles. For example, Group 9 and Group 10 both address the change of proper names, appellations and titles. The only distinction between these two groups lies in the term employed for 'change': Group 9 uses '*yue*' 曰, while group 10 utilizes '*wei*' 爲. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of the function of this document, several representative instances from each group are examined for their usages in the pre-unification and post-unification texts.

   AIII: *Jia* 叚 remains unchanged, but change it in *jiaren* 假人 (叚如故, 更假人).[20]

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[16] Anthony Barbieri-Low (2022: 93) convincingly argues that this document was 'compiled from various imperial instructions, ordinances, or other official documents, each of which had a slightly different purpose and structure.'
[17] For instance, BVIII '王室曰縣官' and BVIX '公室曰縣官' both address substitution of the old terms for 'ruling house' with the new term 'county office' (representing the government). These two clauses adhere to an identical grammatical structure and use the same terminology.
[18] The numbering system follows Tian 2018: 410–411. A represents Row 1, B represents Row 2. AIII represents the third entry of Row 1. The first two entries in Row 1 are missing because of the fragments so it starts from AIII.
[19] I view the final entry, BXXXII in Row B of Tian Wei's paper, as a continuation of the phrase in BXXXI. Therefore, these two entries should be consolidated, resulting in a total count of 54, not 55.
[20] Note that this is only a tentative translation before we grasp the meaning of the terms and function of this document. After further discussion of a few more instances within the following pages, a more accurate translation of this entry shall be: *Jia* 叚 remains unchanged, change [叚 to be 假 in the word] *jiaren* 假人, [when *jia* means 'to borrow.']

In this first extant entry, 叚 and 假 are a pair of homophonous loangraphs (*tongjiazi* 通假字)[21] that are commonly used interchangeably in early texts. For example, the *Shuowen jiezi* (Xu 2012: 64-b, 165-a) defines 叚 as 'to borrow' (叚, 借也), while at the same time explaining that '借 means 假' ('借, 假也'). Excavated texts show that 叚 is used earlier than 假, so we can see 叚 as the orthograph and 假 as its loangraph.[22] Therefore, 假人 in this entry should be understood as an example to illustrate the context in which 假 is used. In other words, 'change *jiaren* 假人' does not mean to change the word '*jiaren*' itself, but rather involves substituting the character '*jia*' from 叚 to 假 within the specific word 假人 along with the contextual meaning it conveys. Nevertheless, the meaning of this word '*jiaren*' remains ambiguous. Chen Kanli (2014: 79) compares the other instances in this group and has shown that 'X remains unchanged, change Y' usually means to distinguish the different meanings of a polysemic graph. The distribution of functional loads of one character is most effectively illustrated in Entry AXI within the same group.

AXI: *You* 酉 remains unchanged, change [it to] *jiu* 酒 [when it means alcohol] (酉如故，更酒). 酉 as a pictorial graph represents an earthenware or alcohol container, with its original meaning being 'alcohol.' Therefore, from the Zhou dynasty bronze inscriptions to the excavated bamboo slips, the character that represents the word {alcohol} in most cases is written as 酉. The later-created graph 酒 started to appear in the late Warring States texts. For example, the word {alcohol} is written as 酒 in 5 instances while written as 酉 in 11 instances seen from the pre-unification Shuihudi Qin texts.[23] Meanwhile, 酉 continues to be used in post-unification texts to denote the earthly stem, such as *xinyou* 辛酉. In other words, the graph 酒 is created later to carry the meaning {alcohol} while 酉 represents the residual meaning of the character *you* 酉 as the earthly stem. Therefore, 'change *jiu* 酒' in the entry means to change the graphic form for the meaning of {alcohol} so that it is uniformly written as 酒 from now. The standardization lies in the rectification of the association between the two graphs 酉 and 酒, and their respective meanings as an 'earthly stem,' or as 'alcohol.' This entry is an example of *zheng yongzi* 正用字, or 'to rectify the use of graphs to match the meaning.'

The relation between 酉 and 酒 may shed light on the real meaning of the term 'to change' (*geng* 更) as used in Group 1. Nonetheless, it differs somewhat from its usage in Entry AIII, which discusses 叚 and 假, due to the absence of a specific instance word within Entry AXI, which focuses on 酉 and 酒. In this regard, Entry AV can be more helpful, which reads: '*Da* 大 remains unchanged, change [大 to be 泰 in the word] *taishou* 泰守' (大如故，更泰守). 泰 first appears in the Qin brick inscriptions and denotes the idea of 'excessiveness' (Wei 2022: 16). This meaning of {excessiveness} is also represented by the character '太,' which is derived from 大. In other words, the character 泰 came into being later and only undertook one segment of the meanings of the character 大. As a result, we can see that the word {大守} is written as '大守' in pre-unification

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[21] In this paper, I use the term 'homophonous loangraph' to denote the practice of utilizing homophonous or nearly homophonous graphs to write another word. This practice is also called 'phonological borrowing.'

[22] The pre-unification Shuihudi texts exclusively employs 叚 without 假, whereas Longgang 龍崗 contains quite a few instances of 假 but only one 叚.

[23] Unless noted otherwise, 'Shuihudi' in this article refers to the texts unearthed from the No. 11 Qin Tomb. For information about the Western Han Shuihudi No. 77 Tomb in close proximity, see Xiong Beisheng *et al.* 2018. Regarding the dating of the Shuihudi Qin texts from Tomb No. 11, the author concurs with the editors in viewing them as pre-unification texts (see Chen Wei *et al.* 2014, 'Preface,' 3). For a recent study of the chronology of excavated Qin manuscripts, see Wang and Li 2021.

texts such as the Shuihudi tomb no. 11 manuscripts, and is written as '泰守' in post-unification texts such as the Liye manuscripts.

This reminds us that the term '更Y' found in the entries of Group 1 is essentially a shorthand or an abbreviated expression—it actually means 'change [X to] Y [within this word or in this particular semantic context of such and such].' To return to Entry AIII, for example, a more precise translation would be '*jia* 叚 remains unchanged [in other contexts], but change [叚 into 假 within the specific semantic context of this word] *jiaren* 假人.' Shi Yang's (2020: 114–128) comprehensive review of the instances of 叚 and 假 revealed that in texts predating unification, 叚 carried the dual meanings of 'lending' and 'borrowing.' However, following the implementation of the Qin standardisation policy, 叚 retained the meaning of 'lending,' while 假 came to specifically denote the meaning of 'borrowing.' This distinction effectively separates the two characters into directional verbs, with opposing orientations, mirroring the English words 'borrow' and 'lend,' where the relationship between lending and borrowing is defined with the possessor of the property or power in the centre. Within the context of administrative archives, the government or officials typically act as the lender. Hence, '假人 in Entry AIII should be interpreted as 'the borrower.'

With this understanding, the 11 entries of Group 1 can be subdivided into two types: those that include a specific word instance, such as 假人, and those that lack a word example to clarify the context. This suggests that the user(s) of the *gengming fang* were sufficiently versed in the linguistic conventions, allowing them to navigate through the concise and potentially ambiguous terms without causing confusion or difficulty for the user. This familiarity suggests that the rules and regulations outlined in the *gengming fang* were not arbitrarily determined but were likely formulated in response to the evolution of language during this era. Entry AVII in Group 1 is a good example of this:

> AVII: *Li* 吏 remains unchanged, change *shi* 事 (吏如故，更事).

The characters 吏 and 事 are allographs and were used interchangeably until late Warring States period. The major distinction between their graphic forms is that the vertical stroke extends through the entirety of 事, whereas in 吏, the vertical stroke does not continue through the bottom radical '又,' as illustrated in these two graphic forms: ▨▮ (Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (eds.) 2012: 250 [slip 8-2037] and 49 [slip 8-21], respectively). However, this regulation aims not to change graphic forms but to rectify and standardise the usage of different characters to denote separate meanings. For example, in the Shuihudi Qin manuscripts, which is believed to be written merely decades prior to the Qin unification, Wang Guiyuan 王貴元 (2021: 4) reviewed all instances of the character representing the meaning {事} and discovered that, out of 150 occurrences, 148 were written as 吏 and only 2 were written in the form of 事.[24] That means 吏 was often used as a borrowed character to denote the meaning of {事} before the unification. However, the use of the two characters was strictly separated in the post-unification texts such as the Yuelu and Liye manuscripts. In every instance, 吏 was used to mean {officials}, whereas 事 was used to convey {work, business, thing, etc.}. Thus, in Entry AVII '吏 remains unchanged'

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[24] Wang Guiyuan argues that even these two instances were inaccurately transcribed by previous editors, proposing that they should be corrected to 吏 and interpreted as such. He further elucidates that in the standard phrase '定名吏里' ('determining one's name, status and village/residence'), frequently seen in Qin legal texts like 'Models for sealing and investigating' (*feng zhen shi* 封診式) from the Shuihudi slip 6, '吏' typically denotes one's social rank, suggesting that it should be read as '吏,' in accordance with its written form, rather than '事.' See Wang and Li 2021: 170.

actually means that '吏 remains unchanged when it is used to denote {official},' and 'change 事' implies the substitution of 吏 with 事 when it denotes {work, business, thing, etc.}.' Therefore, this entry primarily focuses on the rectification of the associations between the graphic symbols and their respective meanings.

In summary, all the entries in Group 1 address the relationship between graphs and their meanings, aiming to establish a consistent distribution of semantic loads among polysemic characters, interchangeable loan characters with similar graphic forms or homophones.

Groups 2 and 3 each consist of one single entry, and they employ distinct terminologies.

> AXIV: Change *tuo* 詑 to *man* 謾 [to convey the meaning of {deceive}].
> AXV: Use this graph *ye* 野 [as the standard graph to represent {wildness}].

Scholars have observed that during the Warring States period, both 詑 and 謾 were used in regional dialects, with 謾 was being more prevalent in the State of Qin.[25] This adjustment mandates the exclusive use of 謾 to signify {deceive, cheat}, excluding the use of alternative characters for this meaning. Similarly, AXV restricts the representation of {wildness} to the character 野, establishing it as the standard form.[26] These changes focus on the adjustment of the relation between characters and their meanings, which is different from the 'unification' of various written forms of a single character. Within the *gengming fang*, Group 6 contains the only two entries dedicated to the standardisation of graphic forms:

> AXVIII: The old graphic form *huang* 皇 is now changed to be this *huang* 皇.
> AXIX: The old graphic form *dan* 旦 is now changed to be this *dan* 旦.

The character 皇 is frequently encountered in transmitted texts but is less common in excavated manuscripts. The Shuihudi Qin manuscripts from before the unification present two instances of {皇}, one written as 皇, the other as 皇. In contrast, the post-unification Longgang manuscripts uniformly uses the standardised form 皇 in both occurrences of the character. In the two volumes of Liye manuscripts published so far, a wider range of samples is used: 11 out of 12 cases of {皇} are written as 皇. The only exception is when it is written as 皇 in the *gengming fang* (Entry AXVIII), where it is glossed as the old, incorrect form of the character. This pattern underscores the Qin dynasty's a strong adherence to the rules of standardisation.

Extending the timeline to encompass the Western Han era, the Zhangjiashan 張家山 manuscripts reveal a different picture: all nine instances of {皇} revert to the old form of 皇, with '自' on the top instead of '白.' This divergence is noteworthy given the strong continuity typically observed between Han and Qin texts, and suggests that the Han made a deliberate effort to distinguish their reign from that of the Qin through the reverential use of 皇 for the emperor.[27] This perspective aligns with Xu Shen's rationale in the *Shuowen jiezi* (Xu 2012: 10-a), where he advocates for preserving the traditional form of the character. Thus, the adoption of standard forms in this context transcends mere chronological changes and reflects deeper ideological concerns.

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[25] Wei 2022: 23.
[26] Chen Kanli 2014: 79–80.
[27] Tian 2018: 417.

The first instance of {旦} in Entry AXIX is not sufficiently clear, appearing as though the bottom short horizontal stroke of '日' is merged with the '一' directly beneath it. This written form is actually common in the Qin manuscripts, as evidenced by another example of '旦' in the Shuihudi, where it is similarly written as ▨ (Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu (eds.) 1990: 54, slip 69). This manner of writing style can easily lead to confusion with the character '且,' a confusion also evidenced by an example from the Shuihudi manuscripts like this: ▨ (Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu (eds.) 1990: 58, slip 115.). In fact, we do see instances where the character is written in the form of '旦,' but it should be accurately read as '且' (Chen Wei 2014: 559). To avoid this kind of confusion in texts, the *gengming fang* specifically requires that '旦' be written in a designated way: ▨.

DECIPHERING THE UNRESOLVED PHILOLOGICAL PUZZLE IN THE *GENGMING FANG*

The preceding section enhances the understanding of the meanings of specific terms within the *gengming fang* by examining actual character examples and drawing on previous research. It demonstrates that the language standards outlined in the *gengming fang*, including both standardised graphic forms and the relation between characters and meanings, were effectively applied in Qin written materials. However, there remains a set of terms within the *gengming fang* that has been a persistent puzzle for scholars since the publication of this document.

Group 7. AXX: 曰產曰族. AXXI: 曰䢺曰荊.

Due in part to the insufficient number of instances available for hypothesis testing, these two entries remain obscure. However, the term 曰 frequently appears in many of the entries in the *gengming fang*, typically indicating a substitution relationship where the character following 曰 is meant to replace the one preceding it, as demonstrated in the earlier example of 更詑曰讆. Despite this seemingly straightforward and logical interpretation, it does not align with the actual frequency of occurrences of these two characters in Qin dynasty texts:

Table 1: Frequency of Occurrences of 產 and 族 in Liye and Yuelu Manuscripts

	產	族
Liye vol. 1	22	2
Liye vol. 2	9	6
Yuelu vol. 1[28]	4	0
Yuelu vol. 4	5	0
Yuelu vol. 5	11	3
Yuelu vol. 6	3	1
Yuelu vol. 7	1	1

[28] It is generally considered that volume 2 and 3 of the Yuelu texts are pre-unification texts, while all other volumes are post-unification texts. Refer to Wang 2021 for further details.

This table clearly shows that in all the volumes of the post-unification Qin texts in the Liye and Yuelu collections, not a single text has more occurrences of 族 than 產. Consequently, this outcome does not substantiate the earlier hypothesis. Meanwhile, Zhang Shichao 張世超 (2014: 106, Tian 2016: 202–209) observed that 產 is a character frequently used in Qin documents, sometimes substituting its synonym 生. However, his argument has not attracted much scholarly attention, primarily because it does not include the character 族 and does not clarify the connection between the two characters 族 and 生. The subsequent section delves into the use of 族 in the Qin and Han textual corpus.

1. 冗佐上造臨漢都里曰援，庫佐冗佐……年卅七歲，**族**王氏。(Chen Wei *et al.* (eds.) 2012: 357)
A full-time[29] assistant, and holder of the rank of *shangzao* (2nd order), from the Du village of Linhan [County], and [his personal name] is called Yuan. Yuan [currently] serves as the assistant of the supervisor of the county arsenal (…) [Yuan is] aged thirty-seven, [he is a member of] the Wang clan.[30] (Liye vol. 1, slip 8-1555)

2. □年卅一年歲，**族**黃氏☒。(Chen Wei *et al.* (eds.) 2018: 282.)
…aged thirty-one, [a member of the] Huang **clan**. (Liye vol. 2, slip 9-1257)

3. 更戍卒城父公士西平賀，長七尺五寸，年廿九歲，**族**蘇☒ (Chen Wei *et al.* (eds.) 2018: 220)
A rotational garrison soldier, [from] Xiping [Village], Chengfu [County], [he is a] holder of the rank of *gongshi* (1st order), [his personal name is] He, [his height is] seven chi five cun (ca. 173 cm), [he is] aged twenty-nine, [a member of the] Huang clan. (Liye vol. 2, slip Ⅰ9-885)

4. 南，齊國，**族**田氏.[31]
Nan is from the State of Qi, [she is a member of the] Tian **clan**. (Zhangjiashan, 'Zouyanshu' Case 3, slip 18)

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[29] For an examination of the two principles of recruitment and mobilization of people, 'full-time' (*rong* 冗) versus rotational (*geng* 更), which were applied to various types of services including military and labor conscription, as well as the employment of administrative functionaries, refer to Miyake 2013: 241–277, Yang 2015: 210–222.
[30] During the pre-Qin era, clan names (*xing* 姓) were predominantly associated with elite individuals, often appearing in the names of elite women linked to extensive descent groups. In contrast, lineage names (*shi* 氏) were typically found in the names of elite males, representing a more narrowly defined unit. Over time, the concept of a 'family name' accessible to all societal members emerged, leading to the blurring of distinctions between *xing* and *shi*. According to Endymion Wilkinson (2013: 113–118), this convergence into a unified concept of family name (*xingshi* 姓氏) began in the late Spring and Autumn period and extended into the Warring States period. The evidence presented in this paper, drawn from the late Warring States to the early Western Han period, reflects a period when the differentiation between *xing* and *shi* had significantly diminished. Consequently, this study treats *zu*, *shi*, and *xing* synonymously as 'family name,' translating both *zu* and *shi* as 'clan' in a broad sense due to the limited information on the social standing and family/clan size of the individuals in question.
[31] Zhangjiashan ersiqi hao Han mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu (eds.) 2006: 93; Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015: Section 4.3, 1199.

In each of these four occurrences, 族 signifies the clan affiliation of the person. Following 族 in these instances are the characters 王, 黃, 蘇, 田, all of which represent common family names. Volume 5 of the Yuelu texts contains a statute that specifies:

諸治從人者, 具書未得者**名、族**、年、長、物色、疵瑕… (Yuelu vol. 5, slip 19/1021)
Those who investigate the followers [of the aristocratic families from the former six states] should write down the missing persons' **name, clan affiliation**, age, height, skin color, visible marks and blemishes in detail…

In the ordinance, 族 is coupled with 名, indicating an individual's given or first name. This pairing of 名 and 族 is not unique; it also appears in multiple instances within the excavated Chu manuscripts from the Warring States period, where the format 'place of residence-name-clan' (*juchu mingzu* 居處名族) serves as personal identification information in judicial and administrative documents (Zhu 2013: 174). This format of identification information developed into the 'name-county-rank-village/ward' (*mingxian jueli* 名縣爵里) structure used during the Han dynasty.[32] Comparing the two formats, 'place of residence' aligns with the 'county-village,' and 'name-clan' with 'names,' the latter introducing social rank as an additional element in the Han dynasty.[33] In other words, the 'name-clan' (名族) pairing is recognized in later contexts as the 'given name-surname' (名姓 or 姓名) combination. This leads to the insight that what is substituted by 族 is 姓, rather than 產. If 族 represents 姓, might the phrase '曰產曰族' suggest a substitution of 產 with 姓? To confirm this hypothesis, further examination of how 產 is used in Qin documents is essential:

1. 廿五年九月己丑, 將奔命校長周爰書: 敦長買、什長嘉皆告曰: 徒士五（伍）右里繚可, 行到零陽廡谿橋亡, 不智（知）□□繚可年可廿五歲, 長可六尺八寸, 赤色, 多髮, **未產鬚**… (Chen Wei *et al.* (eds.) 2012: 149)
In the twenty-fifth year, ninth month, on the *jichou* day, Zhou, head of the emergency troops submit the transcript of a statement: corporal Mai and head of the ten households Jia both reported that Liao Ke, a *tu shiwu* (a member of the rank and file employed as a forced labourer[34]) from the You village, absconded when passing the Wuxi bridge of Lingyang County, it is unknown □□. Liao Ke is about twenty-five years old, around 6 *chi* and 8 *cun* tall (appr. 157 cm), red skin color, he has abundant hair, but **does not grow a beard**… (Liye vol. 1, slip ‖8-439+8-519+8-537)

2. 故邯鄲韓審里大男子吳騷, 爲人黃皙色, 隋（橢）面, 長七尺三寸
年至今可六十三、四歲, 行到端, 毋它疵瑕, 不智（知）衣服、**死產**、在所囗 (Chen Wei *et al.* (eds.) 2012: 244)

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[32] *Hanshu* 漢書 8.253: '[Emperor Xuan] ordered that all commanderies and kingdoms annually submit reports on detainees who died due to excessive beating or privation, noting their crimes, name, county of residence, rank of honor, and home village/ward' (其令郡國歲上繫囚以掠笞若瘐死者所坐、名、縣、爵、里).
[33] This divergence suggests that 1) clans held greater influence in the local communities of the Chu state compared to the diminished role they played in the Qin; 2) the emergence of the twenty ranks of the honour system marked a growing importance of social rank in shaping a status-based society during the Qin and Han periods.
[34] The term '*tu shiwu*' 徒士伍 appears to represent a compound status. For further exploration into the various social identities associated with *shiwu*, see Su 2017: 235–260.

An adult male Wu Sao, originally from the Hanshen village of Handan, with the following personal features: pale yellow skin, oval face, 7 *chi* 3 *cun* (168.6 cm) tall, 63-64 years old, straight gait, no other distinguishing marks. It is unknown what clothes he wears, whether he is **dead or alive**, or where he is… (Liye vol.1, slip 8-894)

3. 律曰：**產捕**羣盜一人，購金十四兩。(Chen Songchang *et al.* (eds.) 2013: 16. Lau and Staack 2016: Case I.2, 123.)
A statute states: Anyone who **arrests** one member of the bandit gang **alive** shall be rewarded with 14 ounces of gold. (Yuelu vol. 3, Case 2, slip 36)

4. **春產**，夏長，秋收，冬臧(藏)。 (Zhangjiashan ersiqi hao Han mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu (eds.) 2006: 171.)
Born in spring, grown in summer, harvested in autumn, stored in winter. (Zhangjiashan 'Book on Therapeutic Pulling' or 'Yinshu' 引書)

Upon reviewing the underlined phrases from the four instances above, they might sound somewhat unnatural to modern readers. Especially the last one '春產' appears particularly strange, possibly due to our familiarity with the idiom '春生，夏長，秋收，冬藏.' Adopting Zhang Shichao's (2014) perspective that 產 often replaces 生 in Qin texts clarifies these unfamiliarity and oddities. Additionally, the term 同產, so prevalent in Qin and Han legal documents, may go unnoticed as a substitute for 同生. Li Yaguang's research into transmitted literature reveals that 同生 started to appear in works like *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and *Guoyu* 國語, but then suddenly almost vanished in Han dynasty writings, appearing only once. In contrast, the *Hanshu* alone records 27 occurrences of 同產.[35] This pattern hints that the alteration '曰產曰族' might indeed involve the substitution of 生 with 產, which is supported by their comparative frequency in texts before and after the unification.

Table 2: Frequency of occurrences of 生 and 產 in Shuihudi Tomb no. 11 (pre-unification), Liye vol. 1, Yuelu vol. 1&4-7 (post-unification), and Zhangjiashan Han texts

	生	產
Shuihudi	270	13
Liye vol.1-2	1	31
Yuelu vol.1, 4-7	4	24
Zhangjiashan	17	53

It is evident that the character 生, initially dominant in the Shuihudi texts, experienced a significant decline in the Liye and Yuelu texts, with only a gradual, but minor, resurgence in the Zhangjiashan corpus. In contrast, the character 產 exhibits a upward trend in its usage. This shift is

[35] The relationship of '同產' (loosely translated as 'from the same parent') holds a fundamental legal significance, with individuals identified as '*tongchan*' being interconnected by mutual liability. For a comprehensive survey of these two words in transmitted literature, see Li Jianping 2018: 756–760, Li Yaguang 2019: 150–161.

particularly noteworthy given that the 'Qin standardisation of characters' took place between the Shuihudi and the Liye manuscript periods. The contrast between the decreasing use of 生 and the increasing use of 產 not only suggests a substitution of the two synonyms, but also underscores the effectiveness of the linguistic standards established in the *gengming fang*, reflecting a broader success of standardisation efforts during this time.

Should this interpretation be accurate, '曰產曰族' might not indicate a transition between 產 and 族, but rather delineate a tripartite relationship among the three characters 產, 族 and 生. While 產 and 生 are commonly recognized as synonyms (Tian 2016), the connection between 族 and 生 remains obscure. Yet, as discussed earlier, 族 in Qin texts is equivalent to 姓, denoting an individual's family name and clan affiliation. Intriguingly, 生 and 姓 are not only homophonous loangraphs but also cognate characters. 生 is the orthograph (*benzi* 本字) of 姓, and these two characters are used interchangeably in both pre-Qin and Qin-Han texts. The *Baihu tong* 白虎通 defines 姓 as '姓者, 生也,' indicating that a surname signifies the clan from which one originate (Chen Li 1994: 401). Similarly, the *Shuowen jiezi* (Xu 2012: 28-b) explains 姓 as 'denoting the family or clan one is born into' (姓, 人所生也). Moreover, in the Warring States manuscript *Xinian* 繫年 from the Tsinghua University collection, 生 is used as the homophonous loangraph for 姓, further illustrating their interconnectedness:

> 以同生（姓）之古（故），必內（入）。 (Qiu 2014: 194; Yinqueshan Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu (eds.) 2010: 228)
> Since she shares the same surname [with my wife], she must enter [the state as our guest].

In the early Western Han texts from Mawangdui 馬王堆 and Yinqueshan 銀雀山, there are notable instances where the character 生 is substituted for 姓 in the term '百生(姓)' (Qiu 2014: 194; Yinqueshan Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu (eds.) 2010: 228). Similarly, in the Shuihudi manuscripts, there are a number of instances in which 眚 and 牲 are used as homophonous loangraphs for 生 and 姓, indicating the interchangeability within this set of cognate characters (Chen Wei 2014: 131, 539, 549). This reveals that 生 serves as the pivotal link between the otherwise distinct characters 產 and 族, effectively bridging their meanings. The two characters 產 and 族 partition the semantic fields of {生}, with each character capturing a distinct facet of its meaning. The intricate relationships among these three characters can be depicted as follows:

> 產⇔生={生}⇔姓⇔族

This analysis suggests that under the *gengming fang* regulation, 姓(生) is replaced by 族, while the remaining semantic load is carried by 產. In other words, the semantic components of {生} are divided, with each component allocated to either 產 or 族. Curiously, 生 itself does not appear in the concise formulation '曰產曰族,' for reasons unspecified. Recognizing that the '曰X曰Y' phrase in Group 7 might implicitly involve a third character Z, let us examine the other entry within this group for further insights:

> AXXI: 曰吽曰荊.

Chen Wei first suggested reading the character 吽 as *wu* '吳,' which was later accepted by Zhang Chunlong 張春龍 and other scholars (Zhang and Long 2009: 12, You 2013: 79, Zhang Shichao

2014: 106). On the other hand, You Yi-fei was among the earliest scholars to link the alteration of 荆 to its avoidance of 楚 as a taboo character in Qin, a theory supported by references in the *Shiji* (6.234):

> 二十三年, 秦王復召王翦強起之, 使將擊荆。張守節《正義》: '秦號楚為荆, 以莊襄王名子楚, 故言荆也。'
> In the twenty-third year [of the King of the state of Qin, Yingzheng], the King of Qin once again summoned Wang Jian, urging him to lead an expedition against the state of Jing. Zhang Shoujie's note in the [*Shiji*] *zhengyi* reads: 'The Qin people referred to Chu as Jing, because the name of the King Zhuangxiang of Qin is Zichu, therefore [Chu] is referred to as Jing.'

However, perhaps considering the positioning of 荆 after 曰, You Yi-fei proposed interpreting '曰玗曰荆' as 'substitute 玗 (楚) with 荆.' But identifying 玗 as 楚 lacks solid philological basis. The phrase '曰產曰族' hints to us that '曰玗曰荆' might be aimed at regulating the relationships between three characters, not merely between 楚 and 荆. This broader view allows for integration of both Chen Wei's and You Yi-fei's interpretations, bringing the third character 吳 into the equation. In other words, while You Yi-fei correctly identifies 楚 as a taboo character, the intended change might involve substituting 楚 with both 吳 and 荆.

The next question is: how can 楚 be conceptually divided between 吳 and 荆? Insights from historical geography provide valuable context for this question. The character 荆, with its early appearance in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, has long been associated with the state of Chu.[36] In the *Zuozhuan*, 荆 refers to Chu during the time when its heartland was primarily within the Han River 漢水 region and the Nanyang 南陽 Basin. However, by the mid-Warring States period, the core territory of Chu began shifting eastward from its original 荆 base. By the late fourth century BCE, after Chu had conquered the state of Yue 越, it expanded into territories formerly belonging to the state of 吳. This expansion led to the cultural and geographical division of Chu into 'West Chu' 西楚, representing its traditional heartland, and 'East Chu' 東楚, denoting the newly conquered lower Yangtze region, previously under 吳. Zheng Wei 鄭威 (2017: 216–229) further categorizes this into the 'Three Chu' 三楚 to emphasize the varied cultural influences within Chu's expanded history. West Chu typically encompasses the original 荆楚 area from the Spring and Autumn period, while East Chu includes the regions of the former state of 吳.

Therefore, the phrase 曰玗(吳)曰荆 implies that 楚 is to be divided and separately substituted by 玗(吳) and 荆, with each representing a distinct portion of its domain. This linguistic convention mirrors the actual historical division. Both entries in Group 7 attest that the phrase '曰X曰Y' carries a unique meaning, which should be understood that 'Z is now segmented and separately replaced by X and Y.' The omission of 'Z' in the phrases might be attributed to 楚 and 生 being considered taboo characters during the Qin's drive for unification and standardisation of writing.

The *gengming fang* further includes a guideline in Group 5 about the avoidance of 'taboo characters,' reinforcing this practice. AXVII: 'All officials with a character *qin* 秦 [in their names][37] are

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[36] For example, the 'Shihu gui' 師虎簋 (mid-Western Zhou period) bronze vessel has the character of '荆' inscribed as: 𣂏. Visit 'Xiaoxue tang' 小學堂 website (https://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/jinwen) for high-resolution images, index number 4316.
[37] You Yi-fei (2013) argues that there is a missing character '*ming* 名' after '*guan* 官.'

required to make a name change (諸官為秦盡更).' It is understandable that *qin* 秦, as the name of the state, is prohibited to be used in officials' names. This rule extends beyond officials to include the populace and convict labourers, who are also mandated to change their names should they contain the character 秦, as evidenced in slip 2026 of the Yuelu texts (Chen Songchang *et al.* (eds.) 2017: 200):

令曰：黔首、徒隸名為秦者，更名之。敢有弗更，貲二甲。

The ordinance states: the "black-headed" people and convict labourers whose names include the character *qin* must change their names. Those who dare not comply will result in a penalty of being fined two suits of armour (equals 2,688 coins [38]).

This aligns with the ritualistic tradition that dictates 'one should not incorporate the state's name in the names of their children' (名子者，不以國; Ruan ed. 1965: 38-2). However, in this case, the character of 秦 still appears in the phrase, in contrast to the 楚 and 生, which are entirely omitted in Entries AXX and AXXI, presumably adhering to a more stringent taboo principle.[39] The rationale behind this differentiation is comprehensible: 楚 and 生 might be names of the First Emperor's ancestors, necessitating their complete omission. 秦 as the state name inevitably appears in various contexts; it is just specifically avoided in certain scenarios, such as in personal names. Hence, 秦 is regarded as a semi-taboo character.

'RECTIFICATION OF NAMES': NOMENCLATURE CHANGES
AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW RULING ORDER

In the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) 13.3, Confucius emphasizes the 'rectification of names' (*zhengming* 正名) as the foremost matter of governance, when questioned about the paramount concern in statecraft. This concept has since become a pervasive theme in Chinese epistemology and political philosophy, underscoring the significance of accurately using names and titles. Such precision in nomenclature is crucial for aligning individual's identities, statuses, interpersonal as well as cosmic relationships. Moreover, it serves as a vital means of defining one's roles and duties, not only in the sphere of governance but also in the cosmic framework. Notably, 35 out of the 54 entries in the *gengming fang* addresses the change of proper names, titles and appellations, highlighting the importance of this practice.

This change is fundamentally rooted in Qin's transition from a regional vassal state to the inaugural empire in Chinese history. As the state's domination expanded to encompass 'all under heaven,' it necessitated that the Qin rulers adjust both linguistically and mentally to this new reality. Essentially, the mandated name changes were part of establishing a new ruling order aligned with this transformation. The most direct manifestation of this change was in the terminology associated with royalty; terms previously linked to 'king' were now modified to align with 'emperor,' illustrating a significant elevation in authority and scope.

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[38] According to the Qin statutes from the Yuelu Academy collection, one suit of armour amounted to 1344 coins. See Yu 2010.

[39] For a detailed discussion on the 'taboo principles' in different types of texts, see Beck 1987: 68–85, Lai 2007: 126–132, Feng Yicheng (=Oliver Venture) 2012: 147–157, Chen Wei 2017: 1–26.

> BVI: 'By the royal command' is now changed to be 'by the imperial instruction.' 以王令曰
> 以皇帝詔
> BXIX: The 'royal palace' is now changed to be 'imperial palace.' 王宮曰皇帝宮
> BXXI: The 'royal hunting excursion' is now changed to be the 'imperial hunting excursion.'
> 王獵曰皇帝獵

Other than this type of straightforward change from 'king' to 'emperor,' there is a necessity to rectify a set of proper names and titles. For example, Entries BVII, BXII and BXIV collectively stipulate that what was once called a 'royal mandate' should now be termed as 'imperial decision' 制 (BVII: 承命曰承制, BXIII: 受命曰制, BXIV: 出命曰制).[40] With the territorial expansion, what was previously known as 'the borderland fortress [in the kingdom of Qin] is now called 'the former borderland fortress,' and areas without a fortress are referred to as 'the former borderland' (BXVII-BXVIII: 邊塞曰故塞, 毋塞者曰故徼). These changes in the nomenclature were accompanied by a series of modifications in the official titles and institutional names, signifying a systematic restructuring to align with the new imperial status.

> BVIII. The 'royal house' is to be called 'county office.' 王室曰縣官。
> BIX. The 'ducal house' is to be called 'county office.' 公室曰縣官。

This process of renaming not only reflects the shift of the ruling order from a feudal principality to a newly established empire, but also defines this transformation. The terms 'ducal house' or 'royal house' represent the old feudal order under the Zhou dynasty, whereas the concept of 'county office' (i.e., the government) symbolizes the new imperial administration, theoretically accessible to all under heaven. This shift eliminated any intermediary authoritative layers between the emperor and his subjects, defining a new, 'public' and universally applicable ruling order.[41] In this regard, the practice of name changing, as exemplified by the *gengming fang*, signifies the evolution of Qin from a localized sovereign entity (or the 'ducal house') to a universal empire with claims of dominion over all under heaven.

By reorganizing the entries according to the type of the changes they institute, regardless of the varied terminologies employed, it is possible to create a table that displays the quantity of entries within each category:

Table 3: Table of the quantity of each category of entries within the *gengming fang*

Category	Quantity
1) regulation of the graphic forms	2
2) rectification of the relation between graphs and meanings	14
3) standardisation of proper nouns, appellations, and titles	35
4) Taboo characters	3

[40] For the exploration of the various genres of imperial commands and their proper translations, see Giele 2006: 234–258, 306–308.
[41] For a discussion of the transformation of the Qin regime from the perspective of the state-family relationship, see Zheng Yifan 2023: 30–34.

This table shows that the third category, standardisation of proper words, titles and appellations constitutes the largest portion of the Qin's efforts to unify written language. In contrast, the standardisation of the graphic forms a much lesser portion. This suggests that the Qin dynasty's endeavor to standardise language had far-reaching implications, extending beyond mere 'unification of the script.' Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the distribution of categories in the table may not fully reflect the entirety of the standardisation of the written language. On the one hand, the *gengming fang* is a fragmentary document comprising only 54 entries, which probably captures only a fraction of the linguistic changes that took place during this period. Additionally, its nature as an individual compilation of excerpts from various documents implies that the choices reflected therein are subject to the compiler's biases, particularly those of a local scribe from this specific region. The expanding corpus of Qin dynasty written materials has revealed a number of standardised characters and terms absent from the *gengming fang*. A notable example, also mentioned in the *Shiji*, is the renaming of the populace from *min* 民 to *qianshou* 黔首. A comparative analysis of the occurrences of these two terms, along with *baixing*百姓, in Qin texts before and after unification demonstrates a rigorous compliance with this renaming directive.

Table 4: Frequency of Occurrences of *min* 民, *baixing* 百姓 and *qianshou* 黔首 in pre-unification and post-unification Qin Manuscripts

	min 民 / *baixing* 百姓	*qianshou* 黔首
Shuihudi	47/15	0
Liye vol. 1	0/0	13
Liye vol. 2	1/0	21
Longgang	0/0	9
Yuelu vol. 1-7	3/0[42]	96
Zhangjiashan	34/1	20

This table shows that during the Warring States period, the terms *min* 民 and *baixing* 百姓 were prevalent in Qin texts, whereas the term *qianshou* 黔首 only gained widespread usage following the unification of Qin. Likely in response to an official decree, the use of *min* 民 and *baixing* 百姓 declined dramatically in the post-unification texts while instances of *qianshou* 黔首 surged across these documents. The term *min*民 did not recover until the emergence of the Zhangjiashan texts during the early Western Han period. The substitution relationship between these terms becomes particularly clear when comparing two closely aligned statutes:

百姓居田舍者毋敢酤酉(酒)。田嗇夫、部佐謹禁御之, 有不從令者有辠。(Chen Wei *et al.* (eds.) 2014: 50)
Common people residing in rural areas should refrain from selling alcohol. The agricultural overseers and the division assistants are tasked with closely monitoring and prevent-

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[42] Note that even among the three occurrences of 'min 民' used in the Yuelu texts, only one is present in Volume 1, as a post-unification instance.

ing such activities. Those who fail to comply with these regulations will be deemed to have committed a crime. (Shuihudi, "Statutes on Fields" slip 12)

黔首居田舍者毋敢醢<醓（酤）>酒，不從令者巻（遷）之。(Chen Songchang *et al.* (eds.) 2015: 106)

The 'black-headed' people residing in rural areas should refrain from selling alcohol. Those who fail to comply with these regulations will be exiled. (Yuelu vol. 4, slip 115/1400)

The two statutes are nearly identical in content, with the major distinction being the substitution of the term 百姓 with 黔首 in the Yuelu statutes, in accordance with the Qin ordinance. The newly discovered documents not only enrich the textual corpus but also present concrete examples of text editing. In a legal document from the Yuelu collection (vol. 3) detailing a murder case, there is a phrase on slips 147-148 that reads 'Tong and Xian are the scourge of [the populace] (同、顯[民] 大害殹(也))'. [43] Editors of the Yuelu manuscripts found that on slip 147, the original character 民 appears to have been deliberately erased, leaving an unnatural blank space that could fit one character, thereby rendering the phrase incomplete. In a corresponding move on slip 148, which is adjacent to slip 147, the term 黔首 is cramped into a space that seems intended for a single character. It is reasonable to speculate that the original character 民 was erased, and 黔首 was later inserted into this restricted space. Additionally, it is plausible that the scribes may have inadvertently failed to inscribe 黔首 on slip 147, thus leaving the observed blank space. This detail sheds light on the meticulous manual interventions of the scribes to comply with the standardisation directive, shaping the manuscripts into their current form and leaving an 'imprint of power' on the bamboo and wooden slips.
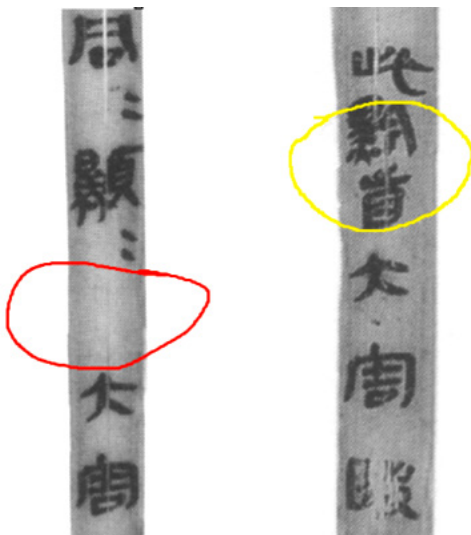

Fig. 2. Example of editing the bamboo inscriptions to align with the standardisation directive (Chen Songchang *et al.* (eds.) 2013: 180–182, slips 147-148)

[43] Chen Songchang *et al.* (eds.) 2013: 180–182. Lau and Staack 2016: Case II. 9, 218–227, and footnote 1073.

CONCLUSION

The First Emperor's 'unification of Chinese writing' in 221 BCE has long been celebrated as the foremost cultural endeavor in historical narratives. However, researchers have been limited by a dearth of textual evidence regarding this monumental project, and the scope and impact of Qin language standardisation have thus remained misunderstood. The discovery of the No. 8-461 'wooden tablet of nomenclature changes,' from the Liye site has shed unprecedented light on the Qin Dynasty's language standards, enriching our understanding of the complexities and nuances of the 'unification' initiative. Furthermore, the rapidly growing number of written records from the Qin dynasty, both before and after the Qin unification, enables verification of these discoveries through comparison with contemporaneous texts.

Analysis of this 2,200-year-old wooden tablet shows that the *gengming fang*, despite its inconsistencies in terminology, is an invaluable piece of evidence for the Qin dynasty's language standardisation project, contributing significantly to our understanding of the language evolution over two millennia ago. Above, we have classified the tablet's 54 identifiable entries into 11 groups based on the specific terminology used in each entry. From a modern linguistic viewpoint, these can further be classified into four broad categories:

1. Regulation of the graphic forms (3.7%);
2. Rectification of the relation between graphs and their meanings (25.9%);
3. Standardisation of proper nouns and appellations (64.8%);
4. Avoidance of taboo characters (5.6%).

This study delves into the *gengming fang* document and conducts a frequency analysis of related characters and words in Qin written records, revealing significant observations. 1. Analysis of contemporaneous texts exhibits a remarkable degree of adherence to the *gengming fang* guidelines, attesting to a highly effective implementation of the Qin standardisation efforts. These guidelines were not arbitrary but were informed by evolving writing practices dating back to the Warring States period, reflecting the linguistic and cultural ethos of the Qin region. 2. The standardisation policy extends beyond the mere unification of script, to include defining the relationships among graphs and meanings, and the proper use of names and titles, which facilitated the establishment of a new ruling order as Qin transitioned from a kingdom to an empire. Additionally, the frequent appearance of variant characters and loanwords in Chinese writing history suggests that diversity, rather than uniformity, was the norm. This diversity resurfaced after the Qin dynasty's collapse, as evidenced by the early Western Han texts from Zhangjiashan, which diverged from Qin standards. As a contemporaneous artefact from the time of the First Emperor, the *gengming fang* offers invaluable insight into the implementation and impact of this monumental policy, providing a direct window into the role of local officials in bringing the First Emperor's vision into fruition.

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