4 Circumcisions and Names

The Dunhuang manuscripts, particularly the documents related to the economic and social history of the region, provide first-hand information, not available in transmitted sources, on daily life in this multicultural and multilingual region. The manuscripts include a variety of texts concerning local associations known as she 社.415 Chinese scholars commonly refer to the texts as sheyi wenshu 社邑文書, or association documents.416 A subset of this group is several hundred copies of circulars sent out to members of such associations, informing them of the time and place of upcoming meetings, the agenda, contributions they were supposed to bring and penalties for late arrival or non-attendance.417 The circulars date from the Guiyijun period and are usually on coarse paper, often on the verso of manuscripts with other texts. Looking at them as a group, it is striking that many of them are in an untrained hand and abound in mistakes.

Some of the surviving manuscripts containing circulars are actual notices sent out to communicate with members, and as such, they are first-hand witnesses of the activities of local associations. They were written by the management and then passed around among members, possibly by means of a messenger. After making a full round, the circular would make its way back to the management. The very fact that some of them have survived is evidence that at times they were kept after having served their initial purpose. Rather than being filed away for record keeping, they may well have been kept as samples for students to copy as a writing exercise.

Indeed, many of the extant circulars are fragmentary and appear in conjunction with texts written by students, indicating they were not originals but copies. The inclusion of these circulars among the repertoire of texts used for practice illustrates how administrative and other documents could serve an

415 The institution of she was not unique to Dunhuang and there were antecedents in central China from earlier times; for a brief overview, see Ning Ke 1985.
416 Hao Chunwen 2007, 129 estimates that the total number of surviving documents related to associations is more than 480. For a brief overview of the documents related to associations, see Rong 2013, 296–300.
417 I follow Yamamoto, Dohi and Ishida 1989 in using ‘association’ as a translation of the Chinese word she. Lionel Giles (1939) referred to them as ‘clubs’; Leonid Chuguevsky as ‘lay social unions’ (in Russian; Chuguevskij 1976 and 1977) or ‘corporations, associations’ (in French; Čuguevskiĭ 1981, 25); Erik Zürcher (1989, 46) as ‘religious societies’. The English title of the reprint of Naba Toshisada’s (1974, 459) seminal study called them ‘voluntary associations’. I prefer the term ‘association’ because it is neutral, in contrast to the interpretive nature of some of the other terms.
entirely different function after their original use. In fact, in many cases their ultimate survival is the result of this secondary function, in contrast to the multitude of other documents and letters which were not utilised in such way and thus perished.

A fascinating feature of the circulars is that they often contain the list of recipients, that is, the document’s intended audience. Taken together, their names constitute an important body of onomastic data with potential insights into the cultural background of local population during the Guiyijun period. The second half of this chapter attempts to tap into this corpus of names and interpret them in the light of what has been said about the region in the previous chapters.

### 4.1 Former scholarship

Scholars recognised the value of documents related to associations relatively early.\(^{418}\) The first person to study such documents from the Stein and Pelliot collections was the Japanese scholar Naba Toshisada 那波利貞. In 1938 and 1939, he published two long studies, in which he not only presented the first overview of this group of texts but also provided an exhaustive analysis of the typology of associations, their characteristics and social function.\(^{419}\) Citing a large number of concrete examples from the manuscripts, he drew attention to a wealth of hitherto unknown material. His systematic approach and attention to detail laid the foundation for subsequent research on the topic.

In Britain, Lionel Giles published the first full translation of an association circular (S.1453) in 1939, as part of a longer project of translating the colophons of dated manuscripts from the Stein collection.\(^{420}\) He also provided a short discussion of such documents, calling them ‘club circulars’. His posthumous catalogue of the Chinese manuscripts gathers the relevant texts together under the heading as ‘Club rules and circulars’ (Nos 7572–7624).\(^{421}\) In France, the eminent historian Jacques Gernet discussed associations in Dunhuang in his book on Buddhist economy. Relying on Naba Toshisada’s research for specific examples, he emphasised the continuity of such associations from the fifth century through the Song

\(^{418}\) For an overview of research on documents related to associations, see Hao Chunwen 2007 and Zhao Dawang 2019b.  
\(^{419}\) Naba 1938, Parts I–III, Naba 1939a and 1939b.  
\(^{420}\) Giles 1939, 1038–1040.  
\(^{421}\) Giles 1957, 259–261.
period.\footnote{422} Accordingly, he saw the Guiyijun associations merely as a local manifestation of a much wider phenomenon in Chinese social history. In Russia, Leonid I. Chuguevsky studied the manuscripts related to economic and social history from the 1970s onward. Working in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), he primarily researched the manuscripts in the Oldenburg collection, and thus his papers were equally important for introducing hitherto unknown manuscripts to scholars around the world.\footnote{423}

Research continued in Japan with a study by the historian Chikusa Masaaki 竹沙雅章, who made a number of important observations, including a clear distinction between original documents and copies made by students as writing exercise.\footnote{424} After a brief hiatus, research in Japan resumed with contributions that positioned associations within the social history of Dunhuang. Dohi Yoshikazu 土肥義和 analysed the role of associations in the construction of cave temples and Nagasawa Kazutoshi 長澤和俊 examined them in relation to daily life.\footnote{425} A major step in the study of the documents was the publication of the Toyo bunko series entitled Tun-huang and Turfan Documents Concerning Social and Economic History, volume IV of which bore the subtitle ‘She Associations and Related Documents’.\footnote{426} Each entry included a transcription, notes, bibliography of secondary literature and, in a companion volume, facsimile reproductions made from microfilms.

Chinese scholars became involved in the study of documents related to associations from the 1980s onward. Significant early contributions were authored by Guo Feng 郭鋒, Ning Ke, and Hao Chunwen.\footnote{427} With the major Dunhuang collections becoming available in facsimile editions, it became possible to study the documents as a more or less comprehensive corpus.\footnote{428} A result of these ef-

\footnote{422}{Gernet’s book was originally published in French in 1956 (Gernet 1956), while the Chinese (Xie Henai 1994) and English (Gernet 1995) translations came out nearly four decades later. The discussion of ‘Organized Associations’ is in Gernet 1995, 259–277.}

\footnote{423}{Chuguevsky 1976, 1977, 1982, and 1996. The collection was kept at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which is known today as the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts.}

\footnote{424}{Chikusa 1964. Paul Demiéville (1970, 17–18) published a brief overview of Chikusa’s study on the pages of T’oung Pao. Other contributions to the subject from this period include Chen Zuolong 1965 and 1973.}


\footnote{426}{Yamamoto, Dohi and Ishida 1989.}


\footnote{428}{Huang Yongwu 黃永武 published facsimile versions of the Dunhuang manuscripts from microfilms in a 140-volume series entitled Dunhuang baozang 敦煌寶藏 (Huang Yongwu 1986).}
forts was the collection of relevant documents Ning Ke and Hao Chunwen published in 1997. This publication was a milestone in research, for at the time it represented the first complete collection of all relevant manuscripts in scrupulous transcription, providing access to primary sources that were otherwise not easily accessible. Although it is more complete than the Toyo bunko edition, both publications remain essential for the study of association documents.

The beginning of the new millennium saw a series of excellent studies on Dunhuang associations, and this trend continues to this day. In addition to researching the social or economic history of the region, scholars continue to exploit the same body of texts for its linguistic features, and recently there has been renewed interest in links with Buddhism. Among the most exciting topics that have generated quite a few publications is the history and nature of women’s associations. There are also book-length studies of the documents related to associations, one by Hao Chunwen, the other by Meng Xianshi. The second edition of Hao Chunwen’s 2006 monograph demonstrates the continuous interest in the subject and its significance for Dunhuang studies in general.

4.2 Documents related to associations

Associations were, and still are, an integral part of religious life in China. Although they were ubiquitous in the medieval period, almost all relevant documents from Dunhuang date to the Guiyijun period and exhibit a high degree of homogeneity. Even documents and circulars written decades apart maintain essentially the same formulaic wording, pointing to a shared tradition. As a result, the relevant documents allow us to reconstruct the main characteristics of

Although by modern standards the quality of the images is far from ideal, the publication was an important stimulus for the field of Dunhuang studies, as it provided access to the manuscripts. Even today, when most manuscripts are available as digital images or good quality paper publications, owing to its comprehensive coverage, the Dunhuang baozang remains a useful resource.

429 Ning and Hao 1997.
433 Hao Chunwen 2006a and Meng Xianshi 2009b.
434 Hao Chunwen 2019.
local associations. The manuscripts reveal that the associations in Guiyijun Dunhuang were governed by the Three Officers (**sanguan** 三官), comprising the President (**shezhang** 社長), the Manager (**shenguang** 社官) and the Secretary (**lushi** 録事). In some cases, an officer called Elder (**shelao** 社老) may also be present.435

As far as we know, the **she** in Dunhuang did not have names. They had a charter that laid down their organisational rules and main principles, but they appeared to have had no unique names by which they were distinguished. The circulars dispatched by the management were only sent to members of that particular association and there was no need to differentiate it from others. In a sense, it was the list of recipients that defined the group. The heading of circulars from Dunhuang sometimes indicate the type of people who formed an association (e.g. irrigation channel managers, brothers, women) and thus distinguish between different types. When people needed to identify a specific association, they could use the name of one of its officers as a term of reference. For example, manuscript Дх-2149 contains the list of people owing firewood, and the list includes ‘Eighty-two people of the **she** of Gao Zhu’er’ 高住兒社八十二人, in which Gao Zhu’er was perhaps one of the officers.436

Manuscript S.5465 contains a series of notes on the source and apportionment of measures of oil. This record mentions two different associations and differentiates between them using personal names. Thus, it is reported that two **sheng** 升 of oil were ‘returned to be used by the **she** of the family from Changle’ 還常樂家社用, probably referring to the village by that name 130 km east of Dunhuang. The next entry states that on a different occasion another **sheng** of oil was ‘returned to be used by the **she** of Ma Pingshui and his brothers’ 還馬平水兄弟社用.437 Ma Pingshui 馬平水 must be the same person whose name also occurs in an association circular in manuscript P.3372 (dated 972) and whose death is recorded in manuscript S.6886 (dated 981).438 The circular with his name, however, does not list anyone else with the Ma surname.

In principle, circulars had a list of names at the end and members appended a mark below their name to indicate that they had received and read the notice. In reality, however, most of the extant circulars do not have lists of names, most likely because they are not originals but copies written by students. Nonetheless,

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435 On the identity of the **she**’s officers, as well as their role, see Yang Sen 1999a.
436 A person with the same name also appears in manuscript Дх-1453, which dates to the **bingyin** 丙寅 year (906/966). On manuscript Дх-2149 and its relevance for taxation during the Guiyijun period, see Liu Jinbao 2007.
437 A transcription of this text is available in Yamamoto, Dohi and Ishida 1989, 123.
438 The records of apportioning oil to associations date to the **dingchou** 丁丑 year, which probably signifies 977.
even such copies occasionally include a list of recipients and thus can help to understand the associations’ demographics. Some of the names match those of the donors in votive paintings, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, were commissioned by elite families.

While a large number of circulars and other documents related to associations survive, they are minimal in comparison with the total population of Dunhuang, which was 25,000 thousand at the time. This is especially the case if we consider that the documents span a period of at least five generations. Unfortunately, it is not known what portion of the local population participated in such associations and how common they were. Most documents were simply lost, and only a fraction survived for reasons largely external to the documents themselves, such as the practice of copying them as writing exercise or using them as scrap paper for conserving Buddhist scrolls. Occasionally monastic names appear among the members, but most associations were made up of lay believers. In rare cases all members of a she were clergy. For example, the list of names at the end of a circular in manuscript S.5139 lists Buddhist monks with titles such as sengzheng 僧政, falü 法律, dusi falü 都司法律, laosu 老宿, shangzuo 上座, sheli 鬧梨, sizhu 寺主 and chanshi 禪師. As the list enumerates the top clergy in Dunhuang, these individuals must have belonged to different monasteries and were quite different from the family-based individuals encountered in most circulars.

Manuscript P.3544, shown in Fig. 59, provides an example of how, when and why Dunhuang residents formed associations. The text is written with a pen in a bold, confident hand on a separate sheet of brownish paper. Although part of the last line has been left blank, indicating the end of a section, in its current form the manuscript is probably incomplete, and the original text was longer. Nevertheless, it is evident that the bylaws have a logical and ordered layout, with the itemised conditions and aims of the association appearing as an indented list of items, similar to modern bullet points. Half-way through line four, an empty space has been inserted before the expression Sagely Lord the Emperor 聖主皇帝. The space is the so-called ‘reverence space’ (jingkong 敬空), a common scribal device used consistently down the ages to modern times. Its significance in this place, along with the well-ordered layout, lies in that it supports the assumption that this is an original document, rather than a copy written by a student.

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439 Rong 2013, 40.
441 See also McMullen 2013, 134 for the significance of the space before the term shengzhu 聖主.
At the onset, the document clarifies that it is a reinstatement of an association that previously existed but had been suspended due to external circumstances. The first part of the text lists the names and titles of the individuals involved in the event, explains the motive for repeatedly drawing up the bylaws, and states the main objectives of the association. This part reads as follows:
On account of the turmoil caused by bandits in the city, leading to the destruction of grain seedlings and difficulties in operating the association, which could no longer be sustained, President Wang Wu, Manager Zhang Haiqing, Secretary Tang Shennu and others on this twenty-ninth day of the ninth month of the ninth year of the Dazhong reign (855), gather in the home of Zhang Luzi and hereby renew the bylaws with the aim of having a written record of those. Dunhuang is a commandery where the rites and rules of propriety are observed, and so, first, for the benefit of the Sagely Lord the Emperor; second, for the sake of constructing caves; and third, for the sake of deceased parents and to participate in the rituals related to inauspicious and auspicious events, [the members] together form a favourable bond, of which [this document will serve] as written evidence for future reference.

The bylaws were composed in the autumn of 855, only a few years into the Guiyijun period, when the region was no longer under Tibetan administration. The expression *chenghuang zeiluan* 城隍賊亂 (‘turmoil caused by bandits in the city’) has been interpreted as a reference to the decades of Tibetan control over Dunhuang.\(^{442}\) This view, however, seems to hinge on seeing this episode in the history of the region as a period of foreign oppression and Zhang Yichao’s revolt as an act of liberation on the part of the oppressed Chinese population. Instead, the expression must signify Zhang Yichao’s rebellion and the ensuing fighting in the region.\(^{443}\) This was a recent event that inevitably had a significant impact on the lives of the individuals drawing up the bylaws, in contrast with the relatively peaceful decades of the Tibetan period, which for those involved would have meant the world in which they were born and raised. The bylaws also make it clear that the association existed in the city earlier, but its operation had to be suspended due to troubled times, which is unlikely to have been a reference to a situation two generations earlier, before the present members’ lifetime.

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\(^{442}\) Hao Chunwen 2003, 94–95.

\(^{443}\) This point is also made in Meng Xianshi 2003, 146. The recto of manuscript P.2598 contains a text about installing a white parasol at the four corners of the city ‘in order to avert calamity and repel bandits in the city’ 為城隍攘（禳）災卻賊. The date of the manuscript is 883 and it is clear that the fear of bandits and possible calamities mentioned here reflect contemporary concerns. On this text, see Yu Xin 2009, 110–111 and Wang Wei 2007, 114.
Shengzhu 聖主 (‘Sagely Lord’) is a common Buddhist term that appears in early translations of Buddhist texts as a reference to the Buddha.\textsuperscript{444} Since the current ruler Zhang Yichao claimed loyalty to the Tang court, the term must refer to the Tang emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 (r. 846–859), who was imbued with religious significance. The wellbeing of the emperor was a common element of votive inscriptions. For example, a colophon to manuscript BD14679 (dated 902) with a copy of the Guanyin jing states that the copying was completed with one’s own blood for, among many other things, the protection and longevity of ‘the present True Sagely Lord’ 當真聖主.\textsuperscript{445}

The phrase zhui xiong jiu ji 追凶就吉 (or zhui xiong zhu ji 追凶逐吉 in other manuscripts), which I translate here as ‘to take part in the rituals related to inauspicious and auspicious events’, refers to funerals and weddings within one’s own family.\textsuperscript{446} In practical terms, the performance of such rituals must have been among the association’s most important functions. As seen in Chapter One, some of the manuscripts were also written as part of the ritual commemorating the dead, demonstrating that religious worship often revolved around funerary rites.

One of the fascinating aspects of Dunhuang associations is that some of them had exclusively female membership. Manuscript S.527, a short scroll with no other content, records the bylaws of such an association. Once again, this is visibly an original document, not a student’s copy (Fig. 60). The text begins with the following words:

\textsuperscript{444} The term has also been borrowed into other religious traditions; for example, in Chinese versions of Christian texts it translates the word Mār (‘Lord’), signifying the figure of Jesus; see Wang Juan 2018, 638.

\textsuperscript{445} Fang Guangchang 1997, 226 reads the character zhen 真 in this phrase as a phonetic substitute for jin 今 (‘now; present’). This reading would match the inscription in Stein painting 5, which uses the phrase ‘for the benefit of the current emperor’ 為當今皇帝; see Whitfield and Farrer 1990, 29. But this particular colophon dates to 902, the final years of the Tang dynasty, and thus the use of the word ‘true’ 真 in reference to the emperor may signify a contrast with an impostor. Therefore, this may not be a simple case of phonetic substitution but rather an expression of the desire to benefit the cause of the ‘true’ emperor, expressing a political standpoint.

\textsuperscript{446} Zhang Xiaoyan 2013, 99–104 and Ye Guiliang 2004, 80.
顯德六年己未歲正月三日，女人社因滋（茲）新歲初來，各發好意，再立條件。蓋聞至诚立社，有條有格。夫邑儀（義）者，父母生其身，朋友長其志（志）；遇危則相扶，難則相救；与朋友交，言如信；結交朋友，世語（與）相續，大者若姊，小者若妹，讓語（與）先登，立條件與後，山河為誓，中（終）不相違。

On the third day of the first month of the jiwei year, the sixth of the Xiande reign (959), our women’s association, on the occasion of the arrival of the New Year, in an expression of each member’s good will, hereby renew the bylaws.

For we have heard that to establish an association with utmost sincerity, one must make written bylaws and regulations. As for members of the association, it is their parents who give birth to their body but it is through friends that they develop their conscious aspirations. Friends aid each other in times of crisis, relieve each other when in difficulty. Dealing with friends, one should be faithful to one’s word, when making friends, one should treat them in generational order; treat the older ones as their elder sister, and the younger ones as their younger sister, yielding and giving priority to each other. [With these objectives in mind, members] establish the bylaws for future reference, and swear to the mountains and rivers an oath which they will never violate.

The bylaws expressly name the she as a ‘women’s association’ 女人社, indicating the members felt it was important to distinguish this kind of specialised association from ordinary ones that did not specify the members’ gender. Among the core principles was a familial-like bond between the members to help each other whenever necessary. The words ‘Dealing with friends, one
should be faithful to one’s word’ 與朋友交，言如信 are a loose quote from *Lunyu* 1:7 (與朋友交，言而有信). The words of Confucius must have lent legitimacy to the document and emphasised that the bond between members was just as important as biological ties, if not more so. According to the list of founding members at the end of the document (Fig. 61), the Manager (*sheguan*) was a nun, whereas the President and the Secretary and the rest of the members were lay individuals. Interestingly, an Elder is also listed and her name is simply Nüzi 女子 (‘woman, girl’).

![Fig. 61: Close-up of women’s names and signatures in manuscript S.527.](image)

As can be seen from Fig. 61, fifteen women signed the document, all identified, apart from the officers, as *sheren* 社人 (‘member of the she’). As this is not a copy but an actual document, the names are written in the same hand as the rest of the document but the signatures are different. Unlike today, the signatures here and in many other documents from Dunhuang and Turfan do not write out the name but consist of simple marks or characters (or fragments thereof) taken from the names. Some of the names that end with the character 之子 (e.g. Nüzi 女子 and

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448 Although this practice was not limited to Dunhuang and Turfan, these two collections provide a considerable amount of first-hand archaeological evidence to document it. On the crow-like mark seen in Guiyijun documents, see Eliasberg 1979. On the fascinating development of signatures in general, see Fraenkel 1992. For the use of finger digit marks and fingerprints for authenticating documents, see Laufer 1912 and 1917 and Chavannes 1913, as well as the very useful remarks in Teiser 2020.
Wu Fuzi (吳富子) have a cross-like sign underneath, which at first sight may be interpreted as a cursive form of zi 子. A very similar cross appears, however, under the name Fulian 富連, suggesting that this may simply be a generic signature mark. Other manuscripts confirm this, as the same sign can follow a variety of different names. In the case of Yiding 意定, the signature resembles an abbreviated or unfinished version of the character 意. One explanation for these types of signatures is that they were written by illiterate people, however, this is not necessarily the case, for such abbreviated signs may well have been a perfectly acceptable way of signing documents. A case in point is the Secretary (lushi), who signed the document using a similar cross-like sign, even though she would have been the person actually writing the documents related to the operation of the association, possibly including these very bylaws. In general, the notion that most commoners, especially women, were illiterate is an assumption that has yet to be researched and proven and may not be the case at all.

In terms of membership, if a member wished to join or leave, he or she had to submit an application to this effect, and the management or members would make an official decision on the matter. For example, the verso of manuscript P.3266 contains an application for joining an association (tou she 投社). It begins as follows:

投社人董延進 右延進父母生身，並無朋有（友），空過一生，全無社邑。金（今）遇貴 社，欲義（意）投入，追凶逐吉。

Applicant Dong Yanjin:
Although aforementioned Yanjin was given birth by his parents, he does not have any friends, has lived his entire life without a purpose, and is unattached to any association. Today, having come across your esteemed association, he would like to join it and participate in the rituals related to inauspicious and auspicious events.

Once again, the rhetoric emphasises the absolute necessity of friendship beyond the biological relationship with one’s actual parents. Yet the point of joining the she is to ‘participate in the rituals related to inauspicious and auspicious events’, that is, to gain the financial support of other members in rituals related to weddings and the commemoration of the dead with respect to one’s own family. This does not, however, mean that fellow members could not be related to each other. On the contrary, it was common for family members to be part of

449 See, for example, P.2932 in which the same mark appears after several names.
450 Huang Zheng 2005, 498 lists this incomplete signature as a variant form of the character 意.
the same association, sometimes together with members of their extended family. A case in point is manuscript S.5698, which records a decision made in response to a request submitted by one Luo Shennu 羅神奴 on behalf of himself and his two sons. The text reads as follows:

癸酉年三月十九日，社戶羅神奴及男文英、義子三人，為緣家貧闕乏，種種不員（緣）。神奴等三人，數件追逐不得，伏訖（乞）三官眾社賜以條內除名，放免寬閑。其三官知眾社商量，緣是貧窮不濟，放卻神奴。寬免後，若神奴及男三人家內所有死生，不關眾社。

The nineteenth day of the third month of the guiyou year. Three members of a household in the she, namely, Luo Shennu and his sons Weny ing and Yizi, have been experiencing difficulties due to their family’s poverty. Shennu and his sons, having been unable to make the contributions on several occasions, earnestly requested the Three Officers and the other members to allow their names to be removed from the charter and relieve them from their membership. The Three Officers brought the matter for discussion in front of the members who decided to relieve Shennu on account of his dreadful poverty. If, following his release, there are cases of death or birth in the family of Shennu and his sons, these will not concern the members of the she anymore.

According to this record, the decision was reached by the assembly, who relieved Luo Shennu and his sons from being part of the membership. Apparently, being part of an association could impose a significant burden on poorer members and they could fall behind on contributions. It is possible that Luo Shennu did not initiate the application for withdrawal but was forced to request it because he had fallen behind with payments. The association would thereby disengage itself from any further obligations towards him and his family. It is also possible that poverty was an excuse and Luo Shennu and his sons simply wished to leave because they did not find that paying the contributions was worth the benefits any longer. They may have been thinking of joining another association or were about to spend an extended period of time away from Dunhuang and did not want to continue paying over that period.

Associations were an integral part of the daily life of people in Dunhuang. They provided the organisational background for much of the religious activity, such as celebrating festivals, building caves at Mogao, renovating temples and bridges, sponsoring the copying of scriptures. Much of the relevant documents available today come from the Guiyijun period but this may simply be the result of the circumstances that led to the sealing of the library cave. Similar types of organisations must have played an important role through most of the region’s history.
4.3 Circulars

The group of texts related to associations include different types of documents, ranging from bylaws to applications and notices to circulars and various kinds of ledgers. All of these documents are essential for reconstructing the social history of the region and the development of the institution of *she* in particular. Yet by far the most numerous documents in this body of material are the circulars that begin with the words *shesi zhuantie* 社司 轉帖. Together they constitute the largest subset of texts related to associations. Although the corpus also contains circulars of other kinds of associations, the generic type that begins with these four characters was the most common. 452

The circulars from Dunhuang are relatively stable in their format and wording throughout the period they were in use. While the earliest unambiguously dated example of such a document is from the tenth year of the Xiantong 咸通 reign (869), there may be earlier ones that are either undated or dated ambiguously. 453 In many cases the dates are given as cyclical signs, which inevitably presents a certain degree of uncertainty. Thus it is possible that some of the undated circulars go back to the Tibetan period, that is, before 848. At the other end of the timeline, none of the documents are later than 992. Therefore, the corpus of association circulars can be dated to the mid-ninth through the late tenth century, which in Dunhuang chronology closely overlaps with the Guiyijun period. In addition, it also approximates the time span of the groups of manuscripts examined in the previous chapters.

To demonstrate the basic structure of circulars, consider manuscript S.1453, a 5 m long scroll with a complete copy of Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Diamond sutra*. The circular is located towards the middle of the verso, on the fifth sheet of paper. Aside from the circular, the verso is largely empty, with only a few one or two-line snippets of texts, apparently in the same hand as that which wrote the circular. The style of writing is semi-cursive (Fig. 62) and the ink is relatively faint, making it not always easy to read the text. In such cases the formulaic wording of circulars is of great help for deciphering individual characters. The document is dated to the second year of the Guangqi 光啟 reign (886), already a generation or so into the Guiyijun period. The text reads as follows:

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452 For the classification of attested associations, see the division in Yamamoto, Dohi and Ishida 1989.

453 As we have seen above in connection with manuscript P.3544 (dated 855), there were other types of *she*-related documents from before 869, but not circulars.
Fig. 62: Section from the verso of manuscript S.1453, showing a circular. (27.2 × 499 cm; The British Library)

From the office of the association. A circular. The aforementioned [office], on account of the annual meeting and feast of the she, kindly invites all members to gather, in response to this circular, on the tenth day of the present moon, at the entrance to the Jiejia Hermitage. Those who do not arrive punctually will be fined one beaker (jiao) of wine.

454 The Jiejia Hermitage 節加蘭若 was one of more than twenty hermitages in the Dunhuang region; Li Zhengyu 1983, 84. The word lamruo 蘭若 (also alanruo 阿蘭若) is a transliteration of Sanskrit aranya (‘forest’) and refers to a smaller scale than Buddhist temples or monasteries. In Dunhuang, they are considered to reflect a Tibetan influence; see Dohi 1980b, cf. Sørensen forth-
and those who do not come at all will be fined half a jar (weng). The circular is to be transmitted rapidly from member to member, and must not be held up or delayed. Whoever delays the circular will be fined according to the regulations [of the she]. When the circular has completed a full round, it should be returned to the office to be used for declaring [the fines imposed].

Tenth day of the bingwu year, second of the Guangqi reign (886).
Secretary Zhang Qi
Manager of the association: Liang Zaisheng
President of the association: Zhang Bianbian
Zhang Quan’er, Liang Gougou, Deng Zan[...], Wang Zaisheng, Wang Henu, Wang Xiangnu, An Fuzhong, Chen Xingsheng

On account of the formulaic nature of circulars in general, this particular copy is fairly representative of the group. Using this example as a generic sample, we can outline the structure of such documents the following way:

**a) Heading**

The words *shesi* 社司 and *zhuantie* 轉帖 typically stand apart. This indicates that even though modern scholars refer to this type of document collectively as *shesi zhuantie*, and here they appear to follow autochthonous terminology, in reality the two words are separate entities that would not have been read together. The phrase *shesi* denotes the association’s management or office, that is, the authority issuing the document, whereas *zhuantie* is the type of document.455 Although in this specific manuscript the main text of the circular begins on the same line, the heading often has a line to itself, and the main text continues on the next line. As seen in previous chapters, in many cases manuscripts contain but a few characters from the heading or the very beginning of the body of the circular.

**b) Announcement of the meeting**

Essentially, this is the core message of the circular, the reason for it being issued in the first place. The rest of the text only stipulates the conditions already familiar to most people. The opening part announces the meeting and the agenda, extends an invitation to attend, and states the date, time and venue of the meet-

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455 We could alternatively interpret *zhuantie* as a verb, meaning ‘to circulate’. In either case, it does not form a phrase with *shesi*.
ing. Although the announcement of the meeting and the agenda invariably come first, the invitation and the time and place of the meeting do not always follow in the same sequence. Among the most common agendas are the organisation of the Solstice and New Year banquets, the celebration of Buddhist festivals and the collection of funerary donations. There are also cases when the proposed agenda is the ‘discussion of a small matter’ 少事商量, which does not reveal the actual agenda, but members were probably already aware of it. Members also had to bring along contributions, which the circular may or may not have itemised.

In many cases the hour of the meeting was also specified. When this was not expressly announced, the gathering probably took place at the usual time. Circulars tended to call their members together in the same month. In some cases the meeting was to be held on the same day as the date of the circular (e.g. S.1453, P.5003), while in other cases it was held a day or two, or even a week later. Thus a circular in manuscript S.5631, written on the fourteenth day of the first month, calls the meeting for the twentieth of the same month, giving six days of notice. Nevertheless, we may assume that the circular made its round among the members relatively quickly, perhaps within a single day, as members must have lived or worked in proximity to one another. In some cases meetings were held at 5–7 am, and in at least one case, at 3–5 am (S.1159). We should probably see this in the context of a New Year celebration, which presumably lasted until the following morning and may have involved several locations.

The circular usually requested members to convene in front of a temple’s entrance, outside of a city gate (e.g. ‘outside the eastern gates’ 東門外), by a bridge, or at the home of a host (zhuren 主人). In cases when the meeting was not at someone’s home, members may have gathered at a specified location in the city and then walked together to the actual venue. Late arrivals would have doubtless known where they had to go, even if the circulars made no mention of such details.

c) Stipulations for late arrival or non-attendance

The management usually treated late arrival and non-attendance separately and imposed different fines. Those who did not arrive on time had to pay considerably less than those who did not show up at all. The fines were fixed in alcohol or grain and appear to have been relatively minor in comparison with those mentioned in circulars of irrigation channel managers, which could impose several lashes with the cane for late attendance. For example, a circular (P.5032) states that late arrivals were to receive seven strokes of the cane and
those not showing up would receive even heavier punishment. The circular
does not specify what kind of heavier punishment, which was perhaps dealt
with on a case by case basis.

Members could also receive a caning for disobeying the Three Officers. The
model association bylaws in S.5629 stipulate that from that point on disobedient
members would be fined seventeen ‘painful strokes with the cane’ 痛杖. The
severity of fines did not seem to have a correlation with the agenda of the meet-
ing but depended on the type of association. Presumably it was a matter of vio-
lating the association’s rules rather than the amount of damage or inconven-
ience caused by the misconduct. It is possible that such measures were
symbolic and members had the option of paying a fine instead.

d) Request to distribute and return the circular

As far as we can determine, the management issued the circulars as single copies,
which were promptly transmitted from member to member. It is possible that the
primary channel of transmission was via personal contact between members.
Once again, the rules imposed a penalty for failing to pass on the circular in a
timely manner. Such persons were to be fined in accordance with the rules of the
she. A circular in manuscript S.705 uses the phrase ni tie 匿帖 (‘to conceal the
circular’) instead of zhi tie 滞帖 (‘to detain the circular’), indicating that such cases
were not entirely unprecedented.

After all recipients had read the circular and it had made its full round, it was
to be returned to the management that issued it. The circular typically ends with
the statement that, once returned, it ‘will be used as evidence for declaring the
fines imposed’ 用憑告罰. Accordingly, in addition to acting as a means of com-
munication with members, the same sheet of paper also had a record-keeping
function. That is to say, the circular played a role in each step of the process of
organising the meeting, from drawing up a list of attendees and notifying those to
imposing potential fines after the event’s conclusion. It was a document with a
complex set of functions going well beyond what the word ‘circular’ normally
connotes.

456 Translation of the phrase is from Giles 1939, 1039.
e) Date and signature

The individual writing and signing the circular was the association’s Secretary. In S.1453, this person was called Zhang Qi 張欺.457 He was one of the officers in charge of the day-to-day management of the association, along with the President and the Manager. In a few cases, the Manager or the President signed the document instead of the Secretary. Sometimes the verb tie 帖 is added after the name of the Secretary, expressly stating that he was the person penning the circular. In terms of their visual format, the date and signature are similar to ordinary colophons seen in manuscripts from Dunhuang, as they appear on a heavily indented separate line and contain similar kind of information.

The date in S.1453 includes the reign title and, therefore, can be converted to our present-day calendar unambiguously. This is, however, a rare example, for the majority of circulars use the cyclical format, which does not tell us the exact year. For example, the recto of manuscript S.6461 contains fragments of circulars and the date ‘eighteenth day of the jiaxu year’ 甲戌年十八日. Aside from the fact that the month is missing, the year jiaxu during the Guiyijun period could refer to 854, 914 or 974. Without further evidence it is impossible to know which of these possible candidates was the year when the circular was written.

f) List of members

The main text of the circular is normally followed by a list of recipients expected to attend the meeting. The list often begins with the Manager who was in charge of daily administration. In some manuscripts the character zhi 知 appears next to some of the names, confirming that these members acknowledged reading the document before passing it on. Names not marked in this manner probably designated members who did not receive the circular. A circular in manuscript P.5003 has twelve names marked with zhi 知 (‘notified’), and three with bu zhi 不知 (‘not notified’), which suggests that neither the zhi nor the bu zhi were written by the members themselves, as members who have not seen the circular could not have recorded this on the document. Instead, it is likely that someone from the management made a note of receipt or non-receipt directly on the document after receiving it back. Further support for this hypothesis derives from manuscript

457 It is curious that his personal name is written with the character qi 欺, which means ‘to cheat, swindle’. As we will see below, personal names with negative connotations were by no means uncommon.
P.5003 in which the markings all appear in the same type of ink, which is consistently fainter than the rest of the circular.

Some circulars may have other marks besides the words *zhì* or *bù zhì*. For example, a circular in manuscript S.5632 (Fig. 63), dated to 967, has a long list of names, the majority of which are marked with a circle, a black dot, a right-angled hook at the top right corner of the name, or a combination of these. Ning Ke and Hao Chunwen speculate that the black dot was placed by recipients as acknowledgment of receipt, whereas the circles and the hooks were drawn by the management to mark whether the person came to the meeting and made a contribution.458 A closer look at the manuscript reveals that some of the black dots may have been erased and then replaced by a circle, which indicates that the status of some members was updated at some point. If this is indeed the case, they may mark not acknowledgment of receipt but something assessed during the meeting, such as punctual arrival or the sufficiency of contributions. It is also possible that it was one of the officers who entered the updates after the circular made its way back to the office, whereas members added the initial marks as the document circulated among them prior to the meeting.

![Fig. 63: A circular with a list of names in manuscript S.5632. (15 × 202.5 cm; The British Library)](image)

458 Ning and Hao 1997, 104.
This raises the question of how the management delivered the circular to members. The clause warning against holding back the document suggests a scenario whereby members would come into possession of the circular for a limited amount of time before passing it on to others, perhaps by finding the next person on the list and handing them the document. The zhi and bu zhi notes on P.5003, written by someone other than the recipients, may also indicate the involvement of a messenger who carried the circular from member to member. This person may have left the circular with each member for some time to return in a few hours and then take it to the next recipient, or may have just showed it briefly to members. Perhaps there was more than one scenario. If a messenger delivered the circular, the recipients may not have seen the actual document at all, as the messenger could have just as easily passed on to them the information orally. The fact that the acknowledgment of receipt is marked as zhi (‘notified’) and bu zhi (‘not notified’), rather than using a verb associated with reading or receiving a physical document (e.g. du ‘read’ or shou ‘received’), is an indication that the delivery of the message may have been verbal. To be sure, not all members would have been fully literate, even if they appeared as recipients of a written document.

The above is the basic structure of association circulars. There are occasional differences in the sequence of sections or sub-sections but, on the whole, the wording and format are consistent. In fact, the formulaic text of circulars must have been so familiar to members that the message did not seem to suffer even when characters were omitted, rendering occasional sentences ungrammatical. Unsurprisingly, documents related to associations abound in omissions and orthographic variants, a phenomenon that is true for not only student copies but also original documents.

4.4 Layout and format

Former scholarship has extracted information from association circulars for reconstructing various aspects of medieval society, including religious cults and festivals, local geography, language, or even food. In most cases, however, scholars worked with them as texts, paying limited attention to their physical form and materiality. In a way, this is a side effect of having conveniently punctuated transcriptions at one’s disposal. While such pre-digested editions may

459 Other examples of using the term zhi (‘notified’) include manuscripts P.4958 Pièce 3, P.2842 Pièce 4 and S.4660.
facilitate access for a wider readership, they also obscure peculiarities that would be apparent when looking at the original manuscripts or high-quality photographs.

Original documents typically appear on a separate sheet of paper, as stand-alone texts. They may have another text on the other side, but this would constitute subsequent reuse of the paper. Originals do not occur on codices, pothis or concertinas. Occasionally, longer scrolls are glued together from small sheets of paper, some of which contain circulars. In general, the circulars that appear in manuscripts amidst a variety of other texts are copies. The size of paper sheets used for genuine documents is often around 27–31 × 41–42 cm, as it is the case with manuscript P.3037, which is 30.6 × 42.2 cm in size (Fig. 64).

Fig. 64: Manuscript P.3037, an original document. (30.6 × 42.2 cm; Bibliothèque nationale de France)
The circular stands out for its lucid layout and competent handwriting. This was, however, not always the case and one cannot rely on these criteria alone to judge the authenticity of a document. In terms of the information they contain, copies may be just as valuable as originals, provided they reproduce the text more or less faithfully. Thus, it is entirely reasonable to rely on them in the study of social and economic history. Problems may arise when applying their date to the entire manuscript. As discussed in the previous chapter, there may be a gap between the time of the original being written and it being subsequently copied as an exercise. Regarding circulars, there is usually no way of knowing when a copy was made as the date forms part of the original document. Usually the time lag between the two is insignificant and applying the date to the entire manuscript does not produce noticeable distortions. But it is also possible that the copy had been made decades after the date of the original, in which case we may judge the manuscript to be earlier than it really is.

Taking a closer look at fragments of circulars is also worthwhile. These offer little of value for historians as they are often too fragmentary to preserve any factual information. For this reason, they are usually ignored. Yet their presence in many manuscripts is in itself an intriguing pattern. They can be extremely brief, only a few characters in length, and may repeat several times in the same manuscript. It is as if someone began writing a circular and stopped after a few characters, only to write another one a bit further on the same scroll. As such mini-fragments do not amount to actual documents, they are not included even in collections of circulars that aim to be comprehensive. Yet as already seen above, they are very common in manuscripts written by students and, partly overlapping with these, in manuscripts with left-to-right bits of text.

Several longer fragments or even complete circulars read from left to right. For example, manuscript S.10564, a detached folio of a codex, has a copy of a circular, superimposed over a contract for hired labour (Fig. 65).460 The ink of the contract is faint, which is why the circular may have been written—palimpsest-style—over it. Evidently, both texts represent writing exercises, confirmed by the fact that both read from left to right and are in the same unskilled hand.461 The beginning of another contract on the right side of the fragment possibly represents a different hand. Both the circular and the contract date to

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460 Its size (21 × 14.5 cm) and rounded corners clearly indicate it to be a folio specifically from a codex, and not some other kind of manuscript.
461 The contract records the conditions of a certain Yin Fusheng 陰富晟 hiring someone for a period of one year. Sha Zhi 1998, 268–269 notes that the contract reads from left to right and constitutes a writing exercise.
the exact same day, namely, the first day of the third month of the *gengzi* year, probably referring to 940. It is clear that neither text could have functioned as an actual document and the fact they bear the same date suggests they are fictional, possibly invented by the student copying the texts.

Fig. 65: Manuscript S.10564 with a circular written from left to right. (21 × 14.5 cm; The British Library)
As seen in Chapter Three, only a few dozen examples of left-to-right writing exist among the tens of thousands of Chinese manuscripts from Dunhuang, which is a very small amount when compared with the size of the corpus. Significantly, all of the examples date from between the late ninth and the end of the tenth century. In the manuscripts, fragments of circulars are more often written in a left-to-right direction than any other type of text. They occur in a specific type of manuscript, in a particular kind of context. There is a conspicuous overlap between the circular fragments and the reversed direction of writing. For this reason, the sheer presence of such fragments, even those that are too short to ascertain the direction of writing, tells us that the manuscript probably belonged to students and dates to between the late ninth through the end of the tenth century.

Returning to the potentially fictive date of the circular and contract in manuscript S.10564, it is possible that students may have changed some of the details in the circulars. Manuscript S.214, already discussed in Chapter Three, may involve a similar case. The recto contains the Yanzi fu (Rhapsody on the Swallow) with a colophon that attributes the copying to the student Du Yousui. On the verso of the scroll, Du Yousui’s name also appears as the secretary (lushi) of a circular that reads in a left-to-right direction. The student either served as the secretary of an association or replaced the original name with his own while copying the circular. In either case, he probably did not invent an entirely fictive circular out of thin air and only changed the name of the secretary.

An obvious example of a circular that represents a writing practice is seen in manuscript BD08172, the verso of which contains a circular written horizontally across the top of the scroll (from right to left), with each character copied vertically for the full length of the line, and occasionally for yet another. This was a common type of writing exercise and there are similar examples with poems, the Qianziwen, Kaimeng yaoxun or other texts. A circular would have been significantly shorter than most of these texts, containing fewer characters, none of which were difficult. The first sample circular on the verso of S.1453 (see above), for example, comprises 124 characters, of which 89 are unique, presenting an entirely manageable workload even for someone in the early stages of elementary education.

462 The same, of course, would be true of contracts copied as writing exercise.
463 The date of this circular is the twenty-second day of the eleventh month of the jiashen year, which must be 924, only a year after the date of the colophons on the recto. This suggests that the student either copied a recent circular or updated the date to the time when he was writing.
Naturally, circulars copied as a writing exercise did not function as real documents. Students simply used them as yet another genre of texts to hone their writing skills. Yet they must have copied, perhaps with some additions or substitutions, actual circulars that had been used in real life. Unlike model letters, which were also common in Dunhuang, the copies of circulars contain actual data, such as the date, place and agenda of the meeting, and often even the names of the members and the Three Officers. They are not model texts but copies of genuine documents no longer in use. It is unlikely that the students invented the elaborate lists of names and other specifics while copying the texts for practice. They may have, as Du Yousui’s example demonstrates, replaced a name or some other detail but probably preserved the rest of the text in its original form. Even the most crudely written circulars appear to be copies of original documents.

4.5 Lists of names

Many of the circulars end with a list of recipients, and the names may offer some clues regarding the cultural and linguistic background of the members. Of course, as the circulars are in Chinese, it would be easy to conclude that the members were Chinese, that is, people whose native language matched that of the documents. Yet in a multicultural region such as Dunhuang, language, especially in its written form, may not be a reliable indicator of someone’s cultural background. The same is true, of course, for names. Chinese and Tibetan were both lingua franca during the Guiyijun period and thus individuals of diverse background routinely wrote and copied texts in these languages.\(^\text{464}\) We should remember that by this time the Dunhuang oasis was an independent state with limited connection to the Tang and its successor states but extensive contacts with its Central Asian neighbours. As the contents of the library cave attest, the population spoke and wrote in Chinese, Tibetan and other languages and had a complex makeup.

The Dunhuang manuscripts and paintings preserve a vast pool of personal names which together represent one of the richest bodies of onomastic data from medieval China. What makes this material particularly valuable is that it consists of names that people at the time used for themselves, rather than how

\(^{464}\) For example, Chinese scribes in Dunhuang commonly copied Tibetan sutras, as is seen from both the names and the inexperienced handwriting in these manuscripts, e.g., van Schaik and Galambos 2012, 33–34; cf. Uray 1981, Takata 2000, Takeuchi 2004 and 2013.
Lists of names

Historians and writers were to call them later. Also, they enable researchers to explore naming practices among individuals who belonged to the same family, the same association or the same group of donors. As we will see below, for example, the given names often recurred in combination with different surnames. While some of these given names were not entirely unique, their recurrence in relatively short lists suggests that members of associations or donor groups belonged to the same extended families in which particular given names featured with high frequency.465

Scholars began paying attention to personal names in manuscripts and paintings as soon as the material became accessible. The catalogues of major collections all include indices which list the names that occur in colophons.466 Similarly, the collection of donor inscriptions from murals in cave temples around Dunhuang, compiled in 1986 by the Dunhuang Academy, contains a personal name index that provides a convenient way of looking up donors.467 A ground-breaking resource on Dunhuang onomastics is a recent index by Dohi Yoshikazu, which represents the result of decades spent editing and researching the material. This collection boasts over 30,000 instances of personal names— including nearly 20,000 full names and about 10,000 given and monastic names—from Dunhuang manuscripts and paintings from the late eighth until the early eleventh century.468 The first volume containing the names amounts to 1,250 pages, whereas the second with the index tables is 500 pages.469 Without doubt, this is a major contribution to the study of Guiyijun Dunhuang, opening up new possibilities for research on pre-modern societies along the Silk Roads and medieval China in general.

Despite the enormous potential of this rich body of onomastic data, relatively little research has been carried out on naming practices specifically during this period. While similar research is available for the Chinese tradition in gen-

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465 This practice was, and still is, common in many societies around the world. For example, in Hingham, Mass., during the period between 1630 and 1734, 74% of first-born daughters shared the name of their mother and 67% of first-born sons the name of their father; Main 1996, 3–4.
467 Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 1986, 238–246.
468 The 10,000 given names are those without surnames, including monastic names and those that omit the surname.
469 Dohi 2015 and 2016.
eral, the tens of thousands of names from Guiyijun Dunhuang have only been examined on an *ad hoc* basis, in connection with the political, economic or religious history of the region. Among the pioneers of onomastic research concerning Chinese Central Asia are Yoshida Yutaka 吉田豊, Wang Ding 王丁 and Sanping Chen, who have made a series of important contributions to the study of Sogdian and other names written in Chinese, especially those found in the Turfan material. Yet naming practices in Guiyijun Dunhuang are noticeably different from those in Turfan and merit separate study.

Naming practices in pre-modern China are a complex phenomenon, further exacerbated by the multicultural and multilingual background of the population of the Tarim Basin and the Hexi Corridor. One of the techniques of adapting Central Asian names into a Chinese-speaking environment was choosing specific surnames already in use for designating natives of specific regions (e.g. An, Kang, Shi). Another method consisted of abbreviating longer surnames and given names into a format familiar to Chinese speakers, such as one-character surname and two-character given name. Nonetheless, even in this sinicized format, the name would often remain recognisably of non-Chinese origin. In fact, as we will see below, sometimes names that retained a foreign flavour would have been deliberately chosen over fully sinicized ones.

One of the obvious ways of engaging with the cultural and linguistic background of the people in Dunhuang and Turfan is through their surnames. From among the so-called Nine Zhaowu Surnames 昭武九姓, historically known to indicate Sogdian ancestry and one’s ultimate place of origin, the surnames An 安 (Bukhara), Kang 康 (Samarkand), Cao 曹 (Kabudhan), Shi 史 (Kesh), Shi 石 (Chach) and Mi 米 (Maimurgh) occurred fairly commonly. The relatively high ratio of these surnames in manuscripts or inscriptions is often cited as evidence

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470 See, for example, Bauer 1959, Alleton 1993 and Blum 1997. Chen Huaiyu 2012 examines pre-modern given names with Buddhist elements.


472 Specifically on names in the Dunhuang manuscripts, see Hong Yifang 1998, Du Wentao 2013a, 2013b and 2016.

473 In this chapter, I use the term ‘surname’ (rather than ‘family name’) to designate the Chinese concept of *xing* 姓. Similarly, I adopt the term ‘given name’ as an equivalent of *ming* 名, that is, the part of a person’s full name that does not include the surname. Western cultures commonly employ terms such as ‘first name’ or ‘Christian name’, neither of which are appropriate in the context of East and Central Asia.

474 Skaff 2003, 478–481 uses this as a methodological principle for identifying Sogdian residents but also acknowledges the limitations of this approach.
of a strong Sogdian presence in the region. Along similar lines, persons with typical Chinese surnames (e.g. Zhang 張, Li 李, Wang 王) are usually understood as having a Chinese background.

Yet even a cursory glimpse at given names in circulars and contracts from the Guiyijun period reveals not only that many of the names themselves are peculiar but also that their distribution is unusual. For example, the repeated occurrence of the same given name in combination with different surnames, sometimes even within the same circular, is markedly different from naming practices attested in transmitted sources, where given names do not repeat at such a rate. Considering the relatively high ratio of Sogdian surnames and examples of left-to-right pieces of text, it is to be expected that the given names corroborate this kind of influence.

A methodological desideratum for the analysis of given names is to look at them in context. In addition to tracing the origin of individual names and establishing their cultural and linguistic background, it is vital to see how these names link with the time and location in which they occur. The lists of names at the end of circulars highlight the cultural complexity of Dunhuang society. The matching surnames in many lists reveal that members of the same family often belonged to the same association, which is not surprising, as the she were intimately involved in family-related events such as births and mourning rituals. Commemoration of a deceased family member is a recurrent agenda in the circulars. A concrete example is manuscript P.2817, a small sheet of paper about 29 cm high and 21 cm wide. One side of the sheet has a confession text and the other an association circular and a loan contract, followed by a list of names (Fig. 66). Moving from right to left, the circular comes first, then the loan contract and, finally, the list of names. As the list of names seems to belong to the circular, the contract is in effect sandwiched between the circular and the list of recipients. The three parts are separated by space and thus form three distinct blocks of text. The circular is incomplete and contains omissions that render parts of it nearly incomprehensible. The text reads as follows:

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476 The most comprehensive study of Sogdian personal names, and an invaluable resource for comparative research, is Pavel B. Lurje's *Personal Names in Sogdian Texts* (Lurje 2010). On hybrid names among the Uighurs, see Zieme 2006.

477 The transcription largely follows Ning and Hao 1997, 130.
From the office of the association – a circular: On account of Suo Baoding’s passing away, we collectively offer as a gift one jar (weng) of ritual ale. Each person [contributes] a peck of millet, a bolt of brown fabric and a bundle of firewood. [The office of the association] kindly invites all members to [gather, in response to this] circular, in the Hour of the Rabbit (5–7 am) of this month\(^\text{478}\) in front of the entrance to the Changtai Hermitage. The two [persons who arrive last shall be] seized...\(^\text{479}\)

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\textbf{Fig. 66:} Manuscript P.2817 showing a circular, a loan contract and a list of names. (29.2–29.6 × 21.1–21.5 cm; Bibliothèque nationale de France)

\(^{478}\) Ning and Hao 1997, 131 suggest that the word \textit{月} (‘month’) here is a mistake and should be read as \textit{日} (‘day’), which would make the circular calling together a meeting at dawn of the same day.

\(^{479}\) Although the characters \textit{足貳} do not give much context to clarify their meaning, examples in other manuscripts make it clear that they are an incomplete variant of the phrase \textit{捉二人後到} (‘the two persons who arrive last shall be seized’). For a similar interpretation of the expression, see Gernet 1995, 272.
At this point the text breaks off in mid-sentence and a loan contract begins, followed by a three-line list of names that seems to belong to the circular. The names read as follows:

索員德 索保定 唐定昌 郭保興 郝獵丹 張丑奴 祝方定 景海子 張長有 李富全
曹住子 曹保通 曹友子 劉定昌

Suo Yuande, Suo Baoding, Fuding, Kang Dingchang, Guo Baoxing, Hao Liedan, Zhang Chounu, Zhu Fangding, Jing Haizi, Zhang Changyou, Li Fuquan, Deng Zhuzi, Cao Baotong, Cao Youzi, Liu Dingchang

The list of names is in the same hand as the circular and possibly the loan contract. This is an untrained hand, as a result of which some of the characters are hard to read. The first three names have the same surname as the deceased, making it likely that they were part of the same family. Surprisingly, the second name Suo Baoding 索保定 is a homophone of the deceased person’s name (i.e. Suo Baoding 索寶定). It was not uncommon to use a similar sounding character in someone’s given name, so the two names probably refer to the same person. As the circular’s the agenda is the death of Suo Baoding, the list of names may belong to another circular issued while Suo Baoding was still alive. The list records the names of three members of the Suo, two of the Zhang and two of the Cao families. The other six surnames are each represented by one person only.

The contract located between the circular and the list of names is not an unrelated document, as it details the conditions under which Hao Liedan 郝獵丹 borrowed silk from Zhang Chounu 張丑奴, both of whom feature in the list of names to the left. It is therefore a record of a transaction between two members of the same she, and it is likely that membership in the same association facilitated the development of similar business deals between members. The date at the beginning of the contract is the twentieth day of the fourth month of the xinsi 辛巳 year, which probably refers to 981. Even though there is an apparent connection between the contract and the circular, the fact that neither of them is complete and that they appear together in a manuscript with a confession text on the other side indicate that the documents were copied as writing exercise.

480 The verso of manuscript P.3108 contains a similar example of a member borrowing from several other members of the same association; see Zhao Dawang 2019a, 54.
Another example of a list of names is manuscript P.3319 with a section of the *Da bore bolomiduo jing* (Great Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom) in Xuanzang’s 玄奘 (602–664) translation, the verso of which contains a number of incomplete snippets of text. Fig. 67 shows the succession of these snippets on the verso, starting with the words 大唐國人 (‘people of the Great Tang state’), already mentioned in Chapter Three. To the left of it are several characters from the beginning of a circular calling for a meeting in connection with the annual New Year banquet. The line is left unfinished and on a new line to the left is the beginning of a poem about Meng Jiangnü 孟姜女, also known from manuscripts P.3911 and P.2809. 481 Once again, the line is left unfinished but is followed by a longer, similarly incomplete, version of the same poem. The following line has a fragment of a circular, followed by two lines of incomplete student poems. After a wider stretch of space are three lines of a circular, more space and, finally, a list of names. As far as can be seen, all of these fragments are in the same clumsy hand, with the exception of the four large characters (‘the people of the Great Tang’) in the top right corner of Fig. 67. Considering the visual appearance of

481 For the text of the poem, see Ren Zhongmin 2015, 65–66; on relevant manuscripts, see Wu Zhen 2011. An English translation of the poem is available in Wagner 1984, 94–95.
the fragments and the mixture of student poems and association circulars, the scroll unquestionably belonged to a student, even if there is no colophon to this effect on the recto. The list of names along the left edge of Fig. 67 reads as follows:

石定信 右 (石)全 石丑子 石定奴 福延 福全 保昌 张丑子 李千子 李定信

Shi Dingxin, Shi Quan, Shi Chouzi, Shi Dingnu, Fuyan, Fuquan, Baochang, Zhang Chouzi, Li Qianzi, Li Dingxin

Of the ten individuals in the list, the first seven share the surname Shi 石, which was a common Sogdian surname, designating, as mentioned above, individuals and families originating from Chach. Although technically the last three of these seven individuals are listed without a surname, it was common practice to omit the surname when it matched that of the previous names. In contrast, the surnames Zhang and Li are considered typically Chinese. Evidently, the meeting, and perhaps the entire association, was dominated by the Shi family.

There are two given names in the list that repeat: there is a Chouzi 丑子 in both the Shi and Zhang families, and a Dingxin 定信 in both the Shi and Li families. This simple observation has two implications. Firstly, the naming practices evidenced here, and in Guiyijun Dunhuang in general, were different from those evidenced in historical and literary sources, where given names tended to be less repetitive and did not come from a relatively limited pool. Secondly, as such repetitions were more likely to occur within the same extended family, the Shi, Zhang and Li families in the list were probably related through marriage. Accordingly, extended family networks must have played an important role in the formation of associations. It is also noteworthy that surnames of Chinese (e.g. Zhang, Li) and non-Chinese (e.g. Shi) origin can take the same given names.

To the right of the list of names in the manuscript, separated from it by a stretch of empty space, is a fragmentary circular. The layout of this circular is

482 This is not to deny the many trends in Chinese naming practices. On large-scale trends during and after the Cultural Revolution, see Lu and Millward 1989. Cf. Wiedenhof 2015, 92.
483 Shi Fuyan and Shi Fuquan share the first (‘generational’) character of their given name, which means that they must have been brothers. The same is true for Shi Dingxin and Shi Dingnu, whose names also occur in manuscript P.5032 in circulars dated to the wuwu 戊午 year (898/958). The same manuscript also contains the name Zhang Chouzi 張丑子, only in circulars dated to the jiashen 年 (924/984). The co-occurrence of these three names in two different manuscripts (but not in other ones) indicates they probably designated the same three individuals.
unusual in that every few characters are followed by two names, each preceded by the phrase zhengjin 正進 ('right effort'). The phrase and the names are in small script, forming double columns (Fig. 68). An explanation proposed for this unusual format is that the names may designate individuals in charge of various tasks in connection with organising the New Year banquet.\textsuperscript{484} This does not, however, resolve the meaning of the phrase zhengjin in this place, which—considering its Buddhist background (i.e. it is the sixth of the Noble Eightfold Path)—may signify a title, perhaps something like an ‘enforcer’. Setting aside the difficulties of interpreting the phrase and the reasons for the atypical layout, let us consider the personal names listed in small script. These three lines contain a total of seventeen names, and all except one are in pairs. The names are as follows:

Fig. 68: Detail of the verso of manuscript P.3319, showing the small-script names in double columns.

\textsuperscript{484} Ning and Hao 1997, 145.
Of the names in the list, only the last four include the surnames. Zhang Chouzi 張丑子 and Shi Dingxin 石定信 overlap with the list of names discussed above, which is located slightly to the left of this circular. This confirms that the circular and the list of names on the left, even though both fragmentary and written distinctly apart, are related. Interestingly, Shi Qianzi 石千子 also has a near match in the list of names, only there it is written with a different surname as Li Qianzi 李千子. This does not automatically mean that there is a mistake in how the names are recorded for, as seen above, given names commonly recurred. Among the paired names without surname, Baochang 保昌 and Fuyan 福延 also appear in the list of names on the left, both with the surname Shi 石.

All in all, the overlap between the small-script names embedded in the text of the circular and those in the list of names on the left is considerable. This is, of course, not surprising as the two texts appear next to each other on the same side of the same manuscript. Both fragments are probably copies of documents related to the operation of the same association and neither contains the full list of members. The availability of members may have determined the list of invitees to the meeting. It is also possible, of course, that the membership of associations evolved over time and the two documents in this manuscript represent different stages in the history of the she.

The above examples involve relatively short lists of names in copies that functioned as writing exercise. As an example of a longer list of names, consider S.1159 with a circular of an association of irrigation channel managers, containing the following names:487

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485 This name is transcribed in Ning and Hao 1997, 144 as Huozi 禍子, although the first character is unlikely to be huo 禍.
486 In the manuscript, the second character of this name seems to have the component 七 at the bottom, which is a non-existing character. For this reason, I read the character as 孕, which was in fact a relatively common component in given names.
487 A transcription of the text is available as circular No. 192 in Yamamoto, Dohi and Ishida 1989, 77.

The list contains a total of 33 full names, each consisting of a surname and a two-character given name. Linghu is the only disyllabic surname, written with two characters. There are a total of eleven different surnames but the number of individuals associated with each of these is uneven. Table 12 arranges the 33 names in the list according to surnames, from most common to least common.

**Tab. 12: Personal names by surnames in manuscript S.1159.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Given names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Liu 刘</td>
<td>Xingshen 幸深, Yuansui 员遂, Anzi 安子, Yuanzi 员友, Xingjin 幸进, Shengchang 晟昌, Runde 闰德, Dingzi 定子</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>An 安</td>
<td>Xingshen 幸深, Chouzi 丑子, Dingqian 定千, Xingde 幸德, Xingyou 员友</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Li 李</td>
<td>Yangzi 養子, Nanshan 南山, Cha’er 察兒, Yuanyou 员友</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fan 汝</td>
<td>Wende 文德, Zhangwu 章午, Zhangyou 章友, Wanxing 万興</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Linghu 令狐</td>
<td>Qing’er 清兒, Cannu 殘奴, Wanyou 万友, Haiquan 海全</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wang 王</td>
<td>Xingjin 幸進, Hongyi 弘義</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kong 孔</td>
<td>Zhuxin 住信</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hua 画</td>
<td>Youzi 友子, Heitou 黑頭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Zhang 張</td>
<td>Anzheng 安正</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yang 杨</td>
<td>Zaiding 再定</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Xu 徐</td>
<td>Jincheng 納成</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most frequent surname in the list is Liu, with eight individuals, followed by An with five. Li, Fan, and Linghu have four individuals each. It is remarkable that the surname Zhang, the most common during this period in Dunhuang, occurs but
once. Again, a pattern that supports the assumption that members with the same surname come from the same extended family is that some of these individuals share the first character of their given name. This, in turn, also suggests that they belong to the same generation within their wider family (i.e. brother/sisters, cousins or second cousins). Such examples are Liu Xingshen 劉幸深 and Liu Xingjin 劉幸進, as well as Fan Zhangwu 泮章午 and Fan Zhangyou 泮章友. In addition, there are three members of the An family whose given name begins with the character xing 幸, and yet another person from the Wang family. In fact, both the Liu and An families include a person whose given name was Xingshen 幸深, suggesting that the two families were related through marriage.

Some given names in this list carry negative connotations, such as Cannu 殘奴 (‘Crippled Slave’) or Chouzi 丑子 (‘Ugly Child’). Another unusual descriptive name is Heitou 黑頭 (‘Black Head’), belonging to a member of the Hua family. In addition, quite a few given names end with the characters you 友 (‘friend’), zi 子 (‘child’), and er 兒 (‘son’), which are less popular choices in the recorded Chinese tradition. There are five names each with the final characters zi 子 and you 友 and two with er 兒, in total comprising more than a third of all names in the list. The given name Yuanyou 員友 occurs twice, once with the surname Liu and once with Li, similarly evidencing naming practices that are different from those familiar to us from transmitted literature.

An even longer list of names is preserved on the verso of manuscript S.2894, probably from the second half of the tenth century. This is a stand-alone list that is not part of any circular, although the same manuscript also contains copies and fragments of circulars. Several circulars date to the renshen 年, most likely referring to 972. Since the circulars, as well as the long list of names, appear amidst a medley of other material on a longer scroll (220 cm), they are not original documents but copies written by one or more students. The list contains a staggering 81 names, listed in Table 13. In the original manuscript the layout is far simpler, and the names simply follow each other (separated by spaces) as a long list.

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488 As already noted in Chapter Two, the surname Zhang was by far the most common in Guiyijun Dunhuang, occurring more than twice as often as the surname Wang, which was the second most frequent one; Dohi 2015, 6.

489 The characters chou 丑 and chou 陋 are used interchangeably in the names and there are examples of the given name of the same individual being written in different manuscripts and inscriptions with alternating variants, which is why the character 丑 can be read in the sense of ‘ugly’. This of course does not mean that the two characters were interchangeable. They were, however, in such names.

490 The transcription of names follows that in Yamamoto, Dohi and Ishida 1989, 86–87.
**Tab. 13:** The 81 names from the long list of names on the verso of S.2894.

| 張富德 | 王清兒 | 李万定 | 趙沒利 | 陰彥弘 |
| 張子孫 | 唐慶住 | 鄧福勝 | 安員吉 | 康辛深 |
| 石海全 | 吉崑崗 | 羅瘦兒 | 曹達怛 | 白揭撻 |
| 米不勿 | 史幸豐 | 唐文通 | 宋茲奴 | 邦醜撻 |
| 泊知客 | 辛懷恩 | 孫昌晟 | 令狐萬端 | 鄭薩女鷄 |
| 程滿福 | 劉建昌 | 郭幸司 | 高憨灰 | 陽繼受 |
| 汊再昌 | 樊賢者 | 范丑奴 | 菜魄華 | 蒂胡八 |
| 賀吉昌 | 索善通 | 翟大眼 | 尹酉子 | 孔阿朶 |
| 閻員保 | 闞硉魅 | 左山榮 | 潘阿察 | 馬良興 |
| 桑阿卛 | 陳喜昌 | 溫員遂 | 上雒咄拙 | 鄭薩女鷄 |
| 雙佛德 | 楊總思 | 星紛堆 | 沈尚憨 | 童討壌 |
| 善美住 | 達葡麿 | 史大頭 | 盧漸勝 | 彭悉弘 |
| 譚什德 | 韓通達 | 郝延 | 郝安定 | 蘇丑兒 |
| 解儒晟 | 吳類奴 | 呂端絕 | 武明菲 | 柳頭頭 |
| 姚延郎 | 嬌病溫 | 美午子 | 美黑頭 | 曹灰子 |
| 黑住奴 | 仍野孟 | 燒不勿 | 周押衙 | 城將頭 |

In contrast to the previous example, the individuals in this list have a wide range of surnames. In fact, most surnames feature only once, and only five of them occur twice (i.e. Shi 史, Tang 唐, Cao 曹, Mei 美 and Hao 郝). This, of course, must be a function of the nature of the list, on which we have no background information. In the list, Zheng Santüji 鄭薩女鷄, Shangluo Douzhuo 上雒咄拙 and Peng Xihong 彭悉弘 probably represent Tibetan names.491

As was the case in earlier examples, a number of given names seem opprobrious, no doubt serving an apotropaic function. Such names include Shou'er 瘦兒 (‘Skinny Son’), Laza 擕 (‘Heap of Garbage’), Gounu 犬奴 (<狗奴, ‘Slave of a Dog’), 陰彥弘 阿奴 (‘Ugly Tartar’), Chounu 僬奴 (‘Ugly Slave’), Nuzi 奴子 (‘Slave Child’), Fendui 坿堆 (‘Pile of Dirt’), Datou 大頭 (‘Big Head’), Chou'er 丑兒 (‘Ugly Son’) and Tuinu 頹奴 (‘Degenerate Slave’).492 Some given names, however, have

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492 The normal pronunciation of the character 坿 (‘dust, earth’) is ben and its archaic reading fen now only occurs in toponyms. Yet, as this given name is relatively common in the documents, its reading must have been similar to the reading of its variants in this context (i.e. fen 粉 and fen 糞). For this reason, I transcribe it as fen.
a positive meaning, such as Fude 富德 (‘Rich and Virtuous’), Qing’er 清兒 (‘Pure Son’), Fusheng 福勝 (‘Fortune and Victory’), Xianzhe 賢者 (‘Hermit’; ‘Worthy’) or Jichang 吉昌 (‘Auspicious and Prosperous’).493

This group of names includes six given names ending with the character zi 子 (‘child’) and three with er 兒 (‘son’). There are no examples of names ending with you 友 (‘friend’) at all but three end with nu 奴 (‘slave’), which evidently has a similar function in the names and is often the final component of theophoric names. Thus the given names have similarities but the surnames, especially as a group, are almost all unique. Oddly, a number of surnames are decidedly uncommon as surnames but common as everyday words: Mei 美 (‘beautiful’), Cheng 城 (‘city wall’), Reng 仍 (‘still, yet’), Jiao 饒 (‘lovely, delicate’), Cai 菜 (‘vegetable’), Xing 星 (‘star’), Jiu 就 (‘to approach’). We may hypothesise that some are miswritten variants of more common surnames, especially as a degree of orthographic flexibility is characteristic of such documents. But this is unlikely as too many of them are in one place. Furthermore, surnames are typically written with the correct character, even if sometimes in a hand that is not easy to read.

4.6 Naming practices in Guiyijun Dunhuang

The few examples seen so far demonstrate that a sizeable portion of given names featuring in the circulars differ from the type of names evidenced in transmitted Chinese sources. On the one hand, the same given names often repeat with different surnames, illustrating that given names in Guiyijun Dunhuang were often chosen from a pool of existing names. On the other, it is striking to see an array of given names with markedly negative connotations, such as those involving the words fen 糞 (‘excrement’), chou 丑 (‘ugly’), can 殘 (‘crippled’), or gou 狗 (‘dog’). The same types of names appear not only in circulars but also in contracts and even donor inscriptions inscribed on votive paintings.

Some variation is evident in a shorter list of names at the end of another circular in the same manuscript (to the left), which contains some of the same names. For example, the character da 達 in Cao Dada’s 曹達怛 name is mistakenly written as xing 幸, omitting the signific 辶. Considering that the same name occurs in more or less the same sequence with other names that are also present in the above list, there is little doubt that it refers to the same person. The common occurrence of the name Dada 達怛 or its phonetic variants in Guiyijun names is yet another piece of supporting evidence for taking Dada as the correct reading.
Differences from the recorded tradition emerge when comparing the given names paired with specific surnames in Guiyijun Dunhuang and in transmitted literature. To do this, we can contrast the names in literary texts from the Tang and Five Dynasties period (618–979) with those that appear in Dunhuang manuscripts and inscriptions during the Guiyijun period.\(^{494}\) Taking the surname Shi 石 as an example, we find that the names from Dunhuang include a significant number of those which, at least to our eyes, seem to have a negative connotation, including some of the ones mentioned above (e.g. Laza 擀搨 ‘Heap of Garbage’, Chouzi 醜子 ‘Ugly Child’, Gounu 獨奴 ‘Slave of a Dog’, Gougou 獨狗 ‘Doggie’). These given names are not unique but occur commonly in combination with other surnames. In fact, they are among the most popular names in Dunhuang during the period in question. In addition, there are also other popular names (e.g. Shide 什德 and Zaizhu 再住), the meaning of which is not immediately apparent.\(^{495}\) In contrast, the much shorter list of names paired with the surname Shi in literary sources from the Tang and Five Dynasties contains no obvious examples of given names with negative connotation.\(^{496}\) The difference between the two pools of names is obvious.

Trying to find a comparable corpus of names that survives in manuscripts inevitably brings us to Turfan. Unfortunately, the pool of names is more limited in scope and this is even more so in the case of the surname Shi 石, which seems to have been rare.\(^{497}\) But examining the much more numerous cases involving the surname Kang 康, out of the nearly 400 complete given names, 10 contain the element nu 奴 (‘slave’) and another 4 the transliteration of the Sogdian βntk with the same meaning (i.e. pantuo 畔𡵄 and panduo 畔多).\(^{498}\) In contrast, in Dunhuang during the ninth and tenth centuries, 22 out of the approximately 370 complete names with the surname Kang feature the element nu 奴, and none the Sogdian form βntk.\(^{499}\) Thus, the Chinese translation of the element ‘slave’ was more than twice as common in Guiyijun Dunhuang. Naturally, the Turfan material in the index encompasses a much wider time range and we would have to take into consideration the chronological distribution of the names for an accurate analysis. Nevertheless, even this preliminary comparison reveals some of the peculiarities of the naming practices in Guiyijun Dunhuang.

\(^{494}\) Fang and Wu 1992 and Dohi 2015.
\(^{495}\) Dohi 2015, 294–305.
\(^{496}\) Fang and Wu 1992, 84–85.
\(^{497}\) Li and Wang 1996, 426.
\(^{498}\) Ibid., 8–21. The numbers for both Turfan and Dunhuang include repeated instances of the same name.
\(^{499}\) Dohi 2015, 189–204.
Concerning the issue of reusing given names, it is apparent that many of the names in Dunhuang are Buddhist in inspiration. Names such as Sheli 阇梨 (‘Ācārya’, ‘Teacher’), Dade 大德 (‘Bhadanta’, ‘Person of Great Virtue’), Xianzhe 賢者 (‘Hermit’), Puzheng 普證 (‘Universal Realisation’), Wunian 無念 (‘Free from False Thoughts’), Lü 律 (‘Vinaya’, ‘Precepts’), are evidently Buddhist in origin and do not necessarily differ from the situation in transmitted sources during the Tang-Song period. It is well known, for example, that the given name of the Tang poet Wang Wei 王維 (699–759) derived from the first syllable of the Chinese name of Vimalakīrti (i.e. Weimojie 維摩詰), and later he chose for his style name (zi 字) the second and third syllables of Vimalakīrti (i.e. Mojie 摩詰).500 A difficulty when working with manuscripts and inscriptions is that it is not always easy to decide whether the part after the surname is a given name or a title (e.g. Falü 法律, Sengzheng 僧政).501 In general, it is not surprising to see different individuals with the same Buddhist given names, as the religious tradition must have been a constant source of inspiration for naming.502 Such names were common throughout the Buddhist world, across different regions and languages.

There are also many given names whose background is not transparent, yet they occur with high frequency. This is less surprising when the name has positive connotations, such as Zaichang 再昌 (‘Twice Flourishing’), which seems to have been an extremely popular given name. It appears in combination with the surnames An 安, Bo 泊, Fan 汜, Jia 賈, Wang 王, Wu 吳, Yin 陰, Zhang 張 and quite a few other ones. In fact, despite the positive message of the name, its high frequency within a restricted corpus of Guiyijun names is curious. Nothing seems to warrant the popularity of this particular name over many other possible ones with similarly inspiring semantics. Certainly, the character zai 再 (LMC tsaj; ‘twice’) is one of the most productive ones in Guiyijun onomastics, and there are dozens if not hundreds of examples of names such as Zaisheng 再晟 (‘Twice Brilliant/Flourishing’), Zaiding 再定 (‘Twice Settled’), or Zaiying 再盈 (‘Twice Abundant’). But aside from its generic positive sense, the reason for its popularity in Guiyijun Dunhuang remains a mystery.

500 On Buddhist names in the Chinese tradition, see Chen Huaiyu 2012; among the Uighurs, Zieme 1990.

501 On a similar practice among the Uighurs of Gaochang of choosing given names that ultimately derive from Chinese titles, see Hamilton 1984, Oda 1987, Zieme 2006, 117–118 and Moriyasu 2008. Common among given names of this type were Tutun from Chinese dutong 都統 and Sanjun from Chinese jiangjun 將軍 (‘general’).

502 This is also analogous to naming practices in Jewish and Christian traditions were the names of the angels, prophets and saints (e.g. Gabriel, Daniel, Joseph) are extremely popular. This is precisely the reason why given names are commonly called ‘Christian names’ in the West.
In contrast to names with positive connotations, which are predictable elements of personal names, there are also semantically opaque ones. The given name Shide 什德 (LMC ʂɦip-təǝ), for example, occurs with a wide range of surnames (e.g. Gao 高, He 何, Suo 索, Tan 譚, Yan 閻), attesting to its popularity in Dunhuang. Although the character de 德 (‘virtue’) certainly conveys an auspicious and desirable quality, the pairing with the syllable shi 什, primarily used in this period for phonetic transcriptions, suggests that the entire given name comes from a non-Chinese language. Takata Tokio 高田時雄 identified the name Beg Zhib Tig in a tenth century Tibetan manuscript P.T.1254 as a transliteration of the Chinese name Bai Shide 白十德 (EMC ɓɛːjk dʑip tǝk; LMC ʂɦip tǝǝ). Another example is the name Ha Shib Tig in manuscript Ch.73. xiii.18, which Takata tentatively reconstructed as He Shide 何十德 (EMC ɣa dʑip tǝk; LMC xɦa ʂɦip tǝǝ̌k). The given name Shide is clearly the one that is commonly written in Chinese manuscripts with the character shi 什. Even though it appears in the Tibetan documents as a Chinese proper name, it is probably more appropriate to see it as a sinicized name of non-Chinese (and non-Tibetan) origin.

During the late 1930s, Peter A. Boodberg wrote several papers in which he discussed Chinese names and their connections to the animal cycle associated with the year of birth of the name-bearer. He cited historiographical sources such as the Beishi 北史 (compiled in 659), which explained that Gao Yang 高洋 (i.e. Emperor Wenxuan 文宣帝 of the Northern Qi 北齊; r. 550–559) was referred to as ‘Son of the Horse’ 馬子 because he had been born in a wu 午 year. Wu is the cyclical sign of the horse and so this case demonstrates that the year of one’s birth could feature in one’s given name or nickname. Elsewhere, the Beishi records a ditty that includes a reference to Yuwen Tai 宇文泰 (506–556) as ‘Son of

503 Of course, the character can be used for writing the numeral ‘ten’ 十 and in the context of given names could potentially stand for the tenth child in a family, a practice still popular, for example, in Japan. Yet on the one hand, we would not expect to have so many families having ten children and, on the other, this does not explain why only the number ten is used in these names. Similarly, since the first character of this name is consistently written as shi 什, it is unlikely that the name is related to the Buddhist concept of ‘ten virtues’ 十德.

504 Takata 2019, 100. The transcription of the Tibetan text was originally published in Gaotian [Takata] 2014.


506 Boodberg 1938, 243–253, Boodberg 1939 and 1940.

507 Beishi 7, 262; Boodberg 1938, 248–251. Due to a discrepancy between Gao Yang’s year of birth and the actual Year of the Horse, Boodberg speculates that even though the Beishi interprets the name Mazi as referring to Gao Yang, the original document the historians relied on must have referred to his brother Gao Zhan 高湛 (d. 569) who was indeed born in the Year of the Horse.
the Dog' 狗子. Yuwen Tai, who also had the nickname Heita 黑獺 ('Black Otter'), was indeed born in the Year of the Dog, which is why the reference could have worked.508

In several attested cases it was the style name that referenced the year of birth. Boodberg cites the case of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386–535) official Liu Teng 劉騰 (464–523), whose style name was Qinglong 青龍 ('Green Dragon') and he was indeed born in the Year of the Green Dragon (jiachen 甲辰). Similarly, one the childhood names of Lu Changheng 盧昌衡 (b. 536), an official during the Northern Dynasties, was Longzi 龍子 ('Son of the Dragon'), probably because he was born in the Year of the Dragon. Boodberg remarks that among the twelve animals of the zodiac, only the dragon and the tiger were used consistently in names.509 Moreover, in the above examples involving the horse and the dog, the animals were not part of the person's real name but were labels other people used to refer to them. Sanping Chen cites the case of the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420) scholar Yuan Hong 袁宏 (330–378), whom the Shishuo xinyu 世說新語 repeatedly calls Yuan Hu 袁虎; the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–557) commentator Liu Xiaobao 劉孝標 (462–521) explains the name Hu 虎 ('tiger') as Yuan's childhood name.510 Although it is not always possible to ascertain the year of birth of historical figures, given names such as that of Shi Yezhu 石野豬, a jester in Emperor Xizong's 僖宗 (r. 873–888) court whose given name literally means 'wild boar', are probably best understood as referencing zodiac signs.511

Following the same line of logic, Chen also draws attention to the popularity of names such as Chounu 醜奴 ('Ugly Slave') in the medieval period and argues that these were not opprobrious, as it was indeed the case with a series of other names, but referenced the year of the person’s birth. In the case of the name Chounu, he reasons that the character chou 醜 ('ugly') signified the left side of the character, that is, you 酉, the tenth of the twelve Earthly Branches,
which is the sign of the Rooster. In at least one case, the same character signified a *chou*丑 year, corresponding to the Year of the Ox. Therefore, Chen argues that the character *chou*醜 in such names does not stand for the word ‘ugly’ but represents ‘the name-bearer’s tutelary or guardian deity’ whose virtues they praised or from whom they requested benevolence or favours. It is, like many others, a theophoric name in which the first part represents the deity.512

While the zodiacal explanation is on the whole convincing, there are also examples that show that the element *chou*醜 in the names cannot refer to the person’s year of birth.513 Votive paintings that include the names of donors alongside their image provide a rare opportunity to approach this matter from a visual perspective. Even if the portraits are sketchy and conventionalised, they may still successfully convey the age, gender, and social status of donors, as well as their position within their family. A case in point is Stein painting 54 (dated to 983) with a large image of Guanyin and a family of donors who appear in two registers in the lower part of the composition. Fig. 69 shows the entire group of donors, with their names inscribed in colour cartouches beside each individual’s portrait.

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512 Chen 2016. As examples of ‘opprobrious’ names, he also cites the name Laza and other similar names, such as Fendui粪堆 (‘Pile of Faeces’); see idib., 118–199. The given name Fendui was sometimes written in a semantically less transparent form as Fendui粉堆 (e.g. Linghu Fendui令狐粉堆 in manuscripts S.6003, P.3379 and P.2680; Li Fendui李粉堆 in manuscript S.4472), which probably still carried the same meaning.

513 Chen 2016, 122 also notes that sometimes the character *chou*醜 may have indeed had an opprobrious connotation in names but these cases were not as numerous as previously believed.
Fig. 69: Detail of Stein painting 54, showing the family of donors. (102 × 75.5 cm; The British Museum)

Ranking within the family proceeds from top to bottom, in an outward direction from the centre occupied by a long donor inscription on a green background. The inscription itself reads, as most similar inscriptions do, from left to right and unites the upper and lower registers, showing that it pertains to the entire family. Moving outward from the central axis, the donors gradually diminish in size, signifying their age and hierarchy within the family. The main donor is Mi Yande 米延德 whose name appears once in a beige cartouche next to his portrait and once, written as Mi Yuande 米員德, in the central donor’s inscription.514 The phonetic variation of the given name may be due to it being a transliteration of a non-Chinese name. The Sogdian surname indicates that the main donor’s family was originally from modern-day Uzbekistan, whereas his wife came from the Cao family and must have also been of Sogdian background. The two of

514 The orthographic flexibility of the name is also an indication that we are dealing with a name that was largely independent of its Chinese transcription. It is not surprising therefore that it occurs in Guiyijun Dunhuang with other surnames, e.g. Wang Yuande 王員德 (S.8468), Zhang Yuande 張員德 (P.3878), Suo Yuande 索員德 (P.2817), Suo Yande 索延德 (P.3231), Cao Yande 曹延德 (S.395), Song Yande 宋延德 (P.2155).
them occupy the place of highest status on the two sides of the donor inscription. Behind Mi Yuande, to the right of him, are his sons Yuanchang 愿昌, Deying 德盈, and Fuchang 富長. Behind his wife of the Cao family, to the left of her, are their daughter Qingbi 清婢 and their sons’ wives of the Yin 陰 and Wang 王 families, both of which are understood to be of Chinese background. In the lower register, moving from the centre towards the right, are the grandsons Chouta 酞撻, Chouding 酎定, Chou’er 酎兒 and Changxing 長興, whereas on the left side are two wives from the Kang and Zhang families. Finally, at the end of this register are the granddaughters Chouzi 酎子 and Chang’tai 長泰. Interestingly, the grandchildren are identified only in relation to the main donor couple (i.e. their grandparents) but no effort is made in the painting to link them with their actual parents.

Four of the six grandchildren have the character chou 酎 (‘ugly’) in their names. It is highly improbable that all of them were born in a you 酎 (i.e. Year of the Rooster) or chou 丑 year (i.e. Year of the Ox), either in the same year or exactly twelve years apart. It is apparent that all such names belong to the youngest members of the family (i.e. the third generation), never to adults. Of the second generation, the daughter Qingbi’s 清婢 (‘Servant of Purity’) name includes the character bi 婢 (‘servant girl, slave girl’), making it analogous to male names ending with nu 奴 (‘slave’). The names of other family members seem less out of the ordinary in that they denote positive qualities.

As only the grandchildren’s names include the character chou 酎, these were probably childhood names or nicknames, and their bearers would have changed them when they grew up. Yet there are also cases of adults having similar names in other manuscripts and inscriptions. For example, one of the main donors in painting MG 22799 from the Musée Guimet is the deceased grandfather Wang Chounu 王醜奴 (‘Ugly Slave’), who was undoubtedly an adult. The name Chounu in particular was extremely common and occurred in combination with a range of different surnames, of both Chinese and Sogdian type. Another case in point is an association circular in manuscript P.3286, call-

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515 A note in small characters under the name of the daughter Qingbi says that she had married into the Li 李 family. Accordingly, while she is identified in this painting using her given name, in a similar votive painting of the Li family, she would feature as the ‘new wife from the Mi family’ 新婦米氏.

516 The first woman is named ‘new wife from the Kang family’ 新婦康氏 and the second, ‘the grandson’s new wife from the Zhang family’ 孫新婦張氏. This distinction makes it likely that the first woman (i.e. Kang) was the wife of the donor’s third son Fuchang, who is depicted as the last male donor in the top register. As for the second woman (i.e. Zhang), she must have been the wife of Chouta, the oldest grandson who is the first male donor in the lower register.
ing together members for a meeting at the home of Zhang Chouzi 張醜子 (‘Ugly Son’), who must have been an adult to host a meeting in his home.

The theophoric nature of many of the names in Guiyijun Dunhuang is evident. Examples include given names with nu 奴 (‘slave, servant’) as the second character (e.g. Shennu 神奴, Qingnu 清奴 and Fonu 佛奴). When looking at these names collectively, given names such as Fonu make it clear that the word preceding nu 奴 functions as not a modifier but a noun in a genitive construction. Therefore, Fonu means not ‘Buddhist slave’ but ‘Servant of the Buddha’, which is a name attested, among others, in Sogdian, Bactrian, Sanskrit and Old Uighur. In fact, the Sanskrit version (Buddhadāsa) also occurs in Sogdian transcription as Butδās (pwttδ’s) and in Old Uighur as Budataz. Along the same line of logic, Shennu 神奴 means ‘Servant of Gods’, while Qingnu 清奴 is the Chinese version of the name Servant of Purity (or Servant of the Pure One).

The element ‘slave’ was a common feature of Sogdian names long before the Guiyijun period. It is attested already in the Sogdian Ancient Letters from the fourth century in the name of Nanai-vandak (mnyβntk, ‘Servant of Nanai’). Chinese renditions of βntk appear in names such as Naning-pantuo 那寧畔陀, Shi Pantuo 石槃陀, An Pantuo 安盤陀, Shi Shewu-pantuo 史射勿槃陀, An Nuo-pantuo 安諾槃陀, Zhai Hudian-pantuo 瞿呼典畔陀. The name Servant of Gods is Vaγivande (βγyβntk), which could be transcribed phonetically as Bohepantuo 波何畔陀 (EMC baɣa-banhda) or Pohepantuo 婆何畔陀 (EMC baya-banhda).

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517 See the discussion in Chen and Mair 2017. Although this paper is primarily devoted to theophoric names with the element hei 黑 (‘black’) in them, possibly reflecting a ‘black cult’ in Iranian onomastics, it contains a wealth of valuable information on theophoric names in general.

518 Analogous constructions are also known from other cultures, e.g. Hebrew Abdiel or Arabic Abdullah; cf. Pulleyblank 1952, 337. The Sogdian version *pwtyβntk is also attested in Khotanese transcription; see Lurje 2010, 315.

519 The name Butδās (pwttδ’s) occurs in the Sogdian inscriptions at Shatial. Sims-Williams 1997/1998, 537 points out that even though it is written in the Sogdian script, it is not a Sogdian person’s name but a transcription of the Indian name Buddhada. For the Uighur example of the name Budataz, see Zieme 1975, 200–201.

520 I am grateful to Nicholas Sims-Williams for his guidance regarding Sogdian names in this section.

521 On the name of the goddess Nanai in Chinese, see also Wang Ding 2005. Other examples of Sogdian names with Nanai include Nanai-farn, Nanai-thvār, Nanai-khsay, Nanayakk, and even Nanai on its own; Sims-Williams 2000, 524 and 527–530. See also Bi, Sims-Williams and Yan 2017 for a bilingual inscription, dated 580, in which the Chinese version of Nanai-vandak appears as Nini-pantuo 墮墬槃陀.


Similar names were not limited to the north-western regions of the Chinese cultural sphere. For example, one of the rare opportunities for examining several Sogdian names in both Chinese and their original language is the bilingual inscription found in a Northern Zhou 北周 (557–581) tomb in modern-day Xi’an 西安. The tomb belonged to the Sogdian Wirkak (Shi jun 史君, ‘Master Shi’) and dates to 580. The tomb occupant’s third son was called Fuluduo 富鹵多, corresponding to Protvandak (pr’wtβntk, i.e. ‘Servant of Prot’) of the Sogdian inscription. Wang Ding points out that although this exact name is unattested in Dunhuang and Turfan, manuscripts from Turfan include the name Fuduo 富多, which is possibly an abbreviated version of Fuluduo 富鹵多. The name Fuduo 富多 is essentially a transcription of Prot, omitting βntk (‘slave, servant’) altogether. We see a similar correlation in the case of Wirkak’s first and second sons, who are called Pisha 毗沙 and Weimo 維摩 in the Chinese inscription, and Vreshmanvandak (βryšmnβntk, ‘Servant of Vaiśravaṇa’) and Zhematvandak (βrymtβntk, ‘Servant of [the Greek goddess] Demeter’) in Sogdian. The Chinese versions of the names omit the ‘servant’ and feature only the name of the deity, no doubt in order to conform to the two-character format of Chinese given names.

The name Fuduo 富多 also occurs in Guiyijun Dunhuang, as is the case with Cao Fuduo 曹富多 in manuscript P.4907. By this time, however, Sogdian names written in Chinese characters seem to have taken a step in the direction of semantic transparency. Thus, it is possible that names such as Suo Funu 索富奴 were the new way of writing the same name, representing the name Prot with the single character fu 富 and translating βntk (‘slave, servant’) as nu 奴.

Other common Sogdian theophoric names are those that end with yān (y’n, ‘boon’). There are plenty of such examples of these in Sogdian onomastics, including Rēwyān (rywy’n, ‘Boon of Rēw’), Āpoxyān (’pwxy’n, ‘Boon of [the

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525 Wang Ding 2011.
526 While Pisha 毗沙 is indeed Vaiśravaṇa, Weimo 維摩 refers to not Demeter but Vimalakirti; cf. Yoshida 2005, 68.
527 Additional examples of this name from Guiyijun Dunhuang include Zhang Funu 張富奴, Cheng Funu 程富奴, and Wang Funu 王富奴. An alternative interpretation of these Chinese names would be to equate them with Rēwvandak (rywβntk, ‘Slave of the Rich One’), which appears among the Sogdian names in the Shatial inscriptions; see Sims-Williams 1989, 135 and Sims-Williams 2000, 528.
Among the popular names is Butiyān (pwtty’n, ‘Boon of the Buddha’), which appears in Chinese manuscripts from Turfan as Fudiyan and Fuyan. Interestingly, the name of the Buddha does not follow the usual way of writing Buddha in Chinese, even though that would also work well phonetically. In fact, it seems that in some cases there was a preference for keeping the foreign flavour of the name, possibly as a means of asserting cultural identity. By the Guiyijun period purely phonetic transcriptions of Sogdian names seem to have become much less popular, giving way to a structure in which one or both elements were translated. Yet the element yan remains relatively common in names, especially in documents related to associations, e.g. Song Yiyan (P.3231), Gao Yuanyan (S.2472), Deng Fuyan (P.5032) or Shi Fuyan (P.3319). In each case, the word preceding the element yan means something positive (i.e. yi ‘duty, honour’; yuan ‘wish, vow’; fu ‘wealth, richness’; fu ‘good fortune’).

Occasionally, the manuscripts feature well-known Sogdian names such as Lushan, which was the given name of An Lushan (703–757), the leader of the rebellion that crippled the Tang dynasty. As modern scholars commonly assert, the name is a Chinese transcription of the Sogdian name Roxšan (Rokhshan) deriving from the word rwxšn (‘bright’). Thus, the colophon following the Qijie foming jing in manuscript S.2360 states that ‘this sutra was reverently copied by the disciple of pure faith Shi Lushan, wishing that all hindrances of harmful behaviour would be extinguished, that his entire family, including the young and the elders, would be at peace, and

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528 This latter name occurs in Chinese as Moyan and Moheyān; Lurje 2010, 235. On names of this type, see also Weber 1972.

529 Lurje 2010, 315. The same phenomenon can be seen in the name Butiśāy (pwtyś’yH, ‘Maid-servant of the Buddha’), which appears in Chinese as Fuzhitai, transcribing ‘Buddha’ as Fuzhi. Yet another example is the name Butifarn (pwtyprn, ‘Glory of the Buddha’), which is attested in Chinese as Bodifen, Fudifan, Fudifen and Futufen, transcribing Buddha in ways that set it apart from the usual way of writing it in Chinese. Cf. Yoshida 1998, 40–41.

530 Pulleyblank 1955, 15 notes (citing W. B. Henning) that Lushan was the Chinese transcription of the Sogdian name Rwxšn, mentioning that this was also the name of Ρωξάνη (Roxane), the princess of Bactria and wife of Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 BCE). Yet, as Yoshida 1998, 39–40 points out, this identification is not without problems, not least because Rwxšn does not seem to be attested as a personal name in Sogdian language sources. Yoshida notes that among the names actually attested in Sogdian is the name rywxşy’n, which he links with the name Aleheishan 阿了黑山, attested in manuscript P.3664 (+ P.3559) as a name of a person from the Luo family; cf. Lurje 2010, 337.
that he would soon be able to see his children who are travelling afar’.\(^{531}\) Here the Sogdian background of Shi Lushan is attested in his surname, his given name, and perhaps even in the fact that his children were travelling afar, possibly because they were involved in long-distance trade. The same name also occurs in manuscript P.3418 in a list of debtors, but since both the surname and given name were fairly common, this was probably a different person altogether. Another related name is seen in manuscript P.4019 Pièce 2c in the form of Shi Lushanmo 石祿山磨, in which the last character may or may not be part of the name.\(^ {532}\) Other examples include Kang Lushan 康祿山, a resident in the Turfan region; Mi Lushan 米祿山 who sold a slave girl to someone in Chang’an.\(^ {533}\) A legal document describes Cao Lushan 曹祿山, a resident of the Tang capital Chang’an, as ‘a hu person who speaks no Chinese’ 身 是 胡，不解 漢 語,\(^ {534}\) evidencing that this was a Chinese name of a Central Asian person living in the capital.

As mentioned above, naming practices in Guiyijun Dunhuang exhibit differences from those in earlier periods. While initially Sogdian-type names tended to be transcribed into Chinese phonetically, by the ninth century it became popular to translate their meaning. Although this was more of a preference than a rigid rule, the massive corpus of names from the Guiyijun period provides ample evidence for the trend. The most obvious examples are the multitude of names ending with \(nu\) 奴 (‘slave’), in contrast to the earlier custom of transcribing \(\beta ntk\) into Chinese as \(pantuo\) 畔陀/槃陀/槃陁. Thus, Servant of Gods became Shennu 神奴, Servant of the Buddha became Fonu 佛奴.\(^ {535}\) The mixed families evidenced in the donor inscriptions of votive silk paintings may be part of the same trend of integration. Yet analogous names are also present in the Old Uighur manuscripts from Dunhuang of the same period, such as Täŋri Qulï (‘Serv-


\(^{532}\) Dohi 2015, 305 reads the name as Shi Lushanno 石祿山磨 but unfortunately the last character is unclear. It is also possible that the bottom half of the character \(mo\) 磨 is in fact the same Shi 石 surname at the head of the following name in the list, whereas the top part of the character (i.e. \(ma\) 麻) is a mistake that has been crossed out. An argument in favour of this scenario is that the given name Lushanmo is entirely unattested, whereas there are numerous examples of the name Lushan in the Dunhuang manuscripts.

\(^{533}\) See Skaff 2003 and Wu 2002, 10, respectively.

\(^{534}\) Hansen 2005, 292.

\(^{535}\) We should note that there are examples of similar names from much earlier periods. For example, the Sôngshu 宋書 (98, 2404) records that two sons of Yang Songnu 楊宋奴 (d. 355) of the Kingdom of Chouchi 仇池國 in modern-day Gansu were named Fonu 佛奴 (‘Slave of the Buddha’) and Fogou 佛狗 (‘Dog of the Buddha’). Both of these names are very similar to those we see in Guiyijun Dunhuang in large numbers.
Naming practices in Guiyijun Dunhuang

ant of Gods’) and Burxan Qu ñi (‘Servant of the Buddha’). The examples suggest that such names often reflect naming practices that transcended linguistic and geographic boundaries.

To return to names from Guiyijun Dunhuang, the question arises whether the opprobrious and theophoric ones were ‘real’ names or various secondary appellations, such as nicknames (hao 号), style names (zi) or childhood names (xiaozì 小字, xiaoming 小名, runing 乳名). There are famous examples of names including nu 奴 (‘slave’) from the medieval period, such as Pusanu 菩薩奴 (‘Servant of the Bodhisattva’), which was the childhood name of Li Congke 李從珂 (i.e. Emperor Min of the [Later] Tang 唐閔帝; r. 933–934), or Wenshunu 文殊奴 (‘Servant of Mañjuśrī’), the childhood name of Yelü Longxu 耶律隆緒 (i.e. Emperor Sheng- zong of the Liao 遼聖宗, r. 982–1031). Neither were opprobrious names rare; for example, the childhood name of the Five Dynasties official Li Song 李崧 (d. 948) was Dachou 大醜 (‘Big Ugly One’).

In Guiyijun Dunhuang specifically, a number of childhood names are identified as such or can be inferred from the context. For example, the newly discovered tomb inscription for Zhang Huaicheng 张淮澄 (848–868), Zhang Yichao’s nephew, states that his childhood name was Fonu 佛奴 (‘Servant of the Buddha’), and he began to be called Huaicheng only from the age of seven. This fits the pattern seen above in connection to Mi Yande’s family in Stein painting 54, where most of the grandchildren had names involving the character 醜 (‘ugly’), but not the adults. The difference between the names of young children and adults suggests that the names changed with age. A similar case is seen in Stein painting 203, showing the Healing Buddha (Yaoshi liuliguang fo 藥師琉璃光佛) featuring portraits of six members of the family of Linghu Hejun 令狐和君. Of the two children, only the son’s name is legible, and he is called Chounu 醜奴 (‘Ugly Slave’). None of the legible names of adult donors have the element ‘slave’, conforming to the naming pattern of the Mi family.

537 Although opprobrious names were not common among the Sogdians, they were a common part of the Turkic onomasticon.
539 Jiū Wudaishi 108, 1419.
540 Wang Qingwei 2017, 13 and 19. Zhang Huaicheng was the son of Zhang Yichao’s younger brother Zhang Yitan who travelled with his father to the Tang court as a princely hostage. He died and was buried in Chang’an, which is where his tomb inscription was found.
541 Li Ling 2012, 7 reads the daughter’s name as Linghu Chou[...], which would fit our pattern, but I am unable to verify that the first character of her given name is chou 醜.
Yet, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are cases in which similar types of names are used by adults. As seen above, male donors such as Wang Chounu 王醜奴 (‘Ugly Slave’) in MG 22799 and Zhang Laza 張擖 (‘Heap of Garbage’) in Stein painting 52 were indisputably adults. The name of the donor Linghu Chouzi 令狐醜子 (‘Ugly Son’) appears in a cartouche next to an adult male figure in a mural from Cave 263. Although most of the names that occur in textual sources (e.g. contracts, circulars) do not reveal the age and gender of the individuals, the above examples demonstrate that apotropaic names and those with the element ‘slave’ were not limited to children.

One of the inherent difficulties in analysing childhood names in pre-modern China is that historical sources do not usually record them. There may have been many more similar names in the medieval period, but most remain invisible to us today. It is therefore possible that the reason for the exceptionally large number of such names from Guiyijun Dunhuang does not indicate different naming practices, but that people continued to use their childhood names into adulthood. They used them in contracts, ledgers, inventories, circulars and even votive inscriptions. In addition, for the most part, Guiyijun names survive in everyday documents and inscriptions, which are very different in nature from standardised histories and other transmitted sources. Accordingly, the popularity of such names may very well be the function of the type of material available, as it was produced not by the literary elite who wrote transmitted historical works but by members of the local elite. Simultaneously, the obvious presence of Sogdian elements in local given names indicates that at least part of the distinctiveness of Guiyijun onomastics was the result of extended interaction with non-Chinese cultures of Central Asia.

542 In fact, Zhang Laza was the donor’s deceased father.
543 This fragment is now in the Hermitage State Museum in St. Petersburg (Дх-195); see Lu Duowa [Rudova] 1993, 48. The cartouche itself with Linghu Chouzi’s name probably refers not to the main figure in the painting but to the one who is only partially seen on the left side. The remaining part of this figure confirms that it is of the same size as the fully visible one and is therefore an adult male.
4.7 Conclusions

One of the possible approaches to understanding the cultural makeup of society during this period is to utilise the large body of names preserved in inscriptions, circulars and texts related to economic and administrative matters. In addition to the commonly cited surnames that indicate Sogdian ancestry, the given names from the Guiyijun period also exhibit peculiarities that attests to the unique nature of local culture. One such peculiarity is the unusually large number of given names containing theophoric and apotropaic elements. Another is a disproportionately high ratio of shared given names, a phenomenon not evidenced in transmitted literature. My argument here is that some of the unusual names reflect Sogdian or other Central Asian naming practices. The Guiyijun period saw a shift from the tendency to transcribe foreign names phonetically to at least partially translating them. Taken together as an onomastic corpus, the Guiyijun names corroborate the impression that local society during the ninth and tenth centuries was entirely different from that of the previous centuries. It was no longer ‘Chinese’ but had a much higher ratio of Central Asian elements.

Naturally, the type of manuscripts and texts in which the names appear (e.g. circulars, contracts, donor inscriptions) would have had a major impact on which names survive. Moreover, as a considerable portion of the names come from copies of circulars and contracts made by students, we should remember that these do not qualify as ‘primary sources’ in the strict sense of the word. After all, the actual function of these copies was to provide sample texts for training purposes, regardless of the original texts’ intended use.