

## *Xiaoyao* and *shuchi*: a few special uses of alliterative binomes

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One of the most important, but still under-investigated, features of the Old Chinese lexicon is its large number of binomes (i.e., compounds of two characters that regularly appear together with distinctive meaning). *Lianmian ci* 連綿詞/聯綿詞 or “binome” (borrowed from the French word *binôme*) is a sound-correlated (alliterative or rhyming) disyllabic compound that carries meaning only when the two morphemes are combined and used as a single word. Binomes consist of two relevant morphemic units, and in most cases, they cannot be decomposed in meaning and pronunciation. While this is undoubtedly true in a general sense, there are texts found among the received Classics or inscribed on excavated documents, especially in rhymed texts, which exhibit particular behavior of binomes that do not necessarily follow the principle of non-separation.

My article published in *Jianbo yanjiu* 簡帛研究 (*Journal of Bamboo Strip and Silk Writings*) examined the variegated uses of some binomes, such as *enuo* 婀娜, *xiaoyao* 逍遙 and *shuyi* 舒遲, exemplifying an initial exploration of how these binomes are hidden behind the extent texts, both transmitted and excavated. My pilot research was conducted on the basis of early Chinese idioms and formulaic expressions concurrently seen in the *Book of Odes* and contemporaneous excavated manuscripts, such as bronze inscriptions and bamboo strip writings. It represents a novel perspective from which to understand how binomes are used within received classical texts, bronze inscriptions, as well as bamboo and silk manuscripts, and demonstrates how the analysis of these binomes can improve the understanding of the inscriptional texts and other excavated manuscripts. Moreover, this approach has the potential to provide new understandings of passages from the received classics that may have previously been misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Here I am going to show a few cases of the decomposition of binomes in the versified and rhymed literature, be it transmitted classics or excavated manuscripts. This phenomenon has misled students of early Chinese studies, both traditional and modern, both Chinese and non-Chinese, in their reception and interpretation of these texts.

## “Pairing up” of binomes and particles/lexical items

1. 伶俐 (sharp)

伶俐齒 (eloquent)

Pair with synonyms  
to form an idiom

隰有萋楚，猗儺其枝。《詩·檜風·隰有萋楚》  
In the Lowlands is the Goat's-Peach. Very delicate are its boughs.

2. 婀娜  
(graceful)

猗與那與，置我鞀鼓。《詩·商頌·那》  
Oh, fine, oh, lovely! We set up our tambourines and drums.

隰桑有阿，其葉有難。《詩·小雅·隰桑》  
The mulberry on the lowland, how graceful! Its leaves, how tender!

瞻彼淇奧，綠竹猗猗。《詩·衛風·淇奧》  
Look at that little bay of the Qi. Its kitesfoot so delicately waving.

“猗猗” was  
derived  
from “猗那”

猗與漆沮，潛有多魚。《詩·周頌·潛》  
Oh, the Qi and the Ju. In their warrens have many fish. (Watson)

“猗與” is an ellipsis of “猗與那與” rather  
than a standalone exclamatory word

The methodological approach that I am going to demonstrate here can thus bring a new degree of linguistic rigor to the study of ancient Chinese documents, and will shed a new light on the field of early China, including paleography, philology and most importantly, manuscript studies.