

An Analysis of “Qingtou”

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Abstract

Purpose: To explore the meaning of “Qingtou” collected by *Han Yu Da Ci Dian*: “She is a *qingtou* girl, so she is less sophisticated than me”. **Methods:** Method of Triangle Theory is put forward by Fuyi Xing to grasp clearly the grammar facts, which is based on the materials of Mandarin, Dialect and Classical Chinese. This study still employs materials of ancient characters. **Results:** “Qingtou” suggests two meanings: one refers to “raven hair” and the other “having not been married and still being a virgin” and the initial form of it is “*qingtong*”. **Conclusion:** There isn’t yet a clear understanding of “*qingtou*” in most modern dictionaries. Such a fact is caused by the insufficient investigation on Chinese language materials. As a result, it’s hard to trace back to the very origin of its meaning.

Keywords

Triangle Theory, *Qingtou*, *Qingtong*, Word-Formation

1. Introduction

The word “*qingtou*” has been collected and interpreted by *Han Yu Da Ci Dian*¹ in page 555 of Chapter 11, whose interpretive discourse is:

【青头】头发乌黑貌。形容年纪轻。清李渔《意中缘》第十八出《沉奸》：“他是个青头女儿，比不得我。”

“*qingtou*” means an appearance of raven hair to describe that someone is very young. “She is a *qingtou* girl, so she is less sophisticated than me” (seen in *Chenjian* in Chapter 18 of *Yizhongyuan* by Yu Li in Qing Dynasty).

The original text in *Yizhongyuan* was as follows:

（欲搂旦介）（旦推开，向老旦做眼势介）（老旦背对净介）他是个青头女儿，比不得我，你还该从

¹In the sections below, it is called *Da Ci Dian* for convenience.

容些，怎么这等性急？²

Jing was to cuddle Dan, but was pushed off. Dan signaled Laodan with her eyes. Laodan turned her back and said to Jing: “She is a *qingtou* girl, so she is less sophisticated than me. You should be patient, why so rude?” (In Chinese opera, Jing stands for male role, Dan for female role and Laodan for elderly female role.)

The quotation from *Yizhongyuan* is about what the old housemaid (Laodan) said to Shikong Monk (Jing) when Shikong was to cuddle Yang Yunyou (Dan). In the context, the meaning of “*qingtou*” is “having not been married and still a virgin, which proves the explanation in *Da Ci Dian* is an inadequate one.

Why does “*qingtou*” mean “having not been married and still a virgin” and what is its motivation of word-formation? The study of word-formation focuses on naming reasons and relationship between a word’s morpheme meanings and things which it represents. Generally speaking, the motivation of word-formation could be found among onomatopoeic words like *guanguan* (tweet of bird), *chanchan* (sound of flowing water), etc., and sound-naming words like *ququ* (cricket), *bugu* (cuckoo), etc. As for compounding words, it is usually obtained by word-structural analysis. According to *Da Ci Dian*, “*qingtou*” is a modified compound whose morphemes “*qing*” (black) and “*tou*” (head) are not distinctive features of an unmarried person. And *qingtou*’s word-formation isn’t clear. To clarify its motivation the arguments of Qian Zongwu (2012: p. 312) are much persuasive. He insists that “the form of a word would change radically during its spreading process. Only based on the primary form were its adequate meanings finally clarified. This was called clarifying the true meanings of a word by finding out its primary form. In the Dialect of Sichuan Anyue, “*qingtou*” has another name: “*qingtong*”. I argue that the latter is the primary form of the former.

2. Body

“*Qing*” is seen in Radical *qing* of *shuowen* as follow: “*Qing* is the color of the East. *Qing* is explained in the opinion that wood produces fire. It has *Sheng* as the phonetic constituent and *dan* (a kind of color) as the semantic constituent. *Danqing* (refers to colors) is like true words, because the colors will not fade easily just like true words cannot change. 𠂔 is the ancient writing of *qing*.” It indicates a kind of cultural meaning (Su Baorong, 2000: p. 174). And Wang Tao (1998) holds that it was produced according to the opinion in Pre-Qin Period that the five elements correspond to the five colors and the five directions. It is not the literal meaning of “*qing*”. Therefore, Guangju Kong points out that *dan* was a color of “*qing*” and “*qing*” had *sheng* (生) as the phonetic constituent and *dan* (丹) as the semantic constituent. The statement that wood produces fire was the wrong explanation. We can see the same arguments in opinions of Hu Pu’an (1941) and Yao Xiaoping (1985). In bronze inscriptions, “*qing*” was written as 𠂔 on Wufangyi (a kind of bronze vessel used for wine) and 𠂔 on Qiangpan (a kind of metal plate). Thus we can conclude clearly that “*qing*” is a *xingshengzi* (a character indicating shape and sound), which takes *sheng* (生) as semantic constituent and *jing* (井) as phonetic constituent. There are also some statements in Chapter 14 of *Shiming*, *Shicaibo* as follow: “*Qing* has a meaning of *sheng* (生), also used to describe the appearance of things at birth.” That was to say, the literal meaning of “*qing*” is to be born and “the appearance of things at birth” is its extended meaning. Endowed with the original meaning “to be born”, “*qing*” has also got through such semantic extensions: to be born → young → immature, underage → having not been married.

In words such as *qingji*, *qing’e*, *qingsui*, the meaning of “*qing*” is “being young”.

Qingji means “young courtesans who performed music and arts in ancient China”. For example:

1) 谢家青妓邃重关，谁省春风见玉颜。（唐·李郢《张郎中宅戏赠》诗之二）

The young courtesan of Xie’s family was hidden in the inaccessible palace and even the spring wind couldn’t see her beautiful face. (Zhang langzhong zhai xizeng by Liying in Tang dynasty)

Qing’e means “young lady or maid”. For example:

2) 青娥羞艳，素女惭光。（南朝宋·江淹《水上神女赋》）

Because of Shennv 神女’s gorgeous appearance, *qing’e* and *su’nv* 素女 (the goddess on the moon) felt ashamed. (Shuishang shennv fu by Jiangyan in Southern Song Dynasty)

3) 红粉青娥映楚云，桃花马上石榴裙。（唐·杜审言《戏赠赵使君美人诗》）

The *qing’e* was so beautiful with elegant chignon and she was riding on a peach blossom horse, dressed in

²Yu Li. Ten Legends of Liwen 1. In Chapter four of collected edition of Liyu, p. 380. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Books Press, 1991.

guava-skirt. (Xizeng Zhaoshijun meiren shi by Du Shenyang in Tang Dynasty)

4) 梨园弟子白发新，椒房阿监青娥老。（唐·白居易《长恨歌》）

Actors in operatic garden began to have head grey, eunuchs and young maids in Jiaofang Palace also looked old. (Song of Everlasting Regret-Bai Juyi in Tang Dynasty)

Qingsui means “age of youth”. For example:

5) 迟美人兮不见，恐青岁之遂逝。（唐·陈子昂《春台引》）

It was feared that we hadn't encountered a beauty before our youth passed by. (Chuntaiyin by Chen Zi'ang in Tang Dynasty)

6) 红颜悲旧国，青岁歇芳洲。（唐·李白《寄淮南友人》）

My old friend was still missing the hometown. Our age of youth stopped in that beautiful place and never came back. (Ji huannan youren by Libai in Tang Dynasty)

7) 隔河忆长眺，青岁已摧颓。（唐·杜甫《昔游诗》）

Gazing out across the river, I was sorrowful for my age of youth had elapsed. (Xiyou shi by Dufu in Tang Dynasty)

Xu Baohua and Miyada Ichiro (1999: p. 3069) hold that “qingzhu”, existing in the dialects of Yunnan Yuxi, Chengjiang and Eshan of Southwest Mandarin, mean “a castrated boar or sow”. It is a word in which “qing” had a meaning of “having not been married and still a virgin”. The reason is that a castrated boar or sow don't have fertility in spite of sexual maturity, so it can remain virgin just like a virgin. It was also used in the dialect of Anyue. For example:

8) 喂两条青猪赚不了多少钱。

(We) won't earned much by feeding two qingzhu (castrated pigs).

9) 大部分家庭只喂青猪和母猪，不喂公猪。

Most families only feed qingzhu (castrated pigs) and sows, rather than boars.

10) 青猪就是仔猪阉割的。³

A qingzhu (castrated pigs) is the one castrated when it was young.

“Tong” was seen in Radical Qian (𠂔) of *shuowen* as follow: “A male criminal is called ‘nu’ (slaves), ‘nu’ (slaves) is also explained as ‘tong’. A female criminal is called ‘qie’ (maid). (Tong has) qian (𠂔) as the semantic constituent and zhong (重) as the omitted phonetic constituent.”

According to Zhan Yinxin (1983), in oracle bone inscriptions, “tong” was written as  屯 650, which has the same constituent 𠂔 as qie's writing  合 32156.  was the ancient writing of zui (臯), which symbolizes a chisel on the head of a slave. It indicates qingxing (a form of punishment which involved branding a criminal by tattooing his face). The symbol of chisel became identification of slaves and prisoners due to its purpose for preventing escaping. In Liu Zhao (1992), the shape evolution from  to tong (童) is clarified:  is the primary

³The examples (8)-(10) and (15)-(16) were sampled in the dialect of Lijia Town, Anyue county, Sichuan Province, which I obtained from Mr. Xianyao Li. After graduation from junior middle school, he has been engaging in farming in Lijia Town. What's more, from all the ancient documents, we found only two examples of qingzhu in Chapter 86 Huang Tianyou of *Tales of Records of the Tianping Era*: When Tianyou Huang left, there existed some writing on the wall of shu palace: “Don't touch the feet of qingzhu, or it will cause a big fire that cannot be put out. The head and tail of a beast shouldn't be yellow. If it happens, all the people will cry for it all the year around.” It was so obscure that wise men couldn't understand. Till the year of Yihai, Jian, king of Shu, started a war and occupied all states in Qinzhou and Fengzhou. When he was celebrating the victory, his palace caught fire and all the treasures were burnt up. It was understood that the year of Yihai was the time of fire, because hai meant pig and referred to qingzhu. Three years later, Jian died and all the people mourned for him. It was the year of Wuyin. People all finally knew that yin meant tiger and it was a beast. Wuyin represented one year in the system of celestial stems and earthly branches, which belonged to earth in five elements system. So was Nayin. The color of the earth was yellow, so it explained why the head and tail of a beast would be yellow. The fact was surprisingly consistent with that writing (quoted from *Luyi ji*, Beijing Zhonghua Book Company, 1961, p. 558.). And then, Tianyou Huang's writing was collected in *Complete poetry of Tang Dynasty* from *Tales of Records of the Tianping Era*, named by *Wanhu Huang Writing Poem on the Wall of the Palace Shu* (seen in Chapter 875 of *Complete poetry of Tang Dynasty*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1960, p. 9904). As we knew, mouse and pig in Chinese zodiac belonged to water in five elements system. The representative color of water was black. In ancient Chinese, both blue and black were called “qing”. Therefore, “qingzhu” in the examples above means black pigs, referring to the year of yihai. They had no connection with “qingzhu” discussed in our paper.

shape whose semantic constituents are 辛 and 見. In bronze inscriptions,  is the result of  plus phonetic constituent , while  connects the two parts above. In , the constituent 人 is omitted and the bottom is a combination between  and 土. In ,  serves as its phonetic constituent and characters of 見 are all omitted. The phonetic constituent 東 and 辛 are combined into , which is a shape of the xiaozhuan (small-seal script) in *Shuowen* and its writing of lishu (clerical script) is 童. From what discussed above, 童 is a xingshengzi, which had  as semantic constituent and 東 as phonetic constituent.

How did the meaning of “*tong*” (童) change from “male slaves” into “underage slaves”, then into “children”? We believe that it is related with “*tong*” (童) itself. There were wars to raven and wars to conquer in human military history. In primitive society, wars to raven were to rob enemies’ property, female adults, and children.  903 正, the oracle writing of “*fu*” (孚), was a reflection and relic of ravenging wars. In the radical part of “*zhua*” (爪) in *Shuowen*, “*fu*” (孚) is explained as follow: “Fu means hatching eggs and takes 爪 and 子 as semantic constituents. Its extended meaning is xin (to be faithful and unchangeable).”

Lin Yiguang (1920: p. 225) holds that fu (孚) was the primary writing of “*fu*” (俘), which is like capturing a child with claws. Shang Chengzuo (1983: p. 24) considered that the radical of “*fu*” (俘) in oracles was , in gubo (an archaic bowl) was . And fu (俘) in Article zhen and in Article xunbo were respectively written as  and  in bone inscriptions. Yu Xingwu (1979: p. 300) held that “in *Shuowen* ‘*fu*’ (俘) meant prisoners in war. It had ren (人, people) as semantic constituent and “*fu*” (孚) as phonetic constituent. We should note that “*fu*” (俘) was a younger graph, which was considered as “*fu*” (俘) among the word fulu 俘虏 (prisoners in war) in oracles... Why was *fu*’s semantic constituent zi (子, children or posterity) instead of ren (person)? This had been a puzzling problem for scholars, and answers for the origination of words could usually be searched in the habitual and custom in primitive clan society. As the habitual and custom in different clans had different characteristics and meanwhile shared something in common. Morgan claimed: “prisoners in war were adopted in clans instead of being killed. Captured women and children generally benefited from this sort of bounties. By adoption, these prisoners shared rights with natives, and were being members of the clans. People who adopted a prisoner, put the prisoner among his brothers or sisters. For example, an senior mother who adopted a boy or a girl, treated the adopted as her own son or daughter afterward.” (from *Ancient Society*, printed by SDX Joint Publishing Company, page 84) This was the example in ancient society that children from other clans were adopted in wars. In ancient China, both sons and daughters were called as zi (child), commonly seen in old classics in Zhou Dynasty. For example, there was a piece of inscription on Fanjusheng Pot (Fanjusheng referred to the name of a person) in Zhou Dynasty: “用媵 氏元子孟妃羌”, which meant that it was used as a ying (dowry) for the eldest daughter in the clan of 氏 (the name of a clan). Yuanzi meant the eldest daughter. From this, 孚 (孚) and 俘 all had 子 as semantic constituent and were ancient writing of 俘. Adopting prisoners in war as children was the origin of 孚. Another 孚, which meant birds hatching their eggs, was a borrowing character, and then replaced by 孵.” The opinion of Yu Shengwu that 孚 was taken as the ancient writing of 俘 and 孚 generated the meaning of hatching, was right. However, he mistakenly quoted what Morgan’s arguments that prisoners were adopted as children. Morgan (1957: p. 216) also claimed that three methods to deal with prisoners existed in three civilization stages (beginning, middle and advanced). In the beginning, slaves were burned at the stake; in the middle stage, they were sacrifice; in the last stage, they became slaves. Therefore, Morgan also thought that prisoners were adopted as slaves.

Besides, we can see clearly in the following oracle examples that prisoners are all sacrificed, instead of adopting as children: I used slaves (, 孚) as sacrifices in the  ceremony. ( probably referred to a kind of religious ceremony) (Oracle Collection 903 正) Were we able to capture two slaves (, 孚)? (Oracle Collection 35362) On the day of Jiachen, started a war with 蚩 and captured (, 俘) fifteen persons. Five days later, on the day of Wushen 戊申, 方 came back and captured (, 俘) another sixteen. (方 and 蚩 were the names of two countries) (Jing 137 正).

As it was children that were enslaved, the male ones were called as “*tong*”, female as “*qie*”. “*Tong*” was underage male slaves, including three semantic features: male, underage and slave. Therefore, the connotation of

“*tong*” diminished, and its extension enlarged into “underage slave”, then into “children”. In class society, except prisoners became slaves, the criminals among clan were also slaves. So with the class society as historical background, Shen Xu said that “A male criminal was called slave”.

“*Tong*” has the meaning of “underage or children” in the following words: “*tonggong* (child labor)”, “*tongnan* (virgin boy)”, “*tongnü* (virgin girl)”, “*tongmu* (sapling)”, “*tongya* (children’ teeth, referring to youth)”, “*tongxin* (childlike innocence)”, “*tongqie* (servant girl)”, “*tongbian* (urine of boys under twelve, which is used for medicine in China)”, “*tongruo* (persons who are childish and young)”, “*tongsun* (little grandson)”, “*tonghun* (marriage of the underage)”, “*tongmeng* (childish and innocent)”, “*tongzhi* (childish)”, “*tongmao* (children’s hair, referring to childhood)”, “*tongshu* (children)”, “*tongchi* (similar to children’ teeth)”, “*tongchen* (similar to children’ teeth)”, “*tongyang* (lamb)”, “*tongma* (pony)”, “*tongji* (chicken)” and so on.

In such words like “*tongshen* (virgin)”, “*tongzi* (boy)”, “*tongzhen* (virginity)”, “*tong*” has changed its meaning from “underage” to “to be a virgin”. For example:

11) 富室之女，自七岁至九岁，至贫之家则止于十一岁，必命僧道去其童身，名曰“阵毯”。（元·周达观《真腊风土记》）

The virgin of daughters aged seven to nine in a rich family would be taken away by monks and so would daughters in a poor family till eleven. This was called zhentan 阵毯. (Zhenla fengtu ji by Zhou Daguan in Yuan dynasty)

12) 要寻一个标致童身女子去赛社，肯出五百两银子身价。（明·徐复祚《投梭记·鬻女》）

(Many people) were to find a beautiful virgin girl to attend Saishe Party and willing to offer 500 liang (两) of silver for her virgin. (Yu’nv in Tousuoji by Xu Fuzuo in Ming dynasty)

13) 年二十始娶，身犹童子。（清·蒲松龄《聊斋志异·乐仲》）

He got married till twenty and he was still a virgin. (Lezhong in Liaozhaizhiyi by Pu Songling in Qing dynasty)

14) 他自己到现在都好好地保持着他的童贞，他一直是童男。（张天翼《报复》）

Till now, he has remained a virgin and he was always a virgin boy. (Revenge by Zhang Tianyi)

“*Qing*” and “*tong*” both had the meaning of “underage and immature” and then, were extended into the meaning of “having not got married and still a virgin”. Therefore, they were compounded into “*qingtong*” to describe someone who was unmarried and still a virgin. In the dialect of anyue, “*qingtong*” is also divided into “*qingtong tongzi* (a virgin boy)” and “*qingtong guniang* (a virgin girl)” by gender. For example:

15) 人家是春花妹子，青童姑娘，你讲话要文明点。

She is still a chunhua meizi (similar to qingtong guniang) and qingtong girl. Pay attention to your words.

16) 青童公子就是爆伙子，说话不负责。

The qingtong guy is hot-temper and isn’t responsible for his words.

Only “*qingtou*” was seen in Chinese dialect works. According to Xu Baohua and Miyada Ichiro (1999: pp. 3070-3075), an unmarried young man was called “*qingtou erzi*” in the dialect of Guizhou Hezhang and Hafang in Southwest mandarin, “*qingtou xiaohuo*” in the dialect of Guizhou Hongzi, “*qingtoufasir*” in the dialect of Henan Xinxiang in Jin mandarin, “*qingtouzai*” in the dialect of Guangdong Yangjiang hailing in cantonese. An unmarried young woman was called “*qingtou meizi*” in the dialect of Sichuan Xichang in Southwest mandarin, “*qingtou guniang*” in the dialects of Sichuan Chengdu, Yunnan Chengjiang, Yongsheng and Guizhou Hezhang, Dafang and Tongzi, “*qingtou nv*” in cantonese. We also knew that in the dialect of Sichuan Anyue an unmarried young man was called “*qingtou wa’er*” or “*qingtong wa’er*” and an unmarried young woman was called “*qingtou guniang*” or “*qingtong guniang*”.

The reason why “*qingtou*” was synonymous with “*qingtong*” was that “*tou*” (head) was a phonetic variant of “*tong*” (child). In middle Chinese, *tong* and *tou* both had the tone of even and the initial of /d/ while *tou*’s final was /ou/ and *tong*’s was /u/. After the nasal-omitted alternation, “*qingtong*” was changed into “*qingtou*”. The form change of words led to that of characters used for recording them. As a result, it was difficult to obtain the primary meaning of words by studying the changed word-form. *Da Ci Dian* had a wrong explanation of “*qingtou*” just depending on its word-form and hadn’t figured out the connection between “*qingtou*” and “*qingtong*” by a thorough search for the etymology. Only by an appropriate word-form can we make a reasonable assump-

tion about word-formation. Triangle Theory was raised by Xing Fuyi (2000), which was applied for the study of “qingtou”. It employed “pu-gu-fang” method, based on the materials of Mandarin, Dialect and Archaic Chinese, like three points of a triangle. Fuyi Xing claimed that when studying the grammar of common Chinese language, we could employ the materials of dialect, archaic Chinese and mandarin to grasp clearly the grammar facts. Scholars also discussed or used the theory in their own study. For example, Jiang Shaoyu (2005: pp. 287-296) put forward a method of Dialect Reference in the study of Late Middle Chinese vocabulary. Those like Jiang Lihong (1988), Dong Zhiqiao (2007), Jiang Zongfu (2002), etc., made a great achievement in the study of Middle and Late Middle Chinese with a combination of modern Chinese dialect.

“Qingtou” also had the meaning of “with raven hair”. We can find some such examples in ancient documents:

17) 青头少妇泣血啼，有年不死将谁齐？（明·杨维桢《杨维桢集·卷一》）

A qingtou lady was sobbing with heart broken and whom was she waiting for to die together? (Chapter one of Yang Weizhen Ji by Yang weizhen in Ming dynasty)

18) 轿中人在轿内闻得孩子声唤，推开帘子一看，见是个青头白脸魔合罗般一个小孩子，心里喜欢，叫住了轿，抱将过来，问道：“你是何处来的？”（《二刻拍案惊奇·卷五》）

The person in sedan heard a child crying outside. He (or she) removed the curtain and saw a qingtou child whose face was lovely and looked like an adorable doll. He (or she) stopped the sedan, held the child and asked: “where are you from?” (Chapter five of Erke pai'an jingqi)

19) 青头鲈妓抚瑶瑟，红眼马郎品玉箫。（《西游记·第六十回》）

Qingtou singsong girls stroked zithers of jasper, while red-eyed dragonflies played jade flutes. (Chapter sixty of Journey to the west)

20) 况且青头白脸一个后生走出来。如今做了个妇人，把甚嘴脸去见人？（《古今奇观》第六十二卷）

Besides, you were a handsome qingtou guy when you left home. Now you became a woman, how could you face your family? (Chapter sixty-two of Gujin qiguan)

Obviously, “qingtou” in these examples means “with raven hair”.

3. Conclusions

In short, considering what we discussed above, “qingtou” had two meanings: one was “with raven hair” and the other was “having not been married and still a virgin”. The word “qingtou” with latter meaning was phonetic-changed from “qingtong”.

Similarly, the meaning “still a virgin” wasn't seen in *Da Ci Dian* which collected “qingtong” but hadn't pointed out its relationship with “qingtou”. There were only four meanings: “a fairy child”, “a senior monk”, “a fairy named qingtongjun” and “the youth”. Besides, the examples like (17)-(20) in the paper haven't been used in *Da Ci Dian*. Due to lack of sufficient materials of dialect and ancient documents, the study of “qingtou” cannot be carried on from the origin so that the reasonable explanation wasn't obtained.

Of course there is still an inadequacy that not all of meanings of “qingtou” have been interpreted in this paper because Guo Hongyi (2011) has been studied the rest meanings of it. So Hongyi Guo's paper should be referred to when you use this paper.

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