



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

A good son is sad if he hears the name of his father : the tabooing of names in China as a way of implementing social values

Adamek, P.

Citation

Adamek, P. (2012, September 11). *A good son is sad if he hears the name of his father : the tabooing of names in China as a way of implementing social values*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/19770>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/19770>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/19770> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Adamek, Piotr

Title: A good son is sad if he hears the name of his father : the tabooing of names in China as a way of implementing social values

Date: 2012-09-11

CHAPTER SEVEN: LAST CENTURIES OF NAME TABOOING

7.1. Yuan

Our knowledge about the tabooing of personal names during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) period is very limited. In the research done by Chinese scholars, it is frequently remarked that this period did “not have taboos.”¹ We do know that there is a large and abrupt change in sources from the abundant and numerous examples of taboo practice of the preceding Song dynasty to the virtual absence of them in the Mongolian dynasty. We also know that the Mongols had their own taboo customs, including perhaps the custom of tabooing Mongolian names. This last practice has not yet been studied and will not be discussed here.²

Gradually the Mongols, especially emperors and their families, started to use Chinese phonetic transliteration of their names for communication with their Chinese subjects. The reason why maintaining a name taboo for Mongolian emperors would have been difficult, is that their names were transcribed into Chinese with many characters, while each individual character would not carry the full name’s meaning. Since individual characters would not remind anyone of the full Mongolian name, there was no need for (Chinese) name taboos as far as the names of emperors and their close relatives were concerned.³

But even if the Mongol rulers did not practice the avoidance of Chinese characters, it is hard to accept that the custom of tabooing names in the family and office was simply abolished in the beginning of Yuan, to reappear again in the beginning of the Ming dynasty. We have to remember that what happened at the state level (and thus can be found in official sources) in the Yuan period does not reflect all levels of political power. It is hard to believe that ordinary Chinese people did not continue practising the taboo custom.

¹ Fan Zhixin 2006, p. 455.

² Wang Jian 2002, p. 230 writes that Mongolians had no taboo names, but this claim seems unfounded or only true with regard to their Chinese names. About Mongolian taboo see Sárközi 1995, pp. 446-447 (women have to taboo the names of their husbands’ mother and father and of their brothers in law, and to avoid identical words, too. Names of relatives are taboo for children). About Mongolian emperors in China see Franke 1994.

³ Similar to the double or full names of the Chinese in the early period (for example, the name Sikong 司空 was tabooed, *si* 司 or *kong* 空 were not, cf. 4.3.1.2).

7.1.1. Sources

The “modern historian’s essential resource for the study of Yuan period”⁴ is the *History of the Yuan* (*Yuanshi* 元史) composed in 1369–1370 by Song Lian 宋濂 *et al.*⁵ One other important work is the *Compendium of Statutes and Substatutes of the Yuan* (*Yuan dianzhang* 元典章) collected in 1322⁶ and the *Legislative Articles from the Comprehensive Regulations* (*Tongzhi tiaoge* 通制條格).⁷ Other sources are *Caomuzi* 草木子 composed by Ye Ziqi 葉子奇 (1327–1390), and later *Draft Arranged in Seven Categories* (*Qixiu leigao* 七修類稿) of Lang Ying 郎瑛 (1487–1566).⁸

7.1.2. Name Taboo

There is only one example of name tabooing in the Yuan period quoted in Chinese sources and research of today. In the *History of the Yuan* (Biography of Cheng Jufu 程鉅夫), the following has been recorded: “Cheng Jufu’s name was Wenhai 文海. He avoided the taboo (*miaohui* 廟諱) of the Emperor Wuzong 武宗 and used his courtesy name”.⁹ The original name of Cheng Jufu (1239–1318, an official from Jinshan county 京山縣 in Hubei province) was changed in order to taboo the given name of the Emperor Wuzong (Bo’erzhijin Haishan 孛兒只斤海山, r. 1308–1311).¹⁰

Since Chen Yuan, this has been explained as an extension of taboo practice of the Southern Song dynasty,¹¹ although the change (if it really happened) was made a long time after its fall. Many counter-examples using of the character *hai* 海 can be found in the *History of the Yuan* (Annals of Wuzong), and even in the decrees of the Emperor Wuzong himself.¹² Therefore, Chinese scholars have since concluded that there was no real

⁴ Mote 1994, p. 689.

⁵ Wilkinson 2000, p. 871.

⁶ Wilkinson writes about an expanded 1303 edition. This is probably a mistake. Wilkinson 2000, p. 873.

⁷ *Legislative Articles from the Comprehensive Regulations* (*Tongzhi tiaoge* 通制條格) are a collection of jurisdictional edicts and laws from the Yuan period.

⁸ Further material for more precise research can be the *New Talk From a Mountain Dwelling* (*Shanju xinhua* 山居新話), compiled by Yang Yu 楊瑀 (1285–1361), trsl. by Herbert Franke – see Franke 1956, cf. especially the story criticizing the Mongol general Bayan of the Baarin (Baiyan 伯顏, 1236–1295) for the adoption of the same honorary title (in Mongolian) Xiechan 薛禪 – the Wise (pp. 107–109).

⁹ *Yuanshi*, j. 172, p. 1a; *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 22, p. 359.

¹⁰ Note that collected works of Cheng Jufu are extant in the SKQS.

¹¹ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 162.

¹² Cf. *Yuanshi*, j. 22–23 passim. For the decree announcing the accession of Wuzong containing the character *hai* 海 see *Yuanshi*, j. 22, p. 2a.

avoidance of single characters from the names of emperors at that time and that the custom of tabooing of names was very lax.¹³

There are still a few records and facts that need to be clarified. In the *Compendium of Statutes and Substatutes of the Yuan* (*Yuan dianzhang* 元典章) a note has been found about a request for name tabooing sent to the Board of Rites in AD 1314, and a proposal made by the Board of Rites and scholars of the Hanlin Academy. It was suggested that there are too many taboo characters that have to be observed in petitions to the throne, and proposed that only the full name of deceased emperors and “evil” characters should be avoided. Characters such as *xiu* 休, *xiang* 祥, *ji* 極 and *hua* 化 would not have to be avoided.¹⁴ Tabooing the full name of emperors is characterized as something done out of consideration, and this would mean that tabooing the names (at least a full name) of emperors was the usual custom.

According to the *Caomuzi* 草木子 by Ye Ziqi 葉子奇 (1327–1390), composed shortly after the fall of the Yuan dynasty, the tabooing of names during that time was much looser than before, and subjects (probably only other Mongols) often had similar names to those of their rulers.¹⁵ The *Qixiu leigao* 七修類稿 of Lang Ying 郎瑛 (1487–1566) records that there was a practice of omitting strokes in writing at the time: “The rulers of Yuan were simple and illiterate. Many taboos were not observed. Therefore, there are many examples of the same names of rulers and subjects. Later, even if the taboo law was prescribed, the omission of strokes can be seen in written works”.¹⁶

The total absence of name tabooing in the time of the Mongols is unlikely, as we know how important this custom was for similar states at the time – e.g., the Western Xia and Jin (see 6.4.7). The Mongols entered North China and defeated these two empires already in 1227 and 1234. In this way, the contact of Mongols with “Chinese” name taboo has lasted much longer than merely since the fall of the Southern Song dynasty, as is usually assumed by Chinese scholars on the basis of Chinese sources.

Certainly Mongolian rulers also gradually learned the Chinese custom of tabooing. They were sensitive to the tabooing of names, because, as we know, they hated the direct use of their names. It was perceived as an insult, and because of that people were

¹³ Wang Jian 2002, p. 234. Cf. also the article in *Nian’ershi zhaji* “None of the personal names of the Yuan (emperors and) empresses was eschewed” (*Nian’ershi zhaji*, j. 29, p. 28ab).

¹⁴ Cf. *Yuan dianzhang*, j. 28, pp. 4b–5a.

¹⁵ *Caomuzi*, j. 3, p. 22b.

¹⁶ *Qixiu leigao*, j. 26, p. 399.

executed.¹⁷ Chinese researchers, as Wang Jian, have pointed out that taboo names were often violated, because in the decree of 1335 recorded in the *History of the Yuan* there was once again an explicit reminder that “the violation of the imperial name is prohibited” (*jin fan yuming* 禁犯御名).¹⁸ But the issue of such a decree also implies that taboo practice existed and the very fact of the reiteration of this prohibition stresses its importance for Yuan emperors.

It can be supposed that all emperors of Yuan, in contrast to those of the Western Xia or Jin, had only Mongolian given names. The Mongolian name was also written in Chinese characters as a phonetic equivalent. There was not, however, one unified way of transcription, and sometimes many variants of writing were possible. It can be plausible that such a name written in Chinese was not necessarily perceived as the real name. On the other hand, all these names in the biographies of every emperor (except for the last one) in the *Yuanshi* are designated as *hui* 諱 (taboo name).¹⁹

7.1.3. Inauspicious Characters

The strangest peculiarity in the tabooing of names in the Yuan period is the existence of lists of numerous inauspicious characters, apparently avoided as taboo. The following list of 159 characters prepared in 1266²⁰ by the Board of Rites was recorded as “Biaozhang huibiziyang” 表章迴避字樣 in the *Compendium of Statutes and Substatutes of the Yuan*.²¹ The original text includes the following characters (small characters included as commentary in the original edition are put in brackets):

表章迴避字樣

極²²盡歸化忘(亡妄望同)

Characters avoided in the report to the emperor

ji, jin, gui, hua, wang (the same for *wang, wang, wang*)

¹⁷ Wang Jian 2002, p. 230.

¹⁸ *Yuanshi*, j. 38, p. 7b. Wang Jian 2002, p. 230.

¹⁹ The last emperor of Yuan – Huizong (r. 1333–1370) – the character *ming* 名 (given name) is used. Cf. *Yuanshi*, j. 38, p. 1a. The designations of emperor’s names as *hui* 諱 could also come from the authors of the *Yuanshi* who are Ming-Chinese.

²⁰ Or perhaps a bit later. The list has no concrete dating. 1266 is the date of the document placed immediately before it. The commentary was probably made 1322, as the final edition of this book was prepared and all the texts were compiled.

²¹ *Yuan dianzhang*, j. 28, p. 4ab; *Yuandianzhang* (b), j. 28, p. 3ab. See also the quotation in *Jingzhiju shihua*, j. 2, p. 15ab of the Qing time with 167 taboo characters.

²² In the text with the component 才 .

播晏征(祚同)靄(哀愛同) ²³	<i>bo, yan, zheng</i> (the same for <i>zuo</i>), <i>ai</i> (the same for <i>ai</i> and <i>ai</i>)
奄昧駕遐仙斯(司四死同)	<i>yan, mei, jia, xia, xian, si</i> (the same for <i>si, si, si</i>)
病苦沒泯滅	<i>bing, ku, mei/mo, min, mie</i>
凶禍傾頹毀(偃仆同)	<i>xiong, huo, qing, tui, hui</i> (the same for <i>yan, pu</i>). ²⁴
壞破晦刑傷	<i>huai, po, hui, xing, shang</i>
孤墜墮服布	<i>gu, zhui, duo, fu, bu</i>
孝短夭折災(要同)	<i>xiao, duan, yao, zhe, zai</i> (the same for <i>yao</i>) ²⁵
困危亂暴虐	<i>kun, wei, luan, bao, nüe</i>
昏迷遇耄過	<i>hun, mi, yu, mao, guo</i>
改替敗廢寢	<i>gai, ti, bai, fei, qin</i>
殺絕忌憂切(激切辱營係舊式)	<i>sha, jue, ji, you, qie</i> ('to excite' <i>qie</i> with insult is the old style)
患衰囚往棄	<i>huan, shuai, qiu, wang, qi</i>
喪戾空陷厄	<i>sang, li, kong, xian/xuan, e</i>
艱忽除掃擯(奸同) ²⁶	<i>jian, hu, chu, sao, bin</i> (the same for <i>jian</i>). ²⁷
缺落典憲法(典字近用不駁)	<i>que, luo, dian, xian, fa</i> (the character <i>dian</i> is recently used again, this is no longer disproved of)
奔崩推殄隕	<i>ben, beng, tui, tian, yun</i>
墓稿出祭奠(饗享同)	<i>?, gao, chu, ji, dian</i> (the same with <i>xiang</i> and <i>xiang</i>) ²⁸
鬼狂藏怪漸	<i>gui, kuang, cang/zang, guai, jian</i>
愁夢幻弊疾	<i>chou, meng, huan, bi, ji</i>
遷塵亢蒙隔	<i>qian, chen, kang, meng, ge</i>
離去辭追考	<i>li, qu, ci, zhui, kao</i>
板蕩荒右逆	<i>ban, dang, huang, you, ni</i>

²³ This is the only line with 4 characters, supposedly one got lost.

²⁴ 毀(偃仆同): *hui* 毀 also has the pronunciation *fui, pu* 仆 also has a similar pronunciation *fu*. The author of this dissertation could not explain the presence of the character *yan* 偃 (or perhaps other, because it is not clear) in this group. An explanation could be possibly shared meanings of characters *hui* 毀 and *yan* 偃.

²⁵ Because it is a homonym with *yao* 夭.

²⁶ Similarity not explained.

²⁷ Because it is a homonym with *jian* 艱.

²⁸ No explanation for the presence of the character *xiang* 享 could be found.

師剝革聯達(尸同)	<i>shi, bo/bao, ge/ji, kui, wei</i> (the same for <i>shi</i>) ²⁹
叛散慘恐尅(反逆同) ³⁰	<i>pan, san, can, kong, ke/kei</i> (the same for the two words for rebel) ³¹
害戕殘偏枯	<i>hai, qiang, can, pian, ku</i>
眇靈幽沉埋	<i>miao, ling, you, chen, mai/man</i>
挽升退換移(非字近用不駁)	<i>wan, sheng, tui, huan, yi</i> (the character <i>fei</i> is recently used again, this is no longer disproved of)
暗了休罷覆	<i>an, le/liao, xiu, ba, fu</i>
弔斷收誅厭	<i>diao, duan, shou, zhu, yan</i>
諱恤罪辜愆	<i>hui, xu, zui, xin, gu, qian</i>
土別逝(誓同)眾陵(土字近用不駁)	<i>tu, bie, shi</i> (the same for <i>shi</i>) <i>zhong, ling</i> (the character <i>tu</i> is recently used again, this is no longer disproved of)

After the list a commentary was added:

“The more than 160 characters in this list had to be either avoided, if it was the character itself, or partly avoided according to its specific pronunciation. Besides, the names of former emperors are not to be used. Characters of days also should not be used too often. All imperial names and temple taboos have to be avoided.”

The original text was composed in 32 lines with 5 characters (one has only four characters as one character has been apparently lost). It seems very probable that the list was made for memorization through recitation. The editor's note about more than 160 characters is not precise. There are 159 characters (and one missing) in the list and about twenty in the comments. Later, the list of Yuan taboos reappeared during the Qing dynasty (sometimes incorrectly copied), first probably in *Zaiyuan zazhi* 在園雜誌,³² and later in many other works, for example in *Jiahe zhengxianlu* 嘉禾徵獻錄,³³ *Dengchuan conglu* 鐙窗叢錄,³⁴ *Siyi tangrizha* 思益堂日札,³⁵ *Siyi tangji* 思益堂集,³⁶ *Jingzhiju shihua* 靜志居詩

²⁹ Because it is a homonym with *shi* 師.

³⁰ This and following two lines are only preserved in the “Yuankeben 元刻本” Edition. Cf. *Yuandianzhang* (b), j. 28, p. 3ab.

³¹ Because they both mean the same as *pan* 叛.

³² *Zaiyuan zazhi*, j. 2, p. 47ab.

³³ *Jiahe zhengxianlu*, j. 39, p. 4b. It is interesting that the problem of tabooing names is placed in the chapter about *ruxue* (Confucianism).

³⁴ *Dengchuan conglu*, j. 1, p. 3ab.

³⁵ *Siyi tangrizha*, j. 5, p. 16a.

話,³⁷ *Jingshi biming huikao*,³⁸ and *Xin Yuanshi* 新元史.³⁹ All these works listed 167 characters. For the most part, these copied lists are identical with the original list, including a few characters from the commentary and some different characters. One text named *Guochao wenlu jibian* 國朝文錄續編 writes about 166 taboo characters, listing only the first four of them.⁴⁰ According to the note in the *Siyi tangrizha*, the list of 167 taboo characters was made in 1314 AD, but sources closer to Yuan apparently give no clear record about the date of the list.⁴¹

The characters of the list are important, insofar as there are almost no other taboo instances in that period. The tabooing of ominous characters was known in China long before the Yuan dynasty, but their number here is especially large. This custom is usually offered by Chinese scholars as the main evidence of taboo avoidance of the Yuan period, perhaps because of the shortage of other evidence from that time. On the other hand, as observed by Chen Yuan,⁴² this taboo list could have been continued from the Jin, and might not even have been composed by Yuan. The comments certainly indicate that the list was older and then amended or partly expanded. We simply cannot be sure about its exact date.

The topic of tabooing inauspicious characters still needs more research. It is very possible that the number of such taboo instances in the Yuan period was not bigger than in other dynasties. The practice of avoiding inauspicious characters existed probably before, and was mixed during the Yuan period with other “imperial” or “family” taboo characters in the list. At least afore-mentioned commentary of the *Yuandianzhang* introduces the characters as taboos of former emperors, although most of them cannot be found among taboos of former dynasties. Such a mix of different groups of taboo characters would probably explain the problem of why there are not only inauspicious characters on the list, but also “good” characters, such as *fu* 服, *bu* 布, *xiao* 孝, *xian* 憲, *fa* 法, *shi* 師, for example. No proposal has been found as yet for this phenomenon.⁴³

³⁶ *Siyi tangji*, j. 5, p. 16a.

³⁷ *Jingzhiju shihua*, j. 2, p. 25ab.

³⁸ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 46, p. 643.

³⁹ *Xin Yuanshi*, j. 88, p. 938.

⁴⁰ *Guochao wenlu jibian*, “Meizhuang wenlu” 梅莊文錄, j. 1, p. 2b.

⁴¹ The first known quotation is very late (19th c.): *Siyi tangrizha*, j. 5, p. 16a. The author of this dissertation could not find the original list in Yuan sources.

⁴² Chen Yuan 1958, p. 163.

⁴³ Perhaps some of these characters were used for names and became ominous as taboo names.

7.1.4. Law and Exams

Several legal compilations were composed in the Yuan period, such as the *Zhiyuan xing* 至元新格, *Fengxian honggang* 風憲宏綱, and the *Comprehensive Regulations and Statutes of Yuan* (*Dayuan tongzhi* 大元通制). In the law of Yuan, name tabooing was also one of the topics.⁴⁴ This fact is recorded in the *History of the Yuan*, where the violation of taboo names (*miaohui* 廟諱) and of imperial names is prohibited.⁴⁵ No concrete penalty is designated, but we can read in the *Tongzhi tiaoge* and *Yuandianzhang* that: “the mouth of people violating names of superiors... should be pasted with soil.”⁴⁶

The importance of tabooing names and the practice of observance can be seen even more during the imperial exams. There were always strong rules about avoiding imperial taboo, and according to the *History of the Yuan*, candidates who violate such taboos were rejected and failed automatically.⁴⁷

7.1.5. Perspectives of Research on Yuan Dynasty Taboos

Research on Yuan taboo has largely concentrated on taboos of the names of emperors and on inauspicious characters. There is no known reference to taboos of religious or philosophical figures, or to taboo practices in families (family taboo) and offices, which was in all likelihood continued after the conquest of the Mongols. There is also not much information about tabooing the names of an emperor's relatives, but we know that, for example, the Board of Rites at the time of Emperor Renzong (1311–1320) suggested proclaiming the name of the empress as taboo, on the grounds that she was “the mother of the All-under-heaven.”⁴⁸ It all shows that taboo practice in the Yuan period may have been much more colorful than we know now.

7.2. Ming

According to folk customs in the beginning of the Ming dynasty, recorded by Lu Rong 陸容 in his *Shuyuan zaji* 菽園雜記, the word *zhu* 豬 (pig) was considered a taboo. The reason for this prohibition was the similarity of the pronunciation of this character to the family name of the Ming imperial family name Zhu 朱 – they were homonyms. The Chinese Alligator

⁴⁴ Wang Jian 2002, pp. 230-231.

⁴⁵ *Yuanshi*, j. 102, p. 8b.

⁴⁶ *Tongzhitiaoge*, j. 8, p. 2b; *Yuandianzhang*, j. 53, p. 28a.

⁴⁷ *Yuanshi*, j. 81, p. 4b.

⁴⁸ *Yuanshi*, j. 116, pp. 1b-2a.

living on the riverbank of Yangtze River was called *zhupolong* 豬婆龍 (sow dragon)⁴⁹ before the Ming. But as the Zhu family started to rule, this word could not be used any more. Instead, people spoke about *yuan* 鼃 (soft-shelled turtle) if they talked about the alligator.⁵⁰ They wanted perhaps also to express their contempt for the Yuan 元 dynasty.

According to the *Yang Wenzhong sanlu* 楊文忠三錄 written by one of the highest ministers Yang Tinghe 楊廷和 (1459–1529), it was claimed at the time that Emperor Zhengde 正德 (r. 1505–1521) in his edict prohibited the raising of pigs. “In the winter of the fourteenth year (late 1519–early 1520), the emperor in Yangzhou issued an edict which prohibited ordinary people from raising pigs. It said that when you ate pork, you would suffer from infestations. It also said that *zhu* 豬 (pig) sounded the same as Zhu 朱, the family name of the imperial house.” As a result, people in the whole country slaughtered or drowned their pigs.⁵¹

7.2.1. Taboo Words

The avoidance of inauspicious words and those that were unpleasant for the emperor seem to have been very popular in the Ming period, especially during the reign of the first emperor of Ming. Many examples of taboo words and stories about such words can be found in the history of Ming dynasty.⁵² Some of them are connected with the emperor, but

⁴⁹ The word *zhupolong* 豬婆龍 can have two meanings: “Chinese alligator” and “giant tortoise.” Cf. *Hanyu dacidian*, Vol. 10, p. 37.

⁵⁰ *Shuyuan zaji*, j. 3, p. 28. Cf. also Wang Jian 2002, p. 240.

⁵¹ *Yang Wenzhong sanlu*, j. 3, p. 36b. For the translation and a discussion about the authenticity of the edict and the context of rumors about pigs, see ter Haar 2006, pp. 3–7. It is interesting that a pun with homophones of the word for “pig” was used later in the 19th century in the criticism about Catholics in China. The Chinese name for Catholic Christianity “the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven” (*tianzhujiao* 天主教) was mocked at as “the Teachings of the Pig of Heaven” (*tianzhujiao* 天豬教) with explicit pictures. Cf. ter Haar 2006, p. 6; Cohen 1963, illustrations after p. 140.

⁵² There are numerous sources useful for doing research on the tabooing of names in the Ming period. The first is, as in former dynasties, the *History of the Ming* (*Mingshi* 明史) composed in 1739 by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1672–1755). Some important sources for institutional history of that time are *Collected Statutes of the Great Ming* (*Da Ming huidian* 大明會典) with two extant editions: *Zhengde huidian* 正德會典 – completed in 1503 (printed in 1511), and *Wanli huidian* 萬曆會典 – printed in 1587. For this dissertation, a few additional records were used, such as *Idle Talk With Guests* (*Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語) composed in 1617 by Gu Qiyuan 顧起元 (1565–1628), *Draft Arranged in Seven Categories* (*Qixiu leigao* 七修類稿) written by Lang Ying 郎瑛 (1487–1566), and the *Harvested in the Wilds During the Wanli Period* (*Wanli Yehuobian* 萬歷野獲編) composed by Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642). Other works are the *Small History of the Ming Dynasty* (*Mingchao xiaoshi* 明朝小史) composed by Lü Bi 呂毖 in the time of Emperor Chongzhen, *Miscellaneous Records from the Shu Garden* (*Shuyuan zaji* 菽園雜記) written by Lu Rong 陸容 (1436–1494), *Historical Materials from Yanzhou* (*Yanzhou shiliao* 弇州史料) prepared by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), *Right Sounds from the Hongwu Period* (*Hongwu zhengyun* 洪武正韻) compiled inter alia by Yue Shaofeng 樂韶鳳 in the beginning of Ming. In addition, works of the Qing

there are also reports of the customs of common people. The increased number of them correlates probably with the general increase in sources for this period, as the custom was also known before.

Strictly speaking, taboo words/characters are of course not necessarily taboo names. But on the other hand the taboo of many words, as for example in the afore-mentioned case of pig (*zhu* 豬), was strengthened by the widespread nature of the name taboo and vice versa. Moreover, in Chinese historiography taboo names and other taboo characters are always treated together. Therefore, we describe here also the practice of tabooing other words than names, since this was a very popular custom during the Ming period.

The first emperor of Ming – Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋⁵³ – seems to have been very superstitious. There were many characters, as it will be described below, he did not use and did not want to see or hear. Born in a poor family in 1328 AD, he lost his whole family in the plague after the flood of the Yellow River in 1344. After that, he was a monk in a Buddhist monastery and later joined the Red Turban Movement against the Mongolian dynasty. Apparently, after becoming an emperor, he hated to be reminded of his poor past and was also suspicious about the intentions of others. One story about him, described in several sources, should be enough to illustrate this character trait of his. A monk came to the first emperor of Ming giving thanks for his favors. He used a poem to express his gratitude, saying *inter alia* such words as *shuyu* 殊域 (strange lands) and *wude song Taotang* 無德頌陶唐 (no virtue is enough to praise the Taotang – the clan name of Yao). But the emperor was irritated and suspected that the word *shu* 殊 express the combination *dai Zhu* 歹朱 (evil Zhu – the family name of the emperor). The second quotation meant, according to the emperor, that he had no virtue and it was not possible to praise him as the Yao emperor. The monk was beheaded.⁵⁴

The custom like the one described above was called “splitting characters” (*chaizi*) and was used for fortune-telling. Stories like the one above are no exception. The early Ming period is rife with stories about political fortune-telling. It is not always clear whether

period describing the tabooing of names during the Ming time were used: *Yingnan suibi* 柳南隨筆 by Wang Yinggui 王應奎 (born in 1732), *Siyitang rizha* 思益堂日札 of Zhou Shouchang 周壽昌 (1814–1884), *Nian’ershi zhaji* 廿二史札記 of Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814), and the encyclopedia *Complete Collection of Pictures and Books of Old and New Times* (*Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成) finished in 1725.

⁵³ For more about him see Teng Ssu-yü 1976, pp. 381–392.

⁵⁴ *Qixiu leigao*, j. 47, p. 688; *Mingchao xiaoshi*, j. 1, p. 55b–56a.

we are facing somewhat later stories or contemporary rumours and events. This might also be a problem in this particular story.⁵⁵

There are, for example, lists of many people who were beheaded because they used characters hated by the emperor in his presence, such as *zei* 賊 (perpetrator – the emperor was called this by officials of Yuan), *dao* 盜 (robber, also its homonym *dao* 道), *seng* 僧 (monk), *ze* 則 (rule, similar to *zei* 賊), *fa* 法 (law, similar to *fa* 髮 hair), *sheng* 生 (student, similar to *seng* 僧). The aversion to the last three characters is explained by scholars as a shame because of the emperor's poor education. But since we know that some characters, such as e.g. *fa* 法, can also be found in the taboo list of Yuan mentioned earlier (see 7.1.3), a more general custom can be presumed. A list of “Confucian Study Officials who submitted memorials and were executed for mistakes” (*jìn biaojiān rúxuéguān yǐ guāwú zhū* 進表箋儒學官以詿誤誅) was published in *Yanzhou shiliao* 兗州史料 of the Ming period, which we quote partially below:⁵⁶

Name	Unfortunate sentence	Inauspicious association
Lin Yuanliang 林元亮	<i>zuoze chuixian</i> 作則垂憲 make it and then hang down the law	<i>zei</i> 賊 (perpetrator)
Zhao Boning 趙伯寧	<i>chuizisun erzuoze</i> 垂子孫而作則 let fall your descendants and make a rule	<i>zei</i> 賊 (perpetrator)
Lin Bojing 林伯璟	<i>yize tianxia</i> 儀則天下 to practice rites and rules over the world	<i>zei</i> 賊 (perpetrator)
Jiang Zhi 蔣質	<i>jianzhong zuoze</i> 建中作則 establish the center and make a rule	<i>zei</i> 賊 (perpetrator)
Jiang Zhen 蔣鎮	<i>ruixing shengzhi</i> 睿性生知 farsighted nature gives birth to understanding/knowledge	<i>seng</i> 僧 (monk)

⁵⁵ For later stories see also Chan Hok-lam 1995, ter Haar 1992. Later stories which reflect negatively on the emperor are not necessary true. Nonetheless, even when not true, they show something of how people thought that reality might have been.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Yanzhou shiliao*, j. 31, pp. 14b-15b.

Men Qing 孟清	<i>shengde zaiqiu</i> 聖德在秋 holy virtue at fall	<i>qiu</i> 囚?
Zhou Mian 周冕	<i>shouyu qianqiu</i> 壽域千秋 long life of thousand years	<i>qiu</i> 囚?
Lü Rui 呂睿	<i>yaozhan difei</i> 遙瞻帝扉 from the distance see the door/ way of emperor	<i>difei</i> 帝非 (emperor is wrong)
Jia Zhu 賈翥	<i>qufa xiangwei</i> 取法象魏 adopt the law like the state of Wei	<i>qufa</i> 去髮 (shave off the hair)
Lin Yun 林雲	<i>shijunfu yiban jue</i> 式君父以班爵祿 to model oneself on the ruler in order to have the salary for nobility (?)	<i>shijunfu</i> 失君父 (lost the father of ruler)
Xu Xuan 許玄	<i>leizhen tianxia</i> 雷震天下 thunder shakes the world	?
Ji Deng 汲登	<i>yongshao yinian</i> 永紹億年 perpetual continuation for hundred million years (?)	?
Lin Bojing 林伯璟 ⁵⁷	<i>tiqian fakun</i> 體乾法坤 to model oneself on heaven, to take earth as one's model	<i>fakun</i> 髮髡 (shave off the hair)
Lin Bojing 林伯璟	<i>zaoshi taiping</i> 藻飾太平 to “adorn” splendidly the great peace	<i>zaoshi</i> 早失 (early lost)
Wu Xian 吳憲	<i>tianxia youdao</i> 天下有道 there is a way In the all-under- heaven under heaven	<i>dao</i> 盜 (robber)

⁵⁷ Note that two scholars are listed two and three times for “mistakes” in various compositions. According to the list the sentence was each time: “executed (*zhu* 誅).” The inauspicious associations between some characters are probably more pronounced in southern dialects. Apparently, for the administration the most important thing was the sound, rather than the way of writing. Alternatively, these were originally oral stories or gossip, which made the oral dimension more relevant than the actual Chinese characters.

Yanzhou shiliao comments that all of these beheaded scholars used characters which sounded the same as or similar to words with possibly rebellious or insulting connotations.⁵⁸

A related story is written a few pages below the list in the *Mingchao xiaoshi* 明朝小史⁵⁹, and copied later together with the list by authors of the Qing period.⁶⁰ A scholar from Hangzhou prefecture, Xu Yikui 徐一夔, included in his composition *Hebiao* (贺表) the following two sentences: “under the bright heaven” (*guangtian zhixia* 光天之下) and “heaven gives birth for the holy man as a model/norm for society” (*tiansheng shengren weishi zuoze* 天生聖人為世作則). The emperor was irritated, and pointed out the similarity of the pronunciation of the characters *sheng* 生 to *seng* 僧 (monk), *guang* 光 to *guangtou* 光頭 (shaven head), and *ze* 則 to *zei* 賊 (perpetrator). The unlucky scholar was beheaded.

There are still many stories related to words tabooed by Zhu Yuanzhang.⁶¹ One of them was recorded in the *Liunan suibi* 柳南隨筆. According to it, Zhu Yuanzhang wanted to forget his past and avoided all characters connected with Buddhism and monkhood, as for example *shi* 釋 (Budda Sakyamuni), *he* 和 and *shang* 尚 (*heshang* means monk). One day, the emperor commanded his officials to write a poem. One composed by Shi Mengwei 施孟微 included among others the sentence: “When the sun arises, splendor shines everywhere” (*richu guanghua zhao sifang* 日出光華照四方). As only the emperor heard the character *guang*, he condemned it and ordered to dismiss Shi Mengwei. The character *guang*, which means not only “light, splendor,” but also “bare,” reminded him of the shaven heads of monks.⁶²

Most examples of taboo words are connected with the reign of the first emperor of Ming. But there are also cases from later times. For example, the Emperor Jiajing 嘉靖 (r. 1521–1566) was afraid of death and avoided the character *si* 死 (death).⁶³ However, here we have to remember that the Jiajing Emperor, similarly to Zhu Yuanzhang, had a very bad

⁵⁸ *Yanzhou shiliao*, j. 31, p. 15b. It is interesting that in the Qing text *Nian’ershi zhaji*, one of the unclear cases from the table mentioned above (*shengde zaiqiu* 聖德在秋) is written as *shengde zuoze* 聖德作則 (*Nian’ershi zhaji*, j. 32, p. 4b). This shows that these were maybe not necessarily historical accounts, but literati gossip. They may not tell too much about what really happened, but they reflect on popular views of the first emperor of the Ming dynasty and on the larger custom of name taboos.

⁵⁹ *Mingchao xiaoshi*, j. 1, p. 25

⁶⁰ *Siyi tangrizha*, j. 5, p. 18b; *Nian’ershi zhaji*, j. 32, pp. 4b-5a.

⁶¹ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, pp. 241-242.

⁶² *Liunan suibi*, j. 6, p. 105. Note that it is a late source.

⁶³ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 46, p. 645.

press among literati, i.e. also the authors of our sources. Thus it is possible that they made up some of the stories.

7.2.2. Taboo of the First Emperor of Ming

Generally, the tabooing of imperial names in the Ming period is considered very loose. There were examples of avoiding taboo names, but also many instances where a taboo character was used openly.⁶⁴ Probably the most avoided character of the founding emperor's name was *yuan* 元. We know, for example, that the poet Wang Yuancai 王元采 (1363–1402) always used only his courtesy name Shuying 叔英 during the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, because of this taboo. It was the same in the case of Song Yuanxi 宋元禧. He deleted, because of taboo, the middle character of his name and used only the form Song Xi 宋禧.⁶⁵

Apparently, due to the taboo of Zhu Yuanzhang, during his reign the “first year” *yuannian* 元年 was written as *yuannian* 原年, and the “first scholar” *yuanshi* 元士, as *yuanshi* 原士.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in contrast to the former dynasties Tang, Song and Yuan,⁶⁷ which distributed both bronze coins (*tongbao* 通寶) and sycee (*yuanbao* 元寶 – silver ingot used as money) as currency – in the beginning of Ming, both kinds of metal currency were called *Hongwu tongbao* 洪武通寶, in order not to violate the taboo of the emperor.⁶⁸ Admittedly, it could also be that the avoidance of the character *yuan* 元 was based on the Chinese people's hatred of the Mongolian Yuan dynasty, which would be a very traditional nationalist interpretation.⁶⁹

If we accept all of the material presented above as historical evidence, than the practice of tabooing names was much more pervasive than is commonly presumed among scholars.⁷⁰ It would also imply that name tabooing had been continued among the Chinese in the supposedly “taboo-free” Yuan period (cf. 7.1), or this custom could not have been reinstituted so fast. It is interesting that we have not only examples of tabooing the given

⁶⁴ Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 164-165.

⁶⁵ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 364.

⁶⁶ *Zaolin zazu*, „Zhiji“ 智集, p. 2a.

⁶⁷ For the currency in the Yuan period see Franke 1949, pp. 34-119 (mainly about paper money).

⁶⁸ Cf. Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 300.

⁶⁹ The Ming coins had apparently in fact no *yuan* 元 characters (Cf. Hartill 2005, pp. 237-262). However the name *tongbao* (universal currency) was commonly used already for the currency of Tang, Song and Yuan (Cf. Hartill 2005, pp. 103-236).

⁷⁰ Cf. Chen Yuan 1958, p. 164.

name of the first emperor, but also instances of tabooing his courtesy name, Guorui 國瑞. The general Hu Tingrui 胡廷瑞 (d. 1384)⁷¹ changed his name to Hu Tingmei 廷美 (and later once more to Hu Mei 胡美), because of this taboo. Ding Guozhen 丁國珍 changed his name to Ding Yu 丁玉, Wu Guoxing 吳國興 to Wu Liang 吳良, Wu Guobao 吳國寶 to Wu Zhen 吳禎.⁷² As we know, the avoidance of courtesy names was quite rare in the practice of tabooing names, and usually was an indication of a very strict taboo custom (see 5.2.4). This strict observance was connected with the powerful founder of the dynasty.

7.2.3. Imperial Name taboos in the Ming Dynasty

The name of the third (and again very strong) emperor of Ming – Emperor Yongle (given name Di 棣, r. 1402–1424) – was also tabooed. In 1402, the names of two counties were changed because of his taboo: Wudi county 無棣縣 to Qingyun 慶云 (located in Cangzhou prefecture 滄州, today Qingyun in Shandong), and Wudi county 無棣縣 (different from the former one, located in Le'an prefecture 樂安州) to Haifeng 海豐 (today Wudi in Shandong).⁷³ Le'an prefecture 樂安州 was called Dizhou 棣州 before the reign of Yongle, and its name was also changed because of the taboo on Yongle's name.⁷⁴ Similarly, in the work of Yang Dong 楊東 the word *tangdi* 堂欂 was written instead of *tangdi* 堂棣 (bush cherry).⁷⁵

During the reign of the Emperor Zhengtong 正統 (given name Qizhen 祁鎮, r. 1435–1449, and with the era name Tianshun 天順 1457–1464), one Sun Zhen 孫鎮 had to change his name to Ming 銘, because of the taboo of the Emperor.⁷⁶ Sometimes the taboo character *zhen* 鎮 was exchanged to *zhen* 真 (different tone) or *tian* 填. For example, such words as *zhenfusi* 鎮撫司 (prison)⁷⁷ or *zhenshouguan* 鎮守官 (Grand Defender)⁷⁸ were written as *tianfusi* 填撫司 or *tianshouguan* 填守官.⁷⁹ Moreover, during the imperial exams in 1460, the best student of the year – Qi Shun 祁順 – was degraded to the end of the list of

⁷¹ For more about him, see Dreyer–Hok-lam Chan 1976, p. 1278.

⁷² *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 364. Cf. *Mingshi*, j. 134, p. 7a; j. 130, p. 1a; j. 131, p. 1b.

⁷³ *Shijia zhaiyang xinlu*, j. 11, p. 13b; *Lidai huiming kao*, j. 1, p. 35a. Two counties with the same name seem to be strange. Between Qingyun and Wudi of today there are only about 20 km.

⁷⁴ (*Jiajing*) *Shandong tongzhi*, j. 2, p. 19b.

⁷⁵ *Shuyuan zaji*, j. 4, p. 44.

⁷⁶ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 369.

⁷⁷ Hucker 1985, p. 121.

⁷⁸ Hucker 1985, p. 122.

⁷⁹ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 369.

examinees, only because it was noticed that his family name was identical with the imperial taboo.⁸⁰

Later, during the reign of Jiajing 嘉靖 (1521–1566, given name Houcong 厚聰), we have a case of a scholar of the Hanlin Academy, Zhang Cong 張聰,⁸¹ who was highly favored by the emperor and was promoted to grand secretary in repayment for the latter's support of the emperor during the Great Ritual Controversy.⁸² According to the *History of the Ming (Mingshi)*, Zhang Cong asked the emperor for a change of name in 1531 because of its similarity to the imperial name, and received a new name from the emperor – Fujing 孚敬.⁸³ The fact that the change was made only ten years after the enthronement was commented on by scholars as neglect of tabooing.⁸⁴ It may be suggested, however, that it also shows the very opposite, i.e. that the taboo custom was still present. It is also a good example of post-facto value judgments by historians (i.e., not always relevant for the original custom of tabooing), since later historians since the later sixteenth century hated Zhang Cong for his support of the Emperor Jiajing in the Great Ritual Controversy.⁸⁵

The severity of name tabooing can be seen during the reign of the next Emperor Longqing 隆慶 (1566–1572). The imperial censor Zhan Yangbi 詹仰庇 wrote a petition to the throne, in which he used words: “repeated illumination of sovereign” (*zaizhao renzhu* 再照人主). The character *zhao* 照 that he used was the taboo name of the former Emperor Zhengde (Zhu Houzhao 朱厚照, r. 1505–1521). His mistake would perhaps have gone unnoticed, if he had not had enemies among the ministers, who wanted to avenge themselves for a conflict from the past. They accused Zhan of a big transgression. The emperor was irritated, condemned him in a decree, and penalized him by flogging with 100 sticks and banishment. Zhan could not avoid the punishment despite petitions of some ministers.⁸⁶ The episode might be connected to the above mentioned Great Ritual Controversy. The Longqing period was a time in which animosities from the preceding reign of Longqing's father Jiajing (whom he hated) were settled.

⁸⁰ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 368.

⁸¹ For more about him, see Chou Tao-chi 1976, pp. 67-70.

⁸² The Great Ritual Controversy (*Daliyi* 大禮議) was a power controversy between the Emperor Jiajing, who demanded the title of emperor for his father, and his court. Jiajing wanted to legitimize in such a way his claim to the throne. For more about the Great Ritual Controversy see Taylor 1998, pp. 861-872.

⁸³ *Mingshi*, j. 196, p. 4a.

⁸⁴ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 245.

⁸⁵ See more about the reign of the Emperor Jiajing in Fisher 1990.

⁸⁶ *Mingshi*, j. 215, p. 4b.

7.2.4. Intensification of Tabooing at the End of the Dynasty

There are more examples of tabooing the emperor's name at the end of the Ming period, during the reign of emperors Tianqi 天啓 (r. 1620–1627, with the given name Youjiao 由校) and Chongzhen 崇禎 (r. 1627–1644, with the given name Youjian 由檢). Many of them concern the taboo of the father of the Tianqi Emperor—Emperor Taichang 泰昌 (with the given name Changluo 常洛, r. 1620). He only reigned for a month and then died, but his taboo continued to be observed in the ruling time of his son.

For example, according to the *History of the Ming*, the Board of Rites wrote in a petition to the throne that everybody having “drops of water (𣶒) with the character *ge* 各 (every),” i.e., the taboo character *luo* 洛, in his name should change it to *luo* 雒. Those having “wood (木) and the character *jiao* 交 (meet),” i.e., the taboo character *jiao/xiao* 校, in their names should change it to *jiao* 較.⁸⁷ In contrast, it was not suitable for an educational inspector to be called *jiao* 較 (in place of the usual *jiao* 校). He should be named *xuezheng* 學政.⁸⁸

All officials of the prince's residence, both civil and military, also had to change their names if they offended the imperial name (*yuming* 御名) or temple taboo (*miaohui* 廟諱).⁸⁹ At the same time, many geographical names were changed because of the taboo name (Changluo 常洛) of the deceased Emperor Taichang. For example, Luonan 洛南 was changed to Luonan 雒南, Luoyang 洛陽 to Luoyang 雒陽. In the same way (i.e., by the exchange of the character *luo* 洛 for *luo* 雒) the names of Luorong 洛容, Luochuan 洛川, Luoshui 洛水, Yiluo 宜洛 were changed. The ancient *Book of Luo* (*Luoshu* 洛書) also had to be written as *Luoshu* 雒書.⁹⁰

The first character in the name of Emperor – *chang* 常 – was tabooed, too, and usually changed to *chang* 嘗. For example, names of people such as Chang Daoli 常道立 – a circuit inspector in Henan, and general Chang Guoan 常國安 were written with the character *chang* 嘗. In the same way, geographical names such as Changzhou 常州 and Changshu 常熟 were changed. Words such as *taichangsi* 太常寺 (Ministry of Worship), *lunchang* 倫常 (human relationship), *gangchang* 綱常 (The Three Cardinal Guides and Five

⁸⁷ Note that this description is also a way for tabooing, as taboo characters are not called directly, but only through their parts.

⁸⁸ *Mingshi*, j. 51, p. 9b.

⁸⁹ *Mingshi*, j. 51, p. 9b.

⁹⁰ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, pp. 372–373.

Constant Virtues), *xunchang* 尋常 (common) were also written with the character *chang* 嘗.⁹¹

In order to taboo the name of the Emperor Tianqi (Youjiao 由校), the character *jiao/xiao* 校 was usually changed to *jiao* 較. The change was made, for example, in words such as *jiangxiao* 將校 (general officers) and *xiaowei* 校尉 (field officer).⁹² Please note that the change was made apparently because of the visual appearance of the characters, as the pronunciation was different. There were also other methods for tabooing the character *jiao/xiao* 校, for instance by exchanging it with the character *jiao* 教 (e.g., Education Official *xiaoguan* 校官⁹³ to *jiaoguan* 教官),⁹⁴ or changing a radical in the character, i.e., to *shou* 扌, and writing it as *jiao* 攵.⁹⁵

There are further examples for tabooing the name of the last emperor of the Ming – Chongzhen 崇禎 (with the given name Youjian 由檢). The character *jian* 檢 was often changed to *jian* 簡.⁹⁶ According to the *Zhengzitong* 正字通, words such as *jiantao* 檢討 (self-criticism) were written as *jiantao* 簡討, and *jianjiao* 檢校 (evaluate) as *jianjiao* 簡校⁹⁷ (in these cases it was again the taboo of a character and not of pronunciation).

The character indicating a generation (*paihang* 排行) in the emperor's name was usually less tabooed than the other characters. But there are examples in the Ming dynasty, especially in its last period where these characters were avoided, too. The character *you* 由, as a part of the names of the last two emperors, who were brothers, was replaced in printed books of that time with the character *you* 繇. For example, in the sentence of the *Zhou Changes* (*Zhouyi* 周易),⁹⁸ the character *you* 由 is written in the Maojin Jiguge edition (毛晉汲古閣刻本, the first half of the 17th c.) of *Thirteen Classics* as *you* 繇.⁹⁹ Sometimes the character *you* 由 could also change its form and be written as 𠂔 (i.e., the appearance of the character was important, rather than its pronunciation), as in the work *Xiaojing* of the same

⁹¹ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, pp. 372-373. Wang Yankun 1997, p. 46.

⁹² *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 375.

⁹³ Hucker 1985, p. 236.

⁹⁴ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 375.

⁹⁵ *Zhengzitong*, „Shoubu 手部“, p. 36b.

⁹⁶ Wang Jian 2002, p. 246.

⁹⁷ *Zhengzitong*, „Mubu 木部“, p. 119b.

⁹⁸ *Zhouyi*, j. 10, p. 79.

⁹⁹ According to Wang Jian 2002, p. 246.

edition, in the sentence: “why not to wait for Zengzi to ask” (*he you budai zengzi wen* 何由不待曾子問)?¹⁰⁰

The impact of tabooing on everyday practice is interesting. The character *you* 油 (oil), having the taboo character as a part, was apparently taboo, too – at least in the imperial palace. No words with this character could be used there, and they were replaced with other expressions. For example, sesame oil (*zhimayou* 芝麻油) was called *zhimashui* 芝麻水, and oil or lacquer based paint (*youqi* 油漆) was called *qizuo* 漆作.¹⁰¹

Numerous examples from the last period of Ming are interpreted by researchers as an intensification of the observance of name taboos.¹⁰² The reason for it could be the attempt to strengthen the emperor’s image in a time of his weakness. Support for such statement is also the order issued in 1630 by Board of Rites, with instructions to observe taboos of the first emperor, Emperor Yongle and the last seven emperors.¹⁰³ We do not know if this order and similar ones were really practiced, though it is very possible, because there is more information extant on this period than on earlier periods.

7.2.5. Other Taboo Examples

Similar to other periods, we do not have much information about taboo names of persons other than the emperor. Anyway, most examples of this kind that we have are about name taboos of imperial relatives. The only instance of a taboo on the crown prince’s name from the Ming dynasty is from the year 1630. In that year, the last emperor of Ming – Chongzhen – appointed his one-year-old son, Cilang 慈烺, to be his successor, and because of this taboo an official, He Lang 賀烺, changed his name to Shishou 世壽.¹⁰⁴

Yet the tabooing of names of other princes of the blood is recorded. Already during the reign of the first emperor, we read in the *History of the Ming* that “Xu Huizu’s 徐輝祖 (1368–1407) original name was Yungong 允恭 ... and his current name was granted to him in order to taboo the name of the emperor’s grandson (with the given name Yunwen 允文).”¹⁰⁵ Yunwen of course later succeeded as the Emperor Jianwen (r. 1398–1402) and was

¹⁰⁰ According to Wang Jian 2002, p. 246. Cf. *Xiaojing zhushu*, p. 1 (here written as *you* 由).

¹⁰¹ *Zhuozhongzhi*, j. 22, p. 4a.

¹⁰² Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 301; Wang Jian 2002, p. 245.

¹⁰³ *Rizhilu*, j. 23, p. 22b.

¹⁰⁴ *Zhuozhongzhi*, j. 11, p. 3b.

¹⁰⁵ *Mingshi*, j. 125, p. 5b.

then deposed by the Emperor Yongle (r. 1402–1424), after a bloody civil war.¹⁰⁶ In fact, it should be noted that already in 1392, Yunwen was appointed crown prince, and the change of name could have been related to it.¹⁰⁷

In 1447, an incident happened during the imperial exams in the province of Shanxi when the sentence *wei zhou zhi zhen* 維周之楨 from the *Classic of Poetry (Shijing)*¹⁰⁸ was chosen as the theme for the official essay. It was realized later that the last character of the sentence occurred also in the name of King Zhao of Chu 楚昭王 (1364–1424, Zhu Zhen 朱楨) – the brother of the great grandfather of Emperor Zhengtong of that time. The examiners were punished by loss of one month's salary.¹⁰⁹ The incident is strange, because there are many years and generations between both relatives, the name was only a private and not a state taboo, and other examples of taboos of relatives are not known from that time. Some modern scholars think it is a sign of increase of taboo practice.¹¹⁰ But we can also presume that the connection of the taboo character *zhen* 楨 with the second character of Emperor Zhengtong's name (Qizhen 祁鎮) could have played a role in the event, if it did really happen. The sources about this event all date from the Qing dynasty.

One case of avoiding the names of high officials is known. In the *Yujing xintan* 玉鏡新譚, written in the Ming dynasty, a note is recorded about a eunuch, Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627),¹¹¹ who was so powerful that ministers did not dare to pronounce his name in the petition to the throne. They said Changchen 廠臣 (Minister of the Workshop, indirectly referring to the offices of the eunuchs) instead of that.¹¹² However, we have to distinguish the tabooing of someone's name as a whole, and the tabooing of a character from this name. The case mentioned above is the common practice of avoiding the names of respected persons by using their courtesy name or their title.

Unfortunately, not much can be found about family taboos in the period of the Ming dynasty. We can only presume that they were important for the people of that time. Taboo names were recorded in the family genealogies (*jiapu* 家譜), and were avoided in the

¹⁰⁶ More about the usurpation of 1402 see Ditmanson 2007, pp. 110–158.

¹⁰⁷ It is possible that name taboos of his name did not become *lèse-majesté* after his deposal by the Emperor Yongle.

¹⁰⁸ *Shijing*, j. 16, p. 1b.

¹⁰⁹ *Rizhilu*, j. 23, p. 24a.

¹¹⁰ Wang Jian 2002, p. 244.

¹¹¹ For more about him see Fang Chaoying – Lee Hwa-chou 1976, p. 130.

¹¹² *Yujing xintan*, j. 3, p. 22b. Cf. also *Mingshi*, j. 305, p. 14b.

naming of children.¹¹³ Among the principles of genealogy, we found one that discusses directly the avoidance of names:

If a living lineage member's name is offensive because it contains the same word as an elder member's name, he should change it. If he is dead, then when his name is recorded in the genealogy, another word with similar pronunciation is substituted.¹¹⁴

We know from the *History of the Ming* that one official, Zhu Xizhou 朱希周 (1473–1557), shortly before his death, considered it important to request not to be given a posthumous name with the character *wen* 文, as it was the taboo name of his father.¹¹⁵ According to Zhou Guangye, the Assistant Minister of the Board of Rites, Cui Xian 崔銑 (1478–1541)¹¹⁶ did not use the word *sheng* 陞 (ascend) in his work *Words From Huan* (*Huanci* 洹詞), since this was the given name of his father. He replaced it with the words *zhi* 陟 or *sheng* 升, both with the same meaning “to ascend”.¹¹⁷

7.2.6. Decrees and Examples of non-tabooing

Generally, name tabooing during the Ming period is commented on by scholars as rather weak and loose.¹¹⁸ There are statements about the neglectful attitude of *dafu* 大夫 and *shi* 士, *inter alia* in literary works.¹¹⁹ Even the first emperor of Ming, who was said to be extremely sensitive in this matter, restored in his decree the old principles of non-tabooing of homonyms and single characters of composite names. Besides, strokes did not need to be omitted in taboo characters of literary works.¹²⁰ Later, the *Great Ming Code* (*Da Ming lü* 大明律, completed in 1397) determined, too, that people using single characters of composite taboo names should not be punished.¹²¹

In a few works of his time, such as the *Hongwu zhengyun* 洪武正韻 (compiled by, among others, Yue Shaofeng 樂韶鳳¹²² in 1375) or the *History of the Yuan* (*Yuanshi*,

¹¹³ About genealogical rules in the Ming and Qing periods, see Buckley Ebrey 1981, pp. 237–239.

¹¹⁴ Buckley Ebrey 1981, p. 238. These rules were published in the Qing times (in 1870), but they used the standard model of genealogy of Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi from the Song period, used during the later dynasties.

¹¹⁵ *Mingshi*, j. 191, p. 7b; Wang Jian 2002, p. 247.

¹¹⁶ He is mentioned in Fang Chaoying 1976, p. 1431.

¹¹⁷ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 39, p. 582.

¹¹⁸ Cf., e.g., Chen Yuan 1958, p. 164.

¹¹⁹ *Shuyuan zaji*, j. 4, p. 44.

¹²⁰ *Hongwu lizhi*, pp. 2b–3a. This could also suggest that stories about the taboo of the First Emperor, quoted in 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, were just gossip.

¹²¹ *The Great Ming Code* 2005, p. 61.

¹²² For more about him see Chan Hok-lam 1976, pp. 1641–1642.

compiled in 1369), the taboo characters of the name of the first emperor – *yuan* 元 and *zhang* 璋 – were written openly.¹²³ Many other examples of non-observance of taboo are known. For example, the Era name Jianwen 建文 (Establishment of civil virtue, 1398–1402) chosen by Emperor Yunwen 允炆, offended his own name, and he also had no problem giving his sons the names Wenkui 文奎 (born in 1396) and Wengui 文圭 (1401–1457) with almost the same character.¹²⁴ Admittedly, we should note that the character *wen* 文 formally was only a homonym of the taboo character *wen* 炆, and did not need to be avoided according to the decree of the first emperor. Thus, this is perhaps better understood as an example of tabooing becoming a written practice (i.e., pronunciation no longer mattered).

Chen Yuan also gives further examples of not avoiding taboo during the reign of Emperor Wanli (r. 1572–1620), quoted predominantly from Shen Defu's *Wanli yehuobian* 萬歷野獲編. For example, the palace of the imperial concubine Zheng 鄭 was called *yikungong* 翊坤宮 at that time, although it violated the taboo name of the current emperor (Yijun 翊鈞).¹²⁵

The tabooing of the Ming period had its own characteristics. The first character of a name was often common for brothers of the emperor (as a *paihang* character) and was not avoided after his enthronement.¹²⁶ It would explain the limited number of taboo examples, because most of the Ming emperors had double names. The tabooing custom does not always seem to be consistent in this period. For example, the omission of a stroke in the imperial name was prescribed in state exams of the year 1477,¹²⁷ but twenty years later, in the state exams of the year 1494, the non-omission of strokes in taboo characters was valid.¹²⁸

If we take both the principles and the disorder in the taboo practices of that time, the custom of name tabooing cannot be called lax. This is all the more apparent, if we read the edict of the first emperor in 1370, in which he ordered the avoidance of the names of former sages, emperors and virtuous persons, as e.g., characters *guo* 國, *bao* 寶, *tian* 天, *jun* 君, *chen* 臣, *sheng* 聖, *shen* 神, *yao* 堯, *shun* 舜, *yu* 禹, *tang* 湯, *wen* 文, *wu* 武, *zhou*

¹²³ See, for example, *Hongwu zhengyun*, j. 2, p. 11b; *Yuanshi*, j. 5, p. 12a.

¹²⁴ *Wanli yehuobian*, j. 1, p. 7.

¹²⁵ *Wanli yehuobian*, “Buyi 補遺”, j. 3, p. 901; Chen Yuan 1958, p. 165.

¹²⁶ *Rizhilu*, j. 23, pp. 34b–35a. Cf. also names of brothers of Ming emperors.

¹²⁷ *Da Ming huidian*, j. 77, p. 14b.

¹²⁸ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 23, p. 370.

周, *han* 漢, *jin* 晉, *tang* 唐. Existing names had to be changed and new names avoided.¹²⁹ In 1397, it was prohibited to use titles as “*taizu* 太祖, *shengsun* 聖孫, *longsun* 龍孫, *huangsun* 黃孫, *wangsun* 王孫, *taishu* 太叔, *taixiong* 太兄, *taidi* 太弟, *taishi* 太師, *taifu* 太傅, *taibao* 太保, *dafu* 大夫, *daizhao boshi* 待詔博士, *taiyi* 太醫, *taijian* 太監, *daguanlang* 大官郎.”¹³⁰ Penalties for violation of taboo, as one might remember from examples at the beginning of this chapter, could be cruel and immoderate, depending on the emperor. This could be seen especially during the reign of the first emperor of Ming (cf. 7.2.1). Therefore, the Ming period cannot be called “a spent force” period in the history of name tabooing in China.¹³¹ The custom changed and became less regular than it had been in the Tang and Song periods, but it was continued.

7.3. Qing

There was a provincial Education Commissioner from Hunan province named Hu Zhongzao 胡中藻.¹³² In 1755, he composed a poem – a simple, non-political poem. Unfortunately, he included the sentence “to distinguish with the heart what is misty and what is clear” (一把心腸論濁清). It was not prudent to put the character *zhuo* 濁 (misty, dirty) before the character used as the name (*guohao* 國號) of the dynasty Qing. When the Qianlong Emperor read the poem, he interpreted it as a political declaration. After the court trial, Hu Zhongzao and the members of his family were beheaded. Later, even the soul tablet with Hu’s name was removed from his ancestral temple.¹³³

In the Qing period, the tabooing of imperial names reached a last high point. It became a part of a “literary inquisition,” called *wenziyu* 文字獄 (imprisonment due to writings).¹³⁴ Although this censorship was present also in former dynasties, it expanded considerably especially in the time of the Qianlong emperor. As a result, not only the violation of a taboo name, but even suspicion of it could lead to a very severe punishment.

¹²⁹ *Ming Taizu shilu*, j. 52, p. 1ab.

¹³⁰ *Kezuo zhuiyu*, j.10, p. 40a.

¹³¹ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 307.

¹³² For more about him, see Hummel 1943, p. 602.

¹³³ *Guitian suoji*, j. 5, p. 59. Cf. also Guy 1987, pp. 32-33.

¹³⁴ For more about the “literary inquisition” see Guy 1987. The “literary inquisition” was supported not only by the emperor, but also by scholars who wanted to climb up the social ladder. We should note an increased availability of sources in the Qing period, and an increasing importance of written culture. They made for a predisposition towards this “literary inquisition,” and in certain ways also towards a more restrictive tabooing of imperial names.

When the poet Cai Xian 蔡顯 (1697–1767)¹³⁵ wrote his poem “Purple Peony” (*Zi mudan shi* 紫牡丹詩), he will not have expected that it would be a big political mistake. He wanted to express his preference for red peonies and wrote the sentence “(the color of peony) competing with the red one is not the real color, different kinds are all called princes (of flowers)” (*duozhu fei zhengse, yizhong jin cheng wang* 奪朱非正色, 異種盡稱王). The choice of the word *zhu* 朱 for “red color,” however, was unfortunate, as it was the family name of the emperors of the preceding Ming dynasty. Apparently, the main problem was the expression *duozhu* 奪朱 – which could be read as “robbing Zhu”. The poem was interpreted by the Qianlong Emperor as praise for the Ming dynasty, and a refusal of acknowledging the legitimacy of the Qing dynasty. The poet was accused and beheaded.¹³⁶ In the case like that, however, it is sometimes very difficult to say whether the “violation” of a taboo was accidental and or intentional.

On the other hand, Chinese historians of that time used to look for taboo words themselves. For example, in 1725, the Advanced Scholar (*jinshi*) Wang Jingqi 王景祺¹³⁷ attacked the character *zheng* 正 as an ominous one. He realized the bad fortune of emperors with such a name, seriously analyzed it in his work *Discourse about Reign Titles of Successive Dynasties* (*Lidai nianhao lun* 歷代年號論) and argued that the cause is due to the structure of the character *zheng* itself, which is the combination of the characters *yi* 一 (one) and *zhi* 止 (to stop).¹³⁸ This belief is interesting, since it tells us about common superstitions and about the way in which (even high cultural) scholars (Wang Jingqi was an Advanced Scholar no less) still shared basic ideas of fortune-telling through character splitting.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ For him see *Zhongguo lidai renming da cidian* 1999, p. 2443.

¹³⁶ *Qingshi jishi benmo*, j. 20, p. 3b; *Zhongguo lidai renming da cidian* 1999, p. 2443.

¹³⁷ For more about him see Fang Chao-ying 1943, pp. 812–813. Later, he became a victim of the “literary inquisition” and was executed.

¹³⁸ *Yongzheng shangyu neige*, j. 48, p. 23ab. Explicitly mentioned was the fate of such emperors as: Hailingwang of Jin (Era name Zhenglong 正隆 1156–1161), who was killed by one of his officers; Aizong of Jin (Era name Zhengda 正大 1224–1232), who later, in 1234, committed suicide; Huizong of Yuan (Era name Zhizheng 至正 1341–1368), who lost control over China; Zhengde 正德 of Ming (1505–1521), who died after an accident and illness at the age of 30; and Zhengtong 正統 (his first Era name 1436–1449), who was imprisoned and only years later was reinstalled as emperor with the new Era name Tianshun 天順 (1457–1464).

¹³⁹ See also Smith 1994.

7.3.1. Taboo of Emperor's Name

We would expect similarities between the tabooing of the names of emperors from the Qing and Yuan dynasties. The Manchurian and Mongolian people, both with their own culture, invaded China and gradually assimilated with the local population. But while we have only very limited information about taboos of the Yuan dynasty, there was a strong taboo custom during the Qing dynasty. It started at the latest from the period of Kangxi. Of course, as recent scholarship has demonstrated,¹⁴⁰ these Manchus were already at least partially sinicized.¹⁴¹ Thus, to see the Qing only as a Manchurian dynasty would be an oversimplification.

The Manchurian language¹⁴² differs greatly from Chinese in structure and script. Therefore, in the beginning, when no fixed Chinese characters were used yet for the transcription of Manchurian names, the tabooing of characters of names was very limited. Some scholars think there was no such custom until the Kangxi times.¹⁴³ It is possible that the Manchurian people had their own Manchurian system of tabooing, but this has not yet been studied. The use of Chinese characters was of course well-known, since already since the time of Nurhaci (1559–1626) in the late sixteenth century these Jürchen leaders had been earning money in the ginseng trade with Ming-China.¹⁴⁴ It is noticeable in the change of the dynasty's name in 1636 from Jin 金 to Qing 清 by Emperor Huang Taiji (r. 1636–1643). Even before the Manchus invaded China, they apparently wanted to avoid the animosity of Chinese people towards the former Jin dynasty (1115–1234), or show their independency. Moreover, according to the modern scholar Wang Xinhua, they even understood the symbolism of the Chinese expression “the red color (and the imperial family name Zhu) of the Ming dynasty has fire” (*ming zhu you huo* 明朱有火) and used the water element – *shui* 水 – in the new character (*qing* 清) in order to overwhelm fire.¹⁴⁵

Not much is known about tabooing the emperor's name before the time of Kangxi. Scholars have observed no taboo examples prior to his reign (not even during the rule of the first Qing emperor in China itself, the Shunzhi emperor, r. 1644–1661).¹⁴⁶ For some time it was prohibited for Manchus to have Chinese names. But very soon, Chinese customs were

¹⁴⁰ See Elliott 2001; Crossley 1990; Crossley 2006.

¹⁴¹ Note that the concept of “sinicization” is a problematic one. For debate about Manchu sinicization see Crossley 1990, pp. 223–224.

¹⁴² Manchurian is a Tungusic language spoken in Northeast China.

¹⁴³ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 168.

¹⁴⁴ Crossley 1990, p. 5; Elliott 2001, p. 50.

¹⁴⁵ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 307.

¹⁴⁶ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 168.

adopted more and more, and people – especially those from the upper echelons of the Manchurian army – gradually changed their names to the Chinese manner.¹⁴⁷ However, members of the imperial family changed their family name from Manchurian Aisin Gioro to the Chinese Jin 金 only after the end of the dynasty.¹⁴⁸

Many examples of name tabooing during the period of the Emperor Kangxi (1661–1722, with the given name 玄燁 Xuanye) are probably best considered as an element of his policy of combining Chinese and Manchu customs. In order to avoid his taboo character *xuan* 玄, the names of prominent figures from the past were also changed, as for example Liu Zixuan 劉子玄 (661–721), whose name had already been changed once in the past because of the taboo of Tang, who now called again by his original name Liu Zhiji 劉知幾.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, the name of a city gate in Peking was changed from Xuanwumen 玄武門 to Shenwumen 神武門 because of taboo.¹⁵⁰

The character *xuan* was often tabooed by using its equivalents *yuan* 元, *yuan* 圓 or *xi* 系, or by dropping one line from the character. For example, according to the *Compilation of State Regulations* (*Huidian* 會典), recorded in *Wuxuelu chubian* 吾學錄初編, all taboo characters *xuan* 玄 were changed to *yuan* 元.¹⁵¹ The *Quan Tangwen* 全唐文, edited in 1815, wrote them as *yuan* 圓.¹⁵² Liu Zongyuan 劉宗元, the author of the *Zhixiao qiuxi xiaoshi tanji* 至小丘西小石潭記 from the Tang period,¹⁵³ had a younger brother, Zongxuan 宗玄. His name could not be replaced with the character *yuan* 元, as their names would become indistinguishable. Therefore, the character *yuan* 圓 was written instead (again, only the character was changed, and not the pronunciation).¹⁵⁴

Yet another taboo equivalent can be seen in the *Hanliu nianpu* 韓柳年譜. The name Zongxuan 宗玄 was written as Zongxi 宗系. The taboo character *xuan* 玄 was probably written in a different way (as 𤇗) and was later mistakenly copied as *xi*.¹⁵⁵ In addition, the

¹⁴⁷ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 308.

¹⁴⁸ Qigong 2004, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Wang Yankun 1997, p. 514.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Yankun 1997, p. 514. It was also the name of the deity Xuanwu who had given his name to the gate (Cf. Chen Xuelin 1997, pp. 89-94).

¹⁵¹ *Wuxuelu chubian*, j. 4, p. 5b.

¹⁵² Chen Yuan 1958, p. 65.

¹⁵³ See *Tangwen cui*, j. 71, p. 7ab.

¹⁵⁴ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 65.

¹⁵⁵ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 65.

practice of tabooing with new characters as equivalents, and tabooing of characters having *xuan* 玄 as a constituent part was known in that time.¹⁵⁶

The character *ye* 燁 was also taboo as a part of the imperial name. The character *yu* 煜 was usually used as an equivalent, as for example in the *Compilation of State Regulations (Huidian)*.¹⁵⁷ Its homonym *ye* 曄 was tabooed, too, and changed to *yu* 煜. Therefore, the name of the Tang emperor Zhaozong (r. 888–904) – Ye 曄 – was adapted to Yu 煜.¹⁵⁸ The name of Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), the author of the *History of the Later Han*, was changed to his courtesy name Fan Weizong.¹⁵⁹

7.3.2 Apogee of Tabooing in Qing

The apogee of the tabooing of imperial names in the last dynasty of China (according to the number of known cases) can be placed in the reign periods of Emperors Yongzheng (1722–1735) and Qianlong (1735–1796).¹⁶⁰ The custom became very restrictive and was a mandatory evidence of loyalty. We can see here a certain similarity to the reign periods of the emperors Zhu Yuanzhang and Yongle in the Ming dynasty (see 7.2.2 and 7.2.3), who were strong autocratic rulers, too. The observance of name tabooing was especially monitored in the composition of essays for the civil service examinations. New rules for naming the imperial family in the Chinese way had already been drawn up in the time of Emperor Yongzheng: fourteen “generation” characters were fixed which had to be used for the names of the next emperors. In fact, only seven of them were required until the end of the dynasty.¹⁶¹ Of course, this supported primarily the imperial succession and was not inspired by any need for characters without taboos implications, but rather the fact that there had been many rumors concerning his ascent to the throne.

The given name of the Emperor Yongzheng – Yinzhen 胤禛 – was tabooed. According to the the *Da Qing huidian shili* 大清會典事例, the Emperor Qianlong determined in 1760 that “the first character of the holy taboo name of the Emperor Shizong (i.e., Yongzheng) should be written as *yun* 允, and the second character as *zheng* 正.”¹⁶² The *Wuxuelu chubian* 吾學錄初編 also quotes a record from the *Huidian* 會典, which ordered the change of the

¹⁵⁶ Wang Yankun 1997, pp. 514–515. Note three strange equivalent characters in Wang Yankun 1997, p. 514.

¹⁵⁷ *Wuxuelu chubian*, j. 4, p. 5b.

¹⁵⁸ *Lidai diwang miaoshi nianhui pu*, p. 12a.

¹⁵⁹ Wang Yankun 1997, p. 535.

¹⁶⁰ About the period of the Emperor Qianlong see Guy 1987; Spence 2001.

¹⁶¹ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 308.

¹⁶² *Qinding Da Qing huidian shili*, j. 344, p. 4a.

first taboo character to *yun* 允, but the second one to a different character – *zhen* 禎.¹⁶³ As observed by Chen Yuan, the names Zhang Jiayun 張佳允, Shen Jiayun 申佳允, Du Yunxi 堵允錫 from the *History of Ming (Mingshi)* on the *Stone Tablets With Names of Successful Candidates in the Highest Imperial Examinations (jinshi timing bei 進士題名碑)* were in fact the names of Zhang Jiayin 張佳胤, Shen Jiayin 申佳胤 and Du Yinxi 堵胤錫, modified because of taboo.¹⁶⁴ Also the name of a famous poet, Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634–1711), was changed ten years after his death to Shizheng 士正, and later to Shizhen 士禎 (this last name was determined by the Emperor Qianlong).¹⁶⁵

The names of former rulers were similarly treated: the name of the last emperor of the Ming dynasty – Chongzhen 崇禎 – was changed to Chongzheng 崇正,¹⁶⁶ and the name of the first emperor of Song – Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 (r. 960–976) – became Zhao Kuangyun 趙匡允.¹⁶⁷ In 1723, the name of Zhending 真定府 (near Shijiazhuang in Hebei) was renamed as Zhengding 正定, because of the taboo of Yongzheng. Furthermore, other geographical names such as Zhenyang 真陽 and Zhenning 真寧 were changed in that way.¹⁶⁸

The long period of the Qianlong Emperor's reign (reigned officially 1735–1796) brought many cases of taboo, and even stronger persecution. Qing emperors wanted to become “more Chinese” and supported the Chinese custom of tabooing names. An important role in the amplification of taboo observance was played by the “literary inquisition”.¹⁶⁹ However, we should be careful not to blame the emperor too much, as there might well be an underlying indigenous current of tabooing as well. Recent scholarship has argued that many of the cases of “literary inquisition” were generally shared and used by Chinese scholars for their own aims.¹⁷⁰

The first taboo character of the name of the Emperor Qianlong – Hongli 弘曆 – was usually changed to *hong* 宏. This fact is recorded in the *Huidian* (quoted by the *Nansheng gongyulu*), with the additional comment that, if the character *hong* 弘 was part of another

¹⁶³ *Wuxuelu chubian*, j. 4, p. 5b.

¹⁶⁴ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 169.

¹⁶⁵ *Qingwen xiantongkao*, j. 221, p. 31ab.

¹⁶⁶ *Lidai huizipu*, j. 1, p. 15b.

¹⁶⁷ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 19, p. 291. Zhou Guangye wrote here his name as “Zhao Kuangyun” and commented: “I have changed the original character because of taboo”.

¹⁶⁸ *Lidai huizipu*, j. 2, p. 44a.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Guy 1987, pp. 166–200. See also 7.3, Fn. 134.

¹⁷⁰ Guy 1987, p. 179.

character (so called *pianpang* 偏旁), it should be written unchanged but without the last stroke. The same source said that the second character of the taboo name (*li* 曆) should be written with the parts *lin* 林 and *xin* 心 inside.¹⁷¹ Therefore, the Era name of the Emperor Hongzhi 弘治 (1487–1505) was changed to Hongzhi 宏治, and the astronomical *Calendar of the Conformity of Time* (*Shixianli* 時憲曆, composed in 1645 by the Jesuit Adam Schall) to *Shixianshu* 時憲書.¹⁷²

Not only the given name of the Emperor Qianlong had to be tabooed, but also the names of his ancestors. Moreover, when his eldest son, Yonglian 永璉 (1730–1738), died young, it was decided to taboo his name. When later his eighth son Yongxuan 永璇 (1746–1832) in 1752 mistakenly wrote the taboo character *lian* 璉, his princely salary was stopped for three years as a penalty.¹⁷³ Besides, the sentence with the word *hulian* 瑚璉 (coral vessel) from the *Analects* (*Lunyu*)¹⁷⁴ was not approved for the state examination, because it conflicted with the taboo name of Yonglian.¹⁷⁵

Sometimes even taboos of former dynasties were avoided. One interesting case involved tabooing the name of the Han dynasty Emperor Wu (with the given name Liu Che 劉徹, 140–87 BC), who had lived almost two thousand years earlier. Proofreaders of the *Imperial Collection of Four* (*Siku quanshu*) got a strong reprimand as they tolerated the sentence “Che of Han imitated the Qin rule” (*Han Che fang Qinzheng* 漢徹方秦政) in the *Ji’nanji* 濟南集¹⁷⁶ of Li Jian 李薦 and the sentence “Che of Han fluttering up and down” (*xiehang Han Che* 頡頏漢徹) in the *Beishi* 北史 (Wen Yuan zhuan 文苑傳).¹⁷⁷ Both quotations were ordered to be changed to Han Wu 漢武, as a sign of respect for an emperor.¹⁷⁸ It should be mentioned that this tabooing was done out of respect for a great ruler who (supposedly) conquered a great territory, like the Emperor Qianlong, and not just for any emperor.

¹⁷¹ *Wuxuelu chubian*, j. 4, pp. 5b–6a.

¹⁷² Chen Yuan 1958, p. 170.

¹⁷³ *Qinshi*, j. 222, p. 3568.

¹⁷⁴ *Lunyu*, j. 5, p. 1b.

¹⁷⁵ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 170.

¹⁷⁶ *Jinanjì*, j. 1, p. 7a.

¹⁷⁷ *Beishi*, j. 83, p. 2a.

¹⁷⁸ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 169.

7.3.3. The Last Century of Qing

In the 19th century, the number of taboo cases seems to have gone down (at least according to the materials we have) and the observance of taboos was apparently relaxed. Since the number of extant sources for the recent past only increases, this is probably not the result of changes in the survival of historical evidence. Some scholars presume it was an effect of the weakness of the imperial state in that time.¹⁷⁹ Judged from the past, the opposite was often the case: weak emperors often used taboos precisely to emphasize their deficient authority. A more likely cause for this relaxation must have been the fact that at the time of the Emperor Daoguang 道光 (1820-1850), the principles of tabooing changed. The first “generation” character of the imperial name, common for all princes, was no longer taboo, as before. Since then only the last character of a name was taboo.¹⁸⁰ Besides, persecution due to violation of taboo seems to have calmed down.

Even so, there are still examples of taboo during the last century of Qing. The name of the Jiaqing Emperor 嘉慶 (r. 1796–1820) – Yongyan 顥琰 – was tabooed, and therefore the character *yan* 琰 was changed to *jian* 儉. This change was made, for example, in the *Yunmu* 韻目. Furthermore, the name of a scholar of Daoism – Yu Yan 俞琰 (ca. 1253–1314) – was changed to Yu Wan 俞琬 in the *Jianming mulu* 簡明目錄.¹⁸¹

Similarly, the second character of the name Minning 旻寧 of the Emperor Daoguang (r. 1820–1850) was tabooed and changed to *ning* 甯 or *ning* 寧 (all apparently old forms of 寧). In the *Da Qing huidian shili*, we can read about it in an edict of 1853 which said that the taboo name of Emperor Xuanzong (i.e., Daoguang) should be written “with omitted strokes” as *ning* 寧, or “totally changed” to *ning* 甯.¹⁸² On the other hand, it is known that, for example, palaces and gates inside the Forbidden City (as e.g. the Palace of Tranquil Longevity Ningshougong 寧壽宮 or Palace of Earthly Tranquility Kunninggong 坤寧宮) were not changed, though the names of a few of them included the character *ning* 寧 which should have been considered as taboo.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 308.

¹⁸⁰ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 169.

¹⁸¹ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 170. Cf. also the taboo prescription of *Huidian*: “In the first (taboo) character two last strokes should be omitted. In the second one the right part of character should be replaced by *you* 又 (*Wuxuelu chubian*, j. 4, p. 6a).

¹⁸² *Qinding Da Qing huidian shili*, j. 344, p. 15a.

¹⁸³ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 169.

No instance of taboo during the reign of Emperor Xianfeng 咸豐 (r. 1850–1861, original given name Yizhu 奕訢) is known at the moment. Nonetheless, there are examples of tabooing the name of the Xianfeng Emperor's successor – the Emperor Tongzhi 同治 (r. 1861–1875, original given name Zaichun 載淳). According to the *Da Qing huidian shili*, an edict in 1861 prescribed that officials who would find the second character of the imperial name in petitions to the emperor should change it to *chun* 淳, and that normally there is no need for omitting strokes.¹⁸⁴

Not much is known about tabooing the name of the Emperor Guangxu 光緒 (r. 1875–1908, original given name Zaitian 載湉).¹⁸⁵ But from the time of the last Qing emperor – Puyi 溥儀 (r. 1908–1911) – numerous examples of the observance of his taboo are known. Names of people were changed, as that of the politician and scholar Tang Shaoyi 唐紹儀 (1862–1938), who changed his name in 1908 to Shaoyi 紹怡 (after the revolution of 1911 he returned to his original name).¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, titles of offices were changed as, for example, that of the Office of Palace Ceremonial (*zhangyisi* 掌儀司)¹⁸⁷ into *zhangli* 掌禮.¹⁸⁸ Besides, names of counties and buildings were changed for five years between 1908 and 1912, e.g. Yizheng county 儀征縣 to Yangzi 揚子縣 (in the Jiangsu province), and the door of a government office (*yimen* 儀門)¹⁸⁹ to *yimen* 宜門.¹⁹⁰ It seems, however, that in all these cases, changes were reversed immediately after the fall of the Qing dynasty, as was also common in earlier dynasties.

7.3.4. Further Examples of Naming Taboo

Incidents of the tabooing names of officials, especially those having power, are quite common in the Qing period. An example can be the person of Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612–1678), who virtually ruled Yunnan in 1659–1673.¹⁹¹ Because the name of his father was Xiang 襄, he changed many names containing this character to *xiang* 廂. Furthermore, his own name was tabooed in a manner similar to the imperial taboo custom: *san* 三 was

¹⁸⁴ *Qinding Da Qing huidian shili*, j. 344, p. 15a.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Wang Yankun 1997, p. 447.

¹⁸⁶ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 170.

¹⁸⁷ Hucker 1985, p. 109.

¹⁸⁸ *Qingshi*, j. 119, p. 1422.

¹⁸⁹ *Cihai* 1999, p. 2008.

¹⁹⁰ Wang Yankun 1997, p. 536.

¹⁹¹ For more about him, see Fang Chao-ying 1943a, pp. 877–880.

exchanged to *can* 參, and *gui* 桂 to *gui* 貴. Many geographical names were changed in this way during that time. For example, Guilin 桂林 was called Jianlin 建林, Guiyang 桂陽 – Nanping 南平, Guidong 桂東 – Yichang 義昌, Xiangyang 襄陽 – Hannan 漢南.¹⁹² Name tabooing was apparently a part of the political propaganda of Wu Sangui during the rebellion.

During the reign of the Emperor Yongzheng, the names of Confucius and Mencius became taboo again.¹⁹³ According to the *Qiaoxi zaji* 橋西雜記 of Ye Mingfei 葉名澧, in 1724 an edict of the Emperor was issued about tabooing the name of Confucius (Qiu 丘). The character *qiu* 丘 had to be written with the part *yi* 卩 (as *qiu* 邱).¹⁹⁴ Similarly, in the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 there is a comment by Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815) under the heading of the character *qiu* 邱 that this character is used according to the present system for tabooing the name of Confucius.¹⁹⁵

It seems, however, that taboo customs were not always taken seriously in China, and were also often an object of jokes. As we know, jokes often play with the sound and appearance of characters and thus are an interesting source of information.¹⁹⁶ There is, for example, an anecdote of Wu Jian 吳趼 recorded in his *Xin xiao shi* 新笑史 about a gift from Yunnan donated to the industrialist Sheng Xuanhuai 盛宣懷 (1849–1916).¹⁹⁷ The content of the packet was described on the outside as “Xuan tui” 宣腿 (ham from Xuanwei). The servant could not pronounce the taboo character and giving over the packet omitted it and said to the official: “Somebody has bestowed a leg (*tui* 腿) upon You”.¹⁹⁸

7.3.5. Law and Punishment

There are different opinions regarding the intensity of the imperial tabooing custom during the Qing times.¹⁹⁹ In fact, a peak of severity can be seen during the reigns of Emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong. At that time, punishment for the violation of taboos was often extremely harsh, as we could see in the cases described before (see section 1): the official

¹⁹² Chen Yuan 1958, p. 18.

¹⁹³ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 317.

¹⁹⁴ *Qiaoxi zaji*, p. 33b–34b.

¹⁹⁵ *Shuowen jiezizhu*, j. 6 xia, p. 55a.

¹⁹⁶ For more about Chinese jokes and tales see Nienhauser 1986, pp. 78–81; Schmidt-Glintzer 1990, pp. 458–459.

¹⁹⁷ See the note about him in Cameron 1943, p. 29.

¹⁹⁸ *Xin xiao shi*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 309.

Zha Siting 查嗣庭 (1664–1727) died in prison, and the scholar Wang Xihou 王錫侯 (1713–1777) was executed. In both cases, their families and competent officials were also penalized. There are, however, other examples where the imperial taboo practice was apparently much more loosely monitored. We know, for example, that in 1767 Chen Hongmou 陳宏某 (1696–1771)²⁰⁰ had already been using a taboo name for many years without changing it, and was not punished.²⁰¹

The taboo law of the Qing dynasty was very similar to that of the Ming. In the Code of the Qing *Da Qing lüli* 大清律例, it was written that every person who mistakenly violated the imperial name (*yuming* 御名) or temple taboo name (*miaohui* 廟諱) in a petition or a report to the emperor would be punished with 80 blows with the stick (*zhang* 杖), and if the violation happened in connection with other documents or works – 40 blows with the bamboo stick (*chi* 笞). A person whose given name violated a taboo would be punished with 100 *zhang*.²⁰² The last punishment was stronger, according to the commentary in law, because such naming is considered not as a mistake but a misdoing, and causes violation of taboo each time that someone would use that person's name. The Qing law also said that homonyms and characters of composite names are not taboo and are not punished. But in contrast to the taboo custom of the Song dynasty, the Ministry of Rites was no longer asked and the classics (as the *Records of Ritual*) were no longer decisive for taboo practice.²⁰³ It was the ruler whose opinion decided about taboo law, though his advisors, of course, might have consulted traditional handbooks or officials from the Ministry of Rites nonetheless.

7.3.6. Names of Barbarians

A peculiarity of taboo custom in the Qing time was the tabooing of barbarians' names. It can be presumed that this practice was intended to conceal the “barbarian” origin of the Qing dynasty, or – on the contrary – to show respect to related tribes and cultures. Especially avoided were those characters with mostly derogative meanings such as *hu* 胡 (north-western barbarians), *lu* 虜 (captive), *yi* 夷 (eastern barbarians) and *di* 狄 (northern barbarians). These characters were often exchanged for their homonyms (*yi* 夷 was written

²⁰⁰ For more about him see the biographical study by Rowe 2001; Suter 1943, pp. 86–87.

²⁰¹ *Chaxiangshi xuchao*, j. 8, p. 5b.

²⁰² *Da Qing lüli*, j. 7, p. 6a; *The Great Qing Code* 1994, p. 91.

²⁰³ Wang Xinhua 2007, pp. 309–310.

as *yi* 彝, *lu* 虜 as *lu* 鹵, *di* 狄 as *di* 敵), or an empty place was left instead.²⁰⁴ It seems to have been a very common custom.

The tabooing of the names of barbarians survived even the decree of the Emperor Yongzheng in 1733 who denounced that practice as wrong and punishable, and ordered revisions of relevant texts.²⁰⁵ The effect was that forty years later, when the Emperor Qianlong read two works – the *Collection of Ancestral Benevolence* (*Zongzeji* 宗澤集) and *Collected Essays of Yang Jisheng* (*Yang Jisheng ji* 楊繼盛集) – he found both works puzzling and only partially corrected.²⁰⁶ When the compilation of the *Imperial Collection of Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu*) was undertaken, the emperor issued a special order in 1777 which prescribed the revision of all books and penalties for bad revisers.²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, when 150 years later, in 1933, Chen Yuan analyzed the *Old History of the Five Dynasties* (*Jiu wudai shi* 舊五代史), which was lost and reconstructed from quotes of the *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 in ca. 1775,²⁰⁸ he found many “barbarian” characters exchanged or deleted in the text.²⁰⁹ Therefore, it can be presumed that emperors preferred “barbarian” names to be tabooed, though they condemned this practice officially, and officials satisfied their wishes, or the officials were too scared not to taboo these terms, even though the emperor claimed to be tolerant of the custom.

7.4. Taboo in Modern China

The common opinion of Chinese scholars on name taboos is that the tabooing of names or *bihui* 避諱 were unique to traditional China and no longer maintained after 1911.²¹⁰ But what has happened with the custom of name tabooing after the “old China” was gone? Did the signing of abdication by the last Emperor of the Qing dynasty on 12 February 1912 really mean the immediate extinction of the practice? Of course not. As far the author of this dissertation knows, however, all works about name tabooing in China stop the description of the custom with the end of that dynasty.²¹¹ This is understandable, since it is

²⁰⁴ Wang Yankun 1997, pp. 85-86; Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 32-33.

²⁰⁵ *Yongzheng shangyu neige*, j. 130, pp. 10b-11a.

²⁰⁶ *Guochao gongshi xubian*, j. 83, p. 23b.

²⁰⁷ *Guochao gongshi xubian*, j. 83, pp. 23b-24a.

²⁰⁸ Wilkinson 2000, p. 285.

²⁰⁹ Chen Yuan 1937a, pp. 1b-2b; Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 315. About Qing editions of Song works against the Liao and Jin see Franke 1987.

²¹⁰ Lin Shimou 2008, p. 53.

²¹¹ Cf. Chen Yuan 1958; Wang Jian 2002; Fan Zhixin 2006. Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 317 mentioned shortly taboos of Yuan Shikai.

not easy to write systematically about name tabooing or its extant forms in modern time, but we will make an attempt here nonetheless.

7.4.1. State Taboo

The attentive reader will have noticed that most of the cases of name tabooing described in this study are related to the name of the emperor. This is rather understandable, because it was precisely this taboo that was mostly recorded and had to be avoided by everybody. After the increase and tragic peak of this custom in the time of Emperor Qianlong in the 18th century, the tabooing of imperial names was gradually relaxed. But even in the last years of the Qing dynasty, there were still concrete examples of the practice for the name of the last emperor Puyi 溥儀 (r. 1908–1911, see 7.3.3).²¹² Since there was no longer an emperor in modern China with the abrogation of the imperial system, we can surely say that tabooing of imperial name was as good as finished. The Xinhai Revolution, and later the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, was a turning point in Chinese history with far-reaching consequences for the custom of *bihui*. Names altered before because of taboo custom were changed back to the original ones. Indeed, this change back was still made according to principles of tabooing which prescribed not avoiding taboo names after abdication.

How fragile the new practice was, however, could be seen three years later, as the general Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916)²¹³ proclaimed a restoration of monarchy in 1915 with the Era name Hongxian (洪憲). This short living dynasty (12 December 1915 – 22 March 1916) had its own taboos. Yuan Shikai implemented name tabooing on a large scale.²¹⁴ We could not find cases that his personal name was avoided, but two other examples are indicative. Apparently when the Lantern Festival (*yuanxiaojie* 元宵節, on the fifteenth day of the first month after the Chinese New Year) of 1916 came, merchants shouted *yuanxiao* on the streets of Peking in order to sell their sweet dumplings of rice. These dumpling had the same name as the Festival. Yuan Shikai believed that he heard “Yuan *xiao* (袁消 – Yuan disappeared) and ordered to execute them all. Only after an

²¹² No information could be found about a possible tabooing of name in the time as Puyi was the Emperor Kangde 康德皇帝 of the puppet state of Manchukuo (1934-1945). We have found only a notice that he avoided the character *huang* 皇 (emperor) as related to the Japanese Emperor (*tianhuang* 天皇) and because of that the name of his Imperial Palace (usually called *huanggong* 皇宮) was changed to *digong* 帝宮 (Cf. Jia Yinghua 2004, p. 268).

²¹³ For more about Yuan Shikai see “Yuan Shih-k’ai” 1971, pp. 78-89; Ch’en 1972.

²¹⁴ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 317.

explanation by his minister did he amend the order and merely commanded to replace the name *yuanxiao* with *tangyuan* 湯圓. This name became perpetuated and is used to this day.²¹⁵ A very similar story is told about coal. It is said that all wall inscriptions of “*yuanmei* 元煤” (raw coal) – often on shops selling coal briquettes in Peking – should be erased, because their pronunciation was similar to “Yuan *mei*” 袁沒 (Yuan is out).²¹⁶ Both stories can only be found in the anecdotal literature and we cannot be sure that they went back to actual proclamations or statements by the historical Yuan Shikai.²¹⁷ They show, however, that the custom of avoiding an inauspicious name (or on the contrary – an intentional usage of it) was continued in modern China. This was not a “classical” example of the tabooing of name, but a part of *bihui* custom, similar to, for example, taboos of Zhu Yuanzhang (see 7.2.1).

The most important change for the custom of name tabooing was initiated by the New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動) of the 1910s and 1920s. It was an intellectual turning point in Chinese culture. It started a break with the traditional social order and traditional customs, to be continued in another way after 1949 in communist China. The subsequent transformation process was described in 1959 by Wolfgang Bauer: “In modern times, the total *paihang* system (with generation names) is dissolving very fast and obviously, together with the disintegration of the Chinese extended family. The same can be said about magical naming – its cosmological foundations are being abolished by the new world view.”²¹⁸ Gradually, given names were openly used, but many practices of avoiding name and courtesy forms were present for a long time. Some of them remain until now and some have returned again in the last decades since family has become more important as well.

It is remarkable that many names of main actors in 20th century Chinese history that we know are not their first names. The first great leader of modern China, Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), had indeed the name (*ming*) Wen 文. Only after his stay in Japan, in 1897, did he take a new conspiratorial name, Zhongshanqiao 中山樵, which later became Zhongshan 中山 – his best-known name in China. The name Yat-sen, that is known currently in the West, is the Cantonese pronunciation of his cognomen Yixian 逸仙, and in

²¹⁵ Lin Shimou 2008, p. 55–56.

²¹⁶ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 317.

²¹⁷ Ch'en 1972, p. 159 ascribes them to Yuan Shikai's purported superstitiousness, but this judgment seems more due to the general historians dislike of him, than being based on historical facts.

²¹⁸ Bauer 1959, p. 249 [translation PA].

addition he also had the courtesy name Zaizhi 載之. It can be also noticed that his name was intentionally changed by Qing officials to Wen 汶 when he was about to be arrested.²¹⁹

The name Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) of China's second important leader was in fact his courtesy name Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石 in Cantonese transcription. His original given name, recorded in genealogy books, was Zhoutai 周泰, although he also had the milk name (*xiaoming*) Ruiyuan 瑞元, known only to his close family. Later he used another name – Zhiqing 志清. Only when he started a new period of his life in ca. 1917 did he change his name to Zhongzheng 中正. In that way he designated a relation with Sun Yat-sen (through the similarity of his name to the latter's most common Chinese name Zhongshan) and positioned himself as his legitimate heir (by the meaning of name – “central uprightness”). That is why this name was never accepted in communist China.²²⁰

Even communist leaders had their own stories with names. Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) normally used his given name, although he also had a courtesy name, Runzhi 潤之, in the beginning. Apparently, when he left Yan'an in 1947 in order to defeat the army of Jiang Jieshi and to become the sole ruler of China, he used Li Desheng 李德勝 as his name. It was supposed to be a good omen, because the pronunciation was almost identical to *li desheng* 離得勝 (leave and win).²²¹

The communist reformer Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997) took this name only in 1927 when he entered the Communist Party of China. His original given name was Xiansheng 先聖. Later, his teacher thought it was inopportune, as only Confucius could be called *sheng* (holy) and so gave him the name Xixian 希賢 (of rare virtue), which he used until 1927.²²²

Often titles were used instead of names, when addressing or referring to leaders of 20th century China. Jiang Jieshi was called Lord Chiang (Jiang *gong* 蔣公), Mao Zedong – Chairman Mao (Mao *zhuxi* 毛主席), Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898–1976, Premier of the People's Republic of China) – Premier Zhou (Zhou *zongli* 周總理). The personal names of leaders could not be spoken. Such violation would be considered not only as a discourtesy and offence, but perhaps also as non-acceptance of their power as ruler.

²¹⁹ Su Man 2000, p. 38.

²²⁰ Wang Shunqi 2003, p. 56; Cun You 2010, p. 41.

²²¹ Wang Shuren 2010, pp. 48–50.

²²² Xiang Rong 2007, p. 63. About the practice of avoidance by naming in the Communist time see Zhang Xiao 2006, pp. 92–93.

Another phenomenon that needs special discussion here is the practice of “raising the head” (*taitou* 抬頭) in the 20th century, as an expression of reverence to one’s name. The name of a person was shifted to the head of the next line (“level raising” *pingtai* 平抬), or at least one character space (or more) was left before the name (“shift raising” *nuotai* 挪抬). The practice existed probably since the Qin dynasty,²²³ and was always the expression of special reverence for the person and his name, and also a sign of power. Thus it is strongly related to the custom of name tabooing. The second form of *nuotai* was still often used in the 20th century, especially in Taiwan, and only in the last years lost its popularity.²²⁴ According to this custom, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek after their deaths were addressed as “Father of the Nation (space) Mr. Sun Yat-sen” (*guofu Sun Zhongshan xiansheng* 國父 孫中山先生) and “Former Reverent President (space) Lord Chiang” (*xian zongtong Jiang gong* 先總統 蔣公).²²⁵ It is also interesting that a Christian (Baptist) translation of Bible used this method and put empty characters everywhere in the front of the character *shen* 神 (God).²²⁶ But here the cause was the need for formatting the *Shangdi* version of Bible (with two characters for God) into the *Shen* version (with one character).²²⁷

7.4.2. Private Taboo

In spite of the impact of “Western customs,” Chinese people cultivate to this day a courteous and discreet attitude to names, especially to names of former generations. This practice is related to the old custom of tabooing names. Even today it is still unusual to directly address parents or older people by their given name (as often heard in America and Europe). Especially in villages, but also in cities, titles such as “mother,” “father,” “elder brother,” etc. are used as applicable within the family. In order to speak about somebody, a description is used, as for example “father of (name of child)” – out of respect for one’s own husband. The original name is normally acceptable only between people of the same

²²³ Lei Rongguang 2006, pp. 53-54.

²²⁴ Personal conversation with Jiang Ryh-Shin and Pan Feng-Chuan, Sankt Augustin, 9.10.2009.

²²⁵ For example, on the entrance gate of his Mausoleum in Qihu.

²²⁶ Cf. *Xinjiuyue quanshu* 1965 (passim).

²²⁷ The *nuotai* practice can be seen in many Chinese Christian sources. On the Nestorian stele, a two-character space is left before the temple names of Tang emperors, and in front of the expression “Lord” (*zhu* 主) “Our Triune (God)” (*wo sanyi* 我三一). Similarly, in works of Jesuits and Franciscans of the 17th cent., an empty space is left in front of the name of Jesus, and the words “Lord,” “God,” etc. Cf. the work *Shengxi guiyi* 聖洗規儀 of Mu Diwo 穆迪我 (Jacques Motel SJ, 1619-1692) and the work *Jinjiao lingxi jielu* 進教領洗捷錄 of Bian Fangshi 卞芳世 (Francisco Peris de la Concepción OFM, d. 1701) with the *nuotai* practice on almost every page. See the reproduction in Standaert 2009, Vol. 18, pp. 33-136.

generation, if they are relatives or good friends. Names of ancestors cannot be used as long as there is still somebody alive from the family who remembers the names. But they are acceptable, for example, in official registries, etc.²²⁸ There is also no longer any problem in using characters from names of the older generation in everyday life and in writing.

Names of ancestors are sometimes unfamiliar to Chinese people. Especially names of female ancestors are affected so that it is possible for one to not know, for example, the name of one's own grandmother.²²⁹ As these names are not used normally, people learn it only incidentally, for example when they have to write down an address. Some Chinese families still have their genealogy book (*jiapu* 家譜), but many others have lost it and can rely only on their memory.

Knowledge about the names of older generations is especially important for the naming of a new child. To this day, it is not possible for Chinese to take names of the older generation for the names of their children, contrary to what is commonly seen, for instance, in Europe. Names of parents, grandparents and their brothers and sisters, and also homonyms of them, are taboo.²³⁰ The process of naming is complex, as the choice of an appropriate name is still considered to be very important nowadays.²³¹ Numerous popular websites can be found offering help in choosing a name.²³² One important piece of information required here is the “taboos of the family” (*jiazu minghui* 家族名諱) explained as “taboos (*jihui*) of family and prohibited characters of former generations.”²³³ Grandparents of a newborn child are naturally involved in the naming process, and give information about the taboo names of the family.

Besides, there are cases known today in which names have to be changed because of the (taboo) name of another person in the family. The situation of similar names is normally prevented within one's own family, but marriage into another family can cause unexpected problems. To this day, a daughter-in-law has to change her name if it is similar to the name of her mother-in-law in traditional families in Taiwan.²³⁴ In mainland China (Xianxian County), newly-married people cannot have names analogous to relatives of their spouse. Such names are revised and cannot be used any longer, at least within the new family. The

²²⁸ Personal conversation with Joseph Xue, Sankt Augustin, 20.11.2010.

²²⁹ Personal conversation with Johanna Zhang, Sankt Augustin, 19.3.2010.

²³⁰ Personal conversation with Joseph Gao, Sankt Augustin, 20.11.2010.

²³¹ A top specialist takes 10000 RMB (1000 €) for devising a new name. Cf. www.babynome.cn/apply (access 21.11.2010).

²³² Cf., for example, www.name104.com; www.chinammw.com; www.nameworkshop.cn; www.babynome.cn.

²³³ Cf. www.babynome.cn/apply (access 21.11.2010).

²³⁴ Personal conversation with Jiang Ryh-Shin and Pan Feng-Chuan, Sankt Augustin, 9.10.2009.

young woman interviewed by me explained that she does not know the former name of her aunt (the sister of her father). The aunt changed her name after marriage, because of the name of one of her husband's relatives, and the old name was not used any more. On the other hand, the mother of the woman uses two names until now: one in her original family and the new one in the present family.²³⁵

Furthermore, special reverence is expected for names of deceased people. In fact, it is usual today to write the full name on the tomb tablet or memorial tablet (also called spirit tablet, *paiwei* 牌位), but it is not appropriate to speak it. It can be often seen that the characters *gong* 公 (Lord) or *hui* 諱 (taboo) are put between the family name and the given name on the tablet.²³⁶ There are numerous questions about “how to write a memorial tablet” on bulletin boards on the Internet.²³⁷ Both forms mentioned above are given very often as an adequate design, e.g. “Spirit tablet of Revered Ancestor (family name) Lord *taboo name* (given name)” (*xianyan* [*xing*] *gonghui* [*ming*] *laodaren zhi lingwei* 先嚴 [姓] 公諱 [名] 老大人之靈位).²³⁸ During the mourning ceremony (memorial meeting, *zhuidaohui* 追悼會) in Handan County, the name of the deceased person is written with white characters on a black cloth. After the given name in the text, an empty space is left out of reverence for the dead person, for example “Mr. (space) (family and given name)” (姓名 [space] 先生).²³⁹

The name has preserved until today its special importance in Chinese society, especially in traditional rural regions. Children still sometimes receive a second name (nickname – *waihao* 外號 or *chuohao* 綽號), as a means of protection from “danger” or ghosts. In contrast, the original given name should be used even recently in popular belief in Xianxian County if a child is ill and crying. In that case, a slip of paper with a text should be hung out at the crossroads. Following this text with a spell should expel ghosts and heal the child:

“(Real name of the child)

Gods, Kings of Heaven and Earth / In my house there is a child crying in the night

You gentlemen passing by, please, read it out three times

And the child will be able to sleep until morning”

²³⁵ Personal conversation with Anna Zhang, Sankt Augustin, 8.3.2010.

²³⁶ For example, in Zhejiang. Talking to Joseph Xue, Sankt Augustin, 20.11.2010.

²³⁷ Cf. for example: tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=716652709; www.wanrm.com/article/bf/3221.html; zhidao.baidu.com/question/188772157.html?push=ql (all access 21.11.2010).

²³⁸ Cf. wenwen.soso.com/z/q179684221.htm (access 21.11.2010).

²³⁹ Personal conversation with Josef Gao, Sankt Augustin, 20.11.2010.

(*ming* 名)

tianhuanghuang dihuanghuang 天皇皇地皇皇

wojia you ge ye kulang 我家有个夜哭郎

xinglude junzi nian sanbian 行路的君子念三遍

yijiao shuidao datianliang 一覺睡到大天亮²⁴⁰

To directly use the names of parents of an antagonist in a quarrel between children is regarded as a big offense²⁴¹ (we can recall the tabooing of hatred in the old times, see 5.4.6). And finally, even today, new names are received, if someone's life is fundamentally changed. Some Catholic sisters in Hebei province have a special ritual in which they receive a new Chinese religious name (*huiming* 會名),²⁴² different from their Christian name (a patron saint). After a prayer, they read a passage of the Bible (or a litany) and choose first one character identical for the whole group of sisters (note the similarity to the *paihang* system). After that, a second individual character is chosen from the Bible. In the perception of the sisters, a kind of new life comes with this new name, which is always used from then on as the proper one.²⁴³

In this chapter, we have looked at taboo customs in the last centuries. In conclusion, we can observe that also in the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties various kinds of name tabooing were still practiced. Furthermore, they were important for both emperors and commoners.

When the reader compares the taboo practice in the Yuan or Ming periods with the custom in the Tang and Song times, the first two seem to exert a rather casual monitoring of taboos. There are not so many equivalents of one taboo character as in the Song, and far fewer taboo cases. In fact, it seems that there were not always strict rules on how to avoid taboos. However, the practice of tabooing changed later and became even stronger. Probably no other periods saw so many executions because of violation of taboo as the Qing period.

The tabooing of names was also connected with the practice of censorship and even “literary inquisition.” The official tabooing of the emperor's name stressed mainly the legitimacy of his power. Starting from the Yuan dynasty, plenty of prohibited inauspicious

²⁴⁰ According to a conversation with Anna Zhang, Sankt Augustin, 8.3.2010.

²⁴¹ Talking to Anna Zhang, Sankt Augustin, 8.3.2010.

²⁴² The choice of a new religious name is an old Christian monastic custom.

²⁴³ Cf. E-mail from Elisabeth Guo 11.11.2010; E-mail from Teresa Li and Maria Guan 10.11.2010.

words and words of power also became tabooed. This custom was already prevailing as a common practice, but only in the last three dynasties in Chinese history was it elevated to official taboo (*hui* 諱) and extensively incorporated into literary works.

After the fall of the Qing dynasty, the tabooing of the emperor's name was officially ended (with the exception of Yuan Shikai). Other kinds of name tabooing have been continued, as shown by the examples of tabooing the names of state leaders throughout the last century. Furthermore, the tabooing of relatives' names (increasingly out of courtesy or respect) is present until today. Similarly, the tabooing of inauspicious words in names can be found nowadays, too.

After chronological chapters presenting various cases, situations and customs in the whole history of China, we shall have a look at the impact and consequences of tabooing of names in the everyday lives of Chinese people.