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

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CHAPTER TWO: TABOO AND NAME

The concept of the tabooing of name involves two terms: taboo and name. In order to have a good grasp of name tabooing in China, one needs to understand the context of both these ideas and their perception in China. This will be described in two steps. In the first one, the problem of taboo in the world and especially in China will be analyzed, dealing also with related questions. In the second step, the focus will be on the question of naming in China, its meaning and importance in Chinese culture, which is essential to this study.

2.1. Taboo

2.1.1. Concept

What is a taboo? The term is very complex and we all have our own understanding of this idea. Various definitions of taboo present various aspects of this phenomenon.[1] One of them is proposed by Roy Wagner in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, as follows:

> a social prohibition or restriction sanctioned by suprasocietal (innate) means or a socially sanctioned injunction alleged to have the force of such a prohibition … at the intersection of human affairs and the forces of the larger universe.[2]

According to this concept, taboo means the temporary or continuous avoidance of contact with a designated person, thing or place, avoiding of some words and names. The "avoided" person or thing is "impure," i.e., dangerous, because of its "power" which can harm. In some societies (as, e.g., in Polynesia) this power of impure and of "sacred" persons (things) is not clearly distinguished. Also the distinction between the power of a ruler and that of a priest or deity is not present.[3] Ethnologists sometimes describe this power – cosmic principle or energy, connected with auspiciousness – with the Polynesian word *mana*.[4] *Mana* power is also the actual source of taboo prohibition.[5] For believers, this power is present everywhere and in every living being (or even in other entities in nature as

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1 Cf. definitions of taboo in Wagner 1987, pp. 233-236; Kreinath 2005, pp. 3-4; Marschall 1998, pp. 877-879; Schmidt 2001, pp. 160-162.

2 Wagner 1987, p. 233.

3 Marschall 1998, p. 877.

4 In Chinese *mana* power (*manna* 曼納) is usually translated as "the power of soul," *lingli* 靈力. In some aspects it can be perhaps compared with Chinese concepts of *qi* 氣 (as energy) or *de* 德 (as ethical power), and with the Christian concept of *charisma* (cf. Wagner 1987, p. 234; *Zongjiao cidian* 1981, p. 954).

5 Therefore it is important not to overstress the description of taboo as "prohibition." In fact, rules of prohibition are important but secondary in taboo practice. The most important is the veneration of "sacral" power.

for example stones), but it can have a different intensity. After contact with a prohibited person or word, common people are overpowered with *mana*. Therefore they have to avoid it or, if contacted, to purify themselves.

Taboo is a worldwide phenomenon, appearing in many aspects of life and has been examined by different disciplines, e.g., history of religion, historiography, linguistics and psychoanalysis, which all give their own interpretations. The meaning of taboo as used in these disciplines is very comprehensive and complex. Different phenomena of various cultures have been described as taboo. This complexity and continuous erosion of its meaning has sometimes caused the term "taboo" to be considered too generic, and thus some academics prefer not to use it.[6] Certainly there is no single, universal concept or system of taboo. Scholars prefer to use this term for specific phenomena of one culture, and some of them replace the word "taboo" with terms from the respective culture that they study.[7] This dissertation adheres to the concept of taboo because of its familiarity for the reader (compared to the Chinese term *bihui*), but it is also important to remember its Chinese peculiarities. It can help us see similarities and differences between Chinese taboo customs (*bihui*, *jinji* etc.) and other taboo phenomena in the world.

2.1.2. History of the Term "Taboo"

The term "taboo" has had a long history before it became an important key concept, especially in the terminology of religious studies and cultural anthropology. The word "taboo" originated in the Tongan (Polynesian) language and denoted an important element of the religious and social structure there. It was first quoted in 1784 by James Cook during his journey through the South Pacific. He explained "taboo" as a "religious interdiction,"[8] affecting people, things and activities. The missionaries and ethnologists of the 19th century noticed that taboo is an unusual status given to people and things with clearly defined rules, violation of which is punished.[9] Research on taboo was intensified at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In his famous book *The Golden Bough,* the social anthropologist James George Frazer (1854–1941) described taboo as a "negative magic" preceding religion, and associated it with "primitive" societies.[10] French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)

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6 Cf. Schmidt 2001, p. 161.
7 Schmidt 2001, pp. 160-161; Emmrich 1992, p. 2.
8 Cook – King 1784, p. 10.
9 Marschall 1998, p. 877.
10 Frazer 2002, p. 19: Taboo is "a negative application of practical magic."

described taboo as "le culte négatif" and identified it as a system of religious prohibitions distinguishing *sacrum* and *profanum*.[11] The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) characterized taboo as a primal conflict of ambivalent feelings between forbidden behaviors and the veneration.[12] In the second half of the 20th century new research on taboo was conducted by Mary Douglas, who described "taboo" as a relational term depending on the specific culture, with different systems of symbols, and as a necessary element of social structure.[13] At the turn of the 20th century, yet another aspect of taboo was disclosed by Michael Lambek: Taboos are "acts which performatively establish and maintain moral states of social commitment and individual conscience."[14] The observance of taboo is significant in the constitution of personhood and society. It instills and maintains social values. There are other scholars, such as F.R. Lehmann, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Franz Baermann Steiner, H. Webster, Marvin Harris or Chris Knight, who deal with the problem, and a fair number of works can be found that contemplate taboo and its different aspects.[15]

In particular, the studies by of Douglas and Lambek about the nature of taboo can help us to understand better the custom of tabooing in China. Taboo is not just a command or prohibition. Taboo is much more an experience and form of expression for individuals. It is a fundamental element of human relations and an essential part of culture. It is the way to implement and perpetuate social values. As the following chapters will show, such was also the case for name tabooing in China.

2.1.3. The Context of Taboo and Related Phenomena

Taboo is related especially to magic,[16] i.e., with "ritual actions and conduct used by people in order to affect affairs and events, which are normally outside the domain of their influence."[17] If taboo can be called a "passive" avoidance, then magic is an active approach.

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[11] Durkheim 1912, p. 427.

[12] Freud mentioned especially the veneration for parents, as well incest and patricide as two universal taboo behaviors. See Freud 1913, p. 86. Cf. also other taboo scholars of that period, as W. Robertson Smith ("purity proscriptions of Hebrew and Arab are relicts of former taboo"), cf. Marschall 1998, p. 877.

[13] Douglas 1966, pp. 58-72; Cf. also the school of functionalism ("ritual of taboo is important for keeping up the social order"), e.g. Radcliffe–Brown 1965, pp. 133-152; F.R. Lehmann ("taboo belongs as prohibitive in almost every culture connected with religion or power"), according to Marschall 1998, p. 878.

[14] Lambek 2001, p. 15430. Cf. also Lambek 1992, pp. 245-266.

[15] Cf., e.g., Lehmann 1930; Lévi-Strauss 1962; Steiner 2008, pp. 297-438; Webster 1942; Harris 1983; Knight 1991.

[16] The Chinese equivalent of what is "magic" is disputable. The traditional translation as *wushu* 巫術 or *fashu* 法術 is controversial, because of the history of these two concepts. Cf. *Cihai* 1999, pp. 415 and 1781; *Zongjiao cidian* 1981, p. 486.

[17] Waldenfels 1997, pp. 225-226.

In that sense, they often go together: magical words should be avoided outside the ritual context, and active use of a tabooed word causes a perceived change of reality.[18]

In connection with taboo, it is relevant to stress the importance of magical words and signs in magical practice.[19] Signs, characters or scripture were used as a talisman (or in other words: amulet, charm, fetish) – as a so-called "script amulet" or "symbol amulet."[20] People believed that talismans could be attributed a magical force and could cause positive occurrences or eliminate negative events. Thus, a talisman could have prophylactic, apotropaic and therapeutic functions. From the modern Western point of view, it was a "carrier of power (...) in the tension between sorcery and medicine."[21]

Also portents (omens) are relevant in the context of taboo.[22] They are "signs that, if understood or interpreted correctly, can reveal personal destinies and the will of the gods."[23] As is known, omens "occupy a central position in traditional Chinese thought."[24] Words, characters and phrases heard by chance can foretell the future and destiny of people. Names are important as omens in a special way because of their connection to the individual. They have a "real" power and therefore they should be chosen carefully.

2.1.4. Limitations of the Term

Admittedly, the reader should be aware of a few biases that can interfere in dealing with the tabooing of name in China. First of all, one must take care to avoid differentiating between taboo phenomena in primitive and developed traditions. Such value judgments and evolutionism have been rejected by ethnology and the study of religion at least since the research of Bronislaw Malinowski. Concepts such as taboo or magic can be found in various forms in many different cultures, not excluding the so-called "high cultures." Although a "traditional" evolutionistic approach can still be seen among scholars and in society, taboo should be described neutrally, without prejudice.[25]

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[18] The term "magic" is sometimes contested by historians as coming from religious studies. The expanded word "ritual" is proposed in place of "magic." The latter one shall be used in this work, as it is more concrete and highlights the belief in intervention of "external" (or "strange," as it is said in China) powers.

[19] About the magic of script in China (in Daoism) see Drexler 1994.

[20] The terms "talisman" and "amulet" are actually synonyms. Some scholars try to distinguish between an active influence (talisman) and a passive impact (amulet) for events.

[21] Sefrin 2001, pp. 162-165.

[22] About the importance of omens in China see Lippiello 2001.

[23] Bloch 1987, p. 454.

[24] Erik Zürcher, "Foreword" in: Lippiello 2001, p. 11.

[25] For further remarks on the anthropological discourse on magic, religion and evolutionism see: Tambiah 1990; Malinowski 1954.

On the other hand, it should be stressed that all "Western" terms and concepts we use for the reader's convenience are to be regarded carefully. In particular, religious concepts such as "religion," "gods," "sacrum" etc. can be easily misunderstood. There is no need here to discuss the problem of religion in China, but it should be pointed out that Chinese religious traditions do not have a concept of "supernaturality." Everybody and everything, including ghosts and gods, is part of the natural order of things. Everything is interconnected in the cosmic power of nature.[26] Therefore, concepts such as taboo or magic etc. should also be interpreted without reference to transcendence.

2.1.5. Taboo in China

In China there is a concept with a very similar meaning to "taboo," called *jinji* 禁忌 (mentioned already in the Introduction, see 1.2). *Jinji* means "men or things, which are prohibited to contact, and other prohibited terms, words and actions."[27] There exist numerous popular *jinji* in China, related to different situations in life. A child, for instance, should by no means sit down on a dustpan, otherwise it will become defiant;[28] one should never place one's chopsticks straight up in a bowl of rice, because it is a mourning custom. Examples vary from taboos on parts of body (men must not touch a woman's arm),[29] through taboos on a rainbow (it is prohibited to point at it with a finger)[30] up to taboos of sacrifices and ghosts.[31]

Is *jinji* identical with taboo? Of course, the term *jinji* has its own long history of evolution, and its historical meanings are sometimes different from the term "taboo" in Polynesia. Some Chinese scholars of religious studies note for example that *jinji* includes both the connection to spiritual power (identified with Polynesian *mana*) and to impurity, which was less important in Polynesia.[32] Moreover, the distinction of partial terms *jin* and *ji* for prohibitions from outside and inside was made. In fact such distinctions have only historical importance. Today, most Chinese scholars, especially in ethnology, use the terms *jinji* and "taboo" as synonyms to describe phenomena both in China and elsewhere.

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[26] The ontological position of Chinese religious tradition is monism. For more about religion in Chinese society see Yang 1961; Eichhorn 1973; Clart 2009; Poceski 2009; Campany 2003, pp. 287–319.
[27] *Cihai* 1999, p. 849.
[28] Cf. Ren Cheng 2004a, p. 94.
[29] Ren Cheng 2004, p. 69.
[30] Ren Cheng 2004, p. 516.
[31] For more examples of taboo in China see Ren Cheng 2004; Wan Jianzhong 2001.
[32] Cf. *Zongjiao cidian* 1981, p. 1009.

The research on taboo in China has a long tradition, dating back to at least J.J.M. de Groot in the West, and started in a modern sense in China by Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) after the May Fourth Movement (1919).[33] After a long break taboo studies were taken up again at the end of the 20th century. Research has revealed an enormous wealth of taboos, with many kinds in different social groups and in various periods of China's history.

2.1.6. Kinds and Functions of Taboo

It is not possible to describe precisely all kinds of taboo in a few words. While such an excursus shall not be attempted here, it is necessary to distinguish different forms of taboo in order to make the topic more concrete. According to social anthropological research, taboo is situated "at the intersection" of man and universe.[34] Because of that it can affect almost every aspect of personal, social and religious life.

Many taboos determine the relation of a human being to his own life. Human body, clothes, jewellery, food,[35] dwelling, toilet and recreation, religious practices – they all have their taboos, in China as well. There were, for example, taboos for ear wax in China. It could not be thrown carelessly to ground. The belief was that if somebody stepped on it incidentally, it would hurt the person to whom it belongs. Even worse, if the ear wax was swallowed, the consequence would be deafness. Therefore such a secretion was also commonly called "deafness" *erlong* 耳聾.[36]

Other taboos were connected with a person's social relations in the family and society. All the *rites du passage* were involved here, as for example birth, marriage, funeral and mourning. Also relations between genders and generations, different professions, politics etc. had their own taboos. Relations with nature, animals, plants and objects, including ghosts and gods were all tabooed. For example, in silkworm husbandry, the silkworms were considered the most tender, "sacred" and sensitive creatures. It was believed that they could tolerate and eat only mulberry leaves cut by scissors after sunrise. Moreover, no pregnant woman or elderly man should enter the shed where silkworms were reared. It would harm the silkworms, just as it would if somebody slept in that place.[37]

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33 Cf. Cai Yuanpei 1976.
34 Wagner 1987, p. 233.
35 For example, about the beef taboo see Goossaert 2005 and Goossaert 2005a.
36 Ren Cheng 2004, p. 67.
37 Cf. Ren Cheng 2004, pp. 372-373.

Among various kinds of taboo, speech taboo played a particular role. As language is very important in human interpersonal communication, every kind of taboo had its particular form of linguistic expression called language taboos. Many words and characters were avoided, if they were regarded as inauspicious, especially in case of words related to sexuality and toilet or characters that were homonyms (homophones) with another one that had a bad meaning. Also today, one may wonder why the Chinese do not like the number "four" (*si* 四), if one does not know that its pronunciation is almost identical (though with different tone) with "death" (*si* 死). Similarly, the Chinese avoid speaking about "cutting of pear" (*fenli* 分梨), as it is pronounced just like "separation" (*fenli* 分離). Different articulation in various dialects is an additional reason for taboo customs.

Before focusing on language taboos, something should be said about functions of taboo. In various social and historical contexts taboo was perceived or used in different roles. In many cases, taboo was an expression of veneration and fear of "strange" powers like nature, gods or ghosts. Often it was also used for the demonstration of political power and the legitimization of authority. Perhaps the most important function of taboo was to be a guarantee of protection: protection of rulers and shamans, protection of respected persons, the elderly, the weak, women and children. If they were considered "taboo persons," they were safe. This protection was especially important in times of passage (adolescence, initiation, marriage etc.), therefore such rites contain many taboos.

Another function of taboo was preventive, for example to prevent the consumption of toxic food or to avoid maladies that could be transmitted via contact with the deceased. Consolation and survival in times of crisis, control and limitation of desires, accumulation and annexation of knowledge (morality), and consolidation of society are also listed by scholars as functions of taboo.[38]

2.1.7. Linguistic Taboo, *Bihui*, and Tabooing of names

Linguistic taboo is, as already mentioned, a kind of taboo known in almost every culture. Language, both spoken and written, is the most important medium of communication between human beings. People perceive a connection between a word and the object it describes, as well as a causal relation between a verbal order and its execution. Thus a word

[38] Schmidt 2001, p. 162; Kreinath 2005, p. 4.

can have a "performative" power.[39] That is why taboo words were also an important part of the taboo system in China.

It seems that the first form of tabooing was "to not speak out." The needed information was conveyed or "performed" with a gesture of the hands, or the movement of the head or one's eyes. This was sometimes not enough and other words would have to be used in place of the taboo word. This kind of linguistic taboo is called *bihui* in Chinese.[40] The custom of *bihui* included many kinds of tabooing, like taboo of inauspicious words, taboo of words connected to sexuality or toilet, taboo of vulgarism, taboo of numbers, age, etc.[41] They all are common in other cultures, too. However, one kind of *bihui* led to particularly elaborate practices in China, much more than in other cultures, which was the tabooing of name, and especially the tabooing of the name of the ruler. This custom has had a tremendous impact on Chinese culture, history and politics.

No special term has been proposed for tabooing of name, and research on it is simply called "the study of avoidances" (*bihuixue*).[42] But this term is in fact misleading, because of the various dimensions it includes, such as the avoidance of names, inauspicious words, etc. Therefore, although the research field is called the tabooing of name, scholars often include tabooing of other words as a part of it. This fact makes the already imprecise distinction between *jinji* and *bihui* still more unclear.

But is the differentiation actually needed? Some Chinese scholars think that such a distinction is necessary – they describe, therefore, *bihui* as a uniquely Chinese phenomenon and *jinji* as the much more common taboo custom. *Jinji* is designated as a "primitive taboo" and *bihui* as a cultivated "Chinese taboo." They point out that *jinji* appears earlier than script, and that Chinese taboo is present in written and spoken forms. *Jinji* taboo stopped on the level of custom, and *bihui* starts on the level of system and law. "Primitive taboo" is strongly connected with "primitive religion," fear of ghosts and shamans, and the Chinese taboo with "humanistic" Confucian culture. *Jinji* concern the relationships between man and deity, and *bihui* – between men. "Primitive taboo" affects one's own name and names of strangers as well, and does not distinguish between classes. The change of a name is made in order to prevent a calamity in an important situation. It has a kind of flexibility, as there

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[39] See the analysis of performative utterances made by the British philosopher of language Austin 1979, pp. 233-252.

[40] Ren Cheng 2004, p. 321.

[41] Further examples of taboo of this kind see Ren Cheng 2004, pp. 321-343.

[42] The term *minghui* 名諱 and *minghuixue* 名諱學 would be perhaps more suitable.

is no difference of value between the old and the new name. In contrast, the "Chinese taboo" (*bihui*) is connected with the strata of society: the lower class observes the taboo of the superior. The effect of *jinji* is psychological, and of *bihui* physical; the executor of punishment of "primitive taboos" is the man violating taboo himself, while in the case of Chinese taboos punishment comes from the man whose name was taboo.[43] This should be enough to clarify some common Chinese views.

In fact, however, the author of this dissertation is not persuaded by this argumentation. There is no substantial difference between *jinji* and *bihui*, since the latter is simply one manifestation of the first. The Chinese taboo custom (*bihui*) is certainly unique in the world, because of its culture, history, various dimensions, and the specificity of the Chinese language. But it is still a special case of taboo (*jinji*) and should be understood as a part of it. Notwithstanding its special aspects, customs partially similar to *bihui* can be seen outside China as well. We also do not consider taboos of popular culture (*jinji*) as "primitive" and taboos prescribed and legitimated by state authority as a "modern" custom. Consequently, it can not be argued that "*jinji* is based on a primitive thought … and *bihui* is based on modern thought."[44] Actually they are both inseparable.

2.2. Name

The significance of names for people of all periods and cultures is known. In the perception of Chinese people, too, the name was very important and affected the whole life of a man.[45] The significance of names in China seems to be connected with the tabooing of name.

2.2.1. Characteristics of Chinese Names

There are many words for the concept of name in China, though usually with important nuances in their connotations and conventions of usage. The most important of them is *ming* 名. The character does not only denote the personal name of a man, but also the real name of all things and terms (concepts), as there is no difference in Chinese between the name and the term.[46] But unlike the "inanimate" sphere of nature, which has only a *ming*, a human being usually possessed many names in China.

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[43] Fan Zhixin 2006, pp. 15-18; Wang Xinhua 2005, pp.66-69; Wang Xinhua 2007, pp. 1-2.

[44] Wang Xinhua 2005, p.66.

[45] Two unique monographs about names in the Chinese culture are Wolfgang Bauer's *Der chinesische Personenname* (Wiesbaden 1959) and Viviane Alleton's *Les Chinois et la passion des noms* (Paris 1993). Remarks on names in China can be found in Wilkinson 2000, pp. 96-105; Emmrich 1992, pp. 14-21.

[46] Bauer 1959, p. 34.

The name given to infants by parents after the birth was the "milk name," *xiaoming* 小名 (also *ruming* 乳名, *xiaozi* 小字) and is a familiar term normally used only in the family. Later, traditionally three months after birth, a child received from his father a "personal name," *ming*,[47] which became his real name and the most important of all names. It was also called *daming* 大名 (or *xueming* 學名). After a young man or woman came of age (boys during the capping ceremony *guanli* 冠禮, at age of 20 (Chinese style years), girls in the hair-pinning ceremony *jili* 笄禮, at 15) they would get a "courtesy name," *zi* 字 (also called *biaozi* 表字).[48] It was normally used outside the family. There were also many other alternative names chosen by the man himself or by other people for him. Especially the literati had "literary names," *hao* 號 or *biehao* 別號 (one to four characters), "room names," *shiming* 室名 or "studio names," *zhaiming* 齋名 (from the Tang period onwards). Other people could have nicknames and sobriquets (*chuohao* 綽號, *hunhao* 渾號, *hunming* 渾名, *waiming* 外名, *waihao* 外號), given usually by others. Officials had official names (*guanming* 官名), monks, nuns and priests – religious names (*faming* 法名, *fahao* 法號 – Buddhist,[49] *daohao* 道號 – Daoist, or *huiming* 會名 – Christian). The ancestral hall names (*tangming* 堂名) were used by kin groups.[50] Furthermore, the posthumous honorary name *shihao* 諡號 was bestowed by the court from the Zhou to the Qing dynasties [51] or by the family and clan after death and mourning,[52] and the personal name *ming* was from that time considered "taboo" (*hui* 諱). Rulers had more names, although they differed in various dynasties. The "temple name" *miaohao* 廟號 was used after the death of the ruler in the ancestral temple and written on the ancestral tablets.[53] The "era name," *nianhao* 年號 was

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47 Wilkinson 2000, p. 98.

48 About the capping ceremony see Dai Chonghai 2006.

49 Note that lay Buddhist might also adopt religious names (*faming*). See ter Haar 1992, p. 39, Fn. 57 and p. 79, Fn. 45.

50 Wilkinson 2000, p. 103.

51 Posthumous names started perhaps in the Shang time (Falkenhausen 2006, p. 56). The King Xiao of Zhou (about 891–886 BC) is declared as the first having a posthumous name. The practice was stopped in the Qin dynasty as being disrespectful. Since the Han period posthumous names were renewed and were sometimes very long. A distinctive feature is the last character, usually being *wang* 王 or *di* 帝 (*Zhongguo lishi da cidian* 2000, Vol. 2, pp. 2987-2988; *Cihai* 1999, p. 1543; Wilkinson 2000, p. 103).

52 About special posthumous titles of officials in the Tang dynasty see Wu Liyu 2008, pp. 413-438.

53 Sporadically used from the Han period on, although there are possible temple names in the Shang-Yin time. It remained customary since the Tang period. A distinctive trait is the last character, usually *zu* 祖 (ancestor) or *zong* 宗 (progenitor) (*Zhongguo lishi da cidian* 2000, Vol. 2, p. 1921; *Cihai* 1999, p. 1172; Wilkinson 2000, p. 109).

chosen by an emperor as a motto, a regal title of the reign period.[54] Rulers might even be referred to by their era names, especially in the Ming and Qing periods, when a ruler only had one era name. Every emperor also had a "tomb name," *linghao* 陵號.

The most important of all names listed here is the real or personal name *ming*, "le nom par excellence".[55] It can have one or two characters, and both forms were practiced simultaneously in the history of China. An exception is the time after Emperor Wang Mang (AD 9–23) who prohibited bisyllabic personal names – an interdiction that was retained until about the third century AD. In the late Ming and Qing dynasty two-character names became standard, but since the 1950s (and especially since the 1970s), one syllable personal names have become more and more common.[56] The most important reason for bisyllabic given names was the practice of marking seniority among brothers or sisters and for marking members of the same generation, the so-called system of *paihang* 排行 (order of rank). In this system, one character of a given name indicated the rank in the family, e.g., *bo* 伯 or *meng* 孟, *zhong* 仲, *shu* 叔, and *ji* 季 – for the eldest, second, third and youngest brother – it was the *paihang* of age. One character in names of brothers and cousins of the same generation (alternatively a part of it in one-character-names) could be fixed. It was the *paihang* of generation (also called *beihang* 輩行).[57] When this social practice was temporarily discredited after 1949, bisyllabic given names also became less common in mainland China. Today, they have returned again to common use, also to avoid a duplication of names.

2.2.2. The Perception of Name

Names, especially personal names, played a very important role in Chinese and many other ancient cultures. A name was a "phonetic image of a man,"[58] and because of that, there was an inseparable connection between them. If something had no name, it did not exist. This phenomenon was already described by the famous anthropologist James George Frazer as follows:

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[54] The custom was known since the Han period. Several names were possible for one emperor. The era name was used as a traditional system of dating (*Zhongguo lishi da cidian* 2000, Vol. 1, p. 1045; Wilkinson 2000, pp. 181-182). Also "the Republic of China" is considered like an era name.

[55] Alleton 1993, p. 7.

[56] Wilkinson 2000, p. 100.

[57] A good description of two *paihang* systems (both often mixed in the literature) can be found in Bauer 1959, pp. 147-222.

[58] Cf. Bauer 1959, p. 1.

> … the link between a name and the person or thing denominated by it is not a mere arbitrary and ideal association, but a real and substantial bond which unites the two in such a way that magic may be wrought on a man just as easily through his name as through his hair, his nails, or any other material part of his person.[59]

Such a perception of name was also particularly apparent in the case of China. There is "no other nation in the world having more estimation for name than the Chinese. They perceive until today a strong interconnection (literally: identity) between the name of a human being and his destiny."[60] Thus, the name in China was perceived as the person himself, and as a destiny affecting the whole human life, as his "soul."[61]

Every name, not only of human beings, but also of animals, plants, "natural phenomena," and of gods or ghosts, was the "soul" or "essence" of that entity. A good instance of the vital importance of names for the Chinese can be seen in the story included in the preface of Liu Xiu 劉秀[62] to the *Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhaijing* 山海經): "During the time of Emperor Xiaowu (Wu of Han) a strange bird was offered to him; it refused to eat anything. When Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154–93 BC) looked at it, he gave its name (*sic*) and [told] what it should be fed; and he was right."[63] The bird needed a name in order to eat and to live. "No name" means here that a creature can have no vital force.[64]

The name in China had a "sacral" character. It was understood as fate. "The name expressed the essence of man and foredoomed his destiny."[65] This connection can be seen already in the form of characters. As pointed out by Bauer, the two characters *ming* 名 (name) and *ming* 命 (fate, destiny) originally were one and the same word, graphically

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59 Frazer 2002, p. 244.

60 Bauer 1959, p. 33.

61 There was no concept of "soul" in Chinese thought as an absolute, spiritual being, as opposed to the body and matter (Granet 1985, p. 293). According to Granet (ibid., p. 301), at birth a human being receives "two groups of life power" *yin* and *yang*: blood (*xue*) etc. from the mother, and breath (*qi*) and name from the father.

62 The original name of Liu Xiu 劉秀 (50 BC – 23 AD) was Liu Xin 劉歆. He changed it because of taboo of Emperor Ai – Liu Xin 劉欣 (r. 6–1 BC). Cf. *Hanshu*, j. 36, p. 31a.

63 *Shan Hai Ching* 1985, p. 384.

64 For more about the significance of names of animals see Roel Sterckx 2002. Sterckx mentions, for example, that "the role of naming and the mastery of animal nomenclature were central elements in the early Chinese perception of the animal world" (p. 30), that "according to Confucius, knowledge about animals was to be acquired through the exegesis of their names in a literary text" (p. 29), and that "through the use of sacrificial names the status of the animal transformed from profane into sacred" (p. 30). Cf. also the naming of animals in the Bible. God formed out of the ground all the animals and brought them to the man. Whatever the man called each living creature that was its name. *Die Bibel* 2006, p. 6 (Gen 2, 19).

65 Kałużyńska 1990, p. 18.

represented by a mouth and a man kneeling in front of it.[66] The relation between both characters was mentioned also in the *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (*Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露)[67] of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BC): "(The wise men of old time) referred to expression (*ming* 鳴) of destiny (*ming* 命) as name *ming* 名" (鳴而命者謂名).[68] In the past and today, the connection *mingming* 命名 is used for "giving a name."[69]

This special relationship between a name and a human being in Chinese tradition was not disrupted after death. The name guaranteed the perpetuation of life. If no spirit tablet inscribed with the taboo name of the deceased is attached to the grave, "there is no continuing inhabitant of the grave in the sense of a distinct personality."[70] The name on the tablet should not be written unclearly – this means the soul is gone.[71] The spirit tablet and the name on it, being considered the man himself, receive the prayers and veneration of a person's family.

2.2.3. The Power of Name

If the name was so important for the life and destiny in China, knowledge about somebody's name was connected with power over him. It was perceived as having control, which could be used actively, causatively and effectively. If somebody knew and called the real name of other persons, animals, ghosts or gods, he could control and command them, and also injure them. Thus the use of name was not only nominal, but had a performative character, and could actively change reality. Therefore names were present already in early China, e.g., in the incantations, already before written amulets first appeared. There are many magic formulas in the history of China, including for example secret names of gods and ghosts.[72] People knowing the names of ghosts obtained power over nature. They could come into contact with ghosts, control and command them.[73] Therefore knowledge about names was kept secret.

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66 Bauer 1959, pp. 37-38, cf. also Karlgren 1964, p. 219.
67 For more about this work see Queen 1996; Loewe 1993, pp. 77-87.
68 Cf. *Chunqiu fanlu*, j. 10, p. 1b.
69 Cf. Schuessler 2007, p. 387: "*ming* 命 – to name, give a name (to a person)." We may associate also a similar idea in Europe, expressed in the Latin sentence: Nomen est omen.
70 Mathewson Denny 1987, p. 305.
71 De Groot 1910, p. 1127.
72 Cf. Drexler 1994, p. 12.
73 De Groot gives an example of one man knowing names of ghosts and using them to catch fish and tortoises (De Groot 1910, p. 1126).

The power of name can be seen in the naming practice of gods and ghosts in many cultures. In religions of ancient times, including those of China, gods were normally not called by their "real names" – they were referred by their attributes or without a name.[74] A certain contradiction can be seen in many religions between request and interdiction of using the name of a god.[75] For example in the Bible (Old Testament) God himself reveals confidentially his own name – Yahweh. But later we read about prohibition of the use or overuse of the name of God.[76] Similarly in China, we see that, for example, the pious repetition of the name of the Buddha Amitabha[77] in the Pure Land sect of Buddhism is believed to be a "real way" to reach him. It is because "the existence of god is proven, if (his name) is called."[78]

2.2.4. Protection of Names

Knowledge of names was a great power in China and was used to control the "supernatural" world. However, on the other hand, it was dangerous if a person's own name was detected by ghosts. Knowing the real name of a human being, ghosts could injure and even kill them. Therefore different methods were developed to protect the "real name" (*ming*) of people. One should protect one's own name, conceal it, or change it into a false, frightening one.[79] Already children – weak and hence very vulnerable to attacks by ghosts – should have a "pseudonym" – an inferior, substandard name, which was not the "real" one and would misguide an enemy.[80] The relationship between "real" names (*ming*) and "not real" pseudonyms (*hao*) can be seen for example in a story from the 19th century in Qujiang county:

> People ask the local Daoist priest to choose a pseudonym for their child and write it on a sheet of paper (…). The sheet was posted on the gate of the local temple. The parents then returned shouting the pseudonym loudly, in the hope, (…) demons who heard it

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74 Waldenfels 1997, p. 25.
75 Waldenfels 1997, p. 155.
76 Cf. *Die Bibel* 2006, p. 56 (Ex 3,13-15), p. 72 (Ex 20,7), p. 174 (Dtn 5,11). The name *Yahweh* was avoided by Jews out of reverence. It was not spoken and not read, not even during a reading of the Bible. The title "Adonai" (Lord) was used instead in prayers. Also interesting is that names of former gods had to be erased, cf. *Die Bibel* 2006, p. 182 (Dtn 12, 3). About historical problems with the translation of the divine name of the Christian God into Chinese see Kim Sangkeun 2004.
77 For the practice of "nian Fo" 念佛 (focused especially on Japan) see, e.g., Andrews 1973; Fujiwara Ryosetsu 1987, pp. 435-438.
78 Waldenfels 1997, p. 155. For more on the importance and power of names in religions, see Goldammer 1960, pp. 232-234.
79 Cf. De Groot 1910, pp. 1128-1129.
80 Cf. Buckley Ebrey 1981, p. 303.

> would only remember this false name, and thus be unable to steal the soul of the child.[81]

In fact most kinds of names enumerated earlier (see 2.2.1.) had the important function of protection. The alternative names protected the "real" name – the personal name that contained the essence of a person. A pseudonym/sobriquet (*hao* 號) could protect the personal name (*ming*). It was a name, but not the "real name," because in contrast to the *ming*, it did not affect the "real" person. Therefore it could be used or should be used to avoid a violation of the real name. Similarly, a courtesy name *zi* was given to young men in order to shield their *ming* in public life. Many other names, including posthumous names (*shihao*), which protected the "real" name after death, prevented the misuse of the *ming* in different periods and situations of life. This was important, because the "real" name should be guarded as life itself. The other names did not usually have to be protected, because they were not real, not "sacred."[82]

2.2.5. Naming

If the name is very important for the life and fate of human beings, giving power and requiring protection, it should also be chosen carefully. The custom of naming (*mingming* 命名) in China is therefore very significant. The choice of a name is not accidental and arbitrary, but is a process in which a character with corresponding meaning and pronunciation is found, and even the number of strokes and components of a written character are considered.[83] This is understandable, because the chosen character will affect the whole life of a man, and every possible ominous connection should be discovered and avoided. Therefore many taboo words are known in the naming custom. We read about it in the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji*) and *Tradition of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*):

> In giving a name to a son, it should not be that of a state, nor of a day or a month,[84] nor of any hidden ailment, nor of a hill or river.[85]
>
> The name must not be taken from the name of the State; or of an office or of a mountain or river; or of any malady; or of an animal; or of a utensil, or of a ceremonial offering.[86]

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[81] Ter Haar 2006, p. 166. Similar custom can be seen among Mongols (Hamayon 1981, p. 176).
[82] Cf. Bauer 1959, pp. 33-34.
[83] Cf. Bauer 1959, pp. 41-42.
[84] This statement is striking, especially in view of the fact that Shang Kings' names always used cyclic signs.
[85] *Liji*, j. 1, p. 21b. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, p. 78.

Existing names of people could not be used by naming, especially the names of deceased and living ancestors.[87] There was also a prohibition against taking names of heroes, emperors, gods or ghosts.[88] Therefore the custom of giving children the same names as their ancestors, as seen, for example, in the case of Europe, or of referring to them as "the son of …" (still visible in family names such as Johnson or Anderson), was practically unknown in China.[89]

2.2.6. Interpretation of Names

The life and fate of a human being were often interpreted in relation to his name. Why did the Prince of Mu of Jin lose his kingdom? It was because he gave his son the name Chou 仇 (enemy).[90] The number of strokes, pronunciation and parts of character were used to explain a past event in the lives of people or for forecasting their future. The advisor of the ruler of Wu state foretold the fast death of Cao Pi 曹丕 (r. 220–226) – ruler of the Wei state – after his enthronement, because he was able to recognize that two parts of characters in the name of the ruler of Wei – *bu* 不 ("no") and *shi* 十 ("ten") could be interpreted as "no more than ten years."[91] The name was also decisive in the important moments of life, as for example a marriage. The names of the young girl and young man were compared to decide if their union was going to be auspicious or not.

2.2.7. Change of Names

Although names were chosen very carefully, life brought many unexpected situations. The connection between the fate of not only a person, but also of a state and his or its name was considered as a matter of course. There were times when a name had to be changed, because the change of an ominous situation depended on the conversion of name. Therefore innumerable examples of name changing can be found, especially if it could improve the fortune of people or designate the start of a new life. There is an example of such a change

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86 *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, j. 5, p. 16b. For translation see Legge 1966, Vol. 5, p. 50.
87 Cf. Buckley Ebrey 1981, p. 303.
88 Bauer 1959, p. 30.
89 As it is shown by Chen Yuan, there were apparently exceptional cases in the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (both in the South and in the North) that fathers and sons could have the same character in their names, which was not seen as an offensive practice (cf. Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 91-93).
90 *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, j. 4, p. 10. For translation see Legge 1966, Vol. 5, p. 40.
91 *Sanguozhi*, "Wuzhi", j. 8, pp. 5b-6a.

in the life of Liu Sanbian 柳三變 (971–1053). As he became old and sick he changed his name to Yong 永 (eternal), in order to change this fate.[92]

The intentions behind name changes in China can be sorted in a few groups.[93] Names were changed in order to improve one's own fate or to avoid the fate of a person with a similar name. Names were also altered in order to mark the start of a new period of life. They could be changed if the rules of taboo or generation name (*paihang*) were changed, or in order to hide the actual name from the government (e.g., because of persecution).[94] Finally, names could be bestowed as an award or punishment also after death.[95] A name could be changed by the affected person, but also by other people, e.g. by the emperor.[96]

2.2.8. Rectification of Names

In connection with the change of name, the systematic "Confucian" conception of rectification of names (*zhengming* 正名) should also be mentioned here.[97] "Attributing names to realities in both human society and the natural world and using those names in a perfunctionary and performative way was a means to order the world."[98] The name and its correspondence with reality were important in China. Therefore Chinese philosophers wrote much about the difference between reality and its denoted representation. There is a discussion about name and reality in the School of Names, *mingjia* 名家, the rectification of names by Confucius and the discussion about the meaning of names (*ming*) at the beginning of the text of *Daodejing*.[99] If the name did not correspond with reality, it was supposed to be changed. Furthermore, the change of name was to be done first, before the change of facts. Without that, any change of reality was impossible. However, the rectification of names has been never explicitly linked to the subject of tabooing names by modern scholars.

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92 *Shengshui yantanlu*, j. 8. p. 75.

93 The custom of name changing was not unique to China. We can compare the change of Abram (to Abraham), Simon (to Petrus) or Saulus (to Paulus) in the Bible as an indication of a crucial transformation in their lives.

94 Cf. the case of Jesuit missionary Alfonso Vagnone/Alphonse Vagnoni. He came to China in 1604 and took the name Wang Fengsu 王豐肅 (courtesy name Yiyuan 一元 or Taiwen 泰穩). In 1625 after the Nanking persecution, he changed his name to Gao Yizhi 高一志 (courtesy name Zesheng 則聖). For his biography and works, see Pfister 1976, pp. 85-95.

95 Cf. Bauer 1959, pp. 54-65.

96 Bauer 1959, p. 52. Similarly geographical names were changed for different reasons, as for example a strange incident, change of dynasty or war. It was because geographical names were perceived as a meaningful omen. For examples of changes of geographical names see Chiao 1970, p. 103.

97 For rectification of names cf. Gassmann 1988; Makeham 2003, 813-814.

98 Sterckx 2002, p. 40.

99 Barret 2003, p. 429.

2.2.9. Power of Script

The name had a power not only in its oral pronunciation but also in the form of written characters. For Chinese the script itself had a magical character and possessed its own power. Magical signs can banish evil ghosts or, on the contrary, provoke calamity.[100] "The ideographical character of Chinese script appears in the magic of scripture."[101] Chinese rites use paper charms, amulets or prayer sheets with written characters. They are applied in order "to cover most of the misfortunes which man may encounter wherever he lives: ill-health, bad luck (...). They protect "from evil spirits or people" and they are capable "to remove 'uncleanness' from a house after sickness or death."[102]

The power of script is especially apparent in Daoism. It can be seen, for example, in the *fu* 符 amulet – very common in Daoist ritual. It was usually "written on a long strip of paper and composed of mystic writings and symbols."[103] Components of characters written on amulets were often inverted, omitted or duplicated.[104] If somebody was in need, the Daoist master (*daoshi*) wrote one or several complicated secret characters, often not existing in standard Chinese. The person using these magic characters as an amulet was protected from gods and ghosts.[105]

As we can see, the script, similar to the name, was considered to have a special power. It is no wonder that they were often combined and used together, and that names could be often found in charms. "The entry of one's name (...) may give the final degree of potency".[106] In this way the "concrete" god or ghost could be addressed, and the concrete human being could receive his help. "If a charm is burned for a special purpose, the name and address of the person to whom benefit is to accrue should first be written on them."[107] The same is done if a certificate to the Heavenly Gods is needed: in the centre the name and address of the user should be written along with the message or instruction to gods.[108] The mystical scripture is often connected with the name of a god. The *fu* amulet is actually a

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[100] *Zarys dziejów religii* 1988, p. 97.
[101] Drexler 1994, p. 1.
[102] Topley 1953, p. 63.
[103] Topley 1953, p. 63.
[104] Drexler 1994, p. 11.
[105] Drexler 1994, p.16.
[106] Topley 1953, p. 64.
[107] Topley 1953, p. 68.
[108] Topley 1953, p. 76.

materialisation of mystical forms that represent the mystical name of a deity, which should be adjured and is also a manifestation of cosmic energy.[109]

Concluding, it should be pointed out that the name was perceived in China as the "essence" of a human being. It had, in the beliefs of the Chinese, an extraordinary importance for life and a special power, in both speech and script. Therefore the name had to be protected and its use avoided in normal life. As the name was significant and related to the fate of a person, it should be chosen carefully. And it had to be changed if it affected a human being negatively.

This chapter described the concept and context of the phenomenon of taboo, and its concrete form in China as *jinji*. Also various kinds and functions of taboo in China have been detailed. Linguistic taboo in particular has been distinguished. In this context, the protection and avoidance of name in China, called *bihui*, has been exposed as a special case of taboo (*jinji*) – the tabooing of name.

[109] Drexler 1994, p. 6; see also Drexler 2001, pp. 227-248.