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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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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>

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Date: 2012-09-11

CHAPTER FOUR: BEGINNING OF THE CUSTOM

Forty years after Pisidia in Asia Minor was conquered by the Romans in 25 BC and incorporated into a new province of Imperium Romanum – Galatia – a large monument was built in Apollonia and called Monumentum Apolloniense. This is how the Romans documented important military successes. The monument consisted of statues of Emperor Augustus and his relatives. There was an inscription on the statue base that read: “The Deeds of the Divine Augustus” (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*), placed also in other localities of the Imperium. The inscription mentions many names identical with the personal name of the deceased deified First Emperor of Rome – Gaius (Julius Caesar Augustus 63 BC – 14 AD).¹

The First Emperor of China, vested after territorial conquest and unification, and also bearing the divine title “August Emperor” (*huangdi*),² had other principles. In order to eulogize the virtuous power of Qin and “announce his historical achievements to the cosmic spirits,” the First Emperor erected steles with inscriptions on mountains in different directions of his territory. In this way he integrated these places in his “overall system of cosmic ritual.”³ Characters identical with his personal name Zheng 政/正 could not be written, and no statues of him were erected. As one of the inscriptions – on the stele of Mount Langye (Langyetai 琅邪臺) in Shandong – needed the character *zheng*, another character – *duan* 端 – was used as a substitute in the expressions “*duanping fadu*” 端平法度 (He rectified and balanced the rules and measures) and “*duanzhi dunzhong*” 端直敦忠 (They are upright and straight, solid and loyal).⁴ This is very early evidence of name tabooing, showing a fundamental difference between Roman and Chinese imperial culture.

4.1. Origin and Time of Appearance

After the basic characteristics of name tabooing in China were introduced in the previous chapter, we now want to inquire where the roots of the custom can be found, and how its evolution looked in Chinese history. We will describe sources, evaluate the authenticity and reliability of supposed taboo examples and discuss topics relevant to different dynasties.

¹ Witschel 2008, pp. 241-266.

² Kern 2008, p. 225.

³ Kern 2008, p. 233.

⁴ For the text of the inscription and an annotated translation see Kern 2000, pp. 25-34: *duanping fadu* (p. 26); *duanzhi dunzhong* (p. 31).

4.1.1. The Roots of Name Tabooing in China

The custom of tabooing names did not appear by accident. But it is almost impossible to find the explicit roots of taboo names in written texts, probably because so many early texts have been lost and the excavated texts have not yet been fully studied for this issue. Different examples are given as a possible first evidence of the custom (see 4.1.2). But even if we accept that the oldest example from the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu*, using the character *mou* 某 in place of the name of the King of Wu, see 4.3.1.1. below), is a true example of tabooing, this still says little about the beginning of the custom. In fact the custom of tabooing names may well be as old as the history of human religiosity.⁵ Since we lack sources on this phase of human history, we can only speculate how taboos and name taboos actually came into being. We can, however, attempt to trace the origins of name tabooing in the earliest sources that we have on Chinese history.

In addition, we can try to analyze motives affecting people who avoided a taboo name. This should also bring us closer to the possible origins of the custom. Two phenomena seem to have provided the principal stimulus for tabooing and became an important basis of the custom: the phenomenon of death and fear of it, and the phenomenon of naming people with its connection to the human being and to life.

Death, as an unavoidable and incomprehensible phenomenon, is a very basic concern for humans of all times and places. People asked what happened with a human being after death, and as they could not explain it, they felt both respect and fear for dead people. They believed that the dead were not far away and might perhaps come to visit if their names were spoken. Therefore it was normally advisable not to use the name of the dead. This belief of the connection between a man and his ghost after death is well-known in China. We read about it in the *Records of Ritual* as follows: “If a man is dead he is called a ghost (*gui* 鬼).”⁶ The Chinese did not use the names of the dead, so that ghosts would not come and hurt them. This custom was called “taboo of the dead” (*sihui* 死諱) or simply “taboo” (*hui* 諱).

The name, as Chapter Two has just shown, was perceived as having a very strong relation with a person and his life, often as an equivalent of them both (see 2.2.2). The name, just like the body, should be protected, in order not to be hurt by ghosts and evil

⁵ This claim was made about the magic of name by probably the best expert on name tabooing – the contemporary Chinese scholar Wang Jian (cf. Wang Jian 1999, p. 46).

⁶ *Liji*, j. 8, p. 38b.

men. There are many examples of magic in China using names to hurt other people or gods. One of them is recorded in the *Records of the Historian (Shiji)*. The ruler Wuyi 武乙 made a statue of a person, named it “the God of Heaven” (*tianshen* 天神), and then beat and pierced it, because he thought in this way he could hurt the god himself. Later Wuyi was killed by a lightning bolt, which was interpreted as a revenge of the god for the ruler’s blasphemy.⁷ A similar example can be found in the *History of the Southern Dynasties (Nanshi)*, in the story of Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 502–549) of Liang in the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, whose milk name (*xiaoming* 小名) was Alian 阿練. His second son hated him, as he considered himself mistreated. When he was in Xuzhou 徐州, he ordered all “silk trees” (*lianshu* 練樹)⁸ to be cut, hoping to hurt his father this way.⁹ This goes to show how old and how strong the magic of names in China was – it stands at the beginning of the custom of name tabooing and was an important part of Chinese religiosity. It is no wonder that names – both one’s own and that of others – had to be protected. This custom of reverence for names of the living was called “not to name” (*buming* 不名).

How were names to be protected and avoided if using names is necessary for contacts between people? The simplest way is to use alternative names in relationships. This was the reason for establishing additional names, as for example the Chinese courtesy name *zi* 字. Therefore it meant that in many cases the given name *ming* 名 and the courtesy name *zi* had a similar meaning: *zi* was understood as an equivalent of *ming*. It is unclear to this day when the courtesy name *zi* first appeared, but the phenomenon seems to be much older than the written documents we have.¹⁰

It is probably impossible to determine which of these two customs was first: tabooing names of the dead, or reverence for names of the living. Although both of these customs accentuated different aspects, they still had many similarities – through their relation to the real name (the same for the living and the dead), and through the ambivalent emotions of reverence and fear (in both cases: for living respected persons and for the dead).

⁷ *Shiji*, j. 3, p. 8a.

⁸ Probably *albizia* – a kind of tree related to *acacia*.

⁹ *Nanshi*, j. 53, p. 6a.

¹⁰ It can be claimed that Confucius had such a name. *Shiji*, j. 47, p. 2a.

4.1.2. Discussion about Time of Appearance

There are still scholars who want to find a concrete “initial example” of tabooing names in texts, and to designate precisely the moment of that “incident.” Wang Jian 王建, probably the best expert on that topic today, has gathered arguments of different Chinese scholars into four groups according to the time of appearance of name tabooing presumed by them.¹¹

The biggest group of scholars indicates the Zhou period as the starting point for tabooing names. This traditional concept was supported, e.g., by Chen Yuan 陳垣. He wrote that “the practice of tabooing names started under Zhou, matured under Qin-Han, and reached its apogee under Tang and Song”¹² and this opinion has been repeated by many other scholars.

As the source for this opinion scholars usually quote the commentary to the *Tradition of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*), written by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648). In the *Tradition of Zuo* Prince Huan, after the birth of his son, asked his ministers about his name and they answered *inter alia*: “People of Zhou served their deities/ancestors with avoidance. The name of the people is tabooed after death.”¹³ Kong Yingda commenting on this sentence in the Tang period, said: “In the Shang there was no custom of tabooing names, it started in Zhou.”¹⁴ This comment of Kong Yingda was repeated by many scholars e.g. by Wang Guanguo 王觀國 (12 c.) in his *Xuelin* 學林,¹⁵ Zhou Mi 周密 (1232–1298) in his *Qidong yeyu* 齊東野語,¹⁶ Zhou Guangye 周廣業 (1730–1798),¹⁷ Chen Yuan (mentioned above) and many others to this day.¹⁸ However the original sentence of the *Tradition of Zuo* did not explicitly or implicitly refer to the Shang to begin with – it was over-interpreted by Kong Yingda and cannot be used as an argument.

There are also those who feel that the practice of tabooing names started only in the Eastern Zhou period. For example Zhao Yi 趙翼 argued in the Qing era in his *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 that there are examples of names that were not tabooed in the *Classic of Po-*

¹¹ Wang Jian 2002, pp. 2-7.

¹² Cf. Chen Yuan 1958, p. 1.

¹³ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, j. 5, p. 16b. Cf. the translation of Legge: “The people of Zhou do not use the name which they bore in serving the Spirits of the dead; and the name is not mentioned after death” (Legge 1966, Vol. 5, p. 50). See also 4.3.1.2.

¹⁴ *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi*, j. 6, p. 13b: “Zi yin yiwang, weiyong huifa, hui shi yu Zhou” 自殷以往, 未有諱法, 諱始于周.

¹⁵ *Xuelin*, j. 3, p. 67.

¹⁶ *Qidong yeyu*, j. 4, p. 39.

¹⁷ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 3, p. 1.

¹⁸ Cf. Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 2.

etry (*Shijing*) and *Tradition of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*). The names of the Kings of Wen and Wu appear in the *Classic of Poetry*, and the names of marquis Xi of Jin and Prince Wu of Song in the *Tradition of Zuo*. Zhao Yi used this as an argument that there was no taboo practice in Western Zhou.¹⁹ Now, there is no guarantee that texts of the *Classic of Poetry* and *Tradition of Zuo* in their present form have been preserved in all details from Shang or Zhou time. Indeed, the reverse is most likely true and the absence of taboos could therefore be easily attributed to later corrections. Moreover every dynasty knows examples of non-tabooing, and this type of argument from silence cannot be used as a reliable argument.²⁰ But insofar as we have no reliable written documents describing tabooing practice from earlier times, opinions like the one above can still be found today.

Some scholars reject the presence of *bihui* in the Zhou period entirely, and argue that the practice started in the Qin era. This is, for example, the opinion of Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797) from the Qing dynasty, who in his *Suiyuan suibi* 随园随笔 said: “*Bihui* started from Qin Shihuang, as the taboo name of his father Zhuangxiang 莊襄 (Chu 楚) was changed to Jing 荆, and because of his name, Zheng 正, the first month (*zhengyue* 正月) was renamed as *yiyue* 一月.”²¹ He gave no further explanations. In modern times, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) argued for the same in his article “Tabooing did not start in Zhou period” (*Hui bushi yu Zhouren bian* 諱不始于周人辨).²² He used three arguments: 1. the unreliability of examples from the *Tradition of Zuo* (just mentioned) and also from the *Sayings of the states* (*Guoyu*),²³ because the age of these texts cannot be determined; 2. no examples of tabooing of names in the bronze inscriptions of the Zhou era (he gives an example in which the name Bao 保 from the time of Duke Zhou 周公 is directly mentioned);²⁴ 3. There are many *tiangan* names²⁵ in his collection of bronze vessels *Liang Zhou jinwen cidaxi* 两周金文辭大系, which means that they were popular in the Zhou and that the names of ancestors were not tabooed on the offering vessels.

Yet, contemporary research seems to confirm the contents of the *Tradition of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*) and *Sayings of the states* (*Guoyu*). It is assumed that the *Tradition of Zuo* was

¹⁹ *Gaiyu congkao*, j. 31, p. 23.

²⁰ This opinion follows Wang Jian 2002, p. 3.

²¹ *Suiyuan suibi xia*, j. 16, p. 1a.

²² Guo Moruo 1954, pp. 113–119.

²³ *Guoyu*, j. 15, p. 2ab (for the description of this case see 4.3.1.4).

²⁴ Mingbao 明保 was the son of the Duke Zhou.

²⁵ Names using characters of the 10 Heavenly Stems and the 12 Earthly Branches.

compiled about 403–389 BCE, and many archaeological discoveries confirm its words.²⁶ Also, the *Sayings of the states* cannot be seen as unreliable. Although the name Bao was not a tabooed name, other words of the text are still disputed. That one name was not tabooed cannot be an argument that the custom of tabooing names was not practiced at all. The *tiangan* names, mentioned by Guo Moruo, were not real names and were given only after death. And the possible reason for that can be precisely the custom of tabooing names.²⁷

There are scholars who place the starting point of *bihui* in the Shang-Yin period. This opinion was first expressed by the scholar Zhang Shinan 張世南 (13th century) of the Song period. He wrote that “Yin people tabooed ghosts, and therefore used courtesy names (*zi*).”²⁸ He gives no arguments for his opinion. Because Yin rulers had a given name (*ming*) and also a *tiangan* name, Zhang Shinan thought these *tiangan* names were given after death during offerings and he argues there was a practice not to express the name of the King directly in Yin times – as was the case when tabooing names. He is supported by modern scholars such as Qu Wanli 屈萬里 (1907–1979), who wrote that the Yin people did not use the name of a ruler in their oracle inscriptions, but the character *wang* 王 instead, because of a taboo on their names.²⁹ Also Dong Zuobin 董作賓 (1895–1963) wrote that as Zu Geng 祖庚 died on the *geng* 庚 day, this day was turned into his ghost name Geng in order to avoid pronouncing his name directly.³⁰ In fact the *tiangan* characters in names can only be an argument that some form of tabooing names was practiced in the Shang-Yin period, but not that it actually started that time.

Some scholars, as, e.g., the scholar Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) of the Qing period, have tried to determine the start of name tabooing in the legendary Xia times, testing names of its rulers in the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu*). He detected that the legendary Emperor Yao 堯 was called “Thearch / Emperor” (*di* 帝) after his death, and Emperor Yu 禹 – “August Ancestor” (*huangzu* 皇祖), and declared this as the beginning of *bihui* practice.³¹ Another attempt was made by Dong Zuobin, mentioned above, who found “a second name” in the names of two (Kong Jia 孔甲 and Lü Gui 履癸) of the last four rulers

²⁶ The physical text we have was undoubtedly edited much later, but the transmission most probably predated the Han period. Cf. Loewe 1993, pp. 67–76; Pines 2009, pp. 429–442 argues for an early date of the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*.

²⁷ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 5.

²⁸ *Youhuan jiwen*, j. 3, p. 15.

²⁹ Qu Wanli 1948, pp. 219–226.

³⁰ Dong Zuobin 1951, p. 10.

³¹ *Rizhilu*, j. 2, p. 1.

of Xia. He realized that in the end of the Xia period, rulers were deified and their names were tabooed.³² A Taiwanese scholar, Yang Junshi 陽君實 goes still further. He states that not only both the names at the end of the dynasty Xia, but also others in the beginning of it can be found, such as Tai Kang 太康, Zhong Kang 仲康, Shao Kang 少康, and Di Ning 帝寧. According to him, the character *ning* 寧 is erroneously read for *ding* 丁 on the bamboo slips, and *kang* 康 is in fact *geng* 庚 (by mistake or because of the identical form of these characters in the past).³³ It would mean that the system of taboo names existed already in the beginning of Xia.

As pointed out by Wang Jian, the mistake of all these attempts to identify the starting point of *bihui* is that they try to find the answer only in texts (which is typical of Chinese research), and usually without giving too much consideration of the texts as objects.³⁴ Since there is a difference between the transmission of a text (or material in the text) and the moment that the present copy or version was finally fixed, such evidence is often not reliable. In addition, it is impossible to find a starting point of name tabooing in texts because its roots may well be in the very ancient past in the first place and can therefore not be pinned down to one concrete moment in history. It will have been a long process connected with the evolution of human mentality and religious beliefs.

4.1.3. *Jinji* and *Bihui*

In order to avoid misunderstanding, we should once more stress the inseparability of the customs of *jinji* 禁忌 (taboo in general) and of *bihui* 避諱 (name taboo). Some Chinese scholars try to differentiate questions of the origin of taboo names into two categories: the origin of the tabooing of names in general (what they call *jinji*) and the origin of “civilized” tabooing of name (what they call *bihui*).³⁵ Differences between *jinji* and *bihui* as they are recognized by Chinese authors have been discussed earlier (see 1.1.7), and it has been argued here that they are really one and the same tabooing phenomenon. One Chinese scholar, Wang Xinhua, used this division and distinguished periods of evolution of name tabooing in the following way:

(In the first period) tabooing of name (*jinji*) was limited to one’s own person only: the subject and object of taboo were the same human being ... The most important was the

³² Dong Zuobin 1951, p. 7.

³³ Yang Junshi 1960, p. 19.

³⁴ Wang Jian 2002, p. 7.

³⁵ Cf. Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 12.

relation with nature and name tabooing helped to protect man himself from the outside world ... (In the second period) name tabooing included also other related people ... and became a social phenomenon ... causing differentiation between people of lower and higher status. In the third period connections between the human being and nature decreased, and were exchanged for relations between human beings. The subject and object of taboo were divided as well ... In this way *jinji* became *bihui*.³⁶

The evolution of tabooing, as described by Wang Xinhua, tries to differentiate schematically the relation of a human being to nature and to himself, and the social relations to other people. As argued before (see 1.1.7), we feel that there is no substantial difference between both, but only a difference in legitimization of *bihui* by state authority as a “modern” and prescribed or codified custom, and *jinji* as mere custom. Therefore we also see not substantial evolution between these two types of taboo, if they are different types to begin with. In another article Wang Xinhua argues even more directly: “*Jinji* is based on a primitive thought ... and the *bihui* is based on the modern thought.”³⁷ Such differentiation is superfluous, because as we will see below, old practices of *jinji* can at any time become prescribed again (as it happened, e.g., in the Yuan time) and many customs considered as *jinji* (for example tabooing of inauspicious words) were practiced up to the modern time.³⁸ Statements about one type of taboo being more modern than the other derive more from the inbuilt tendency of modern historians to consider literati customs more rational than popular customs, than from a detailed analysis of the customs in question.

4.2. Shang

Tabooing of name has its roots in the very distant past, but our knowledge about this practice during and before the Shang period is very limited. Yet, this period is very important for the practice of the tabooing of names and should be marked. The custom was apparently practiced as a spoken taboo, until script was invented, but this is now impossible to research. Oracle inscriptions are almost the only extant written sources of that time, and are usually very laconic and without an expanded explanation, but still record many names.

³⁶ Wang Xinhua 2007, pp. 18-19.

³⁷ Wang Xinhua 2005, p. 66.

³⁸ We should mention here the problem of differences of taboo custom among common people and in the high society. The prevalent opinion of scholars is that the tabooing of names was in the beginning practiced only in the high society and only much later by the common people. Certainly it is impossible to determine the custom among common people, as we have only very few sources from the time before Qin and most of them are names of rulers and their families.

4.2.1. Sources

Script started in China, as far as we know, under the Shang dynasty. The oldest known evidence for it are oracle-bones inscriptions (the oldest from the time of King Wuding 武丁, ca. 1250–1200 BCE),³⁹ as well as some records on bronze, pottery, jade, stone and ceramic vessels. These inscriptions include “given and family names,”⁴⁰ especially those of rulers. However, we do not know too much about “given names.”

The names we find in the oracle inscriptions belong to two groups: names of ancestors, rulers and their family, and names of diviners. The pre-dynastic ancestors and the dynastic kings of Shang had many ceremonial names (technically called *miaohao* 廟號)⁴¹ and one of their important characteristics was the use of the *tiangan* cyclical characters.⁴² In addition, characters signifying relationships and special characteristics (as, e.g., “great” *da* 大) were used.⁴³

Real given names were apparently very rare. The reconstructed list of the Shang dynasty is generally similar to that in the *Records of the Historian (Shiji)*.⁴⁴ Different ceremonial names were used when different types of sacrifice for ancestors were offered. For example King Zuyi 祖乙 had seven names or titles as Fuyi, Neiyi, Zuyi, Xiaoyi, Xiaozuyi, Yazuyi, Houzuyi.⁴⁵ Besides names of ancestors and contemporary rulers, the names of their wives, children, feudal lords and royal servants are also recorded in the oracle bones, as for example names of 64 wives and 53 children of King Wuding.⁴⁶

One group consists of diviners’ names. According to Keightley “most Shang names recorded in the inscriptions are thought to have been generic rather than the exclusive possession of individuals” and were probably inherited. It is still unclear if they “refer to individuals, statelets and their leaders, places ... or local powers worshipped there.”⁴⁷ We know that in some periods the name of the diviner was inscribed, and in other periods omitted.

There are further sources of subsequent periods which deal with names dating back to the Shang dynasty. Separate names can be found in the *Classic of Poetry (Shijing)* and

³⁹ Keightley 1978, p. xiii.

⁴⁰ Cf. Keightley 1978, p. 134; Cheng Te-k’un 1960, p. 155 and 176; Bauer 1959, p. 20.

⁴¹ Cheng Te-k’un 1960, p. 220.

⁴² According to Cheng Te-k’un, they are not connected with their date of birth or death, and are also not a posthumous title, but the day of worship (Cheng Te-k’un 1960, p. 219).

⁴³ Cheng Te-k’un 1960, p. 220.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Shiji*, j. 3; Cheng Te-k’un 1960, p. 218; Keightley 1978, p. 95.

⁴⁵ Cheng Te-k’un 1960, p. 221 (Chinese characters of names are not listed in the book).

⁴⁶ Tung Tso-pin 1964, p. 82. It is possible that some of these names for women were for the same wife.

⁴⁷ Keightley 1978, p. 102, Fn. 37.

Classic of Documents (Shangshu), and the *Records of the Historian (Shiji)* and *Bamboo Annals (Zhushu jinian 竹書紀年)* both have a special chapter treating the Kings of Shang.⁴⁸ Yet the problems of authenticity and age of these texts are still being debated and evidence from these sources cannot be considered definitive.⁴⁹ Chinese historiography used the names and the history of Shang written in the *Records of the Historian* as a basis for its research. And the “given names” conveyed from the *Bamboo Annals (Zhushu jinian)* are listed in encyclopedias as the real names (*ming*) of Shang rulers.⁵⁰ Although the texts we have are quite remote from the Shang period, parts of them might have been transmitted faithfully in oral tradition. This is also, for example, the possible explanation for the similarity of names of Shang kings in oracle inscriptions and in the *Records of the Historian*.

4.2.2. Characteristics of Name Tabooing in the Shang Period.

We still do not have a complete view for the use of names in the Shang times. The existence of given names can be presumed, but their real function is disputable. There are definitely many names in the inscriptions of oracle bones, such as the names of diviners, officials, family members of the emperor.⁵¹ But many of them can be explained as clan, functional or generic names.

Other questions are connected with names of rulers. In the oracle inscriptions from Shang times we found phrases such as “The King (asked) the oracle (which) said” (*wang bu yue* 王卜曰)⁵² where the character “king” is used instead of a name. Then again other names appear in the oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, predominantly with the *tiangan* characters, when ancestors are designated. They are considered by most scholars as temple or ceremonial names, given after death. It can then be presumed that there was a custom in Shang to call rulers during their lifetime by the title of “king” (*wang*), and to bestow upon them a posthumous name after death. One step further would be a supposition that these sometimes numerous ceremonial names should replace or protect the real name, which was a taboo, both during lifetime and after death.⁵³ However, all of this is just supposition.

⁴⁸ *Shiji*, j. 3; *Zhushu jinian*, j. shang, pp. 20b-35b.

⁴⁹ For text criticism cf. Loewe 1993, pp. 39-47 (for *Bamboo Annals*) and pp. 405-414 (for *Records of the Historian*). Though these sources are not fully reliable, they are the next best after oracle inscriptions.

⁵⁰ Cf. for example *Zhongguo lishi da cidian* 2000, pp. 1699-1700 (Wuding 武丁).

⁵¹ Cf., for example, Lefevre 1985, p. 380.

⁵² Hsü Chin-hsiung 1979, esp. p. 24 (S 0452). Cf. also Lefevre 1985, for example, pp. 335, 346-347.

⁵³ Cf. Wang Xinhua 2007, pp. 5-6.

Most examples of name tabooing concern rulers, which is nothing unexpected, given the nature of our sources. Also later in the history of China, even in the Qing dynasty, most recorded names were those of rulers. The modern scholar Fan Zhixin 范志新 has argued that other persons in the oracle inscriptions, such as princes, ministers, wives and sons, are addressed directly by name, and that the custom of *bihui* had only just started and concerned only rulers.⁵⁴ Yet, it may also be argued that the real meaning of these names is still unclear. Some of them express family relations (for example “brother” *xiong* 兄) or are singular cyclic characters (*nei* 内, *zi* 子).⁵⁵ Still other people besides rulers had a kind of “temple name” as, for example, the queen consort of King Wuding (also a powerful priestess and military leader). She is addressed in oracle bone inscriptions as Mother Xin (*muxin* 母辛) or as Fu Hao 婦好.⁵⁶ Also unclear is the origin of the temple name of the King Wuding – Gaozong 高宗 – in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*).⁵⁷

4.3. Zhou

The victory of King Wu over the Shang armies is traditionally considered a pivotal point when a change was supposedly made from a loose practice of name tabooing to a system of political rituals. In fact, this should be considered only as a legend. We simply lack the evidence to say anything with certainty about the early Zhou and Shang periods. There are many other regulations thought to have been made by this first ruler of Zhou, and they all are very likely fictional. Instead, they have been projected back in time in order to provide them with the aura of venerable age and by implication truth. What we can really observe is that the practice of name tabooing as we know it in Zhou became codified thanks to the rise of writing late in this period, and that it developed many different forms.

4.3.1. Sources

We want to describe examples and rules of taboos which can be found in written documents during Zhou time. But there is one problem that should be mentioned in the beginning: the dating of our sources is often difficult and disputable. The texts which we will discuss below were mostly changed or compiled during the Han. Therefore specific fragments of texts

⁵⁴ Fan Zhixin 2006, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Cf. Table 6 in: Keightley 1978, p. 195.

⁵⁶ Cf. Keightley 1978, p. xvi. The function of the name Fu Hao is disputable. The meaning of it is “the goodness of woman/wife.”

⁵⁷ *Shiji*, j. 3, p. 8a.

can be weak as an argument. Below we present the available evidence, but the reader should keep this overall caveat in mind.

4.3.1.1. *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書)

The oldest written text related to the tabooing of names is recorded in the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu*). This is at least the traditional opinion of Chinese historiography.⁵⁸ We find here information that the King of Wu, in the second year after he destroyed Shang (according to tradition 1065 BC), became seriously ill. Therefore his brother, the Duke of Zhou, built an altar for kings Tai 太, Ji 季 and Wen 文 (his ancestors) and sacrificed himself on behalf of his brother saying:

Mou 某, your great descendant, is suffering from a severe and violent disease; if you three kings have in heaven the charge of watching over him, Heaven's great son, let me Dan 旦 be a substitute for his (*mou*) person.⁵⁹

We can see that the word *mou* is written twice in place of the name of the King Wu. These two characters are explained in the commentary of Kong Anguo 孔安國 (from the early Han period) in the following way: "The descendant" is King of Wu 武王, *mou* means his name, used because the subject tabooed the name of the ruler.⁶⁰ The King of Wu had the family name Ji 姬 and the given name (*ming*) Fa 發. The Duke of Zhou could not use his name, and because of that he used *mou*. An adequate (correct) interpretation should be: "Your great descendant Ji Fa."⁶¹

The dating of the text of the *Book of Documents* is debatable. It is hardly a text from Western Zhou (and the commentary is even later), although the chapter "Jinteng" 金縢 is presumed by some Chinese scholars to be "original" and one of the oldest in the version we have today.⁶² There are three possible explanations for this text:⁶³ 1. the character *mou* was really used by Duke Zhou and designated the name of the King Wu (Ji Fa 姬發); 2. the son of King Wu – King Cheng 成王 – tabooed the name of his father (as argued by the Han commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄);⁶⁴ 3. later historiographers avoided the name of King Wu

⁵⁸ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 16.

⁵⁹ *Shangshu*, j. 4 xia, p. 2a. For translation cf. Legge 1966, Vol. 3, pp.353-354.

⁶⁰ *Shangshu*, j. 4 xia, p. 2b.

⁶¹ Wang Jian 2002, p. 17.

⁶² Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 3; For an opposite opinion see Loewe 1993, pp. 376-389, esp. 379.

⁶³ According to Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Shangshu zhushu*, j. 12, p. 13a.

(as argued by the early Qing author Gu Yanwu 顧炎武).⁶⁵ The third option is most likely, because the Duke of Zhou did not need to keep a taboo in the temple, and the King of Cheng was too young to participate in the ceremony. There are also several instances that the character of the name of King Wu (Fa 發) or King Wen (Chang 昌) is directly written in the *Book of Documents*.⁶⁶ Besides, the Duke of Zhou's own name is not tabooed in the text quoted above. But that would be plausible as a way of saying "I".

4.3.1.2. *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋)

Concealment and tabooing of events in *Zuo's*, *Gongyang's* and *Guliang's Tradition*

There are a few paragraphs in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* explained in the *Traditions of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), *Gongyang* (*Gongyangzhuan* 公羊傳) and *Guliang* (*Guliangzhuan* 穀梁傳) as tabooing (*hui* 諱). Both texts claimed that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* used concealment as a method of tabooing: the name of a person should have been written, but it was not. This is then explained as the tabooing of the name of a person related to a specified situation. A good analysis of that way of tabooing has been made by Thomas Emmrich.⁶⁷

We find, for example, in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* under the year 690 BCE the sentence: "The Prince of Ji lost his country" (*Ji hou da qu qi guo* 紀侯大去其國). The meaning of this sentence is explicated in the *Tradition of Gongyang* (which is a Han source) as follows:

What means 'lost'? It means 'was defeated'. Who defeated him? The army of the Qi state. Why is the Qi not mentioned? Because of tabooing (*hui* 諱) the name of Duke Xiang (*Xiang gong* 襄公). The *Spring and Autumn Annals* tabooes illustrious people (*Chunqiu wei xian hui* 春秋為賢諱).⁶⁸

Of course it is not possible to ascertain if the text of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is a real case of tabooing, or just later speculation from the viewpoint of the Han time. Furthermore, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* are a very laconic source since it stems from the oldest known phase of archival writing anyhow.

⁶⁵ *Rizhilu*, j. 24, p. 5a.

⁶⁶ Cf., e.g., *Shangshu*, j. 1, p. 33b; j. 3, p. 33a.

⁶⁷ Emmrich 1992, pp. 36-42.

⁶⁸ *Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan*, j.6, p. 6a.

Another fragment of *Spring and Autumn Annals* is explained as taboo in the *Tradition of Guliang* (*Guliangzhuan*). The original text has only a short notice in the fifth month of the twelfth year of Duke Ai (483 BC): “Mengzi died” (*Mengzi zu* 孟子卒). The *Tradition of Guliang* (which is a Han source) explained that Mengzi was the wife of Duke Zhao 昭公 of Lu. The absence of the name of Duke Zhao is intentional in order to conceal (*hui* 諱) the fact that he violated the order of exogamy.⁶⁹ The ruling families of Lu 魯 and Wu 吳 (family of wife) were all offsprings of Zhou and had the same family name Ji 姬.⁷⁰ Therefore their marriage was against ritual, and was tabooed. Similar explanation can be seen in the *Tradition of Zuo*.⁷¹

On the other hand, non-tabooed names are used in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* as a kind of reproach (according to later commentaries). As explained by Thomas Emmrich, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* accurately and intentionally chooses or omits an expression, according to the method of *baobian* 褒貶 (praise and denigration). The direct use of personal names is a way to criticize a person. The reason for the criticism could be losing a state, fleeing, being captured, and violating a mandate. One more motive was the attack by a clan with an identical clan name.⁷²

As an example of such an explanation, we can give the following fragment of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*: “In the duke’s twenty-fifth year (635 BC), in spring, in the king’s first month, on *bingwu* 丙午 day, Hui 燬, marquis of Wei 衛, extinguished Xing 邢. In summer, in the fourth month, on *guiyou* 癸酉 day, Hui marquis of Wei died.” The explanation of the *Tradition of Zuo* was that “the lords of Wei and Xing were of the same surname Ji 姬 and therefore the text gave the given name of the marquis to his disgrace.”⁷³ Such explanations are, of course, disputable. Furthermore, the reverse could be argued: the use of names that should be tabooed could mean that tabooing was not yet widely practiced.

Tabooing of names in *Zuo’s Tradition*

Two texts of the *Tradition of Zuo* (but not from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* themselves) referred to the tabooing of names. One of them described rules of naming and included taboo names, which could not be used. The occasion was the birth of the son of Prince Huan

⁶⁹ *Chunqiu Guliangzhuan*, j. 20, p. 11a.

⁷⁰ Wang Jian 2002, p. 16.

⁷¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 59, p. 1a.

⁷² Emmrich 1992, p. 31.

⁷³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 15, p. 1a.

of Lu, and only this fact is noted in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. He asked the Duke Shen Xu 申繻 for help in naming and got a long explanation:

Names are taken from five things: some (come from) pre-intimation; some (are) auspice of virtue; some (result from) striking appearance of a child; (some are) the borrowing (of) a name of some object; or some similarity ... 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. The people of Zhou do not use the name which they bore in serving the Spirits of the dead; and the name is not mentioned after death.⁷⁴

This is a very important text and a basic statement for tabooing in the custom of naming.

Directly after these rules above, two important examples of the concrete practice of name tabooing are mentioned. According to the commentary of *Tradition of Zuo*, titles were changed because of the name taboo of a ruler: The given name (*ming*) of the marquis Xi of Jin (晉僖侯, r. 840–823 BC, also called marquis Li 晉釐侯) was Situ 司徒. His name was identical with the title of office and in order to taboo his name, “the name of office was changed (to *zhongjun* 中軍).” The name of Lord Wu of Song was Sikong 司空 (r. 765–748 BC), identical with the office. Therefore his name was tabooed and “the name of office changed (to *sicheng* 司城).”⁷⁵

4.3.1.3. *Records of Ritual* (Liji 禮記)

The *Records of Ritual* was compiled in its present form during the Han period but stems, in part, from older traditions.⁷⁶ The date and origin of the work and its individual sections are controversial. According to tradition, the work is attributed to Confucius, but the present compilation was reworked by various scholars during the Han Dynasty, finally perhaps by Cao Bao 曹褒 (d. 102 AD) or his school.⁷⁷ The *Records of Ritual* contains the biggest collection of rules of name tabooing. It was therefore often quoted in later periods as the standard work for that subject (see, for example, 5.2.6, 5.3.4 and 5.4.2). Whatever its historical origins, it has since become a canonical work.

⁷⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 5, p. 16ab. For translation see Legge 1966, Vol. 5, pp. 49–50.

⁷⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 5, pp. 16b, 18a. Explanation in brackets was made by Du Yu 杜預 (222–285).

⁷⁶ Cf. Loewe 1993, pp. 295–296. Loewe argues, however, not to be too hasty “in assuming that parts of the *Liji* originated in the pre-Han texts.”

⁷⁷ Loewe 1993, pp. 293–295.

Rules of taboo

The most important fragment of the *Records of Ritual* has been partly presented already and discussed in the section on rules of taboo (3.5). Here because of its importance, we quote fully:

When the ceremony of wailing is over, a son should no longer speak of his deceased father by his name (*zu ku nai hui* 卒哭乃諱). The rules do not require the avoidance of names merely similar in sound to those not to be spoken (*bu hui xian ming* 不諱嫌名). When a parent had a double name, the avoiding of either term used singly is not required (*er ming bu pian hui* 二名不偏諱). While his parents are alive, and a son is able to serve them, he should not utter the names of his grandparents; when he can no longer serve his parents through their death, he need not avoid the names of his grandparents. Names that would not be spoken (in his own family) need not be avoided (by a great officer) before his ruler; in the great officer's, however, the names proper to be suppressed by the ruler should not be spoken. In (reading) the Books of Poetry and of Documents, there need be no avoidance of names, nor in writing compositions (*Shi Shu bu hui, lin wen bu hui* 詩書不諱, 臨文不諱). In the ancestral temple there is no such avoidance (*miao zhong bu hui* 廟中不諱). Even in his presence, a minister need not avoid the names improper to be spoken by the ruler's wife. The names to be avoided by a wife need not be unspoken outside the door of the harem (*fuhui bu chumen* 婦諱不出門). The names of parties for whom mourning is worn (only) nine months or five months are not avoided.⁷⁸

Further rules for avoidance of names of relatives are described in *Records of Ritual*:

After the wailing was ended, there commenced the avoiding of certain names. An officer did not use the name of his paternal grandfather or grandmother, of his father's brothers or uncles; of his father's aunts or sisters. Father and son agreed in avoiding all these names. The names avoided by his mother the son avoided in the house. Those avoided by his wife he did not use when at her side. If among them there were names which had been borne by his own paternal great-grandfather or great-grand-uncles, he avoided them (in all places).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Liji*, j. 1, pp. 38b-40a. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, p. 93.

⁷⁹ *Liji*, j. 7, p. 83b. Translation according to Legge 1968, Part IV, p. 161.

The listed persons are all distant relatives and normally did not need to be avoided.⁸⁰ But if they were tabooed by one's father and mother, the whole family had to taboo them. Taboos of one's wife were not be used in her presence, but could be spoken in other situations.

Concrete examples for implementation of rules

After rules of name tabooing, a text about the practice of behavior is included:

When one crosses the boundaries of a state, one should ask what its prohibitory laws are (general taboos); when entering it, he should ask about its customs; before entering the door (of a house), he should ask about the (taboo) names to be avoided in it. (*ru jing er wen jin, ru guo er wen su, ru men er wen hui* 入竟而問禁, 入國而問俗, 入門而問諱).⁸¹

Next, the behavior is described in the case when somebody incidentally violated a taboo name:

When an officer, by mistake, used a name to his ruler which was supposed to be avoided, he rose to his feet.⁸² If he were speaking to anyone who had a name that should be avoided with the ruler, he called him by the name given to him on his maturity.⁸³

Three more fragments from the *Records of Ritual* (in the chapter “Tangong” 檀弓) explain customs connected with tabooing of names and the rule of non-tabooing of homonyms with the example of Confucius' mother:

When the wailing is over, the name of the deceased is avoided. The service of him as a living (person) is over, and that for him in his ghostly state has begun. When the wailing is over, the cook with a bell having a wooden clapper issues an order throughout the palace, saying, “Give up disusing the names of the former rulers, and henceforth disuse (only) the name of him who is newly deceased.” This was done from the door leading to the chambers to the outer gate.⁸⁴

The second fragment is as follows, referring to Confucius as the Master:

⁸⁰ For rules of tabooing of distant relatives see 3.5.4.

⁸¹ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 40a. For translation cf. Legge 1968, Part III, p. 93.

⁸² It means the position on a mat on the ground, so this is quite a physical exertion, from sitting to the menial position of standing.

⁸³ *Liji*, j. 7, p. 94a. Translation according to Legge 1968, Part IV, p. 168.

⁸⁴ *Liji*, j. 2, p. 89a. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, p. 190.

When a name was composed of two characters they were not avoided when used singly. The name of the Master's mother was Zhengzai 徵在. When he used Zai, he did not at the same time use Zheng; nor Zai, when he used Zheng.⁸⁵

And the third fragment is as follows:

When Zipu 子蒲 died, the wailers called out his name Mie 滅. (A disciple of Confucius) Zigao 子皋 said, "So rude and uncultivated are they!" On this they changed their style.⁸⁶

The *Records of Ritual* notices here a mourning ritual *fu* 復 that involved calling the name of dead.⁸⁷ Mie 滅 was apparently the given name of Zipu. The soul of the dead person is called by his real name. It is necessary to perform the ritual. Later, after mourning, a respectful son would be sad if he saw a person similar to the deceased or heard words similar to the names of his parents.⁸⁸ Tabooing connotes respect and longing for the dead relative. It is a kind of extension of the funeral ceremony. Therefore Zigao's criticism about calling the name during a ritual is strange. It is also possible that the ritual or social practice was in flux at the time.

Further prescriptions

Two other texts in the *Records of Ritual* determined who should be called by name and who not. It is not clear if the prescriptions were made for life or for historiography.

The ruler of a state should not call by their names (*buming* 不名) his highest ministers, nor call by their surnames the two noble ladies who accompanied his wife to the harem. A Great Officer should not call in that way an officer who had been employed by his father, nor the niece and younger sister of his wife (members of his harem). (Another) officer should not call by name the steward of his family, nor his principal concubine. The son of a Great Officer (of the king, himself equal to) a ruler, should not presume to speak of himself as "I, the little son". The son of a Great Officer or (other) officer (of a state) should not presume to speak of himself as "I, the inheriting son, so-and-so". They should not so presume to speak of themselves as their heir-sons do.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Liji*, j. 2, p. 89b. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, p. 190.

⁸⁶ *Liji*, j. 2, p. 45b. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, p. 153.

⁸⁷ For more about this ritual see Yü Ying-Shih 1987, pp. 365-369.

⁸⁸ *Liji*, j. 7, p. 83b.

⁸⁹ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 46b. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, pp. 100-101.

The second passage reads as follows:

The Son of Heaven should not be spoken of as 'going out (of his state)'. A feudal prince should not be called by his name, while alive. (When either of these things is done), it is because the superior man will not show regard for wickedness. A prince who loses his territory is named, and also one who extinguishes (another state ruled by) lords of the same surname as himself.⁹⁰

The last two sections of the *Records of Ritual* determine situations of tabooing names by the emperor, and the office responsible for taboo names.

When an officer (*shi* 士) was speaking before the ruler, if he had occasion to speak of a Great Officer (*dafu* 大夫) who was dead, he called him by his posthumous epithet, or by the designation of his maturity (a name of courtesy); if of an officer (who was also dead), he called him by his name. When speaking with a Great Officer, he mentioned officers by their name, and (other) Great Officers by their designation. In speaking at a Great Officer's, he avoided using the name of the (former) ruler (*gonghui* 公諱), but not that of any of his own dead (*sihui* 私諱). At all sacrifices and in the ancestral temple, there was no avoidance of names (*hui* 諱). In school there was no avoidance of any character in the text.⁹¹

And from another part of the same book:

The Grand Recorder had the superintendence of ceremonies. He was in charge of the tablets of record, and brought before the king what (names) were to be avoided, and what days were unfavorable (for doing particular affairs). The son of Heaven received his admonitions with reverence.⁹²

These numerous passages from the *Records of Ritual* approach many topics related to the tabooing of names. They determine basic rules, which were observed or discussed later in the whole history of China (cf. 3.5). They describe the way to inquire about taboo and the proper behavior in various situations. Still more the *Records of Ritual* give concrete examples for to demonstrate the manner of tabooing. A special official is mentioned, who records taboo names and remind rulers of them. No wonder that in the whole history of China the *Records of Ritual* were considered as the fundamental and normative text, deciding about the time, situation and way of taboo observance.

⁹⁰ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 63b. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, p. 113.

⁹¹ *Liji*, j. 6, p. 23b. For translation cf. Legge 1968, Part IV, pp. 17-18.

⁹² *Liji*, j. 3, p. 35a. For translation see Legge 1968, Part III, pp. 238-239.

4.3.1.4. Other Sources

There are still a few other sources mentioned in relation to name tabooing in this period. One of them is the story of Fan Xianzi 范獻子 in the *Sayings of the states* (*Guoyu*). The compilation of this work is presumed by research to be from 431–314 BC (with the chapter “Jinyu” dated to 384–336 BC).⁹³

Fan Xianzi visited Lu and asked people of Lu about the Ju 具 and Ao 敖 mountains, opposite to their country. Fan Xianzi asked: “Are they not called Ju and Ao?” They answered: “These are taboos of former rulers Xian 獻 and Wu 武.” Fan Xianzi came back ... and said: “It is important to learn. I went to Lu and used two of their taboos, and made myself look ridiculous because of my ignorance.”⁹⁴

It is an instance of unintentional violation of local taboos. Dukes Xian of Lu (Ju 具, 886–855 BC) and Wu of Lu (Ao 敖, 824–816 BC) were presumed to have lived about 300 years before the described journey in the 21st year of the Duke Zhao of Lu (521 BC). The text shows that knowledge of tabooed names was very important, especially for educated people. Of course it is also possible that this is a textual invention and not a description.

Another case is described in the *Han Feizi*. As the Lord of Wei entered Zhou, he was asked by a guardsman about his name (*hao* 號). He answered “Duke Land-Extender” (*bijiang* 辟疆). The guardian said that a duke cannot have the same name as the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子). After that the Lord of Wei corrected himself and said “Duke Hui 燬” and was allowed to enter.⁹⁵ The Feudal Lord of Wei had used a name/title for himself identical with the title of the King of Zhou, which was considered a violation of taboo. This case can also be regarded as an arrogation of titles (see also 8.1.1).

There is also a sentence in the *Mengzi*, interpreted as an explanation of tabooing of given names. “Mencius answered, ‘For mince and broiled meat there is a common liking, while that for sheep-dates (*yangzao* 羊棗) was peculiar. We avoid the name, but do not avoid the surname. The surname is common; the name is particular.’”⁹⁶

⁹³ Loewe 1993, p. 264.

⁹⁴ *Guoyu*, j. 15, p. 2ab.

⁹⁵ *Han Feizi*, j. 14, p. 7b. For translation see Liao 1959, p. 132.

⁹⁶ *Mengzi*, j. 14, p. 14a. For translation see Legge 1966, Vol. 2, pp. 497–498. Besides after another fragment of *Mengzi* the commentator of Han period Zhao Qi 趙岐 (108–201) noticed about Duke Wen of Teng 滕文公 (4–3 c. BC) that the name of his father Duke Kao 考公 was changed “by later generations” to Duke Ding 定公, because of an (undetermined) name taboo (cf. *Mengzi*, j. 5, p. 1a.).

In the last source the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), we find the description of the second official responsible for taboo names (*xiaoshi* 小史). “The official *xiaoshi* ... distinguished the system of *zhaomu* 昭穆 (see 3.5.5) ... and decreed taboos of ruler (*jihui* 忌諱).”⁹⁷ Here, according to the commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200), *ji* 忌 means taboo days of former rulers, and *hui* 諱 means their names.⁹⁸

4.3.2. Characteristics of the Period

Although the dating and authenticity of the sources which we presented above are still disputed, the existence of name tabooing in the Zhou period is generally accepted by scholars. The evidence is sufficient to assume that personal names were really tabooed in that time. There are relatively many prescriptive texts about taboo in this time, but not too many concrete examples. It is possible, however, that this was largely an elite custom and we cannot tell how widely it was practiced socially. Most sources used here originated in the late Zhou period. They generally described taboos of rulers (*guohui* 國諱). This is not surprising because these sources are “official” works made in the court by professional writers.

4.3.2.1. Taboo as a System

Chinese researchers write about a significant change in tabooing of names starting in the Zhou period, from religious relations between humans and gods, to a “secular” relation between people, and from the tabooing of the dead (*sihui* 死諱) to tabooing of the living (*shenghui* 生諱).⁹⁹ Religious and political power was combined in China before the Zhou period. Besides, the political system of Zhou, with its Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命), was established as a religious system. The ruler was also the main priest and had a mandate and authority to perform sacrifices for ancestors.¹⁰⁰ This also implied the authority to rule the state.

Therefore sacrifices in the ancestral temple and knowledge about names of ancestors were very important. During sacrifices, using taboo names, the ruler could come into contact with the souls of ancestors, and receive authority from their hands. Apparently there was no difference between taboos of dead ancestors (*sihui* 死諱) and of the state (*guohui* 國

⁹⁷ *Zhouli*, j. 6, p. 43b.

⁹⁸ *Zhouli*, j. 6, p. 43b.

⁹⁹ Wang Xinhua 2007, pp. 121-123.

¹⁰⁰ For more about the ancestor worship in the Zhou period see Cook 2009, pp. 237-279.

諱), but since all the sources used in this research are related to the state, one cannot be sure. Only later did the state taboo take on a special role, as protection of the ruler's authority.

Special officials were established in the Zhou dynasty to be responsible, amongst others, for recording taboo names and organizing sacrifices: Grand Scribe (*dashi* 大史)¹⁰¹ and Junior Scribe (*xiaoshi* 小史).¹⁰² They were responsible for sacrifices in the temple of ancestors: Grand Scribe for regular sacrifices and Junior Scribe for occasional ones. They had to record taboo names and taboo days of ancestors and present them to the ruler, and were also competent in the rules of tabooing.¹⁰³ Subsequent dynasties also preserved these or similar offices (cf. 5.1.2.4).

Offerings and prayers to ancestors in the temple expressed reverence and worship, similar to the avoidance of taboo names outside the temple. The violation of taboo was shameful as an indication of ignorance, but we have no records that it was punished by the ruler. It can be presumed that the punishment was the shame,¹⁰⁴ taking place primarily in the psychological and social sphere, and directly accompanying the act of violation. It needed no special rules. In this age of highly personal relationships shame may have been a more severe punishment than it would be in a more bureaucraticized society. Later the violation of taboo started to be considered more and more as an insult in the relation between the violating person and the tabooed person (cf. the method of reproach in 4.3.1.2). Therefore the need for punishment appeared. It is also possible that punishment reflects the increase of state power more than expressing a viewpoint on taboos.

The punishment and the act of violation were separated in the Zhou period, and the punishment started to be performed by the ruler, as a kind of enforcement of veneration for the living ruler. The tabooing of names became formalized as the center and basis of the political system in China, as a law protecting stability in society and a method of demonstrating reverence for the ruler.¹⁰⁵ Very meaningful here are the words of Kong Rong 孔融 (153–208 AD), who later stressed the importance of taboo custom in the society. His words

¹⁰¹ Hucker 1985, p. 470.

¹⁰² Hucker 1985, p. 237.

¹⁰³ Tsien Tsuen-Hsueh 1963, pp. 5–6.

¹⁰⁴ For more about the shame and the phenomenon of losing face (*diulian* 丟臉) in China see Konior 2008, pp. 43–62.

¹⁰⁵ Wang Jian 2002, p. 29.

recorded in the *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 noticed that “the high and the low classes have a system, and the center of this system is the tabooing of names.”¹⁰⁶

4.3.2.2. Methods for Tabooing

In the sources used for this research, the following methods for tabooing in this early period can be found. The given name (*ming* 名) could be concealed. Concealment because of taboo is highlighted above in the two examples from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (see 4.3.1.2). The intentional violation of a taboo, i.e., the direct use of personal names as a way of criticizing and reproaching can be seen in the same work.¹⁰⁷ We should remember that both methods are also a written record of expression, but it can be presumed that they are the oldest (and also the most natural) methods of tabooing.

Probably there was also an equivalent of taboo in speech. However, the spoken form of taboo is more difficult to verify. An example can be found in the *Sayings of the states* (*Guoyu*) in the example above (see 4.3.1.4), where the names of two mountains are not spoken (i.e., are taboo) because of their identity with the names of former kings, and an unintentional violation of them is shameful.¹⁰⁸

Other methods of tabooing have been only found as single examples in the texts of Zhou: the exchange of one character (from *sikong* 司空 to *sicheng* 司城 and from *situ* 司徒 to *zhongjun* 中軍 in the title) in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Tradition of Zuo*)¹⁰⁹ and a replacement by a courtesy name (*zi* 字) in the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji*).¹¹⁰ These two methods were probably developed in the late Zhou or written down only in the Han period.

The difference between the tabooing of names of the living and of the dead is kept distinctive by means of special terms (cf. 4.1.1). In the sources, we can see that the tabooing of names of the dead is called *hui* 諱. Names of the living are “not spoken” (*buming* 不名).¹¹¹ They regulate hierarchical relations between living people.

¹⁰⁶ *Beitang shuchao*, j. 94, p. 2b.

¹⁰⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 15, p. 1a.

¹⁰⁸ *Guoyu*, j. 15, p. 2ab.

¹⁰⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 5, pp. 16b, 18a.

¹¹⁰ *Liji*, j. 6, p. 23b.

¹¹¹ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 38b; j. 1, p. 46b.

4.3.2.3. Types and Rules of Tabooing

The tabooing of names in the Zhou period is often compared to that in later dynasties, with the system of the name tabooing in the Zhou time being considered inconsistent and under-developed. But on the other hand, we can see that the long Zhou period was the time in which the practice and rules of tabooing names were first formalized. It is this formalization that provided the basis for the custom of name tabooing for the next two thousand years, even if further changes also took place.

The evolution can be seen if we compare rules in texts of the *Tradition of Zuo* and *Records of Ritual*. In the *Tradition of Zuo* we can see rules for taboo words prohibited in naming, which included names of states, offices, mountains, rivers, maladies, animals, ceremonial utensils etc., and names are only taboo after death (see 4.3.1.2).¹¹² In the *Records of Ritual* we already see formalized prescriptions with time, place and principles which should be considered in tabooing. The tabooing (*hui*) started after the mourning time. There was no need to taboo homonyms, characters of double names,¹¹³ classics and other writing compositions. There was no taboo in the ancestral temple and no private taboo before the ruler. There was no taboo of grandparents' names after the death of one's father, etc (see 4.3.1.3).

These rules were developed during the Zhou era and became the basis for the system of taboo in the next dynasties, though of course they evolved later, too. Theory and practice of the tabooing custom of that time are still discussed, but one can suppose that, if such rules were made, there were concrete instances which enforced them.

Most examples of tabooing we have from that period are taboos of rulers. There are only a few instances of family taboo (*jiahui* 家諱) from this time. One of them is the text of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* commented in the *Tradition of Guliang*. In the text of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is mentioned the ancestor of Confucius, called Kong Fu 孔父, living six generations earlier. The *Tradition of Guliang* commented that Confucius (considered by earlier historians as the compiler of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*) tabooed (as private taboo) the name of his ancestor (*xianhui* 先諱) and wrote "father" (*fu* 父) in place of it, as a kind of a posthumous name.¹¹⁴

¹¹² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 5, p. 16b.

¹¹³ A double name was perhaps considered as a single word. It would mean that there was no tabooing of characters, but of words in that period.

¹¹⁴ *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan*, j. 3, p. 3ab.

The case described above and the tabooing of the name of his mother Zhengzai 徵在 by Confucius¹¹⁵ could be perhaps consider as first known examples of the custom of private taboos. The small number of private taboo examples could be interpreted as the beginning of a diffusion of taboo practice from the taboo of a ruler to taboo of relatives (*jiahui*), at first in the high society. More plausible seems, however, the explanation that only cases of tabooing by the ruler (and Confucius) and that of the ruler were written down, and other spoken taboos of names of dead ancestors were not.

The practice of tabooing (or not speaking) names of living people (*buming* 不名) was probably not very strict, and related to a particular situation. In all likelihood there were already differences in tabooing between higher and lower classes of society. The text of the *Records of Ritual* prescribed that rulers should not speak the names of their ministers and noble ladies, while the Great Officer was prohibited from speaking those of former officers and the relatives of his wife.¹¹⁶ This implies that there were also private taboos of living, but – differently from the case of taboos of death (*hui* 諱) – they depended on the person's function in society or in the family.

4.4. Qin

The First Emperor of Qin is known as the unifier of the various Chinese kingdoms. It can be presumed that the practice of tabooing of names was also unified. It is still too early, however, for a comparison of taboo practice in various parts of China. The sources begin to be better dated and researched from this period. But the examples of taboo are still often controversial. The tabooing of name “originated under the Zhou Dynasty and matured under the Qin Dynasty”.¹¹⁷ However, the short Qin dynasty could, practically speaking, only employ the existing practice of former periods, maybe in a reformed way.

4.4.1. Sources

Similarly to the Zhou period it is hard to determine texts from the period of the Qin dynasty. We can probably speak only of the Inscription of Langyetai, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, as dating definitely from that time. There are various other texts supposed to

¹¹⁵ *Liji*, j. 2, p. 89b.

¹¹⁶ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 46b.

¹¹⁷ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 1.

be originally from the period of Qin. The tabooing of names of Qin emperors is used as one of the methods of verification.

One (not explicit) Qin text is included in the *Records of the Historian (Shiji)* in the Basic Annals of the First Emperor of the Qin.¹¹⁸ It was recorded that on the “twenty-third year (224 BC): the king of Qin summoned Wang Jian 王翦, requesting him to make a special effort to return to active duty. He sent him to lead troops in an attack on Jing 荊.”¹¹⁹ The word “Jing” was explained as an archaic name for Chu 楚, used for tabooing the personal name (Zichu 子楚) of the First Emperor’s father. This explication was first written in the *Correct Meaning (Zhengyi 正義)* – the commentary to the *Records of the Historian* written by Zhang Shoujie 張守節 in the 8th c. AD, which is, of course, a very late commentary.¹²⁰

In the same Annals, we can find another sentence that is explained as an instance of taboo. It was recorded that “The Second Emperor conducted a fast at the Wangyi 望夷 palace.”¹²¹ According to the Zhou Guangye 周廣業 (1730-1798), the character yi 夷 (east barbarians) means in fact hu 胡 (north barbarians) and was put here only as an equivalent for the taboo character of the Second Emperor.¹²² This is not a strong example, since the character yi could have been in the original, too.

Besides, also in the *Records of the Historian*, but in the Chronological Table by Months for the period Qin-Chu (209–206 BC), the sequence *duanyue* 端月 is used for the first month two times (for the years 207 and 208).¹²³ According to the *Guide Rope to Obscurities (Suoyin 索隱)* – a commentary to the *Records of the Historian* written by Sima Zhen 司馬貞 in the 8th c. AD, the usual expression *zhengyue* 正月 was tabooed here because of the personal name of the First Emperor Zheng 政/正.¹²⁴ This very late commentary is regarded here as disputable, too.

A fragment of the *Lüshi chunqiu* is also listed as a possible case of taboo. It is generally accepted that the *Lüshi chunqiu* was written during the rule of the First Emperor, that

¹¹⁸ About textual problem in the *Shiji* see Nienhauser 2003, pp. 39-58.

¹¹⁹ *Shiji*, j. 6, p. 7a. For translation see Watson 1993, p. 41. The tabooing is mentioned in a footnote.

¹²⁰ *Shiji*, j. 6, p. 7ab; Cf. also Chen Yuan 1958, p. 1.

¹²¹ *Shiji*, j. 6, p. 28b. For translation see Watson 1993, p. 71. No note about tabooing is mentioned.

¹²² *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 5, p. 87.

¹²³ *Shiji*, j. 16, p. 3b and 6a.

¹²⁴ *Shiji*, j. 16, p. 3b.

is, about 239 BC.¹²⁵ There is a sentence “In the matter of yesterday, you were the master (*zhi* 制); in the business of today, I am the master (*zhi* 制)” (*zuori zhi shi zi wei zhi, jinri zhi shi wo wei zhi* 昨日之事子為制, 今日之事我為制).¹²⁶ It was compared with the following sentence from the *Spring and Autumn Annals (Tradition of Zuo)*: “In the matter of sheep, you were the master (*zheng* 政) of yesterday; in the business of today, I am the master (*zheng* 政)” (*chou xi zhi yang zi wei zheng, jinri zhi shi wo wei zheng* 疇昔之羊子為政. 今日之事我為政).¹²⁷ These two very similar sentences originate apparently from the same source, but are written differently: one of the distinctions is the character *zhi* 制 used in place of *zheng* 政. The comparison was made very late: only the scholar Chen Shuhua 陳樹華 of the Qing dynasty considered the line in the *Lüshi chungiu* as a quotation from the *Tradition of Zuo*, and the character *zhi* 制 as the tabooing of the name of the First Emperor Zheng 政.¹²⁸ It is no wonder that modern researchers of the *Lüshi chungiu*, such as, for example, Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷 (1917–2006) assumed that this fragment simply came from another source and that this example is therefore not really an evidence of taboo.¹²⁹

There are also two sentences of the *Zhanguoce* 戰國策 considered as evidence of taboo of Qin. This source is perhaps older than the Qin period, but the text we have today is much younger, and the time between taboo observances of sequential dynasties could have affected the text. Regarding the origin of the *Zhanguoce*, it can also be said that, although it deals with events before 221 BC, it was compiled only at the end of the first century BC.¹³⁰

In the *Zhanguoce*, in the fragment about the Qin state, a reference was found for the state of Jing 荊.¹³¹ The character *jing* 荊 was commented on by Bao Biao 鮑彪 (12 c.) in the Song period as the taboo equivalent for Chu 楚 (the name of the First Emperor’s father).¹³²

Later in the same work, there is one more sentence having the character *ying* 郢.¹³³ Similarly the use of the character *ying* 郢 (which was the name of the capital of the Chu state) was commented on by Bao Biao as the taboo for Chu 楚.¹³⁴

¹²⁵ Loewe 1993, p. 324.

¹²⁶ *Lüshi chungiu*, j. 16, p. 14a.

¹²⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 21, p. 6b.

¹²⁸ According to Wang Yankun 1997, p. 645.

¹²⁹ Chen Qiyu 1984, Vol. 3, p. 1009.

¹³⁰ Loewe 1993, p. 4.

¹³¹ *Zhanguoce*, j. 3, p. 5a.

¹³² *Zhanguoce zhu*, j. 3, p. 51a.

¹³³ *Zhanguoce*, j. 6, p. 8b.

¹³⁴ *Zhanguoce zhu*, j. 3, p. 65ab. Cf. also examples of taboo collected by Liu Dianjue 1990, pp. 217–290.

4.4.2. Problems with the Character *zheng*

We now have no other examples of possible taboo names except for these of rulers (First Emperor Zheng 政/正 and Second Emperor Huhai 胡亥), and of the father of the First Emperor, King Zhuangxiang 莊襄 – Zichu 子楚. If the examples above are to be explained as taboo, there are many other cases where these three names appear without taboo in the same source which was supposed to taboo them.¹³⁵

For example, in the *Records of the Historian* (in the passages related to Qin), the character *zheng* 政 can be found at least 5 times,¹³⁶ *zheng* 正 3 times, two of them as 正月, ¹³⁷ *chu* 楚 – 15 times, and *hu* 胡 – 12 times,¹³⁸ sometimes only a few lines from the examples above. Why do sources taboo a name at one time, and then fail to at another time? Perhaps it happened because of the existence of various later copies and compilations that tabooed or did not taboo these characters. Why should Sima Qian (145–87 BC) taboo the name of the First Emperor of the former Qin dynasty at all? Perhaps he used the original or older texts and copied them into his work without changing taboo characters.

If we do presume that the examples above are instances of taboo avoidance, then new problems appear. Most of them are related to the taboo character of the First Emperor 政/正, which is supposed to be replaced by his equivalent *duan* 端 (see examples in the beginning of this chapter). This new (or since that time noted) method of tabooing was later used in many dynasties, especially during the Han time. Besides, the meaning of *zheng* (first [month]) and *duan* (beginning) is similar, like in the later practice of the Han time.

But if we assume that the expression *duanyue* 端月 in the *Records of the Historian* is really an example of taboo for the first month (*zhengyue* 正月), as in the example above (see 4.4.1), we should ask which characters were in fact avoided. The name of the First Emperor is known as Zheng 政 (today the fourth tone) and the character of the first month as *zheng* 正 (first tone). Some scholars of the past already announced this example as the first case of avoiding homonyms or assumed that the pronunciation of the character *zheng* 正 changed because of taboo.¹³⁹ Others argued that according to the *Records of the Histori-*

¹³⁵ Cf., for example, *Zhanguoce*, j. 3, p. 4a, 9a, 10ab, 11ab.

¹³⁶ *Shiji*, j. 6, p. 1ab, 34b, 35a, 38a.

¹³⁷ *Shiji*, j. 6, p. 1a, 6a, 36a.

¹³⁸ Cf., e.g., *Shiji*, j. 6, p. 2a (for *chu*); p. 39a (for *hu*).

¹³⁹ *Youhuan jiwen*, j. 9, p. 52. Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 252. For archaic pronunciations of *zheng* 正 see Karlgren 1957, nr. 833j; for 征 – nr. 833o; for 政 – nr. 833r.

an, the name of the First Emperor was given because he was born in the first month, and should be, in fact, Zheng 正, and writing it as zheng 政 is a mistake.¹⁴⁰

According to the research of Chen Yuan, we know that the character zheng 正 was at that time another variant of zheng 政. That is likely because at that time, radicals (classifiers) were not yet fixed.¹⁴¹ As Chen Yuan wrote, the pronunciation of zheng 正 in first and fourth tone is also known in other sources and was not connected with taboo there.¹⁴² Both characters zheng (政 and 正) were interchangeable at that time.¹⁴³ But there were also some rules of interchanging, which we perhaps do not know. The character zheng 政 can be seen in many combinations in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, being interchangeable with the character zheng 正, but the first month is nowhere written as zhengyue 政月, but only as 正月. Furthermore, if we mention that zheng 政 and duan 端 also do not have a similar meaning (which was usual for equivalents in the Han period), the rules of tabooing seem to be still more unclear. Therefore, the modern scholar Wang Jian suggested that the real name of Qin Shihuang was Zheng 正, as the only plausible explanation of taboo.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, it was written in the *Records of the Historian* as Zheng 政 not because of a mistake, but because of taboo.¹⁴⁵ However, as we have no original Han version of the *Records of the Historian*, it is not possible to determine the truth of this conclusion.

One more aspect of name taboo of Qin Shihuang was analyzed by B.J. Mansvelt Beck on the basis of the “Chronicle from Shuihudi” 睡虎地, found in the tomb of a man named Xi 喜 (d. ca. 217 BC, i.e. during the reign of the First Emperor).¹⁴⁶ The Chronicle records events of 306–217 BC, and contains on strip 3 (recorded in the year 251 BC) the sentence: “The fifty-sixth year, the posterior ninth month: Zhao died. First month: Su was born.” (*wushi liu nian hou jiuyue Zhao si zhengyue Su chan* 五十六年後九月昭死正月遯產). Mansvelt Beck tries to explain how the tabooed character zheng 正 (and two more in the Chronicle) appeared in this text during the rule of the First Emperor, and he initially

¹⁴⁰ Wang Jian 2002, p. 34.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Boltz 1994, pp. 158–167.

¹⁴² Cf. Chen Yuan 1958, p. 8. This argumentation of Chen Yuan is also disputable, because we are not sure about the sounds of the *Shiji*-time.

¹⁴³ Wang Jian 2002, pp. 34–35.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 35.

¹⁴⁵ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 5, p. 79.

¹⁴⁶ Mansvelt Beck 1987, p. 68–76.

finds the possible solution in an intentional violation of taboo,¹⁴⁷ if the Chronicle was not to be intended for public. But then he notices that the Chronicle observes another Qin taboo (the name of the father of the First Emperor Zichu 子楚), and that entries of the Chronicle are not only private. He states that the character *zheng* 正 was not considered taboo during the life of the First Emperor, but only after his death. He argues in support of that thesis that other examples from the time of the reign of the First Emperor, like the expressions *duanzhi* 端直 and *duanping* 端平 in the Inscription from Langyetai, mentioned before (see 4.), are current expressions and not taboo instances.¹⁴⁸

4.4.3. Characteristics of the Period

It is generally emphasized that the short period of the Qin dynasty had an immense influence on the whole of Chinese history, also in the field of name tabooing.¹⁴⁹ In fact, our knowledge about the practice of that period is still vague. It seems that there is no single example of taboo in our sources beyond any doubt. The reason is *inter alia* the diversification of spoken and written forms Chinese used, and our deficient knowledge about spoken expressions and writing of that time.

The First Emperor and his subjects probably had many taboos in their customs, among them also the taboo of names, especially for the dead. It is also possible that he supported the tabooing of name intentionally, as a medium for legitimated political power. As well known, the First Emperor carried out many reforms. One of them was the termination of the custom/system of posthumous names (*shifa* 諡法).¹⁵⁰ This custom was a kind of expression of esteem for the dead ancestor and is, as one may suppose, an indication for the existence of name tabooing before that period. It can be presumed that the reason for termi-

¹⁴⁷ This option is also preferred, because the Chronicle use disrespectful expressions such as “died” (*si* 死) for the four kings of Qin instead of “passed away” (*zhong* 終) as for the death of Xi’s father (cf. Mansvelt Beck 1987, pp. 69-70).

¹⁴⁸ Mansvelt Beck 1987, pp. 72-73. Other scholars Wu Guang (Wu Guang 1985, p. 157) and Carine Defoort (Defoort 1997, pp. 24-26) pointed out taboo cases in the collection of philosophical writings *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子 from the Warring States period as arguments for dating. According to Wu Guang there are two cases in chapters 1 and 2 with the character *duan* 端 used as the equivalent of the taboo character *zheng* 正 (*Heguanzi*, j. shang, p. 1b and j. shang, p. 2b), which show that these two chapters were compiled under the Qin. Carine Defoort mentioned, however, that taboo observance is not very reliable in that case: the tabooed fragment of text can be a later copy, though it is “tempting to believe” that it was written or copied at the end of the Qin. The argument of taboo for the dating of fragment in the Qin time was repeated by Yang Zhaogui (Yang Zhaogui 2002, p. 75).

¹⁴⁹ For other kinds of taboo in the Qin and Han periods, for example time taboos, birth taboos, marriage taboos, body taboos, etc. see Liu Tseng-Kuei 2009, pp. 881-948. Tabooing of names is shortly mentioned on pp. 935-936. See also Wang Jian 2002, p. 31.

¹⁵⁰ *Shiji*, j. 6, p. 9a.

nation was to avoid the evaluation of the life of (the dead) ruler, and in this way to strengthen the centralized political power.¹⁵¹

Another change was the gradual spread of Chinese writing. In the Shang and Zhou period, usually only professional writers were involved in the process of recording facts, most often related to religious customs. Now reading became more general (or less “exclusive”) and also men of letters started to write more and more about relations between people. Writing became ever more common, and general knowledge appeared.¹⁵² It had a concrete impact for written taboo names and characters: concrete rules in writing were needed.

In conclusion, we can say that the taboo custom in all likelihood appeared and evolved a long time before the Qin dynasty. Various taboo examples can be presumed in the Shang and Zhou periods. However, the sources we have at hand do not allow a precise description of the practice of that time. It is certain that the subsequent Han dynasty already had a developed system of tabooing names, which must have had its origin in earlier decades or even centuries.

Before the Han, in the three periods that have been described here for the reader, taboo custom was probably still strongly connected with religion, and the differentiation between “official” and “popular” taboo custom was still not distinct. A certain evolution can be assumed in the custom of tabooing names: from different types of social and religious taboos (taboo of fear, taboo of ruler) to one state taboo. Another evolution was the unification of the taboo of the dead (*sihui*) and the reverence for living people (later called *shenghui*, related to the practice of “not to call” – *buming*). From the Han dynasty onwards, this difference disappeared and both taboos had to be avoided. Further, we can suppose a slow change of motives for tabooing in that time, from the feeling of shame to tabooing by proscription.

¹⁵¹ Wang Jian 2002, p. 32.

¹⁵² Cf. Lewis 1999, p. 13.

