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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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CHAPTER FIVE: NAME TABOOING IN ANCIENT TIMES

“Field chicken” (*tianji* 田雞) and “wild chicken” (*yeji* 野雞) are not chicken at all. I made this unexpected discovery while having lunch in a restaurant of Macao. “Field chicken” is a frog and “wild chicken” – a pheasant. Both names are the result of tabooing. The names for frog (*wa* 蛙 and *guo* 鵲) have been avoided since antiquity as symbols of the moon and dark feminine *yin* forces.¹ In order to explain the second taboo, we also have to “chercher la femme.” The First Emperor of Han – Gaozu – had a wife, Empress Lü Zhi 呂雉 (241–180 BC), who became powerful especially as Empress Dowager and regent after the death of her husband in 195 BC. Her name Zhi 雉 became taboo and nobody dared to use it directly in speech or writing. However *zhi*, also means “pheasant” and the bird had to be called in some way. Therefore, the new expression “wild chicken” (*yeji* 野雞) was adopted and is used to this day in most Chinese languages – Northern as well as Southern.²

5.1. Han

There are numerous examples of name tabooing in the Han period, not only of the emperor, but also of the emperor’s relatives (father, mother, wife), and private family taboos (e.g., Sima Qian avoided the name of his father in the *Records of the Historian*, see 5.1.2.2). Concrete characters (often synonyms) were appointed as equivalents (*daizi* 代字) for taboo characters. It is a unique feature of that period. On the other hand, the word “such and such” (*mou* 某) could also be used instead of a name, as is sometimes the case in the *Book of the Han* (*Hanshu*) and *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*). In the Han dynasty the tabooing was still not consistent. There are examples of tabooing and not tabooing in the same source. In the *Records of the Historian* and *Book of the Han* no name of Han emperors was written in their own chronicle, but in other parts tabooed characters are preserved. The author of this dissertation found in the *Records of the Historian*, for example, 13 characters *bang* 邦, 14 *ying* 盈, 24 *qi* 啟, and 5 *che* 徹 (taboo names of four emperors of Han). There are also numerous characters known as Han taboos in the *Book of the Han*. As our extant sources are later copies, we can only presume that these works were copied in various times, or were compiled from different fragments (underlying sources). When copying tabooed characters may have been restored and other inconsistencies may have crept in. It

¹ Cf. Künstler 1994, p. 131.

² Cf. Künstler 1994, p. 130.

seems implausible that authors of the *Records of the Historian* and *Book of the Han* intentionally tabooed only in parts of their works.

5.1.1. Sources

Records of the Historian (Shiji)

Our main sources for the period of Han dynasty are the three historical works: the *Records of the Historian*, *Book of the Han* and *Book of the Later Han*. They contain numerous characters interpreted as equivalents of taboo. Some of the fragments are apparently quotations from other works such as the *Spring and Autumn Annals (Tradition of Zuo)* or *Classic of Documents (Shangshu)*, but with a different character used in place of the taboo name. For example, a sentence with the character *ying* 盈 from the *Tradition of Zuo*³ is written with the character *man* 滿 in the *Records of the Historian*,⁴ which replaced the taboo name Ying 盈 of the Emperor Hui of Han (r. 194–188 BC). Similarly, in a fragment from the *Book of Documents*⁵ all *heng* 恆 characters, being the name of the Emperor Wen (r. 179–157 BC), are replaced by *chang* 常 in the *Records of the Historian*.⁶

Numerous other characters in the *Records of the Historian* have been discovered and explained later by Chinese historians as taboo instances. There is, for example, the case of the character *cheng* 逞, explained as being the taboo character *ying* 盈 by the *Jijie Commentary*,⁷ and two characters *chang* 常, explained as representing the tabooed character *heng* 恆 by the *Suoyin Commentary*.⁸ According to the same *Suoyin Commentary*, because of the name taboo of Emperor Jing of Han (r. 156–141 BC), Qi 啟, the name of Wei Ziqi 微子啟 (the son of the Emperor Yi of the Shang Dynasty) was written as Wei Zikai 微子開 in the *Records of the Historian*.⁹ The character *mou* 某 used in another sentence¹⁰ is also commented as a taboo of the same Emperor.¹¹

³ *Zuozhuan*, j. 10, p. 4a: “Wan is the completion of numbers” (*wan ying shu ye* 萬盈數也). Legge 1966, Vol. 5, p. 125.

⁴ *Shiji*, j. 44, p. 1b: (*wan man shu ye* 萬滿數也)

⁵ *Shangshu*, j. 4 shang, p. 30b.

⁶ *Shiji*, j. 38, p. 6b.

⁷ *Shiji*, j. 39, p. 28a..

⁸ *Shiji*, j. 2, p. 3b and j. 2, p. 10b.

⁹ *Shiji*, j. 38, p. 1a.

¹⁰ *Shiji*, j. 10, p. 5b.

¹¹ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 4.

Finally, in the afore-mentioned *Records of the Historian*, a case of taboo of an empress is reported. The sentence “wild chicken crows in the night” (*yeji ye juan* 野雞夜雉) is commented in the *Jijie Commentary* as a taboo instance of the word “pheasant” (*zhi* 雉), because of the name of Empress Dowager Lü Zhi 呂雉 (d. 180 BC), the wife of Emperor Gaozu of Han (206–195 BC).¹²

Book of the Han (Hanshu) and Book of the Later Han (Hou Hanshu)

Numerous characters of the *Book of the Han* and *Book of the Later Han* are presumed to be tabooed because of the names of emperors of the Han dynasty. As we already mentioned, characters which were the names of reigning emperors are not present in their own Annals sections. For example, there is no *bang* 邦 character in the “Annals of the Emperor Gao” (“Gaodi ji” 高帝記), as it was his given name. This fact was explained as taboo custom by Xun Yue 荀悅 and Yan Shigu 顏師固 – commentators of the *Book of the Han*.¹³

The use of the character “such and such” (*mou* 某) in a sentence of the *Book of the Han*¹⁴ is strictly explained as avoidance of the taboo character *bang* 邦.¹⁵ But still more important is the explicit statement by the author of the *Book of the Han* Ban Gu 班固 himself in another fragment. After a sentence with the character *mou* 某 he explained: “The character *mou* means the name of the Emperor Gao” (*mouzhe, Gao huangdi ming ye* 某者, 高皇帝名也).¹⁶

In other sentences in the *Book of the Han*, we can find yet other characters explained as taboo by Xun Yue or Yan Shigu:

- the character *tong* 通 as the equivalent of the character *che* 徹 – the name of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 140–87 BC), both meaning “to penetrate”;¹⁷

- the character *bu* 不 as the equivalent of the character *fu* 弗 (both meaning “not”) – the name of Emperor Zhao of Han (r. 86–74 BC).¹⁸ The relevant fragment is a changed quotation from the *Spring and Autumn Annals (Tradition of Zuo)*;¹⁹

- the character *mou* 謀 as the equivalent of the character *xun* 詢 – the name of

¹² *Shiji*, j. 28, p. 3b.

¹³ *Hanshu*, j. 1 shang, p. 1a.

¹⁴ *Hanshu*, j. 1 xia, p. 11a. The same sentence in *Shiji*, j. 8, p. 26a.

¹⁵ Wang Yankun 1997, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Hanshu*, j. 99 shang, p. 34b.

¹⁷ *Hanshu*, j. 45, p. 1a.

¹⁸ *Hanshu*, j. 20, p. 42b.

¹⁹ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, j. 17, p. 13a.

Emperor Xuan of Han (r. 73–49 BC),²⁰ both meaning “to plan”;

– the character *jun* 俊 as the equivalent of the character *ao* 驚 – the name of Emperor Cheng of Han (r. 32–7 BC),²¹ and so forth.

In the same way, the equivalents of taboo names of emperors from the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD) are listed in the Commentary to the *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu*): the taboo character *da* 烜 of the Emperor Zhang (r. 76–88 AD) is replaced by *zhao* 著 or *zhao* 昭,²² the taboo character *zhao* 肇 of the Emperor He (r. 89–105 AD) is replaced by *shi* 始,²³ the taboo character *bing* 炳 of the Emperor Chong (r. 144–145 AD) is replaced by *ming* 明,²⁴ and the taboo character *zuan* 纘 of the Emperor Zhi (r. 145–146 AD) is replaced by *ji* 繼.²⁵ In all of these cases, the taboo character shares some meaning with the tabooed character.

Other sources

We have very early evidence of taboo custom in the text of the *Daodejing* discovered in Mawangdui (Changsha). From the Han tomb (No. 3) of Mawangdui, dated to 168 BC, writings on silk were excavated with two versions of the *Daodejing*: Text A (*jiaben* 甲本) and Text B (*yiben* 乙本). Text A of the *Daodejing* has the sentence “And when it is cultivated throughout the state, good fortune will be in abundance” (*xiu zhi yu bang qi de nai feng* 修之於邦其德乃豐),²⁶ where “the state” is written with the character *bang* 邦. Text B replaced the character 邦 (taboo of Gaozu 206–195) with the character *guo* 國. As the name of the next Emperor Hui (194–188) is not tabooed, the texts could therefore be quite precisely dated to the time of Emperor Gaozu (Text A), and after his death but before 168 BCE (Text B)²⁷ – since taboos were for the dead.²⁸

²⁰ *Hanshu*, j. 8, p. 1a. Wang Yankun 1997, pp. 518-519.

²¹ *Hanshu*, j. 10, p. 1a.

²² *Hou hanshu*, j. 3, p. 1a.

²³ *Hou Hanshu*, j. 4, p. 1a.

²⁴ *Hou Hanshu*, j. 6, p. 13b.

²⁵ *Hou Hanshu*, j. 6, p. 14a.

²⁶ *Daodejing*, j. 54, p. 118 (here already replaced by the character *guo* 國).

²⁷ According to Liu Xiaogan 2009, p. 213, the silk editions were dated by archeologists to 195 BC (Silk A) and 169 BC (Silk B).

²⁸ Interesting that the same Text A from Mawangdui has the character *heng* 恆 in place of the familiar *chang* 常 in the famous first lines of the *Daodejing* (*dao ke dao fei heng dao* 道可道非恆道, *ming ke ming fei heng ming* 名可名非恆名), cf. *Daodejing*, j. 1, p. 1. It is because the character *heng* was later tabooed as the name of the Emperor Wen of Han, changed to *chang* and the text was perpetuated in the new form in later editions. Cf. *Daodejing*, j. 1, p. 1, Fn. 2 and 5.

Further examples of name tabooing are assumed in the text of the *Huainanzi*. The character *xiu* 修 in the text²⁹ is explained by Yan Shigu as the taboo equivalent of *chang* 長,³⁰ which was the name of the father of Liu An 劉安 – author or patron of the *Huainanzi*. The work *All About Rulership* (*Duduan* 獨斷) of Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192) explains that the title *jinzhong* 禁中 was apparently changed to *shengzhong* 省中, because of the name of the marquis of Yangping Wang Jin – the father of queen consort Wang Zhengjun 王政君 of Emperor Yuan of Han).³¹ In the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 of Xu Shen 許慎 (58–147) the words “imperial taboo” (*shanghui* 上諱) were found, e.g., after taboo characters as: *hu* 祜,³² *zhuang* 莊,³³ *xiu* 秀,³⁴ *da* 烜,³⁵ *zhao* 肇,³⁶ which were all names of emperors of Han.

Decree of Emperor Xuan (64 BC)

The first known decree of an emperor on taboo is known from the Han time (64 BC), recorded in the *Book of the Han* (*Hanshu*):

We have heard that in old times the names of the sons of heaven were of a kind that they could be known with difficulty (as they were rare) and easily avoided. Now the people when presenting memorials often violate (my) taboo and become liable to punishment. I have great pity for them, and hereby order my name to be changed (from Bingyi 病已)³⁷ to Xun 詢. All cases of violation which occurred before this decree are forgiven.³⁸

Emperors of Han supported the principle that names should have less used characters and be easy to avoid (*nanzhi er yibi* 難知而易避). Sometimes they intentionally changed their names because of that. It shows that the most important for them was the voluntary observance of taboo in practice, not only because of punishment.

²⁹ *Huainanzi*, j. 19, p. 5a.

³⁰ Wang Yankun 1997, p. 43–44.

³¹ *Duduan*, p. 3a. About *Duduan* see Giele 2006.

³² *Shuowen jiezi*, j. 1 shang, p. 1b.

³³ *Shuowen jiezi*, j. 1 xia, p. 1b.

³⁴ *Shuowen jiezi*, j. 7 shang, p. 7b.

³⁵ *Shuowen jiezi*, j. 10 shang, p. 7b.

³⁶ *Shuowen jiezi*, j. 12 xia, p. 6a. if you want you could combine these footnotes into one note At the end of his sentence.

³⁷ The characters *bing* and *yi* were both common and therefore they were hard to avoid.

³⁸ Cf. *Hanshu*, j. 8, p. 12a.

Outer Commentaries to the Book of Songs by Master Han

In the *Outer Commentaries* (*Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳) from the Han period an incident related to the custom of proper usage of name taboos can be found. The action supposedly took place in the Warring States Period. It is a dialogue between marquis Wen 文 of Wei 魏 (d. ca. 396 BC) and his minister Cang Tang 蒼唐. The son of the marquis Wen – Ji 擊 – became the ruler of the Zhongshan 中山 state.

The marquis Wen asked: Is Ji well? Cang Tang gave no answer. Wen asked three times and three times there was no answer. He asked: Why do you not give me an answer? (He was told in response) I wait for You, Marquis, not to call the name of the ruler ... If You ask using his name, I do not dare to answer. Thereupon marquis Wen asked: Is the ruler of Zhongshan well?"³⁹

The text shows that even fathers had to taboo the name of their son, if he became ruler.

Stone inscriptions

Finally we want to mention the stone inscriptions of the Eastern Han period, which sometimes reflect taboo practices. In the Stone Classics of Han – according to the *Lishi* 隸釋 of the Song period – the character *bang* 邦 was replaced by the character *guo* 國 in the texts of the *Analects* (*Lunyu*) and *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu*).⁴⁰ In the Zhang Qian stele 張遷碑 (186 AD) the same happened with the text of the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing*) and in the Stone Tower of Kaimu temple 開母廟 (123 AD) from Henan the character *qi* 啟 was replaced by *kai* 開.⁴¹

5.1.2. Characteristics of the Period

5.1.2.1. Codification of Taboos

The tabooing of names in the Han period is already accepted as a widespread practice by all scholars. This is the first period having not only plenty of examples of taboo, but also a concrete system of rules. The standard rules of *bihui* were codified in the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji*). The time of its formation, apparently different for various parts, is still discussed by scholars (see 4.3.1.3), but these rules were definitely given their final shape during the Han

³⁹ *Hanshi waizhuan*, j. 8, p. 102.

⁴⁰ *Lishi*, j. 14, p. 13b.

⁴¹ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 2.

period. We have already described the *Records of Ritual* in the section concerning the Zhou period (see 4.3.1.3), because we presume that the rules of tabooing already existed before the Han dynasty.⁴²

The general rule was to avoid the taboo of an emperor when presenting a memorial or addressing the emperor.⁴³ The fact that we have many instances of not avoiding taboo in inscriptions and writings can be explained by a lax attitude toward tabooing at that time, but the inconsistency could also have been caused by later revisions. Perhaps the rule of the *Records of Ritual* about not tabooing in written literary works also played a role and the taboo was originally used mostly in day-to-day administrative practice.

The Han time was apparently a time of stabilisation and codification of the custom of name tabooing. The modern scholar Wang Jian presumed that rules for tabooing names were part of a new system of rituals, made by Shu Suntong 叔孫通 at the orders of the First Emperor of Han, who unified elements of different rituals of the Zhou and Qin periods, probably also of different regions of China.⁴⁴

What is certain is that the Han dynasty already knew decrees with promulgations of the emperor's taboo.⁴⁵ Dictionaries since that time have notes supposed to be the equivalents of taboo characters,⁴⁶ which became a characteristic trait of that time. For example, dictionary from the Han Dynasty *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (early 2nd c. AD) of Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 100 AD) has explanations such as “*bang* is *guo*” (*bang, guo ye* 邦,國也).⁴⁷ On the other hand already in the oldest extant Chinese dictionary⁴⁸ *Erya* 爾雅 (compiled possibly in the 3rd c. BC)⁴⁹ we find sentences such as “*xun ... is mou*” (*xu ... mou ye* 詢...謀也),⁵⁰ where the supposed “equivalent character” is placed as an explanation of the respective “taboo character.” Entries like that can be also explanations of characters, not obligatory the indication of tabooing. Therefore the author of this dissertation thinks that such sentences are hardly evidence of equivalents of taboo. Both listed characters have, in fact, similar meanings, which in English could be respectively translated as “country” and

⁴² For more about the Han period see Loewe 1967.

⁴³ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 129.

⁴⁴ Wang Jian 2002, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁵ Cf. Decree of Emperor Xuan (64 BC) recorded in *Hanshu*, j. 8, p. 12a., mentioned in 5.1.1.

⁴⁶ Cf. references to equivalents of taboo in Wang Jian 2002, pp. 36-38.

⁴⁷ *Shuowen jiezi*, j. 6 xia, p. 5b.

⁴⁸ Loewe 1993, p. 94.

⁴⁹ Loewe 1993, p. 96. The first reference we have comes from the Eastern Han period.

⁵⁰ *Erya*, j. shang, p. 1b.

“state”. Admittedly, such dictionaries could have been used to find a character to replace a tabooed one.

The system of equivalent characters for tabooing was called “the method of equivalent characters” (*tongxun daihuan* 同訓代換).⁵¹ Such characters were known apparently before the Han time. For example, the name of Duke Huan of Qi, Bai 白 (Jiang Xiaobai 姜小白, d. 643 BC), was probably tabooed with the equivalent character *hao* 皓 (both meaning “white”),⁵² and the name of Duke Ding of Lu – Song 宋 (509-495 BC) was exchanged for *shang* 商 (another name for the Song state).⁵³ But only in the Han times did the custom of *tongxun daihuan* become a system.

5.1.2.2. Tabooed Persons

The known examples (see 5.1.1) are not many, but include both men and women, more distant ancestors, public and private persons: empresses, their fathers, uncles, fathers of private persons. There are instances of tabooing names of an emperor’s relatives and also of one’s own ancestors. Therefore, we can presume that tabooing names must have been much wider spread than we know at present.

Tabooing, particularly the written tabooing of names, was probably especially cultivated in the higher circles of society. Concrete examples of tabooing of private family names can be found in works of famous writers of that time. The compiler of the *Book of the Master of Huainan* (*Huainanzi*) Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BC, grandson of Emperor Gao) apparently tabooed the name of his father Liu Chang 劉長, as a result of which many *chang* 長 characters in his book were changed to *xiu* 修.⁵⁴

In the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*) Sima Qian (ca. 140–86 BC) tabooed the name of his father Sima Tan 司馬談 and changed the character *tan* 談 to *tong* 同, as for example in names of Zhang Mengtan 張孟談,⁵⁵ or Zhao Tan 趙談.⁵⁶ But there are still other 17

⁵¹ Sometimes it was also called *tongxun xiangdai* 同訓相代 (cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 67), and during the Qing dynasty *huixun* 諱訓 (Wang Jian 2002, p. 38).

⁵² *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 26, p. 436.

⁵³ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 6, p. 91. About the meaning of *shang* 商 see *Handian* 漢典 (www.zdic.net).

⁵⁴ *Yeke congshu*, j. 9, p. 85. In fact there are still many *chang/zhang* 長 characters in the *Huainanzi* (Cf., for example, *Huainanzi*, j. 3, pp. 5b, 9b, 11b). Perhaps they were only tabooed if read as *chang* and not if read as *zhang*.

⁵⁵ *Shiji*, j. 43, p. 10b.

⁵⁶ *Shiji*, j. 39, p. 25b; j. 43, pp. 2a and 3b.

(untabooed) *tan* 談 characters that the author of this dissertation found in the *Records of the Historian*,⁵⁷ remaining unexplained.

5.1.2.3. Rules and Methods of Tabooing

The extent of the avoidance of homonyms in the Han time is still disputed. The discussion was inspired by a sentence from the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*) with two characters *chetong* 車通.⁵⁸ In the commentary the *Shiji jijie*, it was explained that both of these characters should actually be written as *chezhe* 車轍 (the rut). A different character was used, according to the *Shiji jijie*, “because of the taboo of the Emperor Wu of Han”.⁵⁹

Yet we know that the real character tabooed by the synonym *tong* 通 is *che* 徹 (the taboo of the Emperor Wu 140–87 BC). Avoiding the character *zhe* 轍 would signify that the homonym of a taboo character was also avoided. Therefore, for example, Zhou Guangye declares this example as the starting point of that practice.⁶⁰ Chen Yuan, in contrast, moved the starting point of homonym avoidance to the Three Kingdom period.⁶¹ He demonstrates that there is an almost identical sentence in the *Book of the Han* (*Hanshu*),⁶² where the character *dao* 道 is written in place of *tong* 通, which can not be considered as an equivalent of a taboo character *che* 徹. He suggests to abandon explanations of the *Shiji jijie* in this way.⁶³

However, the characters *tong* 通 and *dao* 道 are very similar when handwritten. As the modern scholar Wang Jian notes, we know today many quotations from the *Records of the Historian* in the *Book of the Han*, in which similar characters are confounded.⁶⁴ Besides, the term *chedao* 車道, that is presented by Chen Yuan as counterevidence against the explanation of the *Shiji jijie*, can be presumed to be an erroneous writing of *chetong* 車通 (or the reverse). Therefore, the explanation given in the *Shiji jijie* can be conclusive, and the tabooing of homonyms in the Han time is possible.

⁵⁷ Cf., for example, *Shiji*, j. 39, p. 27a.

⁵⁸ *Shiji*, j. 27, p. 26b.

⁵⁹ *Shiji*, j. 27, p. 26b.

⁶⁰ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 7, p. 109.

⁶¹ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 72.

⁶² *Hanshu*, j. 26, p. 16b.

⁶³ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 74.

⁶⁴ Wang Jian 2002, p. 41.

As noted, the rule of the *Records of Ritual (Liji)* that “homonyms do not have to be tabooed”⁶⁵ is also an indirect indication that such practice did exist if it had to be prohibited. But in fact we have no concrete instances of such practices. On the contrary, there are examples, in which a taboo character is exchanged for another one with the same pronunciation. For example, the family name Yu 渝 was changed to Yu 喻 (with different tone) because of the name of Empress Bo 薄.⁶⁶ What is certain is that the avoidance of homonyms, if it was practised in that period, was not very strict.

Much more evident is the practice of avoiding characters with a taboo component. We find, for example, a sentence with the character *ying* 楹 in the *Tradition of Zuo (Zuozhuan)*,⁶⁷ which is quoted with the character *zhu* 柱 in the *Records of the Historian (Shiji)*.⁶⁸ The character *ying* 楹 is apparently avoided because of the name of the Emperor Hui (Ying 盈). As the taboo character was a part of the character *ying* 楹, it was replaced. This example is considered by some scholars as the beginning of this way of tabooing.⁶⁹ In fact it can also be explained as avoidance of homonyms, because *ying* 楹 is a homonym of the taboo character *ying* 盈. However, we know that “the differentiation of variant forms (of characters) based on their structure ... was not significant” for people at that time.⁷⁰ Originally it was possibly the same character and was avoided for that reason, and not as a homonym.

5.1.2.4. Practice of Tabooing

From the Han on the influence of name tabooing was very apparent. There are already relatively many examples of tabooing known from this period, including the complete change of names. For instance, Wei Ziqi 微子啟 changed his name to Wei Zikai 微子開,⁷¹ and Kuai Che 蒯徹 to Kuai Tong 蒯通 (see 9.1.1.1).⁷² The same was done with family names (e.g., the surname Qing 慶 was changed to He 賀)⁷³ and geographical names (e.g.,

⁶⁵ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 39a.

⁶⁶ *Gujin xingshi shu bianzheng*, j. 30, p. 413: The family name Yu 渝 was changed to Yu 喻 in the year 148 BC because of the courtesy name Ayu 阿渝 of Empress Bo of Jingdi (cf. 3.4.2).

⁶⁷ *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, j. 36, p. 4a.

⁶⁸ *Shiji*, j. 32, p. 14b.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 6, p. 100.

⁷⁰ Cf. Galambos 2006, pp. 2 and 78-87.

⁷¹ *Shiji*, j. 38, p. 1a.

⁷² *Hanshu*, j. 45, p. 1a.

⁷³ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 15, p. 1a.

Hengshan 恒山 was changed to Changshan 常山).⁷⁴ We also know that common words were affected by taboo custom. For example the word *zhi* 雉 (pheasant) was changed to *yeji* 野雞 (wild chicken, see 5 and 5.1.1),⁷⁵ and *xiucai* 秀才 (scholar) to *maocai* 茂才.⁷⁶

Characters which were state taboos in speech or writing were promulgated in public, in a special decree of the emperor (see, e.g., the Decree of the Emperor Xuan in 5.1.1).⁷⁷ Taboos which had to be preserved within the palace confines were announced and supervised by special officials of the emperor (*dashi* 大史 and *xiaoshi* 小史). One had to ask about other taboos of family or territory when visiting. Tabooing of names in the Han period was present in everyday life and was considered an important part of the social system.

5.2. Three Kingdoms

Domeyko's and Doweyko's adverse feelings came,
Strange to say, from resemblance between name and name,
Inconvenient to both men.⁷⁸

This passage coming from one of the greatest masterpieces of Polish literature and the national epic of Poland *Pan Tadeusz* (by Adam Mickiewicz, 1834) is the introduction to the anecdote of the two neighbours Domeyko's and Doweyko's argument about who should get the credit for killing a bear during a hunt. The similarity of names had already been a frequent source of inconvenience and misunderstanding. Finally they solve their conflict by marriage to the sister of each other and a merging of enterprises. That is how it was done in Poland.

For the same problem, the Chinese found their own solution. It was one thousand five hundred years earlier in the period of Three Kingdoms. Teng Mi 滕密 – the father of the Empress Teng (滕皇后) and Ding Mi 丁密 – the Minister of the Interior (*situ* 司徒)⁷⁹ in the time of the last Emperor of the Wu state, Sun Hao (r. 264–280) – both had the same name Mi 密, which caused inconveniences. Therefore, they decided to avoid each other's

⁷⁴ *Hanshu*, j. 28 shang, p. 23b.

⁷⁵ *Shiji*, j. 28, p. 3b.

⁷⁶ *Xuelin*, j. 3, p. 68.

⁷⁷ *Hanshu*, j. 8, p. 12a

⁷⁸ Transl. from: www.antoranz.net/BIBLIOTEKA/PT051225/PanTad-eng/PT-books/BOOK04.HTM (access 26.7.2011).

⁷⁹ According to the *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 3, p. 15a Ding Mi / Ding Gu was a Minister of the Interior (*situ*). Only in the *Taiping huanyuji*, j. 94, p. 14b he appears as Minister of Public Works (*sikong* 司空) and later also in Chen Yuan 1958, p. 133. It is obviously a mistake.

taboo and both changed their name to their courtesy name (*zi*): Teng Mi to Teng Mu 滕牧 and Ding Mi to Ding Gu 丁固.⁸⁰ This custom of mutual tabooing of each other's names is considered a specific custom of this period. It seems that it was not continued later.

5.2.1. Sources

The division of China into Three Kingdoms: Wei, Wu and Shu caused probably some differences in the taboo practice. The three states, however, all had similar instances of name tabooing, in addition to their own features, even though their rule was relatively short. The best known examples of taboo are preserved in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi*) – the basic source of that period,⁸¹ divided into three books: “The Book of Wei”, The Book of Wu” and “The Book of Shu.” Most cases come from Wu, fewer from Wei, and the least from Shu.⁸² A possible explanation is – as we suppose – that there was no chronicle preserved in Shu, and Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297) – the author of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, could use only his own memory to record its history.⁸³ Another explanation could be that he still observed taboos of Shu and did not want to write about them. Chen Shou was born in the Shu state and served as an official there. The *Records of the Three Kingdoms* was compiled 285–297 AD, but some taboo instances were mentioned only in the commentary to it, made by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451) one century later.⁸⁴

As already mentioned, there are relatively numerous instances of tabooing concerning the Wu state. For example, we can find information about the change of the geographical name Hexing 禾興 to Jiaying 嘉興, because of the name of the crown prince of the Emperor Sun Quan – Sun He 孫和 (223–253): “In spring, the first month of the fifth year (of the Chiwu Era 赤烏, i.e. 241 AD), he established his son He 和 as the crown

⁸⁰ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 3, p. 10b: “(Teng) Mu’s original name was Mi 密. He tabooed the name of Ding Mi and changed it to Mu. Likewise Ding Mi tabooed the name of (Teng) Mu and changed his name to Gu.” The same case is repeated later in the *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 12, p. 5b, but here only Ding Mi tabooed the name of Teng Mu: “The son of (Ding) Lan 丁覽 was (Ding) Gu 丁固, courtesy name Zijian 子賤. His original name was Mi 密, but he tabooed the name of Teng Mi and changed it to Gu.” Both fragments are commentaries of Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451).

⁸¹ For English translation of the *Sanguozhi* see Luo Guangzhong 1999.

⁸² Wang Xinhua 2007, pp. 257.

⁸³ Cf. *Cihai* 1999, p. 1429. For a contrary opinion and the controversy about the historical records of the state of Shu see De Crespigny 1990, ch. 9, p. 6, Fn. 20.

⁸⁴ Cf. Wilkinson 2000, pp. 503 and 810.

prince, (and announced) a big amnesty. The name of Hexing was changed therefore to Jiaying”.⁸⁵

In another example we can see that people's names were changed because of the courtesy name of the Emperor Sun Hao – Yuanzong 元宗.⁸⁶ “The Minister of public works Meng Ren 孟仁 died... His original name was Meng Zong 孟宗. He tabooed the courtesy name of (Sun) Hao and changed it”.⁸⁷ This explanation is from the commentary of Pei Songzhi. There are also other individual characters supposed to be equivalents of taboo characters of the Wu emperors. For example, the characters *bing* 柄 and *shi* 勢 in two fragments of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguozhi)*⁸⁸ are presumed to have been used in place of the character *quan* 權 – the taboo name of the Emperor Sun Quan (r. 222–252).⁸⁹

From the state of Wei, we can mention the case of tabooing the geographical name Fanglin garden 芳林園 because of the taboo name of the Prince of Qi 齊 – Cao Fang 曹芳 (r. 239–254). “The Fanglin garden is the Hualin garden 華林園 of today. It was changed to Hualin as the Prince of Qi Fang ascended to the throne.” (*Fanglinyuan ji jin Hualinyuan, Qi wang Fang jiwei, gai wei Hualin* 即今華林園,齊王芳即位,改為華林).⁹⁰

Later sources for the tabooing of names in this period are: *A New Account of Tales of the World (Shishuo xinyu 世說新語)* written by Liu Yiqing (403–444),⁹¹ and the *Gazetteer of the World during the Taiping Period (Taiping huanyuji 太平寰宇記)* written around 976–983.⁹² The first has the phrase *zhuodao* 捉刀 (hold a knife) in a sentence,⁹³ which is supposed to be the phrase *caodao* 操刀 (grasp a knife) from the *Records of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguozhi)*,⁹⁴ changed because of the taboo of the father of the Emperor Wen – the famous late Han warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (d. 220).⁹⁵ In the second source, we can find a fragment about tabooing the name of Xiuyang county 休陽縣 in the Wu state,

⁸⁵ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 2, p. 23b.

⁸⁶ It was a courtesy name, though it looks similar (because of the character *zong* 宗) to most temple names of emperors.

⁸⁷ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 3, p. 14b.

⁸⁸ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 7, p. 12b and j. 20, p. 4a.

⁸⁹ According to the commentary in *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 9, p. 140.

⁹⁰ *Sanguozhi*, “Weizhi”, j. 2, p. 18b. The explanation is the commentary made by a Chen Song 臣松.

⁹¹ For more information see Wilkinson 2000, pp. 812–813.

⁹² Wilkinson 2000, p. 823.

⁹³ *Shishuo xinyu*, j. xia shang, p. 1a.

⁹⁴ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 1, p. 1a and j. 9, p. 11a.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 9, p. 137.

because of the name of the Emperor Jing (r. 258-264) – Xiu 休. “Xiuyang county ... Wu tabooed the name of Sun Xiu 孫休 and changed it to Haiyang 海陽.” (*Xiuyangxian ... Wu bi Sun Xiu ming gai wei Haiyangxian* 休陽縣 ... 吳避孫休名改為海陽縣).⁹⁶ This source is late, but it is quoting in this place a much older text entitled the *Map of Counties* or *Yitu* 邑圖. Finally we will mention the *Encyclopaedic History of Institutions* (*Tongdian* 通典), compiled in 801 AD by Du You 杜佑 (735–812).⁹⁷ This late source has a special discussion about taboo in the period of the Three Kingdoms,⁹⁸ and, though it is late, it is considered the most important source for the practice of taboo at that time. I will discuss it extensively below (see 5.2.3).

5.2.2. Decrees on Names Tabooing

The practice of proclaiming official imperial decrees about name tabooing, as already known from Han time (cf. above the decree of Emperor Xuan, 64 BC), was continued in the Three Kingdoms period. Two edicts of emperors from the Wei and the Wu states are known to deal with the problem of taboo avoidance. The first of them, concerning the Wei state, is recorded in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*:

In the sixth month (of 260 AD) an edict was issued: “In antiquity the personal name of the ruler was difficult to offend against and easy to avoid. Now the taboo character of the Duke of Changdaoxiang 常道鄉 (260–265) is very difficult to avoid; it is ordered that extensive deliberations be held about a change of the name and a detailed report be presented.”⁹⁹

The Duke of Changdaoxiang 常道鄉公 (or Prince of Chenliu 陳留王) originally had the given name Huang 璜. The character *huang* referred to a curved jade probably often used at that time in rituals such as sacrifices and funerals, and also as jewel, and was therefore difficult to avoid. Hence at the time of his accession to the Wei throne (about 260 AD), his name was changed to the less common Huan 奂.¹⁰⁰

Two years later (AD 262) another edict of Emperor Sun Xiu of the competing Wu state is recorded in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi*) as a quotation from the

⁹⁶ *Taiping huanyuji*, j. 104, p. 4a.

⁹⁷ Cf. Wilkinson 2000, p. 525.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Tongdian*, j. 104, pp. 549-555.

⁹⁹ *Sanguozhi*, “Weizhi”, j. 4, p. 23b. Cf. Chen Yuan 1958, p. 133.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 66.

Records of Wu (Wulu 吳錄)¹⁰¹:

According to the rites, names ought to be difficult to offend against and easy to avoid ... (accordingly) I now create new names for my four sons: the eldest is to have the name 𣎵, pronounced like *wan* 灣, with the courtesy name 蒯, pronounced like *qi* 迄. The second is given the name 眞, to be pronounced *gong* 觥, and the courtesy name 羿, pronounced *xian* 殲. The next is to have the name 𣎵, pronounced *mang* 莽, with the courtesy name 昱, pronounced *ju* 舉. The next is given the name 𣎵, pronounced *bao* 褒, and the courtesy name 𣎵, pronounced *yong* 擁. These are all different from those in common use.¹⁰²

The new names chosen by the Emperor Sun Xiu were a unique and even somewhat strange invention. All Chinese historians from the first commentator Pei Songzhi 裴松之¹⁰³ up to the modern scholar Wang Jian 王建 have laughed at this edict, because “it did not follow rules of Chinese characters and pronunciation”.¹⁰⁴ The emperor’s idea was, however, only to make tabooing easier. His plans had no future, because, as we know, two years later – after his death – his nephew Sun Hao was enthroned and two of the elder sons were later executed. But the basic principle of picking rare names was not abandoned. Both decrees of the Wei and Wu emperors show that they were lenient in their taboo practices. The controversial attitude of the last emperor of the Wu state Sun Hao, considered as extremely cruel, will be discussed below (see 5.2.5).

5.2.3. Discussions about Tabooing

From the time of the Three Kingdoms, the first abstract discussions of scholars about the tabooing of names are reported from the states of Wei and Wu. In the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, we find the polemics of a Wu official Zhang Zhao 張昭 (156–236) against a late Han scholar Ying Shao 應劭 (d. ca. 204 AD). Ying Shao is quoted as saying that there were altogether 56 “former rulers” (*jiujun* 舊君) whose names had been tabooed (since the

¹⁰¹ Lost work of Zhang Bo 張勃 (ca.225-266 AD), reconstructed from quotations in the Commentary to *Sanguozhi* made by Pei Songzhi 裴松之. Cf. *Zhongguo congshu zonglu*, Vol. 2, pp. 278–279.

¹⁰² *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 3, p. 7b-8a. Perhaps these pronunciations make more sense with historical pronunciations.

¹⁰³ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 3, p. 8a.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 68.

beginning of the Han period¹⁰⁵ and that the taboos of all these emperors of the past should be avoided. Zhang Zhao argued in his treatise against Ying Shao's opinion. He said that the blood-relationship gradually decreased, and if it was extinct, one was no longer obliged to taboo these names and can have the same name.¹⁰⁶ Apparently, the practice that was common for the Han subject Ying Shao was not so significant for the Wu subject Zhang Zhao.

Much later, in the Tang dynasty's *Tongdian* 通典, there are recorded different topics related to *bihui* in the Wei state of the Three Kingdoms period, in the chapter dealing with posthumous names and rules of tabooing. In particular, the commentary of a Wei scholar Wang Su 王肅 (195–256 AD) is mentioned, who reports about discussions on concrete themes related to the tabooing of names. According to him, imperial taboo did not have to be avoided in memorials to the throne, in the study of classics, in literary compositions, and in temple services, but should be avoided in names.¹⁰⁷

5.2.4. The Tabooing of Courtesy Names

The most of tabooed names in this period were, as usual, given names (*ming*), but there is also a relatively large number of examples for name changes because of one's courtesy name (*zi* 字), which was new in the history of Chinese name tabooing. The first known example of that practice, noted in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* can probably be dated to the late Han times. It says that: “When (Sima) Lang 司馬朗 (171-217 AD) was nine years of age, a guest asked him about his father, using his courtesy name *zi*. The boy answered that such a question is disrespectful to his father and the guest apologized to him.”¹⁰⁸

Another example from the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* says that a boy named Changlin 常林 had the courtesy name Bokui 伯槐. When he was seven years old his father used this name (i.e., Bokui) when talking to him. The boy protested and his reaction was approved.¹⁰⁹ These two examples tell about children, but they show that already in the last years of the Han period, calling one's courtesy name was perceived as disrespectful: Sima

¹⁰⁵ Perhaps taboo names of the Han emperors and their ancestors.

¹⁰⁶ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 7, p. 1a. The polemics is mentioned in the commentary of Pei Songzhi.

¹⁰⁷ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 554.

¹⁰⁸ *Sanguozhi*, “Weizhi”, j. 15, p. 3a.

¹⁰⁹ *Sanguozhi*, “Weizhi”, j. 23, p. 3b.

Lang and Chang Lin were aware of the new custom and the criticised guests acknowledged their *faux pas*.

We can observe this change of custom in the case of the general Ma Chao 馬超 (176–222 AD), written down in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. Ma Chao used with respect the courtesy name of Liu Bei 劉備 (the founding emperor of the state of Shu, r. 221–223) in order to observe the taboo of his name. But officials were irritated and demanded his execution. Finally they forgave the unconscious “affront” of Ma Chao.¹¹⁰ We can see from this that the courtesy name, which was originally used just for protection of one’s personal name, could now also be tabooed. It became a peculiar custom in the Three Kingdoms period. There are more known examples of such practice. Meng Zong 孟宗 changed his name to Meng Ren 孟仁, because of the courtesy name Yuanzong 元宗 of Sun Hao 孫皓 (the last emperor of the Wu state, r. 264–280), and Mengda 孟達, with the courtesy name Zijing 子敬, who changed his own courtesy (!) name to Zidu 子度 (because of the identical courtesy name Zijing 子敬 of the uncle of Liu Bei).¹¹¹

5.2.5. Status of Tabooing in Wu: Problems of Homonyms and Punishment

The taboos of Wu were apparently the strictest¹¹² and are the best known of the Three Kingdoms period. It is certainly odd that it was not Wei, the cultural heart-land and former political center of the Han, but the Wu state that had the most of known cases of name tabooing in that period.

There are examples of avoiding names for almost every emperor of Wu,¹¹³ names of their ancestors (e.g. Sun Jian 孫堅)¹¹⁴ and crown princes (e.g., Sun He 孫和). The avoidance of homonyms (only one example) is also announced in Wu: As it was mentioned before (see 5.2.1), when Sun He 孫和 was nominated heir apparent, the name of Hexing 禾興 county was changed to Jiaying 嘉興.¹¹⁵ Chen Yuan calls it the first recorded instance of

¹¹⁰ *Sanguozhi*, “Shuzhi”, j. 6, p. 6b. Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 63.

¹¹¹ Cf. Chen Yuan 1958, p. 133–134.

¹¹² Wang Jian 2002, p. 66.

¹¹³ As far as we know there is only no instance known for the tabooing of the name of the emperor Sun Liang 孫亮 (r. 252–258).

¹¹⁴ Sun Jian 孫堅 (d. 191 AD) was the father of the first emperor of the Wu state – Sun Quan (r. 222–252). The character *lao* 牢 (firm) in a sentence of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 13, p. 4b) is commented as the equivalent of the taboo character *jian* 堅 by *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 9, p. 142.

¹¹⁵ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 2, p. 23b.

homonym avoidance in Chinese history.¹¹⁶ As we already discussed before (see 5.1.2.3), possible examples of homonym avoidance were claimed to be found for times long before, and one isolated instance in this period is also unconvincing as evidence of a real and lasting change.

Another problem is the punishment practice of the Three Kingdoms period, practiced mainly by the last emperor of Wu – Sun Hao 孫皓 (r. 264–280). We find a note in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, stating that “those who inadvertently violated taboos of Sun Hao were arrested and sometimes even executed.”¹¹⁷ One could think, for this reason, that taboo prohibitions were particularly severe. But as it was explained by Chen Yuan, this is not necessarily an indication for a strict prohibition of taboos, but only the description of Sun Hao’s aversions,¹¹⁸ and was limited to the period of his personal reign. There are also no records about concrete punishments because of a violation of taboo in that time in even one of the three states.

5.2.6. Tabooing in Wei

Sources of tabooing in the state of Wei are much more limited than for Wu.¹¹⁹ From the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, we know about the problem of the taboo of the Duke of Changdaoxiang 常道鄉 (260 – 265) and the issue of an imperial edict, as noted above (see 5.2.2). We also know about the tabooing the name of the Prince of Yan 燕王 – Cao Yu 曹宇 (d. 278 AD), who was not an emperor, by his son – Emperor Cao Huan 曹奂 (r. 260–265).¹²⁰ The Prince of Yan had special privileges because of the power of his son, and his name had to be tabooed in every place except the temple. There are also examples of the substitution of names as a way of tabooing in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. The taboo characters of Wei rulers were replaced, for example, in this way: *fang* 芳 (fragrant grass) by *hua* 華 (flower), *cao* 操 (grasp) by *zhuo* 捉 (hold, see 5.2.1).

More information can be gleaned from later sources. *Tongdian* 通典 of the Tang dynasty, mention the opinion about the tabooing of names of an official Wang Su 王肅 (195–256). When the Emperor Cao Rui 曹叡 (r. 226–239) died, his soul tablet had to be moved to the ancestral temple, therefore according to ritual the soul tablet of the Emperor

¹¹⁶ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 72.

¹¹⁷ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 20, p. 8a.

¹¹⁸ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 134. It is maybe just an example of a “last bad emperor” in historical sources.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 64.

¹²⁰ *Sanguozhi*, “Weizhi”, j. 4, p. 24b.

Gao (Cao Teng 曹騰, adoptive grandfather of Cao Cao 曹操) had to be moved out from it. There were five generations from Cao Teng to the Emperor Cao Fang 曹芳 (r. 239–254). One minister came to Wang Su and asked whether the name of Emperor Gao should be still tabooed. The answer was that “names of princes (*zhuhou* 諸侯) need not to be tabooed after five generations, and emperors (*tianzi* 天子) could also be treated that way.” Therefore the names of distant ancestors of the emperor need not be tabooed.¹²¹

Wang Su also regarded as incorrect the attitude of Fan Xianzi 范獻子 (see 4.3.1.4), who felt ashamed because he violated the taboo of Prince Xian and Prince Wu after 300 years.¹²² The most important thing was not to use names of former rulers in names of subjects. According to the modern scholar Wang Jian, this attitude of Wang Su is near to an abolition of *bihui*.¹²³ Perhaps it is also an explanation of why we find relatively few cases of taboo in the Wei state. The statement of Wang Su from the *Tongdian* explicitly supports the possibility that the Wei used less taboo.

5.2.7. Tabooing in the Shu

There is little information about the practice of name taboos in the state of Shu. We know from the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* that not only the name of ruler Liu Bei 劉備 (r. 221–223) was tabooed, but also that of his uncle (his father’s younger brother) Liu Zijing 劉子敬. Liu Bei had an adoptive son Liu Feng 劉封 (d. 220), who provoked his anger. Meng Da 孟達 proposed to Liu Feng to flee to Wei, but he refused. Later he was sentenced to death, and said: “Why have I not listened to Meng Zidu 孟子度”.¹²⁴ The real courtesy name of Meng Da was Zijing 子敬, but it was tabooed by Liu Feng because of the name of his uncle.¹²⁵

There is also an example of not tabooing the name of the Emperor Liu Bei. More than ten persons requested the enthronement of Liu Bei, quoting old books in order to support him, although his taboo character *bei* 備 appeared in these quotations. Liu Bei did not protest.¹²⁶ This case can be explained as not tabooing books. But it is also possible that the reason for non-observance of taboo was the fact that the character *bei* had to be used on

¹²¹ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 554.

¹²² *Guoyu*, j. 15, p. 2ab.

¹²³ Wang Jian 2002, p. 65.

¹²⁴ *Sanguozhi*, “Shuzhi”, j. 10, p. 3b.

¹²⁵ Wang Jian 2002, p. 64.

¹²⁶ *Sanguozhi*, “Shuzhi”, j. 2, p. 13ab.

purpose in order to convince people of their own legitimation. The choice between legitimation and etiquette was made in favour of legitimation.¹²⁷ We can presume that the practice of tabooing names, its intensity and methods of tabooing depended on the respective ruler.

5.2.8. Mutual Avoidance of Name Taboos

Although China was divided into three parts, people (at least in diplomacy) apparently respected taboos from other states, according to the old custom from the *Book of Rituals*: “If you come to a country you should ask about taboo”.¹²⁸ This is explicit in the diplomatic relations. When Sun Quan 孫權 (r.222-252) became emperor of the Wu state (222 AD), a chancellor of the Shu state – Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) – sent congratulations to him through an envoy, Chen Zhen 陳震. Chen Zhen asked about taboos using the words of Fan Xianzi 范獻子 as mentioned above (see 4.3.1.4), showed his sense of propriety, and his mission could be fulfilled.¹²⁹ Later (265 AD), the Emperor Sun Hao 孫皓 (264-280) sent two envoys to the Wei state. “As they entered, they asked about taboos.”¹³⁰

Perhaps there is also an instance of taboo in the answer of Liu Bei (Emperor of Shu state) to Sun Quan (Emperor of the Wu state), quoted in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. Sun Quan wanted to persuade Liu Bei to attack Shu, but Liu Bei did not want to. In his reply, he used the sentence “in the past the ‘center’ (power) was with (Cao) Cao” (*jie shu yu Cao* 借樞於操).¹³¹ The character *shu* 樞 in the sentence can be perhaps seen a substitute character for the taboo character *quan* 權 – the taboo name of Emperor Sun Quan. This way, Liu Bei could avoid saying his name directly.¹³² On the other side he did infringe on the taboo for Cao Cao’s personal name.

5.3. Jin and Sixteen Kingdoms (265–420)

Zheng Achun 鄭阿春 was the wife of the Emperor Yuan 元帝 (r. 317–322) of Jin. She was born probably about 290 AD, but very soon, she lost her parents and became an orphan. Later she married one Mr. Tian 田 and bore him one son, but the man died shortly after. In

¹²⁷ Wang Jian 2002, p. 64.

¹²⁸ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 40a.

¹²⁹ *Sanguozhi*, “Shuzhi”, j. 9, p. 5a.

¹³⁰ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 3, p. 11b. *Liji*, j. 1, p. 40a.

¹³¹ *Sanguozhi*, “Shuzhi”, j. 2, p. 7b (in the commentary of Pei Songzhi).

¹³² Cf. *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 9, p. 140.

312 Achun met the Prince of Langye 琅邪王 – Sima Rui 司馬睿 – by chance and he chose her as his wife. A few years later, in 317, Rui became Emperor Yuan – the first Emperor of Eastern Jin. Achun bore him three children, but already in 322 Rui died. In 326, the life story of Achun also came to an end, but the story of her name just started.¹³³

Forty five years later, after the reign of sons from other wives and grandchildren of Rui, eventually one of the sons of Achun, Sima Yu 司馬昱, also became for one year the emperor of Jin (as Emperor Jianwen 簡文帝, r. 371–372), and after him, his son and her grandson Sima Yao 司馬曜 (Emperor Xiaowu 孝武帝, r. 372–396). They wanted to venerate Achun as their ancestor and to express this by tabooing her name. The practice of tabooing the name of an empress would have been acceptable at that time. A few empresses had already been venerated in such a way already, in the Eastern Jin dynasty. For example the name of the Empress Du Lingyang 杜陵陽 (321–341), the wife of the Emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 326–342) was tabooed and therefore Lingyang county 陵陽縣 was changed to Guangyang 廣陽,¹³⁴ which is regarded as the first example of changing a geographical name because of an empress' taboo.¹³⁵ The name of Empress Wang Muzhi 王穆之 (d. 365) was also tabooed. Because of that, the general Mao Muzhi 毛穆之 had to change his name and use only his childhood name (*xiaozi* 小子) Wusheng 武生.¹³⁶ Du and Wang were also empresses, and the tabooing of their names met with no objections. But Achun had not achieved this high status. She was legally only a concubine of the Emperor Yuan, as he had had another wife before (already deceased), who had been an empress. Should her name be tabooed nonetheless?

As the official tabooing of Achun's name was proposed during the reign of the Emperor Xiaowu, the result was a long debate in the court. At least this is the version presented in the *Tongdian* 通典 written in the Tang period. According to it, a high official

¹³³ For the biography of Zheng Achun see *Jinshu*, j. 32, pp. 5a-6a; *Zhongguo lidai renming da cidian*, Vol. 1, p. 1581.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Jinshu*, j. 32, p. 2a. The fact that the character *yang* 陽 of her name was not changed here and in other places can be explained by the fact that her real name was Ling and was only expanded in the *Jinshu* to Lingyang (cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 77). Another possibility would be that her real name was Lingchun 陵春 and the character *chun* was later replaced by *yang* 陽, because of taboo of Zheng Achun. It is also possible that the name Lingyang was perceived by the Chinese in terms of words, not of characters. Hence changing the place name Lingyang to Guangyang was enough.

¹³⁵ Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 260.

¹³⁶ *Jinshu*, j. 81, p. 9b. Mao Muzhi changed his name to his courtesy name Xianzu 憲祖 at first, but later, because of the mother's name Xuan 憲 of the general Huan Wen 桓溫 (312–373) changed it once more to his childhood name.

ordered Wang Biao 王彪 to ask other ministers for their opinions about this tabooing. Their opinions varied. The official Wang Shao 王劭 said that only the primary wife of an emperor and maybe his other wives can be tabooed, if they are empresses. Achun was not an empress, her name was not on the taboo list (*huibang* 諱榜), and there was no similar custom before, therefore there was no need for tabooing. The Second Assistant Minister Dai Mi 戴謐 opposed him and pointed out that, in common practice, the taboo observed by a father is also observed by his son. In the same manner, names tabooed by a ruler should also be taboo for subjects. After all, the name of “the small ruler” (*xiaojun* 小君) – the mother of an emperor – should be taboo. Thereupon Wang Biao showed the difference between the relation of father – son (relatives, with the same family name), and the relation of ruler – subject. He thought that this difference disoblged the need for tabooing and he supported the opinion of the official Wang Shao.¹³⁷

Apparently, the objections of some officials were ignored and the name of Achun became taboo. In 394 AD, 68 years after the death of Achun, her grandson Emperor Xiaowu issued a decree, and promoted Achun to Empress Dowager.¹³⁸ The character *chun* 春 in names and titles had to be changed, usually to *yang* 陽. Many examples are recorded. For example in the *Book of the Song* (*Songshu*), we read that “Fuyang 富陽 in the Hanjiu 漢舊 county was originally called Fuchun 富春 ... but was changed in the time of the Emperor Xiaowu to Fuyang, due to the taboo Chun of the Empress Dowager Zheng of the Emperor Jianwen of the Jin dynasty.”¹³⁹ The same happened to Yichun county 宜春縣 (changed to Yiyang 宜陽) and to Chungu county 春穀縣 (changed to Yanggu 陽穀).¹⁴⁰ Also books related to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*) met the same fate.¹⁴¹ The reader should not be surprised if he or she still finds books with the title *Yangqiu* 陽秋 in the next 800 years after the Jin dynasty. It was also the case with such books as the *Jin Yangqiu* 晉陽秋 of Sun Sheng 孫盛 and the *Yunyu yangqiu* 韻語陽秋 compiled of Ge Lifang 葛立方.¹⁴² The last title was evidently used because of established custom, not directly because of taboo.

¹³⁷ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 553.

¹³⁸ *Jinshu*, j. 32, pp. 5b-6a.

¹³⁹ *Songshu*, j. 35, p. 4a.

¹⁴⁰ *Songshu*, j. 36, p. 12a; *Shijia zhai yangxin lu*, j. 11, p. 9a.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Qidongyeyu*, j. 4, p. 41: “The taboo name of empress Zheng of Emperor Jianwen was Achun, therefore *Chunqiu* was changed to *Yangqiu*.”

¹⁴² *Lishaobian*, j. 40, p. 10a. Cf. also De Crespigny 1970, p. 54.

5.3.1. Sources and General View

During the time (265–420) of both the Eastern and Western Jin dynasties, which included Sixteen Kingdoms, the observance of taboo became very diversified in matters of taboo persons and taboo methods. The main source for knowing about tabooing of that period is the *Book of the Jin (Jinshu)* written in 644 by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648), which covers the years 265–419. For the first period of Jin the *Records of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguozhi)* can be used, the author of which, Chen Shou (233–297), lived in the time of the Western Jin. Many other topics and discussions about taboo were also recorded in the above-mentioned *Encyclopaedic History of Institutions (Tongdian)* written in 801 AD. Although this source is much younger and for that reason needs to be regarded with caution, it is still valuable material assembling many disparate and now lost sources.¹⁴³

A peculiar custom of this period was the special attention for the observance of taboo names of empresses, with the greatest amount of such examples in Chinese history. It testifies to the importance of women in that period. Names of empresses were in that time put on the official list of taboos. One other feature is the inclusion of private taboos of the emperor in the imperial taboo: all taboos observed by emperor, as, e.g., the taboo of the emperor's mother, now had to be avoided by ministers and subjects as well.

5.3.2. Western Jin

Although the traditional period of the Western Jin dynasty (265–316) starts from Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 265–290), it can be helpful to mention the tabooing practices of his ancestors. The grandfather of the Emperor Wu – Sima Yi 司馬懿 (179–251) – had been a minister during the Wei dynasty and gradually obtained the highest political power in the state. As recorded in the *Han Wei chunqiu* 漢魏春秋 of Kong Yan 孔衍 (268–320), a decree was issued, ordering his name to be tabooed, especially by other ministers presenting a memorial to the throne.¹⁴⁴ When Sima Yi died in 251, political power was inherited by his sons Sima Shi 司馬師 (208–255) and Sima Zhao 司馬昭 (211–265). And as before, it was ordered in 256 that the name of Sima Zhao “not to be spoken in memorials to the throne.”¹⁴⁵ It should be mentioned that the principle “not to use a personal name in a memorial to the emperor” (*zoushi buming* 奏事不名) had been established by Liu Bang of

¹⁴³ For more about *Tongdian* see Wilkinson 2000, p. 525.

¹⁴⁴ *Sanguozhi*, “Weizhi”, j. 4, p. 6a.

¹⁴⁵ *Jinshu*, j. 2, p. 5b.

the Han dynasty as the highest privilege of the prime minister.¹⁴⁶ In the case of Sima Yi and Sima Zhao, we can see the strong relation between the real political power and the tabooing of names. In 265 AD this power was complete when the son of Sima Zhao – Sima Yan 司馬炎 – coerced the last Wei emperor to abdicate and became the Emperor Wu of Jin.

In the beginning of the Jin dynasty the observance of taboo was still limited. The tabooing of ancestors was restricted to three generations and started from Sima Yi. The *Encyclopaedic History of Institutions (Tongdian)* records a memorial of Sun Yu 孫毓, responsible for the tabooing practice, who postulated in his memorial *Qimiao huizi yi* 七廟諱字議 the return to the old tradition of tabooing for seven generations.¹⁴⁷ The *Book of the Jin (Jinshu)* also noted that the minister “proposed the tabooing of seven temples,” but the Emperor has not allowed it.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, Sun Yu, who regarded tabooing as an instrument for social order and a clear indication of status, at the end of his memorial used the taboo character *fang* 防 – the name of the great-grandfather of the Emperor.¹⁴⁹ It can be interpreted as his irritation about the failure of the project.¹⁵⁰

Another topic of tabooing discussed in the Jin period and recorded in the *Encyclopaedic History of Institutions (Tongdian)* was tabooing of characters in quotations from classical works. The problem was noticed in two terms of the *Rites of Zhou (Zhouli)*: *fengshi* 風師 and *yushi* 雨師,¹⁵¹ which contained the taboo character of the name of the uncle of the Emperor Wu – Sima Shi 司馬師 (208–255). The Emperor ordered in his decree in 275 AD that the character *shi* 師 should be tabooed, and written without the upper stroke, i.e., as *shuai* 帥.¹⁵² Scholar Shu Xi 束皙 (261–300), in his treatise *Discussion about what should not be tabooed (Bu dei bihui yi)* 不得避諱議 disapproved of such changes in the classics.¹⁵³

The case of Kong Chao 孔晁 can serve as evidence for a relative tolerance in observing taboos in that period. According to the *Encyclopaedic History of Institutions (Tongdian)*, he offended apparently two times the taboo of Emperor Wu in a memorial, and explained it with the principle of not tabooing classical works. Since a memorial is hardly a

¹⁴⁶ *Hanshu*, j. 99 shang, p. 13b. Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 69.

¹⁴⁷ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 553.

¹⁴⁸ *Jinshu*, j. 3, p. 3b.

¹⁴⁹ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 553.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Jian 2002, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ *Zhouli*, j. 5, p. 10b. The character *feng* 風 is written in *Zhouli* as *feng* 飗.

¹⁵² Wang Jian 2002, p. 71.

¹⁵³ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 553.

classical work, a few ministers were irritated, but the Emperor himself did not persecute Kong Chao. He only issued a decree and reordered the observance of taboo.¹⁵⁴ Most examples of name tabooing in this first period of Jin, as we can find in the historical documents, are the names of the “three emperors” Sima Yi, Sima Shi, and Sima Zhao, who never actually ascended the throne.

5.3.3. A New Method of Tabooing – “Situational Equivalents” and others

A new tendency can be seen in the Western Jin in the method of tabooing. If we compare this period to the Han dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period, we can see that the number of equivalents for taboo characters considerably increased. This was due to the new principle that came into use, which can be called the method of “situational equivalents” of tabooing (*linshi xunbi* 臨時訓避).¹⁵⁵ The equivalent character replacing the taboo character was no longer fixed, but was chosen corresponding to the situation.

If we examine the tabooing of the name of Sima Yi, we can find at least five different equivalents for his taboo character *yi* 懿 (perfect): *yi* 壹 (one), *mao* 茂 (luxuriant), *mi* 密 (close), *mu* 睦 (harmonious), and *mao* 懋 (luxuriant).¹⁵⁶ Most of these characters have meanings related to the character *yi* 懿 and to the emperor. They were specially chosen for tabooing, according to the actual situation. The character *yi* 壹, which does not have a similar meaning (unless as one, united, which is perfect), is a part of the taboo character. It was perhaps another method of tabooing or just a mistake.

The author of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi*) Chen Shou (233–297), who lived in the time of the Western Jin, also tabooed the name of Sima Yi. For example Wu Yi 吳懿 (d. 237) from the gazetteer *Records of Huayang Country* (*Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志)¹⁵⁷ is recorded by him as Wu Yi 吳壹,¹⁵⁸ and Zhang Yi 張懿 from the *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu*)¹⁵⁹ is recorded as Zhang Yi 張壹.¹⁶⁰

In the case of Sima Shi, there were more than ten characters being used as equivalents of the taboo name. The change of the character *shi* 師 to *shuai* 帥 (by omission of one stroke) was used in tabooing not only for the already mentioned classic works (see

¹⁵⁴ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 553.

¹⁵⁵ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 553.

¹⁵⁶ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, pp. 147–148.

¹⁵⁷ *Huayang guozhi*, j. 7, p. 5a. More about *Huayang guozhi* see Wilkinson 2000, p. 812.

¹⁵⁸ *Sanguozhi*, “Shuzhi”, j. 3, p. 3b.

¹⁵⁹ *Hou Hanshu*, j. 105, p. 1a.

¹⁶⁰ *Sanguozhi* (b), j. 30, p. 1b. *SBBY* records the name as Zhang Yi 張益 (*Sanguozhi*, “Shuzhi”, j. 1, p. 1b).

5.3.2), but also in names: there are examples that people with the family name Shi 師 changed it to Shuai 帥.¹⁶¹ According to Zhou Guangye, all characters *bing* 兵, *jun* 軍, *zhong* 眾 in the *Records of Three Kingdoms* are equivalents of the character *shi*.¹⁶² The *Book of the Jin* (*Jinshu*) recorded that in the beginning of the Jin period, because of the taboo of Emperor Jing 景帝 (i.e. Sima Shi), the title “Grand Preceptor” (*taishi* 太師)¹⁶³ was not used, but instead *taizai* 太宰.¹⁶⁴ It is interesting that according to the *Tongdian* the same title was exchanged for *taishuai* 太帥.¹⁶⁵ The same *Book of the Jin* said that the title “Mentor” *shi* 師 was changed in the Jin times to *fu* 傅.¹⁶⁶ Other examples of tabooing of *shi* 師 are the change of the title “Army Supervisor” (*junshi* 軍師)¹⁶⁷ into *junsi* 軍司,¹⁶⁸ *tianshi* 天師 into *tianguan* 天官,¹⁶⁹ and Metropolitan Area (*jingshi* 京師) into *jingdu* 京都.¹⁷⁰ Chen Yuan also notes (but without giving sources), that the title *jingshi* was sometimes changed to *jingyi* 京邑.¹⁷¹

As for the reasons for the method of situational equivalents in tabooing, the scholar Wang Jian alluded to two factors:

- only taboo characters were announced in public, but not equivalents, as had been the custom in Han times;
- Chinese characters have many meanings, and therefore they should be replaced by different equivalents.¹⁷²

The character *shi* 師, for example, can denote a military troop, and then can be changed to *bing* 兵 or *jun* 軍; as a group of people to *zhong* 眾; as a commander of the army to *shuai* 帥; as an official to *zai* 宰 or *si* 司; as a gentleman to *fu* 傅; or as a capital to *du* 都 or *yi* 邑.¹⁷³

¹⁶¹ *Tongzhi*, j. 28, p. 468.

¹⁶² *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 149.

¹⁶³ Hucker 1985, p. 481.

¹⁶⁴ *Jinshu*, j. 24, p. 2a. Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 483.

¹⁶⁵ *Tongdian*, j. 30, p. 171.

¹⁶⁶ *Jinshu*, j. 24, p. 13a. For title *shi* see Hucker 1985, p. 421. For title *fu* see Hucker 1985, p. 216.

¹⁶⁷ Hucker 1985, p. 202.

¹⁶⁸ *Tongdian*, j. 29, p. 168; Hucker 1985, p. 203.

¹⁶⁹ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 152. Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 509.

¹⁷⁰ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 152. Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 172.

¹⁷¹ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 22.

¹⁷² Wang Jian 2002, pp. 73-74.

¹⁷³ Wang Jian 2002, p. 74.

Apparently there was also another, less common method of tabooing – omitting the taboo character altogether. It is noted for example that the title *junjijiu* 軍祭酒¹⁷⁴ should be in fact *junshijijiu* 軍師祭酒,¹⁷⁵ and the character *shi* 師 was deleted because of the taboo for the name of Emperor Jing.¹⁷⁶

The method of situational equivalents was also used for tabooing the name of Sima Zhao. The most used equivalent character was *ming* 明. The character *zhao* 昭 means “clear,” and therefore it was changed to *ming* 明 (bright), with a similar meaning. For example, in the *Book of the Jin (Jinshu)* there are the characters *minggao* 明告 in the speech of the Emperor Wu.¹⁷⁷ Apparently this term has the meaning of *zhaogao* 昭告 (proclaim publicly).¹⁷⁸ Also the famous Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 from the Han time (1st century BC) – one of the Four Beauties, who had been sent to marry the Xiongnu ruler Huhanye 呼韓邪 – appears as Wang Mingjun 王明君. The writer Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300) wrote in the introduction to the *Poetry about Wang Mingjun (Wang Mingjun ci 王明君辭)* that the name of Wang Zhaojun was changed because of the taboo of Sima Zhao.¹⁷⁹ But the character *zhao* could also be changed to *xian* 顯. For example, after the title *xianminggong* 顯明宮 of Sun Haozhuan in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguozhi)*, Pei Songzhi 裴松之 wrote in his commentary: “(It should be) *zhaominggong* 昭明宮 ... but was changed because of the taboo of Jin dynasty”.¹⁸⁰ Still another equivalent character was *yao* 曜, for example Wei Yao’s 韋曜 original name was Zhao 昭, but he changed it, when it became taboo.¹⁸¹ The characters *ming* 明, *xian* 顯, and *yao* 曜 have the similar meaning as the taboo character *zhao* 昭 – this way of tabooing was known in China already in the Han period (though before usually limited to one character) and is called in Chinese research “the method of equivalent characters” (*tongxun daihuan* 同訓代換, see 5.1.2.1).

The situational equivalents, however, were an innovation of the Western Jin or, more precisely, of the period of the Emperor Wu’s reign. This custom was not present in the Han period. Different characters (with a similar meaning) such as *shu* 樞, *bing* 柄, and

¹⁷⁴ For example, in *Sanguozhi*, „Weizhi“, j. 4, p. 25a.

¹⁷⁵ For the title *junshi* see Hucker 1985, p. 202, for *jijiu* p. 130.

¹⁷⁶ *Gangmu dingwu*, j. 1, pp. 3b-4a.

¹⁷⁷ *Jinshu*, j. 3, p. 2a.

¹⁷⁸ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 153.

¹⁷⁹ *Xuelin*, j. 4, pp. 107-108.

¹⁸⁰ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 3, p. 13a.

¹⁸¹ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 20, p. 6a.

shi 勢 were already used for tabooing the name of Emperor Sun Quan 孫權 (r. 222–252) of the Three Kingdoms period (see 5.2.1 and 5.2.8). In fact, however, the custom of situational equivalents in the Jin time was limited practically to the rule period of one emperor (for the tabooing the name of him and of his ancestors). After the Emperor Wu this method also disappeared, perhaps because of the weakening of political power and the temporary dwindling of tabooing practices more generally. The use of various characters for tabooing in different situations complicated the recognition of taboo for the next generations.

Another method of tabooing which became very popular in the Jin times is the use of the courtesy name *zi* 字. The tabooing of the courtesy name (as “beautiful name” *meicheng* 美稱)¹⁸² from the Three Kingdoms period disappeared again in the Jin times. With this the courtesy name, already used earlier as a substitute for the personal name, could once more reclaim its function as one of the important and practical methods of tabooing. One example of such custom is recorded in the *History of the Southern Dynasties (Nanshi)*. As the names of two brothers, Wang Rui 王睿 and Wang Yi 王懿 from Taiyuan 太原, who entered the state of Eastern Jin, violated the taboos of Sima Yi 司馬懿 and Sima Rui 司馬睿, they were changed to their courtesy names Wang Yuande 王元德 and Wang Zhongde 王仲德.¹⁸³ Zhou Guangye calls it the first case in the Jin period.¹⁸⁴ This method became a very popular way for tabooing names and was continued later on.

5.3.4. The Tabooing of Names of Empresses and the Eastern Jin

A few examples and problems connected with the topic and related to the Empress Zheng Achun were already discussed before (see 5.3). We can further mention that apparently the idea of tabooing the names of empresses was present already in the Western Jin time, although it was still not codified. As early as 266 AD, according to the *Encyclopaedic History of Institutions (Tongdian 通典)*, a proposal was made in a memorial to the throne for tabooing their names together with the taboo of the emperor, but Emperor Wu had not approved it. Moreover, he criticized the existence of this practice in his decree and said that

¹⁸² Wang Jian 2002, p. 88.

¹⁸³ *Nanshi*, j. 25, p. 1ab.

¹⁸⁴ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 147.

“according to the *Records of Ritual (Liji)* the inner taboo (*neihui* 內諱) is limited only to the court.”¹⁸⁵

As the Western Jin ended and the Eastern Jin started, the political power of emperors decreased further, and perhaps because of that there are not too many examples of taboos of emperors from that period. Wang Jian found only 13 taboo examples of emperors during more than one hundred years of the Eastern Jin: there are taboo examples of only 5 of 11 emperors: Kang 康帝 (r. 342–344) – 7, Yuan 元帝 (r. 317–322) – 3, Ming 明帝 (322–325), Mu 穆帝 (r. 345–361), and Jianwen 簡文帝 (r. 371–372) – 1. In contrast he found 69 examples of taboo in the much shorter period of the Western Jin,¹⁸⁶ which is, of course, remarkable.

Although examples of emperors’ taboo were very limited in the Eastern Jin, there were relatively numerous instances of taboo of the empress, “more than in all other dynasties.”¹⁸⁷ In that period, the names of empresses were put on the imperial taboo lists (*huibang* 諱榜).¹⁸⁸ The possible reason for that new tendency was the growth of political power of empresses in the time of regency.¹⁸⁹ Empress Yuwen Jun 庾文君 (297–328) was a regent only for a few years, but Empress Chu Suanzi 褚蒜子 (324–384) controlled the political situation mostly as a regent for ca. 40 years. These two empresses together had the political power for almost half of the period that the Eastern Jin lasted. A connection between authority and tabooing can be presumed, though concrete examples of these two empresses’ taboo are lacking.¹⁹⁰

5.3.5. The Tabooing of the Crown Prince’s Name

Apart from the tabooing of the names of empresses, there are other customs and vivid discussions in the Eastern Jin period, which indicate that tabooing was important for the elites of that time. One of them was the theme of tabooing the name of the crown prince. The problem, according to the *Tongdian*, emerged 394 AD, as the name of the Crown Prince Sima Dezong 司馬德宗 (382–419, later Emperor An 安帝) was openly used by Chu

¹⁸⁵ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 555.

¹⁸⁶ Wang Jian 2002, p. 76.

¹⁸⁷ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 136.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 553.

¹⁸⁹ About the further evolution of that phenomenon see Eisenberg 2008, pp. 61-91.

¹⁹⁰ There is, however, an example of the taboo of Yuwen Jun’s mother in the *Jinshu*. Yu Yu’s 虞預 original name Mao 茂 violated the taboo of Yuwen Jun’s mother, therefore he changed it to Yu (*Jinshu*, j. 82, p. 4b).

Shuang 褚爽 (governor and father of the Empress Chu Lingyuan 褚靈媛, 384–436) in a memorial to the emperor. In the discussion about that case, all opinions (e.g., of an official Zang Tao 臧燾, 353–422) remain ambiguous without taking a concrete position. It is pointed out that classical works are against tabooing the crown prince, but it is also mentioned that the avoidance of his name is safer and the calling of it disrespectful, because he would be the future emperor.¹⁹¹

5.3.6. Conflict between Family Taboo and the Name of Office and Officials

The conflict between a family taboo and a name of office was a serious problem for people of that time. During the Western Jin, Jiang Chun 江春 became an official in Yichun 宜春, and his nephew Jiang Tong 江統 described his dilemma: if petitioners called him as was custom by the name of office, they would disrespectfully violate his taboo. The name of office could not be changed, because it would confuse the administration system, and the name would not correspond to reality.¹⁹²

Cases are reported from the time of the Eastern Jin concerning the problem of names of offices and officials that were identical to their ancestors' names. Already in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), there was an admonition not to take names of offices as one's personal name,¹⁹³ but only in the Jin time did it become a real problem. There was, for example, an official Liu Tan 劉曇, whose father's name was Xia 遐. He liked his job until a new superior Wang Xia 王遐 was appointed. Through this new situation, he was constantly confronted with the character *xia* 遐. The stress was insufferable for him and finally he resigned from office.¹⁹⁴

In the discussion about this case in the *Tongdian*, his attitude was supported by the scholar Xie Quan 謝銓, who pointed out that “the reverence for one's father is the most important in the world.”¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, the result of the tension between a family taboo and the name of office was not always resignation. Take for example the case of a Palace Attendant Kong Anguo 孔安國 (4 c. AD), whose father's name was Kong Yu 孔愉. Since he had many public dealings with Wang Yu 王愉 because of his office, and often had to hear the family taboo character, he asked for dismissal. But his petition was refused with

¹⁹¹ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 554.

¹⁹² *Jinshu*, j. 56, p. 4ab. Cf. also Wang Jian 2002, 84–85.

¹⁹³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, j. 5, p. 16ab.

¹⁹⁴ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 554.

¹⁹⁵ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 554.

the statement: If everybody follows his sense of family taboo and resigns from office it would have bad consequences for the legal and political system of the state.¹⁹⁶

We can see that the observance of a concrete case of tabooing custom sometimes depended on a decision of the superior. Similar examples can be found related to the toponyms in the name of office, when they were identical with one's father's name. Wang Shu 王舒 was appointed Interior Minister (*neishi* 內史)¹⁹⁷ of Kuaiji 會稽 (in today's Zhejiang province), but he did not accept it because his father had the name Wang Hui 王會. However, other ministers persuaded him that the character *kuai/hui* 會 in these two names had different pronunciations, and they finally changed the name of the location to Kuai 郛. In that situation Wang Shu had to accept the office.¹⁹⁸ The story had its continuation when, in 342 AD, the emperor appointed Wang Yunzhi 王允之, the son of Wang Shu, to the same office. Then Wang Yunzhi asked for a change because of the taboo name, the emperor and ministers answered that he should not mix private and public affairs and that an order of the emperor is more important than his father's taboo.¹⁹⁹ Finally Wang Yunzhi was coerced to accept the office, but before that happened, he died (sic!).²⁰⁰

Some modern scholars, as for example Wang Jian, criticize the Jin people for only changing names or offices, but still continuing the “malpractice” of *bihui*, which was used by rulers for political aims.²⁰¹ The tabooing of names was, however, perceived in Jin times as a psychological necessity: it was the expression of filial piety, the basis of respect and also of political power. Even if the tabooing complicated the everyday life of people, it was an important part of their culture, especially of the Chinese elite, and should not be condemned too hastily.

5.3.7. Tabooing of Posthumous and Era Names

Emperors and illustrious people received a posthumous name (*shihao* 謚號) after their death as a kind of appraisal of their lives. In the beginning, it was a panegyric name, tabooing the real name, and it was of course not itself tabooed. But in Jin times it began to be perceived as a respectful name for emperors and illustrious people, and sometimes tabooed

¹⁹⁶ *Jinshu*, j. 20, p. 20a.

¹⁹⁷ Hucker 1985, p. 350.

¹⁹⁸ *Jinshu*, j. 76, p. 1b.

¹⁹⁹ *Tongdian*, j. 104, p. 555.

²⁰⁰ Wang Jian 2002, p. 84.

²⁰¹ Wang Jian 2002, p. 85.

as well. The first example of such tabooing can be seen already in the practice of the father of the first Emperor of Jin – Sima Zhao. As his father Sima Yi and his brother Sima Shi obtained the posthumous names Wenhou 文侯 and Wuhou 武侯, similar to those of rulers of the Wei state Cao Cao (Wudi 武帝) and Cao Pi (Wendi 文帝), he considered them discourteous and changed them to Xuanwen 宣文 and Zhongwu 忠武, and later to Xuanwang 宣王 and Jingwang 景王.²⁰² It is possible that the real reason for the change was not respect for the rulers of Wei or the tabooing of their name, but rather a reluctance to have the same names as a rival, a kind of battle for political power, expressed in the tabooing of names of one's own family. However, the change from one character (Wen) to a two-character name (Xuanwen) also stresses a higher position.

In 287 AD the posthumous name Jinghou 景侯 was given to the official Guo Yi 郭奕. This choice was criticised in a report to the throne by one of the ministers because the posthumous name of Guo Yi was identical to that of the “Emperor” Sima Shi (Jingdi 景帝), which should be taboo. The character Mu 穆 had to be taken as a replacement. Other ministers such as Wang Qi 王濟 or Yang Ye 羊璞 thought that such tabooing was not required, because the posthumous name was not the same as a personal name. Cheng Can 成粲 and Wu Mao 武茂 also suggested that, for example, the character *wen* 文 was often used for different emperors and was not tabooed. Nevertheless, the Emperor Wu ordered a change in this posthumous name: “It is not true that subjects can not have the same posthumous name as the ruler, but the name Jing 景 for Guo Yi is inappropriate. He should be called Jian 簡.” His order was carried out.²⁰³ In 368 AD, when the minister Wang Shu 王述 died, the name Mu 穆 was bestowed upon him, but shortly after it was changed to Jian 簡 in order to taboo the posthumous name of the Emperor Mu 穆帝 (r. 345–361).²⁰⁴ It shows that tabooing of posthumous names had already become a custom.

There are also disputed examples of tabooing the Era name (*nianhao* 年號). The first example of such tabooing can be seen probably in the *Records of Wukang county* (*Wukang xianzhi* 武隸縣志): “Yong'an county 永安 was changed to Yongkang 永康 and shortly later to Wukang 武康. The (second) change was made because of the Era name Yongkang 永康

²⁰² *Jinshu*, j. 20, p. 19a.

²⁰³ *Jinshu*, j. 20, p. 19a.

²⁰⁴ *Jinshu*, j. 75, p. 4a.

(300–301) of Emperor Hui 惠帝.”²⁰⁵ This custom of tabooing the posthumous and Era names can be explained through the unstable political power of Jin rulers. Emperors probably tried to use additional kinds of tabooing in order to stress their status.

5.4. Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589)

The observance of name taboos in the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (*Nanbeichao* 南北朝, 420–589) seems to vary per person and dynasty. There were no uniform practices in that time. The situations in the South and the North were quite different: the North was occupied by non-Chinese tribes, who gradually merged into the Han Chinese culture. This period can be called “an interim period” between the Jin and Tang dynasties, in which many inherited customs become formalized.²⁰⁶

5.4.1. Sources

We possess a number of works recording instances of the tabooing of names in that time. The most important sources are again the dynastic histories: in the South there were the *Book of the Song* (*Songshu* 宋書, composed 492–493 by Shen Yue 沈約), *Book of the Southern Qi* (*Nan Qishu* 南齊書, by Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 in 489–537), *Book of the Liang* (*Liangshu* 梁書, composed in 628–635 by Yao Silian 姚思廉), *Book of the Chen* (*Chenshu* 陳書, composed in 622–629 by the same author), and *History of the Southern Dynasties* (*Nanshi* 南史, composed in 630–650 by Li Yanshou 李延壽) – the last three were written already during the Tang dynasty. In the North we have *Book of the Wei* (*Weishu* 魏書, composed in 551–554 by Wei Shou 魏收), *Book of the Northern Qi* (*Bei Qishu* 北齊書, composed in 627–636 by Li Boyao 李百藥), *Book of the Zhou* (*Zhoushu* 周書, composed ca. 629 by Linghu Defen 令狐德棻) and *History of the Northern Dynasties* (*Beishi* 北史, composed in 630–650 by Li Yanshou 李延壽) – again, the last three being written in the Tang period.²⁰⁷ Important materials for studying name tabooing of that time can be found also in the *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓) – the first extant “family instructions” composed by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591).²⁰⁸ It is remarkable that the *Encyclopaedic History of Institutions* (*Tongdian* 通典) with its many historical materials

²⁰⁵ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 155.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 91.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Wilkinson 2000, pp. 810–811.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Wilkinson 2000, pp. 116–117. For translation see Teng Ssu-yü 1968.

on the Three Kingdoms and Jin periods, and later also on the Tang dynasty remains totally silent about the 169 years of the Southern and Northern Dynasties period.

5.4.2. Southern Dynasties and Lists of Taboo

Generally, as already said, there was no consistent system in the time of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. We can presume that in the South, especially in the beginning of that period, practice and methods of tabooing would have been similar to those of the Jin time. We know about a petition to the emperor written by Sima Daojing 司馬道敬 in the beginning of the Liu Song dynasty (420–479), also known as Former Song dynasty. The petition suggested that the taboo of an ancestor of Emperor Wu (r. 420–422) – Liu Jing 劉靖 – should be recorded on the list of taboos (*huibang* 諱榜) and avoided by all subjects. The result is not known, but the project was criticised by the astronomer He Chengtian 何承天 (370–447).²⁰⁹

One other petition is also noted in the *History of the Southern Qi* in the first year of this new dynasty of Southern Qi (479 AD). One official had proposed the following:

- official tabooing of names of empresses and recording them on the list of taboos;
- official tabooing, proclaiming and recording of names of ancestors.

This petition was opposed by Wang Jian 王儉 (452–489). In his memorial to the throne, he was against the tabooing of the name of the empress and wrote about the old principle of the *Records of Ritual* that the “taboos of women should be not observed outside of court”.²¹⁰ He accepted only the tabooing of ancestors, but without recording it on the list of taboos.²¹¹

The discussion was continued by a cousin of Wang Jian – Wang Ci 王慈 (451–491) – who was even more radical. He condemned all lists of taboos, showed that the custom was rather new and in conflict with the tradition. According to him, empresses of former dynasties were of noble character and high prestige, and there was no need for lists of taboos, only posthumous names were to be announced. But apparently such opposition to the custom of tabooing was the exception rather than the rule. Scholars such as Li Hui 李攜 and Wang Xian 王憫, for example, supported the practice and lists of taboo. Wang Xian stated that lists helped people to notice taboos which should be observed. Ren Fang 任昉 went even further and stressed that lists of taboo not only helped, but were also a deeper

²⁰⁹ *Nan Qishu*, j. 9, p. 19a.

²¹⁰ *Liji*, j. 1, pp. 38b–40a

²¹¹ *Nan Qishu*, j. 9, p. 19a.

expression of subjects' veneration for the emperor.²¹² Lists of taboos were a new phenomenon. Therefore the distinction was made between observing taboos and recording them in a list.

We do not know too much about the form, content, place and time in which lists of taboo were posted. There are no direct records about that. From the memorial of Ren Fang, we can learn that the antecedent of taboo lists was probably the (oral) "promulgation of taboo" (*banhui* 班誥/頒誥) of the Han dynasty.²¹³ At that time, when the new emperor was enthroned, his taboo was announced, but not recorded. Together with the taboo characters, its equivalents were designated. Wang Jian assumed that written lists of taboo appeared probably in the Jin period, without equivalents, related to the custom of situational (*linshi xunbi* 臨時訓避, see 5.3.3) or arbitrary avoidance (*suiyi gaiyi* 隨宜改易) of that time. He supposed that in the first Liu Song dynasty lists of taboo were similar to those of Jin and changed only in the Southern Qi time.²¹⁴ From memorials of Ren Fang and Wang Ci, we still can learn that lists were put inside the court and were accessible only for higher officials, not for everybody. These lists could be seen every day, without time limits.

Concrete examples of tabooing can be found, e.g., in the *Book of the Southern Qi*, recording the case of the Crown Prince Xiao Zhangmao 蕭長懋 (458–493), who did not accept the post of the Vice Director of the Palace Library (*bishucheng* 秘書丞)²¹⁵ because its homonym Cheng 成 was the name of the father of Emperor Gao of the Southern Qi – Xiao Daocheng 蕭道成 (479–482).²¹⁶ Yet in many other places of this work this taboo is not avoided.²¹⁷ Other examples of exaggerated observance of taboo are recorded in the *Family instructions of Master Yan* (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓). According to this source, Xie Ju 謝舉 of the Liang dynasty (502–557) kept in good memory the words of the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji*), that "if a good son sees a face similar to those of his ancestors or hears their names, he feels sadness (literally: fright)."²¹⁸ Therefore, Xie Ju cried every time he heard (sic!) names similar to those of his ancestors.²¹⁹ In another one, the supervisor Zang Fengshi 臧逢世, whose father had the name Yan 嚴, often saw characters *yanhan* 嚴寒 (bitter cold) in

²¹² *Nan Qishu*, j. 46, pp. 2b-3a; Cf. also Wang Jian 2002, pp. 93-95.

²¹³ Cf. *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 24, p. 382.

²¹⁴ Wang Jian 2002, p. 95.

²¹⁵ Hucker 1985, p. 376.

²¹⁶ *Nan Qishu*, j. 21, p. 1a.

²¹⁷ Cf. *Nan Qishu*, j. 1, p. 1a; Chen Yuan 1958, p. 139.

²¹⁸ *Liji*, j. 7, p. 75a and 83b.

²¹⁹ *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, pp. 1b-2a.

the correspondence. He cried every time, was late with his work and got into trouble.²²⁰ There was also a man whose friend was called Shen 審, and he therefore never wrote his family name Shen 沈 in a letter.²²¹ Somebody else tabooed the character *tong* 桐 and called the Chinese parasol tree (*wutongshu* 梧桐樹) a “tree of galvanized iron” (*baitieshu* 白鐵樹).²²²

One other case concerns two brothers from the Liang dynasty: Liu Tao 劉綽 and Liu Huan 劉緩. Because of the name of their father Zhao 昭, they did not use the character *zhao* 照 in their whole life, and if its use was unavoidable they changed it to *zhao* 炤.²²³ This last case is commented upon by author, who thinks that there was no need for such an overstatement. Tabooing should be limited, according to him, to real names (*zhengming* 正名). Avoidance of homonyms was absurd: e.g., consistent tabooing of the characters *zhao* 昭 would cause the avoidance of both brothers’ own family name (Liu 劉), which has also a character *zhao* 釗 inside. Such tabooing would make it impossible to write books. In this way the son of Lü Shang 呂尚 would be unable to use the character “over” (*shang* 上), and the son of Zhao Yi 趙壹 unable to use the character “one” (*yi* 一).²²⁴

5.4.3. Northern Dynasties

The situation in the north was quite different from the south. The territory had been occupied since the beginning of the 4th century by various tribes with their own customs (and probably own taboo practices). Many Han Chinese fled to the South.²²⁵ Gradually, the newcomers in the north adopted Chinese culture with its elaborate taboo system.

The first example of such adaptation can be seen already in the Later Zhao dynasty (319–351) of the Sixteen Kingdoms. The Emperor Ming 明帝 (Shile 石勒, r. 319–333) from one of the tribes of Xiongnu (Jie 羯) undertook the Chinese system of administration and many Chinese customs. His name Le 勒 was tabooed and other characters were used in its place. Apparently for this reason, the name (probably transcription) of coriander/parsley (*luole* 羅勒) was changed to “fragrant of orchid” (*lanxiang* 蘭香).²²⁶ Also the medicine

²²⁰ *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, p. 2a.

²²¹ *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, p. 2a.

²²² *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, p. 2b.

²²³ *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, p. 13a.

²²⁴ *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, p. 13a.

²²⁵ For the situation in the period of Southern and Northern Dynasties see Dien 2007, pp. 4–14.

²²⁶ *Qimin yaoshu*, j. 3, p. 8b.

helile 訶梨勒 was changed because of a taboo to *hezi* 訶子.²²⁷ We also know that the name Hu 虎 of the nephew of the Emperor Ming was tabooed (probably after he was enthroned), and all names with that character were changed.²²⁸

In the period of the Northern dynasties, the first of them – Northern Wei (386–535) – already knew the tabooing of names. In the *Book of the Wei* we find the biography of Yuwen Mohuai 宇文莫槐 (a chieftain of the Yuwen tribe in the North-East China, d. 293) with a note: “His original name violated the taboo of Taizu 太祖 (i.e. Emperor Daowu 道武帝 – Toba Gui 拓拔珪, r. 386–409 – the founder of the Wei dynasty) and was changed.”²²⁹ Probably the former name was Gui 珪 and was changed to *huai* 槐.²³⁰ The homonyms of the name of this emperor were sometimes apparently also tabooed. The Shanggui county 上邽縣 in the prefecture Tianshui 天水 was changed to Shangfeng 上封 because it violated the homonym of the taboo name of the Emperor. The name of Xiagui county 下邽縣 of Huazhou 華州 was also changed because of this taboo to Xiafeng 夏封.²³¹

On the other hand, the tabooing of homonyms is questionable considering that the Emperor Xianwen 獻文帝 (Toba Hong 拓拔弘, r. 466–471) had no objections to giving the homonym of his given name – Hong 宏 – to his son (the son later changed his family name to Yuan 元, in Chinese manner, and became the Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝, r. 471–499). At the same time, a similar example could be seen in the South: the Emperor Ming 明帝 (Liu Yu 劉彧, r. 465–472) of Former Song (Liu Song) had a son with the name Yu 昱 (later Emperor Houfei 後廢帝, r. 473–477). Since numerous instances of the same name of father and son can be seen, the tabooing of homonyms seems to be probably exceptional or at least infrequent. It would mean that there was practically no taboo on sound in this period.

From the North, there is also a record in the *Book of the Northern Qi* (*Bei Qishu*) reporting the case of Xin Ziyan 辛子炎, who read in his petition to the general Gao Huan 高歡 (the father of the first Emperor of the Northern Qi dynasty, later honored with the temple name Gaozu 高祖, 496–547) one of the characters as *shu* 樹 (Gao Shusheng 高樹生 was the name of his father, 472–526).²³² Gao Huan was infuriated. He did not accept (or did

²²⁷ *Shiwu jiyuan*, j. 10, p. 34a.

²²⁸ *Tianzhongji*, j. 46, p. 29a.

²²⁹ *Weishu*, j. 103, p. 10a.

²³⁰ Cf. Wang Jian 2002, p. 97.

²³¹ *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 13, p. 189.

²³² For him see *Zhongguo lidai renming da cidian* 1999, Vol. 2, p. 2000.

not understand as a foreigner) the argument from the *Records of Ritual (Liji)* of not avoiding two-character names separately,²³³ and considered the case to be an infringement of the taboo. Xin was therefore flogged.²³⁴ Besides, in the North, an occasional practice of tabooing the courtesy name *zi* 字 is reported.²³⁵ This practice, which could be noticed earlier in the Three Kingdoms period (see 5.2.4), is not found in the South.²³⁶ It is also criticised by the scholar Yan Zhitui 顏之推 as erroneous and not corresponding to tradition.²³⁷

5.4.4. Shared Names in the Family

A special custom of this period was the use of the same names as ancestors, without feeling a sense of taboo violation. There are many examples of such practice. The most famous are probably the case (still from the Jin period) of the family of the famous Chinese calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361, with the same name character Zhi 之 in three generations),²³⁸ or the case of the family of Wang Biaozi 王彪之 (305–377) – with the same character in their name in six generations (up to Wang Jinzhi 王進之, 5–6 c.).²³⁹

It seems strange when we consider how important was the tabooing of the name of one's father for the Chinese before that time and until modern times, and that the practice of the same name was not an episode, but was continued in many generations of that period. On the other hand, it seems to be parallel to the European practice of the last centuries, where the name of an ancestor was not called directly, but was used as a name in the next generations just as a sign of veneration for him.

5.4.5. Genealogical Records

The observance of taboo in the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties was apparently not uniform and sometimes inconsistent. Sometimes it seems that the tabooing of names was not very important for some dynasties, as there are no known taboo examples from the ruling time of many emperors. But on the other hand, we know, that the tabooing of names was important for people in that time. For example, the Grand Guardian (*taibao*

²³³ *Liji*, j. 1, pp. 38b–40a

²³⁴ *Bei Qishu*, j. 24, p. 4b.

²³⁵ Cf. Wang Xinhua 2007, pp. 263–264.

²³⁶ *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, p. 9a.

²³⁷ *Yanshi jiaxun*, j. 2, p. 8b.

²³⁸ Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 91–93.

²³⁹ Wang Jian 2002, p. 103.

太保)²⁴⁰ of the Emperor of Former Song (Liu Song) dynasty – Wang Hong 王弘 (379–432) – met every day more than a thousand clients without a violation of their taboos.²⁴¹ It was possible only because of the development of written genealogy.

It was precisely in that period that genealogical records developed, with personal and posthumous names, the date of birth and death, rank and office, sometimes also spouse and friends.²⁴² Especially officials of Ministry of Personnel (*libu* 吏部)²⁴³ were specialists of genealogy. The genealogy became more and more important and gradually almost every family had its genealogical book. The connection between the development of genealogy and tabooing of names was disclosed by Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602) from the Ming dynasty.²⁴⁴ Before that, only lists of taboos of emperors were published, now every family had its own written genealogy. This is a crucial change in the practice of name tabooing.²⁴⁵

5.4.6. Intentional Violation of Taboo

At this time, we also find instances of the intentional use of taboo words in order to insult somebody. The tabooing of names had already become an expression of respect and courtesy between people, used not only for superiors, but also for people in inferior positions. We read, for example, that the Emperor Xiaozhao 孝昭帝 (r. 560–561) of Northern Qi (550–577) “did not violate family taboos of other people, if he knew about them.”²⁴⁶

Inversely, the direct use of a taboo name became a way of defamation. Many examples can be found in this period. In one case, when governor Wang Liang 王亮 from the Liu Song period wanted to dismiss a rough official – Shen Cuan 沈攸 – who often violated his name, Shen Cuan said ironically: “I, low official, am being transferred for offending against your taboo. But I do not really know your taboo name. If it is the word *you* 攸 (place), should it be written as a legless *zun*-vessel (𩚑) with a dog (犬) at its side (*you* 猷)? Or as a dog with legless vessel at its side (*you* 猶)? Is it a character *you* 攸 with a heart 心 (*you* 悠), or without a heart? Please instruct me”.²⁴⁷ In fact, Shen Cuan ironically

²⁴⁰ Hucker 1985, p. 480.

²⁴¹ *Nanshi*, j. 59, p. 9b.

²⁴² For more about Chinese genealogy see Stockwell 2004, pp. 41–42.

²⁴³ Hucker 1985, p. 306.

²⁴⁴ *Shaoshi shanfang bicong*, “Gengbu” (庚部), “Hualin boyi xia” (華林博議下), p. 1b.

²⁴⁵ Wang Jian 2002, p. 108–111.

²⁴⁶ *Beishi*, j. 6, p. 1a.

²⁴⁷ *Nanshi*, j. 23, p. 4ab.

used four characters with the same pronunciation as the name of Wang Liang's father – You 攸, as a payback. He repeatedly violated his taboo and insulted him by adding “a dog” to the pretended equivalent characters.²⁴⁸

In conclusion, it is important to stress the evolution that took place between the Han period and the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. During this period, the custom of name taboo was given a definitive shape for the next periods. Concrete rules of taboo, such as the principle of interior taboo (3.5.3), were established and concrete methods of tabooing, such as the method of equivalent characters (*tongxun daihuan* 同訓代換) were developed in that period.

The tabooing of the emperor's name was very important in this time. Edicts of the emperor regulated and stressed the tabooing of the emperor's name. But it was also a period of an evolution in the tabooing of distant ancestors, near relatives and officials. Particularly in the Three Kingdoms era, there are instances of tabooing the name of (living) relatives of the emperors and empresses, as for example, the father of the empress (see 5.2.1) and the uncle of the emperor (see 5.2.4).

Still more, the tabooing of women's names was practiced and discussed in this period. The first example of tabooing of the empress' name is recorded for the Han period (see 5.1.1). In the Jin time, we find even a discussion about the tabooing of the name of the physical (not legal) mother of an emperor. Gradually, family taboos of people (probably literati in particular) also became more and more important. A big impact must have come from the increasing use of paper (originated in China during the Han dynasty),²⁴⁹ which allowed an increase in literacy and in the status of writing. Literati started to write themselves, and genealogical records became important.²⁵⁰ The result was also a changing availability of sources from the time that affected the custom of name tabooing.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Chen Yuan 1958, p. 128.

²⁴⁹ Needham 1996, p. 13.

²⁵⁰ For the medieval Chinese oligarchy see Johnson 1977.