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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 EIGHT: CONSEQUENCES FOR PEOPLE

The custom of name tabooing was present in all periods of Chinese history. It affected not only the emperor and intellectuals, but also all other social strata, and had a big influence on everyday life of all Chinese. We can imagine many such situations: First, one had to know the taboo names of one's own family. They were often recorded in family genealogies and avoided, for example, in the naming a newborn child. Secondly, one had to ask about the taboos of other people, in order not to hurt.¹ Especially taboos of people with power (and their family members) had to be learnt, such as those of emperors and officials.

Avoiding taboo names caused numerous changes in the language on the level of vocabulary and names. Especially names of people, geographical names and titles of offices were changed. There were also many other words, such as names of daily things and other common expressions, for new words had to be invented. Avoiding names also influenced people's lives on a daily level, sometimes in a very troublesome way. Anecdotic stories of people avoiding stones or music because of association with the names of their fathers, such as given at the outset of this work (see Chapter One), may be regarded as extreme. But there were many other, less spectacular connections of name tabooing with an individual's everyday life.

Name tabooing had a big impact on the life of the literati who stressed the observance of taboo and at the same time were monitored for possible violations. A taboo name in their family could compel them to renounce exams or resign from office. If they accidentally used a taboo name of the examiner during an exam – they could fail the exam. If they used an imperial name – they could be punished, sometimes with the capital punishment. The research on the influence of name tabooing for the lives of people is still underdeveloped and needs to be continued further. This section will show the reader the impact that name tabooing had for the lives of people.

8.1. Changes in Language

The clearest impact of name tabooing can be seen on a linguistic level. Names and words were changed in order to avoid a taboo name. Examples of the change of names can already be seen in the Zhou period, and perhaps even earlier.

¹ Cf. *Caomuzi*, j. 3, p. 22ab: "First you should ask about the taboo name of ancestors" (*xian wen fuzu hui* 先問父祖諱).

8.1.1. Given Name (*ming* 名)

The usage of the same name as somebody else, especially the emperor or a man with power, was apparently seen as an insult, usurpation of power and a kind of harassment. It is possible that given names were changed to temple names or replaced by the character *mou* 某 as early as the Shang and the beginning of the Zhou period. But usually the incident in the *Han Feizi* (as noticed briefly in section 4.3.1.4) is considered the first known record of a name change because of taboo:

Once, the Feudal Lord (*zhuhou* 諸侯) of Wei was paying a visit to the court of Zhou. The official usher of Zhou asked his pen-name. “The Feudal Lord of Wei, Land-Extender (*bijiang* 辟疆)” was the reply. The usher, refusing his admission, said, “No Feudal Lord is supposed to have the same name as the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子).” Thereupon the Ruler of Wei changed his pen-name and said, “The Feudal Lord of Wei, Hui 燬” Thereafter he was ushered into the court.²

In fact, Hui was the given name of Duke Wen of Wei (衛文公, 659–635 BC) and the title “Land-Extender” was reserved only for the king (*wang* 王). Thus it was more a kind of usurpation. Furthermore, it was not the given name, but the title that was replaced.

Many examples of changing a given name because of taboo can be found from the Han period. Chen Yuan divided them into three groups, according to three methods of change: assuming a new name, replacing the name with a courtesy name and dropping a character of the given name.³ As already described, there were many more methods for changing it. It seems that normally it was enough to use someone’s title or function instead of his given name for observing private taboos. But for characters of the emperor’s name, a special type of veneration and tabooing was prescribed, resulting in the change of one’s own name.

A given name could be changed temporarily, if it was necessary for some occasion or until the cause for tabooing was gone. This was, for example, often the case if a crown prince died or the dynasty ended (see, e.g., the tabooing of the name of the last Qing emperor in 7.3.3). In the *Xumo kehuixi* 續墨客揮犀 of Peng Cheng 彭乘 (985–1049), we find also the example of an official (Court Gentleman, *fenglang* 奉郎)⁴, named Wang Sengyan 王僧彥, who renamed the ink-stone (*yan* 硯) as ink-pond (*mochi* 墨池) in order to

² *Han Feizi*, j.14, p. 7b. Translation according to Liao 1959, p. 132.

³ Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 12-14.

⁴ Cf. Hucker 1985, pp. 214-215; Xu Lianda 2010, pp. 327-328.

taboo his own name, and drum (*gu* 鼓) as “skin quivers” (*pibing* 皮棚) in order to taboo the name of his father (Shigu 師古). Other people apparently often violated his taboos. But one time, a soldier, whose name was Li Yangu 李彥古, came to him. Probably knowing about the taboo names of Wang Sengyan, he changed his name for this occasion and reported himself as “Li Mochi Pibing 李墨池皮棚.” After this introduction words, the official was very happy and grateful, and mentioned his words as an example for others.⁵

There are examples of repeated changes of given names because of taboo throughout history. This was, for example, the case with the historian Liu Zixuan 劉子玄 (661–721) who changed his former name Zhiji 知幾 to his courtesy name because of a homonym with the taboo name of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang (Longji 隆基, r. 712–756). Later, his former name was restored by Qing scholars, as the name of Emperor Kangxi (Xuanye 玄燁) had to be tabooed.⁶

Furthermore, names were also changed because of taboo words in general, as the examples of Song Jiao 宋郊 (996–1066) and Wang Deyuan 王德元 (10th c.) prove. The first person changed his given name to Song Xiang 宋庠 because the character *jiao* 郊 was considered inauspicious (similar to *jiao* 交 – decline).⁷ The second person was the son of Wang Yan 王晏 (890–966) and was originally called Dan 湛. But then the Emperor called Wang Yan and said to him: “Liu Dan 劉湛 (392–440) and Jiang Dan 江湛 (408–453) did not die a natural death.”⁸ The name Dan is not auspicious. You have to change it.”⁹ Thereafter, Wang Yan changed the name of his son.

8.1.2. Other Names and Titles of People

There are also cases in which name tabooing caused a change of other names and titles, including even family names (*xing* 姓), Era names (*nianhao* 年號), and posthumous names (*shihao* 諡號). There are many examples that because of name tabooing family names were changed. In the Song work the *Tongzhi* 通志, there is a list of such changes during the Han, Jin and Liu-Song dynasties.¹⁰ It was copied by Chen Yuan and can be found in his work

⁵ *Xumo kehuixi*, j. 6, p. 6ab. Interesting that the character *shi* 師 is written without the first stroke.

⁶ *Lidai huizipu*, j. 1, p. 11b.

⁷ In *Songshi*, j. 284, p. 6ab.

⁸ Secretary Liu Dan 劉湛 and official Jiang Dan 江湛 were both killed. See *Zhongguo lidai renming da cidian* 1999, Vol. I, pp. 647 and 714.

⁹ *Nan Qishu*, j. 42, p. 2b.

¹⁰ *Tongzhi*, j. 30, p. 484.

together with a few further examples.¹¹ Other examples are included in the *Shiguo chunqiu* 十國春秋 and *Old History of the Five Dynasties* (*Jiu wudai shi* 舊五代史) for a slightly later period. Cheng Ji 成及 (847-913) changed his family name to Xian 咸, because of the taboo name (homonym) of Zhu Cheng 朱誠 – the father of the first Emperor of the Liang dynasty.¹² A certain Cheng Rui 成汭 (d. 903) changed his family name for the same reason to Zhou 周.¹³

Era names and posthumous names were sometimes changed retrospectively, especially during the Tang and Song dynasties. Most of them concerned names of the distant past and therefore affected normally only historians, and not people in their current lives. Yet in some cases, they still could be relevant for people, as for example the posthumous name Zhong 忠 of an official of the Northern Zhou dynasty, Li Yuan 李遠 (507–557), which was changed only a relatively short time after his death to Huai 懷, because of the given name of the father of Emperor Wen of Sui – Yang Zhong 楊忠 (507–568).¹⁴ Similar is the case of the honorific title of Empress Dowager (太后 *taihou*) which was to be bestowed in 961 upon Empress Zhong (鍾皇后, d. 965) of the Southern Tang dynasty. Because the taboo name of her father was Taizhang 太章, the title was changed to “Eminent Respected Empress” (*shengzunhou* 聖尊后).¹⁵

8.1.3. Names of Offices

As has been pointed out in the historical analysis (Chapters Four–Seven), changes of office names were common in many periods. Since they were highly visible in administrative discourse, taboos mattered mostly in this sphere of life. The first known case is reported in the *Tradition of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*): the titles of the Minister of Education (*situ* 司徒)¹⁶ and Minister of Works (*sikong* 司空)¹⁷ were changed to *zhongjun* 中軍¹⁸ and *sicheng* 司城,¹⁹ because of the names of former kings.²⁰

¹¹ Chen Yuan 1958, p. 11-12.

¹² *Shiguo chunqiu*, j. 84, p. 10a.

¹³ *Jiu wudai shi*, j. 3, p. 6a.

¹⁴ *Zhoushu*, j. 25, p. 6b.

¹⁵ *Nan Tangshu*, j. 16, pp. 354-355.

¹⁶ Hucker 1985, p. 458; Xu Lianda 2010, p. 214.

¹⁷ Hucker 1985, p. 450; Xu Lianda 2010, p. 213.

¹⁸ Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 189; Xu Lianda 2010, p. 105.

¹⁹ Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 442; Xu Lianda 2010, p. 213.

²⁰ Cf. *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, j. 5, pp. 16b, 18a. Explanation in brackets was made by Du Yu 杜預 (222–285). See also 4.3.1.2.

Most cases were related to changes because of the taboo name of an emperor. For example, because of the imperial name of Sima Shi 司馬師 (208-255, the uncle of the first emperor of the Jin dynasty 晉, posthumously honored as Emperor Jing 景帝), titles of offices such as *taishi* 太師 or *junshi* 軍師 were changed to *taizai* 太宰²¹ and *junsi* 軍司.²² Similarly, in the Jin dynasty 金, the title *biyan chengfeng* 筆硯承奉, already changed in 1163 to *biyan gongfeng* 筆硯供奉, was restored soon after because of the taboo name Yungong 允恭 of the father of the Emperor Zhangzong (章宗, r. 1190-1208).²³ Because of the name Youjian 由檢 of the last Ming emperor, the title of offices with such characters were changed, e.g. *jiantao* 檢討 to *jiantao* 簡討 and *jianxiao* 檢校 to *jianxiao* 簡校.²⁴ In his *Shihui juli* Chen Yuan provides further examples of such changes.²⁵

Sometimes names of offices were also changed because of the taboos of officials (private taboo). We find such a situation in the *Old Book of Tang (Jiu Tangshu)*, in the account of the appointment of the official Xiao Fu 蕭復 to Army Aide (*hang/xingjun zhangshi* 行軍長史).²⁶ But as his father had the given name Heng 衡 (apparently in that time a homonym to *hang*),²⁷ the name of office was changed to *tongjun zhangshi* 統軍長史.²⁸ According to the *Old History of the Five Dynasties (Jiu Wudaishi)*, Feng Yun 馮贇, whose father's given name was Zhang 章, himself changed the name of his office from Manager of Affairs (*pingzhangshi* 平章事)²⁹ to “Cooperating with Second Rank Officials of the Secretariat-Chancellery” (*tongerpin* 同二品).³⁰ It seems, however, that such “private” changes of names were rather uncommon or unofficial and rather restricted to one's own use.

8.1.4. Geographical Names

Innumerable changes of geographical names are known from almost every period of Chinese history because of the tabooing of names. Mountains, rivers, but especially names

²¹ *Tang liudian*, j. 1, p. 2b; *Tongdian*, j. 20, p. 114; *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 149.

²² *Tongdian*, j. 29, p. 168; *Jingshi biming huikao*, j. 10, p. 150.

²³ *Jinshi*, j. 53, p. 7a.

²⁴ *Zhengzitong*, j. 5, p. 109b.

²⁵ See Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 16-17.

²⁶ Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 244.

²⁷ Cf. Wang Xinhua 2007, p. 234.

²⁸ *Jiu Tangshu*, j. 125, p. 4b.

²⁹ Hucker 1985, p. 386; Xu Lianda 2010, p. 178.

³⁰ *Jiu Wudaishi*, j. 44, p. 4a. For the title *tongerpin* cf. Xu Lianda 2010, p. 247; Hucker 1985, pp. 554-555 (*tongsanpin* 同三品).

of counties and villages, and even of buildings, were changed whenever they violated the taboo name of the current emperor. Therefore, already in the *Tradition of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*) and *Records of Ritual* (*Liji*), we find the instructions not to name people after rivers, states, offices, mountains, maladies, animals, ceremonial utensils etc.³¹ A similar statement is made in the *Sayings of the states* (*Guoyu*), where we also find the first example of changing geographical names – of two mountains.³² Nevertheless, in every period of history places can be found with a taboo character in their name. It would be impossible to name all of these cases, because of their sheer number and because research on it is still in progress.

Josef Chiao writing 40 years ago already identified 229 cases of such changes in Shanxi and Sichuan provinces alone.³³ For example, Longshan 隆山 in Sichuan was changed during the Tang dynasty to Pengshan 彭山, because of the name of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong (given name Longji 隆基, r. 712–756) and Zhongjiang 中江 in the same province was changed to Neijiang 内江, because of the name of the father of the Sui Emperor Wen – Zhong 忠 (d. 568). Similarly, Xiaoyi 孝義 in Shanxi province was changed to Zhongyang 中陽, for the name of Taizong of Song (r. 976–997) was Guangyi 光義, and Heiling 黑嶺 to Wuling 烏嶺, because the character *hei* was part of the nickname of Yu Wentai 宇文泰 (507–556) – Heita 黑獺 (Black beaver), the father of the Emperor Xiaomin 孝閔 (r. 557) of Northern Zhou.³⁴

In fact, many other changes are also known in geographical names, which must have been confusing for people of that time. Also here, similarly to the change of given names, the change was usually made in order to avoid the taboo name of an emperor, often directly after his enthronement. Besides the few examples given by Chen Yuan,³⁵ we can further note the change of Heng Mountain (Hengshan 恒山) to Chang Mountain (Changshan 常山), made because of the name of Emperor Wen of the Han (r. 179–157 BC),³⁶ or the name change of Longqing 隆慶 county to Yanqing 延慶 (today a part of the municipality of Peking) because of the Era name of the Emperor Longqing 隆慶 of Ming (r. 1566–1572).³⁷

³¹ *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, j. 5, p. 16b; *Liji*, j. 1, p. 21b.

³² *Guoyu*, j. 15, p. 2ab.

³³ Chiao 1970, p. 129.

³⁴ Chiao 1970, pp. 105–106.

³⁵ Cf. Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 17–18.

³⁶ *Hanshu*, j. 28 shang, p. 23b. Cf. also *Hanshu*, j. 3, p. 1b.

³⁷ *Mingshi*, j. 40, p. 8a.

It was also possible (though rare) that geographical names were changed because of the taboo of an important official. The change could be made by the emperor himself, but also by an official. We know, for example, the case of Dong Si'an 董思安 from the end of the Tang period, who was appointed prefect (*cishi* 刺史) of Zhang prefecture 漳州, but refused this post because of the taboo name of his father Zhang 章. Thereafter the emperor changed the name of the prefecture to Nanzhou 南州.³⁸

It is important, however, for readers to remember that the tabooing of names was admittedly the most important, but not the only motive for changing geographical names. Such names were also changed if a new dynasty started or a new Era name (*nianhao* 年號) was announced, and occasionally after a military success or mysterious incident.³⁹ For the present work, it is relevant to mention that some changes of toponyms were made because of taboo words that were not names, but words with inauspicious connotations. In this way, the name of the Imperial Garden “Jiao Pond” (*jiaochi* 教池) in Bianjing 汴京 (today Kaifeng) was changed to *shangchi* 上池, after somebody recognized the dangerous connection of the name with the similarly sounding word *jiaochi* 較遲 meaning “quite late”.⁴⁰ We should always keep in mind that the name of a place was connected in the people’s perception with their fate (see 2.2.2). Names were an omen and should be changed if they were “harmful”.

8.1.5. Other Words and Terms

Names of people, titles of offices and toponyms are perhaps the most extensively recorded changes made because of taboo of name. There are, however, other words that were changed too, if they conflicted with a taboo name or taboo character. Many examples of changes made in names of animals, plants or things have been collected by Chen Yuan in his *Shihui juli*, such as the words for pheasant, tiger, shellfish, pomegranate, or even musical instruments.⁴¹ Probably in every sphere of life, numerous examples of change due to taboo can be found.

We want to give here a few examples related to taboo cases in medicinal herbs. According to Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593), author of the famous *Compendium of*

³⁸ *Zizhi tongjian*, j. 285, p. 12b.

³⁹ Cf. Chiao 1970, pp. 104–105.

⁴⁰ Wang Yankun 1997, p. 225; Feng Jiahua 2005, pp. 38–42.

⁴¹ Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 25–26.

Materia Medica (*Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目, compiled in 1578, published in 1596) the herb *changshan* (常山) is identical with *hengshan* (恆山).⁴² It apparently grew originally in the mountains of the same name. When the name of the mountain was changed because of the taboo of Emperor Wen of Han (Heng 恆, r. 179-157 BC), the name of the herb was also changed to *changshan* and was recorded in this way in the book on medicinal plants *Shennong bencaojing* 神農本草經.⁴³ Later, the old name was probably partly restored, but the new name was also used interchangeably.⁴⁴

The same *Compendium of Materia Medica* (*Bencao gangmu*) identifies *hugua* 胡瓜 as *huanggua* 黃瓜 (both mean cucumber, also used for medical purposes). The original name should be *hugua*, as it was brought from the Western regions of the Hu 胡 tribes. Apparently, the Emperor Ming (r. 319–333) of the Later Zhao dynasty prohibited use of the character *hu*, and the name was changed to *huanggua*. A possible cause for the tabooing may have been that it was a homonym (with another tone) of the name Hu 虎 of the nephew of the Emperor Ming (see 5.4.3) or the fact that the emperor originated from the Hujie 胡羯 tribe and was a believer of the “barbarian heaven” religion (*hutian jiao* 胡天教), probably Zoroastrianism.⁴⁵

The original name of the Chinese yam (*shuyu* 薯蕷) sounded similar to the name of Emperor Daizong of the Tang – Li Yu 李豫 (r. 762–779). Therefore it was changed to *shuyao* 薯藥. Still later, the first part of the name became ominous because of the taboo of the Emperor Yingzong of Song (Shu 曙, r. 1063–1067) and the name was changed to *shanyao* 山藥. The original name seems to have been extensively forgotten.⁴⁶

Other names of medicaments of traditional Chinese medicine were changed for having the character *xuan* 玄 in the name, which was the taboo of legendary First Ancestor of the Song dynasty Zhao Xuanlang 趙玄朗 (see 6.4.4), and later of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing dynasty (cf. 7.3.1.). Especially during the Song dynasty, after the decree of the Emperor Zhenzong (r. 997–1022) in 1014, names such as Corydalis (*xuanhusuo* 玄胡索) were changed to *yanhusuo* 延胡索.⁴⁷

⁴² *Bencao gangmu*, j. 17, p. 26.

⁴³ Cf. *Shennong bencaojing*, j. 2, p. 3b.

⁴⁴ Cf. Shi Xinjian 2009, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Shi Xinjian 2009, p. 21. One other cause could also be perhaps the taboo of fox immortals (called *hu* 狐).

⁴⁶ *Bencao gangmu*, j. 27, p. 119.

⁴⁷ *Bencao gangmu*, j. 13, pp. 57-58.

The medical prescription “Zhenwu broth” *zhenwutang* 真武湯 is generally not known by its original name anymore. Its first name was connected with the name of the guardian spirit of the north *xuanwushen* 玄武神, and was “Xuanwu broth” *xuanwutang* 玄武湯. As the name of spirit was changed because of the taboo of an ancestor of Zhenzong of Song, the name of prescription was also changed. Although after the end of the Song dynasty, the official taboo for the character *xuan* was rescinded, people probably continued to use it.⁴⁸

The names of the Ten Heavenly Stems, used commonly for many purposes such as time measurement, were often changed, too, if they conflicted with taboo names. The best known changes concern the characters *bing* 丙 and *wu* 戊. The first one was changed to *jing* 景, and used in that form during the Tang dynasty (618–907) because of the taboo of Li Bing (李昞) – the father of the first emperor. We learn about that because many books compiled from that period, such as the *Book of the Jin* (*Jinshu*), *Book of the Liang* (*Liangshu*), *Book of the Sui* (*Suishu*) etc., use the character *jing* instead of *bing*.⁴⁹ In this case both sound and appearance of the taboo character were changed.

Similarly, the character *wu* 戊 was changed to *wu* 武 during the Later Liang dynasty because of the taboo of the grandfather of the first emperor of the Later Liang (r. 907–912) – Zhu Maolin 朱茂琳.⁵⁰ Other changes were made by the Taiping Rebellion in the system of the Twelve Earthly Branches (see 10.3.1). They considered the characters *hai* 亥, *chou* 丑 and *mao* 卯 as inauspicious, because of their similarity in sound to *hai* 害 (harmful), *chou* 丑 (ugly) and *mao* 冇 (Cantonese: not to have, to lack). Therefore, new names for years were chosen: *xinkai* 新開 instead of *xinhai* 辛亥 (1851), *guihao* 癸好 instead of *guichou* 癸丑 (1853), *yirong* 乙榮 instead of *yimao* 乙卯 (1855). Many other changes in the language of people in common expressions can be found.⁵¹ We can hardly imagine what kinds of problems this might have caused for people.

⁴⁸ *Zhangshi yitong*, j. 16, p. 28b. Cf. *Shiqishi shangque*, j. 94, p. 1067.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Jinshu*, j. 20, p. 16b; *Liangshu* (b), j. 48, p. 10b (Note that the SBBY edition the character was changed to *bing* 丙. Cf. *Liangshu*, j. 48, p. 4b); *Suishu*, j. 9, p. 6a. The character *jing* 景 is used also in the work of a Song scholar Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) for numbering of chapters in his work *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志. Cf. *Yijianzhi* (b), Vol. 2, p. 879. In Qing editions (for example, in *Shiwan juanlou congshu* 十萬卷樓叢書, published in 1879) the numbers of chapters were changed to *bing* 丙. Cf. *Yijianzhi*, Vol. 29, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Xuelin*, j. 3, p. 70.

⁵¹ For more examples see Chen Yuan 1958, pp. 21–23.

8.2. Consequences of Tabooing in People's Lives

Undoubtedly, the biggest impact of name tabooing can be seen in changes of names and characters or words. We should, however, not forget that language is used in every part of human life, and affects almost all situations encountered in life. In fact, Chinese people used their principles of name tabooing intentionally and automatically every day. Taboo names and words were avoided first of all in one's own family. Other taboos had to be observed when meeting neighbours or officials. One had to ask about unknown taboos. State taboos and the name changes they caused had to be known and observed by everybody. In all likelihood, people became accustomed quickly to new taboo names and could live with them.

Problems started if a taboo name, usually a family taboo name, conflicted with one's job, career or intended action. Such conflicts, together with drastic punishments, although numerically not as common as the actual linguistic changes, had the most perceptible consequences for people, and are the most spectacular for us to read about. In many cases, the tabooing of names determined the whole life of a person. Examples of people afraid to step on stone (*shi* 石), or taking flight in order not to hear music (*yue* 樂), because of their father's name (see Chapter One), can be safely regarded as anecdotic and extreme.⁵² But we know for certain that most people took name tabooing seriously. The rules of tabooing made a disproportionate impact on intellectuals who were especially expected to observe them. Many cases are known about a resignation from office or career because of actual or potential taboo violations.

8.2.1. Resignation from Office or Function

A person's career path could be closed if the name of his ancestor conflicted with the name of an office. This taboo was observed by the man affected and also enforced by the administration. Numerous examples of such conflicts are known and some of them have already been described earlier in this work. The *History of the Song* (*Songshi*) features stories such as that of Lü Xichun 呂希純 (11 c.), who was appointed to be Editorial

⁵² Further similar examples are recorded. For example, if your grand-father was called An 安 you could not accept an office in the prefecture Chang'an 長安. If your father's name was Jun 軍, son could not become a general (*jiangjun* 將軍). Cf. Alleton 1993, p. 93.

Director (*zhuzuolang* 著作郎).⁵³ Because of the taboo name of his father Gongzhu 公著, he had to refuse.⁵⁴

Li Ruozhuo 李若拙 refused to take the government post of Left Grand Master Admonisher (*zuozanshan dafu* 左贊善大夫),⁵⁵ because of a conflict with the name of his father Guangzan 光贊.⁵⁶ Another official Li Jianzhong 李建中 (945–1013), could not accept work in the Institute for the Glorification of Literature (*zhaowenguan* 昭文館),⁵⁷ because the name of his father Zhaowen 昭文 was written with the very same characters.⁵⁸

Numerous examples of such situations can also be found in other sources. Hu Yuan 胡瑗 (993–1059) was asked to become the State Historiographer (*xiuguoshi* 修國史).⁵⁹ Unfortunately, he had a father named Xiuji 修己, and could not accept this office.⁶⁰ The *History of the Jin (Jinshi)* mentions the story of Xu Ding 胥鼎 (d. 1224). He refused to take the function of Manager of Governmental Affairs (*pingzhang zhengshi* 平章政事),⁶¹ because it was in conflict with the given name of his father Zhang 章.⁶² And the *History of the Ming (Mingshi)* writes about a Zeng Lu 曾魯 (1319–1372), who, because of the name of his father Shun 順, refused to become the Grand Master of Palace Accord (*zhongshun dafu* 中順大夫).⁶³

In all these examples, there was a direct conflict between the names of offices and the name of a potential official's father. But there are known cases in which homonyms of taboos in the name of office were avoided, though this was criticized.⁶⁴ Most people straightforwardly and honestly refused a problematic office themselves. For those who tried to conceal it, the prescription made in the *Tang Code* was, that “those who hold posts whose administrative designation or official titles violate their father's or paternal grandfather's name taboos ... are punished by one year of penal servitude.”⁶⁵ The same penalty was designated for officers and generals in the army.

⁵³ Hucker 1985, p. 184; Xu Lianda 2010, p. 532.

⁵⁴ *Songshi*, j. 336, p. 13a.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 516.

⁵⁶ *Songshi*, j. 307, p. 9b.

⁵⁷ Hucker 1985, p. 118.

⁵⁸ *Songshi*, j. 441, p. 9b.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 248.

⁶⁰ *Daoshan qinghua*, p. 21ab. For Hu Yuan and his family see van Ess 2003; Hon Tze-ki 2000, pp. 67–92.

⁶¹ Cf. Hucker 1985, pp. 385–386.

⁶² *Jinshi*, j. 108, p. 4b.

⁶³ *Mingshi*, j. 136, p. 6b. Cf. Hucker 1985, p. 194.

⁶⁴ In some cases the custom of tabooing of names was perhaps used in order to avoid a certain appointment.

⁶⁵ *The T'ang Code* 1979, Vol. II, p. 91.

Sometimes it was not possible to enter a school or to reach a specific level of education, if the taboo of an ancestor interfered with it. The most famous case is probably that of Li He 李賀 (790–816), described earlier (see 6.2.8). As one might remember, he could not attend the Presented Scholar (*jinsshi* 進士) exams because the name of his father was Jinsu 晉肅. Similarly, the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846)⁶⁶ could not attend the exams of “Broad learning and extensive scholarship” (*boxue hongcike* 博學宏詞科)⁶⁷ because the name of his grandfather was *huang* 鎰.⁶⁸

There is one further example of a scholar, Bi Shi'an 畢士安 (938–1005), recruited in 992 to the Hanlin Academy (翰林). When he discovered that the name of the Academy contained a character of the name of his father Yilin 乂林, he changed his mind and did not enter. Others urged him that there is no need to taboo single characters of composite names and in the end he could be convinced to join the academy.⁶⁹

8.2.2. Taboo during Imperial Exams

The tabooing of names could determine, as already seen, whether somebody was allowed to participate in exams or not. Therefore, many taboos had to be observed during state exams, much more than usual. From the Tang dynasty onwards, we have examples for such cases (see 6.4.5). The avoidance of taboo was expected from both the examiner and students.

Examiners should verify precisely the themes of examination, in order to avoid imperial taboos, inauspicious words, and words which could be interpreted as criticism against the ruling dynasty. Examples of such faults were found especially during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the already mentioned incident in 1447 during the imperial exams in Shanxi, the examiners did not notice that the sentence they chose from the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing*) (*wei zhou zhi zhen* 維周之禎),⁷⁰ contained the taboo character of the brother of the great grandfather of the current Emperor Zhengtong – Zhu Zhen 朱楨 (1364–1424). They lost a month's salary as punishment (see 7.2.5).⁷¹ Similar cases in the Qing dynasty were even punished with the death penalty (see section 1).

⁶⁶ About him see *Zhongguo lidai renming da cidian* 1999, Vol. I, p. 447.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hucker 1985, pp. 265 and 388. The name of exams was changed later in the ruling time of the Emperor Qianlong of Qing to *boxue hongcike* 博學鴻詞科, because of his taboo name (*Cihai* 1999, p. 134).

⁶⁸ *Huang* 鎰 and *hong* 宏 were apparently homonyms at that time. Cf. *Jingshi biming huikao*, p. 555; Pulleyblank 1991, p. 124.

⁶⁹ *Songshi*, j. 281, p. 4a. NB *jin* sounds the same, but even *su* could be similar to *shi* in local dialects!

⁷⁰ *Shijing*, j. 16, p. 1b.

⁷¹ *Rizhilu*, j. 23, p. 24a.

Imperial exams also proved to be a challenge for students. Besides the necessary academic knowledge, they had to think about imperial taboos, taboos of the examiner (of him and his ancestors), and of course their own taboos.⁷² If somebody used such a name by mistake, he could be secretly eliminated and put in the last class of candidates. There are known cases, such as that of Lou Yue 樓鑰 (1137–1213), who accidentally violated a former name of the emperor during exams in 1163 and was placed at the end of the list,⁷³ or that of Qi Shun 祁順 – who was declared the best student in 1460 and later degraded because his name was the same as that of the emperor (see 7.2.3). Little wonder that students tried to avoid many characters, even if there was just the slightest suspicion that they could be problematic. Their career and life depended on these taboo words. It was even a greater misfortune when they detected on the day of the exam, after a long preparation, that there was a (family) taboo word in the theme of the examination. In this case, they could only resign and wait for the next time.⁷⁴

8.2.3. Penalties and Codes

Violation of taboo, regardless of whether it was accidental or intentional, was usually punished. Not much is known about penalties prior to the Tang dynasty. Perhaps the psychological aspect of tabooing was of greater significance then. Because of the lack of good documentation, we can only speculate what the custom was. Possible violation of taboo was punished mainly by disapproval and shame. It could be recompensed by the rectification of names, after which no further penalties would be given. In this way, Fan Xianzi 范獻子 (recorded in the *Sayings of the states* and treating an event that took place in 384–336 BC, see 4.3.1.4) felt shame after he violated the taboo of local people,⁷⁵ and the Feudal Lord of Wei (see 8.1.1) was allowed to enter Zhou country after he corrected his answer to avoid taboo words.⁷⁶ Probably the oldest information on punishment practices comes from the Three Kingdoms period (see 5.2.5). The ruler of the Wu state, Sun Hao, arrested and sometimes executed people who violated his taboo by accident.⁷⁷ The

⁷² Cf. also the note about using names (and avoiding prohibited names) during imperial exams in: Zi (Siu) 1894, p. 25–27. The author of this dissertation found no notes about the tabooing of names in two other works related to the topic: des Retours 1932 and Ichisada Miyazaki 1976.

⁷³ *Songshu*, j. 395, p. 1a; Shiba Yoshinobu 1976, pp. 668–672. See 6.4.5.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Nanbu xinshu*, j. 3 (*bing*), p. 24.

⁷⁵ *Guoyu*, j. 15, p. 2ab.

⁷⁶ *Han Feizi*, j. 14, p. 7b.

⁷⁷ *Sanguozhi*, “Wuzhi”, j. 20, p. 8a.

peculiarity of this penalty, and the apparent lack of such a practice in other states, shows that punishment often depended on a ruler's whim.

The lack of clearly defined penalties is also related to the statutes which did not prescribe concrete punishments until the Tang period. As already presented in the historical part (chapters 4-7), the first lists of taboo prohibitions in naming are known from the *Tradition of Zuo (Zuozhuan)*.⁷⁸ Expanded prescriptions and rules of tabooing were recorded in the *Records of Ritual (Liji)*.⁷⁹ Additionally, many emperors issued their own decrees and edicts in order to determine concrete rules or refer back to an old one. The first known decree of Emperor Xuan (64 BC),⁸⁰ was followed by many others, as e.g. that of the Wei state in 260 AD⁸¹ or of Emperor Sun Xiu of the Wu state in 262 AD (see 5.2.2).⁸² But they all prescribed rules and did not designate any penalties. Only since the Tang period there were concrete penalisation included in the Codes and thus we also find the first recorded cases of punishments since that period.

The *Tang Code*, issued in 653, made concrete rules of punishment for violation of taboo. Rules and penalties concerning taboo appear in three places and describe treatments for violating name taboos in documents or petitions submitted to the Emperor and in administrative designations and official titles:

All cases of violating ancestral temple name taboos in documents or petitions on affairs submitted to the emperor are punished by eighty blows of the heavy stick. If such errors are spoken, or used in other official documents, the punishment is fifty blows with the light stick. Cases of offending by using the emperor's name are punished by three years of penal servitude. With regard to taboo names, the use of words that sound the same but are written differently or the use of only one of two taboo words is not punished.⁸³

The tabooing of family taboos in official titles is discussed in two fragments:

All cases involving those who hold posts whose administrative designations or official titles violate their paternal ancestor's name taboos ... are punished by dismissal from the occupied office.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, j. 5, p. 16b.

⁷⁹ *Liji*, j. 1, p. 21b, p. 39a, p. 46b.

⁸⁰ *Hanshu*, j. 8, p. 12a.

⁸¹ *Sanguozhi*, "Weizhi", j. 4, p. 23b.

⁸² *Sanguozhi*, "Wuzhi", j. 3, p. 7b-8a.

⁸³ *The T'ang Code* 1979, Vol.II, p. 83-84.

⁸⁴ *The T'ang Code* 1979, Vol. I, p. 129, 132.

All cases involving those who hold posts whose administrative designation or official titles violate their father's or paternal grandfather's name taboos ... are punished by one year of penal servitude.⁸⁵

In the sub-commentary to the first fragment, the necessity of tabooing was extended to the great-grandfather. On the other hand, dismissal from office meant no job for one year and the reduction of rank by one degree.⁸⁶

These rules from the *Tang Code* influenced all punishments because of taboo in later dynasties. The author of this dissertation could not find rules of taboo in the *Yuan Code*,⁸⁷ but the codes of the Song,⁸⁸ Ming and Qing repeat the *Tang Code* almost literally, with only minor changes:

In all cases where people violate imperial names or imperial ancestral temple title taboos in petitions or statements to the throne, they shall be punished by 80 strokes of beating with the heavy stick. If they mistakenly violate the taboos in other documents, they shall be punished by 40 strokes of beating with the light stick. If they use [these characters] as personal names and thus violate [the taboos] they shall be punished by 100 strokes of beating with the heavy stick. However, if [the characters by which they violate the taboos] have similar sounds but different forms from the imperial names or imperial ancestral temple title taboos, or there are two characters but only one is used, in all cases there shall be no punishment.⁸⁹

In every written communication to the Emperor, if there is a violation of the prohibition against mentioning the imperial name or the name of a deceased ancestor, the punishment is 80 strokes of the heavy bamboo. If the same error is committed in another text, the penalty is 40 strokes of the light bamboo. If this word is used as a [personal] name, and thus constitutes an offence (*this does not refer to something momentary, but to using it as a name that others use to call one by*),⁹⁰ the penalty is 100 strokes of the heavy bamboo. If the offence [against the prohibition of the use of the] imperial name or that of the deceased ancestor consists in using [a character whose] sound is similar but whose form is different, or if there are two

⁸⁵ *The T'ang Code* 1979, Vol.II, p. 91.

⁸⁶ Cf. *The T'ang Code* 1979, Vol. I, p. 132.

⁸⁷ Ratchnevsky 1937.

⁸⁸ *Lü*, j. 3, p. 5a.

⁸⁹ *The Great Ming Code* 2005, p. 61.

⁹⁰ The commentary indicated by italics was made by William C. Jones.

characters [to the imperial name] and one is used, there is, in both cases, no punishment.⁹¹

The author of this dissertation could find no prescription about resignation from office because of taboo in the available Song, Yuan and Ming codes.

These three codes (including the Code of Song) laid the foundation for penal practice during the last thousand years. They were supported by further decrees of emperors, determining taboos and deciding authoritatively about concrete cases. For example, Emperor Taizong of Song (r. 976-997) changed his taboo name by decree;⁹² Emperor Guangzong of Song (r. 1189-1194) reminded commoners in 1190 AD not to violate taboos of distant imperial ancestors;⁹³ and a Yuan decree of 1335 prohibited the use of words of the imperial name.⁹⁴

In fact, penalties from the dynastic codes were implemented in many known cases, though not always exactly as laid down in the statutes/law. As we remember, Song Ang 宋昂, who had the same name as the emperor, was demoted by two grades (see 6.2.5).⁹⁵ The Imperial Censor (*yushi* 御史)⁹⁶ Zhan Yangbi 詹仰庇, who used the taboo character *zhao* 照 of the former Emperor Zhengde in his petition to the throne in the reign of Emperor Longqing (1566-1572), was penalized by flogging with 100 sticks and banishment, because his act was interpreted as intentional (see 7.2.3).⁹⁷ During the reign of the Emperor Qianlong, his eighth son Wang Yongxuan 王永璇 mistakenly wrote the taboo character of his older brother Wang Yonglian 王永璉, who had died young. Thereafter, his princely salary was stopped for three years as penalty (see 7.3.2).⁹⁸ The final decision about punishment was in the hands of the emperors, and sometimes they dodged the rules as well.

Although the use of homonyms was not punishable in all codes, there are relatively many cases of people being accused of that offense. Usually, they were freed in the end, as in the case of Li Xi 李谿 (d. 895) who was punished in 871 with the reduction of his salary for using the character *song* 訟 (homonym of the taboo name Song 誦 of Emperor Shunzong

⁹¹ *The Great Qing Code* 1994, p. 91. Cf. also Boulais 1966, p. 141.

⁹² *Songchao shishi*, j. 1, p. 9ab. See 6.4.3.

⁹³ *Songshi*, j. 108, p. 10b.

⁹⁴ *Yuanshi*, j. 38, p. 7b.

⁹⁵ *Tanghuiyao*, j. 23, p. 453.

⁹⁶ Hucker 1985, p. 592.

⁹⁷ *Mingshi*, j. 215, p. 4b.

⁹⁸ *Qingshi*, j. 222, p. 3568.

of Tang, r. 805) in a petition. Fortunately, he was finally acquitted.⁹⁹ In another case, Xin Ziyan 辛子炎 was to be flogged, as he used the word *shu* 署 – a homonym of the taboo name Shu 樹 (of the grandfather of the Emperor Wenxuan of Northern Qi). Eventually he could be absolved, too.¹⁰⁰

Of course, the most drastic measure for transgression of name tabooing was capital punishment, used by the emperor in special cases, if he suspected (with or without reason) an intentional violation of taboo. Tragic stories such as that of Zha Siting 查嗣庭 (1664–1727) – an examiner from the time of Emperor Yongzheng 雍正 – who was held responsible for using “dangerous” characters of the *Classic of Poetry (Shijing)* as the subject of an exam in 1726 (see section 1), were the most terrible outcomes of name tabooing for the lives of people. They affected not only the “sinner” (who in this case died in prison and whose corpse was dismembered), but also his family (imprisoned and exiled) and the whole province (cancelation of exams for a few years). However, such severe punishments are known only in very specific circumstances of the Qing dynasty during the 18th century.

The violation of private taboos was not treated in the codes (except if they were related to the name of office), but it could of course still affect massively someone’s friendships and political networks. For example, Xi Ang 郗昂 living in the time of Tang dynasty accidentally violated the taboo name of his friend Wei Zhi 韋陟. The result was the breaking-off of the relationship and emotional inquietude of Xi Ang.¹⁰¹ Even more dangerous was the violation of private taboos of powerful people. They sometimes had the means to punish one with flogging and banishment, as in case of an actor who intentionally violated the name of Shi Mijian 史彌堅 (1166–1232) – official and brother of a chancellor of the Song dynasty.¹⁰²

Even cases with a fatal conclusion are known, as in the example mentioned before (see section 6) from the Later Tang. At the time the Chancellor appointed out of spite a new subordinate of the Minister of Works, Lu Wenji 盧文紀 (876–951), with intention of using taboo custom to hurt him. The new subordinate’s name was Yu Ye 于鄴 and his name violated (as a homonym) the taboo name of the father of Lu Wenji – Siye 嗣業. Therefore,

⁹⁹ *Tanghuiyao*, j. 23, p. 453.

¹⁰⁰ *Bei Qishu*, j. 24, p. 4b.

¹⁰¹ *Tangguo shibu*, j. 1, p. 11b-12a.

¹⁰² *Xihu youlan zhiyu*, j.5, p. 4b.

Lu Wenji refused to receive Yu Ye when he came. After some time, Lu Wenji asked about Yu Ye and found that he had committed suicide – he could not suffer the disgrace caused by his superior.¹⁰³ This last example once more demonstrates that the tabooing of names and its consequences had an immense impact on the lives of people. The whole problem of name tabooing is difficult to understand for present-day people. We tend to see in it only aspects of language or courtesy. In fact, the crucial aspect of name tabooing was a psychological one.

In concluding, we can see that the custom of name tabooing was a pivotal factor in the lives of people. Names, words and terms were changed. People had to resign from office or failed in exams because of taboo. Sometimes even capital punishment was prescribed for intentional or accidental violation of taboo custom. However, as will be shown in the next chapter, equally important was the influence of name tabooing on Chinese literature and Chinese historiography.

¹⁰³ *Xin Wudaishi*, j. 55, p. 2ab.