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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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# Summary

## 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

Piotr Adamek

This dissertation deals with the tabooing of names in China, or *bihui* 避諱. The names of sovereigns, ancestors, officials, teachers, etc. were taboo, meaning that it was prohibited to pronounce or record them. This custom had an enormous impact on Chinese culture and serious consequences for the daily lives of many Chinese, as well as for Chinese historiography. Because of such name taboos, not only many given names, titles and geographical names were changed, but also the names of plants, things of daily life, common expressions, and even the Heavenly Stems used for naming days, months and years in the calendar. People had to stop their careers or change their style of life in order to maintain a naming taboo. Some of them were even killed in connection with the tabooing of names.

The first systematic research on the tabooing of names in China was done by Chen Yuan in his very significant work *Examples of Taboo Names in Historical Writings* (*Shihui juli* 史諱舉例). Since the 1980s intensive research on this topic started in China and soon attained the status of an independent interdisciplinary field of research, *bihuixue* 避諱學. This knowledge about the tabooing of names not only helps us to understand the cultural practice of *bihui* and determine taboo characters, but also date editions of books and manuscripts, to determine the age of a text, to reconstruct old names, meanings and pronunciations, and so on. At present it is not possible in China to imagine the historiography or literary criticism without a deep knowledge of *bihui*.

In the long history of the tabooing of names, numerous changes of taboo practice have taken place. Various methods and a complex system of rules were created. The tabooing of names was an expression of courtesy and respect, fear and anger, legitimization of power and protection. It existed as an important element of Chinese culture and was perceived as significant cultural and social factor by the Chinese and the cultures that surrounded them, such as Korea and Japan. Chinese traditional culture cannot be contemplated without taking into account the tabooing of names. The impact and various social and cultural aspects of the tabooing of names in Chinese history are described and evaluated in my doctoral dissertation.