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Traditional Chinese Rules Concerning Personal Naming and “Depreciating Names”

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some traditional Chinese rules concerning personal naming, especially the regulations on words or terms to be avoided in personal names, and to analyze in some more detail the problem of so-called “depreciating names”. The paper will also discuss 104 different terms used for 215 given names or their parts and considered by some Chinese and Western scholars (cf. Selected Bibliography) as names depreciating people, i.e. being inelegant, unpleasant, and even scolding their bearers.

Chinese personal names

In Chinese culture (and some other cultures) the relationship between a name and the reality was not regarded as formal or ideal, but as real and very important. De Groot, the eminent researcher of the Chinese religion system, noted: “The fact then is that the Chinese of ancient times were dominated by the notion that beings are intimately associated with their names” (De Groot 1810:1126). The fact that the Chinese considered their names so real, made them express their culture-oriented desires by deliberately formatting their proper names, and by establishing various rules of their usage and protection.

A typical Chinese personal name consists of a surname or a family name (*xing* 姓, *shi* 氏 or *xingshi* 姓氏) followed by a given name (*ming* 名 or *mingzi* 名字). The standard form of a surname is composed of a monosyllabic word, although there are certain family names of two or even more syllables. The common form of a given name is made up of two syllables/morphemes/words, although monosyllabic names are also frequent.

On the basis of the scattered materials referring to the origin of surnames in the ancient Chinese civilization, it appears that it was legendary Fuxi (the III millennium B.C.) who established the law of marriage and ordered the adoption of surnames. According to the

etymology, the word *xing* 'an original surname' denoted 'production by a woman', while the word *shi* 'a titled surname' denoted 'a root' (Kiang 1935:131). It seems that in ancient times the *xing*-surname was given after the mother, and the *shi*-surname was conferred from the father's influence. In the early historical period of China surnames were the privilege of the aristocracy. In the majority of cases the females used their *xing*-surnames as indicators of the fundamental significance, because of the principle of the clan exogamy, and the males used their *xing* or *shi*-surnames as the indicators of their rank of nobility or of a place of origin. From the Qin Dynasty (221–206 B.C.) onwards the disappearance of formal division into estates resulted in the disappearance of the differentiation between *xing* and *shi* surnames. The two notions became synonymous, and in the Modern Standard Chinese they both mean 'a family name, a surname'. The clan organization has been extended to all people. The great clan structure of the Chinese society has resulted in a rather limited list of Chinese surnames (surnames of the people of the Han nationality). According to Chinese scholars (Xue 1994:43–45), there are about 6000 Chinese surnames recorded in various kinds of historical documents (different numbers are given: 5652, 5662, 5730, and 6300). In nowadays China there are about 3000 surnames used, and less than 300 of them are commonly used. One hundred of the most popular family names are used by 87% of Chinese people and the first 19 of the list are shared by about 56% of Chinese population.

In the domain of given names the situation differs. In the past a Chinese had a number of names. The most important of them was his original name, *ming* 名, given in the infancy and considered as a private and sacred one. Sometimes small children had their pet names, called 'small names', *xiaoming* 小名, or 'milk names', *ruming* 乳名, used by their relatives instead of their usual first names to express familiarity. On attaining majority the Chinese was given an official name, *zi* 字, to be used in public. He could also adopt other names, nicknames and pseudonyms, *hao* 号. Apart from this, rulers and notables were granted certain names posthumously, as their posthumous memorial titles, *shi* 谥 or *shihao* 谥号. Like the emperors, they were also granted posthumous temple titles, *miaohao* 庙号. In present day China a Chinese usually has one name, called *ming* or *mingzi*. Sometimes small children have their pet names.

There has been no limited list of traditional given names in the Chinese culture. A name was and still is chosen individually. In the past, the relationship between the man and his name, his private name in particular, was considered extremely important for his existence. It was believed that a man and his name were almost identical, the name represented his body, his soul and energy. The name expressed the essence of the man and foredoomed his destiny. It was even believed that certain magical exertions could be carried out with the help of a man's name – for example, it was enough to call out the name of one's enemy to defeat him (Shou 1985:19). People might vanquish evil spirits by knowing their names, and, conversely, the forces of darkness might injure or even murder men by knowing the individuals' names (De Groot 1810:1127). Therefore, the Chinese regarded their names as an essential part of themselves and treated them with due respect. The relationship between a man and his given name was considered more crucial

than that between the man and his surname. The great Chinese philosopher Mencius (372–289 B.C.), stated: “We avoid the name, but do not avoid the surname. The surname is common, the name is peculiar” (Legge 1960:497-8). There was no necessity of the particular protection of a surname, which defined so many individuals at a time. Still, the special attention paid by Chinese to their private given names led to the phenomenon of the personal name taboo.

The personal name taboo appeared in China about the 10-th century B.C. and was abolished by the Revolution of 1911 (Kałużńska 1990). At the beginning it was restricted to the private names of the dead, later on it began to apply to the names of the living. It became impossible to utter or write down the private names of a ruling sovereign, a notable or a person of higher rank, as well as one's parents or other ancestors. *Liji* (“Notes on rites”), the work comprising the standards of behavior of the ancient Chinese in every domain of life, warns: “Before entering the door of somebody's house, one should ask about names to be avoided” (*Liji* 1957:134).

The Chinese resorted to different methods to prevent the taboo violation. First, the private names of notable person, unlike their public names and titles were usually not used. Proper names or appellatives identical with those of the sacred personal names were substituted by others. It is evident that all restrictions caused by the taboo were more strictly obeyed as far as the emperor and the members of his family were concerned. Nevertheless, everyone breaching the taboo committed an offence against the law of the State and the rules of social behavior.

In early Chinese texts one can find many personal names and some rules concerning the personal name-creation and name-giving. The rules concerned various aspects of personal names. First of all, they defined what words/categories of words could be used or should be disused in name-giving, and what was evidently connected with the purpose of name-giving.

First Chinese rules concerning patterns of personal names

The first rules concerning personal names are to be found in *Zuo zhuan* (“Zuo's Commentary”), one of the ancient (the Vth century B.C.) commentaries on the *Chunqiu* (“Annals of Springs and Autumns”), the chronicle by Confucius (551–479 B.C.), in the chapter entitled “The sixth year of duke Xuan”. The son of Xuan, duke of Lu, was born and the duke asked Shen Xu about names. Shen Xu replied:

“Names are taken from five things: some pre-intimation; some auspice of virtue; some striking appearance about the child; the borrowing the name of some object; or some similarity. When a child is born with a name on it, that is a pre-intimation; when a child is named from some virtue, this is called an auspice; when it is named from some resemblance about it to something, this is called naming from the appearance; when it is named from some object, this is called borrowing; when the name is taken from something about the father, this is called a name from similarity. The name must not be taken from the name of the State; or of an office; or of a mountain or river; or of any malady; or of an animal; or of a utensil, or of a ceremonial offering. The

people of Zhou do not use the name *which they bore* in serving the Spirits of the dead; and the name is not mentioned after death. To take the name from the State would do away with the State's name; one from an office would do away with the office; one from a hill or stream would do away with the sacrifice to it; one from an animal would do away with its use as a victim; one from a utensil or a ceremonial offering would do away with its use in ceremonies" (Legge 1960:46-50, with some technical changes).

The above quoted statement by Shen Xu may be treated as enumerating five patterns of personal name-giving and six categories of personal names to be avoided.

Five patterns of personal name-giving:

- 1) names inspired by some celestial events which accompanied the birth;
- 2) names referring to some auspicious omens or circumstances, which accompanied the birth;
- 3) names referring to some physical features (appearance) of the bearer after his birth;
- 4) names referring to some objects related to the bearer;
- 5) names after some characteristic features shared by the bearer with his father.

Six categories of forbidden personal names:

- 1) personal names after a state name;
- 2) personal names after a name of an office in a state;
- 3) personal names after names of mountains and rivers of a state;
- 4) personal names after diseases;
- 5) personal names after domestic animals;
- 6) personal names after ritual vessels or products.

In *Baihu tong* ("Debate in the White Tiger Hall") by Ban Gu (32–92), who reports on a debate at the court in 79 referring to the correct interpretation of the classics, one can find a statement:

„A personal name is not made after the sun, the moon, mountains, or rivers, because a personal name is a belittling and self-depreciatory appellation. A subject ought to taboo [the names of his superiors, which would be difficult if they were formed after] things of general use; so they are avoided" (*Po Hu Tung* 1952:586-7).

The prohibitions were mainly caused by the requirements of the taboo of personal names. When personal names are tabooed, any everyday words which resemble these names have to be replaced, so that the personal names will not be used in inauspicious circumstances. Therefore, if the above mentioned terms and names were given as personal names, the former ones would have to be abandoned or changed, which could result in many inconvenient effects, such as instability of names and difficulties in communications.

The rules of personal naming, as formulated by Shen Xu, have been treated here as the basis for further explorations in the domain.

The purpose of name-giving

The Chinese believed that the name was closely connected with the reality or even that the name was the reality. The personal name expressed the essence of the man and

foredoomed his destiny, so it had to be formatted in a proper way and treated with due respect. Some early statements on the purpose of name-giving and functions of names may be found in the text of *Zuo zhuan*, in the chapter entitled *The second year of duke Xuan*. The famous passage of the text reads:

“Years back, the wife of Mu, marquis of Jin (B.C. 811–784), a lady Jiang, gave birth to her eldest son at the time of the expedition against Tiao’ou, and on that account there was given him the name Chou (**Enemy**). His brother was born at the time of the battle of Qianmu, and he got with reference to it the name of Chengshi (**Grand-Success**). Shifu said: »How strange the names our lord has given to his sons! Now names should be definitions of what is right; the doing of what is right produces rules of what is proper; those rules again are embodied in the practice of government; and government has its issues in the rectification of the people. Therefore when government is completed in this way, the people are obedient; when this course is changed, it produces disorder. A good partner is called Fei (**Consort**); a grumbling partner is called Chou (**Enemy**) – these are ancient designations. Now our lord has called his eldest son **Enemy**, and his second son **Grand Success** – this is an early omen of disorder, as if the elder brother would be superseded« (Legge 1960:40 with some technical changes).

Another famous statement concerning not only the function of personal names, but names in general as well as their relations with the reality (or their influence on the reality), are to be found in *Lunyu* (Selected sayings or Analects of Confucius), in the chapter entitled *Zilu*. It is stated there:

“If names are not rectified, what is said does not sound reasonable; if what is said does not sound reasonable, efforts cannot culminate in success; if efforts cannot culminate in success, the rites and music will not thrive; if rites and music do not thrive, crimes cannot be punished properly” (*Lunyu* 1994:228).

There is another version of the translation of the part of this passage:

“Why must a man have a [personal] name? To reveal his emotions, and in the reverential service of others to present himself. The *Lun yu* says »If the names are not correct, the words will not confirm [with the facts]” (*Po Hu T’ung* 1952:581).

One can also find another statement concerning the role of personal names and the purpose of name-giving in the work *Qianshu* by the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) scholar, Tang Zhen (1630–1704). In chapter entitled *Mingcheng* (“Names”) he stated:

“A name arranges what is old and what is young, [it] distinguishes what is honorable and what is mean, [it] separates what is suspicious and what is doubtful, it is very important for courtesy” (Tang 1984:447).

The regulations concerning name-giving evidently originated in belief in the magical influence of language, belief that words did control objects, people and spirits, so “names should be definitions of what is right”. Thus, it was believed that a good, proper and correct name might bring good effects and fortune, and a bad name might lead to trouble and misfortune for all the country as well as for individuals.

Chinese depreciating personal names – textual evidence

As stated above, the ancient Chinese were very careful while choosing and using personal names, because they believed that the whole of their being resided in their name. They also believed that good names could significantly improve the destiny of their bearers, since whatever is spoken or written might constitute or produce the reality of what it expressed. However, among Chinese names of the past and present one can find many names which are derogatory or pejorative in meaning. The list of names is full of unpleasing and ugly specimens. Such names are called by Chinese scholars *chouming* 丑名 or *eming* 恶名, i.e. ugly names, or inferior names, or debasing names, or mean names, or despicable names. These names are called 'depreciating personal names' in this paper. In the beginning of Chinese civilization this kind of names was quite common. A long list of depreciating personal names can be made of those found in the literary works of the Zhou (1050–249 B.C.), Qin, and Han (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) dynasties, like *Zuo zhuan*, *Xunzi*, *Mengzi*, *Shiji* ("Records of the Grand Historiographer") by Sima Qian (145–87? B.C.), as well as those found in later works, for example: *Jin shu* ("Book of Jin"), *Nan shi* ("History of the South"), *Wei shu* ("History of Wei Dynasty"), *Zizhi tongjian* ("Ongoing mirror as an aid to government") by Sima Guang (1019–1086), *Jin shi* ("History of Jin Dynasty"), *Yuan shi* ("History of Yuan Dynasty"), etc.

Depreciating names are treated by some Chinese scholars as improper, inelegant, and formatted against the rules of name-giving as formulated by Shen Xu. (cf. p. 3), as violating the principles that "names should be definitions of what is right" (cf. p. 4), and as names not conforming with the facts (cf. p. 4). The reasons for bestowing this kind of personal names seem to be not quite clear to many Chinese scholars of the past. Some remarks on this kind of names are to be found in *Yanshi jiaxun* ("Admonitions to the members of the Yan family") by Yan Zhitui (531–after 590) from the Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577) who states:

"The duke of Zhou called his son **Poultry**, Confucius called his son **Carp**. [The names] were connected only with so named persons, there was no need of avoiding them. However, the marquis of Wei, the son of the duke of Wei, and the prince of Chu were all called **Louse**, Sima Xiangru [the famous poet] was called **Dog-son/Puppy**. Wang Xiu [the minister of Eastern Jin Dynasty] was called **Dog-son/ Puppy**. [These names] were connected with the generation of their fathers. The reasons [for such names] are not clear. What was proper in the past, now is to be laughed at. There were in the northern countries many people who gave their children such names as **Young Ass**, **Colt**, **Sow**, by which the bearers were to call themselves and to be called by their brothers" (Yan 2001:44).

Some other remarks on depreciating names were made by Lu Guimeng (?–881) of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) who noticed in his work entitled *Xiaoming luxu* ("Records on pet names"):

"From the Zhou Dynasty onwards the names were given after the circumstances, so there were such vulgar names, like: **Black-Buttocks** [or] **Black-Arms**; such strange names, like **Sheep-Arm** [or] **Fox-Hair**; such debasing names, as **Grass-Firing /Fomenters of disorder**, such powerful names, as **Manage-Robbery**, and

names like: **Mortar-Pestle**, **Bamboo-Mate/Crippled**, **Shaved-Blockhead**, **Wild-Crafty**, **Not-Knowing**, **Not-Scrupling**, **Not-Long-Living**, **Not-Minister**. All these names are not correct and the words do not confirm [the facts]. So, what about the justification of what Shen Xu said? (Lu 1997:120).

Wang Shizhen (1634–1711), the poet and scholar of the Qing Dynasty, noted in his work *Chi bei ou tan* ("Occasional discussions north to the pool"), in chapter entitled *Mingming* ("Namings"):

"Shen Xu in *Zuoshi zhuan* stated: 'There are six bans concerning names: [names] must not be taken from a name of a state, or of an office, or of a mountain or a river, or of any malady, or of an animal, or of an utensil or ceremonial offering'. On the grounds of the names of feudal lords, princes and high officials of the Spring and Autumn Period, [it may be stated that those] who violated the bans were very numerous. The situation was similar at the beginning of the Han dynasty. Such names, like: **Mole**, **Itch**, **Fault**, **Skin Disease**, **Louse**, **Dog**, **Pig**, **Wag-Tail** and so on, were too many to enumerate them all" (Wang 1982:544-5).

Liang Zhangju (1775–1849) of the Qing Dynasty in his work entitled *Lang ji cong tan* ("Collected writings of Langji") in the chapter entitled *Chouming* ("Bad names") stated:

"Ancient people gave personal names after the form [of a person's body], for example, there were personal names such as **Head**, **Eye**, **Ear**, **Nose**, **Dent**, **Tooth**, **Hand**, **Leg**, **Palm** [of a hand], **Finger**, **Buttocks**, **Belly**, **Navel**, **Stomach**. In [the works] *Zhuangzi* (...) there was **Zhu Kidney**, in *Liezi* there was **Wei Black-Egg**, in *Bei meng suo yan* there was **Sun Egg-Uniform**, but it is not clear what the sense of these names was. Ancient people did not avoid names after animals. In Wei there were noble men [called] **Shi Dog**, **Qu Older-Fish**, **Shi Fish**. The minister of the duke Xuan of Wei was **Sima Dog**. In *Hanshu* (...) among others there was **Sima Xiangru**, whose first name was **Puppy**. In Southern Qi there was a junior envoy also called **Puppy**. In the biography of Zhang Jing'er in *History of Southern Qi Dynasty* [chapt.45, l.13] it is told: »His father Chou joined the army. His mother, while asleep in a field, had dreamt that a horned puppy licked her; and having as a consequence become pregnant, she gave birth to Jing'er, whose first name therefore was **Puppy**. And when she had another son, she dubbed him, on account of **Puppy**, with the name **Piglet**«. In *History of Liao Dynasty* among the offspring of Yizu there was a junior general called **Puppy**. The fifth son of Shengzong, the prime minister of nanfu, was called **Puppy**. There also was a general of Liao called **Red-Puppy**, seen in *History of Jin Dynasty*. And the son of Shizong of Jin, Zhengwang, used the name **Stone-Puppy**. And in *Biography of Li Ying* there was a general of Lanzhou guard called **Wang Puppy**, there was also a commander called **Pig-Dog**. In *History of Yuan Dynasty* there was **Shimo Dog-Dog**, very famous because of his warrior skills, there also were **Guo Dog-Dog** and **Ning Pig-Dog**, very famous because of their filial behavior. There was also a high official called **Puppy**, but his family name is unknown. In *Bei meng suo yan* there are **Li Maggot** and **Hao Cow-Droppings**. In *History of Liao Dynasty* (...) there was **Wang Ass-Droppings** from the prefecture of Liaoxi. In *History of Jin Dynasty* (...) there was... **Li Lamed-Ass**, in *History of Yuan Dynasty* (...) there was a junior officer called **Ugly-Ass**. These names are very inelegant. And ancient people did not avoid them. There are many examples of such names among officials in history records, like those already mentioned. It is very difficult to understand" (Liang 1997:105-6).

It seems that the use of depreciating names is one of the mysteries in the domain of the Chinese onomastics. Many researchers of the past did not understand this phenomenon, and for the contemporaries it is even more difficult to explain. Some Chinese scholars tried to make the problem of depreciating names clear by explaining this phenomenon by moral category of self-depreciation or modesty of the Chinese in the past, cf. Ban Gu's statement: "a personal name is a belittling and self-depreciatory appellation" (cf. p. 3).

As Yu Cheng (?) from the Song Dynasty (960–1279) stated in his work *Jianxue cong shuo* ("Collected works of Jianxue"),

"When contemporary people have sons, they have too high an opinion on themselves, many of them bestow names containing one of four following words: 'literate', 'military', 'rich', 'honorable'. (...) Ancient people while giving names deliberately depreciated themselves. [The names] were: **Stupid**, or **Vulgar**, or **Awkward**, or **Mean**. All such names carried the sense of modesty" (Yu an 1994:51).

However, some scholars consider depreciating names as connected with the ancient Chinese belief in evil spirits and the magic force of names. The Chinese depreciating names are treated as those supposedly having the power to avert evil influences or bad luck. Such names in the Western culture are called apotropaic names, according to a Greek word *apotropaios* 'averting evil', as in some cultures people-children might be named after unpleasant notions to make them undesirable to evil spirits (Crystal 1997:113).

According to J. Dyer Ball (1926:416),

"[In China] to cheat the evil spirits which may wish to rob a man of his son, the boy may be called by some name that convey the idea of vilifying the young child, such as **Puppy**, or his head may be shaved and he called **Buddhist priest**".

As De Groot maintains, Chinese people felt and manifested an aversion from pronouncing and writing personal names, especially their own private, sacred given names, and those of persons whom they were bound to esteem and love. The use of personal names of some kind could not possibly be banished from a daily life and conversation. Therefore it was wise to use as personal names such terms which in the ears of bad spirits denoted not the persons involved, but quite different things, preferably despicable things, which were not worth attending to. Thus, naming people had to be overt depreciation, or even scolding – evil spirits, on hearing such names, believed that the bearers were not valuable and as such despised by every one, and they would turn their maliciousness against persons of more importance. Especially boys received such debasing names, first of all weak, unhealthy and only sons, mainly as their pet names, being in use among the family and good friends. Persons who required no extraordinary attention and care (e.g. girls who in the Chinese culture were not valuable children), were exempted from such manifestation of affection. De Groot stated:

"The 'mean names' perfectly satisfy the conditions to which names in Chinese life have to answer, that is to say, they allow every one to pronounce them at any time and place, without any risk being run by the bearer or his felicity. Most people of the common class want no other names. In this respect they differ from the better classes, who are educated enough to know, that well chosen names may greatly improve the destiny of the bearers" (De Groot 1810:1134).

It is quite evident that many Chinese people (especially those poorly educated, but also some of the higher classes of the society) believed that depreciating names averted

diseases and mortality from children, and remarkably reduced difficulties connected with their bringing up. Some evidence of the belief is to be found in various Chinese texts.

Wang Mao (?) of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in his *Yeke congshu* (“Collected writings of Yeke”), in the chapter entitled *Xiaoming quanzi* (“Pet name **Puppy**”), noted:

“Parents wanted him to be brought up smoothly, so they called him **Puppy**. (...) Contemporary people do it with the same intention. The reason is clear” (Wang 1991:441).

In the above mentioned work *Lang ji cong tan* by Liang Zhangju of the Qing Dynasty one can find a story of Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), the famous statesman and writer, who called his son **Monk-Brother**. The reasons of the naming are explained as follows:

“People wanted their little sons to grow up easily, so very often named them after unpleasing specimens, like dogs, sheep, horses or cows. The name **Monk-Brother** arose of the same intention” (Liang 1997:106).

In the past epochs people in China sometimes asked poor people to give a name to a child, since they believed it could help bringing up their kids easy and guarantee them good condition to live. The best example of such a practice is to be found in the chapter 42 of the novel *Honglou meng* (“The Dream of the Red Chamber”) by Cao Xueqin (1715–1764). Wang Xifeng asks a poor woman to choose a name for his beloved daughter who was very often sick. He says: “If you, a poor and humble person, bestow her a name, it will be the last chance to keep her alive” (Yuan 1994:51-2).

According to Yuan Tingdong (Yuan 1994:51) in contemporary China, people in the countryside still believe that *ming jian cai hao dai* 名贱才好带 “[children] having mean names are easy to be brought up”. The result is that there are many people having names, especially pet names, such as **Puppy** or **Cow-baby**. It is because parents want their children to grow in peace, and they believe that having a personal name after a mean object makes bringing up easy.

Another contemporary Chinese scholar, Hui Yuan (Hui 1999:206-7), maintains that there are two main reasons for bestowing depreciating names. The first reason is the belief that depreciating names make the life of their bearers longer – as in the common saying: *jian ming chang ming* 贱名长命 “mean name, long life”. The second reason is the belief that it is proper to treat evil things or situations with the same evil – as in another common saying: *Yi xiong dui xiong, yi xie zhi xie* 以凶对凶, 以邪治邪 “to oppose evil with evil, to cure evil by evil”.

Classes of depreciating personal names

Basing on collected 104 different terms used as given names or as their parts and considered by some Chinese and Western scholars as debasing or inelegant ones, it is possible to make the following classification of Chinese depreciating names:

- names after animals considered ugly and worthless, especially dogs and pigs;
- names after animals considered ugly and disgusting, especially insects and worms;
- names after animals considered disgraceful and cruel;
- names after diseases and physical deformations;
- names after detested objects, people or phenomena, as signs of unhappy events or calamities;
- names after disgusting or shameful things, like excrements;
- names after disgusting or harmful qualities of people, animals or appearances;
- names after unlucky words.

Personal names given after animals that are considered ugly and worthless constitute the largest group of names (15 terms, 60 names, 28% of all names analyzed). The species treated by Chinese people as the representatives of ugly and worthless animals are mainly dogs and pigs. In China, there is a depreciating folk saying: “*lian zhu gou dou bu ru* 连猪狗都不如 [someone] is inferior even to pigs and dogs” (Hu i 2002:295). The depreciating terms are as below:

gou 狗 ‘a dog’;

gou’er 狗儿 ‘a puppy’;

gougou 狗狗 ‘a dog of dogs’;

gouzi 狗子 ‘a puppy’;

ju 驹 ‘a foal’;

lǚ 驴 ‘an ass, a donkey’;

niú 牛 ‘an ox, an cow’;

quan 犬 ‘a dog’;

quanzi 犬子 ‘a puppy’;

shi 豕, ‘a pig’;

tun 豚 ‘a pig’;

xi 豨 ‘a pig, a hog’;

zhi 豕 ‘a swine’;

zhu 猪 ‘a pig’;

zhu’er 猪儿 ‘a piglet’.

The second category of depreciating terms and names are those constructed after animals considered by Chinese people as ugly and disgusting ones, especially insects, worms and snakes (13 terms, 26 names, 12% of all names analyzed). The terms are as below:

chong’er 虫儿 ‘an insect, a worm’;

guqu 蛊蛆 ‘internal worms, maggots’;

hama 蛤蟆 ‘a frog’;

hao 蚝 ‘an oyster’;

hui 虺 ‘a venomous snake’;

huo 蝮 ‘a looper, an inchworm, a geometer’;

ji 虱 ‘a louse, a nit’;

jishi 虱 'a louse';
li 蛎 'a rock-oyster';
mushi 木虱 'a bedbug';
shi 虱 'a louse, a parasite';
shu 蜀 'a large catleppillar';
ying 蝇 'a fly'.

The category of depreciating terms and names given after animals considered by Chinese disgraceful and cruel ones (11 terms, 28 names, 13% of all names analyzed) is represented by the following:

bao 豹 'a leopard, a panther';
baozi 豹子 'a leopard, a panther';
chai 豺 'a ravenous beast, a jackal';
chi hu 赤虎 'a red tiger';
hu 狐 'a fox';
hu tou 虎头 'a tiger's head';
lang 狼 'a wolf';
mao hou 毛猴 'a crude monkey';
nou 犍 'an angry dog, a mad dog';
pi 羆 'a kind of a bear';
xiong 熊 'a bear'.

The category of depreciating terms and names given after diseases and physical deformations (18 terms, 25 names, 11.6% of all names analyzed) includes:

chi 瘰 'spots on the body, moles';
chi 痴 'mad, insane';
ci 疵 'a fault, a mole';
cuo 瘥 'a skin disease';
hei bei 黑背 'a black back';
hei gong 黑肱 'a black upper-arm';
hei jian 黑肩 'a black arm';
hei luan 黑卵 'a black egg, a black ovum';
hei tun 黑臀 'black buttocks';
hei yao 黑要[腰] 'black waist';
ji 疾 'a disease, sickness, illness';
jie 疥 'the itch, to itch, scabby';
liu 瘤 'a tumour, a swelling';
quchu 蒹蓎 'a mate, a crippled, disabled person';
tuo 橐 'a hump, a humpback';
yan 魔 'a black mole';
yongju 痈疽 'an ulcer';
yu 伛 'a hunch, a hunchback'.

The category of depreciating terms and names given after detested or despised objects, people or phenomena, as signs of unhappy events or calamities (15 terms, 20 names, 9.35% of all names analyzed), is represented by:

- dao* 盜 'a robber, a thief';
fanli 藩篱 'a fence, barriers, a place or conditions of confinement';
fuchu 负刍 'grass for firing, fomenters of disorder';
hongshui 洪水 'a flood, a cataclysm';
hui 毁 'to ruin, to destroy';
jiefu 劫夫 'a robber, a bandit';
mainu 买奴 'a bought slave';
niulao 牛牢 'a pen, a prison, a jail';
qi 乞 'a beggar';
qizai 乞仔 'a little beggar';
seng 僧 'a monk';
wuyun 乌云 'black clouds';
xiefu 泻父 'dispersed father';
yu 圉 'a horse stable', a groom';
yukou 御寇 'a robber'.

The category of depreciating terms and names connected with disgusting or shameful things, especially excrements of worthless animals (6 terms, 10 names, 4.75% of all names analyzed), includes:

- fensao* 粪扫 'sweepings, excrements';
goushi 狗屎 'dog's droppings';
lūfen 驴粪 'donkey's droppings';
niushi 牛屎 'cow's droppings';
zhufen 猪粪 'pig's droppings';
zhuniao 猪尿 'pig's piss'.

The category of depreciating terms and names connected with disgusting or harmful qualities of people, animals or appearances (13 terms, 20 names, 9.35% of all names analyzed) is represented by:

- chou* 丑 'ugly, a physical or moral deformity';
chou er 丑儿 'an ugly fellow';
chou han 丑汉 'an ugly Chinese';
chou lū 丑驴 'an ugly ass';
chou nu 丑奴 'an ugly/a vile slave';
hei lū 黑驴 'black ass';
kuangjiao 狂狡 'cruel, crafty';
kunwan 瘤驴 'shaved blockheaded, bald and stupid';
liu lū 瘤驴 'a lamed donkey';
mangsi 莽饲 'a slovenly reared';

popi 泼皮 'rude and unreasonable, a rascal';
que lú 瘸驴 'a crippled ass';
zhuang gou 蠢狗 'stupid dog'.

Names given after unlucky words (13 terms, 26 names, 12% of all names) include following terms:

ai 哀 'grieved, sorrowful, pity';
bei 悲 'grief, grieved, sorrow, sorrowful';
huai 坏 'bad, harmful';
jiu 咎 'a fault, a calamity, inauspicious omen';
pin 贫 'poor';
qi 弃 'abandon, throw away';
qiong 穷 'poor';
sun 损 'decrease, lose, harm, damage';
wan 完 'finished';
wu 恶 'evil, wrong';
xie 邪 'evil, harmful';
xiong 凶 'evil, unfortunate';
zhong 终 'end, finish, die'.

Beside of the above-mentioned terms, there are also some others, which occur in personal names, and might be considered by contemporary people as depreciating ones. In the time of formation of such names, however those terms had no depreciating meaning, so they have not been discussed in this paper. One of the examples is the term *gui* 龟 'a turtle, a tortoise'. In old China it symbolised longevity, immutability and steadfastness while in present day China it is mainly regarded as an immoral creature, and used in the meanig 'a cuckold, a pimp' (Yuan 1994:52).

Conclusions

The purpose of the paper has been to introduce some traditional Chinese rules concerning personal naming, especially the regulations regarding terms or lexical items not to be used in personal names, and to analyze the problem of the so-called "depreciating personal names". The paper has presented 104 different terms used for 215 given names or for their parts, and considered by some Chinese and Western scholars as names depreciating people, i.e. being inelegant, unpleasant, and even scolding their bearers.

The available body of texts and facts indicates that ancient Chinese believed that relation between a name and the reality was real and important, therefore well chosen names could greatly improve the destiny of the bearers. Since the Chinese also believed in evil spirits and the magic force of names, depreciating personal names were considered as apotropaic ones, i.e. those having the power to avert evil influences or bad luck, to

make the bearers of such names undesirable to evil spirits. The fundamental idea of which depreciating names have grown up, namely the protection of persons from evil powers, fell into oblivion, and such names were treated by some scholars as probably arisen from the sense of modesty of the ancient Chinese people. For the most of researchers, however, depreciating names were considered improper, inelegant, vulgar, and formatted against the traditional rules of name-giving formulated by Shen Xu, as violating the principles that "names should be definitions of what is right", and as names "not conforming with the facts".

In contemporary China's name-giving practice, all categories of depreciating names are avoided by educated people, although some of the depreciating personal names (especially pet names) are still quite common among simple and uneducated people in the countryside.

Therefore, the situation in the domain of Chinese personal names mirrors some prevailing beliefs and practices of the Chinese society.

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