

## TRADITIONAL CHINESE GENERATION NAMES

**Key words:** Chinese naming system, Chinese given names, Chinese generation names, names indicating the order of birth, Chinese p'ai-hang

Personal names of various types and categories contain some information which falls within the content of culture, in the broad meaning of the word. They are often imbued with information on history, religion, social organization, mentality, values, preferences or symbols. They carry important cultural or social messages, e.g. on the system of values common to the entire society or a smaller group, on social aspirations and preferences, on the pursuit of prestige or higher status, on the formation of a family and local identities, on the structure of families and societies. They also carry information on the circumstances, in which the personal names emerged, i.e. on the political, cultural or social situation. Cultural issues include people's motivations, rooted in their value system, the magic role of names, social values important for families and the society, role models for children, religious motivations, choices based on aesthetic values, on fashion, etc. Therefore, the different categories of personal names characterise the time of bestowing and the people who either coined or selected them (Kałużyńska, 2008, pp. 9–14).

Chinese naming practices do not restrict the inventory of possible given names, i.e. given names are formed individually, by a more or less vivid process of onymization, and given names are in most cases semantically transparent. Therefore, given names seem to be well suited for a study of some stereotyped opinions and cultural expectations concerning people in Chinese society of the past and of the present.

Unlike Western personal names there was and there is a great variety in assigning Chinese given names. Chinese naming practices based upon characteristics of the Chinese culture, Chinese language and Chinese writing system grant a great deal more opportunity for creativity in naming than is the case in Western cultures.

## CHINESE GENERATION NAMING

Since ancient times some mainly elite Chinese families have cherished the tradition of giving names by indicating the order of birth of children within a family or within generations of a clan. This method of naming is generally called *yǐ páiháng qǐmíng* 以排行起名 or simply *páiháng* 排行 ‘naming by seniority’, ‘in order of seniority (of brothers)’, literally ‘naming by ranking in rows’, while the specific method of naming by using terms denoting the order of birth in a family is often called *yǐ xiōngdì páiháng qǐmíng* 以兄弟排行的起名 ‘naming by the seniority of brothers’ or, in a broader meaning, ‘naming by the seniority of brothers and sisters’ (Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998, pp. 40–46; HYC; Ji, 1993, p. 48; Jones, 1997, pp. 12–13; XXH, p. 1196). The method can also be called *shùnxù fǎ* 顺序法 ‘method based upon the order [of birth of children in a family]’ (Wanyan, 1994, pp. 61–65) or *bèifēn páiháng de mìngmíng* 辈分排行命名 ‘naming by the order of seniority in a family or a clan’ (Ji, 1993, p. 96), or *zì yún* 字匀 ‘sharing of words/characters’, or *pàimíng* 派名 ‘order names’, or *páiháng shùn* 排行顺 ‘seniority in age within one generation’ (Jones, 1997, pp. 12–19).

These categories of names or parts of a given name in Western literature are known as generation names or generational names, i.e. names that identify a person by indicating the person’s position within the family hierarchy or as belonging to a given generation of family members (Bauer, 1959, p. 597; Jones, 1997, p. 12; Li, Lawson, 2002, p. 163; Louie, 1998, p. 52).

In China, Confucian social philosophy stood for a society with an emphasis on distinction between superiority and inferiority, for social hierarchy, for obedience, for recognition of authority in a family as well as in a state.

Genealogies, graveyards, generational naming and ancestral halls [...] are thus elements in a cultural complex that are applied to mark a hierarchy of distinctions of inclusion and exclusion (Pieke, 2003, pp. 102–103).

The first evidence of creating so called Chinese generational names can be found during the Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 B.C.). However, the more regular practice of such naming started during Wei Kingdom (220–266), Jin Dynasty (265–420) and Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589), together with the accumulation of wealth and the rise of great houses during the 3<sup>rd</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ji, 1993, p. 97). The recording of generational names for current and future generations in familial genealogies in times of Tang Dynasty (618–907) and Song Dynasty (960–1279) became almost a standard. The generational naming reached its height during Ming (1368–1662) and Qing (1664–1912) dynasties. The tradition was formed to ensure the unity of the great family and main-

tain its continuity and prosperity. It became usual for each large family or clan to have its own individual table of generation names.

The tradition of naming by order of seniority is somewhat on the decline in contemporary China, mainly due to the Communist reign, the destruction of great Chinese families and clans, the braking of traditional ties to the land, the perceived feudal aspect of generation names, and great social and cultural changes, especially urbanization (Li, Lawson, 2002: 163). The decrease in generational names was also brought about by the introduction of the policy “one child in a family” in the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) in 1978.

According to Z. Lu:

In earlier days, parents included as part of their children’s names a so-called generation name. The generation name was predetermined by previous generations and was shared by all siblings and cousins of the same generation [...]. Today, however, the sense of clans is blunted, and many families no longer use generation names (Lu, 1989, p. 275).

R. Jones also remarks:

It seems that nowadays in Malaysia, generation names are no longer widely used, and then only by those who maintain contact with the clan association where they can have access to the list of generation names (Jones, 1997, p. 17).

According to E. Lip:

Generation names for the clan no longer exist, but the practice is adopted by the more traditional families [...]. Generational names help to reinforce the strength and the unity of the family” (Lip, 1997, p. 8).

However, the generational method of creating names is still in some use today, especially in order to indicate to what generation or what branch of the great family or clan the kid belongs to. The genealogical research again became quite common in China, and “the most basic function of a local genealogy for these descent groups was to (re)establish the proper kinship relationships in terms of address and generational names, thus reasserting the descent group as a local community of belongings” (Pieke, 2003, p. 105). Some interest in genealogies and generational names may be related to a return of interest in traditional Chinese culture.

#### DIFFERENT TYPES AND CATEGORIES OF CHINESE GENERATION NAMES

Chinese anthroponymic material has not been the subject of careful and systematic investigations by European and American scholars. There are some reference notes, articles and monographs mainly dealing with some pragmatic aspects of

Chinese anthroponymy. In contemporary China, beginning from the eighties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many larger works and numerous articles by Chinese researchers dealing with Chinese names have been published. They deal rather with selected aspects of the subject and attempts at synthesis are scarce. There is a lack of a more detailed scientific description of different groups of Chinese personal names, their structure and meaning, as well as of a more thorough presentation of some naming phenomena occurring in Chinese anthroponymy. Interpretations of some names and anthroponymic facts differ, as the theoretical foundations of the scientific investigation of names have not yet been elaborated.

Some categories of Chinese generation names have been pointed out by various scholars (Alleton, 1993; Bauer, 1959; Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998; Ji, 1993; Jones, 1997; Li, Lawson, 2002; Lip, 1997; Liu, 1996; Louie, 1998; Sung, 1981, Yuan, 1994). However, there is a lack of their more detailed description, and it is difficult to determine the scope of the Chinese generational naming phenomena.

One of the problems connected with generational naming is the correct definition of a generation name. It is not always clear if the term 'generation name' refers to a whole given name or a part of a given name, or an extra name added to a given name. One can read:

In earlier days, parents included as part of their children's names a so-called generation name. [...] The true given name was thus a third character, in addition to the surname and the generation name" (Lu, 1989, p. 275).

Traditional Chinese names are composed of three parts: the family name, a generation name, and a given name" (Li, Lawson, 2002, p. 163).

One can also read:

Chinese names generally consist of three words, the first being the surname, the latter two being personal names. [...] In addition to the surname, Chinese have personal names corresponding to the Christian names or given names of the West. As a rule personal names comprise two elements, though single personal names are not uncommon. [...] We see then that the generation p'ai-hang [páiháng 排行] by the use of a shared element in the name distinguishes one generation from another. Conventionally it is found as one of two characters representing the personal name of an individual. This is called a 'full p'ai-hang'. From this we might assume that someone having personal name consisting of only one character could not have a generation name. However, this is not so, for the sources refer to another type, called the 'part p'ai-hang.' In the 'part p'ai-hang' the common element, the 'generation name', consists of only one part of the character, usually the radical (Jones, 1997, pp. 1–13).

According to M. Y. Sung:

A Chinese personal name generally consists of two to four characters (or lexemes) of which the first one or two constitute the surname, and the last one or two the given name. [...] Some families tend to reflect their generation order by way of naming. [...] Male and female members

of a generation may share the same generation indicator, or each sex may have its own. In some other cases, siblings' names may be selected from characters which share the same component (radical) (Sung, 1981, pp. 67, 78–81).

In this paper it is assumed that Chinese personal names consist of a surname and a given name (that can be constructed of one word/character or two words/characters), and 'generation names' are called given names (formed in a somewhat special way) that identify a person by indicating the person's position within the family hierarchy or as belonging to a given generation of family members.

According to the research material, it can be stated that there are two main types of these names, namely (I) names denoting the order of birth in a family by using special seniority terms or numerals, and (II) names indicating the order of birth within generations of a family or a clan or the seniority in a family, created by using some special methods of forming Chinese names, based mainly on the characteristics of the Chinese language and its writing system. There are, however, some generation names that can be classified as belonging in equal measure to these two main types.

#### I. Names and terms denoting the order of birth in a family by using special seniority terms or numerals

In a Chinese family, the seniority within a generation was regarded as an important principle, connected with the rules of hierarchy, that should be respected by every member of the family. Therefore, in many families, children's names were bestowed according to their birth order. Names of this type are formed by special terms (indicators of seniority), called *páihángzì* 排行字 'terms/characters of seniority' (Ji, 1993, p. 48) or *cìxùzì* 次序字 'terms/characters of order', or *biǎocháng yòu shùnxù de yòngzì* 表长幼顺序的用字 'terms/characters indicating the order from the eldest to the youngest' (Yuan, 1994, p. 65). These terms are usually used as the first word/character of the two-word/two-character name. The second word/character can be different for every child or can be shared by all the children of the family, cf. below.

The special seniority terms appeared in names during the Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 B.C.) of Zhou Dynasty (c. 1050–249 B.C.), e.g.: Zhong Shan Fu 仲山父 or Bo Yang Fu 伯阳父 (Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998, p. 40; Yuan, 1996, p. 68).

The list of the most typical terms of seniority within a family is quite short, cf. (Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998, pp. 40–41; Kałużyńska, 2008, pp. 301–304). These are:

*bó* 伯 'eldest among brothers or sisters' (HYC; MCED; XXH), e.g.: [Miao] Boying [繆] 伯英 'Eldest Flower' (*yīng* 'flower; hero');

*mèng* 孟 ‘eldest among brothers or sisters (HYC; MCED; XXH), e.g.: [Fang] Mengshi [方] 孟式 ‘Eldest Pattern’ (*shì* ‘style; pattern; form’);  
*zhòng* 仲 ‘second among brothers or sisters’ (HYC; MCED; XXH), e.g.: [Wu] Zhongwen [伍] 仲文 ‘Second Writing’ (*wén* ‘writing; literature; culture’);  
*shū* 叔 ‘third among brothers or sisters’ (HYC; MCED; XXH), e.g.: [Luo] Shuzhang [罗] 叔章 ‘Third Order’ (*zhāng* ‘chapter; section; order’);  
*jì* 季 ‘fourth or youngest among brothers or sisters’ (HYC; MCED; XXH), e.g.: [Li] Jilan [李] 季兰 ‘Youngest Orchid’ (*lán* ‘orchid’).

There are, however, some other terms that could have been sometimes used to denote the order of birth due to one of their meanings, cf. (Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998, p. 41; Kałużyńska, 2008, pp. 301–304), e.g.:

*cì* 次 ‘second’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*dà* 大 ‘eldest; great’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*guàn* 冠 ‘first child in a family’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*shào* 少 ‘young; later’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*tài* 太 ‘more or most senior; highest; greatest’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*xiǎo* 小 ‘young; youngest’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*yòu* 幼 ‘young’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*yuán* 元 ‘first’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*zhǎng* 长 ‘eldest’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*zhī* 稚 ‘youngest’ (HYC; MCED; XXH);  
*zhōng* 中 ‘middle’ (HYC; MCED; XXH).

The best examples of naming by terms/characters of seniority are to be found not among Chinese standard given names, *míng* 名, but especially among Chinese so called social names or styles, *zì* 字, bestowed to be used in public relations. Famous general, Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) had seven sons, and their styles were coined of appropriate terms of order (except the seventh one), and one word/character shared by all members of a generation. These were: 1. Boquan 伯权 ‘Eldest Rule’ (*quán* ‘rule; power’), 2. Zhongquan 仲权 ‘Second Rule’, 3. Shuquan 叔权 ‘Third Rule’, 4. Jiquan 季权 ‘Fourth Rule’, 5. Youquan 幼权 ‘Young Rule’, 6. Zhiquan 稚权 ‘Youngest Rule’, 7. Yiquan 义权 ‘Righteous Rule’ (*yì* ‘righteous’) (Yuan 1994, p. 67, ZLMC).

Numerals can be used in Chinese generation names with the same purpose, namely they can simply denote the order of birth of children in a family or a clan. The tradition of using numerals in generation names started during Tang Dynasty (618–907), and the method is called *yòng shù mù zì zuò pái háng* 用数字作排行 ‘using numerals to make generational names’ (Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998, p. 42).

Generational naming by numerals was especially common among famous poets and writers of Tang Dynasty. They had their other given names, but they used their numerical names, denoting the order of birth in a great family or a clan, to call each other, e.g.: [Li] Bai [李]白 (701–762) was called Li Shi'er 李十二 'Li the Twelfth', [Du] Fu [杜]甫 (712–770) was called Du Er 杜二 'Du the Second', [Han] Yu [韩]愈 (768–824) was called Han Shiba 韩十八 'Han the Eighteenth', [Bai] Juyi [白]居易 (772–846) was called Bai Ershi'er 白二十二 'Bai the Twenty second' (Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998, p. 42; Yuan, 1994, p. 70; ZLMC).

In nowadays China and South-East Asia this traditional type of naming is practically out of use (Jones, 1997, p. 19).

## II. Names indicating the order of birth within generations of a family or a clan or the seniority in a family formed by using special generational methods

Most of noble families tended to reflect their generation orders by the way of naming. Whenever a baby was born in the family, it was usually named according to the generational method chosen by its ancestors. In some families names or elements of names were chosen even for the members of all future generations. When a baby was born, its relatives referred to the family genealogy record and found the name already chosen for it, according to what generation and what branch of the family the kid belonged to.

Today, many Chinese people may not have the conventional idea of continuing the family line as in the past, and they do not attach so much importance to the order of the seniority in the family or clan. However, some generational methods of naming are still in some use.

It may be noticed that there are several methods commonly used in generational naming according to the seniority among generations or members of the family. They are: (1) creating names with one word/character in common, (2) using in names characters for different ideas but having the same radicals, (3) using characters/words, selected according to the concept based primarily upon the ancient Chinese theory of Five Elements, (4) using in names component parts of one composed Chinese character, (5) using words that are synonyms or antonyms, (6) using words/characters from the same phrase.

Below one can find short characteristics of all these methods, and some examples of the generation names of the type.

(1) In some Chinese families the first (but sometimes the second) of the two words/characters in the personal name is shared by all male members of a generation. The Chinese call it *èr zì míng zhōng tóng yòng yī zì* 二字名中同用一字

‘sharing one character of the two-character name’, or *páizibèi* 排字辈 ‘arranging an order by the use of characters’, *hángpài* 行派 ‘arrangement of rows’, or *zìpài* 字派 ‘arrangement by characters’. This method of naming is considered to have been quite common since Jin Dynasty (265–420), and later on (Feng, Ding, Yin, 1998, p. 43; Ji, 1993, p. 97; Yuan, 1994, p. 72). However, as the first evidence of names of the type are considered names of four brothers: Jiaoru 侨如, Fenru 焚如, Rongru 荣如, Jianru 简如, recorded in *Zuozhuan* 左传 (Zuo’s Commentary), one of the ancient (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) commentaries on the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Annals of Springs and Autumns), a chronicle probably written by Confucius (551–479 B.C.), and dealing with important events in the state of Lu in the period 722–479 B.C. (Yuan, 1994, p. 66).

Most of these generation names are worked out in advance. Sometimes male and female members of a generation may share the same word/character as generation indicator, or each sex may have its own, or females have not any generation names. It is stated “For females the generation name (if there was one) was applied less formally” (Li, Lawson, 2002, p. 163). In some families there is a small number of generational words/indicators and they are cyclically repeated. These words, indicators of a generation, can also be called “genealogical code words” (Jones 1997, p. 15). The head of a family may select a poem or a narrative, or a sentence about the history of the family, or about a hope for its future achievements, and use the first word/character of it as the generation indicator for the first generation, the second word/character for the second generation, and so on.

As M. Y. Sung wrote (Sung, 1981, p. 79), the Huang family selected as generation indicators a sentence consisting of ten words/characters:

*xian ren yi li ze, yi shi zhong shu tian*  
 先人贻礼则, 奕世种书田

‘precious person give ritual principle, great generations plow book field’.

There are two possible ways of naming for the members of this family. Members of the first generation have their given names Xian 先 X, Xian 先 Y, Xian 先 Z, etc. or X Xian 先, Y Xian 先, Z Xian 先, etc. Members of the second generation are named Ren 人 X, Ren 人 Y, Ren 人 Z or X Ren 人, Y Ren 人, Z Ren 人, etc.

According to Li Zhonghua (Li, Lawson, 2002, p. 166) the generation poem, formed by “genealogical code words” of the great family of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976), the great Chinese leader, was determined in 1737 (first four lines) and in 1881 (last four lines). It goes, as follows:

Li xian rong chao shi,  
 Wen fang yun ji xiang.  
 Zu en yi ze yuan,



Shi dai yong cheng chang.  
 Xiao you chuan jia ben,  
 Zhong liang zhen guo guang.  
 Qi yuan dun sheng xue,  
 Feng ya lie ming zhang.

立显荣朝士,  
 文方运际祥。  
 祖恩贻泽远,  
 时代永承昌。  
 孝友传家本,  
 忠良振国光。  
 起元敦圣学,  
 风雅列明章。

Celebrity and eminence glorify government officials,  
 And knowledge and education extend the good luck of the state.  
 There is no end to the bounties of ancestral kindness,  
 On which prosperity keeps for following generations.  
 Filial piety and benevolence preserve the family,  
 And faithfulness and loyalty invigorate the nation.  
 Encouragement be given in the beginning for imperial honour,  
 And noble elegance and refinement exalt every generation.

The 40 words/characters in the poem would provide the generation name for each of the following 40 generations of Mao family. As one can see, Mao Zedong was a member of the fourteenth generation of this great family. His two brothers are Mao Zemin 毛泽民 and Mao Zetan 毛泽覃 (Jones, 1997, p. 27).

The first and the second set of ten words/characters for the famous Kong 孔 family, the descendants of Confucius (551–479 B.C.), was established for his grandson of the fifty sixth generation during the Yuan Dynasty (1260–1368), the third set of ten words/characters was established during Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), and it is still in use (Yuan, 1994, p. 73).

Hence, when one encounters Chinese given names sharing one word/character, e.g. Deng Xiaoping, Deng Liaoping, and Deng Guoping, one may suspect with almost certainty that the people named are brothers or cousins. This method of creating generation names seems to be the most popular and common, even in nowadays China or South-East Asia.

(2) The method of using Chinese characters for different ideas but having the same radicals started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and it is called in Chinese *dānmìng yǐ tóng piānpáng wéi biāozhì* 单名以同偏旁为标志 ‘the same radicals of one-

character names serving as indicators [of family relations]’ (Ji, 1993, p. 101) or *dān míng zhōng yòng xiāngtóng piānpáng biāoshì xiōngdì páiháng* 单名中用相同偏旁表示兄弟排行 ‘in one-character names using the same radicals to indicate the seniority of brothers’ (Yuan, 1994, p. 65). The first evidences of such naming are considered names of two brothers [Liu] Cong [刘]琮 and [Liu] Qi [刘]琦 living in the end of the Later Han Dynasty (25–220), as their given names are written in Chinese characters sharing the same radical 玉 ‘jade’ (Ji, 1993, p. 101), or of two brothers [Xun] Yu [荀]昱 and [Xun] Tan [荀]曇 of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), as their given names are written in Chinese characters sharing the same radical 日 ‘the sun’ (Yuan, 1994, p. 66). The method is still in some use in China and South-East Asia.

One can read:

In order to demonstrate that children born into the same family share the same character trait, some parents name their offspring by using words [characters] with the same radical which has a specific meaning. For instance, using the part that means “water”, which is essential to all living things, the parents can choose from a large number of words [characters] with this radical, such as qīng 清, jiāng 江, hǎi 海 tāo 涛 [...], etc., which can all be used in names (Liu, 1996, pp. 38–39, with some changes).

Therefore, when one encounters names [Su] Qin [苏]沁, [Su] Lan [苏]澜, [Su] Hong [苏]鸿, [Su] Pei [苏]沛 (all sharing the same radical of the Chinese characters that write down the given name), one may suspect that the people named are brothers or cousins. This method of creating generation names seems to be still quite popular and common in China and South-East Asia.

(3) The method of creating generation names by using characters/words, selected according to the concept, based primarily upon the ancient Chinese theory of *wǔ xíng* 五行 ‘Five Elements’, or ‘Five Phases’, or ‘Five Agents’, is considered to have been started during Tang Dynasty. It is sometimes called *bānbèi* 班辈 or *bèifēn* 辈分 ‘order of generations’ (Yuan, 1994, p. 72).

Five Element theory is a fivefold conceptual scheme that many traditional Chinese fields used to explain a wide array of phenomena. The “Five Elements” are Metal (*jīn* 金), Water (*shuǐ* 水), Wood (*mù* 木), Fire (*huǒ* 火), and Earth (*tǔ* 土). This order of presentation is known as the *xiāngshēng* 相生 ‘mutual generation’ or ‘mutual creation’ sequence. According to the concept, that “Metal generates Water, Water generates Wood, Wood generates Fire, Fire generates Earth, and Earth generates Metal”, givers of generation names selected appropriate words/characters for names of all members of future generations: the first generation had Metal (as a separate word or a radical of a character), the second had Water, the third had Wood, etc. The first evidence of using the method are names of Bi Gou 毕构, his son Bi Kang 毕炕, his grandson Bi Jiong 毕炯, his

grand grandson Bi Rui 毕锐 of the Tang Dynasty. The radicals of the second character in these four-generation names are 木, 火, 土, and 金 (Yuan, 1994, p. 72). Every five generations these Five Elements could be cyclically repeated in other generation names.

The method based upon Five Elements was similar to the methods by which subsequent generations were named by words/characters chosen from the set of words/characters, “genealogical code words”, prepared in advance for this purpose, cf. (1) and (2). This method was preferably used by imperial families, and it became almost the standard during Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). In nowadays China it is rather scarcely used.

(4) The cases of using component parts of one composed Chinese character to create names for one’s children are not frequently found. However, in order to show the close relation among sibling or cousins (that they are ‘united as one’), name-givers can choose one Chinese composed character and use its component parts (that can also be used separately to write down other words, i.e. they also are characters) to form generation names (Liu, 1996, p. 36–38). For instance, the character 钟, used to write down the word *zhōng* ‘wine jar; bell’, can be divided into two components: 金, used to write down the word *jīn* ‘metal; gold’, and 中, used for the word *zhōng* ‘middle’, thus two children in a family can be called by these words.

Some other examples (Liu, 1996, pp. 36–38) are as below:

雷 *léi* ‘thunder’ can be divided into 雨 *yǔ* ‘rain’ and 田 *tián* ‘field’;

晏 *yàn* ‘sunny, peaceful’ can be divided into 日 *rì* ‘the sun’ and 安 *ān* ‘peace’;

翼 *yì* ‘wing’ can be divided into 羽 *yǔ* ‘feather’, 田 *tián* ‘field’ and 共 *gòng* ‘common; together’.

This skilful method of creating names for children in a family involves some difficulty. Not all Chinese characters can be divided into separate parts (characters) that write down other simple words. Some characters can be divided, but many of their component parts (characters) do not write down words having “good meaning” or being used in personal names. Further on, the more siblings there are in the family, the more difficult it is to use this method. It is quite easy to divide one character into two or three component parts (characters), but it is almost impossible to divide it into four or five parts. What more, it is not easy to plan precisely the number of children in a family to be born. However, “a little ingenuity in using this method can help parents create names with originality” (Liu, 1996, p. 37).

Normally people may not pay much attention to the meanings of these Chinese names, but once the meanings are pointed out and explained, people usually find something unique or special about them.

One can read:

The word *chéng* 誠 [chén 'sincere; honest'] expresses the parents' wish that their children will be "honest". By dividing the word [character] into 言 and 成, they name their two children [Zhang] Zhenyan [张]真言 and [Zhang] Zhencheng [张]真成. The last word [character] of the two names, when combined, would form the character 诚, which means [writes down a word meaning] "honesty". Meanwhile it combines with the common word [zhēn] 真 to mean "sincerity", and the combination of the two names again forms the phrase *zhēn chéng hé yī* (真成一), which means "sincere unity" (Liu, 1996, pp. 37–38, with some changes, especially words and characters in square brackets).

(5) The method of creation of names for children of one generation by using words that are synonyms or antonyms seems being scarcely used or recorded. However, it happens. Usually, given names of this category are constructed of two words/ characters, and the first (but sometimes the second) of them is shared by all members of a generation, the other one is a synonymous or antonymous word.

Name-givers in hope that all the children in a family will grow up with the same trait of character or manner, can use synonyms to name them. For example, if one expect the children to have a noble character, one can use words describing moral integrity, if one expect children to have good health and beauty, one can use appropriate synonymous words meaning health and beauty, etc.

The following are generation names using, as their last word/character, some synonyms meaning moral character: [Zhang] Shangde [张]尚德 (*dé* 'virtue; moral character'), [Zhang] Shangxian [张]尚贤 (*xián* "virtuous; virtuous person'), [Zhang] Shanghui [张]尚惠 (*hui* 'kindheartedness, kindness'), and [Zhang] Shang'ai [张]尚霏 (*ǎi* 'gentle'). The first two are boys' names, the other two are girls' names (Liu, 1996, p. 40).

In order to achieve uniqueness in the names, one can also use antonyms, which result in the unity of opposites, e.g.: using of *dōng* 东 'east' and *xī* 西 'west' in names [Gu] Xiangdong [顾]向东 and [Gu] Xiangxi [顾]向西, or *nán* 南 'south' and *běi* 北 'north' in names [Gao] Qinnan [高]勤南 and [Gao] Qinbei [高]勤北 (Liu, 1996, p. 40).

The method of using antonyms in generation names applies only to the case of two children. What is important, it excludes the use of antonyms with commendatory and derogatory meanings, like "good" and "bad", "kind" and "wicked", etc.

(6) The method of creation of names for children of one generation by using words from phrases or idioms is a skilful method and it needs time and good knowledge of Chinese language, literature and history. Name-givers select an appropriate phrase and separate it into segments that will form names for children to come.

When two children are expected, the name-givers divide two-word/character phrase into two single-word/character names, or divide a four-word/character idiom into two two-word/character names. The following are some examples (Liu, 1996, pp. 30–32).

[Li] Zhen [李]珍 and [Li] Bao [李]宝, based upon the composed word *zhēnbǎo* 珍宝 ‘treasures’;

[Li] Guang [李]光 and [Li] Ming [李]明, based upon the composed word *guāngmíng* 光明 ‘light; glory’;

[Liu] Anjia [刘]安家 and [Liu] Liye [刘]立业, based upon the idiom *ān jiā lì yè* 安家立业 ‘establish home and career’;

[Zhao] Bixue [赵]碧血 and [Zhao] Danxin [赵]丹心, based upon the idiom *bì xuè dān xīn* 碧血丹心 ‘loyal-hearted’.

When three children are expected, the name-givers can select a three-word/character phrase and use each word to name each of the children, or can add the selected words to one word/character shared by all members of the generation (Liu, 1996, pp. 32–33), e.g.:

[Feng] An [冯]安, [Feng] Ru [冯]如 and [Feng] Shan [冯]山, based upon the idiom *ān rú shān* 安如山 ‘firm as a mountain’;

[Yang] Yupin [扬]玉品, [Yang] Yude [扬]玉德, and [Yang] Yujia [扬]玉佳, based upon the phrase *pǐn dé jiā* 品德佳 ‘good moral character’;

[Chen] Yueyin [陈]月音, [Chen] Guangyin [陈]光音, and [Chen] Mingyin [陈]明音, based upon the phrase *yuè guāng míng* 月光明 ‘bright moonlight’.

When four children are expected, the name-givers can select a four-word/character phrase and use each word to name each of the children, or can add the selected words to one word/character shared by all members of the generation (Liu, 1996, p. 34), e.g.:

[Zhang] Jin [张]锦, [Zhang] Xiu [张]绣, Zhang Qian [张]前, Zhang Cheng [张]程, based upon the idiom *jǐn xiù qián chéng* 锦绣前程 ‘a glorious future’;

[Jiang] Yunlong [蒋]云龙, Jiang Yunfei [蒋]云飞, Jiang Yunfeng [蒋]云凤, Jiang Yunwu [蒋]云舞, based upon the idiom *lóng fēi fèng wǔ* 龙飞凤舞 ‘lively and vigorous like flying dragons and dancing phoenixes’;

[Zhao] Jinping [赵]金平, [Zhao] Biping [赵]碧平, Zhao Huiping [赵]辉平, Zhao Huangping [赵]煌平, based upon the idiom *jīn bì huī huáng* 金碧辉煌 ‘resplended and magnificent’.

While selecting phrases or idioms to be used for given names of future children, it is important to choose ones that express appropriate ideas and are proper for both sexes (or without gender connotations).

## CONCLUSIONS

Generation names seem to be unique to China. Various types and categories of Chinese generation names played and to some extent play today an important role of indicating the order of birth of children within a family or within generations of a great family or a clan. The seniority in a generation was regarded as an important principle, connected with the rules of hierarchy, that should be respected by every member of the family. The knowledge about the order of generations of a great family was important for the idea of continuing the family line and constituting the whole great family.

In nowadays China many people have not the conventional idea of continuing the family line as in the past, and they do not attach so much importance to the order of the seniority in the family or clan. However, generational methods of naming are still in some use, especially in order to indicate to what generation or what branch of the great family or clan the person belongs to.

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#### SUMMARY

Personal names usually contain some information which falls within the broad content of culture. They are often imbued with information on history, religion, social organization, mentality, values, preferences or symbols. Chinese naming practices do not restrict the inventory of possible given names, and as based upon characteristics of the Chinese culture, Chinese language and Chinese writing system, they grant a great deal more opportunity for creativity in naming than is the case in Western cultures. The paper deals with the specific tradition and practice of Chinese generational naming, i.e. it presents various types and categories of Chinese generation given names, indicating the order of birth of children within a family or within generations of a clan. Generation names appear to be unique to China. The tradition and practice of generation naming were formed to ensure the unity of the great Chinese family and to maintain its continuity and prosperity. According to the research material, there are two main types of generation names, i.e. (I) names denoting the order of birth in a family by using special seniority terms or numerals, and (II) names indicating the order of birth within generations of a family or a clan, or the seniority in a family, created by using some special generational methods of forming Chinese names, based mainly upon the characteristics of the Chinese language and its writing system.