

# Chinese Given Names Since the Cultural Revolution

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## Abstract

Chinese given names, best considered lexical, rather than onomastic, items, often reflect political, social, and cultural conditions at the time of naming. An investigation of the given names of four groups of Chinese students born in 1966, 1973, 1979, and 1981 reveals great differences between the names of those born early in the Cultural Revolution and those born later. The investigation also reveals differences between names for males and females (reflecting differing cultural expectations for the two sexes) and a recent trend toward one-character given names.

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A Chinese name consists of two parts: a surname (or family name) and a given name (or personal name); the surname precedes the given name. Like people in most of the rest of the world, the Chinese cannot choose their own surnames, which are inherited, usually from their fathers. Compared to European traditions, the number of Chinese surnames is very limited. Estimates of the total number of recorded surnames for all of Chinese history range from slightly less than 6,000 to about 8,000. My survey of 714 people includes only 118 different surnames, that is, one surname for every six people. Some surnames are much more frequent than others: only twelve surnames account for almost sixty percent of the total recorded. Of these twelve, the three most frequent, *Wang*, *Zhang*, and *Li*, are also the most frequent surnames in China as a whole, although the national ranking is *Li*, *Wang*, and *Zhang*. Seventy-two of the surnames in my study appear only once.

The present study, however, is primarily concerned with given names. As Zhu and Millward report, Chinese naming practice grants parents a great deal more opportunity for creativity in naming their offspring than is the case in Western cultures. Because tradition does not

restrict the pool of possible given names, the names actually assigned often directly reflect contemporary culture and politics. Hence given names would seem to be ideally suited for a sociolinguistic study. To test this assumption, I collected data from four carefully selected age groups. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the informants.

The students from Nanjing University were asked to submit a short essay in either English or Chinese about their names. In addition to their surnames, their given names, and the meaning of their names, some students included the names of their siblings, feeling that one could fully understand their own names only if one knew the names of their siblings. For example, a boy with the given name *Yuan-fang* said he had an elder brother named *Yuan-dong* and a younger sister named *Yuan-hong*. The *Yuan* portion of the name indicates that they have the same parents. When put together, the second parts of their names, *dong-fang-hong*, mean "The East is Red," the title of a song eulogizing the late Chairman Mao Ze-dong, a song very popular during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). A girl wrote in her essay that her name was *Fei* 'heavy rain,' while her elder brother's and younger brother's names were *Lei* 'thunder' and *Ji* 'clear up,' respectively.

For Group II, only the list of names and the sex of the informants were available. Fortunately, even without additional information, the

Table 1. Sources of the data.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Year of Birth</u>	<u>Number of Informants</u>	<u>Location of Informants</u>
I	1966	411 (192 male; 219 female)	Nanjing University (137) Nanjing Normal Univ. (190) Jiangnan Univ., Wuhan (84)
II	1973	107 (40 male; 67 female)	High School attached to Nanjing Normal Univ.
III	1979	120 (71 male; 49 female)	Yu Shi Jie Primary School, Nanjing (75) Changjiang Road Primary School, Nanjing (45)
IV	1981	76 (40 male; 36 female)	Kindergarten attached to No. 2 Normal School, Wuhan (46) Xiantao Kindergarten, Xiantao (30)

political implications of their names are obvious to anyone who has witnessed the social and political upheavals of the last two decades.

The pupils in Groups III and IV were given a form for their parents to fill out, asking

for the child's name, sex, date of birth, the meaning of the name, and the names of the child's siblings, if any. These data are highly reliable because the information was provided directly by the name-givers rather than being based on guesswork, as some of the respondents in Group I frankly acknowledged their explanations were.

The students in Groups I and II were born during the Cultural Revolution; those in Group III and IV after the downfall of the "Gang of Four" in 1976. No two decades in the history of the People's Republic of China are more unlike each other. As mirrors of the culture, the names created in these two periods can be expected to differ greatly and in specific ways.

### Names and Socio-Political Trends

With very few exceptions, each Chinese character is a separate morpheme (and a separate syllable), which makes it possible for name-givers to express their ideas, whatever they may be, in one or two characters. Because the name-givers' ideas are inevitably affected by the society in which they live, the names they create mirror the social and political environment of the times.

During the Cultural Revolution, the personality cult of Mao Ze-dong went to extremes. Reflecting this are a number of names containing the character for *Dong*, such as *Jing-dong* 'love and respect Mao Ze-dong,' *Wei-dong* 'safeguard Mao Ze-dong,' *Xiang-dong* 'be loyal to Mao Ze-dong,' *Heng-dong* 'follow Mao Ze-dong forever.' Altogether, there are twelve such names in my survey. Almost all of them appear in Group I. The only exception occurs in Group III, but it has nothing to do with Mao's personality cult. That name is *Dong-hui*, meaning "the brilliance in the east." When asked why he gave his son this name, the young father said, "My son was born one month after the Party's Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, which thoroughly criticized the Cultural Revolution and paved the way for the healthy development of our country. In the Party's strategic shift toward economic construction, I saw great hopes for China, the giant in the East." The fact that no *Dong* appears in Group II is not accidental; it shows that, long before the end of the Cultural Revolution, people's interest in the movement had died down.

An equally frequent character in my survey is that for *Jun* 'army' (that is, the People's Liberation Army). It appears in such names as *Jian-jun* 'build the Army,' *Wei-jun* 'the great Army,' *Hong-jun* 'the Red Army,' *Ai-jun* 'love the Army,' and *Hai-jun* 'the Navy.' Eleven boys' and three girls' names contained the character; all were born in 1966 when the ten-year upheaval began. Even prior to that time, people had been asked to admire the fine qualities of the Army men, who were later considered the mainstay of Mao's "proletarian revolutionary line." At the advent of the movement, Mao and his followers wore army uniforms on all occasions as a warning to his opponents that the Army was still under his control. With Mao as the example, the green army uniform was soon in fashion all over China. Names referring to the Army also became fashionable at this time.

To arouse people's interest in the political movement, Mao Ze-dong met millions of Red Guards in Beijing. On one of these occasions, Mao changed a girl's name from *Bin-bin* 'refined and courteous,' a traditional female name, to *Yao-wu* 'be valiant.' Following his example, many people, the radical Red Guards in particular, changed their names overnight if they thought the names given by their parents were not revolutionary enough. During these unusual times, changing one's name seemed to be quite easy. A classmate of mine called *Xue-ru* 'studying Confucius' declared one day in class, "From now on, don't call me *Xue-ru*. My name is *Xue-biao*. If anyone still calls me by the old name, I won't answer him." (*Xue-biao* means "learning from Lin Biao"; Lin Biao was then regarded as Mao Ze-dong's most reliable comrade-in-arms and the most loyal successor to Mao's cause.) This name was discarded several years later when Lin betrayed Mao and became the object of criticism in the ensuing political movement in which Lin and Confucius (551–479 BC) were labelled "jackals from the same lair." As soon as he heard of Lin Biao's death, my classmate changed his name to *Xue-ru*, the pronunciation of which is exactly like that of the name given him by his father, but quite different in meaning. *Ru* here means a little child. Probably he intended to say that only little children were pure in heart and hence worth learning from.

In some instances, group pressure was so strong that, if individuals did not change their names themselves, others forced them to do so. A young man named *Zhong-li* 'remain neutral' was urged to alter the characters of his name immediately because, he was told, "the Cultural

Revolution is a struggle of life and death. To remain neutral means nothing but surrendering to the enemy." Zhong-li changed his name to *Zuo* 'left.'

Under such circumstances, it is understandable that many parents would give their newly born children politically relevant names. Here are a few examples from my survey:

*Wen-ge* 'the Cultural Revolution'

*Wu-wei* 'military defense,' a name derived from a policy instituted by Jiang Qin, Mao's wife, in her declaration that a proletarian revolutionist should defend himself with arms if a counterrevolutionary dared to attack him in a debate. The implementation of this policy led to the acceleration of violence all over China during the Cultural Revolution.

*Su-qing* 'eliminate.' The characters of this name were extensively used in political slogans such as "Eliminate counterrevolutionaries!" and "Eliminate the pernicious influence of the revisionist line!"

*Si-xin* 'the Four News,' referring to new ideas, new culture, new customs, and new habits; the whole campaign was called "Doing away with the 'four olds' and cultivating the 'four news.'"

Before the Cultural Revolution, the character for *Hong* 'red' had been used in girls' names, but during this period, it no longer denoted merely the color red; it meant "revolution." Twenty-two names in my survey contained this character, making it the most frequent character in girls' names. Typical examples include *Hong* 'red; revolution,' *Hong-jun* 'the Red Army,' *Ying-hong* 'welcome the Red,' *Zhong-hong* 'be loyal to the Red,' *Qing-hong* 'celebrate the Red,' *Hong-ya* 'Red Asia,' *Qiu-hong* 'red autumn,' *Gui-hong* 'red sweet-scented osmanthus,' *Hong-wei* 'Red Guard,' *Chu-hong* 'reddening,' *Yan-hong* 'aim to be red,' *Hong-yun* 'red clouds,' and *Hong-ying* 'red flower.' Other words synonymous with *Hong* were also chosen by parents, such as *Dan* in *Dan-yang* 'the red sun,' and *Tong* in *Tong-ping* 'red duckweed.' In all, twenty-one names with *Hong* appeared in Group I and only one name in Group II.

Perhaps no character was distorted more than *Wen* 'culture' during the ten years of upheaval. In my study, thirty-one names bore this character; their distribution appears in Table 2.

It is recognized now that the Red Guards were little more than vandals and that the so-called Cultural Revolution was strangling traditional Chinese culture. But at the time few people realized this. Under the

Table 2. Names with the element *Wen*.

<u>Sex</u>	<u>Group I</u>	<u>Group II</u>	<u>Group III</u>	<u>Group IV</u>
Male	11	1	1	0
Female	16	2	0	0

spell of beautiful revolutionary slogans, people became blind to the facts that classics, both Chinese and foreign, were being labeled poisonous weeds and burned; that intellec-

tuals were being severely criticized and exiled to the countryside; that temples and churches were being destroyed as symbols of feudalism and imperialism. What is more, thousands of young people were deprived of formal education and reduced to illiterates. Even if one recognized the facts, one might still think that the widespread destruction and disruption were essential to establish the "four news." Roughly 150, or about one-third of the total names in Group I, refer in one way or another to the Cultural Revolution.

When the Party's stress shifted from the endless political movements to the efforts for the four modernizations, political names fell out of favor. As a result, only three or four names in Groups III and IV have a political orientation; without the explanation of the name-givers, these might have been overlooked. In Group III, one boy, whose parents were sent to the countryside and worked there for eight years before he was born, was named *Gu* 谷 'rice.' His parents chose the character *Gu* for his given name, not only because rice was their agricultural product, but because this character contains two "eight" characters (八) and the character for "mouth" (口). Another boy in the same group was named *Ba-qing* 'wishing the day would be fine soon.' His mother attached a long letter to the survey, pouring out her suffering during the Cultural Revolution, which in her memory was a cataract. The end of the catastrophic rain thus became her ideal.

One name in Group IV could have invited great trouble for the name giver if the child had been born ten years earlier. That name was *Zhou Li*. (*Zhou* is the surname; *Li* the given name), which could mean "Rites of the Zhou dynasty," for which Confucius fought all his life and for which he was criticized more than 2,000 years later at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Even though the name-giver did not mean that, the revolutionary masses would not have given him any chance to explain.

The same name can have different interpretations under different

social circumstances. The character for *Xiang* is a good example. Eight people, five in Group I, one in Group II, and two in Group III, had this character in their given names. Literally this character means “soar, hover.” By using this character in the name, parents indicate that they wish their children to aim high in the future. The children in Group III were also given the name because they were born in the Year of the Sheep; part of the character for *Xiang* 翔 is 羊 ‘sheep.’ Representing the lunar year with one of the twelve animals (Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig) is an old tradition which was denounced as feudal and superstitious even before the Cultural Revolution, but which was restored immediately after the downfall of the Gang of Four, together with many other time-honored traditions.

### Names and Gender

In old China, women were appendages to men. Before marriage, they depended on their fathers and brothers; once married, they depended on their husbands; if their husbands died before them, their sons became their supporters. As they had no access to the outside world, names were not felt to be especially important for them. In fact, many women stopped using their names after they were married. If they did something worth mentioning in the family histories, such as giving their lives for their husbands, they would be remembered by their husbands’ surnames plus their maiden names, that is, the surnames of their fathers. Ever since the 1911 Revolution, however, the social position of Chinese women has been rising. One reflection of this trend is the fact that women no longer drop their given name after marriage, making the term “maiden name” meaningless.

Though “unisex” is now a world-wide trend, the distinction between male and female names in China is still recognizable; that is, in most cases, one can identify the sex of a person just by the name. Table 3 lists the words that appeared three times or more in my study. The number of occurrences is given in parentheses after each name-element.

An examination of the two columns in Table 3 makes it fairly clear that sex stereotyping is still going on in China as elsewhere. There is, of course, some overlapping, but a large part of this occurs with *Wen*

'culture' and *Jun* 'army'; we have explained that names containing these elements are confined almost exclusively to the earlier years of the Cultural Revolution, during which both male and female offspring were given these names (though only three girls in my study were named *Jun*). It is perhaps not merely a coincidence that this was also a period when men and women were forced to dress alike in drab uniforms, and long or curly hair, jewelry, and makeup on women were virtually forbidden by law. Other names occurring at least three times for both males and females are *Xiao* 'dawn,' *Hua* 'China,' *Min* 'agile,' *Zhong* 'loyalty,' and *Qing* 'young.' Otherwise, males are handsome, intelligent, strong, healthy, auspicious. They are expected to be brave, to soar, to construct, to defend. They are associated with the sea, big waves, mountain peaks, and pine trees. Women are also intelligent, but, unlike men, they are beautiful, quiet, graceful, pure, fragrant, hard-working. They are associated with flowers, precious things, small birds, and serene aspects of nature such as rosy clouds, spring, and sea shells. Interestingly, there are no active verbs among the most frequent women's names; women are expected to be passive.

Exceptions to these general patterns do occur. Some boys are given girls' names, and some girls have boys' names. For instance, one boy was named *Yu-hua* 'jade-like flower,' and a girl was named *Jing-dong* 'respect Mao Ze-dong.' A girl bearing a boy's name said, "I like my name very much, simply because people can't tell whether I am a man or a woman by the characters in my name." But a man with a female name is not so happy. A boy called *Fang-fang* said in his essay, "Because of the repetition of the character for *Fang*, my name sounds like a girl's. I want to change it some day so that others will not be able to ridicule it any more." (Reduplicated names are normally associated with females or small children.) Such attitudes suggest that male dominance, though weakening, is by no means extinct in our society.

### Names and Social Convention

Theoretically, any Chinese character can be used as a given name; thus the reference book for many young parents is a dictionary. Still, consciously or unconsciously, their choice will be guided by a series of conventions derived from the various names they hear and see every day.



Table 3. Most frequently used words in Chinese given names.

<u>Male Names</u>		<u>Female Names</u>	
<u>Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Wen (13)	culture; short form for the Cultural Revolution	Hong (21)	red, revolutionary
Jun (11)	army	Wen (18)	culture, Cultural Revolution
Dong (10)	the east; Mao Ze-dong	Xiao (14)	dawn
Hai (9)	the sea	Hua (13)	flower; China
Ning (8)	serene; Nanning (the city)	Ping (13)	duckweed
Liang (8)	bright; daybreak	Yan (12)	swallow
Xiang (8)	hover, soar	Jing (10)	quiet
Ming (8)	bright, intelligent	Yan (9)	colorful
Feng (7)	peak	Jie (8)	clean and pure
Xiao (7)	dawn, daybreak	Xia (8)	rosy clouds
Jun (7)	handsome; scholar	Mei (8)	plum blossoms
Wei (7)	great	Juan (7)	beautiful and graceful
Hua (7)	China	Li (7)	beautiful
Guo (7)	country; China	Min (6)	agile
Song (6)	pine tree	Ting (6)	graceful
Xin (6)	new	Yuan (6)	pretty lady
Bin (6)	gentle	Ya (5)	second
Xiang (5)	auspicious	Li (5)	jasmine
Qiang (5)	strong	Bei (4)	cowrie
Wei (5)	defend	Ying (4)	clever
Yong (5)	brave	Ying (4)	jade-like stone
Ping (5)	even, calm	Chun (4)	spring
Min (5)	agile	Fang (4)	fragrant
Tao (4)	billow, big wave	Qing (4)	young
Bo (4)	wave	Hui (4)	bright and intelligent
Fei (4)	fly	Na (3)	graceful movement of the body
Jian (4)	build, construct	Qin (3)	a kind of musical instrument
Jian (4)	strong and healthy	Lan (3)	orchid
Peng (4)	the roc (legendary bird)	Fan (3)	commonplace, ordinary
Zheng (3)	correct, straightforward	Jia (3)	excellent
Qing (3)	young	Zhen (3)	treasure, precious
Zhong (3)	loyalty	Xue (3)	snow
Bing (3)	soldier	Bei (3)	bud
Zhi (3)	ideal, aspiration	Qin (3)	hard-working
		Wei (3)	rose
		Jun (3)	army
		Ling (3)	tinkling of pieces of jade
		Zhong (3)	loyalty
		Tong (3)	deep red

Defying the conventions is not easy, and violating some of them is impossible because it is they that distinguish a Chinese name from a Japanese name or any other foreign name.

In the preceding sections, I have mentioned some of the conventions, for example, that a given name cannot be longer than two characters. Restricted by this convention, those who admire foreign names have to choose from the names whose Chinese versions contain only two characters, such as *Yue-han* (John) or *Ma-li* (Mary). As was noted earlier, some characters are suitable only for boys, and some are for girls. Comments like “That doesn’t sound like a girl’s name” attest to the reality of the conventions.

There are other conventions that young parents cannot neglect if they wish a name to be favorably accepted by the society. First, the characters in a name should not be derogatory or pejorative in meaning. This convention originated in the superstition that the name of a person was related to his or her destiny; a good name might bring a person good fortune and a bad name might lead to trouble. Very few people would admit to believing this now, but no one wants to depart from the rule because parents of course always wish their children to be happy and prosperous. Some people do use *Chou* ‘worry’ and *Bing* ‘sickness’ in names like *Mo-chou* ‘not worry’ and *Qu-bing* ‘cure of the disease,’ which are something like negative magic.

A good name should also be meaningful, unique, easy to read and memorize. A good name is one in which the surname and the given name are integrated to form a meaningful and grammatical phrase and in which rhetorical and graphic devices are employed to make the name distinctive. Some examples from my survey of names that illustrate the integration of surname and given name are *Hao Hong-jun* ‘a good Red Army man’, *Xia Yang* ‘the sun in the summer’, *Jiang Tao* ‘big waves in the river’, *Gao Jie* ‘noble and pure’, *Ren Zhong* ‘arduous task’, *Da Ling* ‘reach the peak of the mountain’, *Huang Gu* ‘yellow rice’, *Yang Guang* ‘sunshine’, *Sang Tian* ‘mulberry field’.

The name *Zhang Gong* 张弓 ‘draw a bow’ illustrates the use of graphic devices. In addition to forming a phrase, the name includes the character *Gong* 弓 as part of the surname *Zhang* 张. Although a transliteration into *pinyin* does not distinguish between the surname and the given name, the given name *Ke Ke* 柯柯 consists of two different characters with different tones, but sharing the element 可. This

name is also special because it alliterates. Similarly, in *Shi Lei* 石磊, the surname character is contained in the given name.

Conventions in naming, like other aspects of a language, change over time, though the changes are slow and not always conspicuous. One obvious change has been the shift from two-character given names to one-character names during the past two decades. The increasing percentage of one-character names is vividly pointed up in Table 4.

This shift is also a reflection of changes in the society. In earlier days, parents included as part of their children's names a so-called generation name.<sup>3</sup> The generation name was predetermined by previous generations and was shared by all siblings and cousins of the same generation. The true given name was thus a third character, in addition to the surname and the generation name. Today, however, the sense of clans is blunted, and many families no longer use generation names.

In addition, the popularity of one-character names is directly proportional to the increase in only children. Though I do not have data on the percentage of only children in Groups I and II, it is certain that the students in these two groups are more likely to have siblings than those in Groups III and IV because they were born in an era when family planning was weakened by the political movement. The traditional Chinese idea about children was "the more the better." In the 1960s this idea was challenged directly by nationwide family planning. The fall from favor of Ma Yin-chu, an ardent advocate of the campaign, and the anarchy during the Cultural Revolution destroyed family planning and was responsible for an increase of millions of babies. That period is now widely recognized as another peak of population, China's version of the Baby Boom. Toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, the problem of overpopulation once again attracted the attention of the government,

and efforts were made to limit the number of children in each family to two. The current one-child policy began in 1979. If a child born in that year was

Table 4. One-Character names in the four age groups.

<u>Group</u>	<u>No. of One-Character Names</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
I	167	40.6
II	67	62.6
III	82	68.0
IV	56	73.7

the couple's first child, it is unlikely that he or she would have younger siblings, although many children born in that year may have older siblings. In my survey, 75% of the children in Group III had no siblings, while in Group IV the figure rose to 95.6%.

The increase in only children will certainly affect naming patterns. Traditionally, when they named their first child, parents assumed that a second and third would follow. Even if they did not use a generation name, they might choose a character to be shared by all of their offspring. In this case, two-character names were unavoidable. The single-child policy had saved them the trouble, thus eliminating another reason for two-character names.

Furthermore, more and more people today realize that a name is only a symbol. Its frequent use in modern life has made people think that a good name should be economical in its use of characters and that one-character names are preferable. This idea was expressed in a short essay appearing in the *Nanjing Daily* in 1986. The young father said, "I decided to give my daughter a one-character name because, to my mind, no words will be used more frequently than one's own name. Having a one-character name can save your children's time as well as that of others" (Ji).

Finally, Chinese seem to prefer two-syllable strings to three-syllable strings phonetically. This preference is attested by several facts. First, two-character given names are more likely to be used independently of the surname, while one-character given names are seldom used without the surname. For example, in official documents, one may find *Xiao-ping* instead of *Deng Xiao-ping* and *Jian-ying* instead of *Ye Jian-ying*, but one never sees the one-character given name *Yun* instead of *Chen Yun*. The single-character given name is possible only within the family circle. Second, because surnames can consist of two characters, the longest names for people of Han nationality are made up of four characters. But in everyday life we often use only the two-character surname to address such people, for such surnames are rare and therefore cannot cause confusion in communication. A young man from Group I called *Ou-yang Xin-sheng* said in his essay, "Wherever I go, people always address me by my surname only, as if I had no given name. I've gotten used to it."

One-character given names are not an invention of the present century. On the contrary, they once dominated Chinese naming patterns. The present trend toward one-character given names represents, in a

sense, the revival of an old tradition, though the motivations for doing so might be quite different from those of the past. The Chinese encyclopedia *Ci Hai* records ninety-eight great names from the Zhou Dynasty to the Eastern Jin Dynasty (1100 BC–AD 420). Of these, only nine are two-character names; one-character names account for ninety percent of the total. After that period two-character given names increase until the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279), when two-character names become predominant.

Another recent phenomenon revealed by the survey is the use of the mother's surname, or the mother's surname plus another character, as the child's given name. There seem to be four types of such names:

(1) mother's surname as the child's given name, e.g., *Cao Yang* (*Cao* is the surname and *Yang* is the mother's surname), *Zhang Yang* (*Zhang* the surname and *Yang* the mother's surname), *Zhou Li* (*Zhou* the surname and *Li* a homonym of the mother's surname).

(2) mother's surname plus another character as the child's given name, e. g., *Gao Cheng-yong* (*Gao* the surname, *Cheng* the mother's surname, *Yong* 'brave'), *Chu Xie-xiang* (*Chu* the surname, *Xie* the mother's surname, *Xiang* 'auspicious'), *Li Jia-feng* (*Li* the surname, *Jia* a homonym of the character meaning "plus," *Feng* a homonym of the mother's surname).

(3) mother's given name used as the child's given name, e.g., *Sun Min* (*Sun* the surname, *Min* the mother's given name), *Xiong Ying* (*Xiong* the surname, *Ying* the mother's given name).

(4) a combination of two characters, one drawn from the mother's given name and the other from the father's, e.g., *Wang Hai-ning* (*Wang* the surname, *Hai* from the father's given name *Hai-bo* 'waves in the sea'; *Ning* from the mother's given name *Ning* 'quiet').

Such names, though small in number compared with names formed in other ways, are significant and worth studying because of former taboos associated with one's parents' names. Traditionally, Chinese persons would never mention their fathers by name. When they had to use a character that happened to be identical to their father's given name, they would try to write it in a different way. A man called *Xu Ji* went so far as never to touch stones simply because the character for *Shi* 'stone' was his father's given name. Not only was one's father's name taboo, the names of all one's superiors were also considered sacred. Violation of this rule in feudal society could mean being lowered in rank or even

losing one's head.

In modern China, there is no such taboo. But many people still believe that children's given names should be different from their parents'. Thus, assigning children a given name identical to that of one of their parents represents a sharp break with tradition. Explaining why he named his daughter this way, Sun Min's father said, "This name may vividly embody the idea that the child is the crystal of love between her parents." Zhou Li's mother had another reason for doing so. The child had no siblings. If the mother had been allowed to bear another child, she would have had that child surnamed for her, as is often the case when a couple has more than one child. Using the mother's surname or given name as the child's given name is one way to compensate for not being able to surname a child after herself. With the increase in only children, the percentage of such names will probably rise in the years to come.

### Conclusion

I have said that Chinese given names are mirrors of the society. This does not mean, however, that they are perfect mirrors, reflecting all aspects of the society or every social change that occurs. After 1949, China experienced a series of political movements such as Land Reform, the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, the Great Leap Forward, the Socialist Education Movement (or "Four Clean-Ups"), and the ten years of the Cultural Revolution. As a reflection of these movements are names such as *De-tian* 'receiving the land originally owned by the feudal landlords,' *Kang-mei* 'resisting the U.S. aggressors,' *Yuan-chao* 'aid Korea,' *Yue-jin* 'the Great Leap Forward,' *Si-qing* 'the Four Clean-Ups,' and *Wen-ge* 'the Cultural Revolution.' As a reflection of our economic achievements, we have such names as *Jian-qiao* 'building a bridge,' *Qing-feng* 'celebrate the bumper harvest,' and *Wei-xing* 'launch a satellite.'

Nevertheless, we should not conclude that the social picture reflected in these names is complete. Only the positive aspects of the society find their way into names. The catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution is reflected only in naming elements like *Wen* 'culture,' *Hong* 'red,' *Zhong* 'loyalty,' and *Jun* 'the Army,' not in more accurately descriptive elements like *Da* 'beating,' *Za* 'smashing,' *Qiang* 'looting,' *Sha* 'kill-

ing,' and *Luan* 'chaotic.'

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, my research included data from four carefully chosen age groups. An obvious extension would be to additional age groups both within China and abroad. My informants were mainly urban residents; a comparison could also be made between names from cities and names from the countryside. As reasons for the increase in one-character names, I suggested the blunting of the sense of clan and the one-child-per-family policy. But in the countryside things are quite different. Far from being blunted, the sense of clan is sharpening in some rural areas. Further, only-child families are still the exception there. If my reasons are correct, one-character names should be much rarer in the countryside.

A comparison between Chinese names in Taiwan and those on the mainland should also be interesting. Because of the different social systems, such a study could help further illuminate the relationship between names and society.

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### Notes

1. In this table and elsewhere, there are homonyms that the Chinese phonetic alphabet (pinyin) fails to distinguish, e.g., *Xiang* 翔 'hover' and *Xiang* 祥 'auspicious.' For other words, the only difference in pronunciation lies in the tone: *wei* pronounced with a falling-rising tone means "great"; pronounced with a falling tone, it means "defend."

2. From the signatures of the parents, I obtained another sample of names, of which one-character names account for 14.9% of the total of 116, even lower than the percentage in the first age group.

3. See Zhu and Millward for a detailed discussion of generation names.

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