

Introducing the Chinese Name-taboo Method *Gaijian* An expansion of recent work by Dou Huaiyong

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ABSTRACT

The present paper represents the first attempt to expand Dou Huaiyong's recent contributions to the field of the Chinese name-taboo practice or *bihui* 避諱. Exclusively dealing with *gaixing* 改形 (modify the shape), a taboo method recognized only by Dou Huaiyong, the paper delves into his use of the term *gaixing* and a group of orthographies that might overthrow the recognition. Although it abandons the term *gaixing* and promotes a new phrase *gaijian* 改件 (modify the components), the paper finds Dou Houiyong's core conclusion agreeable, taking *gaijian* as a taboo method that appeared in the year 658 by analyzing 500 stones carved between 618 and 663. While doing so, this paper introduces for the first time *gaijian* to the English scholarship, proposing to re-examine how the Chinese name-taboo practice developed in the early Tang dynasty.

KEYWORDS

Chinese name-taboo practice, *bihui*, taboo method, *gaijian*, *gaixing*, the Tang dynasty, Dou Huaiyong

1. INTRODUCTION

The contributions of Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 to the field of the Chinese name-taboo tradition or *bihui* 避諱 have been mounting up to a considerable number.¹ During the past ten years or so, he has examined a wealth of diverse Chinese sources that include stone carvings, historical records, private writings, as well as all the dated, undisputable Dunhuang manuscripts (Dou 2013, 2010, 2009a, 2009b, 2007). Although Dou Huaiyong remains overwhelmingly technical and exclusively publishes in the Chinese world about the pre-twelfth century taboo of the imperial names, his studies must be consulted by sinologists, experts of the Chinese taboo tradition as well as researchers of the Far Eastern cultures, because they not only shed a new light on longstanding name-taboo issues initiated by Chen Yuan 陳垣 in 1928 but also challenge our common understanding about how the Chinese users avoided names of gods, sages, emperors, ancestors, teachers, patrons, elders and even enemies in the seventh century.²

It is not my purpose here to enumerate all his contributions; instead, the present paper is addressed to *gaixing* 改形 (modify the shape), a taboo method that has not been recognized by anyone else but Dou Huaiyong.³ Specifically, it deals with two issues: the inaccuracy of his term *gaixing*; the orthographies that might overthrow his recognition. First, however, we shall look at Dou Huaiyong's recognition of *gaixing*.

2. DOU HUAIYONG'S RECOGNITION OF GAIXING

As suggested, the recognition of *gaixing* as a taboo method is a new scholarly development. Dou Huaiyong first identified it in his PhD dissertation (2007: 218–226), which examines 600-plus dated Chinese Dunhuang manuscripts. Shortly afterwards, he reinforced the recognition in his first monograph converted from his above dissertation (Dou 2010: 156–171). Although Dou Huaiyong has reworded a few places with the need to accommodate additional data collected from a few hundred more Tang stones, the modifications are slight and all major arguments remain unchanged, building up to one core conclusion: *gaixing* is a taboo method that appeared in the year 658 during the Tang dynasty 唐朝 (618–907).

In order to have direct grasps of this terse conclusion as well as to facilitate further inquiries below, I have generalized Dou Huaiyong's discussions, providing here a survey of features of the *gaixing* method.

Feature One. The term *gaixing* is used to categorize how a special group of Chinese characters were tabooed. The uniqueness of these characters is that they are not the names of the (imperial) people but characters that consist of these names — for illustrations, see below. However, Dou

¹ Parts of this paper, as well as my other article published by *Acta Orientalia Hung.* (Sun 2018a), grew out of my PhD dissertation written in Leiden University (Sun 2018b). Yet there is no conflict of interests. The immense rewriting hereto takes into consideration comments suggested by the anonymous reviewers to whom I shall remain grateful. All mistakes, should this paper have, are mine.

² The imperial name taboo is known as *guohui* 國諱 or *gonghui* 公諱, which literally means 'national or public taboo'. It persisted until the last emperor Pu Yi 溥儀 abdicated the Chinese throne in 1912. For the contribution of Chen Yuan, see Sun (2018a, p. 331) and Adamek (2015, p. 12–13).

³ I am not aware that someone in China as well as in the West has attempted to examine Dou Huaiyong's proposal. The latest publications authored by Bian Renhai (2017), Adamek (2015) and Galambos (2012), for instance, do not discuss this taboo method.



Huaiyong refrains from labeling these characters. Here, I would like to refer to them as composite characters or *hetizi* 合體字 in Chinese, particularly because all these characters consist of at least two components. That is, *gaixing* only works for the composite characters, of which one element is a name that should be avoided.

Feature Two. The appearance of *gaixing* is clear. According to Dou Huaiyong, the official promulgation is recorded in the short decree preserved in the *Jiutangshu* 舊唐書, according to which Emperor Tang Gaozong (d.683) ordered to avoid two characters that consist of Emperor Tang Taizong's (d.649) name, *shimin* 世民, on January 25, 658 (Liu Xu 945/1975: 77):⁴

[Tang Gaozong] changed 'hun' and 'ye' on the sixteenth day [of the twelfth month in the second year of the Xianqing reign]. ([唐高宗顯慶二年十二月] 庚午，改 “昏” “葉” 字。)

Evidently, *hun* 昏 and *ye* 葉 are not the name of Tang Taizong. They are characters that contain his name. For instance, *hun* is composed of two components. The top is *min* 民, the second character used in Tang Taizong's name; the lower *ri* 日. *Ye* has three elements. The top is *cao* 艹; the lower *mu* 木; arranged between them is *shi* 世, the first character of Tang Taizong's name. Although neither *hun* nor *ye* is the name of Tang Taizong, both characters have to be tabooed according to the above decree. Since the year 658, their common scripts must be modified and written in forms that deviate from their orthodox orthographies. In Tang sources examined by Dou Huaiyong, for example, *hun* 昏 was written as 昏, *ye* 葉 was changed into 葉 and 葉 in P.3742, and none of their taboo examples has been dated earlier than the above decree.⁵

Feature Three. Although the Tang decree mentioned only two characters, a host of composite characters were avoided. As suggested by Dou Huaiyong's research, a composite character, as long as it is composed of *shi* or *min*, is subject to the taboo. For example, the composite characters that consist of *shi*: *xie* 濊 (濊, P.2617) and *die* 諫 (諫, S.388); characters that contain *min*: *min* 泯 (泯, P.2475) and *hun* 婚 (婚, P.2646).

Feature Four. Tang Chinese people did not just taboo the composite characters that are composed of Tang Taizong's name. Since the year 658 onward, they also avoided the composite characters that consist of other emperors' names. For instance, *dan* 但 were often written as 旦, which has been found in F.096, P.3757, S.4642, P.2617, P.2859A and S.692.⁶ This handwritten example is to avoid *dan* 旦, which was used in the name of Emperor Tang Ruizong, Li Dan 李旦 (d. 716).

In short, *gaixing*, in the opinion of Dou Huaiyong, is a taboo method promulgated in the year 658. After the promulgation, the composite characters, although they were not the imperial names, were subject to the taboo. These characters must not be written in their 'normal' scripts but in 'wrong' forms, producing many new orthographies — the word new is used here advisedly, see below.

⁴ The Chinese dates below are transferred into the Western calendar via the Sino-Western Calendar Transfer Program offered by Academia Sinica at <http://sinocal.sinica.edu.tw>. All websites referred to in this paper were retrieved on July 5, 2017.

⁵ All the original taboo illustrations used in this comment, unless otherwise stated, are dated to 641–907 and have been examined by Dou Huaiyong (2010: 220–249; 2007: 73–126). Yet, all examples have been re-checked and scanned by me from the manuscript images downloaded from the website of International Dunhuang Project, <http://idp.bl.uk/>. However, the source condition varies. Some examples are too unclear and have to be processed with software or replaced by the edited forms.

⁶ The first three sources have been examined by Huang Zheng (2005: 75); the last three by Dou Huaiyong (2010: 244–245).



3. REPLACING THE TERM *GAIXING* WITH THE PHRASE *GAIJIAN*

As said, Dou Huaiyong coins the term *gaixing*. However, this term should be abandoned and replaced with the phrase *gaijian*. We shall outline four reasons.

Firstly, to replace a term neither is trivial nor is for the sake of neologism. A good term lends great aids in identifying the research area, illuminating the relationships of different fields. A weak term, however, blurs the categorical boundaries. It cannot accurately reflect the properties of the research subject. Meanwhile, a bad term is an improper label, often causing complex confusions that scholars have to devote considerable efforts to delineating, clarifying and eradicating.

Secondly, to replace *gaixing* with *gaijian* is neither to attain semantic accuracy nor to add finer nuances upon a synonymous term. In the writing of the Chinese characters, the meanings of the two terms are by no means close. *Xing* 形 means ‘form’, ‘shape’, and ‘appearance’; *jian* 件 stands for ‘element’, ‘component’, and ‘part’ — by the way, *gai* 改 is ‘change’, ‘modify’ and ‘revise’. That is, the terms *gaixing* and *gaijian* convey different ideas, depicting different concepts.

Thirdly, the phrase *gaijian*, compared with the term *gaixing*, more accurately depicts how the Tang people avoided composite characters. This observation can be illustrated by the following pattern of tabooing these characters, which has not been explicitly articulated elsewhere. As revealed by the above examples, the taboo is placed not on the whole composite characters but on their components. More precisely, the component that happens to be the imperial name is always subject to the taboo. This pattern of avoiding composite characters is rather clear. It seems to be a rule, allowing few exceptions. As a matter of fact, the taboo of the non-name parts of a composite character, although one cannot assuredly rule out the possibility that these non-name parts might also be avoided together with the name element, is extremely rare. In the examples analyzed by Dou Huaiyong and me, for instance, the non-name parts have never been changed.

Anyway, my point is that what resonates with this peculiar pattern is the Chinese character *jian* rather than the character *xing*. In this regard, the term *gaijian* is more sufficient than the phrase *gaixing*. In order to illustrate this point as well as the above pattern of avoiding composite characters, I here offer the taboo of *die* 揲. This composite character consists of three components. Its left part is *shou* 扌, the right-top *shi* 世; the right-bottom *mu* 木. As far as the sources are concerned, the taboo is placed only on its right-top element. In these two taboo examples, 揲 (P.2617) and 揲 (P.2602), for instance, the right-top element (*shi*) is changed into 廿 and 云 respectively whereas the other parts are still written in their orthodox orthographies. I am not aware that the elements *shou* and/or *mu* of this composite character had ever been modified in order to conform to the taboo tradition.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, the phrase *gaixing* is a general term, under which all the taboo methods can be classified.⁷ Any taboo example, strictly speaking, changes the *original* shape of a particular character. Here, we discuss two extreme methods, *fuhuang* 覆黃 and *kongzi* 空字. At the first glance, these two methods cannot be classified under the term *gaixing* because they do not appear to alter the shape of a character. The method *fuhuang* allows the scribe to write down a name although this method dictates the scribe to cover that name with a yellow slip of paper; the *kongzi* method commands the scribe to leave a blank space when a name is encountered. On second thought, however, both methods do change the shape of a character. The reason is that these two methods are adopted in order to avoid the names: the scribe intends to employ a character;

⁷ There are more than a dozen taboo methods. For a helpful list, see Adamek 2015: 49–59.



however, he has to embrace the taboo tradition and cannot use that character. That is to say, when we examine these methods, we actually deal with the taboo practice — to be more accurate, the characters avoided in a context. Therefore, the original shape of a character, in cases of *fuhuang* and *kongzi*, is covered by a slip of paper and is represented (replaced?) by a blank space respectively. To put it in another way, the methods *fuhuang* and *kongzi* work on all the parts of a character, transforming the entire shape from the visible into the invisible. Thus, any taboo example, regardless of a specific method, can be labeled as a taboo example made within the method *gaixing*.

In light of the above point, the term *gaixing* is rather imprecise, and I would rather promote the phrase *gaijian*. Since the phrase *gaijian* can more accurately capture the uniqueness of avoiding composite characters, it will be used in the following section to label the method under discussion.

4. ARCHAIC ORTHOGRAPHIES USED AS TANG TABOO FORMS

One important reason why many scholars have not accepted Dou Huaiyong's recognition of *gaijian* is that his arguments are premature, at least intellectually unsustainable. In fact, Dou Huaiyong's own study surprisingly contains conflicting claims about the appearance of *gaijian*, and these claims are not difficult to find. According to Dou Huaiyong, all the taboo forms of composite characters must appear after the year 658. Meanwhile, however, Dou Huaiyong himself reveals that some so-called taboo forms were already used long before Tang China. In the eyes of many scholars, therefore, these pre-658 forms give no support to but undermine the recognition of *gaijian*.

Take for instance the form 昏, about which Dou Huaiyong exposes two opposite positions.⁸ On the one hand, mainstream scholars represented by Chen Yuan (1928: 542) maintain that 昏 is a taboo form of 昏 昏, the first character mentioned in Tang Gaozong's decree. The top element (*min* 民) of 昏, according to them, is deprived of the short right-top vertical line, thus being written as 氏. On the other hand, quite a number of doubters represented by You Mingzhi (2002) advocate that 昏 was not a form introduced in order to taboo *min* because 昏 had appeared long before Tang China. Relying on historical use, they further add that 昏, in fact, was the original form and it became obsolete and was replaced by 昏, which was finally accepted as the orthodox form since the Han dynasty 漢朝 (206 BCE–220 CE).

That is, the pre-658 use of some so-called taboo forms makes the first appearance of *gaijian* less trustworthy than it is claimed by Dou Huaiyong. The recognition of *gaijian*, particularly given that Dou Huaiyong neither offers a list of these antedating forms nor theorizes about their pre-658 use, does not withstand scrutiny. Regarding 昏, for example, Dou Huaiyong adopts the middle ground. He maintains that it can be seen as a Tang taboo. Meanwhile, he also clearly shows his doubts, warning that one should tread very carefully when adducing it as a taboo example in the examination of sources because it was indeed used before 658.

Despite the pre-658 appearance of these forms, their (early) Tang use reinforces rather than refutes Dou Huaiyong's core conclusion. Their Tang occurrences, I argue, can be taken as taboo forms. Most likely, for instance, 昏 was employed as a taboo of 昏 during the early Tang dynasty.

⁸ The following two paragraphs are based on Dou Huaiyong 2010: 241–243. For another useful survey of these two views, see also You Mingzhi 2002.



Firstly, the aforementioned three arguments about 昏 seem to adopt the extreme end. Main-stream scholars ignore the pre-Tang use. Doubters neglect the Tang edict enacted in 658 as well as the Chinese taboo tradition that had already become extravagant by the 650s.⁹ Dou Huaiyong, as shown below, somewhat also downplays how the Tang Chinese used 昏.

Secondly, although Dou Huaiyong does not offer a verdict about 昏, none of the Tang sources examined by him reveals that *gaijian* appeared before 658. His earliest taboo example made within the *gaijian* method occurs in *Ganbo* 028 *Mohe banruo boluomi jing juan di'er disan* 摩訶般若菠蘿蜜經卷第二、第三.¹⁰ In this Dunhuang Buddhist manuscript, *min* 泯 is written as 泯. According to the Chinese date found in the colophon (the third day of the sixth month in the third year of the Xianqing reign 顯慶三年六月三日), this source was produced six months later than the above decree (Dou 2007: 74).

Thirdly and importantly, my quantitative survey about how 昏 and 昏 were used between 618 (the establishment of the Tang dynasty) and 663 strongly suggests that the Tang use of 昏 is a *gaijian* taboo form of 昏 — see Table 1.

Table 1 The use of 昏 and 昏 on early Tang stones (618–663)

Volumes	昏	昏
1 (619–646)	r9c9w4, r14c25w12, r16c15w16, r17c24w23, r44c19w4/5, r45c29w28, r60c22w7/8, r62c27w23, r65c22w2/3, r70c20w8, r74c22w8, r77c20w9, r83c14w17/c22w12, r88c25w4, r94c5w4	-
2 (646–652)	r109c19w1, r125c16w17, r130c10w8, r137c15w22, r145c9w3, r159c22w1, r161c23w23, r163c22w6, r172c18w8, r182c10w13, r188c13w19	-
3 (652–656)	r201c19w10, r210c22w10, r215c12w18, r218c22w20, r220c17w13, r222c19w15, r255c15w19, r278c14w3, r293c18w8	-
4 (656–660)	r328c18w1	r360c15w1, r380c9w25, r381c18w8, r389c19w16, r398c30w8
5 (660–663)	--	r427c13w11, r435c18w7, r436c23w7, r445c18w7, r498c18w14

Table 1 exhaustively lists all the occurrences of 昏 and 昏 used in 500 early Tang tombstone rubbings.¹¹ These rubbings are the first five volumes of The *Tangdai muzhiming huibian fukao* 唐

⁹ For the excessive taboo practice in the 650s, see Sun 2018a: 320–321.



¹⁰ *Ganbo* stands for Gansusheng bowuguan 甘肅省博物館, a provincial museum in China.



¹¹ The combination ‘r44c19w4/5’ in Table 1 indicates that a rubbing (No. 44) contains two examples (Words/characters 4 and 5) in one column (Column 19). Moreover, a complete tombstone is a highly formatted text, which can be divided into three parts. The opening briefly introduces the deceased’s ancestral blood. The second part tells us the late person’s career, marriage, offspring and death including the funeral. In most cases, the stone ends with a verse, mainly reiterating the deceased’s achievements and virtues. For more information about these tombstones, see below.



代墓誌銘彙編附考 edited by Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 (Mao 1986a, 1986b, 1985a, 1985b, 1984).¹² Since Mao Hanguang numbered them from 1 to 500 and arranged 100 rubbings in each volume, the time span of each volume is as follows: V.1: 619–646, V.2: 646–652, V.3: 652–656, V.4: 656–660 and V.5: 660–663. Although fifty-one stones have not been photographed, fourteen rubbings are unclear and this exercise actually peruses 435 pieces, the examples collected from these stones, in my opinion, reflect how 昏 and 昏 were commonly employed by many strata in Tang society between 618 and 663. I shall outline three reasons.

First, the stones were made by different people. Most run 300–500 characters and are tombstones of low rank officials and common Tang people, who are not documented in Chinese historical accounts. They were carved by the bereaved families and were buried inside tombs on the funeral days. A small number of stones contain almost 1,000 characters. They were made by the elite Chinese including the Tang court. Second, the stones have been found throughout China. Although many were found in the Chinese central plains, an impressive number of stones were excavated in the mountainous areas as well as the remote borders including the Central Asian deserts. Third, these stones have been rubbed and examined by Chinese experts several times and can be cross-checked with other versions. Many rubbings were made between the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. A very small portion were produced earlier, and a handful after World War II and up to the 1980s. As a matter of fact, most rubbings printed by Mao Hanguang were moved from Beijing to Taipei toward the end of the Chinese Civil War in modern times (1945–1949). They can be checked with the version published by their former custodian Beijing Library (now National Library of China). Thanks to the Beijing version, as shown below, some illegible examples published by Mao Hanguang have been clarified in this survey.

Anyway, as indicated by Table 1, the use of 昏 and 昏 are rather clear. The early Tang people first employed the form 昏. Between 618 and 657, they only used 昏, which occurs forty times. Its last occurrence is found in Rubbing 328, *Lu Huo shi zhi* 路霍氏誌. Although the re-scanned example,  (Mao 1986b: 109), is not clear, it is still possible to determine that this example is an orthodox form. In another version of the same stone, this example is  (Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 1997: 45). According to the inscription, this tombstone was buried on ‘the twenty-eighth day of [...] the eighth month [...] in the second year of the Xianqing reign 顯慶二年 [...] 八月 [...] 廿八日 [October 11, 657]’ (Ibid).

On a large scale, however, 昏 disappears, and 昏 begins to appear in a sudden. As given in Table 1, 昏 never appears between 618 and 657. All its ten examples occur between 658 and 663. Its first occurrence, , is found in Rubbing 360, *Song Yi zhi* 宋義誌 (Mao 1986b: 243). Although this example is also not clear, another version of this tombstone attests that it is 昏,  (Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 1997: 91). As indicated by the Chinese date, this stone was buried on ‘the seventieth day of [...] the eleventh month [...] of the third year in the Xianqing reign 顯慶三年 [...] 十一月 [...] 十七日 [December 17, 658]’ (Ibid).

¹² Mao Hanguang planned to examine all available Tang stones made in 618–907 but his project was interrupted. Between 1984 and 1994, he and his team read 1,800 rubbings and stopped in the year 727. In total, they published eighteen volumes. Moreover, the plates that defy reproduction are Rubbings 3, 28, 32, 47, 48 and 52 in V.1; Rubbings 116, 154, 155, 156, 157, 164, 178, 183, 195 and 197 in V.2; Rubbings 208, 209, 211, 216, 250, 252, 258, 263, 281, 289 and 295 in V.3; Rubbings 302, 303, 308, 312, 316, 335, 357, 359, 367, 371, 378, 385, 399 and 400 in V.4; Rubbings 407, 423, 437, 450, 463, 467, 470, 480, 486 and 500 in V.5. The illegible inscriptions are Rubbings 6, 23, 58 and 79 in V.1; Rubbings 110 and 170 in V.2; Rubbings 227, 244, and 277 in V.3; Rubbings 336, 369, 370 and 382 in V.4; Rubbings 469 in V.5.



On the basis of this quantitative survey, the other two observations above, the 658 decree as well as the taboo examples of many other composite characters examined by Dou Huaiyong, several conclusions about 昏 and other similar questionable forms can now be drawn.

1). The early Tang people neither equally nor randomly used 昏 and 昏. They seem to have followed certain rules. The use of 昏 and 昏 in these 500 Tang tombstones is clearly demarcated by the year 658. Before 658, all occurrences exhibit 昏. After 658, all examples display 昏. As for this frequency of occurrence, a reasonable explanation is that the use of 昏 and 昏 was determined by the Tang 658 decree or the promulgation of *gaijian*.

2). The early Tang use of 昏 and 昏 does not give support to the doubters' claim. Given Table 1, we may find it hard to accept that the sudden nationwide re/use of 昏 was a mere coincidence that just happened at the same time when the Tang court enacted the 658 decree. Therefore, the doubters may encounter difficulties in explaining this question: Why did Tang China suddenly abandon 昏 and begin to use 昏 since 658? In hindsight, today we can deduce that 昏 had been used before 658 and was actually an archaic form of 昏. In the eyes of the Tang people, however, it seems that 昏 was accepted as a form of 昏 in order to avoid Tang Taizong's name.

3). A finer touch can be added to Dou Huaiyong's observation on using 昏 to conduct research. Given what has been surveyed, it is not safe to reject the argument that 昏 was a taboo form. Since this form had remained obsolete for a few hundred years before the *gaijian* method was introduced, we seem to be in a strong position to claim that 昏 used in a Tang text is actually a taboo form of 昏. In the study of Tang Chinese sources, therefore, the form 昏 is a textual indication which is so valuable one cannot afford to ignore. For instance, its occurrences give clues regarding the production of a source, suggesting that the source might be made no earlier than the year 658.

4). Pulling together the above three points, we probably can formulate this scenario: 昏 was discouraged because of the taboo tradition; whereas 昏 was revived by the Tang decree and used as a form to circumvent the taboo.

5). This scenario can also be used to expound on other taboo forms similar to 昏. Although these forms appeared long before the year 658, they became archaic and fell out of general use. Since the promulgation of *gaijian*, however, they were retrieved, revived and employed as taboo forms in the early Tang society. Here, I have no intention to deny their pre-Tang use. What I want to stress is that we should understand their use in the Tang context: their sudden, nationwide re/appearance after the year 658.

5. CONCLUSION

Although Dou Huaiyong's term *gaixing* is inaccurate and must be replaced with the phrase *gaijian*, his recognition is insightful and his core conclusion is acceptable. Various Tang sources made between 618 and 663 demonstrate that *gaijian* appeared no earlier than the year 658 when Tang Gaozong decreed to avoid characters that consist of Tang Taizong's name, *shimin*. This method represents a new development of the Chinese taboo tradition. Since then, the Chinese people had to avoid the composite characters even though these characters were not the names of the emperors. As a result, not only did the Chinese users invent new orthographic forms, but they also revived and re-adopted the pre-Tang forms that can conform to the taboo tradition. We must agree with Dou Huaiyong, taking *gaijian* as a new taboo method and re-exploring how the Chinese taboo tradition developed in the seventh century.



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