
Method and Motives for Naming Geographical Objects in Chinese and Western Cultures

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Abstract: Place name is a symbol to describe geographic object. With the development and change of history, place name gradually gets strong national cultural characteristics. Comparing Chinese and Western place names, one can find that Chinese place names pay more attention to history and culture, while Western place names are more functional and pay more attention to rationality and practicality. This is related to the different historical and cultural backgrounds and national cultural psychology between China and the West.

Keywords: place names, Chinese and Western cultures, comparison, culture, history, toponymy, linguistic typology.

INTRODUCTION

When they first appeared, place names were used to refer to geographic entities, and were symbols used by humans to recognize and distinguish the natural and social environment in which they lived. With the development of human society and the expansion of human activity areas, the connotations of place names are becoming more and more abundant. Usually, toponym not only reflects the various characteristics of the geographical environment and natural landscape, but also reflects the various characteristics of history and culture, has the function of cultural identity, reflects the social mentality of a nation, and reflects a nation's social psychology, traditional values, and moral spirit.

MAIN CONTENT

Place name is a broad and profound cultural system, which contains many profound connotations such as politics, economy, military events, folklore, geography, and history. Through the comparison of Chinese and Western place name naming methods, we can also prove more concretely that place names are important abbreviations and manifestations of historical and cultural facts. This article mainly compares the naming methods of Chinese and Western place names from five aspects.

PLACES NAMED AFTER NATURAL FEATURES

There are many place names in China and the West that describe natural features such as animals, plants, and terrain related to the place of residence. These place names are people's summaries or generalizations of the geographical and landforms of the place, reflect the feelings of human love and worship of nature (Fitzgerald, 2000).

The place names of mountains and water resources are most common in China and the West. For example, the names of places in China include the names of counties such as Fenghua, Putuo, Dongtuo, Tiantai, and Qingtian are all derived from the mountains of the same name. Zhejiang, Heilongjiang, Hunan and Qinghai are named after the rivers and streams in the territory (Junliang, 2005). There are also many places in the West that use mountains and rivers as their names. Some important towns often get their names from the rivers where they are located, such as the province of Southeastern France named Vaucluse, it takes its name from the spring water of the same name in the territory; and place name originates from the mountains, such as Piemonte in Italy. The reason why it is called Piemonte is that it is located in the Alps.

There are still many place names in China and the West that have a description status, which can reflect the characteristics of the local natural environment. Such place names usually reflect people's perception of nature. For example, there is Mingsha Mountain in China, which means sand that makes sounds. This is a peculiar natural phenomenon that exists everywhere in the world. In deserts or dunes, due to the influence of various climatic and geographical factors, the sand slides or moves due to wind vibration, many sand particles rotate in the air current, and the surface cavities cause effects and make noise. And in western place names has Colorado, a state in the western United States, named for the Colorado River. The name comes from Spanish, meaning "red river", and is named after the clay that washes down the canyon and turns the water red (Harder, 1976).

Animals and plants are also one of the common place names in China and the West. Most place names with animal names in China are due to the shape of the terrain resembling animals. For example, Heilongjiang means black dragon, because from a distance, the river is like a black dragon flying in the forest. Some of them are named after plants, such as Panzhihua City, whose name comes from a century-old Panzhihua tree in the territory. In addition, China has many towns and villages named after typical local plants, such as Taoyuan (the garden of peach), Liyuan (the garden of pear), etc. In addition, many places in China are named after plants because the terrain in the territory is similar to the plant, so they are named in a visual way. For example: Hulu Town (the town of gourd) in Hunan Province is named because the terrain in the area is very similar to gourd; Liancheng (the city of lotus) in Guizhou Province is named because it looks like a lotus in full bloom when overlooking the city.

There are also places named after animals and plants in the West. For example, in Germany has a city named Coburg, it means cow castle, and in the United States has place name like Peacock, Eagle. In the West also has place names are named after plants. For example, in the United States has White Apple, Orange, also the place which is called Cannes in France means reed and so on.

In addition, many Chinese and Western place names are named after mineral resources. For example, the city in central Spain is called Almaden, because it is rich in mercury deposits; the famous Marathon in Greece, which means more fennel. And in China, Tieling City is located in Liaoning, named because of the rich iron resources in the mountains; Tongling City is located in Anhui Province, named for the rich copper reserves in the mountains.

It can be seen China and the West have a common theoretical basis when naming place names by nature, which reflects the common national cultural psychology of China and the West. The difference is that the symbolic meaning of the place names named by Chinese animals and plants is more prominent. For example, the dragon is a totem of the Chinese nation's worship and belief (Deqing,2002).The Chinese nation calls themselves "the descendants of the dragon", so there are many place names named after the "dragon" (State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping. The record of Chinese place names, 1983).

PLACES NAMED WITH SURNAME AND NAME OF PEOPLE

In China, naming by surname is the most common way of naming a certain place name. Place names are usually named after the surname of the people who originally lived here or the surname with the largest number of people in the area (Zizheng,2002). For example, Shijiazhuang in Hebei Province got its name because the family whose surname is Shi lived here for the first time. There are also a large number of villages with surnames, such as Lijiazhuang (the village of family Li), Fanzhuang (the village of family Fan), Tianzhuang (the village of family Tian), and so on.

Although China rarely uses people's names to name place names, there are still place names named after celebrities to commemorate great historical figures (Ming, 1946). For example, Zhongshan City in Guangzhou Province was used to commemorate Sun Yat-sen (Zhongshan Sun), who is the pioneer of the modern democratic revolution; Huanghua City in Hebei Province is used to commemorate Hua Huang, and Jinyu County in Jilin Province is used to commemorate Jinyu Yang, both of them are national heroes in the war between China and Japan. However, such place names are very rare in China.

The names of people used as place names in the West are often well-known politicians, military strategists, scientists, and writers in history. People use their names as place names for commemorative purposes. Using people's names as place names is quite common in the West. For example, Augusta in Italy was named after Roman Emperor whose name is Augustus, and many cities in the United States were named after Madison, the fourth president, or Washington, the father of the United States. And place names are also named after military heroes or scientists. For example, Brantford in southeastern of Ontario in Canada is named after the leader of Mohawk Indian who is named Joseph Brant during the American Revolution. Also, the United States has many cities, counties and towns named after the inventor Fulton.

It can be seen it is common to name places after surnames in China, while it is rare to name place names after people, but it is more common to name place names after people in the West. The surname in Chinese place names represents the family, indicating that the residents living in this place are all of this surname or most of them are this surname. In ancient China, the economy was backward, so people had a strong concept of clan. People with the same surname often lived together. The purpose of using surnames as place names was that neighbors can live peacefully and help each other, also it can help people ensure the best interests of the family, and maintain social stability. But western place names are usually related to famous people, representing personal values and achievements. Western culture emphasizes achievements and admires heroes, which reflects the people's respect and love for the people who have made major contributions to the country.

In addition, the place names of China and the West are exactly the same. That is a person who behaves badly. Even if he is very famous, it is impossible to name place names after him. This shows that promoting justice is the common cultural psychology of China and the West (Xinhua,2007).

PLACES NAMED AFTER RELIGION

Religion is a social and cultural phenomenon, and it only appears when human society has developed to a certain historical stage. As a social ideology, it accumulates the wisdom of the early ancestors of the nation. Once formed, it will diffuse into all aspects of the national culture and become the hidden core of people's thinking and behavior. Religion has a great influence on social life. The Chinese and Western place names all have traces of religion. Places named after religions in China are mainly realized in the following three forms:

The first is to name the place directly by the temple name which is located in the territory. For example: Beisi Village, Baofeng Township, Gaofeng Temple. The second is the place name named after the religious idea. Religion claims that life is hard, and only by abandoning all desires can you enter the paradise. For example, China has many place names related to paradise, such as Xianyou County (the county where immortal travelled), Xianju County (the county where immortal lived), and so on. These place names all reflect the people's yearning for a better life in the future (Jiyu, 2009).

"Religion represents a kind of personal identity, social interaction and important rituals" (Bryson, 1990). Western culture is also deeply influenced by religion. Christianity is the religion of Western countries, and the Bible is the classic of Christianity. The place name such as Hebron, Jordan, Eden are all place names in the Bible. There are also place names that are influenced by Catholicism. For example, Los Angeles is related to Catholicism, which means angel; There is a city in France called (Le Havre de Grace), which means "harbour of mercy". This is because there is a small church in this city to commemorate the merciful Virgin Mary. Another example is the city in southeastern Hungary called Gyulamonostr, which is dedicated to the Catholic priest named Gyula who built the church (monastery) in this city.

Religion has a great influence on place names in both China and the West, which are mainly derived from the original place names, religious names, religious legends, religious doctrines, and religious buildings in religious classics. In China, there are few place names related to the original place names in religious classics, while in the West there are few place names related to religious buildings (Jiucheng, 2015). The different religious factors in Chinese and Western place names originate from different religious sects. Because China and the West are in different geographical environment and historical background, so they have completely different religious sects: Taoism and Buddhism are mainly popular in China, while Christianity and Catholicism are mainly popular in the West.

PLACES NAMED WITH EXPECTATIONS

Yearning for a better life is the commonality of humanity. When naming places, both Chinese and Western countries have national cultural psychology that makes the name carry good expectations. In China, the place names, such as: Xinglong (Prosperity) County, Fu'an (happiness and health) City, Shouning (longevity and peace) County, reflect people's yearning for a better life and the pursuit of a happy life; Place names such as Taiping (peace) District, Yong'an (be peaceful forever) City reflect people's hope that the world will be peaceful and people can live in a stable life forever; Place names such as Youyi (friendship) County, Chongren (kindness) Town, Shangli (courtesy) Village, Zhongxiao (loyalty and filial piety) Village reflect the social mentality that people value friendship, affection and morality (Rulong, 1993). In the beginning, China was a country that developed an agricultural civilization, so it pursued a peaceful and stable life and also paid more attention to etiquette and ethics. Therefore, such place names are the most fundamental embodiment of Chinese cultural spirit.

These place names also are abundant in Western countries, such as Concord, Harmony, Hope, Hopewell. These reflect people the good wishes for their countries and the word. There are also place names like Liberty, Union and Independence which emphasize the struggle for the normal political development of the country and the survival of the nation. They embody people's aspiration and show people's ambition in establishing social order. In comparison, such place names in China pay more attention to daily life, while in the West emphasize the aspiration of life.

PLACE NAMES WITH NUMBERS

Some Chinese and Western place names are related to numbers. In China, the place names are related to numbers and these numbers have special meanings: some are the number of local characteristic buildings; some are dates with commemorative significance; some numbers mean large quantity (Qinghua, 2006). For example, the place name San Qiao village means three bridges, because the village has rivers and three bridges on them; the meaning of place name Shi Zipo is the cross slope, it is called this name for the shape of this place looks like number ten which is written in Chinese language; the place name San Qi city represents the third and seventh day in every month, the reason why it is called this name is that on the third and seventh of every month, there will build a temporary market in which people can buy things from the farmers straightly. In addition, the number thirty-six in the place name San Shiliu Dao Bends (Thirty-six bends) means large quantity, because this village is on the top of the mountain which has many bends and the terrain is very complicated. Numbers also

have been used in Western place names, such as Eighty-eight, Thousand Palms, Twenty-nine Palms, Seven Sisters, Six Mile, Ten Thousand Islands, etc.

Place names with numbers are quite special. Most place names with numbers in China have special meanings, while those with numbers in the Western do not have much symbolic meaning.

CONCLUSION

Through the comparative analysis of Chinese and Western place names, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, from a linguistic point of view, Western geographical names come from many languages, such as French, German, Old English, Indian, Spanish, etc, so geographical names will also be affected by different languages. For example: Colorado, a state in the western United States, named for the Colorado River. The name comes from Spanish, meaning "red river", and is named after the clay that washes down the canyon and turns the water red (Harder, 1976).

China is a country with many ethnic groups, so there are also place names which are related to the languages of minority. For example: Kizilsu River, originating in the Pamir Plateau. It is named after the river's water is dyed red by red soil. "Kizilsu" is a Uyghur phonetic translation, meaning "red water".

Second, the formation of place names is closely related to the local natural environment and culture. Place names reflect people's certain understanding, certain feelings or certain expectations of this place. On the feelings, descriptions and explanations of natural entities, Chinese and Western place names are very similar, however, due to different cultural backgrounds, there are many differences between Chinese and Western place names in expressing feeling and desire. Chinese culture emphasizes psychological construction, emphasizing morality and culture (Xilun,2004); Western culture emphasizes material civilization and emphasizes scientific development. This difference is reflected in place names: the Chinese place name, which contains more cultural connotations and historical factors, pays more attention to human factors. Such as the place name Xuan Wu is related to the emperor in the Chinese history while the Western place name pays more attention to natural factors and function. For example, the place name "the northwest area" has a clear sense of guidance. There are many allusions in place names in China, while the Western place name pays more attention to functions and other aspects. In addition, Western culture emphasizes the value of life, pursues democracy and freedom, also advocates development and competition (Zizheng,2002).

Third, China is more cautious in naming place names, and place names are more solemn, serious, and restrained. There are many considerations about place names. But the western place name is more flexible. For example, in the town of Peculiar in Missouri, it is said that the mayor of the town gave several names to the town at that time, but they were not approved. So, he wrote a letter to the higher officials: "Just give us one peculiar name." After the officials who received the letter saw the letter, they really named the town Peculiar. This shows the western humor. There are also some western place names, which do not exist in China, are named after occupations. Such as: Soldier, Doctor town, Fisher, Farmer, Miner, etc.

The knowledge of place names can help people understand different social and cultural features. Different nationalities sometimes have very different understanding of place names. Therefore, in international communication, it is necessary to deeply understand cultural tradition and value between different countries, also need to recognize accurately the actual meaning of place names in other culture, so that cross-cultural communication can be carried out smoothly. It has great significance to improve people's cultural adaptability and is good for communication between people of different cultural background.

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