Comparison of the characteristics for naming geographical objects in Chinese and Western cultures

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Abstract. Toponym is rich in cultural connotations, which can help human beings understand the economy, culture, geography, religion of a certain region and a certain stage. With the increasing intercultural communication, cultural exchange has been extended to people's work and life and the significance and influence of toponym in cross-cultural communication has been gradually highlighted. This paper compares the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western place name from three aspects. Due to the unity of human thought, there are similarities between Chinese and Western place names. But because of the great cultural differences between China and the West, there are also great differences in the place names. Chinese place name is more deliberate and rigorous while western people treat place name only as an accusative symbol and the naming of it is more casual and flexible. Therefore, the study of place name can provide insight into the characteristics of Chinese and Western cultures which is important for the promotion of cultural exchange. The article also considers the prospect of using information computer technologies for processing wide layers of toponymic material. Keywords: parable; simile; metaphor; arbitrariness; rationality; realism; intentionality; toponym.

1 Introduction

Place name, as a kind of naming activity, is the exclusive name that people give to a physical or human geographic entity in a specific spatial location. Toponymic science, due to its specificity, has to operate with a huge amount of source material. Meanwhile, the natural possibilities of a person in understanding this material are limited. There is an urgent need to use computer technology in toponymic research. Computers allow you to compactly and reliably store and process a huge number of toponyms according to the specified parameters. At the same time, it is possible to correct the mistakes made and refine the data processing program. Working with a computer best contributes to the fulfillment of the main tasks of scientific research, i.e. the collection, accumulation, storage, processing, analysis and transmission of information. The long and exhausting initial preparation of data and their input into the computer is subsequently compensated not only by a sharp increase in performance, but also by the reliability of the results. The possibilities of using computers...
create a fundamentally new level of research of this class of words, when a huge amount of source material enters the researcher's orbit. As one of the first and most important conditions for the computerization of toponymy, there should be a unity of methods for collecting and processing material. The unified method of collecting and processing material, in addition to the advantages associated with using maximum information about each toponym and object referred to by this toponym, makes it possible to receive data on requests from other regions via the Internet. The technical capabilities of modern computers allow you to process a huge amount of material. The features of the structural organization of the language material, the composition of units and the relations between them can be identified through the categories of quality and quantity. Scientific results obtained on the basis of statistical methods objectify linguistic conclusions, increasing their reliability. The use of computer technologies makes it possible to involve in scientific circulation all available toponymy, including substrate (non-etymologized). With point etymology, only individual toponyms can be "deciphered "according to the principle of similarity with the phonetic appearance of existing" living " languages. The vast majority of substrate toponyms remain outside the scope of the researcher. The use of the method of toponymic isoglosses, as the most effective in toponymy, will make it possible to introduce into scientific circulation not only toponymy, where the appellative vocabulary is clearly visible, but also substrate (unethymologized) toponymy. Such common phonetic complexes (traces of the substrate) can be viewed on quite extensive territories. Finally, computer technologies make it possible to organically replenish existing databases with new materials, as well as to a certain extent, if necessary, adjust (refine) the structure of the database. Thus, the methodology of toponymy research achieves a systematic approach that allows us to consistently analyze all the collected toponymy of the region and compare it with the toponymy of other regions.

Toponymic material, despite the complexity of its phonetic, morphological and semantic structure, in principle lends itself to formalization. Each toponym is a word (simple, complex, suffixal) or a phrase that functions as the name of a particular geographical object. Thus, a toponym has a sum of firmly defined features that can be formalized. Such signs are: 1. Graphic, 2. Structural, 3. Semantic. The graphic features of a toponym are a chain of symbols—letters corresponding to the sound appearance of the word. These signs allow you to identify phonetically similar words or parts of words. Words (or parts of words) can be etymologically permeable if the connection with the appellative that gave rise to this toponym is not lost. In other cases, a part of a word may be impervious to etymological analysis. And, finally, quite often there are toponyms, the meaning of which is lost. The identification of complexes of the same type in phonetic terms and devoid of internal meaning will allow us to determine topoisoisoglosses, i.e. the spread of a particular toponymic phenomenon of substrate toponymy.

Structural features determine the typological systems of toponyms. The toponymic system of any language reflects to a certain extent the structure and vocabulary of this language.

Every country and every region chooses different place names to distinguish the location. Chinese and Western place name is influenced by their different cultures at the beginning of naming, so the place name reflects its respective cultural connotations. "The unique design of each language contains a unique world view. The process of creating language by humans reflects two completely different ways of thinking or worldviews of humans."[12] Therefore, there are many similarities between Chinese and Western place names, such as metaphor and metonymy, arbitrariness and justification, realism and intentionality, all of which are applied in Chinese and Western place names. However, there are great differences between the way of thinking in Chinese and Western, so in the process of naming place name, they also show great differences, such as: Chinese place names are more metaphorical; Chinese place names are more rational, while Western place names are more arbitrary; Chinese place names are more intentional, while Western place names are more realistic, etc.
2 Parable in Chinese and Western place names

Simile and metaphor are widely used in naming places. The way of human in thinking is generally consists of logical way and imaginative way. Westerners are accustomed to using logical way to objectively show the essential properties and basic appearance of things while Chinese people are good at using imaginative way, they usually add their own views, opinions and emotional attitudes to the objective things, so that the objective things have a strong humanistic character.

In the naming of Chinese place names, people borrow a specific name to refer to an objective thing through imagination, so that the objective thing also takes on certain characteristics. For example, in Chinese place names, the similarity of two different things is used for imagination and one thing is used to compare with another thing which makes the place name vivid and thus deepens people's memory. Such as: 象鼻山 (the Elephant Trunk Mountain, the "elephant trunk" and the "mountain" in the real world are different things, yet the two have similarities in appearance, so people make full use of the similarities between them through imagination, combining the two things, so that the name gives a vivid image of the mountain, increasing the artistic impact.[7] Another example is the 金锁关 (Golden Lock Pass): the "lock" is a security tool, and the "pass" refers to the mountain pass which means the location in a range of mountains of a geological formation that is lower than the surrounding peaks. “Golden lock” and “pass” are quite different from each other in the real life. However, the golden lock is made of gold which cannot be easily destroyed, and the mountain pass joins one mountain to another one, its terrain is complex, so the “golden lock” and the “pass” have similarities, both of them are hard to destroy or pass. Therefore, using the "golden lock" to modify the "pass" can outline the characteristics of the pass accurately and imaginatively which is named “like a golden lock of mountain which protect the mountain, even the birds are hard to fly over it” [11].

As same as China, the West also uses simile to name places, such as “Heads”, “Mouth of Wilson”, “Thumb”, “Tongue Point”, “Finger”, “Arm”, “Hand County”, “Black foot”, “Sleepy Eye” [1] and so on. These place names also use the rhetorical method of simile, associating geographical objects with specific figurative human body parts ("head," "eyes," "fingers").

It can be seen that the use of simile to name places is a very common phenomenon in both China and the West. However, unlike Western place names, Chinese place names are more metaphorical. For example, among the names with animals, there is 龟峰 (Turtle Peak) in China. It named not only because of the appearance is like a turtle, but also because the turtle is a symbol of longevity in China. So it shows the dream of people that can have a healthy body and live longer. Also in China has mountain named 龙虎 (dragon and tiger). In China, the dragon is the symbol of the Chinese nation and the tiger represents bravery in China, so the place name represents that the life of people is full of bravery and good fortune. Among the western place names also have names like: Elephant Rock, Tiger, Dog Island, Wild Horse, Peacock, Turtle Mountain, Sheep Range, Eagle, Birds, Chicken, Sleeping Bear Point, Wolf, etc. [3] They are also related to animals but have no special meaning.

In summary, the principle of simile is used in both Chinese and Western place naming, but the Chinese place names pay more attention to metaphor to reflecting the cultural connotation and good wishes of the name than expressing the physical characteristics of geographical objects.
3 Rationality and Arbitrariness in Chinese and Western place names

At the beginning, the place names were given by people arbitrarily and went through the process in which place names were only used by a few local people, then were known gradually and at last widely used by the society. However, at the same time, place names appeared after language symbols were created and they either reflect the local geography or the local culture and history, so both Chinese and Western place names are rational and arbitrary, but Chinese place names are more rational than Western place names, and Western place names are more arbitrary than Chinese place names.

In China, more attention is paid to the naming of place names and has a department which is set up to manage the work of place names. The process of naming places goes through many considerations and will be adjusted with the changes in the history of place names, for example: The Chinese city named 西安 (peace in the west) has several names: 1) 咸阳 (Qin Dynasty, all sunny), the reason why it was called this is that it is located on the south side of the mountain and the north side of the river, because in China, the south side of the mountains and the north side of the river are all called sunny.[8] 2) 长安（long-lasting stability，Han Dynasty), 3) 大兴 (very prosperous, because at that time the city was a center of trade, Sui Dynasty), 4) 西安 (peace in the west) (Now it means always be peaceful in the west).[9]

But in the Western it may be a very accidental event, such as the C. Name (Name Corner) in the U.S. The name comes from an accidental event: in the past, the compiler of map found a place which had not been named, so he wrote "? , name". But because his writing is unclear, so the draughtsman mistook it for "C Name", and wrote it as C.Name (a corner named “name”).[6]

It can be seen that Chinese place names are named more carefully, while Westerners treat naming only as an accusative symbol and name it arbitrarily. In addition, it is also influenced by the words, whether in Chinese or English, the final meaning of a word can only be determined in the combination of words. However, as far as individual words are concerned, the Chinese character has rationale. The meaning of the Chinese character can be inferred from the shape of the character and people focus more on the meaning of the character, for example: "海(sea)．河(river)．湖(lake)", in these characters, they all have the part”氵" which means water or the things which are related to water[2]. However, the "letter" in English is arbitrary and the meaning of a word is not inferred from the shape of one letter, but from the combination with other letters [10]. So English is more focused on the structural relationship. Therefore, Chinese place names pay more attention to the meaning and choice of characters. For example, in Chinese culture, animal 狐 (fox) is a symbol of cunning, so the character 狐 (fox) is hardly used in place names.

4 The realism and intentionality in Chinese and Western place names

"Realism" refers to the imitation of physical objects, focusing on their appearance while "intentionality " refers to the expression of meaning, focusing on the meaning of physical objects. Place names are names given by human beings to a certain space, so the subjective way of thinking of human beings is more or less reflected in the place names. Due to the abstract thought, human beings need to express their feeling with the help of some physical
objects, so the realism and intentionality are reflected in both Chinese and Western place names, but the Chinese are more intentional while the Western are more realistic.

For example, among the place names named by numbers, in the Western place names have name like: Thousand Palms, Twentynine Palms, Six Mile, Ten Thousand [5], etc... these names are just expressions of the meaning of numbers and the natural characteristic of the area. But in Chinese place names, the use of numbers usually has its own meaning and conveys the meaning of "auspiciousness" which reflects intentionality. Such as: 六盘山 (Six mountain bends), 九寨沟 (A ravine with nine villages), 八宿 (In Tibetan, it means "the village at the foot of the warrior mountain"), 十堰 (Ten dams). The reason why they are called these names is that they reflect the complex local natural conditions, but the more important reason is that these numbers which are included in place names have good meaning in China: 六 (six) means everything goes well; 九 (nine) means longevity; 八 (eight) means wealth; 十 (ten) means perfection, so these numbers are often used in place names to express good expectations.

So that, Chinese place names are more intentional and rich in human characteristics while Western place names are more realistic and focus more on the marking function of names.

5 Conclusion

Chinese place names focus on humanistic factors while Western place names focus on natural factors; Chinese place names have more subjective factors attached to them while Western place names pay more attention to objective aspects such as function.

For example, Beijing (China). The place names of Beijing are humanistic, contain more cultural connotations and historical factors. Such as: 1) 天桥 (the bridge of sky). In the ancient time, when it came festival, the emperor needed to go outside to celebrate the festival for wishing the god can help country keep peaceful and prosperous. Every time went outside, the emperor must pass through the bridge, also only the emperor can walk on the bridge and because the emperor was regarded as the son of sky, so it is 天桥 (the bridge of sky); 2) 苹果园 (Apple Orchard). It is said that during the Ming Dynasty, there was a very rich official who bought a large piece of land in the west of Beijing to grow various fruits. But probably due to the problem of soil and water, only apples grew best here, so he ordered that only apple can be planted. In this way, a huge apple orchard appeared on the west side of Beijing. Of course, the apple trees here were later cut down and the land was converted into farmland, but the place name is unchanged. Unlike the rich cultural connotations of Beijing's place names, the place names in Washington are more functional, such as "the area of Northwest and Southeast" [4] which have a clear sense of recognition and orientation.

Information technologies open up new opportunities for toponymy researchers. They include not only basic data about the toponym (morphological and syntactic structure of the toponym, semantics of its components, functioning in speech, etc.), but also extralinguistic information about the object called a toponym (motivation of the name, causes of occurrence, characteristic features of the object, folk etymology, etc.). The use of language universals, strict identification of similar phenomena in the structure of the description of toponymy allow using information technologies in the study of toponymy of languages of different countries, thereby contributing to the creation of a single world computer bank of toponymy.
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