Book Reviews

America—Naming the Country and Its People. By Allen Walker Read. Lewiston, N.Y: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001. Price (hardcover) $89.95. Forward by Frederic Cassidy, Preface by Leonard R.N. Ashley, editor.

The 26 unpublished essays herein are a sample of the papers Read, a retired Columbia University Professor of English and Linguistics, had presented at onomastic conferences over more than 30 years. As Ashley, this book's compiler and editor, reminds us in his preface, these papers were often the grounds for audience discussions on the issues he raised; and as part of the audience in some of his earlier presentations, I took advantage of these opportunities to question, challenge, and seek further enlightenment. That is how I got acquainted with the man I consider one of the major influences in onomastic study in this country.

A partial listing of the topics of Prof. Read's essays reproduced in this book will give an idea of his many and varied interests in onomastics: to what does the name America refer and other names proposed for our country; what people in America and some of its states and regions have called themselves and been called by others; some nicknames used by and for Americans and some state residents (like Yankee); critical evaluations by travelers of the placenames (e.g.) New York State; multi-cultural sources of some state's placenames (e.g. Connecticut); placename pronunciations; patterns of transcription of the variant spellings of Indian placenames; official decisions about what places should be called; the dynamics and patterning of American placenames.

How well did he do with each? Variably, in that he relied, as he said he would and we know he should, on statements made by scores of historians, journalists, travelers, linguists, and others who coined, used, and commented on names and naming experiences. Prof. Read, as a researcher into fairly obscure sources, was non-pareil.

One might criticize Prof. Read's essay for not being detailed enough on some topics. But we need to bear in mind that these papers were all presented at conferences and were

usually of 20 minutes duration. Few of them were subsequently (by Read or Ashley) fleshed out any further. (Perhaps they all should have been but I won't argue that. As brief as they were, each was, to me and others, very insightful and useful.) Another thing to bear in mind is that some of these topics were dealt with in several oral presentations at different times and thus there are many repetitions. This book is not intended to present a consistent, organized narrative with beginning, middle, and end. (I recall my answer to a person who, like me, had heard many of his presentations at different times and complained, "Oh, I heard this before." "Well," said I, "they're certainly worth hearing again.")

Now, what issues did Prof. Read's presentations, as recorded in these essays, deal with that inspired novices like me in our onomastic considerations?

One of his favorite concerns was the names Americans have been given and have given themselves, like why have we been called Americans? I especially recall (and even applauded) his papers on a possible native American source of America. And shouldn't it bother us that we call ourselves (and are called by others) Americans since we share this name with other countries in our hemisphere? Perhaps, but Prof. Read conceded that, by now, it has become so much our own national identity that worrying about it is unproductive. Should we have sought and used some other means of identification, unique to us? We did seek this many times, Read reminds us, but, for various reasons, like simplicity and convenience, we ruled them out. He told us what they were and also attempted to explain why we have been the United States and not, for example, the Confederate States.

Another concern is how we have dealt with so-called "Indian" names. He often remarked on the difficulties historians and linguists had with these, especially in transcribing and deriving them. We have still not come to terms with this, and Prof. Read and I doubted we ever would. When I read these essays and recalled the oral presentations, I was reminded of the years-long problem we have had in deriving the name Kentucky for our state and its principal river. We have learned that many words in several "Indian" language families and dialects sound alike and thus could have accounted for the name. But we have still not come close

to knowing which or why. For we have, as Prof. Read pointed out several times, confronted the English, French, and even other "Indian" renditions of these names and accepted them as "genuine Indian." [Why I put quote marks around "Indian" should be obvious to onomasticians; there were scores of "Indian" languages and dialects in our country, unrelated and unintelligible to one another.] Then there is the whole matter of what is a "genuine Indian name"? I have angered many of my fellow onomasticians by expressing the claim of most Kentucky historians that very few of the Indian-sounding names in our state were "genuine." What we meant is that they were not given, in that form, by "genuine" Indians. Most were given by white settlers long after the Indians had left that area because they sounded Indian or may have had some Indian association somewhere else. I remember once being taken to task by an "expert" on Indian names when I insisted that Helechawa, the name of a station and post office in Wolfe County, was not an Indian name. I finally convinced him that it had been given by the man who had brought the railroad into that territory and honored his mother, Helen Chase Walbridge.

Another of Prof. Read's concerns was what people called themselves—what he considered "derivative forms of placenames." Many of his essays dealt with this. Yet another was the distinction between the lexical or literal or denotative meaning of a name and its cultural, metaphoric, or connotative meanings. Though he did not deal as much with this as he could have, he inspired many of us (e.g. Nicolaisen, Orth, and others) to do so. Probably the main thing I learned from Prof. Read is that any place or feature with a name, however it was derived, is and should be of legitimate concern to placename scholars; that every name means something to someone even though it might be, seemingly to others, sheer nonsense, or misderived or incorrectly explained. For that reason, we can accept many Indian-sounding names whose literal meanings may not be apparent in their renditions simply because they mean something to the people who use them or are identified by them.

While we agreed that the main concern of placename study is the meaning of the names to those who used or were identified by them, I did take issue with his blanket

implication that we generally know who did the place naming. In point of fact, at least in the places I have studied, we seldom do. Only a small handful of namers ever left records and while we may know (or think we do) who named a little more than half our names, we seldom know why they chose that name over some other. (And we do a lot of assuming on the basis of why we would have given that name had we been the person to do so.) But Prof. Read admits that many names were superceded by other names, some of which later became official.

Then there is the matter of finding patterns in naming. Does naming actually form a predictable pattern, as Prof. Read implies? Perhaps in some places, but I have learned that it is not invariably true. But what is patterning, actually, and how should it be studies? Since, with few exceptions, we cannot find the chronology of naming, we cannot see any direct natural patterns. As we compile our dictionaries, we tend to start with current names and we tend to assume that those places or features were always called that and we do not always do a creditable job of tracing earlier names for the particular place or feature.

In one of his essays, he mentions "folk names," those that "grew up by common consent" as distinct from those "given by authority." I guess we can accept this but only if we can accept the fact that the largest majority of a state's or region's names are of this kind (certainly true of its natural feature names) and that few can legitimately be called "authoritarian."

All in all, this is an important contribution to the published toponymic literature. We can only hope that more of Read's unpublished work might see the printed page.

Bob Rennick

Contemporary Chinese Placenames: Names of Administrative Divisions at County and City Level. By Irena Kaluzynska. Schweizer asiatische Studien: Monographien, Volume 33 (Bern: Peter Lang AG European Academic Publishers, 2002). ISBN 3-906762-67-X.

Placename scholarship has been indebted to antiquarians and local historians willing, in fact eager, to ferret out the date, meaning, contextual background, and evolution of toponyms within a narrow geographical orbit. Without such building blocks of basic, indispensable and sometimes irreproducible effort, the pyramid of toponymic knowledge and understanding would be unsupportable, its apex (the hope of synthesis) a mere mirage.

My enthusiasm at the opportunity to review this monograph derived partly from interest in and ties with China. Indeed, the first draft of this review was written in Shenzhen, China. Shenzhen, north of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, is surely the locus of the most intense and rapid creation of geographic names of all kinds in human history. When Shenzhen was designated as China's first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in 1981, it was a small border post and village of fewer than 30,000 inhabitants. The SEZ's population is now officially over five million and unofficial estimates run as high as eight million inhabitants. New names of all kinds are very much a part of the new China, in astonishing contrast to the bland, sparse nomenclature one associates with the Maoist cultural and economic landscape.

I took on the review too because, although my cultural-geographic research has only occasionally focused on toponyms, placenames have always interested me and were in fact my first exposure to serious geographic research and inference. As a British high school student, I struggled to decipher dozens of 1:63,360 Ordnance Survey topographic maps, each with upwards of 200 settlement names, mostly established between the 6th and 10th centuries A.D. The standard classroom and take-home assignment was to classify the names by ethnicity and constituent elements and their meaning, map the resultant suffix groupings, and interpret the patterns obtained with reference to drainage patterns, relief, surface geology, vegetation, and earlier occupance patterns

such as Roman, Celtic, or even Neolithic archeological sites. The Rosetta Stones of this regular exercise were the standard simplified published guides to (mostly) Anglo-Saxon and Danish common placename elements by British historical geographers such as Jean Mitchell. The more quixotic toponyms could usually be resolved by reaching for Ekwall's great dictionary or, more occasionally, by published regional guides. The experience stuck. For four decades I have viewed placename study as, ideally, a project which begins with common meaningful elements, considers their geographic pattern, context, and (ideally) chronology, and aims at inferences which speak to issues of human settlement and its underlying priorities and values. While I freely concede that this perspective on placename studies is narrow, I believe it is one widely shared by cultural-historical geographers.

Dr. Kaluzynska's monograph does not match this perspective or resemble any other placename scholarship I have previously encountered. Her work is my first exposure to a doctoral thesis in linguistics, further distinguished by its Polish origin, Chinese topic and sources, Swiss publisher, and English text. As linguistics scholarship it devotes much attention to purely endogenous structural considerations that rarely engage historians or geographers. The author's mastery of the nuances of written Chinese is breathtaking. She draws on 25 centuries of placename documentation culminating in major Chinese placename dictionaries published between 1929 and 1994. Dr. Kaluzynska's secondary sources bridge onomastic scholarship in North America, Europe, and China, the latter reflective of the revival of placename studies in the People's Republic since the late 1970s.

The monograph is not merely an exercise in structural linguistics. The majority of the text focuses on the semantics of Chinese placenames, and the approach used draws on G.R. Stewart's taxonomy, published in its initial form in this journal in 1954.

As a doctoral thesis in the European tradition, the monograph demonstrates a magisterial grasp of its subject matter after two decades of preparation. Such works show greater breadth of scope than the typical North American or British Commonwealth doctoral thesis, and it is not always mandatory that very specific questions or problems be

identified, still less answered or solved. In the author's own words, the purpose of the monograph is to:

> "discuss different aspects concerning Chinese geographical names, and a more detailed description of the selected groups of contemporary Chinese placenames, their structural and semantic features as words belonging to the vocabulary of the Chinese language, as well as the presentation of some naming phenomena occuring [sic] in toponymy" (p. 18)

I cannot tell whether the colorless prose reflects a shortcoming of style, translation, or committee mandate. Suffice to say that the entire monograph is equally bland without, admittedly, any glaring lapses of vocabulary or grammar.

Notice too that the extract above omits mention of the placenames selected for study even though they do appear in the monograph's title. The omission is not accidental. The author's statement of purpose disregards the specific placenames studied because the actual names and their context are not a focus of interest. They are instead a convenient, coherent, well-documented sample which lends itself to descriptive profiles of structural composition and semantic content.

A total of 1973 placenames is embraced by this study. The places are China's 302 cities which enjoy autonomous municipal status, plus 1591 counties, 74 autonomous counties, and six special districts or regions. In China, county seats duplicate the names of the counties they administrate so treating county names as 'place' names entails no ambiguity. Conditions are those prevailing in 1986, and the study area encompasses just those provinces within the Chinese language toponymic region. Qinghai Province and the five autonomous regions associated with China's minority peoples lie outside the study area.

While Chinese toponyms are thought to have originally emerged as single character monosyllables, most are now bisyllabic. The second syllable or *tongming* is usually a generic element such as *shan* ("mountain") or *dao* ("island"),

while the first syllable or *zhuanming* is a specific adjectival qualifier within that generic class, such as *bei* ("northern") or *bai* ("white"). It is of course the character, not the phoneme, that conveys the explicit meaning. The syllable *gang*, for example, may connote "creek" or signify "harbor." Some single character placenames have survived in the Chinese toponymic landscape. Normal Chinese practice compounds such names with whatever generic term describes their administrative status. The term is not otherwise generally used if the placename is already polysyllabic. Of the 1973 names studied in the monograph, 1789 are bisyllabic, 145 monosyllabic but augmented by an administrative generic, and 38 comprise three or more syllables.

The author notes that the largest published compilation of Chinese generic terms distinguishes 899 elements, of which roughly 100 are very common. They typically describe landforms, hydrographic features, current or archaic administrative units, settlement types, and built landscape features. Although the hundred or so common generics seem very comparable with the pool of generic elements one associates with the toponymic variety of European language regions, Chinese practice seems to have followed no clear parallel to grassroots and exceptionally common European generic elements reflective of initial settlement, secondary offshoots, and land-clearing (no direct correspondence with Anglo-Saxon -ham, -ton, and -field or -stead, for example, or at least none that I could discern from the monograph).

In any case, the city/county name set selected by Dr. Kaluzynska sets readily apparent limitations to useful analysis of semantic content. For one thing, aside from the axiomatic *shi* ("city") and *xian* ("county"), no element among the common pool or grand array of elements seems common enough to permit locational or contextual inference based on a total of 'only' 1973 places. Indeed, the frequencies are so low that the author reviews elements and their specific examples with little recourse to tabular summaries of frequencies except in the case of shift-name incidence. The only other tables in the monograph are city/provincial counts of administrative divisions and syllabic composition. The one chart summarizes the chronology of China's city/county names, the majority of

which date from the Ming dynasty or later (A.D. 1368 on). The work lacks maps of any kind, an omission emblematic of the author's indifference to questions of space, time, and context.

Dynastic accretion over close to three thousand years (not forgetting lavish additions to China's county totals under twentieth-century Nationalist and Communist rule) was not oblivious to local naming practices, but in China, as elsewhere, top-down and bottom-up placenaming traditions were at odds. Around 40 percent of all Chinese placenames, most of them micro-places, incorporate a specific element indicative of clan or family (very rarely of individual persons, a practice taboo from circa 1050 B.C. to 1911, and sanctioned again since 1949). Among the city/county names studied, however, only 1.7 percent incorporate clan/family/surname elements and 1.5 percent include a personal name specific. Similarly, transfer names redolent of migration or borrowing are much less characteristic of city-county names than of Chinese placenames in general. The city/county names, insofar as one can distill generalization from their piecemeal treatment, are most apt to include physical geographic elements (32 percent), specifics of commendation (19 percent), and those of cardinal direction and relative location (15 percent). Other specifics include those of chronology (old, new), sensory stimuli, and scale. The author finds that 7 percent of county/city names are homophones of earlier forms, replacing archaic, unfamiliar, or undesirable characters through a change of meaning but not of spoken form.

In summary, this monograph holds strictly to its author's stated purpose. It is resolutely descriptive. More fairly put, Dr. Kaluzynska considers what seems to be every classifiable facet of Chinese county/city naming practices in what must surely be a unique portal for anyone, myself included, unable to read Chinese characters. Indeed, the monograph will also be revelatory for those who do command basic literacy in Chinese because so many placename characters lie outside the pool of 4000 frequently used characters connotative of solid literacy. (In all the written language may encompass as many as 60,000 characters.) Dr. Kaluzynska reports one Chinese estimate that 221 characters are used only in Chinese toponymy and 43 additional characters have a special meaning when they are incorporated

in placenames. Unfortunately, the monograph's value as a reference source is limited by its lack of a geographical index. This and other reservations aside, the work is clearly a unique achievement as a source in English and an ambitious undertaking given the relative recency and subject matter of placename studies in Chinese. Its singular nature more than compensates for its limited objectives.

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Tennessee Place Names. By Larry L. Miller. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press. 2001. Pp. 248.

In this book of Tennessee place names, the author states that his primary purpose is to provide the reasons for naming the state's hamlets, towns, and cities so as to aid in historical or geographical research, as well as to satisfy the curiosity of general readers. Within these limits, the author rightfully claims his book to possess by far the best and broadest coverage of any similar work on Tennessee's populated places. In addition to providing place name origins for 2,071 communities, explanations of the origins of the names of Tennessee's 95 counties are also given (in a separate listing).

Miller's preface lays out the parameters of the volume, its scope, contents, and objectives. Some historical background of the most common sources of names is given, as is a brief discussion of the methodology employed in gathering data—primarily through federal and state census rolls, newspapers, county historical and genealogical societies, individual correspondence, and extensive library research. A curious feature of the preface is that it is almost identical to that of the author's work on Ohio place names, published in 1996, also by Indiana University Press. In fact, the two volumes in their entirety are almost identical twins.

Most of the text is presented in a single large section listing each place alphabetically and indicating the county in which it is located. In addition to an explanation of the current name of each community, any previous names are given, as are dates of settlement and incorporation, when known. The most common sources of place names are early individuals or families living in the area, historical figures or places, early settlers' place of origin, geographical features (including vegetation), natives, and the railroads.

This is clearly a reference book, hence few people will read it cover to cover, from Acton through ZuZu, as I have done. It was not a dull exercise. Although the author kept each entry brief, anecdotal information has been included where pertinent to help expand a reader's geographic or historical knowledge, or simply for amusement. (As a side note, ZuZu is not to be found on even the most detailed topographical maps

but does appear on the General Highway Map of Fayette County, Tennessee, just 3 miles north of Yum Yum, on Yum Yum Road.)

Considering that onomastics often deals with vague or conflicting information, this book is remarkably free of apparent or actual errors. One "apparent" error can be noted in the two entries for Austin Springs, one in Washington County, the other in Weakley County, with suspiciously similar descriptions. Both springs, laden with minerals conducive to good health, are said to have been discovered by two brothers names Austin. The springs became great attractions for people from miles around. The brothers built a hotel at each site, which, years later, burned down. Both communities are now much reduced in population and importance. Almost identical histories for two places more than 300 miles apart appear to be far-fetched. Yet, from independent inquiries, the descriptions given seem to be basically accurate. On the other hand, the Jefferson County entry, which attributes the name to the nation's *second* president, is clearly in error. A conspicuous omission is an entry or Mount Pleasant (Maury County), with a population of 4,278.

Some sources of information are cited in the individual place name entries, and acknowledgements are made to an extensive list of individuals, but without indication as to their position, place of residence, or contribution. The only disappointment for this reviewer, however, is the absence of a complete bibliography. My summary assessment is that the author has made a major contribution to statewide place name studies, both by this volume and by his previous work on Ohio names.

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