

Notes on Place-Naming in Chinese and English

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Chinese and English are, of course, both literally and figuratively a world apart, perhaps seemingly too far apart for a meaningful comparison of their onomastic systems. The languages belong to completely different families, and their phonology and grammar are very different. The Chinese ideographic writing system is based on entirely different principles from the English alphabetic system. The historical backgrounds of the two cultures could hardly differ more: China's political and social insularity and Britain's geographical insularity have made the one traditionally inward-looking and the other traditionally outward-looking.

On the other hand, because both Chinese and English are analytic languages, there are strong, sometimes even startling structural affinities between the two. Both the Chinese and the English cultures have a long, unbroken tradition of literacy, record-keeping, place-naming, and map-making. And, despite the relatively closed culture of China vis-à-vis the extensive external influences on the English-speaking world, both languages have, over the centuries, assimilated foreign elements into their place names. Therefore, in spite of the great disparities, we feel that a meaningful comparison of the place-naming habits of the two cultures can be made.

In the following pages, we first compare some of the linguistic features of Chinese and English place names and then examine some of the kinds of place names.¹ That is, we first look at place names as a subsystem of the grammar of the language as a whole and then at the etymology of place names. For the most part, we compare Chinese to English, rather than the other way about — not because of any ethnocentric prejudice favoring English, but because, for most readers, the English system will be the familiar one and the Chinese the unfamiliar one.

One striking difference between Chinese and English place names that

¹For the purposes of this paper, we do not distinguish between British and American English. We are indebted to George Stewart's *American Place Names* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970) for some of the categories we employ and for some of the English examples cited.

is directly related to neither linguistic structure nor to etymology should be mentioned at the outset. The names of Chinese places have historically been highly susceptible to change, so much so that maps made two or three hundred years apart will show only a few of the same names for even the most important features. Over the years, for example, Beijing (Peking) has had at least the following names: *Ji*, *Yan*, *Yan Jing*, *Da Du*, and *Bei Ping*. This is, of course, in sharp contrast to the great stability of most English-language place names. The name *London*, for instance, has survived, in recognizable form, at least two thousand years and successive political and linguistic invasions by Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Norse, and French.

Little need be said about the phonological features of place names in Chinese and English. Obviously the place names of any culture must conform to the phonological constraints of the spoken language(s). For example, it is completely predictable that Chinese place names contain no consonant clusters because the Chinese language contains no consonant clusters. Indeed, we mention phonology only because names borrowed, but not translated, from one language into another must be adapted to the phonological system of the receiving language. The result may have no meaning in that receiving language except as a name. Hence English *Mississippi* from Algonquian or Chinese *Bai Yun E Bo*, in which *E Bo* is from Mongolian.²

For the spoken language only, the cases of *Mississippi* and *E Bo* may be essentially the same. Both *E* and *Bo* are familiar Chinese syllables, and thus also morphemes, because every syllable in Chinese is a separate morpheme. But, because of its highly restricted syllable structure, Chinese has many, many homonyms. *E* is the romanization of at least seventeen different Chinese morphemes (and at least thirty-five if we ignore differences in tone), and *Bo* is the romanization of at least nineteen (again at least thirty-five if tone is ignored). Precisely because *E* and *Bo* have so many meanings, the hearer of the name is not likely to associate any one particular meaning to either of them in the context of a place name, and the meaning of the combination is probably only the place name itself.

However, for the written language, the situation is not quite the same. Every morpheme in Chinese is represented in the written language by a

²We use here the *pinyin* system of romanization for Chinese and the official forms of standard Chinese based on the northern dialect. To aid readers not familiar with Chinese, we transliterate each Chinese character as a separate word, hyphenating only when two characters together correspond to a single word in English. For the sake of simplicity, we have not marked tones.

unique character. That is, each of the seventeen *E*'s and the nineteen *Bo*'s is written in a different way. When *E Bo* was transliterated from Mongolian, one of the existing characters for *E* and for *Bo* was chosen, more or less arbitrarily, to represent each syllable-morpheme, thus potentially giving a meaning to previously meaningless syllables. In this way, a kind of folk etymology can be built into the transliteration of foreign names in Chinese by a process without parallel in English.

On the other hand, the sequence *E Bo* (as represented by the characters) is ungrammatical in Chinese, thus reducing the probability that the reader will interpret it as anything other than an unanalyzable place name. Further, even when the transliteration results in a grammatical construction, repetition and familiarity likely neutralize the "artificial" semantics most of the time. But it is still there, potentially retrievable in a manner similar to that by which native speakers of English can retrieve the etymology of such place names as *Newport* or *White Plains* — and in a way no untrained English speaker can etymologize *Mississippi* as 'big river.'³

If one can conceive of a prototypical place name, it would probably have the form modifier + noun in both Chinese and English. The modifier precedes the noun, and the noun is very often some kind of generic term for the place being named. Hundreds of examples come easily to mind for English: *Iowa City*, *Bald Mountain*, *Burnt Hills*, *Harpers Ferry*, *Hog Island*. Similarly for Chinese: *Bei Jing* 'northern capital,' *Lu Shan* 'cottage mountain,' *Dai Shu* 'big tree,' *Hong Shui* 'red water,' *Er Tang* 'two ponds,' *She Dao* 'snake island.'

Dialectal differences in the generic term of a place name are common in English, as in, for example, the regional variations in the word used to designate a stream — *Brook*, *Branch*, *Burn*, *Creek*, etc. Chinese has some regional variations, although, surprisingly perhaps, they are not nearly as

³One could, we suppose, imagine someone's hearing *Mississippi* as *Mrs. Sippy*, or, straining one's imagination even further, "seeing" the morphemes *miss*, *is*, *sip*, and *pi* in *Mississippi*, but the idea seems very far-fetched.

Our topic here concerns Chinese place names within China and not the translation of place names outside China. However, it is worth noting that, in the translation of foreign names, an attempt is made to reproduce at least some of the consonants and to approximate some of the vowels of the original name. Beyond that, the translation may be ungrammatical and semantically absurd as in *Niu Yue* (New York), which is 'handle' + 'appointment.' It may be grammatical but semantically absurd as in *Pu Tao Ya* (Portugal), which is 'grape' + 'tooth.' It may be both grammatical and meaningful, as in *Mei Guo* (America), which is 'beautiful' + 'nation.' Finally, the name, or at least part of it, may be grammatical, meaningful, and etymological, as in *Lu Sen Bao* (Luxembourg), where the Chinese character for *Bao* means 'fortified place, fortress,' reflecting the etymology of *bourg*.

extensive as in English. The normal generic term for a river is *He* in the north (*Huang He* ‘yellow river’) and *Jiang* in the south (*Chang Jiang* ‘long river’ [Yangtze]). But this differentiation may be due to the fact that the *Huang He* is the most important river in the north, and the *Chang Jiang*, dominates the south—each perhaps lending its name as a generic to all tributary streams. On a map of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1027–77 B.C.), the generic term for almost all rivers is *Shui* ‘water,’ including even the *Chang Jiang* which is there called *Jiang Shui*. Hence even the present dialectal variation of *He* and *Jiang* is of relatively recent date.

In an area with as many dialectal differences as China has, one would certainly expect more variety in place-name generics. Two factors may have contributed to the homogeneity. One is the written language, which is universal throughout the nation, despite the diversity in the spoken language. The other factor is the relative lack of foreign influence in China; of the four English terms for a small stream mentioned above, *Branch* is ultimately from French, *Creek* from Old Norse, and only *Brook* and *Burn* date back to Old English.

In spite of the ubiquity of the article in English, it is relatively rare in place names, being restricted to *sui generis* items like *The Grand Canyon*, to plural formations like *The Great Lakes* or *The Cairngorms*, and to prepositional names like *The Gulf of Mexico*. Because Chinese has no articles at all, it obviously has no place names with articles.

Unlike some societies, such as those of many American Indian tribes, both Chinese and English cultures have historically had the concept of personal ownership of land and other geographical and political entities. Consequently, the modifier in both Chinese and English place names is often the possessive form of a personal name. In English, this possessive may be fully marked (though the apostrophe may have disappeared from the spelling), as in *Kingston*, *Pittsfield*, and *Martinsville*. Or the possessive [s] may be lost, as in *Hopkinton*, *Fayetteville*, and *Irwindale*. In non-place-name contexts, Chinese regularly uses a kind of “possessive” particle, *de*; for example, *Wang de shu* = *Wang* + particle + *book*, or ‘Wang’s book.’ In place names, however, this particle is never present: *Zhang Zhuang* ‘Zhang village,’ *Liang Xiong-Di Dao* ‘two brothers’ island,’ *Li Jia Zhen* ‘Li family town.’

Similarly, Chinese, like English, distinguishes ordinal from cardinal numbers in the regular language: *yi* ‘one,’ but *di yi* ‘first;’ *san* ‘three,’ but *di san* ‘third.’ The ordinal particle does not, however, appear in Chinese place names. Before generic terms describing topographical features such as mountains, rivers, and lakes, the numeral is interpreted as a cardinal;

before generic terms for streets, it is usually interpreted as an ordinal, despite its cardinal form.⁴

Blend names, or names consciously created by merging parts of pre-existing words or names, are familiar in English in such place names as *Texarkana* and *Saybrook*. Chinese uses the same process fairly extensively. For example, the name *An Hui* is a blend of *An Qing* and *Hui Zhou*. The name *Wu Han* was created for the triple city that resulted from the consolidation of the three earlier cities of *Wu Chang*, *Han Kou*, and *Han Yang*. *An Hui* and *Wu Han* are like acronyms in that they are composed of the initial elements of the original names. Chinese blend-names are not, however, created only from initial syllables. The railway line connecting Beijing and Guangzhou (Canton) is called the *Jing Guang* line, from the second syllable of *Bei Jing* and the first syllable of *Guang Zhou*.

In both English and Chinese, ordinary attributive adjectives are rare as place names. Most apparently adjectival names in English, such as *Love-ly*, *Noble*, and *Imperial*, are probably from personal or company names. But such towns as *Eclectic*, *Liberal*, *Barren*, and *Oblong* seem likely to be straight descriptives and not derivatives from some other kind of name. Parallels in Chinese are *You-Hao* 'friendly' and *Fu-Rao* 'abundant.'

Less familiar to English are verbs as place names; indeed, our somewhat cursory search failed to uncover a single nonparticipial form that did not originate as a personal name (e.g., *Yell County*, Arkansas). Though not common in Chinese, the type does occur: *Tui-Guang* 'popularize' and *Zhen-Xing* 'vitalize.'

Thus far we have discussed place names whose formation reflects fairly close parallels between Chinese and English grammar. For many Chinese place names, comparison with English structures is not so easy because Chinese grammar differs so greatly from English grammar that apparent similarities or dissimilarities between names may be a function of how the Chinese name is translated into English. For instance, the Chinese name *Da Chai Gou* is most literally translated as '(to) cut firewood gully,' a type of formation very alien to English. However, if we recall that Chinese verbs have no separate participial forms, we could just as well translate the name as 'woodcutting gully,' certainly an acceptable, if not a common, form in English. On the other hand, *Hu Pao Quan* 'tigers run

⁴Note that English is similarly perverse when it writes a Roman (cardinal) numeral after a personal name but reads it as an ordinal; we write *Henry VIII*, but say "Henry the Eighth."

spring' would *not* properly be translated as 'running-tiger spring'; 'running tiger spring' would be *Pao Hu Quan* in Chinese.

Always bearing in mind the hazards and occasional arbitrariness of translation, we do find a number of syntactical structures in Chinese place names that have no parallel in English. These include various kinds of locatives, full sentences, and even complex sentences.

A certain restricted type of locative construction is relatively familiar in English place names. This consists of a settlement name followed by a locative preposition and a noun denoting a body of water. An article may optionally precede the name of the body of water. Typical examples from England are *Wells next the Sea*, *Stratford upon Avon*, *Southend by Sea*. Except for New York State, the type is rare in the United States, and, again except for New York, the article seems to be obligatory. Some random examples are New York's *Croton-on-Hudson*, Maryland's *Venice-on-the-Bay*, and Ohio's *Geneva-on-the-Lake*. This particular type of formation does not appear in Chinese.

Nevertheless, locatives as place names are fairly common in Chinese, and a variety of structural types appears. There are simple 'prepositional phrases' like *Quan Shang* 'on (the) spring,' *Shui Bian* 'by the water,' and *Tian Zhong* 'in the field.'⁵ *Gang Shang Ji* 'fair on the mound' consists of a noun modified by a prepositional phrase.

For some generics in English, for example, *Lake*, *Fort*, *Port*, *Cape*, and *Mount*, the order of descriptive (modifier) + generic (head) is often or usually reversed: *Lake Ontario*, *Fort Wayne*, *Port Washington*, *Cape Hatteras*, *Mount McKinley*. A word-for-word translation of many Chinese place names would suggest at first glance the same kind of reversal. *Xi Shan* 'west mountain' is the name of a mountain, but we also find the province named *Shan Xi* 'mountain west,' and parallel formations like *Shan Dong* 'mountain east' or *Hu Bei* 'lake north.' Actually, these latter examples are not parallel to the English types at all. Rather, they too are locative phrases, best translated as *Shan Xi* 'to the west of the mountain,' *Shan Dong* 'to the east of the mountain,' and *Hu Bei* 'to the north of the lake.'

Even more alien to English place-naming principles are Chinese names consisting of an entire sentence; these may appear with or without a following generic term. Examples include *Shuang Feng Cha Yun* 'twin peaks pierce (the) clouds,' *Mao Tiao He* 'cats jump river,' *Ma Si* '(the)

⁵The word-for-word translations would be 'spring on,' 'water by,' and 'field middle,' but insofar as one can equate English prepositions with any Chinese part of speech, *shang*, *bian*, and *zhong* are prepositions in these constructions.

horses neigh,' *Dong Fang Hong Gong-She* '(the) east is-red commune,' and *Wei Ma* 'feed (the) horses.' There can even be the equivalent of a complex sentence, as in *Gui Jian Chou*, most accurately translated as '(even a) ghost would worry (if he) saw (it).'

Both English and Chinese are characterized by easy creation and heavy use of compounds. English is also known for its avoidance of "equal-weight" compounds; most English compounds are best analyzed as modifier and head, and the exceptions are so few that the same examples (e.g., *gentleman-farmer* and *blue-green*) appear and reappear in most discussions of the subject. Chinese, on the other hand, abounds in equal-weight compounds. The place name *Zhen Xing* 'vitalize' mentioned earlier is a typical example of such compounds. *Zhen* means 'shake, brace up, buoy up,' and *Xing* means 'prosper, rise, prevail.' Because of the pervasiveness of the type in the language as a whole, it is not surprising that it also appears in place names. The compound may be composed of adjectives, as in the previously cited *Fu Rao*, translated as 'abundant' here, but consisting of two adjectives, both meaning 'rich, abundant.' Other place-name examples include *Hong Bai* 'red (and) white,' *Ma Lu* 'horse (and) deer,' *Tao Xing* 'peach (and) apricot,' *Lin Zhou* (two surnames), and *Qi Ba* 'seven (and) eight.'

In the broadest sense of the word descriptive, all place names are descriptive in that any place name defines a locality in such a way as to distinguish it from other localities. In a narrower sense, place names are descriptive if they specify natural features of the terrain or indicate animal, vegetable, or mineral entities associated with the locality. Probably descriptive names of this sort appear in every language and culture: certainly they are very common in both English and Chinese. They may merely specify relative size as in English *Big Bend*, *Little Compton*, *Great Barrington*, *Grand Canyon*, or in Chinese *Dai Shu* 'big tree,' *Dai Gang* 'big port,' *Xiao He* 'little river.' Or they may specify some permanent feature of appearance as in Chinese *Chang Bai Shan* 'eternal whiteness mountains,' so named because the mountains are covered with snow year-round or *She Shan* 'snake hill,' called thus because it is long and narrow like a snake. Completely parallel are the American place names *White Mountains* and *Grand Tetons*.

Color is another obvious feature to be used in place-naming. Corresponding to names like English *Red River* and *Yellowstone* are Chinese *Hong Shui* 'red water' and *Huang Shi* 'yellow stone.' But, while English tends to be rather sparing in its use of terms for hue in its place names, Chinese has a wealth of them, though they are not necessarily always descriptive of the topography. A few additional examples are *Hong Bai*

'red (and) white,' *Jin Lan* 'gold (and) blue,' *Huang Long* 'yellow dragon,' *Hei Jing* 'black well,' *Lu Chan* 'green spring,' and *Zi Xi* 'purple stream.'

A somewhat unimaginative but economical source of descriptive terms for place names is the points of the compass. English, of course, uses this device generously. In general, one of two stances is taken. One may implicitly assume some central point of reference and then name the entity with respect to its direction from this central point. Hence such place names as *Westerly*, *East Lansing*, *Northampton*, *The Midwest*, *The Central Valley*. Alternatively, one may use directional words to distinguish between two (or more) similar entities, resulting in such names as *North* and *South Dakota* or *Middle Fork*, *East Fork*, and *South Fork Salmon River*. Chinese uses the first of these techniques copiously: *Dong Hai* 'east sea,' *Zhong Guo* 'central kingdom' (China), *Nan Sha Qun-Dao* 'south sands archipelago,' and *Bei Da Huang* 'north big wilderness.' Examples of the second approach include *Bei Jing* 'northern capital' and *Nan Jing* 'southern capital,' and *Dong Dan* 'eastern flank' and *Xi Dan* 'western flank.' But, as suggested earlier, Chinese also employs a third kind of directional naming, that of identifying one type of entity by specifying its direction from another, different type of entity. Thus, for example, *Shan Dong* (Province) 'to the east of the mountain' (Tai Hang Mountain) and *Hu Nan* (Province) 'to the south of the lake' (Dong Ting Lake).

Perhaps the most unimaginative — but also inexhaustible — source of descriptive names is numbers. Numerals are most common as street names in both Chinese and English. However, while English is usually content with an ordinal numeral alone (*Fifth Avenue*, *Forty-second Street*), Chinese usually combines a cardinal numeral with another descriptive word or words. For example, in Han Kou, there is a series of streets named *Yi Yuan Lu* 'one primacy road,' *Er Yao Lu* 'two glory road,' *San Yang Lu* 'three sun road,' *Si Wei Lu* 'four dimension road,' and *Wu Fu Lu* 'five fortune road.' The second elements are the basic descriptive names, while the numerals are added merely to indicate the order in which the streets appear. A small street near Wu Fu Road is named *Wu Fu Xiao Lu* 'little five fortune road.'

Despite their subordinate role in street names, numbers are very important in Chinese place-naming and appear in thousands of place names. Frequently a village is designated solely by a number: *Er Shi Er* 'twenty-two' or *Qi Ba* 'seven (and) eight.' Other numerical examples include *Ba Bu* 'eight steps,' *Shi Li Pu* 'ten-li store,' *Liu Hu* 'six households,' *San Er Chang* 'three (and) two place,' and *Wu Shi* 'fifty.'

In using numerals to designate features other than streets, English normally uses ordinals for relative position and cardinals to indicate plurality or a group as a whole: *Second Beach* and *Third Beach*, but *Six Corners*, *Four Lakes*, *Thousand Islands*. As we mentioned earlier, Chinese does not distinguish between cardinal and ordinal in place names: *Er Tang* would always be translated as 'two ponds' and never as 'second pond.'

Not surprisingly, both Chinese and English use animal, vegetable, and mineral terms as place names, although, in both languages, it is often impossible to know whether the name originated as a descriptive term, an incident name, or even as a personal name. Parallel to *Fox Hill*, *Buffalo*, *Horse Creek*, *Coon Hollow*, *Eagle Mountain*, *Bullfrog Flats*, and *Phoenix* are Chinese *She Dao* 'snake island,' *Gou Jie* 'dog street,' *Bai Tu* 'white rabbit,' *Hu Pao Quan* 'tigers run spring,' *Huang Long* 'yellow dragon,' *Ma Lu* 'horse (and) deer,' and *Feng-Huang* 'phoenix.' Corresponding to English *Oak Ridge*, *Redwood City*, *Spruce Mountain*, *Rosedale*, and *Peachton* are such Chinese place names as *Dai Shu* 'big tree,' *Tao Xing* 'peach (and) apricot,' *Tao Zhuang* 'peach village,' and *Gu Rong Ying Bin* 'ancient banyan welcomes guests.' Parallel to such English names as *Iron Mountain*, *Silver City*, *Salt Lake*, or *Alum Mountain* are *Tie Lu* 'iron furnace,' *Tong Jing* 'copper well,' and *Qian Shan* 'lead mountain.' The city of *You Xi* 'having tin' was named for the great tin mine that once existed nearby; after the tin was exhausted, the city was renamed *Wu Xi* 'no tin.'

The practice of shifting names is common in both English and Chinese. The *Hudson River* gives its name to falls on that river, and the falls in turn provide the name for the nearby settlement of *Hudson Falls*. Similarly, in Chinese, *Zi Yang Hu* 'purple sun lake' gives its name to *Zi Yang Gong-Yuan* 'purple sun park' and *Zi Yang Lu* 'purple sun road.' Names transferred from one locality to another are too familiar in English to require further comment. But while Americans transfer names freely from virtually the entire world (*Paris*, *Berlin*, *Moscow*, *Delhi*, *Alexandria*, etc.), Chinese confines its transfers to other Chinese names. Thus many Chinese cities have a Shanghai Street or a Peking Avenue, but there is no Rome or Tokyo.

It is not always easy to draw the line between realistic — if optimistic — descriptive names and hyperbolic names. However, such English names as *Paradise*, *Prosperity*, *Eden*, *Hope*, and *Providence* clearly belong to the category of commendatory rather than descriptive names. Chinese parallels include *Wan-Shou Shan* 'longevity mountain,' *Bao Zhu Dong* 'cave of precious pearls,' *Tong Tian He* 'river going to heaven,' and

✕ *De He Yuan* 'garden of virtuous harmony.' Derogative hyperbole, exemplified by such American place names as *Hell's Half Acre*, *Hardscrabble*, *Devil's Canyon*, *Skunk's Misery*, or *Bug Hollow*, seems to be absent in contemporary Chinese place names. One earlier example is the ancient name of Taiwan, *Yi Zhou* 'barbarous province.'

As an alternative to describing the natural features of a locality, one may name it for the use to which it has been put by man. Such functional or occupational names are of course extremely common in English; the function may be specified in either the modifier or the generic term. Examples include *Valley Forge*, *Fort Wayne*, *Harpers Ferry*, *Furnace Creek*, *Fishtrap*, and *Mine Creek*. Chinese examples are *Du Kou* 'ferry,' *Jiu Dian* 'wineshop,' *Yu Gong Dao* 'fisherman's island,' *Jun Dian* 'army post,' and *Tie Chang* 'iron works.'

Naming places for people is also very common in both Chinese and English. Surnames are by far the most frequent form of personal names used in place names in both languages; examples of these were cited earlier. Earlier examples have also shown the occasional use in Chinese and English of a single name compounded from two surnames (English *Saybrook*, Chinese *Lin Zhou*). Making a name out of both the given name and the surname of an individual is much less common in both Chinese and English (English *Jeff Davis*, *Tom Dye Rock*; Chinese *Liu Ren-Ba* and *Fan Li*). The United States also has a number of place names made from two given names, usually feminine names (e.g., *Anjean*, *Annada*), but we found no examples of this in Chinese. The single given name as place name is also fairly common in the United States (*Hattiesburg*, *Elmira*, *Marias River*, etc.). It is very rare in Chinese, and the few examples found are probably better treated as commemorative names than as personal given names.

Although many place names unquestionably originate in incidents that occurred at or near the locality named, incident names are an elusive category because the incidents are so easily forgotten, and the resulting name is likely to be taken as a descriptive or personal name. Further, folk etymology often invents incidents to explain otherwise obscure names. Finally, it is frequently difficult to decide whether a name given as a result of an event should be classified as incidental or commemorative. Perhaps if the event is of importance to people other than those involved in it, the name could be labeled commemorative, but, even so, the distinction is not always easy to make. Of course, if the event or person being remembered in the name had no particular association with the locality, then the name is clearly commemorative and not incidental. Because of the difficulty of verifying incidental names, we will provide only commemorative examples here.

In both English and Chinese, political events, concepts, and figures account for a large number of commemorative names. Nearly every state in the United States has its *Washington*, *Lincoln*, and *Jackson*; its *Liberty*, *Freedom*, and *Union*. Likewise in China we find numerous entities named for Sun Yat Sen. *Jing Yu* was named after a famous general in the war against the Japanese. *Peng Liu Yang Lu*, a street in Wuhan, is named for three martyrs executed by the government during the Qing Dynasty. Liberation Roads, Democracy Streets, Victory Roads, People's Squares, Red Flag Streets, and the like abound throughout the country.

Religious and mythological place names appear in both English and Chinese. For such English names as *St. Paul*, *Falls Church*, *Angels Landing*, *Apollo*, *Valhalla*, and *Sharon*, there are the corresponding Chinese *Guan Yin* (name of a Bodhattva), *Fo Tang* 'Buddhist hall,' *Xian Jiang* 'immortal's descent,' and *Long Wang Miao* 'dragon king's temple.'

Literary influence in American place names is widespread, ranging from the classical city names like *Rome*, *Athens*, and *Utica*, through other exotic names (probably obtained from books) like *Canton*, *Cairo*, *Memphis*, and *Shanghai*, to the names of literary characters such as *Othello*, *Rob Roy*, *King Lear Peak*, and *Hiawatha*. Authors are represented by *Homer*, *Milton*, *Dickens*, *Bunyan*, *Byron*, and the like. There are no names of famous foreign cities in China, nor are larger entities named after famous authors or literary characters. Even Confucius' birthplace was not renamed in his honor. On the other hand, there has traditionally been a strong literary influence of another kind in Chinese place names. Poets competed in suggesting poetic names for scenic spots. High officials, including even emperors, were occasionally asked to name a place. For example, the emperor Kang Xi (Qing Dynasty) provided the place names *Ping Hu Qiu Yue* 'autumn moon on the calm lake' and *Liu Lang Wen Ying* 'among willow waves one hears orioles (singing).'

Partly because English avoids long phrases or clauses in place names, it lacks names that are actual literary quotations; we find no **Ora Pro Nobis* or **To Be Or Not To Be*. Chinese, with its more compact syntax and fewer syntactic restrictions on its place names, can have such names as *Duan Qiao Chan Xue* 'remaining snow (on the) broken bridge,' from two lines of a poem by Su Shi, a noted poet of the Song Dynasty.

It is perhaps a universal human attribute not to be content with merely having a name for a place, but to want an explanation of how the name originated. In every culture, folk etymologies arise to satisfy this need to know how and why. Examples from English traditions are so common as to require no documentation here. In traditions such as Old Irish, folk etymology is elevated to a kind of literary genre. Perhaps an example of a

Chinese folk etymology would be a fitting conclusion to these notes on Chinese and English place names.

In Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), there is a mountain named Fei Lai Feng. According to the legend, an Indian monk once visited Hangzhou. When he saw the mountain, he exclaimed, “Isn’t this the peak I saw in India? When did it fly over here?” Bystanders told him that the mountain had been there for thousands of years. The monk replied that he knew the name of a white ape living on the peak and that he could prove that he was right by summoning it. By chance, a white ape actually did appear when he called, and from that time on the mountain was called *Fei Lai Feng* ‘peak that flew over.’

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GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR, the Russian name for World War II. Translation of Russian *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina*.

—*The Barnhart Dictionary Companion*, Vol. 1, no. 2, p. 21.

GLAVLIT, *n.* the Soviet state censorship agency. The Chief Literary Administration (called “Glavlit”) must approve every word published in, or sent out of, the U. S. S. R. *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1955, p. 10.

Glavlit is an acronym of Russian *Glav(noye upravleniye po delam) lit(erature i izdatel'stvi)* Chief Administration for affairs of literature and publishing houses.

—*The Barnhart Dictionary Companion*, Vol. 1, no. 2, p. 22.

SOVIET UNION, RUSSIA

In the U. S. S. R., the distinction between *Rossiya* and *Sovietskii Soyuz* is religiously kept. In the West the two names are synonymous by dint of Russia’s historic domination of the area and its expansion after 1917. Officially, though, the appropriate name of the country is the Soviet Union.

—*The Barnhart Dictionary Companion*, Vol. 1, no. 2, p. 23.