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**Chinese Directional and Locational Place Names**

Semantic classifications of Chinese place names distinguish two important classes of toponyms called “directional place names, *fangwei diming* 方位地名” and “locational place names, *weizhi diming* 位置地名.” No general treatment of such names seems to be necessary since they are familiar in European cultures. In short, the semantic function of such toponyms is to denote the place concerned by indicating its position in reference to other topographic objects, i.e. neighbouring mountains, rivers etc. or nearby towns, counties, and villages which serve as landmarks or, in a broad sense, as “points of orientation.”

Chinese directional and locational place names are still incompletely explored. There are several short reference notes and articles, mainly by Chinese authors, but they deal only with sections of the subject, without any synthesis or even an attempt at it.

The purpose of this paper is to treat in some detail these two classes of toponyms, especially those names which refer to mountains, *shan* 山 and waters, *shui* 水, i.e. rivers, lakes and seas, as to their “points of orientation.” Such a limitation of the inquiry is due to the fact that geographical names refer most frequently to mountains and waters as typical landmarks.

The paper will discuss 222 toponyms. They have been selected, as being either directional or locational, from the research material consisting of 1991 names (of all semantic types) of the contemporary Chinese administrative divisions, i.e. names of 20 provinces, 1733 counties, and 238 municipalities and cities. This research material takes no account of names from the area of two provinces (Qinghai and Taiwan) and of five autonomous regions (Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Guangxi, Ningxia and Xinjiang). The names explored belong mainly to the toponomastic region of the Chinese language, while the names discarded belong to the toponomastic regions of other languages (Mongolian, Tibetan, Zhuang, Hui, Uygur and Manchurian). Such a limitation of the research material cannot even exclude all non-Chinese names since the administrative division of China only approximately corresponds to the division

into toponomastic regions. The research material can be considered exhaustive and representative for the Chinese names of the administrative units of the People's Republic of China in 1986. Thus, the directional and locational names discussed in the paper make 11.1% of all the Chinese names explored.

An examination of the structure of the directional and locational names of the contemporary Chinese administrative units reveals a certain pattern. The names consist of two parts: a qualifying part and an identifying part.

An identifying part is constituted by a name of a unit of the administrative division of China, i.e. a province, *sheng* 省; a county, *xian* 县; a municipality or a city, *shi* 市.

An identifying part always consists of one word (one syllable) and is placed as the last element of the whole name. Sometimes, as it happens in everyday use of place names, the identifying part is omitted, e.g., one may say "Hebei", not "the Hebei Province", etc.

A qualifying part in most cases consists of two elements, both of them monosyllabic units. One of these two elements refers to a mountain (water) as to "a point of orientation." There are four possible different relations between this element of the qualifying part and the mountain (the water) it refers to:

1. the element is identical with the proper name of the mountain (the water), which happens when the latter is also a monosyllabic word (most cases);
2. the element is identical only with a part of the proper name of the mountain (the water), if the latter consists of two or more syllables;
3. the element is constituted by a common noun "a mountain" ("water") or it can also be considered as a short form of the singular description "this mountain" ("this water");
4. the element is constituted by one word description specifying a characteristic feature of a mountain (water).

The second element of a qualifying part of a toponym is always an appropriate directional or locational term. These terms will be presented further on. They are regarded to be determinants of classifying the names as either directional or locational ones and of dividing these two classes of names into small groups.

An order of elements forming qualifying parts is, in general, fixed for the particular group of toponyms. For most cases the element referring to a mountain (water) as to "a point of orientation" comes first, whereas the directional or locational term is the second.

An analysis of the structure proves that the directional and locational place names originated as a kind of a singular description which can be formulated as "a province (a county, a city) situated in a given direction (localisation) in reference to a given mountain (water)."

Examination of the research material reveals that the directional and locational place names appeared at the very beginning of the Chinese naming system and the tradition of this kind of naming is still alive and unchanged. Among the names of the contemporary Chinese administrative units (or rather their qualifying parts) one can



find those which originated under the Zhou Dynasty (1122–256 B.C.) as well as those which have been established recently. Each example of the toponyms presented in this paper is followed by an approximate date of its origin or rather the origin of its qualifying part (in parentheses).

### Directional Place Names (112 cases)

The directional place names presented here denote a province (a county, a city) by indicating the direction of its position in reference to a mountain (water).

Such names in their qualifying parts comprise some special elements, called directional terms. These are mainly the names of the four cardinal points (compass bearings), *sizhi* 四至, but also their toponomastic equivalents. The directional terms being the names of the four cardinal points can be called “clear” or “explicit.” Their toponomastic equivalents can be regarded as “hidden” or “implicit” directional terms.

While examining the names of the contemporary Chinese administrative divisions one can find the following “clear” and “hidden” directional terms and formations of toponyms which comprise such terms as their determinants:

#### 1. “clear” directional terms and names:

*dong* 东, the east;

e.g.: the Hengdong County 衡东县, the Hunan Province, (1966), “east of the Heng Mountains 衡山” — 5 cases;

the Guidong County 桂东县, the Hunan Province, (the Song Dynasty 960–1279), “east of the Gui River 桂水” — 2 cases;

*xi* 西, the west;

e.g.: the Yuexi County 岳西县, the Anhui Province, (1936), “west of the Qian Yue Mountains 潜岳山” — 3 cases

the Fenxi County 汾西县, the Shanxi Province, (the Northern Qi Dynasty 550–589), “west of the Fen River 汾水” — 5 cases;

*nan* 南, the south;

e.g.: the Hengnan County 衡南县, the Hunan Province, (1952), “south of the Heng Mountains 衡山”, — 3 cases

the Luonan County 洛南县, the Shaanxi Province, (the Sui Dynasty 589–618), “south of the Luo River 洛水” — 14 cases;

*bei* 北, the north;

e.g.: the Luobei County 萝北县, the Heilongjiang Prov. (1912), “north of the Tuoluo Mountain 托萝山”, the Jiangbei County 江北县 the Sichuan Province, (the Qing Dynasty 1644–1912), “north of the Jialing River 嘉陵江” — 5 cases;

#### 2. “hidden” directional terms and names:

*yang* 阳, lit. “bright”, the south of a mountain and the north of water, as those sides which receive the sun;

e.g: the Hengyang County 衡阳县, the Hubei Province, (the Tang Dynasty 618–906), “south of the Heng Mountains 衡山” — 17 cases;

the Gaoyang County 高阳县, the Hebei Province, (the Zhou Dynasty 1122–256 B.C.), “north of Gao River 高河” — 49 cases;

*yin* 阴, lit. “shady”, “dark”; the north of a mountain and the south of a river, as those sides which remain in shade;

e.g.: the Mengyin County 蒙阴县, the Shandong Province, (the Han dynasty 206 B.C.–220 A.D.), “north of the Meng Mountain 蒙山” — 3 cases;

the Huaiyin County 淮阴县, the Jiangsu Province, (the Qin Dynasty 221–207 B.C.), “south of the Huai River 淮河” — 5 cases.

There are also some “hidden” directional terms which occasionally occur or occurred in the past in the field of Chinese geographical names, but unfortunately names comprising such terms are absent in the research material for this paper. Nevertheless, these terms deserve mentioning:

*chaoyang* 朝阳, lit. “facing the sun”; the eastern slope of a mountain; the east;

*xiyang* 夕阳, lit. “the setting sun”; the west as that side of a mountain which receives the afternoon sun;

*qian* 前, lit. “the front of”; “in front of”; the south of a mountain;

*hou* 后, lit. “the back of”; “behind”; the north of a mountain;

*zuo* 左, lit. “the left side”; the east;

*you* 右, lit. “the right side”; the west.

While ending the presentation of Chinese directional terms it is worth emphasizing the dominant role of the “hidden” directional term *yang*. The toponyms comprising *yang* make about 59% of the directional names analysed.

### Locational Place Names (110 cases)

The locational place names discussed here denote a province (a county, a city) by indicating its position in reference to a mountain (water).

Such names in their qualifying parts comprise some specific words of location, called locational terms. The locational terms, and analogically the locational names, can be divided into several groups. A type of localisation indicated by a locational term serves as a classification criterion:

#### 1. localisation near water (a mountain)

*lin* 临, to face; to overlook; near to;

e.g.: the Linru County 临汝县, the Henan Province, (1913), “near the Ru River 汝水” — 20 cases;

the Linq County 临朐县, the Shandong Province, (the Han Dynasty), “near the Qu Mountain 曲来” — 2 cases;

*wang* 望, to face; to look towards;



e.g.: the Wangjiang County 望江县, the Hebei Province, (the Sui Dynasty), “near the Chang Jiang (River) 长江”

the Wangdu County 望都县, the Hebei Province, (the Zhou Dynasty), “near the Gu (Du) Mountain 孤(都)山”;

yan 沿, to follow; to go along; to coast; along; by;

e.g.: the Yanhe County 沿河县, the Guizhou Province, (the Yuan Dynasty 1280–1368), “near the Wu River 乌江”;

bin 滨, to be close to; border on;

e.g.: the Binhai County 滨海县, the Jiangsu Province, (the Qin Dynasty), “close to the Yellow Sea 黄海” — 2 cases;

## 2. localisation on a river bank or seashore

pu 浦, a bank of a river;

e.g.: the Zhangpu County 漳浦县, the Fujian Province, (the Tang Dynasty 618–906), “on the bank of the Zhang River 漳水” — 5 cases;

gao 皋, a bank of a river;

e.g.: the Langao County 岚皋县, the Shanxi Province, (1917), “on the bank of the Lan River 岚河”;

bin 滨, a bank; a brink; a shore; a beach;

e.g.: the Huaibin County 淮滨县, the Henan Province, (1952), “on the bank of the Huai River 淮河” — 2 cases;

## 3. localisation at the place where rivers have their sources:

yuan 源, a spring; a source; a beginning;

e.g.: the Qinyuan County 沁源县, the Shanxi Province, (the Northern Wei Dynasty 368–534), “at the source of the Qin River 沁水” — 18 cases;

yuan 原, a source; a beginning;

e.g.: the Qingyuan County 清源县, the Liaoning Province, (1930), “at the source of the Qing River 清河” — 2 cases;

## 4. localisation at the upper reaches of a river

shang 上, upper; up; upwards;

e.g.: the Yingshang County 颖上县, the Anhui Province, (the Sui Dynasty), “at the upper reaches of the Ying River 颖水” — 3 cases;

## 5. localisation at the middle reaches of a river

zhong 中, a middle; a centre;

e.g.: the Zizhong County 资中县, the Sichuan Province, (the Han Dynasty), “at the middle reaches of the Zi River 资水” — 5 cases;

## 6. localisation at the lower reaches of a river, in place where it falls into another river, a lake or a sea

men 门, an entrance; a gate;

e.g.: the Haimen County 海门县, the Jiangsu Province, (The Posterior Zhou Dynasty 951–960), “in place where Chang Jiang 长江 falls into the Eastern Sea 东海” — 4 cases;

*kou* 口, an opening; a mouth of a river;

e.g.: the Hukou County 湖口县, the Jiangxi Province, (the Tang Dynasty), “in place where Chang Jiang falls into the Poyang Lake 鄱阳湖” — 7 cases;

#### 7. localisation at the confluence of the tributaries

*he* 合, to join;

e.g.: the Hejiang County 南汇县, the Sichuan Province, (the Northern Zhou Dynasty 557–581), “at the confluence of the Tuo River 沱江 and Chang Jiang 长江” — 5 cases;

*hui* 汇, to gather into one place; waters converging to one spot;

e.g.: the Nanhui County 南汇县, the Shanghai Municipality, (the Ming Dynasty 1368–1644), “at the place where the Southern, *nan* 南, flow of the tidewater joins the Qiantang River 钱塘江”;

*tun* 屯, to collect; to assemble;

e.g.: the Tunxi City 屯溪县, the Anhui Province, (1949), “at the confluence of the rivulets, *xi* 溪, i.e. the Xin'an River 新安江, the Heng River 横江 and the Yucun River 榆村江”;

*hui* 会, to assemble; to join; to meet;

e.g.: the Huitong County 会同县, the Henan Province, (the Song Dynasty), “at the confluence of the Hong River 洪江, the Qu River 渠河, the Tan River 潭溪, the Lang River 朗江 and the Yuan River 沅江”, the word *tong* 同 means “together”, it is not “a point of orientation”, but the result of the action of assembling; 2 cases;

*jiao* 交, to join; to intercourse;

e.g.: the Jiaohe County 交河县, the Hebei Province, (the Jin Dynasty 265–317), “at the confluence of the Hu Tuo (River) 滹沱 and the Zhang River 漳水” — 2 cases;

The same localisation can also be indicated by the use of numerals which replace either a locational term or “a point of orientation”:

e.g.: the Shuangliu County 双流县, the Sichuan Province, (the Han Dynasty), “at the confluence of two, *shuang* 双, tributaries, *liu* 流, i.e. the Min River 岷江 and the Wen River 温水” — 8 cases; the Sihui County 四会县, the Guangdong Province, (the Qin Dynasty), “at the confluence of four, *si* 四, tributaries — only two are known — the Sui River 绥江 and the Bei River 北江”.

#### 8. localisation at the bend of a river (a mountain)

*qu* 曲, a bend;

e.g.: the Hequ County 河曲县, the Shanxi Province, (the Jin Dynasty), “at the bend of the Yellow River, Huang He 黄河” — 2 cases;



*zhou* 輜, a bend of a mountain;

*zhi* 阡, a bend of a river;

The last two terms are now practically disused, cf. point 3 below.

9. *localisation between two mountains or rivers*

*zhong* 中, in the middle; between; among;

e.g.: the Hanzhong County 汉中县, the Shanxi Province, (the Qin Dynasty) “between the Han River 汉水 and the Han Mountain 汉山”;

*jian* 间, between; among;

e.g.: the Hejian County 河间县, the Hebei Province, (the Northern Wei Dynasty), “situated among rivers”.

There are 12 toponyms which deserve special treatment. The qualifying parts of these place names consist only of directional or locational terms without any element referring to a mountain (water) as “a point of orientation”.

These toponyms can be regarded as:

1. clearly directional

e.g.: the Nanyang County 南阳县, the Henan Province, (the Qin Dynasty), “south of the Funiu Mountain 伏牛山 and north of the Han River 汉水” — 5 cases;

2. mixed directional-locational

e.g.: the Quyang County 曲阳县, the Hebei Province, (the Zhou Dynasty), “south of the bend of the Taihang Mountains 太行山” — 3 cases;

3. clearly locational

e.g.: the Zhouzhi County, untill 1964 盩厔县 since 1964 周至县, the Shanxi Province, (the Han Dynasty), “north of the bend of the Qinling Mountains 秦岭 and south of the bend of the Wei River 渭河” — 4 cases.

The long existence of the majority of Chinese directional and locational names has resulted in some deformations of their semantic clarity and in violations of what can be called “the correspondence between the name and reality”.

The blurrings of semantic clarity were caused by changes of the characters used for writing down the names. The reasons for such changes could be different. The most common were: the phenomenon of the personal name taboo<sup>1</sup> and the tendency to the simplification of Chinese characters.

The phenomenon of the personal name taboo appeared in China at the time of the Zhou Dynasty and was done away with by the Revolution of 1911. Characters used for writing down the sacred personal names (especially those of the emperors and members of their families) were avoided and if these particular characters had

<sup>1</sup> For further information on this subject see: I. Kałużyńska, *The Taboo and Chinese Geographical Names*, “Orientalia Varsoviensia”, 3, 1990, pp. 17-35.



been used for any other proper names or words, they had to be substituted by other characters. It was within the emperor's authority to decide which names were to be changed (as usual, the names known throughout the country, among others the names of the administrative divisions). So it happened that out of many names which in their written form had a taboo character, only some were changed while others remained in the original form. For example, under the Han Dynasty the Zhaoyang County 昭陽縣 was established since it was located "north of the Zhaoling River 昭陵水"; during the reign of the emperor Wu (266–290) of the Jin Dynasty the name of the county was changed into Shaoyang 邵陽, as the personal name of the emperor's father was Zhao 昭. Thus, there are now the Shaoyang County 邵陽縣, the Hunan Province, and the Zhaoling River 昭陵水 as its "point of orientation".

In present-day China there is a strong tendency towards the simplification of Chinese characters, especially those in everyday use (as the characters for the names of the administrative units). Among place names there are plenty of toponyms preserving, in their written form, characters which are rarely used or used only in the field of geographical names, the so-called *shengpizi* 生僻字. In many cases such characters are now substituted by others used for homophonous or nearly homophonous words. This kind of substitution preserves the original sound of the toponym but blurs its etymological clarity and results in a different form of writing down that name. For example, during the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581) the Qianyang County 汧陽縣 was established since it was situated "south of the Qian Mountain 汧山". In 1964, in order to eliminate the character *qian* 汧, used only in the geographical naming, the name of the county was changed into Qianyang 千陽, when *qian* 千 means "a thousand; many". The etymological clarity of the name of the Qianyang County (the Shanxi Province) has been blurred.

While examining the correspondence between the name and the actual position (localisation) of the area denoted, one may conclude that in many cases such a correspondence does not exist, for example the name of the Liaoyang County 遼陽縣, (the Liaoning Province) suggests that the county is situated "north of the Liao River 遼水", but in fact it is located east of that river. Under the Han Dynasty when the name Liaoyang was used for the first time to denote a county, the name had its justification in real geographical conditions of the area. Now, after two thousand years of frequent changes of the Chinese administrative divisions the name does not correspond to the real geographical position of the county it denotes.

It happens that in order to preserve the correspondence between the name and the actual area denoted, the name of a county is changed according to a new position or localisation of a county area. For example, during the Sui Dynasty the Runan County 汝南縣 was established, since it was situated "south of the Ru River 汝水". In 1913 the name of the county was changed into Ruyang 潁陽, "north of the Ru River", because that was its actual position (the Henan Province).

While ending the presentation of the Chinese directional and locational place names referring to mountains (waters) as their "points of orientation", it must be



added that beside the toponyms analysed in this paper there are also about 200 names in which the words called here the directional or locational terms occur. They are mainly used to indicate a direction or localisation of places in reference to other "points of orientation" and sometimes for different purposes.

In some cases the toponyms really appear to be directional or locational ones, but in fact they are not. For example, the name of the Pingyang County 平阳县, the Zhejiang Province, is not connected with the geographical position of the county area, but with the name of the Pingyang Mountain 平阳山. So it cannot be regarded as directional, but as a place name derived from the name of a mountain.

All that proves once again that the correct interpretation of toponyms is possible only on the basis of a great amount of verified data.

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