

A Brief Analysis on the Differences Between Chinese Names and Western Names as Well as Their Cultural Connotation

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of the modern society and the increase of the international exchange, name has become more and more crucial to the modern persons as a very important identity symbol. As a result, more and more college English teachers and cultural scholars have begun to focus on such a topic during the past two decades. This thesis mainly makes a detail analysis on the differences between Chinese names and Western names from the following aspects respectively, the differences of the surname origin between China and Western countries, the differences of the structures as well as the categories between China and Western countries and the differences of the way of selecting the names between China and Western countries. On basis of the above parts, the author makes a detail instruction on the cultural connotation contained in Chinese names and Western names to provide with some valuable references and impel the relevant research to move forward further in the coming years.

Keywords: Chinese names, Western names, Differences, Cultural connotation.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that name plays a very important role in the social communication, political activities and economical lives as a conspicuous mark to distinguish different persons in the society. However, during its consistent development, name has been influenced by many different kinds of factors such as cultural values, social systems, religious convictions, ethnic history, geographic environment and life styles, which make it endowed with many different kinds of distinctive characteristics. Starting with the comparison of the origins between Chinese names and Western names, this thesis will make a detail instruction on the differences between Chinese names and Western names from the following aspects such as the structure, source and the way of selecting names; furthermore it will make a deep analysis on different cultural connotation behind Chinese names and Western names, which will be helpful to deplete the misunderstanding between different persons especially from different cultural

background, promoting the intercultural communication among the people in the world.

2. THE DIFFERENCE OF THE SURNAME ORIGIN BETWEEN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

In China, the earliest surname can be dated back to the period of the matriarchal clan in the primitive society, when people tended to use the name of the tribe head as the surname of all the members in the whole tribe. As a result, there were lots of surnames to start with the female radical such as “姚”, “姬”, “姜”, “嬴”, “姒” when people began to make use of the surnames.[1] During the period the surnames were endowed with the function to determine whether males could be allowed to get married with females. If the males and the females belonged to the same tribe, they would be forbidden to get married with each other. Also some tribes tended to make use of the totems from the nature as their tribal names, which became another origin of Chinese surnames such as “云”, “龙”, “牛”, “马”,

“羊”，“熊”，“鹿”，“鱼”，“鲍”，“花”，“杨”，“柳”和“梅”。As the tribe became larger and larger, the original clan had to be divided into some small ones and people in the clan began to find some new habitats. When the Western Zhou dynasty was founded, the system of enfeoffment was established, there appeared lots of small states. And the people at that time began to make use of the names of the habitats or states as their surnames, such as “鲁”，“齐”，“晋”，“秦”，“楚”，“韩”，“魏”，“陈”，“宋”，“蔡”，and so on. These surnames not only signified their origins but also fostered a sense of identity and belongings. With the further development of the society, more and more professions began to come out. And the names of some professions became the original of Chinese surnames such as “陶”，“乐”，“巫”，“匠”，“屠”，“史”，“卜”，“师”，“商”，“农”，“张” and so on. As the establishment of the feudal states and the development of the capital cities. The names of some official positions and the specific locations for people to inhabit in the city also became the source of the Chinese surnames such as “东门”，“西门”，“南郭”，“司马”，“司徒”，“司空”，“尉迟”，“上官”，“令狐”，“帅”，“尉”，etc. In addition, some Chinese surnames come from the title or the posthumous title of the forefathers or ancestors, such as “王”，“侯”，“公” and so on.[5] What's more, some Chinese surnames come from the colors in the nature such as “红”，“黄”，“蓝”，“白”，“黑”. And there are some surnames coming from the minority nationalities such as “呼延”，“宇文”，“慕容”，“长孙”，“独孤”，“贺兰”，“端木”，“金”，“那” and “包”.

When it comes to the Western surnames, they began to appear much later than their names. Before Normans invaded into Great Britain in 1066, the British persons had no surnames. Only after Normans came to the islands of Great Britain, most Westerners began to make use of the surnames in order to distinguish the persons with the similar names or avoid the repetition of the names in the daily lives.[3] Unlike Chinese persons, most of whom pay great attention to their surnames, the Westerners tend to take a casual attitude towards their surnames, which can be reflected from the source of the Westerners' surnames. Some surnames tend to be associated with the landform or the landscape of their ancestors' resident places such as “Field”，“Hill”，“Wood”，“Moor”，“Lake”，“River”，and “Bush” Some Western surnames tend to have something to do with the work or the jobs for their forefathers to take up such as “Carpenter”，“Cook”，“Goldsmith”，“Copper smith”，“Blacksmith” “Baker” “Barber”，“Thatcher”，“Tailor”，“Fisher” and “Hunter”. Also, there are

some Western surnames that are linked with some natural phenomena such as “Snow”，“Rain” “Thunder”，“Frost”，“Cloud”，“Summer”，“Winter” and “May”. Even some surnames come from the names of the animals or plants from the nature which are very similar to some Chinese surnames such as “Bird”，“Fish”，“Lion”，“Swan”，“Wolf”，“Fox”，“Apple”，“Rose”，and “Flower”. And like the Chinese surnames, there are some Western surnames that come from the colors in the nature such as “Brown”，“Pink”，“Red”，“Silver” and “White”. Even some Westerners tend to make use of the names of some specific things or vessels such as “Agate”，“Coffin”，“Glass”，“Lever”，“Stone”，“Vane”，which is usually thought to be strange or unimaginable from most Chinese' points of view. In addition, there are some Western surnames that are related to the body characteristics of people in their daily life, such as “Long”，“Strong”，“Short”，“Small”，“Fat” and “Stern” which is also difficult to be understood in most Chinese's eyes. Last but not least, some Western surnames come from the names of their family members like their father or grandfather, which can be reflected in the following surnames such as “Johnson”，“Anderson”，“Stevenson”，“Williamson” and “Thomson”.

3. THE DIFFERENCES OF THE STRUCTURES AND CATEGORIES BETWEEN CHINESE NAMES AND WESTERN NAMES

When it comes to the structure of Chinese names and Western names, as a result of the differences of cultures values, thinking patterns and religious faiths, there are lots of distinctions between the two. Generally speaking, both Chinese names and Western names are made up of three parts, which include first name, middle name and family name or surname. However, there are quite a few differences of the sequential order while making use of them in the daily life. In China, people tend to put their family names or surnames before their first names or given names. However, most Westerners tend to place their first names before their family names or surnames. For example, In the Chinese name like “林浩东”，“浩东” is the first name or given name, and “林” is the surname, however the surname “林” has been put before the first name or given name “浩东”. Meanwhile, in the Western name “Black Smith”，Black is the first name or given name, and Smith is the family name. But the family name “Smith” has been placed behind the first name “Black”. Apart

from what has been said above, both Chinese names and Western names have the middle names, but these middle names denote quite different meaning in their respective linguistic environment. In China, the middle name or the middle Chinese character in the full name is usually called “辈分”, which stands for the seniority of in his or her large family. Taking a Chinese name “唐建军” for an example, here “建” shows the position of the person in his family clan. On the contrary, in Western countries, the middle name is also called the baptism name. When the little children are more than one month after the birth, Western parents tend to take them to the church for receiving a baptism. Before that, the parents have to make an appointment with the priest in advance. On that day, the children’s parents, together with their god parents take the babies to the church, where the priest tends to baptize the baby. After the baptism, the priest will make a name for the baby, which is called the baptism name.[2] There are some Westerners who tend to make use of their father’s or grandfather’s name as their middle names. And in the daily life, most Westerners don’t make use of their middle names as often as possible, therefore sometimes, they tend to use one letter to substitute their middle names. For example, a person with the name of John Peter Smith can be called “John P. Smith and the name “George Walk Bush can be also written “George W. Bush. In some cases, if some persons in Western countries don’t like their first names, they tend to make use of their middle names as often as possible, where such middle names equal to their first names actually. For example, if a person with the name of “John Henry Brown” doesn’t like his first name. He can make use of his middle name “Henry” in the daily life as often as possible.

As for the categories of names, Chinese persons tend to have much more diversified names than Westerners especially in Chinese ancient time. For most Chinese persons, as well as their formal names which contain the first name or the given name, they tend to have a pet name, which is usually used by their parents, grandparents or some other members in their families to display an intimate relationship between family members such as “小明”, “小强”, “小刚”, “小龙”, “小虎”, “玲玲”, “宁宁”, “晶晶”, “璐璐”, “兰儿”, “翠儿” and so on. In some rural areas in the past, in order to show their expectation for their children to live and grow healthily, the parents tended to choose some ungraceful pet names such as “狗蛋儿”, “狗剩儿”, “铁蛋儿”, “臭蛋儿”, “毛孩儿”, “毛妞儿”, “留根儿”, “锁柱

儿”, “门栓儿”, “门墩儿” etc. Also, in the daily life, people tend to make some nick names for some persons according to their appearance, temper, personality and the physical characteristics in order to display a close relationship between good friends or show their admiration for the persons with some special talents, such as “飞毛腿”, “话痨”, “百灵鸟”, “智多星”, “学霸”, “篮球王子”, “音乐达人”, “老黄牛”, “故事大王”, “电影迷”, and “戏篓子”. However, while making the nick name for others, it is necessary to pay attention to the situation and try to avoid making use of some insulting words in order not to offend them. As well as the pet name and the nick name, some celebrities or scholars tend to be given a courtesy name to show their extraordinary identity. In ancient China, when the boy was twenty years old, he tended to receive a capping ceremony. After holding such a ceremony, he would be given a courtesy name by his parents or some reputable persons in the family clan. The courtesy name is usually used among their family members and good friends, also it can be used in the social communication especially for taking part in some public activities. And lots of ancient or modern famous figures tend to possess their courtesy name. For example, the courtesy name of Li Bai, a world famous poet in Tang dynasty was “太白”, and “子美” was the courtesy name of another famous poet in Tang Dynasty, Du Fu; For some figures during the period of Three Kingdoms, the courtesy name of Zhao Yun was “子龙” and “孔明” was the courtesy name of Zhuge Liang. When it come comes to some modern celebrities, the courtesy name of Mao Zedong was “润之” while “翔宇” was the courtesy of the prime minister, Zhou Enlai. Besides the courtesy names, some ancient scholars also tended to name themselves a pseudonym (号) to demonstrate their grand aspiration. For examples, Li Bai also called himself to be “青莲居士”, and Su Shi was also called to be “东坡居士”. As a famous female poet in South Song dynasty, Li Qingzhao was also called “易安居士” while the famous poet in East Jin Dynasty, Tao Yuanming also named himself to be “五柳先生”. [4] What’s more, some famous writers or artists tend to make the pen names or the stage names such as “鲁迅”, “巴金”, “茅盾”, “曹禺”, “老舍”, “梅兰芳”, “小白玉霜”, “小彩舞”, “白牡丹” and “芙蓉草”. Compared with Chinese names, Western names don’t have so many categories. Besides the baptism name or the Christian name that have been said above, most Westerners usually make use of the pet names in some informal situations among the family members or good friends such as “Bob”, “Tom”, “Jack”, “Peter” and “John”. Sometimes, Westerners

also tend to make some nickname (绰号) according to a person's appearance, temperament, disposition, behaviour and physical characteristics, which is similar to most Chinese persons in their daily life. Perhaps the most typical nicknames in Western countries are Uncle Sam and John Bull, which have described the image of Americans and British persons vividly and lively in the mind of most people in the world.

4. THE DIFFERENCE OF THE WAY OF SELECTING NAMES BETWEEN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

In China, most parents tend to express their beautiful expectation, aspiration and bailment while choosing the names for their children such as “建国”, “治国”, “安国”, “定国”, “建华”, “永清”, “永康”, “永发”, “长生”, “超凡”, “超尘”, “立群”, “掌印”, “耀祖”, “志高”, “志坚”, “志强” etc. Some parents prefer to choose the names according to the seasons, the solar terms or the weather conditions in which their children were born. For examples some children are named with the words of seasons, solar terms or weather conditions like “春生”, “秋生”, “冬生”, “清明”, “谷雨”, “小满”, “雨生”, “雨晨”, “雪生”, and so on. Some children's names are associated with their birth places such as “京生”, “沪生”, “鲁豫”, “苏淮”, “黄河”, “长江”, “粤生”, “湘生” and “港生”. And the girls' names are usually related to some plants and flowers such as “梅”, “兰”, “菊”, “荷”, “桃”, “百合”, “玫瑰”, “茉莉”, “水仙” and “牡丹”. [7] As well, some parents tend to choose the names according to their children's birth date and the eight characters at the birth moment. Before giving the name to the children, they tend to ask the fortune-teller to make a comparison between the children's eight characters at the birth and the five elements (gold, wood, water, fire, soil), making a judgement about the element for their children to be lack of. Then they can give the names accordingly. For example, if the child has no wood in the eight characters at the birth, it is best to give him a name with some words associated with wood such as “林” and “森”. If a child is lack of fire in the eight characters at the birth, it will be beneficial to give him or her the name with some word related to fire such as “炎”, “焱” and “焱”. As for the children without enough gold in their eight characters at the birth, it is best to make them the names with the words containing gold such as “金” and “鑫”. And for the child with the lack of water in his or her eight characters at the birth, it is a good idea to choose a name with some

words connected with water such as “江”, “河”, “湖”, “海”, “洋”, and “淼”. But if both fire and soil are deficient in the eight characters of some persons at the birth, they had better choose the names with the words containing fire and soil such as “煜堃”. Sometime, Chinese parents tend to give the names to their children according to the sequence of the children among brothers or sisters. During the Western Zhou dynasty, the first child was called “伯”, the second child “仲”, the third child “季” and the fourth child “叔”. Since then, these words have been used in the Chinese names.

When it comes to Westerners' way of selecting names, there are both some similarities and differences in comparison with Chinese way of selecting names. However, Westerners' names tend to be influenced by many different kinds of elements. While making the baptism name, they would like to choose some fair-sounding and smooth spelling words such as “Grace”, “Harlow”, “Amy” and “Brook”. Westerners' way of selecting names is also influenced by Western culture and Western religions; lots of Western names come from the the main characters from the Bible, the ancient Greek literature and the ancient Roman culture. For example, Abraham comes from Hebrew which means “father of nationality”. However, Abraham was also the forefather of Jews, who was thought to be strong, honest and clever, therefore, lots of Westerners would like to choose it as their baptism name. And there are lots of Western names coming from the bible such as “Adam”, “Aaron”, “Benjamin”, “David”, “Eve”, “Isaac”, “Jacob”, “John”, “Danial”, “Joseph”, “Moses”, “Noah”, “Peter”, “Rebecca”, “Sarah” Simon” and “Thomas “. “Arthur” was said to be the king of Great Britain, which left others an impression of a wise person to keep the promise; Solomon was the son of David, the king of ancient Israel, who was said to be the embodiment of wisdom; Gabriel was the angel to tell the happy news in the religious legendary. Therefore, these names are very popular with lots of Westerners. The names form the ancient Greek culture and the ancient Roman culture include respectively “Cynthia”, “Daphne”, “Flora”, “Irene”, “Diana”, “Iris” and “Beatrice”, which are also the popular names with the girls in Western countries. In addition, some Westerners usually choose the names of the seniors, the predecessors or the social celebrities as their names such as “Roosevelt”, “Edward”, “Lincoln”, “Washington”, and “Richard”. Also, some Western names have something to do with their forefather's resident

places, states or cities such as “Virginia”, “Georgia”, “Dallas”, “Colorado”, “Huston”, “Denver” and “Preston”. Just Like most Chinese persons, When Westerners make the names for the girls, they would like to choose some beautiful and graceful words such as “Alisa”, “Daisy”, “Donna”, “Amber”, and “Amy”. While making the names for the boys, they tend to make use of some words that can demonstrate the males’ masculine quality of being handsome, strapping and strong such as “Andrew”, “Derek”, “Brian” and “Aaron”. [7]

5. THE CULTURAL CONNOTATION CONTAINED IN CHINESE NAMES AND WESTERN NAMES

As everybody knows, language is an important carrier of culture. And as a very important constituent part of language, names from different regions contain the deep cultural connotation. China is a country with the history of more five thousand years and Confucianism has had a far-reaching influence on most Chinese persons’ daily life as well as their cultural values. As a result, since the ancient time, family has been occupying the most important position in the mind of most Chinese people. Most ancient young person tend to work hard for seeking fame and success in order to glorify their large family. That is to say, most Chinese persons tend to take the priority of the collective interests over their individual benefits. [6] That’s the reason why the Chinese persons usually put their family names before their first names, which reflects a universal social phenomenon of paying great attention to the family names and looking down upon the first names. After all, lots of surnames have passed down from generation to generation for about thousands of years, which represents a glory or a heritage which can not be changed easily. Just like a saying goes among most Chinese people, it is easier to change ones’ names but their surnames. And from the historical point of view, a large family would never change their family names unless they tried to escape from the punishment of being beheaded, or the whole family was endowed with a new surname by the emperor. Even nowadays, in the daily life, if people want to get to know and make friends with each other, they also tend to ask “Could you tell me your surname?”, which can demonstrate what an important status the family name takes up in the mind of most Chinese people.

However, for most Westerners, on account of the deep influence of the Christianity. Seeking the

individuality, freedom and equality has been the common goal for Westerners to be in the pursuit of, which can also be reflected in Western name culture. Unlike most Chinese persons who tend to put their family names first, Most Western persons tend to put their first names or the given names before their family names. And the Western surnames emerged only more than one thousand years after their first names came out. These phenomena can turn out the fact adequately that most Westerners tend to pay great attention to their first name or the given name rather than their surnames, which can demonstrate fully that Westerners tend to concern more about themselves, try to seek their own individuality. It is known that the first pronoun is always denoted with the capital letter “I”, showing the lofty status of the individual in their mind, and as for the meaning of the surnames, the explanation to be given in English is the names that ones share with other members of their family, which also shows what most Westerners focus on is the first names of the persons for them to talk with instead of the family names, That’s the reason why most Westerners tend to start a topic by asking the others “Could you tell your first name?” when they want to get to know and make a friend with the others. As well, comparing to Chinese surnames which have been inherited for thousands of years, containing the rich family heritage and culture, Western surnames seem to be more casual, more informal, manifesting the quality of Westerners to pursue the individuality and freedom. Finally, while selecting the first names for the children, both Chinese and Western parents tend to express their yearning for beautiful things. The boys’ names are usually associated with the words such as strength, bravery, nobility and valiance while the girl names are usually related to the words with the meaning of being beautiful, elegant and graceful or the names of plants and flowers. The distinction lies in their different concerns. Most Chinese person tend to connect their children names to the flourish of the large family, after all in China the individual destiny is mostly determined by the prospect of the whole family. Conversely, what most Westerners care about is their individual growth and their future development while choosing the names for their children.

6. CONCLUSION

As a very important constituent part of Intercultural communication, pushing forward the research on the name differences between China

and Western countries is of great significance to remove the misunderstanding, promoting the understanding as well as the mutual respect between the people from different cultural background and establishing the human community with a hared future. Of course, the research on the name differences between China and Western countries is a complicated and systematic project; it is not possible to accomplish in a short time, instead it needs the common effort and mutual coordination from most college English teachers and lots of cultural scholars. Only by doing this, can people's cognition on the name differences between China and Western countries be deepened more greatly, and can the research about the intercultural communication be carried forward further in the future.

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