

# An Intercultural Comparative Study on Names of Chinese and English\*

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**Abstract**—To know a society usually starts from the contact with its people through their names. Names are told to each other at the first encounter. People all form distinct impressions when they first hear a name. A name is not only a mark or a symbol that distinguishes people from each other but also full of cultural message of a nation. Such as, language, history, geography, religion, customs, value and class status, etc... With the globalization all over the world, people can use lots of ways contact with foreigners. As we know in term of the eastern and western cultures, the Chinese and English are the typical representatives. It was originated from two different traditions, and manifest two distinct cultural backgrounds. So there are great differences on philological view, religious belief and historical development. Hence, the perception of name also has something different. In some way, these differences influence severely of intercultural communications. In a word, it is necessary for people to know and learn how to improve it. Therefore, there is no doubt that people should pay more attention to the study of differences in names of Chinese and English in Cross-cultural Communication. The most key point is that people should try their best to avoid misunderstanding and conflict that caused by different names perspective while communicating. So, our intercultural communication activities can make a great progress.

**Index Terms**—names, cross-cultural communication, cultural differences, measures

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of modern countries, there are more and more cultural conflicts on cross-cultural communication. It is well-known that people communicate with others mainly through language, which expresses us the largest information. So it is certain that people think highly of language information. Accordingly, in terms of names English and Chinese have their own characters on the way of expression and usage. On the following text, the thesis will analysis the differences deeply in some ways with the purpose of grasping the deeper meaning of personal names in both English and Chinese, thus it can help people make communication more effective, more smoothly with western people. It is necessary to know the mutual names that will benefit to communication among people from different cultural background, which aims to help people to know two classic cultures through personal names, learn to use something benefit from each other. By careful survey over Chinese and English name, this thesis tries to explore different cultural psychological attributes in both Chinese and English. By the information window, people can easier perceive some countries and its culture deeply. In addition, by learning the mutual translation of names, the most key point is that people should try their best to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts while communicating. If people can have a good understanding on different name conception, intercultural communication activities will make a great progress.

### **Definition of name**

Name is a mark, everybody has his name when he was born in the world. Since then, name will accompany us go through all of the difficult that we will face. Someone use name to express some spirits, some people want to do something in the future by called name, other people also want their baby to be a outstanding people by called a better name. It is generally known that name as a cultural phenomenon both in English and Chinese cultures. We know Chinese and other countries have different meanings towards names. What people need do is link it to a nation's historical and cultural background, so people can correctly understand its meanings if they combine it with its background. For this reason, there are many similar name cultures and different name cultures in both Chinese and English.

Firstly, the thesis will talk about the definition of “family name” and “given name” in Chinese. A Chinese name can divide into four parts, family name, surname, clan name and given name. But for convenience, it is preferred translate family name and given name. We usually put surname and clan name into family name when it is no necessity to be distinguished. In *modern dictionary* defines “family names” as “words suggesting a family”, and “given names” as “one word or words together with family, representing the specific meaning between a certain people and other people”.

Secondly, the thesis will talk about the definition of “given name” and “family name” in English. “given name” is christian name, when a baby was born he or she can acquire a name. “family name” means “surname”, it is connected

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with its given name or its kinship, but it does not emphasize blood relationship.

## II. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH PEOPLE'S NAMES

Name is a special cultural language, it reflects some social history, cultural spirit and religious customs of this nation. It is a significant epitome of cultural of a nation. People know that there are some similarity in name system both in Chinese and English speaking countries. But Chinese name system vary from English name system. After thinking the differences, people can get the following revelation.

### A. *Origins of Chinese Family Names*

First, the Chinese family names system is far more than the English family names system. Not only the form is more complex than English name, and occupies an extraordinarily important position in people's thinking conception. When it is long time ago Chinese family names was generated and it was appeared before given names. China is one of the pioneer that use family names all over the world. As far as Chinese people concerned, family names were a individual symbol of family. Chinese family names originated mankind previous primitive tribe in the matriarchal society. Since the origins of family names were centered on woman. So the children who raised by the same woman have the same family name. At that time, family name was a mark in a tribe. Chinese family names based on the Han nationality, generally speaking, based on the studies by other people, family names can be divided into some main parts originated as following. 1. some ancient family names used which indicate that family names originates from matriarchal society. Such as: Jiang (姜), Ji (姬), Yao (姚), Yun (云), Niu (牛) and so on. 2. Some family names used by the title of their ancestor, such as Xuanyuan (轩辕), Gaoyang (高阳). 3. Stemmed from the place of residence, for example, Dongguo (东郭), Ximen (西门), Nangong (南宫) are all of this kind. 4. In ancient times, some family names are come from its fief, such as Qin (秦), Chu (楚), Qi (齐), Song (宋) belong to this class. 5. Derived from titles or someone professions, such as Wang (王), Hou (侯), Qian (钱), Sima (司马), Wei (尉) belong to this class. 7. National minority translate their names to Chinese, for instance, Yuwen (宇文), Bai (白), Bao (包) are all of this kind.

### B. *Origins of English Family Names*

Compared with Chinese family names, the history of English family names looks so tininess. It was appeared in the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the British people do not have family until the Norman conquest of Britain, British began to have their family names. At first, family names only can used by the nobility or the rich. It was as the symbol of honor and position. But with the pace of feudal society and a steep increase of British population, there are no enough family names used by people. In order to solve that problem, British began to use many ways to acquire their names and then they gradually come into a complete family names system in the end. English family names express some implications at first, but as time went by it fade away its original meaning. It became a cultural mark. The study show that there some primary origins as following. 1. Names derived from their profession, Cook come from the person who cook dinner, Smith who link to steel, Clerk means that person work in a organization, Tailor originated some people make clothes, these names are all of this group. 2. Stemmed from the topography of their residence, for example, someone lived near a small hill, he or she can called Hill as family name. In addition, Lake means someone like live near the lake, so other call them as Lake. If people who reside in wood, generally speaking, other will call them as Wood. Others like Brook, Bush, Moor are similar to this situation. 3. Some family names were characterized by body or personality. For instance, Small was called as the person who body look very tiny, Short means a certain people undersized than other people. Other just like Wise, Long were the same situation as this. 4. The name stemmed from the place where people residence, such as Kent, London, York and other some places are come from England. 5. Some British family names consisted by given name plus some words to indicate paternity. For example, Jackson means he is son of Jack, in other words, Jack's son is Jackson. So such as Wilson, Johnson, and so on generally have the same hints. 6. Some people for the sake of express their worships or attract attention by novelty to change their family names. There are lots of Black people like the famous liberator president Lincoln, in order to commemorate him, they change their names become Lincoln. Other people want to let their names look well cool, so someone turned the word "You guess" into "Yogess" as a new family name even if it sounds very queer feeling when we hear that name for the first time.

### C. *The Differences of Formative Forms in Names*

Chinese names generally made of by family name and given name and family name ahead of given name. Besides, Chinese also own courtesy name and literary name. The Chinese people's name: LiMing is consisted by family name and given name. But British views on this issue vary from to Chinese people. For example, James Jones is consisted by given and surname (family name). This difference has its essential reason, in China, the origin of family name at first when the come out of name while in the UK the given name is in front of family name.

Chinese ancient people generally have two names, one of this is a childhood nickname, such as TaoYuanming's nickname is XiGou. Because when people lived in Zhou Dynasty, people started to pay attention to choose the name with the etiquette and institutionalization. The name need go through a strict ceremony and people should not call someone's formal name, so many families gave children get a nickname, so that in the family, people will more closer to the person who was called. Another is to grow up by name, also known as the name. Even though in modern society

people talk in interpersonal relationships by call formal name, but it still retains the habit of call nickname. In addition, more and more families only own a child, their parents usually call a nickname to reflect good wishes and deep love for kids. Courtesy name is derived from the meaning of the name, is a interpretation and supplement of name. Such as Cao Cao, his courtesy is Meng De, Li Bai, his courtesy name is Tai Bai. Courtesy name is the ancient in name, take the name and mean near to name. Now there is no doubt that people hardly use the courtesy name in addition to some men of literature and writing.

In Britain, name is formed from given name and family name. Usually, given name is before family name, so the given name is called first name, the family name is called last name. It is opposite to Chinese name. English name also is divided into single and double family name. His name is also called Christian name and middle name. The Christian name is called by minister or parents' friends when the baby was born to a church.

#### *D. Features of Chinese and English Given Names*

It is said that we can not see anyone at the night, in order to know where is someone we need to use name to call themselves. The use of experienced a long historical evolution and come into being modern names.

##### **1. Features of Chinese given names**

There is a long history in China and the way of names has gone through an evolution. Reflecting culture is a well-known thing, so the name with the time brands is a very natural thing. With the analyze of given names, we know some features about Chinese given names. We can simply classify the Chinese given names as following. 1. The name structure is fixed, generally a word or double words. 2. A person name with a sense of meaning or wishes to express something or else by their parents. 3. Personality or ideal. There are huge differences in person's thinking. Many Chinese given names represent this aspect, such as Wenwu, Ziqing, Zhiyuan, Zhigang, Gaoyuan, etc. 4. The gender boundary of male and female names is pretty clear. As reflected in the man names: Qiang, Gang, Tie, Yi, Jian, etc. As reflected in female names such as Qing, Xiu, Mei, Juan, Ya, Wan are all of this kind. 5. Some Chinese given names reflected epochal character, it is not surprising for them use some modern words as the given names. For example, Jianguo, Hongwei, Yuejin, Geming, Jiefang and so on belong to this class.

##### **2. Features of English given names**

English people usually only have one name in most cases, but someone also can have two, three or even more. This is the first name or Christian name. In Britain, people should let their baby to accept baptism and naming after the birth of a child. People need not use middle name until facing hand official business or sign a important document. In writing the name should obey this order: the first name(given name) +middle name +last name(family name). For instance, Linda Mary Jim, but in order to facilitate, sometimes written as L.M.Jim. It is said that more than 1,000 given names are being used by English. English given names are characterized by long origins, abundant allusions and rich implication. Like Chinese, British give their kids names very carefully, usually indicate the following characteristics: 1. Some given names come from other languages, the energy of absorbing foreign language is very strong. 2. Some given names have rich symbolic implication. Name is often used to symbolize the beautiful, favorite, smart, elegant, fantastic. For example, Helen means "charming", Lily English means "lily". In addition boys are commonly used "hero" to express his brave and ambitions. 3. Using the characters in Bible directly, such as: Adam, Marie, Paul, David and so on. 4. We can use the name of parents and friends for name. For example, the president Roosevelt and his son took over all the same name, in order to more easily the distinction, Roosevelt said the child is Roosevelt Junior Franklin (little Roosevelt). 5. There are many nicknames in English Christian name, the female names more, such as Christian Eliza (Elizabeth ) nickname: Bess, Bessie, Betsy, Elise and so on. 6. Just like Chinese, English also divided men and women in terns of name. Chinese female names usually with beautiful things. The female names in English are mostly ending with the vowel a, e, y, etc. Like Mary, Liz, Jim, Lily, Liza and so on.

#### *E. The Mutual Translation of Chinese and English Names*

Name is the most common object for all of people in the world. However, thanks to cultural and beliefs are naturally different, so Chinese and English names different accordingly. When people choose to translate the names, we must be deeply understanding and research names by carefully. The most direct way to cope with the translation of people's names is transliteration. We all know names are used to as a mark to distinguish one from other persons in the society. Therefore, whatever the ways of translation from Chinese to English or from English to Chinese. It is essential issue for translation. Whether it is the Chinese name for English translation, or the British name for Chinese translation must be followed by two rules. The name should after the originating people and need obey the convention basic principles in translation of the name.

##### **1. Translate Chinese names into English names**

When one country was set up, because of the huge territory of the county and plenty of dialects in China. It make a great trouble in the translation of Chinese name and the place name. Relative government prescribed that the names of Chinese should be translated into Chinese Phonetic Alphabet when we talk with someone. So we can gradually remove confuse in the translation of Chinese names. For instance, the family name 柯 can only spelled as Ke at present. With the pace of time, the persons from different can get abundant understanding of other countries' cultures by some correct principle. There are some standards are as following: 1. Chinese people usually put family name ahead of given name. 2. The first letter of family name should be capitalized and the same as the first letter of given. For example, Yang

Qingshan, Li Ming, Wang Yutao all of these belong to this rule. So according to these rules we can judge some spell for names as correct or false. Such as: from some spell for one person name just like Li Ming-yu, Mingyu Li, Ming-yu Li, Li Mingyu, according to the standards, the above spell only Li Mingyu is correct.

## 2. Translate English names into Chinese names

The Chinese translation of the names of British has been more chaotic, one name often is translated by many ways. The main reason is that the translation, translation based by phonetic, however, there are too much Chinese homophone words. However, according to the British cultural tradition, the following principles we need to obeyed. 1. The first name and last name principle. because British emphasis on personality, to prompt personal struggle. They usually put given name in front of family name to express the aspire. It is consisted of Christian name (given name)+ middle name +family name. For example, The United States famous inventor Thomas Edison's full name is Thomas Alva Edison. 2. Woman's names should be different from that of man's names. When we translate woman's name, we need carefully select some Chinese characters with the part of grass, rain, female, ,etc.. 3. Try to keep the features for foreign name and avoid to Chinese only style. Firstly, we should respect their culture, then choose some Chinese characters with no special meanings. Therefore, we can keep the original characteristic in foreigner names well. 4. In addition, in terms of some renowned foreign people's name. some of their names have been accepted by Chinese person for many years ago. People need not change the name. Such as Bernard Shaw. However, a satisfactory answer that can be accepted by all of people is not easy. It needs more time and more efforts put into there.

### III. THE REASONS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND ENGLISH NAMES

People know Chinese names generally made of by family name and given name and family name ahead of given name. However, in England, it is consisted of Christian name (given name)+ middle name +family name. The name reflects a kind of social cultures, with rich social connotation, broad knowledge field. A comparative study of English and Chinese names can help us understand Chinese and English two ethnic groups in the history of development, religious beliefs, national psychology and the common characteristics or differences in personality and politics. Then we can together improve cultural awareness and deeply promote national communication.

#### A. The Reason of Religion and Clan

Chinese family names are a code of clan, so family names represent the Chinese traditional clan form of conception. It takes a special form of blood culture records the formation and reproduction of Chinese nation, in the assimilation and the state of the Chinese nation. The blood maintained by the patriarchal clan system long-term extension continued, is a vital feature of Chinese political structure. English family names fully reflect the religious features. Many English names come from Latin, because of the rise of the reform movement of religion in 16th century. The name of the church and the saints in the Christian name greatly enriched the English language family name library, which fully demonstrated the Christian religion has played an important position and close connection with people's life.

#### B. The Other Main Reasons for the Culture Differences in Names

There are some reasons can explain the cultural differences in names in two countries as following. To begin with, different national psychology, Chinese feudal patriarchal conception makes clan as the most essential part. Under the influence of this kind of national psychology, the family name must as the first name. However, on the behalf of the individual personality of the name can only be placed behind the first name. The British emphasis on individuality, their family name is also fully reflected in the characteristics and democratic culture. According to their national psychology, they like to embody the given name with the concept of personality in front of the family name. Furthermore, on differences of value orientation. Chinese family name reflects collectivism values in the family based on Chinese culture. Wherever place in China, the personal name can only be placed behind of family name. In English culture, advocating individual standard values of Western, the pursuit of individual freedom, advocating personal interests. Above all fully reflects the individual is supreme, individualism is the most important. In addition, the concept of hierarchy. Chinese attaches essential to the blood relationship and particularly emphasis on class conception. Ancient Chinese women only can get family name, but no given name. In the United Kingdom, in accordance with the traditional family name system, women in general have to use the name of her husband after marriage. But with the progress of society and the development of the women liberation movement. The name of the couple's family name is created.

### IV. CONCLUSION

As a kind of carrier of social cultures, the name carries the rich cultural connotation. Although the name looks small, we can see from the simple language phenomenon to perceive the Chinese and English some traditions. Chinese and English names are reflected patriarchal ideology. First of all, from the family name and the given different position, people can know that Chinese put the family name ahead of given name, but English completely opposite to this. Through the comparison and study of the differences of Chinese and English names culture, people can understand the culture of the family name in depth. People can further know the differences of two countries in the national psychology, political philosophy, value orientation, the concept of hierarchy. In short, the historical source of the name is far. What

counts is we should master the generated roots in cultural differences between Chinese and English names. Not only it will help to enrich our historical knowledge, but improve our cross-cultural consciousness. Then it also can promote cultural inter flow between the two countries. All in all, it is essential to pay special attention to the differences in national culture and the styles of expression in the cross-cultural communication. By learning the differences on the names in Chinese and English, people should master as much as cultural background knowledge. Only in this way, can we fight against the consequent cultural conflict for successful cross-cultural communication.

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