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**Local Chinese Dialects and Toponymy of Chinese
Streets in Sibü, Sarawak**

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore into the categories, structural formation, syllables and alphabetic characteristics of the naming of Chinese streets in Sibu, Sarawak. Sibu is the third biggest city in Sarawak, is also called “New Foochow” or “Little Foochow”. The Foochow people is one of the main ethnicities in Sibu. The Foochow culture and dialect play an important role in developing the history of Sibu. One of the significant influences of the Foochow culture and dialect towards the history of Sibu is the naming of the city streets in Chinese. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to collect and analyse research data, where a historical comparative study is adopted to study the naming categories, the structural formation, syllables and alphabetic characteristics of the Chinese streets in Sibu.

Keywords: Sibu, Chinese streets, toponym, Chinese dialects, naming categories, formation structure, phonetic characteristics

Introduction

Sibu represents the third biggest city in Sarawak. The Foochow people being one of the main ethnicities in Sibu, is also called “New Foochow” or “Little Foochow”. The Foochow culture and dialect play an important role in developing the history of Sibu. One of the significant influences of the Foochow culture and dialect towards the history of Sibu is the naming of the city streets in Chinese. Naming the streets in Chinese is based on an oral agreement among the local people and were not directly translated from the official names given by the Sibu government; but is based on various sources connected to the local history and Foochow migrants from China. This paper aims to explore into the categories, structural formation, syllables and alphabetic characteristics of the naming of Chinese streets in Sibu, Sarawak.

According to the population survey conducted by the Foochow Association of Sibu in 2011, the local Foochow population of Sibu is approximately 90,000. The Foochow culture and dialect play an important role in developing the history of Sibu (Pan 2000, Cao & Cheng 2016).

Through the studies of Cao and Cheng (2016), the Foochow dialect is the business and social communicative language among the Chinese people in Sibu. Hence the Foochow dialect is perceived as the more popular and dominant local dialect spoken by the majority of the Chinese population in Sibu, regardless of their ethnic background. One of the significant influences of the Foochow culture and dialect towards the history of Sibu is the naming of the city streets in Chinese.

Shi (1982, p.191) points out that toponym is a discipline to study the methods, rules and implications for naming places based on various sources like the relationship between naming places and the location. In fact, toponym is knowledge in relation with geography, history, language and nationality. Toponym also includes the studies to explore local geographical environment and the development of society during the historical periods. Toponym concerns about historical facts, development of economics and geographical environmental changes (Shi, 1982, p.190).

Lu (1997, pp.37-38) believes that toponym is a study to investigate the phenomenon of places and streets to be given such naming, and how this naming can be formed, and the objectivity in the development of toponym. Toponym studies activities of a nation or place from the aspect of ethnology (Shi, 1982, p.191). Naming places provide ethnological information to conduct comparative studies on different races of people, and how these ethnic differences can affect the naming of places from the views of linguistic anthropology. Migration and movement of ethnic groups can become the historical sources for naming places (Shi, 1982, p.191).

Toponym concerns about historical facts, development of economics and geographical environment changes (Shi, 1982, p.190). These sources are valuable in the discipline of toponym for naming places, roads, streets and lanes. Toponym provides us knowledge about geographical situation, natural scenes, social and humanity features, and development of the local communities. The relationships between toponym and linguistics, according to Zhang and Yan (2013, p.15); the naming of places or streets is living fossil that can provide us information about development of vocabularies used to form the naming of places or streets, through a comparative study between the naming of places or streets in reality world and the naming of places or streets recorded in the historical text. Thus enabling the verification of the earliest formation of the vocabularies used to form the naming, and its connection with other ethnic languages in the same territory.

Based on the ethnic and dialect backgrounds of the Chinese people in Sibü, this study facilitated the insight into the influences of the local Chinese dialects on the naming of the Chinese streets in Sibü, especially the names which were formed using some of the local Chinese dialects.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to collect and analyse research data, where a historical comparative study is adopted to study the naming categories, the structural formation, syllables and alphabetic characteristics of the Chinese streets in Sibü. The research methods from Yin (2003, pp. 71-72), was adopted to study the toponym of Chinese streets in Sibü through the study of the following: maps, comparisons of the present and historical developments, text analysis, field work researches and statistical research.

Text analysis includes formal history, local history, series of books, notes, tablet inscription, epigraph and so on. Through field work research, data collection from non-structural interview on pioneers or historical personages, information on social and cultural phenomenon, geographical condition, historical period and statistical research collected.

Photos of the Chinese street signs, the contrasts between the alphabetic names and the actual street signs, help to determine the existence of these streets in road maps, drawn by Wong's & Associate based on the Master Map from the Sibü Municipal Council, under the instructions of Mr Kong Sien Han and Mr. Wong Fu Toh,

the former was the Chairman of Sibü Municipal Council, Sarawak, and the latter was the engineer for this council.

This study is based on the research outcomes, data collection of conceptual framework and research methodology. Library research and the electronic resources from the websites such as CNKI (China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database) provide relevant research information to this study. Research sources from the following were much adopted from the history of Sibü (Li, 2016), the Foochow society in Sarawak and its structure (Cao & Cheng 2016, Chen 2016), the conceptual framework of toponym and ethnology (Zhang & Yan 2013, Li 1997, Lu 1997, Shi 1985, Shi 1982), the methods for naming the Chinese streets (Yuan 2015, Su 2014, Ceng, Fang & Ye 2011, Gu 2010, Yin 2013).

This study adopts methods of text analysis to analyse structural and ethnological formation about the methods of naming the Chinese roads, streets and lanes in Sibü from the aspect of linguistic anthropology. Comparative linguistics method is used to compare the sound characteristics of the alphabetic names of Chinese streets in Sibü with the local Chinese dialects in order to verify the sources of the Chinese dialects to be used to form the alphabetic names of the Chinese streets in Sibü, Sarawak. From the naming of Chinese streets in Sibü, this study tries to discuss the Chinese naming and alphabetic names are based on the local Chinese dialects showed on the street or road sign boards which reflected the ethnological information about the historical backgrounds of Sibü and how this naming information related to the toponym of Sibü.

A comparative study is adopted to verify the sources used to form the alphabetic names of the Chinese streets in Sibü. Two informants from Sibü interviewed help to identify which local Chinese dialects are being used to form the alphabetic names of the Chinese streets, and which naming of the Chinese streets can reflect the ethnicity characteristics of the local Chinese people in Sibü. *Sounds of the characters in the Chinese dialects* (《汉语方音字汇》, 2008) compiled by Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Peking University, China, edited by Wang Futang (王福堂)¹ becomes the main reference for this comparative study with the alphabetic names of the Chinese streets in Sibü. This publication recorded the sound systems of the Foochow, Hokkein (Amoy), Cantonese (Canton), Hakka and Teowchow dialects(in the southern part of China) and the phonetic formation of these dialects in the methods of colloquial and literary.

Analysis

Besides the common names for roads and streets, another common name is found to label lanes, called “巷” [ɕiaŋ⁵¹]. Lane means a narrow road in a city. Proper noun is placed before the common category to form a specific meaningful name for road or street. Therefore, proper noun contains a useful meaning from various sources adopted to name roads or streets.

The sources used to form the naming of Chinese streets in Sibü can be from names of personages, historical places, local scenery, natural scenes, cultural terms about ethnicity and social communities, depending on how

¹ The reason for this study to refer this publication as the main reference for doing this comparative study is because the Chinese migrants from China to Sibü were from the southern part of China, the mother tongue of the China migrants derived from the same sources as the dialects noted in this publication. 北京大學中國語言文學系語言學教研室編，王福堂修訂。2003。漢語方音字彙（第二版重排本）。北京：語文出版社。2008年第2刷。

the local authorities or people want to name those roads or streets. There are two approaches; methods of description and recordings were used to form the naming of Chinese streets in Sibü.

Under the description methods, there are four sub-methods namely; direction, numerical order, natural landscapes and natural resources.

1. Direction, as in the following roads, streets, lanes in Sibü: Nan Sang Lane (南山巷) and Central Street (中街). “Tung”(东)is east, “Nan” (南) is south and “middle” (中) is central.
2. Numerical order is the naming of roads, streets or lanes followed by numbering in sequence. For example; main road Jalan Then Kung Suk (邓恭叔路), the other five lanes around the main road are numbered accordingly such as Lorong Then Kung Suk 1 (邓恭叔路第一巷), Lorong Then Kung Suk 2 (邓恭叔路第二巷) , Lorong Then Kung Suk 3 (邓恭叔路第三巷) and so on.
3. Natural landscapes are adopted to name the Chinese roads, streets or lanes in Sibü, for instance, “海唇街” or “海墘街” both streets are named as “Jalan Channel”. “海唇” is formed by the Hakka dialect, whereas the Chinese name “海墘” is the name derived from the Hokkein dialect. “Channel” in English means an area of water that connects two larger areas of water.
4. The natural resources of Sibü played an important role in the naming of these roads, streets and lanes like; “Jalan Seng Ling” is “森林路”in Chinese. “Sing Ling” is the alphabetic name formed by the local Chinese dialect, which means “Forest Road” in English. “Jalan Getah” is “橡胶路”and “Rubber Road” in Chinese and English respectively. “Jalan Lada” is “拉达路”in Chinese, “lada” meant “pepper”, which is one of the famous local agricultural products in Sibü.

During the British colonial times, these natural resources once became a source of naming Chinese streets in Sibü.

The second main method used to name the Chinese roads, streets and lanes in Sibü is through researches into past records. Under this naming category there are three sub-methods namely; through cultural landscapes, records, personages, ethnicity and the social community and historical facts.

1. The cultural landscapes in Sibü, also took effect on naming some roads as in “Jalan Temple”, “庙街” in Chinese. With a Tai Pek Kong Temple (大伯公庙) and a Kwan Yin Pagoda (观音塔) located around this road. there is sufficient evidence that cultural landscape affect the namings of some streets in Sibü.
2. Historical personages being the second sub-method had contributed a great deal to the development of Sibü, just like the Chinese migrants Wong Nai Siong (黄乃裳) and Then Kung Suk (邓恭叔). They were some of the pioneers in the reclamation of wasteland in Sibü. In recognition of their contributions, their Chinese alphabetic names were used to form Chinese roads, streets and lanes in Sibü.

Naming of Chinese streets in Sibü also included the Chinese ethnicity source, as in Jalan Hua Khiew which is called “华侨路”in Chinese. The Chinese name “华侨” meant, “Chinese residing abroad”. It indicated that migrants from China settled and establish their new homes in Sibü, thus acknowledging themselves as “Hua Khiew”. The Chinese naming of this road contained a historical fact about the Chinese migrants who had settled down in Sibü in the 20th century. Jalan Tiong Hua called as “中华路”in Chinese and “Tiong Hua”in

Chinese can be understood as “China”. Jalan Foochow “福州路”, Jalan Kwong Tung “广东街” and Jalan Amoy “厦门路” are some of the roads, street in Sibü, named after some of the different Chinese settlements from Foochow, Hokkien and Kwong Tung provinces.

In Jalan Huo Ping, “和平路” in Chinese, the Chinese vocabulary “和平” meant ‘peace’. Jalan Hock Ann as “福安路” in Chinese, where the Chinese vocabulary “福安”, meant ‘good fortune and safety’. The above showed the Chinese migrants’ desire to live in peace and prosperity.

3. Historical facts as recorded showed in the third sub-method for naming the Chinese roads as in Jalan Kai Ping “开平路” The Chinese vocabulary “开平” meant reclaiming and levelling the wasteland related to the history of reclamation of Sibü

The structural formation of the naming of Chinese streets in Sibü is proper noun plus category name. The proper nouns placed in front of the roads or streets or lanes carried information about locations, reflected the first impression and recognition of the local people on roads or streets or lanes (Li, 1997, p.31).

The naming of Chinese roads, streets and lanes in Sibü contained different number of syllables. Minimum syllables used to form the specific names of the Chinese roads or streets is two morphemes and the maximum is 7 morphemes. The specific names placed in front of the category names (road, street and lane) normally were formed by two syllables, this structural formation included the naming based on almost all the methods of description and recording except in the naming methods for lanes un numerical order and historical personages. These two categories of Chinese naming were formed by more Chinese syllables than other road or street naming categories.

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Normally the three syllables structural formation which included [specific name + category name] was adopted for most when naming the specific names of the roads, streets and lanes.

There are 42 Chinese roads and streets in Sibü with alphabetic names formed by the local Chinese dialects. The Foochow and Hokkein dialects are the two more popular Chinese dialects adopted compared to the Cantonese, Hakka and Teowchow dialects. Jalan Sie Poi Khieng (施培坚) was formed by the Foochow dialect, and Jalan Tiong Hua (中华路) was formed by the Hokkein dialect. Through comparative study and linguistics evidences on the alphabetic names of the Chinese roads, streets and lanes in Sibü, the local Chinese people used the local Chinese dialects or a mixture of two Chinese dialects to form the alphabetic names of the Chinese roads, streets and lanes in Sibü, such as the alphabetic names of Jalan Wong Nai Siong (黄乃裳) and Jalan Ding Lik Kong (陈立广) which were formed by the Foochow and Hokkein dialects.

This study also discovered that most of the alphabetic names of the Chinese streets in Sibü did not differ in literary and colloquial pronunciations. However, some of the surnames or last names of the Chinese historical

personages used to form the alphabetic names of the Chinese streets in Sibü were from the colloquial or literary pronunciation of the local Chinese dialects. For instance, the middle name of Jalan Wong Ting Hock was formed by the literary pronunciation of Foochow dialect; the surname of Jalan Teo Chung Loh was formed by the colloquial pronunciation of Hokkein dialect.

Conclusion

The sources used to form the naming of Chinese roads or streets or lanes in Sibü were all from the descriptive and recording methods. The main characteristics of the Chinese streets in Sibü from the aspect of toponym is its Chinese naming showing the features of historical personages and the ethnicity of the local Foochow people in Sibü. Different Chinese dialect is used to form the alphabetic names of the Chinese streets in Sibü, but the Foochow and Hokkein dialects are the two most popular local Chinese dialects used to form the alphabetic names of Chinese streets in Sibü. The alphabetic names of some Chinese streets in Sibü are formed by more than one Chinese dialects, often with a mixture of both the Foochow and Hokkien dialects. Natural resources such as rubber, pepper, gambir and timber, being the main resources of Sibü at that time, were also used in the naming of Chinese streets in Sibü. Chinese names displayed on the street signboards indicated the invaluable contributions of the Chinese community in Sibü to the local community and government.

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