

The Easy to Remember Rule Governs the Way to Name A Place in the Southwestern Region, Vietnam

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Abstract: Place name is complex research object because they contain historical cultural value and express natural features, etc. of a land. Approaching thousands of place name of a land, researchers often take a hard time finding the scientific data to decode them. In fact, many place names have their origin associated with the data of language, culture, history... However, many place names are named by the simple reason. Applying the cultural region theory and the specific research methods through place name research on the Southwestern region from cultural perspective, we discovered that the easy to remember rule dominates strongly the way to name a place. The rule proves that the place name is deeply influenced by the cultural life, habits and behavior of local people. At the same time, this is also one of the research tool to look the origin up and explain the meaning of the place name, contributing to solving a number of the problems that researchers have not found satisfactory scientific findings yet.

Key words: place names, the easy to remember rule, southwestern region, Vietnam, research of geographical names through cultural perspective

1. Introduction

Studying Vietnamese place-names from a linguistic perspective over time has contributed to the interpretation of place-names in terms of phonetics, vocabulary, grammar so as to form the basis of scientific research on the place-names. Although there are certain contributions, the research direction still has some limitations. At present, there is no scientific basis for solving problems such as cultural rules govern the way of naming places, the origin of the formation and transmission of place-names or the recognition of the place-names under the systematic perspective and in the linkage of places together. From this research gaps, by studying place-names of the Southwestern region in Vietnam, we have discovered the easy to remember rule governs the way to name a place in the region, contributing to the theoretical basis of decoding the origin of the place-names systematically.

2. Finding and Discussion

Applying the theory of cultural region and research methods such as analysis method, fieldwork method, comparison method, in which there is specific the identifying cultural elements method¹... we survey place name

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¹ The method of identifying cultural elements is proposed by the author and has been successfully applied in research works.

in the Southwestern region including Can Tho city and 12 provinces: An Giang, Bac Lieu, Ben Tre, Ca Mau, Dong Thap, Hau Giang, Kien Giang, Long An, Soc Trang, Tien Giang, Tra Vinh, Vinh Long, the results show that, the place name is deeply governed by the easy to remember rule.

Based on the definition of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Name, "Place-name as a name applied to a feature on Earth. In general, the place-name is a proper name (a specific word, a combination of word, or expression) used consistently in language to refer to a particular place, feature or area having a recognizable identity on the surface of the Earth named feature include: 1) Populated places (for example, cities, towns, villages); 2) Civil divisions (for example, states, cantons, districts, boroughs); 3) Natural features (for example, streams, mountains, capes, lakes, seas); 4) Constructed features (for example, dams, airports, highways); 5) Unbounded places or areas that have specific local (often religious) meaning (for example, grazing lands, fishing areas, sacred areas) (United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Name, 2006) and based on the classification according to subject that derived from the Hoa Trung Le's research theories, he defines "geographical names as words or phrases which is used to name the natural terrain, administrative units, regions territories and constructions in two-dimensional space" and classifies place name according to etymology "Han-Vietnamese place name, Pure-Vietnamese place name, minority place name, foreign place name" (Hoa Trung Le, 2011). At the same time, through surveying place name, we also classify place-names by two types: administrative place name and folk place-name.

Based on these classification, we consider the transmission characteristics of places in the folk culture in the Southwestern region. As a result, we have shown the cultural characteristics and historical process of the Southwestern region have governed the way to name an easy to remember place, and indicating some form of naming place easy remembering by the common psychology of identification. This is a scientific discovery as a foundation to the process of decoding the origin and transmission of the places.

By surveying place-names of 13 provinces/cities in the Southwestern region, we found that the folk place-names of pure Vietnamese origin are majority named by the easy to remember rule. The administrative place-names of Han-Vietnamese origin, since the formation of the name of the places, they do not arise from that demand. Because the Han-Vietnamese place-names are largely governed by the government, they often express desires of people about a peaceful, prosperous and beautiful land forever. However, in the process of splitting and merging the land, the government has used the easy remembering rule to name places to the administrative place-names of Han-Vietnamese origin. This feature can be seen clearly through some places are named by sequence rule that we will discuss below.

2.1 The Forms of the Easy Remembering Rule Through Place Name Research on the Southwestern Region

It can be said that most of places name are derived from the rule of easy to remember. In this statistic, we have shown that the group of places name are strongly influenced by the easy to remember rule compared to other places name. At the same time, the manifestations of these groups of places name prove that the easy to remember rule can directly decode the origin of the place name in some cases.

2.1.1 Places Name Reflect Local Cultural Life

When identifying any object, the Southwestern residents are often based on the cultural life of the locality to name the places. Almost all things, phenomena in daily life can become a name of place: from animals, plants, customs, religion-beliefs, folk knowledge and so on. However, not all things and phenomena in the folk culture

life are also reflected by place-names. The people just name for the objects that need to identify when they meet the requirements of easy to remember. By surveying the origin of place-names in the Southwestern region shows that, folk place-names of pure Vietnamese origin are largely named by the easy to remember rule. The easy remembering is viewed in terms of truth reflection of things, phenomena, material and spiritual life of the Southwestern residents. Typically, we had counted group of places name which have the origin of easy to remember rule associated with cultural components such as:

+ Places name associated with terrain: Normally, this type of place is called by name to describe the shape of object, color, size and characteristics of the object to be named. How it appearance would be, the people describe it as such appearance as long as they recognize it (Examples: Kinh Cụt; Rạch Chân Rút (The Blind canal; The Legs Of The Centipede canal, Vinh Long province); Kinh Giữa (The Middle canal, Tien Giang province); Rạch Đầm Lớn (The Big Dam Canal, Tra Vinh province), ect).

+ Places name associated with waterway traffic: The Southwestern is a land with many canals and traffic intersection on rivers, so the river culture becomes a prominent feature of this land. Currently, in order to be able to trade and interact together, each family buys a small boat or junk to travel, commercial act and living or when familiars get sick abnormally, they will have means of transporting patients in time. Writer Son Nam — a researcher on the ancient land of the South, said: “In Gia Dinh, anywhere has also boats or using boat as a house, or using boat to go to the market, to visit familiars, to carry rice, wood and doing business is more convenient. Boats on the river, travel overnight, nose and tail of boats are touch each other”, “they usually use boat to go to the neighborhood to visit friends, to buy tea, cakes, to joint wedding, funeral procession, to take midwife and doctors. Even thieves, robbers also use the river means to come suddenly and to escape fast” (Son Nam, 2007). Therefore, people are keen on recognizing the right/left traffic intersection, the great traffic intersection on the river, this is also the reason to explain the origin of a large number of places bring names of right/left/big/small intersections, although the identification of these intersections is just feelings of the local people, they arise from reason of naming the object is mainly easy to remember and travelling on the river (Example: rạch Ngã Cái (The main corners canal, Dong Thap province); sông Ngã Bảy; rạch Ngã Sáu (The seventh corners river; The Sixth corners canal, Hau Giang province); ấp Ngã Con (The baby corners village, Kien Giang province), rạch Ngã Ngay (The straight corners canal, An Giang province), cầu Ngã Hậu (The behind corner bridge, Trà Vinh province); Cầu Kinh Tắc (Cut off the corner canal bridge, Can Tho city), ect).

The group of places associated with words Bat/Cay is also included in the group of places is named by this principle. Because, “Bat-Cay” is also the rule of traffic on rivers and canals. Current at that time, General Staff Nghi Bieu given regulation: “The boat goes regardless of wind direction, water line or reverse come together to shout “bat” (the custom of going to left to be “cay”, going to right to be “bat”), then my boat goes to the right, the others also goes to the right, that’s driving”. As such, boats want to avoid each other, the driver shouts “Bat”. When boats go to the station, being aground or any breakdown, let shout “Cay”. Therefore, places were named by rule of Bat/Cay is to ensure easy remembering the identification process and easy to identify the waterway traffic rules that have been applied across provinces of the Southwestern region (Examples: kênh Ngã Cay, ấp Ngã Bát, ấp Ngã Bát (Nga Cay — The left turn Canal; Nga Bat — The right turn village, Kien Giang province); kinh Ngã Bát (Nga Bat — The right turn canal, Ca Mau province); cầu Ngã Cay (Nga Cay — The left turn bridge, Can Tho city), etc..

+ Places name were named after famous people who have lived in the area that needs to be identified: This is a group of places with name of ordinary people, midwife or doctors... We found that there are quite a number of

places that bearing countrymen's name such as hierarchical names of children in family. This group usually occupies a large number. Normally, in the Southwestern region, the first child is called as second brother/sister; the second child is called as third brother/sister²; the third child is called as fourth brother/sister. Just like that the ninth child is called as tenth brother/sister. However, the eleventh child is called as youngest brother/sister. In the traditional society, the tenth child is not called as the eleventh, as the Southwestern residents hope they do not continue having a baby. Because they cannot look after too many children. Traditionally, each couple usually accepts a maximum of 10 children, however, previously they did not use contraception, so there are too many children leading to a big concern about living standard. Many couples in the Southwestern rural area can give birth to the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth but non stop, then they named their children are út còn, út rắng, út hết, út ét, út lớn, út em, rather, naming the number order anymore (Example: Cống Năm Sứ, Rạch Sáu Đồng (Nam Su sewer, Sau Dong canal, Vinh Long province), Gò Tám Ấu (Tam Au mound, Dong Thap province), Cống Út Thôi (Ut Thoi sewer, Vinh Long province, ect). This cultural feature has been associated with many places name for a very simple reason. When identifying naming place, residents often use the name of people living near area that need to name the place. Therefore, the name of the ordinary people also penetrate into the name of place. Similarly, the large of nicknames of the people are come into being places name by reason of easy to remember (Example: cầu Chín Lùn, cống Mười Hí (Chin Lun bridge; Muoi Hi sewer, Vinh Long province); cống Su Liêu (Su Lieu sewer, Long An province); kênh Bảy Thợ (Bay Theo canal, Hau Giang province, etc). Naming this type of place is different from the type of place bearing Heroes name have merit for the country with position in contemporary society. (For example, when building up urban roads, local governments often use the names of people who have made merit to the county to name the road without considering that hero has been living in that area or not. This is completely random and does not follow the easy to remember rule).

+ Places name associated with belief and religious establishments: This is as a group of places use name of worships such as pagodas/temples/churches to name places or use the name of worships to name the places. Naming these places associated with the habit of beliefs and religious activities in the daily life of the Southwestern residents. Under the habit, residents often come to the temple to worship the god to support their family and themselves in peace and get lucky in business. Similarly, they often go to shrines of the deceased, animals or the gods of the scared river to look forward to support. They also have religious beliefs when coming to the pagodas, churches for ceremony. These are places of community activities, so naming places by the easy to remember rule of places and worships associated with the needs of spiritual life of the local residents (Examples: sông Nhà Nguyễn (The Chapel canal, Ben Tre province); kênh Chùa (The Pagoda canal, Kien Giang province); ấp Nhà Thờ (The Church village, Tra Vinh province), kênh Nhà Thờ (The Church village, Soc Trang province), etc).

+ Places name associated with construction works: Similar to the group of places associated with religious worships, we found that anywhere has construction works, when naming place and easy to remember, people just need to match the nomenclature along with the name of that work (Examples: rạch Cầu Xây (The bridge concreting canal, Dong Thap province); kênh Đập Nhà Lầu, ấp Cầu Đúc (The Building dam canal, Bridge made of concrete village, Tra Vinh province), etc).

+ Places name reflect the small-scale production establishments and villages in the rural areas: distilleries, blacksmith's shops, aluminum ovens, rush mat hamlets, fishing hamlets and so on operate in areas where people pay attention and they are easy to become the name of places. Because of the very simple reason that when people

² Meanwhile in the North, the first child is called as elder brother/sister and the second child is called as second brother/sister.

mention the production facilities, it will be very easy to imagine that place, such as: ấp Rẫy; ấp xóm Cối (Kitchen-garden village; Mortar hamlet village Ben Tre province), etc. In general, some of this places name are also related to construction works (Examples: đường Lò Rèn (The Smithy street, Bac Lieu province); kênh Lò Rèn (The Smithy canal); kênh Lò Bún (The Vermicelli oven canal, Dong Thap province), etc).

+ Places name associated with plant in rural areas: We found that, most of them are usually originally derived from people's identification where the plant is living and in order to identify they use its name for that place. Normally, any place where many plants the people use name of that plants to name place (Examples: rạch Mù U, rạch Cây Me (*Calophyllum inophyllum* canal, *Tamarindus indica* canal, Soc Trang province); kênh Trâm Bàu, kênh Mái Dầm (*Combretum quadrangulare* canal, *Cryptocoryne ciliata* canal, Hau Giang province), etc). Particularly, residents are interested in which name of medicinal plants and vegetables for famous in the folk culture life (Examples: kênh Chòi Mòi, ấp So Đũa (*Antidesma ghaesembilla* Gaertn canal, *Sesbania Grandiflora* Pers, Long An province); cầu Cây Cách (*Premna integrifolia* bridge, Tra Vinh province), đường Gò Muồng (*Senna alata* mound streer, Bac Lieu province).....). Their name is often used by people to name place to meet the need of the easy remembering.

+ Places name are named to be based on nostalgic psychology of migrants in the Southwestern region to remind old and new places. History of migration in the Southwestern region shows that, in the 16th century, migrants from Northern and Central regions had sporadically migrated to the South of the country. They traveled overland and waterway, where they are easy to live, they stop and set up villages. At the same time, along with the intervention of the Nguyen Lords, in 1698, the Nguyen Lord sent Nguyen Huu Canh to the South and officially established the administrative rules in the Southern, "the Nguyen dynasty expanded a thousand miles of lands, more than four thousand households, so they recruited more emigrants from Bo Chinh back to the South. Establishing villages, hamlets, divide boundary, reclaim fallow land, drafting taxes and inhabitants of family books for taxing" (Quoc su quan of Nguyen dynasty, 2002). Thus, with the official migration, residents of the central provinces had been supported by the state, they had come to the South in general, the Southwestern in particular to set themselves up in business. After coming to this land, in the process of breaking fresh ground, setting up villages, communes and hamlets, these migrants always miss their hometown where they were born. Therefore, they bear the name of places in the North and the Central region to name many places in the Southwestern or the Nguyen government had actively named many places associated with the homeland of migrants to easy to remember and identify area of migrants (Example: xóm Huế, xóm Gò Công Cũ (Hue Hamlet, Go Cong Old Hamlet, Long An province); rạch Trường Tiền Lớn (Big Truong Tien canal, Soc Trang province), etc).

+ Places name use descriptive, idiomatic, simple and common language to meet the needs of identification: According to Le Quy Don, the Southern villages in the late 18th century (1776) were generally desert place, not yet reclamation of land "In Gia Dinh district, Dong Nai, Can Gio, Loi Lap, Cua Dai, Cua Tieu is the forest of thousands of miles" (Le Quy Don, translated by Do Mong Khuong, Nguyen Trong Han & Nguyen Ngoc Tinh, 2007). Therefore, in the first stage of reclamation, Southwestern residents have to spend a lot of effort to turn the land into lush garden. They have to fight against elephants and tigers. Especially when travelling on the rivers, they must know how to avoid crocodiles attack. In the folk cultural treasure of the Southwestern region, there were many tragic stories about the Southern residents were killed by crocodiles and tigers. At that time, money is not the most important thing, human sentiment is a valuable thing. The Southwestern residents consider "righteous conscience is indeed priceless". Living circumstances have led people to think that, if they have money, they are

not sure they can have everything. For example, while fighting against dangerous wildlife, they have to unite, love each other to survive. Therefore, the Southwestern residents must treat each other gratitude “when lights go out, they are in each other”. This practical life has raised a moral viewpoint, do not like the vanity, luxury, without sincerity. This has led to the desire of simplicity making a simple life style, as long as keeping human ethics. Therefore, in daily communication, the rhetorical sounding words are strange to the Southwestern residents, they love people, speak upright and straightforward. It is also the source of the common and simple languages appear in communication. They go to the place in a very natural way, especially the words are used to name the iconic place to describe the true phenomena, sometimes these words are rustic because they think that using the more popular words to name place, the more easy to identify the place.

By studying, we realize that, to achieve the purpose of identifying the words to name places are more honest and simpler under the principle “to call a spade a spade”. Some places use the simple words “colloquial” proving the need to name places in an easy to remember way and to prove the “true characteristics” of the Southwestern residents, this case is not completely because of lack of culture and sensitivity in language usage (Example: kênh Chết Chém (To be beheaded canal, Dong Thap province); bung Địa Thúi (the bung which is near the pond with rotten water, Vinh Long province); lộ Bãi Rác (The garbage road, Soc Trang province), etc).

2.1.2 The Way Naming According to Sequence Rule Is One of the Manifestations of the Easy Remembering Rule

“The sequence rule governs the way to name a place in the Southwestern region, Viet Nam” findings show that condition and expression of the sequence rule through places such as places are in geographical distance, the places are merged and split. In this group, we present a set of places are named under sequence rule and also show the easy remembering rule in the way to name places. The easy remembering here is analyzed on the basis of its own characteristics easy to remember principle of transition.

- + From the adjacent object, to easy remembering, the Southwestern residents have used the name of adjacent object as the name of place: this group is equivalent to the group of places located adjacent to the worship facilities, beliefs, construction works, and places bearing plant name that we mentioned earlier.

- + In term of meaning, adjacent places to ensure easy remembering for the cluster of places (Example: *Hoi Nhon village, Hoi Nghia village, Hoi Tri village, Hoi Tin village* – Hoi Xuan commune, Cai Lay rural district, Tien Giang province that are expression meaning “Kindness - Decorum - Uprightness - Wisdom – Faithfulness” in Confucianism philosophy).

- + When naming for new place from adjacent place, to identify the Southwestern residents have attached to auxiliary elements under logic order with the nature of easy remembering principle of transition followed by new place (Example: ấp Long Hòa A, ấp Long Hòa B; khu phố 1, khu phố 2, khu phố 3 (Long Hoa A village, Long Hoa B village; Quarter 1, Quarter 2, Quarter 3, Tien Giang province); ấp Tây Hạ, ấp Tây Thượng (Tây Hạ village, Tây Thuong village, An Giang province) etc).

- + Using nomenclature and available places to name new places: this is the place including two nomenclatures named by the easy remembering rule on the basis that people have known available places (Example: kênh Vàm Đất Sét (Clay estuary canal in Hau Giang province which used the name of old place is that Clay estuary), etc.

- + When naming for new place from the place using nomenclature and the name of available place, in order to be easy to remember, the Southwestern residents have attached to auxiliary elements under logic order with the nature of easy remembering principle of transition followed by new place (For Example: ấp Kinh A, ấp Kinh B (A Canal village, B Canal village, Tra Vinh province), etc)

In general, the expression of identifying rule is one of the manifestations of easy to remember rule in naming place. The naming of a new place is based on the name of old place is to ensure easy remembering in the process of transmission of new place. At the same time, this way is also reminiscent of old place.

In addition to the large group of places mentioned above (2.1.1 and 2.1.2), we found that there are many places named by the Southwestern resident under the easy to remember rule associated with other cultural elements.

2.2 The Scientific Significance of Discovering the Easy to Remember Rule Through Examining Place Names on the Southwestern Region

It can be concluded that, apart from the need of identifying, to name places by the easy remembering rule also derives from the cultural preference of convenience, simple culture of the Southwestern residents has set up in the history of reclaiming this land. From this result, we can generalize about the place name that is governed by the easy remembering rule as follows:

Nomenclature + The adjacent place name/object/grounding phenomena
Nomenclature + A true description of the nature of things and phenomena to be identified
Nomenclature + events happen to the local have a profound impact, strong impression in the heart of residents

In some cases, when decoding the origin and transmission of the places name, the researcher are need to remember the easy remembering rule to screen faulty data during fieldworks. The research findings show that a large number of place-names have initially arisen from real life as long as they meet the needs of identification. Therefore, the easy to remember rule for naming places has become the initial basis for explaining a series of folk places such as places of shape, color, size, characteristics; places associated with plant species; places is called by traffic intersection and places associated with the worship in Vietnam in general and in the Southwestern region in particular.

The easy to remember rule for naming place is closely linked with the process of transmitting the place. Because the place was named, it just would be handed down successfully. Detecting the easy to remember rule that is also basis for researchers of places have simpler viewpoints, based on the function of identifying places rather than finding academic and sophisticated answers, with many profound causes in some cases that places are distorted, deformed and confused by the process of transmission in folk or places that researchers do not have basis for deciphering them.

As mentioned above, the easy remembering rule strongly governs the way to name the places. The easy remembering rule has directly contributed decoding the origin of places name. In some cases, the easy to remember rule also do not shows directly. In order to clearly know about this rule to name places we must look up the origin of each place through the fieldwork process. Furthermore, in order to contribute to the study of place-names, in addition to discovering the easy remembering rule in naming places, we must coordinate with other methods to help find out the time of appearance of the places.

3. Conclusion and Recommendation

The discovery of the easy to remember rule through place-names of the Southwestern region has contributed to statistics a number of manifestation of place-names associated with this rule so as to decode a large number of place-names origin, building up the initial scientific basis to decode place-names of Vietnam in general and of the

Southwestern region in particular, and as a guideline to decode the sophisticated place-names and hard to understand. Based on the above research results, we urge to keep the folk name of pure Vietnamese origin in folklore place-names and the administrative place-names of pure Vietnamese origin still exist in the Southwestern region, as well as places are named by the sequence rule to preserve and promote the rustic and simple culture arising from naming places under the easy to remember rule.

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