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National standardization

**China's Campaign to Clean up and Standardize Non-standard
Geographical Names**

Submitted by China **

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Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

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Provisional Agenda Item 9

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China's Campaign to Clean up and Standardize Non-standard Geographical Names

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Summary: With the rapid development of China's new urbanization, a large number of geographical names disappeared while new geographical names keep emerging, and quite a few of which are exaggeration, foreign, strange and several places within certain geographical territory have exactly the same names or their names are homonyms, damaging the toponymic culture and cutting off the historical tradition. The Chinese government took the Second National Survey of Geographical Names as opportunity, made special plans to clean up and standardize the existing non-standard geographical names. At present, this activity is officially implemented as planned.

Geographical names are important carriers of national and ethnic culture. In recent years, with rapid urbanization in China, a large number of geographical names have quickly disappeared while new geographical names keep emerging, and quite a few of which are non-standard geographical names, damaging the toponymic culture and cutting off the historical tradition. To further standardize the management of geographical names and strengthen the construction of toponymic culture, the Chinese government has made special plans in the Second National Survey of Geographical Names to clean up and standardize the existing non-standard geographical names.

I. Definition of Non-standard Geographical Names

Non-standard geographical names mainly refer to the geographical names of residential areas, large buildings, streets, roads, and bridges, which contain "exaggerated", "foreign", "strange" words or use the same characters as other geographical names. The specific meanings and standards are as follows:

—"Exaggeration" in a non-standard geographical name refers to the deliberate exaggeration in the naming of a place in terms of the meaning, type and size of the place. The deliberate exaggeration leads to the overstatement of the actual condition of the geographic entity that specific element and/or generic term refer(s) to. Such a phenomenon violates the Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Administrative Regulations on Geographical Names, which provides that the geographical names shall "reflect the cultural or natural features of the local area." As far as the specific element is concerned, deliberate exaggeration is mainly manifested by the overstatement of the purpose and function of a geographic entity. For example, the use of words describing an extra-large area like "world", "global" and "universe" and the names of continents such as "Asia" and "Europe", and the abuse of special terms like "Chinese", "Central" and "National" are seen in the naming of a residential community or a building. The deliberate exaggeration of generic term mainly refers to the confusion in geographical hierarchy and misnomer, for example, "Avenue" and "Street" refer to the main roads with red line width of more than 50 meters, of which, roads used mainly for purposes of traffic are called streets and roads with both traffic and commercial functions are called avenues, but in reality, roads with red line width of less than 10 meters and with no commercial function are also named as "XX Street".

—The “foreign” words in non-standard geographical names refers to the phenomenon that the geographical names, in violation of the *Administrative Regulations on Geographical Names* and other regulations, use foreign words or their Chinese transcription to name Chinese places, or spell Chinese geographical names in foreign languages. For example, some residential areas are named as “Provence”, “Eaton Town”, “Venice Garden” and so on.

—The “strange” words in non-standard geographical names refer to the phenomenon that the geographical names are in violation of the *Administrative Regulations on Geographical Names* and the detailed rules for the implementation of these Regulations, which provide that the geographical names shall “reflect the cultural or natural features of the local area”, “standard characters in Chinese and ethnic minority languages shall be used”, and “the use of uncommon words shall be avoided”, and that grotesqueness is pursued blindly, the meaning is unclear, the logic is chaotic, vulgar words are used, simplified and traditional Chinese characters are mixed with each other, Chinese characters and foreign words are mixed with each other, or the names have a strong feudal feature. For example, the titles of ancient emperors, or the official titles, job titles, administrative region names in ancient times, or the words with a strong feudal feature such as “emperor”, “king”, “imperial”, are used in new geographical names without historical basis, not only showing a strong feudal feature but also being inconsistent with the local history and culture.

—Another problem is that several places within certain geographical territory have exactly the same names or their names are homonyms. This is in violation of the *Administrative Regulations on Geographical Names* and the detailed rules for the implementation of these Regulations, which provide that “towns, townships, and sub-district offices in a county (city, district) shall not use the same names as other towns, townships and sub-district offices in the same administrative region; natural villages in a town or township shall not use the same names as other natural villages in the same administrative region; no two streets, lanes, and residential areas shall use the same names within a town”.

Non-standard geographical names containing “exaggerated, foreign, strange” words or use the same characters as other geographical names shall be standardized in accordance with the relevant laws, regulations and standards. Where the non-standard geographical names are in violation of the naming principles and strongly criticized by the public, the organizations or property owners in question shall be urged to change the names; where a geographic entity does not have a name, it shall be given a proper name without delay; where a geographic entity has several names, a standard name shall be determined for it; where a single name is used for several geographic entities, the problem shall be solved by such means as renaming and adding regional determiners; where the geographic entity is named or renamed without going through the formalities to obtain the approval, they must go through the necessary formalities in accordance with the specified procedures and requirements. It is necessary to strengthen the supervision and inspection of the use of geographical names, promptly correct the practice of using non-standard geographical names in public places, and focus on correcting the use of non-standard geographical names, the use of non-standard Chinese characters in geographical names, the use of foreign words in geographical names, on such public signs as geographic entity signs and traffic signs, on such public media as news, advertisement, radio program, in such public publications as maps and reference books, and in various instruments such as official documents, certificates, and bus, ship or air tickets.

II. Working Principles and Methods

The working principles for clean-up and standardization of non-standard geographical names are as follows. **First, the work shall be done on the basis of the survey and in accordance with the laws.** The preservation of toponymic culture as well as the clean-up and standardization of non-standard geographical names shall be an important part of the Second National Survey of Geographical Names, and shall be done as planned together with the survey. The relevant regulations and rules shall be followed strictly to preserve the toponymic culture and solve the problem of non-standard geographical names. **Second, the work shall**

be done for the purposes of preservation, inheritance and development. The naming and evolution law shall be followed, arbitrary changes to geographical names shall be prohibited resolutely, the rapid disappearance of toponymic cultural heritages shall be avoided, and the excellent traditional toponymic culture shall be inherited and further developed. **Third, standards shall be followed strictly and the work shall be pushed forward steadily.** It is necessary to properly balance the relationship between clean-up & standardization of non-standard geographical names and maintenance of toponymic stability, well manage the new geographical names and standardize the existing geographical names, prevent the emergence of new non-standard geographical names while standardizing the existing non-standard geographical names, implement the tasks in a classified, graded, stratified manner, move the work forward steadily in accordance with the law and in an orderly manner, and avoid rushing up to rename geographic entities without a good reason. **Fourth, the work shall be done for the convenience of the people and in a manner to conserve resources.** It is necessary to preserve, inherit and develop the geographical names reflecting the excellent traditional culture and local cultural characteristics, restrain from making unnecessary changes to geographical names accustomed to the public, and make correction, adjustment and gradual replacement of non-standard geographical names according to the actual situations.

The preservation and standardization work began in February 2016 and will end in June 2017. The work is done in five stages. **1. Mobilization the action plan.** The provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government shall formulate and implement the implementation plan based on the actual situation, strengthen publicity and mobilization, and create a favorable working environment. **2. Survey.** The localities shall get to know the details of their toponymic cultural resources and non-standard geographical names through the survey, and produce a preliminary list of non-standard geographical names. **3. Clean-up and standardization.** Experts in history, geography, culture, society, and law shall be invited to form a working group for the preservation of toponymic culture and clean-up & standardization of non-standard geographical names, to be responsible for the review and evaluation work. The working group of experts shall review and discuss the preliminary list of non-standard geographical names, put forward their own list of non-standard geographical names to be cleaned up and standardized and offer suggestions on how to deal with them, invite competent experts and representatives of the general public to conduct legal assessment and risk assessment, and hold public hearings if necessary. Where it is necessary to replace non-standard geographical names, the replacement shall be done by competent administrative authorities in accordance with the legal procedures. Upon confirmation of toponymic cultural heritages and replacement of non-standard geographical names, the results shall be made public timely. **4. System improvement.** By taking advantage of this campaign we shall promote the rule of law in the naming of geographic entities, further improve the regulations and standards regarding geographical names, define clearly the approval authority, refine the work procedures, standardize management measures, establish long-term mechanism to manage naming and renaming as well as cancellation and use of geographical names, avoid the emergence of non-standard geographical names at the source. **5. Experience summary and inspection for acceptance.** It is necessary to timely summarize the experience from the clean-up and standardization work, and report the results to the leading group for the survey at the next higher level for inspection and supervision.

III. Work that Has Been Done

In 2016, the Leading Group for China's Second National Survey of Geographical Names issued the document titled *Implementation Plan on Strengthening Preservation of Toponymic Culture as well as Cleaning up and Standardizing Non-standard Geographical Names*, held the video work conference on strengthening the preservation of toponymic culture as well as cleaning up and standardizing non-standard geographical names, mobilized and made action plans for the work regarding clean-up & standardization of non-standard geographical names. It organized the drafting of the *Training Materials for Strengthening Preservation of*

Toponymic Culture as well as Cleaning up and Standardizing Non-standard Geographical Names, organized two training sessions for this work, produced and broadcasted three programs reflecting the problem of non-standard geographical names at CCTV's *Focus Interview*, published feature articles in *People's Daily*, *China Society News*, *Chinese Civil Affairs*, *Oriental Outlook*, people.cn and other media outlets, actively guided public opinions, strengthened the work guidance and publicity guidance, carried out special inspections, and urged all localities to earnestly implement the clean-up and standardization of non-standard geographical names. At present, the experience summary and inspection for acceptance is underway, in order to present sound results of clean-up and standardization of non-standard geographical names.