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The Name Changes of NanJing City Over 2500 Years

Nan Jing is now the capital of JiangSu province that is located in east China. It has been set as capital of either a Chinese empire or regional power for 6 times in history. Due to its importance, it has attracted too much attention from rulers of successive dynasties. Nan Jing has changed over 20 names in its 2500 years history. There's no other Chinese city that has had as many names as Nan Jing. Why has Nan Jing been frequently renamed? The reason for some renames cannot be proven due to the loss of records. However there are still some remarkable tales that are still spreading between people which provide us with very interesting facts and give us a deep understanding of Chinese culture and community. Due to the property of Chinese characters which one character can often represent multiple meanings, there's a lot of fun when interpreting classical Chinese to modern Chinese and English. The brief words from our ancestors left a large space of imagination for us to understand these names as we prefer. In this article, 6 old names of NanJing city and the stories behind these names will be introduced, some long time misunderstanding of some names will also be clarified in this article, the introduction will be time based, you could find out the hint of Chinese naming principle after reading this article.

A colloquial name of NanJing that has been widely used by local people for over 2000 years is Chang Gan Li. In this context, "Chang" means long, "Gan" is a narrow plain between two mountains and "Li" is the most basic community unit in ancient China. The basic meaning of "Chang Gan Li" is a small community located on a long plain between two mountains. By reading the satellite map of the city it will be easy to understand how vividly this name describes Nan Jing's geography. There's a mountain range that lies along the south coast of Yangtze River like a smooth stripe, the mountain goes from southwest to northeast. A plain appears right in the middle of the continuous mountain range, it looks like a fault of the mountain. As the founding of the feudal system in the iron age, cities have been fastly founded through China. An old system "Li" which has been proved widely used in 1800 B.C. tribes now has been picked up. The ancestors build the cities with grids, the small squares that people live in are called "Li" and the squares people use to do trading are called "Shi" which means market.

"Jin Ling" is the name that has been used since 333 B.C. when a larger city was built upon the old stone city. In this name, "Jin" means gold in a narrow sense and "Ling" means "rocky mountain range" or "large royal tomb". "Jin Ling" is a widely known name of NanJing, today in China it is the most frequently mentioned ancient name among all names that NanJing has ever had. However, as a most appreciated name of NanJing, there are too few records that claim the real reason why exactly this city has been named as "Jin Ling" during such a long era. There are two popular statements that are trying to explain the initial naming logic of "Jin Ling". In 333 B.C. China was in the Warring States Period. The first statemate which is also more

metaphysical goes like this: the 37th lord of Kingdom Chu seized new lands along the Yangtze river after defeating Kingdom Wu. As we said above, the terrain around “Jin Ling” is a continuous mountain range and could be imagined as a Chinese dragon since the mountain range is narrow and long. This lord of Chu Kingdom believes this “dragon” represents the national fortune of his enemy Wu. In order to keep Kingdom Wu from recovering from this loss and keep decaying, he decided to follow the traditional five elements theory of China. The theory claims there are metal, wood, water, fire and soil existing in this world, each one of them can reinforce one other particular element while restraining one other element. In this case the five elements create a circulation. In its derived theories, “metal” element can cut down the pneuma of the dragon born from the mountain. Under the guidance of these theories the lord of Chu buried metals under this city and destroyed the national fortune of WU. In Chinese metal and gold are both pronounced “Jin” and they even share the same character so we are not able to differentiate from ancient books whether this lord buried gold under this city or he just buried some kind of inferior metal. To this, “Jin Ling” earned its name. The second statement is more trustworthy because it sounds like a reasonable fact, again the 37th lord of Kingdom Chu built a new city upon the old stone city after winning the war against Wu. The old stone city was built on a mountain which nowadays is called “Violet Gold Mountain” which is rich of bronze also called violet gold in ancient shines brightly under the sunshine and the new city surely included all territory of the old city plus the Violet Gold Mountain is the most symbolic scene in the city thus “Jin Ling” became a brief and elegant name of “Violet Gold Mountain”.

If we say when “Jin Ling” was first built, the character “Jin” is an abstract reference, when time comes to around 170 A.D. When the 12th emperor of the Han Dynasty was in power, a gold mine was discovered in the south east direction of Jin Ling. This emperor of Han started to exploit this gold mine to cover his military expenditures. In an ancient Taoism book “He-Tu” describes Jin Ling as: “The mountain of gold, rocks lies within, wars and diseases shall not reach it, flood and waves shall not drown it, this is called Jin Ling, dragon lies underneath in ancient legends...”. Hong-Jing Tao. (499 A.D.) Zhen Gao. *Taoism Book*. The words from “He-Tu” appeared in HongJing’s Taoism book, the real author of He-Tu is untraceable right now. Both the mining of gold in the Han Dynasty and the narratives of “He-Tu” are confusing the enthusiasts to make them think the name of Jin-Ling really comes from gold. In fact, there’s actually very little connection between Jin-Ling’s name and real gold.

Carry on the preceding stories of the Warring States Period. In 210 B.C. the 36th lord of the Kingdom Qin defeated all other Kingdoms in China and ended the continuous war that lasted over 500 years. This lord of Qin is also the first emperor ever in Chinese history. During his inspection tour from north to south, he passed through Jin Ling, he’s also afraid of the myth of dragon buried under mountains around Jin Ling thus he chose to demote the pneuma of this dragon by belittling the name of Jin Ling city. He renamed Jin Ling with “Mo Ling”. The character “Ling” remains the same meaning which simply claims the city was found upon rock. The character “Mo” here means forage that normally people use to feed horses and other livestock. “Mo Ling” is the most humiliating name this city has ever received. It is also a name that would never be brought up again by today’s Nan Jing citizens. This dishonorable name lasted more than 400 years until the Three Kingdoms Period.

In 211 A.D. one of the Three Kingdoms, Wu, set its capital in Mo Ling then changed the name to "Jian Ye". The word "Jian" is a verb here means "establish" or "build", the word "Ye" means estate. The King of Wu, Sun-Quan meant to expand the family estate he inherited from his brother and father. Compared to the lords of other fragmenting powers who mostly have prominent family backgrounds, the father of Sun-Quan climbed from the bottom as a low level military officer. Due to such reasons, Sun-Quan is strongly anxious about gaining fame and expanding territory. The new name he gave Jin Ling embedded his ambition and his expectation toward his young kingdom. However, Wu Kingdom was soon annexed by the new Empire of Jin after Sun-Quan's death. A propitious name wasn't able to prevent the perish of this fragmenting regime. (expand the concept of Civilians are the key to prosperous, add his opponent who focus more on civilians life instead of believe in superstitions for instance: Liu-Bei)

The Jin Empire is the third in China who reached the Great Unity which means it has expanded its territory to the whole "China" region and could only be stopped by deserts, tropical forests and himalayan mountains. The fourth emperor of the Jin Empire was Sima-Ye, the unfortunate Jian Ye city had to change its name again due to there's one character in its name - "Ye" duplicated with the emperor's name. In ancient times, the characters in Chinese emperors' names automatically became forbidden words from the day he became emperor to the day his dynasty ended. When the emperor's alive, the words that appeared in his name can't be used in others' names. Fortunately, a large number of emperors will be named with those rare-used characters with special meanings. This time, "Jian Ye" has been changed to "Jian Kang". Sima-Ye's effort soon came in handy after he renamed this city. Sima-Ye lost half of the territory north of the Yangtze River from the invasion of alien ethnics that broke into the Great Wall during the Jin Empire's civil war. In 317 A.D. he had to relocate the empire's capital to "Jian Kang", the city he had just renamed.

In the following 1000 years, Nan Jing has been given multiple names by whoever dominates it. But none of those names can last too long because wars were frequent. In the year of 1368 A.D. a new country was born in this land that brought over 200 years of continuous peace to China - the Ming Empire. The founder of this empire - emperor Zhu-Yuan-Zhang has used this city as his base for many years but he didn't rename it as "Ying Tian" until he formally ascended the throne. There are two interpretations on the name "Ying Tian", unlike the previously mentioned naming rules, we need to combine both stories when we're trying to interpret the name of this capital of Ming Empire. "Ying" means "answer" or "obey" in this context. "Tian" means "God" or "Heaven". Zhu-Yuan-Zhang is proud of his achievement that destroyed the Yuan dynasty built by Genghis Khan's grandson. He thought it was under god's will that he dislodged the Mongols from China. This is the first part of the story why he named the city "Ying Tian". After decades of rehabilitation after the war, Zhu-Yuan-Zhang star's to think about moving the capital to other cities in order to better control the empire. His ministers had a serious discussion over years and they inspected many cities in person around the whole country. The ministers tried best to debate with each other about which city will benefit the empire more and which city buries more obvious dragon penuma. An unexpected accident happened when

they're busily discussing something. The chosen inheritor of Zhu-Yuan-Zhang his first son prince Zhu-Biao passed away due to disease. Zhu-Biao was the crown prince that Zhu-Yuan-Zhang relied on for a long time, the emperor had paid too much attention and expectation on his son. After the death of Zhu-Biao, Zhu-Yuan-Zhang became disheartened, he stopped all preparation about relocating the capital because he doesn't believe changing capital - a human being's activity can affect god's decision. He said: "The rise and fall has its own rules, mortals can only obey heavenly order." From that moment, Zhu-Yuan-Zhang must have understood the god's will more deeply. Even the emperor can't always be favored by gods.

In modern times, after the founding of the Republic of China, the governors again set the capital in NanJing. "Nan" simply means the direction of the South which claims NanJing city located in south China, "Jing" straightly means capital. Together "Nan-Jing" means a capital in south China. The reason why they made the name so simple is because the modern governors believe in science. There were no concerns of superstitions in the naming process. The second reason is the Republic of China was established in the war, there was not a single year that the NanJing government was not in the war until its perish. The governors had no leisure to make the capital's name elegant and classical. The name "Nan Jing" has also been adapted by the People's Republic of China until today. By viewing the history of NanJing's name, it is not tough to realize that civilians' advice were insignificant in the past and they're not even qualified to name the city they live in. All those names came from rulers' own belief and started from their own fortune's concern. No matter how soundful those old names are, my favorite name of NanJing is Chang Gan Li because it is plain without decoration, it is a name that has been approved by people living around, it is also a name generated from people's talk and people's words are what rulers should be hearing.

Reference

Unknown Author, Unknown Year, *He-Shu-Zhong-Pian*

Gong-Yang-Gao, Unknown Year, *Spring and Autumn: Gongyang Biography*

What has been revised: from the peer review I got feedback that some expansion on “Chang Gan Li” will be necessary so I’ve added the history of “Li” as a basic community unit. I’ve also been reminded that APA citation is necessary so I corrected it. One of my peers also said my introduction was not clear enough so I’ve added a roadmap to give readers a clue about how the structure of this article will be.