CULTURAL SYNONYMY: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON COMPREHENDING SACRED SPACES

SINONIMIA CULTURAL: UNA PERSPECTIVA TRANSLINÜÍSTICA SOBRE LA COMPRENSIÓN DE LOS ESPACIO SAGRADOS

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Abstract: This study explores how people with different cultural backgrounds comprehend diverse sacred spaces all over the world, from a cross-linguistic perspective. The challenges surrounding intelligibility relate to spatial resemblance, complexity of religion, as well as many obscure proper names. With the lexicalization of relevant religious concepts, "cultural synonyms" are generated. Through surveying the vocabulary within the domain of "TEMPLE" as an exemplification, the cultural synonymy of the Chinese lexicon in demonstrating spiritual intricacy has been elucidated. Based on the theory of "multi-competence", a reasonable hypothesis on cross-culturally understanding the sacred space is proposed: Multicompetent individuals can have other comprehensions about sacred spaces when compared with monolinguals of either the native or the target language; A monolingual or a cross-cultural experiencer without knowledge of the regional language depends on translation to apprehend the sacred space, which may result in confusion; Deficient translations may also interfere with multicompetent individuals, while their linguistic awareness allows them more chan

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ces of differentiating cultural synonyms and accordingly clarification of any misguided perceptions.

Keywords: Cultural Synonymy, Sacred Space, Comprehension, Linguoculturology, Chinese

Resumen: Este estudio explora cómo las personas con diferentes antecedentes culturales comprenden diversos espacios sagrados en todo el mundo, desde una perspectiva interlingüística. Los desafíos que rodean la inteligibilidad se relacionan con la semejanza espacial, la complejidad de la religión, así como con muchos nombres propios oscuros. Con la lexicalización de conceptos religiosos relevantes se generan "sinónimos culturales". A través de la inspección del vocabulario dentro del dominio de "TEMPLO" como ejemplo, se ha dilucidado la sinonimia cultural del léxico chino para demostrar la complejidad espiritual. Con base en la teoría de la "competencia múltiple", se propone una hipótesis razonable sobre la comprensión transcultural del espacio sagrado: los individuos multicompetentes pueden tener otras comprensiones sobre los espacios sagrados en comparación con los monolingües de la lengua nativa o de destino; Un experimentador monolingüe o transcultural sin conocimiento del idioma regional depende de la traducción para aprehender el espacio sagrado, lo que puede resultar en confusión; Las traducciones deficientes también pueden interferir con las personas multicompetentes, mientras que su conocimiento lingüístico les brinda más posibilidades de diferenciar sinónimos culturales y, en consecuencia, aclarar cualquier percepción equivocada.

Palabras clave: sinonimia cultural; espacio sagrado; comprensión; linguoculturología; China

Introduction

With the emergence and the evolution of human civilization, various faiths and beliefs have been persistently embodying their abstractions into tangible or visible structures, thereby generating meanings for the physical presence of construction. Transcending a prodigious number of views and discussions on the so-called *Sacred Space*, such as of theology, architecture, aesthetics, anthropology, folkloristics, mythology, etc., a cross-linguistic perspective can be conducive in surveying how people with vastly different cultural backgrounds comprehend diverse sacred spaces all over the world.

Eliade (1961: 20-65) splits the human experience of reality into sacred and profane space and time. "The experience of sacred space makes possible the 'founding of the world': where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence". He emphasizes that "the experience of space known to nonreligious man- that is, to a man who rejects the sacrality of the world, who accepts only a profane existence, divested of all presuppositions", but "such a profane existence

is never found in the pure state." Admittedly, it is reasonable to presume that a person who holds religious beliefs in conflict with their own secular beliefs or even an atheist can acquire meaningful involvement with, and absorption when soaking-in sacred spaces. Benefitting from convenient transportation and accessible information in modern times, individuals can concern themselves about the spatial sacrality by means of visiting ancient ruins, exotic monuments, or even just by watching a documentary. Specifically, second language learners generally find it an important constituent of immersion in the target cultural circumstance, approaching comprehension of holy sites, abundant with ethnic or local characteristics and traditions.

1. Challenges to Cross-Culturally Comprehending Sacred Spaces

Whether one is entering the space in person, or simply knows and experiences the sacred place and scene through a medium, the iconic proximity of configuration and material, or similar methods of interaction between humans and the divine environment, these can all stimulate analogical associations based on their pre-existing knowledge. This cognitive transfer can be negative and result in intercultural confusions or misunderstandings. For example, the Roman triumphal columns, the rostral columns, the obelisks and the *huabiao*[2] share a similarity in semblance: upright-standing, high, stony, ornate, prominent, and so on. However, conjecturing that the huabiao are erected in memory of a victory in war is a reasonable assumption, yet is erroneous, given that its original function was more akin to a bulletin board for those wishing to air grievances or to comment on governance, and henceforth merely a symbol of the governor's responsibility to the people. With respect to the cases of settling huabiao on 神道 (*shéndào*, spirit roads leading to a tomb of a major dignitary), it is more comparable to a 鳥居 (*torii*, a traditional Japanese gate for a Shinto shrine), symbolically marking the spatial transition from the profane to the sacred.

Furthermore, even when cognitive transfer is applied in situations corresponding to a more homogenous oriental culture, misunderstandings between these cultures can also occur. For instance, a religious structure called เสาชิงช้า (Sao Ching Cha, The Giant Swing) in Bangkok, Thailand closely resembles a torii. However, the swing is not for symbolizing the segmentation between the profane and the sacred, but for re-enacting the

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[2] 华表 (*huábiǎo*) is a type of Chinese ceremonial column traditionally erected in front of palaces and tombs.

Brahminic celebration of Naga serpents welcoming Shiva's descent to the earth.

Besides misconceptions caused by resemblance, the confusion resulting from the inherent complexities of religion may also obstruct the interpretation of cross-religious sacred spaces. This intricacy can be attributed to numerous factors, such as the evolutionary origins of religions, history of religions, religious proliferation and spread, localization and denominational variation, administrative apparatuses and hierarchies of religion, political interference, human migration, and so forth. Along with the development of religion and the lexicalization of religious concepts, more and more proper names have been coined for sacred places, which are often very obscure, especially when the multiple referents resemble one another, as can be seen with the following relevant English stock words.

church, cathedral, basilica, duomo, minster, ecclesia

chapel, bethel, tabernacle, chantry, shrine, collegiate church, meeting house

monastery, convent, abbey, priory, friary, nunnery, cloister

temple, mosque, synagogue

Temple Church

Such glossaries are products of the language, reflecting the complexity of religions. Additionally, concerning the internal structure of language such as morphology, semantics, lexical evolution, etc., complication in a strictly linguistic sense may incur difficulties when understanding sacred places. The following exemplification can illustrate this issue.

塔	*tǎ*	tower
窣堵波	*sūdǔbō*	stupa
塔婆	*tǎpó*	stupa
浮屠	*fútú*	Buddha; stupa

From the Western Han Dynasty (206BC – AD25), due to increasingly frequent international exchanges, a considerable number of foreignisms entered the Chinese language, which are clearly identifiable even in modern times. This surge in loanwords during this period has made yet another distinctive mark in Chinese lexical evolution. Towards the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), with increasing translation of Buddhist scriptures,

the Chinese language imported many Buddhist vocabularies from Sanskrit, Pali and ancient Central Asian languages. Examples include 窣堵波 (*sūdŭbō*, transcribed from Sanskrit 'stupa') and 塔婆 (*tăpó*, transcribed from Pali '*thupa*'). As the polysyllabic transcriptions in common use tend to be abbreviated to a corresponding monosyllable, the 塔婆 was shortened to the 塔 (*tă*), and then the abridged component, as a root morpheme, can also compound words, for instance, 宝塔 (*băotă*, pagoda), 灯塔 (*dēngtă*, beacon, pharos), 水塔 (*shuĭtă*, water tower) and so on. The 浮屠 (fútú) was originally a variant of 佛陀 (*fótuó*, Buddha), and then semantically extended, referring to "Buddhist pagoda or stupa", such as in the common saying:

救人一命，胜造七级浮屠。

Jiù rén yīmìng, shèng zào qījí fútú. There is greater merit in saving a single life than in building a seven-tier pagoda.

Thus, without insight into this kind of linguistic complexity, attempts to holoculturally comprehend sacred places, such as 塔林 (*tălín*, pagoda forests), commonly found in many temples in China, are fruitless exercises.

2. A Brief Review of the Studies on Chinese Cultural Synonymy

As elucidated above, sacred spaces are normally rich in their history and tradition, and for expressing their ample and often highly specific cultural connotations, related religious concepts have been lexicalized, and accordingly "cultural synonyms" have been formed. More precisely, they are near synonyms or sometimes even just a subject-related thesaurus. If any semantic differentiation can be conducted for these synonyms, rather than from the aspects like "scopes", "formality", "sentimental colors", "syntactic functions", etc., their inherent cultural information is more pertinent as a result.

The earliest research on cultural synonymy in China can be traced back to the compilation of *The Ready Guide* (《尔雅》 *Ěr yă*)[3], the first Chinese dictionary, or rather, the first thesaurus dictionary of an encyclopedic nature. It contains a wide variety of object names and differentiates

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[3] Presumably compiled in the Qin Dynasty (221BC-206BC) or the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty (206BC-AD25). See also Zhang Minghua (张明华, 1998), Zou Feng (邹酆, 2006) and Yong Heming (雍和明, 2006).

synonyms, which were likely to puzzle language learners at that time. It helps them to see more clearly the differences between these commonly encountered confusable words to develop a strong command of the Chinese language. Remarkably, the thesaurus involves a semantic category "释宫 (*shì gōng*, interpreting the court)", which focuses on the primeval names of palaces and the relevant roads and bridges. Certainly, such places represent sacredness, similar to the Greek word "Temenos", meaning sanctuary, but could also include a piece of land assigned to a king, or a precinct dedicated to a god.
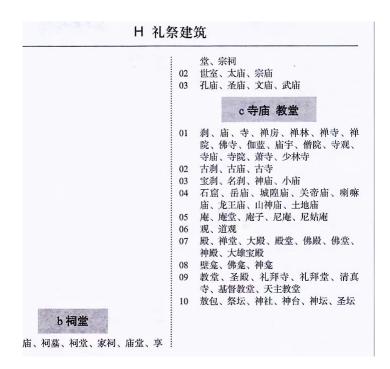
In recent years, there have been more investigatory probes into cultural factors when reasoning the formation and evolution of Chinese synonyms, such as in Zeng Zhaocong (曾昭聪, 2004), Li Min (李敏, 2005), Zhuang Enzhong (庄恩忠, 2007), Zhou Guangqing (周光庆, 2012) and Hong Chengyu (洪成玉, 2017). Some of the studies have illustrated the cultural device of the Chinese lexicon in constructing synonymous items, exemplified by the vocabulary regarding sacred spaces. Moreover, Wang Lu (王璐, 2011) has argued that synonymy is sourced from the diversity of our encyclopedic knowledge and cultural experiences, while also advocating that from the perspective of translation, synonyms are cognitively and cultural-context dependent.

3. Cultural Synonymy and Cross-Cultural Comprehension

3.1 Cultural Synonymy: Exemplified with the Domain of "Temple" in the Chinese Lexicon

Due to the complexity of faiths and beliefs, culturally synonymous items have been continuously formed, so that correlative concepts can be denoted more accurately. Regarding the so-called sacred space, specifically places of worship, edifices or even complexes, signifiers are universally abundant in the world's languages, so are they also in the Chinese language. For the conceptual domain of "temple", in A Thesaurus of Modern Chinese (《现代汉语分类词典》)[4], more than 60 lexical items are listed under the semantic category of "寺庙 教堂 (temple and church)", and another 15 under the category of "祠堂 (ancestral temple)", as shown in the image below.

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[4] Page 67. Su Xinchun (苏新春, 2013), 北京: 商务印书馆. See also the lexical database "Chinese Wordnet" (CWN 中文詞彙網絡 http://lope.linguistics.ntu.edu.tw/cwn https://lope.linguistics.ntu.edu.tw//cwn2)

堂、宗祠
02 世室、太庙、宗庙
03 孔庙、圣庙、文庙、武庙

c 寺庙 教堂

01 刹、庙、寺、禅房、禅林、禅寺、禅院、佛寺、伽蓝、庙宇、僧院、寺观、寺庙、寺院、萧寺、少林寺
02 古刹、古庙、古寺
03 宝刹、名刹、神庙、小庙
04 石窟、岳庙、城隍庙、关帝庙、喇嘛庙、龙王庙、山神庙、土地庙
05 庵、庵堂、庵子、尼庵、尼姑庵
06 观、道观
07 殿、禅堂、大殿、殿堂、佛殿、佛堂、神殿、大雄宝殿
08 壁龛、佛龛、神龛
09 教堂、圣殿、礼拜寺、礼拜堂、清真寺、基督教堂、天主教堂
10 敖包、祭坛、神社、神台、神坛、圣坛

b 祠堂

庙、祠墓、祠堂、家祠、庙堂、享

On some occasions, differentiating a certain synonym from the others is not always onerous, because the essential cultural factor/sememe is often obvious and distinct. For example, 庵 (*ān*, Buddhist nunnery)[5] usually classifies for Buddhist nuns and female practitioners, rather than monks, so that compounds sharing this particular monomym tend to be synonymous, such as 庵堂 (*āntáng*, 堂: hall), 庵子 (*ānzi*, 子: suffix), 尼庵 (*ní'ān*, 尼: Buddhist nun), and 尼姑庵 (*nígū'ān*, 尼姑: Buddhist nun).

The lexical items relating to a specific religion or denomination can also be easily differentiated, and sometimes cannot even be recognized as synonyms, instead displaying differences in sememes. For instance, 观 (*guàn*, Taoist temple) and 道观 (*dàoguàn*, Taoist temple, 道: Taoist) are for Taoism; 禅房 (*chánfáng*, Buddhist temple, 禅: deep meditation, 房: house), 禅林 (*chánlín*, Buddhist temple, 林: forest, [figurative] circles), 禅寺 (*chánsì*, Buddhist temple, 寺: temple) and 禅院 (*chányuàn*, Buddhist temple, 院: courtyard) are for Zen Buddhism, while 喇嘛庙 (*lǎmamiào*, la-

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[5] 庵 (ān) is polysemous. This sense is more frequent in the Modern Chinese, although its original meaning is "thatched hut."

masery, 喇嘛: lama, 庙: temple) for Tibetan Buddhism; 清真寺 (*qīngzhēnsì*, mosque, 清: clear, 真: true, 清真: Muslim, 寺: temple) for Islam, whereas 教堂 (*jiàotáng*, church, 教: religion, 堂: hall) normally for Christianity, less frequently for Judaism; and 敖包 (*áobāo*, ovoo, transliteration of Mongolian o *во*о, sacred pile of stones, earth, grass, etc.) is used by Mongolians as a place of worship or landmark.

When importing a new religious concept into China, initially, the foreign word may be directly introduced, forming an assimilated loanword by the means of transliteration. Subsequently, the Chinese language tends to recreate a neologism utilizing its native lexical resources. Thus, the original phonetic borrowed version can be synonymous with the latter semantic substitute. For example, it is not hard to identify the exotic-native style juxtaposed with 刹 (chà, Buddhist temple, abbreviated transliteration of Sanskrit '*Kṣetya*'), 伽蓝 (qiélán, Buddhist temple, abbreviated transliteration of Sanskrit '*samghārāma*'), and 佛寺 (*fósì*, Buddhist temple, 佛: Buddha, 寺: temple).

As for differentiating between 寺 (*sì*, temple) and 庙 (*miào*, temple), the etymology and semantic extension shed light on the matter. According to *An Explanatory Dictionary of Chinese Characters* (《说文解字》 *Shuō wén jiě zì*)[6] the original meaning of 寺 (sì) is "court"[7], referring to the government bureaus of imperial China, as illustrated by 大理寺 (*dàlǐsì*, Imperial Court of Justice), 鸿胪寺 (*hónglúsì*, Court of State Ceremonials), 光禄寺 (*guānglùsì*, Court of Imperial Entertainments), 太府寺 (*tàifǔsì*, Court of the Imperial Treasury) and so on. In the late Western Han Dynasty (206BC – AD25), Buddhism was introduced into China. When two Indian monks named Kasyapa Matanga (迦叶摩腾) and Dharmaratna (竺法兰) arrived in Luoyang (洛阳), they were housed in a temple called "白马寺 (*Báimǎsì*, White Horse Temple)" to translate Buddhist scriptures. This name derives from the two white horses used to transport books and Buddharupas for them.[8] This marked the beginning of the character 寺 (*sì*, court) being used for naming temples, and was also a display of respecting the sacred place as an official institution. In later periods, the word 寺 (sì) became polysemous, apart from "court, ministry", it was also used to denote "temple", "monastery" or even "mosque", for example, 少林寺 (*Shàolínsì*, Shaolin Monastery), 法门寺 (*Fǎménsì*, Famen Temple), 悬空寺 (*Xuánkōngsì*,

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[6] Compiled by 许慎 Xu Shen, ca.58 - ca.147, and considered as the origin of character dictionaries in China.

[7] The original text: 廷也。有法度者也。See also the comparative database of different editions of *An Explanatory Dictionary of Chinese Characters*, provided by Laboratory for Chinese Character Research and Application, Beijing Normal University, http://szsw.bnu.edu.cn.

[8] See also Ling Haicheng (2005).

Hanging Temple), 大昭寺 (*Dàzhāosì*, Jokhang), 塔尔寺 (*Tǎ'ěrsì*, Kumbum Monastery), 清真寺 (*qīngzhēnsì*, mosque), etc. Notably, the compound 萧寺 (*xiāosì*, Buddhist temple) is synonymous with the monosyllabic 寺 (*sì*, temple), while involving a literary register. It originated from an allusion to Emperor Wu of Liang, Xiao Yan (梁武帝萧衍, 464-549), who is famous for his contributions to Buddhism. He once issued an order to the calligrapher Xiao Ziyun (萧子云, 487-549) to write a character "萧 (*xiāo*)" onto a newly built Buddhist temple, which is the ancestral name of the Liang dynasty (502-557).[9]

In contrast, according to *An Explanatory Dictionary of Chinese Characters* (《说文解字》), the word 庙 (miào) originally signified "a shrine for worshipping ancestors"[10], as can be seen in the compounds 太庙 (*tàimiào*, the Imperial Ancestral Temple), 宗庙 (*zōngmiào*, ancestral temple of a ruling house), 家庙 (*jiāmiào*, lineage temple). Subsequently, the denotation became generalized to the adoration of various deities or spirits, especially for folk beliefs, including the veneration of the many forces of nature, eminent figures in history, or even monsters of the supernatural world. See the examples shown below.

文庙	*wénmiào*	Confucian temple
孔庙	*Kǒngmiào*	Confucian temple
夫子庙	*fūzǐmiào*	Confucian temple
圣庙	*shèngmiào*	honorific title to Confucian temple
武庙	*wǔmiào*	martial temple
关帝庙	*Guāndìmiào*	temple of Lord Guan[11]
岳庙	*Yuèmiào*	temple in memory of Yue Fei[12]
文昌庙	*wénchāngmiào*	temple to the God of Culture and Literature

[9] See also *An Addendum to Tang History* (《唐国史补》), compiled by Li Zhao (李肇, ?-?), in 《唐国史补·因话录》上海: 上海古籍出版社, 1979. The original text: 梁武帝造寺，令萧子云飞白大书"萧"字。至今一萧字存焉。

[10] The original text: 廟，尊先祖皃也。See also the comparative database of different editions of *An Explanatory Dictionary of Chinese Characters*, provided by Laboratory for Chinese Character Research and Application, Beijing Normal University, http://szsw.bnu.edu.cn.

[11] Lord Guan (关羽,?-220), military general in the Three Kingdoms period. He was later deified and became known in folklore as the God of Wealth (财神).

[12] Yue Fei (岳飞, 1103-1142), military general who lived during the Southern Song dynasty.

妈祖庙	*māzǔmiào*	Mazu temple[13]
娘娘庙	*niángniángmiào*	temple to the Goddess of Fertility
三嵕庙	*sānzōngmiào*	temple to Lord Archer[14]
城隍庙	*chénghuángmiào*	temple to the City God[15]
土地庙	*tǔdìmiào*	temple to the Lord of the soil and the ground[16]
山神庙	*shānshénmiào*	temple to local mountain gods
岱庙	*dàimiào*	Temple to the God of Mount Tai (泰山)
龙王庙	*lóngwángmiào*	Dragon King temple
狐仙庙	*húxiānmiào*	temple to the fox spirits[17]
喇嘛庙	*lǎmamiào*	Lamasery
神庙[18]	*shénmiào*	hieron, fane, temple
祆神庙	*xiānshénmiào*	Zoroastrian fire temple

Additionally, there are two more words 祠 (cí, ancestral hall) and 宫 (*gōng*, palace) that frequently refer to "shrine" or "temple" as well. According to *An Explanatory Dictionary of Chinese Characters* (《说文解字》), the word 祠 *(cí)* initially indicated "memorial services in springtime", and

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[13] *Mazu* (妈祖) is a Chinese sea goddess, who is the deified form of the legendary figure Lin Moniang (林默娘), a Fujianese shamaness.

[14] In Chinese mythology, *Sanzong* (三嵕) is the location where *Hou Yi* (后羿, Lord Archer) shot down nine suns with his bow and only left one still shining in the sky.

[15] *Chenghuangye* (城隍爷), lit. "god of the moat and the walls", refers to the tutelary deities in Chinese folk religion.

[16] *Tudigong* (土地公), lit. "lord of the soil and the ground", is a tutelary deity of a locality in Chinese folk religion.

[17] In Chinese mythology, *Huxian* (狐仙), lit. "fox immortal", are spirits or monsters usually capable of shapeshifting. They may be either benevolent or malevolent.

[18] The word 神庙 (shénmiào) in Chinese is more commonly used to denote the temples in the West rather than those in East Asia, for example, the Egyptian temples 阿布辛贝勒神庙 (*Ābùxīnbèilè shénmiào*, Abu Simbel temples), 卡纳克神庙 (*Kǎnàkè shénmiào*, Karnak), the Greco-Roman temples 帕特农神庙 (*Pàtènóng shénmiào*, Parthenon), 雅典娜神庙 (*Yǎdiǎnnà shénmiào*, Athenaeum), or even 众神庙 (*zhòngshénmiào*, pantheon), etc. As for the Jewish temples, 神庙 (*shénmiào*, hieron, fane, temple), 圣殿 (*shèngdiàn*, sanctuary), 会堂 (*huìtáng*, assembly hall, synagogue), or even 教堂 (*jiàotáng*, church) and 清真寺 (*qīngzhēnsì*, mosque) can be all applied, such as 亚历山大犹太神庙 (*Yàlìshāndà yóutài shénmiào*, "Eliyahu Hanavi" Synagogue in Alexandria), 耶路撒冷圣殿(*Yēlùsālěng shèngdiàn*, Temple in Jerusalem), 烟草街会堂 (*Yāncǎojiē huìtáng*, Dohány Street Synagogue), 老犹太教堂 (*lǎo yóutài jiàotáng*, Old Synagogue), 开封犹太教清真寺 (*Kāifēng yóutàijiào qīngzhēnsì*, Synagogue in Kaifeng).

the original meaning of 宫 *(gōng)* was "house, mansion".[19] Eventually, people extended the observance performed in a 祠 *(cí)* to not only worshipping ancestors but also some specific deity or historical figure. See the examples shown below.

祠堂	*cítáng*	ancestral hall
祖祠	*zǔcí*	ancestral shrine
宗祠	*zōngcí*	ancestral shrine
家祠	*jiācí*	lineage temple
生祠	*shēngcí*	temple to a person who is still alive
神祠	*shéncí*	shrine
土谷祠	*tǔgǔcí*	temple to the Lords of the soil and the grain
祆祠	*xiāncí*	Zoroastrian fire temple
屈子祠	*Qūzǐcí*	Temple for memorizing Qu Yuan[20]
武侯祠	*Wǔhóucí*	Temple of Marquis for memorizing Zhuge Liang[21]

Following this semantic extension, the meaning of 宫 *(gōng)* evolved even further. It later referred to a "residence of nobility", later still, came to signify a "sacred place" in a general sense. This is on account of factors including: caesaropapism, sanctification, or conversely, anthropomorphism, and even the investiture of folk religious deities, especially that of Taoism, etc. See the examples shown below.

布达拉宫	*Bùdálāgōng*	Potala Palace	caesaropapism
雍和宫	*Yōnghégōng*	Yonghe Lamasery[22]	sanctification

[19] The original texts: 祠，春祭曰祠。品物少，多文詞也。从示司聲。仲春之月，祠不用犧牲，用圭璧及皮幣。And 宫，室也。从宀，躬省聲。凡宫之屬皆从宫。See also the comparative database of different editions of *An Explanatory Dictionary of Chinese Characters*, provided by Laboratory for Chinese Character Research and Application, Beijing Normal University, http://szsw.bnu.edu.cn.

[20] Qu Yuan (屈原, ca.343 BC - ca. 278 BC), Chinese poet and politician in the State of Chu during the Warring States period.

[21] Zhuge Liang (诸葛亮, 181-234), chancellor of the state of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms period.

[22] The Palace of Peace and Harmony (雍和宫) had been the residence of Emperor Yongzheng (雍正, 1678-1735) before he ascended the throne. In 1744, Emperor Qianlong (乾隆, 1711-1799) issued an edict of converting the palace into a lamasery.

梵宫	*fàngōng*	Buddhist temple	
水月宫	*shuǐyuègōng*	palace of Avalokiteś-vara[23]	anthropomor-phism
太清宫	*tàiqīnggōng*	palace of the Supreme Venerable Sovereign[24]	
天后宫	*tiānhòugōng*	Mazu temple[25]	investiture
协天宫	*xiétiāngōng*	temple of Lord Guan[26]	

Noteworthily, the synonymy in the Chinese lexicon is uniquely featured with its morphological significance. Synonymous monosyllabic words can act as free morphemes to form coordinative compounds[27], as can be seen with 寺庙 (*sìmiào*, temple), 寺观 (*sìguàn*, Buddhist and Taoist temples, temples in general), 宫观 (*gōngguàn*, Taoist temple), 祠庙 (*címiào*, ancestral temple), which are also synonymous to the constituents. Moreover, by sharing synonymous mononyms, the compounds are constructed to also be synonymous with minute semantic nuance or pragmatic variance. See the examples shown below.

寺院	*sìyuàn*	temple
庙宇	*miàoyǔ*	temple
庙堂	*miàotáng*	temple; imperial court
祠堂	*cítáng*	ancestral hall
祖祠	*zǔcí*	ancestral shrine
宗祠	*zōngcí*	ancestral shrine
家祠	*jiācí*	lineage temple
家庙	*jiāmiào*	lineage temple
太庙	*tàimiào*	Imperial Ancestral Temple

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[23] Guanyin (观音) is the East Asian equivalent of Avalokiteśvara. *Shuiyue Guanyin* (水月观音, Water-Moon Guanyin) is usually portrayed in statues and painting as a young man or woman in a relaxed lalitasana pose beside a pond with the moon reflected in the water.

[24] The Supreme Venerable Sovereign (太上老君)，also called *Taiqing* (太清, the Grand Pure One) is one of the three highest divinities of Taoism.

[25] *Mazu* (妈祖) was later officially conferred a title "天后 (Empress of Heaven)".

[26] *Guan Yu* (关羽) was later addressed a honorific title "协天大帝 (Emperor assisting Heaven)" in Taoism.

[27] These compounds are nearly analogous to the Siamese twins in the context of the English language, such as milk and honey, short and sweet, sink or swim and so on.

宗庙	*zōngmiào*	ancestral temple of a ruling house
梵刹	*fànchà*	Buddhist temple
梵宫	*fàngōng*	Buddhist temple
喇嘛庙	*lǎmamiào*	lamasery
喇嘛寺	*lǎmasì*	lamasery
佛寺	*fósì*	Buddhist temple
祆祠	*xiāncí*	Zoroastrian fire temple
祆神庙	*xiānshénmiào*	Zoroastrian fire temple
妈祖庙	*māzǔmiào*	Mazu temple
天后宫	*tiānhòugōng*	Mazu temple

3.2 Multi-competence for Cross-cultural Comprehension

As previously expanded, the cultural synonymy demonstrates religious complexity. People understand the various sacred places in the world not merely through their personal experience of being there, but also based on their encyclopedic knowledge, and to a significant extent, knowledge of the language in their own mind. With such an abundance of cultural synonyms about the concept of the "sacred space" in a given language, as well as their immemorial etymons, subsequent semantic extensions and their inherent religious implications, even a native language speaker can be challenged when grasping the essentials, not to mention language learners.

Cook (1991, 1992) proposed the theory of "multi-competence", which signifies "the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind". He argued that the L2 user has other uses for language than the monolingual, like code-switching and translation, and their knowledge of the second language is typically not identical to that of a native speaker in syntax, vocabulary etc. Furthermore, knowing more than one language also changes the way people use their first language, and even the way they think, so the knowledge of their first language is, in some respects, no longer the same as that of monolingual native speakers.[28]

Thus, it is a reasonable hypothesis that multicompetent individuals can have other comprehensions about sacred spaces when compared to monolinguals of either the native or the target language. When an L2 user attempts to comprehend sacred spaces that have tremendous complexity in

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[28] See also Cook, V. J., & Li Wei (2016).

the sense of linguoculturology, in addition to their encyclopedic knowledge, they may also employ their linguistic awareness to preclude ambiguity. Inversely, the cognition of a monolingual or a cross-cultural experiencer without knowing the regional language of the local religious sites is dependent on translation, which may result in confusion. For example, without knowing Thai language, a Chinese person may feel fairly perplexed about the translated name "城隍庙 (*chénghuángmiào*, temple to the god of the moat and the walls)" for the ศาลหลักเมือง (*sal lak mueang*, shrine of city pillar) of Thailand, due to the fact that หลักเมือง (*lak mueang*, city pillar) are columns rather than the anthropomorphic statues housed in 城隍庙 in China, despite the belief that เจ้าพ่อหลักเมือง (*Chao Pho Lak Mueang*, deity city pillar) is tutelary. In actuality, when analyzing the language, besides "pillar", หลัก (*lak*) also means "principle, base", which is conducive to understanding the Brahman's belief. Regardless of what form or material is applied to the symbol, the laying of a cornerstone is a universally employed metaphor in religion, as can be seen in other religious examples such as the Foundation Stone in Jerusalem or the omphalos at Delphi.

In another instance, a multicompetent individual using the Chinese language can more insightfully and comprehensively understand the sacred spaces 天坛 (*Tiāntán*, Temple of Heaven), 地坛 (*Dìtán*, Temple of Earth), 日坛 (*Rìtán*, Temple of the Sun) and 月坛 (*Yuètán*, Temple of the Moon) in Beijing, by simply recognizing the root morpheme 坛 (*tán*, altar)[29], even though he has never truly visited there or lacks the relevant specific learning. The altars mentioned above can be understood as distinct from altars in the Western understanding of the word, as, altars are usually found front and center in a church, whereas they are but one component of the sacrificial grounds constituting the larger Chinese imperial sacred spaces. In this sense, the term 坛 (*tán*, altar) is also culturally synonymous with the 寺(*sì*), 庙 (*miào*), 宫 (*gōng*), 观 (*guàn*), 祠 (*cí*), etc. Deficient translations may interfere with multicompetent people, while their linguistic knowledge, however, allows them more chances of clarifying this misguided perception, or even to expand their learning about the analogues of an exotic culture. As mentioned above, the 华表 (*huábiǎo*) shares a similarity in semblance with the triumphal columns yet is uninvolved in memorializing victory or merit. However, a multicompetent person who knows about the Chinese language may notice the root morpheme 碑 (*bēi*, stele), composing the translated term 方尖碑 (*fāngjiānbēi*, obelisk), and realize the ubiquitous presence of 碑碣 (*bēijié*, stele)[30], ordinarily seen with calligraphical inscription carved in

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[29] These are all altars pertaining to various complexes, such as the 圜丘坛 (*Yuánqiūtán*, Circular Mound Altar) in the Temple of Heaven, and the 方泽坛 (*fāngzétán*, Square Water Altar) in the Temple of Earth.

[30] The cultural phenomenon is prominent with the numerous stele forests (碑林 *bēilín*) all over the country.

relief. Such structures were erected for diverse purposes, be it as funerary monuments, praising achievements, recording classic works as a reference document for scholars, commemorating imperial sacrifices and so on. Linguistic knowledge can certainly function as a useful tool for finding clues and avenues of inquiry into sacred spaces.

Compared with real-world locations as discussed above, cross-culturally approaching fictional sacred spaces can be even more problematic. When translating "pantheon" to Mandarin, the terms 先贤祠 (*xiānxiáncí*, lit. shrine of sages) or 万神殿 (*wànshéndiàn*, lit. hall to gods) are commonly used, thus, a multicompetent person rooted in Western culture yet with sufficient knowledge of Chinese culture, could connect the translations to the referent without a struggle. In contrast, the terms 英雄祠 (*yīngxióngcí*, lit. shrine of heroes), 英烈祠 (*yīngliè) cí*, lit. shrine of fallen heroes) and 英灵殿 (*yīnglíngdiàn*, litt. hall of martyr spirits), which commonly map to the Greek "heroa" are insufficient when translating the "Valhalla" mentioned in Norse mythology, thus the transliteration "瓦尔哈拉 (*Wǎ'ěrhālā*)" is necessary. Analogically, the native Chinese cultural synonyms 阴间 (*yīnjiān*), 阴司 (*yīnsī*), 阴曹地府 (*yīncáodìfǔ*), 幽都 (*yōudū*), 幽冥 (*yōumíng*), 冥界 (*míngjiè*), 黄泉 (*huángquán*), 九泉 (*jiǔquán*), 地狱 (*dìyù*), 鬼门关 (*guǐménguān*), etc., all refer to the "underworld", "nether world" or "hell". As this concept is almost universal, other examples include the Egyptian "Duat", the Greek "Tartarus", "Hades", "Styx", the Hindu "Naraka", "Patala", the Japanese "Yomi", "Ne-no-Kuni", and the Catholic "Hell", "Purgatory", "Limbo" etc. Although the mythological source defines the respective meanings, the morphological knowledge still helps in dealing with differentiation, as the Chinese compounds are considered in general to be semantically transparent, based on morpheme meanings, and radicals of the Chinese characters which also carry meaning.

4. Conclusion

When people with different cultural backgrounds attempt to comprehend diverse sacred spaces all over the world, apart from just misconceptions caused by spatial resemblance and confusion over the complexity of religion, they can also feel challenged with obscure proper names. This is most likely due to the vast number of "cultural synonyms", generated with the lexicalization of the relevant religious concepts. As a convincing exemplification, the vocabulary within the domain of "TEMPLE" demonstrates to a great extent the cultural synonymy of the Chinese lexicon in reflecting spiritual intricacies.

Based on the theory of "multi-competence", a reasonable hypothesis on cross-culturally understanding the sacred space is proposed: Multicompetent individuals can have other comprehensions about sacred spaces when compared to monolinguals of either the native or the target language; A monolingual or a cross-cultural experiencer without knowing the regional language depends on translation to apprehend the sacred space, which may result in confusion; Deficient translations may also interfere with the multicompetent individuals, while their linguistic awareness allows them more chances of differentiating cultural synonyms and accordingly clarifying the misguided perception.

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