

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 26 2020

WANG CHAOQUN

Healthcare security system should transit to poverty prevention

Since the beginning of the battle against poverty, China has stepped up efforts for targeted poverty alleviation through basic healthcare insurance, healthcare assistance, and other systems. This year, the battle against poverty will reach its conclusion, absolute poverty will be eliminated, but relative poverty remains. In the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of CPC (Communist Party of China), it was decided to “establish a long-term mechanism to address relative poverty.” Starting from 2020, the function and role of China’s healthcare security system should transit from poverty alleviation to poverty prevention.

In recent years, China carried out critical work in poverty alleviation through healthcare security systems. This provides reference for future work.

First, healthcare security systems have many functions, such as income redistribution, cost control, and resource allocation. However, the most fundamental aim is to dissolve the risk of healthcare expenditures, this is the basic mission of the system. Only when activities are based on fulfilling this mission, can the system perform its other derived functions. By providing affordable healthcare to poverty-stricken populations, healthcare security work can effectively reduce



Healthcare security is being implemented in China as an effective way to eliminate poverty. Photo: FILE

the burden and risk of healthcare expenditures.

A high level of financing ability is the premise of healthcare reimbursements and benefits. Healthcare financing is not only consumption, but also human capital investment. Currently, the actual reimbursement rate among poor people in many regions reaches 90%, which can be attributed to the high totality of funds spent on the poor, which has increased significantly from previous figures. This shows that the burden of healthcare expenditures for the poor, and even for the whole population nationwide, can be effectively

reduced, provided that the healthcare security system improves its financing capacity.

The system should ensure substantive fairness by offering differentiated guarantees to differentiated groups of people. Different people face different healthcare expenditure risks and have different needs. Poverty-stricken people with low incomes and a poor ability to resist risk should enjoy a higher degree of healthcare security. The system should thus be tilted towards the poor to ensure substantive fairness. This is how most countries adjust—tilting towards special groups such as the elderly,

children, and low-income groups. As healthcare security systems mature, they can better offer different services to different groups of people.

However, due to the uncertainty of disease itself and unpredictable healthcare expenditures, the problems of becoming poor or re-collapsing into poverty due to illness will persist for a long time. This possibility still needs to be addressed. Different from current healthcare security work, which is mainly aimed at poor populations, future work is dedicated to poverty prevention and should be aimed at the whole population.

The first step is to improve the financing capacity of healthcare security systems. Currently, the financing abilities of employee healthcare insurance are sufficient. However, the ability of healthcare insurance to cover urban and rural residents, who account for the vast majority of the country’s population, is relatively low. Their contributions to healthcare insurance account for a low proportion of their disposable income, and the number is largely lower than their tobacco and alcohol consumption expenses and self-paid healthcare expenditures. Urban and rural residents are not entirely unable to pay, but have a low willingness to pay. This requires a shift from voluntary insurance to mandatory insurance payments.

At the same time, it is necessary to appropriately increase the amount of healthcare reimbursements and benefits to reduce the risk of people’s healthcare expenditures.

The next step is to strengthen points of weakness, adjusting the overall structure. One weakness is that the reimbursements and benefits guaranteed for outpatients are insufficient. Ailments treated in outpatient clinics are an important and potentially catastrophic healthcare expenditure risk, especially for the elderly poor. Therefore, it is necessary to improve reimbursements and benefits for outpatient treatment. Furthermore, critical illness insurance for urban and rural residents has abolished the upward limit (top line) for the poor, so it is suggested that healthcare insurance for employee and urban and rural residents could also do so.

The last task is to increase protection of groups who face higher risk. Poverty caused by illness is not unique to rural people, nor to low-income groups. We should focus on strengthening the healthcare assistance system for illness expenditures. For example, families whose healthcare expenditures exceed their joint income by a certain proportion can be assisted.

Wang Chaoqun is from the School of Public Administration at Central China Normal University.

YANG LILI, SHANG GUOWEN

Place name regulation should consider cultural factors

Since June 2019, many cities in China have begun regulating place names, with strong social reactions. Government departments intervened in non-standard place names for commercial properties, housing estates and enterprise buildings. The Hainan Provincial Civil Affairs Department took the lead in issuing a “Notice on the List of Non-Standard Place Names to be Regulated,” which aims to normalize the “foreignized, peculiar and duplicated” names that appear in housing estates, hotels and other buildings. Other provinces such as Guangdong, Shaanxi and Jiangsu also issued similar documents.

As a heatedly discussed moment where language meets life, this is a typical case of government departments planning public language projects. Taking it as an opportunity for research, the relationship between linguistic phenomena, linguistic policies and people’s attitudes can be explored.

Foreignized names are commonly seen in many cities of China. The phenomenon of borrowing place

names or geographical symbols from foreign countries is pervasive. Placing a high value on things because they are foreign—this is a manifestation of today’s consumption society. As the product of a market economy, naming commercial property is closely related to commodification.

Those who name (property developers) intend to induce interest and purchasing desire from potential consumers by naming commercial properties foreignized names. Driven by economic interests, property developers cater to the consumers’ obsession with foreign things, and increase the added value of commercial property by adopting foreign-styled names.

However, abandoning national traditions when naming places, and blindly taking advantage of the symbolic value of foreign names leads to a grandiose and vulgar advertising bluff. Commercial property becomes less valuable than it originally seemed. In today’s consumer society, foreignized names are usually connected with identity,

status, wealth, and other symbolic meanings. It is this misguided effort to capture prestige that causes property developers cater to people’s cultural value orientations, which results in urban spaces fraught with foreignized names.

The regulation of foreignized place names is closely related to building China’s cultural self-confidence. Expressing a positive attitude toward the nation’s cultural value and faith in the nation’s cultural vision, is reflected in people’s behavior and norms of daily life.

In addition, a particular culture is usually characterized by a particular language. Bearing the unique cultural and national features of a country, language becomes a core component that maintains a nation’s identity. Whether the role of foreignized place names in urban language life is praiseworthy or detrimental, it certainly is common. This language product appears with frequency in city life, showing that certain people are making the phenomenon popular.

However, as society progresses,

as people’s educational levels improve, and as the government advocates the importance of “cultural confidence,” foreignized place names have gradually aroused the public’s attention and led to reflection. This naming pattern is essentially a manifestation of social and cultural psychology, mirroring social development in a linguistic way. The government should consider this in a comprehensive way when formulating language policies.

So how do we develop place names that truly are worthy of the places? Toponymy, linguistics, economics, advertising and other related disciplines should work together to name city buildings and offer more constructive suggestions for urbanization. For the naming of commercial property, being pragmatic is important. Naming should be conducive to people’s social interactions and communication norms, but also conducive to the government’s administrative management. Meanwhile, from the perspective of embodying cultural

values, the names should inspire genuine public delight. These new names should truly inherit the history, conform with the public’s conceptual convention, and embody factors of civilization. The names should also be easy to remember, serving as an easy guide for wayfinding. Merely satisfying biased consumption psychology with pompous propaganda and commercial hype should finally be set aside.

In short, the standardization of geographical names needs to follow certain rules. What we ultimately need to solve is the spiritual ethics and national sense of belonging of contemporary people. Only when the cultural self-confidence is established on an ethical level and when people’s aesthetic taste is improved, can they take the traditional culture as the supreme and actively absorb refined elements from traditional culture. By that time, the foreignized names would have no market and value.

Yang Lili and Shang Guowen are respectively from the School of Chinese Language and Literature at Suzhou University and Department of Foreign Languages of Faculty of Humanities at University of Bergen.