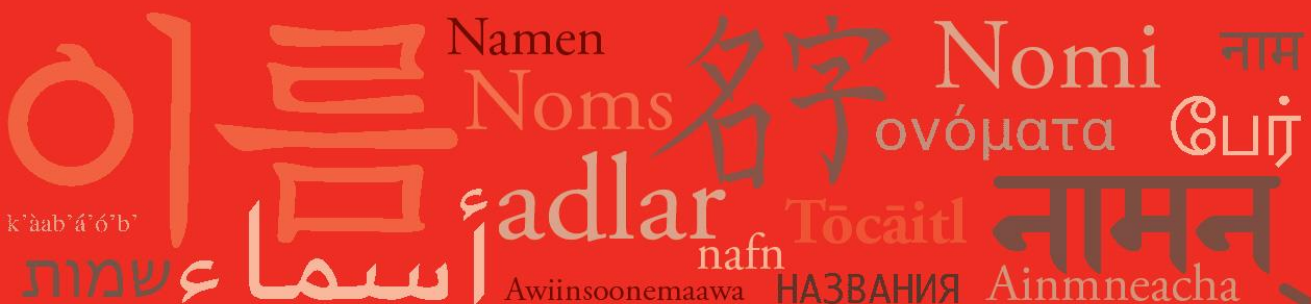


Names | A Journal of Onomastics



Naming New Commune-Level Units: Retention, Combination, and Innovation in Việt Nam's 2025 Administrative Reform

Khoa Nguyen-Viet

Hanoi University of Science and Technology, VIỆT NAM

ans-names.pitt.edu

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

Vol. 74 No. 2, Spring 2026

DOI 10.5195/names.2026.2813



Articles in this journal are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/).

Abstract

Việt Nam's 2025 commune-level administrative consolidation, enacted through Resolution 202/2025/QH15 by the National Assembly, provides a large-scale context for examining how states negotiate identity through place naming. This study analyzes 3,321 newly constituted commune-level units to identify patterns of name retention, combination, and innovation. Using a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative pattern mapping with qualitative analysis of policy documents, historical maps, and toponymic archives, it interprets naming as a sociolinguistic process through which governance, heritage, and collective identity intersect. The findings reveal a predominance of name retention in rural, culturally cohesive areas, and greater innovation in urban centers such as Hồ Chí Minh City, where renaming reinforced heritage and place branding. Situating the Vietnamese case within the framework of critical toponymy, the study demonstrates how large-scale administrative reforms mediate between political rationalization and symbolic continuity. It contributes to onomastic scholarship by proposing a replicable model for analyzing state-led renaming and by advancing understanding of how naming practices encode power, memory, and belonging.

Keywords: Vietnam, Việt Nam, administrative reform, toponymy, name retention, name innovation, place branding

1. Introduction

Place names are more than labels; they are political, cultural, and historical artefacts that both reflect and shape collective identities (Alderman & Inwood 2013; Azaryahu 2011; Rose-Redwood et al. 2009). Within the field of critical toponymy, state-led renaming projects have been examined as instruments of ideological consolidation, heritage negotiation, and territorial rebranding (Filipa & André 2025; Gnatiuk 2025; Ndletyana 2012; Light et al. 2002). Yet, much of this literature focuses on urban or national-level renaming in postcolonial, post-socialist, or post-conflict contexts, with comparatively little attention to systematic naming at lower administrative levels, especially in Southeast Asia.

Việt Nam's 2025 commune-level administrative consolidation offers a rare opportunity to study toponymic decision-making at scale. Guided by Resolution 202/2025/QH15 by the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam (hereafter National Assembly) and related regulatory documents, the reform reduced the number of commune-level units nationally from 10,035 to 3,321, producing three naming outcomes: retention of an existing name, creation of a combined name from existing units, and introduction of entirely new names (National Assembly 2025). The principles stated in Resolution 76/2025/UBTVQH15 by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly (hereafter Standing Committee), which prioritize historical significance, community consultation, and administrative clarity, reflect a balancing act between continuity and change, aligning with broader governance reforms and identity politics (Standing Committee 2025).

While studies of Vietnamese toponymy have addressed historical stratification (Lê 2006; 2012), ideological shifts (Nguyễn 2024), and urban naming trends (Bùi 2025; Bùi & Lê 2025), the large-scale, state-orchestrated reconfiguration of commune names has yet to be systematically documented or analyzed. This study aims to fill that gap by situating Việt Nam's current reform within comparative and theoretical debates in critical toponymy and sociolinguistics.

Accordingly, the research is guided by two questions:

- (1) What patterns of retention, combination, and innovation emerged in the naming of newly constituted wards/communes during the 2025 administrative reform?
- (2) How do political, historical, and spatial dynamics shape the balance between symbolic continuity and innovation in commune naming?

By combining quantitative pattern analysis with qualitative examination of official resolutions, policy rationales, and historical maps, this study seeks to contribute both an empirically grounded account of a major naming reform and a conceptual discussion of how place naming operates as a site of negotiation between state authority and local identity in contemporary Việt Nam.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Toponymic research

Place naming is never neutral; it is a symbolic inscription that constructs and contests social, political, and cultural identities (Alderman & Inwood 2013; Azaryahu 2011; Rose-Redwood et al. 2009). In state-led administrative reforms, toponyms serve bureaucratic and ideological purposes alike, framing history, asserting control, and rebranding territories (Filipa & André 2025; Gnatiuk 2025; Ndletyana 2012; Light et al. 2002). Cases from post-socialist Eastern Europe, post-apartheid Africa, and conflict-affected Ukraine show that renaming is unevenly deployed, reflecting power dynamics and memory politics. These examples illustrate how naming performs identity work, reproducing collective memory while delineating symbolic ownership of space.

Urban naming, particularly of streets (urbanonymy), demonstrates how odonyms reinforce or challenge social hierarchies. Studies of European cities expose gender imbalance, ideological asymmetry, and linguistic stratification in street-name systems, revealing how naming inscribes normative narratives within urban landscapes (Božilović 2025; Ursini & Long 2024). Similar mechanisms operate elsewhere: Nenotek (2025) interprets Indonesian street naming as a sociolinguistic practice of local identity construction, while Tubić (2024) shows how hodonymic change in Serbia reflects both onomastic and sociolinguistic shifts. These findings offer valuable parallels for contexts where functional or numerical designations are replaced with historically resonant or culturally meaningful terms.

Systematic classification of toponyms remains fundamental to comparative inquiry. Frameworks distinguishing descriptive, commemorative, administrative, and invented names allow for consistent cross-case comparison and interpretation of naming motivations (Blair & Tent 2021; Bigon 2020). Such typologies inform this study's operational categories of retention, combination, and innovation and help identify underlying intentions such as heritage preservation, administrative clarity, or place branding.

Methodological advances now integrate computational and spatial approaches. Geographic name databases (like GeoNames), together with reproducible spatial pipelines, have enabled scholars to map renaming processes across large territories (Ye et al. 2025; Gritta et al. 2020). These approaches underscore the benefits of mixed-method designs combining quantitative pattern analysis with qualitative interpretation. They inspire the present study's design, which merges statistical analysis with textual and historical examination of naming rationales.

Although global research on critical toponymy is extensive, large-scale administrative renaming below the national level has rarely been explored, especially in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese case extends these international frameworks by applying them to a nationwide administrative restructuring in which toponymic policy and cultural identity are tightly interwoven.

2.2. Vietnamese Toponymic Scholarship

Vietnamese toponymy provides a unique lens for understanding the intersection of language, history, and governance. Nguyễn (2024) offers a comprehensive two-volume history tracing the creation, consolidation, and renaming of administrative units from the Hùng Kings era (circa 2,000 B.C.) to 2024. Drawing on archival maps, decrees, and chronicles, this work situates modern reforms within a millennium of state-directed naming and boundary adjustment.

Earlier regional studies such as Nguyễn (1996) on Hải Phòng and Từ (2004) on Quảng Trị show how economic function, local history, and ethnic diversity shape distinctive naming patterns. Nguyễn (2000) established a systematic framework for Vietnamese place-name study, defining principles and semantic categories, while Lê (2006, 2012) refined this typology by classifying names according to linguistic origin, cultural significance, and administrative function. His concept of toponymic resilience explains the persistence of names such as *Hoàn Kiếm* (Hà Nội) and *Bến Thành* (Hồ Chí Minh City), which survive successive reforms because of their deep cultural resonance. Trần (2008) analyzed the Red River's multiple appellations to demonstrate how a single hydronym embodies layered historical and cultural identities.

Recent Vietnamese research warns against neglecting historical continuity in renaming. Vũ and Nguyễn (2023, 121) caution that disregard for heritage "threaten community identity" while Nguyễn and Nguyễn (2015) argue for an ontologically grounded approach that situates toponyms within cultural and political realities rather than treating them as static linguistic units. Contemporary commentators including Bùi (2025) and Bùi and Lê (2025) examine the 2025 renaming campaign as a negotiation between administrative

rationalization and cultural meaning, emphasizing collective memory and community consultation as vital components of legitimacy.

Collectively, these Vietnamese-language studies combine linguistic, historical, and policy perspectives, ensuring that current analyses of naming reform are informed by domestic intellectual traditions. They also highlight continuities between earlier scholarship and international critical toponymy, confirming that Vietnamese naming practices offer a fertile site for comparative study.

2.3. Critical Toponymy and Power Dynamics

Critical toponymy interprets naming as a political and semiotic act through which authority is asserted, challenged, or reproduced (Rose-Redwood et al. 2009). Place names not only identify space but also encode ideology and belonging. Yeoh (1996) demonstrated how commemorative street naming in Singapore inscribed nation-building narratives; Light et al. (2002) traced ideological change in Bucharest's urban odonyms after 1989, and Wanjiru and Matsubara (2017) examined Nairobi's postcolonial renaming as a form of symbolic decolonization. Gnatiuk (2025) showed how Ukraine's toponymic reforms express geopolitical identity, while Božilović (2025) revealed patriarchal structures embedded in Serbian street naming. Likewise, Różycki (2018) demonstrated how, during and after Poland's democratic transition, the decommunization of urban toponymy reflected uneven symbolic change across cities: Kraków's historical continuity allowed local autonomy, Warsaw's capital status reinforced a national mythscape, and Wrocław, constrained by its German past, adopted external symbols to align with dominant narratives. Together these studies show that naming is a key mechanism through which states construct and contest meaning in space.

Equally, critical toponymy underscores community agency. Persistent or reappropriated names can signal resistance or adaptation to state authority (Usmonova & Xujboyeva 2025; Azaryahu 2011). In Việt Nam, similar tensions appear between centralized decision-making and local sentiment. Vũ and Nguyễn (2023) warn of alienation when historical continuity is ignored, while Bui and Lê (2025) stress that participatory consultation can enhance symbolic legitimacy. Situating the Vietnamese reform within this literature clarifies how naming serves as a negotiation between governance imperatives and community identity.

2.4. Administrative Context of Vietnamese Name Change

Administrative reforms often reshape toponymic landscapes, revealing tensions between state governance priorities and local cultural identities (Rose-Redwood et al. 2009). Việt Nam's administrative system was historically organized into a three-tier hierarchy of provinces, districts, and ward/communes. In recent years, however, the central government has advanced a program of administrative streamlining aimed at improving governance efficiency, reducing redundancy, and enhancing service delivery. This agenda was codified in Resolution 202/2025/QH15, which mandated the consolidation of selected provincial, district, and commune-level units nationwide (National Assembly 2025b).



Figure 1: Map of Việt Nam with 34 Provinces

The reform’s objectives are both practical and political. Practically, it seeks to rationalize administrative boundaries, strengthen fiscal sustainability, and ensure more uniform public service provision. Politically, it reflects a long-term vision of establishing a leaner two-tier governance model, in which intermediate administrative layers are reduced, and local units are larger, stronger, and more capable. The most recent and far-reaching reform, enacted via Resolution 202/2025/QH15 by the National Assembly on June 12, 2025, restructured provincial-level units from 63 to 34, merging 52 units into 23 new ones while 11 remained unchanged, resulting in 28 provinces and 6 centrally-run cities (National Assembly 2025b; see also figure 1). A key change was the transition from a three-tier (provincial, district, ward/commune) to a two-tier (provincial, ward/commune) system, abolishing approximately 696 district-level units effective July 1, 2025 (National Assembly 2025a; Nguyễn et al. 2022).

Concurrently, commune-level units (wards, communes, and special zones) were reduced from 10,035 to 3,321. Implementation was carried out through 34 resolutions of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, this reform necessitated a nationwide renaming process that had to balance cultural heritage with governance efficiency (Government News 2025).

Place names in Việt Nam encode dense layers of social, historical, and cultural meaning, often drawn from historical figures, revolutionary events, cultural symbols, or geographic descriptors (Nguyễn 2024; Lê 2006 2021). While some commune names were retained, others were created by combining elements from multiple former names, and still others were entirely new. Toponymy, the study of place names, is widely recognized as a sociolinguistic practice that mediates between heritage preservation and administrative standardization, encoding social identities, collective memories, and power dynamics within geographic spaces (Rose-Redwood et al., 2009; Lê 2006). Recent scholarship reinforces this dual role: Nenotek (2025) demonstrates that urban street naming functions as a non-neutral discursive practice; Usmonova and Xujboyeva (2025, 84) highlight the cultural and ideological “layers” that naming encodes; and Rose-Redwood et al. (2009) address the symbolic dimension of naming as how it reshapes place identities and provokes struggles over belonging, memory, and authority, offering analytical parallels for Việt Nam’s urban renaming processes.

The 2025 wave of commune-level consolidation represents the most extensive reconfiguration of local place names since the post-reunification administrative reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s. By situating Việt Nam’s current renaming campaign within both domestic political reforms and global scholarship in critical toponymy, this study explores how administrative restructuring interacts with sociolinguistic identity construction, heritage politics, and language policy under conditions of rapid administrative change.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative pattern analysis with qualitative interpretation (Creswell & Clark 2018). The combined design enables an in-depth understanding of both observable naming outcomes and the sociopolitical and cultural rationales underlying them. The methodology directly addresses the research questions: (1) identifying patterns of same, combined, and new names, and (2) explaining how political, historical, and spatial dynamics influence symbolic continuity and innovation in naming decisions.

3.1. Data Sources

Primary data were obtained from the official post-merger commune-level administrative lists effective 1 July 2025, as promulgated in Resolution 202/2025/QH15 of the National Assembly (National Assembly 2025b) and related implementing documents issued by provincial People’s Committees. Supplementary materials included the 34 resolutions of the Standing Committee (Government News 2025). Verification was performed using statistical data compiled by Quang Tuệ et al. (2025) and cross-referenced with historical maps, cartographic archives, and naming guidelines provided in Resolution 76/2025/UBTVQH15 (Standing Committee 2025). These combined sources established both the quantitative dataset for classification and the qualitative context for historical and cultural interpretation.

3.2. Unit of Analysis

Each newly established commune-level administrative unit was treated as a single observation. The dataset encompasses 3,321 units, representing the entire population of post-consolidation communes, wards, and special zones nationwide.

3.3. Quantitative Classification Procedure

Each unit was coded into one of three naming categories:

- (1) **Same:** the new name is identical to one of the pre-merger unit names.
- (2) **Combined:** the new name contains lexical elements from two or more pre-merger names, or a modified form through addition, deletion, or substitution of directional, numerical, or semantic components.
- (3) **New:** the new name shows no direct lexical overlap with any pre-merger unit name.

In cases of minor orthographic differences (such as historical spellings or accent variations), the most recent official form recorded in National Assembly resolutions was adopted as the authoritative version. Earlier forms were noted in the dataset for reference but not used in final classification. When ambiguity persisted, historical maps, gazetteers, and provincial archives were consulted to ensure accurate categorization.

3.4. Qualitative Analysis

To examine the social, political, and historical dimensions of naming decisions, qualitative analysis combined policy review, archival interpretation, and contextual coding. Resolutions 202/2025/QH15 and 76/2025/UBTVQH15 were analyzed to identify state priorities such as historical continuity, cultural grounding, and public participation.

Several analytical concepts guided the qualitative coding:

- (1) Contextual coding: systematic annotation of names with relevant historical, geographic, or policy-based information drawn from archival and secondary sources.
- (2) Degree of territorial consolidation: the number of pre-merger units combined into each new unit.
- (3) Heritage significance: references to historical figures, sites, or culturally symbolic lexemes identified in previous scholarship (Nguyễn 2024; Lê 2006).
- (4) Community preference: instances where field-level reports, media interviews, or official consultations (Bùi 2025; Bùi & Lê 2025) documented local opinion or resistance toward proposed names.

For names classified as new, additional codes specified their semantic motivation as historical, commemorative, or cultural-geographical, following categories established by Blair and Tent (2021) and adapted to Vietnamese naming conventions. For example, *Hà Huy Tập* was coded as commemorative, while *Đông Hoa Lư* was coded as cultural-geographical due to its reference to a historic site.

3.5. Coding and Reliability Measures

Each name was coded according to the administrative reference level: commune (former commune or ward), district (former district), or provincial/municipal (former province or centrally governed city). For new names, codings also recorded semantic source (historical, commemorative, or cultural-geographical).

Coding was conducted in two rounds. In the first round, all 3,321 units were coded independently for quantitative and qualitative variables. In the second round, codes were cross-checked by two researchers to ensure consistency. Inter-coder agreement reached 98.60%, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and reference to primary documents.

3.6. Data Integration and Statistical Testing

Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to address both research questions. Descriptive statistics identified the proportions of same, combined, and new names, while qualitative evidence provided interpretive depth regarding the sociopolitical and cultural rationale for each pattern.

To test possible associations between naming outcomes and contextual factors, a multinomial logistic regression was conducted. Predictor variables included the degree of urbanization, heritage significance, and territorial consolidation. This model was used to examine how these variables may have influenced the likelihood of retention, combination, or innovation in commune naming. The detailed statistical results are presented in the following section.

4. Results

4.1. Overview

The national commune renaming reform produced a total of 3,321 newly recognized commune-level units as of 1 July 2025. Quantitative analysis categorized the new names into three outcome types: retention (78.10%), combination (8.73%), and innovation (13.09%). Retention was dominant in most provinces, particularly in rural areas where cultural continuity and community identity remain strong. Combination and innovation were concentrated in urban centers and zones of administrative amalgamation.

These distributions indicate that, although the administrative restructuring was extensive, most new units maintained symbolic continuity with preexisting local identities. Table 1 presents the overall proportions by region and type of renaming.

Table 1: Naming Pattern Distribution in Counts and Percentages

Naming Pattern	Units	Percentage
Retention	2,596	78.1
Combination	290	8.73
Innovation	435	13.09

4.2. Patterns of Retention

Retention refers to cases where one of the pre-merger names was preserved as the official name of the new unit. This category accounted for 2,594 communes (78.10%). It was the prevailing strategy in provinces characterized by stable rural populations, cohesive cultural traditions, or strong historical associations with existing names. Examples include *Xuân Hòa* ‘spring harmony’, *Phú Lộc* ‘prosperous settlement’, and *An Bình* ‘peaceful village’, which are widely distributed across northern and central Việt Nam. These names often convey values of prosperity, peace, and seasonal fertility, echoing agricultural symbolism that has defined Vietnamese rural life for centuries.

Retention frequently occurred where historical or revolutionary significance was already embedded in the pre-merger name, such as *Hà Huy Tập* (named after a major early twentieth-century revolutionary leader) or *Tân Trào* ‘new resolution’, associated with the 1945 independence movement. Such names carry commemorative weight that communities are reluctant to alter, especially when they embody pride or identity continuity. Retention also correlated with administrative pragmatism: retaining a well-established name reduced bureaucratic confusion, minimized costs of re-registration, and facilitated citizen acceptance.

4.3. Patterns of Combination

Combination accounted for 8.73% (290 units) of all cases. Combined names typically merged elements from two or more pre-merger units, forming a composite that signaled both administrative union and symbolic balance. For instance, *Đông Hoa Lư* combines *Đông Hòa* ‘eastern harmony’ and *Hoa Lư* (the name of the ancient capital of *Đại Cồ Việt* ‘Great Vietnam’), preserving heritage while acknowledging territorial merger. Similarly, *Sơn Thủy* ‘mountain-water’ unites two adjacent communes whose names referenced contrasting landscape features, creating a metaphorical equilibrium familiar in Vietnamese aesthetics. Combinations were particularly common in transitional peri-urban districts where local authorities sought to balance administrative rationalization with recognition of multiple legacy identities. This pattern reflects a pragmatic attempt at symbolic inclusion, especially in areas where merger negotiations were sensitive.

4.4. Patterns of Innovation

Innovation comprised 13.09% (437 units), representing the creation of entirely new names. Innovative naming occurred most prominently in metropolitan regions such as Hà Nội, Hồ Chí Minh City, and Đà Nẵng, where local governments used renaming as a tool for urban rebranding, modernization, and cultural differentiation.

Examples include *An Đông* ‘peaceful east’, revived from a premodern commercial district in Hồ Chí Minh City to evoke historical urban vitality; *Chợ Lớn* ‘big market’, referencing a long-standing Chinese–Vietnamese trade hub integrated into the contemporary metropolis; *Thiên Đức* ‘divine virtue’, historically the name of a district several hundred years ago and also the Sino-Vietnamese name of the river running through the area, revalorizing local history and geography; and *Khúc Thừa Dụ*, honoring a 10th-century ruler who established the early Vietnamese autonomous polity, illustrating how innovation may coexist with historical commemoration.

The linguistic creativity in this group often involved selective revival of archaic or Sino-Vietnamese morphemes, aligning with the broader strategy of reinforcing regional heritage and place branding. Innovative naming thus reflects both linguistic modernization and cultural revalorization, situating local identity within national and global narratives of heritage and development.

4.5. Regional Variation

Analysis by region reveals clear spatial differentiation. The Northern Delta exhibited the highest proportion of retention (84%), consistent with its long historical settlement and dense network of culturally persistent place names. The Central Region showed moderate retention (71%) and higher rates of combination due to fragmented settlement patterns and frequent mergers of small communes. The Southeast and Mekong Delta displayed greater innovation (22–28%), aligning with rapid urbanization and migration-driven demographic change. These findings demonstrate how naming outcomes mirror broader socio-geographic contrasts: cultural conservatism in agrarian provinces versus symbolic reinvention in expanding cities.

4.6. Summary of Quantitative Findings

Overall, the commune naming reform reveals a national tendency toward symbolic continuity tempered by selective modernization. Retention ensured administrative stability and local attachment, while innovation, although limited, served strategic goals of heritage reinforcement and urban branding. Table 2 summarizes these quantitative findings.

Table 2: Naming Pattern Distribution in Counts and Percentages

Category	Number of Units	Percentage	Dominant Contexts
Retention	2,594	78.10	Rural, historically cohesive communes
Combination	290	8.73	Peri-urban or merged communes
Innovation	437	13.09	Urban centers and rebranded areas

4.7. Statistical Overview

To explore relationships between naming outcomes and contextual variables, multinomial logistic regression was applied (see section 3.6). Preliminary results confirmed that higher degrees of urbanization and administrative consolidation were associated with increased probability of combination or innovation, while strong heritage significance predicted name retention. These patterns support the interpretation that naming decisions were shaped by both pragmatic governance considerations and symbolic-cultural imperatives.

5. Discussion

The results demonstrate that the 2025 commune naming reform in Việt Nam combined strong tendencies of symbolic continuity with selective adoption of innovation. Retention dominated nationally, but innovation appeared strategically in metropolitan regions where political visibility, heritage revitalization, and place branding were prioritized. These patterns align with both sociolinguistic and critical toponymic theories of naming as a site of negotiation between authority and identity.

5.1. Sociolinguistic Dimensions of Naming

From a sociolinguistic perspective, place naming can be understood as a communicative practice that indexes social relations and ideological positions (Rose-Redwood et al. 2009; Spolsky 2004). A name's linguistic form, etymology, and cultural reference express not only meaning but also social alignment and power. Calling toponymy a "sociolinguistic practice" (see sections 2.1 and 2.4) therefore means recognizing that it is a form of language use embedded in social structures, capable of producing and reproducing identity through linguistic choice.

In the Vietnamese context, this practice is intensified by the administrative system, where naming decisions are shaped by both local preference and central policy. Each chosen name represents a negotiation between linguistic tradition, state authority, and collective identity. Retaining an existing name often reaffirms the legitimacy of local speech and memory, while adopting a new one repositions the community within a broader ideological frame of modernization or national unity.

"Sociolinguistic identity construction" (see section 2.4) in this sense, refers to the process through which communities express, contest, or redefine their social belonging through language choices in naming. When local authorities or residents advocate for heritage-based names such as *Tân Trào* or *Hà Huy Tập*, they are not only commemorating the past but also asserting symbolic continuity with recognized cultural values. Conversely, when the local communities create innovative names like *An Đông* or *Thiên Đức*, they engage in linguistic innovation to project a modern or historically revalorized identity. Thus, the value of this study for sociolinguistics lies in showing how naming functions as a socially regulated form of linguistic agency, a structured yet creative space where speakers, institutions, and cultural memories interact.

5.2. Continuity, Power, and Symbolic Authority

The prevalence of retention (78.10%) reflects the durability of linguistic and cultural attachment to place. As Alderman and Inwood (2013) argue, continuity in place names stabilizes memory and sustains the moral geography of belonging. In rural Việt Nam, retaining names such as *Xuân Hòa* or *An Bình* maintains links between linguistic heritage, geography, and moral symbolism. It also reflects local resistance to perceived bureaucratic intrusion, echoing Azaryahu's (2011) observation that residents often act as custodians of symbolic landscapes.

At the same time, innovation and combination illustrate how power and policy shape the linguistic landscape. Through Resolution 76/2025/UBTVQH15, the state provided naming criteria emphasizing clarity, unity, and historical relevance. These guidelines positioned naming as both an administrative necessity and a performative act of governance, one that asserts the state's symbolic authority. Yet local adaptation remained visible: combination names like *Đông Hoa Lư* balanced administrative merging with respect for historical resonance, mirroring patterns observed in Bucharest (Light et al. 2002) and Nairobi (Wanjiru & Matsubara 2017), where local histories reemerge through official decisions.

This dynamic confirms Rose-Redwood et al.'s (2009) notion of "toponymic inscription", the process through which naming operates as both a tool of spatial control and a medium of collective negotiation. Vietnamese administrative naming demonstrates that the linguistic landscape is never entirely determined from above; rather, it is co-produced through policy frameworks, public consultations, and inherited semantic repertoires.

5.3. Innovation, Heritage, and Urban Rebranding

The 13.09 percent of innovative names reveal how language policy, heritage politics, and urban strategy intersect. Urban authorities in Hà Nội, Đà Nẵng, and Hồ Chí Minh City frequently adopted new names that evoke historical grandeur or cultural symbolism while differentiating restructured districts. For example, *An Đông* revived a term historically associated with commercial vitality, aligning with contemporary aspirations for globalized urban identity. Similarly, *Khúc Thừa Dụ* invokes early national sovereignty, reaffirming heritage as a symbolic resource in modern urban branding. *Thiên Đức* similarly revalorizes historical and geographical memory in the urban landscape.

Comparable strategies appear in other global contexts. In Ukraine, Gnatiuk (2025) found that renaming under geopolitical tension served to reinforce national identity; in South Africa, Ndletyana (2012) observed that urban toponymic change symbolized post-apartheid transformation. In both cases, as in Việt Nam, the act of naming extends beyond administrative function to become a linguistic assertion of belonging and transformation.

The Vietnamese evidence therefore supports a broader sociolinguistic insight: naming is a communicative mechanism through which modernization and heritage are simultaneously articulated. It reconciles bureaucratic rationalization with symbolic continuity, turning language policy into a cultural act.

5.4. Integration with Critical Toponymy

By aligning Vietnamese commune naming with the global framework of critical toponymy, the study illuminates how naming reform embodies both governance and cultural agency. Rose-Redwood et al. (2008, 163) describe naming as a “spatial politics of public remembrance” while Azaryahu (2011) stresses the everyday negotiation of power embedded in street names. Vietnamese commune renaming exhibits both processes. It operates through top-down rationalization yet remains locally negotiated through historical and linguistic preferences.

Furthermore, the Vietnamese case extends critical toponymic theory by revealing how state-driven reforms in an officially socialist yet market-oriented system differ from the postcolonial or post-socialist cases commonly discussed in the literature. The combination of centralized authority and culturally participatory consultation produces a hybrid mode of naming governance: centrally coordinated but symbolically decentralized.

This contributes to global onomastic theory by showing that critical toponymy must account for administrative toponymy: naming not only of streets or landmarks but of entire administrative units, where linguistic decisions directly affect bureaucratic structures and citizen interaction, an act deeply embedded in what Różycki (2018, 21) calls the “spatial politics of memory”.

5.5. Synthesis

Overall, the findings of this study reveal that the 2025 commune naming reform in Việt Nam represents far more than a bureaucratic exercise in territorial rationalization. It is a deeply linguistic and sociocultural process in which the state and local communities continuously negotiate symbolic meaning. The predominance of retention demonstrates how language operates as a mechanism of collective continuity, allowing local identities to endure administrative change while reaffirming cultural attachment to place. At the same time, the coexistence of combination and innovation highlights that authority over naming is not purely top-down but negotiated across multiple levels of governance and community engagement. The naming process, therefore, becomes a communicative arena where local voices, historical memories, and institutional directives converge.

Innovation further illustrates how naming serves as a means of cultural repositioning. Through the deliberate creation or revival of historically charged and culturally resonant names, local governments, and communities reassert heritage while articulating aspirations of modernization and urban renewal. This duality, preserving the symbolic depth of tradition while embracing linguistic and spatial innovation, reflects a broader sociolinguistic pattern in which naming both anchors identity and redefines it. In this way, the Vietnamese reform exemplifies how administrative toponymy can function simultaneously as a practice of governance and as a form of cultural expression that bridges the past and the present.

6. Implications for Onomastic Research

The Vietnamese commune renaming reform contributes to the growing field of critical and administrative onomastics by revealing how state-led naming operates within a multilingual, culturally layered, and politically centralized context. Most onomastic studies have focused on street names or commemorative urban naming, yet large-scale administrative renaming at the commune level remains comparatively underexplored. This study demonstrates that such processes present distinct theoretical and methodological challenges for the discipline.

First, the findings extend the scope of critical toponymy by illustrating how naming functions simultaneously as linguistic practice, governance mechanism, and symbolic negotiation (Alderman & Inwood 2013; Rose-Redwood et al. 2010). The Vietnamese case confirms that the politics of naming extend beyond urban commemorations to encompass the organization of territorial space itself. The state acts not only as an agent of control but also as a facilitator of symbolic continuity, mediating between efficiency, history, and local identity. This dual role calls for onomastic frameworks that recognize naming as both a discursive and administrative act.

Second, the study contributes to methodological innovation in onomastics. By integrating spatial statistics, mixed-method coding, and policy analysis, it offers a replicable approach for examining national-scale toponymic change. The methodological design demonstrates that quantitative mapping of naming outcomes can be effectively combined with qualitative interpretation of historical and sociolinguistic context. Such integration strengthens the analytical rigor of onomastic inquiry and enables cross-national comparison.

Third, the results highlight the sociolinguistic agency of local actors within centrally managed naming systems. Although the Vietnamese reform was state-driven (Standing Committee 2025), patterns of retention, combination, and innovation reveal continuous negotiation between official guidelines and community preferences. This challenges deterministic models of top-down naming and invites further research into how local identity and collective memory influence policy-driven linguistic change (Rose-Redwood et al. 2019; Spolsky 2004).

Finally, the study suggests that future onomastic research should consider administrative naming as a dynamic subfield in its own right, distinct from urban or commemorative naming, requiring theoretical attention to institutional decision-making, public participation, and symbolic geography. By situating Vietnamese evidence within global scholarship, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how names function as instruments of governance, heritage, and identity in rapidly changing societies (Filipa & Andr 2025; Ndletyana 2012).

7. Conclusion

It is clear that the nationwide patterns of retention, combination, and innovation of new names and the underlying factors, including political imperatives, historical resonance, urban-rural differences, and language policy considerations, illustrate how administrative consolidation in Việt Nam negotiates both governance efficiency and symbolic continuity.

The reform of commune-level names across the country demonstrates how administrative restructuring is inseparable from cultural and linguistic negotiation. By analyzing 3,321 new administrative units through both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study has shown that naming is not a neutral technical act but a socially meaningful process in which continuity and innovation coexist. The predominance of retention underscores the strength of local attachment and the resilience of historical memory, while the presence of combination and innovation reflects the state's attempt to reconcile efficiency with symbolic renewal.

Within an onomastic framework informed by sociolinguistic insights, the findings confirm that naming operates as a discourse through which communities and institutions articulate identity, authority, and belonging. The Vietnamese case adds empirical depth to critical toponymy by revealing how state-driven reforms engage local linguistic agency rather than suppress it. Administrative naming, often overlooked in onomastic scholarship, thus emerges as an important field for examining how governance and language policy interact to shape cultural space.

The study's methodological integration of spatial statistics, archival interpretation, and policy analysis also offers a model for future comparative work. Further research could explore public perception of renaming decisions, the semantics of rejected names, or longitudinal changes in the symbolic geography of post-reform Việt Nam. Such inquiries would continue to link onomastic theory with the lived sociolinguistic realities of place, demonstrating that every administrative name carries a trace of history, authority, and collective imagination.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the three anonymous reviewers and the Editor-in-Chief of *NAMES* for their constructive and motivating feedback and insights, which significantly improved the quality of this article.

Conflict Disclosure Statement

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

AI Disclosure Statement

The author used no Generative AI Tools or Technology to conduct research or write this article.

References

- Alderman, Derek H, and Joshua Inwood. 2013. "Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging: Spatial Injustices in the Toponymic Commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr". *Social & Cultural Geography* 14, no. 2: 211–233.
- Azaryahu, Maoz. 2011. "The Critical Turn and Beyond: The Case of Commemorative Street Naming". *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 10, no. 1: 28–44.
- Bigon, Liora. 2020. "Towards Creating a Global Urban Toponymy - a Comment". *Urban Science* 4, no. 4: 1-9.
- Blair, David, and Jan Tent. 2021. "A Revised Typology of Place-Naming". *Names* 69, no. 4: 30–47.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Božilović, Jelena. 2025. "Street Names as a Locus of Patriarchy: A Case Study of the City of Niš". *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 25, no. 3: 465-483.
- Bùi, Đình Phong, and Văn Cường Lê. 2025. "Đặt tên xã, phường có tầm nhìn trăm năm, cần nghiên cứu kỹ lưỡng, thấu đáo". [Naming Communes and Wards Should Be Undertaken with a Hundred-Year Vision and Require Careful, Thorough Study]. Interview by Kim Anh. *VOV - Voice of Vietnam*, April 20, 2025. Accessed August 10, 2025. <https://vov.vn/chinh-tri/dat-ten-xa-phuong-co-tam-nhin-tram-nam-can-nghien-cuu-ky-luong-thau-dao-post1194314.vov>
- Bùi, Hoài Sơn. 2025. "Đặt tên xã, phường ở Hà Nội: Có chiều sâu, coi trọng ký ức tập thể". [Naming Communes and Wards in Hanoi: Depth and Respect for Collective Memory]. Interview by N. Huyền. *VietNamNet*, May 6, 2025. Accessed August 10, 2025. <https://vietnamnet.vn/dat-ten-xa-phuong-o-hanoi-co-chieu-sau-coi-trong-ky-uc-tap-the-2397818.html>
- Creswell, John W, and Vicki Plano Clark. 2018. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Filipa, Raimundo, and Paris André. 2025. "After the Carnation Revolution. Continuity and Innovations in Portuguese Odonomastics: The Case of Aveiro". *Memoria E Ricerca* no. 1: 83-102.
- Gnatiuk, Oleksiy. 2025. "Iron Ukrainization." *Names: Journal of Onomastics* 73, no. 2: 46–57.
- Government News. 2019. "VN to Reduce Number of Districts, Communes". *En.baochinhphu.vn*. Vietnamese Government. March 13, 2019. Accessed August 10, 2025. <https://en.baochinhphu.vn/vn-to-reduce-number-of-districts-communes-11134675.htm>
- Government News. 2025. "34 Nghị quyết của UBNDVN về sắp xếp các đơn vị hành chính cấp xã". [34 Resolutions of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on the Arrangement of Commune-Level Administrative Units]. *Baochinhphu.vn*. Vietnamese Government. June 18, 2025. Accessed August

- 10, 2025. <https://baohinhphu.vn/34-nghi-quyet-cua-ubtvqh-ve-sap-xep-cac-don-vi-hanh-chinh-cap-xa-102250618163209716.htm>
- Gritta, Milan, Mohammad Taher Pilehvar, and Nigel Collier. 2020. "A Pragmatic Guide to Geoparsing Evaluation". *Language Resources and Evaluation* 54, no. 3: 683–712.
- Lê, Trung Hoa. 2006. *Địa danh học Việt Nam*. [Vietnamese Toponymy]. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
- Lê, Trung Hoa. 2012. *Tìm hiểu địa danh Việt Nam*. [Exploring Vietnamese Place Names]. Ho Chi Minh City: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Light, Duncan, Ion Nicolae, and Bogdan Suditu. 2002. "Toponymy and the Communist City: Street Names in Bucharest, 1948–1965". *GeoJournal* 56, no. 2: 135–144.
- National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 2025a. *Law 65/2025/QH15 (Law on Organization of Local Governments No. 65/2025/QH15)*. Adopted March 1, 2025. <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=213074&classid=1>
- National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 2025b. *Resolution 202/2025/QH15 on the Reorganization of Provincial-Level Administrative Divisions*. Adopted June 12, 2025. <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=213930>
- National Assembly Standing Committee of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 2025. *Resolution 76/2025/UBTVQH15 on the Arrangement of Commune-Level Administrative Units in 2025*. Adopted April 15, 2025. <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=213382>
- Ndletyana, Mcebisi. 2012. "Changing Place Names in Postapartheid South Africa: Accounting for the Unevenness". *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 1: 87–103.
- Nenotek, Seprianus A. 2025. "When Names Speak: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Street Toponymy in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara-Indonesia". *Journal of Language, Education, Literature and Culture* 3, no. 1: 53–62.
- Nguyễn, Công Đức, and Văn Lập Nguyễn. 2015. "Địa danh học Việt Nam: Những vấn đề cần bàn" [Vietnamese Toponymy: Issues for Discussion]. *Language and Life* 234, no. 4: 1–5.
- Nguyễn, Kiên Trường. 1996. "Đặc điểm chính về địa danh Hải Phòng (trong Vài nét đối sánh với địa danh Việt Nam)". [Main Features of Hải Phòng Place Names (in Comparison with Vietnamese Place Names)]. Doctoral dissertation, Vietnam National University, Hanoi.
- Nguyễn, Quang Ân. 2024. *Thành lập và thay đổi địa danh, địa giới đơn vị hành chính trong lịch sử Việt Nam*. [Establishment and Change of Place Names and Administrative Boundaries in the History of Vietnam]. Hanoi: NXB Chính trị quốc gia sự thật.
- Nguyễn, Văn Âu. 2000. *Một số vấn đề về địa danh Việt Nam*. [Some Matters Regarding Vietnamese Toponyms]. Hanoi: VNU Hanoi National University Press.
- Quang Tuệ, Thuỳ Linh, and Duy Khánh. 2025. "Tên phường xã mới được đặt lại thế nào" [How New Commune and Ward Names are Chosen]. *VnExpress. Bộ Khoa học và Công nghệ* [Ministry of Science and Technology]. Accessed August 10, 2025. <https://vnexpress.net/ten-phuong-xa-moi-duoc-dat-lai-the-nao-4918502.html>
- Rose-Redwood, Reuben, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu. 2008. "Collective Memory and the Politics of Urban Space: An Introduction". *GeoJournal* 73, no. 3: 161–164.
- Rose-Redwood, Reuben, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu. 2009. "Geographies of Toponymic Inscription: New Directions in Critical Place-Name Studies". *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 4: 453–470.
- Rózycki, Bartłomiej. 2018. "Renaming Urban Toponymy as a Mean of Redefining Local Identity: The Case of Street Decommunization in Poland". *Open Political Science* 1, no. 1: 20–31.
- Spolsky, Bernard. 2003. *Language Policy. Key Topics in Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trần, Trí Dối. 2008. "Tên gọi của sông Hồng: Dấu tích biểu hiện nét đa dạng văn hóa trong lịch sử người Việt". [Names of the Red River: Traces Reflecting Cultural Diversity in Vietnamese History]. In *Third International Conference on Vietnamese Studies*, 62–76. Hanoi: NXB Thông tin và Truyền thông.
- Từ, Thu Mai. 2004. "Place Names in Quang Tri". Hanoi: University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi.
- Tubić, Tamara. 2024. "О промени сјеничких ходонима са ономастичког и социолингвистичког аспекта. [On the Change of Sjenica's Hodonyms from an Onomastic and Sociolinguistic Aspect]". *Гласник Етнографског института САНУ [Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnography SASA]* LXXII/2024, no. 3: 201–218.
- Ursini, Francesco-Alessio, and Haiping Long. 2024. "Urbanonyms and Their Linguistic Properties in Italian". *Names* 72, no. 3: 65–75.
- Usmonova, Mohinur, and Mushtariy Xujboyeva. 2025. "Symbolism and Identity in Toponyms: Cultural and Ideological Layers in Place Naming". *Развитие и инновации в науке* [Development and Innovation in

Science] 4, no. 6: 84–87. Accessed August 10, 2025.
<https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/dis/article/view/113724>

- Vũ, Thị Sao Chi, and Đức Tồn Nguyễn. 2023. “Nghiên cứu địa danh từ phương diện văn hóa dân tộc và trường hợp lai lịch địa danh ‘Kinh Môn’ (Hải Dương)”. [A Study of Place Names from the Perspective of Ethnic Culture and the Case of the Renaming of Kinh Mon Place Names (Hai Duong)]. *Vietnam Social Sciences* no. 12: 122–31.
- Wanjiru, Melissa Wangui, and Kosuke Matsubara. 2017. “Street Toponymy and the Decolonisation of the Urban Landscape in Postcolonial Nairobi”. *Journal of Cultural Geography* 34, no. 1: 1–23.
- Ye, Peng, Yujin Jiang, and Yadi Wang. 2025. “CHTopo: A Multi-Source Large-Scale Chinese Toponym Annotation Corpus”. *Information* 16, no. 7: 1–18.
- Yeoh, Brenda. 1996. “Street Naming and Nation Building: Toponymic Inscriptions of Nationhood in Singapore”. *Area* 28, no 3: 298–307. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20003708>

Notes on the Contributor:

Khoa Nguyen-Viet is Associate Professor of Linguistics. He holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Sussex, England. He is the former Acting Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Việt Nam. His research interests include socio-onomastics, practical lexicography, cross-cultural awareness in EFL teaching, and foreign languages for science and technology.

Correspondence to: **Khoa Nguyen-Viet**, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Việt Nam. Email: khoa.nguenviet@hust.edu.vn