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REPORTS BY GOVERNMENTS ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Submitted by the Government of Thailand

Even though there is no national body in Thailand to deal with names policy and with the standardization of geographical names, some effective actions have been taken, or are being initiated by various Royal Thai government agencies and some research organizations.

The Government planned the compilation of a geographical gazetteer on the whole Kingdom in 1933. In 1935 the work of compiling the Thai Geographic Gazetteer was assigned to the Royal Institute and has been carried on by that Institute since then. It was soon discovered that the source material collected through the various educational supervisors all over the country was not adequately reliable for inclusion in the Gazetteer. Therefore, the Royal Institute had to review and study each name and its related information individually. The Royal Institute's decision upon each name was accepted as the most authentic one.

In addition to the compilation of the Gazetteer, the Royal Institute established a romanization system in 1939.

Along with the Royal Institute, the Ministry of the Interior is the other main authority responsible for collecting and filing names of all administrative divisions. Within the Ministry of the Interior a committee was set up to deal with administrative division names in 1963. Whenever a conflict of the names exists, or there is any changing of names, those names are sent to the Royal Institute for review and check.

The Royal Thai Survey Department has also been active in the selection and processing of geographical names. In 1956 there was urgent need for large numbers of geographical names for large-scale mapping of the Kingdom. Names were collected in the field during the classification stage of this project. To obtain names in the field, trained inquirers asked local officials and local inhabitants. These names were reviewed and checked with the existing old maps as well as with the Ministry of the Interior lists before being used on map publications.

When it was discovered that many geographical names of the new maps differed with other sources, the Royal Thai Survey Department realized the urgent need for an organized body to deal with the standardization of geographical names. A geographical names section was set up within the Department for this purpose in 1965. The section is now active in solving names problems in co-operation with other governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in this field. A long-range project has been laid out by the Royal Thai Survey Department to carry out a field check of geographical names which are in doubt. It is expected that the results of this field checking will be useful for the consideration of any authorized body, either currently existing, or to be organized in the future to standardize such names.

The need for immediate action towards resolving the problems related to the standardization of geographical names has become urgent. A private research organization which is working on the project - Village Information System - Thailand - for the Government must have, not only standardized Thai and romanized place names, but it must also have officially accepted names on which to build its village data base. In working closely with the Royal Thai Survey Department and the Royal Institute to produce an official list of the first - and second - order administrative division names (71 changwats and the 550 amphoes and king amphoes) of Thailand it was discovered that no one official list of either changwat or amphoe names in Thai characters existed. There were several labelled as official but no two of them agreed on all Thai spellings. Also the romanization of these names were not uniformly rendered to any one list.

In view of these problems, work was started on a new list immediately. During the period December 1966 to March 1967, the Royal Thai Survey Department produced the list of every changwat, amphoe and king amphoe, and submitted it to the

Royal Institute Committee. The Committee gave careful consideration or reconsideration to every name. Some Thai spellings were changed from the spelling appearing in the decree published in the Royal Gazette. This was always done in accordance with the Thai spelling rules that the Committee had made in the Thai dictionary of 1950. Romanizations were also checked with equal care. The new list of names has now been approved by the Government as the official names for the two highest levels of administrative divisions.

At present the names of the two lower administrative divisions, Tambon and Muban, have been selected to be standardized. This work has been assigned to a committee^{1/} appointed by the Ministry of the Interior in May 1967. A sub-committee has been assigned to collect names from the Ministry and from the National Statistical Office lists to compile the most reliable list. This list will always include the Thai spelling along with its romanization.

The Government of Thailand appreciates the encouragement given by the United Nations. It is hoped that in the near future Thailand will establish a national body to deal with geographical names.

^{1/} The Committee for the Establishment of an Official Administrative Divisions Directory consists of representatives from the Ministry of the Interior, the Royal Institute, the Royal Thai Survey Department and the National Statistical Office.