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PROGRESS REPORT ON WORK RELATING TO GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM  
(1967-1972)

Report prepared by the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam

Pending the establishment of the National Commission on Toponymy, which has been the subject of more than one proposal by the National Geographical Directorate of the Ministry of National Defence, the Directorate is at present the only body in the Republic of Viet-Nam dealing specifically with geographical names.

The work on toponymy from 1967 to 1972, which is the subject of this report, falls into five basic categories:

- (a) Extensive co-ordination and expansion of toponymic research
- (b) Compilation
- (c) Standardization of rules for transcription
- (d) Preparations for compiling the Dictionary of Geographical Names

I. CO-ORDINATION AND EXPANSION OF TOPONYMIC RESEARCH

Efforts have been made to extend international co-ordination and expand toponymic research within the country.

At the Sixth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, held in October 1970 at Teheran, Iran, the Republic of Viet-Nam, together with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Republic of the Philippines (the Khmer Republic and Laos were absent), designated Thailand as their representative in the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which met in New York in February 1971.

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Subsequently, the National Geographical Directorate of the Republic of Viet-Nam has kept in constant touch with the Royal Thai Survey Department in the matter of toponymic problems.

The Directorate has intensified toponymic research work and identified sources dealing with regional geography with a view to extending and consolidating the documentation on toponyms.

A comprehensive collection has been made of documents such as monographs on provinces, books on regional geography, etc. At present, 15 monographs out of a total of 44 have been collected; the remainder will be provided shortly by local authorities.

The Directorate works in close co-operation with the Institute of Archaeological Research in checking toponyms which appear in old books, by providing it with maps and various documents.

A study in depth of the method of transcribing the geographical names of other countries has also been undertaken.

## II. COMPILATION

Up to 1969, with the aim of providing our country rapidly with basic map coverage, the Directorate, with the assistance of allied cartographic services, concentrated on the publication of a topographic map (scale 1:50,000, series L.7014) of the Republic of Viet-Nam. For this purpose toponymic accuracy was sacrificed or almost forgotten.

During this period our specialists restricted their field work to classifying geographical details. Toponyms appearing on old maps published by the former Indochina Geographic Service were compiled; with the exception of some thinly-populated regions where the situation and time permitted, geographical names were collected in the field, checked and transferred to an overlay. For that reason many errors are still found in toponyms on maps published up to the present.

Since 1969, the problem of toponymy has been given particular attention by the National Geographical Directorate. Precise technical instructions on the work connected with geographical names have been given to the specialists in order to ensure the highest levels of precision and accuracy. Before going into the field, our specialists prepare toponymic overlays on which they transcribe geographical names taken from existing maps. In addition to the maps published by the Directorate, our specialists must scrutinize all existing maps, on any scale, published by other bodies such as the General Directorate of Agrarian Reform and the Directorate of Shipping. In the field, when consulting local inhabitants, our specialists must take great care to determine the identity of their informants in order to evaluate the information they provide; this has never been done until now. Depending on their personal experience, they attempt to evaluate the information gathered in order to arrive at the exact and correct form of each toponym. In general, toponyms confirmed by local scholars and elders living in the

area are considered valid. In doubtful cases, our specialists request fuller details from local authorities. In regions populated by non-Viet-Nameese races, when a geographical name cannot be transcribed directly by our specialists, it is recorded on tape (if possible) and later studied in the office with the co-operation of linguists. Toponyms can be written down either directly by the informant or by our technicians on the basis of the pronunciation which is considered correct. The meaning and background data for each toponym (legends, archaeological remains, etc.) should as far as possible be recorded.

In late 1971 the Directorate began compilation in 2 of the 44 provinces of the Republic of Viet-Nam. This work will be carried forward in 4 other provinces during 1972. The results will be used later in preparing the Dictionary of Geographical Names.

### III. STANDARDIZATION OF RULES FOR TRANSCRIPTION

Work on the standardization of rules for transcription was carried out during the period 1967 to 1972 covered in this report. A seminar on cartographic techniques, including the problem of toponymy, was organized in May 1971 in the Directorate and the rules for transcription were systematically standardized.

Two procedures for transcription of toponyms must be strictly followed.

Firstly, in the office, before preparing toponymic plates for the reprinting or first printing of maps on any scale, the Toponymy Section closely examines, checks and transcribes each toponym in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Directorate (see Conclusion in document E/CONF.61.L.10).

No existing toponym will henceforth be reproduced without prior verification.

Toponyms must be entered in conformity with the special subject and the scale of each map series.

By way of example, the toponymic plate of the geological map on the scale of 1:2,000,000 has been completely remade, and the orographic and hydrographic names appearing on it have been completely revised.

In the case of dubious toponyms, the Directorate must seek information either from local authorities or from the Ministry of the Interior to ensure a precise and faithful transcription. Six such contacts were made in 1970, and 96 more in 1971. The toponyms in question are finalized only after careful examination and thorough checking.

### IV. PREPARATIONS FOR COMPILING THE DICTIONARY OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Preparation for compiling a Dictionary of Geographical Names is at present one of the main activities of the Directorate.

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The preparation of such a Dictionary for the entire territory of the Republic of Vietnam requires much time; for that reason the Directorate has decided first to publish booklets of geographical names with miscellaneous information, one for each province. These booklets, which number 44, corresponding to the 44 provinces of the Republic of Vietnam, will serve as basic documents for compiling the Dictionary.

This method may seem illogical, but it is the only way of ensuring early publication of this Dictionary.

In 1972, six out of the total of 44 pilot booklets will be published.

We hope that in future the work of collection will proceed more quickly and that all the documents necessary for compiling the Dictionary of Geographical Names for the entire territory of the Republic of Viet-Nam will have been assembled within five years.

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