

World Section of the AD 1021 Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names  
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**Information Paper No. 13**

**Report on Regional Activities  
Thailand**

## Report on Regional Activities

At the sixth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, held in Tehran during October - November 1970, Thailand was unanimously elected by delegates representing 6 countries of the South East Asia to represent the South East Asian region in the third session of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Since the session will take place in February 1971, the appropriate time does not allow Thailand to convene regional meeting prior to that date. Correspondence was made to all countries of the region informing them of the responsibility held by Thailand. Copies of document obtained at the Conference (1) and questionnaire were also sent to those countries.

Replies have been received from 2 countries in the region, but other 6 countries have failed to response to the request.

The following is obtained from the replies to the questionnaire, except for Indonesia and Republic of Vietnam, papers submitted by them to the last Regional Cartographic Conference are summarized in order that their problems may be known.

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- (1)
- a. Resolution 19 adopted at the Conference
  - b. Extract of the report of Technical Committee IV dealing with Geographical Names.
  - c. Report of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its second session.

## Indonesia

There are many factors that create problems on geographical names, especially names appear on Indonesian maps. Too frequent changes in administrative boundaries and names, together with other factors, are technical problems faced by Indonesian map makers at present.

The carelessness in spelling is another factor. It resulted from the intention of early surveyors to write place name the way their tongue wanted it to be pronounced and not the way it should be spelled.

Places renamed formerly by the Dutch possess two names. Those places are known nowadays by their original names only, although the Dutch given names are still written on maps.

There are places whose names are alien to the native ears and tongues. Alien though they may sound, they will still appear, at least for some time in the future on maps, since replacement will not be possible, because local names never exist.

Since Indonesia is essentially a nation of diversity with regard to race, culture and language, so vernacular is another factor. The lingua franca which is officially used and understood almost everywhere in the country cannot be unconditionally used for maps. It seems to add more confusion and so tends to reduce the effectiveness of the map as a tool for orientation purposes.

The retention of local terminologies for certain physical features, such as for the term of rivers, lakes, islands, hills and mountains and so on, is therefore preferred.

Names primarily found in South Sulawesi are spelled with double consonants contrary to common practice usually found in Indonesian language.

In West Djawa, it is usually hard for one who is not familiar with the area to distinguish from the name whether it is meant for a river or a place name.

Although there is no official policy from the government on geographical names, the map makers are determined to take steps towards its solution. For future maps attempts will be made to write down the right spelling of those names misspelled on previous maps. Alien names will still appear and local names will either replace those names of Dutch origin or appear temporarily with them. The retention of local terms will be advocated for physical features with the attempt to differentiate the writing of place names and natural entities.

At present, the Direktorat Hydrografi of the Navy succeeded in compiling around 13,000 island names, the geographic location of each has been checked by the Badan Atlas Nasional. Geographic names on land are also being compiled but progress has been slow.

### Malaysia

At present, The Directorate of National Mapping is a national authority in Malaysia dealing with the standardization of geographical names. The name and address of an individual in the Directorate who will serve as liaison officer for communicating with the United Nations Group of Experts are given below :-

Mr. Kok Swee Tuck  
Assistant Director  
Directorate of National Mapping, Malaysia  
Jalan Gurney  
Kuala Lumpur.

List of geographical names exists. Details given against each name in the list are :

- a) Grid referense on map manuscript
- b) Information on how name is obtained such as,
  - ( i ) from penghulu ( chieftain ) and verified by District Officer of the district .
  - ( ii ) from local inhabitants
  - ( iii ) from signboards
- e) Languages used are Malay and English .
- d) Scripts used are Romanized Malay and English .

Names from any unwritten language or from language using alphabets or scripts are recorded by phonetically writing down. Those names are rendered into the approved list after verification with District Officers in Romanized Malay and English.

#### Republic of Vietnam

In the Republic of Vietnam, the National Geographic Department is paying particular attention to the problem of place names. For the time being there is no national authority dealing with the standardization of geographical names, but it is hoped to have such authority in the future. In spite of all efforts, there are still numerous gaps in the recently published maps, for the geographical names are usually based on those shown on the maps previously prepared by the old Service Géographique d'Indochine.

The compilation and standardization of geographical names are rather complicated in this country. The present situation does not make it easy to check each place name on the spot for the purpose of making complete compilation and standardization.

It is stated that the best policy to deal with the names is to agree on the method for complete compilation and for a single, logical and appropriate transcription, with respect to the accuracy of the name, since every place name in this country generally has a meaning and an origin.

In compilation, names can be categorized into official names and those that possess no administrative standing. The compilation for the official names seems to be without any problem, however, some difficulties such as the existence of numerous accents in written and spoken language still exist. This is a continuous source of hopeless confusion and frequent distortion due to ignorance or caprice, Change of existing names during the First Republic (1955 - 1963) into new, purely Vietnamese names which bear not even a remote relation to the actual names encounters obstinacy or bad feeling on the part of local population who oppose or disregard all kinds of changes, thus being another source of confusion to on-the-spot map users.

Names having no administrative standing are ancient folk names of small inhabited localities, other places and natural entities which are still used and very familiar to the local inhabitants. These names vary from one government body to another, and were from one document to another, depending on the personal knowledge of its author. The definitive form of each name is only decided upon, by Vietnamese geographers, after very detailed analysis and painstaking check but, however, it would not be easy in such cases as the ignorance of local population to the new name, if so given, while the administrative authorities continue

to use it. Names for large and extending natural features may undergo a change from one area to another under the influence of local names.

In transcription, names of purely Vietnamese origin can be transcribed with high degree of accuracy, if the customary accent marks of Vietnamese script is utilized. A problem arises only for geographical names having no administrative status, and becoming more complicated in case of names of non-Vietnamese origin. Each ethnic minorities such as the Montagnards of the High Plateaus and Vietnamese of Khmer origin has its own dialect and some of them have recently adopted a Romanised transcription.

The method of phonetic Romanized transcription based on the local inhabitants has been adopted by explorers and ethnographers, but it is never perfect and subjected to certain increasingly serious distortions due to the absence of sufficient accent marks in the French.

Attempt was first made to replace certain original French transcription of orographical terms by their Vietnamese equivalents and to add Vietnamese orographical terms before each already complete Montagnard names, while correcting the transcription wherever possible. The latter attempt gives rise to inadmissible pleonasms.

The present policy of the National Geographic Department is to standardize the transcription, and to revert, after meticulous correction, to the original Montagnard orographical terms of origin, and are explained by a margin glossary in the map legend.

As to geographical names of Khmer origin, they still give rise to many difficulties. Names of Khmer origin have been distorted by some means. The many Centuries of co-existence between the two countries, Vietnam & Khmer, satisfies the Vietnamese who, instead of imposing new Vietnamese geographical

names, adopt the names of Khmer origin, especially in the southern provinces, while more or less their pronunciation is distorted and their phonetic transcription is meaningless. The adoption of Sino - Vietnamese geographical names, by Emperors of Vietnam, which have more literary flavour was resulted in departing from phonetic transcription.

In spite of the doubly illogical nature of distortion, it gave rise to geographical names which have been universally adopted by official bodies as well as the people over a fairly long period.

#### Singapore

There is no national authority in this country dealing with the standardization of geographical names. The institution interested in this work and the individual who is willing to serve as liaison officer for communication with the United Nations Group of Experts are given below.

The Officer - in - charge

Mapping Unit, MINDEF

Dover Road

Singapore 5.

It was informed that none of gazetteer or list of geographical names exist in the country.



Thailand

1. Place names standardization

Progress has been made in Thailand since the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names to standardise the names of two lower administrative divisions, Tambon and Muban.<sup>(1)</sup> It should be noted that names of the upper three divisions have been standardised, both in Thai script and Romanization form, and approved as the official names by the Government.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Committee appointed by the Ministry of Interior has been assigned to compile an official administrative divisions directory. Priority of the area to be carried out depends on the needs of the government. Up to the present, name lists for 2 changwats in the North-eastern part of the country are completed. Each of them contains standardized name of all sub-divisions, its transcription, with geographic coordinates and grid reference against each name, and also sheet number of the country's base map covering the area.

Names listed in the directory were collected from maps of various sources. Some of these maps were of large scale, special purposes maps such as National Statistical Office's Survey maps and the Malaria Eradication Project maps for Mubans.

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(1) Administrative divisions in Thailand consisted of

1. Changwat
2. Amphoe
3. King Amphoe
4. Tambon
5. Mubans

(2) Reported at the First Conference as document E/CONF. 53/L. 21

When it was found out that names of the same place differed, study was made either to the historical background of such name or by field checking.

It is the nature of Thai language that phonetics spelling may be varied. Whenever the case arose, the local inhabitant pronunciation was maintained while the spelling was modified in respect to its origin or official documents.

## 2. Romanization

Since the adoption of single romanization system for Thai geographical names, the system has been widely applicable, although some self-determination romanization without consulting the official transcription rules can be found. The government proclamation of official romanization system and romanized administrative divisions name list attained better standardized spelling in the local English language newspapers. The most effective results are actions taken by State Railway of Thailand in applying the system to romanize names of railway stations throughout the country, and by Bangkok Municipality in replacing all street signs in Bangkok with the ones that show systematic romanized names.