



A Linguistic Analysis of Administrative Place Names in Ba Dinh District, Hanoi, Vietnam

Research Article

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Abstract

Hanoi's Ba Dinh District, as the political and historical heart of Vietnam's capital, offers a multifaceted toponymic landscape reflecting national heritage. This study examines the linguistic patterns, semantic categories, and cultural significance of Ba Dinh's official place names, including ward names, street names, and residential group names to reveal underlying naming trends. Through a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of approximately 264 toponyms, key patterns emerge. Commemorative names honoring historical figures and events form the largest group, underscoring Ba Dinh's role in preserving national memory. Traditional locality names (e.g. old villages, craft guilds) and landmark-related names also contribute significantly, while trade-related street names, so prominent in Hanoi's Old Quarter – are less common in Ba Dinh. The linguistic structure of these names shows a predominance of two-syllable compounds consistent with Vietnamese naming conventions, and a majority of names derived from Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary reflecting Vietnam's linguistic heritage. Over time, Ba Dinh's place names have evolved through colonial and revolutionary periods, with many older names replaced by new ones commemorating heroes and milestones of the 20th century. By situating Ba Dinh's naming practices in historical context and comparing them to patterns in Hoan Kiem District, this paper highlights how urban toponyms serve as "living testimonies" of history and culture, balancing the preservation of local heritage with the imprint of political change. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of urban toponymy as a tool for cultural heritage preservation and collective memory in Hanoi's urban development.



Keywords: Ba Dinh District; place names; toponymy; linguistic heritage; cultural history; urban nomenclature

1. Introduction

Toponyms constitute a significant domain of linguistic and cultural inquiry, functioning simultaneously as navigational tools and as repositories of collective memory (Van Langendonck, 2007; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2010). Within critical toponymy scholarship, street names have been conceptualized as “spatial texts” through which political regimes inscribe ideological narratives onto urban landscapes (Azaryahu, 1996; Giraut & Houssay-Holzschuch, 2016). This perspective is particularly salient in postcolonial contexts, where successive administrations have employed place-naming as a tool for nation-building and identity construction (Yeoh, 1996).

Hanoi, Vietnam’s capital with over a millennium of continuous habitation, presents a compelling case for toponymic analysis. The city’s naming practices reflect multiple historical strata from pre-colonial village nomenclature through French colonial designations to post-independence commemorative naming (Phùng, 2016). However, existing scholarship has predominantly focused on Hoan Kiem District’s commercial street names, leaving other central districts comparatively understudied.

Ba Dinh District occupies a distinctive position in Hanoi’s urban fabric. As the nation’s political-administrative center, housing the Presidential Palace, Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, and the ancient Thang Long Citadel site - the district’s toponymic system likely reflects different naming priorities than commercial areas. The district name itself commemorates the Ba Dinh anti-colonial uprising (1886 - 1887), suggesting a strong commemorative orientation.

This study addresses the following research question: *What are the linguistic structures, semantic patterns, and historical layers embedded in Ba Dinh District’s administrative place names?*

We analyze 96 semantically meaningful toponyms (14 ward names and 82 street names) using a mixed-methods approach that integrates: (1) morphological analysis of name structures; (2) lexical classification by etymological origin (Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese, hybrid); (3) semantic categorization by thematic content; (4) temporal periodization; and (5) assessment of semantic evolution. This framework draws on Tent and Blair’s (2011) toponymic typology while adapting it to the Vietnamese linguistic context following Lê (2006).

By situating Ba Dinh’s naming practices within the broader framework of critical toponymy (Rose-Redwood et al., 2018), this study contributes empirical evidence from a Southeast Asian context to theoretical discussions on urban place-naming as cultural heritage preservation and political expression.

2. Theoretical Background

Toponymy, the study of place names, lies at the intersection of linguistics, geography, history, and cultural studies. A variety of theoretical perspectives inform the analysis of urban place naming. Van & Van (2016) emphasize that toponyms function simultaneously as cultural symbols and

navigational tools, embodying both the tangible geography and the intangible heritage of a place. This dual nature means that administrative names can be “read” for insights into what a society values or chooses to commemorate.

According to Azaryahu’s framework of critical toponymy, street names act as “spatial texts” that reflect political power and cultural narratives inscribed onto the city map. Regime changes and historical turning points often lead to renaming of streets and landmarks, as new authorities assert identity and values through toponyms (e.g., replacing colonial names with national heroes). This is highly relevant in Hanoi’s case, where successive political eras (imperial, colonial, socialist) have each left distinct traces in place naming.

Linguistically, place names in Vietnam can be analyzed using typologies such as Tent’s (2015) classification, which examines the morphological structure, semantics, and origin of toponyms. Vietnamese toponyms often consist of a generic element (indicating the feature type, like *phố* “street,” *phường* “ward”) followed by a specific element (a proper name or noun). Understanding whether the specific element is derived from Vietnamese or Chinese lexicon (or a mix) is crucial, given the long history of Sino-Vietnamese influence on Vietnamese vocabulary. Works like Lê (2006) on Vietnamese toponymy provide a foundation for identifying pure Vietnamese vs. Sino-Vietnamese elements in place names.

Cultural significance in toponyms can be approached through Tent’s and other scholars’ categorizations of name motivations, for instance, whether a street is named after a person (commemorative), a local product or craft (descriptive), a landscape feature, or an event. These semantic groupings reveal patterns of cultural emphasis. In Ba Đình’s context, one might expect a strong commemorative trend (names of patriots, leaders, martyrs) corresponding to Vietnam’s 20th-century history of struggles and nation-building.

Finally, the concept of semantic evolution of place names addresses how meanings can shift or erode over time. A Street that once literally described a local activity (e.g., *Hàng Bún*, “Vermicelli Street”, where vermicelli noodle makers worked) may lose that literal meaning if the activity disappears, even though the name remains. Alternatively, a new commemorative name might replace an old one, thereby overlaying a new meaning onto a location. Neethling’s (2016) model highlights how examining such changes can illuminate social and political influences on naming decisions.

In summary, this study draws on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework: considering linguistic structures, cultural-semiotic functions, and historical-political contexts of toponyms. By applying these perspectives to Ba Đình District, we aim to decode the stories embedded in its place names and compare them to known patterns in Hanoi’s core districts. The approach is both synchronic (analyzing the current naming system) and diachronic (considering historical layers), aligning with recent toponymic research priorities.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of naming patterns with qualitative insights into historical and cultural context. The study proceeded in three stages:

3.1 Data Collection

We compiled a dataset of official administrative place names in Ba Dinh District, using city maps, administrative directories, and field verification. The dataset includes approximately 264 toponyms, consisting of 14 ward names, 82 street names, and 168 residential group names. These numbers reflect Ba Dinh's current administrative subdivisions (as of the 2005 - 2025 period, during which the district had 14 wards) and the network of named streets and numbered alley clusters. Only post-1954 official names are considered, following the scope used by Nguyen and Phung (2013) in their Hanoi street name studies. Historical or colloquial names no longer in use were noted for context but not counted in the primary dataset.

3.2 Linguistic and Structural Analysis

We first examined the morphological structure of each toponym, adopting the approach of Nguyễn et al. (2015) and Văn's framework (2007) for Vietnamese place-name structure. Each name was parsed into its generic element (e.g., *phường*, *phố*, *ngõ*, *tổ*) and specific element (proper noun or descriptor). We then classified the specific elements by syllable count (one, two, or three syllables) and by lexical origin - categorizing them as pure Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese (Hán-Việt terms), or *hybrids* of both. This provides a quantitative overview of Ba Dinh's toponymic language composition. We also identified patterns in pronunciation and phonology (tonal and syllabic features) common to these names.

3.3 Semantic and Historical Analysis

Next, we categorized the place names semantically into meaningful groups: for example, those referencing traditional trades or products, historical figures (people names), cultural sites or monuments, and natural or geographical features. Using Tent's (2015) typology and local historical sources, we determined what each name refers to and symbolizes. We then analyzed the historical periods represented by the names, whether a name dates back to the pre-colonial era (e.g. an old village name), originated during the French colonial period, or was introduced in the modern (post-1954) era. This involved archival research to trace when each street was named or renamed. Finally, we evaluated the semantic evolution: does the current name still correspond to an existing feature or activity (original meaning retained), has the connection become tenuous (partial shift), or is the name now purely historical/commemorative with the original reference gone (complete change)?

Our analysis is supported by both quantitative data (frequencies, percentages) presented in tables, and qualitative explanation drawing on Hanoi's historical records. The study leverages prior research for comparative context, especially Phung (2017), who documented Hanoi's street names from 1888 to 2008 across four central districts, and related Vietnamese scholarship on urban toponyms. We also incorporate insights from critical toponymy to interpret how Ba Dinh's naming patterns relate to cultural identity and power dynamics (e.g., which figures are memorialized, which heritage is emphasized). By combining statistical trends with cultural interpretation, this methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of Ba Dinh's administrative place names as both elements of language and carriers of historical meaning.

All findings are cross-checked with authoritative sources and maps. In the following section, we present the results of the analysis, beginning with the structural characteristics of Ba Dinh's toponymic system and then delving into lexical-semantic aspects and historical significance.

4. Examination of Ba Dinh District Place Names

Two main areas of focus in studying Ba Dinh's place names are (a) their structural formation within the administrative hierarchy, and (b) their lexical-semantic characteristics. Through these lenses, we can observe not only the systematic arrangement of urban toponyms but also the imprint of historical and cultural changes in this district, which serves as the nation's administrative core.

4.1 Administrative Place Names' Structural Features

We first consider how Ba Dinh District's place names are constructed and organized within Hanoi's administrative system. Table 1 summarizes the basic structural patterns of Ba Dinh's official toponyms, divided by administrative level (ward, street, residential group), along with their counts and proportions in our dataset.

Table 1: Basic Structure of Administrative Place Names in Ba Dinh District

Administrative Level	Structural Format	Number	Percentage (%)	Example
Ward	<i>Ward</i> + Proper Name	14	5.3	<i>Phường Ngọc Hà</i> (Ngoc Ha Ward)
Street	<i>Street</i> + Proper Name	82	30.8	<i>Phố Hoàng Diệu</i> (Hoang Dieu Street)
Residential Group	<i>Group</i> + Number + Ward Name	170	63.9	<i>Tổ 8 phường Vĩnh Phúc</i> (Group 8 Vinh Phuc Ward)
Total		266	100	

(Note: "Street" here includes roads designated as *phố* or *đường*; "Residential group" refers to numbered household clusters within wards.)

As shown in Table 1, Ba Dinh District's toponymy is organized into three tiers, each with its own naming conventions. Ward names (*phường*) in Ba Dinh uniformly consist of the generic "Phường" followed by a unique proper name. There are 14 wards (accounting for about 5.3% of the toponyms). Many ward names in Ba Dinh derive from historical village names or significant locations. For example, *Phường Ngọc Hà* takes its name from the old Ngọc Hà village (literally "Jade River"), famed for its flower gardens, and *Phường Quán Thánh* is named after the Quan Thanh Temple, a prominent historical shrine. Some ward names like *Điện Biên* (after the Điện Biên Phủ battle) and *Nguyễn Trung Trực* (after a patriotic hero) were designated in the 20th century to commemorate important events or people, reflecting a conscious effort to infuse national history into the urban fabric. In general, Ba Dinh's ward names tend to preserve either local heritage (former village/locality names) or national significance (heroic symbols), aligning with their role at the top of the local administrative hierarchy.

Street names form 30.8% of the toponyms in Ba Dinh. The standard structure is “Phố/Đường + [Proper Name]”, where *phố* means street (usually in densely built areas) and *đường* means road. The proper names of streets in Ba Dinh are predominantly those of notable individuals or places, especially figures in Vietnamese history. For instance, *Phố Hoàng Diệu* honors Hoàng Diệu, a 19th-century official who died defending Hanoi against the French, and *Đường Liễn Giai* carries the name of an old area/village (Liễn Giai). A distinctive feature of Ba Dinh’s street nomenclature is the emphasis on commemorative names: many streets are named after revolutionary leaders (e.g., *Phố Phan Đình Phùng*, *Phố Lê Hồng Phong*) or historical events (*Đường Độc Lập*, “Independence Road”). This reflects Ba Dinh’s identity as the capital’s administrative district, where naming serves to celebrate national history and heroes. There are fewer streets named for trades or crafts compared to Hoan Kiem’s Old Quarter; one exception is *Phố Hàng Bún* (“Vermicelli Street”), which harkens back to a traditional product once made there, though such cases are relatively rare in Ba Dinh. Often, the street names intersect with ward names, for example, *Phố Ngọc Hà* runs through Ngọc Hà Ward, helping to reinforce local geographic identity.

The majority (over 63.9%) of Ba Dinh’s place names in sheer number are the designations of residential groups (*tổ dân phố*). These are the smallest administrative units (often a cluster of households or a city block). Their naming formula is simply “Tổ [number] + [Ward name]”. For instance, *Tổ 8 phường Vĩnh Phúc* denotes residential Group 8 within Vĩnh Phúc Ward. These group names are highly functional, serving administrative and postal purposes rather than cultural commemoration. The numbers are assigned sequentially or geographically within each ward. While they carry little semantic meaning beyond identification, they are important for addressing and indicate the ward context (as the ward name is part of the designation). The prevalence of numbered groups (170 in our count) highlights the dense population and fine-grained administrative management in Ba Dinh. Such names, of course, preserve the ward name within them, indirectly keeping alive the historical or cultural meaning of the ward’s name. For example, every group in Ngọc Khánh Ward includes “*Ngọc Khánh*” (name of an old village meaning “Precious Jade”) as part of its address, thus perpetuating that toponym.

In summary, Ba Dinh’s structural naming conventions mirror those of Hanoi at large, with an orderly hierarchy: wards named for places or figures of significance, streets largely honoring national heroes or notable sites, and numbered groups ensuring local administrative clarity. The pattern underscores how cultural preservation and administrative function are balanced in the naming system. Ward and street names carry the cultural-historical weight, whereas group names provide systematic coverage. For example, the ward name *Phường Vĩnh Phúc* (literally “Eternal Blessing”) imparts an auspicious meaning chosen during a 2005 administrative reorganization, while *Phố Đội Cấn* (Doi Can Street) commemorates a Vietnamese anti-colonial fighter. Below this, a group address like *Tổ 5 phường Đội Cấn* carries the ward’s commemorative name into everyday use, even if the number “5” itself has no cultural meaning. This multi-tier system thus embeds heritage at higher levels and practicality at lower levels.

4.2 Lexical and Phonological Characteristics

Beyond structural formats, Ba Dinh’s place names can be analyzed for their linguistic content – specifically, how they are formed in terms of sound (phonology), syllable structure, and origin of

the words. Table 2 and Table 3 present these aspects by examining the *ward and street names* (excluding the purely numerical group labels, which have no inherent lexical content). There are 14 ward names and 82 street names in our data (96 names total) that consist of meaningful words. We analyze their semantic categories and syllabic patterns below.

Table 2: Semantic Categories of Proper Names (Wards and Streets) in Ba Dinh

Semantic Category	Number (out of 96)	Percentage (%)	Examples with Translation
Historical Figures/Events	46	47.9%	Phố Phan Đình Phùng (Patriot Phan Dinh Phung Street), Phố Điện Biên Phủ (Dien Bien Phu [Battle] Street)
Traditional Trade/Craft	10	10.4%	Phố Hàng Bún (Vermicelli Street), Phố Hàng Than (Charcoal Street)
Cultural Sites/Landmarks	20	20.8%	Phố Chùa Một Cột (One-Pillar Pagoda Street), Phố Quán Thánh (Quan Thanh Temple Street)
Geographical Features	20	20.8%	Đường Trúc Bạch (Truc Bach Lake Road), Phố Cửa Bắc (North Gate Street)
Total	96	100%	

In Table 2, we see that Historical Figures and Events constitute the largest semantic category for Ba Dinh's ward and street names, nearly half of the total (about 47.9%). This is a striking difference from Hoan Kiem's Old Quarter, where traditional trade names were dominant. In Ba Dinh, commemorative names are prevalent, reflecting the district's status as Hanoi's political and memorial center. Many streets are named after national heroes, leaders, or significant historical events. For example, *Phan Đình Phùng* and *Hoàng Diệu* are streets honoring Vietnamese officials who resisted French colonization, while *Phố Điện Biên Phủ* commemorates the decisive 1954 victory that ended French rule. Ward names like *Điện Biên* (after the same battle) and *Nguyễn Trung Trực* (after a 19th-century anti-colonial hero) also fall in this category. These names serve to promote national identity and collective memory by embedding the sacrifices and victories of history into the city map.

The Traditional Trade/Craft category accounts for about 10.4% of Ba Dinh's names - significantly smaller than in the Old Quarter (where names like *Hàng Đào*, *Hàng Bạc*, etc., formed the majority). Ba Dinh has a few legacy street names from old craft villages or market activities. Examples include *Phố Hàng Bún*, which indicates an area historically known for making rice vermicelli, and *Phố Hàng Than*, which literally means "Charcoal Street" (the site of a charcoal trading area in the past). Another example is *Ngũ Xã* (meaning "Five Villages"), the name of the islet where bronze-casting guilds from five villages settled - famous for its craft (bronze wares). These trade/craft names preserve echoes of the pre-colonial economy and local artisan culture in Ba Dinh, though today the activities have diminished or changed. For instance, Hàng Bún Street no longer specializes in noodle-making, and Hàng Than is now better known for a traditional sweet called

cốm (young rice cake) rather than charcoal. The presence of these names, even as a minority, provides a link to Hanoi's mercantile heritage in a district otherwise dominated by political symbols.

Names of Cultural Sites and Landmarks form about 20.8% of Ba Dinh's ward/street toponyms. These refer to temples, pagodas, old gates, and other notable man-made landmarks. For example, *Phố Chùa Một Cột* is named after the One-Pillar Pagoda (an 11th-century icon of Hanoi, which still stands in Ba Dinh), and *Phố Quán Thánh* is named after the Quan Thanh Temple, one of the Four Sacred Temples of the old capital. Such names indicate the physical presence of important cultural or religious sites, many of which are concentrated in Ba Dinh (the district contains the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, the Presidential Palace, Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, and numerous temples). Another example is *Phố Ông Ích Khiêm* which, while named after a person (a Nguyễn Dynasty official), is adjacent to the ancient Hanoi Flag Tower (*Cột cờ Hà Nội*), a notable landmark implicitly tied to the area's identity. The inclusion of landmarks in place names helps root the modern city in its architectural and cultural past. Even when urban development changes the surroundings, the toponym like "Chùa Một Cột" ensures the historical site's legacy remains front-of-mind. This category complements the historical figures category: together they highlight how Ba Dinh's nomenclature honors both the people and the places important to heritage.

The Geographical Features category, about 20.8% as well, includes names derived from natural or topographical features. In Ba Dinh, this often overlaps with human-modified geography. For example, *Trúc Bạch* (meaning "White Bamboo") is the name of a lake and its surrounding street – the lake itself was separated from West Lake in the 17th century and became famous for a village producing Trúc Bạch silk. *Cửa Bắc* ("Northern Gate") refers to the north gate of the old Citadel – the gate still exists as a historical relic, lending its name to a street and a nearby church (Nhà thờ Cửa Bắc). Other ward names like *Vĩnh Phúc* ("Eternal Blessing") and *Thành Công* ("Success") have geographical connotations only in a figurative or aspirational sense (these were names given during the socialist era, not traditional geography). We also include *La Thành* (as in *Đường La Thành*, the road along the path of the old city rampart) in this category, it recalls a physical defensive wall that once encircled Hanoi. Geographical toponyms in Ba Dinh therefore either describe natural landscape elements (lake, hill, etc.) or historical geography (gates, walls, ancient quarters). While comprising a smaller share of names, they are significant in preserving the memory of Hanoi's physical layout in previous centuries, for instance, both "Cửa Bắc" and nearby "Phố Phan Đình Phùng" trace the line of the former citadel wall, thus their names (North Gate and the name of its fallen defender) jointly tell a historical story on the map.

Overall, the semantic profile of Ba Dinh's place names emphasizes its character as a center of governance and history. The dominance of historical and commemorative names (nearly half) indicates a deliberate naming strategy to honor patriots and key events - literally inscribing national history into the city's streets. The presence of cultural-site names underscores Ba Dinh's rich concentration of monuments and temples. Meanwhile, the minority of trade-related names shows Ba Dinh is less about commerce (unlike Hoan Kiem) and more about political-cultural significance. This distribution indeed reflects the district's primary identity as the political-historical axis of the capital, rather than a commercial hub. It aligns with the fact that Ba Dinh hosts the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, Presidential Palace, ancient Thang Long Citadel grounds, and other national

symbols, its toponyms serve to preserve important cultural memories and ideals in the urban landscape.

From a phonological and syllabic perspective, Vietnamese place names have distinctive patterns. Table 3 analyzes the number of syllables in the core proper names of Ba Dinh's wards and streets (again, a total of 96 names). Vietnamese words are typically one or two syllables, but personal names often consist of two or three syllables. This is reflected in the toponym statistics:

Table 3: Syllabic Structure of Proper Names (Wards and Streets)

Number of Syllables	Number of Names	Percentage (%)	Examples with Translation
One syllable	5	5.2%	<i>Bưởi</i> ("Pomelo"), <i>Đống</i> (as in <i>Đống Đa</i> – "Mound") ¹
Two syllables	50	52.1%	<i>Kim Mã</i> ("Golden Horse"), <i>Ngọc Hà</i> ("Jade River")
Three syllables	41	42.7%	<i>Hoàng Hoa Thám</i> (Revolutionary leader Hoang Hoa Tham), <i>Phan Đình Phùng</i> (Patriot Phan Dinh Phung)
Total	96	100%	

The data in Table 3 shows that the majority of Ba Dinh's ward and street names (about 52%) are two syllables long (when we look at the specific identifier part of the name). This mirrors the general preference in Vietnamese toponyms and proper nouns for two-syllable constructions. Two-syllable names in Ba Dinh commonly take the form of either a descriptive compound or a first name + last name of a person. For instance, *Kim Mã* (literally "Golden Horse") is the name of a street and ward, originating from a local legend about a golden horse - it's a concise two-syllable phrase. Another example is *Liễu Giai* (name of an old village/ward, two syllables). Many commemorative street names that honor people use two syllables if the person is known by a compound name or alias, for example, *Trúc Bạch* (technically two syllables, though it's a lake name), or *Trần Vũ* (from the temple name *Trần Vũ*, two syllables). The prevalence of two-syllable names helps with memorability and conforms to Vietnamese naming rhythms. These names are often combinations like [noun + adjective] or [adjective + noun] for places (e.g., *Ngọc Hà* = Jade + River) for personal names (though many personal names used for streets tend to be three syllables, including a middle name as discussed below).

Approximately 42.7% of the names have three syllables, which is also significant. Most of these are full personal names of historical figures. Vietnamese personal names can consist of a family name (one syllable) + given name (which might be one or two syllables, often including a middle name). In the context of street naming, it's common to use the full name of a person (family name plus given names) for clarity, especially if the family name alone would be ambiguous. For example, *Hoàng Hoa Thám* is three syllables (*Hoàng* is family name, *Hoa Thám* is the two-syllable given name of the famous anti-French rebel leader). *Phan Đình Phùng* (another national hero) is also three syllables (*Phan* - family, *Đình Phùng* - given name). *Nguyễn Tri Phương* (a 19th-century general) and *Nguyễn Thái Học* (leader of the 1930 Yên Bái uprising) are other three-syllable examples. These

names illustrate how commemorative street naming often necessitates three-syllable names to clearly identify the honored individual. In some cases, the middle name might be dropped if the person is commonly known by just first and last name (e.g., *Trần Phú* is two syllables, as *Trần* is the surname and *Phú* the given name; he has no middle name in usage). However, many have the full three (*Nguyễn Văn Ngọc*, *Phạm Hồng Thái*, etc.). This pattern indicates that Ba Đình's names give preference to using full names for distinction, resulting in a higher proportion of three-syllable names than might be found in older quarter toponyms (which often are single words like *Hàng*, *Cầu*, etc., or two-syllable traditional names).

One-syllable names are relatively uncommon, about 5% of the total. Pure one-syllable place names in Hanoi are rare, as most Vietnamese words are compound or have accompanying classifiers. In our list, "one-syllable" refers to cases where the specific element of the name is a single syllable (though often it will be paired with another word when spoken, e.g., *Đường Bưởi*, where "Bưởi" is one syllable meaning "pomelo"). *Bưởi* is an example: *Đường Bưởi* (Pomelo Road) takes their name from an old market that sold pomelos (*Chợ Bưởi*). Another case is the ward name *Đội Cấn*, which appears to be two syllables but "Cấn" is a single-syllable name preceded by a title "Đội" (meaning squad/leader, an honorific for the person *Đội Cấn*). If counting just "Cấn" it's monosyllabic, but in usage it's always two syllables. Truly single-syllable names surviving in Hanoi are often ancient ones (like *Huế* in Hoan Kiem's context). In Ba Đình, one might count components like *Đồng* (in *Đồng Đa*, though that's a district name outside Ba Đình) or *La* (as in *La Thành*) if they stood alone, but they typically do not. Thus, one-syllable names are few; *Bưởi* stands out as a genuine example in Ba Đình's current roster of streets. The low count of one-syllable names suggests a tendency to use more descriptive or compound terms for clarity.

Phonologically, these names follow normal Vietnamese patterns, with a balance of Sino-Vietnamese readings and vernacular words. Two-syllable names often come from compound nouns or adjectives (e.g., *Ngọc* "jade" + *Hà* "river" are both of Sino-Vietnamese origin, making a descriptive compound). Three-syllable names as personal names are typically Sino-Vietnamese in each element (e.g., *Hoàng* (yellow), *Hoa* (flower), *Thám* (to explore) – although as a name it just identifies a person, each syllable has Sino-Viet meaning). The mix of tones and initial consonants in Ba Đình's toponyms is diverse, but one can notice common patterns: many names start with *Hoàng*, *Phan*, *Nguyễn*, *Trần* (very common Vietnamese family names for people); others start with descriptive words like *Thành* (citadel/success), *Quán* (shrine), *Liễu* (willow), *Trúc* (bamboo). This diversity in sound and structure reflects the layered sources of the names.

Crucially, Ba Đình's naming conventions show a balance between brevity and completeness. Where possible, names are kept to two syllables for simplicity (especially site names or concepts like *Kim Mã*, *Trúc Bạch*). Yet, where distinction is needed (as in commemorating individuals), longer names are used to avoid confusion (there are many famous *Nguyễn* or *Trần* in history, so including the full name like *Nguyễn Tri Phương* is necessary to distinguish from, say, *Nguyễn Trãi* or others). This helps the toponymic system maintain both administrative clarity and cultural specificity. Citizens and visitors can often infer from a street name whether it's likely a person's name or something else simply by its syllable count and structure: a three-part name in Hanoi almost always signals a historical figure, whereas a shorter name might signal a location or common noun. In Ba Đình, seeing a street like *Điện Biên Phủ* (three syllables) one recognizes it as

an event/place name of great importance (the battle's name), whereas *Ngọc Khánh* (two syllables) one might recall as an old village or lake.

In conclusion, the linguistic profile of Ba Dinh's place names shows a predominance of Sino-Vietnamese compounds and full personal names, resulting in mostly two and threesyllable constructs, with very few monosyllables. This indicates the strong influence of Vietnam's historical lexicon on official nomenclature, and the preference for using complete names to convey clear meaning or honor. The phonetic form of these names, while secondary to their semantic content, contributes to Hanoi's soundscape - the mix of native and Sino-Viet words in Ba Dinh's map tells a story of linguistic layering, just as the meanings tell a story of cultural layering.

4.3 CulturalHistorical Significance and Evolution

The place names of Ba Dinh District collectively serve as a chronicle of Hanoi's history, encapsulating various eras and cultural influences. As Phung (2017) observes, the toponyms of Hanoi's central districts act as "living testimonies of urban development history", reflecting different layers of the city's collective memory. In Ba Dinh, this is particularly evident: the names range from ancient village identifiers to colonial-era designations to post-revolutionary commemorations. In this section, we interpret Ba Dinh's toponymic system in terms of its cultural-historical content and discuss how the meanings of these names have shifted (or persisted) over time.

Table 4 recaps the cultural-historical thematic breakdown (from Table 2) in a way that highlights Ba Dinh's identitycategorizes the names by the historical period they originate from or reference.

Table 4: Cultural - Historical Categories of Ba Dinh Place Names

Cultural - Historical Theme	Number	Percentage (%)	Representative Examples
Heroes & National History (figures/events)	46	47.9%	<i>Hoàng Diệu</i> (martyr official), <i>Điện Biên Phủ</i> (historic battle)
Traditional Villages & Trades	10	10.4%	<i>Hàng Bún</i> (noodle craft street), <i>Ngũ Xã</i> (five guilds village)
Monuments & Sacred Sites	20	20.8%	<i>Chùa Một Cột</i> (One-Pillar Pagoda), <i>Quán Thánh</i> (Tran Vu Temple)
Natural & Old Geography	20	20.8%	<i>Trúc Bạch</i> (lake name), <i>Cửa Bắc</i> (Old North Gate)
Total	96	100%	

From a cultural perspective, Ba Dinh's toponyms clearly emphasize patriotic and historical remembrance. Nearly half of the names commemorate heroes or key historical events, underscoring how the district's spatial vocabulary is used to honor those who shaped Vietnam's destiny. This heavy commemorative slant aligns with the presence of Vietnam's national monuments in Ba Dinh (such as the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and war memorials), the environment is consciously imbued with national significance. In everyday life, when Hanoians mention going to streets like *Phan Đình Phùng* or *Đội Cấn*, they are literally speaking the names of

heroes, keeping history in daily discourse. This reflects the ideological role of street naming noted by Azaryahu: embedding political memory in the city's very navigation system.

Traditional culture is not absent, however about one-fifth of the names point to temples, communal houses, and legendary sites, indicating Ba Dinh's continuity with the spiritual landscape of old Thăng Long (Hanoi). Names such as *Quán Thánh* and *Hoàng Thành* (the latter meaning Imperial Citadel, used as a locality name) preserve the ancient capital's footprint. They serve as reminders that beneath the modern capital lies a layer of imperial and spiritual heritage. Likewise, names like *Hàng Bún* or *Châu Long* (Chau Long was a princess's name lent to a pagoda and street) carry echoes of daily life and local lore from centuries past.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of critical toponymic research by examining how urban place names function as repositories of cultural memory and political identity in a Southeast Asian context. The analysis of Ba Dinh District's 96 semantically meaningful toponyms reveals patterns that both align with and diverge from established frameworks in the field.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The predominance of commemorative names (47.9%) in Ba Dinh confirms Azaryahu's (1996) thesis that street naming serves as a mechanism for legitimizing sociopolitical order. However, our data also reveals a nuanced layering absent in many Western studies: pre-colonial village names coexist with revolutionary-era commemorations, creating what we term a 'palimpsest toponymy' where multiple historical narratives are simultaneously inscribed in urban space.

The linguistic analysis demonstrates that Sino-Vietnamese (Hán-Việt) vocabulary dominates Ba Dinh's nomenclature. This pattern aligns with established features of Vietnamese onomastics, where Sino-Vietnamese terms have historically been preferred for formal naming, particularly for personal names used in commemorative contexts (Le, 2006; Phung, 2016)."

5.2 Comparative Insights

Comparing Ba Dinh with Hoan Kiem District reveals significant functional differentiation in Hanoi's toponymic landscape. While Hoan Kiem preserves commercial heritage through trade-related names (~45%), Ba Dinh emphasizes political-commemorative functions (~48%). This spatial distribution of naming themes reflects deliberate urban planning decisions that allocate symbolic capital across different districts.

The temporal distribution of names with 43.8% from the modern (post-1954) era, aligns with Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu's (2010) observation that regime changes often trigger intensive toponymic interventions. The Vietnamese case, however, shows a distinctive pattern: rather than wholesale erasure of colonial names, authorities selectively retained indigenous toponyms while replacing French designations with patriotic alternatives.

5.3 Semantic Evolution and Heritage Preservation

The semantic evolution analysis reveals that approximately 31% of toponyms retain their original referents, while 40% show partial semantic shift. This finding has implications for heritage conservation: place names can function as 'intangible heritage markers' even when their physical referents have disappeared. Names like Hàng Bún (Vermicelli Street) preserve memory of traditional crafts despite complete functional transformation of the area.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the exclusion of numbered residential groups (tổ dân phố) from semantic analysis, while methodologically justified, means that the full administrative naming system is not captured. Second, the historical periodization relies on available archival sources, which may contain gaps. Third, resident perceptions of place names, an important dimension of critical toponymy were not empirically investigated.

Future research could employ ethnographic methods to examine how Hanoians perceive and use these place names in daily life. Extending this analytical framework to all 30 administrative units of Hanoi, including the historical core districts (Hoan Kiem, Dong Da, Hai Ba Trung), intermediate urban districts (Cau Giay, Thanh Xuan, Hoang Mai), and recently incorporated suburban districts (Hoai Duc, Dong Anh, Gia Lam) would enable a comprehensive mapping of the capital's toponymic landscape. Additionally, longitudinal analysis tracking name changes over time would contribute to understanding toponymic dynamics in rapidly urbanizing contexts

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed 96 semantically meaningful administrative place names in Ba Dinh District, revealing distinctive patterns that reflect Hanoi's historical evolution and cultural identity. Three key findings emerge from this research.

First, Ba Dinh's toponymic system is dominated by commemorative names (47.9%), distinguishing it from commercial districts like Hoan Kiem. This pattern reflects the district's role as Vietnam's political-administrative center and demonstrates how authorities deploy street naming to inscribe national narratives into urban space.

Second, the linguistic composition predominantly two-syllable (52.1%) and three-syllable (42.7%) names of Sino-Vietnamese origin, reveals the enduring influence of classical Vietnamese nomenclature traditions. The prevalence of full personal names for streets named after historical figures demonstrates a preference for clarity and distinction in commemorative practices.

Third, the temporal layering of names spanning pre-colonial (31.3%), colonial (25.0%), and modern (43.8%) periods, creates a chronological palimpsest that preserves multiple historical narratives simultaneously. This finding supports the conceptualization of urban toponyms as 'living testimonies' of history (Phung, 2016).

The study contributes to critical toponymy scholarship by demonstrating how place-naming practices in postcolonial contexts balance heritage preservation with political commemoration. For urban planners and cultural heritage practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of

toponyms as intangible cultural resources that merit systematic documentation and thoughtful management as cities continue to evolve.

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Bio-note:

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