

AN ASSEMBLED SKETCH OF PLACE NAMES IN LAC DUONG DISTRICT, LAM DONG PROVINCE

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Abstract

Lac Duong District, located in Lam Dong Province, is traditionally inhabited by the Cơ Ho people (also known as the K'Ho), who are divided into two major subgroups: Chil and Lạch. The district is noted for its unique cultural and historical features, partly reflected in its place names. This study, conducted over a year in 2023, involved selecting and analyzing names of places in Lac Duong District by qualitative methods, statistical analysis, linguistic analysis, and place-name grouping. The paper classifies these names into four groups and examines the characteristics of Lac Duong District in terms of etymology, cultural space, historical period, and cultural subject. The findings provide a concise, yet significant, insight into the district's cultural and historical depth. In the context of increasing cultural and economic exchanges, this research is timely and essential for supporting the preservation and promotion of the local residents' cultural identity.

Keywords: Cơ Ho; Chil; K'Ho; Lạch; Lac Duong; Place names.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lac Duong is a mountainous district with an area of 1,513.8 km² located in the northeastern part of Lam Dong Province, 12 kilometers from the center of Da Lat. The district is geographically bordered by Khanh Hoa and Ninh Thuan provinces to the east, Lam Ha District to the southwest, Da Lat and Don Duong districts to the south, and Dam Rong District to the north and northwest.

Lac Duong is situated in a temperate climate zone, with an elevation ranging from 1,500 to 1,600 meters above sea level and an average annual temperature of 19.5 °C. The district has 87.43% of its area covered by primary forests, which play a crucial role in protecting the water sources for local hydroelectric projects. Therefore, Lac Duong experiences a mild, cool, and fresh climate year-round (UBND tỉnh Lâm Đồng, 2001).

Lac Duong is home to 19 ethnic minority groups, including the Cơ Ho (comprising two main subgroups: Chil and Lạch), Chu Ru, Thai, Ê Đê, and others. As of November 2022, the district had 7,684 households with a total population of 32,220; among these, 5,063 households with 21,517 individuals are from ethnic minority groups, making up 66.74% of the population (UBND huyện Lạc Duong, 2023). The Cơ Ho, in particular, have long been a significant presence in Lac Duong District, profoundly influencing its cultural characteristics. The legacy of the Cơ Ho people is evident in many local place names, which help preserve the unique aspects of their way of life and reflect their historical impact on the region.

As the country continues to develop and integrate, particularly with the merging of administrative units, many place names in Lac Duong District have been lost or altered. This has led to a reduction in the regional characteristics that these names once conveyed. Despite this, there has been limited comprehensive research on Lac Duong's place names. Existing studies are scattered across various articles and research studies by authors such as Lê (2015, 2022a, 2022b) and Ngọc et al. (2013). Consequently, there is a pressing need to systematically and scientifically collect, catalog, and evaluate place names in Lac Duong District to support the preservation and promotion of the Cơ Ho ethnic identity amidst globalization.

According to the results of the 2019 National Population and Housing Census published by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam in 2020, the Cơ Ho ethnic group has a total population of 200,800, with the majority residing in Lam Dong Province (175,531 people), which represents 12.3% of the province's population and 87.7% of the Cơ Ho population in Vietnam (Tổng cục Thống kê Việt Nam, 2020). The Cơ Ho ethnic group is subdivided into several branches, including Cơ Ho Xrê, Cơ Ho Chil (Cil), Cơ Ho Lạch (Lat), Cơ Ho Tơ Ring (Tring), Cơ Ho Cơ Don (Cơ Dòn), and Cơ Ho Nộp (Nộp).¹ In Lac Duong, the predominant Cơ Ho resident subgroups are the Cơ Ho Chil and Cơ Ho Lạch.

¹ The list of ethnic groups in Vietnam issued under Decision No. 121-TCTK/PPCĐ, dated March 2, 1979, by the Director General of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam.

Agriculture is the primary economic activity of the traditional Cơ Ho people. Additionally, they gather forest products and engage in various crafts, including blacksmithing, weaving, and basketry. The highest social organization among the Cơ Ho is the *buôn* or *bon* [village]. The Cơ Ho follow a matrilineal system, which significantly shapes and defines many unique aspects of their cultural practices and way of life (UBND tỉnh Lâm Đồng, 2001).

Before Alexandre Yersin explored the Lam Vien Plateau in 1893, the Cơ Ho primarily resided in Da Lat. Following the French designation of Da Lat as a resort center for French officers and soldiers in Indochina and the subsequent development of the city, the Cơ Ho gradually relocated northeast to settle in Lac Duong District and its surrounding areas. These details are meticulously recorded in Yersin's travel diary on the exploration of the Lam Vien Plateau (Yersin, 2023). Additionally, Jennings (2022) provides a comprehensive analysis of Da Lat's development from 1893 until the French departure from Indochina in the early 1950s, addressing political, economic, planning, educational, and religious aspects. This evidence clarifies the impact of French colonial policies on the relocation of the Cơ Ho from Da Lat to Lac Duong District in the early 20th century.

2. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Toponymy in Vietnam began later than in many other regions, but it has since developed a strong foundation supported by several important works. Notably, the studies by Lê (2003, 2006) have played a significant role in establishing methods, criteria, and classifications for toponyms (also known as place names), thus advancing the field of toponymy in Vietnam.

No comprehensive and systematic study specifically dedicated to explaining place names in Lac Duong District exists. However, some place names in this area have been previously discussed and clarified by Lê et al. (2009), Lê (2015), Lê (2022a, 2022b) and Ngọc et al. (2013). These studies have introduced and traced several place names in Lac Duong District, shedding light on the stories and explanations behind place names such as Langbiang Mountain, Đan Kia Lake, Ankroet Waterfall, and Mount Bidoup. Notably, the research carried out by Lê (2022b) has uncovered several intriguing aspects of place names with minority language origins in Lac Duong and Di Linh districts. Overall, the approach to place names in Lac Duong District has primarily been introductory and descriptive and focused on specific research objectives. However, there remains a gap in the collection, systematization, and classification of place names that, if filled, would provide a comprehensive view of the region through these names, which is an area that researchers still need to address.

3. DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Data-collecting process

To carry out the data-collecting process, the research team conducted surveys and gathered information from five communes (Lát, Đạ Sar, Đạ Nhim, Đạ Chais, and Đưng K'Nó) and one town (Lạc Dương) in Lac Duong District over the span of one year (2023).

A total of 140 questionnaires were distributed and returned, achieving a 100% response rate. The selected questionnaire respondents met two main criteria: long-term residency in the area and a certain level of knowledge about the surveyed region. Specifically, we aimed to gather information and conduct in-depth interviews with officials involved in cultural and social work, individuals fluent in both Vietnamese and K'Ho (the Co Ho language), and other respected community figures such as village elders and leaders. Due to clear instructions regarding target groups and criteria, the survey achieved a perfect response rate (100%). Following the data collection, the research team carefully aggregated, classified, and grouped the place names following the methods and principles outlined by Lê (2003). During the processing phase, the team's focus was on ensuring reliable place names. The research team verified place names using documents, images, and maps, focusing on names that had changed over time, disappeared due to historical events, or evolved due to geographical changes. The researchers were cautious of place names that were introduced by small resident groups for ease of remembrance and were not widely recognized outside the locality to avoid data distortion. For place names that were unreliable or ambiguous due to multiple variations, particularly those of K'Ho origin, such as Đạ Lor Nghệt/Đạ Nghệt, Đăng Ya/Đăng Ja/Đăng Gia, Đạ Nhím/Đạ Nhím, Đạ Cai/Đạ Chais/Đạ Cháy, and Đăng Gia Rết/Đăng Gia Jit/Đăng Gia Dết, the team reviewed the information, consulted Co Ho collaborators for accurate translation and transcription, and revisited the sites for verification.

3.2. Research methods

We employed the following primary methods in this research:

Qualitative methods involve observations, interviews, focus groups, questionnaire surveys, and secondary research such as collecting existing data in the form of texts, images, and audio or video recordings. They help in gathering and investigating the origins of place names. The findings obtained from qualitative methods provide a foundation for the research team to compile place names and offer scientific and convincing interpretations and evaluations of place names in Lac Duong District.

Statistical analysis was used by the research team in compiling and classifying place names based on the collected data and materials. This approach enables a clear understanding of the place-name types, such as place names indicating natural features and those indicating man-made structures. Consequently, the initial characteristics of each type as well as the overall characteristics of place names across the district can be determined. This method is employed in the process of collecting place names.

Linguistic analysis is one of the fundamental and essential methods in studying place names since toponymy (the study of place names, including their origins, meanings, usage, and types) involves etymology, which concerns the linguistic evolution of place names.

Place-name grouping involves organizing a set of place names that are internally related, particularly in terms of their reflective value. Once place names are systematized and grouped, they can help outline the most general features of the names of places in Lac Duong District. Additionally, this method provides further data to shape an

understanding of certain characteristics of the Cờ Ho people's way of life in Lac Duong District throughout history.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Classification of Lac Duong place names

By the end of the collection process, the research team had identified 258 place names and categorized them into four groups that indicate natural features, man-made structures, regions, and administrative units.

- Group 1: 125 place names indicating natural features (48.4%)

Lac Duong District encompasses the highest region of the Lam Vien Plateau, including its highest peak, Mount Langbiang. The district's natural landscape is marked by numerous mountains, hills, and waterfalls, typical of highland geography. Additionally, the Cờ Ho people, the area's original inhabitants, have an economy deeply connected to nature. It is therefore natural that their worldview and daily lives reflect the influence of natural elements. Thus, it is not surprising that place names referring to natural features make up a large portion of the collected place names.

- Group 2: 67 place names indicating man-made structures (26.0%)

Historically, the Cờ Ho people's way of life was largely based on shifting cultivation and seasonal migration. Their construction efforts were primarily focused on traditional stilt houses and small community buildings that served local purposes, and these structures generally did not require formal names. Consequently, place names related to man-made structures are not very common. Among the collected place names in this category, most are associated with the French and Vietnamese construction activities in Da Lat from the early 20th century to the present. The place names include those for bridges, roads, churches, dams, and hydroelectric plants.

- Group 3: 22 place names indicating regions (8.5%)

This category of place names illustrates how social organization was organized around clan relationships or groups of individuals connected by blood or marriage. It distinctly reflects the settlement patterns and tight-knit social structure of the Cờ Ho before administrative systems were formalized. Consequently, place names were used to mark the boundaries of residential areas, grazing lands, and fields belonging to different groups. In practice, these place names offer a relative degree of precision, though many boundary areas are not clearly delineated. Despite this, the names hold considerable significance for the Cờ Ho, especially in the absence of the modern mapping tools available today.

- Group 4: 44 place names indicating administrative units (17.1%)

In Lac Duong District, the number of place names indicating administrative units is relatively small, as most administrative units were established after 1975. Previously,

the Cơ Ho people organized their social structures into *bon/bòn/buôn*, a system similar to the Vietnamese village structure. During the Vietnam War (1954–1975), the majority of what is now the Lạc Duong and Đam Rong districts was administratively part of Đà Lạt, and the traditional Cơ Ho village [*bon/buôn*] system was maintained. It was only after 1975, with the establishment of Lạc Duong District, that the current administrative divisions were implemented (UBND tỉnh Lâm Đồng, 2001). Despite this, the region remains sparsely populated, with many uninhabited forested and mountainous areas, resulting in a relatively low density of administrative units (5 communes, 1 town, 23 hamlets, and 11 neighborhoods).

Place names indicating natural features are the primary place-name group in Lạc Duong District with 48.4%, while place names indicating regions are relatively few at 8.5%. This distribution reflects the nature of Lạc Duong District, a highland area marked by significant geographical fragmentation and numerous distinct highland landforms, such as mountains, forests, streams, and waterfalls. The Cơ Ho have traditionally engaged in hunting, agriculture, and shifting cultivation and have a deep connection to the terrain and natural landscape, which is reflected in the large number of place names indicating natural features. In contrast, the social organization of the Cơ Ho was based on the village [*bon/buôn*] system organized around kinship relations, with clearly defined common spaces. Place names indicating regions were used primarily to delineate areas between different resident groups. However, since there is not much variation between these groups (UBND tỉnh Lâm Đồng, 2001), the number of regional place names is relatively low. Overall, the classification of place names in Lạc Duong District helps to clarify these fundamental characteristics.

4.2. Lạc Duong District from the perspective of toponymy

4.2.1. Etymology

Based on the study results, the toponyms in Lạc Duong District can be categorized according to two linguistic origins: Vietnamese and K'Ho. This distinction reflects the historical settlement processes and the influence of various resident communities on the region.

- Place names of K'Ho origin

Before the French arrival, the Lâm Viên Plateau was long occupied by ethnic minorities from the South Trường Sơn region, including Chu Ru, Mạ, Cơ Ho, Mông, and others. The area now known as Lạc Duong District was originally settled by the Cơ Ho people. The presence of the Cơ Ho is evident throughout the Lâm Viên and Di Linh plateaus because they named the lands they lived in or traveled through, and their heritage and community have been preserved. As a result, most place names in Lạc Duong derive from K'Ho, with 217 out of 258 recorded place names (84.1%) being of K'Ho origin. Generally, the majority of the place names of K'Ho origin in Lạc Duong District refer to natural geographical features, while place names for man-made structures are relatively

rare (18 out of 217, accounting for 0.8%). This pattern reflects the Cơ Ho people's deep connection to nature and their role as cultural stewards of the region.

- Place names of Vietnamese origin

After 1975, when Lac Duong District was established, along with the formation of administrative bodies at the district and commune levels, there was an influx of various ethnic groups, including the Việt, Thái, Tày, Nùng, and Ê Đê, into Lac Duong for administrative duties and economic activities. This migration, particularly of the ethnic Vietnamese (Việt), marked a new historical era characterized by significant cultural interaction in the district's development (UBND tỉnh Lâm Đồng, 2001). This is evident in the Vietnamese-origin place names (either pure Vietnamese or Sino-Vietnamese) found in Lac Duong District. The data show that there are currently 41 place names out of 258 (15.9%) of Vietnamese origin, with most being Sino-Vietnamese. Vietnamese adaptations of place names include new names in pure Vietnamese or Sino-Vietnamese, such as street names honoring historical Vietnamese kingdoms or dynasties (the kingdoms of Văn Lang and Vạn Xuân and the Tây Sơn dynasty), notable Vietnamese figures (King Lạc Long Quân of the Hồng Bàng dynasty of ancient Vietnam and Emperor Duy Tân of the Nguyễn dynasty in Vietnam), historical dates (March 14, 1954, the day President Ho Chi Minh sent a letter to the officials and soldiers at the Dien Bien Phu Front; May 19, the birthday of President Ho Chi Minh), or geographical features and locations (Làng Ruộng [Field Village], Dốc Huyện [Slope District]). Additionally, there are alterations of the original K'Ho names into Vietnamese or Sino-Vietnamese equivalents (Lạc Dương from Lác Dông, Lâm Viên from Lơm Biêng, Đạ Cháy from Đà Chais, Đạ/Đạ Nhím from Đà Nhêng, Tiêng Liêng from Tiang Liang, Long Lanh from K'Long K'Lăn, and others). Although these names account for only 15.9% of the total, they signify the presence and influence of the Vietnamese people from both administrative and cultural perspectives in Lac Duong District.

4.2.2. *Cultural space*

Before the French arrived at the Lam Vien Plateau, the Lac Duong area was a well-established Cơ Ho settlement. Following the French establishment of Da Lat, the Cơ Ho residents migrated towards the foothills of the Langbiang and Bidoup mountains, which led to the Lac Duong area becoming increasingly isolated. Between 1945 and 1975, neither the French colonial authorities nor the subsequent South Vietnamese government paid much attention to the development of this region. It was only after the reunification of the country in 1975 and the establishment of Lac Duong District that the area began to experience certain changes linked to cultural exchanges and economic development. Nonetheless, it remains relatively isolated compared to other districts and towns in Lam Dong Province.

Examining Lac Duong District from the perspective of toponymy reveals that the local toponyms reflect the natural environment, including its distinctive natural features (landforms, landscapes, flora, and fauna). This is evidenced by the fact that 48.4% of the collected place names indicate natural features. The natural features depicted in Lac

Duong District include mountains, hills, rivers, streams, lakes, and waterfalls, alongside a few references to fields, small grasslands, and valleys nestled between hills and mountains. Place names indicating natural features highlight the rugged features of the terrain, such as Liêng Wêt [Narrow Waterfall], Liêng Lơ Hur [Smooth Waterfall], and Bảy Tầng Waterfall [Seven-Tiered Waterfall]. (The names refer to waterfalls in the communes of Đa Nhim, Lát, and Đưng K'Nớ.) Other names describe specific natural features such as Jù liang bor [Waterfall Mountain] or flora and fauna prevalent in the region, such as Đẳng Ja [Grass Hill], Yô Jil [Mountain with many trees named Jil], Liêng T'rèng [Waterfall with many trees named T'rèng], Bon Pasamek [Mosquito Place], and Bon Kon Klang [Eagle Place]. These names not only reflect the geographical characteristics and the Cơ Ho people's knowledge of the land but also shed light on their traditional practices, such as shifting cultivation and seasonal migration.

Furthermore, the cultural space represented by the place names in Lac Duong District extends beyond mere natural and physical features to include significant cultural and historical elements. Examples include Làng Đa Bla [Flooded Water Village], Làng Par s'mach [Golden Fly Village], Cánh đồng Dong Tiêng Đae [Mouse Tail Field], Xã Đưng Knoh (Dong Kon rơh) [Miracle Field], and Làng Cau Lác/Bòn Lác [Bald Hill]. The last name is associated with a local legend about a man named Srai who, after being mistreated by the villagers, cursed the land, rendering it unsuitable for cultivation (Ngọc et al., 2013). These place names reflect a rich tapestry of cultural and historical narratives, providing insight into the local legends, environmental transformations, and social practices of the Cơ Ho community.

In addition, the collected place names also assist in depicting the social space of the Cơ Ho community. This space is essentially the *bon* [village], which is closely tied to each resident throughout their life. Consequently, some place names reflect not just current locations but also the names of old villages that were carried over to new areas as a form of remembrance. Examples include Đa Ra Hoa (Lac Duong District), Đa Ra Hoa (Duc Trong District), Liêng Bông/Liêng Bồng (Lac Duong District), Liêng Bông (Don Duong and Duc Trong Districts), Đẳng Gia (Lac Duong District), and Đẳng Gia (Di Linh District).² There are also names for places where the Cơ Ho once lived but no longer do. These names endure in local memory with the prefix R'hàng (or Rơ hàng), meaning old village, such as R'hàng Lom Biêng (or R'hàng Biêng), R'hàng Kroc, and R'hàng T'reh. Furthermore, the place names reflect the distinctive social organization of the Cơ Ho, often deriving from the name of the dominant clan or the village leader, as seen in names such as Lom Biêng and Bòn Nơr.

Overall, the names of places in Lac Duong District reflect both the natural environment and the social structure of the Cơ Ho, effectively “imprinting” their connection on the cultural and historical context of their community. These names offer

² Dang Gia Village, which belonged to Son Dien Commune in Di Linh District, has now been merged with Bo Cao Village to form Dang Cao Village. This change was enacted by Resolution No. 166/NQ-HĐND, dated January 21, 2020, concerning the arrangement, merging, and renaming of villages and residential groups in Lam Dong Province.

insights into the deep relationship of the Cơ Ho with the land and the social dynamics of their society during a particular historical period.

4.2.3. *Historical periods*

Place names are not just labels; they also serve as “witnesses” that record and reflect the long-term processes associated with the habitation of a region. The district of Lac Duong is no exception to this.

First and foremost, place names reflect the settlement history of cultural groups in Lac Duong District. This is evidenced by many names derived from individuals or groups who once lived in or had a significant connection with the area. For instance, the place name Yàng Tàng Siêng (Yan Tann Sienn) refers to a section of the Đắk Heur River, named after two brothers, Tàng and Siêng, from the Chil ethnic group, who contributed significantly to the community and were honored as deities [*yàng*]. Additionally, place names might be derived from the names of early settlers or founders of the area, such as Păng Tiêng/Pàng Tiêng [Mr. Tiêng], Pàng Đoòng [Mr. Đoòng], and Pàng Prài [Mr. Prài]. Naming conventions may also include family names for communities, such as Lom Biêng and Bon Nor, or the names of community leaders, as in Đung K’Nó, which is named after the first village headwoman (Lê, 2022a, p. 77).

Additionally, place names in Lac Duong District also reflect the administrative organization of different historical periods. Before 1945, names of places in Lac Duong District were primarily names indicating natural geographical features and regions established by local communities and closely tied to their living areas, often along water sources. This explains the prevalence of names with prefixes such as Đạ/Dà. Similarly, many place names in Lac Duong District incorporate the term *bôn/bon* [village], which represents the most complete social organization of the Cơ Ho. Later, despite the presence of the French and Americans in Lac Duong District, their influence was largely political rather than administrative (Mạc, 1983). Consequently, place names from this period do not reflect administrative changes and are often just phonetically transcribed versions of French names. This transcription process significantly altered many original names due to differences in pronunciation between the local population and the French, such as Đan Kia from the K’Ho name Đẳng Ja and Ankroet from the K’Ho name R’hàng Kroc. Thus, from the perspective of toponymy, the administrative influence of the French and Americans before 1975 is relatively minimal.

After 1975, the administrative organization in Lac Duong District became more clearly defined through names of villages, residential groups, communes, and towns aligned with the national administrative system. These names also illustrate changes in administrative organization at the commune and village levels, including some names that are no longer in use. For example, the commune of Lạc Tiến, which was a large area in the eastern and northeastern parts of Lac Duong District before 1975, was renamed Kilplanol Hạ after 1975 and eventually divided into the three communes known today as Đạ Sar, Đạ Nhím, and Đạ Chais. Additionally, some toponyms (place names of roads), such as Điện Biên Phủ Road, Thống Nhất Road, and 29/3 Road in Lac Duong District,

reflect significant national events such as the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ, Thống Nhất Day [Reunification Day], and the milestone marking the liberation of Lạc Duong District (March 29).

Thus, with their characteristic of conveying simple and concise information, place names in Lạc Duong District offer valuable insights into the presence and history of the Cơ Ho in the region. In a context where the lives of the Cơ Ho were not documented in writing, these place names serve as valuable historical resources that preserve and enrich our understanding of Lạc Duong District.

4.2.4. Cultural subjects

In Lạc Duong District, the Cơ Ho are the primary cultural custodians. The place names in the area not only reflect the cultural space and period of the community but also reveal unique aspects of the Cơ Ho people's cultural life.

Firstly, place names in Lạc Duong District reflect the matrilineal culture of the Cơ Ho, characterized by such aspects as women proposing marriage, inheritance rights for daughters, and the significant role of women in the family. These matrilineal traits are evident in the place names through stories and details that illustrate this cultural aspect. For example, the name of the iconic mountain in the Lam Dong Province, Langbiang³ is linked to a Cơ Ho legend about the characters K'Lang and K'Biang. K'Lang was the only daughter of K'Yah and Brah Yang, entrusted by the deities to oversee the southern part of the plateau. K'Bông married K'Krong and gave birth to K'Biang, who governed the northern region and was the wealthiest in the area. During a festival, K'Lang and K'Biang fell in love and promised to marry. After returning to their respective villages, K'Lang fell ill from missing K'Biang, and no healer could cure her. Only when K'Biang visited did K'Lang recover and seek her parents' permission to marry him. However, her request was denied, leading to a dispute between the two families. In their anger, K'Lang's family demanded compensation and sent warriors to drive wild animals from the highlands, while K'Biang's family sent soldiers to block them, resulting in a conflict that ultimately led the lovers to take their own lives. The mournful gods created the Langbiang Mountain as their grave, and the tears of the gods formed the Đa Nhim River [Tears River].⁴ The name Langbiang thus embodies both the yearning for unity among the tribes and elements of the Cơ Ho's matrilineal culture, such as the importance of maternal lineage and women's roles in marriage. Similarly, the name of another prominent mountain in Lạc Duong District, Bidoup, also reflects matrilineal cultural elements. In the K'Ho language, the word Bidoup means a person lying prone or sinking low. There are three explanations for this name: (1) In the story of Bidoup and Núi Bà, Bidoup and Núi Bà were once a niece and her aunt. The aunt, Núi Bà, always cared for her growing niece, Bidoup, who became taller and larger than her aunt. To prevent her niece from touching the heavens

³ Langbiang (also spelled Langbian, Lang Bian, Lang-Bian, and Lang Biang) is the basis for the name Lâm Viên, which refers to the highland area (Lam Vien Plateau) encompassing both Đa Lat and Lạc Duong District. The name Langbiang (also known as Lombiêng or M'Biêng) is also used to refer to the Langbiang Biosphere Reserve.

⁴ Interview with Elder Krajan Plin from Lat Commune, Lạc Duong District, in 2023.

with her height, the aunt said, “Lie down,” which led to the niece lying down and becoming Mount Bidoup. (2) According to the story of K’Rè, the name Bidoup originates from K’Rè (also known as K’Ròng), Langbiang’s younger brother. Due to his poor hospitality towards his siblings, he was slapped hard by his brother-in-law, causing him to *bik doup* [fall prone] and become Mount Bidoup. (3) In the third version, Langbiang and Bidoup are siblings. Bidoup, the younger brother, wanted to surpass his elder sister, Langbiang, in height. Angered, Langbiang slapped him and forced him to lie down, resulting in Bidoup being lower in stature than Langbiang. While these stories vary, they all explain why Mount Bidoup is lower than Mount Langbiang. Additionally, two of these explanations emphasize the role of women in the family, reflecting the significance of women in the matrilineal system of the Cơ Ho.

Additionally, the belief in polytheism plays a significant role in the spiritual culture of the Cơ Ho. This belief system attributes spiritual significance to everything and holds that various deities, including the gods of the Earth, water, forests, and rivers, govern the natural world. This polytheistic belief is reflected in several place names, such as Đưng Iar Jiêng/Dong Iar Jiêng (the field of the Jiêng deity). Field research indicates that before French colonization, local inhabitants practiced chicken worship to ward off illness and believed that a deity named Jiêng resided in that field. Thus, they named the hillside where they lived after this deity. (The word “Iar” means deity; the word “Jiêng” is a proper name.) Another example is the name of the Yan Tann Sienn hydropower plant (Yàng Tàng Siêng or Yann Tann Sienn), which refers to two deities, Tàng and Siêng, who were brothers. According to legend, these two brothers were honored as deities [*yàng*] due to their significant contributions to the community.

Thus, while not fully capturing the entirety of the cultural identity of the Cơ Ho people residing in the area, the place names in Lac Duong District nonetheless offer a valuable glimpse into the cultural life of the Cơ Ho, reflecting their historical presence and way of life in the region.

5. CONCLUSION

Place names are created to identify spatial and geographical locations, but they serve more than just this function. They also offer a concise reflection of the cultural life and historical changes of a region. Place names in Lac Duong District exemplify this. By collecting, analyzing, categorizing, and studying 258 place names, the research team has initially outlined the character of the area, providing a meaningful, though not entirely comprehensive, perspective from the viewpoint of toponymy.

From the toponymy perspective, the most prominent aspect of Lac Duong District is the reflection of the Cơ Ho’s relationship with the natural world and their communal life. Whether examining etymology, cultural space, historical periods, or cultural subjects, it is evident that place names offer a rich array of concise yet intriguing information about the Cơ Ho. This includes insights into their subsistence methods, social organization, and customs such as bride price, marriage practices, and polytheistic beliefs connected to natural features, as reflected in place names. Although further time and detailed research

are needed to fully investigate the origins and meanings of place names, the current results provide valuable insights into the Cơ Ho and their presence in the Lạc Dương region.

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