

Special Feature

The Renaming and Metamorphosis of Korean Toponyms

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Introduction

Toponyms—the names of geographical features—have historically changed and continually transformed. In this process, human and non-human actors have expressed the concreteness of these transformations and metamorphoses through human language (Coccia 2025; H. Kim 2024).

In particular, human actors, who have led the creation of a hybrid world through governance within an actor-network, have created the nation-state and community. They have delimited the space of their dominion, assigned names to the divided zones, and changed them as needed, aligning them with the ideologies and identities they pursue.

The process of reorganizing the space of governance, driven by state power, can be realized through naming and renaming toponyms to align with the nature of power, turning “unfamiliar” spaces into domains that are calculable, legible, and governable. These domains are then transformed and reborn as places that are “familiar and intimate” to human actors. In short, historically, the state and intellectual authorities have implemented toponym standardization following administrative district reorganization as a form of toponym renaming, all to strengthen domination and ensure effective governance over the national territory (S. Kim 2013).

Throughout history, Korean toponyms have also been purified in line with the *zeitgeist* and transformed in a consistent manner required by the era. That is, due to the appearance of social subjects seeking to rename toponyms and to the ideologies and identities they favor and advocate, Korean toponyms have been homogenized into similar linguistic forms across various historical periods and at multiple geographical scales (S. Kim 2012a, 2013).

Led by the human actors who possess naming rights, these renaming episodes have historically included the early Silla period, specifically the renaming of the six *bu* (six districts 六部) within the royal palace of Gyeongju during the ninth year of Yuri Isageum’s reign (32 CE), as well as more recent attempts such as renaming a Gyeongui Line Railway Station in Eunpyeong-gu, Seoul, Digital Media City Station and creating new *dong* (neighborhood) names such as Eco Delta-dong in Gangseo-gu, Busan. In all these cases, the dominant naming subjects have changed the relevant toponyms in their preferred manner.

This article aims to organize and introduce the history and types of Korean toponym renaming, as analyzed in preceding studies, focusing on the political

power relations inherent in the process of territorial delimitation and toponym renaming by human actors. While an analysis of the non-human actors who have participated in toponym renaming is left for future research, this article presents the characteristics and types of renaming with a focus on studies by Kim Sun-Bae (2013, 2022) that analyzed the process of Korean toponym renaming and transformation across time and space.

To understand the historical characteristics of the renaming and transformation of Korean toponyms, Kim Sun-Bae (2013, 2022) established five time periods for his studies' cross-section: pre-Unified Silla period, Goryeo period, Joseon period, Japanese colonial period, and post-liberation period. He obtained examples of toponym renaming across each time period through archival document research, using various internet search services, such as the Korean Studies Data Platform, the Database of Korean History, and the Integrated Database of Korean Classics. Furthermore, in introducing the types of Korean toponym renaming, he described six types of renaming *myeon* 面 toponyms in Gyeonggi-do during the Japanese colonial period and examined the six tendencies toward standardization resulting from the toponym renaming process.

The History of Toponym Renaming and Metamorphosis

The preceding studies by Kim Sun-Bae (2012b, 2013, 2022) draw attention to the history of the renaming and transformation of Korean toponyms. According to his research, Korean toponyms possess complex polysemy and multiplicity. He identified the causes as the complexity of toponym transformation resulting from various language notation methods throughout history, alongside the frequent creation of toponym domains and contention among diverse social subjects. In particular, the dominant social subjects who wished to emulate Chinese civilization have, since the Three Kingdoms period, had a practice of Sinicizing indigenous toponyms—originally composed of pure Korean words—by borrowing Hanja, or Chinese characters (S. Kim 2013).

This Sinicization of Korean toponyms was unavoidable for Koreans, who did not possess their own writing system for toponym notation. The method of notating toponyms with Chinese characters, known as character-borrowing notation 借字表記 of a toponym, was a way of transcribing the pronunciation

or meaning of the traditionally spoken pure Korean toponyms using Hanja. In this regard, Toh Soo-hee (1999, 146–47) hypothesized that when ancient indigenous toponyms, which had been passed down orally, were notated in borrowed Hanja, a partial renaming began, as sometimes transcription by meaning 訓借表記 was used instead of transcription (S. Kim 2012a, 2013).

This was devised to supplement the incomplete meaning-delivery function inherent in transcription. A toponym transcribed using Chinese characters, when read with the pronunciation current at the time of notation, restores the pronunciation of the indigenous word. However, since the late Joseon period, the tendency to emphasize the meaning of the Hanja notation increased, which reinforced the linguistic habit of interpreting the toponym by analyzing the Hanja's meaning 訓. As a result, the meaning of the toponym became distorted, and simultaneously, a new perception of the toponym emerged. Historically, the process of renaming indigenous toponyms through the Hanja-borrowing notation corrupted both their sound and meaning, which is understood to have led to the popularization and empowerment of Hanja toponyms since the Joseon period (S. Kim 2013).

To examine the history and characteristics of Hanja renaming and foreign-language toponyms, as well as the types of renaming found in the history of Korean toponyms, this chapter refers to studies by Kim Sun-Bae (2013, 2022), which are divided into the pre-Unified Silla period, Goryeo period, Joseon period, Japanese colonial period, and post-liberation period. Most toponym renaming cases discussed here stemmed from the centripetal naming practices of the ruling classes who wielded central and local power—namely, the state and intellectual authorities who left tangible records in written language.

The first documented case of renaming in the history of Korean toponyms occurred in the Silla capital around the first century CE. The records state that in the ninth year of Yuri Isageum's reign (32 CE), which was early in the Silla period, the six *bu*, located in what is currently Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do, were renamed as follows: Yangsan-bu 楊山部 > Yang-bu 梁部, Goheo-bu 古墟部 > Saryang-bu 沙梁部, and Daesu-bu 大樹部 > Cheomnyang-bu 漸梁部, and the tribal people of each *bu* were granted surnames (*Samguk Sagi*, Yuri Isageum, "Annals of Silla," Year 9, Month 3, spring).¹

1 The Romanized Korean readings for the renamed six *bu* toponyms are expressed in the current Korean reading of the Hanja to aid modern readers. The exact Hanja pronunciation used in that

In this case, no unifying intention or principle can be found behind the six renamed *bu* toponyms. However, it can be observed that the characters *ryang* 梁 and *hwe* 喙 were actively used in three of the renamed toponyms (S. Kim 2013). In his study, Jeon Deogjae (1998, 5–68) conjectured that *ryang* and *hwe* had the same meaning, given that only *hwe* was used in Silla-era epigraphs to denote *bu* names. In contrast, *ryang* was used in all Goryeo-era documentary records. Accordingly, he argued that the generic name *ryang* communicates the same meaning as the notations *beol* 伐 and *buri* 夫里, which mean flatland 野 (National Geographic Information Institute 2020, 22).

Six hundred years later, Baekje (660) and Goguryeo (668) were defeated by the allied forces of Silla and the Tang dynasty. In 669, Tang Emperor Gaozong 高宗 planned to establish Dodok-bu (Office of the Commander-Governor 都督府) in the former territory of Baekje, which he had occupied (S. Kim 2013). Specifically, In 660, the year Baekje fell, its former administrative districts—which consisted of 5 *bu* 部, 37 *gun* 郡, and 200 *seong* 城—were reorganized, and five Dodok-bu were established in Ungjin 熊津, Mahan 馬韓, Dongmyeong 東明, Geumnyeon 金漣, and Deogan 德安 (*Samguk Sagi*, King Uija, “Annals of Baekje,” Year 20).

The reorganization of Baekje’s administrative districts and the renaming of toponyms immediately after the fall of Goguryeo in 669 CE are detailed in the *Samguk sagi* (“Miscellaneous Records,” Geography 4, Baekje). This record details the renaming of 1 Dodok-bu, 7 *ju* 州, and 51 *hyeon* 縣, including 13 *hyeon* belonging to the Dodok-bu.

Tang’s attempt to rename toponyms included some that were merely transcribed to preserve the sound and meaning of the original Baekje toponyms. However, all the renamed toponyms standardized the prior morpheme of a toponym to two characters. Furthermore, the Tang leadership’s desire to demonstrate the historical fact of having pacified the Baekje “barbarians” is reflected in some toponyms, such as Jiryuk-hyeon 知六縣 → Pyeongi-hyeon 平夷縣, Gosaburi-gun 古沙夫里郡 → Pyeongwae-hyeon 平倭縣, Maseoryang-hyeon 馬西良縣 → Gwihwa-hyeon 歸化縣, Gujijisan-hyeon 仇知只山縣, →

era must be inferred by estimating the Old and Middle Chinese sounds of the Chinese characters. Furthermore, the “a > b” presented in the main text indicates a diachronic toponym change from toponym “a” to toponym “b,” while “a → b” indicates a synchronic toponym change from toponym “a” to toponym “b.”

Dangsan-hyeon 唐山縣, Gammula-hyeon 甘勿阿縣 → Nosan-hyeon 魯山縣, and Sangno-hyeon 上老縣 → Jwaro-hyeon 佐魯縣. There is also evidence of renaming criteria emphasizing Confucian ideology and resulting in Chinese-style toponyms (S. Kim 2013).

The subsequent Unified Silla actively adopted Confucian culture from Chinese civilization. Aggressive Sinicization policies, particularly those promoted during the reigns of King Gyeongmun 景文王 (r. 861–875) and King Heongang 憲康王 (r. 875–886), are mentioned in various steles and the writings of Choe Chiwon 崔致遠 (D. Jeon 2011, 2–3). An earlier example that helps us grasp the reality of the Sinicization policy in the early Unified Silla period is the introduction of the Chinese-style county and prefecture system, as well as the toponym naming method, during the reign of King Gyeongdeok 景德王. The renaming case that made possible the full-scale transplantation of Chinese-style toponyms by adopting the Chinese-style local administrative county and prefecture system in Korean history occurred in the 16th year of King Gyeongdeok's reign (757 CE) (S. Kim 2013). Toponyms were renamed at the time to strengthen control over the expanded territory following the unification of the Three Kingdoms (676 CE) and the corresponding implementation of a centralized administrative system.

At that time, King Gyeongdeok adjusted the local administrative districts to strengthen governance over the unified territory and renamed major administrative toponyms above the county and prefecture (*gun* and *hyeon*) level to “two-character Hanja toponyms” such as Hansan-ju 漢山州 → Han-ju 漢州, Suyak-ju 水若州 → Sak-ju 朔州, Ungcheon-ju 熊川州 → Ung-ju 熊州, Sabeol-ju 沙伐州 → Sang-ju 尙州, and Mujin-ju 武珍州 → Mu-ju 武州. Specific examples of renaming are found in the records of King Gyeongdeok in the “Annals of Silla” section of the *Samguk sagi*, as well as in the “Geography” section, comprising Volumes 34 through 37. The official method of renaming administrative areas with a two-character Hanja toponym has been followed as the “model” naming method up to the present day, to the extent that Korea is now recognized as a toponymic colony of China (Yoon 2012, 13).

Furthermore, from a military perspective, state leaders changed the names of the *gun* and *hyeon* where the ten military installations (*sipjeong* 十停) were based. Specifically, the prior morpheme of the toponyms for these *gun* and *hyeon*, which had varied from two to four characters, was uniformly standardized to two characters in the renaming, as in Samnyanghwa-hyeon 三良火縣 → Hyeonyo-

hyeon 玄驍縣, Golgeunnae-hyeon 骨乃斤縣 → Hwanghyo-hyeon 黃驍縣, Beollyeokcheon-hyeon 伐力川縣 → Nokhyo-hyeon 綠驍縣, and Geosamul-hyeon 居斯勿縣 → Cheongung-hyeon 青雄縣 (Han 1998, 100–01). In this process, the *gun* and *hyeon* where the *sipjeong* were located were renamed to correspond to the colors of the military uniforms worn by the soldiers stationed there, all for the sake of efficient and unified military operations and control (S. Kim 2013).

The first notable case of toponym renaming in the Goryeo period occurred in 940 CE, the 23rd year of the reign of King Taejo 太祖, when he delimited the entire country after unifying the Later Three Kingdoms 後三國 in 936 CE. The fact of toponym renaming, recorded in 940 as “the names of *ju*, *bu*, *gun*, and *hyeon* were changed,” is also mentioned in the geographical preface of *Goryeosa* 高麗史 (Vol. 56, “Geography 1”), compiled by Jeong Inji 鄭麟趾 (S. Kim 2013).

Even before 940, there were several instances of large-scale toponym renaming. A record from the first year of King Taejo’s reign (918 CE) states that Gung Ye’s 弓裔 Taebong Kingdom 泰封國, which existed before the founding of Goryeo, renamed existing Silla toponyms (S. Kim 2013). The fact that Gung Ye renamed *gun* and *eup* 邑 names for being “vulgar and base” 鄙野 suggests that local administrative systems were already being reorganized before the founding of Goryeo (D. Jeon 2006, 159). It is assumed that the Chinese-style toponym naming method, which was perceived as an advanced cultural practice, was adopted at the same time.

Subsequently, King Seongjong 成宗 (r. 981–997) extensively reorganized the central bureaucracy and local administrative systems and adopted Confucianism as a new political ideology to establish a more centralized state (S. Kim 2013). In the second year of his reign (983 CE), he named 12 administrative *mok* 牧 areas in imitation of a system from the ancient Chinese Zhou 周 dynasty.

In short, the introduction of the Chinese-style county and prefecture system, which formed the basis of Goryeo’s local administration, is known to have started with the renaming of *eup* names 邑號 in the 23rd year of King Taejo (940 CE), followed by the establishment of the 12 *mok* in the second year of King Seongjong and the renaming of *eup* in the 11th year (992 CE), the implementation of the ten *do* system 十道制 in the 14th year (995 CE), and finally, the establishment of the main and subordinate *hyeon* system in the ninth year of King Hyeonjong (1018 CE) (Yun 2002, 159).

The renaming of administrative toponyms carried out in the 11th year of King Seongjong of Goryeo (992 CE) primarily targeted the *ju* 州. As can be confirmed from the renaming of port toponyms that had originally expressed wishes for a safe voyage, most changes involved altering the prior morpheme of a toponym to two characters (S. Kim 2013). Furthermore, in renaming cases such as Gwa-ju 果州 → Buan 富安 and Goe-ju 槐州 → Sian 始安, the toponyms were refined to Chinese-style 雅化, and specifically Tang-style, or adopted the names of Chinese *gun* 郡 directly, as in the case of Wonju 原州 → Pyeongnyang 平涼 and Dong-ju 洞州 → Nongseo 隴西. A characteristic feature of early Goryeo toponym renaming is switching to two-character Chinese-style Confucian toponyms, such as Gong-ju 公州 → Hoedo 懷道, Seon-ju 善州 → Hwaui 和義, and A-ju 牙州 → Yeongin 寧仁.

The Joseon 朝鮮 dynasty, which succeeded Goryeo, was founded in 1392 CE. With its establishment, the entire country was partitioned into eight *do* 八道, and traditional indigenous toponyms were extensively renamed to propagate Confucianism, the ruling ideology, down to the village level. The renaming implemented in the 13th year of King Taejong's 太宗 reign (1413 CE) was a large-scale nationwide toponym renaming project aimed at strengthening royal authority (S. Kim 2013).

To ensure effective local administration at the time, potentially confusing administrative toponyms were changed in accordance with specific renaming standards and principles. For instance, toponyms of ordinary *gun* and *hyeon* that contained the character *ju* 州 were supposed to be renamed to include characters such as *san* 山 or *cheon* 川, except for those governed by a magistrate 牧使 (*Taejong sillok*, Vol. 26, Year 13, Month 10, Day 15; S. Kim 2013). There were also cases of renaming to avoid taboo characters 避諱, where a Hanja character was identical or similar in pronunciation to the name of the king or palace. One example is the change of Nisan 尼山 → Noseong 魯城 (currently Noseong-myeon, Nonsan-si, Chungcheongnam-do) given the similarity with Yi San 李祘, the original name of King Jeongjo 正祖 (S. Kim 2012a).

Following the renaming in the 13th year of King Taejong, partial renaming efforts continued intermittently throughout the Joseon dynasty, with many cases of renaming resulted from the application of the Town Name Promotion and Demotion System 邑號陞降制 (Lim 2000). In the late Joseon period, as centralized control extended to the village level, the new *myeon* and *ri* system was established, and the prior morphemes of the *myeon* and village toponyms

belonging to each local *gun* and *hyeon* were combined into two-character forms and Sinicized (S. Kim 2013). In the 32nd year of King Gojong at the end of the Joseon dynasty (1895), a new local administrative system called the 23 *bu* system 府制, was implemented. The following year, that was replaced with the 13 *do* system 道制, leading to the emergence of the *do* (province) administrative toponyms currently in use (S. Kim 2013).

Consistent with the central government's policy of unifying administrative toponyms at the *gun* and *hyeon* level, renaming efforts occurred at the local scale where local administrative power and Confucian intellectuals changed the prior morpheme of existing village toponyms composed of three or more indigenous characters to two-character names with Confucian and moral meanings, such as Annidae 安尼大 → Anin 安仁, Dojiljil 都叱質 → Dogokchon 道谷村, and Ihwaeo 伊火於 → Igu 益友. That served to extend the influence of Confucian ideology to the village level (S. Kim 2013).

After the Japanese empire annexed the Korean empire 大韓帝國, a period known as the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), toponym renaming was carried out nationwide by the Japanese imperial administrators, who had seized the new naming rights. The characteristics of toponym renaming during this period, based on a study by Kim Sun-Bae (2004, 99–105) analyzing the case of the current Daejeon area, are summarized as follows.

The nationwide administrative district reorganization carried out in 1914 by the Joseon Government-General, as Japan's colonial administration was called, resulted in the renaming of many administrative toponyms at the official level. At that time, the Joseon Government-General merged and reorganized local administrative units into 12 *bu* and 220 *gun*, respectively. For *myeon*, existing units were merged or adjusted to create 2,521 *myeon*. The smaller *dong* and *ri* under *bu* and *myeon* were also substantially merged and reduced (Son 1983c, 62–63). In short, the national administrative districts were organized into 13 *do*, 12 *bu*, 220 *gun*, and 2,521 *myeon*, and toponym renaming was carried out accordingly (S. Kim 2004, 2013).

At this time, some *gun* and administrative districts below the *myeon* level were renamed using the composite toponym naming method, which refers to taking one character from the names of two or more administrative districts that are being merged to form a new toponym. However, these composite toponyms led to the corruption and distortion of the toponyms' original meaning. Meanwhile, Japanese-style toponyms were newly assigned as official toponyms

in urban areas with a high Japanese population (S. Kim 2004, 2013).

For example, new Japanese-style toponyms were introduced in the vicinity of Daejeon Station on the Gyeongbu Line during the Japanese colonial period, a direct transplant of toponyms from mainland Japan. According to the *Singu daejo Joseon jeondo bu gun myeon ri dong myeongching illam* (*A Comprehensive List of Names of Bu, Gun, Myeon, Ri, and Dong in All Provinces of Joseon, Old and New* 新舊對照朝鮮全道府郡面里洞名稱一覽) (1917, hereafter *Singu*), before these Japanese-style toponyms were introduced, traditional toponyms such as Daejeon-ri, Jangdae-ri, and Sucham-ri, all villages where Koreans resided, were distributed in the Daejeon Station area. Following the migration of Japanese people and the urbanization of Daejeon-myeon, the existing toponyms were replaced with Japanese-style toponyms including Bonjeong iljeongmok 本町一丁目, Chuniljeong iljeongmok 春日町一丁目, and Yeongejeong 榮町 (S. Kim 2004, 2013).

The uniform administrative district reorganization and toponym renaming enforced by the Japanese colonial administration in 1914 led to two major changes. First, the administrative district reorganization of 1914 is known to have caused numerous distortions and transformations of traditional toponyms (S. Kim 2004, 2013). That is, as mentioned above, the reorganization of administrative districts such as *gun*, *myeon*, and *ri* in 1914 resulted in the mass production of so-called “composite toponyms.”

Second, the number of characters and the posterior morpheme of village toponyms were standardized. In other words, the administrative district reorganization and renaming policy implemented by the colonial administration extended to the village level, leading to the formation of the administrative village 行政村 for the first time in Korean history (S. Kim 2004, 2013). These toponym renaming efforts increased the uniformity of village toponyms.

For example, village toponyms recorded as being two to four characters in length in the *Gu-Hanguk jibang haengjeonggyueok myeongching illam* (*A Comprehensive List of Names of Local Administrative Districts in Old Korea* 舊韓國地方行政區域名稱一覽) (1912, hereafter *Gu-Han*), which contains toponyms from before the 1914 administrative district reorganization, were reduced to two or three characters in the *Singu* (1917) (S. Kim 2004, 2013). Furthermore, the posterior morphemes of village toponyms, which had been diversely notated as “-ri” 里, “-dong” 洞, and “-chon” 村 in the *Gu-Han* (1912), were standardized as “-ri” in the *Singu* (1917) (S. Kim 2004, 2013).

In the course of the 1914 nationwide administrative district reorganization, 4,322 *myeon* were merged into 2,521, resulting in many name changes. According to a study by Kim Sun-Bae (2022) that analyzed the renaming process of Gyeonggi-do *myeon* toponyms at the time, there were six types of renaming, which are briefly introduced as follows. First is the composite toponym naming method, where a new *myeon* toponym is created by taking one character from the toponyms of two or more *myeon* to be consolidated. Second is the influential *myeon* toponym naming method, in which the name of the more centrally located *myeon* of the two being consolidated is used for the new *myeon*. Third is the influential village toponym naming method, where the new *myeon* toponym is named after the most centrally located village, instead of the names of the consolidated *myeon*. Fourth is the shared toponym naming method, where the name of a mountain or river distributed across the two consolidated *myeon* is adopted as the new consolidated *myeon* toponym. Fifth is the old toponym naming method, where the new *myeon* toponym is named for a famous old toponym distributed within the administrative boundaries of the two consolidated *myeon*. Last is the new toponym naming method, where an entirely new name is created and assigned instead of the existing *myeon* names.

The Republic of Korea, which was liberated from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, saw its territory divided into South and North Korea after the Korean War (1950–1953). Consequently, the rivalry and contention between the capitalist market economy system in South Korea and the socialist-communist system in North Korea have greatly influenced toponym renaming. In particular, modernism and capitalism, which emerged as dominant ideologies in South Korea, reinforced a development ideology emphasizing unity and progress, leading to the naming of toponyms that represented those values (S. Kim 2013).

In the case of North Korea, the authorities actively worked on naming and renaming toponyms so as to reflect socialist political ideology after the 1950s, leading to uniform, oppressive toponym renaming enforced by the authorities (K. Kim 2013; Rose-Redwood and Kim 2020). For instance, toponyms such as Kim Ilseong gwangjang, Jeongilbong, and Chungseong-dong were actively utilized as effective tools to propagate the Juche Idea and socialist thought to the general public (S. Kim 2013).

Meanwhile, in South Korea, the Road Name Address System, which was fully implemented nationwide by the government in 2014, mass-produced road names that represented modernism and capitalism, emphasizing uniformity

and efficiency (Rose-Redwood, Tantner, and Kim 2022). In this process, conflict and disputes persist among social subjects who sought to include high-profile apartment and road names in the new address system (S. Kim 2013). Furthermore, the economic value of renaming—which seeks to enhance toponym brand value and raise real estate prices by renaming toponyms—is also receiving attention.

Given the rapid increase in conflicts and disputes over toponym renaming since the 1990s, discussions on toponym standardization are gaining momentum at the level of governance to resolve these issues (United Nations 2008, 24). Korean organizations currently responsible for toponym standardization include the National Geographic Information Institute, the National Committee on Geographical Names, and the Provincial/City Committee on Geographical Names. Comparable organizations at international level include the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), and the Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN) (S. Kim 2013).

In particular, the National Geographic Information Institute has been planning and promoting the standardization of domestic toponyms by producing the *Jimyeong pyojunhwa pyeollam (Manual for Toponym Standardization)* in 2005, 2012, and 2018 (National Geographic Information Institute 2012, 2018). It is also building a toponym management system to organize and preserve domestic toponyms and respond to the increasing demand for toponyms.

The Tendency toward Toponym Renaming Standardization

Historically, there has been a consistent tendency toward standardization and unification in the process of renaming Korean toponyms. According to a study by Kim Sun-Bae (2013), a diachronic analysis of the history of Korean toponym renaming revealed six tendencies in standardization that can be subdivided into form-based tendencies and meaning-based tendencies. The form-based tendencies that have been identified are (1) Sinicization to two-character toponyms, (2) unification of the generic (classification) names, (3) composite toponym creation, and (4) foreign-language toponym creation, while the meaning-based tendencies that have been identified are (5) dominant ideological

toponym creation and (6) the replacement of physical toponyms with abstract toponyms (S. Kim 2013).

First, Korean toponyms have generally been standardized into two-character Hanja toponyms, a form similar to Chinese toponyms (S. Kim 2013). As a result, Korean toponyms possess a dual toponym structure where indigenous toponyms of three or more characters such as Napttari, Neujinmogi, and Murusil, which are commonly used by elderly residents of traditional villages, coexist with two-character Hanja toponyms that are officially recognized and formalized by state agencies, such as Gyeonggi 京畿, Hoedeok 懷德, Gwangju 光州, and Daegu 大邱.

Second, the notation of the posterior morpheme of a toponym, which corresponds to its generic or classification name, has been unified under specific Hanja characters (S. Kim 2013). That is, the posterior morpheme of mountain toponyms, such as “-moe” (mountain), “-bong” (peak 峰), and “-ak” (high mountain 岳), have been unified into “-san” (mountain 山), and river names that were variously called “-kkeol” (stream/valley), “-nae” (stream/valley), “-naru” (ferry/wharf 津), and “-gae” (harbor/port 浦) have been changed to “-cheon” (stream/river 川) and “-gang” (river 江). For natural toponyms, village names that were variously called “-sil” (village), “-mal” (village), “-chon” (village 村), “-gok” (valley 谷), and “-gye” (village association 契) have been renamed to “-ri” (village 里) and “-dong” (neighborhood 洞).

Third, there are many composite toponyms among Korean administrative and artificial toponyms. Composite toponyms formally emerged during King Taejong’s toponym renaming program in the Joseon dynasty and were mass-produced during the administrative district reorganization of the Japanese colonial period. Examples of composite toponyms that have been named recently include **Gyeongju** + **Sangju** → **Gyeongsang-do**, **Hongju** + **Gyeolseong** → **Hongseong-gun**, **Biok** + **Anjeong** → **Bian-hyeon**, and Seoul-si **Godeok-dong** + Guri-si **Topyeong-dong** → **Godeok-topyeong** Bridge (S. Kim 2013).

Fourth, many foreign-language toponyms have been named in Korea. In Korea, which is a contact zone between diverse natural and human environments, foreign languages that exerted powerful influence in each era have been actively reflected in the toponym-naming and renaming process. As a result, Chinese-style Hanja toponyms such as Inui-ri 仁義里 and Gangsang-chon 綱常村 were named through the Joseon dynasty. During the Japanese colonial period, Japanese-language toponyms such as Bonjeong iljeongmok and Sowha-

jeong 昭和町 were named, mainly in areas where Japanese people resided (S. Kim 2013). Recently, under the powerful influence of Western culture, English-style toponyms such as Eco Delta-dong, Gasan Digital Complex, and Rodeo Street have been actively named or renamed (Y. Kim 2024).

Fifth, Korean toponyms have historically been named to reflect the dominant ideology. For instance, Buddhist toponyms such as Jeolgol, Sadong 寺洞, and Buramsan Mountain 佛岩山 were named during the Goryeo dynasty; Confucian toponyms such as Uiri 義里, Sungmun-dong 崇文洞, and Gwoli-chon 闕里村 during the Joseon dynasty; modernistic toponyms such as Beonyeong-ro, Haengbong-ro, and Sinheung-dong in the modern era; and socialist toponyms such as Cheongnyeon jageopban mal, Sinheung nodongjagu, Yeongung myosan, and Jeongilbong in the socialist state of North Korea, thereby reflecting the thought and values of the dominant ideologies of each era (S. Kim 2012a, 2013).

Sixth, Korean toponyms have historically been converted from physical toponyms to abstract toponyms. That is, a tendency is found where existing indigenous physical toponyms are notated in Hanja ideals, thereby changing them into abstract toponyms that reflect a specific ideology (S. Kim 2013). For example, Godeungol, located on a straight valley, was renamed Jikdong 直洞 to represent the Confucian ideology of loyalty, filial piety, and valor and to signify a place inhabited by people striving for an “upright” life. Additionally, toponyms like Gobusil, which referred to a bend in the mountains surrounding the village, and Nongol, which originated from a valley with many rice paddies (*non* 畓), were Sinicized and renamed, respectively, to Gokbu 曲阜 and Noeun-ri 魯恩里, thereby representing the city of Qufu 曲阜 and the State of Lu 魯 in China—the birthplace of Confucius, founder of Confucianism.

Conclusion

This article has broadly reviewed the history of Korean toponym renaming and the characteristics and types of renaming, referencing earlier research by Kim Sun-Bae (2013, 2022), who conducted a historical-geographical analysis of the process of Korean toponym renaming and transformation. In particular, this article noted that political power relations operate within the toponym renaming process carried out by human actors, reflecting the ideologies and identities

pursued by specific social subjects in the toponyms.

The historical analysis of Korean toponym renaming by period led to the organization of the following toponym renaming types and standardization tendencies: first, regarding toponym renaming before the Unified Silla period, this article noted that the notations *hwe* and *ryang* were actively used in renaming the six *bu* toponyms in the ninth year of Yuri Isageum's reign (32 CE) and posited that the two Hanja characters, despite having different pronunciations, possibly share the same meaning, that is, a plain or flatland, represented by the character 野. In the case of the establishment of the Dodok-bu and toponym renaming in the former Baekje territory during the reign of Tang Emperor Gaozong (669 CE), there is evidence of a deliberate plan of formally unifying the prior morpheme of a toponym to two characters and renaming them to reflect Confucian ideology. The toponym renaming in the 16th year of King Gyeongdeok of Unified Silla (757 CE), carried out after the unification of the Three Kingdoms, also strengthened centralized royal authority and the administrative system by changing most of the existing three- or four-character indigenous toponyms to two-character Hanja toponyms.

During the Goryeo dynasty, two-character Confucian toponyms were widely adopted by Confucian intellectuals as part of an active Sinicization policy implemented to reinforce Confucian political ideology and centralized governance. Inheriting the characteristics of toponym renaming from the Goryeo era, a multitude of two-character Confucian toponyms were also named during the Joseon dynasty. This phenomenon extended to the village level, impacting *myeon*, *dong*, and *ri* names, as well as the names of man-made structures controlled by local authorities.

In 1914, during the Japanese colonial period, various composite toponyms and Japanese-style toponyms were created in the nationwide administrative district reorganization. In this process, prior morphemes of toponyms were standardized as two-character forms and posterior morphemes of toponyms, which had been variously called *dong*, *chon*, and *gye*, were standardized as *ri*. Furthermore, in urban areas where many Japanese people resided, *ri* villages were renamed Japanese-style toponyms such as Bonjeong iljeongmok and Chuniljeong ijeongmok 春日町二丁目. This article also presented six types of renaming for the Gyeonggi-do *myeon* toponyms that emerged from the 1914 administrative district reorganization: composite toponym, influential *myeon* toponym, influential *dong* or *ri* toponym, shared toponym, old toponym, and

new toponym naming.

Following liberation, there were cases of toponym renaming being influenced by the spread of modern thought and the capitalist market economy. In recent years, conflicts and disputes among social subjects have sharply increased in the process of toponym naming and renaming, and the government has initiated toponym renaming to address the growing need for efficient management and standardization of toponyms.

Finally, in summarizing the history of renaming Korean toponyms, six tendencies toward standardization were identified: Sinicization to two-character toponyms, unification of generic names, composite toponym creation, foreign-language toponym creation, dominant ideological toponym creation, and the replacement of physical toponyms with abstract toponyms.

It is undeniable that preceding studies on toponym naming and renaming in Korean history, as presented above, have adopted a narrow perspective within the framework of human-centric ontology and epistemology. From perspective of non-Anthropocentrism, future research is required to analyze how the human and non-human actors and actants that have participated in the naming and renaming of toponyms have been transformed through human (spoken and written) language, using specific toponym renaming cases.

Ultimately, there is a need for a third phase of re-linguaging to re-think and re-structure the world constructed by narrow human language, in the process of reflecting upon and contemplating the Anthropocene to seek a world of re-Renaissance.

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Abstract

Korean toponyms have changed across eras and geographical scales, aligning with the ideologies and identities pursued by the agents of renaming. From the renaming of the six *bu* 六部 during the ninth year of Yuri Isageum of Silla (32 CE) up to recent examples such as Digital Media City Station on the Seoul Gyeongui Line, names have been altered according to the preferences of the renaming agents of each period. This article introduces the characteristics and types of toponym renaming across different eras by consolidating relevant research to understand the history of renaming and transformation of Korean toponyms. The article particularly emphasizes the types and trends observed during the toponymic renaming process. First, it highlights that around 1914, during the Japanese colonial period, *myeon* toponyms in Gyeonggi-do were renamed in six types: compound toponyms, influential *myeon* toponyms, influential *dong* or *ri* toponyms, shared toponyms, old toponyms, and new toponyms. Second, the article describes six key tendencies observed during the process of toponym renaming and standardization: Sinicization of two-character toponyms, unification of generic names, composite toponym creation, foreign-language toponym creation, dominant ideological toponym creation, and the replacement of physical toponyms with abstract toponyms. Finally, while reflecting on the narrow ontology and epistemology of previous toponym research conducted from an anthropocentric perspective, this paper suggests the necessity of non-Anthropocentric research on the non-human agents that have participated in the naming and renaming of toponyms.

Keywords: toponym (geographical name), renaming, standardization of toponym, types of renaming, tendencies of renaming