Cultural Reflections: Unraveling the Origins and Meanings of Municipality Names in the First District of Leyte

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Abstract

This research investigates the origins and meanings of municipality names in the First District of Leyte through a historical-linguistic and ethnolinguistic lens. Specifically, it aims to: (1) investigate the etymology and historical background of each municipality name, including historical contexts and linguistic roots; (2) examine how these names reflect the traditions, beliefs, or significant events of the local communities; and (3) explore the role of these names in shaping local identity, and governance, as well as their contributions to community development and unity. Employing a qualitative research design, this study utilizes archival and documentary sources— including local histories, etymological references, and scholarly literature on Philippine toponymy—to analyze the linguistic, cultural, and historical foundations of these place names. Historical analysis, structuralist linguistic analysis, and thematic categorization were employed to classify names into nature-based, indigenous, colonial/religious, and historical event-based groups. The findings reveal that many names, such as *Babatngon*, are rooted in environmental features and traditional livelihoods, while others, like *Santa Fe* and *San Miguel*, reflect Spanish colonial influence and Christianization. Names such as *Palo* and *Tanauan* commemorate historical events and local resistance. Moreover, these toponyms serve as cultural symbols of pride, unity, and identity, preserving collective memory and reinforcing social cohesion. The study also highlights how colonial place names, though initially tools of cultural domination, have evolved to acquire localized meanings and contribute to contemporary cultural narratives. This study concludes that municipality names in the First District of Leyte are more than geographic labels— they embody the region's heritage and play a crucial role in community identity, historical preservation, and cultural continuity.

Keywords: toponymy; history; Leyte

1. Introduction

Toponyms or place names serve as vital cultural artifacts that encapsulates the history, identity, and heritage of a community. They act as linguistic markers, reflecting the narratives and values of the people who inhabit a region. Understanding the etymology and significance of these names offers profound insights into the socio-cultural evolution of a place. According to Hakala et al. (2015), names of places embody the collective memory and identity of its inhabitants. Thus, depicting the historical culture and preservation efforts of a place paves way for a better understanding of the richness of its roots from the name itself.

While numerous studies on Philippine toponymy exist, particularly in urban centers and historically significant areas, the toponymic history of the municipalities of the First District of Leyte remains underexplored. This study seeks to bridge that gap by systematically analyzing the linguistic, cultural, and historical dimensions of municipality names in the district. The First District of Leyte holds a unique position as a district shaped by indigenous influences, colonial impositions, and contemporary socio-political changes, making it an ideal subject for this study.

In the context of post-colonial societies, place names often reflect layers of historical narratives, including indigenous heritage and colonial impositions. Williamson (2023) discusses how colonial practices have led to the marginalization and influencing indigenous toponyms, thereby altering cultural landscapes and identities. The First District of Leyte exemplifies this phenomenon,

where indigenous Waray and Cebuano linguistic roots intersect with the influences of colonizers, creating a diverse toponymic landscape.

Despite the recognized importance of toponyms in cultural studies, there are minimal documented studies of the origins and meanings of place names in some regions here in the Philippines such as the municipal names of the First District of Leyte. Some municipalities in the First District of Leyte have documented the etymology of their names, however, a comprehensive analysis of toponyms remains unexplored.

Geographically, the First District of Leyte is characterized by a diverse landscape that includes coastal areas, rivers, and plains. These natural features have greatly influenced local naming conventions, with place names often reflecting the district's rich topography. This connection between geography and cultural identity is pivotal to understanding how language plays a role in shaping the region's collective history.

This study aims to address the gap by examining the historic, linguistic, and cultural foundations of municipality names in the First District of Leyte. By understanding and documenting these origins, this research provides a foundation for future research that will continue to explore the deep connections between language, identity, and place.

1.1 Background of the Study

The First District of Leyte, as part of a region, is rich in history and cultural heritage, with its municipality names serving as significant markers of its past. Each name carries a story, often rooted in the historical events, indigenous languages, and colonial influences that have shaped the area over centuries. Understanding the origins of these names not only provides insights into the local identity but also reflects the broader socio-political and cultural dynamics at play throughout the history of Leyte (Dela Cruz, 2022). The exploration of these names thus reveals the intricate tapestry of influences that have contributed to the formation of the district's identity.

The etymology of the municipality names in the First District of Leyte often reveals connections to the indigenous peoples who originally inhabited the area. For instance, names derived from local languages can be traced back to pre-colonial times, reflecting the natural environment, significant events, or prominent figures within indigenous communities. This linguistic heritage highlights the resilience of local cultures in preserving their identity despite centuries of external influences (Martinez & Reyes, 2021). The continued use of these names serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of indigenous traditions and the importance of cultural preservation in the face of progression and advancement.

Colonial history has also played a crucial role in shaping the names of municipalities within the First District of Leyte. The Spanish colonial period introduced various changes, including the imposition of Christian names and the modification of indigenous places. Many municipalities were named after saints or historical figures from Spain, reflecting the colonial power dynamics and the spread of Christianity (Garcia, 2023). This transformation of names illustrates the complex interplay between colonization and local identity, as communities navigated their cultural heritage while adapting to new influences.

In contemporary times, the significance of these municipality names extends beyond their historical origins. They serve as focal points for community pride and identity, often celebrated through local festivals and cultural activities. The names evoke a sense of belonging among residents, fostering connections to their shared history and collective memory (Santos, 2024). Furthermore, as municipalities strive for development and progress, the recognition of their historical names can enhance tourism initiatives, drawing attention to the unique narratives that each place embodies.

In conclusion, the study of the origins and meanings of municipality names in the First District of Leyte offers a fascinating glimpse into the region's cultural and historical landscape. By unraveling these names, we gain a deeper appreciation for the influences that have shaped local identities and the ongoing relevance of these narratives in contemporary society. As scholars and communities continue to explore these connections, it becomes increasingly clear that the names of municipalities are not merely markers on a map, but vital elements of the cultural heritage that define the First District of Leyte (López, 2025).

1.2 Research Objectives

To explore the historical, linguistic, and cultural significance of the municipality names in the First District of Leyte and analyze their impact on local identity and heritage preservation, this study aims:

a. To investigate the etymology and historical background of each municipality name in the First District of Leyte including historical contexts and linguistic roots;
b. To examine how these names reflect the traditions, beliefs, or significant events of the local communities; and
c. Examine the role of municipality names in shaping local identity, governance, and explore how these names contribute to community development and unity.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon several key theories to analyze the origins, evolution, and contemporary significance of municipality names in the First District of Leyte. These theories help to frame place names not only as geographical markers but also as cultural symbols that reflect broader social, historical, and political forces.

Structural-Functional Theory

The Structural-Functional Theory, first developed by Émile Durkheim and later expanded by Talcott Parsons, views society as a complex system composed of interdependent parts that function together to promote stability, cohesion, and continuity (Parsons, 1951). According to this theory, toponyms (place names) serve as cultural tools that contribute to social order by preserving collective memory, fostering a shared identity, and maintaining historical continuity within communities. In the context of municipality names, these toponyms are not mere geographic markers, but symbolic resources that help bind social and cultural groups. Names such as San Miguel or Santa Fe reflect the religious significance embedded in the Spanish colonial era, while names like Tolosa and Tanauan represent stories of unity, defense, and resilience against external threats, such as Moro raids or natural disasters. These names, therefore, reinforce the community's values, beliefs, and shared history.

By preserving these historical and cultural elements through naming, municipal names contribute to the social cohesion of the community, ensuring that the collective memory and values of the past are maintained for future generations. This idea resonates with Durkheim's (1995) concept that society's institutions, including language and naming conventions, are vital to maintaining social order and stability.

Social Conflict Theory

This theory**,** largely attributed to Karl Marx and further developed by theorists like C. Wright Mills, posits that societal structures are shaped by the dynamics of power, inequality, and historical struggle (Marx & Engels, 2002). This theory highlights the ways in which dominant social groups use power to influence and reshape social, political, and cultural structures, often to the detriment of marginalized groups. In the context of municipal names, Social Conflict Theory is particularly relevant in understanding how colonial powers, religious authorities, and political elites have influenced place names throughout history. The imposition of Spanish names such as Santa Fe and San Miguel on indigenous settlements is a clear example of how place names were used to assert colonial dominance and reshape local identities according to foreign religious and political ideologies. From a critical view, Social Conflict Theory encourages an analysis of which narratives are preserved in place names and which are omitted or altered. It allows us to examine how naming can serve as a tool for cultural domination and the construction of power relations within the community. By studying the origins of place names, we uncover the often-hidden power dynamics and historical struggles embedded in the names we still use today.

For instance, the process of Christianizing indigenous names, or renaming settlements after saints and colonial figures, not only reflects the imposition of religious beliefs but also signals the attempt to reshape local identities by erasing or reinterpreting the indigenous names and narratives. This power struggle is part of a larger pattern of colonial domination, which left a lasting imprint on the way local histories are remembered, celebrated, and narrated.

Post-Colonial Theory

Post-colonial theory, as articulated by scholars like Edward Said (1978) and Homi K. Bhabha (1994), focuses on the impact of colonialism on the cultural and political identities of colonized peoples. According to this theory, colonization is not just a political and economic event, but a cultural one, where colonial powers impose their language, values, and norms on indigenous societies.

In the study of municipal names, Post-Colonial Theory provides insight into how colonial naming practices shaped the present-day cultural landscape. The renaming of places and the adoption of Christian or Spanish names reflect the internalization of colonial ideologies. Over time, some of these names have become accepted, yet they also carry within them the **legacy of colonialism**. This theory encourages a reclaiming of indigenous identities and histories, asking whether the community has the power to redefine itself outside the shadow of its colonial past. Through the lens of Post-Colonial Theory, it becomes essential to explore how modern-day communities view the names they inherit, and whether these names still carry the colonial weight, or if they have taken on new meanings that reflect the current cultural, social, and political realities.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism, as developed by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, focuses on the role of symbols and language in shaping human behavior and social interaction. According to this theory, names are symbols that hold meaning for individuals and groups, and the way people interact with and interpret these symbols influences their social reality.

In the case of municipality names, Symbolic Interactionism suggests that the names of places carry social significance and symbolic meaning that affect how people perceive their own identities and their relationship to the community. For example, names like Babatngon, which evoke memories of indigenous practices like hunting, or Tolosa, which represents unity among local chieftains, become symbolic markers of community pride, resilience, and identity. The meanings that people attribute to these names, whether they are tied to religious beliefs, historical events, or cultural practices, shape how they see themselves within the broader social structure.

This theory also invites us to consider the evolving meaning of place names over time. As communities grow and develop, their interactions with the names of their towns may change. For instance, older generations may continue to uphold traditional interpretations of place names, while younger generations may reimagine these names to reflect more contemporary concerns or shifts in local culture.

By employing Structural-Functional Theory**,** Social Conflict Theory**,** Post-Colonial Theory**,** and Symbolic Interactionism, this study provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the names of municipalities in the First District of Leyte. These theoretical lenses allow us to examine how place names are not only historical artifacts but also symbols of power, identity, and cultural continuity. They provide insight into the social cohesion**,** historical struggles, colonial influences, and symbolic meanings embedded in the toponyms of these communities. Through this theoretical framework, we can better understand how the past is inscribed in place names and how these names continue to shape the present-day identity and culture of the municipalities in Leyte.

This study will shed light on the intricate relationship between language**,** power, and history, offering a deeper understanding of how municipal names serve as important cultural and historical symbols that connect the present to the past.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Understanding the intricate tapestry of cultural identities within a region often begins with the names of its municipalities. In the First District of Leyte, the etymology and significance of municipality names provide a fascinating lens through which to explore historical narratives, socio-economic developments, and cultural exchanges that have shaped the area. This study aims to delve into the origins and meanings of these names, revealing not just linguistic elements but also the historical and cultural resonances they carry. By examining the interrelationship between language, culture, and identity, this thesis endeavors to contribute to the broader discourse on local history and cultural heritage in the Philippines.

The specific focus of this research lies in uncovering the significance of municipality names in the First District of Leyte. This district, characterized by its unique historical background and diverse cultural influences, serves as an ideal case study for understanding how place names encapsulate the essence of local identity and heritage. The study will address the etymological roots of these names, their historical contexts, and the meanings derived from local languages and dialects. By highlighting these aspects, the research aims to foster a deeper appreciation for the cultural narratives embedded within these names, which often reflect the region's indigenous traditions, colonial influences, and contemporary realities.

This research is particularly relevant considering existing studies on regional nomenclature and cultural identity in the Philippines. While much attention has been given to broader national narratives, there remains a gap in localized studies that explore the significance of municipality names as a reflection of collective memory and identity. By focusing on the First District of Leyte, this study

will contribute to filling that gap, offering insights that not only enrich local historical understanding but also inform broader discussions on cultural preservation and its importance.

2. Review of Related Literature and Studies

The names of municipalities often carry profound cultural, historical, and linguistic significance. In the First District of Leyte, these names reflect a rich tapestry of indigenous heritage, colonial influences, and local narratives. This review aims to explore the origins and meanings of municipality names in this district, drawing on various academic sources and studies that contribute to understanding the interplay between culture and nomenclature.

The study Bursting Ear of Rice: A Toponymic Study of the Place Name Leyte explores the etymology of the name "Leyte," shedding light on the deeper linguistic and cultural roots of place naming in the region. It examines the semantic links between local barangay names and rice cultivation, proposing that the name "Leyte" may have originated from Waray terms associated with rice and agricultural practices. (Oyzon, 2024). By challenging widely accepted folk etymologies, the study highlights the critical role of historical dictionaries and ecclesiastical records in uncovering more accurate and culturally grounded explanations for place names. This research contributes valuable insights into the field of toponymy and underscores the cultural significance embedded in local nomenclature.

Philippine place names, or toponyms, are rich in cultural, historical, and mythological meaning, reflecting the country's diverse indigenous roots and colonial experiences. Prior to colonization, many names were derived from natural landscapes, local flora and fauna, or significant events in the oral traditions of communities. These toponyms often carried symbolic meanings, indicating how early Filipinos related to their environment and the spiritual world. For instance, names that reference rivers, mountains, or plants suggest the centrality of nature in shaping identity and belief systems (Oyzon, 2024).

The Spanish colonization of the Philippines brought with it a wave of renaming, often replacing indigenous place names with those honoring Catholic saints, Spanish royalty, or Christian virtues. This was not only a form of administrative reorganization but a deliberate cultural imposition aimed at restructuring native identities and aligning them with colonial ideologies. As Pagliawan (n.d.) notes, many of these Spanish-era names were chosen based on religious significance or the names of patrons from Spain, such as "San Isidro," "Santa Rita," or "San Miguel," reflecting the deep entrenchment of Catholicism in Filipino sociopolitical life. This dual naming history—indigenous and colonial—provides a layered narrative that reveals the cultural negotiations and historical transitions communities have undergone.

The article "Importance of Place Names Underscored in New Book" published by the Philippine Daily Inquirer further reinforces the value of toponymic research in understanding Filipino cultural and historical identity. The book featured in the article, co-published by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) and the Philippine Toponymy Society, brings together studies that critically examine the origins and meanings of place names across the country. Like Oyzon's Bursting Ear of Rice: A Toponymic Study of the Place Name Leyte (2024), the book emphasizes the importance of using historical, linguistic, and archival sources to debunk folk etymologies and reveal the deeper cultural narratives encoded in local nomenclature. Both works reflect a growing scholarly interest in recovering indigenous and historically accurate accounts of place naming, recognizing toponymy as a vital lens through which national and local identities are understood. Together, they demonstrate how place names function not merely as geographic labels, but as cultural texts that preserve community memory, language, and worldview.

A conference session convened by the University of the Philippines Los Baños Department of Social Sciences emphasized the significance of toponymy as a means of reclaiming cultural identity and reasserting historical narratives. The session focused on how geographic names in the Philippines serve not only as spatial identifiers but also as symbols of collective memory and cultural continuity. By encouraging the rethinking and correction of place name narratives, the conference highlighted how toponymy plays a crucial role in understanding the complexities of Philippine history.

Leyte's history is marked by significant events that have shaped its cultural landscape. According to Cruz (2019), the arrival of Spanish colonizers in the 16th century introduced a new layer of naming conventions, often derived from local languages or Spanish terms that reflected the geography, flora, fauna, or historical figures associated with the area. For instance, the name "Leyte" itself is believed to have originated from the Waray term "leyte," meaning "to take," which signifies the island's importance during trade and migration.

The indigenous peoples of Leyte, primarily the Waray, have a substantial impact on the nomenclature of municipalities. Bacalso (2020) highlights that many names are derived from Waray vocabulary, reflecting the unique characteristics of the land and its people. For example, the municipality of "Carigara" is derived from the Waray word "karigara," which translates to "to cling" or "to hold on," suggesting a connection to the region's natural features or cultural practices.

The colonial period introduced a blend of Spanish and American influences that further complicated the naming conventions. De Jesus (2021) notes that municipalities like "San Isidro" and "San Juan" reflect the Catholic heritage brought by Spanish missionaries. These names often honor saints, indicating the significance of religion in shaping local identities. The adaptation of indigenous names into a colonial context illustrates a form of cultural syncretism that continues to characterize the region.

The linguistic diversity of Leyte plays a crucial role in the interpretation of municipality names. Gonzales (2018) emphasizes the importance of language in preserving cultural heritage and identity. The variations in pronunciation and meaning among different dialects can lead to multiple interpretations of a single name. For instance, "Ormoc," which is often associated with the term for "river," may have different connotations in various local dialects, showcasing the complexity of linguistic heritage.

In contemporary times, the significance of municipality names extends beyond historical and cultural roots. Reyes (2022) discusses how these names serve as a source of local pride and identity. They play a crucial role in community branding and tourism, as municipalities leverage their unique names to attract visitors. Understanding the origins and meanings of these names can enhance community engagement and foster a stronger sense of belonging among residents.

The municipality names in the First District of Leyte are rich with cultural reflections that encapsulate the region's historical, linguistic, and social dynamics. The interplay of indigenous heritage and colonial influences has created a complex tapestry of meanings that continue to resonate with the local population. As this review highlights, further exploration of these names can provide deeper insights into the cultural identity of Leyte and contribute to the preservation of its rich history.

3. Methodology

This study aims to explore the origins and meanings of municipality names in the First District of Leyte by examining historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

3.1 Research Design

This study will employ a Qualitative Research Design with a Historical-Linguistic and Ethnolinguistic Approach to analyze the origins and meanings of municipality names in the First District of Leyte. This study will explore linguistic roots, historical influences, and cultural significance behind place names, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how these names reflect the place's history and identity.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

To investigate the etymology and historical background of municipality names, data will be collected from Archival and Documentary Research. The local history books will also be consulted to trace the historical developments of these place names. Linguistic and toponymic sources such as published works on Philippine toponymy, dictionaries and etymological references related to Waray-Waray, Spanish, and Filipino will be used to analyze the linguistic roots of the names. Academic research will further support the analysis such as the utilization of digital resources including scholarly articles from online platforms. This information will be cross verified through academic sources.

The focus of this study is on documented historical and linguistic sources which provide a comprehensive and verifiable account of the etymology and evolution of names. Hence, structural interviews will not be utilized in the development of this research. Moreover, this will ensure consistency in analyzing all names in the First District of Leyte in relation to their historical and linguistic roots.

3.3 Data Analysis Technique

The data collected were analyzed using the following methods:

Historical Analysis: Archival documents, historical texts, and records were reviewed to trace the origin and transformation of municipality names. According to Gaddis (2018), historical analysis helps in understanding the broader sociopolitical and temporal contexts that shape naming practices.

Linguistic Analysis: Etymological and phonological aspects of the municipality names were examined, tracing language origins and semantic shifts. This approach is rooted in the work of structural linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), who emphasized the relationship between language structure and meaning.

Thematic Analysis: Municipality names were categorized based on recurring themes such as natural features, historical events, religious influences, and indigenous linguistic origins. This method, as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), allows for the identification and analysis of patterns or motifs that provide deeper cultural insight.

The toponyms were classified into four major categories:

- **Nature-based names**
- **Indigenous linguistic names**
- **Colonial or religious names**
- **Historical event-based names**

This classification enabled the researchers to systematically interpret how place names reflect specific environmental, social, and historical conditions.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Proper citation and attribution will be ensured to maintain academic integrity throughout the research process. All sources of information, ideas, data, and quotations from other sources or authors will be correctly referenced to give due and appropriate credits.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on the examination of archival records, historical texts, and documentary research regarding the etymology and historical significance of the municipality names in the First District of Leyte. The analysis reveals that many indigenous toponyms were modified under the influence of colonial and administrative forces, reflecting broader historical and socio-political changes in the region. These evolved place names continue to play a vital role in shaping municipal identity, guiding governance narratives, and supporting tourism and cultural promotion efforts.

The names of the municipalities in the First District of Leyte carry deep historical and cultural significance, often reflecting the geography, influential figures, or indigenous heritage of the area. The following discusses how these names rose to prominence, shaped by geography, local livelihoods, and historical events:

Tacloban – The origins of Tacloban trace back to its early settlement as Kankabatok, meaning "Domain of Kabatok," after a prominent local settler, Kabatok. This name was later associated with the bay that bears his name today, Cancabato Bay. By 1770, after the arrival of Augustinian missionaries, Kankabatok was officially established as a municipality. The name evolved to Tarakluban, referring to the "taklub," a bamboo device used for fishing, particularly in catching crabs and shrimp. Over time, this name shortened to Tacloban. Tacloban's port became an essential trading hub, especially between the provinces of Leyte and Samar, and in 1830, it was designated as the capital of Leyte. The city reached a new milestone on June 20, 1952, when it was granted cityhood through Republic Act No. 760, signed by President Elpidio Quirino.

Tacloban's modern cultural relevance is deeply embedded in its strategic location and role as the regional economic and educational center for Eastern Visayas. It is a major contributor to regional tourism, with a significant number of tourist arrivals, especially due to historical landmarks like the San Juanico Bridge and its proximity to historical sites related to World War II. The city's recovery post-Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in 2013 further showcased the resilience of the local population, revitalizing Tacloban's economy and infrastructural development. Today, Tacloban stands as the primary commercial, educational, and healthcare hub of the region, with plans for sustainable growth in

its new township project, Tacloban North, positioning the city for future expansion (Tacloban City Profile, 2023; History of Tacloban, 2023)

Alangalang – The origin of the name *Alangalang* is tied to a remarkable story of miscommunication during the Spanish colonial period. One day, a group of natives was attempting to cross a creek, which was neither shallow enough to wade through nor narrow enough to leap over. The travelers found themselves stuck in a moment of indecision, unsure of how to cross. A Spanish friar, observing the situation, asked the group in Spanish what the place was called. The natives, misunderstanding the question, thought he was inquiring about their problem, and responded with "hi-alang," referring to their difficulty in crossing the creek. This miscommunication was carried forward through the years and eventually became the name *Alangalang* (Alangalang Municipal Government, n.d.).

Alangalang's early settlement was located at Bukid, a hilly area along the Mainit River. In the mid1800s, the community was led by Tomas Pongol, a lay leader, and gradually spread to surrounding areas, including across the river to a settlement called Binongto-an. However, the location was prone to flooding, leading to the town's relocation in 1883 to its present site. This relocation was prompted by a devastating flood, after which local governance was reorganized, with various Jefe Local (town leaders) overseeing the transition. Alangalang's evolution continued through several leadership changes, eventually becoming a municipality in the 20th century, with Nicolas Salazar becoming the first elected Municipal Mayor in 1937 (Alangalang Municipal Government, n.d.).

The name *Alangalang*, born from a historical moment of indecision, encapsulates the enduring challenges and resilience of its people. The town's agricultural land and its history of overcoming natural adversities have shaped its identity. Today, Alangalang is known for its rich cultural heritage and agricultural productivity, with residents continuously striving to preserve and develop the community for future generations. The spirit of perseverance and adaptability that marked its past continues to inspire the *Alangalanganon* people today, who take pride in their history and look forward to a brighter future (Alangalang Municipal Government, n.d.).

Babatngon – The official name Babatngon is derived from the word Babatongan, which translates to "a place for trapping wild hogs." As digitally documented in the National Library of the Philippines, according to local elders, the area was once abundant with wild hogs, which made it difficult for settlers to cultivate the land. To overcome this, the residents had no choice but to trap the wild animals, using nets and other tools to control their numbers, thus improving the area's livability.

Historically, Babatngon has been recognized as one of the most peaceful towns in the province. This peace has been evident since the Spanish colonial era and persisted through the Japanese occupation. The town's serenity was so well-regarded that guerilla fighters sought refuge there during World War II, drawn by its calm atmosphere and safe surroundings. Babatngon's identity remains deeply rooted in its long-standing tranquility.

The town is known for its peaceful, orderly lifestyle, which has continued to shape its reputation. Despite various historical challenges, the town's residents have maintained a strong sense of security and order. This enduring legacy of peace is an integral part of Babatngon's cultural resilience, and the town's lifestyle continues to be a point of pride for its people.

Palo – The name *Palo* is believed to have originated from the local term *palu*, meaning a carpenter's hammer. This tool was commonly used by early inhabitants of the town, many of whom were skilled carpenters. Established officially in 1768, Palo's historical roots trace back to the Spanish colonial period. Another version of the name suggests it comes from the Spanish word *palo*, meaning "mast," inspired by the ships that once docked along the town's shores, rich in fish. Additionally, an oral tradition recounts that the name *Palo* evolved from *walo-walo*, which referred to the typhoons that struck the area every eight days. The term was later shortened and altered to *Palo*. A final folk story claims that the name came from an incident during the Spanish era when a soldier overheard locals shouting "Atitipalo!"—a reference to a centipede species—mispronouncing the last syllable as "Palo," a name that stuck (National Library of the Philippines, n.d.).

One of the most significant events in Palo's history occurred on October 20, 1944, when General Douglas MacArthur and his victorious American forces landed at Red Beach, marking the beginning of the Philippines' liberation from Japanese occupation. This pivotal event turned Palo into a symbol of

hope and resilience for the Filipino people. During World War II, the Palo Cathedral also served as both a hospital for wounded American soldiers and a shelter for local residents fleeing from Japanese atrocities, further cementing the town's historical importance in both wartime and spiritual contexts.

Palo's unique history, marked by its significant role during the war, its connection to early carpentry traditions, and its spiritual legacy through the Palo Cathedral, continues to influence the town's cultural identity today. The intertwining of historical narratives and the town's natural environment, including the bay and frequent typhoons, has shaped Palo into a community proud of its resilience and cultural heritage.

San Miguel – San Miguel's name is derived from St. Michael the Archangel, who became the town's patron saint. Local legend recounts a miraculous event during a Moro raid when the town's residents, fleeing in fear, were saved by a towering figure dressed in purple who appeared at the mouth of the river. Holding a shield in his left hand and a sword in his right, the figure stood firm, challenging the approaching raiders. Struck with terror, the Moro attackers turned their vintas around and retreated. The townspeople, believing this figure to be a divine apparition of St. Michael, named their town San Miguel in his honor (Philippines Tacloban Mission Alumni, n.d.).

The town's historical significance is rooted in this legendary defense against the Moro invaders, marking a defining moment in San Miguel's development. The story of St. Michael's intervention was passed down through generations, reinforcing the town's identity as one under divine protection. Over time, this miracle has contributed to the town's sense of security and spiritual resilience.

San Miguel's naming after St. Michael the Archangel continues to shape the community's identity. The story of the miraculous apparition remains central to the town's cultural narrative, with residents proudly honoring St. Michael as their protector. This legend not only ties the town to its spiritual roots but also serves as a reminder of the strength and unity that emerged from this early encounter with adversity.

Santa Fe – The municipality of Santa Fe, Leyte, was named after the Spanish term *Santa Fe*, which translates to "Holy Faith." The name was given during the Spanish colonial period by Rev.

Pantaleon de la Fuente, a Jesuit priest who also served as the curate of Palo. Although the exact reasons behind his choice are not documented, it is believed that the name reflects the deep-rooted Catholic faith that has been central to the community's identity since the early colonial era (Santa Fe Leyte WordPress, 2016).

Before it became an independent municipality, Santa Fe was originally a barrio called *Maslog*, named after the river running through the area. It wasn't until 1949 that Santa Fe officially became its own municipality through Executive Order No. 277, signed by President Elpidio Quirino. This decision followed strong advocacy from local leaders and residents who sought greater autonomy. The separation from Palo marked a significant shift in the community's political landscape and paved the way for the development of Santa Fe as a distinct entity.

Today, Santa Fe's name continues to symbolize its enduring legacy of faith and unity. Its historical roots in Catholicism remain influential, with the community continuing to celebrate its religious traditions and values. The municipality's identity is intrinsically tied to the ideals of *Santa Fe*—a place of spiritual devotion and communal solidarity.

Tanauan – In the article of Philippines Tacloban Mission Alumni, the municipality of Tanauan, Leyte, traces its roots to a settlement led by a local leader named Calanao, situated by the Bukid River at the foot of Adil Hill. In 1661, a Chinese mestizo named Juanillo Siengco, along with his family from Cebu, integrated with Calanao's tribe. This union formed a community that would eventually produce the town's first officials. To defend themselves from frequent Moro pirate raids, the settlers built a stone-walled enclosure known as a *cuta*, and religious orders such as the Jesuits and Franciscans established early churches that also served as refuges for the people (Philippines Tacloban Mission Alumni).

The settlers, in an effort to protect their communities from constant pirate attacks, developed an innovative warning system. A lookout was stationed atop a tall Molave tree, serving as a natural watchtower. This elevated post, referred to in the local dialect as *Tan-awan* (meaning "a place to watch from"), allowed the watchman to spot incoming threats from a distance. The watchman would strike a

hollow log suspended from the tree to signal danger to the community. Over time, the name *Tan-awan* became synonymous with the area and eventually evolved into "Tanauan," which became the official name of the town.

The story of Tanauan's origins reflects the resourcefulness and resilience of its early inhabitants, whose efforts to protect their community from external threats contributed to the formation of the town's identity. The name Tanauan, which continues to echo the town's history of vigilance and unity, remains a testament to its enduring legacy of protection, faith, and survival.

Tolosa – Located at the foot of Mount Inapusong on Leyte's eastern coast, Tolosa is a town rich in both historical and cultural significance. According to local legend, the name *Tolosa* is derived from the Waray phrase *"an tolo nag-usa"* meaning "the three became one." This phrase commemorates the legendary unity of three warring chieftains—Daginot, Tostosanay, and Bankaw—who put aside their conflicts to join forces in defending their land against the Moro pirates. The chieftains' battle efforts were so fierce that, according to the story, they hurled massive rocks and spears, which eventually formed the Lad-an, Pamalbagan, and Kabuyuan Rivers (Philippines Tacloban Mission Alumni).

In addition to their heroic defense against external threats, the town's strategic location saw the construction of a watchtower atop Mount Inapusong, which became crucial in alerting the community to incoming pirate attacks. The watchtower reinforced Tolosa's role as a central hub for defense during the era of constant raids. Tolosa was originally part of the municipality of Tanauan but later gained independence through the tireless efforts of leaders like Magdaleno

Today, Tolosa stands as a community deeply rooted in its historical narrative of unity and resilience. The town's devotion to St. Michael the Archangel and its cool, inviting climate make it a beloved destination for residents, especially during the vibrant and festive fiesta celebrations. Tolosa continues to honor its rich past, offering a warm homecoming for its people while maintaining a legacy of protection and strength.

To better understand the cultural, historical, and linguistic significance of place names in the First District of Leyte, the following table presents a comparative summary of each municipality. The analysis is based on archival research, historical records, and digital documents and studies. It highlights the etymology of each town's name, the historical events or conditions surrounding its origin, and how these names continue to influence local identity, cultural heritage, and contemporary relevance.

Table 1. Summary of Municipality Name Origins and Their Historical, Cultural, and Contemporary Significance

Municipality	Etymology / Name Origin	Theme Category	Historical Context	Cultural Significance	Contemporary Relevance
Tacloban	From "Kankabatok" (a prominent settler) to "Tarakluban" (a bamboo trap for crabs)	Nature-based names	Officially proclaimed as a municipality in 1770, capital of Leyte in 1830, and a chartered city in 1952. It became a highly urbanized city in 2008. The city was severely impacted by Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, leading to a significant recovery effort.	Tacloban became an economic, cultural, and educational hub in Eastern Visayas. Known for its resilience post-Haiyan and for being a major tourism and business center in the region.	Tacloban today serves as the regional hub for education, healthcare, finance, and tourism. The city continues to grow with modern infrastructure, attracting investments and contributing significantly to the regional economy.
Babatngon	Derived from "Hi-alang," a miscommunication related to difficulties crossing a creek	Indigenous Linguistic names	The town evolved from a Bukid settlement to a municipality, guided by dedicated leaders throughout its history. During the Spanish era, it struggled with flooding and geographical issues, which led to a relocation.	Known for its peaceful history and rich culture, Alangalang has maintained strong community values and pride in its heritage.	The town continues to honor its historical leaders and maintains a community-focused approach to development, striving for progress and resilience in the face of challenges.
Babatngon	Derived from "Babatongan" meaning a place for	Naturebased names	Babatngon's history is linked to the challenge of managing wild hog	The town is renowned for its peaceful history,	Babatngon continues to maintain its peaceful nature and

	trapping wild hogs		populations. It developed into a peaceful community that survived through the cooperation of its residents.	remaining a calm and orderly community through Spanish colonization and the Japanese occupation. The town's tradition of hospitality continues today.	remains a community where traditions are preserved, attracting visitors due to its tranquility and cultural significance.
Palo	Derived from "palu" (carpenter's hammer) or "palo" (mast of a ship)	Colonial or Religious names	Palo was established in 1768. It played a significant role during World War II, especially when General MacArthur landed at Red Beach in 1944. The Palo Cathedral was pivotal as both a hospital for soldiers and a refuge for locals.	The name reflects the influence of Spanish colonial history, and Palo's cathedral continues to be a historical and cultural landmark.	Today, Palo is a town with historical sites and educational institutions that carry forward its cultural heritage. It is also home to important landmarks associated with the American liberation of the Philippines.
San Miguel	Named after St. Michael the Archangel after a miraculous apparition during a Moro raid	Colonial or Religious names	During a Moro raid, a tall figure holding a sword and shield miraculously appeared to protect the town, leading to the town's naming in honor of St. Michael.	San Miguel is deeply rooted in Catholic traditions, with St. Michael being its patron saint.	The town celebrates its religious heritage through annual festivities and maintains a sense of peace and security reflective of its early history.
Santa Fe	"Santa Fe" meaning "Holy Faith" in Spanish, reflecting Catholic roots	Colonial or Religious names	Established as a separate municipality in 1949 through an Executive Order. Originally a barrio called Maslog, the name "Santa Fe" was given during Spanish rule by a Jesuit priest.	The name "Santa Fe" symbolizes the town's strong Catholic identity, and this faith is deeply embedded in local culture.	Today, Santa Fe continues to be a community deeply rooted in faith, marked by its celebration of Catholic traditions and vibrant community spirit.
Tanauan	Derived from "Tan-awan," meaning "a place to watch from" due to its lookout against pirates	Nature-based names	Tanauan originated as a settlement led by Calanao, later joined by Chinese mestizo Juanillo Siengco. To defend against pirate raids, the settlers built watch towers, one of which was atop a Molave tree to act as a lookout.	Tanauan's history is shaped by its strong defensive nature, and the community's commitment to mutual protection is reflected in their cultural practices.	Today, Tanauan honors its history of resilience and unity through local festivities and continues to maintain a vigilant, peaceful community.
Tolosa	Derived from "an tolo nagusa," meaning "the three became one," symbolizing unity	Indigenous Linguistic names	Tolosa was formed through the unity of three chieftains—Daginot, Tostosanay, and Bankaw—against Moro pirates. The town gained independence from Tanauan, and its strategic location allowed it to serve as a defensive stronghold during pirate attacks.	Tolosa's name symbolizes the strength that arises from unity, and the town's cultural pride and spirit of cooperation continue to define it.	Today, Tolosa continues to be a serene town known for its peaceful atmosphere, cultural celebrations, and community-based activities.

As seen in Table 1, the etymology and historical contexts of these municipality names are rich with cultural significance, illustrating their deep-rooted connection to the geography, traditions, and historical experiences of the region. The municipality names in the First District of Leyte embody not only geographical features and historical events but also the resilient cultural identity of the communities. These names continue to influence local governance, tourism, and cultural preservation efforts, underscoring the importance of toponyms in shaping the region's collective memory and future development.

5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1. Summary

This study explored the origins, evolution, and contemporary significance of the municipal names in the First District of Leyte, Philippines. Using a combination of historical analysis, linguistic analysis, and social theory, it traced how cultural, colonial, and geographical influences shaped the identities of these municipalities through their names.

The municipalities analyzed include Alangalang, Babatngon, Palo, San Miguel, Santa Fe, Tanauan, Tolosa, and Tacloban. Each name carries unique significance—some are derived from indigenous languages or environmental features, while others reflect Spanish colonial influence and religious devotion. Employing theoretical lenses such as Structural-Functional Theory, Social Conflict Theory, Post-Colonial Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism, the study revealed that these names function as cultural symbols that help preserve collective identity, memory, and social cohesion.

Furthermore, it was found that:

- Several names commemorate resistance, unity, or communal struggle.
- Some names reflect the Spanish colonial agenda but have since taken on localized meanings.
- Toponyms remain crucial to contemporary identity, tourism, governance, and cultural preservation.

5.2. Conclusions

The following key conclusions were drawn from the study:

- **Environmental and livelihood-based names** (e.g., Babatngon, Tanauan, Tacloban) reflect how early communities interacted with their physical surroundings.
- **Religious and colonial influences** are evident in names like San Miguel and Santa Fe, revealing how colonization imposed Catholic identity onto local spaces.
- **Historical and symbolic toponyms** (e.g., Tolosa, Palo) preserve memories of unity, resilience, and wartime events.
- **Place names foster social cohesion**, serving as reminders of shared heritage, spirituality, or defense.
- While **colonial naming practices** initially served hegemonic functions, these names have been reinterpreted over time by local communities to reflect their present values and pride.
- **Municipality names continue to be relevant** in cultural branding, educational initiatives, and identity formation in local governance and tourism.

5.3. Recommendations

Considering the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Cultural Preservation and Education**. Local governments and academic institutions should prioritize educational campaigns and curricular inclusion that explain the cultural origins of place names.
- **Reclaiming Indigenous Narratives**. Initiatives must be made to document and celebrate indigenous naming practices that were erased or altered during colonization. Where appropriate, dual naming systems can be implemented (e.g., local name and colonial name).
- **Documentation of Local Histories**. Oral histories, legends, and folk etymologies should be collected and preserved through town archives, museums, and academic partnerships.
- **Tourism and Heritage Promotion**. Place name origins should be incorporated into local tourism programs and cultural events to attract visitors and strengthen community pride.
- **Community Engagement**. Engage local residents in participatory research and workshops on their town's name history, fostering shared ownership of cultural heritage and its modern relevance.
- **Further Research on Toponymy and Decolonization**. Scholars should pursue in-depth studies on the long-term effects of colonial renaming on identity formation and develop frameworks for cultural reclamation and empowerment.

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