



# What Is Your Legacy? A Pilot Study of Naming Practices of Legacy Hawker Stalls in a Singaporean Hawker Center

Shaun Tyan Gin Lim <sup>1</sup> and Francesco Perono Cacciafoco <sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Independent Researcher, Singapore 639798, Singapore

<sup>2</sup> Department of Applied Linguistics (LNG), School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), Suzhou 215000, China

\* Correspondence: francesco.perono@xjtlu.edu.cn

**Abstract:** Hawker food is a cherished element of Singapore's cultural identity. For much of Singapore's history, hawkers were itinerant salespersons who sold their dishes from place to place via pushcarts. The situation changed in the 1970s when hawkers were shifted to hawker centers, and they had to name their businesses overtly. The present research focuses on naming practices in older hawker centers which comprise many stalls with itinerant pasts. More work remains to be done on the names of hawker stalls in newer hawker centers. This communication studies the naming practices of hawker stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market, a new hawker center that was opened in August 2022. It finds that the naming strategy, which combines a name and food/cuisine sold, is the most common naming pattern. The authors also study how "legacy" stalls name themselves. These stalls enjoyed great success at their original outlets and hence, opened another branch at this hawker center. "Legacy" stall names allude to the geographical location where the stall's business took off, index culinary authenticity, and/or index the hawkers' cultural heritage. The last pattern is observed most notably among Chinese hawkers who use auspicious Chinese characters to articulate their desire for a thriving business.

**Keywords:** Singapore; hawker culture; food; street food; onomastics; toponyms



**Citation:** Lim, Shaun Tyan Gin, and Francesco Perono Cacciafoco. 2023.

What Is Your Legacy? A Pilot Study of Naming Practices of Legacy Hawker Stalls in a Singaporean Hawker Center. *Social Sciences* 12: 341. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12060341>

Academic Editor: Nigel Parton

Received: 21 November 2022

Revised: 3 June 2023

Accepted: 5 June 2023

Published: 9 June 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Singapore and Its Hawker Culture

Singapore is an island nation located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It has a population of 5.45 million people, of which 73% are Singapore residents and 27% are non-residents (these are foreigners who are working, studying, or living in Singapore but not granted permanent residence) (Department of Statistics 2021). The latest figures show that among Singapore's 3.99 million residents, the ethnic composition is 74.2% Chinese, 13.7% Malay, 8.9% Indian, and 3.2% Others (Department of Statistics 2021), illustrating the multicultural nature of Singapore. People who are categorized as "Others" are usually of Eurasian, European, or Arab descent. As a multilingual society, a variety of languages are spoken, with the most common being English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. A significant proportion of older Singaporeans also speak dialects of Mandarin Chinese, such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and Hakka, among others. In the Singaporean context, Chinese dialects are regarded as mutually intelligible varieties of Mandarin even though they use the same script.

Singapore's hawker (or street food) culture is something that is greatly cherished, both by its citizens and policymakers. A 2018 survey conducted among 1103 Singaporeans by the National Environment Agency (NEA), the body that manages Singapore's hawker centers, found that a whopping 83% of its respondents eat at hawker centers at least once a week. Hawker centers are large, covered areas with rows of individual stalls selling food and drinks, as well as dining areas for people to consume their meals. Common

reasons cited by respondents for eating out at hawker centers are the good variety of affordable food that hawker centers provide and their proximity to the workplaces and/or homes of Singaporeans (National Environment Agency 2019). Hawker culture was successfully inscribed as Singapore's first element on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020. In celebrating this milestone, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the organization responsible for promoting Singapore as a travel destination, noted that hawker food is "more than just a meal" and is "a hallmark of what it means to live here", before exhorting Singaporeans to "rediscover" Singapore's hawker culture (Singapore Tourism Board 2020). As an intangible and unofficial national treasure, hawker food is evidently a quintessential component of the Singaporean identity.

### 1.2. A Brief History of Hawking in Singapore

It is worth noting that although hawker food is synonymous with street food, today, all hawker food in Singapore is sold in covered spaces rather than on the streets. Hawkers have been described as itinerant salespersons (Leimgruber 2018). This stems from the period of itinerant street hawking up from colonial to early post-independence Singapore, where street food was sold according to the "routinised schedules and routes of the itinerant hawkers" (Chua 2016, p. 23). Street food also played an integral role in the social lives of Singapore's early inhabitants, as hawkers brought along their pushcarts and sold food at different times of the day according to a fixed pattern. This daily temporal organization, according to Chua (2016), resulted in the patterning of the residents' day, which structured "the routines and cycles of social life of the consumers" (Chua 2016, p. 23.) and contributed to the social fabric of pre-modern *kampongs* (or 'villages') that existed in Singapore during the 1950s and 1960s.

According to the colonial authorities and, later, the People's Action Party (PAP) government, unregulated itinerant hawkers posed significant health and social problems. Street hawkers often lacked an awareness of safe methods to store and prepare food. Thus, the food sold by street hawkers was regarded as unsafe and unsanitary. Street hawkers were blamed for the improper disposal of waste, which led to water-borne diseases and pest infestation. Furthermore, hawkers, with their "jumble of goods", blocked streets and defied "all order and reason" (Ghani 2011, p. 3). It is with little wonder that the British-led Hawkers Inquiry Commission concluded that street hawkers were "a public nuisance to be removed from the streets" (Ghani 2011, p. 2). Similar public health concerns were raised by Singapore's post-independent PAP government (see, for example, Clancey 2018). The hawker problem, as it became known, was at odds with the PAP's developmental goal of modernizing Singapore. Thus, from the 1970s, the government introduced a nationwide process of registering and licensing hawkers. Hawkers were made to ply their trade at hawker centers which provided essential facilities like running water, electricity, and proper refuse disposal. All hawkers were eventually resettled into hawker centers by the early 1980s. The hawker resettlement process transformed hawking from being "chaotic to ordered" (Tarulevicz 2018a, p. 294) or what other scholars call the immobilization of itinerancy (Leimgruber 2018), where the hawker stops moving from place to place and sets up a stationary stall at a clearly delineated location. Moreover, as opposed to the colonial past, hawking was no longer an unskilled trade as hawkers were required to undergo training and certification, and food stalls are routinely graded for hygiene standards. Hawker centers have also become centrally managed; today, the Hawker Centers Group under the NEA, a government body, is responsible for managing and enhancing Singapore's hawker centers. As aptly summed up by Tarulevicz (2018b), hawkers and hawking "were once seen as unseemly—dirty, visceral, a grotesquery of bodily functions. And so they were cleaned up, their hands washed, their cooking equipment inspected and standardized. The spaces in which they plied their trade were eradicated or repurposed, and the emerging "reasonable" and "ordered" spaces—hawker centers—were increasingly policed, cleaner, and more orderly at every turn" (Tarulevicz 2018b, p. 175).

### 1.3. Business Names

[Ermolaev and Ruban \(2022\)](#) distinguish between business and brand names; in the former, the former is more important to businessmen, while the latter are more important to customers. It is also worth noting that previous research has looked at how branding can be used in both consumer ([Chan and Huang 2001](#)) and industrial products ([Shipley and Howard 1993](#)), although the distinctions between business and brand names tend to be unclear, and hence, the difference as outlined by Ermolaev and Ruban is useful.

Business names have featured prominently in academic research. Many companies recognize the importance of business names: as [Alserhan and Alserhan \(2012\)](#) argue, business names are a crucial aspect of the company's image. Having a good business name would result in customers having a positive view of the company and, ultimately, "helps create a differentiated clear image that cannot be explained by product attributes" ([Alserhan and Alserhan 2012](#), p. 331). Moreover, a good business name would drive the brand value of the organization, resulting in a greater market share and revenue for the company ([Ailawadi et al. 2003](#)). Recognizing the impact of business names on the profitability of the entity, [Mancuso \(1978\)](#) provided a number of principles on how to name (and not name) a business, such as avoiding one's name and nonsense words, using business names that describe the product(s) sold, having easily recognizable and recallable names, and having names which are pleasant sounding and graphically appealing. Other researchers, such as [Herbert \(1999\)](#), have also studied the naming practices behind a corpus of business names and compared typological differences between Western and African business names.

Business names are inextricably linked to the sociocultural contexts that businesses function. This holds true across different contexts; the boom of Arctic tourism has led to the word "Arctic" being included in the names of many companies in Sweden ([Marjavaara et al. 2022](#)). [Thonus \(1991\)](#) argued that because of the increased prestige of English in Brazil, a traditionally Portuguese-speaking country, English has become increasingly important in business names and, consequently, leads to "the validation of businesses and goods and services" that the business provides ([Thonus 1991](#), p. 65). Furthermore, many entrepreneurs in Fryslân, the only minority language region in the Netherlands, associate the language strongly with their cultural identity. Unsurprisingly, many business names in the region are named in Fryslân ([Van Langevelde and Pellenbarg 2003](#)). Likewise, [Liesch et al. \(2015\)](#) reported that business names in Michigan follow regional-naming practices and geographical boundaries. Meanwhile, many Russian firms name their businesses after the Siberian cedar, even if they are not necessarily located in Siberia, and are in industries that do not use the tree as a raw material ([Ermolaev and Ruban 2022](#)). The authors postulate that the tree is associated with positive connotations such as stability and power, which bodes well for businesses and, at the same time, is aligned with the "stereotypical vision" of Siberia in Russian culture—one characterized by cold weather and enigmatic taiga forests where cedars grow ([Ermolaev and Ruban 2022](#), p. 6). Given that business naming is highly influenced by the larger sociocultural contexts, it is highly possible that the names of Singapore's hawker stalls reflect broader sociocultural practices.

The intersections between names, businesses, and the political milieu that they function in have also been well-documented. In today's neoliberal capitalist world, it is common for naming rights to be sold to large corporations. [Crețan \(2019\)](#) writes about how the commodification of a Romanian football club name and its subsequent renaming caused social tensions among various groups who staked their claims to the club's name. More broadly, these contestations can be attributed to the "post-communist urban practices of delayed economic restructuring" ([Crețan 2019](#), p. 805). Researchers have even argued that (re)naming streets and places after martyrs can be used as a form of branding and marketing strategy ([Light and Young 2015](#); [Crețan and Matthews 2016](#)), which is in line with the increasing prominence of cultural politics of place naming in the growing field of Critical Toponymies.

#### 1.4. Hawker Stall Names as Business Names

As seen in the previous sub-section, current research on branding and/or business names tends to focus on consumer products, with occasional studies about industrial products and how street names can function as a form of branding. What this study aims to do is to conceptualize hawker stall names as business names which has been given scant attention in academic literature thus far.

In Singapore, as in other countries with a strong hawker culture, hawker stalls advertise the food and/or drinks they sell on a signboard placed prominently above the counter. The stall is distinctly named by the businessmen, and hence, these hawker stall names can be argued as business names. The presence of business names stemmed from the sedentarization of hawkers. Previously, hawkers relied on the daily scheduled routes or street crying to advertise their grub. Moreover, the itinerant hawker was referred to by the food he sold, for instance, “the *ice kacang* man” (translated into ‘bean ice’ and is a dessert made of shaved ice, red beans, jelly, and syrup). However, in a fixed location (i.e., the hawker center), there is now a greater density of hawkers competing for a limited number of customers in relatively smaller areas as compared to the busy streets and walkways of colonial and post-independence Singapore (Leimgruber 2018). This makes the need for identification and advertisement via a business name even more pronounced for the hawker-businessman.

At the local level, there have been a few studies focusing on the naming practices of hawker stalls (Leimgruber 2018, 2020; Lee 2013, 2022a), although these tend to be situated at older and more established hawker centers whose hawker legacies date back to the itinerant phase. Leimgruber (2018) found that many stalls at Ghim Moh Hawker Center indexed their itinerant hawker heritage. The hawker center opened in 1977 and comprised many hawkers who originally sold their food from pushcarts. Some stall names at the hawker center contained a toponym that references the original place of the hawker’s itinerant street hawking. Lee (2013) conducted research on the names of hawker stalls in Maxwell Food Center, Tiong Bahru Food Center, and Chinatown Complex—older hawker centers built to house itinerant hawkers. Given the large population of Chinese residents in the surrounding areas that these hawker centers serve, hawker stall names are predictably in Mandarin Chinese and/or Chinese dialects. Therefore, there appears to be a lack of analysis on present-day hawker stall names. Further attention can be given to historical traces in modern-day linguistic landscapes (Leimgruber 2018), which the authors do in this study via a comparative analysis of store signs. Leimgruber makes this point in light of Pavlenko’s (2010) argument that the meaning of present-day linguistic landscapes, or the public usage of written language, “cannot be fully understood without considering those of the past” (Pavlenko 2010, p. 133).

This communication presents the results of a pilot study on the naming practices of twenty-eight hawker stalls in a new hawker center called Fernvale Hawker Center and Market. The facility opened in August 2022 and is marketed as a “legacy” hawker center which boasts of hawker stalls that enjoy huge popularity at their original outlets (Daniel Food Diary 2022) and have thus opened another branch at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market. These include hawker stalls that trace their roots back to the itinerant hawker era, as well as stalls that have opened during the sedentarization phase of hawking. As a result, this hawker center offers a fascinating case study in analyzing how historical forces, especially those in the hawker trade, can shape naming practices, which are reflected in the linguistic landscape through public signage.

The authors seek to answer two research questions: Firstly, how are hawker stalls in this new hawker center named? Secondly, what influences the naming choices of “legacy” hawker stalls? What are the legacies and stories that shape the linguistic landscape? At the same time, the authors would like to note that this is a pilot study, which means that even though descriptive analyses and observations can be made, it cannot be argued as a general tendency across all hawker centers.

Ultimately, this study aims to fill a gap in the current global research on business names, which focuses heavily on consumer products. The authors conceptualize hawker stall names as business names and link their naming practices to the broader linguistic as well as sociocultural-historical realities in Singapore. On the local front, the authors also build on existing works by combining linguistic landscape research and onomastic studies in a new, previously unstudied hawker center.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Fernvale Hawker Center and Market is housed within the Fernvale Community Club (CC), located at Sengkang West in the North-East region of Singapore. These CCs, as they are locally called, play a crucial role in disseminating information and policies on behalf of the government. At the same time, CCs serve as common spaces which bring residents together to partake in activities like exercising, culinary classes, and even singing, thereby increasing social capital and interaction among residents who live in the vicinity. Fernvale CC is no exception; it has spaces for wellness classes and culinary courses, a 24-h gym, a running track, badminton courts, and a hawker center and market. As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted in his opening address of the hawker center, “Residents need the shared spaces to meet, interact and build togetherness. We designed Fernvale CC with this in mind: to be a focal point for the community, to bring together residents . . . ” (Lee 2022b). Fernvale Hawker Center and Market is located in this CC. In some ways, the changes in the spatial organization of the hawker trade are mirrored here; rather than hawkers going to consumers, consumers now go to the hawker. Hawkers now sell their fare near public housing estates where there is a largely stable clientele, compounded with the fact that hawker centers are also tied to wet markets and, increasingly, other public amenities that serve nearby residents.

There are twenty-eight hawker stalls and twenty market stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market (in this communication, only the names of the hawker stalls are considered). Fernvale Hawker Center and Market also holds the record of being the first hawker center and market where residents can buy raw ingredients at the market before getting them cooked at selected hawker stalls (Tan 2022). Within the hawker center, there are tables and chairs which are bolted to the floor and large fans overhead. Such facilities allow a free-seating and communal dining experience and at the same time, ensure that the hawker center is well-ventilated.

Over a period of one week in October 2022, the authors visited the hawker center and photographed the signboard on top of each stall. The signboard functioned as the unit of analysis (see Figure 1). Borrowing from the conventional definition of linguistic landscapes (Landry and Bourhis 1997), these signboards are part of the public and commercial signs and hence, are part of the linguistic landscape. The linguistic landscape, in turn, can yield valuable insights into the onomastic practices and historical forces behind such trends.



**Figure 1.** The signboard of *D'Junction Bakery*.

The signboards of hawker stalls are usually of identical size. Each signboard has a series of common features, such as the stall's name, which is featured prominently in the middle of the signboard, and other information that identifies and advertises its products. The stall's unit number takes up a small portion at the right-hand side of the signboard. In general, the unit number begins with the floor number (in this case, '03') followed by the stall number (which is also '03' for *D'Junction Bakery*). The bottom right-hand corner of the stall is reserved for the hygiene standard of the hawker stall (hawker stalls in Singapore are

given letter grades for their hygiene levels). In this study, particular attention was given to the stall's name, located at the center portion of the signboard. The signboards were then coded for the textual and linguistic elements that appeared in the center portion. The authors analyzed the naming practices and the languages found on the signboards for each stall, where necessary, conducting informal interviews with the stall owners to ascertain the naming practices and hawker histories.

During our visits, all twenty-eight stalls were in operation. Table 1 summarizes the type of food and/or drinks, as well as the type of cuisine found in these stalls. As shown in the table, there are nineteen stalls that sell Chinese food, four sell Malay cuisine, and two sell Indian food. There are three stalls selling other types of cuisine, namely Western (two) and Korean (one).

**Table 1.** A summary of the types of cuisine and food products sold by the stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market.

|                 | Chinese | Malay | Indian | Others | Total |
|-----------------|---------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| Food only       | 18      | 3     | 2      | 3      | 26    |
| Drinks only     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0      | 0     |
| Food and drinks | 1       | 1     | 0      | 0      | 2     |
| Total           | 19      | 4     | 2      | 3      | 28    |

Thereafter, further research was done to ascertain if the hawker stalls were “legacy” hawker stalls. The authors relied on interviews with hawkers and publicly available information (e.g., posts and videos about the food and histories of hawker stalls) produced by established local food websites such as *Daniel Food Diary*, *Miss Tam Chiak*, *SETHLUI.com*, *ieatishootipost*, and social media content uploaded by the hawkers themselves. The subsequent section will provide a brief explanation of the naming practices behind the hawker stalls.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Overall Naming Practices

Table 2 summarizes the naming practices of the twenty-eight hawker stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market.

**Table 2.** The naming practices of hawker stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market.

| Naming Practice                      | Count | Examples   |
|--------------------------------------|-------|--|
| Food only                            | 2     | <i>Desserts</i><br><i>Fins &amp; Feathers</i>  |
| Food and <u>name</u>                 | 14    | <i>178 Yi Qi Fa Econ Beehoon • Nasi Lemak</i><br><i>Fu Shi (Traditional) Roasted • Wonton Mee</i><br><i>Abang Teh Tarik</i><br><i>Nasi Padang by Umi's Spices</i><br><i>Al-Hyzin Mee Delights Mutton Soup</i><br><i>Kopi Kiosk</i> |
| Food and <b>place</b>                | 7     | <i>Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle</i><br><i>Amoy Street Lor Mee</i><br><i>Rice Garden</i>   |
| Food, <u>name</u> , and <b>place</b> | 5     | <i>Mohamed Danish Prata Paradise</i><br><i>Jin Kimchi Express @ Fernvale</i><br><i>Tong Fong Fatt Hainanese Boneless Chicken Rice</i>  |

In general, if the hawker stall contains the food and name of the stall, the name is underlined. If the hawker stall contains the food and place, the place name is bolded. If the hawker stall contains the name of the food, name and place, the name is underlined and the place name is bolded.

There are four main types of naming practices among the stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market. Two stalls have chosen to name their stalls after the food they sell—*Desserts* (a stall selling Chinese desserts) and *Fins & Feathers* (a name that represents the signature

dishes of the Western food stall, i.e., fish and chicken). The most common pattern that stalls have adopted is combining a name with the food/drink sold. Fourteen stalls adopt this practice. The name could refer to a person, as in the case of *Abang Teh Tarik* (*abang* means ‘brother’ in Malay) or *Nasi Padang by Umi’s Spices* (*umi* means ‘mother’ in Malay). In other instances, the name could also include auspicious characters in Mandarin Chinese, such as 發 (*fā*) ‘prosper’ and 富 (*fù*) ‘rich’ in the Chinese stall names of *178 Yi Qi Fa Econ Beehoon • Nasi Lemak* and *Fu Shi (Traditional) Roasted • Wonton Mee*, respectively. The discussion on auspicious Chinese characters will be taken up in greater detail in the following sub-section.

The role of place names, or toponyms, in food stalls is also something noteworthy. Seven stalls have a name that combines the food they sell with a place. These places could be imaginary places, for instance, *Rice Garden* or a place with a general reference like *Kopi Kiosk*. This stall, which sells coffee (known locally as *kopi*) and finger food such as sandwiches, borrows from the meaning of the word ‘kiosk’, i.e., a small place where newspapers and drinks are sold ([Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries n.d.](#)). Other stalls like *Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle* and *Amoy Street Lor Mee* are named after specific places in Singapore where the hawkers once operated at. Finally, there are five stalls whose names include a food, name, and place, such as *Mohamed Danish Prata Paradise*, *Jin Kimchi Express @ Fernvale*, and *Tong Fong Fatt Hainanese Boneless Chicken Rice*. As aforementioned, the places in these examples can include imaginary areas (e.g., *Paradise*) or a specific region (e.g., *Fernvale* or *Hainanese*, named after the Hainan Province in China).

In terms of the languages used on the signboards, English words appear on all twenty-eight stalls and Chinese on eighteen. While in most cases, there is an English-to-Chinese translation of the sign, there are other instances that innovatively combine both languages, such as the case of 滿 *unchi Pancakes*, as shown in Figure 2. The Chinese word 滿 (*mǎn*), which appears in the traditional character here and means ‘full’, ‘filled’, and ‘complete’ sounds similar to the first syllable of the English word, *munch* /*mʌntʃ*/. The name 滿 *unchi* is evidence of linguistic hybridity ([Lee 2022a](#)), where the stall name, in this instance, involves linguistic elements from English, Pinyin, and Traditional Chinese.



**Figure 2.** The signboard of 滿 *unchi Pancakes*.

In terms of Chinese characters, official simplified characters were found in more instances as compared to traditional characters (sixteen vs. eight). The use of one type of character need not be at the expense of another; in six cases, both simplified, and traditional Chinese characters were used simultaneously. A surprising find was the discovery of kanji characters (i.e., 麵 *miàn*, meaning ‘noodles’) on one signboard. Although kanji is a Japanese writing system, it consists of logographic Chinese characters (or *hanzi*) and hence, bears some physical resemblance with traditional Chinese words (for instance, 麵 *miàn* in traditional Chinese). Malay words appeared on the signs of all four hawker stalls selling Malay cuisine. Words in Arabic from the Muslim religious text, the Quran, were found on six stalls. This could be a means to indicate that the owner is Muslim and serves halal food, thus catering to the Malays (who are predominantly Muslims) as well as Indian Muslims. In this sense, language was also used to indicate or index one’s religious identity, thereby increasing in visibility and positive resonance among Muslim diners. Lastly, Korean was found on the signboard of the single Korean stall.

### 3.2. Naming Practices of “Legacy” Hawker Stalls

Out of the twenty-eight hawker stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market, a whopping nineteen are considered “legacy” stalls. These stalls have enjoyed success at their original locations and have established a branch at this hawker center. Of the nineteen stalls, the histories of two stalls can be traced to the itinerant phase of hawking, when hawkers sold food from pushcarts, and the other seventeen opened during the sedentarization phase. *Amoy St Lor Mee* (see Figure 3) reflects the use of toponyms in the naming of hawker stalls, something which has also been documented by other scholars (see, for example, Lee 2013 and Leimgruber 2018).



**Figure 3.** The signboard of *Amoy St Lor Mee*.

The original outlet of *Amoy St Lor Mee* is located at Whampoa Food Center, some eleven kilometers away from Fernvale Hawker Center and Market; prior to shifting to Whampoa Food Center, the stall operated at Amoy Street Food Center in Chinatown in the 1980s and 1990s. The toponym, Amoy Street, is named after Amoy, a port from Fujian Province in China, where many early settlers arrived from. While at Amoy Street Food Center, the stall used to sell fish soup because there were at least two other famous stalls selling *lor mee* there (*lor mee* is a Hokkien noodle dish served in a starchy gravy and topped with condiments like braised egg and fried fish). The beginnings of the *lor mee* recipe, however, stretch back to the 1950s, when the hawker’s father used to sell *lor mee* from a pushcart along the back lane of the Jit Poh Building along Keppel Road. The stall’s origins are grounded in the itinerant phase of hawking, and for this reason, the stall notes that it has been serving customers since 1959. It was only after the hawkers moved to Whampoa Food Center that they decided to switch to selling *lor mee*. Contrary to Leimgruber’s argument that the name of the hawker stall indexes the bygone era of itinerant hawking, the name *Amoy St Lor Mee* pays homage to its first location where the itineracy of hawkers had been immobilized. The stall name makes no reference to the days of itinerant hawking or the area where the owner’s father used to peddle his *lor mee* pushcart, focusing instead on the specific place where the stall first opened. The toponym Amoy St could also be used to situate the *lor mee* within the collective imagination of where the best *lor mee* in Singapore can be found since there are other famous stalls at Amoy Street Food Center.

The use of toponyms in naming stalls is also observed among seventeen “legacy” stalls that were opened during the sedentarization phase. Two stalls, namely *Kopi Kiosk* and *Rice Garden*, refer to general places or imaginary locations, respectively. Another five incorporate specific locations, such as the place where the dish originated from or a reference to the location of the original stall. The authors provide two examples to illustrate this point—*Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle* (shown in Figure 4) and *China Whampoa Home Made Noodles* (shown in Figure 5).

*Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle* first opened as a stall at the now-defunct Whitley Road Hawker Center in the 1970s. The hawker center was referred to by patrons as the hawker center “under the flyover” (*The Long and Winding Road* 2010) as it was located under the flyover that connected Jalan Toa Payoh to Whitley Road. Whitley Road, as reflected in the stall name, is named after Mr. M. H. Whitley, Singapore’s Attorney-General from 1925 to 1928. *Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle* was one of the most well-known stalls at the hawker center. Customers had a choice of yellow or thin noodles served in a full-bodied broth made of prawn shells, prawns, and pork ribs. The stall is credited for popularizing the practice where prawn noodle stalls offer prawn noodles using premium giant prawns

(Hong 2022), something which is also reflected in the stall's name. The stall later moved to Farrer Park Hawker Center before settling permanently at Old Airport Road Food Center in 1996. While the stall underwent a process of internal migration, shifting from one hawker center to another, the name indexes the rich heritage of the stall by placing the product from where the stall originally plied its trade and became popular. The humble beginnings of *Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle* at a hawker center “under the flyover” is encapsulated in its name, illustrating how historical forces (particularly that of internal migration) find their way into naming practices and the linguistic landscape.



Figure 4. The signboard of *Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle*.



Figure 5. The signboard of *China Whampoa Home Made Noodle*.

Despite its name, *China Whampoa Home Made Noodle* was founded in 1989 by a Singaporean couple. It is located at Whampoa Food Center, and hence, the stall name indicates the stall's premises; Whampoa is named after Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, a wealthy Chinese businessman and government official. The stall is regarded as one of Singapore's most popular *ban mian* stalls (Daniel Food Diary 2020). *Ban mian* originates from the southern part of China and combines both Hakka and Hokkien cooking methods; handmade egg noodles are cooked and served in a flavorful soup with marinated minced pork, vegetables, and, occasionally, seafood. By adding the toponym China to the stall name, the stall name comes to symbolize a form of culinary authenticity that the stall wishes to be associated with, even if the stall owners are not necessarily from China.

The inclusion of toponyms in stall names is common for many “legacy” hawker stalls that opened during the early years of the sedentarization phase, as seen in the names of *Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle* and *China Whampoa Home Made Noodles*. The toponym situates the product within the place where the dish enjoyed resounding success and/or links the hawker to the original location to where the food comes from. However, a different naming pattern emerges for newer “legacy” stalls that were set up in the last ten years. This figure stands at seven stalls (nearly one-quarter of the stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market). In contrast to the example of *Whitley Road Big Prawn Noodle*, which shifted twice, these stalls do not undergo many rounds of internal movements. Neither have they experienced the early, tumultuous years of the sedentarization phase, which as Leimgruber (2018) notes, upended hawkers' old ways of life. Consequently, names of newer “legacy” hawker stalls tend not to reference geographical features such as the locations where the stall originally started. Instead, the names become an index of the hawkers' cultural identities via auspicious Chinese characters. This is documented in four instances and is particularly prevalent among Chinese stall names. In Chinese culture, it is commonplace to use many auspicious characters in the hope that the business will thrive. Common characters as aforementioned include 發 (fā) ‘prosper’ and 富 (fù) ‘rich’. The authors will explain the

names of two other examples, 178 Yi Qi Fa Econ Beehoon • Nasi Lemak (see Figure 6) and Feng Xiang Herbal Bak Kut Teh | Fried Porridge (see Figure 7).



**Figure 6.** The signboard of 178 Yi Qi Fa Econ Beehoon • Nasi Lemak.



**Figure 7.** The signboard of Feng Xiang Herbal Bak Kut Teh | Fried Porridge.

The Chinese name of the stall reads 一起發 (yīqǐfā). The last character, 發, means ‘prosper’ and is pronounced as *huat* in the Hokkien or Teochew dialects. The stall serves economic *bee hoon* (stir-fried vermicelli with a variety of dishes) and *nasi lemak* (a dish of fragrant rice cooked in coconut milk). The name is an indicator of the dreams of the stall; 一起發 expresses hope that the stall, its customers, and its workers will prosper or *huat* together (SETHLUI.com 2020). The digits 178 are included because they are read in Chinese as 一七八 (yīqībā). These numbers sound like the stall’s name and can be seen as a double proclamation of the stall’s aspirations.

*Feng Xiang Herbal Bak Kut Teh | Fried Porridge* is a hawker stall that was born during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the founders was unable to return to his hometown of Klang in Malaysia due to border closures. He started the stall to satisfy his craving for affordable and tasty hawker food. Klang-style dishes such as *bak kut teh* are found at the stall (*bak kut teh*, also known as ‘pork bone tea’, is made of pork ribs cooked in a broth). Another popular dish is fried porridge; the porridge is first simmered in a special broth before being fried to give it *wok hei* ‘wok’s breath’—an important element of Chinese cooking. Within a span of two years, the stall has remarkably expanded to four outlets (including the Fernvale stall). The Chinese name of the stall is 豐香 (fēngxiāng), and the traditional Chinese word 豐 (written as 丰 in simplified Chinese) is another auspicious Chinese character and means ‘abundant’ and ‘flavorful’. The owners have tied the name to their aim of serving an abundance of flavorful food to their customers. The stall name indexes quality products, along with the owner’s aspirations through tapping into the linguistic repertoire stemming from the owner’s Chinese heritage. In this case, an auspicious Chinese character 豐 is used. The meaning of the word (i.e., ‘abundant’ and ‘flavorful’) conjures positive connotations that are directly transferrable to the products that the stall produces and suggests that the business aims to meet this goal of selling tasty dishes.

#### 4. Conclusions

In this communication, the authors investigated the naming practices of hawker stalls at Fernvale Hawker Center and Market, a new hawker center that was opened in August 2022. They found that the most common naming patterns combined names (be they after people or auspicious characters) and the food/cuisine sold at the stalls.

Another area explored by the authors was the naming of “legacy” hawker stalls. In so doing, they examined how historical traces shape naming practices and the broader linguistic landscape. We find that some stalls that date back to the itinerant era of hawking, as well as the early years of sedentarization, tend to name themselves after places, particularly the location of the original stall. In some instances, the stall might have shifted several times,

but the stall name indexes its longstanding culinary success (and hence, hawker heritage) by referencing the location where the stall first gained success. The place name might also refer to where the dish originates from and hence, indexes a form of culinary authenticity that the stall wants to be identified with.

Notwithstanding, newer “legacy” stalls established in the last ten years tend not to have experienced much internal movement (whether forcibly or voluntary). Their names often contain auspicious Chinese characters and can be argued to index the hawkers’ cultural heritage. At the same time, it also reflects the tradition amongst Chinese to include such words in Mandarin to express their vision of success—an unsurprising find in Chinese-majority Singapore. Thus, these stall names have strong cultural overtones according to the sociocultural setting in which they function.

Ultimately, this communication analyzes hawker stall names as business names, an area that remains undeveloped in the scholarly literature. Due to the sedentarization of itinerant Singaporean hawkers, it was imperative that they name their stalls (and products sold). The authors studied the languages and naming practices used to name hawker stalls in a new hawker center that markets itself as a “legacy” hawker center. From a linguistic perspective, this study adopts a novel and multi-disciplinary approach by looking at written signs in public places (i.e., a hawker center) and studying the stall’s heritage to determine their naming practices, thereby working on Pavlenko’s exhortation to consider the past whilst studying public usage of written language.

It must be noted that the data in this communication are limited to one hawker center. The authors recognize that the sample size is rather small, and their findings cannot be extrapolated to represent newer hawker centers that opened over the last two years (Zhang 2022; Hong 2023). Nevertheless, the analysis in this communication can be used as a pilot study for future research, particularly among newer hawker centers as well as a comparison between older and newer hawker centers to yield more substantial results. This study, in the final analysis, supports a timeless principle as espoused by Herbert (1999): that naming is a dynamic linguistic act, and scholars need to adopt cross-cultural approaches in studying names.

**Funding:** The authors received no funding for this project.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- Ailawadi, Kusum L., Donald R. Lehmann, and Scott A. Neslin. 2003. Revenue Premium as an Outcome Measure of Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing* 67: 1–17. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Alserhan, Baker Ahmad, and Zeid A. Alserhan. 2012. Naming Businesses: Names as Drivers of Brand Value. *Competitiveness Review: An International Business Journal* 22: 329–42. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chan, Allan K. K., and Yue-Yuan Huang. 2001. Chinese Brand Naming: A Linguistic Analysis of the Brands of Ten Product Categories. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 10: 103–19.
- Chua, Beng Huat. 2016. Taking the Street Out of Street Food. In *Food, Foodways and Foodscapes: Culture, Community and Consumption in Post-Colonial Singapore*. Edited by Lily Kong and Vineeta Sinha. Singapore: World Scientific, pp. 23–40.
- Clancey, Gregory. 2018. Hygiene in a Landlord State: Health, Cleanliness and Chewing Gum in Late Twentieth Century Singapore. *Science, Technology & Society* 23: 214–33.
- Crețan, Remus, and Philip W. Matthews. 2016. Popular Responses to City-Text Changes: Street Naming and the Politics of Practicality in a Post-Socialist Martyr City. *Area* 48: 92–102. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Crețan, Remus. 2019. Who Owns the Name? Fandom, Social Inequalities and the Contested Renaming of a Football Club in Timișoara, Romania. *Urban Geography* 40: 805–25. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Daniel Food Diary. 2020. China Whampoa Ban Mian—Popular Ban Mian Stall at Whampoa Food Centre, with Outlets at Geylang (24/7). Available online: <https://danielfooddiary.com/2020/03/30/chinawhampoa/> (accessed on 11 November 2022).

- Daniel Food Diary. 2022. Fernvale Hawker Centre at Sengkang West—With Famous Curry Chicken Noodles, Bak Chor Mee and Claypot Fried Porridge. Available online: <https://danielfooddiary.com/2022/08/06/fernvalerhawkercentre/> (accessed on 29 October 2022).
- Department of Statistics. 2021. Population Trends 2021. Available online: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/population/population2021.pdf> (accessed on 29 October 2022).
- Ermolaev, Vladimir A., and Dmitry A. Ruban. 2022. Siberian Cedar in Russian Business Naming: A Case Study. *Social Sciences* 11: 450. [CrossRef]
- Ghani, Azhar. 2011. A Recipe for Success: How Singapore Hawker Centres Came to Be. Institute of Policy Studies. Available online: [https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/ag\\_history-of-hawkers\\_010511.pdf](https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/ag_history-of-hawkers_010511.pdf) (accessed on 29 October 2022).
- Herbert, Robert K. 1999. Of Barbers and Bottle Shops: Naming Businesses in South Africa. *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* 47: 249–55. [CrossRef]
- Hong, Lynda. 2023. 2 New Hawker Centres to Open in Bidadari and Buangkok This Year. *The Straits Times*, March 2. Available online: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/2-new-hawker-centres-to-open-in-bidadari-and-buangkok-this-year> (accessed on 2 June 2023).
- Hong, Terence. 2022. Top 10 Best Prawn Noodles in Singapore. *Tropika Club Magazine*, June 2. Available online: <https://magazine.tropika.club/the-best-prawn-noodles-in-singapore/> (accessed on 11 November 2022).
- Landry, Rodrigue, and Richard Y. Bourhis. 1997. Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16: 23–49. [CrossRef]
- Lee, Cher Leng. 2013. Names of Chinese Hawker Stalls and Foods in Singapore. In *Onomastics in Contemporary Public Space*. Edited by Oliviu Felecan and Alina Bugheşiu. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 293–313.
- Lee, Cher Leng. 2022a. Singapore Hawker Centres: A Linguistic Landscape of Identity, Diversity, and Continuity. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*. [CrossRef]
- Lee, Hsien Loong. 2022b. Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Opening of Fernvale Community Club and Fernvale Hawker Centre and Market on 25 September 2022. Prime Minister's Office. Available online: <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lee-Hsien-Loong-at-Fernvale-Community-Club-and-Hawker-Centre-and-Market-opening> (accessed on 29 October 2022).
- Leimgruber, Jakob R. E. 2018. Itineracy Immobilised: The Linguistic Landscape of a Singaporean Hawker Centre. *Linguistic Landscape* 4: 178–99. [CrossRef]
- Leimgruber, Jakob R. E. 2020. Naming Practices in Singapore's Hawker Centres: Echoes of Itineracy. In *Talking about Food: The Social and the Global in Eating Communities*. Edited by Sofia Rüdiger and Susanne Mühleisen. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 235–56.
- Liesch, Matthew, Linda M. Dunklee, Robert J. Legg, Anthony D. Feig, and Austin J. Jena Krause. 2015. Use of Business-Naming Practices to Delineate Vernacular Regions: A Michigan Example. *Journal of Geography* 114: 188–96. [CrossRef]
- Light, Duncan, and Craig Young. 2015. Toponymy as Commodity: Exploring the Economic Dimensions of Urban Place Names. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39: 435–50. [CrossRef]
- Mancuso, Joseph R. 1978. How to Name—And Not Name—A Business. *Harvard Business Review* 56: 20–26.
- Marjavaara, Roger, Robert O. Nilsson, and Dieter K. Müller. 2022. The Arcticification of Northern Tourism: A Longitudinal Geographical Analysis of Firm Names in Sweden. *Polar Geography* 45: 119–36. [CrossRef]
- National Environment Agency. 2019. High Majority of Patrons Satisfied with Hawker Centres. Available online: <https://www.nea.gov.sg/media/news/index/high-majority-of-patrons-satisfied-with-hawker-centres> (accessed on 29 October 2022).
- Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. n.d. Kiosk. Available online: [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/kiosk](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/kiosk) (accessed on 31 October 2022).
- Pavlenko, Aneta. 2010. Linguistic Landscape of Kyiv, Ukraine: A Diachronic Study. In *Linguistic Landscape in the City*. Edited by Elana Shohamy, Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Monica Barni. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, pp. 133–50.
- SETHLUI.com. 2020. A Different Kind of Start Up: Yi Qi Fa Nasi Lemak—Food Stories. YouTube. Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc\\_ESnC5yXA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc_ESnC5yXA) (accessed on 11 November 2022).
- Shipley, David, and Paul Howard. 1993. Brand-Naming Industrial Products. *Industrial Marketing Management* 22: 59–66. [CrossRef]
- Singapore Tourism Board. 2020. Hawker Food Is More than Just a Meal in Singapore. Facebook. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/STBSingapore/posts/hawker-food-is-more-than-just-a-meal-in-singapore-it-is-a-hallmark-of-what-it-me/2184674371662945/> (accessed on 29 October 2022).
- Tan, Adeline. 2022. Get Your Raw Ingredients Turned into Meals at Market and Hawker Centre at Fernvale CC. *The Straits Times*, September 25. Available online: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/community/get-your-raw-ingredients-turned-into-meals-in-new-fernvale-community-club> (accessed on 29 October 2022).
- Tarulevicz, Nicole. 2018a. Hawkerpreneurs: Hawkers, Entrepreneurship, and Reinventing Street Food in Singapore. *RAE: Revista de Administração de Empresas (Journal of Business Management)* 58: 291–302. [CrossRef]
- Tarulevicz, Nicole. 2018b. Sensing Safety in Singapore, 1900–2015. *Food, Culture & Society* 21: 164–79.
- The Long and Winding Road. 2010. Macaroni Under the Flyover. Available online: <https://thelongnwindingroad.wordpress.com/2010/05/18/macaroni-under-the-flyover/> (accessed on 11 November 2022).
- Thonus, Terese. 1991. Englishization of Business Names in Brazil. *World Englishes* 10: 65–74. [CrossRef]

- Van Langevelde, Ab, and Piet Pellenbarg. 2003. What's in a Frisian Business Name? Regional Identity in the Netherlands. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie (Journal of Economic and Human Geography)* 92: 309–23. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Zhang, Jane. 2022. 4 New Hawker Centres Opening in S'pore by 2nd Half of 2022. *Mothership.SG*. March 7. Available online: <https://mothership.sg/2022/03/new-hawker-centres-2022/> (accessed on 2 June 2023).

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.