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From Land to Legacy: The Interplay of Necronyms and Social Stratification in Cina Benteng

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ABSTRACT

Cemetery names (necronyms) serve as linguistic, cultural, and historical markers that reflect social stratification, migration history, and identity retention within the Cina Benteng community in Indonesia. This study examines how necronyms function as more than burial site identifiers by encoding class distinctions, ancestral connections, and generational linguistic shifts. Utilizing a multimethod approach that includes cemetery name documentation, semi-structured interviews with community members, and historical records analysis, the study categorizes cemetery names based on phonological, morphological, and semantic patterns to explore their role in identity preservation and cultural adaptation. Findings reveal that necronyms reinforce social stratification, with elite families securing named burial sites that emphasize lineage and status, while lower-class cemeteries are often designated with generic or geographically descriptive names. Associative meanings in cemetery names highlight the community's migration history, with references to ancestral origins in China (e.g., Fujian, Guangdong) and symbolic representations of resilience, survival, and integration. Emotive necronyms encode collective memory, reinforcing spiritual beliefs through cemetery names that emphasize peace, honor, and ancestral

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reverence. Linguistic analysis indicates a gradual shift from traditional Chinese phonetics and morphological structures toward Indonesianized and hybridized naming conventions, reflecting broader socio-political and linguistic integration trends. Older cemetery names retain Mandarin and Hokkien phonetic elements, while newer cemeteries increasingly adopt Indonesian and English-influenced names, reflecting a generational transformation in identity perception. The study also finds that commercial and modern burial practices have influenced the shift toward neutralized and marketable necronyms, prioritizing accessibility and emotional resonance over cultural specificity.

Keywords: Necronymslinguistic; Identity; Social Stratification; Onomastics; Sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Names serve a dual function in their existence: an informational function and a symbolic function. Informationally, names function as identifiers or navigational tools for individuals or locations. Symbolically, names represent social and cultural markers that convey meaning and reflect underlying cultural and social issues. In this context, naming practices are an integral part of language use in a sociocultural setting, shaping and reflecting the linguistic and social identity of a community^[1].

The study of naming, known as toponymy, is a branch of onomastics that focuses on discussing names. It is generally known as the study of onomastics^[2]. Meanwhile, studies that ask about the history or origins of a place or building are known as toponymy studies^[3, 4]. Besides, the earliest toponymy study investigates the relationship between names and their referents^[5]. Interestingly, the field of toponymy research has begun to intersect with brand naming theories in marketing literature, leading to the development of concepts such as place name commodification^[6]. In linguistic studies, onomastics emphasizes the semantic aspects of names, exploring their etymology and lexical evolution. Toponymy examines place names influenced by both natural and human-made elements, revealing their historical, social, and cultural significance. Studies have shown that place names are not merely labels but are deeply embedded in identity, power structures, and sociopolitical contexts.

Globally, research on toponymy has evolved across various disciplines. Critical toponymy scholars have highlighted the importance of place naming as a form of discursive power within urbanization processes^[7]. This approach has been expanded to include the concept of toponymic assemblage, which considers how place names are assembled in heterogeneous and historically contiguous ways. Many studies have

characteristics of toponymy such as road names^[8, 9], urban features^[10, 11], and cemeteries^[12, 13]. These studies collectively suggest that naming practices are powerful tools for preserving memory, asserting cultural presence, and marking social stratification.

Place naming studies have extended to sacred spaces, including cemeteries. Research by Taturia and Lauder (2023) emphasizes that cemeteries hold cultural, historical, and philosophical meanings, influencing local traditions and oral historie^[14]. Further studies by Wuryandari (2019) and Suratminto (2023) explored sacred spaces in Indonesia, highlighting their socio-historical significance^[15, 16]. These studies provide insights into how naming practices in burial sites reflect cultural values, religious beliefs, and social status.

In Indonesia, toponymic research has primarily focused on the naming of streets, villages, and geographical landmarks. However, studies on necronyms (cemetery names) remain scarce. Existing research has examined the linguistic and historical aspects of naming in various ethnic groups, yet there has been little exploration of how cemetery names reflect ethnic identity and social stratification. Given Indonesia's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape, there is a need for more focused research on this subject. Referring to the categorization of graves according to Rugg (2000), this research focuses on the type of burial ground as known as necronyms or cemetery name^[17].

This study investigates the naming of cemeteries within the Cina Benteng community in Tangerang, Banten. As an ethnic group with a long history of cultural assimilation and preservation, Cina Benteng retains distinct linguistic and cultural practices, including the name of burial sites. The research examines the meanings embedded in these necronyms and their implications for understanding social hierarchy and identity within the community.

Using the framework of Linguistic Relativity, this study

explores how necronyms in Cina Benteng reflect social stratification, identity, and cultural values. Language plays a crucial role in shaping worldview, particularly in the associative and emotive meanings attached to burial names. These meanings contribute to the community's collective narrative on migration, resilience, and belonging.

A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach is employed to examine the power dynamics and cultural dominance inherent in naming practices. Through this lens, the study investigates how language—specifically necronyms—embodies historical and sociopolitical contexts. The analysis aims to uncover the ways in which cemetery names function as sites of discursive power within the Cina Benteng community.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this research explores how language interacts with class, ethnicity, and social mobility in the naming of cemeteries. Names serve as markers of social boundaries, indicating how different groups within Cina Benteng navigate their identities in both rural and urban settings. The study considers how linguistic choices in naming practices reflect broader societal norms and cultural expectations.

Additionally, the study explores the impact of bilingualism in Cina Benteng, particularly the influence of Mandarin and Bahasa Indonesia on naming conventions. Given that the

community predominantly speaks a local dialect rather than traditional Chinese, the research considers how language shifts affect the perception and retention of necronyms.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discursive dimensions of necronyms in Cina Benteng cemeteries^[18]. Given the interdisciplinary nature of cemetery naming, this research integrates linguistic analysis, sociolinguistic perspectives, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the meanings, functions, and social implications of burial site names. The study employs descriptive and interpretive methods to uncover patterns of naming, social stratification, and identity preservation within the community.

A case study approach is used to focus on selected cemeteries in Tangerang, Banten, where the Cina Benteng community has historically resided (**Figure 1**)^[19]. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of naming conventions, contextual factors influencing cemetery names, and the broader sociocultural dynamics of the community. The study prioritizes qualitative insights into quantitative generalization, ensuring that findings reflect the lived experiences and historical contexts of the community.

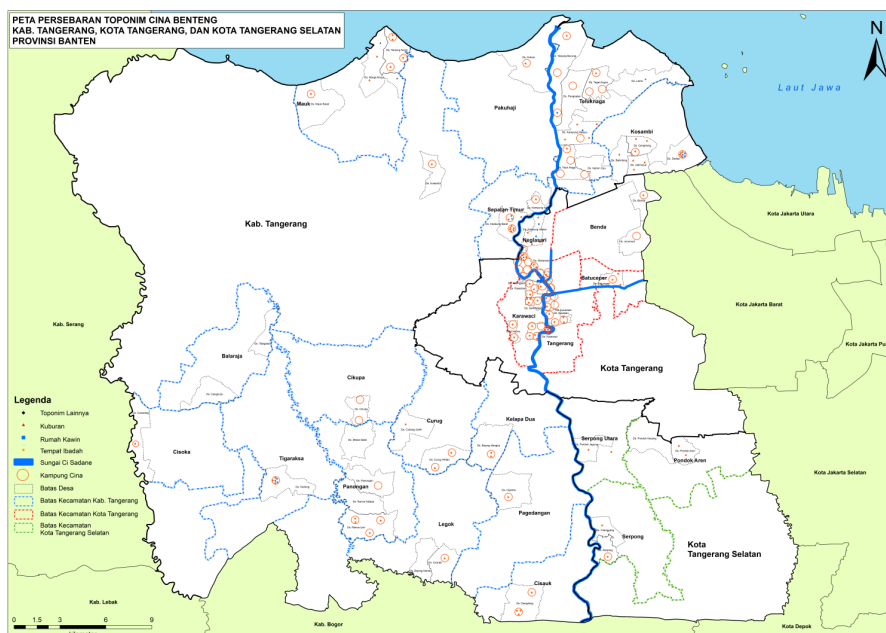


Figure 1. Map of the Distribution of Cina Benteng Settlement in Tangerang, Banten^[19].

2.1. Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in seven cemeteries located in Tangerang, Banten, an area historically associated with the Cina Benteng community, a Chinese-Indonesian ethnic group with deep-rooted cultural traditions. The region was selected due to its historical significance, linguistic diversity, and evolving burial practices, which provide a unique lens for analysing how cemetery names (necronyms) reflect social stratification, cultural identity, and language shifts. The research focused on cemeteries with varying historical and social characteristics, including:

Kuburan Tionghoa Lama (Old Chinese Cemetery) – One of the oldest cemeteries in Tangerang, housing early migrant settlers and reflecting the linguistic continuity of necronyms over time.

Kuburan Keluarga Tan (Tan Family Cemetery) – A private burial ground for a prominent merchant family, representing elite social stratification in naming practices.

Makam Guang Fu (Guangdong-Fujian Cemetery) – A community-based cemetery referencing ancestral migration history from Southern China.

Kuburan Umum Kali Deres (Public Cemetery) – A shared burial site where necronyms are influenced by Indonesianized naming trends, reflecting linguistic assimilation.

Kuburan Kapuk – A geographically named cemetery with mixed burial traditions, showing transitional linguistic patterns in necronyms.

Taman Damai (Peaceful Garden Cemetery) – A modern cemetery reflecting the shift toward emotionally resonant and commercialized burial naming practices.

Kuburan Tanah Air (Homeland Cemetery) – A burial site where necronyms encode diasporic connections, nostalgia, and collective memory.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring diverse perspectives from those with direct knowledge of cemetery management, cultural heritage, and linguistic practices. Community elders shared oral histories regarding traditional naming conventions, while cemetery caretakers provided insights into modern burial naming trends and the increasing use of Indonesianized naming structures. Additionally, historians contributed to contextualizing how social, political, and linguistic forces have shaped the evolution of necronyms over time.

The rich historical and cultural landscape of Tangerang, Banten, with its diasporic Chinese influences, multilingual

interactions (Mandarin, Hokkien, Indonesian), and shifting burial traditions, provided a valuable setting to explore how necronyms function as dynamic linguistic and social artifacts. By focusing on cemeteries as sites of linguistic memory and cultural adaptation, this study uncovers the intricate ways in which language, history, and identity intersect in the Cina Benteng community's naming practices.

2.2. Data Collection

The study employs three primary data sources: (1) cemetery name documentation, (2) semi-structured interviews, and (3) historical and archival records. To analyse the linguistic structures and meanings of necronyms, the study systematically documents cemetery names from selected burial sites in the Cina Benteng community. The selection criteria focus on three key aspects: historical significance, which includes both pre-20th century and post-independence sites; linguistic diversity, examining names that incorporate Mandarin, Hokkien, Bahasa Indonesia, and hybrid forms; and socioeconomic representation, ensuring the study captures cemeteries that serve different social classes within the community. This study also adapted the interview guide research related to toponyms used by Ainiala (2016)^[20]. Apart from that, this study considers referring to the toponym interview guide from BIG as Standard Operating Procedures Part VI Field Equipment Survey. The interview process was executed with the informants using an interview guide consisting of 17 questions.

The methodology involves detailed documentation of each necronym's phonetic, morphological, and semantic properties. The linguistic analysis goes further by examining the presence of loanwords, hybrid constructions, and the influence of tonal patterns from Mandarin or Hokkien languages. This comprehensive dataset serves as the foundation for investigating the categorical, associative, and emotive meanings embedded within these cemetery naming conventions.

The study's contextual understanding is enriched through semi-structured interviews with three key groups: community elders and religious leaders who provide insights into the historical and spiritual significance of burial site names; family members of the deceased who share personal and cultural interpretations of necronyms; and specialists in Chinese-Indonesian communities and toponymy, includ-

ing linguists and historians. These diverse perspectives help build a comprehensive view of how cemetery names function within the community's social and historical framework.

The interviews explore several crucial aspects: the reasoning behind specific cemetery name choices, whether commemorative, symbolic, or lineage-based; the evolution of naming practices over time in response to language shifts and sociopolitical influences; and the deep cultural and emotional meanings that necronyms carry within family and community narratives. All interviews undergo careful recording and transcription, followed by thorough thematic analysis to identify patterns and linguistic choices that characterize necronym discourse. Archival research complements the linguistic and ethnographic findings by examining several key sources: historical maps and colonial records that document cemetery layouts and naming policies, ethnographic studies focusing on Cina Benteng traditions and burial rites, and previous research on cemetery naming practices in Southeast Asian Chinese communities, which provides valuable comparative insights for the study.

2.2.1. Data Analysis

Necronyms are systematically analyzed through three linguistic dimensions: phonology, which examines sound patterns and tonal shifts in Mandarin-Indonesian hybrid names; morphology, which looks at word formation, affixation, and compound structures in names; and semantics, which explores categorical, associative, and emotive meanings embedded within these cemetery names.

The analysis employs Nyström's (2016) presuppositional meaning theory to classify necronyms into three distinct categories^[21]. First, categorical meaning examines how cemetery names classify burial sites based on lineage, economic value, or historical status. Second, associative meaning explores the cultural symbols, legends, or historical references embedded within the names. Third, emotive meaning investigates the emotional resonance of these names, particularly in relation to mourning, remembrance, or fear.

The study employs Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework to examine how power relations are embedded within cemetery naming practices^[22]. At the textual level, this involves a detailed examination of lan-

guage choices in cemetery names, looking specifically for indicators of hierarchy, colonial influence, and social prestige. The discursive analysis focuses on identifying how these cemetery names construct complex narratives of identity, belonging, and exclusion within the community.

At the broader social level, the analysis seeks to understand how these naming practices either reinforce or challenge historical inequalities within the Cina Benteng community. This approach reveals how cemetery names serve not just as simple identifiers, but as powerful tools that reflect and shape social relationships, cultural hierarchies, and community dynamics over time.

The study utilizes sociolinguistic frameworks to examine complex language interactions within necronym formation, specifically focusing on how Mandarin, Indonesian, and Hokkien elements come together in creating cemetery names. This analysis also explores language shifts in naming conventions, carefully documenting the ways traditional Chinese naming patterns either persist or adapt over time within the community. Through this sociolinguistic lens, the research investigates how cemetery names serve as powerful encoders of social identity, revealing intricate class distinctions, preserving migration histories, and reflecting generational changes within the Cina Benteng community. This approach helps illuminate how naming practices both mirror and shape the community's evolving social and cultural landscape.

3. Social Stratification Through Cemetery Naming

Cemetery names in the Cina Benteng community serve as powerful markers of social stratification, distinguishing burial sites based on economic class, lineage, and community status. The study found that naming conventions reinforce historical class divisions, migrant experiences, and ancestral reverence. Through cemetery name documentation, interviews with community members, and historical archival analysis, clear patterns emerged in how burial names function as linguistic indicators of wealth, heritage, and social standing. It is illustrated in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Social Stratification's Category on Cemetery Names.

Category	Characteristics	Implications
Elite Family Cemeteries	Prestigious, honorific names; Includes family names (e.g., Tan Tjoe); Tombstones feature insignias and plaques	Reinforces lineage-based status and economic privilege; Cemetery names as markers of intergenerational wealth
Middle- & Lower-Class Cemeteries	Generic or geographically descriptive names; Reference to natural landmarks (e.g., Kapuk Cemetery, Riverbank Cemetery); Lack of personal identifiers	Emphasizes shared identity over inherited status; Reflects economic constraints and community-based burial traditions
Migrant & Displaced Cemeteries	Collective burial sites; Emphasize community over lineage (e.g., Old Chinese Cemetery, Public Cemetery); Symbolize economic hardships and survival	Highlights migration and settlement struggles; Symbolizes economic exclusion from private burial land

Table 1 illustrates an analysis of cemetery names across seven burial sites in Tangerang revealing three dominant patterns. First, elite families tend to have prestigious and honorific burial names, signifying lineage and economic success. Cemeteries associated with wealthy merchant families or prominent historical figures bear names such as Tan Tjoe, directly linking them to commercial legacy and social status. These burial sites often feature elaborate tombstones, family insignias, and large memorial plaques that reinforce intergenerational prestige. The deliberate use of family names in cemetery naming suggests an enduring effort to maintain social recognition even after death.

In contrast, burial sites designated for middle- and lower-class individuals tend to have more generic or geographically descriptive names. Cemeteries such as Kuburan Kapuk (Kapuk Cemetery) and Pemakaman Kali Deres (Riverbank Cemetery) reference natural or locational features rather than personal identifiers. The absence of family names in these burial sites suggests a communal rather than individual approach to memorialization, reflecting the economic constraints that shaped burial traditions among lower-income groups. These names emphasize shared rather than inherited identity, reinforcing the class-based distinctions that persist in burial practices.

A third pattern emerges in cemeteries historically associated with early Chinese migrant laborers and displaced communities. Burial sites such as Kuburan Tionghoa Lama (Old Chinese Cemetery) and Kuburan Umum (Public Cemetery) reflect the struggles of early settlers who lacked private burial land. These cemeteries serve as historical markers of migration and survival, emphasizing communal rather than familial ownership. The use of names that denote collective

burial sites rather than individual lineage underscores the economic and social hardships faced by these early generations.

Interviews with community elders, cemetery caretakers, and local historians provided further insights into how cemetery names function as symbols of wealth, lineage, and social stratification. Many respondents emphasized that burial naming practices continue to shape community perceptions of status and heritage.

One community elder (78 years old, interviewed in Tangerang, January 2025) explained:

“We always knew which families were the richest in the area based on their cemetery names. The Tan, Ong, and Liem families had their own sections, separate from the commoners.”

This statement highlights how cemetery names serve as enduring markers of elite status, reinforcing intergenerational wealth and prestige. The use of family names in burial sites signals historical privilege, distinguishing prominent families from the broader community.

A cemetery caretaker (54 years old, interviewed in Batuceper, February 2025) shared:

“Many of the poorer Chinese in the past couldn’t afford private burial land. They were buried in shared cemeteries, with names that described the land, not the people.”

This observation underscores how economic limitations shaped burial naming practices. Lower-income families were often buried in cemeteries named after physical features rather than personal lineage, reinforcing social distinctions even in death.

Among younger generations, perceptions of cemetery naming are evolving. A younger community member (32

years old, interviewed in Karawaci, March 2025) noted:

“Many of the new cemeteries don’t use traditional Chinese names anymore. Now, they follow Indonesian naming styles.”

This shift suggests that cemetery naming is becoming increasingly Indonesianized, reflecting broader linguistic and cultural integration. While traditional Chinese naming conventions remain prominent in older cemeteries, modern burial grounds show a tendency toward hybridized or fully Indonesianized names.

The evolution of cemetery naming in Chinese Indone-

sian communities reveals fascinating historical shifts across different eras. During Dutch colonial rule before 1945, wealth and social status played a defining role in burial practices. Colonial archives paint a clear picture: prosperous Chinese merchant families enjoyed special privileges, receiving private burial lands that proudly displayed their patriarchs’ names. Walking through early 19th-century Batavia and Tangerang, one would have immediately noticed the stark contrast between these exclusive family plots and the unnamed common grounds where working-class migrants found their final rest. It is as indicated in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Time Periods of Social Stratification on Cemetery Names.

Period	Characteristics	Implications
Colonial Period (Pre-1945)	Wealthy Chinese families had private burial lands with personalized names; Lower-class migrants buried in public fields with non-distinctive names	Clear social distinctions between elite and commoners; Class-based cemetery sections documented in colonial records
Post-Independence Period (1945–1998)	Government policies encouraged nationalized burial names; Traditional Chinese cemetery names were replaced with Indonesian equivalents	Cemetery naming as part of assimilation policies; Efforts to minimize ethnic distinctions in public records
Modern Period (1998–Present)	Hybrid naming patterns; Revival of Chinese necronyms in private cemeteries; Increased bilingual identity shift	Reclamation of cultural heritage; Increased integration of Mandarin and Indonesian linguistic elements

Table 2 indicates that the winds of change swept through cemetery grounds during Indonesia’s post-independence period, particularly under Suharto’s New Order regime. From 1945 to 1998, government policies pushed for greater national integration, and even the names of the dead were not exempt from this drive for assimilation. State-managed cemeteries saw their traditional Chinese inscriptions gradually replaced with Indonesian equivalents, a transformation carefully documented in period archives. This renaming campaign reflected broader societal pressures that sought to blur ethnic distinctions in public spaces, fundamentally altering how Chinese Indonesian communities commemorated their deceased.

Since the 1998 reforms, cemetery naming has entered a more nuanced phase that mirrors the community’s evolving identity. Modern burial grounds, especially private ones, have witnessed a resurgence of Mandarin-based names alongside Indonesian conventions. Today’s burial records tell a story of cultural revival and adaptation, where families freely choose between Chinese traditions and Indonesian influences, or often blend both. This contemporary approach

suggests that while historical policies left their mark, newer generations within the Cina Benteng community are confidently embracing their dual heritage, creating burial practices that honor both their ancestral roots and their Indonesian identity. Cemetery names in Cina Benteng serve as more than just geographical labels; they function as markers of social identity, economic history, and cultural transition. Traditional naming conventions continue to reinforce historical class divisions, distinguishing elite families from lower-income groups. However, modern shifts indicate a growing trend toward linguistic hybridity and integration, reflecting broader changes in cultural identity and national belonging.

The study highlights how cemetery naming operates as a dynamic cultural practice, shaped by economic structures, state policies, and evolving generational perspectives. While burial names historically reinforced social stratification, contemporary transformations suggest a gradual shift toward more inclusive and adaptive naming practices. These findings underscore the complex interplay between language, identity, and social hierarchy, demonstrating how even in death, naming remains a deeply political and cultural act.

4. Cultural Identity Through Naming Practices

Necronyms in the Cina Benteng community serve as linguistic artifacts that encode cultural identity, preserving connections to Chinese ancestry while integrating Indonesian influences. Cemetery names reflect historical narratives, migration experiences, and religious values, creating a layered identity that bridges both cultures. Findings from cemetery name documentation, interviews with community members, and historical records reveal that necronyms function as markers of belonging, reinforcing collective memory

and identity formation. It is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3 reflects a systematic analysis of over 50 cemetery names across seven burial sites in Tangerang revealed three key patterns that highlight cultural identity preservation. First, many necronyms retain Mandarin phonetic structures, even when transcribed in Bahasa Indonesia or Romanized script. Examples include names such as Tan Siong, Liem Hui, and Ong Tek, which follow Chinese tonal patterns despite being adapted into Indonesian spelling systems. This suggests a deliberate effort to maintain Chinese linguistic heritage, even as spoken Mandarin becomes less prevalent among younger generations.

Table 3. Cultural Identities on Cemetery Names.

Category	Characteristics	Implications
Mandarin Phonetic Retention	Cemetery names retain Mandarin phonetic elements despite being transcribed in Bahasa Indonesia; Examples: Tan Siong, Liem Hui, Ong Tek	Demonstrates a deliberate effort to maintain linguistic heritage despite reduced Mandarin fluency among younger generations
Symbolic References to Confucian and Buddhist Values	Use of words denoting peace (安 - Ān), honour (德 - Dé), and remembrance (怀 - Huái); Integration of Buddhist and Taoist elements such as nature and cosmic balance	Reflects Confucian teachings on filial piety and ancestral respect; Burial naming serves as a spiritual practice
Bilingual Naming Conventions	Combination of Indonesian location markers with Chinese family names; Examples: Kuburan Tan Ciok (Hokkien name + Indonesian place name)	Highlights linguistic negotiation between cultural preservation and national integration; Cemetery naming remains a key identity marker

Second, cemetery names often incorporate symbolic references to Confucian and Buddhist values. Several burial sites include words signifying peace (安 - Ān), honour (德 - Dé), or remembrance (怀 - Huái), reflecting Confucian teachings on filial piety and ancestral respect. Some cemeteries also integrate Buddhist or Taoist elements, such as references to nature, longevity, and cosmic balance (e.g., Kuburan Ang Hui, meaning "Red Remembrance Cemetery," symbolizing grief and reverence). These findings confirm that spiritual philosophy influences cemetery naming, reinforcing the role of necronyms as cultural and religious expressions.

Finally, many cemeteries exhibit bilingual naming conventions, where Indonesian location markers are combined with Chinese family names (e.g., Kuburan Tan Ciok, incorporating a Hokkien name with an Indonesian geographical term). Hybrid naming reflects a linguistic negotiation between cultural preservation and adaptation, mirroring the bilingual nature of the Cina Benteng community. The persistence of Chinese names within an Indonesian linguistic

framework demonstrates how cemetery naming remains a site of identity negotiation across generations. To understand how necronyms function as markers of identity, semi-structured interviews were conducted with community elders, religious leaders, and family members of the deceased. Their insights provide a deeper understanding of how cemetery names contribute to identity preservation.

A 73-year-old community elder (interviewed in Tangerang, January 2025) noted:

"Even if we no longer speak Mandarin fluently, our cemetery names keep our ancestors' identity alive. We may be Indonesian now, but our roots are still in China."

This perspective reflects the strong cultural attachment to ancestral origins, reinforcing the idea that cemetery names serve as linguistic markers of heritage.

A Buddhist temple caretaker (interviewed in Batucapeer, February 2025) explained:

"The words used in cemetery names matter. A name with 'honor' or 'peace' is a sign of respect for the dead. It

shows that the family values harmony and tradition.”

This insight confirms that symbolic naming is not just a linguistic feature but a spiritual practice, deeply rooted in Confucian and Buddhist principles.

A 29-year-old interviewee (interviewed in Karawaci, March 2025) observed:

“My grandfather was buried in a cemetery with a traditional Chinese name, but my father chose an Indonesian-style burial site. It seems like newer generations care less about using Chinese names.”

This generational shift indicates a gradual language transition, where traditional Chinese necronyms are being replaced by Indonesianized burial names, signaling a transformation in cultural identity expression. These interviews confirm that cemetery names are deeply intertwined with emotional, cultural, and generational identity, shaping how the Cina Benteng community perceives itself over time.

Historical records paint a fascinating picture of how cemetery naming evolved within the Chinese Indonesian

community, reflecting deeper shifts in cultural and linguistic identity. Maps and burial records from the Dutch colonial period show that in the 18th and 19th centuries, cemeteries exclusively used Chinese necronyms written in traditional characters. These early burial grounds stood as linguistic islands, preserving pure Chinese naming traditions without any Indonesian translations - a testament to how strongly the early settler community maintained its cultural practices. This is reflected in **Table 4**.

Table 4 indicates the landscape began to change during the colonial and nationalist era of the early to mid-1900s. Government burial maps from the 1950s reveal the first signs of hybridization, as cemetery names started incorporating Indonesian elements alongside Chinese surnames. This transformation wasn't merely linguistic - oral histories from community elders tell us that political pressure during the Suharto years pushed many families to modify their cemetery names to sound more Indonesian, marking a significant shift in how the community presented itself through its burial traditions.

Table 4. Time Periods of Cultural Identities Naming Characteristics.

Period	Characteristics	Implications
Early Settlement Period (18th–19th Century)	Chinese necronyms exclusively used; Names written in Chinese characters without Indonesian translations; Wealthier families had private plots, while lower-class migrants shared burial spaces	Strong community cohesion and linguistic preservation; Emphasized monolingual Chinese identity and ancestral lineage
Colonial and Nationalist Era (1900s–1970s)	Hybridization begins; Indonesian place names incorporated alongside Chinese surnames; Government-led assimilation policies prompted modification of cemetery names	Reflects political and social shifts; Cemetery naming adapted to avoid restrictions on Chinese cultural expressions
Modern Era (1980s–Present)	Revival of Mandarin-based cemetery names in privately owned cemeteries; Public cemeteries continue using Indonesianized naming conventions; Bilingual identity shift	Illustrates ongoing negotiation between heritage preservation and national identity; Younger generations favor Indonesianized naming patterns

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, cemetery naming entered a new phase of cultural revival, particularly in privately owned burial grounds where Mandarin-based names made a comeback. Yet this renaissance wasn't universal - public cemeteries largely maintained Indonesian naming conventions, highlighting how official policies continued to favour national identity over cultural specificity. The modern era has essentially created two parallel naming traditions, each reflecting different aspects of the community's complex identity.

The evolution of these naming practices reveals deeper truths about cultural preservation and adaptation within the Cina Benteng community. While many cemetery names still carry Mandarin phonetic elements and Confucian values of honour and remembrance, they've been skilfully adapted to fit Indonesian spelling patterns. This delicate balance shows how successive generations have managed to preserve their heritage while embracing their Indonesian identity, creating a unique linguistic bridge between past and present. From purely Chinese names to modern hybrid forms, these ceme-

tery names tell the story of a community’s journey through political change, social adaptation, and cultural preservation.

Therefore, cemetery names in the Cina Benteng community function as cultural markers, ensuring that language, identity, and ancestral memory remain embedded in burial traditions across generations. The findings suggest that while linguistic shifts are inevitable, cemetery naming continues to serve as a crucial link between past and present, shaping how the community defines its evolving identity in a multicultural Indonesian context.

5. Phonological Patterns

The linguistic analysis of Cina Benteng cemetery names revealed phonological shifts influenced by Mandarin, Hokkien, and Bahasa Indonesia. Over time, phonetic adaptations, tonal simplifications, and hybrid spellings have shaped how necronyms are pronounced and transcribed within the

community. Findings from cemetery name documentation, semi-structured interviews, and historical records provide a comprehensive understanding of how phonological patterns in necronyms reflect linguistic evolution and cultural adaptation. It is as depicted in Table 5.

Table 5 depicts a systematic phonological analysis of 50 cemetery names across seven burial sites revealing distinct patterns in pronunciation and phonetic modifications. One of the most evident changes is the tonal simplifications due to Indonesian influence. Mandarin is a tonal language, where variations in pitch change the meaning of words. However, Bahasa Indonesia lacks tonal distinctions, leading to the gradual loss of these features in Cina Benteng naming practices. For example, the surname “Liem (林, Lín)” is pronounced with a rising tone in Mandarin but has become a flat-sounding “Liem” in local usage. This tonal loss suggests that as Mandarin usage declined within the community, phonetic adaptations occurred to align with Indonesian pronunciation norms.

Table 5. Phonological Naming Characteristics.

Category	Characteristics	Implications
Tonal Simplification	Loss of tonal distinctions in Mandarin names due to Indonesian influence, e.g., “Liem (林, Lín)” losing its rising tone	Reflects broader linguistic assimilation; Phonetic adaptation to fit local pronunciation norms
Phonetic Adaptation	Aspirated sounds /p ^h / (ph) and /t ^h / (th) in Mandarin replaced with unaspirated /p/ and /t/; e.g., “Thio” becoming “Tio”	Modifications align with Indonesian phonology; Adaptation driven by decreased Mandarin fluency
Hybrid Naming and Spelling Changes	Traditional Chinese names altered through Indonesian spelling conventions, e.g., “Ng” transcribed as “Eng” or “Huang”	Orthographic modifications lead to pronunciation shifts across generations

Another observed pattern is phonetic adaptation, where Chinese syllables are modified to fit the phonological constraints of Bahasa Indonesia. Aspirated sounds such as /p^h/ (ph) and /t^h/ (th) in Mandarin are often replaced with unaspirated counterparts’ /p/ and /t/ in local pronunciation. This is evident in names like “Thio” (张, Zhāng), which is pronounced as “Tio” in Indonesia, illustrating aspiration loss. Additionally, some necronyms exhibit hybrid naming, where Indonesian spelling conventions have altered traditional pronunciations. For instance, the surname “Ng” (黄, Huáng) is often transcribed as “Eng” or “Huang,” reflecting the changing orthographic preferences across generations. These phonetic transformations suggest that while necronyms retain Chinese roots, they have evolved to accommodate local lin-

guistic patterns.

To gain a deeper understanding of phonological adaptations in necronyms, semi-structured interviews were conducted with linguists, cemetery caretakers, and elder community members. Their insights provide ethnographic evidence of how pronunciation changes over time and how different generations perceive these linguistic shifts.

A 65-year-old community elder (interviewed in Tangerang, February 2025) described how tonal variations have gradually disappeared:

“Our names used to have distinct tones, but as we spoke more Indonesian, we lost them. Now, most people don’t pronounce the original tones anymore.”

This statement confirms that tonal simplifications oc-

curred naturally over time as Mandarin usage declined in daily interactions. The adaptation of necronyms to fit Indonesian phonology reflects broader linguistic assimilation trends within the community.

A cemetery caretaker (interviewed in Bataceper, March 2025) shared observations about pronunciation changes among younger generations:

“Many young people mispronounce old names because they use Indonesian phonetics. Even family members don’t say the names the way they were originally spoken.”

This insight highlights the generational shift in pronunciation. As younger members of the Cina Benteng community primarily speak Bahasa Indonesia, they unknowingly modify the phonetics of traditional names to match local speech habits.

A 32-year-old interviewee (interviewed in Karawaci, March 2025) reflected on how naming conventions have changed within his family:

“My grandfather’s name was written as ‘Ng,’ but my uncle changed it to ‘Eng’ because people kept mispronouncing it.”

This example illustrates how orthographic modifications lead to pronunciation shifts, reinforcing the gradual

transformation of necronyms. As necronyms evolve, they reflect both linguistic heritage and contemporary adaptation to dominant language norms.

These interviews confirm that phonetic adaptations in necronyms are shaped by generational language shifts, where pronunciation is influenced by the dominant language of daily communication rather than strict adherence to historical phonological rules.

An analysis of historical records, burial maps, and colonial linguistic documentation provides insight into how phonological patterns in necronyms have evolved over different historical periods. It is as recorded in **Table 6**.

Table 6 records that during the early settlement period, colonial-era burial records from the 1800s show that cemetery names were transcribed using Chinese phonetics, preserving full tonal distinctions and aspirated sounds. Names such as “Tan Kwee” (陈贵, Chén Guì) retained their original pronunciation, reflecting strict adherence to traditional Chinese phonological norms at the time. The presence of Chinese characters in cemetery inscriptions suggests that linguistic continuity was a priority for early migrant communities.

Table 6. The Period of Phonological Naming Characteristics.

Period	Phonological Characteristics	Linguistic Implications
Early Settlement Period (1800s)	Strict adherence to Chinese phonetics in cemetery inscriptions; Full tonal distinctions and aspirated sounds maintained	Linguistic continuity prioritized by early migrant communities
Colonial & post-Independence Era (1900s–1970s)	Introduction of phonetic adaptations; Romanized spellings modify names (e.g., “Goh” becoming “Go”)	Influence of Dutch colonial policies and later Indonesian assimilation efforts
Modern Era (1980s–Present)	Indonesianized phonetic forms become dominant, e.g., “Teo” written as “Tio” or “Tjo”	Reflects generational language shift and hybridization of linguistic identity

During the Dutch colonial and early post-independence periods, phonetic adaptations became more common as cemetery records reveal early modifications of Chinese phonetics into Romanized Indonesian spellings. For example, “Goh” (吴, Wú) began appearing as “Go,” reflecting an early attempt to simplify phonetics for local comprehension. Political pressures for linguistic assimilation, particularly during the Suharto era, further influenced phonological modifications, as many families sought to make their names more

“Indonesian sounding” to avoid discrimination.

In the modern period, recent burial documentation indicates that many necronyms have fully transitioned into Indonesianized phonetic forms. The surname “Teo” (张, Zhāng) is now frequently written as “Tio” or “Tjo,” demonstrating the final stage of phonological adaptation. These pronunciation shifts align with broader linguistic integration, as younger generations increasingly use Indonesian phonetic conventions rather than preserving traditional Chinese pro-

nunciation. While some families continue to honor older phonetic forms, the dominant trend indicates a merging of linguistic identities, where necronyms are reshaped by both historical continuity and contemporary linguistic realities.

Findings from cemetery name documentation, community interviews, and historical records confirm that the phonological features of Cina Benteng necronyms have undergone significant changes over time. The loss of Mandarin tones, the replacement of aspirated sounds with unaspirated equivalents, and the shift toward Indonesianized spelling conventions all indicate a broader linguistic transformation. These changes reflect both natural linguistic evolution and the impact of socio-political factors that have influenced naming conventions in the community. The historical trajectory of phonological adaptation highlights how necronyms serve as both cultural markers and evolving linguistic artifacts. While earlier cemetery names adhered closely to Mandarin phonetics, contemporary necronyms exhibit phonetic hybridization, balancing tradition with modern linguistic practices. This evolution underscores the dynamic nature of language, where historical influences persist even as linguistic identities shift in response to changing societal norms.

As a result, the phonological transformation of Cina

Benteng necronyms illustrates the intersection of heritage and adaptation, where cemetery naming practices continue to function as both a record of linguistic tradition and a reflection of contemporary language usage. As future generations navigate their linguistic identities, necronyms will likely continue to evolve, maintaining their role as cultural and historical touchstones within the Cina Benteng community.

6. Morphological Structures

The morphological analysis of Cina Benteng necronyms reveals that cemetery names predominantly follow a compound noun structure or a possessive construction. These naming patterns reflect the linguistic heritage, social hierarchy, and cultural blending within the community. Findings from cemetery name documentation, semi-structured interviews, and historical records indicate that the morphological structures of necronyms serve as linguistic tools for preserving ancestry, land ownership, and cross-linguistic influences. The persistence of specific morphological patterns highlights the adaptability of Cina Benteng naming conventions while maintaining a connection to traditional Chinese identity. It is categorized as **Table 7**.

Table 7. Morphological Naming Characteristics.

Category	Characteristics	Implications
Compound Noun Structure	Family surname combined with honorific markers (e.g., “Ong Goan,” where “Ong” is the family name, and “Goan” denotes leadership or prestige)	Reinforces lineage-based status and family prestige; Ensures ancestral recognition across generations
Possessive Constructions	Use of possessive markers to indicate clan-based land ownership (e.g., “Kuburan Tan Tjoe” signifying burial land associated with the Tan family)	Embeds historical land ownership into cemetery names; Serves as a record of clan-based burial traditions
Loanwords and Hybrid Forms	Integration of Malay or Javanese morphemes into Chinese cemetery names (e.g., “Kuburan Gunung Mas,” where “Gunung” is a Malay term for mountain)	Demonstrates linguistic adaptation and cultural integration; Reflects the blending of Chinese and local naming practices

Table 7 categorizes detailed morphological analysis of over 50 cemetery names across seven burial sites in Tangerang identified three dominant naming structures that shape necronyms. The first pattern observed is the compound noun structure, in which a family surname is paired with an honorific or leadership marker, signifying status and lineage. An example of this is the name “Ong Goan,” where “Ong” represents the family name, and “Goan” denotes a

leader or elder. This morphological structure reinforces the importance of lineage in Cina Benteng society by ensuring that family names are attached to burial grounds in a way that conveys ancestral prestige.

The second pattern follows possessive constructions, where cemetery names include possessive morphemes that indicate landholding connections within clan-based systems. For example, “Kuburan Tan Tjoe” (Tan Tjoe Cemetery)

demonstrates that the burial site is associated with the Tan family. The use of possessive markers suggests that cemetery names historically functioned as markers of land tenure and social hierarchy. These names often reflect the burial rights of influential families, signifying historical land inheritance and control within the community.

The third pattern involves loanwords and hybrid forms, where Malay or Javanese morphemes are incorporated into cemetery names. This reflects historical linguistic interactions between Chinese settlers and indigenous communities. A notable example is “Kuburan Gunung Mas,” where “Gunung” (mountain) is a Malay term, illustrating linguistic adaptation. These hybrid naming conventions indicate that while Cina Benteng families maintain elements of their Chinese identity, their burial traditions have also absorbed local cultural influences, resulting in a unique blend of linguistic structures.

To further understand how morphological patterns reflect cultural identity and social hierarchy, semi-structured interviews were conducted with community elders, cemetery caretakers, and linguists specializing in Chinese-Indonesian heritage. These interviews provided deeper insights into how morphological structures are perceived and maintained within the community.

A 78-year-old community elder (interviewed in Tangerang, February 2025) described how cemetery names with honorific markers signify social prestige:

“If you see a cemetery with a family name like ‘Ong Goan’ or ‘Tan Tjoe,’ you know that it belongs to an old and important family.”

This response confirms that compound necronyms reinforce family prestige, ensuring that the legacy of influential ancestors is recognized and preserved across generations. The inclusion of leadership markers in cemetery names reinforces the hierarchical structure within Cina Benteng society, where burial grounds are not only places of mourning but also sites of ancestral honor.

A cemetery caretaker (interviewed in Bataceper, March 2025) explained how some burial grounds serve as markers of historical clan ownership:

“Some burial grounds were passed down for generations. The names tell us which families historically owned the land.”

This perspective aligns with the possessive constructions observed in cemetery names. By embedding family ownership into burial site names, Cina Benteng families establish long-term claims to burial lands, maintaining lineage connections through morphological markers. The use of possessive necronyms helps sustain historical continuity, ensuring that land inheritance is documented through naming traditions.

A linguist specializing in Chinese-Indonesian studies (interviewed in Karawaci, March 2025) noted how cemetery names reveal linguistic blending:

“Many cemetery names have been adapted to Indonesian and Javanese linguistic structures. Hybridization in morphology shows how language shift influences identity.”

This observation supports the documented presence of Malay and Javanese loanwords in cemetery names, demonstrating how linguistic contact has shaped burial naming conventions over time. The integration of local languages into cemetery naming practices highlights the evolving nature of Cina Benteng identity, where cultural adaptation does not necessarily mean cultural erasure but rather a reconfiguration of linguistic traditions.

These interviews validate the morphological patterns observed in necronyms, demonstrating that naming structures not only preserve lineage and land ownership but also adapt to linguistic interactions with local cultures.

An examination of historical documents, colonial-era burial maps, and ethnographic records reveals how cemetery naming structures have evolved across different historical periods.

Archival records from the Dutch colonial era (1800s) confirm that early cemeteries were predominantly named using compound noun structures featuring family names. An example of this is “Lim Boon” (林文, Lín Wén) cemetery, where the name follows the Chinese tradition of pairing a surname with a descriptor. This pattern indicates that early Cina Benteng settlers maintained strict adherence to traditional morphological rules in necronyms, using burial naming to reinforce ancestral honor and family cohesion. It is shown in **Table 8**.

Table 8 shows that during the Dutch colonial period and the early post-independence era, possessive construc-

tions began appearing in official state burial records. An example of this is “Kuburan Tan Kongsí,” meaning “The Tan Family’s Burial Ground,” which illustrates how clan-based land ownership became embedded in necronym morphology. Dutch colonial records also document the emer-

gence of hybrid naming, where cemeteries incorporated Malay and Javanese terms alongside traditional Chinese elements. These shifts indicate that as political and social conditions changed, burial naming adapted to reflect new linguistic and cultural influences.

Table 8. The Period of Morphological Naming Characteristics.

Period	Characteristics	Implications
Early Settlement Period (1800s)	Strict use of Chinese morphological naming conventions (e.g., “Lim Boon” following Chinese tradition of surname + descriptor)	Highlights strong adherence to traditional Chinese linguistic structures in early migrant communities
Dutch Colonial & Post-Independence Era	Appearance of possessive constructions in official burial records (e.g., “Kuburan Tan Kongsí” indicating family-based burial ownership)	Indicates the institutionalization of family-based land tenure in cemetery names
Modern Era (1980s–Present)	Shift toward Indonesianized naming conventions, combining Chinese and Indonesian elements (e.g., “Makam Gunung Mas”)	Reflects bilingual identity and increasing adaptation to national linguistic trends

Recent burial records suggest a shift toward Indonesianized morphological structures, where Chinese names are increasingly integrated into Indonesian naming conventions. For instance, “Makam Gunung Mas” (Golden Mountain Cemetery) combines Chinese symbolic meanings (gold, wealth) with Indonesian morphological structures. This trend suggests that contemporary necronyms are moving toward standardized Indonesian naming practices, reflecting broader linguistic integration while still maintaining elements of traditional Chinese identity.

Findings from cemetery name documentation, semi-structured interviews, and historical records confirm that the morphological structures of Cina Benteng necronyms serve multiple purposes, preserving ancestry, reinforcing social hierarchy, and adapting to linguistic contact with local cultures. The compound noun structure remains dominant, highlighting how lineage and family prestige continue to shape burial naming practices. Possessive constructions reflect historical land ownership, embedding clan-based burial traditions into morphological patterns. The presence of loanwords and hybrid forms illustrates how linguistic adaptation allows necronyms to reflect cultural integration while maintaining core elements of Chinese identity.

Historical records confirm a gradual transition from strict Chinese morphological structures to hybrid Indonesian-

ized naming conventions, illustrating a long-term cultural and linguistic adaptation process. Modern cemetery names continue to evolve, reflecting the increasing tendency toward standardized Indonesian naming conventions among younger generations.

Taken together, the morphological structures of cemetery names in the Cina Benteng community function as both linguistic preservation tools and markers of cultural transformation. By maintaining ancestral memory through structured naming conventions, Cina Benteng families ensure that heritage, social status, and historical continuity remain embedded in burial traditions for future generations.

7. Semantic Categories

The semantic analysis of Cina Benteng necronyms reveals distinct patterns that reflect social, cultural, and emotional meanings embedded in cemetery names. Drawing on Nyström’s (2016) presuppositional meaning theory, this study categorizes necronyms into three primary semantic groups: categorical meaning, which classifies cemeteries based on lineage, class, or historical status; associative meaning, which carries cultural or symbolic significance related to prosperity, resilience, or leadership; and emotive meaning, which evokes emotional connections associated with

mourning, remembrance, or ancestral reverence^[21]. These categories function as linguistic markers of identity, heritage, and collective memory, shaping how burial sites are named, perceived, and maintained within the Cina Benteng community. It is reflected in **Table 9**.

From **Table 9**, many cemetery names explicitly reference social class, occupation, or lineage, reinforcing historical divisions within the community. For instance, “Tan Tjoe”

(陈祖, Chén Zǔ) is a cemetery reserved for merchant families, signifying economic class distinction and reinforcing a legacy of business prominence. Similarly, “Kuburan Keluarga Ong” is a clan-based burial site that indicates exclusive use by a single extended family. These naming conventions serve as a linguistic method of social classification, distinguishing elite and merchant-class burial sites from communal cemeteries used by the general population.

Table 9. Semantic Naming Characteristics on Cemetery Names found in Cina Benteng Community in Indonesia.

Category	Semantic Characteristics	Cultural and Social Implications
Categorical Meaning	Cemetery names classify burial sites based on lineage, class, or historical status, e.g., “Tan Tjoe” for merchant families	Reinforces social hierarchy; Distinguishes elite family burial sites from communal cemeteries
Associative Meaning	Names carry cultural or symbolic significance related to prosperity, resilience, or leadership, e.g., “Kuburan Gunung Mas” (Golden Mountain Cemetery)	Embeds philosophical and religious meanings into burial practices; Aligns with beliefs in prosperity and protection
Emotive Meaning	Names evoke emotional connections associated with mourning, remembrance, or ancestral reverence, e.g., “Taman Damai” (Peaceful Garden)	Provides comfort to grieving families; Guides burial choices based on emotional and spiritual considerations

Other cemeteries incorporate symbolic references to prosperity, resilience, and leadership, reflecting community values and historical memory. For example, “Kuburan Gunung Mas” (Golden Mountain Cemetery) utilizes the term “Golden” (Mas) to signify prosperity and spiritual significance, aligning with Chinese cultural beliefs about wealth and fortune. Another example, “Taman Surya” (Garden of the Sun), incorporates cosmic imagery, representing the cycle of life and afterlife beliefs in Chinese spiritual traditions. These necronyms indicate that burial site naming is not only about location or ownership but also about embedding philosophical and religious meanings into the memorialization process.

Certain necronyms emphasize emotional significance, reinforcing the deep connection between the living and the deceased. “Ang Hui” (红悔, Hóng Huǐ) translates to “Red Remembrance”, symbolizing grief, sacrifice, and ancestral respect. Meanwhile, “Taman Damai” (Peaceful Garden) is a contemporary cemetery name that emphasizes serenity and spiritual peace for the deceased. These emotive necronyms guide families in their burial choices, as many prefer cemeteries whose names reflect comfort, tranquility, and respectful remembrance of their loved ones.

To gain insight into how community members interpret

necronyms, semi-structured interviews were conducted with elders, religious leaders, and descendants of those buried in Cina Benteng cemeteries. These interviews helped validate the semantic categories identified in cemetery names, confirming that necronyms function as more than just spatial markers—they encode historical, cultural, and emotional significance.

A 75-year-old community elder (interviewed in Tangerang, February 2025) described how cemetery names were historically tied to social divisions:

“When I was young, we knew which cemeteries were for rich families and which were for the common people. The names made it clear.”

This response highlights how categorical naming functions as a form of social stratification, shaping how burial sites are perceived and maintained over generations. Cemetery names that reference elite family names or merchant status continue to reinforce historical class distinctions within the community.

A Buddhist temple caretaker (interviewed in Batuaceper, March 2025) explained how symbolic references in cemetery names serve a spiritual function:

“Cemeteries are named after symbols of strength and prosperity to bless the souls resting there. It’s a way to keep

good energy.”

This insight confirms that associative naming serves not only a linguistic purpose but also a spiritual and protective one. By embedding concepts of fortune, leadership, and cosmic balance into cemetery names, the Cina Benteng community ensures that burial sites carry auspicious meanings aligned with traditional Chinese beliefs.

Emotional Significance of Cemetery Names

A 40-year-old family member (interviewed in Karawaci, March 2025) shared how emotional considerations influenced their choice of burial site:

“When my father passed, we chose a cemetery with ‘Damai’ (peace) in the name because we wanted his soul to rest well.”

This response illustrates how emotive names play a crucial role in burial decisions, guiding families toward cemeteries that reflect their hopes for their deceased loved ones. Choosing a burial site with a name that conveys serenity, and remembrance provides comfort for grieving families and

aligns spiritual beliefs about the afterlife.

Historical records and colonial-era burial maps provide insight into how cemetery naming conventions have changed over time, reflecting shifts in social structure, cultural values, and linguistic preferences.

Archival burial records from the 1800s indicate that early cemeteries were strictly classified based on social status and occupation. Cemeteries such as “Kuburan Pedagang” (Merchant Cemetery) documented in colonial records suggest that necronyms explicitly identified economic roles, ensuring that burial grounds were segregated based on class distinctions. It is classified from **Table 10**.

The classification from **Table 10** indicates that during the Dutch colonial and early Indonesian independence periods, cemetery names began incorporating more symbolic references rather than rigid class distinctions. Burial sites such as “Taman Harapan” (Garden of Hope), found in mid-20th century records, indicate a shift toward spiritual renewal and optimism, moving away from explicitly hierarchical naming conventions.

Table 10. The Period of Semantic Naming Characteristics.

Period	Semantic Characteristics	Cultural and Social Implications
Early Settlement Period (1800s)	Cemetery names explicitly identified social roles and economic status, e.g., “Kuburan Pedagang” (Merchant Cemetery)	Segregated burial sites by class; Reinforced economic and social divisions
Colonial & post-Independence Era (1900s–1970s)	Shift toward symbolic naming rather than rigid class distinctions, e.g., “Taman Harapan” (Garden of Hope)	Cemetery names reflect optimism, renewal, and cultural integration efforts
Modern Era (1980s–Present)	Adoption of commercialized and comforting names, e.g., “Sanctuary Park,” “Taman Damai”	Cemetery names emphasize peace, remembrance, and emotional appeal rather than historical or social classifications

In recent decades, many cemeteries have adopted emotive and commercialized names to align with modern burial preferences. Examples such as “Sanctuary Park” and “Taman Damai” (Peaceful Garden), found in private cemetery advertisements, illustrate a trend toward comforting and marketable burial names that appeal to contemporary sensibilities. This evolution reflects broader cultural shifts, where cemetery names are increasingly chosen for their emotional and spiritual appeal rather than their historical or social classifications.

The careful documentation of cemetery names in the Cina Benteng community reveals layers of meaning that go far beyond simple identification. Through interviews and

historical research, we can see how these names work on multiple levels: they maintain social hierarchies by distinguishing elite family plots from public burial grounds, embed cultural philosophies about prosperity and protection, and provide emotional comfort to grieving families. The names aren’t just labels - they’re carefully chosen phrases that carry auspicious meanings and spiritual significance, helping families process their loss while maintaining connections to their heritage.

Over time, these naming patterns have evolved to reflect changing social values and linguistic preferences. Historical records show a gradual shift away from rigid class-based naming toward more emotionally resonant choices,

particularly in modern cemeteries where names increasingly emphasize peace, remembrance, and spiritual tranquility. Yet even as naming conventions adapt to contemporary tastes and commercial influences, they continue to serve as powerful cultural artifacts that preserve the community's historical memory and reverence for the dead. Through these carefully chosen names, the Cina Benteng community maintains its connection to the past while embracing new ways of honoring their departed loved ones.

8. Discussion

This study has examined the linguistic, sociocultural, and historical dimensions of cemetery naming in the Cina Benteng community, demonstrating that necronyms function as linguistic artifacts that preserve historical narratives, reinforce social stratification, and reflect shifting cultural and linguistic identities. The findings align with previous research on linguistic relativity^[23], critical discourse analysis^[22], and sociolinguistic perspectives on naming practices^[24, 25], highlighting how cemetery names serve as more than mere designations of burial spaces but as markers of identity and community history.

The study confirms that cemetery names reinforce social stratification, particularly through categorical naming patterns that distinguish elite family burial sites from communal or lower-class burial grounds. As observed in previous studies on place-naming and social hierarchy^[3, 21], necronyms encode economic and social distinctions, with elite cemeteries incorporating surnames or honorific markers (e.g., *Tan Tjoe*) to signal familial prestige, while lower-income burial sites adopt more generic, geographically descriptive names (e.g., *Kuburan Kali Deres*). This naming pattern mirrors broader linguistic trends where onomastic choices reflect socio-economic divisions, reinforcing linguistic relativity in naming traditions^[26].

Clan-based cemetery names further illustrate how burial sites historically functioned as extensions of family land ownership. The presence of possessive markers in names like *Kuburan Keluarga Ong* or *Makam Lim Eng* indicates that these burial grounds were historically inherited within extended kinship networks. These findings support earlier research on toponymic inheritance and kinship-based land tenure in diaspora communities^[10, 27, 28]. However, as

commercial burial management becomes more dominant, the traditional system of family-controlled burial sites is gradually being replaced by public and commercialized cemeteries, leading to the decline of clan-based naming conventions^[8].

Associative meanings in cemetery names highlight how burial sites encode migration narratives and resilience. Many necronyms reference ancestral origins in China, such as *Kuburan Hokkien* or *Makam Guang Fu*, reinforcing the diasporic memory of early settlers^[29]. This pattern aligns with previous studies on cemetery naming in diaspora communities, where place-based necronyms act as linguistic records of migration^[14]. Additionally, names that emphasize survival and adaptation, such as *Makam Harapan* (Cemetery of Hope), reflect the aspirations of migrant families striving for socio-economic stability. These findings echo previous research on necronymic narratives of endurance and belonging in migrant communities^[7, 13].

Beyond their role in encoding migration history, cemetery names serve as markers of cultural and religious identity. Necronyms that incorporate words denoting peace, unity, or protection (*Taman Damai*, *Kuburan Sejahtera*) illustrate how cemetery names function as spiritual artifacts, embedding Confucian and Buddhist values related to the afterlife. These findings support previous research on naming as a medium of religious and spiritual expression^[30, 31], reinforcing the sacred significance of burial spaces in the cultural landscape. The presence of these religiously and emotionally resonant names suggests that cemetery naming remains intertwined with spiritual beliefs, even as broader linguistic shifts occur.

Interviews with community members revealed generational differences in the perception of cemetery names, further supporting previous research on language shift and generational identity change^[16, 25]. Older generations view necronyms as sacred cultural symbols, emphasizing their role in ancestral veneration and heritage preservation. However, younger community members increasingly see these names as historical markers rather than active identity symbols, suggesting a declining personal attachment to traditional burial naming practices. This generational shift mirrors broader sociolinguistic trends where heritage languages and naming conventions gradually integrate into dominant linguistic structures^[8, 21].

Historical records further confirm the evolution of cemetery naming practices. During the early settlement

period, cemetery names followed strictly Mandarin phonetic and morphological structures, reinforcing the strong cultural presence of early Chinese settlers. However, post-independence burial records indicate a shift toward hybridized naming, reflecting the linguistic and socio-political pressures of national integration^[32]. These changes align with previous studies on naming policies and cultural assimilation in postcolonial Indonesia^[3, 27, 28]. The introduction of Indonesianized naming conventions in the mid-to-late 20th century suggests that cemetery naming, like other linguistic practices, was influenced by state policies promoting national identity over ethnic distinction.

In the contemporary period, cemetery naming has become increasingly commercialized, with private burial sites adopting market-driven naming conventions. Unlike traditional necronyms that emphasize lineage, migration history, or religious significance, modern cemeteries prioritize emotionally comforting and globally recognizable terms, such as *Sanctuary Park* or *Eternal Rest Garden*. These findings echo previous research on the commercialization of cemetery spaces and the neutralization of ethnically specific burial naming^[7, 10]. This trend suggests that economic and commercial considerations are playing an increasing role in shaping contemporary naming practices, gradually replacing traditional, culturally specific cemetery names with more generic, universally appealing alternatives.

Despite these linguistic and generational shifts, cemetery names continue to serve as important markers of identity within the Cina Benteng community. The persistence of Chinese-derived names in older cemeteries illustrates the resilience of cultural heritage, even as external influences encourage linguistic adaptation. While some traditional necronyms are being replaced by Indonesianized or hybrid structures, the act of cemetery naming remains an essential practice for maintaining historical continuity^[26, 29]. This reflects a broader tension between cultural preservation and linguistic assimilation, where naming traditions evolve while still retaining elements of their historical and social significance.

These findings align with previous research on language shift and identity negotiation in diaspora communities, reinforcing the idea that naming practices are dynamic and subject to social, political, and economic influences^[25, 27, 28]. Cemetery names, like other forms of linguistic heritage,

evolve over time, reflecting changing societal norms, government policies, and community preferences. The transition from strictly Chinese cemetery names to hybrid or fully Indonesian structures is a testament to the ongoing negotiation between heritage retention and adaptation within the Cina Benteng community.

Looking ahead, the future of cemetery naming in the Cina Benteng community will likely continue shifting toward Indonesianized and commercialized naming conventions. However, efforts to revitalize Chinese cultural heritage may contribute to the preservation of traditional necronyms in privately managed burial grounds. The extent to which future generations maintain or modify naming traditions will depend on broader sociopolitical dynamics and community engagement in linguistic heritage preservation^[16].

In conclusion, cemetery naming in the Cina Benteng community reflects a complex interplay between tradition, adaptation, and identity formation. While historical necronyms serve as markers of migration, social stratification, and collective memory, modern linguistic and generational shifts are reshaping how these names are perceived and maintained. Despite these changes, cemetery names remain deeply embedded in the cultural and historical landscape, ensuring that ancestral narratives and linguistic heritage continue to be preserved for future generations.

9. Conclusions

This study highlights the multifaced role of cemetery naming practice within the Cina Benteng community, revealing them as powerful linguistic, social, and historical tools. Cemetery names not only distinguish burial sites but also serve as markers of migration history, social hierarchy, and cultural identity. Wealthier families historically secured personalized cemetery names that included surnames and honorifics, reinforcing their elite status, while generic names characterized communal or lower-class cemeteries. These distinctions mirror broader sociolinguistic patterns where naming signifies power and status. Furthermore, references to Chinese regional origins and themes of resilience in cemetery names reflect the community's historical journey of migration, adaptation, and survival, reinforcing a connection to ancestral homelands and cultural memory.

Over time, cemetery naming practices have shifted due

to generational language change, sociopolitical influences, and commercialization. Younger generations increasingly view cemetery names as historical rather than active cultural markers, often favoring Indonesian or hybrid names over traditional Chinese necronyms. National assimilation policies and modern market trends have led to more universalized and emotionally neutral naming conventions, contrasting with traditional names rooted in lineage, spirituality, and heritage. Nevertheless, cemetery names remain crucial to preserving community' cultural identity. While contemporary pressures may erode some traditional practices, efforts to revive Chinese heritage suggest a continued, albeit evolving, significance of cemetery names as symbols of memory, identity, and continuity in the Cina Benteng diaspora.

Author Contributions

Writing—original draft preparation, S.A.K. (introduction, social stratification, conclusion), D.M.A.T. (method, cultural identity), R.M.P.S. (phonological patterns, abstract), J.H. (morphological structures) and S.B. (semantic categories). All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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