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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL
NAMES

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Reports by Governments on the Progress Made in the
Standardization of Geographical Names

Submitted by the Government of the
Republic of China

Foreword

The Chinese language has an unique nature of writing systems, it is not in alphabetical system but rather in individual characters, Each character consists of three elements: (1) writing form; (2) correct reading; and (3) meaning.

Since there is only one official language in China, there is no problem in writing form. In 1928, the Government published a phonetic system known as National Phonetic Letters and teach it at the primary school level in an effort to improve the spoken language of whole China.

Although China has a long history, but the writing form of the geographical names at present time has been practically the same as it was in ancient times. All important geographical names were shown on the published maps or in the local geographical reports, such as Hsien (county) and province geographical monographies. The

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problems that we have most frequently encountered are as follows:

1. The same character with different tones, for in Chinese, each character has four tones, namely 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th tone. For example, 長 (chang) in 長子 (changtzu) and 長 (Ch'ang) in 長江 (ch'ang, the Yang-tze River);

2. Abbreviations, as Shang-hai abbreviation is Hu and Canton Province is Yueh;

3. Names of public usage: For instance, Wu Hsien in Chiang-su Province and Taipei Hsien in Taiwan Province, they are official geographical names, but Soo-chow and Pan-chaio are of the local usage. In most cases, names of local or public usage would take precedence over names in official documents. It has been found that local residents resist to use the name that is different from that in local use.

The Project:

In view of the fact that there is lack of systematic method in the treatment of geographical names, the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of China established a Research Committee for Map Standardization in 1959. As the result of the meetings held by the Group of Experts, an agreement on a workable outline was reached as follows:

- a. Collecting information concerning geographical names to have correct reading and spelling;
- b. Determination of the extent of physical features to which names could be properly applied;
- c. To work out a standard procedure in defining geographical entities;
- d. Treatment of existing names from unwritten languages or from minority languages or from dialects and regional forms of principal language;
- e. Determination of the names of all entities so that abbreviations are unambiguous;
- f. To provide such useful information on names as gender, position of stress and pronunciation;

g. Establishing an authoritative agency for treatment of geographical names and making decision for name policy;

h. To bring about both local and international acceptance of nationally standardized names;

In the mean time, the Committee being awared of the problems that will not be accomplished in a short period of time, has laid out a three-year long range program in an effort to designate all the basic geographical entities of China at an earliest date. The priority is set up as follows:

a. 1st priority is to be given to Taiwan. The information to be used will be 1 : 25,000 and 1 : 50,000 scale topographic maps of Taiwan. It is estimated that there are 10,000 basic entities;

b. 2nd priority is to be given to the area from southeast coast area up to northeast of Manchuria and inner provinces. Based on the 1 : 1,000,000 scale maps of China, the total entities will be amounted to 110,000;

c. 3rd priority is ^{to} be given to the peripheral area which includes Mongolia, Tibet, Hsin-an, Liao-pei, Jeh-ho, Cha-har, Shiu-yuan, Nin-hsia, Tshin-hai. Si-kan Provinces. The source materials to be used are 1 : 1,000,000 scale maps of China. The total number of basic entities is estimated at 10,000 entries.

In preparation, the card system will be used. The information containing in the card will be Chinese geographical names, English transcription, geographical coordinates, the extent of physical features, populations, historical evidence, abbreviations of the geographical names and alternate names. If better methods come out of the forthcoming UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the Chinese delegation will take consideration to adopt them to improve our own system.

As far as the transcription of geographical names is concerned, there will be only in English at present. The existing romanization system is "Key to Wade-Giles Romanization of Chinese Characters" revised jointly by Chinese Topographic Service and Mr. Shaperd and Mr. Anming A. Fu of United States Army Map Service in 1961.

The standardization of geographical names will be checked by the Group of Experts of the Research Committee for Map Standardization of the Ministry of Interior in accordance with UN 21 Recommendations of the Conference of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names held from 20 June to 1 July 1960.

Achievement:

- a. In 1961, a Geographical Gazetteer of Taiwan was published;
- b. Geographical name card of five provinces along the south-east coast area of China Mainland was accomplished;
- c. In 1967, Key to Wade-Giles Romanization of Chinese Characters was published.

Wishes and Recommendations:

1. It is our intention that a Chinese name-standardization agency be set up under the assistance of United Nations;
2. We agree that the United Nations establish an International Committee on geographical names responsible for collection and publication of the information concerning the geographical names of the member countries;
3. It is recommended that English be designated as the only language for international transliteration, or transcription.