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TECHNICAL EXPLANATIONS ON SPELLING IN
THE "ATLAS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA"
IN THE CHINESE PHONETIC ALPHABET

(Paper submitted by China).

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(Submitted by China Division)

The "Atlas of the People's Republic of China" in the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet (Pinyin) is the first such atlas published in our country. Its publication provided necessary materials of place names for the adoption of the "Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet" as the standard in romanizing Chinese geographical names.

The Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet (1958) is the official Chinese spelling scheme using the Roman alphabet. It summarizes the long experience in creating Chinese phonetic schemes in the history of our country. There is an extensive mass basis for adopting the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet (Pinyin) as the international standard for the romanization of Chinese geographical names.

In the last twenty years, many toponymists and experts in geographical names at home and abroad have devoted themselves to the study and experiment on spelling Chinese geographical names with Pinyin, contributing to the uniform romanization of Chinese geographical names.

Since 1958, Pinyin has been in use in spelling Chinese place names by the post, telegraph and transportation departments. The recording of Chinese minority place names with Pinyin has been conducted by the surveying departments.

Since 1961, Pinyin has been used in spelling Chinese geographical names in maps and atlases published by more than ten countries in Europe and America.

In 1974, the "Rules for Spelling Chinese Place Names with Pinyin" were drawn up jointly by the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language and the National Bureau of Surveying and Cartography; the Cartographic Publishing House for the first time compiled and published an 1:6000000 "Map of China" in Pinyin together with a names index, which was well received by readers at home and abroad.

After the publication of the 1:6000000 map in Pinyin, we made further research in some technical questions of importance unsolved in this map and revised the "Rules for the Transliteration of Minority Place Names with Pinyin (draft)". On this basis, we began the work on the compilation and publication of the "Atlas of the People's Republic of China" in Pinyin.

In this atlas, Chinese geographical names are spelt according to the "Rules for spelling Chinese Place Names with Pinyin". We took over the main technical rules applied to the 1:6000000 map and assimilated the results of investigation and research gained after the publication of the map. These results are embodied in the 51 sheets of maps in the atlas and the index of 18000 entries of place names.

This atlas was published in Beijing in Feb. 1977. At the third United Nations conference on the standardization of geographical names held in Athens in Aug. of the same year, the Chinese delegation distributed copies of the atlas.

Now we would like to make some technical explanations on the spelling of the Chinese Han and minority geographical names.

1. Han Geographical Names

The Han characters are ideographs. The connection between characters and spelling is the pronunciation of the characters. The multi-readings of place names are caused mainly by the difference between dialectic pronunciations ~~and~~ the multi-readings of Han characters themselves.

The "Rules for Spelling Chinese Geographical Names with Pinyin" regulates that Han geographical names are spelt according to the Common Speech pronunciation. This regulation eliminates the possibility of multi-readings resulting from the difference between dialectic pronunciations of the Han language.

The multi-readings of Han characters themselves refers to two or more pronunciations of the same Han character, due to its different meanings and other reasons, and allowed by the Common Speech. For examples, the character 行 has two pronunciations, "xíng" and "háng"; 洛 has three pronunciations, luò, lǎo and là. Such characters are called multi-pronunciation characters.

As has proved by practice, the key to the determination of the pronunciation of a Han place name lies in choosing the right pronunciation of the multi-pronunciation character involved in each case, and secondly in correctly pronouncing rare characters (which do not appear in ordinary dictionaries). The main methods we have used in choosing the right pronunciation of the multi-pronunciation characters in place names are as follows:

1. choose pronunciation according to meaning: to determine the pronunciation in accordance with the meaning of a multi-pronunciation character in the context of the place name;

2. judge pronunciation by geographical factors: to determine the pronunciation of a multi-pronunciation character in a place name by reference to regional accent or to the historical changes of the place name; place name involving

3. determine pronunciation through investigation: when the two previous methods fail, learn the local pronunciation of a multi-pronunciation characters through the channel of local authorities (for example, the county revolutionary committee), and then determine the pronunciation in the Common Speech accordingly;

4. in the same area, after analysis, research or sampling, one pronunciation is decided on for each multi-pronunciation character which is frequently found in place names ←

5. when oral pronunciation is different from the pronunciation of the written character, the latter prevails.

In order to maintain the relative stability of the pronunciation of place names, the multi-reading characters whose pronunciations have been determined in the past are taken over in principle without determining their pronunciations once more. The reference works for determining pronunciation in the past mainly consist of "the First Draft of the General Glossary of Variable-reading Characters in the Common Speech by Three Determinations(1962)", "Xinhua Dictionary(revised edition, 1971)", the Cihai(Lexicographical Encyclopaedia, 1965 draft), and the name list of post and telegraph offices in Pinyin.

The problem of pronunciation of rare characters in place names is generally solved by consulting old lexicographical works(Kangxi Dictionary, as an example) or making local investigations.

In addition to the question of pronunciation, there are questions concerning forms of writing which need to be solved in spelling Han place names with Pinyin.

The "Rules for Spelling Chinese Place Names with Pinyin" regulates that in writing Han place names, proper nouns and common nouns are written separately, but in the case of the names of towns and villages, all the syllables are run together. The modifying adjectives are generally treated as part of the proper nouns or common, as the case may be. The first letter of a place name and that of each of its separate parts are capitalized.

In addition, the apostrophe is used for separation where a syllable preceded by a, o, e immediately follows another syllable. Thus Xi'an and Tian'e.

The separation of proper nouns from common nouns in writing is beneficial for showing the characteristics geographic of the entities so that a distinction can be made between the names of towns and villages and those of ~~natural~~ natural entities which would otherwise be the same in written form. The separation of proper from common nouns also facilitates interchange of place names between different languages.

There is a great variety of common nouns in Han place names as a result of China's vast territory and the geographical difference in natural conditions and Han vocabulary. The common nouns selected to be used in the "Atlas of the People's Republic of China" amount to 86. In actual life, more common nouns are used. The adoption of effective methods to reduce rationally the number of common nouns is necessary for the reading and application of Han place names.

Some common nouns are prevalent in the whole country and some only in part of our country. In the Atlas in Pinyin, we confined the common nouns in Han place names to those which are nationally prevalent. Those used only in a part of our country are assimilated into the proper nouns so long as this does not alter the meaning of the place names. 孟良崗 Menglianggu, a mountain name in Shandong province is just one example.

In practical work, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether a common noun is prevalent or not. In addition, whether tone marks or other methods should be used to differentiate characters of identical sounds remains a problem, such as 区 qū(district) and 渠 qú(channel), 角 jiǎo(cape) and 礁 jiāo(shaol). The solution of these problems depends on the cooperation and efforts of surveyors, geographers, historians and linguists.

2. Minority Place Names

China is a unitary, multi-racial socialist country. In addition to the Han nationality, more than fifty minority nationalities live in our country. Except for the Hui, Man and She nationalities who use the Han language, all other minority nationalities have their own languages, some with their own scripts.

In spelling minority nationality place names with Pinyin, two alternative methods may be applied. One is indirect transliteration, i.e., that of the transcribed Han characters, and the other is direct transliteration. The former method is quite easy, since most place names have already been transcribed into Chinese characters, which can be spelled out by whoever has grasped Pinyin. However, the Han characters, being a limited number of monosyllabic sounds, are unable to represent accurately many minority sounds which are absent in the Han language. Furthermore, the (translations Han) have not been standardized, and it often happens that one minority place name has several Han translations. So if transliteration is made of the Han characters, there will still be confusion in the spelling of minority place names. The method of direct transliteration, based on the minority nationality written languages, is far superior to the first method in representing sound.

The method of direct transliteration with Pinyin is used in China, but for the present it is only applied to Mongolian, Uygur and Tibetan place names. The letters used are limited to those of the Pinyin alphabet. Syllabication is free from the restrictions of the Han language pattern. Where a minority language has adopted the Roman script, such as the Uygur language, transliteration is based on its own written forms. Where a minority language uses a non-Roman script, we spell its place names according to the pronunciation prevalent in vast areas. For example, the transliteration of Mongolian place names is made from the customary pronunciation based on their written forms and the Bairin Right Banner pronunciation. The Tibetan language has three main dialectic branches: Lhasa, Amdo and Dêgê, and its standard pronunciation has not yet been determined; for the time being the transliteration of Tibetan place names is made from the pronunciation used in the Tibetan broadcasts of the Central People's Broadcasting Station.

In spelling minority place names, common nouns and modifying adjectives are usually also transliterated. As for those habitually translated or rendered both in sound and in meaning, we treat them generally as is habitually done in the case of Han place names, i.e., where the meaning is translated into Han characters, we transliterate the Han characters; where the sound is rendered, transliteration is done directly from the pronunciation in the minority language.

The above-mentioned are explanations of some technical questions involved in the spelling of the place names of the Han and minority languages appearing in the "Atlas of the People's Republic of China" in Pinyin. There are no doubts shortcomings in our work. It is necessary to make further research and summarize experience so that it may be improved.

We hope that the publication of the "Atlas of the People's Republic of China" in the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet will help realize the uniform romanization of Chinese geographical names and strengthen international friendship and cooperation.