

THE ROMANIZATION OF CHINESE GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Zong Shiyang
Deputy Director
Research Institute of
Surveying & Mapping
People's Republic of China

The Chinese phonetic alphabet (Pinyin) was adopted as the international system for the romanization of Chinese geographical names (resolution No. 8) at the third UN conference on the standardization of geographical names held in 1977 in Athens. The implementation of the resolution is under way smoothly. Now I would like to do an analysis of the technical basis for the reference of personnel concerned.

1. The International Standardization of Geographical Names

Every geographical name has its pronunciation, written form and meaning. It is mainly through the written language that geographical names are quoted in the international affairs. Every country has its own script to write its geographical names. It is difficult not only in printing but also in recognition to adopt all geographical names in original. The roman alphabet is popular in the international community. However, it is pronounced differently in different languages. The written forms of geographical names can be unified if the nationally romanized spellings are accepted as the international standard. In case consideration can not be given to both pronunciation and writing, the only international solution is to prefer writing to pronunciation. General speakers do not care about the meaning of geographical names with the exception of geographical generics. Therefore the international standardization of geographical names lies in the single romanization in written forms.

The concrete principles for the single romanization may be summarized as follows:

- a. Where countries use the roman alphabet as their official scripts, the official spelling of their geographical names should be accepted as the international standard;
- b. Where countries use the non-roman alphabet, but have official or prevalent romanization systems, these romanization systems should be accepted as the international standard for their geographical names;
- c. In non-roman countries where exists neither an official romanization nor a prevalent one, the spelling of their geographical names to be adopted

international organization through consultation.

d. As for the names of regions and geographical features beyond national jurisdiction, the spelling should be decided upon by international organization through consultation.

The People's Republic of China promulgated in 1958 "The Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet" (known as Pinyin and hereinafter referred to as Pinyin system) with the approval of the National People's Congress. It is China's official phonetic system. Its use in spelling Chinese geographical names is compatible with the single romanization. It was expounded by Chinese representatives respectively at the sixth session of the UNGEGN in 1975 and the third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Athens in 1977, and was adopted at the latter conference.

2. The Romanization of Chinese Geographical Names in Han Language

Before the Pinyin system was officially adopted and promulgated, China had no standard for the romanization of its geographical names. For Han language, it took over mainly the Wade system (with diacritical marks dropped). But different spellings existed in different languages. For example, 北京 was spelt as Peking, Pékin, Pekin, Pekino and Pequin, and 上海 was spelt as Shanghai, Changhai, Schanghai, etc. Furthermore, even in one language existed different spellings for a geographical name. For instance, in German, 重庆 was spelt as Tschongking, Schun-king and Chungking. Owing to the defect in the designing of system or its improper use, quite a number of geographical names with different pronunciation were spelt as the same. For example, 唐山 in Hebei province and 石塘山 in Jiangsu province were spelt all the same as Tangshan, 漳州 in Fujian province and 常州 in Jiangsu province were spelt as Changchou, thus causing unnecessary confusion.

The Pinyin system was drawn up after the summation by China's linguists of the experiences and lessons in continuous propositions and experiments over the past 60 years, and through repeated discussions and revisions. The propositions and experiments by China's linguists during that period had come into being under the influence of Sino-Western cultural exchange over the past three centuries. Each of the previous romanization systems for Chinese (Han) characters went its way and could not overcome the limitation of that age. Now taking the Wade system for example. It is scientific in phonetic analysis and had played a certain role in the past. It can not, however, convey the actual pronunciation

of Chinese characters as far as the fact is concerned that it uses the same letter with or without a diacritical mark (for example, p', p, t', t, k', k) to differentiate two phonemes differing only in aspiration and unaspiration in Chinese language. The diacritical marks are likely to be dropped either carelessly or purposely when used, heaping confusion on one-sixth of the total number of syllables in the common speech of Chinese language. The phonological opposition in Chinese language is represented in the main by whether it is aspirated or not. The Pinyin system uses p, t, k for aspirated consonants and b, d, g for unaspirated ones. By so doing, the above mentioned four names can be spelt as Tangshan, Dangshan, Zhangzhou and Changzhou respectively.

Some people are afraid that once the Wade system which has been used for more than one century is abolished, the international community will meet with difficulties in communications. In fact, before the 60s, the Chinese Postal system* or old post names were mainly used in the atlases published by USA and UK. For example, in the mid-century edition published in 1954 of the Times Atlas of the World which is well-known and influential, the forms of Chinese (Han) geographical names on its plates of China are mainly under the Postal system formulated in 1906 by the Joint Commission of the Imperial Post and the Imperial Telegrams or the then prevalent spellings. The following statistics shows the ratio of the Chinese geographical names spelt respectively under the two different systems found in that atlas.

Classification	Example	Number	%
A. Identical both in the Postal system and the Wade system			
a. the names in the atlas and the post names being the same	Changshu (樟树)	350	11.7
b. the names in the atlas being under both system, but no existence of such post office	Dabashan (大巴山)	32	1.6
B. Different in two systems			
c. the names in the atlas being under the Postal system or taking over the post names	Ankwo (安国)	1134	57.3

* The Postal system is one of the romanizations of Chinese language whose distinction from the Wade system lies in the facts: (1) the Wade system adopts an aspirate mark whereas the Postal system does not use this mark; (2) the initials ch, hs and u in diphthong finals used in the Wade system are superseded by k or ts, h and w respectively in the Postal system.

Not all the names of old post offices are under the Postal system. The names of old post offices in province Guangdong and part of provinces Fujian and Guangxi were spelt from dialectic sound. In addition, some post names continued to use the prevalent spellings in the western language at that time.

d. the names in the atlas being under the Postal system, but no existence of such post offices	Tahing (大兴)	125	6.3
e. the post names and the names in the atlas being respectively under the Wade system and the Postal system	Ningshia(post) (宁夏) Ningshia (atlas)	4	0.2
f. both the post names and the names in the atlas being under the Wade system	Anchi (安吉)	36	1.8
g. the names in the atlas being under the Wade system, but no existence of such post offices	Chiaonan (胶南)	24	1.2
h. the names in the atlas and the post names being respectively under the Wade system and the Postal system	Fowshan(post) (浮山) Foushan(atlas)	15	0.7
i. the post names being hybrids of the two systems, taken over in the atlas .	Chinchow (锦州)	7	0.4
C. Irregularity in the post names			
j. the post names being spelt from dialectic sound, taken over in the atlas .,	Kongmoon (江门)	84	4.2
k. the post names being mis-spelt, taken over in the atlas	Yushih (尉氏)	76	3.8
D. Others		96	4.8
		Total 1980 100	

In the statistics, the spelling of the post names are based upon the English edition of the List of Post Offices published in 1932 by the Chinese Post and Telegram Administration. It is 26 years earlier than the publication of the Times Atlas of the World. During the 17-year period from 1932 to the founding of New China, a number of post names under the Postal system came perhaps into being, but only a few of them were adopted in the atlas. It is obvious that China did not announce new post names still in the Postal system during the period from 1949 to 1958 when the atlas under question was published. So the comparison can be made though the date in the statistics are not the same.

From part one of the statistics, i.e., identical in the Postal and Wade system, we are at a loss as to which system is adopted in this atlas. But from part two, i.e., different in two systems, we can readily draw a conclusion from the sections c, d, e and i that Chinese (Han) geographical names in the atlas are in favour of the Postal system. The entries of such names are 1720, while the entries of the names referred to in the sections f, g and h spelt in accordance with the Wade system are only 72. Their ratio is 18:1.

Just as part one of the statistics, part three, i.e., irregularity in the

post names, can not make clear that whether the editor of the atlas is inclined to the Postal system or to the Wade system when spelling Chinese geographical names. It is, however, certain that Chinese post and telegram service would exert its influence abroad so long as it uses the spellings of its own. Therefore if the names in this part could be put on the side of the Postal system in its contention with the Wade system, their ratio would be 20:1.

The above statistics and analysis indicate that the spellings of Chinese (Han) geographical names in the Times Atlas of the World, 1958 edition, are in favour of the Postal system or post names, but not the Wade system. In addition, the majority of Chinese geographical names in the Times Gazetteer published in London, 1965, containing 345,000 entries of geographical names, are also mainly in the Postal system or post names. The reason can be traced back to the principles on designing the Atlas of the Chinese Empire by the China Inland Mission, London 1908. The following is quoted from the preface to the atlas: "The romanization as now settled will not satisfy sinologues, but it is designed to provide a settled form for the use of correspondents writing or telegraphing to places in the interior, with the certainty that, in copying faithfully a post-mark or letter-head, their communication will reach the place indicated, and will not be sent elsewhere". It should be noted that the postal and telegraphic departments in China abrogated the Postal system or the old post names in 1958 and since then have adopted the Pinyin system for the romanization of the names of post offices.

It is worth meditating that before the Map of the People's Republic of China in Pinyin was published in 1973 for the first time in China, during the period from 1963 to 1970, Bertelsmann, USSR, Aguilar and Rand McNalley had successively spelt Chinese geographical names in accordance with the Pinyin system. It is true that Chinese geographical names so spelt on these maps are trifles in number as compared with the hundreds of thousands of Chinese geographical names spelt in the Wade system in the archives of the United States and Great Britain. But we have to see another fact that those having chance to refer to archives are limited whereas the users of commercially circulated atlases are numerous. Besides, more detailed maps of China will be published in the future. So it is incontestable that the influence and application sphere of Chinese geographical names spelt in the Pinyin system are expanding day by day whereas the Wade system and others are just the opposite.

Besides the resolution of Athens conference, the following instances are also worth consideration. The primary schools throughout China have the course of

Pinyin which tens of millions of pupils study every year; the words in Chinese character dictionaries are arranged in the order of Chinese phonetic alphabet; Pinyin is already in extensive use, such as post and telegram, transportation (civil aviation, railway stations, wharfs and street names) and the names of shops, trademarks and other things of daily life. So Pinyin has been naturally adopted as the international system for the romanization of Chinese geographical names.

3. The Romanization of Minority Geographical Names

Geographical names of China consist of Chinese (Han) language and minority ones. If a minority nationality has its own written language, its geographical names are written both in its own script and with Chinese characters; in case a minority nationality has no written language of its own, as a rule, its geographical names are written with Chinese characters. In romanizing minority geographical names according to the Pinyin system, there are two approaches: (a) to annotate the translation in Chinese, an indirect method, known as the annotation of Chinese characters; (b) to transcribe directly from the minority script or spoken language in accordance with their respective standard or common speech sound, known as transcription.

It should be made clear that the Pinyin system has the pronunciation and usage of its letters chosen to suit the needs and ways of Chinese (Han) language with due consideration given to the international practice. Therefore in romanizing minority geographical names according to the Pinyin system, only the pronunciation and usage of the letters should be compatible with the Pinyin system, but the syllabic structure should not be confined to the pattern of the common speech of Chinese (Han) language. This is just as the usual practice in English, French and German which do not and should not make a detour to use Wade, Vissière and Lessing systems when rendering the non-Han Chinese geographical names.

Chinese characters are a script with fixed syllables, only representing about 415 syllables without counting the difference in tones (see attached syllabic tables). They have not syllables enough for conveying diversified pronunciations. For example, a number of simple syllables such as do to no, go ko ho, zo co so and others occurring in Mongolian, Uygur and Tibetan geographical names do not exist in Chinese (Han) language, but can be spelt when romanized with Pinyin:

For Example:

<u>Dolon Nur</u> (多伦诺尔)	<u>Akto</u> (阿克陶)	<u>Nomhon</u> (诺木洪)
<u>Golo</u> (果洛)	<u>Koksu</u> (阔克苏)	<u>Hoxud</u> (和硕特)
<u>Zorge</u> (若尔盖)	<u>Cona</u> (错那)	<u>Solon</u> (索伦)
<u>Jalaid</u> (扎赉特)	<u>Qagan Nur</u> (查干诺尔)	<u>Xatongmon</u> (谢通门)

<u>Jangsib</u> (江赛)	<u>Qangdin Sum</u> (昌都庙)	<u>Xangdoring</u> (桑多郎)
<u>Jeminay</u> (吉木那)	<u>Qedir</u> (策大雅)	<u>Xehila</u> (协合拉)
<u>Jone</u> (卓尼)	<u>Qomolangma</u> (珠穆朗玛)	<u>Baxo</u> (八宿)
<u>Ju'Ud</u> (昭乌达)	<u>Qumar</u> (楚玛尔)	<u>Xulun Hoh</u> (正蓝旗)

In Chinese (Han) language there are no consonant clusters and finals other than n and ng. As a result, sometimes one syllable in minority language is represented by several Chinese characters, thus a monosyllable becoming a polysyllable. Compared with the direct transcription, the annotation of Chinese characters use more letters. This is especially true of the geographical names of Altain family. Sampling in a specific area has made it clear that in both about 3200 names, the Mongolian and Uygur geographical names would increase respectively by 35% and 29% in the letters used when romanized by indirect annotation of characters than by direct transcription. Here are examples:

- a. Han translation 吉格代力克巴格
 Transcription Jigdilikbag (meaning in Uygur language: oleaster orchard)
 Annotation Jigedailikebage
- b. Han translation 额勒沙图沃布勒卓
 Transcription Elst Oboljo (meaning in Mongolian language: a winter campsite)
 Annotation Eleshatuwobulezhuo
- c. Han translation 阿亚克吐孜鲁克奥塔克
 Transcription Ayak Tuzluk Otak (meaning in Uygur language: a lower salty campsite)
 Annotation Ayaketuziluke'aotake
- d. Han translation 楚鲁特达巴音珠恩高吉格尔
 Transcription Qulut Dabagin Jun Gojgor (meaning in Mongolian language: a rocky ridgeway to the east or left of a pinnacle)
 Annotation Chulutedabayinzhu'engaojige'er

Due to lack of specification from time to time, there are several transcriptions for a minority name or word. For example, Qong Karaqol, an Uygur geographical name, meaning a big black desert, has five Chinese translations as shown below:

Transcription	Han translation	Annotation
Qong Karaqol	大哈拉俊	Dahalajun
	哈拉俊	Halajun
	哈拉取力	Kalaquli
	喀拉朱	Kalazhu
	琼喀拉结尔	Qiongkalajie'er

These examples show that the pronunciation of Chinese translations deviates far from the original. Furthermore, it is not easy to determine which translation should be annotated without research and check. This, however, doesn't mean all Han translations are in such confusion, but multi-translations are actually more or less in existence. Multi-translation for a word are of high frequency. For example, a frequently-used word in Mongolian geographical names, meaning abundant, according to incomplete statistics, has more than ten Han translations and several spelling forms such as bayan, bayin, baiyan, baiyin and baiyun. Another example is kizil, a common word in Uygur geographical names, meaning red. If spelt from its Han translations, this word would have the following spellings: heizi, keril, keril'er, kerilu, kesai, keshilie, kezeili, kezi, kezige, kezile, kezili, kezilu and keziluo.

As we know that one kind of letters can be converted to another between two different kinds of phonetic script. This is known as transliteration. This process can also be applied to romanizing minority geographical names according to Pinyin system. The Uygur script has already been romanized. There are 26 roman letters and 6 new letters in the new Uygur script, whose pronunciation and usage are identical or similar to their counterparts in Pinyin. Consequently the geographical names in new Uygur script can be just copied if no new letter exists at all in them. For example, 乌鲁木齐 is spelt as Ürümqi, not Wulumuqi; 阿图什 is spelt as Atux, not Atushi. If new letters appear in Uygur names, they can be converted, with some adaptation, to the customary roman letters. For example, in the new script 克拉玛依 and 准噶尔 are spelt respectively as Karamay (the letter k, having a tail) and Jungqar (q being a new letter), but they can be transferred to Pinyin as Karamay and Junggar.

The reformation of the written language has not yet been carried out in the Mongolian and Tibetan languages. Besides the difference in dialectic sound, the written language is usually divorced from the colloquial speech. For example, the Mongolian geographical generic term mountain and lake would be spelt agula and nagur if transliterated from their Mongolian written forms letter by letter. But if transcribed from the actual pronunciation of the modern Mongolian language, they are spelt as ul and nur (being spelt as uul and nuur, if the long and short vowels are differentiated). Another example is the common word red in the Mongolian geographical names, whose letter by letter transliteration is ulagan, whereas its actual pronunciation is ulan (ulaan). Consequently, 乌兰诺尔, a place name meaning a red lake, would be spelt as Ulagan Nagur if transliterated letter by letter. But it would be spelt as Ulan Nur (Ulaan Nuur), if during the course of transliteration, due consideration is given to

the customary pronunciation based on its written form and the common colloquial speech. The situation in the Tibetan language is even more complicated than that of the Mongolian language. Every Tibetan letter represents a phoneme, but in certain structures it sometimes has a phonetic change and sometimes makes the letter nearby changing phonetically while being voiceless itself. For example, if transliterated from Tibetan written form letter by letter, 珠穆朗玛 is spelt as Qomoklangma, which has one more letter k than Qomolangma, a transcription of the original pronunciation. As to the name of 吉隆, it would be spelt as Skyigdrong if transliterated from the Tibetan written form letter by letter. This spelling is apparently unsuitable for the broad users. Now the transcription of Tibetan geographical names is made from their pronunciation in the Tibetan broadcast by the Central People's Broadcasting Station. As a result, this name is spelt as Gyirong which is in accord with the actual pronunciation.

In view of the above mentioned analysis, the transcription is more scientific and applicable than the annotation of Chinese characters and the straight transliteration. So the transcription is used in the romanization of the Uygur, Mongolian and Tibetan geographical names with Pinyin system.

In a word, the romanization of Chinese geographical names with Pinyin system is a gratifying step towards the international standardization of geographical names.

Syllabic Table of Chinese (han) Characters

in Accordance with Pinyin

Final/ Initial	Initial	0	b	p	m	f	d	t	n	l	g	k	h	j	q	x	z	c	s	zh	ch	sh	r	y	w	ng	-r			
-a	a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0					+	+		
-o	o	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+				+					+	+	
-e	e	0	+		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
-ê	e	0							Ⓜ																					
-i																			0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
-er		0																												
ng		0																												
-ai	ai	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0		+			0	0	0	0	0	0							
-ei	ei	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0					0			0	0	0							
-ao	ao	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
-ou	ou	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
-an	an	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				+		
-en	en	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0		0	0	0	+	+			0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
-ang	ang	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				+	+	
-eng	eng	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
-ong							0	0	0	0	0	0	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
-u	wu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0	+	
-ua	wa	0									0	0	0							0	Ⓜ	0	0	0	0					
-uo	wo	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
-uai	wai	0									0	0	0							0	0	0	0	0						
-ui	wei	0					0	0	Ⓜ		0	0	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
-uan	wan	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
-uen	wen	0					0	0	Ⓜ		0	0	0			+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
-uang	wang	0									0	0	0							0	0	0	0	0	0					
-ueng	weng																								0					
-i	yi	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	+		+					0				+	+	
-ia	ya	0						Ⓜ	0					0	0	0								0						
-iê	ye	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0				0	0	0								0						
-iao	yao	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0				0	0	0								0						
-iu	you	0			0		0		0	0				0	0	0								0						
-ian	yan	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0				0	0	0								0						
-in	yin	0	0	0	0		+	Ⓜ	0	0	+			0	0	0							+	0					+	
-iang	yang	0					+	Ⓜ	0	0	+			0	0	0	+							0						
-ing	ying	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0				+	0	0	0							0					+	
-ü	yu		+	+			+	+	0	0	+	+		0	0	0			+	+				0				+	+	
-üe	yue								0	0				0	0	0								0						
-üan	yuan								Ⓜ					0	0	0								0						
-ün	yun								Ⓜ	+				0	0	0								0						
-iong															0	0	0							0						
Final	Han								0																				0	
	Uyгур		+	+	+		+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+			+					+						
	Mongolian		+		+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+			+					+				+	+	
	Tibetan		+		+		+		+	+	+														+				+	

0 q.v. Xinhua Cidian (New China Dictionary), 1971 edition.
 Ⓜ q.v. other dictionaries on Chinese characters.
 + Uyгур, Mongolian and Tibetan syllables in excess of Chinese (data incomplete).