

70-06274

Translated from Chinese

A REPORT ON
THE ROMANIZATION OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

I. The characteristics of the Chinese characters

Chinese characters are all monosyllabic. Such characters are known to the Chinese as han-tzu. Chinese characters are used over a wide area. Apart from the fact that over seven hundred million Chinese use Chinese characters, these characters also appear in large numbers in the written languages of both Japan and Korea. Formerly, Vietnamese was also a branch of the language family employing Chinese characters. Chinese scattered all over the world have likewise retained the use of the characters. Chinese-language newspapers are published and circulated in all the East Asian countries. The United States alone has a variety of Chinese newspapers. And Chinese newspapers are published even in Mauritius.

In the field of geographical terminology, many place-names in Japan, Korea and Vietnam are written in Chinese characters. For this reason, place-names in Chinese characters occupy a special place in geographical terminology.

Chinese characters are traditionally classified into six categories known as liu shu, in accordance with the different ways in which they are formed. These categories are:

(1) Hsiang hsing (pictographs): characters that are representations of the physical likenesses of objects. For example, ☀ jih⁴, "the sun", and 🌙 yuèh⁴, "the moon";

(2) Chih shih (simple ideographs): characters whose shapes indicate the senses. For example, 上 shang⁴, "up", and 下 hsia⁴, "down";

(3) Hui i (compound ideographs): characters whose meanings are suggested by their makeup. For example, 信 hsin², which is formed from 人 jen², "man", and 言 yen², "word", signifies "a man of his word," or "a pledge of one's word";

(4) Hsieh shêng (phonetic compounds): characters in which the radical indicates the sense while the other part indicates the sound;

(5) Chia chieh (phonetic loans): characters borrowed and used to represent homonymous words for which no characters had previously existed. For example, 令 ling⁴, "to command", and 長 ch'ang², "long";

(6) Chuan chu (derivative characters): synonymous characters which, by analogy of form, have acquired similar or identical sounds.

The great majority of Chinese characters belong to the fourth category mentioned above. These six categories indicate the basic principles which govern the formation of Chinese characters, and constitute a specialized field of study. These characters together with the functions they fulfil by reason of their shapes, sounds and the meanings they convey have served for thousands of years as a cornerstone on which Chinese civilization is founded.

This is no place to go into the question of how the component parts of Chinese characters had evolved in ancient times. What follows is a brief discussion of the levels of pronunciation and tones of Chinese characters:

Levels of Pronunciation All languages or dialects have different levels or styles of pronunciation. Even among speakers of Mandarin Chinese born and bred in Peiping, there are variations in pronunciation according to mood, speed, and context. For instance, the character 長 means "long" when pronounced ch'ang², and "to grow" or "elder" when pronounced chang³. Likewise, the character 乾 means "the male or positive

element" when it is pronounced ch'ien², and "dry" when it is pronounced kan¹. Much more can be said in this connection, but let this suffice.

Initials, Finals, and Tones The most convenient way of analyzing the sound of a Chinese character is to divide it into:

- (1) an initial, or the beginning sound,
- (2) a final, or the rest of the syllable, and
- (3) a tone, which may be regarded as a quality of the whole syllable.

As to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the Wade system, and the Chinese National Phonetic Alphabet, the present writer will not go into the details of these three systems of pronunciation, but will rather refer the reader to Dr. Y. R. Chao's Introduction to Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary.

A Chinese syllable therefore consists of not only an initial and a final, but also a tone, or a time-pitch whose function is to express the mood of a syllable. Thus, 狼 lang² in a high rising tone, is the Chinese word for "wolf," and 浪 lang⁴ in a falling tone is the Chinese word for "wave". These two sounds are different from each other just as long is different from wrong and long from lung in English.

The dialect of Peiping has four tones in stressed syllables, and all the tones can be divided into the following five equal pitches according to their rising or falling patterns: 1. low, 2. half-low, 3. middle, 4. half-high, and 5. high.

The four tones of the Peiping dialect are:

					Pitch
(1)	陰平 (聲)	<u>yin</u> ¹ - <u>ping</u> ² (<u>shéng</u> ¹)	Upper Even (Tone)	High level	55
(2)	陽平 (聲)	<u>yang</u> ² - <u>p'ing</u> ² (<u>shéng</u> ¹)	Lower Even (Tone)	High rising	35
(3)	上聲	<u>shang</u> ³ - <u>shéng</u> ¹	Rising Tone	Low rising	214
(4)	去聲	<u>ch'ü</u> ⁴ - <u>shéng</u> ¹	Falling, or Going, Tone	High falling to low	51

For greater details, see Dr. Y. R. Chao's Introduction to Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary and various works in Chinese on this subject.

China is a country spacious in territory and diversified in dialects. All the dialects in China proper have been classified on the basis of similar-

ities in pronunciation into nine categories, corresponding to nine geographical areas, by the eminent scholar Chang Pin-lin. Others divide them into twelve language groups. There are differences even among dialects in each area.

The Chinese Phonetic Alphabet used for phonetic transcription of Chinese characters was adopted after extensive research done by a large number of scholars, and was promulgated by the Chinese Government in 1928. As part of the effort aimed at the development of a unified national language, this phonetic alphabet bears no resemblance to the Roman alphabet. Some of its letters are phonetic units consisting of both consonants and vowels, and as such, can be pronounced separately. This phonetic system has been used to indicate the pronunciation of Chinese characters in Chinese primary school textbooks. As a result, all Chinese students have learned to speak correct Mandarin Chinese.

II. Developments since the 1967 Geneva Conference

The compilation of geographical terms and the recording of place-names in a card catalogue system has been completed as regards the entire province of Taiwan and a part of the Chinese mainland. Work on the other areas is expected to be completed in two years.

Further research on the Wade-Giles system in the light of various other Romanization systems has been in progress since the Geneva Conference. The original "key" will be revised and re-published to meet our need.

With regard to Resolution 15 adopted by the 1967 Geneva Conference the Chinese Government is prepared to formulate an acceptable Romanization system for place-names in East Asia.