Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on Romanization Systems

Brief Introduction of Foreign Geographical Names
Transformed into Chinese*

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Summary

The foreign geographical names can not be transformed into Chinese in the ways of transliteration, but transcription. There are a lot of polyphonic and homophonic characters in Hanzi. Appropriate characters should be selected. Pursuing the standardization of transforming foreign geographical names into Chinese, China has instituted many transcription keys.

Hanzi (Chinese character) is not a kind of alphabetic writing. The foreign geographical names can not be transformed into Chinese in the ways of transliteration, but transcription, using similar sounding Hanzi to represent pronunciation of foreign geographical names. Due to the diversity and complexity in pronunciation of kinds of languages, it is unable to use Hanzi to represent all the pronunciation precisely. Therefore, it is hard to reach the extraordinary precision, but only approximate expression of the pronunciation in transforming foreign geographical names into Chinese. For example, the English geographical name "Snow Hill" is transformed into "斯诺希尔"(sī nuò xī ěr), "Panorama" is transformed into "帕诺拉马"(pà nuò lā mǎ), the German geographical name "Leverkusen" is transformed into "莱沃库森"(laí wò kù sēn), the Russian geographical name "Пеньково" is transformed into "佩尼科沃"(peì ní kē wò).

As a necessary step of standardization of transforming foreign geographical names into Chinese, transcription key should be instituted to confirm the characters representing pronunciations of foreign geographical names. The rule of selecting characters mainly includes:

1. Pronunciation exactly.

There are a lot of polyphonic characters in Hanzi. Choosing polyphones in the transformation of foreign geographical names will cause confusion in pronunciation. So polyphones should be avoided. For example, the pronunciation "cha" can be represented in Hanzi as "查" or "差". But "差" is a polyphonic character. It has another two pronunciations "chai" and "ci". If an English geographical name "Challis" is transformed into "差利斯", it might be pronounced as "chaī lì sī" or "cī lì sī". While if "Challis" is transformed into "查利斯", it can only be pronounced as "chá lì sī". Therefore, the character "查" should be used, but not the polyphonic character "差".

2. Easy to read and write

The rarely-used Chinese characters should not be used in the transformation of foreign geographical names into Chinese so that the transformed names are easy to read. The frequently-used simple Chinese characters are suitable to be used so that the transformed names

are easy to write. For example, the Chinese characters "坎", "勘" and "龕" can all be pronounced as "kan", but the simple one "坎" should be selected in the transformation of geographical names for it is more simple than other two characters. So the English geographical name "Campbell" should be transformed into "坎贝尔", not "龕辈耳".

3. Avert interpreting without real understanding

Hanzi contains a lot of homophones. One pronunciation can be represented with many different characters. Hanzi is one kind of ideograph. Each character has its own meanings. If we do not pay attention to the meaning of a chosen character, inappropriate meanings may occur in the transformation of geographical names. For example, the English geographical name "Hampton" can be transformed into "汉普顿", "汗铺吨", "喊仆蹲" or "寒瀑�". The "汉普顿" presents a clearer and more accurate meaning among them, not liable to cause misunderstanding. As a result, the characters that are not liable to cause ambiguity are selected as far as possible during the geographical names transformation. Characters that may cause derogation or association are not suggested to use especially. For example, the characters like "东"（means "east"）, "南"(means "south"), "西"(means "west") that indicate directions should not be used at the beginning of a transformed geographical name to prevent misleading people to comprehend that these geographical names are in the east, south or west. Homophonic characters like "栋", "楠", "锡"can be used in place of them.

According to the idiomatic usage of Chinese, the generic term should go after the specific term of a geographical name. However, the generic term come before the specific term of a geographical name in some languages. Necessary adjustments are needed according to the idiomatic usage of Chinese in transforming foreign geographical names into Chinese. For example, the English geographical name "Lake Taquin" should be transformed into "塔尔昆湖", but not "湖塔尔昆".

For the foreign geographical names that are or were written in Chinese, such as the geographical names of Japan, ROK, DPRK, Vietnam and Singapore, we use their Chinese forms directly, but not to transcription. For example, the Japanese geographical name "日本" is just copied as "日本", not to transcribe as "尼洪". Another one "東京" is also copied in simplified characters as "东京", not to transcribe as "托基奥". For characters used in geographical names of these countries that different from Hanzi used in China, if the acceptation is same but the grapheme is difference, it can be replaced by the corresponding synonymous current Chinese characters. For example, the Japanese geographical name "広岛" can be written as "广岛", another one "丹沢" can be written as "丹泽". If there is no such a character in China, just copy it. For instance, the Japanese geographical name "栃木". The method gives full consideration to historical habit. But because the pronunciations of Chinese characters in these countries are different from that in China, it results in some difficulties to communication also.

Pursuing the standardization of transforming foreign geographical names into Chinese, China has instituted over 50 kinds of transcription keys, 8 of them (English, French etc.) have been ratified as national standards. But variance of transformed geographical names still exists for the casualness of translators. More efforts are needed to realize the standardization of transformation