

Ad Hoc Group of Experts on
the Standardization of
Geographical Names

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REPORT ON ROMANIZATION

Submitted by
Republic of China

Report on Romanization

I. Chinese Characters and Their Pronunciations.

Chinese characters are grouped according to their constructions, as follows:

- (1) Representation of objects, as 日 for the sun and 月 for the moon;
- (2) Characters whose forms indicate the meaning, as 上 for "up" and 下 for "down";
- (3) Constructions which suggest the meaning, as 信 from 人 and 言, a person and his word, meaning either a letter or to trust;
- (4) Characters composed of a radical giving the idea of the meaning and the other part, the sound;
- (5) Characters used only for their sounds;
- (6) Characters which have more than one sound, the meaning of which also changes with the sound.

The majority of Chinese characters belong to the fourth group, i.e., with a radical on the left and a phonetic value on the right. In ancient times, only the phonetic part was used. The need to distinguish the growing number of homonyms led to the addition of radicals. Thus, the dominant element in a character is the phonetic part on the right; the radical being only complementary.

Chinese characters are mono-syllabic. Each syllable has an initial and a final. Furthermore, each sound has four intonations -- even tone, rising tone, departing tone and entering tone.

Due to its vast territory, China is divided into various linguistic regions, each with its own dialects. The sounds and tones of Chinese characters vary considerably from one dialect to another. Mr. P. L. Chang, a noted Chinese linguist, maintained that there are nine major regional dialects in China proper. Others have listed twelve dialects based on geographical divisions. These dialects branch out further into minor dialects.

The National Phonetic Letters were introduced in 1928, in an effort to establish a more uniform spoken language throughout the country. These letters are comparable to, but not entirely the same as the Roman alphabets. In the case of the alphabets, a consonant must be combined with a vowel to form a sound, whereas a Chinese phonetic letter can be used alone since a vowel is already included in each letter. This system has been adopted in the text-books of all elementary schools in China. It gives an accurate indication of the sound of each character, thus enabling all the students to speak the official ~~dialect.~~ *language.*

Geneva

II. Activities Since the 1967[^] Conference.

The card system for the collection and recording of geographical names has been ^{carried and} completed for the entire province of Taiwan and part of the Mainland. The rest is expected to be completed within the next two years.

~~Inaccuracies have been detected in the Wade-Giles System of romanization presently in use.~~ A continuous study of this system is being carried out and revisions made as the needs arise. The results of the latest revisions made since the 1967 Conference may be obtained by request.

Concerning Resolution 15 adopted by the 1967 Conference, the Government of the Republic of China is ready to undertake a study of an acceptable standard system of romanization for geographical names of the East-Asian region.