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THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
Athens, 17 August-7 September 1977
Item 15 of the provisional agenda.

Writing systems:

- (a) Conversion of names from one writing system into another:
 - (i) Romanization

ROMANIZATION IN JAPAN

Paper presented by Japan

1. Present situation

As reported at the Second Conference, the writing of geographical names in roman letters in Japan comes in two types - Kunrei-Siki (system adopted under a Cabinet ordinance) and Syūsei Hebon Siki (modified Hepburn system). Kunrei Siki is used for topographical maps, nautical charts and Antarctic maps, whereas Syūsei Hebon Siki is in use for aeronautical charts and geological maps.

2. Circumstances leading to establishment of Kunrei Siki

It is said that the practice of writing Japanese in roman letters originated in the last years of the sixteenth century. From the beginning of the Meiji Era, the campaign calling for more use of roman letters was gradually spreading. In or around the twentieth year of the Meiji Era, a number of associations were organized to push forward a Romanization campaign in Japan.

Significant in this campaign were the support given for Syūsei Hebon Siki invented and later modified by James C. Hepburn, an American, and the support given for Nihon Siki advocated by Aikitsu Tanakadate. In addition to these two systems, a number of other systems were also advocated.

Syūsei Hebon Siki is based on English pronunciations, whereas Nihon Siki is a simplified writing method attuned to the system of Japanese pronunciation.

The supporters of both systems asserted their views and strived for the propagation of the system they supported, with the result that the Romanization campaign became all the more intense.

Government and company officials as well as individuals opted for one or other of the two systems, and consequently many inconveniences were resulting, internationally and at home. In response to strong calls for the standardization of the romanizing of Japanese, the Government established in 1930 a Provisional Council for the Survey of Romanization to carry out surveys and researches with this end in view.

For seven years from 1930, this Council held 14 general meetings and its Committee of Chief Investigators met three times for theoretical studies and deliberations.

The Council came up with the draft plan for the writing in roman letters, a partial modification of the conventional Nihon Siki. On the basis of this plan, the Government promulgated a Cabinet Ordinance on a standard method of writing in roman letters in 1937. This is the writing method which is presently known as Kunrei Siki.

3. Situation after the Second World War

After the issuance of the 1937 Cabinet Ordinance, government agencies and commercial concerns started using the Kunrei Siki writing method, and there

appeared signs of a gradual spread of this system (it was used for secondary education, the 1:1,000,000 scale International Map of the World, nautical charts and signboards of railway stations, etc.). However, there remained organizations and individuals who supported the use of the Nihon Siki and Syūsei Hebon Siki. Hence, the parallel use of the three systems.

After the Second World War, teaching of the English language increased, and, with this, the Syūsei Hebon Siki was gaining increased popularity for some time. However, when the Ministry of Education started to provide guidance on the learning of writing in roman letters in compulsory education, the matter of which system to choose of the three was left to the option of each school, and consequently the three systems have been in use in education.

4. Investigation Council

In view of the situation mentioned above, there arose strong calls for the standardization among the government agencies as well as the society in general. To find a solution, the Ministry of Education again established an investigation council. From 1948 through 1952, the Council held deliberations at a total of 54 conferences. On the basis of the results of these meetings, the Ministry of Education exchanged views with other Ministries and government agencies. In 1954, the Government issued a Cabinet Notification and Ordinance, the substance of which was introduced at the Second Conference.

5. The 1954 Cabinet Notification and Ordinance

The Notification and Ordinance carry Tables No. 1 and No. 2. The revision of the original Kunrei Siki introduced by this Notification and Ordinance, including Table No. 1 (Kunreisiki) and Table No. 2 (modified Hepburnian and other systems), was made from the consideration that, when taken account the situation of the use made in society of this romanizing system since 1937 when it was first made public, Japan's expanding international relations, and the convention involved in Romanization in Japan, as well as educational needs, unless this system be adjusted so as to be able to meet the needs of the time, giving it flexibility, rather than hastily attempting to bring about an immediate unification of systems, it would be impossible for it to be generally used in society.

When this Notification and Ordinance was issued in 1954, it was not expected that, by this step taken, an immediate standardization of romanizing systems could be brought about. However, in the light of the history of Romanization in Japan as has been reviewed above, the Kunrei Siki is considered to be a best available system for the romanizing of Japanese in the present phase, in the sense that it is phonetically suited to the Japanese tongue and easier for the Japanese public, and it might be said that there is a possibility that the existing romanizing systems may be ultimately unified in this particular system.

6. Difference between Kunrei Siki and Shūsei Hebon Siki

As noted above, the Kunrei Siki is a system suited to the Japanese tongue, whereas the Shūsei Hebon Siki is based on English pronunciations. The former is well systematic and simplified, while the latter is not so systematic. The annexed table gives the two systems of romanizing Japanese.

別 表

	base character									nigori		han-nigori			
A	ア	カ	サ	タ	ナ	ハ	マ	ヤ	ラ	ワ	ガ	ザ	ダ	バ	パ
B	あ	か	さ	た	な	は	ま	や	ら	わ	が	ざ	だ	ば	ぱ
C	a	ka	sa	ta	na	ha	ma	ya	ra	wa	ga	za	da	ba	pa
D															
A	イ	キ	シ	チ	ニ	ヒ	ミ		リ		ギ	ジ	ヂ	ビ	ピ
B	い	き	し	ち	に	ひ	み		り		ぎ	じ	ぢ	び	ぴ
C	i	ki	si	ti	ni	hi	mi		ri		gi	zi	ji	bi	pi
D			shi	chi								ji	ji		
A	ウ	ク	ス	ツ	ヌ	フ	ム	ユ	ル		グ	ズ	ヅ	ブ	プ
B	う	く	す	つ	ぬ	ふ	む	ゆ	る		ぐ	ず	づ	ぶ	ぷ
C	u	ku	su	tu	nu	fu	mu	yu	ru		gu	zu	zu	bu	pu
D				thu		fu									
A	エ	ケ	セ	テ	ネ	ヘ	メ		レ		ゲ	ゼ	デ	ベ	ペ
B	え	け	せ	て	ね	へ	め		れ		げ	ぜ	で	べ	ぺ
C	e	ke	se	te	ne	he	me		re		ge	ze	de	be	pe
D															
A	オ	コ	ソ	ト	ノ	ホ	モ	ヨ	ロ		ゴ	ゾ	ド	ボ	ポ
B	お	こ	そ	と	の	ほ	も	よ	ろ		ご	ぞ	ど	ぼ	ぽ
C	o	ko	so	to	no	ho	mo	yo	ro		go	zo	do	bo	po
D															
A		キャ	シャ	チャ	ニャ	ヒャ	ミャ		リャ		ギャ	ジャ	チャ	ビャ	ピャ
B		きゃ	しゃ	ちゃ	にゃ	ひゃ	みゃ		りゃ		ぎゃ	じゃ	ちゃ	びゃ	ぴゃ
C		kya	sya	tya	nya	hya	mya		rya		gya	zya	zya	bya	pya
D			sha	cha								ja	ja		
A		キュ	シュ	チュ	ニユ	ヒユ	ミユ		リュ		ギユ	ジュ	チュ	ビユ	ピユ
B		きゅ	しゅ	ちゅ	にゅ	ひゅ	みゅ		りゅ		ぎゅ	じゅ	ちゅ	びゅ	ぴゅ
C		kyu	syu	tyu	nyu	hyu	myu		ryu		gyu	zyu	zyu	byu	pyu
D			shu	chu								ju	ju		
A		キョ	ショ	チョ	ニョ	ヒョ	ミョ		リョ		ギョ	ジョ	チョ	ビョ	ピョ
B		きよ	しよ	ちよ	によ	ひよ	みよ		りよ		ぎよ	じよ	ちよ	びよ	ぴよ
C		kyo	syo	tyo	nyo	hyo	myo		ryo		gyo	zyo	zyo	byo	pyo
D			sho	cho								jo	jo		
A		ン													
B		ん													
C		n													
D															

A Katakana

B Hiragana

C Kunrei-siki

D Syūsei-Hebon-siki (Modified Hepburnian)