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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS
AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Report on progress made in the standardization of
geographical names in China

Paper presented by China

Since the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of
Geographical Names, gratifying progress has been made in the following aspects in
China:

1. The Establishment of Authorities Dealing with Geographical Names

In September 1977, the China Geographical Names Committee, which is composed
of representatives of appropriate ministries, commissions and scientific
institutions, was set up. It is a national organization responsible for place name
work under the State Council and takes charge of the standardization of
geographical names, draws up principles to guide the standardization of
geographical names and gives guidance to its sub-committees at provincial,
municipal and autonomous regional level in their work. The committee maintains a
secretarial office to deal with its daily routine. Sub-committees at provincial,
municipal and autonomous level have been set up in succession in the past few
years, in charge of the standardization of their respective localities.

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2. The Realization of the Standardized Romanization of Chinese Geographical Names

With the attention of the Chinese Government, the departments concerned in our country have made detailed preparations for the standardized romanization of Chinese place names. The National Bureau of Surveying and Cartography, in co-operation with the departments and local authorities concerned, has carried out a survey over a vast area of Mongolian, Uygur and Tibetan place names and carefully taken down the original way of writing, pronunciation and meaning of minority place names. At the same time, it has worked out certain rules to normalize the transcribed Han names of the place names of areas inhabited by minority nationalities. In September 1978, the Chinese Government notified all the departments concerned of the decision that the Chinese Phonetic Scheme be adopted as the standard in romanizing the names of Chinese persons and places. As from 1 January 1979, the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet (Pinyin) was used to spell the names of Chinese persons and places in the translation of documents of the Chinese Government. In order to satisfy demands at home and abroad for place names material, the Research Institute of Surveying and Mapping under the National Bureau of Surveying and Cartography has compiled "A Concise Gazetteer of Chinese Geographical Names", which contains 32,000 entries of names, each name providing the following information: the written form in Han character, Pinyin, its geographical co-ordinate, the province where it is located, location on the map, etc. In addition, the gazetteer has two annexes, i.e., Chinese-English glossary of generic terms and glossary of generic terms in the Han, Mongolian, Uygur and Tibetan languages. The gazetteer will be published by the Cartographic Publishing House in 1983.

3. The Carrying Out of the Nation-wide Toponymic Investigation

In compliance with the demand set by the Second National Conference on Place Names work in April 1980, toponymic investigation is carried out throughout the country with a view to realizing the standardization of Chinese geographical names at an early date. The investigation covers all the names of administrative divisions at and above country level, the names of rural people's communes and production brigades, and their seats, the road and street names in urban areas, and the names of major mountains, peaks, rivers, lakes, islands and other natural features. It also covers the origin, evolution and meaning of the names of key places. Through the investigation, the standardized written forms in the Han character, minority written languages and Pinyin will be determined. Efforts have been made to avoid duplication of names in the same category and at same level within a given area.

In December 1979, our State Council promulgated "Provisional Rules on Giving or Changing Place Names in China". The rules are a legislative document of our country pertaining to place name work, stipulating not only the principles for giving or changing place names, but also clearance procedures and authorities, thus laying down a legislative foundation for the standardization of Chinese geographical names.

4. Unification of the Systems in Rendering Foreign Place Names into Han Characters

In the past, the related departments in China worked out respective systems in rendering foreign place names into Han characters. After it was set up, the China Geographical Names Committee organized the departments concerned for the specifications of work in this regard. Up to now it has worked out the "General Principles for Rendering Foreign Place Names into Han Characters" and "Transcription Keys for the Rendering of English, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Arabic Place Names into Han Characters" (both for trial implementation). In addition, draft transcription keys for more than 40 foreign languages have been worked out. In accordance with the "General Principles" and "Transcription Keys", the committee has standardized the transcription in Han characters of 18,000 foreign place names and has compiled "A Gazetteer of Foreign Place Names in Han Characters", whose publication is scheduled for the end of this year.

5. Toponymic Study

Toponymists, scientific and research professionals, and teachers of institutions of higher learning in our country are actively engaged in toponymic study with a view to doing a still better job of the standardization of geographical names under theoretical guidance. The toponymic study is very important especially for our country, which is a multinational one and has an ancient culture. Some place names can be traced back to two thousand years ago. The research on the origin and standardization of Chinese place names is of great value to our research in linguistics, history, geography and other disciplines. At present "Toponymic Knowledge" and other toponymic journals are in print. The compilation of "A Dictionary of Geographical Names of the People's Republic of China" is under way. Lectures on toponymy are given in the geography department in some institutions of higher learning. The toponymic study is in full swing.
