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REPORT ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN  
THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN CHINA

(Paper submitted by China)

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( Submitted by China Division )

Since the third United Nations conference on the standardization of geographical names, new progress has been made in this field in China. In Sept. 1977, with the approval of the Chinese government, the China Geographical Names Committee, the national organization responsible for place names work, was set up. In Sept. 1978, the government noticed all the departments concerned of the decision that the Chinese Phonetic Scheme be adopted as the standard in romanizing names of Chinese persons and places. As from January 1, 1979, the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet (Pinyin) was used to spell the names of Chinese persons and places in the translation of diplomatic documents of the Chinese government. Other departments concerned in our country will implement the decision step by step according to their concrete conditions.

The China Geographical Names Committee is an administrative organization responsible for place name work, composed of the representatives of 17 government bodies and scientific institutes. Under the leadership of the State Council, it takes charge of the national standardization of geographical names, gives guidance to the provincial, autonomous regional and other local organs engaged in this work and participates in international exchanges concerning place name work. The Committee maintains a secretarial office to deal with its daily routine. In the past one year and more, organized and guided by the China Geographical Names Committee, pilot investigations into the question of place names were carried out in some provinces and autonomous regions. At present, the Committee is engaged in drawing up a set of principles governing the standardization of Chinese place names with a view to its systematic realization.

As for the uniform romanization of Chinese place names, the departments concerned in our country have done detailed preparatory work in order to implement the decision to adopt Pinyin as the standard for spelling Chinese place names. The "Gazetteer of Chinese Geographical Names in Pinyin" has been revised, and the revised edition will be published in the near future. In order to provide minority place names materials, the National Bureau of Surveying and Cartography, in cooperation with the departments and local authorities concerned, has carried on a survey of Mongolian, Uygur and Tibetan place names over a vast area. During the survey, the original way of writing, pronunciation and meaning of minority place names were recorded in detail on large-scale topographic maps. At the same time, some orthographic work was done and the transcribed Han names normalized in a proper way. The collected materials were edited and transliteration with Pinyin was done. All these materials will be provided to the departments concerned in stages and area by area.

In addition, the Committee is organizing the departments concerned to standardize the rendering of foreign place names into Han characters. This work includes drawing up transliterating tables and rules and compiling standardized gazetteer of foreign place names in Han characters.

At present, China has entered a new historical period. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese people are making vigorous efforts to realize the "Four Modernizations" (of agriculture, of industry, of national defence and of science and technology). The task of socialist modernization will continuously make new demands on the work of place names. The China Geographical Names Committee was set up not long ago, and we still lack experience in our work. We are attending this session with modesty. We wish to learn from the beneficial experience and advanced technology of other countries in the standardization of geographical names, and use the standardized place name materials of all countries.

We hope to have the support and help of our colleagues. We are full of confidence that, with the attention of our government, greater progress will be made on the existing basis in the standardization of geographical names. We also hope that our colleagues in the Group of Experts on Geographical Names will make new efforts and progress in promoting international uniform romanization, reduction of exonyms and other objects of the standardization of geographical names.