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Report on the Progress Made in the
Standardization of Geographical Names in China

(Submitted by the China Division)

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Standardization of Geographical Names in China

Since the eighth session of the UNGEGN, new gratifying progress has been made in the field of the standardization of geographical names in China. Two national conferences on place name work were held respectively in 1979 and 1980 with a view to promoting the standardization of geographical names in the interest of our socialist modernization. The conferences demanded that a general investigation of place names and the work of the standardization of geographical names be carried out to ensure that the writing and pronunciation of geographical names should be compatible with the orthographic and orthoepic regulations. It was also demanded at the conferences that further steps be taken to collect, edit, check and store materials on domestic and foreign place names, to compile and publish all kinds of literature on geographical names, establish step by step geographical names storage and retrieval system suitable to the concrete conditions of our country, and to conduct toponymic researches.

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 the clearance procedures and authorities. (for more information, see "Provisional Rules on Giving or Changing Place names in China" promulgated by the State Council of the People's Republic of China)

Pursuant to the demands of the above-mentioned conferences, the majority of the provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions of our country are now engaged in toponymic investigation and check. In the investigation, the origin, alteration or substitution, and meaning of every key place name should be made clear, at the same time, the standardized written forms in the Han characters, minority written languages

and Pinyin should be determined. In view of the vast territory, diversified nationalities, long history and complication of geographical names of our country, great care should be taken in this work. In standardizing geographical names, stress has been put on the continuity and when alteration is necessary for a place name, public opinion should be fully solicited and official clearance procedures be followed in accordance with the rules promulgated by our State Council.

In rendering the foreign place names into the Han characters, the China Geographical Names Committee has organized the departments concerned to do the specification work in this regard, and has worked out the "General Principles for Rendering the Foreign Place Names into the Han Characters" and "Transcription Keys for the Rendering of English, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Arabic Place Names into the Han Characters" (both for trial implementation). Now in consonance with this "General Principles and "Transcription Keys", the Committee is engaged in compiling a standardized gazetteer of the foreign place names in the Han characters.

Since the decision was made by our government that the Chinese Phonetic Scheme be adopted as the standard in romanizing names of Chinese persons and places, Pinyin has been officially so used in the departments concerned of our country and all diplomatic documents. The Ministry of Posts and Tele-communication, and the Central Bureau of Meteorology of our country have submitted Pinyin materials on place names respectively to the International Tele-communication Union and the World Meteorological Organization. The Publishing House of Surveying and Mapping Literature has revised and republished the Gazetteer of Chinese Geographical Names in Chinese Phonetic Spelling in order to meet the needs at home and abroad

In the standardization of geographical names, we have drawn up some relevant rules and regulations according to the characteristics of our country, and made gratifying progress in our work. However we still lack experience in this field. Therefore we want to learn from the precious experience of other countries in standardizing their place names and learn

from their advanced techniques. We are willing, together with our colleagues of the UNGEGN, to make efforts to promote the standardization

of geographical names.