2-1-1980

Pinyin vs. Wade-Giles for Library Purposes

Beatrice Ohta

Ben Tucker

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol1980/iss61/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of East Asian Libraries by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
New ideas about romanization schemes seldom receive unanimous acceptance by librarians. What is tried and true always has strong adherents, while the proponents of new systems are as vehement in their partisanship, sometimes as automatically as are the traditionalists who cling to the status quo. It is inherent in the nature of all writing systems that they are less than perfectly hospitable one to the other, a fact that provides ample opportunity for claims both pro and con. The present controversy over Chinese romanization, however, appears to have less justification for debate than most. Since the public is already using pinyin widely in place of Wade-Giles, libraries do not appear to have much choice if they are to serve the purposes for which they were established. They must accommodate themselves to this change in usage.

Chinese characters, which number about 50,000 in a large dictionary, were developed more than 4,000 years ago. Examples of written Chinese date back to at least the 15th century B.C. During this long history the characters have served as the written medium for Chinese thought in all fields. In fact, they provide a tremendous practical aid for communication among the millions who speak different forms of Chinese. These forms differ most in the spoken language, due to the various distinctive pronunciations that characterize

*IDEAS/77 is an IR package developed jointly by Science Information Processing Center at University of Tsukuba and Toshiba. The package is not only capable of performing bibliographic search but also retrieving numerical data, along with statistical processing and calculation of various kinds. IDEAS/77 has a function of DBMS on which TULIP has been formed.
Mandarin, Wu, Cantonese, Fukienese, etc. The written language in Chinese characters is largely a single language, however. When considering a satisfactory romanization of this single language, one finds many obstacles, not the least of them being the fact that roman alphabets offer only two or three dozen letters and signs to represent values equivalent to the approximately 50,000 characters, a very great number of which are homonyms in speech. In romanizing the characters the cataloger must reduce each to a single pronunciation, necessarily ignoring all others, so that a single roman value is frequently the equivalency of multiple characters. This phenomenon entirely negates reversibility, i.e., the possibility of converting roman back to the exact form of the original script. Since any scheme for romanizing Chinese has this ambiguity as a defect, a certain amount of information inherent in the characters is lost in romanization. It may be that no cataloging data shorn completely of the characters is adequate—no matter what romanization system is being followed. Nonetheless, romanization must be used at least for bibliographic access points, even if the description retains the Chinese characters.

Teng Hsiao-p'ing or Deng Xiaoping? Pei-ching or Beijing? The first question concerns the name of the Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China, a Chinese of recent fame in the United States; and the second, the name of the fabled Chinese capital that most of the world has known for about 550 years. The Chinese characters in both cases are unvarying, but they are spelled differently in our roman alphabet depending on which romanization scheme is being used. Among the many different romanization schemes designed for the Chinese language, the two most widely used at the present time are Wade-Giles and pinyin. The Wade-Giles system, invented about 1860 by Sir Thomas Wade, a British diplomat and Cambridge University professor, was subsequently developed by Herbert Giles, also a Cambridge University professor. Pinyin was announced in 1956 by the Committee for Chinese Writing Reform of the PRC as being in the planning stage. The final version of pinyin was adopted and promulgated by the National People's Congress in 1958. The Wade-Giles system has been widely used since its formulation and until recently served as the principal means for making the pronunciation of Chinese accessible to English-speaking people. It is not a perfect system, however. For example, one of the most confusing aspects of pronunciation in the Wade-Giles scheme is the use of an aspirate mark to distinguish aspirated consonants such as p'ai (pronounced with a "p" sound) from unaspirated consonants such as pa1 (pronounced with a "b" sound). This usage created a novel value for the aspirate mark quite arbitrarily. Pinyin, on the other hand, aims at being an international system, not limited to the English-speaking portion of the roman-alphabet world. It is not a perfect system. either, but it aims higher than Wade-Giles in representing Chinese characters phonetically and, in contrast to the aspirate mark in Wade-Giles, it has not added any arbitrary signs or symbols to the roman alphabet. Pinyin uses the existing orthographic conventions of one or more roman alphabet languages. This new system does use roman values such as "c", "q", "x", "zh", and "j" in ways that may confuse English speakers, yet these values represent a compromise between expectations of English-speaking and non-English-speaking persons that is justified in light of pinyin's international aim. Clearly, pinyin is well qualified to become an international standard romanization for Chinese, replacing a system that is largely con-
fined to English-speaking countries.

Informal talks with many people during the ALA Annual Conference in Dallas last June indicated that they understood the Library's leaning toward pinyin, yet were puzzled as to how this system would be implemented. This paper attempts to elaborate some suggestions being made regarding the handling of pinyin in the Library of Congress if pinyin should indeed be adopted in 1981. As reported in *Language and Linguistics in the People's Republic of China* by the American Linguistics Delegation that visited the PRC from October 16 to November 13, 1974, the Committee on Language Reform (of the State Council) perceives that tone and word division in pinyin application needs further consideration. Indeed, most of the criticism concerning the pinyin system centers on word division. To sum up: in a library application of pinyin, the total concerns seem to be the following: word division, tonal marks, and the scope of application of pinyin.

Before seeking a solution to the problem of word division, we here review some of the unique features of Chinese. Chinese is often described as a monosyllabic language, but the validity of such a description depends on how much we stress the concept of words in the Western sense. The language has two types of units, each of which has some but not all of the features of a word in Western languages. The first type is that represented by the single monosyllabic Chinese character (tzu/zi), which almost always operates as a meaningful unit. The second type is represented by a close-knit combination of two or more tzu/zi, the combination closely approximating a "word." For purposes of consistent terminology, henceforth we shall call such combinations "junctures." Naturally, when junctures are employed, some words also consist of a single tzu/zi. There is in fact a high degree of judgment involved in combining or not combining tzu/zi as soon as the possibility of junctures is admitted. With junctures in mind, one can argue that Chinese is polysyllabic. Whether Chinese is monosyllabic or polysyllabic then is a matter of opinion based primarily on whether one emphasizes the monosyllabic tzu/zi or polysyllabic junctures. The fact of boundless freedom in judging when junctures should be formed, however, means a uniform word division is not possible. Rules that sounded good might indeed be written to permit junctures, but we are convinced that even the best sounding rules would be variously interpreted. (Those who follow our Japanese and Korean cataloging also will readily see the point of this contention and agree that our concern is relevant and is based on actual experience.) The consequent danger engendered by inconsistent arrangement of title entries, for example, is obvious.

Information about China's policy relative to word division is also needed as a preliminary note before proceeding. Pinyin was originally developed as a possible replacement of Chinese characters, and in mass education programs the Chinese are at least occasionally using the pinyin spelling in writing and publishing some works. When writing these works in the pinyin roman form, the Chinese are creating junctures of tzu/zi wherever their judgment indicates that a juncture is more meaningful than a sequence of unjoined tzu/zi. As already indicated, however, the Chinese feel word division needs further consideration. Presumably, if one analyzed a group of the texts written/published in pinyin roman, one would find a varying application of
junctures, or at least cases in which the analyzer did not agree with all the
junctures. Not surprisingly then, the National Library of Peking when romani-
zizing bibliographic data from works written and published in characters, has its
own library cataloging policy that differs from that of mass education efforts
in not permitting the questionable identification of "meaningful" units and
making junctures of them. We have written this paper entirely from the point
of view of library purposes for romanization. Therefore in our recomme-
dation about junctures, the reader must understand that what we are discussing
is a cataloger's romanization of Chinese characters, not a cataloger's tran-
scription of romanized data: in respect to word division, we shall transcribe
romanized data as it appears.

In using roman pinyin as a substitute for characters (rather than as a roman-
ization of characters), the Chinese may gradually develop a policy for junctures
that could take decades to reach a "final" ideal, adopting and discarding many
interim notions. Our application of rules for bibliographic description of
roman-alphabet publications, including pinyin publications, requires tran-
scription of word division as it appears in the source. If China publishes
much in pinyin and we catalog these publications, our cataloging will ne-
cessarily reflect any variations in word division practices over the years.
But for a cataloger's romanization of data transcribed from publications in
characters, we mean, with library purposes in mind, to start with and stick
to a policy that yields absolute uniformity: we feel that there will be
enough variation caused by those attempting to create junctures when writing
and publishing in pinyin; we are unwilling to add to the amount of variation
by attempting to create junctures also when romanizing characters according
to pinyin.

The Library of Congress proposal for implementing pinyin includes a basic
provision generally requiring a space between each roman equivalency of each
character. Specifically, this means that in the romanization of the title
proper and in the romanization of titles for uniform title purposes, the
roman value for each character will be separated from a succeeding value for
another character by a space, even when the titles in question contain proper
nouns or adjectives of any type. Headings, however, must respond not only
to the requirements of a romanization scheme but also to other rules and
practices of a cataloging agency. We recommend that junctures be formed in
personal and geographic name headings but not in corporate name headings.
For corporate name headings, forming junctures would be too problematical,
while it is easy to do so in the case of personal and geographic headings,
as general practice shows. For geographic name headings, we shall thus be
following the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, which approves junctures when
listing a place name in pinyin roman form. Junctures in personal names is
a simple matter not requiring any guide, given the uncomplicated structure
of practically all Chinese names. Here there has never been any doubt as
to which characters "go with" which characters.

Two less involved questions remain. For tonal values, note that the Wade-
Giles system in current use by LC ignores them. We prefer to continue this
policy, particularly since the Chinese are still studying this question.
We therefore do not recommend the use of tonal marks in the implementation of
pinyin. Regarding the question of scope of application, we feel that it would
create a very confusing catalog if different romanization systems were applied to Chinese works depending on where the works were published or in which form of Chinese they appeared. Thus, we recommend that pinyin be applied to Chinese works both in Mandarin and in non-Mandarin forms of Chinese and to works published both on and off the mainland (Taiwan, Singapore, etc.). There may be questions about a satisfactory implementation of pinyin apart from the issues we raise here. No others have come to our attention, however. Whether or not other problems lurk in hiding, we have already noted the existence of certain aids that the cataloger of Chinese might use to advantage if pinyin is adopted. For example, a useful guide for moving between Wade-Giles and pinyin in various kinds of situations is the U.S. Joint Publications Research Service's Reference Aid: Handbook for Pinyin Romanization of Chinese Proper Names (Arlington, Va.: The Service, 1978). Also, there are several dictionaries issued in Peking that give the pinyin values for Chinese characters, e.g., Tz'u hai/Ci hai. A new edition of this dictionary came out in 1965 and this was republished in 1979 by the Zhong Hua Book Store, Hongkong Branch.

The cataloger's goal is to identify and describe each item in the collection for the purpose of producing a catalog record that can be integrated with the records for other items in the collection. Keeping this purpose in mind, catalogers must consider how decisions might best respond to the needs and interests of most users of the catalog. "Users" is the key word. The mission of the cataloger is to make the materials available to library users, but not necessarily in the form that is the most convenient one for librarians.

The Library of Congress has already listed many reasons for adopting the pinyin system (cf., Library of Congress Information Bulletin, June 29, 1979). Here, we would like to emphasize some of the most important of these reasons. The possible adoption of pinyin is not due to political influence, but rather to a practical reality—particularly if one accepts our emphasis on library users. Recent developments indicate that sooner or later pinyin will become the most popular method for rendering Chinese characters because it is being used not only by the news media but also as a teaching aid in universities and colleges. For example, in 1969 Georgetown University, and in 1970 the University of Maryland, introduced pinyin in Chinese-language teaching programs. There are, in fact, many universities, such as Brown University, the University of Hawaii, the University of Virginia, and the University of Pennsylvania, that have switched to pinyin in their Chinese teaching programs, either from Wade-Giles or from the Yale system. Developments from such beginnings are inevitable, and it seems to us that a change to pinyin would best be accomplished by a clean break with our past practice, that is, by initiating the use of pinyin in romanizing library records in conjunction with the freezing of our card catalog and the implementation in 1981 of the new cataloging code, the second edition of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR 2).

Persuaded as we are that more and more people will, in the future, approach Chinese through pinyin romanization, we believe that it would be inefficient to continue to use the Wade-Giles system for the cataloging of Chinese library materials. Already many library users of Chinese collections acquainted with Wade-Giles are also learning to use pinyin, by osmosis if not
through formal instruction; and as pinyin becomes more established, we anticipate that fewer and fewer library users will have a working knowledge of Wade-Giles. Against the change to pinyin it has been argued that users of Chinese library materials will, for several decades at least, have to learn Wade-Giles, as well as pinyin, in order to be able to use Chinese collections which have been cataloged according to the Wade-Giles system over the past 20-odd years. Nevertheless, recent publishing trends indicate that a large number of works that have been cataloged under the Wade-Giles system in the past, for example, Chinese literary and historical classics and local histories, are being republished either in new editions or as reprints; and these trends may be expected to continue into the future. If pinyin is adopted, many of these republished texts will subsequently be cataloged under the pinyin system, and as increasing numbers of such older titles are republished and catalogued, the need for a knowledge of Wade-Giles may be expected to decrease.

The immediate hardships involved in switching from one romanization system to another are obvious and do not need to be described to custodians of Chinese collections, particularly those in large research libraries. What we have attempted here, rather, is to emphasize the long-range benefits of a change to the pinyin system to both library users and librarians. We believe that current trends clearly indicate the growing acceptance and use of pinyin as the standard form of romanizing the Chinese language, and that we must decide to come to terms with this development as soon as possible. With the marked increase in availability of Chinese publications, the time and energy invested in converting to pinyin will, in the long run, prove to be worth the inconveniences we face in the present. We must therefore exhort both ourselves and our colleagues in other research collections not to let immediate hardships make us lose sight of our primary responsibility to the generations to come.

***

The East Asian Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: a description of its contents using a sampling technique

Edward Martinique University of North Carolina

Many academic collections of East Asian library material were begun less than two decades ago when the federal government enabled many universities to begin or augment educational programs in area studies. The collections acquired to serve these educational programs were subsidized with federal government monies and therefore grew fairly rapidly. The development of the East Asian collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) may be typical of many of the East Asian collections created in the early 1960's. Collecting East Asian language materials at UNC-CH began in