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Library of Congress

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS WILL CONVERT TO PINYIN FOR ROMANIZATION OF CHINESE

The Library of Congress is preparing to adopt the pinyin system for the romanization of Chinese. Draft guidelines for pinyin romanization are being prepared for comment by the library community. The Library is now planning the scope, procedures and timetable for implementation of the new standard and the conversion of its existing files to pinyin. The new romanization standard will be announced in the near future, but well in advance of its implementation date. (Although a firm date has not been set, it is not anticipated that conversion will occur before the year 2000.) Early announcement of the new standard is intended to provide the library community with sufficient time to plan for adoption of the new standard.

The pinyin system of romanization of Chinese is now generally recognized as the standard throughout the world. The United States government, international agencies, the news media and many foreign libraries have used pinyin to romanize Chinese for many years. Because most users of American libraries today are familiar with the pinyin romanization of Chinese names and places, providing access to the Chinese language with that system will make it easier for them to locate material. The use of pinyin romanization by libraries should also facilitate the exchange of data with foreign libraries.

With adoption of the new romanization scheme, the Library would also wish to convert a substantial portion of its files to reflect the new standard. Use of the collections will be facilitated because users will need to use only one romanization scheme to find material in Chinese. Also, the name authority file would then correspond with access points on bibliographic records.

The Library of Congress first proposed conversion from the Wade-Giles system to pinyin in 1980 to coincide with its introduction of computerized cataloging of Chinese material. The East Asian library community did not support the change at that time. Since then, however, most librarians have come to realize that conversion to pinyin will be necessary if American libraries are to provide adequate service to their users. This year, in a survey conducted by the Council on East Asian Libraries, East Asian librarians indicated strong support for conversion to pinyin.

Changing the romanization practice to pinyin would necessitate a conversion of files so that the Library's database will, to the extent possible, reflect the new standard. Until recently, conversion has not been economically feasible. However, the Library believes that recent technological improvements and capabilities should make it possible to change the romanization standard and carry out a corresponding conversion project.

Significantly, the National Library of Australia (NLA) has recently converted over 500,000 Chinese records to pinyin, utilizing an independent conversion software program that identified and converted Wade-Giles data in MARC records, and then reassembled the records. The Library is considering using such an approach in order to convert its files to pinyin.

It is also expected that improved software features in the Library's anticipated integrated library system (ILS) will facilitate the conversion process.

The Library has already discussed its plans to convert to pinyin romanization widely -- with the American Library Association, OCLC, RLG, and the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL), as well as with the NLA. A Pinyin Task Group has been formed, and planning for conversion of files and implementation of the new standard has begun. The Library will continue to consult with the library community and bibliographic utilities throughout the process in order to most effectively coordinate and harmonize conversion procedures and activities.

(Library of Congress announcement dated September 24, 1997)