A Suggestion for the ALA-LC Romanization Table for Chinese

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A SUGGESTION TO ADD THE WORD “識” TO THE
“TABLE OF MODIFICATIONS” OF THE
ALA-LC ROMANIZATION TABLE FOR CHINESE

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From the Library of Congress Pinyin Conversion Project website (http://lcweb.loc.gov/catdir/pinyin/pinyin.html) we learn that many changes are under way. One change is that the new Romanization Table for Chinese transliteration, based on Pinyin Romanization will appear in the next edition of the ALA-LC Romanization tables. Since the Chinese Romanization table of the ALA-LC Romanization table is going to be revised, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest that the word “識” be added to the Chinese Romanization table in the section called “Table of Modifications to Romanizations”.

The character “識” has two meanings, when it is pronounced “shi”, it means to recognize, to know, to be acquainted with, to distinguish. When it pronounce “zhi”, it means to remember, to record.

For example:

“Shi”: “文學知識” is “shi”;
“Zhi”: “文學識小” or “文學小識” is “zhi”.

I searched the word “識” in RLIN, and obtained 455 clusters in book format. Among the 455 clusters, at least in 96 clusters the word “識” should have been romanized as “zhi”.

Examples are:

越 中雜識
物理小識
毛詩識小
大祿識餘
文學識小
七詔堂識小錄
南北史識小錄
東瀛識略
儀禮識誤
群經識小
二十五史識語
地志識略
史記識誤
墨香居畫識
淮南雜識

Among the 455 clusters, two titles in Japanese the word “識語” should have been romanized as “shigo” instead of “shikigo”. Japanese “shiki” corresponds to Chinese “shi”; Japanese “shi” corresponds to Chinese “zhi”. These two titles are: “O Taku gyosho shikigo” “Chugoku kodai shahon shikigo shuroku”
The compound word 《識語》 according to Dai Kan-Wa jiten, v. 10, p. 589 (Tokyo, Taishishukan, 1984-1986), is pronounced “shigo.” “Shigo” or “zhiyu” is a style of text commentary. It is often part of a preface, or an afterword added to the text, with the editor’s name and date of editing. Therefore “shigo” means to record the editor’s word.

To support my suggestion, I offer two arguments. One is based on the linguistics, and one on examples found in dictionaries.

From the standpoint of linguistics, we may begin with the Middle Chinese (7th to 9th century) values of the two pronunciations for the word “shi”.

1. to recognize, to know  
   MC sjak>shi
2. to remember, to record  
   MC tsi>shi

There are two differences. (a) Form 1 is in the Entering tone; form 2 is in the Departing tone. (b) The initials of forms 1 and 2 are different. Form 1 has MC s- (palatalized s-), and form 2 has MC ts- (palatalized ts-). According to the theories of Andre Haudricourt (“Comment reconstruire le chinois archaïque”, Word 10 (1954), 351-64) and F.K. Li (“Studies on Archaic Chinese Phonology”, Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies 9, 1-2 (1971), 1-61), both differences can be explained.

Adding an Archaic Chinese *-s to syllables ending in -p, -t, -k would convert the Entering tone into Departing tone in MC. Adding an Archaic Chinese prefix s- would result in MC *s-. So the two forms of “識” are cognates in Archaic Chinese:

1. to recognize, to know AC *sthjak>MC sjak>shi
2. to remember, to record AC *tjak>MC tsi>zhi

In terms of dictionaries, the following authorities give the character “識” pronounced as both “shi” and “zhi”:

大漢和辭典。東京 : 大修館

漢語大字典。武漢: 湖北辭書出版社


漢語林。東京 : 大修館

現代漢語辭典。北京 : 商務印書館
In sum, the word “識” has two pronunciations associated respectively with two different meanings. When the meaning is “to recognize, to know,” it should be romanized in Pinyin as “shi;” when the meaning is “to remember, to record,” it should be romanized as “zhi.”