A Report from the Chairperson

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The Chairperson would like to bring to your attention a letter he has written on behalf of CEAL to the Library of Congress regarding its tentative decision to adopt pinyin for romanization of Chinese, which was reported in the last issue of this Bulletin. Many of you contributed to the discussion of the pinyin question, and the chairperson gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to you in writing the following letter:

November 28, 1979

Mr. Joseph H. Howard
Assistant Librarian for Processing Services
Library of Congress
Washington, D. C. 20540

Dear Joe:

I have heard and read a great many opinions and comments on the question of pinyin, and such is their diversity that it is a difficult task to summarize these views. However, a consensus emerging out of the East Asian library community seems to be that we have no overwhelmingly compelling reasons to switch to pinyin in 1981 at this time. We therefore strongly urge LC to defer the decision to switch until such time as machine readable processing is available for Chinese and other East Asian script materials. This sentiment is now definitely much stronger than was indicated in the numerical results of the national survey on this question conducted by the Committee on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) and submitted to you in August.

First, our point by point comments on the June announcement of the Library of Congress on the issue are as follows:

A. 1. Chinese words in romanization which appear in the mass media are mostly limited to newsworthy personal and place names while research libraries must romanize a far greater variety of authors and titles in written Chinese in order to file in their catalogs tens of thousands of bibliographic entries. Thus the choice of romanization system for use in libraries should not be dictated by popular, but very limited usage.

2. Although documents issued by the People's Republic of China (PRC) use pinyin for added titles in romanization and transcribing Chinese proper nouns in its foreign language publications, the transliteration has been done without consistency, especially with regard to word division and transliteration of words with foreign origin. Indeed we have no official rules from the PRC on these problems. Pinyin seems to be still at a formative stage, and it may, as confirmed by Chinese linguists themselves, undergo further changes. Even in China, only a few libraries have started
using pinyin; the recent American library delegation to PRC headed by the Deputy Librarian of Congress was able to observe the use of pinyin at the National Library of Peking and only one other library. In fact, at the National Library of Peking, the delegation was told that the PRC lacks standardization in many areas of library practice, including pinyin, and that the PRC will work toward national standardization in the future. Currently, the National Library of Peking uses pinyin solely for materials in Western style binding and not for traditional, stitch-bound volumes. Similarly a group of CEAL members, who recently visited the PRC, did not encounter any libraries which use pinyin other than the National Library of Peking.

Furthermore, the romanization system adopted by a national government is not always followed in the U.S. for transliteration of materials originating from that nation. A case in point is the romanization of Japanese materials. While the National Diet Library uses the kunreishiki romanization for Japanese, which has been recognized as the official romanization system by the Japanese government since 1937, for its national bibliography and printed cards, the American Library community continues to use the modified Hepburn system, which has been better established in, and better suited for, the English speaking world. Furthermore, in 1971 the American National Standards Institute adopted the modified Hepburn system as the American National Standard System for the Romanization of Japanese and drafted a resolution recommending the adoption of the system to Technical Committee 46 of the International Standard Organization. With Japan's objection in 1974, the issue is still pending.

I might add that neither do we use either of the romanization systems of Korean which are officially recognized by the governments of South and North Korea.

3. While the Journal of Asian Studies recently announced its policy of gradual conversion to pinyin for romanizing Chinese, other journals of equal importance to Chinese specialists have no such plans as of now. They include the Early China, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Journal of Asian History, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Monumenta Serica, Orients Extremus, and T'oung Pao. The use of pinyin among the specialists may very well increase in the future; however, it is not certain at this time that pinyin in its present form will become widespread in professional and scholarly literature in the near future.

4. Pinyin may now be used more frequently in teaching, but it should be noted that it is only one of a number of systems currently used in teaching Chinese. The Yale system remains popular, as does the Wade-Giles system for the instruction of literary and classical Chinese. Again, the frequent use of pinyin "in the presentation of Chinese sounds to the non-specialists" is not particularly relevant to the requirements of a research library; the advantage of bringing the entries for Chinese materials into conformity with the headings with which non-specialists may be familiar would, by itself, appear to be rather limited. Needless to say, the primary function of a Chinese library is to serve the needs of those who work with Chinese language materials.

5. So far, we have not found one library in the United Kingdom which plans
to follow the British Library in adopting pinyin for romanizing Chinese. In fact, we do
not see a world-wide rush to make a switch to pinyin at this time. A CEAL Subcommittee
on Technical Services report on foreign libraries is attached herewith for your information.

6. The adoption of pinyin for PRC names by the U.S. Board on Geographic
Names (BGN) and other executive agencies of the U.S. government must be duly dealt
with; however, this fact alone does not unequivocally necessitate the total change of the
romanization system for Chinese.

I understand that while the BGN accepts Chinese geographic names in pinyin,
it does not approve the use of pinyin romanization at this time. That is to say, the
BGN will not accept pinyin romanization derived from Chinese characters, but only
those names which appear in pinyin in sources published in the PRC, e.g., the Atlas
of the People’s Republic of China by Provinces, published in 1977. Furthermore, the
use of pinyin names applies only to the PRC and not to Taiwan, where Wade-Giles
names are still in use. In fact, the minutes of the BGN meeting of January 23, 1979,
in which this matter was discussed, state:

Under these conditions, the committee recognized that conversion
to Pinyin names would be a long process and would eventually depend
upon availability of Pinyin names from the P.R.C. Any conversion
program would necessarily result in Pinyin and Wade-Giles names
appearing side by side in maps, charts, and other graphic documents.

If the BGN decision were the only compelling reason for the proposed change
while there existed overwhelming problems involved in this change, the Board’s decision
may be followed by using pinyin for the place names so affected, without changing the
entire romanization system for Chinese. The normal use of cross references can ade­
quately support such practice.

B. January 1981, when the implementation of the second edition of the Anglo-
American Cataloging Rules (AACR2) commences, is regarded by LC as the most opportune
time to change the romanization system for Chinese. However, this view is not shared
by most other libraries. That is, a majority of East Asian collections in the U.S. are
expected to continue using their existing card catalogs well beyond 1981. LC cards
will be used with minor modifications as needed for interfiling in these catalogs. Many
of these catalogs will presumably be closed when automated processing of East Asian
vernacular scripts becomes available sometime in 1980’s. With the recent release of the
Library Catalog Cost Model prepared by King Research Inc. for ARL, more general
libraries may also continue their existing catalogs beyond 1981; consequently, those
East Asian collections which are closely tied to their parent general libraries may also
continue their existing catalogs beyond 1981.

However, the adoption of pinyin by LC in 1981 will most certainly force
these East Asian collections either to close their card catalogs, or to face the
staggering prospect of changing the headings on all LC cards to the Wade-Giles
romanization. Any new card catalogs thus created will also have to be closed when
automated processing becomes available for East Asian materials.

In short, we believe that the adoption of pinyin in 1981 would be premature, although we do not rule out a possibility of its adoption in more permanent form at a later date. Despite seemingly growing acceptance of pinyin, especially at a popular level, its present use in Chinese libraries is still quite tentative and limited. In fact, there is no relevant experience in the use of pinyin at any large research library at this time, so that we do not know what practical problems may arise. Nor do we have a common set of rules to insure consistent application of pinyin romanization among research libraries. We are not even certain that pinyin in its present form will become widespread throughout Chinese libraries. For these points, please see the attached statement, "LC's interpretation and proposed application of pinyin differ from those of the Chinese," prepared by the CEAL Subcommittee on Technical Processing.

Essentially, romanization in libraries is a means for filing bibliographic information, and the Wade-Giles system has served our purpose for more than 50 years. Accordingly, we request that LC investigate and implement whatever means are necessary to insure a future conversion to pinyin in its present automated system, but we also request that LC defer its decision to adopt pinyin for its bibliographic products until such time as problems with standardization of pinyin application have been sufficiently resolved, and the card catalogs are ready to be replaced by MARC for East Asian scripts. LC is also urged to continue discussion of the use and standardization of pinyin with Chinese libraries and the library community in the U.S.

I am enclosing for your information two relevant documents prepared by Mr. Thomas Lee, chairperson of the CEAL Subcommittee on Technical Processing, and a recent letter from Mr. Weiyang Wan, chairperson of the CEAL Subcommittee on Chinese Materials.

Cordially,

(Signed) Hideo Kaneko

Enclosures

Attached with the letter were two documents by Mr. Thomas Lee, most of which are incorporated in "What's New in Technical Processing" in this issue, and a letter from Mr. Weiyang Wan, which is reproduced below:

November 16, 1979

Mr. Hideo Kaneko, Curator
East Asian Collection
Yale University Library
120 High Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06520
Dear Hideo,

The memorandum that you prepared for CEAL is excellent. It is also an accurate summary of the consensus of the East Asian libraries. The following is just a list of some things that came to mind when I was reading your draft:

A1. From the point of view of the library, variant personal names is not a new problem. Many authors have more than one name. The cross reference is used for that purpose. Geographical names are very similar cases. There's no reason why we must change the whole bibliographic presentation just because of the variant names.

A2. Pinyin has been developed as part of the Chinese orthographic system, not library bibliographic presentation system. The result is that even in the PRC it has to be used with major deviation from the principles of the system. There is no standardization; there is no experience to which we can compare.

So far, there are only a few "readers" that have been published in Pinyin. What the American libraries collect is in Chinese, not in Pinyin. For those journals with added title in Pinyin, it could be treated in the same manner as we treat other added titles - in Latin, Russian, English, and so forth.

A3. For major journals of Asian Studies published in the "Western world", they have never depended entirely on transliteration. Usually, proper names, titles, phrases are given in "characters", either in the text or in the notes. To some extent, the journals do not insist on standardization, either. An author who wishes to have his Chinese more exactly presented may choose the Yale system, which shows the tonal differences through spelling variations. It is not a valid argument one way or the other.

A4. Pinyin is likely to gain popularity in language teaching. But serious students of China cannot afford not to know Wade-Giles. There are more than two generations of Western Sinological scholarship represented in Wade-Giles. They will have to know both. That's a fact of life.

A5. What the British Library does to its bibliographic system has little relevance to our decision. If we should make a premature decision to adopt Pinyin in the form of the British Library deviation (from the basic principles of Pinyin) or our own deviant form based on speculation, we could be defeating the very purpose for which we went in for the adoption when the Chinese libraries have standardized their usage.

In short, Pinyin as a library bibliographic system is something that does not exist. We cannot make a decision on the basis of something unknown. The libraries so far have done with Wade-Giles what they deem most appropriate to their own needs. Pinyin is a different matter. We should watch what the Chinese libraries will do with it and urge them to come up with standardized practices for library and bibliographic purposes. We should convey to them the problems as we see them.
For the cross references and the possibility of eventual adoption, the conversion hooks should be put into the LC system. As we have discussed on several occasions, to convert Wade-Giles to Pinyin should not be a problem.

With warmest regards,

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Weiying Wan