

CHINESE ROMANISATION ON THE AUSTRALIAN BIBLIOGRAPHIC NETWORK

1. Background

Since its inception in 1981 the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) has adopted the Wade-Giles scheme as its sole standard for romanised Chinese. In doing so, ABN has followed the Library of Congress (LC) standard, just as it has for other East Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean, where the LC standards are Modified Hepburn and McCune-Reischauer respectively. However, in the case of Chinese, not all Australian libraries with vernacular collections use Wade-Giles. While the older and larger collections, including those of the National Library, the Australian National University, the University of Sydney and University of Melbourne, follow Wade-Giles, several smaller and newer collections have adopted the Pinyin system, namely, Griffith University, Macquarie University, Murdoch University and the University of Adelaide.

2. ABN Annual Users' Meeting

The ABN Annual Users' Meeting held in Melbourne on 16 June 1988 discussed a paper on Chinese romanisation from the Western Australian Users' Group, initiated by Murdoch University Library. This paper stated that Murdoch University had adopted the Pinyin system in 1975 and had no intention of changing over to Wade-Giles. It strongly urged ABN to consider adopting Pinyin or to allow both Pinyin and Wade-Giles to sit side by side, otherwise Murdoch would not be able to input its Chinese language holdings to the network. The meeting agreed with Murdoch's proposal which was then referred to the ABN Network Committee, due to meet the following day, 17 June.

3. ABN Network Committee

After consideration, the Network Committee passed the following resolution (ABN/NC/1988/RES/31):

"That the matter of the use of Pinyin as ABN standard for romanisation of Chinese be referred to the Standards Committee for a full examination of all factors involved, including LC's current policy, technological issues and use of a parallel sequence."

4. Papers presented to the ABN Standards Committee

Prior to its meeting in Canberra on 14-15 September 1988 the Standards Committee received seven papers on Chinese romanisation plus comments by telephone. These are summarised below.

a) Murdoch University

Murdoch stated that the Chinese government introduced national language reforms in the 1950s, leading to the adoption of the new Pinyin romanisation system. Murdoch and certain other Australian universities adopted the new scheme in their library catalogues. Their current inability to process Chinese language material in Pinyin on ABN is inconvenient. These libraries are not able to contribute their Chinese holdings on ABN, thus detracting from the completeness of the national database and interlibrary lending across the nation. Murdoch urged that Pinyin and Wade-Giles be allowed to co-exist on ABN.

b) Macquarie University

Macquarie's paper supported the proposal for a parallel sequence of Pinyin and Wade-Giles on ABN. While ideally the parallel forms should be linked so that an approach by either romanisation would retrieve all relevant records, the provision of such linking was deemed unlikely, so users would need to be resourceful and persistent in order to retrieve all materials. Macquarie urged that for Pinyin on ABN agreement should be reached on having each character regarded as a word.

c) Susan MacDougall

Susan MacDougall, of the Centre for Library and Information Studies, Canberra College of Advanced Education, presented a lengthy, detailed paper. She stated that ABN must consider the implications of adopting Pinyin very carefully before making any changes, as the exchange of bibliographic records, copy cataloguing and retrieval would be affected. Her conclusion was that she had doubts about changing to Pinyin because of the difficulties involved, but if most Australian libraries with Chinese language material favoured changing, ABN should adopt single-syllable word division for Pinyin; ABN should issue Chinese cataloguing guidelines to standardise procedures, making it clear that Pinyin romanisation in Chinese publications is inconsistent, and ABN should employ a review with Chinese and other language

skills to maintain quality control. She also pointed out that a number of Pinyin records already exist on ABN in a variety of inconsistent forms.

d) Asian Collections Section, National Library of Australia

The Asian Collections Section paper first stated the arguments against a changeover from Wade-Giles to Pinyin. ABN is heavily dependent on LC data in Wade-Giles for Chinese cataloguing. China, which uses Pinyin, is unlikely to be a significant source of Chinese language data for ABN in the foreseeable future, as ABN cataloguing standards are very different from those used in China. 90% or more of the total Chinese collection in Australia is in libraries using Wade-Giles. Maintaining Wade-Giles as the sole standard would have major advantages over parallel sequence: ABN would maintain a cleaner file without duplication of bibliographic or authority records, searchers would encounter fewer false hits, searchers could be confident that one search would be sufficient rather than having to check the Wade-Giles form plus all word division variations in Pinyin. Despite the disadvantage to a few Pinyin-using libraries unable to enter Chinese data, ABN should not change its policy while the difficulties with Pinyin are unresolved.

e) University of Sydney

The University of Sydney's paper opposed changing to Pinyin or allowing parallel sequence. It stressed the reliance of ABN on LC data in Wade-Giles, the fact that the major Chinese collections in Australia use Wade-Giles, and that Pinyin word division is currently varied and uncertain, making searching using Pinyin costly and time-consuming.

f) National Library of Australia

The paper prepared by the Standards Librarian, National Library of Australia, opposed changing from Wade-Giles to Pinyin as sole standard on ABN, for reasons similar to those given by the Library's Asian Collections Section and the University of Sydney. The paper then recommended parallel sequence be allowed, subject to the development or acceptance by the Standards Committee of one national system of Pinyin romanisation. To this end it proposed consideration of single-syllable word division as used by the British Library. It also suggested that Pinyin-using libraries consider adding their holdings to corresponding Wade-Giles records in the interests of national interlibrary lending.

g) Australian National University

The ANU paper argued against allowing Pinyin as a national standard on ABN on the grounds that until the major issue of lack of consistency in Pinyin word division is resolved, any change would be premature. ANU also opposed parallel sequence unless it was also proposed that the Wade-Giles equivalent be provided for all Pinyin input.

h) Comments from ABN Users

Six users commented to the ABN Office by telephone, and their responses are summarised below:

(i) Canberra College of Advanced Education Library

Comment: In many cases the Pinyin romanisation was the form found on the title page, with no Chinese characters, so there is no possibility of using Wade-Giles. They feel that it is not possible to write a successful computer program to automatically convert Wade-Giles to Pinyin and vice versa.

(ii) State Library of South Australia

Comment: Reference staff would prefer Pinyin but the cataloguing staff think it would be too impractical to change the ABN standard.

(iii) Melbourne College of Advanced Education

Comment: They would like to include records for Chinese language dictionaries in their catalogue for the benefit of Chinese speakers who use Pinyin.

(iv) State Library of New South Wales

Comment: The bibliographic record should contain an added entry which will provide access in the alternative form of romanisation.

(v) State Library of Victoria

Comment: There are already some serial records in Pinyin on the ABN database and it is difficult to search them on ABN.

(vi) State Library Service of Western Australia

Comment: ABN should develop an enhancement to convert Pinyin records to Wade-Giles on ABN.

5. ABN Standards Committee

At its meeting on 14 September 1988, the Standards Committee gave detailed consideration to the various arguments put forward in the papers presented. The Committee then passed two resolutions, as follows:

ABN/SC/1988/RES/18

"Wade-Giles should not be replaced by Pinyin as the ABN standard for the romanisation of Chinese language materials."

ABN/SC/1988/RES/19

"The matter of romanisation of Chinese language materials should be referred to interested users for advice on the following issues:

- (i) the development of a standardised Pinyin romanisation scheme;*
 - (ii) the implications of Pinyin records existing on ABN in parallel with Wade-Giles records, noting particularly the effect on authorities of this;*
- and (iii) any other matters which may make Chinese language materials more readily available through ABN regardless of the romanisation scheme used on publications or by users."*

6. Conclusion

The Standards Committee has decided against replacing Wade-Giles by Pinyin as the sole standard for Chinese romanisation. On the question of whether to allow both Pinyin and Wade-Giles to co-exist on the network, the Committee has deferred its decision, and is seeking further advice from users on the development of a standardised form of Pinyin and the implications of parallel sequence.

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