

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Colleague,

Most EALRGA members work in an academic or research environment, their concerns focused largely on access to data bases, networking, and academic resources, particularly looking forward to the time when vernacular records will be available.

I write as a cataloguer whose work is done largely for the public library system, and I must admit that, when I read our EALRGA Newsletter, I frequently feel that I work in a different profession.

The public library system is concerned primarily in getting a book on a library shelf as quickly and cheaply as possible consistent with providing usual catalogue access and subject headings of a high order. I will be very pleasantly surprised if any authority in the public library system is even thinking about vernacular OPACs for my particular languages, Chinese and Japanese. It seems to me that the public library system will be making do with romanisation *vice* the vernacular for a long time yet.

Japanese is not too bad: word division rules and a uniform system make the current system as useful as romanisation can ever be. My concern is with our current compromise with romanised Chinese.

It behoves us to present the romanisation, for public library users who are native Chinese speakers, in as useful a romanised form as possible. In admitting Pinyin into ABN, but in a compromise form, I believe we have nullified its usefulness. If we are going to use Pinyin let us do it properly.

Here is the text of a submission I have made to the ABN Standards Committee. It is self-explanatory, but I would be interested to hear from any colleague, working in an institution that uses Pinyin, who has any firm opinion either way on the subject.

"ABN has been admitting both Wade-Giles and Pinyin for some time now - enough time to have some feel for how the new rules are working - and I am writing to present one view (of a cataloguer primarily serving public libraries) of how the compromise between Pinyin and Wade-Giles is working, and to seek a change in the guidelines.

The views are my own and not necessarily those of the institution for which I work.

I probably find comparatively fewer hits with the data base than an academic institution would - public library stock is generally written for a popular rather than an academic market - but there are enough hits to be encouraging. There are

certain aspects however which I believe are open to improvement: they are raised hereinafter in what I would deem to be descending order of desirability.

Personal names - the use of a hyphen between given names seem an unnecessary flouting of normal Pinyin usage. The fact the LC authorities do not use a hyphen is one reason for adopting their system: however, to mind, the most cogent argument for dropping the hyphen is the fact that it would make a name immediately identifiable as being in Pinyin. In the current situation, in which both Pinyin and Wade-Giles are permissible, it is not always immediately obvious which is being used. Many ABN users will be relying on romanised Chinese records for many years yet; the quicker a change is effected, the better it will be for Pinyin users. Because of retrospective records, many of the ABN records are, in any case, already in standard Pinyin format.

Word division - similar arguments apply for the adoption of a polysyllabic Pinyin word-division. Although there is absolutely no substitute for the vernacular script when it comes to a native speaker consulting a catalogue, many Chinese - and, for that matter, non-Chinese - are familiar with Pinyin as a medium in education and general information.

Retrospective records already contain polysyllabic Pinyin word-division. It grieves me to input Pinyin in single syllables knowing that it negates the most useful feature of Pinyin - the familiar polysyllabic structure. I am aware of the problems in standardising polysyllabic Pinyin word-division, but, as a temporary measure, to adopt a common tool such as, for example, the Chinese-English dictionary *Han Ying Ci Dian*, Bei-jing Wai Guo Yu Xue Yuan Ying Yu Xi, *Han Ying Ci Dian Zu*, 1978, would be better as a stop-gap measure than throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Parallel records - to make use of extant records in downloading from ABN, I often add the Pinyin version of title with an explanatory note. It often strikes me that the explanatory note is unnecessary. The rules could perhaps accommodate an AEDOES, in those circumstances, without the note.



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