

cost an estimated 226 million rupees.⁴ Melford Spiro's study of a small but typical Upper Burma village in the 1960s shows that 30 to 40 percent of its annual income went to religious giving, not to mention time and energy.⁵ In 1953, when land was to be nationalized, many landowners donated their holdings to the *sangha* rather than "give" them to the government, in order not to jeopardize their chances for a better rebirth—precisely the type of reasoning behind similar actions of the rich in premodern Burma.

When everything has been said, however, the real issue may well be neither 10 percent nor 60 percent, but the meaning of these figures. Can we say that 60 percent is more significant than 10 percent simply because it is larger? Gregory Bateson⁶ and others would say, "No." In a delicately balanced economy, 10 percent may well have far more impact than 60 percent would in an elastic and fluid economy. Being aware of this, the quantification in my article was used merely as support for the thesis by the type of evidence historians are inclined to accept as more valid. The point of my article had more to do with the *relationship* between the alienation of land and political ideology than with the amount of land itself.

Anthony Johns, almost twenty years ago, warned us not to allow the mere passage of time to become the criteria for establishing "periods" in history, because it creates artificial boundaries where none may exist.⁷ Lieberman's article is perhaps an example of how dates have dictated and confined his view of change and continuity, to the extent that his article seems to say: "Your model does not work in *my* period," which is the historian's equivalent of the anthropologist's, "not true in *my* village."

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The Use of *Pinyin*

It is hard to help feeling that the editorial decision announced in a recent issue of *JAS* (38:4 [1979], 649) to initiate a transition to the uniform use of the *pinyin* romanization of Chinese in future issues of our *Journal* is both unfortunate and premature. One would have thought that a question recognized to be "difficult and troublesome . . . for a great many people in the China field" would for that very reason have called for careful and reasoned discussion in the pages of *JAS* before a decision to "firmly promote" *pinyin* was made. To dismiss such discussion in advance as "wrangling" is hardly consistent with the attitude proper to a scholarly journal.

To be sure, much of the discussion that has taken place hitherto has been so marred by muddleheadedness and political posturing on both sides that impatience with it is understandable. At the risk of being branded a wrangler, however, I venture to raise the subject with you myself for two reasons. First of all, I do not see that the real reasons for using either Wade-Giles or *pinyin* are much considered in discussions of the problem; and, second, it seems to me that the approach that you are proposing to adopt is likely to prove destructive in several ways.

⁴ Ludu Daw Ahmar, *The World's Biggest Book* (Mandalay: Kyipwayay Press, 1974), p. 20.

⁵ Melford Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 459.

⁶ Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Neces-*

sary Unity (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), Chap. Two, pp. 25–64.

⁷ Anthony H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, pt. 2 (1961): 10–23.

What seems to be the best argument in favor of the uniform adoption of *pinyin* starts from the premise that it is now the official system adopted by the Chinese themselves and draws from this the conclusion that, in the interest of long-term consistency, we ought to adopt it too, rather than continuing to produce material that future generations of students and scholars will find increasingly difficult to use by virtue of its being cast in a discarded romanization. One of the problems with this is that "officialness" and consistency are very much two-edged swords. Objections to the acceptance of *pinyin* as "official" can be raised on a number of grounds. Some of these, such as its not having been adopted in Taiwan (Hong Kong and Singapore can be added for a flavor of disinterested objectivity, if desired), are essentially irrelevant, however directly they may speak to other concerns, and to advance them is only likely to strengthen the conviction of the friends of *pinyin* that they are on the right side. A more serious objection is that there simply remains a good deal of doubt as to just how "official" *pinyin* is, recent policy declarations on the subject notwithstanding, and how long it will remain so. The most striking example of this is perhaps that we now have two ongoing projects to publish complete English translations of the *Hung-lou Meng*, one all in *pinyin* from Penguin Classics in England, and another more recent one from the Foreign Languages Press in Peking all in Wade-Giles! Such examples are not at all rare. The most recent set of generally available Chinese language texts to come from China, the *Modern Chinese Readers*, naturally uses *pinyin* to transcribe all Chinese utterances. But Chinese names occurring in translated material are in Wade-Giles or (shudder!) the old postal system. Add to this the remarkably mercurial quality of "official" Chinese policy in all areas, and it is hard to help concluding that those who feel an irresistible urge to jump aboard the *pinyin* bandwagon would do well to check the gas gauge first.

The argument from consistency would seem to hold only if that from "official" does. That is, the only rationale for *JAS* making it difficult and confusing for its readers who do not know Chinese to go from our *Journal* to the works of Waley, Watson, Fung Yu-lan, Sirén, Goodrich and Fang, Hummel, Boorman et al. (not to speak of all the contributors to its own earlier issues) is that they will at the same time be in a position to use with convenience all the wonderful things that will certainly be published in *pinyin* for millenia to come—if Chinese policy does not change. Certainly we are abandoning any thought of consistency where it counts, with the existing body of scholarship in Chinese studies, some of which at least is bound to prove durable for a few more years.

There is an additional consistency issue, however, one tied more closely to the idea that one ought to adopt, as a matter of courtesy, the way other people transcribe their own language. Whatever the merits of this argument in general, it certainly seems never to have counted for much in the editorial offices of *JAS* before. One searches past issues of our *Journal* in vain (and future issues as well, I should wager) for similar commitments in respect of the "official" romanization of Japanese and Russian, to take only the most obvious examples. Not fifty pages from the announcement of the *Journal's* brave step in the direction of "now standard" transcriptions we find, in Rice's article on the Japanese wartime economy, not the long "standard and official" "Takahusa," "Yosimori," and *zaibatu*, but good old-fashioned Hepburn Takafusa, Yoshimori, and *zaibatsu*.

"Heavens to Hangchow!" exclaims the righteous partisan of Wade-Giles, "is it possible that consistency and reason and courtesy are *not* the real explanations for this urgent call for the 'firm promotion' of *pinyin*, that some other motive lies behind all

this?" One can be forgiven for suspecting such to be the case, that the adoption of *pinyin* is not at all a matter of bringing our treatment of Chinese into line with that accorded other peoples and languages in the past, but rather one of making Chinese the object of quite special and extraordinary treatment, at no matter what expense in convenience and even comprehensibility to our students and other members of the lay population. *Why* would anyone want to do such a thing? Alas, the answer is not far to seek, and it has less to do with rational analysis and scholarly judgment than with a strongly felt need, a compulsion even (more appropriate, I cannot help but observe, in your country than in mine), to make some large and impressive gesture by way of exorcising the ghost of John Foster Dulles, which evidently wants exorcising more urgently than that of the *Enola Gay*.

Well, goodness knows Wade-Giles is not ideal (though certainly much better than what de Quincey would no doubt have called "the spurious and defective romanization of the French"), and perhaps *pinyin* really is here to stay, as far as the Chinese are concerned, and is in some way more official than *titibu* and company. Or perhaps it is just more important for us to respond to China's recent openness to the West than to adopt a transcription of Japanese that has never really caught on even in the country of its origin. And, if all this is the case, is it not wiser on the whole to accept the temporary inconvenience of rendering all existing works of reference and library catalogues a trackless wilderness for anyone who does not know Chinese and to start building the future, rather than clinging to an increasingly isolated and irrelevant past couched in the awkward invention of a generation of economic imperialists and missionaries? No, in fact it is not, and this for reasons that ought to be obvious to anyone who has been following (even at a distance) recent advances in computer technology and their application to scholarly communication. The age of learned journals printed from type and distributed through the postal system is rapidly drawing to a close. By the end of this century, if not the new decade, we and our students will not be trudging over to the library to manhandle weighty bound volumes of *JAS*, we will be consulting it on a television-type screen connected by telephone to a data bank and perhaps choosing sections to be printed out as portable hard copy. Then, nothing will be simpler than shifting back and forth between romanization systems, either as the material is entered into the data bank in the first place or as it is being read out by a user.

The practical importance of this is as follows. In the first place, it means that we have plenty of time to consider the whole question of romanization fully and carefully. There is no need whatever to "firmly promote" anything right now—except thorough and rational discussion. It also means that in the interval we need fear nothing less than the possibility that we are carving on stone; our guide in choosing a system of romanization for present use ought to be its present convenience to users of our work. We should use whatever system of romanization is likely to cause the least confusion among those who will go from it to (or come to it from) other material already published in the same area. For studies chiefly concerned with Professor Hawkes's *Story of the Stone*, Chinese railway station signs, or the last year or so of the "*Beijing Review*" and our own popular press, this will naturally be *pinyin*; for most other publications, Wade-Giles. This will no doubt strike some as a messy solution, but we live in a messy world. Any attempt to evade the real problems and opportunities and to go about "firmly promoting" the establishment of one fragile romanizational utopia or another instead is simply "gluing the pegs to keep the lute in tune." It will compound the confusion and bad feeling already in existence; it will drive away many

potential readers or contributors to *JAS*, especially those concerned with the humanities and with premodern China (areas whose underrepresentation in our *Journal* has long been deplored); and it will, in the short run at least, seriously diminish the amount of attention paid to the real possibility of constructive work toward the development of systems for romanizing Chinese that will serve the actual needs of their users.

One element of such work, as Y.R. Chao pointed out long ago, is to realize that we actually need at least two different systems of romanization. First of all, we need one for use in transcribing pieces of Chinese that are cited in running text in another language. It should be a system designed to function as a pronunciation guide, not an obstacle course. I have yet to meet anyone who can look me straight in the eye and tell me that “Pi Rixiu,” “Qu Shisi,” and “Cao Xueqin” put any less strain on the effective deodorant protection of the average radio announcer or undergraduate student giving an oral report than “P’i Jih-hsiu,” “Ch’ü Shih-ssu,” and “Ts’ao Hsueh-ch’in,” grotesque as impromptu performances of the latter group generally are. If it is a sad comment on our profession that we have put up with Wade-Giles for as long as we have, it will be even sadder if we prove to be prepared to sign an open-ended contract for the use of something that is not a whit better.

Quite separate from this is the question of a romanization for use in elementary language teaching. Here a choice between Wade-Giles and *pinyin* is not really the issue, since no one would dream of using the former for this purpose. There is much to be said in favor of both Yale and G.R., which at least attempt to encourage students’ visual memories to work with, rather than against, their aural/oral experience (has anyone tried to calculate how much wasted time and confusion the arbitrary handling of *u* and *ü* in *pinyin* costs us in the classroom each year?). In fact, there is so much to be said in their favor that we can’t possibly say it all here. Two things, at least, ought to be clear. First, we owe our language student something less confusing than *pinyin*’s hodgepodge of superscript filigree work and piecemeal revisions grafted onto the inept linguistic whimsies of Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai. And second, whatever we decide about a system for language teaching, it has no necessary connection with the editorial policy of *JAS*.

The latter, as far as the romanization of Chinese is concerned, ought to be based on the recognition that our primary responsibility is not to the vagaries of Chinese policy but to reason and to our readers, particularly those readers who cannot count on a command of the original language to tell them that the striking similarities they notice between the careers of Teng Hsiao-p’ing and Deng Xiaoping are more than coincidental. We might very well, in the best spirit of *huxiang xuexi huxiang bangzhu*, explain to the responsible people in Chinese linguistic circles (who have yet to make it clear to me that they even *care* what I use) what our legitimate dissatisfactions with *pinyin* are and why many of us have strong reservations about a wholesale conversion to it at this time. Whatever their short- or long-term response, let us have, from the editorial offices of *JAS*, more reasoned discussion—even wrangling, if it cannot be avoided—and much, much less firm promotion.

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