

Indexing personal names

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Chinese personal names

Liqun Dai

Construction of Chinese names

Chinese surnames (i.e. family names) precede given names. So, to take an example discussed further below, in 'Yen Junling', 'Yen' is the surname, 'Junling' the given name. This is the practice also followed in a number of European countries, but in English-speaking countries, of course, the more normal form would be 'Junling Yen' except for alphabetical order purposes, when the order would be the same as in Chinese but with a comma inserted after the surname (i.e. Yen, Junling).

The list of possible Chinese surnames is short. In a recent survey,¹ the Institute of Genetics and Developmental Biology, part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, collected 4100 surnames based on a database of a quarter of entire population in China. The top 129 surnames are shared by 87 per cent of the Chinese population. *The hundred surnames* (Bai Jia Xing) includes just over 500 surnames, with the top 100 shared by 87 per cent of the Han² population.³

The basis of both family and given Chinese names is the character, discussed below. Family names usually have one character. Out of over 500 surnames listed in *The hundred Surnames*, only 60 are double-character, and fewer than ten of these still survive today. Sima (司马), Ouyang (欧阳), Situ (司徒), Zhuge (诸葛) and Dongfang (东方) are among the most popular.

Chinese women usually retain their maiden names after marriage. In most cases, children bear the same surname as their father.

Chinese given names are usually made up of just one or two characters. Because of the limited number of family surnames, people use a wide variety of characters as given names for their offspring. In theory, there could be as many given names as there are characters in the Chinese dictionaries, not to mention the two-character combinations.

In many two-character given names, the first character is a generation name shared by all members of the same generation in one or more related families, such as 'Mao Zedong', 'Mao Zetan' and 'Mao Zemin'. 'Ze' is a generation name. This tradition is becoming increasingly at odds with the one-child family policy and the recent fashion for single-character names.

Historically, people used to have style names in addition to their given names. The style names are known as 'Zi' or 'Hao' in Chinese. A 'Zi' style name is usually given by parents to male children upon reaching maturity and to women by marriage. A 'Hao' style name is self-chosen and can have as many as four characters. A 'Hao' name is often selected on the basis of people's personal characteristics or achievements or a place in which they have lived. 'Ouyang Xiu' (1007–1072), for instance, had two 'Hao' names, 'Zuiweng' ('drunk man') and 'Liuyi Jushi' ('Liuyi' being the name of his study room). ('Ouyang' is a double-character surname.) When cited, 'Zi' and 'Hao' style names usually follow the given name, so 'Ouyang Xiu' might become 'Ouyang Xiu, Hao, Zuiweng'.

Like pseudonyms, some style names may become so well known that they replace the given names as the main means of identifying people. For example, Qu Yuan (340–278 BC) is best known for his 'Zi', 'Yuan'. His given name 'Ping' is hardly ever mentioned.

People living in Hong Kong, Taiwan and south-east Asian countries tend to have a western name in addition to their Chinese name. This is also the case with many overseas Chinese living in other parts of the world. In her wonderful book, *A thousand pieces of gold*, Adeline Yen Mah wrote, 'My maiden surname is Yen and my given name is Junling. Thus my Chinese name is Yen Junling. My husband Bob's surname is Mah. When I married Bob, my Chinese name became Mah Yen Junling, whereas my English name became Adeline Yen Mah.'⁴

Transliteration of Chinese names

The Chinese logographic writing system uses symbols ('characters') of pictorial origin ('pictographs') to represent words. Words may be either just one character or a combination of characters.

The two most widely used transcription systems (romanizations) are Wade-Giles and Pinyin. The former was devised by Sir Thomas Francis Wade in 1895 and later modified by Herbert Allen Giles with a view to simplifying

Chinese characters for the western world. Although widely used during the pre-Pinyin era, the Wade-Giles system is thought to be confusing, using, for example, the same symbol to represent different sounds. For instance 'ch' in Wade-Giles can be 'j', 'q', 'zh' and 'ch' in Pinyin.⁵ Pinyin was introduced in the 1950s to standardize Chinese language pronunciation on the basis of the Beijing dialect. Like phonetics in English, Pinyin is used to teach pronunciation in schools. In 1979, the Chinese government made Pinyin official usage for the romanization of Chinese documents and other publications. The ALA-LC Romanization Tables provide a means of ready conversion between the Wade-Giles and Pinyin systems.⁶

Pinyin, for teaching purposes, indicates the four tones either by an accented mark above the vowels or by a number following the Pinyin. For instance mā (ma1), má (ma2), mǎ (ma3) and mà (ma4). Each Chinese character has one syllable and one tone. So 李白 comes out as Lǐ Bái. Two-character names appear as one Pinyin with two syllables, joined together or hyphenated. 李太白 is spelled as Lǐ Tàibái. Many Chinese characters have the same pronunciation or Pinyin (as in the English homophones, 'see' and 'sea').

But when Pinyin is used as a means of transliterating Chinese characters, the tone marks are absent. This means that two or more completely different Chinese names can appear in the same Pinyin transliteration. Take for example 吴修 (Wú Xiū) and 伍秀 (Wǔ Xiù), which would both be transliterated as Wu Xiu.

Pinyin transliteration of Chinese names not only ignores the four tones, but also has considerable inconsistency in written forms. In an article entitled 'English versions of Chinese authors' names in biomedical journals: observations and recommendations', the author collected four different forms of transliterated names – 'KE Zhi-Yong' (surname all in capitals followed by hyphenated or joined-up two-character given names); 'Lu Wenju' (surname with just the initial letter capitalized); 'Shou-liang CHEN' or 'Dayuan Li' (surname inverted), and Q. B. Xiong (initial followed by surname).⁷ What seems to be a straightforward name construction in Chinese can be very confusing when transliterated, particularly to cataloguers, indexers and people trying to track down names.

Suggestions on referencing and distinguishing Pinyin transliteration of Chinese names

- In accordance with Chinese practice, Chinese names lead with the surname without a following comma, except in the case of Chinese people living abroad, who may use the inverted form of their name or, where the original order is retained (as in an index or bibliography), adopt the western comma. For instance, when the Chinese name is transliterated as 'Mah Yen Junling', the same form should be adopted in the index without a comma inserted. When the same name is westernized as 'Junling Yen Mah', the correct form in an index would be 'Mah Yen, Junling', unless the author prefers otherwise.
- Though around 60 double-character (two-syllable) surnames are included in *The hundred surnames*, only a

few have survived (see above). Two-syllable names are likely to be given names.

- When both surname and given name are single-character (one syllable), a check against *The hundred surnames* should help identify which is the surname. Confusion may occur when both characters (Pinyin) can be used as surnames on their own, such as in Li Bai and Zeng Lei. Extra caution is then required. Cross-referencing may be the only way out, but in any case will always be useful where the reader might be uncertain as to the 'correct' or preferred version.
- When referencing Chinese names, the surname and initial may not be sufficient to identify the person in question.⁸ In this case it would be sensible (as in western practice) to include the full given name.
- There are 56 ethnic groups in China. The names of these minority groups and their transliterations differ greatly from those of the Han. *The Rules for Cataloguing Chinese Documents* suggests that the minority names should be filed according to the authors' preferred form, followed by minority group and the year of birth.⁹ For example 'Cai Dan Zhuo Ma (Tibet 1937-)'.

Notes

1. Zhang, Jiansong and Li, Bin (10 January 2006) *The new hundred family names published: Li, Wang and Zhang stay the top three*. Available online at www.XINHUANET.com
2. There are 56 ethnic groups in China. Han, the major group, constitutes about 92 per cent of the population of mainland China. Further information is available in Han Chinese, Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_Chinese
3. He, Zhongyuan (ed.) (2003) *The hundred surnames*. Qingdao: Qingdao Publishing.
4. Mah Yen, Adeline (2004) *A thousand pieces of gold*. London: Harper Perennial, pp. xv–xvi.
5. Wade-Giles romanization, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edn (12), 446.
6. *Chinese: rules of application*. The ALA-LC Romanization Tables. Available online at www.loc.gov/catdir/cps/romanization/chinese.pdf
7. Sun, Xiaoling; Zhou, Jing (2002) English versions of Chinese authors' names in biomedical journals: observations and recommendations. *Science Editor* 25(1–3). Available online at www.councilscienceeditors.org/pdf/v25n1p003-004.pdf
8. For example, 'Mao, Z.' for 'Mao Zedong', 'Mao Zetan' or 'Mao Zemin'.
9. Personal names of Chinese minority groups, in *Rules for cataloguing Chinese documents*, 2nd edn, 2005. National Library Beijing: Beijing Library Publishing, pp. 344–5.

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