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A Guide to Chinese Names

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and
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Today, many law enforcement agencies are experiencing increasing difficulties in identifying accurately individuals with Chinese names. These difficulties have arisen primarily because of the diversity of the Chinese language and naming systems and how authorities recorded Chinese names in the past. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to discuss Chinese characters and dialects, romanization systems, and how to determine and record Chinese proper names. It is intended to provide law enforcement officers with a basic understanding of the Chinese language and naming system, thereby helping them to report

and record Chinese names more accurately.

Chinese Characters

Unlike English and other Western languages, Chinese is not built upon an alphabet. Rather, it is composed of thousands of characters, each of which represents one syllable. Each character, or syllable, is also a unit in itself and represents a complete idea.

Some Chinese characters are pictographic in nature. These characters are derived from ancient Chinese symbols that are pictures of the objects they represent. Chinese characters may also be combined to create another character and con-

cept. For example, the character meaning "bright" is composed of the characters that represent the sun and the moon. Together, they suggest the idea of brightness.

Chinese Dialects

Written Chinese characters are understood by anyone who understands Chinese; however, spoken Chinese varies according to dialects. In other words, although all Chinese read the same language, they may not be able to understand someone who speaks a different dialect of Chinese. Therefore, to consider Chinese as one language is an oversimplification. Rather, Chinese is a group of related, yet distinct,

languages within the Chinese branch of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Chinese is composed of hundreds of dialects and subdialects, each of which developed as various peoples migrated to different geographic regions. Scholars disagree as to the number and classification of Chinese dialects, but for the purposes of this article, only seven major dialects will be discussed.

The most common Chinese dialect is Mandarin. Mandarin is spoken by approximately 70 percent of the Chinese population, primarily in northern, eastern, and southwestern China. It is the national language of both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan. The Wu dialect, common to the area near Shanghai, is the second most prevalent and is spoken by roughly 15 percent of the people.

Cantonese is popularly spoken in Canton and Hong Kong. Taishenese, or Toyshan, a subdialect of Cantonese, was once the most important Chinese dialect in the United States because it was spoken by most of the early Chinese immigrants. The Min, or Fukienese, dialect is derived from Fujian Province of China. Gan and related dialects are common in eastern-central China, and Xiang is spoken in central and southwestern China. In addition, Hakka, unlike other dialects, is not geographically based. This dialect is common among descendants of refugees from China's 9th century civil wars.

It must be emphasized that the above dialects are as different as French is to Spanish. For example, a Mandarin speaker cannot communi-

cate verbally with a Cantonese speaker just as someone who speaks Spanish could not understand someone who speaks French. However, unlike French and Spanish, speakers of different Chinese dialects can still communicate through the written form of the language.

Furthermore, most dialects branched out and subdialects evolved. Subdialects are variations of the mother dialect. While subdialects differ to varying degrees, it is easier for speakers of various subdialects, derived from the same dialect, to understand one another. For instance, a speaker of the Southern Min subdialect will find it easier to converse with a Northern Min speaker than with someone who speaks Cantonese.

Language reformers within China have tried to standardize spoken Chinese, in the hope of eliminating the difficulties created by so many dialects. This movement led

to the establishment of Mandarin Chinese as the standard dialect and official language of both the People's Republic of China and of Taiwan. Mandarin is also taught uniformly throughout the educational systems in both countries.

Romanization Systems

The phonetic representation of a Chinese character into words or syllables using the Latin alphabet is called romanization. This process is, at times, referred to as transliteration. Transliteration is different from translation in that it only provides the pronunciation, whereas translation provides the meaning of the character.

Romanization of a Chinese character into English is accomplished by replicating the pronunciation of the Chinese character using English letters. For example, the Chinese character meaning "man" or "husband" is pronounced in both



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Mandarin and Cantonese as “fu,” and thus, it is romanized as “fu.” However, in another example, the Chinese character meaning “3” is pronounced differently in Mandarin and Cantonese. As a result, it is romanized as “san” in Mandarin and as “sam” in Cantonese.

Ideally, the romanization process should be standardized and documented to ensure that all transliterations are consistent and accurate. Without a standardized system, one transliterator may romanize the same character as “fu” and another as “foo.” Even though both transliterators intended their romanized word to represent the character for “man” or “husband,” their romanizations are different because each used different rules for converting the same sound into English. As a result, someone could incorrectly believe that the transliterators were referring to two different characters that have two different meanings. This issue of consistent romanization becomes critical when applied to specific individual names.

Even though not all dialects have their own standardized romanization systems, most common dialects, such as Cantonese, do use a standardized romanization system. In other words, in order to convert Chinese characters into Cantonese, each and every character should always be consistently converted (transliterated) into the same English spelling (pronunciation). In addition, each romanization system has different rules for transliterating characters into English words or syllables.

Mandarin has two popular romanization systems, Pinyin and

Wade-Giles. Both systems represent the same Mandarin sounds, but use different rules for incorporating these sounds into English words or syllables. The Wade-Giles system was developed during the late 1800s and early 1900s by two British diplomats and is still used to this day in many parts of the world. The

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People’s Republic of China introduced Pinyin in the mid-1950s and officially adopted this system in 1978 for its Chinese-language publications and business letters sent to foreign countries.

Since the People’s Republic of China adopted the Pinyin system in 1978, many institutions, including the FBI, have also adopted the Pinyin system for Mandarin romanizations. As a result, in FBI files prior to 1980, the Chinese characters for names of people who speak Mandarin were romanized according to the Wade-Giles system—the only romanization system used for Mandarin at that time. After 1980, the FBI adopted the Pinyin system of transliterating Mandarin names.

There are also romanization systems for Cantonese and

Toyshan, which use different rules for transliterating characters into English words or syllables. Whatever system is used, it is imperative that the conversion of the characters into English spelling be done faithfully in adherence to the rules of that system so that a particular system will not romanize a character in more than one spelling.

While stressing the importance of consistency in romanization, it is of equal importance to know that the Chinese do not necessarily romanize their names according to any established systems. Often, a Chinese name will be romanized based solely on how it sounds to the English listener. For example, the name of the Chinese general and politician, CHIANG Kai-shek, can be romanized into numerous forms, including:

- JIANG Jieshi (Mandarin/Pinyin)
- CHIANG Chieh-shih (Mandarin/Wade-Giles)
- TSEUNG Kai-shek (Cantonese), and
- CHIANG Kai-shek (his own romanization part Mandarin/Wade-Giles and part Cantonese).

The same can be said of the name of the founder of the Republic of China, SUN Yat-sen, whose variations include:

- SUN Yixian (Mandarin/Pinyin)
- SUN I-hsien (Mandarin/Wade-Giles)
- SUN Yat-sin (Cantonese), and
- SUN Yat-sen (his own romanization).

In the first example, CHIANG Kai-shek's own romanization is composed of a Cantonese given name and a Mandarin family name. In the second example, SUN Yatsen created his own individual romanization of his given name; yet, the romanization of his family name is "SUN" in all systems. These examples are indicative of the various possible romanizations and the difficulties law enforcement officers can encounter as a result of attempting to identify a Chinese person by using a romanized name.

Standard Telegraphic Code

As explained above, the various romanization systems present difficulties in identifying a Chinese individual because they create different versions of spelling when converting a Chinese character into English. This problem highlights the fact that the best identification of a Chinese name is the characters themselves. However, this procedure is complicated by the fact that most communication systems do not transmit Chinese characters, and most law enforcement officers do not have the proficiency to read them.

To remedy this problem, coding systems, developed many years ago, are used. These systems convert Chinese characters into four-digit numbers which, unlike Chinese characters, can be transmitted by telegraph, teletype, or typewriter. These numbers are also readily recognizable and can be retrieved easily. Several such coding systems are the Chinese Telegraphic Code (CTC), the Chinese Commercial Code (CCC), and the Standard Tele-

graphic Code (STC). However, to avoid confusion and ensure consistency, it is recommended that law enforcement agencies use the STC when possible.

As mentioned, the STC provides numerical equivalents for all Chinese characters by assigning a four-digit number to each character. For example, for the name CHIANG Kai-shek, the four-digit numbers would be 5592, 0094, and 4258 respectively.

An STC manual also provides an English equivalent, or romanization, for each character for

some of the common dialects, such as Mandarin (Pinyin), Mandarin (Wade-Giles), Cantonese, and/or Taishanese. Also, some STC manuals furnish the meaning or translation for each of the characters. For example, the meaning for STC number 0857 is "excellent, praise."

When a name in Chinese characters is transmitted in STC numbers, the receiver simply uses the STC manual to decode the STC numbers into their corresponding Chinese characters and romanize them into the proper dialect. Since both the sender and the receiver of

Helpful Hints to Record/Report Chinese Names

- *Include the STC numbers as an alias*—WANG Jianguo, aka. STC 3769/1696/0948
- *Place the romanized family name in uppercase letters*—WANG Jianguo or WONG Kin-kwok, and/or
- *Place a comma after the family name*—Wong, Kin-kwok, and/or
- *Place the family name in double parentheses*—((WANG)) Jianguo, and/or
- *Underline the family name*—WONG Kin-kwok

- Have subject print name in Chinese characters
- Have subject print romanized name, along with any aliases
- Confirm with subject which character and romanized name is the subject's family name and indicate this in writing
- Remember that in Chinese, the family name is listed first
- Determine the STC numbers for subject's name.

STC Numbers and Their Equivalents in Various Dialects

Language specialists look up the Chinese characters in the STC manual to determine the corresponding STC numbers. They will also find the corresponding romanizations according to the various Chinese dialects. For example:

STC No.	MANDARIN Pinyin	MANDARIN Wade-Giles	CANTONESE	TAISHAN
3769	Wang	Wang	Wong	Wong
1696	Jian	Chien	Kin	Gan
0948	Guo	Kuo	Kwok	Gwok

the information use the same STC manual, accuracy is guaranteed.

The STC numbers should be kept and recorded as an alias. Many Asian law enforcement agencies will accept requests for identification checks or fugitive stops only if the providing agency submits the subject's name in either Chinese characters or STC numbers. Although the recent wide use of facsimile machines allows for the transmission of Chinese characters, it should be emphasized that the receiver needs to be proficient in the written Chinese language to read it and romanize the text.

Chinese Names

Chinese names generally consist of three characters. The first character represents the family name, and the last two characters represent the given name. Unlike English proper names, Chinese names are presented with the family

name first and the given name(s) last. This could be illustrated by taking the typical American name, John Henry Doe, in which the given names are listed first and the family name is last. However, the Chinese equivalent to this name would be Doe John Henry. This custom is kept even in the West. For example, Chinese leader, DENG Xiaoping, is never referred to as Xiaoping DENG.

In addition, a Chinese individual generally will be referred to by both family and given names. For example, one would address a man with the name WANG Jianguo with his full name rather than as Jian, Jianguo, or WANG. Only among relatives and close friends do Chinese address one another by their given names. However, Cantonese speakers may address close friends and family with the family name preceded by "Ah," an informal term that can be translated

roughly as "dear." Thus, WONG Kin-kwok may be addressed by a close friend as Ah WONG. In the same manner, Mandarin speakers may precede their family names with "Lao," "Xiao," or "Da" as in Lao WANG, Xiao WANG, or Da WANG, which means "Old Wang," "Little Wang," and "Big Wang," respectively.

In the United States, Chinese-Americans commonly add a Western or "Christian" given name as a prefix to their Chinese name. For example, after adopting a Western given name, such as Peter, the Cantonese name LEUNG King-hung becomes Peter King-hung LEUNG or simply Peter LEUNG. However, often the adoption of a Christian name is for convenience only and may not be reflected in official records.

In addition, married Chinese women will usually keep their full names and add their husbands' names before the others. For example, if Miss LEUNG Yut-wa married Mr. CHAN, she would become Mrs. CHAN (LEUNG) Yut-wa. However, sometimes Chinese-American women will not use their given and maiden names and will keep only their married name. This is particularly true if the woman has an Americanized name. For instance, if Mary Yut Wa LEUNG married Mr. CHAN, she would become Mrs. Mary LEUNG CHAN.

The arrangement of given names is treated differently in the various romanization systems. The Wade-Giles system connects the two syllables of the given name by a hyphen (e.g. LI Yu-lung), while the Pinyin system links the two syl-

lables without any break in between (e.g. Li Yulong). Still another arrangement, commonly used in Malaysia and Singapore, treats the three romanized syllables as three separate words, such as LEE Yu Lung.

How to Determine and Record Chinese Names

Because the Chinese language is so diverse, investigators should take great care when recording and reporting Chinese proper names. Often, a subject's name will only be reported in its romanized form. This can cause great difficulty in light of the multiplicity of possible characters for any one phonetic spelling.

This confusion could be likened to looking in the telephone book under Gene Smith for an acquaintance who actually spells his name Jean Smythe. For example, if the only information available is that the romanization of the subject's family name is WANG, this is not enough to determine the exact Chinese character that WANG represents. In the Mandarin dialect, WANG may be represented by 19 different characters. In other words, there are 19 different characters that have the Mandarin pronunciation and romanization of WANG. Also, in Cantonese, WANG could refer to one of five characters, none of which is identical to any of the Mandarin characters for WANG.

However, if the Chinese character for the subject's family name is known, then an accurate romanization can be determined. Therefore, recording an individual's name in its original Chinese characters is crucial to identify accurately

any Chinese individual. In addition, when the suspect or individual in question is providing this information, they should be reminded to print the characters. And, because many individuals use romanized names for certain American legal situations, the investigator should

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accurately.**
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have them print their romanized names. This can be especially helpful if the subjects have an unusual romanization.

Again, when recording Chinese names, investigators should also remember that in Chinese, family names are listed first. For example, someone with the name WANG Chien-Kuo should be addressed as Mr. WANG, not as Mr. Kuo. Therefore, when recording Chinese names, it would be helpful to identify clearly which name is the family name. For example, suppose a Chinese individual is arrested and interrogated. The investigator should immediately have the suspect print his name in Chinese characters and his romanized name, along with any aliases. The investigator should then confirm with the subject which character and which romanized

name is the subject's family name, and then clearly indicate such in writing.

Next, the STC numbers for the subject's name should be determined. This process will most likely require a Chinese language specialist or someone schooled in Chinese transliteration to look up the characters in an STC manual. As mentioned previously, some STC manuals also provide romanizations for different dialects, such as Mandarin and Cantonese. The STC manual will also reveal one or more romanizations for the subject's name which may or may not confirm the individual's own romanization.

Conclusion

Despite the numerous dialects, romanization systems, and various other peculiarities of the Chinese language, there are methods law enforcement can apply to better understand Chinese individuals and to determine and record Chinese proper names accurately. Today, American society represents a wealth of ethnic diversity. As a result of this diversity, however, it is imperative that law enforcement officers nationwide become more familiar with other cultures that are becoming increasingly present in their communities. Basic knowledge of various cultures and languages, such as Chinese, is just one way law enforcement officers can help tear down the walls between various ethnic groups and better protect the citizens they serve.

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