

# English Versions of Chinese Authors' Names in Biomedical Journals: Observations and Recommendations

The English language is widely used internationally for academic purposes. Most of the world's leading life-science journals are published in English. A growing number of Chinese biomedical journals publish abstracts or full papers in this language.

We have studied how Chinese authors' names are presented in English in biomedical journals. There is considerable inconsistency. This inconsistency causes confusion, for example, in distinguishing surnames from given names and thus citing names properly in reference lists.

In the current article we begin by presenting as background some features of Chinese names. We then provide examples of the varied ways in which journals have presented the transliterated names of Chinese authors. Finally, we propose a standardized format and note its advantages.

## Features of Chinese Names

Some features of Chinese names differ from those of English names. These differences contribute to the variability in how names of Chinese authors are presented in English. Recognizing these features can aid in devising a clear and consistent format.

In Chinese the surname precedes the given name. Thus, for example, in the Chinese name Zhou De-An, Zhou is the surname and De-An is the given name. When writing their names in pinyin or other forms of transliteration, some Chinese authors retain the Chinese order, but others place their given names first, in keeping with the usual format for names in English.

Chinese surnames usually have one syllable (for example, Chen, Li, Sun, Wang, and Zhou). Chinese given names may be either one syllable (for example, Hong) or two syllables (for example, Jian-Hua).

In English transliteration, two-syllable given names sometimes are spelled as two words (Jian Hua), sometimes as one word (Jianhua), and sometimes hyphenated (Jian-Hua).

Occasionally Chinese surnames are two syllables (for example, Ou-Yang, Mu-Rong, Si-Ma, and Si-Tu). Editors who are relatively unfamiliar with Chinese names may mistake these compound surnames for given names.

China has 56 ethnic groups. Names of minority group members can differ considerably from those of Hans, who constitute most of the Chinese population. Many minority-group members' names (for example, the Uighur name Munire Mudessir and the Tibetan name Gong-Bao-Cai-Dan) clearly differ from typical Chinese names. Names of minority-group members have been transliterated in various ways.

Different systems of transliteration contribute to the variability with which Chinese names are presented in English. Early overseas Chinese residents came largely from the coastal regions of the provinces Guangdong and Fujian. The Cantonese and Hakka dialects they spoke served as the basis of the Wade-Giles system of transliteration. In the 1950s the Chinese government introduced the pinyin system of transliteration, which is based on the Mandarin dialect. When writing their names in English, authors from mainland China now generally use the pinyin system. However, many overseas Chinese authors and authors in Hong Kong prefer the Wade-Giles system, with which they have long been familiar. For example, they would write Chou Hsun-Tse rather than Zhou Xun-Ze and Sung Kuo-An rather than Song Guo-An.

## Forms of Chinese Authors' Names in Biomedical Journals

We recently reviewed forms of Chinese authors' names accompanying English-language articles or abstracts in various Chinese and Western biomedical journals. We found considerable inconsistency even within the same journal or issue. The forms were in the following categories:

- Surname in all capital letters followed by hyphenated or closed-up given name, for example,
  - KE Zhi-Yong (*Chinese Journal of Contemporary Pediatrics*)
  - GUO Liang-Qian (*Chinese Pharmaceutical Journal*)
  - WANG Ai-qin (*Chinese Journal of General Surgery*)
  - ZHANG Song-wen (*Journal of Shanghai Medical University*)
  - LIU Xiuhua (*Chinese Medical Journal [Beijing]*)
- Surname with only first letter capitalized followed by hyphenated or closed-up given name, for example,
  - Huang Zheng-ji (*Chinese Medical Journal [Beijing]*)
  - Guo Weimin (*Chinese Journal of Practical Pediatrics*)
  - Lu Wenju (*Academic Journal of Guangzhou Medical College*)
- Hyphenated or closed-up given name followed by surname in all capital letters, for example,
  - Da-Nian QIN (*Asian Journal of Andrology*)
  - Zhangwei CAI (*Pediatric Research*)
- Hyphenated or closed-up given name followed by surname with only first letter capitalized, for example,
  - Wei-Chun Lin (*Chinese Medical Journal, Taipei*)
  - Shou-Liang Chen (*Asian Journal of Surgery*)

Dayuan Li (*American Heart Journal*)

- Given name plus initial followed by surname, for example,

Jiang F. Luo (*American Heart Journal*)

- Initials followed by surname, for example,

Q. B. Xiong (*American Journal of Clinical Pathology*)

Examples of inconsistency in format in a given issue or volume include the following:

*American Heart Journal*, Vol 137, 1999:  
Dali Feng, Ya-Ting Chen, Ming W. Liu

*American Journal of Clinical Pathology*,  
Vol 112, 1999:  
Chiao H. Wang, Q. B. Xiong, Chung  
Wu Lin

*Asian Journal of Surgery*, Vol 24, 2001:  
Shou-Liang Chen, Shenming Wang,  
Yongjie Lin

### A Suggested Format for Chinese Authors' Names

The inconsistency in how Chinese authors' names are presented in English can confuse editors, readers, and indexes. Furthermore, such inconsistency can create a poor impression of a journal. However, imposing consistency beyond that required for clarity may needlessly interfere with authors' right to state their names as they wish.

To maximize clarity and facilitate searching the literature, we suggest that Chinese authors write their surnames in all capital letters and, if their given names

are two syllables, hyphenate them. We recommend, however, that authors retain freedom to use the forms of transliteration that they prefer and to list their surnames either first or last.

Writing Chinese surnames in all capital letters helps editors and readers to distinguish between the surname and given name, no matter whether the author places the surname before or after the given name. It is effective regardless of whether the author uses the pinyin system or the Wade-Giles system of transliteration and whether the author is of the Han ethnic group or a minority ethnic group. Examples of names in this format are LI Jian-Hua, De-An ZHOU, CHOU Hsun-Tse, and Munire MUDESSIR. Such clear designation of surnames is of particular value in preparing bibliographic databases and indexes.

Chinese compound surnames should be hyphenated in addition to appearing in all capital letters (for example, MURONG and SI-MA). The hyphenation helps make clear that these surnames have more than one syllable. It also is consistent with Chinese culture, in that compound surnames contain more than one Chinese character.

Most names of Tibetans do not include surnames. Tibetan authors' names should be written accordingly (for example, De-Ji-Mei-Duo and Cai-Rang) unless the author states that part of the name is a surname. Avoiding full capitalization unless indicated reflects the nature of Tibetan names and respects Tibetan customs.

Hyphenating Chinese given names of

more than one syllable, rather than closing up such names or giving only one or more initials, helps to maximize the amount of information available for literature-searching. For example, if an author's name is listed as CHOU Hsun-Tse, it is likely to be indexed as Chou, HT; if listed as CHOU Hsuntse, it will be indexed merely as Chou, H. Furthermore, inclusion of the full given name rather than merely initials facilitates distinction among authors with the same combination of surname and initials.

To summarize: Chinese names differ in structure from English names. When presenting names of Chinese authors in English, authors and editors should strive for clarity and consistency while maintaining sensitivity to Chinese traditions and personal preferences. Writing Chinese surnames in all capital letters, hyphenating two-syllable given names, and following the other guidelines above can achieve these goals.



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Note: A version of this article in which the Chinese names are written in Chinese characters, as well as transliterated, is available from the authors. To obtain it, write to ZHOU Jing at [jingzhou111@hotmail.com](mailto:jingzhou111@hotmail.com). Other correspondence about the article can be directed to the same address.