Clarification of LC practice concerning the use of diacritical marks in Japanese romanization

The current ALA-LC romanization table for Japanese has been implemented inconsistently due to conflicting guidance from the Library of Congress (**LC**). The following clarifies which diacritical marks to use and when to use them when romanizing Japanese from the vernacular.

Background

The 1991 and 1997 editions of the *ALA-LC romanization tables* called for use of the apostrophe and macron as the two diacritic marks used in Japanese romanization. *Cataloging service bulletin* number 100 (Spring 2003) on the other hand directed that the alif be used instead of the apostrophe. Although the reason for this change was not enumerated, the most likely reason was to bring the ALA-LC Japanese romanization table into line with RLIN practice, then used for LC's online input of Japanese cataloging records. The ALA-LC Japanese romanization table was never changed, and the LC website continues to call for apostrophe use.

With the passage of time there is no longer any reason to use the alif instead of the apostrophe. Catalogers have found that the apostrophe is convenient and easy to remember, whereas the alif is often cumbersome. Because using both the apostrophe and alif for the same purpose could affect searching and retrieval, LC wishes to resolve the issue by unambiguously calling for use of the apostrophe, and not the alif, when romanizing Japanese.

Accordingly, LC proposes that a new section be added to the Japanese romanization table that clarifies when apostrophes and macrons should be used. The new section would be inserted after the punctuation section and before the word division section.

Proposed language

Diacritic marks

1. Transcribe the macron (ˉ) over the letters *a, i, u, e*, and *o* to indicate a long vowel pronunciation.

rōdō	労働
kenkyū	研究
Tōkyō	東京
sābisu	サービス
chīzu	チーズ
sētā	セーター

2. Transcribe the apostrophe (') between syllables when the first syllable ends with the letter *n* and the following syllable begins with the letter *a, i, u, e, o*, and *y* and when it is necessary to separate romanization.

toshokan'in	図書館員
Nagai Ken'ichi	長井憲一
Shin'etsu	信越
hon'yaku	翻訳
Man'yō	万葉
shin'ainaru	親愛なる
san'okuen	三億円
shin'uchi	真打

File maintenance

Catalogers are urged to perform thorough file maintenance to replace alifs with apostrophes when encountered in Japanese romanization in bibliographic and authority records, particularly in access points (titles and headings). Please note that the alif has been employed in few romanized words, but it does appear in hundreds of personal names.

Comments

Comments on this clarification of LC practice should be sent to Bruce Johnson in LC's Policy and Standards Office < bjoh@loc.gov > no later than January 22, 2012.