ONE LANGUAGE, DIFFERENT ROMANIZAITON RULES:
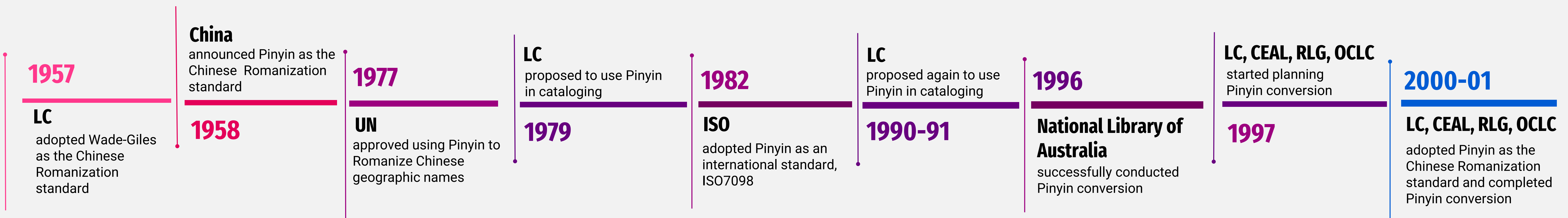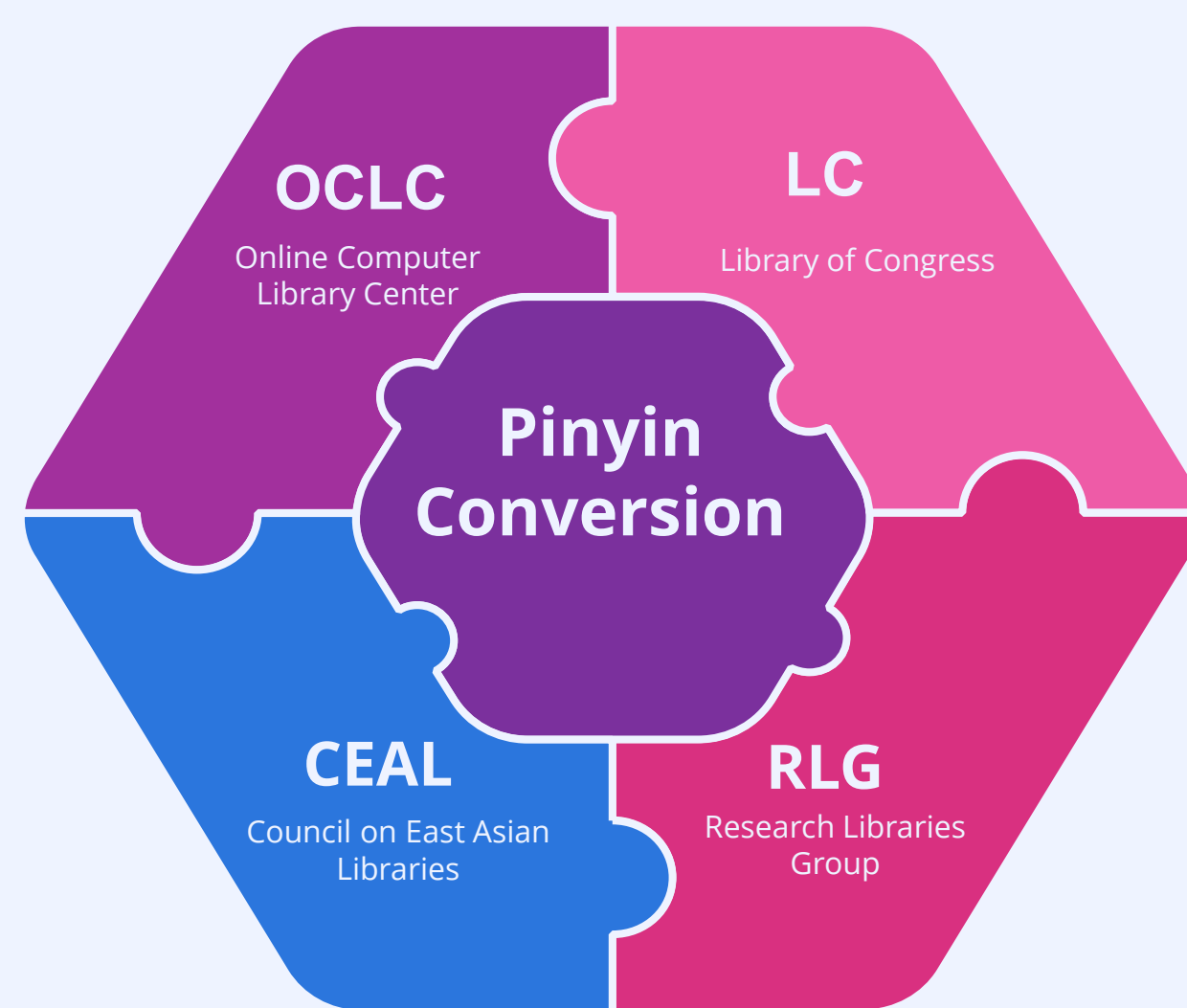# THE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PINYIN CONVERSION PROJECT

Lucy Gan, University of Toronto Libraries; **Yao Chen**, University of Chicago Library;
Xiang Li, University of Colorado Boulder Libraries; **Chengzhi Wang,** Columbia University Libraries

Timeline

1957
LC adopted Wade-Giles as the Chinese Romanization standard

China announced Pinyin as the Chinese Romanization standard
1958

1977
UN approved using Pinyin to Romanize Chinese geographic names

LC proposed to use Pinyin in cataloging
1979

1982
ISO adopted Pinyin as an international standard, ISO7098

LC proposed again to use Pinyin in cataloging
1990-91

1996
National Library of Australia successfully conducted Pinyin conversion

LC, CEAL, RLG, OCLC started planning Pinyin conversion
1997

2000-01
LC, CEAL, RLG, OCLC adopted Pinyin as the Chinese Romanization standard and completed Pinyin conversion

Our Project

2001-2021

- Uncovering the history
- Celebrating the legacy
- Seeking reflection and inspiration
- Exploring community building

Oral History Interviews (2021-2022)

Martin Heijdra (Princeton)
Peter Zhou (UC Berkeley)
Cathy Yang (LC)
Guoqing Li (Ohio State)

Xiaotong Wang (Oregon)
Shi Deng (UCSD)
Philip Melzer (LC)
Amy Tsiang (UCLA)

Yu-Lan Chou (SCC Public Library)
Sarah Elman (Columbia)
Hsi-Chu Bolick (UNC-Chapel Hill)
Shuwen Cao (Princeton)

Growing Chinese Collections

CEAL: Total Chinese Physical Volumes Held, 1957-1998, https://ceal.ku.edu/table/advanced

北京
Pekin
Peking
Beiking
(PY) Beijing

毛澤東/毛泽东
(WG) Mao Tse-tung
(PY) Mao Zedong

鄧小平/邓小平
(WG) Teng Hsiao-p'ing
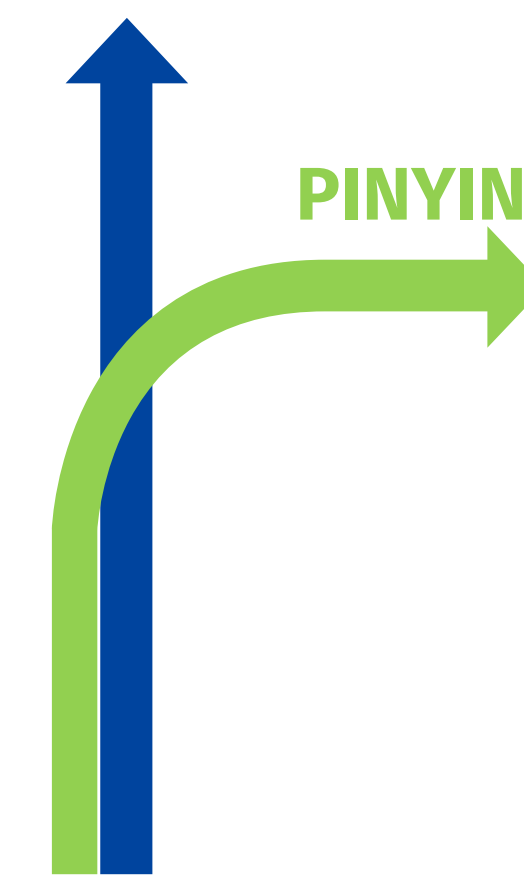(PY) Deng Xiaoping

Chinese Romanization and North American Libraries

Wade-Giles (adopted in 1957)

- ✔ Easy for Western users
- ✔ Conventional standard
- 🚫 Use of the same letters to represent different sounds
- 🚫 Frequent use of diacritic marks
- 🚫 Changing user needs
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WADE-GILES → **PINYIN**

Pinyin (adopted in 1999)

- ✔ Accuracy and clarity
- ✔ International ISO standard
- ✔ Pinyin eco-system: scholarly & non-scholarly
- ? Task impossible? Conversion of accumulated bibliographic records
- ? Reliable computer technologies
- ? Chinese Romanization Guidelines
- 🚫 Politics and sentiments
......

Pinyin Conversion Project, 2000-2001

Key Players:

- **LC –** Initiator and leader
- **CEAL –** Coordinator of the network of East Asian Libraries
- **RLG & OCLC –** Bibliographic utilities

Major Timeline:

- Aug. 1, 2000: Moratoriums on Chinese language authority work and the cataloging of Chinese materials
- Oct. 1, 2000: *Day 1*, when Pinyin officially became the standard for Chinese Romanization in library operations
- Oct. 1, 2001: *Day 2*, when RLG and OCLC started to convert bibliographic backfiles
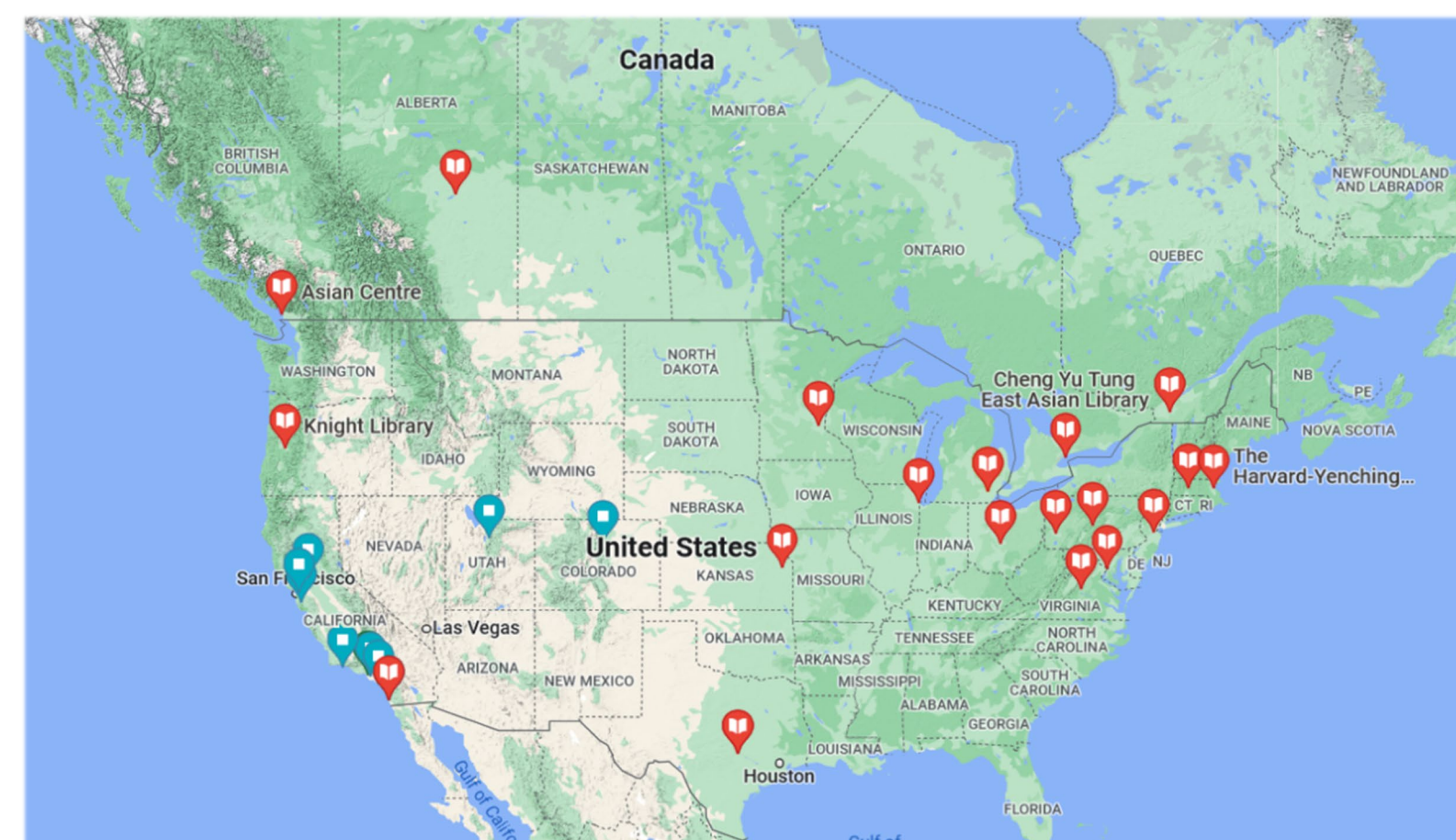
Major Accomplishments*:

- Chinese Pinyin Romanization Guidelines
- Conversion of over **15,900 authority files**
- Conversion of over **3,200,000 bibliographic records**
- Conversion of individual libraries' bibliographic records

* Melzer, Philip. "The Pinyin Conversion Project and the Challenge of Cleaning Up Afterward." *Journal of East Asian Libraries*, no. 175, 2022, Article 5. Jun. 1, 2023, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol2022/iss175/5.

plan
collaborate
create
work
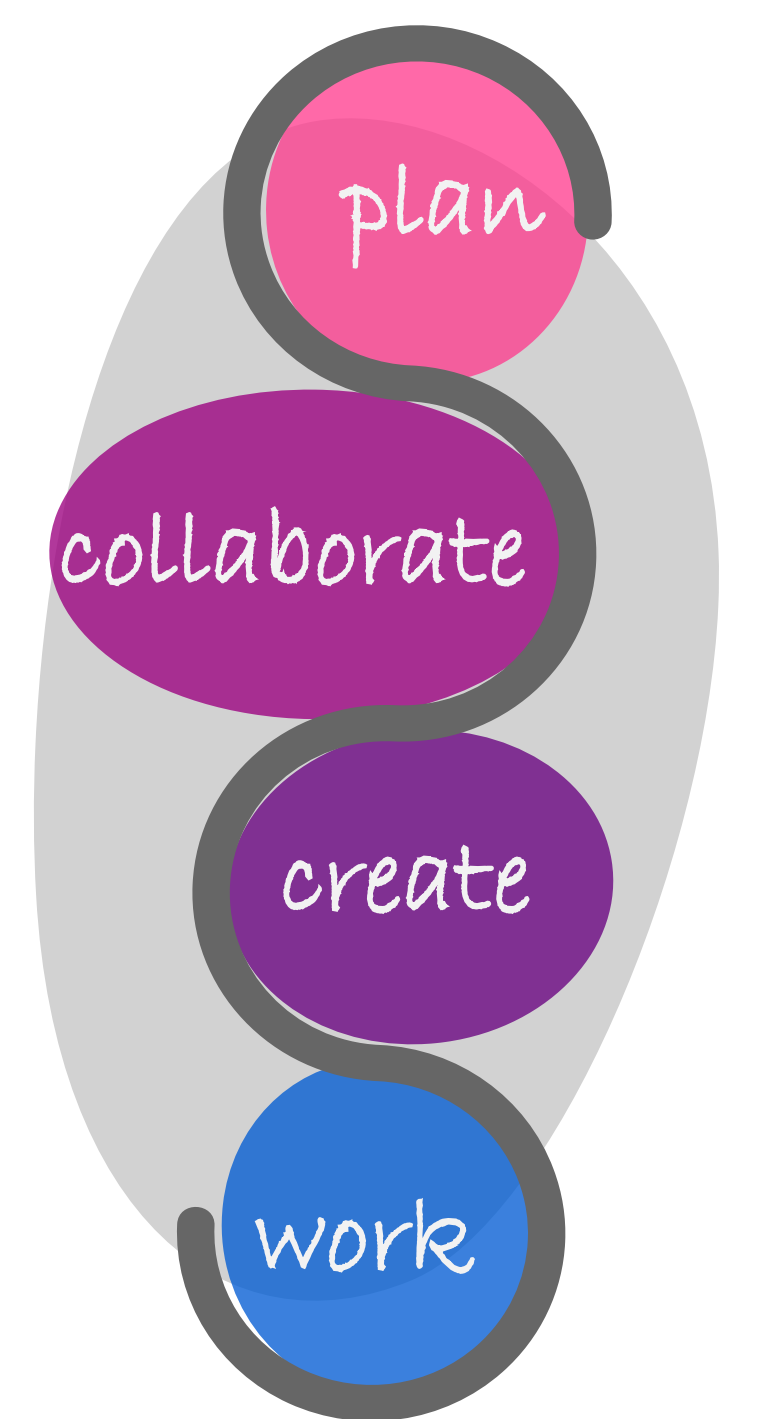
Let's Work Together, Let's Library

Reflections

Professional Sustainability:

- Adapting to evolving information ecosystem
- Building the East Asian Library community
- Being open-minded and keeping learning

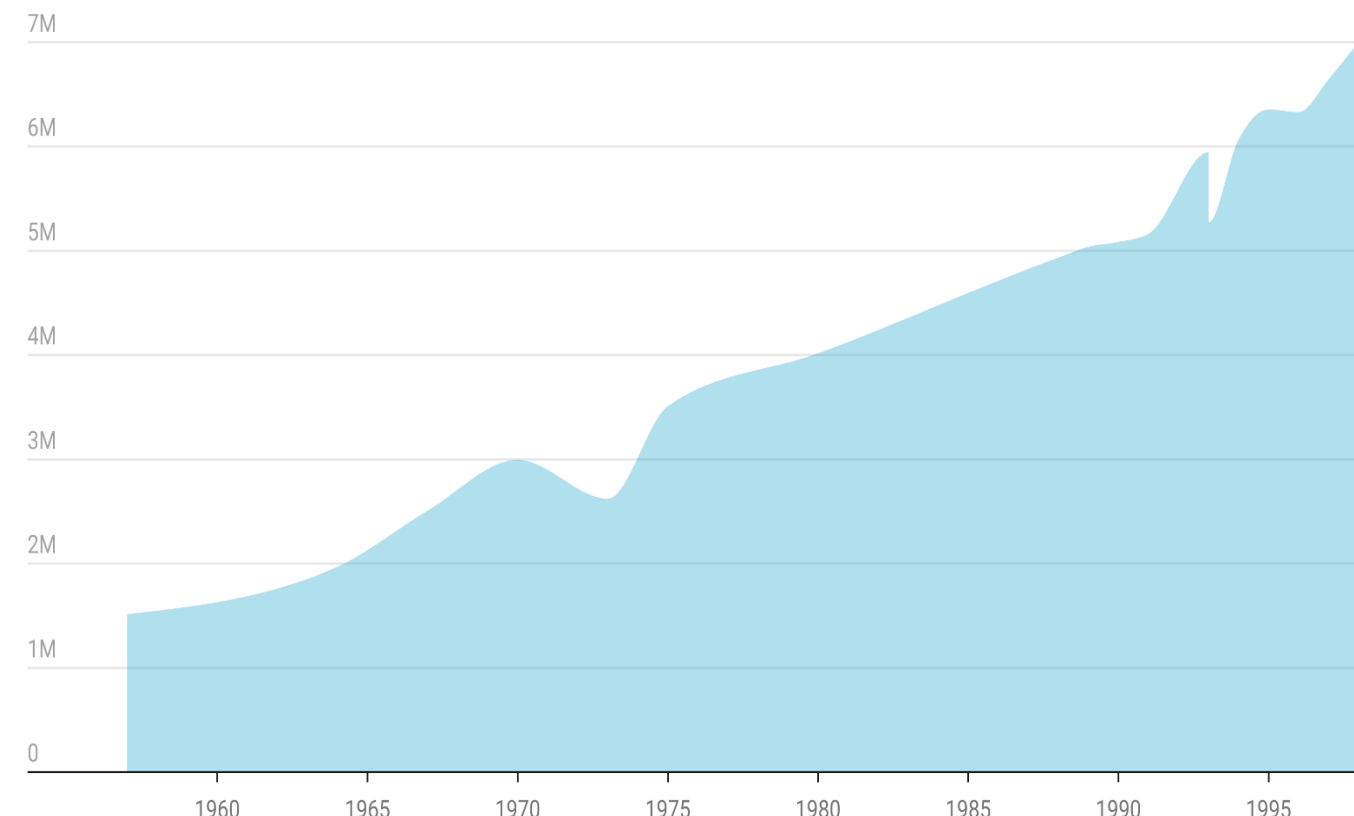*Embrace Changes, Embrace New Technology and Possibilities!*

Our Team

Lucy Gan
Yao Chen
Xiang Li
Chengzhi Wang