

ROMANIZATION SYSTEM FOR KOREAN
McCune-Reischauer System
BGN/PCGN Agreement

This system was devised by G.M. McCune and E.O. Reischauer, and was originally published in the Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Volume XXIX, 1939. It has been used by the BGN since 1943, and was later adopted for use by the PCGN. A main characteristic of this system is the attempt to represent approximate Korean pronunciation, while systematically converting the Hangul characters to corresponding Roman-script letters. Since Korean pronunciation is often inconsistently represented in Hangul, the McCune-Reischauer conversion tables are rather elaborate, and reverse conversion (from Roman script back to Hangul) is not possible.

Although Sino-Korean characters continue in use in Korean writing, the language is presently written mainly in terms of the Hangul alphabet, formerly known as Onmun. This alphabet was devised in the fifteenth century and is unique in at least one respect, that is, the order in which the Hangul characters are customarily written in words. For instance, the Korean geographic name P'anmunjŏm is written as follows.

Hangul			Romanization		
left to right			top to bottom		
판	문	점	or	판	P' a n
P' a n	m u n	j ŏ m		문	m u n
				점	j ŏ m
					→ P'anmunjŏm

The Korean language comprises several quite disparate dialects, but Hangul spelling has become largely standardized in recent decades. A characteristic which renders the romanization process difficult, however, is the retention of historical and/or morphological identity in numerous words at the expense of consistent representation of the spoken word.

CONSONANT CHARACTERS

Hangul

Romanization

	Beginning of word	End of word	Within a word (syllable-final)	Within a word (syllable-initial)
ㄱ	k	k	g, k, ng	g, k
ㄴ	n, not romanized	n	n, n', l	n, l
ㄷ	t, ch	t		d, t, ch, j
ㄹ	n, not romanized	l	r, l	r, n, l
ㅁ	m	m	m	m
ㅂ	p	p	b, p, m	b, p
ㅅ	s, sh	t	d, t; k, n, p, s, not romanized	s, sh
ㅇ ¹	not romanized	ng	ng	not romanized
ㅈ	ch	t		j, ch
ㅊ	ch'	t		ch'
ㅋ	k'	k		k'
ㅌ	t', ch'	t		t'
ㅍ	p'	p		p'
ㅎ	h			h
ㄲ ㅅㅈ	kk			kk, k
ㄸ ㅅㄷ	tt			tt, t
ㅃ ㅅㅂ	pp			pp, p
ㅆ	ss			ss, s
ㅈㅈ ㅅㅅ	tch			tch
ㄷㄱ		k		k
ㄷㅂ		p		p

VOWEL CHARACTERS

Hangul Romanization

ㅏ	a
ㅑ	ya, a
ㅓ	o
ㅕ	yō, ō
ㅗ	o
ㅛ	yo, o
ㅜ	u
ㅠ	yu, u
ㅡ	ü
ㅣ	i
ㅐ	ae
ㅒ	yae
ㅔ	e
ㅖ	ye, e
ㅚ	oe
ㅜㅣ	wi
ㅡㅣ	üi, i
ㅘ	wa
ㅙ	wō
ㅞ	wae
ㅟ	we

ALTERNATE ROMANIZATIONS OF KOREAN CHARACTERS
AT THE BEGINNING OF SYLLABLES

Each romanization shown in the following table represents the combination of a Korean consonant character (shown in the left-hand column) plus a Korean vowel character (shown in the top row) occurring in a particular graphic environment. A romanization preceding a vertical stroke is to be used at the beginning of non-initial syllables. A romanization for which no alternate forms are shown is to be used in both environments.

	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ
ㄱ									ki ki gi	
ㄴ	ya nya lya	yō nyō lyō	yo nyo lyo	yu nyu lyu	i ni li	ye nye lye			ni ni li	
ㄷ	cha cha ja	chō chō jō	cho cho jo	chu chu ju	chi chi ji	che che je			ti ti di	
ㄹ	ya rya nya lya	yō ryō nyō lyō	yo ryo nyo lyo	yu ryu nyu lyu	i ri ni li	ye rye nye lye			ni ri ni li	
ㅁ							mi	mi		
ㅂ							pi pi bi	pi pi bi		
ㅅ	sa	sō	so	su	si	se	shwi	ㅅsi	shwi	
ㅆ	cha cha ja	chō chō jō	cho cho jo	chu chu ju		che che je		chi chi ji		
ㅈ	ch'a	ch'ō	ch'o	ch'u		ch'e		ch'i	ch'wi	ch'we
ㅊ								k'i		
ㅋ	ch'a	ch'ō	ch'o	ch'u	ch'i	ch'e		t'i		
ㆁ							p'i	p'i		

ROMANIZATIONS OF HANGUL CONSONANTS
AND CONSONANT CLUSTERS WITHIN WORDS

Plus (+) represents any Hangul vocalic character. The consonants and consonant combinations shown in the table below should be understood as being preceded and followed by any romanized Hangul vowel character. Hangul characters ending syllables are listed in the left-hand column; Hangul characters starting succeeding syllables are listed in the top row. Thus a syllable ending in + ㄱ (left-hand column) followed by a syllable beginning with ㄴ+ (top row) will read **ngn**; a syllable ending in + ㄴ followed by a syllable beginning with ㄷ+ will read **nch'**. Small raised numerals refer the user to notes on page 61.

	ㄱ ₊	ㄴ ₊	ㄷ ₊	ㄹ ₊	ㅁ ₊	ㅂ ₊	ㅅ ₊	ㅇ ¹ ₊	ㅈ ₊	ㅊ ₊	ㅋ ₊	ㅌ ₊	ㅍ ₊	ㅎ ₊	ㄲ ₊	ㄴㄷ ₊	ㄷㄹ ₊	ㄴㅅ ₊	ㄴㅈ ₊
ㄱ ₊	kk	ngn	kt kch	ngn	ngm	kp	ks ksh	g	kch	kch'	kk'	kt' kch'	kp'	kh	kk	kt	kpp	kss	ktch
ㄴ ₊	n'g	nn	nd nj	ll	nm	nb	ns nsh	n	nj	nch'	nk'	nt' neh'	np'	nh	nkk	nt	npp	nss	ntch
ㄷ ₊	lg	ll	lt lch	ll	lm	lb	ls lsh	r	lch	lch'	lk'	lt' lch'	lp'	rh	lkk	lt	lpp	lss	ltch
ㅁ ₊	mg	mn	md mj	mn	mm	mb	ms msh	m	mj	mch'	mk'	mt' mch'	mp'	mh	mkk	mt	mpp	mss	mtch
ㅂ ₊	pk	mn	pt pch	mn	mm	pp	ps psh	b	pch	pch'	pk'	pt' pch'	pp'	ph	pkk	pt	pp	pss	ptch
ㅅ ₊	kk	nn	tt tch	nn	nm	pp	ss ssh	d	tch	tch'	tk'	tt' tch'	tp'	th	tkk	tt	tpp	ss	tch
ㅇ ₊	ngg	ngn	ngd ngj	ngn	ngm	ngb	ngs ngsh	ng	ngj	ngch'	ngk'	ngt' ngch'	ngp'	ngh	ngkk	ngtt	ngpp	ngss	ngtch
ㄱ ² ₊	g	n	d j	r	m	b	s ssh	ㄱ ²	j	ch'	k'	t' ch'	p'	h	kk	tt	pp	ss	tch
ㄱㄷ ₊	lg	ngn	kt kch	ngl	ngm	kp	ks ksh	lg	kch	kch'	lk'	kt' kch'	kp'	lkh	lkk	kt	kpp	kss	ktch
ㄴㅁ ₊	mg	mn	md mj	ml	lm	mb	ms msh	lm	mj	mch'	mk'	mt' mch'	mp'	mh	mkk	mt	mpp	mss	mtch
ㄷㅂ ₊	pk	mn	pt pch	ml	mm	lb	ps psh	lb	pch	pch'	pk'	pt' pch'	lp'	lph	pkk	pt	lpp	pss	ptch

1. At the end of a syllable, the character ㅇ should be romanized **ng**: 동 → **tong**,

장 항 → **Changhang**. At the beginning of a syllable, ㅇ should not be romanized:

한 양 → **Anyang**, 여수 → **Yösu**.

2. Syllable boundaries within words are not reflected in romanization. In the different types of syllables shown below, C represents any consonant character, V represents any vowel character, and / represents a syllable boundary.

CVC/CVC: 일 영 → **Iryöng** CV/CVC: 여 량 → **Yöryang**

CVCC/CV: 읍 아 가 다 → **Olmagada** CVC/CVC: 알 맹 이 → **Almaengi**

3. A sound change occurring anywhere within a word or geographic name should be reflected in the resulting romanized form.

오 곡 도 → **Ogok-to** or **Ogok To**, but

소 운 도 → **Soun-do** or **Soun Do**

대 성 령 → **Taesöng-nyöng** or **Taesöng Nyöng**, but

덕 우 대 령 → **Tögudae-ryöng** or **Tögudae Ryöng** and

위 견 령 → **Wögyöl-lyöng** or **Wögyöl Lyöng**

4. Although the traditional Sino-Korean numerals (一, 二, 三, 四, 五, 六, 七, 八, 九, 十) are still encountered, the Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0) are much more commonly used.