

ROMANIZATION OF KOREAN

FOR THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Ministry of Culture and Tourism System (2000)
BGN/PCGN 2011 Agreement

This system for romanizing Korean was devised by the Republic of Korea’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2000, and has been implemented extensively in South Korea since that date¹. In 2011 BGN and PCGN agreed to adopt this system for the romanization of Korean geographical names in the Republic of Korea. This replaces BGN and PCGN’s recommendation to use the system developed by G.M. McCune and E.O. Reischauer in 1939, a system which has been used by the BGN since 1943, and was later adopted for use by the PCGN. The McCune-Reischauer system remains the approved system for use as it relates to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

The main characteristic difference of this system is the absence of diacritical marks. The official tabulation of the system is considerably simplified as compared to the elaborate McCune-Reischauer system, and as such does not in all instances provide for the linguistic nuances of the Korean language. Certain irregular or unusual character combinations are not fully specified by this system, and where there is any ambiguity of application an official South Korean Roman-script source, such as the National Atlas of Korea², should be used for reference.

The Korean *hangeul* alphabet was devised in the fifteenth century and has 24 letters: 14 consonants and 10 vowels. Although the Korean language is now principally written in *hangeul* characters in the Republic of Korea, there is still some use of *hanja* characters. *Hanja* is the Korean name for Chinese characters (Mandarin, hanzi). Like *hanja* characters, *hangeul* is presented in syllabic units. An example follows:

Korean		Romanization
Left to right	Top to bottom	
부 산	부 산	Busan
Note: While Korean script may be written horizontally or vertically, romanization will always be written from left to right		

The tables which follow specify the romanization of *hangeul*. To romanize names written in *hanja*, which are not available in *hangeul*, it is necessary to find the *hangeul* equivalents of the *hanja* characters in a *hanja-to-hangeul* reference table, and then romanize the *hangeul* by means of the *hangeul*-to-Roman tables below.

¹ It is sometimes referred to as the Revised Romanization of Korean.

² Produced by the Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs, 2009, ISBN 978-89-93841-03-9

Romanization of consonants and vowels

Table 1 gives the romanizations for Korean consonants, table 2 the romanizations for vowels.

TABLE 1

Consonant characters	
Hangeul	Romanization
ㄱ	g, k ^{NOTE 1}
ㄴ	n
ㄷ	d, t ^{NOTE 1}
ㄹ	r, l ^{NOTE 2}
ㅁ	m
ㅂ	b, p ^{NOTE 1}
ㅅ	s
ㅇ	ng ^{NOTE 3}
ㅈ	j
ㅊ	ch
ㅋ	k
ㅌ	t
ㅍ	p
ㅎ	h
ㄲ	kk
ㄴ	tt
ㅃ	pp
ㅆ	ss
ㅈ	jj

TABLE 2

Vowel characters	
Hangeul	Romanization
ㅏ	a
ㅑ	ya
ㅓ	eo
ㅕ	yeo
ㅗ	o
ㅛ	yo
ㅜ	u
ㅠ	yu
ㅡ	eu
ㅣ	i
ㅝ	ae
ㅞ	yae
ㅟ	e
ㅠ	ye
ㅡ	oe
ㅢ	wi
ㅣ	ui
ㅤ	wa
ㅥ	wo
ㅦ	wae
ㅧ	we

Romanization of consonant clusters

Table 3 shows the romanizations that are to be employed for word-medial consonant clusters, some of which are irregular as compared to the romanization of each of the composite characters individually. These irregularities capture some of the phonetic changes inherent in the Korean language. For these word-medial clusters, characters ending syllables are listed in the left-hand column and characters starting succeeding syllables are listed in the top row.

TABLE 3

		SYLLABIC INITIALS													
		ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ
SYLLABIC FINALS	ㄱ	kg	ngn	kd	ngn	ngm	kb	ks	g, ngn	kj	kch	k-k	kt	kp	kh, k
	ㄴ	n-g	nn	nd	ll, nn	nm	nb	ns	n	nj	nch	nk	nt	np	nh
	ㄷ	tg	nn	td	nn	nm	tb	ts	d, j	tj	tch	tk	t-t	tp	th, t, ch
	ㄹ	lg	ll, nn	ld	ll	lm	lb	ls	r, ll	lj	lch	lk	lt	lp	lh
	ㅁ	mg	mn	md	mn	mm	mb	ms	m	mj	mch	mk	mt	mp	mh
	ㅂ	pg	mn	pd	mn	mm	pb	ps	b	pj	pch	pk	pt	p-p	ph, p
	ㅇ	ngg	ngn	ngd	ngn	ngm	ngb	ngs	ng	ngj	ngch	ngk	ngt	ngp	nggh

Through the examples given in official tabulations of this system, such as that available at <http://www.korean.go.kr/eng/roman/roman.jsp>, a number of further irregular romanizations for consonant clusters may be seen. However, these are described as pertaining only in certain instances, so should not be interpreted as being intended to be adopted uniformly.

Where alternative romanizations are given, a reference source should be consulted for the appropriate romanization according to its context.

Notes

1. The consonants ㄱ, ㄷ, and ㅂ are transcribed respectively as *g*, *d*, and *b* when they appear before a vowel; they are transcribed as *k*, *t*, and *p* when followed by another consonant or form the final sound of a word, e.g. 불국사 – Bulguksa; 목호 – Mukho

2. ㄹ is transcribed as *r* when followed by a vowel, and as *l* when followed by a consonant or when appearing at the end of a word. ㄹㄹ is transcribed as *ll*, e.g. 설악 – Seorak; 칠곡 – Chilgok; 울릉 Ulleung

3. ㅇ has no sound value when appearing at the beginning of a syllable, and should not be romanized in this position, e.g. 울산 – Ulsan.

4. For stylistic guidance on the presentation of generic terms, reference should be made to an official Roman-script source such as the National Atlas of Korea. Broadly speaking, the presentation of generic terms for populated places and administrative divisions appear as separated from the name by a hyphen with a lower case initial letter, whilst most other generic terms are run solid with the name. The relevant generic terms usually appearing with a hyphen are:

도, -do (province); 시, -si (city); 군, -gun (county); 구, -gu (district); 읍, -eup (town); 면, -myeon (township); 리, -ri (village); 동, -dong (township); 가, -ga (section of a street or district); 로, -ro (road); 길, -gil (street, road). Assimilated sound changes are not reflected in romanization across the hyphen, e.g. 삼죽면 - Samjuk-myeon.

Where the generic term is run solid with the name, however, assimilated sound changes are reflected throughout, e.g. 독립문 – Dongnimmun.

5. The Romanization columns show only lowercase forms but, when romanizing, uppercase and lowercase Roman letters as appropriate should be used.