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Our ref: 0661-08

Dr Kaihsu Tai

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Dear Dr Tai,

Your Freedom Of Information Request

I am writing to confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has now completed its search for the information which you requested on 05 August 2008, in which you asked about the British-Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macao giving Chinese names to British political figures.

The FCO does not have an official list of Chinese translations of names of UK government figures. The British-Consulate General in Hong Kong (BCGHK) has a list, which I attach, but this is for internal reference only. This is not an official, or an exhaustive list of translated names.

We are not aware of any FCO documents setting out the principles of translations of British names into Chinese. Where a person already has a translated Chinese name, the BCGHK will use this existing translation. However, some of the names on the Wikipedia list you mentioned in your request will have been translated by the staff at the BCGHK. Where BCGHK staff do need to translate a name, in most cases they use the common Hong Kong style of taking the first syllable of the person's surname and translating it into a suitable Chinese surname (which becomes the first character of the person's Chinese name). The second two characters are usually based on the person's given English name. The characters used usually resemble the sound of the person's English name but the meaning of the characters is also considered in translating a name.

British Missions in mainland China commonly use the translation of the name provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing. Since the name given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is replicated in official media throughout China, this becomes the de facto official translation. Unless there is exceptional reason to do otherwise (e.g. having an existing Chinese name), British Missions use this Ministry of Foreign Affairs translation.



If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, you should write to me within 40 days.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the FCO. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Lisa Thumwood
Far Eastern Group



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