

A Study on Manchu Phonology

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The purpose of this study is to set up the phoneme inventory of Manchu of the 17th Century and to describe its phonological system.

The past studies of the phonological system of written Manchu were carried out mainly by examining the standard Manchu records of the 18th Century written in TFSH (Tongki Fuka Sindaha Hergen), a Manchu alphabet with dots and circles, as well as the Chinese phonetic notations used for the contemporary Manchu. And there has been no attempt to my knowledge to analyze the Manchu phonological system by tracing and comparing the changes of the Manchu writing system. In this thesis the writer attempts to investigate the hitherto neglected area, i.e., the various aspects of the changing stages of the Manchu writing system since the period of TFAH (Tongki Fuka Akū Hergen), an old Manchu alphabet lacking dots and circles, and tries to postulate the Manchu phonological system of the 17th Century.

The material used in this thesis for examining the Manchu writing system is mainly from *Man-wen yüan-tang* 滿文原檔, early original Manchu documents included in *Chiu Man-chou tang* 舊滿洲檔 relating to the founding period of the Manchu Dynasty between 1607 and 1636. The Manchu language began to be written since 1599 in TFAH, the old Manchu alphabet lacking dots and circles, which was borrowed from the Mongolian writing system. And the oldest Manchu records now available which is written in TFAH is none other than *Man-wen yüan-tang*, early original Manchu documents written around 1620. TFAH had undergone gradual revision until

1632 when it was finally transformed into TFSH and promulgated officially as the standard Manchu alphabet. It is noted, however, that even after 1632 the usage of some letters did change, especially in representing certain syllables. It is in the records of 1639 that the first instance of the standard writing system of Manchu syllabary, *Shih-erh-tzu-t'ou* 十二字頭, occurs. In other words, the year 1639 marks the date when the standard writing system of Manchu was stabilized in official documents.

It is difficult to assume that there was any structural change in phonological system* of Manchu of 1620s and 1630s. Accordingly it is not unreasonable to conclude that the differences in the writing system as exhibited in *Man-wen yüan-tang* (1607~1636) represent nothing but alternative writings for the identical Manchu language of the same period. And it is through a comparison of the alternative writing systems that the writer tries to postulate the Manchu phonological system of the period in question.

The main types of writing system noted in *Man-wen yüan-tang* are as follows:

- 1) The early stage of TFAH as noted in *yüan-tang* 原檔, original documents, in the period between 1607~1625.
- 2) The later stage of TFAH as noted in *yüan-tang* in the period between 1625~1632.
- 3) The stage of TFSH occurring in *yüan-tang* in the period between 1632~1636.

By comparing these three types of writing system with the standard TFSH which dates from 1639, the writer attempts to examine the phonological system as well as phonetic variants of Manchu in the early 17th Century. In addition to the comparative study of the alternative Manchu writing systems mentioned above, the following materials have also been examined in this thesis with a view to making as accurate a postulation as

possible of the 17th Century Manchu phonological system:

- 1) Chinese and Korean phonetic notations used in Manchu of the 18th Century.
- 2) Sporadic materials of Manchu dialects.
- 3) Phonetic descriptions of Manchu found in works on Manchu grammar written by western scholars in the 19th Century.

As a result of this study on the Manchu phonological system the following facts have been discovered:

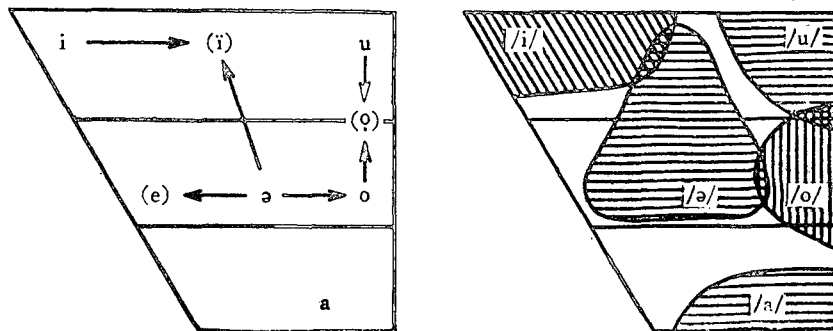
1) The letter \bar{u} does not represent a separate phoneme. It simply stands for allophone $[\underline{u}]$ or $[\text{ɔ}]$ of the phoneme /u/ as well as an allophone $[\text{ɔ}]$ of the phoneme /o/.

2) Accordingly the inventory of Manchu vowel phonemes is as follows:
/a, ə, i, o, u/

These five vowel phonemes constitute the following vowel system by virtue of its two-term oppositions of 'rounded-unrounded' and 'high-low'.

i (i)	u (u, \bar{u})
ə (e)	o (o, \bar{u})
a (a)	

And it seems that these vowels show the following allophonic variations as determined by phonotactic conditions:



3) The letters *q* and *k* do not stand for two separate phonemes but for allophones of the phoneme /k/. As these two letters are in opposition in writing as in *kū(qū)*: *ku*, it looks inevitable to treat *ū* as a separate phoneme unless one is prepared to take *q* and *k* as two separate phonemes. Since *ū* has not been treated as a separate phoneme in this thesis, however, it seems natural to list *q* and *k* as two separate phonemes. However the results of the present study show that *q* and *k* are merely letters by which two different allophones of one and the same phoneme are represented under the pressure of the orthographical tradition of Manchu.

4) The letter *š* does not stand for a separate phoneme. It represents the phoneme sequence /sj/.

5) The Manchu consonant system of the 17th Century is now postulated as follows:

			Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Stop	Plosive	asp.	/p ^h /	/t ^h /		/k ^h /
		unasp.	/p/	/t/		/k/
	Affricate	asp.			/tʃ ^h /	
		unasp.			/tʃ/	
Fricative			/f/	/s/		/x/
Nasal			/m/	/n/		/ŋ/
Lateral				/l/		
Trill				/r/		
Semi-vowel			/w/		/j/	

Finally, phonotactic structures, and their characteristic features, of word-medial consonant clusters in Manchu are discussed in this thesis. In Manchu, consonant clusters occur only word-medially, and not word-initially or word-finally, and the syllable boundary lies between the two consonants forming such a cluster. The word-medial consonant cluster -CC-, which seems to have been derived from -CVC- structure by V-dropping, shows certain

characteristic restrictions in its phonotactic possibility.

If -CC- clusters were derived from -CVC- structure by V-dropping, one might expect that almost all consonants can freely occur in C_1 and C_2 of the -CC- cluster. Contrary to such expectation, however, written Manchu shows phonotactic restrictions in C_1C_2 combination. Such phonotactic restrictions as are found in -CC- cluster may be accounted for, historically, as a result of consonant assimilation which occurred between C_1 and C_2 of the -CC- cluster soon after its formation. And this thesis has tried to postulate what type of assimilation rule applied in -CC- cluster to entail such phonotactic restrictions as can be seen in the consonant clusters of written Manchu.

<요 약>

만주어 음운론 연구

이 논문은 17세기 만주말의 음운 체계를 엿보기 위하여 무권점 만문의 다양한 표기를 검토하여 본 것이다. 흔히 우리는 무권점자 만문은 음운론 연구를 위해서는 매우 부적합한 자료로 생각되어 잘 살펴보지 않았고, 또 그 자료를 다루는 일이 많은 문제점이 있기때문에 제쳐놓고 있었던 것이 사실이다.

그러나 이 논문에서 필자는 문자 표기가 시작되면서부터 1632년 유권점자 만문이 나타나기까지의 다양한 표기는 17세기 만주어 연구를 위해서 매우 소중한 자료이며, 그 자료를 이용함으로써 17세기 만주말의 참모습을 살펴보는 일이 가능하다는 것을 보여 주었다.

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