

Manchu A 09/06/2016

Manchu Script, continued (See also Roth-Li, pp. 21-27)

The k/g/h sequence:

1. k/g/h are written with the same basic forms, g is written like k with an added dot, and h is written like k with an added small circle, both diacritics written to the right of the letter.
2. However, the entire k/g/h sequence is written differently depending on the vowel that follows; this is where vowel harmony in Manchu comes into play.
3. e and u are “front vowels” or “feminine vowels,” while a, o, and ū are “back vowels” or “masculine vowels.” i is a neutral vowel; that is, it can generally accompany either front vowels or back vowels. Vowel harmony can be helpful in figuring out what a word is when it is written unclearly, but note that it is not followed strictly.
4. To go along with Manchu’s vowel harmony, k/g/h have both a front-vowel form (used with i, as well as e and u), and a back-vowel form (used with a, o and ū).
5. e and u are not written with a dot when following k/g/h – they are distinguished from a/o by the shape of the consonant that precedes them, and any diacritics are used to mark the k/g/h distinction, not the vowel distinction.
6. In addition, there is a special form of k (the back-vowel form, with 2 dots added to the left) used directly preceding a consonant (or ending a word). This form is not used when k is preceded by e (with one exception – the sequence “tek” is written using the consonant-preceding form), ū, or ku/gu/hu. Words containing e-k-consonant or ū-k-consonant simply use the regular front-vowel form.
7. Note that h cannot precede a consonant, and g can only precede a consonant when following n (and “ng” is treated as a separate letter, discussed below), so neither has an analog to the consonant-preceding form of k.

t/d:

1. As with k/g/h, t/d (distinguished from each other by the addition of a dot to the right to mark d) have two forms, one for front vowels (e and u), and one for back vowels (a, o, ū) and i.
2. Note that for t/d, the back-vowel form is used preceding i, while in k/g/h, the front vowel form is used before i.
3. Again, as with k/g/h, e and u are not marked with dots when following t or d, but are distinguished from a and o by the shape of the preceding consonant, and dots are used exclusively to mark the difference between t/d
4. As with k, there is a special form of t used when it precedes a consonant. Unlike with k, t is always written in its consonant-preceding form when it precedes a consonant, regardless of the vowel that precedes it. As with g/h, d cannot precede a consonant.

n:

1. n is written with a dot to the left when preceding a vowel, and with no dot when it precedes a consonant. Extremely rarely, you will see a left dot on a final n.

2. The above rule means that in the middle or at the end of a word, n is frequently written identically to a. So how to distinguish them? The most important rule is that the letter a cannot directly follow another vowel, while n can only precede a consonant if n follows a vowel. So if the preceding letter is a consonant, a single tooth (or a tail going off to the right) must represent a, if the preceding letter is a vowel, it must represent n.
3. The toughest distinction to make is between “en” and “a” at the start of a word (remember that an initial e does not receive a dot, and consists of only a head, so both e+n and a are written with an undotted head and a single tooth). There are two ways to tell them apart – the first is to use vowel harmony (again, this isn’t a perfect rule, but it works pretty well). Does the letter e appear later in the word? Then it’s probably “en.” Does the letter a appear later in the word? Then it’s probably “a.” The other trick is to recognize that most authors will in fact write “a” and “en” slightly differently – often by leaving more space between the head of the e and the tooth of the n than they would between the head and tooth of the a. You can see this in the example words on this sheet – I have given you the words “enduri” and “adasun” side by side in the same script; you’ll note the different spacing at the start of the word (and vowel harmony helps a bit as well).

f/w:

1. The letter w can only precede the vowels a and e.
2. When the letter f precedes any vowel other than a or e, it is written identically to w. It has a unique form prior to the letters a and e to enable you to distinguish it from w.

ng:

1. ng is a special case of n+g.
2. It is always written using the front-vowel form of g, even if all vowels in the word are back vowels.
3. When it is followed by n or back k/g, be sure to note that the tooth of the n or the first tooth of the k or second g is written using the bottom part of the ng letter.
4. ng ends words relatively commonly on account of the large number of Chinese loan-words in Manchu.

Remaining letters:

1. s/š – we covered s on Thursday. Note that š (pronounced like “sh”) is written similarly to s, but with an extra line angling down and to the left from the top of the letter. For convenience, š is sometimes transliterated as “x.”
2. j/c/y – these are relatively simple letters, though some writers’ handwriting may occasionally make them difficult to distinguish in the middle position, while other writers make little distinction between middle j and middle i (and sometimes middle y)
3. p – vowels behave the same way following p as they do following b (final a/e have their tails to the left, for instance)
4. r – should present no problems. Almost never found at the start of a word.

Examples of k/g/h

kame

gilahun

hukun

hulambi

buhe

uksin

leksei

Examples of t/d (including more k/g/h)

dasara

tembi

teksilembi

bithesi

akdulame

tabuku

tidu

Examples of n and f/w

enduri

adasun

nofi

anabufi

wasihun

afaha

feksimbi

Examples of ng

anggala

wang

fungnembi

senggime

hungken

gikihangge

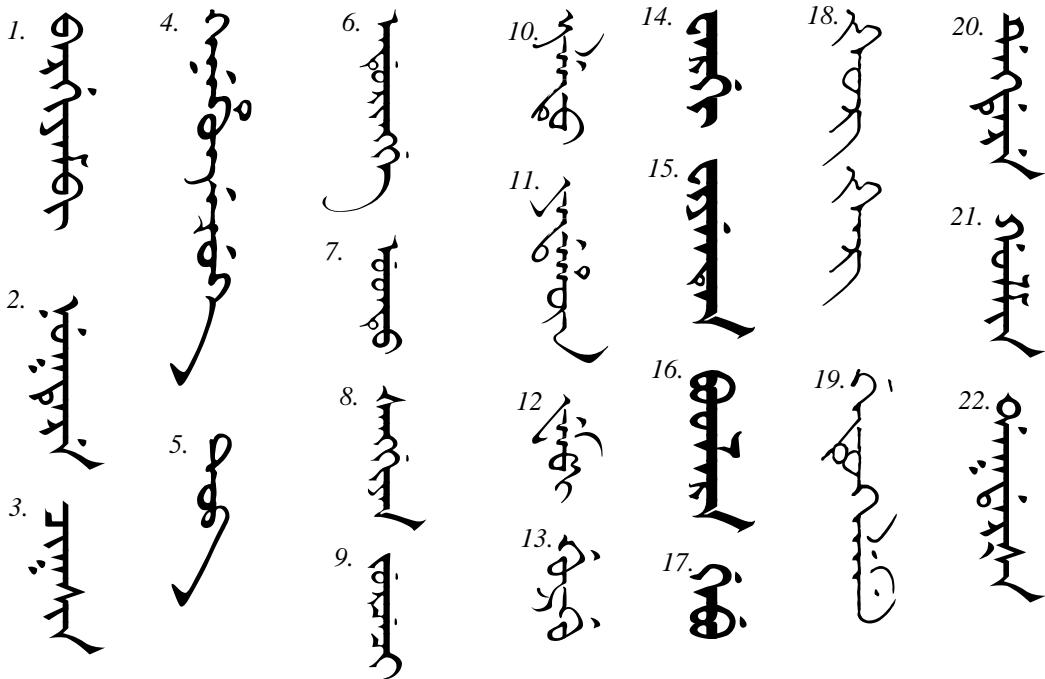
teng

Examples of remaining consonants (s, š, j, c, y, p, r)



sirara šangnafi faššaci jušen cianliyang pilere aljara

Reading practice: transcribe the following words



Writing practice: write the following words in Manchu

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1. fekceku 2. giranggi 3. hahardafi 4. toktobumbi 5. uthai 6. tacibukū