



Lesson 1: Script I, Vowels

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

Basic Principles:

1. Written from top to bottom, left to right (so books and documents flow in the opposite direction in Manchu as they do in classical Chinese; this principle is frequently employed in bilingual documents to avoid giving precedence to one language)
2. The letters in a word are written along a straight vertical axis, linked together. Words are separated by a space.
3. Letters change form depending on their position in the word; there are four possible positions: standalone (only for vowels), initial, intermediate, and final. Some letters lack one (or more) of the forms because they can only be used in certain positions.
4. Some letters have multiple forms in the same position, depending on the letters that surround them.
5. Punctuation in Manchu is poorly standardized, but there are two basic punctuation marks (prior to Modern Sibe, which has adopted additional marks):  
These represent a partial stop (sometimes roughly equivalent to a comma, sometimes to a period) and a full stop (sometimes roughly equivalent to a period, sometimes marking the end of a document or a section of a document) respectively.
6. There is a certain degree of variation between printed and handwritten styles and within handwritten styles; I will vary the styles that you are shown to help you practice.
7. The standard transcription of Manchu is the Möllendorff system, a version of which we will use in this class

Vowels (see chart on p.2):

1. Manchu has six vowels: a, e, i, o, u, and ū (often called “long u” due to the macron used in romanization, though its pronunciation is not in fact longer than that of u)
2. ū is often transcribed using the letter v (which otherwise does not appear in Manchu) for the sake of convenience. This convention is also commonly used in Manchu input systems.
3. The vowel i is written with two diagonal strokes when following another vowel in the intermediate position.
4. In general, a and e, and o and u are distinguished from each other in the intermediate and final positions through the addition of a dot to form e and u. We will discuss the exceptions to this rule when we study the consonant k/g/h and t/d
5. Manchu has limited vowel harmony, with e and u considered front vowels, a, o, and ū considered back vowels, and i considered a neutral vowel

ローマ 字表記	单独形	語頭形	語中形	語末形
a	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ
e	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ ㇰ
i	ㇰ ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ
o	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ
u	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ	ㇰ ㇰ ㇰ ㇰ
ū	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ	ㇰ

To study the basic vowel forms, we will combine vowels with three different consonants,
m ㇰ

l ㇰ

b ㇰ

Note that vowels combine with b differently from how they combine with m and l. Also, note that ū does not appear in the following examples, because it is used almost exclusively with the more complicated consonants that we will cover in Lesson 2.

Examples

ama

eme

mila

omo

emu

amba

aili

lama

babe

ili

bi

Practice (transliterate the following words)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

14.

Practice (write the following words in Manchu)

1. baibi

2. moo

3. umai

4. eimeme

5. olbo

6. lali