Lesson 21: Script IV, Transliterating Chinese

Many Manchu transliterations of Chinese words are obvious for anyone who knows pinyin. The Manchu word wang is the same as the pinyin wang (and so, usually, refers to the Chinese character 王). Other transliterations, though not absolutely identical to pinyin, are quite easy to decipher – the Manchu dung is the same as the pinyin dong, the Manchu cu is the same as the pinyin chu (easy if you remember that the Manchu c is pronounced like “ch”), the Manchu k’ao is the same as the pinyin kao, the Manchu šeng is the same as the pinyin sheng, and the Manchu lio is the same as the pinyin liu.

The following are a few conventions for transliteration that are more likely to trip you up, and so are worth learning. If you’re ever stuck, a complete list of pinyin/Manchu equivalences is found in Roth-Li, pp.377-381.

1. The Manchu eo represents the pinyin ou (so ceo = chou, jeo = zhou, etc).
2. The Manchu oo represents the pinyin ao (so boo = bao, loo = lao, etc).
3. The Manchu uve represents the pinyin uo (so guve = guo – note that sometimes Manchu will represent uo simply by using o, but it’s worth recognizing uve)
4. The Manchu ioi represents the pinyin ü (so ioi = yu, sioi = xu, lioi = lü, etc). However, note that when the pinyin ü sound is followed by an n (as in xun or qun), Manchu will use iyün (so ciyün = qun) and when the ü sound is followed by an (as in quan or xuan) Manchu uses iowan (so siowan = xuan).
5. Many Chinese diphthongs have their vowels separated by either a y (if the first vowel in the diphthong is an i) or a w (if the first vowel in the diphthong is a u) when represented in Manchu. (So liyan = lian, hülwang = huang, jiyei = jie, cuwan = chuan, biyoo = biao, etc)
6. The j in pinyin can be represented with either a j or a g in Manchu (so both giyan and jiyan = jian) but note that the Manchu g can also represent a pinyin g (so ging = jing, but geo = gou).
7. The pinyin g and k will always be represented by a front consonant, so if the following vowel is a back vowel, the special forms g’ and k’ will be used. Remember that these letters link to vowels in the same way as do the front g and k (so don’t for instance, mistake g’an for g’a).
8. The pinyin x is sometimes represented by a Manchu s and sometimes by a Manchu h (so both hiyün fu and siyün fu are possible forms of xunfu – 巡撫)
9. The pinyin q is sometimes represented by a Manchu c and sometimes by a Manchu k (so both ciyan and kiyan are possible forms of qian).
10. Remember the special rules for certain pronunciations of the pinyin i. Chi, zhi, shi, are written with the regular Manchu i, but using special consonant forms (shi is written as Manchu ši, chi and zhi have unique forms of c and j marked with a circle). Pinyin si, meanwhile, uses the normal s, but a special form of i (also used with ts to represent pinyin ci). Pinyin zi is written by attaching a short left-facing tail to Manchu dz.
11. Remember the special letters used for Chinese sounds: Manchu dz = pinyin z, Manchu ź = pinyin r (in initial position only, pinyin er is given as Manchu el), Manchu ts = pinyin c.

The back of this page has some Chinese place names, names, and words written in Manchu (words which might well appear in a Qing document). Try to identify each Chinese term.

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Practice words/names/place names (note that a few examples include regular Manchu words)