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Reviewed work:

Manchu: A Textbook for Reading Documents (2nd ed.).
(2010). Gertraude Roth Li. University of Hawai‘i Press. Pp.
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The first edition of the *Textbook* for reading Manchu documents in English by Dr. Gertraude Roth Li was long overdue. Indeed, the previous Manchu textbook in English was written by von P.G. Möllendorf in 1892; since then Manchu Studies have advanced significantly, but no new textbooks in English have appeared. In the last century, however, the extralinguistic situation changed radically. The Manchu language—with several exceptions—went out of use, and only a handful of specialists worldwide can now read and translate original Manchu documents written in Classical (Standard) Manchu. Even fewer, and these few include Dr. Roth Li, can understand texts written in Old Manchu, which is based on the Mongolian syllabic alphabet. Most of the pre-1644 Manchu documents were written in this old script, which was in use until the Manchu scholar Dahai essentially improved it. With the help of special diacritic signs, dots and circles, Dahai (1632) encoded every Manchu sound by a separate letter. Dr. Roth Li is a leading expert in both versions of Manchu, her English translations from Manchu are precise and her explanations comprehensive.

As is well-known, the Manchu Qing dynasty—after ruling China for more than 250 years (1644–1911)—left numerous official documents that can shed light on the history of China, the relations of this long-lived state with other nations and regions, and the history of Central and Eastern Asia in general. These documents were mostly bilingual, written in both Chinese and Manchu; however, the Manchu-language texts often contained the most consequential and confidential information, absent in the Chinese versions. Manchu became a kind of a secret code. Its use was especially important in the conduct of innumerable military campaigns, for which the Manchus became well-known to the outside world, and also for other sensitive topics the Manchu officials preferred to keep confidential. Hence, the most significant information can be discovered in the documents written in Manchu.

The main purpose of the *Textbook* is to teach students, predominantly Chinese students of History, to master Manchu documents. The book is additionally useful for linguistics students and for scholars of Manchu studies.

The *Textbook* is very well-structured and comprehensive. The preface contains a brief description of the history of the Manchus and their language, which originated from the language of the ancient Jurchens. Dr. Roth Li also provides information about major archives worldwide where Manchu documents can be found. The author then presents the basic phonetic features of the vowel and consonant inventories in Manchu, as well as a description of the correspondences between phonemes in Classical Manchu and Sibe, which can be considered the only living dialect of Manchu, and which over time has developed features of a distinct language.

In keeping with its chief purpose, the *Textbook* includes a detailed description of the Manchu script, with attention to all the peculiarities in both versions, standard and old. The Reading Selections are divided into several chapters. The first one presents a discourse written in the Standard (Classical or Written) Manchu language; the second chapter presents texts selected as prime examples of the rules by which Manchu documents were compiled. The third chapter gives examples written in the Old Script, and the final one contains samples of the Sibe language. Each Reading Selection is followed by a transliteration of the original Manchu text and by Notes, in which the author explains, both general basic properties of the language, as well as distinctive features of each particular text. Special exercises designed to help students consolidate their knowledge of the basic grammatical rules of Manchu are also provided. English translations of the Manchu texts ensure comprehension.

The *Textbook* also provides a brief explanation of the pronunciation of Manchu phonemes, and I am in complete agreement with Dr. Roth Li when she states that the description of pronunciation can only be approximate. Most significantly, the second edition of the *Textbook* contains audio recordings that accompany the initial text selections. This is a valuable resource, and not only for students who intend to study Manchu; such a rich and rare source of phonetic material is not easily obtained, and can stimulate linguists to further investigation of Manchu phonology.

The *Textbook* rightly includes additional information and reference sources, without which reading and understanding the Manchu documents would be extremely difficult. These include *Terms and Phrases related to memorials* (pp. 194–195); *Manchu translation of Chinese syllables* (pp. 377–382); and *Personal names and reign titles related to the Qing dynasty reigns* (p. 383). It is precisely this kind of information that rapidly becomes vague outside its original context and its inclusion is very useful for the reader.

As the *Textbook* informs readers, Western scholars have long known about numerous Manchu documents held in Chinese and Taiwanese archives. With the opening of China in the 1980s, Manchurologists have gained access to the rich archives in Beijing, Shenyang (the centre of the Liaoning Province, considered the place of origin of the Manchus), and Dalian. Some documents can also be found in Oriental countries such as Japan, Mongolia, and India; several European countries hold them as well. Quite impressive Manchu collections are kept in the U.S.A., notably the one in the Library of Congress.

Not all Western scholars, however, are aware of the interesting and valuable Manchu documents, as well as Manchu-Chinese-Mongolian dictionaries, original manuscripts in Manchu and texts in Sibe, that are preserved in Russia. Most of them are located in St. Petersburg, in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences; the Archive of Orientalists in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts; and the library of St. Petersburg State University. Unfortunately, many of these Manchu materials have not yet been thoroughly analysed and still remain in archival form.

In Russia, Manchu studies arose from the practical need to participate in early frontier diplomatic relations and trade negotiations with China, as early as in the 17th century. All documents concerning those activities were normally written in Chinese, Manchu, and very often in Mongolian. Later on, the remarkable school of Manchu philology evolved, mainly due to the efforts of members of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking (1715–1858), which also performed secular functions. Russian Manchurologists were the first scholars to introduce the Manchu language and script to Western society, and to translate a number of valuable Manchu manuscripts and textbooks into Russian. Some of those materials became well-known in Western Europe only a century later. Among published works of great value I can point to the *Manchu Grammar* by Zakharov (1879), which—as I have noted with satisfaction—was reprinted by the University of Hawai'i Press in 2009. Dr. Roth Li has used some of this Russian-sourced linguistic material in her *Textbook* (p. 358).

I agree with Dr. Roth Li when she notes—in contrast to scholars in the past—that the Manchu language should not be considered “an easy language” (p. 34). This is not only because of the not-easily-understood script, the learning of which is time-consuming and sometimes akin to solving a puzzle. The difficulty of the language is largely because of the polysemy of Manchu words (lexemes) and polyfunctionality of Manchu word forms, which developed an impressive range of various grammatical functions. The grammatical status of a large number of word forms is very difficult to define, since they were found in a state of transition. Partially losing their lexical meanings, many words (mostly nominals and converbs) gradually became functional elements, a kind of postpositions and conjunctions. The old Manchu manuscripts show the instability of many language phenomena. Dr. Roth Li is exactly right when she writes that such fundamental verbal categories as aspect and tense cannot be easily defined. In addition, it should be mentioned that long before Sinor (1968) wrote about special features of Manchu verbs, Avrorin, whose *Manchu Grammar* was published in 2000 in Russian, devoted a special article to the investigation of these significant verbal categories in Manchu (1949). He came to the conclusion that verbs in this language could be characterised as possessing the category of aspect, perfect and imperfect, rather than the category of tense, and that the former reveals the tendency of developing into the latter. Moreover, the category of the verb proper can be analysed as a state of process; its functions are normally performed by the participle, the quasi-grammatical category, common for all Altaic languages.

As a specialist in Manchu-Tungusic linguistics, I cannot say that Manchu is the most important among the Tungusic languages; of course, in a sense there are no unimportant languages. Manchu, however, obviously stands apart for its significant peculiarities. And Manchu was, and still is a well-documented language, while the standard languages and writing systems for

Tungusic peoples scattered over the vast spaces of Siberia and the Far East were created only in the 1930s by scholars of the former Soviet Union.

As I read the *Textbook*, I came to appreciate Dr. Roth Li's Reading Selections. These texts represent a variety of styles of different time periods and, as a consequence, a variety of handwriting methods. The selections are useful not only for Chinese students, but also for scholars who intend to master documents in Manchu, especially pre-1644 texts. The comparison between Standard and Old scripts that anyone can follow creates the opportunity for further scientific investigations. Although changes in any writing system do not always reflect the corresponding changes in the phonetic system of a language, appropriate information can provide researchers with new suppositions. In addition, the data concerning the Sibe language (*Xibo* in Chinese), spoken in Western China (Xinjiang region) and still alive (and which, I argue, as does Dr. Roth Li, to be a direct successor of Manchu), clearly contributes to the understanding of how a language can develop over time, influenced by geographical, historic, and sociological conditions.

One shortcoming in the *Textbook* is the omission of important works in The List of Selected Reference Materials—notably works by the Polish scholar Kałużyński, who published, among various articles, a very important book (1977). Based on the materials collected by the Russian Manchurologist F. Muromskii during his visits to Xinjiang in 1906 and 1907–08, this book includes Sibe texts and vocabulary compiled by the author himself. Detailed linguistic analysis of these texts, mainly the description of the phonetic correspondences between Classical (Written) Manchu and Sibe, was published by Kałużyński in the Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on the problems of the languages of Asia and Africa in 1987. This valuable paper clearly shows that the major differences between Classical Manchu and Sibe—a variant of the language existing by that time—are phonological and morphological markers that mostly have only different phonetic forms. Students intending to study Sibe on their own could explore these publications without access to a teacher. A brief survey of the history of the Sibes and an impressive quantity of texts, together with translations and vocabulary that reflect the language as recorded in the second half of the 19th century by V. V. Radlov, can be found in the book by Lebedeva & Gorelova (1994). This book also includes some data concerning correspondence between the relatively old version of Sibe and the contemporary one. Though written in Russian, the book's Latin transliteration of the texts by G. Stary provides ready access to the language material.

Although the *Textbook*, in keeping with its purpose, does not focus on linguistic analysis, as a linguist, I cannot help commenting on the differences of opinion regarding some language phenomena in Manchu that are mentioned in this book.

In Manchu—as in all Altaic languages—there exists a universal and ancient verbal form, which is conventionally termed participle by scholars engaged in Altaic studies. This form, or to be more precise, hyperform, comprises a few grammatical paradigms on the basis of a single generic form. The participle can perform three functions, and each of them can be in correlation with three different grammatical models. The first function is a predicate in a simple sentence or in the main clause of a compound sentence. In this role participles reveal their verbal properties, such as aspect, voice, mood (tense and modality), and person. The ability to govern noun cases is

a distinctive feature of the Manchu participle as a verbal form. The second function of the participles is that they may serve as attributes or predicates in attributive constructions, which are used to modify nouns. This function of the participle as a grammatical category is well-known from grammars of the European languages. The third function of the participles is that they may serve as predicates in subordinate clauses; in this function they may take markers of oblique cases or occur in the nominative case (with a zero marker). If followed by the accusative case, they normally serve as predicative objects, not topics (as claimed on pp. 113, 169–170, 275, etc.). Since they are capable of taking any nominalizing suffixes, case markers or nominalizers, participles are often used as substantives. In this function they may act as a subject or an object governed by verbs proper (the finite forms) and can be rightfully called verbal nouns. That is why I prefer—contrary to the opinion of Dr. Roth Li (e.g., see p. 44)—to analyse the form in *-hA* (conventionally called *perfect* or *perfective* by scholars) and in *-rA* (*imperfect* or *imperfective*) as participles. In certain syntactic patterns, however, participles may perform the function of a predicate of the sentence, (i.e., and serve as verbs proper). And I do not think that verbs can be nominalized, as stated in the *Textbook* (pp. 69, 185, 202, 312, etc.). On the other hand, the participles are nominalized on a regular basis (Gorelova, 2002, pp. 252–266).

Contrary to the opinion of Dr. Roth Li, neither verbs proper (with the exception of the Imperative), nor converbs have negative forms (p. 43); only participles have them in forms with the negation particle attached to their categorial suffixes: *akū: -hA + akū > -hAkū; -rA + akū > -rakū*. Therefore, in cases when the negative form of the verb is required, the negative participle is used. The Imperative negative form is formed by adding the prepositional particle *ume* to the imperfective participle; this form is often specified as the prohibitive (mood). In the *Textbook* these forms are analysed as Imperatives (p. 72).

Dr. Roth Li correctly notes that the imperfective finite form in *-mbi* is normally used as a basic dictionary form (p. 43). This is the convention, not only in old dictionaries, but even in relatively contemporary ones, such as *A Concise Manchu-English Lexicon* by Norman (1978). I think this tradition is no longer appropriate in the context of modern linguistics. The lexical meaning of a verb is conveyed by the verbal stem only; hence, the verbal stem should be used as the basic dictionary form. A verb stem can be followed by various derivational suffixes, and these new verbal derivatives should be presented as separate lexical entries.

Bearing all this in mind, I have to stress that all these differences in the analysis of linguistic categories can be explained, firstly, by the individual researcher's understanding of language facts, and secondly, by the insufficient knowledge about Manchu in general.

In my view, the layout of the *Textbook* could be improved if the author placed Grammatical Points before all the Reading Selections. The Points themselves should include not only language examples, but some initial grammatical explanations, even in brief form, without which the Manchu texts cannot be understood. In this way there would be no need to repeat the grammatical notations, firstly in the Notes following each Selection, and then in Grammatical Points, as is now the case with grammatical information concerning case markers (p. 42 and pp. 355–357), personal pronouns (p. 42 and p. 358), numerals (p. 67 and p. 359), verbs (pp. 43–46 and pp. 364–368), converbs (pp. 47–48 and pp. 369–371), etc. If I were a student using the *Textbook*, I would prefer firstly to obtain an understanding of the language structure in a

grammar section before the readings, and then, as needed, refer to the Notes for additional explanations of difficult and specific occurrences of grammatical forms, terms, and constructions.

Finally, I must say that the most interesting linguistic explanations of the language phenomena were to be found precisely in the Notes following each Reading Selection. As a linguist, I have greatly benefited from exploring them. I have gained new knowledge regarding the Manchu language from my study of Dr. Roth Li's *Textbook*; and the absolutely delightful language material it contains will be propitious in my future research.

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