

IDEAS BEHIND SYMBOLS – LANGUAGES BEHIND SCRIPTS

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Ideas behind symbols – languages behind scripts

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The field research on the Manchu inscriptions in Beijing

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Introduction

The Manchu historical linguistics is an important, but still a relatively minor sub-branch of the Manchu studies. While the spoken Manchu language and the Classical Manchu language of the manuscripts and the xylographs are comparatively well researched, the Classical Manchu language of the inscriptions remains completely neglected, even in China, where the inscriptions were mainly used by the historians.

My initial interest in the Manchu inscriptions was triggered by “On the Tracks of Manchu Culture” (Stary et al., 1995). On page 37 of this book, we read “Today the greatest wealth of Manchu inscriptions is to be found in the ‘Peking Museum of Stone Carving Art’ (Beijing shike yishu bowuguan 北京石刻藝術博物館) which has been set up in the garden of the Wutasi 五塔寺 Temple, north to the Peking Zoo.” I also searched for other possible locations of the Manchu inscriptions in Beijing besides this museum, and then I located some in the Beihai Park (北海公園), the Beijing Confucian Temple (北京孔廟), and the Beijing Imperial College (北京國子監).

During my sixteen days’ fieldwork in summer 2016 in Beijing, I found and photographed twenty-five stelae from the Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum, two from the Beihai Park, nine from the Beijing Confucian Temple, and two from the Beijing Imperial College. There are no monolingual Manchu inscriptions, most of them being Manchu-Chinese bilinguals, but also including four trilingual Manchu-Mongolian-Chinese inscriptions, and two quadrilingual in Manchu-Chinese-Mongolian-Tibetan.

Fields

Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum

The Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum is located on the premises of the Zhenjue Temple (Zhenjuesi, 真覺寺), the Temple of the Righteous Awakening, also known as the Wuta Temple (Wutasi), the Temple of Five Pagodas, named by the style. The Temple was built in 1473.

The entry of the Museum is by the south. There are five main sections of stelae on the grounds of the Museum, three in the east wing, two in the west wing. From the east wing, to the right of the entry is the Area of Representative Engraved Stelae (綜合碑刻區), then counter-clockwise to the north is the Area of Tomb Stones of the Jesuit Missionaries (耶穌會士碑區), and behind that is the Area of Engraved Stelae of Ancestral Temples and Tombs (祠墓碑刻區). To the north of the west wing, is the Area of Engraved Temple Stelae (寺觀碑刻區), and behind is the Area of Tomb Stone Carvings (陵墓石刻區).

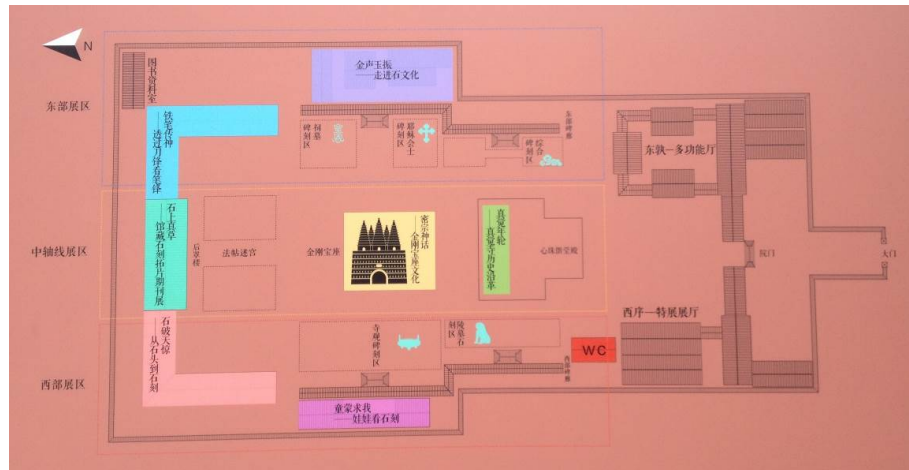


Figure 1: Layout of the Museum (source: KAO, 2016, Beijing, photo)

In the first section, there are twenty-six stelae, including six with Manchu script, five from the south part, one from the north part. Among these six stelae, there are three in Manchu-Chinese, two in Manchu-Mongolian-Chinese, and one in Manchu-Chinese-Mongolian-Tibetan. In the second section, there are thirty-five stelae, including one in Manchu-Chinese, although that one was not for the missionaries but for the temple, and the Manchu part is already illegible. The reason that this stela was put in this section, in my opinion, was for keeping the equilibrium with a Mongolian-Tibetan version of this stela in the fourth section, which is kept in the west wing. In the third section there are twenty stelae, including sixteen with Manchu script. Among these sixteen stelae, there are fifteen in Manchu-Chinese, and one in Manchu-Mongolian-Chinese.

In the fourth section, there are thirty-three stelae, including one in Manchu-Chinese. In the fifth section, there are no inscriptions at all. I also found some stelae aside the wall by the first section, two in Manchu-Chinese, including one undated.

Beihai Park

As for the Beihai Park (the “Park of the North Lake”), I had heard that there were some stelae in the Hall of Heavenly Kings (天王殿), but unfortunately it was under renovation during my visit. In the Temple of Bliss Interpretation (闡福寺), however, I found two stelae, but both were totally unreadable, I was not even sure in what language it was written.

There is one more stela in the west side of the Park in Manchu–Chinese–Mongolian–Tibetan, i.e. the Stela of the Tower of Ten-Thousand Buddhas (萬佛樓石碑). There is another stela in the White Pagoda of the Jade Flowery Islet (瓊華島), in Manchu–Mongolian–Chinese.

Beijing Confucian Temple and Beijing Imperial College

In the Beijing Confucian Temple, there are fourteen pavilions of stelae, one stela per pavilion. There are nine stelae with Manchu inscriptions, and they are all in Manchu–Chinese. In the Beijing Imperial College there are two pavilions of stelae, and these two stelae are also both in Manchu–Chinese. These two sites are just side by side.

Summary and example

In total, there are thirty-eight stelae with Manchu script, thirty-two in Manchu–Chinese bilingual, four in Manchu–Mongolian–Chinese trilingual, and two in Manchu–Chinese–Mongolian–Tibetan quadrilingual. Among these thirty-eight stelae, there are seven from Ijishūn Dasan (Shunzhi, 順治) era, eight from Elhe Taifin (Kangxi, 康熙) era, three from Hūwaliyasun Tob (Yongzheng, 雍正) era, fifteen from Abkai Wehiyehe (Qianlong, 乾隆) era, three from Saicungga Fengšen (Jiaqing, 嘉慶) era, and one with no date.

	Bilingua 1	Trilingual	Quadrilingual	
Ijishūn Dasan (順治) 1644–1661	5	2		7
Elhe Taifin (康熙) 1662–1722	8	1		9
Hūwaliyasun Tob (雍正) 1723–1735	3			3
Abkai Wehiyehe (乾隆) 1736–1795	12	1	2	15
Saicungga Fengšen (嘉慶) 1796–1820	3			3
undated	1			
	32	4	2	38

From the purposes of these stelae, there are eleven stelae for temple use, from all the four sites; one stela for the construction of Route, from the Museum; six stelae for the Victory of Conquest, all from the Confucian Temple; twenty stelae for Tomb or Ancestral Hall, all from the Museum.

An example of inscription from Fig. 2, named the Stela of the Restoration of the Pusheng Temple (普勝寺重修碑), carved in 1744 is shown below. The Manchu text is written in the middle, the Mongolian in the right, the Chinese in the left.



Figure 2: Manchu inscription (source: KAO, 2016, Beijing, photo)



Figure 3: Mongolian inscription (source: KAO, 2016, Beijing, photo)

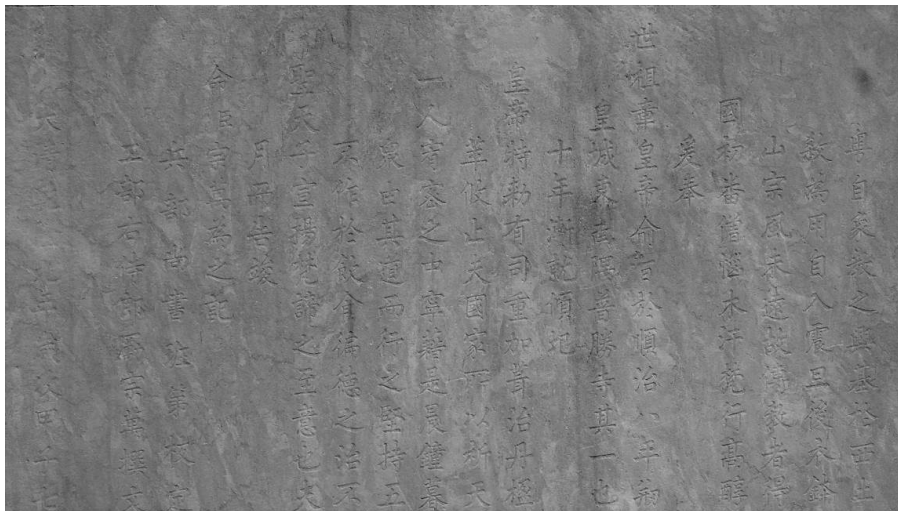


Figure 4: Chinese inscription (source: KAO, 2016, Beijing, photo)

Conclusion

The Classical Manchu language of the inscriptions is different from the language used in the narrative texts of the manuscripts and in the xylographs, like the Veritable Records. The most obvious differences are the lexicons, and also the format and the formula in syntax. It is more similar to the language of the official edicts, but it still should or could have its own peculiarities. The grammar features of the Classical Manchu of the inscriptions need a scholarly account and commentary as well.

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