THE HISTORY OF PEH-OE-JI

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0. Introduction

Peh-oe-ji (hereafter: POJ) literally means 'vernacular script'. In this paper, POJ refers to the missionary romanization system for the Hoklo language which was introduced to Taiwan by Western missionaries during the late 19th century. By restricting the term POJ to one particular romanization system, I intend to avoid terminological misunderstandings which may arise from broader definitions.

This paper outlines the history of alphabetic orthographies for Southern Min dialects devised by Western missionaries. Section 1 introduces early systems of Southern Min romanization developed Spanish missionaries. The description of the gradual development of POJ during the 19th century is based on a number of representative works, which are introduced in section 2. Section 3 investigates orthographic changes proposed by individual missionaries. Lastly, in section 4, I discuss the functional change of POJ vis-à-vis the Chinese character script.

1. Spanish approaches to the Romanization of Hoklo

First Southern Min sources in a Romanized script date back the 16th century. These were compiled by Spanish Dominicans and their translators working among the Chinese community in Manila. The introduction of romanization was a gradual process, as the translators initially relied on the use of characters as used by the Chinese immigrants. One early translation in the Hoklo language is the Doctrina christina en letra y lengua china 'The Christian doctrine in the Chinese script and tongue' (hereafter: Doctrina), the first part of which was presumably written soon after 1587 by Chinese interpreters working with the missionaries Miguel de Benavides and Juan Cobo (cf. Van der Loon 1966). Early Hoklo reference works mentioned by Van der Loon (1967: 99) include a Hoklo-Spanish dictionary ("Bocabulario de lengua sangleya por las letraz de el A.B.C.") and a grammar ("Arte
de la lengua chiochiu"). These works were presumably compiled in the early 17th century. The manuscripts are now kept in the British museum.

Another early lexicographic source is the anonymous manuscript of a Dictionario de la lengua Chincheo que contiene los vocablos tambien simples que comuestos, con los caracteres y peculiares a este dialecto, segun lorden del alfabeto español y las cinco tonadas chineses [Dictionary of the Zhangzhou language, containing simple and compound words, with peculiar characters of this dialect, in Spanish alphabetical order and the five Chinese tones]. This dictionary presumably dates back to 1609. According to Van der Loon (1967: 97), there is no information about the whereabouts of the manuscript after 1894, when the last owner of the manuscript had his library sold in France.

As it is evident from Van der Loon's description (1967: 108ff.), sound values of particular letters in the missionaries' mother tongue influenced Spanish romanization devices. Their system therefore differs in many respects from orthographies devised by Medhurst and later Protestant missionaries. This also goes for the use diacritics by the Spanish missionaries. As Von der Loon points out, their scheme comprises a total of 13 diacritics, to be used alone or in combination. This set was not used consistently: "Most part of the manuscript [of the Doctrina] only contain diacritical marks for aspiration and nasalization, probably because of the existence of a less developed notation. In the Doctrina even these are found very sporadically, no doubt owing to the indifference of the copyist" (1967: 110).

It is very unlikely that early Spanish conventions of romanizing Hoklo served as a model for Western missionaries in the 19th century. Yoshihide Murakami (1965: 61) conjectures that Medhurst never consulted the Dictionario de la lengua Chincheo. Evidence that supports this assumption is the lack of any reference to early Spanish romanizations in Medhurst's and other POJ works of the 19th century.

2. Sources in POJ

The orthographic conventions of POJ had largely been fixed by the middle of the 19th century. Since then, a vast amount of literature in POJ has been published. No comprehensive inventory of this literature exist. The following quotation from Philip Wilson Pitcher (1912: 209) may give an impression of the amount of literature in POJ after the turn of the 20th century. Pitcher writes that "[POJ] is taught in all our primary
schools, in the churches and chapels on Sundays, and in the homes on week-days. It is
difficult to estimate accurately the number of readers of this Amoy Romanization [i.e.
POJ]. Probably a safe estimate would be between five and six thousand." He
categorizes the published literature into "dictionaries and other helps, Religious
Literature, General Literature, Text Books and Periodicals".

In Taiwan, the efforts of the Scottish missionary Thomas Barclay (1849-1935)
of the Presbyterian Church of England contributed to a rapid spread of POJ during the
late 19th and early 20th century. Following his slogan "the Bible in the Mother-
tongue" (Band 1972: 130), Barclay translated the Old and New Testaments in
Taiwanese, prepared his Supplement to Douglas' dictionary (1923) and, in 1885,
initiated the monthly publication of the Tâi-oân-hú-siâⁿ Kàu-hoe-pò ('Taiwan Church
News'), containing information on religious subjects and current world events
(Christine L. Lin 1999: 53). In 1913, William Campbell proudly notes that the Tainan
Mission Press "turned out 700,357 pages, chiefly in the dialect or brogue of South

Orthographic conventions for POJ were developed during the mid-19th century.
Alterations were subsequently proposed in later reference works and teaching
manuals. The outline of the orthographic development of POJ in this paper is based on
the following works from the 19th and early 20th century (full titles are listed in the
References):

(1) Walter Medhurst (1832): A dictionary of the Hok-këèn dialect. This reference
work contains approximately 10,500 entry characters arranged in alphabetical
order following Medhurst's orthography. Entries in Medhurst's work are
selected from Xie Xiulan's rhyme book Huiji yasu shiwu yin ('Collection of
refined and vulgar fifteen sounds'; hereafter: Shiwu yin)

(2) Elihu Doty (1853): Anglo-Chinese manual with romanized colloquial in the
Amoy dialect. This is the earliest existing textbook for a Southern Min dialect.
It is "designed to be, simply what its name imports, a small book at hand to
assist those who have occasion to hold intercourse with the Chinese of Amoy
about every day affairs" (p. v). The 26 sections cover various topics such as
"the universe", "professions and employments", and "of zoëlogy".

(3) John MacGowan (1869): A manual of the Amoy colloquial. MacGowan's
teaching manual is "designed to assist beginners in their first efforts to acquire
a knowledge of the Amoy dialect”. The book contains 43 sections and an appended "dictionary of some of the principal verbs and adjectives in the Amoy dialect”.

(4) Carstairs Douglas (1873): Chinese-English dictionary. Containing approximately 8300 entries, Douglas’ reference work is the first systematic attempt to codify spoken Amoy. It is also the first Southern Min dictionary entirely based on romanized transcriptions.

(5) Warnshuis, A. Livingston and H.P. de Pree (1911): Lessons in the Amoy vernacular. This manual for beginners contains 30 lessons, a vocabulary index and classified word lists.

(6) William Campbell (1913): Dictionary of the Amoy vernacular. For 15,000 of the more than 23,000 romanized entries, characters are indicated. Each entry is followed by a brief definition in romanized Amoy. Campbell's dictionary is the first reference work in romanized Amoy published in Taiwan. Its 19th edition was published in 1997.

(7) Thomas Barclay (1923): Supplement [to Douglas 1873]. Barclay's Supplement provides new terms that had arisen since the publication of Douglas' dictionary. In contrast to the latter, however, the 3,600 entries in the Supplement represented in characters and a romanized transcription.

3. Contributions by individual missionaries

3.1 Medhurst

Medhurst's "Orthography of the Hok-kēèn Dialect" (1832: xxxii-lvii) is based on two lexicographic sources, viz. the Shiwu yin, and Robert Morrison's Dictionary of the Chinese language (1815-1822). The Shiwu yin was published in the year of Medhurst's arrival in Malacca, where he initially worked at the printing-house of the London Missionary Society. Before leaving for Asia, Medhurst had studied Mandarin in London, only to find "that not one man in five hundred knows any thing of the Mandarin tongue, or can carry on a conversation of more than ten words in it" (1832: v). Medhurst consequently turned to the languages spoken by the population of Malacca, viz. Malay, Cantonese, and Southern Min (cf. Hong Weiren 1993a: 19). Only one year later, he was already able to deliver sermons in Southern Min.
According to Hong (ibid.), during this year of intense learning, the *Shiwu yin* became Medhurst's personal "model dictionary" for Southern Min.

In the Preface to his dictionary, Medhurst explains that in the *Shiwu yin*, "fifteen initials (hence the name) and fifty finals are employed, to express all the possible variations in sound, of which the Hok-kêèn dialect is capable. These initials and finals are hereafter described, and attempted to be expressed in European letters" (p. vii). The number of letters for syllable initials in Medhurst's orthography, however, exceeds the set of fifteen "character heads" representing initials in the *Shiwu yin*. Medhurst departs from his lexicographical model in the following instances (p. xxxii f.):

1. -h is transcribed with <l> and <n>. These two spellings are distinguished as follows: "Léw ¬h gives the initial sound of l, in its combination with all those sounds which are not nasal, but when it is joined to a nasal final, the power of the l is in a great measure merged in the nasal, in which case it acquires a sound similar to n", e.g. in -l 'young gentleman', which is spelled <neŋ> for [ŋ].
2. -^ represents the zero initial in the *Shiwu yin*. In Medhurst's orthography, the voiced glides [u, j] are spelled as <w> and <y> respectively.
3. The letter <g> and the digraph <gn> both represent the character head »y. The former "conveys the initial sound of g", the latter occurs in "nasal words, when it acquires the sound of gn, pronounced with a nasal twang".

The impact of Medhurst's "Orthography of the Hok-kêèn Dialect" on later systems remained limited. His diacritic marks for tones are the same as in modern POJ, his set of initials has undergone slight changes, and his complicated spelling of syllable finals did not gain any acceptance by later scribes. For a phonological description of this system, I refer to Hong Weiren (1993b: 50-75). The differences between Medhurst's spelling of initial consonants and POJ are as follows (for a description of sound-symbol correspondences in POJ, I refer to Tiun 2001):

1. In POJ, /ŋ/ is rendered as <ng>, Medhurst spells the same sound as <gn>.
(2) In POJ, the aspirated initials /pʰ, tʰ, kʰ, sʰ/ are spelled <ph, th, kh, chh> respectively. In Medhurst's orthography, aspiration is indicated by an apostrophe <'> followed by <h>, as in <p'h>, <t'h>, <k'h>, <ch'h>.

(3) In POJ, the voiced glides [u, j] which function as onsets with zero initials are unmarked. In Medhurst's system, these sounds are spelled as <w> and <y> respectively.

3.2 Doty and Talmage

Modern POJ orthography is too a large extent attested in Elihu Doty's Anglo-Chinese Manual with Romanized Colloquial of 1853. Only twenty years after the appearance of Medhurst's pioneering dictionary, Doty departed from the orthographic model proposed by Medhurst. The extant sources, however, do not allow safe conclusions as to who actually initiated orthographic innovations in the mid-19th century.

In the 1840s, the legal foundations for missionary work in China changed. In the Treaty of Nanking (1842), imperial regulations preventing foreign missionaries from entering were partly lifted. Five seaport were opened to foreigners, and Amoy was one of these ports. Amoy-based missionaries soon embarked upon teaching the local vernacular. This resulted in renewed interest in the romanization system and efforts to improve it. Pitcher (1912: 201) notes that "in 1850 it [i.e. Romanized Amoy] was being taught at a school here, but even before this date […] initiatory steps must have been taken towards its formation by choosing seventeen of the Roman letters for an alphabet."

The work was apparently tackled jointly by missionaries of all Amoy-based denominations, viz. the American Reformed Missions, the London Missionary Society, and the English Presbyterian Mission. According to Pitcher, "the chief promoter of this scheme of writing Chinese was, perhaps more than any other, the Rev. J.V.N. Talmage D.D. He was, however, heartily supported by all his colleagues working in the three Missions" (1912: 207).

Five publications by Talmage were in Romanized Amoy, viz. (cf. Wylie [1867] 1967: 165f.):
I have not been able to localize the whereabouts of these publications. Doty, however,
states that his "orthography with one or two minor variations, is that employed by
most of the missionaries residing at Amoy" (1853: v). In many instances, Doty's
system resembles modern POJ. It therefore seems safe to assume that the present POJ
orthography had largely been fixed by the late 1850s.

It has been suggested that orthographic innovations in the early 1850s were
initiated by the Canton-based missionary Samuel Wells Williams, e.g. by Alvin Lin
bases his assumption on an extract from the 46th chapter of Genesis (Chhòng-sè Toan)
in romanized Amoy, published by Williams in the magazine Chinese Repository in
1851. The orthographic conventions of this extract largely correspond to POJ.
Williams described the extract as "one of the first attempts at Romanizing the Chinese
language for the purpose of teaching the natives through another medium than their
own characters" (p. 472).

John DeFrancis (1950: 21), however, suggests that the Genesis passage was
translated by Amoy-based missionaries. This assumption seems reasonable, as the
passage appeared in the column Bibliopgraphical notes in which Williams discussed
publications by other authors, and not his own. Moreover, in the years before,
Williams had developed his own romanization system for Chinese dialects that
differed in many respects from the orthography applied in the extract mentioned by
Lin. Williams' system was gradually developed in a series of articles in the same
magazine. In these articles, he had elaborated on the deficiencies of both Chinese
character script and Morrison's orthography (1835-42). In 1836, he had called for the
"application of the Roman alphabet, as used in Italy, with some modifications, to the
Chinese language", followed by a new orthography "adopted for representing the
sounds of Chinese characters, by the Roman alphabet, in the national language and in the dialects of Canton and Fukien" (1842).

Hong Weiren (1993a: 23, 1993c: 4) suggests that these proposals mark the orthographic transition to POJ. Again, however, there is no convincing evidence that Williams' "New Fukien Orthography" inspired later approaches to the romanization of Southern Min. Many of Williams' orthographic proposals were neither applied in the extract quoted above neither by Doty, as for example the introduction of additional diacritics indicating vowel length. Moreover, we not find any reference to Williams' orthography in later reference works for romanized Fujianese. Moreover, many of Williams' proposals are not used in the orthographic scheme of the 1850s, as in the following five examples:

(1) Tone marks. Williams introduced new set of tone marks. These marks precede syllables of the ping and shang category, and follow syllables of the qu and ru category. In Doty (1853) and later POJ sources, however, Medhurst's tone marks are used.

(2) Treatment of the phonological distinction between /ɔ/ and /o/. Williams proposes no convention for this distinction. In Doty's work and following POJ sources, a superscript dot <◦> distinguishes the former from the latter: <ɔ> represents /ɔ/, and <o> /o/.

(3) Representation of aspiration. In modern POJ, the aspirated initials /pʰ, tʰ, kʰ, ᵃʔʰ/ are spelled as <ph, th, kh, chh> respectively. In Medhurst's orthography, aspiration is indicated by an apostrophe <'> followed by <h>, as in <p'h>, <t'h>, <k'h>, <ch'h>. In Williams' and Doty' orthographies, aspiration is indicated by a spiritus asper </>. <h> for aspiration is attested in Mac Gowan (1869) and later systems.

(4) Representation of the of the initial /ŋ/. Like Medhurst, Williams spells this sound as <gn>. The spelling <ng> is attested in Doty (1853) and following POJ sources.

(5) Representation of nazalized vowels. In Medhurst's and Williams' orthography, superscript <ⁿ> precedes nasal open vowels, e.g. in <hⁿó> (Medhurst) and <hⁿó> (Williams) for [hⁿɔ̃]. The modern convention of using a superscript <ⁿ> following the vowel (hⁿó) is firstly attested in Doty (1853).
3.3 POJ in the late 19th century
In the second half of the 18th century, missionary compilers of Southern Min reference works regularly proposed orthographic innovations. Some of these proposals gained acceptance and ultimately replaced earlier solutions. The spiritus asper <₇> indicating aspiration of the initials /pʰ, tʰ, kʰ, ðʰ/ in Doty's system, for instance, was replaced by an additional letter <h> in later orthographies. Other proposals were rather short-lived, for example Carstairs Douglas' additional line in the letter <₇> for /ɔ/, the use of which was discontinued in later reference works. An overview of orthographic alterations in the major works following Medhurst is presented in table 1.

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3.4 Other alphabetic orthographies
Apart from these variations, missionaries generally adhered to the orthographic conventions developed in the middle of the 19th century. Dictionary compilers not associated with missionary institutions, however, did not feel bound to these conventions. This is evident in the dictionary of the Dutch translators C.F.M. de Grijs and J.J.C. Francken (1882) and the work of their colleague and fellow-countryman Gustave Schlegel (1886-90).

In 1862, Schlegel and Francken had been appointed interpreters in Java. After taking up their job, they realized that "a good Chinese-Dutch and Dutch-Chinese Dictionary […], in the most generally spoken dialect of Netherlands-India, was of the
first necessity”. De Grijs died only one year after his arrival in Java, but his first drafts were supplemented and edited by Francken. As the compilation of the *Chineesch-Hollandsch woordenboek* was carried on for 20 years, it appeared only shortly after Douglas' groundbreaking *Chinese-English dictionary*. Hence it became, as Schlegel put it, "superseded and rendered useless". In contrast, Schlegel's Dutch-Chinese counterpart gained some historical significance, which lies in its sheer size. Up to the present day, his four-volume *Nederlandsch-Chineesch woordenboek* has remained the most comprehensive reference work for a Southern Min dialect dictionary ever published.

The orthography in Schlegel's and Francken & De Grijs' works differs in many instances from POJ. In his bilingual *Inleiding/Introduction*, Schlegel mentions that he personally discussed spelling issues with Douglas before his return to Holland in 1872. However, without further elaboration, he conceded that he only "partially succeeded" in convincing Douglas to adopt his system. As Schlegel's orthography has not had any attestable influence on later romanization systems for Taiwanese Hoklo, I will not discuss it further here.

### 4. The functional change of POJ

When Walter Medhurst designed his alphabetic orthography, he intended it as an auxiliary device for reading Chinese characters. In Medhurst's view, alphabetic writing was thus not considered an alternative to Chinese writing traditions, but a means of access to it. In the closing line of his *Preface*, Medhurst expresses the hope that "the present feeble undertaking be rendered eminently serviceable in the promotion of Chinese literature" (1832: xi). Medhurst's attitude reflected a common view among early 19th-century missionaries. As DeFrancis puts it (1950: 18), "in 1834 there was still unanimous agreement among experts and amateurs alike that the Chinese language should be characterized as exceedingly difficult, uniquely monosyllabic, and most important, necessarily ideographic in its written form".

After the early 1850s, positions regarding the function of POJ vis-à-vis the Chinese character script became more diverse. Commenting on the first reported success in teaching romanized texts among Chinese pupils, Samuel Wells Williams (1851: 474) wrote:
Some missionaries think the best way is to open a new road through their spoken language for the Chinese to get to the temple of learning, and no longer try to plod the old track, where thousands of characters, like misshapen boulders and jutting snags, so obstruct the way, that most of the travelers altogether lose their time, patience, and opportunity, before they reach their journey's end.

Among Amoy-based missionaries, Carstairs Douglas proposed the most radical break with the original perspective of POJ. His endeavor to codify the spoken language by exclusively using POJ was unique among 19th and early-20th-century missionaries. In the Preface of his dictionary, he states (1873: vii):

[Amoy] is not a mere colloquial dialect or patois; it is spoken by the highest ranks as by the common people, by the most learned as by the most ignorant […]. Nor does the term "dialect" convey anything like a correct idea of its distinctive character; it is no mere dialectic variety of some other language; it is a distinct language, one of the many and widely differing languages which divide among them the soil of China.

By defining Amoy as a distinct language, Douglas naturally felt less commitment to Chinese writing traditions than earlier Romanizers. Instead, he held that the use of alphabetic writing as a replacement for the Chinese script would manifest the distinct position of Amoy. In the same Preface (p. viii f.) he wrote:

The most serious defect is the want of the Chinese character. This is due to two causes: (1) There are a very large number of the words for which we have not been able to find the corresponding character at all, perhaps a quarter or a third of the whole […]. (2) Even if the characters had been found, it would have been very difficult or impossible for me to use the Chinese character in printing at home. […] Meantime, while I greatly regret that the Chinese character does not appear in the book, I am in one sense glad that it is absent. For it may serve to make manifest the fact that the Vernacular of Amoy is an independent language, which is able to stand alone without the help of the written character.

The different approaches to the application of POJ are presented in illustration 1 and 2. Whereas romanized expressions in illustration 1 appear as auxiliary adjuncts to characters, POJ is applied as a full-fledged writing system in illustration 2.
Douglas’ unorthodox view did not remain uncontested. After all, the alphabetic script was rejected as "childish writing" by most Chinese and many foreign scholars (cf. Chiung 2000). In the following decades, missionaries were in continuous disagreement whether educational benefits associated with the use of alphabetic writing could outweigh reservations against the abolishment of time-honored
character writing traditions. The dispute is reflected in the following two quotations from the first promoters of POJ in Taiwan, William Campbell and Thomas Barclay. Campbell (1913: iii) rejected the notion that alphabetic writing could fully replace the Chinese writing system:

Following the trend of recent events in China, it will thus be seen that no sympathy is shown here for the action of those missionary brethren who push forward Roman letters with the avowed intention of thrusting Chinese methods of writing and printing into the scrap-heap. No: seeing that native periodicals are now increased by the hundred, so the humble contribution herewith submitted also comes forward, not as a Supplanter, but as a cheap convenient little Handbook for helping those who use it to a fuller and more accurate knowledge of the written language of China.

Thomas Barclay, on the other hand, defended his support for the use of alphabetic writing as follows (quoted by Band 1972: 67):

Soon after my arrival in Formosa I became firmly convinced of three things, and more than fifty years experience has strengthened my conviction. The first was that if you are to have a healthy, living Church it is necessary that all the members, men and women, read the Scriptures for themselves; second, that this end can never be attained by the use of the Chinese character; third, that it can be attained by the use of the alphabetic script, this Romanised Vernacular. I also thought that to describe this Romanised Vernacular as a system suited to women and children and uneducated persons, while scholars like myself used the character, was to condemn it as a failure from the outset. Accordingly I resolved to do what I could by way of personal example by using it instead of the Chinese character. During all my term of service I have only on one occasion used the Character Bible in the pulpit, and that once I regret. I knew of course that this was done at the risk of losing one's reputation as a scholar, but that was a small matter compared with the hoped-for result.

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——. 1997 [1913]. *A dictionary of the Amoy vernacular spoken throughout the prefectures Chin-chiu, Chiang-chiu and Formosa (Taiwan)*. Tainan: Renguang Chubanshe.


Medhurst, Walter Henry. 1832. *A dictionary of the Hok-kêên dialect of the Chinese language, according to the reading and colloquial idioms*. Published in Batavia, printed in Macao: East India's Company Press.


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