

# AMY WILKINSON AND THE CHINESE BLIND BOYS BAND

Keith Robinson and Wang Lingli [王 玲俐]<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

One aspect of the work that the missionaries did in China that has received little attention is the teaching of the blind to read, in particular to read music. Amy Wilkinson is particularly interesting because in 1922, she brought her Chinese Blind Boys Band to England and they toured all over the country giving concerts. The concerts were widely reported in the local press, and so we have quite detailed positive accounts of how well the band played. Any scepticism about what the standard of performance might have been like can be quelled by reading these accounts. What this book attempts to do is understand how these early pioneers developed systems to enable the blind Chinese to read in Chinese, with first the use of embossed letters and then Braille. They then went on to teach music notation with embossed systems and then later Braille music notation. There are considerable technical difficulties for blind people to read Braille music notation, and these must have been made more challenging teaching blind Chinese boys Western instruments and music that required an understanding of Western harmony and rhythm. Amy Wilkinson's achievements in this field deserve wider recognition than they have so far received.

## Keywords

Disabled people, music notation, Chinese history, Braille for music, Blind Boys Band

## INTRODUCTION

There is an excellent biography of Amy Oxley Wilkinson's (1868–1949) missionary work by Robert and Linda Banks (2018) that helped me a great deal in my research into her life. When we read accounts of missionaries and their musical activities, such as Timothy Richard (1845–1919) (Richard, 1845–1919) and Mary Richard (1843–1903) (Kaiser, 2014), William Edward Soothill (1861–1935) (Young, 2012), and Calvin Wilson Mateer (1836–1908) (Hyatt, 1976) and his wife Julia Ann Brown (1837–1899) (Mateer, 1912), one will not find any mention of Amy Oxley Wilkinson's work, yet I think her achievements in music with the blind are quite remarkable.

## MISSIONARY WORK WITH THE BLIND IN CHINA

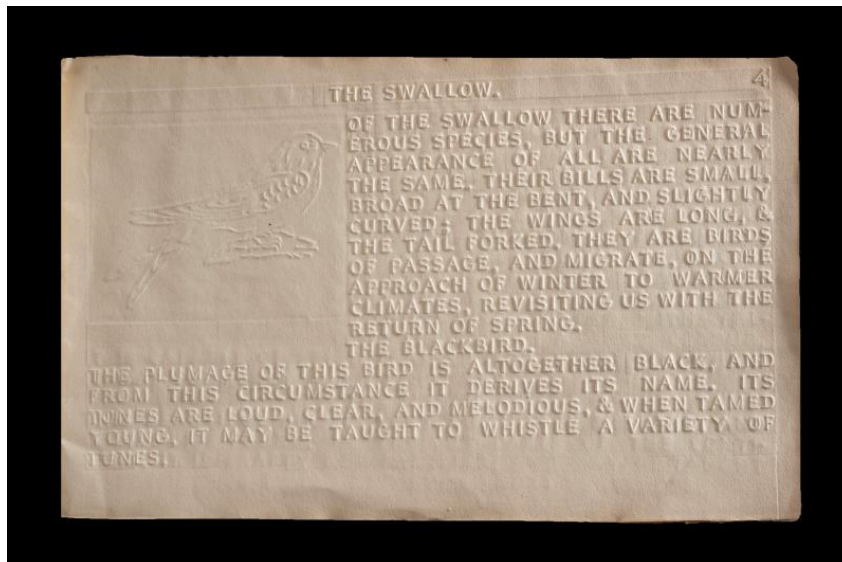
The missionaries working in China were all from different denominations, and they were sponsored by different religious groups in different countries, so often their teaching methods working with the Chinese blind were very different and uncoordinated. It was also a time of great invention and entrepreneurship, and this led to many different ideas and inventions being tried in different parts of China, often at the same time. Some of these approaches to teaching the Chinese blind to read were short-lived and became obsolete and were very quickly displaced by better methods. I think understanding a rough chronology of these methods and a brief explanation of their principles will help when we discuss the work of missionaries who worked with the Chinese blind people.

## EMBOSSSED LETTERS

John Alston (1743–1818) of Glasgow used Roman capitals, and this continued to be used in England and Philadelphia, USA (Armitage, 2012).

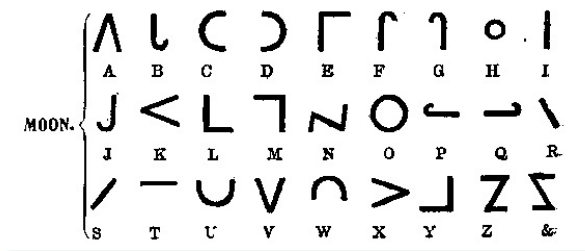
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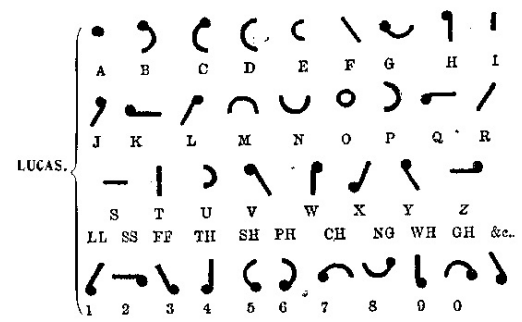
**Figure 1: A Peep into the Menagerie of birds, Alston type. RNIB Collection Acc No: L1/3, printed by courtesy of Heather Tilley.**

The difficulty of using embossed Roman letters led to two other types of experiment: those composed of lines and those composed of dots. William Moon (1818–1894) in England devised a series of lines, some compatible with the existing shape of letters and others completely different. The lines were bracketed together, with a curved line taking the reading finger from the end of one line to the beginning of the next, which is read backward, so that the lines are read from left to right and from right to left alternately. The letters in the return line retain the same absolute position as in the advancing line; consequently, their position, relative to the reading finger in the return line, is reversed (Armitage, 2012; Farrell, 1956).



**Figure 2: Moon’s use of existing embossed systems, photo by courtesy of New York Special Education Institute.**

Thomas Mark Lucas (1764–1838) was another interesting person in this regard. In 1838, Lucas introduced a kind of stenographic shorthand. The characters are completely arbitrary, consisting mainly of lines with or without a dot at one end. The lines do not reverse but are read from left to right. They were used by the London Society for teaching the blind to read and in Birmingham and Nottingham as noted by the National Library of Scotland in a publication with code number RefMMSID9930185233804341.



**Figure 3: Lucas was teaching ‘Writing Systems for the Blind’. <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/research/centres/peltz-gallery>). Last accessed 22 April, 2023. Photography by courtesy of New York Institute for Special Education.**

What I think is interesting is how many of these early systems developed music notation. An example of this is a Hymn Tune book in Lucas's embossed music notation, "Music for the Blind", which was published in 1854 by T.M. Lucas W. Wood and some others.

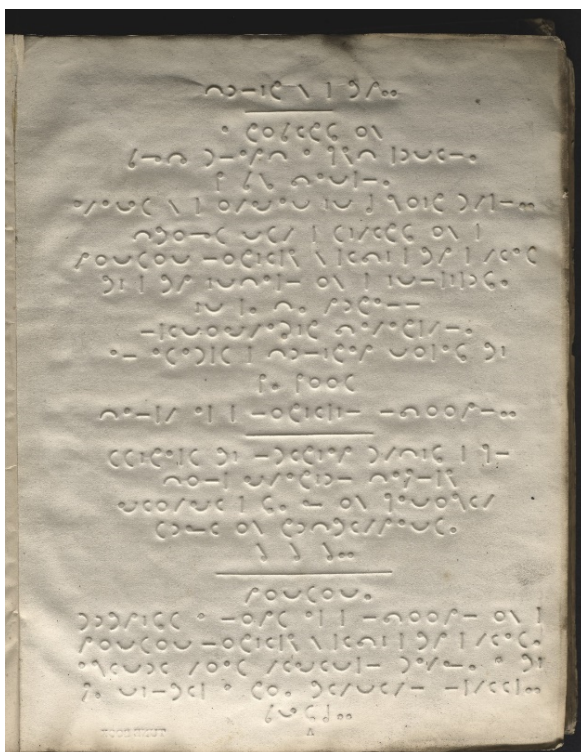
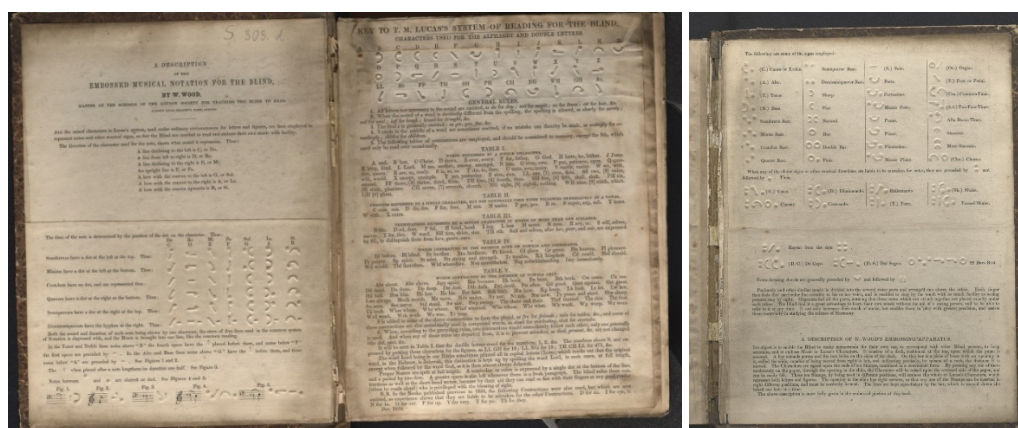


Figure 4: This is a printed page of this material. To be found at the National Library of Scotland, RefMMSID: 9930185233804341, and here used with permission.

We know that Reverend Campbell originally published his Phonic System of Taiwan Dialect for the blind in Moon's embossed script, and it would be reasonable to suppose that his blind members of the congregation sang and played hymns written in embossed musical notation similar to the example above by Lucas. The complexity of these embossed systems must have made it difficult for Blind Chinese to learn and memorize the many hundreds of hymn tunes introduced by the missionaries.



Figures 5a and 5b: In this writing, one can find Here is Lucas's musical code as published (Lucas et al, 1854). Reused and printed with permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Using Lucas's codes, here is the treble part of the hymn, which is the theme from Haydn's "Creation Mass." This is just the first four bars. The blind pianist would then read the alto part, then the Tenor, and then the Bass. Memorize all four parts and learn to play them on the piano with both hands. Remember these are blind Chinese illiterate boys learning an unfamiliar tune, with unfamiliar harmony and rhythm. It would have been a prodigious feat of memory and technical playing ability to memorize the whole hymn book.

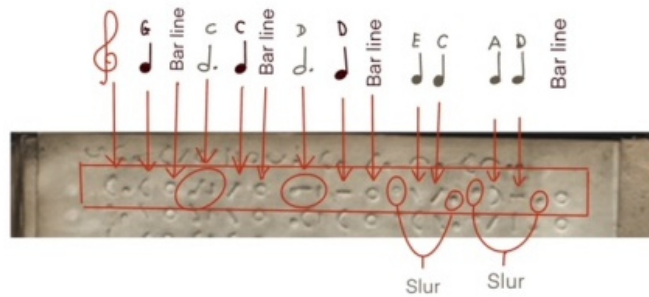


Figure 5c: Treble part of an embossed music notation. Reused with permission.

## THE BRAILLE ALPHABET

Louis Braille attended the Institute des Juenes Aveugles School for the blind. He was an organist and in 1829 developed a writing system based on the formation of small dots that can be read by touching the index finger on paper. The writing is done by perforation of the paper with a punch. In 1829, Braille published his 'Process for Writing Lyrics, Music and Plainchant by means of dots' (National Institute for the Blind, 2023).

**BRAILLE ALPHABET.**

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
⠁	⠃	⠉	⠙	⠑	⠖	⠗	⠈	⠊	⠚
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
⠅	⠌	⠍	⠝	⠕	⠏	⠑	⠗	⠎	⠞
U	V	X	Y	Z	ç	é	à	è	ù
⠥	⠘	⠭	⠟	⠵	⠉	⠑	⠗	⠎	⠞
À	á	í	ó	ú	ë	ï	ü	œ	w
⠠	⠡	⠢	⠣	⠤	⠥	⠦	⠧	⠨	⠩

⠠ prefix for numbers.      ⠠ Sign for end of line in Poetry.      Apostrophe.      Hyphen.

Punctuation signs (in middle and lower grooves.)

,	;	:	.	?	!	( )	“ ”	*	”
⠂	⠆	⠒	⠄	⠑	⠗	⠠	⠠	⠠	⠠

Figure 5: National Institute for Blind Youth. 2023. Reused with permission.

## WILLIAM HILL MURRAY (1843-1911)

William Hill Murray was employed by the National Bible Society of Scotland. He arrived in China in 1871, and his past experience with blind people in Scotland had taught him that they were keen to read the Bible for themselves, and he thought blind Chinese people would also be interested (Gordon-Cumming, 1898). He struggled to find a method that would work until 1878 when he began to adapt Braille to teach one or the other blind men. In 1879, he was visited by the traveler and writer Constance F. Gordon-Cummings, who was so impressed by his work that she published a lot of articles about him so much so that he became famous worldwide.

The Murray Numerical System is a list of 408 possible tone-independent Mandarin syllables arranged in the alphabetical order of their Wade-Giles Romanization and numbered without gaps from 1 to 408. Murray organized the list into 41 rows × 10 columns and defined two series of numbers, indicated by different 6-dot braille symbols, with one range (00–40) for the rows and another range (0–9) for the columns. He left the first cell of the first row (00–0) and the last cell of the last row (40–9)

9) empty, leaving 408 occupied cells. He also defined four separate symbols to indicate tones. (Note that the total number of cells came to 56, well under the 64 possible dot combinations for a symbol.) Tones aside, every sound in the list could be represented by two Braille symbols, a row number symbol and a column number symbol. However, Murray opted not to include the 00-row number symbol for the items in the first row and represented them with the column symbols alone.

He provided the system with a set of mnemonics based on the mapping of the digits 0–9 (in both row and column number symbols) to Latin letters corresponding approximately to initial sounds S, T, N, M, J, L, Sh, K, F, and P.

To summarize, Murray reduces the Chinese language to 408 words born of single syllables and listed in alphabetical order by their English pronunciation, and he gives each word a number from 1 to 408. The number is written in Braille. The blind student has to memorize all 408 words and also what their number is. Therefore, if he reads the number 387, he must remember that links to the word “yáng,” and then he has to know the meaning of the word.

Murray is the first to attempt to link the Chinese language to Braille. He also included information on the tone. He adapted his system by using black lines to join the Braille dots so that sighted people could use the same system and read without having to learn the traditional Chinese characters.

This is an example of Table 7A from the Murray system for sighted people. The first column is the mnemonic to help them remember which words were on each row. Then we get the number, next the Chinese character, and then below that the English phonic; then at the bottom, the lines are the visual representation of the Braille number and the tone.

沒理 Mei Li	350 慚 T'san	351 臧 Tsang	352 倉 T'sang	353 造 Tsao	354 草 T'sao,	355 宅 Tsé	356 策 T'sé	357 賊 Tsei	358 增 Tseng	359 層 T'séng.
沒食 Mei Shih	360 作 T'so	361 錯 T'so	362 走 T'sou	363 湊 T'sou	364 足 Tsu,	365 醋 T'su	366 鐵 T'suan	367 躡 T'suan	368 嘴 Tsui	369 崔 T'sui.
曠告 Mengkao	370 尊 T'sun	371 村 T'sun	372 總 T'sung	373 從 T'sung	374 子 T'sü	375 慈 T'sü	376 娃 Wa	377 外 Wai	378 玩 Wan	379 枉 Wang.
民分 Min Fen	380 位 Wei	381 問 Wèn	382 翁 Wéng	383 我 Wo	384 無 Wu,	385 牙 Ya	386 埃 Yai	387 羊 Yang	388 遙 Yao	389 野 Yeh.
明白 Ming Pai	390 言 Yen	391 義 Yi	392 音 Yin	393 應 Ying	394 約 Yüeh,	395 餘 Yü	396 原 Yüan	397 月 yüeh	398 云 Yün	399 有 Yu.
如斯 Ju Ssu	400 用 Yung	401 告 Kao	402 靠 K'ao	403 得 Tei	404 咱 Tsên	405 村 T'sên	406 特 T'è	407 塞 Sai	408 拋 P'ou	

Figure 6: Page in William Hill Murray’s teaching book. Reused with permission of the National Institute for Blind Youth.

Of course, phonic systems cannot convey the same amount of information that can be contained within the traditional Chinese characters, but since the majority of the common people, both the sighted and the blind, were illiterate, it was an improvement. It had other advantages: if a blind person went to the villages and could “read” the Bible in Braille, it would create a great impression on the village people.

One of Murray’s students is quoted as saying: “Three months ago,” he said, “I came, though believing it to be impossible for a blind man to learn to read and write. Now praise God for His wonders to me! I can read and write anything, and instead of having to remember all as a burden on my memory, I have several books which I have written out myself. But my countrymen are all heathen, and I must go and show them what the Lord has done to me, and preach His blessed Gospel to them” (Gordon-Cumming, 1898: 77).

Rev William Campbell is critical of Murray’s system as were other missionaries working in China. In a report (Anonymous. October, 1890), Campbell praises the conference for approving the Braille

system of writing and printing, even though at the time, there was a strong movement to adopt the Braille Numerical signs as proposed by Murray. He points out that students of the “Numerical Spelling” have to commit to memory 408 sentences and from then on writing them out in figures, which must not be pronounced according to their own meaning but after the sounds which they have been made to represent.

## WILLIAM CAMPBELL (1841-1921)

W. Campbell says that it is over 30 years since he first started to work with the blind helped by Mrs Graham, daughter of Bailie Alston, Hon Treasurer at the Glasgow Blind Asylum. (Therefore, that would be about 1885). He starts off with embossed books in the Romanised Amoy dialect. Then Dr W. Wright of the British and Foreign Bible Society asks him to prepare an edition of St Matthew’s Gospel. Wright then urged him to make an adaption using the Braille system of dots. It would reduce the size of the books, and the blind people would have a system that enabled them to also write. Campbell says of his Braille system as he was quoted (Anonymous. October, 1890) in the “it is an alphabetic arrangement; its twenty-four letters being all of full space size, so as to conserve the Braille numeral and punctuation signs for their original purpose, and thereby avoid the confusion of using these signs also as word-symbols.”

He goes back to Glasgow and raised £525 to help with his work with the blind in Formosa. His assistant was Mr Lim Ang, who could read both embossed and Braille. Miss Graham in Xiamen (formerly Amoy) heard what he was doing and asked if someone could come to Chin-chiu (where she was working) to start work with the blind. He sent Mr Lim Ang. When Mr Ang left Miss Graham’s school, it was put in the charge of Mr Cook, a blind teacher specially brought over from England.

Campbell explains (Campbell, W. 1841–1921) that the adaption of Braille, which has been made to the Amoy vernacular, the letters of the alphabet are full-length, thus leaving the tone marks to be formed from upper and middle dots and the punctuation from middle and lower ones. The letters are combined phonetically- also as initials and finals – to spell out short monosyllabic words, which, on average, require only three letters and a fraction to each. Of course, the Braille figure-dots are kept for the use they were originally intended to serve.

William Campbell seems to have been the first to use phonics to represent the sounds of a Chinese word; he did it by having an Initial, the sound of the start of the word, and then a Final, the sound of the rest of the word, and in addition, he included an indication of the tone. It is this system that he then adapts to Braille. In Campbell’s Braille system, they are using alphabetical letters to represent the phonic sounds of the Chinese.

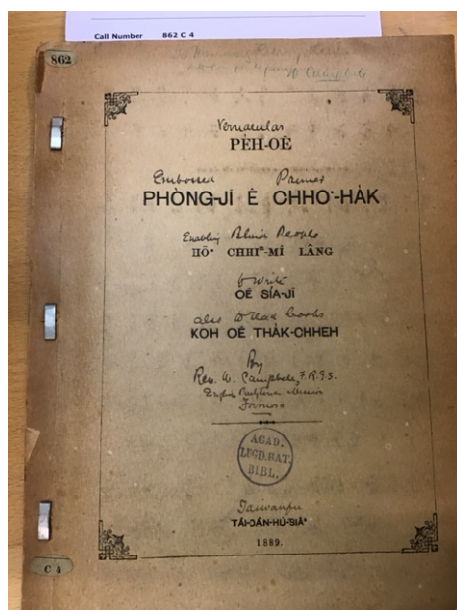
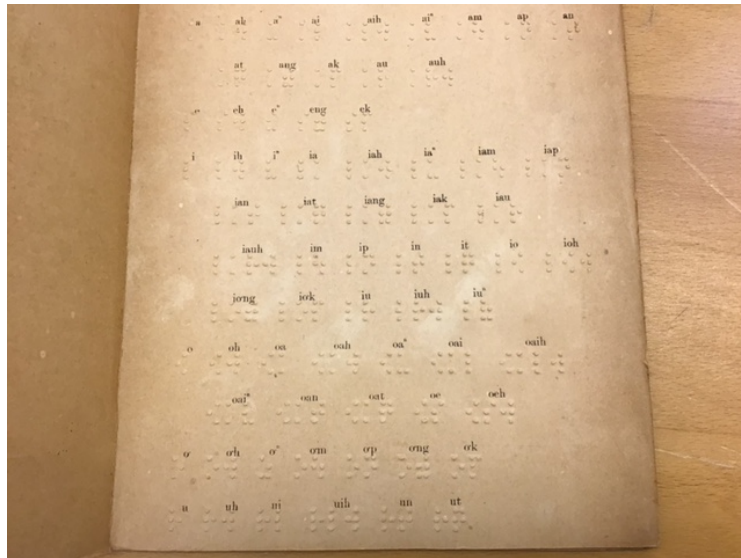


Figure 7a: This is a copy of Campbell’s Braille system. With permission of Leiden University Library Special Collections.



**Figure 7b: Another content page of Campbell's Braille system. With permission of Leiden University Library Special Collections. Pêh-hoē Phòng-ji ê Chho-hak Hō'Chhi"-mì Lâng Oē Sîa-ji Koh Oē Thak-chheh.**

Campbell must have been a brilliant linguist because he says himself that he was using his “Initial and Final, plus a Tone” system as early as 1858 but with embossed script. As we shall see later, a modified version is still being used by the blind in China today.

## AMY OXLEY WILKINSON (1868-1949)

Amy Oxley Wilkinson says in 1898 she was invited to Xiamen (formerly Amoy) district and learnt Braille from Mrs Graham and Mr Cook at the English Presbyterian Mission (Banks & Banks, 2018).

Amy Wilkinson’s translation of the Bible into the Fuzhou dialect builds on Murray’s and Campbell’s ideas, and she wrote an explanation as quoted by Banks & Banks in their second chapter in 1914:

“I thought it would interest you this morning to know how we can adapt the Chinese language to Braille. When you think that we have to learn thousands of characters to read Chinese classics, and over 4,000 to read the Bible, it seems impossible to teach the blind to read. But with the Initial and Final system we do that, and in South China we have three schools using that system, one for boys, one for girls, one (with a different dialect) where there are about thirty girls and women. I am glad to say I think this system can be used over the whole of China. I was asked by a missionary if I would adapt it to Mandarin, and I found it was possible to read it perfectly well, and she was sure they would be able to use that system. I have something that may help you understand. In Chinese we have so many initials and so many finals, and with combinations we can make up 420 different signs. It is so simple that one boy who had never been to school was able to learn to read and write St Mark’s Gospel in six weeks. The British and Foreign Bible Society, I am thankful to say, have adopted it, and now print a book of the Bible each year.”

Another report continues referring to a speech of Wilkinson (Guang, 1914) by explaining that his name in Chinese is ‘Guang’ the initial G, and the final ‘uang’, which means a ruler. Now in dialect we have seven distinct tones and combinations which make it difficult. A very noted English Chinese scholar thought the devil had something to do with our dialect. Mandarin is much simpler. In Foochow dialect if I want to say “mountain” I say ‘sǎng’; if I want to say ‘I am very angry,’ I say ‘sāng’ (in a different tone). In the Chinese there is a character for every word, the ‘sǎng’ meaning ‘mountain’ will have three strokes, and the ‘sāng’ meaning ‘I am very angry’ will have five different strokes, and you know by the look whether it is ‘angry’, ‘mountain’ or ‘umbrella’; but in the Romanised we add a tone mark after the word, and thus know what it means. (The speaker showed a chart and gave a number of examples.)

I would like to say just one or two more things. You see (pointing to the chart) we do use English numerals. I have started to teach English, and I have seven boys now learning, and I may say the Government has given the degree of B.A. to one boy for his knowledge of English, Braille and Mandarin. I think if Mr Murray were here today, he would adopt this system, but all honour to him for the work he has done. I have just heard that a conference was held in Shanghai, in November last, and the English and American Bible Societies have decided to emboss the Scriptures for the whole

of the Mandarin speaking parts of China in the Initial and Final System that was accepted by that conference.

Amy Wilkinson clearly acknowledges the work that Murray has done, and what she shows is that Campbell's system can be equally successful when adapted to a different dialect, in her case the Fuzhou dialect.

In the early 20th century, there was a movement among the missionaries to develop a system of phonic writing. Missionaries realized that having a lot of different Braille systems for each specific language spoken in China increased the printing cost of Braille books and meant blind people could not communicate easily with other blind people from a different province. The solution was to link Braille to a common phonic writing system. Amy Wilkinson was a pioneer in showing how it could be done.

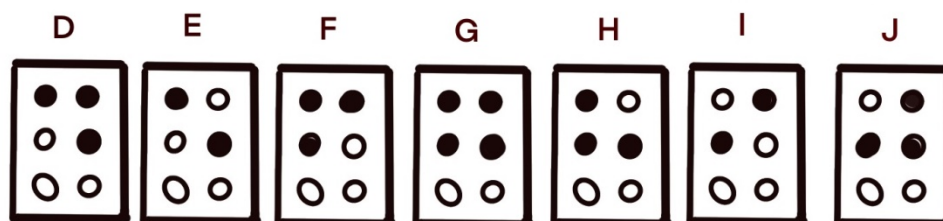
The work was continued by another Australian missionary, Miss S. J. Garland (Garland, 1919). In a writing of her, she discusses the progress that has been made to agree on a phonetic Chinese script that she calls 'Chu Yin.' Today, Zhuyin is the principal phonetic system used for teaching reading and writing in elementary schools in Taiwan. It does use an initial and final phonic, but phonetic writing was about sighted people being able to communicate easily with people who spoke other Asian languages, not the phonetics that William Campbell or Amy Oxley Wilkinson was dealing with in linking Braille to Chinese.

In fact, Garland makes this clear and finishes by saying, "In closing let it be said that in all probability quite a million of China's illiterates are blind. These can be taught at home by means of the Mandarin Union Braille system. The work of teaching can be done by any Chinese Christian who has an average knowledge of Chinese characters, with the minimum of oversight from the foreign missionary."

## BRaille MUSIC

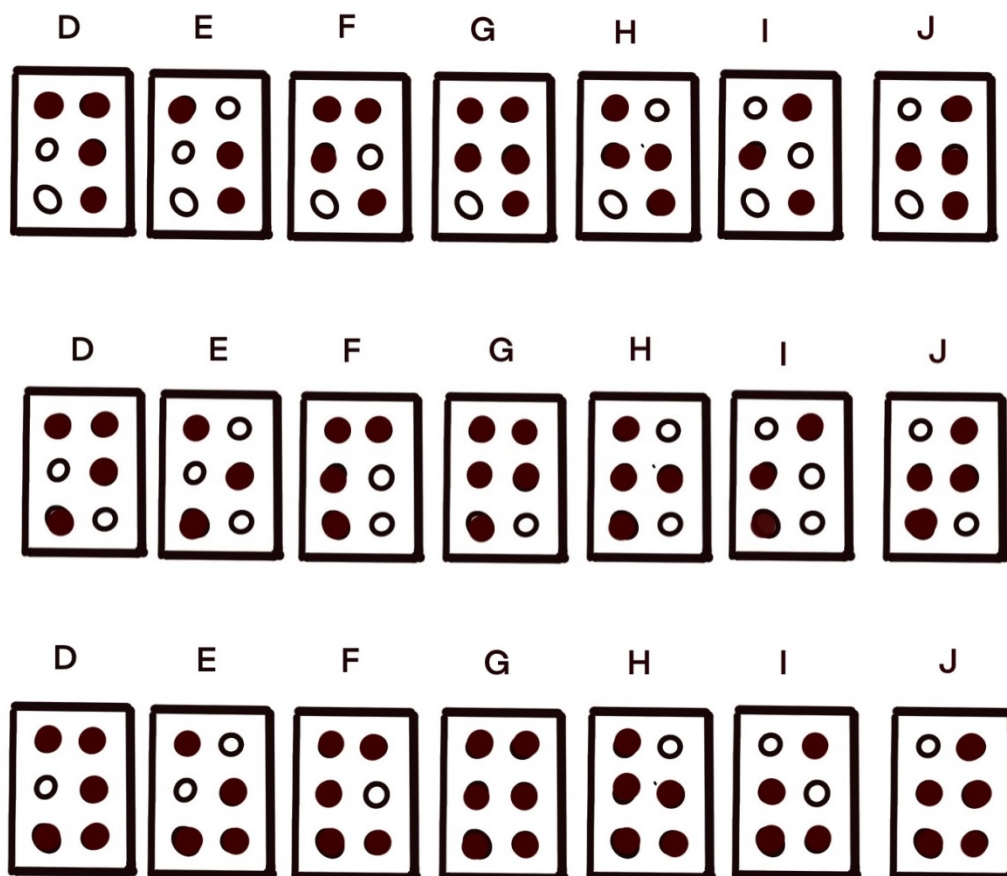
Braille uses a 6-dot matrix. All the letters of the alphabet and everything we need in music are made up from those six dots. Being French, Louis Braille would have thought about music in terms of Doh Ray Me Fah Soh La Te. According to French habits, Doh was always the note C. For this one reason,<sup>2</sup> it made sense to Louis Braille to use D for Doh and then carry on up the scale using the next letters of the alphabet: E = Ray, F = Me, G = Fah, H = Soh, I = Lah, and J = Te. So, Doh, Ray, Me, and so on correspond to those letters of the alphabet.

In Braille, those seven letters only use the top four dots of the 6-part cell. So, using those four dots gives us the pitch and also the note length, which is Quavers in this case.



<sup>2</sup> There was another reason as absolute D was also mostly an empty string of the erhu in dramatic contexts which made it obviously easy to sing along by male singers.





**Figure 8: Using the bottom dot on the right-hand side means that the length is Crotchet. Anything that uses the bottom left-hand dot gives the length of Minim. If we use both bottom dots, then the length is semibreve. Overview printed with permission.**

At this point, there are no more dots, so the dots for semibreves can also be semiquavers, but there is no confusion because, for instance, we cannot have 16 semibreves in a 4/4 bar. Using the same method, the dots for Quavers can also be used for 128<sup>th</sup> notes (semi hemidemisemiquaver), Crotchets can be used for 64<sup>th</sup> notes (semi demisemiquaver), Minims can be used for 32<sup>nd</sup> notes (demisemiquaver), and Semibreve can be used for 16<sup>th</sup> notes (semiquavers).

Braille is not written on a five-line staff; it is written linearly. So, it has octave signs to indicate whether the pitch is in the right hand on the piano and in which octave.

Of course, music notation also tells us the expression, whether it is loud or soft, *accelerando*, or *ritenuto*. Braille has signs for all those kinds of things, and that always comes before the note to be played because obviously, if we read the note first and then get told which dynamic, it would be too late.

The blind musician has to read the music with their fingers and then remember it and then learn to play it on their instrument. So, Braille piano music has to be read first by the right hand and memorized; then the next line will be the same phrase but for the left hand. Once both hands have been memorized, then the pianist can play them together. The next section of the music is then learnt in the same way. It is easy to understand that a big work like a Chopin Impromptu can take a long time to prepare.

The system is capable of giving the most detailed information to the player, but the player needs time to read it, memorize it, and then play it on their instrument. To be of any use, the player must also have a good understanding of music theory and harmony.

## STUDENT RECOLLECTIONS OF WILKINSON AND THE SCHOOL

An important source of information about the school is the interviews held in 2009 by Chen Jun'en, a music teacher at Fuzhou Blind School with alumni who were already very old but had clear memories of the school. They were Liu Zhongying, Rong Meiying, and Chen Renhe. I am very grateful for the school in allowing me to use this information. It is, I believe, of such importance that I have reproduced the original transcription of the interviews in Chinese and then given an English translation with the help of Wang Lingli [王伶俐].

What these eye witness accounts tell us is that music was an important skill and well taught. Chen Renhe says, "At first, she hired someone to teach Chinese music in the school for the blind. Later, she personally taught western music." Traditionally, blind Chinese males had made a living playing music and begging, so teaching them traditional instrumental skills would have been an obvious step toward making some of them independent.

Rong Meiying is particularly interesting because she specifically states, "Huang Shuyu taught girls to play the organ (the piano was only available in Mingdao School for the Blind in 1948)." She also says, "The girls are also good at writing words and music." Blind girls were most often employed as servants, not musicians, but with learning instruments or singing, they were obviously taught music theory. We know Amy taught the boys how to read and write music in Braille, but the implication from Rong Meiying's account is that girls learnt the same skills.

In addition, we know that Amy Wilkinson also taught them some Western instruments. From the photographs taken in London, they included cornets, Eb horns, trombone, euphoniums, flute, clarinet, and keyboard. From a technical point of view, the brass instruments all require a similar embouchure but are transposing instruments. The trombone would need specialist instruction because the notes are produced using a slide. The clarinet is an interesting choice because the lower register requires a different set of fingerings to produce the notes than the upper register. Again, it is a transposing instrument. For all these instruments to play together, the music must have been arranged and then written in Braille. Each musician would have learnt his part individually and then memorized it. Only at this point could ensemble training commence. How do blind musicians know when to begin playing if they cannot see the conductor? Interestingly, George Shearing in his biography says that they could hear the swish of the baton through the air and so judge when to play. It has to be remembered that instruments such as the trombone, euphonium, Eb horn, and clarinet would have been allocated the harmony parts, but of course, traditional Chinese music did not use harmony, so understanding how their individual part fitted with the rest of the instruments would have had to be learnt.

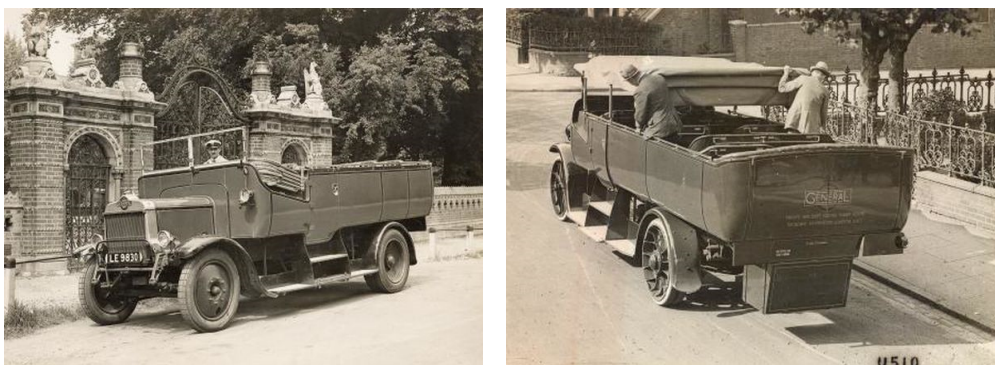
But they did not just learn how to play music, as Chen Renhe says that in England, "Liu Tianquan studies piano tuning. . .It is worth mentioning that Liu Tianquan became the most famous piano tuning technician in Fuzhou."



**Figure 9:** Image courtesy of Jamie Carstairs and Special Collections, University of Bristol Library.

## ITINERARY OF THE TOUR OF ENGLAND 1922

It is difficult to get accurate details of exactly where the band visited and performed, and this list has been compiled from newspaper accounts. What is clear is that in nearly every venue, the band performed two concerts, one in the afternoon and again in the evening. Sometimes, these were in the same hall, but most times, they were not. The afternoon concerts were often for school children. The other striking thing is that the band hired a charabanc to travel around in and took their own bedding and cooking equipment and food. The plan was that where no accommodation could be found, the boys would sleep in the charabanc. It must have been a slow and uncomfortable road journey. These photographs give a good idea of what the charabanc would have been like. They had a top speed of 15 mph, solid tyres, and no suspension.



Figures 10 and 11: Photographs reproduced with permission from the London Transport Museum.

## MAP OF PLACES VISITED IN MAY AND JUNE 1922

To help visualize how taxing the journeys must have been and gain some idea of the distances covered, I have included a map for each month of the tour.

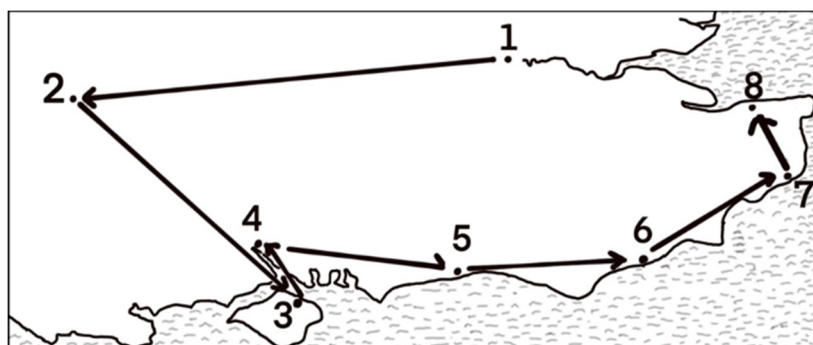


Figure 12a: Visitation places in 1922.

1. London, May 17 to June 15, 1922.
2. Bath, June 26, 1922.
3. Ryde, July 1, 1922.
4. Southampton, July 4, 1922.
5. Worthington, July 6 and 7, 1922.
6. St Leonards, July 13, 1922.
7. Dover, July 21, 1922.
8. Ramsgate, July 22, 1922.

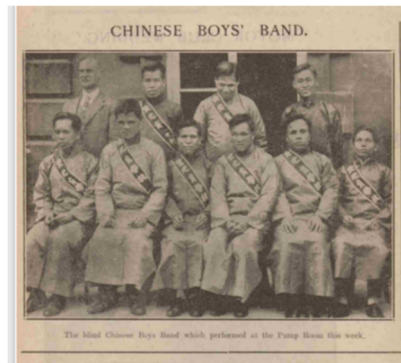


Figure 12b: Sunday Mirror 1922. Chinese Band outside the concert hall. Figure 12c: The “Bath Chronicle” Sat July 1, 1922 carries a photograph of the band in Chinese dress with a sash with the caption “The Chinese Blind Boys’ Band performed at the Pump Room this week.”

## MAP OF PLACES VISITED IN AUGUST 1922

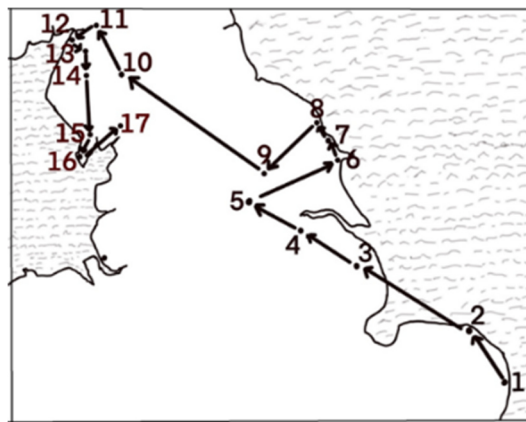


Figure 13: Visitations in August of the same year.

1. Lowestoft, August 1, 1922.
2. Cromer, August 2 and 3, 1922.
3. Louth, August 4, 1922.
4. Scunthorpe, August 5, 1922.
5. Monk Fryston, August 7, 1922.
6. Bridlington, August 9, 1922.
7. Filey, August 19, 1922.
8. Scarborough, August 11, 1922.
9. York, August 12, 1922.
10. Penrith, August 15, 1922.
11. Carlisle, August 16, 1922.
12. Siloth, August 17, 1922.
13. Wigton, August 18, 1922.
14. Keswick, August 19, 1922.
15. Ulverston, August 22, 1922.
16. Barrow, August 23, 1922.
17. Kendal, August 24, 1922.

## MAP OF PLACES VISITED IN SEPTEMBER 1922

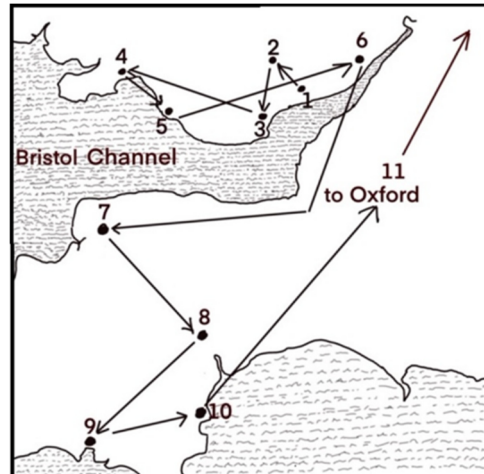


Figure 14: Visitations in September of the same year.

1. Newport, September 4, 1922.
2. Abercarn, September 5, 1922.
3. Cardiff, September 6, 1922.
4. Swansea, September 7, 1922.
5. Porthcawl, September 8, 1922.
6. Chepstow, September 9, 1922.
7. Barnstable, September 15, 1922.
8. Exeter, September 18, 1922.
9. Plymouth, September 19, 1922.
10. Torquay, September 20, 1922.
11. Oxford, September 30, 1922.

## MAP OF PLACES VISITED IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 1922

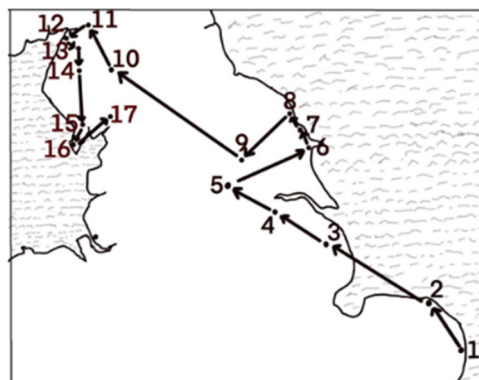


Figure 13: Visitations in August of the same year.

18. Lowestoft, 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1922.
19. Cromer, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 1922.
20. Louth, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
21. Scunthorpe, 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
22. Monk Fryston, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
23. Bridlington, 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
24. Filey, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
25. Scarborough, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
26. York, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
27. Penrith, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
28. Carlisle, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
29. Siloth, 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.

- 30. Wigton, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
- 31. Keswick, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.
- 32. Ulverston, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1922.
- 33. Barrow, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1922.
- 34. Kendal, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1922.

## MAP OF PLACES VISITED IN SEPTEMBER 1922

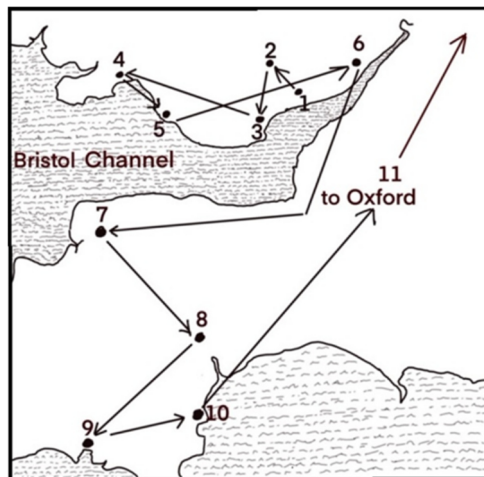


Figure 14: Visitations in September of the same year.

- 12. Newport, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 13. Abercarn, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 14. Cardiff, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 15. Swansea, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 16. Porthcawl, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 17. Chepstow, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 18. Barnstable, 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 19. Exeter, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 20. Plymouth, 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 21. Torquay, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.
- 22. Oxford, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1922.

## MAP OF PLACES VISITED IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 1922

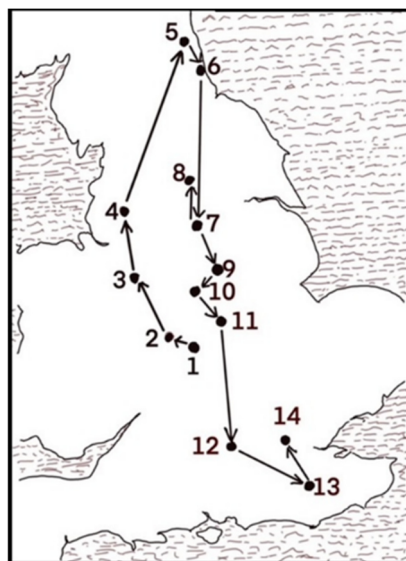


Figure 15a: Visitations in October of the same year.

1. Leamington Spa, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1922.
2. Birmingham, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1922.
3. Stoke, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1922.
4. Stockport, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1922.
5. Newcastle, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1922.
6. Sunderland, 30<sup>th</sup> -31<sup>st</sup> October, 1922.
7. Sheffield, 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1922.
8. Leeds, 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1922.
9. Nottingham, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1922.
10. Derby, 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> November, 1922.
11. Leicester 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1922.
12. Reading 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1922.
13. Tunbridge Wells 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1922.
14. London 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1923.



Figure 15b: On the right is a dizi, erhu, sanxian, yueqin, and jinghu. Depiction reused with permission.

## CONCLUSION

What stands out most is that Amy Wilkinson was a brilliant administrator. She had the ability to see what each individual student's aptitude might be and then organize the school to allow that potential to develop. So just looking at the senior students, they play many different instruments. These need to be taught; they need time to practice and memorize their music, but at the same time, they are learning to read Braille, studying the scriptures, making Matts, learning shoemaking, or tuning pianos. The practical skills needed in organizing making Matts are immense. We need to buy the raw materials, decide on what pattern to make, dye the material, teach the students how to weave the Matts, supervise them making the Matts, sell the Matts to generate income in order to buy more raw materials, and so on. In addition, the younger children's needs have to be met in order that she has a continual stream of students who can continue these practical skills.

One of the impressive achievements often overlooked is that when she left, the school was able to continue and still survives to this day. A lot of gifted and talented people can start up organizations that achieve amazing results, but once that charismatic figure leaves, the organization dies out. That did not happen at this school.

The Chinese Blind Boys' Band tour of England is the first and foremost a tour de force of Amy Wilkinson's organizational skills.

It is very difficult for us to make an assessment of the standard these blind musicians achieved because we have no recordings made at the time. Accounts such as this one by Gordon-Cummings about what Murray's pupils achieved can make one sceptical because they are so fulsome in their praise: "Mr. Murray mentions that at very short notice a new hymn-book was adopted by the London Mission. He and Peter set to work, arranged plans, found the new tunes, and Peter wrote them out embossed from dictation, and by the aid of Mr. Murray's system of memorizing, within two months he had mastered the whole book, so that as soon as a hymn was given out, he knew the appointed tune for it. As the book contains more than four hundred hymns, even a Chinaman could not have done this without the aid of the system of mnemonics" (Gordon-Cumming, 1898: 37).

Music was clearly not Amy Wilkinson's main interest, yet one cannot help but admire the time and dedication she must have put in to achieve the high standards that her blind musicians achieved. She was unusual in that she encouraged the boys and the girls to read music and study harmony and

composition and did not exclude or neglect learning traditional Chinese instruments and their repertoire. I think her work in music with the blind and her contribution to the eventual establishing of a phonetic Braille system that could be used all over China deserves much wider recognition than it has so far received.

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