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VERNACULAR CHINESE-CHARACTER MANUSCRIPTS FROM EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Edited by David Holm

STUDIES IN MANUSCRIPT CULTURES

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Vernacular Chinese-Character Manuscripts from East and Southeast Asia

Studies in Manuscript Cultures

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To Piet van der Loon

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David Holm

Introduction

The present volume offers a series of case studies of vernacular Chinese character manuscripts of Chinese dialect speakers, minority ethnic groups within China and Southeast Asia, and character manuscripts of genuinely 'foreign' peoples like the Vietnamese. A key feature is that it brings together contributions by scholars active in research on character manuscripts and scripts among non-Chinese East and Southeast Asian peoples with those of scholars working on scripts and manuscript traditions among Chinese dialect-speakers. We believe it will be fruitful to compare the various ways in which different communities have adapted the Chinese writing system and produced manuscripts to meet their own needs.

Writing and manuscript production and use in society are forms of social practice and an integral part of complex cultural configurations. The focus of specific chapters in this book is varied, and includes topics ranging from the intricacies of writing practice and graphic variation, to problems of manuscript dating, local and traditional methods of paper manufacture, linguistic typology, cultural transmission of literacy and recitation, the use of manuscripts in religious recitation and inter-community communications, the role of local school-based education, the degree of geographic variation in vernacular writing systems, and guidance on manuscript collections in Western libraries and institutions. Both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of such issues are canvassed.

In terms of language affiliation, this book includes chapters on both Chinese and non-Chinese vernacular character manuscripts. These include the southern regional languages Cantonese and Hokkien, three chapters on Yao manuscripts, three on Zhuang and related Tai-Kadai languages, and one on a manuscript in Vietnamese *Chữ Nôm*. We have chosen the designation 'Vernacular' in the title 'Vernacular Chinese-Character Manuscripts ' in order to highlight the fact that the common feature of all these local and regional manuscript traditions is their use of the Chinese character script, usually modified in some fashion by local people in order to represent locally spoken language varieties or language varieties used in local ritual recitation.[1] The term 'vernacular' is used in contrast to the orthographic Chinese

1 The use of the Chinese script to write non-Chinese language material is sometimes given the designation 'Sinoxenic'. However, as Henning Klöter notes in his chapter, the term 'Sinoxenic' strictly speaking refers to texts written in languages that are genuinely 'foreign', such as Japanese or Vietnamese, rather than regional Chinese languages.

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script used to write standard literary Chinese. Used in this fashion, the term is sufficiently inclusive, less prone to misunderstanding than terms like 'Sinoxenic', and has the added advantage of pointing to the connection with locally spoken languages or other language varieties as a component of regional and local popular cultures.

Chinese and foreign

The present volume focusses on vernacular manuscripts in two of the regional languages ('dialects') of South China, along with minority languages of various Yao and Zhuang peoples, also from the South, and a foreign language, Vietnamese. All these languages, including Cantonese and Hokkien, have had communities of speakers resident in Southeast Asia for many centuries. Within the wider region subject to Chinese cultural influences over the *longue durée*, including China south of the Yangtze River and the northern parts of mainland Southeast Asia, there are of course other regional Chinese languages (Hakka, Teochiu, Wu, Shanghainese and so on) and other southern minorities that made use of Chinese-style character scripts, such as the Kam (Dong), Bouyei and Gelao of Guangxi, Guizhou and Hunan. So in a sense, the present chapters are mere drops in an ocean of potential studies on related topics over a much wider field. Nevertheless, they may serve as examples of how such vernacular manuscripts and scripts might be approached, and present detailed investigations of some of the issues that are likely to be encountered when working on manuscript holdings in libraries or undertaking broad-based, socially integrated studies of such phenomena through fieldwork.

This is particularly the case because the Chinese character script has been used, almost from the time of its beginnings, to give graphic form to words, phrases and texts that came from 'foreign', non-Chinese languages.[2] A number of well-known examples of connected texts – complete texts, that is, rather than isolated words – survive from the late classical period, such as the 'Song of the Yue' ('Yueren ge' 越人歌), which records the lyrics of a song reportedly sung by boatmen in the middle Yangtze area who came from the kingdom of Yue. The lyrics are written with Chinese characters but are in a non-Chinese language.[3] Beyond that, scholars

2 The potential for writing systems to be used to write languages other than the one for which they were originally created seems to be universal. See e.g. the discussion on cuneiform Sumerian and Akkadian in Coulmas 2003, 41–49, 67.

3 For the text and translation see Holm 2013, 784–785. Another early example is the 'Song of the White Wolf' ('Bai lang ge' 白狼歌) that appears in the *Hanshu* 漢書 and has been seen as representing a Tibeto-Burman language ancestral to Yi 彝. See Holm 2013, 784.

and scribes from the Central Plains would have had to grapple continually, down through the centuries, with writing down 'foreign', non-Chinese personal names, place-names, and even the names of landforms as the empire expanded to encompass more and more barbarian territory, much of it alien terrain covered with primaeval forest, karst mountains, or grasslands.[4] This facility to represent foreign or non-Chinese words was put to full use at the time of the Buddhist incursions some two millenia ago, incursions which took place both via Central Asia and via the southern Maritime Route.[5]

A full literature review of this broader phenomenon, encompassing northern China and Central Asia as well as the west and south, is well beyond the bounds of this introduction. The best single study thus far is that by Lu Xixing 陆锡兴, who documented the history of the wider dispersal of the Chinese character script.[6] Lu also wrote a companion volume on the cosmic connectedness of the Chinese script in Chinese tradition and its attendant use in prognostication and other manifestations in popular culture.[7] The cosmic connections of the script are already reasonably well recognised in international scholarship,[8] and among other things have to do with orthodox Confucian views on the 'rectification of names', namely the idea that social roles and actions should correspond to their archetypes, but also the idea that words in language, spoken or written, are ontologically connected with their referents, and uttering or writing them has a causal effect, the effect that is of bringing about that to which they refer.[9] For research on vernacular character manuscripts, it turns out that it is not just the strictly grammatological and historical aspects of this topic that are relevant, but also the cosmic connections and methods of prognostication.[10] Spirit writing, using written characters as a means of direct communication from the spirit world, is amply documented in scholarship

4 There were also alien spirits, as Ge Hong's 葛洪 warnings about entering the southern mountains make clear (Wang Ming 1985, 299–314, 'Deng she' 登涉 chapter). For an English translation see Ware 1966, 279–300 ('Into Mountains, Over Streams').

5 Zürcher 2007, 39–43.

6 Lu Xixing 2002. A revised version of this classic work was published in 2018 (Lu Xixing 2018). Lu Xixing is best known for his authoritative annotated editions of newly excavated manuscripts.

7 Lu Xixing 2003.

8 See e.g. Boltz 1994, 173–177.

9 See for example Margaret Sung 1979. On the philosophical basis for such concepts see Needham 1956, 279–303. The basic idea, contrary to Western views, is that the Chinese language and script are not arbitrary human constructs, but rather direct reflections of the natural order itself. This means that words in spoken and written form are linked with heaven and earth and the universe with a causal connection that operates in both directions, in a form of resonance (*gongming* 共鳴).

10 The latter include procedures such as 'divining with characters' (*ce zi* 測字) and 'breaking characters apart' (*chai zi* 拆字). On which see Lu Xixing 2003, 70–106.

on millenarian religions,[11] and the evocative powers of Daoist *fu* 符 talismanic characters are also well-explored,[12] but the relevance of such practices to vernacular scripts and manuscripts is less well recognised.[13]

Lu Xixing's 2002 book on the diffusion of the Chinese script among non-Chinese peoples first reviews what was then known about the emergence of the script in the Central Plains region, comparing traditional accounts with newly emerging evidence from excavated manuscripts. He gives some examples from regional systems during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), and reviews efforts under various dynasties to promote orthographic standard characters in the face of continuing tendencies for the emergence of vernacular variants (*suzi* 俗字). Subsequent chapters outline diffusion of the script in various directions, toward the southwest, south, north, northeast, and east. His discussion on diffusion towards the south is most relevant for our purposes: his coverage includes the Warring States polities of Chu 楚, Wu and Yue 吳越, Min-Yue 閩越, Nanyue 南越, Xi'ou 西甌, and minority peoples such as the Zhuang, Hmong (Miao 苗), Yao 瑶, Kam (Dong 侗), Bouyei 布依, Lisu 傈僳, Sui 水, and finally Vietnam. For each of these, he gives dates for the emergence of the first signs of character script use, based on historical sources and archaeological evidence, and notes significant typological differences in script adaptation in each regional system.[14]

Much of the same wide compass is covered in a recent study by Zev Handel (2019). Using a linguistic approach, Handel focusses on mechanisms of borrowing and adaptation and on the relationship between spoken language typology and resulting modifications of the Chinese script. He finds everywhere two basic mechanisms in script borrowing, namely phonetic and semantic borrowing, and finds that languages which are isolating like Chinese tend to develop new compound graphic representations of foreign morphemes, while agglutinating languages, with morphemes embedded in longer strings of syllables, tend to develop glyphs based on phonetic representation of added syllables as an adjunct to the use of characters. This is a macro-argument on the causal relationship between language typology and forms of graphic adaptation, with potential relevance for manuscript studies as well

11 Jordan and Overmyer 1986.

12 See especially Drexler 1994.

13 See however Holm 2013, 63–65.

14 For example, for Vietnamese, he notes the frequent use of semantic components in compound graphs directly indicating the basic meaning of the character.

as vernacular writing systems.[15] More pertinently, though, concrete evidence from traditional manuscripts can be brought to bear on these general propositions.

Purpose of this book

The purpose of this book is to explore commonalities and differences in these local vernacular traditions. All of the chapters in this book explore examples of manuscripts written in vernacular Chinese scripts, used to write languages other than standard Chinese.

There are two commonalities among these manuscripts that are worth highlighting here. The first is that such manuscripts and scripts differ from orthographic and official writing and literary Chinese in that they have not been subject to direct government standardisation. This means that the scripts themselves are not standardised: they vary from place to place, and their graphic representation of the words in the language – each graph normally representing a monosyllabic morpheme or single syllable in a binom in all the languages discussed here – is usually also variable rather than rigorously unified with one-to-one correspondence between word and graph. If the vernacular script in question is found over a relatively wide area, it is usually the case that the script will represent local dialect pronunciation in some form, or another language found in the local community.

The Chinese state down through the centuries promoted the unification of the Chinese script, with varying degrees of intensity, but Chinese scholar officials typically ignored or paid little attention to local people's unorthodox uses of the script. Such things were regarded as 'beyond the pale of civilisation' (*huawai* 化外) or as vulgar, and thus not a fit subject for scholarly interest. It is therefore only recently that the nature of this geographic and dialect variation started to attract the requisite scholarly attention.

The second aspect is that vernacular Chinese scripts are based on and derived from the standard Chinese script, as taught to children in schools. Casting a cursory glance over any of the sample manuscript pages in this collection will confirm that most of the characters on any given page are standard Chinese graphs or easily recognised variants of them. It will only be in a minority of cases that individual

15 A recent book by Peter Kornicki (2018) is similarly broad in scope, and focusses primarily on processes of translation from texts in literary Chinese into vernacular languages such as Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. It is worth noting that Kornicki's use of the term 'vernacular' is different from that adopted here; Kornicki was not dealing with regional Chinese dialects but with non-Chinese languages around the Chinese periphery.

characters are found to be local inventions, characters not found in any Chinese dictionary, or otherwise unrecognisable graphs. These language-specific graphic inventions will often be found, on closer inspection, to be modifications of standard Chinese characters, such as compound graphs composed of recognisable graphic components in some novel combination, thanks to the modular nature of the Chinese script.[16] Reading and making sense of the content of the manuscript, of course, is quite a different matter, even for a reader who is proficient in reading Chinese.

The first task then, in deciphering and analysing a vernacular Chinese manuscript, will be to match up the graphic representations with the reading pronunciation and meanings of the words, phrases, and lines of verse in the relevant language or dialect, in consultation with the traditional owner of the manuscript or another equally knowledgeable informant. This much is well understood and common practice. Naturally, for the study of historical manuscripts or manuscripts abstracted from their original social and cultural milieu, where fieldwork is no longer possible, other sources of information need to be found, such as contemporary informants' accounts.

All of the studies in the present collection base themselves on original manuscript materials and address these issues in one way or another. For most of our chapters, that is a common point of departure. On that basis, though, we have here a wide range of scholarly topics and interests represented.

Vernacular characters and variation

In China, research on vernacular characters, alternate characters (*yitizi* 異體字) and other such non-standard graphic phenomena has developed greatly over the last few decades. A pioneer in this field was Zhang Yongquan 张永泉, whose monograph on vernacular characters was published in 1995.[17] The developing field of Dunhuang manuscript studies has also produced ample evidence of variation in the script at the manuscript level. A degree of variation in the ways Chinese characters are written continues to this day, and the evidence indicates that standardisation was not fully implemented even during and after the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) unification of the script, even when strong dynasties made concerted efforts in favour

16 On which see Ledderose 2000, 9–23.

17 Zhang Yongquan 1995.

of standardisation.[18] In fact, even the calligraphic models used in pre-modern times for the teaching of character-writing in the schools, themselves often replicas of works by famous calligraphers, incorporated a certain degree of graphic variation.[19] This was usually at the level of one graphic component being substituted for another near look-alike, and normally went unnoticed or at least unremarked. For pre-modern people before the advent of industrial factory production, with its replaceable parts fitting exactly, 'near enough was good enough', even for officials. The strong element of *Gestalt* perception in normal reading practices would also have contributed to this outcome.[20] The result in any case was a fairly capacious set of writing and reading practices, which I have referred to as the 'calligraphic mainstream'.[21] Apart from non-official manuscripts that 'circulated among the people', some variation in graphic composition is even found in pre-modern official documents.[22] The reasons for this are not difficult to understand: because of budgetary constraints, the scribes who produced the routine everyday official *yamen* documents were hired locally, and their writing reflected local practices.

One aspect of this variation that is immediately visible in a number of manuscripts discussed in the present collection is the presence of simplified characters. Many of these simplified characters are the same as those promoted since the 1950s by the People's Government in Beijing, or very similar to them. In fact, many of these simplified graphs have been in use for many centuries. Roar Bökset has conducted a special investigation of this phenomenon, and readers will find ample numbers of examples in sources such as the *Dunhuang suzidian* 敦煌俗字典 compiled by Huang Zheng 黄征.[23]

Manuscript layout

It is interesting that, in spite of all such variation on the graphic level, manuscripts written in Chinese tended until recently to be set out in a fairly standard format, with columns of script written from the top right, and multi-page texts in thread-bound

18 On the implementation of the Qin unification see especially Chen Zhaorong 2003. For a summary of Chen's findings, see Holm 2006, 156–157. See also Galambos 2006. For present-day variation, see Holm 2006, *passim*.

19 Holm 2006, 127.

20 On which see Huang and Wang 1992.

21 Holm 2015, 50.

22 Holm 2006, 158–160.

23 Bökset 2006; and Huang Zheng 2005.

volumes bound on the right-hand margin.[24] Within each column the characters are evenly spaced, and punctuation of some kind (round circles or right-slanting short strokes) at the end of each line of verse. There is a clear contrast with the kinds of formats found in Tibetan and other manuscripts employing Indic scripts. Often manuscript text is set out on the page with a set number of characters per line and a set number of columns per page. Even traditional chapbooks, small booklets of song lyrics often tucked up a sleeve and taken along to traditional singing festivals, followed the same general pattern.

Different formats, with horizontal layout and left-to-right pagination, have made their appearance since the middle of the twentieth century or so, in response to Westernised schooling and the ready availability of cheap notebooks with plastic or paper covers. Some of the versions of song lyrics are even recorded on notepads, glued or stapled on the top margin, with text written horizontally on the red lines on the pages of the notepad. Such manuscripts are regarded as non-sacred, are for personal use by their owner, and are not normally circulated.

Sacred manuscripts, of course, would be quite different, and would be treated with great respect, often wrapped in yellow cloth and placed on a high shelf when not in use. We have in this collection one example of a manuscript that was not just sacred, but was held to be enspirited (Estévez, this volume). The specific instructions on what would be considered proper treatment of such manuscripts would vary according to the religious lineage involved.

Paper

Each of the 'four treasures of the study' (*shufang sibao* 書房四寶) – paper, writing brushes, ink, and inkstones – has rightly been the focus of a great deal of scholarly attention. Among these, research on paper has understandably assumed paramount importance in manuscript studies, if only because the paper on which manuscripts are written is the most immediately present when manuscripts are inspected, long after writing brushes and inkstones have disappeared. Paper can also be subjected to various kinds of paper testing in the laboratory, and be made to yield quite significant amounts of information about fibre content, chemical composition, and dating. A number of chapters in the present volume provide first-hand information

24 Apart from thread-bound volumes, manuscripts in scroll form are also found in the wider Chinese cultural region, with a similar internal layout, though no examples are discussed in the present volume.

about traditional paper-making practices in the villages and paper analysis of premodern manuscripts (Meng, Cawthorne, and Shimizu).

The chapters

A review of each of the chapter contents and their contribution to scholarship would not be out of place here. We have divided the contributions by language or dialect grouping (Hokkien, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Yao, and Zhuang). We will give a brief overview of the chapters in the same order as they appear in the present volume.

Hokkien

Henning Klöter in his chapter ‘Sinoperipheral Writing and Early Written Hokkien’ starts his discussion with an overview of Chinese regional languages (‘topolects’) and regional character-based writing systems. He then discusses his use of the term ‘sinoperipheral writing’ to refer to the latter, distinguishing them from sinoxenic writing properly speaking, in which character-based writing is used to represent genuinely ‘foreign’ languages not related to Chinese. ‘Sinoperipheral writing’ is peripheral in both geographic and cultural senses, since most such systems are found in the southeast and south of China and have never been part of the orthographic mainstream. Klöter points out that his provisional use of the term is not intended to imply marginalisation of the people who use such systems. He then goes on to outline the main mechanisms of script adaptation, pointing out that shared etymology of topolect and mainstream morphemes is not infrequently a matter of some contestation, and that local scribes in any case would have made choices about how to write words based on their own linguistic intuitions as native speakers. Semantic loans, phonetic loans and creation or adaptation of dialect characters are discussed with reference to a wide range of examples taken from Cantonese, Hokkien, and other regional languages. Klöter next outlines briefly the social dimensions of such writing through history, noting signs of official disapproval (‘vulgar’) and a burgeoning of regional literature in the nineteenth century. The focus then turns to Hokkien, and the early emergence of regional writing for Hokkien in the Philippines, where Klöter finds detailed evidence of the process of manuscript composition lying behind a corpus of seventeenth century dictionaries.

Manuscripts found in the Philippines left over from the early days of Spanish colonisation by Hokkien speakers have long been a source of useful information for scholars working on the history of Southern Fujian dialects. Lien Chinfa in his

chapter 'A Glimpse of Sibilant Shift in Early Modern Spanish in Seventeenth Century Manuscripts through the lens of Hokkien Sinographs' turns our attention in another direction, from the analysis of Hokkien speech sounds using early romanised transcription material to the analysis of historical stages in the phonological development of European languages – in this case Spanish – using Hokkien character transcriptions of Spanish words. The manuscript employed for this purpose is a bilingual wordlist similar in nature to the long-established Chinese tradition of Sino-xenic syllabaries (華夷譯語 *Hua Yi yiyu*). Lien singles out one particular feature of phonological shift in early modern Spanish, namely the spirantization and devoicing of sibilants, and demonstrates that Spanish in the early colonial period was still at the pre-modern three-sibilant stage.

Analysis of bilingual materials including Chinese and some other language have long been used by historical linguists to date phonological changes in Chinese. Particularly well-developed is the scholarly literature on early Buddhist transcription practices, used to date changes in syllable structure from Late Han Chinese to Early Middle Chinese, but there are many other examples as well. Lien's contribution is to show that vernacular and dialect Chinese manuscript material can be used to establish the dating of key changes in the other direction, that is, phonological changes in foreign languages that were in contact with Chinese dialect speakers.

Cantonese

Robert Bauer in his 'Hong Kong's Written Cantonese Language and Its Twelve Basic Principles' focusses on one particular example of a regional vernacular writing system and its contemporary social and cultural dimensions. Hong Kong is exceptional among jurisdictions inhabited by speakers of regional Chinese varieties in China in that its special status over the last few decades has meant that writing in the local language has flourished without let or hindrance, and even become a badge of identity for many Hong Kong residents. Written Cantonese has a long history going back centuries, and was the basis for a manuscript culture connected with traditional regional theatrical and performing arts. Today, Hong Kong's socially widespread and flourishing literate culture has developed beyond traditional confines to become a broad, flexible, and invaluable instrument for social and personal expression in the digital age. Bauer analyses the Cantonese writing system's relationship to the corresponding spoken language in extensive detail, and comprehensively identifies and exemplifies the fundamental principles that underlie the transformation of Cantonese speech into transcribed text through the use of standard and non-standard Chinese characters and letters of the English alphabet. English loanwords have inevitably entered into this mix, as a consequence of the long history

of Britain's colonial rule of Hong Kong and the deep absorption of English vocabulary into the everyday lives of Hong Kong people. Finally, Bauer observes that in spite of its extraordinary development, Hong Kong's written Cantonese language still continues to be a vernacular writing system that has not been standardised but is characterised by its own assortment of non-standard and ad hoc usages.

Vietnamese

Shimizu Masaaki in his chapter 'A Manuscript of a Sino-Nôm version of the *Fo shuo tian di ba yang jing* 佛說天地八陽經 preserved in the Library of Kyoto University' analyses one particular Buddhist manuscript written in Vietnamese *Chữ Nôm* characters that was originally held in the Wat Sammananam in Bangkok, with a view to determine its date and the variety of Vietnamese represented in its written form. Shimizu's investigation includes paper analysis as well as analysis of internal evidence. He finds that both of these methods point to a date in the nineteenth century, while analysis of the dialectal variations in the script suggest that the text represents central or southern Vietnamese. This fits in with what is known about the Vietnamese population that migrated to Thailand in earlier times.

Yao

Chen Meiwen in her chapter 'Collections of Yao Manuscripts in Western Institutions' focusses on library and museum collections of Yao manuscripts outside China. These collections, in Europe, America, Japan and elsewhere, took shape in recent decades, primarily in the post-Cold War period, and have been connected with the intense scholarly interest in Yao Daoism internationally. Chen points out at the beginning of her chapter that the designation 'Yao' really needs to be further specified ('unpacked'), since both in China and outside, there are numerous sub-groups that speak quite different languages and have different customs and writing cultures. Towards the end of her chapter, Chen provides specific advice about how to determine which sub-group a given manuscript belongs to. This is necessary because many of the Yao manuscripts in library and museum collections have no information attached, either internal or in cataloguing, about where they came from. Chen tells us what is known about processes of acquisition that lie behind existing collections, including discussion about the role of art and antiquities merchants in purchasing manuscripts in Thailand and other countries and selling them on to European and American libraries. The central part of her chapter focusses on providing an overview of various scholarly efforts to document and classify these

Yao manuscript collections. A key point of interest here is that in many Yao manuscripts so far analysed, the manuscript title (and thus the entry in the library or museum catalogue) and the manuscript contents are quite different. In pre-modern times the connection between manuscript contents and the title was much looser in any case, but sometimes the title on the cover was used to deflect attention from what was inside. In China this is sometimes referred to as 'hanging up a sheep's head and selling dog meat'. With manuscripts, of course, the intention is not to make a fat profit, but to hide material from the prying eyes of officials or competing ritual specialists.

Almost all of the research on Yao manuscripts thus far has focussed on the well-known Daoist texts. Daoist ritual practices are also found among the Kim Mun in Luang Namtha province in northern Laos, but Jacob Cawthorne's chapter, 'Kim Mun Letters: An Introduction to Yao Primary Sources', looks at the Kim Mun practice of writing letters, both as a literary practice and as a cultural phenomenon. The Kim Mun, like other Mienic-speaking Yao in the region, came to their present location as a result of migration, and continue to maintain cultural linkages with other Yao communities through the practice of letter-writing, addressed either to specific people – relatives in other villages – or more generally to Yao communities elsewhere. The letters are written in a character script based on Chinese, and Cawthorne's investigations indicate that the language in which they are written is broadly comprehensible among far-flung communities. A particular strength of Cawthorne's presentation is the detailed information given about the three languages the Kim Mun identify as their own: a religious-ritual language, a literary and poetic language, and a vernacular language. After discussing the language in which the letters are written, he then goes on to discuss the letters as manuscripts, including writing instruments (hard styluses or writing brushes), ink, and paper. Paper is made locally from bamboo or paper mulberry, and paper production is mainly in the hands of women. The second half of the chapter analyses language and text, Kim Mun reflections on writing, and Kim Mun letters as primary sources on history, biography, geography, the local economy, and other aspects of Kim Mun culture, community, and identity, all with examples taken from actual letters.

The Kim Mun of Luang Namtha are also the topic of the next chapter, by Joseba Estévez, 'On the Lanten Methods to Fetch the *Hon* or Living Force of the Original Rice'. Estévez uses the common term 'Lanten' (based on the Chinese word for 'indigo' *landian* 藍靛) for this ethnic group, which is much more widely known than the autonym Kim Mun. The manuscript and ritual performance he describes in stunning detail is a set of 'secret words' used by Lanten ritual masters each year to fetch the wandering vital spirit (*hon*) of the rice crop, bring it back to earth, and install it in the rice-fields. As Estévez notes, this ritual is of vital importance in Lanten

society, since the health of the rice crop and an abundant harvest are necessary for the survival of these communities. The Lanten are a widely dispersed society that resides in river valleys in the highlands rather than on the tops of mountains like other Mien groups, so wet-rice cultivation is of primary importance. Estévez first describes the cosmological world the Lanten inhabit, and sources of ritual efficacy ('magic'). His focus is consistently 'emic'. He notes that Daoist manuscripts are of two types, one of which is deemed to be enspirited and which must therefore be treated with great respect and care. The 'secret words' of the rice ritual are of this kind. The detailed description of the ritual process is framed against the ritual specialists' knowledge of an extensive corpus of oral stories that circulate among Lanten communities, and provide necessary background understanding for the often sparse articulation in the text of the manuscript.

Zhuang

Antiphonal singing by boys and girls, men and women was a prominent part of village culture throughout the south of China in pre-modern times, and song booklets in vernacular script – in a variety of Chinese regional and local languages as well as non-Chinese languages like Zhuang, Yao, Kam, Bouyei and so on – were produced in great numbers on a local basis. Meng Yuanyao in his chapter 'Manuscripts of the traditional Zhuang song text "Song of the Brigands"' focusses on one particular song, performed by men and women at traditional song festivals ('song markets') in the central-western part of Guangxi. The Brigands' Song is part of a living tradition, and one which has been changing in response to people's needs and aesthetic sense up till the present. The song gains its cultural importance from the fact that village men in the former chiefly domains were all liable to be called up to serve in the army of the native chieftains. Meng presents information on a wide variety of different manuscripts of this song text that circulate in the region, as well as published editions of the song lyrics. He notes aspects of the considerable variety that is found in the manuscripts, including longer and shorter versions of the same song, manuscript copying among song artists, the same lyrics written in different form, and lyrics word-processed on a computer. He reviews the strengths and shortcomings of various published editions, and on that basis, goes on to explain what kinds of information are necessary for a thorough and scholarly treatment of traditional song texts.

There are a number of chapters in the present volume that report on matters related to paper-making as an aspect of manuscript cultures. Meng Yuanyao's 'Traditional Paper-making in the Zhuang Villages of Southwest China' is devoted to an investigation of the processes involved in one cultural region, and more

specifically the counties of Mashan, Dahua and Du'an in central Guangxi. Here the primary material used is the paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*), a plant that has been used for paper-making in East Asia reportedly since the Eastern Han period. Meng provides a botanical description of this species, and gives operational details of each stage in the paper-making process. He also provides information about the Zhuang-language terms referring to each stage in the process and a range of other relevant matters and, in conclusion, discusses the uses of paper in contemporary Zhuang village society.

My own chapter 'Modes of Transmission in Tày, Nùng and Zhuang Manuscript Cultures' first points out the need for an holistic approach to fieldwork on manuscript cultures, in order to salvage as much useful information as possible for the benefit of future scholars and local communities. Fieldwork on both sides of the China-Vietnam border on traditional manuscripts of Tai-speaking peoples has indicated there is a wide range of quite different modes of inter-generational transmission of reading knowledge in this region, including performative literacy and performative orality.

In sum

The contributions in this volume are all framed in terms of different technical terminology and theoretical concepts. This is an emerging field, and during the editing process it was not felt appropriate to make any attempt to arrive at a standard set of terms, though of course such matters as terminology were discussed from time to time. What one finds in this volume then is a kaleidoscope of different views on complex cultural processes. Nevertheless, it is often the case that contributors can be seen as discussing what amount to the same or similar questions using different terminologies and theoretical approaches.

So what, can we say, are the results of all this? What all these studies have in common is that all the manuscripts investigated make use of the Chinese character script in some form or other, for a wide range of social and cultural purposes. Grammatologically, however, the various traditions show different features, in terms of the methods they use to derive vernacular non-standard graphs from their Chinese originals. The proportion of vernacular non-standard graphs in these manuscripts to orthographic or near-orthographic Chinese graphs will be different in different local systems, and the degree of reliance on phonetic borrowing as opposed to semantic borrowing, both in orthographic Chinese graphs and in vernacular non-standard compounds, will also be different in different local systems. The ways in which the manuscript characters are read in recitation or otherwise will also

be different: in Cantonese for Cantonese manuscripts and Hokkien for Hokkien manuscripts, in Hán-Việt or Vietnamese for Vietnamese manuscripts,[25] in some form of Yao Chinese or vernacular language for Yao manuscripts, and in the local Zhuang dialect for Zhuang manuscripts or words borrowed from elsewhere, with the age and source of the readings (Middle Chinese, Southwestern Mandarin etc.) varying from region to region. In all these cases, though, the point of departure for reading or producing such manuscripts is knowledge of the Chinese script, along with some form of attendant reading pronunciation, often learnt at school or through home instruction.

Finally, I have used the word 'systems' in the above paragraph, and it is appropriate to ask to what extent the phenomena we have investigated constitute 'writing systems'? If by this term 'systems' we mean entities which are self-contained and internally coherent when viewed, as it were, from an overall, objectivist viewpoint, then we would want to say 'not entirely'. Vernacular writing typically is grounded in ongoing social practices in human communities, and very often reflects the broader social connections of such communities, such as trading, migration, intermarriage, schooling, master-apprentice relationships, bilingualism, and so on. So vernacular writing is open to outside influences, and open to change. Of course, writing skills are also handed down from one generation to the next, and usually in ways which result in faithful and respectful reproduction by apprentices or schoolchildren, and consequent limitations on gratuitous innovation. The point, though, is that all these factors of social embeddedness are particular rather than general, hence the complexities explored in this book. For the analysis of manuscripts in library collections, also, the studies here provide potentially valuable information about the kinds of social and cultural dynamics which might have been operative in the communities from which they were extracted.

Future prospects

The contributions to the present volume have pointed out a number of areas in which further research is needed, and even topics on which no systematic research has been done at all. I list a few of them here by way of conclusion, with a few additional observations. The ideal is to combine emic and etic perspectives in

25 Hán-Việt is the designation for the unified system for the pronunciation of Chinese characters used in Vietnam.

a way that yields further insights and knowledge useful both to researchers and local communities.

In research on manuscripts based on *in situ* fieldwork, transcending the limits of local knowledge by traditional owners and putting the understanding of the relevant manuscript tradition in a wider context will require additional analytical steps. Subsequent stages in the linguistic analysis of such manuscripts involve addressing a series of issues:

1) distinguishing between genuine local inventions and Chinese vernacular characters, and variant graphs of the kind found widely in Chinese writing;
2) determining which characters can be matched up with their recited pronunciations in the local language, or with the meaning of the graphs (for semantic borrowings);
3) exploring possible sources of reading pronunciations in some form of locally or regionally current Chinese pronunciation, including schoolhouse pronunciations;
4) exploring correspondences of reading pronunciations with earlier stages in the history of Chinese, such as Early Mandarin, Late Middle Chinese, Early Middle Chinese, late Han Chinese, and Old Chinese;
5) exploring correspondence of reading pronunciations with earlier stages in the history of the relevant language group (proto-Tai, proto-Hmong-Mien, etc.);
6) with graphs that are local inventions, exploring the ways in which they could have been derived graphically from recognisable orthographic characters or vernacular variants.

On this last point, our own investigations, based on a survey of traditional Zhuang manuscripts in forty-five locations conducted in collaboration with traditional manuscript owners, have indicated that what seem at first puzzling local inventions in vernacular scripts can almost always be shown to be based on transformations of orthographic Chinese characters.[26] Knowledge of such pathways of graphic transformation can provide scholars with a more complete understanding of the manuscript culture. If surveys of manuscripts in different localities have been conducted, such knowledge can potentially also provide useful information about migration pathways in past history, especially for peoples who have historically had a high degree of mobility, such as the Yao and Zhuang.[27]

26 By way of an example, the character 汨 MSC *mì* (name of a river in Hunan) is used in Tày texts in northern Vietnam to represent *thâng* ($t^haŋ^1$) ‘to come’. This can be shown to be derived from 湯 *tāng* ‘hot water; soup’ through a process of drastic graphic simplification (Holm 2013, 197–198).
27 Holm 2020.

In the study of Yao manuscripts, further research is needed at almost every level. In library collections, if the content of Yao manuscripts is often at variance with the titles that appear in catalogues – a common situation encountered in manuscript studies cross-culturally – then this is something that should be carefully investigated and documented, starting with individual collections of Yao manuscripts in libraries and museums. Scholars will need to prepare themselves with an adequate understanding of the ritual repertoire of Yao Daoism, for which Joseba Estévez's chapter provides an example. On the languages underlying such manuscripts, Jacob Cawthorne documents that there were three quite distinct languages employed in the community he studied. Is this also true among other Yao communities in other areas and belonging to other sub-groups? If the language employed for the recitation of Daoist manuscripts was based on Chinese, what variety of Chinese was it based on? Full analysis of the recited pronunciation and comparison with available Chinese dialect data over an appropriate geographical range (Guangxi, Yunnan, Guangdong, Hunan and Jiangxi provinces) has yet to be conducted. While it may be true in some areas that the recited pronunciation 'seems to be' based on Cantonese, careful studies of other areas are needed.[28]

The graphic analysis of the various Yao sub-groups' use of the Chinese script also needs to be properly investigated. Here there is much work yet to be done.[29] Clearly there are vernacular variants visible even in manuscripts that are otherwise written in Chinese, including simplified graphs of the type in common use in China since the 1950's. Simplified variants have their own history in the wider Chinese region, often stretching back many centuries, and their appearance in Yao documents needs to be systematically documented.

For the study of Zhuang manuscripts and scripts, research is a little more advanced, and there has been some research at least on the range of topics mentioned above. Even here, though, research has concentrated on manuscripts in a number of key areas in the central and west-central regions of Guangxi, and research on manuscripts in the southwestern region of Guangxi where Southern Zhuang dialects are spoken has been fairly minimal thus far. There are other geographic areas that are of interest but also under-documented.

For Cantonese, the present collection includes Bob Bauer's thorough and punctilious documentation of written Cantonese as it has taken shape in contemporary Hong Kong, but further studies are needed of traditional Cantonese vernacular manuscripts from the Cantonese heartland in Guangdong, including scripts for

28 Zhao Yuanren's pioneering study (1930) was based on Yaoshan 瑶山, present-day Jinxiu 金秀 county in eastern Guangxi.

29 A key reference remains Song Enchang's article on the Yao script (Song Enchang 1991).

opera and art-song. The same holds true for Hokkien. We have two studies in the present collection investigating the Hokkien script in the Philippines, but Hokkien vernacular manuscripts for opera and art-song performance are also a topic of considerable importance for the study of Chinese regional cultures, not just in Taiwan but also in Fujian.[30]

For Vietnamese *Chữ Nôm*, it would be worth reviewing current research on the broader regional distribution of *Chữ Nôm* scripts, including in the Red River region to the north where presumably the history of this script is the longest. It would be interesting also to explore the social mechanisms through which the *Chữ Nôm* script was taught and disseminated, and the extent to which it was subject to forces of standardisation.

Further afield, we note that in addition to the area covered in the present volume, there are many other regions for which systematic research on vernacular manuscripts is needed. Apart from Cantonese and Hokkien, there are other regional systems, some of them very well developed with histories stretching back centuries. The song culture of the Wu 吳 dialect area in eastern China is well-known,[31] and the Chaozhou region in eastern Guangdong has a theatrical and art-song culture that would be worth special study. Throughout the south of China, there were also local traditions of antiphonal singing at seasonal festivals and other occasions, many of which were written traditions productive of large numbers of song texts written in small-format chapbooks.

It is worth pointing out that China has its own traditions of scholarship on regional and non-Han song texts, at least in late imperial times. Worth mentioning here are Feng Menglong's 馮夢龍 work on the songs of Wu, which date from the Ming, and Li Tiaoyuan's 李調元 study of Zhuang and Yao songs, dating from the Qing.[32] Bringing existing scholarship on these regional vernaculars into dialogue with other regions and ethnic groups would be well worth the effort.

I look forward to further discussions on all these important issues.

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30 See van der Loon 1992.

31 See e.g. Lowry 2005.

32 For Feng Menglong's *shan'ge* 山歌 see Töpelmann 1973; for Li Tiaoyuan see Shang Bi 1985.

effort and sage advice from our anonymous reviewers. We would also like to thank Imre Galambos for his expert typesetting and Caroline Macé for her skilful editing.

This volume is dedicated to Piet van der Loon (1920–2002), a pioneer in the fields of Daoism, ritual theatre, Hokkien and Cantonese vernacular manuscripts, and fieldwork-based explorations of the non-Confucian bedrock of Chinese society.

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Henning Klöter

Sinoperipheral Writing and Early Written Hokkien: Reflections and Hypotheses

Abstract: This chapter categorizes the written representation of Sinitic topolects as Sinoperipheral writing. Occupying an intermediate position between Sinitic mainstream writing and Sinoxenic writing, its peripherality is defined by social and geographical distance from the socio-cultural and political elite. Against this background, the use of sinographs and mechanisms of standard script adaptation are examined as well as the social status of early written Hokkien in the historical context of Chinese migration to the Philippines in the seventeenth century.

1 Introduction

The Ethnologue database lists no less than 306 languages for China,[1] including languages of various ethnic groups and regional Sinitic varieties. Despite their common historical roots, these Sinitic varieties are mutually largely unintelligible, which is why, from a linguistic perspective, it is justified to refer to them as languages or topolects and not as 'dialects' (*fāngyán* 方言) as is usually done in China. Irrespective of such classifications, seven languages or dialect groups are traditionally distinguished,[2] all of which are spoken in China's eastern and southeastern provinces. The fairly high degree of multilingualism and internal variation within the group of Sinitic languages is not matched on the level of writing, at least if one subscribes to the widespread 'myth that Chinese characters cut across boundaries of speech'.[3] This myth is easily refutable when Sinoxenic languages are involved.[4] In the context of inner-Sinitic multilingualism, however, matters are different. It is still widely held that the Chinese script is the binding force that unifies the different regional varieties. This view rests on the premise that the literary standard spread to the

1 Eberhard, Simons and Fennig 2023, https://www.ethnologue.com/country/CN/.

2 These seven dialect groups include Mandarin, Wú 吳, Xiāng 湘, Kèjiā/Hakka 客家, Mǐn 閩, Gàn 贛, Yuè/Cantonese 粵; cf. Norman 2017, 42.

3 DeFrancis 1989, 95.

4 See also Lien Chinfa's discussion in this volume on Chinese characters read in Hokkien as a means for transcribing the Spanish language.

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Southeastern topolect areas and became the sole written language in these regions. Yet the spread and adaptation of the literary standard needs to be distinguished from the writing of regional languages. During the long history of Chinese writing, most if not all of China's regional languages have developed some kind of written form on their own. As Handel rightly argues, 'the history of vernacular writing in China is an enormous topic',[5] but a comprehensive comparative study has yet to be written. It can even be argued that the study of vernacular writing is still lacking a recognized terminological framework. On the one hand, due to close genetic relations, typological affinity, and a shared cultural tradition with the Sinitic mainstream, topolect writing usually falls outside the scope of Sinoxenic writing. If we understand *xenic* in its original meaning as 'foreign', the 'xenicity' of topolects fails to receive acceptance.

Against this background, this chapter provisionally employs the term 'sinoperipheral writing' in order to distinguish topolectal writing traditions from Sinoxenic writing. In the paragraph that follows I briefly reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the term. I will then look at Sinoperipheral writing from two different perspectives: Taking a linguistic perspective, I will first briefly introduce the mechanisms of adaptation that are involved when topolect expressions are written with sinographs. The linguistic analysis of grapheme-morpheme correspondences needs to be distinguished from the status of topolect writing in a specific regional and social context at a given time in history. Such a historical sociolinguistic approach is taken in the following paragraph, which deals with early forms of written Hokkien. Hokkien is an alternative glossonym for Southern Min which is mostly used for Southern Min dialects spoken in Southeast Asia.[6] In the context of this chapter, it refers to the language spoken by Chinese migrants and traders in the Philippines in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

5 Handel 2019, 55.

6 Min 閩 is another designation for Fujian 福建 province on the south coast of China. Southern Min dialects are spoken in the southern part of Fujian, in contiguous eastern parts of Guangdong 廣東 province including Chaozhou 潮州, on the island of Taiwan, and in overseas communities widely spread across Southeast Asia.

2 Sinoperipheral writing: Terminological reflections

Sinoperipheral writing refers to the writing of Sinitic topolects with sinographs. In addition to sinographic writing, all major Sinitic topolects also have a history of alphabetic writing that is linked to missionary linguistics. For the sake of brevity, these are not discussed in this chapter. The introduction of the term Sinoperipheral writing follows the need to distinguish written Sinitic topolects from Sinoxenic writing. Due to common genetic origins, Sinitic topolects share a great amount of cognate morphemes with Literary Chinese, which is the major written language of China's mainstream literary tradition. With features such as tonality, SVO sentence order, and an isolating morphology, Sinitic topolects are also marked by closer typological proximity than there is between Sinitic and its neighboring East and Southeast Asian languages. As Handel has pointed out, specific typological traits of languages such as Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Zhuang have a 'marginal but significant effect […] on script adaptation'.[7] Typological differences arguably play a much less important role when the use of sinographs for the writing of topolects is involved, if typology plays a role at all.

In addition to genetics and typology, Sinoperipheral and Sinoxenic writing also differ in terms of the history of language contact and script adaptation. When it comes to written Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Zhuang, there are identifiable periods of cultural contact during which script adaptation took place. In the case of written topolects, such periods of cultural contact leading to script adaptation cannot be identified and Handel rightly argues that these traditions 'can be viewed as simple extensions of the process of script development that took place in the 1st millennium BCE'.[8] Against this background, 'peripheral' has a geographical and a social connotation: Originating in the southeastern coastal regions of the Chinese empire and thus outside the center of the political power, texts written in topolects never received formal recognition and were largely considered a marginal phenomenon. Whereas 'periphery' aptly captures the geographical and social marginality of topolect writing, an obvious disadvantage of the term is its obvious Sinocentric connotation which carries a language-ideological load that is incompatible with the self-identification of those who write and read a particular language. Examples in case are written Cantonese and Taiwanese: Despite genetic and typological affinities with other Sinitic languages, writers and readers of Cantonese and Taiwanese

7 Handel 2019, 21.

8 Handel 2019, 55.

texts would not necessarily subscribe to the notion that these are peripheral phenomena of a unified Sinitic mainstream. Against this background, my use of the term sinoperipheral writing is of heuristic nature and reflects the difficulty of finding a terminological alternative that combines conceptual precision with language-ideological sensitivity.

3 Sinoperipheral writing: Mechanisms of script adaptation

General overviews of Chinese linguistics make occasional references to 'dialectal characters'[9] or 'dialect characters'.[10] Such overviews mostly deal with the broader question of how the Chinese script was adopted for writing a Sinitic topolect. Generally speaking, topolect writing exclusively relies on different mechanisms of adaptation from the standard and therefore cannot be treated independently from the latter. From a cross-linguistic perspective, at least four modes of adaptation can be distinguished:[11]

(1) Use of original characters
(2) Use of semantic loan characters
(3) Use of phonetic loan characters
(4) Use of dialect characters

1. Use of original characters: The most common way is the use of characters for words that have obvious cognates in the standard language, for example the character 茶 for writing Hokkien *tê* 'tea' (*chá* in Mandarin), 四 for *sì* 'four', 好 for *hó* 'good', 來 for *lâi* 'come', etc. Without elaborating on issues of etymology, You Rujie refers to characters of this type as 'original dialect characters' (*fāngyán běnzì*), arguing that these 'are the oldest written forms of dialect words'.[12] It needs to be emphasized, however, that the Chinese term *běnzì* is often defined in terms of shared etymology. The underlying assumption is thus not that 茶 is the oldest attested written form of the Hokkien word *tê* 'tea', but rather that this attestation is based on a shared etymology with the same morpheme in Classical Chinese or Mandarin texts.

9 Norman 1988, 74–77.
10 You Rujie 2017.
11 Based on Bauer 2018, Klöter 2005, You Rujie 2017.
12 You Rujie 2017, 39.

From a philological perspective, using original characters can be regarded as 'reasonably accurate',[13] and claims have been made (and also vigorously challenged) that each dialect morpheme can be linked to its original Sinitic character.[14] The search for original characters and its underlying notion of (all) dialect morphemes having verifiable Sinitic etymologies has obvious language-ideological dimensions in that it reinforces the ideal of the unity of the Chinese language. Or, in the words of Branner, '[t]he use of *beentzyh* [= *běnzì* 本字] leads people to see the characters as absolute symbols of the Common Chinese morphemes underlying all dialect forms'.[15]

Although shared etymology can be identified as a core criterion distinguishing Sinoperipheral from Sinoxenic writing, it must be emphasized that etymology is by no means self-evident. Until today, there is often dispute between professional etymologists whether two Sinitic morphemes derive from the same origin or not. But then the scribes behind historical sources were seldomly if ever professional etymologists. The crucial question is therefore not whether shared etymology can be claimed according to modern linguistic standards, but rather whether we can imagine that a scribe assumed shared etymology following his own linguistic intuition as a native speaker. Since we simply do not know what motivated the selection of a particular sinograph, the distinction of original characters from semantic and phonetic loan characters therefore remains on shaky grounds.

2. Semantic loan characters are standard characters that are used for their meaning irrespective of their pronunciation. You Rujie refers to this type as semantic loan dialect characters (*fāngyán xùndúzì* 方言訓讀字).[16] Examples include Cantonese 歪 *me2* 'slanting, askew, aslant' (Mandarin *wāi* 'slanting'),[17] Cháozhōu 欲 *ãi5* 'desire' (Mandarin *yù* 'wish, desire') and Fúzhōu 到 *kau5* 'arrive' (Mandarin *dào* 'arrive').

3. Phonetic loan characters complement the former type in that they are used for their established standard pronunciation regardless of the meaning. This type can be exemplified by 水 for Hokkien *suì* 'beautiful', which resembles the Mandarin reading *shuǐ* ('water') of the same character. There is no semantic link between Mandarin *shuǐ* 'water' and Hokkien *suì* 'beautiful'. Another example of this type is Cantonese 使 *sai2* 'to spend; to need' (Mandarin *shǐ* 'to send, use, cause').

13 Fuehrer 2016, 435.

14 For details, see Victor H. Mair, <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=52699> (accessed on 11 April 2022).

15 Cf. Branner 2000, 35.

16 You Rujie 2017.

17 Example in Bauer 2018, 131.

4. Dialect characters are graphs that are only used for the writing of regional expressions and which therefore do not belong to the stock of standard characters. You Rujie makes a further distinction between 'specialized dialect characters' (*fāngyán zhuānyòngzì* 方言專用字) and 'vernacular dialect characters' (*fāngyán súzì* 方言俗字). The former, according to You Rujie, are those which 'are recognized by dictionaries of all times (including rime dictionaries) as standard Chinese characters which are used to write dialect words'.[18] He gives the example of 囝 for Hokkien *gín* 'child', which is attested in the rime dictionary *Jíyùn* 集韻 (eleventh century) and also in the *Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn* 现代汉语词典 (Dictionary of Modern Chinese), where it is labeled as 'dialect' (*fāngyán* 方言) usage.[19] By contrast, vernacular dialect characters are not included in standard dictionaries, for example Cantonese 咁 *gam5* 'in this way, in that way' and 佢 *keoi* 'he, she'.

The category 'dialect characters' and You Rujie's subcategories are not without their problems. First, since the inclusion of some dialect characters in historical dictionaries and the exclusion of others does not follow a recognizable principle, the distinction between vernacular and specialized dialect characters has no explanatory value with regard to the characters themselves. Second, due to a lack of defining criteria, it is difficult to identify a solid number of characters that unambiguously qualify as regional or dialectal characters, i.e. characters for words that 'cannot be etymologically related to their semantic equivalents in standard Chinese'.[20] As regards Cantonese, according to Bauer, such words 'are regarded as giving the language its distinctively Cantonese identity.'[21] If dialect characters are to qualify as visible markers of a Cantonese identity, they should arguably also be uniquely Cantonese in the sense that their usage is restricted to the writing of Cantonese only. This poses an analytic challenge, since it is extremely unlikely that a certain graph is completely unattested in other sources. If we take the *Hànyǔ dà zìdiǎn* 漢語大字典 ('Unabridged Chinese character dictionary', HDZD) with its close to 55,000 distinct head characters as a reference point, graphemic regionality and uniqueness will easily be diluted by exposure to standard lexicography. It must be asked, however, what difference one singular reference in a historical source really makes. Does a one-time appearance in a recognized reference work turn a graph into a standard character? Certainly not, but there is no generally accepted criterion for drawing the line between standard and general use and non-standard regional use.

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18 You Rujie 2017, 40.
19 Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn 2012, 634.
20 Bauer 2018, 111.
21 Bauer 2018, 111.

For example, at first glance, Cantonese 髀 *beu6* 'jostle with the hips'[22] could qualify as a dialect character. However, in the *Hànyǔ dà zìdiǎn* it is attested with the reading *bào* 'arrowhead made of bone or wood' (骨或木制的箭鏃).[23] Another example is Cantonese 冇 *mou5* 'not have', which, due to its high frequency of occurrence in Cantonese texts, is easily recognized as a 'typical' Cantonese character. It is often overseen, however, that the very same character has an older Hokkien past with the reading *phann³* 'hollow, soft' which is attested in sources of the seventeenth century. However, since this morpheme/character seldom occurs in Hokkien texts, its Hokkien identity is often neglected. It is also not possible to judge whether the use of the same graph for writing morphemes in two distinct dialects is a matter of chance resemblance or the result of graphic borrowing.

Against this background, it is obvious that the analysis of Sinoperipheral writing requires distinctions that only partially correspond to those of Sinoxenic writing. For the latter, the notion of 'original characters' is obviously irrelevant, since the implicit notion of a shared etymology of the lexicon is at odds with the fact that Sinoxenic languages and Chinese are genetically unrelated. For example, Japanese 三 *san* 'three' is result of borrowing of both the grapheme 三 and the Sino-Japanese syllable *san* at some point in history. By contrast, Cantonese 三 *saam1* 'three' derives from the same protolanguage as Mandarin 三 *sān* 'three', so instead of borrowing there is a shared lexical origin.

Within Sinoperipheral writing, mechanisms of script adaptation can therefore only be identified for graphs that lack an obvious etymological counterpart in the standard language. The mechanism of adaptation behind semantic loan characters is the same as that behind Japanese readings of the *kun-yomi* 訓読み type, e.g. 人 for Japanese *hito* 'man, person' (Mandarin *rén*), leaving aside the fact that the same graph also has an *on*-reading. Phonetic loan characters correspond to the Japanese phonograms known as *ongana* 音仮名 which form part of the ancient writing system known as *Man'yōgana* 万葉仮名. One example is the use of 都 (Mandarin *dū* 'city' and *dōu* 'all') for the Japanese syllable /tu/ in 多都 *tatu* 'rise', 都麻 *tuma* 'wife', 都久流 *tukuru* 'make'.[24] Phonetic loan characters are also widely attested in the traditional Zhuang script. Finally, Sinoxenic languages also widely apply the mechanism of creating new graphs. One example is the invention of 'national characters' (*kokuji*) in Japan, including 榊 *sakaki* 'Cleyera japonica', 裿 *tsuma* 'skirt, hem' and

22 Example in Bauer 2018, 111.
23 HDZD, vol. 7, 4409.
24 Example in Frellesvig 2010, 19. For details, see Frellesvig 2010, Chapter 1.

鳰 *nio* ‘grebe’.[25] In addition, numerous graphs that were created in the Vietnamese Chữ Nôm 㸃喃 tradition belong to this category.

4 Social dimensions of Sinoperipheral writing

The mere existence of different types of regional character use is only one aspect of Sinoperipheral writing. When it comes to regional writing traditions, however, the characters alone do not reveal much about the social status of Sinoperipheral writing in history. In other words, the history of Sinoperipheral writing is not only a history of individual graphs, but also a history of writers and readers, writing and text production, and the status of a written topolect in a society that was dedicated to the literary canon and, by implication, the written standard. In short, aside from the graphemic dimension, due attention must be paid to the sociology of writing. For example, with regard to written Cantonese, Bauer claims a special and unique status by pointing to its ‘extraordinary and especially noteworthy development, conventionalization, and widespread use throughout the speech community […] across many domains’.[26] This remark mostly pertains to modern written Cantonese in Hong Kong. In the history of Chinese writing, however, regional writing in general always played a marginal role and was considered ‘vulgar’ (*sú* 俗) in comparison to the elegant (*yǎ* 雅) language of canonical texts and official documents. This is not only true for Chinese perceptions of their own languages, but also for early Western perceptions of the sinophone world. Significantly, one of the first Western missionaries to China, the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), already claimed in the early seventeenth century that a ‘province dialect would not be used in polite society’.[27]

Despite the overriding dominance of the Classical Chinese literary language in the history of Chinese book production, topolects gained some visibility in literature. The oldest extant printed editions of stage plays with a strong regional – in this case: Southern Min or Hokkien – influence date back to the sixteenth century. It is documented that the regional practice to perform in the local language at times met heavy criticism from officials. The Provincial Commissioner Dai Jing 戴璟, for example, commented in 1535 that he had ‘been informed that it is the custom in Chaozhou to perform plays in the local tongue, stirring up immoral thoughts among men and women’.[28]

25 Quoted from Osterkamp 2017, 116.
26 Bauer 2018, 109.
27 Matteo Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione* [1615], tr. Gallagher 1953, 28–29.
28 Quoted by van der Loon 1999, 2.

In the late nineteenth century, novels written in regional varieties, especially in the Wu dialect, gained some popularity.[29] A well-known example is the 1892 novel *Hai shang hua liezhuan* 海上花列傳 (The sing-song girls of Shanghai) by Han Bangqing 韓邦慶 (1856–1894).[30] Like the earlier editions of Southern Min stage plays mentioned above, this novel is a linguistic hybrid. The dialogues are written in the Wu dialect of Suzhou, whereas the narratives are written in Mandarin. Another example is the novel *Hedian* 何典 (1879) by the Shanghai author Zhang Nanzhuang 張南莊, likewise written in the Wu dialect, which 'anticipated the next generation's experiments with linguistic local color'.[31] Although Wu literature had achieved some popularity,[32] the upsurge of dialect literature at the turn of the century cannot belie the fact that dialects played at most a marginal role when it came to literary composition. As Gunn writes, non-Mandarin regional languages of Chinese 'entered the twentieth century with no sustained tradition of writing, and often none at all'.[33]

5 Early written Hokkien

The social dimensions of Sinoperipheral writing can only be assessed on the basis of detailed case studies. These should ideally provide answers to questions about the status, the spread, and the function of a closed and definable corpus of written texts which can unmistakably be attributed to a certain region at a certain point in history. It must be emphasized from the outset that the extant historical source materials at best allow for partial answers. As a consequence, the uncertain – formulated through open questions in combination with arguably reasonable but yet unprovable claims – inevitably outweighs what is certain in a definite account of the social dimensions of Sinoperipheral writing, as I will demonstrate in the sections that follow.

My analysis is based on a corpus of Hokkien dictionaries and grammar guides that were compiled at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. These sources can be ascribed to Spanish missionaries that were based in Chinese communities in the Philippines. All of the extant sources listed in Table 1 are early written

29 Cf. Kang 1986, 131–132.

30 The English translation of the title goes back to Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing 張愛玲, 1920–1995) who translated the novel in the 1970s.

31 Wang 1997, 4.

32 Cf. Snow 2004, 34.

33 Gunn 2006, 1.

documentations of the Hokkien language as spoken by Chinese traders and craftsmen in Manila in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Table 1: Early Spanish-Hokkien manuscripts

Author	Petrus P. Chirino (1557–1637)
Title	*Dictionarium Sino Hispanicum*
Year	1604
Owner	Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms. 60; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, chinois 9276
Length	88 folios
Author	Unknown
Title	*Dictionarium Hispanico Sinicum*
Year	Unknown
Owner	Manila, Archives of the University of Santo Tomas, tomo 215
Length	551 folios (double sided)
Author	Unknown
Title	*Vocabulario de la lengua Española y China No. 1*
Year	Unknown
Owner	Manila, Archives of the University of Santo Tomas, tomo 214 Bis
Length	328 folios (double sided)
Author	Unknown
Title	*Bocabulario de lengua sangleya por las letraz de el A.B.C.*
Year	c. 1620 (estimated)
Owner	London, British Library, Add MS 25317
Length	222 folios (double sided)
Author	Unknown
Title	*Arte de la lengua chio chiu*
Year	c. 1620 (estimated)
Owner	Biblioteca de la Universitat de Barcelona, Ms. 1027[34]
Length	33 folios (double sided) plus incomplete sections on numerals

For detailed information about the contents and the kind of evidence upon which claims concerning dates and authorship are based, I refer to my previous study *The*

34 This manuscript is digitised: https://bipadi.ub.edu/digital/collection/manuscrits/id/29744/.

Language of the Sangleys.[35] In the context of this chapter, I shall limit myself to the question of to what extent these sources provide insights into the spread and social status of written Hokkien in the early seventeenth century. First of all, it must be emphasized that these sources are obviously Western in terms of (assumed) authorship, lexicographic arrangement, and purpose of usage. Compiled by Western missionaries, they served the main purpose of training new cohorts of missionaries in the language of the Chinese population. From an analytical perspective, this Western bias is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, due to the obvious dominance of Western perspectives reflected in these sources, they could be dismissed as Eurocentric and therefore irrelevant for the present inquiry. On the other hand, however, a closer look at the sources shows that they arguably reflect written Hokkien less normatively biased than if written by a Chinese scholar.

Using both Chinese characters and a Romanized transcription, three of the five sources (Chirino's *Dictionarium*, the *Dictionarium Hispanico Sinicum*, and the *Arte de la lengua chio chiu*) listed in Table 1 have a digraphic representation of Hokkien expressions. There is almost no textual evidence as to who wrote the Chinese characters, neither in the sources themselves nor in other historical sources. The only exception is the missionary Pedro Chirino (1557–1635) who, in 1604, published his book *Relación de las islas Filipinas* ('Report on the Islands of the Philippines'). The preface of the English translation says that after 1595, Chirino resided in Cebu where he 'undertakes to instruct the Chinese, whose language he soon learns sufficiently for that purpose'.[36] Iaccarino conjectures that Chirino must have used the dictionary during his stay in Cebu when studying Hokkien. He also claims that a comparison of the alphabetic handwriting in the *Dictionarium* with other historical sources points to Chirino as a scribe.[37] This brings us to the question of the scribal origins of the Chinese handwriting. Historical records indicate that Chirino was studying Chinese with a 'young lad' (*mozo*)[38] who acted as his tutor. There is no further information about the young lad and his background, nor about the way Chirino and his tutor interacted when the former learned the language. Irrespective of the pedagogical and didactic details, there are good reasons to assume that the Sinographic traces in the *Dictionarium* were left behind by the tutor and not by Chirino himself. The most persuasive piece of evidence is the shape of the characters which were obviously written by a native Chinese hand and not by a beginning

35 Klöter 2011.

36 English translation in Blair and Robertson 1904, 22. See also Klöter 2011, 58.

37 Iaccarino 2022, xvii.

38 Iaccarino 2022, xvi.

language learner.[39] The same is true for the Chinese handwriting in the *Dictionarium Hispanico Sinicum* and the *Arte de la lengua chio chiu.* Pointing to variation in writing style, Masini assumes that two Chinese hands may have been involved in writing the manuscript.[40] Moreover, with its single characters, words and phrases relating to daily life, the *Dictionarium* qualifies as a reading primer that is rooted in the Chinese *zázì* 雜字 tradition of home education[41] rather than a dictionary in the conventional European sense.[42] It can thus be conceived of as a medium of direct interaction and exchange where different didactic, cultural, and ideological concepts coalesced, including the sinographic representation of Hokkien words and phrases.

Whereas it is safe to say that one or maybe two Chinese hands were involved in writing the manuscript, claims about the educational background of Chirino's tutor are on more tenuous grounds. It can be conjectured that Chirino engaged a tutor who was known as a literate person in a broader sense. Since the dimensions of literacy in the Chinese communities in the Philippines in general and, more specifically, the status of Hokkien literacy, are still under-researched topics, further specifications cannot be given. Historical sources have pointed out the fact that many if not most members of the Chinese community in the Philippines belonged to social groups that were distant from the higher ranks of China's learned officialdom. In the late sixteenth century, Juan Cobo (*c.* 1546–1592), one of the first Spanish missionaries to the Philippines, writes: 'I wish to say that the people who come over are the poor, seagoing people, fishermen and laborers who come to earn a living'.[43] The underrepresentation of members of the scholarly elite is also noted by Wills who mentions that there is 'remarkable evidence for the presence of at least one reasonably learned Chinese scholar in Manila at this time and for the very rapid progress of Dominican dialogue with the Chinese'.[44]

To be sure, literacy is not an either/or thing and in a premodern Chinese context by no means solely defined as the ability to read the Confucian classics and write scholarly essays in Classical Chinese. It should instead be conceived as a continuum with intermediate stages defined by different criteria.[45] For the Chinese traders, bookkeeping was but one facet of daily professional activities that involved reading and writing. As Rawski points out, by 1644 there must have existed 'a substantial

39 Due to copyright restrictions, a sample of the handwriting cannot be displayed here. A complete facsimile edition of Chirino's dictionary can be found in Lee et al. 2022.

40 Masini 2000, 62–63.

41 Cf. Rawski 1979, 128.

42 For details, see Klöter 2011, 59–66 and Klöter and Döhla 2023.

43 Quoted by Felix 1966, 138.

44 Wills 1994, 117.

45 Cf. Rawski 1979, 2.

degree of popular literacy'.[46] Yet however we define literacy, there will still be much speculation as to how common it was for the average member of the Chinese community to write Hokkien texts of whatever kind. If Chirino's Chinese tutor in Cebu and other co-scribes behind the manuscript were indeed distant from the higher end of the literacy continuum, the supposed 'Western nature' of the missionary sources would actually offer analytical advantages. Since the anonymous Chinese scribes were supposedly not exposed to elite norms of reading and writing, the linguistic perspective inherent in the sources is actually much less prescriptive than it would have been in the presence of Chinese scholars. In other words, the Chinese scribes wrote Hokkien as they were used to write the language, and not according to the norms set by elite scholarship. In addition, the combined representation of alphabetic and sinographic words and phrases in the aforementioned sources allows for much safer conclusions about historical Hokkien character readings than other sources of the same period.

As pointed out above, the mere attestation of Sinographs standing for Hokkien morphemes in one particular source is insufficient evidence if we want to claim the existence of an early tradition of Hokkien writing. Since the latter would require a fairly high degree of conventionalization of writing across different sources and genres, such a tradition could only be claimed on the basis of detailed comparative research. Since this would be beyond the scope of this chapter, I shall limit myself to pointing out that all aforementioned types of script use and adaptation are attested in the sources in table 1. Most morphemes in these sources are shared cognates and accordingly written with standard graphs, including 茶 *tê* 'tea', 四 *sì* 'four', 好 *hò* 'good', and 來 *lâi* 'come'. Semantic loan characters are 打 *phah* 'beat', and 田 *tshân* 'field', whereas the widely-attested character for 只 *tsit* 'this' is a phonetic loan character. Graphic innovations of the 'dialect character' type include 𤆬 for *tshuā* 'lead, protect' and 𪜶 for *in* 'they'.

6 Concluding remarks

Sinoperipheral writing occupies an intermediate position between Sinitic mainstream writing and Sinoxenic writing. Closely bound to the former in terms of shared vocabulary and typological similarity, it makes use of mechanisms of script adaptation that are similar to those in Sinoxenic writing. Since the etymological status of a particular character is in many cases not clearly defined, it is less obvious

46 Rawski 1979, 6.

to which category such a character belongs. By contrast, the distinction of semantic and phonetic borrowing in Sinoxenic writing is uncontroversial. Another difference lies in the social and historical contexts of the written texts. Sinoxenic writing constituted the mainstream writing in different historical periods, and this status is still continued in the case of written Japanese. Sinoperipheral writing, by contrast, has always been a marginal phenomenon, and it is unknown how widely texts written in Sinitic topolects were actually read. Thus, as regards written Hokkien in the seventeenth century, this chapter closes by translating the combination of safe and conjectural evidence into this hypothesis: A certain degree of conventionalization in the use of characters suggests the existence of a writing tradition that involved various writers and readers of lower social ranks. Participation in this regional writing tradition constituted a kind of popular literacy that was shaped by daily needs of written communication and documentation, such as bookkeeping, stocktaking and interpersonal correspondence. The dimensions of written Hokkien in scope and time can only be ascertained through systematic comparisons of different sources which must be left for future research.

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Abbreviations

HDZD = *Hànyǔ dà zìdiǎn* 汉语大字典 [Unabridged Chinese Character Dictionary] (1986–1990), ed. Hanyu da zidian bianji weiyuanhui 汉语大字典编辑委员会 [Editorial Committee of the Unabridged Chinese Character Dictionary], 8 vols., Chengdu: Sichuan cishu chubanshe / Wuhan: Hubei cishu chubanshe.

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Lien Chinfa

A Glimpse of Sibilant Shift in Early Modern Spanish in Seventeenth-century Manuscripts through the Lens of Hokkien Sinographs

Abstract: This chapter aims to capture an aspect of consonantal shifts in early modern Spanish deduced from the Hokkien sound glosses of Chinese characters in two seventeenth century bilingual manuscripts. In Old Spanish (twelfth–fifteenth century) there were six sibilants, consisting of one pair of dental affricates and two pairs of fricatives. They experienced two kinds of phonological change: (1) spirantization and (2) devoicing. Based on a Hokkien seventeenth century manuscript we can pinpoint with confidence that Early Modern Spanish in the seventeenth century as witnessed in the colonial Philippines was still at the three-sibilant stage.

1 Introduction

When the Hokkien diaspora encountered the Spaniards in seventeenth century Luzon, they tried to learn Spanish in an ingenious way, by drawing on their own writing system. They used Sinitic characters phonetically to render the sound of Spanish expressions.[1] Such a unique way of learning a foreign language is recorded in an extant manuscript which was collected during fieldwork. The aim of this chapter is to investigate an ongoing change of a special type in the consonantal shifts of seventeenth century Spanish in the heyday of the maritime navigation era. We will focus on and try to reconstruct the ongoing development of sibilants in the Spanish consonant system, based on a collection of freshly published rare manuscripts, the Philippine Chinese manuscripts in the Herzog August library (PCHA) (Lee et al. 2020). These manuscripts mainly consist of three parts: (1) letters, (2) linguistic information, and (3) account books with attachments. My study will be based on part 2, featuring language data. This part bears the title 佛朗機化人話簿 *Folangji Huaren huabu* or 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu* for short, and is a handwritten manuscript in parallel format with Chinese expressions and Spanish

1 See also Klöter's chapter in this volume for a discussion of phonetic loan characters.

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counterparts rendered phonetically in Sinitic script.[2] It looks like a miniature encyclopedia, featuring vocabulary items classified according to semantic fields as well as everyday daily phrases and sentences.[3]

化人話簿 *Huaren huabu* is very much in the tradition of 華夷通語 *Hua Yi tongyu* or 華夷譯語 *Hua Yi yiyu* (Sinoxenic bilingual parallel texts). They are compiled to cope with the problem of learning and teaching foreign languages. The practice prevalent in imperial China starting from the Yuan Dynasty (the thirteenth century onwards) was to use Chinese characters as phonological units to render the sound values of foreign languages. 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*, the source of the present study, follows such a long-standing tradition. In a sense it is like 類書 *leishu* (guidebooks) in that in addition to a collection of unclassified phrases and sentences, it contains a wealth of everyday expressions classified into eleven semantic categories, namely 天文門 *tianwen men* (universe and nature), 地理門 *dili men* (earth and environment), 時令門 *shiling men* (seasons), 人物門 *renwu men* (human relationships), 人事門 *renshi men* (human affairs), 身體門 *shenti men* (the human body), 花木門 *huamu men* (plants and flora), 器用門 *qiyong men* (tools and utensils), 鳥獸門 *niaoshou men* (birds and beasts), 采色門 *caise men* (color terms), and 數目門 *shumu men* (cardinal numbers and measure words).[4] The text mainly comprises Spanish expressions, but there are small portions featuring loan words from Tagalog and Japanese.[5] It is definitely not homogeneous and its heterogeneity will be touched on in Section 4.

The present chapter is organized as follows: 2. consonantal systems of Spanish and Hokkien; 3. the reconstruction of consonant shifts based on the rendition in Chinese characters; 4. the heterogeneity of 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*: and 5. closing remarks.

2 化人 *hua*³ *lang*⁵ in Hokkien was used by the Chinese diaspora in Manila to refer to the Spaniards (Douglas 1873: 142. 化人 may well be 佛朗 as a shortened form of 佛朗機 *Farangi* (a word borrowed from Persian) to refer to Spaniards or Portuguese in late Imperial China. 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu* means The Spaniards' manual of languages. It is a handwritten record of Hokkien and Spanish expressions.

3 What follows is a description of the manuscript based on Lee at al 2020.

4 See Lee et al. 2020, iii–vi, 3–5 for a brief introduction to the manuscript.

5 See Figure 1 for lexical items written in Chinese characters with parallel Spanish expressions transcribed with Sinograms, words featuring the semantic field of human relationship in the manuscript 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*.

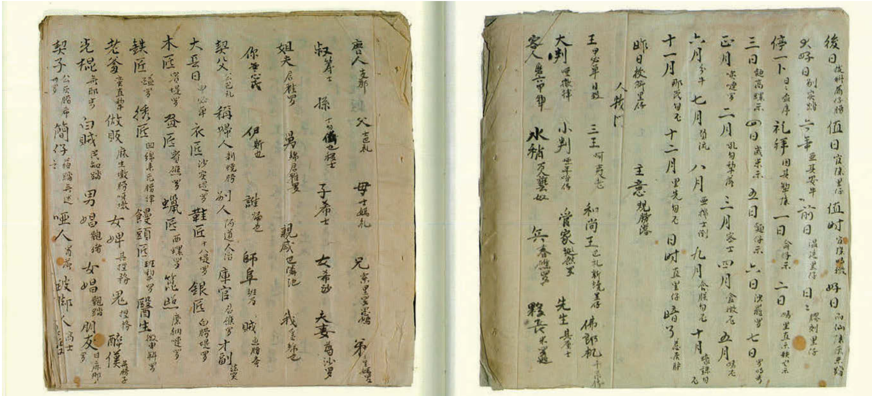

Fig. 1: Part of the Division of Human Relationships in the Manuscript 化人話簿

2 Consonantal systems of Spanish and Hokkien

When people in the Hokkien diaspora came into contact with Spanish colonists and tried to learn Spanish in the seventeenth century, they resorted to the effortless and to them most convenient means of recording the foreign language, relying on the Chinese character script that they were most familiar with, rather than learning the alphabet first. The sinographs, as they are sometimes called,[6] ultimately represent a logographic system, but here they are used phonetically to render the Spanish expressions. They thus represent syllables with phonological shape, devoid of any semantic content.[7]

2.1 The encounter of two phonological systems

Before embarking on a discussion of using sinographs with Hokkien sound values to investigate an aspect of consonantal shifts (in particular sibilants) in the consonantal system of Hokkien and Medieval Spanish (mid-tenth century to the end of the fifteenth century), a preliminary comparison of consonants in Hokkien and Spanish is

6 Handel 2019.

7 However, in some minor cases the characters chosen for phonetic loans may also reflect semantic content to some extent, as in 西士 *se su* for 'Jesus', literally meaning 'virtuous man from the west'. 西士 is also used to render *ceja* in Spanish for the lexical item 眉 'eyebrow' in Hokkien. See Table 5. In the latter case neither syllable in 西士 is associated with the semantic dimension.

needed.[8] This comparison will serve as a backdrop for our ensuing discussion of how sinographs were used to represent Spanish sound values. Consider the Hokkien Consonant Chart in Table 1 and the Medieval Spanish Consonant Chart in Table 2.

Table 1: Hokkien Consonant Chart

	Voicing	Aspiration	Bilabial	Dental	Velar	Glottal
Stop	Voiceless	Unaspirated	p	t	k	
		Aspirated	ph	th	kh	
	Voiced		b		g	
Affricate	Voiceless	Unaspirated		ts(ch)		
		Aspirated		tsh(chh)		
	Voiced			dz (j)		
Fricative	Voiceless			s		h
Nasal	Voiced		m	n	ŋ (ng)	
Lateral	Voiced			l		

Table 2: Medieval Spanish Consonant Chart

	Voicing	Bilabial	Dental	Prepalatal	Midpalatal	Velar
Stop	Voiceless	p	t			k
	Voiced	b	d			g
Affricate	Voiceless		ts	tʃ		
	Voiced		dz			
Fricative	Voiceless		s	ʃ		h
	Voiced		z	ʒ	ʝ	
Nasal		m	n	ɲ		
Lateral			l	ʎ		
Trill			r			
Flap			☼			

8 Hokkien refers to Southern Min dialects, including Quanzhou and Zhangzhou varieties in southern Fujian, as well as the Chao-Shan (Chaozhou-Shantou) variety in eastern Guangdong. Speakers of these dialects also migrated to Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, as well as many other parts of the world.

The consonantal system in Hokkien consists of the following traits:[9] (1) for voiceless obstruents, aspiration and non-aspiration are in phonemic contrast; (2) nasals and their homorganic voiced stop counterparts can be construed as pairs of allophones in complementary distribution.[10] The voiced stop /d/ has been merged into the lateral /l/; (3) there is only one set of affricates and fricatives; (4) the velar nasal can appear as the onset.

Let us make a short detour to elaborate on the convention of Romanization of Hokkien and the constraints on the representation Spanish sound values by means of Hokkien graphs. The spelling of Southern Min in this paper is based on the Church Romanization system given in Douglas (1873). Some modifications have been made. In particular, diacritic tone marks have been replaced by numerical superscripts. No distinction in affricates is made between *ch* and *ts* or *chh* and *tsh* as they do not involve phonemic contrast. Open o /ɔ/ and closed o /o/ are rewritten as oo and o, as in 虎 *hoo*^{2} 'tiger' and 好 *ho*^{2} 'good'. Nasalization of vowels is signaled by a double n, as in 三 *sann*^{1} 'three' rather than the superscript /n/ as in /sa^{n}/. For details on the graphic conventions of Hokkien see the online Ministry of Education's Taiwanese Southern Min Common Words Dictionary.[11]

More often than not a character in Hokkien will have alternate pronunciations. For example, the character 西 has three phonological forms: *sai*^{1} as in 西爿 *sai*^{1} *ping*^{5} 'west side', *se*^{1} as in 西洋 *se*^{1} *iunn*^{5} 'Europe' and *si*^{1} as in 西瓜 *si*^{1} *kue*^{1} 'watermelon'. The choice of a phonological form from alternate pronunciations of a character to render the syllable in a Spanish word is not random. It is dictated by the consideration as to which form can best represent the sound value of a Spanish word.[12] For example, 表 has two sound shapes in Hokkien: /pio/ and /piau/. The first one rather than the second one is chosen to represent the first syllable in the Spanish word /piojo/ 'louse', since /pio/ in Hokkien is much closer to /pio/ in /piojo/ in Spanish than /piau/. The principle of faithfulness to the target language (Spanish) cannot always be upheld, since the source language (Hokkien) is limited by the constraints of its own phonological system. A syllable structure in Hokkien may consist of a nasal

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9 If there is a discrepancy between IPA and Romanization, the Roman letter is put in parentheses.

10 The choice of nasal and stop in the onset of a syllable is conditioned by whether the rime is nasalized or not. The onsets with the nasal origin such as *m- *n- and *ŋ- remain as nasals when the rime is nasalized, as in minn^{7} 麵 'noodle', ninn^{5} 年 'year', and ŋenn^{7} 硬 'hard'. But when the rime is not nasalized, the onset with the nasal origin will be denasalised, as in biŋ^{5} 明 'bright', lam^{5} 南 'south' and giŋ^{2} 研 'to grind'. Note that /l/ rather than the expected /d/ in lam results from the merger of /d/ to /l/. See Lien 2000 for details.

11 https://sutian.moe.edu.tw/zh-hant/.

12 Such a consideration resembles phonetic loan characters in sinoperipheral writing. See Henning Klöter's chapter in this volume for discussion.

onset /n/ and a rime featuring oral vowels such as /na/. In this case, the nasal onset will be denasalized yielding /da/, which will undergo further change into /la/. Thus, it is well-motivated to choose /la/ (膋), a less faithful form, rather than /na/ in Hokkien to render the first syllable /na/ in the Spanish word /naranja/, since /na/, i.e. nasal onset + oral vowel, is not available in Hokkien. Note that the colloquial form /nann/ for 林 'wood, grove' historically with the onset */l/ is no exception to the phonological constraint, since the nasal onset of the syllable is followed by a nasalized rime /ann/.

Let us now turn to the consonantal system in Spanish. The consonantal system in Medieval Spanish exhibits the following traits: (1) obstruents show a contrast of voicing instead of aspiration; (2) apart from /tʃ/, there are six obstruents forming three pairs, differing in voicing (ts/dz, ʃ/ʒ and s/z); (3) there are prepalatal nasals /ɲ/ and laterals /ʎ/ (also written as /λ/); and (4) there is a distinction between trills and flaps.

Obstruents show a voicing contrast of stops and affricates in both Medieval Spanish and Hokkien. We can see a gap in the stop series in Hokkien, in that /d/ is missing, as it merges with /l/. Voiced obstruents are historically the reflexes of early nasals, as in 米 *bi*^{2} 'rice' (cf. *mi*^{3} Mandarin), 南 *lam*^{5} 'south' (cf. *nan*^{2} M.) and 牛 *gu*^{5} 'cattle' (*niu*^{2} M.). The difference lies in fricatives: unlike Hokkien, Medieval Spanish exhibits a contrast in dental and palatal fricatives.

2.2 Major consonantal shifts from Latin to Medieval Spanish

Spanish is a Romance language and a descendant of Latin. In Latin, there are only stops with a voicing contrast.[13] Apart from stops, there are only the voiceless dental/alveolar /s/ and the voiceless velar fricative /h/ (x), but no affricates. However, affricates arise partly as a result of the palatalization that dental/alveolar or velar stops underwent in the development leading to Medieval Spanish. Fricatives also experienced palatalization, yielding palatal fricatives. A consequence of this development is the rise of four pairs of sibilants, as shown Table 3:[14] (1) dental affricates /ts/ and /dz/, (2) palatal affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, (3) dental fricatives /s/ and /z/, and (4) palatal fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. Some affricates further developed into fricatives. In later stages, such as Early Modern Spanish (fifteenth–seventeenth century), as in Table 4, the voiced sibilants were devoiced, with the result that all of the sibilants became voiceless. Compare the following two consonantal tables:

13 In what follows, discussion of the Spanish phonological system in diachronic and synchronic perspective is based mainly on Penny 1991, Lapesa 2004, and Pharies 2007.

14 The symbols in square brackets are in IPA.

Table 3: Sibilants in Medieval Spanish

Sibilants	Voicing	Dental	Palatal
Affricate	Voiceless	ç, c [ts]	ch [tʃ]
	Voiced	z [dz]	j, g [dʒ]
Fricative	Voiceless	-ss- [s]	x [ʃ]
	Voiced	-s- [z]	j, g [ʒ]

Table 4: Early Modern Spanish

		Voicing	Dental	Palatal
Sibilants	**Affricate**	Voiceless	ç, c [ts]	ch [tʃ]
	Fricative	Voiceless	-ss- [s]	x [ʃ]
Approximant	**Lateral**			ʎ
	Central			ʝ

First, sibilants including affricates and fricatives went through two kinds of phonological changes: as in (1) deaffrication (viz., spirantization) of affricates. Second, as in (2), devoicing of each pair of the three sets of sibilants (dental fricatives /s̄/ vs. /z̄/, alveolar fricatives /s/ vs. /z/, and prepalatal fricatives /ʃ/ vs. /ʒ/).

(1) Deaffrication (Spirantization)

$$\begin{array}{l}/ts/\\ /dz/\end{array} > ① \left\{\begin{array}{c}\bar{s}\\ \bar{z}\end{array}\right\} > ② \ /\bar{s}/$$

(2) Devoicing

$$\text{a.} \left\{\begin{array}{c}\bar{s}\\ \bar{z}\end{array}\right\} > /\bar{s}/$$

$$\text{b.} \left\{\begin{array}{c}s\\ z\end{array}\right\} > /s/$$

$$\text{c.} \left\{\begin{array}{c}ʃ\\ ʒ\end{array}\right\} > /ʃ/$$

The two phonological processes, which could have occurred in the sixteenth century, yielded three pairs of fricatives distinguishable only in terms of place of articulation (dental, alveolar, and prepalatal).[15]

When Hokkien and Early Modern Spanish came into contact in the sixteenth century, devoicing of sibilants had occurred, resulting in the loss of voiced sibilants in Spanish, whereas /dz/, a voiced affricate, was still in existence in early Southern Min. There was no voiced affricate in the consonantal inventory of Early Modern Spanish that could be used to render /dz/ in early Southern Min. /j/ [ʒ] and /x/ [ʃ] had been neutralized as /ʃ/. However, the letter *x* as well as *y*, usually with the superscript *s*, was adopted as a measure of expediency to represent /dz/. In contrast, the letter /j/ was occasionally used to represent /s/, as in Juan Cobo 高母羨, where 羨 is pronounced /suan7/ in Southern Min.[16] Juan Cobo (*c.* 1546–1593) was a Spanish missionary who arrived in the Philippines in 1588 and is supposed to have written a grammar of Mandarin, *Arte de la Lengua China*, which is one of the first lost manuscripts.[17] The name Jesus is also rendered as 西氏 /se su/ in the Chinese version of *Doctrina Christiana*.[18]

Further phonological shifts following deaffrication or rather spirantization occurred. The effect of devoicing the sibilants yielded two results:

(1) The dental voiceless /s/ resulting from deaffrication and devoicing was further fronted to interdental /θ/. (2) The voiceless alveolar and prepalatal fricatives merged and turned into velar fricative /x/.

Van der Loon provides the following diagram, followed immediately by an explanation under it, where three sets of sibilants enclosed in the boxes have developed into interdental /θ/, alveolar /s/, and velar /x/ in modern Castilian Spanish.[19] The phonological change is exemplified by the vocabulary items *caza* 'hunt'(/θ/), *casa* 'house' (/s/), and *caja* 'box' /x/ respectively.[20]

15 Penny 1991, 88–89.

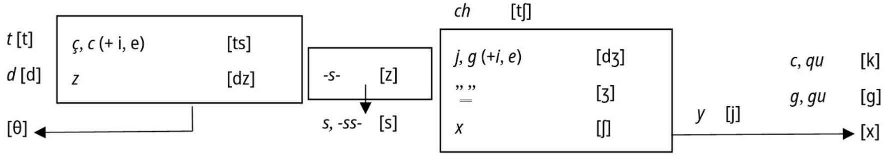
16 That is, the pronunciation of the Roman letter /j/ in early modern Spanish was /s/, or probably a voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/, rather than a velar fricative /x/ as in modern Spanish. Juan Cobo, rendered as 嗃呣嗼 *Kobo Suan* in Hokkien, is said to be the author of 無極天主教真傳實錄 *The Veritable Record of the Authentic Tradition of the True Faith in the Infinite God*. His name was also rendered as 羨高茂 *Suan Komoo* in another document (van der Loon 1966, 3, 24). Despite different characters in the two renditions, there is no difference in Hokkien pronunciation: /kobo suan/. I am indebted to Alain Peyraube for calling my attention to the important contribution of Juan Cobo.

17 For 西士 Jesus rendered as /se su/ in Hokkien, see van der Loon 1967, 144).

18 Van der Loon 1967, 144.

19 Van der Loon 1967, 114. The phonetic symbols in square brackets are in IPA, corresponding to the words in Romanization. The arrows stand for the direction of the phonological change.

20 Penny 1991, 88–89.



In the Doctrina, *ç* in the Spanish words (*gracia*, *confirmación*, *unición*, *sacerdotal*) is rendered by Hokkien *s*. Evidently *j* had not yet been velarized, as Hokkien *s* served for this consonant also (in *jueves*, *José*, *virgen*, *Jerusalén*), but *ç* had already lost its plosion.[21]

In Andalusian Spanish as well as American Spanish, however, a different pattern of phonological development can be observed. Dental and alveolar sibilants were merged into the dental, whereas palatal sibilants have merged with laryngeal fricative /h/.[22]

3 The Reconstruction of consonant shifts based on the rendition in Chinese characters

As shown in Tab. 5, the consonant /j/ as the onset of the last syllable is rendered as a set of characters such as 孫 /sun/, 士 /su/, 沙 /sa/, 卅 /sap/, 序 /su/, and 事 /su/, all sharing the onset /s/. In the seventeenth century, /j/ is construed as taking on the phonological value of /[ʃ]/ in Early Modern Spanish, in contrast to /x/ in modern Spanish at the present stage. Since there is no palatal fricative /[ʃ]/, Hokkien has to make do with a sound (viz. /s/) close to but not the same as /[ʃ]/.[23]

21 Van der Loon 1967, 114.

22 Penny 1991, 90.

23 In this table as well as other tables in this chapter, column 1 (words) and column 2 (Hokkien) are what appear in the manuscript. Words in column 1 are lexical items, and Hokkien in column 2 are Sinograms (viz., Sinitic characters functioning as phonetic symbols) used to transcribe corresponding Spanish words. The remaining columns are added. Column 3 features Romanization based on Sinograms, Column 4 lists the corresponding Spanish words. Column 5 gives the numbers of the pages in which the words and Sinograms occur.

Table 5: Sound value of /j/ in 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Words	Hokkien	Romanization	Spanish words	Page
廂	葛孫	kat sun	cajón	25
眉	西士	se su	ceja	24
子	希士	hi su	hijo	17
女	希沙	hi sa	hija	17
目	窩士	o su	ojo	24
跛腳人	光士	kong su	cojo	24
甕	之那卅	tsi na sap	tinaja	25
針	亞牛卅	a gu sap	aguja	25
遠	螺序	le su	lejos	18
舊	威序	biet su	viejo	18
虱	表事	pio su	piojo	26
賭	湏(須)牙	su ga	jugar	19
温(湿)	毛沙膀(朥)	moo sa la	mojar	19
目鏡	安罗(羅)士	an lo su	andeojos	32
柑	膀(朥)难(難)卅	la lan sap	naranja	24

There are two examples showing that /j/ has taken on the sound value of /h/, as shown in Table 6, where both 歲 and 負 featuring the onset /h/ are used to render /j/ in Spanish. However, 歲 has two sound values: (1) hue[3] (colloquial) and sue[3] (literary). If it is the literary form, then /j/ would still be rendered as /s/ rather than /h/.

Table 6: Sound value of /h/ in 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Words	Hokkien	Romanization	Spanish words	Page
四日	歲米示	hue bi si	jueves	16
七月	負流	hu liu	julio	16

Other texts such as the *Memorial de la Vida Christiana en Lengva Chinna* 新刊僚氏正教便覽 translated by Padre Fr. Domingo (1606), and *Doctrina Christiana* 基督要理 (1605), also provide valuable information about the rendering of proper names in Chinese characters, which only make sense when the Spanish pronunciation is reconstructed based on Hokkien sound values.

Apart from the consonant /j/, other consonants such as /c/, /g/, /s/, and /z/, when followed by high and mid front vowels, are also worth looking into. It is quite revealing to examine which sound values can be constructed based on the choice of Chinese characters in Hokkien pronunciation. It is patently clear that /c/ in Spanish takes on the sound value of /s/ rather than modern /θ/ when followed by high or mid front vowels, as in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Sound value of /ci/ in 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Words	Hokkien	Romanization	Spanish words	Page
天	西朥(朥)	se lo	cielo	15
十二月	里先勿[兀.](厘)	li sing but li	diciembre	16
利匁（錢）	牙难(難)邪	ga lan sia	ganacias	20
做兄弟	法西亜綿牛	huat si a mi gu	facir amigo	23
伍	生光	senn kong/sinn kong	cinco	26
十六	日日西氏	jit jit si si	dieciséis	27
十七	日日舌氏	jit jit siat si	diecisiete	27
十八	日日倭就	jit jit o tsiu	dieciocho	27
十九	日日羸微	jit jit lue bi	diecinueve	27
五十	生瓜踏	senn kue tah	cincuenta	27
一百	王仙除	ong sian tu	ciento	27
镸(頭)	甲微西朥(朥)	kah bi si la	cabecillo	33

Table 8: Sound value of /ce/ in 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Words	Hokkien	Romanization	Spanish words	Page
水漲	圭梨西	ke le se	crecer	15
近	西螺咬	se le ka	cerca	18
做	法西	huat se	hacer	19
葱	紗冒罗(羅)	se boo lo	cebolla	25
十一	温(溫)而	un ji	once	26
十二	罗(羅)而	lo ji	doce	26
一把	黄(黃)馬示	uinn ma si	un mace	27
乱(亂)侖	英西实(實)除	ing se sit tu	incesto	100

As shown in Table 9, /g/ took on the sound value /j/ (i.e, /dz/) when followed by the front high or mid vowel in the seventeenth century. However, /g/ is realized as a voiceless velar fricative /x/ when followed by high and mid front vowels in modern Spanish.[24]

Table 9: Sound value of /ge/ or /gi/ in 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Words	Hokkien	Romanization	Spanish words	Page
別人	阿道人治	a to jin ti	otro gente	17
姜（薑）	而迷	ji be	*gengibre*[25]	25

In Table 10, /s/ is realized as /s/, identical to modern /s/, whereas /z/ is realized as /s/, though in modern Spanish it has become /θ/, as in Table 11.

Table 10: Sound value of /-s-/ in 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Words	Hokkien	Romanization	Spanish words	Page
夫妻	葛沙罗（羅）	kat sa lo	casado	17
煩惱	膠实（實）踏	ka sit tah	casida	21
棹（桌）	微卅	be sap	mesa	25
天平	弊士	pe si	pesa	25
虱	表事	pio su	pioso	26
十三	氐犂而	ti le ji	trese	26
六十	实（實）仙踏	sit sian tah	sesenta	27
袈裟	葛雖仔	kat sui a	casulla	32
许（許）个	挨西	e se	ese	78
一疋	黄（黃）別卅	uinn piet sap	un pesa	142
是乜貨	圭高卅	ke ko sap	que casa	144
嗽	突西	tut se	toser	163

24 Judging from its development into modern /x/, a voicelss velar nasal, the sound value of /g/ may have been /ʒ/ as a voiced palatal fricative rather than as /dz/ (i.e., /j/ as a Roman letter) as a voiced dental affricate in the seventeenth century.

25 *Gengibre* is an alternative form of *jengibre*. See Lee et al. 2019, 482.

Table 11: Sound value of /-z-/ in 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Words	Hokkien	Romanization	Spanish words	Page
井	褒序	po su	pozo	15
鞋匠	十八堤罗（羅）	tsap pat the lo	zapatero	17
頭	甲微卅	kah bi sap	cabeza	24
身	賠罗（羅）硃	pue lo tsu	braza	24
白糖	亜湏刈	a su kuah	azucar	24
核桃	雷氏	lui si	nuez	24
鋤長（頭）	亜沙朥（勝）	a sa la	azado	25
藍	亜湏如	a su ju	azul	26
拾	列士	liat su	diez	26
一丈	王勿劳（勞）氏	ong but lo si	un braza	27

3.1 Consonantal shifts in Castilian Spanish

Spirantization of dental affricates and the devoicing of sibilants yielded three (viz., dental, alveolar and velar) voiceless fricatives. The dental fricative merged into the interdental fricative, and the palatal fricative merged into the velar fricative.

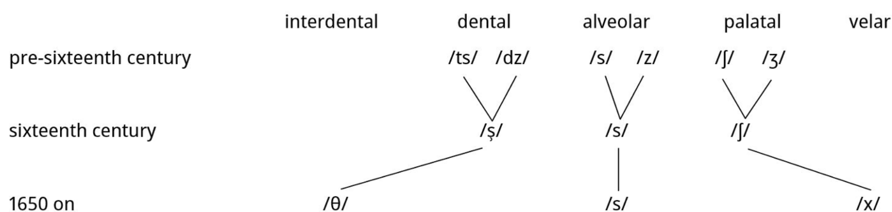


Fig. 2: Shifts of three kinds of sibilants in Castilian Spanish[26]

3.2 Consonantal shifts in Sevillian, Andalusian, and American Spanish

Spirantization of dental affricates yielded a pair of dental fricatives with voicing contrast. There are therefore three pairs of fricatives, each differing in voicing: dental,

26 Penny 1991, 88.

alveolar, and palatal fricatives. On the one hand, voiceless and voiced fricatives each merged into their dental counterparts. The devoicing merged the voiced dental fricative into the voiceless one, and the same devoicing process merged the voiced palatal fricative into the voiceless palatal one. This happened in the seventeenth century. The palatal fricative further merges into the laryngeal fricative.

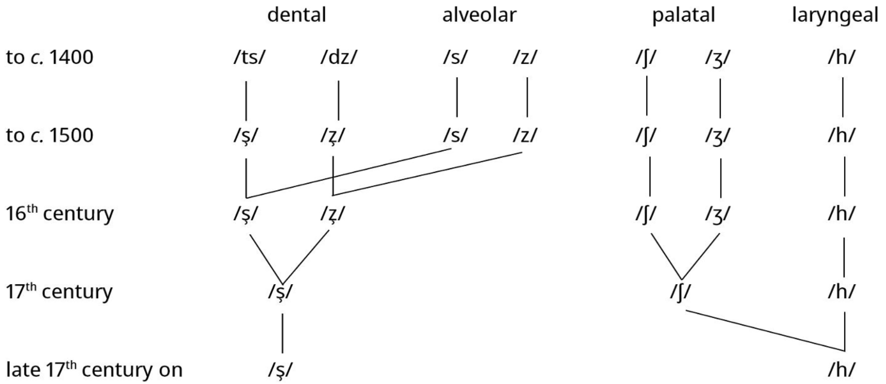


Fig. 3: Shifts of three kinds of sibilants in Sevillian, Andalusian and American Spanish[27]

The above two diagrams show that there are two major patterns in the development of sibilants. For Castilian Spanish, three phonological categories are still kept apart, and the alveolar sibilant remains unchanged, whereas the dental sibilant has become an interdental fricative, and the palatal sibilant has merged into a velar fricative. For Sevillian, Andalusian, and American Spanish, the dental sibilant has merged into an interdental fricative, whereas the palatal sibilant has become a glottal fricative. Thus, three phonological categories have been reduced to two categories. The sixteenth century seems to be the watershed when the devoicing of the fricatives occurred.

Since there is only one type of fricative in Hokkien, and no phonological distinction is made between alveolar and palatal fricatives, we cannot determine whether the fricative is alveolar or palatal from the Hokkien sound glosses. There are, however, some minor cases, as shown in Tab. 9, where 人 and 而, both having the voiced dental affricate /dz/ as the syllable onset, are used to render /j/ or /g/ when followed by a high front vowel. The letter /j/ or /g/ may well be a voiced prepalatal fricative /ʒ/ or a voiced midpalatal fricative /ʝ/ in some minor cases, as there are more

27 Penny 1991, 90.

examples where /j/ is rendered as a voiceless fricative. The preservation of the voiced sibilants may point to a dialectal variant (Judaeo-Spanish) where the voicing contrast of sibilants are still kept.[28]

4 The heterogeneity of 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*

Before concluding, some observations on the nature of the manuscript 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu* are in order. The manuscript is not homogeneous. It mainly features Spanish, but there are also Tagalog, Malay, and Japanese words in it.

As attested in some Spanish words rendered in Hokkien characters, Hokkien expatriates may not have learned Spanish directly from Spaniards but from Tagalog mestizos conversant with Spanish. The observation about the hetereogenity of all the words in this section draws on the manuscript 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu*. For example, 改罪 'confess' is rendered as 公比沙 *kong pi sa* (p. 21), corresponding to *confesar* in Spanish. What is unique about the rendition is that the onset of the second syllable is a bilabial stop /p/ rather than the labio-dental /f/ in the original Spanish word. Hokkien does not have the labio-dental fricative in its phonological inventory. However, Hokkien expatriates did not opt for the strategy of using the bilabial stop /p/ to render /f/. Instead, they used glottal fricative /h/ to render it.[29]

Spanish loanwords in Tagalog show that /f/ in Spanish is rendered as /p/. There are in modern Tagalog a few loanwords from Spanish attesting to such a practice, as in *familia* (pamilya), *fiester* (pista), *fruta* (protas), *café* (kape), *frontal* (prontal), and *frente* (prente). *Confesar* also carries a non-religious sense meaning 'confess guilt on trial'. The lexical items 認/招 and 招認, for example, are rendered as 公必沙 *kong pit sa* (p. 74) and 公丕沙 *kong phi sa* (p. 106). In both examples, the labio-dental fricative /f/ onset of the second syllable in the original Spanish word has been replaced by the voiceless bilabial stop, be it unaspirated or aspirated, in the loan words.[30] From this different strategy of adapting loanwords, we can see that people

28 Penny 1991, 22–23.

29 The onset /f/ in all the place and human names in English is rendered as /h/ in Amoy (viz., Hokkien) rather than /p/, if they are phonological loans, as in *Finland* (Hun-lan) and *Frank* (Huat-lan-khek). See Appendix II in Campbell 1913, 55–56. The issue of adapting /f/ to /p/ in Spanish loans in Tagalog should not be confused with the issue concerning the use of the Roman letter *v* for the sound of bilabial stop /b/ in the onset of syllables in Spanish.

30 *Confesar* is adapted into Tagalog as *kumpisál* where the coda /m/ is a result of regressive assimilation triggered by the onset of the bilabial stop of /p/ in the penultimate syllable.

in the Hokkien diaspora may not have learned Spanish directly from Spaniards but from Tagalog and Spanish mestizos instead.

Another aspect of the heterogeneity of the text is the incorporation of some expressions in local languages that Spanish came into contact with, such as the Meso-American language like Nahuatl in Mexican Spanish in the New Spanish period, Tagalog in the Philippines and Malay. Some examples are provided below.

笼(籠) ('hamper') is rendered as 必礁咬 *pit ta ka* (p. 25). It corresponds to *petaca* in Spanish, a loanword from Nahuatl, a native Meso-American Aztec language, meaning 'woven wicker hamper'. It experiences a change of meaning and takes on the sense of 'cigarette case' in modern Spanish. For the lexical item 通事 'interpreter', there are two variants (p. 62). It is rendered as 儒驴猫卅 *ju lu ba sah*, corresponding to *jurubasa* in Malay, and 老啞礁廚 *lau a ta tu* corresponding to *nahuatato* or *naguatato*, a loan word from Nahuatl.[31] 傘 'umbrella' is rendered as 巴容 *pa yong* (p. 114) rather than the Spanish word *paraguas*. *Payong* is a nativized loanword from Malay in Tagalog.

The diversity or rather the mosaic nature of linguistic elements in the manuscript 化人話簿 *Huaren huabu* shows that localization of Spanish occurred, being adapted to the new milieu in the Philippines by absorbing some indigenous expressions.[32] This also points to the possibility that the manuscript is a permanent written record of a multilingual community where people of diverse linguistic backgrounds came into contact to eke out their living.

5 Closing remarks

In the above discussion, we have examined a freshly published manuscript bearing witness to the time-honored tradition of using Sinographs as phonetic borrowings to represent a non-Sinitic language. In this case, they are used to record the seventeenth-century Spanish in Luzon in the early stages of the maritime navigation era. We can pin down the patterns of the ongoing change of sibilants based on the onsets of the Hokkien pronunciation of characters used to render the Spanish expressions.

In line with the previous literature on the evolution of sibilants in Spanish, which serves as the backdrop of our research, we have been able to capture or retrace

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31 *Jurubasa*, literally 'expert language', means 'language expert, interpreter', whereas *nahuatato* means speakers of many tongues or interpreters.

32 Such heterogeneity is also attested in another seventeenth-century manuscript featuring Spanish expressions with corresponding Hokkien words. See Lee at al. 2019. For a preliminary study on the document see Lien 2023.

the routes of changes that the sibilants underwent with some measure of accuracy. Though a logographic writing system, Sinographs can also function as an effective way of representing the sounds of speech in other languages, including those usually written using an alphabetic writing system such as Spanish. This highlights an interesting relationship between writing and speech.

What we have found about the shifts of sibilants in Early Modern Spanish is a rough picture reconstructed, based on the Sinographs realized as Hokkien sound values. Our study seems to have some implications for research on language contact.

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Robert S. Bauer

Hong Kong's Written Cantonese Language and Its Twelve Basic Principles

Abstract: Five processes operate in Hong Kong's written Cantonese: traditional usage of the standard Chinese characters (or sinographs), as well as their phoneticization, indigenization, semanticization, and – quite independently of and separate from the Chinese characters – alphabeticization, which has been one result of the uninterrupted intimate contact between Cantonese and English for over the past three hundred years. In addition, written Cantonese rests on a foundation formed by twelve basic principles. Combining the five processes with the twelve basic principles provides us with the means for systematically analyzing and better understanding written Cantonese. If written Cantonese were ever to be standardized, then two residual issues of variation in transcription of lexical items will require appropriate resolution.

1 Introduction

At the outset, the author should make clear to his readers that he refers to the Hong Kong Cantonese linguistic variety as a language rather than a dialect on the basis of several distinctive criteria that characterize this particular variety of Chinese. First of all, it is the predominant speech variety spoken on a daily basis by about 90% of Hong Kong's 7.5 million population. Second, Cantonese is the principal speech variety used within Hong Kong's government, its law courts, and broadcast media (radio and TV). Third, Cantonese as one of several southern Chinese varieties distinguishes itself for being mutually unintelligible with Mandarin (also known as Putonghua), China's national language, along with a number of other major regional varieties, namely, Gan, Hakka, Min, Wu, and Xiang. Fourth, Hong Kong Cantonese has developed a highly-conventionalized written form that is widely used in the community, although this writing system has never been officially or formally standardized. And fifth, the term 'dialect' can carry negative or even pejorative connotations, and the author believes this is undesirable, inappropriate, and to be avoided, in view of the high prestige that Cantonese holds among its speakers in Hong Kong, which is one of the world's leading financial centers and major business hubs.

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Recently, while the author was listening to a local Hong Kong English-language news report broadcast over the radio, he heard the news-reader say, '. . . the letter [was] written in colloquial Cantonese . . .' In the author's view, whoever had written that news report regarded the phrase 'written in colloquial Cantonese' as important enough that it needed to be explicitly stated; because the author has become relatively sensitivized to almost anything related to the Hong Kong Cantonese language through his more than five decades of researching it, not surprisingly, that phrase leapt out at him and abruptly grabbed his attention. As it turns out, from the perspective of Hong Kong's linguistic milieu, what this phrase refers to is especially interesting, intriguing, and so compels our attention. Yet, what does it precisely mean?

As a matter of fact, the development and usage of the written form of the Cantonese language in Hong Kong, particularly its colloquial form, should be appreciated as extraordinary linguistic phenomena that compel our scholarly interest. Concisely defined, written Cantonese is the transcription of Cantonese speech through the combination of Chinese characters (or sinographs) and letters of the English alphabet.[1] It can be emphasized here that Hong Kong's written Cantonese language has never undergone any formal standardization; schoolchildren are not taught how to read and write it; and occasionally so-called language experts criticize and condemn it. Nonetheless, in Hong Kong, but *not* in Guangdong province of mainland China,[2] the homeland of Cantonese, it continues thriving in every domain where written language can be found. Indeed, the informal development, cumulative conventionalization, and widespread use of its written form have combined together to make Hong Kong's Cantonese linguistic variety stand out as different – even unique – among all other regional varieties of the Chinese language.

1.1 Defining the Cantonese language

Cantonese has been called by a variety of names by its speakers and others, namely, 廣東話 *gwong2 dung1 waa6/2* 'speech of Guangdong (province)'[3]; 廣州話 *gwong2*

1 Bauer 1988, 2006, 2010, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2019, 2020.

2 This phrase 'mainland China' is Hongkongers' usual, regular, ordinary, common way to refer to China; it helps the speaker/writer distinguish between tiny Hong Kong perched on the South China coast from the surrounding vastness of China to the north. It carries no Cold War flavor, nor any anti-China stance (although it may possibly do so in Taiwan).

3 The Cantonese romanization system that has been employed throughout this chapter is called Jyutping, i.e., 粵語拼音 *jyut6 jyu5 ping3 jam1*, which was devised by the Linguistics Society of Hong Kong (2002). Tone numbers can be written either in-line or superscript. Appendix 1 below compares

zau1 waa6/2 'speech of Guangzhou (the provincial capital)'; 香港話 *hoeng1 gong2 waa6/2* 'Hong Kong speech'; 唐話 *tong4 waa6/2* 'Tang speech', i.e. speech of the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), which Cantonese-speakers have traditionally regarded as the historical apex of Chinese civilization; 白話 *baak6 waa6/2* 'plain speech' (literally, 'white speech'); 粵語 *jyut6 jyu5* 'language of Jyut or Yue' (another, older name of Guangdong province).[4] Due to the heavy-handed promotion of Putonghua, China's official spoken language, throughout mainland China, Cantonese has been in steady decline in Guangzhou over the past few decades. In sharp contrast, in Hong Kong Cantonese predominates as the 'usual, daily' spoken language of almost 90% of the population;[5] for this reason Hong Kong has been quite rightly termed 'the Cantonese-speaking capital of the world';[6] in recognition of its status, this writer believes the most appropriate name for Cantonese is now 香港粵語 *hoeng1 gong2 jyut6 jyu5* 'Hong Kong Cantonese language'.

1.2 Distinctive phonological features of the Cantonese language

Among its special phonological traits are the syllable endings -m, -p, -t, and -k that have been retained from the Ancient Chinese language (but have become lost in Putonghua). While the doubling of the original four tone categories of Ancient Chinese to eight is found not only in Yue but also in some other Chinese dialects, one distinctive, definitive characteristic of many (but not all) Yue dialects[7] has been the split of the 陰入 *jam1 jap6* tone category (carried by syllables with stop endings -p, -t, -k) into two subcategories of 上陰入 *soeng6 jam1 jap6* 'High-stopped Tone, or Upper Yin Ru' and 下陰入 *haa6 jam1 jap6* 'Mid-stopped Tone, or Lower Yin Ru'; this development has been conditioned by vowel length for the standard reading pronunciations of the standard Chinese characters (with only a very few exceptions); that is, syllables with short vowels co-occur with the High–stopped tone 1 (上陰入 *soeng6 jam1 jap6*), while syllables with long vowels co-occur with the Mid-stopped tone 3 (下陰入 *haa6 jam1 jap6*). Other phonological features include the co-occurrence of colloquial morphosyllables with sonorant initials (m-, n-, ng-, l-) with

the symbols for this romanization system with the corresponding IPA symbols. Mandarin pronunciation is romanized in the official *Pīnyīn* system.

4 Bauer and Benedict 1997, xxxi.

5 Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2017.

6 Bolton 2011, 64.

7 Norman 1988, 217–218.

high register tones, and the use of the changed tone or 變音 *bin3 jam1* on syllables to derive additional words with different meanings.[8]

1.3 Distinctive morphological features of the Cantonese language

Morphological features include the occurrence of modal particles at the ends of utterances; for example, 吖嘛 *aa1 maa3*, 啊 *aa3*, 嚤 *bo3*, 㗎嘛 *gaa1 maa3*, 㗎 *gaa3*, 啩 *gwaa3*, 喇 *laa3*, 囉 *lo1*, 嚕 *lu3*, 嘛 *maa3*, 咩 *me1*, 喎 *wo3*, 喎 *wo5*, 啫 *ze1*, 唧 *zek1*, 之嘛 *zi1 maa3*, etc. Also known as discourse markers and sentence-final particles, these morphosyllables carry no semantic content in isolation but convey the speakers' feelings and attitudes towards their utterances in the language context, such as certainty, disbelief, disdain, dismay, doubt, exasperation, impatience, indisputableness, intimacy, irritation, surprise, etc. The series of aspect markers which also lack semantic content on their own and that are suffixed to verbs include 緊 *gan2*, 哩 *maai4*, 晒 s*aai3*, 咗 *zo2*, 住 *zyu6*, etc.

1.4 Defining the written Cantonese language

The question of how to define 'written Cantonese' naturally arises and deserves a satisfactory answer. One early and relatively broad approach presented in Bauer 1988 identified as written Cantonese any text that was deliberately written to be read by the Cantonese-speaking reader and included in it at least one Cantonese lexical item – the written form of which could be represented by a standard Chinese character, Cantonese character, or letter of the English alphabet.[9] However, today the author would clarify the definition by recognizing that such texts that include one or more Cantonese lexical items can be written in standard Chinese for the intended audience of Hong Kong Cantonese-speaking readers.

In defining written Cantonese, Shi accurately identified some of its features, but at the same time created the misunderstanding that its limited distribution has made it either obscene or funny: '... written Cantonese found in pornographic magazines and some comic books ... is a verbatim transcription of the dominant local dialect, using Cantonese syntactic structures and a lot of unique characters created

8 Bauer 2016c.

9 Bauer 1988, 254–255, 282.

for recording nothing else but Cantonese ...'[10] Indeed, as we will see as follows, there are numerous special linguistic features, including phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and social, which give Cantonese its unique identity and so distinguish it from all other Chinese varieties of southern China.[11]

A written text of colloquial Cantonese refers to Cantonese speech that has been uttered in an informal, casual context, and then has been written down; this would typically be done through the combination of both standard and non-standard (or so-called dialectal) Chinese characters, and possibly even with letters of the English alphabet. Despite the fact that the written form of Cantonese has never been standardized, Cantonese writers have developed and adopted some generally-recognized conventions that have accumulated over the decades and so have been functioning as the basis of written Cantonese. At the same time, however, we must recognize that how individual Cantonese words and lexical expressions are transcribed can vary from one writer to another and from one context to another.

1.5 Historical antecedents of written Cantonese

Hong Kong's contemporary written Cantonese language is based on a long and richly diverse record of historical antecedents; Snow has identified a variety of literary genres that number a dozen or so as follows:[12]

(1) vernacular Chinese texts associated with Buddhism for singing and chanting;
(2) 木魚書 *muk6 jyu4 syu1* 'wooden fish books', or 'novels in verse', with folk songs and popular songs and dating from at least the mid-seventeenth century;[13]
(3) transcripts of 木魚歌 *muk6 jyu4 go1* 'wooden fish songs' with popular stories on historical themes, Buddhist scriptures, popular plays, folk tales, etc.;
(4) 南音 *naam4 jam1* 'southern songs' which date from the early eighteenth century, were chanted or read, and also another name for 木魚書 *muk6 jyu4 syu1* because of the accompanying music;[14]
(5) 粵謳 *jyut6 au1* 'Cantonese love songs' from the early nineteenth century;[15]
(6) Cantonese textbooks for Cantonese-speakers;
(7) 粵劇 *jyut6 kek6* 'Cantonese operas';

10 Shi 2006, 299.
11 Bauer and Matthews 2017.
12 Snow 2004, 77–99.
13 Van der Loon 1991, 92.
14 Van der Loon 1991, 92.
15 Van der Loon 1991, 92.

(8) political articles published in newspapers in Guangzhou and Hong Kong in the early 1900's;
(9) literary works of communist propaganda written for the masses in the 1940s by the 廣東方言文藝研究組 *gwong2 dung1 fong1 jin4 man4 ngai6 jin4 gau3 zou2* 'Guangdong Dialect Arts Research Group';[16]
(10) 三及第 *saam1 kap6 dai6/2* which was a popular Hong Kong satirical writing style from the 1950s that mixed together elements from classical Chinese, Cantonese, plus standard Chinese;
(11) 小報 *siu2 bou3* 'mosquito press' (literally, 'little report') which were cheaply-priced four-page newspapers with entertaining gossip about movie stars and opera performers and popular in Hong Kong in the 1940s;
(12) works of fiction, such as popular paperback pocketbook novels that were published in Hong Kong in the late 1980s, e.g., the series entitled 小男人周記 *siu2 naam4 jan4 zau1 gei3* 'Diary of the Little Man' by 阿寬 *aa3 fun1* and 何劍聰 *ho4 gim3 cung1*.

1.6 A Cantonese letter as sample text of written Cantonese

In this section the author introduces a short, sample text of written Cantonese that comprises several lines from the middle section of the personal letter that was written in Cantonese and referred to at the beginning of this chapter; this text of seven numbered lines is presented below along with its romanized Cantonese pronunciation in the Jyutping system plus its English translation.[17] These lines are then repeated and followed by their corresponding explication. As for this letter's background, it was written by a young Hong Kong man to his parents while he was being detained in a prison in mainland China but located near Hong Kong; he had been part of a group of twelve young people who were intercepted and arrested by China's coastguard during their attempt to sail from Hong Kong to Taiwan in 2019. They had originally been arrested by the Hong Kong police for allegedly committing illegal acts while engaged in protests against the Hong Kong government, but they had been released from police custody and were out on bail when they had tried vainly to flee to Taiwan. In the letter that follows each line has been consecutively numbered for ease of reference.

1. Dear 爸媽，
dia1 baa1 maa1,

16 Snow 2004, 106–107.
17 *Apple Daily*, 20 November 2020, A8.

Dear Dad (and) Mom,
. . . . . ,

2. 你地放心 . . . ,
nei5 dei6 fong3 sam1,
You all rest easy,

3. 我係呢到無比人洽，
ngo5 hai6/2 ni1 dou3/6 mou4 bei2 jan4 hap6/1,
I haven't been bullied by anyone here,

4. 無比人打，
mou4 bei2 jan4 daa2,
I haven't been beaten by anyone,

5. 同倉嘅人都好融洽，
tung4 cong1 ge3 jan4 dou1 hou2 jung4 hap6,
my cellmates are very easy to get along with,

6. 食好瞓好。
sik6 hou2 fan3 hou2.
I eat well and sleep well.

7. 我好快返黎架喇。
ngo5 hou2 faai3 faan2/1 lai4 gaa3 laa3.
I'm coming back very soon.
. . . . .

As a consequence of the fact that the written form of the Cantonese language has never undergone any formal process of standardization, we frequently observe variation in the graphs with which colloquial Cantonese lexical items are transcribed; that is, the same 'word' (or more accurately, morphosyllable) can be written with two or more different sinographs (Chinese characters), and even letters of the English alphabet. In our sample text we find several examples of variation between how certain lexical items have been written and their more common or typical written forms. Furthermore, the predominant variation that is observed here is the borrowing of standard Chinese characters with homophonous (or nearly homophonous) pronunciations to transcribe certain colloquial Cantonese lexical items which are otherwise typically written with non-standard Cantonese characters, and in some cases with other standard Chinese characters that have similar pronunciations.

From Line 2: 你地 *nei5 dei6*; the first standard Chinese character 你 *nei5* means 'you', while the second standard one 地 *dei6* means 'earth, ground';[18] the second character has been borrowed solely for its homophony to transcribe the colloquial pluralizing morpheme for pronouns *dei6* which is commonly written with the non-standard Cantonese character 哋 *dei6*.[19]

From Line 2: 係 *hai6/2* 'to be at, in, on (a place)'; the standard character's original meaning is 'to be connected; to be';[20] it has been borrowed for its near homophony to transcribe the colloquial preposition *hai2* which is commonly written with the non-standard Cantonese character 喺 *hai2*.[21]

From Line 2: 呢到 *ni1 dou3/6* (for *dou3/6* the original tone 3 has changed to tone 6 for its usage in this particular context); the original pronunciation and meaning of standard character 呢 is *nei4* (*ní*) 'heavy woolen cloth', while the standard character 到 *dou3* (*dào*) means 'to arrive';[22] however, in their usage here both characters have been borrowed for their near homophony to transcribe colloquial Cantonese *ni1 dou6* ' here' which is commonly written as 呢度 *ni1 dou6*,[23] where 度 *dou6* means 'linear measure; degree'.[24]

From Lines 3 and 4: 無 *mou4* 'nothing, nil; no; not have';[25] this standard Chinese character has been borrowed for its near homophony and essentially identical meaning to transcribe colloquial Cantonese *mou5* which is commonly written with the non-standard Cantonese character 冇 *mou5*.[26]

From Line 3: 洽 *hap6/1* (the original tone 6 has changed to tone 1); this standard character's original meaning is 'arrange with somebody, consult',[27] but in its usage here it has been borrowed solely for its near homophony to transcribe the colloquial Cantonese morphosyllable *hap1* 'to bully' which is commonly written with another borrowed standard Chinese character 恰 *hap1*;[28] the standard meaning of 恰 is 'appropriate, proper'.[29]

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18 Yao 2000, 477, 125.
19 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 93.
20 Yao 2000, 694.
21 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 105.
22 Yao 2000, 477, 118.
23 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 303.
24 Yao 2000, 145.
25 Yao 2000, 683.
26 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 73.
27 Yao 2000, 523.
28 Bauer 2020, 422; Hutton and Bolton 2005,177; Zhang, Ni, and Pun 2018, 261.
29 Yao 2000, 523.

From Line 4: 比 *bei2*; this standard Chinese character's original meaning is 'comparison; comparative marker',[30] but in its usage here it has been borrowed solely for its homophony to transcribe the colloquial Cantonese morphosyllable *bei2* 'by' (in passive construction) which is commonly written with two other borrowed standard characters, i.e., either 俾 'in order to; so that' or 畀 *bei3/2* 'to give'.[31]

From Line 5: 同倉嘅人 *tung4 cong1 ge3 jan4* 'cellmates'; in this phrase the Cantonese lexical item of interest to us is the colloquial grammatical morphosyllable *ge3* that indicates the genitive relationship between 同倉 *tung4 cong1* 'same cell' and 人 *jan4* 'person'; it is written with the non-standard Cantonese character 嘅 (the variant form 嘢 is also in use).

From Line 5: 都好融洽 *dou1 hou2 jung4 hap6* 'are all very easy to get along with'; in this clause the item of interest to us is Cantonese 好 *hou2* which can convey such meanings as 'good', 'very', 'well', etc. In the present context 好 *hou2* functions as the adverbial intensifier 'very'; its corresponding semantic and functional equivalent in modern standard written Chinese is 很 *han2* (*hěn*) which typically does not occur in colloquial Cantonese speech and writing.

From Line 6: 食 *sik6* 'to eat'; although this standard Chinese character is used in both modern standard written Chinese and Putonghua, it has different collocations; the semantic and functional equivalent of Cantonese 食 *sik6* is standard Chinese 吃 *hek3* (*chī*).

From Line 6: 瞓 *fan3* 'to sleep'; this colloquial Cantonese morphosyllable is written with a non-standard Cantonese character; its corresponding semantic and functional equivalent in modern standard written Chinese is 睡 *seoi6* (*shuì*).

From Line 7: 黎 *lai4*; this standard character's original meaning is 'multitude; host',[32] and it has been borrowed solely for its homophony to transcribe the colloquial Cantonese morphosyllable *lai4* 'to come' which is more commonly written with the non-standard Cantonese character 嚟 *lai4* .[33]

From Line 7: the original meaning of the character 架 *gaa3* is 'frame, shelf',[34] and it has been borrowed solely for its homophony to represent the colloquial Cantonese 'utterance-final particle for emphasis' *gaa3*, which is commonly written with the non-standard Cantonese character 㗎 *gaa3*.[35]

30 Yao 2000, 31.

31 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 56. The original tone 3 of 畀 *bei3/2* has changed to tone 2.

32 Yao 2000, 389.

33 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 119.

34 Yao 2000, 295.

35 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 233.

In sum, these several lines extracted from the Cantonese letter reflect several distinctive features of the written Cantonese language: some standard Chinese characters that are semantically equivalent in both standard Chinese and written Cantonese, but they have different collocations in written Cantonese; Cantonese characters have been created to write colloquial Cantonese morphosyllables; standard Chinese characters are borrowed solely for their pronunciations (and their meanings are ignored) to write homophonous (or nearly homophonous) colloquial Cantonese morphosyllables.

2 The Cantonese lexicon

2.1 Identifying the Cantonese lexicon

As a result of numerous, accumulated differences in their phonological systems, lexicons, semantics, grammatical systems, etc., Cantonese and Putonghua/Mandarin are two mutually unintelligible spoken Chinese varieties. The Cantonese lexicon refers to those lexical items that are distinctively Cantonese in terms of their written forms, pronunciations, meanings, usages, collocations, etc.; while the same individual Chinese characters and lexical items may occur in the spoken and written forms of both modern standard Chinese and Cantonese, at the same time, however, their meanings and collocations differ in the two linguistic varieties. It comes as no surprise that written texts of colloquial Cantonese can be almost unintelligible to literate Mandarin-speakers from Beijing and Taipei.

2.2 Colloquial Cantonese vocabulary

Colloquial Cantonese speech includes a number of vocabulary items that are regarded as giving the language its distinctively Cantonese identity; interestingly and curiously enough, these words cannot be etymologically related to their semantic equivalents in standard Chinese; and, as we can see in the following examples, some of them are written with non-standard, dialect characters: e.g., 骲 *beu6* ‘to bump, hit, jostle, push against (someone or something) with a part of one’s body, such as the shoulder, hips, or elbow’; 𨳍 *cat6* ‘dick, shlong. i.e. vulgar term for male sex organ’; 揼 *dam3* ‘to droop, hang down’; 揼 *dap6* ‘to beat, pound’; 掟 *deng3* ‘to throw (at a target)’; 啲 *di1* ‘plural marker for nouns; marker of comparative degree for stative verbs’; 瞓 *fan3* ‘to sleep’; 曱甴 *gaat6 zaat6/2* ‘cockroach; derogatory term used by Hong Kong police for protestors’; 𨅝 *jaang3* ‘to kick off’; 閪 *hai1* ‘cunt, i.e.

vulgar term for female sex organ'; 屙 *ke1* 'shit'; 佢 *keoi5* 'he, she, it'; 𡁻 *kwaak1* 'loop, circle'; 嚟 *lai4* 'to come'; 冇 *mou5* 'to not have; no'; 腍 *nam4* 'soft, tender'; 啱 *ngaam1* 'to be correct, suitable, all right, good'; 踋 *pe5* 'to stagger'; 嘥 *saai1* 'to waste'; 氹 *tam5* 'puddle'; 搲 *we2* 'to scratch'; 咗 *zo2* 'verbal marker of completed action'.[36]

Cantonese lexical items can be found transcribed in some relatively mundane places, such as my local supermarket receipt which the cashier hands over to me after I have paid for my groceries. A couple of recent receipts included the following distinctively Cantonese lexical items (which have been translated here into English and followed by their standard Chinese equivalents that are enclosed in parentheses): 藍桑子 *laam4 song1 zi2* 'blueberries' (*lánméi* 藍梅); 進口椰菜仔 *zeon3 hau2 je4 coi3 zai2* 'imported Brussels sprouts' (*qiúyá gānlán* 球芽甘藍); 美國西芹 *mei5 gwok3 sai1 kan4* 'American celery' (*Měiguó qíncài* 美國芹菜); 芫茜 *jyun4 sai1* 'coriander, cilantro' (*yánsui* 芫荽); 茄瓜 *ke4 gwaa1* 'eggplant' (*qiézi* 茄子); 無核青提子 *mou4 wat6 cing1 tai4 zi2* 'seedless green grapes' (*wúhé qīng pútáo* 無核青葡萄); 泰國包裝青檸 *taai3 gwok3 baau1 zong1 ceng1 ning4/2* 'pack of limes from Thailand' (*qīng níngméng* 青檸檬, *láimǔ* 萊姆, *suānchéng* 酸橙); 泰國毛茄 *taai3 gwok3 mou4 ke4/2* 'okra from Thailand' (*qiūkuí* 秋葵); 新奇士大裝鮮橙 *san1 kei4 si6/2 daai6 zong1 sin1 caang4/2* 'Sunkist large fresh oranges' (*chéngzi* 橙子, *júzi* 橘子); 薯仔 *syu4 zai2* 'potatoes' (*tǔdòu* 土豆); 無核提子乾 *mou4 wat6 tai4 zi2 gon1* 'seedless raisins' (*wúhé pútáogān* 無核葡萄乾); 翠玉瓜 *ceoi3 juk6 gwaa1* 'zucchini' (*lǜpí mìshēng húlu* 綠皮密生西葫蘆). There was also one standard Chinese item on the list: 菠蘿 *bo1 lo4* (*bōluó*) 'pineapple'. In addition, several English loanwords appeared as well: 比爾芝士 *bei2 ji5 zi1 si6/2* 'brie cheese'; 青奇異果 *cing1 kei4 ji6 gwo2* 'green kiwi'; 荷蘭長啤梨 *ho4 laan4/1 coeng4 be1 lei4/2* 'conference pear from Holland'; 馬來西亞車厘茄 *maa5 loi4 sai1 aa3 ce1 lei4 ke4/2* 'Malaysian cherry tomatoes'; 士多啤梨 *si6 do1 be1 lei4/2* 'strawberries', and 芝麻梳打 *zi1 maa4 so1 daa2* 'sesame soda crackers'.[37]

2.3 Spoken and written forms of Cantonese words

In analyzing the Cantonese lexicon, we can distinguish between two forms of its words, viz., the phonetic shapes with which they occur in the spoken language, on the one hand, and the written forms with which they are transcribed in Cantonese writing, on the other. Furthermore, from the objective point of view of linguistics in contrast to what many literate speakers of the Chinese varieties believe, spoken

36 Cheung and Bauer 2002; Bauer 2020.

37 Bauer 2020.

words and Chinese characters belong to two different, separate, albeit related systems. Although one might think that it should go without saying, the author believes he had better say it here anyway: *the Chinese characters do not equal the Cantonese language* – or even the standard spoken Chinese language, or any other Chinese speech variety. This is because the scope of the spoken Chinese language is not only far broader than the set of Chinese characters for writing it, but also because speech is dynamic by constantly changing and evolving. However, even more importantly, as we will see in the analysis and discussion of written Cantonese that follows, we must face the inescapable fact that the Chinese characters on their own are simply inadequate for unambiguously transcribing Cantonese speech in its fully expressed form. The Cantonese language includes a number of indigenous morphosyllables which cannot be linked to their etymological (or original) Chinese characters. How can these seemingly 'unwritable' Cantonese morphosyllables be written? As will be explained in more detail in the relevant sections that follow below, there have been essentially four solutions for writing such unwritable lexical items:

(1) Borrowing standard characters for their similar or homophonous pronunciations (and ignoring their associated meanings);
(2) Creating Cantonese characters;
(3) Using individual letters of the English alphabet or combinations of them for their homophonous or similar pronunciations as a kind of *ad hoc* romanization;
(4) Using the 'empty-box' □ as the last resort to indicate the lack of a Chinese character, either standard or non-standard (dialectal), with which to write the morphosyllable, and also as a kind of place-holder in a line of Chinese text.

It is a given in linguistics that spoken language is primary, but written language is secondary. While young children learn to speak the language they hear being spoken around them without really needing direct instruction on pronunciation, lexicon, and syntax (although caregivers may still give them some help with these), they do need to go to school to learn from their teachers how to read and write the language(s) they speak.

In etymology, i.e., the study of the origins of words, there is the saying, *Every word has a history of its own*. We could paraphrase this by saying simply, *Every word has its own story*. In the course of writing my *ABC Cantonese-English Comprehensive Dictionary* (Bauer 2020), I have learned first-hand just how true this is; in the case of some Cantonese lexical expressions their stories have turned out to be long and convoluted, but nonetheless, they are almost always quite interesting.

2.4 Stratification of the Cantonese lexicon

Broadly speaking, in terms of the etymologies (origins) and distributions of lexical items by registers in the spoken Cantonese language and the corresponding written forms of lexical items, we can analyze the Hong Kong Cantonese lexicon as comprising a series of three main layers or strata as follows:

(13) The **Hong Kong Standard Chinese Literary Layer** includes many lexical items that overlap with those in the modern standard written Chinese language of mainland China; however, while some of these items have identical meanings in both Cantonese and modern standard Chinese, at the same time their collocations can differ significantly when they are used in Hong Kong Cantonese; in addition, there are some distinctively Hong Kong lexical items that do not occur in standard Chinese, or if they do so, they have quite different meanings in Cantonese. Further, the Cantonese pronunciations of these standard lexical items that are shared by the two varieties differ so much from Mandarin that they are unintelligible to Mandarin speakers who do not understand Cantonese speech.

(14) The **Colloquial Cantonese Layer** includes uniquely Cantonese words that are etymologically unrelated to their semantic equivalents in modern standard written Chinese; some of these items are written with nonstandard, so-called 'dialect' characters, and some with standard Chinese characters that have been borrowed solely for their homophonous (or nearly homophonous) pronunciations; furthermore, we observe that some colloquial words are being written with standard Chinese characters that have been borrowed solely for their associated meanings but are read/pronounced with the semantically-equivalent colloquial Cantonese morphosyllables; there are even a few colloquial morphosyllables that are written with English letters in a kind of *ad hoc* Cantonese romanization of last resort, as there do not seem to be any suitable Chinese characters with which to write them.

(15) The **English Loanwords Layer** comprises lexical items that have been borrowed from the English language with which Cantonese has been in intimate, unbroken historical contact ever since the late seventeenth century when English-speaking traders from Britain first arrived in South China to buy China's exports of tea, silk, porcelain, pewterware, silver, carved ivory, and so forth; as a result of this sustained contact over the last few centuries, the author believes that no other Chinese variety has been more influenced by a European language than Cantonese. However, we do note that its earliest, sustained contact with a European language seems to have been with Portuguese, as Portuguese traders had arrived in South China before the British and established their enclave of Macau in 1557; the influence of Portuguese on Cantonese appears to be limited

to the lexicon of the Macau variety.[38] As already stated, written Cantonese has never been standardized, so we observe these loanwords, which number well over 700, are being written in several different ways as follows:[39]

(a) Phonetically transliterated using Chinese characters with suitable Cantonese pronunciations; e.g. 巴士 *baa1 si6/2* 'bus'.
(b) Semantically translated using standard Chinese characters with appropriate meanings; e.g., 樽頸 *zeon1 geng2* ('bottle' + 'neck') 'bottle neck, as in congested road traffic'.
(c) Phonetic transliteration combined with semantic translation; e.g., 沙甸魚 *saa1 din1 jyu4/2* 'sardine' (魚 *jyu4/2* 'fish').
(d) Transcribed in a kind of *ad hoc* romanization with individual English letters pronounced with Cantonese morphosyllables; e.g., BB *bi4 bi1* 'baby'.
(e) Transcribed with their original English spellings which are pronounced with Cantonese morphosyllables; e.g., CUT *kat1* 'cut'.

Additional examples of these five categories of the written forms of English loanwords are presented and analyzed in more detail in a later section that follows below.

Lexical items from all three of these layers as listed above typically occur mixed together in the speech of Cantonese speakers, and they are not restricted to occurring in the speech of particular speakers. However, we observe that as the speech register increases in formality, there is a corresponding increase in the numbers of lexical items from the standard or literary Chinese layer that occur in speech; and *vice versa*, as the speech register becomes more informal, there is a corresponding increase in the number of colloquial lexical items in speech.

As for just how Cantonese words (and other morphosyllables) are written with Chinese characters and letters of the English alphabet, our closer inspection reveals that the lexicon is relatively more complex than the general outline just sketched above. The following section on written Cantonese provides a more in-depth systematic analysis of the processes and principles on which the written forms of Cantonese words are based.

38 Sun 2006.
39 Bauer 2010.

3 Analysis of written Cantonese

As has already been pointed out above, among the various regional linguistic varieties that are being spoken today in China, the Hong Kong Cantonese variety can be regarded as extraordinary: it distinguishes itself by being written with its own highly conventionalized form. This is to say, not only is Cantonese a spoken language in Hong Kong, but it currently is also a widely written one as well.[40] The traditional Chinese phrase 我手寫我口 *ngo5 sau2 se2 ngo5 hau2* '(literally) my hand writes my mouth', that is, 'I write the way I speak', was first advocated by the Qing dynasty poet 黃遵憲 Huang Zunxian, and then it later became a slogan of the May 4th Movement (beginning in 1919) which called for 白話文 *baak6 waa6/2 man4* 'colloquial spoken (Chinese) language' to replace the old style 文言文 *man4 jin4 man4* 'classical style of written (Chinese) language' as the language of modern Chinese literature. Indeed, this sentence *I write the way I speak* expresses precisely what Cantonese-speakers are doing – writing down pretty much *verbatim* with Chinese characters in combination with letters of the English alphabet the vocabulary and grammar of their Cantonese speech. This is quite unusual in the context of Cantonese lexicography, as it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that the written form of Cantonese has never undergone the formal process of standardization; nonetheless, the compilation and publication of numerous Cantonese dictionaries, grammars, glossaries, stories, and other forms of documentation have promoted its development and allowed it to accumulate over time relatively consistent conventions which writers have generally adopted and adhered to in producing their texts so that they are intelligible to their Cantonese-speaking readers.

From this writer's point of view, one fact that makes written Cantonese especially remarkable is that its conventions are not explicitly taught to schoolchildren in Hong Kong schools (and neither is any kind of Cantonese romanization for that matter); nonetheless, Cantonese-speaking schoolchildren have still been able to pick these conventions up informally and so learn to read and write Cantonese through their contact with and exposure to its texts that pervade the domains in which written language are used, such as advertising, personal correspondence, newspapers, popular novels, comic books, internet chats, Hong Kong government posters, and so on. Indeed, it can be pointed out here that learning how to read Cantonese texts requires that the learner be able to speak Cantonese, so that both speaking and reading Cantonese go hand in hand to reinforce each other.

40 Bauer 1988, 2006b, 2016a, 2018b; Cheung and Bauer 2002; Chin 1997; Snow 2004.

3.1 Motivations for writing in Cantonese

Why do some Cantonese-speakers deliberately choose to transform their Cantonese language into written form? Cheung and Bauer have answered this question as follows:[41]

> . . . writing in Cantonese is perceived by writers and readers as conveying the writer's message with a greater degree of informality, directness, intimacy, friendliness, casualness, freedom, modernity, and authenticity than writing it in standard Chinese, which is the formal language the Hong Kong Cantonese-speaker learns to read and write in school, but its spoken counterpart s/he does not ordinarily use when speaking with coworkers, friends, and family members.

As for the process of transforming Cantonese speech into its corresponding written form, we must recognize there is a mismatch between the inventory of Cantonese morphosyllables that occur in speech and the standard Chinese characters. By this I mean we cannot link up each and every Cantonese morphosyllable in the spoken language with its etymologically-related standard Chinese character because we simply do not know what some of these characters are (despite the best efforts of scholars who concentrate on 本字考 *bun2 zi6 haau2* 'investigation into the original Chinese character'). This mismatch or disjunct has everything to do with the very early formation and historically-complex evolution through language contact of the Cantonese language with various Sinitic and non-Sinitic languages. Furthermore, because there are more Cantonese morphosyllables in the Cantonese syllabary than there are standard Chinese characters with suitable pronunciations (whether or not etymologically related) for writing the morphosyllables,[42] writing Cantonese words has been made that much more difficult.

It is interesting for us to note that the Hong Kong community's attitudes toward written Cantonese can at best be described as ambivalent – *accepting* to some extent but not necessarily *approving*. Some decades ago when the author was conducting research for his Ph.D. dissertation on Hong Kong Cantonese phonetic variation and change,[43] he had an unforgettable experience: as part of his research work to collect texts of tape-recorded Cantonese speech, he requested the participants in his study to read aloud various kinds of research instruments, one of which was a story that was written out in Cantonese and included some Chinese characters whose pronunciations were related to the phonological variables that were being investigated. When this story was given to one of the subjects and asked to read it

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41 Cheung and Bauer 2002, 4.

42 Bauer 2016b.

43 Bauer 1982.

aloud, he looked at the story with some surprise and then said as if everyone should know, 'Cantonese is not a written language'. His point was that written Cantonese is not the proper standard Chinese language, it is not taught in school, and that in comparison to modern standard written Chinese in which important documents are transcribed, some people typically believe that any text of written Cantonese is not to be taken seriously. And he was and would still be quite correct in saying this. Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the fact that the spoken Cantonese language does indeed have its written counterpart, even though it has never undergone the formal process of standardization, and no one actually learns how to read it in school.

3.2 Distinguishing between Cantonese words and Chinese characters

As for Cantonese words in the spoken language, they exist independently of how they are written. Yes, we are quite interested in knowing how the words are written with Chinese characters (and, as it turns out, English letters), but that is not necessarily the most important aspect of a word. In the case of Cantonese, there are many words that have two or more written forms, and we may not be able to determine which one is 'better' or 'correct' or 'original' or 'proper'. Which Chinese character should be used to write a Cantonese word? This question which one often sees being raised on the Internet is usually framed as: what is the 'correct' or 'original' Chinese character (本字 *bun2 zi6*) that should be used to write a particular colloquial Cantonese word? The questioner may have paraphrased its meaning, and even transcribed it in a kind of *ad hoc* romanization in order to represent its pronunciation.

From the point of view of the lexicographer, that the word has a written form certainly makes it more convenient to work with that word and keep track of it. Fortunately, in the case of Cantonese, we are not limited to transcribing its words with Chinese characters; we can also write them down with Cantonese romanization, and very often a particular word's romanized form is more accurate in representing its pronunciation and so more useful to us than the Chinese characters with which it is written, since characters can have multiple pronunciations and different meanings associated with them.

In analyzing the written form of Cantonese, we should keep in mind that the conventions of written Cantonese cannot produce a fully accurate transcription of the spoken language but only an approximate representation of it. As matters currently stand, we will discover in the following discussion that the Chinese characters are not fully adequate for writing the Cantonese language. Writers have been doing the best they can with the *ad hoc* conventions that they have at hand, yet they still must cope with gaps in the tools that are available to them. To enhance and

improve the writing system, Cantonese writers have even taken to supplementing the Chinese characters with letters of the English alphabet to romanize the pronunciations of some seemingly 'unwritable' Cantonese morphosyllables, and so give them form, as mentioned above.

4 Twelve basic principles of written Cantonese

On closer examination and more specific analysis of texts of written Cantonese, we find that at least twelve basic principles underlie written Cantonese and demonstrate how the above five processes function. Taken together these two approaches to the analysis of written Cantonese can help us better understand its present state and ongoing developments.

4.1 Traditional usage of the standard Chinese characters

The first principle recognizes that standard Chinese and Cantonese share many vocabulary items in common; written Cantonese uses the same standard Chinese characters and their meanings to transcribe these identical lexical items which generally have the same usages and collocations in both varieties. Both written Cantonese and modern standard Chinese share the same lexical items with the same meanings and usages:

八月 *baat3 jyut6* 'August' (standard Chinese *bāyuè*)
隨時隨地 ceoi4 si4 ceoi4 dei6 'at all times and places' (*suí shí suí dì*)
飛機 *fei1 gei1* 'airplane' (*fēijī*)
女人 neoi5 jan4/2 'woman' (*nǚrén*)
銀行 *ngan4 hong4* 'bank (financial institution)' (*yínháng*)
星期一 *sing1 kei4 jat1* 'Monday' (*xīngqīyī*)

4.2 Phoneticization (1): Borrowing Chinese characters for their pronunciations to transcribe Cantonese morphosyllables

The second principle of phoneticization recognizes that standard Chinese characters are employed – or 'borrowed' – solely for their pronunciations and their original meanings are completely ignored, to transcribe homophonous but etymologically and semantically-unrelated Cantonese morphosyllables (i.e., both free and bound morphemes). Two types of phoneticization are distinguished in this study, with the

first type applying to indigenous Cantonese lexical items, and the second type to English loanwords as described in the following section. Phoneticization is actually one of the so-called six traditional principles of character formation, or 六書 *luk6 syu1*, namely, 假借 *gaa2 ze3* 'character loan' (literally, 'false borrowing'). Some examples of the first type of phoneticization are as follows:

呢度 *ni1 dou6* 'here' = standard Chinese 這裏 *ze3 leoi5* (*zhèlǐ*); cf. standard Chinese 呢 *ne1* (*ní*) 'heavy woolen cloth' + 度 *dou6* (*dù*) 'degree; pass'.
唔 *m4* 'no; not' = standard Chinese 不 *bat1* (*bù*); cf. standard Chinese 唔 *ng4* (*ňg*) 'exclamation particle'.
邊 *bin1* 'where; which; who' = standard Chinese 哪 *naa5* (*nǎ*); 誰 *seoi4* (*shuí*); cf. standard Chinese 邊 *bin1* (*biān*) 'side'.
使 *sai2* 'to spend; to need (negative context)' = standard Chinese 花 *faa1* (*huā*); 需要 *seoi1 jiu3*; cf. standard Chinese 使 *si2*, *sai2* (*shǐ*) 'to send, use, cause'.

4.3 Phoneticization (2): Borrowing Chinese characters for their pronunciations to transcribe English loanwords

Chinese characters are also borrowed for their pronunciations but with their meanings completely ignored in order to transliterate phonetically words that have been borrowed from English. This is to say that the majority of English loanwords are typically adopted and represented in written Cantonese via phonetic transliteration (semantic translation is also used but less frequently): Standard (and non-standard) Chinese characters are borrowed solely for their pronunciations in order to approximate the pronunciations of the English loanwords, but the original meanings of the Chinese characters do not apply in this context (just as in case of indigenous Cantonese words, as explained in the previous section).

Some examples of English loanwords that are phonetically transliterated with standard and non-standard Chinese characters are as follows:

巴士 *ba1 si6/2* 'bus' <= bus
波士 *bo1 si6/2* 'boss' <= *boss*
的士 *dik1 si6/2* 'taxi' <= taxi
科文 *fo1 man4/2* 'foreman' <= foreman
士多 si6 do1 'store' <= *store*
天拿水 *tin1 naa4/2 seoi2* '(paint) thinner' <= *thinner*
貼士 *tip3/1 si6/2* 'tips' <= tips
威吔 *wai1 jaa2* 'wire' <= *wire*

4.4 Indigenization (1): Creation of (non-standard) Cantonese characters

As has been noted above, Cantonese and Putonghua are two mutually unintelligible Chinese languages; a major contributor separating them is their different lexicons. Cantonese includes numerous lexical items that are etymologically unrelated to their semantic and functional equivalents in Putonghua, so the corresponding standard Chinese characters are not suitable for writing the Cantonese words (except in some special cases, as will be described below). As a result, Cantonese characters have been specially created by Cantonese writers to transcribe indigenous Cantonese morphosyllables which cannot be etymologically linked to their semantic and functional equivalents in modern standard Chinese. This kind of Chinese character formation typically follows traditional principles that involve combining together a semantic component (or radical, also known as semantophore) with a phonetic component (pronunciation indicator, also known as phonophore). When standard Chinese characters are put to use in this way solely for their pronunciations, their original meanings are ignored. Many colloquial Cantonese characters have been created by adding the so-called 'mouth' radical (which is radical number 30 口 hau2 'mouth') to existing standard Chinese characters as demonstrated by the following examples:

哋 [<= 口 + 地 *dei6* 'earth; land; soil'] *dei2* (1) 'suffix for reduplicated stative verbs', 紅紅哋 *hung4 hung4/2 dei2* 'somewhat red'; (2) *dei6* 'plural marker for pronouns and 人 *jan4*', 我哋 *ngo5 dei6* 'we, us', 你哋 *nei5 dei6* 'you (plural)', 佢哋 *keoi5 dei6* 'they, them', 人哋 *jan4 dei6* 'people (in general)'; cf. standard Chinese 們 *mun4* (*men*).
啲 [<= 口 + 的 *dik1* 'target'] *di1* (1) 'plural marker for nouns', 啲學生 *di1 hok6 saang1* 'the students', cf. standard Chinese 些 *se1* (*xie*); (2) 'marker of comparative degree', 好啲 *hou2 di1* 'better', cf. standard Chinese 點 *dim2* (*diǎn*).
嘢 [<= 口 + 野 *je5* 'wild'] *je5* 'thing', cf. standard Chinese 東西 *dung1 sai1* (*dōngxi*).
㗎 [<= 口 + 依 *ji1* 'depend on'] *ji1* in 㗎家 *ji1 gaa1* 'now', cf. standard Chinese 現在 *jin6 zoi6* (*xiànzài*).
靚 [<= 口 + 靚 Cantonese *leng3* 'pretty', standard Chinese *zing6* (*jìng*) 'to dress up'] 靚 *leng1* 'young man, teenager; young triad member'.
啱 [<= 口 + 岩 *ngaam4* 'rock; cliff'] *ngaam1* 'right; correct; suitable'.
𡃶 [<= 口 + 趙 *ziu6* 'a surname'] *zeu6* 'to screw, have sex with (someone); to beat up, strike, hit (someone)'.
咗 [<= 口 + 左 *zo2* 'left (side)'] *zo2* 'aspect marker of completed action', cf. standard Chinese 了 *liu5* (*liǎo*, *le*).

Some additional examples of Cantonese characters that have been invented to transcribe Cantonese lexical items (which are etymologically unrelated to their semantic equivalents in standard Chinese) and English loanwords are as follows:

𥄫 *gap6* 'to keep an eye on, fix one's gaze on, closely watch (someone or something)'.
喼 *gip1* 'bag, grip' <= English *grip*.
䁯 *gwat6* 'to glare at (someone or something); to glance at (someone or something)'.
咹 *hon1* 'horn, as of a motor vehicle' <= English *horn*.
咭 *kaat1* 'card' <= English *card*.
佢 *keoi5* 'he, she, it', cf. standard Chinese 他 *taa1* (*tā*).
𠺢 *ko1* 'call' <= English *call* .
𨋢 *lip1* 'elevator, lift' <= (British) English *lift*, (American English) *elevator*.
冇 *mou5* 'not have', cf. standard Chinese 沒有 *mut6 jau5* (*méiyǒu*).
啱 *ngaam1* 'to be correct, suitable'
睃 *zong1* 'to peep at, peek at, spy on, surreptitiously look at (someone or something); to steal a glance at (someone or something)'.

4.5 Indigenization (2): Use of variant (non-standard) Chinese characters

A second type of indigenization arises from the use of variant but non-standard Chinese characters: while modern standard Chinese and Cantonese share the same etymologically-related morphosyllables which have the same (or ultimately related) meanings in both varieties, some Hong Kong Cantonese writers may write them with variant Chinese characters that are considered non-standard. The number of such variant sinographs is not large. The use of some non-standard variants is exemplified as follows:

𧘹 *fu3* 'trousers, pants' = standard Chinese 褲子, 裤子 *kùzi*.
梘 *gaan2* 'soap; alkali' = standard Chinese 碱 *jiǎn*.
韮 *gau2* in 韮菜 *gau2 coi3* 'Chinese chives' = standard Chinese 韭 *jiǔ*.
杧菓 *mong1 gwo2* 'mango' = standard Chinese 芒果 *mángguǒ*.
餂 *sit6* 'to lose (money), suffer a loss (as in business)' = standard Chinese 蝕, 蚀 *shí*.
䞍 *zaan6* 'to earn, make (money)' = standard Chinese 賺, 赚 *zhuàn*.

4.6 Indigenization (3): Non-standard usage of standard Chinese characters

The third kind of indigenization is the use in written Cantonese of some standard Chinese characters whose meanings are similar or even identical in both varieties, but in written Cantonese these Chinese characters have developed quite different usages and collocations than are ordinarily associated with them in standard Chinese. In the following examples we observe that written Cantonese and standard Chinese use completely different basic vocabulary items that are semantically equivalent:

係 *hai6* 'to be' = standard Chinese 是 *shì* 'to be' (= Cantonese *si6*; 係 *xì* 'to be').
飲 *jam2* 'to drink' = standard Chinese 喝 *hē* 'to drink' (= Cantonese *hot3*; 飲 *yǐn* 'to drink').
衫 *saam1* 'clothing; dress; shirt' = standard Chinese 衣服 *yīfú* (= Cantonese *ji1 fuk6*; 衫 *shān* 'upper garment').
食 *sik6* 'to eat' = standard Chinese 吃 *chī* (= Cantonese *hek3*; 食 *shí* 'to eat').
睇 *tai2* 'to see, watch, look at, gaze at, observe; to read (silently)' = standard Chinese 看 *kàn* (= Cantonese *hon3*; 睇 *dì* 'to look askance, cast a sidelong glance').

4.7 Indigenization (4): Revival of old Chinese characters

Some Chinese characters which have come to be thought of as 'Cantonese characters' have not necessarily been 'created' by Cantonese-speakers, but rather they have been revived. This fourth kind of indigenization refers to the revival (or recycling) in written Cantonese of some old, abandoned Chinese characters that occurred in earlier stages of the Chinese language and that can be found recorded in old dictionaries of various kinds, for example, the 說文解字 *Shuōwén jiězì* (100 CE, 121), 廣韻 *Guǎngyùn* (1008 CE), 集韻 *Jíyùn* (1037 CE), 康熙字典 *Kāngxī zìdiǎn* (1716 CE),[44] and so on. However, such old characters, for whatever reasons, have fallen by the wayside over time and are now rarely or never used in the modern standard written Chinese language; however, some of them may still be listed as entries in standard Chinese dictionaries but specially marked as 方 *fong1* (*fāng*) 'dialectal (usage)' for the benefit of users who speak regional Chinese varieties, such as Cantonese.[45] In addition, the meanings of some of these old, revived characters may have changed with the passage of time as far as their usage in Hong Kong Chinese and Hong Kong written Cantonese is concerned; some examples of these revived Chinese characters follow below:

煲 *bou1* 'a pot; to boil, cook in a pot, saucepan' = standard Chinese 鍋 *guō*; 燒開 *shāo kāi*, 煮 *zhǔ*.
畀 *bei3/2* 'to give' = standard Chinese 給 *gěi* (畀 'to give' from Zhou Dynasty 900–700 BCE.[46]
壆 *bok3* 'dike, bund' = standard Chinese 堤防 *dī fáng*; occurs in 路壆 *lou6 bok3* '(roadside) curb' = standard Chinese 路邊 *lù biān*; 石壆 *sek6 bok3* '(roadside) curb; ledge' = standard Chinese 路邊 *lùbiān*; 壁架 *bìjià*.
入禀 *jap6 ban2* 'to bring a lawsuit to a court' = standard Chinese 提起訴訟 *tíqǐ sùsòng*.[47]

44 For an overview see Liu Yeqiu 1984. For the Kangxi dictionary see Zhang et al 1987.
45 See e.g. *Xinhua Zidian* 1972; Yao 2000.
46 See Karlgren 1957, 141, 521.a.
47 Karlgren 1957, 177–178, 668a–b, where the correct form is said to be 稟 *bán*, while 禀 is described as vulgar; in standard Chinese 禀 *bǐng* 'to report to a superior'.

4.8 Indigenization (5): Reading Chinese characters for their meanings and not with their etymological pronunciations

The fifth kind of indigenization is observed when Cantonese writers employ some modern standard Chinese characters that are read (i.e. pronounced) with their semantically-equivalent but etymologically-unrelated colloquial Cantonese morphosyllables which replace the standard, historically-derived Cantonese readings of these standard Chinese characters. This phenomenon is the so-called 訓讀 *fan3 duk6* (*xùndú*) 'reading the Chinese character for its meaning and not its pronunciation' (this is a common phenomenon in the Japanese language and is referred to as *kundoku* or *kun-yo(mi)* 'reading Chinese characters with Japanese sounds').[48] Some examples of standard Chinese characters being read with their semantically-equivalent but etymologically-unrelated colloquial Cantonese morphosyllables are as follows:

> 孖 *maa1* 'twin, pair, double', as in 孖仔 *maa1 zai2* 'twin boys', 孖女 *maa1 neoi5/2* 'twin girls' = standard Chinese 孖 *zī* 'twins, two children born from the same pregnancy of the same mother'.
> 歪 *me2* 'slanting, askew, aslant, awry, crooked, not straight' = standard Chinese *wāi.*
> 仰 *ngong5*, 打仰瞓 *daa2 ngong5 fan3* 'to sleep lying on one's back' = standard Chinese 仰 *yǎng.*

In addition, some standard Chinese characters can be read with English loanword syllables as indicated below:

> 泊 *paak3* 'to park'; loan from English *park* as in 泊車 *paak3 ce1* 'to park a car' (= standard Chinese 泊 *bō* 'to anchor, moor (a boat); to anchor alongside the shore; (for a boat) to be at anchor').
> 阿蛇 *aa3 soe4* 'address term for policemen and teachers; policeman, teacher'; *soe4* is loan from English *sir* (= standard Chinese 蛇 *shé* 'snake').

4.9 Ad hoc Romanization of colloquial Cantonese morphosyllables

Some colloquial Cantonese morphosyllables cannot be historically traced back to their original, etymologically-related Chinese characters, so they lack Chinese characters as their written forms. In addition, due to the mismatch in the Cantonese syllabary between its large inventory of colloquial morphosyllables and the literary syllables that are associated with the standard Chinese characters as their standard reading pronunciations, so there are not enough standard Chinese characters with

48 Li 2000, 209.

suitable pronunciations that could be ‘borrowed’ (i.e., reused or recycled) to write the etymologically-unrelated, colloquial morphosyllables. So just how can such seemingly ‘unwritable’ Cantonese morphosyllables be transcribed? The simple, expedient solution of last resort has been for ordinary Cantonese-speakers, recognizing the accessibility and flexibility of the English alphabet, to invent their own kind of informal, unsystematic, *ad hoc* romanizations to represent both the written forms and the pronunciations of these seemingly-unwritable morphosyllables, as writers apparently have nothing else to fall back on. At this point the author believes there is a need for emphasis to be put on this phrase *ad hoc* romanization, as well as providing an explanation for it. Curious as it may seem, it is the case that Cantonese-speaking children in Hong Kong have never explicitly been taught at school how to read and write *any* kind of formal, scientifically-accurate Cantonese romanization system, such as Jyutping (粵語拼音 *jyut6 jyu5 ping3 jam1*), the excellent system devised by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong in 1993. The author assumes that the failure to adopt Jyutping or any other romanization system has been quite deliberate and intentional on the part of Hong Kong’s education authorities, and that the reason behind this is because teaching a formal Cantonese romanization system to primary schoolchildren would undesirably and inappropriately elevate the status of Cantonese in the classroom to be on a par with Pinyin that is used to teach Putonghua (or Mandarin). From the author’s perspective and his own experience, it appears to be the case that the question of why Cantonese romanization is not taught in Hong Kong schools remains too politically-sensitive to be raised and discussed.

We find a few indigenous colloquial lexical items that are etymologically unrelated to their semantic and functional equivalents in modern standard Chinese lack standard Chinese characters as their written forms. In order to write such morphosyllables, Hong Kong Cantonese-speakers who are typically familiar with the English alphabet by having learned to speak, read, and write English to some degree have been inventing their own *ad hoc* romanizations to transcribe the Cantonese pronunciations of these lexical items but without marking or indicating their tones. Some examples of romanized Cantonese words that one frequently observes being written in some local Hong Kong newspapers (e.g., 蘋果日報 *Apple Daily*) and on the Internet are the following:

CHOK (= *cok3*) ‘to pull with force; to jerk on (something); (for a vehicle) to jolt, lurch, suddenly move forward but then suddenly stop; to shake or jerk something up and down; to probe or tease someone so as to get the person to reveal something; (for a person) to look cool or sexy’.
CHUR (= *coe2*) ‘to breathe in deeply, as smoke from a cigarette; to feel breathless, smothered; to make material demands on (someone); (for something) to be difficult’.
GUR (= *goe4*) ‘to feel satisfied, comfortable, reconciled’.
HEA (= *he3*) ‘to be idle, indolent, lazy, laid-back, doing nothing; to hang around, lounge around; to idle away one's time’.

JER (= *zoe1*) 'young boy's or man's penis'.

4.10 Alphabeticization (1): Single English letters represent Cantonese morphosyllables

Each of the 26 letters of the English alphabet has its own Cantonese pronunciation with one or two or even three Cantonese syllables as follows:[49]

> A *ei1*, B *bi1*, C *si1*, D *di1*, E *i1*, F *e1 fu4*, G *zi1*, H *ik1 cyu4*, I *aai1*, J *zei1*, K *kei1*, L *e1 lou4*, M *em1*, N *en1*, O *ou1*, P *pi1*, Q *kiu1*, R *aa1 lou4*, S *e1 si4*, T *ti1*, U *jyu1*, V *wi1*, W *dat1 bi1 jyu1* or *dat1 bou4 jyu4*, X *ek1 si4* or *ik1 si4*, Y *waai1*, Z *ji6 set1* or *zi1*.

Cantonese writers have been borrowing individual letters of the English alphabet according to their Anglo-Cantonese pronunciations as a means for transcribing, or romanizing, some indigenous, (nearly) homophonous Cantonese morphosyllables, or just their initial consonants, because they lack suitable Chinese characters with which to write them.

> D *di1* 'plural marker', as in 呢 D *ni1 di1* 'these'; marker of comparative degree', as in 好 D *hou2 di1* 'better' (also written as 啲 *di1*).
> E 家 *ji1 gaa1* 'now' (this word may also be written as 依家 *ji1 gaa1* and 咿家 *ji1 gaa1*; also written and pronounced as 而家 *ji4 gaa1*).
> J *zei1*, as in 打 J *daa2 zei1* 'to jerk off (i.e. masturbate)', 戒 J *gaai3 zei1* 'to cease the habit of jerking off', J 咗 *zei1 zo2* 'to have jerked off', J *zei1* = ad hoc romanization of initial consonant of 朘 *zoe1* 'penis'.
> K *ke1* 'shit' as in 吔 K *jaak3 ke1* 'eat shit' (also written as 屙 *ke1*).

Single English letters can also be used to stand for certain tabooed Cantonese morphosyllables which the reader may recognize, and so either pronounce them as such, or instead pronounce the English letter itself as a kind of euphemism. Examples of English letters that can function as euphemisms for tabooed Cantonese morphosyllables are as follows:

> Q *kiu1* replaces either 閄 *gau1* or 𨶙 *lan2* 'shlong, dick, cock (vulgar term for male sex organ); 'damn' as in 麻 Q 煩 *maa4 kiu1 faan4* which stands for 麻閄煩 *maa4 gau1 faan4*, or 麻𨶙煩 *maa4 lan2 faan4* 'damn troublesome'.
> X *ek1 si*2 written in place of 閉 *diu2* 'fuck', as in X 你老母 instead of 閉你老母 *diu2 nei5 lou5 mou5/2* 'fuck your mother!'.

49 Bauer and Benedict 1997, 404.

4.11 Alphabeticization (2): Single English letters pronounced with Cantonese morphosyllables transcribe the abbreviated forms of English loanwords and can be combined with Chinese characters

Single letters of the English alphabet that are pronounced with Cantonese morphosyllables are used to transcribe the short forms or abbreviations of longer English words. These English letters as abbreviated words function as loanwords which can combine together with standard and non-standard Chinese characters to transcribe Cantonese morphosyllables that occur in the phonetic transliteration and transcription of the English loanwords and other related Cantonese syntactic structures. For example, B pronounced as *bi1* and *bi4* and reduplicated transcribes the English loanword BB *bi4 bi1* 'baby', as in the phrase BB 女 *bi4 bi1 neoi5/2* 'baby girl', BB 仔 *bi4 bi1 zai2* 'baby boy'. Appendix 2 below lists a number of additional examples that indicate how individual English letters pronounced with Cantonese morphosyllables are used to transcribe the abbreviated forms of English loanwords.

4.12 Alphabeticization (3): Retention of original English spellings of English loanwords that are pronounced with Cantonese morphosyllables

Written Cantonese transcribes some English loanwords with their regular (or original) English orthography, but the typical Cantonese-speaking reader knows how to transform these English words into Cantonese loanwords by pronouncing them with the corresponding Cantonese morphosyllables that approximate the original pronunciations of the English words; for example, ACCOUNT *aa3 kaang1*. Additional examples of this type of loanword are listed in Appendix 2. We observe that a few polysyllabic loanwords are shortened or truncated to monosyllables which are usually the first syllables of the loanwords;[50] for example, CERT *seot1* is a short form for 'certificate'. At the same time, however, we also find that some monosyllabic English words are changed into polysyllabic loanwords due to their particular English phonetic structures, such as the occurrence of a word-initial consonant clusters, word-final stops, or fricative consonants; for example, ART *aat1 ci2*.

50 Luke and Lau 2008.

5 Problems of variation in written Cantonese still to be resolved

Hong Kong's written Cantonese language has never been formally standardized, and this has exacerbated the phenomenon of variation in the ways that lexical items are being written.[51] In Hong Kong there is no formal body of Cantonese-language experts who have been officially appointed by the government and explicitly entrusted with the task of standardizing Hong Kong Cantonese pronunciation and its written form. While grammars, glossaries, dictionaries, and various other kinds of materials on Hong Kong Cantonese have been published over the years and have most certainly contributed to the development of its *ad hoc de facto* standardization, nonetheless, these works have been typically and sporadically produced by self-motivated, self-appointed individuals who have been working on their own without an official mandate.

Due to the lack of any formal, comprehensive standardization of the written Cantonese language, there are at least three major, outstanding features of variation that are currently associated with it and that need to be resolved in order to make written Cantonese less ambiguous and more consistent and accurate. These three problems of variation that await resolution can be stated as follows:

5.1 Two or more graphs transcribe the same morphosyllable:

5.1.1 The morphosyllable *bei2* 'to give' is written with at least the following four different Chinese characters:

「被」*bei6/2*.
「比」*bei2*.
「俾」*bei2*.
「畀」bei3/2.

51 Hou and Wu 2015.

5.1.2 The morphosyllable *di1* ‘plural marker for nouns; marker of comparative degree’ is written with at least the following four different graphs:

「的」 *dik1* => *di1.*
「啲」 *di1.*
「尐」 *di1.*
「D」 *di1.*

5.1.3 The word *ngaa6 zaa6* ‘to bar the way, obstruct’ can be found written in at least the following three different ways:

「岈嵖」.
「挜揸」.
「訝詐」.

5.2 One Chinese character can carry two or more pronunciations, each of which represents a different morphosyllable and meaning:

5.2.1 The Chinese character「㖞」carries at least the following four different pronunciations and associated meanings：

a. *lan2* ‘vulgar term for penis’ (also written as 𨶙).
b. *lang1* in 溜㖞 *liu1 lang1* ‘uncommon, rare, highly specialized and unusual’.
c. lang3 in 半㖞哽 bun3 lang3 kang3 ‘half-way’.
d. *nang3* in 㖞埋一齊 *nang3 maai4 jat1 cai4* ‘join together’.

5.2.2 The character「揼」carries at least the following five different pronunciations and associated meanings:

a. *dam1* ‘to delay’.
b. *dam2* ‘to beat, pound’.
c. *dam3* ‘to hang down, let fall’.
d. *dam4* as in 圓揼囵 *jyun4 dam4 doe4* ‘ to be round and full (as the moon)’.
e. *dap6* ‘to beat, thump; to fall; to soak’.

5.3 Empty box □ as last resort for morphosyllables with no other written form:

The Cantonese lexicon includes a number of colloquial morphosyllables for which no Chinese characters can be etymologically associated; and they are also not written with English letters. So, as a kind of last resort, the so-called 'empty box' □ has typically functioned as a place-holder to indicate that no etymological (or original) character has been identified to write that particular morphosyllable. For example, the Cantonese dictionary by Rao, Ouyang, and Zhou listed the following Cantonese morphosyllables that lacked Chinese characters as their written forms:[52]

□ *faak3* 'to whisk'.
□ *gong6* 'crab's claw' (also written as 弶, 蝈).
□ *he3* 'to hang out, idle away one's time' (also written as 迤).
□ *kwaang2* 'stalk of a plant' (also written as 簾, 框 *kwaang1/2*).
□□ *laau2 gaau6* 'in a mess, topsy-turvy' (also written as 嘮嗷).
□□ *lak1 kak1* '(for person) stammering; (for road) to be bumpy' (also written as 躪�xyz).
□ *lem2, lim2* 'to lick' (also written as 舔).
□ *ngong5* 'facing upwards; 打～瞓 *daa2 ngong5 fan3* 'to sleep lying on one's back' (also written as 仰 *joeng5* => *ngong5*).
□ *soe4* 'to slide down' (also written as 嗖, 嗚).
□□聲 *wiu1 wiu1 seng1* 'shrill sound made by a siren'.

Interestingly enough, as indicated above, for some lexical items colloquial (or dialectal) Cantonese characters may have been created or borrowed to write some of these morphosyllables, but they may still not be widely known and used, and they may not have been added to computerized Chinese-character fonts. At any rate, we may note here that in 2016 Rao, Ouyang, and Zhou published the revised edition of their Cantonese dictionary, and in the relevant lexical entries they included a number of newly-created colloquial Cantonese characters for writing some previously, seemingly unwritable morphosyllables, and so eliminated the use of the empty box □.

52 Rao, Ouyang and Zhou 1997, 363.

6 Conclusions on Hong Kong's written Cantonese language

In Hong Kong the unhindered development and widespread use of the written form of the Cantonese language have made Cantonese stand out among all other regional Chinese linguistic varieties (in Taiwan the written form of Taiwanese has been developing there, but it has been described as chaotic due to the lack of agreement among writers on how to write Taiwanese words,[53] and so still lags far behind in comparison to Hong Kong's written Cantonese). Simply stated, Hong Kong Cantonese has become an extraordinary linguistic phenomenon: only in Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China, and nowhere else in mainland China, can we observe the highly conventionalized and pervasive use of written Cantonese in many domains, as stated previously, such as advertising, personal correspondence, comic books, newspapers, internet chats, Hong Kong government posters, etc. Hong Kong's written Cantonese is especially remarkable for at least the following five reasons (although there may be more):

(1) Written Cantonese in Hong Kong has developed spontaneously and naturally in response to the needs and interests of its Cantonese-speakers.
 In Hong Kong written Cantonese coexists and even thrives as a parallel system in competition with the modern standard written Chinese language. Although texts of written Cantonese have traditionally been regarded as being less serious than those written in standard Chinese, nonetheless, the tradition of writing in Cantonese continues to develop in Hong Kong and persists as a pervasive phenomenon. At the end of the day, one obvious observation we can make is that some writers recognize how beneficial writing in the Cantonese language can be: it enhances communication by reaching out to and connecting directly and immediately with Cantonese speakers.
(2) In Hong Kong no officially-appointed body of language experts has ever been formally tasked with developing and promoting standardized conventions on which the transcription of Cantonese colloquial speech could be based.
 The conventions of written Cantonese have been evolving informally, sporadically, and inconsistently as Cantonese writers have had to improvise *ad hoc* solutions to the problems inherent with writing Cantonese colloquial speech.
(3) Hong Kong's written Cantonese has never undergone any formal standardization, has no official status in the community, and is not taught in schools.

53 Klöter 2003, 245.

Despite all the negative factors that would seem to discourage and even undermine the continued existence of written Cantonese, nonetheless, Hong Kong schoolchildren and adults have managed to learn how to read and write Cantonese colloquial speech – although they have been doing this quite informally and haphazardly.

(4) Cantonese writers have had to use their ingenuity to devise special graphs in order to write many colloquial Cantonese words because they are not etymologically related to their semantic and functional equivalents in modern standard Chinese. They have also been creating the written forms of some English loanwords.

(5) Curiously and paradoxically, written Cantonese continues to thrive in the Hong Kong community despite its severe criticism and even condemnation by so-called education authorities, academic experts, and community leaders who believe it has been undermining and even corrupting the purity of the modern standard written Chinese language.

Appendix 1: Cantonese Romanization 粵語拼音 *jyut6 jyu5 ping3 jam1*

Corresponding IPA symbols are enclosed in brackets.[54]

1. Initial Consonants:

b = [p], p = [p^{h}], d = [t], t = [t^{h}], g = [k], k = [k^{h}], gw = [k^{w}], kw = [k^{hw}], m = [m], n = [n], ng = [ŋ], f = [f], s = [s], h = [h], z = [ts, tɕ], c = [ts^{h}, $tɕ^{h}$], w = [w], l = [l], j = [j], Ø = [ʔ].

2. Final Consonants:

m = [m], n = [n], ng = [ŋ], p = [p̚], t = [t̚], k = [k̚].

3. Vowels in Rimes:

i = [iː], ing = [e^{j}ŋ], ik = [e^{j}k]
yu = [y:], yun = [y:n], yut = [y:t]

54 Bauer and Benedict 1997, 471–475; Linguistics Society of Hong Kong 2002, 18–20.

e = [ɛː], ei = [eʲj], eu = [ɛːw], em = [ɛːm], en = [ɛːn], eng = [ɛːŋ], ek = [ɛːk]
oe = [œː], oem = [œːm], oeng = [œːŋ], oek = [œːk]
eoi = [ɵɥ], eon = [ɵn], eot [ɵt]
ai = [ɐj], au = [ɐw], am = [ɐm], an = [ɐn], ang = [ɐŋ], ak = [ɐk]
aa = [aː], aai = [aːj], aau = [aːw], aam = [aːm], aan = [aːn], aang = [aːŋ], aap = [aːp], aat = [aːt], aak = [aːk]
u = [u], ui = [uːj], un = [uːn], ung = [oŋ], ut = [uːt], uk = [ok]
o = [ɔː], oi = [ɔːj], ou = [ow], om = [ɔːm], on = [ɔːn], ong = [ɔːŋ], op = [ɔːp], ot = [ɔːt], ok = [ɔːk].

4. Tones as Jyut Ping Numbers with Corresponding Tone Categories [followed by corresponding Chao tone letters and tone values]:

a) 陰平 Jam1 Ping4 High Level = [˥ 55]
上陰入 Soeng5 Jam1 Jap6 High Stopped [˥ 5];
b) 陰上 Jam1 Soeng5 High Rising = [˧˥ 25];
c) 陰去 Jam1 Heoi3 Mid Level = [˧ 33],
下陰入 Haa6 Jam1 Jap6 Mid Stopped [˧ 33];
d) 陽平 Joeng4 Ping4 Mid-low Falling = [˨˩ 21];
e) 陽上 Joeng4 Soeng5 Mid-low Rising = [˨˧ 23];
f) 陽去 Joeng4 Heoi3 Mid-low Level = [˨ 22]
陽入 Joeng4 Jap6 Mid-low Stopped [˨ 2], [˨ 22].

5. Changed Tones 變音 bin3 jam1 (for morphological derivation):

1/2 High Level [˥ 55] => High Rising [˧˥ 25]
2/1 High Rising [˧˥ 25] => High Level [˥ 55]
3/1 Mid Level [˧ 33] => High Level [˥ 55]
3/2 Mid Level [˧ 33] => High Rising [˧˥ 25]
4/1 Mid-low Falling [˨˩ 21] => High Level [˥ 55]
4/2 Mid-low Falling [˨˩ 21] => High Rising [˧˥ 25]
5/1 Mid-low Rising [˨˧ 23] => High Level [˥ 55]
5/2 Mid-low Rising [˨˧ 23] => High Rising [˧˥ 25]
6/1 Mid-low Level [˨ 22] => High Level [˥ 55]
6/2 Mid-low Level [˨ 22] => High Rising [˧˥ 25]

Appendix 2: Single English letters combined with Cantonese morphosyllables representing the abbreviated forms of English loanwords

A *ei1*, as in AA 制 *ei1 ei1 zai3* 'to split the bill, as for a meal in a restaurant; to go Dutch treat'. The original meaning of AA *ei1 ei1* is uncertain, but it may represent the two people who are dining together.

B *bi1*, *bi4*, as in BB 女 *bi4 bi1 neoi5/2* 'baby girl', BB 仔 *bi4 bi1 zai2* 'baby boy', <= BB *bi4 bi1* <= 'baby'.

C 朗 *si1 long5* 'Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro' (born February 5, 1985), the internationally-famous, Portugal-born footballer (soccer player); C *si1* is the first letter in his first given name, and 朗 *long5* is the partial phonetic transliteration of his second given name.

CCTV *si1 si1 ti1 wi1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of the phrase 'closed circuit television'.

CD *si1di1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of the phrase 'compact disc'.

DJ *di1 zei1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of the phrase 'disc jockey'.

DQ *di1 kiu1* derives from the initial consonants of the first two syllables in 'disqualify', 'disqualification', 'disqualified'; e.g. DQ 風險幾大 *di1 kiu1 fung1 him2 gei2 daai6* 'the risk of disqualification is very great'; 佢被 DQ 咗 *keoi5 bei6 di1 kiu1 zo2* 'he was disqualified.' In Hong Kong the term DQ is typically used in regard to pro-democracy candidates who attempt to stand for election to government offices and serve as representatives of voters, but they may not be allowed to do so and be disqualified, because the returning officers who have vetted their qualifications believe they do not genuinely support Hong Kong laws.

E 道 *ji1 dou6* 'electronic channel'; this is used in regard to Hong Kong residents having their Hong Kong identity smartcards read by a machine at an immigration checkpoint; E *ji1* is the initial letter in and abbreviation of 'electronic'.

ICAC *aai1 si1 ei1 si1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption.

ICU *aai1 si1 jyu1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of the phrase Intensive Care Unit.

ID *aai1 di1* derives from the first two letters in 'identity'; as in ID 卡 or ID 咭 *aai1 di1 kaat1* 'ID card' which in the Hong Kong context typically refers to a Hong Kong identity card.

IDD *aai1 di1 di1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of the phrase 'international direct dial'.

IQ *aai1 kiu1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of the phrase 'intelligence quotient'.

IT *aai1 ti1* derives from the initial letters in and abbreviation of the phrase 'information technology'.

K *kei1*, as in (1) K 士 *kei1 si6/2* 'case', as in 'This is a case for the police'; also written as 畸士 *kei1 si6/2*. (2) K 仔 *kei1 zai2* 'ketamine' with K the initial letter in and abbreviation of ketamine. (3) K 場 *kei1 coeng4* 'karaoke bar, center, lounge', K 歌 *kei1 go1* 'karaoke song', with K the initial letter in and abbreviation of 'karaoke'.

M *em1*, as in (1) M 到 *em1 dou3* 'to menstruate', M 巾 *em1 gan1* 'sanitary pad', with M the initial letter in and abbreviation of 'menstruate, menstruation'. (2) M 記 *em1 gei3* 'McDonald's', the fast-food chain, with M the initial letter in and abbreviation of the company name. (3) 維他命 M *wai4 taa1 ming6 em1* 'vitamin M', i.e. 'money', with M the initial letter in and abbreviation of 'money'.

O *ou1*, as in (1) O 記 *ou1 gei3* 'O.C.T.B.'. O *ou1* is from 'Organized' in 'Organized Crime and Triad Bureau' 有組織罪案及三合會調查科 *jau5 zou2 zik1 zeoi6 on3 kap6 saam1 hap6 wui6/2 diu6 caa4 fo1* (a department within the Hong Kong Police Force). (2) O 嘴 *ou1 zeoi2* 'to be surprised, astonished, amazed', with the circular shape of the letter O imitating or mimicking the round shape of the wide-open mouth in an expression of surprise, astonishment, or amazement

OT *ou1 ti1* 'overtime', as in 開 OT *hoi1 ou1 ti1* 'to work overtime', OT 到幾點 *ou1 ti1 dou3 gei2 dim2* 'to work overtime till what time', with OT the initial letters in the two words that form the compound word 'overtime'.

P *pi1*, as in (1) the initial letter and abbreviation of 'park', as in P 波 *pi1 bo1* 'park gear' (literally 'P ball'), i.e. the gear that the driver of a motor vehicle shifts into when parking the vehicle. (2) P *pi1* as in the abbreviation of 'party', as in 開 P *hoi1 pi1* 'to have or hold a party.' (3) P *pi1* as the abbreviation of 'person', as in 玩 3P *waan4/2 saam1 pi1* 'for three people to engage together in sex acts.' (4) P *pi1* as the initial consonant in and abbreviation of 'Probationary' in P 牌 *pi1 paai4* 'probationary (license) plate', i.e. in Hong Kong the sign or tag with the large red letter 'P' that is hung in the front and rear of a motor vehicle indicating the driver has a probationary driver's license.

PVC *pi1 wi1 si1* derives from the first letters in and abbreviation of the phrase 'polyvinyl chloride', a kind of plastic material.

Q *kiu1*, as in (1) 'cute', derived from the Cantonese syllable imitating the initial part of the pronunciation of the English word 'cute' [k^hjyut], as in Q 版 *kiu1 baan2* 'to make something cutely cartoonish'. (2) Q 棍 *kiu1 gwan3* 'cue stick (as used in snooker or billiards)'; 撻 Q *taat3 kiu1* 'to miscue the ball (in snooker); hit the ball

wrongly (in soccer); to make a mistake'; from homophony between 'cue' and 'Q' [k^{h}jyu]. (3) 孖 Q *maa1 kiu1* 'Double Quinella', a type of bet in horse-racing, with Q *kiu1* the initial letter in and abbreviation of 'Quinella'. (4) 入 Q *jap6 kiu1* 'for a racehorse to come in first or second place in a horse race', and Q 率 *kiu1 leot6/2* 'percentage rate at which a particular racehorse finishes a horse race in first or second place', with Q *kiu1* the initial letter in and homophonous abbreviation of 'queue', meaning 'set of sequential items', such as people waiting in a line, or racehorses racing on a racetrack, that are ranked according to some criterion, such as a person's time of arrival to stand in a line, or a racehorse's time of finishing a horse race.

T *ti1*, as in (1) 啪 T *paat1 ti4* 'party'; also written as PARTY *paat1 ti4* (see also below). (2) 三 T *saam1 ti1* 'Triple Trio', a type of bet in horse-racing, with T *ti1* being the initial letter of 'Trio'. (3) T 恤 *ti1 seot1* 'T-shirt'; also written as T 裇 *ti1 seot1*.

U *jyu1*, as in (1) 'university', with U the initial letter in and abbreviation of 'university'. (2) U 形水管 *jyu1 jing4 seoi2 gun2* 'U-shaped water pipe'.

V *wi1*, as in V 領 *wi1 leng5* 'V-neck', as the style of an upper garment.

W *dat1 bi1 jyu1*, as in W 形喉管 *dat1 bi1 jyu1 jing4 hau4 gun2* 'W-shaped pipe'.

X *ek1 si4* or *ik1 si4*, as in X 光 *ek1 si4 gwong1* 'X-ray', with X borrowed from the English word and 光 *gwong1* the translation of 'ray.'

Appendix 3: English loanwords that retain their original English spellings but are pronounced with Cantonese morphosyllables

ACCOUNT *aa3 kaang1*.

ADD *et1*.

AGENT *ei1 zeon2*.

APARTMENT *aa3 paat1 man2*.

APP *ep1* 'app' <= *app* which is derived from the truncation of 'application'.

ART *aat1 ci2*.

ASSIGNMENT *aa3 saai1 man4*.

AUNTIE *aan1 ti4*.

BABY FAT *bei1 bi1 fet1*.

BAND *ben1*, as in BAND 仔 *ben1zai2* 'member of a band', 入 BAND *jap6 ben1* 'to join a band.'

BANNER *ben1 naa2*.

BARCODE *baa1 kuk1*.

BIO *baai6 o1* is short form for ‘biology’.
BLOCK *bok6 lok1*.
BOOK *buk1*, as in BOOK 枱 *buk1 toi4/2* ‘to book a table, as in a restaurant’; E 卜 *ji1 buk1* ‘E-book’, an electronic book which can be downloaded to a hand-held electronic device for reading.
BRA-TOP *baa1 top1* ‘bra, brassiere.’
BUFFET *bou6 fei1*, also written as 布菲 *bou3/6 fei1*; also written and pronounced as 蒲菲 *pou6 fei1*.
BUY *baai1*.
BYE *baai1* and BYE-BYE *baai1 baai1*.
CALL *ko1* ‘call’ <= ‘call’.
CAM *kem1* as in 車 CAM *ce1 kem1* ‘dash cam, dashboard camera’, CAM *kem1* <= ‘cam, camera’.
CANCER *ken1 saa2*.
CAP *kep1*, also said and written as CAP 帽, 喼帽 *kep1 mou6/2*.
CARE *ke1 aa4*.
CERT *seot1* is short form for and loan from ‘certificate’.
CHEAP *cip1*, as in 佢好 CHEAP *keoi5 hou2 cip1* ‘He’s quite cheap’, i.e. does not like to spend money.
CHECK *cek1*.
CHEM *kem1* is short form for and loan from ‘chemistry’.
CHEQUE *cek1*.
CLAIM *kem1*.
CLICK *kik1*.
COLOUR *kaa1 laa4*.
COMMISSION *kam6 mit1 seon2*.
COOL *ku1*.
COPY *kop1 pi4*.
COUNTER *kaang1 taa2*.
CUT *kat1*.
CUTE *kiu1* (also written as Q *kiu1,* see also Q *kiu1*).
DOWN *daang1*, as in DOWN 機 *daang1 gei1* ‘computer systems are down.’
DOWNLOAD *daang1 lou1* ‘download’.
DRY *zuaai1*.
EASY *ji1 si4*.
ENCORE *en1 ko1*.
FACE *fei1 si2* ‘face, i.e. respect’ is loan from ‘face’.
FACIAL *fei1 sou4*.
FANS *fen1 si2*.

FAX *fek1 si2*, as in FAX 畀我 *fek1 si2 bei2 ngo5* 'fax me, send a fax to me.'
FEEL *fiu1*; as in FEEL 到 *fiu1 dou3/2* 'to feel, sense (something)', FEEL 唔到 *fiu1 m4 dou3/2* 'to be unable to feel, sense (something)'.
FIT *fit1*, as in 操 FIT *cou1 fit1* 'to do physical exercise on a regular basis so as to build up or tone one's muscles', KEEP FIT *kip1 fit1* 'to keep one's body in good physical condition by exercising regularly'.
FOUL *fau1*.
FREE *fi1*.
FRIEND *fen1*.
FUN *fan1*.
GAG *gek1*, as in 攪 GAG *gaau2 gek1* 'to pull a gag.'
GAME *gem1*.
GEL *zeu1*.
GYM *zim1*, as in GYM 房 *zim1 fong4/2* 'gym, place where a person goes to engage in physical training, weight-lifting, etc.'; 做 GYM *zou6 zim1* 'to work out in a gym', i.e. use specially-designed equipment in a gym to exercise one's body in order to achieve and maintain physical fitness.
HAPPY *hep1 pi2*.
HI-FI *haai1 faai1*.
HIGH *haai1*.
HOLD *hou1*.
HURT *hoet1*.
ICON *aai1 kon2*.
IDEA *aai1 di1 aa4*.
IN *jin1*.
IPOD *aai1 pot2*.
JACKET *zek1 kek4*.
JAM *zem1*.
JOB *zop1*.
JOIN *zon1*.
KEEP *kip1*, as in KEEP 住 *kip1 zyu6* 'to keep (something).'
KILO *ki1 lou2*.
KING *king1*.
KISS *ki1 si4*.
LABEL *lei1 bou2*.
LAST *laa1 si2*.
LIKE *laai1 ki2*, as in 我唔 LIKE *ngo5 m4 laai1 ki2* 'I don't like it.'
LINE *laai1*, as in 玩 LINE *waan4/2 laai1* 'to go online, surf the Internet; to meet friends in an online chatroom.'

LOGO *lou1 kou2*.

LOOK *luk1*.

MAN *men1* ‘manly’<= ‘man’, as in 你好似 MAN 咗好多！ *nei5 hou2 ci5 men1 zo2 hou2 do1* ‘You seem to have become much more manly!’ (as said by a young woman in admiration of her handsome boyfriend).

MEG *mek1* is short form for and loan from ‘megabyte’.

MON *mon1* ‘monitor’ <= ‘mon’, which is derived from truncation of ‘(computer) monitor’.

MOOD *mut*1.

MOVIE *mu1 fi2*.

OK *ou1 kei1* ‘OK, all right’ is loan from ‘OK, okay’.

OUT *au1*.

PACK *pek1*.

PARTY *paat1 ti4*, also written as 啪 T *paat1 ti4*.

PART-TIME *paat1 taai1 m4*.

PIZZA *pi1 saa4*.

PO *pou1* is short form for and loan from ‘post’, such as to post a message on social media.

POLO *pou1 lou1*, as in POLO 衫 *pou1 lou1 saam1* ‘Polo shirt.’

POPO *pou1 pou1* ‘police’ (humorous); derived through the reduplication of the first syllable of ‘police’.

PREFER *pi3 foe*1

PROJECTOR *pou3 zek1 taa2*.

PROTEIN *pou1 tin4*.

QUALI *ko1 li2* is short form for and loan from ‘qualification’; such as in 騷 QUALI *sou1 ko1 li2* ‘to show off one’s positive or attractive qualities; to demonstrate one’s skills’.

QUOTA *kou1 taa2*.

RAP *wep1*, as in RAP 歌 *wep1 go1* ‘rap song.’

ROUND *laang1*.

SALES *sew1 si2*.

SEAT *sit1*, as in SEAT 位 *sit1 wai6/2*.

SEED *sit1,* as in 爆 seed *baau3 sit1* (lit. explode seed) ‘to push oneself beyond the limit.’

SELL *sew1*.

SEM *sem6* which is short form for and loan from ‘semester’.

SENSE *sen1 si2*.

SET *set1*.

SEXY *sek1 si4*.

SHARP *saap1*.

SHOPPING *sop1 ping4*.

SHORT *sot1* 'crazy', as in SHORT SHORT 哋 *sot1 sot1 dei2* 'somewhat crazy (or muddleheaded)', 佢 SHORT 咗 *keoi5 sot1 zo2* 'he's gone crazy'; the connection is to the English phrase '(electrical) short circuit'; SHORT 咗 *sot1 zo2* is similar to the Cantonese expression 黐線 *ci1 sin3* 'to be crazy' (literally, 'wires are stuck').

SIM *sim1* as in SIM 卡 *sim1 kaat1* 'SIM card', SIM is acronym derived from Subscriber Identification (or Identity) Module; i.e., a type of smart card that allows wireless electronic devices, such as mobile telephones, to connect to cellular networks; also said as 電話咭 *din6 waa6/2 kaat1* (literally, 'telephone card'), also written as SIM 咭 but less common.

SIR *soe4* in 阿 SIR *aa3 soe4* 'address term for police officer or teacher; police officer, teacher'; SIR *soe4* <= 'sir'.

SIZE *saai1 si2*.

SORRY *so1 li4*.

STYLE *si4 daai1 lou2*.

TAKE *tik1*, as in TAKE 嘢 *tik1 je5* '(literally, take stuff) take drugs', 企硬唔 TAKE 嘢 *kei5 ngaang6 m4 tik1 je5* 'Stand firm and don't take drugs' (Hong Kong government slogan intended to discourage young people from taking drugs); 生命冇 TAKE 2 *saang1 ming6 mou5 tik1 tu1* 'There's no take two in life, that is, there is no second chance.'

TALK *tok1*, as in 齋 TALK *zaai1 tok1* 'just talk (and with no action or follow-through).'

TASTE *tei1 si2*, as in 佢冇 TASTE *keoi5 mou5 tei1 si2* 'he has no taste (that is, does not know how to appreciate fine things).'

THANK YOU *fen1 kiu4*, or *feng1 kiu4*; also written and pronounced as 頂轎 *teng1 kiu4*.

TISSUE *ti1 su4*.

TITLE *taai1 tou4*.

TOMBOY *taam1 boi1* 'lesbian'; also said as TB *ti1 bi1*.

TOP *top1*.

UNCLE *ang1 kou4*.

UN *an1* is short form for and loan from 'understand'.

UNDER *an1 daa2* is short form for and loan from 'underwear'.

UPDATE *ap1 dei1*.

VAN *wen1*, as in 貨 VAN *fo3 wen1* 'van for hauling goods', 綠 VAN *luk6 wen1* 'green minibus', VAN 仔 *wen1 zai2* 'van for hauling passengers or goods'; VAN *wen1* <= English 'van' (as a type of motor vehicle; also written as 㷫 *wen1*, but VAN is the much more common form, as the Cantonese character 㷫 does not display in Internet search engines).

VIEW *wiw*1.

VIP *wi1 aai1 pi1* which is the abbreviation of 'Very Important Person'.

WARM *wom1*.
WASABI *waa6 saa1 bi4*, i.e. the Japanese condiment that is green-colored, made from horseradish, and has a spicy-hot flavor.
WATT *wok1*.
WI-FI *waai1 faai1*.
WORK *woek1*.
ZOOM *sum1*.

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A Manuscript of a Sino-Nôm version of the *Fo shuo tian di ba yang jing* 佛説天地八陽經 preserved in the Library of Kyoto University

Abstract: This study introduces a collection of Buddhist scriptures that was originally preserved at Wat Sammananam Boriharn in Bangkok, was then brought to Japan in 1978, and is currently preserved at the library of the Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Based on general knowledge about papermaking, bibliography and dialectology in Vietnam, a preliminary analysis of one of the scriptures written in Chinese and Vietnamese Chữ Nôm, called *Fo shuo tian di ba yang jing* 佛説天地八陽經, was carried out through cooperation between paper studies and linguistics. Paper analysis shows that the material used to make the scripture is bamboo paper (*chikushi* 竹紙), which was used in Vietnam until the end of the 19th century. The period of the 19th century coincides with the period when the taboo characters for the king's name were avoided in the document. The phonological and lexical analysis of Chữ Nôm characters in the document reveals the dialectal variations used in the text of the scripture, which reflect central or southern Vietnamese.

1 Introduction

This chapter aims to analyze the Sino-Nôm manuscript *Fo shuo tian di ba yang jing* 佛説天地八陽經 (*Phật Thuyết Thiên Địa Bát Dương Kinh* in Vietnamese, hereafter abbreviated *TDBY*) (WS007a) contained in the collection of texts originally stored at Wat Sammananam Boriharn in Bangkok,[1] brought to Japan in 1978, and donated to Kyoto University by the late Professor Sakurai Yumio. My purpose is to investigate the period of compilation and the characteristics of the language in the document. In the whole collection of 98 volumes, the title of *TDBY* and its variants are found in five volumes, therefore *TDBY* is one of the representative documents in the collection. The collection includes Buddhist and Daoist scriptures as well as scriptures from other religions, written mainly in literary Sinitic and/or Vietnamese Nôm characters, sometimes accompanied by annotations in Thai scripts. Sakurai

1 Its Vietnamese name is *Cảnh Phúc* (*Phước*) 景福 Temple.

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originally made a catalogue of this collection,[2] but some of the items are so damaged that it is quite difficult to identify the real items with those on Sakurai's list. The first task of our project,[3] therefore, was to generate a revised list by checking the real item with each document. The revised list contains 98 items, including cases where a single text is divided into a number of different ones and multiple texts are compiled into one. The text of the *TDBY*, for example, was compiled along with the *Fo shuo bao en chan fa juan zhong* 佛說報恩懺法卷中 (*BECF*), the former assigned the number WS007a and the latter WS007b in the revised list.

The textual content of *TDBY* (W007a), which consists of 39 leaves (78 pages) in total, is a Buddhist scripture written in literary Sinitic accompanied by a Vietnamese translation in Nôm script (see Appendix 1 and 2) and a few Thai annotations. The translation is nearly word-for-word, a form called *diễn âm* in Vietnamese, and the annotations seem to have been written recently in pencil.

In this chapter, the periodization and the characteristics of the language in the manuscript of *TDBY* are analyzed from three different perspectives. The first is concerned with the content of the main text written in literary Sinitic; the second with their translation into Vietnamese Nôm script written on the right side of each sentence; and the third with the physical material on which these texts are written. In the following sections, each of those three aspects is investigated in turn with the methods of philology, grammatology, phonology, and paper analysis. It will be concluded that the manuscript was compiled in the 19th century, and based on a central or southern dialect of Vietnamese. This conclusion will shed light on the characteristics of the collection as a whole, which comes from Vietnamese documents originally stored at the temple in Bangkok, Thailand.

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2 Sakurai 1979.

3 The collaborative project *Documentary Research on Han-Nôm Manuscripts* within the project of the International Program of Collaborative Research (IPCR) of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies Kyoto University has as its aim 'to compile bibliographic information on Han Nôm texts, written in both Chinese and Chữ Nôm characters and archived by Vietnamese temples in Thailand, into a database. It will also collect and examine original documents in order to determine their value in the broader set of relevant resources and manuscripts. The goal of this research is to investigate whether "style theory" and "morphological theory" used in Japanese paleography can be applied to Southeast Asian source material' (Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University 2017, 25). The project is conducted through the collaboration of linguists, historians, bibliographers and paper studies scholars.

Main text in literary Sinitic

TDBY is a kind of apocryphal sutra (*weijing* 偽經) that originated in China. The main topic of *TDBY* is the Buddhists' attack on Daoism and folk religion, in which the Buddha answers the question Bodhisattva Unimpeded (Wu'ai pusa 無礙菩薩) asked about the way one can make beings with wrong views achieve understanding and free them from suffering.

The construction and the contents of the main text in literary Sinitic of the present manuscript were investigated in detail by Oda Juten in 2010. He studied a number of available texts of the *Bayang jing* 八陽經 and classified them into three groups based on two criteria: the contents of the preface, and eight passages representative of the scripture as a whole. His Group 1 contains (1) Dunhuang text B (S500), (2) a Chinese text in Tibetan script (Pt1258), and (3) the original and a revised Turkic translation (B6, B12, K1, K3), which could be dated to the first half of the ninth century or earlier. Group 2 contains (4) an Old Tibetan translation (Pt 746, Pt749), (5) a new Tibetan translation (S416, S458, Pt106, Pt745, Pt2110) and (6) Dunhuang text A (S252, S480, S1408, S3324, S5373, S6424, S6667, P2098, P2181, P3759, P3915, Pk 宇 10, Pk 収 79, Pk 律 97, Pk 衣 57, Pk 龍 50, Pk 致 38, Pk 鹹 67, Pk 宇 77, Pk 黄 11, Pk 出 85), which are dated to the ninth and tenth centuries. And Group 3 contains (8) a Mongolian translation (MS, MK) dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, (9) the Korean Yi-dynasty block-print (Ungsinsa edition, 1807), dated to sometime after the 14th century, and (10) the manuscripts preserved in a Vietnamese temple. Through the detailed comparison of these texts, he pointed out that the text in the Korean block-print and that of the Vietnamese versions represented a merging of Group 1 and 2, and concluded that the text in the Vietnamese manuscripts dated to sometime after the fifteenth century.[4]

On the other hand, there are numerous indications that the date of compilation of the text in the present manuscript is not that early. One available piece of evidence in the main text is the date as recorded by the Chinese sexagenary cycle written on the last page. It contains the year and the month '乙酉年十二月', which means the twelfth lunar month of an *yi-you* 乙酉 year. An *yi-you* 乙酉 year could be any of the following: 1765, 1825, 1885, 1945, as well as other years that are too early or recent to merit consideration.

As will be shown in the next section, this manuscript contains a certain number of Nôm characters representing the southern dialect of Vietnamese, some of which are not found in any existing dictionaries. Therefore, the dating of this manuscript

4 Oda 2010, 44–47.

not only reveals one aspect of the history of the whole collection but also contributes to the historical study of southern dialects of Vietnamese.[5]

Translation in Nôm script

Grammatological analysis

By looking at the translated sentences in Nôm script, several characters relating to naming taboos can be found. In Vietnam, the practice of avoiding tabooed names was quite widespread during the period from the Trần dynasty (1225–1400) to the Nguyễn dynasty (1887–1945). The translated portion written in Nôm script contains at least two characters that show the traces of avoiding the characters of the emperor's or his relative's names. We can identify two cases of the replacement of tabooed characters: that is, 時 is replaced with 辰, and 實 replaced with 寔. *Thì* (*thời*) 時 was the real name of Emperor Tự Đức 嗣德, who was on the throne from 1847 to 1883, and *thật* (*thực*) 實 was the real name of Empress Tá Thiên Nhân 佐天仁, the wife of Emperor Minh Mạng 明命 who was on the throne from 1820 to 1841.[6] However, the text does not adhere to thoroughgoing avoidance of these two characters. The translated text in the Nôm script contains both tabooed characters, but the main text in literary Sinitic does not contain either of them. Furthermore, even in the translated text the avoidance is not thorough. We can think of two possibilities: one is that the document was compiled in Thailand, where the avoidance did not make sense, but some characters were still written in the taboo-avoiding style as was the writer's habit; and the other is that it was compiled after the time when avoidance was mandatory, that is after 1883, but some instances of character avoidance still remained there. Based on the cyclical characters for the year, written on the last page, and the similarity between the handwriting in the main text and the translated one, I believe that the scripture was compiled in the 19th century, either in 1825 or 1885.

The graphic form of the Nôm characters also give us some evidence about the date of compilation. To analyze the Nôm portion, first we need to transcribe each Nôm graph in the translation portion into modern romanised Quốc Ngữ script. The

5 The value of these Nôm characters in the field of historical linguistics has been discussed in Shimizu 2022, 1–14.
6 Ngô 1997, 113–177.

transcription procedure is based on the traditional readings of each character, with reference made to the available dictionaries[7] and online databases.[8]

The Nôm graphs appearing in this text basically have the typical construction, which consists of one phonetic component (with optional sound-changing diacritics such as 〈), with or without one semantic component. The phonetic components have been chosen on the basis of the Sino-Vietnamese (or Early Sino-Vietnamese[9]) readings of Chinese characters and sometimes on the readings of existing Chữ Nôm graphs. This manuscript also contains several variations of these two typical cases, and very few cases of 'semantic+semantic' and 'phonetic+phonetic' construction.[10] Some examples are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Types of Chữ Nôm graph construction in *TDBY*

		Hán-based	**Nôm-based**
'phonetic'	- diacritics	尼 *này* (< 尼 *ni*) 'this'	𡶀 *nối* (< 𡶀 *núi*) 'to connect'
	+ diacritics	𠰃 *vái* (口+尾 *vĩ*) 'to pray'	𠸼 *mời* (口+𨑮 *mười*) 'to invite'
'phonetic + semantic'		𨑮 *mười* (< 十+邁 *mại*) 'ten'	𦀊 *nối* (< 糸+𡶀 *núi*) 'to connect'
'phonetic + phonetic'		𠅜 *lời* (< 麻 *ma*+利 *lợi*) 'word'	
'semantic + semantic'		𡗶 *trời* (< 天+上) 'heaven'	

One example of a Nôm-based phonetic component is 𡶀 *nối* 'to connect' which is based on 𡶀 *núi* 'mountain' = 山 (sem) + 内 (phon: *nội*).

Variations of the 'phonetic+semantic' combination involve the simplification of phonetic or semantic components. For example, 𨑗 *trên* 'above' = simplified 連 (phon: *liên*) + 上 (sem), 𨑤 *gặp* 'to meet' = simplified 遇 (sem) + 及 (phon: *cập*) by removing the 車 and 禺 elements in the middle. In addition to these forms, we can

7 *Tự điển Chữ Nôm* (2006), *Tự điển Chữ Nôm dẫn giải*, tập I, II (2014), *Giúp đọc Nôm và Hán Việt* (2004), *Đại tự điển Chữ Nôm* (2007), *Đại tự điển Chữ Nôm* (1999), etc.

8 *Nôm Lookup Tool* provided by Nôm Preservation Foundation (http://nomfoundation.org/nom-tools/Nom-Lookup-Tool; accessed on 5 December 2023).

9 Alves 2014, 33 defines the term 'Early Sino-Vietnamese' loanwords as 'colloquial borrowings predating the spread of Chinese rhyming dictionaries, which led to the development of standardized literary Sino-Vietnamese readings of Chinese characters'.

10 A popular classification of Chữ Nôm construction is given in Hannas 1996, 80–82, while a highly detailed one is proposed by Nguyễn Quang Hồng 2014, 14–18.

easily find alternative forms in the database, such as 𨕭 and 𬩔, respectively, which retain these elided graphic components.[11]

Some of the 'semantic+semantic' cases in this text can be analyzed as cases of confusion between semantic and phonetic components. For example, in the case of 㑏 *giữ* 'to keep', two alternative forms for the same morpheme can be found in the database: a. 佇 *giữ* = 亻 (sem) + 宁 (phon: *trữ*) and b. 𡨹 *giữ* = 守 (sem) + 宁 (phon: *trữ*).[12] Let us suppose that the form 㑏 is a combination of 亻 (a. sem) and 守 (b. sem), in which 守 must have replaced 宁, which was originally the phonetic component in a. The replacement may have taken place because of the similarity of form between 守 and 宁. One example of true 'semantic+semantic' construction in this text is 𡗶 *trời* 'heaven' = 天 (sem 'heaven') + 上 (sem 'above'),[13] and an example of 'phonetic+phonetic' construction is 𫜗 *lời* 'word', which will be analyzed in detail below.

According to Izawa, the Nôm characters with Nôm-based phonetic components and the above kinds of 'semantic+semantic' cases as a result of confusion between semantic and phonetic components can only be found in the later period of Nôm evolution, such as in the *Chàng Sơn Di Lục* 長山遺禄, a folk drama playscript which was compiled in the middle of the 19th century.[14]

Phonological analysis

One of the phonological features of Chữ Nôm scripts in this scripture is the lack of 'phonetic+phonetic' cases. One exception is 𫜗 *lời* 'word' = simplified 麻 (phon: *ma*) + 利 (phon: *lợi*), which has an alternative form, 𫜗.[15] The evidence supporting this interpretation of its construction is the existence of *mlời* form found in the 17th-century dictionary, *Dictionarium Annamiticum, Lusitanum et Latinum* compiled by Alexandre de Rhodes in 1651, with an initial ml- cluster which was later simplified to initial l-. Although we also find another form 唎 for *lời* in this text, which can be

11 𨕭 (http://nomfoundation.org/common/nom_details.php?codepoint=2856d); 𬩔 (http://nomfoundation.org/common/nom_details.php?codepoint=2ca54).
12 佇 (http://nomfoundation.org/common/nom_details.php?codepoint=4f47): 𡨹 (http://nomfoundation.org/common/nom_details.php?codepoint=21a39).
13 This graph is symbolically significant in that it is the first Chữ Nôm character that appears in textbooks intended to teach Chinese characters such as the *Tam thiên tự giải âm* 三千字解音: 天𡗶地坦 *thiên trời địa đất*.
14 Izawa 2023, 72.
15 http://nomfoundation.org/common/nom_details.php?codepoint=2b717.

analyzed as 口 (sem) + 利 (phon: *lợi*), it occurs only once, on page 8b5,[16] but 唎 occurs seven times, on 12b3, 12b4, 18a1, 24a4, 28a2, 30a1 and 31a4. Vu Duc Nghieu points out that 'the two clusters /bl/ and /ml/ continued to be retained in spelling of a few words in written [Quốc Ngữ] documents until the early 19th [century]. They were reaching the final stage of their trajectory'.[17]

The most useful diagnostic feature of this document is the signs of dialect readings in the Nôm graphs, which provide us with important information about the characteristics of the language the text was written in. Generally speaking, when one is choosing the phonetic components of a graph, the final consonants (codas) in closed syllables are given the highest priority, usually reflecting one-to-one correspondence between Chữ Nôm and Sino-Vietnamese readings of their phonetic components. In the case of the 佛說大報父母恩重經 published in the 15th century in North Vietnam, for example, the correspondence of Chữ Nôm to Sino-Vietnamese readings demonstrates a one-to-one relationship (see Table 2).

Table 2: The correspondence of Sino-Vietnamese (SV) and Chữ Nôm (CN) codas in the 佛說大報父母恩重經

SV / CN	-p	-m	-t	-n	-k	-ŋ	-j	-w
-p	21							
-m		54						
-t			81		1***			
-n		2*		123				
-k			1**		76			
-ŋ						152		
-j/front V							192	
-w/back V								78

There are 3 exceptional cases: 閔 *mỉm* (SV *mẩn*), 欲 *dượt* (SV *dục*) and 列 *liếc* (SV *liệt*). For the first case (marked with * in Table 2), no SV syllable has an /m-V-m/ sequence, which leads to the choice of /m-V-n/ instead. The second morpheme (marked with ** in Table 2) has an alternative form 閱 *dượt* (SV *duyệt*),[18] but the difference between the vowels may have led to the selection of *dục* as the other syllable. The third case

16 In '8a5', '8' denotes the sequential number of sheets, 'a' the first half of the sheet, and '5' the number of line (1–5) in one page.

17 Vu Duc Nghieu 2019, 161.

18 http://nomfoundation.org/common/nom_details.php?codepoint=95b2.

(marked with *** in Table 2) can also be explained by the fact that the syllable candidates for SV readings lack *liếc* or *liệc*. If we may be permitted to regard these three cases as exceptions, one-to-one correspondence of codas seems to be the norm for Chữ Nôm, at least for texts from northern Vietnam.

Meanwhile, *TDBY* (WS007a) contains 10 cases of mismatching between Chữ Nôm and SV codas. Those ten cases are 变 *biếng* (SV *biến*) ‘to be lazy’ (in 2a4), 戛 *nhác* (嘎 *dát*) ‘to be lazy’ (2a4), 弋 *dứt* (SV *dặc*) ‘to disappear’ (5b5, 6a1, 6b1, 7b1), 擳 *chắc* (質 *chất*) ‘to be firm’ (7b4), {口+免} *miệng* (免 *miễn*) ‘mouth’ (12b3), {扌+弋} *dứt* (弋 *dặc*) ‘to disappear’ (24a3), 邛 (= 鄧) *đặn* (SV *đặng*) ‘to be regular (*đều* -)’ (27a2), {言+狂} *cuốn* (狂 *cuồng*) ‘classifier for book’ (28b2), {氵+吝} *lặng* (吝 *lận*) ‘to be silent’ (31a1) and 終 *trọn* (SV *chung*) ‘whole’ (32a5). We can find alternative forms for each morpheme in the database as follows: 丙 *biếng* (SV *bính*), 落 *nhác* (SV *lạc*), 悉 *dứt* (SV *tất*), 職 *chắc* (SV *chức*), 𠰘 *miệng* (皿 *mãnh*), 憚 *đặn* (SV *đạn*), 卷 *cuốn* (SV *quyển*), 朗 *lặng* (SV *lãng*) and 論 *trọn* (論 *luận*). The latter forms prove that the ten cases cited above are not cases for which there was a lack of candidates in SV readings. Furthermore, 𠰘 *miệng* and 論 *trọn* also appear in this scripture (𠰘: 8b5, 29b3; 論: 31b5, 35a5). Dialect studies of Vietnamese show that the codas -ŋ/-k and -n/-t occuring after [- front] vowels and 3 diphthongs in the northern dialect are merged into -ŋ/-k in the central and southern dialects. Further, the isogloss between them is located around the border of Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên – Huế provinces.[19]

Some lexemes also show some dialect features, such as 𥐇, {矢+門} *vắn* (問 *vắn*) ‘to be short’ (30a5, 2a5), 莫 *mắc* (SV *mạc*) ‘to suffer’ (8b2) and 邛 (=鄧) *đặng* (SV *đặng*) ‘to get’ (3a1, 3a2, 3b1, 4b1, ... 65 times); their northern equivalents are *ngắn*, *bị*/*phải*, and *được*, respectively. Their geographical distribution is shown in Table 3, in which the central dialect is defined as being distributed from Nghệ An province to Bình Thuật province, and the southern dialect from Đồng Nai province southward.[20]

Table 3: Central and southern lexemes in *TDBY* (007-001)

Vocabulary	Explanation	Distribution
vắn	Adj. *Ngắn* ‘to be short’	central, southern
mắc	V. *Gặp phải* ‘to meet with (unexpected events)’	central
đặng	Aux. *Được* ‘can’, *Để* ‘in order to’	central, southern

19 Hoàng Thị Châu 2004, 92–93; Shimizu 2014, 152–153.

20 Phạm 2009, pp 433, 284, and 163 for these items.

In sum, the phonological analysis shows that the Nôm characters carry with them the characteristics of a central or southern dialect from Thừa Thiên – Huế province southward. Lexical analysis also shows that the text contains lexical items distributed from Nghệ An province southward (Fig.1).

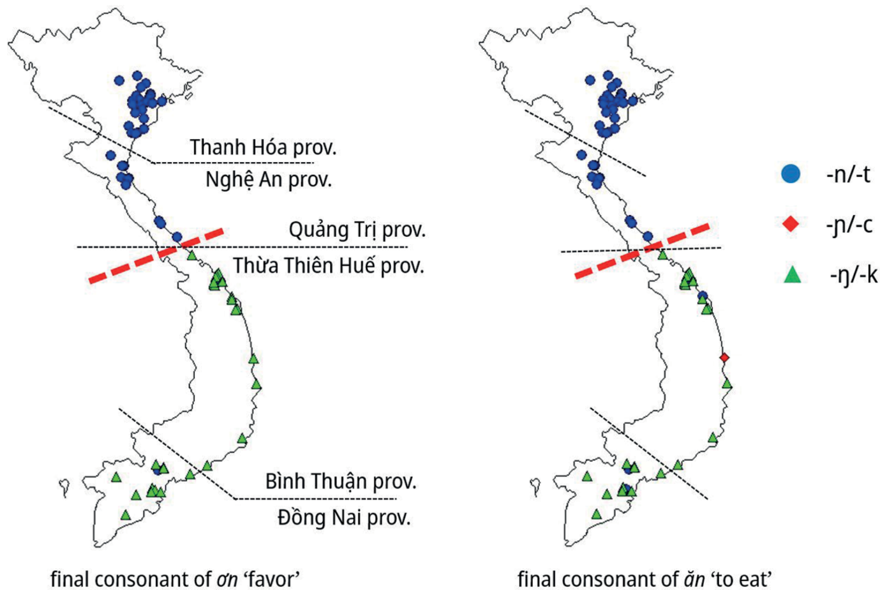

Fig. 1: The border of *-n*;*t* ≠ *-ng*;*c* and *-n*;*t* = *-ng*;*c*; © Shimizu Masaaki.

Paper analysis

The analysis of the physical material the text was written on also provides us with important information about the period of its compilation. Following the traditional methods of Japanese paleography,[21] all the materials underwent the following modes of analysis: shape and surface observation, size measurement, and optical observation and measurement (non-invasive), including the observation of shape as well as size of paper (length and width) and the ratio of length to width; thickness of paper; the kinds of fiber present (determined microscopically), loading (*tenryou* 填料), laid lines (*sunome* 簀目) and chain lines (*itome* 糸目); pasted marks (*itame*

21 The discussion about paper studies in this section is based on Kojima and Yano 2018.

板目) and brush marks (*hakeme* 刷毛目). The results of this examination for *TDBY* are as follows:

Most of the 98 documents are either bound or folded; in the case of the former, bound in thread stitch binding (*fukurotoji* 袋綴).

Regarding the ratio of the length to the width (of each half leaf 半葉), most of the texts in this collection including *TDBY* have a 2/1 ratio, which is the same as that of the Chinese *changfang* style 長方式, but reflects the ratio of the width to the length measurement. *Changfang* style, along with *doufang* style 斗方式, whose ratio is 1/1, was popular during China's Han dynasty;[22] it may therefore be the case that Chinese *changfang* style was preserved without interruption in some materials in this collection.

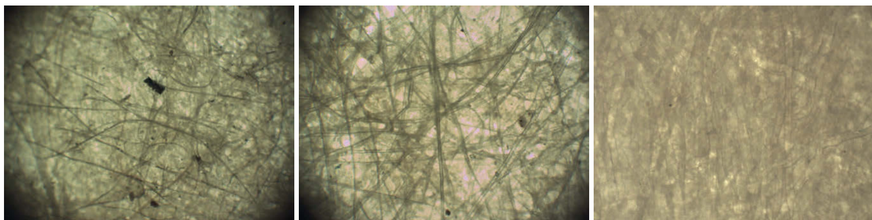

Fig. 2: Fiber of bamboo paper (a.), paper mulberry (b.) and pulp (c.)[23] / Kyoto / 2019-6-8 /; © Shimizu Masaaki.

Microscopic observation to determine the material composition (number and kinds of fiber)[24] showed that of the 98 scriptures, 38 contain bamboo paper (*chikushi* 竹紙), 15 contain paper mulberry (*kozo* 楮), and 48 contain pulp. For example, *BYTD* W007a) and *BECF* (W007b) were, as mentioned above, compiled as one book, but are composed of different paper materials: bamboo paper and paper mulberry respectively (Fig. 2).

The papermaking process usually involves the addition of loading to make the paper white. In this collection, some of the materials containing the paper mulberry had grains of rice added as loading. For example, an image of grains of rice as loading was observed in *BECF* (W007b), which contain the paper mulberry.

The number of laid lines within one Japanese *sun* 寸 (≈30.303 mm) and the distance between chain lines often emerge as the criteria for determining the kinds of

22 Tomita 2014, 19.

23 Kojima and Yano 2018, 72.

24 Okawa 2017 was the main reference for this task.

fiber used, as well as the places and periods in which the paper was used. For now, insufficient data are available for this purpose in the region of Southeast Asia. However, the number of laid lines used to make Chinese paper is usually 35–45, and that of the laid lines used to make the paper in this collection is about 25. This difference in the number of laid lines may reflect the difference between the materials used in China and Vietnam, but more data is needed to make further investigations into this matter.

In the process of drying the paper on a board or clay wall, the side holding the laid lines and chain lines is usually stuck to the board or clayey wall; it therefore also holds the pasted marks. The other side often preserves the brush marks, which are the traces of the act of brushing the paper to make it stick to the board or clayey wall. In this collection, only six texts preserve the pasted marks, and about fifty texts including *TDBY* preserve the brush marks.

Kojima and Yano (2018, 74) pointed out that bamboo paper was quite popular in China, while a kind of material called *dó* paper was popular in Vietnam,[25] and paper mulberry was popular in Thailand.[26] It is therefore surprising that the number of scriptures containing bamboo paper in this collection is much higher than might be expected. It is necessary to investigate the origins of bamboo paper use and paper made from paper mulberry in this collection to determine whether it might have originally been made in Vietnam or was brought from China.

The results of analyzing *TDBY* (WS007a) are summarized as follows: title: *Fo shuo tian di ba yang jing* 佛説天地八陽經; shape: bound book (thread stitch binding); length: 262 mm; width: 141 mm; length-to-width ratio: 1/0.54; thickness: 0.1 mm; fiber: bamboo; laid lines: 30; chain lines: 1.6; brush marks: yes.

The kind of paper that Vietnamese and Japanese emperors historically used contained fiber from the *Thymelaeaceae* family, which may reflect the influence from China, where the emperor traditionally used paper made from *Edgeworthia chrysantha*, a plant which belongs to the *Thymelaeaceae* family.[27] It is well-known that *dó* paper, made from a plant which also belongs to *Thymelaeaceae* family, was usually used for the royal deification decree (*thần sắc* 神勅) in Vietnam. Given the substantial number of scriptures containing bamboo paper in this collection, it is possible to conclude that it may have been customary to use different paper materials for different purposes, such as *dó* paper for royal deification decrees and bamboo

25 This is made from a plant the scientific name of which is *Rhamnoneuron balansae*, called *shupishu* 鼠皮樹 'rat-skin tree' in Chinese.

26 It is also distributed in Southwest China (Needham 1985, 56–57). See also Meng Yuanyao's chapter on papermaking in this volume.

27 Takashima 2018, 88.

paper for scriptures.[28] Because papermaking techniques have employed wood pulp as the main material since the beginning of the 20th century in Vietnam, documents made from bamboo paper might have been compiled in the earlier period.

Concluding remarks

Philological analysis of the main text in literary Sinitic indicates that the texts were written in 1825 or 1885, based on the taboo characters and cyclical signs for lunar calendar years found in the text. Through the grammatological analysis of the Nôm script in the translated sentences, the text has been shown to contain the types of Nôm characters that belong to the later stages of its evolution, quite possibly also the 19th century. One of the most prominent features of this text is the fact that the text contains a certain proportion of Nôm characters created on the basis of central or southern dialects of Vietnamese.

Sakurai has pointed out a historical fact that the Vietnamese people who supported Wat Sammananam Boriharn in Bangkok, where the collection was originally stored, were from northern, central, and southern Vietnam, and that more than half of them were from central and southern Vietnam.[29] Therefore, the hypothesis that the scripture was translated using a central or southern dialect of Vietnamese is quite plausible from the historical point of view.

Paper analysis of the documents in the collection reveals that a substantial number of scriptures are written on bamboo paper. Papermaking techniques employing wood pulp as the main material began in the beginning of the 20th century in Vietnam. The period extrapolated from this fact coincides with the period estimated from the philological analysis of the main text and the grammatological analysis of the Nôm script.

Based on the results above, the conclusion is that the document *TDBY* (WS007a) in the collection was compiled in the 19th century based on a central or southern dialect of Vietnamese. This not only gives us an important insight on the consideration about the historical features of the whole collection, but also gives us new data for linguistic and grammatological analysis. So far, a preliminary index of the Nôm scripts created in Southern Vietnam was compiled by Vũ Văn Kính in 1994, based on famous literary works such as the *Lục Vân Tiên* 陸雲僊, the *Dương Từ Hà Mậu* 楊慈何茂, the *Ngư Tiều Vấn Đáp* 漁樵問答儒醫演歌 (阮廷炤 1822–1888), the *Nguyễn*

28 Kojima and Yano 2018, 74.
29 Sakurai 1979, 78.

Hữu Huân tiểu truyện 阮友勳小傳 (? 阮友勳 1813–1875), the *Kim Thạch Kỳ Duyên* 金石奇緣 (裴有義 1807–1872), among others. The documents containing *TDBY* (WS007a) in this collection will provide a certain amount of additional data for the index. Furthermore, it will contribute to the historical dialectology of the southern Vietnamese language, which has previously had much less available data than the Northern dialects.

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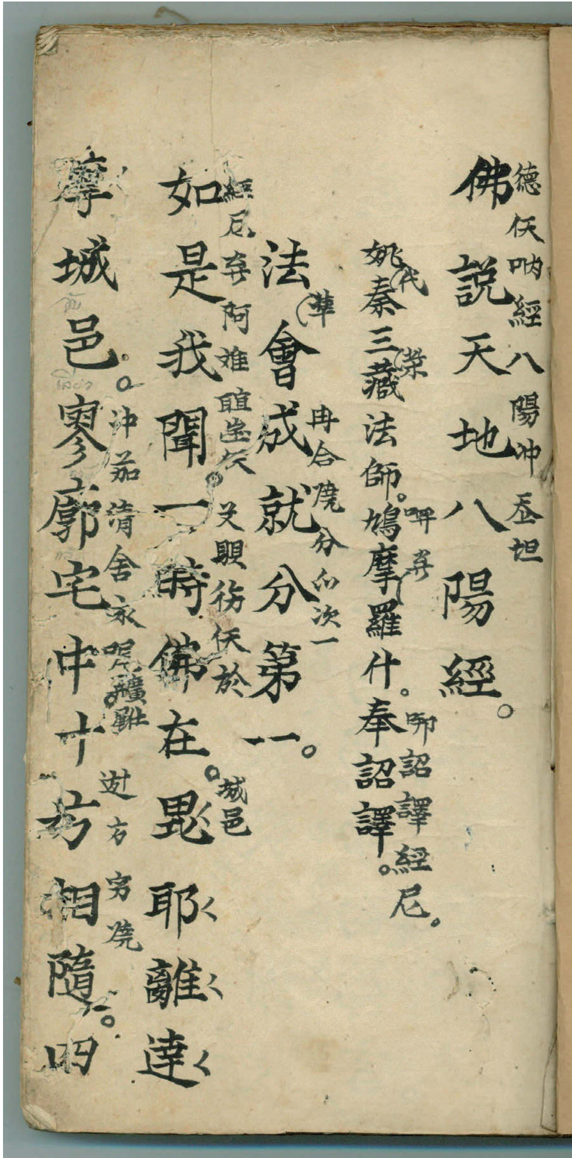
Appendix 1



佛說天地八陽經。

姚秦三藏法師鳩摩羅什。奉詔譯。

法會成就分第一。

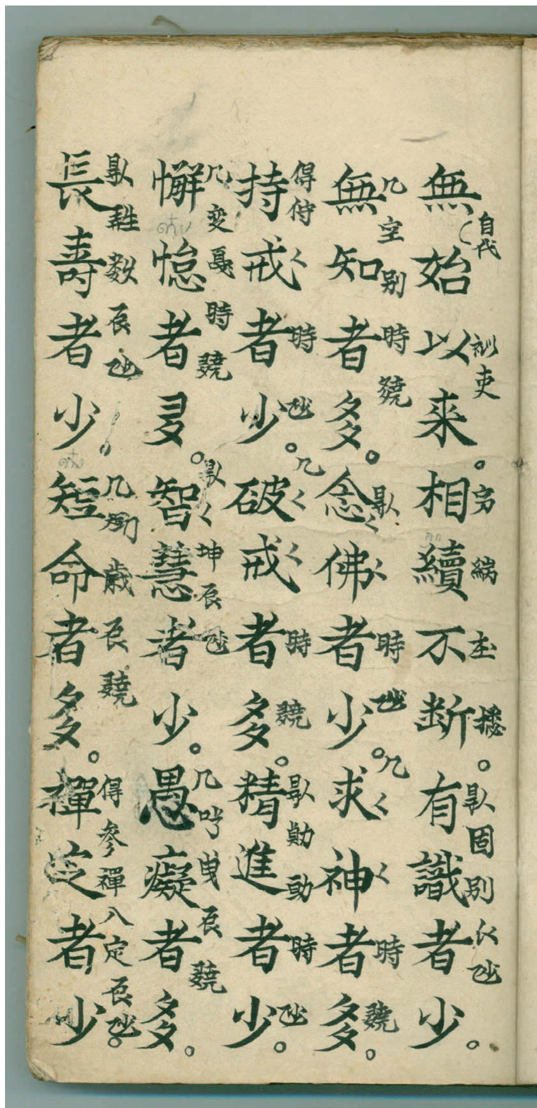
如是我聞一時佛在毘耶離達

摩城邑。寥廓宅中十方相隨

[01a1]
德伕吶經八陽冲𡗶坦
Đức Phật nói Kinh Bát dương trong trời đất
[01a2]
代姚秦柴三藏法師
Đời Diêu Tần thầy Tam tạng pháp sư
哶𡚦 鳩摩羅什
là ông Cưu Ma La Thập.
哪詔譯經尼
vâng chiếu dịch kinh này
[01a3]
準法會冉合僥分〳次一
Chốn Pháp Hội nhóm họp nhau phần làm thứ nhất
[01a4]
經尼𡚦阿难𦗏𡞕伕
Kinh này ông A Nan nghe chưng Phật
𠬠眀彷伕於
Một buổi đức Phật ở
城邑毘耶離達
thành ấp Tỳ Da Ly Đạt
[01a5]
摩
Ma
冲茹清舍永𠸗𪆧𠹚
trong nhà Thanh xá vắng vẻ rộng rãi.
进方穷僥
mười phương cùng theo

Fig. 3: *TDBY* (W007a, 2a) and transcription of Chữ Nôm portions (1a1~1a5)

Appendix 2



無始以来相續不斷有識者少
無知者多念佛者少求神者多
持戒者少破戒者多精進者少
懈怠者多智慧者少愚癡者多
長壽者少短命者多禪定者少

[02a1]
自代無始𥙩吏
từ đời vô thủy lấy lại,
穷納庄撝
cùng nối chẳng dứt
𠊛固别衣乙
Người có biêt ấy ít
[02a2]
几空别時𡗉
kẻ không biết thì nhiều
𠊛念佛時乙
Người niệm Phật thì ít
几求神時𡗉
kẻ cầu thần thì nhiều
[02a3]
得侼戒時乙
Người giữ giới thì ít
几破戒時𡗉
kẻ phá giới thì nhiều
𠊛𠡚𠢞時乙
Người siêng gắng thì ít
[02a4]
几变戞時𡗉
kẻ biếng nhác thì nhiều
𠊛智坤㐌乙
Người trí khôn thì ít
几�School曳㐌𡗉
kẻ ngây dại thì nhiều
[02a5]
𠊛𤯩数㐌乙
Người sống lâu thì ít
几𦀿歲㐌𡗉
kẻ vắn tuổi thì nhiều
得参禪入定㐌乙
Người tham thiền nhập định thì ít

Fig. 4: *TDBY* (W007a, 2a) and transcription of Chữ Nôm portions (1a1~1a5)

Chen Meiwen

Collections of Yao Manuscripts in Western Institutions

Abstract: This chapter aims to provide background information on the collections of Yao manuscripts in European and American libraries and museums. It looks at Yao manuscripts beyond a 'content approach' and focuses on the various ways in which these manuscripts found their way into overseas collections. It elaborates on three aspects of Yao manuscripts that are essential for us to understand. Most notably, the Yao are not a homogenous ethnic group, and Yao manuscript culture is not homogenous either. It is essential to study Yao manuscripts from a sub-group perspective. Overseas collections of Yao manuscripts which were acquired mostly by purchase came mainly from two Yao sub-groups, the Mien and the Mun, both Mienic-speaking peoples of the Hmong-Mien language family. I then give an overview of collections of Yao manuscripts outside China and discuss problems of classification, methods of textual transmission, reading pronunciation, the use of the character script, and other aspects of Yao manuscript cultures. Finally, I elaborate on some simple methods to differentiate between manuscripts of the Mien and the Mun sub-groups to facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of Western collections.

1 Defining Yao manuscripts

The publication of *Yao Documents* by Shiratori Yoshirō in 1975 drew scholarly interest in studying Yao manuscripts among scholars outside China.[1] Reviewing *Yao Documents*, Michel Strickmann in his ground-breaking essay 'The Tao among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China' pointed out that there was a textual relationship between Shiratori's Yao manuscripts and Daoist scriptures.[2] Since then, the study of Yao manuscripts has primarily taken a 'content approach', especially in exploring their Daoist elements.[3] This chapter aims to expand our understanding of Yao manuscripts beyond the 'content approach' by studying how the

1 Shiratori 1975.

2 Strickmann 1982.

3 For instance, Hu Qiwang 1994, 61–69.

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manuscripts in library and museum collections came to be there, and how they might be related to other aspects of their original societies and cultures.

The Yao are highly mobile non-Han ethnic peoples living in southern China, mainland Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. Over the past few centuries, they have taken their manuscripts on their migratory routes from China and Mainland Southeast Asia and in very recent times, to Western countries.[4] Some of the Yao manuscripts ended up in several European and American university libraries or museums. Until now, the scholarly articles that provide an overview of these collections are introductory in nature.[5] Their focus is not how the categorisation of Yao manuscripts came into being or how the manuscripts were written, read, or sung. Even with today's dynamic international collaboration on various digitalization projects, research on Yao manuscripts that goes beyond a 'content approach' is still scarce.[6]

Then, what is a Yao manuscript? Adam Smith offers a working definition: 'The texts are 'Yao' in the sense that they are likely to have been possessed and used by Yao individuals, and in some cases copied or composed by Yao transcribers or authors'.[7] This paper takes Smith's definition as a point of departure. In general terms, we can say that Yao people borrowed the Chinese script and modified it to write their own texts for a variety of their own religious and cultural purposes. However, it is important to notice three specific socio-political factors associated with the production of Yao manuscripts.

First and foremost, readers need to know that 'Yao' is an umbrella term that includes a number of quite different groups, having different cultures and speaking different languages. Various peoples at various times fled up into the hills to avoid taxation by predatory officials. 'Yao' was originally an exonym, not an autonym, given to them by the Chinese.[8] In China, the Yao are one of 56 nationalities officially recognised by the Chinese government. So defined, they incorporate speakers of four main language families: there are Hmongic-speaking groups (such as the Bunu),

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4 For the cross-border migration history of the Yao, see Cushman 1970.

5 Obi 2010, 'Yao Manuscripts in Western Collections', paper presented at the Yōzoku dentō bunken kenkyū kokuji shinpojūmu ヤオ族伝統文献研究国際シンポジウム [International Symposium on Research of Yao Traditions], November 23, 2010, Yokohama, Kanagawa University; Chen Peng 2018; Wu Chiayun 2019.

6 Cawthorne 2021 and Estévez 2022 are among the few works that approach Yao manuscripts both with and beyond their contents. Cawthorne demonstrated the production process of Yao manuscripts in terms of their materiality. Estévez illustrated how the Yao manuscripts attained their ritual powers through a series of rituals surrounding their production.

7 Smith 2017, 574. We note that Adam Smith says 'likely' – that is, he leaves open the possibility that manuscripts purporting to originate from Yao communities may actually be forgeries.

8 Feng Henggao 2007.

Mienic-speaking groups (such as the Mien), Kam-Sui speaking groups (the Lakkia), and Chinese dialect-speaking groups (e.g., the Pjon toa jeu) (autonyms in all cases).[9] Manuscript cultures and Daoism-laden ritual traditions can be found among all the above groups, except for the Hmongic-speaking groups. Hence, the concept of 'Yao manuscripts' encompasses the manuscripts written, owned, and used by the Mienic, Kam-Sui, and Chinese dialect-speaking groups as they are found in China.

However, outside China the Yao come mainly from two groups, the Mien and the Mun; both these groups are speakers of Mienic languages of the Hmong-Mien language family. These are the main Yao groups who migrated from China to Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos) in order to escape taxation, corvée labour, and military incursions, or to seek better living conditions. Later in the late 1970s, they also escaped to other countries (America, Canada, France, and Australia) because of the CIA's secret war in Laos (1964–1973).[10] The Yao manuscripts found outside China belong mostly to these two groups. The collections of Yao manuscripts housed in American and European libraries and museums were, for the most part, obtained from the Mien and the Mun living in Southeast Asia. In other words, the Yao manuscript collections held outside China are largely comprised of manuscripts written, owned, and used by these two groups.[11]

The second aspect is gender. In general, only Yao men can write Yao manuscripts. This characteristic relates to the fact that Yao women did not acquire Chinese literacy until the last century. The Yao composed Yao manuscripts with Chinese characters and Chinese-based vernacular graphs. Only men normally acquired Chinese literacy; therefore, they remained the sole transcribers of Yao manuscripts.[12]

The third aspect is commissioned transcription. Yao men wrote Yao manuscripts as part of a literate culture that included recitation of liturgical texts during rituals, letter-writing, and other things. Copying ritual texts from the collection of manuscripts owned by one's master is one of the ways for a disciple to learn the Chinese written characters, if he has not already had the skill, and acquire the contents. On the other hand, commissioning scribes (*daibi* 代筆) to copy manuscripts has been a conventional practice in Yao manuscript culture. Shiratori Yoshirō reports that many Yao ritual manuscripts he collected and compiled for *Yao Documents* were

9 Mao Zongwu 2004, 3, 6–8.

10 See Pourret 2002, 26 for how the Yao came to Southeast Asia; Litzinger 2000, xi; and Obi and Müller 2005, 228 for an editorial note on how the Yao came to western countries.

11 In the following discussion, I will use the term 'Yao' as shorthand to refer to the Yao groups that had such manuscript traditions.

12 Yao women participate in the manuscript culture by making paper. This paper-making tradition is still alive in the Yao (Lanten or Mun) villages in northern Laos. Women are the primary paper makers (Cawthorne 2021, 1–16).

purchased from Tung Sheng-li (Dong Shengli) 董勝利, a Han Chinese from Yunnan. Tung was married to a Yao woman and his job was to transcribe Yao manuscripts for Yao ritual specialists. In the case of a Yao manuscript made in this manner, the scribe usually added remarks and wrote his own name and the name of the commissioner at the end of the manuscript. For instance, the last page of a ritual manuscript in the Leiden collection (UB 2004–15 Folder 71) with an unidentifiable title contains the sentence, 'This book was commissioned by the disciple Li Yunkai [and] copied by a scribe surnamed Pan from Guangxi' (*Dizi Li Yunkai zhi ci Yuexi ren Panshi daibi* 弟子李雲開置 此粤西人潘氏代筆).

My focus in this chapter is on collections housed in libraries and museums outside China.[13] As Yao manuscripts are part of a living tradition, such collections are usually understood to have their origin in manuscripts that circulated or were used at the village level in Yao communities. These collections came into the possession of Western public institutions in various ways; each collection has its own story and history.

2 Collections of Yao manuscripts outside China

2.1 Overview

Outside China, collections of Yao manuscripts are housed in various institutes in countries that include Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam.[14] Some collecting projects are carried out by research institutions to study Yao (and other ethnic groups) in their own countries, for example the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies in Hanoi has preserved around 3,000 manuscripts (including but not limited to Yao), and the Sơn La Provincial Museum in northwestern Vietnam has 1,250 Yao and Thai manuscripts.[15] Apart from these in-country projects, methods of acquisition for academic institutes are either

13 These collections of Yao manuscripts are invariably located in the Asian Division, under a special collection of oriental origins.

14 This section lists various past and present projects to collect and digitize Yao manuscripts and conduct research on them. This listing is inevitably incomplete because the study of Yao manuscripts is a growing field. New projects, research, and publications are to be expected before the publication of this chapter. Collections of Yao manuscripts held by Yao people overseas and antique collectors can also be considered collections outside China. However, the listing here does not include them, and these too must remain beyond the scope of this research. This survey is summarised in a schematic form in Appendix 1 below.

15 Volkov 2012, 242.

by purchase or by donation, or both (see below). Nowadays, collecting Yao manuscripts for research purposes is sponsored by well-known funding bodies like the British Library, and involve collaboration between researchers and the manuscripts' owners – that is, the Daoist priests and ritual masters. The Yao Dao project team based in Hong Kong University is an example of this new model.[16]

The first method of collection is by purchase through oriental art dealers. Collections of this kind, for instance, are the Yao manuscripts held in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, and the US. In the 1990s, through R. L. Stolper, an oriental art dealer, a large consignment of Yao manuscripts from Laos and Thailand was purchased by the following libraries, museums, and university libraries: the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford (in two consignments: 307 manuscripts and 375 manuscripts); the Bavarian State Library (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) in Munich (2,776 manuscripts); the Institute of Chinese Studies (Institut für Sinologie) at the University of Heidelberg (220 manuscripts); and the National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde) in Leiden (216 manuscripts).[17] Furthermore, two smaller collections, containing 29 and 37 manuscripts respectively, are preserved in the Asian Library of Leiden University and the Royal Library in Copenhagen.[18] The Library of Congress in Washington DC purchased its Yao manuscripts a few years later, between 2006 and 2008 (241 manuscripts).[19]

The second method of collection was through donations made by the researchers who had collected manuscripts during their fieldwork. For instance, the collections housed at the Museum of Anthropology at the Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan, and the Museum of Avallon in Saint-Martin, France, are of this kind. The collection currently preserved in the Museum of Anthropology in Nanzan University was donated in 2000 by Shiratori Yoshirō, the author of the book *Yao Documents*.[20] Similarly, in 2008, the collection at the Museum of Avallon was donated by the French ethnographer, Jess G. Pourret, who had lived in Thailand for an extended period. Another extensive collection of Yao texts, around 2,000 (it is unclear how many are manuscripts), was donated by the Dong Sơn Today Foundation, based in Vietnam, to the Frederick and Kazuko Harris Fine Arts Library of Ohio University.

How did the collections acquired by purchase make their way into the abovementioned Western public institutions? In his review article that discusses the Munich collection of Yao manuscripts, Hjorleifur Jonsson revealed that there was

16 Guo Huiwen et al. 2022.
17 Chen 2016, 57–61; Wu Chiayun 2019, 18–28.
18 Kuiper 2005, 42–67; Pedersen 2016, 3–119.
19 He Hongyi 2017.
20 Shiratori Yoshirō 1975.

an ongoing international trade network from which these overseas collections of Yao manuscripts were obtained:

> By asking traders about these goods, I learned that the German library most likely acquired its collection over a few years from a calligraphy dealer in England, who bought them from a 'tribal and primitive art' dealer in Thailand. This specialist in Yao materials in turn makes collecting trips. His scouts in Laos and Vietnam have a sense of what materials attract interest and the kinds of prices paid.[21]

It is highly possible that the English art dealer Mr. Stolper did not know much about Yao culture. The Yao manuscripts he sold to Western institutions were an assembly collected from different villages across Southeast Asia through local dealers as intermediaries. Because of the acquisition method, Western collections suffer from a lack of background information. For example, if the colophon page is missing, then the information about the manuscript owner and the date of composition is also missing. Even more importantly, there will be no information about where the manuscript comes from. Such de-contextualized circumstances surrounding the collections acquired by purchase in Western institutions create particular difficulty for researchers wishing to use these manuscripts.

On the other hand, beginning in the 2000s, a new research trend in the study of Yao manuscripts began, involving the direct collection of manuscripts from Yao villages for digitization and preservation. These collections of Yao manuscripts are usually made by collaborations between researchers and Yao ritual specialists. Compared with the collections of Yao manuscripts purchased through art dealers, the origins of these Yao manuscripts are identified in these digitalizing projects. The earliest such project, sponsored by the Ford Foundation from 2006 to 2008, was: '"Culture", Texts, and Literacy in Contemporary Vietnam'. In 2008, the project accounted for over 11,000 texts of the Yao (called Dao) in Vietnam. The project's organisers hoped to develop an analytical index for digital collection and to publish the entire corpus in CD format.[22] Another small digitizing project covering around 200 manuscripts discovered in Vietnam was conducted by the research team led by Alexei Volkov at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, from 2007 to 2011. This four-year project, 'Traditional Sciences among Vietnamese Minorities', investigated the religious manuscripts of the Nùng, the Tày, and the Yao (Dao).[23]

21 Jonsson 2000, 223.
22 Davis 2011, 5.
23 Volkov 2012.

There are several digitalizing projects of Yao manuscripts administered by the British Library.[24] The first one is the 'Preservation of Yao Manuscripts from South Yunnan: Text, Image and Religion' (EAP 550) (2012). 208 manuscripts were digitized from Kunming, Yunnan by Dr. Xu Jian 徐堅 of Sun Yat-sen University.[25] Another one was 'Digital Library of the Lanten Textual Heritage' (EAP 791) (2015), led by Professor Dr. Josephus Platenkamp of Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. This project has enabled the digitization of 768 manuscripts from northern Laos.[26] Another project is 'A Digital Library of the Lanten Textual Heritage-Phase II' (EAP 1126) (2018) led by Professor Doctor Helene Basu of Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. This Phase II project continues the digital processing of the Lanten manuscripts in northern Laos initiated by the EAP 791 project. This project identified 1,396 manuscripts, a more significant number of manuscripts than initially listed for preservation.[27] Digitalization is an efficient way to preserve Yao manuscripts and make their content accessible to a wider readership (see Appendix 2).

2.2 Genres and classifications

The Yao people have used the Chinese script, including orthographic characters and vernacular characters, to write down anything they deemed necessary. As a result, the manuscript genres found in the collections of Yao manuscripts, both inside and outside China, are diverse. Bradley Davis has provided a general description of the different genres of texts collected for the above-mentioned '"Culture", Texts, and Literacy in Contemporary Vietnam' project conducted in Vietnam between 2006 and 2008:

> These texts covered a wide variety of subject matter related to Yao communities. Contents included songs for children, epic poems, lineage stories, guidelines related to customs and cultural practices, traditional handicrafts, weather forecasting according to traditional methods, and animal husbandry. Other texts discussed matrimonial customs, descriptions of ceremonies, rites to be performed to ensure a felicitous marriage, family mores, and funerary practices. A specific category of text dealt with disease prevention, remedies for illnesses, and recipes for folk medicines.[28]

24 The Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) is funded by the Arcadia Foundation and administered by the BL.

25 See https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP550.

26 See https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP791.

27 See https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP1126.

28 Davis 2011, 4–5.

Considering the different contexts in which scholars encountered Yao manuscripts, it may not be surprising that there is no consensus on even a general categorisation of Yao manuscripts. The following discussion of different classification models inside and outside China touches on the broadest classification frameworks for different collections. Before demonstrating three classification models developed for overseas collections (the Library of Congress collection, the Munich collection, and the Hong Kong Yao Dao collection), I include a discussion of two classification models suggested by Chinese scholars and offer pertinent information on the division of ritual labour between the traditions of Daoist priests and ritual masters, the religious dimensions of the category 'Songbooks', and the syncretic influences of different Daoist schools and forms of vernacular Daoism. The goal of the discussion about classification models for Yao manuscripts is to show the complexity of Yao manuscript cultures and why it is critical to study them from a sub-group perspective.

2.2.1 Classification for collections inside China

Chinese scholars follow the official classification of Yao by lumping together documents found in all four Yao language groups. They usually know the provenance of a manuscript, but only highlight the group differences when needed. For instance, one of the digitalization projects sponsored by British Library (EAP 550) that includes 208 manuscripts collected from Kunming by Dr. Xu Jian 徐堅 of Sun Yat-sen University only mentioned that these texts are from Yunnan but did not elaborate further on which manuscript belongs to which sub-group. Furthermore, the Chinese classifications, as represented by Zhang Youjun 張有雋, tend to give a broad classification that does not reflect on the different religious traditions and manuscript cultures among the Yao. Take Zhang Youjun's classification of Yao documents for example. He proposed grouping Yao manuscripts into six categories: 1) Charters (*guoshan wenshu* 過山文書), usually found among the Mienic-speaking group, and the Mien in particular; 2) Genealogies (*jiapu* 家譜) and Stone Tablet texts (*shipaiwen* 石牌文); the former are often referred to as 'Lists of Household Ancestors' (*jiaxiandan* 家先單) or 'Registers of Lineage and Branch' (*zongzhibu* 宗支簿) and tend to be associated most with the Mienic-speaking group, whereas the latter are closely linked with the Lakkia, a Kam-Sui-speaking group living in Jinxiu 金秀 county in eastern Guangxi;[29] 3) Religious Scriptures (*zongjiao jingshu* 宗教經書);

29 The stone tablets are connected with traditional forms of village-level social organisation. For example, the Lakkia used them to publicize village-level laws (*xiangyue* 鄉約), serving as legal

4) Songbooks (*geshu* 歌書); 5) Medical Books (*yixueshu* 醫學書) and 6) Contracts (*qiyueshu* 契約書).[30]

There is yet another mode of classification developed by Chinese scholars that reflects the basic division of ritual labour between the two scriptural and ritual traditions among the Mun and the Lakkia, one for Daoist priests and one for ritual masters, but is still unable to show the sub-group differences in Yao manuscript cultures, for the Mien only have a tradition of ritual masters. Huang Guiquan 黃貴權[31] and Pan Jinxiang 盤金祥[32] separately suggest a classification framework that contains three main categories for all the Yao manuscripts: Books for Gods and Spirits (*shenshu* 神書), Songbooks (*geshu* 歌書), and Miscellaneous Books (*zashu* 雜書).[33] Taking into consideration the division of ritual labour between the Daoist priests and ritual masters among the Mun and the Lakkia, in the category of Books for Gods and Spirits, they distinguish two sub-categories: Daoist-Priest Manuscripts (*daogong shu* 道公書) and Ritual-Master Manuscripts (*shigong shu* 師公書).[34]

To cover their needs as ritual specialists, the Mun Daoist priests and ritual masters own different sets of manuscripts. To give an example, a Mun Daoist priest possesses a set of ritual manuscripts for the performance of funeral ceremonies, one of which is entitled 'Ritual for Attacking Hell' (*poyuke* 破獄科). By contrast, a Mun ritual master possesses a particular set of ritual manuscripts that ensure the smooth passage of birth and pregnancy. One example is a text with the title 'Ritual for the Red Building' (*honglouke* 紅樓科).[35] 'Ritual for Attacking Hell' is a ritual segment performed for funerals, and the 'Ritual for the Red Building' is recited in rituals conducted for the living. The category Books for Gods and Spirits also includes

documents for every member of society to read and follow. Eastern Guangxi is not the only area where one can find stone tablets. The book edited by Huang Yu (1993) includes stone tablets collected from other parts of Guangxi, Guangdong, Hunan, and Guizhou.

30 Zhang Youjun 1991, 320–321; Zhang Youjun 1992, 71–74.

31 Huang Guiquan 2010, 497.

32 Pan Jinxiang 2009.

33 The discussion of Huang Guiquan and Pan Jinxiang's classification model combines my readings of their works on the related topic and face-to-face interview notes during my ten-day stay in Kunming in late October and early November 2012. In particular, the discussion of 'Songbooks' is from my interview notes. Similarly, Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun (2000, 33) also identify three categories for the Yao manuscripts they investigated in Yunnan: Religious Scriptures, Confucian Classics, and Songbooks. Yang and Yang highlight 'Confucian Classics' in their broad classification of Yao manuscripts, while this category is labelled as Miscellaneous Books in Huang and Pan's discussion.

34 For a list of Mun religious manuscripts of both Daoist priests and ritual masters found in Yunnan by Huang Guiquan, see Huang 2003, 123–126.

35 Although not great in numbers, it is not uncommon for a Mun male to be ordained in both the Daoist priest and ritual master traditions. See Liu Guangyuan 2003, 19.

Registers and Memorials (*biaozou* 表奏) containing formularies for petitions to the gods and spirits, and Secret Instructions (*mijue* 秘訣 or *miyu* 秘語) that sets out instructions for ritual performances. The former are used by both Daoist priests and ritual masters (including the Mien ritual masters); the latter are found only among the Mun for both Daoist priests and ritual masters and are absent among the Mien.[36]

Unlike other classifications, Huang and Pan highlight the importance of songbooks and make it a separate category. They report on two sub-categories for Songbooks found among the Mun communities in China: Literary-style Songs (*wenyan geyao* 文言歌謠) and Colloquial-style Songs (*baihua geyao* 白話歌謠). The Literary-style Songs of the Autumn Lotus (*qiulian ge* 秋蓮歌) are a reasonably specialized genre that few Yao have the expertise to compose and sing. This situation is the opposite of the Colloquial-style Songs, for instance, Letter Songs (*xin ge* 信歌) and Songs of Bridesmaids (*yuanyang ge* 鴛鴦歌), which are commonly known and widely performed. As for the Mien songbooks found in China, Pan Meihua reports a similar division between Literary-style Songs and Colloquial-style Songs. The former, called 'ancient songs' (*guyan geyao* 古言歌謠), narrate the history of ancient times. Songs that do not recount the history of ancient times can be regarded as Colloquial-style Songs.[37]

Last but not least is the category of Miscellaneous Books. In this category, Huang and Pan count all the other texts that are not directly used in ritual performances, including books on Divination (*zazhan lei* 雜占類), Textbooks for Moral Education (*qimeng shu* 啟蒙書), Language Acquisition, and Dictionaries.

2.2.2 Classification for collections outside China

I discuss three classifications in this section, those of the Library of Congress collection, the Munich collection, and the Yao Dao project team collection, to show different approaches to the collections of Yao manuscripts outside China and the broad classifications they produced.

For the Library of Congress collection, He Hongyi 何紅一 followed the Chinese classification of Yao ethnicity and did not distinguish between manuscripts belonging to different Yao groups when dealing with the 241 manuscripts in the Library of Congress collection. In other words, the sub-group differences in Yao manuscript

36 *Mijue* is used as the generic term for the manuals of a ritual practitioner containing the methods most crucial and therefore restricted in their circulation. See Pregadio 2008, 746–747.

37 Private conversation with Pan Meihua 盤美花 on 6 December 2013, in Nanning. Pan Meihua is of Mien origin and is a linguist and teacher at the Faculty of Arts at Guangxi University for Nationalities.

cultures are only highlighted when needed. She identified six categories of manuscripts that are of Mun and Mien origin: Scriptures (*jingshu* 經書); Documents (*wenshu* 文書); Songbooks; Textbooks for Moral Education; Divination Books (*zazhan lei* 雜占類); and Others (unidentified manuscripts, *qita* 其他).

The Munich collection: using 801 out of 2,776 manuscripts, Obi and Müller have classified the Munich collection into two main groups: manuscripts of a religious nature and manuscripts of a non-religious nature. They not only kept the essential distinction of 'Daoist-Priest manuscripts' and 'Ritual-Master manuscripts', but also devoted much effort to ascertain the scriptural and ritual traditions between different Yao sub-groups. According to their estimate of 100 identifiable titles, 60% of the manuscripts belong to the Mun, 30% of the manuscripts are of Mien origin, and 10% of the manuscripts come from the Pai Yao (their autonym is dzau^{53} min^{53}, a Mienic-speaking group). They do not seem to have manuscripts from the Lakkia group in the Munich collection.[38] Judging by the ritual function, they have further classified 'manuscripts of a religious nature' into five groups as follows: Scriptures (*jing* 經), Ritual Texts (*ke* 科), Registers and Memorials, Secret Instructions, and Minor Rites (*xiaofa* 小法). They also identified five subcategories among the 'non-religious manuscripts': Textbooks for Moral Education, Language Acquisition and Dictionaries, Epics and Songbooks, Divination Books, Documents, and Medical Texts.

The Hongkong Yao Dao project team collection: Unlike the above two library collections of Yao manuscripts, both acquired by purchase, all the Hong Kong manuscripts were collected for digitalization from a Mun village, with a population of around 4,700, located on the border of three provinces, Luang Namtha, Bokeo, and Oudomxay, in northern Laos. Joseba Estévez, a Yao Dao project team member, has conducted long-term fieldwork in this Mun village. Based on a digital corpus of 2,120 texts containing multiple entirely or partly duplicate texts, the Yao Dao research team categorized the manuscripts into three categories:

(1) Ritual texts, including liturgical texts, 'living manuscripts' (the Landian call these 'living manuscripts' *pei you* 秘語 [secret words or secret instructions]), and scriptures.[39] Scriptures are texts from the Daoist canon and used by the Daoist priests. Liturgical texts and 'living manuscripts' were further sub-categorized

38 Obi and Müller 2005, 250.

39 The Hong Kong Yao Dao project team use the designation 'Lanten Yao' instead of Mun or Landian Yao (a *hanyu pinyin* rendering of 藍靛瑤). These 'living manuscripts' embody deities within them and, thus, are deemed to be 'alive' by their owners. They must be covered with clothes ('dressed in uniform'). Also see Joseba Estévez's chapter in this volume.

into Dao Kong books (i.e., Daoist-Priest Manuscripts) and Tai Kong books (i.e., Ritual-Master manuscripts);[40]
(2) Companion texts or non-religious texts (almanacs, moral teachings, learning material, songbooks);
(3) 'Limbo', meaning books lacking an external title and books that are difficult to classify without further study.[41]

The Yao Dao project team also selected a 'Reference Collection' of the best versions of a set of unique and representative texts out of the corpus. Informed by Joseba Estévez's ethnographical knowledge of the rituals in which these manuscripts are used, the classification used for the Yao Dao project team collection is more closely connected with the original social context than the Western collections. Because it is still contextualised, it can also serve as a point of comparison for research on decontextualised Western collections for scholars wishing to understand the possible ritual functions of each manuscript and how they might have been used during ritual performances.

2.3 Discussion

As we can see, the modes of classification of Yao manuscripts varied in different contexts. The classification can be seen as a result of not only how different scholars possessing distinct conceptions of 'Yao manuscript' and 'Yao' interacted with the material objects, but also partly on the basis of what access they had to manuscripts and other artefacts in different domains, inside China as well as outside China.

To help readers understand the division of ritual labour between the Daoist priests and ritual masters highlighted in Huang and Pan's works and interviews, the Munich collection, and the Hong Kong Yao Dao project team collection for the Mun manuscript cultures, I offer further explanation here based on my fieldwork, surveys of different overseas library collections, and readings of related secondary literature. In general, Mun Daoist priests take charge of Daoist rituals like *Zhai* 齋 (funerary rituals) and *Jiao* 醮 (communal sacrificial rituals). They also perform ordination ceremonies, ceremonies in which a man becomes a Daoist priest or a ritual

40 Dao Kong (for Daoist priest) and Tai Kong (for ritual master) are terms used by the Hong Kong Yao Dao project team. Personal email exchange with Joseba Estévez on 5 May 2023.
41 The information on classification came originally from a powerpoint presentation entitled 'Manuscripts as Objects of Exchange' by Joseba Estévez at the 'Yao Dao: Daoism, Ethnic Identity, and State Socialism' conference held at Hong Kong University on 16–17 December 2019. A fuller explanation of the classification framework is available in a recent publication: Guo Huiwen et al. 2022.

master.[42] On the other hand, Mun ritual masters take charge of non-Daoist rituals that are often involved with exorcism and the curing of disease. The two types of ritual specialists often cooperate with each other in rituals and ceremonies like weddings, redemption of vows, and ordination.[43]

The main difference in the division of ritual labour between Daoist priests and ritual masters is aptly encapsulated by a saying offered by a Mun Daoist priest, Zhang Zhenzhen 張振針[44] from Dingcao 丁草 village, a Mun hamlet in Kujiao Village 枯叫村, Nanping Township 南屏鄉, Shangsi County 上思縣, Fangchenggang City 防城港市, in southwest Guangxi (the area is also known as Shiwan Dashan 十萬大山 'Ten Thousand Big Mountains'). Zhang said: 'A ritual master specializes in telling stories; a Daoist priest specializes in dealing with sadness. The former concerns matters that bring laughter; the latter is involved with matters that bring tears' (*shigong zhuanmen jiang gushi, daogong zhuanmen jiang youchou. yige guan xiao, yige guan ku* 師公專門講故事，道公專門講憂愁。一個管笑一個管哭). In other words, the speciality of a ritual master in ritual performance is to invoke the deities by reciting short dramatised narratives in verse that describe the attributes of the deities and the events through which he or she demonstrated their divine powers. The short narratives of the deities are often spiced with entertaining plots that will make people laugh. Another aspect pertinent to laughing is that the task of a ritual master concerns the living, not the dead. By contrast, a Daoist priest takes charge in matters of death and the afterlife, subjects that are often infused with sadness.

Readers might wonder which Daoist traditions and schools the Yao have adopted. Judging from the contents recorded in the Yao manuscripts available to be investigated today, one can easily observe a highly syncretistic influence of various Daoist schools that emerged in different historical periods.[45] For instance, the contents of the Daoist-Priest manuscripts are arguably similar to those in the Daoist canon, consisting of scriptures and liturgical texts that bear the textual traits of the

42 See for instance, Lemoine 1982; Takemura Takuji 1986; Zhang Jinsong 2003.

43 We still need more research to determine what kinds of rituals the Yao Daoist priest and Yao ritual master perform together and how they cooperate during ritual performances. I observed the cooperation between the two types of ritual specialists in weddings during my 2012 field trip to the Mun village, Dingcao. For their cooperation in ordination and redemptions of vows (Mun), see Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng 2014. Research on the cooperation between the Daoist priests and the ritual masters among the Lakkia still needs to be conducted.

44 I met Zhang Zhenzhen during my fieldtrip from September to November 2012.

45 Many scholars have noticed the syncretistic influences of various Daoist schools in Yao religion. To name just a few, for instance, Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun 2000, 1–22; Zhang Jinsong 2003; Obi and Müller 2005, 227–279.

Daoist schools of Lingbao 靈寶 (Numinous Treasure),[46] Zhengyi 正一 (Orthodox Unity),[47] and Tianxin Zhengfa 天心正法 (True Rites of the Heart of the Heaven).[48] On the other hand, the Ritual-Master manuscripts are associated with different forms of vernacular Daoism, bearing textual and ritual traits of Lüshan 閭山 (Lü Mountain) and Meishan 梅山 (Plum Mountain) traditions, for instance.[49] However, the texts themselves provide merely possible indications of any specific Daoist and vernacular Daoist influences, and should be studied together with the social, cultural, and ritual contexts in which they are produced.[50]

On another note, it is important to be aware that some of the songbooks also have a ritual function. During my 2012 field trip to the Mun village Dingcao, I met a group of women aged between fifty and seventy who were gifted with beautiful voices and possessed a religious songbook entitled 'Songbook of Relieving People in the Red Building (*honglou duren geshu* 紅樓度人歌書). The lyrics written in the songbook are descriptions of different ritual programmes conducted in the ordination ceremony. The significance of this specific songbook is that whenever an ordination

46 'The name Lingbao (Numinous Treasure) was originally a description of a medium or sacred object (*bao* 寶, "treasure") into which a spirit (*ling* 靈) had descended. The Lingbao texts describe an elaborate cosmic bureaucracy and instruct practitioners to approach these celestial powers through ritual and supplication. At the apex of the pantheon is the Celestial Worthy of Original Commencement (*Yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊)'. See Pregadio 2008, 663–669.

47 The Zhengyi ritual tradition the Yao practice is similar to the tradition of popular Zhengyi Daoists (*huoju daoshi* 伙居道士). The Yao Daoist priests do not live in a Daoist temple or on a mountain; they live in families in a way not dissimilar to ordinary people. *Huoju daoshi* are also found on Taiwan. The 'Three Pure Ones' (*sanqing* 三清) are the highest Daoist deities to be revered. See Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun 2000, 19–22.

48 'The Tianxin tradition is the earliest and most influential of the new Taoist exorcistic and therapeutic traditions that became important during the Song dynasty. It had already appeared in Southeastern China by the tenth century. However, the central corpus of texts, representing its earliest documented form, was only compiled at the beginning of the twelfth century'. See Pregadio 2008, 989–993. Strickmann's article (1982) was the earliest study to connect Yao Daoism with specific historical schools. In particular, Strickmann argues that the title '太上奉行北極驅邪院川通閭梅二教三戒陞明加職弟子' an ordained ritual master receives, indicates the incorporation of Tianxin Zhengfa in Yao Daoism. Notably, the title is only used in the Mien group.

49 The ritual tradition of Lüshan (*Lüshan jiao* 閭山教) 'was syncretically forged by grafting borrowings from different branches of Daoism and esoteric Buddhism onto a local shamanic or spirit medium substrate'. See Baptandier 2008, 17. See also Ye Mingsheng 2001, 149–184. The ritual tradition of Meishan (*Meishan jiao* 梅山教) refers to a particularly distinctive form of Daoism that mixed ritual and liturgical elements of indigenous beliefs and different Daoist schools and is widely found among non-Han Chinese peoples, for example Yao, Zhuang, and Tujia, but also Han Chinese communities of southern China. See Holm 2004, 32–64; Obi and Müller 2005, 235–236.

50 For an example of the Lüshan and possible Lingbao influences in Mien ritual performance, see Chen 2022, 201–244.

ceremony is to be held, two women who can sing and possess such a songbook must be invited and included. Similarly, as noted by different scholars, a songbook entitled 'Songs for King Pan' (*Panwang ge* 盤王歌) records the epic of King Pan and is only sung at the ritual of 'Repaying a Vow to King Pan' (*huan Panwang yuan* 還盤王願) among the Mien. We could also consider this specific songbook to be a religious text.[51]

Last but not least, the category of Textbooks for Moral Education, Language Acquisition, and Dictionaries, though not significant in number, indicates a long tradition of 'private schools' (*sishu* 私塾) located in the Yao villages, particularly among the Mun. These Chinese texts usually circulated in the border regions among non-Han Chinese communities in imperial China; for example, the 'Wisdom of Ancient Aphorisms' (*zengguang xianwen* 增廣賢文) was an enlarged edition of a collection of sayings used in elementary education from late Ming times.[52]

3 Linguistic features: How the manuscripts are written and read

This section discusses the linguistic features pertaining to the production and use of Yao manuscripts. It explores the questions of how the manuscripts are written and read, including a discussion of three forms of textual transmission and a preliminary analysis of Yao languages and scripts the Yao used and created.

3.1 Titles and contents

A prominent feature of Yao manuscript culture is that manuscripts with the same titles do not necessarily contain the same contents; or, manuscripts with the same contents have different titles. This textual feature applies to both the Mien and the Mun groups.[53] Jacques Lemoine explained that textual variations result from the fact that the disciples who copied the texts from their masters '…will never be tempted to test their accuracy by comparing them with similar documents from another source.'[54] An alternative explanation for variation in manuscript content may

51 Obi and Müller 2005, 242–243, 263–265; Chen 2016, 170–171; Zheng Changtian 2009, 216–234.

52 Wang Li and Huang Guiquan 2002.

53 Obi and Müller 2005, 239 and Guo Huiwen et al. 2022, 33 also notice this feature of Yao manuscript culture.

54 Lemoine 1982, 29.

be related simply to errors made by the transcriber during copying. In fact, the scribes are not passive agents in textual transmission. In the process of transcribing, they often altered, combined, added to, or omitted from the contents.[55]

The manuscripts I will examine here are from the Leiden collection of 216 manuscripts stored in the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, the Netherlands, and manuscripts found during my fieldwork trips to Guangxi (specifically, the manuscripts owned by Li Decai 李德才, on whom see below). By reading extensively among the 216 manuscripts in the Leiden collection and manuscripts collected during my fieldwork in Guangxi, I discovered three forms of textual transmission, which I dubbed respectively as 'faithful copy of a Daoist text', 'indigenous content under Daoist cover', and 'incorporation of folk songs'.

One ritual manuscript in the Leiden collection perfectly characterises the first form of textual transmission, a 'faithful copy of a Daoist text'. This manuscript (UB 2004-15 Folder 2), entitled 'The Second Scroll in the Scripture of the Jade Emperor' (*Yuhuang zhongjuan jing* 玉皇中卷經), was copied by a man named Li Xuanlian 李玄蓮 and produced in the first year of the Xianfeng 咸豐 reign of the Qing dynasty (1851). It is a Mun manuscript. When compared with 'Combined Scriptures of the Founding Acts of the Jade Emperor on High, the Second Scroll' (*Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jijing juan zhong* 高上玉皇本行集經卷中) in the Daoist Canon (CT 10–11), it offered unequivocal confirmation that 'The Second Scroll in the Scripture of the Jade Emperor' in the Leiden Collection is a 'verbatim' handwritten copy of 'Combined Scriptures of the Founding Acts of the Jade Emperor on High' included in the Daoist Canon.[56] Except for a few words rearranged and inserted into the Yao text, the two texts are the same.

Another ritual manuscript in the Leiden collection of 216 manuscripts illustrates the second form of textual transmission, namely 'indigenous content under Daoist cover'. The manuscript UB 2004-15 Folder 23, with a cover bearing the title 'Scripture of Miscellaneous Kinds' (*Zhupinjing* 諸品經) in the catalogue, was copied by a man called Deng Xuanhe 鄧玄和 (the date of transcription is not given). It is also a Mun manuscript. On the first few pages of this specific manuscript, we can find the same title and content of 'Combined Scriptures of the Founding Acts of the Jade Emperor on High, the Second Scroll'. However, closer inspection made it

55 Until the mid-twentieth century, the only way to produce a Yao manuscript was to write it by hand. However, some of the Yao ritual specialists I met in Guangxi and Yunnan have started to use photocopying to multiply texts in recent years.

56 *Daozang* 道藏 [Daoist Canon] 1986. CT refers to Schipper 1975. The English translation of the title *Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jijing juan zhong* 高上玉皇本行集經卷中 is from 3.B.7 (pp. 1096–1097) in Schipper and Verellen 2004.

apparent that the Daoist title and first part of the text only serve as a cover, and that the rest of the manuscript remains indigenous.[57] After selectively copying only a few lines from the Daoist scripture, the content of the text shifts into a different kind of content. From pages 23 to 28, two titles and the accompanying contents describe the regionally worshipped deities closely associated with pregnancy and childbirth, namely the Flower Deities (*huawang* 花王) and the Holy Mothers (*shengmu* 聖母). The titles read 'Wonderful Scriptures of Various Saintly Goddesses and Flower Deities Set Up by the Grand Supreme' (*Taishang she zhu shengmu huawang miaojing* 太上設諸聖母花王妙經) and 'Wonderful Scripture Narrated by the Grand Supreme for Thanking Holy Mothers and Flower Deities and of the Way to Expel Six Calamities' (*Taishang shuoxie huawang liuhai miaojing* 太上說謝花王六害妙經). This manuscript suggests that the copyist used a Daoist written genre as a covering device for honouring local deities.

The third form of textual transmission is 'incorporation of folk songs'. This refers to ritual manuscripts that have absorbed folk song elements. My example here is also about regionally worshipped deities, Flower Deities (*huahuang* 花皇) and is of Mien origin. Collected during my fieldwork in Guangxi, the title of this manuscript is 'Inviting the Flower Deities and the God of the Passes to Clear the Road and Let Us Pass by the Dark Mountain' (*Qing huahuang guanshen jie xiaoguan du hua du anshan* 請花皇關神解小關度花度暗山). The manuscript was copied and owned by Li Decai 李德才 from Weihao 偉好 village in Tianlin 田林 county, Baise 百色 municipal region, Guangxi. Unsurprisingly, my search did not find any titles or contents from the Daoist Canon corresponding to this ritual manuscript. Therefore, a search through a compilation of folk songs and stories of the Yao, Compilation of Yao Folksongs and Stories from the Dayaoshan, Guangxi (*Guangxi Dayaoshan Yaozu geyao gushiji* 廣西大瑤山瑤族歌謠故事集) was conducted.[58] Fortunately, this search identified part of the contents of the ritual manuscript, the part concerning the twelve months of changes among the blooming of the flowers, in a folk song entitled the 'Song of the Flowers' (*gehua* 歌花).[59] This ritual manuscript perfectly exemplifies an inter-textual relationship between folksongs and ritual texts.[60] Kristofer Schipper also reported a similar textual phenomenon among the ritual-master texts in southern Taiwan. It appears that borrowing folksong elements to describe the four seasons of the agricultural year when referring

57 A similar pattern in Zhuang Daoist texts is discussed in Holm 2004, 63–64.

58 Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui Minzu weiyuanhui bangongshi 1958.

59 Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui Minzu weiyuanhui bangongshi 1958, 38–39.

60 Zheng Changtian 2009, 216–234.

to birth and pregnancy may have been common practice across ethnic boundaries in South China.[61]

3.2 Sounds and scripts

Much ethnographic evidence shows that Yao manuscripts, especially manuscripts of religious nature, are still in use in the everyday life of Yao communities in South China and Southeast Asia.[62] How are these manuscripts read during ritual performances? I was not trained in linguistics, so I relied on secondary literature of this topic to give a general picture of the sounds and scripts associated with Yao manuscript culture.

3.2.1 Sounds

The Mien and the Mun, the two Yao groups most crucial to understand the Western collections of Yao manuscripts, both have three kinds of languages spoken for different settings: in scholarship on the Yao languages, the first type is called 'daily language' (*richangyu* 日常語), used in daily interactions. The second type is 'folk song language' (*geyaoyu* 歌謠語), used during folk song performances.[63] The last type is 'religious language' (*zongjiaoyu* 宗教語), used exclusively in religious settings.[64] To give an example of these three different languages spoken by the Mun, the Mun term meaning 'no' is pronounced *ma* in daily language, *jam* in folksong language, and *pat* in religious language.[65]

Pan Meihua further explains that the religious language is distinct from daily and folksong languages. She reports on four ways the Mien perceive and name religious language. In Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam, the Mien refer to it as *tsie wa* 斜話. The Mien in Baise 百色, western Guangxi, call it *Wuzhou hua* 梧州話 ('Wuzhou dialect'). In Hezhou 賀州, northeastern Guangxi, they call it *lin tsieu siŋ*

61 Schipper 1985, 31.
62 To name just a few instances, see Chen Meiwen 2018 for the Mien manuscript culture and ritual performance in northeastern Guangxi; Huang Guiquan 2010 for the Mun religious culture and manuscript tradition in southeastern Yunnan, Zhang Jinsong 2003 for the Mien ordination ceremony and its accompanying manuscripts in southwestern Hunan, Estévez 2022 for the Mun religious performance and manuscript tradition in northern Laos.
63 Purnell 1988, 143–155.
64 Pan Meihua 2008.
65 Huang Guiquan 2009, 7.

連州聲 (Lin tsieu or Lianzhou is the name of a place in northwestern Guangdong). Furthermore, the Mien ritual masters in Hezhou describe it as neither a Yao language nor a Han-Chinese language, but *mien wa* 鬼話, literally meaning 'ghost language'. Since the term for ghosts and deities is the same in Mien daily language (mien[53]), 'ghost language' can be broadly understood as the language utilised to communicate with otherworldly beings. 'Ghost language' is used to chant and recite ritual texts and invoke such Daoist deities as the Three Pure Ones (*sanqing* 三清), among many others, for it is understood that these 'Chinese' deities do not know the Yao language.[66] The Chinese pronunciations used by the Yao are not Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), but are based on the Pinghua dialect, earlier pronunciations of Chinese and occasionally the local variety of Southwestern Mandarin (SWM), Gui-Liu hua 桂柳話.[67]

3.2.2 Scripts

The characters found in Yao manuscripts can be grouped into two groups: those borrowed from the Chinese script, including orthographic Chinese characters and vernacular Chinese characters (*suzi* 俗字), and those which the Yao invented.[68] Like Zhuang scripts, most of the characters used by the Yao are standard Chinese graphs found throughout the Chinese cultural region.[69] The Yao used Chinese vernacular characters of the kind that are found throughout the Chinese cultural area. Examples of such vernacular graphs for Chinese can be found listed in A Glossary of Vernacular Characters in use since the Song and Yuan Dynasties (*Song-Yuan yilai suzipu* 宋元以來俗字譜), which includes 6,240 commonly-used Chinese characters selected from twelve block-printed editions of the popular literature of the Song (960–1279), Yuan (1271–1368), Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties.[70] Some of these familiar Chinese characters appear in Daoist scriptures and liturgical texts as well.[71]

The Yao adopted these Chinese characters to represent either the original Chinese word, including sound and meaning, or borrow them phonetically or semantically to represent native Yao words. For instance, the Mun borrowed 'culture'

66 Pan Meihua 2008.
67 Pan Meihua 2008. Gui-Liuhua is now the lingua franca in Guangxi, the speech of Guilin and Liuzhou. See Holm 2013, 42–44.
68 He Jing 2017, 205–224.
69 See Holm 2006, 125–176 for the example of Zhuang scripts.
70 Liu Fu and Li Jiarui 1930; Yu Yang 2009, 144–145.
71 He Hongyi and Wang Ping 2012, 183.

(*wenhua* 文化, the Mun pronunciation of which is *ban wa*) to represent the original meaning of the Chinese word. In the folksong language, they used 'extremity, to carry' (*duan* 端) only phonetically to mean 'men' (*nanzi* 男子) (the Mun pronunciation is *toon*). Also in the folksong language, they borrowed 'know' (*zhi* 知) only semantically to represent a Mun native word and pronounce it as *pei*.[72]

There are also a small number of Yao-invented graphs, mostly modified Chinese characters related graphically to an original Chinese character, which, within the academic circle of Yao studies in China, are called *Yao suzi* 瑤俗字 (Yao demotic characters) or *fangkuai Yaowen* 方塊瑤文 (square Yao script) in Chinese. Yao demotic characters frequently appear in the ritual texts of the Mun but are less frequent in the ritual texts of the Mien.[73] Though not exhaustively, we can at least identify three ways in which the Yao made demotic characters:[74]

(1) Adding or reducing semantic components (*zengjian yifu* 增減意符). An example of adding semantic components is an orthographic Chinese character meaning 'pacify, install' (*an* 安). The Yao added a 'tree' (*mu* 木) radical on the left (桉) or 'grass' (*cao* 艸) on top (荌) to mean 'pacify' or 'install'. The Chinese character 'save, help' (*jiu* 救) is an example that illustrates reducing semantic components. It sometimes consists of only the left part 'beseech' (*qiu* 求), leaving out the right-hand component 'rap, tap' (*sui* 攵), yet it still means 'to rescue'.

(2) Contextually transformed (*leihua* 類化). The way a character is written is influenced by the combination of characters proceeding or after it. There are plenty of examples, including in the term 'lake of blood' (*xuehu* 血湖), where the 'blood' (*xue* 血) sometimes appears in a form with the 'water' (*sui* 氵) radical added on its left (洫), because it is influenced by 'lake' (*hu* 湖).

(3) Using the ready-made structure or components to create new graphs (*jieyong xiancheng jiegou huo bujian jiangou xin zi* 借用現成結構或部件建構新字). For example, the Yao created a demotic character 丵 (*ye*) for 'father' and 爷 (*niang*) for 'mother,' using 'father' (*fu* 父) as a basic component. The character 'above' (*shang* 上) has been added below the graph 'father' to make the demotic

72 Huang Guiquan 2003, 59.

73 Feng Henggao 2007, 278.

74 He Hongyi and Wang Ping 2012, 183; Song Enchang 1991, 27–28.

character 圣 (*ye*). And, the character ‘below’ (*xia* 下) has been added below the graph ‘father’ to create the demotic character for ‘mother’.[75]

3.3 Discussion

This section has described forms of textual transmission, pronunciation, and Chinese-style characters associated with Yao manuscripts. It elucidates three identifiable forms of textual transmission in the Yao manner of composing religious texts. Though the details of historical context remain elusive, the first form of textual transmission, ‘faithful copy of a Daoist text’, proves that the Yao – in this case, the forebears of the Mun – had access to Daoist scriptures. The second form of textual transmission, ‘indigenous content under Daoist cover’, shows that copyists were not passive agents when transcribing texts. Apart from creating verbatim copies of Daoist scriptures, the Mun seemed to have consciously utilised the Daoist written genre as a rhetorical cover to record ritual texts devoted to their own deities. The third form of textual transmission, ‘incorporation of folk songs’, as evidenced in the Mien manuscript culture, tellingly indicates that folksongs are also integrated into ritual texts, instantiating a transition from orality to textuality and characteristic of an enduring inter-textual relationship between folk songs and ritual texts, a textual feature shared beyond ethnic boundaries that can be traced back to the *Yuefeng xujiu* 粵風續九, an early Qing folksong collection including songs from both Han and non-Han Chinese peoples in Guangxi.[76]

Because the Yao adopted the Chinese characters used throughout the Chinese cultural region, many Yao texts including liturgical texts are written in Chinese, and it is these texts which readers think they can understand. However, some Yao texts also contain native Yao words, and for an understanding of these it is necessary to possess knowledge of the relevant Yao language. Similar to the discussion of classifications for Yao manuscripts, it is essential to understand the linguistic features associated with Yao manuscript cultures from a sub-group perspective.

75 This example comes from the Mun: Feng Henggao 2007, 829. It is worth mentioning that the Yao used two or more modified Chinese characters to refer to the same word. For instance, the radical ‘legs’ (*bo* 癶) with the character ‘mother’ (*niang* 娘) underneath it is also used to mean ‘mother’: 癶娘 (*niang*).

76 Pan Meihua 2013.

4 Differentiating between manuscripts of the Mien and Mun

As previously mentioned, the Mien and the Mun are the only two groups of Yao people who are resident both in South China and highland Southeast Asia. Via art dealers, their manuscripts found their way into special collections in Western public institutions. During their trips to the West, many manuscripts lost their covers and colophons, some pages were lost, and sometimes their pages got torn or damaged. The provenance of each manuscript is not clear, either. How these manuscripts were assembled presents a tremendous challenge for researchers wishing to use these collections. One basic question is: how does one differentiate between manuscripts of the Mien and the Mun? It is essential to distinguish between the manuscript cultures of these two Yao groups because, as mentioned above, they have adopted different religious traditions and manuscript cultures. So it is important to understand as clearly as possible which manuscript belongs to which group when utilising library and museum collections.

Obi and Müller in their article provide invaluable clues to solving this problem. One of the crucial clues is ordination names (*faming* 法名). On the colophon pages of a Yao manuscript, the transcriber would write down the ordination name of the book owner (sometimes the transcriber himself or the person who commissioned the transcription). Frequently, one will find more than one ordination name written down in a Yao manuscript. These are the names of male descendants who inherit the manuscripts or the disciples who received the manuscripts from their masters.[77]

The Mun and the Mien have two different ways of naming postulants following an ordination ceremony. For the Mun, who have adopted two ritual traditions, a Daoist priest tradition and a ritual master tradition, the ordination names of these two kinds of ritual practitioners are significantly different. To clarify, here are examples of a Mun Daoist-priest-style ordination name and a ritual-master-style ordination name: Li Dao-de 李道德 (Daoist-priest-style) and Pan Xian-gui 盤顯貴 (ritual-master-style). The Daoist-priest-style ordination name uses a set of generational names, including Dao 道, Jing 經, Yun 雲, Xuan 玄, and Miao 妙 in sequence for the middle character. In contrast, the ritual-master ordination name uses another set of generational names, among them Fa 法, Li 利, Ying 應, Xian 顯, and Sheng 勝 sequentially for the middle character. By looking at the middle character

77 Obi and Müller collected 2,000 names from 801 manuscripts. See Obi and Müller 2005, 265–267.

of the ordination name, it is possible to recognise immediately whether it is a Mun manuscript and which religious tradition the manuscript owners have inherited.[78]

The Mien, who only have the ritual master tradition, have at least four levels of ordination in their clerical hierarchy. In order of sequence, they are *kwa dang* (hanging the lamps), *tou sai* (ordination of the master), *chia tse* (additional duties), *pwang ko* (or *chia tai*) (enfeoffing liturgies) (all pronunciations are Mien religious language).[79] A postulant receives an ordination name according to the level of ordination ceremony he has undergone. A postulant who has received *kwa dang* ordination will be given an ordination name with the specific character *fa* 法 in the middle, for instance, Li Fa-tong 李法通. This format of an ordination name remains the same until *tou sai* but will change into Li Tong San Lang 李通三郎 when the postulant reaches the level of *chia tse*. The ultimate ordination name consists of the postulant's surname, a non-numeric character followed by a numeral (indicating birth order) and then the character lang 郎 (a respected title for men, gentlemen, and husbands). With this simple method, I identified 83 Mun manuscripts and four Mien manuscripts from the Leiden collection of 216 manuscripts, with 200 identifiable Yao manuscripts, resulting in a 43.5 % identification rate.

Attentive readers may notice that the Mun and the Mien might share the same ordination names with the character *fa* 法, a character used in the Mun ritual master tradition and at the first two levels of Mien ordination ceremonies. Should this occur, we could look further at the titles and specific hints in the contents. A key difference mentioned in Obi and Müller's article is that, compared with the Mun, the Mien do not have a separate genre of Ritual (*ke* 科). In other words, a manuscript carrying *ke* in its title is invariably of Mun origin. Furthermore, when giving a scripture (*jing shu* 經書) a title, the Mun tend to use *Jing* 經 in the title, while the Mien use *Shu* 書. In terms of content, if the text involves a goddess of fertility, Imperial Mother (*Dimu* 帝母), or a Daoist martial deity, the Father of Commands (*Linggong* 令公) (usually in pair), then it is a Mun manuscript. Only the Mun pay worship to this pair of deities, and not the Mien.

In sum, it would be useful for researchers to pay attention to these clues regarding the origins of these randomly assembled manuscripts in order to utilise the

78 It is not uncommon for two ordination names with different middle characters to be mentioned together on the cover of a manuscript or somewhere inside the text. In a few cases, the copyist may have mastered two religious traditions. It is also noteworthy that since there are different sets of generational names for the middle character in the ordination name, the Mun use certain characters in both the Dao 道 and Shi 師 traditions, such as Miao 妙 and Sheng 勝. Nevertheless, the middle character in the ordination name in the Mun manuscript is a handy identifier to determine the origin of the Yao manuscript.

79 Mclntosh 2012, 4–6.

western library and museum collections more effectively, especially the collections acquired by purchase. In addition to ascertaining which are the authentic Yao manuscripts, researchers also need to be aware of the distinctive features of the Mien and the Mun manuscript cultures. Obi and Müller conducted a painstaking investigation to determine the origins of the 801 manuscripts in the Munich collection. Their work proves to be an invaluable reference. This section offers some simple methods a researcher can use to determine the origins of the Yao manuscripts in Western collections: by looking at the ordination names recorded in the texts, the titles of the manuscripts, and the specific deities the Mun worship, we can often tell very quickly which manuscript culture we are dealing with.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored different contexts in which the Yao adopted and integrated the Chinese written culture, local beliefs, and regional folksong cultures to write their manuscripts. It provided information useful for exploring wider topics, including but not limited to religious interactions between Yao and Han Chinese cultures. For instance, the discussion on the linguistic features of Yao manuscripts indicated a long history of how non-Han Chinese people appropriated, integrated, and transformed the Chinese spoken and written languages into their religious and cultural lives. It also touched upon how scholars came up with different classification models that reflect on their concepts of Yao and Yao manuscripts and how they encountered Yao manuscripts in specific contexts. All of the discussion pointed out the importance of studying Yao manuscript cultures from a sub-group perspective.

The chapter first gave an overview of collections of Yao manuscripts outside China and addressed the issue of classification. It showed that the answer to the question ‘what is a Yao manuscript’ is not self-evident. Next, it discussed three forms of textual transmission manifested in Yao religious manuscripts: ‘faithful copy of a Daoist text’, ‘indigenous content under Daoist cover’, and ‘incorporation of folk songs’. The analysis of these three forms shows that while a verbatim replication of a Daoist text seems standard practice, the influence of local elements can often be identified in the Yao written tradition (for instance, locally worshipped deities and the folk songs sung in a secular setting). In particular, the ‘incorporation of folk songs’ indicates a transition from orality to textuality, characterising an enduring inter-textual relationship between folk songs and ritual texts across ethnic boundaries.

It then elaborated on the linguistic features of the sounds and characters associated with performing and making the Yao manuscripts. It is important to

understand the Yao, both the Mien and the Mun, speak three kinds of Yao languages: daily language, folk song language, and religious language.[80] Graphically, they have shown proficiency in the employment of the Chinese character script for a wide variety of purposes. Though not great in number, they have both created Yao demotic characters to represent words in their own language (more among the Mun and less among the Mien). The use of these Yao vernacular graphs may vary from place to place and remains a matter to be investigated systematically. Finally, this chapter looked at how to distinguish between the Mien and the Mun manuscripts in the collections of Yao manuscripts, particularly those housed in Western public institutions and acquired by purchase. Based on the data generated in Obi and Müller's 2005 article, the chapter offered some simple methods to determine at least some information on the origins of these manuscripts (for example, the format of the ordination names).

The information provided in this chapter is meant to increase the accessibility of Western collections of Yao manuscripts and help interested researchers take the first steps in situating those de-contextualized manuscripts in specific contexts. It is hoped that researchers in the field of Yao studies, manuscript cultures, ethnic studies will then be able to utilise these Western collections more efficiently and make contributions to the growing field of international Yao studies.

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80 On this topic see also the discussion in Cawthorne in this volume.

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Appendix 1: Collections of Yao manuscripts outside China and research on them

Europe

Copenhagen (Denmark), Det Kongelige Bibliotek

Call numbers: Cod. Yao 1–37

Number of manuscripts: 50, acquired from donations and by purchase[81]

Main publications: Pedersen 2016

Heidelberg (Germany), Universität Heidelberg, Centrum für Asiatische und Trans-kulturelle Studien (CATS) Bibliothek

Number of manuscripts: 220, all acquired by purchase[82]

An exhibition of the Yao manuscripts stored at Heidelberg University can be found on-line: <https://projects.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/cats/library/exhibitions/yao/#/> (accessed on 15 July 2022).

Leiden (the Netherlands), Universiteitsbibliotheek, Asian Library

Call numbers: Or. 23.085–108, Or. 23.294–296, Or 26.311–312

Number of manuscripts: 29, all acquired by purchase

Main publications: Kuiper 2005, 42–67

This collection was acquired through a special grant provided to the Asian Library by B.J. ter Haar in January 1993. The collection was purchased in northern Thailand, probably from Michael Goh's tribal and primitive art shop 'The Lost Heavens' in Chiang Mai.[83]

Leiden (the Netherlands), Museum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology)

Call numbers: UB 2004-15 Folder 1–216

Number of manuscripts: 216, all acquired by purchase

Munich (Germany), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek

Call numbers: Cod. Sin. 147–2928

Number of manuscripts: 2,776, all acquired by purchase

Main publications: Höllmann and Friedrich 2004 (the catalogue contains only about 30% of the collection); Obi and Müller 2005 (detailed introductory article)

81 37 manuscripts were collected in northern Thailand in 1970 and donated by Jesper Trier. Six manuscripts were purchased from R. L. Stolper.

82 Reportedly, these manuscripts were acquired together in northern Laos from a ritual master and headman of a village. The collection has a number of copies of the same texts and manuscripts from different families. It is unlikely that the man said to be a ritual master and headman was the original owner, but rather a collector or trader.

83 Kuiper 2005, 42.

Avallon (France), Musée de l'Avallonnais Jean Després
Number of manuscripts: unknown, from donations

Southeast Asia/East Asia

Hanoi (Vietnam), Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies
Number of manuscripts: unknown
Main publications: Yuenan Laojiesheng wenhua tiyu lüyou ting (eds) 2011[84]

Nagoya (Japan), Museum of Anthropology at Nanzan University
Number of manuscripts: 220, from donations
Main publications: Kanagawa daigaku daigakuin rekishi minzoku shiryō-gaku kenkyū-ka 2014
Zheng Hui 2011 provides a brief discussion about the collections of Yao manuscripts stored in the Museum of Anthropology at Nanzan University and the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies in Hanoi.

Sơn La (Vietnam), Provincial Museum in Sơn La (Bảo tàng tỉnh Sơn La)
Number of manuscripts: around 50 Yao (Dao) manuscripts, along with 1200 Thai (Thái) manuscripts[85]

United States of America

Athens, OH, Ohio University, Alden Library, Frederick and Kazuko Harris Fine Arts Library
Number of manuscripts: unknown, they were donated by the Dong Sơn Today Foundation. It is said that there are around 2,000 manuscripts involving Yao religion and culture.

Washington DC, Library of Congress
Number of manuscripts: 241, all acquired by purchase
Main publications: Yu Yang 2009; Yu Yang 2011; He Hongyi and Wang Ping 2012; He Hongyi, Huang Pingli and Chen Peng 2013; Huang Pingli, He Hongyi, and Chen Peng 2013; He Hongyi 2017

United Kingdom

Oxford, Bodleian Library
Sinica 3241–Sinica 3547

84 This book, published in Chinese, is a work of collaboration between scholars from Vietnam and Guangxi.
85 The information is from Prof. David Holm's personal communication with Kiều Thảo, lecturer in Linguistics at the Northwestern University (Sơn La) (Đại học Tây Bắc, Sơn La), 8 December 2023.

Number of manuscripts: 307, all acquired by purchase, almost all digitized on https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ (accessed on 8 February 2020)[86]

Main publications: Guo Wu 2012a and 2012b; Hu Xiaoliu 2013; Xu Fei 2016

Oxford, Bodleian Library

Dep. Stolper 1–Dep. Stolper 907, the manuscripts remain a private collection of the Stolper family

Number of manuscripts: 375, all acquired by purchase[87]

Appendix 2: Digitisation projects for Yao manuscripts

2006–2008: ‘Culture’, Texts, and Literacy in Contemporary

Location: Vietnam

Sponsor: Ford Foundation

Results: Analytical index for the digital collection; the entire corpus on CD format (not available)

2007–2011: Traditional Sciences among Vietnamese Minorities

Location: Vietnam

Sponsor: National Science Council (now National Science and Technology Council, Taiwan)

Results: Around 200 manuscripts of Nùng, the Tày, and the Yao (not available online)

2012: Preservation of Yao Manuscripts from South Yunnan: Text, Image and Religion (EAP 550)

Location: Kunming, Yunnan, China

Sponsor: British Library

Results: 208 manuscripts (available online)

2015: Digital Library of the Lanten Textual Heritage (EAP 791)

Location: Northern Laos

Sponsor: British Library

Results: 768 manuscripts (available online)

2018–2020: A Digital Library of the Lanten Textual Heritage-Phase II (EAP 1126)

Location: Northern Laos

Sponsor: British Library

Continuation of the EAP 791 project (available online)

86 The total number of this collection is 307, instead of 317, because there are missing cod. numbers and overlapping cod. numbers.

87 Even though the cod numbers range from 1 to 907, the exact number of manuscripts is not 907 but 375 (1–189, 213–218, 314–413, 817–887, 898–907). See Xu Fei 2016, 77.

Jacob Cawthorne

Kim Mun Letters: An Introduction to Yao Primary Sources

Abstract: Yao (Kim Mun and Iu Mien) religion is well-known for its Daoist religious practices and texts. This is seen as its most significant feature, especially in academic and government circles, and is at times presented as the epitome of Yao culture. However, alongside ritual texts there exist other manuscripts including handwritten letters and songs, which constitute both records and representations of the people and their history, culture, and identity. While historical, anthropological, and linguistic approaches have been applied to the study of Yao ritual texts, the letters and songs have received little attention or opportunity to speak. This chapter advances the case for concerted research on Kim Mun (and Yao) letters and songs as primary sources for the study of the history, politics, and religion in the borderlands of China and Southeast Asia.

1 The Kim Mun

Kim Mun speak a language that belongs to the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) language family, and make up the second largest sub-group of the Mienic (Yao) branch – the largest being the Iu Mien.[1] While the Mun and Mien groups constitute the majority of the Mienic-speaking groups, the Yao ethnonym has more disparate coverage. There are at least four major language groups included within the Yao ethnonym: the Mien-Mun-speaking groups, Hmong-speaking groups, Lakkia-speaking groups (Tai-Kadai language family), and groups that speak various southern Chinese dialects. Hence, there are ethnic communities who self-identify as Yao or are categorised under the Yao ethnonym in China, and to a lesser extent Vietnam, but who do not share the same language or culture as the Kim Mun and Iu Mien groups.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, the information presented here comes from fieldwork conducted in Luang Namtha Province (in 2011–2012, 2014, and 2016) and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (2013). The information draws from the same body as used in Cawthorne 2020. Despite this overlap, the arguments made here cover different ground. All photographs were taken by the author. Figs 3 and 5 are also used in Cawthorne 2020.

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At present, most Kim Mun communities live in northern Laos, northern Vietnam, and the provinces of Guangxi, Yunnan, and Hainan in southern China.[2] They are counted as a minority ethnic group in each province or territory, usually grouped under the Mien or Yao ethnonym.[3] The endonym *kim mun* means 'mountain people'.[4] The term *mun* (sometimes written 們 MSC: *mén*) is used in self-reference, meaning simply 'people', and appears often in Kim Mun literary texts. The term also dominates Kim Mun spoken vernacular; for example, *mun wa:* means the Kim Mun vernacular language, while *mun sa:* and *mun tɔn* an unmarried girl and boy respectively. Conversely, *iu* (瑤 MSC: *yáo*) is used in specific reference to group identity, often as *iu ɲin* (瑤人 MSC: *yáorén*).[5] The Kim Mun also make distinctions within their own group, using terms such as highland Kim Mun (*kim kjaŋ mun*) and lowland Kim Mun (*kim ha mun*), or clan-names, for example *kjaŋ mun* (people of the Kiang 蔣 clan) who are known for their good-looks and propensity to prattle.

The Kim Mun originally inhabited a region in modern-day southern China. It was in this area that Kim Mun communities first came into contact with Daoism and its rituals and texts.[6] At present, historical accounts of the Kim Mun (and Iu Mien) are tied to the Yao ethnonym and largely come to us via Chinese historical texts, official documents, and 20th century anthropological surveys.[7] These documents

2 The Kim Mun in Hainan are classified under the Miao ethnic group (苗族 MSC: *miáozú*) despite linguistic ties to the Mienic branch of the Hmong-Mien language family and similar cultural and religious practices. For descriptions of the Mien linguistic group, see Mao Zongwu 2004; Ratliff 2010. For the Yao ethnic group, see Mao Zongwu, Meng Chaoji, and Deng Zongze 1982; Pu Chaojun and Guo Zhu 1992.

3 Herein, the term *Mien* refers to both the *Kim Mun* and *Iu Mien* groups. The term *Yao* is used when it appears in references to Chinese historical sources or contemporary works. Care must be taken when using both the Mien and Yao ethnonyms as the Yao ethnic group (瑤族 MSC: *yáozú*) in China includes non-Mienic speaking communities as well as disparate religious beliefs and practices. *Mun* and *Mien* both translate as 'person' or 'people' in their respective languages.

4 Mun is a tonal language, however I have chosen not provide tone marks here, in part because of the differences exhibited by different geographic communities, so as not to favour one over the other. This convention was also employed by Zhao Yuanren (1930), though not systematically. The orthography used here is based on the form of the language found in Laos.

5 There are several variant characters used for the term *iu* in both Mien and Chinese sources, including 瑶, 遥, 傜, and 猺, see also Alberts 2006, 21–74.

6 Scholars disagree with a precise location, with some arguing for the south of Hunan Province while others propose areas further east and south, see also Wu Yongzhang 1993, 92–106 and Zhang Zehong 2002, 67–70.

7 Some argue *yáo* is a Chinese phonetic transliteration of the Mien term *iu*. Others believe the Mien acquired it from Chinese, either linking it to *mòyáo* (莫徭 'exempt from corvée') which originated in the Tang Dynasty as an administrative designation for communities not required by the state to

present the Yao as both antagonist and collaborator in China's history of its southern regions, with reports of Yao uprisings in rebellion against imperial tax and corvée demands, banditry in response to loss of land due to Han-Chinese migrations into Yao areas, as well as cooperation with local officials and their attempts to administer the region.[8] These factors gave impetus to Kim Mun communities to seek new lands and greater autonomy beyond the reach of the Chinese empire.

Despite their turbulent history, the Kim Mun have maintained their complex and highly literate religious system. It is perhaps their religious system that first captured the attention of scholars due to its clear relationship with Daoism and the associated ritual texts (hand-copied manuscripts) and religious paraphernalia. It is unclear as to how this system developed; whether Daoism was brought in by Daoist missionaries, adopted in response to Han-Chinese civilizing projects as an act of cultural self-preservation, or appropriated in the pursuit of spiritual salvation and a higher learning.[9] Nevertheless, Daoist ritual practices and beliefs are a foundation of Kim Mun (and Iu Mien) religion and society.

Yao use of the Chinese script also has been long documented in Chinese historical sources, but this has received little attention in Chinese publications.[10] While some scholars in China recognise that Yao writing and texts have their own internal logic, many also continue to use Chinese orthographic conventions for script and language to evaluate Yao texts, highlighting 'orthographic errors' and emphasising the oral quality of Yao religion and culture.[11] Western scholarship, drawing predominantly on fieldwork among Iu Mien communities, has also emphasised these characteristics; while some authors are in favour of the notion of a Yao 'semi-literacy' or 'performative literacy' and highlight the cultural significance of the written word in Yao society,[12] others regard Yao writing (as noted) as simply a mnemonic device

pay tax or provide corvée labour, or to *yáorén* (傜人) which appeared as an ethnic classifier in the Song Dynasty; see Cushman 1970, 48–73; Alberts 2006, 21–48.

8 Faure 2006, 171–189; Shin 2006, 56–105; Wu Yongzhang 1993, 92–106.

9 Strickmann 1982, 22–30 makes the initial argument regarding the Yao acquiring Daoism in Hunan during the Song Dynasty, one which has been followed by some scholars, including Alberts 2006. Holm 2004, 36–68, highlights that this is a hypothesis only. Meanwhile, other scholars, such as Zhang Youjun 1994, 15–21; Zhang Zehong 2002, 36–40; Ni Caixia 2011, 97–105 have proposed alternative arguments regarding when, where, and how the Yao 'acquired' Daoism.

10 Alberts 2006, 21–74.

11 GZZB 1987, 388–416; Huang Guiquan 1994, 193–207; Li Zenggui 1986, 55–60; Mo Jinshan 2014, 191–235; Xu Zuxiang 2006, 10–35; Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun 2000, 1–22; Zhao 1990, 165–172.

12 Kandre 1967, 583–638; 1976, 171–197; Lemoine 1986, 194–211; Purnell 1991 369–396; 1998, 277–302. 'Performative literacy' is a term that refers to a set of practices in which recitation of texts is not based on the ability to read them, but involves reading as a performative act, based on prior memorisation of orally transmitted text contents.

or mantric practice.[13] A related offshoot of the fascination with Yao ritual and textual paraphernalia, and its links to Daoism, has been the increase in collections of texts held in libraries in Europe, Japan, and the United States as well as by private collectors – what Miles calls 'Yao Bibliophilia'.[14] Both Jonsson and Miles have been critical of such collections, stating that the philological work associated with these texts tends to dislocate the texts from the plurality of the social, political, and historical contexts of Yao culture while imposing new sets of institutional or curatorial meanings on them.[15]

Most scholarship on Yao groups has focused on Yao religion in the context of Daoist studies, Yao history and culture in the context of the study of ethnic minorities, or it has framed the Yao in terms of upland/borderland communities vis-à-vis the state(s). This research has given scholars remarkable insights into the histories and cultures of various Yao groups, as well as into neighbouring ethnic groups, local religions, and regional histories. However, there has been little work done to understand the Kim Mun and Iu Mien literary domains – songs and letters. In particular, much less has been done on Kim Mun and Iu Mien literary texts and writing as social practice,[16] and how these texts can be used to better understand Yao history and culture and the broader histories and cultures of the peoples among which they live.[17]

A Kim Mun letter (信 VM: *kjen*; MSC: *xìn*) is a letter written by one or multiple people. They are manuscripts in that they are handwritten, ordinarily on homemade paper (using fibre from mulberry or bamboo trees; see Figs 1[18] and 2 for examples).

13 Davis is another scholar who writes of the notion of Yao literacy in his description of the Yao Script and Education Project in Lào Cai, Vietnam, see Davis 2011, 4–5.

14 Miles 2009, 7–8.

15 Jonsson 2000, 222–231; Miles 2009, 1–31.

16 For examples, see the works of Zhao Yuanren 1930 and Hirota Ritsuko 2016. Theoretical developments around writing as a social practice are ongoing in literacy studies, on which see Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič 2000; Collins and Blot 2003; Street 1984. Work on literacy and education in relation to state schooling can be found in studies of the Yao ethnic group in China, see Zhang Youjun 1997.

17 See Cawthorne 2020 for the first major study on this cultural practice among Kim Mun in Laos and China.

18 Cawthorne 2020, 313–318.

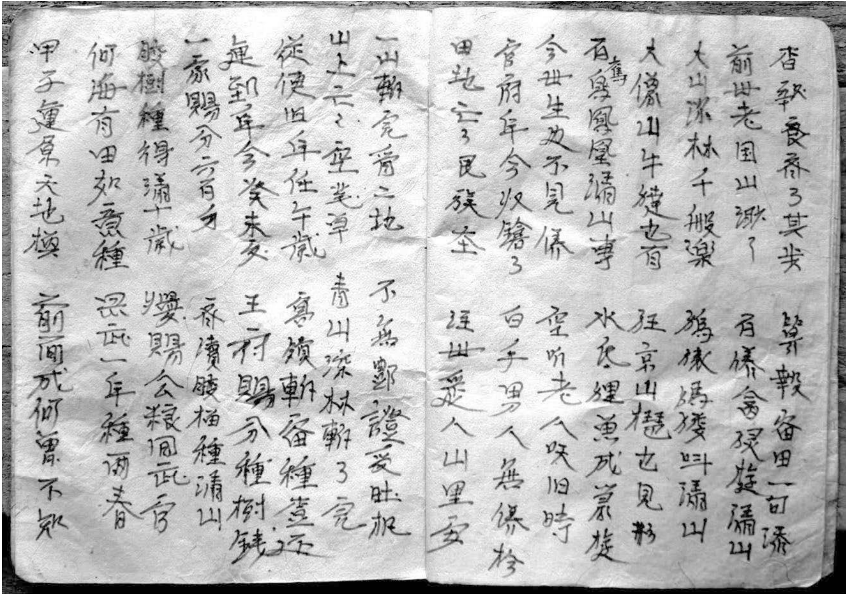

Fig. 1: Namtha-Vietnam Letter; photograph 2011, Luang Namtha.

Fig. 2: Hainan-Namtha Letter; photograph 2013, Luang Namtha.

Kim Mun letters can articulate personal thoughts and affairs, record biographical details, create new narratives, or redevelop older narratives. They are mostly composed with the purpose of being sent to other individuals or villages elsewhere. These destinations can be villages in a neighbouring district or commune, or they may be in an entirely different country. In order for Kim Mun letters to reach their destination, they typically pass through many hands as people visit other villages. At each village a letter 'visits', it will be read, shared, and copied into a new manuscript by Kim Mun in that village, as a community record and to enjoy at later dates. A key feature of many of these letters is that they are typically intended to be read aloud, i.e. performed, for an audience – and many of them explicitly say so. This process continues, and the original letter is passed on, but so too are copies, as Kim Mun visit other villages and bring a copied letter with them. Consequently, the letter multiplies and disperses further, and one day the original or a copy will hopefully reach the intended person or destination. Fig. 3 highlights the letter's source and place where it was recorded for the Kim Mun letters that are discussed below.[19]

There is a lot happening in this practice of writing and sending letters, much more of which will be discussed below, but two key features warrant introduction here. To begin with, Kim Mun letters employ a common script and shared languages, something that is assumed knowledge and assumed practice among Kim Mun communities, and it is something which is explicitly stated in the letters that they produce. Furthermore, letters are not just private items of correspondence between individuals, but they are also written for public consumption and enjoyment by the community. For example, they pose questions to their intended recipients and make statements regarding how their letter should be understood and distributed, thereby speaking to a larger Kim Mun community.

These letters are, historically speaking, written by men.[20] Women are not excluded from the literary domain, despite typically being unable to produce written texts, and women are often among the most well-versed and ardent talents in cultural and literary production. Women's production of works in the literary language is mostly seen in the realm of song – i.e. via the oral form of the literary language. As is the case with men, it is socially expected that women become learned in the literary language in order to understand and compose songs; their

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19 Cawthorne 2020, 225.

20 This pattern was not confined to the Yao. Very high rates of female illiteracy were widespread throughout China in traditional times. On which see Rawski 1979, 6–8. In China after 1949, access to formal education (and specifically literacy in the national language) may have resulted in some women starting to produce their own letters. Nevertheless, they have been seen to record and transcribe their own and other people's songs.

knowledge of it is in some ways essential for aspects of social relations and rites, such as those for marriage ceremonies and group visitations between villages.[21] Their involvement with the literary tradition may seem at first glance to be solely located within the realm of oral performance. However, men will write down songs sung by women at communal gatherings (see Fig. 4)[22] or put them in letters that they will be sending to relatives located elsewhere. Thus, women have opportunities for their voices to be written down and in this way (a way that does depend on literate men) find representation in written texts.

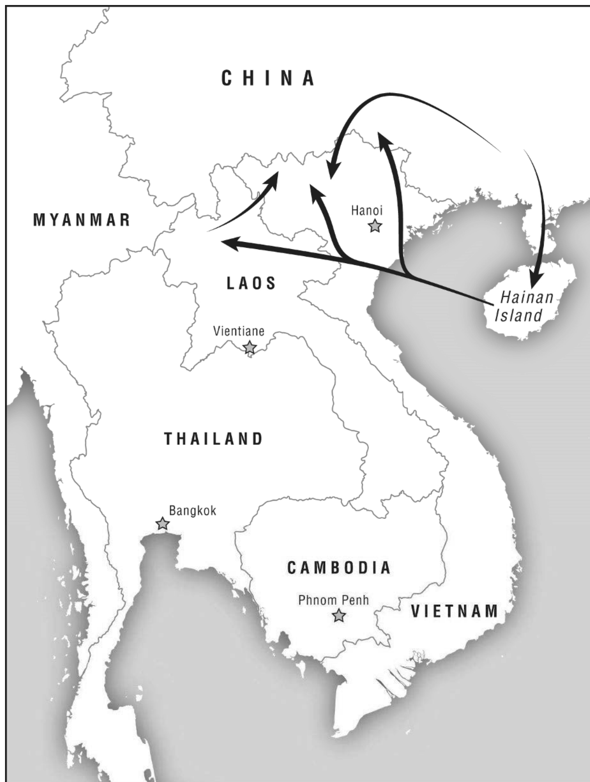

Fig. 3: Origins and destinations of Kim Mun Letters discussed in this chapter.

21 The role of women singing as a component of ritual practice is also well documented in China, see Chen Meiwen 2016, 154–186; Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun 2000, 35.
22 Cawthorne 2020, 209.

Fig. 4: On-going transcription of a Kim Mun song.

Kim Mun letters have received little attention in scholarly research and academic publications, both as subjects of interest themselves and – importantly for this chapter – primary sources in their own right. Kim Mun letters have potential value for research that spans the religions, cultures, and histories of China and Southeast Asia. They not only provide a window into the lived experiences of Kim Mun communities, with some texts dating back over 150 years, but also contain historical information regarding place and people that has potential implications for our understanding of the region more broadly.

To date, research on Kim Mun ritual texts and religious materials vastly surpasses research on literary writing and song. A quick look at catalogues and collections (and associated grants), in libraries across the United States and Europe reveals a focus on the digitisation and documentation of Yao religious manuscripts and research into Yao religion.[23] While studies of Yao communities also focus on social and historical aspects or themes of Yao communities, i.e. beyond religion and

23 Collections are held by the Library of Congress, the Munich State Library, the Central Library in Leiden University, the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, and various projects associated with the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme. For detailed discussion see Chen Meiwen's chapter in this volume.

ritual texts, the social and cultural aspects of writing and the creation of texts remains under-represented in these studies.[24]

While the number of publications that cover or reference Yao cultures, customs, histories, and traditions continues to grow, very little of what Yao people have written about themselves has permeated into any of these scholarly discussions.[25] Putting aside arguments of Yao literacy, the available texts – handwritten letters and song books – that are held in the above-mentioned libraries (and the many held by Yao communities themselves) and the information that they hold and represent provide considerable material for further investigation.

The opportunities to pursue such investigations are becoming fewer. There is enough evidence to merit concern about the loss of literary knowledge and skills among Yao communities. Many of those who can read and write 'Yao' literary texts are passing away, and there has been a sustained lack of interest among Yao youth in learning how to read and to produce the literary texts of their culture (and similarly, to learn the rituals of their religion).[26] Both of these factors are contributing to a dwindling number of Yao who understand the meaning and practices of their letters and writing culture.

I suggest that it is imperative to begin work on these letters in order to make the content of Kim Mun letters available to various concerned parties. To begin with, research on Yao communities should reference the histories and texts that were produced by Yao themselves. These texts can also serve research in other academic fields, and of other religious or ethnic communities in China and Southeast Asia. The letters may also find relevance and interest among individuals who belong to those populations. The Yao have not lived in isolation and their writing includes information about people and places that matter to other communities, ethnic groups, and histories. Lastly, these texts can also help broaden our understanding of Sinitic/Sinoxenic scripts and writing cultures more broadly.

This chapter will present some important examples from Kim Mun literary works that highlight how Yao texts can be used in scholarship on China and Southeast Asia.[27] I only focus on Kim Mun texts here, but the arguments are also applicable for Iu Mien texts, and the literary texts of other ethnic communities more broadly.

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24 It is important to bear in mind that not all peoples who are categorised as Yao have a writing culture or produce letters.

25 Cawthorne 2020, 29–40.

26 Cawthorne 2015, 6–33.

27 For a discussion of the religious domain of Kim Mun textual culture, see Joseba Estévez's chapter on a ritual text and its logic and use within a rice ritual by Mun ritual practitioners in this volume.

2 Reading Kim Mun letters

Kim Mun letters display a variety of features that lend them to being important primary sources. In order to show this, it is important to understand the ways in which these letters are produced, written, distributed, and used.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on several Kim Mun letters that originated in different locations and were photographed in different locations. The main letters cited here are the Shangsi-Hainan Letter;[28] the Shangsi Letter;[29] the Vietnam Letter;[30] the Shangsi-Vietnam Letter;[31] the Hainan-Namtha Letter;[32] and the Namtha-Vietnam Letter.[33]

2.1 The language of letters

The Kim Mun have three languages which they identify as their own: a ritual-religious language, a literary/poetic language, and a vernacular language. Vernacular Mun (VM) can be thought of as being indigenous to Mun culture, and it belongs to the Hmong-Mien language family. The ritual and literary languages (RM and LM) are most often described by scholars generally as variants of Guangxi Cantonese, of the Guangxi Pinghua (平話) dialect, or of Southwestern Mandarin,[34] which the Yao acquired at different times and places, although no one has yet identified how

28 Called 黄楼信 in GZZB 1987, 390–395.
29 Called 元国歌 in GZZB 1987, 388–390.
30 Called 交趾信歌 in GZZB 1987, 407–409.
31 Called 给散失在越南亲友的信歌 in GZZB 1987, 409–416.
32 Unpublished, photographed in Luang Namtha, 2013.
33 Cawthorne 2020. The transcription methods used for the examples in GZZB 1987 are not described, hence it is difficult to assess whether or not simplified versions of graphs were used in place of variants or their corresponding complex forms. Nonetheless, the attention given to annotating many variants suggests that some consideration was given to the use of variants or Kim Mun graphs. I have reproduced these examples here as they are found in published sources. One of these letters, 元国歌 in GZZB 1987, has been translated into Chinese in a journal article by Li Zenggui 1986, who is one of the few scholars to undertake a content analysis of a Kim Mun letter. Mo Jinshan 2014 also investigates two of the letters in GZZB 1987, 元国歌 and 交趾信歌, as part of his work on Yao history. Although the other letters also have titles, I have chosen to label them according to where they were written and/or collected.
34 Zhao Yuanren 1930, 1–30; Li Zenggui 1985, 88–94; 1986, 55–60; Huang Guiquan 1994, 193–207. For Pinghua, see Li Lianjin 2000.

each of these is related to the other in linguistic terms.[35] The ritual and literary languages were initially borrowed from external sources. Nonetheless, as is the case with the Iu Mien as described by Purnell, the Kim Mun also internalise the latter two languages while recognising their 'foreign' origins.[36]

These three languages form a system. They are mostly used in the domains designated by their names. However, there is a significant degree of interoperation between them, particularly between the literary and vernacular languages. These two languages intermix most interestingly in the space of cultural production, such as the composition of songs and letters, but one also finds elements of the literary language being used in everyday speech. This tripartite structure is noted in a Kim Mun letter,[37] henceforth called the Shangsi-Hainan Letter:

> One part [of this letter] is to be read in the vernacular, while other parts should be read in the literary and ritual forms.
> 一半读成集白话　　一半读歌半读神

The author of the letter states that his letter is written using all three languages employed by Kim Mun. Some of the letter is to be read in the vernacular language, some in the literary language, and some in the ritual language. As in the Namtha-Vietnam Letter, the term *pɛ wa:* (白話) indicates the Kim Mun vernacular language (in a literary context). The literary language is written as 读歌 (讀歌) (RM: *tɔ kɔ*, VM: *tɔ djoŋ*) and as before, the graph 歌 is used in place of 信. The author is not articulating that oral and written formats are incompatible, as one format can easily become the other (what is spoken can be written and vice versa); rather, the two terms describe the mediums in which a single literary language is used, i.e. for reciting letters or for singing songs. The use of *tɔ* (讀 MSC: *dú*), which means 'to read' or 'to recite', with either 'song' 歌 or 'deity' 神 following, denotes the actions and therefore the languages that are associated with the two domains. In general, one uses the literary language when reading or reciting letters or singing songs, and one uses the ritual language when reading or reciting the lists or names of deities during ritual activity.

Before turning to Kim Mun letters and their content, it is necessary to explain a little more about the Kim Mun languages and their uses, as both are tied up in

35 The whole question of Yao religious and literary languages and their relationships with other regional languages and dialects awaits systematic investigation. See Holm 2013, 37–45 for a discussion of this issue in relation to the Zhuang.

36 Purnell 1991, 369–396; 1998, 277–302. In addition to these three languages, other languages are known and used by Kim Mun in Laos, but they are all considered 'foreign'.

37 GZZB 1987, 391.

how we read and understand the letters. There are various synonyms for each in each language, and these synonyms reflect how the languages are used. The ritual language can be written as 字話 and is pronounced *ði wa:* in the ritual language, but it is more common to refer to it in the vernacular language as *tɔ daŋ* 讀字 (to recite graphs) for individual readings of graphs and *tɔ θou* 讀書 (to recite texts) for the recitation of religious texts (both terms are used as names for describing the ritual language). These terms are those used in Luang Namtha, and while they correlate with terms used by Kim Mun in China, there also exist other terms for describing these languages, as in the examples from the Shangsi-Hainan Letter quoted above. The literary language can be referred to as *kɔ wa:* (歌話 lyrical language/speech), but this term is predominantly pronounced *djoŋ wa:* according to its vernacular reading. In addition, *pɛ wa:* (白話 MSC: *báihuà* – vernacular or local dialect) is sometimes used to describe the literary language, while *tɔ wa:* (讀話) means to recite the literary language. The vernacular language is also at times referred to as *pɛ wa:* in written texts, but is most commonly referred to as *mun wa:* (们話), *la:n wa:* (≈谈話), or *kɔŋ wa:* (≈说話). The uses for *pɛ wa:* to label forms of prose and poetry that incorporate both the literary and vernacular languages show the extent to which both languages are employed in literary projects. While words, speech, and text can individually and collectively be ascribed to one of these three

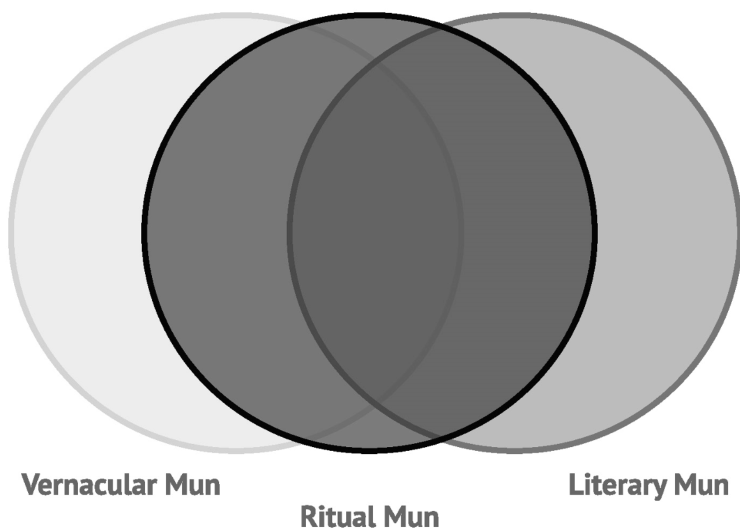

Fig. 5: A diagrammatic representation of the Kim Mun language system.

languages in a general sense, the boundaries which demarcate each of them are in practice quite porous. Huang Guiquan has represented this situation as in Fig. 5.[38]

All three languages are written using the Chinese script. For example, 'mountain' can be written as 山 and read as *θan* in the ritual language, *θin* in the literary language, and *kim* in the vernacular language. Vernacular Mun is the language of everyday discourse in Kim Mun village life, the mother-tongue, but it is also employed in literary and religious performances. While the ritual language is predominantly only used in its own domain, the literary language has a strong influence on the vernacular language. Table 1 gives examples of the three different recitation forms for several common words.[39]

Table 1: Comparison of Kim Mun ritual, literary, and vernacular languages

English	Graph	Ritual Mun	Literary Mun	Vernacular Mun
flower	花	wɑː	kwɑː	fɑːŋ
mountain	山	θɑn	θin	kim
bone	骨	kwɑt	kwɑt	θuŋ
to burn	燒	θi̤u	hi̤u	pu
mouth	口	ha̤u	kṳ	dʑet
left	左	θɔu	θɔu	θɑi
hand	手	θɑu	θɑu	pu
name	名	meŋ	meŋ	meŋ
sea	海	hɔ̤i	kɔ̤i	kɔ̤i
small	小	θiu	θiu	kjen
blood	血	jut	jut	sa̤ːm
kill	殺	θɑt	θɑt	tɑi
to sing	唱	sɑŋ	sɑŋ	djoŋ
human being	人	ɲɑn	ɲin	mun
forest	林	lɑm	gjɑm	gjɑm
cloud	雲	wɑn	wɑn	pɑn
no, not	不	pɑt	jɑm	mɑ
red	紅	hɔŋ	hɔŋ	θi
yellow	黄	woŋ	woŋ	wɑŋ
moon	月	ɲot	ɲot	lɑ
head	頭	dɑu	dɑu	pjei

38 Huang Guiquan 1994, 196.

39 I was told that the recited pronunciations for the RM forms given in the table, which were performed in isolation, differ slightly from the recited pronunciations used during ritual performance. Furthermore, although tone marks have not been included, for many words in LM and RM it is only their tones that differ.

Although the transcriptions are only a guide, the example that shows perhaps the clearest distinction is ‘no, not’. However, in *pɛ wa:* literary works, instead of the graph 不 the graph 马 (MSC: *mǎ*) will often be employed as it is homophonous with the vernacular pronunciation of 不 (VM: *ma*), which is an example of phonetic borrowing within the Kim Mun language system. In another example, ‘name’, the recitation is quite similar, excluding tone, across all three languages. However, in daily speech *bu* is used for ‘name’ in preference to *meng*, whereas *meng* is used in literary works, even those which mostly employ the vernacular language.

There has been little scholarly work on the Mun literary language. Research on the Mien literary language has been more extensive, yet an investigation of or comparison between Literary Mien and Literary Mun, or of areal variations, is still lacking. Scholars generally describe both the Mun and Mien literary languages as variants of Guangxi Cantonese or of Southwestern Mandarin.[40] There have been a few reprints of Mun literary texts and transcribed oral works[41] and analyses of their language and content,[42] but the recitation language, the methods of reproduction, and the social contexts for its use remain under-researched.

Zhao Yuanren (Y.R. Chao) produced the first analysis of the phonetic inventory of a regional form of the Mun literary language.[43] His data were derived from earlier fieldwork conducted by Zhongshan University in the Jinxiu-Dayaoshan area in northeastern Guangxi. He concluded that the language used for singing songs, while related to Chinese, did not match any known dialect in Guangxi or Guangdong. He believed that it was related to Cantonese and might be treated as a Guangxi dialect of Cantonese with some Guangdong Cantonese borrowings.[44] More recently, Huang Guiquan published an article on the Kim Mun ritual and literary languages and their use of the Chinese script, comparing the Kim Mun ritual and literary languages with Cantonese, and concluding that both ritual and literary Mun were akin to pidgin languages.[45] Purnell has produced a number of works based on data that he collected from Iu Mien communities in Thailand and the United States.[46] His research includes, along with a discussion of phonology, detailed descriptions

40 Huang Guiquan 1994, 193–207; Li Zenggui 1985, 88–94; 1986, 55–60; Purnell 1998, 277–302; Zhao Yuanren 1930, 7.

41 See GZZB 1986, 1987.

42 Huang Guiquan 1994, 193–207; Li Zenggui 1985, 88–94; 1986, 55–60.

43 Zhao Yuanren 1930.

44 Zhao Yuanren 1930, 7.

45 Huang Guiquan 1994, 193–207. A pidgin language is a restricted language that develops from two (or more) languages between two peoples, one group being in a more dominant position; see Romaine 2017, 23–25.

46 Purnell 1998, 277–302; 1992, 61–79; 1991, 369–396.

of the structure of Mien songs and cultural contexts of performance. Table 2 contrasts a few words recorded by Zhao Yuanren and Purnell with their equivalents in Luang Namtha.[47]

Table 2: Contrast between literary language recitations

English	Kim Mun (L. Namtha)	Yao (Jinxiu)	Iu Mien (Thailand)[48]
flower	kwɑ:	k'ua^{42}	kuaa1
four	θei	θɛi^{35}	fei5
three	θɑ:m	θa:m^{42}	faam1
hand	θɑu	ɕieu^{53}	siou3
come	tɑ:i	ta:i^{42}	daai2
rise	sɑ:ŋ	t͡swaŋ^{11}	zaang6
forest	gjɑm		sen1
large	tɑ:i	ta:i^{11}	daai6
year	nin	nin^{42}	nin1
water	θui	ɕui^{53}	sui3
ten	sɑp	ɕiep^{11}	ziep6

The table above highlights some expected similarities between the recitations for the three source locations, but more importantly shows, in the context of a literary tradition that entails sending letters between communities, the scope that exists for a mutual understanding of texts and for their recitation (at the very least between Kim Mun communities).

2.2 Letters as manuscripts

The literary and vernacular languages are both employed in the world of letters. This is reflected in the two generic types of letters. These are commonly described as the *kjou gjin* (秋蓮) form, which makes more use of the literary language (a letter in this style would be called a *kjou gjin kjen* 秋蓮信), and the *pɛ wa:* (白話) form, which employs more of the vernacular language (a letter in this style would be

47 Purnell 1998, 277–302; Zhao Yuanren 1930, 3–26.

48 Purnell uses the Iu Mien Unified Script, developed in 1984 between groups from China and the US that combined elements of the romanised script developed in the US with the *pinyin*-based romanised script developed in China.

called *pɛ wa: kjen* 白話信).[49] These classifications are less rigid upon closer examination, as literary letters can include vernacular terminology and vice-versa. Nevertheless, while the two formats employ different styles, they use the same script. Both styles typically follow a format of fourteen graphs per line (seven graphs per half-line), and during recitation the major caesura occurs between the fourth and fifth graphs of each half-line. Padding syllables are also employed during recitation, especially when a word with a final stop occurs at the fourth or seventh place in each half-line (but these padding syllables are not written).

Letters are often written using a hard stylus made from wood; however, if a man is lucky enough or wealthy enough, he will own a writing brush. While there are traditional methods for producing ink, these days it is bought from stores in town. The paper used, however, is almost always home-made, either from bamboo or mulberry bark. The production of paper is predominantly the domain of women.[50] Figs 6–10 show bamboo paper being made. In recent times, store-bought notebooks

Fig. 6: Bamboo harvested in November-December, is cut into slices, placed in bags in the river, or in containers and covered near the home; photograph 2011, Luang Namtha.

49 Fieldwork, Luang Namtha. Zimmer 1999 has argued that *baihua* is a term referring to a vernacular written medium of expression and is not linked with the vernacular (spoken) language of a particular time or place.

50 See the studies by Shimizu Masaaki and Meng Yuanyao in the present volume.

Fig. 7: After one to three months soaking, the bamboo fibres are pounded into pulp and stored, or used straight away and mixed with water; photograph 2011, Luang Namtha.

Fig. 8: Pulp mixed with a stick or by hand to suspend the particles of bamboo in the water, and again with a gluing agent made from a native tree; photograph 2011, Luang Namtha.

Fig. 9: Solution poured over cotton boards; left to dry for three to four hours (or all day); photograph 2011, Luang Namtha.

Fig. 10: Boards are placed upright in the sun and, once dry, the sheets of paper are peeled off the cotton board, folded, and stored; photograph 2011, Luang Namtha.

and paper have been used to transcribe songs and stories, but they have not replaced home-made paper which is still used for formal letters, nor for religious texts and associated materials.

Literary (and religious) texts are written in columns and read from top to bottom and from right to left, like Chinese. Ideally, there is symmetry across the page, but in instances where the writer has written the characters too small, a marker that resembles a breve will be added to fill in space and preserve the intended aesthetic symmetry. Similarly, in instances of transcription errors, a mark (often a 'cross' [x], but the symbol varies) is used to indicate the error and the correct graph is written to the left or right of the mistake. While text is read in a linear fashion, some parts of religious texts require the reader to decide which section to use/recite, based on desired actions or results determined 'beyond the page'. Such a decision may be made, for example, by another ritual practitioner performing concurrently with the recitation of the text.

2.3 Language and text

Kim Mun letters are written using the Chinese script. A fascinating feature of the Chinese script is that it has been used with a variety of languages and dialects, and deployed in a variety of religious, political, and artistic contexts. The script has also been used beyond China and beyond the Han Chinese, by other ethnic groups in China, such as the Zhuang, and is or was used by the now nation-states of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. These uses entailed both the culture of classical Chinese as well as the innovative use of their own languages with the Chinese script.[51] Similarly, Kim Mun letters in some instances follow, or at least attempt to follow, the Chinese classical tradition; elsewhere, however, they employ their own vernacular readings and graphic forms. For this reason, the connection between the words in a Kim Mun letter and the Chinese readings of the individual graphs, not to mention the grammar, will vary according to the style in which the letter was written. A *pɛ wa:* letter, which incorporates a large proportion of vernacular readings and phonetic loan graphs, is at times unreadable when viewed from a purely Sinitic perspective. For example, in the Shangsi Letter[52] written in the *pɛ wa:* style:

51 Elman 2014; Holm 2013.

52 GZZB 1987, 388.

> Behold the prefectures of Shangsi and Yongning; among the people of those boundless plains there are no Kim Mun.
> 看奏上思邕宁府　　度洞[53]茫茫门马乃

The last three graphs are phonetic loans that are read in the vernacular as *mun ma nai* and can be translated as ‘there are no Kim Mun’. This use of phonetic loan graphs occurs within the Kim Mun language system. Each graph could also be used to convey meanings concordant with meanings in written Chinese. Later, in the same letter, the author writes of how he desires to return home, but he doesn’t know where his parents are:[54]

> My heart has yearned to return home for I don’t know how long; but I do not know where my mother and father are.
> 心曾爱回马知玖　　马知父母音帝咧

In the second half-line, apart from the two graphs for father 父 and mother 母, the first two and the last three graphs, read as *ma pəi* ‘not know’ and *jɛm ti ɛː* ‘to be where’, are all read in Vernacular Mun.[55] The whole line can hence be read as ‘I do not know where my parents are’. The corresponding Sinitic readings are irreconcilable with this reading. Zhang Youjun, based on the names and terminology used to describe the towns, proposes that this letter was most likely composed during the Qing Dynasty and that the title of the letter, 元国歌, refers to China.[56] This interpretation of the title is somewhat at odds with Li Zenggui’s interpretation.[57] Nevertheless, it is evident that these letters cannot be read without consideration for Vernacular Mun.

2.4 The transmission of letters

Kim Mun letters often do not contain detailed information related to the intended destination of a letter. The absence of information resembling an address, or even the name of a specific village (to which the author wishes to send the letter), creates

53 There is some disagreement regarding the translation of this term, and I have therefore used the broadest interpretation. The graph 度 is used here and in other letters in binomes which relate to ruling, lowland peoples, such as the Han, Zhuang, and Kinh (Vietnamese).
54 GZZB 1987, 389.
55 The second graph 知, meaning ‘to know’, is semantically linked to its Chinese meaning but it is written and read here according to its Vernacular Mun pronunciation.
56 Zhang Youjun 2001, 339.
57 Li Zenggui 1986, 55–60.

a significant problem for sending letters to specific individuals or village communities. This difficulty is mitigated by the process of transferring the letters between villages as well as by allowing each village to read them. Ideally, each village can be thought of as a node in a quasi-postal network that passes such letters on – often when men travel for commercial purposes, visitations, or to hunt – and if a specific recipient is intended, then this is stated within the letter. The 'payment' for passing on these letters is, in part, the inherent permission given to any village that receives and passes them on to read and enjoy them. This shared reading allows readers or audiences to obtain news from other Kim Mun communities in other places. Although this system may not apply in all cases, it has been until recently the most common means for transmitting these letters. The example from the Shangsi-Hainan Letter below shows how the author explicitly expects his letter will be read by others as it is passed between villages *en route* to Hainan, where it will hopefully reach his older brother. Even though this letter is quite personal in nature, it nonetheless also speaks to the Kim Mun in general; i.e. those who pass on this letter.

> I don't know the limits of the mountains of Hainan; I don't know the prefecture where my older brother lives.
> 不知海南山高远　　不知小兄住何州
> If my letter can make it to the places of the Kim Mun, let them open and read this little tale of sorrow.
> 郎书能到山人[58]殿[59]　　开来读听小愁风
> The first village will read it and pass it on to the second, and so it will be passed on until it then reaches my older brother, however slowly.
> 一村读了二村传　　传到郎兄且慢沉

In fact, the author of the letter goes on to explicitly invoke a sense of fictive kinship and of a supra-local community, via a metaphor of fraternity, on which he depends for his letter to reach its destination:[60]

> Neighbouring villages are like brothers; if one has an issue, then it is borne by all.
> 邻舍村乡如兄弟　　一人有事众人担

58 It is unclear if 山人 means Kim Mun or highland people in general, but as the second half-line refers to reading the letter, I have assumed that it refers to the Kim Mun specifically. Furthermore, although Kim Mun is often written 山们, 山人 is also acceptable, and likewise 金门 is phonetically the same as *kim mun*.

59 This graph can be translated as 'hall' or can refer to a generic place.

60 GZZB 1987, 393.

A similar device is used in the Namtha-Vietnam Letter,[61] where the author invokes a sense of Yao kinship, emphasising that this letter is open to all Yao.

> This letter is not limited to any village or hamlet; where there are Yao is where this letter will travel.
> 不至何村共何寨　　何處有遥[62]何處遊
> We send this letter out and hope it will arrive in such places; we hope it will reach the hands of our dear relatives.
> 其信放行望到安　　望達親情双手全
> After one village has read it, they will send it to the second; and when the second village has finished reading it, it will travel to the third.
> 一村讀了呈二寨　　二寨讀完三村遊

It is important to understand that Kim Mun letters, while simultaneously being private correspondence between individuals, families, and relatives, are also public bulletins or broadcasts that furnish Kim Mun communities with news about relatives in new and distant lands or from family back 'home'.

The distances that these letters travel are not exceptional, for Kim Mun, nor are they an unintended coincidence. In an example below we will see how the author of the Hainan-Namtha Letter described potential routes that his letter might take, routes which are not limited to his local area. Moreover, in the three examples above, which are typical of many other letters, the authors state that their letter is to be passed on from village to village, read and copied (although this is more implied than explicit) by those who wish to do this, and ultimately passed on to the next Kim Mun village. The fact that letters are copied while *en route* accounts in some ways for their ultimately widespread distribution (the Hainan-Namtha Letter that I photographed was not the original). In writing such requests, the authors make two very big assumptions: first, that audiences will be able to read and understand their letter (and that they would want to); and second, that the cultural norm which encourages people to pass these letters onward will be followed. This is just one of many norms that writers inherently assume to be shared among the members of their intended recipients.

2.5 Reflections on writing

Along with the idea that these letters will be passed on between many villages, copied and read out to audiences whom the author does not necessarily know

61 See Cawthorne 2020 for the entire letter.
62 An allograph of 瑶.

personally, come self-deprecating statements on the part of authors regarding their prose or handwriting skill. Many authors openly claim in their letters that they are not intelligent men and ask their audience not to 'mock their mistakes' and to 'find it in their hearts to forgive any errors'. This literary practice recurs throughout the Namtha-Vietnam Letter, and it is also prominent in many others.

The importance of writing well, that is of being fully literate, is repeatedly expressed as an important skill for Kim Mun men to have. In another letter collected in Shangsi (titled 信歌一首)[63] a man writing to his younger sister says:

> Relatives who read this, I ask you not to laugh [at my mistakes]; and whichever sentences are incomplete, please add [amend] what is needed for my younger sister.
> 亲者读到报依笑　　何句不齐替妹添

Prior to this line the author describes how he is not as learned as he would like to be, and how he has struggled to compose this letter to his younger sister. In this line he asks those who read it to help make any corrections that are necessary so that his younger sister can understand him (it is unclear whether or not when his sister receives the letter it will be read for her by a literate man). Here, the author not only reflects upon the content of the letter but also on his own writing; he has a sense of what a written text should look and read like, and he is engaging his audience to help him rectify any perceived shortcomings.

Studying and learning to read and write is a common theme shared by many letters. The issue of literacy may be presented from the perspective of the individual, who feels he has not studied enough, or written from the perspective of a village or local area where access to formal education may be lacking. In the Shangsi-Hainan Letter,[64] the author remarks both on his own lack of learning and the lack of opportunity for formal education in his community. Yao populations have most likely been aware of the existence of local education opportunities external to village-based systems and practices for a long time. Chinese historical sources speak of Yao children attending schools under the patronage of local officials,[65] and likewise anthropologists have noted Iu Mien communities employing itinerant Chinese to copy texts and teach their children handwriting.[66] The following excerpts from the Shangsi-Hainan letter highlight the author's experiences of learning to read and write as well as the association of these activities with schooling,

63 GZZB 1987, 403.
64 GZZB 1987, 393.
65 Cushman 1970, 48–73.
66 Iwata 1990, 6–24; Lemoine 1986, 194–211.

knowledge, and identity. The passage also gives some indication of perceptions of and access to local education opportunities.

> In the beginning I didn't know the value of writing; now I want to study, but it is too difficult as I am too old.
> 初时不知字成宝　　意学能人老了难
> Every day I saw the mountains and the trees; yet nowhere did I see a school, so how could I be at ease?
> 日日看山看树木　　不见学堂何养安
> It requires little to put rice on the table; but to know how to take up a brush and write even just a little is difficult.
> 白饭上台小知为　　拎笔写字小知难
> I can wield a machete or an axe with ease; but the smallest of brushes I cannot handle.
> 拎刀拎斧常时为　　五寸笔同拎不成

In this same Shangsi-Hainan Letter,[67] the author concludes (as other authors have) by emphasising – yet again – the paucity of his own literary skills.

> I have written the characters in my humble letter poorly; elder brothers, please don't laugh when you read it.[68]
> 贱书抄字写不好　　高兄读了依笑吟
> The strokes are not correct; who could possibly read it? But I implore the elders to tell your youth what is in this letter.
> 笔界不齐慢晓读　　晓仅老人报嫩人

Despite his insistence that his writing is sub-standard, the author still emphasises that he wants the elders who read his letter to also tell the youth about his stories, his life. The author understands the potential influence his words can have on his audience, people he has never met, yet people whom he considers to be part of his ethnic community. He hopes that others may learn from his life, and that in the context of the above excerpt, they may encourage youth in other villages to see the importance of schooling.

What we see here is that Kim Mun letters function much like letters have in other places among other peoples. The assumption that all literate Kim Mun could read and understand the graphs is implicit in their efforts to send them. However, the fact that letters frequently used the vernacular language (within the framework of stanzas and verse structures) indicates a shared assumption that other Kim Mun

67 GZZB 1987, 395.

68 Here, 'elder brother' is not limited to the author's own brother but is a respectful way of addressing anyone who read the letter.

would understand the text, that Vernacular Mun in the context of letters is a shared trait, a common identity.

A few examples of graphs used to write Vernacular Mun terms are presented below. They show that the use of these graphs is predicated on an assumed understanding across Kim Mun communities – that this writing system belongs to all Kim Mun.

Table 3: Phonetic substitution based on reading in Vernacular Mun

Graph	Vernacular Mun	Chinese	Meaning
恩	ɑn	还	still, continue to; yet
們 or 门	mun	人	people (also in Kim Mun)
能	nɑŋ	象	to appear like, imitate
云 or 伝	pɑn	我们	we
庇	pɘi	被; 给	by; for, so that
依	ji	不要; 别	do not
罗 or 逻	lu	找	to seek, to look for

3 Kim Mun letters as primary sources

In order to understand the kinds of information present in Kim Mun letters and their use as primary sources, it is important to highlight some key features of Kim Mun writing. While the existence of these features in Kim Mun letters supports the argument of a literate culture,[69] they also help contextualise our understanding of the data and texts. These are formality and orthodoxy, and the qualities of creativity, reflexivity, and communicative effect.[70]

Kim Mun authors work within a framework of formality and orthodoxy. This commitment is visible in the textual component found in both the religious and literary domains. Of course, there is a high degree of standardisation and formalisation in text-related religious practice. This sense of orthodoxy regarding texts and writing is not just implicit as it is in religious texts, but it is also explicit as demonstrated in Kim Mun reference texts such as character and word dictionaries

69 Cawthorne 2020, 219–274.
70 Cawthorne 2020, 325–327.

and variant character lists.[71] A concern with issues of correctness and error in writing can also be seen in the excerpts from Kim Mun letters presented here, where authors talk of their writing being unattractive or incorrect.

Kim Mun authors produce new literary texts that express individual experiences and thoughts. Within these texts they can shift between reality and invention in their descriptions and representations. Hence not only can they produce observations, lists, and 'objective' descriptions, but metaphor, hyperbole, and fantasy – the products of imagination – can also be detailed in the same space.

This creative capacity to produce new texts is also intertwined with reflexivity; the capacity of authors to reflect on their own authorial selves, their environments, and their activity as writers.[72] For example, a major feature of Kim Mun writing is the representation of the self and of the self that is contextualised as part of a self-defined community – as relatives, as kin, as brothers, as Kim Mun.

Kim Mun authors also display a clear sense of the communicative effect of the written word, most evident in the act of composing and sending letters that reach audiences which include people whom the authors do not actually know, and posing questions to these people with hope of a response, or asking people to share this letter and read it to new generations.

3.1 Histories and biographies

Many letters function as open letters. While each letter may have a target recipient in mind, they are also often addressed to the wider Kim Mun community. Letters contain records of the events that shaped the life of the author and often the lives of those around him (or potentially her), and often represent elements of the historical memory of the community. Some events are specific to one particular location, and they might be considered minor in the context of larger histories, though they are no less relevant or important to the Kim Mun. Others, however, include accounts that invoke historical events that were shared by many people.

In a letter written by a Kim Mun man from Vietnam who migrated to Guangxi (the Shangsi-Vietnam Letter) the author details his life and how he came to live there. The destination of the letter is wherever his (literal) kith and kin are – those who once lived in Vietnam with him. This letter was written before the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and it documents some of the harsh conditions

71 Cawthorne 2020, 253–256.

72 This reflexivity also involves a capacity to express the worlds of both reality and invention and an ability to reflect actively in writing upon the principles and formalities of their writing system.

that many ethnic groups endured during this time of war.[73] The Shangsi-Vietnam Letter, entitled ‘A Letter for my Lost Kith and Kin in Vietnam’,[74] provides a personal account of the kinds of conditions and situations encountered by many ethnic populations across the northwest of Vietnam during this period; such accounts of hardship and mistreatment by ‘officials’ in other locales are a recurrent theme in many letters.[75] Like other authors, he too writes this letter not just in the hope of finding lost relatives and friends, but also to record his story for later generations. There is only space to provide a few excerpts from this letter here, but the full narrative is tied up in the larger socio-political events of the time.

> The people plant their fields, yet this is against the law; as if they had committed a crime, they are taken by the Vietnamese.[76]
> 人民启春恩犯罪　　如同犯罪到度交[77]
> The masses were made to move down to the plains; although the land is bountiful, it is not safe or peaceful.
> 供人齐住越南地　　空分铁山不平安
> No one was able to leave; everyone was made come together into work communes.
> 根总何人不得走　　齐押连合公社入
> In the past, the militia would heed their wishes; the officials of today are not like those of old.
> 前初假兵听心意　　今世不同前世官
> If any family had a son of eighteen years old [or over], the Vietnamese would take him to fight in the war.
> 何家有儿十八岁　　度交来捉宁争国
> Those who fought were given official [Vietnamese] names, but these names were not as great as our own Kim Mun names.
> 争洲占府官名字　　不到山门明字高
> If anyone had sons but didn’t let them go, those parents were taken and put in prison.
> 何个有儿不分去　　又捉父母[78]宁坐甘

73 The letter was written before the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976, most likely between 1955–75 during the north-south split. The author’s writing focuses on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and their actions.

74 GZZB 1987, 409.

75 GZZB 1987, 388–390.

76 I have used the term ‘Vietnamese’ here; however, the meaning in the original text implies a variety of political, public security, and military actors rather than the Vietnamese populace in general.

77 Linguistically, *keu* (SZ *gyeu*) as a term for Vietnamese begins as a place-name, then being a shortened form for *jiaozhi* 交趾 from the Han Dynasty onwards, referring to northern Vietnam (the Red River Valley). Afterwards it came to be used of its inhabitants. See Holm and Meng 2015, 24–28. Among the Tày in northern Vietnam, the term *keo* came to be used specifically in reference to the Kinh – ethnic Vietnamese. See Hoàng Triều Ân 2003, 228.

78 Here, ‘father and mother’ or ‘parents’ was written as 耂 and 爷.

Here, the author of the Shangsi-Vietnam Letter relates the effects of government actions on the mountain populations during wartime, and he describes an increasing militarisation as young men were conscripted into the armed forces. He also talks of the formation of work communes, and how the local population had little choice in the matter. This was a period of radical instability, and throughout his letter the author reflects on how in older times things were much more peaceful in the mountains. Life in the communes was difficult by his account. Given that the hardship of work in the communes was shared by many ethnic groups, the author even calls them all brethren:[79]

> The government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam offered little prosperity; it did nothing for the suffering people.
> 越南民主福忿小　　不用难民[80]呼[81]奈何
> People were forced from the country; the suffering masses could not live peacefully.
> 开关赶人向国外　　千万难民住不安
> ……
> The suffering people in Vietnam had no harvests; we just worked in timber production and could grow nothing of our own.
> 难民在交无春启　　空做林场不启春
> We couldn't clear-fell the mountains; the Vietnamese took us and separated us into work groups.
> 难民不得斩山了　　押度带工点分分
> We worked from the beginning to the end of the year, and at the year's end we gave all we had.
> 年头做工到年尾　　年尾峒人分不寅
> At the year's end we were not governed fairly; the local officials ate the fruits of our labour.
> 年尾峒人不平政　　度帝吃了难民工

The author goes on to describe the harsh conditions of war and corvée labour, which ultimately led him and many others to flee to other areas: some, like the author, went to China, while others went south and further into Southeast Asia. He describes the dangers he encountered during his flight to China and the 'relatives' (Kim Mun) he met on the way, and he expresses the hope that those who read the letter will tell their children his story.

A similar historical account can be seen in the Namtha-Vietnam Letter. Here, the author has written a letter seeking those 'relatives' in Vietnam whom they met as allies on the battlefields in Luang Namtha during the Second Indochina War (1955–1975).

79 GZZB 1987, 412.

80 While 难民 can be read as 'refugees', in the context of the letter it is more likely to take a broader meaning.

81 This graph is also used in the Namtha-Vietnam Letter.

After celebrating the year *gui-mao* [1963], we met with four of our dear relatives' sons.
過后推逢癸卯歲　　得見親情四个兒
A man named Lau, a man named Kwin, a man named Pou, and a man named Meng.
一个男留个男县　　一个男宝个男明
We went to the lands of the Lao people; we took up iron fans in our hands and fanned the mist.
良斉專到柳叱地　　手拎铁箭發霜雲
We fanned the mist and drove it away, and the sun lit up the Heavenly Gate and tempered the people's hearts.
發得霜雲散离了　　日影天門衆寛心
We spoke our language with our relatives; we now knew that our ancestors truly are descendants of Pan Huang.[82]
共親良斉呋白話　　真是盘皇前子孫

Here, we see the author providing an account of something that occurred over forty years ago (at the time this letter was written); a historical account about Kim Mun written by Kim Mun. Many Kim Mun letters include details of local events important to the histories of the region. They provide factual details as well as opinions and viewpoints not often recorded in writing. Opening up these letters to broader research and synthesis with other primary sources can enrich existing understandings and narratives of history in China and Southeast Asia.

3.2 Local geography

Another feature of Kim Mun letters, more often than not tied up in descriptions of journeys taken or places belonging to an author's childhood, are the names of villages, towns, provinces, dynasties, and countries. For example, in the Hainan-Namtha Letter, we see the author map out a possible journey that his letter may take. In doing so, the author shows his understanding of local geography and the names and locations of places at the time when the letter was written.

This letter will go to Tianzhou, where it will be passed from village to village.
此歌[83]放上田周[84]去　　放过一鄉到一鄉
Then it will be sent on to Sacheng and Xilin, after which it will then travel to Yunnan.

82 On this figure, see further below.
83 The graph used here is 'song', but the meaning implied is the physical letter. The use of the word 'song' underscores the idea that the letter is recited aloud to an audience, and is thus in many ways a song. The title of the letter uses the word 'letter'.
84 Here, Tianzhou 田周 is likely to be 田州, which was was the name of a powerful chieftaincy in west-central Guangxi. Tianzhou (田州镇) is also the name of the district seat of present-day Tianyang County (田阳县) in western Guangxi. Without further examination it is difficult to confirm these locations because there is no date on this copy of the letter.

> 放上洒城[85]西林[86]去　　放上雲南省里飛[87]
> The letter will then travel into the mountains [around Hekou]; after which it will journey into Cao Bang[88] Prefecture.
> 退落挍枝羅山里　　放入高平府里飛

Many Kim Mun letters mention place names and related geography, information which can contribute to existing histories of the region. This information could shed light on gaps in current knowledge, as well as provide alternative understandings of human mobility in the region.

3.3 Economy and livelihood

Another common and important kind of information found in Kim Mun letters are descriptions of trade, markets, and livelihoods. The topic of salt is one such example. Along with indigo, salt appears to be a key trade product that the Kim Mun sought and valued in their economic interactions – price and availability being key information shared between communities far and wide. In the Hainan-Namtha Letter, the author writes that:

> In Hainan it is not expensive to eat salt; one peck[89] is only ten[90] coins.
> 海南吃盐是不貴　　一斗白盐口十錢
> ……
> The local market is filled with all kinds of stalls, and some are packed with rice.
> 喜鍚街口[91]万般有　　般步小口白米斉

85 Sacheng (洒城) is very likely to be Sicheng 泗城, which is the former name for another powerful chieftaincy in northwest Guangxi, with its seat of government in present-day Lingyun County (凌云县). Other letters, such as those collected in GZZB *Diaocha* V6 (1987a), also mention Sacheng along with Tianzhou.

86 Xilin 西林 is also the name of a county in the far northwest of Guangxi, although this may not be the specific reference made in the letter.

87 The itinerary described leads north from Tianzhou through Sicheng and on to Xilin, after which the presumed route would lead through the southeastern part of Yunnan.

88 Cao Bằng is the capital and largest settlement of Cao Bằng Province, Vietnam. It is located in northernmost Vietnam, around thirty kilometres from the border with China.

89 Also known as a 'Chinese peck', this is a unit of dry measure for grains (among other things) approximately equal to 8.8 litres. It should be noted that there existed a degree of variation in measurements and associated terminology throughout China, and hence the figures given here are simply a guide.

90 The figure is smudged and hence mostly illegible; a guess is that it is ten or a multiple thereof.

91 The manuscript is too damaged to discern this graph. It is possibly 堙 or 壇, the latter also being a homophone of 攤.

Among the stalls you can hear the vendors calling: one catty [of rice] for only two coins!
般步口中有砇[92]賣　　一斤[93]石[94]砇兩个錢
There is never any frost in Hainan; the leaves of each harvest of indigo are always luxuriant.
海南注來無雪水　　藍根歳歳葉菁菁
It is not expensive to produce indigo dye, and a catty can be sold for fifteen coins.
作靛算來不為貴　　斤靛賣來十五錢[95]

The Namtha-Vietnam Letter also discusses economic matters and livelihood conditions, in particular the natural environment, rubber plantations, and relationships with local government.

Among the great mountains and dense forests there were a thousand kinds of delight; gibbons and monkeys called out and the sound filled the forest.
大山深林千般楽　　烏猿猽㺜呌满山
There were also elephants, wild gaur, and rhinoceros; sambar deer and roe deer could be seen as well.
大象山牛犍也有　　狂京山杷也见形
Sparrows and hornbills flew all through the mountains; in the streams there were wild fish swimming freely.
白雀鳳凰滿山専　　水氏狸鱼成篆遊
Those born in the current generation haven't seen such things; they have only heard their elders talk of them in older times.
今世生边不见樣　　空听老人呹旧時
……
As we came to the year *gui-wei* [2003], the government granted money to people to plant [rubber] trees.
運到年今癸未岁　　王府賜分種樹錢
Each household was given [loaned] 6,000,000 [kip]; rubber saplings were planted such that they filled the mountains.
一家賜分六百万　　斉瀆胶秵種滿山
The planted rubber trees will mature in ten years; then we must slowly pay interest back to the government.
胶樹種得滿十歳　　熳賜公粮回庇官
As for those people who have fields, they focus on planting [rice], such that each year they can plant two harvests.
何海有田如意穜　　恩庇一年種两春
The sexagenary cycle continues to turn and the world continues to change; what the future will bring we cannot know.
甲子運原天地換　　前面成何曾不知

92 Possibly 叫.
93 A traditional Chinese measurement for weight that is approximately equal to 0.6 kilograms.
94 Possibly 只 or 谷.
95 This graph was written in a cursive style, similar to 豕, see Weng Zhifei 2005.

Salt, indigo, and local commerce are just some of the subjects related to livelihood that are included in this letter. The letter was written to encourage other Kim Mun to move to Hainan, so the locale is, of course, depicted in a favourable light. In the Namtha-Vietnam Letter we also see the author discuss rubber cultivation and its effect on the surrounding countryside. Many letters sent abroad also contain details of the wild animals in the area, as well as the abundant forests and the access to streams. In the Namtha-Vietnam Letter the author laments that so many of the animals he used to see when he was younger are no longer around. It is a common regret shared by many Kim Mun elders in Laos that their children will not see these animals in the wild. Often the animals discussed are also of value in local and regional markets, for their hides, furs, or meat. Discussions of livelihoods and commercial affairs can also carry personal sentiment with them. In the Namtha-Vietnam Letter there is a sense of sadness; it was written by a man in his sixties, already now a great-grandfather, recalling what has transpired around him through the course of his life, perhaps with a sense of loss of control. The author of the Hainan-Laos Letter was much younger, and he was excited by the possibilities of life in Hainan. These two positions reveal not just environmental or economic aspects, but also how the environment or economy impact upon individual sentiments in relation to the sense of place and time. Not only do we get a sense of the local economy, but we also get an understanding of authorial sentiments regarding the epoch in which they write and the generation to which they belong.

3.4 Culture, community, and identity

All of these letters discussed here belong to Kim Mun. Apart from the fact that they were copied from texts in the possession of Kim Mun, this is evident in the use of terms of self-reference in the content of the letters, i.e. in the use of graphs, in various combinations, which signify ‘Kim Mun’. However, various other cultural markers are used in the letters that are characteristic of highland ethnic groups in the area in general as well as those particular to the Kim Mun, especially in the way of terminology. One of the most common of these, and one that attempts to underscore the shared ancestry of author and audience, is the reference to *Pangu* 盤古 or King Pan 盤皇. These two may be the same deity in two different manifestations, or they may be two distinct deities. The overlapping of myth and common terminology at times makes it difficult to distinguish between the two names and their identities. The myths themselves differ between Yao sub-groups to varying degrees, which adds to

the mystery.[96] Nevertheless, Kim Mun consider Pangu and King Pan to be the creator of the universe and/or their primogenitor (typically of their ‘five ancestral lineages’) and they serve as markers of a shared identity. For example, in the Shangsi Letter:[97]

> In the past we lived in our homeland; we don’t know how we came to Guangxi.
> 卡罗夫音园国地　　不知拆离道广西
> The sons and grandsons of Pangu have endured much suffering; you don’t know how much we have been through.
> 盘古子孙夫愁过　　真是愁咧亲马知

Similarly, in the Shangsi-Vietnam Letter[98] and the Hainan-Namtha Letter respectively we see an identification of the clans of King Pan, and a distinction made between them (the audience, the Kim Mun and/or the Yao) and the general populace:[99]

> King Pan opened the heavens and formed the land; and we are the progeny of the five lineages.
> 盘王开天供立地　　五姓宗枝是小亲

And

> The clan-names Pan, Deng, Zhao, Li, and Jiang; these five clans are the ancestral kin of King Pan.
> 盤鄧趙家李蔣姓　　五姓盤皇宗祖亲
> There are many other clans living among the villages; but their ancestral lineages do not follow King Pan.
> 㚈村也集白[100]姓住　　不是盤皇三祖親

As well as origin myths, common cultural practices are also frequently depicted in letters, especially as these serve not only to heighten the emotive aspect of the letter, but also to invoke shared cultural linkages. In the Shangsi-Vietnam Letter,[101] the author depicts the traditional courtship meetings organised between young men and women as part of his descriptions of the beauty of his village’s surroundings.

> The mountains and plains are ever fecund; crops of every kind can flourish.
> 好山好地胜了胜　　生里万般件件成
> Young women and men go out in groups; they are like butterflies in the spring-time.

96 Alberts 2011, 19–65.
97 GZZB 1987, 388.
98 GZZB 1987, 407.
99 References to these two deities also feature in the Namtha-Vietnam Letter.
100 Given the poor state of the copy of the manuscript as well as the context of this passage it is impossible to say for certain; however, this graph is most likely to be 百 (‘hundred’ MSC *bǎi*).
101 GZZB 1987, 408.

> 门姩[102]门郎成群专　如同蝴蝶彩春堂
> Night and day their songs resound unendingly; and flowers bloom along the road-side like stars in the heavens.
> 日夜歌声唱不断　　花开路上能天星

In addition to invoking a cultural practice which would be warmly familiar to all the adults who read this letter or heard it recited (in particular as this is likely to be how they 'officially' met their own spouse), the letter also uses a graph in the second line (姩) which may be a Kim Mun invention, or it may be something more widespread among populations in southern China and northern Vietnam. This graph is employed in Kim Mun texts in Laos, as well as in Yunnan and Guangxi. Regardless of its origins, it is a standardised graph among Kim Mun populations which does not appear among standard Chinese characters and is frequently seen as a binome combined with *mun* (們), meaning 'young lady' in Vernacular Mun. Several works on Kim Mun communities make specific reference to this graph as a Kim Mun (or Yao) invention.[103]

Along with specific graphic forms, which include common uses of phonetic borrowings, there are also cultural and religious terms employed in many letters which require the audience to also know them in order to make sense of the passage. In a letter collected in Shangsi,[104] for example, the author refers to his own clan-name as it would be recited during ritual activity:

> Like sky and earth, the clan of Longxi has been separated; now we have been provided with a place to be reunited.
> 天地注分陇西郡　　供龙盖住合鸳鸯[105]

The term *lɔŋ sa tɕun* (陇西郡) is an example of the shortened versions of the alternyms used for clan-names during ritual. Without a list for all possible names, or the full version, we cannot be certain, but the author most likely belongs to the Li 李 clan (which is named: 徵音陇陋郡子). Here, 徵 (MSC: *zheng*, but also written as 正) is the graph signifying the clan-name while 陇西 (or 陇陋 MSC: *longxi* or *longsa*) links the Li (李) clan with an ancestral hall at Longxi in Xi'an. The binome 郡子 refers to the fact that the man is a son of this clan or lineage.[106] Other clan-

102 Read *mun sa*, meaning 'young, unmarried woman' or 'young girl', depending on context.
103 GZZB 1987, 385–416; Li Zenggui 1986, 55–60.
104 GZZB 1987, 403.
105 This term, 鸳鸯, means 'mandarin ducks' or 'a couple', but given that the author is writing to his sister, it most likely means that they can be together or be reunited again.
106 Here, 郡子 may also be read as 君子 ('gentleman' MSC: *jūnzǐ*) or 郡 ('commandery' MSC: *jùn*) as denoting 'clan' or 'lineage'.

names follow the same pattern, such as for the Deng (鄧) clan-name (宮音南陽郡子) where 宮 is the alternym and Nanyang (南陽) refers to the ancestral hall of its namesake in Henan, and the Jiang (蔣) clan-name (商音樂安郡子) where 商 is the alternym and Yue'an (樂安) is the name of the clan's ancestral hall of its namesake in Jiangxi.[107]

This knowledge of the alternyms used for clan-names is a notable feature of Kim Mun religion,[108] though it is also found among the religious practices of other groups in China. Even so, unless the letter's audience is also versed in Kim Mun religious concepts, the meaning would be obscure.[109] What this shows us is that there is an intersection of cultural and religious practice related to clans and lineages that is most likely tied up in larger histories and developments in China and beyond, and that these texts can contribute to our understanding of how they evolved.

4 Implications for further research

Kim Mun letters and the practices that sustain their production provide a critical lens through which to investigate and understand Kim Mun culture and Yao culture more broadly. Further research on this aspect of their culture is also important for building on the body of knowledge on Yao social organisation, religious practices, and historical developments. In addition, a key aspect, but one not covered in detail in this chapter, is how a 'Yao literacy' can contribute to global studies on literacy and writing. Nevertheless, the argument put forward in this chapter is that these letters are not just significant for understanding the Kim Mun and Yao themselves; they can open up a new opportunity for investigating and understanding the region in which Yao communities have lived and the peoples, chieftaincies, empires, and states with which the Yao have had interactions and relationships.

The depth and detail present in Kim Mun letters provide significant opportunities to build on current knowledge of history and culture across the southern China and mainland Southeast Asia region. The letters cover broad topics about history, geography, economy, religion, and tradition, and major events relevant to the study of other groups living in the region, and of the region itself more broadly. Furthermore, we gain viewpoints of various individuals and communities that

107 In these examples the location of the ancestral hall is tied into the names of territorial and administrative areas (see Streiter and Goudin 2013, 459–494).

108 GZZB 1987, 385.

109 These ritual forms of clan-names are also used in later passages of the Namtha-Vietnam Letter (not reproduced here).

have been influenced by their lived experiences and coloured by tropes and metaphors. This gives us information not just about what happened, but how people felt about it and what impact it had on them and their communities.

A sustained period of work with Kim Mun communities is needed to contextualise and document their letters and songs in order to understand their meaning(s) and the practices associated with their production and use. To achieve this, the work must account for the needs and wishes of the communities as well as the objectives of the research project(s). The collections of Kim Mun letters in various libraries, as well as those held in private collections (Kim Mun and foreign alike), remain under-utilised and are not easily available to scholars, people with an interest in these texts, or Kim Mun communities themselves. These are not just a collection of individual primary sources but can represent a collective history of the Kim Mun people. At the very least, these are texts written by and for Kim Mun. Their initial design was not intended for the purpose of outside research. Nevertheless, despite the dangers of creating and editing a body of work to represent a people, the endeavour would have merit for creating space for Kim Mun 'voices' in the histories that are created by states through formal institutions, such as universities and research institutes, and held and protected by their libraries and museums.

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Abbreviations

GZZB	Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu (广西壮族自治区编辑组)
LM	Literary Mun
MSC	Modern Standard Chinese
RM	Ritual Mun
SZ	Southern Zhuang
VM	Vernacular Mun

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Joseba Estévez

On the Lanten Methods to Fetch the *Hon* or Living Force of the Original Rice

Abstract: Rice rituals are core to the rice-cultivating societies in Southeast and East Asia. The planting, growth, and harvest of rice depend upon how well the farmers secure their spiritual integrity and the effectiveness of the homage paid to the spiritual owners of the rice. This chapter presents one of the ritual actions associated with the Lanten rice rituals in northern Laos: fetching the *hon* or living force of the original rice. Informed by a decade of fieldwork and various academic projects directed by the author in Laos, this chapter translates and discusses the secret words in ritual use employed by the Lanten master leading the ceremony, revealing the logic and ethnographic context of the ritual itself in connection with research on rice rituals and their historical development in the region, with a focus on Yao Studies.

1 Introduction

The Lanten, a branch of the Yao, are one of the smallest and most marginal ethnic minorities in Laos, numbering some ten thousand and living in forty villages in the provinces of Luang Namtha, Bokeo, Oudomxay, and Phongsali, in the far northwest of the country close to the borders with Thailand, Vietnam, China and Myanmar. Their autonym Mun means ‘person’ in the Mun language (a language of the Hmong-Mienic family; both the people and the language are also referred to as Kim Mun), yet they present themselves to outsiders by the ethnonym Lanten (French: Lantène), from the Chinese 藍靛瑤 Lándiàn Yáo, literally ‘Indigo [dye] Yao’. This is a name that is accepted by both Lanten and non-Lanten communities in Laos.[1] It

1 The Lanten in Luang Namtha designate their autonym *Jiu Mun*, meaning lit. ‘Yao person’ as *Iu Mien* does in Mien language; in Mun language, *Dou* 民 ‘people’ identifies any other non-Lanten person. There are two Mun-speaking societies in Laos, those who call themselves *Kwa Bu Mun* or Blue Trousers [wearing] People, who have a population of around 4,700 members and reside in the provinces of Luang Namtha, Bokeo, and Oudomxay; and the *Kwa Kia Mun* or Black Trousers [wearing] People, with a population of around 5,500 members, who reside exclusively in Phongsali province, along the Sino-Lao border (Lao Statistics Department, 2010). There is no contact, exchange, or intermarriage between these two societies – the same applies to communities of the

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constituted the favoured choice for early European travellers who visited northern Laos in the 1890s and who interacted with various Lanten communities at that time and documented these encounters, which testifies to the old use of the term and its wide acceptance in the region.[2]

The Lanten ritual system presents a remarkable complexity that can be ascribed to the so-called Yao Daoism, which has long fascinated scholars owing to its structural similarities with the earliest organized Daoist communities of the Later Han dynasty.[3] All Lanten young men undergo ordination as Daoist ritual masters, receiving accreditation as *dao kong* 道公 'priests' and *tai kong* 師公 'masters'.[4] Although all the Lanten men are – ideally – ordained in their teens, interviews with ritual experts in the Lanten settlements in Laos revealed that only around ten per cent engage in an increasingly specialised path as ritual experts. Their dedication to the community grows as they are freed of the most demanding household tasks, as their children cater for them (i.e., after they are forty to fifty years old), enabling full-time dedication, one that is seasonal as the most demanding ceremonies are arranged during the dry season.[5] The ordained status allows the men to participate

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other Yao society in Laos, namely the Iu Mien. This research focuses on the Blue Trousers People of Luang Namtha.

2 For instance, in the Luang Namtha region: Lefèvre-Pontalis 1902, 288; McCarthy 1900, 150–151; Lefèvre 1898; and Davis 1909, 371–372. Both British and French explorers and travellers to North Myanmar and North Vietnam, respectively, documented the use of the ethnonym Lanten. 'These are called variously Yawyin, Yaoyen, Yaojên, Laoyen, and Lanten [...] there are four main divisions of this people [...] the eldest branch call themselves Yu-mien or Yao-mien [...] the other branches are the Lantien Yao, the Santeng Yao, and the Chiaokuo Yao' (Scott 1900, 601). The use of English and French in the transliterations may result in exotic outcomes, such as that used by Prince Henri d'Orléans (1898, 47) as he met members of this society during his travels in Yunnan, China: 'They said they were Lintindjous [i.e., Lanten Yao], but the Chinese called them Yaos'.

3 For instance, Alberts 2007 and 2017; Lemoine 1982 and 1983; Lemoine and Chiao Chien 1991; Shiratori 1975 and 1978; and Strickmann 1982. Based on conversations with Lemoine at his home in Bangkok, Michel Strickmann wrote an unpublished conference paper 'Chinese Sources of Yao Ritual and Myth' presented at the First International Colloquium on Yao Studies, held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 26–30 May 1986, which should enlighten this matter. Both Strickmann and Lemoine drew attention some decades ago to the Han connection with the Yao rituals, a topic which deserves more research. The detailed programme of this colloquium was published in the *Chinese University Bulletin*, 3: 3–4, accessible at: https://www.iso.cuhk.edu.hk/images/publication/archive/bulletin/198603/html5/english/files/assets/common/downloads/bulletin202001_en.pdf (accessed on 11 December 2023).

4 This article only provides a basic phonetic notation of the Lanten ritual language in Luang Namtha as per reference for the few terms transliterated here.

5 The ritual experts must be married (i.e., embody female and male aspects of the cosmos) and old age allows for the creation of the intimate relationship with the deities who grant the gifts of life

actively in the thriving Lanten ritual life, with the senior ritual experts leading all the major ceremonies.

2 Rice and its ritual significance

The Lanten are a widely dispersed society that resides in river valleys in the highlands rather than on the tops of mountains like other Mien groups, so wet-rice cultivation is of primary importance, along with other varieties grown in dry fields on the hillsides. Being their staple food, rice is something the Lanten excel at cultivating in its many variants and in a variety of terrains. These include numerous types of rice, including long-grain and short-grain rice, with some variants of the latter being sweeter and more glutinous. Boiling and steaming are the main ways to cook rice among the Lanten. The Lanten cultivate rice in paddy fields ('wet', next to streams) and hill lands ('dry', unirrigated) in a cycle marked by the duality of the rainy and dry seasons characterizing their tropical habitat. Ploughing the fields and planting takes place right before the start of the rainy season or monsoon (around the middle of March), and the harvest takes place at its end (middle of October). The importance of rice and its cultivation and the uncertainty and risks associated with the farming cycle are embedded in the major rice-related myths, oral stories, songs, and ritual practices maintained as a living tradition by the Lanten. To understand the complexity of rice farming among the Lanten, one needs to be introduced to their general cosmovision – as a shared integrated system of beliefs, practices, and understanding that the Lanten, as a society, uphold about the world and their own meaning and purpose in the universe.

Most societies cultivating rice across South, Southeast, and East Asia share a view of the rice as composed of a dual body comprising physical and spiritual component parts, and perform rice-related rituals that are informed by the acknowledgement and reinforcement of this duality. This is also the case with the Lanten and explains the central role of rice in Lanten rituals. The duality in the body of the rice grains results in the nurturing of the person's physical and spiritual bodies as

extension and a 'second life'. Hence, full-time ritual expertise relates to the Lanten concept of the person, notions of being *complete*. In addition, the acquisition of the necessary ritual competence is built up over decades of study, and leading a ceremony entails following certain ritual rules that reflect seniority; for instance, sexual intercourse is avoided during the rituals (including preparation and follow-up) to prevent deities from being born into the world, thus, younger ritual experts with a more active sexual life do not engage so enthusiastically in the rituals, especially if they are still trying to conceive children.

well. The spiritual body of the rice grains strengthens that of the Lanten; according to the Lanten, no other grains fulfil this essential task. This explains the significance of rice and its conceptualisation as a gift of Heaven. In addition, rice in its many forms, as plant or grains, as grains with and without husk, cooked or uncooked, boiled or steamed, prepared as sweet or savoury cakes or distilled into rice liquor, and even in the form of ashes from its straw or chaff, plays a central role in the Lanten rituals. Rice conveys an intrinsic nurturing value but also serves as a vessel for other spiritual components that the Lanten ritual experts can embed into it, allowing for their incorporation as the rice in its many shapes is consumed or employed in ritual actions. This ideology does not pertain exclusively to the Lanten, but also constitutes a fundamental aspect of other rice cultivating societies.

The passages from the few pages translated below contain a fundamental ritual text used in the ritual actions aimed at fetching the *hon* or living force of the original rice so this can be planted every year.[6] These pages are employed in three different ritual actions. Two of these ritual actions pertain to the only two communal rituals that are celebrated among the Lanten in Laos; the third one is performed at the household level. The chronology of the three rituals relates to the lunar (full moon) and agricultural cycles; thus, the exact dates vary across January to February (the Lanten New Year), February to March (the Festival for Planting the Rice), and March to April (the ritual to install the *hon* of the rice into the growing rice plants). The last of these can be performed on any day within the same lunar month; the communal festivals must occur on the exact date each year, since both the world of the living and the wider cosmos (deities and ancestors) are subject to the calendar.

The Lanten New Year Festival coincides with the Chinese New Year and aims (among its many functions) to honour the harvest and the transition of the annual lunar cycle. This festival is exclusively attended by male representatives of the Lanten households (ideally, all ordained men), who come together in a designated venue to honour the Deities of the Village (*pun kaeng dan* 本境神), a pantheon comprised of deities and communal ancestors that supported the original foundation of the community and safeguards its growth and prosperity. Nevertheless, Namlue Village also has a small shrine placed outside the village boundary, next to the north gate, that serves as an abode for these deities. Cleaning and honouring this shrine and inviting the deities to occupy their seats in it constitutes an essential task of the Festival for Planting the Rice (*Thu Song*, lit. to carry out the planting), which is

6 See Holm 2004, 145–174 for the 'redemption of the rice spirit' among the Zhuang in Southern China, which presents a comparable narrative.

celebrated precisely one full lunar month after New Year.[7] This festival ends with a banquet to which all the adult villagers are invited (men and women sitting separately). The Lanten lack temples, and each household becomes an ephemeral sacred space during the celebration of a major ritual. For the communal festivals, one household is selected to represent the village as a whole and to host the events; this honour requires the household and its members to commit themselves for at least a year (a complete ritual cycle); the position requires supporting some of the costs but also involves charisma as the venue's owner plays a central role in the ceremony as the third leading ritual expert and the embodiment of the village – representing the locality, the community, and the Lower Realm in the Lanten tripartite cosmos. The other two ritual experts are the master and the priest, who represent, respectively, the Middle and Upper Realms; the entire cosmos attends the ritual. The participants in the communal festival include the representatives of the households (i.e., all residents), with little to no outsider participation. Since each household sends at least one male representative and all the Deities of the Village are summoned, the festivals engage a 'community of spirits' comprised of the living (embodying reincarnated ancestors) and their pantheon of deities and communal ancestors.[8] These communal festivals engage the entire community in celebrating annual cycles (the lunar calendar and farming calendar). The third rice ritual pertains to the household level, and the owner organises it; this ritual takes place between one and two lunar months after the actual planting of the rice (that is, from April until May) and has the aim of fetching the *hon* of the original rice to reinforce the rice crop. The rice field's owner can perform the ceremony himself (if he has the ritual competence), or hire experts to do it on his behalf; the ritual action takes place outdoors, in the rice fields.

The same text serves to fetch the same *hon* or living force of the original rice in the three rituals, but each ritual embeds the rice *hon* into three different bodies and focuses its major aim on different purposes. In the New Year Festival, the rice *hon* is embodied in husked uncooked rice grains that the ritual experts place in small glasses or cups that are filled with rice liquor; each attendee consumes a series of these glasses as the representative of their households; the rice *hon* that they ingest

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7 See Cawthorne 2015 for another view of this ceremony in Namdee Village, Luang Namtha; on Lanten textual culture, see Cawthorne 2021.

8 On the 'community of spirits', see Wessing 2006. In Namlue, there are Lanten (the majority) and non-Lanten residents; several Khmu families moved from the neighbouring Nale District to reside in the village. They live on the periphery. Nonetheless, they are invited to join the Lanten celebrations, as Namlue is designated officially by the Lao government as a Lanten cultural village. The Khmu community also organises and celebrates their own events (e.g., Khmu New Year, celebrated in December) and invite their Lanten neighbours to join them.

in this manner reverts to the Lanten households which they represent as parts-and-wholes.[9] In the Festival for Planting, the rice *hon* is embodied in rice seeds, rice cakes, and an object shaped like a rice plant with two panicles that every household receives as a gift, representing the original gifts of rice and its cultivation. Finally, in the third and final ritual action, the rice *hon* is summoned and embodied into the growing rice plants in the fields and gardens. The three rice rituals contain the necessary ritual actions to reproduce the social and cosmological orders of the village, ensuring its existence and the well-being of the community, along with the fundamental tasks of starting the farming season. The third ritual guarantees not only the efficacy embedded in the triple repetition common to all the Lanten rituals, but guarantees the spiritual integrity of the rice plants as wholes – preventing disease and abnormal circumstances from affecting them (from drought to flood, including all types of accidents whose root causes are often interpreted as having cosmological origin).[10] The *hon* or living force is ascribed with a natural predisposition to return to the spiritual domains in which they originate; this tendency of cosmological elements to return to their '*foyer d'origine*'[11] accounts for the idea that only rituals of socialisation may grant human beings a long and healthy lifetime, and the same logic applies to crops (i.e., rice) and livestock.

The spiritual and ritual dimensions and meaning of rice are not exclusive to the Lanten of Luang Namtha or the so-called Yao, but are widespread in Southeast Asia and East Asia.[12] Furthermore, the cultural essence and functions of the Lanten communal festivals are also comparable with Chinese festivals.[13] Indeed, the study of rice cultivation culture and rituals played a central role in the early development of Yao Studies. In his seminal lecture 'A new working hypothesis on the structure of early Chinese cultures' during the Second Conference of the Society for Ethnology in Leipzig, 1936, Wolfram Eberhard proposed a new framework for the study of Chinese civilisation as a whole made up of different parts, with different ethnicities

9 Mauss 1966, 76–81.

10 Platenkamp 1998 and 2004 and Estévez 2016 present health as a social condition in which the incompleteness or deterioration of the spiritual body results, eventually, in that of the physical body. The manifestation includes disease, and natural disasters affecting the crops in the case of rice cultivation. Hence, the third rice ritual is key to securing the proper maturation of the plant and a fruitful harvest.

11 Hertz 1988, 56.

12 For a general overview of the religious and mythical dimensions of rice and its dual soul-body in Southeast Asia, see, for instance, Hamilton 2003, Schiller et al. 2006, Sunarti et al. 2021, and Walker 1994; for Japan, for comparable cosmogony and cosmology and presentation of rice deities, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 44–63.

13 Bodde 1975; Eberhard 1952; and Katz 1995.

making up the parts. This holistic approach moved the focus from the Han as the chief identifier of Chinese civilisation into the dynamics of cultural interactions with all the societies sharing the territory, and defined China as a cultural conglomerate under this novel vision.[14] Eberhard's research set an historical benchmark at an early time, around the seventh century, as a period in which all these cultural 'wholes' coexisted independently, establishing a baseline for an ethnography of each society. He then proceeded to analyse the processes of social and cultural integration, hybridity, and migration. Yao societies are fundamental in this vision, as they constitute one of the principal civilisations or cultural wholes in interplay in his framework. More critically, Eberhard placed the Yao and other 'barbarians' such as the Miao, Tai, Liao, and Yüeh as cultural clusters sharing an intimate commonality and cultural origins, one that predated the migrations to Southeast Asia from communities originating in this region and ethnicities. This approach may serve as a framework for comparing their myths and rituals to reveal common cultural patterns, values, and ideologies, not only in modern Southeast Asia,[15] where these minorities are now neighbours and cultural exchanges occur in real time, but also based on evidence in earlier times when many of their rituals and myths crystalised.[16]

Shiratori Yoshirō, who had translated Eberhard's works on Chinese history and the so-called Southern barbarians into Japanese,[17] organised a research team on the Yao of Thailand at Sophia University. Shiratori's research was influenced by that of Matsumoto Nobuhiro, who, like Eberhard, saw a commonality dating back to the early history of South China and also present in the rice-cultivating mountain and river basin cultures of Southeast Asia.[18] Japanese anthropology had been strongly

14 Under this holistic approach various German ethnographers and historians have detailed chapters dedicated to Yao society in early China. Apart from Eberhard (1942, 196–221, 1943, 148–162, and 1968, 33–139), Egon von Eickstedt also presents a discussion about Yao society within his 'bloc of Southern Barbarians' in his *Rassendynamik von Ostasien* (1944, 148–161), and Otto Franke did likewise in his *Geschichte des Chinesischen Reiches* (1965, vol.1, 32–61).

15 See e.g. Barraud and Platenkamp 1990.

16 Eberhard dedicates his *China's Minorities: Yesterday and Today* (1982) to elaborate on this part and presents the 'Strategies of Chia I' (Eberhard 1982, 107–110) as an example of this systematised civilising process. Coalescing societies with differentiated identities, i.e., 'wholes', became minorities or 'parts' within the Chinese Empire and were subjected to dynamics empowered by Chinese imperial diplomacy, conquest, and colonization. Civilising the barbarians involved persuasion, marriage, ambassadorial missions, tribute and trade exchange, military conquest, civilising religious endeavours (Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism) and intervention in religion as a means of control.

17 Shiratori 1964 and Shiratori 1966, 147–163.

18 This was the First Synthetic Research on the Rice-Cultivating Cultures and Ethnicities in Southeast Asia, organized by the Japanese Society of Ethnology, 1957–1958.

influenced by the German *Kulturkreis* School (roughly, 'culture circle' or 'cultural whole') proposed by Fritz Graebner, the founder of the Vienna School of Ethnology. This central idea in early 20th-century German anthropology promoted focusing on the particular histories of individual societies to understand them as cultural complexes ('wholes'; societies such as the Yao) that influenced each other (e.g., via diffusionism), producing a cultural conglomerate whose parts enable an analytical holistic understanding of the totality. Robert von Heine-Geldern and his studies on Southeast Asia and cultural diffusion[19] also influenced the Japanese teams, whose members tried to interpret Japanese origins and culture within these various academic frameworks and scholarly endeavours, which envision rice myths and rituals and rice cultivation cultures in South China and Southeast and East Asia as functioning as a cross-cultural language sharing a rice-based commonality. This commonality was forged long before the arrival of the Lanten in Southeast Asia, and is one that has been and is being shaped by continuous cultural exchanges, historical developments, and contingencies.

Shiratori's team developed its endeavour by means of conducting field research in Northern Thailand between 1969 and 1974.[20] Their work focused on Yao social structure, livelihood, ecology, economic activities, and the religious system (e.g., ritual, symbolism, and mythology), including Yao Mien manuscript culture – they collected many artefacts, together with many manuscripts.[21] Their work and findings attracted the attention of Strickmann and Lemoine, the latter being one of the founders of the Yao Studies Association, which came into being in Hong Kong in 1986.[22]

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http://jominken.kanagawa-u.ac.jp/research/fieldsience/koplrv0000000ijq.html [in Japanese, last accessed on 1 July 2022]. Matsumoto led the first Japanese multi-disciplinary research on rice-cultivating cultures and ethnicities in Southeast Asia. See Miyamoto and Shiratori (eds) 1959 and Matsumoto 1965. This endeavour was related to the Rice Farming History Research Meetings (1955–1963), also co-initiated by Matsumoto.

19 Heine-Geldern 1942.

20 The baton of Yao culture studies in Japan is carried by Hirota Ritsuko, of Kanagawa University, and her team at the YAOKEN (https://www.yaoken.org). The Yao Dao Project, focusing on the Lanten (Yao Mun), does so in Hong Kong (https:/www.yaodao.hku.hk) – these research endeavours co-organise frequent workshops and discussions.

21 Amongst the Japanese scholars in this team are Takemura Takuji, whose research interests cover Mien rice rituals and social morphology. His latest publication (Takemura 2003) revisits his research from the early 1960s to the 1990s. Leif Jonsson 2000 discusses the commercialisation of the Yao material heritage as collectibles and also points out the underlying rationale of Japanese research on Southeast Asia – one about digging into their own cultural origins.

22 Lemoine 1990.

This chapter on the Lanten rice rituals in modern-day Laos contributes to the above-mentioned academic work and discussions. Research on rice-cultivating cultures led to awareness among Western academics of the so-called Yao manuscripts and Yao Daoism; this chapter brings us back to the rice-cultivation culture and ritual. The following sections present the ritual context, the need for the 'secret words' (a concept explained below) that enable the Lanten ritual experts to fetch the *hon* or living force of the original rice, and the logic of the methods to do it – serving as a holistic approach to the annotated translation of the secret words accompanied by comments on their ritual use presented in the second part of this article.

3 A short explanation for Lanten magic

The essential Lanten *ideologeme*[23] *yam kaang - yang kaang* refers to a dual permeable and interpenetrating reality composed of two interwoven complementary worlds.[24] These terms refer to the invisible or spiritual world and the visible and biological or living world. They are related to the Chinese *yin-yang* dyad; other societies in South China and Southeast Asia related linguistically and culturally to the Lanten present a comparable ideology. Such is the case of the Mien, who pronounce these concepts as *yiem genv - yaangh genv*[25] and the Hmong, who pronounced them as *yeeb ceeb - yaj ceeb*.[26] In all cases, this *ideologeme* refers to a dual reality that encompasses a world that is invisible and immaterial (*yam*) and inhabited by immortal and powerful spiritual beings who include deities, ancestors, and the dead, and another world that is visible and material (*yang*), inhabited here by the living. In some ritual contexts, the invisible and visible worlds amount roughly to Heaven and Earth,[27] respectively, indicating the duality of invisible-visible and the socio-cosmos resulting from it. For the sake of clarity, we shall refer to them from now on as either the invisible or spiritual and visible or material worlds, or by employing the Lanten terms *yam yang*.

The origins of such a duality are described in the Lanten cosmogonic myth that recounts the origins and development of the universe. According to this myth, the present socio-cosmos was put in order and hierarchised from an original chaos. This

23 A fundamental unit of ideology, after Dumont 1977.

24 Standard Chinese *yinjian yangjian* 陰間陽間 lit. 'dark/shady realm/domain' and 'bright/sunny realm/domain'.

25 MacDonald 1997, 37.

26 Tapp 1989, 59.

27 *Tin Di* 天地, lit. 'heaven and earth'.

order enabled life and, ultimately, human society. Bountoud, a principal informant in my projects, and Lao Lee my master-father and adoptive father,[28] narrated this cosmogony as part of my training. Similar versions, more or less complete, have been provided by other key informants. This is my translation from the vernacular version (Mun language) assisted by my Lanten collaborators:

> In the beginning, there were only clouds. Two deities came out of the clouds, and suddenly all these clouds disappeared: *Njui Woung* 玉皇 – the first deity – created the invisible world and, soon after, *Boun Woung* 盤皇 came to be the second deity, and from his body resulted the visible world. *Boun Woung* experienced a further transformation: his eyes became the Sun and the Moon, and each of his head-hairs, beard-hairs, and teeth turned into stars; his bones and flesh originated the mountains and soil; his body hair became forests including animals and plants, and his blood became rivers, ponds, lakes, seas, and the aquatic life in them. Finally, his last breath grew into a wind that started moving all things. From that moment on, the invisible and the visible worlds came to exist, one world for the deities, and everything else came into being.
> To guarantee the separation between Heaven and Earth, *Njui Woung* and *Boun Woung* created the Middle Realm, a buffer zone aligned on its top with Heaven and its bottom with Earth, dividing them.[29] *Njui Woung* commanded the Middle Realm to two new deities, *Sang Tin Tai* 張天師 and his younger brother *Lui Woung* 雷皇. The former was born first; therefore, he became the ruler of this realm; the latter exerted military and executive duties. In the Middle Realm, each brother oversaw a season: The elder brother controlled the dry season, and the younger brother did the same with the wet or rainy season. For thousands of years, peace, order and prosperity prevailed, and the Three Realms grew prosperous together. Thanks to the two well-balanced seasons, the Lower Realm became a lustful green paradise filled with life.

This variant of a well-known Chinese Daoist cosmogonic myth,[30] whose metaphorical relations appear deeply embedded in the Lanten stories and rituals, establishes the basis of the power structure in the Lanten socio-cosmos. The three emperors (*Tam Woung* 三皇) in this story are the Jade Emperor, the Thunder Emperor, and Pangu the Cosmic Giant (also known as *Boun Kouk* 盤古 among the Lanten); the physical body of the latter becomes the visible universe. The elder brother in the story is Celestial Master Sang who, with the Thunder Emperor, rules the two seasons, thus the year and the passage of time. The roles of these deities are crucial for rice rituals as the ultimate rulers of the Lanten cosmos and governors of the seasons marking the passage of time (i.e., the lunar and agricultural calendars). The creation of the two worlds mentioned above is a transformative process that substituted a particular order with another one: from a type of order characterised as

28 Estévez 2019.
29 *Tjan kaai* 上界; *tjong kaai* 中界; *ya kaai* 下界.
30 Schipper 1978, 355–386.

'clouds', two distinctive and opposing principles were generated, namely a dualistic order. This is a common theme very familiar in the cultural Sinosphere and Daoism. The differentiation of the original clouds into two worlds, one visible and another invisible, also initiated a course of interactions and circulation, exchange, and flow of forces within. It is, indeed, this circulation that articulates and upholds the differentiation. The interactions serve to show that these two worlds cannot stand on their own and be complete in themselves: once separated, one is only possible in juxtaposition to the other, and only together do they constitute a whole.

The sequential order in forming the two halves established a hierarchy in which the invisible world is acknowledged as the elder (that is, the first born), and the visible world is acknowledged as the younger (that is, the second born). This hierarchy serves to articulate various essential relations. The first of these relations provides the rationale for enthroning the Jade Emperor, the first-created deity and, thus, the first born, as ruler of the socio-cosmos. His rule, in turn, empowers the authority of the invisible world – *yam* or heaven – over the socio-cosmos, subjecting to its mandate the realm of Pangu and the visible world – *yang* or earth. Hence, the creation myth provides a particular model of dualistic reality and makes clear – based on the lineal order of creation – which world governs which and, ultimately, which leads the socio-cosmos: everything starts in the invisible world. The second relation is based on this same reasoning and conceives of the inhabitants of the invisible world as the spiritual 'owners' of all the domains and landscapes existing in the socio-cosmos, for they were born first and, thus, became the original inhabitants.[31] By contrast, in modern times, it is the Lao State, defined as the Lao national community, who represents the owner and manager of the land, granting long-term and secure rights to land use.[32]

A third relation establishes that all living beings constitute micro-reflections of the dualistic socio-cosmos by embodying both the visible material and invisible spiritual dimensions within the same dual entity. This feature is found in persons, animals, plants, ritual spaces, and objects.

The Lanten concept *hon* 魂 is employed directly in this discussion rather than using a translation. The concept *hon* has a high lexical ambiguity as it signifies various notions: (1) the living force animating all living beings, and also present in some

31 The concept of spiritual ownership is widespread. For Southeast Asia, see for instance Condominas 1954 and 1980. The concepts 'cosmo-morphic' or 'socio-cosmic' refer to a society's belief that its social morphology is structurally commensurate in scope with the cosmological order as a whole (Barraud et al. 1994).

32 General provisions of the Land Law (amended 2019) in the Lao PDR. In English: https://data.laos.opendevelopmentmekong.net/en/laws_record/presidential-decree-on-the-promulgation-of-land-law-revised-2019/resource/843816b2-b0d0-43c9-b616-1d0e07a062f9 (accessed on 11 December 2023).

inorganic matter such as silver and gold; (2) the spiritual body as opposed to the physical body in the *yam* and *yang* duality; and (3) the various spiritual component-parts comprising the spiritual body of a person. The spiritual body of the Lanten men consists of seven *hon* and women's bodies contain twenty-four. Various informants provided different numbers such as twenty-three or twenty-six; this range of numbers in oral traditions seems to be associated with variations in the transmission of ritual knowledge. Twenty-four is, however, the number employed in the ritual actions. All these *hon* contain the life-principle. A person's last breath leads to the loss of all *hon*, which means the death of the physical body; losing one or more affects the integrity of the spiritual body, which manifests itself as disease in the physical counterpart. However, there is a clear distinction between the spiritual part that contains the persona, that is, the ancestral part and self, and those that stand for the life-principle that animates the body with its various ritual and gender-specific dimensions. All these dimensions of the concept *hon* warrant further discussion. Some plants and livestock have a *hon* compatible with that of the people, and, therefore, consuming them replenishes ones *hon*. Rice in its many forms constitutes the staple food of the Lanten for this reason; the rice *hon*, including distillations, reinforces a person's spiritual body – for the Lanten, bread or millet lack the capacity to substitute for rice because of their absence of compatible *hon*.

In this view, the farming of rice and livestock whose production cater for this type of compatible *hon* lies at the basis of the Lanten ritual economy. This model of farming and husbandry requires the support and protection of deities who grant, manage, and protect the *hon* in the invisible world. The ritual gifts presented in the ceremonies comprise offerings crystalising their gift of *hon*. Furthermore, the duality of the Lanten socio-cosmos and the relations mentioned above demand that the farming of the rice must take place first in the invisible-and-spiritual world to empower the farming season in the visible-and-material counterpart, following the logic of creation in the cosmogonic myth. Farming, like many other everyday activities among the Lanten (e.g., hunting), constitutes a ritual action, and specific myths and stories provide an accompanying narrative. The compatibility of *hon* means that animals may substitute for persons; for instance, a bride can be substituted for by a large pig with the same symbolic value of a person, and the celebration feast objectifies the contract and the value of the dowry, with kilos of meat counted as kilos of silver. Holm provides the Zhuang logic for the sacrificial value of a buffalo:[33] it can serve as a substitute for a person (the Lanten have preserved a similar idea). The compatibility of *hon* enables modalities of exchange, and the competence of the Lanten ritual experts to transfer *hon* into persons or ritual objects, facilitates its

33 Holm 2003, 206.

manipulation. The festivals create and constitute a liminal sacred time and space where these ritual experts mediate between the social (Earth - *yang*) and cosmological (Heaven - *yam*) orders.

The Lanten deities share some characteristics, hagiographies, physical descriptions, functions, and attributes ascribed to deities honoured in Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, and Chinese popular religion.[34] According to this understanding, the deities are arranged hierarchically in a manner that echoes the organisation of the late Chinese imperial government: the Jade Emperor rules the known socio-cosmos from his palace in the Upper Realm, just as the Chinese emperor ruled the Chinese empire from his capital. Nevertheless, each of the Three Realms has a ruler; the Thunder Emperor and Pangu rule the other two realms, the middle and the lower respectively. Together, these three emperors, also referred to in the rituals as the Three Old Sages,[35] preside over and oversee the Celestial Administration.[36] This power structure supports an elaborate assembly of deities and ancestors, which amounts to the governance of the known socio-cosmos. Note that this celestial governance designates the Thunder Emperor as the ruler of the Middle Realm, while the cosmogonic myth presented above does so with his elder brother Celestial Master Sang; we shall return to this essential question later. To this Celestial Administration pertain all the major deities and the ancestors of Lanten households. The ritual experts serve this government as high-ranking officers certified by Daoist ordination. As part of these ordinations, Lanten men become the living incarnations – embodiments – of various deities. The authority of the priests and masters within this power structure emanates from their intimate relationship with the invisible world or *yam* and the rulers they represent.

Each of the principal deities' domains is conceptualised as an office or imperial court-like department, meaning that its scope is explicit, often located in a particular space, and based on exclusive ritual functions that are not duplicated or held simultaneously by other deities. These celestial offices hold plenipotentiary powers over the domain they control and include its internal hierarchy. Internally, they consist of various celestial officers, with one high officer presiding over the office

34 See Feuchtwang 2001 for the 'imperial metaphor' of a celestial power structure that is anchored in time and imagery – hence immutable despite the uncertainty and contingency affecting the world of the living; see also Wolf 1974, Ahern 1981, Seidel 1983, and Meulenbeld 2015.

35 *Yao Thaeng* 舊聖, lit. the old sages; also, *Tam Thaeng* 三聖 lit. the three sages – being the Three Emperors.

36 *Yam Thee* 陰司, lit. the officers [in charge] of the invisible/spiritual world or *yin*. Note than in the Chinese context these same characters refer to the 'officers of the Netherworld', which is represented by the Chinese character 陰 *yin*. The concept *Yang Thee* 陽司 refers to the rulers of the polities in the visible *yang* world.

and supervising his or her subordinates, described as lower-ranked bureaucrats who hold specific ritual titles with detailed positions and functions within that office. These offices oversee the fundamental ritual functions such as the reincarnation of ancestors (i.e., the birth of new babies); the wellbeing of children and women; exorcistic healing; the extension of life for older people, caregiving in the afterlife; land ownership and other land-related matters; farming; animal husbandry; divine justice, and so on. The deities incarnated in the ritual experts enable the mediation between the invisible *yam* and the visible *yang* worlds; these deities empower their authority, and their embodiment into novices assures the transmission of this ritual expertise to younger generations.[37]

The Lanten concept *pap* 法 lit. 'method', which I have translated as 'magic',[38] refers to the ritual manipulation of unseen forces by means of complex ritual procedures that include visualisations, mental commands, and ritual actions carried out by Lanten ritual experts. The Lanten *pap* or magic is comprised of various dimensions, each designating different principles or aspects of the whole. The physical dimension of magic refers to persons, landscapes, objects and manifestations of magic in the visible world and the methods, laws, ways, and solutions to embody, store, transmit, and apply magic. Different types of spiritual component-parts or energy fields, such as the *hon* or living force that animates persons, livestock, and plants, originate in cosmological domains; the Lanten envision magic as unseen cosmic forces, emanating from and connected to their cradle. Each independent cosmological domain in the invisible world constitutes a spiritual dimension of magic. The social dimension identifies the continuum or chain of transmission that originates in the spiritual 'owners' of the magic and flows uninterruptedly (through the master lineages) into the ritual experts who employ the magic in the current spacetime.

The Lanten ritual experts describe different aspects of the Lanten magic as 'owned' by different deities. Ultimately, the spiritual 'ownership' of the magic is ascribed to the deity *Lao Kwan* 老君 (also 老子), who rules the cosmological domain where magic originates. However, the different methods or techniques to channel, control, craft, and apply magic with efficacy are attributed to the deities *Tam Teang* 三清, the Three Pure Ones, and *Tam Nyun* 三元, the Three Primordials. These six

37 My primary findings on this matter, namely a detailed systematisation of the most important celestial beings in the Lanten cosmos, are presented in detail in my doctoral thesis (Estévez 2023).

38 As widely employed in writing on the Daoist concept of Thunder Magic (Chinese 雷法 *leifa*); see, amongst many others, Reiter 2016. While the sectarian development of the Daoist Thunder Magic tradition became dominant in the Song dynasty, a time when Tantric Buddhism also exerted an impact on Daoist practices, the use of magic among the Lanten Yao should first be approached independently from the Han historical trajectory, owing to its own particular characteristics. Further research will be required to allow comparison between the Han Daoist practices and the Lanten.

deities are the original three priests and three masters who became the Celestial Masters teaching the ritual system to the Lanten. The Three Pure Ones initiated the priestly or civil division, and the Three Primordials did so with the master or martial division. From each division is derived different forms of magic and ritual legitimacy, and each one employs different methods, sets of ritual tools, manuscripts, and secret knowledge. This secret knowledge is half transmitted orally and half recorded in a textual corpus. Part of this corpus is comprised of liturgical texts and companion texts, and another critical part encompasses living manuscripts that embody deities acting as officers who empower the ritual knowledge associated with this particular type of ritual text.[39] These living manuscripts are ascribed with a will of their own, as opposed to other manuscripts which are considered inanimate objects.[40] The Lanten call these living manuscripts *pai nyui* 秘語, lit. 'secret words', in reference to the complex procedures, narratives, and ritual knowledge they contain. Being identified as the embodiment of celestial officers (hence, living beings), these manuscripts must be covered in 'uniforms', that is, wrapped in cloth, resulting in a primary distinction within the Lanten textual corpus between dressed or living manuscripts and the rest (liturgical texts and companion texts).

Accordingly, Lanten magic is intimately interconnected with several Lanten deities whom the Lanten designate as its ultimate guardians, spiritual 'owners', and other deities presiding over celestial offices administering it (and associated with types of *hon*) within the Celestial Administration. Thus, Lanten imperial magic is subjected to a three-fold condition: one needs access to the magic's source, the necessary ritual knowledge, to channel it, and the authorisation to employ it, sanctioned by the proper ritual payments that sanction its 'ownership'. The efficacy of magic in ritual use manifests itself in the visible world when the anticipated outcomes of the ceremony come to be realised. For instance, the efficacy of the magic for fetching the *hon* of the original rice and the ritual farming of it in the invisible world is confirmed when the rice barns are full to bursting at the end of the season.

Lanten magic constitutes a 'total prestation',[41] which metonymically (as part for whole) stands for every aspect of the Lanten socio-cosmos it is part of. Using magic involves the visible and invisible worlds and the circulation of exchanges between them, including, for instance, *hon*, gifts, and ritual knowledge in use, connections

39 These companion texts include texts such as almanacs, visual dictionaries, teaching material, and songs, which are used to assist the memorisation and performance tasks of the ritual experts and the transmission of their ritual knowledge; these do not qualify as liturgical or living manuscripts.

40 Among the Lanten, various items are ascribed with *hon* or living force, for instance knives and swords, and brooms and spinning wheels. For a general discussion on Lanten manuscripts as ritual objects, see Estévez forthcoming.

41 Mauss 1966 [1925].

between the deities and the living and with the ritual experts as mediators, transforming the fabric of society in the process. Studying the magic is, therefore, essential to understanding the Lanten ritual system. The operationalisation of the invisible world occurs primarily in the mind of the ritual expert, and it is imperceptible to outsiders, for the methods – magic in use – consist mainly of mental commands and visualisations. These constitute a very powerful tool in the ritual experts' repertoire, one that demands those trying to understand the meaning of the Lanten secret words to work in close cooperation with them.

The primary role of the visualisations is to enable the ritual experts to re-enact and call upon specific stories, myths, and events associated with the particular aims of the ritual—the stories about rice and how the Lanten cultivate it to inform their rice rituals. The ritual experts read the texts and recite in their minds the oral stories; they employ their own experiences and knowledge to imagine these narratives with the visualisations being compared to (in my master-father Lao Lee's words) 'watching a movie in your head'. In short, it enables recreating the cosmos in their minds and working on it by imagining the stories and subjecting it to mental commands. These stories refer to the mythical time in which the deities performed their mighty deeds, employed specific tools or objects that performed a function in the ceremony, and they describe the origin of cosmological domains, include hagiographies whose narration summons and activates the deities mentioned in them, or recount stories whose themes and motifs record positive developments that once benefited Lanten society and whose recollection invites a similar beneficial effect. By visualising these narratives, the ritual experts connect their space-time with the mythical time that frames the stories, making the stories 'alive' in the sacred space. Mircea Eliade designates this ritual storytelling the 'eternal return' (*l'éternel retour*),[42] which consists of summoning the mythical age, transforming the profane space and time into sacred space and mythical time.

It is the creation of this liminality, objectified in the sacred space and time articulated by the rituals, that enables the priests and masters to run the invisible world, which ultimately transmutes the visible counterpart from within. Stories are a key element in such rituals, for their enactment (performative and imagined) shapes and articulates the operations on the cosmos by the ritual experts. As part of many ritual functions, chanting fragments of these narratives, uttering the titles of stories or names of deities, the theatrical performance in the central stage of short plays about them, and the creation of ritual objects, all reinforce the ritual action as a whole, completing and reinforcing the efficacy of the *pap* magic, meaning the methods and the unseen force working in the invisible world.

42 Eliade 1949.

The ritual training of the Lanten men includes increasing their familiarity with different stories (such as stories about rice), which are present in some summaries and references in liturgical texts and living manuscripts (e.g., in the pages translated below), and especially in the oral stories shared within the Lanten community and the ritual knowledge orally transmitted from masters to apprentices. Ritual experts who perform the rice rituals (active or retired) usually have more knowledge about details and variants of the stories, since they are interested in the topic. Only when a ritual expert commands a holistic understanding nurtured by the intertwining of oral and textual knowledge and secures the necessary qualifications can he lead the communal rice-related rituals – the same applies to other major rituals which are associated with different collections of stories. The men performing the rituals are appointed to these positions by the council of elders, a body comprised of well-respected senior ritual experts in each village. There is no single ‘complete’ source for the oral stories, and the texts gain meaning only when informed by the oral knowledge, including multiple variants. Often, the manuscripts include markers informing the reader about the need for missing oral ritual knowledge that has been systematically omitted from the texts. The intent behind such omissions is to reinforce the master-apprentice relationship. This has the effect of making the texts alone useless in the ritual. This distributive model of ritual knowledge is inherent in the Lanten ritual system and its transmission.[43]

The narratives of all the rituals share a universe, main characters, themes, and motifs, which eventually assist the ritual experts in memorizing by association new elements and stories. As a form of material support for the ritual experts’ memory, the living manuscripts containing secret words that store half of the knowledge – usually the most challenging elements to memorise, such as the myriad of ritual names for the deities and all their emanations, their locations, designations of ritual actions, and the names of ritual objects. The compression of the content in these ritual texts and their multiple references to orally transmitted knowledge make their meaningful translation a challenge. A crucial ritual function of the living manuscripts and their secret words is that of being a memory palace or journey method to facilitate the visualisations and activation of the mythical time. For these reasons, the contents sometimes include fragments of ritual names, functioning as keywords that enable cross-referencing of content and the decompression of the narrative as a rich visualisation. The most fundamental moment in a ceremony is when the leading ritual experts hold a living manuscript in their hands, their eyes closed or in a blank stare, silenced by ritual rules, while they construct their visions in their heads.

43 Estévez forthcoming.

When attending a Lanten audience ritual, what we see and hear, and read in the ritual texts available in situ, gain their full significance only when we understand the happenings taking place in the invisible world, which is reconstructed in every instance by the leading ritual experts based on their comprehensive, quasi-encyclopaedic ritual knowledge.

4 The storytelling associated with the fetching of the *hon* of the original rice

A long and complex form of storytelling informs the logic, magic, and ritual actions associated with the Lanten rice rituals. The Lanten flood myth tells how only the two siblings *Bok Njee* 伏羲 and *Thea Mui* 姐妹 survive the flood, which only ends when their organic ship made of giant gourd hits the grounds of the Jade Palace in Heaven (in the Upper Realm) and the Jade Emperor sends the Marshals to capture the Thunder God who caused the flood by blocking the Five Holes in the Seas with his hands, feet, and torso, while creating massive storms and raining for seven days and nights.

This action is part of the Thunder God's quarrels with his elder brother over the rulership of the Middle Realm; a position ultimately granted to the Thunder God, who becomes the emperor despite being the younger brother. The two siblings are the children of Celestial Master Sang, the elder brother; they were born in the Middle Realm but are now stranded in the Lower one. As the entire world has been annihilated, the siblings Bok Njee and Thea Mui, must consummate an abnormal (incestuous) conjugal union that produces, after three years of gestation, a bitter melon (instead of a baby) from which, eventually, all the ethnic groups emerge, creating the primary social differentiation between the people living in plains (the domains in the plains) and the people living in the mountains (the hamlets established in the highlands). Thus, they become the ancestors of the Lanten and every living person, and also provide a mythological basis for the ethnic diversity in the region.[44]

The flood myth conveys a narrative of cosmic renewal and an account of the origin of humankind. The Lanten variant pertains to a widespread tradition of comparable narratives on flood myths and surviving siblings documented in Southeast

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44 See Proschan 2001 for the gourd myth and its relevance in the construction of ethnic identity in Southeast Asia; also on this matter, see Lemoine 1987.

Asia and China.[45] Abadie documented variants preserved by the Man Lan Ten (indigo people) and Man Quan Trang (white trousers people) in Vietnam that are closer to the Lanten case in Luang Namtha.[46] The unity in themes and the diversity of details in the variants, along with their significance in the associated rice rituals, invite comparative approaches, such as those proposed by Eberhard and his views of early China and its conglomerate of societies connected by cultural diffusion, and the Japanese research on rice cultivation cultures in modern times. While the cultural tropes embodied in these stories suggest a unifying commonality relating to all these societies, the diversity (that is, differences in details) relates more to social identity and ethnic differentiation – even among branches of the same ethnic group.[47] The same applies to the concept of the physical and spiritual body of the person, in which the number and location of the parts express gender, ethnic, and religious identity.[48]

But the Lanten flood myth does not end there. Following the repopulating of the new world, the following story summarises fetching of the *hon* of the original rice – which is missing in the post-flood world that has destroyed everything and, thus, must be retrieved. The deities and ancestors witnessed in awe how the new humankind, born out of the bitter melon, must face the primaeval forests surrounding them without the proper means and tools, feeling hungry and feeding by trial and error on the plants and animals surrounding them. Many die quickly, and are poisoned, while others face famine. For these reasons, the Jade Emperor arranges

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45 For a comparison of the variants and their major themes, see Birrel 1997, Yang and An 2005, 22, and Dang 1993. Lewis 2006 and Saechao 2019 present in detail the Chinese case (the siblings Fuxi and Nüwa) and Iu Mien (siblings Fu-hei and Tze-mui), respectively.

46 Abadie 1924, 22 and 141. Holm 2003, 192–205 discusses the act of divine incest along with its ritual significance among the Zhuang in the context of an analysis of connections between Zhuang and other Tai versions and earlier Chinese textual evidence.

47 Lemoine 1987 discusses this differentiation in view of the variants of the flood myth among the Miao-Yao. The current chapter identifies many relations between the Lanten variant of the flood myth and those of other societies, but its aim is to present how the version of the Lanten variant in Luang Namtha shapes the logic of their rice rituals. The comparison and study of the diffusion and dynamic of incorporation of the themes and elements, or a chronology and directions of this diffusion of the stories across time, space, and societies, is a matter for future academic investigation.

48 The Lanten concept of the *hon* invites close comparison with its homonyms Chinese *hún* and Vietnamese *hồn*. In Laos, Tai-speaking societies both Buddhist and non-Buddhist have a comparable concept in the *khwan*, an analogous spiritual body comprised of various component parts whose number and location also varies with ethnic and religious identity (Platenkamp 2010; see also Anuman 1962 and Estévez 2023).

a special mission: he sends his guard, the mighty Five Marshals,[49] to rescue some seeds of the original rice. The original rice grew like a tree that produced abundant fruits in numbers sufficient to provide for the old humankind.[50] But both the original rice and old humankind perished during the flood. As part of her devoted scholarly venture, an eccentric old female deity, Grandma Thaek Ge (*Thaek Ge Bu* 釋迦婆), had preserved in her private herbarium seeds and samples from all the medicinal plants existing in the pre-flood world. The Marshals are commanded to cross nine mountain ranges and three great rivers (three mountains and a river at a time), sneak into the deity's palace, steal some seeds of the original rice, and return with them. To achieve this goal, the Jade Emperor transforms the Marshals into white mice and grants them gold incisors. The mission is perilous and barely successful. Upon return, only the embryo of the original rice[51] has survived, stuck between the incisors of the mice. The deity *Dan Long* 神農 collects the embryos, operates his magic on them to strengthen the seeds, and develops the necessary farming techniques to plant and harvest them successfully, providing the new humankind with the necessary instruction and seeds to farm their own rice from that moment on. The new rice prevents starvation and becomes the staple food of the new humankind; his vital assistance qualifies Dan Long as the deity of farming. The new rice is small and difficult to farm, so frequent rituals are needed to secure a fruitful harvest every year. This story – the fetching of the original rice – is central to the pages translated below and indeed, core to the Lanten rice ritual.

Bonifacy translated into French a 'Song of *Dàn-nông*' that a community of Máns Lam-diên (Landian Yao) in Lào-tri, Vietnam, had preserved as a text and employed in their rice rituals.[52] The song shares the principal themes and motifs with the case presented below, and it includes the part about fetching the rice *hon* as a means to

49 *Ti Sui Man* 四帥神, lit. 'celestial armies of the four directions' – the central army is implied. These deities were five teenagers, all brothers, who became deities after confronting the Jade Emperor. The elder brother is the strongest one amongst them; the four younger brothers originated from pieces of the cover of the coffin in which his father tried to bury him alive. To escape this destiny, the boy blew the cover up, with the four largest pieces turning into four younger boys who identified him as their elder brother.

50 Terwiel 1994 presents a general overview of this theme in the rice myths of Southeast Asia; Estévez and Yangnouvong 2020 have edited a selection of Lanten oral stories including stories about rice.

51 The body of *Blau Nya Man* (in vernacular or Mun language), lit. the deity of the tooth/embryo of the rice who 'activates' the rice seeds, making them germinate.

52 Bonifacy 1904, 188–194. Full text available online at: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k44108884/f190.item

feed the many children of the married siblings. One part of the song deserves special attention; my translation in English from Bonifacy's French goes as follows:[53]

> […] Dàn-nông felt compassion [shed tears] and sought a way to feed the people. He researched the one-hundred different plants [i.e., all] until he found a precious one that was very tasty – this was the rice plant. However, a rat from the mountaintop of a dark purple mountain took the seed of the rice plant in its mouth and ran with it into the forest. The Three Emperors sent the deity Buddha Sèc-kè after the rat; this deity was able to fetch and rescue the rice seeds. Dàn-nông came to the Earth and planted and sowed the rice [teaching the people to do so], and since then the people can cultivate rice and feed themselves up to the present time […]

The Song of Dàn-nông instructs that its chanting must be accompanied by drumming, meaning that this song constitutes an invitation and invocation of the deity *Dàn-nông*. In this regard, the song also has the Lanten three-act ritual structure that starts with the ritual invitation and summoning of the celestial guests that transforms the profane space and time into sacred space and time by initiating an imperial Chinese audience-like ceremony (the middle or peak act in which the central ritual actions occur), with the last act being the return of the space and time to its profane status as the celestial guests are sent back to their residences in their cosmological domains. Bonifacy's translation into French constitutes the only other source reflecting on Lanten rice ritual and their associated stories; his work reinforces the significance and widespread use of the rice myth and rituals among the Lanten not only in Luang Namtha, but elsewhere.

The variant preserved by the Máns Lam-diên in Vietnam recounts their flood and rice-cultivation stories and presents the deity Dàn-nông in a central role in their rice rituals. Dàn-nông is known as Dan Long 神農 among the Lanten of Laos, both echoing the Chinese deity Shennong (known in Vietnam as Thần Nông), who in the Chinese myths teaches the humans the basics of agriculture (that is, ploughing and rice planting) and the use of medicinal plants. More interestingly, the song introduces Buddha Sèc-kè, the Sage of the Śākya, Śākyamuni Buddha, as the main character rescuing the rice from the thief – a rat who steals the rice seeds and runs away with them – saving the day.

The presence of Śākyamuni Buddha in the rice rituals in Thailand, Laos, and China is not strange.[54] My research in this region has documented not only Lanten rituals but also local variants of the Lao Rice Harvest Festival and Thai chants to

53 Bonifacy 1904, 193.
54 See van Esterik 1984, 47; Yang and Lesmana 2022; Simmalavong 2011; Jotisakulratana 2012; and Jaruworn 2005.

summon or call back the *khwan* or living force of the rice.[55] The spiritual ownership of the rice, namely the rice *khwan* soul or living force is ascribed to the female deity Phra Mae Phosop (Thai: พระแม่โพสพ) who is often identified as the 'mother of the rice *khwan*' (Thai: แม่ขวัญข้าว Mae Khwan Khao). In some recorded stories, a farmer or the farmer's wife mistreated the deity who, feeling upset, retires to the deepest part of the forest. Her absence resulted in the death of the crops and the farmers' inability to grow new rice, leading to famine and suffering in the community. It is Śākyamuni Buddha who convinces the deity to return, or she returns to assist Śākyamuni Buddha's mission of salvation. Upon her return, all farmers treat her with respect, and as a result, the rice planting is straightforward and its harvest abundant; since then, homage to her is celebrated annually when the rice in the fields is about to mature. The rice festivals in Laos and Thailand are celebrated in January or February and include both homage to the female deity in the rice fields and gifts of rice (a share of the harvest) to the nearest Buddhist temple to feed the monks during the rainy season. The main themes in these stories deal with (1) the spiritual ownership of the rice, (2) the methods to fetch the spiritual body of the rice, and (3) the mediation of one or more deities in the process – this mediation refers to the fetching itself but also to the necessary farming knowledge. Often, variants in these themes ascribe to ethnic differentiation and the creation of cultural identity.

The variant shared by the Lanten of Luang Namtha includes these themes. The spiritual ownership of the rice is ascribed to two different entities: the fearsome guardian of the seeds, and the deities of the rice who find abode in its embryo. The Lanten deity Grandma Thaek Ge (釋迦婆 Thaek Ge Bu) shares a name with Śākyamuni Buddha, a name that the Lanten of Laos have recorded accurately but bestowed on a female deity of their own whom various stories describe as a bad-tempered old lady. Grandma Thaek Ge is a well-known Lanten female deity of medicine who devoted herself before the flood to collecting samples of all the medicinal plants and remedies in the world; she became a zealous custodian of her herbarium after some of her medicines were stolen by thieves and ended in the possession of the Lanten ritual experts. Indeed, her personality, as described in the Lanten stories, is opposite to the kindness and compassion attributed to Śākyamuni Buddha – a stranger for most Lanten since their contact with Buddhism is minimal (beyond driving by the local temple when they visit the town), and Buddhist references in their texts haven been filtered through their own cultural understanding, which is divorced from canonical Buddhism.

55 Lao: ບຸນຄູນເຂົ້າ *boun khoun khao*; Thai: คำสู่ขวัญข้าว *kham su: khwan khao*; see Rajadhon 1955 on rituals and traditions related to the rice *khwan* and the rice mother in Thailand.

The role of the rat in Bonifacy's translation (or that of the 'mother of the rice *khwan*') is to withhold or take away the rice, so this must be fetched or rescued, a common task to carry out as part of the rice rituals. In the Lanten stories, the Jade Emperor transforms the Marshals (one, four or five, depending on the variant) into a rat or rats, which is the hero who fetches the original rice *hon* – stealing it from Grandma Thaek Ge, in an inversion of the story presented in the song of Dàn-nông. The Jade Emperor and Dang Long mediate on behalf of the new humankind, with the latter becoming the patron of farmers, mainly for rice cultivation.

Readers should be reminded that this article does not use Han Chinese and Chinese culture and religion as the primary reference for the translation of the four pages of secret words presented below; instead, the Lanten emic understanding of their own texts forms the core of my research approach to the Lanten ritual system and, hence, the primary outcome of this research. Some of the findings may surprise readers unfamiliar with the Lanten society and rituals – Grandma Thaek Ge is a notable example. The Lanten are a non-Han population whose use of Chinese has been integrated according to their own cultural understanding; differences and discrepancies between emic and etic readings are expected in the script and its meaning and interpretation. The Lanten secret words can often be obscure or idiosyncratic for non-Lanten readers, yet full of meaning for the Lanten ritual experts employing them.

5 A living manuscript in ritual use

Three leading ritual experts perform the communal rituals. They represent the Three Realms and the Three Emperors, namely the Jade Emperor and the Upper Realm (priest); the Thunder Emperor and the Middle Realm (master), and Pangu and the Lower Realm (the venue's owner). They hold specific ritual titles during this event. The priest is referred to as *toung lao* 村老 the Village Elder, the master as *nin lai yang koung* 年例鄉官 the Village Official in Charge of the New Year Ritual, and the venue's owner becomes *kam dau soud tjui* 藍頭說主 the Spokesman for the Indigo-headed People – all such titles being more descriptive than part of a hierarchical official system. The meaning, roles, and duties associated with these titles deserve some attention. The role of the owner of the house in these festivals recalls a third type of ritual expertise (*thang kong* 僧公 'monks') whose transmission was interrupted in Laos at the start of the Laotian Civil War (1954–1975) due, amongst various factors, its associated high costs (ten large pigs) and risks (the novice had to jump from a platform into a handmade net, prompting accidents); his ritual tasks

were incorporated into those carried out by the priests in everyday life and the venue owner in the course of the communal festivals.

The priest is the director of the ceremony and the spiritual 'owner' of the village; he is the designated elder (*primus inter pares*) who represents the council of elders as a single voice. His ritual functions are to (re)establish (moral) order, law, and harmony as the advocate and local representative of the Celestial Administration. As the embodiment of the Jade Emperor (civil sphere), the priest is identified as the Morning Star (金星), representing the Upper Realm. The master is the master of ceremonies who invites all the celestial guests and guarantees their well-being and satisfaction during the ceremony; he also mediates and transfers the ritual payments. This ritual function builds on his role as the matchmaker in the conjugal union between Heaven and Earth. As the embodiment of the Thunder Emperor (martial sphere) and the Middle Realm, the master has an intimate relationship with the agricultural cycles and is designated the embodiment of the Sun (日宫). As a master of ceremonies, his ritual role is central. The venue owner and his family and house embody the village and the community (Lanten and non-Lanten residents). His home is transformed into a temporary sacred space that functions like a 'yamen' hosting the visiting celestial guests. During this time, the family's behaviour epitomises 'being Lanten' in the eyes of the deities, the communal ancestors, and the living: the family members must wear new clothes and their best silver jewellery and behave appropriately – meaning according to Lanten notions of being civilised, respectful, humble, even-tempered, in control of ones emotions, kind, and generous (but not spendthrift). The owner is the embodiment of the Moon (月府) that relates to the Lower Realm. His ritual title recognises the Lanten as Indigo People, reinforcing the idea that this term and colour is fundamentally interlaced with the Lanten ethnic identity.

The three ritual experts do not receive payments; their remuneration is measured in terms of merit (service to the community), prestige, and charisma. In most Lanten villages, these three positions are held by senior active members of the council of elders; most have held – or hold – a position as village mayor in the past. For instance, the priest in Namlue Village has been the village chief for many years. Owning the associated magic to perform the ceremony is a sine qua non condition to lead any ritual.[56]

The selection of the appointed candidates holding these highly valued ritual positions results from consensus in the village. The council of elders appoints the priest and the master whose positions last for at least one ritual year (a complete cycle); most appointed ritual experts carry out their duties for over a decade or

56 See Estévez forthcoming on this matter.

until they die, move out of the village, or are incapable of doing it so for personal or health reasons. The council of elders is responsible for the internal governance of the village, which at the administrative level is represented by three mayors or chiefs (Lao: *naiban*) who must be proficient in Lao language and culture – these mayors are, in modern times, often younger men who do not hold a concomitant position in the council of elders. The venue is selected amongst the many that may compete for the honour; any candidate household must commit to serving as the public meeting place for village festivals for, ideally, three years (at least one ritual year); the venue owner holds his ritual position for the same time for his ritual role emanates from being the venue's owner.

The most specialised ritual experts have their own collections of manuscripts.[57] Most of the Lanten manuscripts are made available within the community and can be borrowed or copied in exchange for ritual payments and fees; rare or special texts are seldom shared, but transmitted from father to son or masters to apprentices. Having a copy of the necessary ritual texts does not qualify one to perform the ceremony: to employ living manuscripts containing secret words and providing abode to the deities, one must own their magic. This ownership comprises a twofold tenure and is objectified in the ritual payments associated with the copying process. One aspect of tenure involves technical expertise and demands understanding the text (often encrypted) and the associated oral knowledge (parts hidden on purpose – secret knowledge), together with knowing by heart how to perform the ritual action (hence, the ritual in use). The other aspect of the tenure refers to being connected with the cosmological domains in which the unique magic originates and, therefore, with the original 'owner' of the magic and with the uninterrupted chain of masters leading to it; the relation master-apprentice functions as the pivotal thread articulating the connection – a chain that links the present time and ones masters with the mythical time and the deities and domains in which the magic originates. The payment of transmission fees sanctions the transfer of knowledge and the articulation of this connection and only those ritual experts who 'own' its magic can perform a given ceremony. Those ritual experts leading the communal festivals have a copy of this fundamental text and also of the tablet containing the names of the Deities of the Village mentioned above. The tablet includes the names of the deities honoured by the village. These are the deities summoned and honoured in the course of the communal festival, and, thus, the list is unique to each settlement, for it also includes the communal ancestors. During the festival, the tablet embodies the deities whose names are inscribed in it, and, for instance, throwing a few droplets of rice liquor three times serves as an invitation to toast and consume

57 See Estévez forthcoming on the ritual production of manuscripts.

the spirits. It is the presence of the living manuscripts with the deities embodied in them that sanctions the ritual – in some cases, the texts have been memorised and yet their physical presence is still necessary, for they manifest the connection to the deities and the cosmological origins of magic.

The manuscript containing the pages whose photographs are presented in this chapter was copied in 2003 by Lao Lor from Tavane Village, who devoted his golden years to copying ritual texts on demand (that is, as a hired scribe) for his many apprentices and other ritual experts.[58] The ritual rules prevent changing the content of the manuscripts by reducing or adding elements. Bounsing, one of his students, the current manuscript's owner, and the master leading the festival in Namlue Village, decided recently to produce a fresher copy of the text preserved in this living manuscript (this process counts as a ritual action). He used high-quality white paper purchased in Mengla, Yunnan Province, China, and wrote a copy of the text himself with a nice brush and Japanese black ink. By employing these novel items purchased far away and writing by hand the secret words that fetch the *hon* of the rice in his village, this reputable senior master displayed his social networks and raised his charisma and reputation, while perpetuating his ritual name in a living manuscript to be passed down by the future generations – hence, achieving a status comparable to that of his former master. This happens to place the value of the living manuscripts in their content and the ability of the ritual experts to bring them to life by embodying deities into them. It also adds to the motivations to copy manuscripts, and clarifies why the text is not used today – therefore, ritual change. The secret words discussed below are read in their minds by the ritual experts who remain silent during the process – a performance that combines reading with visualisations and mental commands as they bring the text to life.

The fetching of the original rice *hon* is one of the five crucial ritual actions associated with the Festival for Planting the rice; the others include cleansing the village by means of banishing various demons from the social space, for instance, the *Ngu Sang Kwai* 五傷鬼, lit. the demons of the five injuries ('those who cause accidents that leave scars') and conceptualisations of vermin that parasitise the village's spiritual body (a reflection of those affecting the visible village), capturing and 'slaughtering' those demons haunting the village and transforming them into compost to nurture the fields, and resetting and reinforcing the village spiritual protections (walls, nests, and gates) and the shrine where the Deities of the Village

58 The full digital version of the manuscript is preserved by the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme (project EAP1126) at https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP1126-1-5-35 [last accessed on 1 July 2022], title 'Yiben bao miao miyu' 一本保苗秘語 'A Book of Secret Words for Securing the Rice Seedlings'.

find abode. The communal rituals contain many ritual actions pertaining to the ritual roles of the priests (civil) and master (martial); the magic for fetching the original rice *hon* constitutes only one of them – one central to the planting season.

Below, in Fig. 1, from right to left, the venue's owner, the priest, and the master (the one holding a smartphone) read and visualise the secret words to fetch the *hon* of the original rice. Each ritual expert follows his owns pace. The altar and setting pertain to the Festival for Planting the Rice in Namlue Village in 2019. Each ritual expert has his own copy of the text; enlarged in the upper left corner stands the text employed by the master and presented here.

The ritual experts read the secret words in their minds; they remain silent during the process – one that combines reading with visualisations and mental commands as they bring the text to life in the ritual space.

Fig. 1: The three ritual experts leading the Festival for Planting the Rice in Namlue Village, 2019, perform the ritual fetching of the original rice *hon*.

Fig. 2: The secret words translated in this article; manuscript EAP1126-1-5-35; pages 8–9 and 10–11.

6 The method (magic) to fetch the *hon* of the original rice–translated and explained

The living manuscript used in this ritual comprises five sets of secret words that empower five different ritual actions, namely, adding extra nurturing soil and ground to the land, roasting the bugs that may jeopardize the planting, fetching the *hon* of the original rice, sealing the village from the evil coming from the Five Directions and Three Gates, and setting up and improving the shrine of the Deities of the Village.[59] The secret words for fetching the *hon* of the original rice are written on four pages. Each page contains eight lines or columns to be read from the right, with around eighteen characters each, and the entire ritual text comprises thirty-one lines. The start and end of the ritual part are embraced by red hook marks shaped as 'ㄱ' and inscribed in red ink.

Although the activation of the secret words demands the articulation of visualisations in the minds of the ritual experts, there are also associated ritual actions that include crafting and using ritual objects to operationalise the invisible world or *yam* and to embody and distribute the celestial gifts received from it.[60] Various ritual objects are employed along with the living manuscripts and relate to their content, for instance, rice grains from the last harvest, scissors, and small rice sachets. The photographs below shall serve as a visual reference for the particular items in ritual use.

The translation is arranged sentence by sentence – sometimes, two sentences are presented together to preserve internal coherence. The sentences are numbered to facilitate analysis identifying the rows of the script in the images. As requested by Bounsing, the owner of the manuscript and the master leading the ceremony, the transliteration contains some corrections in parentheses as he noticed minor mistakes in the original manuscript, which prompted him to produce an updated version. The translation includes the text in the manuscript, the literal meaning in English with some minor notes in brackets clarifying the meaning, and explanations on the manipulation of physical objects performed by the ritual experts, their visualisations, and other relevant matters requiring comment.

There is a discrepancy in the translation that is comprised of three aspects. One aspect is ethnographic and is connected with Bounsing, the ritual expert who owns

59 Estévez 2023, 418–419 presents these secret words in ritual use followed by the description and meaning of the associated ritual actions.

60 Estévez 2023 is devoted to the Lanten cosmography, ritual system, and communal festivals, and contains a detailed account about these rice rituals.

the text, who considers that there are mistakes in the manuscript text presented in the photographs – mistakes consistently recognised by other Lanten ritual experts. He agreed to share his expertise on the condition that I take note of his corrections, which I agreed to do. A second aspect is related to the textual transmission. Those copying the Lanten manuscripts, i.e., the Lanten ritual experts, do not intend to simplify or complicate the texts – they copy a manuscript *as it is* according to their competence and level of literacy, with ritual rules that prevent any change in the contents. A Chinese reader will find simplified and traditional characters in the Lanten texts, including terms from many points of origin and historical strata, some as employed long ago. The Lanten do not wish to invent a unique writing system to distance themselves from China or other Chinese Daoist corpora. To translate this chapter in accordance with their understanding of the texts that they use in their rituals, I have written them in standard traditional characters to aid readers in understanding the meanings of the text; some characters in the Lanten text are non-standard and require dedicated software for digital reproduction. This chapter presents a comprehensible approach, for its focus is on meaning, not on the Lanten writing itself; the latter is a topic for another article in the future. Here, traditional characters are used to transliterate the texts for the convenience of writing and reading. A third and last dimension regards the meaning of the characters for their users (all being Lanten ritual experts) and the non-Lanten readers of this chapter. For this reason, two different translations accompany the text, one that refers to the Chinese text and conveys a more or less literal meaning of the sentences, and the accompanying explanations that aim at transmitting Lanten ritual experts' understanding of the text and their ritual use as informed by the oral knowledge and the associated actions.

6.1 Title: 論取禾魂法 On the Method of Fetching the Rice *Hon*

> L01 取船來，開光成滿天船。
> Get a boat, open its eyes so it becomes a full[-fledged] celestial ship.

This line is an instruction to prepare the ritual setting. A central element in this setting is a winnowing tray, used for sifting rice, which the internal narrative describes as a *boat*. In the ritual context, it serves as a multi-terrain vehicle that allows for travelling to every location within the vertical Axis mundi of the Lanten sociocosmos, which is interconnected by a myriad of rivers, lakes, and seas. The ritual experts describe this ship sometimes as a sampan (see L02), but also as a bamboo raft or vessel with sails, a flying ship, depending on the context in which it appears.

The ‘opening of the eyes’ of the different ritual objects and tools transforms them according to the narrative’s specifications. The ritual experts execute this action by linking the physical body standing in the visible world with a spiritual body existing in the invisible counterpart. This enables them to operationalise the *yam yang* simultaneously, as the ritual objects exist and function in both worlds.

Fig. 3: This particular setting pertains to the New Year Festival; the scissors (the rat’s golden teeth in the magic) are used to pierce the bags of rice.

> L02 點三三九個月。降生成三返滿天船了，納香錢
> Dot [to activate] it three times, repeat thrice [to give] nine months. [The boat] is born after three turns as a full[-fledged] celestial ship; pay incense and money.

He turns the lamp three times above the items whose ‘eyes’ he aims to open; these items are reborn in the ritual space as a duality (united spiritual and material parts) linking the visible and invisible worlds. Each turn equals a month. The nine months represent human gestation and, thus, the birth of the item into its new self.

The object’s activation (opening of the eyes) is mediated by an oil lamp or burner that has been lit at the start of the ceremony. The lamp’s flame embodies and represents the Morning Star, Sun, and Moon, symbolising and embodying the Three Old Sages (Three Emperors), the Three Pure Ones or original priests, and the Three Primordials or original masters. The flames articulate the separation between the *yam yang* and connect the person holding the lamp to the original priests and masters as a member of the Celestial Administration he represents.

By directing the lamp’s light, the ritual expert commands the universe and its ritual time cycles, often corresponding to natural cycles (e.g., orbits of the celestial bodies, the seasons, and human life).

> L03 存一員諸司兵馬，一令成鼠白，筶子成雙燕子。
> Visualize a marshal with his officers and troops. Order one to become a white rat. The divination blocks to become a pair of swallows.

This line invites the Marshals to lead and navigate the celestial ship as its crew, marking the start of the journey. The line assists the ritual expert in recalling and visualising the story in his mind. Fig. 3 above presents various items that the ritual experts visualise and transform into living ritual objects.

The Marshals are five brothers; the elder brother, Tong Ku, is the Marshal of the Central Direction, so he remains at the central altar protecting the ritual space. His four brothers carry the special tactical operation as the crew of the sampan, protecting troops and the rat. The Jade Emperor transforms the second brother, Marshal Dan of the South Direction, into a white rat with golden teeth. In some versions of the oral stories, four or five brothers are turned into rats to carry the seeds of the five types of rice (each rat carries a seed).

The moon blocks are transformed into a pair of swallows (a married couple) accompanying the team to provide surveillance and reconnaissance.

The swallows' principal task in the mission is, nevertheless, different, and relates to the tendency of the *hon* to fragment and return to its cosmological origin. It is understood that rice grains have been lost during the last year for many reasons. The rice *hon* is deemed scattered across the Five Directions of the Three Realms. It has ended in cracks in the ground, riverbanks, trees in the deep jungle, and so on. Swallows are well known for stealing the seeds that the farmers plant in mountain fields and paddies. The pair employed in the ritual action are expected to replicate that natural behaviour, thus, looking for the rice *hon*. The swallows also watch out for the *hon* and ensure that none is left behind, adding a layer of efficacy to the ceremony by guaranteeing the spiritual integrity of the collected rice *hon*.

The wooden stamp (*laeng*) represents a one-headed lion; however, in this ritual action, the lion has one head standing on each of the Nine Administrations of the Three Realms, hence the nine heads. This lion is a guardian of the rice, and the number of heads reflects its might and competence in watching over the rice: nothing can escape its many mouths. Therefore, the original rice is well-protected.

The twelve small glasses in Fig. 3 are filled with rice liquor and a few rice grains; each glass represents a month, representing together an entire year. In the New Year Festival, the rice grains from the previous harvest embody the *hon* of the original rice, so the representatives of the households can consume it to start the year in prime condition.

> L04: 一把剪香竿祖母髻髮二。變成一雙玉女。
> One pair of scissors, two incense sticks, and two Grandma's hair bun wigs. They [the incense sticks] are transformed into a pair of jade maidens.

The pair of scissors are the white rat's golden incisors, deemed so powerful that they can nibble through anything. The golden teeth are a gift from the Jade Emperor to the second Marshal so that he can face this challenging mission with a better chance of success; they serve as tools and weapons, since the rat cannot carry anything else. In the New Year ceremony, a small bag filled with rice grains accompanies this pair of scissors – this small bag represents the 'hair bun wig' and bags with the original rice seed treasured by the deity Grandma Thaek Ge in the Upper Realm.

The two incense sticks (see Fig. 3) become two beautiful celestial consorts. In the Lanten ritual system, incense sticks are 'fruit trees' in the invisible world, whose juicy fruits are made available to the deities and ancestors, always described as being in a state of hunger. This gift of fruit trees prevents them from feeding on the *hon* of the living; therefore, the ritual rules mandate that incense must be burned during the entire ceremony. Here, the ritual experts are directed to open their eyes and visualise the incense sticks as jade maidens. Another set of incense sticks burned nearby completes their intended function as fruit trees; the logic of opening the eyes of the ritual objects entails identifying the invisible element to understand what and how the master operationalises the universe by manipulating the visible counterpart.

The kinship term 'grandma' (祖母) is identified as Grandma Thaek Ge. The oral stories narrate how she was tricked once: many of her medicines were stolen. She found the thieves and executed all but one – the survivor was the knowledgeable ritual expert Tam Kai 三界 who, with the support of his ancestors, escaped with a share of the medicines and eventually became a deity himself. Tam Kai passed down his medicinal repertoire and ethnobotanical knowledge to the Lanten ritual experts. In this context, Grandma Thaek Ge fulfils an important role in the challenge of fetching the rice *hon*: a mighty 'dragon' defending a fabulous treasure located far away, in the furthermost region in the Upper Realm – a guardian of the threshold to be broken through to attain the *hon* of the original rice and return home with it.

> L05: 帶五色花，粘黃白紙，貼粘米、糯米二禾魂。
> [The two celestial consorts] carry the Flowers of the Five Colours, glue on yellow and white paper, stick on the *hon* of the two kinds of rice – non-glutinous and glutinous [to collect them].

The performative part requires cutting paper shaped as two basic flowers that represent the two celestial consorts. The two flowers are made of gold and silver in the invisible world; cuttings of red and yellow paper – or any other available colours – serve as the ritual objects. The ritual experts glue rice grains to these paper-flowers (non-glutinous rice on the right side, and glutinous rice on the left) to represent the gathered rice *hon*, which is described as trapped bees.

The rice *hon* is conceptualised as 'bees' attracted to the beautiful and fragrant gold (yellow) and silver (white) flowers. Most elements in the invisible world are made of precious gold and silver. Two jade maidens carry all five types of flowers whose delicious nectar and fragrance lure and help capture the *hon* of all types of rice – characterised as a myriad of dispersed bees. The flowers become a trap that helps collect the bees or rice *hon* effortlessly by embodying it into rice grains, thus enabling its manipulation in the visible world.

The metaphor of *hon* being insects that wander around and like to travel far away is common in the Lanten ritual narratives, which are shaped by a horticultural, often floral, language. Honey bees and honey are known as 'good' *hon* (found in ancestors, persons, rice, buffaloes, swine, and chickens) compared to the 'bad' *hon* of parasitic pests such as maggots, wasps, or locusts that represent non-social deities. Bees leaving the hive (a symbol of spiritual integrity) and flying in every direction portend fragmentation. Collecting the bees represents achieving wholeness: the parts come together once again. Most Lanten rituals aim at a two-fold function: to exorcise unwanted spiritual elements and to call or bring back those that have run away.

The efficacy of the ritual action builds up in the iteration of the ritual actions and the duplication of methods; the triple repetition addresses the tripartite socio-cosmos. Therefore, there are many methods to fetch the rice *hon*.

> L06: 叩伝師傅入船内了，四帥棹子滿天船度上。
> Summon the masters to enter inside the boat. The Four Marshals paddle the full celestial ship upstream.

The celestial ship and its celestial crew are ready to begin their mission. The upstream direction and the downstream direction remind the reader about the vertical Axis mundi defining the Lanten socio-cosmos, shaped by a river network.

The ritual experts identify the 'masters' in this line as the Three Pure Ones, the Three Primordials, and the Marshals. The ritual experts embody all these deities; hence, the ritual expert visualises himself carrying the action, transforming this adventure into a spiritual journey.

> L07: 月府、日宮、金星、三三九重天石壁白表去。
> [Travel through] the Moon Mansion, the Sun Palace, and the Morning Star. [Pass through] the Three Realms and Nine Administrations to reach the surface of the White Rock Cliff.

The Moon, Sun, and the Morning Star (the 'brightest star' or Venus) represent the Three Realms and their three rulers (the Three Emperors). The three celestial bodies create liminality (as sacred space and time do) as they appear together briefly in the sky during sunrise and sunset. The celestial bodies also are identified as the rulers' residences or palaces, and their linear order provides the necessary

direction: from night and Earth (the ritual venue) to sunrise and Heaven, marking the stopovers in a journey. The venue where the ritual occurs counts as the 'harbour' and starting point for the ship. Due to their ritual significance, these characters appear highlighted (in brackets) in red in the ritual text. The White Rock Cliff is the ultimate destination, the residence of Grandma Thaek Ge.

The Lanten socio-cosmos is divided into Three Realms, and each of these realms has three administrative subdivisions that replicate its power structure. Each realm has a capital or headquarters (a central polity) and two delegations or embassies, one from each of the other two realms. Hence there are nine administrations. The Lanten in Laos compare these celestial bodies to the modern-day three administrative tiers: the village, the city, and the province.[61]

> L08: 到金單星、紫微頂、大西天國土，去見佛(婆)。
> Arrive at the Lone Morning Star, the Summit of the Purple Tenuity [Mountain], the Realm of the Great Heaven of the West, to see the Buddha (Grandma).

The character (婆) is an addition by Bounsing, the owner of the text. *Bu* 婆 is a familiar term for 'grandmother' and an old lady that I translate here as a respectful yet intimate 'grandma'.

The line describes the arrival at the destination, namely the residence of the deity Grandma Thaek Ge, whom the ritual expert informants explicitly identified by the characters 佛 (婆). The text places this residence at the White Rock Cliff, which, according to the oral stories, stands in the Upper Realm's Westernmost region, a region that one can only reach after passing the residence of the Jade Emperor at the Purple Tenuity Mountain, described as the highest mountain. This inaccessibility makes this journey especially adventurous.

The oral story provides further details as it translates the Three Realms as three large rivers and the Nine Administrations as nine big mountain ranges. This cosmological landscape correlates with the heavy labour and uncertainty of planting and harvesting rice, and the significance and difficulties of the mission to be carried by the white rat, which are common to both shamanistic journeys and Daoist ritual petitions addressed to the highest deities.[62]

61 Lao: ບ້ານ *baan* or village; ເມືອງ *mueang* or district; and ແຂວງ *khoueng* or province.

62 This theme invites further discussion as it reveals old practices carried by migrating communities in the highlands, such as the Lanten themselves, who, having been deprived of their rice grains (e.g., after being assaulted or fleeing a war in a rush), had to steal rice from the inhabitants of the plains to eat and plant it. The Marshals' journey, the secrecy of their mission, the invasion of Grandma Thaek Ge's palace (epitomizing the granaries of the city lords of the polities along the

L09: 釋迦婆殿。前日混沌元年，水淹六國九州。
In the Palace of the Grandma Thaek Ge. The day before was the first year of chaos, when water inundated the Six Kingdoms and Nine Continents.

The first year was the starting point of the havoc (i.e., flood) that destroyed the world. That year, the Six Kingdoms, meaning Earth, and the Nine Administrations, meaning Heaven, were devastated. The Thunder Emperor created storms and blocked the drainage system at the bottom of the seas, causing flooding.

This sentence requires the ritual expert to recall the oral story and invites him to visualise it all.

The year of chaos refers to a cosmic renewal and the start of a new order. During the Festival for Planting the Rice, the priest performs a ritual action that replicates the flood, destroying the universe, so he can recreate it and bring it to its prime to produce the best setting for the new planting season. The 'chaos' shapes a liminality characterised by the presence of the raw forces of destruction and creation.

L10: 人民死絕了。釋迦婆全禾魂、五色禾竿恩米。
The people died out completely. Grandma Thaek Ge fully preserved the rice *hon*, the Five Coloured grain stems of the blessed rice.

This line identifies the rice *hon's* saviour: Grandma Thaek Ge. The mythical original rice is still available at her palace; she is its spiritual 'owner' and custodian.

Many stories circulate among the Lanten to describe the characteristics of the original rice. It grew strong and fast like the banana tree, and large and fruitful like the mango tree. The original panicles produced rice grains as large as a thumb (or a green mango) that could feed everybody effortlessly. Nobody needed to plough the land or worry about planting and harvest, and people could collect rice from the trees and satiate their hunger any time. As discussed above, these stories form part of the rice myths common to South, Southeast, and East Asia.

L11: 勒袋放。鼠白入來勒袋，存取五姓禾魂。
Untie the strings of the bag. The white rat enters the bag. Visualise obtaining the rice *hon* of the Five Surnames.

This sentence is critical to the ritual actions in the New Year Festival and conveys the instruction to visualise the opening of the rice sachets with the scissors; see Fig. 3, on the right: the three leading ritual experts use the scissors to do so.

river basins), and the struggles to return with the precious loot serves for both the narratives of a shamanistic journey and the harsh reality in the margins of the Chinese Empire.

In this action, they embody the second Marshal or white rat, who has reached the residence of the deity and bypassed all the defenses. The original rice is in bags hanging from the ceiling beams (similar to the way Lanten households keep food in the kitchen). Only a tiny rat with the unique abilities of the Marshals and enhanced by the Jade Emperor's gift of golden incisors can complete this mission. The theme of the rat as a thief appears in another Lanten story that tells of a fearless rat that invaded the private chamber of the Jade Emperor's third daughter several times to harass her. The Jade Emperor taught his daughter how to capture the rat, which ended up being killed. Its skin was used to make the 'thief bag' (賊包) that the deity Celestial Master Sang bestows the Lanten novices with in the course of their ordinations. This enchanted bag looks like a normal Lanten travel bag but its interior can store an unlimited number of belongings, enabling the ritual experts to carry all their ritual objects in the invisible world (their actual travel bag being the visible counterpart). This story articulates a close relationship between the rat, a skilful thief able to penetrate the most restricted quarters of Jade Emperor's palace, and the Lanten ritual experts who 'wear' its skin, providing further rationale for the transformation of Marshall Dan into a rat to steal the original rice seeds.

The five surnames are identified as the residents (the family names or households) in the village receiving this gift of rice *hon*; the ritual experts visualise the most common surnames in the village (all of them in the same particular hamlet), which serve as an addressee for this gift. This part is crucial because the households sponsor the ceremony, and their surnames must be properly identified so that the celestial gifts can be delivered to them and allow them to start the planting season.

> L12: 打入鐵鐘, 四帥敕起(铁杖)。內有頭獅子。腹內取五色禾魂。
> Forcing their way into the iron bell, the Four Marshals initiate their command to wield [the iron spear]. Inside there is a lion. From its belly extract the *hon* of the five- coloured rice.

The oral stories fill some gaps in the journey. After fetching several seeds of the original rice from the bags, the crew leave the palace through a back gate. Informants describe how Lanten houses have a front or main door and a back or kitchen door, and note that the palace's floorplan incorporates this same structure. The point of using this back door is to signal that the journey continues. The crew follow a different path and, thus, will face new situations and adventures. This explanation is part of the background required by the secret words: the oral stories and cultural knowledge provide the necessary information to visualise a coherent and vivid story.

The first of these new scenarios is a metal cage ('iron bell') containing a mighty nine-headed lion. This line relates to the role of the wooden stamp (*leang*) shaped like a lion in Fig. 2 above. Grandma Thaek Ge keeps this lion as a pet or guard-dog to protect her palace. The awe-inspiring lion symbolises the might of its owner and

the value of the treasure inside. The Marshals force the cage open with their iron spear. The ritual experts explicitly mention this spear and its omission may indicate a mistake in the manuscript at this point.

The nine-headed lion guards the rice *hon* in its belly. This scenario echoes that involving the bees, and counts as another instance of re-iteration, as the rice *hon* is extracted various times.

> L13: 香髻髮在內。竿祖母髻髮召入九頭獅子。
> The incense and hair wig buns are inside [at Grandma Thaek Ge's palace]. Stick the stems of Grandma's hair wig into the nine-headed lion.

The Four Marshals open the cage and subdue the lion with their bare hands. An iron spear helps them to open its jaws and reach deeper locations in the lion's body, from the lion's multiple jaws to the deepest section of the lion's stomach.

This action symbolises subjecting Grandma Thaek Ge's pet lion to the might of the Marshals, therefore, to the ritual experts.

> L14: 口吐出五色禾竿。收入三返船內，重棹船。
> Spit out from your mouth the five coloured rice grain stems. Load them onto the ship, three times over, and row the ship back.

The Marshals force the lion to spit out the rice *hon*. Fetching the rice *hon* in this scenario comprises three actions: retrieving it from the lion's heads, stomach, and saliva. The triple repetition completes the cargo, enabling the crew to return home, turning the ship anti-clockwise three times. Nevertheless, the adventure has not yet ended.

> L15: 又踏上後背高風山。枯樟挖取，即是五色禾魂。
> Then, step onto the back of the High Windy Mountain. From the withered camphor tree is extracted the five-coloured rice *hon*.

This line presents a new scenario. The rice *hon*, as honey bees do, have flown far away, attracted by a dark, cosy, dry hollow provided by a withered tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*; *Ga Sang Nyang*), where the bees have built a new hive and are producing honey.

The new scenario constitutes an indication of the extent and richness of the cosmological landscape and the length of the adventure. Mind journeys across the Three Realms are part of the ritual experts' training; these narratives exemplify how the journeys operate. The secret words include the necessary information to identify and navigate to the residences of the deities and those hidden spots where the *hon* enjoys wandering around and finding solace.

L16: 如是蟥蜂結糖在此。伝重打下此。
As the bees gather their honey here. I [the ritual expert] order to strike it hard down here.

This line instructs the ritual experts to visualise the collection of honey.

The visualisation is informed by a skill – honey gathering – that Lanten youngsters learn when they are allowed to go hunting alone after receiving their ritual names.

L17 and L18: 存發取五色禾魂，恩入滿天船內了，重打農特滿、谷金黄、盤特護、雷監春、李明聖、李明境。
Visualize obtaining the rice *hon* of the five colours. Load the blessed [rice] into the full celestial ship. Hit hard again [the grains to wake up the following deities] Nong Te Man, Kok Kiam Woung, Boun Dak Hu, Lui Kam Tjan, Lee Meang Thaeng, Lee Meang Keang

These two lines are combined to keep the structure of the invitation. After securing the cargo of the rice *hon*, the deities whom the Lanten describe as the protectors of the rice are alerted, so they can get ready to carry out their duties during the farming season. The action entails visualising the awakening of the protectors of the rice grains by threshing rice grains by hand. In the text, the names of these deities are separated by red dots that indicate their ritual importance.

Overseeing this group is the deity Nong Te Man. In the Lower Realm, Kok Kiam Woung and Boun Dak Hu (emanations of Pangu) care for the rice by managing the watering system, nurturing the plants, adding enough rich soil, and preventing threats and pests. In the Middle Realm, Lui Kam Tjean (an emanation of the Thunder Emperor), Lee Meang Theang, and Lee Meang Keang (embodiments of the Lights of the World, namely the Sun and the Moon, and their children the Stars) deliver, respectively, all the needed rain and sufficient sunlight and warm weather ('not too hot, not too cold') to promote healthy growth. The Jade Emperor and the Upper Realm are not invoked in this ritual action.

These deities personify essential ritual functions (i.e., appear as emanations of the principal deities) that echo the needs and uncertainties of a rural community whose supply of staple food depends on rice farming. The rice protectors are assigned the management of the unpredictable regional weather cycles and the local microclimate and landscape.

L19: 點名鬼，打各案，開取禾魂，打下腹內，開取心頭血罡。
Call out the names of the ghosts, knock on each table, open and extract the rice *hon*. Hit to extract the belly. Open it to obtain its arterial blood from the heart.

This instruction tells the ritual experts to submit a sincere invitation to summon the Deities of the Village (the 'ghosts') to join the high tables in the final banquet. This

line reminds the ritual expert that his own heart functions like an echo chamber for his mental commands and visualisations: True believers receive true gifts.

The celestial presence of the Deities of the Village will facilitate the circulation of *hon* originating in their cosmological domains, enhancing the cargo of rice *hon*, and strengthening those in the presence of divinity – those actively sponsoring and attending the ceremony.

A piece of emic information allows for understanding the reference to the blood and the heart. This part refers to the gift of the 'real blood' of the Tao Dan 斗神, the astral deities of the Big Dipper who manage the registers of life and death and hence assign each person's lifespan to them. These deities do not attend the festivals but provide two important gifts. The ritual experts visualise their arterial blood (*sam kong* 心罡), which invigorates the living, and their gift of longevity to be embedded in the rice cakes.[63] The summoning of their gifts is hinted at in these secret words and the various tags glued to the central altar constructed for the Festival for Planting the Rice.[64]

> L20: 尿包(泡)、尿綞、尿醬是禾魂，存取恩船內。
> The urine bag (foam), urine strand, and urine sauce are the rice hon. Visualize to take the blessed [rice] inside the ship.

In the emic explanation, the celestial guests invited to the banquet respond as the living would do in such a situation: After enjoying a copious banquet, they feel the call of nature. Like any liquid or organic matter left unattended in the forest, their depositions attract insects quickly. These insects are also described as carriers of rice *hon*. These *hon* are gathered and added to the ship's cargo. This line reminds us that the *hon* has many origins and that even the celestial depositions have value and may nurture the living.

> L21 and L22: 打金星萬年桃木，存取禾魂；打日宮靈角樹，存禾魂；打下月府菩提樹，存取五色禾魂。
> Hit the Ten-Thousand-Year Peach Wood in the Morning Star, visualize extracting the rice *hon*. Hit the Water Caltrop Tree in the Sun Palace, visualize preserving the rice *hon*. Hit the Bodhi Tree in the Moon Mansion, visualize extracting the five coloured rice *hon*.

These lines describe how the crew descends along the vertical Axis Mundi to return to the host venue. The liminality of the space is addressed on descending (downstream) from sunrise to darkness, to the venue hosting the ceremony.

63 *Tao dan liang liu* 斗神粮料.

64 The officers providing these gifts are named, appearing on the tags (left and right sides): Yao Tao Liang 右斗像, Yao Tao Thi 右斗司, Thao Tao Liang 左斗像 and Thao Tao Thi 左斗司.

A different tree represents each realm, ruler and palace. These trees are the immortal Flat-peach Tree (*Prunus persica* var. *platycarpa*), the Water Caltrop Tree (*Trapa bicornis*), and the Bodhi Tree (*Ficus religiosa*).

The Lanten ritual experts in Laos are not aware of what types of trees are described in these secret words; they have never seen them with their own eyes. The noun tree 樹 appears in the narrative, and the specific type of tree is thought to be irrelevant to the associated ritual action.

Striking the tree refers to the technique of shake-and-catch employed for harvesting fruit trees: Hitting or shaking the trunk causes the ripe fruits to fall, making it easy to gather them from the ground. During the past year, the rice *hon* has found an abode in the flowers of these trees. Upon beating the trees, all the flowers fall (like fruits), and so do all the bees/*hon* trapped inside, enabling the ritual experts to collect the rice *hon* effortlessly.

> L23: 竿香煙、綿花寶、米銀魂、恩船內滿了
> With burning incense sticks, precious soft flower blossoms, silver rice *hon*, and the blessed [rice], load them onto the ship until it is full.

The missing rice *hon* is visualised as insects that the ritual experts must lure and trap. The incense sticks are visualised as a bait of intertwined precious flowers that lure all the insects around with their scents. The insects are quickly collected and added to the cargo. This amounts to another call to collect rice *hon*: more repetition and recurrence.

> L24: 想此禾魂童子變成玉女，帶五色花香，引召取五色禾魂。
> Visualize this rice *hon* child transforming into a Jade Maiden, carrying the fragrance of the five coloured flowers, attracting, summoning, and gathering the five coloured rice *hon*.

According to the informants, this sentence means that the deity Dan Long, the divine farmer, sends one of his own children to help with fetching the rice *hon.* This gift is instrumental in completing the mission and designates the deity, not mentioned explicitly in the text, with an extra task in the ritual. The child is transformed into a beautiful jade maiden wearing flowery garments that lure the rice *hon* embedded in the insects around about. The presence of this celestial consort and her attributed kinship relationship with Dan Long is understood to be a precious gift.

> L25 and L26: 如是五色蟥蜂成千千萬萬朝花，存禾魂。諸司兵馬退落金星[。。。]東方長生院剳船厶地。
> Just as the five-coloured bees in their hundreds and thousands head for the flowers, visualize the rice *hon*. The soldiers and horses retreat and land on the Morning Star [...] the Court of Longevity in the East ties up the ship in a certain place.

After collecting as much rice *hon* as possible, the mission is deemed complete, and the ship returns to the venue designated as a harbour for the ship, where the expedition started. But before returning, the Marshals arrange a stopover at the Morning Star or Upper Realm to visit the palace of the Tao Dan, to collect their gift of longevity (mentioned above).

The text symbol [。。。] indicates that a piece of information known by the ritual experts does not need to be written again. In this case, it refers to the detailed route through the Three Realms and Nine Administrations that brings the ship safely back to the starting point.

In the ritual action, the tray or pan symbolizing the ship is turned clockwise three times to represent the upstream journey and three times anti-clockwise to represent downstream. Each turn is equated with a realm, and the directions up and down refer to the vertical Axis Mundi.

> L27: 開船蓬烈，開發五色禾魂與三位臣師。櫃庫滿了。
> Open the awning of the ship fiercely. Deliver the five coloured rice *hon* to the three leading ministerial masters. The cabinet in the granary is full.

The crew returns home with the celestial ship, paddled fiercely by the Marshals. They have fetched the rice *hon* successfully, along with other gifts. Removing the ship's awning facilitates the distribution of the rice *hon* in full display so that everybody can attest to the fair distribution, and ensure that not even a single grain is left behind.

It is the three ritual experts who receive the rice *hon* first, and then they distribute all the *hon*. The informants insisted that every family in the village receives the same gifts in the same amount. The different outcomes (actual harvest) between households are ascribed to differences in farming techniques (knowing which type of grain to plant in which type of soil, proper watering, and so on), work ethics, and the particular relationships between the household and its pantheon and the community (its networking in the *yam yang*).

> L28: 重賞入五姓人等。庫滿了，帶禾魂去到畬中種禾落地。
> Heavily reward the people of the Five Surnames. The granary is full. Carry the rice *hon* to the open fields and plant the seedlings on the ground.

The villagers have all the necessary rice *hon* now. But the Lanten celestial gifts are gifts of potentiality: making things happen in the invisible world establishes life, latent abilities and capabilities that can be later developed in the visible counterpart, and lead to future success. Fetching the rice *hon* constitutes only half of the job in rice rituals: the rice fields in the invisible world must be planted, and Dan Long 神農 is the deity granting the gift of cultivation.

Fig. 4: Left: two winnowing trays with sweetened glutinous rice cakes embodying rice *hon* and the gift of longevity to be consumed by representatives of the households; there is also a metal bowl with rice grains with their husks (seedlings) and rice plants with two panicles made of bamboo and paper. Right-top: the general setting during the ritual use of the living manuscript. Right-bottom: detailed view of the ritual object representing a rice plant (the paper panicles are filled with rice grains).

> L29: 第一種米何大岭，畲禾報生，蕉芽切切。
> The first planting takes place on a certain formidable mountain ridge. The seedings in the open field report their growth, as rapid as banana seedlings.

The ritual planting constitutes a triple recurrence and relates to three ritual objects produced during the Festival for Planting the Rice and the three phases of the planting and the growth of the rice.

The first phase transforms the rice with husks into rice seedlings to be planted on the mountain ridge. These seedlings are commanded to grow like banana trees, which the Lanten describe as healthy, beautiful, fast-growing trees that produce abundant fruits. In this conception, the rice panicles should become as large and plentiful as banana bunches (with many 'teeth'), which echoes the descriptions associated with the original rice in the oral stories.

> L30: 第二種，我師口庇綠，胸生切切。
> For the second planting, I the master, swallow [it] to protect the green, within my chest it grows rapidly.

The second phase describes the transplantation of the rice seedlings from the mountain into the bodies of the ritual experts. Their bodies will nurture the seedlings as the rice paddies do. All the attendants contribute to this narrative when they chew, swallow, and digest the rice cakes they receive as gifts in the venue. Those actions (eating the rice) represent ploughing the fields, arranging the seedlings, and transplanting the seedlings into the fields in the invisible counterpart: the rice seedlings are planted in their stomachs symbolically.

The ritual experts do this first, 'teaching' the method by example and re-enacting the story of the flood myth when Dan Long developed the methods to cultivate rice and taught them to the people. The leading ritual experts perform this part on behalf of the entire village; the representatives of the households attending the ceremony do so on behalf of their families.

> L31: 第三種, 腹內左右膀胱，兩塊肥油也。
> For the third planting, inside the belly are the left and right bladders, which are two pieces of fatty oil.

In the third phase, the ritual experts' bodies become the rice plants. The 'fat' in their bodies nurtures the rice plants to grow quickly and healthily. The left and right sides of the abdomen become the two types of rice panicles as narrated in the oral stories (non-glutinous and glutinous).

The ritual experts become a matrix that can operate the alchemical transformation that realises the potential of the seeds and *hon* of the original rice. The rib cage of a person reminds people of the shape of the panicles. This body part houses the same organs (the heart, the lungs, and the liver) that represent the sacrificial offerings, and hence the core or essence of the *hon* in a person or the livestock.

The ritual object modelled after the rice panicles represents this idea and combines the gifts of rice and farming. At this stage of the ritual, the celestial gifts have been embodied into ritual objects and presented to the community. A representative from each household collects the cakes, seeds, and crafted rice plants with two panicles. The farming season can start now in the visible world.

These three phases describe a complete and successful farming season in the invisible world. After the Festival for Planting the Rice, the season's first rain symbolises the deities' sanction and approval of the ritual. The rice barns filled with rice after the harvest attests to the efficacy of the process.

7 Some final remarks

The primary ritual function of the secret words presented here rests on the foundation that the oral stories establish: the original rice was lost, and it is fragmented and must be recovered to allow seedling and planting in the new farming season. The magic and secret words bring it back (though only its 'tooth') and reverse its fragmentation by restoring its wholeness to the best ability of the ritual experts. The community's survival depends on filling the rice granaries by the end of the season. Hence, the ritual requirement is to fetch as much of the original rice *hon* as possible. All the collected rice *hon* is embedded into food and drinks to nurture the community, seeds to allow for the new planting, and, for the growing plants, the wherewithal to restore their spiritual integrity and thus make them 'stronger', resilient against pests, producing dense panicles, and resulting in an abundant and uncomplicated harvest. Nevertheless, the internal narratives establish the impossibility of fetching all of the rice *hon*, providing plausible arguments for explaining bad harvests.

In this ritual, rice appears as a complex and multifaceted being whose spiritual 'ownership' belongs to many deities: from the deities of the tooth or embryo of the rice (that is, the rice itself), the zealous guardian who keeps the original rice plants, and the deity who developed the necessary cultivation techniques or the protectors of the rice as it grows. Rice *hon* also has many origins in its fragmented form in the invisible world. Some are precious like honey bees; others are filthy, the depositions of the deities, reminding readers that life, which feeds on them, also has light and darkness. Failures in addressing all these components and paying homage properly to the various spiritual 'owners' may result in disaster. Ritual narratives avoid absolutes, and imperfection intensifies the liminality sustaining the logic of partial efficacy or null results.

Every Lanten ritual expert employs the same secret words, and every Lanten household receives the same gifts. The third fetching of the rice *hon*, arranged by households in the fields separately that reinforces the spiritual integrity of the rice plants, corrects omissions or mistakes during the communal celebrations, and resolves any dispersal of rice *hon* during the planting process in which seeds or grains may have been wasted. More importantly, this ritual establishes the agency and logic determining the different outcomes in the rice harvest amongst Lanten households.

The Lanten magic and secret words employ a horticultural or floral language (bees, flowers, and so on) whose understanding in terms of grammar, motifs, and themes requires a variety of approaches methodologically. It is the study of the Lanten stories, songs, and oral ritual knowledge that has facilitated the breakthrough of emic meaning in the few sentences translated here. As a living tradition, emic

explanations by ritual experts were essential for decoding the living manuscripts and understanding the ritual actions, revealing the internal structure of the ceremonies as a whole. Using this approach, the comparison of rice rituals and rice-cultivating societies in modern-day and early Southeast Asia and China should enable us to discover patterns of cultural diffusion and ritual exchange. Multidisciplinary investigations informed by ongoing developments and academic trends in religious, linguistic, and ethnohistorical studies are crucial to positioning these findings comprehensively and holistically.

The variations in the emic (Lanten understanding) and etic readings (literal translation of the texts from Chinese) of these secret words do not constitute a limitation but the opposite. They illuminate the way that the secret words are on one level stable structures that bring forth complementarity by which the emic and the etic inform each other. Ultimately, it is through dialogue between different interpretations that one can achieve a more holistic meaning and enhanced understanding. The Lanten Chinese employed in the Lanten living manuscripts reveals a flexibility that empowers ethnic and local interpretation while providing a very stable body and structure for transmitting ritual knowledge. The depth of this understanding depends upon ones familiarity with the Lanten culture and ritual system. The associated performance can vary to encompass modernity and contingency. The secret words remain unchanging, providing an anchor to the Lanten ritual system to remain consistent – and by doing so, to the Lanten society whose members cohere meanings around them.

Finally, last but not least, the Lanten use of the Chinese script requires a wide-ranging review of the textual corpus to identify encoding systems, unique characters employed by the Lanten, character variation within the corpus, emic translations and meanings, and homophones reflecting on the Lanten vernacular, ritual, and singing languages. This work has yet to be done systematically.

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Meng Yuanyao

Manuscripts of the Traditional Zhuang Song Text 'Song of the Brigands'

Abstract: The 'Song of the Brigands' (*Fwencaeg*) is a long song cycle that is current in traditional song markets in the Zhuang-speaking areas of west-central Guangxi in southern China. It is usually sung antiphonally by two male and two female singers, singing the parts of young men called up into the armies of the native chieftains and their young women. Evidence indicates that the song cycle dates from the Ming dynasty. Various versions of this song cycle circulate in different localities, and the lyrics circulate in the form of chapbooks, small manuscript booklets written in the Zhuang vernacular script. This paper will present an overview of this manuscript tradition, explain how the booklets are used in actual performance, and discuss aspects of regional variation and cultural transmission.

1 The song and an explanation of the title

The Brigands' Song is by any reckoning a remarkable piece of traditional popular culture. In the whole of the East Asian area, as far as we have been able to ascertain, it stands alone as an account of the experiences of ordinary soldiers and their families during wartime in the pre-modern era. The history of Chinese literature is replete with many martial arts novels and the like, but the focus is almost always exclusively on the exploits of famous generals or brilliant strategists. David Holm and I have recently published an annotated critical edition of this important document,[1] and the following account is based on that experience and my own fieldwork investigations in the same area in central-western Guangxi.

A literal translation of the Zhuang title *Fwencaeg* (fɯːn¹ ɕak⁸) would be 'Brigands' Song', or *zeige* 贼歌 in Chinese. The word *fwen* (fɯːn¹) means '[Zhuang-style] song', while *caeg* (ɕak⁸) is an old Zhuang borrowing from Chinese *zéi* 贼 'brigand, bandit'.[2] This is the title of a long song-cycle current among the Zhuang in the Youjiang 右江 river valley and in surrounding areas.

1 Holm and Meng 2021.

2 Zhuang words in this chapter are given in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in parentheses, following a transcription in *Zhuangwen* 壮文, the standard romanisation used for the Zhuang

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The lyrics of the Brigands' Song are sung antiphonally by people taking the part of two young men and their beloved young women, and narrate a story in which the local chieftain calls up native troops, and the young men are forced to join the army. Afterwards the lyrics describe the army on the march, fighting battles, and the slaughter that ensues on the battlefield. After undergoing all sorts of dangers and hardships, eating rough and sleeping out in the open, the men find that the war has ended, and they sell their horses and equipment, including the clothes off their backs, and finally are able to return home to their beloved young women and be reunited. The descriptions of war in the song are interspersed with descriptions of all the disastrous consequences for ordinary Zhuang villagers, and there are also vignettes of everyday life and customs. The entire song cycle is redolent with the atmosphere of village life in the Zhuang-speaking highlands.[3]

In the Zhuang areas, soldiers in the imperial armies in former times were referred to as *bing* (piŋ^{1}) 'soldiers' (Ch. 兵), while the troops that the native chieftains commanded and called up when required were called *yong* (joŋ^{4}) 'braves' (Ch. 勇). Regardless of whether the men were 'soldiers' or 'braves', when called up to go on campaign, the young men had to go and fight on the front lines and face all kinds of dangers, kill people, and set fires, and this activity was referred to in the Zhuang language as *bae guh caeg* (pai^{1} ku^{6} ɕak^{8}) 'going to do [what] a brigand [does]'. The word 贼 in Old Chinese implies 'killing'. The word in this meaning is found in a passage in the 'Annals of Shun' in the *Book of Documents*, which reads: 皋陶，蠻夷猾夏，寇賊姦宄。[4] '[The emperor said,] "Kaou-yaou, the barbarous tribes disturb our bright great land. There are also robbers, murderers, insurgents and traitors."' The commentary on this passage reads: 殺人曰賊。 'One who kills others is called a murderer'.[5] So a 'brigand' is 'someone who kills people'. This is not to suggest that the Zhuang understanding of the term is based directly on this ancient source – though the thirteen classics were part of the traditional school curriculum in Zhuang lands as elsewhere –, but rather that this implication was part of the understanding of the term in Chinese tradition, and was thence absorbed into Zhuang usage as well.[6] Thus *caeg* 'brigand' came to be used to refer to native troops serving under

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language in China. *Zhuangwen* transcription affords access to a range of dictionaries and other resources. For an overview, see the 2018 edition of the *Zhuang-Han cihui*, 995–999. See also Holm 2003, 223–228, for a description that includes IPA equivalents.

3 For an outline of the basic narrative, see Holm and Meng 2021, 10–11.

4 *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 3:18 (p. 130 下).

5 For the translation see James Legge 1865, 44.

6 In fact, service in the army of the native chieftain did involve killing enemy soldiers and cutting off their heads. This was also standard practice in the imperial armies. See Holm and Meng 2021, 33–34, and lines 1461–1484.

the native chieftains. The title of this song cycle, then, serves to indicate ordinary people's abhorrence of killing. In Zhuang there is a saying, "*Bing gaj bing cih raeg, caeg gaj caeg cih liux*" (piŋ^1 ka^3 piŋ^1 ɕi^6 rak^8, ɕak^8 ka^3 ɕak^8 ɕi^6 liːu^4), "If soldiers kill soldiers then they're done, if brigands kill brigands then it's finished".[7] The meaning is that soldiers and brigands kill each other in battle and they will both perish, and only after they are dead will the world return to peace. This saying was particularly apt during the Ming dynasty, when Guangxi was repeatedly wracked by large-scale rebellions and military incursions.

2 Comparison of different manuscripts

This long song cycle is held in high regard among ordinary Zhuang villagers in the area in which it is current, and it has circulated widely among them. From what we have been able to ascertain, the centre of this tradition is in present-day Pingguo 平果 county, and the song is also current in the surrounding counties of Mashan 马山, Dahua 大化, Tiandong 田东, Tianyang 田阳, Bama 巴马, and some areas in Bose 百色, specifically the towns of Santang 三塘, Sitang 四塘, and Longchuan 龙川 in the eastern part of Bose near the border with Tianyang. It is especially prevalent in Pingguo, where it is performed in all eighteen of the traditional song markets in the county.[8] We have not yet conducted investigations in the nearby counties of Long'an 隆安 and Tiandeng 天等 to the south of the river, so we do not yet know what the situation is in those areas.

The lyrics of the song in this song tradition are written in small booklets, as is common throughout the Guangxi area. Here, however, early observers at traditional song markets noticed that the male singers carried the chapbooks with them, and consulted them in the course of performance. They also noted that in this area, there was a very extensive body of traditional songs, with lyrics that were relatively fixed, with less latitude for variation and on-the-spot improvisation, which were common elsewhere. They came to the conclusion that there was a very high level of traditional popular literacy in this region.

One aspect of popular literacy that is thrown into high relief here is that literacy was confined to males. Boys were taught to read, both in school and at home, whereas girls generally were not. Of course there were some exceptions to this general pattern. In traditional chapbooks the female-side lyrics were not included, and

7 Meng Yuanyao 2006b, 25.

8 On song markets (*gexu* 歌墟) see Holm and Meng 2021, 41–44. See also Map 4 on page 42.

there was a general expectation that female singers would follow the men in song.[9] Typically this meant singing more or less the same lyrics in response to what the men had just sung, with slight variations in wording in each stanza. In modern chapbooks, there has been a shift in the direction of writing the female-side lyrics into the chapbooks. Women acquired their own mastery of the traditional song repertoire by learning at home, committing the lyrics to memory, and practicing singing with female singing partners.[10]

What both men and women learnt in the Pingguo area was a more or less fixed repertoire. Nevertheless, in the process of cultural transmission, various changes to the lyrics were made by generations of song masters on the basis of their own experiences and feelings about life, and so different areas have produced different variations of the lyrics, written in different ways and sung in different regional song modes as appropriate in each locality.

Thus far we have been able to inspect five different manuscripts from Pingguo county, two from Tiandong, and three from Mashan. These manuscripts vary greatly in appearance, size, materials, use of paper, calligraphic style, and they were also written at very different times. These circumstances indicate that the song masters in this Zhuang-speaking region were enthusiastic copyists of this extensive song cycle.

Structurally, the song booklets transcribed in each area have lyrics which vary in length. We have edited a manuscript from Matouzhen 码头镇, the county town of Pingguo, owned by a prominent song artist Mr. Lu Shunhong 陆顺红; this manuscript contains 2088 lines, but a number of stanzas of female-side lyrics have left out (4 lines after line 108, four lines after line 112, and 4 lines after line 140), so we could say that the total length ought to be 2100 lines. This version of the song lyrics has been handed down within Lu Shunhong's family for generations. According to him, his paternal grandfather and his paternal grandmother fell in love with each other while singing this song antiphonally, and his father's elder brother also met up with his aunt while singing this song. So the song text has been in the family since at least his grandfather's generation. It is still being sung today. Mr. Lu is a well-known singer in the Pingguo area, and he has recorded various songs within the regional corpus of traditional songs for a program on the Guangxi Television Channel.[11]

9 This was a deeply embedded cultural expectation throughout China, and not just in the Zhuang areas. As the 'Thousand Character Text' *Qianzi wen* 千字文 puts it, *fu chang qi sui* 夫唱妻隨 'The husband sings and the wife follows'.

10 Holm and Meng 2021, 49.

11 On Lu Shunhong and his singing companion Mr. Huang Qingzhu 黄庆祝, see Holm and Meng 2021, 59–61.

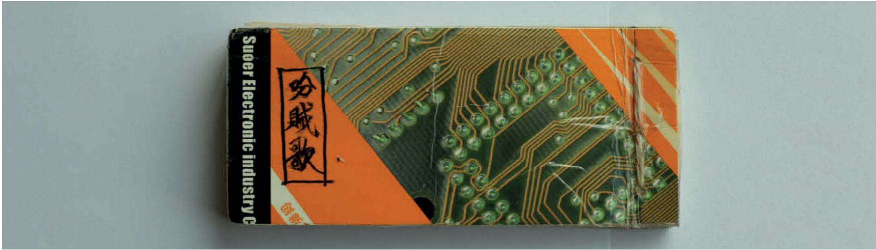


Fig. 1: Cover of Lu Shunhong's Brigands' Song

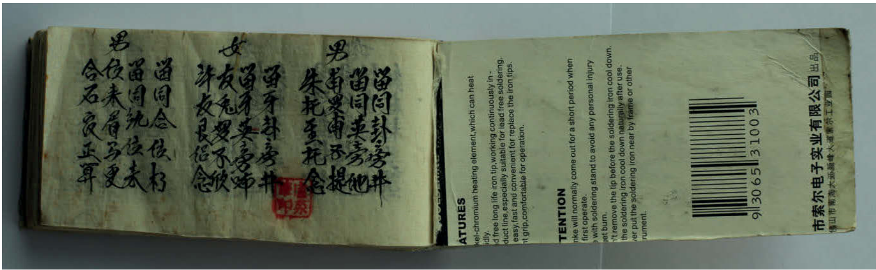


Fig. 2: Page 1a of Mr. Lu's Brigands' Song

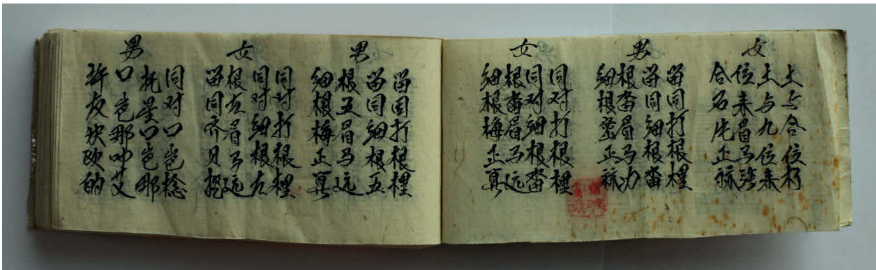


Fig. 3: Page 2a; Page 1b

This particular manuscript was written on traditional mulberry paper, with oblong pages (4.5 x 10 cm) folded on the outer margin and thread-bound in the traditional fashion. The cover is fashioned from plastic-laminated cardboard taken from packaging of a piece of electronic equipment. Like traditional thread-bound volumes, the front of the chapbook is found with the binding on the right. Each folio is also laid out in the traditional Chinese fashion, in vertical columns arranged to be read from right to left. Each folio has three four-line stanzas and a total of twelve lines

of verse. The character text has been written with a writing brush in a mixed but mainly semi-cursive style, with the male and female stanzas labelled with the characters 男 and 女 (*nan* 'male' and *nü* 'female' respectively).

Fig. 4: The cover of Huang Guoguan's songbook

We have also inspected a song booklet written in the Zhuang square script belonging to Mr. Huang Guoguan 黄国观 from Pingguo. This includes both male and female singing parts, and 623 stanzas, making a total of 4984 lines. Huang Guoguan is the current president of the Pingguo County Folksong Association, and a keen singer. According to his own account, the Brigands' Song manuscript in his possession is not from a single location, but contains quite a few passages which he copied from other songbooks. This is what makes his song text rather long, and it also means that other singers find it very difficult to accompany him in song from beginning to end. However, this also shows that the Brigands' Song is a piece of living culture, and is still changing in form and content in accordance with changing circumstances. Increased mobility for ordinary people in rural areas of China since the beginning of the Reform Era (1979 onwards) has meant that many of the traditional constraints on the circulation of texts and cultural knowledge have been considerably loosened,

and local and regional forms of art are no longer confined to small areas. Of course, it would be interesting in this case to learn more about the specific details of Huang Guoguan's process of text compilation: who were the 'song kings' he visited, where they were living, what influenced his choice of lyrics to add to the text, and so on.

Huang Guoguan's songbook is threadbound in the traditional fashion, but with the binding on the left and pages also running from left to right. The lyrics are laid out horizontally in the modern fashion on each page, written in the Zhuang vernacular script with the men's lyrics on the left and the women's lyrics on the right. The women's lyrics are a modern addition, but the women's lyrics differ only in a small number of characters from those of the men, so what we see on these pages is straight horizontal lines replacing all the women's lyrics which are the same, leaving only the words that are different to appear as characters. This convention is found in a number of modern manuscripts reviewed here.

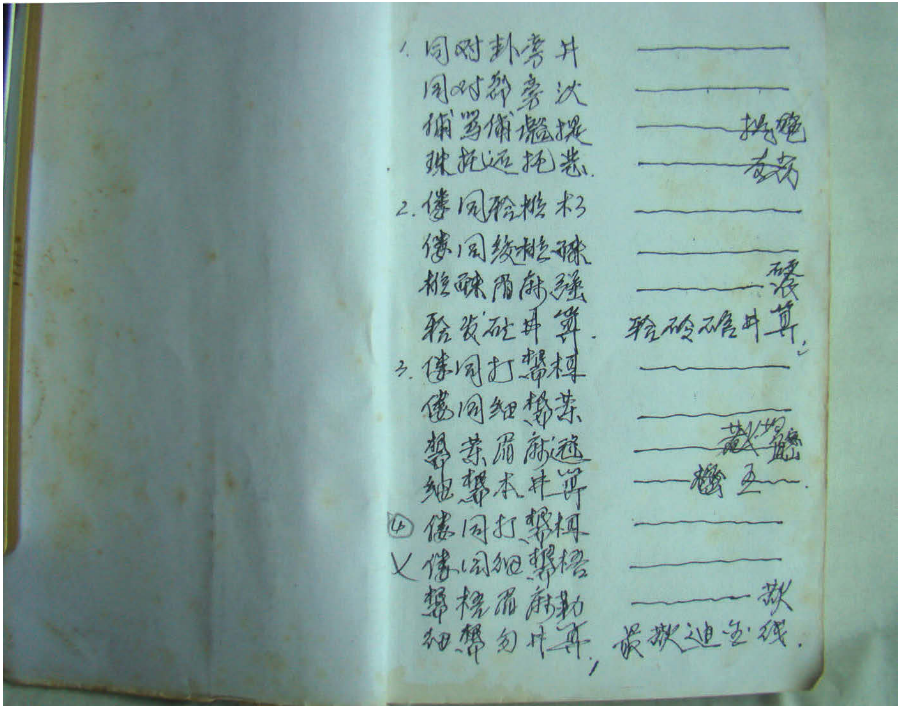


Fig. 5: The first page of Huang Guoguan's songbook, showing the men's lyrics (the women's lyrics differing only in a small number of characters)

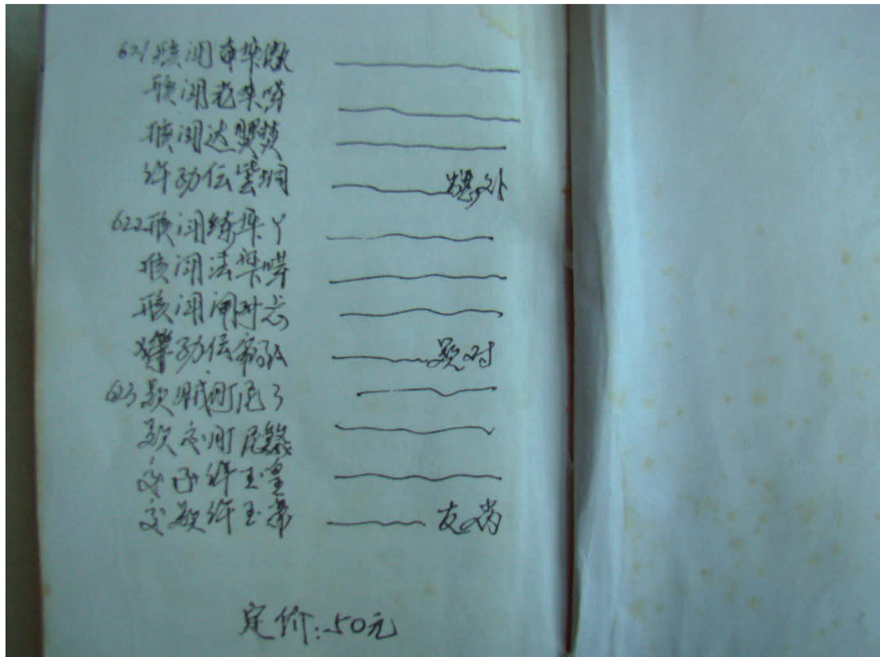


Fig. 6: The last page of Huang Guoguan's songbook

Another song booklet we have inspected belongs to Mr. Li Xiulang 李修琅, who comes from Burong 布荣 village in Guohuazhen 果化镇 in the southwestern part of Pingguo. Mr. Li is of Zhuang nationality and was at one time the vice-chairman of the Pingguo County Political Consultative Conference. He is a member of the Chinese Writers Association, and a keen advocate for the local folksong tradition. Since his retirement he has travelled all over the region singing with people. He has transcribed a Brigands' Song manuscript that contains 3456 lines. This edition of the Brigands' Song has not yet been subjected to editing or analysis.

Li Xiulang's song lyrics are written in an inexpensive notebook with a black plastic cover of the kind one can purchase in stationery shops, measuring 14.0 x 20.5 cm and opening on the right. English lettering in gold with the word 'Notebook' in block capitals is visible underneath the Zhuang title *Fwen caeg* 呅贼 pasted on top. The lyrics are written horizontally, with the female-side lyrics to the right of each page, and the stanzas numbered with Arabic numerals, from 1 to 432.

A very similar layout is found in a text transcribed by Ma Fuqin 馬副勤, who also comes from Matouzhen, the county seat. This is a modern notebook with a brown cover, entitled 呅贼 (*Fwencaeg*), with a total of 3520 lines, 440 double stanzas,

and 110 pages. The text in this notebook was transcribed in 2005 by Ma Fuqin, according to a note at the bottom of the last page (see Fig. 9). Here also the men's lyrics are written out in full, except where repeat lines have allowed the scribe to substitute a horizontal line covering either the whole or part of the line (see Fig. 8). The women's lyrics, by contrast, appear often as a wavy line (~) or a note *tong nan* 同男 'same as the men', except where they differ from the lyrics that the men have just sung. Any mistakes in transcription are simply crossed out. The character text in the lyrics is written in a semi-cursive style with a modern pen and black ink, with evidently no attempt at elegance. An interesting additional feature of this manuscript is that notes on the reading of some of the words are found at the bottom of the page (see Fig. 8). It is clear that this is a working document, intended to serve the singer and his singing partner with ready access to the lyrics under performance conditions.

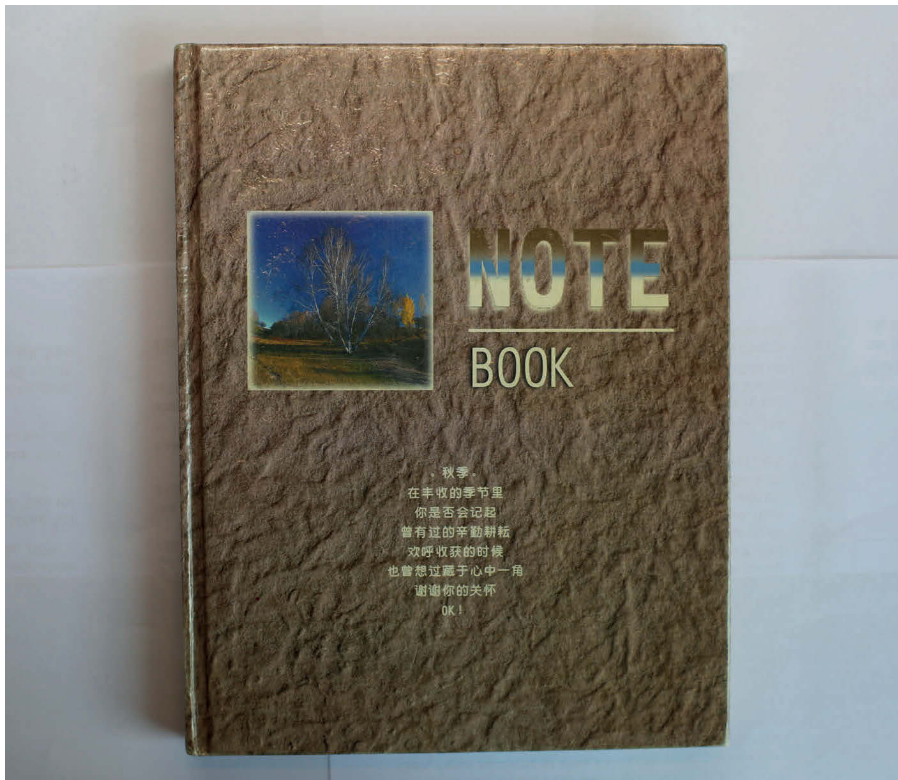


Fig. 7: Ma Fuqin's manuscript, cover

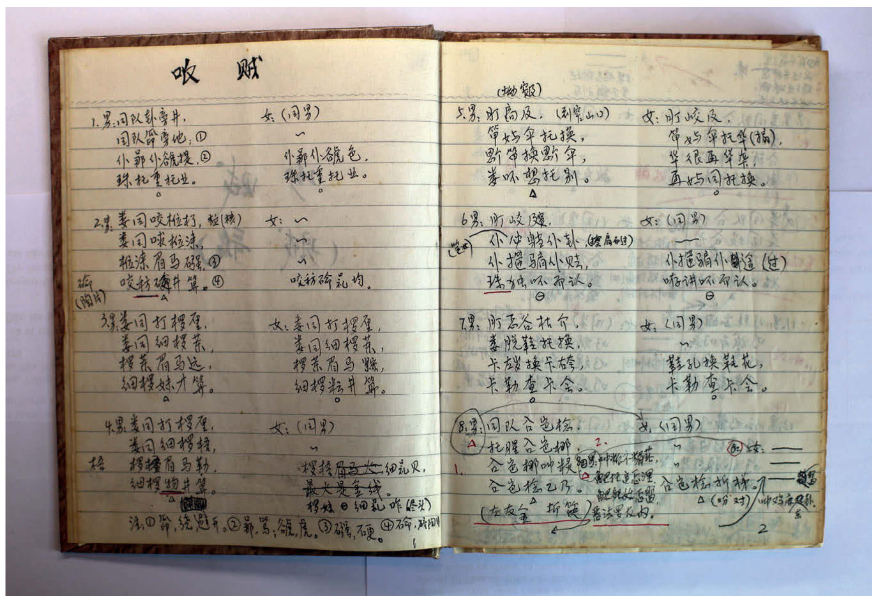


Fig. 8: Ma Fuqin’s manuscript, first page

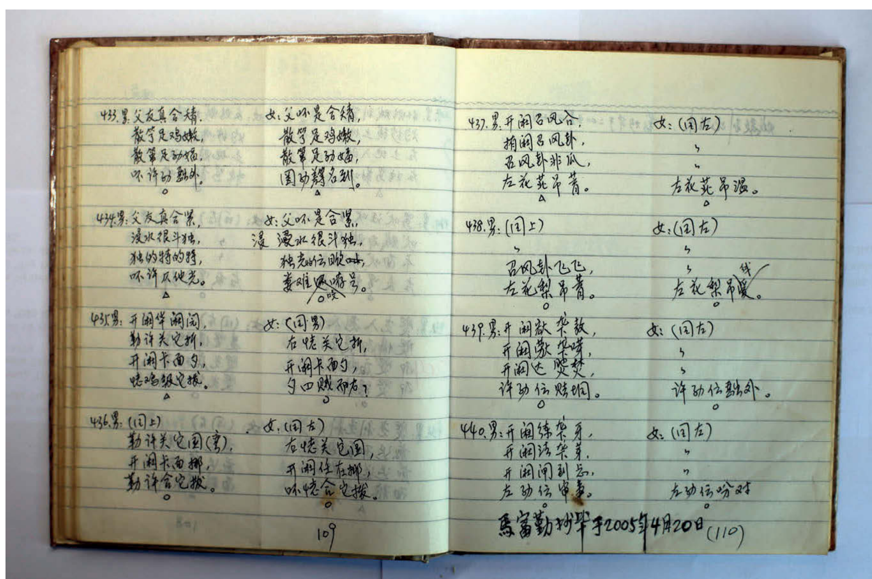


Fig. 9: Ma Fuqin’s manuscript, last page

We have also inspected two Brigands' Song manuscripts from Tiandong county, just to the west of Pingguo. One has been provided by Mr. Luo Minjie 罗敏杰 of Najia 那加 village in Shuoliang town 朔良镇.[12] This little songbook, convenient to carry around, is unusual because the lyrics were printed from a computer word-processing file. The vast majority of the characters are standard characters of the kind found in computer character fonts, and there are only very few characters that are variant graphs. Specially created Zhuang characters are even fewer. This is a version of the text that is still in use among the ordinary people in Tiandong. Because the character text was produced on a computer, this kind of 'manuscript' is easy to reproduce, and copies can now be found in all the markets and towns in Tiandong. Typically, the places that sell this kind of songbook also sell DVDs of traditional local songs.

Fig. 10: Luo Minjie's Tiandong manuscript, cover

12 Formerly Shuoliang xiang 朔良乡, a rural area located in the northeastern part of the county, north of the Youjiang river and in an area where Northern Zhuang dialects are spoken. See Map 3 in Holm and Meng 2021, 38.

目 录

大路歌 1 ………… 1-23
吩兰火 ………… 24-26
吩 捻 ………… 26-32
吩 排 ………… 32-42
吩 雨 ………… 42-52
吩 船 ………… 52-84
吩 烟 ………… 85-91
吩 贼 ………… 92-165

Fig. 11: Luo Minjie’s Tiandong manuscript, table of contents

分贼：
同对入巴捻，多性入巴那，入巴那更灵，入巴捻拆梯，

女：同对入巴捻，多性入巴那，入巴那更灵，入巴捻月乃。

更粥不眉菜，炸多跳下里，炸多飞下排，日女更挨足。
女：更粥不眉菜，炸多跳下里，炸多飞下菲，迷嘛更挨足。
更粥不眉菜，炸多跳下里，炸多飞下令，日女更灵足。
女：更粥不眉菜，炸多跳下里，炸多飞下令，迷嘛更灵足。

92

Fig. 12: Luo Minjie’s Tiandong manuscript, beginning of Brigands Song lyrics

This booklet is smallish and of oblong shape, bound on the left in what appears to be stitch-binding, with pagination running modern-style from left to right. The characters used are modern simplified characters, set out in rows horizontally with four lines of verse – one stanza – per line of print. The women's lyrics are distinguished from the men's with a *nü* 女 character in front of the line.

Another manuscript was one currently in the possession of Luo Fengxian 罗凤仙, the daughter of Mr. Luo Minjie. Luo Fengxian is an MA student in the Faculty of Arts at Guangxi Nationalities University in Nanning, and the traditional owner is Ms Luo's paternal-side uncle. Her uncle gave her this copy of the text to serve as her MA research material. This manuscript is of oblong shape and has a cotton cloth cover, thread-bound on the right. The text is written with a brush on traditional mulberry paper, set out in traditional Chinese format with vertical columns read from right to left. The text of the lyrics is written out in full, except where the lyrics are repetitive, in which case the characters that are the same as the previous stanza are left unwritten and only the characters that are different are written in the corresponding location.

Fig. 13: Luo Fengxian's manuscript, cover

The title of this manuscript is written as 吩贼, with 吩 read as *fwen* (fɯːn^{1}), and 贼 read as tsak^{8}. This way of writing the title indicates that the manuscript comes from Pingguo.[13] It is bound together with other song texts such as 'drinking songs' (*jiuge* 酒歌), 'tobacco songs' (*yan'ge* 烟歌), and 'Give way to women' (*Gei nüren kaixian* 给女人开先). The manuscript is rather old and well-worn, and so in quite a few places the text has been worn away and is no longer legible. The Brigands' Song part of the manuscript is preserved in good condition, but it is only 574 lines long, so this is an abbreviated version of the text. It begins with the couples entering the market and going to eat rice noodles,[14] rather than the episode of entering the mountains together that is found at the beginning of most texts.[15] We think probably this version of the Brigands' Song only contains the sections of the longer text that the singers in that locality particularly liked, and that this explains the way in which the text was truncated.

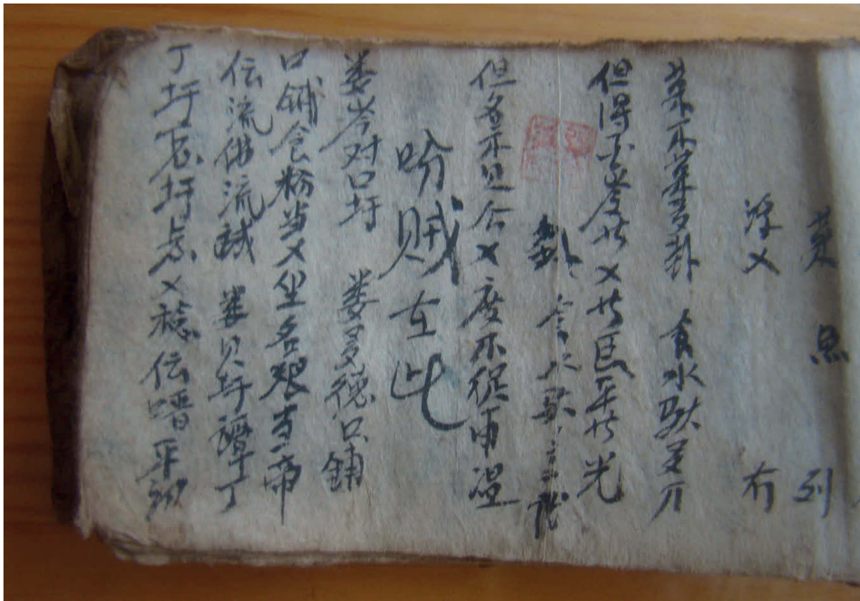


Fig. 14: Luo Fengxian's manuscript, beginning of Brigands' Song section

13 The pronunciation tsak^{8} for 'brigand' is found in the Shuoliang 朔良镇 area in Tiandong county.

14 Corresponding to lines 73–120 in Lu Shunhong's text. See Holm and Meng 2021, 87–88.

15 Corresponding to lines 33–60 in Lu Shunhong's text. See Holm and Meng 2021, 86.

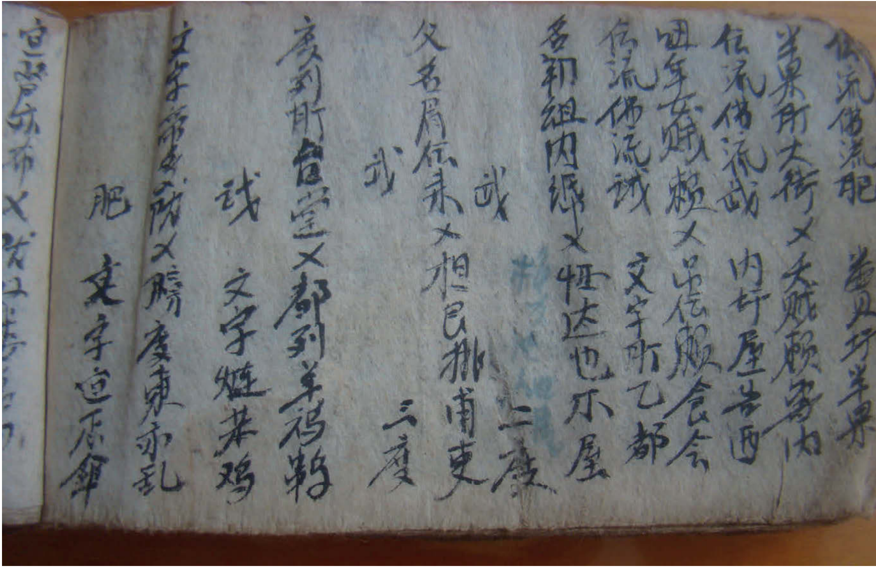


Fig. 15: Luo Fengxian’s manuscript, sample page

In the western part of Mashan county, to the northeast of Pingguo, we have collected a Brigands’ Song manuscript from one of the local singers, Mr. Huang Hanwen 黄汉文. The text comes from Junlong 俊龙 administrative village in Yongzhou town 永州镇.[16] Mr. Huang is from the hamlet of Nongxian 弄仙屯 in that village, and is a well-known local singer, with a special skill in versifying and singing impromptu in the local style. He has taken part in song contests organized by the Mashan county government, and has won the title of ‘Mashan song king’ (*Mashan gewang* 马山歌王) on many occasions. Huang Hanwen’s Brigands’ Song text is relatively concise, at 984 lines, and not nearly as long as Lu Shunhong’s version in Pingguo. But it is complete from beginning to end, the narrative details are clear and cohesive, the main content of the song is well preserved, and the phrasing of the lyrics is particularly elegant and refined. This shorter version of the lyrics has its own special qualities. It is not as expansive or repetitive as the longer texts from Pingguo. With a length just short of 1000 lines, this is a song of medium length but may also qualify as a ‘long song-cycle’.

16 Yongzhou is located in the far west of Mashan county, just east of the present-day border with Pingguo county.

Fig. 16: Huang Hanwen's manuscript, cover

The manuscript itself is thread-bound on the left, with the text inside in vertical columns also read from left to right, i.e. reversed from the traditional right-to-left format. There are two lines to a column, and the stanzas are labelled 男 *nan* 'male' and 女 *nü* 'female'. Female lyrics are included. The title *Fwen caeg* is written as 㕬贼, and the song begins with the lyrics of the drought song, a short segment not included in the lyrics of Lu Shunhong's text.[17]

17 *Fwen* here is written with a vernacular character composed of a MOUTH radical (*kǒu* 口) on the left and 宽 MSC *kuān* 'broad' on the right, with *kuān* as the phonetic component. This way of writing *fwen* is found in Mashan county and in contiguous counties to the north, Du'an 都安 and Dahua 大化. The choice of this graph is based on a Pinghua 平話 or Cantonese reading of 寬, such as *hun*[44]

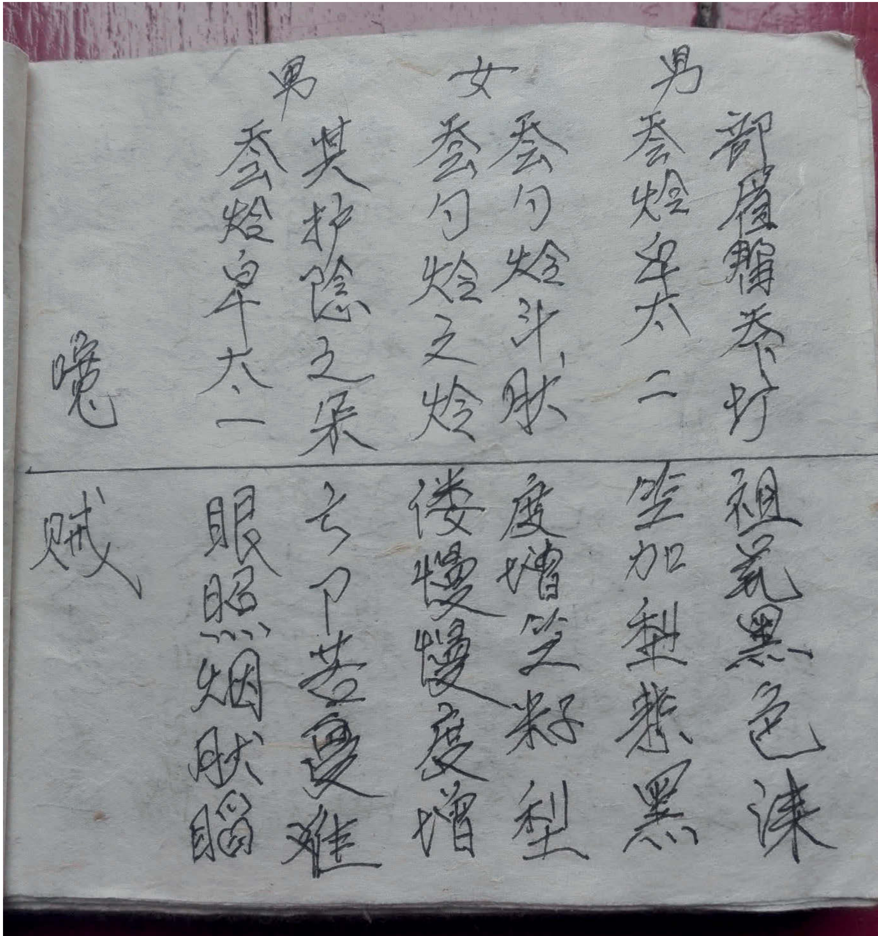
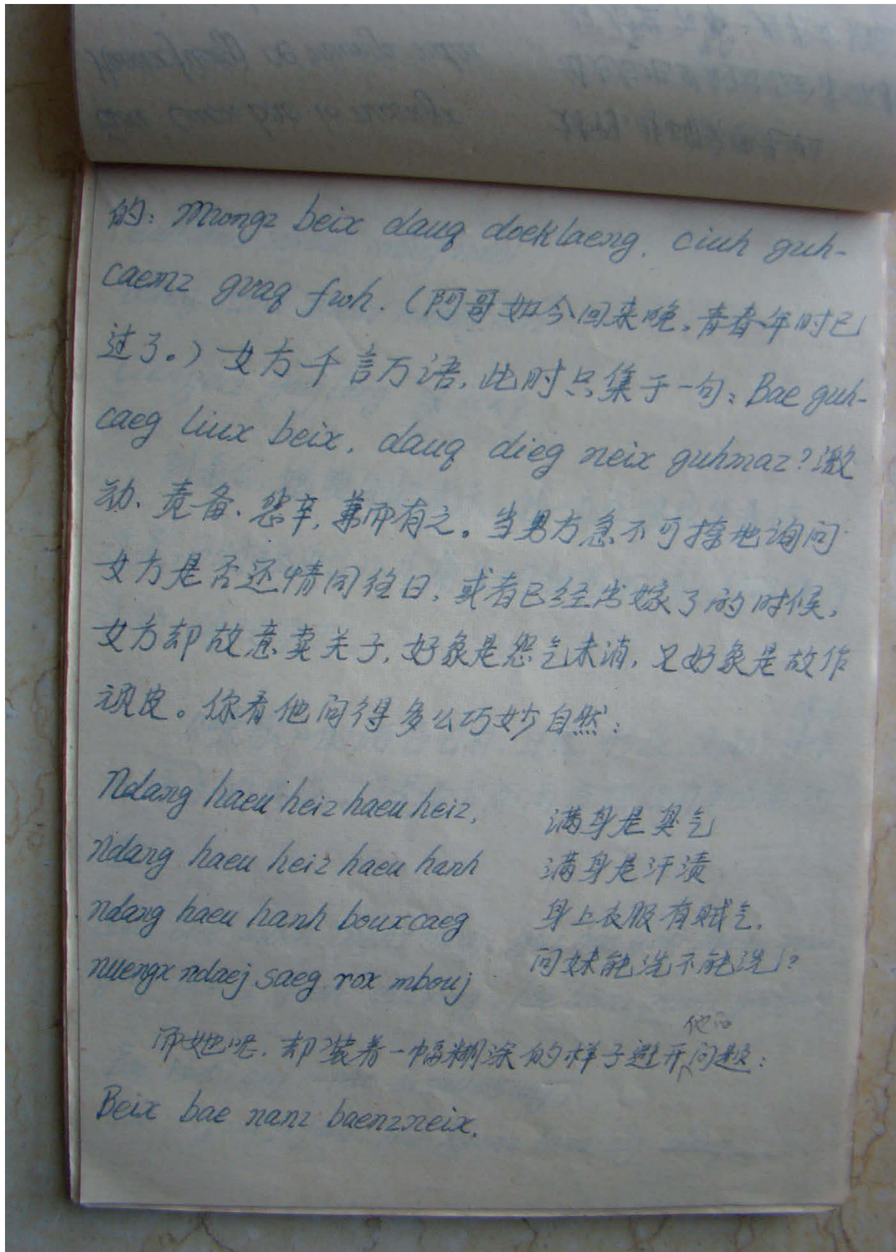


Fig. 17: Huang Hanwen's manuscript, first page, read from left to right

In addition, the Mashan song master Lu Zhideng 陆之登 has provided us with two manuscripts of the Brigands' Song. These also come from Yongzhou 永州 in the western part of the county. These are manuscripts that he himself copied out in 1984–5, when he borrowed a copy of the text from a friend of his.

in the central parts of Guangxi, *fun*^{53} in Tengxian 藤县, and *fun*^{55} in Guangzhou Cantonese. See Li Lianjin 2000, 237, item 2364.

Fig. 18: Lu Zhideng’s first manuscript copy of the Brigands’ Song


的：Mwongz beix daug doeklaeng, ciuh guh-caemz gvaq fwh.（阿哥如今回来晚，青春年时已过了。）女方千言万语，此时只集于一句：Bae guh-caeg liux beix, daug dieg neix guhmaz? 激动、责备、怨辛，兼而有之。当男方急不可捺地询问女方是否还情同往日，或者已经出嫁了的时候，女方却故意卖关子，好象是怨气未消，又好象是故作顽皮。你看他问得多么巧妙自然：

Ndang haeu heiz haeu heiz, 满身是臭气
ndang haeu heiz haeu hanh 满身是汗渍
ndang haeu hanh bouxcaeg 身上衣服有贼气，
nuengx ndaej saeg rox mbouj 问妹能洗不能洗？

而她呢，却装着一幅糊涂的样子避开他的问题：
Beix bae nanz baenzneix,

Fig. 19: Lu Zhideng’s first manuscript copy of the Brigands’ Song, sample page

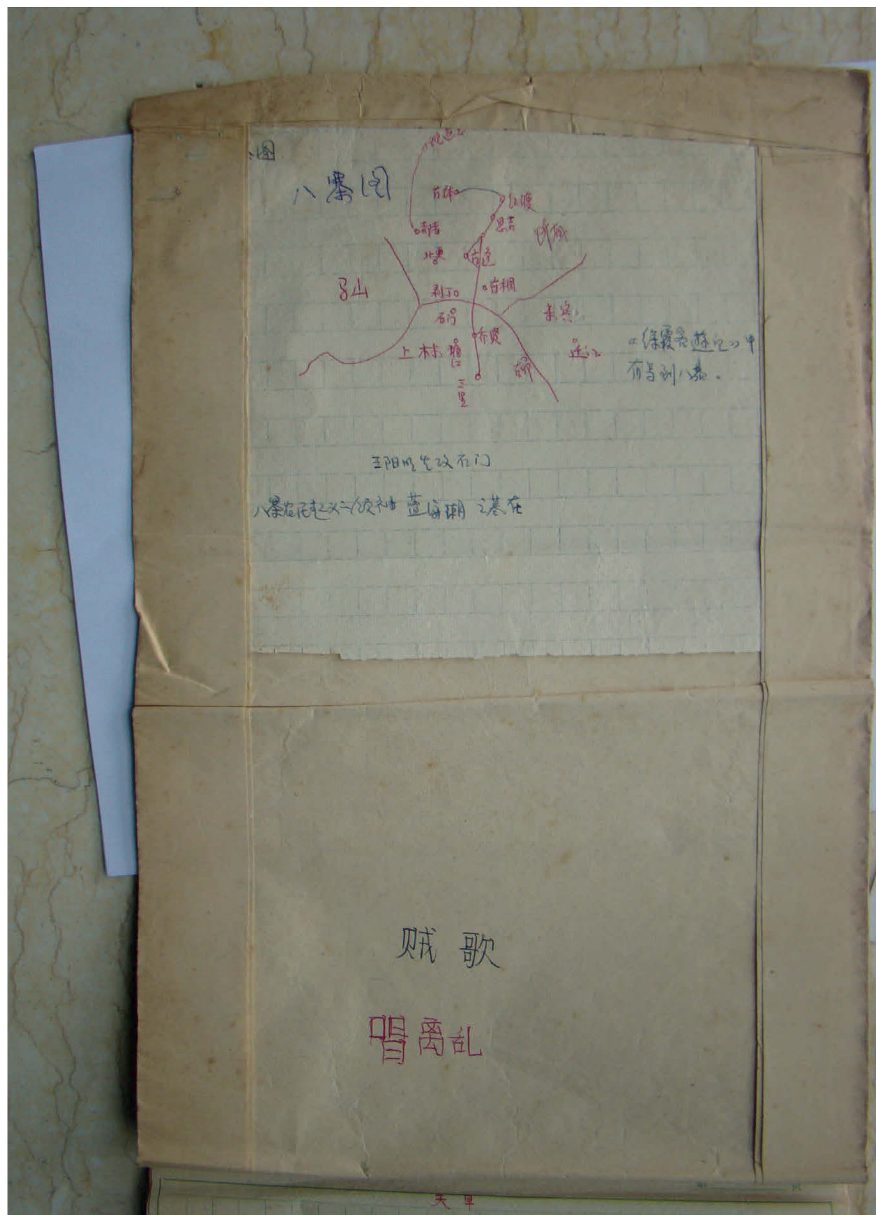
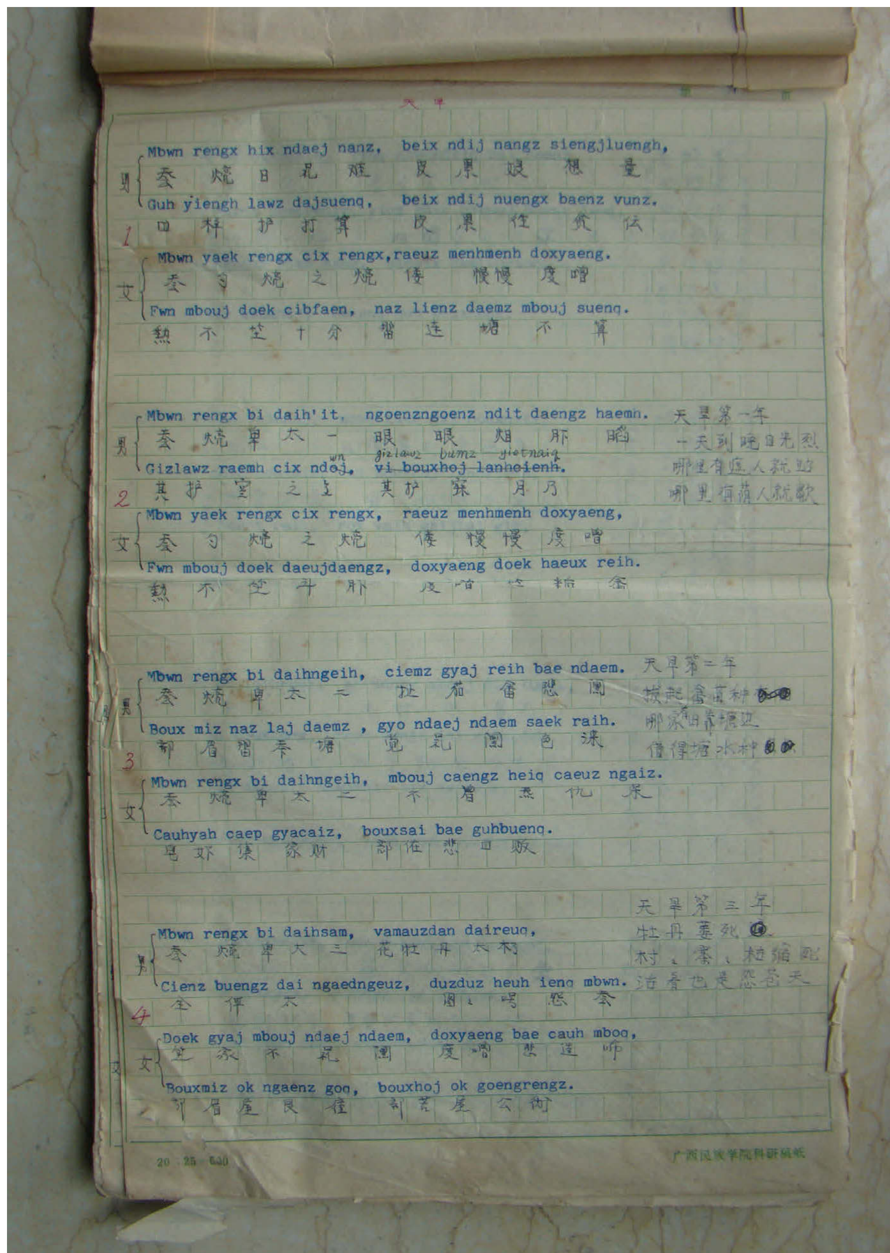


Fig. 20: Lu Zhideng's second copy of the Brigands' Song manuscript, cover



1

Mbwn rengx hix ndaej nanz, beix ndij nangz siengjluengh,
Guh yiengh lawz dajsuenq, beix ndij nuengx baenz vunz.
Mbwn yaek rengx cix rengx,raeuz menhmenh doxyaeng.
Fwn mbouj doek cibfaen, naz lienz daemz mbouj suenq.

2

Mbwn rengx bi daih'it, ngoenzngoenz ndit daengz haemh.
Gizlawz raemh cix ndoj, ~~vi bouxhoj lanheienh~~.
Mbwn yaek rengx cix rengx, raeuz menhmenh doxyaeng,
Fwn mbouj doek daeujdaengz, doxyaeng doek haeux reih.

3

Mbwn rengx bi daihngeih, ciemz gyaj reih bae ndaem.
Boux miz naz laj daemz , gyo ndaej ndaem saek raih.
Mbwn rengx bi daihngeih, mbouj caengz heiq caeuz ngaiz.
Cauhyah caep gyacaiz, bouxsai bae guhbuenq.

4

Mbwn rengx bi daihsam, vamauzdan daireuq,
Cienz buengz dai ngaedngeuz, duzduz heuh ienq mbwn.
Doek gyaj mbouj ndaej ndaem, doxyaeng bae cauh mboq,
Bouxmiz ok ngaenz goq, bouxhoj ok goengrengz.

Fig. 21: Lu Zhideng's second copy of the Brigands' Song manuscript, sample page

Both these copies were written on standard writing pads of the kind one can buy at stationer's shops, with thin lined paper inside and brown paper covers stapled on the top margin. The lyrics inside have been written with a fountain pen in blue ink, with both character text and *Zhuangwen* romanisation written interlinearly. In the first copy, there is a stanza written in *Zhuangwen* on the left with a Chinese translation on the right. On the top half of the cover of the second copy, there is a hand-drawn map of the Eight Forts area ('Bazhai tu' 八寨图), an area in the east of Mashan county that was considered by some scholars to be the location of the Ming-dynasty military campaign most closely connected with the origins of the Brigands' Song.[18] On the bottom half there is a title in Chinese and below it in red characters, an alternative title 'Chang liluan' 唱离乱 'Song of Parting and Disorder'.[19] On the sample page of the second copy, we can see lyrics laid out horizontally, two lines of verse to a line, with printed *Zhuangwen* transcription mimeographed in blue and handwritten vernacular characters underneath. Both the male and female lines are laid out in full, with a blank space following each male-female exchange. A Chinese translation is written on the right-hand margin. These lines are also from the beginning of the 'drought song'.

Professor Huang Fengxian 黄凤显, formerly a Vice-President of the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing, has also collected three manuscripts of the Brigands' Song that come from the Yongzhou area of western Mashan. We have not yet compared them with manuscripts to hand, and so do not yet know of any differences or similarities. Professor Huang is a Zhuang scholar from the Yongzhou area, and is very familiar with the local vernacular script and with local manuscript traditions.

Further afield, Mr. Nong Minjian 农敏坚, a local expert on the Liaoge 嘹歌 song tradition in Pingguo,[20] reports that when he was serving as an official in Napo 那坡 county in the far southwest of Guangxi, he was able to collect manuscripts of the Brigands' Song there as well. According to his account, these had been brought to Napo by migrants from Pingguo. The owners of the songbooks had already lived in Napo for 5–6 generations. The songbooks in question would have to be at least 100 years old. David Holm reports that Brigands' Songs also circulate across the border in Cao Bằng 高平 province in the northern part of Vietnam, just to the south

18 See Holm and Meng 2021, 22.

19 See Holm and Meng 2021, 12–13. This is a title derived from the first Chinese-language translation of the Brigands Song, published in the 1980s.

20 Liaoge is the traditional song mode current throughout most of the region in which the Brigands' Song is sung. In Zhuang song markets, typically only one traditional song mode would predominate. See Holm and Meng 2021, 35–56.

of Napo, with content which is around 80% identical with the lyrics of the Brigands' Songs that circulate in Pingguo.[21]

Comparing the different versions of the Brigands' Song from different areas, one finds that the characters used by the various song masters in each locality and the style of the lyrics are not all the same. For example, the character 进 MSC *jìn* 'to enter' in Mr. Huang's songbook is an archetypal Zhuang semantic reading of a Chinese character, borrowing both the graphic form and the meaning, and reading directly with a Zhuang pronunciation. This kind of borrowing appears most often with some Chinese characters that are seen most frequently. When people see these Chinese characters, they can think up the corresponding Zhuang reading pronunciation on the basis of the context. In the same songbook, the character 躲 MSC *duǒ* 'to hide' can also be read as *haeuj* (hɐu^{3}) 'to enter'. The key is that 'hiding' involves entering an enclosed space. In Zhuang the two verbs *ndoj* (ʔdo^{3}) 'to hide' and *haeuj* 'to enter' are often used to form a verb compound *ndojhaeuj* (ʔdo^{3} hau^{3}). Thus when someone sees the character 躲 they can make the connection with *haeuj*. However, this is not a common or regular usage, and can only be described as a form of synonym substitution.

Also frequently found in these texts are the character combinations 鸡马, 鸡麻, 几马, and 几馬. These are all read as *gijmaz* (ki^{3} ma^{2}) 'what?; some'. The first syllable *gij* (ki^{3}) is an indefinite classifier, meaning 'some', and *maz* (ma^{2}) is a question word meaning 'what?'. The character combination 介麻 is read as *gaiqmaz* (kaːi^{5} ma^{2}), where *gaiq* (kaːi^{5}) is basically a classifier meaning 'piece, lump' (Ch. *kuài* 块). In Zhuang, classifiers pertaining to physical objects often have a deictic function, so *gij* and *gaiq* when used together with question words are used to form combinations meaning 'what thing?', which come to mean 'what?' after a period of habitualisation. The compound *gaiqmaz* (kaːi^{5} ma^{2}), however, after frequent use, has come to be read locally with the *gaiq* (kaːi^{5}) pronounced as *gah* (ka^{6}), so there are some people who confuse it with the pronunciation of *gijmaz* (ki^{3} ma^{2}). In fact the interrogatives *gijmaz* and *gaiqmaz* are entirely the same in meaning and usage, and they both begin with an initial *g*- (k-), so their pronunciation is also relatively close to each other. That the owner of a manuscript should pronounce the word 介麻 as *gijmaz* (ki^{3} ma^{2}) is entirely within the bounds of conventional expectation. This phenomenon serves to indicate that the Zhuang script has not been standardised, and the way the singers write the lyrics – or sing them – exhibits a reasonably high degree of latitude, which can usually be explained in terms of local speech habits.

21 See Holm 2023. This pattern of geographic distribution is related to Zhuang people's tradition of fleeing their homes in the direction of present-day northern Vietnam in times of famine and war.

Overall, there is a tendency for the script in song texts to opt for graphic simplification. Because there are differences in dialect and lect, there are quite a few dialect words, and some differences in ways of writing that can be ascribed to local pronunciation differences. These local variants are transmitted and sung within fairly small geographic areas, owing to the constraints imposed by the fact that the songbooks are used as prompt-books for antiphonal singing. People can only sing together or sing antiphonally if their speech variants and singing styles are close enough together to allow them to respond to each other in song. Judging by the use of paper in these songbooks, the older manuscripts all are written on traditional mulberry paper, but as we have seen, modern singers use store-bought notebooks, letter-writing pads, and other materials.

Another noteworthy aspect of this regional song culture and the circulation of manuscripts is the prominent role played by Zhuang scholar-officials and other local singers with access to local government resources. Men in these positions played a double role, one part of which was to continue their own performance of local songs and indulge in their love of singing. At the same time, they were able to travel around more than other people, and gain more of an overview of the variation and richness of the regional song culture. They were also in a position to make reports of their findings and recommend publishing projects to the relevant offices in the provincial capital of Nanning, including, in the early 2000's, the recommendation that the Pingguo song culture be granted Intangible Cultural Heritage status.

3 Published editions

In the middle 1980s, Huang Qiongliu 黄琼柳, He Chengwen 何承文 and Mo Yongji 莫勇继 produced an edition of the Brigands' Song text from Tiandong, transcribed into *Zhuangwen*. This was published by the Guangxi Nationalities Publishing House in Nanning in 1985. This edition was based on a manuscript of the Brigands' Song collected by He Chengwen in Tiandong. The title is *Fwen Biengz Luenh* (fɯːn^{1} piːŋ^{2} luːn^{6}), which literally translated means 'Song of the Domain in Disorder', which has been translated as 'Song of Parting and Disorder' (离乱歌 'Liluan ge'). The editors took the source manuscript, edited it, and transcribed it into *Zhuangwen* romanisation. None of the lyrics are translated into Chinese, and there are no explanatory notes, although after some of the dialect words they have provided standard Zhuang equivalents in parentheses. According to He Chengwen's explanation, they did not use a single manuscript as the source for this this edited volume, but took material from a number of manuscripts, compared them, and combined them into a kind of omnibus edition. Hence one can say, this is a work that is the product of

literary processing and embellishment, and not a translation based on an edited manuscript in its original form as it existed among the people. Nevertheless, this was one of the first open publications of a Brigands' Song text in China.[22]

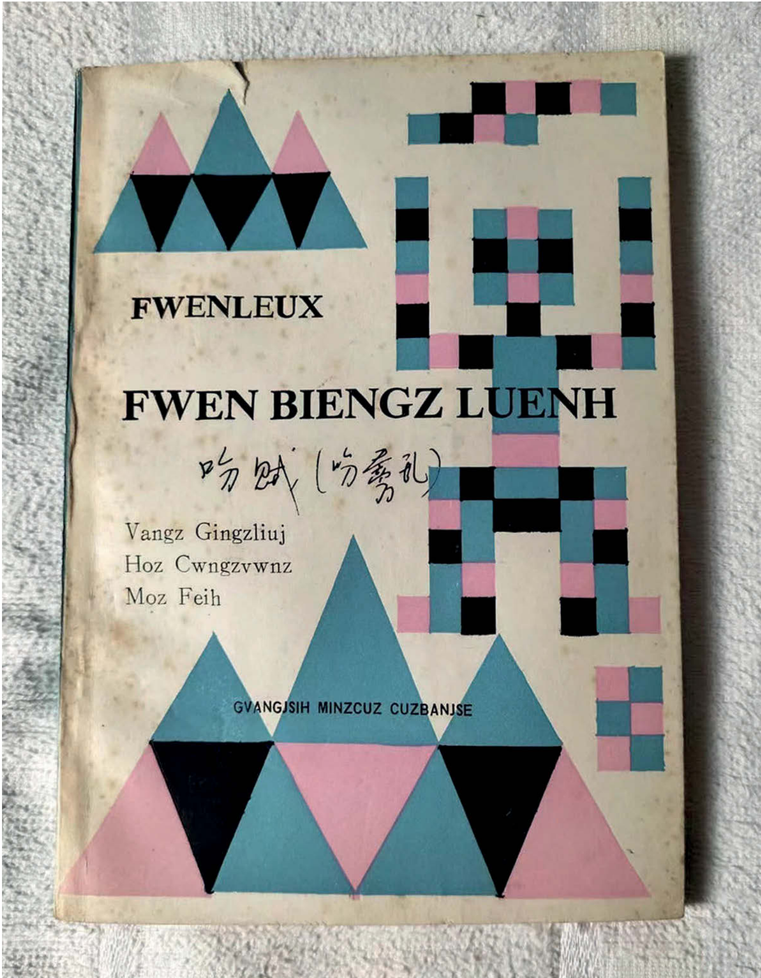
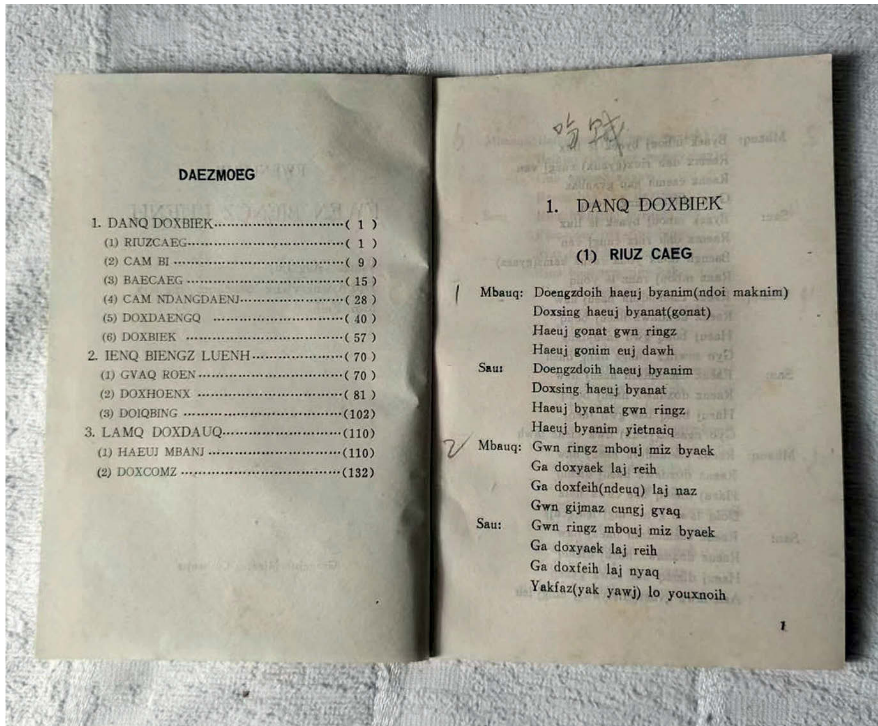


Fig. 22: The Brigands' Song edition by Huang Qiongliu et al., cover

22 A Chinese translation of the text by Huang Yongsha and Huang Yaoguang was published in 1963 in the provincial-level journal *Guangxi wenyi* 广西文艺. For details see Holm and Meng 2021, 13.



DAEZMOEG

1. DANQ DOXBIEK (1)
(1) RIUZCAEG (1)
(2) CAM BI (9)
(3) BAECAEG (15)
(4) CAM NDANGDAENJ (28)
(5) DOXDAENGQ (40)
(6) DOXBIEK (57)
2. IENQ BIENGZ LUENH (70)
(1) GVAQ ROEN (70)
(2) DOXHOENX (81)
(3) DOIQBING (102)
3. LAMQ DOXDAUQ (110)
(1) HAEUJ MBANJ (110)
(2) DOXCOMZ (132)

1. DANQ DOXBIEK

(1) RIUZ CAEG

Mbauq: Doengzdoih haeuj byanim(ndoi maknim)
Doxsing haeuj byanat(gonat)
Haeuj gonat gwn ringz
Haeuj gonim euj dawh
Sau: Doengzdoih haeuj byanim
Doxsing haeuj byanat
Haeuj byanat gwn ringz
Haeuj byanim yietnaiq
Mbauq: Gwn ringz mbouj miz byaek
Ga doxyaek laj reih
Ga doxfeih(ndeuq) laj naz
Gwn gijmaz cungj gvaq
Sau: Gwn ringz mbouj miz byaek
Ga doxyaek laj reih
Ga doxfeih laj nyaq
Yakfaz(yak yawj) lo youxnoih

1

Fig. 23: The Brigands' Song edition by Huang Qiongliu et al., first page of text

Then in 1993, the Guangxi Minority Nationalities Office for Publishing Ancient Documents organized Huang Yaoguang 黄耀光 and others to collect and edit manuscripts of the Brigands' Song from Tiandong. This edition, however, also turned out not to be an edition of any specific original manuscript, but used five different manuscripts and produced a composite and modified version of the text.[23]

Another edition of the Brigands' Song was included in Nong Minjian 农敏坚 and Tan Zhibiao's 谭志表 five-volume edition of *The Liao Songs of Pingguo* (平果嘹歌 *Pingguo liaoge*). The volume entitled 'Long Songs' (长歌集) included a version of the Brigands' Song with a length of 3656 lines. This was published in 2006 by the Guangxi Nationalities Publishing House. This edition placed the Chinese translations

23 Zhang Shengzhen, ed.-in-chief 1993. For the editors' explanation of their methods of collection and other information see pp.13–14. See also Holm and Meng 2021, 56–57.

separately up front, followed by the *Zhuangwen* transcriptions, and finally the text of the song in the original Zhuang square character script.[24]

Then in 2014 the Brigands' Song appeared in another edition, entitled *Liao songs of the Zhuang* (*Zhuangzu liaoge* 壮族嘹歌).[25] The first volume of this collection included an edition of the Brigands' Song. The arrangement was different, with the square character text in front, followed by the *Zhuangwen* transcription and finally the Chinese translation, but otherwise the text of the Brigands' Song was the same as in the 2006 edition produced by Nong Minjian.

Luo Hantian 罗汉田, a scholar at the Nationalities Literature Research Institute in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, produced an edition of the Brigands' Song text in the possession of the song master Tan Shaoming 谭绍明 from Taipingzhen 太平镇 in the central part of Pingguo. This was published in 2009 by the Nationalities Press in Beijing as part of his five-volume edition of the lyrics of Pingguo Liaoge. This edition provided a romanised *Zhuangwen* transcription of the song lyrics and a Chinese translation in five-syllable verse, but did not provide the original vernacular character text. Annotations were provided, but they were relatively brief and devoted in part to explaining the differences in meaning between the Chinese translation and the wording of the original Zhuang-language text.[26] Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Luo's transcription into *Zhuangwen* was modified in such a way as to indicate local pronunciations.[27]

In 2011 Professors Zhou Yanxian 周艳鲜 and Lu Lianzhi 陆莲枝 of the Baise Academy produced an English-language translation of the Pingguo Liao Songs (*Pingguo Zhuangzu Liaoge* 平果壮族嘹歌), including the Songs of the Third Month (*Sanyue ge* 三月歌), the House-building Song (*Fangge* 房歌), Day Songs (*Rige* 日歌), Night Songs (*Yege* 夜歌), and the Brigands' Song. This was published in 2011 by the Guangxi Normal University Press.[28] The idea was to make this corpus of traditional Zhuang song accessible to the world community. Unfortunately, the translated

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24 Nong Minjian and Tan Zhibiao, eds. 2005. The character text included in this edition was not a photo-reproduction of the original manuscript, but rather a re-transcription by the Zhuang scholar Qin Chengqin 覃承勤 (personal communication, 2005).

25 Other song texts included in the same volume were 'Wooing Songs from Moxu' (Moxu liange 模圩恋歌) and 'Wooing Songs from Bangxu' (Bangxu liange 榜圩恋歌). Moxu is a market located in Longzhu 龙竹 village in Taiping parish, to the northwest of the county seat, while Bangxu is located in the far north of the county.

26 Luo Hantian 2007. Translation into Chinese five-syllable verse is a fairly common practice, but tends to obscure the literal meaning of the Zhuang language original.

27 For example, tones are often marked with their local values rather than values in Standard Zhuang. Luo writes *ndix* (tone 4) 'with' rather than *ndij* (tone 3); see Luo 2007, 160.

28 Zhou Yanxian and Lu Lianzhi 2011.

edition did not include the original Zhuang lyrics or a Chinese translation. Moreover, the translation was not based on any Zhuang language original, but on a translation into Chinese. In quite a few places this indirect method results in the original flavour and meaning being lost.

Strictly speaking, none of the above-mentioned published editions of the Brigands' Song should be considered a work of careful and thorough scholarship. Most of them are works produced with an eye to a wider readership, and combine material from various manuscripts in a way that the editors thought would be pleasing, with the result though that the connection with any original text is rendered invisible. The same is true of the 1993 edition produced by the Guangxi Minority Nationalities Office for Publishing Ancient Documents, though there at least we have some information about which villages the original manuscripts came from and who the original singers were. For the scholarly community to make use of these materials, they must overcome the obstacles that these works put in their way, conduct their own research, and dig deeper and conduct more fine-grained analysis; otherwise they will remain confined to the surface level of the documents and have no way of elucidating the internal structure or meaning.

4 Comparison of Brigands' Song manuscripts

From the above discussion of published editions and unpublished manuscripts, we can see that the Brigands' Song is not exactly the same in all areas. There are longer versions with 3000 or 4000 lines, and then there are abbreviated versions only a few hundred lines long. If the length varies to this extent, the content will naturally also not be entirely the same, with each manuscript incorporating a more detailed or more sketchy presentation. In language and style as well, each area has its own special characteristics.

First, the beginning stanzas of the song are different. Just to take the published editions, Huang Yaoguang's edition from Tiandong starts with the male and female singers meeting together and going up into the mountains to work, finding at mealtime that there is nothing to eat and no chopsticks. The Luo Minjie Tiandong version, Luo Hantian's edition of Tan Shaoming's songbook, and Zhou Yanxian's English translation all have these stanzas at the start of the song cycle.

The Pingguo Brigands' Song edited by Nong Minjian and Tan Zhibiao begins with a description of a great drought, and uses this aberration in the weather to make an analogy with the way in which the empire will fall into disorder. Huang Hanwen's manuscript from Yongzhou in Mashan and Lu Zhideng's manuscript are also like this. But Luo Fengxian's manuscript from Tiandong starts with the couple

entering the market town and eating rice noodles, an episode which appears only later on in the longer versions of the song cycle.

Next, the ending of the song cycle also differs. The ending in most of the manuscript versions has the male and female protagonists finally back getting together, renewing their old feelings for each other, and settling back down into their old relationship, reunited at last. But Huang Hanwen's manuscript from Mashan has a different trajectory: the men come home from the campaign, but find that the women have already married themselves off to other men. In real life, this is one of the tragic consequences of war, and is sometimes unavoidable. A song with this kind of ending also is a shock to people's feelings. The sound of song does not always bring people happiness: bitterness and hardship also appear and temper people's emotions, and expressing the pain caused by such situations also evokes people's attachment to their lives.

One can see that song texts that circulate among the people commonly vary from place to place. These differences are the cumulative result of the ways in which the songbooks and singing styles have been transmitted from one generation to the next. Different people sing antiphonally in different places, and all of them have their own viewpoints, life experience, and likes and dislikes. Changing the lyrics in order to make a better fit with one's own disposition, or forgetting the lyrics momentarily and making up others on the spot to fill the gap, are commonplace occurrences among the Zhuang song masters singing antiphonally in traditional song markets. Then, heard by other members of the audience with a keen interest in song, these impromptu lyrics may be taken up and transmitted.

Apart from lyrics and narrative content, the characters used to write the lyrics are not entirely the same. Most of these songbooks are hand-written, with only Luo Minjie's Tiandong booklet being a computerized printed version. The latter is a new development. However, computerized Zhuang square characters will tend to gravitate toward the standard Chinese script, and make best use of the ready-made characters that are part of the computerized fontset. There are other innovations: in the songbook owned by Lu Shunhong from Pingguo, Arabic numerals and letters from the Roman alphabet have replaced some traditional square-script characters.[29] This is a natural development, given that the traditional Zhuang script itself was primarily a script that represented the sounds of language. Although the Zhuang script is a script originally borrowed from Chinese and part of the Chinese script family, its primary mechanism is representing sound. Zhuang is a different language, however, and so a single character can be used to represent a range of sounds, and a

29 These are listed in the 'Index of Zhuang Characters and Other Symbols' in Holm and Meng 2021, 715.

single sound can be represented by a range of different characters. This is very common. Since the function of the script is to represent sound, the form of the characters and how they are written is less important. The most important thing is that they can be recognized as representing certain reading pronunciations.

Naturally, in manuscripts that circulate among the people, the transcribers' cultural level varies considerably, so many characters are written with either more or fewer strokes. This is another reason why different manuscripts manifest different ways of writing the same lyrics. It also happens that the same person will use different characters to write the same word in different parts of the manuscript. So it is not difficult to understand how different ways of writing the lyrics could appear in different manuscripts.

5 A Reliable way of approaching manuscripts in the Zhuang square script

The situation with documents and manuscripts from the Zhuang-speaking areas is quite complicated. I have been working now for many years analysing and editing Zhuang traditional texts. If one wants to be able to read such documents correctly and conduct research on a reliable basis, the first requirement is being able to make sense of the reading pronunciation of each line of verse, and better still if one can ascertain the semantic meaning of each character and morpheme in the text. What one must not do under any circumstances is to rely on ones own individual experience and guess at the pronunciation and meaning of each word based on standard Chinese.

For example, in a Funeral Lament (叹亡) song from Mashan there is a passage:[30]

求字�napping佈傒， 父㙜提乙肉。 求字�napping姆婳， 挦香食啚亡。

Here, there is no way of guessing either the pronunciation or the meaning of the phrases 乙肉 and 食 on the basis of the Chinese. The phrase 乙肉 (Ch. *yǐ ròu*) is pronounced *ietnyuk* (ʔiːt^{7} ȵuk^{7}) in Zhuang, meaning 'small encoffining', while 食 (*shí*) is pronounced as *swek* (θɯːk^{7}), meaning 'make offerings'. To make offerings to the dead means to present offerings of food. Thus these four lines of song mean:

求要男孩子，父死能入殓。求要女孩子，上香祭亡灵。
We request of the male children,
When their father dies they should be able to put him in the coffin.

30 Meng Yuanyao 2010, 151.

> We request of the female children,
> They should offer up incense and make offerings of food to the departed spirit.

If we had not asked the funeral officiator (the ritual master) to recite these lines for us and explain them, we would have had no way of guessing the correct reading pronunciation, and would not have even been able to make sense of the meaning of this passage.

If you want to obtain a correct reading pronunciation for any Zhuang traditional manuscript, the most reliable method is to ask the traditional owner of the manuscript to recite it for you and explain its meaning. If you cannot find the traditional owner, at least one should find someone who is familiar with the manuscript tradition in that area to recite it for you. If you are able to invite the relevant ritual specialist or a song master from the same locality to recite it for you and explain each line, then both the reading pronunciation and the explanations will be a highly reliable source of information about the manuscript, and can be used with confidence by other researchers.

When conducting fieldwork, the best thing is to take along sound recording equipment, and have local experts recite the text and explain the content line by line. All of this should be recorded, with their permission. This allows you to listen repeatedly to the recitation, and refine your transcription step by step. If you can obtain a copy of the original manuscript in advance, you can go over it carefully and make notes of any peculiarities, important passages, or doubtful lines. Then after you have recorded a recitation and the traditional owner's explanations, you will be in a position to go into more detail and obtain genuine answers to your specific questions.

Generally speaking, the traditional owners of a manuscript will be quite familiar with the way in which the manuscript is to be recited, but there may be quite a few words for which they will be able to say what the meaning is in general terms but not explain why. Or they will know the meaning in Zhuang, but have no way of explaining this in Chinese. They may not even know what the Chinese equivalent of the Zhuang word is.

Here is an example. When we were translating and annotating Lu Shunhong's Brigands' Song manuscript, the one from the Pingguo county town, we encountered a number of plant names, such as *byaekroux* (pjak^{7} rou^{4}), *godaeb* (ko^{1} tap^{8}) and *liu* (liːu^{1}). Looking these up in the 1984 Zhuang-Chinese Lexicon (壮汉词汇), under *byaekroux* we found only the definition 'name of a wild green vegetable', and then a further note "Leaves green on the upper surface, white on the lower surface, with straight stems, crowned with flowers, bitter in taste, and commonly growing in waste land". Just which plant species this was could not be determined on the basis of this information. The situation was similar with *godaeb*, described in the same

source as 'name of a shrub', and described further as "With ovoid leaves, about two fingers broad, with fine white hairs on the leaf surface." As for the *liu*, this was defined as 'name of a reed', and further described as "Grows on mountains, can be cut down and used as material for torches."[31] The definitions of these three plant species basically did not provide an identification, and the notes were of no help either, though they did provide some information on some of the ways in which the plants were used. Other reference works were also like this. The assumption seemed to be that ordinary people could not be expected to take an interest in the scientific identification and scientific names of these plant varieties. So we asked our informants to take photographs of each of these plants. Our local collaborators very quickly sent us photographs, and armed with these, we sought the advice of botanists, and obtained scientific identifications of these three plants.

Fig. 24: (From left) Common Elsholtzia; Large-leaf Flemingia; Mountain Reeds

It turns out that the Chinese name of pjak[7] rou[4] is 泥糊菜 *nihucai*, Common Elsholtzia, and the scientific name is *Elsholtzia ciliata*. The Chinese name of ko[1] tap[8] is 大叶千斤拔 *daye qianjinba*, Large-leaf Flemingia, and the scientific name is *Flemingia macrophylla*. And the Chinese name of li:u[1] is 类芦 *leilu*, Mountain Reeds, and the scientific name is *Neyraudia reynaudiana*.[32] In 2018, when we were revising the

31 *Zhuang-Han cihui* 1984, 79, 338, 471.

32 Holm and Meng 2021, 592–593, 459–460, 537–538 (notes to lines lines 1668, 60, 954). Identification was also cross-checked with entries in provincial flora, such as the *Guangdong zhiwu zhi* 2009, and national-level flora with line drawings. English names were based on the *Xinbian La-Han-Ying zhiwu mingcheng* (1996).

Zhuang-Chinese Lexicon, we added this information about these three plant names under the appropriate headings.[33] One can see from this that in order to conduct scientific or ethnological research at the highest level, one must be prepared to dig deep and enquire further. This identification was only possible on the basis of information from local informants, but pursued several steps further and linked with other bodies of information. Only in this way could the annotated edition of our manuscript attain the highest academic value and be of permanent value to local people.

The same applies to other species mentioned in Zhuang traditional manuscripts. In Luo Hantian's edition of the Brigands' Song, the opening two lines contain the phrases *bya nim* and *bya nat*.[34] The word *bya* in Zhuang means 'karst mountain', but the words *nim* and *nat* refer to plant species that grow on the mountains, which are not identified. The *nim* is also called *gonim*, and is to be identified as 桃金娘 *taojinniang* in Chinese, Rose Myrtle in English, with a scientific name *Rhodomyrtus tomentosa*. And the *nat* is called either 爆芽郎 *baoyalang* or 假豆稔 *jiadouren* in Chinese, Melastoma or wild peony in English, with a scientific name *Melastoma candidum*. Both of these plants are commonly found as ground cover in the forested slopes of west-central Guangxi.[35] If we can provide accurate plant identifications for these and other species, attentive readers will not feel that they are enveloped in a cloud of fog, or trying to scratch an itchy foot through a boot. Plant and animal names are critically important for the study of Zhuang culture and society, since Zhuang people or their forebears have been living in the area for thousands of years and have accumulated a deep practical knowledge of the local biota. This knowledge is relevant for the Brigands' Song as well, since our native troops on campaign would have been operating in the kind of terrain that was familiar to them.

For Zhuang manuscripts, presentation of the results of recording and analysis are best presented in the form of an interlinear text. Here for example are the opening four lines of Lu Shunhong's Brigands' Song manuscript (see above figure 2) (Holm and Meng 2021: 151):[36]

33 See *Zhuang-Han cihui* 2018, 118, 458–459, and 628.

34 Luo Hantian 2009, 1. Luo's Chinese translation simply replicated the characters that were probably in his original manuscript.

35 See Holm and Meng 2021, 457 (note to lines 33–34). On Zhuang botanical nomenclature, see Meng Yuanyao 2006a, and Meng Yuanyao 2021.

36 The *1a* in the right-hand margin indicates the page number in the original manuscript, and the asterisks (*) indicate notes in the Textual and Ethnographic Notes section.

男 **M:**

㽞	同	卦	旁	井	1
z̲au˧˥	təŋ˧˩	kwaː˨˦	paŋ˨˩	sɪŋ˧	*1a*
raeuz	doengz	gvaq	bangx	cingj	*
we	together	pass.by	side	well	

㽞	同	英	旁	他	2
z̲au˧˥	təŋ˧˩	ʔɪŋ˧˨	paŋ˧˩	taː˨˩	*
raeuz	doengz	ing	bangx	dah	
we	together	lean.on	side	river	

甫	罗	甫	不	提	3
pou˧˩	laː˧˨	pou˧˩	puː˧	tei˧˩	*
boux	ra	boux	mbouj	dawz	
CLF.person	look.for	CLF.person	not	obtain	

朱	托	重	托	念	4
ɕei˨˦	to̞˧˩	nak˥	to̞˨˩	ʔliːp˦˥	*
cawq	dox -	naek	dox -	ndiep	
predestined	mutually	think.heavy	mutually	think.of	

The second row in each line, is the transcription into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), based directly on a recitation of the manuscript by the traditional owner. The third row is the transcription into Zhuangwen, the official transcription that provides access to dictionaries and other resources, and the fourth row is word glosses in English, based on the basic meaning of the Zhuang morpheme.[37] A translation into English, or into Chinese, is then produced directly on the basis of the meaning of the Zhuang lyrics, as represented also in the word glosses and other relevant information such as sentence-level interpretations provided by our principal informants:

M: We've passed each other by the side of the well,
We've leant on each other on the bank of the river.
One looks for someone but does not get her,
Destined to treasure and think of each other.

On this basis we also go on to produce textual and ethnographic notes on a wide variety of different points that arise in the interpretation of the text, again in collaboration with the traditional owners of the manuscript. In this way, we are confident that we can produce relatively thorough and reliable information about a

37 Derived meanings (meanings in context) are provided after a comma where necessary. More systematic information about both basic and derived meanings are provided in the Zhuang-English Glossary section.

traditional manuscript. At the very least, we can provide valuable and sometimes irreplaceable information that can be of use to other scholars conducting further studies of the same material.

In sum, the Brigands' Song is a jewel in the crown of Zhuang traditional culture and literature. It is full of information about language, the script, literature, culture, folk customs and history, and deserves to be further explored and analysed by other scholars. For an understanding of late traditional Zhuang society and village life it provides valuable information. Conducting a comparative study of different manuscripts and editions of this song cycle helps us understand the psychology of the Zhuang common people, and gain something of an internal perspective on their folkways and customs. One can also come to understand more about the way in which manuscripts in the Zhuang vernacular script take shape and the ways in which they are still being used and changing in the contemporary environment, and the ways in which they reflect the unique qualities of the Zhuang language.

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Meng Yuanyao

Traditional Paper-making in the Zhuang Villages of Southwest China

Abstract: Traditional paper-making using paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) has a very long history in the south of China, and the use of the plant in the Indo-Pacific region goes back several millenia. The author conducted fieldwork investigations of traditional paper-making methods among Zhuang-speaking villages in the central part of Guangxi as part of a broader project to document Zhuang ethnobotany and the traditional uses of plants in village life. This chapter will give an overview of such practices as they are maintained in present-day villages, and provide details of the technical procedures employed in the process as well as the traditional names for things in the local language.

1 Introduction

Paper is formed of thin sheets, usually made by subjecting plant fibres to a process of rinsing and gluing to a flat surface.[1] There are many uses of paper: for writing, for painting, for wrapping objects in, and for making fans, umbrellas and the like. Once they had paper, people could transmit knowledge widely and easily. Compared with animal skins, bamboo splints and cloth, the advantages of paper as a writing medium are without equal. In brief, the material is beautiful and its price is cheap. One could say that paper is an emblem and medium of the advance of human civilisation. Once they had paper, people could make effective and long-lasting records of all kinds of knowledge, and transmit it down through the ages. Because of the incredible diversity of uses in social life, the making of paper is accounted the first place among the four great discoveries of ancient China, along with compasses, gunpowder, and printing.

The author has been investigating Zhuang village culture and language in the central part of Guangxi for some decades, with ethnobotany as a special focus. In this general area, including the counties of Mashan 马山, Du'an 都安, Dahua 大化

1 Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter on Zhuang paper-making is derived from fieldwork conducted over many years on Zhuang ethnobotany in the Zhuang-speaking areas of Guangxi. All photographs are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

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and Pingguo 平果, village workshops producing traditional paper are reasonably widespread, and all of them utilise what is basically the same set of procedures for paper manufacture. The present report is based an investigation of a workshop in the Gongchuan 贡川 area in present-day Dahua, but we can affirm that the information presented here is part of a wider pattern.

Gongchuan is a small town on the middle reaches of the Hongshui 红水 River, not far downstream from the confluence with the Pingzhi 平治 River. It is well connected by road with other towns in the western part of Mashan county such as Yongzhou 永州, Zhouxu 州圩, and Zhoulu 周鹿 as well as the Mashan county seat at Baishanzhen 白山镇. In the 1980s a periodic market was held there every three days, attended by 5000 people speaking the local dialect of Zhuang and Cantonese.[2] The entire region is limestone karst.

2 The raw material of paper making

As far as a previous generation of scholars were able to ascertain, the character *zhǐ* 紙 for 'paper' makes its first appearance in the *San fu gu shi* 三輔故事, a text that dates from the fourth year of the Taishi 太始 reign period of the Han (93 BCE).[3] However, there is some doubt as to whether the character *zhǐ* 紙 in this work actually refers to paper or to some other material. In ancient times, raw materials for paper-making included old silk floss, old hempen cloth, old worn-out fish-nets and the like. The plant materials included *Cannabis sativa* (*dàmá* 大麻), white jute (*huángmá* 黄麻, *Corchorus capsularis* L.), flax (*yàmá* 亞麻, *Linum usitatissimum*), ramie (*zhùmá* 苧麻, *Boehemeria nivea*), and various vines (*téng* 藤); and the tree barks included paper mulberry, common mulberry (*sāng* 桑) and laurel (*yuèguì* 月桂, *Laurus nobilis*). In chronological order, hemp was the earliest of these raw materials, with use that can be traced back to the Western Han. Use of paper mulberry started in the Eastern Han, vines in the Jin period, and bamboos from the Tang period. The use of rice and wheat straw only dates from the Song period.[4]

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2 Lü Mengxi et al. 1987, 27. Access to markets was important for traditional paper manufacture, even if not all the paper produced locally would have passed through the local market.

3 Tsien 1962, 131–132.

4 Needham and Tsien 1985, 52–61.

3 Paper-making in the Zhuang areas of Guangxi

In some of the more remote Zhuang-speaking areas, people still employ traditional handicraft methods to make paper in small workshops. One kind of 'native paper' made out of kudzu vines (*géténg* 葛藤, *Pueraria montana*) is rather thick and heavy, with a colour which is greyish-white. The Zhuang call the kudzu vine *gaeugat* (kau¹ kaːt⁷), a name in which *gaeu* (kau¹) means 'vine' and *gat* (kaːt⁷) refers to the species name, 'kudzu'.[5] In the past, kudzu vines were also an important raw material for weaving cloth. The bark of their stems is rich in fibre, and after being stripped off and soaked, the fibres can be spun into threads and woven into cloth. Kudzu clothes (葛衣) and kudzu cloth (葛布) are made from this raw material. In remote mountain villages in the Baise 百色 region of western Guangxi, there are still some people who use kudzu vines for paper-making. There is an exhibit of the products of this industry in the museum of the Baise Academy (百色學院).

In the region of Mashan 馬山, Du'an 都安 and Dahua 大化 counties in the central part of Guangxi, the most important raw material for traditional paper-making is the bark of the paper mulberry. Paper mulberry has been a traditional raw material for paper making since the Eastern Han period.[6] Paper made from the bark of the paper mulberry is white in colour. Once there were brushes, ink and paper, cultural knowledge could be propagated widely and without hindrance. In this sense, one could say that the paper mulberry is a tree species that was central to the historical advance of civilisation. In the Zhuang language this tree species is called *gosa* (ko¹ θa¹), where *go* (ko¹) is a noun head referring to vascular plants and *sa* (θa¹) is the species name, meaning 'paper mulberry' or 'paper'. The bark fibre is known as *sa* (θa¹), and the paper produced is known as *ceijsa* (ɕei³ θa¹), hence the Zhuang name of the tree.[7] Because it grows into a tall tree which is also used for timber, it is also called *faexsa* (fai⁴ θa¹), where *faex* (fai⁴) means 'wood, woody plant, tree'.

The paper mulberry, along with other *Broussonetia* species, is found very widely in both karst and non-karst areas in the south of China.[8] The saplings sprout up everywhere: on the village outskirts, in the fields, and along the edges of the forests. After people cut them down, they quickly send forth new branches, which in two years or so can be cut down again. Two-year old stems are regarded as ideal

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5 In this chapter, Zhuang words are given first in *Zhuangwen*, the standard romanisation for Zhuang, followed by IPA (the International Phonetic Alphabet) in parentheses.

6 Needham and Tsien 1985, 56–58.

7 In this compound, the first syllable *ceij* (ɕei³) is the Zhuang rendering of *zhǐ* 紙 as a Han loan-word.

8 For karst areas see Yu Shengxiang et al. 2017, 231. This source lists 28 counties in Guangxi, 20 in Guizhou, and 9 in eastern Yunnan in which this species is found.

Fig. 1: Two year old paper mulberry

for paper making (Fig. 1). Because they are a fast-growing tree and useful, farming households also take care to preserve the old root-stocks, so that they can be guaranteed a supply of fresh stems over the long term.

The paper mulberry is called *chǔshù* 楮樹 or *gòushù* 構樹 in Chinese, and its scientific name is *Broussonetia papyrifera*. It is a deciduous tree, reaching a maximum height of 16 m.[9] The simplex leaves form opposite each other, and the leaves are ovoid or elongated ovoid in shape, and are either lobed or unlobed to form 3–5 deeply partitioned leaf sections, with leaf edges that are saw-toothed. The upper side of the leaves is rough, while the under-sides are covered in soft hairs. The male flowers are soft and catkin-shaped, while the female flowers have spherical heads. The fruits are berry-like, spherical clusters containing many fleshy fruits, which are red in colour when ripe (Fig. 2). The flowering season is in April, and the fruiting season in July.

9 The Latin name of this plant and a botanical classification are given in Zhongguo kexueyuan Zhiwu yanjiusuo 1996, 131. For a morphological description, see Zhong Jixin 1982, 146; and the online *Flora of China* (*Flora Reipublicae Popularis Sinicae*): http://www.cn-flora.ac.cn:28080/plantonline/plantonlinesite/toDetailPage?plantId=9d0a4b9ef8b34c7ca77e1b6fc876ed53 (accessed on 20 December 2022).

Fig. 2: Fruit of the paper mulberry. Photograph by Lan Richun

This species is mentioned in early Chinese sources.[10] The Tang dynasty period *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 records: 構, 穀田久廢必生構。葉有瓣曰楮，無曰構。'The *gòu* tree: when grainfields are abandoned for a long time *gòu* trees will inevitably grow there. If the leaves have petals they are called *chǔ*, and if they do not they are called *gòu*.'[11] And even earlier, Xu Shen's *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 records, 楮，穀也。从木者聲。'*chǔ*, this is the *gǔ* tree. [The character] follows 'wood' and has *zhě* as its sound'.[12] From this it appears that *gǔ*, *gòu* and *chǔ* may be all different names for the same tree. For the 'leaves to have petals' means that the leaf blades are palmate, and divided into sections. The same tree can produce ovoid leaf blades and palmate leaves. Some of the leaves may even grow unevenly, with deep divisions in the leaf on only one side. At any rate, this variability in leaf shape is one of the defining features of the species (Fig. 3).

10 For a classic investigation of this topic and its connection with the earlier bark-cloth culture of the Asia-Pacific, see Ling Shunsheng 1963.

11 Duan Chengshi, repr. 2012, 108.

12 Xu Shen, repr. 1981, 117.

Fig. 3: Paper mulberry, showing variation in leaf shape

Paper mulberry leaves can also be used as fodder for pigs, oxen and sheep, so they are also called *byaeksa* (pjak[7] θa[1]), where *byaek* (pjak[7]) means 'green edible vegetable'. The leaves can also be used as green fertiliser. Young and tender branches are picked off and dropped into the pig pens or cattle byres, and the animals are allowed to chew on them. Anything left over is trodden in by the animals and becomes part of the fertile organic layer at the bottom of the animal pens.

The bark of the paper mulberry is rich in fibre. The fibres extracted from the bark after it is peeled off are called *sa ndip* (θa[1] ʔdɪp[7]), where *ndip* (ʔdɪp[7]) means 'raw, uncooked'. The paper that is produced from them is called *ceijsa* (ɕei[3] θa[1]), where, as previously mentioned, *ceij* (ɕei[3]) is the Zhuang loanword for *zhǐ* 紙 'paper'. The Zhuang name for the tree, *sa* (θa[1]), corresponds to the pronunciation in Zhuang of *chǔ* 楮, the tree name in Chinese. So *ceijsa* (ɕei[3] θa[1]) means 'paper from the paper mulberry tree'. People often go by the sound of the Zhuang words and call this kind of paper *shāzhǐ* 紗紙, where *shā* 紗 represents the Zhuang pronunciation of the character 楮. This character in turn has *zhě* 者 as a phonetic component. The pronunciation in Old Chinese was the same as 賭 and 睹, both reconstructed as OC

*tag.[13] Frequently in Zhuang-Chinese correspondences, Zhuang /θ-/ corresponds to Chinese /t-/ or /t^{h}-/. Thus Chinese 抖 *dǒu* ‘to tremble’ corresponds to Zhuang *sauj* (θau^{3}), the 帶 *dài* in 帶子 *dàizi* ‘belt, sash’ becomes *sai* (θaːi^{1}) in Zhuang, 拕 *tuō* ‘to entrust’ corresponds to *daz* (ta^{2}) and *sa* (θa^{1}) in Zhuang, and 撻 *tà* ‘to flog, whip’ corresponds to *dad* (taːt^{8}) and *sad* (θaːt^{8}) in Zhuang.[14]

Apart from the paper mulberry and hemp, which have long been used as sources of fibre for paper-making, another important plant, used as a raw material for the glue used as adhesive, is Evergreen Lindera (*wūyào* 烏藥). This shrub is commonly found in the rocky mountainous areas of Guangxi.

Fig. 4: Evergreen Lindera. Photograph by Lan Richun

The Zhuang call this plant *gaujveh* (kaːu^{3} we^{6}), and also call it *gaujhaeu* (kaːu^{3} hau^{1}). The word *gau* (kaːu^{3}) is actually 栲 *kǎo*, ‘chinquapin’ (*Castanopsis*). Ordinarily Zhuang people have the habit of classifying some of the plants in the camphor laurel family (*Lauraceae*) as 栲 *kǎo*, a plant of the *Fagaceae* family. The Zhuang word *veh* (we^{6}) means ‘to stir up’, and *haeu* (hau^{1}) means ‘stinky’. Because it is used to make paper, it is also called *gaujceij* (kaːu^{3} ɕei^{3}), where *ceij* (ɕei^{3}) means ‘paper’. Thus the name means ‘chinquapin [that is used to make] paper’. Evergreen Lindera is a plant of the *Lauraceae* family, and its scientific name is *Lindera aggregata*. It goes

13 Dong Tonghe 1997, 155. Zheng-Zhang 2013, 563, lists OC *thaʔ for *chǔ* 楮.

14 For a more detailed discussion, see Meng Yuanyao 2010, 163–164.

by various English common names, such as Combined Spicebush, Chinese Allspice, Evergreen Lindera, and Black Medicine.[15] It is an evergreen shrub, growing to a height of five metres, with bark of a brownish-grey colour. The leaves are leathery or somewhat leathery, alternate, ovoid or elongate to nearly round (Fig. 4). The leaves are usually 2.7–5 cm long and 1.5–4 cm across. The young shoots are bright green. When the leaves along with the tender shoots are dried, they become black in colour. The flowers are formed at the branching points along the stems, and the fruits are ovoid or nearly round. When the stems and leaves are rubbed they give off a pungent and fetid odour, and when pounded they produce a thick sticky mucilaginous paste.[16] It is this paste that is used in paper-making.

4 Method of production for traditional mulberry paper

The paper manufacturing process is known as *daek ceij* (tak⁷ ɕei³) 'scooping up paper', and the craftsman who makes the paper is known as the *cangh daek ceij* (ɕaːŋ⁶ tak⁷ ɕei³), 'craftsman who scoops paper') or *canghceij* (ɕaːŋ⁶ ɕei³), 'paper craftsman'. The Zhuang term *cangh* (ɕaːŋ⁶) is a Han loan from 匠 *jiang* 'craftsman'.

Farming households often harvest the twigs of the paper mulberry just after autumn. Two year old twigs and branches are preferred, since they make the best paper. First, they use the young leaves for pig fodder. After peeling off the bark, they use bamboo knives to scrape off the next outer layer. This process is called *ndan sa* (ʔdaːn¹ θa¹), *ndan* (ʔdaːn¹) meaning 'to scrape away'. The inner layer remaining after removing the outer layer, is called *sa ndip* (θa¹ ʔdɪp⁷), meaning 'raw yarn' (ʔdɪp⁷ meaning 'raw'). After being dried in the sun, this is tied into bunches and sold to paper workshops (Fig. 5).

Paper manufacture is carried out in workshops on a household basis. In the past, the whole process was done by hand, taking a dozen or so steps, as described below:[17]

15 Zhongguo kexueyuan Zhiwu yanjiusuo 1996.

16 Wu Delin 2005, 55–56.

17 The chief informant for the details of this manufacturing process was Mr. Wei Youheng 韦有恒 of Gongchuan. Mr. Wei's family has been manufacturing paper for the past nine generations.

Fig. 5: Raw bundles of fibre with the bark removed

(1) *cimq sa* (ɕɪm^{5} θa^{1}), ‘soaking the yarn’. In the early morning, the raw yarn is taken to the river to soak and soften it in the running water. The softened yarn is collected in the evening of the same day.
(2) *mbek sa* (ʔbe:k^{7}θa^{1}), ‘separating the yarn’. The soft yarn is torn into thin strips and any yarn of indifferent quality, or yarn which is black or damaged, is removed.
(3) *ndong sa* (ʔdo:ŋ^{1} θa^{1}), ‘steeping the yarn’. The wet yarn is put into a small pond, and steeped in quicklime for one or two days.
(4) *gaenx sa* (kan^{4} θa^{1}), ‘washing the yarn’. The yarn is again taken to the river to be washed. The word *gaenx* (kan^{4}) means ‘to mould, rub, and knead’, the activity which is done to ensure that all the quicklime in the yarn is washed out.
(5) *cawj sa* (ɕaɯ^{3} θa^{1}), ‘boiling the yarn’. The clean yarn is put into a pot and boiled, with quicklime or anhydrous sodium carbonate (Fig. 6). This has a bleaching action. The yarn is boiled for 8–9 hours, after which it is called *sa cug* (θa^{1} ɕuk^{8}), ‘cooked yarn’. The yarn is then rinsed again (Fig. 7). Finally, the yarn is bleached again and given a final rinse (Fig. 8).

(6) *biuq hau* (piːu^{5} haːu^{1}), ‘bleaching’. This term is composed of *biuq* (piːu^{5}) ‘to bleach’, a Han loanword from *piao* 漂 ‘to bleach’, and *hau* (haːu^{1}) ‘white’, a Zhuang native word. The cooked yarn is bleached once more. Bleaching powder is put into a pool, and the yarn is soaked there for one or two days, so that it becomes soft, like silk floss.

(7) *dub sa* (tup^{8} θa^{1}), ‘pounding the yarn’. The bleached yarn is taken out, put on a wooden block, and beaten into a pulp, until it resembles a thick paste. It is then scooped up, kneaded into a ball, and placed in a stone pot for later use.

(8) *hoih gyau* (hoi^{6} kjaːu^{1}), ‘making paste’. This term is composed of *hoih* (hoi^{6}) ‘to bring together’ and *gyau* (kjaːu^{1}) ‘paste’, a Han loan-word from *jiao* 胶 ‘paste’. The leaves of the Evergreen Lindera *gaujveh* (kaːu^{3} we^{6}), a plant of the *Lauraceae* family mentioned above, are picked, dried or roasted, ground into fine powder with a pestle and mortar, then put into a bucket or a jar and stirred into a thick paste. The sediment is filtered out, leaving a paste.

Fig. 6: Boiling the raw yarn

Fig. 7: Rinsing the yarn that has been boiled

Fig. 8: The processed yarn after rinsing off the lye solution

Fig. 9: Fibre pulp being stirred in the trough

(9) *hoed sa* (hot⁸ θa¹), ‘stirring the yarn’. A stone trough is used for stirring and mixing the yarn. This is known as an *aen cauz* (ʔan¹ ɕa:u²) ‘trough’, where *cauz* (ɕa:u²) is a Han loan from *cao* 槽 ‘horse trough’. It is shaped like a large semi-circular basin, like a large pipe which has been split into two lengthwise. The trough is 130 cm long, 100 cm wide, and 80 cm deep. The paste made with *gaujveh* (ka:u³ we⁶) is poured into the trough, filling it to above half-full, and about 10 kg of pulp (the yarn after beating) is poured in. They are then mixed together, until the pulp fibres are evenly suspended in the paste (Fig. 9).

(10) *daek ceij* (tak⁷ ɕei³), ‘scooping up the paper’. The paper fibre is scooped up with a bamboo screen mould, known as a *fwz* (fɯ²). This screen was traditionally woven out of thin strips of bamboo with fine silk, but nylon thread is often used nowadays. The screen is about 68 cm long and about 60 cm wide. The bamboo screen itself is fastened to a wooden frame, made by nailing small wooden boards (2 cm thick and 4 cm wide) to a rectangular frame. It should be large enough to accommodate the bamboo screen. The frame is put into the paste and moved slightly from side to side, so that the suspended pulp fibre adheres evenly onto the bamboo screen, forming a thin layer of paper fibre (Fig. 10). The wooden frame is then taken out (Fig. 11), and the two ends on the bamboo screen are trimmed off with a bamboo knife (Fig. 12). The screen is taken out of

the frame, and hung upside down on a small bamboo mat (*reu*, reu[1]) woven of bamboo strips. The bamboo screen is then removed from the paper (Fig. 13). This produces a sheet of wet paper, each scoop giving one sheet. The pieces of wet paper are piled up in the order in which they are scooped up. The whole process is repeated until there is a pile of 120 pieces, called a *dab* (ta:p[8]).

Fig. 10: Scooping up the fibre pulp onto the bamboo screen

(11) *anq ceij* (ʔa:n[5] ɕei[3]) 'drying the paper'. The word *anq* (ʔa:n[5]) (Ch. *an* 按) means 'to apply pressure from above', such as in the phrase *anq douhfouh* (ʔa:n[5] tou[6] fou[6]), meaning to put bean curd paste into a frame to squeeze the water out. A flat wide rectangular stone slab is positioned by the side of the stone trough. On the slab are carved fine horizontal and vertical lines forming a series of squares. Surrounding this is a deep trough, with an opening for discharging water. This stone slab is called a *gek* (ke:k[7]), ke:k[7] (Ch. *ge* 格) meaning 'checker [pattern]', due to the square pattern on its surface. When the paper was first scooped out, the small bamboo mat (reu[1]) is put on the slab (described in the step above). The sheets of wet paper are piled up, piece by piece, on to the bamboo mat, until there is a pile of 120 pieces. A wooden board is placed on top of this pile. Long

Fig. 11: Taking the bamboo screen out of the water

Fig. 12: Trimming the edges of the wet paper

Fig. 13: Pulling the bamboo screen off the wet paper sheet

Fig. 14: Peeling off the half-dried paper sheets

wooden sticks are then threaded through the holes on the sides of the boards, and placed horizontally on the wet paper. Stones are hung at one end of the wooden sticks, to remove the water by increasing the pressure on the pile of wet paper. The weight must be increased gradually. If it is increased to the maximum level immediately, the sheets of paper may get stuck together and become inseparable. Pressure is usually applied in the evening, and the paper will be ready by the following morning.

(12) *sat ceij* (θaːt⁷ ɕei³), 'pasting the paper'. After a whole night of pressure, the sheets of wet paper are semi-dry. They are removed piece by piece (Fig. 14), and pasted up on the walls and doors of the workshop in rows. After drying naturally in the air, the paper is ready for use. The pasting is known as *sat* (θaːt⁷), with a palm-fibre brush being used to paste the sheets evenly to the walls (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15: Pasting the paper sheets on the wall for drying

Larger workshops and factories usually have a drying oven as well, called a *daek cwz* (tak⁸ ɕɯ²), which literally means 'bull ox'. Firewood is burnt in the stove, and the sheets of paper are pasted on the outer walls of the oven, to accelerate the drying process.

Taking the dried paper off the walls is called *sou ceij* (θou¹ ɕei³), 'taking in the paper'. A small pile of paper, called a *naeb* (nap⁸), consists of 40 sheets, and *cib naeb*

guh bog (ɕɪp^{8} nap^{8} ku^{6} poːk^{8}), “ten small piles make a *bog* (poːk^{8})”, a unit consisting of 400 sheets of paper. Paper is sold by the poːk^{8} (Fig. 16). A ton of raw yarn will make 130–140 poːk^{8} of paper, that is, 1 kg of raw yarn will produce approximately 0.4 kg of finished product.

Fig. 16: The completed bundles *bog* (poːk^{8}) of paper

My investigations have indicated that traditional paper workshops in this part of central Guangxi utilise what is basically the same technology and set of procedures for paper manufacture. In some places, the process is also marked by social division of labour and coordination between workshops. Some village families specialise in boiling the yarn and producing the paper mash, and then sell the half-dried paper mash on to households who specialise in straining the fibres onto the bamboo moulds. Households with more ample resources or those better positioned geographically still handle the entire production process themselves in the traditional fashion. The only difference is that households must now produce paper sheets of the size specified by the buyer. Households with capital and with members well-connected socially specialise in buying raw fibres and selling on the finished product. The technology of traditional paper production in the Gongchuan area has recently been given recognition by the Hechi 河池 regional municipality as an intangible cultural heritage item. The expectation is that this village industry will remain

viable for some time to come, given that the market for this traditional paper is vibrant and serves many purposes.

5 Main uses of mulberry paper

Paper made of paper mulberry is strong, pliable and soft. Its ink absorbing qualities are good, and it is highly suitable for writing with a writing brush. If used for copying important documents, it can be preserved for two or three hundred years without difficulty. Although modern printing presses can batch-print all kinds of books and charts, hand-produced calligraphy and painting still rely on the artistic attractiveness of hand-made paper. In particular, because traditional Zhuang song-books written in the vernacular character script contain many characters that cannot be printed mechanically, song masters prefer to use mulberry paper, make it into little thread-bound booklets, and use it to write their song lyrics on. For brush-written calligraphy practice as well, mulberry paper is still the material of first choice: it is beautiful in appearance and its price is cheap. By comparison, *xuan* 宣 paper also gives good results for both calligraphy and painting, but its price is prohibitively high. So as a medium for practicing writing or copying ordinary documents, people will normally prefer mulberry paper.

In the Zhuang areas, people often use mulberry paper for pasting on windows. In the past, there was no glass for windows, and when winter was approaching people would glue sheets of mulberry paper to the window frames. This let in the light, and could ward off the cold winds that blew in from the north.

Because mulberry paper has a certain elasticity, people also frequently use it to wrap things in. For instance, they use it to wrap small-kernel vegetable seeds, herbal medicines in powdered form, and to make fuses for fireworks by wrapping it around a thin trail of gunpowder. And so on. Folded fans and umbrellas are also made of this material, but covered with a layer of tung oil after the objects are made in order to make them water-proof and durable. When cleaning equipment, mulberry paper is often used to wipe the grease and grime off tools and machinery.

The paper is also used in all kinds of rituals, especially for funerals. Mulberry paper is used for the spirit money that is burnt as offerings, for the set of paper clothes that is prepared for the deceased to use in the afterlife, and for a wide range of other funereal items, such as paper horses, paper houses, paper stoves, and paper treasure repositories.

In the past, the market for mulberry paper was quite extensive. Paper making became one of the mainstay sidelines in the traditional economy of the Zhuang-speaking highlands. At present, this industry has entered a downhill trajectory. Even

though some people still engage in the traditional trade, the market for traditional paper has atrophied, and it is now difficult to produce paper on any considerable scale. Still, as a kind of folk handicraft, it will continue to survive and people will continue to make handmade paper, as long as there are still some people who will use it. At least this craft is not one that is difficult, or requires a very high degree of skill; the equipment needed is fairly simple, and the initial outlay is not prohibitively expensive, so as long as one has a basic knowledge of the techniques involved, even single families can engage in it. For these reasons, traditional paper-making is likely to continue as a cottage industry for the foreseeable future. By investigating these workshops, one can still see the techniques involved in paper production and admire the skill and care that goes into it.

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David Holm

Modes of Transmission in Tày, Nùng and Zhuang Manuscript Cultures

Abstract: In this chapter I first give a preliminary overview of the fieldwork project I have conducted over the past few years in the northern provinces of Vietnam and in contiguous areas on the Chinese side of the border. The methodology for this survey was developed during an earlier survey of traditional character scripts among Tai-speaking groups in Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, and northern Vietnam. I go on to outline several quite different modes of inter-generational transmission of reading knowledge found in this region, on both sides of the border. With vernacular priests called *mogong*, who recite texts in the local language for Tai-style rituals, learning to recite the texts takes place separately from learning to read and write, resulting in practices that have been called performative literacy. With Daoist priests of both the Meishan and Maoshan schools, there is a much closer connection between text and recitation. For shamanic practitioners in northern Vietnam, including both men and women, there is a highly organised form of master-disciple transmission that involves instruction from both 'mother' and 'father' teachers, and results in a much higher level of skill in reading vernacular manuscripts. Finally, with song texts that circulate widely among the people, learning to read and learning to sing take place largely through home instruction and apprenticeship to individual song masters. I discuss the implications of these findings for fieldwork methodology and future work on manuscript cultures.

1 Introduction

With the help of Zhuang, Vietnamese, and Tày scholars, the writer has conducted a fieldwork-based survey over the past few years covering the northern provinces of Vietnam and contiguous areas on the Chinese side of the border. This project concentrates on Tai-speaking groups such as the Zhuang, Tày and Nùng that use Chinese character-based writing systems to write documents in their vernacular languages. It builds on the findings of an earlier survey of the Zhuang, Bouyei, and

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other groups based on 45 traditional texts in 45 locations in Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, and northern Vietnam.[1]

In this chapter the main focus is going to be on modes of cultural transmission of literacy practices in these societies, based on investigations in the field and close analysis of actual recitations of traditional manuscripts. This experience has indicated the importance of viewing such practices holistically and at a level of linguistic and ethnographic detail much finer than the usual practices in the contemporary social sciences. This is based in turn on a mode of thinking about the scholarly vocation in general and what I take to be its chief aim, the production of coherent bodies of knowledge for the benefit of future research and future generations – all subject, of course, to rebuttal, disproof, or confirmation. At the present juncture, it has become increasingly clear that traditional societies everywhere are under threat of dismemberment and dispossession by the forces of globalisation and modernisation. It is not just languages which are endangered, but also entire cultures and societies, leading to displacement of increasing numbers of marginalised peoples. Under such circumstances, and wherever possible, scholarly work should document not just manuscripts or languages, but undertake more wide-ranging investigations that record as fully as possible all relevant aspects of the human communities being studied, including indigenous systems of knowledge, material culture, kinship and the dynamics of social interactions, and the ways in which traditional knowledge is handed down from one generation to the next. The main focus is on facts on the ground, and cultural practices in operation.

Fieldwork based on this kind of motivation is not exactly a new phenomenon, and in anthropology has sometimes been referred to as 'salvage anthropology'. Where it parts company methodologically with the other social sciences, as conventionally taught to undergraduates, is in the commitment to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and undertake holistic investigations that take into account – or are open to – evidence from all possibly relevant quarters. Such an approach builds on the findings of other disciplines but is not confined to either their methods or subject matter – or, for that matter, 'current debates'. In investigating previously undocumented societies, with their as-yet unfathomed patterns of social dynamics and under-documented languages, it would clearly be foolish to rule out any source of information as irrelevant *a priori*.

Being mindful of the objective of producing grounded information as a basis for future research and future generations also entails documenting social processes at a finer level of detail than is customary in the social sciences, and at a level that can be described as 'operational'. In the analysis of the way in which manuscripts are

1 For which see Holm 2013.

recited or sung in their original social context, it involves producing transcriptions of audio recordings that are more information-rich than the phonemicised transcriptions conventionally produced by scholars in linguistics.[2] In the analysis of handwriting in manuscripts, it involves paying attention to the details of the writing process as well as the graphic traces of such processes, including stroke order, degree of cursivity, and so on, as well as providing an overview of the full range of graphic variation in relation to the Chinese graphic mainstream. In the analysis of plant and animal names, it means collecting sufficient information for making generic or specific identifications *in situ* in collaboration with knowledgeable members of the local community, and collecting ample information about the way these things are used or thought about in local society. In all these cases, high-grade local information can then later be matched up with available bodies of scientific data – with calligraphic dictionaries and grammatological compendia, with dialect survey data, with zoological and botanical survey data, and so on. In principle, the basic idea is to avoid any jumping to conclusions, any premature aggregation of data, and to allow the full complexity of the field data to 'participate' in the development of hypotheses and explanation-building. It also means bringing local knowledge into dialogue with scientific data.

In one of my recent articles,[3] such attention to ongoing social processes, as well as the material artefacts generated by such processes (viz. manuscripts), led to a kind of two-stage presentation, the first an objectivised overview of textual phenomena based on field data and objective analysis, and the second a step back into an 'emic' view of the ongoing social event (such as a ritual recitation) from the point of view of the various participants on the scene as the ritual unfolded. The second step, of course, cannot be based just on the investigator's subjectivity, however informed by scholarly constructs such as 'participant observation', but needs to be based on fieldwork-derived information collected locally from participants.

Here it might be not out of place to mention briefly some of the works that have informed my theoretical understanding. An early source of inspiration was the Foxfire project, which documented many aspects of the traditional material culture of the Scotch-Irish inhabitants of rural Appalachia in the eastern United States.[4] Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice helps one move away from a focus on

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2 Here we find parallels in recent trends in 'variationist linguistics', inspired by the work of William Labov among others.

3 Holm 2017a.

4 Launched in the very late 1960's, this was a project that sought to document how people actually made things, and it involved groups of local high-school students in field investigations and interviews with knowledgeable older people. The project resulted in a series of published volumes of essays on various topics, entitled *Foxfire*, *Foxfire 2*, and so on. See Wiggington 1972.

adherence to social rules, as in earlier anthropological theory, to a focus on strategising in ongoing social life.[5] In the study of writing systems, the work of Roy Harris has been an important influence, as has the work of Florian Coulmas. Jacques Derrida's trenchant criticism of Ferdinand de Saussure is also worth taking on board.[6] In phonetics and phonology I have drawn particular inspiration from the work of Robert F. Port, a phonetician who has demonstrated the relevance of finely detailed distinctions in the articulation and reception of speech sounds in ordinary social life, and the importance of cadence in natural speech.[7] A common thread in many of these works, though one variously recognised in the writings themselves, is the concept of a non-deterministic universe, full of what Ilya Prigogine refers to as 'self-organising systems'.[8]

2 The Tày and Nùng

The Tày and Nùng are Tai-speaking peoples who inhabit the mountain and hill areas in northern Vietnam to the north of the Red River plain. The main concentrations of the Tày and Nùng populations are found in six northeastern provinces: Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Bắc Kạn, Thái Nguyên, Hà Giang, and Tuyên Quang. In many districts, they comprise the great majority of the local population, with the less numerous ethnic Vietnamese population being concentrated in the towns. Unlike the better-known Tai groups of the far northwest of Vietnam,[9] with their Indic-derived writing systems, the Tày and Nùng have a sinified culture and employ a modified version of the Chinese character script to write their own languages. In this and in other respects, they are similar to the Tai-speaking peoples to the north of the Chinese border: the Zhuang, the Nong, the Sha, the Bouyei, and other groups.

The Tày have a very long history of settlement in the area, going back several thousand years, and may be considered for all intents and purposes indigenous.[10] The Nùng, by contrast, are relatively recent arrivals, having migrated into the area

5 Bourdieu 1977.
6 Derrida 1976, 29–73.
7 Port 2009. That is, in speech articulation and reception, information is carried at a much finer level than phonemes.
8 Prigogine 1997. See also the various essays in Agazzi and Montecucco (eds) 2002.
9 These groups are sometimes called the 'tribal Tai', in contradistinction to the Thai and Lao: these groups are the Black Tai, the Red Tai, and the White Tai. Unlike the Thai and Lao, these groups are not adherents of Theravada Buddhism.
10 For a brief overview of the Tày, see Holm 2019, 3–4.

from various home districts in China mostly during the last 500 years or so. The Tày speak a Central Tai language that is quite distinct from most Central Tai dialects spoken north of the border, in the southern part of Guangxi and eastern Yunnan. The Nùng are speakers of various Central Tai dialects closely related to those spoken in the southern part of Guangxi, and sub-groups are typically referred to by their place of origin. Thus the Nùng Cháo come from the area of Longzhou 龍州 in the far southwestern corner of Guangxi, and the Nùng Fanh Sling come from Wancheng 萬承 in present-day Tiandeng 天等 county, a different dialect area.[11] Altogether there are around eight distinct Nùng sub-groups in the north of Vietnam.[12]

All of these groups are literate, in the sense that they have traditional writing systems and substantial cultural content that has been transmitted from generation to generation through the written medium. This does not mean that everyone in these societies could read. The ability to read and write was more circumscribed than it has since become in the modern period. Girls, for a start, were generally not taught to read and write in traditional society. Literacy and associated skills and cultural knowledge were taught in traditional Confucian schools, which have a very long history in Vietnam as well as in China,[13] and these skills were also passed down in families through the medium of 'family teaching'. The effect overall was to make literacy or at least literate culture broadly accessible to males in Tày and Nùng society, certainly at least in the relatively prosperous villages in the rice-growing valleys, in administrative centres, and along major transport routes. Most villages seem to have had at least one or two male elders who were known locally to be the keepers of local knowledge and local traditions. Some of these men may also have been ritual specialists – Mo, Pụt, Then, or Daoist priests.[14] Such patterns are also found north of the border in the Zhuang-speaking areas of Guangxi and contiguous provinces, except there the ritual specialists were *mogong* 麼公, ritual masters (*shigong* 師公), Buddhist priests (*fogong* 佛公), and Daoist priests (*daogong* 道公).[15]

Transmission of this vernacular culture was exclusively via manuscript – that is, hand-written texts. To my knowledge there were no vernacular Tày or Nùng materials or documents in printed form. On the other hand, as in China, this vernacular

11 In Guangxi these Central Tai dialects are referred to as Southern Zhuang dialects, and the peoples classified as Zhuang. The official designations are different again in Yunnan.

12 See Holm 2010, 16–18. The Fanh Sling designation comes from the pronunciation of Wancheng in the local language. Nùng Fanh Sling groups migrated far and wide, and are even found in the southern part of Vietnam, where their languages were documented during the 1960s by Janice E. Saul, Nancy Freiberger Wilson, and other scholars working for the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

13 See Nguyễn 2020.

14 For details see further below.

15 See Holm 2003, 20–23.

literacy was dependent on teaching of the Chinese script in the schools, with a primary school curriculum based on the traditional Confucian textbooks and the Four Books, and some of these school texts almost certainly circulated in the form of traditional woodblock printed editions. Writing with a writing brush was also widely taught, and even now, over a century after the arrival of the French colonial administration and the discontinuation of traditional teaching through the medium of Chinese characters, one finds village men from literate Tày and Nùng families in the northern provinces of Vietnam who will proudly insist on writing characters in the traditional fashion with brush and ink, rather than with ball-point pens or other more convenient modern writing tools.[16]

By the late traditional period – over the last few centuries – this literate culture among the Tày and Nùng had blossomed into a rich tradition that incorporated ritual texts for a wide range of communal and household rituals, vernacular-language versions of the Confucian primers and classics taught in school, dictionaries of the vernacular Tày script, song texts for a wide range of seasonal festivals and ceremonial occasions, including wedding songs and wooing songs, moral homilies for the instruction of young people, and fictional narratives in verse form. Some of these works of fiction were based on Chinese or Vietnamese themes and subject matter, but others were *sui generis*. A survey conducted by provincial cultural departments starting in the mid-1970s revealed that there were nearly 60 fictional titles in circulation in the northern provinces of northern Vietnam.[17] Some of this rich heritage of traditional manuscripts is now being made available in a series published by the Hán Nôm Institute, which includes photo-reproductions of manuscript texts, transcriptions into romanised Tày, Vietnamese translations, and annotations.[18]

To this wide range of manuscript genres we should add family registers, usually in Chinese, medical texts, calendrical handbooks and almanacs, and Daoist ritual texts in both Chinese and vernacular-language versions. Daoists in the northern part of Vietnam are mostly of the kind called *daogong* 道公 in the south of China, and have an extensive ritual repertoire for both funerals and for other household rituals. Even as far south as Chợ Đồn in the southwestern corner of Bắc Kạn province, well to the south of the border with China, they recite their Chinese-language texts in a form of Southwestern Mandarin.[19] Often though they also have

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16 Holm, fieldwork, Quảng Uyên district, Cao Bằng province, August 2015.

17 Details of titles and the areas (districts) within which these works circulate are provided in Hoàng Triều Ân 2003, 621–622.

18 There are some 19 volumes thus far. The series title is *Tổng tập truyện thơ nôm các dân tộc thiểu số Việt Nam* [Collection of verse stories in the vernacular scripts of the minority peoples of Vietnam].

19 Holm, fieldwork, Chợ Đồn district, Bắc Kạn province, August 2015.

Tày or Nùng-language versions of ritual texts, especially it seems for funeral texts. Recent fieldwork has indicated that these local-language Daoists (*tudao* 土道), as they are called in western Guangxi, are found widely also in the northern provinces of Vietnam.[20]

In format all these manuscripts, both in Chinese and the local language, are of the Chinese type, thread-bound volumes with sheets of paper folded on the outer edge and characters in vertical columns, reading from the right-hand side of each page. At first sight such manuscripts look Chinese. In content, however, they are often very different.

3 What lies behind the written text: Manuscripts in their social and cultural context

But here we must take a step back. What we have discovered, through some years of fieldwork-based engagement with the cultures and manuscripts of Tai-speaking peoples in the southwestern provinces of China and across the border in Vietnam, is that there is a great deal of variety in the literate cultures – or cultures of literacy – across this broad region. Working first in western Guangxi with the texts and recitations of the *mogong* (Zhuang *bouxmo*), vernacular priests with strong ties to the traditional indigenous religious practices of the Tai peoples, I was disconcerted to discover that the 'text' as recited was often different from the text as written in the manuscript. In these texts and recitations also, analysis revealed that there were many historical layers of readings of Chinese characters, with many readings corresponding to Middle Chinese.

The second kind of text I worked with were the Zhuang or Bouyei-language texts of Ritual Masters (*shigong* 師公), vernacular Daoists of the Meishan 梅山 school, and similar vernacular texts belonging to 'local Daoists' of the so-called Maoshan 茅山 school. These texts were evidently of much more recent origin (Ming or Qing dynasty), and were written in a fairly uniform, mature vernacular script, usually with only one or two ways of writing each morpheme. This meant in turn that the recitation and the written text were in fairly close alignment, since the texts had been produced expressly for recitation in the context of Taoist rituals. Even here, however, there were variations in readings based on synonym substitution

20 Holm, fieldwork, Quảng Uyên district in Cao Bằng province and Chợ Đồn district in Bắc Kạn, August, 2015; Cao Lộc, Lộc Bình, and Vân Quan districts, Lạng Sơn province, August 2017.

and similar mechanisms, and processes of abbreviation or augmentation in actual ritual performance.

The third type were the manuscripts of the priests called *Then* in northern Vietnam, where there was a highly organised and systematic transmission of the ways in which manuscripts were recited to both male and female acolytes. The *Then*, shamanic practitioners who drew their inspiration from early strains of Buddhism and brahmanism in the Red River Valley, perform rituals that are structured as journeys up into the sky, out into the wilderness, or down to the bottom of the sea.[21] Their manuscripts are written in a mature and relatively unified script that contains many vernacular Vietnamese graphic elements, but also a layer that corresponds in readings to Early Middle Chinese.[22]

Finally, the fourth type is song texts, chapbooks used as a crib for antiphonal singing contests in traditional 'song markets'. Here, the graphic representation of the lyrics may be quite abbreviated. Evidently this is not disfunctional, as long as the owner of the chapbook knows how the lines are meant to be sung. The examples we have studied most closely have scripts that are very mixed typologically, with reading pronunciations based on a mixture of local Pinghua 平話 dialect, Southwestern Mandarin, and schoolhouse pronunciation, and with a strong preference for characters with very few brush strokes that are easy to write and easy to recognise.[23] However, even the singing partners of the men who own such chapbooks often find it difficult to read them.[24] Playscripts operate in a manner rather similar to song-books, in that the texts and the script are designed as an aid to performance, and actual recitation is subject to variation, depending on the performance context, the memory of the actors, and on-the-spot creativity.

Behind each of these manuscript types lies a different pattern of cultural transmission – that is, the conventional means by which knowledge about how to write, and how to read the manuscript, and how to make use of it in practice, is conveyed from one generation to the next. Of course, the manuscripts themselves may be treated with varying degrees of care, respect, and veneration outside the context of actual performance, but their *raison-d'etre* is their use or 'participation' in ritual,

21 Holm, 2018b and 2019, 4–19.

22 He Dawei 2023.

23 Holm and Meng, 2021. Pinghua dialects are Chinese dialects spoken by descendants of the oldest stratum of Han Chinese migrants to the Guangxi area. For a description of Pinghua, Southwestern Mandarin and schoolhouse pronunciation see Holm 2013, 38–45. On schoolhouse pronunciation see Ban Chao 1999.

24 A point also made by Meng Yuanyao in his chapter on the Brigands Song, in this volume.

ceremonial, or non-sacred performance in the ongoing social life of the community.[25] In what follows, we will explore the underlying patterns of cultural transmission for each of these types of manuscript culture in turn.

4 Performative literacy

We will first look at a pattern called performative literacy, found pre-eminently among the Tai-style male ritualists called *mogong* in Chinese.[26] *Mogong* are found among Zhuang-speaking communities in western Guangxi and eastern Yunnan, but also among the Bouyei in Guizhou and various Tai-speaking groups in northern Vietnam.[27] *Mogong* texts are ritual texts recited for the household, lineage, or village community. The act of reciting these scriptures is the central part of such rituals and indispensable for their ritual efficacy. Typically, in *mogong* ritual performance, dances and magical transformations of ritual objects play a much lesser role than they do in Daoist ritual. In northern Vietnam as well as in Guangxi, Guizhou and Yunnan, the ritual texts are cast in the form of five-syllable lines of verse, written in a form of vernacular Chinese script but recited in the local Tai dialect (see Fig. 1). Reciting the manuscript during a ritual may involve turning the pages at more or less the right time, and other performative gestures, but does not necessarily entail actual reading – focussing, that is, on each line of verse in turn (see Fig. 2). How such texts are recited is something that is memorised by the young apprentices of the older generation of master priests, often during childhood while accompanying older family members to local ritual events. Such apprentices from a young age would listen carefully to their master's recitations and follow along, adding their voices to his. By the time they were ordained, they would have developed a high degree of familiarity with a range of liturgical texts, and be able to recite them from memory. The transmission of knowledge of how to recite such texts, in other words, is oral. On the other hand, the written content of the manuscripts is preserved quite carefully from generation to generation: each generation of apprentice priests is required to copy out carefully by hand all the ritual texts that his master provides

25 It is worth noting in passing that when a man dies in the Lingnan area (Guangxi and Guangdong), all his manuscripts are usually burnt along with items of clothing and bedding, in order to get rid of the miasma of death pollution.

26 This section draws on the author's previous discussions of this issue, as in Holm 2013, 61–62; and 2017a, 380–381.

27 See Holm 2017b, 173–189. On the *mogong* among Thai domains in northwestern Vietnam, see Holm 2017b, 183–184.

to him. The master's own copies of the manuscripts are normally burned along with the master's other personal belongings at the time of his death. The textual tradition, in other words, is highly conservative.

The overall effect of this cultural pattern is that the recitation of texts and the transmission (copying) of texts are de-coupled. Knowledge of how the texts are recited is absorbed through the process of apprentices listening to recitations and replicating them in their own oral performance, while knowledge of the script in which the scriptures are written is effected by transcription (making manuscript copies). These two modes for the transmission of cultural knowledge not only differ in quality, but are separated in time. Oral recitation begins quite early in the process of a young person's participation in rituals – some acolytes learn to sing along when they are well under ten years of age, usually accompanying an older relative – whereas transcription of texts takes place at a later age, when an apprentice undergoes ordination.

Thus the act of recitation in a ritual context, while it may involve turning the pages at more or less the right time, does not actually involve focussing on the pages of the manuscript, much less reading each character one by one. Reciting the text, in other words, is a performative act. This is a very common situation among ritual practitioners in Southwest China.[28] We have found in the course of conducting fieldwork interviews that priests will not necessarily be able to say what the pronunciation of an individual character is, taken at random, or even be able to recite lines of verse from the middle of a ritual segment; they will need to go back to the beginning of the section and start from there.

One consequence of this cultural pattern is: because learning how to recite the texts takes place orally, and separately from copying the manuscripts, any mismatch between the recitation and the wording of the text can go unnoticed. Over the generations, various discrepancies develop. These discrepancies happen naturally and gradually, through processes such as synonym substitution, and are not normally noticed by the priests themselves. It is possible for scholars, of course, through careful comparison of the recorded recitation and the written text, to point out where such changes have occurred, and even in many cases to show how they might have arisen. What is not possible, however, is to predict how the written texts might be recited, in the absence of field data (a recording of the recitation) and

28 This has parallels in the 'recitation literacy' of Central America. See Houston 1994, 27–49.

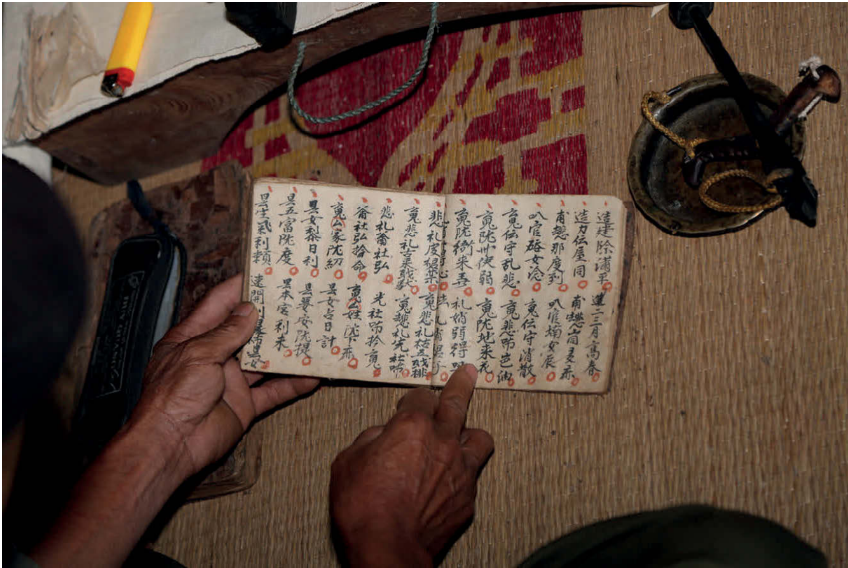

Fig. 1: *Mogong* manuscript, Phi Hải, Quảng Uyên district, Cao Bằng province, Vietnam; photograph by D. Holm, August 2015.

Fig. 2: Ritual recitation by *Mogong*, Phi Hải, Quảng Uyên district, Cao Bằng province, Vietnam; photograph by D. Holm, August 2015.

given only the manuscript. In many cases, it will not even be possible to say what the text means.[29]

5 Daoist vernacular ritual texts

Unlike the *mogong*, Meishan 梅山 and Maoshan 茅山 Daoists are ordained male priests who conduct the core business of their rituals in Chinese. For both groups, the primary liturgical texts are written in Chinese, and recited in Chinese. The dialect used for recitation varies from place to place and from one Daoist lineage to another, but one common pattern in the central and western parts of Guangxi is for Meishan Daoists to recite their texts in the local Chinese dialect, in Pinghua, or in a closely related 'schoolhouse pronunciation'. Daoists of the self-styled Maoshan lineage, however, tend to recite their texts in Southwestern Mandarin, both in Guangxi and in northern Vietnam.[30]

In addition to texts in Chinese, Meishan ritual masters usually also have quite a number of texts written in the Zhuang vernacular script, and recited in Zhuang. There is a great variety of such texts, including liturgical texts which call down deities and spirits into the ritual arena, narrative texts in verse encompassing a wide range of traditional stories and myths, moral homilies, and ritual theatrical pieces. While many of these pieces are intended for the entertainment of the deities and ancestors, who are deemed to be present during the ritual proceedings, as well as for the human audience, they are considered to be of a semi-sacred nature, but still, depending on the circumstances of ritual performance, they are subject to elaboration, augmentation, and truncation. Generally, the vernacular script in which they are written is more recent than that of the *mogong* texts, dating probably in large part from the eighteenth century, and is much less internally complex and many-layered.

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29 Even for standard Chinese characters, readings are not confined to phonetic and semantic borrowing. There are as many as twelve different ways of reading such characters in a vernacular text. See Holm 2009, 245–292. The typology presented in that article was based on the analysis of recitations of traditional texts, as recorded in the field. It would not have been possible to develop such a typology, or even imagine some of the variations that are found in actual practice, on the basis of library research.

30 Holm, fieldwork, Cao Bằng, February and August, 2015, and Lạng Sơn, August 2017. On the diagnostic features for readings in Southwestern Mandarin see Holm 2013, 42–44.

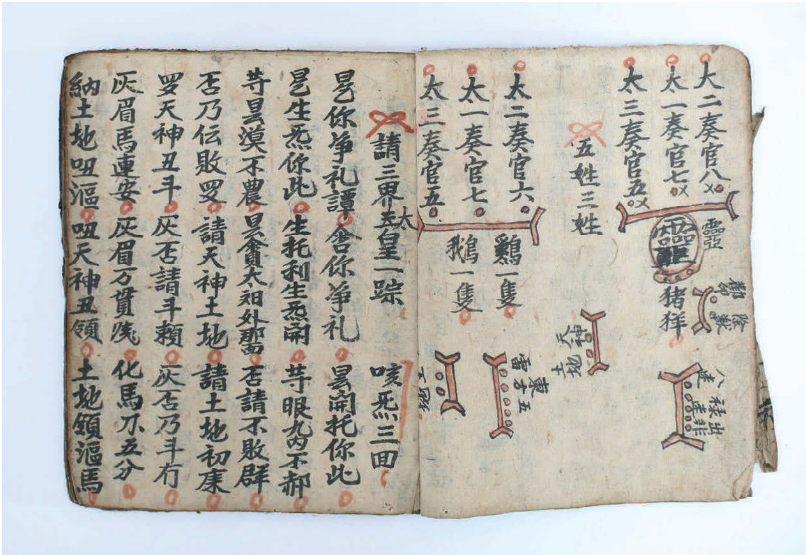

Fig. 3: Daoist vernacular manuscript, Long Tay, Hà Nam province, Vietnam; photograph by D. Holm August 2015.

In some localities the Maoshan Daoists, who perform mainly at funerals, also have some manuscripts written in the vernacular script, and recited in the local language, ordinarily some dialect of Zhuang, Tày, or Nùng (see Fig. 3). The main function of these texts is to serve as a vernacular-language adjunct to the main ritual business, which is conducted in Chinese. This is done partly to provide families and local people with a local-language commentary – thus the content to some extent runs parallel to that of the Chinese ritual texts – and sometimes to provide light relief during the funeral process. One example of the latter type is a comic skit making fun of the *papier-maché* horse provided by the son-in-law of the deceased.[31]

Nowadays, in northern Vietnam, recitation of vernacular Daoist character texts by Tày and Nùng priests is sometimes facilitated by a transcription into the Tày or Nùng equivalent of *Quốc Ngữ*, the romanised Vietnamese script (see Fig. 4). Among the current generation of ritual practitioners, Chinese character reading and writing skills are becoming more of a rarity, and many priests find it easier to perform rituals if they write out a romanised transcription of the text for their own use. The

31 Holm 2001a.

romanised transcription is one that they can read much more easily, particularly in the stressful environment of an ongoing ritual recitation.

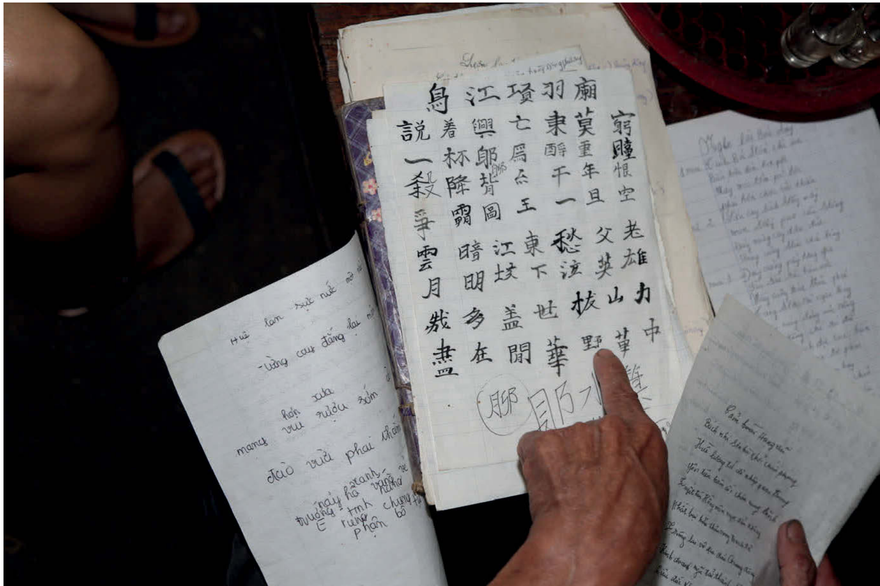

Fig. 4: Nùng An Daoist with character text and romanised transcription, Phúc Sen, Quảng Uyên district, Cao Bằng; photograph by D. Holm, August 2015.

6 Instruction from father and mother teachers among the *Then*

Among the Tày in Vietnam and in the far southwestern part of Guangxi, there are many different kinds of religious practitioners. The kinds of priesthood that are transmitted by masters who are ordained include the *Pụt* and the *Then*, as well as the *Mo* and *Tạo*. The *Pụt*, *Then*, and the *Mo* in most areas concentrate on rituals for the benefit of the living, and recite texts in the Tày language.[32] Both the *Pụt* and the

32 Of these, the *Mo* correspond to the *mogong* of Guangxi and Guizhou, while the *Tạo* are equivalent to the *daogong*. The word *Then* in Tày is pronounced much the same as English 'ten'.

Then perform rituals which involve shamanic journeys into the sky.[33] Female *Pụt* have a repertoire that is orally transmitted, but male *Pụt* and both male and female *Then* have a text-based ritual repertoire, in which ritual efficacy depends on the correct recitation of texts. The *Then* have an extensive repertoire, and most manuscripts used during ritual performance are recent copies, in large format but thread-bound and a Chinese-style textual layout (see Fig. 5). Individual *Then*, however, may also possess older manuscripts handed down within their families (see Fig. 6).

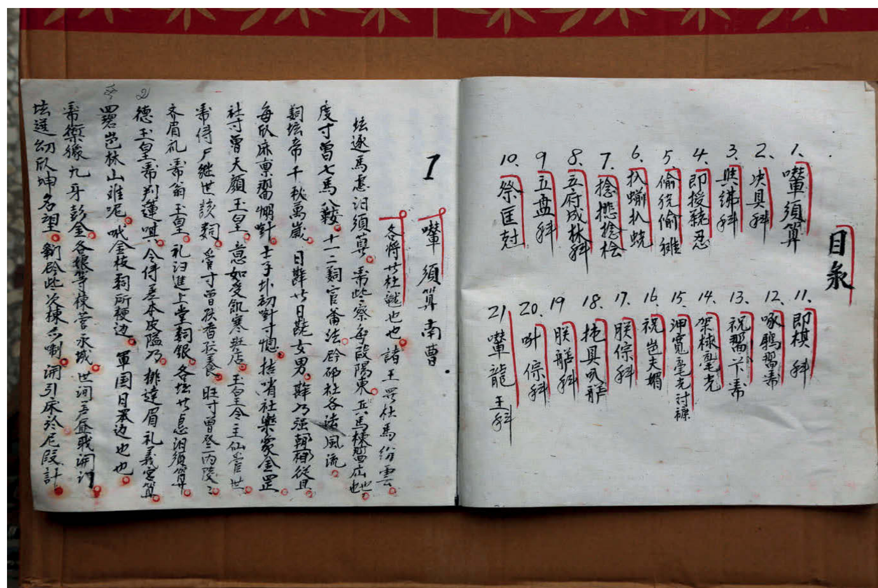

Fig. 5: Modern *Then* manuscript, Jinlongdong, Longzhou county, Guangxi; photograph by D. Holm, February 2016.

Among the *Then* there are both male and female priests, and males and females share much of the same repertoire. This is significant in itself, and quite unlike the situation in most of Guangxi, where male and female specialists may collaborate but have quite different ritual traditions, often even reciting in different languages. Male and female *Then* perform together for major communal rituals, where as many

33 Holm 2019. Interestingly, the names *Pụt* and *Then* are both written with the same character in their texts: 仸, which is a demotic allograph for 佛 *fó* 'buddha'. The Late Han and Early Middle Chinese pronunciation of 佛 *fó* was 'but'.

as a dozen priests may join in the recitation. However, there is still a difference in the performance styles of males and females. Male performance tends to be text-based, and male *Then* and *Pụt* can be seen to recite or chant directly from the relevant ritual manuscripts. They read from the manuscript that is open in front of them (see Fig. 7). Female *Then* and *Pụt* do not do this, but recite their 'texts' from memory. One could easily get the impression that female priests were not able to read, and acquired their knowledge through oral transmission.

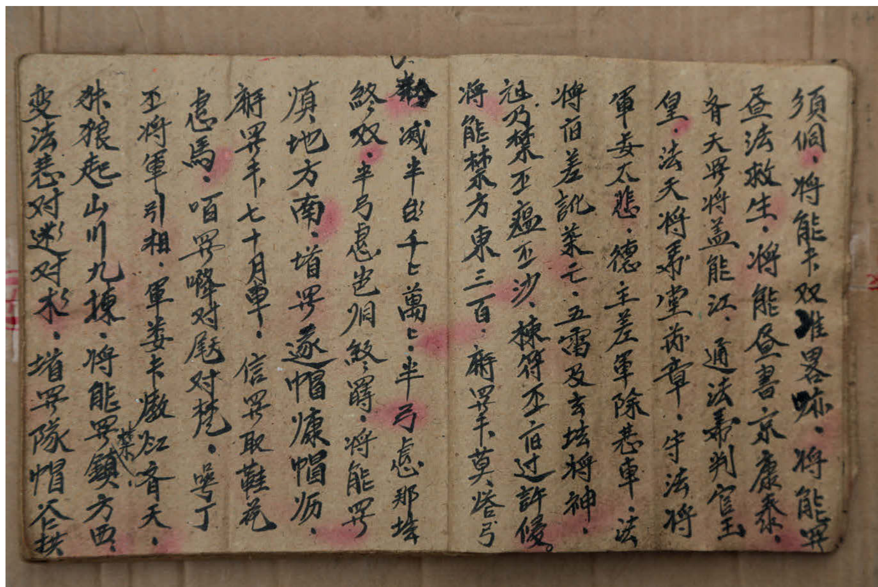

Fig. 6: Traditional Then manuscript, Jinlongdong, Longzhou county, Guangxi; photograph by D. Holm, February 2016.

Among male *Then* priests, then, the recitation is based directly on the act of reading the text. That is to say, the *Then* priest actually reads each line as he recites it. In talking with *Then* from Jinlongdong 金龍洞 in southwestern Guangxi, I discovered that male priests were actually able to recite lines and pronounce individual characters out of context.[34] *Mogong* usually cannot do this, and have to start over at the beginning of the text or the beginning of the section, and begin their recitation from that point. There are two factors that account for this. The first is, the Tày

34 Holm, fieldwork, Jinlongdong, Longzhou county, Guangxi, February 2016.

vernacular script is a much more standardised script, with one written form usually corresponding with one spoken word, and vice-versa, while in *mogong* texts, with their more ancient pedigree, there may be as many as five or six different ways of writing the same word. The second factor is connected with the first: the *Then* possess dictionaries of the vernacular Tày script. These dictionaries are pre-modern dictionaries, patterned after the *Er Ya* 爾雅, and come in two different versions: Chinese-Tày-Việt and Việt-Tày-Chinese (see Fig. 8).[35]

Fig. 7: Ritual recitation by *Then*, Jinlongdong, Longzhou county, Guangxi; photograph by D. Holm, February 2016.

35 Holm, fieldwork, Longzhou, February 2016.

Fig. 8: Sample page of a Chinese-Tày-Việt dictionary, Jinlongdong, Longzhou county, Guangxi; photograph by D. Holm, February 2016.

Lying behind this quite different pattern of ritual performance and reading skill is a different mode of cultural transmission. Throughout the northern part of Vietnam and also among Tày communities in Guangxi, both male and female apprentice

Then are required to have one male and one female master teacher. Each aspiring *Then* student has one 'mother teacher' (*slay mẹ*) and one 'father teacher' (*slay cha*). The 'mother teacher' is usually a senior practitioner with long years of experience as a religious practitioner. The 'father teacher' is usually a senior male Daoist priest. Traditionally, the way the 'mother teacher' imparted her ritual knowledge to her 'children' was through oral instruction, since in this area girls traditionally did not go to school and would not have been able to read; the 'mother teacher' herself often could not read. The 'father teacher' taught the 'children' how to recite what was written in the liturgical manuscripts, and taught the boys how to read them.

Fig. 9: Female *Then* priest with manuscripts, Jinlongdong, Longzhou county, Guangxi; photograph by D. Holm, February 2016.

What this means is that the girl apprentice *Then* received from their male 'father teacher' a direct transmission of the contents of all the ritual texts needed for the recitation of texts during *Then* ritual performances.[36] To put this another way, female *Then* did not receive their ritual knowledge by means of oral transmission as this term is usually understood, by word of mouth from one generation to the next,

36 Holm 2019, 14–15.

down through the generations, but received the text-based knowledge necessary for the recitation of *Then* ritual texts directly from their 'father teacher', which they then committed to memory. This is a form of practice I have called 'performative orality', whereby female priests receive their instruction from male teachers in how to recite ritual texts, but perform in public without reading from any written texts.[37] The boys, however, were taught to read the same texts, and also how to write them. This is why male and female *Then* can perform rituals together. Furthermore, at least in Guangxi, where girls have been going to school since the 1950's, there are also many female *Then* who can now read ritual texts themselves, and have their own copies of the ritual manuscripts (see Fig. 9). Their schooling in Guangxi would have given them facility in reading and writing the Chinese script, unlike their counterparts over the border in Vietnam.

7 Traditional song texts

Throughout the far south of China in pre-modern times, there was a vibrant and pervasive culture of songs and song texts. Seasonal song contests used to be widespread throughout the region, including the whole of Guangxi and, at least until the eighteenth century, western Guangdong and further afield. In the more sinified districts in eastern Guangxi, part of the repertoire was sung in Chinese and part in the local language, but part was also often written in Chinese and sung in the local language. In many of these areas, written songbooks circulated in vast numbers.[38]

The songbooks were mostly in the form of small threadbound volumes, sometimes only an inch or so high and three or four inches wide (2.5 cm × 7–10 cm), with song lyrics written in columns Chinese-fashion from right to left (see Fig. 10). In these song manuscripts, any characters in the lines of song that were repeated from a previous stanza or otherwise predictable from context were often indicated by a straight line, rather than written out in full. The booklets were small enough so that they could be tucked up a sleeve and taken along to song markets and other performance venues, where they could be pulled out and consulted by the young male singers during performance. In Zhuang-speaking areas as well as generally in the rest of China, it was characteristic in late traditional times that only male children went to school, only males could read, and only males had songbooks. The

37 Holm 2019.

38 The eighteenth-century *Guangdong xinyu* 廣東新語 describes a cave shrine devoted to the song goddess Liu Sanmei 劉三妹 in western Guangdong, where there were 'trunkfuls' of songbooks donated by worshipping song artists. See Holm 2004, 205–206.

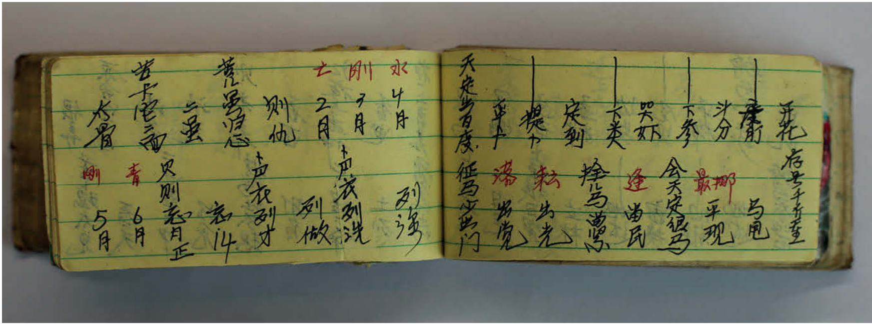

Fig. 10: Song booklet, Yexu parish, Pingguo county, Guangxi, written on exercise notebook paper; photograph by D. Holm, December 2015.

young female singers were also instructed in the art of traditional singing and impromptu versification, but they relied on memory during performance, and their lyrics generally followed those of the men, with the alteration of a few words or a line or two per stanza. Songs were sung antiphonally, with two young male singers and two young female singers taking turns to sing a stanza each. The songs were sung in two-part harmony, with the lead singer singing descant and the other chiming in, singing the same lyrics a fourth or fifth lower.[39]

Such performances were part of a wider cultural pattern in which youths and girls chose their marriage partners through participation in such song markets, rather than via arranged marriages Chinese-style. Thus until recently it used to be uncommon for any young person of marriageable age not to be able to sing in the local style and not to be able to have reasonable command of the local repertoire. It is no exaggeration to say that one's marriage prospects depended on being able to sing, and being able to sing well.

According to field investigations, one mechanism for the transmission of knowledge and skills involved in singing the traditional repertoire took place between famous singing masters and aspiring young singers who sought their instruction.[40] Particularly outstanding song masters might travel around and put in an appearance at a number of local song markets. The students of any one song master would make copies of his songbooks for their own use, and the script they employed

39 For the musical score of a sample stanza from the Brigands Song, see Holm and Meng 2021, 54–55. The singing style was quite unlike Chinese.

40 For details see Qin Naichang 2005, 95–96.

would replicate that of their master's songbooks. The important point to note is that this form of transmission was particularistic, from song master to disciple.

Fig. 11: Antiphonal singing at a Traditional Song Market, Taiping, Pingguo county, Guangxi; photograph by D. Holm, February 2016.

Transmission of song texts also took place within families, with fathers teaching their sons how to read the family's song texts and sing the songs in the traditional manner. Boys would attend village schools and learn to read and write Chinese, and at a certain point would be required by their fathers to make their own copies of the family's song texts. Then in performance at song markets, young men of marriageable age would use these texts as a crib for antiphonal singing of extensive bodies of traditional song, with two young men singing the male parts and two young women singing the female parts (see Fig. 11).

What actually happens in the course of performance is that the two male singers bring along a chapbook, usually one belonging to the lead singer. Between stanzas of song, while the female singers are singing their lyrics, the men quickly confer, and the owner of the chapbook quietly reads the lyrics of the next stanza to his singing partner. There would be no need to do this if the singing partner were able to read the lyrics in the other man's chapbook. This is true even in areas where the lyrics are relatively standardised – in other words, in areas where there ought

to be a high degree of predictability in actual content even if the graphic form is particularistic and variable.

It should be clear that scholars working on such song texts would find themselves in a similar situation, unable to fully comprehend what is written without the help of the traditional owner.

There is also a mode of transmission involving song texts which are written in Chinese but recited in the local language. I discuss an example of this kind of practice among the Mulam in northeastern Guangxi.[41] In such cases, of course, the text itself is in Chinese, so if you only had the manuscript to hand, you would not have any idea that it was recited in another language.

8 Some observations on methodology

What kind of methodological approach is needed, then, in order to tease out these complexities? At the very least, we need a recitation of the text as well as a photo-facsimile of the manuscript in question. A transcription of the recitation into the International Phonetic Alphabet can then be prepared and matched up, word for word, with the characters in the manuscript. Any departures from an expected range of readings for the Chinese or vernacular graphs can then be noted and followed up with further investigation either in the field or in the library. It was the discovery of such unexpected or seemingly idiosyncratic readings of characters in the manuscripts that led to further investigations in the field and a subsequent focus on the patterns of cultural transmission that lay behind them. Further and wider reading on cognitive anthropology and literacy then led to the recognition that performative literacy as found among the *mogong* in western Guangxi actually had parallels elsewhere, and was not *sui generis*.

Of course, and it almost goes without saying, a precondition for such research is that the researcher should have sufficient command of the local language to make informed judgments about the language of the text. Such judgments, however preliminary, can then be brought into dialogue with native language speakers and a range of other informants, and serve as an epistemological check on the information from any single source. The traditional owners of manuscripts are naturally the primary source of information, and what they say needs to be recorded in full, but at least under conditions of performative literacy, their notions about the meaning of individual morphemes or lines of verse may be somewhat vague, or in

41 Holm 2013, 74–76.

some cases just guesswork. Under these conditions there is no substitute for combining the emic with the etic.

Local informants and even traditional owners of manuscripts are not the only source of information about words found in manuscripts. Very often we have found that some words come from elsewhere, and are not known or recognised in the local dialect, even if their pronunciation is preserved or if the character used to write them carries traces of a pronunciation from elsewhere.[42] Our method here is to report what local people tell us, but to supplement this with information taken from a variety of other sources: fieldwork in other localities, dialect survey material, and so on. Such is the overall degree of mobility among Tai peoples in southern China and northern Vietnam and further afield that we often find the key information in sources at some considerable distance from our field site. In the case of the texts from Donglan and the Tianyang Bama border area, most of our exotic readings came from the Bouyei-speaking areas to the north (up-river along the Hongshui 紅水 River), or – surprisingly – from the southern dialect areas and northern Vietnam. Thus far, the most distant clue we have found to what was obviously the correct explanation for a word unknown locally came from Shan (in northern Myanmar).[43]

For that matter, we also look at substrate languages for information about particular morphemes, which in Guangxi means primarily Buyang and Gelao.[44]

Thus, within the scope of fieldwork investigations we include the social and cultural setting and local history, as well as the manuscript itself and its traditional owner. Potentially at least a wide range of factors are relevant, including village history, local knowledge of any past migration, family history, availability of schools and family-based instruction, and so on. Neither the script (the 'writing system') nor the manuscript exists in isolation: rather, they are intricately connected with ongoing social practices. Rather than focussing just on the relationship between the script and the spoken language, our aim is to record the way the manuscript is traditionally recited along with the cultural context in 'literacy practices'.

In the area of phonetics and phonology, many of our recording and analytical procedures are similar to those used in field linguistics. What we have found, though, is that each locality we investigate is to some extent new and undocumented. Even if there exist dialect survey data for nearby locations, we are likely to discover

42 On which see Holm 2015.

43 This is not to say that the particular word was borrowed from Shan, but rather procedurally, in this case, that we included the whole geographic spectrum of Tai-Kadai language material in our search, and found the relevant word was documented in a Shan wordlist.

44 See the discussion about 'crows' and 'eagles' in Holm and Meng Yuanyao 2015, 426–430.

that there are differences in tonal contours and in the phonetic realisation of initial consonants, vowels, and codas in the local spoken language (or languages). Even within families, father and mother will often come from different villages and speak in ways that are subtly or obviously different.

In analysis, a narrow transcription along with sufficient information about the local social and linguistic environment also allows one to identify signs of dialect mixing in the speech of informants. Without this information, the recorded data, with as many as three or four quite different 'allophones' for a single putative initial consonant, would prove quite resistant to analysis. Dialect mixing is common in all of the areas investigated so far.

Another matter that requires careful investigation and analysis is the layer of Chinese readings and borrowings in the manuscript material.[45] The relevant historical layer of Chinese for the analysis of particular readings may vary between near-contemporary Southwestern Mandarin to Late or Early Middle Chinese or Han-period Chinese or even Old Chinese.[46]

Results of a survey of vernacular scripts can also be brought to bear in investigations of a wide range of social-historical factors, such as the domains of the native chieftaincies in the western part of Guangxi, the westward spread of ritual masters of the Meishan Daoist school, the prevalence of local village schools in Tai-speaking areas, and so on. In Vietnam, the distribution of the relatively unified Tày vernacular script needs to be investigated in light of the history of the Mạc dynasty, which had its capital in the Tày-speaking province of Cao Bằng for a period of 70 years. One aspect of our current research is to investigate commonalities in scripts and migration pathways of the various Nùng sub-groups in Vietnam.[47]

9 Conclusion

Knowledge of the script and how to read and write it are practices that need to be transmitted to younger generations in each generation if the tradition is not to die out. What we have found is that methods of transmission of literacy practices in the Tai-speaking regions are far from uniform. These things need to be investigated locally in every locality and for every genre – ritual texts, song texts, playscripts, moral homilies, and so on – since their pathways of transmission and modes of use

45 I have discussed these issues at some length in Holm 2013.

46 See discussion in Holm 2018a.

47 See e.g. Holm 2020a.

in society are so very different. In this chapter I have briefly described four quite different modes of transmission:

(1) performative literacy, common among the vernacular priests (*mogong*) in the western part of Guangxi, Guizhou, Eastern Yunnan, and in northern Vietnam, in which reciting the texts is a performative act in which very little actual reading takes place during the recitation;
(2) ritual texts of Ritual Masters and Daoist priests, where the recitation follows the manuscript more closely, aided by the use of a relatively mature vernacular script;
(3) a highly 'literate' and regionally integrated form of literacy among the Tày shamanic practitioners (*Then*), with female priests in performance engaging in a practice which we may call 'performative orality';
(4) song text literacy transmitted by family-based instruction or song master-student relationships, conveying knowledge of a particularistic simplified character script designed for ease of reading in the context of song market singing competitions.

None of these different kinds of literacy practices could be predicted on the basis of any writing systems theory. They are radically different from each other, and operate with local script variants which are also typologically quite different.

Manuscripts housed in library collections or museums are of course artefacts which have been de-contextualised, taken out of the social milieu in which they served social purposes and in which they were part of an ongoing process. Just how useful such manuscripts might be to scholarship – and even to what extent they can be decoded at all – is, as we have seen here, something that would vary greatly, depending on what kind of literacy practices lie behind them. At the very least, it is vitally important to track down whatever information about modes of transmission can still be found, that is, if the place of origin is known either in general or specifically.

There is another remedy, which is to undertake broad spectrum fieldwork and philological investigations of the kind I have described in this article and use the information systematically to build up our knowledge about living manuscripts in living social contexts. Such knowledge could then be brought to bear on the materials housed in library collections.

A final remedy would be a variation on 'returning the manuscripts to the original owners'. That is to say, manuscripts from libraries in digitised form can be taken to the field and used as material for in-depth discussions with knowledgeable

men and women in village communities, in areas where the relevant literacy practices are still alive or still within living memory.

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Indices

Two indices have been prepared for the present volume. The first is an Index to Manuscripts and Other Written Artefacts discussed in the book. The second is a General Index to the subject matter in the chapters and introduction, covering the wide range of topics related to vernacular manuscripts and scripts, their analysis, and their use in traditional and modern society. An asterisk attached to a page number indicates that the page in question contains a diagram or photographic illustration.

David Holm

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– GZZB 1987, 409–416 (给散失在越南亲友的信歌), Shangsi-Vietnam Letter 158, 176–178, 183

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