Introduction

This book is about manuscript culture in Dunhuang 敦煌 at the end of the first millennium CE. Politically, this period overlaps with the Guiyijun 歸義軍 (Return to Allegiance Circuit, 851–ca. mid-eleventh century), a military governorship with an allegiance to the Chinese court. The fundamental argument at the core of the book is that Guiyijun Dunhuang had a unique culture quite different from the previous period when the region was under Tibetan dominance (786–848), and the Tang 唐 period (ca. 622–786) that preceded it.[1] When, as part of an ambitious expansion in the second half of the eighth century, the Tibetan Empire extended its control over modern Qinghai 青海 and Gansu 甘肅, including the so-called Gansu or Hexi 河西 Corridor, Dunhuang was no longer part of the Tang realm. The prolonged Tibetan presence in Hexi inevitably brought about significant changes in the cultural and ethnic makeup of local society, and the manuscripts provide evidence of these changes. The end of Tibetan imperial control six decades later, however, did not result in a restoration of the pre-existing conditions.

The book examines several groups of manuscripts from the Guiyijun period. The groups themselves function as typological categories chosen for their textual and non-textual characteristics. My aim was to identify clusters with shared patterns, which then could be analysed for clues to help explain why certain groups of individuals produced these manuscripts, and how they were used. The criteria for grouping involved palaeographic and codicological features, such as book forms, handwriting, layout, colophons and marginalia. Just as importantly, the types of texts and their combinations, including the scribble-like notes seen on the verso of some scrolls have been taken into consideration. My contention is that the shared patterns within the groups are indicative of a similar social and cultural background. Accordingly, one of this study's objectives is to gain as improved an understanding as possible of this background and shed light on the circumstances that led to the production of these manuscripts.

Although there are undeniably dozens of such groups that could be assembled based on different sets of criteria, the four groups in this book are, in effect, case studies meant to explore the social, religious and cultural dimensions of the Guiyijun period. The objective is not to identify all possible groups of manuscripts but to analyse several of them in more detail. Similarly, within each group the purpose is not to be comprehensive and list all relevant examples but to collect

1 The dates of the Tang period here refer to the dynasty's control over Dunhuang and the Hexi region, which naturally differ to the dates of the dynasty itself (i.e. 618–907).

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enough of them to identify additional patterns which in turn may tell us more about the people and the social and religious practices connected with the production of the manuscripts.

In addition to social and religious practices, some of the features in the groups also evidence the mixed cultural background of local society. As an oasis city at the westernmost end of the Hexi Corridor, Dunhuang lay at the intersection of Chinese and Central Asian civilisations, and its population was both multicultural and multilingual. This was the case even during the cosmopolitan age of the Tang Empire but perhaps even more so in the Guiyijun period. As most of the surviving manuscripts and inscriptions have been written in Chinese, Dunhuang is thought of as an essentially Chinese society. The written material from this period, however, exhibits features that point to extensive Central Asian connections even more pronounced than during the Tang period. The left-to-right direction of donor inscriptions is one such pattern, as is the sudden appearance of new book forms, such as the codex or the pothi. Such details attest to the palpable presence of Central Asian elements in the local culture of Guiyijun Dunhuang, which sets it apart from the situation during the Tang and earlier periods. The non-Chinese influences are detectable not only in the multitude of manuscripts written in other languages but also in the Chinese ones, which we would normally associate with a Chinese-speaking population.

Additional proof of how mixed local society was in the period is evidenced by the vast pool of personal names that survive in manuscripts and paintings. While the names display a striking disparity with personal names attested in transmitted literature, internally they share a number of patterns that attest to the unique naming practices in Guiyijun Dunhuang. Individual elements of this onomastic data connect segments of the local population with Central Asian cultures. Interestingly, the personal names in Dunhuang during this period are also noticeably different from those of earlier periods when the region was a part of the Chinese political realm (i.e. before 786). Once again, this underscores the unique cultural character of the population of Dunhuang during the Guiyijun period, suggesting that it was considerably less 'Chinese' than typically assumed.

(i) The Dunhuang manuscripts

The Dunhuang corpus is the largest body of manuscripts that survives from medieval China. The material was discovered in 1900 in a sealed-off cave, which had been closed in 1006 or shortly after.[2] When first opened, the cave contained tens of thousands of manuscripts stacked up to the ceiling.[3] The material was written in nearly twenty languages and scripts, attesting to the multicultural nature of local society during the centuries leading up to the sealing of the cave, but particularly in the last 150 years. Manuscripts in Chinese were by far the most numerous, followed by those in Tibetan, but there were also many in languages such as Old Uighur, Sanskrit, Khotanese and Sogdian. Some of the languages were written in more than one script.

The manuscripts recovered from the library cave are predominantly Buddhist in content. We do not know whether they had once belonged to a monastic library or were simply the result of a gradual accumulation of manuscripts no longer in use, but one thing is certain, they were connected with the life of the Buddhist community in Dunhuang during the ninth and tenth centuries. Only a relatively modest quantity of manuscripts, amounting to approximately 5–10% of the total number, contain non-Buddhist texts. Though small in comparison with the entire corpus, this part is also substantial. It includes copies of the Chinese Classics, scriptures related to other religious traditions (e.g. Daoism, Manichaeism, Christianity), histories, encyclopaedias, literary texts (e.g. Tang poetry, anthologies, popular literature), dictionaries, primers, divination manuals and medical treatises.[4] It also contains a sizeable body of documents related to administrative and economic matters, such as contracts, bills, census records and official dispatches.

Due to the orientation of China scholarship during much of the twentieth century, research commenced with the study of non-Buddhist texts, in spite of the library cave's overwhelmingly Buddhist content. This preference was manifest

2 For a summary of scholarly views on the reasons behind the sealing of the cave, see van Schaik and Galambos 2012, 18–28.

3 The discovery was made by Abbot Wang 王道士 (i.e. Wang Yuanlu 王圓籙, 1851–1931), the self-appointed caretaker of the caves, who discovered a side chamber in the corridor leading to one of the caves while clearing away the sand. This side chamber came to be known as Cave 17, or the 'library cave'. For the first reports of the discovery, see Pelliot 1908 and Stein 1909b, 245–248.

4 Naturally, there is an overlap between the categories, and it is not easy to classify each text as belonging to a single genre. A case in point are the so-called transformation texts (*bianwen* 變文), popular narratives that usually revolve around Buddhist topics but may also include secular themes. On transformation texts, see Mair 1983 and 1989; for an early translation of such texts from the Stein collection, see Waley 1960.

from the start, when Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) selected the thousands of manuscripts he eventually shipped to Paris.[5] Although M. Aurel Stein (1862–1943) was the first foreigner to inspect the contents of library cave in 1907, his inability to read Chinese forced him to depend on his Chinese secretary when making his selection from the enormous hoard of manuscripts.[6] He collected material that was in good condition or looked interesting. By contrast, Pelliot, a sinologist by training, selected manuscripts he deemed valuable from the point of view of traditional Chinese philology and history. He chose non-Buddhist texts and those that looked unfamiliar or were in different languages. When considering Buddhist scrolls, he was primarily interested in those that had dated colophons. As a result, his collection was more valuable from the perspective of sinological scholarship, a point noted with admiration by Chinese and Japanese researchers in the decades following.[7]

In a brief paper on Dunhuang studies, for instance, Zhou Yiliang 周一良 quotes Ikeda On's 池田温 statistics on the percentage of different types of texts in the four major collections (Table 1).[8]

Tab. 1: The types of texts in the four major collections of Dunhuang manuscripts.

	Beijing	**Paris**	**London**	**Leningrad**
Buddhist texts	99.7%	62%	84%	85%
Daoist texts	0.3%	6.1%	1.9%	1.2%
Confucian texts	0.0%	4.5%	0.8%	0.7%
Administrative documents	0.4%	20%	6.2%	6.5%
Dated texts	0.5%	19.1%	4.3%	1.4%

5 By all accounts, Pelliot was a scholar of exceptional linguistic and intellectual abilities, who made a lasting impact on the development of Dunhuang studies. On his scholarship and significance, see Drège 2008 and Drège and Zink 2013.

6 A brilliant linguist himself, Stein was a specialist of Indian and Iranian languages and did not read Chinese at the time. He seems to have learned enough to communicate orally but, in his own words, these were but 'the rudiments of conversational practice'; Stein 1909a, 12. See also Mirsky 1998 and Whitfield 2004. For an assessment of the phenomenon of foreign achaeologists—such as Stein and Pelliot—removing manuscripts and antiquities from Western China at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Jacobs 2020.

7 For example, Hu Shih 胡適 (Hu and Cao 2001, v. 4, 342) notes this effect in a diary entry in 1926. See also Imaeda 2008, 82, Rong 2013, 104–105. Fang Guangchang 1999, 15, however, points out that Pelliot's unfamiliarity with Buddhism made him overlook some important manuscripts among those that remained after Stein's visit.

8 Zhou Yiliang 1985, 56–57; cf. Ikeda 1975. In his memoirs, Zhou Yiliang talks about meeting Ikeda and other Japanese Dunhuang scholars while he was in Japan; Zhou 2014, 131–154.

Although Buddhist texts undeniably comprised the highest percentage in all four collections, it was clear that the Pelliot collection had the highest amount of non-Buddhist material, whereas the collection in Beijing had very few such texts. Zhou wrote the following commentary on Ikeda's numbers:

> The majority of Buddhist scriptures from the cave are ordinary sutras, such as the *Lotus sutra*, *Great Perfection of Wisdom sutra* and *Diamond sutra*, which the monks recited every day; these manuscripts do not differ much from their transmitted copies. More valuable are the Confucian texts of the four categories and Daoist scriptures, with administrative documents and all types of texts with dated colophons having especially high value. This brief analysis (i.e. in the table) shows that the Paris collection has higher numbers in four categories (i.e. administrative documents, dated texts, Confucian and Daoist texts) and lower in one (i.e. Buddhist texts), and thus in terms of its quality is by far superior to the other three collections.[9]

Buddhist manuscripts were clearly considered to be the least valuable part of any collection and the fact that the manuscripts in Beijing were almost completely Buddhist in content remained a painful reminder of the humiliation associated with foreigners acquiring the bulk of the Dunhuang manuscripts. That Stein did not read Chinese and thus overlooked some of the most valuable material was part of the general rhetoric when writing about the discovery of the manuscripts.

Among those who refused to see the 'fonds Pelliot' as the most valuable collection was Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃, one of the most important scholars in the field of Dunhuang studies in the twentieth century. He was also among the few scholars who had the opportunity to examine, on several occasions, the manuscripts in Paris and London in person. In his introduction to the manuscript collections, he complained about the 'treasure-hunting' approach so prevalent among the early generation of scholars, claiming that one of the reasons informing this attitude had been Pelliot's criteria for selecting the manuscripts:

> Pelliot made his selection at Tunhuang from the standpoint of a sinologue. Although it is true that the non-Buddhist manuscripts in Paris are far more numerous than in other collections, this has for half a century induced scholars to take the Tunhuang manuscripts as a treasure-trove of sinology, rather than a mine of information on the bibliography of manuscripts. Surely, the writing exercises of schoolboys are hardly suitable for the textual criticism of Chinese classics![10]

9 Zhou Yiliang 1985, 56–57.
10 Fujieda 1966, 7–8.

As Fujieda pointed out, another problem was that scholars wishing to work on the Pelliot and Stein collections could only access a few manuscripts at a time, being forced to pick manuscripts of special interest. Instead, he argued that it was important to assess the overall composition of the original content of the cave library and appreciate it as a single collection.

Pelliot's targeted approach to acquiring the manuscripts led to the Stein collection containing a larger proportion of Buddhist texts that were initially less appealing for China scholars, especially as many of them were essentially copies of a few well-known texts.[11] Their text-critical value was limited, as was their potential to reveal something new about the background of the texts. Nothing demonstrates this better than when in 1990–1995 the Sichuan People's Press published facsimiles of the Stein collection of Chinese manuscripts in 14 large volumes, they only included the non-Buddhist part. Appropriately, the English title of the series was *Dunhuang Manuscripts in British Collections (Chinese Texts Other than Buddhist Scriptures)*. The decision to omit the Buddhist part of an essentially Buddhist collection was of course symptomatic of the state of the field at the time, as was the choice to exclude texts in other languages.[12] A point that has become apparent only recently is that Stein's less targeted selection of material renders his collection more representative of the original contents of the library cave.[13] Furthermore, in the last two decades there has been a growing interest in the history of Chinese and Central Asian Buddhism, which has also helped focus attention on the Stein collection.[14]

As is probably the case with any collection of books, the largest portion of the Dunhuang manuscripts comes from the period closest to the cut-off date, that is, the early eleventh century. Hence, most of the material belongs to the ninth and especially the tenth century, with numbers rapidly diminishing for earlier centuries. While on the whole the manuscripts range from the fourth through to the early eleventh century, as a collection, the Dunhuang material belongs to the ninth and tenth centuries. By that time, earlier Buddhist scrolls would have been considered precious rarities. This also means that many of the earlier manuscripts had to have undergone various degrees of subsequent intervention, as their owners appropriated them for their own purposes.

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11 Whitfield 2007, 121–124.

12 Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan Lishi yanjiusuo et al. 1990–1995.

13 This point was made, among others, by Susan Whitfield at the Stein Study Day at the British Museum on 1 April 2019; cf. Rong 2013, 519–520.

14 A related issue is the potential presence of a large number of forgeries among the Dunhuang manuscripts, a theory advocated by Prof. Fujieda Akira; see some of the contributions in Whitfield 2001. Although there are indeed occasional cases of forged manuscripts, the assumption that some of the large collections were entirely forged has since been discredited; Rong 2013, 501–517.

(ii) The Guiyijun period

Narratives of the role of Dunhuang along the Silk Roads typically allude to the city's strategic location on the crossroad between East and West, describing it as a place where East meets West. This is, of course, true and the archaeological record bears witness to the mixed nature of the region, demonstrating the unique consequences of the continuous interaction of peoples and cultures over the course of many centuries. At the same time, this model is very much based on seeing East and West as the primary cultural centres and Dunhuang as an in-between zone. It is an approach that imagines the vast area between the main centres as a transitional region through which the centres interact. While this view certainly has its merits, it is also possible to redirect the focus on this in-between region and see it in its own right, rather than in the shadow of the primary centres.

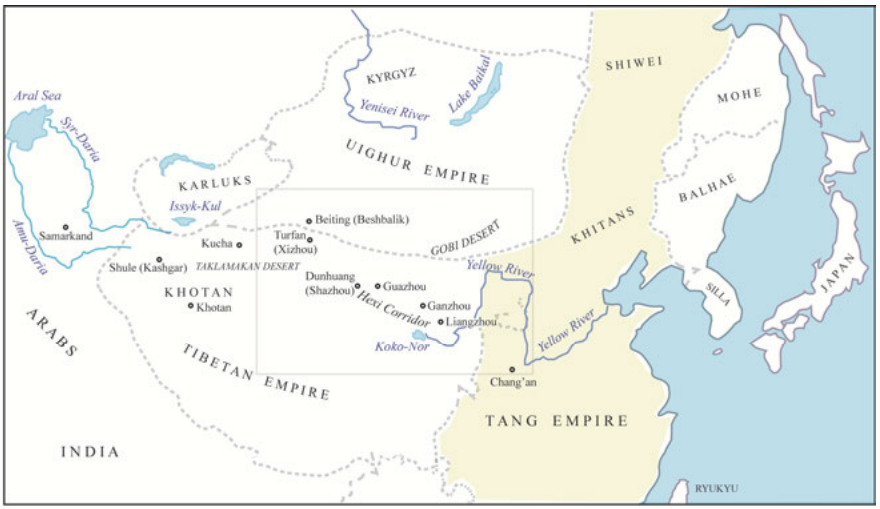
One of the main problems with the East-West model is its binary nature, which results in seeing the region as a frontier zone, a tunnel that leads from one place to the other. In a way, the thousand-kilometre-long Hexi Corridor extending from the Central Plains to the deserts of Central Asia is the epitome of a geographical channel that connects different worlds. This model, however, is only part of the truth and its heavy dependence on the paradigm of opposing civilisations prevents one from appreciating the region's unique situation. In addition, it depicts the region as an East-West hub, conveniently ignoring the northern and southern exchanges which were just as important in terms of the region's history. The image of Dunhuang exclusively as a major stop along the Silk Roads is a modern illusion that exoticizes the contrast between distant cultural centres that are more familiar to us today.

During the first half of the Tang period, Dunhuang, along with a considerable portion of Central Asia, was firmly part of the Tang domain. The outbreak of the An Lushan 安禄山 rebellion (755–763) dealt a devastating blow to the dynasty, which was soon forced to abandon its western protectorates and even the western territories under regular control, including the Hexi region.[15] Dunhuang fell to the Tibetans at the end of a long siege in 786 and remained under their control until the mid-ninth century. The decades of Tibetan rule brought great changes not only politically but also in terms of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural makeup of local society. Chinese scribes were employed to copy Tibetan sutras for large state-run transcription projects and the Tibetan language became part of the linguistic

15 Franke and Twitchett 1994, 4. On the An Lushan rebellion, see Pulleyblank 1955 and Twitchett 1979, 426–463.

landscape for many centuries.[16] During the entire Tibetan period, Dunhuang remained an important Buddhist centre and, no longer being part of the Tang realm, was spared from the persecution of foreign religions that raged during the Huichang 會昌 era (844–846).[17]

Map 1 shows Central Asia and the northern part of East Asia in 820, when Dunhuang formed part of the Tibetan Empire. The smaller rectangle in the centre of the map shows the Hexi Corridor with Dunhuang at its western end and the wider area surrounding it. By this time, the Tang had completely relinquished the lands west of the Yellow River, and Dunhuang was deep in Tibetan territory. The oasis states of the so-called Western Regions 西域 in modern-day Xinjiang 新疆 (e.g. Kucha 龜茲, Khotan 于闐) were also under Tibetan control. The Uighur Empire in the north was still a major power and remained so for another two decades.



Map 1: Central Asia and the northern part of East Asia in 820. Loosely based on Tan Qixiang et al. 1982, 36–37.

16 When Lajos Lóczy and Gustav Kreitner arrived at the Mogao Caves in 1879, the place was occupied by only two Tibetan monks, who had been caring for the caves for the past fifteen years (Kreitner 1881, 669). When Aurel Stein went there in 1907, he also saw a Tibetan lama; Stein 1912, v. 2, 164. Similarly, Yoshikawa Koichirō 吉川小一郎, a member of the second Ōtani expedition, mentions seeing a Tibetan monk at the site in 1911; Galambos 2008, 30–31.

17 On the Huichang persecution of Buddhism, see Dalby 1979, 666–669.

Around the mid-ninth century, a series of momentous changes reshaped the political landscape of Central and North Asia. In 840, the Kirghiz tribes in modern-day Mongolia defeated their Uighur overlords and brought the Uighur Empire to an end. Hundreds of thousands of refugees migrated southward, establishing themselves in several locations. One such area was that of Xizhou 西州 (modern-day Turfan 吐魯番), where they formed the West Uighur Kingdom. From the second half of the tenth century, this group gradually converted to Buddhism, although for a period of time they continued to practise Manichaeism, which had been the state religion of their northern empire.[18] Another group settled in the Hexi Corridor, east of Dunhuang, in the region of Ganzhou 甘州 (modern-day Zhangye 張掖).[19] Two large groups arrived consecutively near the Chinese border garrisons in the Ordos and, after unsuccessful attempts to submit to the Tang, were gradually annihilated in a series of battles.[20]

Around the same time, succession struggles following the death of Emperor Langdarma (r. 838–842) resulted in the collapse of the Tibetan Empire. The rise of warlords and the dissolution of the central administration led to a period called 'the era of fragmentation'. Buddhism, which had enjoyed strong imperial patronage in the previous decade, went through a period of persecution.[21] In Dunhuang, Zhang Yichao 張議潮 (798/799–872), a local warlord, led a successful uprising in 848, establishing his rule over the region. Taking advantage of the weakening of Tibetan power, he gradually extended his control over several former Tang prefectures, such as Guazhou 瓜州, Ganzhou and Yizhou 伊州. Among his first steps to secure his position was to send an embassy to the Tang capital Chang'an 長安 and declare allegiance to the court. In recognition of his victories, and to keep him at bay, the court appointed him military commissioner of the Return to Allegiance Circuit 歸義軍節度使. Naturally, allegiance was somewhat rhetorical, as Zhang Yichao effectively ruled as a king over his newfound domain.[22]

Apparently, the Tang court harboured no illusions regarding Zhang Yichao's loyalty and observed his military successes with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they welcomed his triumphs over the Tibetans but were cautious not

18 On the chronology of Uighur conversion to Buddhism, see Moriyasu 2008.

19 Wilkens 2016, 197–199.

20 Drompp 2005. The two groups of Uighurs not only fought the Tang forces but also each other and various peoples under Tang control.

21 van Schaik and Galambos 2012, 4.

22 On Zhang Yichao and the Guiyijun, see Rong Xinjiang 1996, 62–78; cf. Rong 2013, 40–43.

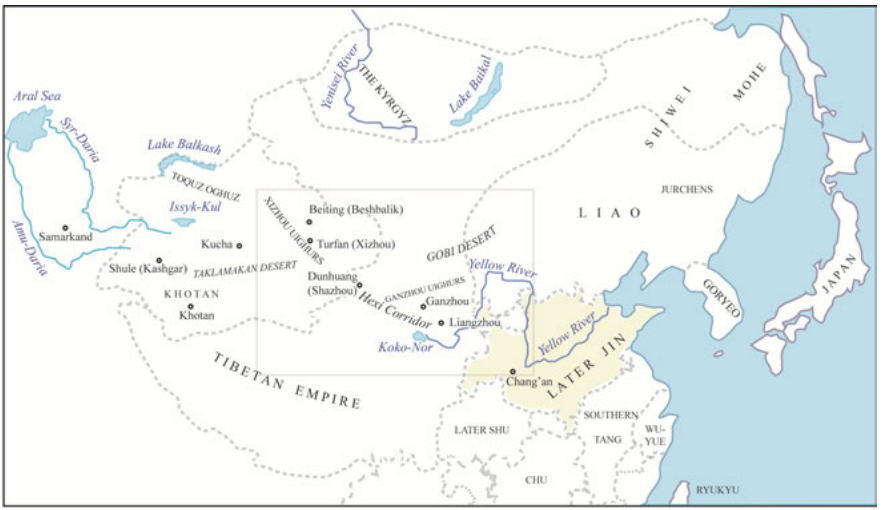
to allow him to become too strong.[23] As a measure of control, they requested his brother Zhang Yitan 張議潭 (d. 867) move to the court as a princely hostage.[24] Hoping to curtail his influence further, in 863 the Tang established a military commissionership in Liangzhou 涼州, its actual control, however, remained in Zhang Yichao's hands. His brother died in Chang'an in 867, just as Zhang Yichao extended his control over the regions of Longyou 隴右 and Xizhou. At this point, the Tang court requested his presence in the capital, and he had no choice but to comply. He left his nephew Zhang Huaishen 張淮深 (831–890) in charge but, despite repeated requests, the court did not officially confer on him the title of military commissioner. This lack of court support significantly destabilised Zhang Huaishen's position, which was no doubt intentional. When he finally received the official appointment in 888, his position had weakened to a point of no return. Two years later, he was assassinated along with his wife and sons.[25]

After Zhang Huaishen's death, a series of internal crises further weakened the Guiyijun, as the Zhang family struggled to hold on to power. When in 910 Zhang Chengfeng 張承奉 learned about the fall of the Tang dynasty, he founded the Jinshan state 金山國 in Dunhuang with himself as its first emperor. The new state was soon forced to acknowledge itself as a vassal of the Ganzhou Uighurs. In 914, however, Cao Yijin 曹議金 (d. 935) took the throne by force and restored the Guiyijun, assuming the title of military commissioner. Within a few years he was able to obtain an official appointment from the Later Liang 後梁 (907–923) court. He stabilised his position by improving relations with neighbouring states, giving one of his daughters in marriage to the new khagan of the Ganzhou Uighurs and, a few years later, another one to the king of Khotan (Map 2). The Cao family's rule lasted until the mid-eleventh century, when the expanding Tangut state brought the Hexi region under its control.

23 As Rong 2013, 41 notes, they were concerned 'that Zhang Yichao would turn into another "Tibet" and challenge the Tang from the west'.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.



Map 2: Central Asia and the northern part of East Asia in 943. Loosely based on Tan Qixiang et al. 1982, 82–83.

According to our current understanding, the Dunhuang cave library was closed shortly after 1006, thus the contents of the cave are closely connected with the history of the Guiyijun. The manuscripts and paintings in the library cave, as well as the murals in the entire Mogao Caves 莫高窟 complex, provide a wealth of information on nearly all aspects of contemporary life. The donors of the Buddhist cave temples and portable paintings were members of the local elite and the material culture they left behind provides important details about their political aspirations and family background.

(iii) A cross-cultural perspective

Research for this book began with my fascination with the Central Asian influences in medieval Chinese manuscript culture, as reflected in the Dunhuang material. I searched for codicological and palaeographic features that were atypical from the point of view of Chinese scribal habits and identified features that could reflect external influences. These ranged from the use of the pen (vs. the brush) to the appearance of entirely new book forms and to donor inscriptions written in a

reversed direction.[26] As research progressed, however, it became clear that even though I focused on the non-Chinese elements in the manuscripts, I essentially perpetuated a Sino-centric view when measuring the contents of the Dunhuang library cave against an idealised image of what 'proper' Chinese manuscripts should look like. Instead of documenting the complex interaction between different manuscript cultures attested in the library cave, I primarily examined Chinese-language data, imagining Chinese scribal culture as a passive recipient of external influences. Yet contacts are seldom unilateral. Actions involving more than one party are usually multi-directional exchanges that affect all participants. Interaction does not simply modify local customs and habits but combines internal and external factors into something new that had not previously existed.

This can be exemplified by taking a look at a couple of episodes in the history of local manuscript culture. The codex as a book form almost certainly appeared in Dunhuang as a result of contacts with Western scribal cultures. Once it became integrated into the local culture, it spread further to other neighbouring regions. As a result, the Xizhou Uighurs, who most likely adopted this form from Dunhuang, called these booklets *čagsı* (< *cezi* 冊子, LMC *ʈʂʰaijk-tsɻ́*), borrowing the word from Chinese.[27] Naturally, the source of the loanword is in itself indicative of the direction of borrowing.[28] Similarly, the writing of Chinese characters in vertical columns from left to right, a phenomenon attested during the Guiyijun period, was possibly a Sogdian or Uighur influence on local scribal practices.[29] Yet the shift in Sogdian scribal culture from horizontal to vertical lines was most probably the result of Chinese influence.[30] The Uighurs adopted this vertical Sogdian script and passed it on to the Mongols, from whom it later became adopted by the Manchus. Similar borrowings and adoptions demonstrate the multidirec-

26 Galambos 2012.

27 Throughout this book, I use the Late Middle Chinese (LMC) reconstructions in Pulleyblank 1991.

28 I am indebted to Simone-Christiane Raschmann for her help with the Uighur book forms and their terminology; cf. Raschmann 2014.

29 Sims-Williams and Hamilton 1990 use the term 'turco-sogdiens' (i.e. Turco-Sogdian) for the Dunhuang manuscripts that combine Turkic and Sogdian linguistic features. For the English translation of this book, see Sims-Williams and Hamilton 2015.

30 Ramsey 1989, 209, Janhunen 2011, 36. The idea of the contribution of Chinese writing to the vertical direction of the Uighur (and thus indirectly to Mongolian and Manchu) script had already been raised in Abel-Rémusat 1820, 61–62. Yoshida 2013 argues that the Sogdians began writing horizontally in the second half of the fifth century. The Sogdian script originally derives from the Aramaic alphabet used in Sogdiana during the Achaemenid dynasty (550–331 BCE) and, accordingly, was written in horizontal lines, from right to left. It is not always easy to tell the orientation of manuscript fragments, since lines that read horizontally from right to left can be simply turned sideways and read as vertical columns from left to right. Cf. Reck 2009.

tional dynamics of interaction.[31] Attempting to interpret such complex patterns of interaction across Central and East Asia based on a traditional Sino-centric framework is problematic at the least.

The current study, therefore, attempts to examine the Dunhuang manuscripts from a cross-cultural point of view, recognising the ubiquity of contacts in premodern societies. Nowhere is this more evident than along the Eurasian pathways we collectively call the Silk Roads. Peoples, religions, technology, material objects and art spread to different regions, and interaction was a constant part of daily life. Instead of invariably trying to explain changes as internal responses to societal development or evolutionary trends, a wider perspective allows us to link some of the innovations with external stimuli.

Neighbouring states to the Tang and Song empires were not merely satellites of a central core but cultural centres in their own right, which maintained contacts with each other and further regions within their field of vision. In many cases they acted as intermediaries in the transmission of objects and ideas. A decentralised perspective is not merely a matter of academic preference or political correctness but a point of view that has very real consequences for how we interpret cultural phenomena and societal changes. A case in point is the period of Tibetan control over Dunhuang from 786 until 848. It is not uncommon to see these six decades as a period of foreign oppression, ended by a Chinese uprising that liberated the region. The liberation narrative, however, leads to a number of problematic assumptions.

One such assumption is that throughout the eighth and ninth centuries Dunhuang persisted as an essentially Chinese city in which the population harboured a culture of resistance, and shaking off the Tibetan yoke enabled the restoration of conditions that had been in place before the occupation. Yet, as this book argues, by the end of Tibet's political control over the region, Dunhuang had become culturally different to what had existed previously. Tibetan administration may have come to an end, but Hexi remained a Sino-Tibetan region. Tibetan remained one of the main languages in the region throughout the Guiyijun period. As Imaeda Yoshirō reminds us, in terms of the amount of writing preserved in them, the Tibetan manuscripts account for at least 30–40% percent of the entire corpus.[32] Many were written long after the collapse of the Tibetan Empire. Interpreting Guiyijun Dunhuang as a newly liberated Chinese state ultimately reflects modern attitudes to national identity, shaped by political events of the twentieth

31 On a similar point concerning the interaction between non-Chinese and Chinese traditions of Buddhism, see Zhiru 2007, 12.

32 Imaeda 2008, 81.

century. While it is true that in their contacts with the Tang court the Zhang family presented themselves as loyalists who resisted the Tibetans, in reality they had held official posts in the Tibetan administration and rebelled only when the decline of Tibetan political power threatened their interests. By contrast with how modern scholarship sometimes describes the Tibetan period, there was probably no widespread culture of resistance.[33]

Another consequence of the occupation narrative is interpreting the Tibetan period as a time of cultural decline. It is common to ascribe real or perceived changes in this period to the population not having direct contact with the Tang empire or its successor states, which are inevitably portrayed as the ultimate source of civilisation. Yet this was by no means a period of isolation for Dunhuang. One could argue that during the period of Tibetan presence the region became integrated into a vast cultural continuum that acted as a powerful stimulant for growth and innovation. There were bound to be changes, many of which were neither forced nor undesirable.

In terms of the manuscripts, one of the conspicuous changes was the shift to using the Tibetan-style pen, as opposed to the Chinese-style brush. Fujieda Akira was the first to draw attention to the phenomenon, arguing that it was no longer possible to acquire brushes from China.[34] Brushes, however, were not a luxury commodity only to be obtained as an import from abroad. Save in exceptional cases, the population must have had the means to produce such brushes locally, and nothing suggests that severed trade routes compelled the scribe to change his primary writing instrument. It is a great deal more likely that the use of the pen was a cultural preference developed under the influence of Tibetan scribal culture. The fact that the brush did not make a comeback at the end of the Tibetan period reveals the profound and lasting impact Tibetan culture had on writing practices. Moreover, it also demonstrates the lack of effort to abandon practices and habits associated with the 'oppressors'.

We can see a similar type of reasoning in the alleged deterioration of the quality of writing paper during the Tibetan period. According to this view, paper from the Tibetan and Guiyijun periods was of inferior quality in comparison with the paper used while Dunhuang was still part of the Tang. This too was considered the result of quality imports no longer being available from the Tang.[35] This ex-

33 Yang 2016 convincingly argues against the ostensible 'Tibetanization' policy in Dunhuang, ponting out that the Chinese population was not forced to dress as Tibetans.

34 Fujieda 1961, 206, Fujieda 1968, Fujieda 1969, 19–22 and Li Zhengyu 2005. Fujieda estimates that more than 60% of all Dunhuang manuscripts were written by pen.

35 E.g. Ueyama 1982 and 1990, 401–423.

planation is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it was probably never common practice in Dunhuang to import paper, at least not in large quantities. The library cave contained some scrolls produced in the Tang capital, which are of exceptional quality and aesthetic finish. In addition, fragments of Tang official correspondence were also of superior quality in terms of both paper and writing style. The majority of the manuscripts, however, were always written on paper of local origin.[36] The supposed deterioration of paper quality after Dunhuang was no longer part of the Tang is more of an assumption than a properly documented phenomenon. This impression, in turn, may partly be due to there being many more irregular manuscripts and fragments from the last couple of centuries of the Dunhuang collection, in comparison with the less haphazard nature of earlier material. That earlier manuscripts, even fragmentary ones, tend to be of higher quality is not because they were written when Dunhuang was part of China but because they are the type of manuscripts that tend to be preserved for centuries. The later stratum in the collection includes a much higher ratio of miscellaneous and ephemeral material connected with the daily life of the population. Unsurprisingly, a great deal of this kind of material is written on paper of lower quality.

Furthermore, scholars have noted that non-Buddhist Chinese texts (i.e. literary and historical works) were typically not copied during the Tibetan period but became popular again at the beginning of the Guiyijun period. This is undoubtedly an important observation, for on the one hand it helps to date undated manuscripts and on the other attests to major changes in educational practices.[37] Yet to interpret the absence of secular Chinese texts during Tibetan rule as a sign of cultural backwardness betrays a strong anti-Tibetan bias. Such a view regards the secular texts of the Chinese (i.e. 'Confucian') tradition more valuable than the largely Buddhist literature in vogue during the Tibetan period.[38] A lack of secular Chinese education, however, does not necessarily indicate decline or regression but simply reflects alternative cultural values or differences in the official curriculum.[39]

36 See the findings of the scientific analysis of paper in van Schaik, Helman-Ważny and Nöller 2015.

37 Zhang Xiuqing 2008, 13.

38 There were, of course, secular texts copied during the Tibetan period, and not only in Chinese. An example of a Tibetan historiographic text is the *Old Tibetan Chronicles*; Uray 1992, Hill 2006, Dotson 2011.

39 This is the case even if there were contemporaneous opinions regarding Tibet's cultural backwardness, which of course inevitably reflect ethnocultural biases. The narrative of China's superiority vis-à-vis the barbarian tribes around her has been a perpetual theme since the beginning of the imperial period.

Chinese classical texts were not in vogue simply because their discourses were irrelevant to a mainly Buddhist ideology.

A related issue is that of cultural borrowing vs. technological innovation during a period of such perceived decline. As mentioned above, the Sino-centric viewpoint explains some of the changes, such as the use of wooden pen instead of the traditional brush for writing Chinese characters, as regressive developments caused by isolation. Here, isolation means being cut off from China and therefore from the perceived source of the civilising force. By contrast, 'positive' changes are interpreted not in the light of the consequences of isolation but as internal innovations.

For example, as Chapter Two is to demonstrate, the Guiyijun period witnessed the appearance of entirely new book forms. These were the pothi, codex and concertina, all page-based manuscripts with discontinuous writing surfaces. Of these, the codex is a borrowing from Western manuscript cultures, for many of the exemplars from Dunhuang, regardless of their language, emulate the quire structure of Western codices, including the method of folding larger sheets of paper or vellum into quires. Chances of this very specific technology being invented independently in different parts of the Eurasian landmass are slim. Yet modern histories of the Chinese book often describe the codex as a technological innovation that arose within the Chinese tradition primarily because it allowed the reader to locate information in books more conveniently.[40]

On the one hand, this view is based on the assumption that the modern book, ultimately a derivative of the Western codex, is the most convenient book form, which is not necessarily true. Even after the introduction of the codex, the vast majority of manuscripts in Dunhuang remained in scroll form and there was no wholesale rush to switch to this ostensibly superior form. On the other hand, the approach that sees the Chinese codex as an autochthonous invention denies the possibility that anything of value could come from outside the Sinosphere. Yet it was precisely during the time when Dunhuang had lost contact with Central China that the codex made its debut in the region, which makes perfect sense if one looks at the wider picture. If anything, a careful comparison of surviving codices across different sites in Western China may shed light on the routes along which this book form spread to the Hexi region.[41]

40 E.g. Ma Heng 1926, Liu 1958, 43, Tsien 1985, 230–231. In contrast, Drège 2018, 28 cautiously suggests that the codex in Dunhuang may represent the influence of Manichaean or Nestorian book cultures.

41 For an argument in favour of a comparative approach in codicology, see Beit-Arié 1993. The first but extremely valuable result of such an initiative is Bausi et al. 2015. Cf. Diringer 1953.

Pre-modern societies, especially along the Silk Roads, were multilingual. Today, the largest collections of medieval manuscripts all consist of materials written in multiple languages. Over thirty languages and scripts are attested at sites around Turfan, approximately twenty in Dunhuang and at least a dozen in Kharakhoto.[42] Even though most individuals no doubt had a limited command of languages, on the level of society, as far as we can see, multilingualism was an everyday reality, rather than something exceptional or out of the ordinary. While the separation of modern scholarship by languages is to some extent inevitable, a willingness to engage in research related to other languages helps seeing medieval societies and manuscript cultures in a more holistic, and ultimately more accurate, manner. Similarly, an attention to the materiality of manuscripts helps transcend linguistic boundaries inevitably present in the texts. Material culture bridges the linguistic divide, enabling us to see connections and patterns that otherwise may remain undetected.[43]

(iv) Manuscripts as physical artefacts

During the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in the materiality of manuscripts in international scholarship.[44] As manuscripts become increasingly accessible in high quality reproductions or digital photographs, their visual attributes such as book form, layout and palaeography receive more attention.[45] Naturally, materiality is but one side of the equation, and it is necessary to consider both text and form together, as two sides of the same coin. The text is inseparable from its physical carrier, which is a first-hand witness of the circumstances

42 In addition to the languages attested in the Dunhuang library cave, the so-called Northern Zone 北區 at the Mogao Caves yielded handwritten and printed fragments with additional languages not represented in the library cave (e.g. Tangut, Mongolian, Syriac); Peng 2001. On the Mongolian material from Dunhuang, see Rybatzki 2009; on a Syriac fragment, Duan 2001; on a Tangut, Matsui 2012; on an Old Uighur, Yakup 2006.

43 Perhaps due to their disciplinary framework, fields such as Buddhist studies or history of science and technology have successfully bridged the linguistic gap in the study of pre-modern manuscript traditions.

44 There is a growing body of scholarship devoted to the scientific analysis of manuscripts. See, for example, Helman-Ważny 2014a and 2014b, Helman-Ważny and van Schaik 2013, as well as the series of papers in issue No. 11 of *Manuscript Studies* (2018).

45 In recent years, a large portion of the Dunhuang manuscripts have become available in good quality digital form through Gallica (http://gallica.bnf.fr), the digital library site of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, as well as the websites of the International Dunhuang Project (http://idp.bl.uk) and its partner institutions.

leading to the production of that particular manuscript. Like any archaeological object, it contains clues which may enhance our understanding of both the text and the social conditions which brought it into being. Approaches focusing on the text alone reduce the manuscript to a mere textual witness, the primary value of which is to contribute data for textual criticism. A holistic enquiry, by contrast, may result in additional insights that lead beyond the text and help to identify the individuals and the occasion responsible for the production of the manuscript. This, in turn, may also have implications for interpreting the text.

The traditional text-based approach understands the text as an entity in itself and makes it the focus of scholarly analysis. Looking back in time from the vantage point of the present, it attempts to track the text through the long line of textual transmission to an imagined original version. This process, however, is in a sense an illusion because scribes often do not copy the text for the sake of long-term preservation, even if they claim to do so. Instead, texts are remnants of social and religious practices. Every copy is made for a specific purpose and this purpose may differ from that of the previous manuscript. The centuries-long chain of transmission is a retrospective construct that connects copies made at different times for different purposes into a single succession.

Finishing the copying of a text did not necessarily mean the end of the manuscript's life cycle, for in addition to the scribe a series of individuals (e.g. peers, disciples, teachers, siblings, descendants, collectors, subsequent owners) continued to engage with it. They added reading marks and punctuation, notes or even other texts, some of which seem to have little to do with the first text. They may have removed damaged parts of the original manuscript and glued additional pieces of paper to it (some with writing) as a means of conservation. The manuscript continued to evolve in ways that may not have been anticipated by the person who had written the first text. In contradistinction to this complex and prolonged process of engaging with the manuscript, the purely text-centric perspective typically envisions manuscript production as a single act, or perhaps a series of disconnected acts, of copying, each of which produces a separate text.

One of the aims of this book is to underline the value of the approach that pays attention to the physical form of manuscripts and to demonstrate how it may provide insights into the social and religious context of their production and use. The examination of codicological and palaeographic features is not a scholastic exercise to its own end but an essential part of considering the available evidence. Therefore, it should be a regular procedure when working with manuscripts.

(v) Structure of the book

This book consists of four chapters. They are preceded by this 'Introduction', which outlines the conceptual framework of the study and enumerates its main questions. It contextualises the analyses presented later in the book by placing them into a grander narrative of Dunhuang at the end of the first millennium CE and the long history of the Chinese book. It also provides a brief historical overview and discusses the main methodological points. The following four chapters are case studies that examine four groups of manuscripts chosen on textual and non-textual grounds. All four groups are from Guiyijun Dunhuang and set out to explore the unique culture of this period. The overall argument is that the culture of the local elite, responsible for producing the manuscripts and paintings examined in this book, was much more mixed and far less 'Chinese' as normally imagined. This was a new development that signalled a significant change from that which preceded it, when Dunhuang was part of larger empires.

Chapter One, 'Multiple-text Manuscripts', focuses on a group of codices and concertinas, which contain a series of shorter Buddhist scriptures and spells selected from a relatively limited repertoire of texts. Although the number and arrangement of texts is different in almost all examples, the manuscripts are all codices and concertinas, and thus their physical form establishes an immediate link between them. This is especially likely since codices and concertinas appeared in Dunhuang around the ninth century and remained relatively uncommon. Another shared feature is that most of these items feature more than one hand, suggesting a collaborative process of production. The analysis of several manuscripts from this group suggests they may have been produced collectively by family members and each person's participation played a part in the religious efficacy of the manuscript. In this, they are clearly different from a series of multiple-text scrolls copied in a single hand, as part of the ritual of commemorating the dead. Due to their small size, it is likely their owners carried the booklets around, and they served apotropaic and ritual functions.

Chapter Two, 'Manuscripts Written by Students', examines manuscripts with student colophons as a distinct group. Although there is evidence that students copied a wide variety of texts, the ones who left the colophons studied at local Buddhist monasteries and primarily copied secular texts, such as the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety), *Lunyu* 論語 (Confucian Analects) or *Qianziwen* 千字文 (Thousand Character Text). Former scholarship has relied on the colophons to reconstruct various aspects of educational practices and institutions in Dunhuang. Scholars have also worked on the primers and other educational texts such manuscripts contained. In contrast to approaches primarily concerned with social history or textual studies, my main interest here is in the seemingly random scribble-like

notes on the verso of these scrolls. My contention is that they were neither random scribbles nor writing exercises, as they are typically explained, but records of assignments of later students who used the same manuscript. This understanding, on the one hand, contextualises the fragmentary bits of text on the verso and explains their function and, on the other, demonstrates that new students continued to use the scrolls years or decades after the date in the colophon. Overall, the manuscripts with colophons of this type offer a glimpse of how students from elite families in Dunhuang studied in local monasteries. At the same time, they are also tokens of the reciprocal relationship developed between the upper echelons of society and local monasteries in Guiyijun Dunhuang.

Chapter Three, 'Writing from Left to Right', examines cases of Chinese characters that read in a left-to-right direction, that is, in a direction opposite to how they would normally read. The examples come from manuscripts and votive paintings. Although sporadic instances of such writing are known from elsewhere, there are over a hundred cases among the Dunhuang manuscripts and paintings. The chapter divides the examples typologically into two groups, based on the orientation of writing. In the first group are examples written horizontally on pothi manuscripts, emulating the way Tibetan lines read in similar manuscripts. The second group gathers cases with vertical lines that read from left to right, which divide into three subgroups according to their specific context. The first of these are geometric compositions in manuscripts featuring mandalas and amulets. These have a strong link with esoteric Buddhism and Tibetan culture, and thus we can confidently link the left-to-right direction of writing, despite it being vertical, with Tibetan scribal practices. The second subgroup consists of examples of vertical columns that appear among the miscellaneous content on the margins and verso of scrolls. This group partially overlaps with student manuscripts and often contain fragments of so-called association circulars (*shesi zhuantie* 社司轉帖), notices sent out by local associations (*she* 社) to members. Still, many items in the group do not share these features but have a Buddhist orientation. The third subgroup comprises left-to-right inscriptions on votive paintings commissioned by the local elite. The donor inscriptions in the majority of surviving paintings read from left to right, suggesting that this way of writing was not accidental but a deliberate choice on the part of the donors. All of the dated examples in the second and third subgroups date to the period between the late ninth and the late tenth centuries, placing this practice securely within the time range of the Guiyijun period. The shared time frame further suggests that the second and third subgroups are related and must have a similar origin. As we cannot document a substantial Tibetan connection, the direction of writing itself suggests a Sogdian or Uighur influence, and the surnames of some of the donors corroborate this.

Chapter Four, 'Circulars and Names', begins with examining a group of manuscripts that contain circulars issued by lay Buddhist associations. Some of these are surviving copies of actual documents sent out by the management of associations but there are also copies written by students. These later ones are often fragmentary and frequently read from left to right. Thus, again, we see an overlap with manuscripts examined in other chapters of this book. The circulars often contain lists of names of individuals who were their recipients. In total, the circulars preserve thousands of personal names from Guiyijun Dunhuang, making them possibly the largest body of onomastic data available from a single place and period in pre-modern China. The names themselves have a number of unusual characteristics that set them apart from names in other periods and locations. One of these peculiarities is that they often contain elements that carry negative connotations, which is not typical in the recorded Chinese tradition. Another unusual phenomenon is that given names often repeat, suggesting a naming practice similar to Western cultures. Several highly popular names, which appear to be phonetic renderings of non-Chinese names, corroborate this impression. Considering the high percentage of surnames of Sogdian origin, many of these given names may also be connected with a Sogdian background. Yet, in contrast with earlier periods characterised by a tendency to transliterate Sogdian given names into Chinese phonetically, by the Guiyijun period most of the relevant names had become translations.

Finally, the 'Conclusions' at the end of the book reiterate the main findings and discuss some of their implications. I emphasise that these four groups of manuscripts exhibit a considerable degree of overlap, demonstrating that they originate with the same segment of society. The main argument is that the manuscripts evidence the unique culture of Guiyijun Dunhuang, which was very different from what existed when the region was part of the Tang or the Tibetan empire. The end of the Tibetan administration in Dunhuang did not mean that life went back to 'normal', that is, to what it had been six decades earlier, for by this time the nature of elite society had changed completely. This unique Guiyijun culture is what we see behind the production of a significant portion of the Dunhuang manuscripts and the murals in the cave temples at Mogao.

The research behind this book has developed over the past fifteen years and it is perhaps unavoidable that one's understanding of the subject continues evolving. As a result, it is necessary to restate some of my earlier findings, including some of those that have already appeared in print. The book incorporates three of my earlier papers, which have now been updated and recontextu-

alised. The first of these is an article on multiple-text manuscripts, which now forms part of Chapter One.[46] The second, an overview of association circulars in Dunhuang, has become part of Chapter Four.[47] The third, a preliminary study of the scribble-like notes on the verso of manuscripts written by lay students, is now part of Chapter Two.[48] All three papers have been re-worked and integrated into the larger narrative of respective chapters.

46 Galambos 2019.
47 Galambos 2016.
48 Galambos 2015a.