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.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111382746-001

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 瑤, 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 黃征.[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* 佛説天地八陽經 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 subgroups 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.

Acknowledgements

We are particularly grateful to Michael Friedrich, then Director of the Centre, for his support and advice. Michael Friedrich also took a keen interest in the process of reviewing and editing the chapters in this volume. We are also grateful for the time,

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.

References

Bökset, Roar (2006), 'Long Story of Short Forms: The Evolution of Simplified Chinese Characters', PhD thesis, Stockholm University.

Boltz, William G. (1994), *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*, New Haven: American Oriental Society.

Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容 (2003), *Qinxi wenzi yanjiu: cong hanzi shi de jiaodu kaocha* 秦系文字研究:從漢字史的角度考察 [Research on the Qin script: an investigation from the angle of the history of the Chinese script], Nangang: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo.

Coulmas, Florian (2003), *Writing Systems: An Introduction to their Linguistic Analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Drexler, Monika (1994), *Daoistische Schriftmagie: Interpretationen zu den Schriftamuletten Fu im Daozang*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

Galambos, Imre (2006), *Orthography of Early Chinese Writing: Evidence from Newly Excavated Manuscripts*, Budapest: Department of East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University.

Handel, Zev (2019), *Sinography: The Borrowing and Adaptation of the Chinese Script*, Leiden: Brill.

Holm, David (2006), 'Some Variant Characters in a Traditional Zhuang Manuscript', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 78: 125–172.

Holm, David (2013), *Mapping the Old Zhuang Character Script: A Vernacular Writing System from Southern China*, Leiden: Brill.

Holm, David (2020), 'The language corridor revisited: Vernacular scripts and migration pathways', *Journal of Chinese Writing Systems* 4: 2, 71–86.

Holm, David and Meng Yuanyao (eds) (2015), *Hanvueng: The Goose King and the Ancestral King, an Epic from Guangxi in Southern China*, Leiden: Brill.

Huang, Jong-Tsun and Man-Ying Wang (1992), 'From Unit to Gestalt: Perceptual Dynamics in Recognising Chinese Characters', in Hsuan-chih Ch'en and Ovid J.L. Tzeng (eds), *Language Processing in Chinese*, Amsterdam: North-Holland, 3–36.

Huang Zheng 黃征 (2005), *Dunhuang suzidian* 敦煌俗字典 [Dictionary of vernacular characters in Dunhuang], Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe.

Jordan, David K., and Daniel L. Overmyer (1986), *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kornicki, Peter Francis (2018), *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ledderose, Lothar (2000), *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lowry, Kathryn (2005), *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th- and 17th-Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire*, Leiden: Brill.

Lu Xixing 陆锡兴 (2002), *Hanzi chuanbo shi* 汉字传播史 [History of the dissemination of the Chinese script], Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe.
Lu Xixing 陆锡兴 (2003), *Hanzi de yinmi shijie* 汉字的隐秘世界 [The hidden world of Chinese characters], Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe.
Lu Xixing 陆锡兴 (2018), *Hanzi chuanbo shi* 汉字传播史 [History of the dissemination of the Chinese script], Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan.
Needham, Joseph (1956), *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Shang Bi 商璧 (1985), *Yuefeng kaoshi* 粵風考釋 [Annotations on the *Airs of Yue*], Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe.
Song Enchang 宋恩常 (1991), 'Hanzi zai Yaozu shehui zhong de chuanbo ji qi yanbian' 汉字在瑶族社会中的传播及其演变 [The dissemination of the Chinese script in Yao society and its transformations], *Yunnan minzu xueyuan xuebao* 云南民族学院学报 3: 25–28.
Sung, Margaret M.Y. (1979), 'Chinese Language and Culture: A Study of Homonyms, Lucky Words and Taboos', *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 7: 15–28.
Töpelmann, Cornelia (1973), *Shan-ko von Feng Meng-lung: eine Volksliedersammlung aus der Ming-Zeit*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
van der Loon, Piet (1992), *The Classical Theatre and Art Song of South Fukien: a Study of Three Ming Anthologies*, Taipei: Southern Materials Center.
Wang Ming 王明 (1985), *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子内篇校釋 [The *Baopuzi Inner Chapters* redacted and annotated], revised edn, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
Ware, James R. (1966), *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei pien of Ko Hung (Pao-pu tzu)*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Zhang Yongquan 张永泉 (1995), *Hanyu suzi yanjiu* 汉语俗字研究 [A study on vernacular characters in Chinese], Changsha: Yue-Lu shushe.
Zhao Yuanren 趙元任 (*minguo* 民國 19 [1930]), *Guangxi Yaoge jiyin* 廣西猺歌記音 [A phonetic transcription of Yao songs from Guangxi], Beiping: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo.
Zürcher, E. (2007), *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 3rd edn, Leiden: Brill.