



MANUSCRIPT FLOWS IN HIGHLAND ASIA: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MATERIAL CULTURE



25-26 March of 2024,

in hybrid mode (with in-person and online participation),

A workshop hosted by

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures Universität Hamburg

Warburgstrasse 26
20354 Hamburg

in coordination

with the activities of the **Asian Highland Manuscripts Working Group**



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CENTRE FOR THE
STUDY OF
MANUSCRIPT
CULTURES

Manuscripts produced across large geographical areas, roughly corresponding to the region that has come to be known as Zomia, share certain features. These have been generated by the use of local materials rather than extensive imports depending on trade, the cultural practices of indigenous traditions, as well as local skills and technologies transmitted and assimilated over many generations. These heritage objects, written on different supports, such as paper, birch-bark, palm-leaves and other materials, were often produced in regions that were situated at the margins of the state beyond the government's military and fiscal control. Their producers (ethnic or religious minorities from the point of view of the hegemonic states around them) often migrated over the course of history, often changing their relation to power centers. As a result of such constant interactions with other cultures, whether dominant or assimilative, local manuscript cultures became increasingly differentiated. This resulted in significant differences in models of manuscript production, reflecting the dynamic between the changes in the habits of use of specific materials and technologies from a spatial and temporal perspective within Highland Asia.

In this workshop we aim to discuss networks of both manuscripts and people, as well as all kinds of interaction between these agents in connection to material culture. We will bring together researchers representing both the humanities and natural sciences working in various fields, such as textual studies, anthropology, (art)history, and material analysis, who engage with the methods and concepts concerned with manuscript studies and network analysis.

Key topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Social network analysis as a means of understanding the circulation and transmission of manuscripts in Highland Asia
- Role of power centers and periphery in the dissemination of manuscripts and book technology (economic networks)
- Trade routes and further infrastructure facilitating manuscript flows in Highland Asia
- Religious and family networks
- Networks of producers and users of manuscripts
- Interconnection of myths, manuscripts and rituals (also across cultures)
- Transfer of technologies in manuscript production (paper-making, book-making, printing)



MONDAY 25.03.2024

9:50–10:00 Welcome

Session chair: Agnieszka Helman-Ważny

10:00–10:40 **Charles Ramble:** *Networks of Bonpo lamas and their patrons from Sichuan to the western Himalayas*

10:40–11:20 **Daniel Berounský:** *Tibetan leyu: traces of an early fertility cult and the emergence of a textual tradition*

11:20–11:40 Coffee break

Session chair: Charles Ramble

11:40–12:20 **Marc des Jardins:** *Three possible moments of exchange between Tibetan pagan traditions and Chinese daoism and popular religions*

12:20–13:00 **Barend ter Haar:** *A common cultural substrate for local cultures (ethnic groups) in southern China*

13:00–14:30 Lunch

Session chair: Lewis Doney

14:30–15:10 **Naljor Tsering:** *Archival Revelations from the Royal Families of rGyal rong: the Religious, Legal Codes, and Ancestral Myths of the Kingdoms Across the Sino-Tibetan Border*

15:10–15:50 **Michela Clemente:** *In search for networks: five Buddhist fragmentary illuminated manuscripts of the Tucci Tibetan Collection*

15:50–16:10 Coffee break

Session chair: Michela Clemente

16:10–16:50 **Kalsang Norbu Gurung and Lewis Doney:** *Re-use, Repair and Recycling: Evidence from Some Manuscripts in the Tibetan Areas of Northern Nepal*

16:50–17:30 **Agnieszka Helman-Ważny:** *Getting to know the scribes through their work: Material choices of the scribes from the Drangsong family of priests*

19:00 Dinner

TUESDAY 26.03.2024

Session chair: Barend ter Haar

9:30–10:10 **Duncan Poupard:** *The creation of new Naxi manuscripts and manuscript networks* (online presentation)

10:10–10:50 **Dan Petersen:** *First observations of scribal features in Dongba manuscripts*

10:50–11:10 Coffee break

Session chair: Volker Grabowsky

11:10–11:50 **Joseba Estévez:** *Charting the Transportation and Trade Infrastructure in Northern Laos during the 1890s-1900s: The Lanten Manuscripts case*

11:50–12:30 **Silpsupa Jaengsawang:** *Social and Scribal Networks of a Monk in Luang Prabang Manuscript Culture*

12:30–14:00 Lunch break

Session chair: Marc des Jardins

14:00–14:40 **Malgorzata Grzelec:** *Manuscript preservation practices as Traditional Knowledge Systems*

14:40–15:20 **Yeshe Lendup:** *Understanding Druk-sho (Bhutanese paper) Making and Records*

15:20–15:40 Coffee break

15:40–17:00 **Agnieszka Helman-Ważny and Joseba Estévez:** *Round table discussion on the materials and technologies of manuscript production in the Highlands of Southern and Southeast Asia (90 min)*

Abstracts

Tibetan leyu: traces of an early fertility cult and the emergence of a textual tradition

DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, CHARLES UNIVERSITY

This paper will focus on references to an enigmatic tradition called leyu (*le'u*) or legu (*le gu*) in 11th-16th century textual sources. These sources use this term to refer to leyu primarily as a deity (*le'u lha*), and it appears to have been a cult of deities who brought the fetuses (*le'u*) of newborns to the people. It is likely that this cult later came to be seen as a specific ritual tradition, and the term leyu came to refer not primarily to deities but to the ritual tradition, its ritual specialists and texts. There is reason to believe that the present-day remnants of these rituals from the Minshan mountain range on the north-eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau are only a fragment of a once much more robust tradition. But its reach in past centuries is difficult to reconstruct today. With the disappearance of a living tradition, probably carried largely orally, the primary sources of information are the abundant surviving manuscripts, which are, however, often fragmentary.

In search for networks: five Buddhist fragmentary illuminated manuscripts of the Tucci Tibetan Collection

MICHELA CLEMENTE, TUCCI TIBETAN COLLECTION, "ISIAO LIBRARY", SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME AND CENTRAL INSTITUTE FOR ARCHIVES AND BOOKS PATHOLOGY (ICPAL)

The Tucci Tibetan Collection of the "IsIAO Library" includes some Buddhist fragmentary illuminated manuscripts, likely dating to the 13th-14th century. Among these, five appear to belong to the same workshop, seemingly sharing the same networks of artists, donors and materials. Building on information gathered in the frame of a new-established project carried out by ISMEO – International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, the Institute for Complex Systems (ISC) of the National Research Council (CNR) and the National Central Library of Rome (BNCR), in collaboration with the Institute of Applied Physics "Nello Carrara" (IFAC-CNR), the Enrico Fermi Study Research Center (CREF) and the Italian Academy of Fine Arts, this paper will attempt to identify networks of patronage, artists and materials hidden behind this group of manuscripts.

Re-use, Repair and Recycling: Evidence from Some Manuscripts in the Tibetan Areas of Northern Nepal

LEWIS DONEY AND KALSANG NORBU GURUNG, UNIVERSITY OF BONN

Premodern Tibetan regions beyond the "Tibet" conceived of as areas along the Tsangpo river remained outside of the centre of power but still maintained their own power networks as well as connecting to these power centres on the Tibetan Plateau in numerous ways. This has led to cultures of the text and approaches to venerating, preserving and transmitting manuscripts and manuscript culture that show influence and affinities with central Tibet but also connections to the southern plains and laterally across the Himalayas. Drawing on evidence from manuscripts in the collection of the Department for Mongolian and Tibetan studies at the University of Bonn and local experience of one of the presenters, this talk will offer some insights into how Tibetan Buddhist and Bon po written materials may have been conceptualised and were really dealt with in parts of Mustang and Solu-Khumbhu in northern Nepal.

Charting the Transportation and Trade Infrastructure in Northern Laos during the 1890s-1900s: The Lanten Manuscripts case

JOSEBA ESTÉVEZ, WESTFÄLISCHE WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT MÜNSTER / THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

In the 1860s, a narrative known as the Yunnan Myth gained traction in Europe, promoting the idea that South-western China, particularly Yunnan Province, held immense untapped potential as a profitable market accessible through European trade. This region was bordered by British Tibet and Burma (now Myanmar) to the northwest, with routes leading into Yunnan via Bhamo (Kachin State) and the Shan States. On the southeast, Yunnan extended towards French Indochina (present-day Laos and Vietnam) through the Mekong and Red Rivers. The unexplored mountainous terrain in these borderlands posed significant challenges for the Europeans, as the cultures and trading routes were relatively unfamiliar to them until the late 19th century. The French and British empires competed to establish dominance along these routes, leading to numerous expeditions in search of new courses, markets, and resources. Their mapping endeavours, including journals and travel logs, offer valuable insights into the reality of this region during that era, shedding light on the local markets and the commodities traded within them and their interactions with local populations, merchants (e.g., caravans), and refugees fleeing conflicts elsewhere. Based on various historical records, this article reconstructs the transportation and trade infrastructure of the 1890s-1900s and examines the exchanged commodities, including manuscripts and their flows, along the travelled routes. The focus will be on the newly established polity of Luang Namtha in Northern Laos, which was re-founded in the early 1890s, and the Lanten (Yao Mun) society – the subjects of the author's social anthropological research.

Manuscript preservation practices as Traditional Knowledge Systems

MALGORZATA GRZELEC, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

Manuscripts hold significant value in the majority of cultures, necessitating ongoing efforts for their protection and maintenance to extend their lifespan. The preservation methods have evolved over centuries, devised by collection caretakers and manuscript users. These practices have resulted in robust knowledge systems that serve as crucial repositories of cultural and social realities within respective communities. Some social networks have formalized their preservation practices, while in other cases, these practices have been passed down through social interactions. While some methods have become obsolete, others remain a living part of intangible cultural heritage. In certain instances, these ongoing practices pose challenges when juxtaposed with modern conservation principles. A key contemporary question revolves around achieving a balance between safeguarding the intangible and tangible aspects of cultural heritage for the benefit of all stakeholders. This presentation aims to demonstrate that manuscript preservation practices in various Asian regions, including Laos, Thailand, China, Nepal, and India, should be acknowledged as Traditional Knowledge Systems. An overview of preservation practices, coupled with a comparison to modern conservation methods, will offer insights into the distinctive nature of these traditional systems.

A common cultural substrate for local cultures (ethnic groups) in southern China

BAREND TER HAAR, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

This paper will develop a methodological position that at least partly goes back to the work of Wolfram Eberhard in the 1930s and 1940s. When we include local cultures in and around the old imperial heartland into our analytical narrative, it is possible to identify historical or even modern regions with a coherent body of ritual practices, mythology and cults that are often consistent over time and internally coherent. These regions often include both Han/Chinese and non Han/Chinese parts (in itself a problematic distinction). Instead of reduc-

ing everything to a single mono-ethnic culture (Han/Chinese or otherwise), I propose an earlier layer which includes shared ritual practices that not necessarily shamanic (an often abused label for early religious culture), fears (of demonic familiars) and so forth. Sharing between cultures is not explained in terms of recent (last two thousand years!) influence, but common roots. As a result of interaction with dominant cultural traditions often represented by textualized hegemonies (both kingly/imperial regimes and religious as well as perhaps even medical traditions) coming from the Tibetan direction (once all the way from the present SAR Tibet up to Gansu and Western Shaanxi) on the one hand, and Sinitic culture from the north (midstream of the Yellow River) and eventually also from the east (Lower Yangzi River region), local cultures increasingly differentiated. Some got a Tibetan textual layer on top, with the substrate developing into Bon, whereas others got a Sinitic layer on top and the substrate developed a vernacular Daoist inspired tradition (not to be confused with classical Daoist ritual practice). Neither Bon nor vernacular traditions represent a decline of some higher order religion, but the growing together and changing of preexisting religious culture and dominant traditions from the outside and from politico-religious elites.

Round table discussion on the materials and technologies of manuscript production in the Highlands of Southern and Southeast Asia (90 min)

AGNIESZKA HELMAN-WAŻNY, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG / UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW AND JOSEBA ESTÉVEZ, WESTFÄLISCHE WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT MÜNSTER / THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

In order to comprehend the materiality of a written artifact, one can look at its production process and the combined technologies that were employed to create it. For instance, paper production (i.e., material support), ink, binding, the development of writing itself as well as tools that were utilized in the process. When combined, both the categories of these materials and their technologies create unique, locally available resources that define the physical appearance of a manuscript. However, it is important to note that different categories of materials and their technologies exhibit distinct dynamics. Materials tend to be influenced more by local factors such as the ecosystem (e.g., endemic plants) and social, cultural, and economic practices. Technologies are usually viewed from a broader perspective, considering the processes of cultural dissemination involved in papermaking, ink-making, binding, writing, and the like.

In many cases, we have limited knowledge regarding the socio-historical baseline of specific technologies, the particularities of their early adoption and transfer, the preconditions for the speed of such transfer and the involved exchange routes and actors.

This round table discussion aims to explore the interplay between patterns of production and the use of specific materials and technologies from localized and synchronic perspectives (case-based approach). Additionally, we seek to understand how the pathways of such materialities (locality) and the trajectories of these technologies (the Highlands' broader region) are interconnected. We will present video sequences captured during our fieldwork that document manuscript production in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Laos, and Thailand to facilitate this exploration. By analyzing these videos, we aim to nurture a discussion on the variations in manuscript production technologies observed across these regions. This exploration includes the proposal to create an audiovisual database listing of materials produced during our fieldwork for further study.

Getting to know the scribes through their work: Material choices of scribes from the Drangsong family

AGNIESZKA HELMAN-WAŻNY, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG / UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

This talk explores the material choices of the scribes affiliated with the Drangsong family of priests that served the royal Mustang family from 15th till early 20th century. The figure of the scribe in the Bon manuscript-mak-

ing tradition may appear elusive compared to other figures such as the author, discoverer, or patron of a text. This situation is largely due to the relative paucity in the past of direct scribal testimony about their activities and lives. Thus, in the absence of detailed biographical evidence, the material analyses of manuscripts with colophons identifying scribes by name can help to better understand the scribal networks active in particular geographical area. This study is based on the comparative material analyses of the Drangsong manuscripts representing the ritual repertoire of the priests of the kings of Mustang that were written by the same scribe. I will discuss what types of writing materials and tools were used by the specific scribes, as well as what we can learn further about their personal preferences that shaped the final look of the manuscript in the making.

Social and Scribal Networks of a Monk in Luang Prabang Manuscript Culture

SILPSUPA JAENGSAWANG, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

In Luang Prabang, the ancient royal capital of Laos and a main centre of Lao Buddhism, there are twenty extant palm-leaf manuscripts the production of which was (co-)initiated by Phan Phon Phibun Theppa-aksòn. The name of this monk often appears along with the names of other sponsors, implying the presence of a network of sponsors or initiators for producing religious manuscripts. Written between 1959 and 1980, these manuscripts are kept at two monasteries: Vat Maha That, the place of a local library, and Vat Mai Suvanna Phumaram, the seat of the Supreme Patriarch until 1975. According to the colophons, Phan Phon Phibun Theppa-aksòn sometimes transmitted Thai Buddhist texts by transcribing them into the Lao variant of the Dhamma script. This reveals that the venerable monk had access to Thai textual sources and was fluent in the Thai language. This study aims at exploring the social and scribal networks in Luang Prabang as reflected in the twenty manuscripts examined. It will be analysed how Phan Phon Phibun Theppa-aksòn established relations with other (lay and monk) sponsors, how their network was organized, as well as the sponsors' social status and their relationship to the copied texts, and the collaborative tasks in the production of manuscripts.

Three possible moments of exchange between Tibetan pagan traditions and Chinese Daoism and popular religions

J.F. MARC DES JARDINS, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Our study of the sa bdag 'bum has provided us with clear links between Chinese Daoism and popular religions and the rituals contained in the Fourfold Collection of Rituals ('bum bzhi) in the Bön Canon (bon bka'). The stories on the Miraculous King Kongtse (kong tse 'phrul gyi rgyal po) and the names of the sa bdag spirits clearly points respectively to these Chinese traditions as source of inspiration and of borrowings. This paper examines three important moments in Chinese and Tibetan history that may give have contributed these cultic exchanges.

Understanding *Druk-sho* (Bhutanese paper) Making and Records

YESHI LENDUP, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF BHUTAN

Papermaking in Bhutan is one of the oldest arts recorded in the history of Buddhism in the 8th century, particularly in the biography of Guru Padmasambava. Bhutan, located in the foothills of the great Himalayan mountain range, having a rich vegetation, is a home to more than 17 different species of *Daphne* plants, locally called Dey-shing. They are scientifically known as *Daphne odora*, a family of Thymelaeaceae, from which the Bhutanese paper *Druk-sho* is made.

However, only two species from the Thymelaeaceae family, the Dey-kar (white daphne, summer daphne) and Dey-na (black daphne, winter daphne), are used in papermaking. As the fibers are very rich and durable, they are not only used in papermaking, but also for making various religious figures or everyday household items such as ropes, threads, etc. Because of the specific organic ingredients and substances used in making this paper, many ancient and treasured manuscripts and woodblock prints preserved in the dzongs (fortresses), monasteries, as well as other ancient archival records are well preserved to this day.

First observations of scribal features in Dongba manuscripts

DAN PETERSEN, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

Research on the Naxi people mentions collective activities such as funeral rituals for high-status Dongba that require the involvement of numerous other Dongba. But close interactions between them must have also occurred when they had borrowed their manuscripts from another in order to copy them for their own use. This may have resulted in inventing personal markers on their manuscripts for better identification. But these encounters could have also led to certain elements of the manuscripts being copied. Unfortunately, after Dongba manuscripts were acquired by Western collectors, much about their provenance or their scribes was already lost. And even if valuable information could still be retrieved from colophons, not all manuscripts entail them. As a result, other aspects of the object must be investigated too. In this talk, I will give some examples of scribal features as reflected in the manuscripts. This involves the observation of recurring patterns in visual organization and the depiction of characters or markers. Ideally, it will also disclose regional features of the manuscripts that could later be utilized for an improved organization.

The creation of new Naxi manuscripts and manuscript networks

DUNCAN POUPARD, THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

The Naxi “dongba” manuscripts display a number of regional differences, and these differences coalesce around regional centres of manuscript production (Lijiang/Baisha, Baidi, Eya/Muli). There has historically been limited spread of traditions between regions, with communication limited by geographic factors as well as the historically clandestine nature of the ritual practices which kept manuscripts confined to a patrilineal system of transmission.

With the geopolitical developments of contemporary China, these factors are increasingly less relevant. How, then, have the manuscript networks changed in the modern era? This paper aims to show how modern “social networks” can aid in the spread of manuscript traditions between regional centres of production by focusing on one particular case study: the flow of manuscripts between Eya in Sichuan and Shangri-la in Yunnan, via Leiden University. The Leiden University Naxi collection of pre-1949 manuscripts was deciphered in Shangri-la, but the books were predominantly identified as Eya manuscripts. As a result, dongba ritualists travelled to Eya and brought examples of recently copied texts back to Yunnan. These texts were then adapted to suit the local ritual tradition in Baidi (Shangri-la). A codicological analysis of the newly modified Baidi manuscript tradition, in comparison with the original Eya text, will show how changing networks have affected the manuscripts themselves.

Networks of Bonpo lamas and their patrons from Sichuan to the western Himalayas

CHARLES RAMBLE, ÉCOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES (EPHE), PSL UNIVERSITY, PARIS, AND THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON EAST ASIAN CIVILISATIONS (CRCAO)

Followers of the Bon religion represent a very small proportion – probably less than five per cent – of the Tibetan population, living for the most part in small communities separated by vast distances across the plateau, but their religious figures were every bit as inclined to travel – necessarily on foot – as their Buddhist compatriots. Biographies (and autobiographies) are the most important sources for information about their peregrinations and the networks they created. Very often however, this genre of literature tends to concentrate on topics such as visionary experiences the subjects had at the sites they visited, meaningful encounters with prominent people, and various virtuous achievements. We rarely hear, for example, what texts they may have found and copied in a given location, or what scriptures they themselves were carrying and may have been copied by their local hosts. Fortunately, information concerning Tibet-wide networks between Bonpo communities and the circulation of texts along these pathways may be derived from sources other than biographies. This paper will consider a number of different types of works that might contribute to our understanding of the contacts between far-flung Bonpo centres and the transmission of texts along these routes. Examples will include the colophons of ritual texts contained in the manuscript collection of a now-vanished Bonpo priestly lineage in Mustang (Nepal), as well as eighteenth-century correspondence found in another Bon community in the neighbouring district of Dolpo.

Archival Revelations from the Royal Families of rGyal rong: the Religious, Legal Codes, and Ancestral Myths of the Kingdoms Across the Sino-Tibetan Border

NALJOR TSERING, ÉCOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES-PSL, CRCAO, PARIS

Located on the border of Tibet, the rGyal rong region is now part of Sichuan Province in the People's Republic of China, encompassing the Aba Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture and Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous County. The region utilizes the rGyal rong language, a Qiangic branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family within the Tibeto-Burman group. In the geographical perspective of the Tibetan people, it is referred to as *rGyal mo tsha ba rong*, the warm eastern valley of the queen. In the Chinese geographical context, it is known as Jialiang yi. Until the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the rGyal rong region has historically been renowned for the eighteen kingdoms that successively emerged in the area.

Similar to other regions in Tibet, the rGyal rong area has witnessed a flourishing development of Tibetan religious texts. Concurrently, in recent years, there has been a surge in the emergence of numerous archives, including royal edicts, letters, dispute records, registers, and tax documents. From museums to private collections, these archives comprise approximately 1500-2000 files, with most materials dating back to the Qianlong era (before and after the Jinchuan Wars of the 18th century). Administrative edicts constitute a significant portion of these records. Owing to the longstanding influence of both Tibetan and Chinese dynasties on the political and religious traditions of the rGyal rong region, these documents reflect a complex interplay between the socio-religious and political-cultural aspects of Tibetan society and the political ideology of China. It can be asserted that the coexistence of two distinct political and cultural logics represents a microcosm of the intersection, reconciliation, and fusion of the political and cultural traditions of Tibet and China on the fringes of their convergence. Simultaneously, the rich cultural identity of the rGyal rong region is primarily interwoven with religious practices and ancestral myths passed down through generations. Since the era of the Tibetan Empire, rGyal rong has been influenced by the religious and cultural traditions of Central Tibet, giving rise to notable scholars in Tibetan religious history. The royal archives of the rGyal rong dynasty provide glimpses into creation myths, religious history, and epic stories, shaping collective consciousness and serving as the cultural foundation that connects different ethnic groups within rGyal rong.