Gendered ritual and performative literacy : Yao Women, goddesses of fertility, and the Chinese imperial state
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Chapter 2. The Yao Existed Before the Court Appeared: The Yao, the Chinese Imperial State, and Yao Manuscripts

Introduction

I recalled an interview scenario that had remained with me as a vivid memory and fortunately I was still able to find it preserved in my old field notes from when I commenced my fieldwork research on Yao religious culture in 1999. It was an interview with a Mien ritual master and the incumbent village-level 'party clerk' (*shuji*) in Weihao, Li Caiyou, who was in his forties when we met. Before we went into the details of village history, Li opened the discourse by quoting an ancient Yao saying: 'The Yao existed before the court appeared' (*xianyouyao, houyouchao*). I can still remember his vivid facial expression, in which pride and bitterness vied with each other, as he told me this. Li Caiyou was clearly aware of the fact that, in reality, history had not unfolded in a way that had allowed the Yao to claim a superior status over the state. It was and still is the other way around.

The saying that 'the Yao existed before the court appeared' is not restricted to the Mien but is also a widespread adage among many other Yao.[1] It draws a state-free picture of Yao society before it was engulfed by Chinese imperial governance as their shared history unfolded. It also implies the Yao's awareness of and possible encounters with successive interventions, represented either as institutions, policies, military operations, trade and market, or as individual officials and religious representatives of the Chinese imperial courts. The Yao's assimilation of Chinese literacy and the religious traditions laden with Chinese culture are clear indications of such encounters, as are their material manifestation, the ritual manuscripts.

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[1] Tang Xiaotao, *Langyao hezai: Mingqing shiqi Guangxi Xunzhoufu de zuqun bianqian* 倀傜何在-明清時期廣西潯州府的族群變遷 (Where were the Lang and the Yao: Changes in Ethnic Boundaries in Xunzhou Prefecture of Guangxi during Ming and Qing Times) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011), 192-193.

This chapter sets out important preliminaries that place Yao religious culture and manuscripts in their proper context. I begin by explaining who the Yao are before introducing the two specific Yao groups whose manuscripts are most relevant to my study. The chapter then proceeds with a section narrating a mythologized past, recorded in text and song, of the Yao's relationships with the Chinese imperial courts. Having established a preliminary understanding of the dynamisms in the historical interaction between the Yao and the Chinese imperial courts, the chapter moves on to introduce four aspects of Yao religious culture and manuscripts, including their scriptural and ritual practices, dating information, different forms of textualities and linguistic characteristics.

The Yao People: From A Chinese Perspective

As were the terms 'barbarian' (*man*) and 'Miao', Yao was once an umbrella exonym used by the Han Chinese in official records to cover a wide range of southern non-Han Chinese peoples.[2] 'Yao' is an English transliteration of the Mandarin pronunciation of a Chinese character written alternatively as 猺, 傜, 傜 or 瑤.[3] A detailed and critical examination of the changes in Chinese uses and perceptions of

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[2] Feng Henggao (ed.), *Yaozu tongshi shangjun* 瑤族通史上卷 (The Detailed History of the Yao, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2007), 39-186.

[3] In Chinese official sources, there have been four ways of composing the character. First is the character 猺, composed of a 'dog' radical on the left and a phonetic element on the right. The first appearance of the character might be dated from the year of 1163, and it was used up through early Republican times (1912-1949) (Cushman, 1970, 49-55). The 'dog' radical is believed to have an apparent association with wild beasts, expressing contempt toward non-Han groups (Alberts, 2006, 26). Second is another form of the character 傜, with the radical meaning 'step on the left foot' on the left, or, alternatively the third form of the character 傜, with the 'human' radical on the left (Ibid., 24). The graph 傜 and 傜 means 'corvée'. The character in question has undergone another change after the founding of the PRC (1949-). The forth written form of 'Yao' is 瑤, with the 'jade' radical meaning 'a precious stone'. Following the guiding principle, Mingcong zhuren (named after the original owner), set by Mao Zhedong (1893-1976) in the early 1950s, the Chinese Communist Party used the character with 'jade' radical to avoid the unpleasant associations of the earlier forms, be it 'wild beasts' or 'people subject to corvée'. The modern change in the written form of the character Yao is not only of political significance, but also has cultural impact. In terms of academic circle, especially in China, the cultural impact has been shown in the prevalent modification of the two previous written forms into the present form, even in the reprints of and citations about the official documents and literary works before 1949. The 'presentism', an attitude toward the past dominated by present-day attitudes and experiences, has often caused the loss of the distinctions between and the associations with the three previous written forms. See Richard D. Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts: Problems in the Ethnohistory of the Yao', PhD thesis (Department of Anthropology, University of Cornell, 1970). Eli Alberts, *A History of Daoism and the Yao People of South China* (NY and London: Cambria Press, 2006).

the word 'Yao' as a label, entered in written records as early as in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (AC 420-589), can be found in the works of Richard D. Cushman and Eli Alberts.[4] Cushman and Alberts both provide sufficient evidence to show that, in the Chinese official sources available, the term 'Yao' was initially utilized as an administrative (for taxation and corvée labour) and a territorial (for geographical and economic references) category, only later did it become an ethnic marker.[5] To give just one example, in his eleventh-century work, the *Houshan Tancong*, Chen Shidao writes, 'Those dwelling in the mountain valleys of the two Guang and not under the jurisdiction of the administrative districts (prefectures and counties) are called Yao people (*Yaoren*).'[6] Alberts observantly points out about this quotation, 'it uses the appellation *Yaoren* not as an ethnic label, but rather as a geo-administrative category.'[7] It was not until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), especially during and after the large-scale mid-Ming 'Yao Wars', known as Great Vine Gorge Event (*datengxia zhiyi*), that the term 'Yao' was transformed into a marker of ethnicity. Thereafter 'Yao' was used to refer to a group of people who were not subject to any form of state control. This term marked them out as a group of people who were the opposite of the 'subordinate people' called *min*.[8]

Certainly, both the classification and the emergence of the 'Yao' people have a definite dynamic relationship with the Chinese state governance in South China. Take the Baimiaotu 百苗圖 or Miaoman tuce 苗蠻圖冊 (Miao Album) (r. 1723-35 or r. 1736-96) for example. The Miao Album depicts eighty-two different ethnic groups, the Yao being one of them, residing in Guizhou.[9] Laura Hostetler concludes that the Miao Album was compiled to provide newly appointed officials with information

[4] Feng, *op. cit.*, 7.
[5] Alberts, *op. cit,* 25.
[6] The original Chinese text is '二廣, 居山谷間, 不隸州縣, 謂之傜人.' in Chen Shidao, Houshan Tancong 後山談叢, Siku Quanshu 四庫全書 1037/89b-90a. Cited in Alberts, *op. cit.*, 37.
[7] Alberts, *op. cit.*, 37-38.
[8] David Faure, 'The Yao Wars in the Mid-Ming and Their Impact on Yao Ethnicity', in Pamela K. Crossley et al. (eds), *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 171-189. Interestingly but most likely erroneously, Cushman suggests that, 'any Chinese speaker who tried to elicit the name for the Yao from a native Yao informant would almost certainly assimilate the 'mien_b_, denoting 'people' to the Chinese 'min' 民 of the identical meaning.' (Cushman, *op. cit.*, 53)
[9] As Miao served as an overarching term back then, Miao Album actually illustrated 82 different ethnic groups, including but not limited to Miao.

about the population they were to govern.[10] Above all, the most significant and recurring criterion in the classification of non-Han people is several dichotomous and paired sets of terms devised to distinguish between 'subordinate people' (*shu*, 'cooked' or 'tamed' people) and 'not subordinate people' (*sheng*, 'raw' or 'untamed' people). Cushman demonstrates that a number of paired terms for the historical naming of the Yao are as follows:

> The most common pair is Shu 熟 and Sheng 生 (i.e. Shu yao 熟猺 and Sheng yao 生猺) and was applied to all, or almost all, of the hill tribes in South China. The most important factor in placing a local group in this classification was whether the group was considered to be subordinate to the local Chinese administration (Shu) or independent thereof (Sheng). Another set of dyadic terms, common only in reference to the Yao, contains a P'ing ti 平地 ("lowlands") and a Kao shan 高山 ("high mountains") dichotomy; occasionally Kao shan is replaced by Kuo shan 過山 ("mountain crossing")....Finally, there are a number of paired names in the literature which seem to be strictly local designations for the Yao. These include Chu 住 ("settled") and Liu 流 ("migrant"), Nei 內 ("internal") and Wai 外 ("external"), Chen 真 ("real") and Yen 贋 ("fake"), and Liang 良 ("settled") and Man 蠻 ("wild"). Despite differences in the basic meaning of the various sets of terms, they all clearly separate the Yao in roughly the same fashion as the Sheng/Shu dichotomy.[11]

The dichotomy shown in these Sheng/Shu paired terms tellingly reflects the different trajectories in the distinct historical experiences of various 'Yao' groups when they encountered the southward expansion of the Chinese state. Roughly speaking, there are three local reactions to state incorporation: to submit to being incorporated into the state; to resist against it, but most likely fail; and/or to escape from the grasp of the state. Throughout the course of Chinese history, especially in the Ming and Qing times, some of the 'Yao' chose to become a part of the state by allowing themselves to be developed into a lineage society. These groups included the She and Hakka in

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[10] David Michael Deal and Laura Hostetler, *The Art of Ethnography: A Chinese "Miao Album"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), xxiv.
[11] Cushman, 1970, 94.

southeast China.[12] In the borderlands of Guangdong and Guangxi, some remained in a constant state of resistance to state control, for example the Yao in central Guangxi, where the Great Vine Gorge Event broke out.[13] In this area, there were some who chose to become *lang bing* or *langjia jun* (literally, 'wolf packs') and supported the military interventions of the state in its suppression of local ethnic uprisings.[14] Finally, some, such as the Yao in upland Southeast Asia, decided to escape the grasp of the Chinese state entirely.[15]

In the Republican Era (1912-1949), the Yao were recognized as an individual group that was included among the seven national nationalities of the Republic of China, including such other major nationalities as the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, Tibetan and Miao. Although they were accorded their national-level recognition, the Yao remained one of the subjects waiting to be civilized.[16] After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, in the early 1950s the communist party carried out a Chinese Ethnic Classification Campaign (*minzu shibie yundong*). The Campaign identified the 'Yao' as an ethnic group principally made up of highland peoples living in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou and Jiangxi.[17] According to a demographic survey published in

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[12] Yang Yanjie, 'Minxi dongshan Xiaoshi de zongzu wenhua jiqi tezhi' (The Lineage Culture and its Characteristics of Xiao Lineage in East Mountain of Western Fujian 閩西東山蕭氏的宗族文化及其特質), in Bien Chiang and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Guojia, shichang yu mailuohua de zuqun* 國家、市場與脈絡化的族群 (State, Market and Ethnic Groups Contextualized) (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2003), 105-132. Wu Yongzhang, Shezu yu Miao-Yao bijiao yanjiu 畲族與苗瑤比較研究 (A Comparative Study of nationalities of She, Miao and Yao) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2002).

[13] David Faure, 'The Yao Wars in the Mid-Ming and Their Impact on Yao Ethnicity', in Pamela K. Crossley et al. (eds), Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 171-189. Ralph A. Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 138-182.

[14] Tang Xiaotao, *Langyao hezai: Mingqing shiqi Guangxi Xunzhoufu de zuqun bianqian* 倮傜何在-明清時期廣西潯州府的族群變遷 (Where Were the Lang and the Yao: Changes in Ethnic Boundaries in Xunzhou Prefecture of Guangxi during Ming and Qing times) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011).

[15] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2009), 127-177.

[16] Zhao Xuexian et al., *Zhongguo guomindang minzu lilun yu minzu zhengce yanjiu* 中國國民黨民族理論與民族政策研究 (A Study of Theory and Policy for Naitonalities of the Chinese Nationalist Party) (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2010).

[17] Based on the Stalinist concept of nationality that is defined by the sharing of such common characteristics as language, costume, culture, belief and lifestyle, the campaign was carried out by the government in co-operation with academia and eventually produced a count of 56 officially recognized nationalities, including the Han as the major nationality. See Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

2010, the 'Yao' in China number roughly 2.79 million.[18] Currently, the ethnic label 'Yao' actually includes diverse peoples who speak different languages and have distinct cultures. Conversely, it also excludes groups that could be meaningfully included (such as the Miao in Hainan, an omission that is a simple oversight in the classification, and even the She).[19]

The classification of Yao languages and their relationship to Miao languages is still unresolved and widely debated. According to Chinese linguists, Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien) should be classified as a branch of the Sino-Tibetan language group.[20] However, many western linguists have proposed that they should be seen as a branch of Austro-Asiatic or Austro-Thai languages.[21] Most Hmong-Mien speakers belong to the Miao and Yao 'nationalities' in China, although not all Miao or Yao people speak a Hmong-Mien language; many now speak local varieties of Chinese instead.[22] Linguistically, there are at least four different language groups that are classified as ethnic Yao in modern China. These four groups include such Miao-speaking groups as the Pu nu, such Yao-speaking groups as the Mien, such Dong-Sui–speaking groups as the Lak kja and such Chinese dialect-speaking groups as the Piog tuo jo (autonyms in all cases). Importantly, these four Yao groups cannot communicate with each other using their own languages.[23] The long and the short of it is that classification into the

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[18] National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China 中華人民共和國國家統計局, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/search/keywordlist2;jsessionid=BB0BD67C6AAE17277DBA9107507F033A?keyword=2010 年瑤族人口>, accessed 18 Feb. 2014.

[19] Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan: Yunnan yaozu wenhua yu minzu rentong* 瑤族志：香碗—雲南瑤族文化與民族認同 (An Ethnography of the Yao, Incense Bowl: Culture and Ethnic Identity of the Yao in Yunnan) (Kunming: Yunnan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 302-305. Wu Yongzhang, *Shezu yu Miao-Yao bijiao yanjiu* 畲族與苗瑤比較研究 (A Comparative Study of the Nationalities of the She, the Miao and the Yao) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2002).

[20] For example, Li Fang-Kuei, 'Guangxi Lingyun Yaoyu' 廣西凌雲猺語 (The Yao Language Discovered in Lingyun, Guangxi), *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* (中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 Bulletin of the Institue of History and Philology, Academia Sinica) 1(1930), 419-426. Zhao Yuanren, *Guangxi Yaoge jiyin* 廣西瑤歌記音 (The Recorded Sounds of Yao Songs from Guangxi) (Beiping: Academia Sinica, 1930).

[21] Andre-Georges Haudricourt argues an Austro-Asiatic origin of Miao-Yao language. See Andre-Georges Haudricourt, 'Introduction à la phonologie historique ... miao-yao,' *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 44 (1954), 555-574. P. K. Benedict also disagrees the Sino-Tibetan hypothesis and proposes an Austro-Thai origin of Miao-Yao language. See P. K. Benedict, *Austro-Thai: Language and Culture, with a Glossary of Roots* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1975).

[22] Stephen A. Wurm et al. (eds), *Language Atlas of China* (Hong Kong: Longman, 1988). See also Martha Ratliff, *Hmong-Mien Language History* (The Australian National University, 2010), 1.

[23] Feng Henggao (ed.), *Yaozu tongshi zhongjun* 瑤族通史中卷 (The Detailed History of the Yao, Volume Two) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2007), 822-826. Robert S. Ramsey, *The Languages of China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 278-285. For a further understanding of the

same language group does not necessarily indicate mutual intelligibility, for instance, within the Mien (Yao)-speaking group there are at least six different subgroups speaking different languages that are sometimes mutually unintelligible.[24] Very significant differences in cultural practice are also found between some of these subgroups. Although in their adherence to ritual traditions, Daoist beliefs and rituals take precedence in the religious life of most of the Yao-speaking and Dong-Sui-speaking groups, obvious borrowings from the Han Chinese religious culture are less prominent in the Miao-speaking group.[25]

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constructed nature of ethnic classification with a focus on the Yao, see Chen Meiwen, 'Constructed History: Ethnic Yao in Modern China', *Leidschrift,* 26/1 (2011), 93-108.

[24] Mao Zongwu, *Yaozu mianyu fangyan yanjiu* 瑤族勉語方言研究 (Research on Dialects in the Mien Language Group) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2004).

[25] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao rende goucheng yu shengming de laiyuan* 從命名談廣西田林盤古瑤人的構成與生命的來源 (Conceptualizations of Personhood and the Origins of Life as Seen in Naming Traditions among the Pangu Yao of Tianlin, Guangxi) (Taipei: Tangshan, 2003), 11-15.
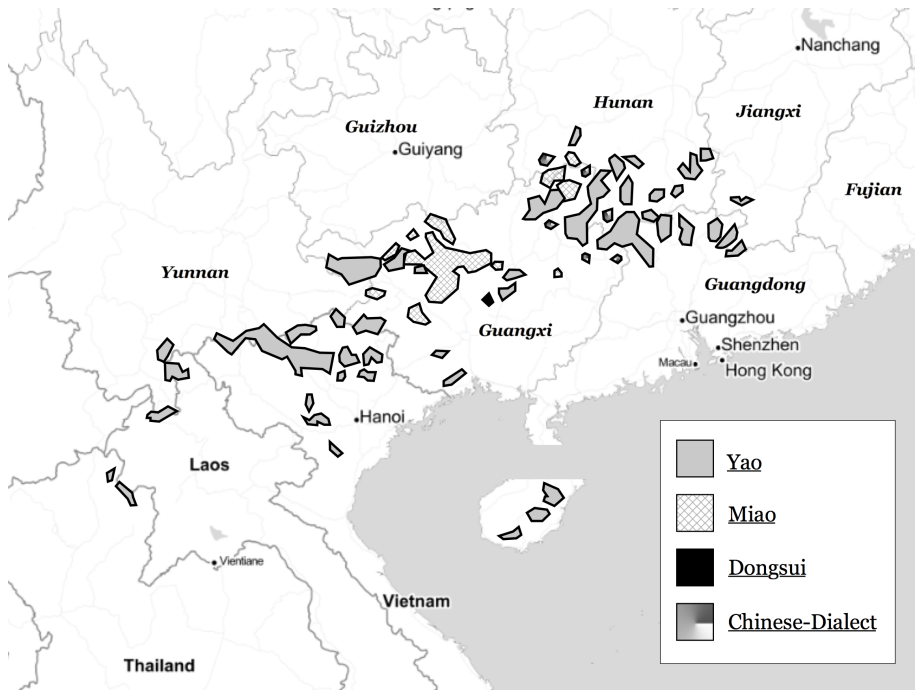
Map 1. Language Distribution of the 'Yao'[26]

In Vietnam, where they are classified as one of the fifty-four official ethnic groups in that country, the Yao are known as Người Dao. They are just one group of the Yao dispersed throughout upland Southeast Asia who are the descendants of different waves of ethnic migrations that have taken place intermittently within the last 300 to 400 years.[27] The Yao populations in Australia, Canada, France and the United States are the result of more recent migrations in the aftermath of the Indochina Wars (1946-1979).[28] Whether the Yao diaspora was voluntary or forced, all the Yao dispersed outside China can trace their roots back to China.[29] Therefore, the

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[26] Based on Robert S. Ramsey, *op. cit.* 278-285.

[27] Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua* 瑤族的歷史與文化 (The History and Culture of the Yao), Zhu Guichang and Jin Shaoping (trans.) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu xueyuan minzu yanjiusuo, 1986[1981]), 4-5. But, according to Richard Cushman, 'Yao may well have been present throughout their modern range of distribution in South China and Vietnam since the eleventh century'. (Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 141.)

[28] Ralph A. Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), xi-xii.

[29] Huang Yu and Huang Fangping, *Guoji yaozu gaishu* 國際瑤族概述 (Introduction to the Yao Worldwide) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1993). Hjorleifur Jonsson, 'War's Ontogeny: Militias and Ethnic Boundaries in Laos and Exile', *Southeast Asian Studies,* 47 (2009), 125-149.

history of the Yao in China merits special attention, a case I shall argue in the pages that follow.

Map 2. 'Yao' Migration[30]

Two groups of Yao-speaking people, the Mien or Iu-Mien and the Kimdi or Kimmun (autonyms), represent the majority of the Yao outside of China. 'Mien' means 'people,' and 'iu' might represent either a name of Chinese origin, presumably in its Cantonese vocalism, or it might be an indigenous self-designation.[31] There are various exonyms used in Chinese written documents to refer to this Yao subgroup (see Table 1). One of the most commonly used exonyms is Pan Yao, literally meaning 'Plate Yao', or 'the people who believe in the mythic dog-ancestor Panhu'.[32] Kimdi or Kimmun (or simply Mun) means 'the people in the forest'.[33] As among the Mien, a number of different exonyms are used to designate this Yao subgroup (see also Table 1). A commonly used exonym, Landian Yao, literally means 'Indigo Yao', or 'those

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[30] Based on Huang Yu and Huang Fangping, *op. cit.* preface 8.
[31] Christopher Anthony Forbes Court, *Fundamentals of IU mien (YAO) Grammar* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1985), 2. Richard Cushman, *op. cit.* 49-55.
[32] Yan Fuli and Shang Chengzu (eds), *Guangxi lingyun yaoren diaocha baogao* 廣西凌雲猺人調查報告 (Survey of the Yao people in Lingyun, Guangxi) (Beiping: Guoli zhongyang yanjiuyuan shenhui kexue yanjiusuo, 1929), 21.
[33] Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu, *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha, diliuce* 廣西瑤族歷史社會調查第六冊 (The Historical and Social Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Six) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 129.

who make dye'.[34] In Thailand both 'Yao' and 'Yiu mien' (Iu-mien) are used interchangeably; the Yao in Laos are known by both the exonym Yao and the autonyms Mien and Mun.[35]

Language	Autonyms	Exonyms
Yao-language speaking	Iu-Mien (Mien)	Pangu Yao 盤古瑤, Pan Yao 盤瑤, Panhu Yao 盤瓠瑤, Guoshan Yao 過山瑤, Daban Yao 大板瑤, Xiaoban Yao 小板瑤, Ban Yao 板瑤, Dingban Yao 頂板瑤, Jiantou Yao 尖頭瑤, Pingtou Yao 平頭瑤, Hongtou Yao 紅頭瑤, Jiangan Yao 箭桿瑤 , Niujiao Yao 牛角瑤, Tu Yao 土瑤 (in Hezhou, Guangxi 廣西賀州), Bendi Yao 本地瑤, Hua Yao 花瑤 (in Yangshuo, Guangxi 廣西陽朔), Ao Yao 坳瑤, Zheng Yao 正瑤, Liang Yao 糧瑤
	Kimdi or Kimmun (Mun)	Landian Yao 藍靛瑤, Shanzi Yao 山子瑤, Huatou Yao 花頭瑤, Sha Yao 沙瑤, Pingtou Yao 平頭瑤, Juzi Yao 堪子瑤

Table 1. Exonyms for Mien and Mun[36]

The bulk of the collections of Yao manuscripts from Southeast Asia now kept in various American and European libraries and museums come from these two specific Yao subgroups. In Southeast Asia, since the 1970s multiple factors, among them poverty, political pressure, loss of knowledge and perhaps even market demand, have caused the Yao to renounce their ritual legacy.[37] This is the reason so many Yao ritual manuscripts from Southeast Asia could be collected by purchase by the American and European museums and universities.

Mien and Mun: A 'Society of Escape'

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[34] Yan Fuli and Shang Chengzu, *op. cit*, 12.
[35] Jacob Cawthorne, 'Taoism and Self-Governance: The Yiu Mien of Laos', paper presented at the conference of Asian Borderlands: Enclosure, Interaction and Transformation, 2nd Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network, Chiang Mai University (RCSD), Thailand, November 5-7, 2010.
[36] Mao Zongwu, *Yaozu mianyu fangyan yanjiu,* 3, 6-8.
[37] Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982), 7.

Before China opened itself up to the outside world in the late 1970s, the migrant Yao, exclusively the Mien and the Mun, outside of China were the only Yao that were accessible to scholarly research. Writing of the origin of the Yao and specifically these two Yao sub-groups, Jess G. Pourret states in his *The Yao: The Mien and Mun Yao in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand* that,

> The Yao originated in China, possibly in the Yangtse Kiang area. They might have originated as a branch of the Han Chinese whose development took a different course, or they might perhaps derive from a completely different stock, perhaps one close to the Mongols….the two largest groups of Mien- and Mun-speakers…compose two distinct entities. Once they must have constituted a single unit, but over time they drifted apart and migrated into several regions, organising their lives with certain elements in parallel, and with certain differences, which could explain some dialectical variants.[38]

The dialects spoken by the Mien and Mun are both classified as belonging to the Mien (Yao) dialects of which there are more than four that form the Mien (Yao) language derived from the Miao/Yao linguistic family.[39] Herbert C. Purnell has postulated that the divergence between the Mien and the Mun, the two major dialect divisions of Proto-Yao, might have taken place between about 500 to 1,000 years ago.[40] Furthermore, 'both groups include Cantonese influences, while Mun has also Fujian dialects influences. Mien and Mun can understand approximately 60-70% of each others' languages, particulary in China and northern Vietnam where contacts are frequent.'[41] Despite the divergence in language, as will soon be shown and argued below, the religious cultures of the two Yao groups both contain a high degree of Daoist-Buddhist, and even Confucian, religious-cultural elements.[42] When composing their ritual manuscripts they have both utilized the Chinese written language in a

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[38] Jess G. Pourret, *The Yao: The Mien and Mun Yao in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand* (Chicago, 2002), 15.
[39] Martha Ratliff, *Hmong-Mien Language History* (The Australian National University, 2010).
[40] Herbert C. Purnell, 'Toward a Reconstruction of Proto-Miao-Yao', PhD thesis (Cornell University, 1970), cited in Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 80-82.
[41] Pourret, *op. cit.*
[42] Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan,* 75.

modified form. Most apposite to the argument here, the two Yao groups have also shared similar cosmologies and concomitant ritual practices to do with female fertility that are unquestionably of regional relevance in southern China as a whole (see Chapter 4).

Another significant note is that the forebears of these two Yao groups, often referred to as Banyao and Shanzi Yao in Chinese written historical documents, might have always lived in a historical position that fell outside imperial Chinese administrative control. Tang Xiaotao's research on the diversity of people in the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) has convincingly shown that the forebears of these two groups of Yao had never been completely integrated into any formal administrative systems, either the *lijia* system, a household registration system established in the fourteenth century by the Chinese imperial courts, or the Stone Tablet System (*shipai zhidu*), a contractual arrangement arguably initiated in the Ming times (1368-1644), organized by the Yao themselves, whose purpose was to exercise a degree of local governance by mutual consensus.[43] Historically, the Chinese imperial courts saw those mobile 'Yao' who were not entered into any registration system and were therefore not subject to taxation and corvée labour as the 'untamed' (*sheng*) Yao, as opposed to the Yao who did conform and were labelled the 'tame' (*shu*) Yao.[44] Importantly, from perspective of state governance, the people who fell into the 'untamed' category were the potential instigators of uprisings and hence the targets for suppression.[45]

However, according to James Scott, the people who were designated as such categories by the state actually intentionally designed their society to avoid being governed by an external state. If we were to agree with James Scott that various forms of subsistence and kinship that are usually taken as given, as ecologically and culturally determined, to be treated largely as political choices consciously made by the people in Zomia, the ways in which the societies of the two Yao groups have been

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[43] Caution is of course needed in reading historical accounts in which such ethnonyms appear, for the current classification in modern China cannot be applied uncritically to claim any direct genealogical link with the people of the same ethnonyms. Tang Xiaotao, *Langyao hezai,* 167-198.
[44] Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 94.
[45] Richard Cushman, ibid.

constructed might indeed characterize a 'society of escape'.[46] One aspect of Yao society to do with the ways the Yao have constantly tried to maintain a high degree of physical mobility is of particular relevance to the intended argument here.

As observed and stated by Takemura Takuji, apart from the Miao (Hmong), the Yao are the only other group of people among many non-Han Chinese groups in southern China who have travelled over a significantly widely ranging space between 20 to 30 degrees north latitude and 102 to 120 degrees east longitude, mostly in west-southwest direction from Southwest China towards upland Southeast Asia, within the last 300 to 400 years.[47] Many hypotheses have been formed to speculate on the reasons and methods by which the Yao undertook these movements, but I agree with Richard Cushman that a 'detailed understanding of the minutiae of village movements is of the utmost importance.'[48] Cushman has aptly concluded,

> The majority of Yao villages are located in the mountains of southern China and northern mainland Southeast Asia and their inhabitants cultivate upland rice and frequently the opium poppy…the size of Yao villages varies enormously, from five or six households with fifty or sixty members to perhaps as many as seven hundred households with a total of two thousand individuals. The size of villages is probably correlated with their stability, with the fertility of adjacent land, and with whether or not the Yao own wet rice fields. Some villages have been in existence for hundreds of years [presumably the case with the Pai Yao village of You Ling, Guangdong]. In contrast, small villages relying on swidden agriculture seem to move fairly frequently, at least until an unusually good location is found….Reasons for the movement of a village to a new site, or for the break-up of a village into factions, all or most of which resettle elsewhere, are tied in with the disruption of local ecological or inter-cultural relationships.[49]

The Mien and Mun villages I have been able to visit in different locations in Hunan, Guangxi and Yunnan on my separate fieldwork trips, including Weihao and Dingcao, are mostly composed of inhabitants not exceeding fifty households, sometimes

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[46] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed,* preface xi.
[47] Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua,* 4.
[48] Richard Cushman, *op. cit.* 123-125.
[49] Ibid., 119-122.

numbering fewer than 150 members to at most 300 individuals.[50] In the case of Weihao and Dingcao, their migratory histories recounted in local gazetteers and oral village histories indicate that they did not settle down in their current locations until the early twentieth century. Small-scale movements into neighbouring areas have been discovered to have occurred since then. Before their major settlement in their current habitations, the two Yao groups basically relied on swidden agriculture.[51] In other words, the ways in which the Mien and Mun villages are constructed and their way of life make it easier for them to migrate. The design of their villages and economic structures that allow maintaining a high degree of physical mobility are revealed, for instance, in their religious practices. The ephemerality of the incense-burners placed on the household altar is a good example.

The incense-burner is called *xuŋ lou* in Mien daily and religious language, and *huuŋ wan* in Mun daily language, *jaaŋ lu* in Mun religious language.[52] The materials used for making the incense-burner vary from village to village and from place to place. The simplest form of an incense-burner is no more than a plastic bottle filled with incense ashes to hold the incense sticks (see Illustration 1), or it can be fashioned from bamboo.[53] Or people simply buy a ready-made incense-burner, usually made of copper or earthenware, from the market in the vicinity (see Illustration 2).

Symbolically, the establishment of a Yao household is not deemed complete until the incense-burner has been set up on the household altar that is usually built high on a wall facing the main entrance gate of the household. The essentiality of the incense-burner in defining a household is clearly expressed when the contents of a household are divided up between siblings.[54] Although the term *pun piau* (Mien daily language) or *fun piaau* (Mun daily language), which literally means 'separating the house', is used to refer to such a situation, the more exact term is in fact *pun xuŋ lou*

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[50] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 32. Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng, 'Menren nüxing gechang chuantong bianqian yanjiu' 門人女性歌唱傳統變遷研究 (A Study of Transitions Regarding Traditional Mun Female Singing from Shangsi County in Guangxi, China), *Kundu yinyue xuekan* (關渡音樂學刊 *Kuandu Music Journal*), 20 (2014), 43-66 at 46.

[51] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 32-39. Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng, ibid., 46.

[52] Chen Meiwen, ibid., 67-70. Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan,* 18-20.

[53] Huang Guiquan, ibid., 19.

[54] This is also well-attested in Chinese religious practice in general. See Barend ter Haar, 'Teaching With Incense,' *SCEAR,* 11 (1999), 1-14.

(Mien daily and religious language) or *fun huuŋ wan* (Mun daily language), both meaning 'separating the incense bowl'. In other words, the sacred incense-burner defines the founding of a household.[55]

Resembling the 'separating the incense' (*fenxiang*) practice between temples or religious groups among Han-Chinese communities, a handful of incense ashes from the original household will be collected and relocated in the new incense-burner of the new household.[56] The major difference is that neither the original household nor the new household bother to keep the incense-burner, as the temples or religious groups in Han-Chinese society are so careful to do.[57] On the basis of his fieldwork experience in Vietnam during the 1980s, Deng Wentong told me that when a Yao family decides to migrate, they like to travel lightly. Only three things do they trouble to take along with them, namely a motorcycle, a hunting gun and a bundle of ritual manuscripts. When I asked why not take the sacred incense-burner so important to a household settlement along, he replied, 'because it can easily be remade'.[58]

On a symbolic level, just as the setting up of an incense-burner defines the founding of a household, the ephemerality of the material incense-burner therefore suggestively indicates the ephemerality of the material house. The ephemerality of the material house can be of course interpreted as the logical result of the frequent moving from village to village by the Yao, but it can also be regarded as a conscious cultural design representing the political mind-set of the Yao, determined to maintain their high degree of physical mobility so as to be able to avoid being governed by the Chinese imperial state.

The special historical position of these two groups of Yao people, who might have been classified as 'untamed' Yao from the perspective of the Chinese imperial state, might explain why they produced *quasi*-edicts, the Yao Charters, which are predominately owned by these two groups, to legitimate their right to roam across mountains and be exempted from taxation and corvée labour. They claimed these

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[55] Huang Guiquan, *op. cit.*
[56] Ting Jen-chieh, *Chongfang Bao'ancun: hanren minjian xinyang de shehuixue yanjiu* 重訪保安村：漢人民間信仰的社會學研究 (Revisiting Bao'an Village: A Sociological Study of Popular Beliefs of Han Chinese) (Taipei: Lianjing, 2013), 199.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Interview notes, 25 Sep. 2012.

charters were bestowed on them by the Chinese emperor. Despite their possession of these documents, their daily experiences have been overwhelmingly permeated with violent military campaigns launched by the Chinese imperial state. The next section illustrates in more detail the bifurcated representation of the Chinese imperial courts, one beneficial, one dangerous, the Yao have revealed in texts and songs.

Yao and the Chinese Imperial Courts: A Mythologized Past

Historically, one of the means used to establish the mutual recognition of political legitimacy between the successive Chinese imperial states and the leaders or headmen of non-Han Chinese societies was by the exchange of accoutrements that played a significant role in rites (*liyi*). Honours such as edicts (*zhaoshu*), official posts (*guangjue*), seals (*yinzhang*) and similar ceremonial acknowledgements were regularly bestowed by the Chinese imperial states on the leaders or headmen of local communities to win over their loyalty. In return, the leaders or headmen would present gifts to the dynastic courts, endorse the appointed local officials and, most importantly, follow the officially sanctioned protocol in swearing their allegiance to successive Chinese imperial states.[59] Generally speaking, this is how the previous *jimi* system ([control by] loose rein system) and the later *tusi* system (native chieftain system) worked in ethnic areas in southern China. Not so in the case of the Yao as the historical sources give the impression that there might not have been any Yao chiefs (*yao qiu*),[60] reported in Han-Chinese official documents, who had assumed the position of a native chieftain (*tusi*), with the benefit of the legitimacy bestowed by the dynastic courts to act as a counterpart for them on a local level.[61]

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[59] He Xi, 'Tuqiu guifu de chuanshuo yu huanan zongzu shehui de chuangzao: yi Gaozhou Xianfuren xinyang wei zhongxin de kaocha' 土酋歸附的傳說與華南宗族社會的創造—以高州先夫人信仰為中心的考察 (Legends of the Allegiances of Indigenous Chiefs and the Creation of Lineage Society in South China: A Study of the Beliefs Surrounding the Lady of Xian in Gaozhou), *Lishi renleixue xuekan* (歷史人類學學刊 Journal of History and Anthropology), 6 (2008), 23-66 at 31-32.

[60] Within the Yao villages, the Yao elect either a chief or a council of elders to settle disputes and mediate, if necessary, with other groups with whom the Yao are in contact. Although village chiefs sometimes extend the effective area of their influence to several neighboring villages, the Yao have never succeeded in creating any kind of permanent supra-village political unity. See Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 121.

[61] Cushman argues, 'the traditions of a Yao king occasionally mentioned in the literature must be ascribed to the garbled transmission of memories of the *t'u szu* [*tusi*] officials in China, or, more likely,

This supposition is prompted by the fact that the presence of an official seal and the posts of 'Yao officials' (*yaoguan*) are only occasionally reported in official Han Chinese documentation. A rare mention of an official seal relating to the Yao merely reads: 'The seal of the official for the pacification of the Yao in Cengcheng County, Bolo County and Longmen County', referring to three counties in the east and southeast Guangdong. On the basis of this evidence, Richard Cushman infers that, 'The person who held the office (hereditary since late Ming times [1368-1644] in a local Chinese family surnamed Li) was merely a mediator between the Yao and the Chinese in the three counties mentioned on the seal and had no authority whatsoever over internal Yao affairs'.[62]

If any Yao documents do actually signify Chinese imperial recognition, the Yao Charters, the 'Charter of Emperor Ping' (*pinhuang juandie* or variants thereof) or the 'Proclamation [Giving the Yao Permission] to Cross the Mountains' (*guoshan bangwen* or variations thereof), might be counted as *quasi*-edicts.[63] The story recorded in the charters recounts how the heroic Yao ancestor, Panhu, had assisted Emperor Ping in destroying his enemy. Should he do so, his reward would be to wed an imperial daughter and, accordingly, the emperor had married his third daughter to Panhu. More generally, the emperor permitted Panhu and the twelve clans of his descendants to cross the mountains without paying a tax or toll or having to provide corvée labour.[64]

Many Chinese scholars take the Yao Charters at their face value and claim they are valid historical sources illustrating the early relationship between the Yao and the Chinese imperial state.[65] However, Barend ter Haar has pertinently questioned this assumption and pointed out that the Yao Charters, 'Simply do not qualify as valid bureaucratic documents, since they lack any mention of the agencies responsible for

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to references to the P'an hu myth (P'an hu, in some versions at least, is given the rank of King by the emperor)'. See Richard Cushman, ibid., 121-122 footnote 50.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Huang Yu (ed.), *Pinghuang juandie jibian* 評皇券牒集編 (An Annotated Compilation of the Charter of Emperor Ping) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1990).

[64] Eli Alberts, 'Commemorating the Ancestors' Merit: Myth, Schema, and History in the "Charter of Emperor Ping"', *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*, 9/1 (2011), 19-65.

[65] This sort of literature is voluminous. To give one example, Li Weixin, 'Shilun Yaozu guoshanbang' 試論瑤族過山榜 (Preliminary Discussion of the 'Proclamation [Allowing the Yao] to Cross the Mountains' of the Yao), *Guangxi minzu xueyuan xuebao* (廣西民族學院學報 Journal of Guangxi College for Nationalities), 3 (1984), 29-34.

drawing them up, of the investigative process and of the official evaluation'.[66] Instead, he suggests viewing the Yao Charters as a creative imitation of one type of official document, namely the charters (*die*) in which official titles were bestowed on local deities, especially common since the late-eleventh century, that were composed by the Yao themselves on the basis of orally transmitted mythology. Ter Haar concludes,

> [The Yao charters] entailed some of the [imperial] system's premises, notably the right of a conveniently distant emperor to dispense favours, but at the same time subverted the much closer authority of the local officials, by placing them outside their power to impose taxes and corvée. Therefore, by accepting the imperial system on a higher level, it became possible to maintain full autonomy on an immediate local level.[67]

In a nutshell, the Yao assumed the role of bureaucratic power-wielders in their vicinity by appropriating the authenticities conferred on them by the more distant and higher imperial authority. While seeking political recognition from the higher authority in the Chinese imperial system, the imperial intervention the Yao had experienced above all others was evidently the cruelty of the military presence of the state, an enduring theme in Yao migratory histories. It is particularly brought to life in the origin myth of 'The Ferry Across the Sea' (*piaoyao guohai*), in which the Yao are said to have been forced to take flight from a utopian world, referred to as the Peach Spring Grotto (sometimes Plum Mountain Grotto [*Meishandong*]) or Thousand Household Grotto [*Qianjiadong*]), to escape state military intrusion.[68]

Another genre that vividly records Yao encounters with state violence is that in the *Indication Songs of Migration* (*qianxi xinge*), and their contents often recounts the events that happened during their migration.[69] In these discourses about state

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[66] Barend J. ter Haar, 'A New Interpretation of the Yao Charters', in Paul van der Velde and Alex Mckay (eds), *New Developments in Asian Studies*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 3-19 at 4.

[67] Ibid.,13.

[68] There are a considerable number of scholarly works on this particular Yao origin myth. To give one example, Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua,* 270-295.

[69] The indication song is called *tian* in Mun language. It is written in the genre of folksong and in a context in which the addresser and the addressee cannot see each other easily. By topic, indication songs can be divided into: the *Indication Songs of Migration, the Indication Songs of Looking for Relatives* (*chaqin xinge*)*, and the Indication Songs of Telling Misfortunes* (*kuqing xinge*)*, and the Indication Songs of Love* (*aiqing xinge*)*. Yuenan Laojiesheng wenhua tiyu lüyou ting (eds), *Yuenan*

military violence, the imperial state is often referred to as 'officials' (*guan*), 'king's soldiers' (*wangbing*) and 'court' or alternately 'dynasty' (*chao*). For instance, the lyrics of the *Song of the Plum Mountain Grotto* state, 'Imperial officials came to seize our land; the Yao were forced to flee to wastelands/the wilderness elsewhere'.[70] Or, a folksong narrating the story of the migration history of the Yao sung in central Guangxi recalls, '…the king's soldiers came to grab the farms; the Yao had no option but to flee into the mountains'.[71] In a version of the *Indication Song of Migration* found in Lào Cai city, Vietnam, the narrative recounts that, 'The Ming dynasty deployed troops numbering one hundred and sixty thousand men…the officials ordered [them] to kill the Yao….'.[72]

To sum up, the textual analysis drawn from different genres implies that the Yao people have a bifurcated perception of the Chinese imperial system. The more distant and the higher the authority, the greater auspiciousness it embodies. Conversely, the nearer the imperial system draws to the everyday experiences of the Yao, the more dangerous it becomes. Consequently, even though the Yao discussed here might have consciously kept a geographical and political distance from the grasping hands of Chinese imperial governance, paradoxically they do seem to have embraced the symbols relating to and radiating from the centre of the Chinese bureaucratic system, the emperors. The Yao's cultural constructions of writing and books, considered to have originated from the emperors, are a positive example of this ideology (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, at the same time, the Yao have managed to manifest their own agency and autonomy by adopting only selected characteristics of the state control mechanism, the lineage society (see also Chapter 3), and appropriating the potency of female fertility (see Chapter 4) and the tradition of female singing (see Chapter 5), in their negotiations and subsequent remodelling of the imposition of Chinese literacy and Chinese culture-laden religious traditions.

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yaozu minjian guji, yi 越南瑤族民間古籍一 (Yao Ancient Books in Vietnam, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011), 27-35. Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqu bianxiezu 廣西壯族自治區編寫組 *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha diliuce* 廣西瑤族社會歷史調查第六冊 (The Social and Historical Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Six) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 240.
[70] The Chinese text is 後來官家佔我地, 瑤人四處把荒逃. Yao Shunan, *Yaozu minsu* 瑤族民俗 (The customs of the Yao) (Jiling: Jiling jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 179.
[71] The Chinese text is 王兵驅壓耕種地, 瑤家無道走山頭. Ibid., 181.
[72] The Chinese text is 明朝調兵十六萬, 官府下言殺瑤子. Yuenan Laojiesheng wenhua tiyu lüyou ting (eds), *op. cit.* 29.

Having established a preliminary understanding of the dynamisms in the Yao's historical encounters with the Chinese imperial courts, the following sections are devoted to introducing the collections of Yao manuscripts studied for this research, before I proceed to conduct a thematic analysis of Daoist ordination, Chinese literacy and, most relevant, the traditional roles and agency of women.

The Collections of Yao Manuscripts Studied

The 1975 publication edited by Yoshirô Shiratori, *Yao Documents*, revealed to the academic world for the first time the existence of twenty-one manuscripts—handwritten in exquisite Chinese calligraphy—discovered among the Yao tribe in northwest Thailand. As Yoshirô Shiratori states in his preface, 'We did not expect that such marvellous documents in Chinese characters were kept among the Yao…. It was unexpected luck to find that many Yao men could read and write.'[73] Over the last three decades, the unanticipated discovery that a non-Han Chinese people who lived in remote mountainous villages knew how to read and write Chinese has aroused huge scholarly interest.

Apart from the sinification approach that stresses Yao literacy in Chinese as a civilizing consequence of imperial governance, there are also many scholarly works that utilize the contents conserved in Yao manuscripts, in particular a document entitled the 'Charter of Emperor Ping' (*pinhuang juandie*) or the 'Proclamation [Giving the Yao Permission] to Cross the Mountains' (*guoshan bangwen*), a document that helps to probe the provenance of the Yao people, their migratory history and route, and their mythic-political relationships with the Chinese imperial court.[74] Scholarly work has also been carried out on the analysis of Yao ritual practices by consulting the contents of the ritual texts.[75]

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[73] Yoshirô Shiratori (ed.), *Yao Documents* (Yôjin monjo 傜人文書) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1975), 336.
[74] This group of scholarly works is numerous. To give some examples, Barend J. ter Haar, 'A New Interpretation of the Yao Charters', in Paul van der Velde and Alex Mckay (eds), *New Developments in Asian Studies* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 3-19. Eli Alberts, 'Commemorating the Ancestors' Merit: Myth, Schema, and History in the "Charter of Emperor Ping"', *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology,* 9/1 (2011), 19-65. Hjorleifur Jonsson, *Mien Relations: Mountain People and State Control in Thailand* (Cornell University Press, 2005), 16-43.
[75] For example, Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao.*

However, yet another approach to Yao manuscripts, a recent development that often involves international co-operation and investigation, one that I refer to as the library approach, is derived from a consultation of those manuscripts now in print, those in Western public collections and in collection projects.[76] Its emphasis is heavily biased towards cataloguing and compiling. Therefore, many scholarly works that have been produced under the influence of this library approach involve compilations,[77] catalogues,[78] introductory articles[79] and research on categorization.[80]

At this juncture, the research carried out under the influence of the library approach is still in its initial phase, not yet producing any thematic exploration of the contents conserved in ritual texts. Take, for example, the four European libraries and museums: the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (the National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden (now on loan to the East Asian Library of Leiden University) (hereafter the Leiden Collection), the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (hereafter the Oxford Collection), the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (the Bavarian State Library) in Munich (hereafter the Munich Collection) and the Institut für Sinologie, Universität

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[76] There are projects whose specific goal is to collect and preserve endangered Yao manuscripts. For example, Bradley C. Davis, 'A Yao Script Project: "Culture", Texts, and Literacy in Contemporary Vietnam', *IIAS Newsletter* No. 56, Spring 2011. <http://www.iias.nl/the-newsletter/article/yao-script-project-culture-texts-and-literacy-contemporary-vietnam>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014. 'Preservation of Yao manuscripts from South Yunnan: Text, Image, and Religion' was the result of a one-year project awarded in 2012, that included co-operation with Sun Yat-sen University and the Archive of the Yunnan Provincial Administrative Office of Minority Classics, as well as the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP), British Library. <http://eap.bl.uk/database/awards.a4d?award=2012;r=41>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014.

[77] Shiratori (ed.), op. cit. Yuenan Laojiesheng wenhua tiyu lüyou ting (eds), *Yuenan yaozu minjian guji, yi* 越南瑤族民間古籍一 (Ancient Yao Books in Vietnam, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011).

[78] Thomas O Höllmann and Michael Friedrich (eds), Handschriften der Yao (Yao Manuscripts) (München, 2004).

[79] Lucia Obi and Shing Müller, 'Yaozu zhi zongjiao wenxian: Gaishu bafaliya zhouli tushuguan zhi guancang yaozu shouben' 瑤族之宗教文獻：概述巴伐利亞州立圖書館之館藏瑤族手本 (Yao Manuscripts: Introduction to the Collection of Yao Manuscripts in the Bavarian State Library, Religiöse Schriften der Yao. Überblick über den Bestand der Yao-Handschriften in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek), Chunmei Zhan (trans.), *Min-su ch'ü-i* (民俗曲藝 Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore), 150 (2005 [1996]), 227-279. Guo Wu, 'Guanyu niujin daxue tushuguancang yaozu wenxian de diaocha baogao' 關於牛津大學圖書館藏瑤族文獻的調查報告 (A Survey of the Yao Manuscripts Housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford), *Daojiao yanjiu xuebao* (道教研究學報 Daoism: Religion, History and Society), 4 (2012), 287-336. He Hongyi, 'The Ancient Magical Books of the Yao People: A Study of the Yao Manuscripts in the Collection of the Library of Congress'. This report is only available online as a PDF file. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/YaoMaterial.pdf>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014.

[80] Zheng Hui, *Yaozu wenshu dang'an yanjiu* 瑤族文書檔案研究 (A Study of Yao Documents and Files) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011).

Heidelberg (the Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Heidelberg) (hereafter the Heidelberg Collection), of which I have had first-hand visiting experience.[81] There is another Western public collection of 214 Yao manuscripts outside Europe, conserved in the Asian Division Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Unfortunately, I have not been able to make a close reading at this stage.[82]

In his review article that mentions the Munich collection of Yao manuscripts, Hjorleifur Jonsson reveals an on-going international trade network through which these Europe-based collections are obtained:

> By asking traders about these goods, I learned that the German library most likely acquired its collection over a few years from a calligraphy dealer in England, who bought them from a "tribal and primitive art" dealer in Thailand. This specialist in Yao materials in turn makes collecting trips. His scouts in Laos and Vietnam have a sense of what materials attract interest and the kinds of prices paid.[83]

Among the four collections of Yao manuscripts housed in European museums or libraries, the Munich and Oxford Collections have been acquired from the same source, the calligraphy dealer in England, R. W. Stolper.[84] Turning to the Leiden and

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[81] I have visited the Leiden Collection on numerous occasions since I began my doctoral research in Leiden in October 2009. I visited the Oxford Collection from December 7-9, 2009, and managed to glance through 122 manuscripts during my short stay. I visited the Heidelberg Collection from July 2-6, 2012, and read through all the 210 copies. From August 13-16, 2012, I made a trip to access the Munich Collection. During my short visit, I was able to make a closer reading of twenty-two ritual manuscripts concerning goddesses of fertility. My visits to these collections were helped by Koos Kuiper and A. J. D. L. Sison at the East Asian Library, Leiden University; David Helliwell at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University; Hanno Lecher at the Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Heidelberg; and Lucia Obi at the Bavarian State Library in Munich. I am very grateful to them for their help.

[82] For a general overview of the collection, see <http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/yao.html>, accessed 17 Mar. 2015.

[83] See Hjorleifur Jonsson, 'Review Articles', *Journal of the Siam Society,* 88/1-2 (2000), 222-234 at 223.

[84] David Helliwell, a curator of Chinese Collections at the Bodleian Library, told me in an email that the Oxford Collection was purchased between Autumn 1991 and Spring 1993. Likewise, the Munich Collection was acquired in the 1990s. Although Munich has the largest collection of around 2,770 Yao manuscripts, the Bodleian Library was in fact the first European buyer and the manuscripts it obtained are of a better quality. The collection stored in the Library of Congress was also obtained through the same source as these two European collections, See Lucia Obi, 'Yao Manuscripts in Western Collections', paper presented at ヤオ族伝統文献研究国際シンポジウム (International Symposium on Research of Yao Traditions), November 23, 2010, 神奈川大学横浜 Yokohama, Kanagawa University, 11-24 at 12, 19-21.

Heidelberg Collections, they 'allegedly were acquired together in the same village in Northern Laos from the ritual master and headman of the village.' But judging from the fact that, 'there are more copies of the same texts and manuscripts from different families in the collection, it is unlikely that he was the original owner, but rather a collector or trader.'[85]

The library collection most accessible to me has been the Leiden Collection. So far, the only mention of this collection has been in the chapter entitled 'The Yao Manuscripts' in the book *Catalogue of Chinese and Sino-Western Manuscripts: In the Central Library of Leiden University*.[86] This chapter lists twenty-nine Yao manuscripts, confined to those in the University Library, that were acquired independently of the collection in the museum, annotated with basic cataloguing information. The Oxford Collection has been documented in a report written by Guo Wu, entitled 'A Survey of the Yao Manuscripts Housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford'. This article is basically a personal note on 289 manuscripts (out of 307), with randomly selected entries extracted from the covers or contents of the manuscripts.[87]

Among the four European collections of Yao manuscripts, the Munich Collection is the largest with 2,776 copies of texts. So far, the research on the Munich Collection has been the most fruitful, resulting in an exhibition held for two months in late 1999, a catalogue book, *Handschriften der Yao* (Yao Manuscripts), published in 2004, and a substantial article, 'Yao Manuscripts: Introduction to the Collection of Yao Manuscripts in the Bavarian State Library', originally published in 1996 and later translated into Chinese and printed in 2005.[88] Nevertheless, the bulk of the

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[85] Lucia Obi, *op. cit.* 21.

[86] Koos Kuiper (ed.), *Catalogue of Chinese and Sino-Western Manuscripts: In the Central Library of Leiden University* (Leiden: Legatum Warnerianum, 2005), 42-67.

[87] Guo Wu states that there are over 1,000 Yao manuscripts stored at the Bodleian Library (Guo, *op. cit.* 292, footnote 15). Unfortunately, I cannot verify this information by following the website link he provided. Instead, in one of our email exchanges David Helliwell has mentioned that the total number of Yao manuscripts is 307 (shelf marked Sinica 3241-4547). Lucia Obi states that there are 311 copies of Yao manuscripts in the Oxford Collection. See Lucia Obi, 'Yao Manuscripts in Western Collections', paper presented at ヤオ族伝統文献研究国際シンポ゜シ゛ウ ム (International Symposium on Research of Yao Traditions), November 23, 2010, 神奈川大学横浜 Yokohama, Kanagawa University, 11-24. The website containing information on the Oxford Collection is: <http://www.isca.ox.ac.uk/research/medical-and-ecological-anthropology/eastern-medicines-and-religions/analysing-manuscripts-of-yao-nationality-daoism/>, accessed 16 Mar. 2015.

[88] There is an exhibition catalogue: Thomas O Höllmann and Michael Friedrich (eds), *Botschaften an*

publications relating to the Munich Collection have been for introductory and public display purposes. Last but not least, the Heidelberg Collection, with 210 manuscripts in total, has not yet undergone any processing at this stage.

In my elaboration below of the collections of Yao manuscripts studied, I have based my work on the findings of previous scholarship and have combined library survey, fieldwork data and textual analysis in my investigations, in which I address four aspects of Yao manuscripts: 1) scriptural and ritual practices among the Yao; 2) the temporal aspect; 3) the textual aspect; 4) the linguistic aspect.

1. Scriptural and Ritual Practices among the Yao

In this section, I shall discuss the classifications generated by scholarly work in both Western and Chinese contexts in order to elucidate the different genres of Yao manuscripts. Having done so, I shall provide ethnographic materials to point out that the Yao perspective of the classifications of manuscripts hinges largely on a binary opposition between the 'literary' (*wenyan*) and the 'colloquial' (*baihua*), but adding a caution that arguably there has been a symbiotic relationship between these two scriptural and ritual traditions.

1-1. Genres

Bradley C. Davis has given a general description of the different genres of the texts collected for a Yao script project conducted in Vietnam between 2006 and 2008. He states:

> These texts covered a wide variety of subject matter related to Yao communities. Contents included songs for children, epic poems, lineage stories, guidelines related to customs and cultural practices, traditional handicrafts, weather forecasting according to traditional methods, and animal husbandry. Other books discussed matrimonial customs, descriptions of ceremonies, rites to be performed to ensure a felicitous marriage, family mores, and funerary practices. A specific category of

text dealt with disease prevention, remedies for illnesses, and recipes for folk medicines.[89]

Contending with the wide range of diversity in genres contained in the Munich Collection, Lucia Obi and Shing Müller decided to classify the Yao manuscripts into two main groups: manuscripts of a religious nature and manuscripts of a non-religious nature.[90] They have classified the former group of manuscripts into five subgroups as follows: Scriptures (*jing*), Rituals (*ke*), Registers (*biaozou*), Esoteric Words (*miyu*) and Minor Rites (*xiaofa*). They also identify five subcategories in the latter group of manuscripts: Textbooks for Moral Education, Language Acquisition and Dictionaries (*daode jiaohua lei de shu, yuyan jiaoke shu ji cidian*); Epics and Songbooks (*shenhua shishi lei wenben ji geben*); Divination Books (*zanbu wenben*); Documents (*jilu wenjian*, such as charters [*jundie*]); and Medical Texts (*yiliao xing wenben*).

They point out that the Mun have developed two different scriptural and ritual traditions, one for Daoist priests and one for ritual masters, whereas the Mien have only a tradition of ritual masters. The contents of the Daoist priest manuscripts are similar to those in the Daoist canon, consisting of Scriptures and Rituals, that they believe bear the textual traits of the Daoist schools of Lingbao (Numinous Treasure),[91] Zhengyi (the Orthodox Unity)[92] and Tianxin Zhengfa (True Rites of the

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[89] Bradley C. Davis, 'A Yao Script Project: "Culture", Texts, and Literacy in Contemporary Vietnam', *IIAS Newsletter* No. 56, Spring 2011, 5. <http://www.iias.nl/the-newsletter/article/yao-script-project-culture-texts-and-literacy-contemporary-vietnam>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014.

[90] Lucia Obi and Shing Müller, 'Yaozu zhi zongjiao wenxian: Gaishu bafaliya zhouli tushuguan zhi guancang yaozu shouben' 瑤族之宗教文獻：概述巴伐利亞州立圖書館之館藏瑤族手本 (Yao Manuscripts: Introduction to the Collection of Yao Manuscripts in the Bavarian State Library, Religiöse Schriften der Yao. Überblick über den Bestand der Yao-Handschriften in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek), Chunmei Zhan (trans.), *Min-su ch'ü-i* (民俗曲藝 Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore), 150 (2005 [1996]), 227-279.

[91] 'The name Lingbao (Numinous Treasure) was originally a description of a medium or sacred object (*bao*, "treasure") into which a spirit (*ling*) had descended….The Lingbao texts describe an elaborate cosmic bureaucracy and instruct practitioners to approach these celestial powers through ritual and supplication. At the apex of the pantheon is the Celestial Worthy of Original Commencement (*Yuanshi tianzun*)'. See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, 'Lingbao', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 663-669.

[92] 'Together with Quanzhen, the Zhengyi school is one of the two main branches of Taoist religion. It is also known as Way of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi dao*), Teaching of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi jiao*), and Branch of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi pai*)….The teaching was called "orthodox" to distinguish it from the many "false skills" (*weiji*) or unorthodox practices prevalent in the waning years of the Later Han dynasty'. Chen Yaoting, 'Zhengyi', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 1258-60.

Heart of the Heaven).[93] They also draw particular attention to a group of liturgical texts for the ordination of Daoist priest that betray a strong influence of the Quanzhen School (Way of Completeness and Truth).[94] On the other hand, the ritual-master manuscripts are linked to Meishan Daoism.[95] The texts for the funeral ceremony show obvious Buddhist characteristics. Specific manuals containing formularies for petitions to the gods and spirits (*biaozou*) are used by both Daoist priests and ritual masters. The genre of Esoteric Words, that sets out instructions for ritual performances, is found only among the Mun and is absent among the Mien.[96] Turning to the Minor Rites, Strickmann asserts that this genre of Yao religious manuscripts is closely akin to the Minor Rites practised by the Taiwanese Red-head Ritual Masters.[97]

Chinese scholars who study Yao manuscripts have also created different types of classifications, but rarely differentiate between the written texts of the four language groups classified as ethnic Yao in modern China. To give an example, Zhang Youjun proposes grouping Yao manuscripts into six categories: 1) Charters (*guoshan wenshu*), that are more commonly found among the Yao-speaking group; 2) Genealogies (*jiapu*) and Stone Tablet Scripts (*shipaiwen*); the former is often referred to as *jiaxiandan* or *zongzhibu* and tends to be associated most with the Yao-speaking group, whereas the latter is closely linked with the Dong-sui-speaking group and is

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[93] 'The Tianxin tradition is the earliest, and one of the most influential, of the new Taoist exorcistic and therapeutic traditions that became important during the Song dynasty. It had already appeared in southeastern China by the tenth century, but the central corpus of texts, which represents its earliest documented form, was compiled only in the beginning of the twelfth century'. Poul Andersen, 'Tianxin zhengfa', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 989-993.

[94] 'Quanzhen is today the main official branch of Taoism in continental China….The appearance around 1170 of Quanzhen, the first Taoist monastic order, whose members could more easily be registered and wore distinctive garments, apparently fit the state's religious policy of segregation between the lay and religious. …Quanzhen has consistently enjoyed official protection since 1197'. Vincent Goossaert, 'Quanzhen', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 814-820.

[95] Such terms as *Meishan daojiao* or *Meishan jiao* (Plum Mountain Teaching), *Meishan wenhua* (Plum Mountain Culture) are coined to refer to a particularly remarkable form of Daoism that mixes up ritual and liturgical elements of indigenous beliefs and different Daoist schools, which is widely found among non-Han Chinese peoples of southern China; for example Yao, Zhuang and Tujia. See David Holm, 'Daoism among Minority Nationalities', in Edward L. Davis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* (Routledge, 2005), 136-137.

[96] The exhibition website of the Munich Collection: <http://willie.itg.uni-muenchen.de:9076/projekte/exhib.htm>, accessed 13 Mar. 2014.

[97] Michel Strickmann, 'The Tao among the Yao', 27.

concentrated in eastern Guangxi; [98] 3) Religious Scriptures (*zongjiao jingshu*); 4) Songbooks (*geshu*); 5) Medical Books (*yixueshu*) and 6) Contracts (*qiyueshu*).[99]

For the manuscripts of Mun and Mien origin, Xu Zhuxiang, Huang Guiquan and Pan Jinxiang suggest a classification that contains two main categories: 'books for gods and spirits' (*shenshu*) and 'songbooks' (*geshu*). [100] In the category of 'books for gods and spirits', they simply distinguish three sub-categories as Daoist Priest Manuscripts (*daogongshu*), Ritual-Master Manuscripts (*shigongshu*) and Miscellaneous Books (*zashu*). As does the Munich classification, they claim that Daoist Priest Manuscripts represent the influence of the religious heritage of Chinese Daoist ritual and scriptural traditions; the majority of the texts are written in the prose genre (*sanwen*) and are read in Mandarin (details see below). Ritual-Master Manuscripts, on the other hand, are related to indigenous beliefs and practices; the texts are composed in seven-syllable verses (*qiyan yunwen*) and read in a Cantonese pronunciation (see details below). Miscellaneous Books include all the other texts that are not directly used in ritual performances, but are still significant to the repertoire of ritual specialists, among them books on Divination and Geomancy.

Zhang Zhenzhen, a Mun Daoist priest in his sixties whom I met in Dingcao village, applies an apt analogy to explicate the distinction between the Daoist priest tradition and the ritual-master tradition. He says, 'A ritual master specializes in telling stories; a Daoist priest specializes in dealing with sadness. The former concerns matters that bring laughter; the latter is involved with matters that bring tears' (*shigong zhuanmen jiang gushi, daogong zhuanmen jiang youchou. yige guan xiao, yige guan ku* 師公專門講故事，道公專門講憂愁。一個管笑一個管哭). In other words, the specialization of a ritual master in ritual performance is to invoke the

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[98] The stone tablets are not confined to eastern Guangxi. The book edited by Huang Yu includes stone tablets collected from other parts of Guangxi, Guangdong, Hunan and Guizhou. But the stone tablets system in eastern Guangxi is based on a relatively large-scale social organization and is more concentrated geographically. See Huang Yu, *Yaozu shikelu* 瑤族石刻錄 (Stone Inscriptions of the Yao) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 1993).

[99] Zhang Youjun, *Yaozu chuantong wenhua bianqianlun* 瑤族傳統文化變遷論 (Discussion of the Changes in Yao Traditional Culture) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1992), 71-74.

[100] Xu Zuxiang, *Yaozu wenhua shi* 瑤族文化史 (Cultural History of the Yao) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 2001). Pan Jinxiang, 'Tan Yunnan Honghe fangkuai yaowen guji jiqi fanyi' 談雲南紅河方塊瑤文古籍及其翻譯 (Discussion of Ancient Books Written in Yao Characters and the Issue of Translation in Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan), *Minzu Fanyi* (民族翻譯 Minority Translators Journal), 3 (2009), 56-61.

deities by reciting short epic ballads that describe the attributes of the deities and the events during which he or she demonstrated their divine powers.[101] The short epic ballads of the deities are often spiced with entertaining plots that will make people laugh. Another aspect pertinent to laughing is that the task of a ritual master concerns the living, not the dead. By contrast, a Daoist priest takes charge in matters of death and the afterlife, subjects that are often infused with sadness.

To cover their specialisms, Daoist priests and ritual masters own different sets of manuscripts. To give an example, a Daoist priest possesses a set of ritual manuscripts for the performance of funeral ceremonies, one of which is entitled *Rituals for Harrowing Hell* (*poyuke*). By contrast, a ritual master possesses a particular set of ritual manuscripts that ensure the smooth passage of birth and pregnancy. One example is a text with the title *Ritual of the Red Fertility Building* (*honglouke*). Zhang Zhenzhen also goes on to mention that, if the manuscripts are involved with the Methods of Thunder (*leifa*), they are most likely ritual-master manuscripts.[102] It is noteworthy that the division of ritual labour and the scriptural categories for dealing with life and death employed by Zhang Zhenzhen to distinguish between the Daoist priest tradition and the ritual-master tradition can also be found in other local religious traditions in South China. For example, Gao Ya-ning's study of the Zhuang ritual specialists concludes that the rough classification between Daoist priests and female spirit-mediums, in terms of a division of ritual labour, means that the former take charge of the dead while the latter are concerned with the living. The

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[101] With reference to Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45/1 (1985), 21-57 at 31.

[102] The Thunder Rituals (*leifa*) are said to have emerged in the Tang-Song transition as that era 'saw a relative decline in the importance of court Daoism and the rise of regional groups and popular practices, often in conjunction'. Innovative practices, such as the Thunder Rituals, 'have been tentatively linked to the expansion of Chinese culture into new areas in the south where hostile non-Chinese religious influences were still strong'. (Kohn, ed., 2000, xxiii). And, it was often the 'popular magicians outside of established traditions' who would be 'armed with the Thunder Rituals or other techniques revealed from gods' that 'helped provide a tumultuous world with a sense of divine justice' (Matsumoto, 1979, cited in Kohn, ed., 2000, 418). Turning to the content of the Thunder Ritual, 'at its core is a repertoire of administrative, judicial, and meditative methods that it makes available to adepts interested in harnessing the vitalizing and punitive powers of thunder on a more regular and consistent basis in their ritual practice'. However, 'the sources and forms of this class of ritual remain obscure'. (Lowell Skar in Pregadio (ed.), 2008, 627-629). See Livin Kohn (ed.), *Daoism Handbook* (Brill, 2000). Matsumoto Kōichi 松本浩一, 'Sōdai no raihō' 宋代の雷法 (The Thunder Rites of the Song dynasty), *Shakai bunkashigaku* 社会文化史學, 17 (1979), 45–65. Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism, Volume One* (Routledge, 2008).

only difference in the comparison between the Yao and the Zhuang is that the Yao do not have prominent female ritual specialists.[103]

The category of 'songbooks' basically consists of the two categories of Literary-style Songs (*wenyan geyao*) and Colloquial-style Songs (*baihua geyao*). The Literary-style Songs, for instance, *Songs of the Autumn Lotus* (*qiuliange*), are a fairly independent genre of which not too many Yao have the expertise to compose and sing. This situation is quite the opposite with the Colloquial-style Songs, for instance, *Indication Songs* (*xinge*) and *Songs of Bridesmaids* (*yuanguge*), that are much more commonly known and performed. As are the Ritual-Master Manuscripts, 'songbooks' are composed in seven-syllable verses and mostly used for such secular purposes as documenting migratory history, recounting the creation myth or communicating with relatives in distant localities. The Mien also distinguish between Literary-Style Songs and Colloquial-Style Songs. The former are called 'ancient songs' (*guyan geyao*); any songs that narrate the history of ancient times belong to this category. The other songs that do not recount the history of ancient times can be regarded as Colloquial-style Songs.[104]

1-2. Symbiotic Relationship between the Two Religious Traditions

Closely resembling the analogy proposed by Zhang Zhenzhen, the Mun have a series of metaphors that they can use to distinguish between the Daoist priest tradition and ritual-master tradition. The former are labelled literary (*wen*), male (*nan*), big (*da*) and dragon (*long*), whereas the latter are categorized as martial (*wu*), female (*nü*), small (*xiao*) and phoenix (*feng*).[105] Whether or not a male Mun member is chosen to be initiated as a Daoist priest or a ritual master, or often both, varies from place to place. Huang Guiquan reports that in most of the Mun communities in southern China, it is common for a male to be the recipient of both traditions at ordination.

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[103] Kao Ya-ning (Gao Ya-ning), 'Singing a Hero in Ritual: Nong Zhigao and His Representation Among the Zhuang People in China', PhD Thesis (Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, 2009).

[104] Personal communication from Pan Meihua on 6 Dec. 2013. Pan Meihua is a linguist who is in her forties and of Mien origin, now a teacher at the Faculty of Arts at Guangxi University for Nationalities.

[105] Liu Guangyuan, 'Cong shiwu tantao zhongguo Guangxi baise Landian Yaoren de zongjiao shijian' 從食物探討中國廣西百色藍靛瑤人的宗教實踐 (A Discussion of Religious Practices of the Landian Yao in Baise, Guangxi from a Dietary Perspective), MA Thesis (Hsinchu: National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, 2003), 19.

Conversely, in southeast Yunnan, for instance, in Guangnan County and Qiubei County, a male member will be ordained simply either as a Daoist priest or a ritual master.[106] Nevertheless, despite this prevailing dichotomous tradition, they still regard a ritual specialist who can master the two traditions simultaneously the ideal. The symbiotic relationship between and hybridization of these two scriptural and ritual traditions are manifested in many aspects. At this juncture, I shall elaborate on just two examples: one concerns ordination names (*faming*); the other refers to the pantheon of deities.

During an ordination ceremony, a Mun male postulant receives his 'cosmic certificate' (*yinyangju*), stating his newly attained ordination name. A full ordination name contains three Chinese characters, including the surname of the male postulant, a generational name in the middle and a Chinese character of his own choice at the end. The great importance of ordination names is that they entitle a person to a status in the afterlife and the power to communicate with the otherworldly. Among the Mun, the male postulant receives two credentials and two ordination names. On one certificate is written his ordination name in the style of a Daoist priest, and on the other is written his ritual-master ordination name. To clarify this, here are examples of a Daoist-priest-style ordination name and a ritual-master-style ordination name: Li Dao-de 李道德 (Daoist-priest-style) and Li Fa-de 李法德 (ritual-master-style). The Daoist-priest-style ordination names use a set of generational names including Dao 道, Jing 經, Yun 雲, Xuan 玄 and Miao 妙 in sequence for the middle character. In contrast, the ritual-master-ordination name uses another set of generational names, among them Fa 法, Li 利, Ying 應, Xian 顯 and Sheng 勝 sequentially for the middle character.[107] By simply looking at the middle character of the ordination name it is

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[106] A male cannot choose into which tradition he would like to be ordained. The principle is that if the boy is a first-born, a third-born and so on, he has to be ordained into the same ritual tradition as that of his father. Conversely, if the boy is the second-born, the fourth-born and so on, he has to be initiated into the ritual tradition to which his father does not belong. See Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan—nahongcun Landianyao dansheng, wenghua, shuadou hen dushi liyi de diaocha yu yanjiu' 藍靛瑤的花、斗、人觀—那洪村藍靛瑤誕生、翁花、耍斗和度師禮儀的調查與研究 (The Conceptualizations of Flowers, Constellations and Person: A Survey of Birth Ceremonies, Flower Rites, Rituals for Supplementing Rice and Ordination), *Wenshan shifan gaodeng zhuanke xueyuan xuebao* (文山師範高等專科學院學報 Journal of Wenshan Teachers College), 16/3 (2003), 161-167.

[107] Deng Wentong goes on to explain that the five generational names used in the Daoist priest style ordination names are a legacy of the Dragon Tiger Mountain (*longhushan*) in Jiangxi province, the centre of the orthodox Zhengyi-Tianshi Daoist School, representing the literary tradition. The five

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possible to know immediately which religious tradition the manuscript copyist has inherited. It is not uncommon for two ordination names with different middle characters to be mentioned together on the cover of a manuscript or somewhere inside the text. In a few cases, it is of course not out of the question that the copyist might indeed have mastered two religious traditions.

The hybridization of the two religious traditions is expressed above all in Yao manuscripts to distinguish the deities and goddesses the ritual specialists worship and invoke in rituals. In comparison to the Zhuang religion found in southwest Guangxi, in which different categories of ritual specialists have different sets of deities with whom they communicate explicitly, neatly marking the boundary between the Daoist pantheon and local gods, this distinction is by no means as clear-cut in Mun religious practice.[108] An example in point is a text in the Guangxi and Yunnan Collection entitled *Ritual for the Mother of Emperors* (*dimuke*), composed in prose by a Daoist priest named Lu Daode in 1814. The Mother of Emperors is a locally worshipped goddess of fertility who appears nowhere in the Chinese Daoist pantheon. The very existence of the text itself is a strong indication that more than two centuries ago at least, the Mun Daoist priests employed a literary device similar to the Daoist genre and composed a text honouring an indigenous goddess (see more details below and in Chapter 4). It is therefore a logical assumption that the Mother of Emperors, the locally worshipped goddess of fertility, was one of the deities whom the copyist Lu Daode, a Daoist priest, might invoke in rituals.

These two examples demonstrate that a symbiotic relationship between both 'literary' and 'colloquial' traditions is not just the ideal aspired by a Mun ritual specialist, it is also a clue that the process of hybridization in both traditions might have begun centuries ago. In fact, both Zhang Zhenzhen, a Daoist priest, and Zhang Daogui, a ritual master, were trained by the same ritual specialist, Li Yongxiang. Li passed away a decade ago. During his lifetime, he specialized in both Daoist-priest and ritual-master ritual repertoires that placed him in a position to mentor both Daoist

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characters used in the ritual-master style ordination names show the influence of Wudang Mountain, another Daoist school based in Hubei province, representing the colloquial tradition. Interview notes, 24 Sep. 2012.

[108] James Wilkerson, 'Negotiating Local Traditions with Taoism: Female ritual specialists in the Zhuang religion', *Religion,* 37/2 (2007), 150-163.

priests and ritual masters. Even now, people still speak glowingly and think highly of Li Yongxiang and continue to refer to him as 'High Priest' (*dashifu*). On a practical level, a trainee might not be able to master both the ritual traditions simultaneously and would need to choose which tradition to follow, but on a symbolic level, there is plenty of evidence of an ideology of pursuing the co-existence of the two scriptural and ritual traditions.

In Mien communities, as mentioned earlier, this sort of distinction cannot be made because there is only one tradition and only one category of religious specialist: the ritual master. Therefore, in Mien society ritual masters take charge of all sorts of rituals and possess various kinds of manuscripts relating to the world of both the dead and that of the living. Compared to the Mun, the most prominent difference is that the Mien do not have a separate genre of Ritual (*ke*).[109] Nevertheless, as in Mun society, female ritual specialists, at least among the Mien in western Guangxi, are conspicuous by their absence.

It should be stressed that the simultaneous mastery of different religious traditions found among the Yao is a common phenomenon, both historically and regionally. As early as the Song dynasty (960-1279), ritual practitioners are recorded as having mastered Daoist and Buddhist ritual repertoires, and having acquired exorcist skills in order to improve their chances of employment in Jiangxi, Fujian and the Lower Yangzi region.[110] In modern Taiwan, a ritual specialist switches between the Daoist-priest (Black-head) and ritual-master (Red-head) traditions simply by changing his ritual vestments (the former wears a crown pinned onto a horsehair wig; the latter a red scarf or turban wrapped around his head).[111]

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[109] Interview notes with Pan Meihua, 10-16 Sep. 2012.

[110] Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

[111] For example, Xu Liling, 'Jibing yu eryun de zhuanyi: Taiwan beibu hongtou fashi dabuyun yishi fengxi' 疾病與厄運的轉移:臺灣北部紅頭法師大補運儀式分析 (Transforming Disease and Ill Fortune: Analysis of the Ritual of Fate-Averting Performed by Red-head Ritual Masters in North Taiwan), in Lin Meirong (ed.), *Xinyang, yishi yu shehui: disanjie guoji hanxue huiyi lunwenji* 信仰、儀式與社會：第三屆國際漢學會議論文集 (Belief, Ritual and Society: Proceedings of Third International Conference on Sinology) (Nangang: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2003), 339-365. 'Taiwan minjian xinyang zhong de buchunyun yishi: yi beibu zhengyipai daoshi suoxing de fashi yishi weili' 臺灣民間信仰中的補春運儀式：以北部正一派道士所行的法事儀式為例 (Ritual of Spring Fate-Averting in Popular Belief in Taiwan: A Case Study of the Rituals Performed by Zhengyi Daoist Priests in North Taiwan), *Minzuxue yanjiusuo ziliao huibian* (民族學研究所資料彙編 Field Materials, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica), 13 (1999), 95-129. 'Taiwan beibu hongtou fashi

In a nutshell, this illustration of the scriptural and ritual traditions among the Yao stresses the importance of local perceptions including a series of binary metaphors, in which that of 'literary' versus 'colloquial' is the most prominent, employed to distinguish between the Daoist-priest tradition and the ritual-master tradition. Despite this dichotomy, they still show a strong tendency towards a symbiosis of the two traditions, that is by no means an isolated development from either a historical or a regional perspective.

2. Temporal Aspect

The sinification approach involves making conjectures about the time at which the Yao acquired literacy in Chinese. Michel Strickmann has suggested a Song origin of the Yao Daoist liturgical texts.[112] Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun have traced the Chinese origin of Yao manuscripts even farther back, to the Tang dynasty (618-907).[113] In this section, that investigates the temporal aspect of Yao manuscripts, I shall refrain from any attempt to engage in this sort of debate. Quite simply, there is no substantial evidence, either historical or textual, to draw any firm conclusions about the issue. Instead, my principal source has been the 'colophons' made by the text copyists of Yao manuscripts to reconstruct the dating information of the manuscripts.

The 'colophons' often appear on the cover or the first or last pages of a manuscript. They contain information about the time at which the texts were composed and, in some cases, how the texts were acquired. The temporal information contained is certainly not sufficient to make any firm statements either about the advent of Chinese literacy or about the texts and influences absorbed into Yao society from the dominant Chinese religious-cultural traditions, but it does help to determine a traceable time-frame within which the origins of the practice of writing can be attributed to Yao society.

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buyun yishi' 臺灣北部紅頭法師法場補運儀式 (Ritual of Fate-Averting Performed by Red-head Ritual Masters in North Taiwan), *Min-su ch'ü-i* (民俗曲藝 Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore), 105 (1997), 1-146. Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', 32.
[112] Michel Strickmann, 'The Tao among the Yao'.
[113] Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun, *Yunnan Yaozu daojia keyi yinyue* 雲南瑤族道教科儀音樂 (The Ritual Music of Daoism among the Yao in Yunnan) (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2000), 1-22.

This strategy compares the earliest dates that appear on the covers or insides of the manuscripts in the collections available for this study (namely, the Guangxi and Yunnan Collections plus the Leiden, Heidelberg, Munich and Oxford Collections). Almost without exception, it has been the custom for a manuscript copyist to write down the date on which he finished the handwritten text. This date is invariably shown by the combination of the imperial Chinese regnal date and the Chinese sexagenary cycle (*tiangan dizhi*) for the year, and the month and day of the Chinese lunar calendar. One example is: 'The transcription was finished on the tenth [day] of the seventh month, in *jiawu* year, the twentieth year of the Guangxu reign' (*taisui Guangxu ershi nian jiawu sui qiyue chushiri chaowan* 太歲光緒二十年甲午歲七月初十日抄完) (UB 2004-15 Folder 25, Leiden Collection).[114] The term *jiawu* refers to a year in the Chinese sexagenary cycle. This is added the twentieth year of the Guangxu period (1875-1908), the year title (*nianhao*) of an emperor during the Qing dynasty, that provides another temporal register. As a whole this information refers to the date on which the copyist finished composing/writing the text as the 10th of August in the year 1894 according to the Western calendar.[115]

When the dates of the transmitted manuscripts are studied in this way, it turns out that most of the extant copies were made in late imperial times, during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). To be more precise, one of the oldest manuscripts, *The Ritual of Ordination for the First Reality of Zhengyi* (*zhenyi chuzhen shoujie ke*) (S3403, Oxford Collection), was composed in the third year of the Yongzheng (1722-1735) period.[116] This finding corresponds to that of Lucia Obi and Shing Müller on the basis of their work with the Munich Collection, that of Guo Wu on the Oxford Collection and that of He Hongyi in the Library of Congress Collection in Washington, DC. The results of this dating suggest that the production and circulation of manuscripts was already a pretty prevalent religious activity among the Yao throughout the Qing

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[114] Leiden Collection has not yet been catalogued. I have used the folder number as shelf marks.

[115] The date conversion has been done using the study tool developed by Academia Sinica, Taiwan: Date Conversion for Two Thousand Years between Chinese and Western Calendars (*liangqiannian zhongxili zhuanhuan* 兩千年中西曆轉換): <http://sinocal.sinica.edu.tw/>, accessed 18 Mar. 2015.

[116] Guo Wu, 'Guanyu niujin daxue tushuguancang yaozu wenxian de diaocha baogao' 關於牛津大學圖書館藏瑤族文獻的調查報告 (A Survey of the Yao Manuscripts Housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford), *Daojiao yanjiu xuebao* (道教研究學報 Daoism: Religion, History and Society), 4 (2012), 287-336 at 309.

dynasty. Bearing this minimum time-frame in mind, it would be safe to trace the Yao's acquisition of Chinese literacy and the influence of the texts of the dominant Chinese religious-cultural traditions back to at least pre-Qing times (before 1644 at the very latest). For instance, Barend ter Haar points out that two extant transcriptions of the Charter genre were first made in 1643 and 1645.[117] Without specifying the source of origin, He Hongyi mentions a rare copy of the *Great Song of King Pan* (*panwang dage*), discovered in eastern Guangxi, that might have been composed during the Xuande reign (1426-1435) in the Ming dynasty.[118] However, most of this is still confined to the realms of speculation. To paint a solid picture of Yao writing practice from the times between the Tang (Yang and Yang's theory) or the Song (Strickmann's hypothesis) and the Qing is a task still waiting to be done—always assuming that these early dates are probable in the first place.

It should be noted that the dates given in most manuscripts have been proved to be accurate. The entries of the dynastic or national titles invariably change with any transition of power, for instance, at the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the foundation of the Republic of China (1912-1949) and then of the People's Republic of China (1949-). In a similar fashion, the manuscripts from Southeast Asia alter the temporal entry by noting the name of the country. For instance, the inscription on a manuscript entitled *The Book of Formularies for Petitions* (*zhouqing shuben*) (S3303, Oxford Collection) reads, 'the sixty-sixth year of the Great Laos, the twenty-second of August in the dingsi' (*daliao liaoguo guanxia liushiliu nian dingsi sui ba yue ershi'er ri*) on the last page.[119] Therefore, pertinently the temporal entries indicate that

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[117] Barend J. ter Haar, 'A New Interpretation of the Yao Charters,' in Paul van der Velde and Alex Mckay (eds), *New Developments in Asian Studies* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 3-19, footnote 13. The two texts are mentioned in Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu, *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha dibace* 廣西瑤族社會歷史調查第八冊 (The Social and Historical Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Eight) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), p. 68 for the copy in 1643; p. 71 for the copy in 1645, and recopied in 1833.

[118] He Hongyi and Wang Ping, 'Meiguo guohui tushuguan guancang yaozu xieben suzi de yanjiu jiazhi' 美國國會圖書館館藏瑤族寫本俗字的研究價值 (The Research Value of Folk Characters in Yao Manuscripts in the US Library of Congress), *Guangxi minzu daxue xuebao* (廣西民族大學學報 Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities), 34/6 (2012), 181-186 at 182.

[119] Guo Wu, *op. cit.* 299. The exact year of the sixty-sixth year of the Great Laos remains elusive.

the Yao have been constantly aware of changes in political power outside their villages.[120]

To sum up, surviving Yao manuscripts indicate that manuscript composition was a relatively prevalent and mature religious activity throughout the Qing dynasty and that it has lasted into the present time. Although roughly 370 years of writing practice among the Yao can be documented, the hypotheses of Tang and Song origins of Yao liturgical texts with Daoist influences have not yet been borne out by the available evidence. Taking the 'colophons' contained in the manuscripts seriously, the dating research shows the Yao's constant recognition and awareness of the external political changes.

3. Textual Aspect

Since the 1980s, the tendency in academia has been to describe Yao religious practices as 'Yao Daoism' (*yaochuan daojia*). This gives a rather distorted picture as Yao texts are by no means limited to Daoist liturgies. As many studies have already shown, besides texts with strong vernacular attributes, there are also texts with Buddhist and Confucian influences.[121] Moreover, apart from the texts obviously influenced by the dominant Chinese religious-cultural traditions, there are a considerable number of folksong lyrics to venerate local deities integrated into written texts (see below).

Until the mid-twentieth century, the one and only way to compose a manuscript was to write it by hand.[122] During the course of copying, even of manuscripts with the same titles, the internal contents of the different manuscripts are hardly identical. Jacques Lemoine explains that textual variations result from the fact that disciples who copied the texts from their masters '…will never be tempted to test

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[120] Occasionally, there are mismatches in the reigning dynasties/nations or years. For instance, two texts (S3252, S3254, Oxford Collection) refer to the twelfth year of the Xianfeng reign (*xianfeng shi'er nian*), when in fact the Xianfeng reign lasted for only eleven years.

[121] For example, Xu Zuxiang, 'Yaochuan daojiao zhong de fojiao yu rujia yinsu' 瑤傳道教中的佛教與儒家因素 (On the Factors of Buddhism and the Confucian School in Yao Daoism), *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* (貴州民族研究 National Studies in Guizhou), 2 (2002), 81-86.

[122] In recent years, some of the Yao ritual specialists I met in Guangxi and Yunnan do use printing to multiply texts.

their accuracy by comparing them with similar documents from another source. […] This is because they [the books] are his personal manuals, corresponding exactly to the rituals he has learned to perform. Other books, even on the same subject, have no value for him.'[123] Drawing inspiration from Chinese literary history, an alternative explanation might be that this considerable textual variation suggests an oral transmission, transcription from memory and embellishment. Conversely, when a text is essentially stable, it is a sign that a dominant published version (or an equally manuscript) was in circulation at the time.[124] The upshot is that during the course of copying, the contents are often altered, combined, added to or left out, because of the above-mentioned reasons or simply the mistakes made by the copyists during the course of copying. As will soon be shown, many previous orally transmitted local stories and folksongs have also been written down.

In this section, I use manuscripts from different collections to elucidate three forms of textualities identified in the way the Yao compose a manuscript, by which I mean three ways in which the texts have been written. I refer to the first of these in this study as a 'faithful replication'; the second a 'creative imitation'; and the third a 'textualization of folksongs'. On the premise that the collections of Yao manuscripts contain many texts permeated with influences from diverse Daoist schools, it seemed a reasonable assumption to commence the exercise by comparing Yao Daoist texts with the Daoist canon.[125]

I began my quest by searching the titles and keywords of a specific text in the Leiden Collection, the collection most accessible to me, in the *Index of the Daoist Canon: Five Concordances to the Daoist Canon* (*Daozang suoyin, wu zhong banben daozang tong jian*), to see if there are any correspondences.[126] Having obtained this data, I compared the corresponding titles and the accompanying contents with the

[123] Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982), 29.

[124] Judith T. Zeitlin, 'Disappearing Verses: Writing on Walls and Anxieties of Loss,' in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu (eds), *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003), 73-132 at 88.

[125] I use the fourth and final Daoist Canon complied in 1444 during the Ming dynasty, which consists of approximately 5,300 scrolls. *Daozang* 道藏 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, reprint in 1986).

[126] Works from the Daoist Canon will be referred to by the catalogue numbers given in Shi Zhouren (Kristofer Schipper), designated by 'SS', and also by volume and page number references in the 1986 edition, *Daozang suoyin: wu zhong banben daozang tong jian* 道藏索引：五種版本道藏通檢 (Index of Daoist Canon: Five Concordances to the Daoist Canon) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1996).

Daoist canon. This proved to be a laborious task as Yao ritual specialists often alter, combine or change titles and content, adapting them to ritual needs and personal selection.

Fortunately, in the Leiden Collection I located a ritual manuscript that perfectly characterizes the first form of textuality, a 'faithful replication'. This specific manuscript (UB 2004-15 Folder 2) is entitled *The Middle Chapter of the Jade Emperor* (*Yuhuang zhongjuanjing*), copied by Li Xuanlian and produced in the first year of the Xianfeng reign of the Qing dynasty (1851). When it was compared to *The Middle Chapter of the Original Conduct of the Honorific Jade Emperor* (*Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jijingjuan zhong*) in the Daoist Canon (SS 1-700), it offered unequivocal confirmation that *The Middle Chapter of the Jade Emperor* in the Leiden Collection is a *verbatim* handwritten version of *The Middle Chapter of the Original Conduct of the Honorific Jade Emperor* included in the Daoist Canon. With the exception of a few words that have been rearranged and inserted into *The Middle Chapter of the Jade Emperor*, the two texts read exactly the same.

Another ritual manuscript in the Leiden Collection provides a good illustration of the second form of textuality, namely a 'creative imitation'. The manuscript (UB 2004-15 Folder 23), entitled *Scripture of Miscellaneous Kinds* (*Zhupinjing*), was copied by Deng Xuanhe (year of composition unclear). It also bears the title and content of *The Middle Chapter of the Original Conduct of the Honorific Jade Emperor*. However, on closer reading it became obvious that the Daoist title and content only act as a 'cover'; the underlying theme remains indigenous.[127] After selectively copying only a few lines from the Daoist scripture, the content of the text is soon transformed into a different kind of content. From pages 23 to 28, two titles and the accompanying contents appear to describe the regionally worshipped deities who are closely associated with pregnancy and birth, namely the Deities of Flowers (*huawang*) and the Holy Mother (*shengmu*). The titles read *Wonderful Scriptures of Various Saintly Goddesses and Flower Deities Set Up by the Grand Supreme* (*Taishang she zhushengmu huawang miaojing*) and *Wonderful Scripture Told by*

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[127] David Holm, 'The Exemplar of Filial Piety and the End of the Ape-Men Dong Yong in Guangxi and Guizhou Ritual Performance', *T'oung Pao,* 90/1-3 (2004), 32-64 at 63-64.

Grand Supreme for Thanking Flower Deities and of the Way to Expel Six Calamities (*Taishang shuoxie huawang liuhai miaojing*). This manuscript convincingly demonstrates that the act of transcription is not a passive one. The copyist has creatively imitated the Daoist written genre as a rhetorical device to honour the local deities.

The third form of textuality is a 'textualization of folksongs', referring to ritual manuscripts that have obviously absorbed folksong elements. The ritual manuscript in question is also about regionally worshipped deities, Deities of Flower, except that in this case they are referred to as the Flower King (*huahuang*). The manuscript is from the Guangxi and Yunnan Collection, entitled *Inviting the Flower King and the God of Passes to Clear the Road and Let Us Pass by the Dark Mountain and the Water-lily Pond* (*qing huahuang guanshen jie xiaoguan duhua du'anshan*), copied and owned by Li Decai from Weihao village in Tianlin county. Unsurprisingly, I could not find any titles or contents from the Daoist canon corresponding to this ritual manuscript. So instead I searched in a compilation of folksongs and stories of the Yao, *Compilation of Yao Folksongs and Stories in the Big Mountain of the Yao, Guangxi* (*Guangxi dayaoshan yaozu geyao gushiji*). [128] Fortunately, I was able to identify the partial contents of the ritual manuscript about the twelve months of the flowery changes with a folksong entitled the *Song of Flowers* (*gehua*). [129] This ritual manuscript is a very good example of an inter-textual relationship between folksongs and ritual texts. [130] As Kristofer Schipper has also reported a similar textual phenomenon among the ritual-master texts in southern Taiwan, it seems that borrowing folksong elements to describe the four seasons of the agricultural year when referring to beliefs about birth and pregnancy might have been a common textual practice across ethnic boundaries in South China. [131]

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[128] Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui minzu weiyuanhui bangongshi (eds), *Guangxi dayaoshan yaozu geyao gushiji* 廣西大瑤山瑤族歌謠故事集 (Compilation of Yao Folksongs and Stories in the Big Mountain of the Yao, Guangxi) (unspecified publisher, 1958).

[129] Ibid., 38-39.

[130] Zheng Changtian, *Yaozu 'zuogetang' de jiegou yu gongneng: Xiangnan Panyao 'gangjie' huodong yanjiu* 瑤族'坐歌堂'的結構與功能：湘南盤瑤'岡介'活動研究 (The Structure and Function of "Sitting in the Hall and Singing" among the Yao: A Study of the Pastime of Telling Jokes among Pan Yao in Southern Hunan) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2009), 216-234.

[131] Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', 31.

To sum up, this section describes three identifiable forms of textualities in the Yao manner of composing manuscripts: namely 'faithful replication', 'creative imitation' and 'textualization of folksongs'. It shows that the copyists are by no means passive actors in the course of transcription. Apart from indeed creating a *verbatim* copy of Daoist scripture, the Yao have consciously utilized the Daoist written genre as a rhetorical cover to write down the stories about their own deities. Folksongs are integrated into ritual texts referring to local deities, showing a transition from orality to textuality, that is a characteristic of an enduring inter-textual relationship between folksongs and ritual texts. The last form of textuality also paves the way for Yao women to act as possible authors and opens the likelihood that the folksongs they composed might have been written down and integrated into the ritual texts preserved in ritual-master tradition.

4. Linguistic Aspect

Although the study of Chinese languages has generally been marked by a strong tendency to view the Chinese as a monolithic ethnic and linguistic entity, the practices of Chinese language on the ground often attest a different scenario.[132] One example is localized Daoist liturgical texts. Lien Chinfa convincingly demonstrates that these texts are dynamic rather than static objects. Lien argues that one of the driving forces in their dynamism is the necessity to facilitate the understanding of the texts by a local, non-literate audience. As a result, the hybridization of literary forms and colloquial forms, such as introducing terms and sounds from the native language, has been inevitable in the production of localized Daoist liturgical texts.[133]

A hybridization of the Chinese language and non-Han Chinese languages is also shown in a vernacular writing system from southern China used among the Zhuang in Guangxi:

> The traditional Zhuang character script is an instance of a sinoxenic

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[132] Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16.
[133] Chinfa Lien, 'Language Adaptation in Taoist Liturgical Texts', in David Johnson (ed.), *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion* (Berkeley, CA: Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1995), 219-246.

script, that is, a script in which the Chinese character script has been borrowed and modified to write a different language, in this case the Tai language now known as Zhuang. [134]

David Holm illustrates the different ways in which the Chinese written language has been used and transformed among the Zhuang people in Guangxi. They have created their own demotic characters (*tusuzi*) by using the principles of 'six [forms of] scripts' (*liushu*) adopted from the Chinese character script.[135] Generally speaking, the creation of Zhuang demotic characters employs two writing strategies: Yindu and Xundu. The Yindu method is to adopt the sound but disregard the meaning of the character; whereas the Xundu method is to adopt both the glyph and the meaning of the character but to bestow a native sound on the character.[136]

A certain degree of hybridization between the Yao and the Chinese languages can be found in Yao manuscripts as well. David Holm's statement about the Chinese used in Yao manuscripts: '…all the Yao manuscripts in Shiratori's collection were in Chinese; none were in the local language spoken by the Yao', is not absolutely accurate.[137] As will be shown in the next section, even though Yao texts are not unintelligible to a Mandarin reader, nevertheless, if the meanings of the texts are to be fully understood, it is absolutely necessary to have knowledge of the Yao language. Like the Zhuang, the Yao have also invented a certain number of demotic characters based on the afore-mentioned Yindu and Xundu principles.

4.1. The Characters

The characters in Yao texts can be divided into two groups: those borrowed from Chinese and those coined by the Yao themselves. The great majority of the characters that appear in Yao manuscripts are the same Chinese characters found

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[134] David Holm, *Mapping the Old Zhuang Character Script: A Vernacular Writing System from Southern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1.

[135] David Holm, *Recalling Lost Souls: The Baeu Rodo Scriptures Tai Cosmogonic Texts from Guangxi in Southern China* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2004), 31-34. Also see William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994), 143-155.

[136] It is noteworthy that these two general writing strategies do not satisfactorily exhaust the ways in which the Zhuang people have forged demotic characters: there are demotic characters that are often used in song texts and that do not resemble any Chinese characters at all (David Holm, ibid.).

[137] David Holm, 'The Exemplar of Filial Piety', 33.

throughout the Chinese cultural region. Apart from miswritten characters, a relatively small number consists of characters especially invented to represent Yao words. In the academic circle of Yao studies in China, the latter are called *Yaosuzi* or *Fangkuai yaowen* (Yao demotic characters) in Chinese. Yao demotic characters frequently appear in the ritual texts of the Mun, but are less frequent in the ritual texts of the Mien.[138]

The characters borrowed from Chinese are used as follows:

a. To Chinese loan words. These words are borrowed for their sounds, meanings and glyphs. represent

b. To represent native Yao words. For example, 牛 (*niu*, cow) in Chinese represents 魚 (*yu*, fish) in the Yao language.[139] In this case 牛 is used purely phonetically, regardless of the glyph and the meaning of the word in Chinese. That is, even though the character is written and pronounced as 牛 (*niu*), it actually means fish.

c. Yao demotic characters. The majority of the newly coined characters are modified Chinese characters that can be related either semantically, namely Xundu, or phonetically, namely Yindu, to the original Chinese character. In her study of the collection of Yao manuscripts preserved in the US Library of Congress, He Hongyi has identified five ways of making Yao demotic characters.[140]

(1) *Zengjian yifu* 增減意符（Adding or reducing radicals). An example of adding radicals is the Chinese character 安 (*an*, pacify, install, etc.). It is sometimes written by adding a 木 (tree) radical on the left (桉), or 艸 (that for grass) on the above (荌). The example of reducing radicals is shown by the Chinese character 救 (*jiu*, save, help, etc.). It sometimes consists of only the left part 求 (*qiu*, beseech), leaving out the right part 攵 (*sui*, rap, tap), but it still means rescue.

(2) *Leihua* 類化 (Influenced by the words around). The writing of a character is influenced by the combination words proceeding or subsequent to it. There are plenty of examples. To give just one: in the term 血湖 (*xiehu*, blood lake), the 血 (*xie*,

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[138] Feng Henggao (ed.), *Yaozu tongshi shangjun* 瑤族通史上卷 (The Detailed History of the Yao, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2007), 278.

[139] The examples are from the *biau muon,* a subgroup of Yao language speaking people. See Pan Meihua, *'Yuefeng xujiu, yao ge' yizhu* 《粵風續九·瑤歌》譯註 (Annotations of the Folksongs from Guangdong, the Yao Folksongs) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 2013), 159.

[140] He Hongyi and Wang Ping, 'Meiguo guohui tushuguan', 183.

blood) sometimes appears in a form with the 氵 (water) radical added on its left (㴲), because it is influenced by 湖 (*hu*, lake).

(3) *Fuhao tidai* 符號替代 (Substitution of components). The principle of this group of demotic characters is to substitute the complex component in a character with a relatively simple component. For instance, 文 (*wen*, culture, writing, etc.) is often used to replace the upper part of such words as 學 (*xue*, learning) and 覺 (*jue* or *jiao*, to awaken from sleep, conscious), and has resulted in the demotic characters 文字 and 文覚 respectively.

(4) *Tong jinyin tidai* 同近音替代 (Substitution of words with the exact same or similar sound). An example for the substitution of word of exact sound is 喬（*qiao*, tall, lofty） as a substation for 橋 (*qiao*, bridge). An example for the substitution of word of similar sound is 娘 (*niang*, woman, mother) for 糧 (*liang*, food, grain).

(5) *Jianyong xiancheng jiegou huo bujian jiangou xinzi* 借用現成結構或部件建構新字 (Using the given structure and component to create new words). For example, the Chinese character 父 (*fu*, father) is used as a radical and the character 上 (*shang*, upper) has been added below the radical 'father' to make a Yao demotic character for father: 父上 (*ye*). To create the Yao demotic character for 'mother', the same Chinese character 父 is again used as a radical, but this time with a Chinese character 下 (*xia*, down) added below to make a Yao demotic character for mother: 父下 (*niang*).[141]

d. There is yet another group of characters, though relatively small in number, that have been created by local scribes and are not officially recognized. Nevertheless, they can be found in *A Glossary of Popular Chinese Characters Since Song and Yuan Dynasties* (*Song Yuan yilai suzipu*), which includes 6,240 commonly-used Chinese characters selected from twelve block-printed editions of popular literature of the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911)

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[141] This example comes from the Mun. Feng Henggao (ed.), *op. cit.* 829. It is worth mentioning that two or more modified Chinese characters can be used to refer to the same semantic field. For instance, the radical 八 (*bo*, legs) with the character 娘 (*niang*, mother) underneath it also means 'mother': 𡥧 (*niang*).

dynasties.[142] Some of these common Chinese characters are also often used in Daoist scriptures and liturgical texts.[143]

To sum up, the great majority of the characters used by the Yao are standard Chinese characters. These Chinese characters have either been adopted to represent the original meaning of the word in Chinese or are used either phonetically, morphologically or semantically to represent native Yao words. Furthermore, there is also a small number of Yao words called *yaosuzi* or *fangkuai yaowen* in Chinese, which are mostly modified Chinese characters coined by the Yao themselves. The last group represents words that have been in use in the Sinitic language area since Song times.

4-2. The Sounds

The spoken languages that the Yao use include three sorts of languages dependent on different settings. In scholarship on the Yao language, the first type of language is referred to as 'everyday language' (*richangyu*), used in daily interactions. The second type is 'folksong language' (*geyaoyu*), used during folksong performances.[144] The last type is 'religious language' (*zongjiaoyu*), used exclusively in religious settings.[145] The languages used to perform the texts from the manuscripts are 'folksong language', mainly employed by both female and male singers and 'religious language', exclusively used by religious specialists (more details see

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[142] Liu Fu and Li Jiarui (eds), *Song Yuan yilai suzipu* 宋元以来俗字谱 (A Glossary of Popular Chinese Characters since Song and Yuan Dynasties) (Beiping: The Institute of History and Philology, reprint in 1930). Yu Yang, '"Panwangge" yu "Song Yuan yilai suzipu" suzi bijiao chutan' 《盤王歌》與《宋元以來俗字譜》俗字比較初探 (The Preliminary Investigation into the Popular Chinese Characters in the "Song of King Pan" and "A Glossary of Popular Chinese Characters since Song and Yuan Dynasties"), *Wenxue Jiaoyu* (文學教育 Literature Education), 10 (2009), 144-145.

[143] He Hongyi and Wang Ping, *op. cit.*

[144] Herbert C. Purnell, '"Youmian" Yao minjian geyao de yunlv jiegou' 「優勉」瑤民間歌謠的韻律結構 (Prosodic Structure of the Folksongs of the Mien), in Qiao Jian et al. (eds), *Yaozu yanjiu lunwenji* 瑤族研究論文集 (Selected Research Papers on the Yao) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1988), 143-155. It is noteworthy that the Yao religious language contains significant characteristics of the medieval Chinese language of the Song and Yuan dynasties (Feng Henggao (ed.), *op. cit.* 282-285).

[145] Pan Meihua, 'Shilun Iu-Mien zongjiao yishi de chuancheng meijie "zongjiao yuyan"—yi huan panwangyuan weili' 試論優勉宗教儀式的傳承媒介「宗教語言」—以還盤王願為例 (A Preliminary Discussion of the Religious Language in Iu-Mien's Ritual Performance: A Case Study of the Ritual of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan'), in Tang Yunshu and Feng Haifeng (eds), *Yaoxue yanjiu: Fei wuzhi wenhua yizhan baohu yu chuancheng* (*diliuji*) 瑤學研究：非物質文化遺產保護與傳承（第六輯）(Yao Studies: Protection and Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Volume Six) (Hong Kong: Zhanwang chubanshe, 2008), 158-176.

Chapter 5). According to Huang Guiquan, both the Yao folksong language and their religious language are a 'hybrid language' (*hunheyu*) made up of Yao and medieval Chinese, but a divergence in pronunciation has occurred between them so the sound attached to the same word is not the same in these two contexts. Nevertheless, their Chinese pronunciations bear some resemblance to the Cantonese and other southern Han-Chinese dialects.[146] To give an example of these three different languages spoken by the Yao, the Yao term meaning 'no' is pronounced *ma* in everyday language, *jam* in folksong language and *pat* in religious language (all pronunciations are in Mun).[147]

Taking another tack, Pan Meihua argues that the religious language is a completely different language from both the everyday language and the folksong language. She reports four different ways in which how the Yao perceive and name it. Some people in Lao Cai, northern Vietnam, say it is called *tsie wa* 斜話; some people in Hezhou, northeast Guangxi call it *lin tsieu siŋ* 連州聲; some other people in Hezhou say it is neither a Yao language nor a Han-Chinese language, but *mien*[53] *wa* 鬼話, a language spoken to ghosts (all three terms are given in Mien); some people in Baice, western Guangxi say it is *wuzhou hua* (Wuzhou language). Moreover, even though the Chinese pronunciations of the Yao religious language bear a great similarity to Cantonese (called *Baihua* in Guangxi), they display more of the linguistic characteristics of medieval Chinese than that does modern Cantonese.[148] In other words, the issue about from which Han-Chinese languages the Yao religious language has been formed is still open to debate. Cogently, the linguistic interaction between these three sorts of Yao languages, particularly the folksong language and religious language, has still more to be explored.

Conclusion

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[146] Huang Guiquan, *Diancun yaozu: Nahongcun landianyao wenhua de diaocha yu yanjiu* 靛村瑤族—那洪村藍靛瑤文化的調查與研究 (The Landian Yao Village: The Research on the Landian Culture of Nahong Village) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe), 57-61.

[147] Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan*, 7.

[148] Pan Meihua, 'Pangu Yao yuyanwenzi' 盤古瑤語言文字 (The Language and Writing among Pangu Yao) (unpublished article).

This chapter situates Yao religious culture and manuscripts in a broader regional and historical context. The creation of the 'Yao' as an ethnic marker has undoubtedly been a gradual historical process facilitated by the imperial Chinese states and the communist Chinese government in their governance of South China. In the diverse historical reactions by the people known as the 'Yao' to state governance, the two specific groups of Yao, the Mien and Mun, have shared a relatively similar geographical and political position, constantly placing themselves outside the administrative control of the state. Should this be accepted, adopting James Scott's theory, the societies of these two Yao groups can be seen as a 'society of escape' (from state governance). Even though state military violence must have been a recurring issue in the Yao's everyday experiences, the invention of the Yao Charters would seem to indicate that the Yao have regarded the symbols pertaining to the centre of the Chinese statecraft, the emperors, as a positive presence in Yao society. Meanwhile, as will be argued and demonstrated in the following chapters, the Yao have shown that they are able to maintain their agency and autonomy by deploying different cultural strategies in their negotiations to counteract the imposition of Chinese literacy and the Chinese-culture-laden religious traditions.

Before delving into a thematic analysis of Yao religious culture and manuscripts, the latter half of this chapter has been devoted to an introduction to the collections of Yao manuscripts employed in this research, examining the scriptural and ritual traditions, temporal information, the ways in which the texts have been written and the linguistic features of the texts, so as to give an overview of the characteristics of Yao religion and written tradition.

The next chapter will show that the patrilineal ideology, a cultural marker of Chinese culture and way of descent, has been particularly reinforced through the concept of the sacredness of literacy and the manuscripts that are its outward and visible form. Eventually, with the passing of time, a male-privileged gender ideal and an androcentric religious domain have been constructed in Yao society.
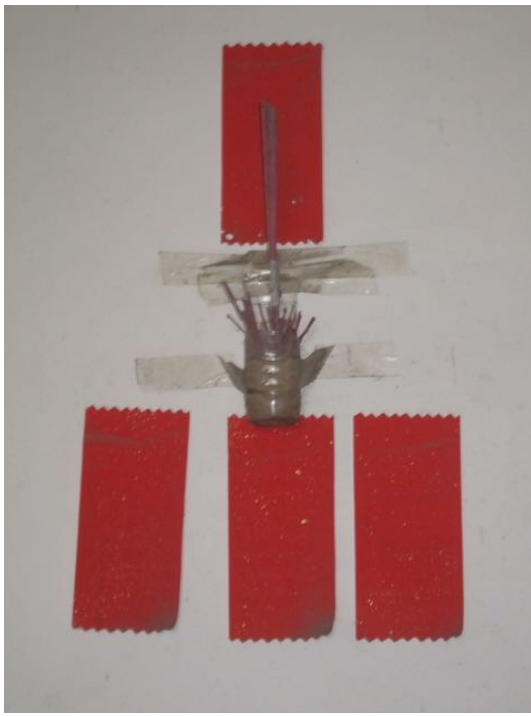
Illustration 1. Incense-burner in Dingcao, Guangxi. Photo by Chen Meiwen.

Illustration 2 Incense-burner in Jinping County 金平縣, Yunnan. Photo by Chen Meiwen.