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Exploring Research Pathways into the Book History of Dunhuang Manuscripts

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Abstract

Book history takes the physical book as its object of study. It examines the book's evolutionary history, taking in its various forms and formats. It studies human reading and learning practices, and the relationship between author and reader. Using the book as its medium, the field investigates the full range of interpersonal relationships and the connection between individuals and society. It explores the comprehensive history of people's interactions with literature, each other, and society through books. Research on book history has emerged from traditional academic disciplines. The previous generation of scholars used the Dunhuang texts to make significant contributions to the fields of philology, linguistics, textual studies, and history. These achievements have provided the foundation for research into book history. This article draws on the author's research experience to explore the research pathways of book history. Through the lens of manuscript studies, the article uses the history of manuscript books as a foundation, traces the threads of intellectual history, and incorporates a social historical perspective. The aim is to reconstruct the academic, cultural, social, and intellectual history of the manuscript book era, and indeed the comprehensive history of the medieval period, in pursuit of a more expansive academic landscape.

Keywords

manuscripts – textual studies – book history – comprehensive history

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1 The Scope of Manuscript Book History Research

While the study of texts is rooted in antiquity, “textual scholarship” as an independent discipline of academia is a relatively modern development. The primary focus of textual studies is how texts of different media are produced, used, and managed, and how they evolve over time. It is a wide-reaching discipline that examines the tensions and transformations between texts and their media in terms of time, geography, organization, authority, and scholarship. The field of textual studies helps to clarify the basic forms and meanings of human records, knowledge, experience, and wisdom. It explores the relationship between the transformation of textual media and the development of human culture and civilization. The study of book history therefore is an exercise in studying the history of civilization itself.¹

If we accept that the discipline of textual studies comprises the study of the relationship among texts and their media and the principles governing that relationship, book history takes one physical manifestation of the text, the book, as its object of research. It examines the book’s evolutionary history, including its various forms and formats. It observes human reading and learning practices, and the relationship between author and reader. With the book as its medium, the field investigates the full range of interpersonal relationships and the connection between individuals and society. While the fields of textual studies and book history overlap to some extent, and should lend support to each other, their methodologies and goals are distinct.

Book history constitutes an emergent field. It is a key theme within the French school of new cultural history. Qin Manyi 秦曼儀, of the Department of History at National Taiwan University, conducted her doctoral research at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in France, offering incisive analyses of the methodological approaches in French book history research. She underscores the field’s interdisciplinary ties to humanities disciplines such as sociology, literary criticism, and philosophy. Several scholars have explored the intersection of book history with intellectual, religious, social, and economic histories. Lucien Febvre (1878–1956), for instance, sought to trace the history of humans’ psychological states reflected in books within the framework of comprehensive histories. Henri-Jean Martin (1924–2007) aimed to provide a holistic interpretation of the relationship between books and society. Roger Chartier and Daniel Roche’s (1935–2023) research in book history adopted a

1 Shi Rui 史睿, “Cong chuantong wenxian yanjiu dao xiandai wenxianxue de zhuanxing” 從傳統文獻研究到現代文獻學的轉型, *Wenxian* 文獻, no. 3 (2019): 186–89.

socio-economic historical approach to uncover collective mentalities and cultural history that pervaded society.²

Rooted in textual studies, book history centers its inquiry on the book and its related bibliographic records. Recent studies have, however, also begun to focus on non-book texts and digital formats. The content of its research is the production, distribution, and reception of books, as well as the relationships between authors, editors, printers, distributors, and readers that are embedded in these processes. Its mode of research closely integrates textual studies and history, and its overarching concern is discovering changes in human society over a relatively long period. In the context of the ancient Chinese book history, there must be a basis in traditional textual studies, social studies, and history. Furthermore, it must integrate multiple domains of research. The resultant approach should break from the static, one-dimensional nature of traditional textual studies and move towards a dynamic engagement with book history. This entails exploring the complex relationships between the changing forms of books on the one hand and knowledge classification systems, academic trends, and social demands on the other. One must study the natural development of a book as one might study an individual life. One must include the overall history of books, from their creation to their demise, as well as the complex transformations that classic books undergo in society over time—their own patterns of rise and decline. Additionally, this study must adopt the “human” perspective, meaning that we consider the book as being read by humans at different stages of historical development. The full cycle from the acquisition of literacy and culture to the production of culture through books must be observed, and so too must the changes over time across different social classes, cultural strata, and historical periods. In short, book history takes in the complete history of the relationships between humans and books, between individuals, and between the individual and society.

In order to move beyond the narrow domain of Dunhuang studies and uncover the broader significance of Dunhuang texts as sources of general historical interest, it is necessary to integrate Dunhuang texts with received texts. They may thus be used to address universal historical issues. To this end, an important area of research is to draw on Dunhuang texts to research further into manuscript (*xieben* 寫本) book history. If one simply adopts the stance

2 Qin Manyi 秦曼儀, “Shuji shi fangfalun de fanxing yu shijian: Ma’ertan he Xiati’ai duiyu shuji, yuedu ji shuxie wenhua shi de yanjiu” 書籍史方法論的反省與實踐—馬爾坦和夏提埃對於書籍、閱讀及書寫文化史的研究, *Taida lishi xuebao* 台大歷史學報 41 (2008): 257–314.

that no works of major significance have been identified in the excavated materials, then even if passages or fragments of important texts are among them, they would be written off as miscellaneous fragments given that they have not been through the process of classicization. This would be a missed opportunity to fully appreciate these rediscovered artifacts from over a millennium ago. A sufficient number of Dunhuang and Turpan 吐魯番 manuscript books have been discovered, allowing us to study these manuscript books as physical objects. When studied alongside received textual materials, and with the academic, cultural, social, and intellectual histories of manuscript books—and even the comprehensive history of the medieval period—as foundation for this work, a vast and promising academic landscape emerges.

2 History of Material Culture as a Foundation for Manuscript Book History

The study of manuscript books includes research into the production, transmission, and consumption of these objects as artifacts of material culture. It encompasses the media and tools of writing, the processes of writing, binding, preservation, and transmission, and environmental factors like architecture, furniture arrangement, and lighting conditions that would have influenced these processes. This involves examining brushes, paper, stationery, materials used for bookbinding and assembly, storage and archiving equipment, and the living environments that surrounded these processes. This area of study pays particular attention to the close relationship between the material conditions of books and their physical forms and content. The primary aim of this research is to analyze the physical forms and remnants of manuscript books and thereby explore the materials, processes, and cultural factors behind the production of books. In doing so, we may gain a deeper understanding of the era and region in which a manuscript book was produced, as well as the costs that went into making it, its social characteristics and function, its cultural status and academic value.

Prior studies of calligraphy history have largely neglected the profound influence of brush-making techniques on script evolution. From the Warring States (475–221 BCE) to the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE), brushes were rudimentary, with bristles inserted into wooden or bamboo shafts, lacking a cohesive tip. The bristles offered little resistance, and the writer's force did not easily carry into the tip, greatly limiting their functionality. By contrast, during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), the introduction of brushes with bound

tips improved bristle resistance and produced a more pronounced point. In my view, the emergence of paper-wrapped brushes can be traced back to the Han and Wei (220–265) periods. In *Bimo fang* 筆墨方, the brush-making process described by Wei Dan 韋誕 (179–253) suggests that several characteristics of layered bristle binding were already in use in the late Eastern Han and early Cao Wei periods.³ *Bijing* 筆經, a slightly later text attributed to Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), mentions “wrapping the base of the brush with hemp paper,” thereby providing a clear record of this binding practice.⁴ In addition, the *Bifu* 筆賦 of Cai Yong 蔡邕 (ca. 133–192) of the Eastern Han, the *Bifu* 筆賦 of Fu Xuan 傅玄 (217–278) of the Western Jin (266–316), and the *Bifu* 筆賦 of Chenggong Sui 成公綏 (231–273) of the Western Jin all similarly mention the binding of brush tips.⁵ A wolf-hair brush excavated from Tomb No. 19 at Hantanpo 旱灘坡, Xiaqi 下畦 Village, Songshu 松樹 Township, Wuwei 武威, Gansu 甘肅 province, dating from the Former Liang period (317–376), demonstrates the use of this binding technique. However, this was a practice of binding the bristles with silk thread, not with paper as described in the *Bimo fang* of Wei Dan or the *Bijing* attributed to Wang Xizhi.

The earliest surviving remnant of a paper-bound brush is a brush head found in a late Eastern Jin (317–420) brick chamber tomb in Xiafang 下坊 Village, Jiangning 江寧 County, Jiangsu province.⁶ The Eastern Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties (420–589) marked a period of transition between unbound and bound brushes. Paper-bound brushes had become widespread in the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, and numerous examples found in Xinjiang are testament to this.⁷ The shift from unbound to paper-bound brushes roughly coincided with the transition from clerical script (*li shu* 隸書) to regular script (*kai shu* 楷書). Aside from the impetus of greater convenience and simpler movements, the inseparability of the writing tool and the

3 Jia Sixie 賈思勰, “Bimo” 筆墨, in *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 齊民要術校釋, annot. Miao Qiyu 繆啟瑜 (Beijing: Zhongguo nongye chubanshe, 1988), 683–88.

4 Su Yijian 蘇易簡, *Wenfang sipu* 文房四譜 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2015), 9.

5 Cai Yong 蔡邕, “Bi fu” 筆賦, in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1965), 58.1055; Fu Xuan 傅玄, “Bi fu” 筆賦, in *Yiwen leiju*, 58.1055; Chenggong Sui 成公綏, “Bi fu” 筆賦, in *Yiwen leiju*, 58.1055.

6 Nanjing shi bowuguan 南京市博物館 and Jiangning xian wenguanhui 江寧縣文管會, “Jiangsu Jiangning xian Xiafang cun Dongjin mu de qingli” 江蘇江寧縣下坊村東晉墓的清理, *Kaogu* 考古, no. 8 (1998): 48–52.

7 Wang Xuelei 王學雷, “Wei Dan bifang jiaoyi” 韋誕筆方校議, in *Gubi kao: Han Tang gubi wenxian yu wenwu* 古筆考—漢唐古筆文獻與文物, ed. Wang Xuelei 王學雷 (Suzhou: Suzhou daxue chubanshe, 2013), 101–8.

script form must be considered. By the middle of the Tang dynasty, a greater differentiation of brush shapes began to emerge in response to the demands of different writing and script styles. The shape of the brush, the resistance of the tip, and the number of layers in which it was wrapped are all closely linked to the features of calligraphic styles.

The Western Jin period marks a new stage in the production and use of paper. By this time, there was already a great quantity of smooth and clean white paper, straight at the edges and strong enough to be folded. It had become the dominant writing medium and the use of bamboo and wooden slips had diminished significantly. Nishikawa Takashi's 西川寧 (1902–1989) quantitative analysis of ink remains from the Wei and Jin periods, found in the Loulan and Turpan excavations, indicates that from the reign of Emperor Huai of the Western Jin 晉懷帝 (r. 307–313), paper had already gained overwhelming dominance as a writing material in northwest China.⁸ This conclusion is supported by the research of Pan Jixing 潘吉星 (1931–2020), which also includes scientific testing and analysis of manuscripts found in Dunhuang and Turpan.⁹ Based on this research, he hypothesizes that the technique of sizing paper (*shijiao* 施膠) originated no later than the Wei and Jin periods. The earliest surviving sized paper artifact, according to Huang Wenbi 黃文弼 (1893–1966), is the *Yiwushu* 衣物疏 manuscript from the year 384 in the Later Qin dynasty (384–417).¹⁰ This sizing process made the paper surface smoother and less absorbent, allowing ink to remain clearer and more defined than on unsized paper. Subsequently, techniques such as beating, sizing, coating, soaking, and burnishing became widespread, and paper became smoother and easier to use. As a result, even the slightest movements of the brush were faithfully captured on the paper's surface.

8 Nishikawa Takashi 西川寧 [Nishikawa Takashi], *Xiyu chutu Jindai moji de shufashi yanjiu* 西域出土晉代墨跡的書法史研究, trans. Yao Yuliang 姚宇亮 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2015), 11–191.

9 Pan Jixing 潘吉星, *Zaozhi yu yinshua juan* 造紙與印刷卷, vol. 5 of *Zhongguo kexue jishu shi* 中國科學技術史, ed. Lu Jiayi 盧嘉錫 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1998), 105.

10 Pan Jixing 潘吉星, "Xinjiang chutu gu zhi de yanjiu" 新疆出土古紙的研究, *Wenwu* 文物, no. 10 (1973): 50–60; Pan Jixing 潘吉星, *Zhongguo zaozhi jishu shigao* 中國造紙技術史稿 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1979), 61–62; see also Pan Jixing 潘吉星, "Dunhuang shishi xiejing zhi yanjiu" 敦煌石室寫經紙研究, *Wenwu* 文物, no. 3 (1966): 39–47; Qing Zhaorong 慶昭蓉 and Jiangnan Hexing 江南和幸 [Kazuyuki Enami], "Tangdai Anxi daduhu fu shiqi zhi Qiuci dangdi yongzhi: Riben Longgu daxue suo cang Kuche chutu Hanwenshu anli yanjiu zhiyi" 唐代安西大都護府時期之龜茲當地用紙—日本龍谷大學所藏庫車出土漢文書案例研究之一, in *Xiyu wenshi* 西域文史 ed. Zhu Yuqi 朱玉麒 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2018), 12: 159–78.

3 Manuscript Studies: a Vital Perspective for Manuscript Book History

A manuscript, as the etymology of the term suggests, refers to handwritten rather than printed texts. Familiar manuscript forms include bamboo and wooden slips, silk books, Dunhuang manuscripts, Egyptian papyrus texts, and medieval European codices. As historical relics, manuscripts have attracted the attention of scholars from various fields including history, literature, textual studies, and linguistics. They are considered important research materials across many disciplines of the humanities. In this sense, the study of manuscripts is not a new phenomenon. However, the field of “manuscript studies” as a cohesive field currently lacks a standardized definition of its scope. Broadly speaking, it encompasses research into various aspects of manuscripts, including textual versions, textual content, how they are inscribed, and manuscript forms. Unlike earlier research that primarily focused on verifying the authenticity of textual versions and analyzing their content, the field now places greater emphasis on the non-textual elements of manuscripts. It focuses more on the material form of the manuscript, and how it was produced and used, and thereby emphasizes a more integrated understanding of the manuscript as a whole.¹¹

The format and layout of manuscripts are crucial areas of manuscript studies. By examining the format of the writing, one can gain insight into the skills of the scribe, and thereby provide an analysis of their identity, which in turn aids in determining its age and area of provenance, as well as its cultural standing. Official scriptures and books often feature colophons noting the translators, scribes, or editors. The style of these colophons resembles that of official records because the scribes of such scriptures and those who wrote official records both had backgrounds in government office. They underwent rigorous training in writing official documents and were able to write, in the prescribed style of the official record, neatly and within designated page layouts. When the colophon happens to be short, the spacing between characters is widened; when it is long, the font size is reduced and the characters are written more densely. This technique allows for colophons of different lengths to be written within a single line. In addition, these scribes maintained a uniform height across every line. Scribes who lacked this training tend to be incapable

11 Feng Jing 馮婧, “Xifang xieben yanjiu dui Dunhuang xieben yanjiu de qifa: yi shiwu xiebenxue, bijiao xiebenxue wei li” 西方寫本研究對敦煌寫本研究的啟發——以實物寫本學、比較寫本學為例, in *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究, ed. Hao Chunwen 郝春文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2022), 21: 313–25.

of achieving this. Their lines might vary in height, or longer colophons might be written across more than one line. Though these might seem like neat inscriptions, when compared with standard official manuscripts they show clear discrepancies which enable the differentiation between original official manuscripts and their later copies. While the copied manuscripts may share the same year of inscription as the original, they are of course later than the original manuscript. This is a crucial detail for accurately dating a manuscript. Manuscripts with verified inscription dates can be used as a benchmark, and one can thereby compare undated manuscripts against them. If the handwriting style is similar, the undated manuscript can be assumed to have been copied around the same time. This is the basic method of dating manuscripts through calligraphy. Its theoretical basis has become widely accepted recently. However, when there is a discrepancy between the period of the copy and the recorded date on the scripture, its usefulness as a dating reference is diminished. Based on the author's inspection of the colophons of *juan 12* of the transmitted Tang dynasty annotated *Shanjianlü* 善見律, held in the Palace Museum in Beijing, *juan 3* of the *Da pusa zangjing* 大菩薩藏經 cataloged as BD14560 in the National Library of China, and the *Fodi jing* 佛地經 cataloged as P. 3709 in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, it is observed that the date provided in the dated manuscripts differs from the actual time of copying.¹²

I will attempt to summarize what these examples have in common. The earliest official copies of Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602–664) Buddhist translations, such as *Fodi jing*, the *Da pusa zangjing*, and *Da pipo shalun* 大毗婆沙論, typically include references to the translation bureau, often accompanied by a translation colophon. If the official scripture was written as a votive scripture for some specific purpose, then it would only contain the votive content and note the scribe, without retaining any mention of the translation bureau. Non-official manuscripts, Japanese official votive scriptures, that took official votive scriptures as their source generally copied their sources faithfully—if the source noted the translation bureau or scribe, then these were replicated in the copies. However, due to a lack of understanding of the significance of the format, or the technical difficulties in reproducing the original style, the format of the manuscript copy often differed from the source. Shorter lines of text occupied less space, while longer ones took up more, resulting in irregular colophons. In cases where there were an especially large number of characters, a line break

12 Shi Rui 史睿, "Fodi jing tiji jinian zaikao" 佛地經題記紀年再考, in *Yuwai Hanji yanjiu jikan* 域外漢籍研究集刊, ed. Tong Ling 童嶺 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2022), 23: 75–82.

was even required. For any manuscript with one or more of the aforementioned characteristics, we can determine it to be a transcription of an official manuscript. For instance, in the P. 3709 *Fodi jing* held in France, mentioned above, the colophon notes both the scribe and the translation bureau with the former preceding the latter. This is a highly unusual combination, as no known official manuscript follows this format. The author hypothesizes that the scribe may have consulted two separate official scriptures, one that noted the translation bureau and one that noted the scribe and combined these colophons. It is also possible that the source used was a transcription of an official scripture, resulting in a colophon style different from the original official scripture. If this analysis is not flawed, this scripture was neither written by Chi Yuanshuang 郗元爽 nor is it from the 22nd year of the Zhenguan 貞觀 era (627–649). Its production date was likely later, perhaps into the early years of Tang emperor Gaozong's 唐高宗 (r. 649–683) reign. In summary, there is a complex relationship between the recorded date of extant manuscripts and their actual transcription date. Accurate dating requires comparative analysis of the colophon styles and compositional patterns of both official scriptures and non-official votive scriptures from the same period.

4 Manuscript Book History in the Context of Intellectual History

An in-depth exploration is required into the relationship between intellectual history of the medieval period as a whole and the formatting of books. We must examine how the transitions between old and new forms of academic thought, as well as the regional differences between northern and southern China, were reflected in manuscript books. Further inquiry is also needed into the connections between pedagogical methods and book design. We may also examine how techniques for manuscript transcription, editing practices, and knowledge management were shared across different academic disciplines. Just what changes occurred in the formatting of books in the transition from the manuscript to the printed era? Research into the styles and standards of books during the manuscript era, as well as scholarly developments and their classification, connects seamlessly with existing research in traditional textual studies. By integrating the manuscript element into traditional scholarly frameworks, we may advance into the domain of manuscript book history. Scholars such as Mou Runsun 牟潤孫 (1908–1988), Jao Tsung-i 饒宗頤 (1917–2018), and Yi Ping 易平 have conducted pioneering research from the perspective of intellectual history, particularly focusing on the styles and standards of books from

the manuscript era.¹³ Their contributions in this field serve as exemplary models for current and future research.

Great advancements have been made by previous generations of scholars into related areas, including academic trends, aristocratic lifestyles, and liturgical protocols (*shuyi* 書儀) relating to auspice and misfortune (*ji xiong* 吉凶) in medieval China. Tang Zhangru's 唐長孺 (1911–1994) article “Du Baopuzi tuilun nanbei xuefeng de yitong” 讀《抱樸子》推論南北學風的異同 establishes a robust framework for medieval intellectual history.¹⁴ Zhou Yiliang's 周一良 (1913–2001) *Shuyi yuanliu kao* 書儀源流考 and related works are milestones in the study of liturgical protocols in the Dunhuang context.¹⁵ The clear and detailed annotations provided by Wang Liqi 王利器 (1912–1998) on the *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 have provided the author with much inspiration for exploring the origins of liturgical protocols.¹⁶

Zhao Heping 趙和平 (1948–2020) provides a systematic collation and comprehensive analysis of Dunhuang manuscript liturgical protocols, and this research seeks to expand this discourse, aspiring to the standard set by Zhao's case studies.¹⁷ Jiang Boqin's 姜伯勤 “Tang li yu Dunhuang faxian de shuyi: Datang Kaiyuan li yu Kaiyuan jian shuyi” 唐禮與敦煌發現的書儀—《大唐開元禮》與開元間書儀 presents an engaging analysis of the historical and

- 13 Mou Runsun 牟潤孫, “Lun Rushi liangjia zhi jiangjing yu yishu” 論儒釋兩家之講經與義疏, in *Zhushizhai congkao (zengdingben)* 注史齋叢稿 (增訂本), ed. Mou Runsun 牟潤孫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 88–155; Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤 [Jao Tsung-i], “Huafan jingshu tili tongyi xiyi” 華梵經疏體例同異析疑, in *Rao Zongyi shixue lunzhu xuan* 饒宗頤史學論著選, ed. Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤 [Jao Tsung-i] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 331–76; Yi Ping 易平 and Yi Ning 易寧, “Liuchao houqi *Shiji* banben de yici zhongda bianhua: Liuchao xieben *Shiji* ‘Sanzhu ru pian’ kao” 六朝後期《史記》版本的一次重大變化—六朝寫本《史記》“散注入篇”考, *Nanchang daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* 南昌大學學報 (人文社會科學版), no. 5 (2006): 56–62; Yi Ping 易平, “Fazang Dunhuang juanzi ben Peizhu *Shiji* ‘Guan Cai shijia’ canjuan chongwen yanjiu: Dunhuang ben yu Suoyin ben, Jingyou ben *Shiji* chuancheng guanxi kaolue” 法藏敦煌卷子本裴注《史記·管蔡世家》殘卷重文研究—敦煌本與《索隱》本、景祐本《史記》傳承關係考略, *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, no. 3 (2007): 34–42.
- 14 Tang Zhangru 唐長孺, *Wei Jin Nanbei chao shi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1955), 351–81.
- 15 Zhou Yiliang 周一良, *Wei Jin Nanbei chao shi lunji xubian* 魏晉南北朝史論集續編 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1991), 261–74.
- 16 Yan Zhitui 顏之推, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie (zengbu ben)* 顏氏家訓集解 (增補本), comp. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993).
- 17 Zhao Heping 趙和平, *Dunhuang xieben shuyi yanjiu* 敦煌寫本書儀研究 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1993); Zhou Yiliang 周一良 and Zhao Heping 趙和平, *Tang Wudai shuyi yanjiu* 唐五代書儀研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995).

cultural aspects of Dunhuang liturgical protocols.¹⁸ In addition, relevant chapters of Toshisada Naba's 那波利貞 (1890–1970) *Todai shakai bunkashi kenkyu* 唐代社會文化史研究¹⁹ have inspired the author to reflect on the cultural significance and historical value of medieval ritual learning. The Tang dynasty liturgical protocols from Dunhuang are undoubtedly a result of the accumulation and development of rites and laws of aristocratic families from the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties. However, we do not find balanced inheritance of rites and customs from north and south in Dunhuang liturgical protocols. This imbalance is related to the social functioning, the direction and degree of cultural development, in northern and southern regions during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties. Firstly, the origins of Dunhuang's auspicious-inauspicious liturgical protocols were deeply rooted in the internal laws and customs of the aristocratic families of the Eastern Jin and the Southern dynasties (420–589). These rites evolved from implicit moral teachings into codified family rituals and instructions. This led to a transition from norms within a kin group to society-wide common understanding and moral standards. They were a mode of expression for the ritual learning of the Southern dynasties and developed in tandem with it. Secondly, the strict distinctions in Dunhuang liturgical protocol between forms of address for various orders of kinship are a concrete expression of new trends in ritual learning in the Eastern Jin and Southern dynasties. Determining profitable gain and loss also relied on the authority of Eastern Jin and Southern dynasties ritual learning. The instances and degree of kinship in which “old rites” (*jiuyi* 舊儀) for addressing family and friends should be applied also resembled the Eastern Jin and Southern dynasties. Furthermore, the number of regulations for naming objects and the prescriptions for courteous exchange outlined in the liturgical protocols corresponded exactly with the ceremonial systems of the Eastern Jin and Southern dynasties. Through this analysis and comparison of specific instances, we have found that the Dunhuang auspice and misfortune liturgical protocols inherited the characteristics of the ritual learning, liturgical protocols, and family instructions of the Eastern Jin and Southern dynasties.²⁰

18 Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤, *Dunhuang yishu zongjiao yu liyue wenming* 敦煌藝術宗教與禮樂文明 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996), 425–41.

19 Toshisada Naba 那波利貞, *Todai shakai bunkashi kenkyu* 唐代社會文化史研究 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974).

20 Shi Rui 史睿, “Dunhuang jixiong shuyi yu Dongjin Nanchao lisu” 敦煌吉凶書儀與東晉南朝禮俗, in *Dunhuang wenxian yanjiu: jinian Dunhuang cangjingdong faxian yibai nian guoji xueshu yantao hui lunwen ji* 敦煌文獻研究—紀念敦煌藏經洞發現一百年國際學術研討會論文集 (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2001), 394–421.

5 Manuscript Book History from the Perspective of Social History

Significant social positions were held by the aristocratic families of the Six Dynasties (222–589), Sui, and Tang periods, allowing them both political and economic privileges. Culture played a central role in shaping the aristocracy and was a marker of their status. The aristocracy shared a common cultural tradition and erudition. This stemmed from the uniformity of the content and processes of their study: reading and memorizing the same classics, adhering to the same behavioral norms, and adopting a similar worldview and set of values. Furthermore, they expressed this culture through literary compilations, family traditions, inscriptions, genealogies, family instructions, and liturgical protocols, thereby reinforcing their collective cultural identity within the aristocratic community. In short, the aristocracy possessed a set of cultural symbols that distinguished them from the common people. The most important were the classical works that represented their cultural heritage.

As Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) and Miao Yue 繆鉞 (1904–1995) rightly note, one's diction was a crucial marker of aristocratic identity during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties.²¹ By the Wei and Jin dynasties, the aristocracy had developed a refined form of speech based on Luoyang 洛陽 pronunciation. After the Yongjia 永嘉 Rebellion in 311, this linguistic standard migrated southward with the aristocratic families. When the Eastern Jin and Southern dynasties established their capitals in Jiankang 建康, Luoyang pronunciation persisted as the benchmark, gradually incorporating elements of speech from the southern region to form the distinctive Jinling 金陵 idiom. In this southern social context that lacked the refined speech from Luoyang, these aristocrats endeavored to preserve their unique linguistic tradition, rendering it a potent signifier of cultural and social distinction. The imparting of correct pronunciation was strictly controlled within aristocratic families. Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–ca. 597) observed that children were trained from an early age to rectify mispronunciations promptly, internalizing such corrections as a matter of personal honor.²² In conjunction with this, the southern aristocrats

21 Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Dongjin Nanchao zhi Wuyu" 東晉南朝之吳語, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 7, no. 1 (1936): 1–4; Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Cong shishi lun Qieyun" 從史實論《切韻》, *Lingnan xuebao* 嶺南學報, no. 2 (1949): 1–18; Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Shu Dongjin Wang Dao zhi gongye" 述東晉王導之功業, in *Jinmingguan conggao chu bian* 金明館叢稿初編, ed. Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 54–55; Miao Yue 繆鉞, "Liuchao ren zhi yantang" 六朝人之言談, in *Miao Yue quanji* 繆鉞全集, ed. Miao Yue 繆鉞 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 1: 331–37.

22 "Yinci" 音辭, in *Yanshi jiaxun jijie (zengbu ben)*, 7:530.

also worked to learn the refined speech, abandoning their native Wu 吳 dialect in their attempt to identify with the aristocratic class. Improper diction, such as mixing in Xi 奚 or Chu 楚 dialects, might obstruct their kin's prospects of marrying into the aristocracy, and would certainly prevent them from being identified with the aristocracy themselves. This contrasted with the situation in the north where the refined speech of the northern aristocracy bore more likeness to local dialects, and the cultural consciousness of preserving the Luoyang way of speaking held less sway. In the Northern Qi dynasty (550–577), Yang Yin 楊愔 (511–560) praised the Pei brothers—Pei Rangzhi 裴讓之, Zouzhi 諏之, and Yanzhi 讖之 of Hedong 河東—for maintaining speech that was uncontaminated by local dialects.²³ This suggests that the Pei brothers were an exception to the tendency of the aristocracy from Hedong, serving in the capital Yecheng 鄴城, to speak in a manner that mixed local elements and did not meet the standard of the refined speech.²⁴

Following years of war and repeated infiltration of the Hu 胡 languages, many classics and scriptures of former dynasties were lost; the preservers of the old culture passed away and the old Luoyang pronunciation became difficult to preserve.²⁵ As a result, diction played a significant role in cultural identification among the aristocracy and the refined speech of Luoyang remained the standard. The southern aristocracy was, ironically, at an advantage in preserving the refined Luoyang speech. However, the phonological issues of the northern aristocracy were less conspicuous given the context of the more similar local dialects. Yet, in the interactions between the northern and southern aristocrats, purity of pronunciation became highly significant. During this period, envoys were sent from the aristocratic families of the north and south and both aimed to demonstrate the cultural soft power of their respective regimes. The speech and mannerisms of the envoys were a focal point in these societies; any eloquent dialogue or conspicuous faux pas would be widely circulated.²⁶ The diction of the envoys, therefore, was a primary factor in their selection. Southern aristocrats, having preserved the old Luoyang speech, had little to worry about. If northern aristocrats were not among those families who paid attention to their diction, however, their speech would inevitably be marked by regional accents, making it unlikely for them to be chosen as envoys.

23 *Beishi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 38.1386.

24 Chen Yinke, “Cong shishi lun *Qieyun*,” 5.

25 *Ibid.*, 8.

26 *Beishi*, 43.1604.

In surveying the northern aristocrats who had served as envoys, I observe that most were from families known for their proper diction, including those spoken of by Yan Zhitui, and can safely be considered members of this linguistic elite. The families observed by Yan Zhitui during his time at Yexia 鄴下 included the Cui 崔 family of Qinghe 清河, the Li 李 family of Dunqiu 頓丘, and the Li 李 family of Zhaojun 趙郡. In addition, we may consider those that had close interactions with the aforementioned families, including the Wei 魏 family of Julu 巨鹿, the Lu 盧 family of Fanyang 范陽, the Xue 薛 family of Hedong, the Pei 裴 family of Hedong, the Xin 辛 family of Longxi 隴西, and the Lu 陸 family of Henan 河南. These families were highly educated. They placed emphasis on the study of rhetoric and produced works on phonology. Not only did they transmit phonological classics, they often studied phonology under southern aristocrats. As a result, they studied the proper Luoyang pronunciation and became carriers of phonology from the southern region.

In the early years of the Sui dynasty, during the reign of Emperor Wen 隋文帝 (r. 581–604), aristocrats from the north and south gathered in Chang'an 長安 to compile the *Qieyun* 切韻, and many scholars from the northern court were from the families mentioned above who emphasized proper diction, with many having diplomatic experience. From this we may see that the exchange between the northern and southern aristocrats played an essential role in the northern aristocrats' restoration of the old Luoyang pronunciation. This led to the promotion of communication between the north and south on phonological texts and studies. This exchange also created new standards for cultural identification among the northern aristocracy. This phenomenon reflects an important aspect of the linguistic and cultural dynamics between the northern and southern aristocracies during the Northern and Southern dynasties.²⁷

Reading pronunciation is an important area in the history of ancient Chinese books. The people of ancient China placed great importance on reading aloud and reciting texts, which were both crucial pathways towards cultural refinement and a significant means of displaying one's cultivation. From youth, students memorized classical texts, mastering character pronunciation while gaining basic familiarity with literary structures, grammar, and even profound philosophical themes. Scholars and literati showcased their sophistication, demonstrating their internalization of classical culture, and seeking recognition of their cultural identity through reciting classical works or their own

27 Shi Rui 史睿, "Beichao shizu de yinyun zhi xue yu Nanbei jiaopin" 北朝士族的音韻之學與南北交聘, *Wenshi* 文史, no. 4 (2016): 53–68; Shi Rui 史睿, "Nanbeichao jiaopin ji de jichu yanjiu: yi *Youyang zazu wei zhongxin*" 南北朝交聘記的基礎研究—以《西陽雜俎》為中心, *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中國典籍與文化, no. 1 (2016): 143–53.

compositions. Despite its significance, research into reading pronunciation and its cultural history in the medieval period often faces the challenge of a paucity of resources. Some discussions of reading pronunciation are preserved in transmitted texts. These, however, are mostly limited to specific rules and cases. By contrast, remnants discussing various reading pronunciations found in the Dunhuang and Turpan manuscripts, as well as in Tang dynasty manuscripts kept in Japan, provide rich and detailed case studies. By examining these sources in conjunction, scholars can gain deeper insights into reading practices and cultural stratification in the medieval period.

The author observes that the Dunhuang manuscripts preserve four levels of correct reading pronunciation. The highest level occurs when the reader can produce a pronunciation that perfectly aligns with the prosody of poetry and prose, without relying on any annotations or symbols in the manuscript. This necessarily entails the internalized understanding of scholars well-versed in the phonological rules of poetry and prose, and reflects their effort to achieve the beauty of literary sound and rhythm. As a result, they can achieve the utmost harmony and subtle beauty of those texts. The second level involves the use of red markings over variant readings of characters to indicate pronunciation. This method requires a thorough familiarity with the variant readings that had been established since the Southern dynasties. The use of red ink to mark pronunciation originated in the Southern dynasties and became common in high quality Tang dynasty manuscripts, with traces found in both literary records and excavated manuscripts. It was mainly applied to canonical scriptures and manuscripts of Six Dynasties works on the *Hanshu* 漢書 and the *Wenxuan* 文選. Although this method is somewhat less sophisticated than reading without such annotations on the manuscripts, its proper employment still requires a rich knowledge of phonetics, exegesis, and textual comparison. The third level involves a more scientific annotation for pronunciation using the *fanqie* 反切 method. Lu Deming 陸德明 (550–630) clearly shows that this method was used for specific classics and would have facilitated correct pronunciation for novices reciting these classics. This simple and practical method of annotation does not require the reader to have extensive prior knowledge. It only requires mastery of the *fanqie* rules. This method was more widely used than the red ink annotation and was applied to texts frequently read by ordinary people, such as the classics listed in historical bibliographies or cited in literature.

The lowest level completely disregards standard pronunciation. The reader would simply use their own dialect to read the text, a method that naturally did not require any annotations or symbols. This approach was a common part of the daily reading practices of common people, who, unlike the aristocratic literati, did not pursue the attainment of literary rhyme, nor adhere to the strict

standards of Luoyang pronunciation for an elegant reading. They had no need to use a standard pronunciation as a conspicuous marker of their social identity or cultural internalization. This method of reading pronunciation leaves traces in the manuscripts in the form of dialectal character borrowings.

Today, scholars can deduce the characteristics of northwestern dialect pronunciation during the Tang and Five Dynasties (907–960) through comparative analysis of Han 漢 and non-Han pronunciations. Thus, phonetic patterns of loan characters can be identified in the excavated classical texts of the Dunhuang and Turpan. From these patterns, we discover a collection of classics that were recited in regional dialects. These include both authoritative canonical texts in the conventional sense and works of popular literature, religious exhortations, and other genres.²⁸

6 History of Manuscript Books: the Symphony of the New Historiography

Western scholarship on Chinese books tends to approach it from the perspectives of material history, manuscript studies, and social history, generally treating the book as a material object of study. Chinese scholars, by contrast, should leverage their strengths attained by virtue of their inherited tradition. In addition to the aforementioned approach, they should integrate book history with the histories of knowledge, academia, culture, and thought. The study of academic history, cultural history, and intellectual history through the lens of book history closely parallels the traditional Chinese academic approach, which draws on the study of bibliographies and disparate editions to “identify authentic scholarly works and trace the origins of texts” 辨章學術，考鏡源流.

Research into book history thus bridges materiality and textuality. It examines the relationship between content and form. By superimposing socio-economic and intellectual histories onto traditional research, we achieve significant insights into history. For instance, research into the formatting of books, illustrations, and paratexts is an area that has been relatively underexplored in Chinese academia. In the case of manuscript books, the Tang dynasty manuscript housed in the Tokyo National Museum titled *Maoshi zhuan jian ji zhengyi* 毛詩傳箋及正義 represents the earliest use of a columned layout, with different sections of the text written in varying font sizes and colors, including the

28 Shi Rui 史睿, “Cong yayan dao fangyin: Zhonggu xieben dushu yin de wenhua fenceng” 從雅言到方音—中古寫本讀書音的文化分層, *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究, ed. Ye Wei 葉煒 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2023), 28: 47–66.

core text, transmission notes, commentary, and phonetic annotations. Similar formatting techniques were used in this period, such as in liturgical protocol and calendar manuscripts. The structure of the text, the sequence in which it should be read, and the relative significance of its parts thus became especially clear. Printed books of commentaries in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1616–1911) periods continued to use columned, sectioned, and color-coded layouts, offering important cues and maximum convenience for readers.

Since the discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts from Mogao library cave, there has been tangible evidence of books with phonetic annotations on the verso, including phonetic guides and glosses. Incorporating the reading history into the study of these manuscripts would bring a significant transformation of this area of study. The framing elements that appear on the surface of the text, or supplementary unique textual elements, belong to the paratext. This includes titles, section markers, author names, colophons, annotations, and collation notes, all of which play a crucial role in the reception of the main text. With regard to the eras of bamboo and silk, or handwritten manuscripts, paratexts represent the differences between various copies of a book. In the woodblock printing era, paratexts highlight the variations between different editions of the same work. As manuscript culture transitioned to printed books, the continuity of the core text along with the increasing variety in paratexts provided rich possibilities for textual transformation. Exploring this richness is a brand-new area of book history research.

Moreover, incorporating the history of the body into this research can uncover interesting details. Examples include the extent to which Bai Juyi's 白居易 (772–846) myopia affected his reading; how the introduction of Central Asian cataract treatments, such as the golden comb technique, benefited Tang dynasty readers; how the hours of natural light available for reading and writing became highly valuable in times when nighttime illumination was an economic burden; how the power generated by reading classics in the refined Luoyang or Jinling pronunciation could subdue treacherous ministers and rebels; or how the transliteration of Buddhist scriptures from foreign regions into classical Chinese characters was essentially carried out by a young Dunhuang monk using his Hexi 河西 dialect. These examples demonstrate that by adopting Western approaches to book history, we can revisit and uncover many important and fascinating topics within Chinese book history.

The scope of the new historiography encompasses both new fields of historical study and new methodologies. The future research path of Dunhuang manuscript book history must integrate the diverse new areas of historiography, broadly embrace new methods (including computational textual studies techniques), and break free from the traditional narrow focus on the text or

surface appearance. It must move beyond static, flat, and one-dimensional approaches to textual research and evolve into a dynamic study of manuscript book history in order to recover, as closely as possible, the historical context of manuscript production, transmission, reading, and regeneration. A comprehensive study of Dunhuang manuscripts from perspectives including material cultural history, the social history of knowledge, religious social history, academic and cultural history, and political history can address the connection between a book's content, form, and social function. It also provides a crucial pathway for understanding the era of these manuscripts. This approach enables the intersection of specialized manuscript book history with various new historiographical paths, ultimately furthering the study of comprehensive histories.

Translated by Rory O'Neill