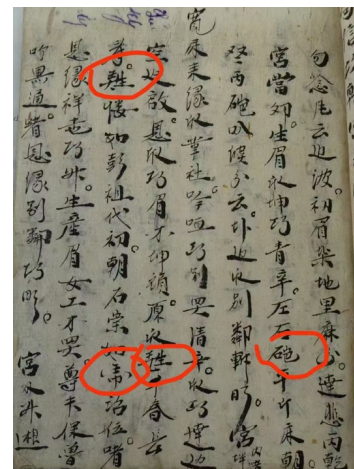
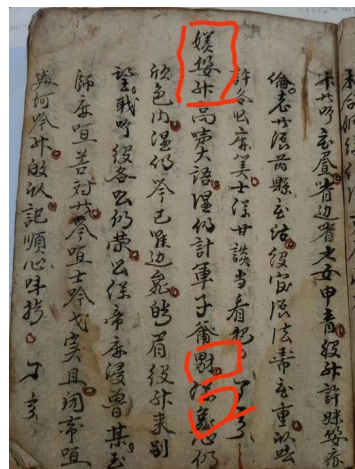
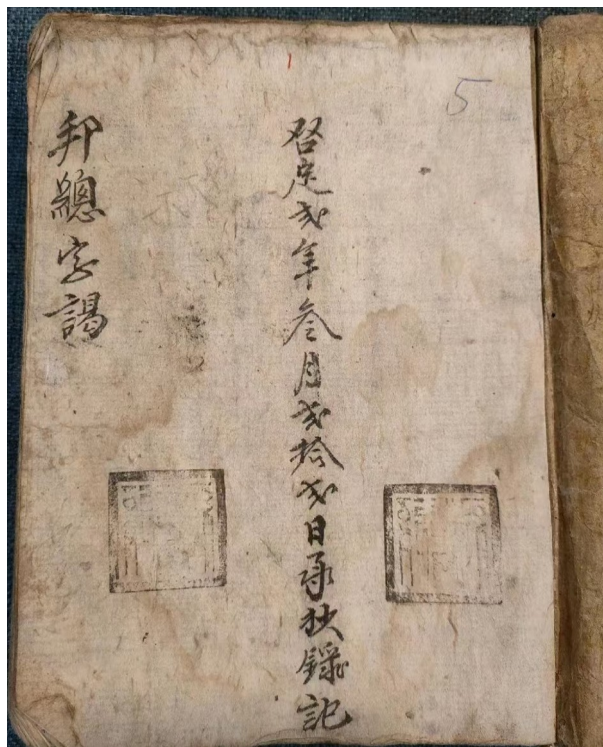


Cultural Rhythms Of Writing:

Experimental Ethnography On Zhuang
Manuscripts And Variant Chinese Characters

Presenter __Boge Xiao__

When a manuscript exceeded our framework



Visible, but unreadable.

A border manuscript first mistaken for something else.

Why Guangxi matters

- Related Research Areas
 - Guangxi is a border region in Southwest China, adjacent to Vietnam
 - It is home to Zhuang ethnic minority and related Tai-speaking communities
 - Manuscripts in Guangxi developed through the interaction of Chinese texts, local Zhuang practices, and cross-border connections with Vietnam.



A Map of the Geographical Location of Guangxi

Why Guangxi matters

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A geographical map of Guangxi and Vietnam

| Why did this manuscript become unreadable?

- We first approached it through a single Chinese-script framework
- We underestimated Guangxi border history and its links to northern Vietnam
- We treated variation as irregularity, rather than evidence of a layered writing environment

Literature Review

- **What scholarship explains**
 - Standardization and central regulation
 - Persistence of older forms in minority regions
 - Border movement of texts across linguistic and political boundaries
- **What remains unclear**
 - Different kinds of variation are often collapsed together
 - Persistence and local refunctioning are not the same
 - Cross-border clues do not equal proven transmission chains

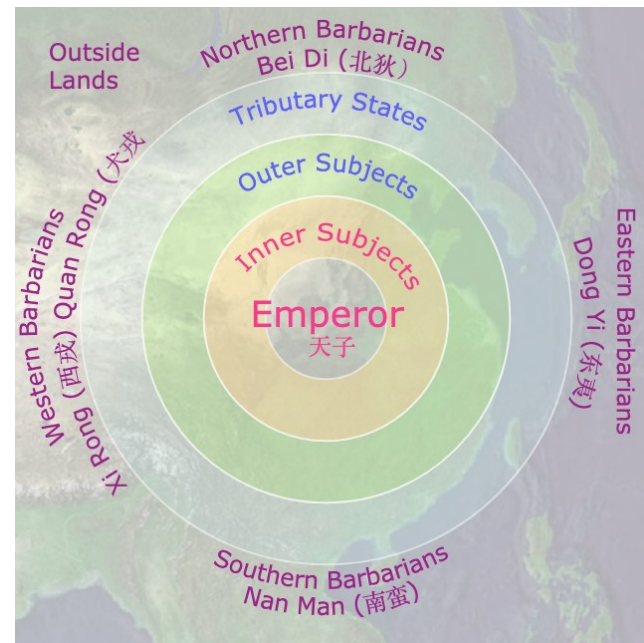


Image of Tianxia (“all under heaven”) from the Western Zhou dynasty (c. 1046–771 BCE)
Graph Sinocentric world and the Barbaric area.

| Not all variation means the same thing

- **Preservation**

- Forms that remain active in local manuscripts after receding from more standardized writing.

- **Resemanticization**

- Forms that are retained, but take on new local, ritual, or semantic functions.

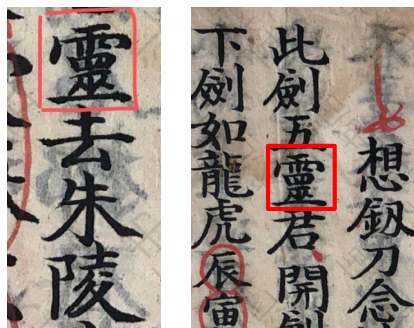
- **Cross-border clue**

- Forms or features that suggest a wider border textual environment, without yet proving a one-way chain of influence.

Not every non-standard form indicates active local reproduction.

Case 1: Preservation

- Some forms remained active in Zhuang manuscripts after receding from more standardized writing
- Their continued use reflects a different pace of textual change, not simply error or backwardness
- Here, “cultural rhythm” helps describe uneven continuity across textual communities



Song Shengmu Xiao'er Shu (Zhuang Manuscript)

Daoguang Period (1821–1850), Qing Dynasty

>>> 靈 >>> 靈
Variant Standard

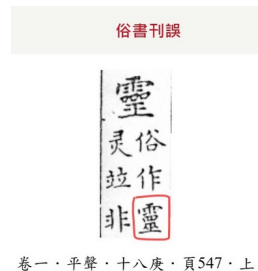
↗
Ming Dynasty
(1368–1644)



↘
Qing Dynasty
(1644–1912)

靈

清
印刷字體
康熙字典

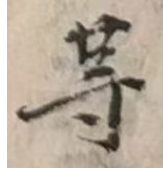
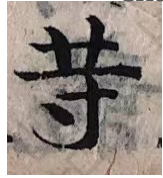


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Case 2: Refunctioning

- The form remains recognizable, but its function is no longer identical across textual worlds
- In Zhuang manuscripts, it enters local ritual and linguistic contexts that reshape its use
- Comparable forms in neighboring traditions suggest a shared border environment, but not a simple one-way chain of influence



The same (in degree or quantity); Grade

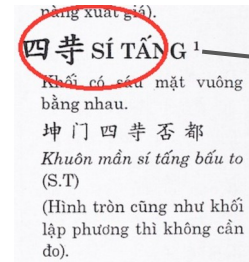
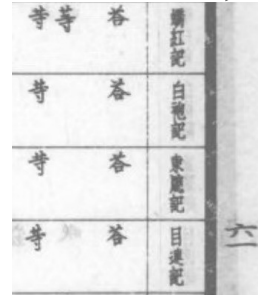
>>>> 等 >>>> 等

Variant
in Zhuang

Step; Many

Standard

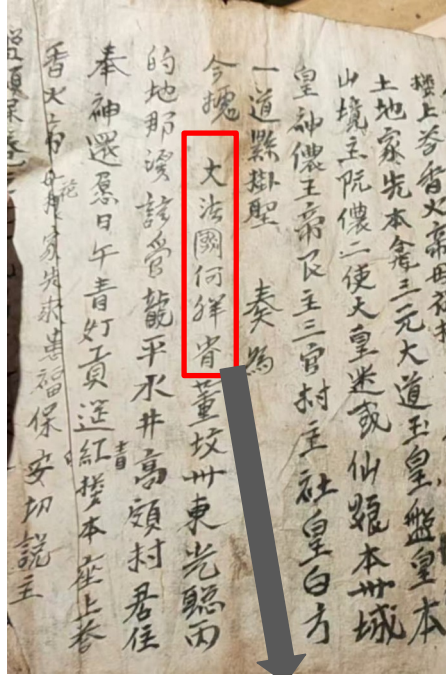
Ming Dynasty
(1368–1644)
Chinese



cubic

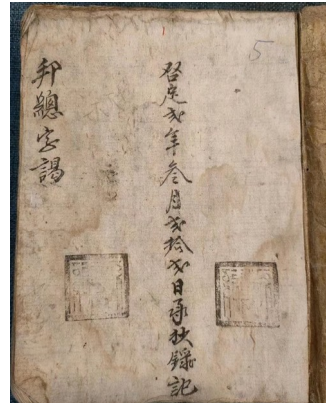
Vietnamese
Chu Nom

Case 3: Cross-border textual traces



Great French Ha Giang (Hà Giang) Province

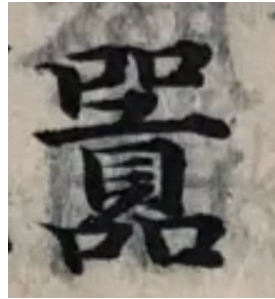
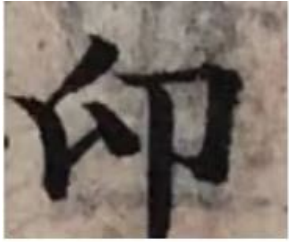
- Some manuscripts preserved in Guangxi retain traces tied to northern Vietnam and colonial-era historical contexts
- These traces show circulation and preservation across the China–Vietnam border, rather than a closed local archive
- Here, “cultural rhythm” helps describe delayed legibility: texts survive across borders, but are not always readable within one framework alone



Title page of a border manuscript dated to the Khải Định era of the Nguyễn dynasty, a period within French colonial Indochina.

| Results

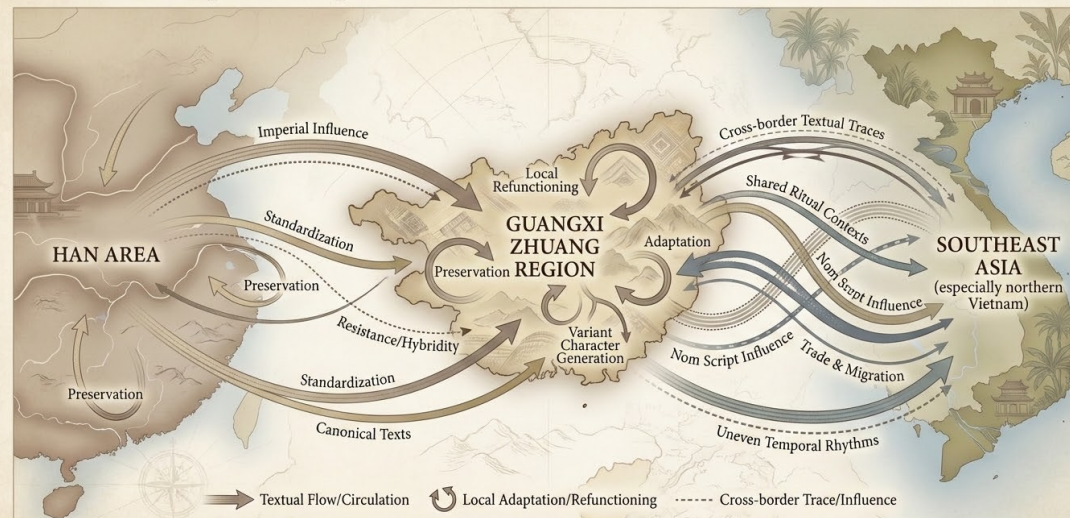
- Key Findings: more and more.....



What “cultural rhythm” helps me see

- Textual change does not happen at the same pace everywhere
- Some forms persist through continuity; others persist by taking on new work
- Some texts remain present but become eligible again only across borders and historical layers

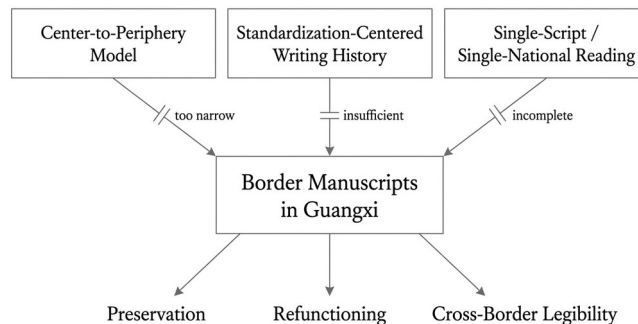
Conceptual Map: Cultural Interaction & Textual Circulation



Schematic Intellectual Diagram of Cultural Rhythms and Textual Interaction

What older frameworks do these cases challenge?

Older framework	Assumption	What my cases suggest
Center → Periphery	Border regions mainly receive or preserve	Border texts also transform, re-layer, and redirect meaning
Standardization-centered history	Non-standard forms are residual or deficient	Some non-standard forms remain active or useful
Single-script / single-national reading	A manuscript belongs to one textual world	Border manuscripts may require multiple frameworks to become legible



Limits and open questions

- Limitations of the Study
 - “Cultural rhythm” is used here as a provisional analytic, not a total theory.
 - These cases are suggestive, not exhaustive.
 - Focused primarily on the Zhuang region; further comparative studies with other minority areas (e.g., Miao or Dong regions) could provide broader insights.
 - At present, there is a lack of systematic linguistic and historical research on the use of some variant characters and their semantic changes
- Future Research Directions
 - Interdisciplinary Approaches:
 - Incorporate digital humanities techniques, such as computational textual analysis, to uncover broader patterns in the evolution of variant characters.

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Thank you for all criticism and guidance.



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