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Introduction

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1. Background

Mainland Southeast Asia including southwestern China is a geographical region that encompasses numerous language groups scattered among diverse ethnic groups. This area is divided by the national boundaries of China, Thailand, Laos, Burma, Vietnam, and Cambodia after their formation as nation states in the twentieth century. As a result, Chinese characters have come into wide use regardless of the influence of ethnic groups in southwestern China, just as are Thai (Siamese), Lao, Burmese, *Quoc Ngu* (the alphabetical writing system of the Vietnamese), and the Khmer scripts in Thailand, Laos, Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia, respectively. These scripts have become part of the official languages in these countries and have spread mainly as a result of the establishment of modern bureaucratic institutions including school education. However, various writing systems—besides the official writing systems found in each individual country—have been transmitted throughout Mainland Southeast Asia for hundreds of years. Therefore, the process of bringing the national writing systems to the fore in the twentieth century should not be regarded as a simple transition from illiteracy to literacy, or from oral tradition to literary culture. Even now, there are countless varieties of signs and symbols carved, written, or printed on writing materials such as stone, paper, and palm leaves in many parts of the region. The content covers numerous genres, including religious documents, genealogies, annals, customary laws, literature, and letters. It should be noted that specific social groups have transmitted specific writing systems for specific purposes. Regional characteristics have shaped the differences between the distribution of language groups and that of writing systems.

How do written cultures influence folk societies of Mainland Southeast Asia? This question led me to organize an international symposium called “Written Cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia”¹⁾ at the National Museum of Ethnology (Osaka) on February 3–4 in 2006. This book contains the findings and conclusions that emerged in the symposium. Here, I will now briefly introduce the program of the symposium.

The contributors of the symposium were researchers dealing with literary sources such as the Tham (Baba Yuji, Tsumura Fumihiko, and Isra Yanatan), Tai Dam (Kashinaga Masao), Lao (Peter Koret), and the Shan script (Murakami Tadayoshi), mainly transmitted by the Tai-speaking groups; the Cham script (Shine Toshihiko) by the Cham people belonging to the Austronesian speaking groups; Karen script (Ikieda Kazuto) by the Karen people of the

Tibeto-Burman speaking groups; and Chinese characters (Yoshino Akira), used by the Mien, belonging to the Hmong–Mien speaking groups in northern Thailand. In addition, keynote lectures by historian Michel Lorrillard and ecologist Takeda Shinya outlined the material and political backgrounds of written cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia. These lectures examined the written cultures in this area from both micro and macro viewpoints.

As part of the symposium, we organized the following four sessions: “Spirit, History, and Identity,” “Text and Power,” “Spirit and Form,” and “Roles, Relationship, and Recipients.” In “Spirit, History, and Identity,” Ogura Shunji, an expert in the history of medieval Italy, provided some comments focusing on the purposes in using texts; in “Text and Power,” Itagaki Ryuta, an expert in the social history of modern Korea, provided some comments focusing on texts and the positions of intellectuals; in “Spirit and Form,” Iijima Akiko, an expert in the social and cultural histories of Tai peoples, provided some comments focusing on the relations between magical and religious practices and literacy; and in “Roles, Relationship, and Recipients,” Kaya Noriko, an expert in the calligraphic arts in East Asia, provided some comments focusing on the transmission of texts. After these four sessions, Zaha Tamami presented her reports on illiteracy as a social disadvantage in the contemporary world. She spoke from the perspective of a programmer planning development projects on literacy and non-formal education in Asian developing countries. Finally, Christian Daniels, as the general commentator, spoke and emphasized that the orality embedded in the written texts formed an important aspect of the cultural character of the written cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia. In addition, Po Dharma (Kuala Lumpur Center of the *École française d’Extrême-Orient*) actively participated in the discussion to share thoughts on the process of establishing the orthography of the Cham scripts in the twentieth century and the difficulties in their transmission. I cannot cover all the discussions from the symposium in this book; however, my aim is to outline the core points of the ten articles that appear in this book, rewritten based on discussions at the symposium.

2. Aims

The mark making of abstract symbols or scripts on various mediums as a means of communication is a peculiar human activity. When we define texts as materials marked with symbols, numbers, scripts, or images, what is the relationship between the production, use, conservation and rejection of the texts, and human cognition, behavior and activity in social contexts? The research on written cultures deals entirely with the social and cultural practices surrounding texts (Kashinaga 2006: 2). Thus, the aim of this book is to consider the kinds of common cultural characters of Mainland Southeast Asia that can be illuminated by the analysis of the written cultures in this widespread geography.

The nine authors in this book deal with the scripts of Tham, Tai Dam, Lao, Shan, Cham, and the Chinese characters in the Mien society in northern Thailand. Apart from the Lao scripts, none of the scripts are national scripts—in terms of being the official writing systems for the national languages—in the regions where each author is conducting research. As mentioned above, many local scripts that differ from the national scripts have been transmitted to villages in Mainland Southeast Asia since the premodern era. Since this fact

is one of the noticeable common cultural characteristics of this widespread area, I asked the researchers focusing on the written cultures of the local scripts to participate in our symposium. Undoubtedly, the number of people literate in local scripts is decreasing against the background of the spread of national scripts since the twentieth century; however, not all of them are vanishing. We can even provide some contemporary examples of the texts and knowledge of some local scripts such as the Tham and the Tai Dam being actively preserved as symbols of regional or ethnic identity. In brief, some local scripts are being rediscovered as materials of traditional culture of the region, and are being authorized by the national or local governments through developing policy to activate the regional economy since the 1980s in Southeast Asian countries. In fact, these cultural movements surrounding the conservation of local scripts are occurring because of nationwide dominance of the national scripts in each country.

As I mentioned above, local scripts have been used by specific specialists for specific purposes. This contradicts the fact that national scripts are recognized for daily needs by the entire nation. Of course, the popularization of national scripts in each country has been facilitated by the introduction of various factors, organizations, institutions, ideas, and financial resources for the production and distribution of different kinds of writing materials, development of printing technologies, establishment of public education, establishment of orthography, teacher training, acquisition of educational finance, and so on. I regard scripts as material culture, and literacy as communication technology grounded in tool use, because all scripts exist as physical materials manifested in specific mediums like paper. It is only natural that both physical materials and technologies are used in conditions for purposes in contexts by users, that all very specific. With regard to scripts, scripts with restricted uses like local scripts must be general, and those with universal uses like the national scripts would be rather specific. In each Mainland Southeast Asian country, the spread of national scripts has been closely linked with the establishment of modern bureaucracy in the twentieth century. This brings to mind the famous remark by Kawada in Japanese anthropological literacy studies, namely, that scripts have two different directives: a secret or cultic nature and an engaging or discursive nature (Kawada 1990: 219–221). However, we must be careful not to misunderstand this remark. These two features are not inherent in the scripts themselves. Whether the scripts have a secret nature or an engaging nature depends on the social conditions surrounding the script used in the society.

Mainland Southeast Asia is a rare region in the world, in that many local scripts are transmitted on account of being embedded in the cultural practices of each community. How are they maintained by being embedded in the local societies? As Daniels points out in his article, it is necessary to pay attention to the tradition of oral cultures to understand the written cultures in this region. However, this book does not aim to analyze textual examples in Mainland Southeast Asia in the context of technical evolution (i.e. the transformation of scripts from voices, handwriting, and printing to electronic typing), by developing past literacy studies that presume a dichotomy between orality and literacy (cf. Havelock 1963; Goody & Watt 1968; Ong 1982; Olson 1988). Rather, I emphasize the focus on technological choices since technologies have different impacts depending on varying demands and circumstances, as demonstrated by socio–historical research on the

changes in social customs and public attitudes that occurred in the process of the spread of literacy as technology in medieval England from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries (Clanchy 1993 (1973): 334). The theme of this book is how scripts—as material culture—and literacy—as technology—are embedded in the social contexts of each community. It envisions an empirical approach toward understanding the regional characteristics of Mainland Southeast Asia by analyzing the relationship of texts with their use in the everyday lives of people inhabiting the region. As Tsumura mentioned in his book review on Veidlinger's book (Tsumura 2007: 284), for thirty years, scholars—including media theorists—have discussed topics surrounding orality and writing, such as alphabetical culture, printing/manuscript, silent reading, and nationalism through language education. However, these studies began with a focus on the effect of typography in the world of European Christianity, so consequently, non-European writing culture has only just begun to move into the spotlight.

3. Content

The notion “Tai Culture Area” (also referred to as the “Shan Culture Area”) was proposed by Shintani Tadahiko to refer to a group of people who were under the rule of Tai-speaking people in premodern northern Indochina (Shintani (ed.) 1998). This sovereignty—called *muang*—is known to have spread over a wide area, covering river basins and valleys, as well mountainous areas. Even today, various cultural and ecological similarities are found among people in the Tai Culture Area, although the area was administratively divided into China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma in the nineteenth century. The Tai Culture Area is a cultural exchange complex that was historically formed by the coexistence and correlation of multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural elements.

The ethnic groups in the Tai Culture Area are roughly classified into the following three groups. The first group transmits its own scripts to write its own languages. This group includes many ethnic groups in the lowlands that belong to Tai-speaking groups. The second group does not have its own script but has adopted scripts from other groups to form its own culture and traditions even in the premodern era. This group comprises the Mien highlanders who use Chinese characters. The third group did not adopt scripts for use in daily social life before the twentieth century. This group consists of many highlanders belonging to the Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer-speaking groups, and so on. The eight articles in this book, except for Shine's article, which considers the written culture of the Vietnamese central highlanders, focus on the social lives of the ethnic groups in the Tai Culture Area. Therefore, I have placed the article by Iijima Akiko, which suggests the concept of the Cultural Region of Tham Script Manuscripts in relation to the perspective of the Tai Culture Area for socio-historical studies and the Lao script is regarded as a variant of the Tham Script in Mainland Southeast Asia, at the beginning of this book. The article concerning the Lao scripts history by Michel Lorrillard follows because the spread of many Lao inscriptions overlaps a large part of the Tai Culture Area. Next, appear three articles by Baba Yuji, Tsumura Fumihiko, and Murakami Tadayoshi, focusing on the local practices

of Tai-speaking groups who have embraced Theravada Buddhism. Kashinaga Masao's article on the rites and offerings for ancestor worship of the Tai Dam people—a Tai-speaking group that does not follow Theravada Buddhism is then followed by Yoshino Akira's article concerning the use of Chinese characters in the Mien villages in northern Thailand. With regard to outside of the Tai Culture Area, Shine Toshihiko addresses the transmission of texts in the Cham script in the next article. Finally, Christian Daniels' article makes references to and comments about all the articles.

In the next section, I will introduce the contents of the articles in this book in slightly greater detail to clarify the book's aim.

Buddhist monasteries possess a great number of palm-leaf or paper manuscripts in Tham scripts in the wide-spanning area, which includes northern and northeastern Thailand, the lowlands of Laos, part of Shan State in Burma and Sipsong Panna in Yunnan province. Iijima calls this the vast region the "Cultural Region of Tham Script Manuscripts." Here, common manuscripts in Tham scripts are found that have been used to transcribe the Buddhist scriptures in Pali since about the thirteenth century. In this Cultural Region of Tham Script Manuscripts geographically corresponding to the Tai Culture Area proposed by Shintani, monks continue to transmit literal knowledge while the secular community dedicates manuscripts to the monasteries. On the other hand, the monks transmit many secular scripts as sacred besides the Tham. Iijima's article describes the transmission of scripts in relation to the religious or state system.

In his article, Lorrillard gives an overview of existing theories concerning the spread of the *t'ai-lao* scripts (refers to the Tai-speaking groups in his article) in Southeast Asia, especially in Laos, including the contributions of E. Aymonier (1844–1929) and L. Finot (1864–1935). Next, he asserts that the birth of the Lao scripts is closely connected to the introduction of the Lanna (Northern Thailand) culture and Buddhism in the lower Mekong basin around the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. In addition, he claims that the analysis of the inscriptions found in every province of Laos confirm the chronology of the geographical spread of both religion and royal power in the Lan Xang kingdom. On the other hand, he also discusses how some Lao researchers adhering to the narrowly simplistic, ethnocentric, and profoundly nationalistic viewpoints claim that the secular Lao script appeared before the birth of the script in Sukhothai (end of the twelfth century), suggesting that Laos is the cradle of the *t'ai* written civilization.

Baba considers the role of texts in the formation of a common history that is recognized by society at large. His paper focuses on differing historical interpretations of worshiping guardian spirits in the collective processes of three Tai Lue villages in Nan province, northern Thailand. Their migration histories have been reconstructed based on rivalries over rural development, especially in N and D villages. An old written document in the Tai-Lue script (Tham script) expresses the villagers' history of migration from their place of origin, Sipsong Panna in Yunnan province. When the statue of guardian spirits was built in N village in 1984, a commemorative publication was issued. It included the migration history translated into modern Thai—the national script—from the old written documents. It was a rewritten version expressing history from the standpoint of N village. In the 1990s, many historical monuments appeared successively, in an opposing movement by D village.

Baba points out that the local and national governments try to stimulate economic development by associating themselves with the rediscovery of the local culture and knowledge in communities; conversely, local traditional knowledge and intellectuals are marginalized while the national script spreads into the local communities in northern Thailand. This kind of revival of local knowledge has made progress throughout Mainland Southeast Asia. Yoshino also concentrates on this phenomenon in his article that considers the use of Chinese characters in Mien society.

Tsumura analyzes modern meanings and uses of traditional scripts in the contexts of actual village life. The Tham script has been transmitted for religious purposes in Buddhist monasteries. However, the number of monks literate in the Tham script has in recent times been decreasing. Moreover, even monks usually use Thai-printed palm leaf books instead of the Tham-written texts during funerals and some annual rituals, based on the influence of the institutionalization of Buddhist education and examinations and the exclusion of education pertaining to traditional scripts by the Thai government. On the other hand, secular religious specialists, *mothams*, provide various services such as counseling, magical healing, and exorcism by using manuscripts in traditional Tham scripts as indispensable tools for their religious practices. The villagers not only regard the Tham scripts as sacred because of the spells written on talismans by the *mothams* in traditional scripts but they also regard the material for writing such scripts as palm tree leaves, called *tonlan*, and a pencil-like piece of wood with a nail top, called *lekcan*, as magical. The secrecy of the scripts is due to the fact that the unfamiliarity of the Tham script itself still maintains its popularity, and based on the belief that *bailan* manuscripts, compiled via oral transmission, also contain the same sacredness as those imparted through oral tradition. Of course, although chanting and writing spells from the Tham script are the essential elements for the rituals, they are not sufficient for their completion. A *motham* always blows on an object during a religious ritual. The *motham*'s breath represents the physicality of the practitioner and the substance of magical power. Tsumura demonstrates that the physical practices of writing or reading manuscripts are embedded as a ritual process in northeast Thailand society. Common examples of this can be found in Shan society, referred to in Murakami's article, and in Mien society, referred to in Yoshino's article. The ability to use text as a tool for ritual is clearly related to the authority of the practitioners in these societies.

Murakami examines how the texts and knowledge of traditional script had been transmitted in Shan society in the beginning of the twentieth century, before the introduction of public education and mass technology. He focuses his discussion on the relationship between oral culture and literal knowledge through his research in Shan villages in Burma and northern Thailand. His area of interest is the production and use of the text, *lik long*, which means great manuscripts. Murakami's article includes commentaries on Buddhist texts and instructive stories adapted from Jataka tales. The *lik long* texts have been transcribed carefully by lay intellectuals, so that they may be read aloud and recited to audiences for Buddhist rites with manuscript offerings, as well as being offered to monasteries to receive merit. Therefore, the *lik long*, written in the Shan language and script is more familiar and real for the villagers than the scriptures in Pali kept in the cabinet of monasteries, because most of the villagers cannot read the latter. The villagers expect the local intellectuals to

orally enact as well as produce and reproduce the texts. In order for a village intellectual to become famous and for the performance to be enjoyable, excellent verbal skills for reading aloud and a good chanting voice is necessary. In short, the intellectuals' oral performance is based on literacy, which, in turn, assures the success of their performances. In fact, monks in monasteries observe this so-called literate orality in religious practices, and the ability to perform verbally is also important to gain fame. Based on his own research, Murakami enforces Ishii Yoneo (1998) or Hayashi Yukio's (2002) idea that oral tradition is very important for the religious practices of Theravada Buddhism, which contrasts ideas of Theravada Buddhism being a "literal tradition." Moreover, Daniels emphasizes in this book that literate orality, in other words, the imbrication of orality and literacy (cf. Cummings 2003), is at the core of the culture and tradition of Mainland Southeast Asia.

Kashinaga concentrates on the transmission and use of the texts, *Xo phi huon*, known as the written genealogies in the Tai Dam script among the Tai Dam people in northwestern Vietnam. The Tai Dam people occasionally use these texts in some ceremonies to make offerings to ancestors. The ancestors, whose names are written in *Xo phi huon*, are often just those the living can remember, as families have often neglected conveying records such as chronicles concerning succession of the chief's position and historical events since the founding generation. Further, in fact, we find that they merely enumerate surnames and names of the dead individuals and do not indicate kin relations such as descent, marriages, and siblings. Therefore, the *Xo phi huon* do not completely serve to remember the names of the ancestors. Rather, they are used as a tool for authentically performing ceremonies and rituals for the family. Kashinaga points out that it is not the content of the *Xo phi huon* texts that are meaningful in rituals but their presence.

Recently, some Tai Dam intellectuals have begun writing the *Xo phi huon* of their families, especially since the 1980s, with the influence of the market economy policy. This has prompted families to regard *Xo phi huon* as traditional ethnic culture in that they perceive their own script as an ethnic symbol and the texts in the traditional script as their own tradition. This contemporary situation implies that even in Tai Dam society, the revival of local knowledge is making progress.

In Vietnam, the Tai Dam script is typically used to visually represent the peculiarity of the Tai Dam culture. Similarly, the Chinese characters of the Mien are considered as representing Mien culture in northern Thailand. Yoshino views the script as being an ethnic symbol of the Mien. However, for the Mien, their traditional script comprises Chinese characters, which they adopted from the Chinese people. The Mien priests read the rituals and secular texts in Chinese characters. Among the priests, literacy with regard to Chinese characters was closely related to the acquisition and rise of religious practitioners. However, the number of people literate in Chinese is decreasing in villages, as being literate in Chinese does not lead to social success in Thailand. Since the 1980s, when the great influence of the market economy penetrated into local communities in Thailand, the Mien began considering Chinese characters as their ethnic symbol.

Kashinaga and Yoshino's theme of the relationship between ethnic identity and script is common to Shine's article. Shine considers the historical changes in land use and subsistence economy of both lowlanders—the Cham—and highlanders—the Raglai—in

central Vietnam during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His discussion is based on field research in lowland and highland villages, and by analyzing the historical Chinese documents of the Vietnamese dynasties including the cadastral registers in the nineteenth century and the manuscripts of historical epic poems in the Cham script. Through his analysis, he demonstrates the mobilization of the ethnic boundary, suggesting that the ethnic identities of the Cham and Raglai have been formed along the distinction between the two groups: the literate religious experts in Cham scripts who hold rituals and the illiterate religious specialists who aim to preserve the Cham texts that are not for their own use. In short, he presents an example of the ethnic boundary being established by basing it on the political relations between the producer, user, and preserver of texts.

Christian Daniels summarizes not only each presentation of the symposium in 2006 but also the significance of this book, from the view of the research concerning the transmission and use of chronicles in Tai Maw society in Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan as follows. One cannot overlook the fact that every traditional script specific to each community is derived from Chinese characters or Indian scripts, when considering the written cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia. Therefore, the scripts, as exotic tools, represent power and prestige for the villagers, and they seldom use, write, and read the scripts in their daily life. As other authors in this book have also observed, some intellectuals and specialists have used the local scripts for special religious purposes. These include ritual practices or political purposes such as descriptions of the legitimacy of rules and constructions of ethnic identities. However, the notion that writing constitutes an enduring and unchanging record that is more reliable than the spoken word did not prevail in Mainland Southeast Asia. Moreover, in Tai Maw society too, chronicles are written in verse to enable people to read them aloud. Rhyme, euphony and repetition when reading aloud makes the performance enjoyable and enables audiences better comprehension of the material. Further, a narrative technique of personification of the Tai alphabet is introduced as a unique way to mark a change in topic or a break from the monotony of the narration. Thus, Daniels insists on the significance of the role of oral tradition in written cultures as an important feature of tradition and cultures in this widespread area. Further, since all papers in this book analyze the imbrications of oral and written traditions, Daniels suggests that the symposium in 2006 (and the title of this book) should have been “Written and Oral Cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia,” rather than simply “Written Cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia.” Given the conclusions that emerged at the symposium in 2006, I may have chosen that title; however, as I intended, this book aims to consider the materiality of the scripts and texts. I adopted the title “Written Cultures” to avoid giving readers the preconceived notion that this book would be edited based on the assumption of a contradiction between orality and literacy.

4. Perspectives

This book focuses on the contemporary situation pertaining to the transmission and preservation of traditional scripts in relation to the daily practices in local communities and the spread of national scripts. Our achievements demonstrate the following two important

characteristics of the written cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia. The first is that we cannot simply consider the spread of national scripts to have caused the decline in traditional scripts. The second is that the indigenous people recognize the cultural value of local scripts not only based on the content of the texts but also on the contexts surrounding the use of the texts.

Most of the articles in this book focus on literacy and the use of these texts in daily life in small local villages. However, this book does not include articles that deal with the role of the texts in commercial transactions, administrative procedures, and judicial proceedings. Moreover, the authors do not delve deeply into the attempts to popularize local scripts such as those used in daily life by the general public. Some examples are the legislation of the orthography of local scripts, the creation of new scripts for printing, computerized correspondence, and the incorporation of local scripts into the public curriculum. In the discussion at the symposium, however, many participants commented on these themes since they prompt a reconsideration of the engaging and discursive elements of the scripts, although there is a tendency to uncritically accept these elements as being self-evident. In light of this, I will detail the achievements and perspectives of joint research on written cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia by focusing on the discussions of these themes.

Local scripts in commercial transactions and bureaucratic practices

From a historical perspective of human history, numerals were invented before scripts, as indicated by evidence that the cuneiform characters used by Sumerians were derived from the written system for recording the balances of commerce in 3,500 B.C. From this arises the question of how people have manipulated and recorded numbers in Mainland Southeast Asia, where many scripts have been derived from the ancient Indian scripts or Chinese characters during the past two thousand years. However, as shown in this book, many local scripts have rarely been used in business transactions and in administration and commerce, or accounting ledgers. The numerals of local scripts used by the Tai-speaking groups are often seen in horoscopes, but rarely found in accounting documents. The reason for this does not mean the lack of development of trade and commerce due to small populations and the subsistence economy of local societies in Mainland Southeast Asia. *Muang* polities had been established as the core of the political, religious, economical, and cultural lives of the Tai-speaking groups at long-distance trading hubs since the twelfth or thirteenth century. At the very least, Chinese and Kinh (that is, Vietnamese) merchants used the Chinese script at the markets of the *muangs*, east of the mainland. A micro-level analysis of the economic activities in terms of commerce and trade in these markets will yield a clearer picture in this regard.

Note that I am not implying that the practical texts written in the local scripts, except for those in Chinese characters, do not exist. For instance, the Tai-speaking groups have passed on many traditional practical texts pertaining to certain fields such as customary law, divination, or pharmacy. While these practical texts are read privately and individually, the texts containing folk songs or chronicles are read aloud, incorporating formal rhythms and tones to create a sense of interaction in a common space shared by the reader and the audience²). Furthermore, texts on divination or talismans include many diagrams and pictures.

In the texts on divination, pictorial images and the layout of pages assist the readers in finding pages containing the information that they seek. The reading of these texts would entail interpreting them on the basis of the descriptions provided through images and scripts, rather than by reading the script aloud. In short, a good reading ability implies a sound interpretation of the text.

In the West, the number of records that testify rights of estate has rapidly increased since the twelfth or thirteenth century; this can be attributed to a combination of technological, economical, and socio-cultural factors such as the mass production of paper, the proliferation of print technology, and the growing predilection to trust oral testimonies over written documents (cf. Clanchy 1993(1979)). In the Tai Culture Area, in contrast, many local scripts were derived from ancient Khmer or Mon scripts from around the same time, for corresponding to the needs of the respective region; however, documentation in these scripts has not been advanced by the local populace, if one defines ‘documentation’ as trust in written statements rather than in oral ones. As Veidlinger demonstrated in his book (Veidlinger 2006), even Theravada Buddhism doctrines have been mainly passed on orally rather than in written form. Further, bureaucratic organization, which was grounded on unitary rule as documented in works like Max Weber’s theory on bureaucracy, had not been fully developed before the advent of Western imperialism in most areas of Mainland Southeast Asia, except in parts governed by Vietnamese dynasties that adopted Chinese characters for official documentation purposes.

As I discussed above, the daily life in local villages of Mainland Southeast Asia has not been isolated from the wide and complicated network of politics, economy, and law. However, prior to the spread of public education on a national scale, the villagers might have had access to texts and education through external materials and technological sources owing to their close links with external authorities and networks such as states, religious communities, and trade activities. In the discussion at the symposium, Tamura Katsumi, on the basis of his fieldwork, mentioned that even announcements by government officials have to be made orally in certain fixed and conventional forms, and that official papers are at present often unwelcome in present-day villages at Burma because they cause extreme stress. Further, as Peter Koret commented on the uses of religious texts in northeastern Thailand, the sacredness of texts is not based on content but on the context of their usage. In other words, even though bureaucratic documentation has spread throughout Mainland Southeast Asia, for local villagers, the scripts continue to be considered as external materials; further, the legitimacy and authenticity of the texts are not inherent but contingent on social contexts. We can highlight this as one of the characteristics of the local cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia with regard to the use of scripts.

Popularization of local scripts

With the on-going globalization of the market economy, we need to address the question of how to transmit traditional culture in society, and consider a process where culture is passed from person to person, rather than through exhibitions in showcases. This is a common theme in the context of local cultures around the world. As I mentioned earlier, the spread of national scripts does not necessarily lead to the decline in traditional scripts.

Nevertheless, as Yoshino's article demonstrates, once there is a revival of local knowledge among local communities through the spread of national knowledge and authorities, the younger generation tends to lose interest in the traditional script. Further, as Zaha Tamami—a participant of the anti-illiteracy education program in Asian countries—declared in the symposium, we cannot help accepting the fact that literacy in the national script of each country is already the prerequisite for everyone to be given equal access to public services, even in remote communities.

Surely, while national scripts are being successfully popularized, there have been attempts to popularize local scripts in some countries. The presentation paper by Isra Yanatan in the symposium refers to the experiments conducted by local governmental officers and researchers to establish the orthography and to collaborate on the computerization of Tai scripts in Sipsongpanna of the Yunnan province since the twentieth century. Further, in Vietnam, similar attempts to popularize Tai Dam scripts have been made since the 1940s. In both cases, they unified the variant forms of scripts belonging to each region and changed the layout of pages by introducing punctuation, chapters, paragraphs, and spaces to facilitate private reading. However, these technical modifications do not fully contribute to the popularization of these scripts, because new genres of texts that attract younger generations have not yet been written or printed and, further, because the number of texts written in local script has not increased adequately. As such, these attempts failed to accomplish more than a general attitude that local scripts are essential elements of ethnic culture or indigenous knowledge (known as *phum-phanya* in Thailand) to be cherished as well as transmitted; this was because these endeavors were not successful in increasing the number of people who used the local scripts in their daily lives.

Orality and literacy

As mentioned above, local texts also include many pictures and diagrams, and improving the layout of pages was inevitable in the first step toward the popularization of local scripts. These facts demonstrate that reading the local texts is not irrelevant to understanding and envisioning even various visual information except for scripts the context through the visual content from the scripts. Moreover, these texts have been reproduced on multiple occasions through a distinct division of purposes, namely, as transcriptions for making copies, transliterations for reading purposes, and as translations for promoting an understanding of the content. In other words, there is a limitation in understanding the texts as equivalent to saying the words orally, even in Mainland Southeast Asia, because the relation between texts and oral words cannot be understood within the context of a simplistic dichotomy of orality and literacy. Nevertheless, there is a clear rationale for why Christian Daniels writes his paper from the perspective of the imbrications of literacy and orality as described in this book. As demonstrated in Murakami Tadayoshi's paper and the presentation by Peter Koret, many texts are written for the purpose of oral performance rather than for communicating and understanding the content. They are characterized by abundant repetition of the same phrase and fixed phrases, because people gain more pleasure from oral performance of the verses rather than visual understanding of the prose. It is natural that the grace and beauty of the intonations and the reader's voice during the reading draws the audience's interest.

Similarly it is certain that orality and literacy are often closely linked in the local practices in this area.

A geographical feature of Mainland Southeast Asia is that it is located at the peripheries of great civilizations such as China and India. As a result, there was a mutual exchange of local scripts among these civilizations for more than two thousand years, leading to the creation of various new scripts and the development of indigenous technologies for papermaking, as Takeda Shinji discusses in his presentation. However, the paper manufacturing industry has not advanced significantly in many parts of this area. Furthermore, as for the texts written in local scripts, with the exception of the Chinese script, the number of texts has also not increased significantly, while the circulation channels of these texts have been consistently expanding and their quantity has also been constantly increasing during the past five thousand years, from the human historical perspective [Nakamura 1997: 154]. This is because many local scripts in this area have often been circulated only among certain classes or specialists in societies, and many texts have even been abolished after reproduction by transcription or transliteration. In the discussion at the symposium, Saito Akira stated that local texts have a particular niche in each society through the use of ecological metaphors, and proposed a viewpoint to referring to the evolution of these local texts as a phenomenon of “local stability.” The proposition of this kind of balanced model forms an important aspect of this book.

Notes

- 1) This symposium was held as part of the core research project of the National Museum of Ethnology (NME) “Textology: An Interdisciplinary Study in the Relations between Man and Text in Historical and Comparative Perspective” and the Inter-University research project of NME “Toward the Creation of Textology” under the joint auspices of the École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) with the financial assistance of the Japan Foundation.
- 2) Even the contract texts in Chinese characters exchanged between the Hmong people and the Chinese merchants existed in the eighteenth century in the southwestern China bordering on the Tai Culture Area (Takeuchi 2006).

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