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Commemorating the Ancestors' Merit:
Myth, Schema, and History in the "Charter of Emperor Ping" *

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This paper focuses on a genre of text that has circulated in certain Yao communities in South China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. It is known by a variety of names, but most commonly as the "Charter of Emperor Ping" (*pinghuang quandie* 評皇券牒) and the "Passport for Crossing the Mountains" (*guoshanbang* 過山榜). The Charter is usually in the form of a scroll, decorated with imperial chops, talismans, illustrations of emperors and Daoist deities, maps, and other images. Because of its resemblance to documents written by Chinese officialdom, the prevalence of imperial symbolism and linguistic usage, and the specific claims about Yao identity embedded in it, most past scholars have taken it to be an imperial edict once issued to Yao leaders, granting them autonomy in the mountainous spaces of the empire. In this paper, I view it instead as an indigenous production, one originally created by local Yao leaders who were familiar with imperial textualizing practices, who manipulated them to serve their own ends and the needs of their people and family members. From the Qing dynasty up through the first half of the twentieth century, Yao people, primarily Iu Mien or Pan Yao 盤瑤 from Hunan, Guangxi, and Guangdong, circulated the Charter and similar documents, made copies, and preserved them for their posterity. The question is, to what end. Finally, I analyze the ordering schema of the entire tradition of charter production in Yao communities and demonstrate how the narrative and visual features work in synergy to commemorate the merit of Yao ancestors, mythical and historical, which forms the basis of Yao (Mien) claims about their position in the state and the cosmos.

Keywords: Yao people, Iu Mien, King Pan, Yao charters, cultural schema

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I. Introduction

To set the stage for this paper, let me relate an incident that occurred during Hjorleifur Jonsson's fieldwork in a Yao (a.k.a. Iu Mien) village in northern Thailand sometime between October 1992 and August 1994. A delegation of Yao experts composed of Westerners, Chinese (including Yao), and Thai visited the village where he was living:

> A committee had made a banner written in Chinese and Thai to welcome the group, and locals formed lines on both sides of the road to the village, men and women on opposite sides. In this, villagers received the guests in much the same way that they would a bridal delegation at the start of a wedding. The visitors acted their part, stepping out of their cars and walking with their hosts to a sub-district meeting hall in the village. As at a wedding reception, they were seated according to sex, men and women forming two sides of a circle, and then the hosts brought them liquor in small cups. As a wedding, the event assumed and reproduced social entities and divisions; it defined people as either hosts or guests, and as men or women (Jonsson 2000:57-58).

The international delegation was then led to view what some, if not all, of its members found a remarkable document: "an illustrated handwritten scroll in Chinese characters, which belongs to the village headman. They viewed it with considerable interest and copied parts of it down to compare with other examples they knew" (Jonsson 2000: 58). This scroll was none other than the "Charter of Emperor Ping" (*pinghuang quandie* 評皇券牒), also known as the "Passport for Crossing the Mountains" (*guoshanbang* 過山榜; *Kia Shen Pong* in Mien),[1] and similar titles. This anecdote highlights a scenario at

1 *Bang* or *Bangwen* 榜文 really means something more like "placard," "notice," or "proclamation." In imperial China, *bangwen* were long scrolls, similar in appearance to the typical form of the *guoshanbang*, which were posted to make official announcements. For instance, *jinbang* 金榜 was a placard that publicly announced successful civil service candidates. *Bangwen* also refers to placards hung in front of temples by Daoist priests announcing to the gods that a *jiao* 醮 (offering) or other important ceremony was to take place. In the case of Daoist ritual, the *bangwen* is burned at the end of the ceremony. However, I translate it as "passport" to maintain continuity with earlier scholarship, including my own. (See Alberts 2006:129-145.) Moreover, the implication of the Yao document is that the bearer can pass over all the mountains in the empire without having to bow to officials or pay taxes. Thus, "passport" seems appropriate, since it implies a document that ensures

play in seemingly diverse life events—the receiving of guests and the uniting of families. The same scenario[2] is at work in the Charter itself, a document that expressly presents a *conjuncture* between local and non-local actors, between the indigenous and the imperial.[3]

Some forty years before Jonsson's fieldwork in Thailand, another conjuncture between local and non-local actors also involved the Charter. Just two years after the Communist defeat of Kuomintang forces, which had retreated to Taiwan, a Chinese government delegation arrived in Haojiang District 豪江鄉 in what is now Jianghua Yao Autonomous County 江華瑤族自治縣, in southern Hunan.[4] On July 21, 1951, residents of the district presented the delegation with a document similar to the one mentioned above, which included a note, written by one Pan Tiancai 盤添財 and signed by fifty-three local people.[5] The note contained several requests concerning livelihood and

safe and legal passage across territory, as exemplified in the words: "Cross the mountains; protect the body" (*guoshan fangshen* 過山防身), which appear at the beginning of the text in its standard guise.

2 Sherry Ortner defines key scenarios as "…preorganized schemes of action, symbolic programs for the staging and playing out of standard social interactions in a particular culture. The point was that every culture contains not just bundles of symbols, and not even just bundles of larger propositions about the universe ("ideologies"), but also organized schemas for enacting (culturally typical) relations and situations" (Ortner 1990:60).

3 By conjuncture, I am referring to Marshall Sahlins' notion of the structure of conjuncture, which he defines as "the practical realization of the cultural categories in a specific historical context as expressed in the interested action of the historical agents, including the microsociology of their interaction" (Sahlins 1981:XIV) and as "...a set of historical relationships that at once reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context" (Sahlins 1981:125).

4 This delegation was one of the Central Minority Nationalities Visiting Missions (*zhongyang minzu fangwentuan* 中央民族訪問團), which were created by the central government in 1950, at the recommendation of Chairman Mao. There were four main missions, which visited minority areas in the Southwest (*xinan* 西南), the Northwest (*xibei* 西北), the Middle South (*zhongnan* 中南), and Inner Mongolia (*neimeng* 內蒙) from July 1950 to the end of 1952. The Middle South team, comprising more than seventy persons (among which were anthropologists Fei Xiaotong 費孝通 and Yang Chengzhi 楊成志), embarked in June 1951. It was further divided into three subsidiary teams (*fentuan* 分團): Hunan, Guangxi, and Guangdong.

5 This incident should be read in light of discussions and actual government policies concerning the place of non-Chinese peoples in the Chinese state, from the late Qing up to the present. See Magnus Fiskesjö's highly informative overview of the possible paths the government might have taken in drawing up the map of modern China, in particular how it might have dealt with the "vast territories populated by non-Han, not yet assimilated non-Chinese peoples…. Should these non-Chinese peoples be granted complete sovereignty and be allowed to break away altogether—for

autonomy, and it was addressed to Mao Zedong, who is called "the great savior star" and "the sun radiating over the ten thousand mountains." The signatories asked that the government allow them to continue the slash and burn (*daogenghuozhong* 刀耕火種) method of agricultural cultivation that past emperors had granted them when they had allegedly issued the Charter. The note also requested that they be allowed to establish governmental offices and schools separate from those of the Han Chinese, and to chop wood in the mountain forests that they could then sell in the market and use to build their homes and produce other necessities (Huang 1990:108-109).[6]

A key point should be kept in mind: the basis of their present requests was the Charter of Emperor Ping and past agreements between Yao people in this area and the government. In their presentation of the Charter with an attached note, were the citizens of Haojiang District alluding strictly to actual historical events or were they also acting out a myth in the sense of Sahlins' mythopraxis?

> History has been known to reenact this cosmic drama. Consider what happened to Captain Cook. For the people of Hawaii Cook had been a myth before he was an event, since the myth was the frame by which his appearance was interpreted. Cook thus descended upon the Islands from Kahiki, invisible and celestial realms beyond the horizon, the legendary source of great gods, ancient kings, and cultural good things (Sahlins 1985: 73-74).

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the sake of justice, or even for racial-segregationist reasons? Or should they be incorporated in some new version of the imperial model, resurrecting the idea of China as a transformative force of civilization, with the primitive periphery as its object? Or should there rather be forced assimilation, creating a single unified citizenry, as some Chinese argued for on the seemingly successful and dominant model of Europe, or America (and as other Asian nations, such as Japan, indeed were attempting)?" (Fiskesjö 2006:15.)

6 Again, the discussion in Fiskesjö (2006) is particularly helpful in determining the cause of animosity, expressed by the presenters of this letter, towards the KMT, which had apparently lumped the local Yao inhabitants of Haojiang District together with the Han. As Fiskesjö writes: "…many victorious republican revolutionaries advocated non-recognition of non-Chinese inhabitants of the former empire, and argued for a quick, outright assimilation of every former ethnic sub-identity, now to be suppressed, and cancelled" (2006:21). According to Fiskesjö: "China's current configuration as a 'multinational unified state,' with a new, carefully crafted 'Han' majority as the 'default ethnicity,' with 55 affiliated ethnic minorities or 'minority nationalities,' is a formula which dates to the early 1950s" (Fiskesjö 2006:19). This would situate the above incident in the precise timeframe when the newly victorious Communist government was configuring its "multinational unified state," and by 1955 Jianghua had become an autonomous county (*zizhixian* 自治縣).

Did those who offered this Charter view Chairman Mao as a latter-day Emperor Ping (*pinghuang* 評皇), whom the Charter records was the first Chinese emperor to issue such a document to the Yao people of the twelve surnames (*shi'erxing yaoren* 十二姓瑤人) because of the merit of their first ancestor, Pan Hu 盤瓠, in the service of the emperor? Did they see the leadership of the Kuomintang, whom they blamed for their present state of poverty, as the enemy King Gao (*gaowang* 高王), whom Pan Hu kills in the most widespread version of the Charter? What about the members of the delegation? Were they as representatives of the government also engaged in reenacting a drama that had been repeated for two millennia in the official histories of the imperial tradition?

Why should local citizens of Haojiang District frame their requests in the mytho-historical schema expressed in the Charter? What was so special about this particular document, object, or treasure—symbolic form that it is—that made it worthy of presentation to the government delegation? Why not another object, such as a Daoist painting or ritual manual? And finally, what does this presentation tell us about a Yao (really Iu Mien) approach to interaction with Chinese officialdom and about a Yao historical consciousness of their position in the Chinese state?

It should also be noted that the rare and treasured document that Jonsson describes was kept in the home of the village headman. We can assume that those who presented the Charter and note in 1951 had some local authority as well, since they were representing their communities in the presence of a government delegation with a mandate from the central government, the highest power in the land.

The text of the Charter of Emperor Ping relates how it was issued to Yao leaders, who are named official representatives of the imperial court by Song dynasty Emperor Lizong 理宗, following the precedent of previous dynasties. The basic elements of the Charter—its narrative describing a heroic act, its imperial and Daoist symbolism (chops 印, talismans 符, figurative representations of emperors and Daoist deities, etc.), its resemblance to documents actually issued by the imperial court, and the very names by which it is known (*bangwen* 榜文, *diewen* 牒文, *quandie* 券牒) — are indeed iconic of a bond between certain Yao leaders and the imperial court.

The Charter of Emperor Ping so resembles documents produced by imperial officialdom that most scholars who studied it in the 1980s and 1990s, when three separate but overlapping collections were published in China,[7] considered such documents to be

7 The three collections of charters from Yao areas in Hunan, Guangxi, and Guangdong are: *Yaozu Guoshanbang xuanbian* 瑤族過山榜選編 (Selected Collection of the "Passport for Crossing the Mountains" of the Yao Nationality, 1984), *Guangxi Yaozu shehui lishi diaocha* 廣西瑤族社會歷史調查 (An Investigation of the Social History of the Guangxi Yao), volume 8 (1985), and *Pinghuang*

real imperial edicts. This was the view of Michel Strickmann (1982) after perusing the six hundred pages of Daoist-inspired ritual manuals in Shiratori Yoshiro's *Yao Documents* (1975),[8] which also included one Charter, photographically reproduced:

> The most spectacular document, however, with which the book opens, is not a religious text. It is, rather, a charter issued under the Southern Sung emperor Li-tsung (Lizong 理宗) in 1260. The present manuscript is probably a nineteenth-century copy. It confirms twelve Yao clans in the possession of their lands, recalls the legend of their divine ancestor, P'an-ku (Pangu 盤古) or P'an-hu (Panhu 盤瓠), and guarantees their right to practice their immemorial slash-and-burn technique of cultivation (Strickmann 1982:23).

Writing a few years after Strickmann, Jacques Lemoine expressed a similar view in his *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*: "Thus, as a first step, the Han might have brought the Yao rebellions to an end by granting the Yao charter (1260 A.D.). This was, of course, not a Taoist document" (Lemoine 1982:23). Such was also the view of practically every Chinese scholar who has written about the Charter (Jao 1991; Huang 1991; Nung 2002; Chen 2002), the only differences of opinion rising around the date that an original Charter was issued: It might have been issued in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the Sui (581–618), the Tang (618–907), the Southern Song (1127–1279), or the beginning of the Ming (1368–1644).

Barend ter Haar's work on the Yao charters challenged the prevailing consensus that the charters were writs issued by actual Chinese emperors:

> Chinese (both Han and Yao) scholars take the claims of these documents to be imperial Charters quite literally and use them as straightforward historical sources on the early history of the Yao. However, it seems much more likely that these documents were composed by the Yao themselves on the basis of orally transmitted mythology in order to create a positive identity vis-a-vis the Han Chinese. This is indicated by the clumsy classical language, the narrative contents of large sections (quite unlike any other imperial documents known to me, with one exception,

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quandie jibian 評皇券牒集編 (Compilation of the "Charters of Emperor Ping,"), compiled by Huang Yu (1991), who also led the Guangxi Yaozu Shehui Lishi Diaocha project. The first collected 30 charters; the second, 89; and the third, the most complete, 101 charters.

8 Shiratori and his team had collected these materials during fieldwork conducted in Yao villages in northern Thailand during the 1970s.

which will be noted), and a range of internal inconsistencies (ter Haar 1998:1).

Ter Haar's overall thesis: "We should see the Charters as part of a cultural repertoire about demonstrating independency and Chineseness" (ter Haar 1998:5). The Charter of Emperor Ping as a genre alludes to, borrows from, and harnesses the efficacy of the imperial tradition—its symbols, narratives, and practices—to model a Yao historicity on the activities of the Chinese court, setting Yao, or a group of Yao, apart from other groups, through its specific claims that Yao people hold a special position in the state and the cosmos. As such, Yao charters should be viewed as "statements about Yao identity and Yao rights" (ter Haar 1998:2), which:

> ... helped to create a supralocal Yao identity and legitimated their right as inalienable privilege derived from the authority of the Chinese imperial system (significantly always a dynasty with a Han background!). This entailed accepting some of the system's premises, notably the right of a conveniently distant emperor to dispense favours, but at the same time subverted the much closer authority of the local officials, by placing them outside their power to impose taxes and corvee. Therefore, by accepting the imperial system on a higher level, it became possible to maintain full autonomy on an immediate local level. This supralocal Yao identity was useful in their dealings with respect to local Han groups and magistrates, as well as with other non-Han cultures (ter Haar 1998:13).

This formulation resembles Sahlins' discussion of the acculturation of Hawaiian chiefs following the death of Captain Cook (1985:28-32).[9] Such acculturation, as Sahlins understands it, was not simply a blind acceptance of European ways, but rather was part of a competitive strategy employed by the chiefs to distinguish themselves from each other and from their subjects. Chiefs amassed treasures from the Europeans, learned to dress like Europeans, and ate copious amounts of European food: "... the continuity of

9 Sahlins writes: "Billy Pitt was an Hawaiian (a.k.a Kalaimoku) who ran the Islands under Kamehameha and Liholiho in the early nineteenth century, with the help of the classificatory brothers "Cox" (Kahekili Keeaumoku) and "John Adams" (Kuakini). These were not isolated instances of the chiefs taking consciousness of themselves as prominent Europeans. Many Hawaiians, noble and not quite so noble, chose such appellations of their own will, and like Billy Pitt insisted on being known by them.... For in realizing themselves as European chiefs, the Hawaiian nobility reproduced a customary distinction between themselves and the underlying population (Sahlins 1985:29).

chiefly status depended on a deployment of the myth as practice. One would need to acquire things European, if necessary by force or guile" (Sahlins 1985:30).

I follow ter Haar in arguing that "these documents were composed by the Yao themselves," since they express a Yao subjectivity. But which Yao? Little is known about the author(s) of the Charter of Emperor Ping, but he or they clearly knew a great deal about imperial Chinese textual, mytho-historical, and religious traditions. They had knowledge of imperial textual production and transmission that was sophisticated enough to fashion their own simulacra of documents produced by the emperor and his representatives, including mostly accurate reference to imperial reign periods and dynasties, knowledge of the positions and emoluments of government officials, and the correct application of imperial icons, so as to convince officials and scholars alike, not to mention the less literate peoples in their midst who were likely the real targets of the Charter's persuasion. They knew enough to splice together different mainstream Chinese literary genres to fashion their own indigenous one that was Chinese and Yao. They knew enough to manipulate literary Chinese—albeit "clumsy classical language,"[10] but still legible to persons who have attained Chinese literacy—to assert specific claims concerning Yao uniqueness, place, and sovereignty.

This is not to say that the Charter represents only a local Yao perspective, or that we learn nothing of the culture of imperial hegemony that orders the textual and visual features of this document. Jonsson argues, for instance: "I think it is more rewarding to view the document as being equally about the state as about the Yao…" (Jonsson 2000:69). He sees it as an emblem of the imperial state's:

> ...cosmographic project of mapping out a domain of civilization within which rank and rule emanated from the center, where people would be connected through relations of tribute and services. The making of the Yao concerned the outside of the state, a process of boundary-making that joined ecological, social, political, and ethnic categories as it established the landscape of history. The state was reproduced through the distribution of rank and through the control over trade and social relations. The Yao were framed as non-subjects in the wilderness, physically and socially separate from the civilized domain (Jonsson 2005:28).

10 It could also be asked whether the apparent clumsiness resulted from the original authorship or in the continuous copying over the course of several centuries.

Does the fact that the state's agenda is expressed in the document by necessity preclude the possibility that the Charter of Emperor Ping was an indigenous production? It is more likely that those who originally wrote the Charter—probably during the Ming dynasty[11]—and many of those who copied and treasured it in later times, were Yao leaders who accepted the imperial system and saw themselves as representatives both of their own constituents and of that very system—they were officials, as it were,[12] like other non-Han local leaders in the Native Chieftain (*tusi* 土司) system that operated across much of Southwest China during the late imperial period.[13] In this view, then, the Charter is a document that was produced locally to commemorate a relationship between some local leaders and the Chinese imperium. Thus, like Sahlin's discussion of Captain Cook and Hawaiian leaders, there was contact, actually a history of contacts between Yao leaders and the state, since peoples known as Yao had interacted with the imperial court through its representatives since at least the early Song dynasty. By the late Ming, and especially during the Qing and Republican periods, it became fairly common to make copies of the Charter to be treasured and passed on to posterity, to keep the memory of the ancestors' merit alive, and to serve as an example to later generations.

In Jonsson's words, the Charter is "a rare prestige object which enables a leader to take off with followers to a new domain. As such, the scroll makes a leader out of

11 Standard versions of the Charter were almost certainly written after 1260, the year the document claims to have been issued. As ter Haar has noted, the document begins with the words: "*Zhen* (imperial we), Emperor Lizong," but the combination of *zhen* and Lizong—the emperor's temple name, which would have been used posthumously—is unlikely (Personal communication, 2001). He goes on to write: "Since the most common date given for the donation of the Charter by the Chinese emperor is 1260 (alternative dates are the Sui, Tang, and Han, in descending order of frequency), it seems likely that the genre was first created during the Yuan (1270-1368) as a piece of historical fiction and took definitive shape during the subsequent Ming. This would also match the quantitative growth of reliable individual records from the early Ming onwards" (1998:6). Other internal elements, I have discovered, also point to a Ming provenance. For instance, the standard Charter claims that it was issued in all thirteen provinces (*shisan sheng* 十三省), the number of provinces in the empire beginning in the Ming. Moreover, the Ming designation, "enlisted Yao" (*zhaofu yaoren* 招撫猺人) is prominently displayed at the beginning of most copies (see below).

12 David Faure originally suggested this to me at the "Ancestors, Territorial Gods, and History in Southwest China" conference, held at National Tsinghua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan on March 23-24, 2008, in a discussion about Yao leaders during the Ming "paying homage" at the imperial court (*laichao* 來朝), registering themselves and their followers as imperial subjects, and working in the service of the emperor.

13 This is not to say that the Yao leaders who produced and transmitted the Charter were themselves known as *tusi*; as I will discuss below, there were other names by which Yao leaders were known during Ming times.

whoever has a copy of it." (Jonsson 2000:73; Alberts 2006:142) In a later formulation, he called it "a rare item of power and prestige with which Mien leaders could strike deals with lowland rulers." Jonsson's informants complicate the situation, because in their telling only certain people can safely possess such a document: "I had heard stories of such objects causing calamity for their commoner owners." More is necessary than simply having lowland connections; one had to also have "powerful connections in the spirit world" (Jonsson 2005:121), the kind gained from ordination rituals through which one becomes a ritual master.

II. The Visible Features of Yao Charters

A close study of the more than one hundred documents reproduced in Huang Yu's *Pinghuang quandie jibian* 評皇券牒集編 (1990), the largest print collection of documents known as Yao charters, reveals a unity of form and content, but also a startling complexity. Even when comparing multiple copies of what on the surface seem to be the same document, one notices fascinating divergences—both with the textual as well as the visual features. They are difficult to recognize at first, especially when working with print versions of Yao charters, since there seem to be so many copies of a single original—all fashioned from the same mold. Indeed, the spread of Yao charters has been the result of continuous communal migration, circulation within and between particular families in specific geographical domains, and copying, sometimes by hand and brush, other times by printing from a wood block copy or other original. The mode of copying seems to play a role in the degree of convergence or divergence between copies with respect to their virtual original or common template.

The Charter of Emperor Ping as a textual genre is delineated by certain names, narrative elements, and decorative features; it is produced in diverse media: paper, cloth, silk, wood, and stone. Yao charters are heirlooms passed on from generation to generation within specific localized communities, but they preserve the memory of a people splintered into multiple, geographically separated groups. Perhaps most importantly they refer to a common cultural entity, known as the "Yao people of the Twelve Clans"—recalling a time and place when the many were one.

To date, most charters that have been collected originated in Mien villages;[14] they describe Mien origin myths, the Mien primogenitor, and Mien claims of merit. While

14 In China, the label *yao* refers to a number of distinct groups with their own languages, customs,

Huang (1990) includes one Kim Mun or Landian Yao藍靛瑤 charter and one charter in the possession of Miao 苗-speaking Yao from northern Guangxi near the border with Hunan, which he explains is the only charter to have been discovered among Yao who speak a Miao language, Yao charters are mainly Mien or Pan Yao 盤瑤 documents. They not only define Yao as Yao, but also distinguish one group of Yao people—Pan Yao (Iu Mien), the descendents of Panhu/Pangu—from other groups now recognized as Yao.

Although other Yao groups do not generally possess charters, similar documents, most commonly known as "ancestral charts" (*zutu* 祖圖), are found in She 畲 communities from southeastern Guangdong northward to Zhejiang. Five such documents from eastern and southern Guangdong are included at the end of Huang (1990).[15] The label *she* does not appear in any of the documents; instead, there are icons of a Yao rather than She identity, such as the phrase "My (or our) Yao people" (*wo yaoren* 我瑤人), and the following declaration: "Those who do not possess the Charter (*quandie*), cannot be considered to be Yao people. This was determined by the Great Tang [dynasty]" (Huang 1990:538).[16] Thus, from the point of view of the She documents, Yao-ness is dependent on the possession of charters. As in the standard charter (discussed below), the figure of Panhu is the protagonist of the She documents, though he is the primogenitor of four

ritual traditions, myths, and migration routes; in Thailand, it refers specifically to Iu Mien. The relationship, in China, between the different groups labeled *yao* is often unclear and differs from region to region. Take the Dayao Mountain 大瑤山 area of Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County (金秀瑤族自治縣), for example, which was the first officially designated autonomous Yao county in China. There are five main Yao groupings in Jinxiu—the Zhuang-Dong speaking Chashan Yao 茶山瑤, the Miao speaking Hualan Yao 花籃瑤, as well as the Mienic speaking Pan Yao 盤瑤 (Iu Mien), Shanzi Yao 山子瑤 (Kim Mun), and Ao Yao 拗瑤. The five groupings comprised a sociopolitical system that was somewhat unique to the area, which was not fully brought under state control until the post-1949 period. In other areas, however, the connections between different Yao groupings are much less obvious. As one example, Iu Mien in Lingui 臨桂 and Longsheng 龍勝 counties whom I interviewed in 2008 had more in common through marriage and other interactions with their Zhuang neighbors than with the Hongtou Yao 紅頭瑤, who live further to the east in Longsheng. When I asked informants about the Hongtou Yao, they replied: "They are different" (*tamen bu yiyang* 他們不一樣). See Alberts (2006), where I describe the evolution of the label *yao* as a geo-territorial label used by Chinese officials, going back to the eleventh century. Even locally, it has such geo-territorial connotations, as in the statement: "Yao live in the mountains; Zhuang live by the rivers; Han live by the roads" (*Yao zhu shantou, Zhuang zhu shuitou, Han zhu jietou* 瑤住山頭，壯住水頭，漢住街頭).

15 They were collected from Huidong 惠東 in the Huizhou City惠州市 area, Chao'an潮安 in the Chaozhou City潮州市, and Haishun 海順 in the Meizhou City梅州市.

16 如無券牒者，另（並）非瑤人，此系大唐[所定].

clans—Pan 盤, Lan 藍, Lei 雷, and Zhong 鐘—rather than the twelve that appear in most of the Mien materials.

Distribution of Yao Charters

The translocal/transnational space delineated by Yao charters should not be viewed as a singular, homogenous zone, but rather as a domain of multiple intersecting localities, each with its own "structure of conjucture," its own microsociology of interaction between Mien and other Mien, Mien and other Yao and non-Yao groups, and with the imperial system itself. The combination of factors—ethnic composition, power relations, ecological conditions—changed from locality to locality, but the transmission of charters, along with the practice of a distinct ritual tradition, established and maintained an imagined and real community based on shared origins, and a tradition of commemorating the merit of past ancestors, who had been recognized by the imperial system. This meant that no matter how far individual families traveled from a mytho-historical homeland, they could always hold up the Charter as evidence (*zhizhao* 執照) of their origins and the routes they had walked before arriving at their present locales.

Although charters have been found in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand, giving the appearance of widespread distribution, the number of those found beyond China's current borders is small when compared to those found within them. Consider that Jonsson came into contact with only a few during his fieldwork. He mentions a man who "burned his copy of *Kia Shen Pong* [Guoshanbang], one of only three that Mien people had brought to Thailand" (Jonsson 2005:59).[17] Michel Strickmann (1979) and Jacques Lemoine (1982) both worked with a single version as well. It is the same or similar to that discussed by most scholars who have written about Yao charters outside China. I refer to it as the standard Charter, since it is the most widespread and commonly reproduced of all such documents in Yao (Mien) communities.[18]

17 His reason for burning it, as Jonsson describes, had to do with Thai government suspicions about highlander ethnic communities and the fear of the spread of communism during the 1960s and 1970s. Thai military forces were particularly suspicious of manuscripts written in Chinese, believing them to be Maoist propaganda: "... Mien people became anxious about their copies of ritual chants and other texts in Chinese characters, such as genealogies. Many burned their texts to avoid imprisonment" (Jonsson 2005:58-59). Ironically, in China during the same period, the government was also confiscating and destroying copies of ritual chants because of their association with superstitious practices.

18 See below for discussion of the standard charter.

Few charters have been found in Yunnan and western Guangxi, and none from southern Guangxi, near the Guangxi–Vietnam border, indicating that China's far Southwest was a marginal area for their circulation and production. Generally speaking, the further west one travels in Guangxi province, beyond Hechi 河池 and Laibin 來賓, the fewer charters one finds. Only one of the charters collected in Huang (1990) had circulated in Yunnan, in Hekou 河口, near the China–Vietnam border. A mere two came from the Baise City 百色市 area of western Guangxi; one of these, from Longchuan District 龍川鄉, is one of the two Landian Yao charters that have been collected.[19]

The largest number have come from the border area where Hunan, Guangdong, and Guangxi provinces converge, and contiguous areas, making this likely the key translocal domain within which charters were produced and circulated.[20] This area in Hunan, south of Heng Mountain 衡山, known since the Han dynasty as Lingling Commandery 零陵郡, the burial place of the legendary sage emperor Shun 舜, is carved out by the Xiao 瀟 and Xiang 湘 rivers and their tributaries. Some accounts in Song and Yuan sources state that this was the heartland of Yao peoples (Alberts 2006:30-47). The Xiang River, as David Faure writes, was "the principal passage from the north into Guangxi, made possible by the famous Lingqu Canal..." (Faure 2006: 175). This made the region a vital crossroads linking northern and southern cultures, and a gateway through which imperial beliefs and practices could enter the south.

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19 This is a quite unique charter, in that it distinguishes five families and seven surnames (*wujia qixing* 五家七姓), linking each family (*jia*) to a different Yao subgroup. What is most interesting, in my view, about this grouping is that Kim Mun (Landian Yao), known in the document as Shanzi 山子, are the second household (*erfang* 二房), while Iu Mien, known in the document as Dingban 頂板, are the head household (*toufang* 頭房). Thus, even though this charter was apparently in the hands of Kim Mun, it seems to ratify a system that privileges Iu Mien. Further *in situ* research is necessary to resolve the question: How do charters in a given locality legitimate—or at least reflect—the existing or wished for power relations among particular groups in that locality?

20 Fei Xiaotong proposed referring to this region as the Southern Range (*nanling* 南嶺) in December 1988 when he was a vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. His plan was to include only seven counties—Jiangyong 江永 and Jianghua 江華 in Hunan; Fuchuan 富川, Gongcheng 恭城, and Jinxiu 金秀 in Guangxi; and Lianshan 連山 and Liannan 連南 in Guangdong. Later, three more counties, including Hezhou 賀州 (then known as He County 賀縣), were added because they were closer than Jinxiu to the Southern Range, which separates Hunan from Guangdong and Guangxi. The center of the modern-day King Pan Festival (*panwangjie* 盤王節) is also located in this region. The first officially sanctioned King Pan Festival was held in 1992 in Hezhou, Guangxi, and since then it has been hosted annually in alternating fashion by one of the ten aforementioned counties in three provinces. There has been some discussion about whether to hold the King Pan Festival annually, every two years, or every three years.

Of the 105 charters that Huang Yu included in his collection, forty came from Hunan, and thirty-six of these originally circulated in the south of the Yongzhou City 永州市 administrative area of Hunan, close to the Hunan–Guangdong–Guangxi borders. Two of the remaining four charters from Hunan circulated in contiguous counties. Besides the aforementioned She documents, only seven Yao charters in Huang (1990) hail from Guangdong, and all of these, as would be expected, circulated directly across the Hunan–Guangdong border, in Lianshan Yao Autonomous County 連山瑤族自治縣 and Lianzhou 連州市 (formerly Lian County 連縣).[21]

While Hunan Yao have produced the greatest number of charters (42), in Guangxi scholars have found charters in the greatest number of locales. Half of the thirty-seven charters collected from Guangxi once circulated in the Guilin City administrative area, most notably in Wantian 宛田 in northern Lingui County 臨桂縣, in neighboring areas of Lingchuan County 靈川縣 and Longsheng Autonomous County 龍勝自治縣, as well as contiguous areas to the south, east, and west.

Circulation and Production

For an area to become a circulation zone, there had to be an extant charter that could be copied. This could be rendered on stone, wood, or other media. Huang (1990) includes two distinct charters circulated in Yizhou that were lithographic prints (*shike yinben* 石印版本), which would have been produced from a stone plate. "Ancient printing plates" (*guben yinban* 古本印版) or wood blocks (*muke yinban* 木刻印版) have also been found. For instance, in 2005 Chinese scholars discovered a Kangxi 康熙 era wood block dated to 1714 in Lanshan County, Hunan, in the home of one Deng Changlin 鄧昌林 (Zhao 2007:84).[22] It is the only wood block version ever recovered, but according to Huang (1990), in 1890 Huang Faying 黃法應 from Lianshan County, Guangdong, had a copy made from an ancient printing plate at a Chongwentang 崇文堂 in Lianshan (Huang 1990:54).[23]

More commonly, individuals made hand copies of documents in circulation that were themselves copies of earlier versions. Because of the nature of copying, these

21 The number and area grows, if we include the aforementioned She documents.

22 In 2006, appraisers from the Hunan provincial government ranked it as a grade A cultural artifact (*yiji wenwu* 一級文物).

23 See Huang (1990:114-15). Huang Yu explains that Chongwentang was the *tanghao* 堂號 or shrine name, which can indicate the claimed place of the surname group, of the artisan who made the copy.

charters often reveal something of their production history. In 1979, for instance, Zhao Fagai 趙法蓋 produced a copy, and in that process he preserved the original copying notes, which said that Pan Shan Yilang 盤扇一郎 and Zhao Shun Yilang 趙順一郎 had both made copies in 1833 (Huang 1990:55).

While there are numerous examples of hand-copied manuscripts, usually in a manual format, a necessary condition for the production of a more finely crafted charter was the involvement of an artisan. This was likely the same person one could commission to paint a set of ceremonial paintings for a ritual master,[24] so it is no wonder that paintings and charters often include the same types of colophon that provide details about where they were painted and who commissioned them. Lemoine describes one such painter whom he met during his fieldwork: "When the artist was Chinese, he might well have been also a kind of 'weekend amateur' painter. When I was in Luang Prabang in Laos, some ten years ago, I knew a petty Chinese peddler who used to settle himself, for months at a time when business was slow, in a Yao village near Vang Vieng" (Lemoine 1982:34; Alberts 2006:9). More frequently, such painters came from artisan families who were not necessarily Yao and who transmitted their craft usually from father to son, for several generations.

The participation of such an artisan, in addition to the availability of charters known to be in circulation locally, helped transform Wantian, a two-hour drive north of Guilin City, into a center of production, second only to Yongzhou in Hunan. Huang (1990) provides a more detailed picture of how charters were produced and circulated in this area than anywhere else.[25] For instance, the volume begins with a charter that was originally in the possession of Huang Yu's grandfather, Huang Weiman 黃維滿, and granduncle, Huang Weixiu 黃維秀, and had been passed down within their family. In the tenth year of the Daoguang 道光 reign era (1830), their great grandfather Huang Wenchao 黃文朝 from Heping District delivered two taels of silver to a Han artisan named Shi Peiling 石配齡 in Simenkou 司門口 (in present-day Wantian, Lingui County) and commissioned him to make a copy of the "Passport for Crossing the Mountains." The purpose: to pass on to the sons and grandsons of the Huang family, from generation to generation without end (*huangmen zisun yongyuan shidai liuchuan* 黃門子孫永遠世代流傳). Three years later, Pan Shan Yilang, from nearby Pingshuijiang Village 平水江村 in Wantian, after consulting with his brothers, commissioned the very same artisan to

24 Huang Yu suggested as much to me (personal communication, December 2008).

25 This is partly because Huang Yu hailed from this area and his family had lived there for several generations.

make a copy for their descendants to look after (*zhaokan* 照看) and preserve.[26] Another charter from the family of Huang Shunting 黃順廷 in Miaoping 廟坪 indicates that it was copied on the day of Qingming 清明 in 1877, when members of the same clan gather to commemorate their ancestors. That charter was likewise meant to be "passed down from generation to generation to the sons and grandsons of Huang Youming 黃有明" (Huang 1990:126-130).

Families in this area had more in common than the circulation of charters. In addition to the market town of Wantian, another important center of the region was Miaoping—a village-level administrative unit under Wantian's jurisdiction. An unusually large number of ritual masters in the region hail from Miaoping; they travel from village to village in Wantian District and areas up the road in Longsheng, to perform ordination, thanksgiving, wedding, and funerary rituals, as well as lesser rituals (*xiaofa* 小法) on request.[27] All Yao in this area are Pan Yao (Mien), and share three main surnames—Huang 黃, Zhao 趙, and Deng 鄧, though the Dengs are divided into Big Dengs (*dadeng* 大鄧) and Small Dengs (*xiaodeng* 小鄧).[28] Locals I met in the area told me that many of the Mien in Wantian and contiguous districts of Longsheng and Lingchuan counties are related and had migrated from the same areas further east. Indeed, when I traveled with one of my informants to different villages and towns, even across county borders, he was clearly on familiar terms with people we encountered, and they chatted about old times.

Charters circulated mainly within particular descent groups of these clans; male elders had them produced for their posterity, to be passed down to their sons and grandsons. It was the same in other areas. For instance, on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month of the sixteenth year of the Guangxu 光緒 reign period (1890), Huang Faying from Lianshan County, Guangdong, made a copy "to pass on to his sons and

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26 See Huang (1990:54): 盤扇一郎兄弟四人商議，請到司門口匠人石配齡，抄奉過山榜一幅，子孫存留照看. Pan Shan Yilang was probably a ritual master of high rank in the Mien ordination system; this is indicated by the "yilang" at the end of his name (see below). According to Huang, an earlier copy of the document was made in 1645. *Zhaokan* might also mean something more like "consult" as evidence (*weiping* 為憑 or *weizhao* 為照).

27 On one occasion, I travelled with an elderly ritual master from Miaoping, one of the most renowned in the area, to a village in Heping Township 和平鄉, just north of the county border in Longsheng, for a three-day thanksgiving ritual (*huan panwang yuan* 還盤王願). Huang Yu's birthplace is also located in Heping.

28 I conducted fieldwork in Wantian in 2008. One of my informants, a big Deng, told me that big Dengs were only allowed to participate in the basic "Hanging the Lamps" (*guadeng* 掛燈) ordination ritual; thus, they could not become full-fledged ritual masters (*shigong* 師公) and could only perform the basic exorcistic, or lesser rites (*xiaofa* 小法).

grandsons to serve as an evidentiary object (a guide) to protect them [during their journeys] over the mountains" (Huang 1990:114-115).[29] Another charter, which had circulated in Rongshui Miao Autonomous County 融水苗族自治縣 in Liuzhou, and which was originally copied in 1643, a relatively early date, includes the words: "Pass on for ten thousand generations to the sons and grandsons of Zhao Mingfu" 趙明府子孫留傳萬代 (Huang 1990:265). An abridged handwritten charter, copied in 1906 by Deng Fazheng 鄧法正 of Cangwu County 蒼梧縣 in eastern Guangxi, includes the words: "The forebears of the Deng clan circulate [this charter] for one thousand years and ten thousand generations" 鄧氏本祖家先，流傳千年萬代 (Huang 1990:383).

A similar message threads its way through the multitude of charters that were copied and recopied over time; they are made for posterity and serve as evidence (*ping* 憑 *or zhao* 照), reminders of the continuity between those who possess them in the present and those who made them in the past, thus between the head of a household—being "the basic production and ritual units" of Mien society (Kandre 1967:612)—and those who come before and after him in the ritual line that traces itself back to the primogenitor, Panhu. As such, charters are stored in the house, which as Peter Kandre explains, "... is the place where the ancestor spirits are fed and the spirit government is honored. The house is always associated with a descent group, which is obligated to a corresponding group of ancestor spirits, that of the 'owner of the house' (*peo tsiu*) and his descendants" (Kandre 1967:590). Charters are evidence then of the descent group as a branch of a larger clan (xing 姓; *fing* in Mien), represented by one of the twelve surnames. Kandre explains that the clan is the "largest of the descent groups" in Mien society: "Clan membership is inherited patrilineally, for life...Members of each *fing* are supposed to have descended from a common ancestor, who was a member of the group that 'came over the sea'" (Kandre 1967:590-591).[30]

Making a copy of a charter, with or without scribal ammendations, and passing it down to one's descendents as an heirloom is itself an act that expands the web of

29 傳於黃門法應子孫，永遠過山防身為照.

30 Kandre goes on as follows: "Clans and their larger subdivisions do not keep genealogies and have no internal organization. Individuals keep the name of their father's clan and add it to their official name (*tum mien bua*), which is used in contacts with persons outside the circle of close relatives and friends, and also add it to their spirit name (*fa bua*), which is used in ritual contexts.
Fing cut through different villages (*laang*) and households, which are associated with particular places and particular men. They cut through households because women do not change their clan membership at marriage" (Kandre 1967:591). On naming practices in Mien society, see Chen (2003:83-120).

relations across space and time, between different communities of Mien—those who came before and those who reside elsewhere. Just as there is a mythical first ancestor and his twelve children, so too is there a virtual first charter, from which all other copies derive their legitimacy. Thus, the scribes of individual charters often remark that they were copied "according to an ancient version" (*zhao guben* 照古本). In this sense, the continuous copying of charters represents both the propagation of a textual tradition, but also the transmisson of knowledge obtained by past ancestors, who lived in different locales. One scribe, Zhao Tiancai 趙添財[31] of Lianshan, Guangdong, for instance, made a copy in 1941 according to the "ancient words of the elders" (*lao guyan* 老古言) for his sons and grandsons (Huang 1990:394). In the words of another scribe from Lingchuan, Guangxi, "As for the time before Kunlong 坤隆 (one of the scribe's forebears), there is only what I've heard passed down in the words of the elders about the thirty-six generations of forebears. There was no possibility for me to read the thirty-six names written in a book. Therefore, if the sons and grandsons have nothing to consult, it would be difficult afterwards for them to select new names" (Huang 1990:67).

Yao charters are not merely evidence of a link between past and present Iu Mien, heirlooms that must circulate within the descent group of the individuals who created them, they are also a link between Mien ancestors and the imperial court. Emperors, mythical and real, are said to have issued charters to Yao leaders on the basis (*zhao*) of the precedent of previous dynasties; such documents were to serve as evidence (*zhao*) of a bond between the imperial court and the local upland headman. Charters are also a basis for action in the present based on ancestral actions in the past, as their own content envisions that past: "The sage sovereigns mercifully bestowed on us places in which to dwell. They gave us the Charter, and commanded that the Charter should serve as a license (*zhao*). The Royal Yao conduct themselves on the basis (*zhao*) of the Charter" (Huang 1990:275).[32]

Charters should be seen as evidentiary also in the sense of authenticating documents, such as the *diewen* 牒文 (dispatch notices) carried by officials, military commanders, and gods, ratifying their mission and position in the bureaucracy, or *dudie* 度牒 (ordination certificates) held by Buddhist monks and Daoist priests that verify their status as ordained functionaries in their respective ritual orders. As mentioned at the outset of this paper, most of the images used to decorate Yao charters—chops, talismans,

31 Chen (2003:100) explains that the character *tian* 添 (Mien: *tim*) usually appears in the names of adopted children, but can also be the result of the naming process, during which the ritual master uses crescent-shaped divination blocks to ask the gods about potential names.

32 聖帝敕賜地方居住，給立評皇券牒榜令券牒為照，王瑤照牒施行.

emperors, Daoist deities (imperial in their own right), maps (similar to those that appear in official compendia and gazetteers)—are iconic of recognition from powerful authorities: the imperial court far away in the capital and Daoist deities in their heavenly abodes beyond the human world. As such, charters are designed to be displayed as emblems, not only of the clan and its ties to a larger entity—known as the "Yao People of the Twelve Clans," the "Royal Yao," Iu Mien—distinguishing them from other peoples, but also of the prestige and authority of the person who makes and possesses them.

Visual Distinctions, Status, and Powerful Connections

There are numerous differences in how Yao charters are decorated, particularly the illustrations that frame the textual elements. The most basic and perhaps earliest illustrated scene appears on a charter reproduced in Pourret (2002), which circulated in Jinping County 金平縣, Yunnan, and was copied during the Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign period of the Qing dynasty (1796–1821). There are no imperial chops—only a representation of a Thanksgiving (or similar) ceremony for King Pan, which appears at the beginning of the document. Five figures, one with an hourglass-shaped drum, commonly used in Mien rituals, and another with a flute dance below the king, who is flanked by two servants (Pourret 2002:254; Alberts 2006:136-137).[33] In other charters, particularly those made in the twentieth century, King Pan is replaced by the Three Pure Ones (*sanqing* 三清), the highest deities in the Daoist pantheon, and other Daoist deities, though a similar group of five figures performing a ritual still appears below them (Pourret 2002:248). In still other charters, King (or sometimes Emperor) Pan is flanked by his twelve (or in some versions, thirteen) children, males on one side, females on the other (Pourret 2002:258).[34]

One also finds divergences in the size of charters; there are longform and abbreviated ones—differences both in actual width and length, as well as in the number of Chinese characters and other iconic graphics. For example, the charter from Rongshui

33 In Alberts (2006), I argued that this imperial figure was Emperor Ping, but I now believe the scene represents two manifestations of Panhu, one on the right as a dragon-dog, represented by a dragon hovering over a dog, and the words: "Panhu, the dragon-dog" 盤瓠龍犬. The imperial figure in the center, on the other hand, is identified by the words: "Panhu, the Yao Emperor" 盤瓠瑤皇. See my discussion of Panhu's transformations below.

34 For a more in-depth, though slightly different, discussion of the visual features of Yao charters, see Alberts (2006: 136-141), which describes other illustrations, such as maps, flower imagery, Daoist bridges and talismans, and other imperial figures, such as Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, China's first emperor, Tang Taizong 唐太宗, the founder of the Tang dynasty, and Emperor Renzong 仁宗 of the Song dynasty. See also Pourret (2002:248-265).

in Liuzhou mentioned above has more than ten thousand characters, which according to Huang Yu, distinguishes it as having the most handwritten characters collected thus far. It includes two lists of mostly Song and Yuan reign periods, though there is also one Tang and one Ming temple name—Ming Emperor Wuzong 明武宗—which, given that there are no Qing era reign periods listed, seems to confirm an early provenance.[35] With sixty-nine round chops affixed in various places, it is the charter with the greatest number of these (Huang 1990:265). In contrast, the copy that Deng Fazheng from Cangwu County had made in 1906 has the fewest Chinese characters and only a single round chop affixed over the Qing dynasty reign period at the end of the document (Huang 1990:383). Other charters, long or short, and irrespective of the medium used, do not feature any chops.

What do these diverging iconographic treatments tell us about the persons who possessed a charter and in some cases more than one such document? Why should one charter have many chops while others have none? Are there important historical differences between charters with mytho-historical, seemingly non-cosmological figures and those with Daoist features? According to Huang Yu, the way a charter is designed reveals a great deal about its owner. He writes:

> Samples of the Charter kept by ordinary people usually show no trace of chops. The round-chopped Charter copies mostly belong to the old and well-known families of Shi Gong (師公) and Dao Gong (道公). Those where square and round chops are found together are even scarcer; they can only be found among Great Priests, village elders or headmen.... I obtained a King Ping's Charter document from the *Jia zei* grade Great Priest Zhao Mingpin (a Guoshan Yao),[36] which was stamped with both round and square chops, and had colour designs and portraits of gods, a most rare sample in the collection of Charters. Both round and square forms of chops use the ancient *zhuan* (篆) characters and are hard to read (Huang 1991:92).

35 Recall that this charter was supposedly copied in 1643, the seventh year of the Chongzhen 崇禎 reign period (1627-1644), more than a hundred years after Ming Wuzong's reign (1505-1521). In attempting to date the provenance of individual charters using such reign period lists, it is important not to rely too heavily on the earliest dates listed, but rather to look at where the list ends. For instance, a reign period list composed of Tang, Song, Yuan periods, and ending with a late Ming reign period or temple name, was most likely written after the latest of the reign periods listed. According to my hypothesis, it would then be either a late Ming or early Qing document. Such calculations do not always prove fruitful, since someone living during the Qing or Republican periods could easily reproduce a list of all Tang dynasty reign periods.

36 i.e. Iu Mien.

Thus, in Huang Yu's understanding, a charter's very decoration creates distinctions, and is iconic of specific ranks and societal functions.

Charters with both round and square chops are relatively rare. Besides the one in the home of Zhao Mingpin of Jinxiu, the others mentioned in Huang (1990) are exclusively from Wantian. The charter that Miaoping resident, Huang Youming, made during the Qingming festival of 1877 has both round and square chops, which indicates, according to Huang Yu's logic, that Huang Youming was an important person in the area. His charter, over two meters *zhang* 丈 long,[37] is decorated with flower motifs along its edges, and also features a scene at the end depicting King Pan with his twelve children (Huang 1990:130). The one that Pan Shan Yilang had made in 1833 is stamped with round and square chops in thirty places. His charter has other distinguishing marks, such as a sun and moon in the left and right corners, an illustration of King Pan and his twelve children, and thirteen ancient pictographs, including a Buddhist swastika. Round red-colored chops (*yuanxing zhuse yinmo* 圓形朱色印模), known as "horse hoof chops" (*mati yin* 馬蹄印), are much more common and seem, as Huang suggests, to be associated with ritual masters.[38]

Nonetheless, given the rarity of charters with both round and square chops, and their localization in one or two areas, it is premature to conclude that such charters were only possessed by the families of high priests and headmen. A charter in the possession of one Zhao Longfei 趙龍飛, in Dali 大理 district in Laibin, one of two that he owned, bore more than fifty chops (Huang doesn't specify their shape). According to the text of the document, "The headman provided the chops" (*yaozong gei* yin 瑤總給印) (Huang 1990:233) Other distinguishing marks are iconic of high status, great wealth, and connections with figures of authority in the Chinese imperium. One charter from Lanshan County, Hunan, in addition to having round chops stamped in several places, also displays the character *ya* 押 written twenty times in a row. This Huang believes could be the marks the Yao headman (*yaozong*) made on receipt of the document, which was presumably issued by the imperial court (Huang 1990:136-140). We can also observe the craftsmanship involved in the production of a charter, the quality and complexity of illustration, and the medium on which the text and images are inscribed. A charter

37 One *zhang* equals 3½ meters.

38 Several Iu Mien and Kim Mun chops are reproduced in Pourret (2002:206), who writes: "Mien chops. The round one (horse hoof in Chinese) is used by Mien from Laos and China to stamp the Cia Sen Pong, King Ping documents. . . . Two smaller ones, called Pan Hung chops, are used for the same purpose by Iu Mien in Thailand and Laos, and Mien in China and Vietnam. Other rectangular chops are used to expedite messages to the gods."

inscribed on stone was probably associated with a person of greater wealth and power than one handwritten on paper, since it required more effort, skill, and money to produce; it points also to a greater fixedness in space, stone being heavy and difficult to take along on one's journeys.[39]

In many cases, it is possible to detect the status of the scribe who copied an individual charter, or its owner, from his name, particularly when that person was a ritual master. Deng Fazheng, Huang Faying, and Zhao Fagai, all mentioned above, were ritual masters at the first and/or second grades of initiation, since individuals who have undergone the first-level ordination ritual known as "Hanging the Lamps" (Mien: *kwaa tang*; Mandarin: *guadeng* 掛燈) change the second character in their names, following the surname, to *fa* 法, which they retain after the second-level *dushi* 度師 (Mien: *tou sai*) ordination (Chen 2003:85). Pan Shan Yilang and Zhao Shun Yilang were both ordained as *jia zhi* 加職 (Mien: *ja tse*) —the highest rank of ritual master—as indicated by "*yilang*" honorific.[40] One Pan Fa Erlang 盤法二郎 from the Jiuyi Mountains in Ningyuan County 寧遠縣, Yongzhou, Hunan, possessed a charter stamped only with round chops despite his high rank (Huang 1990:155).

Kandre refers to such ordinations as "merit-making ceremonies," which require increasingly greater investments of money:

> These investments must be made in the world of men in the form of merit-making ceremonies, in which the individual's spirit receives a status in the spirit world from the spirit central government. Merit-making (*fiu too*) is carried out under strictly controlled conditions and requires expenditures of various amounts of wealth, particularly silver (Kandre 1967:588).

The amount of wealth needed to conduct a *ja tse* ordination makes it an extremely rare event nowadays, and even *tou sai* ordinations are seldom witnessed in most Mien

39 As John B. Thompson writes, "Prior to the development of telecommunications, the extension of availability in space required the physical transportation of symbolic forms…. Hence the media favouring the extension in space tended to be relatively light and transportable, such as papyrus and paper….Inscriptions in clay and stone are among the most durable, although written and printed texts and, more recently, symbolic forms stored on film, tape or disc make possible the extension of availability in time and, therewith, the exercise of power across temporal distances" (Thompson 1990:169-170).

40 Chen Meiwen 陳玫妏 suggests that ritual masters ordained at the *ja tse* rank, add *yi lang* (first gentleman), *er lang* (second gentleman), and so on, according to their order of birth (Chen 2003:85, 92-95).

villages. Through these merit-making ceremonies, individuals not only gained status in the spirit central government, but also in the human realm, and anyone who had attained the rank of a *ja tse* ritual master—great master (Mien: *tum sai kung*; Mandarin: *da shigong* 大師公)—would have commanded immense prestige in Mien society, along with the requisite wealth to invest in merit-making.[41]

Jonsson describes one such great master in northern Thailand around the turn of the twentieth century: Tang Tsan Khwoen, who became a high-level headman (*tom tao mien*; Mandarin: *da touren* 大頭人) and led a group of followers from their homeland in China:

> His prowess related to his connections into the spirit world, in which he had the highest level of ritual rank (*ja tze*, the third-level ordination in the ranked scheme of Daoist rituals). Before he took off, he had purchased from another Mien man a *Kia Shen Pong* scroll. With his various markers of leadership and his success in inspiring a following, Tsan Khwoen set off into the unknown (Jonsson 2005:78).[42]

Unfortunately, there are no further details concerning how Tang Tsan Khwoen acquired his charter, but he lived at the precise historical moment when Yao (Mien) villagers in Hunan, Guangxi, and Guangdong, and farther afield, were making copies of charters and circulating them locally, across regions, and even transnationally. According to Jonsson, the possession of the Charter and other legitimating objects, along with ranks acquired through Daoist rituals and a reputation obtained as a result of physical prowess, granted

41 Jonsson adds, "There is some variation among the Mien as to whether a man undergoes a ritual to reach a *ja-tse* rank or whether he is automatically promoted to this status when all of his sons have reached the rank of *to-sai*. *Kwa-tang* ordinations take three days and require "big" spirit mediums, *to-sai* twelve, and *ja-tze* eighteen mediums. This graded ritual hierarchy affects men's status in the afterlife; they become spirits of rank rather than just ordinary ancestor spirits. Importantly, while women are barred from such ordinations and other dealings with spirits, the wife of a man who has ritual rank also acquires ritual status" (Jonsson 2005:91).

42 Jonsson notes: "The migration itself was socially constitutive—it made the group a social unit through their leader and his relations with a particular spirit. The list of domains that the people stayed in during their migration is preserved in ritual chants to the King's Spirit, which is a spirit specific to this migration group" (Jonsson 2005:79). These lists are sometimes incorporated into Yao charters, where the journeys of specific migration groups are represented as outgrowths of the mythological, historical, and cosmological accounts associated with King or Emperor Pan and the Twelve Clans.

a person with the requisite prestige to lead a community of followers from one region to another.

Kandre and Jonsson focus on the power and status of Mien headmen, both within local Mien society and also in interaction with other peoples and socio-political formations. Jonsson describes Tang Tsan Khwoen's prestige in his village:

> Tsan Khwoen's architectural separation from the rest of the population, his quite considerable wealth, his unique ritual contract...his supreme ritual rank, his prestige items, his title from the Nan king, and his trade relations with the opium monopoly all indicate his unique standing and how he acted on it. As tribute from his followers, Tsan Khwoen received a basket of rice from each household every year (Jonsson, 2005:77).

Kandre explains that many Mien political leaders in Laos and Thailand during the twentieth century began their careers "as wealthy and respected village headmen and gradually secured their reputation by skillful mediation of conflicts in the mountains." Such leaders gained their influence "by cooperating with the external powers, who need agents for the control of the mountain regions.... In some cases they finally established themselves as semi-feudal princes over huge collections of villages with a wide range of distinct socio-economic-ritual systems which were veritable multiple societies" (Kandre 1967:615-616). Kandre mentions one Mien chief, Uen Tsoe, whose "authority was recognized by more than a hundred villages associated with seven different socio-economic systems (Iu Mien, Lanten, Akha, Khamu, Meo, Lahu, and Kato" in the Lao–Yunnan border region (Kandre 1967:616).[43]

While Kandre and Jonsson both focus on Laos and Thailand, the situation they describe, whereby upland, if not necessarily Mien, leaders cooperated with lowland power structures, is reminiscent of the native chieftain system (tusi土司) in force across

43 According to Kandre, Uen Tsoe "gained his position on the basis of his personal qualities, the prestige of his ancestors (several of whom had been distinguished high-level headmen), and through his competence as a skillful mediator with the French colonial regime" (Kandre 1967:617). Jonsson adds that Wuen [Uen] Tzo was both "a spokesman for the highlanders to the colonial rulers" and also an agent of the colonial rulers, one who "aided the French in suppressing noncompliant upland peoples." He goes on to describe Uen Tzo's prestige objects: "Wuen Tzo's collection of clocks was a museum-like display of this chief's unique connection to the contours of power and privilege, a one-man show of prominence. The collection and display of wealth and power constructed and reflected the prominence of an upland leader who had a title from the lowland authorities" (Jonsson 2005:75).

much of South and Southwest China during the late imperial period. The Chinese version had roots planted deeply in the soil of Chinese antiquity. Native chieftains were local headmen recognized by the imperial court, which offered them ranks and emoluments, employing them to keep order in territories on the margins of the empire that could not easily be controlled by military commanders in charge of troops from afar.[44] By this stratagem, the territories these chieftains governed were nominally brought under the control of the court, while their autonomy was effectively preserved.

However, as David Faure has pointed out, peoples labeled yao often found themselves living in undesirable conditions, boxed in by larger power structures associated, on the one hand, with the county magistrate (zhengtang 正堂), and on the other, with powerful lowland chieftains, who in the case of Guangxi Province, were mostly Thai-speaking Zhuang people (zhuangren 壯人—formerly written as 獞人). Even among Yao peoples in China, Iu Mien, known since Qing times as Guoshan Yao 過山瑤 (Yao Who Cross the Mountains), often occupied highlands that were difficult to farm, so they relied upon moving from place to place and leasing croplands from other peoples, including those now referred to as Yao. We can see how this works out in the Dayao Mountains area, now known as Jinxiu Autonomous Yao County. The five distinct Yao groups inhabiting the region—Chashan Yao 茶山瑤, Hualan Yao 花籃瑤, Ao Yao 拗瑤, Pan Yao 盤瑤 (Iu Mien), and Shanzi Yao 山子瑤 (Kim Mun)—once comprised an autonomous sociopolitical system that privileged the three former groups, which inhabited the more desirable lowland territories. Under the conditions engendered by the harsher upland landscapes, in which "villages or village segments...move in search of better soils or more congenial social climates," a particular Iu Mien attitude towards political power evolved. In Kandre's words, it emphasized conformity "to the prevailing power structure of the area into which they enter" (Kandre 1967:617).

Nonetheless, Iu Mien and other poor upland Yao and non-Yao peoples held a position of strategic importance for the court, which sought to extend the reach of the empire. Mountainous regions had long been places of refuge for those branded by the state as bandits and rebels. Like the situation in early twentieth-century Laos and Thailand, local magistrates, as representatives of the emperor, tended to seek the aid of Yao (including Mien) chiefs familiar with the lay of the land and the feelings of the people who lived in the mountainous areas. These local leaders could serve as agents for the imperial court—spreading its message, persuading so-called bandits to come out of hiding, and rallying their constituents to fight in battle. A stone stele from Gongcheng

44 On the *tusi* native chieftains, see John E. Herman (2006 and 2007) and Leo K. Shin (2006).

Autonomous Yao County 恭城瑤族自治縣 in Guangxi,[45] for instance, recognizes several Yao headmen (*yaomu* 瑤目) with names, given the area, that are most likely Mien—Zhao Zhongjin 趙中金, Deng Jintong 鄧金通, Zheng Yuantong 鄭元安, Pan Jinzhang 盤金章, and others—for their service defending the mountain passes (*bashou aikou* 把守隘口). For example, according to the stele, in the fifteenth year of Ming Emperor Wanli's 萬歷 reign, the county government appointed the Yao leaders, Zheng Jinwang 鄭進旺, Deng Deyuan 鄧德元, and Zhao Shulu 趙殊祿, to lead twenty Yao soldiers (*tongdai yaoding* 統帶瑤丁) to kill a bandit chief (*zeishou* 賊首) who was causing unrest. The headmen were rewarded with seventy *liang* of silver for their services (Huang 1993:1).

A stele from Chenzhou in Hunan, inscribed in 1722, the sixty-first year of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor's reign, describes a village elder (*yilao* 邑老) named Hu Guoqing 胡國清, whom the local government in 1656 dispatched to spread news of the emperor's humaneness (*xuanbu huangren* 宣布皇仁). After he was able to convince the Yao people—literally "ant Yao" (蟻瑤)—to surrender at the military barracks (*junmen* 軍門) in southern Jiangxi (*nangan* 南贛), Hu Guoqing was named an "enlisted Yao elder" (*fuyao laoren*撫瑤老人)[46] and was eventually promoted to the Chenzhou magistrate's office because of the merit he had gained from cooperating with the state (*zhaofu yougong* 招撫有功). He later attained the rank of "enlisted Yao commander" (*fuyao bazong* 撫瑤把總)—a rank that his sons retained for three generations. Because of their work in the service of the court, "flocks of Yao all submitted" (*qunyao xianfu* 群瑤咸服). Thus, members of the Hu family served officially in the government as keepers of order who were adept at persuading rebellious Yao to surrender to authorities (Huang 1993:9-10).

"Enlisted Yao" harkens back to a government policy that Faure argues entailed more lenient treatment of Yao people during the early years of the Ming dynasty: "Yao chiefs who offered their allegiance to the imperial authorities, sent tribute all the way to the capital, and were rewarded by the emperors" (Faure 2006:173).[47] The first Yao leader on record to pay homage (*laichao*來朝) in this way was Pan Gui 盤貴 from Xinyi 信義 in Gaozhou 高州, Guangdong, during the third month of the fourth year of Yongle's reign

45 Gongcheng shares a border with Jiangyong County in Hunan. Yao people in the county are predominantly Mien.

46 Alternatively, "elder who enlists Yao people."

47 It was first implemented in southwestern Guangdong in Shuangshui 瀧水 (present day Luoding 羅定, under the jurisdiction of Yunfo City 云浮市) near the Guangxi border. Apparently, Yao people had been wreaking havoc there since the late Yuan dynasty, well into the first few decades of the Hongwu emperor's reign. The initial approach had been to send military leaders into mountainous areas to hunt down and pacify Yao leaders. See *Guangdong tongzhi* 57.3-7.

(1405); he offered local products (*fangwu* 方物), which the *Guangdong tongzhi* (57.3-7) says became the model for subsequent tribute from Yao leaders (*yaoshou yaozong* 猺首猺總).[48] Subsequently, Yao leaders paid homage every one or two years, for several years. This was not simply a one-way act, but an exchange. Yao leaders offered local products to the emperor; in return, the emperor bestowed on them various possessions, which included paper money (*chaobi* 鈔幣), stitched, silken clothing (*najuanyi* 納絹衣), and other types of garments (*xiyi* 襲衣). Those who received these gifts must have prized them, given their imperial provenance, as well as their iconic value as evidence of recognition from the imperial court and as markers of status.

More was at stake, however, than an act of exchange and offering of allegiance; this process also involved the attempt by the government to register large numbers of people in the service of specific Yao leaders. For instance, the *Veritable Records of the Ming* (*Mingshi lu* 明實錄) states that two clerks (*li* 吏) from Huazhou 化州, Guangdong, made it known that there were Yao people who had not yet offered allegiance to the emperor but desired to do so. One of the clerks, Feng Yuantai 馮原泰 was sent to offer them amnesty and enlist them. Because of Feng's powers of persuasion, more than twenty-five hundred households (*hu* 戶), comprising over seventy-five hundred people (*kou* 口), were registered in the second rank. Feng Yuantai was thereupon promoted to assistant to the county magistrate (*xiancheng* 縣丞), and he became an active promoter of the emperor's cause. Feng Yuantai was also involved when one Luo the Second 駱第二 came to court in 1410, which involved 160 households with more than five hundred people registering in the second rank. He was once again promoted, this time to the position of assistant prefect (*panguan* 判官) of Deqing 德慶 because "he was good at enlisting the various Yao."[49]

During the late imperial period, "enlisted Yao" leaders played an important role in the state's efforts to reign in rebellious peoples in South and Southwest China, particularly in the mountainous areas of Guangxi, Guangdong, and southern Hunan, helping to incorporate these territories into the imperial realm. While "enlisting Yao" was a policy implemented beginning in the early years of the Ming dynasty, it was in turn modeled on military strategies that had been employed during the Song dynasty. The *Guangdong tongzhi* describes the origins of the strategy this way: During the reign of Song Emperor

48 Throughout the Yongle years (1402-1424), this policy was mainly administered along the border with Guangxi, from Gaozhou 高州 up to Zhaoqing 肇慶, though the *Veritable Records of the Ming* (*Mingshi lu* 明實錄) says that the Li 黎 of Hainan Island, the Zhuang 僮, and the Miaoliao 苗僚 followed the same practice (Liu and Lian 1988:15).

49 See Liu and Lian (1988:18):"以其善撫諸猺也."

Ningzong 寧宗 (1194–1224), it says, the military commissioner of Hunan, Zhao Liangli 趙亮勵 selected local strong men (*tuhao*土豪) who were respected by the Yao people there, to become military commanders (*zongguan* 總管) of the area. In this way, he apparently was able to "suppress" (*tanya* 彈壓) local inhabitants. In similar fashion, according to a section entitled "Yao Troops" (*yaobing* 瑤兵), the prefect of Gaozhou 高州 in southwestern Guangdong, Kong Yong 孔鏞, implemented the policy of "enlisting Yao" (*fuyao*) during the reign of Ming Emperor Chenghua 成化 (1464–1487), whereby the enlisted Yao leaders were exempted from labor service. "Thereupon, he installed a Yao headman to command Yao armies on every mountain and in every encampment."[50]

The provenance of the earliest Yao charters can likely be traced back to this period. They were probably first drafted by Yao headmen, perhaps those very leaders who paid homage at court as "enlisted Yao." The heading "Enlisted Yao People" (*zhaofu yaoren* 招撫瑤人) is prominently displayed at the beginning of many Yao charters, particularly the standard type that eulogizes the merit of Panhu the dragon-dog. Yao charters not only preserve the memory of past Mien leaders—mythical and historical—but also serve as guides to action for would-be leaders by providing them, in Sherry Ortner's words, with "preorganized schemes of action," or in Sahlins' view, the "deployment of the myth as practice." In a strategic sense, they provided a model for interacting with various external powers—most notably, the Chinese imperium.

III. The Ordering Schema of Yao Charters

While the schema of meritorious practice, structuring the actions of Mien leaders, and ordering the entire tradition of charter production in Mien society derives from a history of political encounters and adaptation to them, older than the tradition of producing Yao charters itself, this schema also shaped other aspects of Mien social and cultural life—marriage, agricultural practices, "merit-producing ceremonies" and the relations between Mien and the central government of the spirit world. This is because, as Kandre contends, the welfare of Mien communities is seen to depend on two distinct power structures: that of the spirit world and that of the political systems at work in

50 "立猺兵每山每寨皆設一猺目" (*Guangdong tongzhi* 23.30-31). The *Guangdong tongzhi* provides exact figures for how many soldiers comprised the Yao armies in each county in the prefecture. There were 580 soldiers in Maoming 茂名, 898 soldiers on the twenty mountains of Dianbai 電白, 277 soldiers in Xinyi 信宜, and 524 soldiers occupying the 51 mountains of Huazhou 化州.

different areas where Iu Mien reside (Kandre 1967:586). In their dealings with either power, perhaps better seen as a continuum, the acquisition of merit is paramount.[51]

The standard charter describes the merit obtained by the Mien primogenitor and prototypical headman, Panhu, and the process by which he became King Pan (*panwang* 盤王). It opens with the words, "We, Emperor Lizong, on the 1st day of the 11th month of the Jingding 景定 reign period (1260) re-issue [the Charter of Emperor Ping] following the precedent of previous dynasties." The text goes on to list twelve Yao leaders, representatives of the twelve clans, on whom Song Emperor Lizong bestowed titles, also in 1260, as well as specific laws that Panhu's descendents must follow. Other charters appear to be survivals of even older encounters between Yao leaders and the imperial court—they include reign periods from as long ago as the Sui and Tang dynasties. Yao charters paint a picture of a long line of Yao leaders fulfilling the role of worthy subjects in the service of the emperor.

Similar texts, referred to also as charters or related names, such as the "Charter and Passport of the Sage Emperor, Pangu" (*pangu shenghuang bangwen quandie* 盤古聖皇榜文券牒), which circulated in Yizhou 宜州 and contiguous areas in central Guangxi, presents the figure of Pangu 盤古 and his creation of heaven and earth as separate realms. Such texts specifically claim that Yao people are the descendents of Pangu, and because of their connection to the source of all things, Yao hold a place of special importance in the state and in the cosmos. They assert that Yao people existed before the Chinese imperial court. This type of charter has the same schema as the standard charter, whereby Yao identity is rooted in meritorious action, though in one, merit derives from cosmogenesis, and in the other, from mytho-historic service to the imperial court.

The most cogent expression of this schema appears in the story of the Yao (Iu Mien) primogenitor, the dragon-dog Panhu. It describes the merit accrued from his meritorious deed, which was passed on to his descendents, who then built on his merit through their own actions, and by commemorating the original deed. The basic structure aligns somewhat with the Sherpa temple-founding schema described by Sherry

51 Kandre writes: "In this context the quality of the ancestors is not judged on the basis of their presumed status in the spirit world (achieved by merit-making) but on the basis of what they accomplished during their life in the world of men. Because the merit-making system is a standard open to all, the true quality of a man cannot be determined on the basis of the ancestors' merit. It is thus not surprising that descent lines whose ancestors included many high-level officeholders sometimes keep special records of the political positions of the ancestors. Such records are distinct from the genealogies used in ritual" (Kandre 1967:618).

Ortner:[52] it involves a rivalry (Emperor Ping v. King Gao), the acquisition of a protector (Panhu), and the defeat of the rival (Panhu kills King Gao and brings his head back to Emperor Ping's court). The hero is clearly Panhu, the protector, rather than Emperor Ping, the generic manifestation of the imperial court. Moreover, in the Panhu myth, the schema involves the hero marrying the emperor's daughter, the couple settling down on a remote mountain, and the birth of twelve children, six boys and six girls, who are the origin of the twelve clans. Thus, the story explains at once the existence of Yao people (or specific groups of Yao people) their particular genealogical system, their place of alleged provenance, their relation to the Chinese emperor, and Panhu's transformation into King Pan, a transformation that has ritual as well as political significance.

It is also the basis of claims that are asserted repeatedly in the standard charter and throughout the tradition of Yao charters; it is the very same claim the residents of Haojiang District invoked when they presented the standard charter and note to the central delegation, mentioned at the beginning of this paper. That is, Yao people (we are still talking about Iu Mien, though the schema, as such, is not limited to them)[53]

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52 Ortner attempts to locate a cultural schema that is common to early temple-founding folklore, Sherpa social life and political relations, ritual practices involving offerings to gods, in which "a new altar is constructed for each performance of the ritual," and finally to the founding of monasteries in the twentieth century: "I will first show that stories unfold in a certain fixed pattern. I will then suggest that the pattern reappears in certain ritual and social (inheritance, political succession) practices, and may be considered to be grounded in those practices. Finally I will show that the pattern or schema reappears in, and seems to be structuring, much of the activity that culminates in the foundings of the celibate monasteries in the early twentieth century" (Ortner 1990:70). Thus, for Ortner the religious institution-founding schema can be chiseled down to a core that involves a rivalry, acquisition of a protector, defeat of the rival, and ultimately to the founding of a temple (Ortner 1990:71-72) or to the construction of a ritual altar, which "…is constructed on the same cosmic plan (the mandala) as the space of a temple. Indeed, the altar is said to be, among other things, a temporary temple (also palace and heaven) for the gods called in for the occasion" (Ortner 1990:73-74).

53 This schema has ancient roots in Chinese history. See Alberts (2006), chapter 2, for discussion of the Panhu myth and the Southern Man narrative. Also see Victor Mair (1998), David Gordon White (1991), and Wang Ming-ke (2006), chapter 8. Wang's book could be said to encompass the entire history of similar stories about ancestral heroes in Chinese history, going back to the legend of the Yellow Emperor, as well as the expression of such stories by various local and regional ethnic formations across China. Alberts (2006), chapter 3, also detects a similar unifying theme, the very cultural schema now under consideration, in several stories told in different parts of South and West China from as early as the Han Dynasty, if not earlier. "The aforementioned stories, including the Panhu myth, involve the shooting of someone or something, either an enemy of the state or a destructive natural or social force, such as a rampaging tiger or insects that obscure the rays of the

hold a special place in the empire and are of a unique kind with respect to other groups and peoples. This claim is described as deriving from a primordial past, prior to the emergence of the dynastic system, when Panhu performed his meritorious deed, what Sahlins, following Heusch, calls the *exploit*: "a feat mythically associated with the ancestor of the dynasty, and frequently reenacted at the installation of each successor" (Sahlins 1985:79). While the original merit supporting Yao claims in the Panhu myth derives from a violent act—biting off the head of the enemy king—it owes its existence to a creative one as well, as in the *Crossing the Seas* (*piaoyang guohai* 飄洋過海) narrative about how King or Emperor Pan rescued representatives of the twelve clans who were lost at sea, and the narratives that recount Pangu's creation of the cosmos.

The Being and Becoming of King Pan

Panhu undergoes several transformations on his road to royalty—transformations that seem to match rites of passage in the course of a ritualized life: birth, the exploit and recognition, marriage, death, and ritual commemoration. Towards the beginning of the standard charter, the roots and bones—that is, the source—of Yao people are described as coming from the body of a dragon-dog. This is Panhu's state before performing his exploit. He is an anomalous being: "three *chi* tall with speckled yellow fur."[54] His will surpasses that of the flock of imperial ministers. Unlike humans who must eat every day, he can go seven days without eating. Indeed, Panhu must travel for seven days across the ocean, riding the clouds (*yunfei* 雲飛), to reach the court of the enemy King Gao, who immediately recognizes that he is not an ordinary animal. Gao even remarks, "I have often heard the saying: 'If a pig arrives, poverty; if a dog arrives, wealth.' Now this anomalous creature has entered my court. Our state will certainly prevail."[55]

Panhu experiences his first transformation after returning to Emperor Ping's court with Gao's head in his mouth. The emperor, after finally assenting to marriage between

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sun. In the Panhu myth, a dog or dragon-dog kills an enemy leader—either General Wu in early accounts, or one King Gao in the Yao rendering of the tale. For the Banshun Man, the enemy was a white tiger, which to the Ba clan was also a deity of worship. Lord Lin—like the more widespread Archer Yi, who shot down nine of the ten suns so that only one remained—achieved merit by rectifying a natural phenomenon that affected his people adversely. Other stories abound, which involve heroes resolving natural calamities—usually droughts and floods—through the shooting or killing of the deity who caused them" (Alberts 2006:80-81).

54 A *chi* 尺 is 1/3 of a meter.

55 See Huang (1990), p. 4: 吾常聞俗語：豬來貧，狗來富。異物進朝，而國必勝.

Panhu and his daughter, instructs his ministers to make a human outfit for the dragon-dog: "Cover his body! Embroider a belt to cover his waist. Embroider a scarf to cover his forehead. Embroider a pair of pants so as to conceal his thighs. Embroider a cloth to wrap around his chest. Do this to hide his shame."[56] This passage not only describes the first Yao marriage and a particular Yao mode of dress, it also iconically presents Panhu's transformation into a human being and his socialization into human society. His imperial wife and his new attire serve as emblems of his merit, which he will pass on to his children and their children, and so on down to every living Yao person.

Some accounts of this event describe it more as an ontological transformation than a symbolic change of clothing. Still another version of Panhu's transformation into a human being came to my attention in November 2008, when I stayed in the home of Zhao Youfu 趙有福, a Mien ritual specialist (*shigong* 師公) from Hezhou, at the crossroads that lead from Guangxi eastward into Guangdong and northward into Hunan. Zhao told me the story of Panhu's merit-manifesting exploit almost verbatim, though he added important details that are missing in all the Yao charters I have seen to date. He explained that the emperor ordered that Panhu should be placed in a container for forty-nine days to transform him into a human. However, fearing that Panhu would starve, the emperor's daughter took him out early and the transformation was still incomplete. Panhu was human in every way except for his head, which retained its canine appearance. According to Zhao, this story explains why Yao people wear headscarves.[57]

In some important ways, Zhao's oration resembles the entextualization of Panhu's deed in certain She sources from Guangdong, as well as from as far north as Zhejiang. For one, Zhao called the enemy king "Fan Wang" (番王), that is, "Barbarian King."[58] Zhao also likened the killing of Fan Wang—Panhu's bringing back of the king's head—to the harvesting of sweet potatoes, which are called *fanshu* 番薯 ("barbarian potato"). More relevant to our discussion of Panhu's transformation is the account preserved in some

56 See ibid, p. 4: 將一身遮掩其體，綉花帶一條，以縛其腰，綉花帕一幅，以裹其額，綉花褲一條，以藏其股，綉花布一塊，以裹其腔，皆所以遮掩其羞也.

57 Some might assert that this divergence reflects a discrepancy between the oral and written word, that there is an unscalable gap between what is said and what is written. I argue that this is a false dichotomy. Just as there are so many different written versions of the Charter, with differences ranging from minor to vast, such is the case also with how the story is performed orally.

58 *Fan* was a name the government used during the Qing dynasty to refer to certain indigenous groups in South China, especially in Taiwan, where officials distinguished between *Han*—Hoklo settlers who had migrated from southern Fujian, particularly Quanzhou and Zhangzhou, as well as Hakka settlers from Guangdong—and *Fan*—the Austronesian peoples who were indigenous to the island.

She documents from southern and eastern Guangdong that appear at the end of Huang (1990), in which the emperor allows that Panhu may marry his daughter if he can transform (*bian* 變) himself into a human. Panhu says he can do it in seven days (recall that in the standard charter it takes him seven days to cross the sea), but after five days he fails to complete the transformation and is left with a human body and a canine head—a result identical to the one in Zhao's recounting.

Panhu's second transformation occurs when Emperor Ping learns of the birth of the couple's twelve children. Rejoicing, the emperor bestows an official title "King Pan," making Panhu the first ancestor and prototypical Yao/Mien headman. The emperor's command has ramifications also for the twelve children, who are part of the imperial bloodline not only because of their mother, the emperor's daughter, but also on the basis of the imperial decree. Emperor Ping calls the twelve children, six boys and six girls, the "Royal Yao" (or perhaps, the King's Yao), and the descendants of these twelve children, are named "Sons and Grandsons of the Royal Yao" (*wangyao zisun* 王猺子孫). Each of the children is given a surname—Pan 盤, Shen 沈, Huang 黃, Li 李, Deng 鄧, Zhou 周, Zhao 趙, Hu 胡, Zheng 鄭, Feng 馮, Lei 雷, and Jiang 蔣—thus creating the twelve clans. The emperor decreed that Pan would be the leading male descendent (*changnan*長男) following their father's surname, and that the six boys would take wives from outside (*qu wairen zhi nü wei qi* 娶外人之女為妻), while the six girls would attract men from outside families to become part of their households (*zhaozhui wairen zhi zi wei fu* 招贅外人之子為夫). In the worldview of the standard charter, it is imperial authority, represented by the command (*ming* 命) of Emperor Ping, which empowers. He speaks and people act according to his every utterance. This brings up a key dichotomy between the standard charter, whose protagonist is the dragon-dog Panhu, and charters that point back to the first being, Pangu, an issue to which I will return below.

The standard charter stresses the need both to spread the ancestral branches (*zongzhi* 宗支) of the Yao of the twelve clans, Iu Mien, but also to always remember the *zong* 宗, the common ancestor, the source of the twelve clans, from where and from what Yao people (Iu Mien) came. To do so, the text uses various natural metaphors. In one version, the mythical Emperor Ping explains it this way:

> It is a tree opening up into one thousand branches. They all originate from the [same] roots. It is like the tributaries of a river, which all derive from the [same] source. With respect to Panhu's male descendents, although the ants are many, they all come from a single hill. [So too] do the myriad sons and grandsons all emerge from a single bloodline. How can one forget his origin?

At the heart of this remembering is not only keeping alive the heritage of the descent group going back to the primogenitor of the twelve clans, but also the memory of Panhu's meritorious deed that resulted ultimately in Emperor Ping issuing the Charter to Panhu and his descendents. That merit, rooted in the bloodline, is both symbolic and real.[59] It accumulates not only through remembrance of the ancestor, but also through repeated performance of the deed, accompanied by repeated recognition from the court. The ongoing conference of titles on worthy subjects ratifies the bond between the court and the subject.

This brings us to the third transformation in the standard charter, the rite of passage that everything endowed with life must inevitably face: death. Panhu, now metamorphosed into King Pan, is killed by an antelope while hunting deep in the mountains. After searching far and wide for their father, who has been missing for several days, his children finally discover him hanging from a catalpa tree (*zimu* 梓木), where he was gored to death.[60] They take him back home and embroider a funeral outfit for him, just as the ministers had done for his wedding, and bury him in a wooden coffin. Recall that the color of Panhu's fur was speckled yellow (*banhuang* 斑黃). His funeral attire is fashioned of a speckled or variegated hue (*banyi* 斑衣). In a slightly different version of the standard charter, Emperor Ping exhorts Panhu's children to embroider a five-colored outfit for him (Huang 1990: 15). This harkens back to descriptions of Panhu's fur color in earlier, particularly Six Dynasties (220–589 C.E.) official sources, and is an obvious

59 According to Kandre, "Iu Mien rules of descent do not refer to biological descent, as understood by modern science, but to ritually established connections with the ancestor spirits. The child is believed to be the product of cooperation between a male and female spirit (both of the father's group), who give the young life spirit to the human parents, who then give it a body, feed it, and make it grow.

An individual is not really a member of the Iu Mien until he has undergone initiation, that is, an introduction to the ancestor spirits after he has reached twelve years of age" (Kandre 1967:590, note 9).

60 Certain She documents, known as the "Record and Chart of the Ancestors" (祖圖記 *zutuji*), explains that Panhu was killed by a mountain goat (*shanyang* 山羊) instead of an antelope. Such documents add detail about another rite of passage in Panhu's life. Rather than hunting in the mountains, Panhu goes to Maoshan to study exorcistic rites (*xuefa maoshan* 學法茅山) or learns Maoshan rites from an itinerant priest. Besides being a famous mountain in Jiangsu Province, known since the Six Dynasties period as a center of Daoist activity, Maoshan is also the name of one of several ritual traditions found throughout South China, which are associated with specific mountains (real or mythical), such as the Lushan sect 閭山派, known mainly in Southeast China, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong, all the way to southern Taiwan, and the Meishan sect 梅山派 in Hunan, Guangxi, Sichuan, and elsewhere. Various Yao and other minority groups in South China have practices connected to one or more of these traditions.

allusion to the five colors (green, red, yellow, white, black) of Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) theory.

Panhu's final transformation in the standard charter manifests itself in the ritualized commemoration of his life and deeds, particularly in painted images. Emperor Ping commands Panhu's children to worship their father by "portraying the likeness of a human face, painting the image of a deified body" (Huang 1990: 5).[61] They are to pass these paintings on to their children to use during sacrifices (*jisi* 祭祀) to him, held every 3 or 5 years, depending on the size and importance of the event. This is the beginning of, or post-facto rationalization for, thanksgiving rituals to King Pan (*huan panwang yuan* 還盤王願), which transforms him into a deity, the royal primogenitor of the Yao people (as defined by the Charter), and a divine figure to whom his descendants can appeal for aid in times of need.

"Crossing the Seas" and King Pan's Merit to his People

The Panhu and "Crossing the Seas" narratives both begin with danger, a situation that must be resolved, and the resolution of which by the actions of the hero or heroes leads to the acquisition of merit and other rewards. In Panhu's case, the danger is an enemy monarch whose threat the emperor orders him to extinguish. The issue in the "Crossing the Seas" narrative is twofold: on the one hand, it involves Mien ancestors leaving their homeland because of war and turmoil, often associated with the rule of the Hongwu emperor (1328–1398) of the Ming dynasty; on the other, it involves the potential loss of their boat in a violent storm. Both stories include a significant journey by sea. Panhu traveled across the ocean for seven days; this same duration is used in many versions of "Crossing the Seas": the descendants of Panhu and his twelve children are on a boat in storm-infested waters for seven days and seven nights. Recall that in the She version of Panhu's life and deeds, the emperor gives him seven days to complete his transformation into a human being, and in Zhao Youfu's oral account, Panhu is placed in a container for forty-nine days—a multiple of seven. Seven days was also the traditional length of the largest-scale version of the thanksgiving ritual for King Pan, though the standard length nowadays is three days and three nights.[62]

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61 描成人貌之容，畫出神體之像. One interesting note is that sets of Daoist ceremonial paintings used by ritual masters are called: "King Pan Paintings" (*panwang shenxiang* 盤王神像).

62 I attended two such thanksgiving rituals in Guangxi Province in December 2008. One was in Liandong 聯東 Village, in the mountains of Hejie 賀街 Township, Hezhou 賀州, the other took place in Daliu 大柳 Village, Heping 和平 Township, in the Longsheng 龍勝 region of Guangxi. In

The standard charter clearly prefigures the worship of King Pan. In addition to exhorting King Pan's children to embody him in painted form, Emperor Ping sets out guidelines for worshipping the Yao primogenitor. Firstly, the emperor decrees that Pan's descendants should raise a pig prior to worshipping him, and he forbids them to sell this pig in the market. In the standard charter instructions, they are to offer the pig at a joyous event that brings together men and women, friends, family, and strangers, including, it would seem, Han soldiers (*baixing junmin* 百姓軍民). "They are to sway with the long drum, blow the *sheng* flute, strike the gong, and beat the drum, to ensure that the people rejoice and the spirits are happy, that there is an abundance of things and flourishing of wealth, and so that there is a plentiful harvest of the five grains" (Huang 1990:15).[63] The emperor also warns that King Pan will bring misfortune to anyone who disobeys. This description imparts the structure of actual thanksgiving rituals, which begin as a request or vow (*xuyuan* 許願) addressed to King Pan, usually concerning bad crops or the sickness of a community member. The initial ritual of request is generally held during the summer months, and those who make the request at that point begin raising a pig, which they will kill as an offering at the thanksgiving ritual, which is held in the eleventh or twelfth month of the lunar calendar.

Thanksgiving rituals performed to ensure King Pan's aid in times of need not only memorialize his merit, as in the standard charter's description of his deeds, they also reenact the events of the "Crossing the Seas" narrative, in which King Pan came to the rescue of his people. While the details vary from charter to charter, and not every charter mentions this narrative, those that do are relatively constant. After leaving their homeland, the ancestors of the Iu Mien are lost at sea, with little hope of reaching shore. In these dire straits they conduct the first ritual of request (*xuyuan*), appealing to their primogenitor, who is sometimes referred to as King Pan, or as we will see, Emperor Pan and even Pangu, the creator of heaven and earth. In one charter entitled, "Documents of the Sage Charter and Passport of King Pangu" (*panguwang shengdie bangwen shu* 盤古王聖牒榜文書), for instance, the twelve surnames, seeing little chance of survival, think of their ancestor, the "Yao King, Pangu, Who in the Beginning Opened Heaven and Established Earth." They appeal for help to the spirit soldiers under his command, the Troops of the Five Banners (*wuqi bingma* 五旗兵馬), who then bring them safely to Lechang 樂昌 County, Shaozhou 韶州, in northern Guangdong (Huang 1990:298).

January 2011, I attended a third one in Hezhou, this time performed by Zhao Youfu, mentioned above.

63 搖動長鼓，吹唱笙歌，擊鑼擂鼓，務使人歡神樂，物阜財興，五谷豐收.

Another version of this story in a charter from Lingchuan, called the "Yellow Passport for Crossing the Mountains" (*guoshan huangbang* 過山黃榜) relates how they "floated on the lake and crossed the sea" (*piaohu guohai* 飄湖過海) for three months and could not find the shore. Then two men, Li Zhenguo 李振國 and Deng Baobang 鄧保邦, told those present to light incense at the front of the boat and kneel down at the back of the boat. They requested the presence of the Troops of the Five Banners, the Ancestors and Forebears (*zuzong jiaxian* 祖宗家先), and the Sage Kings of the Three Temples of the Three Prefectures (*sanzhou sanmiao shengwang* 三州三廟聖王).[64]

Merit, unlike in the Panhu myth, is obtained not from service to the emperor, but rather by King Pan's service to his own people. King Pan transcends his role as the Yao primogenitor, becoming the generative force of the cosmos personified. He is now clearly a deity humans can worship, to whom they can make offerings, and from whom they can seek help in times of need. Merit is not, however, restricted to a deity's response and efficacy, but also resides in and is accumulated by rituals such as those performed on the boat, and by extension, through each ritual specialist and each and every time the ritual is performed.

Pangu's Creativity

The Pangu-type of Yao charter shares the same ordering schema as the Panhu-type, but positions Yao people in a higher and more important place in the cosmos.[65] Instead of rooting Yao merit and associated claims in Panhu's deed, a violent or in Sahlin's words, "barbarous act," Pangu's exploit is one of creation: he is the separator, and in some versions, the creator, of heaven and earth. When Pangu first emerges, the cosmos was

64 Huang (1990:68) explains that the three prefectures are Lianzhou 連州, Shaozhou 韶州, and Yangzhou 揚州; the three temples are Fujiang 伏江, Fuling 伏靈, and Xingping 行平; the three sage kings are King Ping 平王, King Tang 唐王, and King Pan 盤王. All of these are invoked during Thanksgiving ceremonies.

65 See David Holm (2003:108-110) for a similar account in Zhuang ritual traditions. Holm (2003:184) is essentially correct in asserting that Pangu "…is a thoroughly Chinese figure," in the sense that there is a long tradition of writing about Pangu in Chinese sources, going back to early medieval times, as there is also a long tradition of writing about Panhu, going back roughly to the same period. However, we do not really know how either of these figures happened to be included in these sources in the first place: Did Chinese authors imagine Panhu and Pangu, or were these authors recording local oral traditions, or both? In any case, for the purposes of this paper, I am interested in how both of these figures have been appropriated in the context of the Yao charter genre.

a chaotic swirl (*hundun*), there is no sun or moon, no day or night. Pangu's creative act, then, established the world, dividing heaven and earth, creating bodies of water and landmasses, the sun, moon, stars, and planets. He created lakes, oceans, and rivers; he set up the five phases, five metals, five directions, the seasons, the twenty-four nodes that divide a year, etc.[66] Pangu is the ultimate creative force in the cosmos, like the Dao itself. The text tells explicitly of his extraordinary merit (*gonggao* 功高), which would pass from generation to generation among his descendants. The Yao people of the twelve clans, referred to in the text and in contemporary parlance also as Pan Yao, because of the surname Pan, thus claim a direct lineal link to the original human and the beginning of the cosmos itself.

One important feature of the Pangu-type charter is how it situates Yao merit prior to any notion of imperial historicity. Pangu himself is prior to the imperial court and the dynastic system that it envisioned. The standard charter, which discusses Panhu, begins its narrative sequence in the *Hundun* (Chaos) reign period—a mythic time—in the court of Emperor Ping. Panhu, the dragon-dog, is at the service of the emperor; thus, his original merit, as it is in early, not necessarily Yao, versions of the Panhu narrative, expresses a bond between the wild outside and the imperial inside. Pangu, on the other hand, arises out of the swirling chaotic One, prior to heaven and earth, prior to Emperor Ping, and to heaven itself:

> In former times, he opened heaven and separated earth. First there was our Sage Emperor Pangu. He drilled open heaven and earth. First there was my (our) body, then there was heaven. The merit has been lofty for countless ages. First he created heaven, which in turn became King Ping. He [Ping] was called the Imperial Ancestor.[67]

66 Compare Huang (1990:276, 301). In the first, after Pangu's series of creative acts, we are told that the "Dragon King Panhu" (or perhaps, Pan the Protector) gives birth to the 12 surnames, while the second says that the "Dragon King Pangu" does this, thus continuing his creativity.

67 See Huang (1990:301), which reads: 昔时开天辟地，首君有我盘古圣皇，凿开天地，先有吾身，后有天，功高万古，首置造天，是为平王，号称皇祖. However, in Huang (1990:276), instead of creating heaven, which becomes Emperor Ping, Pangu is said to have created the stars in heaven, which become Emperor Ping: 首置造天星，是 平王，号称皇祖. Notice the similarity of form of the characters 星 (star) and 皇 (emperor).

Pangu's merit here is greater than, and prior to, the merit obtained through service to the imperial court. It instead has cosmogonic significance, without which the court would not exist, nor would humans, their institutions, or the world in which they dwell.

Thus, whereas the Panhu narrative roots Yao merit in service to the emperor, and claims special privileges vis à vis other contiguous peoples, the Pangu narrative prioritizes Yao existence not simply vis à vis other local peoples, but with respect to the imperial court itself. In fact, Ping, who in the standard charter is an emperor, in the group of Pangu charters from Yizhou is reduced to the status of a king (*wang*), albeit the ancestor of emperors (*huangzu* 皇祖). Pangu, on the other hand, is esteemed as Sage Emperor Pangu. This different prioritization crystallizes in statements repeated in certain charters, for instance, "First there were the Yao people; then there was the court" (*xian you yaoren, hou you chaoting* 先有瑤人後有朝廷).

The Yao pedigree in the Pangu story is anterior to the state and even the cosmos. Pangu, the original being, simply creates the twelve clans just as he created everything else. This has ontological ramifications in the sense that the ancestors of Yao people, first Pangu or Pan the Dragon King, and then the twelve clans, are described as miraculously conceived *prior* to Han people. In fact, at this point in the text, no people exist other than Pangu, his descendents, and Emperor Ping.

The mythic accounts concerning King Pan rationalize or legitimate certain actions; they provide the raison d'etre of those actions. Why do Yao people worship King Pan? Why do they wear specific clothing or hang paintings during certain rituals? Why does a ritual last a certain amount of time? I have given the example of a ritual specialist expressing a link between Panhu's bringing back the head of the enemy king and bringing in sweet potatoes through the work of farming. In this sense, charters and the narratives embedded in them play an explanatory role but, going further, they frame what appear to be diverse activities—farming, ritual, hunting, wedding ceremonies, and political encounters—in the same cultural schema.

Moreover, these three narrative accounts highlight different aspects of King Pan: the Panhu narrative in the standard charter explains how Panhu became a king and the basis of his merit. The *Crossing the Seas* narrative, which appears in several charters, describes how King Pan's descendants can appeal to him in time of need. The Pangu narrative envisions King Pan, both as primogenitor of the Yao people and as generative force of the cosmos, likened to the Dao of Daoism. The same schema orders each of these accounts: a hero (or heroes) performs an exploit and through this accomplishment acquires merit. This merit, however, does not die with the hero; it lives on in his descendents, who keep it manifest in the world through their commemoration and replication of the original deed. While the Pangu-type places that deed on a higher plane

than the imperial court, the standard charter develops a historical picture of Yao service to Chinese emperors, beginning with Panhu's service to Emperor Ping, but continuing in the service of his descendents to later, historically documented emperors.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to break new ground in the study of Yao charters, by analyzing them both as material objects with their own histories of production, circulation, and functionality in specific social-cultural contexts, and as texts that can be analyzed using literary, historiographic, and anthropological methodologies.

Yao charters have circulated in a process of continuous copying among diverse geographical communities. They are heirlooms passed down for generations, symbols composed of symbols. As objects, people used them, but how? Were they displayed during specific rituals or simply hidden away, as mementos collecting dust and cobwebs? I might never have thought to ask such questions had I simply engaged in literary analysis. Yet at the same time, Yao charters are clearly self-referential (metatextual)—they speak about what they are. They describe their purpose, or at least indicate those who had sponsored and written them, who added comments to specific copies, including editorial notes in print collections; they do have something to say about their use and significance. Every author, beyond being a voice in a text, was also once a flesh-and-blood person, like anyone you might meet in the course of fieldwork or in everyday life. With this in mind, I chose to include statements made by these mostly anonymous authorial voices, as a kind of evidence, along with statements obtained from living informants.

I have been concerned with the relation between myth and history, since Yao charters seem to express both, to varying degrees.[68] These apparently separate spheres—one imagined, one real—are structured according to the same schema in these charters: merit is commemorated and re-enacted repeatedly, without end. The mythic accounts serve as a basis for continued action, as guidelines to the perpetual acquisition of merit, but so too do the charters' other iconic features, and the documents themselves, copied and recopied, treasured and circulated, in a sense contain the memory of actual members of the community, living and dead, who obtained merit serving the imperial court and the Daoist manifestations of the spirit world.

68 See Terence Turner (1988) for his insightful comments about the relation between myth and history.

This paper should be viewed as a stage in the process of investigating these documents, a piece of the puzzle. While I have attempted to provide a holistic view—in part structural, but a structure derived from Yao responses to their world, and one that is capable of change—I recognize the need to look deeper into the connections between individual charters and specific descent groups, clans, and localities. Huang (1990) preserves examples of charters that are unique to certain locales, unlike the standard charter, which circulated across a vast area. These include the charters that circulated in and around Yizhou, which recount Pangu's merit instead of Panhu's. Why should they be so much more cosmographic than those found in other areas? What does that say about the figures of Panhu and Pangu, but also about the author(s) of these documents, when they were written, the inhabitants of this region, and the other peoples with whom they would have come in contact? Other charters that circulated almost entirely within one or another locally based clan narrate events pertinent to that clan, and even provide information about the specific paths of migration undertaken by the clan's ancestors. Understanding more about how and where charters circulated, then, is helpful for selecting fieldwork sites, since there is generally more at play in a given locale than simply the circulation of a charter.

More work needs to be done, as well, in documenting the microhistories of the locales where individual charters circulated from the late Ming up through the Republican period. That means tracking the history of government policies in these areas, Yao (Mien) responses to them, and the local chiefs who either led rebellions against the state or sought state patronage. One starting point for such an extended project is the area to the south of Yongzhou City in Hunan, particularly Lanshan and Jianghua and contiguous areas of Guangdong and Guangxi, where the largest numbers and greatest variety of Yao charters have been collected; where an early Qing wood block has been discovered, evidence of the early transmission of the standard charter. This is the same area where fifty-three local influentials signed a note requesting favors from the newly founded government of Chairman Mao. Incorporating the various local documents and archival materials, stone steles and temple inscriptions, gazetteers and other official and non-official sources, and newspaper and magazine articles from the twentieth century, while at the same time interviewing those who can still recollect former times when charters were treasured, would add greatly to the picture I have portrayed in this paper, particularly the local manifestations of the translocal space created by Yao charters.

Finally, the connections between Yao charters and local as well as translocal, Yao and non Yao, cults formed around the worship of King Pan deserve closer attention. In addition to rituals performed in the home, we might also look at the history and distribution of temples dedicated to both Panhu and Pangu in the areas where charters

have circulated. Moreover, It will be useful to compare depictions of King Pan in the Yao charters with his multiple representations in other texts, material and oral—especially those used in rituals—objects, images, and clothing, as well as his roles in the rituals themselves. Recording stories told orally in different locales about King Pan, the Twelve Clans, and their exploits crossing the seas and mountains, would deepen our understanding of the processes of entextualization of these accounts.

Over the course of the twentieth century, Chinese scholars and officials "discovered" more than one hundred Yao charters and often removed them from their original contexts in mountainous Mien villages to deposit them in local museums, government offices, research institutes, and private scholarly collections.[69] Such decontextualization has complicated the task of reconstructing the original context in which Yao charters were used and had significance. Of course, it could be argued that such decontextualization has always been at work, since those who possessed Yao charters might migrate and their heirs make new copies. The charters in Thailand discussed by Jonsson, for instance, are in a different context than those that were produced in Hunan or Guangxi. It is not only movement in space that alters context, the passage of time does as well. Does Huang Yu, who has collected more charters than perhaps any other scholar, have the same understanding of the tradition of charter production as his grandfather Huang Weiman and granduncle Huang Weixiu, who showed their copy to the anthropologist, Yang Chengzhi 楊成志 in 1936?[70] What about that of their great grandfather, Huang Wenchao, who originally commissioned this charter, almost a century before they showed it to Professor Yang?

In the 1980s Chinese scholars, officials from tourism, cultural, and minority affairs bureaus, along with local Yao leaders searched for one common icon that could help unite the many disparate groups who had been labeled "Yao." They settled on King Pan,

69 In December 2008, I viewed one that was stored at the Hezhou City Museum. The document was badly damaged due to improper preservation in a humid environment. Much of the writing was smudged and illegible, though from what I could read, it seemed to be a similar, if not the same text, as the Tuyao 土瑤 charter reproduced in Huang (1990). Hezhou is in northeastern Guangxi, at the crossroads that lead to Guangdong to the East and Hunan to the North.

70 A charter that had been in their possession is the first reproduced in Huang (1990). In 1936, Yang Chengzhi, a professor from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, stayed in their village and borrowed this document, replacing it with a copy. Huang (1990:9) includes a letter from Professor Yang to the two brothers: "Your Passport is already old and decayed. If you keep it in your home for another year, it will be destroyed by moths. I will make another copy for you, transcribing it exactly, without making the slightest change to any characters. If you give me the original, I will return the new one to you. This should serve both of our interests. I think you will definitely approve."

the protagonist in the "Charter of Emperor Ping" and the primogenitor and protector of the most populous and widespread Yao group, Iu Mien. Thus began King Pan's new career, appropriated and re-imagined by the modern nation-state.

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紀念祖先功績：《評皇券牒》中的神話、基模與歷史

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本文關注中國南部、越南、遼國和泰國地帶瑤族（特別是所謂盤瑤）流傳的一種文獻。該文獻以很多名稱出現，最常見的《評皇券牒》或《過山榜》；通常為卷軸形式，上有帝王印章、護符、皇帝和道教神明畫像、地圖等。由於和中國官府文件很類似、使用了帝國象徵和語言、以及其中蘊含的瑤族認同，過去的學者通場將之視為帝國授與瑤族領袖、允許他們在帝國山區自治的敕令。本文中，筆者將之視為原住民的創作，源自地方的瑤族領袖，他們操弄熟知的帝國文本慣例，為自己、族人和家人謀利。從清朝到二十世紀前半，瑤人（主要是湖南、廣西和廣東的盤瑤）流傳、複製、並為後代保存《評皇券牒》與類似的文件。本文探究其目的為何？最後，筆者分析瑤族社群創作券牒的傳統，說明其如何結合敘事和視覺特點紀念瑤族祖先的功績——無論是神話的或歷史的。那是瑤人宣稱其在國家和宇宙間位置的基礎。

關鍵詞：瑤族、盤瑤、盤王、券牒、文化基模