

“Layered Learning in a Children’s Primer Found at Dunhuang”

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My paper looks at textual and paratextual elements in a manuscript copy of the children’s primer entitled *Kaimeng yaoxun* 開蒙要訓 (“Important instructions for beginners”) found as fragments or full texts in dozens of Dunhuang manuscripts. Though essentially absent from the bibliographic record outside of Dunhuang, there is evidence that the work was popular in the centuries after its composition: it appears in a late ninth-century catalogue of Chinese books in Japan—*Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku* 日本國見在書目錄—and likely circulated widely in China as well, as indicated by its presence in a list of books found in the *Zachao* 雜抄 in Dunhuang that some scholars have argued was a form of exam curriculum. I will focus on the document labeled P.2578 and held in the Pelliot collection at the Bibliothèque National de France. This document includes, in addition to the full text of *Kaimeng yaoxun*, both punctuation and hundreds of additional paratextual characters inserted in interlineal spaces to indicate the pronunciation of about a third of the characters in the text proper. I will use these elements to analyze the different stages in creating this document and speculate on what this might tell us about how *Kaimeng yaoxun* and other primers were used in the medieval period.