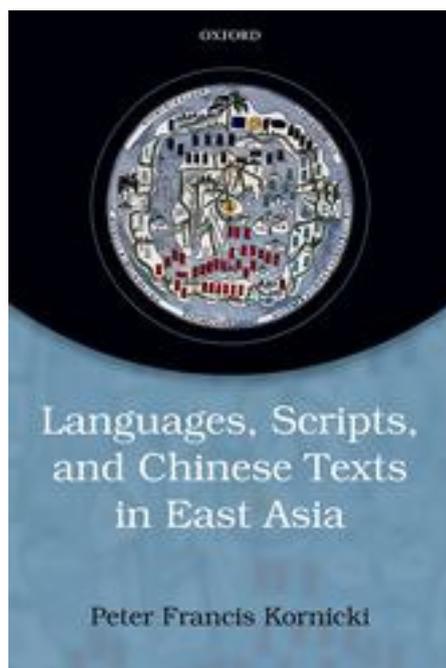


Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia



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著者:Peter Francis Kornicki

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This book is a wide-ranging study of vernacularization in East Asia, and for this purpose East Asia includes not only China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam but also other societies that no longer exist, such as the Tangut and Khitan empires. It takes the reader from the early centuries of the Common Era, when the Chinese script was the only form of writing and Chinese Buddhist, Confucian, and medical texts spread throughout East Asia, through the centuries when vernacular scripts evolved, right up to the end of the nineteenth century when nationalism created new roles for vernacular languages and vernacular scripts. Through an examination of oral approaches to Chinese texts, it shows how highly valued Chinese texts came to be read through the prism of the vernaculars and ultimately to be translated. This long process has some parallels with

vernacularization in Europe, but a crucial difference is that literary Chinese was, unlike Latin, not a spoken language. As a consequence, people who spoke different East Asian vernaculars had no means of communicating in speech, but they could communicate silently by means of written conversation in literary Chinese; a further consequence is that within each society Chinese texts assumed vernacular garb: in classes and lectures, Chinese texts were read and declaimed in the vernaculars. What happened in the nineteenth century and why are there still so many different scripts in East Asia? How and why were Chinese texts dethroned and what replaced them? These are some of the questions addressed in this book.

作者介绍:

Peter Francis Kornicki

Emeritus Professor of Japanese, University of Cambridge and Fellow of Robinson College

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