GRAPHEMIC BORROWINGS FROM CHINESE
THE CASE OF CHỮ NÔM--VIETNAM'S DEMOTIC SCRIPT

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For a long time, Classical Chinese called "the Han or scholars' script" was used in Vietnamese education, religion, legislation and administration — and even in private deeds and contracts. After independence was gained in 939 A.D. native scholars gradually succeeded in the invention of a demotic system of writing referred to as "the southern script" (chữ nôm). This paper traces the history of this highly creative collective effort to use Chinese characters and parts thereof to transcribe the Vietnamese language.

The paper examines in detail the evolution of different methods of using characters, radicals and diacritics, then relates various approaches to the area of nôm studies, to its contribution to Vietnamese historical linguistics and to the analysis of major gems of Vietnamese classical and folk literature, including such narratives in verse as The Tale of Kiều.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chữ nôm 喃字 "southern, i.e. Vietnamese, script" is the demotic system of writing based on Chinese characters and used in conjunction with the regular Chinese script from possibly the eleventh century until the early decades of this century. It was the medium found in many works by traditional scholars, some of whom preferred to retain their anonymity in authoring beautiful pieces of vernacular literature while continuing to pen official documents— and to compose classical poetry and prose— in the Chinese script itself, called chữ nho“ the scholars’ characters "or chữ Hán" Han characters. "Later both systems were displaced and replaced by quốc-ngữ, the Roman script which Catholic missionaries helped devise in the seventeenth century [Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1959] and which the
Nguyen Dinh-Hoa

French colonial administration later sanctioned as the official writing system in Vietnam.

Romanized versions of all the narratives in verse, for instance, do exist. However, liberties taken by scribes in successive efforts to preserve, restore and block-print such literary gems as The Tale of Kiều, Phan Trần, Luc Văn Tiên, etc. have led to controversial questions of interpretations of their graphemics within the nôm texts. This paper reviews the latest findings, that are due to newly discovered epigraphic or printed texts, about the origin, structure and evolution of this uniquely creative writing system which played a vital role in the transmission of a major segment of Vietnam's classical and folk literature [Trân Quang-Huy 1973; Durand and Nguyễn-Trân Huân 1985]. Bibliographic sources are also described and analyzed while on-going research projects in nôm studies both inside Vietnam and abroad are introduced.

In their dictionary of nôm characters published in Saigon, Vũ Văn Kính and Nguyễn Văn Khánh [1970:3-4] cite both religious and administrative motives for the creation of chữ nôm. They say that names of villages and cantons such as Bùng, Bữ, and personal names such as Cu, Cô, Đêu, could not be transliterated adequately by means of Chinese characters. On the other hand, if an incantation involved such a personal name as En, Kính, Khênh, Khạng, Uơn, Cuôn, Lữ, Mộm, etc., Confucian and Taoist priests would have had to use a Chinese character, then add either a diacritic mark or another character, or a part of a character in order to render the sounds of a Vietnamese word. These two authors further assert that, as writers of prose and poetry kept adding and changing, the script became crystallized into its present shape(s) and thus it could not have been invented by one single person, but rather resulted from cumulative efforts of many people through successive periods of revision and improvement [Vũ and Nguyễn 1970:4].

2. THE ORIGIN OF CHỮ NÔM

Although such a need for a native script soon after Vietnam gained independence from its northern neighbor in 939 A.D. could be seen as obvious, the date of the first in-
vension of \textit{chữ nôm} has been a bone of contention among students of Vietnamese language and literature. There have been several theories on this subject.

First of all, about the word \textit{nôm}. Several scholars, including Wang Li [1948, repr. 1958], who quoted Chêon, interpret \textit{nôm} 喃 in \textit{chữ nôm} as denoting "south" (< \textit{nam} 南 in Sino-Vietnamese, the latter being the Vietnamese pronunciation of written Chinese characters). Quoting Wang Li, Hashimoto [1978:17] says that this interpretation "may not be convincing" and he also points out that Toru Mineya [1972] "argues that the word simply means 'vulgar, colloquial.'" I have been using both adjectives "southern" and "demotic", keeping in mind that there is also the word \textit{nôm} meaning "[of wind] southerly" and that the standard dictionary \textit{Việt-nam Từ điển} [Hanoi: Khai-trí Tiễn-duc, 1931] gives this definition: "the colloquial speech of the Vietnamese people as opposed to \textit{chữ nho}" [p. 370]

2.1 According to Nguyễn Văn San (1848–1883, penname Văn-da Cử-sĩ), author of \textit{Đại-Nam Quốc ngữ} (1880), a 50-entry Chinese-Vietnamese glossary, the demotic writing system was created by Chinese Governor Sĩ Nhiếp (Shih Hsieh 士樊, second century A.D.) in order to teach Chinese language and writing to the Vietnamese. He wrote:

"列國言語不同，一國有一國語。我國自士王譯以北音，其間百物猶未詳識，如 睛鳩不知何鳥，羊桃不知何木，此類甚多。是書註以國音，庶得備攷，或有易 知者亦不必註。"

In a detailed discussion of the origin or \textit{chữ nôm} Trần Văn Giáp[1969b] cites that same Chinese-Vietnamese thesaurus by Nguyễn Văn San, saying that the \textit{nôm} script could have appeared in Vietnam toward the end of the reign of Emperor Ling-te of Han (168–187 AD) as a Vietnamese creation [emphasis mine], under the rule of that learned governor, who was often called King Si (Sĩ-vương 士王) or" the Ancestor of Learning in Nam-giao" (Nam-giao Học-tọ 南交學祖). Trần Văn Giáp further notes that the first transcribers of Vietnamese were anonymous refugee scholars from North China, who were given support by Shih Hsieh as the latter official used them for the consolidation of his own political power and the dissemination of Han thought and culture. The script thus evolved further as successive periods saw more Vietnamese scholars and scribes constantly
creating new graphs, whose accumulation became the peculiarly "southern script" [Trần Văn Giáp 1969b:18-19].

Although Nguyễn Văn San did not cite any reference, it had been mentioned on later occasions, sometimes with some doubt (as by Nguyễn Đỗ Chi [1955]) and sometimes with approval (as by Trường Chính [1956]), with the suggestion that chữ nôm was comparable to the writing system of the Chuang, in Kwangsi. As early as in 1932, the scholar Lê Dư (pennname SĐ Cuông) while voicing approval of this theory in an article which appeared in Issue 172 of the review Nam Phong, wrote:

"In my opinion, when our people studied Chinese books, both teachers and students definitely had to use our mother tongue in explanations. Moreover, they needed some kind of written language to represent and record the sounds and help their memorization. So King Si selected those Chinese characters as they were pronounced in our language to be the symbols to render Chinese sounds. In their readings, students who wanted to remember Chinese words had also to memorize corresponding Chinese characters so as not to forget them. However, since Chinese characters could not adequately represent their words and express their ideas, they had to choose a Chinese character as one half, and another Chinese character as the other half, then combine them to represent sound and/or meaning in transcribing our language: this was the reason for the creation of chữ nôm."

[p. 495]

Lê Dư even wrote that in his educational task, Governor Shih followed a script devised by the people of Kwangsi, just as Nguyễn Văn San had suggested [Lê Dư 1932: 496]. Indeed Lê Dư said that Governor Shih was inspired by 周去非 Chou Chu-fei who, in his book 嶺外代答Ling-wai Tai-ta [1178], cited thirteen characters of a "local speech" (of the Chuang people) in Kwangsi:

竈 "short"; 套 "stable"; 妓 "skinny and weak"; 並 "dead"; 截 "paralyzed"; 孺 "child"; 妓 [徒架切] "older sister; 門 "bolt [of door]"; 臧 "cliff"; 坎 "to swim"; 為 "submerged under the water"; 私 "with big mustache"; 辟 [ 東敢切] "sound of stone thrown into water" [Tran 1973:6, note 2; Chou 1979 reprint: 1793]
Graphemic Borrowings from Chinese

“廣西俗字甚多。如嘔音時，則不分音。諧音和言大坐則和言。甲音拗。言瘦弱也。歪音終。言死也。啣音臘。言不能舉足也。秋音鶉。言小兒也。妖徒架切。言孩子的。門音閭。言門閭。言塞也。渝音術。言人在水上也。癸音魅。言没人在水下也。טל音鰶。言多髭。辟東敢切。言以石擊水之聲也。”

Lo Hsiang-lin in his book on the origin and culture of the Hundred Yue 百越源流與文化Pei-yue Yuan-šiu yu wen-hua [1955:72] mentioned that the Chuang people of T'ai-ping Fu 太平府, T'u-chou hsiien 上州縣had a writing system in which characters for “sky, sun, moon, and star” were written respectively 向, 星, 滑, and 星, with each grapheme combining two borrowed Chinese elements, one indicating Chuang pronunciation and the other showing meaning in Chuang. Similar examples can be found in Wei [1953:21–22], Li [1956:21–24], Wei and Tan [1980:97–101], as well as in Wen Yu’s long article on the speech of the area inhabited by the Chuang people [1936:497–552]. Li Yueh-in 李樂殷 recently provided a comparison between the “square-block” characters used by the Chuang people and the Vietnamese nôm characters [1983].

In addition to Nguyễn Văn San, Trần Văn Giáp [1969b] also cites Hùng-chân Phâptính, a Buddhist scholar of the Lê dynasty who had edited 指南玉音解義Chinym Ngôn-hâm Giả-nghĩa. The Preface of this early Chinese-Vietnamese dictionary, reprinted in 1761, mentions that “King Shih for over forty years spread culture and education, explaining in the common language of our country all the writings in Han Characters and gathering poems in the national language in his two-volume Chinym Phạm-vương 指南品彙[Trần Văn Giáp 1969b: 12; Trần Xuân Ngọc-Lan 1982:18]

...至於王之時移車就國，四十餘年，大行教化，解義辛俗以通章句，集成國語詩歌，以致號各；類作指南品彙，上下二卷，學者難詳...

2.2 In 1930, in his review of Phan Kế Bình’s Việt-Hán Văn-Khảo, a book on Sino-Vietnamese literature, Nguyễn Văn Tố noted two Vietnamese words in the title Bố Cái Đại-vương 布蓋大王 “the Great King (who was like the people’s) Father and Mother” which was bestowed on Phùng Hưng, a national leader, in 791. Since the two kinship terms bố “father” and cái “mother” were written with the two Chinese characters 布 and 蓋, ordi-
narily meaning "cloth" and "cover", respectively, Nguyễn Văn Tố asserted that this was "evidence that nôm characters had been in existence in the eighth century." In his textbook on Vietnam's literary history, Dương Quảng-Hàm [1943:101] while repeating this reference but considering the problem of the origin of chữ nôm "one that could not yet be solved," cautiously said that "perhaps [his emphasis] the demotic script had already been in existence at the end of the eighth century." In his 1969 article, Trần Văn Giáp cited the anonymous author of an article "On Words" (Tự-học) from the book Việt-sử Lược-t szy 597. This person said that "Vietnamese characters appeared only 600 years after the Six Dynasties Period in the title Bố Cái Đại-vụtong and in the appellation Đại Cố Việt 大瞿越 given to the country under the Dinh, whereas the remainder of our language was boor-ish and bland." [Trần Văn Giáp 1969b:8]

2.3 In his comments on Trần Văn Giáp's 1969b article, Hoàng Thúc Trâm (penname Hoa Bằng) indicated [1971:60] that his colleague Đào Duy Anh had told him in a "small talk" that "chữ nôm could possibly have appeared since the T'ang period (7th-9th centuries), because under T'ang domination Chinese studies in Vietnam were greatly expanded and furthermore present-day Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation shows many traces of T'ang phonology." Hoàng Thúc Trâm himself modestly advanced a "shallow" theory that the nôm script had been first conceived even before Shih Hsieh's time, possibly during the administration of the two Eastern Han governors Nhâm Diên 壬延 and Tiễn Quang 錫光 in the first century A.D., that it took shape under the autonomous rule of Phùng Hưng in the eighth century, and that later "through the struggle of the people and the pressure of the masses" it further developed and grew from the Khúc dynasty (906–921) on. Hoàng affirmed that some system of writing must have been used in the difficult task undertaken by Khúc Thừa Hạo to organize the country into administrative units down to the village level, to legislate about land taxes and rentals, and to set up written records of population census and vital statistics [Hoàng Thúc Trâm 1971:60–61].

2.4. According to a fourth theory, chữ nôm made its appearance under the Trần dynasty, when Nguyễn Thuyên 阮誘 was said to use this native script to compose poetry and thư. In
Hải-dông Chí-lục 海東志略, Ngô Thời Nhiệm (1726-1780) recorded that "the writing system of our country started using the vernacular since (Nguyễn) Thuyên’s time." (我國文字多用國語自詮始).

This latter scholar received his doctorate under the reign of Emperor Trần Thái-tông (1225-1257). According to Đại-Việt Sử Ký Toàn-thụ 大越史記全書 in the fall of the Year of the Horse [1282], while holding the post of Minister of Justice, Nguyễn Thuyên was ordered by the emperor (Nhân-tông) to write a memorial and throw it down the river in order to drive away a crocodile which had come to the Red River. When the reptile left, the emperor allowed his minister to change his family name from Nguyễn 阮 to Hàn 韓, because a similar incident had occurred to the Chinese poet-scholar Han Yu" [768-824]. Thuyên was skilled in poetry and fu, and many people imitated him." [Vol. 2, Bk 5, p. 68]. The historian added, "Rules of prosody followed by poets in nôm today and known as Han rules dated from that time."

This led some French scholars to claim that Nguyễn Thuyên himself was the inventor of chữ nôm. Pelliot and Cadière [1904: 621, note] subscribed to the idea that the demotic script was invented at Nguyễn Thuyên’s time, when compositions in the vernacular were prospering. In his often quoted 1912 article, Henri Maspero confirmed what those two previous authors had said, and also revealed the existence of a stele discovered on Mount Đức-thuý (Hồ-thành-sơn), Ninh-binh Province. This inscription of 1343 was said to contain some twenty names of Vietnamese villages and hamlets in nôm characters [Maspero 1912:7, note 1].

2.5 According to still another theory, worthy of less credence, Phạm Huy-Hô wrote in the review Nam-phong that the Vietnamese people had learned Chinese characters and devised their own nôm script as early as under the Hùng-Bàng dynasty (2879–258 B.C.). At that early period of Vietnamese history, he said, chữ nôm was already used to record names of deities such as Ông Công, Ông Chậu, Chương Cá, Chàng Hai, etc. on their ceremonial tablets" [Phạm 1919:416].

2.6 During the past several decades, foreign and Vietnamese scholars have evaluated all
Nguyen Dinh-Hoa

five above-mentioned theories. They have done this while examining either the mechanics of the nôm script or some proposed readings of certain graphs found in works of Vietnamese folk literature.

Among several French "annamitisants" deeply interested in nôm studies right from the beginning, the Bishop of Adran, Pignau de Béhaine, was the author of an unpublished Vietnamese-Latin dictionary [1772] that contains nôm characters for both entries and illustrative examples: it was on the basis of this precious manuscript that Bishop Taberd later constructed his monumental Vietnamese-Latin dictionary published in 1838 [Nguyễn 1987]. Several early dictionaries of Vietnamese like Paulus Huỳnh-Tịnh Cua's monolingual one [1895-96] or the Vietnamese-French volumes by Bonet [1899-1900] and by Génibrel [1898] that supplied nôm characters provide fairly reliable evidence of their shapes at the end of the nineteenth century.

A. Chéon even authored a Cours de chữ nôm [no date] in addition to a textbook and a reader for the use of students of Vietnamese. Indeed in a lecture at the Ecole Coloniae in Paris on March 28, 1925, Cordier said, that to his knowledge, Chéon "reste le seul Européen qui se soit occupé des caractères nôm" [Cordier 1935:118]. Cordier expressed some doubt about the Sĩ Nhiếp theory -- since the scholar whom he quoted, Trương Vĩnh Ký [1888], had not indicated any reference, but had merely said that "the ideographic writing of the Chinese was definitely introduced into Annam and made obligatory under the reign of the learned king Sĩ-vương or Sĩ-Nhiệp [sic]" [1886:6] and that chữ nôm was "une écriture composée et idéophonétique particulière aux Annamites" and used "to write and represent the sounds of the spoken language" [8].

Cordier, noting both the Nguyễn Thuyền anecdote and the Họ-thành-sơn inscription, appeared to believe that the use of the demotic script developed itself at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century [Cordier 1935:117]. That chữ nôm was already used under the Trần dynasty is beyond dispute. Indeed, according to the book Hậu-dông Chữ-lộc, after Emperor Trần Anh-tông had given his daughter Huyền-Trân in marriage to the King of Champa in 1306, "several scholars, using the similar theme of the
wedding of a Han princess to a Hun sovereign, started composing poems in the Vietnamese language to make fun of the Viet-Cham union" [Cordier 1935:117].

Đại-Việt Sử ký Toàn-thù 大越史記全書 [Cao Huy Giu, transl., 1971 edition, Vol. 2, Bk. 5, p. 68] also recorded that in 1288, under the Trần, each time the Court issued an imperial proclamation, the hành-khiến 行遣 interpreters had the duty first to study its text in Chinese and then to explain both the sounds and the meanings (in Vietnamese) in order to help the population understand.

Everyone has agreed, on the other hand, that although Nguyễn Thuyên was considered the first to compose poetry in chữ nôm, he could not be the inventor of this script. As for the memorial which he allegedly composed, then cast into the river to drive away the crocodile, Thái Văn Kiệm (penname Tân Việt Điều), in a comparison between the Vietnamese text and Han Yǔ's text, included a photocopy of the former in nôm [1959: facing p.353]. But it is well known that the so-called Nguyễn Thuyên message was only a fabrication by Nguyễn Can Mông (1880–1954), who had it published in the review Tủ dân Văn-uyễn 四民文苑 [Trần Văn Giáp and others 1971:vol.1, p. 509].

The title Bố Cái Đại-vương, supposedly bestowed upon Phùng H Injectable and generally interpreted to mean "The Great King (who was like the people's) Father and Mother" [Nguyễn Văn Tố 1930, Dương Quảng-Hàm 1943, Nguyễn Văn Huyên 1944, etc], has recently been given new interpretations. André Haudricourt suggests that the first two characters 布蓋 should be read not bô and cái, but vua and cái, and that the title in question thus contained a repetition of the phrase "Great King" — Vua Cái Đại-vương [Haudricourt 1974, quoted in Francis 1977: 22]. I disagree with this on the ground that the nôm character for vua "king" has the element 王 on top, thus 王. Indeed Nguyễn Khắc Kham [personal communication 1978] gave the character 王 the reading bô instead, explaining that bô cái means "elderly leader of a tribe or of the whole country" (ông già dùng đầu bố-lặc hay cả nước), and is therefore similar to such titles as tù-trưởng, lão phó thần, đại trưởng lão 酉長, 老夫臣, 大長老, etc.

In any event that title given posthumously to Phùng H Injectable did not receive notice until
the publication of the historical annals D'ai-Việt Sư-ký Toàn-thù in 1749 under the Lê dynasty, and the stele dedicated to this leader and erected in 1390 at his temple in Cam-lâm village, Phúc-thọ District, Hà-tây Province, made no mention of it, either [Đào Duy Anh 1975:42].

The official name D'ai Cổ Việt 大瞿越 given by Đình Bệ-Lĩnh in 968 A.D. to a reunified Vietnam has been the subject of controversy, too. Such scholars as Lê Dữ, Hoàng Thúc Trâm, etc. thought that the middle character 瞿 in the country’s name, ordinarily rendered as cù in Sino-Vietnamese, is indeed a nôm character to be read cỡ with the meaning "big, great". Others did not agree, but could not explain what cù or cỡ means in that appellation.

Keith Taylor wrote that, in 1054 the third ruler of the Lý dynasty dropped the word cỡ and used only the name D'ai-Việt, but that the expression dãi-cỡ, according to him, is a hybrid form "that reflects a creative development of the local language used for political objectives" during the new period of independence [1983:281].

In a lecture on "Word Corruption in Vietnamese Under Chinese and French Rule " delivered at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale on September 25, 1978, Professor Nguyễn Khắc Kham offered quite a novel interpretation. "In my opinion," he said, " Cổ-Việt 瞿越 might have been the old Vietnamese spelling of the two Chinese graphs 瞿越 Ṭu-Việt. " Since the character 瞿 īu had two pronunciations in Archaic Chinese, namely *U and *KU, Nguyễn Khắc Kham articulated the hypothesis that the founder of the Đinh dynasty "might have used the Chinese character 瞿 cù instead of ìu 瞿 in order to avoid any possible confusion." Nguyễn Khắc-Kham also ventured another hypothesis as follows: 瞿瞿 Cù/Cổ Đâm was the family name of Buddha as transcribed from Sanskrit Gautama. Given the exceptionally vigorous development of Buddhism in Vietnam under the Đinh and the prominent role played by the Buddhist clergy at the court, I am inclined to think that D'ai Cổ Việt might also mean ' The Great Buddhist Country of Viet'. In this respect, let us not forget that one of Đinh Tiên-hoàng's five wives was named Cổ-quốc 瞿國 'Buddha's Country'. "[Nguyễn Khắc-Kham 1978]. As for Hoàng Xuân-Hân, he merely
Graphemic Borrowings from Chinese

gives to this word cõ the meaning "country" [1978:12].

In general, students of Vietnamese language and writing or Vietnamese literature and culture only discussed the mechanics of chữ nôm in passing [Wen Yu 1933, Wang Li 1958, Mineya 1972]. But some, as expected, looked for concrete evidence of the script, and therefore expressed serious doubts about the existence of it either during the Hông Bàng period [see 2.5], that is to say, before "Sĩ Nghiệp prohibited the use of nôm characters [Trương Vĩnh Ký 18??, as quoted by Cordier 1935], or under Sĩ Nghiệp’s administration [see 2.1]. The Bồ-Cái Đài-vưỡng theory [see 2.2] has been considered rather favorably, e.g. by Nguyễn Hữu Quy 1971. Typical is (Nguyễn Phước) Bưu-Câm’s opinion: in 1960, the chairman of Nôm Studies Department at the University of Saigon advanced the hypothesis that "perhaps chữ nôm was invented during the period between the eighth century and the tenth century, i.e. during the transitional period between proto-Vietnamese and pre-Vietnamese" [Bưu-Câm 1960a:355]. Citing two pieces of evidence — the title Bồ Cái Đài-vưỡng of 791 and the country name Đài Cồ Việt of 968, in which Han and nôm characters co-occur — Bưu-Câm argued that the creation of nôm graphs could not be accomplished in a short period or by any single individual, but was rather the labor of many people working over several generations. He then affirmed that "chữ nôm appeared after Sĩ Nghiệp’s time and before Nguyễn Thụyền’s time" [354–355].

Professor Chen Ching-ho, in his 1949 article written in Chinese (Vietnamese translation by Đoàn Khoạch 1963), maintained that chữ nôm could not have existed before the Lý period.

In connection with the latter period of Vietnamese history, the link between chữ nôm and Buddhist culture had been pointed out early by Liên Giang, who conclusively wrote that the demotic script could not have been created by either Sĩ Nghiệp or Nguyễn Thụyền, but rather by Buddhist monks, who needed it to say mass and to deliver sermons. According to him, "the use of nôm in private correspondence exchanged among the Buddhist clergy or among people who asked the priests to help them pen their letters, subsequently led minor yamen officials to follow suit and draft summons to village officials in the new
script, thus enhancing mutual comprehension and facilitating administration* [Liên Giang 1942:269]. He concluded that chữ nôm, already widely used under the Đinh and the Lý, was "first created by native or Chinese monks after Buddhism had spread into our country, around the end of the Five Dynasties and the beginning of the T'ang dynasty".

In 1961, Nguyễn Khắc-Kham himself said that chữ nôm "was perhaps burgeoning under the Lý in Buddhist monasteries, being used to translate Buddhist scriptures and probably somehow related to the woodblock printing business of that time" [75-76]. In this connection, the volume 禪苑集英 Thiền-uyên Tạp-anh on Vietnamese Zen mentioned that, for generations, the forefathers of the resident monk Tín Hóc (? - 1190) of a temple on Không-lô Mountain were engaged in the trade of woodblock print [Nguyễn Đông Chi 1942: 150]. This shows that the "cottage industry" of wood engraving had existed rather early in support religious and literary writings.

One cannot help agreeing with Bửu-Cẩm and Nguyễn Khắc-Kham that the Chinese-borrowed script developed as the product of local creativity over several generations before it became systematized in Nguyễn Thuyên's time. More recently, Nguyễn Khắc-Kham further commented that chữ nôm "had developed right at the time Buddhism was introduced into Giao-châu (third to fourth centuries A.D.) when a large number of venerable monks started translating the sutras and gathas" [personal communication 1979].

Material evidence of nôm characters in printed books or stone inscriptions being the crux of our discourse about this novel yet ancient script, we owe some scholars inside Vietnam recent studies available in book form. Đạo Duy Anh, the sinologist-lexicographer [Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1987], contributed in 1975 the first monograph on the origin, structure and evolution of chữ nôm. In it he argued cogently that this script formally appeared "only when the needs of society motivated people to create a sufficient number of graphs to be used in all aspects of life," i.e. soon after the country freed itself from Chinese rule, "especially under the Đinh and Earlier Lê dynasties and the beginning of the Lý dynasty" [Đào 1975:52]. The system, he went on, through its gradual and creative development during a few centuries, "became fairly complete at the time of Emperor Lý Cao-tông
Graphemic Borrowings from Chinese (1176–1210)", who in 1195 authorized civil service examinations based on all three religions — Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism [Dương Quảng-Hành 1943: 78]. Actually, the “oldest evidence” discussed in Đạo Duy Anh’s book and dated 1210 has to yield to the (scanty) evidence discovered in 1958: fishermen off the Đất Sơn seacoast that year found a bronze bell, identified as belonging to the Văn-bàn temple. Trần Huy Bá[1963] gave the date of this bell as 1076: among the Han characters on this object, there are two nôm characters  משמעות Hà denoting a plot of land that had been donated to the temple.

Frustrated because nobody had been able to locate the 1343 inscription which Maspero mentioned in his often quoted 1912 article, Đạo Duy Anh went through some 22,584 rubbings of steles collected by the Social Sciences Library in Hanoi. His persistent efforts paid off: the stele of Bảo-an Temple in Thập-miếu Village, Phúc-yên Province (nowadays Vĩnh-Phúc), a two-faced stone slab dated 1210, recounts the building of the temple as well as the gifts of ricelands by a number of neighboring villages, whose popular names, like all place names, were transcribed by means of nôm characters. The front bears such names of localities as Động Hấp, Động Châu, Động Nhe, Bối Diên, 同斡, 同纬, 同㘤, 潦田, etc. whereas the back side has names of ten donors, each name preceded by the classifier thằng. 偉. The 24 characters in question show the two main principles of nôm graphemics — the 假借 giã-lá and the 形聲 hình-thanh methods — with most of them (eighteen) following the former method.

The year after Đạo Duy Anh’s book was published, a book review mentioned an even older stone inscription, dated 1173: the tombstone at the grave of Lê Phượng-Thành, erected in the eleventh year of Chinh-long Bảo-úng of Emperor Lý Anh-tông at Hương-nôn Temple, Phú-thọ Province (nowadays Vĩnh-Phú). This stele contains at least six nôm characters for đâu đình, cửa ngõ, and bên sông, respectively 頭停, 舉午, 涟溝 [Trần Xuân Ngọc-Lan and Cung Văn Lộc 1976: 48]. Thus stone inscriptions do play an important part in helping to determine the date of appearance as well as the evolution of the demotic script [Lê Văn Quân 1981:14-15].

Continuing the work of Đạo Duy Anh, and following the phonological approach to
Nguyen Dinh-Hoa

Sino-Vietnamese (Hán-Việt) readings of Chinese-borrowed graphs, Nguyễn Tài Cấn argued that the nôm script could not have existed before the seventh or eighth century, but "could appear only at the time the country gained its independence, i.e. the eighth and ninth centuries" [1971:41]. Lê Văn Quán, who in 1973 had already presented the same argument in a journal article, pursued it even further in his 1981 monograph, where he additionally discussed the tones in Sino-Vietnamese [52–61]. Concentrating on the tonogenesis of Vietnamese, Lê subscribed to the Haudricourt theory that Vietnamese, originally a non-tonal language related to Mon-Khmer, later acquired three tones in the sixth century, then all six tones toward the twelfth century [Haudricourt 1954].

As for printed materials, in addition to Trần dynasty poems by Chu An, Nguyễn Sĩ Cố, etc. that had been lost, students of nôm are fortunate to have a few fu, chants and sutras preserved in Buddhist monasteries, and the 254 lyric poems by Nguyễn Trái (fifteenth century), then those of the Hồng-dúc period, or those by Nguyễn Bình Khíêm, followed by a considerable amount of works by later writers in nôm.

The four fu of the Trần dynasty contain indeed far more nôm characters than the three above-mentioned stone and bronze artifacts. They had been reprinted in a small book titled Thiên-tông Bấn-hạnh 禪宗本行, originally published at Hoa-yên Temple on Yên-tử Mountain (Yên-hưng District in present-day Quảng-ninh Province) in 1805, but reprinted by Monk Thanh-Hanh of Vinh-nghiêm Temple, Đức-la Village, Trí-an Canton, Lạng-giang District, Bắc-giang Province (nowadays Hà-Bắc) in 1932. From its Preface, one learns that its very author was the Venerable Monk Chân Nguyên, also known as Tự-Dắng (end of the seventeenth century) [Nguyễn Lang 1974: 251]. This precious little book contains eight texts, four of which are nôm pieces authored by Trần writers: two fu texts by Emperor Trần Nhân-tông (1279–1293) — the founder of the Bamboo Forest Zen sect — one fu by Zen master Huyền Quang — the third founder of the same sect — and one fu by Mặc Định Chi.

The fu on "Living down-to-earth but enjoying the Way", Củ-trần Lạc-dạo phủ 居廛樂道賦, had been briefly discussed in the 31st and last installment of "An attempt to write
the history of Vietnamese literature" Thự viết Việt-Nam văn-học-sự by Hoàng Thúc Trâm (penname Hoa-Bằng), in the review Tri-tân [1942]. Phạm Thảo Ngữ's textbook [1963, vol. 2] also mentioned it, and in his history of Vietnamese Buddhism [1974, repr.1977] Nguyễn Lang noted in Volume 1 [pp. 250–251] that a copy of Thiền-tông Bàn-hành is in the possession of Professor Hoàng Xuân-Hân of Paris, who had himself mentioned the Liên-hoa woodblock edition of 1745 in an article in Văn-Hành, the review of the Buddhist University in Saigon [1966]. Incidentally of this marvelous volume, there seem now to exist only two copies: that beautifully printed 1745 edition by Nun Diệu-Thuần of Thăng-long (present-day Hanoi) which belongs to Professor Hoàng, and the 1932 Vĩnh-nghiêm edition that was put at Đạo Duy Anh's disposal in 1973 by Mr. Cao Xuân Huy [Đạo 1975: 7], thus enabling him to establish the identity of the authors of four pertinent nôm texts and to write a detailed analysis of the mechanics and evolution of nôm characters.

The sinologist-lexicographer also discusses his experience in deciphering nôm texts, in interpreting puzzling characters, and in transcribing several major narratives into the Roman script. In the Appendix, he contrasts Tây nôm and Vietnamese nôm, using the study of the former characters by Nguyễn Văn Huyễn [1941]. On the system of Thọ nôm characters, Chen Ching-ho [1963: 768–772] made a comparison of the Thọ characters with the system used in T'ai ping District, Kwangsi Province and described by Wen Yu [1936; see 2.1]

3. THE MECHANICS OF CHỮ NÔM

The above review of different theories regarding the origin of chữ nôm has given an inkling of how southern or Vietnamese characters were used often right alongside Han or Chinese characters in a coherent text.

Đạo Duy Anh's meticulous étude de textes [1975] makes his monograph a highly useful combination textbook-workbook, and must have inspired Lê Văn Quán, another
nôm expert, to produce a similar tool in 1981. Dao provides an illustration of how certain characters taken from the four early fû samples as well as from the narrative Hoa-tiên kỳ 花箋記, from the story of "The Faithful Wife of Khoái-châu" in the collection Truyện-ký Mạn-lực 傳奇漫錄, and from the preface of Chí-nam Ngôc-âm Gìái-nghĩa 指南玉音解義, should be read — and why such or such a reading makes better sense. Using the same pedagogical device, Lê Văn Quân introduces [1981:198–221] excerpts from a variety of books: 新編傳奇漫錄增補解音集註Tân-biên Truyện-ký Mạn-lực Tằng-bồ Gìái-âm Tạp-chú, 指南玉音解義Chí-nam Ngôc-âm Gìái-nghĩa, and even a book of recipes of traditional eastern medicine, 十三方加減Thập-tam-phương gia-giảm, all three of them appearing in the 17th century and representing the third period in his history of chir nôm.

We will now address the question of how nôm characters are structured, and what changes they have undergone through the history of the Vietnamese language.

In the preface to his Tư-học Tồăn-yêu 字學纂要, a dictionary of three thousand Chinese characters commonly known as Tam-thiên-tú 聖三千年字解音[Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1973; 1989], Ngô Thời-Nhiên (1746–1803) said, "The six rules of character formation have been transmitted to us over the four seas people are following the same kind of script," thus hinting that nôm characters also followed the "six scripts" [Trần Văn Giáp 1969b: 14–16]. Actually, however, creators of chir nôm used primarily phonetic compounds ( hình-thanh ), false borrowings ( giã-tá ), and in some rare cases logical combinations (hội-ý), but no imitative pictures ( tướng-hình ), indicative symbols ( chí-suơ ) or turnings of meaning ( chuyễn-chú ) at all: see for instance Wang Li [1958:382].

Huỳnh-Tỉnh Cữa, author of Đại-nam Quâc-âm Tư-vi 大南國音字彙, a monumental monolingual dictionary which was initially meant to be a (Vietnamese-French) bilingual dictionary [Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1987], discussed the structure of nôm characters as follows in his preface in Vietnamese and in French:

"In constructing nôm characters, it is often necessary to use real characters and unreal ones in combination in order to represent words. The real character, usually placed on the left side, indicates the meaning or serves as evidence; the unreal one, usually placed on the
Graphemic Borrowings from Chinese

right side, indicates the sound or imitates the pronunciation. The real characters have been borrowed from a dictionary of Chinese characters according to their respective radicals or categories, for example, nước (water) written 诺(水+若); lửa (fire) written 烈(火+吕); or the radical (mouth) 口 is used in mếng (mouth), in 嗅 (speak, say), etc. Hundreds and thousands of them are designed that way. As for words that have different meanings but sound very similar to Vietnamese, e.g. ai 埃 (dust) used to transcribe ai (who?), their characters are used as they are. Sometimes the graph 口 or a diacritical mark is added to show that it is a nôm character. The vulgar characters do not obey absolute rules. However there are “learned” nôm characters, which we must use as standards.” [Huỳnh-Thịnh Paulus Cửu 1895: iii]

In the French translation by C. Cotel of that Preface, one reads: “Si aucune règle certaine ne préside à la formation des caractères vulgaires, il en est cependant qui sont tracés avec méthode et habileté. Ce sont ceux que nous devons imiter.” [vii]


Nguyễn Tài Cẩn & Xtankevich [1976, repr. 1985] offered a classificatory scheme that uses a binary system to discriminate seven methods of creating nôm characters. renamed A, B, C, D, E, F and G in Figure 1.

The A, B and C characters are borrowed from regular written Chinese, the two subclasses A1 and A2 borrowing both graph and sound, and the two subclasses C1 and C2 borrowing just the graph to represent a homophone or near-homophone of the Sino-Viet-
namese form, and making up the majority of nôm characters of Type I. Class B of abbreviated graphs has only around forty examples.

Of the new creations (Type II), Class D includes "derived" forms that contain a diacritic "to warn the reader that this is not a case of C": thus, mài < should be read not mủi, but mōi "new; recent(ly)"; mọc < should be read not mocz, but mocz "to grow"; rỗ < should be read not nhưng, but nhưng "[plural marker]".

Characters of Class E, though offering a rare pattern, represent an extremely interesting case for historical linguistics. Most of them reflect initial consonant clusters, a feature peculiar to seventeenth-century Vietnamese as recorded in Alexandre de Rhodes’ Vietnamese–Portuguese–Latin dictionary of 1651 [Gregerson 1969]. Examples are /bl-/ , /kl-/ and / ? r-/ (Maspero’s /r/) as in

\[\begin{array}{llll}
\text{trái} & "fruit" & < *blai & (ba + lai) \\
\text{trán} & "forehead" & < *blan & (ba + lan) \\
\text{tráng} & "moon" & < *blang & (ba + lăng) \\
\text{treo} & "to hang" & < *kleo & (cũ + liéu) \\
\text{tròn} & "round" & < *klon & (cũ + luân) \\
\text{trọn} & "complete" & < *klon & (cũ + luân) \\
\text{trọng} & "drum" & < *klong & (cũ + lông) \\
\text{sâm} & "thunder" & < *?ram & (cũ + làm) \\
\text{sang} & "noble" & < *?rang & (cũ + lang)
\end{array}\]

eetc.

The class of hôi-ý ( hui i ) 音意 characters (F) is a small one and suggests the kokuji forms in Japanese (峰 toge "mountain pass", 榜 sakaki "curya ochnacea", 株 mori "grove at a shrine") [Kono Rokuro 1969 as cited in Nguyễn Khách Kham 1974]. These characters are said to number nearly twenty [Nguyễn Tài Căn & Xtankevich 1976: 23, note 17]. Typical examples are 香 tròi giòi (天 + 上) "sky"; 企 trùm (人 + 上) "leader, boss"; 令 seo (人 + 下) "village crier"; 並 răm (望 + 五) "15th day of month"; 余 or 來 or mây (人 + 水 or 小 or 小) "a few"; 並 chây (遅 + 其) "late"; 进 mudi (し + 什) "ten". Đào Duy Anh also cites a sixth exam-
Graphemic Borrowings from Chinese

I. BORROWED

Sino-VN

A1

才

tài

(TVN) tight

A2

符

bié

ś

same

sound

non-meaning

graph + sound

Sino-VN

B

lâm

vi

‘do’

‘talent’

‘amulet’

C

ròi

trái

‘sky’

‘recent’

‘know’

D

mői

biết

mèt

‘fruit’

‘frail’

‘ba’

E

qua

thao + cò

戈

quốc

‘seize’

‘grass’

‘古’

F

ch. + ch.

rad + ch.

G1

找

G2

co

II. NEW CREATIONS

compound

sound + meaning

s + s

m + m

‘derived’

NOM CHARACTERS

Figure 1. Nguyên Tài Cấn’s classificatory scheme.
ple: sánh (並\+多) "to compare", but it is actually a phonetic compound (hình-thanh) character, in which *phlek > bîq > sanh [Vuong Loc 1973]. The character mạt for mạt does not follow the hôi-ý method, but is rather a case of fianchie [Wang Li 1958: 385]. Trần Xuân Ngọc-Lan & Cung Văn Lộc also list such well known characters as đế trong "space above", trù dưới "space below", tìm nhôm "to look, peek" [1976:23] while Nguyễn Tài Cẩn & Xtankevich contribute chuôi "string", lũ "exhausted", and trăm "(to look) furtively" [1976:23].

The compound characters which make up subclasses 1 and 2 of Class G consist of a signific and a phonetic element. The former element may be a radical or a whole graph. Đào Duy Anh gave examples of G1 characters, saying that chu nöm makes use of over 60 radicals including lồng "big" and xa "chariot". Concerning the former element, one can argue, as Wang Li did [386] that this is a radical, which appears in lón, giò and sang. However, it is found in E characters instead, as a phonetic first member of an initial */kl-/ . As for the use of xa in the nöm system, it is a good instance of gid-tá characters later becoming hình-thanh ones:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{trước} & \quad \text{"space in front"} & \text{nôm} > \text{鞭} > \text{鞭} ; \\
\text{sau} & \quad \text{"space in back"} & \text{姜} > \text{鞭} > \text{鞭} ; \\
\text{lui} & \quad \text{"to step back"} & \text{雷} > \text{鞭} > \text{鞭} .
\end{align*}
\]

Schneider [1979], paying attention to the interaction between graphic shape, phonetic form, and meaning, distinguishes three broad categories of chu nöm: those borrowed from Chinese, those newly created, and those having the same initial consonants. In the first category he includes Sino-Vietnamese words, nöm words, phonetic loans, and semantic loans. His second category comprises five subgroups, including "agrégats logiques" (hôi-ý) and "complexes phonétiques" (hôi-âm). His unique contribution consists in pointing out characters created through the fian-chie method, and in the third category characters representing reduplications.
In his monograph, Lê Văn Quán distinguishes between six types of characters A, B, C, D, E, and F, that are simply borrowed from the Sino-Vietnamese repertory, on the one hand [1981:86–88], and on the other hand, eight other types, that are created by combining either two elements (as in G, H, I, and J), or a graph and a diacritic (as in K and L), or by using abbreviations (as in M and N) [88–93] [see Figure 2]:

| A | 材 | tài "talent": Sino-Vietnamese tài |
| B | 务 | mùa "season": SVN vụ |
| C | 肝 | gan "liver": SVN can |
| D | 腋 | nách "armpit": SVN dịch |
| E | 没 | mòt "1": SVN mọt |
| F | 别 | biệt "to know": SVN biết |
| G | 晏 | trăng "moon": [巴 SVN ba + SVN lăng] |
| H | 全 | trùm "(village) leader": [人 nhân + 上 thượng] |
| I | 驱 | tanh "[fish] smelly": [月 nhục + 星 tinh] |
| J | 蒜 | cỏ "grass": [草 thảo + 古 cỏ] |
| K | 矽 | phên "bamboo partition": [片 phien + 音 diacritic] |
| L | 咭 | lân (phân) "[hair] sparse": [口 diacritic + 各 lân] |
| M | 毛 | mòt "1": abbreviation of 没 |
| N | 偳 | làm "to do, work": abbreviation of 為 vi. |

The latest classificatory scheme is provided by Nguyễn Ngọc San, in Book 4 of a four-part textbook on Hán-Nôm [1987:184–227]. Starting from a basic list of ten typical nôm characters, he ends up with fourteen types [see Figure 3]:
Figure 3. Nguyễn Ngọc San's classificatory scheme

Nôm characters

Phonetic

Without adjustment

- Meaning
  - Sino-VN sound
  - non-Sino-VN sound

- Sound only (Sino-VN)
  - Modified Sino-VN

With adjustment

- Signal
- Initial consonant
- Associative
- Meaning in Han

Non-Phonetic

One-element
- Semantic meaning
- Structural phon.
- Area

Two-element
- tai
- mùa
- mốt
- biết
- mủa
- khe
- trắng
- vo'
- giày
- gần
- đất
- ch'in
- trời
- lôi
Since the first four types (1 to 4) are direct borrowings, the remaining ten types involve different ways of prompting a reader to give the character a slightly different pronunciation (5 to 12) or to rely entirely on the ideograms (13 and 14).

We can observe that, although among Nguyễn Ngọc San’s first four types, the fourth one, 别, to be read biểt instead of biết, does not quite belong to the “complex” group, his scheme, nevertheless, offers tightness and comprehensiveness, when we consider that Vietnamese syllables overwhelmingly outnumber Sino-Vietnamese syllables (3,525 vs 1,310) [Nguyễn Ngọc San 1987:189].

Though both the classification offered by Lê Văn Quân in 1979 and that offered by Nguyễn Ngọc San in 1987 are more detailed than the one which Nguyễn Tài Cẩn and Xtankevich first introduced in 1976 (and repeated in 1985), I consider the latter scheme adequate in its tree-diagram representation of the mechanics of chú nôm.

4. THE EVOLUTION OF CHỮ NÔM
In retracing apparent trends in the history of the development of chữ nôm, we have noted the role of diacritical marks and abbreviations. One mark is often called đầu cá or đầu nhập-nhány and appears on the right side of a character, to which a slightly off pronunciation should be given:

mái yielding 賣 < mơi "new"; những yielding 仍 < nhằng "[plural]"; mọc yielding 木 < mọc "to grow"; côté yielding 骨 < (cô)カテゴリ化 "orphaned"; ly yielding 禮 (song) le "however"; lang yielding 郎 < lảng "quiet"; bán giắc yielding 半角 < bán chac "to sell and barter"; âm yielding âm 音 "to try, feel out"; ní yielding nầy 尼 "this", etc. Đào also mentions instances where this diacritic is "erroneously" written as 司 as in gững 託 and vui 翁, or as 巨 as in lang 蕭 and vương 龍 [Đào 1975:93].

Actually the diacritic đầu cá 不 is different from the đầu nhány : đầu or độ is written at this. Nguyễn Ngọc San mentions the diacritic 不 found in 我, 𠇳, and 𠇵 nghe in Buddhist texts, and the diacritic 不 found in 仆 buội, 証 cha, 𪠕 cấn, 善 khen, and 女: 吳 thanh thời, found in Nhật thap từ hiệu diện-ca. Both Phật-thuyết and Chí-nam Ngọc-âm have the diacritic used in 不 or 不 for vua : it later became 司 as in gững, and 司 vua.

Regarding the mark 口, found in such characters as va 吧, hản 翰, 𠇱 others, it has been said to resemble the 口 radical found in 咖, for example [Wang Li 384]. We are tempted to think that it is rather a special diacritic placed on the left to direct the reader to substitute rt for /l/, as in ra 喔, rể 喔, tròi 喔, etc. [Đào 1975:87]. The two co-authors Vũ Văn Kính and Nguyễn Văn Khánh mention a mark 不 found in 善 nhau, ordinarily written 善 [1970:3]

Professor Hoàng Xuân-Hân, who mentioned seven marks in 1953, has now listed eight different ones: 不, 多, 巨, 司, 𠉇, 不, 巴, and 車. The first one is often written as 不. The fourth one was later replaced by the third one. The last three are used to indicate respectively the first consonant in the initial clusters /ml-, bl- and sl- [Hoàng 1978:52-53].

In some rare cases, one dot is omitted from a character, as in the two reduplicative forms 不 不 khê-khá "[of voice] drawling and hoarse" and 不 不 khênh-khàng "to walk slowly like an important person" [Nguyễn and Vũ 1917: viii], found in a poem by Cao Bả
Nguyen Dinh-Hoa

Quật, or in 亭 kềnh-càng. These examples remind us of the two characters 兵兵 used in Chinese to write ping-pong.

Nguyễn Ngọc San discusses such elements as 巴,波,可,巨,⬳,車,阿,which are used to signal the first member of an initial consonant cluster /b-, k-, m-, etc./ as in trẫm 稀, trẳng 點, but which may be omitted, as in trấm 林<蠢 or in trước 翠<聳, or even replaced by the diacritic _UTF8_ as in trái 僅<擬, trấm 橋<聳. He also says that the element ba (written 巴 or 波) is used to indicate preglottalization as in /9 b, 9 d, 9 j and 9 g:/ ðễlòng 勞 for Chinese 志心, duố́t 穴 for Chinese 習, ghê thay 波加世 for Chinese 無量, dãi gay 对阿尔 for Chinese 苦餓[202-203], and that both 巨 and 車 are used to represent the phoneme /k/ in the syllable-initial cluster /kC/- [203-204]. For the first time, Nguyễn Ngọc San mentions the element 巨 found in Phật-thuyết (which suggests the change /kr- > ks- > s-/) [204]. He agrees with Professor Hoàng Xuân-Hần that the element 麻 is the first member of the cluster /ml-/ as in 旁 mlôi, written initially with a double graph 麻例 for Chinese 言行.[1987:204]

Two abbreviated forms of high frequency in nôm texts are ꞌ used for làm, and ꞌ for lalâ ꞌ羅. The former is often said to stand for the character 爲vi, but according to Professor Hoàng, the change has been instead from 濫 to ꞌ[Hoàng 1978:54]. But these shorthand-like forms are outnumbered by countless abbreviations; Cordier spoke of "formes régulières" such as dên 鎮, which following the loi du moindre effort became the form 且, or 有固 for có becoming shortened to 固, with the signific sometimes left out by the scribe, as in 萌<縹mành "window blinds", 斡<洛lần "to dive", or 童<撣chàng "guy", etc. Actually, however, the transition has rather been in the reverse direction: dên 典>鎭, or 且>鎮 "to arrive"; mổi 買>貢 "only then"; dội 代>改 "generation"; mãi 失>訖 "to lose"; tuổi 岁>歳, "year of age"; thầy 体>覽 "to see", etc. Father Hồ Ngọc Cân, writing in 1923, cited the sentence Cổ xúta nay, which was first written thus 固初尼 by Catholic missionaries, but later on changed to 個習尼 or 個習尼 with a view to indicating the signific as well.

Very often, part of that signific in the donor character is left out:

фт bàn "dirty" <汚; 嘴cay "peppery-hot" <該 cai; 稔 châu "grandchild, nephew" <孫

--- 408 ---
Graphemic Borrowings from Chinese
tôn + 韻chiều; 嬰chữ "pregnant" < 淤chữ; 朕chột "suddenly" < 私trạt; or 坦đất "earth" < 但đất; etc.

Sometimes, an abbreviation turns up as the phonetic element suggesting the pronunciation of the parent character that yielded it originally:

崔, abbreviated form of 時thì, appears as signific in 嘉ngày "day", in 婕or 婕người / ngài "man; sir", and in 婕ngài "silkworm moth" (Cf. ngai 爲). In another example, the part 能< 能năng, is used as signific in 能hay "good, proficient", but as phonetic in 能năng "to raise".

Fluctuations in the design of the script have led scholars to discussions of its strengths and weaknesses [Đặng Quang-Hàm 1942, Bù Cẩm 1960, among others], but have also enabled specialists to trace the evolutionary history of nôm characters. Đào Duy Anh [1975] distinguished three periods: the first period is represented by the Lý stele and the four Trần fu texts, with Nguyễn Trãi's Quốc-âm Thi-tập and the collection of poems Hồng-dực Quốc-âm Thi-tập written under Lê Thánh-tông, and Chí-nam Ngọc-âm by Hương-chân Pháp-tình representing the second period. Truyện-kỳ Mạn-lục Giai-âm of the Mạc dynasty was chosen by him to represent the transition from the second period to the third period. During the latter period, the nôm characters used in Hoa-tiền ký (end of the Lê dynasty) and Đại-nam Quốc-sự Điện-ca (Nguyễn dynasty) are considered by Đào Duy Anh as typical of the script before its demise as a writing system.

Lê Văn Quán [1981:172] distinguishes four periods: (a) the period represented by the stone inscriptions of the Lý and Trần dynasties; (b) the Early Lê period, with Nguyễn Trãi's Quốc-âm Thi-tập; (c) the third period represented by Trần-biện Truyện-kỳ Mạn-lục Giai-âm, Chí-nam Ngọc-âm, Thập-tam phượng Gia-giận; and (d) the fourth period represented by Tam Thiên Tự "The Book of Three Thousand Characters" by Ngô Thời-Nhiệm [Nguyễn Đình-Hoà, ed. 1989], Đại-Nam Quốc-sự Điện-ca, and The Tale of Kiều [Schneider 1986].

5. THE ORIENTATION OF RESEARCH
5.1 Of research tools needed for the study of chữ nôm, Duong Quang-Hàm four decades or so ago recommended the compilation of a dictionary of demotic characters with the following ideal quality:


Thanks to the industriousness of scholars old and young in both zones of the country during the partition and since 1975, we have had several of those dictionaries or lists of nôm characters: Trần Đức Rất 1967; Chen 1970; Vũ Văn Kính & Nguyễn Văn Khánh 1970; Nguyễn Quang Xuyên & Vũ Văn Kính 1971; Viên Ngọc-ngữ-học 1975. Overseas there is the recent dictionary by Japanese professor Takeuchi 1988. Whereas this excellent compilation lists the characters in alphabetical order, with variant forms [pp. 1-632] and cross references to the characters themselves [pp. 633-694], it does not provide the literary sources for the citations. Schneider (penname Xuân-Phúc), who has translated several works of Vietnamese literature into French and also written books and articles on chữ nôm, has completed the compilation of about 6,500 nôm words showing graphemic, semantic and phonological changes in Vietnamese between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, and listing separately 1,000 nôm words of Han origin, i.e. those "directly borrowed from Han prior to the birth of Sino-Vietnamese forms".

Despite the usefulness of such research tools, Professor Hoàng Xuân-Hán, who has himself edited and annotated a large number of nôm texts — both poetry and prose — currently thinks that dictionaries of chữ nôm constitute only works of compilation and would not really be of great use to readers of nôm. He is of the opinion that "perhaps only a contrastive list of initial phonemes in nôm and Hán would be of greater help to research workers" [personal communication 1979]. He has made such a bảng hổ-chiếu của âm-tố
The late scholar of nôm, Maurice Durand, wrote as follows:

"L'étude des textes nôm de la littérature vietnamienne présente en plus de l'intérêt littéraire et philosophique un intérêt linguistique qui touche à la sémantique vietnamienne et à la phonétique comparée des langues du Sud-Est Asiatique ou par rapport à la langue chinoise."


5.2 In particular, the Buddhist work titled Thiền-tông Bàn-hành, to which Professor Hoàng had devoted an earlier article in Issue 15 of the review Văn-Hành [Saigon 1966], has now been meticulously deciphered and annotated [1978-1980], thus illustrating a socio-cultural fact -- the role played by Buddhist monasteries in ancient Vietnam in the preservation and dissemination of nôm literature more than five centuries ago -- and a literary factor -- the importance of nôm texts of the Trần-Lê period. This socio-cultural fact and this literary factor have definitely stimulated research activities both inside Vietnam and overseas thanks to the writings of such philologists and lexicographers as Đạo Duy Anh 1975, Hoàng Xuân-Hãn 1978, Vũ Văn Kính 1978, Nguyễn Tài Cẩn 1971, Lê Văn Quán 1981, etc.

5.3 In his introduction to his French translation of Kim-Thạch Ký-duyên 金石奇緣 by Bùi Quang Nghĩa, P. Midan spoke of the hostility encountered by the users of chữ nôm, who were confined to the creation of "popular novels and plays" [1934:13]. Midan said that that innovation "portait atteinte à leur prestige [the prestige of the real scholars] en mettant
à la portée d’un plus grand nombre un moyen de transmettre la pensée. Elle menaçait aussi la toute puissance de l’Empereur car elle allait permettre la diffusion d’idées nouvelles” [1934: 12], just as “the country of Annam had no Chaucer to impose a language that was being formed” [13].

Indeed the rulers had always been “rather afraid of the effect that works in the vernacular could have on the people” [Cadière & Pelliot 1904:621; note 3]. An imperial order of 1718 complained that “recently troublemakers have taken vulgar sentences from tales in the national language, and, without any distinction between what could be done and what should not be done they had them engraved on woodblocks, then printed and sold. That is something that must be prohibited. Henceforth all those who own in their homes either printing blocks or printed copies of such books must turn them in to the mandarins so that they may examine them and destroy them completely” [Cadière & Pelliot 1904:621, note 3, citing 歷朝雜紀Lịch-trieu Tap-Kiệt, 2.1718].

This policy of linguistic and literary proscription is a significant aspet of language planning and language treatment that could be probed further in its political overtones.

5.4 The interest presented by chủ nôm, however, can be just strictly philosophical and literary. After pointing out the difficulty in reading a nôm text, since “one must be thoroughly conversant with Vietnamese in order to recognize when a ‘perfectly good Chinese grapheme’ is doing duty as the representative of a semantically totally unrelated Vietnamese morpheme,” the late David Ray, a veteran student of Vietnamese philology, went on to say that “generally speaking, the study of chủ nôm phonetic compounds is chiefly of use for the light it sheds on earlier pronunciation of the purely Vietnamese element in the lexicon or wordstock of Vietnamese.” [Ray 1979: 76] The several book reviews and analytical articles which paid attention to the retention of old Vietnamese sounds in early nôm characters have revealed a number of archaic Vietnamese words (used in poems by Nguyễn Trãi, Nguyễn Bình Khiệm, and others before and after them) as well as certain plausible readings for some characters, for examples song viết sữ [see Nguyễn Đình Hoà 1985], oc [Trần Xuân Ngọc-Lan & Cung Văn Lực 1976], Dinh Gia Khánh 1978–79], to name just a couple of cases. Studies of Vietnamese consonantism by Gaston Nhan 1967
and by Lê Quán 1972, and of Vietnamese tones by Lê Văn Quán 1972 seem to point to the right direction.

The objective of a vast study and research program must be to collect and collate the valuable texts, to study graphemic variants thoroughly, and to analyze doubtful cases in order to reestablish each author's text: it is perhaps impossible now to go back to the original and authentic text edited during his or her own lifetime and possibly reviewed by him/herself. But we should endeavor to lay our hands on at least a text that best approximates and reflects the original composition. In this area, scholars in Vietnam have had worthy accomplishments, sometimes with the help of textual finds and epigraphic evidence — the Hán-Nôm Commission in Hanoi has completed a 21-volume bibliography of 20,797 rubbings of stone inscriptions. The recent establishment in Hanoi of an Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies for both teaching and research was a happy event for nôm studies, and we are all grateful for its several publications. Outside Vietnam, French and Vietnamese scholars working in France are more privileged than those working in the USA and elsewhere thanks to remarkable library resources and the fine tradition of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient and of the Société des Etudes Indochinoises. In time it is expected that erudite studies in the series of nôm texts within the "Collection de Textes et Documents sur l'Indochine" will continue to appear in Europe (some reprint collections have been published in Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China) to support and supplement efforts by native scholars and teachers to show off that beautiful corner of the fragrant garden of Vietnamese literature.

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安子山林，陈朝禅宗

Thiên-Tông Bàn-Hành, Thirteenth century

A
174 [Bảo-kính Cánh-giói 47]

Tuy rằng bốn bé cùng anh tam,
Có kẻ hiền-lành, có kẻ phạm.
Nhữ thơ dã đánh nhiều sự lỗi,
It ăn thời lại ít người làm.
Xa-hoa ở rộng nennie khó,
Tranh-canh làm hèn bởi tham.
Kì thường nọ, đại náo có dư,
Người hàm, ta thiệt, mỗi hậu cam.

Úc-trại Nguyên Trại
(Quốc-âm Thị-tập 國音詩集)
Fifteenth century

All men are brothers living by the four seas—
yet some are meek and gentle, some act wild.
He who talks much says much that will offend.
Eat less and you'll need fewer feeding you.
Spendthrifts live high and fall on days of want,
Contestants fight and feud because of greed.
A tug-of-war drags on, for rope breaks not.
Give way a bit—all will be well again.

(Nguyễn Sanh Thông, translator)
45 re alios in scienfia.
blōi: scen, calumni, i. mat
blōi: o sol; solis, sū blōi:
lyarcu da velha: iris, idis-mou
blōi: final de tormenta; sig-
gnum tempestatis in celo;
blōi, máblōi, matiói:
diabo que aparece de noite;
diabolus nocturnus.
blon: metet por dentro:
intromitto, is.
blon; nóblon ngot: fal-
lar mal d'outrem por de trés:
murmurare in absentia, nóblon
ngot, idem.
blon: inteiro, tudo; inte-
ger, gra, grum, totus, a.vm.
giu dao cho blon: guardar
a leyl inteiramente; integrē
legem servare; blon dō: iota-
da a vida; per totam vi-
tam.
blop, vide blāp.
blōt: inteiro; integer,
gra, grum.
blōtngāy: dīa inteiro; in-
tegra dies, nóblō miō:
salar inteiro até o cabo; in-
tegrum sermonem profer-
re.
blōt: plantar-semear; plan-
to, as, lāmino, as, blōt blōt
cāy: planter arbores; plan-
tar arbores, blōt blot hāt:
sēmen, pesides: sūminarē,
sēmen.
blōt mōi: beisōs virados;
labia dilicta; blōt mūi: na-
ris revítado; nafus simūs.
blōu, blōu cāy: plantār
arbores; plantare arbores.
blōu lāo: sōberbo; arco
gans, tis, blāo, idem.
blōu nūa: canudo da ca-
vaque fica entendu e nó: in-
ternodium, iï.
blōu: cousa fia não cor-
rupta; integra res non de-
prauata, gao blōu, arrós que
eblōu: casa fia minímē
corrupta; ca blōu: peixe sōo
não corrupto: integer & cor-
ruptione carens pilcis.
blūc, tāblūc xuāng: vi-
rarse a embarcação; intertii
& immergi nauim. glō blūc
cāy: o vento arrancar & vivar
arbores com a rati pera cima;
eradicari arbores & cuerti vi
venti.
blui: assar sobre as brasas;
torrere in prunis, nūāng
blui, idem.
blūoč, tāblū blūoč;
cabelo desconcertado; impexi
capilli, blúōng:

A page from Dictionary Annaminicum Lusitanum et Latinum (1651) by Alexandre de Rhodes
Graphemic Borrowings from Chinese

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