Chữ nôm or the former Vietnamese script
and its past contributions
to Vietnamese literature

Chữ nôm (Chữ 'script,' and nôm < nam 'south, Vietnamese') is the name given by the Vietnamese to one of their two former systems of writing created by the modification of the Chinese characters. It was called so, as opposed both to Chữ Hán or the Han Chinese script 1) and to Chữ Nho or the script of Vietnamese confucianist scholars. In the latter connotation, it means the demotic or vulgar script in traditional Vietnam.2)

The date of its invention has not been so far established beyond controversy. According to Ngô Thị Nhâm 吳時任 (1726-1780) "our National language was most used from Thuyên." 3) Thuyên was Nguyễn Thuyên 阮詮, a scholar who lived at the end of the thirteenth century, under the Trần 陳 dynasty. "He received his doctorate under the reign of Emperor Trần Thái Tông 陳太宗 (1225-1257). In the fall of 1282, while holding the post of Minister of Justice, he was commissioned by Emperor Trần Nhân Tông 陳仁宗 to write a message to a crocodile which had come to the Red River. After his writing drove the animal away, the emperor allowed him to change his family name from Nguyễn 阮 to Hàn 韓, because a similar incident had occurred before in China to the poet-scholar Hàn Yu 韓愈 (768-824). The anecdote was related in Khâm định Việt-sử Thông-giam Cương-mục 欽定越史通鑑綱目, 7.26a 4) according to which, Hàn Thuyên 韓詮 was skilled in writing Shih fu 詩賦, and many people took model after him.5)

On the basis of these facts, Hàn Thuyên was claimed to be the inventor of Chữ nôm. Such was the opinion of P. Pelliot 6) and H. Maspero. The latter who shared P. Pelliot's views, also mentioned a stele discovered in Hộ Thành sơn 護城山, Ninh Bình province 寧平省, North Vietnam.7) This stele bore an inscription dating from the year 1343 and on which could be read twenty Vietnamese village and hamlet names in Chữ nôm.

The above hypothesis has not been accepted without reserve by other scholars. Nguyễn văn Tố presumed that Chữ nôm had probably existed as early as at the end of the eighth century when the title of Bố Cái Đại Vương 布蓋大王 (Father and mother of the people) was given by his successor and his subjects to Phùng Hưng 馮興, who, in 791, overthrew the then Chinese governor and seized upon the Protectorate of Annam.8) Such was also the opinion of Dương Quảng Hàm in his Short history of Vietnamese literature.9) A third hypothesis was advanced in 1932 by another Vietnamese scholar, Sở Cương, who tried to prove that Chữ nôm dated back from Shih-Hsieh 什軒 (187-226 A.D.). His arguments rested mainly on a statement by a Vietnamese confucianist scholar under the reign of Emperor Trư-Dức 穀德, known under the name of Nguyễn văn San 阮文珊 and the pseudonym of Văn-Da cu-sī 文多居士. In his book entitled Đại-Nam Quốc-ngũ 大南國語, this scholar stated that Shih Wang 什王, was the first to try translating Chinese Classics into Vietnamese by using the Chinese characters as phonetic symbols to transcribe Vietnamese native words. Among the difficulties allegedly encountered by
Shih Hsieh in his attempts, he quoted two examples: *sui chiu* (the osprey) and *yang táo* (the carambola or willow peach), to which he did not know what kind of bird and what kind of fruit might correspond in Vietnamese. Só Cuông subscribed to Văn-Dà cur-sí’s opinion, although he regretted that this author did not give any references to his statement. In support of it, he put forward the following arguments:

1) At the time of Shih Hsieh, when the first Vietnamese did Chinese studies, they could understand only through the Vietnamese language and their Chinese teachers must have used such Chinese characters as having sounds similar to the Vietnamese words to teach the Vietnamese how to read some Chinese characters. On the other hand, as the Chinese sounds and symbols could not transcribe all the Vietnamese native words, the then Vietnamese students must have tried to fill the vacancies by combining together various components of the Chinese characters to form new characters on the basis of such principles of Chinese writing as *Hsiai shêng* 諧聲, *chiah chieh* 假借, and *hui-i* 會意. It is in this way that Chữ nôm was likely to have been devised.

2) Furthermore, Shih Hsieh was a native of Kuang-Hsin 廣信, where, according to the *Ling wai tai ta* 嶺外代答, by Chu ch'u Fei 朱去非, under the Sung 宋, there had existed from the remotest times, a local script very similar to the Vietnamese Chữ nôm. For instances, *呆* (= small) and *呔* (= quiet).

3) The two Vietnamese Bố, father and Cái, mother as found in the posthumous title of Bố-Cái Đại-Vương bestowed upon Phùng-Huông were historically the earliest evidences for the use of Chữ nôm in the eighth century. Later, under the Định 丁, Đại Cồ Việt 大瞿越, the official name of the then Vietnam included also a nôm character 瞿Cò. Under the Trần 陳 there was a very common use of Chữ nôm as evidenced by the practice of the then Court Minister called Hành Khải 行搪, who used to annotate royal decrees with Chữ nôm so as to make them better understood by the people.10)

All the views as just outlined above have each some good points. However, anyone is authoritative enough to be adopted as conclusive on the date of the invention of Chữ nôm.

In fact, Chữ nôm, far from being devised by an individual sometimes in Vietnamese history, should rather be considered as the product of many centuries of patient and obscure elaboration. Such is the most reasonable conclusion made by most scholars quite recently in their research on Chữ nôm.

As previously defined, Chữ nôm consisted essentially of Vietnamese adaptation of borrowed Chinese characters. Accordingly, its invention could be realized only at a stage when the knowledge of Chinese characters had been wide-spread enough in Vietnam.

The first Vietnamese who commanded the use of Chinese characters were a few entirely sinicized intellectuals. Such was the case with Lý-Tiễn 李進, Lý Cầm 李琴, Trương Trọng 張重 (second century A.D.). Later, some of these intellectuals came to write poetries and prose poetries in Chinese after the Chinese models. Such was the case with Phùng Đại Trí 冯戴知 whose poetic composition was lauded by the Chinese emperor Kao Tsu 高祖 of T’ang 唐 (618-626), Khương Công Phú 前公辅 a prose-poetry writer whose work can still be found in Chinese anthologies.11)

During the period from the Han to the T’ang some Chữ nôm patterns might have been devised to represent some native words, especially the names of places, persons and official titles in Vietnam. Only a few remains of these attempts have subsisted so far. Such are Bố and Cái transcribed by two Chinese characters whose Vietnamese reading is similar to the sounds of the two corresponding Vietnamese native words.
From the tenth century to the thirteenth century, although the Vietnamese had gained back their national independence from China, the Chinese script still enjoyed an exclusive privilege strengthened by the system of civil service examination patterned after the Chinese system. For that reason, Vietnamese intellectuals continued to express their thoughts and feelings in Chinese characters. Not only poetries, prosa-poetries and historical records but also royal edicts, memorials to the Kings, laws, and regulations etc... were written in Chinese characters. However, all of these Vietnamese writings in the Chinese script might not have been the same as those of the first Vietnamese intellectuals mentioned above. The form was Chinese but the substance was Vietnamese. In another respect, various genres of Chinese literature in which Vietnamese writers tried their hands were definitive acquisitions for the forthcoming Vietnamese literature in Chữ nôm. As far as the nôm script is especially concerned, the official use of the two nôm characters Bố and Cái late in the eighth century and that of the nôm character Cồ in the tenth century are fair indications that some patterns of Chữ nôm were devised by the Vietnamese at the latest from the eighth to the tenth century. Besides such nôm characters as Bố, Cái, Cồ, others might have been created about at the same periods both by the phonetic and by the semantic use of Chinese characters. For example, Vietnamese native words mốt (one), and ta (I, we) are respectively transcribed by Chinese characters 沒 and 們 with their phonetic reading. Vietnamese native words, cày, cày, ruộng, bắp are respectively transcribed by Chinese characters 耕, 稻, 田, and 灵 with their semantic reading. As to such other more refined patterns of Chữ nôm as those coined on the basis of the principles of Chinese writing hui-i and hsieh-shêng, they must have been invented only later, probably after the Sino-Vietnamese had taken a definitive shape.

To summarize, Chữ nôm was not invented overnight to be put at the disposal of Hàn Thuyên for writing poetry and prose-poetry but its formation process must have stretched over many centuries by starting at the latest from the eighth century before reaching a certain degree of completion under the Trần 阮. It was later improved successively by its users from the Lê黎, to the Nguyễn阮 before attaining to a relative fixity in such popular long narrative poems as Kim Vân Kiều 金雲翹 and Lục Vân Tiên 陸雲僖.

As far as can be judged from these masterpieces of Vietnamese literature in Chữ nôm, this script is not so fanciful and irrational as some of its critics have claimed. In fact, it was governed by rather precise and even rigid rules.

In our previous study on Foreign borrowings in Vietnamese we have given some examples of its main patterns. We will take advantage of this opportunity to describe its structure as fully as we could with materials we have access to.

As rightly observed by Prof. Rokuro Kono, the Vietnamese Chữ nôm shows striking similarities to the Japanese Kana and the Japanese Kokujï 國字. Following are some examples given by him. In the Kojiki 古事記, the phonetic and semantic readings of Chinese characters which also are made use of in Chữ nôm are both employed by its compiler Ono Yasumaro. Thus the phonetic representation is used in such proper names as 須佐 for/susa/of 迢須佐之男命, 須賀 for/suga/of 須賀宮. This phonetic method is completely adopted in the famous song beginning with "yakumo tatu..." The phonetic representation is not a dominant current except in proper names and songs. Even in proper names the phonetic method is not always adopted. 迢須佐之男 (hayasusanowo) is represented by the semantic method except 須佐 /susá/, which is also prevalent in such
examples as 足名椎 (Asinaduti) and 稲田宮主 (Inada-no Miyanusi). Besides the two examples mentioned above, Prof. Rokuro Kono quoted also the instances 今 今, 初 {fazime, 時 {toki, 雲 {kumo, 歌 {uta, 神 {kami, 首 {kubi. The hui-i characters newly created are found both in Japan and Vietnam, e.g. ㊁, giời is created by compounding the character 天 and 上. The characters invented in Japan, the so-called Kokuji 國字 (National character) e.g. 神 (sasaki), 稲 (tauge), 杜 (mori) etc..., are the developments of the hui-i characters in the same way as the nôm character ㊁, giời.

Despite all these apparent similarities, in view of the differences between the Japanese and the Vietnamese languages as to their phonetic system and the historical background of the Chinese writing influences, the structure of Chữ Nôm preserved its distinctive originality, as clearly shown hereafter by its various formation patterns.

Chinese characters borrowed by Chữ Nôm to represent a single morpheme in Vietnamese may be used singly or in combination.

I. A single Chinese character is used to represent

1) a Vietnamese morpheme of Chinese origin, which has exactly the Sino-Vietnamese reading and the meaning of the corresponding Chinese character. Ex. 頭 dâu (head), 衣 áo (robe, tunic).

2) a Vietnamese morpheme of Chinese origin which has preserved the meaning of the corresponding Chinese character but whose Vietnamese reading has been slightly different from the Sino-Vietnamese reading of the corresponding Chinese character. Ex. Chinese character 法, Sino-Vietnamese reading: pháp is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme phap (law, rule). Chinese character 旌, Sino-Vietnamese reading kỳ is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme cờ (flag). Chinese character 橋, Sino-Vietnamese reading: kiều is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme cầu (bridge).

3) a Vietnamese morpheme probably of Chinese origin, whose meaning is the same as that of the corresponding Chinese character but whose reading compared to the Sino-Vietnamese reading of the Chinese character has been strongly altered. Ex. Chinese character 捲, Sino-Vietnamese reading: quấn is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme cuốn (to roll). Chinese character 本, Sino-Vietnamese reading bán, bôn is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme món (capital, funds).

4) a Vietnamese morpheme of the same meaning as the corresponding Chinese character but whose reading is quite different from the Sino-Vietnamese reading of it. Ex. 從, Sino-Vietnamese reading: dích, is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme việc (work, job, occupation).

5) a Vietnamese morpheme whose reading is the same as or similar to the Sino-Vietnamese reading of the corresponding Chinese character but whose meaning is completely different. Ex. Chinese character 戸, Sino-Vietnamese reading:  戸 (lance, spear) is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme qua (to pass by). Chinese character 沒, Sino-Vietnamese reading:  mòt (to disappear under water, to be submerged) is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme môt (one). In these two examples, the Sino-Vietnamese reading of the Chinese character is exactly the same as the reading of the Vietnamese morpheme represented. Ex. Chinese character 朱, Sino-Vietnamese reading chu (red, vermilion) is used to represent the Vietnamese morpheme cho (to give). Chinese character 籐, Sino-Vietnamese reading ky or ca (crible, sieve) is used to represent Vietnamese morpheme kia (over there, that). In the last two examples, the Sino-Vietnamese reading of the Chinese character is almost similar to the reading of the Vietnamese morpheme represented.
Such chữ nôm as included in the second, third, fourth and fifth categories above by Dương Quảng Hàm 17 were considered by Hồ Ngọc Cẩn 18 as belonging to the same category of chữ nôm represented by Chinese characters whose Sino-Vietnamese reading offers sound similarities with their Vietnamese reading. There are, according to the latter, several cases of these sound similarities as follows:

1) Sound similarities between the Sino-Vietnamese reading of a Chinese character and the reading of one or several Vietnamese morphemes except for the initial consonant. Ex. Chinese character 板, Sino-Vietnamese reading: bàn may represent phân in Nôm.

2) Sound similarities only as the final syllable or only as the vowel or the vowel cluster before the final consonant. Ex. 会, may be read hop, hòa, hiệp or hô.

3) Sometimes, the Sino-Vietnamese reading of the Chinese character used to represent a Vietnamese morpheme differs from the latter both by the initial consonant and the final syllable. Ex. 職, Sino-Vietnamese: chức may also represent, in Nôm, chức or giấc.

4) Sound similarities considered as such despite the difference of tones. Ex. 今, Sino-Vietnamese ngâm is also used to represent, in Nôm, ngâm, ngâm or ngâm.

To understand the above and other similar examples of chữ nôm, we should know which initial consonants, which vowels or vowel clusters, which final syllables in the Sino-Vietnamese word corresponding to a Chinese character and in the Vietnamese morpheme to be represented in Nôm used to be considered as interchangeable.

A) Initial consonants considered as interchangeable for representation in Nôm.

a) Initial consonants b-, ph-, v-. Ex. 了, Sino-Vietnamese reading: bóc which represents in Nôm such Vietnamese morphemes as bóc and bôi may also represent vóc; 板, Sino-Vietnamese reading: bàn may also represent in Nôm phân, bàn or ván.

b) Initial consonants c-, k-, gh-, qu- used to be interchangeable. Ex. 及, Sino-Vietnamese reading cáp may also represent, in Nôm, càp, gập or kip; 群, Sino-Vietnamese reading: quàn, may also represent còn in Nôm.

c) Initial consonants d-, t-, v- used to be interchangeable. Ex. 性, Sino-Vietnamese reading: tính or tánh may also represent định in Nôm; 省, Sino-Vietnamese reading: dính may also represent, in Nôm, đánh or dánh.

d) Initial consonants ch-, gi- and less frequently tr-, x- used to be interchangeable. Ex. 執, Sino-Vietnamese reading: cháp may also represent, in Nôm, chup, gắp, xấp, or xor.

e) Initial consonants l-, r-, tr- used to be interchangeable. Ex. 律, Sino-Vietnamese reading: luật may also represent, in Nôm, làt, lât, lót, rot or trót.

B) Syllables considered as interchangeable for representation in chữ nôm.

a) ác, ác, ức, ức used to be interchangeable. Ex. 块, Sino-Vietnamese reading: bác may also represent, in Nôm, bác, bục or buóc.

b) ạch, ńsk, iék, ích used to be interchangeable. Ex. 役, Sino-Vietnamese reading: dịch may also represent việc in Nôm; 赤, Sino-Vietnamese reading: xích, may also represent, in Nôm, xích or xích.

c) ai, ay, ăy, ăai, ăay, ăâu, ăi, ă, ăi, and sometimes ua are interchangeable. Ex. 支, Sino-Vietnamese reading: chí may also represent chia in Nôm; 皮, Sino-Vietnamese reading: bi may also represent, in Nôm, bê or vĩa.
d) am, âm, ām, em, ēm, im, iẽm, om, ôm, om, um, uom used to be interchangeable. Ex. 耳, Sino-Vietnamese reading: dam may also represent, in Nôm, dâm, dem or döm.

e) an, ân, ān, en, ên, uyên, in, uán, on, ôn, uon, on, un, un, uón used to be interchangeable. Ex. 禹, Sino-Vietnamese reading: lán was also used to represent lăn in Nôm.  

f) clang, ingerprint, unng, uong used to be interchangeable. Ex. 登, Sino-Vietnamese reading: đằng was also used to represent, in Nôm, dăng or chính.

g) ong, ông, ung and sometimes unng were interchangeable. Ex. 用, Sino-Vietnamese reading: dung was also used to represent, in Nôm, dòng, dũng.

h) anh, ênh, inh, iêng, ang, un, ung used to be interchangeable. Ex. 生, Sino-Vietnamese reading: sinh or sanh was also used to represent siêng in Nôm.

i) ao, âu, o, ô, ơ, u, ur, u, rua, trau used to be interchangeable. Ex. 牠, Sino-Vietnamese reading: lao was also used as hsiai-shêng to represent lao, lau, trao or trau.

j) ap, áp, áp, ep, ép, êp, ip, op, ốp, op, up, up, uorp were interchangeable. Ex. 及, Sino-Vietnamese reading: cấp was also used to represent, in Nôm, gáp, gáp or kip.

k) at, āt, REATED, ot, ơi, or, ut, ut, uot, uôt, it were interchangeable. Ex. 乙, Sino-Vietnamese reading: ât was also used to represent in Nôm, ât, ült or it.

l) et, ett, iett, it were interchangeable. Ex. 歌, Sino-Vietnamese reading: hiệt was also used to represent in Nôm hệt or hit.

N.B. From the above examples, we see that several Chữ Nôm were made up by changing not only initial consonants, but also final syllables and sometimes even tones. Ex. 及 could be read cấp, gáp, kip or kip; 金字塔 could be read ngâm, ngâm or gám.

II. Chinese characters used in combination for representation in Chữ Nôm.

Whenever a single Chinese character could not represent a Chữ Nôm with its Sino-Vietnamese reading or sound similarities of its Sino-Vietnamese reading, two Chinese characters were used, the one as signific, the other as phonetic. The choice of the Chinese character to be used as phonetic was based upon the twelve rules given above by Hồ Ngọc Căn about sound similarities. As to the signific, it used to be represented either by a Chinese character or a Chinese radical. Ex. Nôm character 耳 (ba, three) is made up of the phonetic (read bâi) and the signific 三 meaning three. Nôm character 猴, (tay, hand) is made up of the signific 手 (hand) and the phonetic 西 (read tây). Nôm character 〵 (trim, hundred) is made up of the signific 壹 (hundred) and the phonetic 林 (read lâm). Nôm character 猴, (ra, to go out) is made up of the phonetic ㄌ (read la) and the signific 出 (to go out). These examples show that the signific does not have a fixed position. In principle, it is placed on the left hand side. Such is the case with the above second example. However, for reason of esthetics, the signific may change its position. Thus it is placed on the right side in the first example, on the top in the third one and at the bottom in the fourth one. In this last one, always for the same reason, it may also be placed on the right side as follows 猴. In case it is constituted by one of the 214 radicals of the Chinese lexicon, its position is the same as would have normally a radical in the Chinese character concerned. Ex. Nôm character 言 nói (to speak) where the radical 口 is on the left side, Nôm character 鴨 qua (raven, crow) where the radical 鸟 is on the right side, Nôm character 杉 nong (flat, large winnowing basket) where the radical 禾 is on the top, Nôm character 唐 long (entrails, heart) where the radical 心 is at the bottom.
Exceptionally, in a few Chữ nôm made up of two Chinese characters used in combination, both of their components may indicate the meaning. We then have a pure Chữ nôm. Thus Vietnamese morpheme giới or trời (sky, heaven) is represented by the Chữ nôm 雲, itself a combination of two Chinese characters 雲 and 晴. There is not even a most remote hint on pronunciation.22) Some Chữ nôm may also consist of a signfic from Chữ Nho or Chinese character with a Sino-Vietnamese reading and a phonetic compound from Chữ nôm. Thus Vietnamese morpheme lời (word, speech, statement) is represented in Nôm by the complicated grapheme *雲 which consists of the Chinese radical 口 used as signfic and of Chữ nôm 雲 (giới or trời) used as phonetic. 23) With these few exceptions, Chữ nôm of this second type are made up of signific and a phonetic, both being taken from Chinese characters.24) However some texts in Chữ nôm especially those of Catholic missionaries and those reproduced by copyists reveal a tendency to retain only the phonetic by suppression the signific. Here is an example quoted by Hồ Ngọc Cấn. The phrase: Có xưa nay (There exists before and now) was represented in Nôm by Catholic missionaries as follows: 固初尼 while it would have been transcribed normally in Nôm as follows: 伽伽伽 according to Hồ Ngọc Cấn or as follows: 伽伽伽2 according to Prof. Nguyễn Quang Xephy and Prof. Vũ Văn Kính25). This simplification of Chữ nôm may be generally accounted for by the necessity for the copyists of Nôm texts to save time. According to Dương Quang Hạnh, the same motivation might have underlain some specifically Vietnamese abbreviated forms of Chinese characters used for representation in Chữ nôm. Ex. Vietnamese morpheme làm (to do) is represented in Nôm by 做, abbreviated form of Chinese character 罹. Vietnamese morpheme là (to be) is represented in Nôm by 做, abbreviated form of Chinese character 雲.26)

In addition to the above types of Chữ nôm, namely that of Chữ nôm transcribed by a single Chinese character and that of Chữ nôm transcribed by a combination of several Chinese characters, a special mention should be made of the following Chữ nôm 喂其 (khế-khà, [of voice] to be drawling and hoarse) and 其 (khếng-khàng, to be awkward; to walk slowly like an important person, put on airs).27) These Chữ nôm of a unique type were found by Prof. Nguyễn Quang Xephy and Prof. Vũ Văn Kính in a poem in Chữ nôm by Cao Bá Quát, a poet scholar under Emperor Tự Đức. According to the authors of Tư-Diện Chữ nôm (Dictionary of Chữ nôm), these two Chữ nôm would defy any analysis as to their structure. Personalh we wonder whether they were created by the Vietnamese on the basis of the same principle of construction as the modern Chinese character ping pàng or ping pong or whether such is only a mere case of pure coincidence.28)

Chữ nôm whose structure has just been described above 29) is not without imperfections.

Following are some of these as pointed to by Dương Quang Hạnh.

1) One Vietnamese morpheme may be represented by two different nôm graphemes. Ex. đốt (to burn) is transcribed sometimes by the grapheme 燃 sometimes by the grapheme ㄌ.

2) The same nôm grapheme may represent two or several different morphemes.
   a) Two homophones, a Sino-Vietnamese word mài (to buy) and a Vietnamese native word mài (always) may be represented by the same grapheme 本.

   b) A Sino-Vietnamese word ban (capital, funds) and a Vietnamese native word with the same meaning but with a different reading (vốn) are represented by the same grapheme 本.
c) A Sino-Vietnamese word quát (a group, a band) and a Vietnamese native word còn (still) having each a quite different meaning may be represented by the same grapheme 群.

d) Two or several words of different meanings but the reading of one of which suggests that of the other or the others are represented by the same grapheme. Ex. mài (to buy) is used to transcribe sometimes mái (always), sometimes mỏ (new, then) or also mây (some, a few, how many?)

e) Two or several Vietnamese words having in common the same final vowel or vowel cluster but not having the same initial consonant are represented by the same grapheme. Ex. Sino-Vietnamese: du may represent Vietnamese word dầu (oil; although) or Vietnamese word rầu (to be sad, depressed).

f) Two or several Vietnamese words with the same sounds but with different tones may be represented by only one grapheme. Ex. Sino-Vietnamese manh (to sprout) represents not only the Sino-Vietnamese word itself but also such Vietnamese native words as manh (in mong-manh, to be thin, frail), manh (piece, bit, fragment), mành (in máng khoẻ, trick, artifice), màn (blind, shades). This use of the same grapheme to transcribe several words of the same sounds is due to the out-numbering of Chinese tones by Vietnamese tones. That is why, to compensate vacancies in Chinese tones, some diacritical marks were invented by the Vietnamese. Such as อบรม, อบรม placed in the upper right and a small □ placed in the upper left of the Chinese character used to represent a Vietnamese native word. Ex. móc (to be mildewed, musty, moldy) is transcribed by the Chinese character 村 (Sino-Vietnamese mộc) with the adjunction of one of the above three diacritical marks. As a result, we have 村 or 村 or also 村.  30)

With such imperfections, Chữ nôm could not indeed compare with the present Chữ quốc ngữ or the romanized script which is a phonetic script par excellence. It must be said, however, to its credit that, long before the invention of the latter system of writing, it had found out some devices of its own to phoneticize Vietnamese native sounds as accurately as feasible. Edouard Diguet showed that the ambiguity possible in the romanized script because of innumerable homophones could be avoided in Chữ nôm.  31)

Quite recently, Prof. Bùi Cẩm brought other strong points of Chữ nôm which with a few exceptions, succeeded in making clear a distinction between initial consonants d- and gi-, between initial consonants ch- and tr-, between final consonants -n and -ng, between final consonants -c(k) and -t. 32)

As can just be seen, Chữ nôm, despite its unavoidable shortcomings, proved to be of some value even in terms of phonemics.

In another respect, from the end of the thirteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, it has played an effective role in the expression and the transmission of Vietnamese literature.

The history of Vietnamese literature in nôm which covered nearly seven centuries may be divided into the following main periods: 1) The Trần-Hồ 陳胡 period (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries). 2) The Lê-Mạc 黎莫 period (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries). 3) The Lê trung hưng 黎中興 or North-South struggle period (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). 4) The Nguyễn 阮 period (nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century).
1) The Trần-Hồ period

According to Khâm-dinh Việt-sử thống-giam Cuong-muc 欽定越史通鑑綱目, the first writer to have used chữ nôm in poetry was Nguyễn Thuyền 阮詠 or Hân Thuyên 韓詠 and others were said to have followed his example. Such were Nguyễn Sĩ Có 阮士固, and Chu An 朱安. The latter and Nguyễn Thuyền were reported to have been respectively the authors of Quốc ngữ thi tập 國語詩集 and Phi sa tập 披沙集. Unfortunately, both of these collections of nôm verses were lost. According to Bùi Huy Bích 裝輝璧 (1744-1818), Trê Công 鳳 or The story in verses of the Catfish and the Toad also dated from the Trần 陳, but the exact date of this satirical fable in lucr-bát meter 六八詩, has not been so far conclusively determined. In addition, Trịnh Thị鼠 or the virtuous mouse, a narrative poem in nôm, the Story in verses of Vương Tượng 王俶傳, and six other writings in nôm related to the Story of Nguyễn Biểu 阮表傳 were also presumed to have dated from the end of the Trần. However, there has been so far much controversy about their true date.

Concerning writings in nôm under the Hậu Trần 後陳 and the Hồ 陳 it was also reported that in 1387 under the reign of King Trần Đức Nghĩa 陳帝堯, the King’s Father Trần Nghệ Tôn,陳藝宗, having granted to Hồ Quý Ly 郜季薔 then Lê Quý Ly 李季薔, a sword bearing the inscription 文武全才君臣同德 (Both a scholar and a warrior, a virtuous subject serving a virtuous King) Quí Ly composed verses in the vernacular to show him his gratitude. Later, in 1437, as King Thái Tô 太祖 of the Lê黎 dynasty wanted to read samples of edicts and verses written in nôm by Hồ Quý Ly, Nguyễn Trãi 阮廌 was reported to have succeeded in gathering and presenting to him some tens of these writings.

2) The Lê-Mạc period

The same Nguyễn Trãi was also said to have left some writings in nôm, such as Úc-trai thi tập 抑薦詩集, an improvised poem in the vernacular addressed to Thị Lộ 氏路, a girl seller of sleeping mats who later became his concubine and a didactic poem in nôm, Gia huấn ca 家訓歌 or family instructions. The so-called improvised poem to Thị Lộ is of dubious authenticity. As to Gia huấn ca, this poem in 796 lines may have been composed later by one or several successive authors. The only writing in nôm by Nguyễn Trãi available at present is the Collection of poems in the National language (Quốc âm thi tập 國音詩集) which forms the chapter seven of Úc trai di tập 抑薦遺集.

If the outset of the Lê dynasty was marked with no other important nôm literary work than this collection of poems by Nguyễn Trãi and two Thế ngôn 契言 by Lê Lợi recently brought to light by Hoàng Xuân Hãn, the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông 黎聖宗 (1460-1497) witnessed an extraordinary flourishing of Vietnamese literature in the vernacular. King Lê Thánh Tông, who was gifted with the rare faculty of composing poetry and was very fond of belles-lettres, founded a literary circle known as Hội Tao Đàn 會廻壇 with as members 28 Court officials called Nhị thập bát tự 二十八宿 or the 28 Constellations and with himself as Chairman 元師, and as vice Chairmen 副元師, Thân Nhân Trung 申仁忠 and Đô Huân 杜濤. Within this Hội Tao Đàn, himself and his courtiers exchanged poems in nôm which were collected later to form the Collections of Vietnamese poems under the reign of Hồng Đức 洪德 i.e. the reign of Lê Thánh Tông. Besides this Hồng Đức quốc âm thi tập 洪德國音詩集, mention should be made of such writings in nôm as Hồng Châu quốc ngữ thi tập 洪州國語詩集, by Lương Như Hộc 梁汝鴻, Kim Lăng Ký 金陵記 by Đỗ Cấn 杜覔. In the next century, under the Mạc莫,
Vietnamese literature in nôm showed much more originality in the famous Collection of poems by Nguyễn Bình Khải 阮秉議 (1492-1587) known as Bạch văn thi tập 白雲詩集. Bạch Văn (White Clouds) being the literary appellation of this poet. Among nôm writings under the Mac, we should also mention Đại Đông phong cảnh phụ 大同風景賦, Tam Ngụng dòng phụ 三峴岫賦, and Tích cực nín thể 倚居寧體 by Nguyễn Hằng 阮杭; Sứ Bác quốc ngự thi tập 使北國語詩集, Sử trình Khúc 使程曲, Từ thời Khúc 四時曲, Tiểu đội lạc phụ 小謠樂賦 by Hoàng Sĩ Khải 黃仕愷 and, finally, Ngu phú nhập Đạo nguyễn truyền 潮父入桃源傳, by Phùng Khắc Khoan 阮克寬.

3) The Lê trung hưng or North South Struggle period

From the death of Lê Thánh Tông in 1497, Đại Việt 大越 or the then Vietnam went on to be plagued with social troubles and a permanent state of political unrest which led to the usurpation by Mặc Đặng Dung 莫登庸 (1527). After the short lived dynasty of the Mac, war broke out in 1627 between the Trịnh 祝 in the North and the Nguyễn 阮 in the South, both claiming to be followers of the Lê 黎. It ended only in 1672 with the agreement to use the River of Linh (Linh giang 淨江) as the demarcation line between the two territories. But in 1775, taking advantage of the Tây Sơn 西山 revolt in the South, the Trịnh attacked and took Phú Xuân 富春, the capital of the Nguyễn in the South. However, both the Trịnh and the Nguyễn were finally overthrown by the Tây Sơn, one of whose leaders, Nguyễn Huệ 阮惠, proclaimed himself Emperor by the end of 1787.

Despite the historic triumph of Emperor Quang Trung 光中 over the Chinese in 1789 and many of its remarkable achievements, the Tây Sơn regime was short-lived and brought to an end in 1802, when Nguyễn Ánh 阮安 proclaimed himself Emperor Gia Long 嘉隆 of the Nguyễn after capturing Emperor Cảnh Thịnh 景盛 of the Tây Sơn and his brothers.

The social and political background of this long period covering the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries had a great impact on the development of the Vietnamese literature in nôm. Most of the writers were military leaders or Court officials mostly involved in the events of their times. All of them wrote in Chinese characters. However they chose to write also in nôm which enabled them to spread more widely their personal political convictions far beyond the traditional academic circle and, at the same time, to enlarge their sphere of influence in the country. Besides such Chinese borrowed literary genres as the Thất ngôn thì 七言詩 or seven beat meter poetry, the Phú 賦 or prose-poetry, the Kinh Nghĩa 經義 or explanations of Chinese Classics, the Văn sách 文策 or dissertation which continued to be in high favour, some long narratives in lục bát 六八 or Six eight meter and in Song thất lục bát 双七六入 or the 7-7-6-8 meter which made their appearance toward the end of the eighteenth century, materialized the new creative spirit of Vietnamese writers in nôm. Following are the most representative works of Vietnamese nôm literature during these two centuries in the then North Vietnam, South Vietnam and under the Tây Sơn.

a) Let us mention, as main nôm writings in North Vietnam under the Trịnh: Giao cảnh hữu tình phú 佳景興情賦, Ngã ba hac phú by Nguyễn Bá Lân 阮伯麟, Chinh phụ ngâm 征婦吟 translated into nôm by Đoàn thị Diệm 段氏點, Cung ơn Ngâm Khúc 宫怨吟曲 by Nguyễn Gia Thiều 阮嘉昭, Hoa Tiễn Truyện 花箋傳 by Nguyễn Huy Tự 阮惠之, Tự tình Văn 善情挽 or two short poems by Nguyễn thị Ngọc Vinh 阮氏玉榮, a concubine of Lord Trịnh Doanh 鄭楨, Lý Triệu Đệ tam Hoàng thất hầu có lục thân tich quốc ng kèm diển ca 李朝第三皇太後古緣國語演歌 by Trương Ngọc Trong, a maid of honor at the time of Lord Trịnh Cương鄭桐, Ngu đề Thiên hoa doan Bách vinh thi tập

Nguyễn Khắc Khoan: Chữ Nôm and its Contributions

19
Besides these nôm writings of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, we would like to make a special mention of the Thien Nam minh giam 天南明鑑, an anonymous long historical poem in the 7-7-6-8 meter, which according to Prof. Pham van Dieu might have been composed between 1623 to 1657 and the Thien Nam Ngur luc 天南語錄, another anonymous historical poem which might have been written between 1787 and 1800 according to Nguyen van To or between 1682 and 1709 according to Hoang Xuan Hanh.

4) Vietnamese literature in Nôm under the Nguyen (1802-1862)

This period which covered about sixty years could be considered as the golden age of Vietnamese literature in nôm. This great flourishing of nôm literary works was not after all due to the cultural policy of the Nguyen who, with the exception of Emperors Gia Long 嘉隆 and Tru Duc 叡德, neither composed verses in nôm like the Lords Trinh 鄭 nor exhorted their subjects to write in nôm. It was, to some extent, both a heritage from and a kind of outgrowth of the nôm literature in the eighteenth century. In another respect, it authorizes us to suppose that readers of nôm especially on nôm narratives in verses must have been more and more on the increase in Vietnam. In any case, the fact is that most of the masterpieces of nôm literature precisely dated from the Nguyen 網 dynasty. For lack of space, we will merely mention a few book titles and authors’ names without pretending to give an exhaustive list of the profusion of writings in nôm which were produced by the nineteenth century. First of all, a place of honor should be reserved for our National poem of Kim Van Kiêu 金雲翹, a 3254 line bát line poem by the famous poet Nguyen Du 阮攸 (1765-1820), of which several translations in foreign languages are available. Next come such writings both in nôm prosa and in verses as Xuan Huong thap春香詩集 by Poetess Ho Xuân Huong 胡春香 (early in the nineteenth century), Nhí thap từ hiểu diện âm 二十四孝演音, Phu cham tiến làm 婦箴便覽, Sû trinh tiến làm...
Monograph on Nôm characters

Khúc 使程使曬曲 by Lý văn Phúc 李文馥 (1785-1840), Mai đình môn Ky 梅庭夢記 by Nguyễn Huy Hồ 阮辉琥 (1783-1841), Kim Thạch Kỳ Duyên 金石緣綫 by Bùi Hữu Nghĩa 裝有義 (1807-1872), Luc vấn Thiên 陸雲德, Dương Từ Hà Mầu 楊徒荷茂, Ngư Triệu văn dập y thuật 魚樵問答術 by Nguyễn Đình Chỉieu 阮廷昭 (1822-1888) Thanh ché Thấp diệu dien ca 聖桀十條演歌, Thanh ché Luận ngữ thích nghĩa ca 聖桀論語釋義歌, Thánh ché tục hoc giải nghĩa ca聖桀字學解義歌 by Từ Đức (1829-1883), politics inspired poems by Tôn Thọ Tường 孫壽祥 and Phan Văn Trị 蕭文治, Chính Khí Ca 正氣歌 by Nguyễn văn Giai 阮文階, Đại Nam Quốc sử dien Ca 大南國史演歌 by Lê Ngọc Cát 黎吳吉 and Phạm Đình Toái 范廷偉, Hàn Thục Ca 幸蜀歌 by Nguyễn Hư 釋陀 (1830-1909), poems and songs called Hát Nói by Nguyễn Công Trứ 阮公著 (1778-1858), Cao Bá Quát 高伯逵 (?-1854) and Nguyễn Quí Tân 阮貴新 (1811-1858), various poems by Nguyễn Khuyên 阮勤 (1835-1909), Trần Thế Xương 陳濟昌 (1870-1907) etc.

Finally, a special mention should be made of such anonymous narratives in nôm verses as Nhì đờ mai 二度梅, Tổng Trần 宋珍, Thạch Sanh 石生, Nị tơ Tái 女秀才, Phương Hoa 芳花, Lý Công 李公, Hoàng Tríu 黃緯, Bích Cầu 碧橋, Phan Trần 藩陳, Quan Am Thị Kinh 觀音氏敬, and Hoa Diệu tranh nàng 花鳥爭能. Other nôm narratives and nôm writings continued to be produced mostly underground even after 1862 until at least the forties and despite the official adoption of the Quốc Ngữ script 國語字. 43)

All the nôm literary works mentioned above have been integrally or partly transcribed in the romanized script. However, such is not the case with a prodigious number of other nôm texts now stored in Vietnamese and some foreign libraries. 45) They are always waiting for transcription in Quốc Ngữ 國語 to be made by specialists. In another respect, nôm texts which have been already transcribed have not been free from transcription errors. Under these conditions, textual criticism is indispensable and it would be possible only through collation of all the versions available both in nôm and in Quốc Ngữ. As rightly observed by Dương Quảng Hành, “a true history of Vietnamese literature could be really undertaken only when all these documents in nôm have been deciphered and transcribed in Quốc Ngữ.” 46) But, all the nôm texts (especially those which require transcription in Quốc Ngữ) are not exclusively limited to literature and there are many important nôm documents related to Vietnamese history and Vietnamese folklore.

In effect, Chữ nôm was not only used by Vietnamese writers for literature but also by other people for various purposes as early as from the seventeenth century. For example, here is a letter in nôm addressed in 1670 to the Lord Nguyễn Phước Trần 阮福溱 by a Japanese named Kadoya Shichirobei 角室七成 兵衛, also known under his Vietnamese name as Cha Chánh 吃正 (Father Chánh): 翁門歲因麋奠祭於坦安南宜浪色作祭翁明 廣汕門理時包忌恩龍翁門裔 (注：原文中碎rm碎ノ誤41).

Following is its transcription in Quốc Ngữ “Ong muơn tươi. Çok em tôi o đất Annam nghe rằng dâ lâm tôi ông, mình làm. Dâu muôn lê thời dà cây lòng (or trọng on. Ông muốn tươi)” [English translation: I wish you ten thousands years of life. I heard that one of my young brothers [i.e. Shichirojiro 七郎次郎] who is living in Annam has become one of your subjects. I feel much pleasure for it. May I recommend him to your benevolence under any circumstances. I wish you ten thousands years of life]. 47)

Still concerning the seventeenth century, let us mention several manuscripts in nôm from Italian Catholic Father J. Maiorica (1591-1651) found by Prof. Hoàng Xuân Hạn at the French National Library (Bibliothèque Nationale) in Paris. The titles of these manuscripts have been transcribed by him as follows. 1) Thiên-Chúa Thánh-giao Hội tổi

Nguyễn Khắc Kham: Chữ Nôm and its Contributions
As just can be seen, Chữ Nôm, which has so richly and diversely contributed to the past Vietnamese literature, will remain an indispensable tool of research not only for the students of the past Vietnamese literature but also for researches on Vietnamese history and Vietnamese culture.
NOTES

Page 549: Nôm = 喃字【意印《南國的字》】

1954. 370: Nôm= Tiếng nói thông thường của dân Viêt Nam đời với chữ Nho.

3) Ngô Thì Nhậm (Hả ơi Ðông chí lược).


5) 《阮詮海陽青林人善為詩賦人多效之後為國音詩曰韓律者以此》欽定越史通
鑑綱目。

6) P. Pelliot, “Première étude sur les sources Annamites de l’histoire d’Annam,”
B.E.F.O t. IV page 621, note.

7) H. Maspero, “Etudes sur la phonétique historique de la langue Annamite. Les
initiales” B.E.F.O, t. XII, no 1 page 7, note 1.

8) Nguyễn Văn Tổ “Phân Kế Bính Viêt Hán Văn Khảo”, Etudes sur la littérature
Sino-Annamite (2e edit.) Hanoi, Editions du Trung-Bắc Tấn Văn, 1930 in 8, 175 p.)

9) Dương Quang Hảm, Viêt Nam Văn-Học Sự-Yêu, in lấn thư bầy. Bộ Quốc Gia

495-498.

11) Nguyễn Đông Chí, Viêt Nam Cổ Văn Học Sử, Hán Thuyên, Hanoi, 1942, pp. 87-
91.

12) The earliest session of civil service examination in Vietnam dated from 1075
under Lý Nhân Tông (1072-1127). See Trần Trọng Kim, Viêt Nam Sử Lược, in lấn thư


Mineya Toru, 三根谷徹, 越南漢字音の研究, 東洋文庫, 昭和 47年 3月 25日.

15) Nguyễn Khắc-Kham, “Foreign borrowings in Vietnamese,” Area and Culture
Studies, no 19, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1969 pp. 142-175.

Neighbouring Peoples with special reference to Korea and Japan.” Memoirs of the
Research Department of the Toyo Bunko (The Oriental Library) No 27. The Toyo

17) Dương Quang Hảm, “Le chữ nôm ou écriture démotique. Son importance dans
l’étude de l’ancienne littérature Annamite.” Bulletin de l’Instruction Publique de
l’Indoche No 7, Mars 1942. N.B. Among the examples of this fourth category of chữ
nôm, Dương Quang Hảm quoted also the grapheme 味, Sino-Vietnamese reading: ṣị
(savor, taste) as being used to transcribe the Vietnamese morpheme mửì. However, this
writer thinks that the Chinese character might have been read mửì by the Vietnamese as
early as the beginning of the Chinese T’ang dynasty in imitation of the Chinese reading.
(cf. H. Maspero, “Quelques mots Annamites d’origine Chinoise” B.E.F.E.O, no 3, 1916,
Accordingly it might have been a chữ nôm whose date was prior to the eighth century.


19) This example is given by this writer instead of 嗍 which, according to Hồ Ngọc Cân, was used to represent in nôm răn, rân or rên.

20) This example is given by this writer instead of 拼 which according to Hồ Ngọc Cân could be read lao, lau, trao or trau.


22) Dương Quang Hâm, page 103.

23) Dương Quang Hâm, op. cit., page 103.

24) According to Prof. Hoàng Xuân Hãn, chữ nôm was originally based on phonetic principle. Later only, it became ideographic by joining together two elements: a phonetic and a signific, but prior to this last stage, it had made use of few peculiar signs which, added to the phonetic, indicated that the Chinese character employed as phonetic was different in meaning from the Vietnamese morpheme to be represented by it in nôm. Here is an excerpt from his study on Girolamo Maiorca’s nôm works concerning the matter: “Les Vietnamiens ont cherché à améliorer le système en distinguant la deuxième catégorie de caractères de la première catégorie par l’accoulement aux caractères “phonétiques” d’un signe particulier dont le sens nous reste encore mystérieux. Enfin la dernière amélioration consiste à remplacer ce signe par une partie idéographique qui est un caractère chinois ayant le même sens que le mot Vietnamiens qu’on veut transcrire ou ayant un sens générique se rapportant à ce mot Vietnamien. Voici quelques exemples illustrant cette méthode. Le sud se dit nam en Vietnamiens, mot provenant du caractère Chinois qui se prononce nan en Chinois actuel. Les Vietnamiens utilisent ce caractère pour transcrire le son et le mot nam. Or il existe en Vietnamien des sons voisins de ce dernier, par exemples nam qui a deux sens: cinq et année. Les Vietnamiens ont transcrit ce son par le même caractère Chinois qui veut dire Sud, parfois en lui accolant un signe particulier. C’est la méthode purement phonétique. Pour faciliter la lecture et la compréhension du texte, souvent ils adjoignent au caractère précédent, soit le caractère Chinois qui veut dire cinq pour le sens cinq, soit le caractère Chinois qui veut dire année pour le sens année.” Concerning the peculiar sign above, Prof. Hoàng Xuân Hãn has added the following foot-note “J’ai décelé sept de ces signes, dont deux semblent se retrouver dans les caractère de Si-Hia (西夏) pays qui existait au Nord-ouest de la Chine de l’époque des T’ang jus-qu’à la fin des Song, ce qui me fait penser que les écritures locales des pays limitrophes de la Chine du temps des T’ang pourraient avoir une origine commune d’ordre administratif.”

25) Hồ Ngọc Cân, op. cited page 166.

Nguyễn Quang Xữ, Vũ Văn Kính, op. cit., pp. 165, 508, 859.
26) According to Prof. Kono Rokuro, the Vietnamese abbreviated form 々 resembles the abbreviated form 서 of the character 为 for the Korean verb { ha “to do” } in the so-called と in Ancient Korea. The chữ nôm character を, he added, is an abbreviated form of the character ト which was used for the word { là “to be” }. This also reminds us of the similar abbreviation in the Korean と (ト, と). Kono Rokuro, op. cit., page 101. See also Mineya Toru, Annango, page 860.

27) Nguyễn Quang Xũ, Vũ Văn Kính, op. cit., Lời Nói đầu (foreword) page viii.


29) For further details about the structure of Chữ nôm, see

30) Dương Quang Hân, Le Chữ nôm ou écriture démotique etc… pp. 283-284a.


32) Bùu Cẩm, “Uu-diem va Khuyet-diem Cua Chữ nôm” (Strong points and weak points of chữ nôm) Việt Nam Khảo Cổ tập san, Saigon 1960, no 1, pp. 50-64.


37) Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Quìhiến Toàn, op. cit., pp. 49-69.

Trần Văn Giáp, Phạm Trọng Diệm: Nguyễn Trãi, Quốc Âm Thi Tập (Hanoi, 1956). Vận-Dận Tập chí, So Đắc biết về Nguyễn Trãi, Bổ IV, số 10 (3/1-9/1, 1963) A symposium about Nguyễn Trãi and his works, with as participants Phạm Đình Tấn, Thái Bằng, Vũ Hạnh, Phạm Đình Khải, Nguyễn Khắc-Kham and Nguyễn Trọng Huy, a 16th generation descendant from Nguyễn Trãi.
Monograph on Nôm characters

   Nguyễn Đình Hoà Book Review: Introduction à la littérature Vietnamiennne by
   92, Number 2, April-June 1972 pp. 364-368.
d’Enseignement Mutuel du Tonkin, Tome XIV, no 1, Janvier-Mars 1934, pp. 30-36.
   Tome XIV, no 2, Avril-Juin 1934, pp. 182-190.
   Tome XIV, no 3, Juillet-Sept. 1934, pp. 460-463.
41) Sơn-Tùng, Hoàng Thúc Trâm, Quốc văn Đời Tây Sơn. Sách Hiếu Biệt, Vĩnh Bảo
   Saigon, 1950, 123 pages.
42) Phạm Văn Диệu, “Thiên Nam Minh Giám.” Văn Hóa Nguyệt San, Sài Gòn
   Loại mới tập XII. Quyển 1, số 77 tháng 1-1963, pp. 49-68.
43) Phạm Văn Диệu, “Thiên Nam Ngữ Lục” V.N.V.H.N.S. Loại mới tập XII, Quyển
44) Hoàng-Nhiên, Nghiêm Toàn Việt Nam Văn-Học Sư Trích yêu, II, Vĩnh Bảo
   Sài Gòn, 1949, pp. 7-70.
   Thanh Lãng, Khơi Thảo Văn-Học Sư Việt Nam. Văn chương Chữ Nôm (Từ của
   Phạm Thế Vụ, Việt Nam Văn Học Sư Giáo ước Tân Biên, Vol. 2 Quốc Học Tùng
   Thư, Sài Gòn 1963.
   N.B. Concerning the true names of Hồ Xuân Hương và Bà Huyền Thanh Quan
   presumed to have been respectively called Hồ thi Mai and Nguyễn thị Hinh, see
   Introduction à la littérature Vietnamiennne (Collection U.N.E.S.C.O, Introduction aux
   littératures Orientales, G. Maisonneuve et Larose Paris, 1969) by Maurice M. Durand and
   Nguyễn Trần Huấn, pp. 181, 189.
45) Concerning the Collection of Nôm texts at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris,
   see: Alexander Barton Woodside, Vietnam and The Chinese Model, A comparative
   Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the first half of the nineteenth century.
   Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, page 323, where we read the
   following statement “In Paris, the baffling riches of the fascinating collection of nôm
texts at the Bibliothèque Nationale are a challenge to any scholar.”
46) Dương Quảng Hảm, Le chữ nôm ou Ecriture demotique etc… page 285.
47) Kawashima Motojiro, 川島元次郎: 朱印貿易史, 大正十年九月十日印刷,
   大正十年九月十五日發行, 内外出版株式會社, page 469.
48) Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Girolamo Maiorica etc… op. cit., pp. 208-213.
字喃と昔の越南文学に対する字喃の貢献

越南には大昔から文字があったかとならば今も解らないが、中国の支配下にあった頃漢字の外には何の文字もなかった事は確かな事である。数人の学者の説に、字喃は西暦二世紀又は八世紀又は十三世紀末に発明されていたとの説が末だにある。字喃発見の年代に就いて、新しい見解を提出し、その造字のルールを明らかにしただけ同結して見た。又越南の文学に対する貢献に重きを置い、字喃によって七世紀近くに亘る長い間の豊富な文学が出来上って、今までは多くの字喃作品を残して来た。更に残っている字喃文献は越南の歴史や民俗に関するものが多くある。それ同時に字喃は昔の越南文学を奨励する鳥になくてはならない大きな役目を持っている。又越南の歴史や文化を研究する鳥にも必要な道具である。
BIOGRAPHY

Prof. Nguyễn Khắc-Kham

Nguyễn Khắc-Kham, pen-names Lãng Xuyên and Lãng Hồ, Professor Emeritus, was born on December 23, 1910 in Hanoi, Vietnam. He holds a Licence ès-Lettres (Sorbonne, France, 1934) and a Licence en Droit (Faculty of Law, Paris, 1934).

From 1937 to December 10, 1946, he taught at Gia Long, Thăng-Long, Vấn-Lang and Hoài-Dúc private High Schools and Chu Vấn-An public High School in Hanoi. He was the Principal of Lyceum Vấn-Lang from 1941 to December 20, 1946. At the same time he was a member of the Literary Committee of AFIMA (Association pour la Formation Intellectuelle et Morale des Annamites). From 1952 to July 1954, while being the Principal of Minh-Tân and later of Vấn-Hoa private High Schools, he taught at the University of Hanoi, Faculty of Letters. From late 1954 to September 1967, he was successively teacher at Pétrus Ký and Chu Vấn-An official High Schools in Saigon, professor at the University of Saigon, Faculty of Letters and Faculty of Pedagogy. He also taught for a short time at the University of Huế and at Văn-Hạnh, a private Buddhist University, Faculty of Letters.

In January 1964, he attended the XXVI International Congress of Orientalists in New Delhi (India). From December 1966 to February 1967 he served as a Visiting Researcher at Ostasiatisches Seminar, Frankfurt (West Germany). From September 1967 to 1973, he was visiting professor at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. During his distinguished career as an educator, he successively cumulated important official positions in the field of Vietnamese culture: Acting Director of the Institute for Historical Researches; Director of Cultural Affairs; Secretary General of the Vietnamese National Commission for UNESCO; Director of National Archives and Libraries. During his stay in Japan, he actively participated in the Annual Congress of Orientalists in Japan (1969-1973) and served as a corresponding researcher at the Center for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, within the Toyo Bunko. During the same period, he was also a member of Tonan Ajiya Shigakkai (Japan Society for Southeast Asian History). In 1971, he was awarded the Education and Culture Medal by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education (ROV) and was promoted by Tokyo University of Foreign Studies to the full professorship (Kyakuin Kyòju). From 1969 to 1974 he was a member of Advisory Board of Southeast Asia, an International Quarterly, Southern Illinois University (SIU) at Carbondale. In 1973, he participated in the Vietnamese Historical Sources Project headed by Prof. Chingho A. Chen, funded by the HEH (National Endowment for the Humanities), co-sponsored by SIU and the Chung Wen University, HongKong.

In 1977, he resettled in the United States and became a naturalized US citizen in 1984. From February 1982 to February 1991, he was successively Research Associate at the Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies and the Center for Southeast Asia Studies, University of California at Berkeley. Since 1982, he has been a member of I.S.A. (Independent Scholars of Asia, a non-profit, non-partisan, professional organization), Berkeley, California in USA. Since February 2000, he has been a member of the Board of Advisors at the Institute of Vietnamese Studies, Garden Grove, California.