

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

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 Trăn*, *Lục Vân 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 [Trần Quang-Huy 1973; Durand and Nguyễn-Trần 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*, *Bưởi*, and personal names such as *Cu*, *Cò*, *Đều*, 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*, *Khệnh*, *Khạng*, *Uốn*, *Cuốn*, *Lũôi*, *Mồm*, 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-

vention of *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 *nôm*. Several scholars, including Wang Li [1948, repr. 1958], who quoted Cheon, interpret *nôm* 喃 in *chữ nôm* as denoting "south" (< *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 *nôm* meaning "[of wind] southerly" and that the standard dictionary *Việt-nam Tự-điển* [Hanoi: Khai-trí Tiến-đức, 1931] gives this definition: "the colloquial speech of the Vietnamese people as opposed to *chữ nho*" [p. 370]

2.1 According to Nguyễn Văn San (1848-1883, penname Văn-đà Cử-sĩ), author of *Đại-Nam Quốc-ngữ* 大南國語 (1880), a 50-entry Chinese-Vietnamese glossary, the demotic writing system was created by Chinese Governor Sĩ Nhiếp (Shih Hsieh 士燮, 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，如雉鳩不知何鳥，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 of *chữ nôm* Trần Văn Giáp [1969b] cites that same Chinese-Vietnamese thesaurus by Nguyễn Văn San, saying that the *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 Sĩ (*Sĩ-vương* 士王) or "the Ancestor of Learning in Nam-giao" (*Nam-giao Học-tổ* 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 Đông Chi [1955]) and sometimes with approval (as by Trương 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 Dữ (penname Sở Cường) 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 Dữ 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 Dữ 1932: 496]. Indeed Lê Dữ 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:

𪛗 "short"; 𪛘 "stable"; 𪛙 "skinny and weak"; 𪛚 "dead"; 𪛛 "paralyzed"; 𪛜 "child"; 妖 [徒架切] "older sister"; 𪛞 "bolt [of door]"; 𪛟 "cliff"; 𪛠 "to swim"; 𪛡 "submerged under the water"; 𪛢 "with big mustache"; 𪛣 [東敢切] "sound of stone thrown into water" [Tran 1973:6, note*2; Chou 1979 reprint:1793]

“廣西俗字甚多。如𡗗音矮。則不長也。𡗗音躑。言大坐則躑也。𡗗音勒。言瘦弱也。𡗗音終。言死也。𡗗音臘。言不能舉足也。𡗗音孺。言小兒也。妖徒架切。言姊也。𡗗音橫。言門橫關也。𡗗音𡗗。言崖也。𡗗音泐。言人在水上也。𡗗音魅。言没人在水下也。𡗗音鬚。言多髭。研東敢切。言以石擊水之聲也。”

Lo Hsiang-lin 羅香林 in his book on the origin and culture of the Hundred Yue 百越源流與文化 *Pei-yue Yuan-liu yu wen-hua* [1955:72] mentioned that the Chuang 僮 people of T'ai-ping fu 太平府, T'u-chou hsien 土州縣 had a writing system in which characters for "sky, sun, moon, and star" were written respectively 𡗗, 𡗗, 𡗗, and 𡗗, 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 Hường-chân Pháp-tính, a Buddhist scholar of the Lê dynasty who had edited 指南玉音解義 *Chi³-nam Ngọc-âm Giải-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 *Chi³-nam Phâm-vũng* 指南品彙 [Trần Văn Giáp 1969b: 12; Trần Xuân Ngọc-Lan 1982:18]

…至於土王之時移車就國，四十餘年，大行教化，解義南俗以通章句，集成國語詩歌，以致號各；韻作指南品彙，上下二卷，學者難詳…

2.2 In 1930, in his review of Phan Kế Bính'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-

narly 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-Hâm [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-tập* 越史略集. This person said that "Vietnamese characters appeared only 600 years after the Six Dynasties Period in the title *Bổ Cối Đại-vương* and in the appellation *Đại Cối Việt* 大罽越 given to the country under the Đinh, whereas the remainder of our language was boorish and bland." [Trần Văn Giáp 1969b:8]

2.3 In his comments on Trần Văn Giáp's 1969b article, Hoàng Thúc Trâm (penname Hoa Bông) 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 Tích Quang 錫光 in the first century A.D., that it took shape under the autonomous rule of Phùng Hứng 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 曲 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 阮詮 was said to use this native script to compose poetry and fu. In

Hải-đông Chí-lược 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-thư* 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 Dục-thúy (Hộ-thành-sơn), Ninh-bình 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-Hồ 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 Hồng-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 Châu, Chàng Cả, Chàng Hai, etc. on their ceremonial tablets" [Phạm 1919:416].

2.6 During the past several decades, foreign and Vietnamese scholars have evaluated all

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, Pigneau 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-Tinh Cửa'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 École Coloniale 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-Nhíp [sic]" [1886:6] and that *chữ nôm* was "une écriture composée et idéphonétique particulière aux Annamites" and used "to write and represent the sounds of the spoken language" [8].

Cordier, noting both the Nguyễn Thuyên anecdote and the Hộ-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 *Hải-dông Chí-lược*, after Emperor Trần Anh-tông had given his daughter Huyền-Trần 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-thư 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-khiển* 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 Kiểm (penname Tân Việt Điếu), in a comparison between the Vietnamese text and Han Yü'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 Mộng (1880-1954), who had it published in the review *Tứ-dân Văn-uyển* 四民文苑 [Trần Văn Giáp and others 1971: vol.1, p. 509].

The title *Bố Cái Đại-vương*, supposedly bestowed upon Phùng Hưng 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 Huyền 1944, etc.], has recently been given new interpretations. André Haudricourt suggests that the first two characters 布蓋 should be read not *bố* 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 𠂔. Indeed Nguyễn Khắc Kham [personal communication 1978] gave the character 𠂔 the reading *bô* instead, explaining that *bô cái* means "elderly leader of a tribe or of the whole country" (*ông già đứng đầu bộ-lạc hay cả nước*), and is therefore similar to such titles as *tù-trưởng*, *lão phu thân*, *đại trưởng lão* 酋長, 老夫臣, 大長老, etc.

In any event that title given posthumously to Phùng Hưng did not receive notice until

the publication of the historical annals *Đại-Việt Sử-ký Toàn-thư* 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 *Đại Cồ Việt* 大瞿越 given by Đinh Bô-Lĩnh in 968 A.D. to a reunified Vietnam has been the subject of controversy, too. Such scholars as Lê Dư, 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 *cồ* with the meaning "big, great". Others did not agree, but could not explain what *cù* or *cồ* means in that appellation.

Keith Taylor wrote that, in 1054 the third ruler of the Lý dynasty dropped the word *cồ* and used only the name *Đại-Việt*, but that the expression *đại-cồ*, 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, "*Cồ-Việt* 瞿越 might have been the old Vietnamese spelling of the two Chinese graphs 瞿越 *Âu-Việt*." Since the character 瞿 *âu* 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 *âu* 瞿 in order to avoid any possible confusion." Nguyễn Khắc Kham also ventured another hypothesis as follows: 瞿 " *Cù/Cồ Đam* 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 *Đại Cồ 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 *Cồ-quốc* 瞿國 'Buddha's Country'. "[Nguyễn Khắc-Kham 1978]. As for Hoàng Xuân-Hãn, he merely

gives to this word *cố* 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 Hồng Bàng period [see 2.5], that is to say, before "Sĩ Nhiếp prohibited the use of *nôm* characters [Trương Vĩnh Ký 18??, as quoted by Cordier 1935], or under Sĩ Nhiếp's administration [see 2.1]. The Bối-Cái Đại-vương theory [see 2.2] has been considered rather favorably, e.g. by Nguyễn Hữu Quỳ 1971. Typical is (Nguyễn Phước) Bửu-Cầm'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" [Bửu-Cầm 1960a:355]. Citing two pieces of evidence — the title *Bối Cái Đại-vương* of 791 and the country name *Đại Cố Việt* of 968, in which Han and *nôm* characters co-occur — Bửu-Cầm 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 Nhiếp's time and before Nguyễn Thuyên's time" [354-355].

Professor Chen Ching-ho, in his 1949 article written in Chinese (Vietnamese translation by Đoàn Khoách 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 Nhiếp or Nguyễn Thuyên, 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 Gian 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-uyển Tập-anh* on Vietnamese Zen mentioned that, for generations, the forefathers of the resident monk Tín Học (? - 1190) of a temple on Không-lộ 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-Câm 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. Đào 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

(1176-1210)", who in 1195 authorized civil service examinations based on all three religions -- Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism [Dương Quảng-Hàm 1943: 78]. Actually, the "oldest evidence" discussed in Đào Duy Anh's book and dated 1210 has to yield to the (scanty) evidence discovered in 1958: fishermen off the Đồ Sơn seacoast that year found a bronze bell, identified as belonging to the Vân-bản 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 翁何 *ông 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, Đào 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 Báo-ân Temple in Tháp-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 *Đồng Hấp*, *Đồng Chài*, *Đồng Nhe*, *Bới Diên*, 同韓, 同紆, 同埤, 港田, etc. whereas the back side has names of ten donors, each name preceded by the classifier *thăng*. 倘. The 24 characters in question show the two main principles of *nôm* graphemics -- the 假借 *giả-tá* and the 形聲 *hình-thanh* methods -- with most of them (eighteen) following the former method.

The year after Đào Duy Anh's book was published, a book review mentioned an even older stone inscription, dated 1173: the tombstone at the grave of Lê Phụng-Thánh, erected in the eleventh year of Chính-long Báo-ứng of Emperor Lý Anh-tông at Hương-nộn Temple, Phú-thọ Province (nowadays Vĩnh-Phú). This stele contains at least six *nôm* characters for *đầu đình*, *cửa ngõ*, and *bến sông*, respectively 頭停, 舉午, 邊淹 [Trần Xuân Ngọc-Lan and Cung Văn Lực 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 Quán 1981:14-15].

Continuing the work of Đào Duy Anh, and following the phonological approach to

Sino-Vietnamese (*Hán-Việt*) readings of Chinese-borrowed graphs. Nguyễn Tài Căn 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 Cỗ, 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 Trãi (fifteenth century), then those of the Hồng-đức period, or those by Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, 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 Bản-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 Vĩnh-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 Tuệ-Đẳng (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 Mạc Đĩnh Chi.

The *fu* on "Living down-to-earth but enjoying the Way", *Cử-trần Lạc-đạo phú* 居塵樂道賦, had been briefly discussed in the 31st and last installment of "An attempt to write

the history of Vietnamese literature" *Thủ viết Việt-Nam văn-học-sử* by Hoàng Thúc Trâm (penname Hoa-Bằng), in the review *Tri-tân* [1942]. Phạm Thế Ngũ's textbook [1963, vol. 2] also mentioned it, and in his history of Vietnamese Buddhism [1974, repr.1977] Nguyễn Lang noted in Volume I [pp. 250-251] that a copy of *Thiên-tông Bản-hạnh* is in the possession of Professor Hoàng Xuân-Hãn of Paris, who had himself mentioned the Liên-hoa woodblock edition of 1745 in an article in *Vạn-Hạnh*, 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 Đào Duy Anh's disposal in 1973 by Mr. Cao Xuân Huy [Đào 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 Tày *nôm* and Vietnamese *nôm*, using the study of the former characters by Nguyễn Văn Huyền [1941]. On the system of *Thổ nôm* characters, Chen Ching-ho [1963: 768-772] made a comparison of the *Thổ* 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.

Đào 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. Đào provides an illustration of how certain characters taken from the four early *fu* samples as well as from the narrative *Hoa-tiên ký* 花箋記, from the story of "The Faithful Wife of Khoái-châu" in the collection *Truyện-ký* 傳奇漫錄, and from the preface of *Chi-nam Ngọc-âm Giải-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 Quán 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-lục Tăng-bổ Giải-âm Tập-chú*, 指南玉音解義 *Chi-nam Ngọc-âm Giải-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 *chữ 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 *Tự-học Toàn-yếu* 字學纂要, a dictionary of three thousand Chinese characters commonly known as *Tam-thiên-tự Giải-âm* 三千字解音 [Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1973; 1989], Ngô Thời-Nhiệm (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 *chữ nôm* used primarily phonetic compounds (*hình-thanh*), false borrowings (*giả-tá*), and in some rare cases logical combinations (*hội-ý*), but no imitative pictures (*tượng-hình*), indicative symbols (*chỉ-sử*) or turnings of meaning (*chuyển-chú*) at all: see for instance Wang Li [1958:382].

Huỳnh-Tĩnh Của, author of *Đại-nam Quốc-âm Tự-vị* 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

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 諾(水 + 若); *lửa* (fire) written 焠(火 + 呂); or the radical (mouth) 口 is used in 𠵼 *miệng* (mouth), in 𠵼 *nói* (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 𠵼 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-Tĩnh Paulus Cửa 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]

Principles for *nôm* creation have been said to number anywhere from two [Hoàng Xuân-Hãn 1953: 206], three [Dương Quảng-Hàm 1942: 273-282], four [Hồ Ngọc Cân 1933: 162-166; Phạm Văn Diêu 1958: 1097-1098], five [Wen 1933; Trần Văn Giáp 1969: 22; Nguyễn Khắc Kham 1974: 174-175]; six [Chéon, as quoted by cordier 1935: 118], seven [Nguyễn Khắc Kham 1970: 144-145; Hoa Bằng 1971: 58-59; Vũ Văn Kính 1971: ix-xi; Nguyễn Phú Phong 1978: 45-50], to eight [Phạm Thế Ngũ 1962: 22-26], and even ten [Schneider 1979: 18-27]. Đào Duy Anh went into the details of the *giả-tả* and the *hình-thanh* after mentioning only six cases of the *hội-ý* method. He distinguished five subcategories of *giả-tả* characters and two subcategories of *hình-thanh* characters.

Nguyễn Tài Căn & 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-

name form, and making up the majority of *nôm* characters of Type I. Class B of abbreviated graphs has only around forty examples.

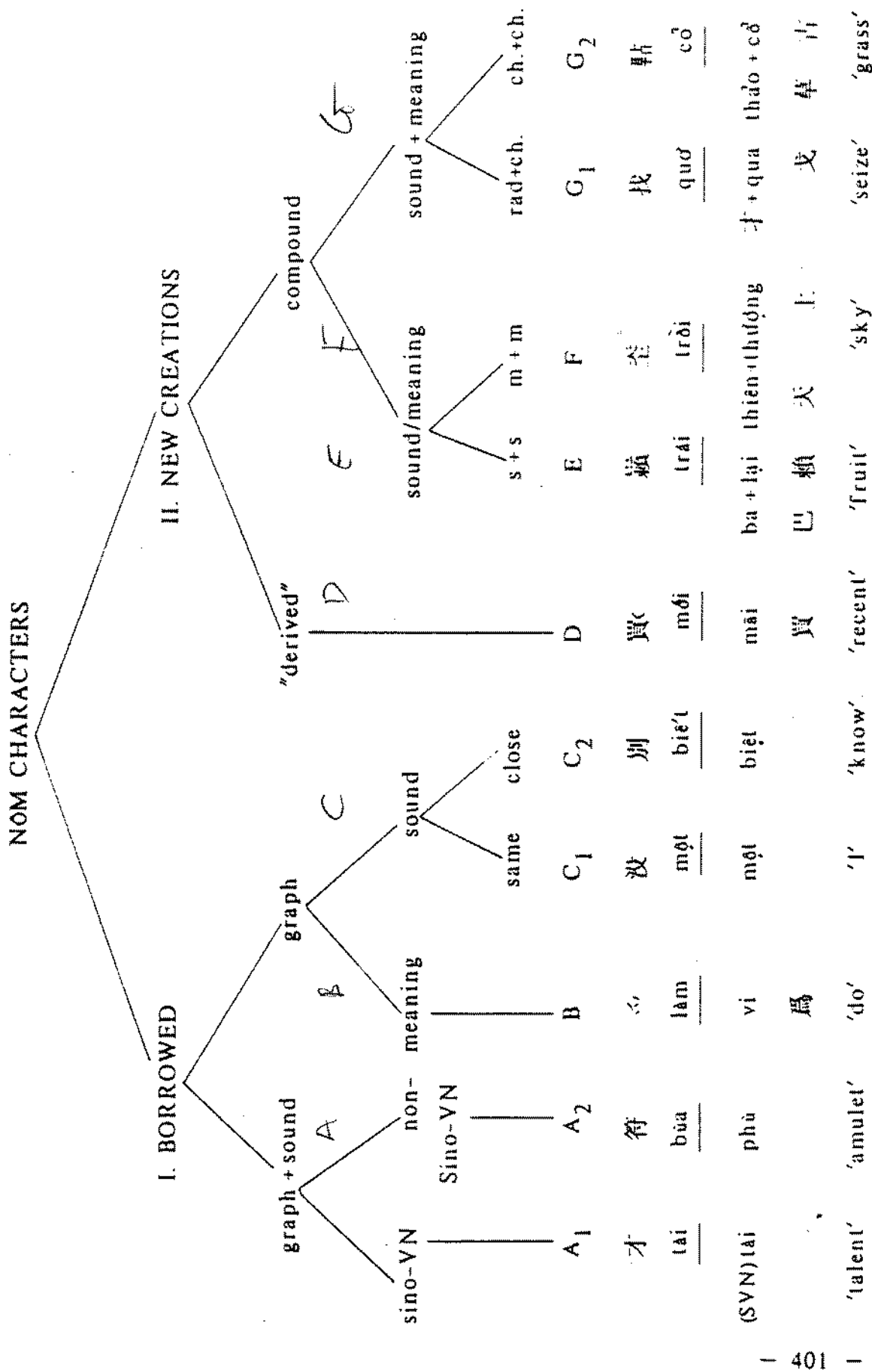
Of the new creations (Type II), Class D includes "derived" forms that contain a diacritic "to warn the reader that this is not a case of C": thus, 買< should be read not *mãi*, but *mới* "new; recent(ly)"; 木< should be read not *mộc*, but *mọc* "to grow"; 仍< should be read not *những*, but *những* "[plural 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 /bi-/, /kl-/ and / ? r-/ (Maspero's //r) as in

| | | | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|---|-------------|
| <i>trái</i> | "fruit" | < *blai | 𣎵 | (ba + lai) |
| <i>trán</i> | "forehead" | < *blan | 𣎵 | (ba + lan) |
| <i>trăng</i> | "moon" | < *blang | 𣎵 | (ba + lãng) |
| <i>treo</i> | "to hang" | < *kleo | 𣎵 | (cự + liêu) |
| <i>tròn</i> | "round" | < *klon | 論 | (cự + luân) |
| <i>trọn</i> | "complete" | < *klon | 論 | (cự + luân) |
| <i>trống</i> | "drum" | < *klong | 鞞 | (cổ + lộng) |
| <i>sấm</i> | "thunder" | < * ? ram | 𣎵 | (cự + lãm) |
| <i>sang</i> | "noble" | < * ? rang | 𣎵 | (cự + lang) |
| etc. | | | | |

The class of *hội-ý* (*hui i*) 會意 characters (F) is a small one and suggests the *kokuji* forms in Japanese (峠 *toge* "mountain pass", 榊 *sakaki* "curry ochracea", 杜 *mori* "grove at a shrine") [Kono Rokuro 1969 as cited in Nguyễn Khắc Kham 1974]. These characters are said to number nearly twenty [Nguyễn Tài Căn & Xtankevich 1976: 23, note 17]. Typical examples are 天 *trời/giời* (天+上) "sky"; 全 *trùm* (人+上) "leader, boss"; 令 *seo* (人+下) "village crier"; 望 *rằm* (望+五) "15th day of month"; 余 or 尔 or 尔 *mấy* (人+水 or 小 or 小) "a few"; 遲 *chầy* (遲+其) "late"; 卅 *mười* (卅+十) "ten". Đào Duy Anh also cites a sixth exam-

Figure 1. Nguyễn Tài Cẩn's classificatory scheme



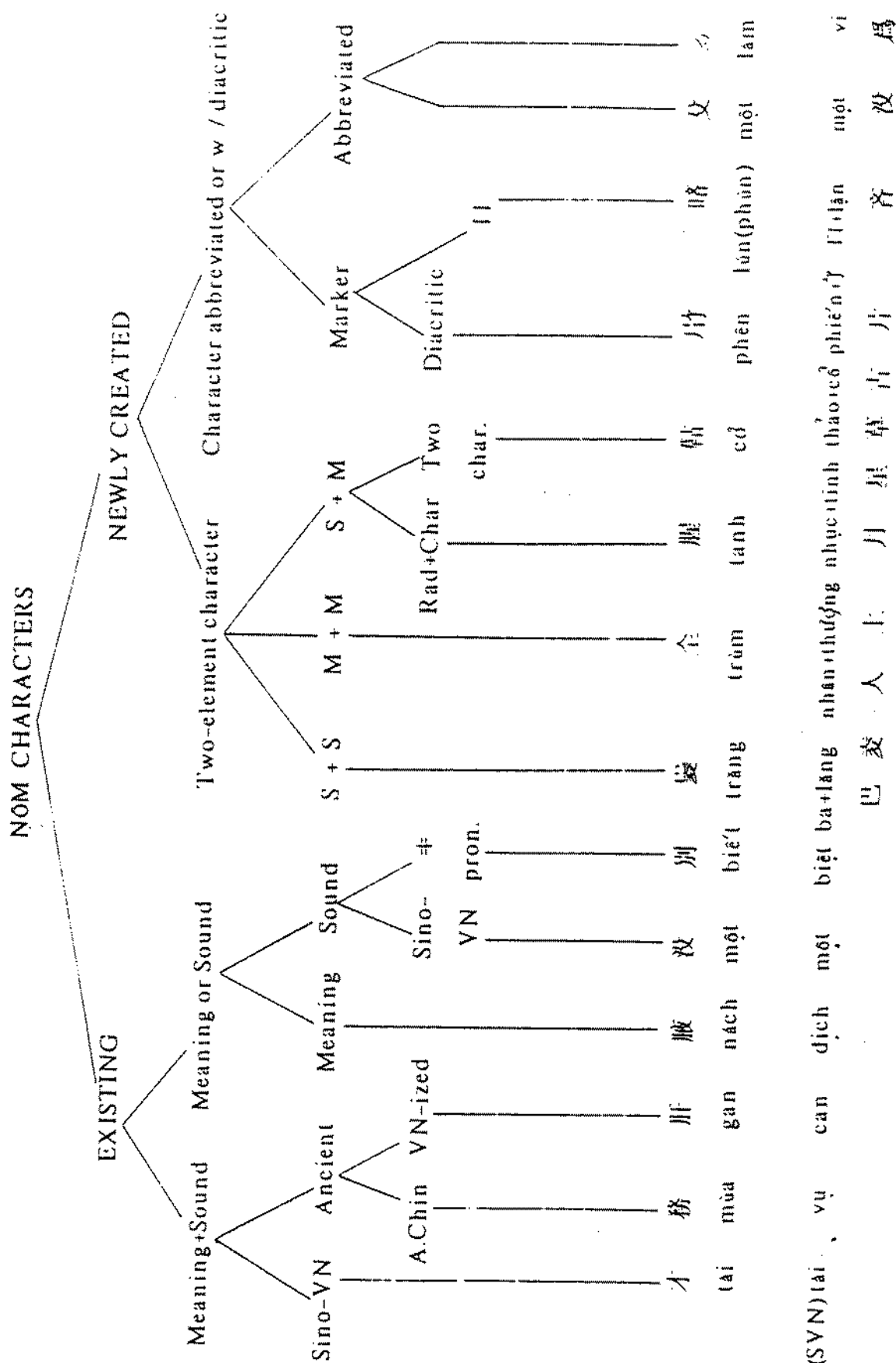
ple: 彭 *sánh* (业 + 多) "to compare", but it is actually a phonetic compound (*hình-thanh*) character, in which *phleg > big > *sánh* [Vuong Loc 1973]. The character 𠵼 for *mất* does not follow the *hội-y* method, but is rather a case of *fan-chie* [Wang Li 1958: 385]. Trần Xuân Ngọc-Lan & Cung Văn Lực also list such well known characters as 迨 *trên* "space above", 迨 *dưới* "space below", 睇 *nhòm* "to look, peek" [1976:23] while Nguyễn Tài Căn & Xtankevich contribute 緝 *chuōi* "string", 秀 *lú* "exhausted", and 𠵼 *trộm* "(to look) furtively" [1976:23].

The compound characters which make up subclasses 1 and 2 of Class G consist of a signfic 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 *chữ nôm* makes use of over 60 radicals including 巨 *cự* "big" and 車 *xa* "chariot". Concerning the former element, one can argue, as Wang Li did [386] that this is a radical, which appears in 𠵼, 𠵼 and 𠵼, 𠵼. However, it is found in E characters instead, as a phonetic first member of an initial */kl-/. As for the use of 車 *xa* in the *nôm* system, it is a good instance of *giả-tá* characters later becoming *hình-thanh* ones:

| | | |
|--------------|------------------|-------------|
| <i>trước</i> | "space in front" | 𠵼 > 𠵼 > 𠵼 ; |
| <i>sau</i> | "space in back" | 𠵼 > 𠵼 > 𠵼 ; |
| <i>lui</i> | "to step back" | 𠵼 > 𠵼 > 𠵼 . |

Schneider [1979], paying attention to the interaction between graphic shape, phonetic form, and meaning, distinguishes three broad categories of *chữ nôm*: those borrowed from Chinese, those newly created, and those having the same initial consonants. In the first category he includes Sino-Vietnamese words, *nôm* words, phonetic loans, and semantic loans. His second category comprises five subgroups, including "agrégats logiques" (*hội-y*) and "complexes phonétiques" (*hội-âm*). His unique contribution consists in pointing out characters created through the *fan-chie* method, and in the third category characters representing reduplications.

Figure 2. Le Van Quán's classificatory scheme

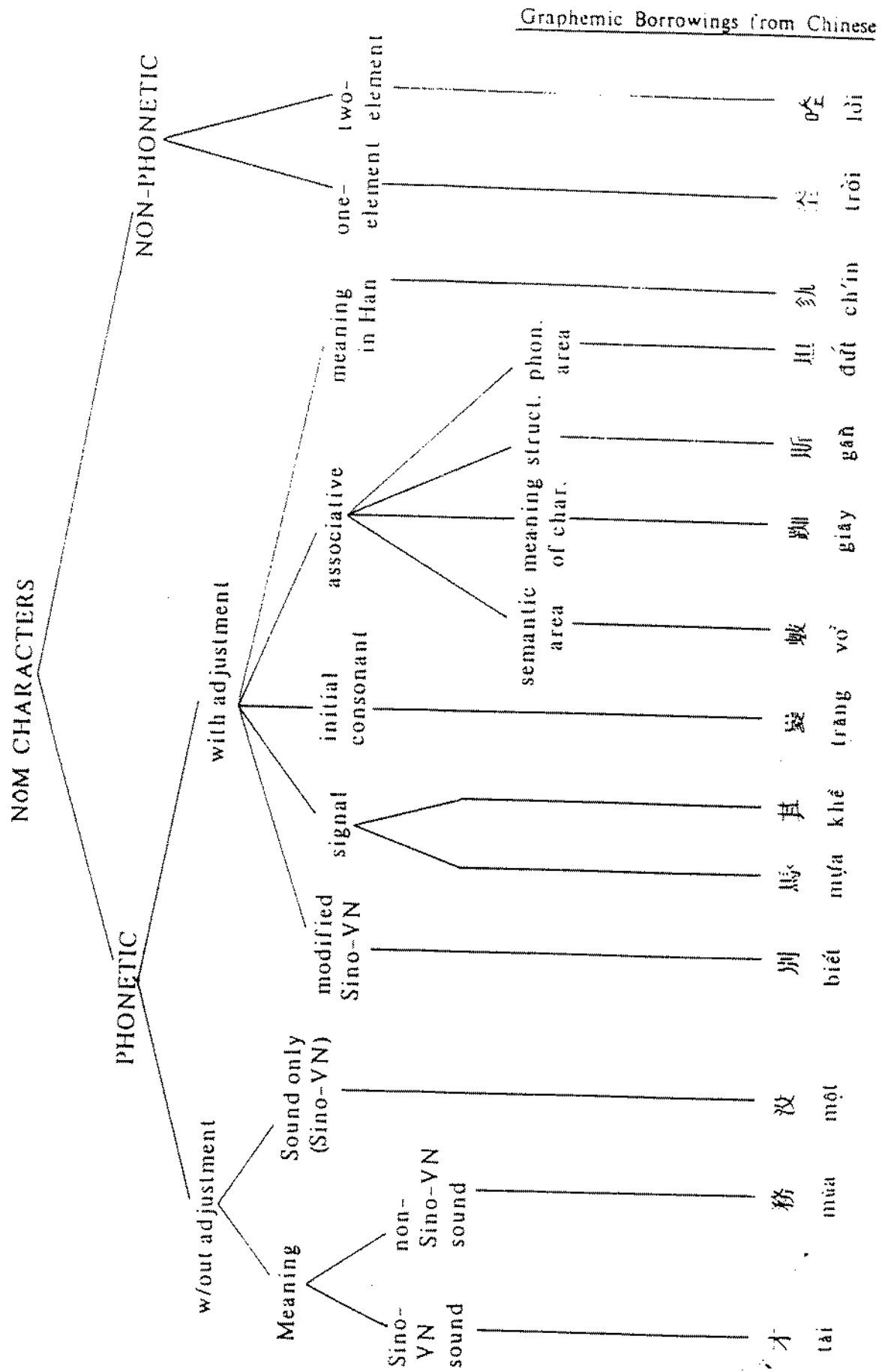


In his monograph, Lê Văn Quán distinguishes between six types of characters A, B, C, D, E, and F, that are simply borrowed from the Sino-Vietnamese repertory, on the one hand [1981:86-88], and on the other hand, eight other types, that are created by combining either two elements (as in G, H, I, and 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]:

| | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|--|
| <i>viết nôm</i> | A | 才 | <i>tài</i> "talent": Sino-Vietnamese <i>tài</i> |
| | B | 務 | <i>mùa</i> "season": SVN <i>vụ</i> |
| | C | 肝 | <i>gan</i> "liver": SVN <i>cán</i> |
| | D | 腋 | <i>nách</i> "armpit": SVN <i>dịch</i> |
| | E | 沒 | <i>một</i> "1": SVN <i>một</i> |
| | F | 別 | <i>biết</i> "to know": SVN <i>biết</i> |
| | G | 曼 | <i>trăng</i> "moon": [巴 SVN <i>ba</i> + SVN <i>lăng</i>] |
| | H | 仝 | <i>trùm</i> "(village) leader": [人 <i>nhân</i> + 上 <i>thượng</i>] |
| | I | 腥 | <i>tanh</i> "[fish] smelly": [月 <i>nhục</i> + 星 <i>tinh</i>] |
| | J | 韜 | <i>cỏ</i> "grass": [草 <i>thảo</i> + 古 <i>cổ</i>] |
| | K | 竹 | <i>phên</i> "bamboo partition": [片 <i>phiến</i> + 个 diacritic] |
| | L | 喀 | <i>lùn (phún)</i> "[hair] sparse": [口 diacritic + 吝 <i>lận</i>] |
| | M | 爻 | <i>một</i> "1": abbreviation of 沒 |
| | N | 𠄎 | <i>làm</i> "to do, work": abbreviation of 爲 <i>vi</i> . |

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



- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 1 | 才 | <i>tài</i> "talent": Sino-Vietnamese <i>tài</i> |
| 2 | 務 | <i>mùa</i> "season": SVN <i>vụ</i> |
| 3 | 沒 | <i>một</i> "1": SVN <i>mot</i> |
| 4 | 別 | <i>biết</i> "to know": SVN <i>biệt</i> |
| 5 | 馬< | <i>mũa</i> "do not": SVN 馬 <i>mã</i> + diacritic < |
| 6 | 其(其) | <i>khê</i> (<i>khà</i>) "to linger over a drink": SVN 其 <i>kỳ</i> minus a stroke |
| 7 | 曩 | <i>trăng</i> "moon": SVN 巴 <i>ba</i> + 麥 <i>lãng</i> |
| 8 | 蚊 | <i>vờ</i> "to pretend" (Nôm character for "moth") |
| 9 | 踟 | <i>giây</i> "instant": SVN 足 <i>túc</i> + 知 <i>tri</i> . Cf. <i>Bước đi một bước giây giây lại dừng</i> [from the poem <i>Chinh-phụ-ngâm</i>] |
| 10 | 斯 | <i>gần</i> "near": SVN 貝 <i>bối</i> + half of SVN 近 <i>cận</i> [cf. <i>xa</i> 除...] |
| 11 | 坦 | <i>đứt</i> "[string] broken": Nôm character 坦 <i>đất</i> |
| 12 | 飪 | <i>chín</i> "cooked": Nôm character for <i>chín</i> "nine" |
| 13 | 𠄎 | <i>trời</i> "sky": SVN 天 <i>thiên</i> + 上 <i>thượng</i> |
| 14 | 𠄎 | <i>lời</i> "spoken words": Radical 口 + Nôm character 𠄎 |

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, 別, to be read *biết* instead of *biệt*, 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 Quán in 1979 and that offered by Nguyễn Ngọc San in 1987 are more detailed than the one which Nguyễn Tài Căn 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 *chữ 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 *dấu cá* or *dấu nhấp-nháy* and appears on the right side of a character, to which a slightly off pronunciation should be given:

mãi yielding 買 < *mới* "new"; *nhưng* yielding 仍 < *những* "[plural]"; *mộc* yielding 木 < *mọc* "to grow"; *côi* yielding 骨 < (*côi*) *cút* "orphaned"; *ly* yielding 离 (song) *le* "however"; *lang* yielding 郎 < *lặng* "quiet"; *bán giác* yielding 半角 < *bán chác* "to sell and barter"; *âm* yielding 𠵼 諳 < "to try, feel out"; *ni* yielding 尼 < "this", etc. Đào also mentions instances where this diacritic is "erroneously" written as 司 as in *gương* 𠵼 鏡 and *vui* 𠵼 詞, or as 𠵼 as in *lang* 𠵼 鬮 and *vâng* 𠵼 鬮 [Đào 1975:93].

Actually the diacritic *dấu cá* 𠵼 is different from the *dấu nháy*: *dua* or *đô* is written 都个. Nguyễn Ngọc San mentions the diacritic 彡 found in 彰 *đấy*, 彰 *đời*, and 彰 *nghe* in Buddhist texts, and the diacritic 彡 found in 𠵼 *buổi*, 𠵼 *cha*, 𠵼 *cán*, 𠵼 *khen*, and 𠵼 *trai* *thành thời*, found in *Nhị thập tứ hiếu diển-ca*. Both *Phật-thuyết* and *Chí-nam Ngọc-âm* have the diacritic used in 𠵼 or 𠵼 for *vua*: it later became 司 as in 𠵼 *gương*, and 𠵼 *vua*.

Regarding the mark 𠵼, found in such characters as *va* 吧, *han* 𠵼, *gũi* 𠵼, it has been said to resemble the 𠵼 radical found in 咖啡, 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 /r/ for /l/, as in *ra* 囉, *rẽ* 𠵼, *trời* 𠵼, etc. [Đào 1975:87]. The two co-authors Vũ Văn Kính and Nguyễn Văn Khánh mention a mark 𠵼 found in 𠵼 *nhau*, ordinarily written 𠵼 [1970:3].

Professor Hoàng Xuân-Hãn, who mentioned seven marks in 1953, has now listed eight different ones: 𠵼, 多, 巨, 司, 𠵼, 𠵼, 巴, and 車. The first one is often written as <. 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 𠵼 𠵼 *khê-khà* "[of voice] drawling and hoarse" and 𠵼 𠵼 *khênh-khạng* "to walk slowly like an important person" [Nguyễn and Vũ 1917: viii], found in a poem by Cao Bá

Quát, or in 亨亨 *kênh-câng*. These examples remind us of the two characters 乒乓 used in Chinese to write *ping-pong*.

Nguyễn Ngọc San discusses such elements as 巴, 波, 可, 巨, 𠂇, 車, 阿, which are used to signal the first member of an initial consonant cluster /b-, k-, m-, etc./ as in *trăng* 𠂇, *trống* 𠂇, but which may be omitted, as in *trăm* 林 < 𠂇 or in *trước* 𠂇 < 𠂇, or even replaced by the diacritic 个 as in *trái* 𠂇 < 𠂇, *trăm* 𠂇 < 𠂇. He also says that the element 𠂇 (written 巴 or 波) is used to indicate preglottalization as in /[?]b, [?]d, [?]j and [?]g/: *đẽ' lờng* 𠂇弄 for Chinese 志心, *duật* 𠂇 for Chinese 習, *ghê thay* 波加世 for Chinese 無量, *đôi gầy* 對阿計 for Chinese 苦饑 [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-Hãn that the element 𠂇 > 𠂇 is the first member of the cluster /ml-/ , as in 𠂇 *mlời*, written initially with a double graph 𠂇例 as in 𠂇例 𠂇 for Chinese 言行. [1987:204]

Two abbreviated forms of high frequency in *nôm* texts are 𠂇 used for *lâm*, and 𠂇 for *lallâ* 𠂇 羅 <. The former is often said to stand for the character 爲 *vi*, but according to Professor Hoàng, the change has been instead from 𠂇 to 𠂇 then 𠂇 [Hoàng 1978:54]. But these shorthand-like forms are outnumbered by countless abbreviations; Cordier spoke of "formes régulières" such as *đến* 𠂇, which following the *loi du moindre effort* became the form 𠂇, or 有固 for *có* becoming shortened to 固, with the signific sometimes left out by the scribe, as in 萌 < 縞 *mành* "window blinds", 吝 < 落 *lạn* "to dive", or 童 < 撞 *chàng* "guy", etc. Actually, however, the transition has rather been in the reverse direction: *đến* 𠂇 > 𠂇, or 𠂇 > 𠂇 "to arrive"; *mới* 買 > 𠂇 "only then"; *đời* 代 > 𠂇 "generation"; *mất* 失 > 𠂇 "to lose"; *tuổi* 歲 > 𠂇, "year of age"; *thấy* 体 > 𠂇 "to see"; etc. Father Hồ Ngọc Cán, writing in 1923, cited the sentence *Cổ xưa nay*, which was first written thus 固初尼 by Catholic missionaries, but later on changed to 𠂇習 𠂇 or 𠂇習 𠂇 with a view to indicating the signific as well.

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

𠂇 *bàn* "dirty" < 𠂇; 𠂇 *cay* "peppery-hot" < 該 *cai*; 𠂇 *cháu* "grandchild, nephew" < 係

· 胎 + 詔chiếu; 媯chứa "pregnant" < 渚chứ; 戾chợt "suddenly" < 秩trật; or 埴đất "earth" < 怛đát; etc.

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

尋, abbreviated form of 時thì, appears as signific in 朝ngày "day", in 馱or 尋nguồi / ngài "man: sir", and in 蠶ngài "silkworm moth" (Cf. ngài 蠶). In another example, the part 能năng, is used as signific in 能hay "good, proficient", but as phonetic in 拏nâng "to raise".

Fluctuations in the design of the script have led scholars to discussions of its strengths and weaknesses [Dương Quảng-Hâm 1942, Bửu Cầm 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-đức Quốc-âm Thi-tập* written under Lê Thánh-tông, and *Chí-nam Ngọc-âm* by Hương-chân Pháp-tính representing the second period. *Truyện-kỳ Vạn-lục Giải-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-tiên ký* (end of the Lê dynasty) and *Đại-nam Quốc-sử Diễn-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 *Tân-biên Truyện-kỳ Vạn-lục Giải-âm*, *Chí-nam Ngọc-âm*, *Thập-tam phương Gia-giảm*; 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-sử Diễn-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-Hâm four decades or so ago recommended the compilation of a dictionary of demotic characters with the following ideal quality:

"Ce répertoire comprendrait deux parties: dans la première, seraient relevés et classés tous les caractères employés dans les éditions suivant l'ordre des clefs ou racines, et, dans chaque clef, suivant le nombre de traits à la façon des dictionnaires chinois. Les caractères seraient numérotés. Chaque caractère serait accompagné de son équivalent en quốc-ngũ et les variantes usitées seraient indiquées. Dans la deuxième partie, tous les termes transcrits en quốc-ngũ seraient mentionnés suivant l'ordre alphabétique avec renvoi au numéro du caractère correspondant." [1942: 285]

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 Rập 196 ? ; Chen 1970; Vũ Văn Kính & Nguyễn Văn Khánh 1970; Nguyễn Quang Xỹ & Vũ Văn Kính 1971; Viện Ngôn-ngũ-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 (pennname 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-Hãn, 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 hữ-chiếu các âm-tổ*

