

SOME REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER SCRIPT EMPLOYED IN THE PRESENT VOLUME

By

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Most of the illustrations in this volume have notes that accompany them. These notes record the names of objects or explain the objects or activities depicted in illustrations for the reader. These notes are written in Nôm characters, with Chinese characters interjected into them as well. For example, in the two illustrations on page 222, the right-hand side has a note written in Nôm which translates (in contemporary Vietnamese Romanized script) to '*Bán Bánh Bò*,' while the illustration next to it features an explanatory note written in Chinese script ('*Mại Oa*,' meaning '*BánẾch*' or 'selling frogs').

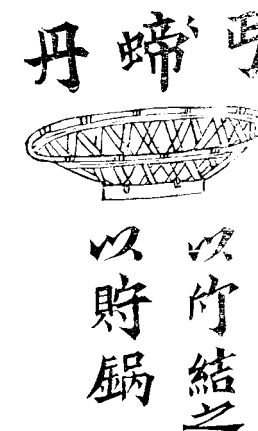


Drawings p. 222

- To distinguish the two kinds of script employed in the text, we have proceeded as follows: concerning annotations in Han (Classical Chinese) characters, we render their meaning into Romanized Vietnamese printed in italics; for annotations written in Nôm characters, we offer a transliteration into Romanized Vietnamese, which is printed in normal type. This presentation preserves the integrity of the Han and Nôm characters which appear in tandem within this volume's annotations.

For instance, the illustration on page 292 has an explanation in Nôm above the picture which explains that this particular illustration depicts '*Cái Rế Đan*.' Below the same picture, another explanation in Chinese characters provides additional

clarification as follows: '*Dĩ Trúc Kê Chi Dĩ Trữ Qua*' a phrase that translates into Vietnamese as '*Rế Đan Bằng Tre Để Đặt Nôi*.' Therefore, the annotation of illustrations in this text includes both phonetic transcriptions of Nôm characters as well as translations of Chinese characters, with both transcriptions and translations rendered into contemporary Romanized Vietnamese. However, as the Vietnamese translations in this volume (consistent with the Vietnamese language itself) retain many Sino-Vietnamese elements, we can never easily and clearly differentiate, in some cases, between a phonetic value resulting from transliteration (Nôm readings of Chinese characters) and a translation of a Chinese character into Vietnamese. Because of this difficulty, we will make such distinctions as circumstances demand.



Drawing p. 292

When transcribing and translating Han and Nôm characters in the present work, we make a distinction between two different contexts within which characters appear. The first is within annotations by either the author or the editor of the text. These appear beside a figure for explanatory purposes. We have taken great care to completely translate these characters. The second context is Han and Nôm characters that solely reference objects or activities in particular illustrations; for instance, characters that appear on seals, on pages of books, pictures, on amulets, on divination objects, etc. We have only selected for translation characters of this type that might aid the reader to more clearly understand particular illustrations.

Within the course of transliteration and translation, we have made use of certain notations. For instance, brackets ([...]), added by the translator, enclose an explanation of particular words, either antiquated Vietnamese or Sino-Vietnamese, for the benefit of contemporary reader. A question mark (?) follows antiquated words for which the translator could determine neither accurate pronunciation nor precise meaning.

Specifically concerning the examination of Nôm characters, if we take our basis for classification from the Hán-Nôm Institute's *Nôm Dictionary*, then we can see that the annotations in this volume employ almost all of the ten varieties of Nôm

⁽¹⁾ This technical introduction has been translated by Bradley Davis.

characters identified by the *Nôm Dictionary*. Of course, there are some special characteristics, stemming from historical circumstance and the individual calligraphy styles of individual authors, as discussed below:



1.- In the present volume, many *Nôm* characters result from the adoption of the meaning of a particular Chinese character, but read with a *Nôm* or Vietnamese pronunciation. In these cases, the *Nôm Dictionary*⁽¹⁾ posits that 'loan-characters borrow the form and meaning of Chinese characters but are read according to a *Nôm* pronunciation of 'purely' Vietnamese origin.' Yet loan-characters with *Nôm* pronunciation, according to the *Nôm Dictionary*, should be used scarcely in written works. However, in the present volume this particular type of character appears often, as in the case of 肩 (Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation: *kiên*) which is read as *vai* in its *Nôm* pronunciation (p.58); 芋 (SV: *vu*) read as *khoai* (pp.83, 206, 328, 507); 笠 (SV: *lạp*) read as *nón* (p.131,); 燈 (SV: *đăng*) read as *đèn* (p.382); 規 (SV: *qui*) read as *khuôn* (p.204; 396); 鹹 (SV: *hàm*) read as *mắm* (p.64); 書 (SV: *thu*) read as *viết* (p.213) etc.

In the present text, this practice of borrowing the meaning of Chinese characters to record Vietnamese pronunciation has generated two special classes of *Nôm* characters, neither of which belong to the type of *Nôm* characters usually encountered. This type is rarely seen in other texts.

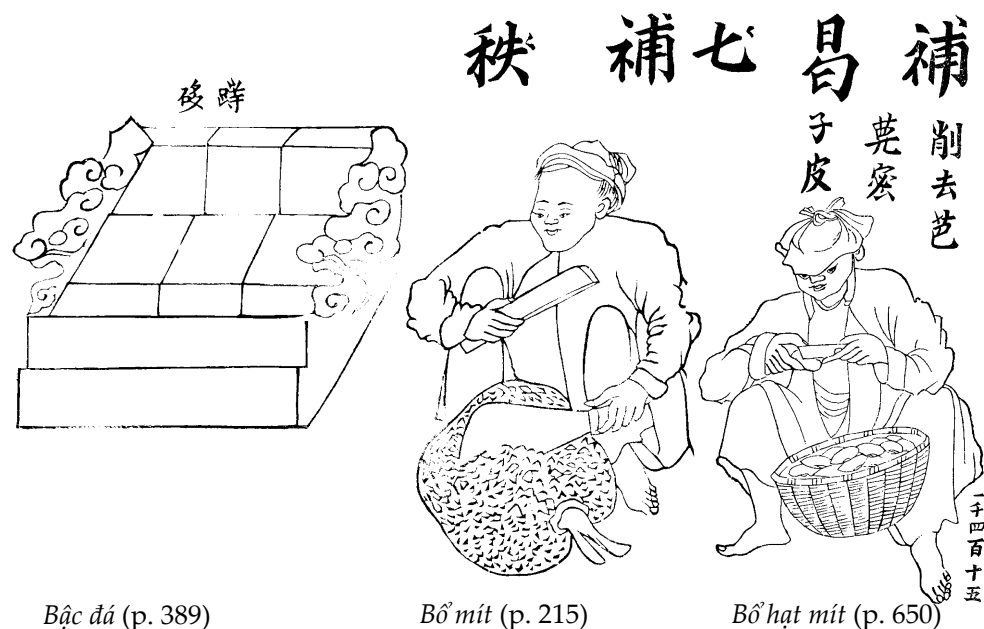
a.- In other examples, the meaning of a Chinese character is translated into Vietnamese to form a phonetic component. To acquire a new meaning, this component is then combined with a radical to form a new character, the pronunciation of which is closely related to the adopted phonetic component. In this case, the meaning of a particular Chinese character has no relationship to the meaning of the *Nôm* character and the Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation of a particular Chinese character also has no relation to the Vietnamese or *Nôm* reading of the character.

For example:

才 (radical) + 歷 (SV: *lịch* ; meaning: *trải*), read as *chải*, *chôi*, *chè*.

足 (radical) + 等 (SV: *đẳng* ; meaning: *bậc*), read as *bậc*.

禾 (radical) + 失 (SV: *thất* ; meaning: *mất*), read as *mít*.



Even though occasionally the composite character formed with a Chinese character is only a homophone of a Chinese character, the meaning of the Chinese character is utilized to represent the pronunciation of an unrelated Vietnamese word. In the case of the character 七 (SV: *thất*, meaning the number 7), it is used to represent the Vietnamese word *mít*, meaning jack-fruit. Both the Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation and the meaning of the Chinese character in this case has no relationship whatsoever with the word *mít*. Here, the character 七 takes the place of a homophone, 失 (SV: *thất*, meaning to lose, an idea expressed in Vietnamese with the word *mất*, becoming thusly '*mít*') in the annotation *Bổ hạt mít* (opening the nuts of the jack-fruit):

⁽¹⁾ Cf. p. 23, *Tự điển chữ Nôm*, Viện Nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, Publié par le Viện Khoa học Xã hội Việt Nam, Maison d'édition Giáo dục, Hanoi, 2006.

b.– Elsewhere in the text, both components of Nôm characters represent phonetic values. In these cases, the first component signifies the Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation of a Chinese character while the second component represents the use of the *meaning* of a particular Chinese character in a phonetic sense.

For example: 北 (SV: *bắc*, meaning ‘north’) combined with 等 (SV: *đẳng*, meaning ‘degree’ or ‘rank,’ a concept also described by the Vietnamese word *bậc*) is read as *bắc* (meaning ‘a junk’).

2.– A number of other Nôm characters used in this work are reserved solely for manifesting the phonetic value of a particular Vietnamese word, and thus do not demonstrate a great concern for the meanings of a certain character's component parts:

– Within this text, there appears also the use of borrowed or loaned Nôm characters, actually importing the phonetic value of a Nôm character, to represent a Vietnamese word with a different meaning, even though many Vietnamese words represented this way may have never had a written form previously. For instance, the Nôm character pronounced as Bé represents the Vietnamese word Bế in the annotation ‘Bế con nằm ngủ (p.51)’, the character for Suối represents the Vietnamese word ‘Chuối’ in the annotation Bè chuối (p. 312); the character for Dày represents the Vietnamese word Giày in the annotation ‘Giày gộc



Bố con nằm ngủ



Giấy gộc tre



Bè chuôi



Bán lọ chè tàu

縛 捆 縛



Buộc tay bắc (p. 80)

tre (p.58),’ the character for Lụa represents the Vietnamese word lụa in the annotation ‘Bán lụa chè Tàu (p.310),’ the character Gã represents the Vietnamese word Gã in the annotation ‘Người gõ chi (p.156)...’

– In other cases, for the same Vietnamese word, several distinct Nôm characters are employed:

Cau: 搞 (p.6); 稿 (p.126); 搞 (p.150).

Kẹo: 轎 (p.184); 矯 (p.62); 稿 (p.382).

Chuôi: 債 (p.4, 57); 滌 (p.312); 措 (p.663).

Kéo: 拮(p.155); 機(p.30); 告(p.46); 擣(p.151); 拽(p.472).

Chè: 枳 (p.343); 扯 (p.558); 穉 (p.133); 攪 (p.308).

- For a number of words of Chinese origin that have their own distinct characters and specific meanings, there are substitutions of Chinese characters with homophonic equivalents as follows:

八 replaces 鉢 (*Bồ bát vào cũi*, p.99)

歎 replaces 碳 (*Gấp than đốt trâm*, p.346)

塘 replaces 糖 (*Sàng đường cát*, p.199)

賒 replaces 車 (*Cái xa*, p.389)

逐 replaces 軸 (*Cái trục máy thợ tiện*, p.293)

– Elsewhere, the use of radicals, in a fluid and somewhat arbitrary fashion, seems to have no role in the specific meaning of particular Nôm characters, for example:

抵 “đay” in *chuốt sọ đay* (p.64);

𪛗 “*cơm*” in *Cái liền cơm* (p.403).

As we can see from the points discussed above, Nôm character annotations in this text can be deciphered with some difficulty. On the other hand, the annotations also provide interesting and valuable textual evidence for researching Nôm characters during the beginning of the 20th century, when this ancient form of writing was in its final stage of development prior to its complete displacement by the Romanized system of *Quốc Ngữ*.