

Three-point proposal for promoting chữ Nôm in Vietnamese studies

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Promote Nôm Studies in the U.S.

Association For Asian Studies

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Two Vietnamese scripts

- Vietnamese has two ways to write the same word—𠄎喃 and chữ quốc ngữ. A 𠄎 or chữ, a written syllable, represents one 𠄎 tiếng, a spoken syllable.
- 𠄎喃 [chữ Nôm] is the national script used in Vietnam at least since the Xth Century.
- 𠄎喃 is an “ideographic” script. Each word is a syllable. Each syllable is written in a square.
- 𠄎喃 was replaced by a latin (roman) script called chữ quốc ngữ in the 1920’s.

Problem #1

- There exists a monumental amount of documents in 𡗗 漢 喃 chữ Hán-Nôm, an ideographic script, used in Vietnam for over 1,000 years since its independence in 939 AD, now in danger of further destruction after more than 100 years of wars.
- Hán-Nôm documents and vestiges have been found languishing in many European and East Asian libraries, museums, private holdings, and all over Vietnam.

Problem #2

- The last national examination using chữ Hán-Nôm was in the 1919. Scholars who master Hán-Nôm are almost extinct.
- The surviving Hán-Nôm scholars do not teach, because they did not go through the standard national pedagogy course work.
- Thus, the wars, the politics of anti-feudalism by all sides, and the modern educational system requirements jointly aggravate the situation.

Problem #3...

- In universities, Hán-Nôm Studies belong to the Literature Department. They logically belong to Vietnamese Department, not just literature.
- Hán-Nôm teaching materials in Vietnam today are few, and the official textbooks sorely lack crucial textual data of those ten centuries.
- The traditional teaching method lacks knowledge of pedagogy as well as educational materials.

Problem #3

- A Hán-Nôm teacher traditionally started with teaching Chinese through 三千字 *Tam Thiên Tự* “Three thousand characters”—they are written in verses by Ngô Thì Nhậm around the end of the 18th Century, with corresponding Vietnamese Hán-Nôm characters.
- The teacher then began the Confucian Classics 四書 *Tứ Thư* and 五經 *Ngũ kinh* in Chinese.
- There are in fact no formal systematic curricula teaching Hán-Nôm.

An alternative

- We are left with one alternative: the web with a careful formal approach.
- There is a need to create new teaching materials that encourage students to study chữ Hán-Nôm, using the web technology with text and dictionary resources.
- After six month surveys of Hán-Nôm scholars in Vietnam in 2005, we have proposed a three-step program for Hán-Nôm from high school to the university level.

Proposal #1: Illustration

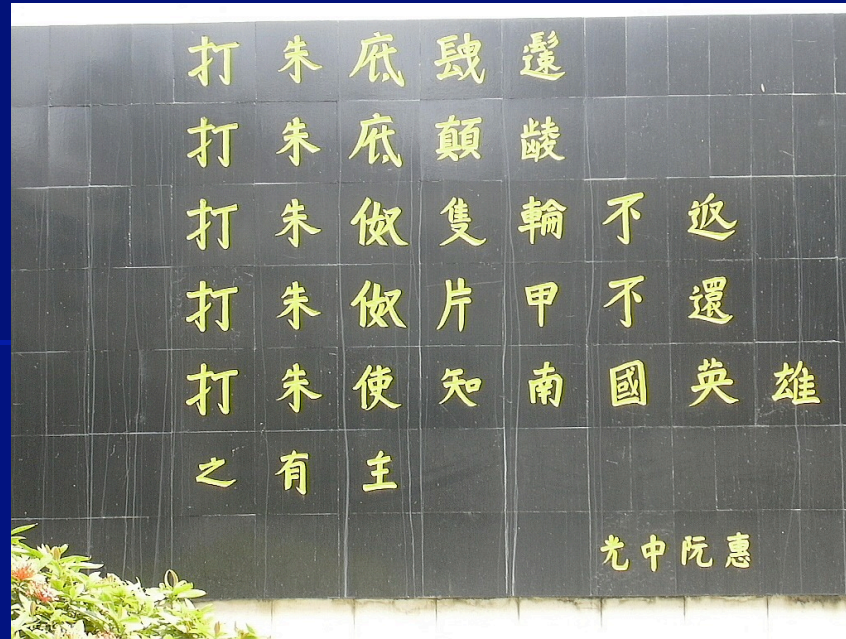
- We propose every mention in chữ quốc ngữ of a historical text, originally written in chữ Hán-Nôm, in high school textbooks, be accompanied by its original, i.e. a picture of the appropriate original document.
- Students are not required to memorize them for tests. The original Hán-Nôm sources are simply there as “illustrations”.
- Teaching materials for teachers can be made available as to the content of the illustrations.

Proposal #1: Illustration

- The proposal relies on human curiosity:
 - the obvious visual similarities:
 - 1 syllable = 1 quốc ngữ word = 1 Nôm char.
 - the obvious visual difference in shapes and presentation of the two writing systems:
 - 1 syllable [𠵶 tiếng] = 1 chữ = 1 𠵶.
- It also relies on the innate language capacity: recognition of regularities, linearity and structure in language, as well as in each of the two writing systems.

Proposal #1: Illustration

- 孛漢喃 chữ Hán-Nôm illustrations are best being a picture of a historical site, an artifact, a famous book, etc.
- For example, on the hill of Đống Đa in Hanoi stands the statue of Nguyễn Huệ, a hero who beat the 靑 Thanh Dynasty army at this hill, with his famous words.



打朱底魏遠
 打朱底顛齧
 打朱倣隻輪不返
 打朱倣片甲不還
 打朱史知南國英雄
 之有主

光忠阮惠

Đánh cho để dài tóc

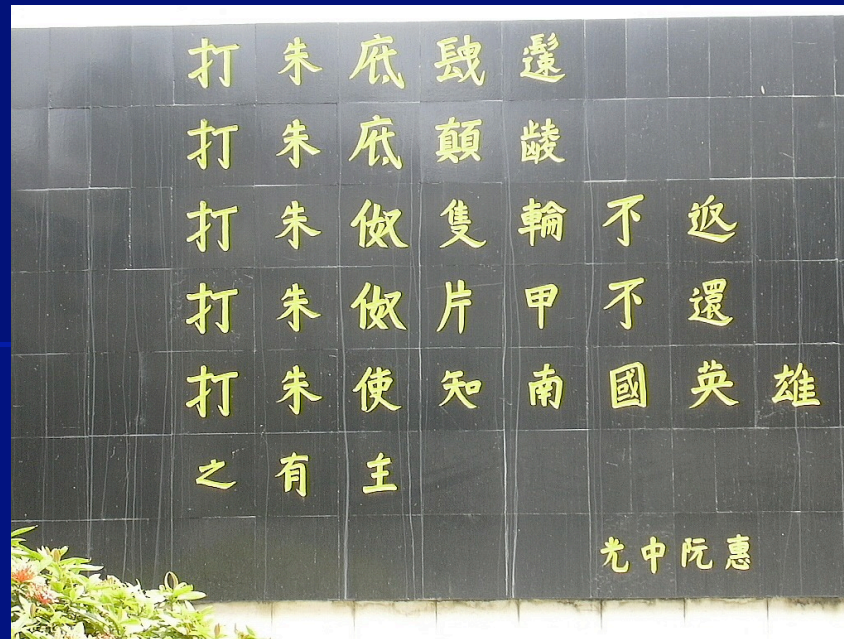
Đánh cho để đen răng

Đánh cho nó chích luân bất phản

Đánh cho nó phiến giáp bất hoàn

Đánh cho sử tri Nam Quốc anh
 hùng chi hữu chủ.

Quang Trung, Nguyễn Huệ



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 光忠阮惠

We beat you because we like to wear our hair long.
 Beat you because we like to blacken our teeth.
 Beat you, so none of your war chariots could run off.
 Beat you to keep your weapons from going home.
 Beat you so history knows the South has its own king.
 Nguyễn Huệ, Emperor Quang Trung, 1789

Proposal #1: Illustration

- On the web, which is mainly visual (or vocal), the Hán-Nôm version and the quốc ngữ version always appear side by side.
- The web also allow different ways of presenting the same data (or, stylesheets), which helps clarifying of the relationship of the two scripts.
- For example, Hán-Nôm and quốc ngữ versions can be presented in pairing formats: character by character, word by word, sentence by sentence,...

打朱底 髡鬣

Đánh cho để dài tóc

打朱底 顛齧

Đánh cho để đen răng

打朱俶 隻輪不返

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光忠阮惠

Quang Trung, Nguyễn Huệ

佳 人 遺 墨
 GIAI-NHÂN DÍ-MÀC

Sự-tích và thơ-từ Xuân-Hương

胡 喜 真



Mà em vẫn giữ tâm lòng son.
 XUÂN-HƯƠNG.

東京印館
 IMPRIMERIE TONKINOISE
 14-16, Rue du Celen, 14-16
 HANOI

館使厨習景永菁
 傷喂師包化罌猫
 創兵永几樞椎楫
 暑秩空畧挾技蔡
 至琢精鯨淹吏擦
 嚇吟長曷点拱初
 帆慈啞拱迥西竺
 遶吻朱鍼沛論縹

Chưa Lươn sủ.
 Lươn-sủ chưa sủi côm vãng tèo.
 Chường ôi sủ đã lĩa ra mèo
 Sảng bành vãng kô khua dũi mỗ.
 Lôi xa chạt không người quết pờ sủ
 Chũ chớ chầy cũi, em lại dũi.
 Lâu dũi chảng hạt dũi cũng đèo.
 Bưởi sủ sấp sủi sảng, Cầy dũi
 Gió sặt dũi nên phải lộn lèo.

Proposal 1: Illustration

- This proposal recognizes a lack of knowledge of Hán-Nôm among teachers in Vietnam today, accompanied by the lack of Hán-Nôm scholars in the education system, plus a lack of Hán-Nôm education in textbooks.
- As a first step, Hán-Nôm sources are simply “illustrations” added to existing textbooks, without a need to revise them.
- It is a temporary step before a total revision of high school textbooks in the educational system.

Proposal #2: core course

- In the first two years of college, we propose students be required to take one 3-credit introductory course in chữ Hán-Nôm. College students in Vietnam are well versed in quốc ngữ and the Vietnamese grammar.
- Students may be required to take core courses in Vietnamese history and an introductory course in Vietnamese linguistics.
- The goal is to prepare students for any field of Vietnamese studies in the future.

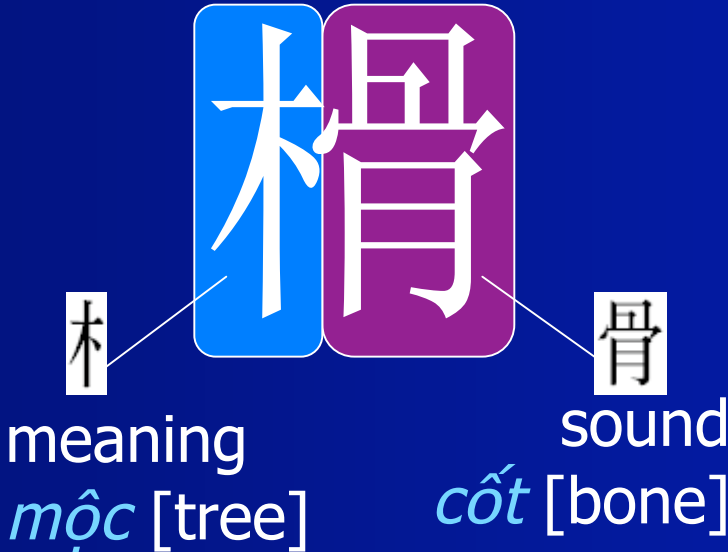
Proposal 2: core course

- The core Hán-Nôm course gives students some basic knowledge in
 - origin, history, composition, types of texts, famous examples from literature, medicine, demographic, or historical documents,...
 - basics of language and writing systems, writing systems and computer “language” representation, text manipulations, and basic skills in computer text editors, databases, and web using chữ Hán-Nôm.

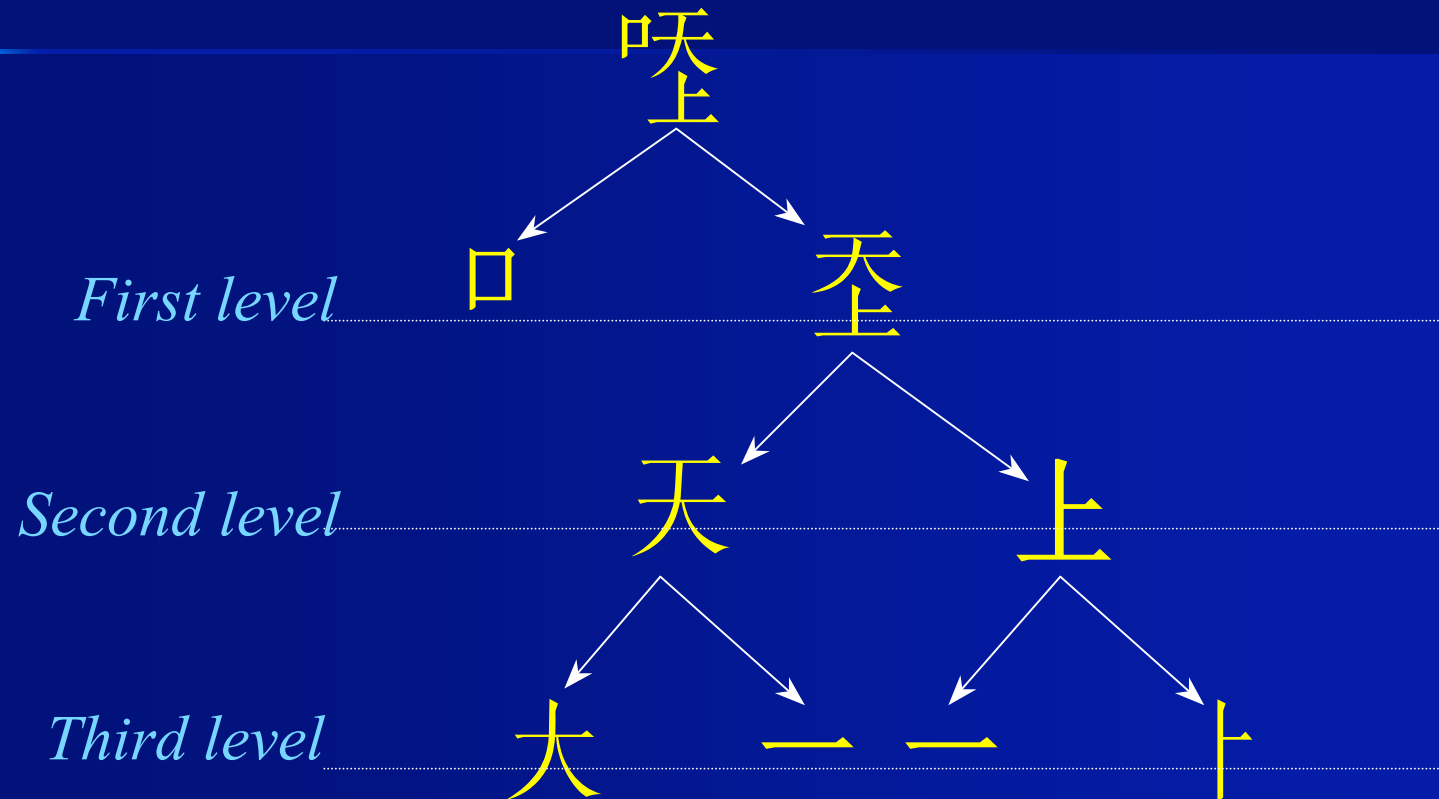
Proposal 2: core course

- From current textbooks, by Vũ Văn Kính, Nguyễn Khuê, Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, University of Hanoi... a core course on the web can already be formulated, if we have enough funding...
- The advantage of the web is in the presentation with links. The links allow students to lookup dictionaries, resources, ... without having to own a copy, because dictionaries in Hán-Nôm today are expensive and hard to get.

Character decomposition

Vietnamese		English
<i>quốc ngữ</i> roman script	<i>nôm</i> ideographic script	Roman script
<i>cột</i>	 <p>meaning <i>mộc</i> [tree]</p> <p>sound <i>cốt</i> [bone]</p>	<i>pillar</i>

Binary decomposition



Characters are formed by other characters
(vis. words are formed by other words)

Spelling is the clue

- 八刀分米粉
bát đao phân mễ phân
- 千里重金鍾
thiên lý trọng kim chung
- Spelling by native speakers gives us the psychological clue as to how characters are formed by other characters.

Characters are formed by other characters

Chữ Hán Nôm 𠄎 lời “word” can be decomposed:

- 𠄎 lời “word” → 口 khẩu *before* 天 trời
- 天 trời “heaven” → 一 nhất *above* 上 thượng
- 一 nhất “one” → 大 đại *above* 上 thượng
- 上 thượng “above” → 卜 bốc *above* 一 nhất

Basic characters: 口 khẩu “mouth, speech”, 一 nhất “one”, 大 đại “great”, 上 thượng “above”.

Representation matters

- Graphic representation of Vietnamese by an ideographic system and by a latin-based system complement each other.
- The latin-based system has a one-to-one correspondence to the phonological representation in IPA.
- The ideographic system is identical to the Vietnamese syntax and word formation.
- The ideographic system records historical development of the Vietnamese language.

雨中山水

用迴文體
兼連環

灣環雨

燕飛輕

剪

儻奔可

在何海

中

聞

蕭然幾

洲

幾幾幾

知幾聞

澗

澗澗澗

五澗澗

州

澗澗澗

山嶽語

雲

澗澗澗

澗澗澗

前

澗澗風

江潮汎

下

平仄四韻

讀成七言五言
六十四章

A poem

Proposal 3: specialization

- Students in social sciences, such as history, ethnology, arts, theater, literature, architects, linguistics, anthropology, archeology, etc., and a few natural sciences such as medicine, zoology, geography, geology, entomology, etc. must take at least 2 courses (6 credits) in chữ Hán-Nôm.
- Any bachelor, master or doctoral thesis requiring sources in Vietnamese historical texts must make references to originals in chữ Hán-Nôm. This should already be in place in universities in Vietnam.

Proposal 3: specialization

The 6 credit requirements (2 courses) are:

- (a) one course specific to their field of study, such as basic vocabularies, concepts, introduction to chữ Hán-Nôm text analysis using famous classics, such as *Truyện Kiều*, *Đại Việt Sử ký*, etc., and
- (b) one course (3 credits) for using, accessing, searching chữ Hán-Nôm in computers and internet. Theses or papers must be presentable on a website.

Properties of Vietnamese

- Language is spoken one syllable after another, like a string of gems (*lời lời châu ngọc*).
- The syllables are strung in patterns of phrases, sentences, paragraphs and discourses, like patterns of a brocade (*hàng hàng gấm thêu*).
- Computer stores and accesses one bit after another.
- Computer bits are strung together in patterns of bytes and blocks, linearly.

Language properties

- Speakers of a language use their oral system to project sounds, and hearers, their auditory system to receive sounds.
- Writers of a language use hands, and readers use eyes.
- A writing system transforms oral-auditory exchanges into manual-visual exchanges.
- A computer character system is a numeric (encoded) representation of a manual-visual system.

Vietnamese basics

- Vietnamese is a tonal, monosyllabic language, belonging to the Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer language subgroup.
- Each *tiếng* (spoken syllable) has 6 tones:

high	<i>lai</i> “mixed”	<i>lãi</i> “tireless”	<i>lái</i> “to drive”
low	<i>lài</i> “jasmin”	<i>lãi</i> “interest”	<i>lại</i> “back”

- Each *tiếng* can be split into initial consonant *l-* and rhyme *-ai*.

Vietnamese grammar

- Vietnamese is an S-V-O (subject-verb-object) and Head-Modifier structures.
- There are two word formation or head-modifier patterns, native (head+modifier) and Sino-Vietnamese (SV, modifier+head). E.g.

dân số (SV) “population” is a synonym of
số dân (native) “population”.

cf. dân “people”, số “number”.

Vietnamese studies in US

- For college and research students in the U.S., we would propose a 15 credit courses.
- Three step program are similar to those proposed to the Vietnamese college students.
- one 6-credit prerequisite course for basic Vietnamese grammar and quốc ngữ: a middle level of knowledge of Vietnamese grammar and culture; and a firm knowledge of quốc ngữ—to be able to access dictionaries and references.

The end