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Scripts, Signs, and Swords: the Việt Peoples and the Origins of Nôm

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Scripts, Signs, and Swords:
*the Việt Peoples and the Origins of Nôm.*¹

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This study is limited to scripts used by the majority ethnic group in Vietnam, that is, the Vietnamese themselves. This discussion does not involve the many other ethnic groups living in Vietnam, nor is this paper concerned with the scripts devised to express the languages of any of those peoples. There are three writing systems which are known with certainty to have been used in Vietnam by the Vietnamese during different and overlapping periods of time since the conquest of Vietnam by the Han Dynasty of China in 111 B.C.² They are Chinese or, to be more specific, Classical or Literary Chinese as it was codified by government supported philologists of the Ch'in and Han Dynasties and introduced into Vietnam after A.D. 43; Nôm, which is the first writing system known to have been used to write Vietnamese; and a romanized alphabetic script designed by Catholic missionaries in the seventeenth century now called Quốc Ngữ. Quốc Ngữ was based on the northern dialect of spoken Vietnamese and it was first codified by Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) who published a Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary using it in 1651. Quốc Ngữ came into official use in Vietnam in 1910 when the French government of

¹Research for the essay was funded by grants from the Fulbright Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, and the University of Washington. I am indebted to Bill Boltz, Victor Mair, Keith Taylor, Trần Quốc Vương, and the members of the Warring States Working group for their comments and assistance. All errors of fact or opinion are entirely my own.

²How much of a 'conquest' this was is dealt with in a masterful fashion by Stephen O'Harrow in "From Co-loa to the Trung Sisters' Revolt: Viet-Nam as the Chinese found It," *Asian Perspectives* 22:2 (1979): 152-156.

Tonkin ordered that all public documents be transcribed in it. Quốc Ngữ is the script used to write Vietnamese today.³

The term Quốc Ngữ (國語) means national language and Nôm was the first script referred to by the Vietnamese as Quốc Ngữ (國語) although the term Nôm itself has very different implications.⁴ When Nôm was called this the words were written in Chinese characters but in all probability they were pronounced in Vietnamese.⁵ The academic arguments concerning the origins and development of Nôm are many.⁶ Indeed there are only three points about Nôm that leading scholars in the field seem to agree upon. Those points are that Nôm was derived in some manner from Chinese characters, that to be fully literate in Nôm a person had to be fully literate in Chinese,⁷ and that, in general, when Chinese characters were adapted and used in Nôm their phonetic value was of comparatively

³Nguyễn Đình-Hoà, "Vietnamese Language and Literature," in *Language in Vietnamese Society: Some Articles by Nguyễn Đình-Hoà* Vietnam Culture Series no. 1 (Carbondale, IL: Asia Books, 1980) 14. See also *Quốc Ngữ: The Modern Writing System in Vietnam* (N.p. 1955) 2-4, and "Vietnamese" in *The World's Writing Systems*, Peter T. Daniels and William Bright, eds. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996):694.

⁴For a detailed discussion of the various Chinese characters used for the term Nôm see John DeFrancis, *Colonialism and Language Policy in Vietnam* Contributions to the Sociology of Language no. 19 (The Hague: Mouton, 1977) 26-28.

⁵Numerous titles and bibliographic entries which include the Chinese Characters which mean national language and which use this term to refer to Nôm can be found in the *Di Sản Hán Nôm Việt Nam-Thư Mục Đề Yếu; Catalogue des Livres en Han Nom* Trần Nghĩa and François Gros, chief eds. (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1993)

⁶A full discussion of these arguments is beyond the scope of this essay but for a thought provoking glimpse of the fall and recent rise of Nôm from politically incorrect to now quite correct scan the titles of articles on Nôm as listed in *An Annotated Index of the Journals Van Su Dia (1954-1959) and Nghiien Cuu Lich Su (1960-1981)*. Nguyen Ba Khoach, Allen J. Reidy and Truong Buu Lam trans. eds. and comps., (Honolulu: Southeast Asia Paper No. 24, Southeast Asian Studies, Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa, 1984).

⁷It was my disagreement with this point that first caused me to investigate the origins of Nôm. During two and a half years of reasearch on Vietnamese Traditional Medicine, done mostly in Hà Nội, I met several elderly traditional healers who told me that they either learned the Nôm terms for traditional materia medica before they learned the Chinese or else they learned the two writing systems simultaneously. Several of these healers also told me that their fathers and grandfathers had been able to read and write in Nôm much more fluently than in Chinese.

more importance than their semantic value.⁸ The question of pronunciation and the relative weight, importance if you will, of phonetic versus semantic elements is the major functional difference between these three scripts.

All scripts, that is, full writing systems capable of expressing any and all thought that might occur to a native speaker of a particular language, are based in large part on the phonetics of that language.⁹ Most writing systems also make use of systems of partial writing that express semantics rather than phonetics. A common one is Arabic Numerals, the number (3) when written this way can be sounded or read in English, Vietnamese, or Chinese but its meaning is the same in all of them. If this number were to be written out in the script of any of the languages mentioned as (three), (ba), or (三) only a person literate in the language in question could read or understand it. Both English and Vietnamese, as written in Quốc Ngữ, are alphabetic systems in which each individual character or letter represents a sound, a phoneme.¹⁰ In most cases in both languages, and in alphabetic systems overall, individual letters are not expressive of semantics; they must, in general, be combined into groups to represent a word which is the semantic carrier.¹¹ The majority of words in most languages consist of more than one phoneme, thus in alphabetic systems of writing

⁸Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, *Một số vấn đề về chữ nôm* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Đại Học và Trung Học Chuyên Nghiệp, 1985). See also, Đào Duy Anh, *Chữ Nôm: Nguồn Gốc-Cấu Tạo-Diến Biến* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1975.), Stephen O'Harrow "On the Origins of Chữ Nôm: The Vietnamese Demotic Writing System." *Indo-Pacific Occasional Papers* 1 (1981), and Trần Nghĩa and Francois Gros "General Introduction" in *Di Sản Hán Nôm*, 17-18, 49-51.

⁹For a detailed discussion of full versus partial writing systems and of the manner in which phonetic elements operate in various types of writing systems, see John DeFrancis, *Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems*. (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1989) 20-208. for a somewhat more technical discussion see William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*, American Oriental Series, vol. 78 (New Haven, CT., 1994) 16-28.

¹⁰DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 174-208.

¹¹Boltz, *Origins* 17-19. See also DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 54-56. For a discussion of syllables as words, and thus semantic carriers, versus syllables that cannot be used independently and whether or not they can be considered words in Vietnamese see Nonna V. Stankievich and Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, "The Word in the System of Vietnamese Grammar." *Vietnam Forum* 7(Winter-Spring, 1986) 19-33.

most words are written as a cluster of the elements/letters of the script. There are exceptions, of course, a good example being (I) in English. When capitalized this single letter carries semantic as well as phonetic weight but in general English words are written as a cluster of characters.¹² So are Vietnamese words as written in Quốc Ngữ.¹³ I have belabored what probably seems to be very obvious in order to explain, in a very simplified manner, the major difference between Chinese script and any alphabetic script.

Many scripts have a semantic element in which a character of the script carries a meaning that may or may not be connected to sound. According to several scholars who study the history of systems of writing all known scripts started as pictograms, each of which represented an individual thing, and, at least in the case of early Sumerian, simple geometric graphs that stood for certain numbers of things worthy of being recorded.¹⁴ These graphs then came to be associated with the sound in a particular language for that thing or for that number.¹⁵ These early graphic systems were only partial writing systems, mnemonic aids as it were.¹⁶ Scholars have defined a full system of writing as one that is capable of representing any and all of the thoughts that could be expressed orally in a given language.¹⁷ Full writing appeared in all four of the earliest known systems of writing which have been deciphered (Sumerian, Egyptian, Chinese and Mayan) when the graphs were used like a child's rebus book.¹⁸ If, for example, in a rebus reader, in English, a picture of a bee is used to stand for the sound of the

¹²Boltz, *Origins* 17-18

¹³I have deliberately chosen not to include syllabic script systems in this discussion as they do not pertain to either Quốc Ngữ or Nôm and although DeFrancis would classify Chinese characters as "Meaning-plus-sound Syllabic Systems" (DeFrancis *Visible Speech*, 89-120) I find William G. Boltz's argument that Chinese functions as a lexicographic or logographic script tied to both phonetics and semantics not only intellectually compelling but also in harmony with my own opinions. I have adopted the views of Professor Boltz on this matter and therefore syllabic script systems do not pertain to this discussion.

¹⁴For an interesting overview of recent theories regarding early Sumerian graphs see Boltz, *Origins* 24-28. For a very strong statement of the relationship between pictographs and writing see DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 50.

¹⁵Boltz, *Origins* 28.

¹⁶Boltz, *Origins* 22-23.

¹⁷Boltz, *Origins* 19. DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 4-5.

¹⁸Boltz, *Origins* 12-13. DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 50.

letter B in butter, or if a picture of a bee and a picture of a leaf stand for the word 'belief' this is the rebus principal and according to linguists this is how all systems of writing got their start.¹⁹ Thus the graphs which were associated with specific sounds also came to represent some word or words in the language that sounded like the original word pictured but which did not necessarily have any semantic connection to it.

After the discovery of the rebus principle all of these scripts moved towards an emphasis on phonetic representation and also towards more conventionalized, within the sets of conventions which developed for each script, pictographs.²⁰ All of them acquired elements used as phonetic complements which carried no semantic weight.²¹ Some of them continued this shift away from graphic marks which represented semantics towards graphic marks standing for phonetic values until they became alphabets or sound weighted syllabaries.²² Although there is evidence that Chinese also was developing in a direction which might have resulted in desemantized graphic elements, instead, due to writing reforms in the Ch'in and Han dynasties, Chinese script has retained much of the semantic value inherent in the pictographs it originated from.²³ Indeed, Chinese characters "have a powerful ability to carry semantic weight in and of themselves-i.e, without entering into combinations, as is necessary for the elements of phonetic scripts to convey meaning."²⁴ This is not by any means to say that there are not phonetic elements in written Chinese. Indeed, in a moment I will discuss how Chinese characters were used for their phonetic value in the development of Nôm. However, in comparison with other scripts the individual elements of Chinese writing, if seen in

¹⁹Example taken from DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 50.

²⁰For conventionalization of graphs in general see Boltz, *Origins* 54. For a discussion of stylization or conventionalization of early Chinese graphs, see Boltz, *Origins* 54-59.

²¹Boltz, *Origins* 12.

²²Boltz, *Origins* 21. For the history of various alphabets and syllabaries and the differences between alphabets and syllabaries see DeFrancis, *Visible Speech* 174-208.

²³Boltz, *Origins* 158-177.

²⁴Victor Mair, "Modern Chinese Writing," in *The World's Writing Systems* Peter T. Daniels and William Bright eds. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 201.

isolation, are more likely to have semantic value than are the individual elements of other scripts.

Perhaps in part because of this continued emphasis on semantic value the phonetic values of Chinese characters are inexact compared with most alphabetic or syllabic systems of writing.²⁵ During the script reforms of the Ch'in and Han Dynasties (221 B.C.-220 A.D.) it was semantic rather than phonetic classifiers which were standardized.²⁶ It is thus arguable that it is more difficult to standardize the pronunciation of any individual Chinese character than it is to standardize the spelling of a word in any language written out in an alphabet or a syllabary. As further evidence, in the People's Republic of China, in Taiwan, and in Japan when children are first taught how to 'pronounce' or 'read' characters they do so by using phonetic systems of transcription. In these three countries three different systems of transcription are used and in none of the three was this the case until well into the twentieth century when decisions were made to standardize pronunciation.²⁷ In other words, every attempt to standardize the pronunciation of Chinese characters, in whatever language they are to be pronounced in, has had to rely on a separate and phonetically weighted script.

While there is no writing system in existence that gives a one hundred percent correlation of symbol to sound, the phonetics of Chinese characters are somewhat more inexact than most.²⁸

²⁵DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 50-52. See also Mair, "Modern Chinese" 201.

²⁶Boltz, *Origins* 168-177. See also William G. Boltz, "Early Chinese Writing" in *The World's Writing Systems* Peter T. Daniels and William Bright eds. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 196.

²⁷Pinyin is used in the People's Republic of China, for a discussion of pinyin as used to teach the proper, i.e. standard, reading of characters see John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language; Fact and Fantasy*. (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii, 1989) 211-212. Taiwan uses a syllabic system known commonly as Bo-Po-Mo-Fo to teach both school children and foreigners to read Chinese characters while Japan uses the syllabic Kana systems to teach the pronunciation of Kanji (Chinese Characters as used in Japanese). For a discussion of Kana and their occasional usage even in newspapers for adults to specify the pronunciation of a given Kanji see DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 140. The Japanese Kana systems were developed and used much earlier than either pinyin or Bo-Po-Mo-Fo. However, it is their usage as a teaching tool for pronunciation of characters which illustrates the present point.

²⁸DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 50-51. Mair, "Modern Chinese" 201.

Precisely because of this inexactness, characters can be, and historically have been, comparatively flexible in regard to phonetic variations in dialect.²⁹ They are flexible but whether in representing standard or regional dialects they are inexact. This is a very important point in considering how Nôm was used to express Vietnamese. Nôm was never standardized in regard to either semantics or phonetics.³⁰ It retained the phonetic flexibility of Chinese script while also maintaining a fluid dynamic between the potential semantic and phonetic values of any given element. Nôm thus remained an appropriate scriptural vehicle for expressing variations in dialect within Vietnamese language.³¹ Indeed Keith Taylor describes Nôm as "a writing system with a high degree of sensitivity to regional pronunciations and to phonetic change from generation to generation."³²

This pattern, in Nôm, of an unstable relationship between phonetic and semantic elements resembles that of scripts known to have been used in what is now southern China which date from before the forcible standardization of Chinese under Ch'in Shih Huang Ti (first emperor of the Ch'in Dynasty). Further, there is sufficient cultural, artistic, and religious evidence in historic perspective to strongly suggest that the ancestors of the Vietnamese people were literate in a related script and that this script was as much a part of the development of Nôm as was Classical Chinese.

The above statement is contrary to general scholarly opinion concerning Nôm. As mentioned above, there are very few points about Nôm that scholars agree upon. One of these few points is that

²⁹This works mainly for representations of isolated dialectical terms such as personal names, place names and common names for plants and animals. Further discussion of this will follow below.

³⁰According to Alexander Woodside the Nguyễn Emperors made occasional attempts to standardize Nôm but the scholarly class of the time resisted these efforts. Personal communication 2/24/96.

³¹In a telephone conversation February 11, 1996, I asked Prof. Keith Taylor if my feeling that some of the variation in phonetic usage of characters in Nôm that is noted by many scholars could be due to regional differences in pronunciation. Prof. Taylor stated that he feels that this is undoubtedly the case. For a general discussion of the importance of sound as opposed to meaning see Trần and Gros, 17-18, 49-50, Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, *Một số vấn đề* 14-17, and Đào Duy Anh, 59-61.

³²K.W. Taylor, "Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region," *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no.4 (November 1998): 972.

Nôm characters were derived from Chinese characters and that many Chinese characters were used as Nôm characters.³³ When scholars say that Nôm characters were derived from Chinese characters they mean two different things. One is that the script itself was devised *after* the introduction into Vietnam of Chinese characters by the Chinese and that its characters came solely from the written form of Chinese that the Chinese themselves introduced to Vietnam. The other meaning of the statement that Nôm was derived from Chinese refers to the fact that the constituent elements of Chinese characters might be put together to make a completely new character that might, to someone who did not know Chinese, look like a Chinese character but that did not, and never had been used to, represent any word in the Chinese language.³⁴ Many Chinese characters were used as Nôm characters, i.e., any Chinese character could be used in Nôm. For example the Chinese characters for loan words from Chinese language into Vietnamese were generally written in their original Chinese form.³⁵ Names of things pertaining to China or to the Chinese were likewise most often written in Chinese characters. In both of these cases these names and terms had come into Vietnamese language via Chinese and thus their pronunciation was likely to be closer to the phonetic value of the Chinese character they were written with in Chinese than the pronunciation of most Vietnamese words would be.³⁶ When Chinese characters were used in this manner within the Nôm

³³ Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, *Một số vấn đề* 12-15. John DeFrancis, *Colonialism*, 24-25. Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Harvard East Asia Monographs, no. 140 (Cambridge, MA: 1988) 50-52.

O'Harrow "Origins" 160.

³⁴ Nguyen Nam, "Explorations of the Relationship between Buddhism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Demotic Script" (Harvard-Yenching Institute and Ho Chi Minh City Univ., 1992) 14. See also Woodside, 51 and DeFrancis, *Colonialism*, 25.

³⁵ Trần Nghĩa and Francois Gros, *Di Sản Hán Nôm* 17-18, 49-50. Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, *Một số vấn đề* 13. Đào Duy Anh, 54-58.

³⁶ For a discussion of Sino-Vietnamese, see Maurice M. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan, *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature* trans. D.M. Hawke (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985) 7-8, 17. See also Phan Ngoc, "Sino-Vietnamese words and their semantics," *Vietnamese Studies* 20 (1989): 78-106.

writing system they had specific semantic and phonetic value just as they did in Chinese.³⁷

Early examples of Nôm used for political commentary and protest exhibit sophisticated bilingual and biscriptori plays on words that could only be made by a writer fluent in both languages and also thoroughly familiar with Chinese philological precepts.³⁸ Reading and writing Nôm is complex and perhaps difficult when dealing with Sino-Vietnamese terms, but it is with the use of Nôm to express indigenous Vietnamese words where matters become really phonetically and semantically complicated and interesting. In Nôm "A single character can refer to as many as a dozen different words, depending upon the time and place it was written; and a single word can be written with as many as a dozen different characters, again depending on the time and place it was written."³⁹ Chinese characters might be used intact to represent a Vietnamese word that happened to be phonetically similar to the sound of that particular Chinese character.⁴⁰ Chinese characters might be combined, with two characters written together, one for semantics and one for phonetics.⁴¹ The constituent elements of Chinese characters might be combined into new characters, as noted above, and parts of characters used to represent either phonetic or semantic value.⁴² Except for Chinese loan words Nôm was never in any sense standardized and even the use of specific Chinese characters for particular loan words was an agreed upon convention that was never formalized.⁴³ Nevertheless, in all its non-standardized complexity, for at least 900 years Nôm was the only script commonly used to write Vietnamese and it is also the only script ever created

³⁷For a detailed explanation of all of the above uses of Chinese characters taken directly into the Nôm system see Nguyễn Tài Cẩn and N.V. Stankevitch "Outline of the formation of nom," *Vietnamese Studies* 20 (1989) 56-77.

³⁸See examples of oracle poetry in Nguyen Nam, 15-16. For a discussion of the codified Chinese philological rules that support these plays on words see Boltz, *Origins* 138-155.

³⁹Taylor, "Orientations" 972.

⁴⁰For specific examples of this process see Nguyễn and Stankevitch, 61-64. See also DeFrancis, *Colonialism*, 24.

⁴¹Đào Duy Anh, 63-65. Durand and Huan, 16.

⁴²Nguyễn and Stankevitch, 58-65.

⁴³Nguyễn and Stankevitch, 72.

by the Vietnamese people. There is scholarly agreement that Nôm was in limited use by the eleventh century and in at least some specialized areas, such as medicine, it was still the script of choice for Vietnamese well into the twentieth century.⁴⁴

Given the political and literary masterpieces that were created by Vietnamese authors in Nôm (and almost all of Vietnam's pre-twentieth century classics were written in Nôm) it could be argued that all of the factors which have caused some scholars to describe Nôm as clumsy or cumbersome are the same factors which gave it an inherent flexibility that was highly suitable for expressing the subtlety and sophistication of Vietnamese language.⁴⁵ We can infer, from the dynamic manner in which Nôm was used, certain beliefs held in common by the Vietnamese people about Vietnamese language. We can also find evidence about many facets of Vietnamese culture in the history of Nôm and its use by Vietnamese authors.

I described these three scripts in their linguistic rather than their historic aspect first because in order to discuss my theory concerning the origins of Nôm I needed to lay a bit of linguistic groundwork. Stated succinctly Quốc Ngữ is the most recently created script to be used in Vietnam. The phonetics of Quốc Ngữ are based on the northern dialect of Vietnamese and Quốc Ngữ is the most phonetically standardized script ever used to write Vietnamese, Classical Chinese is probably the oldest script ever used in Vietnam but, while it was used for various purposes in Vietnam for nearly 2,000 years, it was never used to write Vietnamese. Chinese characters, as introduced by Chinese administrators in the first

⁴⁴For Nôm in Vietnamese medical texts see "Transfer and Transmission: Materia Medica and the Development of Vernacular Scripts in Vietnam" chapter 4 of Claudia Michele Thompson. "A Negotiated Dichotomy: Vietnamese Medicine and the Intersection of Vietnamese Acceptance of and Resistance to Chinese Cultural Influence." Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Washington. 1998.

⁴⁵Stephen O'Harrow notes that despite the general opinion that Nôm was clumsy and inconsistent "it was largely functional at the time it was employed and did not suffer from so many internal contradictions as to pose real impediments to comprehension. The problems which are faced by modern scholars who try to decipher Nôm texts are due as much to their unfamiliarity with the vocabulary of the period as to problems inherent in the script." "Origins" 160.

century AD., were more standardized than Nôm ever was but were inherently less capable of being codified in terms of pronunciation than Quốc Ngữ. Nôm is younger than Chinese but it is certainly older than Quốc Ngữ. Nôm was never standardized in regard to either phonetics or semantics. We know exactly when, where and by what group of people Quốc Ngữ was created. Although we don't know exactly when Chinese first began, we know where the earliest examples of it as a fully functional writing system come from.⁴⁶ One of the things that scholars who study Nôm disagree quite strongly about is the origins, in terms of time, of Nôm or even if it really was the first script used to write Vietnamese.

The earliest example of a phrase that is now widely accepted as Nôm dates from the eighth century posthumous title for Phùng Hưng, 布蓋大王, a Vietnamese rebel leader, in which the first two characters of the title are Chinese characters used as homonyms for Vietnamese words and thus are Nôm characters.⁴⁷ According to Keith Taylor, the name given by Đinh Bộ Lĩnh to the Kingdom he founded in the mid-ninth century after defeating the Chinese is another example of Chinese characters being used to express Vietnamese. The term in question, Đại Cồ Việt, 大羅越, uses both a Sino-Vietnamese term Đại, meaning great and represented by its original Chinese character, and a Vietnamese term, Cồ, also meaning great and represented by a phonetically suitable Chinese character to modify Việt.⁴⁸ Other early examples of Nôm which are

⁴⁶Boltz, *Origins* 31.

⁴⁷Keith W. Taylor, "Phùng Hưng: Mencia King or Austric Paramount," in *Vietnam Forum* 8 (Summer-Fall 1986), 10-14. For the story of Phùng Hưng, see Taylor, *Birth* 200-212.

⁴⁸Taylor "Phung Hung" 11-12. Stephen O'Harrow expresses some skepticism regarding the first example of Nôm cited in Taylor. O'Harrow makes the point that the earliest mention of this phrase comes some 500 years after it was supposedly first used and that it may be an appellation applied to an earlier period rather than a phrase that was actually used during the period in question. "Origins" 165. Lending weight to the opinion that these phrases are indeed Nôm is the fact that their arrangement fits Yamagiwa's typology for the development of vernacular scripts from Chinese, see Joseph K. Yamagiwa, "From the Chinese to the Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese Systems of Writing: Three Cases of Linguistic Nationalism" in Denis Sinor, ed., *American Oriental Society, Middle West Branch Semi-Centennial Volume* Asian Studies Research Institute, Oriental Series, no. 3. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) 239-245.

still extant include inscriptions dating from the reign of Lý Cao Tông (1176-1210), and other inscriptions dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D. which list toponyms and names of contributors to a Buddhist temple.⁴⁹ Scholars agree that Nôm was probably in limited use for at least a short period of time, a generation or two, before these early examples appeared. This puts the earliest date for which we have any limited amount of agreement as to the probable existence of Nôm as being somewhere in the eighth century A.D. There is however, evidence which points to the use of some system of writing, other than the Chinese introduced under the Han, well before this time.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars argued that there was evidence of some system of writing used in what is now northern Vietnam before the Chinese conquest of Vietnam and the historic beginnings of the use of Chinese characters in Vietnam.⁵⁰ Terrien de Lacouperie concluded that an alphabetic system of writing was used by the inhabitants of northern Vietnam at a very early period. His conclusion was based in part on the writings of Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký, and in part on the reports of several missionaries living in the area as told to Lacouperie personally and apparently to A. Bastian whom Lacouperie quotes. The evidence that this script resembled more closely an alphabetic writing system than anything like Chinese characters is scanty indeed.⁵¹ Trương Vĩnh Ký merely says, where cited, that at the time of the Hung Kings the language and the writing of China and Vietnam were different

⁴⁹O'Harrow "Origins" 160-161. See also Trần Nghĩa "Study of Han-Nom, progress and prospect." *Vietnamese Studies* 20 (1989): 35., and Hà Văn Tấn "Inscriptions from the Tenth to the fourteenth Centuries Recently Discovered in Việt Nam." in K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore eds. *Essays Into Vietnamese Past: Studies on Southeast Asia* no. 19 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995) 57.

⁵⁰Terrien de Lacouperie, *The Languages of China Before the Chinese. Researches on the Languages Spoken by the Pre-Chinese Races of China Proper Previously to the Chinese Occupation.* (London: David Nutt, 1887; Reprint. Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1966), 55; and *Beginnings of Writing in Central and Eastern Asia, or Notes on 450 Embryo-Writings and Scripts.* (London: D. Nutt, 1894), 30-31, 180. A. Bastian "Remarks on the Indo-Chinese Alphabets," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, n.s., 3 (1868): 68.

⁵¹Lacouperie, *loco citato*. For an interesting discussion of the criteria for classifying writing systems see DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 47-64.

and that the annals report that interpreters and translators were needed for the credentials of emissaries. He gives no description of the writing itself other than to say, at a later point in his work, that the writing supposedly prohibited by the Chinese was phonetic.⁵²

The Chinese annals state that there were sporadic contacts between polities existing in northern Vietnam and those in China proper from around 1100 B.C. on. The Chinese also record that documents of various sorts were exchanged and that some of these had to be translated or perhaps transliterated.⁵³ No samples of this writing can be validated as to their origins if any still exist. Extant Chinese records concerning the period immediately prior to the imposition of Han Dynasty overlordship contain no descriptions of this writing; they only note the existence of records and "population registers" that were exchanged.⁵⁴ Clearly if records were being exchanged someone had to write them. Who were the people in Vietnam at that time who would have given records and population registers to the Chinese?

Archaeological discoveries in Vietnam in recent decades have redefined periods of early Vietnamese history that used to be referred to as legendary or semi-legendary.⁵⁵ Eighteen generations of kings known to legend and history as the Hùng Kings ruled in the area of what is now northern Vietnam and parts of what is now southern China. The last of these kings was defeated in the latter part of the third century B.C. by a man named Thục Phan who, according to Nguyen Khac Vien, was the ruler of a group of tribes from what is present-day Cao Bằng Province in the far north of Vietnam along the border with China. Thục Phan took the reign title

⁵²Trương Vĩnh Ký (Petrus J.B.) *Cours d'histoire Annamite* (Saigon, 1875) vol. I. p.11, 27. See also Trương Vĩnh Ký as cited in Lacouperie *Languages of China*, 30 n. 3.

⁵³Ký, p. 11. Ký's conclusions have recently been completely discounted. See DeFrancis, *Colonialism* 9, but I suggest that, as long as one does not try to force what Ký has to say into an argument for an alphabet, that his work may reflect oral traditions which should not be totally ignored. See also Taylor, *Birth* 28-33, for accounts of exchanges involving records of some sort for the period immediately preceding the Chinese rule of Vietnam.

⁵⁴Taylor, *Birth* 28-29.

⁵⁵See Nguyen Khac Vien, *Vietnam a Long History* (Hà Nội: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1987) 12-20. See also Taylor, *Birth*, 1-17.

An Dương and set up his capital in the citadel of Cổ Loa in or about 258 B.C.⁵⁶ There is considerable controversy about exactly who An Dương was and where he and his family had come from in the generation or two before he and his followers moved south and established themselves at Cổ Loa. He is traditionally thought to have come from the State of Ba(巴) or the State of Shu(蜀) in what is now Sichuan province.⁵⁷ Stephen O'Harrow makes the argument that evidence of cultural affinities between Dian (滇) in what is now Yunnan and the peoples he terms proto-Vietnamese in what is now northern Vietnam make it probable that An Dương may have come from Yunnan rather than Sichuan.⁵⁸ O'Harrow further argues that oral transmission may have preserved the idea that An Dương embodies some "connection between the PVN (proto-Vietnamese) and peoples living to the northwest."⁵⁹ It should be noted here that recent works on ancient China define Ba, Shu, and Dian as a related cultural area. It should also be noted that, during the period in question, the peoples of this area were regarded as non-Chinese by the Chinese commentators.⁶⁰ The people of Ba and Shu were not only literate in archaic Chinese, but they also had two scripts of

⁵⁶Nguyen Khac Vien, 16-18. See also Taylor, *Birth*, 17-23. According to Nguyen Khac Vien the citadel of Cổ Loa was surrounded by three rings of earthen ramparts "the outer walls measuring about 8,000 metres in length, the walls being 12 metres thick (25 metres at the base) and 3-4 metres high."

⁵⁷O'Harrow, in a reanalysis of several of the traditional histories of this period and a correlation with the archaeological evidence available to him at the time of writing "From Co Loa," refers to these as one State of Ba-Shu, 148. As the two often shared a border region, and just as often fought with each other and traded territory, and as they shared considerable cultural affinities Thục Phan might be considered as coming from what Li Xue Qin calls the Ba-Shu culture as "the concept of Ba and Shu cultures and the history of the Ba and Shu states did not completely correspond." Li Xueqin. *Eastern Zhou and Qin Civilization*, trans. K.C. Chang (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 206.

⁵⁸O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 149. For a detailed discussion of the archaeological remains from Dian see Michele Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens "The Bronze Drums of Shizhai Shan, their Social and Ritual Significance" in R.B. Smith and W. Watson eds., *Early South East Asia: Essays in Archaeology, History and Historical Geography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) See also Magdalene Von Dewall "Local Workshop Centres of the Late Bronze-Age in Highland South East Asia", in Smith and Watson.

⁵⁹O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 149.

⁶⁰Li Xueqin. "Ba 巴 Shu 蜀 and Dian 滇" Chapter 13 in *Eastern Zhou*, 204-221. See also Charles Higham, "South of the Clouds" chapter 5 in *The Bronze Age of Southeast Asia*, Cambridge World Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 136-182.

their own, neither of which has yet been deciphered.⁶¹ Given the fact that numerous artifacts have been found which bear one or the other of the two Ba-Shu scripts and that these scripts are described as "undoubtedly representing archaic Ba-Shu dialect" it appears that a fair percentage of the Ba-Shu elite were literate.⁶² Thus if Thục Phan came from the area traditionally ascribed to be his homeland he, and his followers, came from a society in which a fair number of the ritual specialists and nobility were literate.⁶³

Thục Phan conquered the last of the Hùng Kings in the midst of a general reshuffling of power in the whole area of northern Vietnam and southern China. This shift in the power structure was connected to major changes in the ethnic and political shape of the geographic areas which became China and those which resisted Chinese cultural and political domination and became Vietnam. Ancient legends have it that the Vietnamese homeland included the area near Tung-t'ing lake, in what is now China, and that the daughter of the dragon of that lake was one of the ancestral mothers of the Vietnamese people.⁶⁴ Tung-t'ing Lake is located just south of the middle stretch of the Yangtze River in what was once the southern part of the State of Ch'u (楚). Scholars agree that ancient southern China "was almost exclusively populated by non-Chinese people."⁶⁵ There is compelling linguistic evidence that the Han Chinese first encountered these peoples near the Yangtze River and indeed borrowed one of the words which forms the name of the Yangtze, one of the major river systems of what is now China, from

⁶¹For a discussion of these two scripts see Li Xueqin *Eastern Zhou* 215-216.

⁶²Tong Enzheng, "Ba Shu de Wenzhi" Chapter 10, Section 3 of *GuDai de Ba Shu* (Sichuan: Sichuan Renmin Press, 1979), 131.

⁶³Artifacts on which the two Ba-Shu scripts, Ba-Shu A and Ba-Shu B, and also archaic Chinese have been found include seals, swords, and other bronze artifacts. Li Xueqin *Eastern Zhou*, 215. See also Tong Enzheng, 130-135 and the frontispieces of his book which have photographs of several artifacts and a map of the location of Ba and Shu.

⁶⁴L. Arousseau, "La première conquête chinoise de pays annamites," *Bulletin De L'École Française D'Extrême-Orient* 23 (1924), 263.

⁶⁵Jerry Norman and Tsu-lin Mei, "The Austroasiatics in Ancient South China: Some Lexical Evidence" *Monumenta Serica* 32 (1976) 274. For a book length treatment of these peoples see Wolfram Eberhard *The Local Cultures of South and East China*, Alide Eberhard, trans., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968)

them.⁶⁶ The word in question, written in Chinese as 江 and pronounced in Modern Standard Mandarin as *jiang*, is one of the several words in Chinese meaning river. It is, however, only found as a part of proper names for rivers and only for those from the Yangtze south.⁶⁷ When general terms are borrowed from one language into another they often become proper names instead of replacing any general term already in use in the host language, such as "*Mississippi* and *Wisconsin*, 'big river' and 'big lake' in Algonquin, which became proper names in American English."⁶⁸ This type of borrowing seems to be most common when one ethnic group is encroaching upon the geographic space of another and thus the receiving language acquires as proper names general words or descriptive terms from the language of the earlier inhabitants. It is thus also possible in some cases "to tell not only which two people were involved but where the contact was made."⁶⁹ Linguistic evidence suggests that the Han Chinese first encountered the Yangtze itself and the people from whom they borrowed the term 江 on the shores of the middle stretches of the Yangtze north of Tung-t'ing Lake.⁷⁰ Norman and Mei offer strong evidence that the word 江 entered Chinese language between 500 and 1000 B.C.⁷¹ It is further known that during this period ethnic Han Chinese were moving south and establishing local centers that became independent polities after the decline in power of the Chou Dynasty. The area they moved into was far from uninhabited, and since it was also far from politically unorganized, conflict was inevitable.

The period from 403-221 B.C. is known, in Chinese History, as the Warring States period. Among the several contending states

⁶⁶Norman and Mei, 280-283.

⁶⁷G. Owen states that the difference in usage for different terms meaning river in archaic Chinese concerns their navigability or the lack thereof. G. Owen *The Evolution of Chinese Writing* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1910), 11-12. While this may indeed have some bearing on usage after the period in which this term entered Chinese I find Norman and Mei's evidence as to the time period during which the term entered Chinese to be so solid as to render Owen's opinion irrelevant to my discussion.

⁶⁸Norman and Mei, 281.

⁶⁹Norman and Mei, 276.

⁷⁰Norman and Mei, 282-283.

⁷¹Ibid.

in southeast China during this time were the State of Ch'u, stretching, at its greatest extent, south from the middle Yangtze to below Tung-t'ing Lake and the various states of the Wu-Yüeh cultural complex east of Tung-t'ing Lake and south of the Yangtze.⁷² This entire area was regarded as barbarian by the Chinese and they applied names for any one of these peoples rather indiscriminately to any and all of them. Stephen O'Harrow quite rightly makes the point that relying on only the early written Chinese sources for knowledge of these people is somewhat dangerous as the Chinese commentators often were not "themselves entirely clear about the various groups called the Hundred Yüeh, who these people really were, how they were related, or where they were located."⁷³ I would like to modify this statement somewhat by noting that archaeological studies of the past thirty years confirm that the various peoples called by the term Yüeh were much more closely related to each other and to the Vietnamese in terms of material culture, religion, and linguistics than they were to the Chinese.⁷⁴

Yüeh is the Modern Standard Mandarin pronunciation of Việt and, as noted above, the region bounded by the Yangtze and Tung-t'ing Lake is the legendary homeland of the Việt people. It is also regarded as ancestral territory for other ethnic groups now inhabiting areas much farther south such as the Hmong and the Tai.⁷⁵ Various reconstructions of the political boundaries from the

⁷²For a detailed discussion of written sources on the non-Han peoples in this area and for an equally informative compilation of recent archaeological reports on sites from the Wu-Yüeh zone see Donald B. Wagner "The State of Wu and the Discovery of Iron " Chapter 3 in *Iron and Steel in Ancient China*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 97-142. See also Li Xueqin "Xu Wu and Yue" Chapter 12 in *Eastern Zhou*. For ethnic plurality in the State of Ch'u see the essays in *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China* Constance A. Cook and John S. Major eds., (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

⁷³O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 143.

⁷⁴For the cultural relatedness of these people within what is now China see Wagner, Chapter 3, and Li Xueqin, *Eastern Zhou*, Chapter 12. For the cultural connections between southern China and northern mainland Southeast Asia see Higham, 61-72 and 90-103. For an examination of how this information pertains to the questions concerning the Yüeh see Heather Peters, *Tattooed Faces and Stilt Houses: Who Were the Ancient Yue?*, Sino-Platonic Papers no. 14 (Philadelphia: Dept. of Oriental Studies, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1990)

⁷⁵For a brief account of the Hmong's move from China see Alfred W. McCoy. *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, rev. ed. (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991), 115-117. For location of various Tai peoples from

Warring States period down to the conquest of Nan Yüeh by the Han Dynasty in 111 B.C. show that the borders between these states were shifting and fluid, particularly to the east near the mouth of the Yangtze and at their southern end near Tung-t'ing Lake.⁷⁶ In geopolitical terms the rise of these states and others in the southern part of China was indicative of the increasing importance, in terms of politics, economics and culture, of southern China relative to the heartland of Chinese culture in the Yellow River Valley of northern China.⁷⁷ As noted previously the peoples of this area did not consider themselves, nor did the Chinese consider them, to be Chinese.

While the term Ch'u did not refer to any ethnic group in particular, this state "clearly contained non-Chinese elements. King Wu of Ch'u acknowledged that he was a southern barbarian" and the Chinese annals state that the populace of Ch'u was "derived from the barbarians."⁷⁸ A King of the Chinese Chou Dynasty offered a feudal title to a noble of Ch'u who refused on the grounds that he "had no use for Chinese titles."⁷⁹ As early as 600 B.C. Princes of the State of Ch'u were expected to study "state annals, chronicles of other states, poetry, rituals, law, quotations and discourses, ancient records, and official documents" in preparation for their official

the Yangtze south to the highlands of northern Vietnam see David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: a Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 3-6.

⁷⁶Albert Herrman. *An Historical Atlas of China* New ed. (Amsterdam: Djambatan n.v., Publishers and Cartographers, 1966) 5-9. See also Geoffrey Barraclough ed. *The Times Concise Atlas of World History* (Maplewood, N.J.: Hammond, 1985) 9, 28-29.

⁷⁷One of the major interdisciplinary arguments in recent years among sinologists has concerned the place of the peoples of east and south China in the development of Chinese civilization. For an excellent overview of these arguments see E.G. Pulleybank "Zou and Lu and the Sinification of Shandong" in *Chinese Language Thought and Culture: Nivison and his Critics*. Philip J. Ivanhoe ed. Critics and Their Critics, vol. III. (Chicago: Open Court, 1996) 39-57. See also Dun J. Li, *The Ageless Chinese* 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978) 53-54.

⁷⁸Norman and Mei, 285. In recent years archaeological finds relating to Ch'u have spurred the growth of Ch'u studies as a sub-discipline of Chinese studies. For recent work in this field see the essays in Cook and Major, see also the articles in *Ch'u and the Silk Manuscript*, vol. 1 of *Early Chinese Art and its Possible Influence in the Pacific Basin*. Noel Barnard ed. (New York: Intercultural Arts Press, 1972).

⁷⁹Li, 53.

functions.⁸⁰ Since the 1930's archaeologists working in the region once ruled by Ch'u have found and analyzed many material objects associated with Ch'u culture. Mixed in with the relics of Ch'u culture are some which are known to be Yüeh but these have received comparatively less attention.⁸¹ Among the Ch'u relics are silk scrolls, found in 1936-37, with passages written in the language of Ch'u. These scrolls give the 'genealogy' of the ruling House of Ch'u which claimed descent from a full brother of the legendary Yellow Emperor.⁸² The Yellow Emperor is credited with having eliminated the 'barbarian' tribes of north China "thus clearing North China for the Chinese."⁸³ Thus the ruling House of Ch'u claimed an ancestral relationship with the Chinese which in effect legitimated any differing customs it may have had by claiming equally authoritative transmission of such customs. The ruling house of Ch'u also took pains to enact marriage alliances with the non-Han

⁸⁰Tsien Tsuen-Hsuein, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: the Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962) 7. See also the essays in Cook and Major.

⁸¹This situation may change in the near future as there are now joint Sino-Vietnamese archaeological teams studying remains from certain sites in Southeast and Southwestern China. Trần Quốc Vương personal communication 8/10/99. See Donald B. Wagner, *Iron and Steel in Ancient China*, Handbook of Oriental Studies (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993) for a chemical analysis of 2 Yüeh swords found in a Ch'u tomb and a discussion of dating by the inscriptions on them see p. 433. Wagner's focus is on the history of metallurgy, for other metallic finds related to the Yüeh see pp. 37, 78, 105, 119-127. For a description of these and other Yüeh weapons in terms of their artistic significance see Max Loehr *Chinese Bronze Age Weapons: The Werner Jennings Collection in the Chinese National Palace Museum, Peking* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1956) pp. 46, 82 n.38, 198-200, fig 97 Plate XXXVIII. See also Charles Higham, *The Bronze Age of Southeast Asia*, Cambridge World Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a discussion of early pre-Ch'u remains see pp. 63-66, for a discussion of Bronze Age finds in the middle and lower Yangtze Valley see pp. 68-70. For a general discussion of Bronze Age material culture in the Yangtze Valley, Yunnan, and Northern Vietnam, which Higham defines as one region during the period in question. see pp. 73-182. For Yüeh artifacts in Ch'u gravesites see Jenny F. So, "Chu Art: Link between the Old and New," and Heather A. Peters "Towns and Trade: Cultural Diversity and Chu Daily Life," both in Cook and Majors.

⁸²Tsien, 122-25. For further information on these scrolls see the articles by Noel Barnard, Jean Mailey and Jao Tsung-yi in *Chu and the Silk Manuscript*, for details on the ancestors of the Ch'u as this information appears on the manuscript see Jao 121-122. For a translation of the Ch'u silk manuscript see Li Ling and Constance A. Cook "Translation of the Chu Silk Manuscript," in Cook and Majors.

⁸³Li, 34.

rulers of other southern states. At least one Ch'u queen, later queen mother, was originally from Yüeh.⁸⁴

Ch'u was a non-Han state which, given the troubled times during which it was founded, maintained its hold from the southern shores of the Yangtze to south of Tung-t'ing Lake with remarkable firmness for some 500 years.⁸⁵ It was the most successful of the southern states in militarily and politically challenging the assumption of economic and cultural superiority by the northern Chinese as they began to move south. Further, according to scholars Ch'u displayed a notable degree of sensitivity towards the many ethnic groups in its empire.⁸⁶ It was thus, in a sense, the first champion of the many ethnic groups inhabiting the region. Its importance to this discussion is twofold. First, it conquered and occupied much of the territory legend holds as the ancestral homeland of the Vietnamese people.⁸⁷ Second, archaeological evidence, from the period of and shortly after Ch'u rule, found in the vicinity of Tung-t'ing Lake bears directly on the question of the literacy of the Yüeh.

The Yüeh were to be found along the coast from modern-day Fukien Province to what are now the southern most provinces of China and also into northern Vietnam where they lived among other peoples referred to in the Chinese dynastic histories variously as Yi, Ou, and Man. Linguists have shown links between elements of contemporary Yüeh dialects from China and Vietnamese language and Stephen O'Harrow theorizes that archaic Vietnamese may have been a lingua franca in use among the various groups living in

⁸⁴Constance A. Cook "The Ideology of the Chu" Ruling Class: Ritual Rhetoric and Bronze Inscriptions" in Cook and Major, 73.

⁸⁵For the geographic expansion of Ch'u see Barry B. Blakeley, "The Geography of Chu." in Cook and Majors.

⁸⁶Gu Tiefu, *Chuguo Minzu Shulue* (Hubei: Hubei Renmin Chubanshe, 1984), 33. See also Li Xueqin, "Chu Bronzes and Chu Culture," in Thomas Lawton ed. *New Perspectives on Chu Culture During the Eastern Zhou Period* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 21.

⁸⁷The shifting political borders of the States of Ch'u and the various Yüeh States can be seen quite clearly in maps from several historical atlases. See for example Albert Herrman, *An Historical Atlas of China*. New ed. (Amsterdam, Djambatan n.v., Publishers and Cartographers, 1966) pages 16 and 17 and Geoffrey Barraclough ed. *The Times Concise Atlas of World History*. (Maplewood, NJ.: Hammond, 1985) pages 9 and 28. Note the two large lakes just below the Yangtze River, the one farthest west is Lake Tung-t'ing.

northern Vietnam and southern China.⁸⁸ In the other direction, in terms of linguistic relationships, the Min dialects as spoken in modern Fukien and Kwangtung contain what linguists regard as "relic forms from the non-Chinese language spoken in this region before the Chinese began to settle there...The pre-Han inhabitants of Fukien were the Min Yüeh."⁸⁹ In their analysis of Austroasiatic linguistic elements remaining in the Min dialects of Fukien the contemporary Austroasiatic language with which these elements correspond most closely is Vietnamese.⁹⁰

The Yüeh were a group of people who were probably lumped together by the Chinese under one term for linguistic reasons. That is, they belonged to a group, the members of which spoke languages that, to the Chinese at least, appeared to be related.⁹¹ At various points in time during the period from 1000 B.C. to the nominal conquest of what is now northern Vietnam by China in 111 B.C. the Yüeh peoples ruled several states in what is now China, Yüeh, Min Yüeh, Nan Yüeh and Wu.⁹² Yüeh peoples were also to be found regularly in other states either as residents or as travelers passing through. The State of Yüeh was non-Han and in contrast to Ch'u it was named for its dominant ethnic group.

The non-Han states in south China were not by any means backwards or remote. There was a great deal of contact between the various small states in the area and many people traveled freely between and among them.⁹³ Southern China in general at this time

⁸⁸O'Harrow, "Men of Hu, Men of Han, Men of the Hundred Man: the biography of Sĩ Nhiếp and the conceptualization of early Vietnamese society." *Bulletin de l'École Française D'Extrême-Orient* LXXV (1986): 255-56. For a discussion of linguistic links between the languages of present day Yüeh living in China and Vietnamese see Norman and Mei, 274-301.

⁸⁹Norman and Mei, 295. For the continued social and political importance of "Southern Min" dialect see Jean DeBernardi, *Linguistic Nationalism: The Case of Southern Min*, Sino-Platonic Papers, no. 25 (Philadelphia: Dept. of Oriental Studies, Univ. of Philadelphia, 1991).

⁹⁰Norman and Mei, 295.

⁹¹Ibid. See also Paul L-M Serruys, *The Chinese Dialects of Han Time According to Fang Yen*, vol. II of *Univ. of California Publications in East Asiatic Philology*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1959). 95-96, 172-174, 180-181, 237.

⁹² For cultural linkages between Wu and Yüeh see Wagner Chapter 3.

⁹³Li, 62-3, 99. For detailed information on the legalities southern traders faced and some of the more common trade routes in the area south of the Yangtze and extending into what is now northern Vietnam see Peters, "Towns and Trade."

was booming in terms of commerce and population and towns with a population in excess of 50,000 were to be found in several of the southern states.⁹⁴ The State of Yüeh is still remembered by Chinese historians as having been home to highly successful merchants. One of them, who was Yüeh's chief minister in the fifth century B.C., amassed such a fortune in the years after his retirement that he is still a patron saint of merchants.⁹⁵ More than a few of the people connected to the ruling elite of the southern states were literate in the scripts current at that time and in that area.⁹⁶ A wide variety of texts are recorded as having been produced for various purposes. States carefully guarded their archives and the removal of them to another State was an admired form of rebellion against a tyrannical ruler.⁹⁷ The literacy of the Yüeh bureaucracy is mentioned as early as 476 B.C. The Yüeh are described as having generally used silk rather than bamboo to write upon and as having used vermilion rather than black ink for state documents.⁹⁸ These facts are not noted as anything unusual but are mentioned in a very casual manner in the course of discussions of other situations concerning the Yüeh.

The situation in which they are perhaps most often discussed is in terms of their military prowess. Jeffrey Barlow notes that Yüeh warriors were so closely associated with use of battle axes "that their very name is cognate to the weapon." Further that a specific type of axe "of a uniquely southern style" was said "to be limited solely to the Yue."⁹⁹ Mencius (fourth century B.C.) notes the exceptional military training of the troops of King Kou Chien of Yüeh, he also mentions the use of drums to signal the troops to advance or retreat.¹⁰⁰ One entry in the Classic of Songs depicts the grief and

⁹⁴Li, 62-3. For types of settlements and the populations they could be expected to have see Peters, "Towns and Trade," 101-3.

⁹⁵Li, 62-3.

⁹⁶Li, 53.

⁹⁷Tsien, 7-11.

⁹⁸Tsien, 129, 165.

⁹⁹Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Early Weapons Systems and Ethnic Identity in the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier* ASPAC Selected Papers (n.p: 1996), 12.

¹⁰⁰Michael C. Rodgers, trans. *The Chronicle of Fu Chien: A Case of Exemplar History*, Chinese Dynastic Histories Translations no. 10 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) p. 289 note 765.

fear of a young girl whose sister has been sent, along with others, to appease this same King Kou Chien of Yüeh and to stave off an attack.¹⁰¹ The State of Yüeh was a major player in the fertile area south of the Yangtze and immediately east of Tung-t'ing Lake for several hundred years but, unlike the people of Ch'u, the Yüeh did not claim descent from the deified ancestors of the Chinese.¹⁰² Also Yüeh language, aside from loan words into Chinese, was not included among the various regional languages considered to be variants of Chinese by Chinese philologists who included the Ch'u language in their survey of colloquialisms.¹⁰³

The Yüeh looked instead to the south and to the west for ties of kinship, culture, language and religion. There is compelling archaeological evidence supporting the theory of a "cultural confederation comprising at least 3 centres: Yue (south-east China), Dong-son (North Viet-Nam) and Shizhai shan."¹⁰⁴ Shizhai Shan is a tomb site belonging to the civilization of a polity known as Dian, conquered by the Han Dynasty in 109 B.C. in what is now southeastern Yunnan. The decorative motifs, artistic styles and techniques from this site correspond closely to other finds within the geographic space that is now northern mainland Southeast Asia and

¹⁰¹ James Robert Hightower, trans. *Han Shih Wai Chuan: Han Ying's Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph series vol. XI (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1952) 40-41.

¹⁰² The Chinese records state that various groups of the Yüeh were descended from members of Chinese royal families outside of the main line of descent. *Shih Chi* (Records of the Grand Historian by Ssü Ma-Ch'ien 145-c. 86 B.C.), 14: "Chronology of the Twelve Feudal Houses" 329-1287, 31: "The Hereditary House of the Taibo of Wu" 1059-1073, 41: "The Hereditary House of King Kou-Chien of Yüeh" 1273-1287, 4 vols. with continuous pagination (Beijing: Xinhua, 1988). Nothing so far has come to light in the archaeological record of Yüeh, Wu or Vietnam which would indicate that the Yüeh *themselves* claimed any such relationship.

¹⁰³ Serruys, the text analyzed by Serruys, the *Fang Yen* which literally means "place speech," and which was compiled under the Han Dynasty has extensive coverage of Ch'u Language and even variations within Ch'u language but as Serruys notes when discussing the ethnic makeup of southeast China "the non-Chinese population was more numerous and denser, and the FY material did not refer to them." Serruys also accepts linguistic evidence which leads to the conclusion that "Chinese culture did not penetrate into the larger part of the Yangtzu Valley until the Chan Kuo (Warring States) period." *Op. cit.*, 96.

¹⁰⁴ See Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens and Von Dewall.

what is now southeastern China.¹⁰⁵ The symbolic repertory of animals, both real and mythological, and of geometric patterns symbolizing water and mountains, corresponds to those same elements as found in origin myths of the Vietnamese people.¹⁰⁶ These same symbols can be seen in a large complex of cliff paintings, dating from around 475 B.C. to 220 A.D., created by the Yüeh in the Tso River valley of southwest Kuangsi.¹⁰⁷ Myths and shaman practices of the early Chinese in contrast emphasize the sky and communication between sky and earth.¹⁰⁸

Exactly why neither the State of Yüeh nor Dian could resist the pressure of the Han Chinese is a matter which is open to debate.¹⁰⁹ To gain strength for their struggles with each other both Ch'in and Ch'u conquered a number of other states. The State of Yüeh was conquered by Ch'u in 333 B.C. The Yüeh ruling class fled southwards where they "established many small kingdoms and principalities."¹¹⁰ Ba and Shu were both conquered by Ch'in in 316 B.C.¹¹¹ Many of the Ba-Shu elite also fled. Among these perhaps were the ancestors of Thục Phan, later An Dương, whom a majority of Vietnamese historians consider to have come from what is now

¹⁰⁵For artistic correlations between motifs from southern China (mainly Ch'u) and those from Thanh Hóa province in Vietnam see Olov R.T. Janse "The Lach-Truong Culture- Western Affinities and Connections with the Culture of Ancient Ch'u" in *Ch'u and the Silk Manuscript*, 199-229.

¹⁰⁶Pirazzoli T'Serstevens, note also that these motifs and similar elements found in origin myths apply to the Hmong also. For a discussion of various origin myths for the Vietnamese and the symbols for them on Đông Sơn drums from Vietnam see Taylor, *Birth*, Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁷For a discussion of these paintings, focusing on the weapons depicted therein, see Barlow, 16-24. See also Wang Kerong et al. *Guangxi Zuojiang Yanhua* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1988).

¹⁰⁸K.C. Chang, "Shamanism and Politics" chapter 3 in *Art, Myth and Ritual: the Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983) 44-55.

¹⁰⁹The arguments of sinologists center around the rise of the State of Ch'in and the figure of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti who is considered to have "united" China in 221 B.C. Donald B. Wagner's recent work on early Chinese iron manufacturing, *Iron and Steel in Ancient China* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), discredits earlier theories that it was the possession of iron weapons which allowed Ch'in to triumph. Indeed Wagner's main thesis is that iron first came into widespread use in what is now China in the 'Southern' states of Ch'u, Wu, and Yüeh.

¹¹⁰Taylor, *Birth*, 14. For a discussion of evidence that the appearance of certain sub-groups of the Yüeh dates from this diaspora see Peters, "Towns and Trade," 3.

¹¹¹Blakeley, 18.

southeast and southwest China.¹¹² In 221 B.C. the State of Ch'in conquered the State of Ch'u and shortly thereafter Ch'in Shih Huang-ti sent his troops into the lands of the Yüeh people.¹¹³ This statement means that Ch'in Shih Huang-ti's troops entered the former State of Yüeh and subdued it.¹¹⁴ Many of the Yüeh fled south or west again. The Viêt of what is now northern Vietnam became involved to some extent in supporting the Yüeh fighting bands who made it as far south as modern day Kwangsi province. It is not certain whether they were involved because of a direct need for self defense or "as I think more likely they were called in as allies of such Yüeh."¹¹⁵ Other Yüeh areas, Min Yüeh and parts of what became Nan Yüeh held out for much longer against first the Ch'in and then somewhat later against the Han but as for those Yüeh whose territory had been conquered, "The people of Yüeh took to the maquis, they lived among the animals yet none would freely become a slave of the Ch'in."¹¹⁶

This period of turmoil in south and southeast China affected the area ruled by the Hùng Kings and those rulers who followed them. The importance to this discussion of these events in China is that, while the theory of mass migrations of the Yüeh peoples to Vietnam has been somewhat discredited, there is general agreement that at least some of these refugee lords and their followers fled as far south as northern Vietnam where they intermingled with the indigenous inhabitants and with the related Yüeh peoples already in the area. Thus the people of the area came to be called Viêt which is the Vietnamese pronunciation of Modern Standard Mandarin's Yüeh.¹¹⁷

¹¹²Taylor, *Birth*, 19. Nguyen Khac Vien, 17. O'Harrow "From Co Loa" 148-48.

¹¹³Taylor, *Birth*, 17.

¹¹⁴Stephen O'Harrow presents a convincing re-reading of the sources pertaining to the question of whether or not the Ch'in actually conquered the Red River Delta or not and concludes that "a proper reading of the texts of the period should not lead the historian to conclude that the Ch'in conquered the Red River delta and beyond." *From Co Loa* 145-46.

¹¹⁵O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 146.

¹¹⁶*Huai-Nan Tzu. A Concordance to the Huai Nan Zi*, The ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies,) Ch.18:3. For a detailed description of this period, which has been seriously challenged by O'Harrow in "From Co Loa," see Arousseau.

¹¹⁷Taylor, *Birth*, 44.

Thục Phan, later King An Dương, may or may not have been called Yüeh by the Chinese. However, I believe that the acceptance of him by the Vietnamese people as the founder of an early Việt state, along with the tradition that his citadel at Cổ Loa was the capital of the Vietnamese people before the Han conquest of Nan-Yüeh, strongly indicates that Thục Phan came from a culture closely related to that of the Việt peoples of the time.¹¹⁸ Whatever An Dương's ethnicity his rise to power in Vietnam "reflects an era of transition. He came from the north and built a great citadel. Although he subdued the Lạc lords, he did not disinherit them. He was absorbed into the legendary traditions of the people he had conquered. Eventually, he fell prey to stronger forces from the north."¹¹⁹

The forces An Dương fell to were those of Triệu Đà, Chinese Chao T'o, an official in the provincial government of Canton under the Ch'in who founded the Kingdom of Nan Yüeh shortly after the death of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti in 210 B.C. I believe that there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence to suggest that Triệu Đà was Yüeh, or if not Yüeh then a member of another minority not considered to be ethnic Chinese. He is described as popular with non-Chinese elements of the population, as having "adopted" the manners of the south, and his family is known to have intermarried with at least one family that was undoubtedly Yüeh.¹²⁰ As an official under the Ch'in it would have been surprising if Triệu Đà were illiterate. Trương Vĩnh Ký notes letters sent from the court of Triệu Đà in response to letters of complaint by the Chinese.¹²¹ Even if he, or other non-Han Lords in the area, were no more than semi-literate it was a standard of the time and place to have literate scribes attached to the courts of such states. Indeed the textual remains from tombs of the Ch'u, Ch'in and early Han period in Ch'u alone

¹¹⁸A person termed 'King' who ruled from Co Loa was killed in the turmoil of the fall of Nan-Yüeh. This rather strongly indicates the continuance of "an autonomous monarchical tradition up to 111 B.C." O'Harrow "From Co Loa" 153.

¹¹⁹Taylor, *Birth*, 23.

¹²⁰Taylor, *Birth*, 23-24. For a discussion of the intermarriage of Triệu Đà's family with that of the Lu family see pages 27-28.

¹²¹Ký, 19.

indicate that elite households often supported large secretarial staffs. This assertion is supported not only by the sheer number of documents, mostly bamboo strips, unearthed in recent decades but by variations in calligraphy and punctuation marks which "reveal the existence of a flourishing profession of legal scribes and copyists."¹²²

Enough state records of some sort existed in the states conquered by Ch'in that the Grand Councilor of Ch'in, Li Ssü, recommended destroying whole private libraries and "all books in the historical archives, except the records of Ch'in."¹²³ This was not only censorship of the records of other states which pre-dated Ch'in, nor only an attempt to wipe out the works of philosophers whose words might not reflect well on the reality of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's rule, the order was given as part of a program to standardize the written characters used in all parts of the empire.¹²⁴

It is clearly unlikely that all of the Yüeh lords who fled south when Ch'u conquered Yüeh were illiterate. They came from an area where literacy was not unusual, which was noted for widespread commercial success, and which had very regular contact with areas of China where works of literature which survive to this day were written.¹²⁵ Bronzes created by the Yüeh still extant contain "long inscriptions...Except for some of the personal names, which are locally distinctive, these inscriptions are sometimes more stylish and literary in style than some of the inscriptions from the Central Plains itself."¹²⁶ However, as I will show below, the Yüeh were literate in scripts which would have been proscribed under Ch'in and discouraged or replaced under the Han. It is most unlikely that they would have used the script promoted by the Ch'in standardizers.

¹²²Susan Weld, "Chu Law in Action: Legal Documents from Tomb 2 at Baoshan," in Cook and Major, 85.

¹²³Tsien, 12.

¹²⁴Boltz, *Origins* 156-58. See also Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier: a Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssü (280?-208 B.C.)*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938) 160-61.

¹²⁵For mention of the Yüeh as a non-Chinese group of people that one might encounter see Mencius VI. ii.3. James Legge trans. *The Works of Mencius* (1895; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 427.

¹²⁶Li Xueqin, *Eastern Zhou and Qin*, 200.

Triệu Đà gained ascendancy over An Dương and his kingdom after a period of alliance followed by an attack and the defeat of An Dương's forces. There is an important legend connected with the subjugation of An Dương by Triệu Đà. In this legend An Dương's daughter either (depending on the version of the legend) falls in love with Triệu Đà's son, without knowing who he is, and betrays the secret of her father's magic crossbow or else An Dương gives her in marriage to Triệu Đà's son and she betrays the secret and Triệu Đà defeats An Dương.¹²⁷ The secret of the crossbow was its trigger made by a holy man or sage from a magic golden turtle claw.¹²⁸ The legendary sage or holy man could represent one of the shamans/chemist/doctors/magicians who were a feature of many elite households of the era in both Chinese and Việt-Yüeh society.¹²⁹ There is good evidence for an interpretation of this legendary figure which is more specific to the Việt-Yüeh.

Donald B. Wagner has made an exhaustive search of Han and pre-Han texts searching for myths, legends, and oral traditions recorded by the Chinese concerning metallurgy. He finds that "in the Warring States and Han periods bronze had a special place in the culture of the Wu-Yue region."¹³⁰ Wagner examines in detail the metallurgical lore in three different texts, the *Wu-Yüeh Ch'un-Ch'iu*, 吳越春秋, the *Yüeh Chüeh Shu*, 越絕書, both compiled in the first century A.D., and a Warring States era text, the *Kao Kong-Chi* 考工記.¹³¹ These texts indicate not only the position and variety of metal workers in the Wu-Yüeh economic system and the number

¹²⁷For two versions of the legend see Taylor, *Birth*, 25-27 and Thomas Hodgkin, "Hung Vuong: Chinese Occupation, c. 2000 BC-AD 938" in *Vietnam the Revolutionary Path* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 15-16.

¹²⁸For the technical complexity of an ancient Chinese crossbow trigger see A. F. P. Hulswé, "Mélanges: Again the Crossbow Trigger," *T'oung Pao* 64, no. 4-5. 86.

¹²⁹See Barlow for a discussion of shamans and shamanesses as depicted in the Kuangsi cliff paintings, 16-24.

¹³⁰Wagner, 109.

¹³¹*Wu-Yüeh Ch'un-Ch'iu. A Concordance to the Wu-Yue Chun Qiu. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series, Historical Works no. 5 and Yüeh Chüeh Shu. A concordance to the Yue Jue Shu. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series, Historical Works no. 6, both (Hong Kong: The Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies, 1993). The Kao Kong Chi was transmitted as a text embedded in the Chou Li and can be found in editions of the Chou Li.*

and variety of them that could be found in almost any place in the Wu-Yüeh region but these texts also discuss sophisticated technical details of metallurgy in a manner which suggests that this knowledge was quite widespread.¹³² This lore from Wu and Yüeh is even more pertinent to the case I wish to make here because "there is almost nothing in the way of metallurgical mythology in the rest of the extant Han and pre-Han literature."¹³³ Such other stories as Wagner was able to find concerning weapons say very little about those who *made* the weapons. One particularly fine sword which is mentioned as an example is "specifically a sword from Wu."¹³⁴ The *Yüeh Chüeh Shu* devotes one whole chapter to swords. In one section, of this chapter, five named swords are evaluated for King Kou-chien of Yüeh by an expert on the basis of their technical merit. Essentially the swords are discussed in reference to the quality of the alloys they are made from. Only one is deemed a "precious" sword by the expert, the story of its making forms the next section of text. The *Wu Yüeh Ch'un Ch'ü* also contains stories of the making of swords. These stories of the 'birth' of certain swords contain many 'magical' details and seem to reflect a tradition of respect for the knowledge and technical expertise necessary to make a fine weapon.¹³⁵

The level of metallurgical weapon making skill described in the three texts mentioned above was a fact rather than an exaggeration. Archaeological finds from northern Vietnam and from the Wu-Yüeh areas of southeastern China include crossbow triggers (sometimes referred to as crossbow locks), crossbow bolts and quite a number of swords which have been described as "magnificent" and "very sharp and finely made."¹³⁶ While it is generally thought that iron is superior to bronze and that when any society developed iron they immediately abandoned bronze this is not always the case where weapons are concerned. In 1959 some 300 metres from the ramparts of An Dương's citadel of Co Loa archaeologists unearthed

¹³²Wagner, 107-115.

¹³³Wagner, 111.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵Wagner, 107-115

¹³⁶Wagner, 105. Li Xueqin *Eastern Zhou and Qin*, 198.

"several thousand bronze arrowheads."¹³⁷ For the tips of crossbow bolts as well as for crossbow triggers precise casting is imperative and "bronze would naturally have been the metal of choice for any kind of precision casting."¹³⁸ Bronze, as compared to iron, is a golden color and a crossbow trigger made of bronze, and perhaps cast with all the skill and sympathetic magic available to the metallurgists at the court of An Dương would have made a formidable weapon or more likely weapons.¹³⁹ The magic crossbow was a symbol of legitimation, an important part of the regalia of An Dương's kingship, and the union of An Dương's daughter and Triệu Đà's son seems to be symbolic of an acceptance of Triệu Đà by the Vietnamese people that was never accorded any ethnic Chinese hero who entered the Vietnamese pantheon of deities. Of all the rulers who came from the geographic space which is now China, and who ruled over the Việt peoples, it is only the Triệu who are listed among the Việt dynasties by Vietnamese historians. Further, it is only Triệu Đà who is accorded possession of any item of the spiritual regalia of the Vietnamese people.¹⁴⁰

This Vietnamese 'legend' is recorded in the Chinese annals in several slightly different formats.¹⁴¹ While the crossbow was an important part of the Han army's arsenal of weapons and its use was integral to their tactics, many scholars are of the opinion that the Chinese had not used the crossbow before the Warring States period and that they acquired it from somewhere to the south and

¹³⁷ Nguyen Khac Vien, 18. The author discusses crossbows but makes no distinction, if it were possible to make one, between plain arrowheads and crossbow bolts.

¹³⁸ Wagner, on casting techniques for crossbow bolts see pp. 157-161. For crossbow triggers and why they would best be made from bronze with the techniques available at the time see 182.

¹³⁹ For a description of two types of crossbows used by Yüeh warriors see Barlow, 11-12.

¹⁴⁰ Phan Huy Lê, "On the National Process in Vietnamese History" *Vietnam Social Sciences* 11, (1988) quotes Nguyễn Trai's list of the Việt dynasties, including the Triệu, pg.42. For a specific example of a Chinese general who is honored by the Vietnamese people and about whom many legends have been recorded but who never acquired any such emblems of power see Taylor's description of the legends surrounding Ma Yuan, Taylor, *Birth*, 47-48.

¹⁴¹ For an overview of the Chinese versions of this and of the literature where they can be found see Taylor, *Birth*, 316-319.

west of the Chinese heartland.¹⁴² It is a very interesting point that Norman and Mei consider this to be the period of time during which the terms for both the crossbow and its trigger entered Chinese language and that Chinese acquired these loan words from an Austroasiatic language.¹⁴³

Triệu Đà sent representatives from his capitol in Canton to keep an eye on the Red River Delta but he left one of An Dương's descendants on the throne in Cổ Loa. Triệu Đà also allowed the indigenous lords of the region to rule as before as long as they acknowledged his over-lordship.¹⁴⁴ Triệu Đà died in 136 B.C. and his kingdom went to his son Hu, who began establishing closer ties to the Han Dynasty which had consolidated its rule over China in 202 B.C. After Hu's death his heir, married to a courtesan from the Han Court, forged ever closer ties with Han provoking a revolt by the Yüeh commander of the army who was also a relative of the Triệu family.¹⁴⁵ The Han Empire sent in its troops and in short order they defeated the rebels and formally established rule over Nan Yüeh. After a short period of further fighting and forging alliances, the Han also established nominal rule over what is now northern Vietnam in 111 B.C.

The Vietnamese met the representatives of Han and turned over the "population registers" mentioned earlier. It should be clear, from the discussion above of the literacy of the ruling classes of the Yüeh and the other peoples of southern China for several hundred years before this date, that it would be more surprising for these people *not* to have had records of some sort than for them to have

¹⁴²Wagner contends that "It is generally believed that the crossbow was an invention of the Warring States period." Norman and Mei state that "Early references to the crossbow in Chinese texts also point to that general region (southwest China and Indo-China) as the place of origin. Wagner agrees that the archaeological evidence "does suggest a southern origin" although he qualifies this by saying that things might look different "with more material." Email communication November 27, 1996.

¹⁴³Norman and Mei, 293-294. This point is still unresolved and has been the subject of recent discussion by the members of the Warring States Working Group. For archived postings on the subject "CROSSBOW" see <http://www.egroups.com/group/wsw/>

¹⁴⁴Taylor, *Birth*, 26-27. See also O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 152-54.

¹⁴⁵Taylor, *Birth*, 27-28

had them.¹⁴⁶ Most of the Chinese records for this and earlier periods exist mainly because they were copied and recopied. Most of the Chinese texts which were first written before the Ch'in and Han Dynasties exist today only as copies. In fact, except for inscriptions on stone, bronze, and pottery and for a few scrolls from recent archaeological finds "virtually all of the transmitted textual evidence whereby we know about the cultural practices, religious beliefs...of the formative pre-Han period has in its transmission down to the present passed through the hands of the scholars and scribes of the Han Dynasty."¹⁴⁷ Even the *Classic of Songs*, one of the essential texts of the Chinese canon, exists only in a form reconstructed from the memory of scholars after it was lost in the Ch'in book burning and the other catastrophes which followed.¹⁴⁸ As for documents which were never proscribed, such as the records probably given by the Vietnamese to the representatives of Han, still, being written on perishable materials, when and if anyone cared to recopy them they were copied in the standard script. If the Chinese lost so much of their own written record is it likely that they would have tried to preserve the script of a group of conquered non-Han barbarians?

In the period immediately following their conquest of Nan Yüeh the Chinese did not bother to impose direct rule. At that time the Han Dynasty was content to leave this distant province much to its own devices under its own indigenous lords as long as the southern trade routes were secure and a certain number of luxuries from the tropics made their way to China.¹⁴⁹ A sudden increase in the immigration of ethnic Han Chinese into the entire southern region of the Han Empire due to the chaos of the Wang Mang Era (9-23 A.D.) disturbed the uneasy equilibrium between the Chinese and the indigenous inhabitants of the region. There was a sudden increase in the number and a change in the type of Chinese who immigrated to the south, including the Red River delta. Prior to this

¹⁴⁶See Susan Weld's discussion of the extent and uses of population registers in Ch'u, 85 and 96.

¹⁴⁷Boltz, *Origins* 156.

¹⁴⁸Hightower, 1-3.

¹⁴⁹Jennifer Holmgren, *Chinese Colonization of Northern Vietnam: Administrative Geography and Political Development in the Tongking Delta, First to Sixth Centuries A.D.* (Canberra: Australian National Univ.: 1980) 1-2.

point most incoming Chinese had been very poor peasants, former convicts, or political exiles.¹⁵⁰ It is arguable that few if any ethnic Han Chinese were among the earliest immigrants. The ease with which these very early immigrants disappeared into Vietnamese society, when it is known that a later influx of men who were undoubtedly Chinese provoked considerable strife, suggests that the cultural conflicts between the Vietnamese and the immigrants did not arise until the arrival of those who were undoubtedly of northern stock.¹⁵¹ Grave goods from tombs dated to the end of the Trưng Sister's Revolt at the latest also show strong artistic and thematic connections to the cultures south of the Yangtze.¹⁵² The earliest immigrants to the Việt areas may have been the dispossessed from non-Han areas of southern China. They probably had no more desire to attract the attention of whatever Chinese officials were in the area than the Vietnamese did.

The newcomers however, were quite different. In general the elite in China opposed the land reforms of Wang Mang, as these reforms meant that those with large land holdings were forced to divest themselves of a proportion of their agricultural land.¹⁵³ One objective of this was a reduction in tenancy, which objective the gentry who had become economically dependent on their tenants naturally opposed. These gentry in opposition are the people whose migration to northern Vietnam is recorded.¹⁵⁴ It is important to note here that these newcomers "tended to be adult males."¹⁵⁵ As adult Chinese males they felt the need for legal and local wives who would then produce legitimate children. These children would, in the view of all Chinese, not only be Chinese but these sons would remain members of their father's clan and would perform the

¹⁵⁰Holmgren, 2-8.

¹⁵¹O'Harrow, 157-59. See also Holmgren, 2.

¹⁵²Olov R.T. Janse, *Archaeological Research in Indo-China: The District of Chiu-Chên during the Han Dynasty*, vol. I. *General Considerations and Plates*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, vol. VII (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947) xvi-xxi. See also Janse "The Lach-Truong Culture" in *Barnard Ch'u and the Silk Manuscript*.

¹⁵³For a general overview of Wang Mang and his economic programs see Li, 112-116. See also O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 157.

¹⁵⁴O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 157-58.

¹⁵⁵O'Harrow, "From Co Loa," 158.

mourning rites for their fathers.¹⁵⁶ It was to satisfy the needs of these new male immigrants that Chinese officials turned their attention to regulating matters affecting the daily life of the people of Vietnam in such matters as clothing and marriage rites.

When the Chinese say that they reformed the marriage rites of an area under Chinese rule they mean much more than that they forced the inhabitants of the region in question to adopt Chinese style ceremonies. What is really meant by this phrase is that they regulated who could marry whom.¹⁵⁷ Many marriages which were perfectly legitimate under Vietnamese customary law were illegitimate under Chinese law. The children of such unions were thus also illegitimate in Chinese eyes and were not eligible to inherit their parents property. This certainly did not affect every Việt family in the area under Chinese military occupation, for one thing the Chinese were likely to ignore those who had little if any land which was probably, then as in later times, the majority of the population. However the Chinese men who settled among the Việt at this particular juncture needed not only wives and children they also needed land and there were established ways to satisfy both needs at the same time.

Stephen O'Harrow argues that the original impetus to 'reform' marriage customs came because male Chinese, used to patrilineal inheritance and male control of any real property wives brought into a marriage, expected to get land through their local wives and that the system in Việt society was clearly bilateral or perhaps even matrilineal. Thus "Marriage to local women, long a standard Chinese practice in frontier areas like Nan-Yüeh...did not, however, procure for them the land they were seeking...in order for the

¹⁵⁶For the importance of both the Chinese clan and of mourning rituals in historic perspective see Hsien Chin Hu, *The Common Descent Group in China and its Functions* (1948; reprint, Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1963).

¹⁵⁷"Regularization" of marriage customs is one of the standard "good deeds" attributed to skillful Chinese administrators in recently conquered or minority areas. For an analysis of the format these biographies often followed see Stephen W. Durrant *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995) chapters 4 and 5. To the best of my knowledge the, to me self-evident, fact that this regulation of marriage also gave control of who inherited what to the Chinese has not been noted by Sinologists.

Chinese to make a legal claim on the land, the marriage laws or customs among the PVN (proto-Vietnamese) would have to be changed over to conform with Chinese practice and aims."¹⁵⁸ 'Reform' of the marriage laws thus legitimated seizure and redistribution of property and land to 'legal' and law abiding individuals. This Chinese system of legalized disruption of indigenous land tenure and of the corresponding social and material cultures tied to this was by no means confined to the period of the Han Dynasty nor to the Red River Delta.¹⁵⁹ Its importance to this discussion is that this was the precise point in time during which one of two factors, the structure of the Vietnamese kinship system and differences in perceptions of language, which the Vietnamese consider to be major points of cultural difference between the Vietnamese and the Chinese first provoked open conflict. The precipitating factor of this conflict was clearly the difference between Vietnamese and Chinese kinship systems and the pivotal role of women in the Vietnamese system of that time.¹⁶⁰

The new regulations and the greed of one particular administrator, Su Ting who may be merely an historical scapegoat, led to the revolt of the two Trưng Sisters, Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị, in AD 40-43.¹⁶¹ While there is a fair amount of disagreement in the sources as to the details of what led Trưng Trắc to revolt, her sister seems to have merely followed Trưng Trắc's lead, the one point that is agreed upon is that Trưng Trắc fell afoul of the new laws somehow.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 159. Trần Quốc Vương, asserts that ancient Vietnamese society was both matrilineal and matrilocal, in comparison to the Chinese, and that traces of this can be seen throughout history. He also asserts that this was undoubtedly one of the causes of not only the Trưng sisters' rebellion but also that of Bà Triệu a little over 100 years later. Conversations during an archaeological field trip to sites connected to Bà Triệu, Nông Cống District, Thanh Hóa Province November 1994.

¹⁵⁹For a description of "lineage segmentation" within Chinese clans during the Shang dynasty and the acquisition of new lands by new lineage segments see K.C. Chang, chapter 1, 9-32. For a description of Chinese male immigrant takeover of lands in Taiwan during the 18th and 19th centuries see Johanna Menzel Meskill, *A Chinese Pioneer Family: the Lins of Wu-feng, Taiwan 1729-1895* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 45-50.

¹⁶⁰Holmgren, 8-9.

¹⁶¹Holmgren, 4-5.

¹⁶²For a synopsis of the sources and their disagreements, see O'Harrow "From Co Loa" 160. See also Taylor, *Birth*, 37-41.

Trung Trắc was the daughter of a family with considerable lands and Stephen O'Harrow believes that her legal problems "had something to do with her rights as a noblewoman over the lands within her family's domain."¹⁶³ That she was recognized by the Việt people as a legitimate leader is "attested to by the success of her revolt."¹⁶⁴ The role of women in the Việt leadership of the time is equally attested to by the fact that it was her sister who was her main lieutenant, no brothers or male relatives of other sorts are referred to by any of the sources. Trung Trắc succeeded in driving the Chinese administration beyond her borders and had herself declared queen. It took over a year for the Chinese to gather together an army considered suitable to deal with the rebels. This army was led by the great General Ma Yüan.¹⁶⁵ Even for General Ma, with some 20,000 troops it took nearly another 2 years thereafter to totally subdue the revolt since resistance continued for some time after the death of the sisters.¹⁶⁶

Ma Yüan made a great impact on "collective memory of the Vietnamese people" and he entered their pantheon of deities.¹⁶⁷ Among other things that he is known to have done was to erect a bronze statue to mark the southern limit of the Han Empire.¹⁶⁸ He is also said to have "taken the bronze drums of the Ou-Yüeh, he melted them and refashioned them into the shape of a horse."¹⁶⁹ Since at least the Warring States era the Chinese had known of the importance to the Yüeh of ceremonial bronze drums. These drums were used in battle to signal troop movements. Indeed some linguists think that the phrase "striking metal" (擊金), as used in texts of the period as a reference to drums and gongs sounded as military signals, entered common usage from a tale related by Mencius concerning the military exploits of King Kou-chien of

¹⁶³O'Harrow, "From Co Loa" 160.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵For a biography of Ma Yüan, see Herbert A Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1898) 572-73.

¹⁶⁶Taylor, *Birth*, 30-44. For an interesting account, including a map of troop movements, of the military aspects of the Trung sisters rebellion and of Ma Yüan's campaign which subdued it see Holmgren 11-14.

¹⁶⁷Taylor, *Birth*, 47.

¹⁶⁸Taylor, *Birth*, 48.

¹⁶⁹*Hou Han Shu*: (The History of the Later Han Dynasty, A.D. 25-220, by Fan Yeh). (Po-na edition) 24/14, 14a.

Yüeh.¹⁷⁰ The bronze drums clearly had specific military, as well as ceremonial uses. These uses extended to Yüeh navies as well as armies where they were most probably used "to mark time for the oarsmen and to communicate over distance with other boats."¹⁷¹ The Chinese recognized the symbolic as well as the practical meaning of the destruction of the bronze drums. Indeed in part because the construction of the drums "demanded considerable wealth and economic power...their confiscation by Ma Yüan symbolized stripping the last vestiges of political and economic power from the native leaders."¹⁷²

If Ma Yüan followed the general Chinese custom of the time he confiscated the swords as well as melting the drums of his opponents. Swords also held an important place in the beliefs of the Yüeh. As noted previously the Wu and Yüeh had the most extensive mythology concerning metal workers, and especially swordsmiths, of any of the peoples of the area. They also seem to have been the only ones to name swords, which is indicative of the ritual power believed to be embodied in such swords.¹⁷³ The Yüeh weapons, drums, and other ritual bronzes which exist today were almost all found outside of the Wu-Yüeh region. They are extant because they were buried with those peoples who conquered the States of Wu and Yüeh.¹⁷⁴ Olov R.T. Janse notes the paucity of bronze weapons found in tombs in Thanh Hóa province which were sealed after the expeditions of Ma Yüan as compared to the number from earlier tombs. Janse considers that other ritual bronzes found buried outside of tomb sites "may be considered as objects saved and hidden by

¹⁷⁰Rodgers 158-59, 184, note 765.

¹⁷¹Barlow, 26. For Barlow's discussion of boats, drums, and Yüeh navies see pages 24-7.

¹⁷²Holmgren, 17. Holmgren also notes that legend attributed the *creation* of the drums to Ma Yüan and offers an interesting schema of the relationship between important political and cultural themes associated with the drums in Việt-Yüeh culture, 17-20.

¹⁷³Wagner, 111-115.

¹⁷⁴Li Xueqin discusses the wide dispersion of the swords of Wu and Yüeh in reference to their having been "obtained" after conquest by the conquering State, *Eastern Zhou and Qin*, 198. See also Xu Shaohua, "Chu Culture: and Archaeological Overview" and Cook "The Ideology of the Chu" both in Cook and Major.

fugitives."¹⁷⁵ There is an oral legend to this effect also which asserts that after the Trưng sisters rebellion "many chieftans buried their drums upside down and filled with weapons- arrow heads, crossbow bolts, and spear points."¹⁷⁶ Given the extensive numbers of bronze swords, with inscriptions in archaic Chinese representing Yüeh nomenclature which are known from twentieth century archaeological sites, it is arguable that the making of Ma Yüan's bronze horse and bronze pillars called for smelting examples of what could be called proto-Nôm.¹⁷⁷

Ma Yüan remained in Vietnam for some time after putting down the revolt of the Trưng Sisters. He saw the government of the region stabilized before returning to the honors which awaited him for his success.¹⁷⁸ Ma Yüan divided the region into smaller administrative districts and left the members of what were to become, in Keith Taylor's terminology, the Great Han-Viet Families at the top of the power structure.¹⁷⁹ One thing which this meant was that sinicization was no longer retarded by a portion of Yüeh society and it was sometime in the decades following Ma Yüan's imposition of Han administrative structure that the Chinese characters in official use in China were put into use by the Han government over the Việt people.

Continuing my earlier discussion of the possibility of an indigenous script in use at the time of the beginnings of direct Chinese rule in Vietnam, some scholars feel that strong evidence of its existence and use by the Viet people at the time of the Chinese conquest is a Chinese prohibition of it.¹⁸⁰ However there is some uncertainty as to whether or not the Chinese specifically prohibited

¹⁷⁵Janse, *Archaeological Research in Indo-China*, vol. I. pg. xxi.

¹⁷⁶Trần Quốc Vương, personal communication 5/18/97.

¹⁷⁷For a partial list of Yüeh swords with the names of Yüeh rulers inscribed on them see Li *Eastern Zhou and Qin*. 199 and for a notation that personal names were "locally distinctive" with a reproduction of a rubbing of the inscription on the sword of King Kou-chien see pg. 200. For a color plate of Kou-chien's sword see Li Xueqin *The Wonder of Chinese Bronzes* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980) plate 19.

¹⁷⁸Ma Yüan was made a marquis and his daughter married to the Emperor as reward for his successful war against the Việt people. Giles, 572-73.

¹⁷⁹Taylor, *Birth*, 45-57.

¹⁸⁰Lacouperie *loc. cit.*

the use of a local script in Vietnam aside from a general push for standardized scripts throughout their empire.¹⁸¹ As for what the Chinese did in Vietnam about Chinese characters, you may choose your scholarly reference and quote it to say that the Chinese forcibly imposed, enforced, promoted or merely introduced the use of Chinese characters and written Chinese as the language required for all official uses in Vietnam.¹⁸² It is agreed that this happened in the first or second century AD and that a man by the name of Shih Hsieh (Sino-Vietnamese Sĩ Nhiếp) was instrumental in spreading the use of Chinese characters among the elite classes of Vietnamese.¹⁸³ Shih Hsieh was a member one of the Han-Viet Families and he was thus from Vietnam whatever his ethnic identity.¹⁸⁴ It is a very interesting point that there is a tradition that Shih Hsieh was also the inventor of Nôm.¹⁸⁵

For the next nineteen odd centuries Chinese characters, used to express Classical Chinese rather than any form of Vietnamese, remained the primary language of official documents in Vietnam. Many members of the Vietnamese upper classes, men and women, became not only literate in Chinese characters but erudite in the classical literary, and philosophical traditions of China.¹⁸⁶ I emphasize the term classical because the written language

¹⁸¹ Although Lacouperie is certain enough of this to give a date for the order to abandon the local script, the existence of which he also feels strongly about, it appears to me that other scholars would have noted such an order if it there were indeed reliable records of it. Lacouperie provides no documentation for the date he gives.

¹⁸² Nguyen Khac Vien, 23. Trần Quốc Vương, *Some Aspects of Traditional Vietnamese Culture* (Hà Nội: 1994), 13. DeFrancis, *Colonialism*, 10. Lacouperie, *loc. cit.*

¹⁸³ Lacouperie, *loc. cit.* DeFrancis, *Colonialism and Language Policy*, 10. For a biography of Sĩ Nhiếp see Stephen O'Harrow "Men of Hu, Men of Han, Men of the Hundred Men."

¹⁸⁴ For a detailed study of the growth of this class see Holmgren.

¹⁸⁵ Nguyen Nam, 1, 21 n.3.

¹⁸⁶ Alexander Woodside, "Introduction" in Huỳnh Sanh Thông trans., *The Tale of Kiều* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1983): xix-xxx. for an account of perhaps the most famous Vietnamese poetess see Maurice Durand *L'Oeuvre de la Poétesse Vietnamien Hồ-Xuân-Hương: Textes, Traduction et Notes*, Collection de Textes et Documents Sur L'Indochine IX, Textes Nôm no.2 (Paris: École Française D'Extrême-Orient, 1968): 1-9. for an account of an early Vietnamese scholar who achieved the highest degree possible in the 8th century examination system in China see Trần Nghĩa "Study of Han-Nom" 34.

introduced under the Han and used thereafter by the rulers of Vietnam, both Chinese and Vietnamese, was the graphic representation of no language spoken as a mother tongue throughout China itself by the time the Han dynasty came to rule Vietnam.¹⁸⁷ It was instead the agreed upon official written language for all territory ruled by the ethnic Han Chinese in a manner somewhat similar to the way in which Latin was the official language of Europe for the operations of the Catholic church.

Defining, naming, the speech of any one group of people as opposed to any other is, in the real world, a matter of politics as much as academics. Linguists say that a dialect of any one language is still intelligible, with perhaps a little difficulty, to ordinary speakers of another dialect of the same language.¹⁸⁸ Thus a speaker of Canadian French and a speaker of Parisian French can, with only a little difficulty, carry on a conversation. A speaker of Parisian French and a speaker of Catalan, in contrast, cannot converse unless one or the other of them knows both languages. This although both French and Catalan are Romance languages and although there are native speakers of Catalan living in France.¹⁸⁹ Parisian French and Canadian French are dialects, in the linguistic sense, of French. French and Catalan are different languages. The various languages spoken in China are called, by the Chinese, "dialects" of Chinese.¹⁹⁰ Books about China and the Chinese generally follow the lead of the Chinese and refer to what is spoken

¹⁸⁷DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 94-95.

¹⁸⁸For an interesting discussion of Hardy's Tess as an example of a fictional character who operates in 2 different dialects of English according to the situation in which she finds herself see Peter Burke, "Introduction" in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, no. 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 7. for Chinese 'dialects', their lack of mutual intelligibility and their linguistic relationship to each other see DeFrancis *Visible Speech*, 94-95.

¹⁸⁹For a discussion of the political fortunes of various dialects of French and of other languages spoken in France before and during the French Revolution see David A. Bell, "Lingua Populi, Lingua Dei: Language, Religion and the Origins of French Revolutionary Nationalism." *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 5 (December 1995)

¹⁹⁰For an extensive discussion of definitions of dialects as they apply to the Chinese and for an outline of the current official Chinese designations for the speeches of China see DeFrancis "Idiolects, Dialects, Regionalects, and Languages" chapter 3 of *The Chinese Language*.

by people in different areas of China as "dialects" of Chinese.¹⁹¹ However most of these tongues are not mutually intelligible, and are no more closely related than are the different Romance languages and indeed, archaic Chinese is to most of them as Latin is to the Romance languages.¹⁹² The languages spoken in China are referred to as dialects for political and social rather than linguistic reasons. In contrast, in Vietnam, among native speakers of Vietnamese, linguistic variation falls within the parameters that linguists refer to as dialects or accents.¹⁹³ So we can say that the Chinese speak in different languages whereas the Vietnamese speak in different dialects.

This brings me to the point of discussing perceptions of linguistic commonalities for the Chinese people versus a different commonality in regard to language that is seen by the Vietnamese as being a part of their 'National Identity'. Although it can be said that until very recent times the majority of speakers of Sinitic/Chinese languages have been illiterate, such prominence has been given to the written form of Chinese that it is often said that for the Chinese people their common linguistic tie is Chinese characters rather than the many languages/dialects/topolects spoken in China.¹⁹⁴ For quite a long period of time, arguably for some seventeen to nineteen centuries, the written form of Chinese was a lingua franca for the educated elites of Japan, Korea, China proper and Vietnam.¹⁹⁵ During this period the Chinese considered that because all of these other ethnic groups could read and write Chinese that they had been *sinitified* and that they shared something in common with the

¹⁹¹ Victor Mair argues that the term, *fangyan*, the Chinese use to describe the different languages/dialects spoken in China should not be translated as dialect in any case but as *topolect*. Victor H. Mair, *What is a Chinese "Dialect/Topolect"? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistic Terms*. Sino-Platonic Papers, no. 29 (Philadelphia: Dept. of Oriental Studies, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1991).

¹⁹² William G. Boltz, class notes from Classical Chinese 1, October 1992. See also DeFrancis, *Visible Speech* 94-95.

¹⁹³ Nguyễn Đình Hoà, "Language and Literature" 11.

¹⁹⁴ Almost every teacher of Chinese language I have ever studied with has made this point. Wang Tsai Chun, class notes Fall 1985. Hu Mei Hsieh, class notes Fall 1987. For a discussion of the Chinese World View and writing see Boltz *Origins* 173-177.

¹⁹⁵ It should be noted here that the *written* Chinese I am speaking of is Classical Chinese rather than Modern Standard Mandarin characters.

Chinese. The non-Chinese peoples of southern China were considered to have been *sinified* and thus civilized in large part because they could read and write and because their best "poetry could be compared favorably with the very best written by the northerners."¹⁹⁶

The graphic representation of Chinese has been seen as a commonality for the Chinese people since it was codified during the Ch'in and Han dynasties. It has been argued quite forcefully and cogently by a leading scholar of Chinese linguistics that Chinese was standardized in regard to visual graphic representation of semantic rather than phonetic value for the reason that semantic values, especially the graphic representation of Confucian ethical precepts, were perceived as a commonality whereas phonetics were not.¹⁹⁷ Further, that variations on the standard representation of these precepts, variations which might include phonetic elements, were seen as heterodox by the scholars appointed by Chin Shih Huang-ti to standardize the writing of Chinese.¹⁹⁸

It was noted above that the graphic form of very early Vietnamese writing, if it existed, may have placed most of its emphasis on the representation of the phonetic sounds of Vietnamese language as it existed at that time. It was further noted, in regard to Chinese characters and Nôm, that phonetics were comparatively more important than semantics in the use of Chinese characters, and in the creation of Nôm characters from Chinese characters for the functioning of Nôm in expressing Vietnamese language.

I would now like to discuss the difference, to the Vietnamese, between *tiếng* or sound and *chữ* or written character. The English term "word" can mean either a written or a spoken word. One can say a few words or jot down a few words. In Vietnamese however "People are often heard to say "nói với nhau vài tiếng" ("to say a few tiếng to one another"), viết cho nó mấy chữ" ("to write him a few chữ"). Indeed "traditional Vietnamese philology did not know the term

¹⁹⁶Li, 53.

¹⁹⁷Boltz, *Origins*, 156-177.

¹⁹⁸Boltz, *Origins*, 168-177.

"word."¹⁹⁹ Modern Chinese make a distinction between speech and its graphic representation but for the Chinese it is the written form of language which is seen as being a cultural bond while for the Vietnamese it can be said that the important commonality of their language lies in its sound. While this is a somewhat simplistic statement, I would like to extend this idea by saying that while the Chinese, historically, feel that any two groups of people who can write to each other in Chinese are sinified and thus share a commonality, the Vietnamese would say that the members of the Vietnamese imagined community can speak to each other.

In this context Phan Huy Lê's paradigm of the intertwined evolution of the Vietnamese people, Vietnamese language and the Vietnamese state is highly pertinent. Professor Lê considers that early Vietnamese polities were "made up of many ethnic groups bound by close ties." These ties included "a language that was evolving into a common medium of intercourse."²⁰⁰ In a discussion of the essential unity of the Vietnamese people and Vietnamese culture, even as they were politically divided during the civil wars of the eighteenth century, Professor Lê chooses to quote the observation of a French traveler that "the people in both regions speak the same language and follow the same customs."²⁰¹ Lê's thoughts on Nôm and its relationship to Vietnamese language and culture are equally pertinent; "Việt took definite form with the birth of the nôm (demotic) script...and evolved into a literary language with the birth of a nôm literature (literature in the Việt language)...Gradually Việt became a common medium of intercourse among the various ethnic groups."²⁰²

As noted above, the phonetic variations in Vietnamese language are those of dialect rather than those of different, even if related, languages and, as also noted, Nôm was an adaptable vehicle for expressing variations in dialect because of the flexibility of its

¹⁹⁹See Nguyễn and Stankievich for a detailed discussion of tiếng, chữ and tự or character for Chinese and Nôm characters.

²⁰⁰Phan Huy Lê, 35-36.

²⁰¹Phan Huy Lê, 45.

²⁰²Phan Huy Lê, 38-39.

system of phonetics. In part because Nôm was never standardized Nôm, rather texts written in Nôm, vary a good bit from region to region and they also vary over time.²⁰³ Some of this variation can be connected to changes in vocabulary, some to regional variations in pronunciation and some perhaps to gradual changes in the system by which Chinese characters were adapted and used in Nôm. Indeed it has been said that for scholars "Nôm is a precious document of the varieties of regional speech and of how language changed through time."²⁰⁴ It is logical to think that if Nôm were derived solely from the Chinese script in official use during the first and second centuries A.D, which is the time period scholars agree upon for the introduction and spread of Chinese writing in Vietnam, then early Nôm should resemble more closely the Chinese of that time than later Nôm does. Yet, on the contrary, in regard to what I see as the major difference between Chinese and Nôm as vehicles for expressing their respective languages it is the other way around. Maurice Durand notes that "Early nôm is more difficult to read than that used by scholars and copyists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In early nôm (up to the beginning of the nineteenth century) the significant is often omitted and only the phonetic written...."²⁰⁵ If early Nôm is further from the Chinese it was supposedly derived from than later Nôm is, this brings us to the question of where did it come from or perhaps what script used in the geographic area which is *now* China was it derived from?

There were two formative periods of the Chinese writing system, both of which occurred before the first century A.D. introduction of Chinese characters to Vietnam.²⁰⁶ The oldest forms of what can be said with certainty to be writing in China come from "the oracle-bone inscriptions of the late Shang period, ca. 1200-1045 B.C."²⁰⁷ These inscriptions are referred to as 'oracle-bone'

²⁰³Keith Taylor, personal communication February 11, 1996. This is certainly true for the medical texts I examined during the course of research for my dissertation. See Thompson *passim*.

²⁰⁴Taylor, "Orientations" 972.

²⁰⁵Durand and Huan, 16.

²⁰⁶Boltz, *Origins*, 14-15.

²⁰⁷Boltz, *Origins*, 31.

inscriptions because of their divinatory contents. The inscriptions themselves consist of characters incised onto the scapulae of oxen and sheep and onto "turtle shells, typically the ventral shell, called a plastron, but occasionally also on the carapace." Boltz terms the period during which these inscriptions were created the Shang-Formation.²⁰⁸ The second period, which shaped the Chinese writing system as it existed at the time it is known to have been introduced to Vietnam, is referred to as the Ch'in-Han Reformation or the Ch'in Standardization and it occurred essentially between 221 B.C. and 100 A.D.²⁰⁹ During the long period of time between the end of Shang Formation period and the beginnings of the Ch'in-Han Reformation, from roughly 1000 B.C. to 200 B.C., Chinese script went through no "fundamental change in the principles that governed the structure of the script or its operation."²¹⁰ For the purposes of this paper the above would be of no interest except for the exceptions that exist to every rule including this one.

While there is no evidence for a diversion in the main course of development of the Chinese writing system there also occurred during this period the "emergence of what appear to be localized non-standard varieties of pre-Han Chinese writing." Since prominent Chinese archaeologists consider that the early scripts used in what is now China "perhaps originated in more than one place independently," it would not be surprising if these independently initiated writing systems exhibited some notable differences.²¹¹ Further, while no significant changes in the operational structure of the script occurred, towards the end of this period "the principles governing the structure and operation of the {Chinese} script begin to show at least a potential for significant change."²¹² These two corollaries to the history of Chinese characters are of importance to this discussion because of the nature and geographic location of most of the known examples of

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*

²⁰⁹Boltz, *Origins*, 13-15 and 156-168, see also Li, 101-103.

²¹⁰Boltz, *Origins*, 14.

²¹¹Chang, 81. For a detailed discussion of several of these local scripts see Li Xueqin, *Eastern Zhou and Qin*, 198-201, 215-16, 453-59; and *The Wonder of Chinese Bronzes*, 53-5.

²¹²Boltz, *Origins*, 13-15.

these local styles of writing and because of the nature of the potential changes which were blocked by the Chin-Han reformers.

In terms of location, variant scripts noted by Boltz and other scholars come almost exclusively from south of the Yangtze River.²¹³ The particular script most extensively examined, in a comparative light, comes from the excavation of the Ma Wang Tui tombs located in what was once the southern part of the State of Ch'u and which was thus right on the aforementioned fluid border with the State of Yüeh.²¹⁴

I shall return to a discussion of the textual contents of this tomb momentarily but first let me present an extremely simplified outline of Professor Boltz's assessment of the development of writing in the geographic area which is now China up to the point in time the Ma Wang Tui tomb was sealed. The script from the oracle-bones was a fully developed writing system which retained "unmistakable traces of its pictographic origins."²¹⁵ It had, by the time it was incised onto these bones, gone through several stages. One was the zodiographic stage of development in which graphs are no longer clearly enough pictures of things to be immediately associated with a particular thing as disassociated from the word for that thing in a particular language but are instead directly associated with words for things.²¹⁶

The oracle bone graphs were also used paronomastically, that is following the rebus principle discussed above to stand for things or concepts whose sound was congruent with the original word represented. Paronomastic usage separates a graph from its first semantic association and links it phonetically to a word that is often semantically unrelated. These Shang Dynasty graphs were also used parasemantically, that is, in what could be called the converse of the rebus principle they were linked to words with similar meanings but dissimilar pronunciation. Boltz terms this

²¹³Boltz, *Origins*, 160. See also Tsien, 46-47 and 122-125. Most scholars seem to feel that the Ba-Shu scripts noted above are a different form of writing rather than a variant of Chinese characters, thus they do not pertain to this discussion.

²¹⁴Boltz, *Origins*, 160.

²¹⁵Boltz, *Origins*, 31. See also DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 91-94.

²¹⁶Boltz, *Origins*, 31-34.

simultaneous use of graphs to represent multiple words congruent in either pronunciation or meaning the multivalent stage.²¹⁷

As one can see such a system might be prone to great ambiguity for a reader trying to determine whether the writer of a given set of graphs were using them for their original meaning, their phonetic value, or for their semantic connections in any one given instance. Chinese, like Sumerian, Egyptian, and Mayan, attempted to resolve this ambiguity through the use of specific determinative elements attached to graphs. Determinatives could be then, and are today, phonetic, semantic or both. This is why for Chinese, and for Nôm, characters composed of three, four, five or sometimes six or more elements, some of which can be independent characters in their own right, are not uncommon.

I discussed at some length above the idea that for the Chinese their cultural bond is seen as being their writing system and that the individual elements of this writing system are more likely to have a strong and obvious semantic value than are the separate elements of an alphabet. The main reason for this is the importance in Chinese writing of semantic determinatives in contrast to other systems of writing which have, for the most part, dropped them. The addition of semantic determinatives to the graphs gave a constant visual reinforcement of meaning associated with shape and "served as a constant reminder that the character stood for a whole word, with a meaning, and not just for an asemantic, syllabic sound value."²¹⁸ But is this putting the egg before the chicken and should the chicken come before the egg? Are the semantic elements of script more prominent in Chinese writing than in an alphabet because most Chinese characters contain semantic determinatives? Or conversely do most Chinese characters contain semantic determinatives because the Chinese collectively decided that the visual semantic aspects of script were at least as important and perhaps more so than phonetics?

There is indeed a point in time at which one can say that this decision was made for Chinese characters. However, one cannot say

²¹⁷Boltz, *Origins*, 60-67.

²¹⁸Boltz, *Origins*, 71.

that the initial phase of this decision was collective. When Ch'in Shih Huang-ti had completed the main phase of his conquest and unification of the numerous States existing in China during the Warring States Period he turned his attention to two things. Militarily he began conquering all he could of the remaining resistant non-Han areas such as the Yüeh territories, and administratively he turned to a number of social goals designed to unify his empire socially, intellectually, and economically. His ministers designed programs to rapidly standardize weights and measures, coinage, and the width of axles on carts so as to enable major works improving highways, byways, and city streets. While in one sense these measures were indeed aimed at improving the general situation for trade and commerce they can also be described as "concrete measures to eliminate local influence so as to discourage any decentralizing tendencies."²¹⁹ Ch'in Shih Huang-ti also ordered members of elite families of the States he had conquered to take up residence in his capital where he and his ministers could keep an eye on them. The Yüeh elite fled south instead.

Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's chief minister was not Confucian, instead he belonged to a school of political philosophy known as the Legalists. An extensive discussion of the Legalists is beyond the scope of my inquiry so suffice it to say that what is important about the Legalists to the present discussion is that Ch'in Shih Huang-ti's chief minister, Li Ssu, followed "the Legalist adage that it was more important to control people's thoughts than to control their actions."²²⁰ The several centuries prior to the Ch'in unification had been one of the most intellectually creative periods in China's history and when the Ch'in united China there were many different schools of thought on almost every subject of importance. This situation did not accord well with Li Ssu's ideas of how a State should be run and he accordingly petitioned (in 213 B.C.) the Emperor to allow him to arrange for the destruction of all the books he could collect on the histories of States other than the Ch'in and the books of

²¹⁹Li, 100.

²²⁰Ibid.

philosophies other than Legalism. Imperial professors were allowed to keep most books in their approved field of study and certain other books in the practical arts, medicine and pharmacy, divination, agriculture, horticulture, and forestry, were exempt also.²²¹

Yet another aspect of Li Ssu's program concerned writing. Many scholars assert that this measure was primarily aimed at improving communications and at standardizing the legal code "thereby to erase the last excuse for misunderstanding or misinterpreting the law."²²² Excuses for such misunderstandings rested on the fact that the writing systems current during the Warring States Period allowed for expression of local 'dialects' which could be, as noted above, different languages. Sinologists, both Chinese and non-Chinese, while condemning the Ch'in book burning, have historically regarded the standardization of writing as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, achievements of the Ch'in Dynasty because it unified the written language of China.²²³ The standardization of writing is considered to be the single most unifying factor of Chinese civilization "a fact which explains why, of all the great civilizations of antiquity, hers is the only one to survive today. And to the continuity and universality of her written language..., this can probably be attributed, more than any other single factor."²²⁴ This view is so commonly accepted among sinologists that it is perhaps the strongest possible argument in favor of my assertion that for the Chinese their written language is seen as a commonality and spoken language is not.

²²¹ For translations of 2 slightly different versions of this order see Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier: a study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssu*

李斯 (280?-208 B.C.), *Sinica Leidensia* vol. III (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), 80-84. For discussions of this order and its implementation see Li, 101, see also Tsien, 11-13.

²²² Li, 102.

²²³ A short list of authors who describe the Ch'in book burning as "thought control" but regard the standardization of written language as "facilitating communications" includes Li, 100-102, Li Xueqin *Eastern Zhou and Qin*, 456. Hung Shih-ti, "The Establishment of a New System for the Consolidation of Unification," 91-115 and "The Role of Ch'in Shih-huang in Progressive Historical Change" 154-63, both in *The Politics of Historiography: The First Emperor of China* Li Yu-Ning ed. (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975).

²²⁴ Bodde, 161.

There is such general agreement, among sinologists, that the loss of written forms for the various dialects was a gain for China that it has never before, to my knowledge, had the term loss applied to it. It is instead presented as one of the critical points in the formation of Chinese culture and is often described as somehow inevitable "There was such a proliferation of different and perhaps redundant forms, due no doubt to the many dialects of the separate states, that the Ch'in legislators had no choice but to eliminate many variants."²²⁵ If, however, a forcible move towards a national script was a gain for the Chinese it was also a loss for the other languages spoken, and before this written, in the area conquered by Ch'in. This program was clearly a part of the attempt to standardize potentially subversive local Chinese cultures and to sinicize local non-Chinese cultures.²²⁶ In the words of one Chinese historian, it "had positive significance in the implementation of policies and official decrees of the time, as well as in the propagation of culture."²²⁷

The order specified that historical records other than those of Ch'in be destroyed and that only "those who hold a function under the control of the bureau of the scholars of wide learning" be permitted to keep and discuss the books banned, "Books not to be destroyed will be those on medicine and pharmacy, divination by the tortoise and milfoil, and agriculture and arboriculture."²²⁸ Writings other than those in books were destroyed, "metal objects in the country were collected by the government, and the manufacture of

²²⁵Constance Ann Cook, "Chung-shan Bronze Inscriptions: Introduction and Translation" (Master's Thesis, Univ. of Washington, 1980), 12. Another discussion of the inevitability of standardization of writing and of Li Ssü's part in it can be found in Bodde, 160-161. An excellent overview of the historiographic rise and fall of Chin Shih Huang-ti can be found in Li Yu-Ning ed. *The First Emperor of China* (White Plains N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975). This book consists of over 20 essays, most of them translated from Chinese, covering some 2,000 years of Chinese assessment of Chin Shih Huang-ti, Li Ssu and their acts. It is noteworthy that whatever the authors opinions of the Ch'in Dynasty, all of them agree that the standardization of script was a positive move.

²²⁶For support of my opinion that this was aimed specifically at local culture see Wang Kuo-wei as quoted in Bodde, 153.

²²⁷Hung Shih-Ti, 113.

²²⁸Bodde, 43.

bronze vessels for use in ceremonials practically ceased."²²⁹ Of the archaeological remains of the Yüeh people that have been found more than a few are bronze weapons and more than a few of those have inscriptions which used Chinese characters to write Yüeh names.²³⁰ The metal collected was melted and reused by the Ch'in administration and often reinscribed with "statements concerning the Emperor's efforts towards standardization."²³¹ This example of melting down the material symbols of local culture was followed by Ma Yüan after his suppression of the Trung Sister's rebellion when he confiscated bronze drums and weapons and had them recast into a statue in his own honor.²³²

While the percentage of books existing that were actually destroyed by Li Ssu's program is clearly open to debate, the major issue being whether or not more books were destroyed by the rebels who overthrew the Ch'in and burned the royal palaces, in 206 B.C., than were lost in Li Ssu's fires, the fact remains that except for twentieth century archaeological finds no pre-Han texts written on perishable materials remain in existence.²³³ This is quite clearly because the ideals of the Ch'in program to standardize *script* were accepted by intellectuals of the many Chinese dynasties which followed the Ch'in even though they rejected the idea of destroying books. Whatever texts remained after the end of the Ch'in Dynasty have been passed down in a reformed version in terms of the script they were written in, this reformation was initiated by the Han Dynasty, the first Chinese Dynasty to rule Vietnam.²³⁴

After a period of civil war, following the overthrow of Ch'in, a man named Liu Pang re-unified approximately the area that had

²²⁹Tsien, 47.

²³⁰Tsien, 47. See also Wagner, 78-79, 433. Loehr, 198-99. See also Cook, "Ideology" 74-75 and note 47, for a brief discussion of the "bird," insect," and "fish" scripts common in the southeastern states especially Yüeh.

²³¹Tsien, 47.

²³²Holmgren, 16. See also de Crespigny 38. The Chinese were well aware of the importance of symbols of power, they were also well aware of the particular symbols which held meaning for peoples of other cultures. For a discussion of Chinese material symbols of power, especially bronzes, see K.C. Chang, "Art as the Path to Authority" chapter 5 in *Art, Myth and Ritual*.

²³³For discussions of this point see Tsien, 12-13. See also Li, 100-103.

²³⁴Boltz, *Origins*, 157.

been ruled by Ch'in, established the Han Dynasty in 202 B.C. and took the reign title Han Kao Tsu. A part of the former Ch'in Empire which the Han did not at first re-conquer was Nan Yüeh under the rule of Triệu Đà. This area remained a center of commerce, and was noted for an early form of wet rice agriculture, a generally prosperous lifestyle, and as a source of tropical luxuries.²³⁵ As long as the proper forms of diplomacy were observed the Han seem at first to have been more interested in internal consolidation than in re-conquering areas largely populated by non-Chinese and having well armed and determined leadership. Maps recovered from Ma Wang Tui tomb number three clearly indicate the disposition of military garrisons in the area of the tomb and their position relative to Nan Yüeh, written simply as Yüeh on the maps.²³⁶ Reliable dates for the closure of the tomb indicate that the maps themselves must have been created before 168 B.C. The occupant of the tomb "had a major role to play in organizing the defences of the southern frontier of Changsha (formerly a Ch'u city) about the time of the conflict with Nan Yue, and the maps placed in his tomb are a record of that period of military tension."²³⁷ Apparently the maps were "drawn to represent the position of defenses with Nan Yue."²³⁸ The people of the former State of Ch'u were themselves not totally resigned to Chinese cultural imperialism although their upper class had by this time allied itself quite firmly with the Han. From 157 to approximately 154 B.C. there was a revolt in what had been Ch'u which spread "across the Nan Ling to the south," that is into the territory of the Wu-Yüeh peoples.²³⁹

²³⁵Rafe de Crespigny, *Generals of the South: the Foundations and Origins of the Three Kingdoms State of Wu*. Faculty of Asian Studies Monographs New Series no. 16 (Canberra: Australian National University, 1990), 3-5. The area had, of course, been the source of many items for the luxury trade since Ch'u times. See Peters, "Towns and Trade"

²³⁶For a full discussion of these maps see Rafe de Crespigny "Two Maps from Mawangdui" *Cartography* 11, no.4 (September 1980): 11-22. For photos of the actual maps and for their reconstruction by scholars in the People's Republic of China see Cao Wanru ed. *Zhungguo Gudai Ditu Ji*. (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1990) plates 20-27, articles on the maps, in Chinese, 9-17 with brief English abstracts 107-108.

²³⁷de Crespigny, "Two Maps" 213.

²³⁸de Crespigny, "Two Maps" 221.

²³⁹de Crespigny, *Generals*, 10.

In 110-111 B.C. the Han court was inspired to overthrow Triêu Đà's successor, as described above. It is significant that this occurred during the reign of Han Wu-ti (r.140-87 B.C.) who was also the first Han emperor to seriously interest himself in the matter of the scripts and books to be found in the area he ruled.²⁴⁰ The Ch'in law which had made it a criminal act for private individuals to own books whose subject matter was outside the allowed subject areas had been repealed in 191 B.C. following the restoration of Confucianism, and Confucians, to a place of respect and influence in the political life of the empire. Han Wu-ti's ministers, in part because of their Confucian leanings, were vitally interested in recovering books thought to have been lost. They sent out agents to look for books and rewards were offered for private collectors who opened their libraries to the copyists.²⁴¹ A centralized imperial library was established where all the materials collected from the area under Han rule, including after 111 B.C. Nan Yüeh and thus the area which is now northern Vietnam, were kept. These materials were stored and arranged in a newly created bibliographic system.²⁴² The bibliography produced by these early librarians included some 13,000 volumes, some of which were multiple copies of one work and some of which were works in more than one volume. These early bibliographies have been lost although most, but not all, of their entries were preserved by a historian, Pan Ku (班固), of the Han Dynasty who adopted large parts of them as the bibliographical section of his historical work on the Han.²⁴³

It is worth noting here that Pan Ku was only interested in subjects pertaining to the Han and to China and the Chinese.²⁴⁴ If

²⁴⁰Han Wu-ti is said to have interested himself in the religious customs of those his armies had conquered. Han Wu-ti became so convinced of the claims of "shamans of the Yue" that he "ordered the shamans of the Yue to set up a place for Yue sacrifices in the capital." See Burton Watson trans., *Han Dynasty II of Records of the Grand Historian*, by Ssu-ma Ch'ien rev.ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 46.

²⁴¹Tsien, 13.

²⁴²Tsien, 14.

²⁴³*Id.*

²⁴⁴Li, 125-26. An exception to this should be noted, because Pan Ku had personally participated in a military campaign against the Hsiung-nu on the northern frontier of the Han Pan Ku does give a description of these people.

the Vietnamese presented "population registers" to the Han in 111 B.C. they probably would have made their way to either the imperial archives or to the imperial library. The records should have been catalogued there but they would not have been of bibliographical interest to Pan Ku and would not have been included in the bibliography preserved in his work. He had no idea that his was the only copy of the imperial bibliography that would survive, therefore he would have had no reason to include items from the imperial library which were clearly extraneous to his subject.

The imperial library was destroyed during the troubles of the Wang Mang era which also produced the troubles leading up to the imposition of direct rule over Vietnam by the Han Dynasty as discussed above. The books which had been saved, along with others collected in the more than 100 years of comparative peace following the Wang Mang Era were largely lost during the closing years of the Han when the capital was moved in 190 A.D. and then again during further disturbances in 208 A.D.²⁴⁵ Assuming that the population registers did exist at one time it is quite likely that they would have been lost during one or another of these disturbances and it is unlikely that Chinese intellectuals would have put the effort into reconstructing the mere population registers of southern barbarians that they put into reconstructing works of Chinese scholarship.

Other works, such as the *Ch'u Tz'u* 楚辭, known to have come from the southern region which have been transmitted exist now only in recopied form.²⁴⁶ These works were rewritten in the official script established by yet another Han Dynasty scholar who lived shortly after the reign of Han Wu-ti. His name was Hsü Shen (許慎) and it was he who compiled the "pre-eminent lexicographical work" of the period, the *Shuo wen chieh tzu* (說文解字).²⁴⁷ This work is much more than a mere dictionary. The *Shuo wen chieh tzu*

²⁴⁵Tsien, 15-16.

²⁴⁶David Hawkes has translated the *Ch'u Tz'u* as *Songs of the South*, this book contains an excellent history of the *Ch'u Tz'u* and its transmission. David Hawkes trans. *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

²⁴⁷Boltz, *Origins*, 138.

essentially codified not only the characters which existed but it codified the manner in which characters should be created, if the need for new ones arose, and the manner in which characters already existing should be used.²⁴⁸ The *Shuo wen chieh tzu* was the culmination of the scriptural reforms initiated by Li Ssü some 300 years previously and it reflected a conscious and deliberate reinforcement of the semantic elements of Chinese characters.²⁴⁹ Works from all over China written in 'rude' or 'archaic' scripts were recopied, reformatted so to speak, in the official style of writing. Aside from the question of the "population registers," other works from the south, particularly works which are not only poetry but expressions of pre-Han religious belief, which did survive, were also recopied in this official script.²⁵⁰ The script that these works and all others in China were gradually re-copied into was the script approved by the Han and codified by Hsü Shen as described above.

This, then, was the Chinese from which Nôm is supposed to have been derived, a script which strongly emphasized semantic determinatives. If Nôm was derived from the script promoted by first and second century A.D. Han administrators, then why did early Nôm emphasize phonetic determinatives to an even greater extent than late Nôm did? Is there perhaps some easily explainable structural difference between the two languages which made semantically weighted characters more difficult to use to express Vietnamese? Chinese was, and is, for the most part, a monosyllabic non-inflectional language. One syllable is one sound and one meaning, and although many *words* are compound words composed of two syllables; for the most part each of these syllables is also a word in its own right. Furthermore, these syllables do not change their sound for such considerations as past, present, or future tense nor for gender or number. The same is true for Vietnamese, archaic and modern. Indeed scholars who have studied the adaptation of Chinese characters by other languages have noted that "As

²⁴⁸For a detailed analysis of this codification and categorization see Boltz, *Origins*, 138-155.

²⁴⁹Boltz, *Origins*, 156-77.

²⁵⁰de Crespigny, *Generals*, 11-16. Subjects connected to divination, mythology and the practices of religious specialists can be found in the *Ch'u Tz'u*.

Vietnamese is a monosyllabic and isolating language, unlike Japanese and Korean, the archaic Sino-Vietnamese readings had the possibility of being assimilated to Vietnamese...Such a phenomena cannot be found in Japanese or Korean from their structure."²⁵¹ Also that "the monosyllabic structure of its [Vietnamese language] lexicon was more like Chinese than Japanese and Korean were, and could therefore be more easily accommodated to representation in the Chinese characters than could Japanese and Korean."²⁵² Why then did Nôm function as differently from Chinese as it did? Why so most especially if it were derived from the Chinese characters introduced and used by the Han Dynasty administrators during the first century A.D.?

A possible answer to this question lies in the other scripts which were used, before the Ch'in-Han codification and promotion of one script, in a very wide area south of the Yangtze River, in the undoubted literacy of peoples closely connected by legend, history, and archaeology to the people of the Red River delta and in the probability that the proto-Vietnamese themselves were cognizant of one or more of the aforementioned scripts. Several of the most recently discovered textual examples of these scripts come from the Ma Wang Tui tomb site and this script has been extensively analyzed by Professor Boltz. As to the tomb itself, although the tomb was built and sealed after the fall of both Ch'u and Yüeh to Ch'in, the point in time (168 B.C.) when it was sealed is also well before the fall of Nan Yüeh to the Han Dynasty. Indeed, as noted above, maps found in the tomb indicate the direction of Nan Yüeh. The tomb was on the border between China, under the Han, and Nan Yüeh under non-Chinese rule. As for the documents themselves, Peking has published the Ma Wang Tui texts on Lao Tzu, the Spring and

²⁵¹Rokurô Kôno, "The Chinese Writing and its Influences on the Scripts of the Neighboring Peoples-with Special Reference to Korea and Japan" *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 27 (1969) 104. See also Andres Fabre "Trois Écritures à Base De Caractères Chinois: le *Idu* (Corée), les *Kana* (Japon) et le *Chu Nôm* (Viet Nam) *Asiatische Studien Etudes Asiatiques* 34, 2 (1980) and William S.Y. Wang "Speech and Script in Some Asian Languages" (Paper presented at the Symposium on Bilingual Research- Asian American Perspective, September 1980),

²⁵²Yamagiwa, 264.

Autumn Annals of the Warring States period, and a volume containing a number of medical texts.²⁵³

According to Professor Boltz the date for one of the two Lao Tzu texts must be before 195 B.C. while the other must have been written after 195 B.C. but before 187 B.C. The other documents seem to have been roughly contemporaneous with the Lao Tzu manuscripts. Thus they were all written before the fall of Nan Yüeh to Han. Of particular importance to my argument is Boltz's assertion that "we can take these manuscripts as fairly representative of the script that was in conventional use within a decade or two of the Ch'in reforms, yet clearly untouched by those efforts when judged against the standards of the period after the *Shuo wen's* [The *Shuo Wen Chieh Tzu*] compilation in A.D. 100."²⁵⁴

What sort of differences are found between the script used in the Ma Wang Tui manuscripts and that officially sanctioned by the Han Dynasty? The major difference between the script used in the Ma Wang Tui texts and the official script of the Han Dynasty as introduced to Vietnam is the "extent to which the characters of the pre-Han script existed without the abundance of semantic classifiers that later came to be attached to nearly every graph."²⁵⁵ Further, there was an extensive use of the graphs paranomastically, that is, using one graph to represent as many as four different words that were homophonic. Although, as discussed above, this type of usage is a part of the development of all writing systems the usage in this case "differs from the typical paranomastic usage of the Shang period in that there were well established alternative ways to write the word in question...graphic alternatives were available to the scribes"²⁵⁶ To vastly oversimplify Professor Boltz's conclusion, in the script from the Ma Wang Tui tombs there is comparatively more

²⁵³For an analysis of one medical text on childbirth and the medical and spiritual precautions connected to it see Li Chien-min "Ma Wang Tui HanMu Shu (Ts'an Tsang Mai Pao T'u) Chien Cheng" (Textual Research on the Silk Writing Entitled *Diagram for Burying Afterbirths* from Mawangdui) *Chung Yang Yen Chiu Yuan Li shih Yu Yen Yen Chiu So Chi Kan* 65, no.4. See also Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: the Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*, The Sir Henry Wellcome Asian Series (London: Kegan Paul, 1998).

²⁵⁴Boltz, 160-161.

²⁵⁵Boltz, 168.

²⁵⁶Ibid.

consistency in phonetic usage of these graphs while semantic usage is comparatively inconsistent. Indeed there was "a kind of graphic instability and apparently free variation...a stage of variability and nascent semantic inconsistency approaching but not quite reaching, desemantization on a significant scale."²⁵⁷ Does this or does it not sound much like Nôm?

Aside from the nature of the script on these documents, what else can the Ma Wang Tui manuscripts, and other manuscripts and epigraphic remains from this area and this period, tell us about writing in general, in what is now China, before the Ch'in-Han reforms took effect? They tell us "that we should speak of third-century B.C. *scripts*, in the plural."²⁵⁸ Something else which one of these ancient silk manuscripts can strongly suggest, if not confirm, is that literacy was fairly widespread.²⁵⁹ It is easily arguable that literacy was diffused among the different specialists in those societies. Indeed "Literacy, once limited to a small caste of scribes and ritualists, had spread to the point where local officials had libraries of bamboo and silk texts."²⁶⁰ From the Wu-Yüeh regions we have the inscriptions on ritual bronzes, long and complex for such a medium, and swords with about as much writing as one could put on a sword. Is it possible to argue that if metalsmiths were literate the upper classes in that society were not?²⁶¹

As for writing materials other than metal and subjects other than the glorification of the ruling elite, physicians of that era "participated in the new text-based alignment of knowledge" and "Medical literature proliferated in the fourth to third centuries B.C."²⁶² There is also a specific textual connection to the Yüeh

²⁵⁷Boltz, 170.

²⁵⁸Boltz, 158. As the Ba Shu scripts have not been deciphered I cannot discuss them more fully here, but I would like to reiterate the point that Ba and Shu were literate societies that were also closely connected to the early Vietnamese peoples.

²⁵⁹Noel Barnard "The Ch'u Silk Manuscript and other Archaeological Documents of Ancient China." In *Ch'u and the Silk Manuscript*. 84.

²⁶⁰Cook, "Ideology of the Chu," 76.

²⁶¹If one argues that someone else must have written the characters the metalsmiths engraved, this still indicates that there were literate people around to do this task.

²⁶²Harper, 43.

among the Ma Wang Tui medical corpus. Donald Harper discusses and translates the "Recipes of Yue" found in one of the Ma Wang Tui medical documents.²⁶³ One of Harper's more interesting and provocative conclusions is that these "recipes" are directly connected to later Taoist hygienic techniques.²⁶⁴ While it is not known what ethnic group the writer of the "Yue Recipes" belonged to, most of the stories center around figures from the regions known to have dominated by the Yüeh. However as the Ma Wang Tui medical texts themselves "exemplify several types of scripts and calligraphic styles" they obviously were not written by the occupant of the tomb and could as well have been written by a Yüeh as by a member of any other ethnic group.²⁶⁵ These recipes could also have been a copy of a Yüeh manuscript. As for the characters the writer employs, "Quite often they are written without the signific" by which Harper is of course referring to the semantic determinative.²⁶⁶

From Ma Wang Tui and the Ch'u silk manuscript we have long and complicated treatises on Taoism, genealogy, myths and legends, medicine and cartography. Given that each of these sub-fields had its own terminology and its own specialists who created the documents concerning it, one has to postulate a fair number of people who could read and write in one or another of these disciplines as well as on more mundane matters. Given also that the people interred in the tombs where these documents were found were upper class, but not heads of state, then one would also have to assume that many of the upper class of the time were buried with some, even if not as many, documents of this sort. There is more than an adequate amount of historic, geographic, archaeological, and linguistic evidence to confirm that the Yüeh, and other peoples who lived from the Yangtze River south to the Red River valley in the period before Chinese conquest of the area, were literate in a script which was contemporaneous with the Chinese of the period. These

²⁶³Harper, 173-83.

²⁶⁴Ibid. Although Taoism has almost completely died out in Vietnam at the present time I am convinced that at an earlier period Taoists were active in medical and alchemical pursuits in Vietnam.

²⁶⁵Harper, 190.

²⁶⁶Harper, 188.

peoples used their scripts not only to write Chinese but also to transcribe personal and place names in their own languages.

The Vietnamese were certainly in fairly close contact with the Yüeh for several hundred years before the Chinese imposed direct rule and officially introduced Chinese characters in A.D. 43.²⁶⁷ Indeed the remains of the royal fleet of Nan Yüeh fled south, pursued by the Han, to the Gulf of Tonkin.²⁶⁸ The Chinese have historically claimed that they introduced not only writing but also agriculture and medicine to all of the Việt-Yüeh peoples from the Yangtze south to nearly present day Huế. This claim is part of a legitimizing formula designating the Chinese as the bearers of culture to the barbarians; "The traditional story is of a single people, the Chinese, creating the arts of civilization, surrounded and threatened at every stage by other peoples at a lower level of development."²⁶⁹ Yet what is coming out of the ground belies much of this.

Agriculture in south China was quite well developed before the arrival of the Chinese.²⁷⁰ Archaeology indicates that it was at least as advanced in the Red River delta as in the area just south of the Yangtze.²⁷¹ Indeed the Han Dynasty census of A.D. 2 shows the Red River delta as the most densely populated area south of the Yangtze.²⁷² From this density of population, combined with the

²⁶⁷For a description of coastal trade between Yüeh cities and the coast of northern Vietnam see de Crespigny, *Generals*, 31-35. See also Wang Gungwu "The Nanhai Trade; a Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea" *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31, pt.2. 11-15.

²⁶⁸de Crespigny, *Generals*, 34. For a preliminary report, with reproduction of one inscription and one name seal, from the archaeological team excavating a royal tomb of Nan Yüeh see *Kaogu* (Archaeology) 3 (1984) 222-230.

²⁶⁹Pulleybank, 39-40.

²⁷⁰For a detailed account of agricultural developments in the region south of the Yangtze see Francesca Bray and Joseph Needham *Agriculture*, pt.2 of *Biology and Biological Technology* vol.6 of *Science and Civilization in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984. On metal agricultural implements used in the south see Wagner, 136-42.

²⁷¹For a discussion of sources on this see O'Harrow "From Co Loa" 142, 151-2. See also Jeremy H.C.S. Davidson "Archaeology in Northern Viet-Nam since 1954." In *Early South East Asia: Essays in Archaeology, History and Historical Geography*. R.B. Smith and W. Watson eds. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).

²⁷²Hans Bielenstein, "The Census of China during the Period 2-742 A.D." *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 19 (1948); pl.II and 135-39.

archaeological finds discussed above, we can infer several things. One thing that we can infer is that this was an area which produced an agricultural surplus on a regular basis and that it had done so for many generations. I should define here what I mean by an agricultural surplus, I mean that many if not all agricultural workers produced more food than was necessary to support themselves. They produced enough for that society to support those with non-agricultural occupations. There was no need for the Chinese to teach these people agriculture, although it would have been natural for there to have been some *exchange* of technology, and for the area from south of the Yangtze to the Red River delta all indications are that the Chinese received at least as much as they gave.²⁷³

Another inference, from the A.D. 2 census and the manuscript collections noted above, which can be made about the peoples south of the Yangtze in general, and those in the Red River delta in particular, is that they had a body of medical lore which was better suited to the ecological conditions of that region than was the medicine supposedly taught to them by the Chinese. I rest this assertion *not* primarily on the fact that medical documents were found among the Ma Wang Tui documents, nor on the fact that much of Wu-Yüeh mythology and oral history is concerned with manipulation of the properties of plants for various purposes. I rest this assertion on the fact that in a region which was for the Chinese considered to be so unhealthy as for it to be nearly a death sentence to be sent there, the Red River delta was more densely populated than was most of China proper.²⁷⁴

The Vietnamese clearly did not need an introduction from the Chinese to the concept of medical arts, although naturally there was an *exchange* of knowledge. It also appears that there was no need for the Chinese to introduce the concept of writing, although I would not contest the fact that Chinese itself became more widely used than Nôm. I realize that my evidence for this is to some extent

²⁷³Dray, 19-20, 41-2, 45-7.

²⁷⁴For Wu-Yüeh plant lore see *Wu Yüeh Chun Chiu*, Chapter 9. See also de Crespigny, *Generals*, 13-14.

circumstantial and thus without extant Nôm from perhaps even the period of the introduction of official Chinese it is also controversial. I first reached the conclusions that I have presented above independently and later was delighted to discover that similar conclusions had long been a subject of debate among Vietnamese archaeologists.²⁷⁵

The arguments presented by the Vietnamese center around markings/writing on artifacts excavated by Olov R. T. Janse and other French colonial archaeologists, and on a brief inscription on the inside of a bronze drum (Cổ Loa 1) excavated at the site of the old Cổ Loa citadel in 1982.²⁷⁶ One bronze công cụ (implement or tool)²⁷⁷ which was originally excavated by Janse in Thanh Hóa province and which is currently held in the Musée Guimet in Paris has two sets of markings on it.²⁷⁸ The Vietnamese agree that dating this article precisely is impossible, however it certainly dates from before Ma Yuan's defeat of the Trưng sisters and thus from before the official introduction of Chinese characters.²⁷⁹ Hà Văn Tấn also argues that, while the markings may not be true writing, these marks are perhaps an early stage of writing.²⁸⁰ Hà Văn Tấn also discusses five signs engraved on a bronze halberd of the type usually referred to, within Chinese archaeology as a *ko* which was also found in Thanh Hóa. While I disagree with Tấn's conclusion that these marks

²⁷⁵ My thanks to Trần Quốc Vương for this information and for copies of the relevant articles.

²⁷⁶ For an overview of the information on Cổ Loa 1 see, Trịnh Sinh, "Hà Nội xưa qua dòng chữ cổ" *Xưa Nay* 32, no. 10 (October, 1996):13. For other artifacts with writing/markings on them see Hà Văn Tấn, "Dấu Vết Một Hệ Thống Chữ Viết Trước Hán và Khắc Hán ở Việt Nam và Nam Trung Quốc" *Khoá Cổ Học* 1 (1982):31-45.

²⁷⁷ công cụ is usually translated as tool, from the illustration this one is probably a ploughshare or a spade. I have relied heavily for my translation of this article on H.H.E. Loofs-Wissowa *Vietnamese-English Archaeological Glossary* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1990).

²⁷⁸ The Vietnamese consider it very unfortunate that they must travel to Paris to examine the many artifacts excavated in Vietnam but sent to France by the French Colonial government of French Indochina. Remarks made at the Institute of Archaeology in Hà Nội 8/7/99.

²⁷⁹ Trần Quốc Vương, remarks made May 18, 1997. Hà Văn Tấn states that the artifact is typical of the Đông Sơn culture (ending around 300 B.C.) in Vietnam.

²⁸⁰ Hà Văn Tấn, 33.

"belonged to a mysterious non-Chinese system of writing,"²⁸¹ I feel that Tấn's observation that these artifacts, and the marks/writing on them closely resemble similar engravings on halberds from Ch'u tomb sites is significant.

The bronze drum Cổ Loa 1 is much less problematic than the artifacts discussed by Hà Văn Tấn,. Although its inscription is merely a notation as to the measurements of the drum the inscription is clearly Chinese²⁸² and it is agreed that the drum itself was made during or shortly after the Wang Mang usurpation in China.²⁸³ It thus dates from before the official introduction of Classical Chinese to the Vietnamese. The contents of Cổ Loa 1 indicate that it was buried deliberately. This drum's discovery seems to validate the oral legend that after Ma Yuan began to confiscate the drums and other metal objects of the Việt elite Vietnamese leaders tried to bury their drums to save them from Ma Yuan. Cổ Loa 1 was buried upside down and was filled with arrow heads, spear points, and other weapons.²⁸⁴

I have presented a body of evidence from different geographic locales and crossing disciplinary boundaries which is more than sufficient to strongly suggest that the Vietnamese themselves had at least a limited use of written language before the Chinese introduced their official script after A.D. 43. It is known that many expressions of local culture were discouraged or actively repressed by the Chinese. The written form of Yüeh/Việt appears to have been but one part of the indigenous culture that was driven underground by the Chinese imposition of direct rule. It is significant that its first certain reappearance comes with the beginnings of a successful struggle for independence.

²⁸¹ Hà Văn Tấn, 46 (Quote is taken from the English abstract of the article).

²⁸² My thanks to Trần Quốc Vượng for a copy of the rubbing taken of this inscription. For a reproduction of this rubbing see the Appendix to this work.

²⁸³ Trịnh Sinh, 13. For reproductions of the designs on the outside of the drum and pictures of it see Phạm Huy Thông et. al eds. *Dong Son Drums in Viet Nam* (Japan: The Viet Nam Social Science Publishing House, 1990): 8-9.

²⁸⁴ Trần Quốc Vượng, remarks made May 18, 1997

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Appendix
Rubbing of the Inscription from Cồ Loa 1



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