

Introduction

Texts of all forms have always constituted a concern for cultural development, cultural identity, as well as scholarship and scholars, for many millennia at any rate. Such attention to texts has emanated in part from the fact that text exhibits an endurance over time, either in written form, or as an oral tradition, despite, possibly owing to its entextualizability. Such endurance, over time and throughout history has thus also culminated in a diversity of types, of categories, and a diversity of uses in just an infinite array of circumstances and scripts, thus catering to certain roles in cultural heritages and developments.

The country of Vietnam, in the Southeast Asian region, is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country, housing approximately 90 languages, and within these, a large number of varieties also exist. In a 2019 census, the population of Vietnam was 96,208,984 people. Here, the Kinh community totals approximately 82 million people, where the remaining 53 ethnic groups have approximately 14 million in population, as ethnic minorities. Work on texts in the social life of these communities, both mainstream and minority has seen extensive scholarship, yet, scholarly work is until the present time, still unsubstantial. To this, for example, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has long attempted to investigate the social nature and correlations of these texts. However, owing to the massive abundance of these texts, in the country of Vietnam, both current and past, that is, pertaining to Vietnam's long history and cultural heritage, and its highly dynamic set of cultural intersections and mixing, not least of which is that with China and India, the work on such texts is infinite, and hence has an unseeable horizon.

As such, this paper seeks to identify a few characteristics and functions of text systems pertaining to the region that is now Vietnam, both past and present, and in all of its cultural diversity. This would require that the paper locate issues influencing these text systems in the social life of ethnic groups in Vietnam. For this, we develop a critical and descriptive study on the patterns and histories of these texts. Within this descriptive work, we also seek to develop a context of influence to and from social contexts, and hence, we seek to understand and to describe the ways in which these texts have mediated social contexts, to develop a social life, throughout Vietnam, and more so, with strong relevance to its ethnic groups.

For this, we have structured the paper as follows: in the second section, we present a highly critical literature review, which explores a multi-ethnic history of these texts in Vietnam. In the third section, we present a description of the methodical framework of the study, as one which is descriptive, comparative, and hence qualitative in its methodical structure. In the fifth section, we present a descriptive analysis of these texts with reference to ethnic groups in the country. In the final and sixth section, we conclude the paper, and offer pathways for future work in the field, as well as the relevance of the study to the current social and cultural contexts in Vietnam.

Literature review

Vietnam, as a highly diverse nation, houses over 50 distinctly different ethnic groups. These ethnic groups, each with its own unique heritage and cultural traditions, have shifted in their heritage practices over millenia, owing to mixing, and shifted practices. Here, the Kinh ethnic groups comprises the majority of the Vietnamese population, while all other ethnic groups within Vietnam have an equally significant role in the forming of national identity, and more so with an increasing attention now given to the cultural and linguistic diversity of Vietnam.

We broadly classify the over 50 ethnic groups throughout larger Vietnam into five main categories. These categories are the *Việt-Mường* (Viet-Muong), *Tày-Thái* (Tay-Thai), *Môn-Khmer* (Mon-Khmer), *Hmong-Đao* (Hmong-Đao), and the *và dân tộc Hoa* (general Chinese). The Viet-Muong, as the largest ethnic group in the country, houses the Kinh people, as it does other groups with which it is related, and for example, the Muong ethnicity. The Tay-Thai and Mon-Khmer groups constitute the second largest (and third) largest, then followed by the Hmong-Đao and Chinese groups, as the smaller sized groups in the country.

Each of these ethnic groups does contain its own distinct and bounded language, as well as its quite bounded customs and traditions, though these at times have strong and quite visible junctures. For example, the *Tay-Thai* group houses several sub ethnicities, for example, the *Tày* (Tay), *Nùng* (Numg), and *Thái* (Thai) ethnicities, all of which have languages varieties that intersect and yet have a distinctive form that differs markedly to the standard variety of Vietnamese. In the same way, each of these groups exhibits a sunique set of customs and cultural mores, as well as social and cultural ideologies, e.g., a reverence to animals such as the buffalo and their practices of ancestor worship, as inherent to these communities. The *Mon-Khmer* group comprises several ethnic sub strands, such as the *Ba Na* (Ba Na), *Ê Đê* (E De), and *Gié Triêng* (Gie Trieng) sub ethnicities. Each of these groups also houses its own distinct variety, which can be well differentiated from the Tay-Thai languages. Each goup also contains its own quite unique cultural lineage and practices, such as their affinity for animism and their use of particular musical instruments, such as the gong. The Hmong-Đao group houses several ethnic groups, such as the Hmong, Đao, and Giay, each of which has its distinct language variety, cultural mores, and heritage, where many of these communities are distincively seen as mountainous peoples, and for their intricate work in handn arts such as embroidery, weaving, and so forth. Simialrly, the larger family fo ethnicities exhibits strong lineage ideologies, such as the family structure. Finally, the sub ethnicities within the Chinese group include the Hoa, as the ethnic Chinese group now stabilized within Vietnam. This group speaks a dialect of Chinese, traditionally structring society on trading and commerce, and ancestor workship, akin to their heritage practices in China. Despite the diversity of these ethnic groups, they all connote a larger Vietnam, and hence evidence its diverse cultural layout, where notions of Vietnam include the aspects and contributions by these diverse groups.

However, the large variety of ethnic groups in Vietnam also attest to its tumultuous history, and not least of which has been its pervasive yet localized discrimination, and efforts to achieve assimilation into a larger Vietnamese culture. The legacy of colonialism, occupation, and war has also significantly impacted on these ethnic groups, where many have struggled to maintain their cultural identity in the face of political and social upheaval, and vis-à-vis new technological and geographical shifts. Yet, despite such pushes for change, the plurality of ethnic groups throughout larger Vietnam continue to play a vital position in shaping the country's cultural and identity landscapes, as they do its political voice on a larger global scale. The government and local bodies have made significant efforts to sustain the cultural heritages of these ethnicities, and these efforts have largely succeeded, yet, not without impediments.

Within this cultural diversity, the ethnic strands and sub strands throughout a larger Vietnam well evidence their writing histories, in highly diverse ways; these texts provide a lens as to the development of the region and the country as a whole, and the respective heritages thus all forming Vietnam's literary and linguistic heritages. For example, the renowned *Truyện Kiều* (the Tale of Kieu), written by Nguyen Du in the 19th century C.E. The tale, in the shape of a poem, was transmitted largely but not wholly as an oral text, thus reinforcing Vietnam's oral tradition. Furthermore, the poem explicates an intensified social and cultural landscape at the time, that is, the mechanisms of gender inequality. In the tale, a young woman Kieu is forced into slavery in order to raise her family from poverty. Structurally, the poem exhibits mastery in its lyricism, complex combinations of characters, and its exploration of themes of romance, fate, and life. We present a small excerpt of the poem below.

Truyện Kiều

Trăm năm trong cõi người ta
Chữ tài chữ mệnh khéo là ghét nhau
Trải qua một cuộc bể dâu
Những điều trông thấy mà đau đớn lòng
Lạ gì bỉ sắc tư phong
Trời xanh quen với má hồng đánh ghen

Similarly, the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* (the Book of the Kings), written during the Tran Dynasty in the 13th century, presents a historical chronicle covering the history of Vietnam from its mythical origins to the termination of the Ly Dynasty. As such, the text and the oral representation of the text, both provide valuable insights into the political, cultural, and social history of Vietnam during this time period, and before. Below, I present a sample of this text, as it was in written form.

Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư

Xét: Thời Hoàng Đế dựng muôn nước, lấy địa giới Giao Chỉ về phía Tây Nam, xa ngoài đất Bách Việt. Vua Nghiêu sai Hy thị¹ đến ở Nam Giao để định đất Giao Chỉ ở phương Nam. Vua Vũ chia chín châu³ thì Bách Việt⁴ thuộc phần đất châu Dương, Giao Chỉ thuộc về đấy. Từ đời Thành Vương nhà Chu (1063 - 1026 TCN) mới gọi là Việt Thường thị, tên Việt bắt đầu có từ đấy.

Central to the character and plural identities of Vietnam are these folktales. Which were transferred through generations by oral tradition, and at times in written form. These pieces of text are structured by moral lessons yet frequently by humorous anecdotes. As an example, Thạch Sanh (the Tales of Uncle Ton), narrate the story of a hero who employs wit and bravery to counter the actions of adversaries.

Structurally, the poetry of Vietnam in all of its plurality, is significantly dependant on lyrical complexity and evocative language, and its emphatic appraisal of the natural world and its aesthetic qualities. For example, the renowned poet Nguyen Du produced romantic and highly aesthetic pieces, and for example, Cảnh Ngày Xuân, for which I provide an excerpt below:

Cảnh Ngày Xuân

Ngày xuân con én đưa thoi
Thiều quang chín chục đã ngoài sáu mươi
Cỏ non xanh rợn chân trời
Cành lê trắng điểm một vài bông hoa
Thanh minh trong tiết tháng ba
Lễ là tảo mộ, hội là đạp thanh
Gần xa nô nức yến anh
Chị em sắm sửa bộ hành chơi xuân
Dập dìu tài tử giai nhân
Ngựa xe như nước áo quần như nêm
Ngổn ngang gò đống kéo lên
Thoi vàng vó rắc tro tiền giấy bay
Tà tà bóng ngả về tây
Chị em thơ thẩn dưng tay ra về
Bước dần theo ngọn tiểu khê
Lần xem phong cảnh có bề thanh thanh
Nao nao dòng nước uốn quanh,
Nhịp cầu nho nhỏ cuối ghềnh bắc ngang

A more pronounced renowned poet, author, and oral narrator, Ho Xuan Huong, lived during the 18th century, and drew on wit and satire to structure her work, while also exploring other themes such as gender and sexuality. Of her most known pieces, the poem, "The Pleasure of Bedbugs" presents a humorous and subversive effort to contest normative traditions with respect to morality and society. The below, *Bánh trôi nước*, is an excerpt from a piece on a local food delicacy.

Bánh trôi nước	
	Thân em thò trắng phận em tròn,
	Bảy nổi ba chìm mấy nước non.
	Rắn nát mặc dầu tay kẻ nặn,
	Nhưng em vẫn giữ tấm lòng son.

Throughout Vietnam's history, these heritage texts have warranted a significant amount of scholarly work. This scholarship has increased over time, and more so in the present era., at which time, and largely owing to movements to reestablish or reaffirm national identity, there has been a renewed interest in the traditional texts of Vietnam. As such, significant efforts have been directed toward preserving and increasing the visibility of these texts, both within Vietnam and globally in contexts with interest in Vietnam, not least of which are the efforts to translate these texts into other languages, and to produce film, theatre, and other media.

Ethnic Text Systems in Vietnam

A copious amount of documentation has emerged in reference to ethnic texts in Vietnam. Below we present some key topics that have been addressed in this field.

The current system of representing spoken and written language is the Quốc ngữ, through which several factors are represented, such as efforts to effect a spelling unification and standard spelling and which is used in media and education pervasively throughout the country. Yet, the texts of ethnic minority groups more closely signify history and heritage.

Writing Systems in Vietnam

The ethnic groups in Vietnam that have had writing texts include the following: Ba Na, Bru Vân Kiều, Chăm, Chơ Ro, Chu Ru, Co, Cơ Ho, Cơ Tu, Dao, Ê Đê, Gia Rai, Giê - Triêng, Hà Nhì, Hoa, H'mông, H'Rê, Khmer, Kinh, Lào, Lô Lô, Mạ, M'nông, Mường, Nùng, Pà Thẻn, Sán Chay, Sán Dìu, Tà Ôi, Tày, Thái, Xơ Đăng, Xtiêng. Yet, the ethnic groups that have not had writing include the following: Bô Y, Brâu, Chứt, Cống, Cờ Lao, Giáy, Kháng, Khơ-mú, Thổ, La Chí, La Hủ, La Ha, Lự,

Mảng, Ngái, Ơ Đu, Phù Lá, Pu Péo, Rơ Măm, Si La, Xinh Mun. Here, traditional text systems that have spanned centuries include the Sinitic, Nom Viet, Nom Tay, Nom Nung, Nom Ngan, Dao writing, San Chi writing, San Diu writing, Lu writing, ancient Cham, Khmer, ancient Thai, Lao, Lu, Pa Then, and the Lo Lo. However, in comparison, the modern forms, and including Latin forms, include the Quốc ngữ, which originated in the 17th century C.E. Some writing systems appeared prior to 1945 (Ba Na, Gia Rai, E De, Koho), whereas other text systems, such as the Chu Ru, Cho Ro, Pa Co - Ta Oi, Bru - Van Kieu, Katu, Ra Glai, Tay - Nung, and so forth, appeared in 1960 and onwards.

Several larger categories of writing have thus emerged, over the period of Vietnam's long history. These include the ideographic writing system (Sinitic, Ngái, Sán Dìu, Pà Thén), the half-ideographic and half-phonographic system (Nom Tay, Nom Nung, Nom Viet, Nom Ngan), and the phonographic writing system (Sanskrit forms: Ancient Thai, Ancient Cham, Khmer, Lu, Lao; Latin forms: Quốc ngữ, Gia Rai, E De, Koho, Chu Ru, Cho Ro, Pa Co - Ta Oi, Bru Van Kieu, Katu, Ra Glai, Tay - Nung, Muong, Thai, Ba Na, Hre, Cham (Hroi), Co, Sedang). However, the Pa Then also exhibits books of worship including drawings (also labelled as 'pictographic writing,' as an ancient form of writing, or pre-writing); the Lo Lo (in Ha Giang and Cao Bang) also exhibits an ancient writing, in the form of 'pins,' which are considered to be 'sacred relics' of their own people, suggested to have been brought in by the Lo Lo people from the Yi community in China, and which are rarely comprehensible to locals.

Propagation and Use

The existing writing systems in Vietnam exhibit their different scopes, domains, and levels of functioning, all of which were propagated and reappropriated in respective ways during each articulate period. The factors influencing these shifts and articulate properties of these writing systems include the design of ethnic groups with large population and a concentrated residence or urban centre as it were; relatively high levels of social and economic development; dialect contexts and language mixing and contact, in their increased or lowered complexities; economic and cultural environments and histories, together with the positioning and development of the political centers, and within which are the religious centers; the development of and ideologies towards language policy of the government; pedagogical constraints and patterns which socialized educators into ways of conveying text, content, and method.

Sinitic characters were introduced to Vietnam in the first century C.E., that is, in the Triệu Đà period, and were deployed as a national writing text, while being continued throughout the next millennium during Chinese domination. This style was indicative of the Confucian character, largely predicated on the form of the texts of Confucianism, and hence on feudalism. Such were the text employed in education, and which grew on and were grounded in the four books and the five classics, the 'writing of the holy sage,' used in administrative transaction papers, scriptures,

genealogy, and texts connected to literature, and epitaphs. This lineage has well contributed to the creation of literary and spoken forms of the ethnic languages throughout the Vietnamese region, and has assisted in the reception of a large amount of loan words from the Sinitic languages, largely during language contact with these languages.

Currently in Vietnam, a number of ethnic groups continue to employ Sinitic characters: Chinese, Ngai, San Diu, San Chay (San Chi group), for example, and in this way record genealogy, traditional literature, and other genres, such as worship books. However, one exception is the use of the Chinese language in their respective Chinese communities. In areas with significant levels of the Chinese population, such as in Ho Chi Minh City, Soc Trang, and Kien Giang provinces, the demand for education on and in Chinese is high, where educational institutions enforce this learning, and the Chinese populations are work to advocate this in political as well as social and cultural sectors.

The Nôm texts in Vietnam were then subsequently modified from Sinitic texts introduced to Vietnam, for local use, a process which proceeded at approximately the 12th century C.E.. These semi ideographic and semi phonographic texts, were used in tandem with Sinitic texts, for quite a long period of time, at unofficial levels and status. Yet, the period during which these texts flourished was largely the early 18th century C.E., and which spanned until the middle of the 20th century C.E., that is, from the Lê dynasty until the end of the Nguyễn Dynasty. This expansion of texts drew on the ideologies and guidelines of Hồ Quý Ly (1337-1407) and Quang Trung Nguyễn Huệ (1753-1792). The texts were mainly deployed in traditional religious and cultural belief sectors: village rules, ancestor worship and god worship, satirical verse, soul-chanting, prayer verses, tutelary poems, historical work, in the art of healing, and so forth. Furthermore, the texts were appropriated in order to record or to transfer poetic narratives that were significant, such as the meditation scene of *King Trần Nhân Tông* and Buddhist monk *Huyền Quang*, the poetry of *Nguyễn Trãi*, *Lê Thánh Tông*, *Nguyễn Bình Khiêm*, *Nguyễn Du*, *Hồ Xuân Hương*, *Bà Huyện Thanh Quan*, *Nguyễn Công Trứ*, *Nguyễn Khuyến*, and *Trần Tế Xương*, as well as the awakening exhortations of *Phan Bội Châu*, *Nguyễn Thượng Hiền*, and *Phan Chu Trinh*. Currently throughout Vietnam, the Sinitic and the Nôm still appear, strongly impressing upon scholars and larger society the patterns of Vietnamese traditional culture, heritage and language use, particularly in its oral tradition.

Nôm rules in Texts: Nom Tay, Nung, Ngan

The origin and appearance of Nom texts is still unclear, despite the extensive work that has been directed toward these texts and their historical and prehistorical contexts. Many scholars have concluded that Nom Tay texts significantly appeared in the 16th Century and in the 17th century C.E., and were somehow associated with the movement of the Mac dynasty's from Thang Long (the name previously given to Ha Noi) to Cao Bang. At the time, the capital city and urban centre

of the Mac dynasty was established at Vu Thuy and Thach Lam (which at present is known as the Hoa An district, in the province of Cao Bang). One legend has it that *Bế Văn Phụng*, a Tay people in Hoa An, in Cao Bang, ordained in the Mac dynasty as Tu Thien Quang Nhạc, in charge of royal ceremonies, used Nom Tay texts in order to develop Lượn Tam Nguyên. One other Tay intellectual was Nông Quỳnh Văn, in Thuong Lang (now known as Trung Khanh district, in Cao Bang province), who appropriated Nom Tay texts to convey the 'Lượn Quý Slip Sloong Bươn, (now known as Lượn Hồng nhan Tứ quý). As such, we can at least in part assume that the Nom Tay text originated in the late 16th century C.E.

Nom Tay texts were appropriated to record anonymous Nom poetry (*Nam Kim-Thị Đan; Lương Quân - Bioóc Lạ; Tần Chu-Quyển Vương; Lưu Đái-Hán Xuân*, and so forth); songs (*lượn cội, lượn sluong, lượn nàng ó*); Hat Then (*kì yên, pây sử, khao sluông*); phong slư; prayers, wedding songs, lullabies; historical stories; idioms, proverbs, rhymes, prescriptions, knowledge of traditional medicine; knowledge of geography and local products; law and customs; historical characters; and calendars. At the present time, literacy levels are still at a low level, as an issue that the government is attempting to counter at the present time.

Nom Dao texts have also been used to record historical tales, genealogy, and historical stories. As such, the poet Bàn Tài Đoàn appropriated this writing to compose poems: *Bát nguyệt hoán tân, Quang lộ, Truyền thế cổ*, and so forth. Also, the current texts of Nôm Ngạn have been preserved mainly by hand-written prayers: *Mo Thần (Mo Bàn Thờ), Mo Hải Lâu (Mo Mở Rượu), Mo Mẻ Hoa (Mo Mẹ Hoa), Mo Tổ Rây Cà (Mo Độ Ôn Thầy), Mo Kế Pác Sòn (Mo Giải Lờì Nguyễn), Mo Slầu Hòn (Mo Thu Hồn)*.

Ancient texts systems in Sanscrit form have played a significant role in the cultural contexts of many ethnic groups until the present time. As such, and until the present time, over 200 documents have appeared that employ ancient Cham texts on palm leaves, on towers, on stelae, on paper and on rustic paper. Võ Cảnh stele, which have been found to have appeared in the 2nd century C.E., contain ancient writing (in the form of akhar hayap) recording the narrative of the first dynasty of the Champa kingdom. Currently, in An Giang province, most of the Cham following Muslims are literate in Malayu as they must recite the Islamic Koran.

The ancient Khmer, texts were widely appropriated and propagated among the Khmer. Yet, from the time of the French period, Khmer language has been taught in pagodas, village schools, and national schools, and its texts have had a unique role in the spirituality of the Khmer, that is, in its teaching and in its learning, where the use of the Khmer texts was seen very favorably by Khmer intellectuals and monks.

The ancient Thai texts have significantly influenced and continue to significantly influence the cultural and spiritual activities of the Thai people, of work in the Thai community, and so forth: *Xóng chụ son sao (Tiễn dặn người yêu), Khun Lú Nàng Ủa (Chàng Lú Nàng Ủa), Quắm tổ mường (Chuyện bản mường), Táy pú xác (Người Thái đánh giặc), Hịt khòng mường bản (Luật lệ bản*

mường). These genres that such texts focus on include the genealogies, literary writings, letter exchanges, and so forth. Yet, associated with the history and traditional arts of the Thai people, the ancient Thai texts were largely respected by Thai intellectuals, considering these as an asset valuable to the Thai. However, the number of Thai-literate people at present is decreasing and it appears that it will continue to decrease from here on without recourse to resurrection, but this remains to be seen. Yet, the coding of ancient Thai texts can actively contribute to the conservation and promotion of the traditional culture of the Thai.

Text Systems in Latin Form

The birth and development of the Quốc ngữ text has been quite unique, in that it was associated with the history of the initiation of Roman Catholicism in Vietnam, that is, in compliance with the roles of missionaries in Dang Trong, from the year 1615 C.E. and onwards. The initial stage of this text system in Vietnam was at approximately 1617 to 1626 C.E. The missionaries involved in this work mainly evangelized in the coastal lands, that is, Cua Han (Da Nang), Nuoc Man (Quy Nhon - Binh Dinh), and Hoi An - Thanh Chiem (Quang Nam). Three missionaries have been largely credited with this work, as they have been recorded in existing and extensive documentation; Francisco de Pina, Cristoforo Bori, and Alexandre de Rhodes. The term 'Quốc ngữ' appeared in 1867, in the Gia Dinh Newspaper, a piece edited by Trương Vĩnh Ký, and which was also the first newspaper written in this Vietnamese text. The French government realized that Quốc ngữ was much more facile to learn than were the more complex and difficult Sinitic and Nom Viet texts, as writings that existed prior to the appearance of Quốc ngữ. This facility provided the rulers of the time and the indigenous people with the apparatus with which to communicate more easily amongst themselves and with others. The agents of governmentality at the time encouraged the teaching, teaching in, and learning of these texts. At first, Vietnamese confucianists strongly objected to the inclusion of these texts, but soon saw the benefits of the role of Quốc ngữ in increasing the intellectual standards of larger society, and in its strengthening of the population of intelligentsia, and hence, effecting a renewal of the country, as they exhorted to popularize Quốc ngữ in the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục movement.

The history of Quốc ngữ texts has been associated with many fluctuations throughout Vietnamese history. Since its inception, the Communist Party of Vietnam has paid great attention to propagating Quốc ngữ texts. Following the August Revolution, beginning in the movement 'diệt giặc đói và giặc dốt,' 'học i tờ,' Quốc ngữ began to become widely spread, becoming the official writing and the national language. The success of Quốc ngữ was influenced by several factors. In particular, the most important of which was the policy of the state, in different periods, as well as the practical use of Quốc ngữ throughout general society.

The advantages of the Latin forms and the influence of Quốc ngữ have motivated scholars to consider a number of factors that contributed to the development of this script, such as its

creation, the time for its creation, the motives for its creation, the structuration of the text. And the pedagogical approaches with relation to the texts, as well as its influence on the identities of ethnic minorities. Many documents produced over time included a note at the bottom of the page, suggesting that the document is “simple, easy to read, easy to remember, and close to the national language (Quốc ngữ).”

Some pre-1945 texts, such as *E De*, *Gia Rai*, and *Ba Na*, were developed by missionaries and employed to evangelize and propagate rhetoric and information among ethnic minorities in the central highlands. Yet, some text systems and other phonetic options emerged from the later French colonisation period, and here, for example, *Hmong*, *Mnong*, *Cham*, *KoHo*, and *Ra Glai*. From 1957 C.E. onwards, SIL has worked to create scripts, and has for example, translated the bible into ethnic languages, in order to assist with its missionary intentions. During this time, bilingual teaching materials (textbooks, lexicons and so forth) emerged and were circulated for use by ethnic groups such as Ba Na, Chu Ru, Co Ho, Ede, Hre, Mnong, Sedang, Ra Glai, Co, and others. The result included phenomena such as the arrival of David Thomas of SIL to Vietnam, who remained for a period of 17, and during which time, a series of text systems were created, and a proliferation of documents were compiled for bilingual and other educational purposes education.

A series of tool books (reference dictionaries and lexicons) were also compiled with these above-mentioned text systems (following which, slightly modified text systems appeared, for example: *Gia Rai*, *Ba Na*, *Ede*, and others), for example: *Learning Ede language* (Nguyễn Hoàng Chung 1961), *Tho Dictionary, Tho - Vietnamese - English* (AC Day 1962), *Ede - French and French - Ede Dictionary* (R.P. Louison Benjamin 1964), *Dictionary of Sedang Vocabulary* (Kenneth D. Smith 1967), *Mnong Rơlơm Dictionary* (Henry Blood 1976), *Klei hriăm boh blu Ede - Ede lexicon* (Y Cang Niê Siêng 1979), *Chù chih dò totayh Jeh ‘Ngữ vựng Jeh’* (Patrick D. Cohen 1979), *A Rhade - English Dictionary with English - Rhade Finderlist* (James A. Tharp and Y Băm 1980), *Katu Dictionary: Katu - Vietnamese - English* (N. A. Costello 1991), as well as a host of guide materials, and articles on grammatical aspects of languages (in which the object described is expressed in the language’s own writing).

Following ‘Decision 53 - CP of the Government Council’ (February 22, 1980) on the policy for ethnic minority writing, Vietnamese scholars directed a significant amount of effort to manipulating and refining text systems of ethnic groups in the South of Vietnam. Many folk art works, customary law, folk songs, traditional narratives and tales, and others, were collected, translated, and published through the refined text systems. For example, the *Vietnamese - Kơho dictionary* (Hoang Van Hanh and many authors 1983); *Kơho grammar* (Lý Toàn Thắng-Tạ Văn Thông 1985); *Hdruôm hră hriăm klei Êđê* (Đoàn Văn Phúc, Y Cang Niê Siêng, 1988); *Applied Grammar of Mnong Language* (Bùi Khánh Thế 1996), *Hdruôm hră hriăm klei Êđê* (Department of Research and Education for Ethnic Students of Dak Lak 2004); *The Phonetic System of the Kơho Language* (Tạ Văn Thông 2004); *Bộ chủ Hrê Bình Định- Hrê Bình Định writing* (Tạ Văn

Thông, Đinh Văn Thành 2008); Ha Nhi language (Tạ Văn Thông, Lê Đông 2009); Xroi Kool - Cor language (Edited by Tạ Văn Thông 2014), Ede - Vietnamese Dictionary (Edited by Tạ Văn Thông 2015).

At the present time, the 'Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Area Newspaper' of the Vietnam News Agency, as a bilingual press publication, publishes ethnic minority texts and information, including the following: Viet - Khmer, Viet - Ba Na, Viet - Gia Rai, Viet - E De, Viet - Cham, Viet - Hmong, Viet - Ko Ho, Viet - Mnong, Viet - Tay, Viet - Xo Dang, Viet - Katu and Viet - Chinese. In Northern Vietnam, Latin texts, namely Hmong, Tay - Nung and Thai, were employed and propagated in the 1960s C.E. Here the latinization of Thai characters occurred at the time when the French arrived in the Northwest (1946 - 1954). A set of Latin Thai texts and publications has existed since the time, in order to record mainly White Thai language.

The Hmong texts were appropriated to compile the following: The Meo - Vietnamese Dictionary (Nguyễn Văn Chính 1971), Grammar Materials Grade 1 and Grade 3 (Phan Thanh and Nguyễn Năng Tân 1976 - 1977), used in the composition of literature. technology, such as *Pêz Hmôngz ndo Hloz Hôxpoem* (Mong people remember Uncle Ho) by the poet Hùng Đình Quý (1991), used in newspapers in Lao Cai and Ha Giang, to publish a number of literary folk art works of the Hmong people and Hmong textbooks, and by radio central and local stations to compile and produce documents.

The Tay - Nung writing was officially issued in 1961, having several characteristics; containing the Tay language in Thach An (Cao Bang) and Trang Dinh (Lang Son) as a basis; reflects the phonetics of Tay and Nung languages; very close to Quốc ngữ (yet with a repetition of Quốc ngữ). The Tay-Nung language was used to compile the Tay-Nung grammar (Hoàng Văn Ma 1971), the Tay-Nung-Vietnamese dictionary (Hoàng Văn Ma 1974), the Vietnamese-Tay-Nung Dictionary, (Hoàng Văn Ma and Lục Văn Pảo 1984), and the Tay-Nung Idiom Book (Lục Văn Pảo 1991).. the language was also employed in order to compile textbooks teaching the Tay-Nung language, to record folk art works such as the Then, Lượn, Pụt, Phong Slur, and so forth.

Methodical Framework

Throughout the current paper, we have opted for a historical descriptive approach. As the development of texts and their use in Vietnam has been a longitudinal one, such a description of the placement of texts in their respective ethnic groups requires a mapping of the historical development of the text, in relation to its own cultural group, the cultural groups of other texts, and the histories of other texts with which this text has interacted. To this, we have also included the discussion of a number of events, in order to explore and possibly to suggest rules regarding the characteristics and functioning of text systems, in Vietnam.

The materials we gathered for this study were largely found during our visits to ethnic communities throughout Vietnam. During these visits and extended stays in the ethnic

communities, we opted to interact with policy makers and educational bodies. We have focused on collecting these texts, and information there of, across several periods, and to observe the ways in which these texts have become appropriated in each of these periods. In the process, we also consulted with people in these ethnic communities, which required that we allow for much time spent in these communities, and with administrative bodies.

Discussion

Expanding on The Origins of Vietnamese Writing systems

Prior to the existence of institutions throughout Vietnam with focus on language and text, the government did have in its policies the requirement for ancient languages, both spoken and written, more so following the abolishment of the feudal state. We now discuss the three periods of appropriating these ethnic texts in Vietnam.

Prior to 1954

Historically, Southeast Asia was deeply influenced by India and China, and more recently the West. One such channel through which these influences emerged was the text. The process of the appearance of texts, both spoken and written, and largely as scripts, in Vietnam, is closely linked to the history of text production throughout a larger Southeast Asia.

China, as a major region in Asia, has expounded its Sinitic texts throughout larger Asia. Sinitic texts may have predominated at the time of the third century B.C.E. These texts likely then evolved in the Shang dynasty (16th – 12th century B.C.E.), carved on turtle shells and animal bones, called ‘armored letters.’ These square Sinitic characters were disseminated beyond borders, which many populations appropriated as their identity texts, not least of which was the bordered Vietnam. At first, these texts were deployed to promulgate Buddhist scriptures, after which, these texts migrated to the classroom, as normative bodies of language, and institutionalized as such to align with neocapitalist and neoliberal intentions. As such, the Nôm was created in order to record Vietnamese, which then spread to the languages of ethnic groups, such as Tay, Nung, Ngan, and so forth.

The case with India is also a similar one, as a major population, not only within Asia, but also globally. Records indicate that India’s early texts were initially largely popularized in the second half of the first century B.C., in the Ganges, through a picturesque design combining half ideographic and half phonetic objects. From the region which is now India, Brahmi and Devanagari, in Sanskrit form, spread to neighboring countries, including Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. These ancient texts then entered Southeast Asia through the Buddhist travelers and their influence, and frequently became the official language and text of these target regions, and for example, Cham, Thai, Khmer, and Laos, i.e., in current Vietnam.

In later periods, at the time when Western travelers appeared in Southeast Asia, a series of Latin texts and languages were brought into the region, and hence replaced the ancient texts in current existence. The Quốc ngữ texts appeared in the 17th century C.E. These texts were initially intended to be employed only for the purpose of recording and evangelizing, yet many Latin texts in other ethnic groups throughout Vietnam followed the route to development and change as did the general, and what was now becoming, standard Vietnamese writing.

One very notable institution that focused on these texts, and that incorporated many of these texts, was the Far Eastern Institute of Ancient Physicians (French: École Française d'Extrême - Orient, abbreviated EFEO) is a French research center on Orientalism. The first headquarters of the Institute, in Saigon, Nam Ky, when newly established in 1900 published a research magazine 'Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient.' The publication has many articles on archeology and Asian history, Vietnamese, Cham, Ba Na, Mnong, Co Ho, Gia Rai, within which, the publication also focused on the texts of a plurality of ethnic groups throughout the region, and beyond.

From 1954 to 1975

In the South of Vietnam, from the mid 20th century onwards, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (University of North Dakota - Vietnam Branch) (SIL) sought to research and collect documents with attention to languages and the creation of writing, promoting literacy, and translating religious texts such as the Christian Bible, into local ethnic languages, while also creating oral languages and forms in these local languages. Based on these texts, many religious publications and ethnic volumes were published.

In Northern Vietnam, the Institute of Linguistics is a specialized scientific research institute belonging to the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. Founded in 1968, the Institute and the Academic have the function of studying theory and application of Vietnamese languages, that is, ethnic minority languages and foreign languages within the territory of Vietnam.

From 1975 until the Present Time

The task of studying ethnic languages in Vietnam is mainly assigned to the Institute of Linguistics (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences). In addition, in some higher educational institutions, the Institute of Educational Sciences has conducted research on applied linguistics. Here, many foreign scholars have developed their work on these languages and texts. Yet, following Decision 53 - CP of the Government Council (February 22, 1980) on ethnic minority writing, Vietnamese scholars opted to increase their efforts to craft and perfect a number of writing and speaking systems of ethnic minorities, and to use these writing systems to compile written texts, dictionaries, grammar, and so forth. As a result, much work has been published, both in general research and in practical research. The works of multi-language translation dictionaries and language-teaching books has thus appeared in the form of ethnic texts.

Similarities and Functions across Vietnamese Text Systems

Over half of the ethnic groups in Vietnam already had writing system prior to the introduction of foreign texts and language contact. These systems were quite diverse while containing and abundance of scripts, and were thus unique in terms of their self-form, origin, formation, transformation, and social function. Some ethnic groups contain more than one writing system, and at times, a plurality of these writing systems. Concurrently, some of these ethnic groups within Vietnam do not have writing systems. Some writing systems can be considered as 'pre-letter writing systems.

The social language conditions and the prevalence of the text systems varies widely across ethnic communities in Vietnam. Despite the strong reception of text systems from the outside, initially, ultimately, this reception waned, and almost came to a halt. However, the patterns of Quốc ngữ opposed this, where, at first it was estranged, but then subsequently was received with warmth, and was disseminated widely in highly organized fashion. Until the present time, and in addition to the use of Quốc ngữ and Tiếng Việt, ethnic minority text systems have not yet fully implemented their social functions, in our opinion. Language education in ethnic minority communities is largely unrelated to writing and formal oral education and implementation, though any such education does occur mainly through oral transmission, depending on the natural bilingual socialization of the community. Here, we comment on the fact that the use and spread of writing systems in Vietnam is somewhat predicated on the text systems themselves (Sanskrit, Sinitic or Latin characters), but more so predicated on factors external to the language. Here, we can include a variety of factors: the status of the ethnic community and its language; pressure from neighboring peoples (domestic and foreign, especially national ethnic groups); religion with religious publications that elevate their texts to the level of their deities and ancestors, or as a bridge to these deities and ancestors; pride, particularly of those with high status in the community; close cohesion with dominant populations; the formation of political, economic and cultural centers; awareness of the role of texts for a nation's culture; the State's policy (and the local government's) with regard to the text systems of the ethnic groups in general and a specific ethnic group particular (together with measures to build, propagate and use the text systems).

Conclusion

Currently, more than half of the ethnic groups in Vietnam have strong formal text systems. These texts are quite diverse in terms of form, origin, transformation and social function. The majority of the scripts in Vietnam have been created by external influences, often associated with religion at first, and then reappropriated into local social, cultural, and other contexts. In Vietnam, at the present time, apart from Quốc ngữ, other writing systems do not have an overly positive social function and connotation, and do not exhibit a significant role in social processes. Language

education and interactions in ethnic minorities are largely without their own text systems, that is, both spoken and written, where many ethnic groups are at risk of losing their now endangered languages, and of losing the traditional forms of culture preserved, developed, and sustained through these native languages of theirs. These texts, and the revitalization of these texts, will effect change in the loss and decline of these languages, as a matter of extreme urgency, that agents of governmentality and concerned groups must address.

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