

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VIETNAMESE LEXICON: PRELIMINARY GLEANINGS FROM ALEXANDRE DE RHODES' WRITINGS

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1. Introduction

The phonological system of Middle (i.e. seventeenth-century) Vietnamese¹ has been treated in Gregerson (1969), Haudricourt (1974), and others. This paper takes a look at the Vietnamese lexicon of the same period, as shown in the trilingual (Vietnamese–Portuguese–Latin) dictionary and in the Catechism authored by the Jesuit scholar-missionary Alexandre de Rhodes (1593-1660). Only ‘full words’ (*thực-từ*) or content words in their archaic forms will be discussed, leaving out function words, known by traditional Sino-Vietnamese grammarians as ‘empty words’ (*hư-từ*).

The *Dictionarium Annnamiticum* [sic] *Lusitanum et Latinum*² (Rhodes 1651a, hereafter *Dict.*) consists of 900 numbered columns, two to each page, listing Vietnamese entry words in alphabetical order according to the spelling of the time, each headword and illustrative example followed by its Portuguese equivalent, then by its Latin equivalent. Between the ‘b’ and ‘c’ sections, there is a section (cols. 65-74) devoted to words whose initial consonant is transcribed with the symbol *ϣ*; this lenis obstruent was described by de Rhodes (1651b: 3) as ‘almost like Greek *β* as in *ϣ*ẻào “enter”, *ϣ*ải cá “fin [of fish]”’. This feature is explained within a 31-page statement on Vietnamese grammar bound in the back of the dictionary, following an Appendix, which contains five unnumbered errata pages, and a 171-page index of Latin words: this *Linguae Annamiticae seu Tunchinensis Brevis Declarato* (hereafter *BD*) is composed of eight headings.

On the other hand, the *Catechismus pro iis qui volunt suscipere Baptismum in octo dies divisus*, *Phép giảng tám ngày cho kẻ muốn chịu phép rửa tội mà ẻào đạo thánh Đức Chúa Blời* (Rhodes 1651c; hereafter *Cat.*), constitutes ‘the first work appearing in romanized Vietnamese’ (*tác-phẩm quốc-ngữ đầu tiên*), as the work is referred to in the title *Giáo-sĩ Đắc-lộ và tác-phẩm quốc-ngữ đầu tiên*, (eds.) Nguyễn Khắc Xuyên and Phạm Đình Khiêm (1961), a book issued on the 300th anniversary of the death of the missionary – ‘the evangelical apostle who codified the *quốc-ngữ* script,

1. Maspero (1912) distinguished five periods in the history of the Vietnamese language: *proto-annamite* (before and during Chinese rule), *préannamite* (during independence), *annamite ancien* (fifteenth century), *annamite moyen* (seventeenth century), and *annamite moderne*.

2. For a general description of this trilingual dictionary, see Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1985b.

and the reverend benefactor of the Vietnamese church and the Vietnamese nation.'

Since the compilation *Dict.* systematically listed the seventeenth-century lexicon, I have first tried to cull out archaic forms used in the *Catechismus*, then to check their listings in the trilingual dictionary. I also present other interesting items found in *Dict.*, but not in *Cat.* In this preliminary gleaning process, of necessity not exhaustive, I shall successively discuss nouns, classifiers, adjectives, adverbs, preverbs, verbs, and postverbs.

2. Nouns

The *Dict.* lists several 'taboo words' denoting sexual organs, e.g. *bẹn, dậu, dồc, dôi, lồn, ke* (female), *bôi, cặc, dái, lô* (male). The entry *đếch* is glossed as 'semen humanum': cf. 'secretion from female genitalia' and 'female genitalia' (Văn Tân 1977, under *đách*).

(ăn)năn tội (*Dict.* 7) 'to eat the bitter grass [called **năn** (*Dict.* 504)] 'to show remorse for one's sin'. *Cat.* 177h.

bải, con bải đi bải (*Dict.* 19) 'prostitute, lustful woman'.

bợm, con bợm (53)* 'prostitute', cf. modern VN **đĩ bợm**.

Both Lê Văn Đức (1970) and Văn Tân (1977) have the compound **bợm bải** 'deceitful person' (cf. **bải, binh bải** (also *Dict.* 19, but separate entry) 'deceitful person').

bạu (30) 'companion, partner'. *Cat.* 234. Lê Văn Đức *et al.* (1970) has both **bạu** 'you [to wife or girl friend]' and **bạu-bạn** 'friends' whereas Văn Tân (1977) has only **bầu bạn** 'same as **bè bạn**, friends'.

cai (79) 'head, commander' *Cat.* 71t, u, cf. modern VN 'foreman'.

cang la (85), same as **giang la** (277) 'wicker basket with handle', cross-listed under **la** (389). This compound can be found in 'Thập-giới cô-hồn quốc-ngữ văn' ('Ten commandments to lonely souls'), in Thiên-nam Dư-hạ Tập, a collection of poems by Emperor Lê Thánh-tông and his co-members in Tao-đàn Circle (fifteenth century):

Song viết liền tay; cang la, nón ánh.

Hôm mai họp mặt: nội cổ, vườn lau.

(Cao Hữu Lượng 1983: 12)

cát nhân (89) 'incense'. *Cat.* 165b-c.

cật (90) 'back'. *Cat.* 185d. *Dict.* also gives **sấp cật cùng ai** and **blái cật** (cf. modern VN **chung lưng đầu cật** and **trái cật**).

chê (101) 'pretty large earthenware vessel'. *Cat.* 181f-g.

châm cu (95) 'punctuation'. This expression is found in Poem 3, line 4, by Nguyễn Trãi (1380-1442): *Phiến sách ngày xuân ngời châm cu*, although the word *cu* (136) for 'sentence' is *câu* in modern VN.

đinh liệu (415, under **liệu**) 'huge bamboo torch'.

đôi tói (228) 'chain, shackle'. *Cat.* 10f. Also spelled **lời tói**, with **tói** itself listed separately (822) 'chain'.

cầm (130) **tlang** (804) 'stock made of bamboo or wood to confine a

*Unless necessary for clarity, *Dict.* is dropped before page number to the entry (Ed.).

prisoner's neck or ankles'. *Cat.* 10f. Cf. modern VN *cùm* and *trống*, respectively, with the second member of the compound occurring in the expression *gông đóng trống mang* to denote the status of a prisoner restrained by a cangue (**gông**, *Dict.* 299) around the neck and by stocks around the ankles.

đào (206), i.e. **đồng** 'spear'. *Cat.* 232q, u.

hè (318) 'mourning rites lasting three years'. Cf. modern *hội hè* 'festivals, merry-making occasions'.

khởi (374) 'period, time' < Chinese *k'ua² 課, which explains why the variant forms **thởi** (776) and **thửở** (784), nowadays spelled *thửa/thuở*, are transcribed in the *nôm* script by the character 課. *Cat.* 150i, 176d, 195h, 196s-t, 197b-c.

khu (376) 'rear end, buttocks'.

lã đá (191 under **đá** and 390 under **lã**) 'stone slab' *Cat.* 280o,p,r. This archaic form is found for instance in Poem 21, line 1 by Nguyễn Trãi: *Dấu người đi lã đá mòn*.³

lấm (396) 'mud' *Cat.* 195n, 196x. Cf. *chân lấm tay bùn*.

mùi tui (489) 'coriander' – seeds from the Hồ-tuy plant (Lê Văn Đức 1970: 939).

nể in **tổ nể** 'ancestors' *Cat.* 81x. Cf. **tổ toũ** (817) and both compounds appearing as subentries under **toũ**, i.e. *tông* (827).

pheo (598) 'bamboo': the second member of the synonym compound *tre pheo* retains this meaning in *Mường*.

rạc (632) 'prison, jail'. *Cat.* *tù rạc* 10z, 10e. *Dict.* also gives the phrase *rạc địa ngục* 'hell'.

táp (725) 'tempest, hurricane', nowadays occurs only in such compounds as *bão táp*.

tang (721) 'mourning' provides cultural meaning of the expression *để tang để tóc* [**tảóc**] (the bereaved man letting his hair grow on top and in front and the bereaved woman cutting part of her hair), which confirms that *tang tóc* is another synonym compound and not a reduplication.

thế (754) 'world'. *Cat.* 5b, 6i: *thế này* 'this world'.

thời (774) 'short moment'. *Cat.* 241m.

thoả (773) 'brothel; prostitute', with **con thoả** meaning 'prostitute, harlot' (cf. the adjective *đĩ thoả* in modern VN).

tôi (822) 'servant, slave' with the compound **tôi tá** 'servants' *Cat.* 6t,x,y (cf. modern VN *tôi tớ*).

3. Determiners, Classifiers and Demonstratives

Two items are used to denote 'all, the whole': **cả** and **thay thay**. The former occurs with **và**: **cả và nhà** 'the whole house', **cả và thiên-hạ** 'the whole universe' (77), **cho cả và loài người ta** 'for our whole mankind' (*Cat.* 88f), **cả và nước** 'the whole country' (*Cat.* 21c). *Dict.* also lists **cả hoà** as the equivalent of **cả và** under the entry **hoà** (329). The latter word can be found in Poems 80, 90, 93 and 247 by Nguyễn Trãi, and it is tempting to posit the following development: *hoà/hwà/* > *uà/wà/* > *và/và/*. One can

3. Theurel (1877: 220) lists *lã đá* 'hail' and *mưa là đá* 'it is hailing'.

also note **và hai** ‘both’ and the use of **và** as correlative conjunction in *và bánh và cá* ‘both bread and fish’ (*Cat.* 184n). The determiner **thay thay** is found with **hết** (734) although under **hết** (322) the spelling **hết thay thái** is presented.

In addition to pluralisers **các** (78), **chúng** (121-2), **những** (559), *Dict.* lists **mớ** (475), as in *mớ tôi* (475),⁴ also discussed in *BD* 12, and **phô** (601), as in *phô ông phô bà* ‘ladies and gentlemen’, *phô thầy* ‘masters’ and *những phô ông* ‘gentlemen’ (*BD* 12, 19). This last example is also listed under **những₂** that is glossed ‘only’, so *những phô ông* means ‘only gentlemen’ with *chẳng những* meaning ‘not only’ whereas **những₁** means ‘all’, and also ‘nothing but’ as in *những mong* ‘only hoping’, *đầy những muỗi* ‘full of mosquitoes’, *những muỗi là muỗi* ‘nothing but mosquitoes’ in modern VN.

Concerning **những**, the sense ‘as many as’ (e.g. *những tám đứa con* ‘as many as eight kids’) seems to have been non-existent in middle Vietnamese, and a dictionary published in the late nineteenth century, (Huỳnh-Tĩnh Của 1896: 143) does not list this sense, either, under the entry **những**.

On the other hand, for the second-person plural pronoun, the two arrogant expressions *mớ bay* and *mớ mây* are noted together with *chúng mây*, *chúng bay* and *bay* ‘you guys’ (*BD* 12).

The pluraliser **phô** (*Cat.* 197 and *passim*) had been used in the fifteenth century by Nguyễn Trãi, transcribed by the *nôm* character 鋪 (Nguyễn Đình-Hoà 1985a: 471); it was still listed in Theurel (1877: ix, 363), and in Huỳnh-Tĩnh Của (1896: 200) with the character 喃.

Under the rubric ‘classifiers’, it is worth mentioning that **cái**, nowadays used for inanimate, non-living things, appears in the *Dict.* with such nouns as **cóc** ‘toad’, **đện** ‘spider’, **ếch** ‘frog’, **kiến** ‘ant’ (128, 167, 249, 380, respectively), etc.⁵

Beside the demonstratives **này**, **nọ**, **ấy**, **kia**, **kìa**, the *Dict.* also has **tê** as a synonym of **kia** ‘that... over there’: *ông tê* (728; *BD* 20). The latter is still used in Central Vietnamese.

nào (507) is shown as occurring following the noun it modifies: *sao nào?*, *thế nào?*, *cách nào?*, *đường/như thế nào?* (*BD* 21) to denote ‘which...?’ and as occurring in such idiomatic expressions as *nào có ai biết?* ‘who knows?’, *nào có tội gì?* ‘which sin? which offence? which crime?’ with the connotation of negativity (508; *BD* 22). But there is also another usage, in which *nào* precedes a noun: *nào sách?* ‘where’s the book?’, *nào thầy?* ‘where’s the teacher?’ (508). This word order can be found in some of Nguyễn Trãi’s poems in the fifteenth century: *nào nơi* ‘which place?’ (poem 47), *nào hoa* ‘which flower(s)?’ (poems 59 and 224), *nào của* ‘which thing?’, *nào thuở* ‘which time?’ (poem 164).

4. Theurel (1877: 279) has the core meaning of *mớ* as ‘10,000’ with its derived meaning as ‘parum, quoddam numerale’ to designate ‘a bunch’ [of vegetables *mớ rau*] or ‘a handful’ [of rice *mớ gạo*]. Huỳnh-Tĩnh Của (1896: 41) gives the *nôm* character 嗎 for *mớ*, and provides two illustrations *mớ tôi* and *mớ qua* for ‘we, us (exclusive)’.

5. According to Theurel (1877: pp. vii-viii) *rắn* ‘snake’, *kiến* ‘ant’, and *sâu* ‘insect, bug’ could take either *con* or *cái* as classifier.