

A TREASURE LONG FORGOTTEN: Arthur Chéon’s *Cours de Chữ Nôm* Rediscovered at Keiō University and How to Study It

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Introductory Remarks

Chữ Nôm 字喃, or “Vietnamese demotic script,” is a Chinese-character based writing system designed to transcribe Vietnamese language. Widely used in medieval and early modern Vietnam until the abolition of the civil service examination in 1919 and the full triumph of the Romanized *Quốc ngữ*, Nôm script was transmitted from one to another generation through empirical tutoring. However, the Nôm writing system had to wait until the beginning of the 20th century to see the emergence of its first textbook written on the basis of modern linguistic concepts coming from the West. The *Cours de Chữ Nôm* (Textbook on *Chữ Nôm*; hereafter *CDCN*) by French linguist educator Jean Nicolas Arthur Chéon is the first ever composed modern textbook on Nôm script. Believed to be long lost (Đào, 9), this seminal work has never enjoyed adequate attention from scholars that it deserves. Fortunately, the rediscovery of *CDCN* from the collection of Emile Gaspardone (1895-1982) preserved at Keiō University’s Shidō Library (慶應義塾大学附属研究所 斯道文庫) allows us a rare opportunity to assess this groundbreaking work.¹ A preliminary scrutiny of the composition of *CDCN* in the sociopolitical and cultural settings of its time reveals that this work can teach us not only about the Nôm script, but also the French colonial government’s language policies, preexisting Vietnamese multiscript textbook models prior to Chéon’s compilation of *CDCN*, or a wide array of subjects, ranging from Vietnamese rural lives, folktales, popular beliefs to the rise of Vietnamese modern fiction. The scholarly life of Chéon also helps us to appropriately locate the *CDCN* within his sociolinguistic heritage. Of no less importance, the rediscovered textbook furnishes us with a chance to reconstruct Chéon’s another work supplementary to *CDCN* that now remains missing. Finally, the long-overdue research on *CDCN* allows the continuity of the Nôm studies tradition initiated by Professor Chen Ching-ho 陳荊和 (1917-1995) at the Keiō Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies in 1970.

Arthur Chéon: A French “Orientalist” in Colonial Vietnam

Arriving in Cochinchina as a young intellectual at the age of 25, Arthur Chéon (1857-1928) would build up his long educational career over there. Brebion’s *Dictionnaire de Bio-Bibliographie Générale* provides us with the following information about Chéon – the “Orientalist,”

Born May 25, 1857 in Sorcy-Bauthememont, in the Ardennes. Orientalist. He arrived in Cochinchina in 1882 as a teacher at the Chasseloup-Laubat College and, consequently, engaged in a thorough study of the languages used in Indochina, particularly that of

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¹ This work has not been catalogued yet.

Vietnamese and Chinese characters. Appointed as a professor of Vietnamese at the College of Interpreters during its creation in Saigon in 1885. Under the auspices of Antony Landes [Director of the College of Interpreters at that time], who had appreciated the power of his work, he was called to Tonkin [to serve] as an interpreter of the General Government in October 1887. Appointed Administrator of Native Affairs (July 14, 1893). He was Chief of Staff to the Superior Resident Fourès (...) in 1896, and Chief of the Department of Indigenous Affairs. First class administrator on April 1st, 1905, he was retired on July 1 of the same year.

(Brebion, 72; unless noticed, all translations in this paper are mine)

His intellectual life in Vietnam proved to be very productive: besides his linguistic research and textbook compositions, Chéon also translated a number of Vietnamese traditional plays as well as Chinese literature, and published them mainly in the *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises* (A full bibliography of his works available in Cordier 1915, 2309-2311, and 2332-2333; and Brebion, 72-73). Well-versed in classical Chinese, Nôm script, and quốc ngữ - the three writing systems practiced in early modern Vietnam, Chéon was acclaimed by his contemporaries as a "remarkable connoisseur of Vietnamese language" (Goloubew, 665). George Cordier highly praises Chéon, emphasizing on his contributions to the studies of Nôm script, "To my knowledge, Chéon remains the only European who has dealt with the Nôm characters, and, as a result of his research, we acquire the principal rules that presided over the formation of this demotic writing." (Cordier 1935, 118). Undoubtedly, Chéon stands out as the pioneer in Nôm-character textbook writing, but it may be an exaggeration to conclude that he is "the only European" working on the script. Besides European missionaries such as the Italian Girolamo Majorica S. J. (1591-1656) or Francisco de Pina (Zwartjes, 292), there exist quite a few Western scholars who also mastered Nôm, and even compiled its dictionaries. Among them, French "Orientalist" Abel des Michels (1833-1910) is a noteworthy figure who introduced Nôm into his Vietnamese multiscript language teaching/learning materials.

Des Michels' Vietnamese Language Multiscript Teaching Model

Although trained in law and medicine (conferred a medical doctor degree in 1857), Abel des Michels took a turning point in his career with Vietnamese language, starting with a teaching position at the Ecole Annexe de la Sorbonne (School Annex of Sorbonne) in 1869 (des Michels, 1869a). In the same year, he published two books *Dialogues en Langue Cochinchinoise Publiés à l'Usage des Commerçants et des Voyageurs* (Dialogues in Cochinchinese Published for the Usage of Traders and Travelers; des Michels, 1869b) and *Huit Contes en Langue Cochinchinoise Suivis d'Exercices Pratiques sur la Conversation et la Construction des Phrases Transcrits à l'Usage des Elèves du Cours d'Annamite* (Eight Tales in Cochinchinese Language Followed by Practical Exercises on Conversations and Phrase Constructions Transcribed for the Use of Students in the Vietnamese Course; des Michels, 1869c). These two textbooks employed different linguistic materials. Based on the *Dictionarium Anamitico-Latinum*, Des Michels extracted the "Dialogue between the Captain of a Ship and a Cochinchinese" from Taberd's *Dictionarium Latino-Anamiticum* (Latin-Vietnamese Dictionary), transcribed it into Nôm script, and made it into the *Dialogues Cochinchinoise*. According to Des Michels, this work was composed based on "the most usual words and phrases most familiar to the Vietnamese" and the texts were transcribed into Nôm script (Des Michels called it "Cochinchinese characters") because the Nôm-transcribed texts would be a great help to their readers as indicated in the "Notice to Readers",

Extreme rarity, or rather the absolute lack of written texts in Cochinchinese characters, has led us to publish these dialogues with the original signs of writing used in the Annam, instead of limiting ourselves, as it is generally done, to Latin writing.

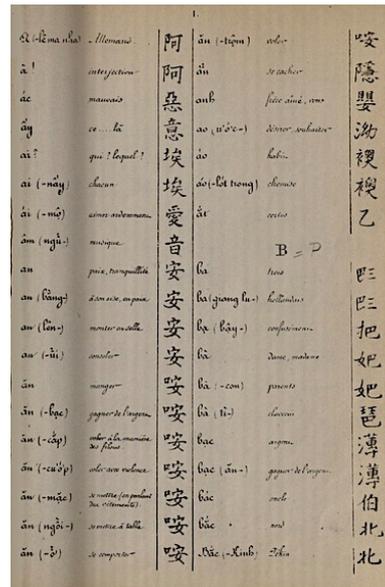
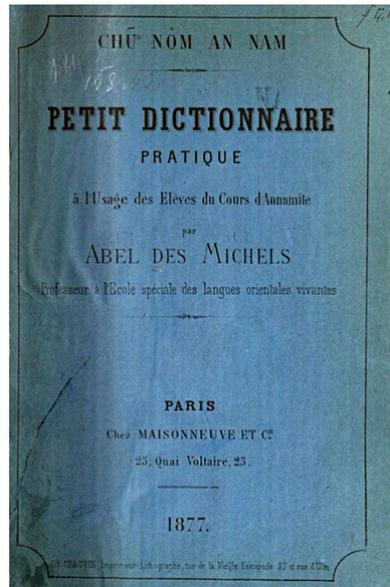
The absolute lack of Annamese texts in figurative characters makes these various publications indispensable for anyone who wants to undertake the study of the language of Cochinchina.

Of course, the procedure of Nôm transcription was based on Pigneaux and Taberd’s dictionaries as Des Michels emphasized the importance of these works through the “Speech delivered at the opening of the Cochinchinese class at the Sorbonne's annex school”,

His work [i.e., Pigneaux’s dictionary], taken over by his successor, Mgr. Taberd, bishop of Isauropolis, was considerably increased by him, and published at Serampore under the auspices of the East India Company. It is the most complete work we have on the subject, and the only dictionary in Annamese characters. Enriched with a grammar, a Latin-Annamese dictionary, dialogues, a Cochinchinese poem and several other additions, it constitutes almost, on its own, a complete teaching body. (Discours, 41)

The *Eight Tales* was actually the Nôm transcriptions of quốc ngữ texts from Trương Vĩnh Ký’s *Cours Pratique de Langue Annamite* (Practical Course of Vietnamese Language; Trương, 1868). In order to reproduce the “primitive texts of the eight tales and the exercises that follow them” into “figurative characters” (i.e., Nôm script) “as closely as possible in word for word” (“Avis aux Lecteurs,” des Michels, 1869c) in the textbooks, des Michels relied mainly on the *Dictionarium Anamitico-Latinum* (Vietnamese-Latin Dictionary) by Pigneaux and Taberd (Taberd, 1838a).

Two years later, des Michels served as a professor of Vietnamese in the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes (School of Living Oriental Languages) for more than two decades, from 1871 to 1892. Unceasingly he compiled a series of textbooks of Vietnamese language. Continuing to use the “Dialogue between the Captain of a Ship and a Cochinchinese” from Taberd’s *Dictionarium Latino-Anamiticum* (Latin-Vietnamese Dictionary), Des Michels had it printed as a multiscript publication and re-titled as *Dialogues Cochinchinois* 冊問答 (Cochinchinese Dialogues), indicating that, “this book [is] designed to familiarize students with the essence of Vietnamese language” (des Michels, 1871). In the next year (1872), des Michels published another book called *Chrestomathie Cochinchinois – Truyen Chơi Văn Chương* 傳制文章 (Cochinchinese Chrestomathy), in which he translated into French twenty tales chosen from Trương Vĩnh Ký’s *Chuyện Đời Xưa* (Tales of Times Now Past), and also transcribed the original quốc ngữ texts into Nôm (des Michels, 1872). It is worth mentioning that in 1877, des Michels compiled a dictionary titled *Chữ Nôm An Nam – Petit Dictionnaire Pratique à l’Usage des Eleves du Cours d’Annamite* (Vietnamese Nôm Script – A Small Practical Dictionary for the Usage of Students in Vietnamese Language Course, 60 pages). The lexicon of this dictionary might have come from the above-mentioned books printed during the period from 1869 to 1872. Together, the textbooks and the dictionary form an unprecedented imperative landmark in the history of teaching Vietnamese outside Vietnam through a multiscript system.



Figures 1 and 2: Front cover and first page from Abel des Michels’ *Chữ Nôm An Nam – Petit Dictionnaire Pratique à l’Usage des Elèves du Cours d’Annamite* (1877)

During his time at the School of Living Oriental Languages, des Michels transcribed two famous Vietnamese narrative poems, *Lục Vân Tiên Ca Diễn* (Nguyễn, 1883) and *Kim Vân Kiều Tân Truyện* (Nguyễn, 1884), from Nôm into quốc ngữ, and simultaneously translated them into French. Unlike his previously published textbooks that taught vernacular Vietnamese language through proses reproduced in Nôm, des Michels’ *Lục Vân Tiên Ca Diễn* and *Kim Vân Kiều Tân Truyện* bring their Vietnamese-language learners to a new level by introducing them to indigenous Nôm texts of literary Vietnamese verses. A few years later, des Michels returned to vernacular Vietnamese prose with his publication of *Contes Plaisants Annamites – Chuyện Đời Xưa* 傳代初 (Vietnamese Pleasant Tales), in which he translated completely seventy-three tales from Trương Vĩnh Ký’s collection, and furnished his readers with the reproduced Nôm texts of those tales (des Michels, 1888). Noteworthy is that in the same year (1888), G. Dumoutier made public his *Manuel Militaire Franco-Tonkinois* (French-Tonkinese Military Manual) that was “adopted by the General Staff of the Occupation Division of Indochina for native troops.” This language-training manual supplies a conversation between a French officer and a Vietnamese soldier, in which the latter is asked whether if he knows how to read and write Chinese characters, Nôm script, quốc ngữ, or whether if he can speak French (Dumoutier, 1888, 44-45). Obviously, multilingualism and multi-literacy became not only needed for native troops, but also recommended for French officers. This explains des Michels’ efforts in training his contemporaries in Nôm script to serve the French colonial government’s needs.

Although the question of how des Michels taught the Nôm script to his French students remains unknown, all of des Michels publications discussed above stand out as the evidence of his Vietnamese multiscript teaching, of which Nôm script is an integral part. The existence of these materials also discloses how well French functionaries were prepared linguistically before their dispatches to Vietnam.

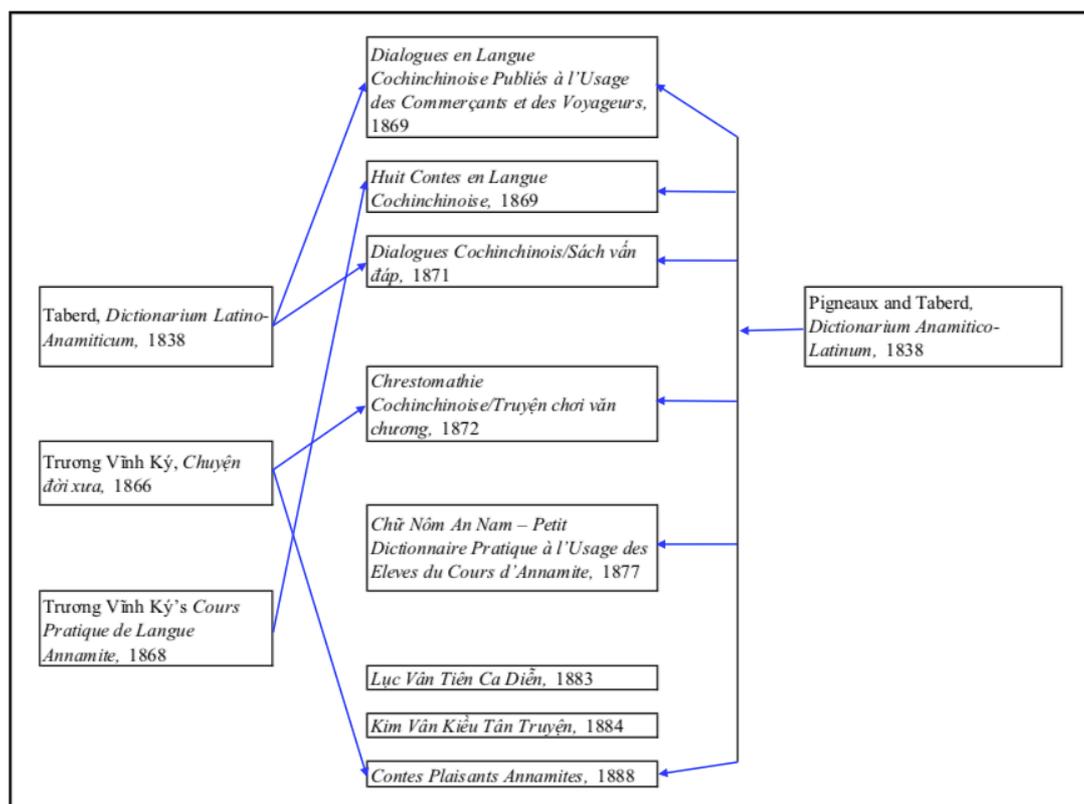


Figure 3: Abel des Michels and his Vietnamese multiscript teaching/learning materials

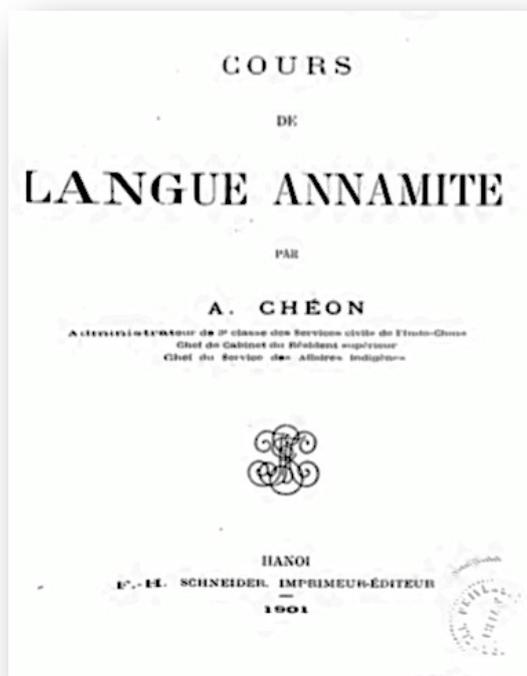
Arthur Chéon’s *Cours de Chữ Nôm* as Part of His Multiscript Vietnamese Language Teaching Model

Unlike des Michels who taught Vietnamese in France, A. Chéon came to the French colonial territory, studied and taught on the ground the written and spoken languages practiced in Vietnam (including classical Chinese, Nôm script, Vietnamese and ethnic dialects). Four years after his arrival in the country, Chéon compiled his first textbook of Vietnamese language called *Cours d’Annamite* (Vietnamese Language Course) for “the usage of European students of Saigon’s College of Interpreters” in 1886 (Chéon, 1901, “Préface,” I). Based on this foundation, it would take him almost other ten years to come up with the most comprehensive Vietnamese language textbook ever written until that time, entitled *Cours de Langue Annamite* (Course of Vietnamese Language), printed in 1901 in Hanoi, and reprinted in 1904 in both Vietnam and France (Brebion, 72). Consisting of more than six hundred pages, Chéon’s seminal work was highly praised by his contemporaries. French missionary and scholar Léopold Cadière (1869-1955) regarded it as a landmark in Vietnamese studies,

Everything is ready for use in Mr. Chéon’s *Cours de Langue Annamite*. It is also permissible to present oneself to the public with confidence, when one can say like the author, “It is nearly ten years since this course was started. This is only the development of the *Cours d’Annamite* composed in 1886.” This long practice, this slow preparation that allow many modifications, many retouches, are one of the surest guarantees of the value of a work. I have no doubt that the appearance of Mr. Chéon’s *Cours [de Langue Annamite]* is a landmark in Vietnamese studies. It is by the publication of works of this value that we will hasten the scientific knowledge of the Vietnamese language so neglected until now.

(...) From now on Mr. Chéon’s course will be, for anyone who wants to use it, a clear and reliable guide. It will present numerous examples to the student’s eyes, it will explain the rules of syntax as they present themselves, and it will give a great deal of information which would be vainly sought elsewhere; finally, at the same time when directing the beginner’s first steps, it will [also] allow those who want [to use] it to acquire a thorough knowledge of the Vietnamese language. (Cadière, 196-197).

At the end of his *Cours de Langue Annamite*, Chéon also included an “Order Fixing the Examination Program for Earning Bonuses for the Knowledge of Oriental Languages” signed by Paul Doumer – the Governor General of Indochina on September 26th of 1900, in which knowledge of Chinese characters and Chinese language was a plus for “officials, employees or agents of local services.” (Chéon, 1901, 628-629). This helps to explain the existence of another textbook by Chéon, in which Chinese characters is taught as part of Vietnamese language.



Figures 4 and 5: Jean Nicholas Arthur Chéon (1856-1928) and his *Cours de Langue Annamite*; courtesy of http://ardenneparis.free.fr/index_js.htm?H=600;W=800;M=%27AAP_MenSorcy.htm%27;P=%27sorcy/aver_tir.htm%27

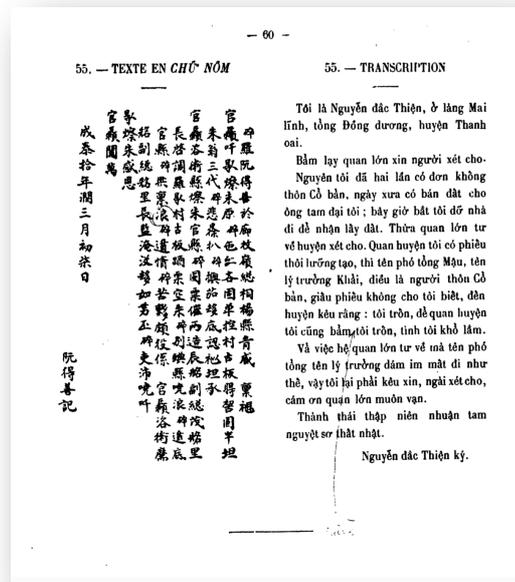
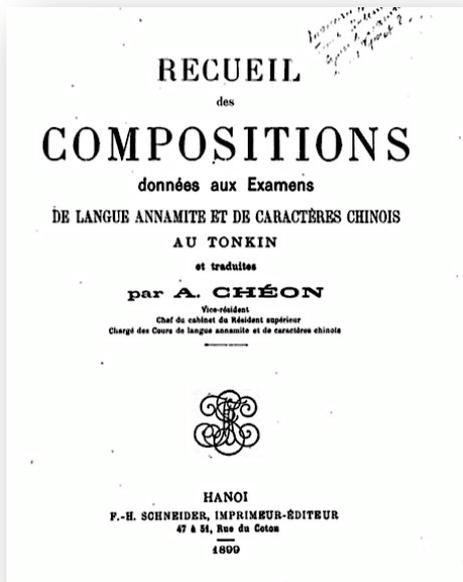
Chéon’s *Recueil des Compositions Données aux Examens de Langue Annamite et de Caractères Chinois* (Collection of Compositions Given at Vietnamese Language and Chinese Character Examinations) was printed in 1899 in Hanoi. A number of governmental orders related to Vietnamese language and Chinese character examinations introduced at the beginning of the collection help to clarify the order signed by Doumer in 1900 cited above. For instance, the order signed by the Resident General Paul Bert on August 9th, 1886 states that,

Any French Protectorate official who passes a practical examination of the Vietnamese language or the Chinese language will receive an annual allowance of two hundred and fifty francs all the time he is employed by the Protectorate if he passes the exam with the mark “passable,” and five hundred francs if he gets the “good” mark. (Chéon, 1899b, I).

Twelve years later, in another order signed by Paul Doumer on June 13th, 1898, regarding written and oral tests of proficiency in Vietnamese language, there is an article numbered 7 that reads,

In these tests, Vietnamese texts are in Latin characters. However, candidates who are able to read the chữ Nôm (Vietnamese characters) will receive a twenty-point advance which will count towards the ranking. (Chéon, 1899b, VII).

These orders showed that under the French Colonial Government’s language policies, knowledge of Vietnamese language (including reading skills of quốc ngữ, Chinese and Nôm scripts) could benefit French officials significantly during their service in the colonial/protectorate. Also noteworthy is that this book presents a petition claiming innocence and denouncing the corruption of local officials written in Nôm and given in the tests. (Chéon, 1899b, 60). This evidential example reveals not only French officers’ levels of understanding Vietnamese and fluency in Nôm, but also the fact that this demotic script had been taught to and learned by French functionaries in Vietnam.



Figures 6 and 7: A. Chéon introduced a petition written in Nôm script, accompanied by a transcription in Romanized quốc ngữ in his *Recueil des Compositions Données aux Examens de Langue Annamite et des Caractères Chinois au Tonkin* (1899)

In addition to the *Recueil des Compositions* briefly presented above, in the same year (1899), Chéon also published another work titled *Recueil de Cent Textes Annamites Annotés et Traduits et Faisant Suite au Cours d’Annamite* (Collection of 100 Vietnamese Texts Annotated and Translated [into French], and Following the Course of Vietnamese Language). In the “*Advertissement*” printed at the beginning of the book, Chéon announced the

upcoming publication of his *Cours de Langue Annamite*, and pointed out the mutual relationship of the Vietnamese language textbooks he had compiled up to this point,

To meet the desire of the candidates for Vietnamese language and written Chinese examinations, and in order to give to those who study these languages for their own use or satisfaction, the possibility of measuring their strength, we have just published a compendium, with translation, of compositions given to these examinations.

This collection [i.e., *Recueil des Compositions Données aux Examens de Langue Annamite et de Caractères Chinois*], which contains more than fifty texts, already offers serious elements of study. Nevertheless, it is not enough for a complete preparation.

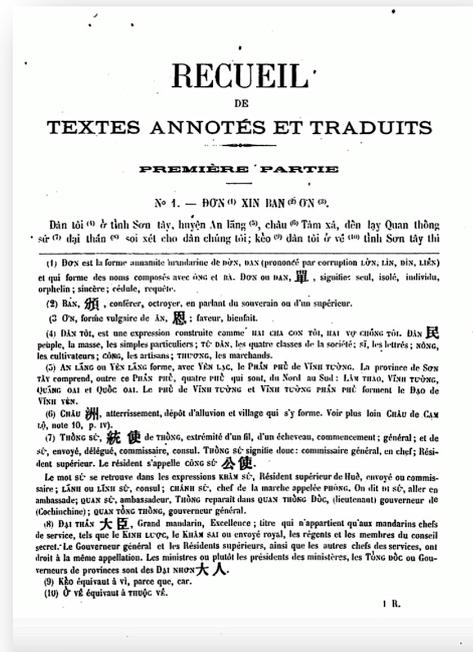
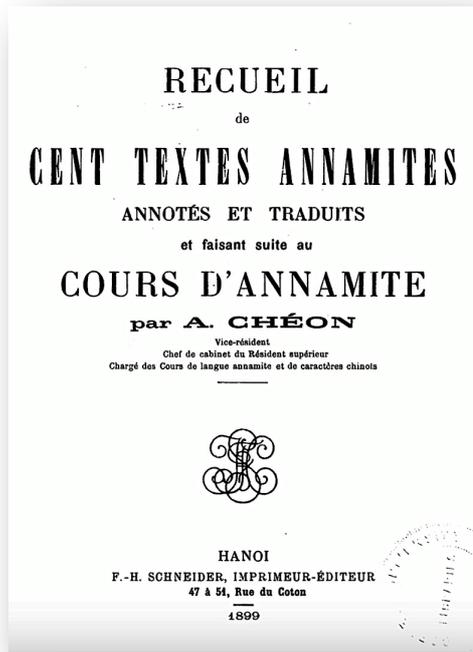
The *Cours de Langue Annamite*, by the same author, published by our [printing] house, includes, besides the lessons – an important part, all of application, and [is] constituted by *one hundred texts* which present, at the same time as a certain variety, a grading to facilitate the course of studies. Rolling on the most diverse topics: petitions, complaints, tales, legends, descriptions, etc., they contain a very wide vocabulary.

(...) These *Cent Textes* [Hundred Texts] were to appear only with the *Cours de Langue Annamite* of which they are the natural complement, but to satisfy a large number of people who expressed their regret of not having this part of the book in hand now, we did not hesitate to print it out [apart]. (Chéon, 1899a, “Advertissement”).

Not only serving as the supplementary materials for the *Cours de Langue Annamite*, the one hundred texts presented in this collection also stand out as socio-cultural and anthropological documents in their own right. Cadière treasures the *Recueil de Cent Textes* dearly, as for him, this work means more than just a sourcebook for language learning,

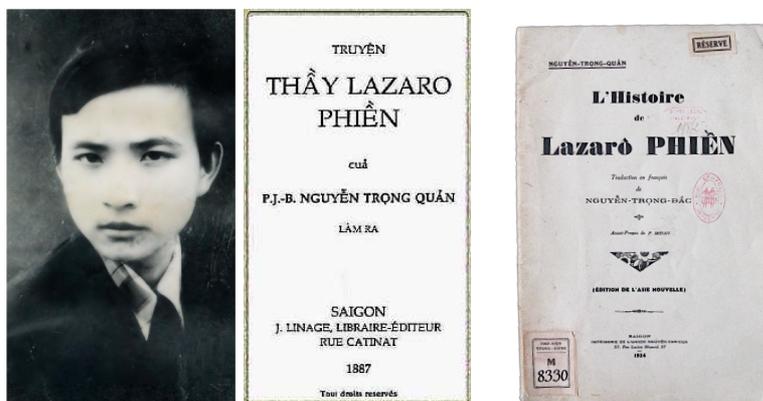
Mr. Chéon, moreover, printed apart a *Recueil de Cent Textes Annamites*. Texts and examples are “thoughts and writings in Vietnamese,” says the author. One cannot believe what a delicate pleasure one feels in reading these small stories, these vulgar queries, acts of sale or purchase, and even simple sayings. This is the Vietnamese language as it is spoken everywhere, in the market, in the courts, on the plank during the long rainy days. It is no longer the Vietnamese language of poems, stuffed with Chinese expressions, literary allusions more or less understood, nor the Vietnamese language of books of religion, copied almost literally on the models of the West. What a profit will be earned by the serious student who reads these texts carefully with a pen in hand, completing, modifying slightly if necessary the many notes of the author! These notes are a real treasure. Everything is there: linguistic remarks, statements of grammatical rules, etymological parallels, traits of manners, folklore, historical explanations. I said that any printed course is a bit like a lifeless body. Mr. Chéon wanted to remedy this defect, and he succeeded to a certain extent. I do not doubt that many readers who would have been put off by the pure and simple study of a text are retained, captivated by the charm they find in reading the notes. They are eminently suggestive. (Cadière, 197).

However, readers of the *Recueil de Cent Textes Annamites* can also find some precious pieces of modern Vietnamese literature hidden in this collection when excusing through the texts.

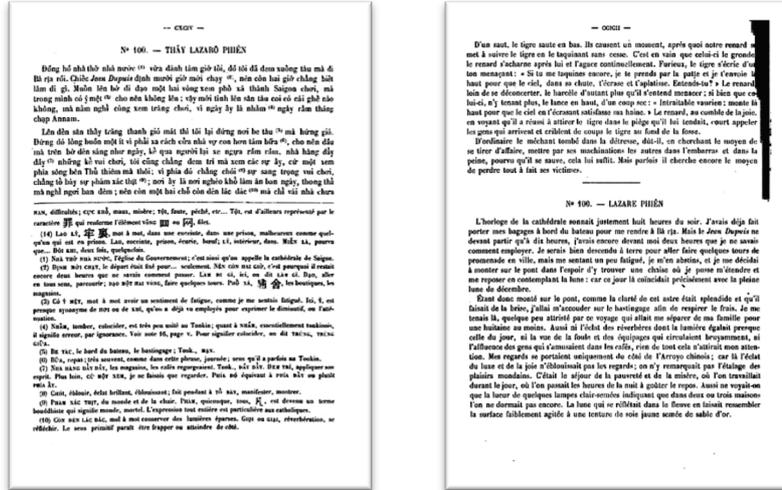


Figures 8 and 9: As an integral part of the *Cours de Langue Annamite*, Chéon’s *Recueil de Cent Textes Annamites* furnishes its readers with an abundant source of readings on a wide array of topics, ranging from petitions, complaints to tales, legends, or descriptions, accompanied by erudite notes from the author.

The collection’s hundredth text called “Thầy Lazarô Phiền” (Lazaro Phiền) has been identified as a “conte modern” (modern story) by French scholars of Chéon’s time (Cordier, 1915, 2332), or highly valued as “the first Western-style short story” of Vietnam by contemporary scholars within and outside the country (“Vietnamese Literature,” *Britannica Academic*).² This novella was written by a Vietnamese Catholic educator by the name of Nguyễn Trọng Quản (1865-1911), and printed in Saigon in 1887. The fact that this literary work was quickly included in the *Recueil de Cent Textes Annamites* indicates its popularity around that time. Also remarkable is that Chéon furnishes readers with an almost full French translation extensively annotated of the novella; one would have to wait for thirty-five years later to read the full French translation published in 1934 by the novelist’s son – Nguyễn Trọng Đắc.



² For a contemporary reading/interpretation of the novella, see Nguyễn-Võ, 685-692.



Figures 10-14: Nguyễn Trọng Quản and his novella *Lazaro Phien*; French translation of the novella by Nguyễn Trọng Đắc; *Lazaro Phien* collected in *Recueil de Cent Textes* and Chéon's French translation of the novella.

Based on its contents, there is no doubt about the importance of the *Recueil de Cent Textes Annamites* in early history of Vietnamese studies led by French scholars. It is worth mentioning that this original work plays a double role in Chéon's Vietnamese multiscrypt textbook project: it serves as a supplement to the *Cours de Langue Annamite* on the one hand, and lays out as the foundation for a new course titled *Cours de Chữ Nôm* on the other hand. Although the relationship between the *Recueil de Cent Textes* and *Cours de Chữ Nôm* shall be discussed in detail below, what has been examined above allows us the possibility to reconstruct Chéon's complex of Vietnamese-language multiscrypt textbooks reflected in the following diagram.

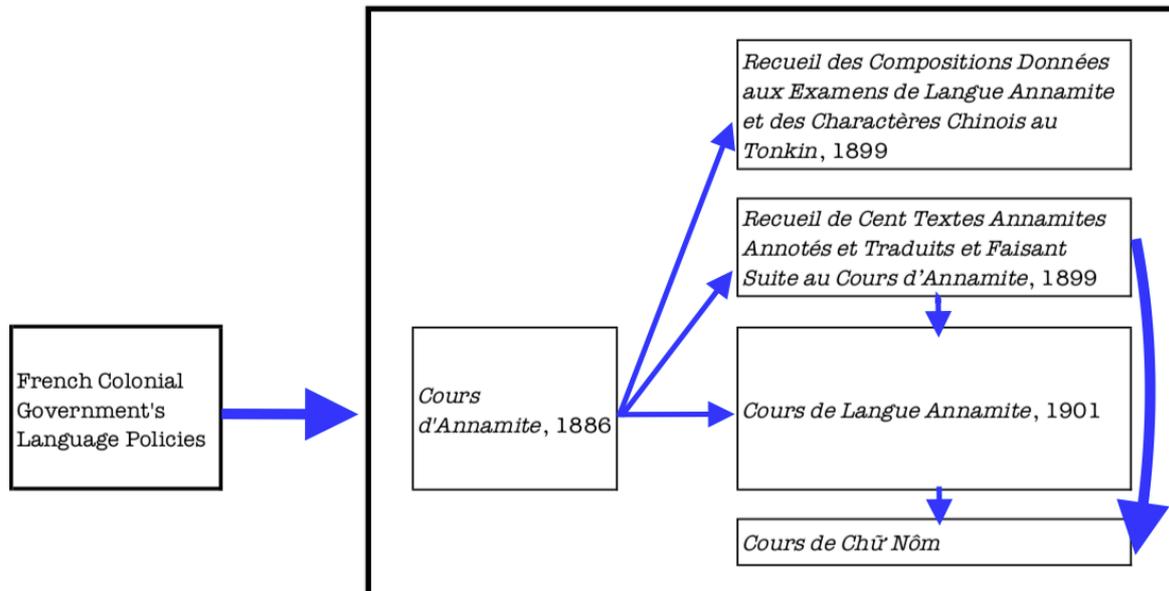


Figure 9: A. Chéon's Vietnamese multiscrypt teaching/learning materials

***Cours de Chữ Nôm* and Its Textual Foundation**

Although it remains unknown about the exact time of the composition of *Cours de Chữ Nôm*, there is one thing for sure: it must have taken shape after 1899 due to its textual relationship with the *Recueil de Cent Textes*. In his *Bibliotheca Indosinica*, Henri Cordier offers a description of Chéon’s course on Nôm as follows,

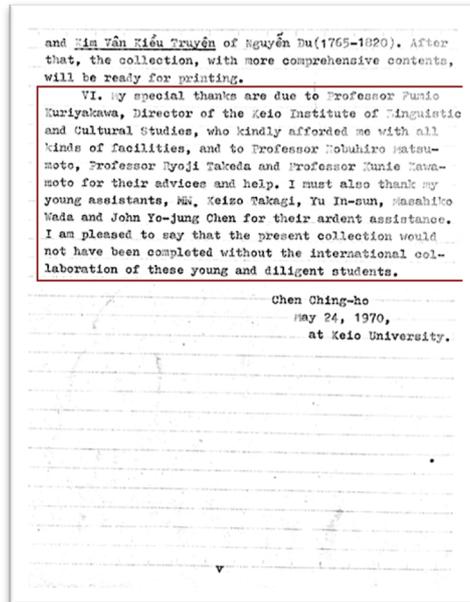
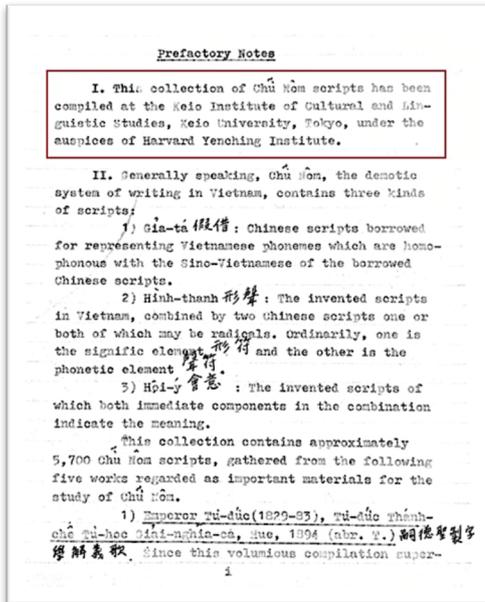
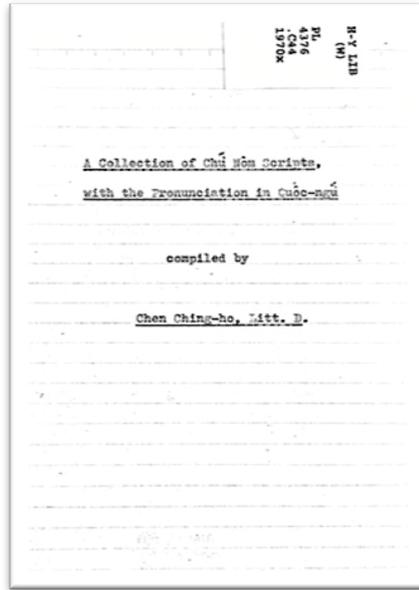
Cours de Chữ Nôm comprising (1) The formation of Chữ Nôm and elementary vocabulary by categories; (2) Analysis of Chữ Nôm of the *Cent Textes*; and (3) Transcription in chữ Nôm of the *Cent Textes* of the Cours d’Annamite (...) pp. 120 + 116. (Cordier, 1915, 2310).

Based on Cordier’s description and on the *Cours de Chữ Nôm* (120 pages) now preserved at Keiō University’s Shidō Library, one can conclude that the third part (transcription in in chữ Nôm of the *Cent Textes*, 116 pages) is still missing. However, thanks to the reestablishment of the relationship between the *Recueil de Cent Textes* and *Cours de Chữ Nôm*, the missing part of the Nôm course also can be reconstructed. Based on the *Recueil de Cent Textes* and the analysis of Nôm script in *Cours de Chữ Nôm*, the first two texts of Chéon’s hundred texts transcribed into Nôm have been restored and appended to the end of this paper.

Because of its crucial roles in Vietnamese studies during the French colonial period in general, and in the history of Nôm studies in particular, the rediscovery of Chéon’s *Cours de Chữ Nôm* from Shidō Library calls for an urgent and comprehensive research on this work. Such a research to be conducted under the sponsorship of Keiō University will be the continuity of a tradition of Nôm study initiated almost fifty years ago at the university. In 1970, then visiting Professor Chen Ching-ho published the first ever-compiled-in English *A Collection of Chữ Nôm Scripts with the Pronunciation in Quốc ngữ* at the Keiō Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies under the auspices of Harvard-Yenching Institute.³ This international scholarly collaboration now can be continued and developed with a new project that studies Chéon’s Nôm course. Such a preliminary research should consist of the following contents,

- (1) French colonial government’s language policies and Vietnamese multiscript teaching/learning model;
- (2) Chéon and his socio-anthropological and linguistic heritage;
- (3) Anthropological and literary aspects of the *Recueil de Cent Textes* transmitted into *Cours de Chữ Nôm*;
- (4) Nôm script analyzed through Chéon’s modern linguistic concepts; and
- (5) A reconstruction of the hundred texts transcribed into chữ Nôm.

³ Léon Vandermeersch’s necrology “Chingho A. CHEN” fails to list this work in Chen Ching-ho’s bibliography. (See Vandermeersch, 10-17).



Professor Chen Ching-ho and his work *A Collection of Chũ Nôm Scripts with the Pronunciation in Quốc-ngữ* (1970). This seminal collection was compiled at Keiō Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keiō University, under the auspices of Harvard-Yenching Institute.

APPENDIX

1

Đơn xin ban ơn

Dân tôi ở tỉnh Sơn Tây, huyện An lăng, châu Tầm xá, đến lạy Quan thống sứ đại thần soi xét cho dân chúng tôi; kéo dân tôi ở về tỉnh Sơn tây thì đàng xa lắm; châu ở ba mặt giáp Sông cái, một mặt gần tỉnh Hà nội, huyện Thọ xương, đất Tam bảo.

Như có việc quan cần phải lên tỉnh Sơn tây cùng đồn Vĩnh yên, thì đàng xa phải đi mười hai tiếng đồng hồ, mà về tỉnh Hà nội thì chỉ có hai tiếng đồng hồ mà thôi.

Xin quan lớn coi xét trong cái địa đồ cho dân chúng tôi sáp về tỉnh Hà, thì việc quan mọi điều được mau chóng lắm.

Ấy là chúng tôi cảm ơn muôn phần, muôn lạy.

Ngày mồng một tháng chạp năm Đồng Khánh thứ hai.

Lý trưởng Đặng văn Tiến

Hương mục Phạm văn Hợp

Dịch mục Lê văn Tuyển ký

(Chéon, 1899, I-II)

單吁頌恩

民碎於省山西, 縣安朗, 洲蠶舍, 黜褫官統使大臣燿燦朱民眾碎; [口+矯] 民碎術省山西辰塘賒夥; 洲於匹糲夾滝丐, 沒糲斯省河內, 縣壽昌, 坦三寶。

如固役官勤磨沛蘊省山西共屯永安辰塘賒沛移迕仁啣銅壺、磨術省河內辰只固仁啣銅壺磨催。

吁官羸(曠)燿醜丐地圖朱民眾碎插術省河、辰役官每調特跣眾夥。

意羅眾碎感恩闔分、闔褫。

得夢沒腦臘辭同慶次仁。

里長鄧文進

鄉目范文合

役目黎文選記

2

Đơn khiếu oan

Bẩm lạy quan lớn,

Tên con là Hứa-kính-Toản ở làng Phạm-xá, tổng Phạm-xá, huyện Chí-linh, phủ Nam-sách, tỉnh Hải-dương, xin quan lớn thương soi xét cho cha con tên là Hứa-đức-Mẫn được khỏi sự oan khổ này.

Vì cha con đã già hơn sáu mươi tuổi: khi các quan đi tuần tập kéo vào làng con khám soát, không thấy người gian nào, đồ lạ gì cũng không thấy. Các quan lại kéo ra ngoài đồng, bắt được một cái bao có mười viên đạn cát tót, thì các quan lại kéo vào bắt cha con và sáu tên kỳ mục làng con giải về tỉnh, giam cầm khổ sở lắm hơn bảy tháng nay.

Vả lại cha con xưa nay là người hiền lành; chỉ biết làm ruộng mà thôi, không biết vì đâu mà hoá ra tội này.

Cho nên con đến sáp mình xuống dưới chân quan lớn, xin quan lớn mở rộng lòng thương soi xét như mặt giời mọc lên phá các sự tối tăm đi, cho các loài dưới đất này được nhờ sự sáng, mà tha cho cha con thật là kẻ oan khổ lắm.

Muôn lạy quan lớn.

Hứa Kính Toản bái

(Chéon, 1899, II-IV)

單叫冤

稟褫官羸,

魁羸羅許敬纂於廊范舍、總范舍、縣至靈、府南策、省海陽、吁官羸傷燿燦朱吒羸魁羅許德敏特塊事冤苦尼。

爲吒羸匄羸欣拵迕鞵: 欺各官移巡緝橋匄廊羸勘刷、(空窺馱奸芾)、(徒)邏(啖共空窺)。各官來橋(黜外垆)、扒特沒丐包固迕圓(彈泔卒)辰各官來橋匄扒吒羸吧拵魁耆目、監禁(擒)苦楚夥欣 腦。

脛吏吒毘習 羅馱賢箝；只別𠄎𠄎𠄎𠄎、空別爲兜靡化黜罪尼。
 朱軾毘鎖挹輪 帶蹠官羆、吁官羆翔羆悉傷燿燿如糴歪木蓬破各事最沁埒、朱
 各類帶坦尼特洳事燭、靡他朱吒毘寔羅几冤苦夥。
 闖襪官羆。

許敬纂拜

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