
BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

VIETNAM AND THE EAST ASIAN BOOK-ROAD

Peter Kornicki*

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Abstract

Chinese texts circulated widely in the Sinographic sphere, so much so that one can speak of an 'East Asian book-road'. Books written in literary Chinese travelled mostly, but not exclusively, in one direction, from China to the neighbouring states. Vietnam was one of those states and in this article I examine how Vietnam fits into the East Asian book-road by considering the evidence for the transmission of Chinese texts to premodern Vietnam.

Keywords: *Manuscripts; Vietnam; Japan; China; Korea*

Since the age of manuscripts, books have always travelled across borders, but it seems obvious that a constraining factor would always be the language in which they were written. Books that were written in what Sheldon Pollock has called 'cosmopolitan languages', such as Latin, Arabic, Persian and Sinitic (literary Chinese) had a potential readership that was vast and geographically scattered [34]. Just as books written in Latin could potentially be read anywhere within the vast Roman empire, so, surely, books written in Sinitic anywhere within the East Asian cultural sphere could be read anywhere else where Sinitic texts formed the basis of education. The question then becomes this: did Sinitic texts in fact travel in East Asia? And if they did, in what directions did they travel and what were the consequences? And how did Vietnam fit into the network of travelling books?

In East Asia, books were indeed constantly

on the move and well before the collapse of the Roman empire. Even within China, there were huge distances to be covered if books were to circulate and be studied, especially when the vast range of territory governed by the Tang Dynasty is taken into account. In spite of the huge distances, Tang-Dynasty literary culture in fact not only reached as far as the desert oases of Dunhuang and Turfan in the course of the first millennium, but also reached beyond the frontiers of Tang-Dynasty China to the places we now know as Japan, Korea, Vietnam and elsewhere. It also reached polities that no longer survive, such as Parhae (Ch. Bohai 渤海), a kingdom which flourished in north-east China from 698 to 926. The flow of books that sustained the spread of Tang-Dynasty literary culture has been described by Wang Yong as a 'book road' on the analogy of the Silk Road, and this 'book road' facilitated the flow of books not

* Robinson College, University of Cambridge. Email: pk104@cam.ac.uk

only within China and outwards from China but also from peripheral states towards China and from one peripheral state to another without ever passing through China [52].

By and large, the East Asian book road was an avenue along which books written or printed in Sinitic travelled and found new audiences. But it should be remembered that language was not an absolute constraining factor. After all, there are other reasons for the circulation of books other than the wish to read them. Books were sometimes acquired as totems, that is to say for their symbolic, magical or prestige value [7]. Alternatively, they can be bestowed to propagate beliefs, to impose a supposedly superior culture or as an expression of cultural pride.

For example, in the 12th century Chōgen 重源 (1121-1206) and Shinryū 親隆 (late 12th century), two Japanese monks from the Tōdaiji temple in Nara, took several works of Japanese authorship with them on a trip to China. These included the *Collection of Japanese and Chinese poems for singing* (*Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集) and the *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari* 平家物語) [37] (page 400). Since it can confidently be said that there was in all likelihood nobody in China who could read Japanese at that time, the probable motive for taking these texts to China was pride in the cultural achievements of Japan. Similarly, it can confidently be asserted that there was nobody in 17th-century Europe who was able to read Chinese or Japanese, and yet missionaries and merchants sent Chinese books to Europe. And Richard Cocks, the head of the English Factory in Hirado in south-western Japan, sent several copies of a Japanese almanac to England and the Netherlands in 1614. The motive of the missionaries was partly to show that China was a country with a long literary tradition and Cocks wanted to send samples of Japanese printing and to show that the Japanese year consisted of twelve months like the

European year. It was also true, however, that curiosity in Europe about other cultures had reached a point at which even books that were unreadable were welcome. It is for that reason that these Chinese and Japanese books have been carefully preserved to this day even though they were not only unreadable but also so alien that recipients did not realize that they were to be read from back to front [12], [11]!

In the pages that follow, I shall focus on the role that Vietnam played in the East Asian book road, but it should be stated at the outset that this role is not easy to trace on account of the catastrophic losses suffered by Vietnam's literary heritage over the centuries. In the case of both Japan and Korea, the evidence is far more extensive for we have at our disposal not only ancient reprints of imported Chinese texts but also some of those Chinese imported books themselves, including in the case of Japan some imported during the Tang Dynasty. In Vietnam we do not have an extensive array of surviving imported books or even of reprints of imported texts dating from before the 18th century.

The flow of Chinese books to Vietnam and to other peripheral states was at first dominated by Chinese translations of Buddhist texts. Until 938, the northern part of what is now Vietnam constituted the Chinese province of Jiaozhi 交趾 (Giao chi) and that geopolitical fact undoubtedly facilitated the operation of a book road to Vietnam. At least from the 2nd century onwards, visitors to Jiaozhi found that there were Buddhist statues, scriptures, and Indian and Sogdian monks preaching there. It was there, too, that the monk Mouzi 牟子 wrote his *Treatise dispelling doubts* (*Li huo lun* 理惑論), in which he referred to the many Indian and local monks to be found in Jiaozhi [40] (#2102, *Hongming ji*, vol. 52, p. 1b, and #2145, *Chu sanzang jiji*, vol. 55, pp. 96b-97a). It was also there that Tang Hôi (Kang Senghui 康僧會, d. 280) was born: he was of Sogdian origin

and had lived in India, but in Jiaozhi he became a Buddhist and began translating Sanskrit texts into Sinitic [30] (pages 10-11) [47], [44]. What is more, three Buddhist treatises written by what were evidently Jiaozhi monks survive from the 5th century, and in the following centuries Jiaozhi monks began making their way to Tang China; some acquired a good command not only of Sinitic but also of Sanskrit [2] (page 331), [30] (pages 12-13), [47] (pages 220-227), [41] (pages 80-3, 182-3). From all this we can safely conclude that Chinese translations of Buddhist texts had already reached Vietnamese lands well before this time.

It is clear, however, that it was not only Buddhist texts that were reaching Jiaozhi. Since some local students even managed to pass the metropolitan examinations in China, there can be no doubt that other Sinitic texts were also reaching Jiaozhi. For example, Khương Công Phụ 姜公輔 (Ch. Jiang Gongfu, d. 805), who was born to a Chinese immigrant family, was one of those who passed the metropolitan examinations and he must have had access in Jiaozhi to a wide range of Confucian and literary texts to be able to do so. Similarly, in 815, a man called Liêu Hữu Phương 廖有方 went up to the capital to take the metropolitan examinations, but he failed on his first attempt. He wrote a lament about his failure that was included in the *Complete Tang poems* (*Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩), but he managed to pass the following year [29] (pages 12-13), [42] (pages 525-526). Neither his success nor that of Khương Công Phụ would have been possible without a reasonable supply of the Chinese Classics and other books, but unfortunately we have no knowledge of what books had reached Jiaozhi or when.

According to the *Complete historical chronicles of Great Vietnam* (*Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* 大越史記全書), the first Vietnamese civil service examinations based on the Chinese

model were held in 1075, and it is said that in the following year Confucian institutions, such as the Imperial Academy and the Temple of Literature, were founded. There is some doubt as to whether there really was an Academy in the 11th century, but there definitely was one by the 15th century, for there is a reference in the *Complete historical chronicles of Great Vietnam* to the execution of a National Academy student in 1435 [9] (Bản kỷ 3, 1075, 1: 248; Bản kỷ 11, 1435.1.21, 2: 583), [31], [42] (page 343). Well before this time, then, it must be supposed that the Chinese Classics and much of the commentarial literature as well had reached Vietnam just as they had Korea and Japan, too. In both Japan and Korea the New Commentaries on the Classics produced by Zhu Xi during the Song Dynasty which gave rise to the phenomenon known as Neo-Confucianism were first imported in the form of Chinese printed editions. Later these were copied by hand, reproduced in the form of facsimiles and later reprinted in local editions. It is most likely that the same process was followed in Vietnam, but there are, alas, no surviving books to testify to this. On the other hand, the *Complete historical chronicles of Great Vietnam* records that a government edition of Zhu Xi's commentary on the Four Books, *Tứ thư đại toàn* 四書大全, was printed in Vietnam in 1435 and that a government edition of the Five Classics, *Ngũ kinh* 五經, was distributed in 1467 [25] (page 273). Not a single copy of either of these editions survives, unfortunately, but the documentary record can probably be trusted.

It was not only canonical works that reached Jiaozhi/Vietnam. We can acquire a glimpse of the range of texts on the move from the story of Confucius and the child prodigy Xiang Tuo 項橐, which was one of the most popular literary works in 9th-century Dunhuang. A version of this story was printed in Ming China in 1585, but the three manuscripts which survive in Hanoi are

not copies of the Ming edition and seem rather to reflect elements of the Dunhuang version and therefore an earlier transmission to Jiaozhi/Vietnam. They are, perhaps, fragmentary evidence of the movement of popular Sinitic writings to Vietnam during the centuries before and after 938 [50] (pages 289-313).

Although we have no concrete information on the movement of Chinese Buddhist texts to Vietnam in the age of manuscripts, there must have been a steady flow at least until the 10th century, when the defeat of Chinese armies by a Vietnamese army led to the formation of an independent Vietnam. This did not, of course, put an end to contacts with China, but rather it placed Vietnam on the same footing as other tributary states on the periphery of China, such as Korea. The *Complete historical chronicles of Great Vietnam* informs us that in 1007 and 1018 tributary envoys were sent to China to request copies of the Buddhist canon. This was in all probability a response to the news that copies of the Kaibao 開寶 printed canon were now available. This was the first printed edition of the entire canon of Buddhist scriptures and it is known as the Kaibao canon since it was in the 4th year of the Kaibao era, which corresponds to 971, that the Song emperor Taizu 太祖 ordered the printing blocks to be carved in Sichuan, which he had just conquered. This gargantuan project, which required the carving of 130,000 woodblocks in order to print 1,081 works in 5,057 volumes, was complete by 983 and Taizu ordered that the blocks be transported to the capital for printing. News of this evidently spread throughout East Asia, for within ten years Japan and Korea had sent missions to acquire copies of the Kaibao canon [6] (pages 313-8), [23], [49].

It seems from records in the *Complete historical chronicles of Great Vietnam* and *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 that Vietnam received copies of the Kaibao canon in 1005, 1009 and

1018. When the Vietnamese envoy who had been sent in 1018 returned with his copy of the Kaibao canon in 1021, an octagonal repository was built to house it, and in 1023 and 1027 two manuscript copies were made [9] (Bản kỉ, 2: 213-5, 224-6), [16]. In this way, the imported printed canon was used as a resource and copied out by hand to facilitate wider circulation: this happened not only in Vietnam but also in Japan and Korea. Another Vietnamese envoy was sent to China in 1034, and when he returned with his copy of the canon, once again manuscript copies were made to enhance accessibility. In 1079, a third copy of the Kaibao canon was bestowed upon a Vietnamese envoy, and in 1081 a further request was made to the Chinese court [38] (197.1a, Fanyi 4-41), [9] (Bản kỉ, 2: 213-5, 224-6), [48] (2: 27). In 1098, when an envoy from Vietnam requested yet another copy of the Kaibao canon, the Song court ordered the Sūtra Printing Bureau to print one [38] (ch. 197, fanyi 4: 41). All these requests show that the initiative came from the states on the borders of China. The Song court responded favourably to these requests but did not spontaneously try to distribute copies to tributary states. On the contrary, it was up to envoys travelling to the Chinese capital to ask the court for a copy.

It is stated in the *Complete historical chronicles of Great Vietnam* that a version of the Chinese Buddhist canon was printed in Vietnam between 1295 and 1299. By this time, the canon had already been printed in the Tangut and Khitan empires and in Korea, and printing was certainly being practiced in Vietnam by then, so it is not inherently improbable that a copy was printed in Vietnam, but no physical trace of it has yet come to light [9] (Bản kỉ, 6:374), [19] (Hung Long 7), [10] (pages 212-218). What is clear, however, is that at least four copies of the Kaibao canon had travelled along the book road to Vietnam, so the body of texts needed

for the preparation of a Vietnamese edition of the canon was certainly in the possession of the Vietnamese court.

A collection of biographies of Vietnamese monks and nuns, which probably dates from the 13th century, demonstrates how well the texts contained in the Chinese Buddhist canon had been digested in Vietnam. For example, Viên Chiếu 圓照 (999-1090), a monk resident at a temple in Thăng Long (now Hanoi), composed a text in Sinitic on the Medicine King (Skr. Bhaiṣajyarāja; 藥王 Yao wang, Dược Vương) and presented it to the Vietnamese king, who promptly gave a copy to a visiting envoy from Song China. The merits of this text evidently reached even the ears of the Song emperor, who had another copy made and returned the original, much to the Vietnamese king's delight [30] (page 123). Some allowance must obviously be made for hagiographic exaggeration and national pride, but such a command of Buddhist Sinitic was by no means exceptional in the monks and nuns of East Asia, and even the desire to show off local Buddhological talent has parallels in Japan and Korea. Furthermore, Buddhism in China was unconcerned by the ethnic or political origins of scholar-monks, and commentaries by Korean and other monks entered the canon, so the narrative is credible. There is a stark contrast here, however, with the lack of interest shown by Chinese scholars in the writings of non-Chinese Confucian scholars, whose works were far less likely to find acceptance in China.

After the 15th century, the Vietnamese state became much more committed to Confucianism, and consequently Buddhism enjoyed less official favour, but it was not criticised and attacked as it was in Korea. No books printed in Vietnam before the 17th century survive, owing to the losses mentioned earlier, so the oldest extant Buddhist imprint is a commentary on the *Heart sutra* (Skr. *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya*, Ch. *Boreboluomiduo xin*

jing 般若波羅蜜多心經), which was printed in 1654 at the request of a Vietnamese nun [25] (page 276). The likelihood is that Buddhist printing began in Vietnam, as it did in Korea and Japan, around the end of the first millennium and made definitive uniform editions of core texts in Buddhist Sinitic readily available.

It should be emphasized at this point that at various times the Chinese state placed restrictions on the nature of the books that could legitimately be exported to other countries. Buddhist books were never seen as a problem and could be freely exported, but from the 8th century onwards anxiety began to be expressed about the wisdom of allowing foreigners to acquire books that might be of strategic benefit to an enemy. In the Song and Yuan dynasties, restrictions were placed on book exports, and during the Ming and Qing dynasties, members of diplomatic missions returning to neighbouring countries were forbidden to take back Chinese historical works, geographical treatises or maps [35] (ch. 39), [36] (pages 89-90). These restrictions were never watertight, however, and it is clear that determined individuals managed to acquire and to take home books that were not supposed to be exported. In 1299, for example, a messenger arrived in Vietnam from the Yuan court to report that a Vietnamese ambassador had been caught trying to return home with copies of a book on the palace gardens, some maps, and other banned books. Nevertheless, in spite of the restrictions and controls, banned books were getting through, and in 1300 the Vietnamese king compiled a selection of extracts from Chinese military manuals smuggled to Vietnam and ordered his officials to study it [19] (*Tiền biên* 8: 30a, 35b), [20] (pages 131-133).

There seems to have been a constant struggle between the Vietnamese court which was keen to acquire banned books and the Chinese authorities, who were equally keen to prevent

such books from leaving China. The celebrated scholar and bibliographer Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇 (1726–1784), for example, spent some time in Beijing as a vice-ambassador on a diplomatic mission, but when he returned to Vietnam in 1761, a lot of the books he had bought were confiscated at the border by Chinese officials [5] (page 2). By the early 19th century Vietnamese envoys were being given instructions not only to purchase printed books in Beijing but even to look out for manuscripts which Qing censorship made it impossible to publish. Other envoys bought books in Canton on the way home, and it was also common for them to be given books by acquaintances in Beijing [5] (pages 3-14), [18].

In the absence of the kind of sources which are available in Japan and Korea, it is not easy to state precisely what Sinitic books were available in Vietnam and from when. However, Vietnamese reprints sometimes provide a convenient *terminus post quem*. For example, as mentioned earlier, the Vietnamese edition of the *Great collection of commentaries on the Four Books* (四書大全 *Si shu da quan*, V. *Tu thur đại toàn*) was printed in 1435: although no copies survive of this Vietnamese reprint, the record of its printing shows that this collection of commentaries, which was compiled in China on imperial command and completed in 1415, had already reached Vietnam within twenty years of its publication: since it was one of the texts prescribed for the examinations in China, it cannot have been difficult to acquire [9] (*Bản kỷ* ch. 11, 2: 591), [3] (pages 218-220).

It is also clear that Chinese visitors to Vietnam were impressed by the range of Sinitic books available. In a book published in China in 1570, one such visitor described the variety of books available in Tonkin (i.e., the area around modern Hanoi). A little later Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水 (1600-1682) spent over two months in southern Vietnam in 1657 and discovered not only that

was there a wide range of Chinese historical works available, but also, to his surprise, that they included two recently published books which had been banned in China [24], [54] (page 223). Lê Quý Đôn, in his *Categorised sayings from the Van Terrace* (*Vân đài loại ngữ* 芸臺類語) of 1773, provided a list of the many texts available to him, mostly dating from the Ming Dynasty or earlier, and this certainly provides further evidence of the Sinitic books available to Vietnamese literati [24].

By the 18th century, there can be no doubt that Chinese books were beginning to reach Vietnam not only in the hands of envoys and other visitors to China but also in trading vessels from Ningbo, which was a distribution centre for Chinese imprints. Successive Chinese dynasties had taken little interest in the export of Chinese books, except in some cases to place bans on their exportation, but seaborne merchants had identified a buoyant market for books in the neighbouring states, and their ships took books to Vietnam to exchange for silks [24]. These books sometimes merited mention in the Vietnamese official histories, particularly when the merchants presented them to the court, presumably in the hope of ensuring continued access to the Vietnamese market. For example, the vast *Imperial Qing commentary on the classics* (*Huang Qing jing jie* 皇清經解) in 1,408 volumes was presented to the court of the Vietnamese emperor in 1831, just a couple of years after it had been published in China [8] (*Tiền biên* part 2, 72: 1a).

In 1842 the Vietnamese emperor encountered, evidently for the first time, the *Illustrated mirror of the emperors* (*Dijian tushuo* 帝鑑圖說), which contained accounts of both virtuous and wicked rulers of the past and had been published in China in 1572. He was so impressed by this work that he wrote several poems in response and showed them to his

officials, all of which suggests that this work had recently been imported into Vietnam, either by a returning diplomat or by Chinese traders [8] (Tiền biên part 3, 22: 16a), [26] (page 409). In fact, the practice of combining diplomacy with book-buying continued throughout the 19th century right up to 1882, when Vietnam was already a French colony: the last formal ambassador recorded in his diary a circuit he made of the bookshops in Tientsin [5] (page 14).

When it comes to the 19th century, much more extensive evidence about the Vietnamese part in the book road is available, both in the form of Vietnamese reprints of imported Sinitic works but also in the form of documentary records. For example, the *Veritable history of the Great South* (大南寔錄 *Đại nam thực lục*) records for the second month of 1827:

The throne ordered the Northern City to investigate the printed books formerly stored in the Temple of Literature there, namely, *Ngũ kinh* 五經, *Tư thư đại toàn* 四書大全, *Vũ kinh trực giải* 武經直解 (blocks stored at the former *Lê Quốc Tử Giám* 黎國子監), and the former and latter parts of the *Thực lục* 實錄 (private blocks of 後軍參謀阮伯科) and *Tư trường văn thể* 四場文體 (private blocks of 海陽鎮守 Trần Công Hiếu) be sent to Hue and placed in the *Quốc Tử Giám* [in Hue] [8] (*Chính biên* II 43: 29b-29a [Minh-mệnh 8.2]).

It is not clear from the language used here whether the wooden printing blocks were still in existence, for the terms used were often employed in East Asian printing to indicate the publisher rather than the physical blocks, but in any case the reference is to books being sent to Hue, not the printing blocks. The first two items may be referring to the fifteenth-century editions of the Five Classics and Four Books mentioned earlier or to subsequent editions from the Later Lê Dynasty. The third book specified should properly be 武經七書直

解 (Ch. *Wu jing qi shu zhi jie*), which is a Ming commentary on the Seven Military Classics. Only one extant book preserved in Vietnam appears to bear any relation to this and it is kept in the Institute of Sino-Nôm Studies (AB.310), but this is a bilingual book with Chinese text above and *nôm* text below; what is more, it is a manuscript and does not appear to be a copy made from a printed text. Therefore this entry in the *Veritable history of the Great South* tells us that the Ming text had been transmitted to Vietnam and an official edition had been printed in Vietnam in the Lê Dynasty; it was still extant in the early 19th century but possibly survives no longer. The fourth item probably refers to the *Đại Việt sử kí toàn thư*, but to a privately-published edition, like the fifth item which I have been unable to identify.

There is much more evidence of the availability of imported books in 19th-century Vietnam than I have space to deal with here. For example, the writings of the high-ranking official Phạm Thận Duật 范慎燾 (1825-1885), who was an active participant in the world of Sinitic texts that spread throughout East Asia, provide an insight into the engagement of litterati with Sinitic texts from China [1]. Other evidence can be found in extant catalogues of imperial libraries, such as *Tự Khuê thư viện tổng mục sách* 聚奎書院總目冊, which is a catalogue of the Tự Khuê Library and is preserved in the Institute of Sino-Nôm Studies (A.119/1-3) and in the 'veritable records' of each reign, but a full examination of those will have to wait for another occasion.

What about Vietnamese reprints of imported Sinitic works? Several 19th-century manuscripts exist in Vietnam which contain extracts from the *Biographies of women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳), a conduct book for women written in the Han Dynasty which generated similar texts in other East Asian societies. The manuscripts preserved in Vietnam include verse translations in *nôm*

as well as the Sinitic text, and another 19th-century survival is a printed book containing the biographies of women from just one Vietnamese province. These books show that the *Biographies of women* had already been adapted to suit Vietnamese readers and was being taken as a model for new works. However, judging by the number of copies surviving today, one of the most popular Chinese conduct books in Vietnam was a work written by a Chinese provincial governor in 1742, *Rules bequeathed for the instruction of women* (*Jiao nü yigui* 教女遺規, V. *Giáo nữ di qui*). This includes extracts from various late Ming conduct books, and it was printed in Vietnam in 1878 entirely in Sinitic. This, and some hybrid texts containing a mixture of passages in Sinitic and Vietnamese, suggest that there was a population of women with some competence in Sinitic, but most of the surviving conduct books consist of translations, usually in verse [21]. It is probable that these texts had been transmitted earlier, but the oldest surviving reprints date from the 19th century and it is unclear if they had been reprinted earlier.

Another genre of Chinese writing which had an impact upon Vietnam was fiction. One of the most influential fictional works in East Asia was *New stories told while trimming the wick* (*Jiandeng Xinhua* 剪燈新話): this work had clearly reached Vietnam by the 16th century, for the Vietnamese work *Tales of the strange casually recorded* (*Truyện kì mạn lục* 傳奇漫錄) was unmistakably inspired by it, although the setting is Vietnam in the 15th century and the characters in the stories are Vietnamese. *Tales of the strange casually recorded* was, like *New stories told while trimming the wick*, written in Sinitic in the 16th century: the oldest extant edition of *Tales of the strange casually recorded* is dated 1712 but it is in fact a facsimile of an earlier edition and consists of little but the Sinitic text. In 1714, a new edition was published with annotations indicating the

tone or Chinese pronunciation of a number of characters, probably for the benefit of literati, and it also included a complete vernacular translation in *nôm*: it is a mechanically literal translation, providing a Vietnamese equivalent for each word in the original [17] (pages 27-31, 80-84), [53], [4] (1: 3-7). In Vietnam, as elsewhere, local works inspired by Chinese fiction were frequently written in Sinitic at first, but later there was a turn to the vernacular, not in the form of translations, but in the form of adaptations and works inspired by Chinese novels. The most well-known example of this in Vietnam is *The tale of Kieu* (*Kim Vân Kiều* 金雲翹), which is in verse and was based on the Chinese novel the *Tale of Jin Yunqiao* (*Jin Yunqiao zhuan* 金雲翹傳); the Vietnamese title simply repeats the original title in Vietnamese pronunciation [46], [14]. From these examples it is clear that Chinese fiction was reaching Vietnam along the East Asian book road.

The East Asian book road also served as a conduit for the books written in Sinitic by European Jesuit missionaries working in Beijing. The Jesuits established themselves in Vietnam in 1624, when Girolamo Maiorica (1591-1656) and Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) arrived, and they began writing Christian literature in Vietnamese in *nôm* script [13]. A few years later, however, when Rhodes was preaching in Thăng Long (modern Hanoi) in 1627-30, one of his listeners showed him a book on Christian doctrine in Chinese which he had brought back from Beijing, and this is the first indication that the writings of the Beijing Jesuits were by this time reaching Vietnam [15] (page 75, note 97).

Another method of gaining some idea of the flow of books from China to Vietnam is to consider the flow of books reaching other peripheral states such as Korea and Japan. Korea is perhaps a special case in view of the geographic proximity of the Korean peninsula to

book markets in China and in view of the close diplomatic relationship between the two states, so let us rather consider Japan, for taking books to Japan required a difficult and dangerous sea passage while Vietnam had the advantage of a land route to China.

We are extremely fortunate to have a detailed guide to some of the Sinitic books that had reached Japan by the 9th century in the form of the *Catalogue of books extant in Japan* (*Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku* 日本国見在書目録), which was compiled by Fujiwara no Sukeyo 藤原佐世 (847-898) in the 890s. We do not know what precisely this is a catalogue of: it does not include any Buddhist or medical texts, so it is definitely not a catalogue of all the books that had reached Japan from China [39]. Nevertheless, Fujiwara no Sukeyo listed a huge number of titles, including many Chinese works that are now lost, and this shows us that they had at least reached Japan by the 890s. Similarly, a Japanese medical treatise, the *Essentials of medicine* (*Ishinpō* 醫心方) of 984 reveals that a substantial range of Chinese medical texts, again many now lost, had reached Japan by that time [22] (pages 532-585). These two Japanese sources alone, the *Catalogue of books extant in Japan* and the *Essentials of medicine*, are witness to the arrival of a vast quantity of texts from China by the end of the first millennium. It is surely unlikely that significantly more Sinitic texts had reached Japan than elsewhere, so the likelihood is that similar quantities of Sinitic texts had also reached Vietnam by then.

The East Asian book road mostly worked in one direction, from China outwards to neighbouring societies, but that does not mean that books did not travel in the other direction, too. Again, unfortunately, very little information is available about Sinitic books written by Vietnamese that reached China. As mentioned earlier, the Vietnamese king gave a copy of a

medical work by Viên Chiếu to an envoy from the Song court some time in the 11th century, but there are also Chinese records of Vietnamese books reaching China in the 12th century [30] (page 123), [27] (page 42). In the years 1407-27 Ming armies invaded and attempted to occupy Vietnam, but the invasion was ultimately unsuccessful and the armies withdrew in 1427. The Ming invasion led to the removal of many books and records in 1405, but not to their destruction, as has often been claimed [29] (57: 1a), [32].

Pharmaceutical medicine was key to the Vietnamese tradition of medicine, and some books of materia medica of Vietnamese origin were exported to China. The most famous Vietnamese physician, Tuệ Tĩnh 慧靜 (fl. 1330-85), was sent to China as human tribute for the Ming court, and he remained there for the rest of his life as a palace physician: most of his works were written in Vietnamese, except for *Miraculous effects of southern medicine* (*Nam dược thần hiệu* 南藥神効), which was written in Sinitic both to explain Vietnamese medicine to Chinese physicians and to inscribe Vietnamese medicine within the corpus of Chinese medicine [45], [28].

The constant movement of tributary missions between Vietnam and China provided an opportunity for the transmission of texts in both directions. Some records of Vietnamese envoys giving books to their Chinese counterparts have survived, and so have a small number of Vietnamese books which probably reached China in the 19th century [27] (pages 43-60, 65-9). The *Imperial Qing poetry anthology* (*Huang Qing si xuan* 皇清詩選) of 1705 contains large numbers of poems from states which maintained tributary relations with the Qing authorities, that is from Vietnam as well as from Ryūkyū, Korea, and other states, so it is clear that Sinitic poetry written by Vietnamese poets was

reaching China [33].

As already mentioned, the sad loss of much of Vietnam's literary heritage leaves us with less evidence with which to examine Vietnam's role in the East Asian book road than is the case with Japan or Korea. All the same, there is sufficient evidence to be able to draw some conclusions. In the first place, it is clear that during the period when Vietnam was called Jiaozhi and was a part of China it enjoyed the benefits of the internal Chinese book road and acquired copies of Buddhist and Confucian texts before they reached the Korean kingdoms or Japan. Secondly, once Vietnam became independent, the Vietnamese state, like other neighbouring societies, took the trouble to send envoys in search of copies once news of the printed Kaibao edition of the Buddhist canon had reached Vietnam. This was, in fact, the pattern for all books produced in China: there is no sign of active cultural imperialism from China, and all the initiative was taken by its neighbours. What those neighbours received in return for their efforts was a huge quantity of books in Sinitic. These naturally posed serious problems in terms of reading and understanding, but the demand for Sinitic books was constant right up to the end of the 19th century, when Chinese accounts of the Opium War and its aftermath provided the only comprehensible information about the threat posed to all East Asian societies by the Western powers.

The stream of books travelling from China to surrounding societies did not cease when the Tang Dynasty collapsed during the unrest, turbulence, and banditry at the end of the 10th century. On the contrary, it continued apace right up to the second half of the 19th century. The flow was largely one-way, like English books making their way from London to all corners of the empire in the 19th century, or French books travelling from Paris to the scattered French

colonies. The initiative, however, came neither from the imperial court in China wishing to spread its influence nor from Chinese publishers seeking to profit from the overseas demand, but rather from the peripheral states themselves. It was their interest and their enthusiasm that kept the flow of books going. This is, therefore, a centre-periphery model with a difference, a reluctant centre and an eager periphery. What is more, there was relatively little flow of books between the peripheral states, even though texts composed in Sinitic were linguistically accessible to the educated throughout East Asia and potentially legible everywhere. Latin books circulated throughout Europe irrespective of their place of printing, and in the same way Sinitic books could have circulated throughout East Asia irrespective of their place of printing, but the fact is that they did not. In this respect the book cultures of East Asia were more hermetic. One reason for this is that printed Sinitic books developed in culture-specific directions with glosses, prefaces by local editors, translations, and the like, making them less readily marketable in other societies. Japanese editions of the Chinese Classics, for example, usually came equipped with glosses that to a Korean or Vietnamese would have been an unnecessary and incomprehensible encrustation on the text.

Although Sinitic texts were the bedrock of education throughout East Asia, little attempt was made to exploit that potentially huge audience, not to say market. Buddhist writings transcended cultural boundaries with ease, but the same was not true of other writings in Sinitic. Chinese merchants did eventually learn to meet the demand for Chinese books in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, but this was a one-way street, and the small numbers of books that made the journey in the other direction were not the result of commercial exploitation of a market opportunity.

The 'book road' from China worked remarkably well, in spite of occasional obstructions, and it thus proved possible for surrounding states to acquire copies of a huge range of Sinitic texts, even banned books. These texts were frequently reprinted in local editions, often with features that Chinese readers would not have recognised, such as glosses, parallel translations, and additional commentaries. In addition to the ancient canonical, historical, and philosophical texts, and later commentaries and exegetical works, from the 16th century onwards new kinds of texts travelled along the book roads. These included fictional writings, scientific and technical works, works written in Sinitic by Europeans, and Chinese translations of European works. These new writings can be easily tracked to Japan and Korea but much less easily to other societies, though some at least of them undoubtedly reached Vietnam, Ryūkyū, and the Manchus. Although all these texts, new and old, were Chinese in origin, they took on local clothing in the societies they reached, and they were oriented to suit particular groups of readers; some were translated and presented in different scripts, or adapted to form the basis of new works.

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