What's so Chinese about Vietnamese?
Mark J. Alves
University of Hawaii at Manoa

1   Introduction

This study explores the ways in which Chinese[1] has and has not affected the language spoken by the Vietnamese and their ancestors over two thousand years of language contact in what is an example of borrowing rather than shift.   Based on comparative lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic evidence, the influence of Chinese, though lexically significant, is best viewed as structurally superficial. This paper demonstrates that, at each linguistic level, Chinese influence is primarily restricted to non-structural aspects of Vietnamese, and the various linguistic elements of Chinese have been fit onto a primarily Southeast Asian and Mon-Khmer[2] linguistic template.

Early language contact between the ancestors of speakers of Vietnamese and speakers of Chinese came through administrative, commercial, and individual contact, though the amount of documentation of each type of contact varies (Taylor 1983). Administrative control over the region of modern northern and central Vietnam, which lasted from the Han dynasty through the Tang dynasty, is the best-documented type of contact. The other two means of language contact have significantly less documentation.   Contact through commerce was certainly common throughout the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations; though, it was probably not continuous enough to result in widespread language shift. Finally, language contact came through the periodic influx of Chinese immigrants into Vietnam who were assimilated into the old Viets or Lac Lords culture.

This latter aspect may be the most important one in exploring the effect of Chinese on Vietnamese since it provided a means of linguistic borrowing through direct social contact and pressure. In Keith Taylor's *The Birth of Vietnam* (1983), it is shown how, within a few generations in modern day northern Vietnam, the early immigrant Chinese largely abandoned their loyalty to the rulers to the north and created what Taylor calls the 'Sino-Vietnamese families', a wealthy and influential social class. These Sino-Vietnamese families may have helped introduce and maintain some parts of Chinese culture and accompanying vocabulary, but it can be assumed that they shifted to the language spoken in that region (an early ancestor of modern Vietnamese) with little overall effect on that language as they adopted the local lifestyle. In terms of language contact, then, Chinese influence on the language of old Viets was through linguistic borrowing. It has been hypothesized that the results of borrowing consist primarily of lexical influence with some accompanying phonological influence

(Thomason and Kaufmann 1988:39). Indeed, that simple statement appears to be the case for Chinese-Vietnamese language contact even two thousand years later, that is, lexical borrowing with some phonological influence. Unless widespread bilingualism was present over following centuries, a claim for which there is no evidence, the mostly illiterate population in that region would have had little direct contact with Chinese, and the structural linguistic changes probably occurred very slowly mostly in the post-Tang era, after the era of Chinese political domination.

What was the language of the Vietnamese ancestors like two thousand years ago at the beginning contact with Chinese? Based on core vocabulary, the Vietnamese language is clearly, as are other Vietic languages (a term coined by Hayes in 1984),[3] a Mon-Khmer language (Huffman 1977; Gage 1985).[4] Thus, the language in question was most likely bisyllabic and did not have a fully-developed tonal system, the prototypical Mon-Khmer structure. Over the past two millennia, Vietnamese[5] has borrowed extensively from the Chinese lexicon, much more so than neighboring languages in the modern mainland Southeast Asian region, such as Thai and Cambodian. However, despite assumptions that significant changes in Vietnamese linguistic structure—particularly its phonology—are due to contact with Chinese, most linguistic characteristics of 20th century Vietnamese can be viewed as the result of ordinary language internal changes seen among languages in Southeast Asia, changes in which Chinese played a smaller part than has been previously thought. Some structural changes that have given Vietnamese its Chinese-like appearance are actually quite recent, developing only in the past several centuries without direct Chinese political domination.

In this paper, Vietnamese phonology, morphology, and syntax are shown to have primarily Southeast Asian (and in some cases specifically Mon-Khmer) typological traits, despite heavy lexical borrowing from Chinese. Chinese influence on Vietnamese linguistic structure is shown to be minimal, and much of it, relatively recent (within the last several centuries).

2   The Vietnamese lexicon

As noted in the previous section, the core vocabulary of Vietnamese is Mon-Khmer in origin. Numerals, body parts, unmarked terms for natural phenomena (e.g., dog, bird, root, leaf), a few personal and demonstrative pronouns are, with few exceptions, Mon-Khmer etyma. In addition to Mon-Khmer vocabulary, Vietnamese has been said to have a significant amount of Tai loans (Maspero 1912; Vương; Hoàng T. C. 1998) and possibly some vocabulary connected with Austronesian languages (Gregerson 1992). Finally, Vietnamese has two layers of Chinese vocabulary: the commonly studied Sino-Vietnamese layer, borrowed as literary readings during the Tang dynasty, and Old Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary[6] that was borrowed before the Tang dynasty (Wang 1958; Lê

1959; Tryon 1979), probably during the Han dynasty and the rise of the Sino-Vietnamese families. It is in part due to this mixture of etymological sources that Vietnamese has been claimed by some scholars to be a language for which no single parent source can be posited. In this paper, Vietnamese is not considered to be a 'mixed' language since its core vocabulary is solidly Mon-Khmer (Huffman 1977) and comparison with more conservative Vietic languages has already clearly demonstrated that Vietnamese is Mon-Khmer (Nguyễn V. L. 1995; Alves to appear).

How much of the Vietnamese lexicon is Chinese? Some estimates put the number at 60 percent (Nguyễn D. H. 1961). Other Vietnamese linguists have put that number even higher (in personal communication). However, considering the nature of dictionaries, on which these figures are based, literary entries necessarily constitute a disproportional amount, thereby misrepresenting the amount of words actually used in the Vietnamese vernacular. In daily speech, which is a clearer indicator of genetic origin and language contact, the percentage of Chinese loanwords is significantly lower. One part of the Vietnamese lexicon includes reduplicant forms, which constitute a notable part of the vernacular and which are non-Chinese in origin. There are 5,000 entries in the recently published dictionary of Vietnamese reduplicants (Viện Ngôn Ngữ Học 1995),[7] which, compared to a regular dictionary of 50,000 entries, is a significant amount. Basic vocabulary may constitute a smaller portion of a dictionary than literary vocabulary, but it will be a larger portion of the spoken language. Hence, for purposes of understanding language contact at the colloquial level, the Chinese element, though still prominent, is not nearly as high when the literary language—a portion not directly available to non-literate Vietnamese in previous centuries—is excluded from statistics.

What lexical areas of spoken Vietnamese has Chinese influenced? The two areas, content words (non-grammaticalized) and function words (grammaticalized vocabulary), are discussed in the following two subsections. The focus is on vernacular Vietnamese.

2.1 Content words

Many Vietnamese content words that are similar to words in modern Thai and Khmer are actually Chinese in origin, as shown in extensive lists in a 1973 article by Pou and Jenner. Words related to trade, such as 'pastry' and 'bag/packet', are seen in many languages throughout the region of modern mainland Southeast Asia and are better seen as regional loans that were not necessarily borrowed directly from Chinese.[8]

Many other Chinese words that were not spread through Southeast Asia present in Vietnamese are those forms related to administrative matters and cultural traits. Many of those words come from the Han era, the Old-Sino-Vietnamese (OSV hereafter) layer, all of which have lexical counterparts in the later Tang dynasty Sino-Vietnamese loans (SV

hereafter). Taylor (Ibid.) described a situation in which the Han Chinese imposed marriage, education, and certain farming practices on the Vietnamese. Loanwords from that period still remain. Examples of OSV administrative vocabulary are ghi 'record', tuổi 'years old', and họ 'family name'. Beyond a few basic familial terms that are Mon-Khmer in origin, Benedict (1947) noted that most Vietnamese kinship terms are Chinese and noted the two layers of Sino-Vietnamese, the OSV and SV loans. However, those borrowed familial terms have very different grammatical functions than do the forms in Chinese, functioning like pronouns, as discussed in section 5.1.

Examples of OSV words related to marriage include gả 'give a woman in marriage', góa 'widow', chồng 'husband', and vợ 'wife'. Vietnamese vocabulary related to studying are generally Chinese loans (e.g., giấy 'paper', bút 'writing utensil', and tủ 'bookshelf' are OSV, while sách 'book' and học 'study' are SV). Most of the OSV words were borrowed again around the Tang dynasty era, but the OSV forms have remained the winners in the competition for daily use, while the later Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary remained part of the literary language only. Only in the 20th century, with the rise of widespread literacy and the spread of East Asian modern vocabulary (see Sinh 1993), has Chinese taken a more prominent role in the Vietnamese lexicon.

2.2　Function words

Vietnamese function words of Chinese origin consist of two types, (a) those that were grammatical in Chinese and have maintained their Chinese semantic functions and patterns of syntactic distribution, and (b) those that were non-grammatical in Chinese but have been grammaticalized after entering Vietnamese (see sections 5.1 and 5.2 for related discussion). Regardless, most of the Sino-Vietnamese loans have changed both syntactically and semantically, often appearing in bisyllabic words with indigenous Vietnamese forms.

Sino-Vietnamese words that have maintained roughly the same semantic functions and syntactic distribution as in Chinese include some measure words and clause-linking words. In Table 1, underlined portions of the clause-linking words are of Chinese origin while the others are non-Chinese. Mandarin readings of the words of Chinese origin are given for reference. Their status as Chinese words is verifiable through their written form (for each a Chinese character exists) and their phonological correspondences.[9]

Vietnamese	Chinese	English
nhưng mà	réng	'but' (but-but)
tr thành	chéng	'become' (return-become)

tuy rằng	súi	'though' (though-that)
b i vì	wéi/wèi	'because' (by/because)

Table 1: Clause-Linking words of mixed etymological sources

In a list of about 150 classifiers and measure nouns[10] in Vietnamese (from Nguyễn D. H. 1957), about 35 (mostly measure nouns) can be traced to Chinese. The Sino-Vietnamese measure words have kept the original meanings and in some cases are also used as measure words in modern Chinese. However, Sino-Vietnamese classifiers (as opposed to measure words) were generally not originally classifiers in Chinese. For example, the Vietnamese classifier for books is cuốn (Sino-Vietnamese) or quyển (Old Sino-Vietnamese), both words for 'volume/scroll'. So some Sino-Vietnamese measure words were not necessarily borrowed grammaticalized but instead underwent grammaticalization later.

Vietnamese	Chinese	English
bao	bāo	bag
hợp	hé	box
bình	píng	bottle
cuốn	quǎn	(measure for book)

Table 2: Classifier and measure nouns

3   Vietnamese Phonology

This section discusses potential cases of Chinese influence on Vietnamese consonants and tones.[11]   Vietnamese phonology generally matches Southeast Asian areal typological traits. However, Vietnamese has been considered typologically closest to Tai or Chinese languages due to their shared traits, namely tonal systems and so-called monosyllabic word forms. Some Vietnamese linguists in personal communication have suggested that the modern Vietnamese prosodic system is the result of Chinese and/or Tai influence. In fact, based on more recent evidence from Minor Vietic languages (Nguyễn V. L. 1995; Ferlus 1992) as well as historical documents (de Rhodes' dictionary, Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội 1991), Vietnamese has only relatively recently developed a so-called monosyllabic CVC shape, the last stage in a very slow process of presyllabic telescoping. A new proposal is given for the development of tones in Vietnamese, one that requires little interaction with Chinese.

3.1   Vietnamese consonants and syllable structure

Chinese loanwords have provided sufficient quantities of certain phonemes to have possibly encouraged phonological changes in Vietnamese word-

initial segments, namely, telescoping and cluster reduction. However, many of the similarities with Chinese seen in modern Vietnamese are rather recent changes and appear to be the endpoint after several hundred years of mainly language internal processes. There is no indication of language shift towards Chinese and no evidence of extensive bilingualism, and borrowing alone cannot have caused such a great change to the Vietnamese syllable structure.

The Vietnamese consonant system has both marked and unmarked traits in regard to Southeast Asian typology. A common characteristic seen in Southeast Asian languages is a four-way point of articulation distinction (labial, dental, palatal, velar) for both nasals and voiceless stops. This series is reconstructable for Proto-Vietic (Ferlus 1992; Nguyễn T. C. 1995) and is present in modern Vietnamese.[12] Vietnamese consonants are listed in Table 3 with hyphens before and/or after to indicate their distribution in syllables (e.g., [f-] occur only as an initial, [-p] as a final, and [-t-] in both positions).[13] Phonemes in bold-faced boxes may have been influenced by language contact with Chinese. For example, [z�] runs parallel with the Middle Chinese palatalized velar category.

	lab	dent	pal	retr	vel	glot
-v, stop	-p	-t-	-c-	ʈ-	-k-	--
+v, stop	b-	d-	--	--	g-	--
-v, asp	f-	tʰ-	ç-	ʂ-	x-	h-
+v, asp	v-	z-	z̢-	--	--	--
liquids	-w-	l-	-j-	ʈ-	--	--
nasals	-m-	-n-	-ɲ-	--	-ŋ-	--

Table 3: Vietnamese consonants and their phonotactic distribution

The labial category in Vietnamese may have been partially affected by phonological changes in Late Middle Chinese (Pulleyblank 1984), but the issues are complicated by changes in both Chinese and Vietnamese. In Modern Vietnamese, [p] is the only voiceless stop that can not be a syllable onset. This odd distribution is in part the result of the voicing of the earlier Vietnamese *[p] to modern [b] and the spirantization of earlier *[pʰ] to modern [f]. The Late Middle Chinese rise of the *fei/fu/feng* onset categories resulted in the spread of [f] in Chinese which is seen in modern Vietnamese. However, the original Proto-Vietnamese *[pʰ] has lasted in some varieties of Vietnamese into the 20th century, and so the Chinese change during the late Tang dynasty before the end of the 10th century seems like a less immediate source of this typologically unmarked change in Vietnamese.

The retroflex category in Vietnamese, a rather typologically marked feature in Southeast Asia, might appear to be the result of borrowing

numerous Chinese words with retroflex initials. However, this category came relatively late. A Vietnamese-Chinese wordlist from the Ming dynasty shows evidence of consonant clusters, if not complete presyllables (Gaspardone 1953:360; Davidson 1975:305). Initial retroflex consonants in many Vietnamese words not of Chinese origin are the endpoints of consonant cluster reduction, which were in turn former presyllables. Consonant clusters in some Central Vietnamese dialects (corresponding to retroflexes in other dialects) have existed into this century (see Maspero 1912:76). De Rhodes' 17th century dictionary and grammar (Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội 1991) show that Vietnamese already had the retroflex category in both Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese words. However, some entries in de Rhodes' dictionary were shown to have both [tl] and [ʈ], evidence of a change in progress. A complete range of stages of development in Vietic is seen among the languages of the Vietic language group (Alves, forthcoming), from presyllables, to clusters, to single-consonant initials. Telescoping is a natural lenition process that, in Vietnamese, was more of a language internal process resulting from typological tendencies than the direct result of contact solely with Chinese. Other Southeast Asian languages are undergoing similar processes of presyllable reduction and telescoping (e.g., Cham (Đoàn V. P. 1985)).

Though the large number of Chinese loanwords could have participated in these changes among Vietnamese initials, at best, they were assistants in the ongoing process. These changes took place over the past several centuries, after the era of direct Chinese political domination.

3.2   Vietnamese tonogenesis: a new model

Haudricourt's 1954 tonogenesis hypothesis helped to dispel the myth that Vietnamese could only be related to a tonal language, but his hypothesis still had holes (Gage 1985), and the use of a clear versus creaky vowel distinction has been added to the Vietnamese tonogenesis paradigm (Diffloth 1989). More recent data on the tonal systems of highly conservative Minor Vietic languages (Nguyễn V. L. 1988, 1992, 1995; Trần 1990, 1991), coupled with a recent hypothesis for phonetically motivated tonogenesis (Thurgood 1998), leads to the possibility that the Vietnamese tonal system developed through three primary stages, as hypothesized below.

In Stage 1 (Table 4), having separated from some sub-branch of Mon-Khmer, Proto-Vietic may have had some kind difference in vocalic phonation (i.e., clear versus creaky), represented by categories A and B in the initial pre-Proto-Vietic stage. All available data on Vietic languages shows some kind of phonation difference. In some Minor Vietic languages, there is only a clear-creaky difference; sometimes there is both vocalic phonation and tones; and, as in some varieties of Vietnamese and Muong, there are tones with inherent phonation qualities.

A	(Clear vowel)
B	(Creaky)

Table 4: Stage 1 (Pre-Proto-Vietic)

In Stage 2 (Table 5), at the onset of contact with Chinese (about 100 BCE), Proto-Vietic, and/or closely related languages in that region, either still had a simple two-way clear-creaky distinction or had already developed a four-way vocalic register distinction based on clear-breathy and clear-creaky distinctions. The existence of that stage of development did not require contact with tonal languages; instead, it was linked to natural and areal typological processes involving laryngeal features. Again, evidence for this stage is seen in the highly conservative Minor Vietic languages. Languages such as Arem (Nguyễn V. L. 1988), Ruc (Nguyễn V. L. 1988, 1995), and Thavung (Hayes 1984) have either a four-way laryngeal distinction or a complete tonal system marked by contour distinctions rather than just voice quality. It is significant to note that Chinese vocabulary in Ruc shows evidence of Han era loans, but not much of the Tang dynasty loans. This may further suggest that these earlier four-way systems arose without much contact with Chinese.

	1 (clear)	2 (creaky)
A	A1	A2
B	B1	B2

Table 5: Stage 2 (Proto-Vietic)

Eventually, in stage 3 (Table 6), the loss of certain final consonants, specifically fricatives and liquids, in combination with increasing amounts of Chinese loans, which may have provided a tonal phoneme slot, led to the final tonal contour category. That the third category developed last is supported by the Minor Vietic language data since the four tones or phonation combinations in those languages correspond only to the Vietnamese tone categories 1 and 2. Category 3 not only developed later than the other two categories, but a split in pitch height resulting in two tonal phonemes may have come later as well. This notion is supported by the uneven distribution of the two tones in category 3 among dialectal varieties of Vietnamese. Category 3 tones have undergone varying mergers in dialects throughout Vietnam (Maspero 1912:95; Alves 1998a).

	1	2	3
A	A1 (ngang)	A2 (sắc)	A/B
B	B1 (huyền)	B2 (nặng)	hỏi/ngã

Table 6: Stage 3 (Viet-Muong)

To summarize, contact with Chinese may have been a partial catalyst to the last stage of the development of the Vietnamese tonal system. The earlier stages were the result of regional, phonetically conditioned processes.

4   Vietnamese Word-Formation

Modern Vietnamese word-formation processes include compounding and reduplication. Due to presyllabic telescoping, remnants of earlier Mon-Khmer prefixes and infixes can only be seen in some interesting sets of doublets (Ferlus 1977), thereby hiding what was present in Vietnamese and what is present in the Minor Vietic languages (Nguyễn V. L. 1992). Reduplication is an entirely non-Chinese process, while compounding is typologically unmarked and does not require contact with another language to occur. However, massive quantities of 20th century sinitic neologistic compounds that have entered Vietnamese certainly increased the process of compounding in Vietnamese.

4.1   Compounding

Lexical compounding[14] in Vietnamese may involve two native Vietnamese elements, two Chinese elements, or a combination of the two types. Table 7 contains examples of the three possibilities. The morphs of Chinese origin are underlined in the compounds of two sources. REDUP refers to the bound alternating-reduplicant syllable.

Most of the compounds with two Chinese morphs from the latter part of the 19th century up through the 20th century are part of the Pan-East-Asian wave of lexicon that originally spread from Japan (Sinh 1993). Compounding is a typologically unmarked characteristic, so compounding in Vietnamese is not the result of language contact with Chinese. However, the widespread use of bisyllabic compounds has increased massively in Chinese in the 20th century (Tsao 1978), and the same can be said for the Sino-Vietnamese lexicon. The large number of Sino-Vietnamese compounds has, in the 20th century, created patterns of word formation paralleling those in Chinese, as is the case for the examples in Table 8.

Category	Form	Interlinear	Gloss
Viet-Viet	mặt trăng	face-moon	'the moon'
	vui vẻ	happy-REDUP	'joyful'
Chin-Viet	nhưng mà	but-but	'but'
	ngu ngốc	stupid-REDUP	'foolish'
Chin-Chin	khoa học	science-study	'science'
	hòa bình	harmony-peaceful	'peace'
	á châu /châu á	Asia-continent / Continent Asia	'Asia'

Table 7: Vietnamese compounds

Vietnamese	Interlinear	Example	Gloss
-hóa	-change	Âu -hóa	'Europeanize'
-học	study of-	Á Châu -học	'Asian studies'
bất	un-	bất- hợp pháp	'illegal'

Table 8: Sino-Vietnamese affixes

What was discussed showed influence of Chinese on Vietnamese, but this is not always the case. Whereas modifying elements precede nouns in Chinese, they follow them in Vietnamese. This has consequences in Sino-Vietnamese. When two Sino-Vietnamese morphs have obscure meanings or which morph is the semantic head is not clear, the compound tends to be borrowed unanalyzed, and order can not and does not matter, as is the case for 'science' and 'peace' in Table 7. On the other hand, when native Vietnamese speakers recognize the distinct meanings of two morphs in a compound, and those morphs are in the modifier-noun order, variation has occurred over time and in different regions. For example, the word 'Asia' has two orders, the original Chinese modifier-head order (Á Châu (Asia-continent)) and the more recent head-modifier Vietnamese order (Châu Á (continent-Asia)). For both structural and sociolinguistic (typically, political) reasons, analyzed compounds have generally been consciously reordered according to Vietnamese syntax.

4.2   Reduplication

Reduplication in Vietnamese involves both the copying and alternating of phonological material from the same base (e.g., vui vẻ 'fun' shows copying of the initial and alternation of the rhyme and tone, while in lò mò 'grope feverishly', shows alternation of the initial while the rhyme is copied). In Table 7, the word meaning 'foolish' contains a reduplicant. Similar processes are seen in other Mon-Khmer languages (Hoàng V. H. 1987, 1993) and Thai (Maspero 1912:107-108). This common pattern of reduplication in Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian languages is not shared by any variety of Chinese.

5   Vietnamese Syntax

This section deals with grammatical Sino-Vietnamese words and Vietnamese noun phrase structure, both examples of the minimal or complete lack of effect of Chinese. The borrowing of syntactic patterns through language contact typically occurs after absorbing large quantities of lexical items, but also, and more significantly, in a shift situation involving interference (Thomason and Kaufmann 1992:37). Were Vietnamese to have experienced a period of even partial shift, some

differences in syntax should be evident. Overall phrasal structure in Vietnamese and Chinese includes either shared unmarked patterns (e.g., SVO order) or common Southeast Asian typological features (e.g., noun-plus-modifier order) that have nothing to do with Chinese. An example of Chinese-Vietnamese language shift is that of Jing-Yu Vietnamese (Wang L. Q. 1983), spoken for a few hundred years in a small fishing village in Southern Guang Dong, China, a variety of Vietnamese that shows noun phrases with modifiers both before (the Chinese order) and after (the Vietnamese order) the modified noun. No similar patterns have been reported for modern varieties of Vietnamese spoken in Vietnam, suggesting that despite large quantities of Chinese loanwords, Vietnamese syntactic structure has experienced no significant structural changes, as to be expected in a borrowing situation. Instead, Vietnamese has maintained the grammatical status of some Chinese loans or some Sino-Vietnamese words have undergone grammaticalization. Grammaticalized Sino-Vietnamese has taken a life of its own in Vietnamese.

5.1   Grammatical loanwords

Vietnamese grammar has been enriched by grammatical Chinese loanwords, though Vietnamese syntactic structure has not been changed. There are two categories of grammatical words in Vietnamese of Chinese origin: words that have kept the original semantic functions and syntactic distributions, and words that differ semantically and/or syntactically, typically in favor of a Southeast Asian typology. Most of these loanwords fall into the second category, another example of Chinese elements being fit into the Vietnamese linguistic system. Grammatical Sino-Vietnamese categories include clause linking, comparison, negation, passive voice, and socially conditioned terms of address.

There are a few Sino-Vietnamese clause-linking words, mainly Tang dynasty forms. However, they are usually used in compounds in which the other morph is indigenous, as shown in Table 9 where the Chinese form is underlined. The use of compounds reduces ambiguity, which, in addition to linguistic prestige, may have provided impetus to borrow words synonymous with existing ones. Historical lexical studies need to be conducted in the demotic Nôm readings to date these elements' entry into Vietnamese.

Vietnamese	Chinese	English
b i vì	wéi/wèi	'because' (by/because)
nhưng mà	réng	'but' (but-but)
tuy rằng	súi	'though' (though-that)

Table 9: Sino-Vietnamese clause-linking words

Several comparative Vietnamese words are Chinese in origin, but most have meanings and/or functions different from the original forms in Chinese (see Table 10). Both the superlative and comparative syntactic patterns have irregular usage among Mon-Khmer languages,[15] suggesting the possibility that Chinese provided such patterns in Vietnamese. Still, the comparative Vietnamese word hơn 'more than' (originally a verb meaning 'better') is Vietnamese in origin, and the superlative in Vietnamese (nhất 'most') follows stative verbs, whereas in Chinese, the superlative marker precedes them. The syntactic pattern of comparison is also distinctly different from Mandarin Chinese, which uses the pattern 'noun1-bǐ-noun2-stative verb'. With the exception of như 'as', all the other forms differ from the original Chinese meaning and syntactic function/distribution. The Vietnamese pattern is the same as in varieties of Yue Chinese, 'noun^1-stative verb-more than-noun^2'. Detailed diachronic comparisons are needed to consider the timing of the development of these patterns and potential influence or lack thereof.

Negation in Vietnamese, too, has been affected. However, all negation words in Vietnamese of Chinese origin (as in Table 11) have undergone semantic and syntactic shift and grammatical specialization (see Nguyễn P. P.'s 1996 of không 'no'). The alternate readings for these words represent language internal changes at the non-literary level, highlighting the vernacular nature of the forms. The rhymes /iŋ/ and /iɲ/ as well as the initials /c/ and /ʈ/ are natural diachronic variants within Vietnamese.

Vietnamese	Gloss	Sino-Vietnamese	Gloss
quá	'exceedingly'	quá (gùo)	exceed
nhất	'most'	nhất (yī)	'one'
như	'as'	như (rǔ)	'as'
bằng	'equal to'	bằng (píng)	'depend on'

Table 10: Vietnamese comparative words and Chinese origin

Vietnamese	Gloss	Sino-Vietnamese	Gloss
không	no/not	không	void
đừng	don't	đình	stop
chứ	except	trứ	exclude

Table 11: Vietnamese negation words and Sino-Vietnamese source

What is in this paper loosely called 'passive'[16] is marked by a number of auxiliary-like verbs in Vietnamese. The most commonly used forms in

20th century Vietnamese are Chinese in origin, but this is very recent development. Sino-Vietnamese bị had not developed its modern passive function by the time of de Rhodes' 1651 dictionary and grammar (Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội 1991), suggesting that, along with the spread of bèi in Mandarin Chinese (Tsao 1978), this form entered Vietnamese in the 20th century. The word được was more common by the 17th century and was probably spread through spoken language contact since it shares grammatical functions (abilitative verb) with varieties of Yue Chinese. These words share some of the semantic and syntactic characteristics of their Chinese counterparts, in particular the option of agents in the lower clause, but they now have expanded and specialized functions not present in Chinese. Table 12 (taken from Alves 1998b:114) shows the Sino-Vietnamese forms, the Mandarin readings, and glosses.

Sino-Vietnamese			Native Vietnamese	
Viet.	*Chinese*	*Gloss*	*Viet.*	*Gloss*
bị	bèi	adversely affected	phải	to suffer
do	yóu	the result of	mắc	to suffer illness
được	dé	favorably affected	chịu	to suffer/withstand

Table 12: Vietnamese 'Passive' Markers

Benedict (1947) noticed the Chinese origin of many Vietnamese kinship terms, such as chú (younger uncle), bác (older uncle), and ông (grandfather). Having entered Vietnamese, these terms took on a non-Chinese but common Southeast Asian function as socially conditioned pronouns. Each can serve as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person with simultaneous reference to gender and relative age of the speaker and listener (Thompson 1985). The original Vietnamese pronoun system has been largely supplanted by these Sino-Vietnamese socially conditioned pronouns (Alves, forthcoming). In that sense, it may appear that the Chinese kinship system has affected Vietnamese socially conditioned pronouns, and yet, complex hierarchical systems of these 'terms of address' are used in Mon-Khmer hilltribes in Vietnam as well. The highly conservative Minor Vietic language Rục has a mixture of Sino-Vietnamese and non-Sino-Vietnamese terms that put this Chinese influence in the Han era. It was probably during the rise of the Sino-Vietnamese families that these terms were spread. However, when exactly the systems of terms of address seen throughout modern day Southeast Asia were spread is unclear, meaning that we cannot yet know whether Vietnamese had such a system at time of contact with Chinese.

Despite Chinese lexical influence elsewhere in the Vietnamese lexicon, basic Vietnamese numerals are strictly Mon-Khmer.[17] Numbers 'one' through 'ten'[18] can all be traced either to Proto-Mon-Khmer or a subbranch of it. Vietnamese interrogative words are definitely not Chinese, but rather

are probably connected to Mon-Khmer, as seen by patterns of word shapes in referential terms (e.g., deictics). Marking plurality in Vietnamese is a mixed bag, including some indigenous and some Chinese forms. Overall, Vietnamese has borrowed a few Chinese numeric terms for grammatical (e.g., 'each') or formal purposes (e.g., borrowing only the Chinese number 'four', and only ordinal purposes (i.e., 4th, 'Wednesday', 'April').

Vietnamese	Gloss	Probable Source
những	'several'	unknown
mấy	'several/how many'	Mon-Khmer
bao nhiều	'however many/much'	Mon-Khmer
mọi	'every'	Mon-Khmer
mỗi	'each'	Chinese (měi)
các	'several'	Chinese (gè)

Table 13: Vietnamese indefinite numerals

5.2   Vietnamese noun phrase structure

Has Chinese influenced Vietnamese noun phrase structure? Vietnamese quantified NP structure (numeral-measure word-noun, as in Vietnamese ba cuốn sách (three-classifier-book) 'three books') is in contrast with that of many Southeast Asian languages (noun-numeral-classifier), such as Khmer, Thai, and Lao (and many minority languages in Thailand, Cambodia, and parts of Laos), which take numerals and measure words to the right of nouns. The order in Vietnamese quantified noun phrases patterns with that of Chinese languages. However, though it may be possible that Chinese, through the various venues of language contact, may have left its imprint the order of elements, in terms of syntactic structure, Vietnamese (and many minority languages in Vietnam that share this order) is still typologically Southeast Asian. By viewing numerals and measures as noun subtypes, each of which may take a following common count noun as a dependent, Vietnamese is still structurally a right-branching language, despite the apparent superficial ordering difference. In a typical Vietnamese quantified NP, a numeral noun requires a measure word as a dependent, since it cannot take common nouns as immediate dependents. The measure word in turn takes its semantically selected common noun dependent.

    The historical development of measure words, too, suggests a more complicated situation than just borrowing word order. Chinese had only stabilized its current NP word sometime during the Tang dynasty (Peyraube 1995). Vietnam had seceded from China just after then, so influence could have occurred by that time. However, as Nguyễn Đinh Hoà (1957:126) notes, older, literary Vietnamese shows two orders: noun-numeral-classifier

order in addition to the modern standard numeral-classifier-noun order. Thus, older literary Vietnamese is at least partial evidence of competing structures during earlier stages of Vietnamese. However, the 17th century dictionary of de Rhodes (Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội 1991) attests to the modern Vietnamese order.

6   Conclusion

The results of a closer inspection of Vietnamese linguistic structure, its qualities as a Southeast Asian language and as a Mon-Khmer language specifically, the historical stages of Vietnamese, and an understanding of the history of Vietnamese-Chinese language contact all lead to the conclusion that Vietnamese is not so 'Chinese' as previously supposed. The Chinese linguistic legacy is certainly significant and worthy of continued investigation, but the contact was a situation of heavy lexical borrowing. Apparent structural and typological similarities of modern Vietnamese and Chinese tend to be partially conditioned influence at best and are generally the result of numerous language internal and natural typological tendencies rather than change through structural borrowing.

7   Notes

[1] The oversimplified term 'Chinese' refers, in this paper, to the language group to which modern languages, such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, etc., belong, without reference to time periods or dialect/language. A better account of the contact between Vietnamese and Chinese must await studies of different varieties of Chinese and the state of those varieties of Chinese in any particular period of contact with Vietnamese.
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Mark J. Alves
University of Hawaii
malves98@yahoo.com

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