

Continuance and innovation: A study of Chinese character variants in late modern Vietnam's village customs texts

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Abstract

This article explores the reception and creation of Chinese character variants in Vietnam within a small scale of eight hand-written village customs texts in Bắc Ninh province dating from 1889 to 1915. The article focuses on the four following main issues: (a) the continuance and innovation rate of variants in Vietnam; (b) the method of innovation of variant characters; (c) the behavior of the writers regarding variant characters; (d) supplementing 71 unrecorded variants to dictionaries of variant characters and previous studies.

Keywords

Chinese characters, Variant characters, Vietnam, village customs texts

Introduction

The variant character, also known as the *diversified form character* and the *different character*, among others, is understood in many different ways, among which, there are very broad understandings such as:

(1) Diversified form, in a broad sense, refers to the present-day script form in contrast with ancient script forms, such as seal script to bronze script and oracle bone script, clerical script and regular script to seal script, running script and cursive script to regular script, they are all diversified form characters because although they have the same meaning and pronunciation, their forms are not alike (Li, 2006: 72);

or (2) “Our script from the Shang-Zhou ancient writing to seal script, from seal script to clerical script, from clerical script to regular script, every new script could be said to be a *simplified variant* of an older script” (Zhang, 2010: 4); there is also a very narrow understanding, such as: “Diversified form character is a word with different types of structure with completely identical expressed meanings and can replace each other in any situation” (Li, 2006: 72). Some scholars emphasize the *epochality* of variant characters:

The unofficial variant script in a certain period stands in opposition to the official script of that certain period. Shang-Zhou had its own unofficial variants, Qin-Han had its own unofficial variants, the early modern period also had its own unofficial variants. (Zhang 2000: 1-2)

There are other scholars with the view that Chinese character variants in Vietnam include the Nôm script:

If the continuance of character variants reflects the reception and acceptance of the Chinese script by Vietnamese people then the diversification of variants has shown that to write the vernacular better, Vietnamese people have donated to Chinese people a new perception. Therefore, the study of the diversification of character variants may increase our understanding of the Vietnamese language. (He and Liu, 2017: 184)

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Many people have already studied Chinese variant characters in Vietnam, among whom He Huazhen – one of the leading experts – co-authored an elaborate work on this issue (He and Liu, 2017). In that article, the authors devote more than a dozen pages (He and Liu, 2017: 172–183) to producing statistics of character variants in Vietnam that they have collected. Besides identifying official and unofficial characters according to the website <http://dict.variants.moe.edu.tw/variants/rbt/home.do>, I also consider the collection of Chinese character variants in Vietnam by Prof. He Huazhen, an important source to determine the unrecognized variants in the scholarship, thereby adding new variants to the repertoire of Chinese character variants in the [Sinitic cultural sphere/Sinosphere].

By comparing to *Jiaoyubu Yitizi zidian*, I found in the 272 variants mentioned above 73 forms that have never been recorded in the dictionaries and were most likely to be unique variants forms of Vietnam. However, it is a situation that, as one of the leading experts in character variants says: “assessing what are character variants in Chinese history and what are *anomalous variants* of Chinese characters in foreign countries is extremely difficult and risky” (He and Liu, 2017: 184). Nonetheless, I still provisionally rely on a method of exclusion based on references of existing tools and documents to consider those character forms provisionally to exist only in Vietnam in order to understand the methods of innovation of Chinese variants in Vietnam. If in the future any of the characters is shown by experts to be a direct continuance from China, it will be my good fortune to receive corrective guidance in my research and learning process.

As mentioned above, through the statistics of character variants from the eight village customs texts, I collected 163 words appearing in variant form, including 272 forms, with the total occurrences of the forms numbering 950. Among these, 73 forms have never appeared in <http://dict.variants.moe.edu.tw> or previous statistics (He and Liu, 2017). From the number of variants (inherited and unique) according to the above statistics, some preliminary conclusions could be drawn as follows.

Some preliminary conclusions from classificatory statistics.

Firstly, the average number of variants per page: the eight village customs texts that I analyzed total 187 pages, counting randomly the first text is 13 pages, with 1424 words (excluding the interlinear notes that are too small and hard to read), dividing the number of words by the number of pages of the first village customs texts, gives an average of 109 words per page. So, the approximate number of words of 187 pages of village customs texts would be: 187 pages × 109 words = 20,383 words.

As mentioned above, there are 950 character variants appearing in the documents, so the average rate of variants in the village customs texts would be: $950/20,383 = 4.66\%$; an average of 950 (words):187 (pages) = 5.08 (variants per page).

Secondly, the ratio between inherited and innovated variants: in terms of the ratio between the continuance and the innovation of character variants, although there are fewer innovated variants than inherited variants, the rate is quite significant: 272/71, equivalent to for every 3.83 inherited variants there is 1 innovated variant. Thus, in addition to adapting Chinese characters and their variants from China, Vietnamese people have also created quite a number of variants.

Comparing the ratio of variants/document page and the ratio of inherited variant/mutated variants from the village customs texts of Nội Viên canton, Tiên Du district, and Bắc Ninh province (late 19th–early 20th centuries) with village customs texts from other provinces in both diachronic and synchronic approaches may yield interesting information about the history of acquiring and creating Chinese character variants in Vietnam. However, in this article, I have not had the opportunity to implement that idea, and will have to put it on hold for another future occasion.

Methods of innovating character variants

The method of innovating Han script variants is a subject that has been analyzed by many experts and, therefore, in this article, I only explore the innovated variants from Vietnam gathered from the eight above-mentioned village customs texts. As can be seen, the methods of innovation include the three following forms: ①. simplifying; ②. keeping the number of strokes but changing the *piānpáng* 偏旁 [structural components] or the *fúhào* 符號 [symbols]; ③. complexifying.

Simplifying

This method has 2 types: ①. reducing the number of strokes or ②. the number of strokes remains the same but reducing the length of the strokes.

Firstly, on reducing the number of strokes: this method is implemented by removing one or several strokes of the character or replacing the existed radical with another *piānpáng/fúhào* for fewer strokes. This type has 62 character forms, including those shown in Table 1.

Secondly, on reducing the length of the strokes, this case has two forms, as shown in Table 2.

At first, I thought that they were not deliberately created variants but are merely formed by the randomness of the stroke length while writing, but because these forms have a high number of occurrences (𠂇 nine times; 𠂆 three times) and are consistent in form, so I speculate that it is most likely an intentional innovation.

The number of strokes remains unchanged – replacing *piānpáng* or *fúhào* for greater ease in writing. This case has two forms, as shown in Table 3.

Although this type does not have many character forms, it could be seen that to write the variants this way is more convenient and minimizes the time to write.

Table 1. Character variants created with the method of reducing strokes.

No.	Official characters	Pinyin	Unofficial character variants	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences	Document
1	畢	bì		3b/6/2t-d ²	1	<5>
2	弁	biàn		1a/5/3t-d	1	<7>
3	嘗	cháng		6a/4/3t-d	1	<4>
4				4a/3/7b-u ³	1	<4>
5	齒	chǐ		4a/5/11t-d	1	<4>
6				3a/4/3t-d	1	<1>
7	遞	dì		4b/1/12b-u	4	<4>
8				9a/4/1b-u	1	<4>
9	貳	èr		1b/7/7b-u	1	<1>
10	廢	fèi		3a/1/2b-u	1	<6>
11				6a/1/1t-d	1	<7>
12	護	hù		8b/6/5b-u	1	<7>
13	嘩	huā		9b/6/13t-d	1	<4>
14	華	huá		4a/1/2b-u	1	<6>
15				7b/1/4t-d	3	<3>
16	還	huán		4b/8/8b-u	2	<4>
17				4b/7/11t-d	1	<1>
18	獲	huò		4a/3/1t-d	1	<7>
19				5a/2/5t-d	1	<3>
20				9a/3/9b-u	3	<3>
21	舊	jiù		1a/5/6t-d	3	<5>
22				1a/1/1b-u	6	<6>
23				1a/2/3t-d	1	<7>

No.	Official characters	Pinyin	Unofficial character variants	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences	Document
24	拘	jū		11b/6/9t-d	1	<4>
25				3a/5/1t-d	1	<1>
26	舉	jǔ		6a/6/8b-u	1	<3>
27				6a/1/3b-u	1	<7>
28	覺	jué		6b/2/5b-u	1	<5>
29	攔	lán		6b/3/6t-d	2	<6>
30	遴	lín		2b/5/10t-d	1	<5>
31	瀘	lú		4b/5/7t-d	2	<5>
32	率	lǜ		7a/6/7b-u	1	<3>
33	麥	mài		7a/2/12b-u	1	<2>
34				14b/1/13t-d	2	<6>
35	滿	mǎn		3b/3/4t-d	1	<8>
36	每	měi		11b/5/11b-u	1	<4>
37	畝	mǔ		8b/2/3t-d	1	<4>
38	擬	nǐ		4b/4/12t-d	1	<8>
39				3b/6/1b-u	12	<3>
40				7b/4/11b-u	1	<3>
41	錢	qián		2b/6/8t-d	1	<4>
42				4a/7/9t-d	30	<6>
43	讓	ràng		5a/1/12t-d	1	<5>

No.	Official characters	Pinyin	Unofficial character variants	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences	Document
44				6a/8/9b-u	6	<4>
45				8a/3/1t-d	3	<4>
46				8b/7/5t-d	3	<4>
47	參	sān		9b/2/2b-u	5	<4>
48				9b/7/9b-u	3	<4>
49				1b/3/13t-d	6	<5>
50				4a/5/13t-d	2	<5>
51	數	shù		4a/1/10t-d	1	<2>
52				4b/4/1t-d	5	<7>
53	歲	sui		5a/6/2t-d	3	<7>
54	庭	tíng		12b/7/2b-u	1	<4>
55	違	wéi		2b/1/3t-d	1	<4>
56	寫	xiě		3b/6/11b-u	9	<6>
57	欲	yù		5a/8/1t-d	1	<8>
58	原	yuán		4b/8/10t-d	1	<8>
59				5b/4/5b-u	2	<2>
60	贓	zāng		4b/5/14t-d	2	<5>
61	齋	zhāi		2a/5/5t-d	2	<3>
62	整	zhěng		3a/6/7t-d	13	<4>

Table 2. Variants created by the method of reducing the length of the strokes.

No.	Official characters	Pinyin	Unofficial character variants	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences	Document
1	芙	fú		6b/5/8b-u	9	<2>
2	干	gān		4b/2/6t-d	3	<2>

Table 3. Variants created by the method of replacing *piānpáng* or *fúhào* to write more conveniently.

No.	Official characters	Pinyin	Unofficial character variants	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences	Document
1	耕	gēng	𠩺	3a/1/4t-d	4	<7>
2	執	zhí	執	3a/8/4b-u	2	<3>

Table 4. Variants created by the method of complexifying.

No.	Official characters	Pinyin	Unofficial character variants	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences	Document
1	嘗	cháng	嘗	3b/3/12t-d	1	<5>
2	函	hán	函	1b/8/8b-u	2	<6>
3	沒	méi	沒	4b/8/7t-d	1	<8>
4	鄉	xiāng	鄉	1a/1/5b-u	49	<7>
5	巡	xún	巡	2a/2/6t-d	35	<3>

Complexifying

Showing the same situation of continuance and innovation of variants in other countries, in Vietnam, besides the simplified variants accounting for the majority of cases, there are also complexified variants. This type includes the five forms shown in Table 4.

In the five forms shown in Table 4, I suppose the reason is that 𠩺 (in xún 巡 – 𠩺) is reinterpreted as three 人s and then as 众, just as in the case of the taboo characters (避諱字, *chǔ hù*), which contain 从, that becomes 𠩺 in the later periods.

The behavior of writers regarding the variants

Aside from unconscious habits, using unofficial variants instead of official characters is mainly intended to save time in writing. Does a person only use unofficial variants while writing, or also use official characters in addition to the variants? What is the frequency of using official characters and unofficial variants? I should think that looking into these matters is an interesting task because it could tell us something about the behavior of the writers regarding the character variants. According to my statistics, out of the eight village customs texts, only text <1> does not show the phenomenon of using both official characters and unofficial variants for one word. The remaining seven documents all have this phenomenon on different levels.

Document <2> has two cases, 錢, 貳, as shown in Table 5.

All of the cases of official characters and unofficial variants mentioned here refer to an amount of money, which means the context and properties of the words/characters are the same, but 貳 is written once in official character form and 22 times in unofficial variant form; 錢 is written in official character form 26 times and in two unofficial forms, 𠩺 and 𠩺, two and four times, respectively. It could be seen that to use the official character or unofficial variant is not decided by the context but, similar to the case of using Chinese characters in the village customs texts written in Nôm script that I have previously studied (Đào, 2017), it is highly improvisational.

Regarding the rate of writing official characters and unofficial variants, it is just as random. By the same writer, the ways to use the number of official and unofficial characters for the words are not the same: 錢 is written mainly in the form of the official character (the ratio between official and unofficial characters is 81.25% versus 18.75%), while 貳 is written mainly in the form of unofficial character (the ratio between official and unofficial is 4.35% versus 95.65%).

Document <3> has five cases, 壹, 錢, 率, 免, 文, as shown in Table 6.

Table 5. Variants written in both official characters and unofficial variants in <2>.

No.	Picture of the variant	Pinyin	The number of variant character forms used	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences of character form	Ratio (%)
1	 *	èr	1 form	2b/1/2t-d	1	4.35%
				2b/2/4t-d	22	95.65%
	 *			1b/5/11b-u	26	81.25%
2		qián	2 forms	2a/5/1b-u	2	6.25%
				2b/8/5t-d	4	12.5%

Table 6. Words written in both official and unofficial characters in <3>.

No.	Picture of the variant	Pinyin	The number of variant character forms used	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences of character form	Ratio (%)
1	 *	lǜ	1 form	5a/1/4b-u	1	50%
				7a/6/7b-u	1	50%
2	 *	miǎn	1 form	8a/2/14b-u	2	33.33%
				7b/3/1t-d	4	66.67%
	 *			1b/6/9t-d	15	53.57%
3		qián	2 forms	2a/1/10t-d	1	3.57%
				3b/6/1b-u	12	42.86%
	 *			6a/6/4cl	12	66.67%
4		yì	2 forms	5b/8/7t-d	4	22.22%
				7a/2/6t-d	2	11.11%
	 *			9b/2/5t-d	2	50%
5		wén	1 form	7b/3/11t-d	2	50%

As in <2>, all the cases of official and unofficial characters mentioned herein are used with the same meaning and, therefore, writing in official or unofficial character forms is completely unaffected by the context. The following cases from here all share the same characteristics, so I will not mention it again.

The ratio between official and unofficial characters is as shown in Table 7.

Of the five words written in both official and unofficial character form in <3>, two words are written in official form more times than in unofficial form (壹, 錢), two words are written in the same ratio of official and unofficial forms (率, 文) and one word has a lower ratio of the official character form (免).

Table 7. Ratio between official and unofficial characters in Table 6.

No.	Picture of the word	The number of occurrences of the character form	Ratio (%)	
			Official form	Unofficial form
1	率*	1	50%	50%
	率	1		
2	免*	2	33.33%	66.67%
	免	4		
3	錢*	15	53.57%	46.43%
	錢	1		
	錢	12		
4	壹*	12	66.67%	33.33%
	壹	4		
	壹	2		
5	文*	2	50%	50%
	文	2		

Document <4> has six cases, 免, 嘗, 本, 鄭, 壹, 錢, as shown in Table 8.

The ratio between official and unofficial forms of words is shown in Table 9.

Of the six words written in both official and unofficial character form in <4>, two words have a higher ratio of official variants (本, 壹), one word is written in the same ratio of official and unofficial forms (鄭), and three words have a lower ratio of the official character form (免, 嘗, 錢).

Document <5> has one case, 畢, as shown in Table 10.

The ratio between official and unofficial character forms of the only case of a word that is written in both forms in this text in 50% versus 50%.

Document <6> has four cases, 充, 留, 錢, 高, as shown in Table 11.

The ratio between official and unofficial forms of words is shown in Table 12.

Of the four words written in both official and unofficial character form in <6>, there is one word that shows a higher ratio of the official form (留); the remaining three show a lower ratio of the official form (充, 錢, 高).

Document <7> has five cases, 處, 總, 儀, 鄉, 僂, as shown in Table 13.

The ratio between official and unofficial forms of words is shown in Table 14.

Of the five words written in both official and unofficial character forms in <7>, three words have the same ratio of unofficial and official forms (總, 儀, 僂); the remaining two have a lower ratio of the official form (處, 鄉).

Document <8> has four cases, 擬, 得, 娶, 原, as shown in Table 15.

The ratio between official and unofficial forms of words is shown in Table 16.

Of the four words written in both official and unofficial forms in <8>, two words have a higher ratio of the official form (擬, 娶), one word has the same ratio (原), and one word has a lower ratio of the official form (得).

Table 8. Words written in both official and unofficial character forms in <4>.

No.	Picture of the variant	Pinyin	The number of variant character forms used	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences of character form	Ratio (%)
1	本*	běn	1 form	7b/7/9b-u	7	87.50%
	本			7b/5/8b-u	1	12.50%
	嘗*			11b/7/10b-u	1	16.67%
	嘗			6a/2/11b-u	1	16.67%
2	嘗	cháng	4 forms	6a/2/2b-u	1	16.67%
	嘗			6a/4/3t-d	2	33.33%
	嘗			9b/7/3t-d	1	16.67%
	嘗			1b/8/3b-u	1	8.33%
3	免*	miǎn	1 form	2a/3/7b-u	11	91.67%
	免			9a/7/12t-d	1	4.35%
	錢*			2a/8/5b-u	21	91.30%
4	錢	qián	2 forms	2b/6/8t-d	1	4.35%
	錢			1a/8/8b-u	61	70.11%
	壹*			7a/6/1b-u	24	27.59%
5	壹	yì	2 forms	9a/2/13b-u	2	2.29%
	壹			12b/6/3t-d	1	50%
	鄭*			zhèng	1 form	12a/1/4cl
鄭						

I have shown above the situation of using both official and unofficial forms of the same word in the same text (by a writer). As shown in Tables 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 15, a character variant could be written by one writer in from one to four forms. The details are as follows:

- one form: 19 cases 貳 (<2>); 率 (<3>); 免 (<3>, <4>); 文 (<3>); 本 (<4>); 鄭 (<4>); 畢 (<5>); 充 (<6>); 留 (<6>); 高 (<6>); 處 (<7>); 總 (<7>); 儀 (<7>); 鄉 (<7>); 僊 (<7>); 擬 (<8>); 娶 (<8>); 原 (<8>);

- two forms: seven cases 錢 (<2>, <3>, <4>, <6>); 壹 (<3>, <4>); 得 (<8>);

- four forms: one case 嘗 (<4>).

From the phenomenon of a writer using both the official character or unofficial variant of a word without any context rules, as the rate of using official and unofficial character forms is not consistent (sometimes prioritizing the official characters, sometimes prioritizing the unofficial variants) according to the statistics above and a writer can use a variety

Table 9. Ratio between official and unofficial characters in Table 8.

No.	Picture of the word	The number of occurrences of the character form	Ratio (%)	
			Official form	Unofficial form
1	本*	7	87.50%	12.50%
	本	1		
	本*	1		
2	管	1	16.67%	83.33%
	管	1		
	管	1		
	管	2		
	管	1		
3	免*	1	8.33%	91.67%
	免	11		
	免*	1		
4	钱	21	4.35%	95.65%
	钱	1		
	壹*	61		
5	壹	24	70.11%	29.89%
	壹	2		
	郑*	1		
6	郑	1	50%	50%
	郑	1		

Table 10. Words written in both official and unofficial character forms in <5>.

No.	Picture of the variant	Pinyin	The number of variant character forms used	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences of character form	Ratio (%)
1	半*	Bì	1 form	3b/8/10b-u	1	50%
	半			3b/6/2t-d	1	50%

Table 11. Words written in both official and unofficial character forms in <6>.

No.	Picture of the variant	Pinyin	The number of variant character forms used	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences of character form	Ratio (%)
1		chōng	1 form	7b/8/4t-d	2	12.50%
				1b/7/6t-d	14	87.50%
2		gāo	1 form	11b/5/1b-u	2	40%
				11b/4/3b-u	3	60%
3		liú	1 form	6b/3/1t-d	5	55.56%
				3a/2/13t-d	4	44.44%
4		qián	2 forms	1b/7/2t-d	6	15%
				2a/2/1t-d	4	10%
				4a/7/9t-d	30	75%

Table 12. Ratio between official and unofficial characters in Table 11.

No.	Picture of the word	The number of occurrences of the character form	Ratio (%)	
			Official form	Unofficial form
1		2		
		14	12.50%	87.50%
2		2		
		3	40%	60%
3		5		
		4	55.56%	44.44%
4		6		
		4	15%	85%
		30		

Table 13. Words written in both official and unofficial character forms in <7>.

No.	Picture of the variant	Pinyin	The number of variant character forms used	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences of character form	Ratio (%)
1	 *	chù	1 form	8b/4/1t-d	1	33.33%
				4b/5/9b-u	2	66.67%
2	 *	zǒng	1 form	1a/1/12b-u	1	50%
				Cover	1	50%
3	 *	yí	1 form	Cover	2	50%
				1a/1/11b-u	2	50%
4	 *	xiāng	1 form	10b/7/7b-u	2	3.92%
				1a/1/5b-u	49	96.08%
5	 *	xiān	1 form	1a/1/7t-d	1	50%
				Bia	1	50%

Table 14. Ratio between official and unofficial characters in Table 13.

No.	Picture of the word	The number of occurrences of the character form	Ratio (%)	
			Official form	Unofficial form
1	 *	1	33.33%	66.67%
		2		
2	 *	1	50%	50%
		1		
3	 *	2	50%	50%
		2		
4	 *	2	3.92%	96.08%
		49		
5	 *	1	50%	50%
		1		

Table 15. Words written in both official and unofficial character forms in <8>.

No.	Picture of the variant	Pinyin	The number of variant character forms used	Location of the variant (page/line/position)	Number of occurrences of character form	Ratio (%)
1	 *	dé	2 forms	3b/3/6b-u	3	27.27%
				2a/2/1t-d	3	27.27%
				2a/4/9t-d	5	45.45%
2	 *	nǐ	1 form	6b/5/5/b-u	2	66.67%
				4b/4/12t-d	1	33.33%
3	 *	qǔ	1 form	5b/6/9t-d	3	75%
				2b/8/6t-d	1	25%
4	 *	yuán	2 forms	4b/4/9t-d	1	50%
				4b/8/10t-d	1	50%

Table 16. Ratio between official and unofficial characters in Table 15.

No.	Picture of the word	The number of occurrences of the character form	Ratio (%)	
			Official form	Unofficial form
1	 *	3		
		3	27.27%	72.73%
		5		
2	 *	2		
		1	66.67%	33.33%
3	 *	3		
		1	75%	25%
4	 *	1		
		1	50%	50%

of variants of one word, the arbitrary nature of the writer can be clearly seen. This spontaneity is most evident in the case of the letter 壹 in <4>: although it appears only in the text with a single meaning of “[number] one”, from pages 1a to 6b, the writer wrote this word in the official character form (壹); From page 7a onwards, it is written wholly in the unofficial variant form (壹); in page 9a, he returned to the official character form (line 7, fifth letter top-down); immediately after that word, right in the same line (ninth letter top-down), he again wrote the word in unofficial variant form (壹); and then from then to the end of the text, again in the official character form, with the total number of occurrences of the word forms 壹, 壹, and 壹 numbering 61, 24 and two times, respectively.

Addition of some variants that have never appeared in dictionaries of character variants or previous studies

As mentioned above, in the eight analyzed village customs texts, I counted 163 words that have variants (with 272 forms), among which there are 71 forms that can be considered not to have appeared in dictionaries or any studies according to the current data. These are the following forms:

畢(1 character form): 畢 弁(1): 弁 參(7): 參 參 參 參 參 參 參
 嘗(2): 嘗 嘗 齒(2): 齒 齒 遞(3): 遞 遞 遞 貳(1): 貳
 贓(2): 贓 贓 廢(1): 廢 芙(1): 芙 干(1): 干 耕(1): 耕
 拘(1): 拘 函(1): 函 嘩(1): 嘩 華(1): 華 獲(2): 獲 獲
 舊(5): 舊 舊 舊 舊 舊 覺(1): 覺 護(2): 護 護 還(2): 還 還
 舉(3): 舉 舉 舉 攔(1): 攔 遴(1): 遴 瀘(1): 瀘 率(1): 率
 麥(1): 麥 滿(2): 滿 滿 沒(1): 沒 每(1): 每 畝(1): 畝
 擬(1): 擬 錢(4): 錢 錢 錢 錢 讓(1): 讓 數(1): 數
 歲(2): 歲 歲 庭(1): 庭 違(1): 違 鄉(1): 鄉 寫(1): 寫
 巡(1): 巡 欲(1): 欲 原(1): 原 齋(1): 齋 整(1): 整 執(1): 執

Conclusions

This article explores the continuance and innovation of Chinese character variants in Vietnam within a small scale of eight hand-written village customs texts of Nội Viên canton, Tiên Du district, and Bắc Ninh province, dating from 1889 to 1915. The research results show that the majority of the variants are already Chinese characters in China, meaning that the reception ratio is higher than the creation rate. To create variants, there are three main methods: simplifying, complexifying, and keeping the number of strokes but changing the order for ease of writing. The way of writing variants also shows that the writers valued improvisation over strict normative rules. Lastly, this article adds 73 variants yet to be recognized in the history of Chinese character variants.

Notes

1. The words analyzed in this article are sorted alphabetically by pinyin transcription.
2. “t-d” means top-down.
3. “b-u” means bottom-up.
4. Words with the (*) mark are words written in official character form.

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