

mắt cá: FROM "FISHES' EYES" TO "ANKLEBONES":
A VIETNAMESE CALQUE?

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'mắt cá là cái gì¹ (nôm= 相筋界何故): "what are fishes' eyes?", asks Vietnamese (VN). The earliest record so far discovered in answer is Alexandre de Rhodes' *Dictionarium* entry (1651:456): 'mắt cá: artelho do pè: talus, i.', in which the Latin talus means 'ankle, anklebone'. Legrand de la Liraye (1874:150b) translates it as 'cheville du pied', Taberd (1877:271a) as 'Occulus piscis; malleoli', while Ravier (1880:706a) notes 'malleolus #4. mắt cá (nơi chân tay)' (=place of the feet/legs 跖 and hands/arms 肘). Của (1897:86b) describes it as 'fleshed bone swelling out on both sides of the foot at the point where it joins the leg'; Trữ Dục (1898:q.3, 3a4, p.51 = p.216, l.19) uses it cryptically to translate the Chinese character 踝 huà 'ankle' (>'anklebone'), huái in Modern Standard Chinese (=putong huà/MSC). Again, Bonet (1899:407a) records it as 'cheville du pied; litt. oeil de poisson', Huê (1937:555a, 2) repeating it as 'cheville du pied, cor, chevillon', while Trữ (1960:299b) defines it as 'heads of bones jutting out at the neck of legs (=ankle) (qv. Trữ 1970:II, 894a) and the Hội Khai Trí (1968:337b) tells us that it is 'the head of a bone budding out near the neck of the leg' (=i.e. the ankle), hence 'the anklebone'.²

This seems to be highly figurative language,³ a descriptive pun (qqv. Emeneau 1947; Hoà 1955; Davidson 1978:37ff., 1986a:354, n.37), for to find a fish's eye, probably rather dead in appearance, looking up at you from the *anklebone* of a person's leg, bulging out⁴ dull, then whitish as it stretches from where it peaks to the darker skin surrounding it on legs that have travailled in fields of paddy, sea-salt, or whatever else, in a Vietnamese-style climate, will certainly provide yet another superb and humorous expression of the impression intended, since the Vietnamese have long associated their vital environment with all the other natural symbolism that they envisage (e.g. Davidson 1978).

Such visual association (qv. n.3),⁵ is frequently complemented by word-play afforded by the opportunities of homophony. An encounter is the Modern Mon (MM) /mốt coin/ 'anklebone' (lit. 'eye of the elephant'; Shorto 1962:170b mốt coin; ref. p.96b coin¹ 'elephant'), while in inscriptional language one finds cin²/cin/ n.'elephant' (Shorto 1971:98) and juñ/juñ/ 'lower limb' (*ibid.*, 125), where a mat²/mót/ n.'eye' (*ibid.*, 285) plus juñ would have provided us with the expected

Mon-Khmer (MK) and Malayo-Polynesian (MP) 'eye of the leg' for an 'anklebone'.⁶ This 'confusion' may well have stemmed from, or led to, folk-etymology and folk taxonomy -- an investigation lying in wait -- but it further emphasizes the point already made of the desire for the use of figurative language and especially for descriptive punning.

Parts of the body are, however, often not identified with any precision in basic and vernacular Vietnamese language, that is, language which excludes or may not include the use of the specific, pointed Hán-Việt (HV) vocabulary found in the literary language of the educated élite, and which is also 'pre-modern', that is, prior to the introduction of western, scientific and other specialist vocabulary.⁷ A general area of the body may be referred to, but not a specific part of it, by a single, special word. So, chân (var. chơn, chũn) stands broadly for both 'leg' and 'foot', tay for 'arm' and 'hand', while together chân tay means 'limbs'.⁸ When an anatomical feature does captivate attention and is accorded a specific term, structural or functional perception of it is a common reason for the formation of the word or words describing it. So, many South-East Asian languages have captured in their vocabularies' imagination the concept of the *ankle* or *wrist* as the 'neck' of the leg or arm and the *anklebone* as the "eye" of the leg/foot' even though in actuality it is not a part of the ankle itself but a swelling out on both sides of the lower end of the two leg bones (tibia and fibula) at the point at which they articulate with the tarsal bones (qv. Cúa 1987:86b).

Naturally, words for 'hands' and 'arms', 'feet' and 'legs' may well have changed in the language families that inhabit South-East Asia, China, South Asia, Oceania and other related areas as their languages developed from the early through to the modern forms, but the phonetic similarity is even now often noticeable. The same is also evident for the words for the 'eye'⁹ (e.g. Shorto 1971:285, i.a.) since one finds links between the Sino-Tibetan, Sino-Tai, Austroasiatic and Austro-nesian forms in both their phonetics and the semantic functions¹⁰ performed. So, as in Vietnamese we have an 'arm' tay, its 'neck' cổ tay 肘 becomes immediately recognizable as the 'wrist' cổ tay, as does the leg's 'neck' become an 'ankle' cổ chân 踝 (e.g. Gouin 1957:181b). Other examples are numerous (qv. n.8 below) but, especially when we find the 'board, table' (bàn 桌 cf. ván 'plank' 板)¹² helping to structure a 'hand' bàn tay or 'foot' bàn chân,¹³ why do we not 'eye' the 'leg' (*mắt chân) to make an 'anklebone'? After all, we have already met the partially successful Modern Mon attempt of một coin and the Malay mata kaki. Bahnar provides us with mắt jông 'cheville du pied' (Dourisbourné 1899:203; cf. Katu maniet, maniit, identified as mắt cá in the Vietnamese equivalents but translated as 'ankle' in the English (Costello 1971:27, 30) and probably from ma 'eye', cf. katam (loc.cit.)), while Sedang gives us ma cheang 'ankle' (lit. 'eye

of the leg/foot') and ma kóng 'wrist' (Smith 1962:15-16) and we can note *en passant* the Chrau jāng 'leg, foot' (Thomas 1966:24),¹⁴ unfortunately with no further relevant data. Going south in present-day Vietnamese territory, we discover more support from the Cham mōtā takai (cf. takan takay, Moussay 1971:379b 'cheville du pied'; cf. *ibid.*, 224 mūta le 'cheville') with the other common uses of the 'eye/face' word as 'node, joint', etc. The same occurs in Nicobarese (Roepsforff 1884:78, 122, 149, mathōu, --okloaka-la; --olmat, etc.; cf. Man 1898-9:6, 178a).

This Vietnamese 'neck' cổ of the 'arm' or 'leg', joining them to 'hands' or 'feet', finds many other Mon-Khmer language equivalents, two directly apparent examples being Modern Khmer kɔː day 'wrist', kɔː cvin 'ankle' (Jacob 1971:1) and Modern Mon kɔʔcān 'ankle', kɔʔ toa 'wrist' (Shorto 1962:53a).¹⁵ Of immediate interest, therefore, and suggestively cognate is the Lao khôː thào 'ankle' (lit. joint of the foot) (Kerr 1972:129b; cf. *ibid.*, 118b khāː;) which is supported by the Modern Standard Thai (MST) khō̌ thāw 'ankle; lit. joint of the foot' (not 'leg', khāw, (n.b. Li 1977:213, §10.6.29 among other entries, e.g. §2.23, 14.11.4, etc.) -- with a secondary vernacular taa tūm (thāw) 'eye of the node (of the foot)' > 'anklebone'. Thus, the possibility of 'link' cognates -- joint-neck-tibia-shin -- keeps springing to mind. Indeed, there is an impression of 'joining, uniting, linking' and of 'reaching, attaining, going to' (see GSR 675a-d 合; e. 合 *gəp/yəp/ho [=MSC hé]) encouraged by the nôm character for 'neck' 骨, which one also finds as Hán-Việt, and in the MSC compound kūlōu ~ 髑 'skeleton', (= khô lâu; cf. MSC gǔgǔ *ibid.* '骨髑' =HV cốt cách). Additionally, there is the Vietnamese word for 'joint; physical articulation' khớp 帖 (>'bone-joint' = ~ xuống), which strongly suggests a relation between it and the Vietnamese hợp 合 'unite, etc.', joining things together.

Reverting in this context to a possibly pre-sinitic word (or a very early Chinese loan?) preserved in present-day Chinese territory, one finds 散 MSC jiāo (GSR 1166p *k'og/k'au/k'iao 胶 'tibia'; =?HV giao); its variant character 骹 used for 'joint' and presented in Ningpo dialect as gao (Morrison 1876:20b), ngau in Swatow (Gibson 1886:107c; cf. VN ngau hợp 'join again' =?Tie-chiu/Hokkien) and its parallel 脛 MSC jìng e.g. jìnggǔ 脛骨 'shinbone' (>'tibia'; (cf. GSR 831k. *g'ìeng/yieng-/hìng 'leg, shank (Lunyü)'), as well as the two pronunciations for 'neck' 頸 MSC gěng/jǐng (GSR 831n. *kiēng/kiāng:/king, and *g'ìeng/g'ìang/k'ing...(Tso)), all of which are related, at least phonetically. Hence the pronunciations for the word for 'neck' in Vietnamese cổ, the Thai khô̌, Lao khôː, a large number of Mon-Khmer languages (qv. Shorto 1971:52), and Archaic Chinese *k'og (GSR 1166p), thrust cognacy before us.¹⁶ The image of an articulated (=joint), tube-like connection of varying lengths between the torso and its ending appendages does, of course, bring the possible linked, root-origins of such words together, while the closeness in pronunciation of the 'leg' word

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in a range of South Eastern Chinese dialects (qv. Bauer 1987), e.g. khá, keùk (=HV cước, also read khước, giving rise to gốc 'base, foot (of a tree)' [nôm 拾] (Trụ 1960:46a)) reconstructed as Archaic Chinese *kiak (GSR 776g-h), forcefully implies a pre-sinitic origin of the word that ends up as the Chinese character 脚/脚 (MSC jué, jiǎo).

But here the Vietnamese mắt cá 'anklebone' remains distinctly in the forefront of one's mind. If the *base* word chân 'leg, foot' which qualified other associated ideas giving us words like 'ankle', 'foot', 'toe', 'toenail', 'heel', etc., (qv. n.8 below) fulfils its purpose, then why does an 'anklebone' suddenly turn from the "eye" of the leg into a 'fish's eye'? Naturally, in a Vietnamese language situation such as this, one looks to the Chinese reservoir of vocabulary for help in solving the problem. In Archaic and in Ancient Chinese one does not find the 'anklebone' separately listed, one finds the 'ankle' 踝 (GSR 351j. *g'lwār/ɣwā:/hua ankle (Li) = MSC huà, huái), the Hán-Việt reading for which is hóa (Thiếu Châu 1966: 660a)¹⁷ but which is intriguingly identified as an 'anklebone' (*ibid.*), and clearly recorded as such in the Từ Điển (1898:q.3, 3a4=p.51 踝 脚新 =p.226, 1.29 as : 'khôa mắt cá') while the MSC gives us huái for 'ankle' and huàizigū 踝子骨 for 'anklebone' (cf. i.a. MacLay 1929: 1090 kua-gauk 踝骨. Other HV 'pedal' terms flourish too. Meanwhile, the MSC 'ankle' occurs as jiǎoyǎngú 脚眼骨 (var. jiǎohuái, juéyǎn) while the Ningpo kyiáh tsang 脚眼 'ankle' (cf. kyiáh gao 脚胶 'ankle-joint', Morrison 1876:20b) relates directly to a Hakka kiok tsang 'heel', and the Hakka 'ankle' kiok muk 脚目 (cf. kiok ngán 脚眼, MacIver 1926: 288b) connects well with the Shanghai kyak mok. Yet, focusing on the 'eye' as the centre of attention in this 'joint', this 'link', strikingly important is the awareness of the "eye" of the "leg", foot', in Southern, and in particular in South Eastern Chinese dialects. There is Cantonese keùk ngáan (kwut) 脚眼骨 'ankle(bone)' (qv. MSC, above; cf. MacIver 1926:344b, Hakka khwa kwut 'the anklebone'), Lungtu kháa muk, Fúzhōu kǎ ngù mək 胶牛目 (= 'the leg [joint]'s ox's eye') (MacLay 1929:1021)¹⁸ the Swatow kha-mák 'anklebone' (and variants, Lechler 1883:9) and the Amoy 'ankle' k'a bák (liter. kiok bok, kha-bák, kió' bak; cf. C. Douglas 1899: 10a, 257b, kha-bák, 'ankle', R. kiok, col. kih). The thought came to my mind of a word of pre-sinitic origin preserved in what are termed South Eastern Chinese dialects and then spurred into a calque by the creative imagination of the Vietnamese because it rhymed descriptively with the phonetic and thence the visual awareness of a 'fish's "eye"' (mắt cá <*khá mák). And, almost instinctively one senses that the Hokkien [Hkn.=Fúzhōu] dialects offer the greatest suggestions. Among them, I think that Tie-chiu [=Cháozhōu] enlivens us. In it we find mák 目 'eye' (Goddard 1883:103a)¹⁹ and k'a 'foot' (*ibid.*, 63a), the tone, pitch and contour of whose pronunciation conform well with the Vietnamese mắt cá, strengthening the argument since it was the speakers of Tie-chiu who made up the largest Chinese

population contributing to the 'early' Vietnamese vocabulary,²⁰ just as it appears to be Swatow speakers who influenced Thai (Egerod 1959).

For here, it seems, we do have a Chinese-Vietnamese calque created by the Vietnamese who, hearing this South Eastern 'Chinese' word *k'á (<TC= Hkn.) for 'foot', visualized its sound association with their word cá, 'fish' and, preferring the fun²¹ behind a 'fish's "eye"', mắt cá,²² to the neutrality of such words as might otherwise have been their special terms (e.g. *gò chân 'hillock of the leg/foot', *mắt chân 'eye of the leg/foot'), transposed the Tie-chiu k'á mák ('foot's eye' > 'ankle-bone')²³ into their own language, reordering the word as mák k'á to fit their syntax, to create a calque, so that the 'ankle-bones' became 'fishes' eyes', mắt cá

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NOTES

1. Immediately, we are alerted to an unusual etymology. Normally, mắt 'eyes' are classified as animate by con 現, so that con mắt cá would mean 'the eye of fishes' even though the syntactic rhythm feels heavily clumsy. But here, it is classified as inanimate by cá, suggesting a variant meaning. What is the reason? (qqv. Thiệu Châu 1966:660a [Hán-Việt (HV= Sino-Vietnamese)] 踝 髁, (or 髁).
1. cá mắt cá chân 'the "anklebones" of the legs'; cf. Anh 1957:510b 鰾, '"fishes" eyes' on the two sides of the ankle', i.e. anklebones).
2. Listings of dictionary entries could continue, but they are not being included as they are meaningfully repetitive, if not identical; e.g. Hung 1955:414a; Thanh Nghị 1967:885a: 'balls of bone jutting out on both sides of the ankle'; Hòa 1967:270a, etc.
3. So, too, is the Palaung ra-nyě jǔng 'ankle' (lit. 'joint of the leg') (Milne 1931:18), with 'anklebone' (*loc.cit.*) a ka-āng i-ār, that is, 'bone of the fowl, hen' (?cockspur. [bone]; cf. VN cựa 距 'cockspur'; xương ~ 'astragalus').
4. Note, interestingly, that in Chinese we have the word 'eye', MSC yán, reconstructed as GSR 4167. *ngən/ngən:/yen eye (Yi) which is also a 'loan for *ngən/ngən:/en protrude as a knob (Chouli)' (*loc.cit.*). The HV is nhân/nhân (qqv. de Rhodes 1651:548, cf. 456; *Trữ* 1898: q.3, 5a3-4, p.52 =p.218, 1.5 'nhân mắt; Davidson 1975:597, no.487). In passing, 'faces' and 'eyes' do, understandably, go together (e.g. Shorto 1971:285; *Trữ* 1898: q.3, 1a5, p.50 面相 =p.215, 1.9 'diện mặt').

5. For instance, there is trứng cá 魚卵 'eggs of fishes' (qv. Bonet 1899:341a trứng cá 'oeuf de poisson'), whence comes 'spawn' and then, because of the visual similarity, 'black-head, comedo' (Hòa 1967:516a; Huê 1937:1088b; cf. Gouin 1957:141b). This is possibly a play on words, on chứng 'symptom of an illness' (nôm/HV 症; MSC zhèng) plus cá 'fishes', whence 'small white face pimples'. Another example is hòn dái 丸疳 (lit. 'balls/stones of the genitals') 'testicles' (Hòa 1967:84a; Huê 1937:191b) paralleled by trứng dái (lit. 'eggs of the genitals') 'sperm' (Bonet 1899:341a; cf. Gouin 1957:1481b, i.a.). Note dái 帶 'to urinate' (also sometimes written 洩, in nôm). Similarly, one finds gò má 腮腮, literally 'mound/knoll of the cheek', so 'cheekbone' (Bonet 1899:230b 'joye, pommette'; Huê 1937:314a; Gouin 1957:482b), but why mát cá for 'anklebone'?
6. The play on words could also have given us một coin¹ 'eye of the elephant' and một coin² 'eye of the ridgepole of the house' (Shorto 1962:96b). Compare the Archaic Chinese use of 骨 (MSC jiāo 'tibia') for 'the tapering end of the spoke of a wheel (Chouli)', (GSR 1166p.).
7. Nowadays, the scientific and medical vocabulary of Vietnamese is as detailed in its anatomical and other descriptions and recognitions (e.g. Thanh Nghị 1967:1532a; Hòa 1967:565a-b) as its main new source language, French; in fact, it is probably made richer by ready recourse to Chinese wherever that proved necessary. Thus Vietnamese has a very rich vocabulary and usually treats technical-type terms in three ways:
- (i) identifying them by direct translation into VN - e.g. 'astragalus' = xương cựa 'cockspur bone';
 - (ii) by use of Chinese terms in the HV pronunciation of their characters, although a degree of Vietnamese word-ordering may be introduced -- e.g. 'haemophilia' = bệnh huyết hữu <MSC xuěyǒu bìng 血友病; or,
 - (iii) by transliteration from the French -- e.g. 'xanthin' = xăng-tin.
8. qqv. Shorto 1971:125; Davidson 1975:597, esp. nos. 474, 489-92. So, paralleling one another, are such compounds as:
- | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------|---|-----------------|--------------|
| <u>bàn</u> | ('table/board') | <u>chân</u> | 'foot' | - | <u>bàn tay</u> | 'hand' |
| <u>ngón</u> | ('toe/finger') | <u>chân</u> | 'toe' | - | <u>ngón tay</u> | 'finger' |
| <u>móng</u> | ('nail/claw') | <u>chân</u> | 'toenail' | - | <u>móng tay</u> | 'fingernail' |
| <u>cổ</u> [?] | ('neck') | <u>chân</u> | 'ankle' | - | <u>cổ tay</u> | 'wrist' |
- (Hòa 1967:58a, 407b; also Bonet 1899:407a; i.a.; cf. cẳng 'paw, leg (of animal)'). Nonetheless, there are independent words for special parts of the body, e.g. gối 'knee', versus

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khủy/cùi tay 'elbow'; bắp chân 'calf (of the leg)'; đùi 'thigh'; gót chân 'heel' (cf. gân gót 'tendon, Achilles heel...'); nam tay 'fist'. And, although there are specific 'finger' words, e.g. ngón tay cái 'thumb', ngón tay út 'little finger', one can easily manufacture parallels like 'big toe', 'little toe', etc., by substituting chân for tay. And so on. The versatility is immense, as is readily shown by the Tu' Baka.

9. See, e.g. Bauer 1987 on the 'leg' in South Eastern Chinese dialects and Tibeto-Burmese; and, in general, Davidson 1975: I, 296ff. & nn.; 1986b:63, & references).
10. The use of the 'eye' as a node of the bamboo (e.g. Bonet *loc.cit.*, mắt tre 'noeud de bambou'; Hué 1937:555a2, *ibid.*; Gouin 1957:801b. ff.) and sometimes as the joint of a part of the body and so on, is also well observed throughout South-East Asian languages (see i.a., Shorto 1962:170a ff.; 1971:284ff.; Moussay 1971:224).
11. qv. de Rhodes (1651:126) 'cổ tay: collo da mao: collum manui', [qv. also p.715]; 'cổ chân: collo do pè: collum pedis'. (Hué 1937:101a; cf. Gouin 1957:181b).
12. In Malay, one apparently circles the leg to form an ankle (Wilkinson 1932:I, 338a, gelang, cf. 290a; 496a kaki) but the 'anklebone' is still the mata kaki 'eye of the leg' (*loc.cit.*, & II, 114a, mata). The thought that the Vietnamese mắt cá might embalm an MP variant of this is farfetched (even given the *proto-language forms being proposed at present) because of the distinctly Mon-Khmer word for 'leg' in Vietnamese.
13. In Bahnar, I understand that /*^kpa:ŋ/ is a possible reconstruction. Might this imply a MK k- 'body' prefix which is now lost in modern Vietnamese?
14. Pacoh deals where relevant with bones but does not seem to have a special term for the 'anklebone'. (Watson 1979:382; cf. parreat (ati)).
15. Note that h- /h-/ and kh- /X/ variants are common in Vietnamese, e.g. n.1 above.
16. Relevant, too, are the semantic similarities and, to a certain extent, the various reconstructed readings of 夾 MSC jiā, jiā (#GSR 630a *kāp/kāp/kia be on both sides of (Shǐ); support (Shu);... loan for 630l. all around (Shu) [= 挟 jiā, xiá] and especially ?/ tsiep/tsie [=MSC xié] encompass, embrace (Shǐ); all around (Chouli.); n.b. GSR 630k, too.

17. But l[?]oa in Anh (1957:510b; Tru 1970:278a4) which implies an original *kl- initial consonant cluster and a shift from it to h- and kh- variants. cf. n.15 above.
18. n.b. giễ m^hek ci^hũ 脚目球 (lit. 'foot-eye-ball', Adam 1891/1905: 11; cf. Maclay 1929:1222) which brings to mind the Burmese khie-myak-ci, transcribed as chi-mye?-si 'foot-eye-ball' = 'eyeball' (note Adam 1905:106 m^hek-ciũ-ci).
19. From the Chinese in which there is 目 MSC m^hu 'eye', reconstructed *miok/miuk/m^hu (GSR 1036a-c), comes the Hán-Việt, m^huc (de Rhodes 1651:488; m^huc, vide m^hoc; 483 m^hoc, con mắt: olhos: oculi; T^hư Đ^uac 1898: q.3, la4, p.50 目相 = p.215, 1.7 m^huc mắt). *En passant*, we may note that final -t and -c /k/ are often interchanged, especially in southern Vietnamese dialects.
20. A large Tie-chiu refugee migration -- one which preceded the late nineteenth century influx of Cantonese who then also provided a vast source of vernacular, material culture vocabulary -- is known to have taken place during the Ming dynasty, and Tie-chiu loans to, and pronunciations of Chinese characters in, Vietnamese -- as distinct from the Hán-Việt forms one normally encounters -- are numerous. Many of such words are readily found in Cửa (1897: e.g. 374a th^hạo; 380a th^hầu; 402a th^hô; 433b t^hĩa 'daddy' [cf. Egerod 1959: no. 159]; 451a t^hòa [cf. Bonet 1899:323b]) and in Tru (1970: e.g. II, 17a m^hang, etc.) but not all dictionaries are as detailedly precise. *En passant*, no Tie-chiu words have, it seems been recorded in de Rhodes' *Dictionarium*, a compilation principally of the northern dialect.
21. As seen in the more risqué or vulgar puns like đu-me for (Paul) Doumer and đít-cua 'crab's arse' for the much despised 'discours'.
22. And its irony. Note the idiom (thành ngữ): ngư mục hỗn châu 魚目混珠 'fishes' eyes may be taken for pearls', meaning that true and false are confused. Its main application in both China and Việt-Nam was to people who used fake materials to make counterfeit, 'real'-looking, goods, thus deceiving others. This was usually jewelry for women and girls.
23. Perhaps this also refers obliquely to notice of a lot of Chinese migrant labour?

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