



Ngữ

Because of the Chinese influence for 1000 years, the Vietnamese language has appropriated a great number of Chinese words. Vietnamese is a tonal monosyllabic language. One syllable may be pronounced over six distinct tones and each constitutes a different meaning. This creates an enormous difficulty for a beginner. Moreover, in writing, these tones are indicated by a diacritical mark, which gives Vietnamese language a great musicality. The example of the following syllable *ma* brings a different meaning according to its accentuation (*ma*: ghost, *má*: mommy, *mã*: horse etc.....). Even though the same language is spoken throughout the country, there is a great difference in accent between the North, Central, and South.

Up until 1648, the written Vietnamese language was dominated by the massive use of Chinese characters (or **chữ nho**). Vietnamese was phonetically romanized by the French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes who published, in 1651, the first famous Vietnamese, Portuguese and Latin Dictionary in **quốc ngữ**. This alphabetical transcription was used first by the Catholic Church and became compulsory only in 1906 in secondary education. In 1919, it became the national written language. It is the only one country in Southeast Asia to have a romanized script in spite of an omnipresent Chinese influence.

Việt-Nam my native country. Land of dragons and legends.

Copyright 1997- 2009. Đặng Anh Tuấn

LANGUAGE