

## 58. The Đổng Nhân Pagoda and the Publication of Mister Lazy's Medical Encyclopedia

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In comparison with other regions in the Sinitic world, a rather small number of medical texts has been preserved in Vietnam. Reasons given are unfavorable local conditions, such as the warm and humid climate, and destruction through prolonged periods of warfare. Also, and in contrast to Ming-Qing dynasty China or Edo Japan, Vietnam lacked a commercial, urban printing industry until the 1920s. Pre-twentieth-century Vietnamese medical manuscripts are consequently rare. Published medical texts are even more so. It's only thanks to the Đổng Nhân Pagoda in Bắc Ninh Province that Lê Hữu Trác's (1720?-1791) *Understandings of Hải Thượng's Medical Lineage* (1770-1786), the most celebrated text of Sino-Vietnamese medicine, has been preserved in printed form, almost in its entirety.<sup>1</sup> One of the prefaces to this text, written by abbot Thích Thanh Cao (?-1896), is translated below.<sup>2</sup>

Completed in 1877, the Đổng Nhân Pagoda was built in the aftermath of Francis Garnier's military campaign of 1873 in Hanoi and the surrounding provinces. After the victory over Granier's French troops, Tôn Thất Thuyết, the general in the north, requested Emperor Tự Đức (r. 1847-1883) to construct a pagoda to gather and pacify the souls of fallen soldiers whose bodies were buried, scattered in the fields of Bắc Ninh. Their bones were collected and reburied on a hillside. The Đổng Nhân Pagoda was constructed next to it.<sup>3</sup> The name Đổng Nhân is most likely borrowed from the thirteenth hexagram of the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*) and can be translated as "fellowship" or "gathering people."<sup>4</sup> Thích Thanh Cao became the first abbot of the Đổng Nhân Pagoda. Like Lê Hữu Trác himself, Thích Thanh Cao originated from Hải Dương Province. According to

steles in the *Đông Nhân* Pagoda, Thích Thanh Cao learned French and lectured on Buddhism in France during the 1840s.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, he was known as the Venerable Master of the Two Countries.

Immediately after its construction, the *Đông Nhân* Pagoda engaged in printing. The histories of Buddhism and printing are interrelated in East Asia, as the earliest examples of wood-block printing developed in Buddhist contexts. In China, the earliest large-scale printing projects of Buddhist texts are associated with Empress Wu Zetian (r. 690–705) of the Tang dynasty, and the earliest dated printed book in the world is a 868 copy of the *Diamond Sūtra* from Dunhuang.<sup>6</sup> Although no copies survived, there is evidence that Buddhist texts were printed in Vietnam by the fourteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The *Đông Nhân* Pagoda's publication of a medical text is not exceptional. Throughout East Asia, Buddhist institutions printed secular literature (including Confucian classics, poetry, and medical texts) alongside Buddhist texts. Yet, especially in Vietnam, Buddhist pagodas played a key role in preserving and transmitting medical knowledge through printing. Not only Lê Hữu Trác's *Understandings of Hải Thượng's Medical Lineage*, but also the oldest extant version of Tuệ Tĩnh's (1330–1389?) *Miraculous Drugs of the South*, the other text that stands out in the history of Vietnamese medicine (see previous chapter), was preserved thanks to a Buddhist pagoda.<sup>8</sup>

The publication of Lê Hữu Trác's *Understandings of Hải Thượng's Medical Lineage* was not an easy task. Between 1855 and 1866, a physician named Vũ Xuân Hiên collected fifty-one surviving sections out of the original total of sixty-six (comprising twenty-eight volumes) of Lê Hữu Trác's text. Vũ approached Thích Thanh Cao to print his collection. Thích Thanh Cao showed enthusiasm. Yet he had to wait until a printing project of Buddhist texts had been finished and the necessary funds could be raised. In 1879, Thích Thanh Cao finally started with engraving the woodblocks of Vũ Xuân Hiên's manuscripts and another four sections that had been recovered in the meantime. The printing at the *Đông Nhân* Pagoda took place against the backdrop of fierce fights in Bắc Ninh Province. One of the prominent fundraisers, whom Thích Thanh Cao refers to in his preface to the text, was Nguyễn Cao (1837–1887), a military commander engaged in the battles against the French, who stationed his troops at the *Đông Nhân* Pagoda in 1882.<sup>9</sup> By the time the publication was finished in 1885, Vietnam had fallen entirely under French control. Soon after, modern Vietnamese written in Latin alphabet replaced classical Chinese as educational language.<sup>10</sup> Lê Hữu Trác's original text would become incomprehensible to all but a few experts. Today, Lê Hữu Trác's encyclopedia circulates in the form of modern translations, which are all based on the *Đông Nhân* Pagoda's publication.

Unlike Tuệ Tĩnh, the other “father” of Vietnamese medicine discussed in the previous chapter, Lê Hữu Trác is not primarily associated with Buddhism. Lê was a “scholar-physician” (or “Confucian physician”) with some Daoist affinities. Lack of ambition for fame and fortune earned him the nickname “Mister Lazy” (*Lãn Ông*) or “Mister Lazy from Hải Thượng” (*Hải Thượng Lãn Ông*).<sup>11</sup> Yet Lê Hữu Trác was far from lazy. He treated patients, trained students, and compiled his huge medical encyclopedia. Lê Hữu Trác's medicine has distinct local Vietnamese flavors, and today he is revered as the “Hippocrates” of traditional medicine in Vietnam. He is also praised for his literary masterpiece *Account of a Journey to the Capital* (*Thượng Kinh ký sự*; 1783). This unique piece

of autobiographic writing portrays vividly yet critically daily and court life during the final years of Trịnh-ruled northern Vietnam and contains a rich collection of Lê Hữu Trác's poetry.<sup>12</sup> This text is attached to the Đồng Nhân publication of the medical encyclopedia.

In his preface to Mr. Lazy's encyclopedia, Abbot Thích Thanh Cao seized his chance to reflect on his personal and Buddhist interests in medicine. Both Buddhists and physicians are preoccupied with saving the people. This was a major reason for Thích Thanh Cao to preserve and circulate Lê Hữu Trác's monument to Vietnamese medical knowledge. Besides Buddhism and medicine, Thích Thanh Cao alludes to Confucianism, Daoism, history, and literature. In fine classical Chinese prose, he displays an erudite knowledge of high Sinitic culture—the culture he shared with Mister Lazy.

Thích Thanh Cao's preface, which I have translated here, and the complete text of the Đồng Nhân Pagoda's edition of *Understandings of Hải Thượng's Medical Lineage*, are digitally available on the website of the National Library of Vietnam.

#### FURTHER READING

- Bates, Ann, and Alan W. Bates. 2007. "Lãn Ông (Lê Hữu Trác, 1720–91) and the Medical Tradition." *Journal of Medical Biography* 15 (3): 158–64.
- Marr, David G. 1987. "Vietnamese Attitudes Regarding Illness and Healing." In *Death and Disease in Southeast Asia: Explorations in Social, Medical, and Demographical History*, ed. Norman G. Owen, 162–86. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- McHale, Shawn. 2007. "Vietnamese Print Culture Under French Colonial Rule: The Emergence of a Public Sphere." In *Books in Numbers*, ed. Wilt Idema, 377–415. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Monnais, Laurence, C. Michele Thompson, and Ayo Wahlberg, eds. 2012. *Southern Medicine for Southern People: Vietnamese Medicine in the Making*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

#### PREFACE TO UNDERSTANDINGS OF HẢI THƯỢNG'S MEDICAL LINEAGE<sup>13</sup>

I, the monk who proofread and printed [the text], am a man from Thanh Lâm in Hải Dương.<sup>14</sup> In my youth, I was impetuous. By chance, I drifted into Zen (*thiền*) Buddhism, and set my steps in Jetavana.<sup>15</sup> I let my heart wander on the Vulture Peak.<sup>16</sup> I often told myself that restraining desires would foster primordial *qi*,<sup>17</sup> and fasting the heart would nourish inner nature and mental agility. From morning to evening, I recited [the *sūtras*] to prolong my natural life span.<sup>18</sup> But what could I do? The bones of immortality<sup>19</sup> had not been transformed yet, and the bones of disease were still being produced! A sour pain in my flanks came and went from time to time. I remembered that we Buddhists have the *Bhaiṣajyaguru Sūtra*, which says, "without doctors and medicines," sickness is suffering.<sup>20</sup>

Thereafter, I invited [medical] masters and requested medicines. But this ailment remained. So I knew that if one plainly does not understand medicine, one makes mistakes all the time. Consequently, I broadly studied medical texts, determined to cure the illness by myself.

Suddenly, Mr. Vũ from Đường My<sup>21</sup> offered me to read a set of [*Understandings of*] *Hải Thượng's [Medical Lineage]* in fifty-one books, and he further advised its publication. I leisurely read it. Mr. Lazy was originally from the same prefecture [as I am]. He devoted his life to study. Although he was outstanding,<sup>22</sup> his initial ambitions were not rewarded. Afterward, he lived in seclusion on Fragrant Mountain in his mother's native Hà Tĩnh. He devoted himself to medicine and set his mind on saving people, with the idea of "if you cannot be a good minister, be a good doctor."<sup>23</sup> Mr. Lazy lived in the region and was careful when considering his treatment. Hence, the words he put down in writing have such a profound meaning. In his differentiations of "Water and Fire" and "yin and yang," and in his discussions of "surface and interior" and "depletion and repletion," he synthesized the great achievements of various masters. He discovered what his predecessors did not yet discover. With a benevolence equaling that of ancient history, he was clearly an eminent doctor of the Southern Country.<sup>24</sup> His ethics and literary works were deeply immersed in the realm of the High Tang dynasty [China].<sup>25</sup>

It is most regrettable that many texts are dispersed because of dramatic changes<sup>26</sup> in this world. If I do not send [*Understandings of Hải Thượng's Medical Lineage*] to press, it will surely end up in broken fragments, and what benefit would [this text], which came into my awareness, then have? At that time, I often wished to publish it throughout the country. I only worried that my strength would be insufficient and my efforts in vain. Furthermore, the Pagoda had many complicated duties. The printing of Buddhist texts was not completed yet. I had to refrain for ten years. In the thirtieth year of Tự Đức [1877], a large number of notables urged me to print. One after the other, they contributed additional money for printing. Thereupon, I entrusted specialists to search for lost manuscripts, and I obtained another four books. The compilation gradually reached its end.

In the thirty-first year [1878], I happened to meet his Excellency Nguyễn, first-place candidate of the Provincial Exams and vice associate military superintendent of the north, from Cách Bi.<sup>27</sup> In his leisure time, he traveled, looking for old friends. When I talked to him about this [project], he had admiration [for it]. On behalf of my cause, he wrote a letter to urge wide financial support. Thereafter, notables gathered and contributed financial support for the publication. In the thirty-second year [1879], after I widely convened scholar-physicians and consulted them for revision, the text went off to print. The printing lasted until this first year of Hàm Nghi [1885] before being finally completed. For the first time, I found some comfort in my heart. Furthermore, I knew that "when one has good intentions, Heaven must follow."<sup>28</sup> All of the expenditure mostly depended on powerful gentlemen. What could [I], a pure Buddhist monk, have [contributed]?

My only fear was that the various drafts would contain mistakes. When words are copied several times, it is easy to make mistakes.<sup>29</sup> The proofread prints of this new publication leave many questions unresolved. If there are shortcomings, I sincerely hope that those who are better qualified will soon correct the mistakes and avoid passing them on to posterity. This is my earnest wish. As a foreword, I first explained the whole story. How would I dare to call this a preface!

Respectfully, [I submit this essay] as a preface. The proofreader and printer, Abbot Thích Thanh Cao of the Đồng Nhân Pagoda, Đại Tráng community, Võ Giàng County, Từ Sơn Prefecture, Bắc Ninh Province, on the first day of the fourth month of the first year of Hàm Nghi [1885].

#### NOTES

1. *Hải Thượng Y tông tâm lĩnh*. On the history of manuscripts and printing in Vietnam, see Pasquel-Rageau 1986 and Nguyen 1989: 82–83. On printing and preservation of texts, including the role of Buddhist monasteries in Vietnamese history prior to the 1920s, see McHale 2007: 377–84. On the import of Chinese texts versus the local printing of texts in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Vietnam, see Li 2011. For a catalogue of preserved medical works in Vietnam, see Lâm Giang 2009. For a discussion on the medical works (written in various scripts) preserved in the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies in Hanoi, see Thompson 2006. For an excellent overview of the contents of medical texts in the Institute of Han-Nôm Studies in Japanese, see Mayanagi 2012–2015, and for the texts in the National Library of Vietnam, see Mayanagi 2006 and his addenda of 2011.
2. Other prefaces are Vũ Xuân Hiên's preface to his collection of remaining sections of *Understandings of Hải Thượng's Medical Lineage* of 1866 and Lê Hữu Trác's original author's preface of 1770.
3. Nguyễn Ngọc Thạch 2006.
4. The Đồng Nhân hexagram is also one of the so-called returning souls hexagrams. See Nielsen 2003: 96.
5. I could not verify these inscriptions yet, but see Nguyễn Quang Khải 2015.
6. For a general overview on the relation between Buddhism and manuscripts and printing, see Galambos 2015.
7. See, e.g., McHale 2007: 380, and Pasquel-Rageau 1986: 258.
8. In the year 1761, the monk Bán Lai printed the remaining parts of Tuệ Tĩnh's pharmacopeia at the Hồng Phúc Pagoda. See Chu 2002: 265.
9. Nguyễn Ngọc Thạch 2006; Nguyễn Quang Khải 2015.
10. See, e.g., Marr 1981 and Bianco 2001.
11. Hải Thượng refers to Thượng Hồng in Hải Dương Province, his father's native region. See Ruan, Du, and Wang 2013.
12. Lê Hữu Trác witnessed the end of the Lê dynasty (1428–1788) and de facto rule of the Trịnh Lords (1545–1787) in the northern part of what is now Vietnam. On the turbulent changes ignited by the Tây Sơn revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, see Dutton 2006.

- For Nguyễn Trần Huân's introduction and a French translation of *Account of a Journey to the Capital*, see Lãn Ông 1972.
13. Preface to Le Huu Trac's *Tân thuyên Hải Thượng y tông tâm lĩnh toàn tập (q.thủ)*, by Thích Thanh Cao, 1885: 10a–12a. <http://hannom.nl.v.gov.vn/hannom/cgi-bin/hannom?a=d&d=CdjlbdgGlMEngTjg1885.1.5&e=---vi-20-1-txt-txIN%7ctxME>, last accessed 30 June 2015.
  14. Thanh Lâm is an old name for Nam Sách County, which is now of part of Hải Du'ng city, the capital of Hải Dương Province.
  15. Here, Jevatana (Kỳ viên) refers to Buddhist monasteries in general. Hence, “settings steps in Jetavana” means that Thích Thanh Cao became a Buddhist monk.
  16. He found pleasure in Buddhism. Vulture Peak (Gijjhakuta) was one of the Buddha's most important retreats in Rājagaha.
  17. *Nguyên khí*.
  18. Literally, “Heavenly years,” or the years given by Heaven.
  19. *Tiền cốt* (Ch. *xian gu*) is another name for the sacrum. The sacrum is an important locus in Daoist inner alchemical practices.
  20. Thích Thanh Cao alludes to the seventh great vow in the *Bhaiṣajyaguru Sūtra* (see chapter 25).
  21. My Thứ village in Đường An County, Hải Du'ng Province.
  22. Literally, “lift and uncover” (*hiên yết*). This refers to the expression “lifting heaven and uncovering earth” (*hiên thiên yết địa*).
  23. This expression is attributed to the famous Han dynasty physician Zhang Zhongjing.
  24. The country south of China, meaning present-day Vietnam.
  25. The High Tang refers to eighth-century China. This was the high period of cultural splendor during the Tang dynasty (618–906).
  26. Literally, “mulberry blue.” This is an abbreviation of the proverb “mulberry plantation changing into the blue sea,” which has its origins in Ge Hong's (283–343) *Biographies of Divine Transcendents (Shenxian zhuan)*.
  27. Nguyễn Cao (1837–1887).
  28. This is a Buddhist expression.
  29. Thích Thanh Cao refers to a proverb: “When you copy a character three times, ‘crow’ (ô) and ‘there’ (yên) become ‘horse’ (mã).” These three words (pronounced ô, yên, and mã in Sino-Vietnamese) have a similar orthography in Chinese, and are easily mistaken.