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The Implications of Gia Truyền: Social Class within the Healing Community in Vietnam.

Vietnamese gia truyền (family transmission) medical texts consist of prescriptions and medical advice handed down within one medical family. In general they are handwritten. They may contain the handwriting of several different healers, or they may have been neatly recopied and organized by someone. In general the text within them concentrates on finding, recognizing, and preparing materia medica and on prescriptions for a number of commonly encountered ailments. In other words they are devoted to practical advice for treatment rather than to theoretical speculation on the aches, pains, injuries and illnesses of everyday life. Gia truyền do not have a very high reputation in the history of Vietnamese medicine, indeed few of them are listed where important Vietnamese medical texts are discussed. While there are many reasons why any one of these individual books might not have received much scholarly attention, I believe that their low status as a genre of medical texts is connected to the status of those who wrote them and to the status of the script most of them are written in. Most gia truyền are written in Nôm or Hán Nôm rather than in 'pure' Classical Chinese. As they were written by the members of medical families this fact presupposes that very few, if any, of them were produced by members of the elite classes. By the late 1920s there was a broad class divide between young members of medical families and the educated, somewhat westernized, younger generation of the Vietnamese elite who were likely to attend the prestigious Hanoi Medical School and to work at the Pasteur Institutes and other French sponsored scientific institutions. Gia truyền are the notebooks of healers on the fringes of the scholar gentry class of colonial era Vietnam and through an examination of gia truyền we can find the voices of their authors, a group which became more and more marginalized during the late colonial period. This paper will examine specific examples of gia truyền extant in Vietnamese archives and will explore the political and social tensions their production and marginalization illustrates.

Medicine, health care, and concepts of the body and its relationship to the natural world and to other human bodies has always been an area of conflict between colonizers and colonized. (See David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body* for example) Further, very localized or regional systems of health care and transmission of medical knowledge often find themselves in opposition not only to imported and sometimes imposed western or bio-medical concepts and beliefs but also to nationally privileged traditions. Under the Nguyễn and at the same time under the French Chinese texts and imported medicaments became to some extent sponsored and exalted over more local and

regional traditions. However, those local traditions did not die out and they and their very marginalized authors can be examined through the group of texts I propose to discuss in this paper. To give you an example of the type of astonishing measures that were taken in the late colonial period that had the effect of privileging Chinese medicine at the expense of more local traditions in 1940-41 the French passed a series of regulations regarding several varieties of local Vietnamese Materia Medica and their use. Imported Chinese drugs were exempt but several locally produced drugs were declared poisons and the French attempted to regulate their sale collection and use. One would think that in 1940-41 the French in Indochina might have had other things to think about? The healers who wrote the gia truyền texts I propose to discuss in this paper are truly a marginalized and an alternative voice from mid-twentieth century Vietnam and they are also truly local regional actors in the context of their times.