



Overcoming prejudice and discrimination: The path for Ton That Tung to becoming an excellent doctor in Vietnam

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Abstract

Ton That Tung was a renowned Vietnamese doctor in the twentieth century. He was well-known and honored all throughout the world for his famous planned liver resection method, which was named after him. Ton That Tung's route to become a talented doctor was marked not only by scientific endeavors, but also by overcoming several barriers created by biased ideas and discrimination, which were a negative influence of colonialism. Ton That Tung faced discrimination during his studies and employment in terms of scholarships, working hours, pay, and job position. Ton That Tung's scientific research was influenced by prejudice and discrimination due to the French's backward perspective of Western civilization over the East; Many of his outstanding research results took many years to be recognized. Although he encountered many obstacles due to the backward and insidious views of imperial colonialism, Ton That Tung overcame and escaped those obstacles. He became an excellent doctor and a Vietnamese medical celebrity in the 20th century.

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1. Introduction

Ton That Tung was a talented Vietnamese doctor and intellectual in the 20th century. His name was always in the top of world-famous liver surgeons in the 20th century such as Hugo Rex, James Cantlie, Jean -Louis Lortat-Jacob, Jacques Hepp, Claude Couinaud, Henri Bismuth, Thomas Starzl, Roy Calne. His method of planned hepatectomy became a groundbreaking mark of world medical achievements in the 20th century. Ton That Tung's medical discoveries not only resonated in the medical world but also attracted academics to learn about this outstandingly talented man. Ton That Tung had been the subject of numerous studies, including those on his life, medical profession, teaching career, and contributions to Vietnamese medicine and international medical literature (Vinh, 2013; Phuong, 2000; Hanoi, 2012; Hue, 2012) [28, 6, 3, 12]. Most of those studies confirmed that Ton That Tung was a doctor with extraordinary talent in the field of surgery. He had a unique talent for exploring deeply into the liver's organization to master the understanding and use of liver manipulation, resection, and transplantation techniques that were previously considered inaccessible in the surgical world. However, to achieve these achievements, Ton That Tung not only had talent, he also overcame many challenges in studying and working conditions when Vietnam was still a French colony, and then went through working time in a country with a long war. Learning how he overcame challenges to achieve great achievements in medicine would contribute to a better understanding of the outstanding doctor, as well as a better understanding of the hardships and obstacles on his path to science of the Vietnamese intellectuals in the 20th century.

2. Literature review and research methods

The life and career of Dr. Ton That Tung has fascinated Vietnamese and world academic circles for decades. There have been hundreds of articles by Vietnamese and international scientists sketching out the portrait of a medical celebrity, an exemplary physician of Vietnam in the 20th century.

Regarding the portrait of a famous Vietnamese medical businessman, many reports clearly outlined the issues of family and homeland, of childhood with its peaceful and violent moments, of contributions to the cause of science, the cause of education, and the contributions to building modern Vietnamese medicine, in terms of emotions and medical ethics of Ton That Tung in his life and medical career (Hue, 2012)^[6]. As a physician and doctor of the Vietnamese people, studies on Ton That Tung have confirmed that he was an intellectual with integrity, possessing all the qualities of a talented scientist and exemplary teacher in the training career of the Vietnamese medical industry (Hanoi, 2012)^[3]. Previous research results have confirmed that Ton That Tung was a person passionate about medical science research, with the desire to bring Vietnamese medicine on par with other countries in the world. He left behind over 120 scientific works, focusing on internal medicine surgery, especially being one of the first scientists to develop a liver surgery method named after him, honored by the international medical community in the most influential medical men of the 20th century.

In addition to research on his life and career, Ton That Tung drew the attention of the Vietnamese and international medical communities to pursue additional research, particularly in the paths he advised, so contributing to the advancement of Vietnamese and global medicine. In this research area, Vietnam has had numerous successfully defended doctoral theses with research topics following Ton That Tung's direction. Typically, the problem of evaluating the results of applying hepatectomy technique according to the Ton That Tung method (Anh, 2008)^[1], researching the application of selective control of the hepatic pedicle in hepatectomy according to the Ton That Tung method (Khai, 2008), research on complications after hepatectomy due to cancer using the Ton That Tung method (Sang, 2018)^[10], research on the indications and results of hepatectomy combining the Ton That Tung and Lortat-Jacob methods treatment of hepatocellular carcinoma (Thanh, 2013)^[14], hepatocellular carcinoma - hepatectomy technique combining Ton That Tung and Lortat-Jacob methods (Thin, 2015)^[15], Research and application of hepatectomy using the Ton That Tung method combined with Takasaki to treat hepatocellular cancer at Nghe An General Friendship Hospital (Toan, 2023)^[18], etc.

In addition to the sources of prior study on Ton That Tung, this article includes references to his own scientific work. Ton That Tung's scientific career is documented in 123 publications, including magazine articles, scientific journals, and books published both in Vietnam and overseas (Hue, 2012)^[6]. This study only looked at a tiny portion of those works, which typically included a new way of liver resection (Tung, 1963), liver resection (Tung, 1971), and certain medical subjects (Tung, 1971). 1981), scientific research activities from 1981 to 1985 (Tung, 1986).

This article employs multidisciplinary historical and anthropological research approaches, as well as descriptive techniques. The article uses this strategy to methodically review everything Ton That Tung encountered during his studies before becoming a brilliant doctor and medical scientist. The article will seek to dynamically narrate historical events in order to interpret and convey the character and significance of events, rather than simply transcribing events, dates, or even describing them. One of the objectives of historical research is to convey past events. There are

numerous subjects in library and information science that might be explored for historical research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Early challenges in life - shock from outdated concepts that were highlighted

Ton That Tung was born on May 10, 1912, in Thanh Hoa, into a noble family from the Nguyen Dynasty. Ton That Nien, his father, rose to become Thanh Hoa province's governor. Ton That Tung's father had arranged for the French envoy to visit his home for dinner in 1912, not long after his birth. When the guests left, his father suffered a heart attack and died abruptly. After his father died, his mother left Thanh Hoa to Hue to buy a garden in Duong Xuan Thuong village, now in Phuung Duc, where he grew up.

Ton That Tung, while coming from a mandarin family, did not continue in his forefathers' footsteps. He aspired to study scientific knowledge in order to benefit life and people. In 1931, he traveled to Hanoi to attend Bao Ho High School (now known as Bui School or Chu Van An High School). In 1935, he enrolled at Indochina University of Medicine and Pharmacy, a member school of the Indochina University Institute, with the belief that medicine is a free profession regardless of class. At the time, Indochina University of Medicine and Pharmacy was Indochina's sole medical school. Ton That Tung experienced the exhilaration of entering a large university at the time, but he also became aware of the nefarious schemes of the French colonialists. As citizens of a colonial country, medical students, even if they have outstanding scores, were only allowed to conduct outpatient internships and could pursue "residency" tests since the colonial authority did not want native doctors that had good professional qualifications and could compete with doctors from their own nation. When the French colonialists invaded Vietnam, they had a nefarious scheme. The ruling government did not want the Annamese people (the French colonialist's name with a pejorative reference to Vietnam) to have contact with civilization. A Tonkinese ambassador, in a letter sent to the Governor General of Indochina, proposed: "The experience of European peoples has clearly shown that spreading education to native people is extremely foolish." That was also the general guiding ideology of the French colonialists when implementing education policy in Vietnam. The purpose of the French government was to create a class of low-level officials who would only serve as lackeys for the French colonialists (Khanh, 1985)^[8]. This outdated viewpoint affected many other areas, bringing shame to many Vietnamese people at that time. Ton That Tung could not stand aside from the situation, along with the intellectual youth at that time, enduring the humiliation of a young man and student when the country was ruled by foreigners.

For the medical profession, outdated concepts, prejudice and discrimination are present both in study and work. Indochina University of Medicine and Pharmacy, known as the university of Indochina, was actually only a place for French people, Vietnamese people are openly "banned". According to Tung (2012), the school's teaching staff were "mostly people who do not fully understand", meaning that the teachers here are French people who are not yet knowledgeable. During class, when a student encountered an unpleasant situation and asked the teacher, the teacher's face turned red and he mistakenly thought the student was teasing him. The anatomy teacher is a dentist who "worries about stomachaches all year round rather than teaching his

students". The physiology teacher preferred "to give demonstrations on stage rather than lecture", "students often run away from class" whenever it is time for this lecturer to teach. A professor who taught "symptomology" was a French medical officer "with only a beautiful beard, famous for teaching students to diagnose intestinal diseases by counting the number of bowel movements per day. The level of French doctors was the same, but the dissatisfaction did not necessarily lie there. What's even more annoying is that no matter how good Vietnamese people are, they still could not get hired. In 1937, when Ton That Tung was still a student, he witnessed a Vietnamese professor with many achievements, famous in the French medical community, returned to Hanoi and submitted an application to teach at the Indochina University of Medicine and Pharmacy but was flatly rejected, with a notice full of prejudice and discrimination "Indochina University of Medicine and Pharmacy had no place for Vietnamese professors!

In Vietnam's French education system, the colonial government did not eliminate the outdated learning perspectives of the feudal regime but also highlighted or transformed into other backward aspects (Khanh, 1985) [8]. Indochina University of Medicine and Pharmacy was no exception to that rule. Ton That Tung also experienced those ironies with many tricky levels, full of prejudice and discrimination in studying and exams. Incompetent teachers, when taking tests, they tried to create difficult test questions to fail students. There were tests, the class had up to 50 students but only 1 person passed.

Prejudice and discrimination took place in many areas of Vietnamese social life. In the field of medicine, many Vietnamese doctors graduated with excellent degrees and worked at prestigious French medical universities, but when they returned to Vietnam, they were only recruited and assigned to work of the probation employees. The first generation of medical doctors in Vietnam such as Ho Dac Di, Hoang Thuy Ba, Dang Vu Lac, Hoang Tich Tri, Tran Duy Hung, Pham Ngoc Thanh, Nguyen Van Huong were famous doctors who have studied and growing up in Paris, when returning to Vietnam, one could not avoid prejudice and discrimination. Not being assigned jobs commensurate with their skills and abilities, having to work for a salary many times lower than that of the French. More harmfully, those in power were often weaker in professional expertise. Doctors Pham Ngoc Thach and Nguyen Van Huong once had to quit their jobs at the hospital because they could not stand the injustices that resulted from prejudice and discrimination to open their own private clinic to treat poor people (Sang, 1991) [10].

Dr. Ton That Tung, even though he was an excellent medical student, could not avoid prejudice and discrimination. Indochina Medical School was the only medical university in Indochina, and was also a typical place demonstrating discriminatory policies towards students. The policy of distinguishing between "inpatient" and "outpatient" internships was a typical example. French and European students enjoyed the "residential" internship policy, with costs 3 times higher than "outpatient" internships. Vietnamese students could only do "outpatient" internships at 1/3 the cost of "resident" internships. Although the regulations stipulated that after 2 years of internship, students would be able to take the exam to convert to "residency", but the French colonialists often deliberately prolonged it, finding every reason not to organize this exam. As an

"external" student, one could only wait patiently. The colonial government did not want to have indigenous doctors with high professional qualifications who could compete with national doctors. Ton That Tung tried his best to fight for the abolition of this unfair policy. In the years 1936 and 1937, Ton That Tung fought for the French authorities to organize "residency" exams for hospitals in Hanoi. In 1938, the French government was forced to organize exams for Vietnamese outpatient doctors. However, only Ton That Tung was accepted for residency, the first doctor to open a precedent for indigenous resident doctors.

What was important to Ton That Tung was not only to fight against prejudiced and discriminatory views. He also set for himself the principles of studying and working to overcome that resistance. He always thought his daily work was the most important "those are the two feet firmly clinging to the ground of the giant in Greek mythology - God Anthene; That was the source of one's own motivation to go into science" (Tung, 2012). It was this spirit that brought Ton That Tung through the early shock of his life against the backward views of colonialism reinforced through prejudice and discriminatory behavior. As a result, during 5 years of hard work at Indochina Medical School, Ton That Tung dissected 200 dead livers at the hospital morgue to study the blood vessels in the liver and redraw them into diagrams. Based on the research and discovery of vascular organization in the liver, Ton That Tung wrote and successfully defended his medical doctor's thesis in 1939 with the topic "How to divide the blood vessels of the liver". For this thesis, Ton That Tung was awarded the Silver medal from the University of Paris (Hanoi, 2012) [3]. Not only did he receive an excellent achievement, Ton's medical doctor's graduation thesis also became the premise for his world-famous scientific works later on.

3.2. The vision of "Western civilization is better than the East" - A long journey of prejudice and discrimination

Colonialism disguised itself as "civilization" when it invaded and ruled over colonies in Eastern countries. They always portrayed Western civilization as advanced and elite, whereas the East was inferior and stupid. The belief that the West was more intelligent and advanced than the East fostered prejudice and discrimination among the Western intellectual class. Colonial practices produced an intellectual class that misunderstood, hated, and even denied Eastern people's scientific achievements. In Vietnam, during the period of French colonial authority, the view of looking down on talent drove French intellectuals to not recognise, especially disdain, and scorn the creative work achievements of Vietnamese people; Many scientific research results of Vietnamese people are ignored, or perhaps they turn to other meanings, trivializing the research work of indigenous people (Nhung, 1996) [11].

At Ton That Tung's place of study and work, the French always looked down and despised the creative research results of native doctors. In 1939 Ton That Tung completed research on the structure of veins in the liver. However, his French teacher - who was also his manager - wanted to direct this work into the field of anthropology. That is, he expressed an untrustworthy opinion and even underestimated Ton That Tung's work, considering it an issue that only has anthropological value, meaning the medical value of the research work about the human liver is denied. Although Ton That Tung tried very hard to explain that it was a study of the

vascular structure in the human liver, it was not a work on anthropology, to be exact, this was a work that belonged to the field of human anatomy, not just Vietnamese people or any other people in the world. Ton That Tung tried to prove that this work was applicable to the treatment of liver disease and liver surgery, but this opinion did not easily overcome the views, prejudices and discrimination - which were already the deep-rooted disease of hatred among French intellectuals towards indigenous people in the colonies at that time (Tung, 2012).

Ton That Tung's planned liver resection method, before becoming a mark in the world's medical achievements, had to go through more than 30 years of challenges, whose profound source also came from a "civilized" perspective more Western than Eastern". From 1935 to 1939, Ton That Tung dissected more than 200 dead people's names, redrawn the diagrams, and found common features. Ton That Tung has a special surgical technique that can "expose" all the blood vessels in the liver, and thanks to this method, he can cut the liver, regardless of part, in less than 10 minutes. Once, he convinced his teacher Meyer May (a French-Jewish professor) to try removing a left lobe of the liver containing a medium-sized hemangioma. After the first failure, two years later, he decided to try it a second time and succeeded. The results were reported to the Paris Academy of Surgery. The scientific report sent to Paris was so fiercely attacked that Ton That Tung - an enthusiastic young doctor - felt bitterly disappointed like "a hammer to the head" (Hanoi, 2012) ^[3].

Despite being fiercely attacked, Ton That Tung still felt pain and was determined to develop liver research. In 1961, for the first time, he tried to intervene in the right liver with the technique that later bears his name, first of all the blood vessels in the liver parenchyma, and to be more careful, he combined it with clamping the hepatic pedicle and lowering it. patient's body temperature. That led to such great success that even he was surprised to see the right liver fall into his hand after only 10 minutes of surgery and ligation of blood vessels. A year later, Ton That Tung conducted another 50 cases and made a big splash worldwide in the medical field. Foreign press called it the "New Liver Cutting Method" (later also known as the "Ton That Tung Method"). Ton That Tung's method is different from Lortat Jacob's method in that the classic method focuses on finding blood vessels outside the liver before cutting. This was very difficult because the blood vessels outside the liver were too short and often change position, so the time for each hepatectomy lasted on average from 3 to 6 hours. According to Ton That Tung, we must first find the blood vessels and hepatic ducts, tie them up before removing the damaged part of the liver safely and purposefully instead of cutting aimlessly, without following the division of the blood vessels. He reversed the "traditional" surgical procedure and proposed the solution: "If it is difficult to find blood vessels, you should go from the liver, through the liver in a groove that does not bleed, the blood vessels are in the liver." very long, very clear to search with a surgeon's finger. But Dr. Ton That Tung's method did not necessarily receive consensus from surgeons around the world. He was even criticized more harshly and strongly than the way he was once "attacked" in 1938. It was not until 1979 that Masson Publishing House (Paris) published Ton That Tung's book titled *Les Résections majeures et mineures du foie* (Major and minor surgeries on the liver). With this book, Ton That Tung's liver resection technique has been definitively defined into procedures and operations. Indeed, one could say

that he "democratized" hepatectomy, allowing any general surgeon, if he took the trouble to learn his method, to no longer have to endure the pain of injury. serious injury to the liver (Tung, 1979).

4. Conclusion

The French colonialists who established colonial rule in Vietnam brought with them a sinister plot. The political views of the authorities always distinguish between "national" people and "indigenous" people. The ruling class not only promoted but also affirmed that French civilization was better than Vietnam's, and that the French "civilized" Vietnam. This prejudiced and discriminatory view has been maintained and highlighted by intellectuals, causing many "native" people to suffer severe harm. Ton That Tung was one of the "native" intellectuals who had to fight those prejudices and discrimination during a long journey. From unfair policies in learning to attitudes of negative prejudice, disdain, disrespect, and even contempt of the "mainstream" people. For an intellectual, Ton That Tung not only encountered discrimination in life, he also encountered many prejudices in recognizing research achievements and creative discoveries in medicine. The medical industry that the French built in Vietnam is considered a typical colonial medical industry in the world. Therefore, prejudice and discrimination against indigenous people, of which Ton That Tung is one, is also natural. But in the end, Ton That Tung overcame it to become an outstanding medical doctor in Vietnam. The name Ton That Tung was recorded in the history of world medicine in the 20th century.

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