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## French influence overseas: the rise and fall of colonial Indochina

Julia Alayne Grenier Burlette

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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FRENCH INFLUENCE OVERSEAS:  
THE RISE AND FALL OF COLONIAL INDOCHINA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

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by  
Julia Alayne Grenier Burlette  
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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Map.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter	
1: French Discovery and Settlement in Indochina.....	7
2: The Loan of 1912.....	33
3: Consequences of French Involvement: The Fall of Colonial Indochina .....	60
Conclusion .....	85
Bibliography .....	88
Vita.....	91

# Map



Indochina 1908-1954

## **Abstract**

This thesis concerns colonial French Indochina, specifically the area known today as Vietnam. Located south of China and east of India on the southeastern-most peninsula of the Asian continent, Indochina comprises the modern-day countries of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. After European contact, the future country of Vietnam was divided into three main provinces: Tonkin in the north, Annam in the center, and Cochinchina in the south. After their establishment in the Southeast Asian country in the mid-nineteenth century, the French sought to improve existing, and to build new infrastructure to increase the productive capacity of the colony. The more efficient the colonial economy was, the more profit there was for the mother country. Unfortunately, what was good for France was not always good for Indochina. While most scholars focus on other causes of the Vietnam War, they rarely discuss how direct French influence was a prime factor.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the French attempted to improve the status of their colony and how these improvements affected the lives of the local population, both negatively and positively. Chapter 1 addresses the foundation of the colony from its missionary roots to its final conquest in the latter part of the 1800s. Chapter 2 discusses two important loans granted by the French government in Paris, first in 1898 and then in 1912. The focus is on the second loan of 90 million francs, for colonial officials squandered much of the first loan of 200 million francs. With this new sum, the French planned to establish better irrigation methods, education systems, transportation, and communication. While their intent was to improve the colony for profitable gain, the French emphasized both to the indigenous population and to the population at home that the new infrastructure could greatly benefit the lives of the Indochinese. Chapter 3 discusses how French influence and technology affected the Annamites

and why this influence forced them to seek independence. After years of oppression and promises of a better future, the Annamites ultimately lost many of their traditions and customs in trying to become French and moved towards rebellion.

## Introduction

Although books on Vietnam are plentiful, there is relatively little recent scholarship on colonial Vietnam, known then as Indochina. Writings about the colony that do exist were written mostly by European authors at the height of the French Empire with a strong pro-colonial bias as the French sought to justify their actions abroad. The most detailed accounts of colonial Indochina were published prior to World War I, and these books often dealt with specific subjects. They provide information about the agriculture, the industry, and the economy of the colony in an effort to give to give the general reader in Europe a basic understanding of French overseas accomplishments. There is much written about what the French specifically changed and improved, but little about how money was spent, or how effective the new programs were. Scholarship written during the colonial era contains almost no information about the everyday lives of the indigenous Annamites.<sup>1</sup> Accounts by the Annamites themselves are nearly nonexistent as any material deemed antagonistic to French rule was confiscated, censored, or destroyed. As a result, few Europeans truly understood the impact French civilization had on the Indochinese.

Before 1945, most Europeans only read about the positive changes that the French instilled overseas and learned little about the civilization that they colonized. Virginia Thompson's *French Indochina* (1937) was a notable exception with its detailed accounts of Indochina's pre-colonial empire, government, and local Annamite traditions. Thompson wrote this book after she visited the colony at the height of the French empire. Her goal was to provide the English-speaking readers a general understanding of Indochinese history, a feat she

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<sup>1</sup> Annamites composed of nearly 75 percent of the Indochinese population. This term is used instead of "Vietnamese" because French primary and early secondary sources referred to the indigenous people as such. The word "Annamite" is used continuously throughout the thesis to maintain consistency.

accomplished with ease. She also discussed the French colonial government, its administration, and its reaction to the indigenous population. Unlike other books written about French Indochina, Thompson's devotes substantial scholarship to the rest of Indochina, especially Laos and Cambodia. By illustrating these cultures, she demonstrates that the Annamites were not the only people affected by French influence. Because she mostly used French sources, most of the book discusses how the Annamites benefited from European intervention, not how the Indochinese reacted to French power. Without a doubt, *French Indochina* is a valuable asset for anyone wanting a basic knowledge of the Southeast Asian countries through the eyes of Frenchmen. Although strongly biased, this book does provide an understanding of the French approach to scholarship about their Empire.

There are other approaches to colonial history aside from the discussion of the general history of an area. Many works about Indochina concern specific aspects of the colony and colonial rule. Gail Paradise Kelly's work, *French Colonial Education: Essays on Vietnam and West Africa* (2000), is an excellent example of such a topical book, and one vital to understanding the development of indigenous consciousness. *French Colonial Education* focuses on the years 1918 to 1938, a pivotal time in Annamite history as the educated Indochinese began to understand fully what French domination meant to the development and future of their society. Kelly claims in her introduction that the colonizers exhibited arrogance, racism and ruthlessness toward their colonial subjects because events such as the Dreyfus Affair and World War I made the French question their own superiority. These attitudes appear to have influenced some of the driving forces behind the French institution of harsh codes in the Franco-Annamite schools, but there is little concrete evidence linking the two. These codes,

along with the Indochinese reaction to these laws, became a vital cause of further complications between the French and Annamites.

Charles Robequain's *The Economic Development of French Indochina* (1949) discusses colonial economics, another subject necessary to understanding the failure of the colony. This work focuses on the changes in the local economy and on the local peasants as the French instituted new industries and farming methods to increase production and profit. With the help and funding of the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of the Colonies, and the Government-General of Indochina, Robequain was fortunate to travel to Indochina and gather the most up-to-date information about the colony—from the French point of view. Robequain wanted his readers to understand the value and importance of Indochina to the French economy, and conversely, the importance of France to the well-being of Indochina. Essentially, this book promoted pro-colonial propaganda to the general public and French administration. Robequain conveys the civilizing mission message throughout, as he consistently reinforces the humanitarian aid and improvements brought in by the French.

Unlike the previous works that focus on a single subject, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial* (1981), written by David G. Marr, discusses multiple conditions that led to rebellion, mobilization, and war. Changes in the political and social consciousness of the Annamite population between 1920 and 1945—and the ability of the French to control numerous aspects of Annamite life, the alteration of the village economy and social relationships, and the introduction of a cash economy—all contributed to the onset of the Vietnam War. Marr spends little time discussing the development and actions of the Communist Party or Ho Chi Minh because he wants to show why the French lost their colony rather than explain why the Indochinese won.

If the reader is looking for sources that err on the side of anti-colonial, one needs to look no further than Ngo Vinh Long's *Before the Revolution: the Vietnamese Peasants under French Domination* and Pham Cao Duong's *Vietnamese Peasants Under French Domination*. *Before the Revolution*, the more anti-French of the two books, discusses the social repercussions of French policies on the rural areas and population from the 1880s to 1945. Growing up in rural Vietnam, Long had the personal experience to portray a straightforward account of peasant life. By using multiple Vietnamese sources, he explains the neglect of the peasantry and their poor living conditions—subjects rarely mentioned in English language writings. Long argues that most writers and historians neglected the subject of the peasant because they wrongly believed that the events of the colonial era and what the French called improvements to Annamite life had no bearing or influence on future events such as the Indochinese and Vietnam Wars. In trying to break this myth, Long instead discusses how the French influence truly impacted the lives of the peasants and led to rebellion.

Although Duong was a refugee from the Vietnam War, he takes a less anti-colonial approach than Long. His *Vietnamese Peasants Under French Domination* focuses not only on peasant conditions but also on the conditions that governed the economics, society, and mentality of peasant life. Like Long, Duong believed that too little material existed about peasant life and so sought the writings and oral histories of former mandarins, notables, and descendants of large landowners. Unlike Long, he used colonial memoirs from the French administrators, politicians, and travelers, as well as articles from French and Vietnamese journalists to balance the Eastern works. Duong explains how the French plans for agricultural development changed the evolution of the rural society and the Annamites. The plans provoked resistance from the outset, but true confrontation came only in the 1930s. He refrains from discussing such

uprisings because, he says, the period is too recent to study objectively with historical perspective.

These secondary sources, in addition to numerous others, show both sides of colonialism. On one side, early twentieth-century sources from French and English authors and historians create an image of a helpful, parent-like France looking out for the best interest of the colony and its inhabitants. On the other side, mid-to-late twentieth-century scholarship turns away from pro-colonial sentiment to depict poor, miserable peasants who find the strength to rise up against their oppressors. Not until recently has more information emerged about true colonial life. Much focus remains on the Vietnam War as authors look backward seeking the true cause—or causes—of the disaster. Yet even Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History*, perhaps the best account and one that does sensitively portray Indochinese traditions, still focuses mainly on the war itself.

The style of life and the changes imposed on the Annamites by the French had a direct link to the downfall of the colony. The French simply could not turn the Annamites into Europeans. The goal of this thesis is to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of what happened to Indochina at the height of French colonialism, and why the French could not change Indochina. By using various primary and secondary sources, I shall illustrate how the French tried to change the indigenous population, how they paid for the improvements, and why these improvements failed. By understanding how the French carried out their plans to meet goals of the colony, the reader will be able to comprehend why everything fell apart.

Most cities and villages in Indochina are spelled a variety of ways. I have chosen to spell them one way, based off of secondary sources, to maintain consistency. All statistics in this thesis came directly from primary sources and secondary sources, and many figures may not

add up to what is stated. Also, the terms “Annamite” and “Indochinese” are used interchangeably since Annamites composed the majority of the population group residing in the colony.

## Chapter 1: French Discovery and Settlement in Indochina

To fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europeans, Asia was a land of mystery, myth, and excitement, a place of precious and rare commodities, mythical creatures, and mysterious people. Although explorations of Asia were rare, writings about the continent were plentiful and colored by fairy tale images. Europeans traded with Persia and Arabia for centuries, but the Far East remained relatively unknown to Western merchants. It was Catholic missionaries who made the first concerted attempts to establish a presence in the Far East. Early attempts at conversion began with the Franciscan missionary, Odoric de Pordenone of Udine, who worked in Cochinchina between 1318 and 1330. Further attempts came a century later, when Nicolo de Conti and Hieronimo Adrome traveled throughout Burma and Siam. Although their written accounts did not spark a major effort by Europeans at exploration, they did, by providing realistic accounts, diminish the prevalence of mythological tales about the Far East.<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic Church did not make a concerted effort to extend its influence into the Far East until the end of the sixteenth century. This new impulse was a direct result of its attempt to regain the power and prestige diminished by the Reformation. The Church began to institute and fund mission trips for the Jesuit, Franciscan, and Dominican orders throughout the world in an effort to convert more people to Catholicism. The Italians and Portuguese launched the first regular missions in Asia. They rapidly ran up against resistance, especially against the Japanese, who expelled them in the late sixteenth century and forced them to find refuge in Indochina. Indochina's geographical location allowed it to become a crossroad where Hindu and Chinese cultures met, clashed, and fused. These cultural differences between the Hindu and the Chinese would be further complicated through the introduction of European culture and attempts at

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas E. Ennis, *French Policy and Developments in Indochina* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936), 13; Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe: The Century of Discovery, vol. I, book I* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 20.

colonization. The complexity of the culture of Indochina would have far-reaching consequences for the ultimate success or failure of European, and especially French, colonization in the area. The improving impulses of French colonial officials would eventually have disastrous consequences for the Indochinese people and society.<sup>3</sup>

The missionaries, and later the traders, encountered a culture far different from Europe. The Annamites, found in central Indochina, were Chinese in origin, Mongoloid in appearance, and composed 75 percent of the Indochinese population. Although it is thought that they originated in Tonkin, the northern-most province, they migrated further south to both the provinces of Annam and Cochinchina. The Portuguese originally name the area “Cochinchina,” using the Chinese characters ‘Giao Chi,’ meaning Vietnam. They added China to the name to distinguish the area from another Portuguese colony in India, also named Cochin. The French continued to use the original Portuguese name, however, using it only to refer to the southern-most province. The French also revived the term “Annam,” meaning “pacified south,” from a Chinese colonist term in order to refer to the middle province.<sup>4</sup> The origins of the nomadic Annamites before their settlement in the Red River Delta between 500 and 200 BC are uncertain, but the Chinese conquered these people between 213 BC and 186 AD.<sup>5</sup>

After centuries of Chinese domination, the future country of Vietnam began to take shape in 1009, first with the formation of the Ly Dynasty, which lasted until 1225, and then with the Tran Dynasty. The Trans expanded their country’s territory, population, army, and bureaucracy, and focused on foreign affairs and national defenses against further Chinese oppression.

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<sup>3</sup> Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe: The Century of Discovery, vol. I, book II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 560; Virginia Thompson, *French Indochina* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 22.

<sup>4</sup> The separation and naming of these provinces did not occur until French arrival. Although the origins of the provinces of Annam and Cochinchina have been traced back, there is no evidence of the foundations of the word “Tonkin.”

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 70; David Joel Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

Ultimately, however, economic crisis and peasant rebellions allowed another Chinese invasion in 1407. After the Annamites were able to defeat them for the final time in 1428, the Le Dynasty emerged but quickly declined due to internal conflict. The final blow to them came in the form of the Tay-Son rebellion of 1771, paving the way for the Nguyen Dynasty. Formed in 1802, the Nguyens became the final rulers of the region before the French conquest. This dynasty nearly destroyed itself, however, before the arrival of the Europeans. The Nguyens discouraged commerce, segregated the Chinese, took away many political rights from women, and regulated and suppressed religions other than Confucianism in order to reduce diversity and criticism. Although discontent was prevalent throughout the country, the Annamites were able to band together in the 1860s against the French. This newfound sense of community was not brought on by nationalism but rather by xenophobia and loyalty to Confucianism.<sup>6</sup>

Through initial Chinese conquest, the Annamites adopted long-lasting Chinese traditions and customs, among them the Chinese system of government and law. Annamites relied on cooperation between the mandarins, who represented the government and theocracy, and the elected notables, who represented democracy within the community. The Annamite emperor, the head of the social hierarchy, had absolute power and was responsible for the welfare and protection of his subjects. He served as priest and judge and claimed his mandate from heaven. Beneath the emperor were his mandarins, a body of officials who helped him in running the empire. To qualify for the position of a mandarin, an Annamite had to pass an examination in which he demonstrated a thorough knowledge of literature, philosophy, morality, and the Chinese classics. Initially, the exam required knowledge of the three common religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In 1075, the government made Confucianism a separate

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<sup>6</sup> Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9-11, 42-43; Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia*, 123, 127, 301.

test, and by 1247, it became the sole basis of the examination. This system, formally adopted from the Chinese in the twelfth century, gave—in theory—each subject in the empire the opportunity to qualify for work in the government. In practice, only the wealthy could afford to pay a tutor to learn the required material and, therefore, held all of the offices.<sup>7</sup>

The life of Annamite society centered on the village, the population of which varied from 300 to 1,000 people. The mandarins ran each village in accordance with the emperor's law through a council of notables and a "village chief," a young, minor notable chosen by the village and approved by the mandarins to serve as a secretary to the council and intermediary to the district mandarin. The notables held considerable power and prestige, handled state relations, taxes, communal lands, and conducted religious rites and harvest festivals. The twelve senior notables, chosen from wealthy and prominent families in the village, formed a council, which conducted religious activities and supervised daily administration. Voting depended upon the unanimity of the council, not a majority. This council also served as the village court in which local conflicts between and within families were solved. A smaller group of minor notables did not have the same power and prestige as the others, but they had to meet three criteria to ascend to the position: mandarinic achievement or education, wealth, and age. Below these notables were six ministers who controlled appointments, finances, rites, war, justice, and public works. The Annamites also had an aristocracy, but this aristocracy did not hold office or hold special privileges. The emperor bestowed titles upon deserving families, but only five inheritable titles existed. The degree of nobility diminished with each passing generation, leaving the sixth generation to reabsorb into the population. At the bottom were the commoners, but where an

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald J. Cima, ed., *Vietnam: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 93, 102-103; Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 119; Stephen H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy (1870-1925)*, vol. II (London: P.S. King and Son, LTD., 1929), 435; Thompson, *French Indochina*, 19, 25-27.

Annamite resided in relation to the village determined his place on the ladder of the social hierarchy. Annamites living within the village, considered “insiders,” had more rights than “outsiders,” even if the outsiders eventually came to live within the city. Transients, refugees, the poor, and even men from other villages marrying into an inside family all received the label outsider. The Annamites focused on the extended family instead of the nuclear and viewed arranged marriages simply as social contracts between the families. Although polygamy was acceptable in Annamite culture, the first wife, though subordinate to her husband, held the power to decide whether or not her husband took on another wife.<sup>8</sup>

In general, Chinese culture and religion, especially Taoism and Buddhism, heavily influenced all three provinces of Indochina. Although initially weak, Confucianism superseded Buddhism. Beyond its mass appeal, Confucianism was especially attractive to the rulers because its theory stated that only superior men were to act as state diviners or worship the gods. When applied to Indochinese society, Confucianism emphasized respect for elders, equals, and authority, and this emphasis fit well into the cult of ancestors, which remained the core of religious life. This religion became popular among the mandarins because of its principle of respect and reverence for authority. In order to keep other forms of religion from infiltrating, the mandarins instituted heavy censorship and controlled religious leaders in their attempts to dilute other spiritual influences. These controls served to homogenize local beliefs, contain Buddhism, and promote Confucianism. The common man was only allowed to participate in ancestor worship. Believing that the spirits of their ancestors influenced the world of the living, the Indochinese regularly paid homage to the dead through special offerings on the anniversary

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<sup>8</sup> Cima, ed., *Vietnam*, 114; Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, 88-89, 92-93, 95, 106; Thompson, *French Indochina*, 26, 28. Consent of the first wife is required before the taking on of others.

of their death. Confucianism regulated the relationships between people and gave unity to politics and society in this region.<sup>9</sup>

By the arrival of the first major wave of European missionaries in the early seventeenth century, Confucianism was well established. When Father Alexander of Rhodes landed in Indochina in the 1620s, he traveled to Hanoi and lived among the Annamites, attempting to convert them to Catholicism. Although he had mixed results with conversions, he instituted an important innovation in the Indochinese language. The Annamites developed their own language, but one that was written using the ideographs and phonetics taken from the Chinese language. Developed between the eighth and ninth centuries AD, this language became known as chu nom, or “southern character.” Chu nom remained the written language of the Annamites until the seventeenth century, when Rhodes helped other French and Portuguese missionaries develop an alphabet for the Annamites based on Latin characters. The Annamites fully adopted this language by the nineteenth century in an effort to distinguish themselves from Chinese culture and language. Today, it is known as quoc ngu. Some Indochinese welcomed the missionaries, but not everyone accepted the foreigners. Tolerance for Christianity and the West depended upon the current emperor and his personal beliefs. The emperors realized that missionary work would lead to trade and believed that trade could lead to political domination. The emperor of Cochinchina, Trinh Trâng, rejected western civilization and its religions, and banished Alexander of Rhodes from his empire.<sup>10</sup>

France was relatively successful in gaining access to Indochina through concerted diplomatic efforts. For instance, King Louis XIV managed to secure a truce between his country’s missions and Trinh Trâng, but upon the succession of Trâng’s son, Trinh Can, relations

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<sup>9</sup> Cima, ed., *Vietnam*, 102; Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, 119, 121-122.

<sup>10</sup> Cima, ed., *Vietnam*, 95; Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 14; Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, 84.

soured. Can initially refused to accept Christians in Cochinchina but was later convinced to relent by the potential advantage that French trade could bring. Other rulers were less easily persuaded, and throughout the next century, the tolerance of Christianity waned dramatically. By the turn of the nineteenth century, these anti-Western and anti-Christian emperors had almost managed to undo completely the work of previous missionaries. Despite these obstacles, missionaries continued to pour into Indochina, serving not only their religious aims but also acting as interpreters to aid in the military conquest of the peninsula.<sup>11</sup>

The missionaries were not the only ones interested in the Far East, for European states also began to see the benefits of a relationship with Indochina. Early exploration lead to attempted settlements. The first began with the Portuguese at Faifo, but it never flourished, serving only as a small port and base for missionaries. By the dawn of the sixteenth century, curiosity sparked the imagination and interest of Europe Fernand Perez explored the coast of Annam as early as 1515, prompting exploration and commerce by mid-century. Although traders moved as far inland as Cambodia, Portugal had no official interest in the area except for her missionaries and soldiers who traveled to Indochina from Macao. Most Europeans were interested only in trading with China and Japan, and used Faifo and other Indochinese ports and towns as a springboard to this Chinese and Japanese trade.<sup>12</sup>

By the time the French arrived, Indochina had attracted a conglomeration of several European nations trying to establish their interests in the area, all vying for trade with China and Japan. The Italians, Dutch, and British joined the French and Portuguese. In 1665, the first French trading company entered Indochina with the intention of allowing missionaries to

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<sup>11</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 14-17, 19; Thompson, *French Indochina*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 13; Jacques Stern, *The French Colonies* (New York: Didier Publishing Co., 1944), 188; Thompson, *French Indochina*, 21.

combine religious and commercial activities, turning the religious men into missionary-traders. They faced much competition, especially from the Dutch based in Indonesia, who in 1682 forced them to withdraw. Moreover, because of the limited purchasing power among the Indochinese, local warfare, and demanding mandarins, trade in the area was hazardous and unprofitable. The other European powers found trade in India, China, and Java to be more lucrative and less problematic. Their exit enabled the French not only to return to Indochina but also to dominate trade in the area.<sup>13</sup>

Indochina became the epicenter of French activity in the Far East during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To the west of French settlement was Laos and Cambodia, and to the east, the country's 2,025 mile coastline bordering the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin. Between China in the north and the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea in the south, the French dominated 1,025 miles of land. The two main rivers, the Red and the Mékong, were the country's lifelines, not only facilitating trade and travel but also supplying the people with water for their everyday needs. Because of the geographical location of Indochina, the missionaries and traders experienced climate and humidity far greater than what they were accustomed to in France: annual monsoons, an average humidity of 84 percent, and temperature ranging from 41 degrees Fahrenheit to 98 degrees Fahrenheit all made European life in Indochina difficult.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the challenges of climate and weather, the French tapped numerous natural resources native to Indochina. On the surface, the French found such items as tea, fruits, and pepper along with the main source of nutrition for the Indochinese, rice and fish. Once the

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<sup>13</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 15-16, 18; Thompson, *French Indochina*, 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Cima, ed., *Vietnam*, 84-85, 89.

French began extensive exploration and mining, they discovered vast mineral resources. Of special importance was the coal from the Quang Yen mines located in Tonkin. The French also dug zinc, tin, silver, lead, and phosphates there, sapphires on the Siam-Cambodia border, and wolfram, iron ore, salt, and limestone in scattered locations. In Annam's province of Song-wan and in the Nui-Kem Valley, and along the streams of the Upper Mékong in Laos, the French found gold. Beyond mining, Indochina became a new place for sugar refining, coconut and peanut oil production, and shipbuilding. Silk, rubber, lumber, tobacco, and cotton all became important commodities to the French through the creation of new industries.<sup>15</sup>

As French exploitation of the Indochinese resources grew, so did their efforts at establishing relations in the region. The major thrust began in the mid-eighteenth century with the explorations of Pierre Poivre, who traveled through the Far East in an effort to provide the French government with economic information essential to the success of their ventures in Indochina. After his return to France, Poivre began concerted efforts to involve the French government in expeditions to Indochina. In June 1748, he proposed an expedition to the French East India Company, the sole purpose of which was establishing commercial relations with Indochina. Unfortunately, the attempt to establish these trading relations failed because the indigenous people would not buy western goods. The mid-eighteenth century seemed right to establish these relations because French traders wanted to challenge the British domination of overseas trade, hoping that Indochina would provide the same riches that India had to Great Britain. France needed to regain the worldwide prestige diminished by her losses in the Seven

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<sup>15</sup> Cima, ed., *Vietnam*, 104, 146; Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 115-116, 118, 131; Marion H. Matheson, *Indochina: A Geographical Appreciation* (Ottawa: Department of Mines, 1953), 22-23.

Years' War. After the peace treaty in 1763, France ceded to Great Britain most of her North American territories, including Canada and all land east of the Mississippi River.<sup>16</sup>

The first successful expedition to Indochina began on March 16, 1816, when the French ship *Cybele*, under the command of Achilles de Kergariou, set sail for Cochinchina with the purpose of establishing relations with Emperor Gia Long, who was as eager as the French to commence trade. This new spirit of cooperation was the direct result of French interference in Indochinese politics. Emperor Gia Long, previously known as Nguyen Anh, had been expelled from his throne in the 1770s. In an attempt to regain power, he appealed to the French government for aid, while taking shelter in France at the home of Bishop Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine. Despite Louis XVI's alliance with Nguyen Anh in the late eighteenth century, the French government did not send military support to restore Anh to the throne under his new name, Gia Long, until 1801.<sup>17</sup> In return for French assistance, the restored emperor opened his country to trade and signed a treaty of friendship and alliance. Unfortunately, these good relations soured upon the accession of Long's son, Minh-Mang, in the 1820s. Minh-Mang was much less tolerant of Christians and Westerners than his father, and he demanded that all foreigners, including the French, leave Cochinchina. Having established profitable economic endeavors, the French were unwilling to leave and refused the new emperor, who retaliated with minor persecutions of Christian missionaries. Continued attempts to reestablish good relations in Indochina proved fruitless, as Minh-Mang's successors were also resistant to Western influence. Successive failures led to discouragement among the traders and politicians, and their hopes at establishing a major colony in Asia began to wane. Despite these initial setbacks, the

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<sup>16</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 5, 22-2; Stephen H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy (1870-1925)*, vol. I (London: P.S. King and Son, LTD., 1929), 3, 8; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 422.

<sup>17</sup> Also spelled Gia-long, or Gialong.

year 1848 proved a turning point as a dramatic series of events changed the destiny of the French.<sup>18</sup>

On November 4, 1847, Tu-Duc ascended to power in Indochina. He, like Minh-Mang, held anti-Christian and anti-Western views, but unlike his predecessor, he maintained a passive policy towards the missionaries. Tu-Duc continued to uphold the religious liberties granted by his father, Emperor Thien-Tri, the son of Minh-Mang. Despite these initial policies of conciliation, Tu-Duc saw the Revolution of 1848 in France as the occasion to rid Indochina of missionaries. He wrongly assumed that the French would be so preoccupied with internal dissension that they would not react to their missionaries. After his election to president of the Second Republic in December 1848, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte attempted to resolve the situation in Indochina by negotiating with Tu-Duc, but to no avail. The refusal of the Indochinese to compromise provided him the excuse to intervene directly with force. Predicated on the flimsy excuse of “insult to the French ruler” and the rationale that the lives of the missionaries were in danger, the French government determined that the time for passivity was over.<sup>19</sup>

Over the next ten years, the French repeatedly protested the treatment of missionaries. They dispatched warships to ensure safety, only to have the problem resurface immediately upon the departure of the French fleet. Although thoroughly irritated at the Indochinese emperors, the French were not entirely reckless in pursuing their goal of subduing Indochina. Bonaparte, since 1852 and the proclamation of the Second Empire calling himself Napoleon III, enlisted the help of Spain, whose missionaries were also being persecuted. Initially, their combined

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<sup>18</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 30-32; Stern, *The French Colonies*, 192; Thompson, *French Indochina*, 20-21, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 33-35.

expedition was successful, capturing the coastal town of Tourane in September 1858, and then Gia Dinh in 1859. Although the outbreak of cholera and typhoid fever forced the abandonment of Tourane, Gia Dinh continued to grow and flourish, primarily because of its vital and uncomplicated route to the open ocean. Napoleon III had limited objectives for this military endeavor and intended to pull out of Cochinchina after the capture of these two towns and the assertion of French control. Yet, subsequent French victories complicated withdrawal, as the treaties and acquisition of new lands made Indochina even more attractive to French ambitions.<sup>20</sup>

Because of military defeats, Emperor Tu-Duc signed the Treaty of Saigon with the French on June 5, 1862. This agreement ceded Cochinchina's three eastern provinces, Bien-Hoa, Dinh-Tuong, and Gia-Dinh (which contained the town of Gia Dinh) to France. Although the expeditionary force initially demanded the western provinces as well, the French government refused to fund the long campaign necessary to complete this acquisition, and as a result, these provinces remained Tu-Duc's for another five years. In addition to the eastern provinces, the Treaty of Saigon also provided the French with the province of Mytho and the island of Pulo-Condor. The French then opened all the ports in the provinces under their control for trade, while at the same time allowing the missionaries to continue their proselytizing and permitting warships to enter Cambodia through the Mékong. To solidify their gains, the French signed a treaty with the emperor on August 11, 1863, placing Cambodia under the protection of France. This treaty would come into play later, after the French became more certain what they would do with the area.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cima, ed., *Vietnam*, 30; Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 36; Roberts, *The History of French Colonialism*, vol. II, 421-422.

<sup>21</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 41. The Treaty of Hué, signed on August 25, 1883, officially placed Cambodia under a French protectorate.

In the late 1860s, the French made a decision to tap into Chinese trade through the country's southern provinces by way of Tonkin in northern Indochina. On June 6, 1866, an expedition set out on the Mékong River to determine its navigability and to confirm or finally put to rest the hopes of a trade route running directly from Szechuan to Gia Dinh. Explorers from the ministry of the Marine reached the Chinese border on October 18, 1867, but the desired connection between Szechuan and Gia Dinh was frustrated once they realized that they could not develop the Mékong past its junction with the Yangtse River. After this discovery, explorers abandoned the idea of a direct route from Cochinchina up the Mékong to China, opting instead for one using the Red River and Tonkin in hope of achieving better access there.<sup>22</sup>

During these explorations of the Red River, new problems began developing. Because the French had not acquired Cochinchina's western provinces under the Treaty of Saigon, rebel forces used this land as a place to assemble and launch attacks. To solidify control of the area and to protect her burgeoning trade, France decided to seize the western provinces. Vinh-Long fell to the French on June 19, 1867, An-Giang on June 22, and Hatien on June 25. During the next two years, the French continued to conquer lands around the Mékong, and by January 15, 1869, the entire Mékong River delta had fallen under French control.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these victories in Cochinchina, most of the French colonies remained scattered, weak, and afflicted with an increasingly hostile population, making the colonies much more difficult to control. Complicating the issue was the fact that some of the colonies were not even certain of their own boundaries. Despite the problems and setbacks, French explorers and traders continued working in the Far East, often with a successful outcome. On November 22, 1873, the French captured the city of Hanoi along with various other small villages along the

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<sup>22</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 42; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 422-433.

<sup>23</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 42, 44.

Red River delta. This victory led to the signing of another Franco-Annamite treaty on March 15, 1874, by which the emperor officially recognized French land claims in Cochinchina. The language of this new treaty was intentionally vague: it imposed a quasi-protectorate over Annam, yet the suzerainty of China continued because the French were unsure of what to do with the territory. Because the treaty did not use the word “protectorate,” Annamite and Chinese officials continued to run the country politically as they had done previously. Yet, the French hoped to establish such an official protectorate in the area if conditions for trade and commerce became favorable. If so, they could say that the treaty implied permission to impose a protectorate. In addition to this quasi-protectorate, the treaty opened the ports of Haiphong, Hanoi, and Quinh-On to French trade, allowing commerce on the Red River up to the Chinese border.<sup>24</sup>

“Early imperialism” relied on mercantile commerce and trading stations, with little ambition to take the land, but under “new imperialism,” in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Europeans began to pour substantial capital into these overseas possessions. These investments increased the value of the imperialized areas, but the European nations became increasingly dependent upon the tropical and exotic goods they provided. Obviously, it became necessary to protect these investments, and politicians rallied the cause among their citizens. The more profitable the colonies became, the more the people at home were apt to support the imperial cause, but many wanted justification.

As the world entered the 1870s, new philosophical ideologies began to penetrate the minds of French politicians, and they began to use these ideas as justification for colonialism and imperialism. Although the philosophers of the eighteenth century believed that western

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<sup>24</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 45; Thomas F. Power, Jr., *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1944), 156; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 425.

societies could learn from other cultures around the world, the Darwinists of the nineteenth century felt otherwise. From Charles Darwin's theory of "natural selection," Herbert Spencer argued for a "survival of the fittest" among nations, in which they would struggle for survival, and the strongest win. Politicians used this excuse—along with the belief that white Europeans simply had a superior culture—to justify colonization. Along with this argument came a moral issue: the civilizing mission. Here was the obligation to introduce indigenous people to western culture, in the belief that they would greatly benefit from western colonialism.

As Europeans sought to justify their domination of the world, the scramble for territory moved into Africa. Competition and rivalry between France and Great Britain in Africa began over the Suez Canal in 1875. The canal, which provided faster and more reliable access from the Mediterranean Sea to Asia, was essential for the British because it facilitated travel and trade to India. Although the French had organized the joint-stock company that built the canal, the bankrupt Khedive of Egypt sold most of his shares in the enterprise to the government of Great Britain. The French became upset when the British were able to extend a protectorate over the country. In January 1895, France, in quest for African land, gained a foothold in the Upper Nile. France declared that this Sudan area was open to all colonial powers, but Great Britain, having claimed the Sudan for her purposes, called future French activity in the area "unfriendly." The rivalry came to a head in 1898 when a French expeditionary force collided with a British one at Fashoda. After tense negotiations, the powers resolved their outstanding colonial issues with Great Britain formally recognizing French claims to West Africa, while France accepted British claims to Egypt and the Nile basin. The African crisis motivated the French government to look elsewhere for more land to improve its international status.

France's ability to take advantage of gains around the world and especially in Indochina, both politically and economically, depended upon legislative support at home. Instrumental to the successful extension of France's imperial aims was the work of Jules Ferry, a one-time Minister of Education turned Premier in 1880, who is credited with creating the modern French Empire. Under Ferry's two cabinets, 1880-1881 and 1883-1885, France became second only to Great Britain as the largest European colonial power, through the gain of nearly two million square miles by acquiring land in Africa and Asia.<sup>25</sup>

Ferry realized that France needed raw materials and new markets as she began to industrialize rapidly and thereby sought to make economics the basis of his foreign and colonial policy. The French territories had all the necessary natural resources to produce finished goods; France merely needed to tap them. In order to exploit these resources, local self-government needed to ensure order, prevent insurgence, and consolidate control. This self-government coupled with French oversight and control, required more than mere imperialistic exploitation. Ferry and his supporters rapidly came to the realization that colonization provided the best method for promoting French interests and aggrandizement, especially in Asia and Africa. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, one of Ferry's cohorts, recognized its importance, declaring, "Colonization is for France a matter of life or death. Either France becomes a great African Power, or in a century or two, she will be a secondary European Power and will count in the world little more than Greece or Rumania counts in Europe."<sup>26</sup> Through colonization, France could prove to the world that she was as great a power as any other European nation. This power would in turn boost morale and national prestige among French citizens.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Power, Jr., *Jules Ferry*, 1; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. I, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. I, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. I, 18.

Despite growing support for colonial exploitation, Ferry ran into problems during his first term. The Chinese began protesting French claims in Indochina and went so far as to refuse recognition of the 1874 treaty. When the Chinese government took military action, the French could do little initially because many of her troops were deployed in the African colonies. Ferry sought money from the legislature for the protection of Tonkin against the Chinese insurrection. On July 21, 1881, he presented a bill to the Chamber of Deputies asking for 2,400,000 francs to explore Tonkin and to clear the Red River of pirates, a vital task if the French wanted this area safe. The bill passed 309-82, and the following year on April 26, 1882, Commander Henri Rivière captured the city of Hanoi. After taking this major port city, the French army commanders took a “man-on-the-spot” attitude by continuing to conquer territory without legislative approval. They argued that by the time the legislators made a decision, problems in the area could escalate beyond the point of control. Acting on his own and without authorization from the French government, Admiral Jean Bernard Jaréquiberry sought to capture all of Tonkin. He argued both for the economic benefits and for the importance to French honor, and thus gained formal permission on October 21, 1882 from the legislature to establish a full protectorate over Tonkin and Annam.<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of his second cabinet in 1883, Ferry realized the importance of clarifying colonial policy and ensuring its direction from the center. In only a few years, Indochina was transformed from an insignificant and small holding to a symbol of French prestige and honor. Because of his patriotism and his commitment to France’s international position, Ferry increasingly sided with the expansionist movement that was now driven by diplomats and politicians instead of merchants and traders. He made a concerted effort to drum up support in the legislature and convinced the members of the necessity for further exploration

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<sup>28</sup> Power, *Jules Ferry*, 158-161. See treaty of 1874; conditions are now favorable for a protectorate.

in Tonkin, obtaining the passage of a new bill by the vote of 351-48 granting a credit of 5,300,000 francs for just that purpose.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the new flow of money, the expedition teams continued to face problems. The capture of Hanoi and the establishment of French protectorates in the area led to further protests by the Chinese government. On August 25, 1883, the Annamites and the French signed the Treaty of Hué by which Annam and Tonkin accepted a French military, diplomatic, and financial protectorate over Tonkin. This agreement also granted France full rights to interfere in Annamite affairs and to establish Cambodia as a French protectorate. Li-Hong-Tchang, the Chinese viceroy, refused to accept the treaty and sent troops into Tonkin as a response. Wanting a resolution to stop the fighting, Ferry sought help from Great Britain in settling the issue. The British suggested a neutral zone between China and Tonkin if China ceased her interference in Annamite affairs. China refused these suggestions and demanded that France recognize Chinese sovereignty in Annam.<sup>30</sup>

After extensive further negotiation, the two sides reached an agreement on May 11, 1884, with the Treaty of Tien-Tsin, in which China agreed to withdraw from Tonkin and France agreed to respect the Chinese border. In addition, the treaty instituted freedom of trade between Annam and China. One month later, China and France formally ratified the Treaty of Hué. France later claimed that China issued a statement after signing the Treaty of Tien-Tsin declaring that she would withdraw her presence from Tonkin within six days of the ratification. Subsequently, disagreements erupted between the military leaders of both countries, and the fighting—which had begun when France first occupied Annam and had been interrupted by brief periods of peace—resumed. Ferry received telegrams describing the situation and accused China of

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<sup>29</sup> Power, *Jules Ferry*, 161, 164.

<sup>30</sup> Power, *Jules Ferry*, 160, 166-167.

violating the treaty. China's response was that neither country set a formal date for the Chinese troops to leave. On July 13, 1884, France presented China with an ultimatum demanding the immediate withdrawal of Chinese troops from Tonkin and payment of a 200-million-franc indemnity, with France threatening to declare war if the demands were not met. Six days later, Ferry reduced the indemnity to 100 million francs, and the Chinese countered by offering 3.5 million as compensation for French soldiers lost in battle. Although Ferry rejected this offer and despite the break down of negotiations, the French legislature never declared war on China, deciding instead to focus on improving the colony.<sup>31</sup>

Discussion in the Chamber of Deputies began on August 14-15, 1884 about a proposal to grant Tonkin an additional sum of 38,482,000 francs for its exploration and defense: the bill passed 334-140. That same year, another bill, passing 354-157, granted an additional 16,147,368 francs to Tonkin; the following year, a third bill, passing 342-170, awarded Tonkin 43,422,000 francs. The Chamber also voted in favor of fully executing and upholding the Treaty of Tien-Tsin. Since the majority of the deputies voted in favor of these bills, here was proof that they were willing to defend the Tonkinese cause even if it meant war with China. France wanted China to recognize the Treaty of Tien-Tsin, and on February 28, 1885, China agreed to do so but refused to pay any indemnities. Ferry reluctantly accepted the Chinese offer, and on April 4, 1885, China officially relinquished all her claims to Tonkin and Annam. By 1897, after obtaining the port of Kwang-chow-wan, France controlled the entire peninsula. Following the complete conquest of Indochina, France slowly lost interest in obtaining raw materials from China. France's attention now turned from exploration of Indochina to the creation of a colonial administration.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Power, *Jules Ferry*, 172-175.

<sup>32</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 57; Power, *Jules Ferry*, 175-176, 180-181, 186, 190.

The French needed to produce a system of government to maintain control of the area and to prevent insurgency. They first realized the importance of this task in February 1861, when a substantial majority of the indigenous leaders fled the country upon French arrival. No one was left to teach the French how to rule over the population or about the Indochinese culture. Another task the French faced was how to unify Indochina. For the French, the solution was to group them together in a loose union. In theory, unification and governmental control seemed easy enough: French officials would simply control the mandarins and the system. The French did not consider a policy of “association,” which would have allowed the native rulers to govern with the help of the French while maintaining their traditions and customs. Instead, the French chose to adopt the policy of “assimilation,” the roots of which developed during the French Revolution.<sup>33</sup>

Because the 1789 Revolution was based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity for all citizens, the colonies could not be an exception. The indigenous people, the economic organization, and the colonial organization would run as if everything were truly French. After all, in the minds of the French, who would not want to be a part of the great French empire and a citizen of France? They believed that the existing Annamite organization represented barbarism and stood in the way of progress. Unfortunately for the French, their theory of assimilation rested on the belief that the indigenous population could forget about their culture and civilization and become French—if not overnight, then over time. Although the French saw this policy as a positive change for the indigenous people of the colonies, assimilation destroyed native traditions and produced a population who lost touch with their past but were not comfortable living in imitation of the French. Assimilation would inevitably destroy Annamite culture. Although assimilation had worked with the population of Algeria in

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<sup>33</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 53; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 419, 435.

the half century since 1830, Algeria had a far less-developed system of society, politics, and economics than Indochina. Unlike the African Arabs, the Indochinese had a highly sophisticated culture, the result of Chinese influence. They had a more developed written and spoken language, a system of morals and education, and a complicated politico-social organization.<sup>34</sup>

The French faced a completely different system of values and traditions. The French valued individualism; the Indochinese appreciated their collectivism. The introduction of French laws often contradicted local customs and morals, leaving a generation of people confused over which path to follow. Under Annamite tradition, anyone under the age of twenty-one faced imprisonment for disobedience or lack of respect towards a family member, as all Annamites were expected to obey and respect their elders. Under French law, children had no legal obligation to obey their parents after their twenty-first year. As generations of the same families fell under the regulation of two different laws, Annamite and French, family feuds often ensued. For example, according to Annamite law, the grandfather was the head of the family and had authority over his grown children. According to French law however, if his son became a French citizen, he no longer had to obey his elders, family or not. The introduction of French law destroyed the ancient customs by which the Indochinese administered religious laws. In 1800, before French rule, the punishment for an adulterous woman was death from the trampling of elephants. As French influence became more prominent, by 1875, adulteresses were punished with eight months of hard labor; after the introduction of French law, the sentence was reduced to imprisonment for a maximum of two years. Before French law, the uttering of an individual's proper name was illegal, dishonorable, and undermined authority because doing so

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<sup>34</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 52, 58, 96; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. I, 68-69; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 436.

represented a lack of respect to ancestors. According to French customs, the use of proper names was required. Despite attempts by the Indochinese to assimilate into French culture by obeying western laws, the indigenous people rarely received equal treatment by the French. The Indochinese destroyed their traditions, hoping to become French; the lack of acceptance left them resentful, disillusioned, and prone to commit acts of retaliation.<sup>35</sup>

Before the completion of their conquest, French officials began establishing what they considered reforms along with a system of government. In 1864, they introduced the Napoleonic Code throughout Cochinchina, and in 1879, applied it to Annam and Tonkin. Despite peaceful attempts to change the Indochinese government to fit the French pattern, the earliest forms of French colonial administration required militia reinforcements to prevent insurrection. Between 1861 and 1879, the French organized the native troops into a western-style army, gave the police modern weapons, and created a central prison in Saigon. In 1862, they created a Consultative Committee for Native Affairs, with an inspector-in-chief at its head, to undertake duties previously exercised by the mandarins. The French also set up various councils of government: the Colonial Council to focus on real estate problems, colonial laws, internal transportation, canal expenses, and general works; the Privy Council, to administer local budgets, new taxes, and direct contributions while supervising the administrative council of Saigon and Haiphong; and the Defense Council, to oversee military problems and advise on the building and maintenance of roads, railroads, and bridges.<sup>36</sup>

While administrative improvements developed abroad, they also began at home in France. Previously, control of the colonies shifted back and forth between the ministry of the Marine and the ministry of Commerce, often leading to chaos and confusion. In Paris, the Third

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<sup>35</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 9, 58, 65-67; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. I, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 53-54, 72, 78, 83.

Republic created the ministry of the Colonies in 1893 to regulate France's numerous overseas investments. Its head was now a cabinet minister who controlled a large bureaucracy. Below him was a governor-general for each colony, who ruled in the name of the French Republic. In Indochina, the governor-general oversaw the local administrative bureaus, the councils of health, of sanitation, and of education, along with the commission on public health. A single Annamite sat on each of these councils as a token representative of the local population. For the individual protectorates—Cambodia, Laos, Annam, Tonkin, and Cochinchina—there were resident-generals who answered directly to the governor-general. In principle, they were to work in concert, but they frequently clashed over money and resources. The problems quickly eased through the work of one man, Paul Bert.<sup>37</sup>

Appointed resident-general of Annam and Tonkin in January 1886, Bert arrived at a chaotic colony and quickly realized that he needed support from the local population. He found himself in a conundrum: the Tonkinese did not like their Annamite rulers, but he needed the approval of both groups. In order to win over the Tonkinese, Bert abolished the Annamite mandarins in Tonkin and set up the Tonkin Academy to permit them to choose their own educated leaders. In April 1886, he established the Council of Notables to which all the provinces would elect indigenous officials for one-year terms and which would meet to discuss problems and the French administration. This body kept all Annamites informed about French policy and gave them a small voice in its execution. Bert hoped doing so would encourage their respect for and approval of French rule. In fact, the council did change the local attitude about the French for the better. Despite opposition from colonial leaders who favored assimilation, Bert believed in the policy of association. He thought that the role of the French government was to supervise and to control the acts of the mandarins, not to rule in their place. Bert rallied

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<sup>37</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 59, 72, 81, 83.

the merchant classes, established the structures of governance, and did it all with a budget of only six million francs. Although he produced peace and productivity, his immediate successors reversed his ideas after his death in November 1886 because they favored the assimilation policy. This shift led to five years of unsuccessful governor-generals and a cycle of twenty resident-generals between the years 1883 and 1891. Yet despite the alternations in administration, there was continuity and great progress in the critical area of creating the basis for economic growth.<sup>38</sup>

The infrastructure of Indochina was all but nonexistent before the arrival of the French. Agriculture was the sole product of the colony, with rice as the staple crop. The only major road in the colony was the Mandarin Road, which was little more than a dangerous dirt track; otherwise, roads consisted of only small, narrow paths. The Annamites had unreliable bridges made of bamboo, and the mail service—reserved only for officials—was as unreliable as the bridges. Despite the lack of infrastructure, the Annamites did accomplish something amazing in their rice fields: a system of dykes, seawalls, storage ponds, and irrigation canals. “In this, the Annamites were the Dutch of the Far East.”<sup>39</sup> In 1881, Governor-General Joseph de Lanessan proposed building railroads and ports, but the French government recalled him before any of the work could begin. After his departure, the colony and its government drifted until the arrival of Paul Doumer in 1897 changed the situation beyond recognition.<sup>40</sup>

The French government sent Doumer to Indochina in hopes of getting rid of him because he exasperated the legislature and hoped he would fail at this new task.<sup>41</sup> Indochina was becoming a lesson in how not to colonize the Orient, thus forcing Doumer onto a chaotic

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<sup>38</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 78-79, 98; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 440, 442-443, 449.

<sup>39</sup> Thompson, *French Indochina*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 78, 80; Thompson, *French Indochina*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Recent scholarship has not identified exactly why the French government did not like Doumer.

situation with a government and administration in disarray. Before his appointment as resident-general of Tonkin, Doumer studied the finances of the colony; therefore, unlike former residents and governors, he assumed office knowing and understanding the financial situation. Doumer's goals upon arrival were practical and necessary: to create a government with organization and to develop public works and finances.<sup>42</sup>

He turned his attention first to Cambodia, which along with Laos remained neglected because of its isolation and long distance from the coast and main ports. Here, he limited the role of the resident-general to providing supervision and advice. This action returned power to the king and to other Cambodian officials. As a result, Cambodia gave full recognition to French land titles and opened the land to production and profit. In Annam, he chose to uphold an efficient and progressive monarchy to maintain Annamite tradition, thereby ensuring popular favor among the locals. Before Doumer came to power, the governor-general also served as the resident-general of Tonkin. Because of this double responsibility, past appointees accomplished little work in either office. Doumer separated the two and created the new post of resident-general for Tonkin whose assignment was to guide and direct the mandarins. He put villages in charge of communal affairs with the Tonkinese administration and allowed the French to interfere only when the indigenous administration encountered problems. As for the role of the governor-general, Doumer converted this office into the position of overseer for the entire colony, rather than just its administrator.<sup>43</sup>

To represent the general interests of the colony, Doumer created the High Council. Its members included the governor-general, the heads of the army and navy, all the resident-generals, the lieutenant governor, and the presidents of the chambers of commerce and

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<sup>42</sup> Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, 451, 454-455.

<sup>43</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 84; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol II, 458-460.

agriculture. Doumer oversaw the publishing of Franco-Japanese, Franco-Siamese, and Franco-Cantonese dictionaries to improve communications and to smooth policies with the Annamites. By 1898, Indochina had fiscal unity because Doumer reorganized the finances. The local governments were now responsible for their individual budgets, and by the end of Doumer's term in 1902, Indochina had become independent of French finances. Doumer revived and reorganized a colony which many in the French government thought was headed for disaster. Through the efficient collection of taxes, Doumer balanced the 1897 budget, paid off the previous year's deficit, and created a reserve. He reinforced the government's authority, reorganized the colonial administration, assured the existence of and strengthened the general budget, increased commerce, and conceived a railroad project.<sup>44</sup>

In 1898, Doumer received a grant from the French government, which gave him 200 million francs towards the construction and improvement of 1,056 miles of railway. This appropriation led the way for a bill in 1912 granting another 90 million francs to Indochina, promising further additions to the infrastructure and public works of the colony, and promising thus to turn it into an economic power. The major advances produced several benefits. Not only would the entire colony benefit from public works, but having a successful colony would improve French prestige throughout the world.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ennis, *French Policy and Development*, 84-88; Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 463.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, vol. II, 464.

## Chapter 2: The Loan of 1912

In 1912 Chamber of Deputies faced a decision whether or not to grant a loan of 90 million francs to the colony of Indochina. The ministry for the Colonies argued that internal public works such as irrigation, roads, schools, sanitary measures, and telegraphs required this sum. Despite such good intentions, a bill to grant such a large monetary amount would not pass through the Chamber without first sparking a lively debate. Despite the improvements made by Governor-general Paul Doumer with the 200 million franc grant in 1898, some deputies alleged waste and abuse of the funds. In fact, Doumer's accomplishments had been mixed—and not without scandal!<sup>46</sup>

Pierre Paul Paris, deputy for Cochinchina from 1910-1914, proposed several safeguards for the 1912 loan. Passionate about law and government from an early age, he chose to study law at Dijon where he obtained his degree in 1880. Shortly afterward, his interests turned to justice and for the well-being of colonial residents, especially in Indochina. He began studying the intricacies of Cochinchina before his appointment as assistant to the representative of Cambodia in 1884. Later appointed resident-general to Cambodia, Paris resigned to focus on his first passion, law, in Saigon.<sup>47</sup>

Other governmental as well as personal accomplishments followed as Paris began to make a name for himself within the colony. He owned and operated a rubber plantation while living in Indochina, and because of his success and influence in this endeavor, his peers appointed him president of the Union of European Planters of Cochinchina in 1886. He became president of the Society of Indochinese Studies in 1893 and of the Society of Mixed Races five

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<sup>46</sup> *Journal Officiel, Chambre des Deputes, Débats parlementaires* (hereinafter cited as J.O.C., Débats), July 3, 1912; Jean Jolly, ed., *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français; notices biographiques sur les ministres, sénateurs et députés français de 1889 à 1940*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1977), 2604.

<sup>47</sup> Jolly, ed., *Dictionnaire des parlementaires*, 2604-2605.

years later. That same year, 1898, Paris became a founding father of a foundation offering protection and education for abandoned children living within the colony.<sup>48</sup>

Because his interests lay within the colony, it was important for him to see it do well. Knowing Indochina needed money, he assured the assembly that the colony would not repeat the 1898 mistakes. Paris explained that the two main problems then—lack of research and abuse of power—could be prevented and eliminated if legislators carefully monitored the spending of loaned money.<sup>49</sup>

Even though the Chamber blamed the colony for the serious errors, the deputies were not themselves guilt-free in this situation. In 1898, the Chamber voted overwhelmingly in favor of granting Indochina 200 million francs despite not knowing exactly what the money was for or how the colony planned to spend it. Although the great majority of the Chamber favored this loan, there was opposition. One deputy wanted the amount of 200 million reduced to a mere 80 million because he felt the former amount was excessive and unnecessary. On the other hand, Paul Doumer, the colony's governor-general, believed the entire amount was necessary and vital to the colony's development and survival. With the loan, Indochina could pay for all of her own troops, develop the area for and create the beginnings of commerce, and generate a surplus of nearly 6 million francs, which would eliminate any sacrifices the colony needed to make. Another deputy, agreeing with Doumer, noted that France, having abandoned her endeavors in India during the eighteenth century, needed Indochina and its resources as a means to replace that loss long ago. He insisted that failure to grant the colony the entire 200 million francs would do it a great disservice and hurt France in the end. He argued for spreading France's wealth to the colonies: giving this money to Indochina was reasonable because the colony had

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<sup>48</sup> Jolly, ed., *Dictionnaire des parlementaires*, 2604.

<sup>49</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

improved immensely as a source of income and resources for France, especially after generating a surplus of nearly 7 million francs that year. Although the loan of 1898 granted a large sum of money, spending so much did not appear to alter the public's opinion on the issue. Both the Parisian general public and journalists alike paid far more attention to the scandal of the Dreyfus Affair than to colonial matters.<sup>50</sup>

The lack of general interest, combined with legislative support for the loan, meant little in the end. The initial financial plans presented to the ministry of the Colonies were prepared improperly and incompletely. To ensure that the colony did not waste the new funds on unproductive or unnecessary works, Pierre Paris wanted committees this time to study extensively the anticipated areas of construction. This step, inadequately taken in 1898, led to significant, yet preventable, monetary losses because of mistakes. In one example regarding railroad construction in the colony, the Chamber had relied solely on a single inspection conducted by the ministry of the Colonies. Unfortunately, ministry officials did not carry out the investigation themselves but instead relied upon data furnished about where neighboring countries placed their railroads. This information, so vital to the Chamber's decision on giving money, did not even pertain to Indochina. Just because another country could build a railroad somewhere did not mean that Indochina could do the same. To prevent another such mishap, Paris strongly urged the committee to force prospective companies to carry out proper studies before building and before any loan money from the government could be spent.<sup>51</sup>

To deal with the second cause of monetary loss, abuse of power, Paris wanted to punish anyone responsible for the misuse of funds. The unauthorized extension of a rail line in the southern part of Indochina was a prime example of this abuse. The planning was in accordance

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<sup>50</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912; *Le Figaro*, December 25, 1898; *Le Journal des Débats*, December 26, 1898.

<sup>51</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

with Paris' recommendation for research as engineers explored two potential areas to build the new line, along the coast or further inland. Although the cost of building a coastal route was expensive, with the terrain making construction difficult to execute, an inland route had problems just as difficult from uneven terrain and unpredictable weather. In the end, engineers chose the coastal route for its flexibility in permitting additional extensions later. Despite such care in approach, the situation quickly got out of hand.<sup>52</sup>

Without receiving authorization from the French legislature, the Indochinese administration, in an example of abusing their powers, used funds to build a small railroad of eight miles to Dong-Ha rather than to the original destination of Quang-Tri. The administration hoped this move would create the opportunity to build a future line around the Mékong region and maximize the number of people who had access to the railroad. Albert Métin, floor leader for the Chamber's committee for foreign affairs, offered an excuse for the decision, arguing that the 1898 loan had allowed for a certain number of miles of rail to be built between Tourane and Quang-Tri and that the extension to Dong-Ha did not exceed this specified number. Paris retorted that the construction bid allowed for a maximum budget of 24 million francs and that the new extension exceeded this amount by 7 million francs.<sup>53</sup>

The road to politics was paved at an early age for Métin. His intelligence shone brightly while attending school in Nancy, especially in the subjects of history and geography, and he later became a professor at the National Conservatory of Arts and Trades. Once he entered politics, he proved faithful to his home province, and he later asserted himself within the Radical-Socialist party during important debates preceding World War I. Métin served on the Chamber's committees for civil pensions, fiscal legislation, budget, and foreign affairs. He

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<sup>52</sup> J.O.C. Débats, July 3, 1912.

<sup>53</sup> J.O.C. Débats, July 3, 1912.

worked on bills favoring worker's retirement and pensions, and campaigned for many projects about which he was passionate, such as the budgets for the colonies and agriculture.<sup>54</sup>

Métin's loyalty and dedication in government spread to Indochina, as did his interest to see the colony develop and become profitable, despite the problems and consequences with which he often had little or nothing to do. He could cite other examples of the misappropriation of funds in the colony. An estimated 6 million francs had been set aside to build a road from the Mékong region to Dong-Ha. At the last minute, without any explanation, a completely separate project providing electrical lighting to an undisclosed city received all of the money. At the time of the project, the need for the road was far greater than that for electricity. To Métin, it appeared that every time the colony received funds, the men in charge of Indochina's administration wasted the money on projects without merit and then escaped without consequences.<sup>55</sup>

Paris regretted that no one punished the perpetrators of the abuses Métin singled out and that prior to 1912, no one even mentioned the mismanagement of money within the colony. Paris alleged that because no one received punishment, the violators must have had, or still have, the support, and sometimes rewards and protection from other members of the Chamber. He further alleged that whoever was committing the greatest crimes must have the most political clout. Indochina, he said, had already lost too much money through the misappropriation of funds and the lack of careful planning, and he did not want to add greed as a third cause. Paris demanded that the minister for the Colonies bring sanctions against the errant officials in order that the French government could feel comfortable trusting the colony to spend wisely.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Jolly, ed., *Dictionnaire des parlementaires*, 2447.

<sup>55</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

<sup>56</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

Because the loan passed so quickly in the Senate—only a matter hours rather than days or weeks—the December 26, 1898 issue of the influential newspaper, *Le Journal des Débats* concluded that important interests were attached to the bill and that sufficient votes for approval had been guaranteed long prior to the voting. The newspaper editorialized that when such situations occurred, there were often long periods—either before or after a bill passed—when no work was done in the legislature even though the houses were in session. Promises made in the past—the editorial writer did not identify who or when—to regulate and bring order into the legislative process were broken. Calls had been made to name a parliamentary committee to study the problem, but these calls never became more than a thought. Métin was a strong advocate for this potential committee because he wanted more order in governance.<sup>57</sup>

Although direct mismanagement accounted for the majority of the lost money, a lesser amount was lost through inflation. The 1898 grant suffered a 2-million-franc deficit because economic leaders did not take either the time or the effort to stabilize the colony's currency, the piastre. "Stabilization," Paris declared, "is an assurance against the devaluing of money."<sup>58</sup> Taking this action could have saved Indochina a significant amount of money—so said Paris. Métin then insisted that everyone involved in the budget have an opinion on stabilization: either for or against. Scornfully, Paris compared Métin's statement to a Frenchman learning the native Indochinese language: in order to have an opinion on the subject, one must take the time to study the subject in order to learn it properly. Albert Lebrun, laughing, rejoined that learning the Indochinese native language would be easier than understanding stabilization.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Le Journal des Débats*, December 26, 1898; Jolly, ed., *Dictionnaire des parlementaires*, 2447.

<sup>58</sup> M. Pierre Paul Paris, *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

<sup>59</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

Although quiet during most of the debate, Lebrun had his own thoughts and opinions on the subject. Destined to follow a career in politics, he was born on August 29, 1871, the day after Germany unified following France's loss in the Franco-Prussian War. Because of his birthday, Lebrun would never forget this significant defeat, and it would motivate his future legislative actions. Alfred Mézières, then deputy for Meurthe-et-Moselle, introduced Lebrun into the world of politics. Through this mentorship, voters elected Lebrun as representative for the district of Audin-le-Romain in 1892. Lebrun's parliamentary activity quickly intensified. By 1903, he found himself serving as the secretary for the Chamber of Deputies and elected one of its vice-president ten years later. His position on important Chamber committees, for public works, for railroads, for the army, for the navy, for foreign affairs and for the colonies and protectorates, testified to his growing importance. When he presided over the committee for the budget, he proved that he had arrived.<sup>60</sup>

Lebrun's special interests were in the development of railroads, both local and abroad, and in the position of resident foreign workers. During the cabinet of Joseph Caillaux, 1911-1912, he served as minister for the Colonies; he regained the ministry when Gaston Doumergue was premier, 1913-1914. Lebrun would volunteer for the service during World War I, and received the Legion of Honor on April 28, 1915 for his leadership as an artillery officer.<sup>61</sup>

All arguments and jokes aside, the French government would not permit the colonial administration to move towards stabilization of the piastre—if that was the chosen course—without a coherent plan. One deputy, serving on the commercial and industrial service in the economic office of the governor-general of Indochina, offered an example to show how the United States solved its inflation problems in the Philippines. The Americans created a special

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<sup>60</sup> Jolly, ed., *Dictionnaire des parlementaires*, 2185.

<sup>61</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

service of charges that had access to special funds, and they were able to deposit the money in accounts located in both New York and Manila. When the colony needed the money, only certain authorized people could emit bills of exchange and then sell these bills to private individuals. In order to facilitate the new monetary system, the Filipino government drew on the New York treasury. This process helped greatly to eliminate fluctuation in the currency's value. Perhaps Indochina could borrow this idea when the time was right. A number of countries in the Far East—with the important exceptions of Indochina, China, and Hong Kong—had stabilized their currencies by 1900, and Mélin did not want France's colonial possession to be the last to do so. Paris, agreeing with Mélin for the first time, added that stabilization should work, provided Indochina had 50 to 60 million francs set aside in reserve funds first. Unfortunately, the discussion on stabilization did not move any further, as members of the Chamber opted to resolve the stabilization issue another day.<sup>62</sup>

When debate about the loan resumed, Paris attempted to restore confidence in the colony despite the mishaps, which had occurred nearly fifteen years earlier. He listed the positives of the colony's economic situation. Indochina's economic earnings were stable and flexible. The years in which the colony's harvests granted an abundant surplus could easily accommodate other years' deficits. With this type of economic security, Paris believed that France and the Chamber could guarantee 90 million francs to Indochina without fearing that the money would be wasted. Paris regretted that France had not received this same guarantee back in 1898 for the 200 million francs. In addition, the colony now provided the Chamber with abundant reports showing specifically where Indochina needed further investment. The major infrastructure improvements required by the colony were irrigation, railroads, roads, telegraphs, hospitals, and schools. Their implementation would result in broader and faster transportation, healthier

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<sup>62</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

workers, and better communications—all leading Indochina to produce more goods and make France wealthier.<sup>63</sup>

## **Irrigation**

Of all the internal improvements on which the French spent money in their Indochinese colony, irrigation had the most profound impact on Annamite society. Prior to French arrival, the Tonkinese had some means of watering their fields, but their system was on a much smaller and weaker scale than what the French could provide. The Annamites had the technology to use only small compartments to water their fields because they had neither the capabilities nor the knowledge to use larger, more complex courses.<sup>64</sup>

Irrigation assisted the colony's largest agricultural product and most valuable export: rice. If the Indochinese learned proper farming techniques, they could produce not just one but two successful harvests annually, thus doubling the wealth of Tonkin each year. French officials proposed a sum of 19,100,000 francs: 10,500,000 for the South Annam region of Phu-Yen, Vinh-Yen, and Song-Cau, 8,200,000 for the lower Tonkinese region of Thanh-Hoa, and 400,000 for the Central Annam region of Thua-Thien.<sup>65</sup>

After studying regional reports carried out on the Red River delta at the turn of the twentieth century, French officials realized that they needed to understand the local conditions and landscapes of the colony before investing any further money into projects. The combination of high and low lands in Indochina made normal irrigation difficult in many areas, thereby forcing engineers to alter plans to accommodate each different situation. The region of Vinh-Yen served as a perfect example of uneven land. Vinh-Yen's farmers found rice harvesting in June difficult because the low lands consistently flooded from the monsoon rains. In an attempt

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<sup>63</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, July 3, 1912.

<sup>64</sup> Report of March 1, 1912, published in the *Journal Officiel, Lois et Décrets* (hereinafter cited as JO).

<sup>65</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

to cultivate these 16,000 hectares, Vinh-Yen needed government assistance to manage farmland more efficiently.<sup>66</sup>

Although the two-harvest system was possible in some areas of Indochina with relatively few problems, others faced pressing issues aside from geographical restrictions. For example, many Annamites were simply too poor to access the work animals necessary to exploit the land fully. Even in areas where money and supplies were not an issue, farmers still faced the possibility of land exhaustion from planting two crops a year, should they be fortunate enough to carry out a second harvest. Despite these obstacles, new farming techniques developed by the nineteenth century found ways to solve both of these urgent problems. If local farmers made a profit from large harvests and exports—something not done under prior contracts with Chinese or European traders—they could afford to purchase the necessary animals and materials required to boost their production. If Tonkin followed this example, previously set by farmers in Java, the harvest of crops would not depend solely on the extent of supplies. A system of field rotation would also be beneficial, as the work could be concentrated in one area, allowing for less labor, equipment, and irrigation, while at the same time, allowing other fields to rest and replenish nutrients. Irrigation also solved a common, yet easily remedied problem resulting from dry winters and humid summers. As these weather variables dried the land and soil, the primitive tools that the Annamites used for farming could not penetrate the ground. If a proper irrigation system existed, the dry land would be one less problem the Annamites would have to face.<sup>67</sup>

Indochina received twice as much rain per year as France, and although it was adequate to sustain life, the rainfall was seasonal. Most of the colony's precipitation came from the

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<sup>66</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

<sup>67</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

summer monsoons, but these large storms did not always bring the necessary amounts of rain vital to the growth and development of crops. These monsoons determined the production of the two rice crops.<sup>68</sup>

The Annamite peasants prepared for the June harvest during the winter and spring seasons. Although the winter was the dry season, February and March often received light, sporadic rain and consistent mist—enough for Tonkin to be known as “Misty Tonkin” in February. Fortunately, Tonkin received little sunshine during the winter months because of heavy cloud coverage, and the overcast prevented rapid water evaporation in the fields. Despite the constant moisture, the June harvest still relied heavily on the preceding summer’s monsoon rains as the major water source. As a result, the rice could only be cultivated in low-lying areas where water gathered after months of moving down from the highlands. In analyzing this problem, engineers in Java and India computed that rice paddies required 70 centiliters a second per hectare in December and January but could then scale back to 25 centiliters a second per hectare in February and March because of natural precipitation.<sup>69</sup>

The Indochinese prepared for the November harvest during the summer and fall. Although the rice paddies received their water supply from the summer monsoons, the high heat and humidity left fields vulnerable to rapid evaporation which could destroy the crops. The same engineers who determined the amount of water needed during the winter computed that the rice paddies needed as much as 80 centiliters to 1 liter of water a second per hectare during the summer months to combat evaporation and to assure proper plant growth.<sup>70</sup>

Because farmers did not harvest rice all year, the Annamites cultivated vegetables that required relatively little water in the rice fields after the November harvest. After the June

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<sup>68</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

<sup>69</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

<sup>70</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

harvest, they used the paddies for fishing. Although a sufficient food source appeared to last the peasants throughout the year, the colony still needed to remedy the inconsistent monsoon rains in order to produce a significant profit on the rice crops. The fields also needed irrigation to protect the fields from the occasional droughts that resulted from long periods without rain.<sup>71</sup>

The importance of rice had further-reaching repercussions than simply feeding the indigenous population. By 1907, Indochina ranked second in the world among all countries that produced and exported rice. Rice-producing countries such as China, Japan, and Malaysia could not generate an adequate supply of rice and fish—both dried and salted—to feed themselves. Thus, they became some of Indochina's largest buyers. The rice for these countries came from the two major deltas of the colony, located in Cochinchina and Tonkin. In 1910, Cochinchina exported 1,108,560 tons of rice, 206,758 more tons than 1909, resulting in a profit of 144 million francs. At the same time, the exports out of Tonkin rose by 160,000 tons and nearly 23 million francs. Irrigation played an imperative part in the increased production of rice in both Tonkin and Cochinchina, and this connection forced the colonial government to take notice and act by asking for 20 million francs to expand the Tonkinese and Annamite irrigation systems.<sup>72</sup>

France could not afford to take the irrigation situation lightly. Water was the life source of the colony, and without it, the colony ceased to exist. With a loan of 90 million francs, French colonial officials could dedicate a substantial amount for the purpose of irrigation to supply the farmland of the colony—especially the rice paddies—with adequate amounts of water to ensure proper and maximum crop growth. Not only would a strong harvest feed the citizens and residents of Indochina, but other countries provided a market to sell the produce, resulting in a profit for the mother country.

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<sup>71</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

<sup>72</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

## Roads

Roads greatly benefited the entire colony because they could be built in areas where railroads could not. Roads also provided faster, cheaper, and more reliable communication that could aid the colonial administration and defense. Although the colony had many roads prior to French economic intervention, they were largely located in the most heavily populated areas, mainly the river deltas. Even if the colony received money to build new roads in less populated areas, the initial construction was only the beginning; roads required continuous maintenance and protection. Southeast Asia's tropical climate produced violent weather that eroded and destroyed infrastructure, and the roads provided easy access for pirates to conspire in illegal activities. Because road construction was expensive, the colony had to decide which routes were the most useful, with money given to the urgent cases first. The colony received a total amount of 11,000,000 francs to build roads divided according to need. Tonkin received 2 million francs for construction and improvement, the Cochinchinese and Lang-Bian roads each received 1.5 million francs, and the largest amount, 6 million francs, went for roads between Dong-Ha and Mékong.<sup>73</sup>

Building roads between Dong-Ha and Mékong would serve two major purposes. The first would be of service to Cochinchina. The colony was home to numerous rubber plantations, for which roads were necessary to transport goods and to expand the means of communication. The second benefit of these roads was to end Laotian isolation. This interior colony remained neglected, completely deprived of any coastline, and remained subject to Siamese control over trade and commerce. The Laotian administration, along with the residents of the Nge-An province, decided to build a road through the Meo plateau. By helping with the planning and building, the local residents could take part and work side-by-side with the French on a major

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<sup>73</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

project. At the same time, they would be doing their part to end their own isolation.

Transportation and communication between this possession and the rest of the French colony was difficult, time consuming, and took long to develop. New roads opened access to the landlocked colony, hastening trade to and from other French colonies.<sup>74</sup>

Roads were especially necessary in Tonkin because the area's mountainous terrain was not only dangerous, but it restricted travel. The Red River to the west and massive mountains—some reaching heights of over 6500 feet—along the Chinese border to the north and northwest made rail construction difficult if not impossible. The Red and the Claire Rivers cut through these mountains, with the Claire providing some communication because of its navigability. The Red River, located near the Chinese border, served as a refuge for pirates, and thus required consistent patrolling by French colonial troops to keep the area safe for merchants and travelers. Roads freed merchants and travelers from the burdens of these Tonkinese dangers.<sup>75</sup>

New methods were of great importance in transporting Indochina's natural resources. Cochinchina contained fifty-one rubber plantations, which were vital to the colony's trade; nine of these plantations had access to capital of about 11,535,000 francs. Although many of the plantations were in the immediate vicinity of Saigon, and therefore close to major rivers and railroads, some of them were in deserted regions beyond the Cochinchinese delta. If engineers placed roads strategically in the areas surrounding the plantations, they could open access to other areas further way. French officials realized that the development of roads for the rubber plantations had further ramifications. Thai-Nguyen, in central Tonkin, was the focus of a mining center that could only transport materials by river. Located in the middle of Thai-Nguyen, the region of Nguyen-Binh benefited greatly from a combination of railroads, waterways, and roads,

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<sup>74</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, March 1, 1912.

<sup>75</sup> *J.O.C. Débats*, March 1, 1912.

as it exploited fully all regional mines. Beginning in 1904, the output of coal in both Tonkin and Annam grew uniformly. This pattern of steady production continued through 1910, when it began to increase exponentially. In northern Tonkin, the region of Hon-Gay employed 5,000 Tonkinese workers and mined nearly 300,000 tons per year. Near Tourane on the coast on Annam, another coalmine produced about 20,000 tons per year. This output proved that Tonkin, which had the most coal mines of the entire Indochinese colony, only truly began the exploitation process upon the arrival and help of the French. The need for roads was imperative in order to continue this exploitation.<sup>76</sup>

To improve upon the infrastructure of the colony, French and colonial governments had to choose where to build new or where to continue building roads or railroads throughout their possessions. Some decisions were easier than others because several areas of the colony would benefit more if new methods of transportation existed. For regular Annamite activities like travel and trade, routes such as the Mandarin Road, which ran north to south along the coast of the South China Sea and supplemented the Trans-Indochinese railroad, would be more than sufficient for the indigenous travelers and merchants.

French merchants and travelers needed safer, cheaper, more reliable forms of transportation to move their products from the colony's interior to the coast for shipment to France. To alleviate these burdens, local Annamite residents began building a road in 1905, made accessible for small cars rather than foot traffic, along a section of the coast of Hatinh. Unfortunately, the coast made construction impossible without bridges. Engineers determined that a tunnel of over 1,902 feet would be more cost-efficient than multiple bridges. Other reports recognizing the necessity of tunnels and bridges throughout the colony did not go unnoticed. A

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<sup>76</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

report drafted on June 8, 1911 stated that a 1,968-foot bridge made of metal would be appropriate and necessary for the area of Vinh, which served as the terminal to the north. This program also planned to build a 984-foot metallic bridge across the Roon River.<sup>77</sup>

The French could not solve every problem. The construction of infrastructure—roads, railroads, canals—was expensive, and the French had to ensure that the colony did not lose money for France, even in environmental disasters. This problem was precisely what Bo-Trach faced. Although the region lay beyond the sand dunes of the coast and housed a substantial population with numerous resources, Bo-Trach was not appropriate for certain types of infrastructure. Frequent tidal waves along the coast had the capability to destroy anything in their path.<sup>78</sup>

Roads were just as important as irrigation. They served the far-reaching areas of the colony in which the railroad could not, expanded trade and communication, and linked isolated areas of the colony to the heart of Indochinese colonial activity. Although they required protection and maintenance, roads were vital to the colony's success.

## **Railroads**

The French built nearly 18,000 miles of roads—half of them were paved—and 1,864 miles of railway during their stay in Indochina. Despite the advantages of roads, building railroads appeared more sensible and less expensive in many areas. Part of the 90-million-franc loan given to Indochina was to be used for an extension of the railroad running from Hanoi to Lang-Son, but such an extension would pass through Chinese territory—potentially a dangerous move. Fortunately, the Indochinese government, knowing their expeditions could take them near, if not into, Chinese territory, undertook negotiations with China over twenty years earlier.

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<sup>77</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912; Barnett Singer and John Langdon, *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 247.

<sup>78</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

This action resulted in the Treaty of Tien-tsin, which the French government authorized on June 26, 1887.<sup>79</sup>

A rail junction extending from Tonkin to Central Annam, once a part of the trans-Indochinese railroad system running from Hanoi to Saigon, had enormous importance in both the political and economical sectors. The two cities were seats of the colonial government and served as the major ports of the French possession. Hanoi was also home to museums, medical facilities, the French School of the East, and the University of Hanoi, which educated Annamite elites such as Ho Chi Minh, who would come to prominence in future struggles with western countries. To complete the Tonkin-Central Annam line, engineers needed to build an additional 560 miles of rail, but this work pushed the cost to nearly 130 million francs. The French government, not wanting to grant such a large sum of money for a single project, argued that the railroad extension was unnecessary because its location would not help the colony harvest new or additional resources. The government also did not want to risk damage to the railroad because the entire section of North Annam faced exposure to harsh droughts, typhoons, and continuous famines. These environmental disasters could rip a new line from its foundation, forcing expensive repairs and significant delays in transportation. Although a junction in this area had at one time supported steamship operations between Saigon and China, a port at Tourane quickly developed into a more profitable and accessible harbor on the Annamite coast.

A connection between Hanoi and Tourane offered greater returns than a Tonkin-Central Annam junction because the location of the former route was more beneficial to the remaining,

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<sup>79</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912; Singer and Langdon, *Cultured Force*, 20. This treaty ensured swift execution of commerce between the two countries in order to promote healthy commercial relations. In accordance with this act, French and Annamite boats, excluding carriers and vessels employed to transport troops, weapons, and war munitions, were able to circulate from Lang-Son to Cao-Bang and also granted the right to travel through the rivers linking Lang-Son to Long Tcheou and Long Tcheou to Cao Bang. Merchandise destined for China could be transported by rivers and roads such as the Mandarin Road.

often neglected, French possessions located further to the interior. A line from Tourane to Tonkin, along with a line from Vinh to Dong-Ha would end the isolation experienced by Laos. In addition, the Vinh line brought the colony closer to the fertile and populated region of Hatinh. This area, neglected like Laos, had the capability to provide greater resources and food to the indigenous population and to the French. To close the gap between the latter sites, engineers needed to build only 186 miles of rail, substantially less than what other potential lines required.<sup>80</sup>

The colonial government proposed to put a portion of the 90-million-franc loan towards constructing a line in the north to cross a region already in the process of development. The allocation of a 10-million-franc building permit allowed for a 43-mile rail between the station at Vinh and one located approximately 6 miles south of Hatinh granting access to the area. The colonial government declared, however, that an extension to Hatinh would not be useful because income from the area was as yet insufficient. Some politicians responded that the extension already existing in Hanoi and Than-Hoa, which went to Vinh, was located in a poor area of the colony, subject to terrible weather conditions and producing only mediocre income. Others contended that envisioning the line as becoming economically and politically useful in the future was imperative, because it could relieve the isolated provinces in North and Central Annam from famine. They insisted as well that the line from Vinh to Dong-Ha would prepare the way for a future junction from two major areas, Hué to Tonkin.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912; Singer and Langdon, *Cultured Force*, 20.

<sup>81</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

## **Schools, Medical Facilities, and Wireless Telegraphs**

Not all of the money granted for the colony was for economic infrastructure and transportation. Education, health care, and communication all required investment. Schools received 1.5 million francs to construct proper facilities for the education and training of Frenchmen and Annamites. Schools for professional training received the same amount. The construction and installation of sanitary facilities in the maternity wards of health centers received 1.5 million francs but had to share a portion of this sum to build a hospital in Hué. Finally, the loan called for approximately 600,000 francs to construct a central telegraph post in Saigon. In addition to the general colonial budget, each colony had its own individual budget from which it could draw funds when needed. The expenses for teaching and hygiene were essential, but because neither service produced a profit, their costs needed coverage from the local budgets.<sup>82</sup>

### **Schools**

The indigenous teaching systems in Tonkin and Annam were well organized upon the arrival of the French. Primary education for Annamites was free and lay, rather than religious, and this approach came from Chinese tradition. Education based on morality and literature and expressed through calligraphy created a system emphasizing possession of a prodigious memory. In this Asian culture, a man measured himself by the number of characters he knew how to read, and as such, education was continuous, not ending with the presentation of a degree. East Asian countries did not educate women because men believed a women's sole destiny was to marry and bear children. The most intelligent Annamites understood literature and morals and

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<sup>82</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

possessed the ability to write calligraphy. Once having successfully passed their courses, they received a diploma comparable to advanced scholastic degrees granted in Europe.<sup>83</sup>

The Annamites maintained their spoken language but used written characters similar to those of Chinese. For many words or phrases, there were no equivalents or proper translations between the Chinese/Indochinese and French languages. This lack made translating written communication difficult. One of the biggest problems Europeans faced was their difficulty learning the Annamite written language. Because few French and other European officials cared to take the time to learn the culture or the language of the peoples they conquered, they believed that a language written in Latin letters would free everyone from the burden of learning thousands of different characters. Seventeenth-century Catholic missionaries developed a Latin letter-based system called quoc-ngu to replace the indigenous Annamite written language. The administrators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found this system both convenient and practical and therefore strove to use it. As a result, the French introduced quoc-ngu into Franco-Annamite schools, and this language began dominating the Cochinchinese schools once the French teachers opted against the instruction of traditional characters. The usage of quoc-ngu became so widespread that it was only a matter of years before the use of the Chinese characters declined significantly. Additionally, French and other European school subjects quickly replaced most of the traditional teachings of the Cochinchinese. Paul Bert, a former Indochinese governor-general, introduced the subjects of history and science to the native students.

Despite the changes, quoc-ngu did not replace traditional letters in every school. Rather, the new language accompanied the traditional with the French principles of literature and science that became the main vehicles for Franco-Annamite teachings. The juxtaposition of the French

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<sup>83</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

teachings with the traditional learning occurred only in some school districts because the colony needed both systems to produce translators and interpreters. By the turn of the twentieth century, the objective for teaching the indigenous population in the methods of the French was to furnish assistants for colonial administrators, while the traditional schools remained open only for the preparation of mandarins. As dictated by Chinese law and tradition, only the educated Annamites could serve as officials.<sup>84</sup>

Before 1906, the status of local schools depended upon how seriously the French administrators took education. If the administration did not push Indochinese children to attend school under French direction, many of them would not go. According to an official report, The State of French Cochinchina in 1908, the number of Annamite children under the age of fifteen was approximately 899,934, but the total actually enrolled in school was only 35,088. The updated edition of 1911 showed the Franco-Annamite school population of boys attending primary school gradually increasing within Hanoi and other surrounding provinces because of French influence. In 1910, Hanoi's school system had 1,430 students, and that number rose to 1,534 in 1911. In the surrounding provinces, the numbers were 3,444 boys in school in 1910, 3,867 the following year. The total of all schoolchildren rose from 4,874 to 5,401, an increase of 527 students. Concerning the Franco-Annamite children during the 1911 school year, the breakdown of the students was as follows: out of 2,050 primary school-age boys, 1,249 attended public schools; out of 115 primary school-age girls, 75 went to public schools. This same report declared that the secondary schools in Indochina would admit approximately 100 indigenous

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<sup>84</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912.

teachers each year for instruction purposes. This increase in faculty, combined with new personnel hired for various educational purposes, was intended for schools in small towns.<sup>85</sup>

Although placing Indochinese children into French schools was important to colonial administrators, repercussions were inevitable. On March 1, 1912, the centrist newspaper *Le Temps* reported on the significance of French activity and influence upon other cultures.

Whether in Indochina, Madagascar, or North Africa, western education slowly created a culture that moved away from indigenous traditions in favor of a European, and specifically French, culture. Through instruction at school, native children began adopting beliefs of western superiority and strove to obtain it.<sup>86</sup>

As some of the Indochinese elite received a French education, their ideas and ways of thinking began spreading among the rest of the elites in the colony. Soon, they all began to realize that if they wanted Indochina to improve, they could either look to, and cooperate with, the French, or they could look elsewhere—perhaps to another, more superior Asian country such as Japan or China.<sup>87</sup>

The French power over the Indochinese from the turn of the twentieth century through World War I was no different from the power the Chinese exerted over the Annamites prior to the French arrival. In an effort to separate from China, the Indochinese had to renounce all forms of Chinese communication and tradition. The French did find Indochina's education odd: it was the only instance where a country based education solely on a foreign language. By using Chinese characters and education, the Annamite countries remained intellectually dependant on China. Quoc-ngu emancipated the Annamites from this subjection, something that they had long

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<sup>85</sup> *J.O.*, report of March 1, 1912; Statistics from the report came from *The State of French Cochinchina in 1908*, 123 and *The State of French Cochinchina in 1908*, 85.

<sup>86</sup> *Le Temps*, March 1, 1912.

<sup>87</sup> *Le Temps*, March 1, 1912.

sought. Yet French instruction in Indochinese schools created an intellectual dependence on the Europeans: it was the same cycle, with different oppressors.<sup>88</sup>

By educating the Indochinese in the ways of Europe, the French believed they could convince the Annamites that under French rule they would realize their aspirations. This realization did not come cheap. The colony foresaw a sum of approximately 1,500,000 francs for the creation of new schools and for the development of a fully-supported school system. An estimate of construction costs established by the administrator of colonial services concluded that Indochina needed 2,772,000 francs to cover the costs of a complete teaching system, but the colony was not to receive this entire amount. As a result, the officials in charge of distributing the money had to select projects carefully, with only the most important and urgent cases funded. They judged the teaching of girls and the teaching of native traditions as local interests and constituted as less of a responsibility for the colonial government, and therefore, severely limited money to them.<sup>89</sup>

Primary, secondary, and professional schools split a total of 1.5 million francs. The cost for secondary schools was 585,000 francs: 337,000 francs went towards the construction of a college at Hué in Annam, and 135,000 francs to another college in Cochinchina, this one located at Chasseloup-Laubat. The remaining 112,500 francs expanded the college in Tonkin. Primary schools in the colony received 927,000 francs. Annam established ten primary teaching centers with European instruction for a budget of 216,000 francs. Tonkin built a total of thirteen primary schools with a larger budget of 369,000 francs, and Cochinchina received 90,000 francs to construct two primary schools. The loan also granted Cambodia 144,000 francs to create four primary teaching centers with European instruction, and Laos obtained 108,000 francs to

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<sup>88</sup> *Le Temps*, March 1, 1912.

<sup>89</sup> *J.O.*, report on March 1, 1912; *Le Temps*, March 1, 1912.

construct six schools. Professional teaching schools received the remaining 135,000 francs of the total budget. Cochinchina built a school for agriculture with 90,000 francs, and Tonkin constructed a professional school in Haiphong to train electrical workers with 45,000 francs.<sup>90</sup>

Educating the Annamites was a task the French needed to consider carefully. Educated too much, the elites might rise up and rebel against the French; educated too little, and the Annamites might turn to other powers for help. To serve the interests of the colonizers, the French believed the Indochinese should understand how inferior their culture was in comparison to the Europeans.

### **Medical Facilities**

Other duties and interests lay in the development of medical service. Unfortunately, in the eyes of the Indochinese population, the French government applied money to this interest too slowly. Wherever resources allowed, the French military and its physicians provided free medical assistance in conjunction with civilian physicians to help eradicate disease in the colony, but this medical care was often mediocre and insufficient. According to the annual report from 1911, only about 100 medical professionals existed in the entire colony: 36 in Tonkin, 20 in Annam, 21 in Cochinchina, 17 in Cambodia, and 7 in Laos. Nurses and indigenous midwives were the last redoubt against unsanitary conditions, but these medical personnel could do little in an area of so many people. The numbers of both were insufficient, especially for the interior colonies. They needed specialized sections in hospitals, ideally maternity wards, to provide a safe environment for pregnant women and newborn children. Health officials called for areas to isolate people affected by contagious diseases such leprosy, plague, and cholera, and thereby halt

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<sup>90</sup> *J.O.*, report on March 1, 1912.

epidemics from running rampant throughout the colony. The facilities already established for these problems in the late nineteenth century were poorly equipped at best.<sup>91</sup>

Cochinchina had two places for medical training, the hospital in Saigon and the outpatient clinic of Saint-Jacques. Tonkin and Annam together possessed six training facilities: the hospitals of Hanoi, Haiphong, Quang-Yen, and Tourane, and the outpatient clinics of Fort Bayard and Son-Tay. There was almost no information on the other regions of the colony. To build maternity wards and health centers, the cost would be 14,000 and 8,000 francs, respectively, in order not to deny anyone proper medical care. With French medicine and training, the Indochinese could experience prolonged and improved lives.<sup>92</sup>

### **Telegraph**

The colony required a loan of nearly 600,000 francs to establish new and improve existing telegraph offices throughout the colonies—roughly 500,000 francs alone for a central office in Saigon, with the remaining estimated 100,000 francs for a subsidiary post in Hué. Two double boilers, pumps, and machinery necessary for energy cost 158,000 francs. The antenna, made of six pylon supports and a concrete foundation, was even more, at 160,000 francs, while the installation of the antenna added an additional 8,000 francs. Alternators, transformers, coil spools, oscillating condensers, and resonators took up 112,000 francs, with reception devices another 6,000 francs. Accumulators, measuring instruments, and batteries added 17,000 francs, while various other expenses accounted for 16,000 francs. Personnel expenses were priced at 40,000 francs for a station head, four mechanics, and two assistants; transportation cost 20,000 and construction 60,000 francs.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *J.O.*, report on March 1, 1912.

<sup>92</sup> *J.O.*, report on March 1, 1912; Singer and Langdon, *Cultured Force*, 20.

<sup>93</sup> *J.O.*, report on March 1, 1912.

The telegraph station in Saigon served as a major station for the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Just as the Eiffel Tower station in Paris played a major role in European political and scientific circles, so the Saigon station would for the Far East. Aside from regular communications, the French and Indochinese used the telegraph for communication exchanges with vessels serving the navigational lines of China, Australia, and the Panama and Suez Canals. The line was of utmost importance to the public because it had the capabilities to distribute news, stock market information, and meteorological forecasts each hour. Its importance reached to the Japanese and Chinese coasts. Because the tower at Saigon broadcast a distance of nearly 5,000 miles, communication throughout the colony and beyond improved. As a result of this improvement, topographers and explorers could relay geographical information about the colony to administrators back to both Hanoi and Saigon. With new and improved information about Indochina, the colonial administration could provide a more accurate mapping of the French Far Eastern possessions.<sup>94</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The introduction of European cultures in the Far East created many benefits for the Indochinese. Despite its limitations, French medical care improved and extended the lives of the Annamites, and the survival rate among infants and children increased. They enjoyed additional agricultural production through improved irrigation and transportation. Despite these innovations, inventions, and techniques, the majority of Indochinese peasants continued living in extreme poverty. The reality of the situation was that French rule in Indochina was not for the betterment of native life. Rather, the goal was to exploit the natural resources, land, and people

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<sup>94</sup> *J.O.*, report on March 1, 1912.

for the benefit of France herself. Despite these selfish reasons, the French culture and influence helped to create modern Vietnam.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Singer and Langdon, *Cultured Force*, 20, 248.

### **Chapter 3: Consequences of French Involvement: The Fall of Colonial Indochina**

The loans of 1898 and 1912 granted millions of francs to France's Indochinese colony for the purposes of internal improvements. Politicians hoped this plan would improve the infrastructure of the colony. Unfortunately, the French did not consider the repercussions the improvements could potentially have on the indigenous population. Everything the French introduced or changed—transportation, industry, education, farming—all brought the peasants closer to understanding what colonialism and domination really meant to them. The Frenchmen at home, in addition to the Annamites abroad, felt the consequences of the colonists' actions, from the reasons to travel to the living conditions, from colonial policy to resistance.

The colony of Indochina remained relatively unknown to most of France until the 1880s, but certain groups of people traveled to the colony in the late nineteenth century to make a living. Initially, the only Frenchmen maintaining constant contact with the Far East were traders. Men from Lyon expressed an early interest in Tonkin because of its close proximity to the Chinese silk trade. This plan failed early because Japanese silk was cheaper and easier to obtain. Men living in Bordeaux historically traded with Spain and Portugal because of the Iberian relationship with countries of the Indian Ocean. Trade with Indochina gave these Frenchmen an opportunity to work closely with India. Soon, soldiers joined the traders as the French acquired more territory. All soldiers stationed in Indochina were volunteers, enthusiastic and eager young men looking to expand their horizons, searching for excitement and adventure. Upon return to France after their tour of duty, these men became living recruiting advertisements for the colony as they shared their experiences with other Frenchmen. Along with the traders and soldiers resided men who journeyed to the colony for business purposes. Unfortunately, for the progress of the colony, many of these men were of "questionable honesty," forced to flee France or else face the

consequences of their shady business dealings. Heirs who wasted their inheritance quickly and needed a means of financial support also found their way to Indochina. Whatever their reason for relocating to the Far East, a Frenchman rarely arrived at the colony directly from France. Except for those from Lyon and Bordeaux, most men came to Indochina from other French colonies, mainly the trading posts in India.<sup>96</sup>

The colonial experience was full of clichés. Propaganda created at home portrayed an ideal image of a colonial settler: he was hardy, talented, ambitious, and adventurous. The French created this man in an effort to lure more men to the colony. The ideal colonist's experience in Indochina also had to fulfill certain stereotypes. Accordingly, they lived in large villas with servants to accommodate their every whim. They ate and drank the finest foods and wines, and relied upon peasant-pulled rickshaws for transportation. Compared to these images, the reality of the colonial life was harsh and grim. Colonists constantly worried about the deadly tropical diseases, especially malaria and dysentery, running rampant throughout the colony. Although doctors could comfort the suffering and treat the symptoms, even the most advanced medicine of the time could not cure tropical diseases because physicians did not understand them. Government officials residing in the colony were fortunate to receive well-ventilated homes with running water and sewers. The colonists also constructed medical facilities in the colony to accommodate both the Annamites and the French. Despite the positive and alluring images advertized in France, most colonists found themselves in an environment completely foreign upon their arrival in Indochina. Isolation, long distance, fear of disease and a hostile indigenous population generated widespread disappointment among the new recruits. Despite the problems, the number of Europeans migrating to the colony steadily increased after World

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<sup>96</sup> Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 18-20, 22, 24, 26.

War I, as thousands braved distance, disease, weather, and crowded conditions. By the 1930s, increases in safety, reliability and the accessibility of hospitals, along with booming cultural centers as major Indochinese cities built museums and gardens encouraged more to move. Although the white population increased, the ratio of Europeans to Indochinese remained 1: 544 by World War II.<sup>97</sup>

As the European presence in Indochina increased, French officials continued building and improving existing methods of transportation for the purposes of military, trade, and communication. Unfortunately, new and improved infrastructure meant imposing on Annamite farmland. Because most Indochinese made their living as farmers, their land was a precious commodity. To preserve the fields, they built their roads around farms whenever possible, but the French found these roads too long, inconvenient, and poorly maintained. Therefore, to ensure the safety and ease of travel for themselves, the colonists disregarded the needs of the peasants and built roads for their own convenience. The French also built thousands of miles of railroads, with the majority of the construction occurring between 1898 and 1913 through the assistance of the two major loans from the French government in Paris. In 1906, the colonists opened a section of line between Tourane and Hué to give the capital access to the sea. By World War I, the colony succeeded in building over 1,250 miles of new rail. This number dropped drastically because of the war, as colonists only built 32 miles of new rail between 1914 and 1922. The Trans-Indochinese Railroad did cause problems among government officials at home. Although this line seemed a good idea on paper, engineers and builders mapped it to cross areas exposed to typhoons and floods while creating competition for shipping.

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<sup>97</sup> Chafer and Sackur, eds., *Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, 15-16; Charles Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*, trans. Isabel A. Ward (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 21; Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee, eds., *France and Indochina: Cultural Representations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 81-82, 91, 95-98, 105.

Additionally, the line paralleled the Mandarin Road, which could already handle transportation and trade. Engineers decided against moving the line further inland because the interior portion of the colony had a sparse population and little business. Regardless of its location, the railroad, serving as the most prevalent form of transportation, became a visible reminder to everyone of the amount of power the French held over the Annamites. The colonists had the capability to alter the physical and social environment, and the French achieved this feat through the construction of the railroad. Unfortunately, they could not get the majority of the peasants to ride the trains. Although fourth class was reserved for peasant travelers, most Annamites used the railroad only for pilgrimages or for travel to markets or neighboring villages. They rarely took the train for long trips. Most peasants continued using familiar, cheaper, and traditional transportation methods for trade such as shoulder poles to transport goods over land and sampans over water. Despite their convenience, the new European methods of transportation were too expensive for the average Annamite to use daily.<sup>98</sup>

Before World War I, the railroad served as the most important form of transportation, taking precedence over roads. This dynamic changed after the war because the Trans-Indochinese Railroad took too long to complete. The Mandarin Road, the only major road in the colony, was only a small trail, interrupted by ferry crossings and mountains, and it became lost in sand dunes along the coast. Before 1913, only portions of the road could handle traders and travelers. Afterward, the colony's general budget slowly reduced the number of ferry crossings through the construction of bridges, the road was widened and quickly repaired after violent storms. The improvements in the roads led to an increase in automobiles throughout the colony.

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<sup>98</sup> Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants Under French Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 72-73; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 91-93, 95-96; Robson and Yee, eds., *France and Indochina*, 64-65, 67.

Modern transportation benefited the French moreso than the peasants, and the ability to obtain such transportation quickly became a status symbol. Automobiles, though expensive in France and the rest of Europe, were comparatively cheap when purchased within the colony as repeated purchases and sales of the cars by numerous owners decreased the cost of the automobile. In France, a man could afford a small car on an average salary. In Indochina, a Frenchman could own a large and luxurious chauffer-driven vehicle for the same price and on the same salary. In an attempt to separate themselves further from the indigenous population and in an effort to fit in with the European social hierarchy in the colony, most Frenchmen purchased a car immediately upon their arrival in the colony. Owning a car showed great success, wealth, and the ability to control the amount of distance and personal space between themselves and others.<sup>99</sup>

As success with internal improvements in the colony grew, every change and every decision made about the colony resulted from decisions made in France. Colonial policy abroad was directly linked to policy at home, and its influences were often traceable from the French Revolution. Elements such as natural religion, social ethics, and General Will developed from the Enlightenment and echoed throughout the coming centuries. As these ideologies emerged, more men applied them to everyday life and, eventually, politics. The largest influence was secularization. The Scientific Revolution, the Reformation, and religious wars gradually diminished the role of religion in everyday life. This decline allowed morality-based ideas to emerge. Morality, sometimes called natural religion, claimed that men were naturally moral beings and possessed the ability to analyze problems rationally. Therefore, according to this rationale, men could be moral without the guide of organized religion. With this attitude, the

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<sup>99</sup> Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 98-99; Robson and Yee, eds., *France and Indochina*, 65, 67-68.

French concluded that religious education was not necessary and strove to establish a secular curriculum.<sup>100</sup>

As modern European society developed, education became a means of social progression. The quality of education determined the future of the country and its strengths and weaknesses as schools produced the future military, administrative, and financial leaders. Since many apprenticeships disappeared during the Revolution, a formal education became the only means to gain an economic advantage. A widespread movement quickly emerged to end class privilege in education and so permit the entire country to learn, progress, and industrialize.<sup>101</sup>

France became the first European country to organize an integrated, hierarchical education plan allowing teachers to become members of the state service. The 1833 Guizot Law required all communities of 800 people or more to furnish and maintain a school for boys with a required curriculum. Pre-primary schools also developed providing a head start to children. It was here that children learned basic reading and writing skills with periods of recreation in between. Any student attending pre-primary school was required to have a smallpox vaccination before beginning. The addition of a written test added in 1830 strengthened the baccalaureate examination for secondary school students. These fundamental changes greatly improved the status of Frenchmen, as their education and skills transformed society for the better. As France's society evolved, so too did Indochina's, as colonists established relationships with the Annamites and developed infrastructure. Among these improvements came the development of education. Because it had transformed the society and economy at home, the colonists believed a stronger

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<sup>100</sup> Joseph N. Moody, *French Education Since Napoleon* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1978), 7; Phyllis Stock-Morton, *Moral Education for a Secular Society: The Development of Morale Laïque in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), 7, 10, 14.

<sup>101</sup> Moody, *French Education*, 8, 27.

education system would do the same abroad. Unlike the attitude at home, the French took a cautious approach to education in the colonies.<sup>102</sup>

The French wanted to produce the notion of a “superior France” in the minds of impressionable Annamite schoolchildren. The colonists viewed education as a means of maintaining and strengthening their domination over the “inferior culture.” By using propagandistic textbooks, the French displayed their power and their nation’s status as both a colonial and a global power. The colonizing nation tried to show that it was the model to emulate and respect. Through the new education system, the Annamite children learned about their society through the eyes of the French and the rest of the world: Indochina was a backward culture, and change was possible only through the rule of the French. The local children learned that the presence of the colonizing nation defined their country and that this presence was inevitable and beneficial. Through this instruction in dependence, the Annamites remained subservient to French rule. The French maintained heavy censorship over all school materials distributed throughout the colony and kept a watchful eye on the teachers and curriculum. Nevertheless, they were shortsighted in their approach. Many Frenchmen believed that western education was no danger because it either would have no effect or would merely change traditional practices. However, western ideas could be hazardous to colonialism if the indigenous population truly understood western ideals (i.e., The Declaration of the Rights of Man). The French instead feared the Annamites could learn anti-western propaganda through the Chinese language traditionally taught in Annamite schools.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Sandra Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education: Liberal Reform in the Second Empire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 34; Moody, *French Education*, 12, 40-41, 46.

<sup>103</sup> Martin Evans, ed., *French Empire and Culture: The French Experience, 1830-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 131-132; Gail Paradise Kelly and David H. Kelly, eds., *French Colonial Education: Essays on Vietnam and West Africa* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2000), 6, 19, 110, 112; David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 62.

On July 8, 1917, colonial officials established the Office of Higher Education to supervise the growth of, and to examine the political and economical impacts of, Indochinese universities. The office closed all schools that did not hire teachers or teach curricula previously approved by the French. As a result, the colonists outlawed Sino-Vietnamese schools because they adhered to traditional teachings instead of the new required curriculum. Four years later, education advocates created the Office of Public Integration to work in conjunction with the Office of Higher Education to supervise all education throughout the colony. This new office hired teachers, assigned books, set examinations, and inspected all schools in an effort to keep a tight hold on methods taught and materials distributed. Because of these strict laws, nearly 2,000 Vietnamese schools shut down in one year after failing to meet the requirements. Additionally, when the French created the new schools to educate children, the Indochinese became the ones paying for the construction, maintenance, and teachers. More schools closed because the Annamites could not afford to pay for them. The French also changed the role of the teacher. Before the colonial era, a teacher's job was desirable among the Indochinese because it provided a leadership role and demanded respect from both students and peers. Teachers held power among politicians and could question the legitimacy of politics, policies, and governmental practices. They had the capability to organize against foreigners and became the backbone of any political network. Because of their role within the community, nineteenth-century traditional Annamite schools became recruiting grounds for anti-French protesters. In addition to the considerable influence teachers held, this position often became the only opportunity for an Annamite peasant to obtain a salaried government job. Unfortunately, the new school regulations enforced by the French undermined the once-powerful influence of the teachers.

School inspectors even criticized the teachers in front of their students, diminishing their authority among peers.<sup>104</sup>

While attending elementary school, grades one through three, Annamite students learned how to read and write quoc ngu and basic French. Despite the opportunity to learn, only 10 percent of students continued their education after this level. Most dropped out after third grade because they thought they had acquired enough education to accomplish everyday business and tasks. In primary school, grades four through six, students were expected to master the French language, but this task was difficult because most teachers barely comprehended the language themselves. The children of elite Annamites had an advantage because their families could afford tutors to teach their children French. Primary school education had three other objectives: to teach French cultural and behavioral norms, to reinforce Indochinese traditional morality, and to instruct in the proper deportment before the colonial masters. Many primary schools were too far away for the majority of students to travel back and forth every day, leaving only two alternatives. They had either to cease their education or to board at school, with the majority of the children choosing the former. Typically, only the Annamite elite received an upper primary education, grades seven through ten. Only eleven cities in all of Indochina had upper primary schools: Hanoi, Haiphong, Lang Son, Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, Vinh, Hué, Qui Nhon, Saigon, My Tho, and Can Tho. For a child of peasants to attend primary and upper primary school was rare but not impossible. Students who did attend did so through scholarships from wealthy family members, with the sponsor assuming the child would repay him later. Other options included private patrons, the child fending for himself, or scholarships from a wealthy patron unrelated to

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<sup>104</sup> Evans, ed., *Empire and Culture*, 133; Kelly and Kelly, eds., *French Colonial Education*, 3, 7, 30, 110-111, 113, 117; Long, *Before the Revolution*, 74.

the family, with the understanding the student would marry his daughter. Any education beyond the tenth grade was for a small minority, as it was rare and a privilege.<sup>105</sup>

The French altered the Annamite school system to fit their agenda and needs—not those of the local children. To ensure the French children in the colony had an advantage over the Annamites, colonial leaders instituted a policy requiring that only children of certain ages could enroll in certain grades. Franco-Annamite schools required the teaching of the native language in the first three years of school with only some French. Although the students were expected to master French in primary school, many did not because of inadequately taught teachers. This failure created a serious handicap for any Annamite wanting to attend a French school later because students lacked fluency in the language. The French further handicapped the Annamites by adding two more years of school to the Annamite curriculum, making the children too old to enter French schools. The Annamites realized that if they wanted more education, they would not find it in the colonial system. Before French conquest, almost every Annamite could read and attend school because education was readily available to everyone. By World War II, the French established 7,100 public schools of all levels to increase education throughout the colony. Yet due to strict laws and a reformed education system, only 15 percent of children attended, and illiteracy rose to an astounding 80 percent. The French also designed their schools for the children of Frenchmen living in the colony. These schools did allow Annamite children into their classrooms, but only if they passed a rigorous entrance examination. Even so, by the dawn of the twentieth century, the Indochinese children began outnumbering and outperforming the French students. French parents complained about this situation, claiming that their students were failing because the schools held low standards in order to accommodate the Annamites.

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<sup>105</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 35-38, 43.

Other parents and local residents argued that if the Annamites received equal education, they would soon demand equal rights.<sup>106</sup>

Educational administrators and politicians faced a conundrum with advanced education for Annamites. To give the Indochinese education would upset the French residents and undermine colonial power. In France, complaints arose that too many Annamites traveled abroad seeking a college education because they could not receive one in the colony. Supporters of colonialism feared travel and education abroad would introduce the Annamites to anti-colonial ideas. As a result, colonists built more universities within their borders. At the same time, colonists feared the universities could train the Indochinese elite and that these men could then demand equal rights because they had received the same educational privileges as the French. If the colonial administration completely dismantled higher education for the Annamites, the elite would rebel. Although the French accomplished much in their quest to educate the Indochinese, more could have been done had the politicians not been preoccupied attempting to pacify both the French and Annamites. The Indochinese persistently asked the French to upgrade education, but the newly designed system seemed to discourage learning. As struggles between the two groups continued to develop, the officials reformed and re-reformed the school system, seeking to appease everyone. The changes attempted to reassert French influence and racial hierarchies between the French and the colonial subjects. Albert Sarraut believed that schools for the Indochinese could exist without the demand for equal rights. He believed these schools could train the indigenous population in agricultural development, lower levels of government, and industry. These skills, if taught correctly, could keep both the French and Annamites happy,

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<sup>106</sup> John E. Dreifort, *Myopic Grandeur: The Ambivalence of French Foreign Policy Toward the Far East, 1919-1945* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1991), 8; Pham Cao Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants Under French Domination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 138; Kelly and Kelly, eds., *French Colonial Education*, 5; Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 35-38, 42-43.

while at the same time boosting the economic status of the colony. Sarraut emphasized to the concerned French that the Indochinese graduates would not be eligible for any civil service offices and trained only for jobs “suitable to their race,” such as manual laborers, servants to the elites, or minor government positions.<sup>107</sup>

Although some Annamite children were fortunate to receive a formal education and the ability to move ahead in society, the majority of the Indochinese remained farmers and resided in the villages where they grew up. The Annamite village was truly a unique characteristic of France’s Asian colony. For years after their arrival, the French rarely interfered with village affairs. At Paul Doumer’s request, the village system remained intact because he refused to end a long-standing tradition. He praised the maintenance, organization, and discipline established in each community and believed that the French should respect it. He wanted the French only to levy taxes, stop fraud, maintain order, and enlist the help of the local notables to carry out these duties. After fifty years of colonization, French officials repudiated Doumer’s advice and decided to impose a system of communal reform they claimed would better exploit the potential of the land. Although their plan had merit, the administration failed to explain the long- and short-term goals to the rural population. The French created additional responsibilities for the notables to keep the villages under close supervision. The men who traditionally held the title did not want these new responsibilities. Instead, they passed the duties to others willing to do the job, but the new notables were too young and inexperienced to do it properly.<sup>108</sup>

Each village had a system of communal lands for the use of all Annamites residing in the village, often used to grow additional crops. French officials took steps to seize communal lands after the pressures of pacification and the need to meet the demands of the colonists made their

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<sup>107</sup> Evans, ed., *Empire and Culture*, 135; Kelly and Kelly, eds., *French Colonial Education*, 28-29, 36, 46.

<sup>108</sup> Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants*, 81-85.

way to the colonial administration. This seizure was at the expense of the poor, for in transforming these lands into large plantations, the French forced the peasants onto plots of land barely large enough to live on. Peasants unfortunate enough to lose their land entirely had to obtain land from private individuals, thereby becoming tenant farmers. The standard of living for the peasants declined; their needs never met; and the heavy taxes forced on by the French made the poor more dependent on the landowners.<sup>109</sup>

The colonial administration poured money into the colony to develop the communal lands and the areas around them. The Red River, though conveniently located, was inconvenient to use. The irregular volumes of water carried tons of sediment that constantly altered the riverbeds and made reliable transportation impossible. The French dredged it and other waterways as a remedy. Prior to French arrival, the Annamites established an intricate system of canals, but over time many had become unusable. The French fixed them and built more. By the end of World War II, the French built an additional 800 miles of canals in their effort to encourage settlement and to assure transportation. The canals cut straight to the middle of the plantations with relatively little cost and improved the quality and productivity of the soil. Rice fields received hydraulics and machines designed to move water for their development and for the conservation of water. Cochinchina desperately needed hydraulics to drain excess water and desalinize fields because this area, which received the most amount of rain, was subject to serious flooding. Tonkin and Annam had different problems. The overpopulation of the two colonies made irrigation difficult because the peasants reserved most of the land for farming and living. The French irrigated insufficiently supplied fields and combated flood problems through drainage systems and improvements in the dike system. The French consolidated the preexisting dikes and built them higher with stronger materials. The dikes also received a flat, trapezoidal

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<sup>109</sup> Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants*, 37, 42-43.

shape to resist water pressure more effectively. Between 1926 and 1944, the French established an effective maintenance system to prevent ruptures that led to flooding. After World War II, the focus turned away from maintenance, a disastrous decision that led to poor supervision and ultimately numerous ruptures and devastated fields.<sup>110</sup>

Between 1906 and 1910, the French irrigated 50,000 hectares in Tonkin alone. By 1939, a total of 250,000 hectares in Indochina were irrigated with long-term plans to irrigate another 250,000. The onset of the World War II halted this proposal as energies focused on issues at home. The majority of land development endeavors occurred during the colonial era before World War I, because by 1914, the colonies became the least of France's concerns. During the late colonial era, rice productivity, land cultivation, and methods of production increased dramatically. Dikes, irrigation, and drainage systems increased production in Tonkin and Annam because there was no place to expand production. One-crop rice fields became two-crop fields, and the French put enough effort into the cornfields to produce enough for export. Although irrigation immensely helped rice growth, it came with serious repercussions. Traditionally, Annamite emperors did not allow the export of any rice. They required that farmers store the crop as insurance against a bad harvest or that it be given to those who did not have enough to eat. The French recognized the potential profit of the extra rice and, therefore, sold it. By World War II, the French made Indochina the largest rice exporter after Burma and Thailand. Unfortunately, money for the French created hardships among the peasants.<sup>111</sup>

Despite the introduction of innovations and life-improving measures by the French, most peasants struggled to survive. Their lack of money drastically slowed agricultural progress

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<sup>110</sup> Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants* 9-11; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 107, 111, 222.

<sup>111</sup> Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants* 13, 22; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 129.

because most peasants could not afford the necessary supplies to boost production. To ease the burden, the French established credit institutions as a means of financial support. In 1876, financial advisors introduced into Cochinchina a credit system that granted loans for crops or land. By 1898, the system expanded into Tonkin and North Annam. The borrowed amount had an interest rate of 8 percent for six months and was renewable only once, in the event of a bad crop. If a peasant did not repay the money, the bank seized the farmer's land or crops. To obtain a longer-term loan, the Annamites offered the free services of their wives or children. Clearly, there was a need to improve this process, but the change came only in 1933. Then, rather than giving money directly to the peasants, agricultural cooperatives received the money on behalf of the peasants who were members. Working together, the peasants planted and harvested the crops, which the cooperative then sold to repay the principal and interest.<sup>112</sup>

The French tried hard to revive failing crops within the colony. Cotton, for example, was grown mostly in scattered areas around Annam and the Mékong River. In these areas, cotton fields were impossible to extend because the overpopulation of Indochina left no additional room. To combat this problem, the French built a cotton plantation in neighboring Cambodia in 1919, hoping it would flourish and produce enough crops for exportation. Unfortunately, the cost of running the plantation exceeded the budget, and the farm failed. The French then tried reviving the native Indochinese cotton crop but without success. Cotton planting was a delicate process. Growing the crop during the dry season was imperative because heavy monsoon rains could potentially destroy the plants, but the dry season could kill the crop should the monsoon rains bring inadequate water to sustain the crops for the rest of the year. The colonists exported the cotton that did survive, but not in sufficient amounts that produced a significant profit.

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<sup>112</sup> Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants*, 19-20; Long, *Before the Revolution*, 86; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 240-241.

Another attempt to create colonial riches came in the production of silk. The French tried to revive the decreasing mulberry trees used to raise silk worms, and initially the silk industry seemed a perfect fit for the crowded population of the villages and cities, which provided an extensive work force. Ultimately, however, unhygienic conditions killed the silk worms, and discrepancies among French industry, European silk factories within the colony, and native weavers and growers generated difficulties, with the result an unsuccessful competition with China. French efforts to improve agriculture also included the construction of agricultural experimental stations throughout the colony. Indochina was home to dozens of rice varieties, and the stations tried to determine which species were the fastest growing or most economical to grow. Like the plans for cotton and silk, the rice experiments failed. They worked independently of each other, were ill equipped, suffered from insufficient funds, and employed over-worked officials.<sup>113</sup>

As they tried to find economical ways to use the available land, the French sought to spread out the indigenous population. The river deltas faced dangerously overcrowded conditions, and the only solution seemed to be to move some of the population inland and towards the mountains. One of the earliest attempts of population relocation came in July 1888, when the French promised five hectares of land in the middle or upper regions of Tonkin to any applicant. In November 1925, a second attempt at population relocation began with the French opening another part of northern Tonkin for settlement. As an incentive, the French granted the Annamites full ownership of the land after three years of occupancy. The Resident Superior of Tonkin added to this promise in early 1936 by offering 500 hectares to any applicants interested in forming their own village. Unfortunately, the plans failed because the Annamites were not

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<sup>113</sup> Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 232-233, 239.

interested in moving from their current villages, nor did they have the money necessary to start new farms. Additionally, the land of upper Tonkin was hilly and mountainous, making cultivation extremely difficult with their primitive tools. The French had a hard time convincing the Indochinese to move to this particular area of the colony because of unhealthy conditions, especially malaria, and a deep-seated superstition that the forests and mountains were unlucky.<sup>114</sup> As they tried improving the colony through farming, the French also hoped to supplement the existing Annamite industries. The native family-oriented production provided additional income, supplemented agriculture, and kept peasants occupied upon the completion of each harvest. Food preparation industries such as rice husking and bleaching and the production of rice paste, cakes, starches, and oils employed the majority of the peasants. Additional industries, producing agricultural and pasturage products, building and running rice mills and distilleries, sugar refineries, and textile mills, all worked in conjunction with the smaller family industries. Indochina also had other, more complex industries such as electrical and chemical production, but they did not account for significant income.<sup>115</sup>

The French believed conditions in Indochina were favorable for developing an industrial colony. The Annamites supplied an abundant skilled labor force and some degree of purchasing power. The colony also possessed an inexhaustible fuel supply of coal and natural gas. As mother country, France even gave Indochina a stable market in which to sell goods. Ultimately, however, the economic progress did not help the peasants. France's agricultural policies forced too many into poverty through the loss of land, and the harsh taxes imposed by the colonial authority left the peasants too poor to purchase finished goods.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants*, 77; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 60-61, 65-66; Singer and Langdon, *Cultured Force*, 18-19.

<sup>115</sup> Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 244-245, 270, 275, 278, 283.

<sup>116</sup> Dreifort, *Myopic Grandeur*, 10; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 269, 290.

Although Indochina was traditionally agricultural, the French understood the importance of expanding industry within the colony. The colonists believed they could take developments from the Industrial Revolution and apply them to the colony. In theory, industry could create new jobs, give the Annamites disposable income, and produce finished products from raw materials harvested from the land. Yet too much success from new industry could, the French worried, lead to overpopulation in the cities as people migrated to them for work, a problem the colonists were already trying to combat. In fact, both the theory and the fear were overblown, for the peasants did not flock to the cities seeking new jobs. Poor working conditions, low pay, and terrible treatment led most Annamites to remain in the fields.<sup>117</sup>

An egregious example of new industry and abysmal conditions was the Michelin Tire Company. Given an enormous boost by the 1920s automobile boom, Michelin created thousands of jobs throughout the colony. The rubber plantations provided the raw material, and the company established production facilities at multiple locations. Despite the job opportunities, Michelin also became a symbol of poor working conditions and malign treatment of the Annamites. Most of its workers suffered from malaria, dysentery, malnutrition, or a combination of all three. Between 1917 and 1944, 12,000 out of 45,000 workers, more than one in four, died from the atrocious conditions. Recognizing the problem, the French finally instituted labor codes in 1936. These codes granted at least one day off per week, limited the workday to eight hours, and forbade women and children from working at night.<sup>118</sup>

Of all the new industries, mining became one of the most profitable. Although few Annamites made their living as miners before French arrival, the French soon convinced them of

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<sup>117</sup> Dreifort, *Myopic Grandeur*, 10; Long, *Before the Revolution*, 102; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 243, 248, 290-292, 304; Jack A. Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French: A Literary Response to Colonialism* (Hanover: The University Press of New England, 1987), 11.

<sup>118</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam*, 129; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 79.

the potential wealth from the vast array of minerals and energy sources located deep beneath the earth. In an attempt to boost the industry, the French instituted a law on January 26, 1912, granting anyone the authorization to prospect one square mile in a location of his choosing. This contract remained valid for three years, with the opportunity for it to become permanent, providing the miner met the legal and financial requirements. This law applied to all mines, except petroleum and natural gas, which required special regulations because of their value. Coal quickly became the most valuable mined resource. In 1913, the French dug 501,000 tons of coal; this number more than quadrupled to 2,308,000 tons in 1937. The Indochinese themselves became an essential part of French mining as a source of labor not only in Indochina but also in other French colonies. The Tonkinese were especially prominent in of New Caledonia, where they outworked the Chinese and coped with the rough conditions better than the Japanese.<sup>119</sup>

The introduction of industrialization and communal land seizures introduced new classes, which developed from the agricultural community. The first group was the bourgeoisie, characterized by wealth, manners, and a European education. These men were often wealthy Annamites who seized the village communal lands as their own and forced the peasants into tenant farming. Many of the peasants then became too poor to pay their landlords and fled to the cities to seek work in factories, mines, or public work projects. These peasants became known as the proletarians. By the 1920s, nearly 7,000 Indochinese families were wealthy enough to become members of the bourgeoisie, and they spent most of their time in the cities while managers supervised their land. Although they tried to emulate the French style of life, they were still dependent upon the income provided by their farms. Recognizing that the colonial system provided the context for their new wealth, they had a low regard for practical political activity and chose to do nothing about French oppression. Instead, they spent their energy on

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<sup>119</sup> Dreifort, *Myopic Grandeur*, 12; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 249-250, 252.

social enhancement through arranging their children's marriages or organizing elaborate functions. Below the bourgeoisie were smaller landlords who chose tradition rather than trying to fit in with the French and so were more attractive to poor Annamites. Unfortunately, most of these peasants failed to realize that their landlords stole money and land from them in an effort to gain more wealth. One step lower, the "petit bourgeois," shopkeepers and traders, understood that that colonial system did not fit their needs, but they had no coherent political vision to change it. Subsistence farmers were fortunate enough not to have landlords, and they grew sufficient crops for themselves plus a little extra to sell. Some even saved enough money to hire extra help during harvests. Because the threat of debt was omnipresent to all of them, many subsistence farmers organized credit associations to stay afloat. The membership in these associations remained limited to trustworthy family, friends, and neighbors. They produced a small profit through sales that they split equally, but it was enough to keep them out of debt and away from tenant farming for a short time. Eventually, however, debt and taxes forced many of subsistence farmers into tenant farming by 1945. By the 1930s, nearly 70 percent of the population was composed of poor peasants, tenants, and agricultural laborers.<sup>120</sup>

Despite progress in Indochina, the colonists had a difficult time gaining broad support from the population at home. French political writers blamed the low numbers of Frenchmen in the colony on everything from classical education, to military service, to abuse of power, to a lack of imagination. During the Second Empire, politicians strongly believed that neither Cochinchina nor Cambodia offered anything to France other than their strategic location to China's southern provinces. Under the Third Republic, the Opportunist Party, in power during the 1880s and 1890s, favored the expansion of Indochina because of its economic potential. As

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<sup>120</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 26-31; Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel*, 18-19.

the years passed and success in the colony fluctuated, other major political parties developed their own colonial views. Socialists believed that overseas expansion was a capitalist plot to gain large profits, while monarchists denounced colonialism an expression of Jewish financial interests. Conservatives feared that colonization played into Germany's plans for France to accept the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. Republicans remained divided over the issue. By the turn of the twentieth century, much of the population and many politicians turned towards anti-colonialism because they came to view imperialism as oppression. Anti-colonialists argued that France was responsible for forcing Indochina's peasants into misery, ignorance, and debt. By the interwar period, anti-colonialism gained momentum, as more believed imperialism to be immoral. The newly formed Communist Party took the lead. During the Great Depression, however, a counter view emerged, arguing that the colonies could provide lacking resources to the mother country and help solve economic problems.<sup>121</sup>

Whatever their political view, as politicians began understanding the importance of the colonies to the mother country, a debate raged among them about how to rule the indigenous population.

Would assimilation or association be more beneficial to France as the colonial policy?

Assimilation would essentially strip the Annamites of local traditions and customs in favor of a new French identity, achievable through education, architecture, and dress. On the other hand, association would take into account local customs in an effort to work side by side with the local population to achieve what was mutually best for both parties.

At first, colonial officials believed that assimilation would provide the best control over the Annamites. The theory of assimilation dated as far back as the late Roman Empire, with Christians attempting to "Latinize" barbarians. As the missionary movements of the late

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<sup>121</sup> Chafer and Sackur, eds., *Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, 16, 56, 65; Dreifort, *Myopic Grandeur*, 9; Evans, ed., *Empire and Culture*, 10, 151-152; Robequain, *The Economic Development*, 153, 190; Singer and Langdon, *Cultured Force*, 129-130.

fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries developed, the discovery of non-Christian worlds encouraged assimilation on the spiritual level by spreading the Christian faith. Assimilation gained supporters from the French Revolution because it inspired and encouraged the French to spread their culture and their belief in equality. Napoleon Bonaparte was skeptical, fearing that assimilation would encourage the colonies to be ruled by the same laws as the mother country. They might then seek equality and control of their own government—and thus upset local economies. As a result, the Napoleonic constitution of 22 Frimaire, Year VIII declared that the colonies be governed by a different code of laws.<sup>122</sup>

Opposition to assimilation gradually grew. By the mid-nineteenth century, nationalism and Social Darwinism emphasized the inequalities among the races, leading to the conclusion that races were incompatible with each other and that equality, therefore, was no longer an option. Other theories circulated that culture was genetic and not communicable from one race to another. Native societies would have to evolve on their own and according to their own laws. The belief that races developed at their own pace in their own cultural environment sparked outcries to change policy. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social thought rejected assimilation as unscientific and harmful to indigenous groups. By the time of World War I, France adopted association as the official colonial policy. Association was simple, flexible, practical, and allowed for change and variation in colonial policy. This doctrine allowed geography, ethnic characteristic, and the rate of social development to determine how the French ruled. The two racial groups would “associate” with each other, work side by side with the traditional village system (although the French did manage to place some puppets within the Annamite government system) and do what was best suited for each. The French took

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<sup>122</sup> Raymond E. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 10-11, 17, 26.

responsibility for the indigenous population while respecting their culture, customs, and existing laws. Although this system worked better with the Indochinese than had assimilation, association was based on mutual interests and fraternity, not equality.<sup>123</sup>

The French arrived in Indochina for selfish reasons, but they did try to improve the status and living conditions of the indigenous population through transportation, industry, and education. Their policy of assimilation, though intended to spread equality, created many problems. Although the French switched to association, years of oppression took its toll on the Annamites pushing them to resist the French. Although rebellion was slow to develop and organize, the Annamites prepared to take back control of their country. Their collective spirit, combined with a historic ability to organize in a time of need or defense, created a community ready to defend their nation.<sup>124</sup>

The Indochinese had a long history of defending themselves against other cultures, invaders, and each other. Between 111 BC and 939 AD and again from 1407-1428, the Annamites struggled against invasions and attempts at domination by China. The Chinese exerted their influence on the everyday lives of their subjects but did not attempt to assimilate them. For two centuries, from 1504 to 1700, Indochina was torn by internal struggles and fights for the monarchy. Then, as European missionaries arrived in Southeast Asia, many Annamites turned to Catholicism as a form of rebellion against rigid and unjust Confucian practices and traditions. Opposition to the French first emerged around 1862 because of xenophobia and reactions from Confucian loyalists. After France's 1885 conquest of Annam, the resistance became more organized. The initial request of the rebels was to restore the pre-colonial Indochinese monarchy, but other events in Asia such as China's Boxer Rebellion and Japan's

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<sup>123</sup> Betts, *Assimilation and Association*, 8-9 23, 59, 106-107, 120-121; Chafer and Sackur, eds., *Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, 171; Dreifort, *Myopic Grandeur*, 7.

<sup>124</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam*, 110-111.

rise to military power influenced a demand among the Annamites for equality among the French.<sup>125</sup>

The more France dominated and changed Indochina, the more unhappy the Annamites became. Under French rule, the colonial administration controlled all foreign relations, civil administration, and trade customs. The Indochinese had no freedom of the press, freedom of expression, or freedom of movement—special permits were required to leave the country. As a result, most Annamites felt trapped in their homeland. But from outside, anti-colonial influences slowly began to make their way into Indochina. By the twentieth century, the works of eighteenth-century French philosophers, the American Declaration of Independence, and France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man arrived in the hands of the Indochinese elite through Chinese translations. Soon, works of Karl Marx, H.G. Wells, Charles Darwin, and other economists and political scientists were translated into *quoc ngu* for Annamites to read.<sup>126</sup>

Through the influx of new reading material, Indochina’s intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s developed interests in global affairs as pamphlets about fascism, anti-communism, and anti-Semitism circulated throughout the country. A group known as the “new intelligentsia” emerged. Unlike other social groups, neither status nor wealth made one a member—what mattered was one’s state of mind. The new intelligentsia members were committed to reading, writing, and thinking about change. Concurrently, other Annamites revived an interest in heroes, both local and international, past and present. Leaders of past struggles against the Chinese and French were regarded great reverence. Whether focused on the future or the past, all agreed that

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<sup>125</sup> D.R. SarDesai, *Vietnam: Past and Present* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 43-44; Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel*, 14, 17.

<sup>126</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition*, 252; SarDesai *Vietnam*, 16; Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel*, 17.

Indochina could not return to pre-colonial ways—the French had destroyed too much tradition—but major changes were needed for their community to survive.<sup>127</sup>

Intellectuals and rebels developed into resistance groups, but they lacked unification, were isolated, and neglected any political efforts to mobilize the general population. As a result, the French easily crushed any rebellions, but one man revolutionized Annamite resistance. In the 1920s, Ho Chi Minh mobilized several Indochinese students studying in southern China into a group he called the *Than Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi*, the Revolutionary Youth League, which issued writings calling for change, yet remained organized in small cells to avoid detection by French officials. When the Great Depression hit the colony in the early 1930s, economic crisis forced down rice and rubber prices, cut production, and sparked strikes. Ho Chi Minh took this opportunity to rally the three rivaling Communist factions within Indochina to form a single cohesive group called the Indochinese Communist Party. It called for independence from France and for the formation of a proletarian government. As the Depression appeared to ease, World War II broke out. In 1940, France faced invasion by Germany at home and by Japan in Indochina. After conquering Indochina, the Japanese forces moved further south, forcing the British from Malay, the Dutch from Indonesia, and the United States from the Philippines. One Asian nation single-handedly destroyed European colonialism. Ho Chi Minh recognized the moment to act. He formed one last organization, led by the Communists, which sealed the fate of French rule in Indochina. He called his new group *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh*, the Vietnam Independence League, or simply the Vietminh.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition*, 31, 252, 340.

<sup>128</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam*, 121, 135-138.

## Conclusion

Regardless of how hard the French tried to impose their modern, European style of life upon the inhabitants of their Indochinese colony, the lives of the Annamites could never truly change to what the French imagined. Much of the Indochinese culture remained strong, bound by tradition and community. Although French influence and intervention destroyed a lot of the tradition, the Annamites rose up against the colonists because thousands of years of attempted conquest by other nations taught them the mechanisms necessary to defend themselves. The uprisings against the French were not an overnight occurrence. Years of oppression by the colonizers, coupled with drastic changes in landscape and culture, led the Annamites to seek their independence.

The French presence in Southeast Asia began innocently with the arrival of missionaries on a quest to spread the word of God. These holy men converted many Annamites to Christianity while facing persecution from disapproving emperors. The emperors feared that if they let the missionaries into their country, other Europeans would follow and attempt to conquer. They were correct. As with most European missionary movements, these practices and conversions paved the way for travelers and traders who immediately recognized the potential of profit in the area. As more Frenchmen moved to Indochina, their military presence increased to defend Europeans and to overwhelm Annamite resistance. Ultimately, the French conquered and claimed Annam, Tonkin, Cochinchina, Laos, and Cambodia as their own.

Although other European countries continued to imperialize the world, the French colonists and supporters constantly had to justify their reasons for colonization among their fellow citizens. The most common reasons they offered were boosting the economy of France, asserting that the French were a superior race, and providing a “civilizing mission.” Whatever

the justification, the colonizers needed to find an appropriate way to govern the colony. Because the 1789 Revolution preached liberty, equality, and fraternity, the French applied these ideas to their colonies overseas. The resulting policy of assimilation disregarded all Annamite traditions in favor of turning the Indochinese into Frenchmen. Unfortunately, this practice shattered Indochinese customs, and the destruction resulted in a dangerous backlash.

Indochina quickly became an example of how not to run a colony, especially because it fell into debt, forcing the mother country to lose money. Fortunately, Paul Doumer's arrival as governor-general turned the situation around. He received a grant of 200 million francs in 1898 to alter and improve the colonial infrastructure. If the colony's economic production became more efficient, Indochina could produce a profit and make France wealthier. Although the lack of planning, inflation, and abuses of power forced the colony to lose money, Doumer's plans provided the colony with a step in the right direction.

In 1912, Indochina received a second chance to turn a profit through a grant of 90 million francs from the French government in Paris. This loan provided money for internal improvements such as irrigation, transportation, education, health care, and communication. The French used the railroads to unite the entire colony cheaply, quickly, and effectively. Engineers built roads where they could not build railroads in order to aid transportation, industry, and farming. These roads, like the railroads, intruded on precious Annamite farmland out of French convenience, leaving the peasants with little room to live or to grow their crops. Additionally, most peasants could not afford to ride the railroads, and no peasants could afford cars. As the colonists constructed new transportation methods throughout Indochina, many peasants were forced off their land to make way for roads, railroads, and irrigation projects. Rich Frenchmen or even other Annamites often seized the communal lands for their own farms and large estates,

forcing most peasants into tenant farming, homelessness, or into the cities to work in the appalling factory conditions.

Other improvements within the colony designed supposedly to help the Annamites as well as the French included education. In reality, little good came to the Indochinese through the French school system. In theory, education was to educate the Annamites in the way of the French and to unify the nation—and did so to an extent through the spread of *quoc ngu*. Unfortunately, the education system imposed on the Indochinese only reinforced the myth that Asians were an inferior race and could advance only through French rule. The Annamites received censored textbooks to prevent any anti-colonial influences from infiltrating the schools, and they needed special permission to pursue a college education abroad. The literacy level fell drastically after French arrival because students discontinued their education rather than travel the long distances to school. Although some Annamites did receive college degrees, they could not receive the same level of pay in the workforce as Frenchmen.

Although the French intended to help advance the Indochinese society through a so-called civilizing mission, almost everything done in the colony was solely to benefit the mother country. The attempted transformations of the landscape and of the people in Indochina destroyed native customs and traditions in favor of a new French style of life that left a generation of Annamites too French for the Indochinese and yet too Indochinese for the French. As new social classes developed and as new literature made its way through the borders, Annamite intellectuals began truly to understand the devastating effects of French influence on their society. Something had to change. Unfortunately, as most often in the struggle for independence, change meant war.

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## **Vita**

Julia Alayne Grenier Burlette was born in Waterville, Maine, though she spent the majority of her formative years in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Julia received her Baccalaureate degree in history, graduating with high honors, from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana, in May 2004. That summer, she relocated to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to pursue her studies in French history. She currently resides in Fredericksburg, Virginia, with her husband, Jeff, and their dog, Lenny.