 Offers an innovative concept of space and place that has a wider applicability far beyond Indochina or Vietnam

Why, Benedict Anderson once asked, did Javanese become Indonesian in 1945 whereas the Vietnamese balked at becoming Indochinese? In this classic study, Christopher Goscha shows that Vietnamese of all political colours came remarkably close to building a modern national identity based on the colonial model of Indochina while Lao and Cambodian nationalists rejected this precisely because it represented a Vietnamese entity. Specialists of French colonial, Vietnamese, Southeast Asia and nationalism studies will all find much of value in Goscha’s provocative rethinking of the relationship between colonialism and nationalism in Indochina.

First published in 1995 as Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, this remarkable study has been through a major revision and is augmented with new material by the author and a foreword by Eric Jennings.

‘Goscha’s analysis extends far beyond semantics and space. His range of sources is dazzling. He draws from travel literature to high politics, maps, bureaucratic bulletins, almanacs, the press, nationalist and communist texts, history and geography manuals and guides, amongst others. … [T]his book remains highly relevant to students of nationalism, Southeast Asia, French colonialism, Vietnam, geographers and historians alike.’ – Eric Jennings, University of Toronto
GOING INDOCHINESE
NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

NIAS Classics Series

Scholarly works on Asia have been published via the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies for more than 40 years, the number of titles published exceeding 300 in total. Since 2002, this work has been continued by NIAS Press. All of those NIAS books published in the earlier decades have been long out of print. However, the Press has begun work to digitize all of our titles so that these will again be available (and this time to a global readership).

As part of this process, NIAS Press has launched a new NIAS Classics book series, comprising selected titles from the NIAS backlist that have been judged to be of enduring value. In each instance, not only will the original book be reproduced (sometimes unchanged) but also supplementary material will be added that locates the work in its contemporary scholarly discourse.

All titles appearing in the series will be published both in printed and digital format.

First titles in the series

1. Hunting and Fishing: Revisiting a Classic Study in Southeast Asian Ethnography by Damrong Tayanin & Kristina Lindell
2. Monks and Magic Revisiting a Classic Study of Religious Ceremonies in Thailand by Barend Jan Terwiel
3. Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina by Christopher E. Goscha

NIAS Press is the autonomous publishing arm of NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, a research institute located at the University of Copenhagen. NIAS is partially funded by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden via the Nordic Council of Ministers, and works to encourage and support Asian studies in the Nordic countries. In so doing, NIAS has been publishing books since 1969, with more than two hundred titles produced in the past few years.
For Luc and Olivia
CONTENTS

Foreword ix
Acknowledgments xi
Introduction: Going Indochinese? 1
1. Setting Indochina into Motion Together: The Franco-Annamese Alliance 13
2. Annamese Colonial Nationalists between Indochina and Annam 51
3. Annamese Revolutionaries between Indochina and Vietnam 75
4. Contesting Space and Place in Indochina: Laotian and Cambodian Views 91
5. One Last Try? Vichy’s Turn 119
Conclusion: Letting Go of Indochina? 145
Bibliography 151
Index 161
LIST OF FIGURES

1: Dai Nam in 1835  16
2: Ethnic populations  20
3: French Indochina, 1862–1936  21
4: Road and rail connections  27
5: Vietnamese labor immigration in Indochina  29
6: Indochina on the move  30
7: Indochina in the world  30
8: Original cover for The Five Flowers  38
9: Indochina explained  41
10: Vietnamese travel with an Indochinese backdrop  43
11: Making Indochina natural  50
12: Crossing the Indo-Chinese line: Pham Quynh in Laos  65
13: Indochinese Postal Service  94
14: Vichy and Indochinese traditions  128
Christopher Goscha’s *Vietnam or Indochina*, republished at last here as *Going Indochinese*, is a conceptual and empirical tour-de-force. Goscha takes up Benedict Anderson’s question of why Indochina broke up, while Indonesia did not.¹ Was Indochina only a decade shy of becoming a reality? Were Cambodians, Vietnamese and Laotians on the cusp of thinking of themselves as Indochinese, much as Javanese people began to conceive of themselves as Indonesian, he asks.

Inspired in part by Thongchai Winichakul’s *Siam Mapped*, Goscha’s analysis extends far beyond semantics and space. His range of sources is dazzling. He draws from travel literature to high politics, maps, bureaucratic bulletins, almanacs, the press, nationalist and communist texts, history and geography manuals and guides, amongst others.

The book’s originality rests in part in the fact that it examines French and Vietnamese federalist currents in tandem – indeed Goscha painstakingly reconstitutes the many sub-currents within each category. He shows that the breakup of Indochina was in no sense foreordained. He reveals how federalist threads remained entwined in Viet-Minh thinking well after 1945.

*Vietnam or Indochina* required the mastery of several fields to research and write. It took a lateral, comparative approach to bring back to life a federation whose impetus, energy and institutions endure today only in the realm of memory or, more often, nostalgia. It required thinking in regional terms. Indeed, it necessitated reconsidering boundaries both internal and external. Few binaries were at work here. Goscha’s Indochina was plural. Outside influences proved equally multifarious: Siam and Japan played important and complex roles. Here, Goscha’s interest in Siam–Indochina relations and boundaries served him well, as did his triple interest in national, colonial, and postcolonial narratives. It

required expertise in the field of nationalism to reconstitute the impact of *Le tour de France par deux enfants* onto the Indochinese *Five Flowers*.

Goscha demonstrates that the very term “Vietnam” constituted an anachronism when applied to the period before 1945. He examines how the French colonial administration relied on ethnic Vietnamese to run the Indochinese federation. He considers circulations and efforts to make the Indochinese federation a tangible reality. Moreover, Goscha ascribes agency to ethnic Vietnamese officials, who, he writes, found it expedient, practical, and no doubt profitable to “cast themselves in Indochinese roles.”

Throughout, Goscha pays special attention to the weight of what is now Vietnam within the putative Indochinese federation. He exposes the federation’s inherent contradictions, as well as its lopsidedness. He shows how some Vietnamese communists came to inhabit the very space formerly occupied by the French, with no apparent sense of contradiction.

Last but not least, *Vietnam or Indochina* has proven seminal: its interest in regional patterns, in maritime and river connections, in specific eras like the Japanese occupation, in colonial-postcolonial continuities and ruptures, all paved the way for future work. Sixteen years on, this book remains highly relevant to students of nationalism, Southeast Asia, French colonialism, Vietnam, geographers and historians alike.

Eric T. Jennings
University of Toronto
AKNOWLEDGMENTS

As this major revision of my original essay, *Vietnam or Indochina?* (VIC),\(^1\) goes to press, I remain indebted to those individuals who first inspired and encouraged me to embark upon this “Indochinese adventure”. They are, in no particular order: Gerald Jackson, Stein Tønnesson, Ruth McVey, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Michael Gravers, Hans Antlöv, Benedict Anderson, Agathe Larcher-Goscha, David Marr, and Søren Ivarsson. Since VIC’s first printing in 1995, I have benefited from the help, comments, critiques, and encouragements from a wide range of friends and scholars including the above mentioned as well as Tuong Vu, David Chandler, Peter Zinoman, Susan Bayly, Keith Taylor, Eric Jennings, Penny Edwards, David Henley, Thongchai Winichakul, William Turley, Alexander Woodside, Daniel Hémery, Andrew Hardy, and Pierre Brocheux among others. A special thanks goes to my editor, Gerald Jackson, at NIAS Press. Without his support, this revised book edition of my original 1995 essay would never have seen the light of day.

Christopher E. Goscha
Université du Québec à Montréal

---

Few in Vietnam today could ever imagine belonging to an Indochinese nation, of holding an Indochinese passport, of actually being Indochinese. If one were to put the question to a shopper in downtown Hanoi in 2011 or to a classroom of high school students in Saigon, I’m sure they would return a look of bewilderment or just simply laugh. Are you out of your mind? This has certainly been my experience. True, older Vietnamese will recall that Vietnam was once a part of the colonial state named French Indochina. Others can remember vaguely the importance of “Indochinese solidarity” in the combined struggle with the Laotians and Cambodians against the French, the Americans, and the Chinese. Few, however, would ever admit to the possibility of “going Indochinese”.

That “Vietnam” takes precedence over “Indochina” today is hardly surprising. Of the estimated 90 million people living in Vietnam as of mid-July 2011, the vast majority never knew the colonial period or the wars for Indochina. A quarter of the current population is under 15 years of age; its average age is 28.1 Having been born in or after 1983, half of the Vietnamese population has never experienced the existence of two Vietnamese nation-states, one in the south, the other in the north. For the vast majority of those living in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) today, “Vietnam” is the real and authentic manifestation of cultural identity and statehood. And the roots of this national identity are located in a faraway past, premised on a long tradition of resistance to foreign domination. This is what every little Vietnamese learns in school.

Going Indochinese

I certainly had no initial reason to contest this version of the national past when I first began studying Vietnam and the Vietnamese language in the late 1980s. Given the suffering the Vietnamese people had endured against so many invaders, who was I to suggest that the Vietnamese were perhaps not quite so Vietnamese? Second, as a young American in the 1980s interested in working on the colonial and war periods, I was very much aware of the battles among Vietnamese and especially non-Vietnamese scholars, politicians, and journalists over the legitimacy of foreign intervention in Vietnam. Added to this was the fact that the war for Indochina was still not over as I entered the academic field. The outbreak of a third conflagration in 1979, this time between former communist brothers-in-arms, lasted throughout the 1980s. I was studying Vietnamese in Hanoi in 1988 when Hanoi implemented its policy of economic liberalization (đoi moi) and began withdrawing troops from Cambodia (and Laos), as a sine qua non for normalizing relations with its enemies and ending its international isolation. I was in Paris in 1991 studying French as the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union opened the way for the signing of peace accords closing what is now commonly referred to as the “Third Indochina War.”

But the war carried on in the academic field, much as it had in Europe after World War I. Orthodox vs revisionist writers and scholars continued to do battle in editorials, books, conferences, films, novels, documentaries, and organizations. While I was not a member of the “Vietnam Generation” or the Pro- or Anti-war Movements (I was born in June 1965), I was keenly aware of the minefield into which I was stepping as I began my study of twentieth-century Vietnam and set

---


Introduction: Going Indochinese

off for Hanoi in 1988.\textsuperscript{4} I certainly knew that the “Indochina idea” was a taboo subject inside and outside Vietnam. On one side, writers used the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and Hanoi’s massive military presence in Laos as proof of communist Vietnam’s expansionist designs of a hegemonic, Indochinese kind. This only confirmed the validity of the American intervention against communism. On the other side were those, opposed to American involvement in the war, who argued just as passionately that Hanoi was the victim of continued and unjustified threats to its national security. Not only was the SRV’s intervention in Cambodia entirely justified given that Hanoi ended Pol Pot’s murderous regime but also Laos and Cambodia were vital to Hanoi’s continued defence against foreign aggression.

The last thing I wanted to do as a young scholar trying to catch an academic break was to walk into such a minefield speaking of Vietnamese nationalists and communists in Indochinese terms. So what happened?

Two important things occurred simultaneously and entirely by accident. Both were intertwined. First, as I started studying French in Paris in 1991 while working as a \textit{garçon au père}, I spent my weekends and time-off perusing dusty old colonial papers held in the old \textit{Bibliothèque nationale} on rue Richelieu and its annex then located in Versailles. I had not yet begun my PhD, but I knew I wanted to do something on the first half of the twentieth century. In those days, one could easily order, consult, and even photocopy the originals of newspapers at a reasonable price. Completely by chance, I decided to order one called \textit{France-Indochine}. I started with the year 1929 – it seemed like an important conjuncture – and began thumbing through the pages. It was a good read and I was content to be improving my French. The “Indochinese adventure” began one day when a bundle of dusty old papers for the years 1930–31 landed on my table. I opened it and began skimming the pages as usual. Within an hour or so, a series of articles written by the famous politician-scholar, Pham Quynh, caught my eye. They had nothing to do with Confucianism, literature, or Franco-Annamese cooperation. They dealt instead with his recent travels to Laos and his thoughts on Vietnamese

\textsuperscript{4} Having come of age during the Reagan years, I remember vividly the cultural wars of which American involvement in Vietnam was an integral part. Thanks to Nayan Chanda, I published my first article (which, admittedly, he largely rewrote for me). It was on the POW-MIA issue during the Reagan years. Christopher Goscha, ‘Letter from Reagan’, \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review} (21 January 1988).
immigration there. I read on until I encountered his lively debate with another cultural giant of the time, Nguyen Van Vinh, over the reality of Indochina.

All of this struck me as very strange since what I had read in the existing scholarship had always focused on the cultural activities of these two men and their collaborative relations with the French. This was very different. Here they were debating whether the Vietnamese could or should become “Indochinese”. Could French Indochina serve as the final form of Vietnamese nationalism? These were their words, not mine. Second, this was 1930–31, the colonial period, not the 1960s or during the third Indochina War. “What’s going on here?”, I remember asking myself. I kept on reading and, to my surprise, the debate widened quickly as I ordered Nguyen Van Vinh’s paper, *L’Annam Nouveau*, in order to read his replies to Pham Quynh. I found other nuggets on these matters in Pham Quynh’s review, *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind). Soon I was moving from one paper to another until I had under my eyes Laotian Prince Phetsarath’s feisty reply to both of these Vietnamese luminaries. As I kept digging, I began to unearth a wider vein of debates about immigration, federalism, Vietnam, Annam, and the reality of Indochina. The articles even provided clues for locating earlier debates, including the *Courrier saigonais*’ rejection of Ho Chi Minh’s confusion of “Annam” with “Indochina” after World War I. Within five or six weekends of enthusiastic reading, it was clear that some of the most important Vietnamese elites of the interwar period were thinking about Indochina in ways I had never imagined possible. It also dawned on me that the press served as the forum (and thus the archive for me) for the colonized at odds over the space in which they were living at the time.

Going through all of this, I couldn’t help but notice that there was a real gap in communist Vietnam’s and the Vietnam War generations’ discourse and scholarship on the Indochinese idea. Most importantly, in all the politically motivated debates over “Indochina” since the start of the wars in 1945, no one had taken a close look at what exactly had been happening among the “Indochinese” during the colonial period. Clearly, the pre-1945 period had had some sort of an impact on those living within it at the time and that this must have influenced later actions, policies, thinking, and events. If not, then why would so many Vietnamese even be asking themselves whether they were “Indochinese”, “Annamese”,

*Going Indochinese*
“Vietnamese”, or indeed something else? It struck me that “colonialism” on the one hand and “nationalism” and “communism” on the other were not operating in a binary opposition. I began to think about how the two sides interacted. But for the time being, I kept my head low, content just to keep on reading, improving my French, and above all making photo-copies. I was soon a regular customer not only at the *BnF*, but also at the colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence and the military ones in Vincennes. I delved into colonial literature, paged through colonial school textbooks for Indochina, and picked up colonial geography books and maps. I also began to order communist papers to see whether the Left and Far Left intellectuals and politicians were talking about such things. They were.

This digging coincided fortuitously with the re-edition in 1991 of Benedict Anderson’s now classic study *Imagined Nations: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. A specialist of Indonesia and Southeast Asia, as well as one of the world’s leading theorists of nationalism, Anderson provided me with a framework from which I could build my analysis of the Indochinese idea. Having a mass of virgin sources was one thing; knowing what to do with them analytically was quite another. Anderson introduced me to an exciting theoretical take on nationalism, using Southeast Asian examples with which I was most familiar, all the while opening my mind to wider comparisons across the globe. Moreover, crucial to Anderson’s argument about the spread of nationalism was the importance of taking colonial connections seriously. This could not have come at a better time for me. And of course for those who have read his book, you already know that he was the first to ask why the Javanese could declare an independent Republic of all of Indonesia in 1945, whereas their Vietnamese counterparts balked at setting up an Indochinese Republic in favour of a Vietnamese one. Focusing on the spread of print culture and the impact of colonial education, among other things, Anderson argued that many Vietnamese did indeed think of themselves as Indochinese. He was the first to speak of the “growth of an ‘Indochinese’ consciousness”.

Anderson got me and others thinking in new ways. Indeed, as I learned just before VIC went to press in 1995, his comparison of Indochina and

---

6 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 120–133.
Indonesia had sent another scholar down a parallel path to mine. His name is David Henley and he wrote an excellent theoretical comparison of the “Indonesian/Javanese” and “Indochinese/Vietnamese” ideas, which has become a classic in the field. Anderson also set off a proliferation of path-breaking studies on Southeast Asian nationalism and state-formation, all of which have deeply influenced me. I’m thinking, among others, of Thonchhai Winichakul’s *Siam Mapped*, Søren Ivarsson’s *Creating Laos*, Penny Edwards’ *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation*, and Eric Jennings’ *Vichy in the Tropics* (though Anderson is less present in Jennings’ analysis than in the others).

While I may differ with Anderson on Cambodia and Laos “going Indochinese” (see chapter 4), I owe much to him and his work. In fact, in 1994, during a conference organized by Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson in Copenhagen on “Asian forms of the nation”, Anderson urged me to keep on going (as did Tønnesson and Antlöv). Meanwhile, at the Université de Paris VII, where I had enrolled in a pre-PhD program, my advisors, Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, both counselled me to forget about the politics of the present and focus on the interconnections occurring during the colonial period. My work under Hémery and Brocheux coincided with the shift in their own work towards understanding the “ambiguous” yet important connections occurring in Indochina during the colonial period.

There is one last person whom I feel I must mention in the genesis of this book. That is the late Deny Lombard. Thanks to his seminar at the

---


Ecole des Hautes études en Sciences sociales and his Braudelian approach, I began to think about the material things on the ground, and not just the ideas in peoples’ heads, that allowed so many Vietnamese to think of themselves in wider, Indochinese terms. Lombard’s *Carrefour javanais* and Braudel’s classic study of the Mediterranean got me thinking about the importance of networks, roads, and people moving along them, essential to the making of space. I have always kept in mind Braudel’s famous line about “his” space, the Mediterranean, when thinking about “mine”: “La Méditerranée n’a d’unité que par le mouvement des hommes, les liaisons qu’il implique, les routes qui le conduisent.” 11 I applied this methodological approach to my study of Indochina as well as to my subsequent work on the Asian context of war and revolution.12

This, then, is the wider context in which VIC and the resulting book here took form. What strikes me most as I revise the manuscript for publication is the degree to which this book really is the product of pure chance. Had I not discovered Pham Quynh’s essays in the pages of *France-Indochine* in 1991 in the National Library in Paris, I honestly do not think that the essay published in 1995 or this book would have come to fruition. The same would be true if Anderson, Tønnesson, Antlöv, and Lombard had not got me thinking in new ways.

Since publishing VIC almost two decades ago, I have continued to test my original argument – that the colonial period counts, that Vietnamese of a wide range of political colors did, in fact, think of themselves in Indochinese terms, and that many of them came remarkably close to “going Indochinese” not just in their heads but also because of the material connections pushing them on the ground. In my subsequent and separate research projects, I have kept my eyes open for all Indochinese things for further information supporting or disapproving


my argument. And here I did indeed find something that led me to revise my thinking significantly. It was another debate over the concept of Indochina, but this time it occurred between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians. It began in the wake of the Pham Quynh–Nguyen Van Vinh debate in 1931, reached a crescendo in 1934–35, and continued to surface in the press until Vichy took over in Indochina during World War II. Whereas Pham Quynh and Nguyen Van Vinh’s exchange demonstrated the extent to which Vietnamese could think of themselves in Indochinese terms, the second debate demonstrated the remarkable degree to which Cambodian and Laotian elites wanted nothing to do with “Indochina”, whether it were French or Vietnamese in design. Laotian and Cambodian nationalists saw Indochina as an exclusive Franco-Vietnamese club and as a threat to their efforts to predicate national identity along Cambodian and Laotian territorial lines.

What I call the “great” Vietnamese-Cambodian debate of the mid-1930s convinced me that there was more to the Indochina story than simply analyzing the new spatial concept of Indochina along strictly Franco-Vietnamese lines. Of equal importance were the Cambodians and Laotians and the question of place, in particular the modern colonial categories and legally delineated notions of “citizenship” and “nationality”. For reasons I discuss below, Cambodians and Laotians were increasingly opposed to the Indochinese idea on the grounds that it would transform them into “Indochinese citizens” and that this would be a very bad thing. Given the preponderant place the Vietnamese would hold in such a territorially defined Indochinese colonial federation or postcolonial nation, Cambodians and Laotians feared that such a legally defined citizenship would allow the Vietnamese to step up their already robust immigration into Laos and Cambodia.

This also got me thinking that, if much has been written over the years in colonial studies about the need to rethink colonial categories between the colonized and the colonizer, this second debate made it clear that we also need to consider how such colonially constituted categories impacted upon relationships among the colonized themselves.13

Introduction: Going Indochinese

As Roger Brubaker demonstrated for the new nation-states of France and Germany in the late nineteenth century, national space (territory) and place (citizenship) went hand in hand. Similar things can be said for colonial states. Not only did the French carve out a territorially defined Indochinese space but also they had to define who belonged to that scientifically delimited space in legal terms. Place therefore refers above all to concepts of colonial “citizenship” and “nationality”. I have thus added a chapter below on these matters, based in part on an article I published in Modern Asian Studies in 2009. Chapter 4 adds nuances and greater depth to my analysis and provides another analytical dimension, helping us to better understand why the colonial concept of Indochina failed to take root in Laotian and Cambodian national minds.

These revisions also explain why the title now reads: Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in Colonial French Indochina. Arguably, Going Indochinese should be followed by a question mark as this would capture the original idea that there was nothing necessarily inevitable about “Vietnam” or artificial about becoming “Indochinese” at the time. (Here, however, I bowed to the wishes of the publisher.) As in the original version, the contested nature of space remains the same, but what I have added here is the matter of place – the legal categories mentioned above. Why French Indochina instead of Vietnamese nationalism as in the original title? For the reason noted above that subsequent research and reflection have convinced me that one cannot exclude Laotian and Cambodians voices – or even French ones for that matter. I try to bring them into the picture, for they were central to rolling back the Indochinese idea. And it is clear that the Franco-Vietnamese attempts to create Indochina played a central role in stimulating modern nationalism in Cambodia and Laos. French Indochina thus serves as my shorthand for referring to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, as well as to the colonizer, France. These are the four main players in my story.

Before moving on, I should say a bit more about our use of the terms “Annam” and “Vietnam.” For many of the political and historiographical reasons evoked above, present convention normally holds that “Vietnam” is preferable to “Annam,” for it captures “true” Vietnamese nationalist sentiments, whereas “Annam” is usually considered pejorative. I accept this explanation, but only partially. There is no doubt that the third syllable of the French word “An-na-mite” could sting painfully in colonial encounters of an unfortunate kind, just as the two Chinese characters, “An-Nam” (Land of the Pacified South), could convey a humiliating sense of submission. The problem, however, is that prior to 1945 many Vietnamese nationalists actually used, and sometimes even preferred, the word “Annam” and “Annamese” in their patriotic writings. I am thinking of the famous poet and editor of the Annamese Review (An Nam Tap Chi), Tan Da; the president of the fiercely anticolonial Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Viet-Nam Quoc Dan Dang), Nguyen Khac Nhu; as well as Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen An Ninh to name but a few. Moreover, as late as 1945, there was nothing preordained about the word or concept of “Vietnam.” In the years (indeed months) leading up to the August Revolution, some nationalists still wanted to see “Dai-Nam” or “Dai-Viet” resurrected, while others countered with “An-Nam,” “Nam,” or “Indo-China.” As Hoang Xuan Han, a former cabinet minister in the short-lived Tran Trong Kim government of mid-1945, told me in the early 1990s: “had the French created Indochina twenty years earlier, we might well have...


declared an Indochinese state in 1945.” All of these patriots were obviously not French “collaborators”; so it seems that the word “Annam” (and “Indochina”) did not always embody pejorative connotations, nor was it necessarily “pro-colonial” or “anti-Vietnamese” at certain points in time.

Thus, instead of discarding outright the term “Annam” on anti-colonialist, nationalist, or stylistic grounds, I feel it is crucial to hold on to “Annam” as a way of locating breaks in the nationalist discourse, behind which competing ideas, such as “Viet-Nam” and “Indo-China”, started contesting its hegemony (and Annam never exercised a semantic monopoly). I will thus take up the word “Annam” in my text on the grounds that this term acknowledged the existence of a geo-political entity both for the French and the Annamese during the colonial period and for the simple yet important reason that a wide-range of Annamese nationalists used it themselves at the time. This will allow me to track their use of certain terms and to understand why, especially when writing in quoc ngu (romanized script), they jumped suddenly from “Annam” to “Dai Viet”, “Nam Viet”, “Nha Nam”, “Nuoc Nam”, “Nam”, and especially “Viet-Nam” and “Dong Duong” (Indochina), and then slid back to “Annam” as if nothing had truly happened. I will switch to the word, “Vietnam”, in chapter 3 for the period from 1930, when this coupling – sometimes but not always – started to take on a powerful life in the minds and mouths of an expanding nationalist elite, communist and non-communist alike.

When I need to make an ethnic distinction, I will use the word “Viet” instead of the inclusive terms “Vietnamese”, “Annamese”, or “Indochinese”. For similar reasons, I will also refer to the inhabitants of western Indochina as the “Cambodians” and the “Laotians” and use the terms “Khmer” and “Lao”, respectively, to distinguish the specific ethnic group. This admittedly oversimplifies a number of things, not least of all notions of ethnicity, and leaves the ethnic minority groups located in the highlands of French Indochina out of the picture (despite the fact that in Laos they constituted the majority of the population). My use of “Laos” here also assumes that such a unitary state had already existed under the

18 Author’s interview with Hoang Xuan Han, 1 August 1993, Paris.
19 Already in June 1946, Paul Mus had captured this idea: « [I] irait contre tout sens de prétendre que l’Annam d’hier s’est évanoui sans laisser de trace et qu’un Viet-Nam en est sorti tout armé et sans commun mesure avec l’Annam ». Paul Mus, Le Viet-Nam Chez Lui, Paris: P. Harmattan, 1946.
Going Indochinese

French, which was not the case until the mid 1940s. I can only plead guilty, recommending that readers consult the excellent studies of Oscar Salemink and Søren Ivarsson, who address such matters expertly. 20

But let us agree on one thing as I turn to the subject at hand here. Rather than assuming the Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia we see on the map today have always existed, let us go back in time and space to try to understand how colonial policies interacted with and transformed pre-existing notions of the geo-political landscape among the “Indochinese.” 21 Whether communist or non-communist, all the Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian nationalists under study here agreed on the reality of a national “body” (un seul corps) – to borrow one famous Annamese patriot’s precise term 22 –, but they had great trouble choosing the geographical patterns of this entity and deciding on who would and would not be a part of it. We might know “the” answer today, in 2012; but all sorts of possibilities existed at the time, when much was in flux in French Indochina. Let us thus start at the beginning of the colonial period and move forward rather than forcing the past to fit the post 1945, war driven debates of the present. 23


23 For a “post-revisionist” critique of war-driven historiography on Vietnam, see Peter Zinoman’s book reviews of Mark Bradley’s (orthodox) and Mark Moyar’s (revisionist) histories of the post-1945 wars for Vietnam. Both reviews can be accessed at H-Diplo at http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/books/.
CHAPTER 1

SETTING INDOCHINA INTO MOTION TOGETHER: THE FRANCO-ANNAMENE ALLIANCE

Although the French conquered the pre-existing imperial state run by the Nguyen dynasty, the colonizer could never have created the new colonial state of Indochina without the Vietnamese. No sooner had the Third Republic dismantled the Nguyen dynasty in the 1880s than colonial authorities issued orders to associate the Annamese with the new colonial order. Judged more dynamic than the Laotians and Cambodians, they would be vital to expanding and consolidating colonial control over areas contested by the Thais. Annamese collaboration would be equally essential to running the lower levels of the emerging colonial state. From the 1880s until the 1930s, the French developed a special relationship with the Annamese in building French Indochina, symbolized by Albert Sarraut’s policy of Franco-Annamese collaboration in the wake of World War I. Ideologically, spatially, and materially, the French pushed the Annamese to think in Indochinese ways. And by setting the colonial state into motion together, scores of Annamese could begin to move in Indochinese ways.

COLONIAL CONQUEST AND SPATIAL REORIENTATIONS

On the eve of French colonial conquest, a linguistically homogenous group of people who called themselves the Viet ruled the lowlands of the eastern edge of the Southeast Asian continent extending from the Red River delta to the Mekong basin. From the twelfth century, demographic pressures had stimulated a “Southward March” (Nam Tien) among these peoples down the eastern side of the Annamese Cordillera. By the late
seventeenth century, ethnic Viet had annexed Champa and moved into the reaches of the Khmer kingdom ruling what is today known as southern Vietnam. Weakened by internal dissensions and troubles with Siam (modern Thailand), the Khmer were in no position to thwart this expansion into under-populated areas of the Mekong Delta. By the late eighteenth century, the Viet peoples had colonized areas that constitute much of, but by no means all of, present-day lower Vietnam. It became part of the Nguyen dynasty. Unified into one state in 1802, the Nguyen then turned their attention west. In 1834, Emperor Minh Mang went so far as to declare Cambodia a provincial protectorate, *Tran Tay Thanh*. He levied taxes, dispatched Viet bureaucrats, and required Khmer subalterns to study the Vietnamese language. However, Cambodian resentment soon transformed into open revolt, forcing Minh Mang’s successor to abandon Phnom Penh in 1841 as the Siamese exerted their influence from the west. Cambodia achieved a fragile independence, but it remained a dual tributary of the Siamese and the Nguyen until the establishment of the French protectorate in 1863.\(^1\)

The tables were turned in Viet relations with China. Based in the Red River delta, the Viet peoples had been ruled for centuries as a province of the Chinese imperial state. In the tenth century this changed when an independent state emerged in the northern delta known as *Dai Viet* (the Greater State of Viet). However, the term *Viet-Nam* (*Yüeh Nan* in Chinese) only appeared in an official sense in the early nineteenth century. Having unified territories running down the eastern coast of the continent into one state (several had existed until that point), the king of the Nguyen dynasty, Gia Long, dispatched a delegation to Beijing to gain recognition of his newly formed empire. Normally, the Chinese sovereign would have bestowed the official seal of *An Nam Quoc Vuong* (Pacified South) on his southern neighbour as a symbol of the tributary relationship that had underpinned their intercourse for centuries. Gia Long broke with this tradition, however, when he chose to refer to his empire as *Nan-Yüeh* – pronounced by the Viet as *Nam-Viet* (Southern Viet/Yüeh). Worried that the use of this term belied expansionist designs on Beijing’s southern flank, the Chinese Emperor reversed the

---

Setting Indochina into Motion Together

word order to form the term *Viet-Nam*. Gia Long accepted this Chinese devised coupling as recognizing an independent Viet state exercising control over southern territories. The Chinese continued to refer to his Empire as *An-Nam*, but changed the seal to read *Viet-Nam Quoc Vuong* (King of the Southern Viet Country). Nevertheless, for unclear reasons, the Nguyen court was not satisfied with this name and official usage of *Viet-Nam* did not last long. In 1813, the court briefly revived the term *Dai Viet* (Greater Viet) and, in 1838, Minh Mang replaced the word “Viet” with “Nam” to refer to his rapidly growing southern empire as *Dai Nam* (Imperial State of the South). He did not inform Beijing. Subsequent Nguyen rulers used this term until mid-1945. “An artificial appellation then”, Alexander Woodside writes of the term “Vietnam”, “it was used extensively neither by the Chinese nor by the Vietnamese”.

The French shared the Chinese (Tang dynasty) preference for the word Annam, using it officially for the first time in the Treaty of Saigon in 1862, which turned the southern section of what they referred to as the Empire of Annam into a French colony, *la Cochinchine*. Two decades later, the French divided the central and northern parts of the Empire into two protectorates, *Annam* and *Tonkin* respectively. Annam referred to the central part of the Empire because of the Nguyen court’s location in Hue, while Tonkin was the French phonetic reproduction of the Sino-Viet word, *Dong-Kinh*, meaning eastern capital. But there was much semantic confusion from the start. To refer collectively to these three spaces, the French borrowed the term *Annam* from the expression *Ancien Empire d’Annam*. Thus *Annam* could mean both the central protectorate based in Hue, nominally run by the Nguyen king, and the whole of the three eastern Viet possessions – Cochinchina, Annam,
Figure 1: Dai Nam in 1835. Adapted with permission from a map in Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988 (2nd edition).
and Tonkin, the former Annamese Empire. The French similarly used the word "Annamese" to refer to the common language spoken by the ethnic Viet living in Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin. To the west, the French expanded their Indochinese colonial domain with a protectorate over Cambodia (1863) and a less clear one over Laos by the end of the century. Together these five new geo-political units – Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia, and Laos – constituted the pentagonal structure that was becoming French Indo-China. Usage of Dai Nam or Vietnam ceased.

New French geographical delimitations required new indigenous formulations. Annamese geographers borrowed the term ky from Minh Mang’s 1833 administrative reforms to describe the French idea of a "specific region, confine or geographical domain". Cochinchina thus became Nam (south) ky in Annamese; Annam, Trung (middle or central) ky, and Tonkin, Bac (north) ky. The Annamese continued to call Cambodia by its Sino-Viet radical: Cao-men, Cao-man, or Cao-mien, while they wrote Laos as Ai-Lao, Ai-Leo, or Leo. In French, each of these five constituents formed a pays (a “land” or “region”), translated into Viet as xu.

Yet the term, Indo-China, was not what it may seem to most today or even during the colonial period. English missionaries and linguists had used this hyphenated coupling as early as 1811 to refer rather loosely to the Asia beyond India or the mouth of the Ganges River. The French

---

5 This discrepancy would be cause for confusion throughout the colonial period. On the French creation of Annam/Vietnam’s western borders, see Sarin Chhak, Les frontières du Cambodge, Paris: Dalloz, 1966, Volumes I–II.


geographer of Danish birth, K. Malte-Brun, joined in around a decade later, transforming it into French as *Indo-Chine* to pinpoint the space falling horizontally between the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea and, vertically, between the Malaccas and southern China. This is why the term “Indo-Chine/Indo-China” must not be confused with that of “Indo-Chine française”. At the beginning, Indo-China referred to a wider geographical space than the term would encompass under French colonial power. Malte-Brun wrote in 1874 that “Indo-Chine” consisted of seven distinct states: 1) l’Indo-Chine anglaise, 2) la Birmanie, 3) le Royaume du Siam, 4) l’Empire d’An-nam (minus Cochinchina), 5) la Cochinchine française, 6) le Royaume du Cambodge, and 7) les États indépendants de la Presqu’île de Malacca.

The Viet word for Indochina, *Dong-Duong*, appears rarely in dictionaries published prior to the early twentieth century. This is hardly surprising. The new, smaller political space associated with French Indochina only came into being at the end of the nineteenth century, as we shall see. One renowned French-Annamese dictionary published in 1898, for example, did not even list it, while another translated *Dong-Duong* first as *les mers orientales* and secondly as *l’Indo-Chine française*. This term can even be found as an ancient name for Japan. By World War I, however, Annamese speakers had begun using this Sino-Vietnamese coupling, borrowed from the Chinese radicals – *Dong* for the “east” and *Yang* for “east of the ocean” – to translate the term *Indo-**

---

Leyden was the first to use the term, “Indo-China”, and not Malte-Brun. See also Daniel Hémery, ‘Inconstante Indochine ... L’invention et les dérives d’une catégorie géographique’, *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* (1er semestre 2000), pp. 137–158.


10 V.A. Malte-Brun, *Géographie*, p. 192. There is no mention of Lao principalities.


12 Bonet, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 161 and 197 and Interview with Hoang Xuan Han, 1 August 1993, Paris.

In 1920, the French tried to change the official Annamese translation of Indo-China to Dong-Phap (France d’Orient) for fear that Beijing would boycott goods marked Dong-Duong, increasingly mistaken for “Japan” by Chinese border authorities. In the end, the Annamese grew accustomed to several words for identifying the geo-political space the French called l’Indochine Française, above all Dong-Duong (Indo-Chine), followed by Dong-Phap (translated as France d’Orient in 1920), An-do-Chi-Na (Sino-Annamese for India-China), and Dong-Duong thuộc Pháp (Indochine française). But for most of the colonial period, no one term exercised a monopoly. This is largely due to the fact the French could not and did not create Indochina overnight. The colonial state was a work in progress and no one at the start knew where it would wind up in the end. In fact, no one at the time knew with assurance what or when that end would be.

RETHINKING SPACE TOGETHER: INDOCHINA AND THE BIRTH OF A FRANCO-ANNAMESE PARTNERSHIP

Once admirals had militarily subordinated an amalgam of pre-existing peninsular empires and states, administrators had to organize them into some sort of an operating colonial structure. Things were in a mess by 1885. To plant the French flag was one thing, and to bring the Nguyen dynasty to its knees may have elicited a sigh of relief in a raucous Third Republic; but to rule over 16 million people of diverse ethnic, cultural, political, and religious backgrounds was quite another. The French had to give shape to this amorphous kaleidoscope of peoples now subordinated to their sovereignty, including the newly added Laotian and Cambodian territories. Cartographers, geographers, soldiers, and diplomats left for the front lines to sculpt out what was slowly becoming l’Indo-Chine française. They negotiated an end to Annam’s traditional pattern of relations with Siam and China and carefully plotted the outlines of an emerging French colonial space. In 1887, French policy-makers agreed that this could best be achieved through the creation of a Union indochinoise. In 1907, cartographers and diplomats finished sculpting the major geographical outlines of the colony, when the French signed treaties with


19
the Siamese Court finalizing the transfer of territories in Cambodia to French Indochina. A western border had now been established to compliment the Franco-Chinese Treaty of 1884 that had delimited Indochina’s northern border. As Jules Harmand put it in 1887, France’s expansion in Indochina had to continue “until it encountered a scientific frontier”.\textsuperscript{15} By the turn of the twentieth century, this had been largely accomplished. While it was formerly known as the Indochinese Union, it was more commonly referred to as “French Indochina”, \textit{l’Indochine française}. This was the colonial state. As Harmand put it bluntly, there would be no more “Vietnam”. It was also from this point that Malte-Brun’s geographical “Indo-China” encompassing much of what we now call “Southeast Asia” began to give way to the political reality of this smaller geopolitical entity ruled now by the French.\textsuperscript{16}

Most troubling to this creative process, however, was obstinate Annamese resistance to the dismantling of the Dai Nam Empire. On the one hand, the French did their best to crush it militarily and ultimately succeeded by the turn of the century. However, in so doing, the French also boxed themselves in, for such repressive action undermined their efforts to win over the support of the very Annamese whose collaboration would be essential to the construction of the colonial state. The colonizer needed them to fill low-level but functionally important bureaucratic positions in the pre-existing administration in Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin as well as in the Indochinese level being introduced into Laos and Cambodia. The Annamese provided a pool of labor essential to building and operating the roads, railways, and bridges of a modern infrastructure as well as the mines and rubber plantations of a modern Indochinese economy. The colonial need for labor – both blue and white collar – was vital to getting French Indochina off the ground.

Like all colonial conquerors, the French thus had to convince the subjugated Annamese that an Indochinese creation was in their best interest, that \textit{Indochina} was less a rupture with the past than a continuation of \textit{Dai Nam}’s imperial future backed now by French power. Jules


Setting Indochina into Motion Together

Harmand and J.L. de Lanessan, two of France’s top Asia strategists and colonial minds in the late nineteenth century, understood best the need to “associate” the Annamese with France’s Indochinese project. As Harmand wrote in 1885, the year the French finally overthrew the Nguyen dynasty:

The day that this race understands that its historical ambitions can, thanks to us, come to fruition in ways that it never before imagined; when [the Annamese] sees our aid allows him to take vengeance for the humiliations and defeats that he has never forgiven his neighbours; when he feels definitely superior to them and sees his domination expand with ours, only then will we be able to consider that the future of French Indochina is truly assured.17

However, the linkage of this Franco-Annamese alliance to the creation of Indochina at the turn of the century was also linked to persistent problems with the Siamese. The historic presence of Annam’s western competitor for Laotian and Cambodian territories did not just disappear overnight. Bangkok rulers, worried by this French Indochina being “scientifically” projected westwards by cartographers and explorers led by Auguste Pavie, strove to create what Paul Beau called “a greater Unité thaïe”. As David Streckfuss has convincingly shown, the Siamese were particularly worried by French racist arguments and policies that threatened to make the “Siamese” a minority in view of the numerous other racial groups constituting what we now call “Thailand”, some of which the French claimed were their colonial subjects.18 Bangkok authorities responded by trying to turn contested subjects in the Mekong valley into Thai subjects (see chapter 4 on colonial categories inside French Indochina).

To French policy-makers, however, the ability of the Siamese to achieve this greater “Thai unity” threatened the constitution of their own French Indochina, which many in Beau’s camp initially wanted to call

l’Unité indochinoise. In Beau’s view, however, the Annamese would be the driving force of such an Indochinese entity. France would “find neither in the Laotian plateaus nor in the Mekong Valley a race or a group [of people] capable of opposing” Siamese attempts to group diverse ethnic groups into a larger Thai body. Only a policy linking the “Annamese race” to an Indochinese space and its new borders extending to the Mekong, Beau argued, could offer the necessary “numbers”, “cohesion”, and “personality” required to “take up the battle successfully and smash this effort towards a unity of the Thai race before it can be realized”.19

Beau and other colonial authorities justified this special alliance with the Annamese on the grounds that the French were naturally assuming Annam’s place in an historic pattern of rivalry between the Hue and Bangkok courts over Laos and Cambodia. Moreover, Beau advised the government to consolidate colonial domination over western Indochina by building roads and railways to transport Annamese colons to the Mekong. “It is beyond the Annamese Cordillera”, Beau insisted, “that we can find plains more fertile than those of the Red River. It is the Mekong and its tributaries that must be offered to Annamese coloniza-tion. The necessity of [building] routes of penetration towards the great river [that is, the Mekong] makes itself clear to me with a most compelling logic and force.”20

Presumably, Beau did not inform Laotian and Cambodian leaders of this Annamese immigration policy. In fact, most colonial administrators considered the Lao and Khmers, unlike the Viet, to be races on the verge of extinction, weak or lazy at best, but certainly incapable of taking on the greater Thai threat. Jules Harmand agreed. To him, the “homogeneity of the Annamese race” and continued Annamese expansion westwards with the French would ensure “the future of Indochina” (which he too had wanted to call at the outset l’Unité indochinoise).21 At one point, with Bangkok clearly in mind, Beau spoke of creating an “Annamese

19 As Paul Beau put it: “Les Siamois ont compris bien avant nous le parti qu’ils pouvaient tirer pour leurs ambitions de cette dispersion de la race Thai. Ils savent que leur longueur peut servir de truchement comme à toutes les communautés thais et ils ont formé le dessein, plusieurs fois avoué, d’une grande ‘unité Thai’”. Paul Beau à M. Etienne,’ Hanoi, 19 February 1903, p. 428, Papiers Paul Beau, PA/AP 11, Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, France (hereafter cited MAE).
Indochina" (Indochine annamite). In a similar vein, he even called for the publication of new textbooks that would give the Annamese “an idea of the great role which they can play with us and under our direction. One must reawaken in them the expansionist instinct that seems to be flickering out”. In the end, French colonial policymakers decided on creating an “Indochinese Union”. But whatever the name, from the outset the construction and operation of French Indochina depended on developing a special relationship with the Annamese – not the Laotians, Cambodians, or ethnic minority populations living in the highlands.22

Indeed, into the 1930s, French administrators of all tendencies promoted Annamese movements throughout Indochina. In 1912, Governor General Albert Sarraut, as one of the Third Republic’s most important colonial thinkers, summed up in one phrase this early Franco-Annamese alliance in a letter to Minister of the Colonies: “French Indochina today is Gia Long’s Empire reconstituted, expanded by us through [the acquisition] of exterior possessions”, a revealing euphemism for Laos and Cambodia as well as French colonial priorities. During a second mandate at the head of Indochina, Sarraut implemented a policy of Franco-Annamese collaboration (see chapter 2). The French and the Annamese would march together, he proclaimed, to transform Indochina economically and politically. Again, no one thought to consult the Laotians, Cambodians, or ethnic minority groups.23

By the early twentieth century, force, diplomacy, cartography had given geographical life to a French Indochinese colony. Through a host of well-known projects, Governor General Paul Doumer endowed the colonial state with an Indochina-wide bureaucracy, budget, and fiscal policy, while Sarraut added the security services and further developed the education program. Legislation passed in 1911 sidelined the court at Hue by consolidating the Governor General’s power as ranking administrator of Indochina, in charge of the colony’s diplomatic relations, civil

22 Chambre des Députés, no. 1904, session de 1887, ‘Annexe du procès-verbal de la séance du 1 juillet 1887, Proposition de résolution’, p. 32, Mémoires et Documents, Asie – Indochine, volume 102, MAE.

service, defence, budget, and internal security. The French took further measures to give political and economical life to the word “Indochina”, by promoting public works projects, communication systems, and by increasing the reach of the bureaucracy.

World War I delayed major projects. However, from 1919 French colonization resumed with vigour under Sarraut’s second mandate. He announced his policy of Franco-Annamese collaboration (politique de collaboration franco-annamite) and made it a key component in Indochina for his famous policy – La mise en valeur des colonies. It was time to set Indochina into motion, he declared. In opening his famous speech to Annamese elites in Hanoi in April 1919, he asked his burgeoning Annamese audience: “What do we want to do and how must we work together, French and Annamese, for the good of this wonderful Indochina and for the welfare of her populations? That is after all the goal to be reached, the very one that occupies my mind and endlessly haunts my spirit”. For the French, running Indochina was a Franco-Annamese affair.24

Many Annamese took Sarraut very seriously that April day, translating and commenting at great length on his speech in a wide-range of local papers and reviews. His plans for developing a modern communications system, an industrial policy, and educational projects convinced many Annamese that there was a promising future in building Indochina with the French. “Modernisation”, la mise en valeur so dear to Sarraut, became the buzz-word. Paul Doumer had already connected Hanoi by rail to Kunming. The French soon laid tracks eastwards towards Haiphong and southwards towards Vinh and eventually down the coast by the mid-1930s. Networks of trails, canals, highways, radios, and telegraphs appeared throughout the colonial state. Routes penetrated the rugged hills isolating Laos to connect silver mines along the upper Mekong to the port at Vinh. Others contributed to the clearing of thick forests in eastern Cambodia in order to truck rubber from plantations in the Mekong basin to the port in Saigon. Shipping lines linked these ports to

Figure 4: Road and rail connections (L'Eveil économique de l'Indochine, 1931)
major trading centres in Hong Kong, Guangzhou (Canton), Bangkok, Singapore, Marseille, and beyond.\textsuperscript{25}

By 1920, things were increasingly on the move in Indochina, with an inner Franco-Annamese momentum all of its own. Faced with over-population problems in Tonkin and northern Annam, the French began shipping Tonkinese and, to a lesser extent, Annamese labourers to southern Indochina to clear the jungle and to labor on rubber plantations. In the mid-1920s, three new roads linking Laos to northern Annam allowed for the easier transportation of Annamese labourers to Thakhek and Savannakhet. In Cambodia, new roads linking Cochinchina to Cambodia saw the Annamese population grow from 79,050 in 1911 to 140,220 in 1921. Of the 16 Indochinese bureaucrats working in the Town Hall of Phnom Penh in 1913, 14 were Annamese and 2 Cambodian. In the offices of the colonial Commissariat at Battambang in 1915, 11 out of 21 bureaucrats were Annamese; in the residence of Kandal, 8 of 14; 13 out of 19 at Kompong Chhang-Pursat; 10 out of 16 at Takeo and so on (see also chapter 4). The overwhelming majority of the workers on rubber plantations in Cambodia were ethnic Viet arriving from the north.\textsuperscript{26}

The ratio of Annamese bureaucrats in Laos was even greater. The Annamese occupied 54\% of the posts offered by the administration by the early 1930s. This was in spite of the fact that the non-Annamese populations in Laos constituted 98\% of the population by the late 1930s. The problem, however, was that the inner-workings of the French bureaucratic system in Laos had concentrated Annamese immigration in the Laotian urban centres, where the Lao population was lowest, but where the French needed the most administrative help in building and running “Laos”. Given the preponderant numbers of Annamese passing the French-language civil service examinations, the Annamese dominated these western Indochinese posts from the outset. By 1937,


Figure 5: Vietnamese labor immigration in Indochina (E. Delamarre, L’émigration et l’immigration ouvrière en Indochine, Hanoi, Imprimerie d’Extreme-Orient, 1931)
Going Indochinese

Figure 6: Indochina on the move (Cartes géographiques Neutroses-Vichy, c. 1950)

Figure 7: Indochina in the world (Air France poster by N. Gerale, 1939)
this immigration was such that there were 10,200 Annamese living in Vientiane, but only 9,000 Lao. The same was true in other towns. As one French writer explained: “Thanks to our roads and railways, we have opened Laos to outsider activities. The mountain barrier that had once protected it is now gone. Between Laos and Annam, the Pyrenées have now vanished.”

The colonial system sent thousands of Annamese soldiers and civil servants beyond this natural mountain barrier in order to ensure the security of French Indochina in frontier posts positioned along the Siamese and Chinese borders. French colonialism even reoriented southerly patterns in Annamese immigration in northerly directions by sending thousands of Annamese as far as Kunming in southern China in a kind of Bac Tien or Movement towards the North. There they served as soldiers, secretaries, and petty traders in France’s little studied “extra-Indochinese” bureaucracy – above all in the many towns served by the French Yunnanese rail line and in diplomatic legations in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the French sent others westwards to Nakhon Phanom, Bangkok, and Singapore as “boys”, sailors, or spies for


28 Roland Meyer, Le Laos, exposition coloniale internationale, Paris 1931, Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extréme-Orient, 1931, p. 63. Meyer is slightly off the mark. While preparations were made to link Laos by train to Annam, this never occurred. His point, however, is still valid for the roads.

29 Annamese soldiers were some of the first travelers to discover the western confines of French Indochina with the French. See ‘Annexe: Tableau fixant pour l’année 1909 les effectifs des différentes Brigades de Garde Indigène du Laos’, Bulletin administratif du Laos, 1908, p. 291.

the political police, the *Sûreté indochinoise* (another extra-Indochinese network designed by Sarraut to keep Indochina safe).³¹

There was nothing necessarily contradictory about this at the time – at least not yet. Again, the colonizer needed local partners to operate the colonial state on the ground and in the countryside. This was indeed one of the material pillars of Sarraut’s Franco-Annamese policy of collaboration. After all, the Europeans never numbered more than 40,000 during the entire colonial period (unlike the 1 million Europeans living in Algeria as of 1954) and they were predominantly concentrated in the eastern Indochinese urban centers of Saigon, Hanoi, Hue, and Haiphong. The French trained Annamese civil servants, housed them, paid them regularly and covered their travel costs between Hanoi and Vientiane, Saigon, and Phnom Penh or to those remote colonial posts in Siemreap or as far away as Hong Kong, Kunming, Bangkok, or Singapore. It is not an overstatement to say that by the 1930s the Annamese were largely responsible – at the ground level – for the running of the Indochinese bureaucracies in Laos and Cambodia.³² It must have seemed slightly odd to Siamese tourists and traders going into Cambodia in the late 1920s to see Annamese customs officers examining their passports and papers at the Poipet border checkpoint.³³ However, to the few Cambodian or

---

³¹ In 1914, it was estimated that there were 2,000 Annamese residing in Yunnan province alone. *Consul de France à Mongtseu à M. Ministre des Affaires étrangères*, 20 April 1914, in Gouvernement général, Amiraux, box 19193, CAOM.

³² The western Indochinese bureaucracy was divided into two administrative subsystems, the first being the “administration française”, the Indochinese level in which the Annamese moved. The second was the protectorate ones under Laotian and Cambodian royal prerogative, subordinate to French Résident Supérieurs, and staffed by Cambodian *chaifaikhets* and Laotian *chaomuongs*. The Indochinese level dealt with such matters as customs, immigration, security, and the governing administrative matters of Laos and Cambodia in relation to the larger Indochinese system. For racial, spatial, legal and tax purposes, it was necessary that each person be defined precisely within this administrative system: 1) “Personnel Européen” was usually used to refer to “the” French; 2) “Personnel indigène de l’administration française” was the rubric within which Annamese civil servants circulated in the Cambodian and Laotian bureaucratic systems; and 3) “Personnel de l’administration indigène du Laos/Cambodge” referred to the Laotians and Cambodians.

³³ List of Siamese visitors to Angkor Wat in *Hotel des Ruines d’Angkor, ‘Cambodge, Mouvement touristique par nationalités du 16 novembre 1928 au 16 novembre 1929*, Papiers Madrolle, PA42, box 3, CAOM. That Annamese worked in Cambodian and Laotian frontier posts is based on my research of the *Bulletins administratif du Cambodge et du Laos* and *Sûreté* files.
Laotian urban elites standing inside the Indochinese civil service offices at Vientiane or Phnom Penh in 1930, it must have been very difficult to believe that French colonization had truly stopped historic Annamese expansion westwards, especially when the only languages being spoken and written in these Indochinese offices were French and Annamese (see chapter 4).  

This colonial collaboration was such that Annamese elites could even petition the French to accelerate the development of Laos by opening it to Annamese “colonization”. The influential editor of La Patrie Annamite, Pham Le Bong, argued for this because it was essential to taking population pressure off Tonkin and northern Annam and “to develop the fertile yet untapped valleys of the Mekong with the financial aid of the State”. The People’s Representative of Bac Ninh (Tonkin) made the same demand for the “colonization of no man’s lands in Indochina”, emphasizing the need to expand the transport and communication systems between Tonkin and Laos, so as to reach outlets in the rest of continental Southeast Asia. In another instance, Annamese civil servant associations in Laos sent a petition calling for the abrogation of rules subordinating the administration of Annamese colonies to Laotian representatives (see chapter 4). The support of Annamese immigration was also high on their list, as were increased political powers for them; the abolition of local Lao language civil service exams; and the granting of land concessions. There was even a request to the French to cover the travel costs incurred by Annamese bureaucrats in Laos during their holiday trips back home in eastern Indochina.

34 Hoang Xuan Han confirmed to me that, during his visit to Cambodia in the early 1940s, he met several of his former Annamese classmates and students working in the colonial bureaucracy, where the second language of the Indochinese level of the French administration was Annamese and not Khmer. Author’s interview with Hoang Xuan Han, 1 August 1993, Paris. Several bureaucratic Amicales in western Indochina conducted their correspondence in Annamese.

35 ‘Vœux de M. Tran Trung Hoa, Représentant du Peuple de Bac Ninh’, Commission Guérrut (CG), box 27, CAOM; ‘Vœux présentés par M. Pham Le Bong’, Hanoi, 8 April 1938, in CG, box 23Bc, CAOM; ‘Laos, Vœux, Lettre no. 5235, 21 December 1937; and Vœux de l’Association amicale des fonctionnaires et de l’Association mutuelle et sportive des Annamites [au Laos]’, pp. 2–5 in Ibid. For continued Annamese colonization southwestwards, see the land concessions made to Annamese settlers in Cambodia and published in the Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge, (February 1928 is a nice example), pp. 146–179.
Going Indochinese

Indeed, the growing number of civil servants traveling between eastern and western Indochina at the cost of the Indochinese administration underscored the changing patterns of Annamese movement within the French colonial system. When a young Annamese student was admitted into the Indochinese civil service, he entered into an Indochinese world that could send him anywhere in the Union where his services might be needed. Official decrees and colonial rubrics governing Annamese movements within the Indochinese level of the Laotian and Cambodian bureaucracies – in particular, “transfer lists”, “promotions”, “nominations”, “designations”, “paid Holiday Lists”, and above all “destinations” – show how the Annamese circulated legally and in an orderly manner from one post to another within the Indochinese universe. The following notice published in the Bulletin administratif du Cambodge is a good example of how the Annamese bureaucrat flowed with the French through Indochina: “The apprentice auxiliary veterinarian, Truong Van Thanh, having completed his training at the Pasteur Institute at Nha Trang is to be transferred to Phnom Penh, where he will begin his work from 10 January 1928”. The administration paid for his trip while bus and car services – often run by Annamese entrepreneurs – transported him to Phnom Penh along newly built colonial roads. Another decree captured the local Annamese transport services being set up along these Indochinese routes in similar terms: “Mr Nguyen Van Nhon, presently residing in Phnom Penh, is authorized to use his car of the following characteristics to establish a passenger transport service on all of the roads of Cambodia.” To an Annamese bureaucrat, entrepreneur, or teacher, the Indochinese administration and economy appeared to be a coherent system linking all five parts of the Union through an integrated transport service and backed up by a governing set of legal decrees. In other words, during the colonial period, Indochina was a functional identity, territorial space, and state for the Annamese moving through it. As Mr. Truong Van Thanh traveled to Phnom Penh in 1928, he had no reason to doubt the reality of Indochina. In his eyes, it existed. One Annamese civil servant in Cambodia even argued for increased (he

meant subsidized) mobility because it would allow the Annamese “to make contact with other brothers of the Indochinese Family”.

In short, by the late 1920s, many an Annamese had found it easier to cast themselves in Indochinese roles. It felt quite natural.

Another related offshoot of the French staffing of the Laotian and Cambodian civil services with literate Annamese bureaucrats was that they unwittingly expanded Annamese readerships westwards. Besides the newsletters and bulletins disseminated by numerous Amicales or associations, most of the major quoc ngu and French-language Annamese papers published in eastern Indochina were shipped by truck or steamship to urban centres in Laos and Cambodia. Readers could purchase easily the Tribune Indochinoise, Tin Tuc, Annam Nouveau or Phu Nu Tan Van. An Annamese teacher edited the Tin Lao (Laotian News) in Vientiane, while publication of the Phnom Penh-based Viet Kieu Nhot Bao tapped into the expanding Annamese bureaucratic and trading communities in Cambodian urban centres by the late 1930s. Not only did these papers keep their ethnic Annamese readers abreast of local events, but they also reprinted articles from other eastern Indochinese papers or tapped into international wire services installed by the French to update the local community of regional and world events. Articles appeared in these quoc ngu papers and the civil service bulletins on the transport and communication systems linking Phnom Penh to Saigon, Battambang, Khone or Vientiane. After all, Annamese bureaucrats being “transferred” (affectés) from one post to another had to know the way to their next assignment.

38 Vœu présenté par M. Cao Van Tuan relatif à la jouissance des congés administratifs à passer hors du pays où est en service le bénéficiaire, Association amicale du personnel indigène des résidences du Cambodge, Procès-verbal de l’Assemblée générale, 19 February 1938, p. 16.


41 This stems from my reading of the Viet Kieu Nhot Bao, Amical bulletins, and the Bulletins Administratifs du Laos et du Cambodge, 1925–1935. I have also con-
This growing, literate Annamese population in western Indochina soon attracted the attention of publishers. By 1935, the manager of the *Indochinese Publishing House* (Nha Xuat Ban Dong Duong) could proudly advertise that his *quoc ngu* books were sold “in major stores throughout Indochina”, while more than thirty Annamese editors splashed the word Indochina – either *Indochine*, *Dong Phap* or *Dong Duong* – across the front-pages of their papers prior to 1940. As Benedict Anderson argues about print culture and nationalism, Annamese printing presses in Vientiane and Phnom Penh reinforced the emergence of an “Indocheinese consciousness” among the Annamese. Neither the Cambodians nor the Laotians operated such printing presses nor were there Khmer and Lao papers on sale in ethnic Viet areas of eastern Indochina. The Chinese did, however.

Colonial educations reinforced the Annamese bureaucrat and journalists’ penchant for Indocheinese things. In 1911, this was symbolised best when Governor General Albert Sarraut created an “Indocheinese University” in Hanoi. One of its major aims was to redirect Annamese attention away from its Chinese influences and towards, as the name suggests, French Indochina. The French abolished the Confucian examination system and replaced it with a French-style education system. History and geography courses emphasized the reality of Indochina, its history, structure, and services. Western-style maps of the five lands of Indochina were commissioned and used in schools throughout the Union. Courses stressed the importance of colonial roads, rail systems, telegraphs, postal services and hospitals in the development of Indochina. The preponderant number of schools in Annam, where there were very few Lao or Khmer students, symbolized the eastern tilt in the French conception of Indocheinese education. Even in Laos and Cambodia, Annamese youngsters often outnumbered their Laotian and Cambodian classmates in the *Franco-indigène* schools, the latter prefer-

---

42 Tran Huy Lieu, *Hoi Kin*, Hue: Nha Xuat Ban Dong Duong, 1935, p. 17 and my count at Bibliothèque Nationale.


ring the Renovated Pagoda Schools.\textsuperscript{45} In 1927 the Governor General, Alexandre Varenne, explained the Annamese content of an Indochinese education as follows: “Where have we put the best of our creative action [in Indochina] if not in the Annamese pays. We built the Indochinese University on Annamese territory. It is in Cochinchina and Tonkin that one finds our best universities, high-schools and lower schools. We did more. To make sure that the young Annamese formed by us had jobs, we arranged administrative positions for them outside their pays d’origine and we staffed the local services in Laos and Cambodia with Annamese bureaucrats”.\textsuperscript{46}

This emphasis on the Annamese role in Indochina even found its way into school textbooks. The most remarkable example was the 1928 publication of The Five Flowers: Indochina Explained (Les cinq fleurs: L’Indochine expliquée). It was written by Jean Marquet, a fervent admirer of Annamese tradition and a long-time civil servant in eastern Indochina, influential in local education policy. Through the form of a fictive travelogue, Marquet explained in simple terms the history of French Indochina to his young Annamese readers.\textsuperscript{47} This book was such a success that A. Thalamas, Director of the Indochinese Public Education system, singled it out as a perfect example of the themes to form an Indochinese education. It was, in his words, fiction of “unequalled” genius.\textsuperscript{48} This is exceptional praise from the chief of Indochinese education policy. Let us take a closer look at the Indochinese space across which the French “were walking” (faisaient promener) their Annamese students.

Once upon a time, an aging Annamese father gathered his five sons together to explain the hard times his tea business was encountering. The competition was increasingly stiff. It was time to diversify. He in-


formed them that he had consulted the proper spirits for advice and had subsequently had a dream in which his five sons handed him five different petals, which, when gathered, formed a unique flower. Marquet has his father figure interpret this dream as a sign that his sons had to travel to the five lands (*pays*) of French Indochina in search of new aromatic leaves to boost the family business. One son explores Tonkin,
another travels to Annam, while the others set off for Cochinchina, Cambodia and Laos. From this point, Marquet takes us on a remarkable spatial voyage with our five young Annamese through the looking glass of French Indochina. However, before we can begin our fictive sojourn, we must stop over at the local village schoolteacher for a quick, Indochinese geography lesson. The son who had been the best in this subject recites: “French Indochina is formed by five wonderful départements: Cochinchina, Cambodia, Annam, Tonkin and Laos”. He then did the same for all the provinces and their capitals. With our map of where we are going now firmly in mind, we can proceed down the newly built French roads, railways, and canals. We discover modern factories, mines and plantations. We explore the most remote parts of Indochina as we ride with our Annamese explorers in cars, trains, steamships, and even in an airplane for our return trip to Hanoi. In a matter of a hundred pages, we streak across this Indochinese wonderland, its history, its development, and its future. Indeed, the airplane is symbolically most important, for it allows Marquet to drive home the modernizing influence of French colonialism and to highlight the spatial reworking of Indochina as a French pilot transports his young Annamese passenger from the Cambodian bush to Hanoi. Our Annamese traveler explains his (Marquet-induced) Indochinese vision during their airplane ride. And hundreds of meters above the ground, the imagination often knows no limits: “I thought I was dreaming: I had just covered almost two thousand kilometres, crossed ten rivers and a thousand hills. In other words, thanks to a flying-machine, I had just passed over all of Indochina within a few hours”. In traditional Annamese travel terms, this was a record crossing of “all of Indochina”. In a matter of hours, our imaginary Annamese voyager had just witnessed Nam Tien in reverse (a common Marquet theme). Reunited at home in the north with his sons, the father solemnly convened them to collect the five petals they had brought from the five regions of Indochina. The family business had been saved – and so had French Indochina.

Thalamas must have known that the Five Flowers was the Indochinese version of the incredibly popular French children’s tale: Le Tour de France par deux enfants (devoir et patrie), published in 1887 by G. Bruno. To make

49 There are maps throughout Marquet’s tale, each with Annamese subtitles – “nuoc cao-mien/Cambodia” and “nuoc lao/Laos”. Nothing is written in Lao or Khmer.
it work in the colonial world, Marquet had taken the model of the traditional Annamese family and its children as an effective way to explaining the existence of the Indochinese patrie to young Annamese tempted by the traditional education system. There were, however, no Lao, Khmer, or Jarai travelers. It was a strictly Franco-Annamese trip, an intentional reorientation of a traditional “Annam” away from its Chinese roots and its eastern geographical tilt towards its French Indochinese future. Although he had exaggerated the successes of French colonialism, Marquet had transformed the Confucian-minded Annamese father into an obedient, modernizing symbol of France Indochina in a primary-school textbook. It was no accident that Marquet emphasized the systems and lines of communication that would transform this Indochinese space into a future “reality”. Addressing his Annamese sons, the father explained the moral of this Indochinese story on the last page as follows:

And what progress has been achieved within a time span hardly equal to the life of a man. Today, the roads, telegraph lines, and railways support the heart of the country just as arteries feed the body. Each province has its school, hospital, ophthalmology centre, daycare centre, and a postal service that allows the denizen of the smallest village to receive the letter sent by the soldier, the trader or the traveler. And each day we see the Protecting Government [France] install even the most modern of western applications, such as the plane, the radiograph and the wireless telegraph. “Do not forget all this, my sons, and repeat it often to your own sons.”

Sarraut’s Franco-Annamese ideology now manifested itself as a children’s story, based in turn on one of the Third Republic’s best known models.

Annamese geographers were already translating similar geo-non-fiction into quoc ngu by 1930, while the introduction of the motion picture further stimulated this (elite) Annamese curiosity for Indochinese things. By 1924–25, there were 28 movie theatres in Tonkin, 18 in Annam, 33 in Cochinchina, 9 in Cambodia and 6 in Laos. The large number of feature films on Laotian and Cambodian ruins, festivals and temples showing on eastern Indochinese big screens is noteworthy. The

51 To introduce Indochina to young school children after World War I, Cao Dang Ngan put a geography manual to verse, An-Nam, Cao-Mien Ai-Lao Dia-Du Dien Cả, Hanoi: Mac Dinh Tự, 1918.
Figure 9: Indochina explained (*Premières notions de géographie de l’Indochine française*, Quinhon: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 4th edition, 1929)
French made over twenty on Laos between 1924 and 1929 and more than forty on major cultural events in Cambodia in 1928 alone.\textsuperscript{52}

In short, Indochina’s geography was coming into better focus for a new generation of Annamese elites growing up within the Indochinese realm. New ideas and mentalities diffused by the French were intersecting with older conceptions of the world and its peoples. Even village-level Annamese primary students had to memorize the names of the roads linking the Indochinese Union. This was particularly the case towards the late 1920s, when the French approved directives to put official maps of Indochina into circulation in the education system. Speaking in 1929, one education official explained that “very soon even the little school will have a general map of Indochina and of the pays of the Union, as well as one of the province to which they belong [...]”\textsuperscript{53} A good example is the \textit{Premières notions de géographie de l’Indochine Française, Cours préparatoire et élémentaire}, published in that year (see Fig. 9). On the first page, official directions explained to geography teachers that they were to have their students memorise and recite the major geographical features of Indochina by using a map, a ruler and a standard set of questions. The first question of the opening chapter was: “What is Indochina?”, followed by “Who are the peoples who live in Indochina?” The answer: “The Cambodians, the Laotians and the Annamese”. Thereafter, the cities, communication lines and economic systems of Indochina were described in detail in relation to the required classroom wall map.

However, like Marquet’s \textit{Five Flowers}, the annex entitled “Little Geographical Dictionary” gave the equivalents of abstract French geography terms in Annamese. There were no Lao or Khmer translations; the discovery of Indochina’s geography remained again a Franco-Annamese experience.\textsuperscript{54} By the mid-1920s, Annamese youngsters had reason to believe in an Indochinese geographical, political and economic space. For perhaps the first time, in 1932, an Annamese geographer could write

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Nguyen Van Ky, ‘La société vietnamienne face à la modernité: Le Bac Bo de la fin du XIXème siècle à la seconde guerre mondiale’, Paris: PhD dissertation, Université de Paris VII, 1992, pp. 455–460, 845.}


\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Premières notions de géographie de l’Indochine française: Cours préparatoires et cours élémentaires, Quinhon: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 4th Edition, 1929.}
a textbook proclaiming that together with the Laotian and Cambodians, the Annamese formed “one country: the Indochinese Union”.55

This geographical prise de conscience by young Annamese towards 1930 is notable and Marquet’s choice of a fictive voyage throughout Indochina in 1927 was not far-fetched. He knew what he was doing when writing his fictional Indochinese travelogue. As his young Annamese passenger stuck his head out of the cockpit to marvel at “all of Indochina”, on the ground a growing number of his compatriots were making similar journeys, catching trains, hitching rides in local buses, or embarking on steamships to work in western rubber plantations and mines as workers or to discover as young travel writers the Indochina that French technology and Annamese labor were opening up around them.

Down below, a wide range of Annamese ran with this new information. The construction of new transport systems, the introduction of the automobile, the train and the steamship by the French, the growth of tourism, and the emergence of Annamese entrepreneurial projects left

Going Indochinese

no doubt about it.\textsuperscript{56} For one of the first times, Annamese young people, bus and truck drivers, traders and revolutionaries could buy modern road maps of Indochina. They could then plot their Indochinese trips in relation to the mile/km-markers popping up alongside the roads, indicating in scientifically precise terms the number of kilometers between Thakhek and Vinh. Calculating distances followed naturally and travel guides of Indochina became hot items on the Annamese reading list.\textsuperscript{57} This was particularly helpful for Annamese entrepreneurs who started forming car, bus, and trucking services in the 1920s to transport goods and people “on all the roads” of Cambodia, Laos, and Annam. Several provided transportation between Saigon and Battambang as well as Vinh and Savannakhet.\textsuperscript{58} At the same time, the French were meticulously mapping lower Indochinese canals and making available precise naval guides to Annamese (and Chinese) skippers transporting rice, pepper and passengers to and from the heart of Cambodia. These guides provided maps showing the locations of canal-side “hotels”, customs stops, local sites and markets.\textsuperscript{59}

Although Annamese sailors, mechanics, drivers, and coolies were often moving along more ancient trading routes running into Laos and Cambodia, they were doing so in unprecedented ways and at greater speeds. For example, by 1925, one could travel between Hanoi and


\textsuperscript{57} Nguyen Tien Lang’s review of the \textit{Guide Indochinois} makes for interesting reading. He praised it for accurate information on train schedules, routes, and information on the \textit{pays} of Indochina. \textit{Annam Nouveau}, no. 12 8 March 1931, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{58} Again, I have tackled the question of local Annamese trucking and bus services in Indochina through a study of the decrees passed by Résident Supérieurs and listed in the \textit{Bulletins administratifs du Cambodge, du Laos et de la Cochinchine} (1927–1933) and \textit{Cahiers des charges relatif à la concession de services postaux subventionnées et de transport administratif par voitures-automobiles entre Donghà et Savannakhet, Vinh et Thakhkek et vice-versa}, Haiphong: np, 1928, p. 17 in file 3, box 13, Papiers Madrolle, PA42, CAOM.

Vientiane in two days instead of a month. With the introduction of the “mini-bus” on the roads and a motorized pirogue service on the canals, local Annamese traders, peasants and clergy could travel more easily and efficiently beyond the “bamboo hedge” of their villages to exchange their goods, labor and ideas in wider circles, often venturing as far as Laos and Cambodia – and further. The spread of the Cao Dai faith as far as Phnom Penh and the continued movement of Annamese rice farmers and fishermen into eastern Cambodia and then on to the Tonle Sap by road and canal are but two examples of continued Annamese westerly movements.60

The fascinating travelogues written by the sometimes entrepreneur Nguyen Van Vinh in the 1920s and 1930s reveal how new transport systems linking Annam to Laos and Cambodia allowed many budding Annamese businessmen to rethink their commercial activities in Indochinese terms. As Vinh put it during his trip to Cambodia, Annamese labor combined with expanded roads and canals would eventually transform Indochina into a Franco-Annamese capitalist entity.61

Annamese entrepreneurs were not the only ones lured by this “Indochinese Far West”.62 Parallel to these economic and religious movements westwards came the Annamese traveller and travelogue,63 yet another way of tracking changing Annamese views of the world outside. By the 1930s, the remarkable Madrolle guides had mapped all of Indochina, southern China, Hainan, and Siam, introducing new ways of thinking about time and space. If there is one common thread in this literature,
it is the detailed descriptions of the routes the travellers took, with the distances carefully noted. In 1930, a proto-travel agency in the form of the famous women’s daily Phu Nu Tan Van organised an Annamese excursion to Angkor Wat, insisting that “to travel is to learn” (di choi tuc la hoc). It was part of an emerging trend. Between November 1928 and November 1929, the Hotel des Ruines d’Angkor lodged 99 French visitors, 24 Annamese and 10 Cambodians. By 1938, enough Annamese were visiting Cambodian temples that one dealer advertised his souvenir shop to Annamese sightseers situated just outside the famous Khmer Temple, while a well-known writer published perhaps the first Annamese adventure novel set in Cambodia, entitled Standing before the Ruins of Angkor Wat.

A surge of travelogues followed naturally and young Annamese journalists were on the cutting edge, inspired by famous French writers passing through Indochina in the 1920s. Roland Dorgeles’ La Route Mandarine was a favourite. Nguyen Tien Lang, a dashing young Annamese civil servant and son-in-law to Pham Quynh, was the perfect example of a part-time Indochinese adventurer. Lang’s travels throughout upland minority regions of Cambodia and Laos appeared in several Annamese papers in the 1930s, with his most famous tales to be found in a year-long series published in the Annam Nouveau and nicely entitled Les Etapes Indochinoises. It was a romantic account of his voyage with Governor General René Robin to the historic sites of Angkor and into the recesses of the Mekong River. “Highland groups”, “historical sites”, “ruins” and “secret lands” formed his major themes as he moved down an unprecedented Indochinese road network linking Laos and Cambodia ever closer to Annam. One sees through the travelogue how the highlands became increasingly accessible to the Annamese. As Lang wrote of the “Moi” regions he traversed in southern Annam: “It’s Annam, but...”

65 ‘Hotel des Ruines d’Angkor, Cambodge, Mouvement touristique par nationalités du 16 novembre 1928 au 16 novembre 1929’, in Papiers Madrolle, PA42, file 7, box 3, CAOM. In fact, 850 “Indochinese” allegedly visited during this same period, but there are unfortunately no clues as to their identities.
it’s not Annam. I don’t know quite how to explain it. One doesn’t quite feel Annamese in the Highlands”. He was right. The highlands were not ethnically “Annamese” or “Viet” for that matter. He was bringing a still largely unknown world to his reading audience. And if French writers like Jules Boissière display a certain *exotisme* in their accounts of the Annamese people and culture at the end of the 19th century, the publication in 1935 of Lang’s masterpiece, *Indochine la douce*, gave away a remarkably similar Annamese mentality towards the upland minorities and the Buddhist societies of western Indochina.68 Equally important is the fact that Nguyen Tien Lang was travelling with the Governor General throughout western Indochina, often in the same car. It was yet again indicative of the special Franco-Annamese relationship underpinning the Indochinese experience.

Nguyen Tian Lang’s more Confucian-minded father-in-law, Pham Quynh, provides even a better example of how travel was expanding traditional Annamese horizons westwards. As the editor of *Nam Phong*, a well-known commentator and a regular contributor to the daily *France-Indochine*, Quynh was aware of the expansion of the road system into Laos and the increasing levels of Annamese immigration to western Indochina in the late 1920s. Inspired by Dorgelès and other popular travel writers of the time, in 1930 he set out with a map of the new colonial roads to make his way to Laos. He traveled first down Colonial Route 1 to Dong Ha to take Road 9 to Savannakhet, carefully noting the distance that separated each major urban centre from the other. He observed that French technology had subdued the mountains that had historically prevented the Annamese from crossing westwards. Whatever Quynh may have read in books, it remained a new world for this culturally minded politician. As he reflected in his travelogue: “The further we drove from Hue, the further we stepped into the Indianized world, leaving the Sinicized realm [of Annam] behind us in the distance”.69

---


This reflection on the two sides of Indochina is noteworthy. For Quynh opened his articles in Annamese with detailed geographical descriptions contrasting the geopolitical history of the Indochinese peninsula before French conquest to the changes set in motion by colonialism and its effects on pre-existing Annamese notions of their surrounding world.\textsuperscript{70} This was explicit in Quynh’s emphasis on the notion of “Indochina” and how in going to Laos he felt he had suddenly crossed an invisible, cultural dividing line. He mused about how the geographical ramifications of this notion of “Indo-China” had never truly occurred to him until he traveled to Laos and was struck by the contrasts between his Sinicized world and the Theravada Buddhist one of the west (forgetting conveniently that many a Vietnamese had adopted (Indian-born) Buddhism, too!). Writing in Annamese, he marveled: “One side is Chi-na, while the other is An-Do [India], and thus we have this land of Dong Duong, which is quite rightly given the name of An-Do-Chi-na”\textsuperscript{71}

Quynh could not help but wonder what his country would have looked like had the Annamese range protecting Laos not blocked his “race’s” expansion before the French arrived in force. Returning to the present, he argued that although the French had neutralized early nineteenth-century Nam Tien, their “creation of a communication system” now permitted “more and more Annamese (nguoi Nam was his term) to travel to Laos with each passing day”. He was no doubt thinking of the Annamese bureaucrats and soldiers, whom he had met during his voyage to Vientiane, as well as the Annamese coolies he noted from the window of his car while crossing into Laos. In several strongly worded articles written after his return to Hanoi, Quynh called on the French to promote Annamese immigration to Laos.\textsuperscript{72} To him, there was continuity between Dai Nam and French Indochina. Had the French not intervened, he noted, the historic southern movement (Nam Tien) of the Viet people would have transformed into a western one (Tay Tien).

\textsuperscript{70} Pham Quynh, ‘Du-lich xu Lao’, no. 158, pp. 5–6 and part II, Nam Phong, no. 159, February 1931, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{71} Pham Quynh, ‘Du-lich xu Lao’, no. 158, p. 7.
He was not the only one at the time to conjure up this glorious imperial past.73

By the early 1930s, thinking in Indochinese terms for an Annamese—even Pham Quynh—was not as hard as it once seemed or as it might seem to us today. Barriers to Annamese mobility were being eroded by French colonialism, eschewed or expanded by the necessity of creating and running a modern Indochinese political, economic, and administrative unit. The automobile, the map, the bureaucracy, and an unprecedented Indochinese road network represented a major reorientation in pre-existing conceptions of time and space.74 This, in turn, allowed Annamese travelers to flow more quickly and easily westwards along the currents of a French Indochinese system in ways which Gia Long’s and Minh Mang’s subjects would have had difficulty imagining in early nineteenth-century Dai Nam. In this sense, Indochina was much more than a mere replica of Dai Nam. The French used the Annamese to construct the western Indochinese roads, to man and repair the steamships going up and down the Mekong, to deliver the mail, to operate the telegraphs and telephones in the hundreds of Indochinese post offices, and to serve as secretaries, translators and pencil pushers in the expanding Indochinese bureaucracy and army. A Résident Supérieur wrote privately in 1936 that without the collaboration of the Annamese, the French would never have been able to organize Laos administratively.75 Writing from within the system in 1930, an Annamese civil servant in western Indochina never thought twice when sending a letter in quoc ngu to a compatriot in the east, even on official colonial stationary


74 For those interested in views from below, see among many others Nguyen Phan Long, ‘La lutte entre le chemin de fer et l’automobile’, pp. 4–5; Jacques Le Van Duc, Du Lich: Ba ngay xe hoa, Quinhon: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 1925; Hy Sinh, et.al., Con duong so 13, Hanoi: Asiatique edition, 1940(?); Bon phan cac chac vien va binh linh Annam khi lam viec o co to luc di duong, held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France; Nguyen Khac Nguyen, Tren Duong Thuoc Dia so 13, Conference faite a l’AFIMA, Hanoi, 23 April 1939; Cuoc du lich Nam Trung Bac, April 1938, held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France; and Vu Ngoc Phan, Nhin sang lang gieng, khao cuu, Hanoi? Minh Phuong Xuat Ban, 1941(?).

75 ‘Conclusion du Résident Supérieur au Laos, Eutrope’ in Rapport de Tezenas du Montcel (document in my possession) and ‘Réponse du Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine, René Robin’, May 1936, in the same report.
Going Indochinese

Figure 11: Making Indochina natural (advertisement in Tân-Thoi, 29 August 1935)

marked Gouvernement Général de l’Indochine, Protectorat du Cambodge (Battambang), Travaux Publics. Given his place and role in helping to operate the colonial state under the French, it seemed quite natural to him.

76 Letter published as an advertisement in Tân-Thoi, no. 31, 29 August 1935, p. 23.
CHAPTER 2

ANNAMESE COLONIAL NATIONALISTS BETWEEN INDOCHINA AND ANNAM

This colonial reworking of pre-existing concepts of space was at the heart of a series of heated debates that broke out in nationalist circles in the early 1930s over how to conceive of the geographical contours of Annamese nationalism. Annamese allied with the French asked if federalism and stepped-up Annamese immigration (several Annamese did not hesitate to call it colonization) could bridge the gap between a precolonial conception of a smaller Annamese/Dai Nam space and the larger and newer one now circumscribed by the boundaries of French Indochina. That the French were thinking in Indochinese terms only reinforced this thinking. Albert Sarraut had first floated the idea of an Indochinese Federation in his 1919 speech designed to give more of a say to Annamese within the context of his reformist policies and efforts to protect the colony from nationalist and communist threats. Faced with the emergence of the Comintern and an anticolonialist Annamese government in exile in southern China, Sarraut went so far as to call for formation of an Indochinese Charter, “a sort of constitution” and strengthened the Sûreté in a move to seal off an Indochinese space from exterior threats.¹

Yet if Sarraut and his successors were thinking of Indochinese autonomy in largely administrative and reformist terms, Annamese elites

allied with the colonizer were immediately imagining an Indochinese entity along political – indeed national – lines. They, too, wanted a state and were willing to march with the French to attain it. Despite French support for local monarchies in line with the protectorate treaties, politicians and colonial administrators from Sarraut to Pasquier right down to Charles de Gaulle and Léon Pignon in the 1940s would only conceive of the colonial state’s future in Indochinese terms. It could not be broken up along national lines. The French never considered separating Laos and Cambodia from French Indochina much as the British removed Burma from British India (see chapters 4 and 5). Nor before 1945 did they ever move towards unifying Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin into one “national body” for their pro-French Annamese allies. The implications of this are important. For if the French could only conceive of the colonial state’s evolution in Indochinese terms, then this only pushed Annamese nationalists working with the French to do the same. As a result, unlike the anticolonialists circulating on the outside of Indochina or taking form on the inside, those moving with the French had a harder time choosing the geographical limits of this future entity. Would it be Annamese, Vietnamese, Indochinese, or something else? These questions were remarkably opened ended at the time.

VIETNAM OR INDOCHINA: CONTESTING CONCEPTS OF SPACE

The formation of the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party under the direction of Bui Quang Chieu was one of the first indications that Annamese nationalism was running in an Indochinese direction after World War I. As editor of the Party’s official mouthpiece, *La Tribune Indigène* (renamed in 1926 *La Tribune Indochinoise*), and one of France’s best Annamese allies, Chieu took Sarraut seriously in 1919 when the latter talked of building an Indochinese Federation together. The Constitutionalists applauded the idea of giving greater “autonomy, decentralisation and freedom of action” to Indochina. They welcomed the privileged place they would hold in Sarraut’s reformist-minded colonial

---

2 I am thinking of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party or the *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang* (VNQDD). See below and chapter 3.
Annamese Colonial Nationalists between Indochina and Annam

They called on the French to allow them to form “a constitutional charter” with “all the structures needed for a modern State”. This transformation, the Constitutionalists argued a week after Sarraut’s speech, was necessary if the colony were to become a “pays autonome” and if “its Annamese personnel [were to] become Indochinese citizens”.4 Another southern intellectual, Bieu Chanh, welcomed this new colonial contract in an article entitled Towards an Indochinese Charter, published in the first issue of the Dai Viet Tap Chi. He added that combined economic and transport systems, as well as abundant natural resources, would inevitably transform Indochina into a reality, an operational state (see also chapter 1).5

These colonial nationalists were not alone in linking an Annamese destiny to its Indochinese future. In his famous Revendications du Peuple annamite, Nguyen Ai Quoc unintentionally set off an intense debate in July 1919 over the frontiers of Annamese nationalism when the future Ho Chi Minh opened his petition calling for real colonial reforms: “the People of the former Annamese Empire, today French Indochina, submit to the honorable governments […].”6 Hostile colonial editors at the Courrier Saïgonnais took him to task for making this linkage. In fact, the “Nguyen the patriot” had provoked what may well be the first public exchange between the “Indochinese” and “Annamese” schools of thought. As the Courrier retorted:

They say: “former Empire of Annam, today French Indochina”. There you have it. What are the Cambodians, the Laotians and the countless other nations occupying the summits of the Annamese Cordillera going to say? They are annexed by the stroke of a pen by our so-called Annamese patriots. Whatever these [Annamese] might think, French

---

3 Editorial [Bui Quang Chieu?], ‘La Peur des Mots,’ La Tribune Indigène, (23 March 1919), p. 1
5 [Ho?] Bieu Chanh, ‘Dong-Duong hiep-chung’, Dai Viet Tap Chi, no. 1 (January 1918), pp. 23–25.
Indochina exceeds strangely the frontiers of what was formerly Annam; so much so that one can conclude that, far from constituting French Indochina today, the former Empire of Annam is the smallest member in terms of surface area and is no more populated by Annamese than Cambodia is by Khmer.\(^7\)

Whether the author got his facts right or not is beside the point for our purposes here. The editorialist’s main goal was to grill Annamese nationalists for thinking in Indochinese terms. It was not so much that the *Courrier* supported Laotian or Cambodian interests as much as it reflected the malaise on the part of the European populations opposed even to moderate Annamese calling for greater reforms and political autonomy (Ho Chi Minh was no communist radical in 1919!) The *Courrier* was nonetheless walking a fine line by forgetting that there were no nations in the context of French Indochina, only five *pays*. Moreover, the French association of the Annamese with this Indochinese creation since the nineteenth century was what the colonial authorities had been advocating for decades and had obviously contributed to the Annamese ability to think in wider geo-political terms than the “former Empire of Annam” (see chapter 1). The famous patriot, Phan Chu Trinh, had already confused Annam and Indochina a decade earlier.\(^8\) How could it be otherwise? The colonial state was, after all, Indochinese. There was certainly no unified “Vietnamese state”.

Nonetheless, the *Courrier*’s editors posed Annamese nationalists a major problem when they hit on the following contradiction: “Yet by speaking of an Annamese people and by attaching these words to the expression of French Indochina, you seem to want to establish a concordance between [Annam and Indochina] that does not exist [...]”.\(^9\) Here

---

8 ‘Union Intercoloniale’, p. 1; ‘Note Confidentielle à M. le Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine,’ no. 443, 22 November 1922, in box 365, SPCE, CAOM; and Phan Chu Trinh (in French translation), ‘Des manifestations annamites en 1908, demande d’aministie,’ p. 1 in box 372, SPCE, CAOM. Phan Chu Trinh wrote: “L’ancien Empire de l’Annam qui porte aujourd’hui le nom d’Indo-Chine ...” Working together in France in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Phan Chu Trinh and Ho Chi Minh (Nguyen Ai Quoc) were clearly more influenced here by the language of French colonial discourse than historic, hegemonic designs on western Indochina.
they were on to something. Indeed, Ho Chi Minh and Phan Chu Trinh were not alone in going Indochinese. On 19 April 1921, the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party published an article to this effect, entitled *L’État indochinois*, in which the party’s official mouthpiece stressed that an Indochinese State could be realized through further Franco-Annamese collaboration and as the natural fulfillment of a precolonial Annamese destiny (discussed in chapter 1).10

The question, however, soon became how the Annamese could truly bridge the gap between “Annam” and “Indochina” in the face of critiques such as that posed by the *Courrier*. Was the preponderant Annamese position in this Indochinese colonial contract justified? What about the Laotians and Cambodians, after all? On 26 April 1921, *La Tribune* published a three-part series, entitled: *La prépondérance politique des Annamites en Indochine est-elle justifiée?* in which the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party justified the concordance between Annam and Indochina on the grounds that it was in keeping with historical Annamese expansion westwards and reflected the greater vitality and dynamism of the Annamese. The French were not the only ones to justify their domination of others as part of a Darwinian “struggle for life.”11 The *Courrier saïgonnais*’ spirited defense of other racial groups living within Indochina had clearly left its mark. As the Constitutionalisists retorted:

We do not deny these races intrinsic qualities or the right to present their problems within the Indochinese Union. But given the overwhelming majority of the Annamese in this country and the importance of their population, the forces behind their expansion continue. Given the more advanced state of their civilization and, finally, their historic rights, they occupy clearly the most important place in the concerns of the Protecting Country [France] in her colonizing mission in Indochina. The Annamese [...] are thus first in line for historic, ethnographic and geographic reasons which would be childish to deny and against which it would be futile to argue. In Indochina [...], it’s the law of the majority

---

that rules [...], within the French Indochinese Union our supremacy is the logical consequence, the very nature of things.\textsuperscript{12}

Borrowed from French colonial discourse and given a special cultural twist by an historic sense of a Confucian civilizing mission, these references to Darwin were used in many Annamese arguments calling for a leading position in France’s policy of association in Indochina.\textsuperscript{13} Many of these Annamese cited the example of Nam Tien as an example of Annam’s historic expansion towards the Mekong Delta. It also provided the example of a glorious imperial past. Like the French, the Annamese were also a proud, colonizing country. This also allowed these writers to distinguish the Annamese race from the “less civilized” and less “vigorous” Lao, Khmer or “Moi” (upland ethnic minorities), who threatened to slow down the evolution of French Indochina.\textsuperscript{14} For constitutionalists betting on reform-minded collaboration with the French, it was only natural that the Annamese thought in these wider Indochinese terms.

This discourse also sought to legitimate the Annamese special relationship with the French in Indochina. It did not necessarily reflect a historical reality. On the contrary, what Indochinese Constitutionalists were attempting in these essays was to rework traditional Annamese historical geography to the colonial conjuncture and model proposed by Sarraut. This meant resurrecting and linking a pre-colonial notion of Nam Tien or Dai Nam to the spatial concept of French Indochina in an attempt to celebrate the Annamese imperial past and thereby justify their “preponderance” within the French Indochinese framework of the moment. Even if it existed more in their minds than in any sort of historical reality, it served nonetheless as a kind of politico-cultural “Manifest

\textsuperscript{12} ‘La prépondérance politique des Annamites en Indochine est-elle justifiée?’ Part I, p. 1.


Destiny” vision of Indochina that many Annamese elites increasingly embraced in debates, editorials, and historical studies.\textsuperscript{15}

Other French allies, concerned more with the economic development of Indochina, were not far from advocating a policy of “filling in the empty Indochinese spaces” with ethnic Annamese. Some supported a policy of increased Annamese immigration westwards to make Indochina an Annamese reality. The Annamese were the fittest; history had already demonstrated their successful struggle for life.\textsuperscript{16} In an essay entitled\textit{De la Nation Annamite à la Fédération Indochinoise}, a budding capitalist Pham Le Bong wrote that “in studying the history of the Annamese nation, one also has the impression that [Annam] is the unachieved history of Indochina”. To him, \textit{Nam Tien} had been well on its way to creating its own “Indochina” before the French stepped in. Despite increased French efforts to protect the Lao and Khmer races (see chapter 4), the economic and demographic imperatives obligated the colonizer to redirect the “evolution of the Annamese nation towards its Indochinese form”. Continuing, Bong insisted that “the Indochinese Federation [was] the last word in the national evolution of Annam and that Annam would not have its full and entire [national] meaning until the day it spread completely throughout the Indochinese Federation”\textsuperscript{17}. To this entrepreneur, the Indochinese model was anything but a fiction; it was, he carried on, “a vital necessity”. Here again this was not an isolated example. Tieu Vien, another outspoken supporter of the French modernization of Indochina pushed by Sarraut, waxed just as lyrically. With Tonkin’s demographic problems firmly in mind, he went a step further:

Annamese emigration is not only an economic or a nutritional problem. It is a tradition, the historical mission of our race. […] The peaceful expansion towards the south and the west remains one of our national goals. What is considered to be the Annamese nation is only a beginning.

\textsuperscript{15} I could provide scores of examples. See for example the articles published in the late 1920s in \textit{Nam Phong} by Annamese scholars on the Cham and \textit{Nam Tien} in Annamese historiography. This coincided with French scholarship on the “ancient” peoples of Indochina, including the Cham and the kingdoms of Angkor.


\textsuperscript{17} Pham Le Bong, ‘De la nation annamite à la fédération indochinoise’, \textit{La Patrie Annamite}, no. 169 (10 October 1936), p. 1.
Going Indochinese

The Indochinese Nation will be the logical outcome, the last word in our evolution. In the meantime, the Indochinese Federation will mark a period of transition, an intermediary stage between the Past and the Future. And within this Indochinese Federation, one must understand the interdependence and the necessary harmonization of the existing interests. One must conceive of a bloc of developing forces in which each element takes its place within the composition of the whole. Moreover, one must finally accord the Annamese element the predominant place merited by its [larger] numbers and [superior] qualities. In other words, one must recognize the right of the Annamese people to make use of their “vital space” within the limits of the Indochinese territory.18

It would be naive to deny the imperialistic impulses driving these aggressive arguments, including the reference to the Nazi imperial project for Eastern Europe in the 1930s. What makes these passages so interesting for our discussion here, though, is that if Pham Le Bong and Tieu Vien had conceded that Indochina was not exactly Dai Nam, both writers reveal that a new Indochinese nation was coming into being in their minds, with the Indochinese Federation serving as “an intermediary stage between the Past and the Future”. Viewed from the interwar period, the Javanese were clearly not the only ones rethinking national identity along the geographical lines of the colonial state. While a businessman in Vietnam today might scoff at the Indochinese idea, that attitude was simply not the case in the 1930s. As Tieu Van put it at the time, “The day will come when Indochina will no longer be an amalgam of distinct and isolated countries, but rather a single country which Annamese blood will have fertilized (aura fécondé) by breathing into this [French] creation his dynamism, strength of action and desire to react. That day, the Indochinese Nation will be a beautiful and living reality”. However, as the future anterior tense gave away, that nation was still to be born. Nevertheless, it is clear that it was already being imagined (to borrow Anderson’s term) and being projected both forwards and backwards into time and space. This is how nations begin to take form.

Again, none of these Annamese nationalists pushing the colonial model of Indochina thought to consult Laotian, Cambodian, or other non-Viet ethnic minority groups on all this. Moreover, as long as the French were there, these writers seemed to have completely forgotten

Annamese Colonial Nationalists between Indochina and Annam

that the Siamese (Thais) and Chinese looking in from the outside might one day have different ideas about “the coming into being” of an Annamese-dominated Indochinese nation on their respective eastern and southern flanks.

Ho Chi Minh would be much more careful to avoid evoking imperial chapters of the Annamese history and “vital spaces”, when he went back to the past in the early 1940s in search of symbols and myths (see chapter 3). He preferred to evoke historic Annamese resistance against Chinese expansionism southwards, rather than the Annamese version of *Nam Tien*. Indeed, these Indochinese ambitions were not monolithic; and one would be committing a serious error to throw Ho Chi Minh, Pham Quynh, or Phan Chu Trinh into the same basket with Tieu Vien or the Constitutionalists. This was particularly true for the new generation graduating from colonial schools during the 1920s. They were having Indochinese visions of another kind.

The fiery young radical from the south, Nguyen An Ninh, is a case in point. In 1924, he wrote a famous essay on Annamese nationalism in which he limited his discussion to the need to unify into one nation what French colonialism had divided into Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin. Ninh made no mention of Laos or Cambodia, he used the word “Annam” throughout his text, and denounced “the arbitrary division” of the precolonial empire of Annam into three parts, which, he insisted, “the Annamese still consider to constitute the same body”. However, Ninh revealed the pervasive power of his Indochinese education when he chose to entitle his essay *Towards the Indochinese Nation*, calling such a nation “the greatest of [his] dreams, the dream of [his] race”. Unlike Tieu Vien’s Indochinese Nation, what Ninh’s dream symbolizes is a remarkable confusion of two very different geo-political entities, the first a traditional remembrance of a unified Annamese Empire, the loss of which his father had long lamented to him as a child, and the new one being a French Indochinese space which had been drilled into his head in the colonial classroom and propaganda (see chapter 1).

---


20 This continued in the 1930s despite curricular moves towards the “Past”. See ‘L’Inspecteur Général des Colonies Moretti à M. le Ministre des Colonies: Le baccalauréat de l’enseignement secondaire local’, pp. 7–9, 16 June 1936, grouping Nouveau Fond, Indochine, file 2495(2), box 287, CAOM and ‘Utilité du
Going Indochinese

In 1924, Ninh (and many of the young elites of his generation) were lost somewhere in the gray area between the extremes of Jean Marquet’s imaginary vision of the Indochinese future and Tieu Vien’s new Social Darwinian interpretations of Dai Nam’s imperial past. Having read most of Ninh’s works, I have found no evidence that he harbored “hegemonic” or “chauvinistic” designs on western Indochina, leading me to postulate that it was a combination of Harmand, de Lannesson, and Sarraut’s policy of association and his Indochinese schooling that made him reach for an Indochinese title, not unlike Ho Chi Minh or Phan Chu Trinh before him. On 19 May 1924, Ninh repeated this when he spoke of revolution in exclusively Annamese terms but posed the question in Indochinese-speak: “Is a revolution possible in Indochina?”

But again, people were thinking about these terms and what they meant. A few weeks later, in a thoughtful response to this question, a certain Trung Ky (meaning the central protectorate of Annam) pointed out to La Cloche Fêlée’s readers the semantic dangers of going beyond the traditional boundaries of Annam, reminding his readers of what he considered to be historic Cambodian and Laotian hostility for Annamese expansionism and of the ethnic contradictions inherent in Ninh’s spatial confusion of “Annam” with “Indochina.” “Indochina is not just Annam”, he warned, “Indochina consists of Laos where the people have their own habitat and are absolutely different from us. In Cambodia, where the people have always been our age-old enemies, as well as in the Mois regions, we can count on few friends. It is a fact that must be recognized”. To this writer, an Annamese-led “Indochinese revolution” was simply out-of-line.

This contradiction between Indochina and Annam came to a head in the early 1930s. On the one hand, it was related to the French economic, administrative, transport and education systems allowing so many Annamese to move and think in wider Indochinese terms by this point (chapter 1). On the other hand, it was connected to a nationalist resurgence from 1925 that culminated in violent revolts in 1930–31. Faced

---

with nationalist and communist rebellions in Tonkin and Annam, the French resurrected the idea of an Indochinese Federation in an attempt to outline a more coherent and solid definition of Indochina as a viable political entity. Already in 1928, Governor General Pierre Pasquier had put forward a 19-point Indochinese Charter. Like Sarraut (the two were very close), he insisted that only the maintenance of French sovereignty could hold the ethnic and cultural diversity of Indochina together in order to create a “Federal Unity” and to form “the Indochinese federal citizen” (le citoyen fédéral indochnois).23 Always concerned by the need to preserve local identities, languages, traditions, and monarchies, Pasquier privately had little confidence in the reality of an Indochinese entity. In fact, he was the man behind the first Bao Dai solution limited to eastern Indochina.24

 Nonetheless, the Federation was seen to provide the necessary cement for building an Indochinese State in the face of growing unrest inside and outside Indochina, especially as the Comintern’s Eastern Bureau started to make itself felt in Asia. As Pasquier defined French Indochina’s status in 1928: “Indochina is not a colony, nor a protectorate or even a possession. Indochina is all of this, and even more. She is a federation of States (une fédération d’Etats). Indochina tends to be generally thought of (tend à faire figure) as a Federal State.”25 Alexandre Varenne, his predecessor as the head of Indochina, had argued in similar terms when he referred to Indochina as “a sort of federal State”. To both men, only France and federalism could provide the unifying “cement” (Sarraut’s preferred term well into the 1950s) that would blend


the diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and political possessions into a larger Indochinese state and identity. One day, Varenne said, “I can see the emergence of a kind of Asian [Indochinese] State linked politically and economically through ever looser links to the metropole, an [Indochinese] State which will find its place next to us just as the Dutch Indies [Indonesia] stand next to Holland.” Pasquier conceded in 1930 that the day “each federated Indochinese will be proud to feel like a son of France as an Indochinese citizen, that day our work will have acquired (aura acquis) a solidness that nothing will be able to break.” But this Indochinese State was still being projected in the future as the future anterior tense consistently revealed. And even Sarraut knew that this was all very fragile when he conceded that without its French “armature” Indochina would “collapse” into “scattered fragments.”

NGUYEN VAN VINH–PHAM QUYNH AND THE “GREAT INDOCHINA DEBATE” OF 1931

Although the French never created a Federation at this juncture, Annamese elites of all political colors were closely following the Indochinese federal idea, the promise it held as a framework for Annamese autonomy, as well as the revolts of 1930–31 it was designed to combat. In fact, the federal ideas advanced by the French set off a parallel series of debates in communist and non-communist circles not only over a future Indochinese state, but also over how to reconcile the geographical limits of Annamese nationalism with the Indochinese model required by the French. If Ho Chi Minh had first encountered this contradiction in 1919 when the Courrier saïgonnais took him to

task for confusing Annam with Indochina, a decade later it was Pham Quynh’s turn.

What became something of the first “great debate” over the reality of Indochina has its origins in Pham Quynh’s travel notes on his trip to Laos in late 1930 (see introduction and chapter 1). In an article entitled Fédéralisme Indochinois et Nationalisme Annamite, Quynh conceded that, although Annam was not alone in an envisioned Federation discussed by Pasquier and Varenne in 1928, the Annamese remained the most important partner for the French in Indochina. As we have seen, Pham Quynh welcomed Annamese expansion into Laos and felt it only natural that the Annamese play the leading role in building French Indochina with the French. But would the Annamese become Indochinese or simply dominate it from within a federation? To Quynh it was clear. “Annam” came first, with federalism being the only way to “conciliate” the Annamese nation with the French Indochinese concept. Although Pham Quynh understood that the French conceived of their colonial state in Indochinese terms, he was a firm believer in the monarchy and the French protectorate treaties theoretically assigning powers to the King. Moreover, he strongly supported Pasquier’s bid to use the monarchy and Bao Dai to head off nationalist and communist backed revolts at precisely the this time. Indochina, yes, but only on the grounds that a federation protected and allowed for the continued existence of the Annamese monarchy, a corresponding Annamese constitution, and an emerging national identity within it. Pham Quynh could only go so far down the Indochinese road.²⁹

If Pham Quynh sought a preponderant place for his projected Annamese monarchy within the confines of the French-led Indochinese Federation, his cultural and political nemesis, Nguyen Van Vinh, came down in favor of an Etat indochinois de fait. This formed the central idea of the latter’s 1931 political program, which rejected the French protectorate, indeed the monarchy, in favor of instituting direct rule. For Vinh,

it was clear: the French would never let go of their conceptualization of the colonial state along Indochinese lines. An Annamese state or nation could never exist independently of it and only with difficulty from within it. Moreover, Pham Quynh was fooling himself to think that the French would allow the Cochininese colony to be united with the northern protectorates to reproduce a national monarchy such as the one Gia Long had first established in 1802. Tonkin remained separate in practice from the court in Annam despite promises made otherwise in the late nineteenth century. If the Annamese were going to achieve increased autonomy as promised in Sarraut's Indochinese charter, then they would have to accept not only Indochinese federalism but also the idea of remaking themselves as “Indochinese.” To Vinh, the French would as such find it easier to recognize the reality of an Indochinese State and its “Indochinese citizen” rather than an independent Annamese one.30

Yet Nguyen Van Vinh went a step further than Quynh and the Constitutionalists to join Tieu Vien, by actually calling for the grafting of Annamese patriotism on to the Indochinese colonial model. This was justified on the grounds that there was nothing wrong with the historic, westward expansion of the Annamese. Immigration was a natural phenomenon. Social Darwinism only confirmed the Annamese manifest destiny. The ethnic Viet worked productively in Laotian mines, on Cambodian plantations, and throughout the Indochinese bureaucracy. Like Pham Le Bong, Vinh was deeply interested in developing western Indochina economically. He had traveled to Laos and Cambodia and had written prolifically in support of immigration westwards, concessions to Annamese settlers, and he would even leave his editorship and family to search for gold in the rugged Indochinese west. He died in the highlands of Laos in 1936, while telegraphing back reports on indigenous cultures, gold prospecting, and Indochinese politics.31

Quynh broke with Vinh over the idea of direct rule via an “Indochinese state” taking his colleague to task for “speaking Indochinese” when he should have been “speaking Annamese”. Annamese nationalism could

---


Figure 12: Crossing the Indo-Chinese line: Pham Quynh in Laos (Nam Phong, January 1931). Pham Quynh is on the far right.
not be grafted on to an Indochinese model, Annam could not give way to Indochina, for the geo-historical abstraction of French Indochina itself was incompatible with a conflicting notion of “Annam”, which continued to exist despite French attempts to build an Indochinese structure on top of it. Quynh explained this contradiction between French colonialism and Annamese nationalism nicely as follows:

But ethnically and linguistically, Indochina has never existed and will never exist. Politically, it could take form within the context of a Federal Assembly; but there will never be a citizen in flesh and blood. No doubt, Mr. Vinh will answer us by saying that he wanted above all to say Annamese when saying Indochinese, and that this dispute over words is silly. But on the contrary I find it very important, for, depending on the point of view you take, Annamese or Indochinese, the problem changes entirely. Seen from the Indochinese angle, it is basically a federal question […]. But seen from the Annamese angle, the problem is uniquely national. And the Annamese nation is a reality that dances before the eyes […].

Unlike Quynh, Vinh was ready to go with the French model of Indochina as a new geographical delimitation for Annamese nationalism. To him, Annamese immigration westwards and their role in the functioning of the Indochinese colony would eventually fill in the blank spaces. It was just a question of time. More importantly, he was convinced that, despite Pasquier’s support of the monarchy (which Vinh did not share), the French could only conceive of the colony’s overall future in Indochinese, federalist terms. Pasquier himself had conceded as much in 1928. It was essential, Nguyen Van Vinh argued, “to link French imperialism to the future of an Annamese nation”, for it would be “impossible to get the French to admit the existence of an Annamese nation living independently of the general evolution of their Indochinese creation”. Vinh went to the core of French justifications for associating the Annamese with their Indochinese creation. Indeed, one can ask whether he had been re-reading Harmand and de Lannessan when he wrote the following paragraph:

All right, Indochina is a French creation, but does not this creation have for a base our country of Annam? […] I distinguish perfectly, like Mr. Pham Quynh, between the Indochinese point of view and the

---

Annamese Colonial Nationalists between Indochina and Annam

Annamese one. But I intend to conciliate the two points of view between which I see no incompatibility. [...] While repeating that our country is not called Indochina but Annam, I submit nonetheless that French Indochina is the fulfillment of an Annamese destiny with French power. Whatever you call it, this fact remains.33

Quynh balked firmly at taking this geographical leap of faith, calling for the elaboration of an Annamese constitution, not an Indochinese one. He reminded his feisty counterpart of just how difficult it would be to weld Annamese nationalism to the French model of Indochina. Backtracking on his own support of Annamese immigration westwards, Pham Quynh concluded that the gap remained too wide. Deeply involved in promoting the first “Bao Dai solution” and mobilizing the monarchy against revolutionaries, Pham Quynh held the line for the “real” Annam:

As I said, Indochina is a French creation [...], whereas Annam has always had and will always have its own national existence. [...] Like us, Mr. Vinh calls for a constitution, but with the key difference that he proclaims an Indochina that remains nothing but a simple geographical and political entity, for which we have little need, whereas we seek a constitution for Annam, which is truly a national reality to which we are tied by the most profound sentiments of our soul.34

Quynh’s defense of the Annamese line is elegant; but if he did not like the Indochinese pattern of Vinh’s nationalist clothes, if he rejected the idea of achieving an Indochinese constitution (Sarraut’s charter), he carefully downplayed his own penchant for “speaking Indochinese” (see chapter 1).

Moreover, days before Quynh and Vinh had begun slugging it out over the Annamese and Indochinese lines, both men had been caught off guard when an unnamed Laotian writer took them both to task in the pages of France-Indochine for belittling Laotian culture and history and pointed out that Annamese immigration to Laos was considered by the Laotians to constitute a real and immediate danger.35 Even Prince Phetsarath entered the debate during a brief stopover in Hanoi.

Interviewed by the same paper, he criticized his Annamese colleagues publicly, saying that “the Annamese are already too prone to think only of Annam when they speak of Indochina.” The Laotians saw the Indochinese idea very differently from their eastern neighbors. Phetsarath continued: “First of all, all confidence in French promises fades away and the Indochinese Federation appears, to the weakest nations making it up, like an eye wash designed to allow the Annamese to rule over the others, under the protection of the French flag”. For the Lao prince, Laos existed, but not Indochina.

The fear that the French were creating a dangerous alliance in the form of the Indochinese state extended into Cambodian circles, too. The widely read *Revue du Pacifique* paraphrased the ideas of an unnamed “Cambodian mandarin” in January 1934 as follows: “And yet too many French, even at this very moment, see Indochina as a homogeneous and Annamese country. [However,] it is too often forgotten that if an Indochinese Union exists administratively, there is no Indochina from an historical, geographical or ethnic point of view. And there is certainly no such thing as [being] Indochinese”. Nguyen Van Vinh read this article carefully before firing off a letter to the editor dismissing this Cambodian’s anti-Indochinese mentality as absurd. In Vinh’s view, he was more the exception than the rule. The Cambodians remained “sweet” and “indifferent” things. He was wrong.

**COLONIAL LITERATURE TO THE RESCUE**

These Laotian and Cambodian rejections of Indochina were not isolated incidents. As we shall see in chapter 4, they were part of an interconnected debate within the Laotian and Cambodian elites on the contours of their own national identities. The expanding Indochinese road system and transportation systems bringing Annamese to the West played


38 Signed “X…”, Cambodian mandarin and Paul Chassaing, ‘La politique indigène de la France au Cambodge, appréciée par un Mandarin Cambodgien’, *La Revue du Pacifique*, no. 1 (15 January 1934), p. 147; and Nguyen Van Vinh, ‘Annamites au Cambodge’, *L’Annam Nouveau*, no. 347 (7 June 1934), pp. 1–2. Even if this is a French official speaking for Mr. X, it only reinforces my point that the Laotians and Cambodians were not experiencing Indochina. See chapter 4.
Annamese Colonial Nationalists between Indochina and Annam

a part in stimulating this “reawakening”. Significantly, the Laotians and Cambodians were not alone combating these Franco-Annamese pretensions. In fact, several French colonial administrators located in western Indochina took up the anti-Indochinese crusade and pushed for specifically Laotian and Cambodian patriotic identities. Whereas Jean Marquet had spun colonial Indochina in Annamese ways in the Five Flowers in 1928 (see chapter 1), two years later another colonial official, Roland Meyer, defended a Laotian identity in his novel entitled Komlah: Visions d’Asie.39 Meyer worked in the Cambodian and Laotian civil services where he developed a life-long passion for these countries, their cultures, languages, and religions. He was proficient in Khmer and Lao and published perhaps the first grammars for both languages.40

His hostility to the idea of Indochina forms one of the key messages of his colonial novel, Komlah. In it, much like Marquet, he marches us across Indochina. Yet it is Meyer, not young Laotian students, who travels as Komlah. Our French protagonist describes Laos and Cambodia in glowing terms, the “Promised Land” and a “Nirvana”. He portrays eastern Indochina in the darkest of images: “funerary”, “somber”, “severe”, and “gray”. Most disturbing in his eyes were the ever-larger number of Annamese moving westwards and the failure of the French to protect the Laotians and Cambodians against this tide. He lamented the fact that new roads linking Laos to Annam hardly boded well for his beloved Laos. It would be, he wrote, “the end of Laos”. The only solution was for colonial administration to take action. Republican values obligated the French to protect the small and the weak against the stronger Annamese, whatever the economic imperatives of building the colony might be.41

It is easy to dismiss this colonial literature as irrelevant to our discussion of contesting concepts of space. The problem, however, is that the apparition of novels like Komlah point up the extent to which colonial administrators – the French – took part in this wider debate and used print media to make their cases in favor of their preferred countries. And whether it should be Marquet, Meyer, or even Pierre Pasquier’s

41 Komlah, pp. 105, 151. Charles Rochet also wrote a Lao grammar.
Annam d’autrefois, all of these Frenchmen were convinced that they knew the “real” identities of “their” countries. Each writer promoted “tradition”, “authenticity” and the like in defense of his respective country. Moreover, the themes chosen by Jean Marquet, Roland Meyer, Pham Quynh, Nguyen Tien Lang, and many others in these publications were being diffused in new and more powerful ways than during the colonial period, absorbed by an increasing number of Indochinese elites increasingly at ease in French and *quoc ngu* by the late 1920s. In 1925, for example, Marquet delivered a conference to the members of the *Education Society of Tonkin* headed by Pham Quynh. Our French expert of Annam opened by announcing that for him Indochina was the Annamese, “being superior both in number and worth to the other Indochinese peoples” who, he argued, “would be fatally absorbed” one day or the other by the Annamese. Before a Tonkinese audience, he could go further than he did in the *Five Flowers* by actually calling for the full-scale “colonization” of Laos by the Annamese. It was destiny, he said, and it was justified because the “lazy” Laotian was not willing to do the “work” that only the “industrious” Annamese could do. His thoughts were later published in a serialized essay entitled *L’Avenir du pays d’Annam* and reproduced in the *Moniteur d’Indochine*, the *Bulletin d’Enseignement Mutuel du Tonkin*, and translated into *quoc ngu* by Quynh himself and published in the pages of *Nam Phong*.42

It is hard to believe that some of Marquet’s thinking did not rub off on Pham Quynh when he set out for Laos in 1930. In fact, a close reading of Quynh’s travelogues on Laos shows that he borrowed liberally from Meyer’s thoughts on the notion of “Indochina” and from Marquet’s argumentation in favor of Annamese immigration.43 In 1939, Marquet published another book entitled the *Chant du Coq* in which he returned to the theme of Annamese expansion. As he wrote in a personal dedication to Bao Dai: “Soon the Mekong River will be the final western wall

---


of your three clawed Empire! Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin”.44 As in the *Five Flowers*, historic Annamese expansion and the superiority of Annamese Confucian culture were two of Marquet’s favorite themes.

None of this was lost on Roland Meyer. As a friend of the Lao (Komlah) and as an ally of Prince Phetsarath, Meyer took it upon himself to promote the Indian side of “Indo-China”. One had to choose, Meyer liked to say, between the “Indo” or “China”, the hyphen being symbolic of a ethno-cultural fault line that French colonialism had failed to bridge.45 Meyer called for the “renaissance” of a Laotian identity through the careful resurrection of ancient “traditions” of a uniquely “Indo-Buddhist” nature (not “Indo-Chinese”!), the rebuilding of long-lost monuments, and the use of monks and reformed pagoda schools as ways of forming a Laotian elite in communion with its roots. As Meyer wrote of his calling: “Let us on the contrary rebuild the ruins, search the treasures of the original traditions of this country and its neighbors of Indo-Buddhist formation. There we will discover their past and the laws of their evolution. And just as an archeologist constitutes a crumbling palace from the surviving elements, let us build for the use of our protected (protégés) a monument of social organization that will provide them a renaissance in line with their past”.46

Meyer was not interested in the Annamese regions of Indochina, only its western parts. A year later, he would take quiet satisfaction when the *Institut bouddhique* came to life thanks to the work of Susan Karpelès of *Ecole Française d’Extréme-Orient*. Prince Phetsarath was one of the main guest speakers at the inauguration celebrations, speaking in defense of this rebirth of Laotian Buddhism and “Tradition”. Worried, Pham Quynh criticized in his travel notes on his trip to Laos these French “fanatics of Laos” and rejected their efforts “to return to the Laotian the awareness of their national traditions, religions and arts”, all which would complicate the emergence of an Indochinese Federation and endanger Annamese im-


71
Going Indochinese

migration westwards. Rather than pushing a Franco-Annamese special relationship in Indochina dating from the days of Harmand and Beau, Meyer insisted that it was a terrible error for the French to try to build a homogenous Indochina identity. It went against History itself. The ethnocultural fault dividing the two halves of Indochina was only too real.

From this point, the French mission in Indochina is not to unify this hybrid mass of protectorates [and colonies] by forcing the assimilation of the weakest with the strongest, the subjugation of the old Indian colonies of the western part of the peninsula with the ancient Chinese provinces of the Annamese coast. Her role is to allow each one to renew its national characteristics within the context of the fertile education provided by French peace, all the while giving them the possibility to play their particular role within the Indian or Chinese orbits of the civilization from which they emerge.

Little wonder Vichy found precious allies in colonial administrators such as Meyer (see chapter 5).

This did not, however, bode well for those wanting to create an inclusive Indochinese identity. The entry of these patriotic-minded colonial administrators into the Indochinese brawl, determined to push separate “Laotian” or “Cambodian” identities, only reinforced an already evident “anti-Indochinese” sentiment among Laotian and Cambodians (see chapter 4). Moreover, local elites were reading and reflecting upon the ideas being tossed around in this colonial literature, educational manuals, travelogues, and book reviews, all of which was intersecting in interesting yet complicated ways with a deeper level of Annamese, Laotian, and Cambodian geographical conceptions of the world around them.


Annamese Colonial Nationalists between Indochina and Annam

The French creation of Indochina had set in motion a complex series of cause-and-effect relationships and reorientations in local conceptions of space. By the 1920s, Annamese were tapping into a new vision of Indochina, taking what the French had offered them as a road-map, an alliance, and molding it into something new, often linking up with a pre-colonial Annamese imperial vision of peninsular geography. By 1930, national identity in Indochina had become a very complicated business. It depended on who you were and where you were standing in time and space in the Indochinese realm. Vinh wanted to become “Indochinese”. Pham Quynh accepted an Indochinese federation but insisted on remaining “Annamese”. Nguyen An Ninh dreamed of being both, whereas Prince Phetsarath insisted that “Laos existed”.
Chapter 3

Annamese Revolutionaries Between Indochina and Vietnam

Annamese allied with the French were not the only ones struggling with the French concept of Indochina. Paradoxically, those opposed to the French colonial project, not least of all the communists, were most receptive to the idea. In fact, at the very moment that Pham Quynh and Nguyen Van Vinh were arguing over “Annam” and “Indochina”, a remarkably similar debate divided Annamese revolutionaries. For the communists in particular, the question was similar but with a key twist: could ethnic Viet communism be grafted onto the Indochinese structure? Communists would oppose imperialism, the highest form of capitalism according to Lenin, but they would use the contours of the colonial state as their spatial *modus operandi*. The colonial concept was certainly not alien to young radicals. They were armed with Indochinese educations, fresh from courses on its history and geography, and avid readers of books, editorials, and travelogues covering Laos and Cambodia.¹ Like Nguyen An Ninh, many of them were already speaking of an Indochinese Revolution in enthusiastic terms by the late 1920s. In their eyes, there was nothing necessarily contradictory about Ninh’s 1924 vision of “the Indochinese Nation” or

“revolution”. French colonialism had been promoting the pattern for decades and the Comintern had now begun to push it.

Complicating things was the fact that “Indochina” had competition from other spaces. Of particular importance was the nationalist resurrection of the term “Vietnam”. The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, or VNQDD) latched on to it and charged it with powerful cultural meaning in the late 1920s, the symbol of national independence and the incarnation of territorial unity running from north to south. The VNQDD’s leaders rejected Pham Quynh’s alliance with the French, but they agreed with him that the ethnic Viet nationalists could not and should not become Indochinese in “flesh and blood”. The communists, however, mirrored Nguyen Van Vinh’s position in that they realized that the Comintern, like the French, were thinking uniquely in terms of the colonial model of Indochina. Like Nguyen Van Vinh, communists such as Truong Chinh were ready to make the Indochinese leap of faith, convinced that federalism would provide the needed cement to do it. But like their counterparts allied with the French, anticolonialists of all political colors had a terribly hard time figuring out whether they should oppose the colonial state on Annamese, Indochinese, or, for the first time, Vietnamese grounds.

VIETNAM OR INDOCHINA?

As we saw in chapter 1, the French had been pushing the reality of a Franco-Annamese Indochinese project since the late nineteenth century. The French, however, were not the only ones pushing the Indochinese model or federalism. The Comintern instructed its Afro-Asian revolutionaries to organize themselves spatially along the borders of the colonial states they were opposing. According to this policy, there could be no “Javanese” or “Annamese” communist parties, only “Indonesian” and “Indochinese” ones. The imperial states were the constituted sovereign realities against which local communists now had to struggle. Moreover, the Soviet Union offered an important model of federalism to the communist world. After all, it was a massive, multi-ethnic state dominated by one “historical nation” (Russia), which had sacrificed its core identity to

---

the modernizing idea of a larger union based on soviets. In 1929, ethnic Viet revolutionaries put the Comintern’s orders into practice by forming the Communist Party of Indochina (Dong Duong Cong San Dang) and the League of Indochinese Communists. The boundaries of their revolutionary action were approved in three words: “Complete Indochinese Independence!” (Dong Duong hoan toan doc lap!)4

Not every Annamese revolutionary, however, was ready to make this Indochinese leap. Ho Chi Minh for one balked when it came time to create a new and unified communist party in 1930. Like Pham Quynh, he still had one foot planted in the pre-colonial world of the Annamese Empire and the other in this new French Indochinese realm. It was more than a simple quarrel over words as in 1919 (see chapter 2). In 1930, the name of the party would define the geographical scope of communist activities and lay out the type of postcolonial state ethnic Viet communists would strive to create. In the course of one conversation, Ho not only rejected “Annamese” (referring to the short-lived Annamese Communist Party, An-Nam Cong San Dang) because of connotations of Chinese domination, but he allegedly found “Indochina” (Dong Duong) “too wide” a framework for Annamese-run revolutionary activities given the ethnic diversity of the French colony.5

Moreover, according to a communist Vietnamese historian, Ho argued in a mini geometry lesson that the word “Indo-China” could be confused with a larger geo-political space falling between India and China, encompassing Burma, Malaya, Siam, Cambodia, Laos, and Annam (see chapter 1). As for the idea of a “French Indochinese Communist Party”, he suggested that this would do little to dissipate the confusion. As for “Annam”, it was too often confused with the central protectorate of the


same name to work. For the moment, Ho and his partisans settled on “Viet-Nam”. It appears that such reasoning won out shortly thereafter, when Ho presided over formation of a unified Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP, Dang Cong San Viet Nam). The guiding revolutionary slogan became: “Complete Vietnamese Independence!” (Viet Nam hoan toan doc lap!) Several terms and spatial concepts were thus at work in early Annamese radicalism.

The use of “Viet-Nam” at this juncture deserves a special detour in our discussion of contesting Annamese concepts of space. Since World War I, this word had been increasingly used by a range of nationalists who sought to capture the idea of an eternal national identity. A key date in this semantic shift towards Vietnam was, unsurprisingly, the conjuncture of 1930–31. To many a nationalist (but by no means all), the idea of “Annam” had become increasingly problematic, since it implied a state of humiliating submission to foreign rule, first the Chinese, then the French. By resurrecting “Viet-Nam”, several nationalists sought to create and project a strong counter identity, one that evoked the unification of the northern and southern parts of the country in the early nineteenth century, and evoked a centuries-old tradition of struggle against foreign domination.

The militant scholar-patriot, Phan Boi Chau, had given this term a clear nationalist hue when he formed the Vietnamese Restoration Association (Viet-Nam Quang Phuc Hoi) and wrote his History of the Loss of the Vietnamese Country (Viet-Nam Quoc Vong Su). Pham Quynh had used “Viet-Nam” as early as 1917 to evoke a timeless tradition and identity and, three years later, Tran Trong Kim opened his Outline

---


9 ‘Viet-Nam Hoi Quang Phuc Chuong Trinh’, original in box 354, Service de Protection du Corps Expéditionnaire (hereafter, SPCE), Centre des Archives d’Outre-mer (hereafter, CAOM).

History of Viet-Nam (Su luoc Viet-Nam) by asking his readers to give up “An-Nam” in favour of “Viet-Nam”.

Ho followed suit in 1923 when he set up a nationalist paper, Hon Nam Viet (Soul of Nam-Viet), although he had initially arranged the two syllables in the same way as Gia Long had done, “Nam Viet”.

Ho turned to the more familiar order, Vietnam, in 1925, when he established the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi). This occurred during the well-known nationalist outpouring that swept eastern Indochina in the wake of Phan Boi Chau’s arrest and Phan Chu Trinh’s death in 1925–26.

**THE NATIONALIST RESPONSE**

Much stronger competition for the appropriation of the term Viet-Nam came from the non-communist, fiercely anticolonialist VNQDD, set in motion by Nguyen Thai Hoc and Nguyen Khac Nhu in early 1928. The non-communist nationalist party is particularly important at this juncture. It had direct links to Phan Boi Chau and strong roots in a militant, ethnocultural patriotism, which it kept alive during the ICP’s 1928–35 journey into the desert of anti-nationalist internationalism in favour of a proletarian, Indochinese identity. More than any other group at the time, the VNQDD made a conscious effort to put the word Vietnam firmly in the patriotic vocabulary – writing it in “blood and iron” (bang mau va sat) if need be. Although Nguyen Khac Nhu had used the word “Annam” in earlier writings, by the end of the 1920s he and others truly felt that the Viet race was on the point of extinction. Going a step further

11 Tran Trong Kim, Viet-Nam Su-Luoc, Hanoi: Trung Bac Tan Van, 1920, p. 1. Not counting the preface, the first page of Tran Trong Kim’s Outline History of Viet Nam is entitled: Quoc Hieu (National Appellation). He lists all the names of the country (and the list is long), before insisting on “Viet-Nam”. This work was a standard textbook for students in southern schools until 1975. Tran Trong Kim, Viet-Nam Su Luoc, Vol. I, Saigon: Ministry of Education, 1971, pp. 3–4.


than Phan Boi Chau, VNQDD leaders took cultural symbols of ethnic identity, such as “Rivers and Mountains”, “Children of the Lac Hong”, and “people of the same family” and started linking them to a modern, citizen-based concept of the nation which they insisted on calling “Viet-Nam”. In the call to arms disseminated days before the unforgettable suicide attack of Yen Bay (and at the precise moment that Ho was arguing in favour of a Vietnamese Communist Party in Hong Kong), Hoc and Nhu went so far as to demand that the people shout “Long live Viet-Nam!” (Viet Nam Van Tue!) before shedding their “blood” for the “nation” (quoc gia). Moreover, the postcolonial state these nationalists had in mind when launching their uprising was a Vietnamese Republic, not an Indochinese one like the communists.

The uprising failed but the power of the word, Vietnam, became legendary on 17 June 1930 with the execution of Nguyen Thai Hoc. Stepping last onto the scaffold at daybreak, he defied the French in culturally powerful terms, when he bowed to the Vietnamese crowd and then screamed with a blood-chilling northern accent – Viet Nam van tue! – shortly before being decapitated. That very afternoon his fiancée took her life moments after signing a double suicide note addressed both to her would-be husband and to the fatherland, Vietnam. Paul Arnoux, Indochina’s super flic who witnessed both these events, was so worried that the VNQDD was reactivating a militant side of the Vietnamese identity that he suspected Phan Boi Chau’s very hand behind Yen Bay.

In his report to Governor General Pierre Pasquier, Arnoux described Hoc’s insistence on the term Viet Nam to explain to his superiors the force of this two-syllable rejection of the French colonial order. Pasquier, the erudite expert on Annamese civilisation that he most certainly was, understood only too well the militant culture that was resurging before

---

14 Comité Central du VNQDD, ‘Proclamation adressée au Peuple’, pp. 1–3, in Recueil de documents relatifs à la propagande révolutionnaire en Indochine au cours du 1ere trimestre 1930, Document 3, GG, box 7F4, CAOM.


16 Arnoux à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin: Déclaration faite par Nguyen Van Nho, no. 3791-S, Hanoi, 20 March 1930, in file no. 2 Phan Boi Chau, box 353, SPCE, CAOM. Nguyen Van Nho was Nguyen Thai Hoc’s brother.
his eyes. The republication of Pasquier's pro-monarchical, tradition-minded *Annam d’autrefois* coincided with the appearance of several Annamese articles coming down in favor of the word Viet-Nam. And it is no accident that Pasquier simultaneously resurrected the Indochinese Federal idea and masterminded the first "Bao Dai solution" at this point. Well into the 1940s, French strategists relied on Indochinese federalism and the mobilization of local monarchies as the best way to hold on colonially against the rise of "Vietnam" (on Vichy, see chapter 5).\(^17\)

Nonetheless, despite its powerful semantic transformation in the early 1930s, the word "Viet-Nam" remained largely unknown to the common folk and was most certainly new for many nationalists at the time.\(^18\) That Hoc, Nhu, and Tran Trong Kim had to ask the people to pronounce this term instead of "Annam" is in and of itself revealing. Less than a month after the execution of Hoc, the famous poet Tan Da (who had known Nhu well) defended the place of "Annam" in his literary review, *An-Nam Tap Chi*, insisting that neither scholars nor peasants were accustomed to the word "Viet-Nam" in their daily language, only "An-Nam".\(^19\) Even Bay Vien, future leader of the secret and often violent Binh Xuyen, was stunned upon arriving at the top-security prison at Poulo Condor in the early 1930s to hear communist and non-communist political prisoners yelling "Viet-Nam" instead of "Annam". As a VNNQDD prisoner explained to him: "The word "Annamite" is from now on to be banished from our language. It is a word used by the colonialists. Our


\(^{19}\) Nguyen Khac Hieu [Tan Da], ‘Kinh ngo cung Doc-gia chu vi’, *An-Nam Tap Chi*, no. 14 (July 1930), pp. 1–3
Going Indochinese

*patrie* is to be called by its historic name: Vietnam. We, the Vietnamese, are all sons of the same race. Remember this, my brother.”⁴⁰ In short, “Viet-Nam” was taking form in the minds of revolutionary leaders, above all those of the VNQDD, but was not on the lips of the entire population. However, when it comes to planning a nationalist revolution, it is more often than not the elite that takes the lead in creating new symbols, words, and myths. Arnoux understood perfectly well what was going on, and the Sûreté continued to translate Vietnam systematically into French as Annam. The European population understood too from this point or soon thereafter that the word “Vietnam” and “Vietnamese” implied a challenge to the colonial order upon which French Indochina rested and their well-being depended. It is no accident that most European settlers refused to use the word “Vietnam” or “Vietnamese” well into the 1950s, if not later.²¹

Newspapers and conversations circulated the idea of “Vietnam”. So did French authors writing about the colony. Louis Roubaud is a case in point. This famous French journalist had witnessed the execution of Nguyen Thai Hoc with the head of the Police and published a sympathetic account of the events of the early 1930s, entitled *Viet-Nam: la tragédie indochinoise*. His book was read widely both in France and Indochina. In it, Roubaud provides a detailed and rather sympathetic account of Vietnamese anticolonialism. He was certainly the first to bring the VNQDD to a wider audience with a riveting account of its rise and fall of the party and the execution of Nguyen Thai Hoc. The title is of course noteworthy for our purposes, too. Not only was it the first time that the word “Vietnam” had appeared publicly in print in French, at least to my knowledge, but it also brings us back to this on going contradiction between “Indochina” and what was now replacing “Annam”.

---

²⁰ Quoted by Pierre Darcourt, *Bay Vien: le maître de Cholon*, Paris: Hachette, 1977, p. 95. Lexicographer, Dao Duy Anh listed the word “Viet-Nam” in his 1931 *Han-Viet Dictionary* and in his Franco-Annamite dictionary of 1936. It appears under the French entry for “Annam”. However, his predecessor, Paulus Cua, in his 1896 Annamese dictionary, did not list “Viet-Nam”. He gave the country’s name as *Nam-Viet* and *Dai Viet*.

²¹ While I will not take up the question here, many a European settler referred to himself as “Indochinese” or a “Français d’Indochine” by the 1930s, just as many Europeans referred to themselves as “Algerians” (or “Americans” for that matter).
to become “Vietnam” in the nationalist discourse, a term which I will now take up in my text.\textsuperscript{22}

COMMUNIST UNCERTAINTY

In early 1930, Ho Chi Minh shared the VNQDD’s preference for “Vietnam”. Nonetheless, if the Nationalist Party limited its revolutionary purview to the eastern part of the peninsula for the next thirty years of its topsy-turvy political life, ethnic Viet communists could not escape the pull of the French Indochinese model pushed by the Comintern. Indeed, many of them embraced it. During a Central Committee meeting in October 1930, on instructions from the Comintern, the VCP became the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP, \textit{Dang Cong San Dong Duong}). Cambodia and Laos became a part of the Party’s geopolitical domain in view of the Indochina-wide nature of French colonialism and the colonial state.\textsuperscript{23} There was strong support from young Vietnamese militants pushing a proletarian line, some of whom accused Ho of narrow-minded nationalism.\textsuperscript{24} Forming an Indochinese alliance with Laotian and Cambodian anticolonialists also attracted those convinced that strength came in numbers. As the internationalist line ran, the Laotians and Cambodians were also among the oppressed of French Indochina. All three peoples had thus to struggle together in order to overthrow colonial domination and since the form of that colonial domination was Indochinese, the communists would have to adopt the same geopolitical model for its revolutionary operations.

\textsuperscript{22} Roubaud, \textit{Viet-Nam}. Roubaud was so moved by what he saw at Yen Bay that he could not wait for the first page to define the term “Viet-Nam” for his readers. Perturbed by this move towards “Viet-Nam”, Nguyen Van Vinh countered in favour of “Annam” in 1932. See the debate in ‘Annam, Dai Nam ou Viet Nam?’, \textit{L’Annam Nouveau}, (9 June 1932), pp. 1–2. However, it would be too simplistic to assume that “Vietnam” was off limits to colonial nationalists like Nguyen Van Vinh or Pham Quynh. Pre-1945 documents show that Pham Quynh used it in 1917, 1931, and 1945.


Yet we need perhaps to conduct more research into this question before classifying Ho Chi Minh narrowly as “pro-Vietnamese” and “anti-Indochinese” or as “more” “nationalist” than “communist”. These classifications of Ho Chi Minh tend to be ideological categories that tell us more about the state of contemporary historiography in Vietnam and elsewhere than about the complexities of these 1930–31 debates on contesting concepts of space at the time. Instead, we might ask as a hypothesis whether Ho simply chose “Vietnam” as a compromise solution needed to unite competing communist groups unwilling to shed their own labels when it came time to create a unified Party? As we have seen, in the late 1920s there was already an “Indochinese Communist Party” (Dong Duong Cong San Dang and not Dang Cong San Dong Duong) and an “Annamese” one (An-Nam Cong San Dang), neither of which was keen on shedding its name. “Vietnam” was still available as something of a compromise solution. Second, a close reading of Ho’s proto-communist review, Youth (Thành Nien), shows that there was already an Indochinese proletarian line flowing into the Revolutionary Youth League he operated in Guangzhou (Canton). In 1926–27, for example, a long series of front-page political essays, entitled Nationalist Revolution and the Nation, appeared in Ho’s review. Quoting Lenin, the editorialist argued that the bourgeois class had created “nationalism” as a way of controlling the toiling masses. The correct line was to be found in an internationalist community of proletarians. The Indochinese pattern was there, too: “In Indochina, not only must we fight against the European and native capitalists, but we must also unite and stir our proletarian compatriots within the five pays of the Union to rise up against these tyrants.” It is hard to believe that Ho was unaware of all of this, given his editorial duties at this precise period and his membership in  


Annamese Revolutionaries between Indochina and Vietnam

the Comintern. 27 Third, it is possible that Ho said “Vietnam” in 1930 because he understood the ethnic contradictions inherent in the Viet use of the Indochinese model in view of the complex racial diversity of the “peoples” of Indochina and the difficulty Viet revolutionaries would have in promoting “Laotian” or “Cambodian” revolutions. Use of “Vietnam” may have allowed him to evoke a needed heroic tradition, while keeping revolutionary activities limited, geographically, to the east. 28

To some extent, Ho Chi Minh was caught somewhere in the middle. On the one hand, the momentum of French colonialism and the international communist movement in which he was moving and building Vietnamese communism pulled him in Indochinese ways. After all, Ho planted the seeds of Lao communism from bases in northeastern Siam. A dedicated internationalist, he helped get the Malayan communist party off the ground in the early 1930s. On the other hand, a simultaneous resurgence of an ethnic Viet patriotism specifically limited to the eastern part of the peninsula checked Ho’s Indochinese temptations. Ho must have known that this contradiction between the internationalist line (Indochina) and a nationalist one (Vietnam) was emerging as a divisive issue in debates between ranking VNQDD and Youth League militants. And it would manifest itself even more violently in encounters at Poulo Condor in the 1930s. 29 Ho must have found it difficult around 1930–31 to harness and then keep this militant patriotism in step with the internationalist line and the required Indochinese model. 30 Ho’s failure to convert Nguyen Hai Than, an older patriot of the early Phan Boi

27 During this period, eighty copies of each edition were edited and printed by Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Hai Than, ‘Annexe à la Note Noël no. 213 du 1 octobre 1925, 26 et 27 septembre 1925, Renseignements fournis par Pinot au cours de l’entrevue avec N. chez M’, box 365, SPCÉ, CAOM.

28 Cac van Kien co ban, p. 29, note 2.


30 See the ICP’s critique of the Yen Bay uprising: ‘Ky niem cuoc tan sat o Yen Bay, chung ta nen nho nhung deu gi?’, Co Vo San, no. 3 (1 February 1931), pp. 1–3, in box 48, Slotfom Série III, CAOM.
Going Indochinese

Chau school of thought, to the communist camp in 1925 underscored the difficulty of reconciling these two currents.\(^{31}\)

Whatever Ho’s precise thinking, the re-written October Political Platform of the ICP addressed this spatial and semantic contradiction by incorporating Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia (Cao-mien), and Laos (Ai-Lao) into a new political unit referred to as the “land of Indochina” (xu Dong Duong). Besides continuing the call for the overthrow of feudalism, the implementation of land reform, and the expulsion of French imperialism, the ICP picked up the earlier slogan calling for “Complete Indochinese Independence!”\(^{32}\) As a communist journal explained: “Although these three countries are made up of three different races, with different languages, different traditions, different behaviour patterns, in reality they form only one country. [...] Although the Party’s name is only a form, since the form is important for the revolution, the change has to be made.”\(^{33}\) In April 1931, as Quynh and Vinh were wrapping up their debate on the limits of Vietnamese nationalism, the Comintern officially recognized the ICP.\(^{34}\)

Young militants were no doubt more at ease with this Indochinese “form” than Ho or Pham Quynh. They could look to the Soviet Union as a helpful reference point in creating an Indochinese union. Second, if Nguyen Van Vinh and Tieu Vien saw an Indochina in capitalist terms by 1930, communists saw a budding Indochinese proletariat in the form of the growing Vietnamese working class toiling away in Laotian silver mines and Cambodian rubber plantations. By the mid-1930s there were around 6,000 Vietnamese coolies working in Laotian mines, among whom novice communists had been militating since 1930 (the future head of the Ministry of Public Security, Tran Quoc Hoan, joined the party while toiling away in a silver mine in Laos).\(^{35}\) A few years later,


\(^{32}\) Tran Phu, Luan cuong chinh tri nam 1930 cua Dang, Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1983, pp. 11, 16–17. This is a post 1979 document.

\(^{33}\) Cited by Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, p. 128.


\(^{35}\) Charles Robequin, L’Evolution économique de l’Indochine française, Paris: Centre d’études de politique étrangère, 1939, p. 292; Hoang Van Hoan, Giot Nuoc trong
these populations were of such a size that Vietnamese communists started forming their own Workers Associations in Vientiane and Thakhek alongside the non-communist bureaucrats’ Amicales. And technology and political relaxations were such that in 1937–38 Vietnamese communists could send administrative instructions by telegraph to their western Indochinese cells.36

In Cambodia, Vietnamese communists concentrated their activities on the thousands of ethnic Viet coolies working on eastern Cambodian plantations, in small-scale industries, and among the young Annamese bureaucrats working in Phnom Penh.37 Things continued in this direction during the laxer Popular Front period, when Vietnamese communists organized the famous “Indochinese Congress” (Dai Hoi Dong Duong), whose Laotian and Cambodian branches centred, unsurprisingly, on Vietnamese urban communities in western Indochina. ICP activists attracted hardly any ethnic Khmer or Lao elite or proletarian support. In short, Indochinese communism remained a largely ethnic Viet affair despite the Indochinese framework.38 As long as the Vietnamese failed to bring the Cambodians and Laotians into their revolutionary system, the creation of a shared Indochinese socialist community would remain elusive.

Nonetheless, the Indochinese Congress is significant because it was yet another effort by Vietnamese communists to actualize in more concrete terms the wider entity they had been conceptualizing since the late 1920s. And both the Popular Front government and International

---


Communist movement were still requiring the Indochinese model for imagining the postcolonial, revolutionary state. The ICP kept in step on both counts. Its revolutionary slogan remained “complete independence of Indochina” with a view to creating a “Soviet Republic” of Indochina. As the political organ headed by a ranking communist Duong Bach Mai put it in 1938: “Must we always repeat that as communists we would never cease to be the determined partisans of the independence of Indochina and of the construction of socialism in this country.”

French colonial administrators and Vietnamese communists had thus one thing in common throughout the 1930s. Both were envisioning parallel, though opposing, Indochinese states as the political endpoints in the evolution of the colony. In a resolution approved at the ICP’s Macao Congress of 1935 (which Ho did not attend), communists promised the Laotian, Cambodians, and other ethnic minorities the right to “self-determination”, but they also aimed to place them within the wider state to be called the “Soviet Union of the Indochinese Republic” (Lien bang cong hoa xo-viet Dong-duong). Even the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China supported the idea of a future political structure to be known as “Soviet Indo-China”. In 1939, another internal communist document explained that the postcolonial state would be called the “Federal Government of the Democratic Republic of Indochina” (Chinh Phu Lien Bang Cong Hoa Dan Chu Dong Duong).

Even Ho Chi Minh could go Indochinese if need be. While he may have had private doubts about the viability of the Indochinese model, in practice he seems to have accepted the new line demanded by the Comintern and many Vietnamese revolutionaries. In a letter dated 20
April 1931, he scolded dissenting colleagues in the Annam section who balked at accepting the Indochinese name on the grounds that “Cambodia and Laos would first have to be [properly] organised.” He reminded them of Comintern instructions calling for the creation of an Indochinese-wide Party.

After spending much of the 1930s in Moscow, Ho returned to the Vietnamese revolutionary scene in 1940–41. In order to attract wide social support for a new national front, he breathed new life into the word “Vietnam” through the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (Vietnamese Independence League, or Viet Minh for short). Yet this does not necessarily mean that he or his followers had abandoned the Indochinese model. In what may be a compromise to the internationalist Indochinese line, Vietnamese communists, including Ho, attempted simultaneously to form both a Cambodian Independence League (Cao-Mien Doc Lap Dong Minh) and a Laotian Independence League (Ai-Lao Doc Lap Dong Minh). Working together, the three national leagues were part of a Vietnamese vision of a larger federated entity that was to be known as the Indochinese Independence League (Dong Duong Doc Lap Dong Minh). This wider Indochinese front would be directed by a “Central Executive Committee” (Tong Bo) under which three national “committees” (chap uy) would represent “each country of the Union.” The ICP’s national front, like the communist party itself continued to operate along Indochinese lines. Even in his famous letter to his countrymen (written in Chinese) in 1941, Ho too gave away a 1930s Comintern accent when he criticized the French for having ceded parts of “our land” (dat dai cua ta) to Thailand. Ho was referring to western Cambodia and Laos – not


Going Indochinese

Vietnam.\textsuperscript{45} According to the Party Regulations approved during the Eighth Plenum of the ICP’s Central Committee on 20 May 1941, “the ICP is the unique forward army of the proletarian class of Indochina. It is the leader of this class and of the universality of the Indochinese people, working for a revolution of liberation and working for the total independence of Indochina [...] in view of realising socialism, the first stage of Communism.”\textsuperscript{46} The slogan of a “Union of Socialist Indochinese Soviet Republics” was allegedly dropped during this Plenum, but it did not rule out the possibility of a future “[Indochinese] Union of Democratic Republics” as the projected postcolonial state.\textsuperscript{47} Until mid-1945, the ethnic-Viet ICP leadership envisioned the creation of three revolutionary states existing together within the political framework of an Indochinese Union or Federation. Like their Vietnamese opponents allied with the French, however, Vietnamese communists never thought to ask what the Laotian and Cambodians might have thought about going Indochinese.


CHAPTER 4

CONTESTING SPACE AND PLACE IN INDOCHINA: LAOTIAN AND CAMBODIAN VIEWS

Few, if any, of the Laotian and Cambodian elites wanted to go Indochinese. However, they most certainly had something to say about all of this Indochinese talk on the part of the French and Vietnamese. Lao Prince Phetsarath was not the only one to speak out (chapter 2). In fact, the Vietnamese exchange of 1931 between Pham Quynh and Nguyen Van Vinh was matched by a second “great” debate on the idea of “Indochina” pitting Vietnamese against Cambodians. This second exchange focused not only on Cambodian reservations about the spatial reality of Indochina; it also discussed in detail the place each of them would or would not hold in such an Indochinese state. Agreeing on a territorially delineated colonial state was only part of the equation; defining who belonged to it as “citizens” was just as important.

In a myriad of ways, the dynamics of colonialism not only engendered complex interactions between the colonized and the colonizer as we have seen in the previous three chapters, but it also set into motion a new set of “inter-colonial” Asian connections among the colonized, ones which directly affected the nature of the “colonial encounter”, to borrow Georges Balandier’s famous term.¹ Many among the Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Chinese subject elites engaged each other and the French in intense and fascinating debates about the political, legal, cultural, and economic place each group held in the colonial state. And this second “great” debate among the colonized can also shed new light on why Indochina, unlike Indonesia, failed to emerge as an opera-

Going Indochinese

tional, shared model for imagining and realizing a postcolonial state. To put it bluntly, the Laotians and Cambodians wanted nothing to do with Indochina, whether Vietnamese or French.²

RECONFIGURING INTER-ASIAN CONTACTS IN A TIME OF COLONIALISM

Few would disagree that the creation of French Indochina reconfigured the nature of inter-Asian contacts inside the new colonial state, as did the Dutch colonial project in “Indonesia” and the British ones in India, Malaya, and the Straits Settlements. For one, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and a variety of “ethnic minorities” were now living within the same state – a colonial one ruled by a European power. This was historically unprecedented: the Dai Nam Empire had never managed such an extensive state or centralized control over Laos, Cambodia, or the highlands. Second, the French facilitated Vietnamese and Chinese immigration to and within all of Indochina. The mechanics of this had important demographic, social, and political effects that became major points of contention during the colonial period and long after decolonization set in. In 1874, an early colonial census noted 4,452 Vietnamese out of a total Cambodian population of 746,424. In 1911, after significant Vietnamese immigration, the totals were 79,050 Vietnamese versus 1,360,188 Cambodians. Ten years later, however, the Vietnamese population in Cambodia almost doubled to 140,225 out of a total Khmer population of two million. While these numbers are most certainly subject to caution, the impact of French colonialism on Vietnamese movements into Cambodia is clear. The most visible manifestation of this increase in immigration obviously occurred in urban centres, above all in Phnom Penh where the Vietnamese numbered only 18,990 in 1921, but represented 61.51% of the total urban population.³ There, as we discussed in chapter 1, they worked as bureaucrats, shopkeepers,


policemen, and tailors. They increasingly played a role in the colonial transformation of western Indochina, working away as mechanics and plantation workers, pumping gas, and driving buses across the pre-colonial borders dividing Vietnam from Cambodia and Laos. In July 1936, the Cambodian population topped three million, with the Vietnamese numbering 191,000.

Again, there was nothing unique about this. Across colonial Southeast Asia, European colonizers increased Chinese and Indian immigration to help man and build their colonial states. New shipping lanes, roads, railway lines, canals, buses, cars, and even outboard motors led to increased movements of more people, who were moving faster and further than before. The colonial need for cheap labour in Southeast Asia, the coastal and maritime colonization of China by the European powers, and of course the weakness of the Qing and subsequent nationalist states in China well into the 1930s, facilitated massive movements of Chinese immigrants into Southeast Asia. In 1879, there were some 45,000 Chinese living in Cochinchina. In 1921, the French counted around 156,000. Even more Chinese moved to the British Straits Settlement, above all Singapore, while Indians immigrated to Burma in large numbers to work in the British India colonial bureaucracy and urban economy in Rangoon and Mandalay. Indeed, Indian civil servants circulated within the wider British colonial state, including the colonial province of Burma, like the thousands of Vietnamese pushing paper in colonial offices in the western pays of Laos and Cambodia.

If Laotian and Cambodian nationalists would later resent this French reliance on the Vietnamese – and the Vietnamese the French economic dependence on the Chinese – both forgot that the French would have been just as willing to work with Vietnamese commercial networks had they existed or to recruit and dispatch ethnic Khmer and Lao civil servants or laborers to work in Hanoi, Saigon, or the mines of Hon Gay had the latter been so disposed. The French preferred instead


Figure 13: Indochinese Postal Service (brochure held in Ecole nationale des Langues orientales et vivantes, Paris)
to tap into pre-existing Chinese commercial networks and Vietnamese bureaucratic proclivities in order to operate their local Indochinese commercial networks, administration, public works, and postal services. Moreover, Vietnamese elites collaborated with the colonizer in much greater numbers and with more fervour than the Cambodians and the Laotians. If the French developed a policy of “Franco-Annamese Collaboration” with the Vietnamese after World War I (see chapters 1 and 2), they never created such a colonial policy for the Cambodians, the Laotians, or the upland populations until the Japanese and Thais forced Vichy France to do so (see chapter 5).  

As we saw, colonial stereotypes also influenced how the Asian colonized would come to view each other during the colonial period. From the outset, the French considered the Vietnamese to be more “industrious”, “intelligent”, and “cunning”, whereas the Cambodians and Lao were characterized as “childlike”, “sweet”, and “lazy”. This reinforced the French proclivity to recruit the more “dynamic” Vietnamese. Speaking of the Vietnamese working as civil servants in the Résidence supérieure in Cambodia in the 1930s, one French administrator said that they had “provided precious services while waiting for the Khmer to evolve sufficiently to take the place of the Annamese in his [the Cambodian’s] own country: as the secretaries, technical agents, mailmen, doctors, and Indochinese veterinarians, etc.” Such arguments served as mantras throughout the colonial period and were often taken up by the colonized themselves. As biased as they were, these clichés impacted upon how Asians perceived each other and often reacted (see chapter 2).

The colonial transformation of demographics and inter-ethnic relations in western Indochina posed a problem for the French by the

7 These stereotypes are present in French official and non-official documents and discourses. For a nice example, see Albert Peyronnet, Senator from Allier, ‘La rénovation du Cambodge’ in Les Annales Coloniales, 31 March 1914. On this question, see Alain Forest, ‘Les portraits du Cambodgien’ in ASEMI, volume IV, no. 2 (1973), pp. 81–107.
8 Le Bon, ‘Résidence de Kratié, enquête no. 3’, sub-file Résidence de Kampot, Enquête no. 3, 1 June 1938, file Commission d’enquête dans les territoires d’Outre-mer, Enquête no. 3, Migrations intérieures, box 96, Commission Guernut, CAOM.
1930s. This was particularly true in Cambodia. For if the French had justified their colonial intervention there in the late nineteenth century on the grounds that they had “saved” the Cambodians from being swallowed by the Thais and the Vietnamese, this claim was contradicted by the French decision to rely on Vietnamese bureaucrats and workers to run the lower but vital levels of the colonial state in Cambodia. By the 1930s, several colonial administrators who had long lived and worked in the country knew it and began calling for protective policies that would directly affect the nature of inter-Asian interactions well into the post-colonial period. Frenchmen such as Louis Manipoud, Roland Meyer, and Charles Rochet became active supporters of western Indochinese interests and identities, considering themselves to be more Lao and Khmer than the Lao and Khmers themselves (on colonial defenders of local patriotisms, see chapter 2). Speaking of the problem of Vietnamese emigration to Cambodia, one French official wrote around 1938:

The immigrating French subject or protégé undoubtedly has the right to our solicitude; however the indigenous [the Cambodians] has fought too hard for his independence for the protecting country [France] to help develop [Vietnamese] colonies, who remain for the Cambodians “foreigners”. In his misfortune, the Cambodian turned to us in full confidence. By organizing, administratively, mass migrations [of ethnic Vietnamese to Cambodia], we would run the risk of losing the friendship of the Cambodian country (pays).

That said, despite memories of pre-French Vietnamese expansion and domination of Cambodia, the two peoples were not always “hereditary enemies” – no more than the Chinese and Vietnamese were destined to remain “eternal” adversaries in spite of some one thousand years of Chinese imperial rule of “An-Nam”. Sino-Vietnamese marriages were common long before the French arrived and Chinese traders had long contributed to the economic and cultural vibrancy of pre-colonial Vietnam. Nor were relations between Cambodians and Vietnamese always antagonistic. Numerous uprisings in the nineteenth century had witnessed Vietnamese Catholics and Cambodians joining together

---

9 That is: the ethnic Vietnamese from the Cochinchinese colony (subjects) or from the protectorates of Annam or Tonkin (protected subjects).
10 P. Chalier, Pursat, file Enquête no. 3-A Questions générales, not dated, box 96, Commission Guernut, CAOM (circa 1938).
against colonial expansion.\textsuperscript{11} There were also (and still are) mixed marriages between Vietnamese and Cambodians and many a southern Vietnamese could speak Khmer – and vice versa. The well-known Cambodian nationalist, Dap Chhuon, had two Vietnamese wives at one point. Son Ngoc Thanh’s mother was Sino-Vietnamese. Vietnamese in Cambodia could participate in Cambodian cultural events at the local levels. And it is worth noting that former Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk never hid the fact that his father spoke Vietnamese as a second language, not French.\textsuperscript{12}

The problem was that an increasing number of Vietnamese located in urban centres, pushing pencils in the colonial bureaucracy or toiling away on rubber plantations, bumped up against an urban-based Cambodian and Laotian nationalist elite increasingly opposed to the growing role the Vietnamese were playing in the administration and modernization of their state, colonial or not, and increasingly angry at the French colonizer for allowing these “foreigners” to do so. Rather than continuing to see the Vietnamese (or the Chinese though in more complex ways) as important historical contributors to the development of the Cambodian and Laotian states and economies as in the past, modern Cambodian and Laotian nationalists increasingly began to construct the Vietnamese as “outsiders”, a threat to an emerging, inclusive national identity in the making during the colonial period.

Colonial legal categories reinforced this “othering” by creating new social groups based on divide and rule, race, politics, economics, law not to mention the complex, drawn-out nature of the French conquest of Indochina (1859–1907). Like the modern nation-states spreading across Europe in the nineteenth century, European powers created new territorially bounded spaces in the non-Western colonial world with accompanying legal categories defining who belonged to these new colonial domains and their subunits – and who did not. In the national context


sweeping Europe in the nineteenth century, nation-states tended to introduce inclusive nationalities or citizenship based on the concepts of *jus solis* or *jus sanguinis*. However, in their colonial manifestations in the “Dutch Indies”, “British Malaya”, and “French Indochina”, things were very different. European nation-states would not necessarily extend French or British citizenship to their newly annexed colonial ones. Other than a handful of the colonized who were “naturalized” French, the “colonized” never obtained full French citizenship via the empire. This was true in Algeria; it also applied in Indochina. Nor did it follow that the European colonizers would necessarily create an all inclusive, homogenous colonial citizenship for all those subjects residing within their respective territorially bounded states in Asia and Africa. In Indonesia and Indochina, therefore, colonial subjects never became full-fledged Dutch or French citizens. Nor did they become legally defined “Indonesian” or “Indochinese” colonial citizens.

13 Rogers Brubaker has argued for nineteenth-century France and Germany that the constitution of modern citizenship marked “a crucial moment in the development of the infrastructure of the modern state and the state system” Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 72.

Contesting Space and Place in Indochina: Laotian and Cambodian Views

Only politically independent Thailand, Turkey, and Japan were in a position to apply modern nationalist notions of citizenship to all the subjects of their territorially bounded states in a nationally, inclusive way.\(^\text{15}\)

Rather than creating and imposing one Indochinese nationality for their Indochinese colonial state, the French created a variety of legal identities for the “indigenous” (indigènes) living within the Indochinese Union. Those born in the French colony of Cochinchina, for example, the “Cochinchinese”, became French “subjects” (sujets français), not French citizens (citoyen français). Those coming from the protectorates (that is the ‘Annamese’, ‘Tonkinese’, ‘Laotians’, Cambodians, and the native denizens of Kouang Tcheou Wan) were considered legally to be protégés français (French-protected subjects; again, not French citizens).\(^\text{16}\) At a second territorial level, that of the Indochinese colonial state, ethnic Viet born or residing in “Cochinchina” were defined by colonial law as “Cochinchinese nationals”, while the Annamese and the Tonkinese enjoyed their own nationalities corresponding to their respective territories. In other words, territorial nationalities existed for the Cochinchinese, the Annamese, and Tonkinese pays/regions. There was no such thing as “Vietnamese” colonial citizenship or nationality, because “Vietnam” did


\(^{16}\) In French colonial law, “indigenous” (the equivalent of the British colonial term of “native” at the time) referred generally to the “aboriginal population” of a colonial territory that had been annexed by France (a colony) or placed under a protectorate or a mandate. Sujets français could be an indigenous Vietnamese from the legally constituted colony of Cochinchina, or those “born in and resident in” the colonial “municipalities” of Hanoi, Haiphong, and Tourane (Da Nang). French protégés could be ethnic Vietnamese from the protectorates of Tonkin, Annam, Laos, or Cambodia. Theoretically, French colonial law apparently considered Laos to be a colony and hence its members sujets français. Henry Solus, Traité de la condition des indigènes en droit privés: colonies et pays de protectorat, Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1927, pp. 11–12, 35–45, 55.
not exist as a legally and internationally recognized state. Nor was there an inclusive “Annamese nationality” regrouping all the ethnic Viet living in Cochinchina, Annam and/or Tonkin. And most importantly for our purposes here, at the level of the colonial state, the Indochinese Union created in 1887, the French never created an inclusive Indochinese colonial citizenship for all those residing within this space.  

The French classified the ethnic Chinese as “Asian foreigners” or *Asiatiques étrangers*. The French maintained and consolidated pre-existing Chinese congregations (*bang*) for their own economic interests. Unlike the Japanese, the Chinese were theoretically subject to Vietnamese law and courts as *Asiatiques étrangers* and not to French law. In reality, however, the Chinese congregational heads answered to the French colonial state, often paid very high taxes, and continued to serve as economic intermediaries and sources of labour for the colonial power. According to the colonial legal specialist Henry Solus, the French categorization of the “Chinese” as “*Asiatiques étrangers*” was based on “race” rather than on French notions of *jus solis*. Thus, by maintaining the congregations apart on racial grounds, the French made it harder to assimilate the Chinese into the local populations during the colonial period and sowed the seeds for inter-ethnic tension later on.  

---

17 Significantly, inside the Indochinese colonial state, each *pays* was given its own colonial nationality. During the interwar period, ethnic minority groups born within or residing in one of the five colonial sub-units of Indochina were considered to be ‘nationals’ of that *pays*. Separate colonial civil codes existed for each of the five *pays*. See, for example: *Code Civil de l’Annam* (partie française), Hue: Imprimerie Phuc Long, 1936, p. 13, Livre Premier des Personnes: Titre premier de la Nationalité, Articles 13, 14, 15, and 17. According to Article 14, non-Viet ethnic minorities were defined legally as Annamese subjects: “Sont également considérés comme sujets annamites tous individus issus de groupements ethniques non rattachés à une nationalité jouissant de la personnalité internationale et fixés de façon permanente sur le territoire de l’Annam”.  

18 Their level of “civilization” was deemed by the French to be such that Japanese enjoyed the same legal status as Europeans. See also C. Fasseur, ‘Cornerstone and stumbling block’, pp. 31–55.  


It is not sure that French colonial experts truly grasped the potentially divisive force that their categories could have on relations among the Asian colonized and even for the survival of their own colonial state. This was despite the fact that one of French Indochina’s most eminent legal experts at the time, Ernest Hoeffel, had put his finger on the problem when he wrote the following:

To grant to a select few of them a particular legal status can be seen as a kind of privileged status, especially when it is analogous to the special status reserved for the nationals of the protecting people [the French]. This spreads the seeds of future dissensions, ever growing rivalries; it is tantamount to breaking the unity of the country, the cohesion of its interests and its normal social evolution.21

Unlike the nation-states in Europe Rogers Brubaker has analyzed expertly, the colonial state tended to create a heteroclite range of legal categories and in so doing generated a new set of divisive inter-Asian tensions, exchanges, and differences not only over space but also over place. This is at the heart of the second great Indochinese debate of the 1930s.

ACT I: THE “GREAT” VIETNAMESE–CAMBODIAN DEBATE OF THE 1930s

If the Vietnamese regretted not being able to turn the Chinese into “Vietnamese” in the 1930s,22 many of these same Vietnamese fought tooth and nail against Cambodian efforts to limit ethnic Viet immigration westwards, to expel those living in Cambodia, or to transform them into Cambodian subjects. During the 1930s, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and French elites became involved in a drawn-out debate focused mainly on two issues: 1) the Cambodian legal right to assimilate the immigrant Vietnamese, turning them into Cambodian nationals, and 2) the Vietnamese attempt to block this Cambodian assimilation by advocating a wider, inclusive Indochinese citizenship based on the colonial territorial model. Such an Indochinese citizenship, it was thought, would allow the Vietnamese to live, work, and move in western Indochina free from Cambodian and Laotian control and assimilation.

---
It was a question of time before the question of colonial nationality became an issue. Mention of it had been made in the 1931 debates over the spatial concept of Indochina between Pham Quynh and Nguyen Van Vinh (see chapter 2). In October of that year, La Presse indochinoise reported that the Résident supérieur in Cambodia had unilaterally expelled to Cochinchina an “Annamese mayor” (meaning an ethnic Viet village leader in this instance). This decision was apparently the result of a local altercation between his “Annamese village” and Khmers living in the area. La Presse indochinoise asked whether the colonial state had the legal right to expel this “Annamese” from Cambodia, since this particular individual had been born in the pays of Cambodia. After all, this writer continued, the French assimilationist conception of nationality, *jus solis* in particular, should have turned anyone born in that territory (the pays of Cambodia) into one of its nationals, regardless of ethnicity. Territory, not ethnicity, should define belonging.

But did the French concept of an inclusive nationality apply in the colonial state and to its colonized, the paper asked? “What is the legal status of an Annamese born in Cambodia?” the author wondered. Thinking in Republican terms, the apparently French editors defended the Annamese/Viet individual born in Cambodia along metropolitan nationally-inclusive lines:

In France, a foreigner who is born there [in France] is French. But here, in [colonial] Cambodia? We would be very happy to be informed of this matter. And this is a useful matter [to elucidate]: For here we will have all the Annamese [ethnic Viet] in Cambodia who are going to have a reason to begin trembling, if the bizarre procedure that we have noted becomes a regularized one.²³

In other words, could a fellow colonized of the same French Indochinese colonial state be deemed – legally – a ‘foreigner’ in one of its member pays, especially if he/she had been born in that territory? And to what degree would ethnicity/race (*jus sanguinis*) or place of birth/territory (*jus solis*) – determine legal belonging in the colonial context? This was clearly an important question for those threatened by expulsion or for

---

²³ ‘Point de droit: Peut-on expulser du Cambodge un Annamite qui y est né : Surtout quand il a raison?’ *La Presse Indochinoise*, no. 346 (3–4 October 1931), p. 5.
those determined to control immigration. It also brings out the problems of Indochinese identity in very revealing ways.

Shortly thereafter, a second article appeared, penned by a Vietnamese who had consulted a French lawyer about the Résident supérieur’s recent decision. According to this legal expert, the Résident supérieur’s decision to expel the Annamese was illegal, because the Annamese in question had been born in the pays of Cambodia. Territory trumped ethnicity. This did not, however, change the colonial outcome: the Vietnamese mayor in question was forced to leave Cambodia. As this Vietnamese writer asked his readers, “are we thus at the mercy of any decision to run us out of this country?”

IMAGINING CAMBODIAN COLONIAL NATIONALITY: ASSIMILATION OR EXCLUSION?

Things cooled down for a while and then, in 1934, La Presse Indochinoise set off a bigger debate, when it published a series of Vietnamese letters critical of the Cambodian mentality and ingratitude they had shown towards the Vietnamese and for what the latter had done for the development of Cambodia. Just as the Chinese residing in eastern Indochina could speak of Vietnamese “lethargy” and “ingratitude”, so too did an equally insensitive stereotype bring Vietnamese and Cambodian nationalist elites into heated confrontation. Four Cambodian writers stand out in terms of their responses and arguments to the Vietnamese and the French: Nimo Rathavan, “I.K.”, Khémarak Bottra, and above
all Khemeravanich, which means “Khmer Commerce”. While they all naturally objected to this pejorative characterization of the Cambodian “soul”, what really concerned them was the need to control continued Vietnamese immigration and to assimilate those “foreign Asians” living in Cambodia into legal Cambodians.

Khemeravanich launched the first volley from the Cambodian side. On 1 July 1934, he initiated a series of articles supporting Cambodian grievances and opposing the privileged position and activities of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. He argued that the colonial level of the Cambodian administration should be reserved for the Cambodians, not the “foreign” Annamese. He insisted that just as a Polish national would not be allowed to work in the French bureaucracy as a foreigner, so too should the Vietnamese be barred from working in the Cambodian civil service. The difference, of course, was that France and Poland (at least at this point) were separate nation-states, whereas Annam (Vietnam) and Cambodia were legal sub-units of a larger Indochinese colonial state. Despite what happened to the ethnic Viet mayor above, the “Annamese” were technically not “foreigners” in French Indochina. Khemeravanich knew it, but he was thinking in increasingly nationalist terms, Cambodian ones: “It’s not the same thing, you will tell me. The Annamese is not a foreigner; he’s an Indochinese and Cambodia is an integral part of the Indochinese Union. Ah! That beautiful Union! You said it yourself, I admit it, in your article. But after all, this Union, it has opened all our gates to the Annamese immigrants. The Union is the reason for all our troubles.”

Khemeravanich contested the viability of Indochina as a territorial entity for the Khmers. “I’m not a jurist”, he lamented, but “was it we who instituted this Indochinese Union? Did anyone ever ask our opinion before creating it?” The question now, he said, was to determine “to

27 Unfortunately, I have been unable to identify these four individuals. It seems clear that they are using noms de plume.
30 Khemeravanich, ‘Frères ennemis?’, p. 6.
Contesting Space and Place in Indochina: Laotian and Cambodian Views

whom does Cambodia belong?” The answer was obvious, of course. Two weeks later, Khemarak Bottra responded that Cambodia belonged to the Cambodians: “Cambodia to the Cambodians and Cambodians for Cambodia”. This slogan was on the lips of budding Cambodian nationalists everywhere in the 1930s. It emerged, however, as less of an anticolonialist response to French “exploitation” than as the expression of a nationalist desire to distinguish a Cambodian identity from the Indochinese one being pushed by so many French and Vietnamese (chapter 1). These elites were also perfectly aware of the fact that Albert Sarraut’s reformism and policy of collaboration formed an exclusively Franco-Annamese partnership.

Nevertheless, the mantra – Cambodia for the Cambodians – still left unanswered who could and could not be a member of this “Cambodian” territory. Was it, for example, ethnicity or place of birth that defined membership? Khemeravanich provided an assimilationist answer to this question. Ethnically non-Khmer nationals, such as the Vietnamese (and the Chinese), could become “Cambodian” nationals, he argued. To turn them into Cambodians, however, he called for three things. First, all these individuals born or residing in Cambodia had to learn to speak Khmer. This language would ensure their “khmerization”, as he put it. Instruction in the Khmer thus had to be mandatory in all Cambodian classrooms, including the Vietnamese and the Chinese ones. Like nationalists the world over, Khemeravanich insisted that school would be “an excellent instrument” for the nationalization of Cambodia’s foreigners. Second, Khemeravanich called for the creation of a Chair in Cambodian Literature in order to improve and enrich the Khmer language. Third, he requested that all “Annamese” be held accountable before the Cambodian courts. On this last point, he was determined to terminate colonial categories, which had effectively accorded extraterritoriality to certain Asians living on Cambodian territory by removing them legally from local law and courts. Khemeravanich was willing

31 ‘À qui donc appartient le Cambodge?’ La Presse indochinoise, no. 488 (4–5 August 1934), p. 4.
33 ‘À qui devrait appartenir le Cambodge?’ La Presse indochinoise, no. 491 (26 August 1934), p. 6.
34 Ibid.
to keep Cambodia colonial, but on the condition that the Vietnamese were assimilated to this wider Cambodian nationality and held accountable before Cambodian courts.\textsuperscript{35} Significantly, he was not arguing along racialist, exclusionist lines, but rather along inclusive, assimilationist ones.

Another Cambodian nationalist using the initials “I.K.” chimed in along similar lines in 1937. He, too, called for the mandatory teaching of the Khmer language in all public and private schools in Cambodia. The Vietnamese language should only be allowed to be taught as a “second foreign living language”. Second, he requested that all Asiatiques étrangers living in Cambodia be held accountable before Cambodian courts. Finally, Vietnamese immigration had to stop momentarily in order to promote a policy of “khmerization” of Cambodia’s ethnically diverse populations. Like Khmeravanich, I.K. was no ethno-culturalist. He insisted that Cambodian nationality be bestowed on any “yellow child born in Cambodia”\textsuperscript{36}.

What worried Khmeravanich and I.K. was that continued Vietnamese immigration would create a mass of non-assimilated foreigners living and working outside of Khmer national control: “But these reforms of a scholastic and legal nature, designed to assimilate the Annamese [into Cambodians], will not be able to bear fruit as long as the immigration movement continues to intensify, as is the case for some time now”. And like the Vietnamese keen on controlling the Chinese, Khmeravanich

\textsuperscript{35} Contrary to what is commonly asserted, the French language was not imposed at all levels of the colonial education system. Local languages and traditions continued to be taught for fear of creating “uprooted” youngsters (déracinés) and revolutionaries. In Cambodia, the French also allowed instruction in Vietnamese in order to facilitate the training of their much-needed Vietnamese bureaucrats. In 1918, Vietnamese was recognized as a local native language. In 1925, ethnic Vietnamese students in Cambodia could obtain the Certificat d’Études élémentaire in Vietnamese. The potentially divisive nature of this policy is obvious in light of the increasingly large numbers of ethnic Vietnamese living in urban centres and sending their children to school. In 1926, the proportion of Khmer students to Vietnamese ones in Cambodia was at 49%. In 1929, it increased to 53%. This language policy constituted an obstacle to absorbing the Vietnamese into the Cambodian national community that Khmeravanich was envisioning above. Khy Phanra, ‘La communauté vietnamienne au Cambodge’, pp. 201–202. 63 Khmer students attended the Collège Sisowath in 1923 against 61 ethnic Vietnamese. In 1929, there were 246 Khmer students and 259 ethnic Vietnamese elementary students in the Sisowath school.

\textsuperscript{36} I.K., ‘Réponse à l’aimable M. Vu Dinh Da: L’immigration annamite au Cambodge’ in La Presse indochinoise, (2 September 1937), p. 4.
called for a halt to Vietnamese emigration to Cambodia. He submitted his suggestions to the King of Cambodia, who, he said, still had important judicial powers as the head of a protected state. But again, he insisted that ethnic Vietnamese could and should become “Cambodian”, because “Cambodia belongs to all of its members regardless of racial or religious differences.”\(^{37}\) *Jus solis* clearly had its proponents among the Cambodians in the 1930s, much to the surprise of the Vietnamese and the French.

**COLONIAL INDOCHINA OR COLONIAL CAMBODIA? CHOOSING THE TERRITORIAL DOMAIN**

The problem was that Cambodian colonial nationalists had to deal with two potential territorial states at the time: the nation-state of Cambodia they were imagining in their heads and the Indochinese colonial-state in which they were living as colonial subjects. While Cambodian nationalists wanted to Khmerize the entire population of Cambodia, they encountered a major legal hurdle: Cambodia did not exist as an independent state. It was but a sub-unit (*a pays*) of the legally constituted colonial state called the Indochinese Union. This is where the Indochinese entity proposed by the French met increasingly fierce national resistance from Cambodian nationalists, who saw the *pays* of Cambodia as the only possible bounded territorial unit for defining citizenship, whether colonial or national in design. The emphasis on Cambodia and on an inclusive Cambodian nationality was the only way to halt Vietnamese immigration. This was the driving issue. An Indochinese colonial state *and* corresponding Indochinese citizenship would prevent the Cambodians from controlling ethnic Viet immigration into their *pays* and would instead assimilate the ethnic Khmers into a wider Indochinese citizenship in which they would suddenly become a minority compared to the Indochinese of ethnic Viet origin.

Conversely, determined to head off the “Khmerization” of ethnic Viet living in Cambodia, many Vietnamese understood the importance of pushing not only for the creation an Indochinese Federation, but also for the establishment of a corresponding Indochinese colonial citizenship. Hostile to just such an eventuality, Khemarak Bottra argued as fol-

---

\(^{37}\) ‘À qui devrait appartenir le Cambodge?’ *La Presse indochinoise*, no. 491 (26 August 1934), p. 6.
Going Indochinese

lows to his Vietnamese readers tempted by the idea of going Indochinese along legal lines:

Of course, Cambodia is not a province: It is a real country with its national patrimony and its consciousness of its future. Though it constitutes part of the Indochinese Union, it must be considered separate in terms of its development in all areas and in terms of the use of its resources. It can only be considered an integral part of the I.U. [Indochinese Union] in terms of its [foreign] relations and external security. [... ] I can well imagine that the French ideal is to lead all of the Indochinese countries together. But nothing prevents it from [administering Indochina] by its parts [pays], in responding to each in terms of its own means. [...] and as for the accomplishment of its obligations in the future, France should adopt the idea of “Annam for the Annamese and Annamese for Annam” just as she should support “Cambodia for the Cambodians and Cambodians for Cambodia”. There you have something which is entirely logical and equitable. 38

Unlike their Vietnamese and French counterparts, very few Khmer nationalists before World War II were willing to speak of “Indochina for the Indochinese”, let alone Indochinese citizenship. As Khemarak Bottra put it, “As for France, it’s always the same for Her; She’s always for the I.U. [Indochinese Union].” 39 Not this Cambodian colonial subject. In 1937, in what would have struck French colonial thinkers as heresy, Khemeravanich called for the deconstruction of the French Indochinese colonial state in favour of creating a separate Khmer colonial state closer in line with the Cambodian national form he had in mind. It was this smaller territorial space, which would serve as the basis of a new Cambodian nationality of an assimilationist if colonial kind:

The institution known as the Indochinese Union, the equivalent in fact of the annexation of Cambodia by the Annamese, is bad for our national

38 Khémarak Bottra, ‘Cambodge aux cambodgiens et cambodgiens pour le Cambodge’, p. 6. This phrase emerged in 1934 apparently. It was directly linked to increasing Khmer demands to have a bigger role in their administration and jobs. ‘À qui devrait appartenir le Cambodge ?’ La Presse indochinoise, no. 491 (26 August 1934), p. 1.

39 Khémarak Bottra, ‘Cambodge aux cambodgiens et cambodgiens pour le Cambodge’, p. 6. One French official reported to Paris that the creation of a Dominion indochinoise would not work because “there were not yet common Indochinese aspirations”. ‘Note d’ensemble sur les problèmes évoqués par les vœux politiques’, p. 27, in box BK.IV, Guernut Commission, CAOM.
Contesting Space and Place in Indochina: Laotian and Cambodian Views

future. If, in effect, the Annamese countries and our own belonged to different masters, for example the former to the Netherlands and us to the French – our frontier in the East would have survived and the Annamese would not be able to stride across it without having to deal with endless passport formalities. I have the firm conviction that the generous French people will not let such a situation continue for long in Cambodia, something which they would have never allowed in France. If not, then [France] will have to answer before History. Those who hold the levers of power should put themselves in our shoes in order to govern us. They should make an effort to Khmerize here all Asians who are not Khmers, which is about one third of the population! In short, the French should give us at least the semblance of a having a national government.40

The problem of course was that the colonial state was territorially Indochinese; Cambodia was but a subgroup. In a fascinating twist, however, several Cambodians came up with a solution they found elsewhere in colonial Southeast Asia. On 2 September 1937, “I.K.” asked the French to detach Cambodia from French Indochina, to administer it as a separate colonial entity. This coincided with the 1937 British separation of the province of Burma from the colonial state of “British India” (in part because of Burmese hostility to growing numbers of Indians working within the province). Cambodia, like Burma under the British, would remain a French colonial state, but it would adopt an assimilationist nationality transforming the ethnic Viet (and Chinese) into “Cambodians”. The reality of colonial Indochina was clearly already in trouble down below, among the colonized, long before the Japanese brought down the entire house in March 1945.41

This Cambodian–Vietnamese exchange also brought the colonizer into the picture. In November 1937, the Résident supérieur, Mr. Thibaudeau, called on Cambodian elites to quit complaining, to take their destiny into their own hands, and to put Cambodia on the road to “progress”. If “Cambodia was to be for the Cambodians”, he retorted, then the Cambodians had to work harder. Yes, he responded, the Vietnamese had long dominated civil servant posts; but it was because Cambodian

40 ‘L’éternelle question’, L’Annam Nouveau, no. 677 (15 August 1937), p. 1, which had first appeared in the Presse indochinoise, as a response to Chu Ha (my emphasis).
youths had never demonstrated the same enthusiasm for working in the colonial bureaucracy. The French had had no choice but to rely on others while waiting for the Cambodians to step up.\textsuperscript{42}

Mr. Marinetti, the delegate for Cambodia to the Ministry of the Colonies, a man who considered himself to be “more Khmer than the Khmer themselves” (his words), also opposed these Cambodian calls for separatism. The British may have detached Burma from British India, but it was unthinkable for the French to do so in Indochina. The bottom line, as he commented in the “great” Vietnamese–Cambodian debate of the 1930s, was that “in Cambodia, we live under French law”, meaning that colonial Indochina took precedence over Cambodia in territorial terms. While he did not say it, he was implicitly calling on the Cambodians to be good little Indochinese citizens instead of secessionist-minded nationalists. However, he forgot to mention that there was still no such thing as a legally constituted category or definition of “Indochinese citizenship” for turning those living within the territorial borders of colonial Indochina into proper “Indochinese” citizens.\textsuperscript{43}

Our Cambodian colonial nationalists were not impressed. In a remarkable extension of the debate, Khemeravanich responded directly to the colonizer, Mr. Marinetti, via the press. He criticized this French defender of Cambodia publicly by saying that, if he were really “more Khmer than the Khmer”, then he should logically try to change French laws detrimental to the Cambodians’ very identity. Speaking ironically, he called on this French friend of Cambodia, as Cambodia’s representative to the Ministry of Colonies, to support Cambodian interests or, implicitly, to get out of the way: “Is it not the duty of the administration to help them [the Cambodians] to stand up since they admit that they are unable to do it themselves? It is a request which we send to the government”.\textsuperscript{44} Khemarak Bottha was even blunter: “And as long as [France] does not change its current, disastrous Indochinese regime to

\textsuperscript{42} Khy Phanra, \textit{La communauté vietnamienne au Cambodge}, pp. 234–236.
\textsuperscript{44} Khemaravanik, ‘Le problème annamite au Cambodge’, \textit{L’Annam Nouveau}, no. 693 (10 October 1937), p. 4.
Contesting Space and Place in Indochina: Laotian and Cambodian Views

which it forces our Kampuchea to join, how can France deserve the title of protector of the Khmer, tell me?”

It appears that this friend of Cambodia, Mr. Marinetti, woke up to Cambodian calls for change. Around 1938, still as a member of the Conseil supérieur de la France d’Outre-mer, he sent a report to the Ministry of the Colonies, arguing that the French had to respond to the needs of all the Indochinese, and not just to those of the Vietnamese. This was a significant change of tack in French policy dating from the days of Paul Beau and Jules Harmand. Marinetti asked the government to reserve administrative posts for members of the Cambodian elite and, in a major volte-face, he solicited a greater degree of political and economic “autonomy” for Cambodia within the Indochinese edifice. He concluded that these “reasonable demands” were needed and that it would be “unforgivable not to implement them.” Colonial alliances and policy were clearly changing by the late 1930s.

Vietnamese editors of La Tribune Indigène were stunned by what they saw, shocked that Marinetti, a French colonial administrator, could make such a colonial concession to Cambodian nationalists. Many Vietnamese feared that the French government might just pursue some of his suggestions. To them, Marinetti’s recommendation of increased autonomy for Cambodia within French Indochina smacked of separatism. In such a scenario, what would happen to their “nationals”, if Cambodia were to attain increased legal autonomy decision-making powers vis-à-vis the rest of Indochina? La Tribune Indochinoise, the mouthpiece for southern Cochinchinese elites allied with the French, replied that rather than advancing towards a break-up of the colonial state along national lines, it was essential to move towards the creation of a more inclusive Indochinese identity.

La Tribune indochinoise asked why the Cambodians were talking of leaving Indochina when the French, in fact, were trying to turn the Federation into a reality: “But why evoke such an eventuality, when for ages French policy has precisely tried to turn the Indochinese Union into a homogenous and harmonious fed-

Fearful that the French would accede to Cambodian demands for increased autonomy, these Vietnamese focused their sights on the French Indochinese model as the best way to protect their nationals in Laos and Cambodia from the potential “khmerization”, “laoification”, or expulsion discussed above. As one Vietnamese responded to Khemeravanich’s separatist arguments: “It is necessary to think of Indochina as a great family whose members must love one another, protect each other, help each other and support one another mutually.” Bui Quang Chieu, the leading spokesmen for the Constitutionalist party, had already spoken in 1931 of the need to create an “Indochinese citizenship” in order to hold Indochina together.

As this long debate shows, colonial legal categories were clearly on the minds of the colonized, directly affecting relations among “Indochinese” elites during the colonial period. These categories were contested, resented, and often rejected, but they were also coveted and pushed by the colonized depending on where one was residing in colonial Indochina. These categories contributed directly to how the colonized saw themselves in relation to the colonizer and in relation to other colonized Asian groups living in the colonial state. As Bui Quang Chieu’s case shows, one could demand the nationalization of the Chinese on the one hand, while simultaneously defending a special colonial status for Vietnamese subjects in Cambodia if not the creation of Indochinese colonial citizenship. Balandier’s colonial encounter was anything but static. Differences over place as much as space had begun during the colonial period, not after it, as our last debate demonstrates.

**ACT II: THE FAILURE OF INDOCHINESE CITIZENSHIP: THE DECREES OF 31 MAY 1935 IN LAOS**

In 1935, the French set off a third, related Indochinese debate, when they approved an assimilationist definition of nationality for the colonial territory of Laos. In so doing, the colonizer paradoxically if not
disingenuously called into question the reality of French Indochina as a viable territorial framework with a corresponding citizenship. This occurred on 31 May 1935, when Louis Marty, the former head of the Indochinese Sûreté now stationed to Laos, signed into law a decree that changed in the stroke of a pen the legal status of ethnic Viet living in Laos. This law effectively placed ethnic Vietnamese/Annamese villages and their headmen under the legal supervision of Laotian authorities (chau muong). Unlike the Chinese congregations in eastern Indochina, the Vietnamese in Laos could no longer legally bypass the local Laotian authorities to deal directly with the French colonial authorities (though they continued to do so). Theoretically, the Vietnamese chief had to deal both with the French Résident supérieur and the Lao naiban and/or tasseng, who determined who would be chief of the ethnic Viet groupings.

Outraged, Vietnamese nationalists across Indochina argued that such a legal change could potentially exclude Vietnamese from moving to Laos, whereas the subordination of the Vietnamese living in Laos to Laotian authorities could transform these ethnic Vietnamese colonial subjects into Laotian nationals! Numerous Vietnamese went straight to local libraries to study the French legal texts themselves. They returned with revealing arguments. For one, some said, French law as laid down in the 1884 treaty held that, as French protégés and sujets, “the Annamese abroad will be placed under the French protectorate”. Therefore, they could not be subjected to “foreign” Laotian authority. Those Vietnamese residing or working in Laos were thus subject to French legal authority, not that of the Laotians. Conversely, if a protected ethnic Lao subject could not be subordinated to Tonkinese or Annamese mandarins and nationalities in eastern Indochina, then how could the ethnic Viet sujet protégé be placed under local Lao control in Laos? Both were protec-

51 As the legal language put it: “tout sujet ou protégé français indochinois, originaires d’un autre pays de l’Union que le Laos”.
52 ‘Arrêté’, Vientiane, 31 May 1935, signed Louis Marty, file 2398 (2), box 271, Nouveau Fonds, Indochine, CAOM and Pham Huy Luc, ‘Le statut politique des Annamites au Laos’, La Tribune Républicaine, no. 13 (1 March 1936), p. 6. Children born in Laos of an “Indochinese mother and father who are not Lao” would not be required to obtain an identity card on obtaining adult status. While it was not stated explicitly, it appears that they would be considered as Laotian colonial nationals.
torates.54 Or, as another argument ran, the French had to protect the Vietnamese protected subjects from “nationalization”, even from within the Indochinese colonial state!

From its position, by establishing its tutorship over our country, France assumed the task of protecting Annam (meaning Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China) and its nationals both on the inside and the outside [outside “Annam” or “Indochina”?]. However, it was never a question for France to delegate her authority to a third power above all when this power is Laos, that is, a country which, until a recent past, was a tributary of our country.55

When the Popular Front’s Guernut commission turned to Laos in 1937, the Vietnamese president of the Association mutuelle et sportive des Annamites petitioned the French to elaborate a new legal status for the ethnic Vietnamese in Laos so that they did not have to become Laotian nationals. He specifically asked for the abrogation of the May 1935 decree, which had established the “arbitrary pre-eminence of the indigenous”, that is the “Laotian”, over the Vietnamese in Laos. Because of their modernizing role in developing Laos, this representative felt that the Vietnamese deserved a special legal status. The French Résident supérieur did not think so, defending to the Ministry of the Colonies the importance of the 1935 decision:

This [Vietnamese] petition, inspired by questions of pride, I would even say of a racial nature (quite strange to find in an element that complains precisely of being subject to “racial prejudice”), is unfounded. It is normal that, living in the Laotian country, the Annamese immigrants are subject to the control of the authorities of this country. In practice, this text has not been applied, at least not in the province of Vientiane or in Luang Prabang where the tong truong (Viet village head) works directly with the Residence. At the most, one could allow the Annamese in Laos located in urban centres to interact directly with the Residents concerning their affairs, but they should [nonetheless] not be exonerated from the indispensable control of the indigenous [Laotian] authorities.56

55 Nam Dan, ‘Sous la couple des autorités laottiennes’, La Gazette de Hue, no. 40 (29 November 1936), p. 3.
The Résident supérieur’s argument that it was “normal” that those living in Laos were subordinated to indigenous, Laotian authorities no doubt thrilled Laotian nationalists like Phetsarath and his counterparts in Cambodia seeking the right to assimilate via law. However, it also set a major legal precedent that ran against the creation of a wider Indochinese legal identity. In fact, it legally opened the way for the non-Indochinese assimilation of other ‘foreign’ Asian groups located in other territorial subunits (pays) in the Indochinese Union. In other words, the 1935 decree was a landmark in identity making in colonial Indochina, for it laid the legal foundations for defining and constituting membership along national lines. And all of this was occurring during the colonial period.

Vietnamese elites were shocked, seeing themselves on the nationalist losing end of these new colonial legal decisions. And in certain ways, they were. After all, “Vietnam” remained divided into three legally distinct entities and nationalities. To my knowledge, the French never considered adopting legal changes to unify Tonkin, Annam, and CochinChina into one single territorial entity complete with its corresponding citizenship. To make matters worse, Republican Chinese nationalists had successfully negotiated an international treaty with the French by which many Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese métis (ming huong) living in Indochina would be considered as Chinese “nationals”, and not as “CochinChinese” or “Indochinese” ones. In a revealing objection, in late 1935, a Vietnamese writer, Nam Dan, noted acerbically:

At the time when the Chinese immigrants residing in Annam [meaning all three Vietnamese pays] benefit from a favourable [legal] system developed by the new Franco-Chinese convention and see themselves promoted to the ranks of privileged foreigners [like the Japanese], it is to say the least strange that the Annamese immigrants in Laos are held to such a strict legal ruling and they (the Annamese) become there [in Laos] diminished nationals (ressortissants).

57 In 1939, under Khmer nationalist pressure, the Résident supérieur limited eligibility for the exam for secretaries in his Résidence to Cambodian candidates and “sujet français” born in Cambodia. Khy Phanra, ‘La communauté vietnamienne au Cambodge’, p. 235.

58 Was this because demands for such unity and citizenship were less vocal than those of the Khmer and the Lao? This question remains unclear.

The problem was that in the end the French defined the categories, not the Vietnamese. The latter were part of a colonial state and this time the French were backtracking on their policy of conceiving of Indochina in aggressive Franco-Annamese terms (see chapter 1). If the Vietnamese hoped to prevent the potential nationalization of their compatriots into Laotian and Cambodian colonial subjects, the only other remaining legal alternative they had at their disposal was, again, to push for the creation of an Indochinese federal state in which they would constitute the majority. This meant supporting a wider, inclusive Indochinese citizenship that would override the contesting national ones the Laotian and Cambodians were advocating. Bui Quang Chieu, the editor of *La Tribune indochinoise* and one of the first to make this connection in 1931, was a fervent supporter of creating an Indochinese citizenship. Less than a year after the application of the 1935 decree on Laos, he argued that the political structures for building an Indochinese identity were already in place: “In the *Grand Conseil de l’Indochine,*” he said, “Lao members mingle fraternally with those of Annam, Tonkin, and Cochinchina. Even better, these representatives of Laos and Cambodia merge very often their votes with those of the Annamese on a number of questions.” He categorically opposed the 1935 Lao decree, knowing full well that it set a precedent for the legal break-up of Indochina right down the middle. In February 1936, he returned to the Indochinese idea, saying that while he understood the French desire to slow “Annamese expansion” westwards, he countered that this immigration was only natural since the Vietnamese played the major role in the policy of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration and in the modernization of the colony. He warned implicitly, however, that the 1935 decision, if maintained, would mean that the “Indochinese Union is nothing but a vain formula”. And he was right. Indeed, as of 1936, there was still no such thing as a coherent, inclusive French Indochinese colonial state or citizenship. There was no Indochinese federation.

These categories had particularly important consequences for the ethnic Viet living in Laos and Cambodia as they quickly realized. In a

---


1938 editorial, one Annamese journalist pleaded with the French to allow “Annamese” children access to the same educational opportunities in Cambodia as the Cambodians. The French administration “cannot ignore [...] its Annamese children. Logically, they must be considered with less rigour by the fact that they, too, are Indochinese and one-hundred percent French subjects. It is thus not excessive to ask whether an Indochinese [read: an Annamese residing in Cambodia] can or cannot attend the schools of Indochina [read: in Cambodia].”\textsuperscript{62} As complicated as these legal categories most certainly were, all of these exchanges among the colonized confirm that few if any Laotian and Cambodian elites were ready to go Indochinese on the eve of World War II.

On the eve of World War II, notions of place and space in French Indochina were real, but they were also very contested among nationalists living on both sides of the Indochinese divide. On the one hand, the idea of an “Indochinese Nation” was quite conceivable for many Vietnamese, both for those allied with the French and those working against them. On the other hand, by the mid-1930s Laotian and Cambodian nationalists had adopted a remarkably hostile attitude towards Franco-Vietnamese talk of Indochina, seeing it as a major threat to realizing nation-states along “Laotian” and “Cambodian” lines. Among the Vietnamese, the “Indochinese” model also had serious competition from those pushing an inclusive identity anchored in and uniting the ethnic Viet of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina in the form of “Vietnam”.

The colonizer was just as confused. In spite of all the talk of creating an Indochinese federation to counter nationalists and communist threats to the colonial order, the French had yet to create such a state or a corresponding citizenship. French Indochina remained an amalgam of colonies, protectorates, and military territories. Renewed foreign and anti-colonialist threats during World War II led the French to dust off their federal idea under the Vichy regime, stimulate local patriotisms, and mobilize monarchs to do so. The only thing that was really new under Vichy was that the Japanese occupation of all of Indochina, combined with Thai territorial designs on Laos and Cambodia, saw colonial authorities officially extend their policy of collaboration to Laos and Cambodia for the first time.\(^1\) However, far from representing a break

---

\(^1\) For more on Sarraut, Pasquier and the cultural politics of Indochinese monarchies, see my ‘Un « cul de plomb » et un « fou génial »: La mobilisation corporelle des rois coloniaux Bao Dai et Sihanouk en Indochine (1919–1945)’, forthcoming
Going Indochinese

with the past, Vichy’s governor general Jean Decoux largely continued Albert Sarraut and Pierre Pasquier’s dual policy combining Indochinese federalism on the one hand with the mobilization of monarchies and local traditions on the other. The goal was the same: to hold on to Indochina colonially. Keeping these two policies on track, however, would be no mean feat for Vichy authorities because 1941 was not 1919 when Albert Sarraut made his Van Mieu speech, nor was it 1930–31 when Pierre Pasquier tried to head off revolts. Moreover, long before Decoux took over at the helm in Indochina, the notion of Indochinese federalism or of an Indochinese identity was already in deep trouble. And by stimulating local patriotic identities and monarchies, Decoux’s team only made the creation of an Indochinese state all the harder to realize.

THE WEAKNESS OF THE INDOCHINESE MODEL ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR

True, Indochina had taken form in many Vietnamese minds by World War II. However, as the Japanese moved into northern Indochina in late 1940, this concept did not yet have the critical mass needed to allow for an Indochinese leap of faith. Some might argue that time was the real problem. A few more decades of French colonialism, accompanied by large-scale industrialization and ethnic Viet immigration westwards, and the mechanisms of colonialism might well have transformed the Indochinese idea into a concrete bureaucratic and economic reality for enough Vietnamese to go Indochinese. Pham Le Bong and Tieu Van certainly thought so, as we saw in chapter 2.

Nor did material connections have the time to take hold down below. Had the Trans-Indochinese railway penetrated widely into Laos and Cambodia as Sarraut had originally envisioned it in 1921, instead of linking Vietnam down the middle, the Indochinese house would have had a firmer material base upon which to set its foundation. But the French first laid tracks for southern China before heading southwards to Saigon. The Hanoi-Saigon railway was not completed until 1936, only four years before the Japanese occupation, while the lines between Saigon and Phnom Penh and between Vinh and Thakhek were


120
never completed before the war. No train ever moved south from Hanoi to Saigon via Vientiane, Battambang, and Phnom Penh. In French Indochina, the rail system never had the time to link the different regions and local economies of the colony into an Indochinese unit (though of course it did link people along its route and contributed to Vietnamese unity!)\(^2\) As a French rail expert wrote on this subject in 1936, “the Trans-Indochinese line will constitute firstly a material and tangible link in the union of the different pays of the Indochinese Federation. But it will take years before ‘a sense of [an Indochinese] nation’, to borrow Mr. Albert Sarraut’s term, can emerge from this amorphous mass of races”.\(^3\) It is, however, true that an unprecedented network of roads and canals linked Cambodia to Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin. However, Colonial Route 13 – the real Trans-Indochinese line running down the entire Mekong valley – was only completed in the mid-1930s.\(^4\) As for Laos, it was only in late 1930s as the Thai threat began to loom large that increased public works projects started, linking this wayward son more closely to the Indochinese family.

Time and transport connections were important, but there was more to it than that. Benedict Anderson is certainly right to emphasize differences between the Dutch and French education policies, the latter implementing language policies that worked against a common bureaucratic language, and eventual Indochinese identity, while the former facilitated an Indonesian person, with a language that was not Javanese,

---

2 In an astonishing affirmation, David Del Testa seems to think that I don’t think trains and railroads link space and time. See his “Imperial Corridor: Association, Transportation and Power in French Colonial Indochina”, Science, Technology & Society, vol. 4, no. 2 (1999), pp. 346–347, note 4. What I argued and what I restate here in the clearest, possible terms is that the railway and the train could not link people and mentalities in an Indochinese way for the simple fact that no train to this day runs through western Indochina (Vietnam alone is not Indochina), that means via Laos and Cambodia. That the railway linked people and contributed to reinforcing a Vietnamese idea of space and identity is obvious.


4 For two wonderful Vietnamese accounts of colonial route 13, the real Indochinese highway, see Nguyen Khac Nguyen, Tren Duong Thuoc Dia So 13 (conférence faite à l’APIMA), Hanoi, 23 April 1939 and Hy Sinh, et. al, Con Duong so 13, Hanoi(?) : Asiatic édition, 1940(?).
but a shared Malay (Bahasa Indonesia).\textsuperscript{5} No such unifying language emerged in colonial Indochina, not even French. Backed by the colonial education system and a wider strategic desire to re-root the colonized in their “traditions”, languages, and colonially controlled and sanitized patriotic pasts, Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians continued to learn their respective languages and individual “traditions”. The widespread idea that the colonized only learned about their ancient ancestors the “Les Gaullois” and did so in French is erroneous. Colonial strategists led by Sarraut and especially Pasquier incorporated educational programs that sought to stimulate local patriotisms, monarchies, and languages in order to combat those who would contest the French right to rule and position the French and their local allies as the real repositories of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian identities and pasts.\textsuperscript{6} True, French had served as a connecting language for nationalists trying to communicate with each other across the Indochinese divide in the 1930s (chapter 4); however, neither French nor Vietnamese for that matter ever obtained the critical mass needed to make it “the” Indochinese language for everyone, certainly not for ethnic Lao, Khmer, and Viet peasant majorities. The contrast to the French Maghreb is clear.

Moreover, in French Indochina, at least until 1940, the Laotian and Cambodians were not experiencing Indochina like the Vietnamese. Their participation in the French Indochinese administration remained miniscule. Official travel lists in the Bulletins administratifs leave no doubt that Laotian and Cambodian bureaucrats were not going east to work in Vinh or Saigon as often as the Vietnamese were going west to work in Phnom Penh or Vientiane.\textsuperscript{7} For cultural differences


\textsuperscript{7} See also ‘Conclusion du Résident Supérieur au Laos, Eutrope’, in \textit{Rapport de Tezenas du Montcel} (document in my possession), p. 12. One might note that Prince Souphanouvong was schooled in eastern Indochina and France. He was as much at ease in French as in Vietnamese. His voyage east and marriage to a Vietnamese gave perhaps more substance to his ability to go Indochinese in a Vietnamese way. See, for example, the letter he penned in the Viet Minh’s official mouthpiece to French officials in October 1945 criticizing their efforts to turn
too complex to explore here, the Laotians and Cambodians did not share the Confucian politico-cultural penchant for linking education to bureaucratic careers. The French reinforced these divergences by promoting Reformed Pagoda Schools for the Cambodians and Laotians that were never designed to train Indochinese civil servants, let alone to bring the eastern and western halves of Indochina together despite the Indochinese speak. The number of Khmer students formed in these Pagodas in Cambodia increased from 53 in 1924 to 3,000 in 1930, reaching 51,991 in 1946, whereas in Laos 2,375 Lao students attended 115 schools, increasing to 7,549 youngsters in 387 Pagoda Schools in 1935. There they learned Khmer or Lao, studied a little Buddhism and history, and even absorbed some French-programmed stereotypes of the Chinese and Vietnamese before returning to their villages.

Of those few who undertook advanced studies in eastern Indochina, most were of royal blood. Prince Sihanouk was a graduate of Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon (like his father), whereas Prince Souphanouvong studied at the Lycée Albert Sarraut in Hanoi. Unlike the Indonesians, the paths of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian students and bureaucrats simply did not cross very often, be it in the Pagoda Schools, scouting organizations, the colonial army, or the “Indochinese university” located in Hanoi. The division of the western Indochinese bureaucracies into two separate halves – the indigenous one staffed by Laotian
and Cambodians and the Indochinese one manned overwhelmingly by Vietnamese – hardly created shared work experiences. There were certainly exceptions, but they were rare. Traditions, cultures, languages, education, associations, and work remained largely distinct. And as we saw in chapter 4, Laotian and Cambodian elites were increasingly opposed to the special Franco-Vietnamese relationship in Indochina, with the problem of increasing Vietnamese immigration being highest on the list.

The hyphen in the word “Indo-China” was thus important, symbolic of a deeper, cultural divide which the French did not succeed in bridging, even though they dropped the hyphen around 1930. In 1936, an official representative concluded that the idea of the “Indochinese Union” remained mysterious: “Time and again, the existence of Cambodia and Laos seems to have been simply forgotten (semble avoir été simplement oubliée), without a doubt the result of what could be called the mystique of the Indochinese Union”. On reading this report, French Governor General, René Robin, took issue with this interpretation but conceded nonetheless that efforts had to be made to bring the Laotians and Cambodians into the Indochinese family. “For reasons of a political order”, he insisted,

I do not think that this Union can be considered by the Laotians in only symbolic terms. If we do not get the Laotians to understand the necessity and above all the interest that they have in rallying to this Union, under French sovereignty, we run the risk of seeing them turn their gaze, no longer towards the other Indochinese pays [i.e., Tonkin, Annam or Cochinchina], but towards the left [right, sic] bank of the Mekong [read: Siam which was becoming Thailand at this same time] … .

12 Nor did Cambodian, Laotian, or Vietnamese elites team up in the colonial capital of Paris, for example, to rethink the future together. Part of this is no doubt linked to the fact that, compared to the Vietnamese, fewer Laotian and Cambodians were going to study in France. Of those “western Indochinese” elites who did go to France, none of them became as involved in politics as their Vietnamese counterparts. The most highly trained Laotian nationalist of the time, Prince Phetsarath, certainly did not join forces with Vietnamese in France to re-imagine the postcolonial state in Indochinese terms. For anticolonial connections in the metropole, see Benedict Anderson, Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination, London: Verso, 2007.

13 ‘Indochine ou Indo-Chine’, Annam Nouveau, 5 March 1931, p. 3.
One Last Try? Vichy’s Turn

The head of the French official delegation sent by the Popular Front government to investigate the needs and desires of the local populations came to a similar conclusion when he wrote: “There is not yet an Indochinese aspiration shared by all our protégés [...]. Certain good intentioned souls have taken up this idea of an Indochinese Federation and support it with their authority. Although one must not reject this hypothesis outright, it seems difficult given the present situation to envisage seriously the constitution of an Indochinese Federal State”. Indeed, during the Popular Front period (1936–39), the ideas of an Indochinese Federation, Dominion and Autonomy were debated yet again but were never – to my knowledge – advocated by Laotians or Cambodians. In 1937, Vietnamese representatives of the Chambre du Tonkin asked for the constitution of an Indochinese Federation of five pays, each of which would be equipped with a Senate containing an equal number of “French” and “Indochinese” representatives. As an autonomous entity, this Federation would have its own army. Nothing came of this. And as long as coherent political status for Indochina did not come into being, one French observer wrote, France would find it difficult to bestow a real “personality” to the idea of “Indochina”. It is hard to disagree.

What French colonial thinkers seemed to have forgotten in the 1930s is that for decades they had predicated their colonial rule in Indochina on a special relationship with the Vietnamese. They seem to have been caught completely off guard by the intensity of the Cambodian and Laotian attacks on the Franco-Vietnamese conception of Indochina in the 1930s (chapter 4). And yet as soon as trouble was in the air, the French instinctively fell back on Indochinese federalism and the policy of channelling local monarchies and patriotisms their

15 ‘Note d’ensemble sur les problèmes évoqués par les vœux politiques’, p. 27, in CG, box Bk, IV, Tonkin, CAOM.
16 Patrice Morlat, La Répression coloniale au Vietnam (1908–1940), Paris, L’Harmattan, 1990, p. 244, n. 69. This is almost certainly a reference to the Indochinese Federal ideas advanced by Pham Huy Luc in 1936 and 1937. Similar arguments were debated in a wide-range of leading quoc ngu papers, with the most interesting ones to be found in Tan Viet-Nam in October 1937. ‘Truc-tri hay tu-tri’, Tan Viet-Nam, no. 11 (6 October 1937), p. 1; ‘Hoa-uoc chi la cai nha pha tuong’, Tan Viet-Nam, no. 14 (16 October 1937), p. 1; and ‘Neu Dong-Duong duoc Tu-Tri’, Tan Viet-Nam, no. 13 (13 October 1937), p. 1.
17 Harlay, ‘Un Dominion indochinois est-il possible?’, Le Courrier de Haiphong, (17 December 1938).
way. Vichy was no exception to this rule. In 1939 and 1940, convinced finally that the Cambodian elites and their political aspirations had to be taken seriously, Résident Supérieur Thibeaudeau informed Governor General Catroux then his Vichy successor, Admiral Jean Decoux, of the Cambodian demands of a non-Indochinese kind. However, like Sarraut and Pasquier, Decoux could not accept Cambodian objections to Indochinese federalism at the very moment he was moving to resurrect it. He could not countenance the potential disassociation of Indochina along Cambodian and Laotian lines as the Thais resumed their efforts to deconstruct French Indochina from the west and the Japanese moved in from the north. Upon taking power, Decoux thus rejected the Cambodian proposals calling for a “Burmese solution”. The Indochinese colonial model had to take precedence and maintain its territorial integrity. The result under Vichy was an even more fanciful set of Indochinese fictions than ever before. 18

INDOCHINESE REDUX – VICHY

Faced with Japanese occupation and Thai efforts to roll back Indochina in the west, Decoux tried earnestly to create a “real” and “living” Indochinese identity. 19 By 1941, Japanese troops had occupied all of Indochina. Given France’s collaboration with Nazi Germany, Tokyo’s main ally, Decoux remained in place to run French Indochina under Japanese supervision. That said, Japanese occupation made it clear to the Indochinese that the French were not invincible, nor did they exercise a monopoly over relationships with the colonized. Although the Japanese shared Decoux’s hostility towards the communists led by Ho Chi Minh, they nonetheless supported a range of patriotic groups often hostile to the French, such as the Cao Dai and Hoa Hoa, and such nationalists as Son Ngoc Thanh,


One Last Try? Vichy’s Turn

Phetsarath, and Ngo Dinh Diem. Moreover, the Japanese alliance with the Thais allowed Bangkok to resurrect its nineteenth-century greater Thai policy (discussed in chapter 1) and obtain large swaths of territories in western Laos and Cambodia. As Paul Beau had feared in the late 19th century, the Thais began rolling back French Indochina in 1941, four years before the Japanese brought down the colonial state.

In a careful balancing act, Decoux and his entourage went to work devising cultural policies to sustain Indochina French in its hour of greatest need.20 Adhering to cultural and educational policies underway in Vichy France but already in existence in Indochina since the revolts of 1930–31 (see chapters 2 and 4), Decoux stressed “Tradition” and the idea of “discovering” and “resurrecting” the “True” Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laotian patrimonies as part of a larger Indochinese one to be led by la Mère Patrie. Like Sarraut and Pasquier, Decoux turned to Indochinese federalism to hold the line against France’s enemies and expanded his predecessors’ support of Bao Dai to include the Laotian King Sisavangvong and his Cambodian counterpart, Norodom Sihanouk. These local monarchs would help the French to reach and mobilize the “people” in favor of the French.21

Decoux’s highly erudite cultural team consciously fanned particular patriotisms through subtle propaganda drives, the formation of youth groups, as well as expanding sporting, scouting, and youth organisations.22 Textbooks were rewritten, articles evoked the glorious nationalist histories of the three patries of Indochina, Buddhist tradition and Confucian values received pride of place, victories against the Thais proliferated, though Nam Tien was conspicuously absent (chapter 1). National anthems, flags, and symbols were designed and diffused for all three countries. Significantly, Vichy never endowed the Indochinese Federation with its own flag or national anthem.23 Decoux’s entou-

21 See my ‘Un « cul de plomb » et un « fou génial ».
22 See Jennings, Vichy in the Tropics, chapters 6–7 and Raffin, Youth Mobilization, chapters 2–4.
23 On discovering, see Jean Saumont, ‘Notre programme’ and Duong Quang Ham, ‘Culture française et culture annamite’, both in Indochine, no. 1 (12 September 1940), pp. 1–2, 3 respectively. Wonderful examples of the ‘real’ Vietnam and Cambodia are in Premiers pas sur la piste, Fédération indochinoise de scoutisme,
Figure 14: Vichy and Indochinese traditions (Dan Bao, 5 March 1942)
One Last Try? Vichy’s Turn

rage did, however, organize tours to bring youth and leaders together in Indochinese ways. In 1943, the Tour d’Indochine sent hundreds of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and French youths pedalling feverishly across all of Indochina. The main idea behind this 4,000-kilometre race was, according to its main organizer Maurice Ducoroy, to allow these Indochinese youth to “study the customs and traditions, to observe the sites throughout the lands they would cross, [and] to realize on the ground (sur place) the diversity of Indochina […]. Through these representatives of the Indochinese youth, we were hoping that, after having contemplated and reflected [on what they saw], they would be able to announce the truth [of the Indochina] surrounding them.”

Even Sihanouk took pleasure in attending the football (soccer) matches alternating between his Cochinchinese alma mater, Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon, and the Sisowath lycée in Phnom Penh. The new king of Cambodia had proudly lit the Indochinese Torch, which “Indochinese youths” carried solemnly from Angkor Wat to Hanoi in 1941.

Decoux marched his kings throughout Indochina, too. He personally crowned Sihanouk in 1941 and then dispatched him into the Cambodian countryside to rally the people to the Franco-Indochinese cause. The governor general also sent Sihanouk to Vietnam and Laos as part of an effort to associate local monarchies in Indochinese ways, while Laos’ Sisavangvong reciprocated with visits to Phnom Penh. Thanks to Vichy, Bao Dai and Sihanouk got to know each for the first time.

Years later, Sihanouk reminisced fondly on his travels around Vichy Indochina: “There again, it was Decoux who sent me down the roads of Indochina, from Saigon to Ha Long bay, from Qui Nhon to Dalat, from Vientiane to Luang Prabang”. When French journalist Jean Lacouture asked him whether these “trips contributed to your ability to think of a

---

24 Ducoroy, Ma trahison, pp. 169–189.
25 Ducoroy, Ma trahison, p.119.
certain ‘Indochinese’ reality’, Sihanouk immediately responded in the affirmative:

Exactly. When I speak of Indochina [today], I feel it and I see it better than most of my interlocutors [in the 1960s]. I visited the Campha mines and the Hue palaces, the Plain of Jars and Nha Trang, Tourane that is now Danang. I loved most of all Hanoi. What a beautiful place then, charming, noble! Recently, I saw it again, certainly less beautiful, wounded by the war, but still so glorious! The pride for all of us, Indochinese!27

These cultural policies were part of the crafting of a larger Indochinese political identity to thwart those competing for the hearts and minds of the colonized. In June 1942, for example, Decoux officially banned the term “indigène” and replaced it with the word “indochinois”.28 Although this in no way meant a rethinking of colonial legal categories discussed in chapter 4, this semantic change was another attempt to think in Indochinese terms and to increase the number of “Indochinois” in the higher reaches of the administration, to provide them with a stake in the colonial state, to ensure their loyalty.

That Vichy’s Indochina was increasingly based on three major national monarchies – Annam (Bao Dai), Cambodia (Sihanouk), and Laos (Sisavangvong) – didn’t seem to bother Decoux and his entourage. Faced with Thai irredentism, Decoux even allowed Laotian elites started to ask themselves seriously: “Qui sommes nous?” He even initiated the policies that began to turn Laos into a unified body instead of an amalgam of colonies, protectorates, and military territories.29 All three could coexist with their own traditions thanks to the creation of an Indochinese Federation. Of course the French would run it from on high and provide the “cement” (a term so dear to Sarraut) to hold it together down below. But federalism would allow for local patriotisms to evolve in alliance

28 ‘En Indochine: La suppression du mot «indigène»’, Indochine, no. 93 (June 1942).
with the French and in harmony with each other. In December 1942, an article appeared in Vichy’s mouthpiece *Indochine*, entitled *Fédéralisme indochinois*, in which the author explained why the three *pays* could not stand alone as “nations”, but rather had to be associated within the tripartite framework of the “Federated Nation of Indochina” (*nation fédérale indochinoise*). Given the threats posed by the Japanese, Thais, and Vietnamese communists, “only Indochina as a whole” could serve as the model of “a viable nation.” Of course, each of the three countries would maintain their unique cultural and linguistic characteristics, “just as the Bretons, Basques, and Corsicans had done in becoming French,” but they would all function politically within a newly created *Conseil fédéral indochinois*. Upon its creation in 1943, it consisted of 23 French and 30 Indochinese, of whom 24 were “Annamese”, four “Cambodian”, and two “Laotian.” The preponderance of the Annamese within this institution could not have been lost on Laotian and Cambodian delegates. But once again, the latter had little say in these matters. For reasons of a political order, the three Indochinese *patries* had to recognize that they shared “common interests”,

that they must rely on each other, understanding above all that their common mission is to work together for prosperity and growth, and to display to the world their shared patrimony, the Indochinese Union, linked by destiny and [then] offered by France to History (*lié par le destin et proposée par la France à l’Histoire*).

If this vision of Indochina was not yet real, this triangular entity, Vichy insisted in late 1942, constituted at the very least “a national virtuality” (*une virtualité nationale*). And this is where the Indochinese idea started to become surreal, even delusional. Even Bui Quang Chieu could reverse the *Tribune indochinoise*’s formerly aggressive cultural visions of the Annamese role in Indochina to conclude that the “Indochinese Federation” was becoming “a nation” and that the French language had

31 ‘Indochine: Création d’un Conseil Fédéral Mixte, décret no. 1525’, 31 May 1943 and ‘Note à Vichy de Decoux sur la création d’un Conseil Fédéral Indochinois’, both in file 2762, box 344, Nouveau Fond, Indochine, CAOM. Yet it seems, based on other sources, that a *Conseil Fédéral* was already in place by 1941.
32 Ibid., pp. 1–2.
33 Ibid., p. 2.
“become the common tongue of the Indochinese elite”.

The editorial board of the *Annam Nouveau* had suddenly to forget the chauvinistic arguments proliferated by its founder, Nguyen Van Vinh, to proclaim with Decoux that the “interpenetration” and “interdependence” of Indochina were giving rise at long last to “a living reality”:

The large-scale youth movement that has been unleashed in Indochina under the direction of the General Commissar of Sports and Physical Education, the Captain Ducoroy, and the common education that is being dispensed to all the children of Indochina, *will soon have fused* (*aura tôt fait de fusionner*) Cambodians, Laotians, and Annamese into one unique *personality*. In place of the historic Annamese expansion towards the south and the west, the French Protectorate has substituted [a policy of] peaceful interpenetration among the peoples of the peninsula favorable to a good entente and towards mutual collaboration for the better of the Union.

Some semi-official essays even advanced that a new “Indochinese Civilisation” was actually “coming into being” (*en train de naître*), one which would close the gap between the Indic and Sinic halves of the Indo-China debated so heatedly by Jean Marquet and Pham Quynh on one side and Roland Meyer and Prince Phetsarath on the other (chapter 2). In what is perhaps a veiled allusion to these debates, this essay argued that the cultural fault line between the eastern and western halves of Indo-China could, in fact, be bridged: “In this way, in the cultural domain as well as other areas, the Indochinese Federation will not become, to the great confusion of its detractors, an empty formula or a *hybrid* creation, but rather a living and magnificent reality.” Another essay insisted in 1942 that France had created “a cultural comprehension of the constituting civilisations” that would give rise to “a consciousness of Indochina, a political and cultural reality and not just a geographical and

---


36 Tan Nam Tu, ‘Civilisation Indochinoise’, *Indochine*, no. 42 (25 June 1942), pp. 1–5. This pen-name “Tan Nam Tu” is usually associated with Nguyen Van Vinh himself. If true, then this would mean that the French posthumously published his essay. Nguyen Van Vinh had died in Laos in 1936.

One Last Try? Vichy’s Turn

administrative grouping.” One writer applauding Bui Quang Chieu’s article added that this Indochinese identity was not some “spiritual, fragile or artificial construction, built on moving sand that the first wind would blow away, but it [was] a nation that possesses a shared way of thinking (pensée commune), [a body] of common interests.”

Yet as of 1942 this Indochinese “personality”, this “virtual nation” advanced by French and Vietnamese was still a fiction, as the reliance on the future anterior tense belied yet again and as the outbreak of anti-Vietnamese demonstrations in western Indochina from mid-1945 would only confirm. The appearance of Laotian and Cambodian children personalities in what was in effect Vichy’s updated version of Marquet’s 1928 vision of a Franco-Annamese Indochina was too little and far too late for bringing the Laotians and Cambodians into this magical Indochinese wonderland “proposed” by Vichy. One cannot help but concluding that Vichy’s Indochina was in fact an optical illusion. After all, Decoux was suddenly asking Vietnamese allies to reverse, almost overnight, their formerly aggressive visions of Indochina, which had rarely included the Lao, Khmer or ethnic communities, in order to work in “solidarity” with their newly found western and highland brothers in the pursuit of a larger Indochinese Family. “Peaceful interpenetration” was a marked departure from Tieu Vien’s 1939 Indochinese Nation forged by Vietnamese blood, sweat, and tears. As for the Laotians and Cambodians, they were no doubt thrilled to finally get the attention of the French, but the ethnic friction caused by Annamese movement westwards prior to World War II would be hard to forget in such a short period of time.

This was all the more the case given that Vichy worked against an Indochinese personality by stressing inner cultural, linguistic, and ethnic particularities. The prestigious Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient

41 Ourot Souvannavong, in ‘Les Annamites et Nous’, Indochine, no. 57 (October 1941), pp. 3–5, tries to reconcile the Lao and Viet brothers into this happy Indochinese family.
conceded publicly that its erudite publications were aimed to “return to the Indochinese their history” and to “awaken in them a national sentiment.” A group of equally erudite French admirers of local cultures and histories were thrilled to see Decoux bring Laos and Cambodia into the French Indochinese project. Like Meyer before him, Charles Rochet became actively involved in building up a Laotian patriotic identity through the pages of *Lao Nhay* and sporting events, albeit he had to keep a lid on stoking anti-Vietnamese sentiments in favor of anti-Thai ones. The Laotian and Cambodians could no longer be “forgotten”, but rather had to be promoted on the same level as the Vietnamese. This only reinforced the consolidation of national identities along separate lines or along pre-colonial notions of Khmer, Lao and Viet kingdoms (Vichy went so far as to let Bao Dai travel to Tonkin.). A scholarly emphasis on ethnology, race, and identity tended to differentiate rather than to assimilate. The re-rooting of “local nationalisms” in their specific cultures, traditions, and languages by colonial administrators dating from the time of Pasquier, Marquet, and Meyer only made it harder for a “superior Indochinese nationalism” to emerge. By exhorting the “Khmer” and “Lao” races against the racial imperialism of the “Thai”, the semi-official reviews, *Indochine, Lao Nhay* and *Kampuchea* must have triggered similar hostility towards the Viet (even though anti-Vietnamese articles were censored). Although Decoux sought to dilute such differences by using French as the unifying form of communication within this Indochinese

---

44 ‘Commissaire aux colonies à M. Nolde (Alger)’, 23 June 1944, file 1204, Nouveau Fond, Indochine, CAOM. On the importance of ethnicity, see David Henly’s excellent discussion, E.F. Henley, ‘Ethnographic Integration and Exclusion in Anticolonial Nationalism: Comparative Notes on Indonesia and Indochina’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37, no. 2 (April 1995), pp. 286–324. and *Hymnes et Pavillons d’Indochine*, Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1941, in particular the words of the national anthems and the national flags. The word “Campuchêa” was officially used for the first time here to get at the timeless Cambodia. However, Roland Meyer was perhaps the first to use it in this patriotic sense in his novel published in 1919, *Saramani: Danseuse Khmère*, 134
body, he would have had a hard time reversing existing educational and linguistic policies stressing the rejuvenation of local languages and traditions. And of course he had little time in which to create Cambodian and Laotian elites competent in French and who would be capable of joining their Vietnamese counterparts in the Indochinese bureaucracy, another of the keys to turning the Indochinese Federation into this “living reality”.

Had the French moved on Sarraut’s post-World War I reforms and calls for the creation of a functional Indochinese federation things may well have been different. But when the Japanese overthrew the French in March 1945, no formal Indochinese Federation had been created – ever. A federal council apparently appeared in 1943 but no constitution or charter ever saw the light of day. To my knowledge, no colonized subject ever carried papers during the Vichy period referring to him or her as a legally constituted “Indochinese citizen”. French colonial legal categories had divided and been contested down below by the colonized for far too long. Vichy’s attempt to assimilate the diverse ethnic populations in Indochina into one wider identity was too little, too late, contradictory, and largely ignored longstanding (and very well-known) Laotian and Cambodian nationalist objections to the political reality of French Indochina and hostility towards Vietnamese immigration since the early 1930s (chapter 4).

As for the Vietnamese, Vichy accentuated things by trying to co-opt the “true” Vietnam that had resurfaced in nationalist circles since 1925–30 and then locking it into an Indochinese framework. Neither was fiction and both Pham Quynh and Ho Chi Minh would find themselves pursuing remarkably similar policies between 1941 and 1945, when they tried to take hold of and promote the “real” Vietnam, while striving at the

Saigon: Imprimerie Nouvelle Albert Portail, 1919, used in the dedication and on the last page, p. 238. One finds it again in Komlah.


same time to keep it in step with Indochinese orders from the French and the Comintern respectively. Decoux gave a loose rein to Pham Quynh’s cultural nationalism by making him Minister of Education in Vichy’s Révolution nationale in Vietnam. Ridiculed by the highly westernized Self-Autonomy Group (Tu Luc Van Doan), Quynh took his revenge to return “ Tradition” to the forefront, a heritage that, in his eyes, had been blurred by years of unbridled westernization and competition from anti-colonial parties. He paid lip service to the Admiral’s Indochinese model, but what mattered most to this man was the return to Confucian values and order, the resurrection of national symbols, culture, and the realization and unification of the Annamese entity he had defended so passionately in 1931.  

Desperate, Vichy authorities tried to have it both ways. In October 1942, Decoux seemed to go further than his predecessors, when he became the first French official to pronounce the word “ Viet-Nam” in public. As one pro-Vichy Vietnamese editorial captured the colonial convergence: “The Admiral, as the honorable representative of the Maréchal and in the name of the Annamese Patrie, gives back [to the nation] its dignity and primacy.” What this author did not say was that Decoux was obviously trying to co-opt one of the most powerful nationalist symbols since the executions at Yen Bay in 1930 – the very idea of “ Viet-Nam.” He failed miserably. The superficiality of it all was clear when Decoux’s successor, Admiral Georges Thierry d’Argenlieu, formally forbade colonial authorities in January 1947 from using this very term as the French tried yet again to build an Indochinese Federation and mobilize monarchies, this time against Vietnamese nationalists and communists.

48 Amiral J. Decoux, Allocution prononcée à l’Université indochinoise, Indochine, no. 112 (22 October 1942), p. 11.
One Last Try? Vichy’s Turn

INDOCHINESE REDUX – THE COMMUNISTS

Perhaps the supreme irony of all this was that Vietnamese communists were trying to have it both ways as much as the French colonialists. Since arriving on the Sino-Vietnamese border in 1940, Ho Chi Minh had been preparing his own nationalist revolution. He evoked many of the same heroes and glorious symbols of “Vietnam” as Decoux and Quynh, and was as careful as the Governor General to avoid resurrecting certain chapters of Vietnamese history that could irritate Laotian and Cambodian sensibilities. Through the Viet Minh nationalist front he initiated in 1941, Ho fostered a strong counter-nationalism based upon an ethno-cultural identity forged in opposition to Chinese and French domination – and not “glorious” southwards expansion (Nam tien) into Cambodia. Unlike Quynh, he could draw upon a full-blown cultural militancy running from Phan Dinh Phung to the VNQDD by way of Phan Boi Chau, elements of which were to be found within his own communist ranks. In brief, Ho had every intention in mid-1945 not to fail as the VNQDD had done at Yen Bay in 1930. The Japanese defeat provided the favorable conditions for the communist-led Viet Minh to take power. The irony, however, was that once Ho returned to Vietnam from China, he had to hold this resurging, militant nationalism within the Indochinese framework demanded by the ICP, the Comintern, and the “New France” led by General de Gaulle.

When French Indochina collapsed on 9 March 1945, Vietnamese nationalists had still not decided how the postcolonial state would look territorially. Even the name remained remarkably contested. But with the French finally gone, nationalists had to choose. On 12 March, for example, Dan Bao (People’s News) heralded formation of Imperial Viet Nam (Viet-Nam De Quoc). It was one of the first times the word Viet-Nam had appeared publicly as the name of the country since Gia-Long. On 16 March, however, another daily published a proclamation refer-

50 I am thinking of Generals Nguyen Binh and Vuong Thua Vu, both VNQDD. After Vo Nguyen Giap, they were the two most important military leaders during the Indochina War.

51 ‘Y chung toi doi voi thoi cuc: Quoc Hieu cua ta la gi?’ Dong Phat, no. 6,000 (20 April 1945), p. 1 and Dai-Nam, Dai-Viet, Annam and Viet-nam, see Linh-Nam, ‘Notre appellation nationale’, pp. 29–32.

going Indochinese

ring to the Dai Viet nation and people. Scores of editorials published in the early 1940s confirm that no one national name held a clear monopoly. Nationalists agreed, however, that “Annam” was no longer an option, for it implied humiliations and submission to foreign powers. It was only after considerable debate, on 12 June 1945, that Bao Dai announced that the word Viet-Nam would be the official name of the country, thereby ending the dynastical use of such terms as Dai Viet or Dai Nam. At the same time, a cabinet meeting in mid-1945 forbade the use in Vietnamese of the terms Nam ky, Trung ky, and Bac ky replacing them respectively with Nam phan, Trung phan, and Bac phan (southern, middle and northern sections) as the three regional constituents of “Viet-Nam”. Ho Chi Minh’s government would follow suit, but dropped phan in favour of bo – Nam bo, Trung Bo, and Bac Bo. Vietnam was finally coming into being.

Yet, if communist and non-communist nationalists had agreed on the name “Vietnam”, they had also to choose a space. Should it include all of French Indochina or only the three ky/phan/bo? Unfortunately,

53 ‘Bao Cao Nhan Dan Dai Viet’, Dong Phat, no. 5,966 (16 March 1945), p. 1 and Interview with Hoang Xuan Han, 1 August 1993, Paris. Ironically, Dong Phat [roughly, Greater Orient] was known until 9 March 1945 as Dong Phap – France d’Orient or by this time: French Indochina.


55 ‘Y Chung Toi doi voi Thoi Cuc: Quoc Hieu cua ta la gi?’ Dong Phat, no. 6,000 (20 April 1945), p. 1.


we do not know how Pham Quynh felt on this question in his role as advisor to Bao Dai (the Viet Minh executed him in September 1945). We do know, however, that many tried to have it both ways. Like the French in 1919–21, 1930–31, 1937–39, and 1941–42, they saw the federal idea as the best way out of this spatial conundrum. On 31 March, an official circular in Dong Phat announced that the term “French Indochina/Dong Phap” would be dropped officially, but the words “Indochina/Dong Duong” and “Indochinese peoples/dan Dong Duong” remained intact.\(^58\) On 25 April, an editorial appeared in the daily Binh Minh arguing for an Indochinese Federation (Lien Bang Dong Duong), not associated with the French. Albeit vaguely defined, it envisioned a union of the states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which together would constitute a central committee to govern the postcolonial Indochinese Federation.\(^59\) An important politician, Nguyen Van Luyen, developed this idea in greater detail in the widely read Trung Bac Chu Nhat in early August. Aware of rising anti-Vietnamese feelings in Western Indochina, he guaranteed that, as a part of a National Indochinese Union (Dong Duong Lien Hiep Quoc), Laos and Cambodia would share power with Vietnam as part of a tripartite federal government in charge of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Finances. By combining their economic potential, communications systems, and defence, he continued, they could not only create a “great nation”, an Indochinese Federation, but they could also become “Indochinese citizens” (cong dan Dong Duong).\(^60\)

The French also kept thinking in Indochina terms. In the wake of the Japanese coup de force ending French Indochina, one of Charles de Gaulle’s top hands in Asia, Léon Pignon, advocated an Indochinese identity in directives outlining a new Federation: “We should not hesitate, and it is the opinion of a good number of Annamese, to think Indochinese, and not only Annamese or Cambodian”.\(^61\) He envisioned plans for the legal constitution of an “Indochinese citizen” and an “assembly”.\(^62\) There was nothing new about any of this, as we have seen throughout this


\(^{60}\) Nguyen Van Luyen, ‘Giao thiep’, no. 256, pp. 2–4, 27 and no. 257, pp. 7 and 24.

\(^{61}\) Cited by Tønnesson, The Vietnamese Revolution, p. 330, note 42.

\(^{62}\) ‘Conditions générales du statut dont bénéficiera l’Indochine libérée de l’envahisseur’, 23 March 1945, Hors série no. 16.
book. Albert Sarraut had already laid this out in the wake of World War I. Pignon must have known this. He arrived in the colony in the early 1930s.

Vietnamese communists were also having a hard time letting go of Indochina and the federal model at this historical conjuncture. As Stein Tonnesson has shown, in June 1945 the ICP’s interim general secretary, Truong Chinh, wrote in the Party’s journal that resistance forces would defeat the Japanese and then “establish an Indochinese Democratic Republic”. Even in the famous Directive no. 1 of 13 August 1945 calling for the general insurrection, Truong Chinh was preparing an “Indochinese uprising”, and not just a Vietnamese one. All of this changed mysteriously, however, when the Viet Minh came to power in late August 1945. Vietnamese communists could have announced the formation of the general secretary’s vision of a postcolonial “Republic of Indochina”. Instead they balked. Quietly changed was the term, “Indochinese”, in the 1929 revolutionary slogan, “Complete Indochinese Independence!” It reverted to Ho’s 1930 preference for “Vietnamese,” “Complete Vietnamese Independence.” There must have been at least some high-level Party discussion in order to change this guideline defining the territorial parameters of revolutionary activity. It most probably occurred during the ICP All-Country conference held in the northern hills on 15 August or shortly thereafter. One also wonders whether veteran Vietnamese communists from Laos and Thailand who made it to this meeting in time cautioned Ho against too strong an Indochinese line, given the anti-Vietnamese tone of rapidly consolidating Laotian and Cambodian nationalisms since 9 March. Moreover, Vietnamese bureaucrats left operating the Laotian and Cambodian administrations in mid-1945 would have been in a favorable position in the first days of the August Revolution in Laos to telegraph Vietnamese officials in Hanoi to report on anti-Vietnamese sentiments and violence. What we do know is that Vietnamese communists, relying on the large Viet populations, did indeed attempt to take major Laotian towns in the name of the wider Indochinese revolution. If there was an August Revolution in


64 Nhung Su Kien, p. 643. However, I have not been able to consult the original to see if it really became “Complete Vietnamese Independence” at this point in time.
Laos in 1945, as many communist historians in Vietnam have argued, it was, yet again, a largely Vietnamese one.65

That said, a Vietnamese nation-state came to life in August–September 1945, not an Indochinese one. The Vietnamese line became government policy on 31 August 1945, when the Acting Minister of Interior signed legislation ordering the word *Indochine* in the *Journal Officiel de l’Indochine* to be deleted and replaced, as of 1 September, by the word *Viet-Nam* in the Official Record of Viet Nam, *Viet-Nam Dan Quoc Cong Bao*.66 The next day, Ho announced formation of the “Democratic Republic of Vietnam” (*Viet Nam Dan Chu Cong Hoa*) in Hanoi before tens of thousands of cheering Vietnamese citizens who were proud to be part of an independent Vietnamese nation. On 20 October 1945, Ho signed Decree no. 53, of which article 2 defined a “Vietnamese national” as an individual born to a father or mother of Vietnamese citizenship or any individual “born in Vietnamese territory of unknown parents or nationality”. Article three turned “ethnic minorities” residing in the pays of the “Tho, Man, Muong, Nung, Kha, Lolo, etc” and with “fixed residence in Vietnamese territory” into “Vietnamese citizens”.67 However, no Indochinese citizenship emerged at this point, placing Laotians and Cambodians in the same colonial state as the Vietnamese.

Nevertheless, the tension and confusion between the “Vietnamese” and the “Indochinese” lines persisted in communist political thinking. This was best symbolized by the fact that the Viet Minh’s official


mouthpiece, *National Salvation (Cuu Quoc)*, used the slogan “Complete Vietnamese Independence”, while the ICP’s *Liberation Flag (Co Giai Phong)*, edited by Truong Chinh, continued to call for “Complete Indochinese Independence” (Dong Duong hoan toan doc lap). Like their colonial adversaries, Vietnamese communists still wanted to have it both ways and federalism would allow them to do so. Even after *Liberation Flag*’s closure following the public dissolution of the ICP in November 1945 (it was never dissolved), the “Indochinese” call re-emerged in the first issue of the Party’s new mouthpiece, *Su That (The Truth)*. This led to a confusing, dual policy in postcolonial communist state-building: the communist-run nationalist front, the Viet Minh, advocated “Viet-Nam”, while the Communist Party, now operating under the cover of a Marxist Study Group, stuck unequivocally to “Indochina” well after the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

In a fitting confusion, a communist faction in the South had even explained at the height of the Revolution that the five points of the star in the Viet Minh’s flag represented “the five lands of the Indochinese Federation that had been liberated under the leadership of the Vietnamese nation.” Perhaps, but that such an argument was put forward at all suggests that the French model of Indochina had a geopolitical staying power all of its own, taken up by communists, turned against the French, and projected into the future as a possible form for the postcolonial revolutionary state. Indeed, Vietnamese communist ideologues such as Truong Chinh would not abandon the idea of an “Indochinese Revolution” or the Indochinese Federation. Archimedes Patti, head of the OSS team that entered Hanoi just after the August revolution, was struck by this spatial contradiction between “Vietnam” and “Indochina” during his military assignment to Hanoi in late 1945. He asked Hoang Minh Giam and Truong Chinh personally to explain this paradox. As Patti recalled their reply years later:

> In 1945 the question of Laos and Cambodia as separate political entities was never at issue. In the context of the struggle for Vietnamese...
independence, the three nation-states complex was interwoven in the French concept of the French Indochina “federation”. On two separate occasions, I asked Truong Chinh and Hoang Minh Giam to clarify the apparent contradiction in terms between Viet Nam as a nation and Indochina as used in the name of the Indochinese Communist Party. They both held that the terms were compatible since the three nation-states, under French rule, had developed commonality of geographical, political and economic interests. Hence Viet-Nam, the name of the three kys (regions of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina) was also applicable to the French “federation” of Indochinese states.70

Indochina was not dead in Vietnamese communist thinking.

---

CONCLUSION: LETTING GO OF INDOCHINA?

The French returned in late 1945 determined to create an Indochinese Federation and citizenship. Not only did they encounter Vietnamese nationalists determined to unify Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin into one national entity, but they were also caught off guard by Laotian and Cambodian objections to all that was Indochinese. In early 1946, French negotiators were shocked to learn that the Cambodian King favored separating Cambodia from French Indochina just as Burma had been removed from British India a decade earlier. The Khmer Court, led by Prince Monireth and Nhiek Tioulong, also demanded local control of immigration as a major pre-condition to signing a Modus Vivendi and joining yet another Indochinese experiment. Tioulong insisted to his bewildered French interlocutors that controlling Annamese immigration was a “matter of life or death for Cambodia.”1 Although a French negotiator replied to Nhiek Tioulong that “France and Cambodia agreed on a good number of points” concerning the problem of Vietnamese immigration, these French officials could not understand why the Cambodians were so hostile to Indochinese federalism and Vietnamese immigration. To the French colonial mind, Cambodia’s disassociation from Indochina was as unthinkable as the unified Vietnamese nation-state being pushed by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and others.2

And yet none of this was new and should have come as no surprise. France’s leading colonial strategists, in particular Léon Pignon,

---
2 Commission d’Etudes franco-khmère, séance du 6 décembre 1945, 3ème séance, file Cambodge, Modus vivendi et constitution, box 1K306, Papiers Alessandri, SHD.
Albert Torel, and Jean Cousseau, had all worked in Indochina in the 1930s and were all well versed in Sarraut and Pasquier’s dual policy promoting the Indochinese federation and rallying the monarchies to the French cause. Léon Pignon led the charge after World War II in rebuilding the Indochinese Federation on the one hand and launching yet another round of royalist “solutions” around Bao Dai, Sihanouk, and Sisavangvong. It would take four more years, a war with the Vietnamese, the arrival of the Cold War, and the Laotian and Cambodian rejection of all that was Indochinese before the French, Léon Pignon at the forefront, were finally forced to create Associated States along national lines with corresponding nationalities.  

Mirroring the French devolution of the Indochinese colonial state into Associated ones was the Vietnamese communist decision to divide Indochinese communism along national lines. Starting in 1950 and in direct reaction to the creation of Pignon’s Associated States of Indochina in July 1949, Vietnamese communists led by Truong Chinh renamed the Indochinese Communist Party the Vietnamese Worker’s Party (this became official in early 1951, but the need to change the name came up in 1949). However, like the French, Vietnamese communists were determined to continue to associate their states along Indochinese lines. The only difference – and it was major – was that Vietnamese communists now had to create such revolutionary postcolonial states that would be able to collaborate with the Vietnamese against the three royalist states the French were now pushing – Bao Dai’s Vietnam, Norodom Sihanouk’s Cambodia, and Sisavangvong’s Laos. In an extraordinary move, Vietnamese communists let go of the Indochinese party but simultaneously moved to create nationalist fronts (the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak) and resistance governments (chinh phu khang chien) for Laos and Cambodia in 1950. They followed this up with instructions to cadres in western Indochina to create proto-communist parties for Laos and Cambodia. As a result, two sets of Associated States born out of the colonial period came into being in this wider Indochinese context.

Colonialism and communist nationalism continued to mirror each other during the rest of the Indochina War.

Ironically, as Truong Chinh and his entourage were moving on creating unprecedented associated states of a revolutionary kind, Albert Sarraut was explaining to another group of non-communist Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian representatives at the Conference of Pau why the Indochinese Union had to be dismantled along national lines. Although the French colonial project had long invested Indochina with “a vital solidarity”, Sarraut explained to his tripartite audience in October 1950 that the Federation now had to be unraveled in order to give rise to three independent though still associated states: Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Until a recent date, 1948, upon that part of the Indochinese peninsula composed of the neighbouring Annamese, Cambodian and Laotian peoples, France exercised a magistrate, either by direct authority or through the more nuanced form of the protectorate, both of which placed within her hands [...] the guiding powers of the [Indochinese] Federation. Through this body, France had assembled and synchronized the activity and life of these three peoples in a structure of solidarity that was then called the Unité Indochinoise. [...] One day, this same France severed with her own hands the unifying links that had been woven between Her and each one of your countries. [...] She unraveled the Indochinese Federation (Elle a défait la Fédération Indochinoise).4

In a symbolic conclusion with echoes of Marquet’s Five Flowers, Sarraut ended his speech at Pau by setting France’s three “sons” upon “the road to the future”. They were now to be the “Associated States of Indochina” (les États associés d’Indochine), what Sarraut brilliantly referred to as a “continued creation”.

However, if this influential Governor General had conceded in 1950 that the French Indochinese Federation now had to be “unravelled”, Vietnamese communists were still determined to hold on to this Indochinese “creation” together with their own Cambodian and Laotian alliances and allies in order to build a future Indochinese socialist family of their own. The Indochinese political, economic, and material space

carved out by French cartographers and diplomats at the turn of the century was still very much alive for Vietnamese communists. And like Sarraut, Truong Chinh would borrow this same idea of “Indochinese solidarity” or “association” to build his own special relationships with the Laotians and Cambodians during some thirty years of war. This, too, was a “continued creation”, part of a larger historical process. It aimed to affiliate Laotian and Cambodian revolutionary nation-states that finally came into being in 1975–76 with their Vietnamese elder brother through intimate political, military, economic, and cultural links. For reasons of a political and military order, Vietnamese communists felt they had to hold Indochina together and, if possible, create a revolutionary, postcolonial federation of an Indochinese kind. Echoing the French before them, it had become an “immutable” law. In 1976, Le Duan’s Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, expounded on this as follows:

We attach great importance to the solidarity between the three countries: Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia […] Together they fought and together they won victory; and, as a result, a special relationship has taken shape. In the new period, we will do all we can to safeguard and develop this special relationship between the Vietnamese people and the Laotian and Cambodian peoples, to strengthen the militant solidarity, confidence, long term cooperation, and mutual assistance in all fields between our country and the two brotherly countries, on the principle of total equality, mutual respect of each other’s independent sovereignty and territorial integrity, thus making the three countries stand shoulder to shoulder forever […]


Sarraut’s expression, *une création continue*, was used by a French writer to describe the dissolution of the ICP. P. Celerier, ‘Création continue: Le parti communiste indochinois’, *Indochine-Sud-Est Asiatique*, no. 28 (April 1954), p. 19.

Conclusion: Letting Go of Indochina

However, no special relationship lasts forever. And as we prepare to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the August Revolution of Vietnam in 2015, we might remind ourselves that behind the name Vietnam lurks another wider space against which Vietnamese – communists and non-communists alike – had to delineate their national identities. Vietnam is a distinct reality today. So are Cambodia and Laos. However, at the time, and that time reaches into the late twentieth century for the communists, “Indochina” was not quite as unreal as we or the young Vietnamese streaking across Vietnam today might think. In many ways, Vietnamese communism has much more in common with French colonialism than some in Vietnam might care to admit today.

The silence that reigns over the Indochinese idea in Vietnamese historical studies today is linked to the fact that the Indochinese space, in which the Vietnamese flowed with the French during the colonial period and the one which the communists sought to turn against them from 1930 until the late 1980s, came unraveled on Truong Chinh and the “communists” just as it had for Albert Sarraut and the “colonialists”. It seems that Vietnamese communists, again, much like their French nemesis, failed to understand that there were those who just did not wish to associate themselves with “Indochina”, no matter who was in charge. In many ways, the Vietnamese have had as hard a time letting go of Indochina as the French did. Security concerns were certainly paramount as the Third Indochina War opposed communists among themselves; but this book has tried to show that there was much more to it than that. For better or worse, Vietnam’s past was interwoven with that of colonial France. Nowhere is this better seen than in the very concept and place of “Indochina”. More than anyone else in this story, Vietnamese communists came the closest to “going Indochinese”.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Going Indochinese


Emmerson, Donald. ‘Southeast Asia: What’s in a name?’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. XV, no. 1 (March 1984), pp. 1–21.


Bibliography


———. *Cours de langue laotienne*, Vientiane: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1924.


Reynolds, Craig. ‘A New Look at Old Southeast Asia’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 2 (May 1995), pp. 419–446.


Going Indochinese


Sujets donnés au diplôme d’études primaires supérieures indochinoise, première session, Hue: Direction de l’Instruction Publique, 1937.


Bibliography


INDEX

Anderson, Benedict ix, 5, 6, 7, 36, 58, 121
Arnoux, Paul 80, 82
assimilation 72, 101, 102, 103, 105, 106, 108, 109, 112, 115
Bao Dai 61, 63, 67, 70, 81, 127, 129, 130, 134, 138, 139, 146
Beau, Paul 23, 24, 72, 111, 127
Brubaker, Roger 9, 101
Bui Quang Chieu 52, 112, 116, 131, 133
Burma, separation from British India 52, 93, 109, 110, 145
categories, legal ix, 8, 9, 23, 84, 97, 100, 101, 105, 110, 112, 116, 117, 130, 135
citizenship
Cambodian 107
notions of 8, 9, 80, 91, 98, 99, 115, 119, 141
Vietnamese 141
civil service. See movements in Indochina, Vietnamese
civilization, Indochinese 55, 72, 80, 132. See also readership, Indochinese; tradition, Indochinese;
Vichy Indochina
collaboration. See Franco-Annamese Alliance
conceptions of Indochina. See Ho Chi Minh; Nguyen An Ninh; Nguyen

Tien Lang; Nguyen Van Vinh; Phetsarath; Pham Quynh; Truong Chinh
Dap Chhuon 97
De Gaulle, Charles 52, 137, 139
Decoux, Jean 120, 126, 127, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 136, 137
Doumer, Paul 25, 26
education, Indochinese ix, 25, 26, 36, 37, 40, 42, 43, 59, 60, 70, 71, 72, 75, 105, 106, 117, 121, 122, 123, 124, 127, 132, 135, 136
federation
Cambodian conception 107, 111, 116
French conception 51, 61, 119, 121, 125, 127, 130, 132, 135, 136, 139, 145, 146, 147
Laotian conception 68, 116, 132
Vietnamese colonial conception 52, 57, 58, 62, 63, 71, 73, 131, 139
Vietnamese communist conception 90, 142, 148
Franco-Annamese Alliance 13, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 32, 33, 49, 53, 55, 56, 68, 73, 76, 95, 105, 111, 116, 119, 132
Franco-Indochinese Alliance 130, 147
geography, Indochinese ix, 5, 6, 12, 17, 18, 19, 22, 25, 36, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 55, 56, 58, 62, 66, 67, 68, 72, 73, 75, 77, 85, 132, 143
Gia Long 14, 15, 25, 49, 64, 79, 137
Going Indochinese

Harmand, Jules 22, 23, 24, 60, 66, 72, 111
historiography 2, 3
Ho Chi Minh 4, 10, 53, 54, 55, 59, 60, 62, 77, 83, 84, 85, 88, 126, 135, 137, 138
Hoang Minh Giam 142, 143
Hoang Xuan Han 10
I.K. 106, 109
ICP. See Indochinese Communist Party
immigration, Chinese in Indochina 92
immigration, Vietnamese into China 31
immigration, Vietnamese in Indochina conception of 64, 70, 103, 124, 135
into Laos 24, 28, 31, 33, 47, 48, 51, 57, 64, 66, 67, 101, 116, 120
into Cambodia 8, 24, 47, 51, 57, 64, 66, 67, 92, 101, 104, 106, 107, 120, 145,
Indochinese Communist Party 77, 83, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 137, 140, 142
Indochinese Constitutionalist Party 52, 53, 55, 56, 59, 64, 112
Japan ix, 8, 18, 19, 95, 99, 100, 109, 115, 119, 120, 126, 127, 131, 135
jus sanguinis 98, 102
jus solis 98, 100, 102, 107
Karpelès, Suzanne 71
Khémarak Bottra 103, 105, 107, 108
Lanessan (de), J.L. 23, 60, 66
Le Duan 148
Lombard, Denys 6, 7
Manipoud, Louis 96
manual. See Education, Indochinese
map. See geography, Indochinese
Marinetti 110, 111
Marquet, Jean 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 60, 69, 70, 71, 132, 133, 134, 147
Meyer, Roland 69, 70, 71, 72, 96, 132, 134
Minh Mang 10, 14, 15, 17, 49
minority groups 11, 25, 46, 58
monarchy, Indochina 52, 61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 81, 119, 120, 122, 125, 127, 129, 130, 130, 146. See also Bao Dai, Sihanouk
Monireth, Prince 145
movements in Indochina, Vietnamese by automobile 39, 43, 49, 93
bureaucracy ix, 14, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 46, 48, 49, 64, 69, 87, 92, 93, 95, 96, 97, 104, 109, 110, 120, 121, 122, 123, 135, 140
by canal 26, 39, 44, 45, 93, 121
mines 22, 26, 39, 43, 64, 86, 93, 130, plantations 22, 26, 28, 39, 43, 64, 86, 87, 93, 97,
by railroad 22, 24, 26, 31, 36, 39, 40, 93, 120, 121
by road 7, 22, 24, 28, 31, 34, 36, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 68, 69, 93, 121, 129
Nam Tien 13, 39, 48, 56, 57, 59, 127, 137
newspapers. See readership, Indochinese
Nguyen An Ninh 10, 59, 60, 73, 75
Nguyen Duy Trinh 148
Nguyen Khac Nhu 10, 79
Nguyen Thai Hoc 79, 80, 82
Nguyen Tien Lang 46, 47, 70
Nguyen Van Vinh 4, 8, 45, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 73, 75, 76, 86, 91, 102, 132
Nhiek Tioulong 145
Nimo Rathavan 103
novels. See readership, Indochinese
Pasquier, Pierre 52, 61, 62, 63, 66, 69, 80, 81, 120, 122, 126, 127, 134, 146
Pham Le Bong 33, 57, 58, 64, 120
Index

Phan Boi Chau  78, 79, 80, 137
Phan Chu Trinh  54, 55, 59, 60, 79
Pham Quynh
  conception of Vietnam/Indochina 7, 48, 49, 59, 63, 64, 66, 70, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 86, 132, 135, 136, 137, 139
  debate with Nguyen Van Vinh  3, 4, 8, 62, 63, 66, 67, 91, 102,
  trip to Laos  3, 46, 47, 48, 71
Phetsarath, Prince  4, 67, 68, 71, 73, 91, 115, 127, 132
Pignon, Léon  52, 139, 140, 145, 146
Popular Front  87, 114, 125
readership, Indochinese  2, 35, 36, 46, 69, 70, 71
revolution, Indochinese  10, 60, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 90, 140, 142, 146, 147, 148, 149
Robin, René  46, 124
Rochet, Charles  96, 134
Roubaud, Louis  82
Sarraut, Albert  13, 25, 26, 28, 32, 36, 40, 51, 52, 53, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62, 64, 67, 105, 120, 121, 122, 123, 126, 127, 130, 135, 140, 146, 147, 148, 149,
schools. See education, Indochinese
Scouting. See education, Indochinese; Vichy Indochina
Siam. See Thailand
Sihanouk, King  97, 123, 127, 129, 130, 146
Son Ngoc Thanh  97, 126
stereotypes, Indochinese  24, 70, 95, 103, 123
textbook. See education, Indochinese
territory
  Annamese  37, 99, 115
  Cambodian  8, 19, 22, 23, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 108, 109, 110, 119, 126, 127
  notions of  9, 14, 22, 91, 97, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 105, 115, 137

Indochinese  8, 9, 14, 34, 58, 99, 101, 104, 109, 110, 113, 115, 119, 126, 140, 148
Laotian  8, 19, 23, 112, 113, 119, 127, 130
Vietnamese  8, 76, 115, 141
Thailand ix, 6, 14, 23, 89, 99, 124, 140,
Thierry d’Argenlieu, Georges  136
Third Indochina War  2, 4, 149
Tieu Van  58, 120
tourism. See Travel, Indochina
tradition, Indochinese  39, 40, 57, 59, 61, 70, 71, 78, 81, 85, 86, 120, 122, 124, 127, 129, 130, 134, 135, 136
Tran Trong Kim  10, 78, 81
Trans-Indochinese. See Movements in Indochina, Vietnamese
transportation. See Movements in Indochina, Vietnamese
travel, Indochina ix, 3, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 122, 129, 134
Truong Chinh  76, 140, 142, 143, 146, 147, 148, 149
Vichy Indochina 119–143 passim
Viet Minh ix, 89, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142
Vietnamese Nationalist Party  76, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 137
VNNQDD. See Vietnamese Nationalist Party
Yen Bay Revolt  80, 136, 137