

The Colonial Moment

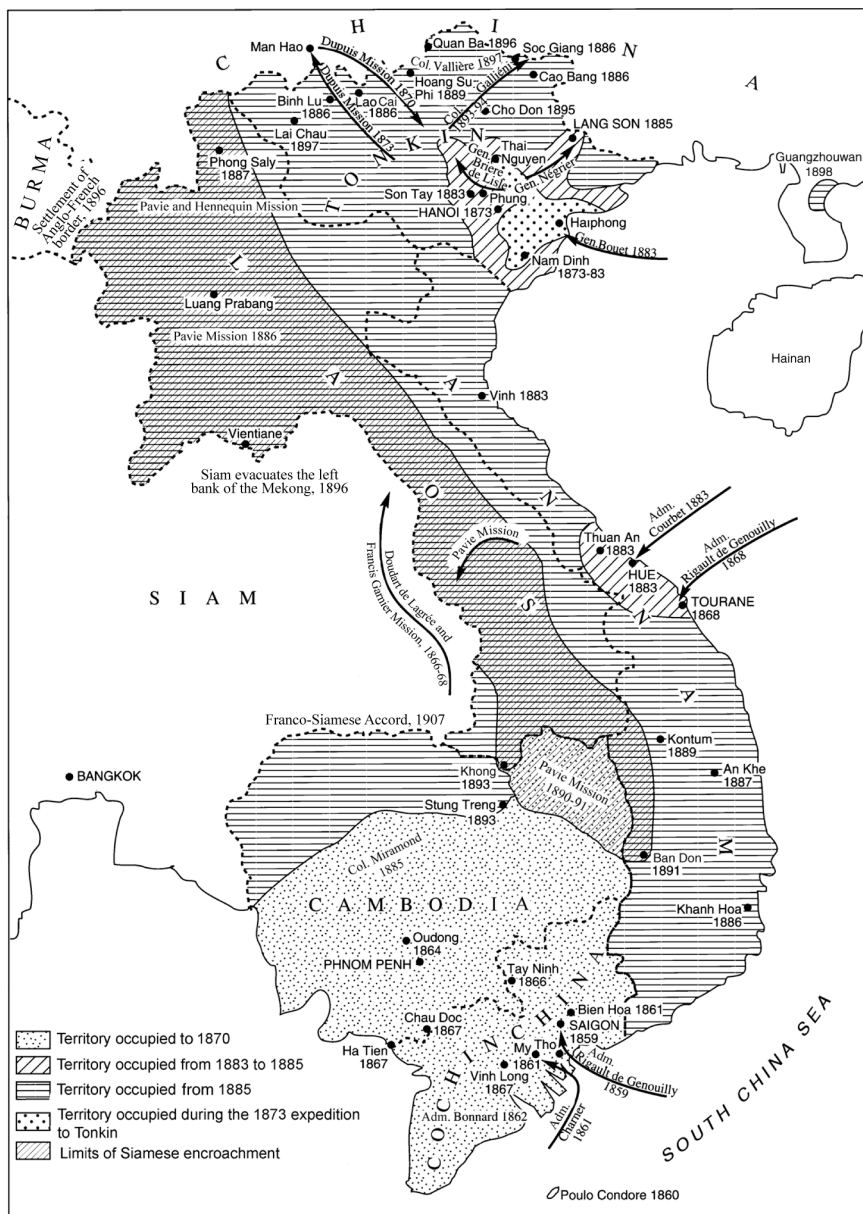
The Making of French Indochina, 1858–1897

Yes, no matter what happens, a European nation will enter Annam in order to take on a controlling influence there. . . . It will not last, I am sure of that, but it is necessary to go through it: Annam cannot escape this fate.

—PAUL BERT, resident general of France in Annam and Tonkin, letter to the Catholic scholar Truong Vinh Ky [Petrus Ky], June 29, 1886

Indochina, a marginal region that was nevertheless central to the French empire, emerged in the midst of war, following a series of military expeditions that did not fulfill their ultimate goals and whose outcome long remained undecided. There were two major periods of conflict, separated by fifteen years of peace. Between 1858 and 1867, the lower basin of the Mekong River, the southern provinces of Dai Nam—present-day Vietnam—and the kingdom of Cambodia came under the control of France. Between 1867 and 1882, the colonial undertakings in Indochina stagnated, with a failed attempt in 1873 to occupy the northern part of Vietnam. From 1882 to 1897, the expansion resumed with vigor: northern and central Dai Nam and the Lao states became protectorates of France (map 1.1), while a sphere of French influence was established in the southern Chinese provinces, Yunnan, Guangxi, and Guangdong. The unequal modern colonial relationship between the crises and the dynamism of a dominating industrialized society and subjected cultures and societies was thus regionally established. The same process led the latter to be forcibly inserted, as a dependent entity, into a world system whose construction at the hands of the great Western capitalisms was nearly complete.

But nothing was played out in advance. If the establishment of Western domination over the Indochinese geographic area was foreseeable from the middle of the nineteenth century, the colonial form this domination took was not inevitable, and the colonizers designed their projects very gradually. It took more than a third of a century of complex transformations for this colonial order to fully impose itself.



MAP 1.1. Stages in the making of French Indochina. (*Histoire militaire de l'Indochine*, vol. 3 [Hanoi, 1931].)

THE CONQUEST OF SOUTHERN INDOCHINA
(1858–1867)

The first advance of French Imperialism in Far East Asia was the annexation, in the context of the Second Opium War (1856–60), of the countries of the lower Mekong.¹ This advance is inseparable from the generalized civil war that, beginning with the revolt of the Taiping (1850–64), made it impossible for the Chinese empire to protect its southern tributaries. Furthermore, it was also determined by the nature of French and Southeast Asian societies. And, last, the competition between France and England was a permanent factor of French colonial expansion in the nineteenth century.

The Christian Question in Vietnam

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, there was no consensus in French society in support of new projects for Asian expansion. Heterogeneous, yet united, interest groups pressed for expansion into Indochina. The earliest urgings came from the missionary Church,² especially the influential Société des missions étrangères (Society of Foreign Missions), created by Monsignors Pallu and Delamotte-Lambert in 1658. Following their failures in China and in Siam, this society, along with the Franciscans of the Philippines, concentrated its efforts on Vietnam. The missionaries, the “teachers of religion” (*maîtres de religion*), created vigorous Christian communities in the six apostolic vicariates of Dai Nam and Cambodia, especially in the Spanish bishoprics of Bui Chu and of Western Tonkin (table 1.1). In Tonkin, their followers represented perhaps 3% to 5% of the population. These communities were strengthened by the support offered at the end of the eighteenth century by Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine and by a handful of French advisors to Prince Nguyen Anh, who became the emperor Gia Long, in the midst of the crisis that shook Vietnam following the great peasant revolt of the Tay Son (1771–79).

Their dynamism, however, was more the result of the clergy’s vigorous action among the peasants, fishermen, boatmen, small merchants, and vagabonds, as well as among certain families of mandarins and semi-scholars who taught ideograms in the missionary schools, as has been shown by Alain Forest for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by Laurent Burel for the nineteenth century.³ It was also attributable to the clergy’s medical work; to the efficacy of the Association de la Sainte Enfance (Society of the Holy Childhood), which oversaw the care and baptism of sick or starving children and ran orphanages, a breeding ground for the Christian communities; to their agricultural colonies, founded on the French Catholic model of raising moral standards through work; and to the tenacious proselytizing of baptizing nuns.⁴ Roman Catholicism—“a religion whose virtues are mightily prophylactic and protective,” in Forest’s words—both echoed local beliefs

TABLE 1.1 Members of Christian communities and French Catholic missions in nineteenth-century Indochina

	1875	1886
Catholics	324,000	353,000
Baptisms	85,351	66,826
Missionaries	114	174
Native priests	245	246
Catechists	501	584
Churches and chapels	951	767
Schools	504	643

SOURCE: This assessment, taken from Vo Duc Hanh, *La place du catholicisme dans les relations entre la France et le Viet-Nam de 1870 à 1886* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 1405–10, is based on the archives of the seminary of the Missions étrangères de Paris, of the *Annales de la Sainte Enfance*, and of the *Comptes rendus des travaux de la Société des missions étrangères de Paris*.

and family rituals and simultaneously responded to a peasant society's desire not only for salvation but for behavioral rectitude.

The Church's activities were tolerated under the reign of Gia Long (1802–20). But afterwards, little by little, the missionaries lost ground in relation to the authorities. Indeed, the Confucian elite, for several valid reasons, considered Christianity a heterodox sect that could not be assimilated and that perturbed the global system of cults and beliefs organized around the imperial figure. They equally deemed it incompatible with other religious practices and with the official version of Confucianism. Furthermore, certain missionaries sustained rebellions in the hope of imposing a dynasty that would be favorable to them. Repression was instituted under the emperor Minh Mang in 1832. The first Catholic martyrs were a Vietnamese priest and a French priest, Father Gagelin, both executed in October 1833. This was followed two years later by the torture and execution of Father Joseph Marchand, who participated in the revolt of Le Van Khoi, adoptive son of the general governor of the south, in whom certain missionaries saw a new Nguyen Anh. In 1836, an edict condemned European priests to death. Thousands of Christians, including seven French and three Spanish priests, were martyred between 1833 and 1840. An inextinguishable conflict had opened up between the imperial power, the dynasty, and the missions. This conflict occurred in the context of a genuine missionary offensive in Asia, supported by the financial power and energy of the Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi (Society for the Propagation of the Faith), created in Lyon in 1822 by Pauline Jaricot. Fourteen new apostolic vicariates, of which seven were assigned to the foreign missions, were created in China from 1844 to 1860. From this arose an increase in tensions between the Roman Church and the Confucian states, which saw this barbarian religion as a cause of moral and social dis-

integration. The more Vietnam took refuge in a quasi-absolute isolationism, the more the ardor of the missionaries intensified.

The story of Monsignor Dominique Lefebvre is very representative of the Church's new Asian dynamism. Condemned to prison in 1845, then picked up by a French ship, he disembarked in Singapore and returned secretly to Vietnam the following year with Father Duclos. Both were captured. Duclos died in jail in June 1846; Lefebvre was condemned to death but not executed. In early 1847, he was back aboard a British ship, but he refused to be repatriated to Europe and disembarked in May 1847 in the Mekong Delta, where he evangelized clandestinely over the next several years. For the missionaries, Vietnam was a perfect mission country; besides the Philippines, it was the Church's only solid base in pagan Asia. They urged the government in Paris to impose religious freedom on the court in Hue, militarily, if necessary. The first serious incident took place in 1847 when, following an ultimatum demanding religious freedom, two French warships destroyed the coastal defenses and the Vietnamese fleet off Da Nang (Tourane). Emperor Thieu Tri put a price on the head of the missionaries and ordered the executions of Europeans, and his successor, Tu Duc, reiterated the edicts of persecution in 1848 and 1851. Even though these orders were not carried out, a threshold had been crossed. Henceforth, the missionary demand for a religious opening of the country was part of a new and irreversible historical logic, also clearly seen in China's difficult experiences during the same period. The establishment of diplomatic relations with outside powers on an equal legal footing resulted in the ruin of the tributary order of the Asian world; freedom of trade was instituted; and the Confucian literate class had to confront intolerable cultural competition, which was sustained in Vietnam by the widespread use of the transcription of the language into Roman characters (Quoc ngu), which the missionaries had invented in the seventeenth century. For Confucian Vietnam, the missionary challenge was of crucial importance.

At the beginning of the French Second Empire, the missionary campaign intensified. As early as 1852, eight bishops in the Far East sent a written demand to Prince-President Louis Napoleon Bonaparte for armed action against Hue. Charles de Montigny's diplomatic mission to Siam (Franco-Siamese treaty of August 15, 1856), Cambodia, and Vietnam in 1856–57 failed in the last two countries. The confusion of its goals and Montigny's tactlessness and arrogance came up against Siamese intrigues in Phnom Penh and a polite but nevertheless firm Vietnamese refusal in Da Nang. In spite of the naval bombardments of the forts of Da Nang, on September 26, 1856, and fifteen days of negotiations in January 1857, the French envoy obtained nothing. The mandarins exclaimed with joy: "The French bark like dogs but flee like goats." This failure implied that the future contained no other option than a military one. Some months later, on September 20, Tu Duc, emperor from 1848 to 1883, ordered the decapitation of Monsignor Díaz, a Spanish bishop in Tonkin; this was used to justify an expedition to Cochinchina. The tireless

organizer of the missionary campaign was Monsignor Pellerin, an apostolic priest who had worked in northern Cochinchina and who, after his return to France in April 1857, with the help of Father Huc, intensified intervention with the Catholic hierarchy, Empress Eugénie, the Quai d'Orsay (the French Foreign Ministry), and the press. It was a note from Father Huc to the emperor that provoked the creation of the *Commission spéciale pour la Cochinchine* (Special Commission for Cochinchina, April 22–May 18, 1857) while the French-English expedition against China aimed at obtaining a revision of the unequal treaties of 1842–44 was being prepared.⁵ The two priests were heard by the commission and received several times by Napoleon III.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary to avoid a mechanical identification of the Church with colonial imperialism. The missionaries working in Dai Nam were in fact more reserved than has generally been admitted regarding the French expansion after 1870. But earlier this was hardly the case. The missionaries legitimated the myth of a “Tonkinese” people ready to rise up against the Hue government, and of a sort of “liberating” conquest. They also played an irreplaceable role as informants and advisors. Thanks to their daily contact with the native populations, they were the only Europeans who could provide first-hand information about these societies. Familiar with indigenous social structures, and well aware of the decisive role played by the literati, the missions sought, at least until 1920, either to weaken those structures or to Christianize them, beginning with the imperial state.

The Church's actions were presented as part of a project that combined the propagation of faith, colonization, and an increase in France's national grandeur.⁶ This convergence was the foundation for the progressive rallying of Catholic opinion to the colonial expansion project. For the Church, colonialism was vital, since it provided a response to the grave difficulties that accompanied its work in the societies of a newly industrialized Europe: the crisis of faith, threats against the papal state, the deterioration of the alliance with the French imperial regime after the war in Italy during 1859, and the rise of Republican anticlericalism. The development of ultramontanist dovetailed with the Church's increased overseas engagements, a path to a renewed universality, compensating for the slow decline of Christian culture in France that had been going on since before the French Revolution. “Precious Cross,” Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine had said in 1799, “the French have knocked you down and removed you from their temples. Since they no longer respect you, come to Cochinchina.”⁷ Missionary action, the “colonization of souls,” as a priest from Lyon would call it, also allowed the overseas coalition of the otherwise conflicting interests of the modern state and the Church, and was an effective restraint on their disputes back in France. It was henceforth one of the keys to the survival and the adaptation of a Catholicism that was on the defensive in France.

"Naval Imperialism"

The question of power was central for the big European states, and the role of the French military, especially of the Navy, which sought to grow along with the nation, was decisive in the first phase of French expansion in Indochina. The Navy was greatly inspired in this project by Justin Prosper Chasseloup-Laubat, who was minister of the Navy and the Colonies without interruption from 1860 to 1867, and who was succeeded as minister in 1867 by Admiral Charles Rigault de Genouilly, the conqueror of Saigon. It was Chasseloup-Laubat who persuaded Napoleon III to annex southern Dai Nam and who, in 1865, initiated the great mission to explore the Mekong led by Captain Ernest Doudart de Lagrée. Two of the five members of the Cochinchina commission of April–May 1857 were from the Navy: Admiral Léon Martin Fourichon and Captain Jaurès.⁸ French Cochinchina was a product of "naval imperialism," and for twenty years, from 1859 to 1879, the Navy alone ran it; this was the so-called era of the admirals, of whom eight would eventually govern the colony after the treaty of 1862. As Prime Minister Jules Ferry put it in 1885: "It is also for our Navy that the colonies are created." Just as the Army had its officers in the *Bureaux arabes* (Arab offices) in Algeria, the Navy had its official administrators and indigenous affairs inspectors in Cochinchina after 1861, until the Gambettists put a civil government in place in May 1879. Even then, its first incumbent, Charles Le Myre de Vilers, was a former naval officer.

There was nothing fortuitous about the role of the Navy, which was more important in Indochina than in any other colony. This was confirmed at each decisive moment and proven by the centralization of power in the hands of Admiral Amédée Courbet in October 1883, and the appointment of admirals to the Haut Commissariat (High Commissioner's Office) of Indochina from 1940 to 1947. The Indochinese enterprise was, in fact, one of the important elements in creating a powerful fleet of warships with global range: the French Navy opted for steamships in the great naval building programs of 1846–51 and 1857, and by 1870, it possessed 339 warships, of which 45 were ironclads, as against 375, of which 42 were ironclads, for the British Royal Navy. It also greatly contributed to the development of the French Merchant Navy, whose rise was nevertheless slower.

In 1840, the Division navale des mers de Chine (Naval Division of the Chinese Seas) was created. This renewal of French maritime power necessitated the creation of a global network of bases able to provide coal, wood, and supplies. Without such a logistical infrastructure, it would be impossible for the French Navy to become independent of the omnipresent network of British bases. Fueling coal-fired ships' engines, in particular, was crucial. The acquisition of the mines of Hon Gai, already coveted in 1878 by the powerful China Merchants Navigation Co., was a driving motivation for the conquest of Tonkin. So, too, was the sensitive question of

recruiting stokers and mechanics for the engine room. Only Asian, Chinese, Arab, and Indian sailors, it was thought, could stand the terrifying heat of the engine room in the tropics.

On September 20, 1880, the warship *Le Tonquin* embarked on the Saigon-Toulon crossing with the first crew of forty "Cochinchinese."⁹ The occupation of the "Indochinese ports," remarkably well situated between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, and the desire to create a French Hong Kong—many dreamed of Saigon, so close to the immense Mekong Delta, whose middle and upper portions were believed to be navigable—counted heavily in the French decision. At stake in the continuous pressure from the Navy was not simply the interest of a military lobby. There was also the possibility that French imperialism would gain importance in a global context. French colonization in the Far East was tied inevitably to the rise in the importance of the Navy, without which the global expansion of French commerce and the French state and the acquisition of the status of a worldwide, rather than just European, power would have been unthinkable. This was, in essence, the goal laid out by Foreign Minister François Guizot before the Chamber of Deputies on March 31, 1842: "To possess across the globe, at those points destined to become great centers of trade and navigation, strong, safe maritime stations that will serve as points of support for our trade. . . ."

The Pressure of Business Circles

The reservations of business circles about colonial action and the persistent misgivings throughout the century of liberal economists in line with Jean-Baptiste Say (1767–1832) have been emphasized for good reason. French historiography has often considered the search for new zones for the enhancement of capital and the role of economic factors to be negligible parts of France's Indochinese expansion. This is by no means certain. In fact, it might be argued that the combined pressures applied by the Navy and the Church in favor of colonial expansion, which had not been effective under the July Monarchy, succeeded under the Second Empire precisely because they then dovetailed with the expansionist dynamics of French capitalism, which after the economic crisis of 1847 entered an unprecedented phase of industrialization. Certainly, France had neither really invested in nor carried out commercial expansion in Asia prior to gaining complete control of the southern Indochinese peninsula: in 1840, only three French ships entered Chinese harbors, as opposed to thirty-four British and thirty-five American ships; the following year, French trade with the Far East was estimated at 40.5 million francs, whereas British exports raised some 310 million francs in China alone; in 1845, of the 108 Western trading firms installed in Chinese treaty ports, only one was French, against 68 British.¹⁰

In Indochina, however, as in the majority of France's colonial undertakings except Tunisia and Morocco, conquest was a necessary preliminary to investment.

After the initial fruitless attempts taken in relation to Dai Nam from 1816 to 1832, the interest of French business circles in Asia deepened as a result of the First Opium War (1839–41), the work of Consuls A. Barrot in Manila and Michel Chaigneau in Singapore, and, especially, the signature of the Franco-Chinese treaty of Whampoa in October 1844. Already in December 1843, an important mission from the chambers of commerce of manufacturing towns, composed of delegates representing Lyon silks and the wool and cotton industries, led by the diplomat Thomas de Lagrené, visited not only Canton and Shanghai but also Singapore, Batavia (Jakarta), Manila, and Tourane (Da Nang). The important survey it published on its return valued the trade of the “seas of Indochina” at a billion francs, half of which consisted of Chinese foreign trade.¹¹ From this arose the dream of a “French Hong Kong,” for which the island of Basilan, in the archipelago of the Philippines, was considered in 1843. In addition, between 1840 and 1847, the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade dedicated some twelve issues of its *Documents sur le commerce extérieur* (Documents on Foreign Trade) to China and the Far East.

Though dominant historiography has downplayed these facts, this is an indication of the role of the economic forces at work and of the imagined economic stakes in France’s first Indochinese expansion. Studies have shown that after 1840, cities with a stake in colonial trading—especially Bordeaux, which was deeply affected by the crisis of the Caribbean sugar economy—redirected their commercial and maritime endeavors toward the Maghreb, Africa, and Asia.¹² As early as 1858, the shipowners Eymond and Hewey opened a regular line from Saigon to Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Manila. By November 1862, the company Denis Frères had settled in Saigon. Even Marseille capitalism, which, up until the middle of the nineteenth century, had done very little in the Far East,¹³ started trying to expand its commercial horizons beyond the isthmus of Suez, especially after the opening of a branch of the powerful British Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (or P&O) in Marseille in 1851.

However, there has been little systematic study of the colonial attitudes of the great industries of the time, metallurgy and textiles. Nevertheless, J.-F. Laffey, Pierre Cayez, and especially J.-F. Klein have revealed the tenacious efforts of the Lyon “Fabrique” (silk industry), which declined precipitously after 1852 because of the silkworm disease pebrine, to widen its sources of supplies in the Far East.¹⁴ Lyon began to buy silk directly from China in 1851 and reached 2,000 tons in 1860, half of total French consumption. In the 1860s, half of Shanghai’s raw silk exports and a third of Canton’s were bought by the French, greatly profiting British shipowners, the masters of the Asian silk trade. As the case of Lyon shows, a true “municipal imperialism” with strong regional roots began to take shape. In 1854, the first Lyon silk merchant settled in Shanghai, joined in 1865 by Ulysse Pila from Avignon, who founded his own trading firm. At the end of 1874, out of sixty-three foreign trading houses in Shanghai, five were French. Between 1887 and 1892, Lyon

on average imported from 6,000 to 7,000 tons of Asian raw silk annually. Though Lyon firms were limited by their dependence on the powerful British firm of Jardine and Matheson and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, their Far East Asian activity was starting. From then on, Lyon capitalism would strive for the establishment of direct maritime links and French banks in the Far East.

The foundation of the *Compagnie universelle du canal de Suez* (Universal Suez Canal Company) and the beginning of the digging of the canal in 1859 strengthened the project of a new French expansion beyond India, structured around the Suez Canal. In 1860, a major bank, the *Comptoir d'escompte*, opened an agency in Shanghai, where a French concession was established between 1849 and 1856. The *Messageries impériales*, the future *Messageries maritimes*, the largest French shipping company and the primary transporter of Asian silk after 1870, inaugurated its Marseille-Saigon line in 1862. In its report of May 1857, the Cochinchinese Commission concluded that it was necessary to occupy the three principal Vietnamese ports in order to ensure the rapid development of French trade in China. To capture a part of the traffic from southern China and to reorient it toward a harbor under French control, preferably Saigon, which was already the center of rice exportation, was the underlying goal defined by the government of Napoleon III for the expedition to China prepared in accord with Britain the following year.

More generally, the new French expansion in Asia should be contextualized in the framework of the considerable development of European economic activities in the Far East from the middle of the nineteenth century on. Between 1800 and 1866, European exchanges with the Far East and India multiplied: in six years, from 1860 to 1866, they rose from 2,600 million francs to 4 billion (an increase of 45%), out of a world trade estimated at 52 billion francs in 1870; French trade with the region, in particular, rose from 285 million francs in 1866 to 638 million in 1888, representing a growth of 84.4% in two decades. In sum, if the real economic interest of French capitalism in the Far East was still fairly slight, a "demand for expansion" into Asia by a segment of business circles was, in fact, emerging. "We believe it is necessary to attract goods coming from the Far East to Marseille," the Marseille shipowner Rostand declared in the context of the great *Enquête de la marine marchande* (Report on the Merchant Navy) of 1863.¹⁵ Chasseloup-Laubat echoed his words that same year, proclaiming: "It is a real empire that we need to create in the Far East."

The Fall of Saigon

In mid-July 1857, despite strong objections by his ministers, Napoleon III decided on a military intervention in Vietnam as a logical annex to the expedition to China. Spain joined the expedition in December with the dispatch of a corps of its Philippine army. Admiral Rigault de Genouilly's instructions were very "elastic."¹⁶ He was to conquer a token territory, the port of Tourane (Da Nang), in order to ne-

gotiate a protectorate treaty or, by default, an “unequal” treaty similar to that which England had imposed on China on June 27, 1858 (and to the one it would impose on Japan on October 9, 1858). On August 31, 1858, a small expeditionary force, consisting of fourteen ships, two thousand French soldiers, and five hundred Spanish troops, backed by a few hundred Tagals, seized Tourane. They lacked the means to attack Hue, and the population did not rise up, as certain missionaries had predicted. Meanwhile, cholera decimated the units. The government of Hue refused to negotiate, and its troops resisted efficiently.

The French high command therefore decided to strike at Saigon, an essential supplier of rice for central Vietnam, located in the area that at the time was called “Basse-Cochinchine” (Lower Cochinchina), which unlike Hue was accessible from the sea. Simply put, the strategy was to blockade rice shipments to central Vietnam. Saigon was taken on February 17, 1859, but the ongoing war with China forced the evacuation of Tourane on March 30, 1860, and only allowed the maintenance in the south of a weak French-Spanish force of under a few thousand men. With difficulty they resisted the attacks of twelve thousand Vietnamese soldiers, reinforced by troops raised in the military colonies (*don dien*) of the delta. Saigon and its Chinese counterpart, Cholon, were defended throughout that year by the powerful fortified lines of Chi Hoa, supported by a defensive perimeter about twelve kilometers long blocking all the waterways, constructed under the orders of the skillful Vietnamese field marshal Nguyen Tri Phung. Meanwhile, the persecution of Christians increased in the rest of the country.

It was the signature of peace with China (with the Beijing Treaty of October 29, 1860) and the end of the war in Italy that gave Admiral Léonard Charner the necessary means to take Saigon. The lines at Chi Hoa were taken on February 24–25, 1861; My Tho, a strategic key to the delta and to Cambodia, was taken on April 13; and French gunboats began penetrating the interior. In April, the provincial capitals of Ba Ria, Bien Hoa, and Vinh Long fell. The Hue court was split between realists—supporters of a “Siamese” strategy of negotiation that would allow more time and the modernization of the country—and diehards. Moreover, it was hampered by the interruption of the southern rice exports and by the serious revolt of the Catholic Ta Van Phung (Le Duy Phung) in the name of the Le, supported by the Spanish Dominicans, in the delta of the Red River. Obligated to choose between its enemies, the Hue court finally resigned itself to signing the treaty of June 5, 1862 (the Saigon Treaty), negotiated by Admiral Bonard, the first French governor of Cochinchina, and the representatives of the court, Phan Than Gian and Lam Huy Diep. Hue thereby ceded the three southeastern provinces of Dinh Tuong (or My Tho), Gia Dinh, and Bien Hoa, to France, along with the archipelago of Poulo Condore (Con Dao); granted freedom of navigation for French ships on all branches of the Mekong and opened Ba Cat, Quang Yen in Tonkin, and Tourane to trade; paid an onerous indemnity of four million dollars (piastres), or twenty million gold

francs; and proclaimed religious freedom in the empire of Dai Nam, which also abandoned its suzerainty over Cambodia. Spain obtained only monetary compensation. The whole was a catastrophic treaty for Hue.

The annexation of the western provinces of Cochinchina, Vinh Long, An Giang (or Chau Doc), and Ha Tien was the logical continuation of this first stage of conquest. But in 1863, nothing was certain. As early as 1859, an active guerrilla war was already being organized among the peasants and the scholars in the occupied provinces, with the secret support of Hue. Go Cong was attacked on June 21–22, 1862. The insurgency, based in the swamps of the west, the coastal mangrove swamps, and along the border of the Plain of Reeds, and led by Truong Cong Dinh, a young *don dien* chief, was at its peak in 1862–63. However, although weakened by their leader's death in August 1864, the guerrillas resumed fighting at the start of 1866 in the western provinces and in the Plain of Reeds.¹⁷ Moreover, Emperor Tu Duc considered the Treaty of Saigon no more than a tactical withdrawal.

In 1863, a Vietnamese diplomatic mission, directed by the remarkable mandarin Phan Thanh Gian, the chief proponent at court of a temporary compromise with France, attempted to negotiate the repurchase of the fallen provinces with Paris by exploiting the distrust of colonial wars of the French liberal middle class, who were dismayed at the cost of the conquest (140 million francs). The Vietnamese propositions—a fairly loose protectorate covering the entire south and the surrender of Saigon, My Tho, and Cap-Saint-Jacques, which amounted essentially to an Indochinese version of the granting of the treaty ports of Canton and Shanghai—seemed to a number of political figures to be more favorable to commercial penetration of Dai Nam than its annexation. Napoleon III, the *libre-échangistes* (partisans of free trade), and the Quai d'Orsay shared this point of view. The naval officer Gabriel Aubaret, an outstanding scholar and a great admirer of Chinese civilization, began negotiations in Hue and signed a treaty on July 15, 1864, that aimed at a restricted occupation. It was never, however, ratified because of the campaign unleashed in Paris by a coalescing colonial party backed by the Republican opposition, by Adolphe Thiers and Victor Duruy, and, in Saigon, by a Comité de développement industriel et agricole (Industrial and Agricultural Development Committee), jointly representing business interests and the Navy. For these, no longer just the commercial conquest of China but also control of a vast territory that was within cannon range—the paddy lands of the lower Mekong, an immense deltaic frontier, a “new Algeria” in the Far East—was at stake in the polemic.¹⁸

The decision reached in Paris to annex western Cochinchina had been anticipated a year before by the signature of a protectorate treaty with the Khmer king Norodom on August 11, 1863, at the initiative of Admiral Pierre de La Grandière, the French governor. Norodom, who was also challenged by the revolt of his step-brother Si Votha in June 1861, hoped in this way to offset the reinforcement of the Thai threat following the lessening of the danger represented to his country by

Vietnam. Trapped in a situation in which it was threatened from the interior and exterior, the Khmer court had only one choice. The preceding sovereign, Ang Duong, had already sought French aid at the time of the Montigny mission to Kam-pot in 1856.¹⁹ A “sanctuary” for the Vietnamese guerrillas of the south, and the key to the Mekong basin, Cambodia was crucial to control of the lower part of the river. Whoever intended to dominate southern Vietnam must also control Cambodia. This had been understood since the eighteenth century by the Vietnamese emperors, who had forced the weak Khmer state into a tributary dependence with the goal of consolidating their control of the delta. It was in essence this same “tributary” strategy that the French authorities took up. Through it, Cambodia was to become the base for an eventual expansion into Siam and toward the Mekong basin.

With the failure of Phan Thanh Gian’s mission, the nonratification of the Aubaret treaty, and the advent of the protectorate over Cambodia, the fate of the last Vietnamese provinces in the south (Vinh Long, Chau Doc, and Ha Tien) was sealed. Between June 15 and 24, 1866, with the backing of Napoleon III, notwithstanding the hesitation of the Foreign Ministry, Admiral de La Grandière annexed the western provinces of the delta without warning. As Hue’s imperial commissioner (*kinh luoc*) in the south, Phan Thanh Gian, who had sought a realistic temporary compromise in order to renegotiate the 1862 treaty and modernize the country, reluctantly gave in and then committed suicide. One year later, on July 15, 1867, a Franco-Siamese treaty confirmed the French protectorate over Cambodia in return for the transfer to the Bangkok government of the three Khmer provinces of Battambang, Sisophon, and Siem Reap.

Protests and awkward proposals for compensation by Hue were rebuffed by the French, who henceforth controlled southern Vietnam. Colonization had prevailed, in spite of the literati’s refusal to collaborate, the administrative void created by the departure of the mandarins of western Cochinchina, and the resistance of peasant guerrillas—renewed in 1867 by the sons of Phan Thanh Gian and continuing until December, through the uprisings of the Achar Sva (Sua) (1864–66) and the Buddhist thaumaturge Pou Kombo (June 1866–December 1867) at the frontier of Cochinchina and Cambodia—as well as the last serious revolt of 1872 in the region of Soc Trang, Tra Vinh, and Ben Tre.

INTERLUDE (1867–1878)

After 1867, French expansion in Indochina entered a period of remission, which persisted until the so-called Opportunist Republicans came to power in France in 1877. Napoleon III’s disastrous Mexican adventure (1862–66); the Prussian defeat of the Austrian empire at Sadowa (1866); the battle of Sedan, when the French emperor and his army surrendered to the Prussians (1870); the Paris Commune (1871); and the sharp conflict between Republicans and monarchists in the years

that followed all contributed to paralyzing the French colonial thrust. For France, European issues once again were the priority.

The Tonkin Crisis of 1873

This crisis exploded in the continuation of the great Mekong exploration that had begun in 1866–68. Led by two naval officers, Ernest Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier, the expedition explored the course of the Mekong for 2,000 kilometers (as well as the course of the Yangtze River for 500 kilometers) and proved its impracticability as a navigable route into China. It discovered the existence of silk, tea, and textile exports from Yunnan via the Red River.²⁰ The commercial myth of Yunnan was thus born and would remain powerful until the end of the century, despite the fact that Consul Alexandre Kergaradec had proven the limits of the Red River's navigability after his two trips upriver in 1876 and 1877. From then on, acquiring privileged access to Tonkin became a necessity for French imperialism, particularly since Britain was exploring ground routes between Burma and Yunnan. It was the start of the race to Yunnan between the French and the British. An active lobby of French businessmen in China rallied to this project—notably, Jean Dupuis, who had been established in China since the Second Opium War (1858–60) and furnished arms to the Chinese imperial forces that put down the Yunnan Muslim uprising of 1855–73, and Ernest Millot, former president of the board of directors of the French Concession in Shanghai—as did the Catholic Missions, the Navy, and the colonial administration of Cochinchina.

In March 1873, Dupuis had successfully led an arms convoy to the Chinese Marshal Ma via the Red River into Kunming. A pretext for military intervention presented itself when Vietnamese mandarins detained Dupuis in Hanoi with his return shipment of salt from May to October. Dupuis's objective was to establish, with his Chinese partners, a two-way flow on the Red River of European products and minerals from Yunnan, in order to open the region to European trade under French control. Determined to intervene, Admiral Marie-Jules Dupré, the governor of Cochinchina, who had ordered the reconnaissance of the Red River in 1872, seized the opportunity. On October 11, he sent Francis Garnier to Hanoi with 222 men and four small ships to officially settle the Dupuis affair. Just then, a Hue delegation arrived in Saigon to obtain the restitution of the three Cochinchinese provinces annexed by France in 1867. In fact, Garnier's main mission was to obtain from Hue, by negotiations started in Saigon or by force, a new treaty that would grant the opening of the river to French trade, the annexation of western Cochinchina, and, possibly, a protectorate in Tonkin.²¹ Dupré's strategy was aimed at finding an economical way to force Hue to capitulate, as had been done in 1858. In view of the Vietnamese refusal to negotiate anything other than the evacuation of Dupuis, Garnier, actively seconded by Monsignor Paul Puginier, the bishop of western Tonkin, decided to use force. He proclaimed freedom of navigation on the Red River under

French protection on November 17, 1873, and on November 20, he seized the citadel of Hanoi, followed by other strategic points in the delta. He also installed pro-French authorities in the provinces of Nam Dinh, Ninh Binh, Hai Duong, and Hung Yen.

It all failed, however. Garnier was killed on December 21 at the Paper Bridge by Black Flags, former Taiping insurgents who had taken refuge in North Vietnam and were hired by the Vietnamese administration to fight the French. In Tonkin, unrest was spreading throughout the country. The emergence, dating back to 1864, of a powerful anti-Christian movement among the literati (evidenced by demonstrations of candidates during examinations and calls for the massacre of Christians, “those French of the interior,” and Prince Hong Tap’s plot in 1864) culminated in 1874 with the Van Than movement.²² Following the example of Monsignor Puginier, the Catholic communities had often helped Garnier. Hundreds of Christian villages were burned in Tonkin and in Nghe An. In Paris, reticence took hold: occupying Tonkin was out of the question. Instructions of January 8, 1874, enjoined Dupré to retreat.

Dispatched to Hanoi, Lieutenant Paul Philastre, who was very hostile to Garnier’s initiative, signed a new, ambiguous treaty with the imperial government on March 15, 1874, under which France would evacuate Tonkin and promised military aid to Hue. In turn, the imperial city acknowledged the abandonment of the western provinces of Cochinchina, accepted the creation of joint customs houses and of concessions, temporarily entrusted the direction of its customs to the French, and legalized Christianity once more. It also agreed to the presence of a French resident in Hue and accepted French consulates, all protected by restricted garrisons, in Hanoi, in Ninh Hai, near the future Haiphong, and in Thi Nai (Binh Dinh). The commercial treaty of August 31, 1874, proclaimed free trade on and around the Red River. Through the treaty of March 15, Vietnam saw “its entire independence” from China recognized (art. 2) and was promised French military and naval assistance, in return for the acceptance of “French protection”—although the Vietnamese negotiators refused to allow the word *protectorat* to be used—and a vague agreement to conform its foreign policy to that of France.

In spite of the Hue concessions, the affair of 1873 was a serious setback for the defenders of the extension of colonization to all of Dai Nam. The monarchist government of the duc de Broglie had liquidated the Garnier expedition as cheaply as possible. The conservative majority in the National Assembly, which was committed to giving priority to “continental patriotism” and was strongly hostile to the politics of conquest, especially since it might lead to conflict with China, searched for a compromise in Asia. In 1877, reverting to Aubaret’s approach, Minister of Foreign Affairs Louis Decazes declared that France had entirely renounced its protectorate over Annam. This final respite temporarily strengthened Dai Nam’s Confucian monarchy. However, given the limitations of its own thinking, the Hue regime was only able to take advantage of this last chance in a traditionalist manner.²³

The treaty of 1874, however, included several possibilities that never saw the light. The first of these was the establishment between France and Dai Nam of a relationship of noncolonial dependence, similar to the “unequal relationship of independence” that Britain was in the process of forming with Siam and China. The second was that of a final respite for the government in Hue, one that Tu Duc and his entourage, henceforth more open to reformist ideas, probably hoped to use in order to proceed, with French technical aid, toward a limited modernization of the empire along the lines of the Chinese *Yangwu yundong* (Western activities movement). They were undermined in this, however, by the echo among the literati of the anti-Christian subversion of the Van Than, and of their radical refusal of any reconciliation with the foreigners. Furthermore, the court never conceived of its relations with France as other than a vague tributary allegiance. The treaty of 1874 therefore inevitably led to a number of incidents. Hue, where the proponents of a traditionalist resistance quickly dominated once again, accumulated the barriers to the development of foreign trade in Haiphong and reinforced its tributary links with China. In 1876 and 1880, the court sent emissaries bearing tribute not to the border village of Nan Ning, as was customary, but directly to Beijing. In 1878, it solicited Chinese military aid against brigands and insurgents in Tonkin. The strength of the dominant political categories in Vietnamese society, the mobilization of Vietnamese literati against the treaty, as well as against Christians, pressure from the colonial lobby in Paris, and the chain of events probably at that point destroyed the possibility of imperial Dai Nam avoiding colonization. The brief encounter of the bureaucratic elite of Vietnam with European “modernity” came too late.

The Rise of the Colonial Idea

During the lull of the early 1870s, a decisive debate took place in France that led to the politics of colonial expansion abruptly accelerating after 1878. Without this, the annexation of the whole Indochinese peninsula would not have been conceivable. Nationalist ideology was reorganized around the colonial project, and the French imperialist doctrine took hold. Indeed, after 1871, colonization gradually became a central part of the collective vision of the national future. “Colonialism”—it would seem that the term was introduced into the French political vocabulary in 1895 by a fierce adversary of overseas expansion, the liberal economist Gustave de Molinari—made its appearance in the form of a vast movement of thought that saw the general functioning of French society, the future of the nation, and colonial development as intimately connected.

The essential texts were the economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu’s *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes* (published in 1874 and reprinted five times by 1908) and Gabriel Charmes’s *Politique extérieure et coloniale* (1885). Leroy-Beaulieu laid the theoretical foundation for the rallying of liberal economic thought, until then very reticent, to the colonial idea. During the 1880s, the majority of liberal economists,

like Charles Gide, Frédéric Passy, and Léon Say, ultimately accepted colonization, all the while looking to promote free trade in the colonies instead of protectionism. For them, colonizing was no longer a marginal activity, but rather a response to the irreparable weakening of France in Europe, to the European crisis of French nationalism, and to the profound upset of the national consensus caused by the events of 1871. It was, furthermore, a legitimate response: Republican culture indeed took it upon itself, throughout the nineteenth century, to develop a messianic vision of liberating colonization that would propagate the Republic's founding trinity, science, progress, and democracy, to the ends of the earth. The "duty of civilization" to native peoples, Jules Ferry asserted in 1882, was "to proclaim the law of work everywhere, to teach purer morals, to spread and to transmit our civilization." It was "to deliver the blessing of the European civilization," as Admiral Charner had already put it in 1861.²⁴

Between 1871 and 1880, the Republican idea, the ideal of the nation's self-representation, in the midst of reconstruction, was enduringly projected into colonization. Finally, the colonial dream corresponded, more prosaically, to the Republican preoccupation with the necessity of establishing a form of social regulation at the heart of industrial nations. For the "advanced" French Republicans, starting with Léon Gambetta (president of the Chamber of Deputies, 1879–81; prime minister, 1881–82), who truly inspired the resumption of overseas expansion, colonial imperialism would be the crutch of equality. It was the indispensable stabilizer of a nation torn apart by five revolutions in the short period from 1830 to 1870, the shock absorber of the fall in the fortunes of the traditional elite and the petite bourgeoisie, as well as the proletarianization of the peasantry. "A nation that does not colonize is bound irrevocably to socialism, to the war between rich and poor," Ernest Renan prophesied in 1871.²⁵ "Social peace, in the industrial age of humanity, is a question of outlets," Jules Ferry said.²⁶ Colonial administrators and theorists such as Paul Bert, J.-L. de Lanessan, Joseph-Simon Galliéni, Auguste Pavie, and Paul Doumer sprang not only from the new Republican bourgeoisie made up of the notables of commerce and industry, but also from the milieu of small manufacturing and small rural landowners, from the new social strata whose arrival Gambetta had predicted in a famous 1876 speech.

The colonial project, a historical new deal counterbalancing the disasters of recent French history, showed an unprecedented capacity to mobilize supporters, notwithstanding that it deeply divided opinion. It did so largely through the scientific movement: numerous scientific institutions, such as the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* (Natural History Museum) and the influential *Société nationale d'acclimatation* (National Zoological Society), today's *Société nationale de protection de la nature*, founded in 1854 by Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire as the *Société impériale zoologique d'acclimatation*; learned societies dealing with political economy, such as that of Lyon; and most especially by the geographical movement. In

the decade following 1871, ten geographical societies were created on the model of the Société de géographie de Paris, which rallied to the colonial expansion in the 1860s under the impulsion of its powerful general secretary, Charles Maunoir, and had 2,473 members in 1885. One of the most active was the Société géographique de Lyon, created in 1873. The representatives of the business milieu joined them, and their involvement created parallel societies devoted to commercial geography, which sought to stimulate prospecting for new outlets for French industry. A case in point is the Société de géographie commerciale de Paris (Paris Commercial Geography Society), which chose Dr. Jules Harmand, former companion of Francis Garnier in Tonkin, as its vice president in 1878. Already coming together before 1870, expansionist and intellectual lobbies and circles constituted themselves into an intricate network connected with the political and business milieus of France.

Indochina occupied a central position in the great colonial debates between 1873 and 1880.²⁷ More than virtually any other area of expansion, Indochina effectively condensed the entire colonial problematic, and one cannot overemphasize the decisive importance that it had for the future of French colonial imperialism in the 1880s, just as it did sixty-five years later, in the twilight of empire. Although rendering dependent what remained of Vietnam incited violent opposition in France, notably during the great Indochinese crisis of French politics in 1885, the defeat of this opposition, already foreshadowed in the previous decade, ultimately gave the French colonial project its true opportunity. Missionaries, officers, voyagers, and explorers, such as Jules Harmand during the course of his five journeys to the Mekong basin in 1875–77, preceded colonial possession with scientific possession, creating a new geopolitical imaginary. They “reinvented” Indochina, a new term whose former hyphen (Indo-China) was subsequently elided, the imagined territory where a colonial domain could be created out of a geographically unknown area.

Francis Garnier was especially active in this regard. In 1873, he published his *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine*, a remarkable account of his exploration of the Mekong from 1866 to 1868, which had a great deal of success. Between 1871 and 1874, he also published six articles and booklets on the necessity of commercial penetration of central China. The notes that he brought back at the beginning of 1873, detailing his journey to Sichuan were published in 1882 as *De Paris au Tibet*. Jean Dupuis's literary activity was also significant: he published fourteen articles and six books between 1874 and 1886; in 1877, in a speech to the Paris Geographical Society, he denounced the inertia of French politics in Annam. The Société académique indochinoise (Indochinese Academic Society) was established to promote the studies of “Trans-Gange India,”²⁸ and more or less romanticized narratives about the peninsula multiplied.

Not only did Indochina become part of the texture of the new national idea, it also became one of the priorities of the newborn Third Republic's foreign policy,

as is shown by the imperialistic leanings of Gambetta's newspaper *La République française* at the time of the Garnier expedition. The campaign of the so-called Tonkinois merged with what Raoul Girardet has called the *nationalisme d'expression mondiale* (global nationalism) of the Opportunist Republicans. This interest in Indochinese affairs, as elaborated on in the writings of Jules Harmand, Paul Bert's son-in-law Joseph Chailley-Bert, Jules Ferry, J.-L. de Lanessan, Paul Doumer, and Albert Sarraut,²⁹ among others, would long remain central to the development of French colonial thought.

FRENCH CAPITALISM AND COLONIAL EXPANSION IN THE FAR EAST AFTER 1879

Certainly, the new colonial discourse was a vehicle for fantasies that intoxicated its authors as well as French opinion, myths that multiplied a hundredfold the promise of the fabulous Chinese market, or of a new Louisiana in Tonkin, which would be the source of many disappointments over the next twenty years. However, the project of opening a commercial route to Yunnan and Sichuan via Tonkin strongly oriented the resumption of French expansion in the Far East.

Classic Colonial Interests

The resumption of colonial expansion in Indochina was part of a fundamental movement that one cannot simply limit, as the solidly installed cliché would have it, to the actions of a small lobby of opportunists and speculators aided by a handful of officers and priests. It is not that their actions were negligible. The classic colonial interests were actually more active than ever. The new Gambettist administration; the merchants and the colonists of Cochinchina—a true *colonie colonisatrice* (colonizing colony); the colony's first civil governors, Charles Le Myre de Vilers (1879–83) and Charles Thomson (1883–85), Gambetta's former secretary; and the deputy Jules Blancsubé, republican mayor of Saigon and a friend of Gambetta's, all affirmed their position in favor of expansion into central and northern Indochina. Their dictum was, as the historian Alfred Rambaud, who was close to Jules Ferry, wrote: "Extending is the only means of preserving."³⁰

The pressure from the business milieu and from the speculators should not be underestimated either, especially that of Dupuis and Millot, who were closely linked to the Gambettists and to Charles de Freycinet. In 1882, Dupuis founded the Société d'études et d'exploitation du Tonkin (Society for the Study and Exploitation of Tonkin) with the view to investing, with the participation of Hong Kong capitalists, in the coalfields of northern Vietnam—plans also claimed by another group organized by a nephew of Ferry's, Bavier-Chauffour.³¹ These milieus produced the myth of the "Tonkin mines," as well as several maps distributed during the parliamentary debates of May 1883, which bore fanciful captions such as

“Mung-tä-tchen-po: *grosses pépites d’or* [big gold nuggets],” “Muong-lou: *riches mines d’or* [rich gold mines],” and so on.

The interests of the French Army and Navy also should not be disregarded. Tonkin and Annam, in particular, offered points of logistical support, since they could supply the coal that would be required by a fleet with global range along the lines envisioned by the *Jeune école* (Young School) of Admiral Hyacinthe Aube and Commander François Fournier, which argued for a more mobile force based on cruisers, torpedo boats, and ships lightly armed with torpedoes.³² The doctrine prevailed for a time with the nomination of a Republican naval officer, Admiral Jean Jauréguiberry, to the Ministry of the Navy and the Colonies in 1879–80, and again in 1882–83. In 1879, he proposed the first plan for occupying Tonkin, which called for a corps of 6,000 soldiers. More than ever, it seemed that possession of Indochina would determine the future of French naval power in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

Finally, after 1880, with the Church and the Republic increasingly at odds, territories that could be colonized also became indispensable grounds for compromise. Even though the Catholic missions were more reserved toward the conquest between 1870 and 1874, certain members of the hierarchy, notably Albert de Mun and Monsignor Charles Freppel, a monarchist deputy for Brest from 1880 to 1891, threw all their weight behind occupation of the whole of Indochina.

The New Economic Problematic

These influences, however, were only successful because they seemed to answer a more fundamental economic exigency. Certainly, the best historians often reject this type of explanation, with seemingly solid arguments to back up their point of view. We know, for instance, that Jules Ferry invoked the commercial imperative only after having taken the political decision to conquer Tonkin. It is also certain that we should not view the creation of the protectorate over Dai Nam and Laos as the work of financial capital (in the Hobsonian or Leninist sense of the term), born of the fusion between large industries and banks, and of large monopolist groups looking to divide the peninsula between themselves. These groups, which would be very active in Russia and in Turkey after 1900, hardly existed in France at the time, and they could in no way have been behind the Indochinese enterprise of the 1880s. There are however, two reservations to this evaluation. First, colonization of the peninsula was the springboard of the expansion into China for coalescing French financial capital. Second, Indochina was long the site of the accumulation and formation of important segments of this financial capital, in particular, of the powerful *Banque de l’Indochine*, today the *Banque Indosuez*. For these two reasons, the colonial Indochinese enterprise can in hindsight be said to have truly participated—by anticipation, if you will—in the imperialistic quest for new realms of profit.

Other data, in contrast, show the extent to which economic decisions were essential in the French colonial offensive in Indochina. French capitalism, along

with all the industrialized economies, suffered a long depression in 1873–95, which reached its low point in 1884–85. The metropolitan economy faced both industrial stagnation—industrial growth rates were negative in 1873, 1877, 1879, and from 1883 to 1885—and a crisis in terms of profits and the exportation of merchandise. France had never known such a long period of economic uncertainty in the industrial era: between 1875 and 1905, its GNP at current prices augmented by only 10%, compared to 113% for Germany and 60% for the United Kingdom. All of the sector indicators confirm the depth and persistence of these difficulties. The mechanisms of profit accumulation and creation were undermined. The deterioration of profits followed the fall of returns on investments in the home market, which was itself caused, as Jean Bouvier has shown, by the hyperaccumulation of capital that had taken place around 1870. For example, the *Crédit lyonnais*, founded in 1863–64 with 10 million francs in deposits, had roughly 1,382 million in 1881. From then on, the export of capital became more critical than ever as a way of raising and regulating the rate of profit. Considerable before 1870 (700 million francs invested abroad on average each year) but hesitant from 1876 to 1885 (with a yearly average of 315 million), this export of capital underwent a recovery from 1885 to 1895 (with a yearly average of 469 million), before reaching a record level from 1896 to 1913 (with a yearly average of 1,200 to 1,300 million).³³ During the economic depression, colonies that could take their place among the principal outlets for these capital fluxes were viewed as solutions to the problem of finding sites for the profitable investment of excess capital. It was indeed precisely at the beginning of this cycle of recession, on January 21, 1875, through the initiative of the *Comptoir d'escompte* and the *Société générale*, that the *Banque de l'Indochine*—whose influence on France's Indochinese politics still needs to be elucidated—was founded.³⁴

Compounding the crisis in profitability was the weakening of French foreign trade, whose key role in the sale of metropolitan products must be kept in mind. Over the nineteenth century, exports steadily increased as a proportion of France's physical product, but they slowed to around 4.25 billion francs a year between 1880 and 1904 (fig. 1.1). During the period from 1875 to 1914, French trade was at its lowest point in 1877, and in 1878, the commercial balance began to show a stubborn deficit (figs. 1.2 and 1.3).

French economic and political leaders thus saw the creation of captive consumer markets as an efficient riposte to a situation that was all the more serious because all of France's principal commercial partners, with the exception of England, adopted protectionist legislation in the 1880s. As J.-L. de Lanessan, the future governor-general of Indochina, noted in 1886:

Industry at first only worked for the home market, through exchanges between cities and the countryside; but soon this market became too narrow, and industry was compelled to manufacture for export, that is, for foreign nations. However, the

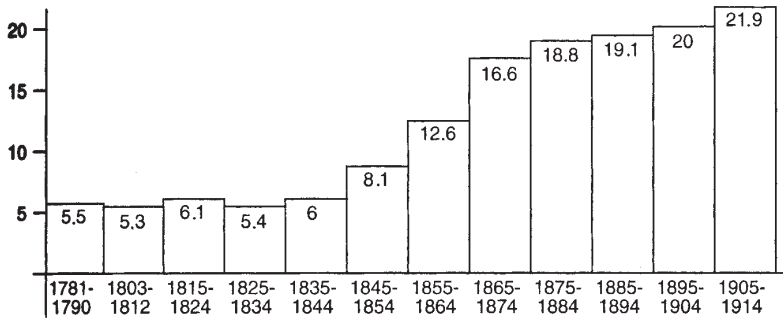


FIGURE 1.1. Relationship between French exports and production (percent), 1781–1914. (Based on data from J.-C. Toutain, “Les structures du commerce extérieur de la France, 1789–1970,” in *La position internationale de la France: aspects économiques et financiers, XIX^e–XX^e siècles*, ed. M. Lévy-Leboyer [Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1977].)

same things have occurred in these nations, the same evolution has taken place in all civilized nations. . . . With the number of unindustrialized civilized countries decreasing every day, it is increasingly outside of them that manufacturers are obliged to search for consumers.³⁵

Gambetta’s decree of November 1881 transferring responsibility for the colonies from the Ministry of the Navy to the Ministry of Commerce, and his decision to place at the head of these two departments spokesmen for commerce from Marseille and Bordeaux, Maurice Rouvier and Félix Faure, were significant in this regard. No less revealing was the debate that ensued in the Chamber in 1883 under pressure from the textile industry of northern France, which wished to abolish the free trade that a Senate decree (*sénatus-consulte*) had established for the colonies in 1866. This debate led to a vote for the assimilation of the customs regulations of the colonies to those of the metropolitan France in November 1887, and then to the protectionist Méline customs tariff on January 11, 1892.

Jules Ferry would affirm forcefully that the most dependable “escape from the crisis,” a necessary corollary to the resumption of growth, was through “colonial policy” that was “the daughter of industrial politics.” This was not simply a commercial fantasy, as is frequently said today, even if the mirage of the markets of Tonkin and Yunnan had some misleading effects. In fact, the entire fabric of French industry and agriculture gradually formed strong ties with colonial markets, and many businessmen pushed for their conquest, or at least accepted it—which was already a great deal. Nevertheless, there was no automatic direct causal link between economic determination and the conquest of Indochina. It was this larger movement that gave unity to the conglomerate of businesses and the very heterogeneous

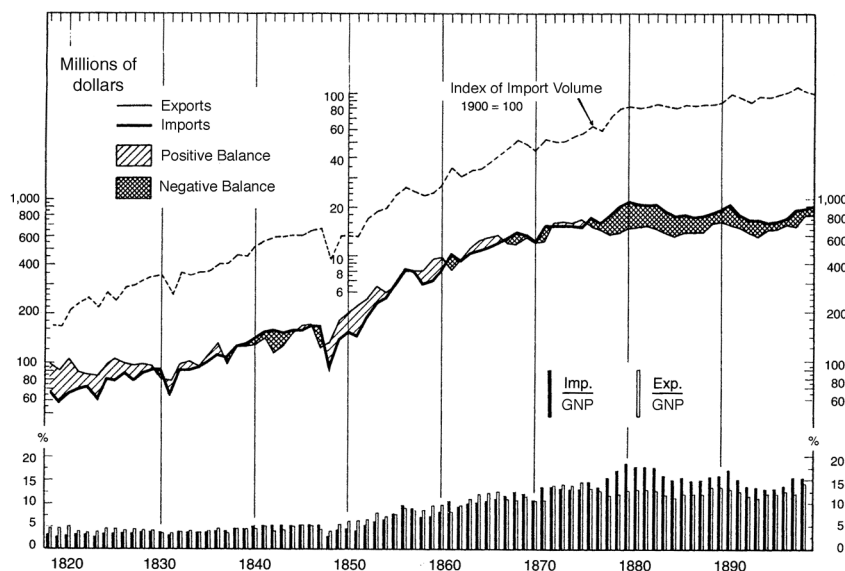


FIGURE 1.2. French foreign trade until 1900. (Based on J.-M. Jeanneney and E. Barbier-Jeanneney, *Les économies occidentales du XIX^e siècle à nos jours*, vol. 1 [Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985], p. 240.)

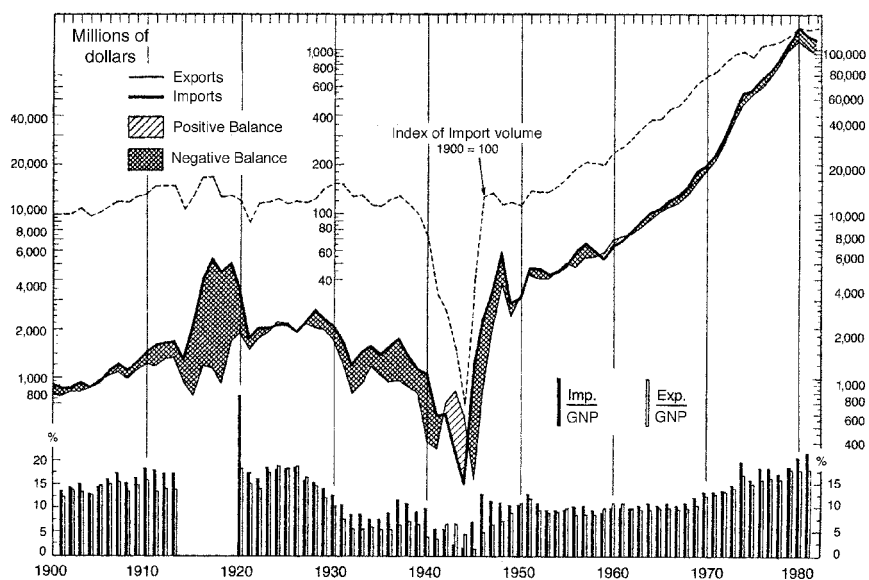


FIGURE 1.3. French foreign trade after 1900. (Based on Jeanneney and Barbier-Jeanneney, *Les économies occidentales*, 1:240.)

interests that would come together to form colonial capitalism. The main industries of the time pressured for Indochinese expansion. The cotton industry of the north, in Rouen and the Vosges, which in 1877 was still the third largest in the world; Le Creusot and Paris metallurgy; and the Lyon silk industry all demonstrated their interest in the endeavor.³⁶ Their goal remained China. It was a goal outlined by Francis Garnier, who wrote in an article posthumously published in 1882: "There is no possible future for our manufacturers if we do not claim our share of the Chinese market, or if we continue to pay British or American middlemen a high commission on Chinese raw materials."³⁷

Thanks to Jean-François Klein's research, the Lyon case is now well known.³⁸ The Lyon silk industry was the only French industry whose production was dominant on the world market; it was endangered, however, by the rise of silk manufacturing in Milan and the Rhine port of Krefeld in Germany. Moreover, after the pebrine disaster, it became dependent on imports of Chinese raw silk. In 1877, 42% of the silk manufactured in Lyon was made with these imports; in 1900, 40.7%, and in 1910, 39.8%.³⁹ Inasmuch as Indochina was potentially a substitute source of raw silk, the Lyon trade was deeply concerned with its development. Its major firms invested in the activities of the Banque de l'Indochine and of the British Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. In 1863, its silk merchants opened a silk-trading house in China directed by the young Ulysse Pila (1837–1909). In Lyon, the factory owners, the bankers, the silk merchants, and, with them, the ironmasters of the industrial basin of the Loire, their newspapers, the chamber of commerce, the Société géographique, and the Société d'économie politique constituted a powerful pressure group, directed by Pila and the banker E. Aynard, a liberal deputy of the Center-Left. Around 1883–84, this group, already in existence, converted to the Tonkin project of the Gambettists and Ferryists. At this point, they planned to penetrate and develop southern China commercially via Tonkin, which was strategically placed for the purpose and would only need to be equipped with economic infrastructure. Henceforth, they subscribed to the idea of a French protectorate at the southern frontier of the Qing empire, entailing colonization of Indochina based on free trade. To this end, the Lyon chamber of commerce and Société géographique, with the support of a dozen other chambers of commerce, organized Paul Brunat's mission for the commercial exploration of Tonkin in 1884–85. They leaned heavily toward military conquest. Allied to business circles in Marseille and Paris, and to the cotton industry of eastern France, they were jointly active in the Banque de l'Indochine, starting to invest before 1900 (perhaps around 15 million francs) in harbor and river infrastructure in Tonkin, as well as in the trading of Annam salt for Yunnan opium. Pila helped found some of the first businesses in the protectorate: Messageries annamites à vapeur in 1885; Docks et magasins généraux de Haiphong in 1886; and the Compagnie lyonnaise indochinoise in 1898. An active Republican, he became the counselor to his friend Paul Bert, with whom he maintained close ties after the latter

became resident general in 1886. Pila also organized an important colonial exposition in Lyon in 1894. He was to be one of the true founders of French Indochina.

Ten years later, when the breakup of China was being planned, French business pressure for more aggressive economic penetration of southern China—"the greatest still unexplored market in the world," according to the British explorer Archibald Colquhoun⁴⁰—intensified. The French focused on Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. As in the past, pressure was often applied by competitive business and the chambers of commerce that spoke for it. In 1894, at the initiative of the indefatigable Pila, those of Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, Lille, Roubaix, and Roanne established the *Mission lyonnaise d'exploration commerciale en Chine*, directed by Henri Brenier (1895–97). This time, however, powerful industrial and banking interests with links to the *Quai d'Orsay* and the Army also intervened. They took action not through the classic channels of the chambers of commerce but by going straight to the top of the government. Indochina was the base for their activity in China, where they, especially the *Banque de l'Indochine*, were readily tempted by the possibilities of cooperating with foreign capital in the creation of international consortiums—which were "ultra-imperialist," in a sense—aimed at equipping the country, notably with railroads.

In June 1896, the *Compagnie de Fives-Lille* obtained authorization from the Chinese to build a railroad from Longzhou to Dong Dang, extending the Hanoi–Lang Son line; but in the end, it was not built. The line from Yunnan (Haiphong–Kunming) was the object of a series of technical and economic missions to China. In 1895, the *Comité des Forges* (Ironworks Committee) created the *Société d'études industrielles en Chine*, which the following year sent out the engineer Dujardin-Beaumetz, an important member of the committee. This mission was completed by the Guillemoto and Belard missions in 1897–98, and those, much more prudent in their conclusions, of the consuls Auguste François (1899) and Haas (1900–1903) to the upper basin of the Yangtze. For its promoter Paul Doumer, who was closely tied to big business—particularly to the *Union des industries métallurgiques et minières* and the *Compagnie générale d'électricité*, over which he would preside in 1911—the construction of this railroad was a necessary prelude to the annexation of Yunnan. The decrease in orders for the construction of railroads in Europe helped to valorize the project for heavy industry and the large French banks. Because the *Quai d'Orsay* deeply disagreed with Doumer's methods, it was with difficulty that a consortium was created, in 1898, based on Guillemoto's hasty report, for the construction of the line, which gave birth to the *Compagnie française des chemins de fer du Yunnan* in June 1901. The consortium grouped together the main French banks (*Comptoir national d'escompte*, *Société générale*, *Crédit industriel et commercial*, *Paribas*, *Banque de l'Indochine*) and the major firms of the railway industry (Count Vitali's *Régie générale des chemins de fer* and the *Société des Batignolles*). A number of mining unions came into being in 1898–1900.

THE CRISIS OF TONKIN AND THE PROTECTORATE
OVER ANNAM-TONKIN (1880-1885)

The mechanisms to advance French colonization in Indochina were therefore established, particularly once the question of the political regime was settled in France after the crisis of May 16, 1877. Yet this advance would be singularly hesitant. Colonization was held up both by the complex decision-making process that accompanied it, composed of initiatives on the ground, as well as governmental decisions—the empire was being built both at its center and its periphery—and by the vigorous resistance it incited in France. Opponents included liberal economists like Gustave de Molinari; nationalists for whom the annexation of Tonkin signified the abandonment of Alsace-Lorraine; and monarchists, like the duc de Broglie, who disagreed that “colonial policies were in any way a compensation for the misfortunes experienced in Europe.” De Broglie long remained attached to the idea of the primacy of continental issues, denouncing the entrapment of France in the “wasps’ nest of Tonkin.” Furthermore, the question of Indochina, the symbol of the colonial project, profoundly divided the Republicans. Like the Socialists, the Radicals, whose program of 1881 and electoral manifesto of July 1885 rejected all politics of conquest, denounced its risks and implications. They believed it was impossible to reconcile overseas expansion with the recovery of external dynamism within Europe, and, most important, that it signified the exclusion of all social reform policies and any hope of raising the standard of living of the popular classes of France. Colonialism was, in other words, the abandonment of radicalism’s original great historical project in favor of external growth. “You want to found an empire in Indochina. We want to found the Republic,” said Clemenceau, who lucidly celebrated “the best of the outlets, the interior outlet, much more powerful, much more desirable, more profitable in the true sense of the word, than the external outlets, so problematic and so costly.”⁴¹

What ultimately came decisively into play in the dramatic engagement of the Republic in Indochina was French capitalism’s commitment to growth. French opinion would never be unanimous on the subject of Indochina. More than any other colonial conquest, that of Indochina took place with very small parliamentary majorities: hardly four votes at the time of the great parliamentary debate on Tonkin on December 21–24, 1885. It unfolded against a backdrop of violent opposition, in particular, in 1885, after the fall of Prime Minister Jules Ferry’s government on March 30, when it became the central theme of the October legislative elections.

With rare exceptions, however, such as Yves Guyot, a radical representative of the Seine and future minister of public works, this opposition was largely motivated more by power struggles, by what was at stake in metropolitan politics, than by any fundamental critique of colonialism, or even of the actual situation in Indochina. Only isolated individuals such as the Bonapartist Jules Delafosse, an elected

representative from Calvados, carried out this kind of fundamental critique. As for the anti-colonialism of the Radicals, they did not challenge the principle of colonization, but rather its methods and the priority over social goals accorded to it by the Opportunist Republicans. Nor did they challenge the idea of a hierarchy of “races,” the ideological pillar of colonization. In fact, denouncing the Indochinese policies of Ferry in their name, Camille Pelletan identified himself explicitly with this idea on December 29, 1885, when he asked: “Don’t populations of the *inferior* races have as many rights as you? You abuse them, you do not civilize them!” It was a remarkable confusion: the opponents of colonization accepted its justification. Indeed, Clemenceau would write the preface for Auguste Pavie’s book *À la conquête des cœurs*. Business opportunism, the abuses of colonial management, the collusion of France’s policy of overseas expansion with the European strategy of Bismarck—all these were denounced. Indochina, however, was a luxury that would be accepted, if it were free of charge.

Much more important than this European-centered anti-colonialism was the conversion of the Opportunist Republicans, in power since 1877, to the Indochinese enterprise, and its insertion into the center of the dominant Republican project. Their conversion was above all the work of Gambetta and his political allies, Charles Freycinet, Jules Ferry, Maurice Rouvier, the young Théophile Delcassé, Jules Méline, Félix Faure, and Eugène Etienne. Between 1878 and 1880, Gambetta and Ferry seem to have rallied to the idea of a dynamic imperialism outside Europe. For them, it represented the only possible defense of France’s status as a world power; as Ferry said, it “would not resign itself joyfully to playing the role of a big Belgium in the world.” It was also the principal means of escape from the economic crisis, which worsened toward 1880, as well as the foundation for a consensus around the Republic. For them, Republican democracy, a return to prosperity, and the search for power and imperialism went together.

Henceforth, France could no longer abstain from taking part in the competition triggered in Southeast Asia with the thrust of the British from Burma toward the upper Mekong—in 1875, a British expedition to open a trade route between Bhamo in upper Burma and Shanghai, under Colonel Horace Browne, led to the murder of a British consular officer, R. A. Margary, evidently with the involvement of the Qing authorities—and from Singapore into the Malay Peninsula. “If, at any given moment, we do not snatch our portion of colonies, England and Germany will seize them,” Gambetta declared in 1878. Numerous votes in the Chamber—notably on May 26, 1883, when the credits requested by Ferry for the expedition to Tonkin were approved unanimously by the 494 representatives present—showed that as long as the policies in Indochina did not have serious financial and military implications, they were largely approved. In any case, the tenacious resistance of Hue to the expansion of European trade in Tonkin hardly allowed Paris a choice other than the use of force.

At the Congrès international de géographie in 1878, the French delegation claimed Annam, Tonkin, and Siam for France. The following day, the campaign in favor of the revision of the Franco-Vietnamese treaty of 1874 became more pronounced. In the following years, national geographical conferences and the chambers of commerce of France's great industrial towns multiplied their resolutions in favor of annexation of Tonkin. "One must search there for new outlets to replace those that were lost through our disasters of 1870," the Douai Congrès national de géographie declared in 1882. Already in July 1881, during Ferry's first cabinet, the Chamber had managed to release an initial credit, but the Opportunist Republicans hesitated until the spring of 1883. The project for the complete occupation of Tonkin prepared by Gambetta's *grand ministère* in November 1881 was struck down in April 1882 in favor of a plan for more limited intervention in the delta, drawn up by Prime Minister Ferry and the governor of Cochinchina, Le Myre de Vilers, in September of the preceding year. Its prudent approach was in part the outcome of the crisis in Egypt and the resulting Anglo-French conflict. The plan aimed at deploying only limited forces to take control of the Red River in order to impose on Hue an interpretation of the 1874 treaty in favor of a *protectorat catégorique* (firm protectorate), in the words of Admiral Jauréguiberry.

Toward War

It was in this context that the Freycinet cabinet, formed in January 1882, sent Commandant Henri Rivière with three companies to Hanoi on March 26. Under pressure from French traders in Tonkin and Monsignor Puginier, Rivière attacked the citadel on April 25 on the pretext of neutralizing it. He handed back only a portion of the captured installations five days later. French policies, hesitant until early 1883, were clearly ready to exploit the general weakening of Dai Nam's empire. Paralysis was spreading throughout a power anchored in a conservatism divided between defenders of peace (*chu hoa*) and of war (*chu chien*). A profound misunderstanding of the West equally blinded it: "His ignorance in all sciences is extreme," wrote Pierre Rheinart, the former French chargé d'affaires at Hue, of the influential minister of finance Nguyen Van Tuong in 1885. "His conversations with the French have taught him little, even about our country. He finds our institutions strange and does not even understand them. Industrial progress surprises him, but in and of itself, he finds little to envy."⁴² Most important, however, Tonkin entered into a process of destabilization, linked to internal causes that are still poorly understood and to the indirect effects of the great revolts that had shaken southern China since 1850. This situation would allow interventionist lobbies to put an end to governmental hesitation.

The Chinese crisis, in effect, caused the migration of highland populations to the mountainous areas of Tonkin and Laos. Among them were Hmong groups who settled on the heights of Tran Ninh and Hua Phan toward 1845–50, as well

as masses of the poor fleeing misery and the civil war. Other groups followed after 1864: bands of Yunnan rebels, known under the generic name of Ho, and the remaining Taiping troops, who lived off the land, among whom were Liu Yong Fu's (Luu Vinh Phuc's) famous Black Flags.⁴³ They settled around Cao Bang and then Lao Cai on the upper Red River and were used by the Vietnamese authorities starting in 1872–73 against the rival Yellow (whose leader was Luong Tam Ky) and White Flags. Implicated in local conflicts between the Hmong and the Yao, they were joined in 1878 by around 10,000 supporters of a rebel military mandarin of Guangxi, Li Yang Kai (Ly Duong Tai). Northern Vietnam, ravaged by floods, famine, and bandits, was therefore on its way to being incorporated into the troubled space of southern China, and after April 1879, at the request of the Vietnamese, some regular Chinese troops arrived to fight the Chinese rebel forces, which were disbanded the following month.

On September 6, 1882, the Hue court decided to mount a military resistance to the French challenge. However, stuck between this challenge and the hostility of the literati, who blamed the court for the successive concessions to the foreigners, it was internally riven by grave dissensions regarding what attitude to take toward France. These disagreements heightened following the death of Emperor Tu Duc, who died childless on July 19, 1883. Ministers and regents disagreed about which policy should be followed: Nguyen Trong Hiep, the minister of foreign relations, favored a compromise and collaboration with France, while two regents, Minister of War Ton That Thuyet and Nguyen Van Tuong, were determined, as were the majority of the literati, to mount an uncompromising resistance. The two men were, however, enemies. Their division degenerated into pitiless struggles for influence that led to a serious dynastic crisis and a nearly total absence of imperial power. Four sovereigns succeeded one another over the course of two years. The first was the presumptive heir, Duc Duc (July 20–23, 1883), nephew and adoptive son of the defunct emperor; accused of incompetence and of involvement with the French, he was consigned by the regents to “close confinement” three days after his accession. The second was Hiep Hoa (July 30–November 30, 1883), his uncle, who was forced to poison himself for the second reason. Then came Kien Phuc (November 30, 1883–July 31, 1884), another nephew of Tu Duc's, enthroned by the resistance party that had been in power at Hue since July 1883, who died after a reign of eight months. Finally, Ham Nghi (August 2, 1884–July 5, 1885), Kien Phuc's thirteen-year-old younger brother, acceded to the throne.

The risk of an armed conflict with China, however, hampered French plans for exploiting the situation in Hue. On December 27, 1880, Beijing warned that occupation of Tonkin would entail war, and, in August 1881, the Chinese sent thirty thousand men there. For his part, on the eve of his death, in January 1883, Tu Duc appealed to China for help. The Qing regime was briefly tempted by the idea of a division of Tonkin as a way of assuring the survival of the tributary system that

associated the Chinese empire with the peripheral states in a relation of superiority. When Rivière attempted, in March 1883, to occupy the principal towns of the delta, a threshold was crossed, and he came up against the Black Flags and the resistance of Vietnamese troops, which encouraged a Chinese military presence. It is clear that what was playing out in Vietnam, as would be the case half a century later, was a radical shift in the organization of the Far East: in this case, the establishment there of Western imperialist rule.

The Franco-Chinese confrontation thus had a determining influence on the outcome of the four successive phases of the crisis in Tonkin, whose Vietnamese, Chinese, French, and international dimensions were closely intertwined. After the negotiation in Beijing of a compromise based on the division of Tonkin into two zones of influence, Chinese to the north, French to the south (Bourée's convention proposal of December 1882), the second Ferry ministry, constituted on February 21, 1883, disavowed the Bourée convention on March 5 and opted, on March 16, for conquest. On March 12, Rivière occupied Hon Gai, where the engineer Fuchs had just discovered coal in 1880–82. Liu Yong Fu's Black Flags challenged, then killed Rivière on the Paper Bridge on May 19. His death dramatized the situation such that on May 26, the Ferry government obtained the necessary votes from the Chamber for the financing and consignment of an expedition "to organize the protectorate," commanded by General Alexandre Bouët and Admiral Amédée Courbet. On August 23, after the seizure of the forts of Thuan An, outside Hue, while Bouët overran the Red River Delta, Jules Harmand, named general civil commissioner on June 8, delivered an ultimatum to the Hue government. If it rejected his proposal: "The empire of Annam, its dynasty, its princes, and its court will have pronounced their own death sentence. The name Vietnam will no longer exist in history." On August 25, 1883, the regents were compelled to sign a drastic protectorate treaty with Harmand that was a prelude to pure and simple annexation. The Tonkin provinces, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh, were to be placed under administration of French residents, along with the management of customs and external relations. Binh Thuan was conceded to Cochinchina, and a French resident was to be installed in Hue, with the right to audiences with the king.

The court, however, still considered all this merely a matter of gaining time. The war continued in the north, where the main Vietnamese fortress, Son Tay, fell on December 16. The regent Ton That Thuyet, the soul of the resistance, fortified Hue and secretly constructed a powerful camp entrenched in the mountains at Tan So, close to Cam Lo in Muong country, as well as building a mountain road toward upper Tonkin. Intending to revive the old strategy of national resistance to foreign invasion from highland bases, Thuyet had artillery, supplies, and a third of the imperial treasury transported to Tan So.

A second stage in the conflict, that of the semi-declared Franco-Chinese conflict, began after the summer of 1883. Convinced of the weakness of the Chinese

army, Jules Ferry demanded on August 9 that it evacuate Tonkin. He was in fact seeking to confront both Beijing and the anti-colonial opposition in the French Chamber of Deputies with a *fait accompli*. This was why reinforcements, voted on December 15, were sent. These policies seemed to succeed: the fall of Son Tay and that of Bac Ninh, held by the Chinese, on March 12, 1884, led Li Hongzhang, the principal Chinese statesman, on May 11, 1884 (with the Fournier agreement), to accept the recognition of Franco-Vietnamese treaties, the opening of southern China to French trade, and the evacuation of Tonkin. Nevertheless, the conflict with China obliged Ferry's government to content itself with the formula of a protectorate over Vietnam and not to ratify the treaty negotiated by Harmand. Instead, a new protectorate treaty, the "Patenôtre treaty"—this one definitive—was signed in Hue on June 6, 1884. A fundamental charter for the protectorate until 1945, it too restored Binh Thuan and the administration of northern Annam to the imperial government, as well as confirming an administrative dissociation of Annam and Tonkin. In Tonkin, the treaty placed the provincial administrations under the control of French residents (through articles 6, 7, and 8). It envisioned France's direction of the foreign policy of Dai Nam and the installation of a French resident general in Hue, who was to have the right to personal audience with the emperor, a stipulation that represented a genuine profanation of the imperial function. For Vietnam, it was the end of the tributary relationship with Beijing. In Hue, the great seal of investiture granted to the Nguyen dynasty by the emperors of China was solemnly melted down on June 6 in the presence of the court assembly and replaced by a seal sent from France, carved from a meteorite. The protectorate of Annam-Tonkin had been established.

In parallel, following forceful action by the governor of the colony of Cochinchina, Charles Thomson, a much more coercive protectorate was imposed on King Norodom of Cambodia, with a view to the quasi-annexation of the country by the colony, under the treaty of June 17, 1884. The treaty envisaged the installation of French residents in the provinces, who were to control the Khmer governors, and, in contrast to the protectorate over Vietnam, it stipulated that the resident general would take charge of public order, economic services, and taxation, and proclaimed the institution of private property and an end to personal enslavement for debt. "Your protection is the cremation of the monarchy," Norodom apparently said.

In a third phase of conflict, the war with China revived, following an incident at Bac Le on June 22, 1884, when, in the absence of an order to withdraw, Chinese units resisted the advance of French troops. Beijing actually felt that a definitive retreat should only take place after a definitive resolution of the conflict. In Paris, intransigence prevailed in the euphoria born of the successes of the spring. The ultimatum of July 12 not only required the Chinese government to evacuate Tonkin immediately, but also demanded the payment of an indemnity of 250 million francs

(making China finance the conquest of Tonkin). Since China refused to pay the indemnity, "There is nothing left to do but deliver a violent blow to that senile old lady, to take something as a forfeit, that is, to occupy Formosa [Taiwan] and then wait," Jules Ferry wrote on August 21.⁴⁴ Thirty-five ships of Courbet's squadron once again set up the strategy of territorial collateral. The bombardment of the great arsenal of Fuzhou took place on August 23–24, followed by the January 1885 occupation of Ke Long and Tam Sui, Formosa's two coal-mining harbors, which the Navy had long dreamed of acquiring. This was followed by a blockade of the island, then the February 1885 embargo on supply of rice to northern China, and finally a landing in the Pescadores in March.

Jules Ferry's maximalist strategy, however, failed because of a violent campaign of protest on the part of the Radicals and Conservatives, which reduced the government's ability to maneuver in the Chamber, and the discontent of the British, whose trade partially controlled the traffic in Chinese rice. Furthermore, Vietnamese and Chinese troops attempted a counteroffensive in the Tonkin Delta. Ferry initially had to come to some sort of compromise and accept unofficial British mediation and a plan for a peace resolution, secretly finalized by Duncan Campbell on March 15, 1885.

Then, suddenly, the unforeseen occurred in Lang Son. After having taken the city with a powerful column of eight thousand men and advanced beyond the border with the aim of neutralizing the Guangxi army, General François de Négrier, returning to Lang Son, was wounded on March 28 at the city walls. The Chinese were about to withdraw, but de Négrier's substitute, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Herbinger, panicked and ordered an accelerated retreat, destroyed his baggage, and abandoned a battery. Militarily, this had no decisive importance, and diplomatically speaking the accord was almost signed in Beijing, but Jules Ferry, who had secretly asked Bismarck to intervene on his behalf with China, could not make public this fact. In Paris, on March 30, panic broke out following an anguished telegram from the new commander in chief, General Ernest Brière de l'Isle, who, fearing a Chinese offensive in the delta, asked for reinforcements. What weighed suddenly on Tonkin was the shadow of the events of Mexico during the Second Empire and the idea of a long war with China and of what *Le Temps* called a "colonial Sedan." In the Chamber, Georges Clemenceau and the Bonapartist Jules Delafosse led the assault against Jules Ferry, asking for his indictment before the High Court. Ferry was overthrown the same day, by 306 votes to 149, with 49 abstentions, "for a disaster that did not take place."⁴⁵

The victory of the opponents of conquest was, however, short-lived, as is evidenced by the last phase of the Tonkin crisis, that of compromise. Charles Fourniau has demonstrated that it was not the colonization of Vietnam per se that was at stake during the crisis of Lang Son but rather three questions that greatly surpassed it: relations with China, the question of what limits to fix on the financial

and military engagement of France in colonial expansion, and the future of the political project of the Opportunist Republicans, who aimed to provide a greater margin to the executive power in relation to the Parliament—Ferry's vision of a "strong government"—and whose failure was marked by the overthrow of Ferry in a climate of extraordinary violence.⁴⁶

The Tonkin crisis squarely established parliamentary dominance—"The Tonkin question is only accessory: the true struggle is over France's domestic policy," wrote *Le Télégraphe* on December 25, 1885.⁴⁷ It ended with a compromise over Indochina. Many important chambers of commerce, town councils, and newspapers sought this solution. They had prematurely denounced a hypothetical evacuation that no one in the Chamber, not even Clemenceau, had called for. In contrast, 46 Radicals out of 143 voted for the 200 million francs and the dispatching of a reinforcement of 8,000 men requested by the new government headed by Prime Minister Henri Brisson and Minister of Foreign Affairs Charles de Freycinet, in so doing granting it the necessary majority. The Patenôtre protectorate treaty of June 6, 1884, was ratified on June 4, 1885, and ratification of the Franco-Chinese treaty followed on June 9, sealing the historic compromise between France and China on Indochina. France gave up all demands for an indemnity and its insular conquests, while China recognized the French protectorate over Annam-Tonkin, in effect abandoning its responsibilities as central power of the tributary system, and accepted the opening of Yunnan, Guangxi, and western Guangdong to commerce and the railroad. In August 1885, the Chinese troops, accompanied by Liu Yong Fu's Black Flags, evacuated Tonkin.

Certainly, anti-colonialist opposition remained powerful in France. The legislative elections of October 1885 were a defeat for the "Tonkinese." On December 18, the "commission des 33" ordered to examine the new request for credits for Tonkin by the Brisson government pronounced on the report of Camille Pelletan in favor of evacuation, and the credits were approved by a majority of only four during the difficult debate of December 21–24, 1885. However, the goal of this opposition stayed the same: to limit France's Indochinese action to Annam-Tonkin; to restrict the level of its military engagement, which the Freycinet government, constituted in January 1886, did; to establish limits on colonial policy; to assure direct management by the government of the initiatives on the ground; to establish parliamentary control of foreign policy and the colonial empire that was being formed. This was the thrust of Paul Bert's intervention in the debate. Colonization must be cheap and imply only a limited mobilization of France's military and financial means.

After the 1885 crisis, most political figures in the Third Republic, aside from the Socialists and a few Radicals like Pelletan and Clemenceau, rallied to what henceforth was the reality of Indochina, and more broadly, the reality of colonialism. In the legislative elections of 1893, only twenty-eight of those elected condemned

colonial expansion in their policy statements. From then on, a consensus on the legitimacy of colonization was maintained through the formation of what would be called the “Colonial Party.” This party was in fact an influential network of heterogeneous, often rival, colonial lobbies set up by Jules Ferry, Joseph Chailley-Bert, and Eugène Étienne. Its main organizations were the Comité de l’Afrique française, founded in October 1891, and the Union coloniale, founded in 1893; the latter’s newspaper, *La Quinzaine coloniale*, and its Indochina section, the Comité de l’Indochine, were, together with the Comité de l’Asie française, founded in 1901, the essential elements. In 1900, two hundred deputies were members of the Chamber’s colonial group, and in 1902, the Radicals held the Ministry of the Colonies for the first time in the person of Gaston Doumergue—a sign of their rallying to the colonial cause.

Henceforth deprived of any sympathetic response from metropolitan France, and cut off from China, imperial Vietnam’s struggle against colonization was doomed. Nevertheless, it continued for another ten years, because in the field, the final and most difficult phase of conquest was just beginning.

RESISTANCE TO CONQUEST: THE CAN VUONG AND ITS DEFEAT (1885–1897)

Hue’s Military Coup (July 5, 1885)

The long war of “pacification” in fact started following the arrival in Hue on July 2, 1885, of General Count Roussel de Courcy—“an idiot who can be a good warrior,” according to Bernard Lavergne, the confidant of the Republic’s president, Jules Grévy⁴⁸—who had been appointed commander in chief and resident general in April. Brutal and ignorant of the real situation, and against the will of Freycinet’s government and the Quai d’Orsay, which was in charge of the supervision of the protectorate, he was determined to forcibly annex Annam and Tonkin, as urged by the Ministry of Colonies, the Army, and Cochinchinese administration. The first step in this direction was clearly the elimination of the regents and the partisans of resistance within the court.

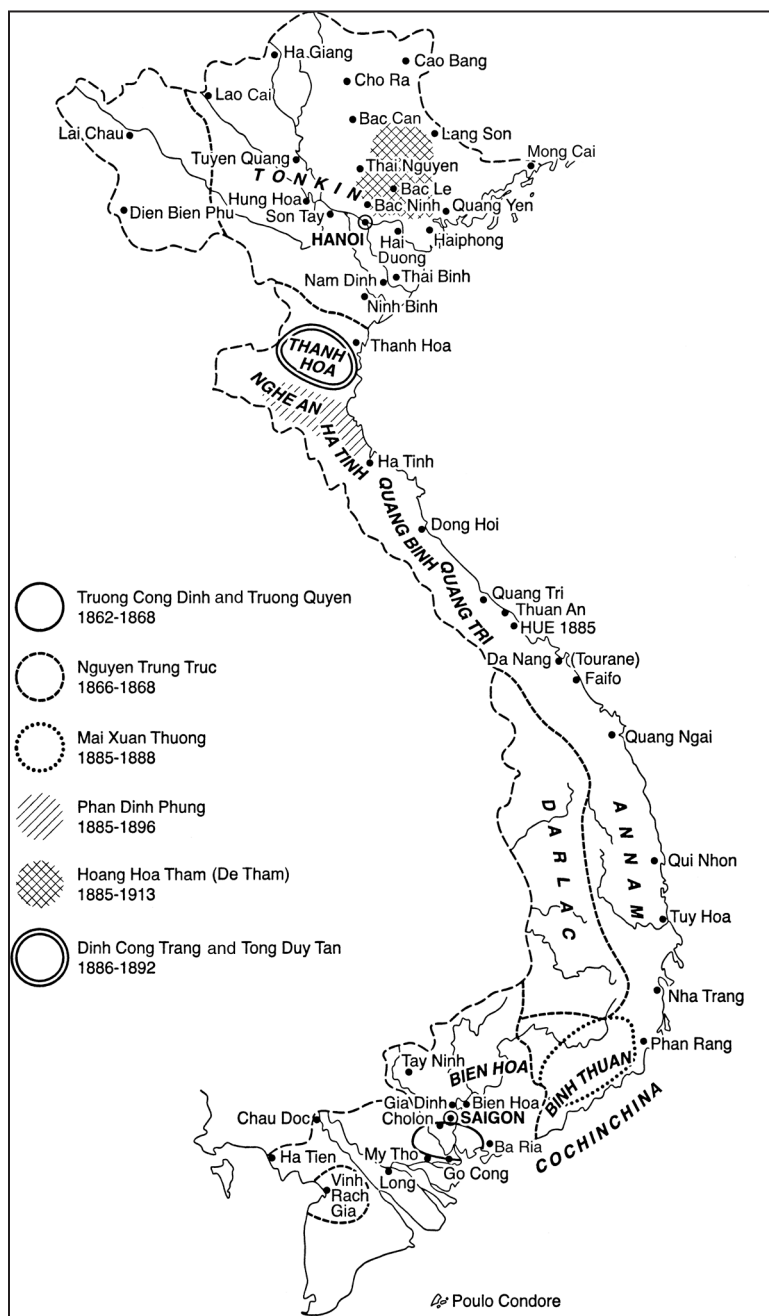
As early as November 1884, the strategy of a military coup against the Hue government had been prepared by Pierre Silvestre, the influential director of Affaires civiles (Civil Affairs) in Tonkin. He was well informed of the divisions within the court as well as of the regents Ton That Thuyet and Nguyen Van Tuong’s secret plan to reach the fortified camp of Tan So, together with the young emperor, Ham Nghi, in order to call for a general uprising there against the French. General Brière de l’Isle, the commander in chief, had given his approval to the Silvestre plan, which prefigured the French strategy of December 1946 in Hanoi. It consisted of feigning ignorance of the Vietnamese preparations and taking advantage of the re-

gents' and Ham Nghi's flight from the capital to proclaim the latter's deposition and replace him with a new emperor, one more docile and accommodating, selected from the imperial lineage.

In Hue, de Courcy made repeated provocations, forcing Thuyet into confrontation sooner than expected. On July 2 he ordered the regents to come to his own residence the following day, which Thuyet refused to do, and insisted he enter the palace for the imperial audience with his entire retinue through the "Middle Door," which was reserved for the sovereign. With no recourse, Thuyet took the initiative to start battle. On the night of July 4 to 5, 1885, imperial soldiers launched a preemptive attack on the French billets and the legation. By dawn, they had been defeated. The regents, with the fourteen-year-old Emperor Ham Nghi and the court, set out for the mountain bases of Tan So. Like Tran Hung Dao during the Mongol invasion in 1284, they sought to raise the nation against the invader, and on July 7 and July 13, they issued a call for general resistance—to help the king (*chieu can Vuong*), according to the title of the proclamation of July 13—as well as for the extermination of Christians.

The French victory in Hue, followed by the sacking of the Forbidden City and taking of the imperial treasure (perhaps 2.6 tons of gold and 30 tons of silver, a small part of which was subsequently restituted to the court), had resolved only the problem of the monarchy's submission—a matter that was finalized already on July 5, with the return to Hue of Regent Nguyen Van Tuong (who would be arrested on September 6 and deported), and then of the queen mother, Tu Du (Tu Duc's mother), and of the majority of the court. Certainly, the partisans of resistance quickly lost their supporters in the high mandarinat and in the royal family, who were determined to assure the continuity of the imperial regime and the social status of the ruling class at any cost, even dependence. With the help of some of the high mandarins, notably Nguyen Huu Do, the governor of Hanoi, who was promoted to grand chancellor and then to *kinh luoc* (imperial commissioner), de Courcy was able to impose the additional agreement of July 30, 1885, which extended the protectorate regime instituted in Tonkin to Annam and gave the resident general the right to preside over the Secret Council (Co Mat Vien). On September 14, he enthroned a new emperor, Dong Khanh (1885–89), a nephew of Tu Duc and future son-in-law of Nguyen Huu Do. This was a crushing humiliation for the dynasty, which was discredited in one blow.⁴⁹

French control, however, was precarious. Outside Cochinchina, the expeditionary corps occupied only the principal towns of the Red River Delta, Lang Son, Hue, and three ports in Annam. Elsewhere, Thuyet and Ham Nghi's appeal, heard throughout the provinces, motivated a formidable resistance movement known as the Can Vuong (Help the King), which spread to Cochinchina, where several conspiracies would be discovered in 1885 in the region of Saigon. Thereafter, "Annam was put to fire and sword," as the new resident general, Paul Bert, telegraphed after his arrival in 1886.



MAP 1.2. Vietnamese resistance to the French conquest, 1858–1897. (J. M. Pluvier, *Historical Atlas of South-East Asia* [Leiden, 1995], p. 45.)

Vietnamese resistance, moreover, developed simultaneously with major events in Cambodia, where a general insurrection broke out in January 1885 under the impetus of Norodom's longtime adversary, his stepbrother Si Votha.⁵⁰ Practically the whole of Khmer society entered into dissidence by protesting against the treaty of June 17, 1884, imposed on the king. The latter refused all cooperation with the French authorities, whose military helplessness was total, insofar as they could not fight on two fronts, Vietnam and Cambodia. The Can Vuong would force them to choose and to divide the military tasks. In August 1886, Saigon and Norodom signed a new agreement, the third, putting aside the treaty of 1884. After a series of tours through the provinces, the king obtained the submission of the insurgents. Cambodia had escaped annexation pure and simple.

National Resistance

The Can Vuong movement, remarkably analyzed by Charles Fourniau, was a genuine national insurrection. The French authorities denied its importance and applied to it, as they had to the Chinese rural banditry of the high region of Tonkin, the Vietnamese notion of "piracy" (*giac*), which in the mandarin tradition was a way of defaming any rebellion. This allowed for the double legitimization of repression, in terms both of the Confucian order and of the Republican vision of a pacifying and civilizing colonization. "What enables us to say," Jules Ferry would write, "that piracy is in a way only an accident, and that it will only have a relatively short duration, is that it is not inspired by a feeling of patriotism and independence. The Annamese has almost no national spirit."⁵¹ Negating the existence of a Vietnamese nation was a way of justifying the colonial theories of an antagonism between the "Tonkinese" and the "Annamese" or between the peasantry and the mandarins, as well as projects to convert them from a protectorate to a regime of direct rule like that in existence in Cochinchina. Until 1887, in fact, Cochinchina, on which the protectorate of Cambodia already depended, tried to annex the two southern provinces of Annam, Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa, and to constitute an Indochinese Union centered in Saigon.⁵²

High commissioners and officers did not all agree, however, and some saw that it was refusal to recognize the national character of the Can Vuong movement that led the policies of pacification from one defeat to another until 1891 (see app. 1). Men like the former general commissioner of Tonkin Jules Harmand (see app. 2), Colonels Armand Servière and Théophile Pennequin, Captain Gosselin, and especially Governor-General J. L. de Lanessan had a clear-sighted view of the movement. The conclusions that de Lanessan, then a Radical deputy, came to in 1887 following his mission to Indochina were categorical: "It is in the name of patriotism that Annam rose up after July 15, in the same way that Tonkin had already revolted."⁵³ This was a lucid assessment of an uprising that was a response to the unprecedented national crisis that the installation of the protectorate and the partition

of Tonkin had precipitated within Vietnamese society. The imperial court surrendered to a “barbarian invasion” that it did not have the conceptual means to effectively evaluate. With this capitulation, it was not only the dynasty’s supposed celestial mandate that was shaken; the entire collective psychological fabric was ripped apart. The cosmic order suddenly began to unravel: “Now the sky is low, the earth is high,”⁵⁴ as a popular song proclaimed. In the midst of this terrible moral trauma, the only viable response was to follow the call of legitimate power. “In the eyes of the people, Emperor Ham Nghi, exiled in the provinces of Quang Binh, represented the homeland struggling against the foreigner,” Colonel Fernand Bernard noted.⁵⁵

The Can Vuong movement was widespread, but it remained fragmented in chronologically staggered and poorly coordinated regional uprisings (see map 1.2). Strictly speaking, “Can Vuong” designates only the uprising that took place in central Vietnam between 1885 and 1888 on the part of those loyal to the fugitive king. But it can be applied to the entire Vietnamese resistance in the sense that their leaders often referred to an ideal royalty as the incarnation of the country’s independence. There were four main centers of insurrection. In Annam, where colonial activity was, in 1885, still unknown, the entire society rose under the direction of its intellectual elite, in a sense in complete legality, to defend the throne. This was notably the case in northern Annam, where supporters of Ham Nghi, organized from Ha Tinh and Quang Binh, and especially around the natural bastion of the high valley of Song Giang, from where it was relatively easy to reach Laos, had controlled the neighboring provinces of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa, where the dynasty originated, starting in February 1886. There, Christians, considered internal enemies, were massacred en masse, especially in Quang Tri in September 1885, following the cry of “Binh tay, sat ta!” (Hunt the Westerners, kill the Catholics!). These atrocious reprisals, which resulted in around 40,000 dead and the destruction of a large part of the Christian communities, left a long-lasting mark on the collective conscience. After the departure of Thuyet for China in early 1887, the insurgents of northern Annam were nevertheless defeated, and Muong warriors delivered Ham Nghi to the French on October 29, 1888. But one year later, in Thanh Hoa, the Hung Linh movement (1889–92) developed, under the direction of the prestigious Tong Duy Tan, while the great La Son uprising broke out in Ha Tinh and Nghe An in 1890, led by the former imperial censor Phan Dinh Phung until his death in December 1895.

In southern Annam, less than one hundred kilometers from Hue, where French presence was sporadic, the two provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai rose up in a general revolt starting in July 1884. More than five thousand Christians were ferociously massacred in Quang Ngai in mid-July. In 1886, the resistance to the mandarin collaborators spread to Khanh Hoa and Binh Thuan. It collapsed the following year, however, under terrible blows from the mandarins rallied to Dong Khanh, Nguyen Thanh in Quang Ngai, and Tran Ba Loc and troops coming from farther south in Cochinchina.

In the provinces of the Tonkin Delta, on the other hand, the resistance was somewhat different. Ravaged for a quarter of a century by revolts, Chinese bands, then the war of 1884–85, the country was in fact under no one's control. The intolerable burden of provisioning the large colonial army, its violence, and the incessant recruitment of carriers—for instance, there were 1,200 coolies charged with carrying 20 to 27 kilograms each for 800 fighters when the Borgnis-Desbordes column fought near Cho Moi in February 1889—mobilized the peasantry as much as the royal summons. Still, the action of the energetic mandarins Tan Thuat, in the east, and Nguyen Quang Bich, in the west, was also essential. A situation of dual power was established very quickly in most of the delta, especially in the vast plain of Bai Say between Hanoi and Hung Yen: indigenous authorities won over to the colonizer were replaced at night by the clandestine power of patriotic leaders. The insurgents were organized in several scores of armed groups, rarely smaller than two hundred and fifty men, and supported by the walled villages, which, according to General Henri Frey, were “surrounded for the most part by a double or triple enclosure, made up of a strong bamboo hedge, reinforced on the inside with an earth wall, which creates a most serious hindrance; between these two successive enclosures lay deep ponds; narrow, twisting alleys, through which a buffalo can barely pass, divide the village into innumerable islands, which when necessary can become as many distinct little forts and centers of resistance.”⁵⁶

The mountain ranges that surrounded the delta, Dong Trieu, Bao Day, Tam Dao, Yen The, covered with dense forests, were the most lasting bastions of guerrilla warfare. “They have a permanent core, hardened, disciplined, maintained by unceasing incursions, and joined, at the leader's call, by contingents provided by villages of the region,” Frey wrote. “They are consistently organized in Annamese style into sections, companies, battalions, and even armies, which they have pompously named: Army of the Vanguard, Army of the Rear Guard, Right Wing of the Faithful Army.”⁵⁷ The guerrillas, clothed in uniforms consisting of blue shirts hanging to mid-thigh, short trousers, gaiters of strong canvas, espadrilles, and straw hats, were all equipped with modern rifles—quite often Winchester repeating rifles, whereas the French still had single-shot Gras rifles—machetes, and revolvers for the group leaders.⁵⁸ The chiefs were Vietnamese and given military mandarins' titles: *doc* (Chief) Tich (Nguyen Van Hien), a minor scholar from the province of Hai Duong, who would be exiled to Algeria; *doc* Ngu (Hoang Dinh Kinh, also called the *cai* Kinh), in the province of Lang Son; *doi* (Noncommissioned Officer) Van in the province of Bac Ninh, who would be executed in 1889; and *de* (Commanding Officer) Tham, the renowned Hoang Hoa Tham (who combined rural banditry with patriotic resistance), in Yen The. Some were Chinese, like Luong Tam Ky (the head of the Yellow Flags), son of a Taiping, who was installed in the region of Cho Moi, in the north of Thai Nguyen. In the heart of the jungle, these guerrilla troops constructed the powerful fortified systems described

by Colonel Joseph-Simon Galliéni in his *Trois colonnes au Tonkin* (Three Columns in Tonkin).

Finally, the upper region, close to the border with China, was in the hands of Chinese bands that had hardly any relations with the Can Vuong. Certain bands, permanently installed, were made up of former Taiping or imperial soldiers. Others were itinerant and recruited from Hunanese and Hakka from Hainan who had settled in Guangxi and Guangdong. Among these was Luong Tam Ky's band, equipped with a thousand rapid-fire rifles, which operated in the Dong Trieu in 1892. These were professional bandits, small-scale local warlords who controlled the frontier traffic in opium, arms, and women and children sold in China as slaves.

With the exception of the Chinese bands, these movements had common characteristics. Their chiefs made open appeals through posters and placards to Emperor Ham Nghi, corresponded with his entourage, which had taken refuge in Muong country, and were certified mandarins. At Quang Nam, for instance, Nguyen Dung Hieu, one of the most important figures of the Can Vuong, was vice-minister of the war while acting as governor of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai.⁵⁹ It was, in fact, a segment of the imperial political system that resisted—more or less overtly depending on the region—in the name of the legitimate ruler. Chiefs of the resistance taxed villages, recruited men, and ordered work duties, organizing a truly parallel administration. When Nguyen Dung Hieu was captured in Quang Nam, five seals, two hundred and fifty blank official certificates for mandarinal nominations, and nine hundred tax registers were seized. Numerous mandarins, even in the court at Hue, secretly aided the uprising or at least offered some cautious support, while many others resigned, to the point of provoking an administrative void in Tonkin. This was only partially compensated for by the nomination of mediocre, venal civil servants, who, as Jean Dupuis noted, took refuge in duplicity:

Alongside the official mandarins named by the French authority and therefore too embarrassed to overtly conspire against us, there were at this time in every province of Tonkin former mandarins who had been removed for having previously taken up against us and who, in the heart of villages where they were hidden among their parents and friends, were the real depositories of royal authority, governing as in the past, although in hiding, and organizing their rebellion as best they could. The official mandarins, who knew them well, naturally kept them informed of everything that pertained to the cause of the resistance and acted only in concert with them.⁶⁰

The Guerrilla War

The resistance—its guerrilla warfare, its mobilization and dispersal of forces—was remarkably well carried out. Overall, confrontation remained limited to the level of local guerrilla warfare, but the leaders of the Can Vuong repeatedly attempted to move beyond this stage and rise above the provincial setting. This was the case at the end of 1886, when they organized a fortified base in the heart of Thanh Hoa,

in Ba Dinh, threatening the French military apparatus at the strategic junction of its Tonkin sector and central Vietnam, located between the plains and the Muong country. At Ba Dinh, where the Can Vuong reached its peak, there was an unsuccessful attempt to “transition to a generalized and coordinated war.”⁶¹ The village fortress measured 1,200 by 400 meters and was constructed in the three villages of My Khe, Thuong Ta, and Mao Tinh (Ba Dinh: “the *dinh* of the three villages”), in the middle of rice fields that were inundated under several meters of water, connected to solid ground by four narrow dams. It was strongly protected by several buried enceintes topped with bamboo. Commanded by a remarkable military chief, Dinh Cong Trang, it was defended by about three thousand men. Three thousand five hundred soldiers—among them Captain Joseph Joffre, the future commander in chief of the French Army in 1914–16—were needed, as well as five thousand coolies, twenty artillery pieces, and a siege of two months, beginning in December 1886, to capture it, which the French did on January 21, 1887.⁶²

Certain chiefs organized audacious raids. In July 1891, the *doc* Ngu (Nguyen Duc Ngu) installed himself in the villages on the left bank of the Red River, opposite Hanoi, and his men opened fire on the French concession, provoking panic among the Europeans. It took an hour to gather fifty colonial infantrymen to respond, and the incident cost Governor General Georges-Jules Piquet his job. Nevertheless, generally, the movements of armed groups did not extend beyond the theater of two or three provinces (there were twenty-three of them at the time in Tonkin), and their objectives remained limited. The resistance did not expand beyond a rural war fought by partisans.

The Can Vuong movement's troops were in fact mostly peasants. Several of its chiefs came from among the notables or the wealthy peasantry. Others came from marginal elements of rural society, like the chief Lo in the region of Son Tay, a young peasant who became a *tirailleur*, then a deserter, and was assassinated in 1889 at the instigation of the authorities. The same was true of the renowned De Tham (Hoang Hoa Tham), born around 1860; he was a buffalo herder until he was enlisted by the Black Flags in 1882. He resisted until 1896 in the heart of the impregnable forest of Yen The, with three hundred men armed with modern rifles, supported by the surrounding villagers. “A hero who merits our complete admiration, just as he has that of all the Annamese,” General Pennequin said of him in 1911.⁶³ Galli ni captured his forts in November 1895, and De Tham became a *chef soumissionnaire* (under the authority of the French) in 1897. He resumed the struggle in 1913, until his assassination by Luong Tam Ky's men, who were allied to the French. It was indeed the peasantry that had to be fought, and it was to the *xa*, the Vietnamese village community, so solidly organized, which supplied the resistance with men and provisions, that the colonial army brought the war. The “forest war” was difficult in the mountains, and no less so in the rice fields, where attacks had to be made against large Vietnamese villages situated in the middle of the waters,

entrenched behind impenetrable bamboo hedges, so that they could only be reduced through artillery and fire. The central feature of the war of pacification was undoubtedly the battle to secure the submission of the rural community.

But it was the literati, a “hostile class par excellence” according to Francis Garnier,⁶⁴ who furnished the royal insurrection with the majority of its greatest leaders: Mai Xuan Thuong in Binh Dinh; Nguyen Dung Hieu in Quang Nam; the great mandarin Nguyen Quang Bich, one of the most famous scholars of his time, in the region of Son Tay; Nguyen Thieu Thuat, former governor of the province of Hai Duong, in the Bai Say; and the most remarkable of the chiefs of the resistance, Phan Dinh Phung, in northern Annam. In 1895, he disposed of at least 1,200 to 1,300 rifles. In ancient Vietnam, the literati were the true managers of a still homogeneous rural society, the equivalent of a “lower clergy,”⁶⁵ whose social functions and influence were immense. Often of peasant ancestry, having competed in literary examinations, they were numerous in villages, to which mandarins of high rank customarily retired. Almost all of them dedicated themselves to the administration of schools, and they possessed great moral authority. They were, according to de Lanessan, “the most intelligent, active, and the only influential group in the country, the ones blindly followed by the workers in cities and the farmers in the rural areas, the ones who represented, and even the missionaries admit this, the national party.”⁶⁶ While the mandarinat, at least in its upper echelons, seems mainly to have lent a strong hand to pacification, especially after 1891, a part of the village elite directed the insurgency until the end and gave it its traditional and patriotic character, as well as its strength, because it mobilized the village networks of authority, especially the powerful and solidly organized lineages. Frédéric Baille, the former resident of Hue, wrote in his memoirs of the actions of Nguyen Dung Hieu in Quang Nam:

This man, still young and of a rare energy, who gradually exhibited a renowned and near legendary heroism, ended up carving out a true royalty in this province. . . . He succeeded in giving to the insurrectionary movement of the Quang Nam the dimension and prestige of a national movement. It seems that he aroused patriotic fire in minds that up until then were ill prepared for this idea. His influence in the province was extraordinary. On his orders, villages depopulated themselves, peasants set fire to their *cagnas* [Annamese peasant houses] to leave a void before our columns.⁶⁷

Nguyen Dung Hieu was captured in September 1886 and beheaded.

The Colonial War

Until 1891, the protectorate army was held in check. The overly large expeditionary corps—it consisted of 42,000 men at the end of 1885 and, with troop rotation, tied up a total of 100,000,⁶⁸ whereas the British conquered upper Burma during the same

period with only 22,000—revealed itself to be poorly adapted to the political and strategic situation it was supposed to master. These mediocre troops, in part recruited from dubious units—the “zephyrs” of the disciplinary companies, the Foreign Legion, sometimes those convicted by military tribunals—were chronically ravaged by epidemics, such as cholera in August through September of 1885, which killed 4% of the corps.

The French commanders were long incapable of analyzing their adversaries, whom they indiscriminately called “pirates.” “They only understand the cannon,” Colonel Gustave Borgnis-Desbordes declared of his colleagues. They oscillated between a strategy of launching heavy columns in pursuit of the rebels—more than two hundred in Tonkin between 1885 and 1891—and creating a network of 259 dispersed military stations (*postes*) to police specific areas, which devoured reserve units.⁶⁹ They were also torn by rivalries between the Army and the Navy, between generals and high-level civil servants. Starting in 1885, these rivalries aggravated the permanent conflict between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Navy and the Colonies; the residents general, under orders of the former, were determined to maintain the protectorate, whereas the latter favored creation of a direct administration.

In a report dated March 1888, General-Governor Jean Constans (1887–88), subsequently minister of the interior during the Boulangiste crisis, deplored the sterility “of this regime of small military stations that cover the territory and multiply indefinitely” and “the unceasing comings and goings of columns seeking adventure, the unannounced requisitioning of coolies, which removes able-bodied men from cultivation to make them beasts of burden who die in pain and leave the roads strewn with their corpses.”⁷⁰ The Red River Delta in fact experienced all the horrors of colonial war: requisitions of coolies, of supplies, and of livestock, the sacking of the *dinhs* (common houses), the burning of villages, summary executions, *baïonnettades* (as de Lanessan called them) ordered by General de Négrier, not to mention the epidemics, the decrease in production, the flight of peasants. As the resistance grew, repressive violence became widespread, as is testified by innumerable narratives, such as this “ordinary” activity log of the Bay Say column during the dry season of 1885–86, which is eloquent in its terseness:

18/9: the manhunt did not find anything, but on its return it picked up two small groups of Annamese installed amid the rushes in shacks built on stilts—these stray people were executed.

19/9: a flying column of 70 legionnaires search a village: a large number of pirates leave at full speed and run away northward, led by two men on horseback. These groups fall under our fire. . . . A good number of them are left on the field. At 6:15, the village is invaded. . . . A group of 25 pirates escape. . . . Half of them are executed, shot from the exterior observation stations.⁷¹

From 1885 to 1888, the French Army and the Vietnamese militia it recruited succeeded only in preventing the concentration of guerrilla troops; in occupying certain points along the border, notably, the sectors of Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Mong Cai; and in capturing Ham Nghi on October 29, 1888, though this did not prevent the perseverance of the resistance carried out in his name. It was necessary to negotiate with several guerrilla chiefs. Through such negotiations, the Chinese Luong Tam Ky became *chef soumissionnaire* in the summer of 1890 and was granted the administration of the region of Cho Chu, the right to arm 500 *linh co* (soldiers), and an annual salary of 150,000 francs.⁷²

There was no progress until 1890—in fact, quite the opposite. As Charles Fourniau has shown, during the dry season of 1890–91, the Can Vuong reached its highest point, a fact explained by the rejection of foreign domination by a peasantry that was deeply weakened by the burden of the colonial war. Colonization faced a situation of intense crisis, of extreme upheaval and misery, aggravated by the terrible floods of the Red River. Famine appeared. In the upper region, the French confronted close to ten thousand men armed with rifles, while in the delta more than two thousand five hundred were organized into thirty-seven guerrilla groups.⁷³ “Tonkin,” Resident Louis Bonhoure wrote, “is an immense Vendée [alluding to the great peasant uprising in that region against the revolutionary National Convention in 1793] where the insurgent bands appear at night and disappear in the morning, dispersing and gathering in the blink of an eye.”⁷⁴ For the resistance, after the failures of 1888, it was the beginning of a second wind, which was marked by the movement of Phan Dinh Phung in Nghe Tinh (1890–95).

Nevertheless, the resistance of the mandarins was defeated. The interpretations invoked a century later to account for this failure can never fully explain it. Who can provide an account of the rupture and unrest that explains how an uprising against foreign domination yielded to national lassitude and resignation? Undoubtedly, the major strategic weakness of the Can Vuong was its dispersal, the impossibility of a coordinated effort on the part of the forces of Tonkin and Annam. This was linked as much to France’s military superiority in its conflict with a numerically limited adversary, which, deprived of Chinese help, often did not have firearms—the colonial war brought two “unequal” technologies into conflict—as to the exploitation by the French authorities of the horizontal divisions of Vietnamese society and the internal weakness of the Can Vuong. David Marr has well demonstrated that the Can Vuong movement was strongly influenced by regionalisms and remained dependent on existing structures of authority. The audiences of its leaders were often limited to lineages and villages where they were rooted.⁷⁵ The uprising was confronted with a wait-and-see policy on the part of the rural elite that is difficult to evaluate. It is plausible that in Tonkin, the members of this elite ultimately resigned themselves to accepting foreign domination in the hopes that it would put an end to the violence that was ravaging the rural areas.

Furthermore, extensive dissidence provided precious support to the colonial power. The Christian villages were a considerable help to the French troops that disembarked in 1883, and were especially efficient, since their clergy solidly organized them and their very existence was being threatened. Victims in Annam, but not in Tonkin, of the atrocious massacres of 1885—there were perhaps forty thousand victims, in the course of the summer, out of about a hundred and forty thousand Christians in the protectorate of Annam—the Christians participated in terrifying reprisals against the intellectual elite and rebel peasants and provided many coolies to the expeditionary corps (more than five thousand during the battle of Ba Dinh). In addition, the conflicting relationships between the montagnard minorities and the imperial administration weakened the resistance precisely in those regions where French troops would have had difficulty maneuvering, although the Tai of Lai Chau and the Muong showed evidence of a significant loyalty to Ham Nghi and Ton That Thuyet. Finally, the desire to defend the Nguyen was not unanimous, for example, among the patriots of the Binh Dinh, who seem to have preserved a vivid memory of the struggles of the Tay Son insurgents of the eighteenth century.

Above all, in spite of its popular following, the Can Vuong was not a modern national movement that included a project of social transformation and general modernization. It was therefore not capable of assuming the historical challenge of “progress” posed by French imperialism and colonization. In fact, this question was only asked by colonization. Even if some within the movement were sensitive to the problematic of modernization, the primary ideal of the resistant mandarins and their partisans was defense of the Confucian order and its guarantors, the imperial state and the village community, against the Western barbarians. They addressed themselves above all to the controlling class of literate civil servants, property owners, and rural notables. A proclamation found in a refuge of the Yen The in 1890 reads:

The Western demons will not disturb the kingdom any longer. May all those who provide them with fish and meat come to our ranks, may students and the scholarly elite of the north and the south, the mandarins who have positions and those who are awaiting one, the children of the mandarin families, may those who are preparing for the undergraduate examinations and those who have passed them, may all the district chiefs and all the village chiefs gather in troops and pursue the pirates [the French].⁷⁶

Patriotism, as vigorous as it was, defined itself in Confucian terms of the prince-subject relation as fidelity (*trung*) and loyalty (*nghia*), two virtues linked to that of filial piety (*hieu trung*). It was fundamentally attached to the past, conservative, and loyalist. Thus, when the literati seized the citadel of Quang Ngai in July 1885, they quickly sought to legitimize their action by naming as their leader Prince Tuy Ly,

the uncle of Tu Duc, who had been exiled to the town by Regent Thuyet.⁷⁷ As Charles Fourniau has remarked, unlike the great Chinese popular revolts of the middle of the nineteenth century, the Can Vuong did not make even the smallest of social claims. Its only source of legitimacy was imperial power. The resistance of the intellectual elite and part of the peasant society was tied to the existence of a nation-state, certainly ancient, but also of a “royal nation,” whose organizing reference point was a monarchical state, which had separated a millennium before from the empire-world of China. The nation identified with the dynastic state, but a modern national ideology did not exist. At the turn of the nineteenth century, it was still the case that the reigning conception of Vietnam implied an emperor, dynastic loyalty, and a Confucian vision of human relations, a double legitimacy that found itself hijacked, through the formula of the protectorate, in service of the foreigner. Suddenly, the political reference points of this national consciousness became confused.

Therein resides the fundamental contradiction of the Can Vuong, which was in a position to exploit colonization from the moment it sought and attained an alliance—an obviously conflicting one—with the dynasty and the majority of the mandarinates. In this regard, colonization in Vietnam was not simply a conquest by the outsider, but just as much an internal process in which a relatively large number of Vietnamese to some extent participated. It was therefore necessary for the colonizers to abandon their dream of a pure and simple annexation of the country.

A first step in this direction was sketched out empirically by the great physiologist Paul Bert, who was named resident general of Annam and Tonkin on January 31, 1886, by Freycinet, at the same time as the two residents superior of Annam and Tonkin, Charles Dillon and Paulin Vial, who were highly perceptive Catholic administrators. Bert was a Gambettist deputy from the Yonne, the inspirer of the educational laws of 1880–82 in France, ex-minister of public instruction in the “great ministry” of Gambetta in 1881–82. He was ambitious and imperious, and imbued with the Republican faith in the trinity of democracy, science, and progress, which according to nineteenth-century French Republican culture were to be universalized through colonization. He was also a brilliant scholar, who in 1869 had succeeded Claude Bernard as the chair of physiology at the *Faculté des sciences de Paris* and had discovered animal transplants. Once he entered into politics, he believed in the grafting of the Republican model onto the civilizations of the Far East: Indochina was founded as much by the Republic of scientists as by that of military officers and merchants. Along with his team (Antony Klobukowski, Dumoutier, Pène-Siefert, Joseph Chailley), he was favorable, especially when it came to Tonkin, to annexationist theories and was fundamentally hostile to the mandarinates. He installed the regime of the protectorate, laid out by the decree of January 27, 1886, which confided its control to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

subordinated military power to civilian power. He also installed the apparatus of the provincial residents.

Above all, it was imperative, in Bert's mind, to develop political dialogue with a part of the Vietnamese society and its elites—"to make the Annamese nation our associate."⁷⁸ During his short Indochinese mandate—he died in Hanoi in November 1886—this policy was, however, undermined by the propagation of the simplistic idea of an opposition between the Tonkinese and the Annamese, set in motion by the establishment of the function of the *kinh luoc* (imperial commissioner invested with a delegation of imperial power), imposed on Hue on July 27, 1886, in Tonkin. This act removed the north of the country from the direct control of Hue and organized the partition of the country, a division that would be the foundation of French Indochina until its collapse in 1945. What did Paul Bert recommend? "In Tonkin, we must have a democratic policy, pacify through the peasant natives . . ."—hence the convocation of an ephemeral commission of elected notables—"in Annam, we must reassure the literati, rebuild the prestige of the king, pursue an aristocratic policy, pacify through the literate natives."⁷⁹

Paul Bert's approach failed, but not completely. It pushed him to "Vietnamize" pacification, which he dared confide regionally to mandarins like Nguyen Than, whose ferocious campaign of 1887 put an end to the resistance in Quang Ngai and who in 1895 crushed the insurrection of Phan Dinh Phung. Influenced by the British model of the Indian Army—native units led by a European officer corps—the protectorate would increasingly call on local troops. Starting in the summer of 1888, the number of European troops fell to fourteen thousand men, supported by twenty-two thousand Vietnamese soldiers.⁸⁰ In Annam, there would never be more than 500 European troops in a territory that was a thousand kilometers long.⁸¹ In Tonkin, in 1894, there were only 5,000 European soldiers and officers in comparison with 12,000 colonial infantrymen. Indochina was controlled and held by a military apparatus largely composed of the colonized. Bert laid the fiscal, budgetary, and structural basis for the protectorate, established the Garde indigène, inaugurated the facilities of the port of Haiphong, and sketched the first outlines of a railroad.

The failure of the annexationist and assimilationist theories to provide the foundation for the colonial regime led little by little to the idea that to counter national resistance, war must first and foremost be a political act. This idea appeared with Governor-General Richaud (1888–89), who, although he was won over to the strategy of heavy columns, discerned that the key to pacification was the village community, whose notables had to be won over one way or another. It triumphed with J.-L. de Lanessan, a deputy of the Republican Alliance, nominated governor-general on April 21, 1891, at a point when colonization was at a complete impasse. In that year, this former naval physician, an important botanist and zoologist, editor of the works of Buffon, professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, and an atheist, materialist Republican who initially belonged to the radical extreme Left,⁸² regained

control of the situation. Through his action, a new intellectual configuration was brought to bear on colonial administration, based on a “scientific” reading of the relationships that had to be established with subject peoples, inspired by the two fundamental theses of “transformist” French anthropology of the end of the century: the hierarchical classification of societies on the ladder of progress, and the law of competition and solidarity that was believed to rule the living and govern the social.⁸³

De Lanessan’s project conceived of colonization as the “transforming agent” of backward countries. Revived by Durkheimian moralism, it led in 1905 to the affirmation of a new concept in Republican colonial policy: association. De Lanessan was one of the first to experiment with it, before formulating its theoretical content in 1897: colonization was a phenomenon that was natural and historic, composed simultaneously of competition and cooperation, and by the production of a “directed” complementarity between Europeans and “native” peoples in pursuit of the development of the world.⁸⁴ He founded his politics on the triple recognition of the unity of the Vietnamese people, the national character of the resistance, and the organic ties that united the Confucian mandarin state to the rural society and elite. What was his project? “To govern Annam and Tonkin by depending on all the active powers of the country: the king, the court and the Secret Council, mandarins, and the literati elite”⁸⁵—in short to define the terms of a compromise with the political structures of Dai Nam and mobilize what it preserved of its social legitimacy, even if this meant reestablishing the unity of both the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin. He argued that the French should “govern with men from the national conservative party, with those who are considered representatives of the Annamese nationality and of the integrity of the empire,” such as the regent Nguyen Trong Hiep, who had a great deal of influence. The protectorate had to make sense to the Vietnamese, and this political offer would be understood by their elites.

Through this project, villages benefited from a lightening of recruitment and requisitions, as well as from certain aspects of a developing program of public works, and taxes were standardized. Pacification operations were entrusted to the Garde indigène and to the *linh co* recruited in the villages, and as little as possible to the regular army. At the same time, adopting the strategy recommended by an exceptional officer, Colonel Théophile Pennequin, and continued by the next generation of officers—Armand Servièrre, Joseph Galliéni, Hubert Lyautey, Pierre Famin, and others—de Lanessan avoided the mistake of occupying only the lowlands, while superficially overseeing the highlands, which in fact strategically commanded the deltas. In August 1891, the mountainous periphery, populated by Tai, Tho, and Nung minorities, was divided into four military territories, entrusted to the administration of officers. The “policy of races,” of which Galliéni made himself the theorist,⁸⁶ valorized the linguistic, social, and political ethnic minorities and acted

to reinforce them through moderate taxes, the reduction of work to a minimum, the eviction of Vietnamese mandarins, and the restoration or consolidation of the power of customary chiefs (*quan lang*) and administrative tolerance of their control of contraband opium. This allowed for the creation of an efficient counter-guerrilla force through the distribution of ten thousand rifles, duly checked, to the Tai and Muong villages. The war in Indochina, then, was the beginning of a vast change in the thinking of the French military elite, which, following the Galliéni-Lyautey school of thought, ended up creating a theory of colonial war, conceived of as a war that was as much political as military. It was a theory presented by Lyautey in his famous article "Du rôle colonial de l'armée" (On the Colonial Role of the Army) in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in February 1900.

Finally, the attitude of China was no less decisive. The retreat of the Chinese troops and the Black Flags in 1885 deprived the resistance of vital support. The support that China granted to the authorities of Tonkin following the Sino-Japanese war of 1894 and the 1894 Galliéni missions to Marshal Su, military commander of Guangxi, deprived the Chinese bands of a part of their supplies and the indispensable "sanctuaries" in Chinese territory. A line of bunkers was rapidly built to block the border, while a second line of militia stations encircled the Red River Delta. The Franco-Chinese convention of May 7, 1896, instituted an efficient mixed police system that would assure the control of the border until 1940. In Tonkin, the Chinese were photographed and forced to carry identification cards. Every military territory was methodically "cleansed" by the slow advance of a line of provisional posts—the tactics of the "oil stain" defined by Pennequin—and opened up by the construction of a network of roads and mule paths. The mountainous zone was thus pacified between 1892 and 1896.

In the meantime, the mandarinat, until then hesitant, seems to have responded, for complex reasons having to do with its culture of service to the state and management of society,⁸⁷ to de Lannessan's offer, as proven by the attitude of the influential regent Nguyen Trong Hiep (1834–1902). The mandarinat moved toward collaboration starting in 1891–92. Its role would be decisive. The brief participation of the respected personality Hoang Ke Vien in the pacification of Quang Binh in 1885 was one of the earliest signs of the potential rallying later incarnated in the figure of Hoang Cao Khai, the *kinh luoc* of Tonkin. De Lanessan sought to reinforce the authority of the court and reaffirmed its sovereignty over Tonkin. The Vietnamese civil servants, through the network of influences and domestic and personal relations that united them to the great lineages, local literate elites, and notables, were in a position to purge village communities. Thus, in 1892, the relationship of political forces was reversed. Leaderless, cut off from external aid, and hunted in the Tonkin Delta, the resistance was forced to withdraw into the middle region, where it became fragmented and separated from the villages. Its political and military horizon gradually narrowed to the mountaintops where it camped.

The defection of the court deprived the resistance of any credible political project. From that point on, it could no longer achieve victory solely by mobilizing an elementary patriotism, particularly since peasant support weakened as the peasants themselves became exhausted after such sufferings.

After 1891, struggle was hopeless. At the end of 1895, Phan Dinh Phung's guerilla band was destroyed. In December, the great resister died in the forest of the high valley of Song Giang, in Quang Binh. After the defeat of the La Son movement, of which Phung was the leading light, the last of the major resistance forces, military initiative passed to the French, where it would remain for a long time. The government was able to pay for the submission not only of authentic bandits such as Luong Tam Ky but also of the last leaders of the anticolonial guerilla war, like the De Tham in Yen The, first in April 1894 and then again in 1897. The final campaign against the last pockets of resistance in the highlands took place between 1895 and 1896. The following year, French forces controlled the entire country.

THE OCCUPATION OF LAOS AND THE FORMATION OF A ZONE OF FRENCH INFLUENCE IN SOUTH CHINA

Once Vietnam was conquered, the problem of closing off the Indochinese frontiers to the west came to the fore. The tributary strategies of Hue and Bangkok had long been in confrontation in the vast Lao and Shan hinterland: in 1830, Siam had annexed the small state of Vientiane, deported a part of its population to the west of the Mekong, and then imposed a tribute on Luang Prabang; the principality of Xieng Khouang and northeastern Laos, however, became dependent on Vietnam in the middle of the century.⁸⁸ By the end of 1885, France's vague initiatives in Burma—the Franco-Burmese commercial treaty of January 15, 1885, the Deloncle mission to Mandalay in May, and the initiatives of Consul Haas—had failed. The British occupied the country in November, which displaced the Franco-British-Siamese confrontation more to the east, to the Mekong basin.⁸⁹

At stake in the question of the Mekong from then on were three major issues. The first of these was the future of the Lao principalities, the deeply weakened descendants of the ancient kingdom of Lan Xang and the Tai domains (*seigneuries*), which fell under a system of "multiple tributes" that maintained their autonomous existence. The region was divided between the royal principality of Luang Prabang, a tributary of Siam, Vietnam, and more loosely of China; the surviving princely powers of the ancient states of Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, and Bassac; the principality of Chiang Khaeng, a tributary of Siam, whose capital was the small center of Muong Sing, which controlled the passage between Burma and Yunnan; the confederation of Sipsong Panna (the "twelve principalities") on the high banks of the river, a tributary of China and Burma; and the confederation of Sipsong Chau Tai,

organized in domains (*muong*) in the hands of hereditary princes, the *chao fa*, who belonged to aristocratic lineages, located on Laotian-Vietnamese border near the Black River and controlled by the Tai aristocracy, especially by the powerful Deo Van Tri family in the region of Lai Chau. The second issue was the regional status of Siam, which was then on the path of modernization, and whose military posts had advanced after 1885, thanks to the weakening of Vietnam, onto the left bank of the Mekong toward the Annamese cordillera, to the plateau of Tran Ninh and the high banks of the Black River. The last issue raised by the Mekong conflict was the opposition between Paris and London. France claimed the “right” to the empire of Dai Nam, whereas the United Kingdom, whose commercial interests in Siam were considerable, hoped to connect the principalities of the upper Mekong to Burma or, at least, to make them into buffer states between British India and French Indochina.⁹⁰ The British also hoped to extend their trade to Yunnan, even though after 1885 London had abandoned the Colquhoun plan of building a railroad between Moulmein (Burma) and Simao (Yunnan), which was supported by the chambers of commerce of London and Manchester but ran into major topographical and climatic obstacles. Nonetheless, Tonkin was in danger of suddenly losing its geographical and economic importance.

After 1890, the Colonial Party of Eugène Étienne and Théophile Delcassé; a “Laotian” lobby (the Syndicat français du Haut-Laos) organized in 1888 by a future deputy of Cochinchina, François Deloncle; and also Gabriel Hanotaux, the influential minister of foreign affairs from 1894 to 1898, and his entourage of diplomats connected to imperialist politics, pressured France into abandoning its former plans to neutralize Siam by transforming it into a buffer state between the British and French colonial domains. In Paris, the Indochinese Union would be considered for a time as the initial base for a vast Southeast Asian empire, encompassing Siam and the Lao principalities. Auguste Pavie, vice-consul to Luang Prabang in 1886, then general commissioner to Laos, had explored the country. Pavie, a fascinating self-taught freethinker and nonconforming colonist, was in the midst of conducting the most systematic study of central Indochina up to that time, for which he traveled some 75,000 kilometers and explored 675,000 square kilometers during his two major scientific missions of 1890–91 and 1895.⁹¹ He was named vice-consul of Luang Prabang in 1885—he arrived in February 1887—and disputed the claims of the Siamese over this land. During an attack by the Tai of Deo Van Tri against the principality in retaliation for Siamese raids against Lai Chau, as well as during forays of the Chinese bandits (the Ho) into the principality, he managed to persuade Oun Kham, the king of Luang Prabang, caught in the crossfire, to ask for France’s protection. In the beginning of 1888, Son La, Lai Chau, and Dien Bien Phu in the Tai country were occupied by military columns and, thanks to the action of Pavie, the Tai aristocracy, in particular the powerful Deo Van Tri family, rallied to the French in April 1890. In February 1892, Delcassé announced,

following a report from Deloncle and a petition signed by two hundred deputies, that France “was taking back” the left bank of the Mekong.

A Franco-Siamese crisis ensued in 1893–95. From April to May 1893, gunboats traveled up the middle region of the Mekong, while three military columns escorted the Siamese garrisons beyond the river. In spite of the dispatch of British ships to Bangkok, a French fleet occupied Chantaboun, in the Gulf of Siam, on July 13, 1893, and Pavie, sent as consul general to Bangkok the previous year, delivered an ultimatum to the Siamese government on July 20. Delcassé’s objective was to impose a protectorate on Bangkok. This explains the French demands, the application of a naval blockade, and the threat of occupation of the provinces of Angkor and Battambang, which had been ceded in 1867. Tension was strong between the French and the British, and compromise was late in coming. Through the treaty of October 13, 1893, under pressure from London, Bangkok accepted the evacuation of the left bank of the Mekong and the demilitarization of a zone of 25 kilometers on the right bank. A combined Franco-British commission was elected to negotiate a settlement on the question of the upper Mekong. It was a difficult confrontation, since toward the end of 1894, pressure grew in Paris from the Colonial Party and the general government of Indochina; both were in favor of a protectorate in Siam, in view of the general dividing up of the Far East that the Sino-Japanese war of 1895 seemed to herald. “Bangkok could be part of the prize reserved for us,” wrote Gabriel Hanotaux in June 1895.⁹²

It was finally the risk of a military confrontation with Britain, the protector of Siam, at a time when tension was increasing regarding the upper Nile, the African counterpart of the Mekong question, that led France to accept the British proposition of October 1895 calling for a condominium over Siam. The French-British agreement of January 15, 1896, led to the resolution of the conflict to the advantage of Indochina; but France abandoned its project of a protectorate over Siam. The upper Mekong would form the border between Burma and Indochina. The principality of Chiang Khaeng was split in two along the river: the western half was included in British Burma and the eastern half in French Laos. The *chao fa* of Chiang Khaeng, Sali No, could do nothing but protest; his function would be done away with in 1916, during the plot of the last holder of the title. Siam was divided into three zones: a central buffer zone, the valley of Chaophraya, in which the two countries committed themselves not to send troops or acquire privileges, and two zones of influence on either side, British to the West and the South, French to the East. The advantages, granted by China to France and Britain concerning Sichuan and Yunnan, would be expanded to the nationals of both powers.

This was in effect a vast regional trade-off between the basin of the Mekong, henceforth French, and the west and south of the Malay Peninsula, henceforth under British influence. In 1895, after the departure of Pavie (nominated in 1893 *commissaire général* of Laos and president of the commission to delimit the up-

per Mekong frontier), the Lao principalities were regrouped into two territories and entrusted to two general commissioners: upper Laos, with Luang Prabang as its capital, and lower Laos, of which the chief town was Khong. On April 19, 1899, they would be merged into a single superior residency, installed in Vientiane. Subsequently, Siam would have to cede territory that had been recognized in 1893 on two occasions: the province of Champassak and the harbor of Krat in Laos in 1904; the two provinces of Battambang and Angkor in Cambodia and that of Sayaboury in Laos, in return for the restitution of Krat, through the treaty of March 23, 1907. The latter was confirmed by the 1926 agreement confirming the demilitarization of the Mekong frontier and specifying the borders along the river. The division of the Indochinese peninsula, then, was finally completed on this date.

Finally, during the same period, the initial goal of the conquest of Indochina, the penetration of the Chinese market, "the only reserve the future holds for us," according to Ulysse Pila, was achieved but revealed to be somewhat disappointing. The Beijing convention of 1887 opened three cities in southern China to French trade and granted the latter most favored nation status. In 1889, the consulate of Mongzi in Yunnan was created, of which the first two incumbents, Émile Rocher and Dejean de La Batie, were efficient promoters of French interests. When a group of Paris banks, with governmental guarantee, granted a loan of 400 million francs to Beijing to finance the war indemnity that China had to pay to Japan in 1895, this allowed France to gain recognition, through the agreement of June 20, 1895, of the transfer of Muong Sing on the upper Mekong, the priority for the mining concessions of Yunnan, Guangxi, and western Guangdong, along with the right to extend railroad lines from Tonkin into Chinese territory. As a result, stimulated by the Quai d'Orsay and by the Ministry of the Colonies, French capital became interested in equipping China. Vast projects of liaison between the Yunnan tin, copper, and iron mines and the Tonkin coal mines emerged following various exploratory missions in southern China, from 1895 to 1898, sponsored by the Comité des forges.⁹³

The action of Paul Doumer, ex-minister of finances, who became governor-general of Indochina in May 1897, was decisive in this regard. Following his journey to France in the summer of 1898, he garnered support from politicians and businessmen for the railway and mining projects in South China and campaigned for the annexation of Yunnan. Some would go so far as to dream of a successful variant of the ongoing confrontation at Fashoda (on the banks of the White Nile in the Sudan, where the British and French were then politely deadlocked) on the upper Yangtze. With the accords of June 12, 1897, and April 10, 1898, Beijing ceded to the pressure, committing itself not to alienate any territory to a foreign power in the three provinces adjacent to Tonkin all the way to the mouth of the Xijiang, conceding to French interests the Lang Son–Nanning and Lao Cai–Kunming railway lines, and granting France a 99-year lease on the bay of Guangzhouwan, so that it

could build a coaling station there. In several months, the bases of a vast zone of French influence were thus established in southern China.

. . .

At the end of this half century, thanks to the emergence of a new Asian order, France was assured of the control of an immense territory of 740,000 square kilometers, the most populated of its new colonial empire, and of a group of ancient civilizations and states. Through Indochina, as much as through its colonies in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, France, now republican, succeeded in converting itself into an “imperial society” (*société impériale*), to use Christophe Charle’s term.⁹⁴ On the Indochinese peninsula, the management of the relations between peoples had been profoundly changed. A mode of recognition between political entities and authorities based on symbolic relationships—like the rites of legitimization practiced by the first “masters of the earth,” such as the Souei in Cambodia; the borrowing of royal titles from Indian traditions; the possession of talismanic protective images, or palladia; tributary allegiances to the Chinese empire (in the cases of Dai Nam and of the *muong* of Luang Prabang) or Siam (in the case of the Khmer monarchy)—was replaced by the modern delineation of borders, the signing of international treaties, and the imperialist organization of Indochinese space. French Indochina, far from being an artificial construct, was the result as much of the dynamic of events, of the shock of antagonistic initiatives, as of a program traced out in advance. In metropolitan France, the arrival of a certain cultural configuration, the new scientific, industrial, and Republican culture, made this “Indochinese moment” possible. This configuration, in turn, found itself consolidated by the creation of Indochina. Indeed, between 1867 and 1884, the “other” possible path—that of noncolonial imperialistic expansion in Asia, notably by French imperialism, carried out through the transformation of the native states into dependent partners of the West, all the while maintaining their political independence—was only progressively put aside in the Indochinese realm. France ignored this other path not only because of international constraints and the multiple demands of nineteenth-century French society but, just as much, owing to the inability of the Vietnamese elite to conceive of their future in this “other,” noncolonial vision of Western expansion.

Reducing the Khmer kingdom to a dependency was certainly a difficult task. The uprising was so widespread in 1885–86 that the colonizers, in order to keep Vietnam—their principal objective—had to resort to royal mediation and abandon their project of a pure and simple annexation. As Alain Forest and Milton Osborne have shown, they were unable to capture the mechanisms of Khmer political power without reinforcing the king’s symbolic power as the “master of existence.”⁹⁵ In Cambodia, colonization had to be patient, and the identification of the nation with its royal rulers would continue to be reinforced.

It was different in Vietnam, where the French had to defeat a lengthy armed opposition and to break the monarchy morally, ideologically, and politically. The result of this difficult power struggle was largely determined by the attitude of the Chinese empire. Constrained to give up its tributary system in Southeast Asia by the war of 1884–85, Beijing outlined what would be China's Indochinese policy until 1950: while respecting the Franco-Chinese compromise as essential, it sought to control France's Vietnamese adversaries through calculated and limited aid, postponing long-term southbound expansion and the transformation of the peninsula's future modern nation-states into satellites.

The ambiguous and contradictory attitude adopted from 1884 to 1888 by the Vietnamese Confucian monarchy and bureaucracy, prisoners of their own ideological tradition, had dire consequences. The actions of Ton That Thuyet, Ham Nghi, and some mandarins and scholars certainly legitimized the resistance, which would evidently not have had the same impact without it. On the other hand, the final rallying of the court and the mandarinat to the protectorate with the aim of preserving the monarchy, the dynasty, and Vietnam's Confucian hierarchy, no matter at what cost—a logical corollary to the Franco-Chinese accord of June 6, 1885—weakens and probably shattered the nation's dynastic and royal affiliation. In the eyes of the literate elite, the Confucian monarchy was permanently discredited, and a breach opened between it and popular patriotism that would never close. The result was the opposite of what was established in Cambodia: the nation, the dynasty and, as a consequence, the monarchy were separated. Not only did the dynasty lose its “celestial mandate,” but its maintenance on the throne by the foreigners made any continuation of this mandate impossible and potentially disqualified the royal function. Patriotism had to look for other paths.

Thus, from 1896 to 1897, the Vietnamese resistance found itself in an ideological void—a state of moral, political, and cultural searching. This was all the more serious for colonization, inasmuch as the Can Vuong had passed on a fierce spirit of denial to the defeated Vietnamese society. In 1900, a perceptive officer, Colonel Fernand Bernard, thinking of the long-term consequences of the defeat of the literati, underlined the emotional violence he saw appearing: “This whole period,” he wrote, “has left a hatred that the years will not ease in the hearts of the Annamese and the Europeans.”⁹⁶ Bernard saw in the defeat of the literati the origin of a political psychology common to most Europeans: “We can conclude that this finally subdued people will not recover the powerful instinct that, so often in its history, has raised it up against the invader. We believe that we possess the ultimate method for keeping it in submission.” However, he added, “repressed feelings persist in the depths of souls. In the countryside of Annam, they are still thinking of the proscribed emperor, of Ham Nghi and his counselors, of Thuyet and Phan Dinh Phung. A naïve legend has already been created suggesting that they still live in the mountains, ready to emerge when the moment arrives.”