

Colonialism: Case Study of French Vietnam (Indochina)

Vietnam before the 19th Century

- 2 Vietnamese Kingdoms (North and South), both open to foreign traders
 - ◆ European Catholic Missionaries were less welcomed
- Local rebellions
 - ◆ Tay Son Rebellion (1771)

Vietnam in the 19th Century

- The relationship between the Vietnamese and French deteriorated so rapidly in the early 19th century because of the irreconcilability between the Vietnamese emperors' attitude and actions taken towards Catholicism and French missionaries on the one hand, as well as French interests on the other
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Extension of French Control beyond Cochin China

- French Presence in the region grew into political and military control over Southern Vietnam
- Ambition interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War
 - ◆ French defeat
 - ◆ Establishment of new government
- Pursued colonialism in Africa and South East Asia aggressively

Is the extension of French control beyond Cochin China justified?

French Interests/International Circumstances

Social Reasons (God)

- Desire to spread the Catholic Faith and Civilise Vietnam

- ◆ Higher Races (French) had a right over the lower races (Vietnamese) because they had a duty to civilise them
- ◆ Believed that European Nations should do this with generosity, grandeur and sincerity
- Missionary Impulse
- Saw colonialism as vital because it provided a response to the grave difficulties that accompanied its work in the societies of a newly industrialized Europe

Gold

- Address Demand for Trading Bases, Raw Materials, New Markets
 - ◆ Demand for raw materials and cash crops
 - Result of the Industrial Revolution intensifying in the late 19th Century
 - Turned to Vietnam as it possessed valuable mineral resources
 - Tin
 - ◆ Manufacture French Goods
 - Zinc
 - ◆ Manufacture French Goods
 - Coal
 - ◆ Needed for the expanding French Navy to fuel their Steamships
 - Phosphate
 - Vietnam's availability of raw materials provided good economic incentive and encouraged the French to expand their control beyond Cochin China
 - ◆ Possibility of Commercial trading opportunities and new trading bases
 - French hoped Vietnam could be used as an inroad to China
 - Initial interest in diverting all trade with China towards Saigon
 - Believed that Southern Vietnam via the Mekong River provides a convenient inroad
 - However, it was unsuitable and unsafe
 - Later turned their attention towards another access route via the Red River
 - ◆ Enticed the French and motivated them to extend control beyond Cochin China

Glory

- Competition amongst European Powers
 - ◆ By 1815, much of France's colonial empire had been lost

- Motivated the French to rebuild their empire and rival Britain's Imperialist expansion
- ◆ Britain – France's main competitor in South East Asia
 - Burma increasingly came under control of the British
 - Made the French worried about British trying to gain access to China through Burma/expand eastward into Siam

Individuals and Circumstances

Individuals

Individuals	Role in contributing to extension of French Control beyond Cochin China
Adm. Jules Dupre	Played a key role in promoting French expansion into northern Vietnam. He supported Francis Garnier's expedition to Tonkin, which aimed to establish a greater French presence but led to conflict with local forces, including the Black Flag Army.
Francis Garnier	Aggressively pursued French expansion in Tonkin (northern Vietnam). In 1873, he launched an unauthorized military campaign to take Hanoi but was killed by the Black Flag Army, which was allied with the Vietnamese.
Nguyen Tri Phuong	Led the defense against French forces in both the Cochinchina campaign (1858–1862) and later in Hanoi in 1873, where he was captured and ultimately refused medical treatment, dying as a symbol of Vietnamese resistance.
Tu Duc	Tried to resist French expansion but was weakened by internal rebellion and external threats. He ultimately signed treaties (such as the Treaty of Saigon in 1862) that ceded control of Cochinchina to France and later lost control over Tonkin and Annam.
Jules Ferry	As Prime Minister in the 1880s, he pushed for French conquest in Indochina, leading to the Tonkin Campaign (1883–1886), which solidified French control over northern Vietnam.
Black Flag	A Mercenary Army that played a key role in defeating Francis Garnier in 1873 and later in the resistance against Henri Rivière's forces in 1883.
Henri Riviere	A French naval officer who led another attempt to take control of Hanoi in 1882. He was killed in 1883 during a battle against the Black Flag Army, which increased French military intervention in Vietnam and ultimately led to the establishment of a French protectorate over Tonkin.

→ Specific individuals and men on the spot accelerated and ultimately helped to formalise France's control over Vietnam and its neighbouring regions

Circumstances (Thank you Xavier)

→ 1871

- ◆ Jules Dupre used warships to extend French rule in Vietnam

→ 1873

- ◆ French merchant arrested for illegal trading.
 - Dupre sent Francis Garnier to settle the issue.
- ◆ However, negotiations failed and Garnier attacked Hanoi.
 - He was killed by the Black Flags soon after.
- ◆ Withdrawal of forces from Hanoi (Tonkin) to avoid further conflict due to resistance from the Vietnamese, and since Dupre was not given permission for the military expedition.

→ 1874

- ◆ Emperor Tu Duc signed the Second Treaty of Saigon to retain his power
- ◆ The terms of the treaty were (15 March 1874):
 - Cochinchina ceded to France, and a French Resident in Hue
 - Ports in Annam opened to French trade, and Red River was opened to shipping
 - Rights of Vietnamese Catholics strengthened

→ 1882

- ◆ Henri Riviere leads another military expedition to Hanoi, and captures Saigon despite Vietnamese resistance

→ 1883

- ◆ Riviere was killed by the Black Flag
- ◆ Emperor Tu Duc dies
- ◆ The French sends an ultimatum to the court: Accept colonisation or face total destruction. 🤖
- ◆ The Treaty of Hue is signed
- ◆ The terms of the treaty were (25 August 1883):
 - Tonkin and Annam are French protectorates, which means Vietnam is effectively a French colony
 - Foreign relations controlled by France, and French Residents to be appointed in all provinces
 - Red River opened to trade, and money is to be paid to France

→ 1884

- ◆ Treaty of Protectorate is signed, giving France greater control over Tonkin, effectively colonising the whole of Vietnam
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Did French Rule do more harm than good to the People of Vietnam?

Policies Implemented

Political Reforms

- Centralised Administrative System (Good)
 - ◆ Direct rule in Cochinchina and indirect rule in Annam and Tonkin
 - ◆ Unified the three states into one administrative unit and centralised everything
- Replacement of Traditional Hierarchy (Bad)
 - ◆ Loss of power and prestige
 - ◆ Although they had indirect rule in theory, the local rulers were mere figureheads as all powers lied in the Resident Superior
- Centralisation of Tax Collection (Both Bad and Good)
 - ◆ More efficient tax collection
 - ◆ However, in pre-colonial periods, village heads could under-report tax amounts to pay less taxes
 - ◆ This caused hardship amongst impoverished families as they had to pay more taxes now

Economic Reforms

- Development of a new Currency (Good)
 - ◆ Before French rule, there was no standard currency (people paid in rice/zinc-copper coins)
 - ◆ However, Vietnamese piastre and coins were used throughout Vietnam to increase profits/facilitate trade and investment
- Development of the Agricultural Sector/Extractive Industries (Good)
 - ◆ Originally, food was grown for one's own consumption, hence there were no exports
 - ◆ However, France wanted to exploit the resources, and hence farmers produced cash crops for trading
 - ◆ It changed to an export-oriented cash economy
 - Rice became Vietnam's leading export
 - Became the largest exporter of coal in SEA (Tonkin was rich in coal)

- Rubber plantations expanded from 15000 to 90000 hectares
- Introduction of Private Property (Bad)
 - ◆ In order to increase profits from their cash crops, the French government introduced private land ownership to increase the areas for farming
 - ◆ They opened areas for farming by declaring them public domain and confiscating land from rebels and village holdings
 - Such lands were given to Vietnamese collaborators, French colonists and French companies
 - ◆ By 1939, there were 225,000 landowners (mainly foreigners 2.5% of population) compared to over a million landless peasants (local tenants who faced land alienation)

Social Reforms

- Large-scale migration and urbanisation (Good)
 - ◆ Originally, Tonkin was more developed and had 10 times higher population than Cochin-China
 - ◆ However, the coal mines and rubber plantations attracted residents in Tonkin to move southwards
 - ◆ Addressed worker shortage and provided cheap labour sources
 - ◆ Relieved pressure on Tonkin
- Development of transport infrastructure (Good)
 - ◆ Railways connecting key ports and cities (e.g. Saigon and Mekong)
 - ◆ Facilitated trade
 - E.g. The Tonkin-Yunnan railway allowed the French to gain access to China
- Improved education system (Good)
 - ◆ Western-educated elite
 - ◆ Primary/Secondary schools and a university in Hanoi
 - ◆ Replaced traditional Vietnamese script with quoc ngu, which became a criteria to join the civil service
 - ◆ Allowed for print publications to spread ideas to influence and gather supporters for nationalist movements
- Improved healthcare (Good)
 - ◆ Built two hospitals
 - De Lanessan in Hanoi
 - Grall in Saigon
 - ◆ Research on tuberculosis and bubonic plague

→ Poor working conditions (Bad)

- ◆ Tonkin–Yunnan railway used up 49,308 kg of gold and the lives of many workers
- ◆ Forced to work for long periods of time with little or no pay
 - Increased dissatisfaction, leading to some uprisings
- ◆ Workers contracted to work for fixed amounts of time in exchange for pay
 - This made income unstable, as prices of goods varied
- ◆ However, this wasn't needed as before that, they could rely on their own farms for food

→ Insufficient medical facilities and education opportunities (Bad)

- ◆ Number of trained medical staff was small
 - Only 90 European and 54 local physicians
 - Only 92 European and 1462 local nurses
- ◆ Only 15% of children of school-going age went to school
 - 80% of population illiterate

→ Deterioration of the standard of living (Bad)

- ◆ Peasants who needed a loan would lease their lands to Chinese money-lenders, who charged high interest rates
- ◆ If they could not repay, they were forced to sell their crops/land to the money-lenders
- ◆ Chinese hence grew in influence while the standard of living deteriorated

→ Heavy taxes (Bad)

- ◆ The French monopolised goods (e.g. alcohol/opium) and taxed them heavily
- ◆ All Vietnamese were required to purchase designated amounts, those who bought too little were punished
 - Led to many becoming impoverished

Conclusion

→ Policies implemented by the French caused Vietnamese society to be more fragmented

- ◆ Eroded the unified state of pre colonial Vietnam by splitting it into 3 administrative units
- ◆ Increasing class division
 - Landless peasants and Vietnamese who supported the French
 - French speaking elites and ordinary people

→ Most Vietnamese experienced a drop in their quality of life

- ◆ Exploitation of Vietnamese
- ◆ Vietnamese culture undermined

- ◆ Discouraged from participating in political activities
 - ◆ Low Literacy Rate
 - The accumulation of discontent would make the Vietnamese more receptive to the idea of nationalist revolution
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Local Responses to the Extension of French Colonial Rule

Collaboration with Colonial Rulers

- Believed that Collaboration with the French and accepting French values and culture wholesale could strengthen the Vietnamese Society
- Mainly
 - ◆ Vietnamese elites
 - Believed in French reforms
 - Rewarded with lands and court positions
 - ◆ Educated Vietnamese not of Mandarin status
 - Attain positions in the court
 - Personal gain
- Saw the French as beneficial to them
- Submitted their authority to the French

Petrus Truong Vinh Ky

- An interpreter for the French
 - ◆ Accused as working for the enemy
- Criticised for serving as an advisor to the French in suppressing the Can Vuong Movement of anti French Resistance fighters

Discriminate Assimilation of Western Culture (Modernists)

- Believed that selective adaptation was necessary to absorb the best of Western Civilization

Phan Chu Trinh

- Believed that National reconstruction required
 - ◆ Radical Rupture with existing Vietnam
 - ◆ Vietnam to borrow elements necessary for its advancement from the French
- Considered it necessary to put an end to certain institutions

- Wanted to
 - ◆ Encourage progress and democracy
 - ◆ Put pressure on the French with the help of the press
 - Elicit the population's participation on political affairs
- Hostile to violence
- However, the French were too oppressive and rejected all his proposals for reform

Armed and Violent Resistance to French Rule

- Vietnamese Nationalists who preferred direct action to drive out the French instead of developing mass support which required time and effort

Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang

- Vietnamese Nationalist Party
- Founded in 1927 under the Leadership of Nguyen Thai Hoc
- Modelled after the Kuomintang (KMT)
- Carried out assassinations of French officials and Vietnamese collaborators
- Organized a general uprising against the French at Yen Bay (failed)

Phan Boi Chau

- Created Vietnam Duy Tan Hoi
 - ◆ League for the Modernisation of Vietnam
- Exiled himself to Japan, from where he led a struggle against the French
- Envisioned the creation of a revolutionary organisation abroad and the preparation an uprising aimed at liberating Vietnam
- Drafted Letter from Overseas Written in Blood
- Organized the emigration of young people to Tokyo
- Expelled from Japan in 1909
- Launched revolts against the French (crushed)

Timeline

Date	Event
1858	French capture of Saigon
5 June 1862	Signing of the First Treaty of Saigon
1873	Francis Garnier attacks Hanoi

15 March 1874	Signing of the Second Treaty of Saigon
1882	Henri Riviere sends a 2nd Military Expedition to Saigon
25 August 1883	Signing of the Treaty of Hue
June 1884	Signing of the Treaty of Protectorate
1885	Launching of the Can Vuong movement
1887	Union of Indochina established
1893	Laos is added to the Union of Indochina

Thank you for Viewing My Notes! All the Best!
Special Thanks to Xavier Oh