

**MASTER OF INDOCHINA AFTER GOD:
DECOUX'S OWN BRAND OF AUTHORITARIANISM
TO MAINTAIN FRENCH SOVEREIGNTY IN
INDOCHINA**

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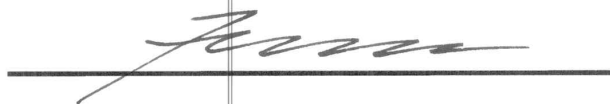
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benjamin Freud', is written over a solid horizontal line.

Benjamin Freud

16 January 2013

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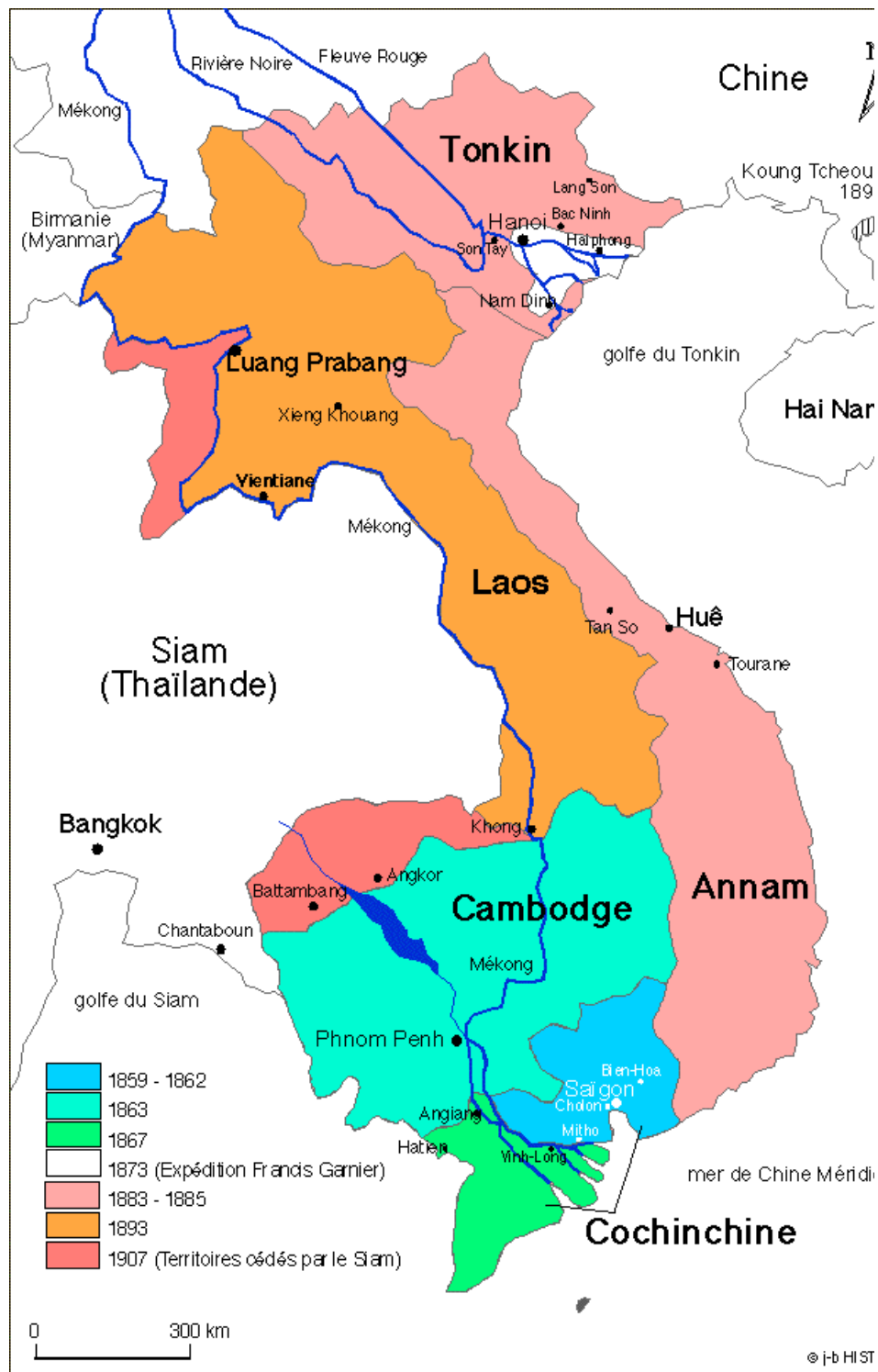
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SUMMARY

This dissertation examines how Governor General Jean Decoux mixed ideology and pragmatism to design policies elevating the colonial *oeuvre* in Indochina to fulfill his only mission: ensure French sovereignty in the region in the post-World War II era. This study begins by establishing that Vichy France had neither the will nor the capacity to export Pétainism abroad. It examines Pétain's regime in the metropole and exposes the vacuity of the National Revolution as a coherent force. It looks at the opposing forces within the metropolitan government and the constraints imposed by the occupying German authorities to determine that there was no one version of the National Revolution, much less one that could be exported twelve thousand kilometers away to a Southeast Asian colony that had drastically different socioeconomic characteristics. The dissertation then explains that the Decoux regime is best understood in light of the ideological influence of ultraconservative Charles Maurras on the officers of the French Navy, including Decoux, whose writings and actions reflected the views of *Action française*. This study shows how Decoux used Vichy's National Revolution as a vehicle to design policy geared toward winning the hearts and minds of the peoples of Indochina and overcoming the colony's slide into autarky, objectives that were essential for the survival of French authority in the colony. Chapter 4 examines how Decoux perfected the administration's propaganda machine—which utilized coercion, censorship, rituals, and festivals—to draw parallels between French and Indochinese cultures to glorify the colonial *oeuvre* in the region. Chapter 5 looks at the regime's

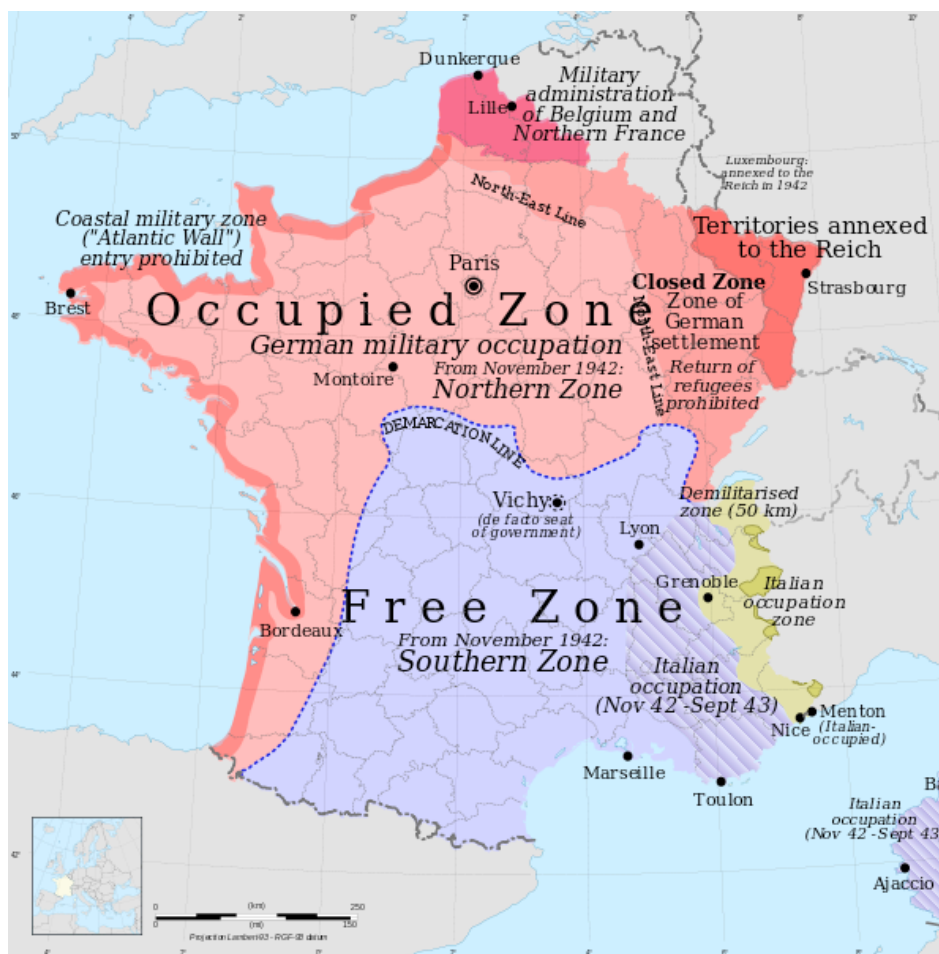
administrative reforms, orchestration of sporting events, and use of the *Légion française des combattants* as desperate endeavors to create the illusion of a nascent federalist spirit guided by a united French community. Chapter 6 focuses on Decoux's reorganization of the economy, designed to prove that the colonial authorities could still provide for the Indochinese peoples in spite of the region's increasingly autarkical situation. Throughout this dissertation, I stress Decoux's relative autonomy from the Pétainist agenda that existed (in rhetoric if not in practice) in the metropole, maintaining that his primordial objective was the salvation of any pretense of colonial legitimacy in the region, in spite of what would turn out to be an impossible situation for the French.

French Indochina¹



1 . http://www.casahistoria.net/images/indochina_conquest_map.gif

France During the Second World War²



2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:France_map_Lambert-93_with_regions_and_departments-occupation.svg

Chapter I: Introduction and Overview

How did the unique strategic and political situation in French Indochina allow Governor General Jean Decoux to implement his own brand of authoritarianism in the colony during the Second World War in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the European and Indochinese peoples? This dissertation seeks to answer this question by exploring how the French colonial administration sought to fulfill its mission of maintaining French sovereignty in the region by balancing its policy-making between the ideological prevalence of a Maurrassian worldview and the endogenous and exogenous factors that required a more pragmatic approach given Indochina's unique geopolitical situation. Moving away from the idea that Hanoi indiscriminately followed a Pétainist agenda and that Vichy "actually cloned itself overseas,"¹ this study will show that the Decoux regime acted with significant autonomy to face its challenges, though its politics had the same ultraconservative and anti-republican ideological roots as those that inspired the National Revolution in the metropole. The marked cultural, socio-political, and economic differences that characterized France (as the metropole) and the five *pays* that constituted the colony rendered it impossible to import a carbon copy of the Pétainist program in Indochina, particularly given the colonists' precarious hold on the region.² Moreover, Decoux's proconsulship outlasted the Vichy government by more than six months

1. Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 2.

2. The term *pays* refers to the five regions of Indochina: Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Laos, and Cambodia.

and Pierre Laval's return to power in April 1942 arguably ended the prominence of the National Revolution in France itself, providing Hanoi with the opportunity to implement policies aligned with Decoux's own worldview. The first goal of this project is to examine how the Decoux administration used the National Revolution as a vehicle to promote its own agenda, inspired by Maurrassism, with policies aiming to justify the five *pays*' relationships with France, through the nurturing of a federalist spirit and concrete administrative and economic changes designed to promote the idea of France as Indochina's natural protector and intellectual guide, in spite of its status as a weakened global power. The third goal is to contribute to a literature that has received little attention from scholars, including French historians, thereby increasing awareness for the legacy of the regime and its effects on post-Second World War Indochina.

Overview and Existing Literature

Much of the scholarly consideration devoted to the Vichy government has either focused on state collaboration and the persecution of Jews in France or the role of the leaders and the mass following they fostered and lost. Other contemporary works have examined how the French extreme Right seized power and the social foundations it tried to lay through the National Revolution. Even more profuse are the efforts to build theoretical models and case studies accounting for the emergence of nationalism in Western and non-Western regions and the struggles for independence that sometimes ensued. Indochina, and Vietnam in particular, has generated a considerable amount of interest due to its

violent experience with decolonization and its role in Cold War containment history. Meanwhile the French empire during the Second World War has mostly been examined for its diplomatic or strategic value. With few exceptions, the contexts within which the imperial administration in Indochina implemented policies bore of anti-republican ideologies, the point where these bodies of literature intersect, have been overlooked.

Traditionally, historians have designated this time in Indochinese history as the “Japanese period,” implicitly bypassing or downplaying the importance of the internal administrative and political machine that the occupying forces allowed the French to run. When not looking at Indochina as a mere piece in the United States’ quest for a decolonized post-war Asia (a vision that disappeared at Yalta in February 1945), scholars have most often focused on Franco-Japanese relations and the unfolding of events that took place ahead of the *coup de force* of 9 March 1945. Brocheux and Isoart present a well documented account of how the Japanese *stationnement* presented diplomatic and strategic dilemmas for France and opportunities seized by Vietnamese nationalists.³ In a book rich on archival research but often short on analysis, Jaques Valette shows the often conflicting opinions and directions of French decision-making *vis-à-vis* the Japanese and the mixed results that ensued.⁴ Meanwhile Philippe Grandjean puts Japan at the center of colonial decision-making, with international relations as the main driver behind

2. Pierre Brocheux and Paul Isoart, *L'Indochine française, 1940-1945* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982).

3. Jacques Valette, *Indochine 1940-1945: Français contre Japonais* (Paris: SEDES, 1993).

Decoux's policies, and Smith is particularly attentive to how the French and the Japanese competed for the realization of their visions of post-war Indochina.⁵

Christopher Goscha's work principally tries to answer the question of why an Indochinese state structure did not come into being after the war given various colonial administrations' desires and plans to create one unified body.⁶ When looking at French imperial policies, Goscha examines how the imperial power constantly had to manage tensions between the Vietnamese on one side and the Lao and Cambodians on the other, particularly given the historical and socioeconomic domination—as well as the self-perceived racial superiority—of the former. His brief section on Vichy Indochina focuses mostly on Decoux's efforts to create an Indochinese “cultural *ensemble*” in parallel with the re-rooting of local identities and nationalisms.⁷ Goscha treats both of these policy directions as reactions to Japanese propaganda and Thai irredentism. However, while much attention is spent on the spillover effects for the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), little is said about the ideological underpinnings that guided Decoux's regime. The intellectual framework that processed events and subsequently decided upon which course to take is largely neglected and yet recognizing the lenses through which the world is perceived is a critical component in understanding policy-making (as opposed to policy-implementation). In fact, Goscha treats Decoux's

4. Philippe Grandjean, *L'Indochine face au Japon: 1940-1945* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004). and Ralph B Smith, "The Japanese Period in Indochina and the Coup of 9 March 1945," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 9, No.2 (1978).

5. Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995).

6. Ibid., p. 83.

endeavors as continuations of the politics of Republican Governor Generals Alexandre Varenne and Pierre Pasquier to redefine local identities based on traditionalism and construct an Indochinese federal system with France as the keystone.⁸ If this is accurate, then the National Revolution in Indochina was not the complete break with the Republic that Vichy intended at home. Perhaps this says more about the Republican colonial authorities than it does about Vichy Indochina, but nonetheless examining the ideological sources underpinning Decoux's ultraconservatism and contextualizing his mission to maintain French sovereignty in the region are essential to understanding the colonial vision of Indochina that Decoux sought to reinforce: one founded on hierarchies, supported by local sovereigns and elites, where France was seen as the protector of an Indochinese union. How Decoux sought to win the hearts and minds of the European and Indochinese peoples through policies based on his worldview is the subject of this study.

A large portion of the historiography of the region examines the effects of Vichyite Indochina's promotion of local identities as a factor in the development of nationalisms. The literature is rich with conclusions that Decoux's initiatives were the impetus behind the emergence of independence movements.⁹ Decoux's policies have to be understood as part of overall changes brought about by colonialism to the relationship between identity and the nation, particularly in Laos and Cambodia. Until the arrival of the French in the nineteenth century, state structures

7. Ibid., 54.

8. Jennings and Raffin are the most obvious, but Goscha and Ivarsson also allude to this.

in what would be these two countries existed outside Western notions of judicial recognition.¹⁰ In these kingdoms, historically held together by fluid borders within *mandala* systems,¹¹ the *colons* altered concepts of geography and spatial delimitations to meet their geo-strategic needs to counter Thai, British, and Chinese threats as well as to organize the colony administratively. Most of the literature on the region sees a continuity between the Third Republic and Vichy in promoting Lao and Cambodian identities to minimize Thai influences and this pays little attention to policies specific to Decoux.

Using Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped* as his theoretical foundation, Søren Ivarsson skillfully investigates how Laos was formed by the larger and competing layouts of Indochina and Siam.¹² He examines how the French colonial administrations used maps, print, and infrastructural improvements to promote a discourse linking Laos to Vietnam and away from Thailand. Ivarsson presents the Decoux administration as the paroxysm of identity politics that already existed during the Third Republic. Clearly the advent of the Lao Renovation Movement and Director of Public Education in Laos Charles Rochet's efforts to cultivate a local identity were outgrowths of Decoux's convictions, but they remained largely directed against the influence of the Thai, particularly after the cessation of territories following the

9. At the risk of generating debate, I loosely distinguish nation from state insofar as the former relates to identity while the latter is more structural and judicial.

10. Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 75; O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Ithaca: SEAP, 1999), 27.

11. Søren Ivarsson, *Creating Laos: The Making of a Lao Space Between Indochina and Siam, 1860-1945* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008).

Franco-Thai war of 1940-41, efforts to which the republican administrators were also sensitive. In contrast, Martin Stuart-Fox, perhaps the most renowned scholar on Laos, and Geoffrey Gunn focus almost exclusively on Lao nationalism as a political movement, devoting very little space to the National Revolution.¹³

John Tully briefly evokes how Decoux was eager to foster Khmer national pride, but his longer term history of Cambodia never treats the National Revolution as much more than a tool to suppress Gaullists, Jews, and Communists.¹⁴ Penny Edwards's work propounds that Cambodia was defined as a cultural space within colonial offices, she mistakenly downplays France's geo-strategic objectives in formulating policy.¹⁵ That is to say that while she treats certain ideological facets of Decoux's politics of promoting local identity, she pays too little attention to the pragmatism involved in his decision-making, particularly when pulled by different and competing forces. Furthermore, Edwards is interested in the revival of Cambodia's Angkorian past, not the thrust of the French national recovery that was so central to the National Revolution.

Unlike in Cambodia and Laos, Vietnam's notion of nationhood dates back at least two thousand years, and the colonial administration's principal objectives there were to prevent local identification with

12. Martin Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State: The Making of Modern Laos* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996); Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Political Struggles in Laos, 1930-1954* (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1988).

13. John A. Tully, *France on the Mekong: A History of the Protectorate in Cambodia, 1863-1953* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002).

14. Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

Japanese pan-Asian propaganda and re-direct emerging nationalism away from the ICP. However the policy outcomes were not always those that Hanoi intended. Brocheux and Hémery treat the Decoux regime as part of an incoherent whole of French policy *vis-à-vis* its colony and relate how the Viet Minh tapped discontent about colonial policies that had very old roots.¹⁶ David Marr's seminal work *1945* provides multifaceted perspectives on the events leading to the Vietnamese Revolution, through French, Japanese, Allied, and Vietnamese lenses.¹⁷ However as its title indicates, the book does not provide more than background information on the politics that preceded the final year of the war. Marr's *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*¹⁸ focuses mainly on Vietnam and while it includes Decoux's efforts to restore the family, reform education, and alter the functions of the mandarinat as part of the forces of cultural change that seized the country since the 1920s, it is never Marr's ambition—nor in his expertise—to understand the dynamics of Hanoi's policy-making, much less as they relate to the metropole.

The literature on colonialism examining the Decoux regime is particularly sparse, with only a handful of books and scholarly articles looking beyond Franco-Japanese relations and concentrating on the relatively free rein of the French administration. In his book *Vichy in the Tropics*—of which Indochina is but one of three parts, the other two focusing on Vichyite Madagascar and Guadeloupe—Eric Jennings argues

151. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochine: La Colonisation ambiguë, 1858-1954* (Paris: Découverte, 2001).

16. David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

17. David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

that Vichy France “projected its ideology throughout the French empire between 1940 and 1944” and “delivered to its empire not only an authoritarianism that was bound to elicit opposition but also the seeds of nationalist resurgence.” He provides a thoughtful analysis of how the National Revolution was adapted to the Indochinese context and how its ultraconservative agenda aimed to keep the indigenous peoples loyal to the empire. Jennings focuses on what he believes were the three principal tendencies of Vichyite politics in Indochina: dependence on and use of mandarins and sovereigns, the impetus given to local nationalisms, and the formulation of a federalist discourse. He shows how Hanoi sought similarities between Pétainism and Confucianism around values of authority, family, work, and hierarchy.¹⁹ In addition, the colonial authorities drew parallels between French and Vietnamese folk heroes such as Joan of Arc and the Trung Sisters. Jennings examines thoroughly the Vichyite regime’s promotion of local identities, its use of sports and organizations to reach the youth, and its cultural push toward a return to tradition, three vectors which he argues were critical in the emergence of independent Indochinese nationalisms. Lastly, Jennings looks at the importation of Vichy’s exclusionary politics and Decoux’s administrative visions of federalism. Unfortunately, in his analysis, Jennings never pays enough attention to the changes occurring in the metropole, specifically Vichy’s changing political directions, its dissonant internal voices, and its diminishing power to project itself in the metropole or overseas. If Vichy cloned itself, then which Vichy was it and when? Furthermore, he never

18. Jennings, 2, 38, 151-153

explains what it was about the Indochina of the Third Republic that Decoux wanted to “revolutionize.” The colony was already non-democratic, exclusionary, and rural. These fundamental but unanswered questions weaken his argument and leave the door open for a new interpretation of the Decoux regime.

Of the essays contained in the edited volume *L'Empire colonial sous Vichy*, Jennings's contributions are the most relevant to this project. In them he evokes many of the same themes found in *Vichy in the Tropics*, notably the role of youth organization, sports, and identity politics. He repeats his assertion that Vichy reproduced itself abroad and that it introduced all of Pétain's favorite themes throughout the empire including the betrayal by “anti-France” elements, fears of an Anglo-Saxon plot to seize its empire, and the National Revolution as a powerful elixir for the recovery of all of France, metropole and colonies alike.²⁰ As in *Vichy in the Tropics*, Jennings completely ignores the economic initiatives of the Decoux regime designed to address the colony's increasingly autarkical situation. The Decoux he paints in these essays is slightly more autonomous than the one of *Vichy in the Tropics* and Jennings affirms that in “Southeast Asia, the Vichy team, dynamic, competent, and even zealous, tried by every means to instill in the Indochinese notions of local patriotism, ancestors, authenticity, even irredentism.” As in his previous book, Jennings concludes that the “formula was no doubt fatal for French colonialism.”²¹

19. Eric Jennings, “La Politique coloniale de Vichy,” in *L'Empire colonial sous Vichy*, eds. Jacques Cantier and Eric Jennings (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), 18.

20. Eric Jennings, “L'Indochine de L'Amiral Decoux,” in Cantier and Jennings, eds., 49.

Anne Raffin focuses primarily on the manners in which Decoux utilized youth organizations for ideological purposes, specifically to counter Japanese propaganda and develop local patriotisms to fall within the colonial context.²² Like Jennings, she argues that the promotion of sports and scouting created the structures and discipline from which nationalists successfully drew in the aftermath of war. Moreover, the cultivation of regional identities, either as part of an ideological agenda or as a pragmatic approach to counteracting Japanese influence, backfired on the French as the infusion of youth organizations

with specific and powerful cultural meanings was viewed by the French colonial authority as a means to reinforce the rapid construction of an imperial political identity of members of each country [but these] preexisting imperial organizations would later help social group formation after the fall of French colonialism in 1945 by reducing the costs of mobilization.²³

Raffin shows that the transposition of the National Revolution to Indochina needed to be customized and localized enough to develop a form of its own if it was to resonate in Confucian and Buddhist cultures. Like Jennings she explicates how the colonial administration drew parallels between French and Indochinese folklores, but she is less rigid in her analysis and her approach to the coexisting efforts to “Westernize” local mentalities and “Easternize” the National Revolution highlights how pragmatic the colonial state could be. She makes an important contribution by investigating how initiatives to create common political

21. Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

22. Ibid., 143.

identities were developed to counteract Japanese pan-Asian propaganda. According to Raffin, the National Revolution drew its strength from five factors in Indochina: 1) Decoux's personality and political orientation (influenced heavily by his *habitus* and the Navy culture);²⁴ 2) Decoux's discretionary powers; 3) Platon's ideology as Vichy's Minister of Colonies; 4) the drive to counter Japanese propaganda; and 5) the relatively low level of interference by the Free French.

Sébastien Verney's recently published *L'Indochine sous Vichy* provides a panoply of detail, demonstrating a thorough research of the measures taken by the Decoux regime. Like much of French colonial literature, however, it is rich with information but light on analysis. It emphasizes the administration's actions rather than its overall strategy or the origins—that is the reasons behind—these actions. Echoing Jennings (though providing more room for customization for the local context) in the few places where he dives into analysis, Verney insists that the Decoux administration “tried to elaborate a National Revolution as faithful as possible to Vichy” to “create a new Frenchman.”²⁵ This dissertation distinguishes itself from Verney's work by arguing that Decoux used the National Revolution as a vehicle to achieve his objectives, which were dominated not by the need to create a “new man” (which as Chapter 2 will discuss was more in line with *ultras* than Pétainist ultraconservatives) but simply to assure the sovereignty of France over Indochina in the postwar. This project contends that Decoux formulated policy based on

23. Anne Raffin, "Tours of Duty, Cross-Identification and Introjection: The Colonial Administrative Mind in Wartime Indochina," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, No.2/3 (2008), 183-212.

24. Sébastien Verney, *L'Indochine sous Vichy* (Paris: Riveneuve Editions, 2012), 161, 475.

his own Maurrassian-influenced worldview, pragmatically adapting to how he saw the Indochinese context through his ideological lenses. As such, this dissertation places a greater emphasis than does Verney on the intellectual underpinnings of Decoux's decision-making and objective-setting.

This overview of the works specifically examining the politics of the Decoux regime and its relationship to the ultraconservative agenda of the National Revolution highlights the literature's quantitative paucity. Moreover, it shows important gaps in the historiography. While Raffin allows Hanoi more independence in its policy-making than Jennings, her extensive focus on sports and youth organizations leaves her less room to examine thoroughly the dynamics and ideological underpinnings of the colonial administration's politics, particularly those based in anti-republican pre-war France. Jennings provides a broader thematic coverage but presents an often incomplete picture of the National Revolution itself, as he neglects its lack of political and ideological cohesion at home—particularly as the conflict dragged on—and Vichy's declining influence; a significant problem since his argument is based on the notion that Vichy cloned itself abroad.

This thesis dissociates Vichy and the ideology behind the National Revolution when examining the dynamics of Decoux's policy-making, looking at three fundamental events in the metropole that have largely been ignored in the colonial literature, though they are critical to evaluating the Vichy's influence on Hanoi and therefore understanding the latter's autonomy (which in turn provides information about the

drivers behind its decisions). These events are: 1) the ideological evolution of the National Revolution; 2) Pétainism's emasculation under the Darlan government and to an even greater extent under Laval's second administration; and 3) Vichy's diminishing power, particularly after the German occupation of the Free Zone. Historian Julian Jackson underscores the problem by claiming that there was "an official version of the National Revolution it was contained in Pétain's speeches—although Pétain himself disliked the term Revolution and only used it four times, preferring to talk of *redressement* [recovery] or *renovation* [renewal]." ²⁶ One highly influential Vichy scholar, Robert Paxton, affirms quite clearly that Vichy was not a bloc and that there were competing "tendencies around several sets of alternatives: integral Catholic moral order—the pagan nationalist moral order of some pre-war protofascist leagues; federal state—centralized state; persuasive means—coercive means." ²⁷ Moreover, when Paxton calls the history of the National Revolution "the gradual gathering around one set of poles: integral Catholicism, Napoleonic centralism, more concentrated capitalism, and coercion" ²⁸ he is describing the dialectical evolution of a political agenda faced with internal and external struggles in the context of war, ones that did not necessarily resonate in Indochina.

It is difficult to accept Jennings's main thesis, that Vichy officials could have extended an "undiluted form of their ultraconservative

25. Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 148.

26. Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 140.

27. *Ibid.*, 142.

ideology” to Indochina, since Vichy’s own politics were never ideologically homogenous; existed in relation to (if not dependent on) its relationship with Germany and the policies of the Reich; and varied consequentially based on the particular Head of government in power at the time, not to mention the incessant machinations of its officials.²⁹ This study departs from Jennings by positing that Vichy never had the power to project one coherent ideological agenda throughout the war as the doctrines it proposed were never unified. Furthermore, its internal drive for fundamental change weakened as Pétain’s own influence declined, particularly after Vichy turned increasingly collaborationist following Laval’s return to power (18 April 1942) and the German occupation of the Free Zone (11 November 1942). Apart from the promulgation of exclusionary laws and its evermore coercive use of power, the period was short during which Vichy applied the ultraconservative doctrines for which it is remembered.

Nevertheless, when the National Revolution’s momentum and the traditionalists’ power were at their zenith, during the first eight months that followed the armistice, the ease and rapidity with which Pétainist programs were enacted in the metropole suggest that they were the products of already existing ultraconservative discourse, and much of this can be traced to *Action française*, the royalist, ultraconservative movement headed by Charles Maurras. This dissertation looks at how this discourse penetrated the upper echelons of the French Navy, influencing Decoux profoundly so that his politics as Governor General were born of the

28. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 2.

same Maurrassian tradition that gained force at the turn of the century in France and inspired Vichy's recovery. As such, it is more useful to understand the dynamics of policy-making of the Decoux administration as the confrontation between a worldview significantly influenced by pre-war ultraconservatism and the specific Indochinese context of the war, including the region's isolation and the administration's primordial mission to maintain French sovereignty in Indochina, which, given France's military impotence and the constant threat posed by the Japanese presence, could only be achieved through policies designed to win hearts and minds.

Vichy's own inability to come up with a pure version of Pétainism makes it impossible to accept Hanoi's implementation of the National Revolution as the pursuit of an undiluted ideology originating from Vichy itself. That is not to say that directives from the metropole weren't sent to and followed by the colonial administration, but Decoux had to exercise some discretion in their implementation since most of Vichy's laws were designed to address specifically metropolitan issues. Hanoi may have supported the *Légion Française des Combattants* (the veterans' organization whose goal it was to diffuse Pétainist principles in France and in the empire), the push for traditional values, and (at times) the application of exclusionary laws, but the ideas behind these initiatives date from long before the war, present in the discourses of *Action française* or *La Croix de feu* founder Colonel de la Roque, as Chapter 3 will show. This study refutes the predominance of the Vichy-Hanoi axis and in its stead proposes that while the politics of Vichy and Hanoi shared similar

ideological roots, their respective situations during the war made it impossible for the former to replicate itself abroad, allowing Decoux a certain freedom to enact his own worldview to accomplish his objectives, the most important being keeping France's imperial hold over Indochina.

To understand Indochina's relationship with the metropole one must make the distinction between Vichy the administrative entity and Vichy the nominative encapsulation of Pétainism, collaboration, and every other image burned into popular consciousness. Within the context of the Second World War, Vichy was a government body, with domestic policies, political relationships with the conflict's powers (including the occupying forces), and ties to the territories of its empire. It is largely in the post-war era of the Allied victory that Vichy as a name has morphed into the more subjective—nebulous—anti-republican and Axis-aiding policies of some of the members of its government (see Chapter 2). Decoux's loyalty to the metropole was first and foremost an administrative one, that is, a refusal to enter into dissent vis-à-vis what he saw as the only legitimate French government. That his worldview coincided with the tenets of Pétainism only reinforced this perception. Moreover, Japan's declarations to French Ambassador in Tokyo Arsène Henry in 1940 that it would only recognize legal representatives of the metropolitan government was a clear threat, and dissent on the part of officials serving in Indochina was unthinkable.³⁰ François Darlan, Head of the French Navy, suggested Decoux replace out of favor Governor General Georges Catroux when those within the French government in

29. Georges Catroux, *Deux actes du drame indochinois* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 71-73; Jean Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine* (Paris: Plon, 1949), 36-37.

favor of an armistice with Germany were desperate to avoid the disintegration of the empire that would have resulted from continuing the struggle from abroad. Darlan trusted Decoux to accept the metropolitan administration as the only legal entity and not to break the chain of command.

Indochina officially promulgated laws originating from the metropole but, as will be discussed, these were enacted with various levels of customization based on regional contexts, and sometimes were kept on the books but not observed. One should not assume, however, that the laws coming out of Vichy were automatically or inherently Pétainist, in the doctrinal sense of the word. As will be explored in chapter 2, Vichy the political entity was often not aligned with Vichy the nominal ideology (which arguably did not exist in itself but has come to designate that for which the National Revolution stood). As such, Decoux's loyalty to Vichy should be understood within a geopolitical framework more than an ideological one, though critically—and this is what this dissertation argues—Decoux and Pétainism shared the same ultraconservative ideological roots. This work will provide evidence of Decoux's autonomy by stressing the logistical impossibilities of having the metropole dictate policies in Indochina and highlighting when and how Decoux chose to act in accordance to his own appreciation of the situation based on political expedient or the customized application of law in the colony. The crux of the argument remains that Decoux's openness to the rhetoric of the National Revolution was a matter of sharing in its pre-war

Maurrassian roots and believing that it was the most appropriate vehicle to ensure the maintenance of French sovereignty in Indochina.

This dissertation will not, it should be noted, provide the Indochinese peoples' responses to Vichy policies. Although these are critical linkages to understanding how wartime events prepared the terrain for the August Revolution of 1945 and the First Indochinese War, local reactions to colonial policies would take this work beyond its intended scope. Beyond the considerable research that is required to draw parallel paths between colonial policies and locals' reactions, this dissertation seeks to divulge how and why policies were made in the colony based on decisions that had to be taken with the limited information the authorities had on specific topics. French intelligence was remarkably out of touch with the locals and their sentiments vis-à-vis the administration, the war, and daily life.³¹ Shawn McHale investigates how the Viet Minh over the course of the war moved from reacting to the colonial rhetoric to crafting a message of their own. He also explores the manner in which, in Vietnam, the rural population was more susceptible to Viet Minh propaganda because they were historically less touched by French culture and influence.³² Locals' reactions is a complex, broad topic and this work will hopefully open the doors for future research that will complete the picture of Indochina during the Second World War.

Background and Project Construct

30. RSTNF 6636 is full of reports positing throughout the war that the locals had little interest for the political situation and were primarily concerned with daily subsistence.

31. Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 133; 178.

Decoux's ascendance was the result of the parallel aggressive expansions of the German and Japanese empires, both of which France was unable to resist militarily. In the metropole, the ultraconservative regime of Marshal Philippe Pétain pursued erratic and sometimes contradictory agendas involving ideologically-driven efforts to destroy the institutions of the Third Republic, which it replaced, and pragmatic approaches, including collaboration with the German occupying forces, to ensure the prominence of France as a power in the postwar. The capitulation of France in Europe, coupled with the disarray that ensued the change of regime, encouraged the Japanese to pressure the French into allowing the stationing of its troops in Indochina, knowing that the colonial authorities were incapable of resisting militarily given their insufficient combat forces.

On 19 June 1940, days before the signing of the armistice in Europe, Japan demanded that French Indochina close its border with China to ensure that no supplies reached Chiang Kai Shek's army. The Japanese had sought the shutdown of the Indochinese-Yunnan railway since 1937, which it suspected served to transport arms to Chinese Nationalist forces. Severed from a French government in the midst of collapse, faced with the threat of a Japanese invasion that would have toppled the French authorities, and receiving no sign of military support from the British or American governments, Governor General Georges Catroux (Decoux's predecessor) decided to appease Tokyo. He prohibited the transport of fuel across the border and allowed the presence of Japanese representatives to control its closure. One week later, republican Minister

of Colonies Rivière dismissed Catroux on grounds that he should never have given in to the Japanese ultimatum and allowed the presence of foreign troops in the colony. The Republican government immediately appointed Admiral Jean Decoux, then commander of the French naval forces in Pacific, as Governor General of Indochina.

Initially in favor of continuing the fight against Germany from the colonies and refusing to give into Japanese pressures even at the risk of a hopeless military conflict, Decoux reluctantly fell in line with Vichy's positions on cessation of hostilities with the *Wehrmacht* and the preservation of Indochina above noble sentiments of resistance to the invader. In August, Japan demanded that the French allow its troops passage in Indochina as well as use local airfields. As Vichy and Tokyo negotiated accords, Decoux continued to oppose compliance, warning the Ministry of Colonies of the nefarious consequences of succumbing to Japanese threats. Again he was reminded of his need for discipline and again the Admiral, with his preternatural sense of duty, complied. The result was the signing of two agreements, one in August and another in September, which ultimately allowed for the presence of 6,000 Japanese troops in Tonkin. Though other agreements would follow, both economic and military (including one that extended Japanese presence across the colony), these first two were the watershed in Franco-Japanese relations that would preserve France's sovereignty in Indochina (until the *coup de*

force on 9 March 1945) in exchange for its subservience to the Japanese war effort.³³

This supposed sovereignty marked the contradiction in Decoux's General Governorship and Indochina's place within the larger global conflict. The French were in no position to resist the Japanese in 1940: 90,000 troops, of which only 14,500 were European (and ostensibly better trained and motivated for combat), six months of munitions for the infantry, three for the artillery, no mechanized units, rifles dating from the Great War, and 98 airplanes, only 15 of which were considered modern fighters.³⁴ Once the Japanese forces arrived in the region, the French hold became even more precarious. The colonial authorities were entirely dependent on Japanese willingness to let them continue to exist, a willingness that ended on 9 March 1945 when Tokyo deemed it in its interests to take control of the region to better assure its defense. French Indochina was, moreover, technically tied to Japan by the Common Defense Agreement (the Darlan-Kato Accord of July 1941), which committed it to fight alongside the Empire of the Sun in case of foreign aggression in Indochina. While Japan used the stationing of its troops in Indochina for its war effort, it needed the region to supplement the rice and resources it was lacking. It could not rely on China to provide it with foodstuffs; Kwangtung especially was deficient in rice. Rice production in the French colony, coupled with Japan's needs for rubber and petrol, incited the Japanese to move southward into Indochina and the Dutch

32. Accounts of these events can be found in Catroux, 18-19; Decoux; Valette; Brocheux and Isoart; and J. Legrand, *L'Indochine à l'heure japonaise; la vérité sur le coup de force, la résistance en Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Cannes, France: Aegitna, 1963).

33. Brocheux and Isoart, 74-83.

Indies.³⁵ When Vichy Prime Minister Pierre Laval accepted a system of reciprocal exchanges in special yen on 30 December 1942, the Bank of Indochina became the ultimate guarantor of trade payments with Japan, effectively forcing Indochina into Japan's financial orbit and absorbing it in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.³⁶ France was technically sovereign and maintained its administration in the region, but only under the sword of Damocles. In spite of this reality, Decoux had no choice but to keep his administration operating and implementing policies in hopes that the war would end with his government still intact.

From the Allies' standpoint, Indochina played little to no part strategically during the conflict other than to reduce the number of Japanese troops which could be stationed in the Philippines to oppose an eventual American return. As early as November 1943, the United States War Department contended that military operations in China would come too late to support an attack on mainland Japan, thereby making an assault on Indochina an unnecessary diversion, though, as Chapter 6 examines, the Allies heavily targeted Indochinese ports and infrastructure to disrupt the region's external and internal trade, which in turn hindered the movement of foodstuffs within the territory and contributed significantly to the 1944-1945 famine in Tonkin and northern Annam. While de Gaulle had designated the liberation of Indochina as the highest priority outside the metropole and the United States was willing to placate him while tapping the French resistance network in Indochina

34. Valette, 32.

35. Martin Thomas, *The French Empire at War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 202.

to provide it with information on Japanese troop movements, Washington had no intention to land its troops in the French colony. The War Department, however, found it useful to keep the Japanese guessing as to where the Allies would strike and planted stories suggesting an imminent invasion of Indochina.³⁷ This policy ultimately had disastrous effects on French Indochina as the resistance believed the Allies would “liberate” the region. Its members often lacked the necessary discretion, overzealous in voicing their support for de Gaulle, in what Jacques Vallette calls the “*raison d’être* of a resistance of the eleventh hour, in a last hope of absolving [those] who, almost to the man, had compromised themselves with an inopportune ardor in favor of Vichy and the National Revolution.” The Japanese overthrew the colonial administration largely in order to address the risks posed by this resistance in case of an amphibious Allied landing in Indochina, as well as to block efforts of Gaullist elements who were beginning to infiltrate back into the colony.³⁸

For four and a half years, the colonial administration would exist and make policies based on its interactions with the two forces that exerted some form of influence over it: the politics of the French and Japanese governments. Though the influence of both of these forces strengthened and waned over the course of the Second World War, the story of Decoux’s administration is primordially one of the struggle of the colonial authorities to ensure a maximal degree French sovereignty over Indochina during the war and in its aftermath. To do so, Decoux had to

36. Marr, *1945*, 44; 197; 276; 316.

37. Valette, 221.

demonstrate to the local people as well as the Japanese forces (and to some extent the Americans, of whose distant gaze he was very conscious) that France—in spite of its defeat in Europe, its capitulation to Tokyo's demands in Asia, and the potential loss of face that ensued both events—was capable and willing to continue to build its *oeuvre* in the colony, which, according to its own narrative, brought the benefits of Western culture and science to the region to elevate the peoples there and develop the societies into modern ones. This was nothing more than the continuation of a republican discourse dating back over sixty years, but the ultraconservative doctrine of Pétain's National Revolution in Vichy provided an alternative vehicle for Hanoi to reach its goals. Decoux, himself influenced by *Action française*, used the National Revolution to implement policies in Indochina that derived from Maurrassism, itself the ideological source of Pétainism, to win the hearts and minds of the Indochinese and French populations. Indochina's isolation from the metropole and the unique context that it presented allowed him unprecedented autonomy to govern, thereby resulting in a brand of authoritarianism that crushed dissenting voices while elevating and fetishizing its own ideological tenets. Moreover, the ultraconservative discourse provided justifications for certain administrative and economic reorganizations that were necessary given the autarkical state of Indochina during the war. How Decoux created his own brand of authoritarianism, based on his worldview, to win the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of Indochina is the subject of this study.

To understand Decoux's regime and in particular its connections with the National Revolution that it supposedly embraced, it is critical to examine the history of Pétainism in the metropole to gauge the power it did or did not exert in France and abroad. The following two chapters look at Vichy's political evolution, particularly in terms of the gap between the rhetoric and the actions of the government, as well as the ideological frameworks of the Maurrassian ideology that permeated the pre-war France, influencing not only the architects of the National Revolution, but also the navy, and aspiring officers such as Jean Decoux. Doing so will demonstrate that Vichy was incapable of projecting itself overseas (or as Jennings puts it "cloning") because it had neither the ideological homogeneity nor the political will to do so. With this established, this project will examine how Decoux's regime formulated policies that re-organized Indochina to face the challenges of its geo-strategic position based on the Admiral's worldview and personal character.

Chapter II: Neither National nor Revolution

The idea that the Vichy government cloned itself overseas presupposes that it consisted of a homogenous body of interests with a coherent political agenda that could be implemented throughout the empire. It suggests that, in the midst of a global conflict and while occupied by a foreign power, the metropolitan administration successfully exported a set of policies that were unabashedly French solutions to French problems. Moreover, the notion assumes that the imperial governor generals had the capacity to adapt the programs to their regions' socioeconomic specificities without losing the spirit of Vichy's original intents. This reproduction would have been all the more impressive in Indochina, a land of variegated cultures located 12,000 kilometers from Vichy, officially absorbed into the Japanese Sphere of Co-Prosperity and cut off from all maritime traffic with Europe by 1941.¹ Indochina represents a unique case in Vichy imperial policy because it is the only colony to have remained loyal to Pétain until the liberation of Paris, as North Africa and Madagascar fell to the Allies in 1942.² This chapter looks at the historical and political contexts that surrounded Pétainism's effort to remold France after its defeat. It examines the reasons behind the failure of the National Revolution as a doctrine, highlighting the unwillingness of many top officials within Vichy to implement its programs and the obstacles posed by the occupying forces. By exposing

1. The ship to leave the Asian region was the tanker *Nivose*, which left Saigon in June 1942 for Dakar. See Paul-Marie Romé, *Les Oubliés du bout du monde* (Paris: Editions Maritimes et d'Outre-Mer, 1983), 95.

2. One would be hard-pressed to consider Guadeloupe a major colony, and even it "fell" in early 1943.

the ultimate emptiness of the National Revolution in the metropole, this chapter shows that Vichy had neither the ability nor the willingness to export a homogenous doctrine to Indochina.

The Third Republic was never able—or truly wanted—to replicate its ideology in the colonies in spite of its self-proclaimed *mission civilisatrice*. For almost fifty years, a debate raged between proponents of assimilation (those who believed in the acculturation of local peoples to the values and rights of the French republic) and associationism (those who favored indirect rule, with limitations of political inclusion of colonial subjects). Neither policy was ever consistently applied in any part of the empire, though in the years preceding the Second World War, associationists were on the ascent. While it held a universalist republican discourse, French imperial practice during the Third Republic limited the political participation of its indigenous peoples, relied on local chiefs to maintain order, allowed religious bodies (both missionaries and monks) to educate the youth, and enforced different legal codes for colonials and subjects.³

Even under the Leftist Popular Front (1936-1937) very little was achieved. Since the Socialists had been continually critical of colonial policy, many expected the administration to enact deep reforms within the empire, but these hopes were soon dashed. In 1927 Léon Blum, who would later be Prime Minister under the Popular Front, had called for colonial legislation that would begin processes of decolonization after a period of “provisional tutelage,” a position somewhat aligned with

3. Martin Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 6; Alice Conklin, "Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914," *The American Historical Review* 103, No.2 (1998).

British policy.⁴ Yet unlike in the Philippines, Burma, or India, the French never held conversations with local leaders about the future of the colonies and no long-term plans were ever designed.⁵ Minister of Colonies Marius Moutet under the Popular Front declared from the outset that the primary goal of colonialism was to improve the social and economic conditions of local populations. This “altruistic colonialism” nonetheless remained subject to economic laws, and with concerns not to increase unemployment in the metropole or create a potentially revolutionary proletariat in the colonies, no policy of extensive industrialization was ever seriously considered.⁶ Particularly in Indochina, the colonial economic model resembled that in Java: the export of raw materials or semi-finished goods. Furthermore, Indochina’s imports from France were higher than its exports to the metropole because the colony was able to sell more to Asia than it bought. This created a positive commercial balance for Paris, masking a deep malaise in the French economy.⁷ It is difficult to export economic, social, and political development with such pressing needs to sustain under-industrialization.

While Hanoi undeniably drew from Pétainist rhetoric of national rebirth and glorification of the Marshal, to understand how the colonial

4. Daniel Hémery, "Aux origines des guerres d'indépendances vietnamiennes," *Le mouvement social* 101, No. October/December (1977): 7.

5. Clarke Garrett, "In Search of Grandeur: France and Vietnam 1940-1946," *The Review of Politics* 29, No.3 (1967): 306.

6. Panivong Norindr, "The Popular Front's Colonial Policies in Indochina: Reassessing the Popular Front's 'Colonisation Altruiste'" in Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, *French Colonial Empire and the Popular Front: Hope and Disillusion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 232-236.

7. Brocheux and Hémery, 133; 174.

administration in Indochina made policy and to determine Decoux's capacity to implement his own brand of authoritarianism to win hearts and minds, it is essential to comprehend the situation in the metropole and measure Vichy's power to replicate its ideology abroad. It is not enough to assert that Vichy cloned itself; one should become familiar with the men who composed the government—in Hans Morgenthau's words, the "individuals who, when they appear as representatives of their nation. . .wield the power and pursue the policies of their nation."⁸ One must understand Vichy's internal mechanics and its driving forces before we can assess its relationship with Hanoi. Only then can one speak in empirical terms of Vichy's power and measure its ability to disseminate its programs abroad and subsequently gain insights into Decoux's administration.

The most striking paradox of the National Revolution—the new order that Pétainism sought to create in France following the debacle—was that it was neither "national" nor a "revolution." From its inception, the rebirth that Pétainism promised could not extend to the entirety of the country. When Parliament voted on 10 July 1940 to give plenipotentiary powers to Pétain, three-fifths of France was under the yoke of occupation and Article 3 of the armistice made it clear that "the German Reich exercise[d] all rights of an occupying power" in the North. While the government in Vichy was theoretically sovereign over the entirety of France, for almost two and a half years German authorities systematically refused to allow Vichy to implement its programs or

8. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1985), 118.

disseminate its propaganda in the Occupied Zone. The *Journal Officiel*, where all French laws and decrees issued in Vichy were printed weekly, needed the approval of the German military before it could be published in Paris and the General Delegation of the Government in the Occupied Territories was established to minimize the isolation of local French authorities faced with the occupying power.⁹ This reality never weakened Pétain's conviction that he embodied the nation. In a phrase that Baudouin described as in the pure style of Louis XIV, Pétain told his Minister "I know I can have full confidence in you, because you identify my person with the nation."¹⁰ Yet Vichy's capacity to govern was further diminished when on 11 November 1942 the *Wehrmacht* crossed the demarcation line, completing the country's subjugation. German control stretched now to the Mediterranean and the Reich installed a *Gauleiter* who had final say on all Vichy legislation, reducing Vichy to an organ of internal repression and organization of migrant French labor to German factories.

The new order was anything but revolutionary and its ultraconservative, reactionary agenda drew the scorn of the quasi-fascist pro-collaboration circles in Paris (who considered themselves revolutionaries), within which Marcel Déat and Jacques Doriot were integral. The Nazi organs shared this contempt. On 22 December 1940, the *Kölnische Zeitung* accused Vichy, the "decree machine," of calling for

9. Jean-Paul Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy* (Paris: Plon, 1996), 116.

10. Paul Baudouin, *Neuf mois au gouvernement, avril-décembre, 1940* (Paris: Éditions de la Table ronde, 1948), 246.

revolution without taking necessary the steps to make one, describing it a place where

one doesn't dare call fundamentally conservative policies conservative but where one is continually forced to seek new, often superfluous qualifiers that nonetheless fail to hide that the content consists, from an ideological point of view, of a return to a past anterior to the Revolution...[as the regime is] spiritually entrenched in the principles of a disappeared epoch.¹¹

Going beyond empty government propaganda, we must answer a few questions to assess the relationship between Vichy and Hanoi. Did Pétain's government implement a coherent program in the metropole that could be used as a model in the colonies? How did internal and external forces mold Vichy's politics? Lastly, how much power did the regime have to project itself and play a direct role in the direction of policies in its colonies? If the answers to these questions suggest that Vichy did not have the capacity to export a coherent program to the colonies, then we must conclude that Decoux acted with certain levels of ideological and administrative autonomy in the region during the war.¹²

From Debacle to Rebirth

The spectacular defeat of the Allied forces during the Battle of France left a country shellshocked. On 15 May 1940, only five days after the launch of operation *Fall Gelb* (the *Wehrmacht's* code name for the invasion of the Low Countries and the subsequent penetration of the Ardennes), Prime Minister Paul Reynaud telegraphed his British

11. Reproduced in Jean-Paul Cointet, *La Légion française des combattants* (Paris: A. Michel, 1995), 124-125.

12. Ronald Chalmers Hood, *Royal Republicans: The French Naval Dynasties Between the World Wars* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 128.

counterpart informing him that the counterattack against the Germans in Sedan had failed and the battle was lost. Including Belgian and Luxembourger citizens, conservative estimates count eight million *évacués* (the term used at the time) flooding the roads to escape the invading forces, and ten to twelve million Frenchmen who came in contact with them during their flight and were thus emotionally and psychologically impacted by the scenes.¹³ This direct experience with defeat contrasted with the static and distant—and therefore only imagined in the minds of most citizens—battle lines of the Great War. Though several journalists and politicians had warned in the years preceding the war of the certain defeat to which France's lack of preparation would lead, when catastrophe struck many sought scapegoats to justify the annihilation of what they had believed to be the most powerful army in the world: a fifth column of communists, a pro-German defeatist camp, or the British who fled all too quickly out of inherent selfishness. The Third Republic remained the most obvious target of blame, even though not one parliamentary deputy from 1936 to 1940 had voted against annual appropriations bills for the military.

As government members faced the decision whether to stay in the metropole or continue the struggle from North Africa, Pétain announced he would not “abandon French soil and [and would] accept the suffering that shall be imposed on the *patrie* and its sons. The French rebirth will be the fruit of this suffering.”¹⁴ Pétain saw an opportunity for the elite to

13. Jean-Pierre Azéma and Olivier Wieviorka, *Vichy, 1940-1944* (Paris: Perrin, 1997), 25.

14. Quoted in Marc Ferro, *Pétain* (Paris: Fayard, 1987), 76.

push for a political, intellectual, and moral renovation following the country's defeat and occupation by foreign armies, as it had been for Prussia after its loss to Napoleon at Iéna in 1806.¹⁵ Foreign Minister Paul Baudouin declared in May that the "horrible misfortunes that appear to be falling upon [France] may perhaps finally be salutary," echoing Pétain's declaration that all must "be started over in this country."¹⁶ Only a program of rebirth could prevent France from falling into anarchy. When parliament voted to accord Pétain with the authority to promulgate a new constitution for the *Etat français*, it permitted the concretization of this program. As with Thiers in 1871, Clemenceau in 1917, Poincaré in 1926, and Doumergue in 1934, the French called on an old man to save France.

Though completely overrun militarily, the French posed two conditions as the *sine qua non* for armistice: the preservation of its navy and the neutrality of its empire, non-aligned with either Allied or Axis powers in the war effort. The navy was deemed necessary to protect the colonies, which in turn ensured France would remain a great, albeit weakened, power after the war. Neutrality was key to prevent the British from invading and later appropriating France's imperial possessions while equally it served as leverage against what Weygand called the "abuses which the Reich impose[d] upon all European people."¹⁷ Neutrality would also shield indigenous peoples from seeing French officers take orders from non-French authorities, undermining French prestige further

15. Ibid., 109.

16. Baudouin, 76.

17. Robert O. Paxton, *Parades and Politics at Vichy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 215.

and risking local uprisings upon a hoped-for liberation.¹⁸ Germany was happy to oblige as it too wanted to avoid French colonies and the fleet from falling into British hands. This position of neutrality extended to the colonies, including Decoux's Indochina.

Unlike their counterparts in the metropole, the military leaders present in the colonies had not experienced the rout of the French army first hand, and debates raged all over the empire whether to pledge loyalty to Pétain or continue to fight. For many, the Marshal's influence and prestige weighed heavily on the decision to accept the cessation of combat, certainly more than that of the largely unknown de Gaulle, who had been promoted from colonel only a few months before. As Admiral Platon's biographer Jean-Marc van Hille highlights, it is surprising how often the term "veneration" was employed in the political discourse of the time when referring to the victor of Verdun.¹⁹ Most of the imperial proconsuls, including Decoux, were career officers trained to serve and obey and believed the military to be above politics. To them any dissidence was a crime against the *patrie*, and every significant colony rallied to the government, except French Equatorial Africa, which rallied to the Free French on 26 August 1940 (though Gabon remained an island loyal to Vichy). Defections were individual, not as groups, and French promises not to continue the war from abroad were critical for the

18. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 302.

19. Jean-Marc van Hille, *Le vice-amiral Charles Platon, 1886-1944* (Estadens: PyrèGraph, 2003), 101.

maintenance of the armistice, to which Germany tied the fates of two million prisoners of war, hence keeping most officers in line.²⁰

The National Revolution

In a speech delivered on 8 October 1940, after the government had already enacted substantial pieces of legislation (including the First Jewish Statute), Pétain called for a Revolution to correct seventy years of republican mistakes that had led to defeat. Never defining exactly what he meant by the value-laden term revolution, he outlined the essential traits of the new regime: “national in foreign policy, hierarchical in interior policy, coordinated and controlled in its economy and above all social in its spirit and its institutions.”²¹ The National Revolution, whose principal architects had been members or sympathizers of *Action Française*, was a response to the disorder, secularism, and class struggle in the name of equality and urbanization that emerged from the the 1789 Revolution’s abolition of moral values and the rejection of social consensus.²² It sought to end the weakness of the government in the face of private interests and the excess concentration of capital.²³ The difficult times ahead required a paternal order “to give the country the strength to live. . .by ridding it of the selfishness that divided and weakened it.”²⁴

A confusing catchall term that meant everything and yet nothing, “National Revolution” had been part of the vocabulary of the

20. Paxton, *Parades and Politics*, 28; 134; 143.

21. Philippe Pétain, *La France Nouvelle* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1941), 71.

22. Christian Faure, *Le Projet culturel de Vichy: Folklore et révolution nationale, 1940-1944* (Lyon: CNRS Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1989), 15.

23. G. Ballard, *La Révolution nationale et la question économique d'aujourd'hui* (Hanoi: Editions du GGI, 1943), 22.

24. Baudouin, 225.

Bonapartist deputy Pierre Taitinger's *Jeunesses Patriotes* during the Interwar period and was also the title of French fascist Georges Valois' book in 1924. It had the advantage of presenting facets of almost every Right-wing ideologue of the previous seventy-five years and therefore represented diverse, though often opposing, ideals (a contradiction that would pose problems for the regime as none of these visions came to fruition). Pétain uttered the words "National Revolution" only four more times afterward. His ultraconservative background precluded him from any reference to 1789 and he preferred the terms *redressement* (recovery) or *renovation* (renewal). This reluctance underscores certain divisions within Vichy: the use of dynamic slogans to rally conservatives quickly weakened the latter's resolve while simultaneously alienating the regime's more radical elements, disgusted with the regimes' inaction.²⁵ Jacques Benoist-Méchin, Secretary of State to the Council in charge of Franco-German Relations (who also participated in the negotiations of the 1941 Franco-Japanese Agreements) and one of Vichy's most ardent proponents of collaboration, did not believe that the "new French revolution" could succeed under existing conditions, either in the North, subjugated by the victor, or in the Free Zone, where there lived a weak and opportunistic population. Like other *ultras* (social nationalist revolutionaries as opposed to ultraconservatives) who embraced the values of Fascist Italy and admired the energy of Nazism, he believed that all revolutions, in order to succeed, required both violent struggle—

25. In the expression "National Revolution," Henri du Moulin de Labarthète, Director of Pétain's Civil Cabinet, saw the combined political heritage of Renan, de Maistre, Le Play, Taine, Maurras, Salazar, and Barrès. Cointet adds Péguy, Proudhon, and Lyautey. Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy*, 135.

with its heroes and its martyrs—and a will to spiritually annex national space and time to construct common ideals. Nothing but insipidity would result from policy made in the comfort of government offices under the watchful eye of the occupier.²⁶

Given the cleavages within Vichy, historians have debated whether one can speak of its “essence.” John Sweets refuses to accept that there was such a thing as a “Vichy of Pétain” or a “Vichy of Laval”: Vichy should always be taken as a whole. He believes that since Pétain was the only figure present in the regime from beginning to end we should accept Pétainism’s goals and policies (in terms of the programs of the National Revolution) as the essence of Vichy.²⁷ This view isn’t entirely satisfactory as it fails to measure the regime’s willingness to adopt a common program incorporating different factions and ideological elements as well as Vichy’s capacity to implement such a program, taking them from theory (and rhetoric) to action, were it even to exist. Vichy only had sufficient power and leverage to carry out the programs outlined by Pétain during its first year, while the French population was still under the shock of defeat, the material hardships were only beginning, and the *Wehrmacht* looked unstoppable. With this in mind, we can nevertheless identify the principal thrusts of the National Revolution (strongest in the regime’s first year but existing at least rhetorically throughout its life): 1) an emphasis on traditionalism, including a reforging of corporatist

26. Jacques Benoist-Méchin, *De la défaite au désastre, 1. Les occasions manquées : juillet 1940-avril 1942*, 2 vols. (Paris: A. Michel, 1984), 30-31.

27. John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 31; 83. See also Jean-Pierre Azéma, “Vichy et la mémoire savante” in Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida, *Vichy et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 26.

economic and social relations; 2) the prevalence of the local community; 3) the hierarchization of society through administrative changes; 4) the redirection of youth and education policies; and 5) politics of national identity and exclusion.

Traditionalism. Pétain's ultraconservative agenda rested on the belief that processes of industrialization and urbanization were socially unstable and had destroyed the nation's moral fibre. For the Marshal, himself of peasant origins, modernity imperiled the family and atomized humans by eroding the communal bonds that once united them. It had been a still largely rural France that defeated Germany during the previous war and urbanization threatened to weaken France by stripping it of its essence. In 1918, it was argued, French soldiers were stronger, healthier, and more adaptable to changing conditions than their German counterparts, who had been corrupted by industrialization.²⁸ Inspired by the turn of the century monarchist La Tour du Pin, Vichy traditionalists saw the peasantry as the incarnation of the "natural order," one of morality, family, and communalism, in opposition to an urban society that favored individualism, divorce, and chaos. From this point, Vichy espoused a corporatist agenda, where production was directed by the state but with the input of labor and owners, thereby overcoming class tensions and regrouping Frenchmen around natural economic groupings. Furthermore, in order to resurrect traditional rural values, the government undertook a "return to the soil campaign" that provided subsidies to families willing to leave the city to pursue agricultural

28. Ferro, 275.

activities and pushed the youth to engage in farm work, either through volunteer corps or labor requisition. It asked teachers to promote the nobility of careers in farming, created elite schools of agriculture, and elevated Jeanne d'Arc as a symbol of the peasant hard at work.²⁹ To remind the country that the rural world fed the city, the authorities printed the portrait of the Duke de Sully, Henri IV's Superintendent of Finance, on the new one hundred franc bill along with his motto "Plowing and sowing are the two udders of France."³⁰

The Prevalence of the Local Community (Regionalism). Closely related to traditionalism, the push for regionalism (referring to the nurturing of local cultures based on traditional pre-Revolutionary provincial identities rather than the prevalence of defined administrative areas) was a means to reverse the loss of identity—often associated with the land—that resulted from the centralization of power in Paris since 1789. On 11 November 1789, the National Constituent Assembly agreed to divide France into administrative *départements* based on geographical and hydrographical—not cultural or traditional—criteria. For Vichy ultraconservatives, the "province," with its history and folklore, represented an extension of the natural community. Beyond the ideological discourse of traditionalism that touched the everyday life of the French, regionalist policies intended to redirect the collective imagination. According to cultural historian Christian Faure, the "province"—the term was used more often than "region" due to its

29. Faure, 110; 112; 120; 123.

30. Pierre Piazza, *Histoire de la carte nationale d'identité* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), 228.

ideological dimension—created a process of social and individual identity that fused region with community and was a necessary step toward the conceptualization of the hierarchy of communities which was the basis of the National Revolution. Furthermore, by replacing the defeated *patrie* with a return to communities (or smaller *patries*), Vichy hoped that a psychological shift would draw away from the frustrations of occupation.³¹ More than an attack on the revolutionary reorganization of the administration, this was an attempt to reverse the atomization of the citizen in favor of an elevation of the community, a re-ordering of values placing the group in front of the individual. These ideas were not new; they were a central piece of Maurras's *L'Enquête sur la Monarchie*, first published in 1909. There was, however, also a pragmatic reason to push for regionalism as it provided the government with greater control over distribution processes by overcoming departmental chauvinism and hoarding, making food supply and the transportation of goods easier through a re-tooled administrative machine.³²

Social hierarchization. On 11 October 1940, the Marshal declared that the

new regime will be a social hierarchy. It will no longer rest upon the false idea of the natural equality of men but on the necessary idea of the natural equality of opportunity, given to all Frenchmen to prove their aptitude to serve. Work and talent alone will be the foundation of the French hierarchy. . . From this will arise the true elite whom the past

31. Faure, 102-103.

32. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 198.

regime has tried for years to destroy and who will constitute the necessary corps for the development and well-being of all.³³

Three months earlier, Pétain announced that “governors [would] be placed at the head of large French provinces. Thus, the administration [would] be both concentrated and decentralized.”³⁴ The changing role of prefects (Heads of *départements*) was to play a central part in the hierarchization of society and the further destruction of revolutionary values. The prefectural corps was originally created on 28 Pluviôse Year VIII (17 February 1800) to provide the government with nonpartisan, impartial representatives to implement Paris’s decisions at local levels and facilitate consensus between the capital and the regions, which in turn oversaw several *départements*. In order to have some sort of stability during the numerous governmental changes of the Third Republic, the prefectural corps was professionalized, its members chosen for their administrative, not their political skills. This led to a culture of prudence, conservatism, and skepticism, where administrative constraints influenced decisions (or lack thereof) more than official texts. Questioning the techno-administrative cultural pusillanimity, Vichy passed several laws to reinforce the power of the prefects, restore the authority of the state, and combat the pluralistic influences of the parliamentary regime.³⁵ Civil servants were forbidden from striking;

33. Pétain, 78.

34. Ibid., 29. Though Pétain used the word provinces, the abolition of *départements* never came about. In November 1940, Raphaël Alibert, Minister of Justice, proposed his project to create 26 regions, which the government never adopted. Pétain at this time envisioned an administrative reorganization based on economic activity, which would have precluded a return to provinces as they existed under the *ancien régime*.

35. Sonia Mazey and Vincent Wright, “Les Préfets,” in Azéma and Bédarida, 268; 271-275.

promotions were based on merit, not seniority; and as a final sweetener, remuneration was largely increased.³⁶ While Vichy's prefectural corps was part of the provincial reorganization necessary to ensure the proper distribution of food and goods, it also served to strengthen the role of the elite as a link between the government and the people, as both tools of propaganda and coercion.

Youth and Education. The proponents of the National Revolution believed that France had lost the war long before 1940 through years of republican indolence and hedonism. Pétain blamed a society that corrupted youth, where the “unhealthy atmosphere in which many of [the youth's elders] grew up [had] slackened their [the youth's] energy, softened their courage and led them along paths of pleasure toward the worst catastrophe of [France's] history.” One of the National Revolution's principal objectives was to re-inculcate the values of work, family, discipline, and strength that the Republic had eroded over the previous seventy years. Pétain predicted that France's young men and women would soon “learn to prefer the joys of difficulties overcome to the easy pleasures.”³⁷ In spite of the numerous programs aimed at youth, no homogenous philosophical current ever emerged out of Vichy, often leading to contradictory actions. Encapsulating the schism between revolutionaries (such as the Paris *ultras* and the staunchest advocates of collaboration) and ultraconservatives (those traditionalists more closely aligned with Maurrassism) within the regime, camps formed around the

36. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 195.

37. Pétain, 102.

question of how to organize youth: based on the new European order (secular and fascist) as embodied in Germany or maintained within a French model, non-unified but Catholic.³⁸

Vichy promoted organizations to inspire youth with courage, discipline, and patriotism. As with education reform, Vichy was never able to resolve the internal disputes between those who sought to provide the Catholic Church (which had been marginalized during the Third Republic) with a central role and those desiring to construct a single youth movement based on fascist models. Originally conceived as a means to fight unemployment, the *Chantiers de Jeunesse*, made it obligatory for all twenty year old men to serve eight months engaging in physical exercise, camping, and hard work—especially in forestry and agriculture—in the open air to build community spirit and fight what was believed to be urban corruption. The *Chantiers* were created to circumvent the limitations of the armistice and inculcate military values in a country limited to a hundred-thousand man standing army. The voluntary *Compagnons de France*, largely designed to save French youth from unemployment through work on farms or artisan workshops, generated more enthusiasm than its counterpart, but the movement's autonomous structures and push for regionalist awakening made it more difficult for the government to control.³⁹ Only the *Jeune Légion*, created in 1943 to develop politically 15-25 year old boys, aimed to identify and cultivate future leaders and members of the elite as part of Pétainist social

38. Faure, 215.

39. Jackson, 341.

hierarchization. Disappointingly, only twenty percent of France's youth participated in these organizations.⁴⁰ None of these organizations existed in Indochina under Decoux.

Exclusion. To most people Vichy is synonymous with collaboration with Nazi Germany—a simplification given the friction that often marred Franco-German relations—particularly in its hunt for ethnic and political undesirables. Vichy's participation, albeit indirect, in the Holocaust perhaps essentializes this perception. Even before rounding up and handing over Jews to the Reich, Vichy had been active in passing legislation to marginalize Jews, measures that found their impetus not in German pressure, but in the nationalist and xenophobic ideologies predating the war. During its first year, Vichy issued 26 laws and 24 decrees directed against Jews, and unlike German ordinances in France that defined Jews by religious practice (until at least April 1941), Vichy statutes referred to race.⁴¹ Though Pétain did protect veteran Jews—spilled blood washes away all suspicions—and opposed the wearing of the yellow star, he was relentless in his hostility to foreign-born Jews (estimated to represent two-thirds of France's Jewish population) deemed pariahs to the nation.⁴² Influenced by Maurice Barrès, writer and

40. Cointet, *La Légion*, 358.

41. Jackson, 355; Ian Ousby, *Occupation: The Ordeal of France, 1940-1944* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 100. According to the 2 June 1941 law, one was considered a Jew if one belonged to the Jewish religion prior to 25 June 1940 and had two Jewish grandparents; if one had three Jewish grandparents; if one had only two Jewish grandparents and the person in question's spouse was Jewish. Interestingly, or confusedly, both Germans and French considered grandparents of Jewish race if their religion was Judaism. An explanation for this difference is found in French civil records, which do not indicate religion. The government faced the difficulty of establishing the relationship between religion and race. It was suggested therefore that the authorities look for ancestors buried in Jewish cemeteries as proof of belonging to the "Jewish community." See AFFPOL 889/3, Raphaël Alibery note.

42. Ferro, 243.

forefather of Right-wing French nationalism, the Marshal believed that national identity was found in the land. Like many others, he saw the Jew, eternal nomad, as the antithesis of the rural values that would lead to France's rebirth.⁴³ Vichy also outlawed secret societies—which meant Freemasons—and within the first week of its existence decided it could sack public servants in all impunity. As one would expect, Communists were also hunted down and interned, with almost five thousand arrested even before Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union.⁴⁴

Vichy presented few excuses in its hunt for secret societies as Pétain seems to have thought Freemasons morally more culpable in the corruption of France than the Jews, stating that “a Jew cannot help his origins, but a Freemason has chosen to become one.”⁴⁵ On 13 August 1940, all secret societies were abolished, its members were banned from public office, and teachers had to swear they did not belong to such organizations. By 1941 endless lists of suspected Freemasons were published; a file of approximately 170,000 names was constituted.⁴⁶ Curiously, the hunt for Freemasons was most fierce under the government of Admiral Darlan, whose father had been a member of the Grand Orient Masonic Lodge. Yet Laval's return marked the *de facto* end of the measures that affected secret societies. By taking control of the Ministry of Justice, Laval was able to marginalize Vichy traditionalists

43. Faure, 120.

44. Jackson, 151.

45. Quoted in Ousby, 98.

46. Denis Peschanski, "Exclusion, persécution, répression" in Azéma and Bédarida, 219.

and extend his clientelist mode of governing, relying on elites, many of whom had belonged to secret societies and once set aside by Vichy.

Factionalism and the Myth of the National Revolution

The foundering of the National Revolution owed much to a factionalism driven by political ambition, a desperation to keep power, and France's economic hardships under the occupation. On 12 August 1941 Pétain spoke of the "ill winds" that compromised national rebirth, a clear sign that he was already aware that the doctrine he outlined in his speeches was faltering. The struggle between those who promoted a traditionalist agenda and those who believed in the German-led New European Order sabotaged both sides' efforts at effecting social and economic change, particularly as the Reich's demands took a heavier toll on France's resources. The interruption of trade and the burden of the occupation costs forced the country into penury, unable to meet the target of seventy percent of 1938 production upon which many policies were based. The government imposed forced savings that were immediately channeled toward the state; at one point forty percent of public spending was covered by these loans. It was impossible to lead a revolution when the state could not even feed its people.

In the wake of the armistice, when the shock of defeat created an environment in which most Frenchmen were open (or at least non-resistant) to Pétainism, three camps formed around the direction of France's internal and external affairs. Weygand and Baudouin believed in adhering to the terms of the armistice and nothing more; Pétain, more nuanced, wanted to follow the Prussian example following its defeat at

Iéna in 1806 (which had led to an intellectual and political rebirth while maintaining ties with Napoleon) and lead France's resurgence while keeping up appearances of alliance; and Laval pushed a Franco-German rapprochement out of opportunism rather than ideological reasons.⁴⁷ Out of these stances emerged the confrontation between Vichy traditionalists (close to *Action Française*) and revolutionaries (inspired by Fascism). While traditionalists like Baudouin believed that France's conception of humanity was antithetical to that of the Nazis,⁴⁸ fascist sympathizers like Benoist-Méchin claimed that in order for France to regain its rank as a world power, it needed to follow an audacious political course and "extend a hand to the revolutionary in Hitler. . .[as France's] politics shouldn't be a simple adaptation to events, but a total resurrection of the flesh and the soul of [its] people."⁴⁹

Further complicating Vichy policy-making, by 1943 no one in France could make a decision without German consent. That year, Hitler's representative Cecil von Renthe-Fink—the *Gauleiter* Pétain called his gaoler—became a fundamental part of Vichy. Renthe-Fink's presence rendered Pétain incapable of physically leaving Vichy without German approval, and the octogenarian lost all independent control over his government. Forbidding another 13 December (when Laval was dismissed from government), Germany blocked Pétain's attempt to sack Laval and replace him with former Minister of Colonies Charles Platon,

47. Cointet, *La Légion*, 45.

48. Baudouin, 259.

49. Benoist-Méchin, *De la défaite au désastre*, 1, 95.

a man about whom the Reich knew very little.⁵⁰ In March 1944, Renthe-Fink demanded that Marcel Déat enter the government. Déat was one of the key figures of the Paris *ultras* who incessantly criticized Vichy's reluctance to align itself with Germany and discredited the National Revolution as an ultraconservative sham. By this time Vichy had long since lost its drive to implement the National Revolution, which existed in no substantial form outside propaganda. The regime had become no more than a vassal of the Reich, capable of little more than coercive policing.

Given these evolutions, one cannot talk of a homogenous Vichy ideology—though broad intellectual sources, mostly stemming from anti-Dreyfussard movements, influenced all members of government—and it was exceptional that one member belonged to a unique school of thought.⁵¹ Though the antagonism between Pétain and Laval is the best-documented case of personal antipathy, factionalism and shifting centers of power created many Vichys (ultraconservative, revolutionary, collaborationist/pragmatic) and thus destroyed any possibility of constructing the National Revolution as a uniform force. Eventually, both traditionalists and revolutionaries were sidelined by Laval, whose desire for an authoritarian government was entirely pragmatic. The counterrevolutionary discourse so central in the first two years

50. Ferro, 110; 112; 120; 123. Given the Reich's reach in French politics, one must ask how it is possible that Platon was so determinant in exporting the National Revolution to the colonies, as Jennings suggests, if his impact on Vichy was such (that is so small) that the German authorities needed to inquire on his personality, of which it knew "so little." Platon's extremism is well-documented, but evidence suggests that his real influence was minimal.

51. For example, Xavier Vallat was both a member *Action Française* and a social Catholic, see Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy*, 138.

disappeared as Vichy evolved into a mere police state. Moreover, real power wasn't centered in Vichy but in Paris, where most of the administration remained, and in Wiesbaden, where the manner in which to carry out the terms of the armistice was negotiated daily.⁵² The symbol of Pétain was the only constant, yet as the conditions of daily life harshened and the *Wehrmacht* became bogged down on the Eastern front, it too lost the potency of its initial years. The Marshal's speeches were the only incarnation of the National Revolution: words existing largely outside of government action. As World War II historian Yves Durand encapsulated: "Vichy, one might say, or much talk and little action."⁵³

The failure of the National Revolution is most striking when examining the masquerade behind Pétainism's two most culturally significant enterprises: traditionalism and regionalism. The gap between rhetoric and reality concerning peasant and artisan policies illustrated the government's real lack of support for the programs—particularly after 1942—and its pragmatic need to push them officially. By emphasizing the eternality of the peasantry and the land, Vichy sought to obfuscate the authoritarian and centralizing measures it adopted concerning agriculture and the *artisanat*. In empirical terms, the "return to the soil" campaign was an early failure—only 1,561 families drew subsidies, of which 409 never even attempted a return—and with Laval's return and France's complete occupation, the push toward the countryside was abandoned

52. Henry Rousso, "Vichy, le grand fossé," *Revue d'histoire* Jan.-Mar., No.5 (1985): 60. In the case of Wiesbaden, the word negotiation may be a euphemism as the commission there was not mixed but a purely German commission working with a French delegation that served as the advocate of French interests. France was certainly not on equal footing and its requests were systematically rejected.

53. Quoted in Sweets, 80.

altogether and order, not to say survival, became the new priority.⁵⁴ The *Corporation Paysanne*'s ambitious goals of promoting and managing "the common interests of the peasant families in moral, social, and economic questions" and regulating "all the conditions of life of the peasant" ceded to state management of agriculture and to an economy geared toward efficiency of production. Juxtaposed with the increased dominance of industrial cartels, the Artisans' Statute of 1943 that integrated the many autonomous professional groups into the state bureaucracy placed the *artisanat* in a weaker position than it had been under the Third Republic when it had an important parliamentary lobby.⁵⁵

Similarly, enthusiasm for regionalism died down after the government's first year, though the propaganda promoting the issue persisted. Pétain carried on with his tours, speaking in front of ebullient crowds about provincial renovation, while in the background ministries centralized power through the establishment of local prefects. Christian Faure highlights how these practices, while contradictory, were also complementary as the first policy obfuscated the second. This strategy was symbolic of Vichy's dualism: an ideological power, incarnated in the image of the Marshal, and a technocratic and centralizing force pushed by Darlan and Laval. Given the media focus on provincial rebirth, local notables were happy to play the game as their prestige increased accordingly. The regional sleight of hand turned the rural population's attention away from the realities of economic planning and production

54. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 208; Faure, 126; 273.

55. Jackson, 165.

appropriation.⁵⁶ The pressing issues of order and food supply rendered any real diffusion of power toward the provinces impossible as the central government, beginning under Darlan, needed to overcome hoarding at the *département* level. Vichy placed such an importance on these matters that each regional prefect had one assistant for police and one for food distribution issues.⁵⁷

Yet through each change in cabinet, the government perpetuated the myth of the National Revolution—an empty shell given the lack of concrete achievements—to reassure the people and divert attention from the quotidian difficulties. With no homogenous driving force, Vichy advanced hesitantly and arbitrarily, its rhetoric disconnected from its actions. With no political cohesion, Vichy tried to exercise many political courses at the same time, a strategy that was “unjustifiable” to many.⁵⁸ Partly explaining Germany’s lack of willingness to engage in collaboration, Hitler recognized this tendency in 1942 when he claimed that “wanting to sit on all seats, [the French] are sat on none. This is explained by the fact that the soul of this country is torn. Just within the government of Vichy, several tendencies are represented: antisemitic nationalism, clerical philosemitism, royalism, the revolutionary spirit, etc. What is missing is an energetic man.”⁵⁹ Pétain, a half-deaf octogenarian, could never be this energetic man and neither Laval nor Darlan was much interested in the National Revolution. On 1 January 1942, Pétain

56. Faure, 104.

57. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 199.

58. Benoist-Méchin, *De la défaite au désastre*, 2, 259.

59. Quoted in Ferro, 388.

declared “the National Revolution hasn’t yet gone from theory to practice.”⁶⁰ With the entry of the United States into the war making an ultimate German victory more questionable—leading to tighter German controls over French affairs and increased socioeconomic hardships—there was neither hope nor momentum for the National Revolution to complete this transformation.

However many divisions and intrigues existed under the Darlan government, they multiplied exponentially under Laval. It was not Pétain’s decision to bring him back in April 1942 but Berlin’s. In 1940 the Marshal had already accused Laval of sabotaging the National Revolution. Pétain despised Laval, who had been a pacifist in his youth and had escaped military service, and saw him as a vestige of the culture of *affaires* of the Third Republic. Laval had the support of the Paris *ultras*, who also sought a rapprochement with the Reich, yet Laval was no revolutionary. Benoist-Méchin described him as “totally incapable of reforging the country’s soul and instilling within it a new vision of its destiny [and] he wanted to erase everything that invoked, from close or afar, the National Revolution” and “the most powerful agent of disaggregation [France] had even known.”⁶¹

Laval declared at his trial: “There was always talk of the National Revolution; I never knew what the National Revolution was, no one ever defined it and it’s an expression that I myself never used.”⁶² While Darlan’s staunch anticlericalism ended the influence of the Catholic

60. Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy*, 64, 78, 84, 109.

61. Benoist-Méchin, *De la défaite au désastre*, 2, 45; 186.

62. Pierre Laval, *Le Procès Laval; compte rendu sténographique*, (Paris: A. Michel, 1946), 86.

contingent, Laval's return concluded the purge of the traditionalist camp. He *de facto* ended the persecution of secret societies by eliminating the anti-Masonic police headed by Platon and secretly authorizing the reopening of lodges in the Free Zone. He reinstated prefects who had been sacked in 1940 and replaced ministers with men loyal to him. Laval's government emphasized collaboration, sidelining all policies—many of which involved Pétainist ideals—that did not serve Franco-German interests. Perhaps already disillusioned, the Marshal admitted on 17 June 1942 that the National Revolution had been a series of “setbacks, uncertainties, and disappointments.”⁶³

By signing the constitutional act of 18 April 1942 that accorded Laval all governmental powers, Pétain completed the process of his own marginalization. Now Head of Government, Laval insisted that Pétain step down as President of the Council and content himself with the honorific title of Head of State. The former deputy who had no time for the National Revolution and had now quasi-dictatorial powers: he simply presented Pétain with the list of ministers he wanted named, passed decrees with only his signature, gained control of the ministries of foreign affairs, interior, and information, and served as chief of police, ambassadors, prefects, and consuls. Perhaps more important, he had the Reich's trust and Otto Abetz, the German ambassador to France, declared that Laval was “the only guarantor of a policy of collaboration.”⁶⁴ By November 1942, Laval refused to provide the

63. Jackson, 213.

64. Benoist-Méchin, *De la défaite au désastre*, 2, 38.

Marshal with any details of his policy-making and even ceased to invite him to the council of ministers, turning it into a ceremonial reading of his own decrees.⁶⁵ Pétain confessed that year: “Laval is hated and I am tired of assuming responsibility for an authority I don’t have. He only does what he wants, I can’t get anything out of him.”⁶⁶ Pétain became no more than a figurehead, relegated to a public role in order to sustain the illusion of unity. His attempt to get rid of Laval in November 1943 failed as it encountered German resistance (Hitler had already written Pétain on 23 April forbidding Laval’s dismissal, pointing to the Head of Government’s efforts to build new relations between France and the Axis powers), proving that France had no power outside of the Reich’s will.⁶⁷

Conclusion

With the collapse of the French forces and the subsequent shock to the civilian population, no government since 1789 had enjoyed more power and so few juridical obstacles to its policies than Vichy in its initial months. Never over the course of the nineteenth century—with the possible exception of the Paris Commune—had a French administration attempted to change simultaneously the political and social order.⁶⁸ The National Revolution as envisaged by Pétain was supposed to rectify seventy years of errors by returning to values eroded by the Republic. In his vision, modernity had corrupted morality and weakened France by atomizing society and creating a hedonistic culture of leisure. The New

65. Cointet, *La Légion*, 275.

66. Ferro, 513; 580.

67. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France, L'abîme: 1939-1945* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1982), 580-588.

68. Olivier Wormser, *Les Origines doctrinales de la "Révolution Nationale;" Vichy: 10 juillet 1940-31 mars 1941* (Paris: Plon, 1971), 82.

Order intended to reconcile the individual with society by reintegrating him into his natural community: his family, his region, and his profession. By returning to the intemporal land, compatriots would reforge the bonds that once united them, eradicating “un-French” elements such as Jews and Freemasons and ending class conflict. The National Revolution tried to establish frameworks within which to create a new generation of Frenchmen, one that valued discipline, work, and respect for authority. Perhaps more important, Pétainism sought a return to social hierarchies, ending what it believed to be the false notions of egalitarianism born of 1789.

The “divine surprise” to which Charles Maurras referred in 1941 was not the defeat of France or the fall of the Republic, but Pétain’s ability to lead the country politically. Maurras stated “We expected so much of him, we could and must expect everything. To this natural expectation, he was able to add something. Now nothing is missing.”⁶⁹ *Action Française* never ceased to support Pétain and the monarchical power in which he wrapped his person, even as the traditionalist camp that embraced the Marshal’s program for national rebirth was marginalized and debilitated within less than a year after the Republic voted to accord Pétain quasi-plenipotentiary powers.

Ironically, Admiral Darlan was designated as successor to Pétain one day after the publication of Maurras’ article and from this point began the decline of the National Revolution as the traditionalists envisaged it. Darlan, whom Socialist Prime Minister Léon Blum of the 1936 Leftist

69. From *Le Petit Marseillais*, 9 February 1941, quoted in Eugen Weber, *L’Action française* (Paris: Stock, 1964), 491.

Popular Front had named Admiral Chief of Staff of the Navy, was neither a Maurrassian nor a believer in the National Revolution. He was driven by ambition rather than ideology, engaging France in a politics of collaboration when convinced Germany would win the war, and cultivating ties with the Allies once his certainty waned. While Darlan's entry into government began a process of technocratization, Laval's return in April 1942 completed the marginalization of the traditionalist camp as he surrounded himself with cronies in his determination to avoid another 13 December, when Laval was ousted from government. Under Laval, prefects were reinstated and Freemasons no longer persecuted, while peasant politics disappeared entirely. Even the *Légion Française des Combattants* lost its identity as it opened up to non-veterans and, absorbed by the government, turned into a tool of coercion and internal repression.

Even if factionalism had not destroyed the National Revolution, the exigencies of occupation and German opposition to French rebirth certainly would have. Hitler never intended to treat France as a partner and used the French hopes of extracting concessions through collaboration to his advantage. Split into two zones, Vichy never exercised its authority over the Occupied Zone. Moreover, German economic and financial demands forced the French government to centralize its authority to ensure distribution and security while emphasizing efficient industrial production. The *Wehrmacht's* total occupation of the metropole in 1942 completed France's subjugation, with any semblance of legitimacy disappearing as it became necessary for Vichy to gain German approval before it could adopt any measure. By 1943, Germany

controlled Pétain's speeches and movements. A *Gauleiter* ensured that no independent action could take place. Laval, whose return was imposed by Hitler, reduced Pétain to figurehead status, a powerless old man whose reluctance to collaborate no longer impeded the former republican's alignment with the Reich.

Understanding the mechanics behind Vichy's National Revolution—and the gap between rhetoric and action—is critical for assessing the policy-making processes of Decoux's administration in Indochina. Vichy was incapable of imposing a coherent policy on its metropolitan territory, over which it was supposedly legitimate. Therefore, its ability to project itself 12,000 kilometers away, in an exotic land under the watchful eyes of the Japanese, is highly questionable. Vichy could not have cloned itself overseas because there was no uniform model to replicate. Yet Decoux did invoke the National Revolution—at least in name—and many of his administration's policies were aligned with those espoused by the traditionalist camp in the metropole, albeit adapted to the Indochinese environment. How can we explain Hanoi's embrace of a Pétainist program that never materialized in the metropole? Given Darlan and Laval's lack of enthusiasm for the National Revolution—keeping in mind that they were heads of government from February 1941 onward, not counting Laval's first stint as Prime Minister in 1940—it is unlikely that Decoux's lack of Pétainist zeal would have warranted his dismissal provided he remain loyal and useful to Vichy as an administrative entity. Even if we suggest that Decoux's regime was more Vichyite than Vichy it follows that it necessarily acted independently of the metropole since the

French government abandoned the ultraconservative doctrine in favor of collaborationist policies that ran counter to French rebirth. Decoux was not faced with a push to collaborate with the Germans and thus enjoyed the autonomy to pursue his own ultraconservative policies irrespective of what was happening in France. The omnipresent Japanese threat forced him to avow loyalty to Vichy as a state (though given his ideology and his preternatural inclinations toward order, hierarchy, and discipline he most likely would have done so any case), but there is little evidence that the Japanese cared about the National Revolution's program itself. The point of entry into the politics of the colonial administration in Indochina should therefore not be how Vichy cloned itself in the region, but rather how Decoux adopted the discourse of the National Revolution to legitimize his own agenda, one based on his own ideology. The next chapter looks at the common worldviews of Vichy's traditionalist camp and Admiral Decoux. It examines their shared Maurrassian ideological sources by turning to the pre-war discourse of the extreme right in France and the influence of *Action française*, and tries to determine where Decoux sat in relation to it.

Chapter III: Decoux and the Legacy of Action française

Though the Vichy government lacked the will and the capacity to project Pétain's vision of national rebirth onto its overseas colonies, the National Revolution, in the form advocated by traditionalist elements during the regime's first year, existed in its own right as a reactionary doctrine prior to the war. The speed with which the government drafted and enacted laws for the metropole during its first three months reveals a pre-existing and well thought out program to destroy the values and institutions of the Third Republic on which policy-makers blamed France's moral decline. The National Revolution's ideological origins can be traced to the extreme Right's appropriation of the nationalist cause (see below) and its criticisms of parliamentary democracy, two tendencies that took form during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. A fervent Catholic, Pétain had sympathized with monarchist movements since his youth at Saint-Cyr.¹ Throughout his career Pétain based his sociopolitical beliefs on the idea that the army ensured the preservation of the national community and he found his moral inspiration in the editorials of Maurras and Daudet; the literary works of Chateaubriand and Barrès; the political ideas of Tardieu, editor until 1939 of the extreme Right wing newspaper *Gringoire* and whose book *La Révolution à refaire* criticized the French parliamentary system; and Salazar, the Portuguese Head of Government who carried out his own ultraconservative National Revolution during the 1930s.² Vichy's National Revolution drew from a

1. André Simone, *J'accuse! The Men who Betrayed France* (New York: The Dial Press, 1940), 24.

2. Ferro, 137; 215; 217; 255.

tradition of French political thought that for many years sought to eradicate the values of republicanism. This chapter investigates the ideological roots of the French ultraconservative—and anti-republican—thought that existed until the outbreak of the war and in particular how the ideas of Charles Maurras permeated the French Navy, or *Marine*. It looks at the culture of conformity within the navy, one that served as an intellectual conduit for officers to espouse the philosophy of *Action française*, Maurras' royalist movement. This chapter shows how close the majority of officers in the *Marine* were to *Action française* and how Decoux had to have been influenced by its ideas, as reflected in his actions and writings. By examining the building blocks of Decoux's worldview through the ultraconservatism that influenced him culturally and intellectually, this chapter seeks to uncover the roots of his policy-making in Indochina.

In 1932, writer Jean Paulhan wrote that the only veritable choice for a young man seeking to engage himself politically was between Charles Maurras and Karl Marx.³ According to the director of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Maurras' *Action Française* and Marxism were the only two doctrines complete enough to contest seriously with the discredited French system.⁴ In Vichy, Pétain's entourage consisted of men who shared many of the ultraconservative ideas of Charles Maurras, though many weren't necessarily royalists; Maurras' thoughts had guided the Right for so long that many within Vichy were Maurrassian without even

3. Stéphane Giocanti, *Charles Maurras: le Chaos et l'ordre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 11.

4. AF and to be distinguished from its quotidian publication L'Action française

realizing it.⁵ AF provided conservatives—even the non-extremists—with the logical and coherent arguments necessary to confront the theories of the Left, and inspired the more active groups to take its ideas to their natural conclusion; putting an end to the Republic.⁶ Maurras' recalibration of the ideas of counterrevolutionary thinkers such as Bonald and Maistre was forcibly at the center of any alternative to republicanism that Vichy sought to establish.⁷ The debacle of 1940 unexpectedly presented the opportunity for AF's doctrines to be implemented, not by Maurras, who remained more a thinker than a politician, but by the second and third generation of his disciples.⁸

Was Admiral Jean Decoux one of these disciples? While the answer would contribute significantly to understanding Decoux's worldview, and hence his policy-making as Governor General of Indochina, no incontrovertible evidence has been uncovered to prove an affiliation to AF. Nevertheless, through Decoux's writings, his social relations, and the professional milieu in which he existed, one can build a picture of his political influences and orientations and infer with confidence that he was one of the many arch-conservatives imbued with a Maurrassian spirit without officially belonging to AF. If the Vichy regime was unable to clone itself in Indochina, then Decoux's Pétainist zeal can only be explained through an ideological congruity with the doctrinal origins of

5. Weber, 487. Men holding direct or indirect power in Vichy who had either belonged to AF strictly speaking or were merely "friends" of the movement included: Baudouin, Dumoulin de La Barthète, Alibert, Brécard, Bouthillier, Caziot, Huard, Fernet, Vallat, Massis, Benjamin, Gillouin, and Pétain's closest advisor Doctor Ménétreel.

6. Ibid., 398; 442.

7. Tony Kunter, *Charles Maurras: la Contre-Révolution pour héritage* (Le Vaumain: Nouvelles éditions latines, 2009), 132.

8. Weber, 579.

the National Revolution. Certainly the spirit of discipline that permeated the military played a significant role in ensuring loyalty to the government of Vichy, but this by itself would not have been enough to prevent dissidence, as demonstrated by the defection to the Free French of Decoux's predecessor, General Catroux.⁹ In this chapter, I will look at how the Right appropriated nationalism into its political program at the end of the nineteenth century, and specifically how one of the French Right's most influential movements, *Action Française*, became the dominant ideology in the navy at the time of Decoux's professional ascendancy during the 1930s. Given the *Marine's* culture of conformity and hierarchy, AF inevitably played a significant influence on the evolution of the future Governor General of Indochina's worldview, a proposition supported by Decoux's affiliations and actions during his time at the Ministry of the Navy as well as in the views expressed in his postwar memoirs. Coming to grips with Decoux's worldview is critical to understanding the mechanism behind his regime's policy-making.

Nationalism, Action Française, and the roots of the National Revolution

9. While it can be argued that there existed a more rigid spirit of discipline and authority in the French Navy than in the army due to the conditions of life at sea, an order alone is never sufficient for a leader as he must be in accordance with it morally. French naval general instructions forbade a commander from obeying orders should these lead to international complications or prove to be dangerous or impossible to execute. The adage "an order is not enough to shoot one's mother" is generally accepted throughout civil and military society. Furthermore, a man of Decoux's rank would have been familiar with Napoleon's dictum that "a general isn't held by the orders of a prince far from the field of operations [as] a military order requires passive obedience only when it is given by a superior present at the time it is given." Lastly, there are significant juridical arguments for not following orders while the presence of an occupying force exerts pressure over one's superiors, compromising their authority and liberty of action. Since the Sixteenth Century it has been accepted that one is no longer bound to one's oath to the prince should the latter be held captive by an enemy force. See Albert Kammerer, *La Passion de la flotte française* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1951), 18; 36; 46; 50.

The wars between 1791 and 1797 were nationalist conflicts, but also due to Jacobin principles of egalitarianism, centralization, and universalism. Fighting invading armies to defend not just France but a revolutionary ideal, both peasants and urban workers (the *sans-culottes*) experienced what the historian François Furet calls the “democratization of glory” by taking roles previously reserved for the nobility. Nationalism meant the synthesis of ideological ideals, and love of the nation integrated the masses into the state, provided its members shared the values of the emerging notion of citizenship.¹⁰ The Boulangist movement (a heterogenous movement mixing socialism, nationalism, and authoritarianism, which threatened the Third Republic) and its particular form of populism sparked the transfer from Left to Right of nationalist ideals and sentiments, a shift that was completely unpredictable within the context of nineteenth-century politics. This mutation began in 1887 and was largely completed by 1899 when the Dreyfus Affair reached its climax, so that by the turn of the century, nationalism was an intrinsic part of the programs of the Right.¹¹ The nation was now defined not merely in terms of its citizens, but by the more subjective notions of identifying with and belonging to a specific territory and the culture, mentality, and traditions that had existed within it for centuries. Concurrently, Right wing literature began to elevate the army as the only entity capable of national salvation, rising above the *affaires*—those scandals that uncover politicians’ acts of corruption, nepotism, and self-

10. François Furet, *La Révolution: 1770-1814*, vol.1 (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1988), 186.

11. René Rémond, *Les Droites en France* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982), 150.

enrichment—and parliamentary musical chairs that characterized the Third Republic.

Writing during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Paul Déroulède's ideas presented a synthesis of the principal ideological currents from the Right during this time. The head of the *Ligue des Patriotes* called for the reformation of the education system to inculcate a love of the *patrie* in all children, one that would permeate all social classes, integrating and mobilizing the masses to ensure the survival of the nation against foreign enemies. He believed the army to be the symbol of national unity and the model of dignity, strength, and independence.¹² This militarism bred contempt for the oratory debates of democracy, refusing to give parliamentarians responsibility for safeguarding national interests. Obsessed with regeneration following the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), Déroulède called for the protection of the country from internationalist doctrines—that is, any ideology that sought to address issues other than domestic ones, including universalism of human rights, freedom, or class struggle—that were nothing more than “the exploitation of France by the foreigner.”¹³ Déroulède directed nationalism on a course from which it would seldom deviate: the individual subordinated to the collective, the exclusion of the liberal order, and a xenophobic patriotism.¹⁴

12. Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), 102-103.

13. Quoted in Zeev Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français* (Paris: A. Colin, 1972), 100.

14. *Ibid.*, 107.

Maurrice Barrès, successor to the head of the *Ligue des Patriotes* following his friend's death, also believed that nationalism alone could reverse France's decadence. For the author of *Les Déracinés*, published in 1897, "in order to allow the conscience of a country such as France to free itself, one needs to root the individuals in the land and in the dead, in the land of our dead." He exclaimed, "Let the influence of the ancestors be permanent, and the sons energetic and righteous, the nation united."¹⁵ The cult of the land and the dead necessitated the defense of familial and regional solidarity, the soil, and the national spirit against foreign elements.¹⁶ Barrès' vision of communities endured for decades, as he declared, "families of individuals, those are the communes, families of communes, there is the region, families of regions, there is the nation."¹⁷ For Barrès, only the development of a national consciousness could reposition the general interest over the individual will and lead to the "harmony of people that are united for generations in the same social institutions to affirm common moral interests."¹⁸

Barrès was one of the first politicians to exploit the nascent anti-Semitism of the 1880s. For him, the essence of nationalism was the transcendence of internal divisions—including those of class—which necessarily implied the rejection of foreign elements that could threaten the consensus. He called anti-Semitism the "popular formula," the only sentiment capable of rallying all social classes. Barrès drew from Edouard

15. Maurrice Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (Paris: F. Juven, 1902), 88-89.

16. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, 321.

17. Maurice Barrès, *Assainissement et fédéralisme* (Paris: Librairie de la revue Socialiste, 1895), 16.

18. Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*, 211.

Drumont, whose *La France juive*, first published in 1886, was one of the biggest successes of its century. According to Drumont, the struggle between Aryan and Jew has perpetuated throughout the ages as the “dream of the Semite, in effect his fixed thought, has constantly been to reduce the Aryan to servitude, to confine him to the glebe.”¹⁹ Barrès claimed that Jews were responsible for France's socioeconomic turmoil as they were the embodiment of finance and refractory to labor, effort, and honest work.²⁰ Exploiting the misery of the working class and playing on the petite bourgeoisie's fears of its own proletarianization, Barrès used anti-Semitism as a form of revolt against economic liberalism and bourgeois society, masking realities through myth, but overcoming social cleavages and ideological oppositions.²¹ He saw anti-Semitism as capable of gathering the “ardent and suffering masses. . .[and] the petite bourgeoisie, eager for the preservation of private property, but jealous of the great fortunes.”²²

The victory of the Republican bloc in the 1902 legislative elections spelled the death of nationalist movements accepting the Revolution and seeking to operate within the republican context (a strategy advocated by Barrès), paving the way for the rise of AF and Charles Maurras. AF called for the violent and complete destruction of the system, freeing France of a “necessarily corrupt and “Jewified” [*enjuivé*”

19. Edouard Drumont, *La France juive*, Tome I (Paris: C. Marpion & E. Flammarion, 1885), 12.

20. Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire*, 220.

21. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, 273.

22. Maurice Barrès, *L'Appel au soldat* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1900), 466.

parliamentarism.²³ With the publication of *Enquête sur la monarchie*, the intellectual center of nationalism moved away from Barrès toward the counter-systemic doctrines of AF. Maurras pushed the concept of *nationalisme intégral*, calling for the predominance of the national interest above all other values and motives, before class and business: he called for *la seule France, réaction d'abord* (France alone, reaction first).²⁴ This program was based on a particular vision: France needed to develop ways of thinking which were natural to France, emphasizing the importance of the soil; France needed to reverse Jacobin centralization and encourage regional traditions; France was military, the glory of its army was necessary for its well-being; France was Catholic and should therefore rid itself of foreign elements (including Protestants, Jews, and Freemasons) and limit naturalizations; and France was not democratic.²⁵

For Maurras as for other thinkers on the Right, the “nation” no longer designated an abstract concept, a spiritual principle as it had during the Revolution, but rather the ethnically homogenous community that existed within juridically defined boundaries, constituting a state that corresponded to “an enormous mass of desires, passions, needs, aspirations, customs, rituals, ways of being, thinking, [and] speaking.”²⁶ France was comprised of French citizens, who increasingly participated

23. Henri Vaugois quoted in Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire*, 354.

24. Marc Biros, *Nationalisme et Révolution nationale* (Hanoi: Editions du Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine, 1942), 11. Note that this was printed in French Indochina under Decoux.

25. Weber, 39; Gladys Kammerer, "The Political Theory of Vichy," *The Journal of Politics* 5, No.4 (1943): 413.

26. Charles Maurras, *Mes idées politiques* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1937), 262.

in the political process and conglomerated into socioeconomic groups.²⁷ Maurras was concerned—as Pétain would be—with minimizing factionalism and reintegrating all Frenchmen around corporatist structures, altering the political process so that “instead of directing the nation, suffrage should represent it.”²⁸ According to the leader of AF, since a society can survive only if it is capable of unity and discipline, a strong state needs to arbitrate amongst factions, toward the greater national good, ending the predominance of the “barbarian chiefs left to the impulses of passion or of interest.”²⁹

Rejecting Rousseau, Maurras was inspired by La Tour du Pin, literary historian Hippolyte Taine, and syndicalist Georges Sorel. He believed humans could only really exist as such within their families, their communities, and their professional environments.³⁰ Liberalism had led to individualism, ridding humans of their substance and their historical form. Inspiring ultraconservatives for decades to follow and preparing the terrain for the ideas of social groupings and corporatism, Maurras wrote that “families can be considered the natural vehicles of tradition” and the strength of France is “the incorporation of the individual in the soil.” By replacing “the artificial, the fictitious” departments with “regions much more vast,” humans would be reattached to the “natural and the eternal” community. Corporatism would end “the state of isolation to which revolutionary individualism has reduced [man, where] he feels too lost

27. Gérard Noiriel, *Les Origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1999), 62.

28. *L’Action française*, 14 November 1924.

29. Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, 45.

30. Wormser, 54-55.

amongst other men and too weak to take on serious responsibilities,”³¹ and reunite society by reintegrating the proletariat and ending the insecurity engendered by big industry.³² AF wanted to replace the individual, that product of the Revolution, with the family, the profession, and the region, for France “[would] only prosper in a sustainable way when it [was] be possible to reorganize the corporations” to reverse the trend where “it seem[ed] the majority of [Frenchmen were] more sensitive to private interests than to the general interest.”³³

AF based its antidemocratic and corporatist philosophy on the concept of social hierarchy and the negation of the false equality that came out of the Enlightenment thinkers. Building on the ideas of social psychologist Gustave Le Bon, for whom “the final dissolution [of all great empires] was carried out by these irrational and brutal masses,”³⁴ Maurras rejected democracy, denouncing the “republican fiction wanting all rational acts, all clear visions, to be necessarily understood and adopted by the enlightened minds and noble hearts of all voters.”³⁵ According to AF, the Republic would always be a war of factions and run counter to the spirit of nationalism, whose intrinsic purpose was to unite. The Republic was pusillanimous and incapable of decisive action, its institutions corrupted humans and limited their power over reality

31. Charles Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie* (Paris: Nouvelle librairie nationale, 1925), 52; 92-93; 95; 96.

32. Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire*, 379.

33. *L’Action française*, 30 November 1932.

34. Gustave Le Bon, *La Psychologie des foules* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1895), 6.

35. Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie*, CXL; William Tucker, “The Legacy of Charles Maurras,” *The Journal Of Politics* 17, No.4 (1955): 579.

through the electoral process.³⁶ This “revolutionary disorder” encouraged the prominence of the “mediocre, the envious, the stupid, and the rogue.”³⁷ Only a “regime of non-equality, limited by the actions of an authority that restrains it would safeguard the duties of justice and charity that watch over the life and the development of those less gifted.”³⁸ For Maurras, only a society based on a hierarchy of ability, where each would have “the most rights possible. . .based on naturally unequal situations,”³⁹ could ensure the glory and progress of France while paternalistically caring for each citizen through his reintegration within the community.

Maurras was convinced that the interests of French citizens were always threatened by the *métèques*—a pejorative term for any foreigner on French soil, which in Maurrassian discourse included Jews, Protestants, and Freemasons, pointing to the cultural distinctions between these groups and what was imagined as the authentic Frenchmen—who could not relate to French problems given that they did not share the common patrimonial heritage. Like Barrès, Maurras recognized the political usefulness of anti-Semitism: “All seems impossible or horribly difficult without this providence of anti-Semitism. With it all falls into place, smooths and simplifies itself. If one was not antisemitic by patriotic will, one would become it by simple sentiment of opportunism.”⁴⁰ For him,

36. Giocanti, 303.

37. Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, 148.

38. Charles Maurras, *Au signe de Flore* (Paris: Les Oeuvres représentatives, 1931), 14.

39. Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie*, 119.

40. Quoted in Zeev Sternhell, *Ni Droite, ni gauche: l'Idéologie fasciste en France* (Bruxelles: Editions complexe, 1987), 80.

nationalism was the will to survive, and he believed that decadence began with the infiltration of elements that threatened the French order.⁴¹ Nationalism “defends the nation against the Foreigner from within.”⁴² The “foreign oligarchy” would be destroyed only if it was “replaced by another nobility, truly born from the guts of the nation.”⁴³ The vision of AF held that as long as foreigners were free to “colonize” France, to increase their influence in all national sectors, the country would be occupied and exploited from within: the solution was either to subjugate the *métèque* or expel him.⁴⁴ A reformed state, assuming its role as socioeconomic regulator, would see to it that foreigners “prosper freely in France, serving it loyally with their talents. . . becoming with time, by alliance or by marriage, very good Frenchmen.”⁴⁵ Integration through the development of a national consciousness and an adherence to the community could overcome foreignness: “neither linguisticism nor racism: politics first! A national politic sees peoples as peoples, not as languages or blood. . . Amongst all, the biological element is the most weakly considered and the least seriously determined.”⁴⁶

While Maurrassism was never able to move from theory to action, it inspired the programs of Salazar. The Portuguese Head of Government (1932-1968) admitted his intellectual debt to Maurras, influenced by his “politics first,” his notions of the strong state, and his condemnation of

41. Michel Winock, “L’Action française” in Michel Winock, ed., *Histoire de l’extrême droite en France* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993), 130.

42. Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, 264.

43. Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie*; Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, 120.

44. Weber, 30.

45. René Groos quoted in *ibid.*, 228.

46. *L’Action française*, 20 July 1938.

democracy as a means of guiding power.⁴⁷ Salazar's volume of collected speeches could be seen on Pétain's table and Portugal represented an experience to which Pétain could refer.⁴⁸ Salazar's discourse in 1936 could have been repeated word for word by the Marshal four years later:

[We] don't ask for much: a notion and a sense of *pátria* and national solidarity; family—social cell *par excellence*; authority and hierarchy; spiritual value of life and of respect owed to human beings; obligation to work; superiority of virtue; sacred character and religious sentiments—here are the essentials for the mental and moral formation of the citizen in the *Estado novo*.⁴⁹

Salazar's view of family as the basis of society, his fear of hedonism and the erosion of traditional values, his desire to organize the nation based on natural groupings and corporations, his push for schools to inculcate morality and the love of the nation, his belief that authority was necessary and a just reward for the elite constituted the bridge between AF and the proponents of Pétainism.⁵⁰ Portugal's own National Revolution was a contemporary model on which traditional Vichy had to draw since, after all, Maurras, whom Pétain respected and consulted, "in the end, [had] built nothing."⁵¹

The French Navy: Conformity in Thought and Action

This discourse, with its emphasis on love of the nation, hierarchy, and authority, had all the ingredients to resound well within certain circles, not least in the military. Defeat in the Franco-Prussian War led to

47. Jacques Bainville, *Les Dictateurs* (Paris: Les Éditions Denoël et Steele, 1935), 266.

48. See Jackson, 51.

49. António de Oliveira Salazar, *Comment on relève un état* (Paris: Flammarion, 1936), 17. Note that the book's first chapter is entitled "La Révolution nationale."

50. *Ibid.*, 13; 17; 24-25; 30; 36; 46.

51. Ferro, 215.

cataclysmic changes in the French civil and military landscapes, with repercussions affecting the officer corps for generations. It is not surprising that the appropriation of nationalist sentiments by the Right in its discourse attracted many within military circles. Déroulède, so obsessed with revenge on the Germans, wrote that to belong to the army meant “belonging to duty, to danger, to death, no longer to oneself, almost no longer be oneself.”⁵² In 1891, *La Revue des deux mondes* published an unsigned article entitled “The Social Role of the Officer in the Universal Service,” written, it was soon revealed, by future Marshal Hubert Lyautey. This piece significantly affected how the military perceived itself and its relationship with French society. Lyautey, whose bourgeois family had numerous ties with members of the legitimist (that is, believing in the return of the Bourbon dynasty) nobility, saw universal conscription as a unique opportunity for officers—who he believed constituted France’s elite—to influence the minds of the country’s youth, as military service exposed every one of the nation’s young men to the army’s values and teachings. The officer had the social duty of inspiring “these twenty year old souls ready for profound impressions, that a spark could light up for life” and, as the educator of the nation, he must teach them that “on the ruins of the lost hierarchies, the social necessities of discipline, respect, and abnegation [would] not cease, and that the army [would] always be the best, if not the only school, where these virtues would be learned.”⁵³ Lyautey’s ideas and the myth surrounding his

52. Quoted in Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, 107.

53. Hubert Lyautey, *Le Rôle social de l'officier* (Paris: Bartillat, 2009), 53; 75; 78-79.

persona marked the spirits of many officers whose careers began at the turn of the century, and both Catroux and Decoux, whose fortunes took such radically different directions, wrote of their admiration for Lyautey.⁵⁴

The socioeconomic makeup of the corps and its particular cultural characteristics provided a fecund ground for the monarchist ideas of AF. According to Chalmers Hood, during the decades preceding the Second World War the *Royale*, nickname of the French Navy, had become a refuge for those with contempt for the egalitarian forces flourishing elsewhere in French society. Ten years before the war, approximately one in six open supporters of AF was in the military. The navy's code of behavior forbade the questioning of authority and its strong sense of hierarchy, coupled with a profound cult of the nation, engendered a mistrust toward a system deemed too unstable and weak, and predisposed minds to royalist arguments.⁵⁵

Even before embarking on their careers, future naval officers understood that they would not succeed if they strayed from the ideological norm. Applicants to the *École Navale* sat for an entrance exam whose questions were structured in such a way as to reveal personal views on political and religious issues.⁵⁶ George Debat recalls how the huge bust of Admiral de Rigny, the last Minister of the Navy under a legitimist government, was deliberately placed at the end of the main walkway at the *École Navale*. According to Debat, AF was the only major political

54. Catroux, 19; Jean Decoux, *Adieu Marine* (Paris: Plon, 1957) 73, 78.

55. Hood, *Royal Republicans*, 39; 122.

56. *Ibid.*, 80; 146.

movement to promote a theory of the state and the nation whose principles resembled those of the Navy, and students, isolated from much of society, often adopted ultraconservative values to fit in with the predominant culture. Even those who called themselves republicans were impregnated with Maurrassian ideas, coming to see how naval hierarchy could be transposed to the rest of society. Debat explains that “taken by the game of the sea and the arms, isolated by its mode of life from the existence of a working class city, proud of its organized power, hateful of a regime incapable of preserving a grandeur rebuilt on blood, the Navy distanced itself more every year from the French people.” He recounts how every day during the interwar period every officers’ quarters received the daily publication *L’Action Française*, which delivered “its blows on the foundations of the Republic and proposed, beautiful and hard like a Doric column, Maurrassian reasoning.”⁵⁷ Its vituperations revived a latent anti-Semitism to which staunch Catholics, like Decoux, were particularly receptive. Debat clarifies that naval anti-Semitism was not so much racial as the xenophobic outcome of a staunchly nationalist milieu.⁵⁸

Many considered it a “law of nature” that French naval officers turned to AF. They had been kept out of the political process by the Law of 29 July 1872, which denied all military personnel the right to vote in the hopes of keeping the armed forces above partisan politics. Without this means of expression, officers sought alternatives to the ballot box,

57. Georges Debat, *Marine oblige* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), 13-20.

58. Ibid., 91-92.

and AF's incendiary discourse appealed to the snobbish and resentful members of the corps.⁵⁹ From February 1928 *L'Action française* devoted two pages, twice a month, to military affairs. Officers read about how "the Republic, the reign of the mediocre, is the enemy of all elites. The officer corps has always been an elite, and as such, it is inevitable that it be the victim of the republicans."⁶⁰ By the early 1930s, when it came time for the men who entered the navy during the 1890s (the first generation born under the Third republic) to reach the upper echelons of hierarchy, the centrist parliamentary influence over the Ministry of Navy—appropriately located on the *Rue Royale*—faded completely, and a single voice, incarnated by AF, came to dominate the naval corps.⁶¹

For years following the Great War, AF sought to exploit the military's self-perception as the sole guardian of discipline, respect, and abnegation and it tried to drive further the wedge between officers and the Republic. The publication wrote of how the government's defense policy was rife with "ignorance, distraction, confused hatred, spew of radical socialist bile against the military professional *only good to get himself killed* to make up for the politicians' mistakes."⁶² AF pushed the myth that the military was the only guarantor of national unity, threatened by internal corruption and foreign influences. The soldier, true representative of the country's valor, twice saved France: during the Dreyfus Affair and during the Great War. By the 1930s, the military increasingly accepted the idea

59. Hood, "The French Navy and Parliament Between the Wars," 402. Xenophobia having more to do with nationality than race.

60. *L'Action française*, 25 February 1928.

61. Hood, *Royal Republicans*, 125-126; 146.

62. *L'Action française*, 25 July 1929 [emphasis in original].

of national recovery pushed by AF and other extreme Right circles, particularly after the failed 6 February 1934 *putsch* and the subsequent formation of the Popular Front.⁶³ More than fifty years after it was written, Déroulède's sophism that "a powerful army is the only safeguard of the prosperity of a nation [and] it is a corresponding truth to affirm that the prosperity of a nation is foremost the support of a powerful army"⁶⁴ resounded within a corps feeling betrayed by an ungrateful government.

After Pétain's ascension to power, many within the armed forces to think they would save France for a third time. Debat recalls how for most officers of the *Royale* the preservation of France required that the fleet submit to the Armistice. Darlan maintained that the Navy was the one French military branch that had not been humiliated and most admirals staunchly defended the Pétainist conception of national interest. Tying the colonies to the prestige of the Navy itself, the *grand corps* saw itself as the sole protector of the empire.⁶⁵ For these officers, including Decoux, swearing allegiance to Pétain was a matter of discipline, honor, and nationalism.⁶⁶ For the Navy

63. On 6 February 1934, an anti-parliamentary rally organized by groups and leagues of the extreme-Right led to riots on the Place de la Concorde, and an attempt to seize the National Assembly, after the government fired on demonstrators. See Olivier Forcade, "Les Milieux militaires et l'Action française" in Michel and Jacques Prévotat Leymarie, eds., *L'Action française: Culture, société, politique* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2008), 122-123.

64. Paul Déroulède, *La Défense nationale: Conférence faite à Rouen, le 22 juin 1883* (Paris: Mann Lévy, 1883), 4.

65. Martin Thomas, "After Mers-el-Kébir: The Armed Neutrality of the Vichy French Navy, 1940-43," *The English Historical Review* 112, No.447 (1997): 649; 669.

66. Michel Huguier, *L'Amiral Decoux, sur toutes les mers du monde* (Paris: Harmattan, 2007), 185.

the common good of the French consist[ed]. . .in the safeguard of the soul of the *patrie*, that is the will to consider as only temporary the defeat of [the] armies, to stay rooted in the hopes of national liberty, and to maintain the presence of France on the field of honor. [Naval personnel] defended this part of the common good essential for personal human dignity that is honor.⁶⁷

In addition to this sense of honor, the absolute discipline that attached the naval officer to the local chief (that is, the squadron commander) as well as to the summit of the national hierarchy (the Head of State) made it nearly impossible to follow one's personal convictions even if they ran counter to Pétain. Otherwise, this would betray the values of abnegation and primacy of the common interest over the individual will.⁶⁸

In the hierarchical culture of the *Royale*, a handful of spokesmen set the ideological agenda and their subordinates followed suit. Leaders sought intellectual conformity to a greater extent than in other military organizations. During the summer of 1940, de Gaulle had only recently been promoted General and his name was largely unknown to those in the Navy. Moreover, Admiral Muselier, the only naval officer who called for dissidence, suffered from a dubious reputation further fueled by his recent retirement.⁶⁹ The *Royale* was a tightly knit and homogenous group in which everyone served and obeyed unquestioningly the orders of their

67. Debat 104.

68. Ibid., 101; 105.

69. Romé, 51; Debat, 87.

superiors⁷⁰ and when Darlan told the admirals to obey the clauses of the armistice lest the country be ruined, officers followed suit.⁷¹

Decoux: Spokesman for the Conservative Cause

Born in 1884, Jean Decoux entered the *École Navale* in Brest in 1901, two years after the Dreyfus Affair had reached its paroxysm, revealing the deep cleavages within the Third Republic; one year after the first publication of Maurras' *Enquête*; and one year before the legislative elections that would mark the victory of secular republicanism over the coalition of the traditional right.⁷² Decoux recalled the visit in 1903 of Minister of Marine Camille Pelletan—Dreyfussard and socialist sympathizer, whose “ephemeral reign took. . .for the French fleet the semblance of a new Trafalgar”—and the sentiments shared among the students that this “hotheaded member of parliament” had stripped the *Royale* of one of its “oldest and most emotive traditions” when he put an end to all religious displays in the Navy, leaving the devout to pursue their activities in clandestinity, “like in the epoch of the first Christians and the time of the catacombs.”⁷³ The end of these long-standing customs polarized the officer corps, leading many to fear an unprecedented and dangerous Masonic and Jewish influence on government.⁷⁴ Given the treatment of these events in his memoirs, these experiences indubitably shaped Decoux's worldview creating in his mind an opposition between

70. Admiral Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1959), 17-18.

71. Kammerer, *La Passion de la flotte française*, 121.

72. This coalition comprised of legitimists, Orléanists, and Bonapartists, who after 1902 would become the liberal right, progressive republicans, and nationalists respectively. See Rémond, 160-163.

73. Decoux, *Adieu Marine*, 9-11.

74. Hood, *Royal Republicans*, 11.

the grandeur of the Navy and the Republic, which plunged France “into the depths of demagoguery and anarchy.”⁷⁵

One of Decoux’s ideological influences was Admiral Antoine Schwerer, one of the navy’s staunchest conservatives and most vocal anti-Semites. Schwerer left active duty in 1924 to become a prominent leader in AF, believing it to be the only movement able to “lead the assault” against the weak and the “men of bad faith” seeking to perpetuate the “very somber” situation of France.⁷⁶ He called the Republic a “Judeo-Masonic regime that wants to destroy the family, the *patrie*, and religion at the same time. . .that will lead [France] to a new war. . .to the parcelling of the *patrie*. . .and to the dechristianization of France. . .The decline of our country is accelerating [and] Judeo-Masonry is triumphing.”⁷⁷ Schwerer, who after the Great War had become a spokesman for the conservative cause within the Navy,⁷⁸ for whom “democracy only survived through the ignorance in which it kept the French people,” accused parliament of weakening France by refusing to reinforce the fleet, diverting the greater part of naval appropriation funds to the arsenals—“parasitic vegetation, of purely electoral order,” and bastion of Bolshevik activity—and weakening the nation by submitting to the Washington Naval Congress.⁷⁹ His voice epitomized the arch-

75. Decoux, *Adieu Marine*, 332.

76. Speech given in December 1931, excerpts reproduced in Agnès Callu and Patricia Gillet, *Lettres à Charles Maurras: Amitiés politiques, lettres autographes, 1898-1952* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2008), 100.

77. *L'Action française*, 3 May 1928.

78. Hood, “The French Navy and Parliament Between the Wars,” 401.

79. *L'Almanach de l'Action française* 1925, 50; *L'Almanach de l'Action française* 1926, 60-62.

conservative sentiments putting the military and parliamentarianism in opposition to each other.

Decoux openly lamented the Republic, with its “infernal cycles of ministers without duration and without authority” and its values of popular sovereignty that led to “the collective hysteria of the masses.” He reviled the “cowardly and amorphous politicians” who “grazed at the trough” of the League of Nations, itself of Anglo-American, “sometimes Hebraic and Masonic influence.” He deplored the 1932 victory of the “bolshevizing” *Cartels des Gauches* and the 1936 Popular Front, which he accused of accelerating the Republic’s declining influence. Decoux regretted Colonel de la Roque’s lack of preparation in his attempt at seizing power during the riots of 6 February 1934, preventing him from ending the “ephemeral and inconsistent governments.” He admired Francisco Franco, one of the leaders of the anti-republican forces during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), many of whose methods of order and discipline derived from fascism, as Decoux understood it.⁸⁰

Decoux tried to convert his political ideas into policy during his five years at the *rue Royale*. Admiral Georges Durand-Veil, head of the Navy’s general staff and Decoux’s former commander-in-chief, whose views exemplified naval conservatism and elitism,⁸¹ must have been aware of his subordinate’s political opinions when he personally asked Decoux in 1931 to join him as Head of the *Section d’Etudes des Armements Navals*. Decoux certainly did little to hide his political leanings afterward, and to

80. Decoux, *Adieu Marine*, 274; 285; 292; 295; 306; 333; 352; 356.

81. Vice Amiral Georges Durand-Veil, "L'Esprit de la marine," *La Revue des deux mondes*, No.1 (1939).

influence his colleagues he often enclosed with his letters clippings of *L'Action française*, and other extreme Right newspapers such as *Gringoire*, or *Candida*.⁸² Participating in several international disarmament conferences, Decoux fought to preserve French naval interests against what he perceived to be Anglo-American plots.

That an officer of the French navy should be anglophobic is not in itself surprising, but Decoux was convinced Great Britain was hostile to any rapprochement between France and Italy, its Latin “sister nation.” This view mirrored that of AF. Maurrassians never stopped asserting that London could not be trusted, since Englishmen were “raised, educated in the tradition that the adversary of England. . . is France,” and their interests lay in pulling France away from her Latin neighbors in order to “enslave” her. England had systematically undercut France following the Versailles Treaty and masked her weakness by cozying up to Germany.⁸³ Debat recalls how Trafalgar was a name that “still sounded awful to our ears”⁸⁴ and Decoux recounts how in the days immediately preceding the *Entente Cordiale* (1904), naval officers still saw England as France’s principal threat. Echoing AF, he believed Great Britain had allowed Germany to rearm in order to rival France’s military, a continuation of London’s historical ambitions for a continental balance of power. He saw the 1935 Anglo-German agreement to increase the size of the Reich’s fleet as a direct affront to the Conference of Stresa (also 1935), where the signatories agreed against unilateral or bilateral decisions that would

82. Hood, *Royal Republicans*, 154-155.

83. *L'Action française*, 25 July 1936; 15 and 25 November 1937.

84. Debat, 73.

compromise peace. Decoux took Great Britain's opposition to the 1935 Rome Accords (where France promised to allow Italy a free hand in Ethiopia in exchange for its support against Germany aggression) as proof that Whitehall "never saw positively any slight desire of France to flirt" with Italy.⁸⁵

During his time at the *Rue Royale*, Decoux promoted a formal alliance of Latin powers (namely with Italy), an action that would have met with Maurras' approval. With Germany's departure in 1933 from both the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference, many within French military and political circles deemed war inevitable. By 1935 French industrial production was a third lower than in 1928, placing serious doubts on France's ability to defend itself, particularly as it could no longer count on its former ally Russia. According to Laval and the French General Staff, the key to offsetting the German threat was Italy. Decoux praised Laval's efforts in 1934 to end long-standing Franco-Italian disputes, and Mussolini's support of an independent Austria (when he sent four divisions to the Brenner following the assassination of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss to avoid a German *Anschluss*) was proof of the worthiness of an alliance. Decoux blamed the communists, the Masonic lodges, and international Jewry for the failure of the Hoare-Laval Pact (in 1935, which sought to end the war in Abyssinia by giving Italy control over significant portions of the region) and the Franco-Italian friendship that would have ensued. When Italy invaded Ethiopia,

85. Decoux, *Adieu Marine*, 39; 294; 308; 318.

Decoux supported Italy's defense of the "cause of Civilization,"⁸⁶ and pushed the French government to help the "fascist revolution and its grandiose projects" with logistical support in Abyssinia.⁸⁷ AF, which attributed Italy's resurgence to its "method, its spirit of discipline, of perseverance,"⁸⁸ supported a Latin union with Mussolini's Italy to fight its internal enemy, the Popular Front, and its external enemy, Germany.⁸⁹ Maurras described the League of Nations as "a coalition of Masonry, Jewry, and England," and castigated it for its "hypocrisy" in opposing the war in Abyssinia.⁹⁰ Both Decoux and AF were eager to open their arms to Mussolini to preserve their ultraconservative vision of France.

Admiral Decoux, Product of his Environment

It is certain that Darlan suggested Decoux to replace General Catroux as Governor General of Indochina on 25 June 1940 (two weeks before Pétain was given plenipotentiary powers and therefore during the last days of the Third Republic) because he knew his character and convictions, and was confident Decoux, who was heading the French naval forces in the Pacific at the time, would obey the Marshal. The *Royale*—which had seen very little combat during the Battle of France and had not experienced the multi-pronged attacks of the *Wehrmacht*, the pathetic flow of refugees clogging the roads, or the capture of hundreds of thousands of its soldiers—was disproportionately represented in the

86. Reynolds Salerno, "The French Navy and the Appeasement of Italy, 1937-9," *The English Historical Review* 112, No.445 (1997): 69-71.

87. Decoux, *Adieu Marine*, 304; 306-307; 320; 328; Hood, *Royal Republicans*, 155.

88. *L'Action française*, 30 April 1934; Jacques Delbecque's commentary in 23 July 1934.

89. Kunter, 170.

90. *L'Action française*, 22 September 1935.

governments of colonial Vichy.⁹¹ Its culture of tradition and hierarchy ensured the loyalty of its officers to the government of Vichy, and Decoux was cut from the most conservative cloth the Navy offered. In 1940, his personal political views were well known as was his uncompromising faith in the chain of command. At a time when France needed its empire as a bargaining chip in its armistice negotiations with Germany, Darlan was convinced Decoux would not break with the administrative entity that was Vichy. While the Vichy government was still reeling from the debacle and the asphyxiating demands of occupation when it decided to dismiss Catroux during the summer of 1940, it still had the logistical capability to send someone from the metropole to take on the duties of Governor General of Indochina. That Decoux was already on site was fortuitous, but his disposition and worldview made him an ideal appointment to follow the Vichy line.

It is not necessary for Decoux to have been a member of AF to embrace its theses. Maurrassism had seeped through France's political Right in the years preceding the war, its ideas symbolizing the emerging nationalism that no longer embodied a spirit, but rather a culture, a race, and a historical tradition. The Navy, where conformity reigned, was particularly sensitive to Maurras' notions of *réaction d'abord* and the publication *L'Action française* was found in all quarters of this branch of the military. Moreover, the years of Decoux's childhood were marked by the virulence that divided society during the Dreyfus Affair, he was

91. Georges Sabattier, *Le Destin de L'Indochine* (Paris: Plon, 1952), 37.

exposed to AF from early on in his career, and he must have been influenced by his superiors' mistrust of the Republic.

Over the course of his professional ascension and in the memoirs he wrote in the crepuscule of his life, Decoux expressed his antidemocratic, authoritarian, and xenophobic views. Personally chosen by, and closely working with, arch-conservative Admiral Durand-Veil, Decoux had worked at the *Rue Royale* in an environment that castigated the Republic for its perceived abandonment of the military and its subjugation to Anglo-American pressures; the ephemerality of its governments and the importance of Leftist and Jewish politicians; and the perceived decadence that ensued from its promotion of egalitarianism and materialism. Decoux's encouragement of an alliance of Latin states demonstrates his willingness to emulate the ultra Right regimes of Mussolini and Salazar to combat the internal threats from the Left and the external menaces from England and Germany. This political action, coupled with his admitted admiration for Franco's methods to ensure authority and discipline, was not only in line with Maurrassian doctrine of the 1930s, but it stood for a larger picture of hostility toward the Third Republic and a belief in the need to alter the course of French politics and society.

Appointed on 25 June 1940 as Governor General of Indochina, Decoux had the authority to actualize his political persuasions, using the framework of the National Revolution as a legitimizing force. Though Vichy was unable and unwilling to export the National Revolution as conceptualized by the traditionalists (see Chapter 2), Decoux's political orientations found their sources in the same Maurrassian discourse that

inspired policy-makers during the first six months of Pétain's regime. Though Decoux believed in the sanctity of hierarchy, his spirit of discipline is not enough to explain his zeal to implement Vichy policies; he had to share common ideological roots with Pétainism, ones found in the pages of *L'Action Française*. As discussed in Chapter 2, Vichy's power to influence Hanoi was minimized by the colony's isolation from the metropole, German pressures (in terms of its economic demands and as discussed below, measures such as its limitations on telegraphic communications between France and Indochina), Japan's incorporation of Indochina into the Asian Sphere of Po-prosperity, as well as the emptiness of the doctrine of the National Revolution. Nothing conveys the sense of remoteness and helplessness in the minds of the men of Vichy regarding Indochina better than former Governor General of Indochina (from 1936 to 1939) Jules Briévé's resignation as Minister of Colonies in March 1943, because he saw there were effectively no more colonies to administer.⁹² Decoux's regime experienced a level of independence (due to isolation) never before experienced by colonial administrators, one that would provide him with the opportunities to implement his own political visions, with a framework adopted from the metropole but driven by his own ideals, adapted to what he perceived as Indochinese specificities. The following chapter examines the propaganda machine he constructed to win the hearts and minds of the Indochinese peoples.

92. Ferro, 461.

Chapter IV: Propaganda

In 1936, Aldous Huxley observed “Propaganda gives force and direction to the successive movements of popular feeling and desire; but it does not do much to create these movements. The propagandist is a man who canalizes an already existing stream. In a land where there is no water, he digs in vain.”¹ The Decoux regime’s propaganda system was by necessity more complex than any of its predecessors’, through its organization, coercive policies, and attempts to manipulate subtly local cultures. To win the hearts and minds of the peoples in Indochina, Governor General Decoux needed to channel the multiplicity of “streams” in the region, facing an ultimately insuperable problem: how would a colonial administration reconcile the different and often opposing interests of an ethnically, culturally, and politically diverse nascent federation while under the scrutiny of an occupying power at war and threatened by an irredentist neighbor?

Eric Jennings contends that the impulsion behind the politics of the colonial administration was the very nature of Vichy ideology: the promotion of local traditions and values, the encouragement of local nationalisms, and the glorification of a great past. He argues these thrusts coexisted with the reinforcement of the notables and the development of a federal discourse.² Evidence shows that the regime’s propaganda efforts mirror these drives and run throughout its communication but Jennings

1. Aldous Huxley, "Notes on Propaganda," *Harper's Magazine*, December 1936, 39.

2. Jennings, "L'Indochine de l'Amiral Decoux," 38-39.

erroneously describes these initiatives as ends in themselves.³ He fails to appreciate Decoux's overarching goal, which drew from the National Revolution but would not—and could not—attempt to replicate it: to maintain French control over Indochina throughout and following the war by elevating France's prestige as the only power able to invigorate the different countries of the region and serve as keystone of the Indochinese Federation.

During the July 1942 session of the Federal Council, Decoux was clear about how he intended to use a multi-pronged approach to reinforcing the local populations' attachment to France:

Franco-Indochinese rapprochement has a sentimental and rather simplistic character that we need to evolve toward greater reason and depth. Vast powers of sentiments have surrounded France and its chief. We now need to reinforce these sentiments through reason. The Indochinese have today rather general notions of Indochinese federalism, of local patriotism loosely associated with French patriotism, etc. We now need to explore, deepen, analyze them in order to have perceived all the harmonies and echoes and consequently to consolidate them in the minds of all, both French and Indochinese. Here is where the considerable role of the elite appears in the Franco-Indochinese rapprochement. It is to this minority. . .that must be entrusted the task of clearing up. . .what could and must be the French Imperial Community and the evolution within its core of Indochina toward a major social and political entity. We must show, in the full light of the principles of the Marshal and the laws of human social evolution, the efficiency and the richness of hope that the notion of Empire evokes. [Everyone] must find the points of conciliation of the existing doctrines and to clear up amongst the diversity of all the systems that link

3. Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 2, Vichy did not have one dominant ideology and sometimes discouraged local traditions and languages if it went against the government's interests.

Indochina to both the Western world and the Chinese world, the common denominator that is nothing else but French humanism in its highest sense.⁴

In this speech are all the major themes behind the policies of the Decoux regime, highlighting their relationship with propaganda: administrative and economic initiatives to mold the consciousness of the peoples to instill a sense of legitimacy and belonging to the French Imperial Community through a disciplined and hierarchical reorganization of society.

The definitive rupture of maritime relations with the metropole in 1941 meant that the French population in Indochina read no recent non-local newspaper, magazine, or book in French until the end of the war, by which time the respective experiences of France and Indochina were so different that Georges Gautier, Decoux's cabinet director, described the divergences in "thinking and expression as such that we had the impression that we no longer spoke the same language when, in 1945, contact was reestablished."⁵ The difficulties in communication and the acquisition of propaganda materials meant Decoux often had to feel his way in the dark when drawing from elements of the National Revolution to promote France's prestige.⁶ Without a dependable flow of information, it was the Maurrassism that influenced Decoux's worldview—as it had

4. GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, "Moyens propres à favoriser le rapprochement Franco-Indochinois," session July 1942 and VNNA, ref 1307, Note 1441, "Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général, 9 June 1942.

5. Georges Gautier, *La Fin de l'Indochine française* (Paris: Société de Production Littéraire, 1978), 64. Indochina did receive news from the metropole through cabled press releases and radio programs, including the pro-Allied radio Delhi. In France, it was the German occupation that plagued most spirits, in Indochina, that of the Japanese. This difference was critical in widening the chasm between metropole and colony.

6. See for example 1/tel786, No.1621, Decoux to LégioFrance, 24 March 1943.

those of the ultraconservative architects of the National Revolution—that served as the vehicle to elevate France as the only possible benefactor of the Indochinese peoples.

Decoux used the National Revolution as one tool to achieve his most important propaganda objective: to show the benefits and necessity of the Franco-Indochinese collaboration and the symbiosis between the cultures under the French-led Indochinese Union.⁷ The colonial administration formulated its propaganda to position France as a benefactor and rebuild its prestige in spite of the metropole's occupation by Germany and the *stationnement* of Japanese troops in the colony. Decoux understood that given France's tenuous situation in Europe and Asia, the administration risked losing whatever legitimacy it pretended to have in the colony if it did not mobilize every resource at its disposal to publicize the depth of French efforts in the region.⁸ He insisted that France's *oeuvre colonisatrice* always be presented as a whole, independent of the political vicissitudes of the metropole. He openly called for state propaganda to channel nascent patriotic sentiments through the ideals of the National Revolution, of federalism, and the empire to destroy "unrealistic aspirations or dangerous illusions" of local nationalism. This effort needed to convince the Indochinese peoples that local moral and intellectual spirits could only flourish within an occidental synthesis, that is under French tutelage and not within the context of the pan-Asianism that the Japanese were espousing.⁹

7. RSTNF 6620, Cousseau to Directors of Vietnamese publications, 6 December 1943.

8. RSTNF 5738, Telegram No.3811, Decoux to ADLOC, 7 September 1940.

9. 3W/152, Decoux to Goucoch, 16 May 1944.

Many of these policies were continuations of his predecessors' initiatives under the Third Republic and did not present fundamental policy shifts.¹⁰ Decoux's regime promoted patriotism and traditional values to fight off external (Japanese and Thai) and internal (Gaullists and Viet Minh) enemies while generating feelings of solidarity amongst all the different *pays* and an attachment to France through the federalist project. Faced with nationalists threats, Governors General Pierre Pasquier and Jules Brévié had also sought a return to Vietnamese tradition and tried to resurrect them as means of growing French power and influence.¹¹ Pasquier and Governor General Alexandre Varenne pushed the concept of a federal Indochina to ensure political and social stability, with France as the unifying cement that held the entity together (see Chapter 5).¹²

In spite of his political views, elevating the French *oeuvre* in Indochina meant Decoux could not break (that is, openly denigrate) with the Third Republic with the same force as Vichy in the metropole, lest the entire colonial effort—and the supposed benefits that it brought to Indochina—be tarnished, weakening the credibility of French tutelage in the region. His regime criticized the Third Republic when it was useful but was careful not to disparage it unnecessarily in the eyes of the locals, fearing that systematic attacks on the Republic turned into attacks on France as whole, weakening the respect that he imagined the Indochinese

10. Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 248.

11. Bruce McFarland Lockhart, *The End of the Vietnamese Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1993), 96-97.

12. Goscha, 53-54. According to Goscha's sources, Pasquier himself used the word "federal."

owed it.¹³ The Governor General stressed the need to adhere to Pétainist doctrine but also thought repeated criticisms of the preceding governments had no constructive value and he was aware of the grave danger that they could produce in the minds of the locals who he believed could not make the distinction between France as a nation and its particular type of government.¹⁴ More than anything, this was an admittance that the National Revolution had very little to do in Indochina, or rather, that his administration could not differ much from the previous ones.¹⁵ The regime's doctrine went so far as to claim that the vices of the Third Republic, denounced by the Marshal, never reached Indochina, whose political and administrative structures allowed France, for three quarters of a century, to give the region its all.¹⁶ In one instance, the weekly publication *Indochine* ran a series of articles on great Governor Generals of Indochina, including Pasquier and Paul Doumer, to stress the longevity of the French *oeuvre* in the region.¹⁷ The Admiral held two propagandistic positions: building his case on a supposed continuity of the colonial *oeuvre* to preserve authority and administrative institutions on one hand and calling for moral rebirth through the new values of the National Revolution on the other.

Conducting the National Revolution without vilifying the Republic so as not to call into question the entirety of the French colonial effort

13. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 369.

14. 3W/149, Decoux to ADLOC and IPP, 4 March 1942.

15. Conversely, republican colonialism resembled ultraconservative doctrines in Indochina.

16. 3W/155, Pisier Testimony.

17. *Indochine*, 25 November 1943.

required a careful balancing act. One solution was simply to turn the page on the previous regime, admitting that its administrators had achieved positive results in the colony but that it was time to focus on renewal and building a new present and future through a return to authority and tradition.¹⁸ By presenting policy changes as evolutionary rather than revolutionary the administration believed in the potential for rapprochement between French and locals as the French drew similarities between Pétainist doctrine and the traditional Indochinese cultures, showing that the ideas of work, family, *patrie*, hierarchy, and order highlighted parallels between the current French government and the Confucian concepts of authority in Annam or the social importance of family in Cambodia.¹⁹

To direct the government's propaganda efforts and its relations with the press, Decoux created the *Service de l'Information, de la Propagande, et de la Presse* (IPP), headed by Captain Marcel Robbe. The IPP ensured that the media untiringly treat every subject—economic, political, scientific, literary, artistic, and religious—that underscored the image the government wanted to create of Indochina's vitality and its aptitude to resolve any problem that presented itself.²⁰ Though the IPP didn't officially own any publications, it coerced newspaper and magazine owners into covering topics of its choosing by enforcing censorship over any content that was deemed unacceptable to the colonial authorities or

18. 3W/152, Marcel Robbe, "Directive d'ordre général pour la propagande," 18 March 1943.

19. GGI 65295, Conseil fédéral indochinois, "Procédés de propagande les meilleurs pour toucher les populations indochinoises," Session December 1941; 3W/155, Desjardin statement; and Discours prononcés, 12 July 1941.

20. Directives politiques, 19 May 1943.

withholding resources, whose distribution it controlled, to prevent publication. It also used local chapters of the *Légion française des combattants* to diffuse the regime's messages throughout the different communities. Propaganda served to uphold the idea of the administration's legitimacy but also to rally locals around colonial projects supposedly aimed at tackling the worsening conditions due to the war. As isolation and bombardments took their toll on Indochina, culminating in the 1945 famine in Tonkin and northern Annam, the propaganda machine worked ceaselessly to extol the benefits and achievements of Franco-Indochinese collaboration.

Decoux recognized that he could not rely solely on the media, as censorship would inevitably lead to a desensitized and cynical readership and alienate readers from the government. His administration understood that it had to reach the peoples of Indochina during leisure time and tap unlikely sources that were not known to be directly under government orders.²¹ While films depicted the great realizations of the French culture and theater groups toured with plays exalting Eastern and Western collaboration, the authorities promoted festivals and sporting events to distract the crowds or turn its attention in periods of agitation.²² Lastly, oral propaganda used locals, under the direction of the IPP, to diffuse rumors or instructions to counteract foreign or nationalist influences.²³

21. GGI 65295, Conseil fédéral indochinois, "Procédés de propagande les meilleurs pour toucher les populations indochinoises," Session December 1941.

22. Directives politiques, 10 September 1943.

23. Decoux also personally ensured that administrators have as much contact with the locals as possible, publicizing the reasons behind their tours, fostering the perception that it was a more caring administration. See Directives politiques, 19 May 1943.

In all of these initiatives, direct or indirect, the IPP was the motor behind the colonial administration's efforts to fight internal and external enemies and rally both French and Indochinese communities to its cause. No matter what the method, the message was the same "Unity behind the Marshal is the safeguard of our future."²⁴ This chapter will examine the IPP as an organization and coercive force that openly promoted the policies of the government and used indirect methods such as festivals and the cultivation—as well as creation—of Western and Eastern cultural parallels to reinforce the links between all the peoples of the Indochinese Federation.

The Service de l'Information, de la Propagande, et de la Presse (IPP)

On 10 February 1941, *Capitaine de vaisseau* Marcel Robbe embarked on a ship in Marseille and arrived in Hanoi three months later.²⁵ He had never met Decoux and learned only shortly after doing so that the Governor General had decided to appoint him head of a new department called the IPP. Montavani, Head of the *Direction des Affaires Politiques*, had had the idea for this department before Robbe's arrival. He wanted to fuse two already existing organizations into one entity: the *Commission Centrale du Contrôle des Informations et de la Presse* (CCIP), created by General Catroux, Decoux's predecessor, and the propaganda service. Established immediately after the outbreak of the war, the CCIP was the "negative" branch, which controlled information and engaged in censorship in

24. RSC 307, Telegram No.6111, Decoux to ADLOC, 22 November 1941. This slogan was openly attributed to General Weygand.

25. 1tel/703, No.141, Platon to Decoux, 14 January 1941.

offices in each of the five capitals of the Union. The colonial authorities created the second organization following the conflict with Thailand, as a more “positive” means of promoting French interests, particularly in Laos. The IPP was originally part of the *Direction des Affaires Politiques*, but having no administrative attributions it was placed under the cabinet of the General Government of Indochina (GGI) in November 1941 by Gautier. Stretched for resources (in particular personnel), Robbe set up local offices in every capital, whose chiefs were chosen by and reported to the Heads of the local administration (ADLOC),²⁶ not to Robbe himself. In his deposition given after the war, Robbe stated that any instruction he gave had to be approved by the ADLOC. This may have been technically accurate, but the IPP controlled the politics behind propaganda efforts, from strategy to positioning (including where to place physically articles in publications). Requiring the signature of a Head of ADLOC had mostly to do with ensuring consistency of policies and tapping into local knowledge of specific issues.²⁷

26. This is the collective term for the *Résidents Supérieurs* and the Governor of Cochinchina.

27. Témoins à décharge, Robbe Statement. Robbe’s statement was corroborated by one witness, pointing to the local seizure of *France Annam*, one of the country’s two most influential newspapers, whose ownership was placed directly under the *Résident Supérieur*. See 72AJ/1905, Bulteau Audition, 2-3. On the other side, Tillard, former Head of the Information Service in Annam, explained during his own hearing that his local office was *de facto* more closely aligned with IPP headquarters because of the sheer quantity of communications coming from the GGI, some of which carried very specific instructions such as where to place articles on the front page or how to address particular events. Tillard claimed he was “incomparably more” subject to Robbe’s directives than to those of Grandjean, the Superior Resident in Annam, because the latter put out few directives, which were mostly political rather than operational. See 72AJ/1905, Tillard & Liacre Audition, 6-7. These positions enlighten more on witnesses’ desire to avoid postwar recriminations and are ultimately the two sides of the same coin. It is improbable that Decoux, known for his penchant for hierarchy, would tolerate political independence from his subordinates in ADLOC or not reprimand actions that did not fall in line with overall administrative policies.

The IPP's first bureau, Information, relied on the police, the army, and postal control for intelligence in various areas such as public order, the country's economic situation, harvests, or the black market. These reports, along with the information gathered by the radio listening and press review services, supplied Decoux with daily accounts of the situation in Indochina, which the Governor General returned with instructions on how to address certain topics for public consumption: usually whether to promote, refute, or ignore. These in turn were distributed by the IPP to whichever service head was most concerned (e.g. Political Affairs, Diplomatic Service, Military Affairs) and then sent back to Decoux for final approval.²⁸ Since this section gathered information to be processed, it did not produce propaganda in any substantial form.

The Propaganda bureau was responsible for printing and diffusing materials and organizing events throughout the Union to promote French interests and convince locals of the benefits of the French colonization efforts. It used Radio Saigon to broadcast *Voix de France*, which provided French and Indochinese alike with information from the metropole and news of loved ones through personal messages. The IPP showed films produced by the private companies "Indochine Films et Cinémas" and "Ciné-Théâtres." It financed theater groups to put on plays reinforcing colonial policy and printed brochures, posters, and billboards with themes and slogans of the National Revolution, and ensured the omnipresence of

28. Témoins à décharge, Robbe Statement.

portraits of Pétain. It was also in constant collaboration with the *Légion* to organize conferences and festivals across the federation.²⁹

The Press bureau's mission was to lean on publications to stress the ideals of the National Revolution and promote the French *oeuvre* in Indochina. Newspapers received verbal directives from the local IPP chiefs during press conferences or one-on-one meetings with journalists. The bureau had a double mission: propaganda and control. It pressured publications to address specific themes and actively censored articles, editorials, literature, and public events.

During his trial, Decoux stated that it was the IPP's duty to recommend cohesion and conformism to the French, loyalty and obedience to the Indochinese, and to develop the theme of a more pronounced Franco-Indochinese collaboration.³⁰ The IPP was not, however, responsible for disseminating blindly the propaganda issued directly from Vichy: it tapped heavily into themes and imagery, but only if they confirmed to the Admiral's vision of policy implementation in the colony.³¹ Robbe claimed that during his time as Head of the IPP he thought propaganda geared toward the French community was of secondary importance because he did not feel he could change Frenchmen's opinions one way or another and that it was best "to save one's strength for more important questions such as French sovereignty,"

29. RSTNF 6282, Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service Local de l'IPP, 1er juillet 1941 au 30 juin 1942.

30. Requisitoire définitif, 52.

31. The question is did the GGI choose the texts included or were they mechanically transmitted by qualified intermediaries? One witness claims that in nine visits to Decoux over the course of two years he never once saw a single newspaper in the Admiral's offices. It is highly unlikely that Decoux would have been allowed mid-level administrators to decide liberally what to include given his penchant, euphemistically speaking, for discipline and hierarchy. See 3W/157, Cocubi Deposition.

leaving the *Légion* to focus on rallying the French to the National Revolution.³² In the game of placing the blame on everyone else, the *légionnaires* in charge of propaganda averred on the contrary their instructions came directly from the IPP.³³ It seems that Decoux did use the *Légion* as the voice for his ultraconservative views, through *Le Légionnaire*, the *Légion*'s publication that appeared in different editions in each of the five countries.³⁴ Robert Garry, former Propaganda Commissioner to the GGI and *légionnaire*, described himself as Decoux's spokesman and recalled the Admiral requesting he speak to *légionnaires* chapters, saying what Decoux couldn't say officially because of the potential repercussions with the Japanese.³⁵

The self-exonerating depositions by those having been involved with the IPP, the media, and the *Légion* paint a confusing picture of how the IPP operated internally, full of contradictions and blame. It remains clear the IPP censored the press heavily and encouraged the media to highlight or avoid specific topics. It is equally certain that the IPP produced direct propaganda to rally Frenchmen and nurture an emotional rapprochement between Europeans and Indochinese peoples. Many within the IPP were

32. Témoins à décharge, Robbe Statement.

33. 72AJ/1905, Roton Audition, 2-3.

34. 3W/149, Decoux Interrogation, 22 July 1948.

35. 3W/155, Garry Audition.

close to the anti-republican stance of Vichy.³⁶ Since anyone within the media chain of production who was openly critical of the government or its propaganda—from the IPP to the press—was reprimanded by the authorities, it follows that everyone who continued to be involved preferred to be part of the machine than bear the consequences of opposition, whether through personal conviction or cowardice. As such it is useful to examine the IPP's two principal activities of output, press and propaganda.

Press. While the IPP forbade contentious French works, “licentious” Vietnamese literature, and English language books imported from Shanghai, it directed most of its offices’ resources to controlling publications in French, quôc-ngu, Chinese, and even English and Japanese. It received frequent instructions on how to exercise this control, whether in broad outlines or case-specific topics.³⁷ The media were told to abstain from all editorials on the course or possible outcome of the war and abide strictly to the communiqués from Vichy, German, or Japanese news agencies (respectively OFI, DNB, and DOMEI), leaving publications able only to treat French or Indochinese events.³⁸

36. Minister of Colonies Platon asked Decoux to exclude anyone from the IPP whose prewar political positions could impede propaganda efforts and according to Jean Saumont, owner of *La Volonté Indochinoise*, many of Robbe's collaborators were ardently pro-German. See 1tel/704, No.2736, Platon to Decoux, 16 June 1941 and 72AJ/1906, Saumont Affair, 3. Coats turned quickly in Decoux's Indochina: Saumont had been the editor of the pro-government weekly *Indochine* until he was fired in August 1942 and though he later claimed to have had poor relations with Robbe, another witness described him as an Anglophobe, an anti-Semite, and an anti-Gaullist. See 3W/155 Casamatta Memoire. Also note that Saumont, who was also the editor of *La Voix d'Empire* until its demise in 1943, was investigated for his publications' “anti-Allied, anti-Gaullist, pro-Vichy propaganda.” See 72AJ/1906.

37. RSTNF 6282, Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service Local de l'IPP, 1er juillet 1941 au 30 juin 1942.

38. 3W/155, Saumont Report.

Before a piece could be printed, newspapers submitted articles to the IPP, which in turn rewrote or blacked out parts it deemed inappropriate. After cutting text, censors added information, made linkages, rearranged sections so that the author often didn't recognize his original article. The IPP prohibited editors from showing where it had made changes or which parts had been inserted by the authorities. Furthermore, it often violated the rules of deontology by not using quotation marks, using "interpretive license" to attribute comments to those who never made them directly. Once the IPP made changes, the original author was not allowed to withdraw his name from the article.³⁹ This process of censorship had a toll on readership as it caused significant delays in production and distribution.⁴⁰

The IPP coerced publications into falling in line by threatening their ability to go to press. It attributed and could revoke press licenses, without which a newspaper could not legally exist, and controlled the supply of paper itself, which it distributed to each publication.⁴¹ The authorities reserved higher quality paper for friendly publications, such as *L'Action*, and punished those who resisted following government directives with grayer paper—sometimes in insufficient amounts for publication—which made the type more difficult to read. Conveniently, the IPP also supplied the typeface characters themselves and followed a similar policy of carrot and stick quality allocation. When all else failed, before shutting a

39. 72AJ/1906, Saumont Case, 10-13 and INF 1198, Bui Luang Chieu letter, 25 April 1941.

40. *Nagaravatta*, 9 August 1941.

41. See RSTNF 453, Rapport sur la Situation du Tonkin, 1942-1943, Chapter II and Rapport sur la Situation du Tonkin, 1943-1944, Chapter II.

newspaper down, the IPP threatened to denounce editors to the Japanese authorities or simply refused to provide paper, officially stating that the government lacked the quantity necessary, as happened in 1943 with *Voix d'Empire* and *Hanoi-Soir*.⁴² This policy was particularly hard on local-language newspapers, many of which were forced to shut down.⁴³

Of course the best way to avoid sanctions was to praise the politics of the colonial administration, loyally follow its directives, and cover subjects that the GGI found useful.⁴⁴ The IPP pressured newspapers into inserting its own articles with clear instructions not to indicate anywhere that this was a government communiqué. According to Saumont, the IPP went so far as to impose headlines, page layouts, and pictures on publications, a credible assertion given that the government issued precise directives to address specific issues, and a refusal to cooperate led to the retaliations mentioned above.⁴⁵ During his postwar hearing, Robbe denied ever giving direct instructions, claiming his service provided only general propaganda themes, but ultimately this was a matter of degrees and the media were coerced into following anything the IPP desired. Decoux intervened personally to criticize or confirm IPP directives and the IPP kept close track of which newspapers reproduced which of its suggested articles.⁴⁶ This reinforces the idea that the IPP and the ADLOC shared responsibilities as the former needed the latter to monitor and enforce directives and ensure the proper relationships with the media.

42. For example 3W/155, Saumont Report.

43. INF 1210, Bulletin de Renseignement No.755/EO/R, 3 January 1945.

44. RSTNF 6335, Service Local de l'IPP Tonkin, Rapport Mensuel sur la Presse, January 1942.

45. 3W/155, Saumont Report.

46. 3W/155, Pisier Testimony; RSTNF 605; 6282; and 6335.

Vichy sent explicit instructions to Decoux's administration to maintain neutrality in the Pacific conflict, as it did in Europe and Decoux was happy to oblige since it was in his interests to keep the Japanese out of Indochina's affairs as much as possible. This meant the IPP had to walk another tightrope: vigorously attacking Gaullists and other dissidents of the regime while not ruffling the feathers of either the Axis or Allied powers.⁴⁷ Decoux was obsessed with fighting foreign propaganda, most of it transmitted through British Radio Delhi, whose French language shows, incessantly criticized the Vichy and Hanoi governments.⁴⁸ He demanded that all means be put to use simultaneously to counter what he labeled "lying affirmations." Vichy itself was concerned that Decoux repress with extreme vigor English and Gaullist propaganda and requested regular reports on the evolution of the situation.⁴⁹ The IPP told the press it was its duty to stress that all sympathy toward Gaullists was unpardonable and to be condemned without pity.⁵⁰ Through the media, the colonial authorities sought to portray Gaullists as threats to French unity, who weakened the position of France no matter the outcome of the war as dissidence could only play in the hands of foreigners.⁵¹ Who these foreigners were exactly was left intentionally vague: the British, the occupying powers, the Soviets, or the

47. Before Pearl Harbor, French Indochina continued to trade with the United States and afterward, Decoux understood that the entry of the United States in the war significantly increased the likelihood of Axis defeat and therefore the Allies needed to be managed accordingly.

48. Exposés et entretiens, 13 July 1943, 19.

49. For example Directives Politiques, 19 May 1943

50. 3W/149, Chef du Service Local [Tonkin] de L'IPP to the Editor of *Le Légionnaire*, 31 October 1942. By 1942-1943, as the tide of war turned, the GGI eased its anti-Allied language further.

51. 3W/152, Marcel Robbe, "Directive d'ordre général pour la propagande," 18 March 1943.

Jews. A regime bent on projecting an image of unity among Frenchmen needed the flexibility that comes with imprecision to provide cohesion and self-identification.⁵²

Until the 9 March 1945 *coup de force*, nothing could be published or broadcast that would offend either the Americans or the Japanese, though much of the information from the war came from Axis sources.⁵³ Moreover, Decoux asked the press to minimize friction with the British since its empire was at Indochina's doorstep.⁵⁴ Since Indochina continued to sell portions of its rubber production to the United States until December 1941, the IPP was careful to censure any disparaging remarks about the Americans to preserve economic relations.⁵⁵ A year later, Decoux continued to dissuade the press from printing anti-American pieces because he wanted to avoid alienating the US and put French Indochina—and himself—in a precarious position after the war. Gautier recounted that by the end of 1942 the Admiral knew that the Allies would prevail and was convinced that Indochina would stay out of the war zone as its geographic position was not strategically determinant to

52. For example 72AJ/1905, Telegram No.4850, Gougal to Goucoch, 22 September 1941.

53. 1tel/746, No.1608, Platon to Decoux, 16 March 1942.

54. Directives politiques, 9 October 1940.

55. RSC 307, Telegram No.3937, Gougal to Goucoch, 3 August 1941.

the outcome of the conflict.⁵⁶ This is corroborated by a Free French intelligence report from January 1943 that explicates the Admiral's dangerous balancing act and states: "Decoux has profoundly evolved in a favorable sense toward the Allies, in particular the Americans. His constant worry is to avoid any incident with the Japanese, who would use any pretext to increase their hold on the colony."⁵⁷ Decoux must also have been apprehensive to alienate the Americans further, knowing their President seemed inclined not to return France's colonies after an eventual Allied victory. Decoux may have prided himself on his apolitical character, but he continually hedged his positions throughout the war to save Indochina and possibly himself.⁵⁸

Anti-British propaganda focused more on dissuading dissidence than attacking the former ally, claiming that London did not have France's best interests in mind.⁵⁹ This also required a delicate approach. During the conflict in Syria, Decoux warned against any article that would further sour the Anglo-French Indochinese relations and preferred to focus on

56. Gautier, 68; GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, "Efforts faits depuis la dernière session et reformes politiques," (Session July 1942) for Decoux's remarks on how fortunes may be turning for the Japanese. Decoux received news of the Americans' plans not to keep Indochina under French sovereignty by the end of 1943 following Roosevelt's speech in Cairo. In 1942, he was most likely unaware of the American President's remarks that the French did not deserve to retain Indochina after the war nor of Roosevelt's notion to place the region under international trusteeship. Still, he appreciated the power the US would have in determining the fate of Indochina. See Jean-Michel Pedrazzani, *La France en Indochine, de Catroux à Sainteny* (Paris: Arthaud, 1972), 119; Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 262-266; 3W/154, General Charles Bernard Deposition, 10 June 1948 on the belief that Decoux saw, privately, with a favorable eye the successes of US and Russian armies.

57. INF 1226, Bulletin de renseignements No.36, 20 January 1943

58. In 1943, Decoux tried to establish contact with the Free French through the industrialist Monsieur François, sent to Alger via China to explicate the Indochinese situation to de Gaulle. Boisanger, with Decoux's approval, met with Gaullists from Chongqing around the same time.

59. For example, 72AJ/1906, Saumont Case.

the “Anglo-Gaullists’” refusal to come to Indochina’s aid in 1940.⁶⁰ The IPP also pushed the media to report on the damage caused by Allied bombardments in the metropole and how Great Britain failed to meet its reciprocal trade obligations with Indochina, leaving the colony lacking in necessary goods.⁶¹ While there was accuracy in these depictions, pushing these themes provided a useful and ubiquitous scapegoat to explain deteriorating living conditions due to the scarcity of resources, somewhat shielding the government and preserving its legitimacy. Nevertheless Decoux knew of the devastating effects of Radio Delhi and Radio Singapore (until 1942) on French and Indochinese morale and, while he punished anyone caught listening to foreign broadcasts, he proposed to the British General Consul in Saigon that the Allies stop emitting pro-Gaullist propaganda in Indochina and in return the GGI would cease anti-Free French messages destined for the South Pacific. Ultimately Decoux’s regime and Britain continued their propaganda warfare, both aware of the risks it posed to Indochinese stability but unwilling to back down.⁶²

Propaganda. The IPP’s propaganda efforts also consisted of printing materials (such as posters, billboards, and brochures), promoting theater productions, showing films, and broadcasting radio. Unlike the press, which it coerced into following its agenda, the IPP had absolute control over these activities insofar as organization and production. One of the first brochures put out by the IPP was “*Paroles du Maréchal*,” a collection

60. For example 3W/155, Gougal to Goucoch, 10 June 1941.

61. For example RSC 307, Telegram No.5820, Gougal to ADLOC, 8 November 1941.

62. For example Réquisitoire définitif, 45-46.

of Pétain's speeches, printed in French and quốc-ngu.⁶³ The authorities printed two editions in quốc-ngu: a luxurious version for the elites (5,000 prints) and a more popular version for the petite bourgeoisie. Decoux personally called on all Heads of ADLOC to publicize the tome and compared it to a plebiscite, believing the success of its sale would give a clue about the attachment of Indochina to France and its leader.⁶⁴ It is a surprising connection to make given that many within the target audience probably purchased the brochure to ingratiate themselves with members of the French community, and perhaps it was just a vulgar pressure tactic to encourage Heads of ADLOC to act. The GGI advertised the brochure well before its publication calling it "more than a book—a treasure," and promised to donate proceeds to the Franco-Indochinese Assistance for Victims of the War.⁶⁵ By 1942, the GGI printed over 60,000 editions of the second volume, in both French and quốc-ngu, with slightly fewer printings of the first.⁶⁶ Other brochures, many of which were signed with pseudonyms, intended to educate the French and Indochinese peoples on topics popular with Decoux such as the similarities between French and Vietnamese cultures, the insidiousness of Gaullism, or the importance of cultivating tradition (over 400,000 were printed by February 1942 on a broad range of topics).⁶⁷

63. Interestingly, the translator, Pham Huy Luc, was a Freemason, but he was spared reprisals due to the high quality of his translation and the belief within the administration that Vietnamese Freemasons joined loges to be closer to France. See RSTNF 6171, Delsalle letter, 4 December 1941.

64. RSTNF 5860, Decoux to ADLOC, 25 March 1941.

65. For example *Indochine*, 10 April 1941, 5.

66. For example RSTNF 6282, Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service Local de l'IPP, 1er juillet 1941 au 30 juin 1942.

67. For example 72AJ/1905, Pizier and Delemer Depositions, 2.

The IPP also printed over a million posters by 1942 alone, most of which consisted of Pétain's portrait or slogans but others emphasized the links between France and the Indochina, such as with images of Jeanne d'Arc or the Trung Sisters. The administration sold portraits of Pétain (70,000 by the end of the first quarter 1941) and placed billboards in various large city centers with similar themes (800,000 by February 1942).⁶⁸ The French were aware that the Indochinese often derided these posters but left them hanging until the liberation of Paris when they were discreetly taken down.⁶⁹ In spite of the ridicule they drew, disposing of them earlier would have been an even bigger embarrassment for the regime.

Decoux understood the need to carry his message to non-urban areas, even though Japanese troops were seldom seen there. The Admiral was a fervent proponent of tours and direct and frequent contact of French officials with local populations. The IPP created a system to broadcast speeches in urban and rural regions alike, using vehicles equipped with speakers to reach areas that had no fixed apparatus.⁷⁰ The administration promoted plays, gave prizes for best dramas and even worked with the Annamite Philharmonic Society to present a live portrait of the three principles of the National Revolution (Work, Family, Homeland). As with every other medium, the IPP pushed works that

68. For example RSTNF 6282, Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service Local de l'IPP, 1er juillet 1941 au 30 juin 1942.

69. For example 1/tel725, No.2008, Decoux to Platon, 19 April 1941.

70. For example, RSTNF 453, Rapport sur la Situation de Tonkin, 1942-1943, Chapter II.

adhered to its propagandistic designs while censoring those it found reprehensible.⁷¹

The IPP used film to reach quickly large numbers of people by transporting projection equipment by vehicle to remote areas devoid of screening rooms. Superseding all censorship measures in place since 1926, the 6 March 1942 decree left two commissions, located in Saigon and Hanoi, to decide, based on the principles of the National Revolution, whether to issue permits for the import of films to the entire colony.⁷² Vichy insisted that the GGI not allow the screening of any anti-German films, though ultimately left censorship to the discretion of the colonial authorities.⁷³ Private companies such as Ciné-Théâtres d'Indochine provided films specific to Indochina, but after 1943 local IPP offices produced and showed their own works with equipment ordered from Japan. Most screenings consisted of short films on the Marshal's speeches or travel (at least during the early years) and events in Indochina, such as festivals, ceremonies, or sporting events, with each segment separated by a cartoon. In Vietnam, a native speaker provided explanations to the public.⁷⁴

One of the IPP's most controversial initiatives was the production of the film *Documents* because of its glorification of Hitlerian Germany at the expense of French society under the Third Republic. Screened across Indochina, one witness described the movie as a series of contrasts

71. For example RSTNF 6282, Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service Local de l'IPP, 1er juillet 1941 au 30 juin 1942.

72. RSTNF 6282, Rapport annuel.

73. FM 1/tel747, No.3204, Brévié to Decoux, 1 June 1942.

74. For example RSTNF 453, Rapport sur la Situation de Tonkin, 1942-1943, Chapter II.

between identical social events in France and Germany: on one side the disorder, laziness, and waste of France and on the other the order, method, and work of Germany. One scene showing abandoned fields in France, with rusty carts was followed by another of German harvesting, organized and efficient among happy farmers. Another scene showed a fiery and quarrelsome session in the French Chamber of Deputies, contrasted with the dignified and disciplined session of the Reichstag. According to Colonel Legrand, stationed in the colony at the time, the film was extremely popular with Vietnamese of all classes, who fought over tickets to enter, though whether the this was because the locals could relate to the subject is questionable as it was it is just as likely that some found pleasure in ridiculing the colonial power. It is also uncertain whether less controversial films were equally popular, in which case the scene described would have had few connections to *Documents* itself. It is any case surprising that the colonial authorities would have found any interest in promoting the film within the Vietnamese community given their stress on promoting the entire French *oeuvre* in the region and their stance that Indochina had remained isolated from all that was nefarious in the Third Republic.⁷⁵ Legrand also claimed that many of the French in Hanoi had to wait months for the film to show again in cinemas located in Vietnamese quarters, though it is possible that "enthusiasm" to see the film was due to government pressure.⁷⁶

75 Also, the French were weary of German designs on Indochina since the years preceeding World War I, making it all the more bizarre that the GGI would allow (and promote to a certain extent) this film.

76. 3W/149, Dutreilh testimony and Legrand, 157-158.

Decoux's regime did not stop at encouraging attendance as once inside the theaters, it coerced the public into staying until the very end, creating a captive audience that had to endure a multi-pronged campaign. Propaganda speeches sometimes preceded the films and in one instance, students in Hanoi were told they were about to witness the "emotional minutes when thousands of Frenchmen greeted, as was their duty, the Savior of our country, the builder of a new France," a curious (and rote) use of language given the students were Vietnamese. They would see their "supreme leader, alive, alert, sometimes serious, sometimes smiling. . .speaking with the poor, comforting the wounded, the unhappy, encouraging the youth" (like the audience).⁷⁷ The GGI gave instructions to project before and after each intermission Pétain's weekly words of wisdom entitled "*Paroles du Maréchal*" in both French and local languages, which when possible were read out loud. At the end of each screening, before leaving, the public was told to rise and listen to *La Marseillaise* while a photo of Pétain appeared on screen.⁷⁸ The GGI was very attached to these rituals, to the point where Robbe wrote a note on 15 September 1941 complaining that the *Paroles* were presented too quickly between two short films and that the audience had not had the time to read and meditate upon its wisdom.⁷⁹ Claiming that most locals left the theater early out of ignorance or negligence, Decoux asked the IPP to

77. RSTNF 5998, Allocution précédant la présentation des films de Propagande aux élèves des écoles d'Hanoi, 30 Octobre 1941.

78. Decoux toyed with the idea of having the "patriotic demonstration" occur before the show, realizing that "the public would be hurrying to exit." VNNA, Mairie-Hanoi, ref 3456, "Decoux to Goucoch.

79. 3W/149, Robbe to President of the Local Committee of Control of the IPP, 15 September 1941.

intervene in the press and in youth organizations to inform the Indochinese of their duty to stay until the end. He believed it was particularly important that the youth be taught the importance of showing respect to the Head of State and get in the habit of observing in this matter a certain necessary discipline.⁸⁰ Habit of observation and internalization of values are two different things (that is appropriating and living by what is observed in order to be learned) and the Admiral was either blinded by his preternatural need for obedience or this audience participation in patriotic ritual was just another part of the show.

Whether for obedience or spectacle, Decoux's determination to have everyone stay until the end was such that he signed a circular on 16 September 1942 threatening legal action against anyone exiting before the presentation of Pétain's portrait.⁸¹ Dupré, Head of Judicial Services, wrote a circular two weeks later claiming that leaving the cinema before this ritual was unacceptable and that all passivity regarding the National Revolution should be considered an act of hostility toward the new regime and its leaders based on the 21 January 1942 law against antigovernment demonstrations. He found it impossible to accept that a spectator who sat through a film for at least two hours could not sit a few minutes longer to assist in the ritual patriotic demonstration.⁸² From this point on, policemen and *légionnaires* waited for spectators keen to leave too early, but according to one Gaullist informer, about a quarter of the

80. 3W/149, Decoux to ADLOC, 16 September 1942.

81. Réquisitoire définitif, 32.

82. 3W/149, Dupré to Monsieur le Procureur Général près la Cour d'Appel de Saigon, 30 September 1942.

public left half an hour early to avoid having to stand up in front of Pétain's portrait.⁸³

During his trial, Decoux defended his actions, claiming that a refusal to stay in the theaters and stand up during *La Marseillaise* compromised French unity which would have been seen as a sign of weakness in the eyes of the Japanese and the Indochinese peoples, perhaps giving some indication as to the reasoning behind the ritual.⁸⁴ He added that the national anthem was played in the cinemas and theaters of the British Empire, with few complaints, and he wanted to do the same in Indochina:

We were not in France, but in Indochina and I had to take into account not only the quasi-unanimous sentiments of the French, but the deep and hidden thoughts of the Indochinese, and above all the mistrust of the Japanese. . . Could we have tolerated that our national anthem and at the same time the image of the Head of State be ridiculed in public under the eyes of our administered Indochinese?⁸⁵

Radio. The IPP used radio to create linkages between the colony and Pétain's France, particularly through the broadcast of the Vichy-produced *Voix de France* channel. The GGI however never used radio as a principal tool of propaganda as it saw danger in promoting a medium that relied on airwaves that opponents of the regime could exploit through broadcasts of their own, particularly through Radio Delhi. Decoux was constantly battling against the foreign propaganda and could never decide on whether radio should be a means to counter these messages or

83. INF 1145(2), Bulletin de Renseignements No.308, 15 June 1943.

84. 3W/149, Decoux Interrogation, 11 June 1948.

85. 3W/149, Decoux Interrogation, 30 October 1948.

whether simply to confiscate radios to prevent people from listening at all. He often criticized *Voix de France* as an ineffective tool, pointing to the more polished and convincing broadcasts from the BBC.

Decoux saw *Voix de France* as uninformative, unreliable, and even a risk to the morale of the colony's population. Early on Decoux wanted to use radio to transmit Pétain's speeches, which he believed to be the best way to bring the Marshal closer to the colony and explain the achievements of the National Revolution. He had local administrators organize collective listening points in cafés and bars to reach audiences beyond owners of radios.⁸⁶ In 1941, Decoux asked Vichy if it was possible to have Pétain address the Indochinese directly, which the Admiral asserted would boost local morale.⁸⁷ Decoux called for fewer stories of heroism and more extracts from the French press that were really characteristic of the situation and analysis of words of the great writers of the National Revolution as well as details on the daily lives and activities of the different social categories.⁸⁸ He was presumably not referring to the assassination of hostages by the SS, the *Rafle du Vel d'Hiv* (when over 17,000 Jews were handed over to the Germans), or the French workers forced to leave their families to work in German factories as the only means of earning subsistence wages.⁸⁹ He asked for greater clarification on the domestic political situation of France since *Voix de France* provided Indochina with world news several days after foreign

86. VNNA, Mairie-Hanoi, ref. 3456, Delsalle circulaire, 5 November 1941.

87. For example 1/tel725, No.2127, Decoux to Platon, 25 April 1941.

88. 1/tel785, No.708, Decoux to Brévié, 13 February 1943.

89. It is not certain how familiar Decoux would have been with these events, but the extreme examples make my point. He had to have known that conditions in France were deteriorating.

agencies had transmitted their own versions, a risk to morale and credibility.⁹⁰ He complained to Vichy that the personal messages to families were broadcasted haphazardly, with no warning, so that the families concerned would often miss them, and admitted his disconcert when on one occasion in 1942 *Voix de France* transmitted its broadcast in Romanian. He reported that its signals were too weak, therefore inaudible, and when Germany refused to allow an increase in the signal, Vichy suspended broadcasts until the issue could be resolved.⁹¹ Decoux worried these cuts too would affect morale, and when Allied bombardment destroyed cables in June 1944, he feared panic among a population deducing that the political and military situation had worsened in the metropole.⁹² Ultimately, the inability to tell more stories of the metropole, specifically about how on the progress and achievements of the National Revolution, accelerated the weakening of the propaganda effort in the later years of the war as the colony was disconnected from France and the theory behind Pétainism was never backed up with concrete examples.

While Decoux admired Radio Delhi, with its clear transmission, good music, and clever speakers whose eloquent French was excellent, he decried *Voix de France's* uninteresting stories and superficial news, and asked IPP to work on ways to make Radio Saigon more effective, particularly for counter-propaganda.⁹³ Distancing himself from *Voix de*

90. 1/tel785, No.750, Decoux to Brévié, 16 February 1943.

91. For example 1/tel769, No.4109, Decoux to Briévé, 4 June 1942.

92. For example 1/tel799, No.495/S, Bléhaut to Decoux, 10 June 1944.

93. For example *Exposés et entretiens*, 13 July 1943, 29-30.

France, he told Vichy that it was preferable that the GGI alone should have a say in the manner in which Radio Saigon (through which *Voix de France* was broadcast) contributed to the propaganda effort since it was in the best position to assess needs on the ground.⁹⁴ He stressed Radio Saigon's potential role in affirming French sovereignty in the region by demonstrating that it was not under Japan's control, but to do this, he had to man the levers and dispense with Vichy's directives, which were under-informed and lacked dynamism due to time delays.⁹⁵ By claiming ownership of the propaganda machine—Indochina's isolation and poor communication with France allowing the Admiral considerable if not total leeway in the crafting of the GGI's message—Decoux was asserting his independence from Vichy because the latter was incapable of projecting itself in the colony.

It seems that Decoux was so unhappy with *Voix de France* that he was willing to forego any of its potential to create emotional linkages with the metropole, preferring to focus on local issues. Internally, Radio Saigon's programs aimed to reinforce nascent awareness of the federal nature of the Union through shows and press reviews in both French and Indochinese languages.⁹⁶ It was also a way for the GGI to fight tendentious information and saturate (if not dominate) the airwaves in calling the populations to rally around the Marshal.⁹⁷ Programs touched on the war in its global context, sometimes using British and American

94. 1/tel726, No.3627, Decoux to Platon, 6 July 1941.

95. Exposés et entretiens, 13 July 1943, 25-26.

96. VNNA, ref. 1307, Note 1441, Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général, 9 June 1942.

97. FP 14PA/8, Telegram No.6904, Brévié to Decoux, 8 November 1942.

sources, though never citing them and careful not to present anything the Japanese may have found controversial and only using DOMEI to relate events in the Pacific. The authorities were aware that a lack of information on Allied successes hurt Radio Saigon's credibility and pushed the public to BBC instead, as the "only radio able to tell the truth," but they preferred to defer to Japanese sensibilities.⁹⁸

Decoux also recognized the importance of using Radio Saigon to improve its image among audiences outside Indochina.⁹⁹ From 1943 onward, Radio Saigon, broadcasted shows in English and Chinese on news and events in Indochina or on French politics in Asia, stressing the successes of the French *oeuvre* in Indochina, targeted at audiences outside the region, in particular dissident colonies in the Pacific, namely New Caledonia.¹⁰⁰ Decoux told Radio Saigon to recount French activities in Indochina and provide political information (written by the GGI) while relying less on pro-Axis sources for information on the war (though in the Pacific it would have to continue to rely on DOMEI). Decoux also insisted upon improving the quality of English-language broadcasts, with more accurate translations and more eloquent speakers. Lastly, he sought to distinguish *French* Radio Saigon from Japanese transmissions in the colony, which began each broadcast announcing in English "This is Radio Saigon," lending to confusion as to the source of the information

98. Directives politiques, 23 May 1943.

99. Directives politiques, 21 June 1943.

100. New Caledonia had turned against Vichy and invited the Allied troops to station on the island. Decoux asked Vichy to strip the leaders there of their French nationality and was given the title High Commission of the Pacific as means of delegitimizing the governing forces in New Caledonia. Decoux even envisaged launching an attack on the island to liberate it from the Gaullists. This is documented extensively in 72AJ/1906.

and, in Decoux's eyes, was a deliberate attempt to undermine French sovereignty in the region.¹⁰¹ After the liberation of Paris the colonial administration continued to use Radio Saigon as its principal tool of external public relations. While the GGI dismantled few internal structures after August 1944—with the notable exceptions of the dissolution of the *Légion* and the removal of images of Pétain—Radio Saigon's tone changed drastically, qualifying Germany as the enemy and reporting more on the activities of de Gaulle's government.¹⁰²

Oral or "La Chaîne locale." In spite of its proclaimed neutrality, the GGI had to find ways to counter the Japanese threat to French political domination, a task altogether delicate yet essential to maintaining Indochina within the French empire. The presence of Japan's overwhelming military on Indochinese soil was a potentially explosive situation and the IPP reminded the press not to make any comments that could be found offensive.¹⁰³ However, the Japanese efforts to undermine French authority, through its commitment to its "Asia for Asians" discourse aimed at the Indochinese to highlight the benefits of participating in the Japanese-led Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, jeopardized the government's efforts to defend the legitimacy of its rule over the region, particularly as it was the only remaining colonial power in Southeast Asia. While the Japanese openly showed films and taught Japanese-language classes—to the great frustration of the colonial authorities—they also supported anti-French groups such as the Cao Dai

101. For example Directives politiques, 23 May 1943.

102. INF 1150, Vallat Report, Note sur la Situation en Indochine, September 1944.

103. 3W/155, Head of IPP to editors of newspapers, 11 December 1941.

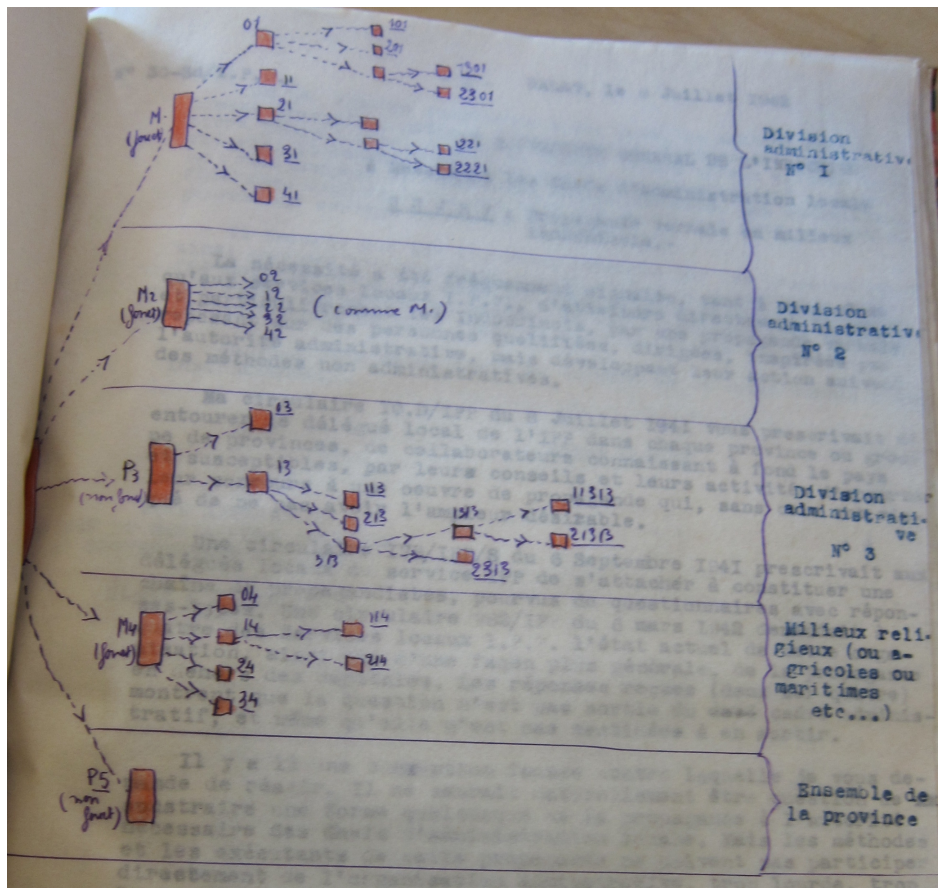
and Hoa Hao sects and the Vietnam Ai Quốc Dang (Vietnam Patriotic Party), giving its members protection against the French police.¹⁰⁴

While on the surface the Japanese and French authorities pretended to be on amicable terms, Decoux asked the IPP to organize a network of pro-French locals—called “*La Chaîne locale*”—to combat rumors spread by the Japanese who were competing with the colonial administration for the hearts and minds of the populations.¹⁰⁵ Using trusted Indochinese rather than government channels served the double purpose of increasing credibility¹⁰⁶ and avoiding Japanese objections by claiming such information as rumors spread outside administrative circles. Decoux envisioned a network that transmitted instructions from the IPP through the ADLOC to influential members of society in contact with the population at large. These contacts could come from any social background so long as they were trustworthy and credible in the eyes of locals. While this meant using “respected” individuals in the hierarchical sense, Decoux understood that certain elements closer to the public could also be effective in spreading rumors. He explained through the drawing below what the network could look like (the underlined names designate individuals in contact with the population):

104. Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Viêt-Nam de 1940 à 1952* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 90-95.

105. For example, 72AJ/1906, Gautier to ADLOC telegram, 30 September 1940, in Gautier Case, 7.

106. Decoux believed that “the Indochinese public, in this area, is more permeable to the neighbor’s talk than that coming too visibly from the administration.”



Decoux instructed the Heads of ADLOC to give orders or information to influential locals orally or by secret and personal letter containing a typewritten page, with no signature, date, or any administrative letterhead that would allow its origin to be identified, so that if discovered, the letter could easily be called a fraud.¹⁰⁷ This meant that the messages the GGI wanted to spread were inherently secretive, “whisper campaigns” rather than public statements so that, presumably, the administration could reap the benefits of the distortions of rumor mongering. The messages the GGI wanted to diffuse sought to discredit the Japanese and raise the prestige of the French, taking on a life of their own as they spread through society. Robbe explained after the war that these themes

107. Directives politiques, 14 September 1943.

were communicated to the ADLOC who orally passed them to their Chiefs of Provinces, who in turn orally transmitted them to propagandists [on the ground] and so on, so that they [the themes] penetrated the population. These themes were generally borrowed from Japanese propaganda and turned against it. This network functioned until the end without getting burned.¹⁰⁸

It is difficult to measure just how effective these networks were in promoting French themes among the locals because of the very nature of rumors and the Japanese may not have considered them enough of a threat to their own endeavors to deploy a plan to counteract them. By the time the authorities established reports—whose accuracy were debatable to begin with—many factors could have influenced public sentiments beyond the information originally injected by the French, which was just left to take on a life of its own. It seems that if the networks had worked as well as the government claimed they did, the French would have made better use of them to displace blame for scarcity of resources on the Japanese or the Allies, particularly during the Tonkinese famine of 1945. Instead, many within the Vietnamese community attributed the lack of food in Tonkin to French hoarding.¹⁰⁹

A United French Bloc as a Show of Strength: The Use of the Légion

Decoux understood that in order to show France's capacity to lead the Indochinese Federation into a bright future, the French community had to appear to be unwaveringly supportive of the government and its initiatives. The Admiral never stopped insisting on the importance of the

108. 3W/155, Robbe Statement.

109. Unfortunately I was unable to find more information on the *chaînes locales*, including their effectiveness or sophistication. There do not seem to be anymore documents in the archives that I researched.

French demonstrating their unity to show that the presence of Japanese troops in the region did not weaken the colonists' altruistic efforts in Indochina and prove that the authorities retained their legitimacy. Because of the severance in maritime relations with the metropole, Decoux could not replace administrators who were not genuinely conquered by the ideals of the National Revolution (see Chapter 5) nor could he be satisfied with his propaganda bureau as the only vehicle to push the benefits of the French *oeuvre* on the populations. Decoux used the *Légion française des combattants* (LFC) as a substantiation of French unity, and he did not hesitate to use coercive tactics to swell its ranks.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the *Légion* served as a tool to impose discipline among its members, specifically to exert pressure against dissenting voices. To convey confidence to the Indochinese peoples that the administration had the resolve and the support to continue to implement the French *oeuvre* in Indochina, Decoux wanted the *Légion* to constitute a compact and imposing bloc, giving everyone the impression of French permanence and vitality.¹¹¹ His position was that Frenchmen had the duty to forget their personal political preferences and unite around the government as a show of authority for the Japanese and the indigenous peoples when they witnessed the *Légion's* ceremonies, though he seemed to take this more for granted than base it on anything tangible.¹¹²

110 . The *Légion française des combattants* was an organizations regrouping French veterans whose purpose was to diffuse Pétainist doctrine in France. The LFC became the *Légion française des combattants et des volontaires de la révolution nationale* when it opened up, in 1941 to non-veterans. Parts of the LFCVRN would become the *Service d'Ordre Légionnaire* under Joseph Darnand, which itself would become the *Milice*.

111. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 365.

112. Boisanger, 35.

It is questionable whether the *Légion*'s ritual demonstrations mattered to the locals, who would not have been able to relate to them given their own exclusion from real decision-making within the government apparatus and the very French nature of the symbols and discoursed utilized. In addition, most would not have been privy to—or in likelihood even much interested in—the European political debates. This mattered even less to the Japanese whose only real concern was that France fulfill its part of the Franco-Japanese agreements in place, which included the effective administration of the colony.¹¹³ Nevertheless, discipline and unity were the administration's only tools to present the French as a force able to govern Indochina in the postwar, convinced that the locals looked up to the colonists; the French could not be tutors if they did not appear confident of the lessons they were teaching. One cannot lose sight of the importance of Decoux's military background in taking such an uncompromising stance, underscoring his penchant for discipline above all else. The Admiral saw his mission to keep the French flag flying over Indochina as a struggle against forces of opposition and just like on the theater of military operations, the commander could not tolerate any questioning of his decisions lest he endanger the success of the operation. Decoux's cabinet director Gautier described the Admiral as difficult leader to serve, whose penchant for decorum reflected his sensibilities for presentation rather than depth.¹¹⁴ Juxtaposed to Decoux's personality

113. Ultimately, Japanese did not want to administer the colony themselves, including the subsequent financial costs. It is also unlikely that any show of support for the government, however impressive, would have deterred the Japanese from pursuing its own propaganda initiative targeted at the locals.

114. Gautier, 29.

traits, parades and oaths of loyalty were very much part of high-ranking naval officials' repertoires, and in the officer's spirit, Decoux demanded unquestioning adherence to this course. For him, the *Légion's* ceremonies were an important part of the propaganda machine.

The *Légion* constituted a rigid, militarized, and hierarchical organization with which the authorities tried to influence its members with ultraconservative values of authority and discipline, but above all, Decoux wanted to regroup all Frenchmen no matter their social or professional positions, as a means of presenting the community as a unified bloc.¹¹⁵ For the Admiral, the *Légion* was the best instrument of French unity because it embraced Maurrassian values of hierarchy and order, which could be incarnated in the person of Pétain, a tangible focus point and example of which course to follow.¹¹⁶ It was the vehicle with which to drive the spirit of the Marshal.¹¹⁷ For Decoux, the National Revolution encouraged all Frenchmen to unite as one bloc following a doctrine designed to reconstitute to France its power and its global rank (through efforts of recovery and renewal into the postwar era), one dependent, as it had been for the previous hundred years, on the preservation of its empire, of which Indochina was an integral piece.¹¹⁸ Pétainism, built upon a Maurrassian base, rejected democracy and equality, and Decoux had to have known he would not be able to convince every Frenchmen, yet at the very least he tried to create a

115. For example 3W/149, Decoux Hearing, "Interrogatoire sur la Légion," 22 July 1948.

116. Discours prononcés, 15 August 1942; 30 August 1943.

117. For example 3W/158, Chauvet Deposition.

118. *L'Action*, 31 August 1943.

culture that discouraged dissent (one leveraged by threats of imprisonment). He was successful for the greater part of his administration—even if only in stifling open dissent, which was ultimately more important than ideological conversions—until the fall of the Vichy government rendered his embrace of Pétainism absurd and many Frenchmen suddenly rallied to de Gaulle.

Officially the *Légion* in Indochina shared the same objective as its metropolitan counterpart; the promotion of the values of the National Revolution. Decoux wanted the *légionnaires* to be militants, on a perpetual mission to convince those who doubted the doctrines of the new regime.¹¹⁹ The *Légion* printed brochures summarizing the ideas of the National Revolution and organized conferences around Pétainist themes, designed to explicate the needs and benefits of the programs to France considering its recent collapse.¹²⁰ From 1941 onward, each chapter had its own bimonthly publication, *Le Légionnaire*, at first distributed free of charge and then through paid subscription. It contained information designed to indoctrinate members further and equip them to explain the ideals of the movement. Some of its contents were read aloud on Radio Saigon.¹²¹ In spite of the force the GGI tried to put behind this propaganda effort, it lacked two components necessary for success: a continuous flow of information from the metropole regarding the successes of the National Revolution and a population that had witnessed

119. Discours prononcés, 1 May 1942.

120. For example, 1AFFPOL 885/1, Secrétaire d'état aux colonies to Monsieur le Directeur général de la LFCVRN, 20 June 1942. The brochures were published in both French and local languages but the conferences were mostly held in French.

121. 1AFFPOL 885/1, Telegram No.501, Decoux to Brévié, 15 June 1942 and Lamant: 31.

the collapse of the Third Republic. As time passed, the *Légion* lost any momentum it had, unable to frame its doctrine with concrete examples. It simply stood no chance of convincing anyone if it could not go beyond fiery speeches with nothing concrete to move beyond theory.

Ultimately, Decoux realized that adhering to the *Légion* did not constitute an acceptance of the values of the National Revolution but he nonetheless applied pressure on Frenchmen, particularly civil servants, to join its ranks. In the Admiral's view, even if the *Légion* was not able to turn those functionaries who remained, at least privately, loyal to the Republic (see Chapter 5), the sight of so many Frenchmen participating in public demonstrations of patriotism could only impress both Japanese and locals.¹²² Early on, the Admiral called for all veterans to join the *Légion* to work toward recovery and regeneration.¹²³ In January 1942 those who were not veterans were allowed to join as Volunteers of the National Revolution, which had equal standing with the veterans, though the latter kept a certain moral precedence.¹²⁴ The opening of the *Légion's* ranks to non-veterans (as had been done in the metropole) was the event that Decoux had been waiting for to push the rest of the French community to join, a step toward achieving the union of all Frenchmen, which served his political agenda better than limiting membership to veterans, which meant processions that were quantifiably less impressive.¹²⁵ It is also likely that the Governor General believed that

122. Pedrazzani, 107.

123. Discours prononcés, 25 April 1941. Emphasis in original.

124. Témoins à décharge, Cocubi Deposition, 6.

125. 3W/149, "Decoux to ADLOC," 31 October 1942.

once in the *Légion*, an *esprit de corps* would materialize promoting discipline (meaning the self-silencing of dissident voices) that could not exist if Frenchmen remained atomized outside the paragovernmental organization. Even if members did not become ardent Pétainists, belonging to the organization might dissuade them from betraying it (through open opposition to the government).

According to Decoux's hearing testimony, he only transmitted Vichy's orders to organize the *Légion*, after which the French community rose up with great enthusiasm, but this is hardly believable as the GGI engaged in coercion to increase membership until at least the summer of 1944.¹²⁶ The Admiral most likely took this position to downplay his own despotic leadership. During the postwar trials, some witnesses denied having felt pressure to join the *Légion*, and Boisanger himself was never a member in spite of his prominence as a high ranking official.¹²⁷ The court however found a basis for allegations that Decoux demanded that functionaries affiliate themselves with the *Légion*, regardless of the Admiral's claims that he only "recommended" them to do so.¹²⁸ The strong language in Decoux's 27 June 1941 circular letter underscores the GGI's commitment to seeing every eligible civil servant join the *Légion*, without openly threatening those who refused: "I ask you to pursue an active propaganda aimed at veterans so that laggards sign up urgently for the *Légion*, as is their duty. This obligation is particularly imperious for functionaries and we must not have any defections," especially at the

126. 3W/149, Decoux Hearing, "Interrogatoire sur la Légion," 22 July 1948.

127. For example 3W/157, Duval Deposition; Boisanger, 35

128. 3W/149, Decoux Hearing, "Politique intérieure," 11 June 1948.

higher ranks as this would “encourage indiscipline” among subordinates. He warned that the refusal to join would promote a spirit of anarchy of ideas and consequently anarchy altogether.¹²⁹ While painfully dramatic, this position reinforces the idea that Decoux wanted to create an *esprit de corps*, a culture of discipline through belonging that superseded individual action, thereby presenting a united bloc to the locals and the Japanese.

After the creation of the *Volontaires de la Révolution Nationale* (which opened the *Légion* to non-veterans), Decoux called those civil servants who refused to join “deplorable examples” and wanted to know which functionaries refused to enroll, envisaging professional sanctions against them, such as withholding their advancement.¹³⁰ Decoux asked his subordinates to establish lists of those who “persisted in their culpable abstention.”¹³¹ The repercussions of having one’s name on such a list are unclear as testimonies of non-*légionnaires* given after the war are themselves contradictory. One civil servant testified that he was never overtly pressured into joining, but saw his name on a list meant for the GGI and was made to understand that when it came to his career “nothing was guaranteed.” Others claimed that Decoux paid no real attention to the lists and promoted functionaries regardless of whether they were members.¹³² The perception that career opportunities depended on one’s affiliation to the *Légion* led many, who were otherwise

129. 3W/149, Decoux to ADLOC, 27 June 1941. Of course in 1941 these would have had to have been veteran functionaries, but the desire to enroll every civil servant did not change once the VRN was created.

130. 1/tel771, No.7212, Decoux to Brévié, 28 October 1942.

131. 3W/149, Decoux to ADLOC, 27 June 1941; 31 October 1942.

132. 72AJ/1905, Camu Deposition, 2; 3W/158, Berthet Deposition, 3; and Chauvert Deposition, 28.

lukewarm, to join through fear or opportunism as some civil servants attested that *légionnaires* received significant privileges.¹³³ One witness testified that it was official policy, originating from Vichy, to promote *légionnaires* “as often as possible,” and top ranking members had extraordinary access to the Admiral to give their opinions.¹³⁴ On this issue as well postwar statements are contradictory.¹³⁵ Officially, Decoux insisted that the *Légion* should not be a means to personal gain, preferring to deny admission to those seeking advancement.¹³⁶ He openly promised to stress quality over quantity, but as discussed, this is in contradiction with the Admiral’s goal of seeing every Frenchman a *légionnaire*, suggesting that he may have been out of touch with the National Revolution’s power to regroup and unite. He must have realized that many within the French community resisted Pétainism and it seems absurd that he viewed adherence to the *Légion* as a demonstration of the popularity of the government. Perhaps the quest for quality over quantity was more for show, and if so then all declarations that there was no relationship between non-adherence and career possibilities can be ignored. In any case, the fear of reprisal was real—this may have been the government’s best weapon—and whether or not there were real

133. 3W/149, Graille Deposition.

134. 3W/155, Casamatta Memoir.

135. For example, Cocubi denied any privilege given to *légionnaires*. See Témoins à décharge, Cocubi Deposition, 25.

136. Exposés et entretiens, 23 July 1943, 19.

consequences mattered little since the outcome was that few wanted to risk sticking out.¹³⁷

The case of Georges Auvray, Chief Engineer of Public Works in Laos, illustrates how the government coerced civil servants to join the *Légion* through fear rather than direct consequences. On 8 July 1941, Gauthier, *Résident supérieur du Laos*, wrote Auvray that he considered it “an imperious duty and a question of discipline on a national level” for functionaries who were veterans to join the *Légion* and wanted to know if Auvray continued to refuse and if so, to explain his reasoning.¹³⁸ The engineer replied that his experience during the Great War prevented him from adhering as it deprived him of the “spirit of collaboration with the invader [Germany]” that he perceived to have taken over the LFC.¹³⁹ Gauthier unsurprisingly retorted that it was inadmissible that the Chief of an important department dissociate himself from his comrades and refuse to conform to the directives given by the Chief of the Colony.¹⁴⁰ According to Bigorgne, Auvray’s superior, Decoux himself wanted Auvray to join the LFC to appease the “worried minds” of the small community of Frenchmen in the region by proving that he was not an opponent of the regime’s policies.¹⁴¹ Auvray persisted in his refusal with no apparent repercussions, until the end of 1942, when he was expressly

137. 72AJ/1905, Camu Deposition, 4. Another explanation is that he did not believe in the *Légion* and was presenting a facade through the appropriate rhetoric, but Decoux’s military and ultraconservative background would ostensibly have been favorable to the *Légion*.

138. 3W/156, Gauthier to Auvray, 8 July 1941.

139. 3W/156, Auvray to Gauthier, 10 July 1941.

140. 3W/156, Gauthier to Auvray, 11 July 1941. Emphasis in original.

141. 3W/158, Bigorgne Deposition.

asked to fill a subordinate vacancy with a *légionnaire*.¹⁴² Incensed by this request, Auvray declined to exclude co-workers who, like him, preferred to distance themselves from the National Revolution, which he accused of cozying up to the New German Order.¹⁴³ Less than three weeks later, Decoux issued a decree suspending Auvray without pay.¹⁴⁴ Auvray was known to have sympathies for the ultraconservative ideas behind the National Revolution, but the GGI felt his comments on the *Légion*'s collaborationist propaganda reflected poorly on the government, and it was officially on this basis that a furious Decoux decided to dismiss him.¹⁴⁵ Whether other civil servants believed the official version or saw in Aubray's dismissal proof that the government was on a mission of *épuration* (see Chapter 5) cannot be ascertained, but certainly Bigorgne's response to an unsuccessful petition to reinstate Auvray could not have alleviated fears: "Our first duty, our only duty, is to serve; serve without [discussing] the government's policies. . . I am counting on the spirit of discipline of all to conform rigorously to this order."¹⁴⁶ What is interesting about this case is that membership in the *Légion* was more important than adherence to ultraconservative values. Certainly Auvray criticized the government indirectly through his association between the National Revolution and collaboration, but he could have been left alone to his ultraconservative ideas. Instead, he was harassed for setting a poor

142. 3W/156, Bigorgne, Inspecteur général des travaux publics to Auvray, 21 October 1942.

143. 3W/156, Auvray to Bigorgne, 4 November 1942. Note how this position was held by significant numbers of *légionnaires* in France. See Chapter 2.

144. 3W/156, Arrêté No.8566, 23 November 1942.

145. 3W/158, Bigorgne Deposition.

146. 3W/156, Bigorgne to subordinates, 20 February 1943.

example by not joining the *Légion* and setting a poor example to others. This shows the administration's stress on quantity rather than quality and the predominance of unity over ideological conviction (or persuasion).

While the administration prided itself on the *Légion*'s swelling ranks, Vichy condemned the strong arm tactics to recruit members,¹⁴⁷ but it seemed mostly motivated to avoid including "undesirables" within the ranks. Vichy preferred the use of "persuasive propaganda" to attract members, leaving individuals free to decide.¹⁴⁸ There was real pressure to make this propaganda effective, as the metropole asked Hanoi to provide it with monthly updates regarding the *Légion*'s activity and numbers.¹⁴⁹ By July 1943, Indochina counted 7,080 *légionnaires*—including roughly 2,700 in both Tonkin and Cochinchina and 1,200 in Annam—out of a French population of 49,000 (it should be noted that women were almost nonexistent in the ranks).¹⁵⁰ In some departments, every civil servant was a member of the *Légion*.¹⁵¹ Within its ranks, and particularly after 1942, the *Légion* counted Freemasons, who, according to Gaullist sympathizer General Sabattier, were willing participants in *légionnaire* processions.¹⁵² All signs however point to a GGI that continued to replace persuasion with coercive tactics in spite of Vichy's own pressures.

Cult of Personality, Cultural Parallels, and Festivals

147. Which could signify that Decoux's quality over quantity position was taken to assuage Vichy's concerns over these strong arm tactics.

148. 1AFFPOL 885/2, Telegram No.6124, Brévié to Decoux, 6 November 1942.

149. 3W/155, Gabeur Testimony. The latest record I was able to obtain is from 5 July 1943.

150. 1AFFPOL 885/1, Telegram No.1089/SS, Decoux to Bléhaut, 5 July 1943 and Témoins à décharge, Cocubi Deposition, 7.

151. 72AJ/1905, Camu Deposition, 5.

152. Sabattier, 64.

Decoux's military background and Maurrassian influence made him particularly receptive to building a cult around Marshal Pétain to rally both French and Indochinese populations. Decoux did everything to maintain the spirit of veneration of Pétain across the society by making him the authentic representative of the distant homeland and the aspirations that he embodied according to the discourse of the National Revolution.¹⁵³ The care involved in creating this cult of personality did not necessarily go further in Indochina than in Vichy, where busts of Pétain in military attire were placed in every city hall, countless books targeted at all age groups published to sanctify his life, and where the Marshal personally asked photographers to increase the blue of his eyes.¹⁵⁴ Vichy sent some of these propaganda materials to Indochina, providing Hanoi with footage and photographs of the Marshal, but this was intermittent at best until maritime relations were severed, after which physical materials only trickled into the colony.¹⁵⁵ That said, even when the materials no longer reached Indochina directly (by 1941), the GGI's efforts continued unwaveringly. The Governor General believed that for most of the French community in Indochina the Marshal incarnated France and that among the Indochinese, this sentiment was even more alive. It is plausible that Pétain did incarnate France within the French community in Indochina, as much evidence points to similar sentiments in the metropole, but even if the Indochinese peoples made the same association, it is unlikely that there would have been many positive

153. 3W/149, Decoux Interrogation, 11 June 1948.

154. Laurent Gervereau, "Y a-t-il un 'style Vichy?'" in Gervereau and Peschanski, eds., 123-124.

155. For example 1/tel725, No.1625, Decoux to Platon, 2 April 1941.

emotional connections with the leader in a distant land. Yet is on this basis of this belief that the GGI drew parallels between Pétain and Confucius (see below), but unlike within the French communities, the image of Pétain had to be created as it is doubtful that many locals had heard of the Victor of Verdun, much less had any sentimental attachments to him or the legend that surrounded him.

The cult of Pétain could only exist within the idea of the National Revolution, not the actions of the Vichy government. The GGI could not replicate the Pétainist program as it existed—if only theoretically—in the metropole because it lacked the depth of information and more importantly, it understood that it had to be flexible to reach the local populations and maintain French sovereignty over the region.¹⁵⁶ During his trial, Decoux defended his actions by claiming that Indochina received only truncated and tendentious information on the actions of the Vichy regime, and ensuring the absolute loyalty to the Marshal, through the extolment of his virtues, was critical in maintaining Indochina in the fold of the empire.¹⁵⁷ The Admiral also denied an overzealousness in his promotion of Pétain's cult, claiming that he was often accused by other Frenchmen of tepidness toward the Marshal, but the ubiquitousness of the Marshal's image (if nowhere else on the millions of posters and daily publications printed) seems to contradict this position.¹⁵⁸ In many ways

156. As examined in Chapter 2, in the metropole itself the National Revolution as an idea and the actions of the Darlan and Laval governments were often dissimilar, the former utilized as propaganda and the latter directed more by pragmatism than ideology. In this sense, the GGI and Vichy operated similarly in spite of inconsistency of communication.

157. Réquisitoire définitif, 39.

158. 3W/149, Decoux Interrogation, 11 June 1948 and Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 359-360. For commentary on Decoux's character and perceived lack of commitment to the values of the National Revolution, see the anonymous letter in INF 2698.

the lack of information coming from Vichy provided excuses for the GGI to make its own propaganda policies, though the GGI understood that a balance had to be achieved between messages that would resound with the local populations and keeping with the general themes that would make it easier to report back to Vichy. Robbe wrote to his subordinates in the IPP:

It seems essential to repeat that propaganda in Indochina does not obligatorily have as a goal the extension or amplification of the metropolitan propaganda. It would be distancing oneself from all reality not to give our propaganda the local character that fits in with the permanence of the interests that we must defend and with that which expects the government of the National Revolution. . .[P]ropaganda must put at the forefront Indochinese problems, and underline the necessity for all to rally around, with order and discipline, the Head of the Federation. . .Less philosophy and more action.¹⁵⁹

The administration pushed themes they believed fit well with local values, such as hierarchy, and the creation of Pétain's cult of personality fit these objectives well.¹⁶⁰ Despite Decoux's protestations during his trial, the discourse under his regime elevated Pétain to almost Christ-like heights. The government asked that each week, in every school and public institution, people meditate on the Marshal's sayings or extracts of his speeches, which were also reprinted in the newspapers.¹⁶¹ In his 1943 New Year's message, Decoux asked for quasi-religious devotion in the name of Pétain's sacrifice:

159. 3W/152, Marcel Robbe, "Directive d'ordre général pour la propagande," 18 March 1943.

160. RSTNF 5996, Résident Supérieur au Tonkin to Resident Chiefs of Provinces, Date unknown.

161. 3W/149, Decoux Interrogation, 30 October 1948.

The luminous figure of the Marshal detaches itself more and more in the tormented background of events like the very image of the *patrie*. There should be no place from now on, in our hearts, for sentiments other than total veneration in his person, while at the same time the absolute desire to serve, more loyally than ever, the great *oeuvre* to which he dedicated his life. His example must dominate each of our thoughts and actions.¹⁶²

When calling on the French colonies in India and the Pacific to end their dissidence, Decoux promised that the Marshal “in his high wisdom and immense goodness, [would] know how to distinguish the criminal instigators of dissidence and having punished them, [would] open the doors of the *patrie* to its reunited [*retrouvés*] children.”¹⁶³ The weekly *Indochine* went so far as to print “Philippe Pétain, on his forehead that knew the laurel, wore the crown of iron of responsibility, and will have the crown of thorns of pain.”¹⁶⁴

Decoux’s administration sought to accelerate Franco-Indochinese rapprochement by stressing his patriarchal qualities and imagining parallels between the Marshal and Confucius. Decoux asserted that the prestigious symbol of the Marshal could help him maintain the allegiance of 25 million Indochinese, through his age, which the French believed the Indochinese people to associate with wisdom and virtue.¹⁶⁵ The administration depicted Pétain as the essence of the superior man, and the press exalted the Marshal’s qualities as a leader, recounting stories of

162. Discours prononcés, 1 January 1943.

163. Discours prononcés, 11.

164. *Indochine*, 23 January 1941.

165. GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, “Moyens propres à favoriser le rapprochement Franco-Indochinois,” Session July 1942.

his glorious past.¹⁶⁶ Maurice Ducoroy, the General Commissioner of Sports and Youth wrote in his memoirs that Pétain's "universally known name, his prestige of victor in the Great War, his advanced age, his peasant origins, made him, in this part of Asia, a respected and venerated standard bearer of our *patrie*."¹⁶⁷ Corroborating this view on the colonial government's reasoning and beliefs, Gautier wrote after the war:

For the people of the Far East, Marshal Pétain was the embodiment of the superior man [i.e. the Confucian ideal of *junzi*, Viet. *quan tu*]. Carrying many years [*chargé d'années*], equating wisdom, covered in the triple glory of the scholar, the diplomat, and the military mandarin, expressing himself with messages both clear and profound, translatable in all languages, and transposable in all traditional philosophies, never had a French Head of State generated in Indochina such respect and admiration.¹⁶⁸

When Laval received *de facto* full powers in November 1942, Hanoi shifted its discourse and presented the Marshal as a symbolic personage and no longer the Head of State, placing him above politics and maintaining his patriarchal aura.¹⁶⁹ The government had to create the idol and the attachment to Pétain within a population that did not share the same emotional connection as the French following the Great War. This remained nonetheless an invention, or rather the GGI had to infuse the Marshal into the local context, in an Orwellian attempt to create a narrative that Pétain had always had an important place in Indochinese

166. For example *Indochine*, 30 April 1942, 1-3.

167. Maurice Ducoroy, *Ma trahison en Indochine* (Paris: Éditions inter-nationales, 1949), 108.

168. Gautier, 71-72.

169. For example 3W/157, Cocubi Deposition.

lore, a dubious assertion. Effective or not in the long run, Decoux's regime placed all its bets on its ability to forge these emotional links.

Hanoi drew tenuous parallels between the National Revolution and Confucianism to promote locals' loyalty and minimize political disturbances. The colonial administration was convinced that Pétainism would appeal to the Indochinese peoples through the Marshal's persona as a revered sage juxtaposed with its promotion of tradition.¹⁷⁰ Under the Third Republic, colonial authorities had seen Confucianism as means of preserving the monarchy, but Western reform and its cultural influences eroded many of its values. Governors General like Pierre Pasquier already tried to revive traditionalism in Vietnam, including Confucianism. Early on, the French understood Confucianism as based on a hierarchical view of society, obedience, and filial piety leading individuals to shun political and social conflict in favor of moral and ethical development and Decoux's efforts continued in this vein (see Chapter 5).¹⁷¹ In Pétainism, whose Maurrassian roots emphasized social hierarchy, order, and the community, Decoux had a more powerful ideological tool to create parallels between France and Vietnam, one that previous administrators lacked, catching them in a contradiction between the values of the republic from which they came and the colonial society they maintained. In his memoirs, Decoux made a tendentious connection between the new slogan "Work, Family, Homeland" and the traditional aspirations of the peoples. For the Admiral, these were unhelped for

170. Raffin, "Tours of Duty," 196.

171. Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 112.

conditions that permitted the construction of parallels between Pétainism and Confucian morality.¹⁷² Even Georges Sabattier, not renowned as a Pétainist zealot, concurred: “it is undeniable that the motto ‘Work, Family, Homeland’ had, because of its objectivity and its kinship with ancestral traditions, a particular resonance with the Annamite spirit.”¹⁷³

The press repeatedly published articles establishing parallels between Confucius and Pétain that transcended time and space. In 1940, Nguyễn-Việt-Nam claimed that “Work, Family, Homeland” was the European equivalent to the four essential duties taught by Confucius: *Tu*, *Tê*, *Tri*, *Binh*, or self-cultivation, managing one’s family, governing one’s country, and keeping peace in the world. He asked “Throughout the centuries and the continents, a same elevation of thought inspired the directives of the great philosopher whose moral influence is still so vivacious in our country, and that of the great Soldier and statesman who intends to regenerate France. Is this not the mark of the common destiny of France and Annam?”¹⁷⁴ Another author wrote:

The Marshal never hesitated to sacrifice his person, in the most difficult circumstances, to serve men overwhelmed by a great moral and material disaster. Confucius never ceased to renounce all favors, all honors that were offered to him to keep the freedom of his thoughts and his word, to serve the cause of the little people subjected to the demands and ambitions of princes and their ministers. . . The two people, French and Annamite, have found a common spiritual patrimony: their respective director of conscience practiced the same moral doctrine, the same social action.¹⁷⁵

172. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 360.

173. Sabattier, 53.

174. *Indochine*, 21 November 1940, 14.

175. *Indochine*, 28 May 1942, 1-2.

The press extracted phrases from Pétain's speeches and juxtaposed them with traditional sayings to establish further connections between the thoughts of the Head of the French State and the ancestral Vietnamese culture while the government published 70,000 pamphlets in quốc-ngũ entitled *Parallel Franco-Annamite Maxims*.¹⁷⁶

In the same vein, GGI propaganda emphasized the hierarchical nature of both Confucianism and Pétainism as part of its efforts to elevate the prestige of the local monarchs. In this effort, the colonial administration found an ally in the court-controlled *Gazette de Huê*. In his 1942 article, Nguyễn Tiên Lang affirmed that the Vietnamese monarchy conformed to the ideals of social hierarchy which Pétain (and Maurras) so often evoked as essential for national renovation. According to the author, serving the Vietnamese monarchy meant serving France and the National Revolution which wanted to give back to its empire a sense of its own ideals. Loyalty to the emperor meant loyalty to France.¹⁷⁷ Effigies of Pétain and the Vietnamese emperor Bao Dai were placed side by side as guarantors of the traditional order.

From drawing extemporal parallels between Pétainism and Confucianism it was a small step to linking the destinies of France and its colony, claiming that France's *oeuvre* would root Indochina in the greatness of its history while allowing it to flourish and join the community of modern nations. In spite of defeat, France alone, one editor wrote, could let the region "advance on the road of Progress and

176. For example Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 65.

177. Lockhart, 122.

Civilization.”¹⁷⁸ Another newspaper claimed that the work of the National Revolution toward national recovery fit in “perfectly with the current needs of [Vietnam]. Its program of restoration of moral values, of invigoration of the youth, applies well to the Annamite people.”¹⁷⁹ One could read in *Indochine* that

France, thanks to the immense wisdom of the Marshal, propose[d] a doctrine of conciliation of a universal coherence and reach. It need[ed] to allow Indochina, to Annamites, to find the equilibrium point that suits them and that is no more the traditional and Confucian concept than democratic individualism, daughter of liberalism. . . The return to traditions, as much for the French as for the Annamites, must be matched by a positive effort of renovation that alone [could] allow to surpass the present and the past. France’s current experience, by which it is universal, must help the Annamites to search and understand.¹⁸⁰

This stress on universality is key to understanding the overall French effort: it is on this linearity of thinking, this idea that all peoples follow a similar progression, that the French based the legitimacy of their tutelage.

However, in wanting to transpose these ideals, the French overestimated the importance of Confucianism in Vietnam. While parts of the Indochinese elite may have fallen under the spell, it is doubtful that the majority of the population gave credence to the parallels drawn between Pétain and Confucius. As noted, the French had to infuse society with the myth of Pétain, who was said to be twice the savior of France, but never the savior of Vietnam. The possibility that the myth could be transposed in Indochina was minimal and any amount of propaganda

178. *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 8 October 1941.

179. *L’Annam Nouveau*, 21 September 1941.

180. For example *Indochine*, 8 October 1942.

was not likely to create an emotional attachment among the Indochinese peoples, who were never going to feel connected to a European, particularly one who had never set foot in the region. While the French administration may have interpreted the pervasiveness of Pétain's portraits inside homes as a sign of approval and loyalty, little evidence points to a genuine popularity of the Marshal with the masses and government intelligence reports consistently lamented that the Indochinese peoples concerned themselves only with their daily needs, staying away from politics.¹⁸¹ The government often used these reports to make policy (given that it was often the only information it had), in spite of their questionable capacity to assess public opinion accurately given cross-cultural differences. It would seem that the French confused disinterest in politics with disinterest in French symbols.

The colonial administration relied heavily on ceremony and festivals to inculcate the values of the National Revolution; reinforce the imagined linkages between France and Indochina, including the forging of the Indochinese Federation under French leadership; and strengthen colonial authority. While the administration reserved its greatest fanfare for Joan of Arc Day every year, it never neglected to fuss over minor events such as inaugurations of monuments or statues of Pétain.¹⁸² As part of its mission, the IPP promoted most of these festivals alongside local authorities, while the *Commissariat général aux Sports et à la Jeunesse*

181. Pierre Lamant, "La Révolution Nationale dans l'Indochine de l'Amiral Decoux," *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 138 (1985): 35.

182. *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 20 March 1942; 3W/157, Cocubi Deposition.

organized youth and sporting events and the *Légion* orchestrated its own ceremonies.

Each festival—no matter the scale—was an integral part of the government's efforts to rally French and Indochinese communities and continue to equate Pétain and national renovation. While the First of May, Workers Day, was politically charged in Europe before the war, it seldom witnessed class related disruptions in Indochina apart from sporadic violence in the 1930s.¹⁸³ Abiding by Vichy's policies in the metropole, Workers Day was renamed Day of Work and Social Peace, in harmony with Vichy's corporatist ambitions and away from its disruptive syndicalist roots. Moreover, 1 May fused celebrations of St. Philippe (as in Philippe Pétain) with Joan of Arc Day (a few days later), symbolically linking the two personages and their common struggle, and emphasizing unity and discipline based on nationalistic sentiments (see Chapter 2). Joan of Arc Day was supposed to reinforce the achievements of the National Revolution—while refraining from criticizing the previous regime in order not to affect the prestige of France's oeuvre in the eyes of the locals—and remind the French community of its duties towards the state.¹⁸⁴ These festivals encapsulated the efforts of the administration to rally French and locals alike (often through pressure or coercion), evoking moral obligations that, under the guise of a blueprint for social renewal,

183. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 203. This can of course be attributed to the colonial authorities' repression of the ICP and the Trotskyists during the 1930s, even during the period of relative relaxation under the Popular Front, when a greater degree of freedom for political activity in Cochinchina was still counterbalanced by a considerable degree of control.

184. RSTNF 6636, Circulaire No.426-3/CB, Delsalle to Provincial Chief Residents, 25, February 1942.

provided the authorities with justifications to punish those whose actions or words ran counter to said duties and thus opposed to the interests of the state and the collective whole.

Joan of Arc Day also provided the opportunity to link further French and Indochinese (though particularly Vietnamese) histories and destinies through the triangulation of Pétain, Joan of Arc, and the Trung Sisters. The Trung Sisters, regarded as national heroines in Vietnam, led a revolt for three years (40-43AD) against Chinese rule when the Chinese governor moved away from a policy of associationism toward outright Sinicization.¹⁸⁵ In the early twentieth century, Vietnamese society had witnessed a revival of this legend through plays recounting their heroics. One of the most famous hagiographies was Phan Boi Chau's 1911 drama depicting the sisters' love of country and their desire to expel the foreign invader.¹⁸⁶ Of course the French had to achieve the virtually impossible task of trying to retain retain the idolization of the Trung Sisters while redirecting the morale of the stories away from the independentist messages of many plays, including Phan Boi Chau's work. More useful were works emphasizing nation building and the loyalty of untrained peasants who willingly risked their lives in following the sisters.¹⁸⁷ The colonial administration tried to create a collective memory to reinforce the bonds between French and Vietnamese, where the former was no longer another foreign aggressor, having a shared set of experiences, but a

185. David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 10.

186. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 200-201.

187. Sarah Womack, "The Remaking of a Legend: Women and Patriotism in the Hagiography of the Trung Sisters," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 9, No.2 (1995): 41.

friend and empathizer against the Japanese occupier.¹⁸⁸ Like Joan of Arc, the Trung Sisters suffered in death. The story of Jeanne d'Arc was meant to stir up nationalist sentiments within the Indochinese peoples that were delineated within the framework of the French empire and the Indochinese Federation. As Christianus wrote in *Indochine*:

Jeanne wouldn't approve any colonial doctrine other than one generous and without reproach, mindful of justice and charity. . It is beautiful to think that while wanting to be themselves [that is in cultivating a sense of national identity], the wise Annamites will recognize themselves as sons of the empire, such has the reality of France entered the history of this people to make up its nature of today and of tomorrow with the other realities of the soil, of the face, and the secular traditions.¹⁸⁹

Every year the festivals surrounding Joan of Arc Day were marked with fanfare and orchestrated acts of loyalty and devotion to the empire, with strong emphases on youth and vitality. In 1941, in Vietnam and Laos, French and Indochinese (including 20,000 students in Hanoi and 7,000 in Hué) gathered in front of statues of Jeanne d'Arc to vow their allegiance to the empire and the Marshal. In France's first attempt to associate Jeanne with the Trung Sisters, children reenacted scenes of both Jeanne and the Sisters' lives and sang *La Marseillaise* in front of tens of thousands of spectators, and processions marched through town streets carrying statues and portraits of Jeanne d'Arc and the Marshal, giving the ceremonies a quasi-religious feel.¹⁹⁰ The following years witnessed similar fanfare across Indochina and the *Légion* participated more actively

188. Raffin, "Tours of Duty," 194.

189. *Indochine*, 15 May 1941, 4.

190. 1/tel725, No.2289, 2602, and 2610, Decoux to Platon, 3 May and 17 May 1941. Note that celebrations in Cambodia were canceled as the country mourned the death of the King Sisowath Monivong.

in the day's organization.¹⁹¹ Celebrations sometimes mixed youth and workers, as occurred in the Clotilde mine (near Uong Bi in Northeastern Tonkin) in 1942 when miners and students pledged their loyalty to France and listened to stories of Jeanne d'Arc and the parallels between the French heroine and the Trung Sisters.¹⁹² The administration's confidence in its ability to create lasting linkages between the Trung Sisters and Jeanne d'Arc was baffling. Official documents warning of the risks posed by the association—that is invigorating anti-French sentiments—are almost nonexistent. It seems the government was both unrealistic about its influence on the Indochinese peoples and aware it was caught in an impossible situation, clinging on to fading hopes of maintaining control and whatever legitimacy to which it pretended, making policy decisions from which it could not turn back, even in the face of absurdity.

Though Joan of Arc Day was arguably the non-sporting event with the most fanfare, the IPP organized other celebrations and demonstrations within the context of the National Revolution or toward Franco-Indochinese collaboration. One such festival was the Day of St Philippe, on 1 May, which Vichy transformed from what was traditionally a day of class celebration into a corporatist Day of Work and Special Peace. This act was more than nominal since according to the regime's propaganda, under the Popular Front 1 May had stopped being a celebration of the working class and became a platform for class

191. For example Tournées, 10 May 1942; 9 May 1943; 14 May 1944.

192. *Sports Jeunesse d'Indochine*, 28 May 1942; *Indochine*, 4 June 1942.

warfare.¹⁹³ Like his republican predecessors,¹⁹⁴ Decoux feared any kind of organized labor, even under corporatist structures, and used St Philippe as a solemn day to emphasize the need for unity and discipline and commemorate French and Indochinese fallen soldiers: the 1943 celebrations in Hanoi began with a 7:30 mass in the cathedral (a Protestant service was held at the same time elsewhere), followed by a speech by the local President of the *Légion* and a laying of wreaths on the monument to fallen French and Vietnamese soldiers.¹⁹⁵ There is no evidence of the effectiveness of these parades, only the overconfidence of and self-congratulations from an administration intent on creating linkages between the colony and its metropole. In 1941, the papers printed Pétain's speech where he reminded the colonies that in spite of defections by Gaullist elements, almost all the territories of the empire had rallied to the government of Vichy, thereby preserving the unity of the empire. Forgetting that for centuries the Lao and the Khmer suffered from vassalage vis-à-vis the Vietnamese as much as the Siamese, Decoux evoked the recent conflict with Thailand where French and Indochinese spilled blood together in what he described as a forging of fraternity.¹⁹⁶

193. *Chroniques*, May 1942, 140.

194. Jennings' position that Hanoi followed Vichy's lead in leaving behind the republican festival calendar is not pertinent given the lack of 1 May celebrations in Indochina under the previous regime, even during the years of the Popular Front. There was nothing to leave behind. In spite of its rhetoric and actions in the metropole—both decried by Pétainists as the encapsulation of republican rot—the Popular Front refused to accord the right to assembly in Indochina in 1936, when meetings of more than 20 people were prohibited. While syndical freedom was promulgated in French West Africa in 1937, Paris and Hanoi kept unions illegal in Indochina and that year saw some of the most heavy-handed repression and arrests of labor leaders. See Norindr, 236; Hémery: 25-26; 31-32. For information specific to government repression, see Van Ngo, *Viêt-nam, 1920-1945: Révolution et contre-révolution sous la domination coloniale* (Paris: Nautilus, 2000), 240.

195. 1/tel787, No.2827, Decoux to Bléhaut, 4 May 1943.

196. *L'Annam Nouveau*, 20 July 1941.

The government even used the Têt as an opportunity to stress the benefits of the National Revolution and the importance of Franco-Indochinese collaboration. In 1941, the administration distributed traditional images representing symbolic images of animals, elders, or historical scenes, on which it printed Pétain's well-wishes. According to the Tonkin bureau of the IPP, these images were in such high demand that it was not able to print enough to satisfy everyone.¹⁹⁷ In 1943, Tonkin's local Head of IPP wrote a circular to newspaper editors openly asking them to publish stories on the moral recovery that resulted from the juxtaposition of Pétainism's new principles and the ancestral traditions and discipline of Vietnam; an imagined symbiosis between French mind and Vietnamese labor. The same document, neglecting the scars left by the Franco-Thai conflict and the blood that was supposedly spilled together, stressed the work of the GGI allowing Indochina to remain "true haven of calm and peace in a world singularly troubled."¹⁹⁸

Ceremonies orchestrated to entrench Indochina emotionally in the empire were not limited to yearly events as children and civil servants saluted the French and local flags concurrently in daily rituals across the region.¹⁹⁹ By raising the colors in schools, in public spaces, and at sporting events, the GGI sought occasions for public acclamations of France, particularly among the youth.²⁰⁰ Decoux hoped to strengthen the

197. RSTNF 6282, Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service Local de l'IPP, 1er juillet 1941 au 30 juin 1942.

198. RSTNF 6620, IPP Circular No.6741, Cousseau circular, 6 December 1943.

157. See RSTNF 242, Decoux to RST, 2 April 1942 for how the French government used the flag of Annam in brochures and ceremonies. The French envisioned a solid yellow flag with the French colors in the top left corner, evoking in many ways the flags of the British Commonwealth.

200. Raffin calls this process, the development of an attachment to the metropole, the fostering of complementary patriotisms. See Raffin, "Tours of Duty," 193.

bonds between the new generation of Indochinese and France by molding the local youth (see Chapter 6). The ritual was a quasi-religious affair that served as a visual and symbolic reminder of the relationship between France and its colony to build the basis of the Indochinese Federation. Orders to raise the colors came from Vichy in January 1941, but the GGI had the freedom to organize the formalities as it saw fit, and given the presence of Japanese troops in Indochina, the ceremony was critical to impress French sovereignty on Indochina, or at least put on a show telling this story.²⁰¹ At the government council session of December 1942, Decoux reminded his audience that Indochina was one of the last bastions where the French flag continued to fly freely.²⁰² Decoux was proud of this image and used it to reinforce the notion of French sovereignty in Indochina.

In both public and private schools children vowed loyalty to France in an oath that had strong militaristic overtones. At the Lycée Albert Sarraut in Hanoi, the children made the following pledge of allegiance:

Sacred emblem of our *patrie* we swear to have the same deep love for France that children have for their mother. We swear obedience and loyalty to the Head of State Marshal Pétain, who in the most dramatic trials of our history assembles all the energies and exalts all hopes. We swear to associate ourselves with all our hearts to the immense work he takes on by practicing in schools the virtues that made his life strong and noble life: work, loyalty, discipline. We swear finally, at the call of the country, to make the supreme sacrifice in worthy sons of those generations of soldiers whose courage in battle and generosity in victory have made the grandeur and the glory of France.²⁰³

201. Unlabeled box, Decoux to ADLOC, 8 February 1941 and Grandjean, 103-104.

202. Discours prononcés, 15 December 1942.

203. No.1172, 1/tel724, Decoux to Platon, 12 March 1941.

The children were reminded of their duties and the reasons to love France and to have faith in its destiny. At the Lycée Chasseloup Laubat in Saigon, Decoux presided over the ceremony and told the students that in seeing “rise toward the sky these three colors that are like the soul of the *patrie*, you will find reasons to hope in the future. . .During this ceremony, you will accomplish an act of love and faith in the *patrie*. . .You promise finally to devote yourself body and soul to the glory and the salvation of France.”²⁰⁴ At the *Ecole Supérieure d’éducation physique de l’Indochine*, the ceremony took place twice daily. When the *chef moniteur* called out “to serve,” the students, lined up regimentally, responded “always” and they all sang *La Marseillaise*.²⁰⁵

Légionnaire pomp was another means through which to build the facade of a National Revolution that enjoyed the support of the French community. Decoux counted on the *Légion*’s outward manifestations of unity, including an oath of loyalty to France and the Marshal and festivals, to prove the extent of the French bloc’s indivisibility and support of the GGI. The oath was a spectacular biannual ritual held during the celebrations of Jeanne d’Arc in May and in August to mark the anniversary of the creation of the *Légion*.²⁰⁶ According to Decoux, the oath marked the loyalty of those who took it to the *patrie*, promising to sacrifice just as the Marshal had.²⁰⁷ Decoux told the ranks that by pronouncing the oath, they committed themselves “before all to obey,”

204. Discours prononcés, 14 February 1941.

205. Ducoroy, 159-161.

206. These dates coincided with the *légionnaire* oath in the metropole.

207. *L’Action*, 2 May 1942.

which would not be difficult since this obedience would “flow from their faith.”²⁰⁸ Through discipline, the *légionnaires* would do no less than “take place among the artisans of the National Renovation, [contributing] their stone to the edifice that [Decoux claimed was already] rising, thanks to the faith of all the good Frenchmen in the recovery of [the] *patrie* and in the values of the chief who [led] it.”²⁰⁹ Again we are confronted with the contradiction between the desire to swell the *Légion*’s ranks and the principle that the members within the organization buy into the National Revolution. It is unlikely that Decoux believed that every member was a convert given his suspicion that the civil service contained functionaries who remained loyal to the Republic so the best explanation for the pomp surrounding the oath ceremonies was to put on an impressive show for outsiders, putting the supposed loyalty of the French on display.²¹⁰ Again it is highly questionable whether these displays had any real effect on the locals, but if anything it points to the Admiral’s penchant for style over substance and a self-delusion that promoted rituals in which participants experienced some level of coercion as means of demonstrating, through some bizarre sublimation, these same participants’ adherence to the values they were supposed to incarnate through the ritual.²¹¹ It is equally

208. GG2 171, Discours prononcés, 15 August 1942.

209. GG2 171, Discours prononcés, 1 May 1942.

210. Of course he probably also wanted (or was told) to mirror similar rituals taking place in Vichy but this does not preclude him from using this replication of acts for his political purposes.

211. Witnesses’ descriptions of Decoux’s character support the idea that his naval background (or rather, his role as the stereotypical naval officer) in itself explains his support and use of the *Légion*. Romé described him as “demanding, nitpicky, difficult to serve and especially to please, terribly conscious of his dignity and respectful of protocol.” Gautier concurs, painting him as “as demanding of others as of himself, driven by precision and clarity, apparently more sensible to presentation than to the substance of things. . . never satisfied.” See Romé, 28 and Gautier, 28.

telling that Decoux believed the *légionnaires*' processions would impress locals, suggesting a potential lack of appreciation for Indochinese cultures, which did not necessarily lend themselves to place much value in such demonstrations. .

The oath was intentionally broad to permit as great a union as possible. The *légionnaires* spoke—and signed—the following:

I swear to serve France with honor and to devote all my strength to the *patrie*, the family, to work. I commit myself to practice friendship and mutual help vis-à-vis my comrades of the *Légion*. I accept freely the discipline of the *Légion* for all that will be ordered of me *in view of this ideal*.²¹²

In every *pays*, *légionnaires* gathered at daybreak to wait the arrival of high ranking government officials: Decoux, Ducoroy, Berenger, or at minimum the Superior Resident. After the raising of the flag, the administration's representative and the President of the *Légion* chapter made rousing speeches evoking national recovery, the duty to sacrifice oneself for the *patrie* as Pétain had, and the need to serve. Afterward the *légionnaires* repeated the oath as one, before crying "*Vive la France! Vive le Maréchal!*" In Saigon in 1941, planes flew overhead dropping leaflets with some of Pétain's sayings, and pigeons, "messengers of encouragement and hope," were released before the *légionnaires* laid a wreath on the Monument to the Dead in the Temple of Memory. After every event, the GGI telegraphed Vichy proclaiming the *Légion*'s loyalty to and best wishes for the Marshal.²¹³

212. 1AFFPOL 886/2, "Serment de la Légion." Emphasis in original.

213. *Indochine*, 26 June 1941; 3 July 1941; 10 July 1941; 14 August 1941; *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 21 June 1941; 19 August 1942; *L'Annam Nouveau*, 22 June 1941.

The *Légion* helped organize many of the regime's festivals , but those commemorating the founding of the LFC were particularly geared as manifestations of strength in unity to the outside. The ceremonies mirrored those in the metropole and Vichy provided detailed programs of its own events, but the Ministry of Colonies only asked Hanoi merely to inspire itself from this information, giving Indochina free reign to organize according to how it saw fit.²¹⁴ In the colony, the military style—including the Roman salutes that reminded some of Nazi demonstrations²¹⁵—was intended as a display of discipline and energy aimed at the Japanese and Indochinese peoples. Decoux believed outsiders could not fail to be impressed by Frenchmen grouped in an imposing order under the French flag to *La Marseillaise*, celebrating their attachment to the distant *patrie*.²¹⁶ Through well orchestrated militaristic rituals, Decoux wanted to show “the living symbol of French unity,” positioning this unity as the primordial condition of French recovery and salvation.²¹⁷ It is striking that very few feared that these displays of patriotism (and even fewer voiced their potential concerns), often backed by social nationalistic undercurrents, would seep into the locals' own worldviews, prompting their own calls for regrouping around the nation and the sovereign state. It seems that in the GGI's obsession with French unity to show strength and the resolve to keep the French flag flying over Indochina, it failed to appreciate that the Indochinese peoples would not

214. 1/tel705, No.3761, Platon to Decoux, 14 August 1941.

215. 3W/155, Casamatta Deposition.

216. Requisitoires, “Requisitoire définitif,” 42.

217. 1/tel788, No.3965, Decoux to Bléhaut, 31 August 1943.

so much be impressed with this determination but rather with the ideology underpinning this supposed resolution, the National Revolution and its call for a restructure of society based on natural groupings. So convinced were the French of the locals' attachment to France that it did not enter their thinking that the social nationalism they presented as the road to the rebirth of their own civilization could be turned against them, providing impetus for the August Revolution.

Decoux took advantage of Vichy's own festivals to promote the indivisibility of the empire. Held in 1942, one of the most striking demonstrations of unity was the collection of soil sent back to France and placed in a cenotaph to be buried in the plateau of Gergovie. Gergovie, "natural bastion of the *patrie*," was the site where two thousand years earlier Gaulish leader Vercingétorix defeated the Roman armies, the first step toward the unification of the *patrie*.²¹⁸ Organized by the LFC in the metropole, earth was gathered from every commune in the metropole and region of the empire in which a *Légion* chapter existed, symbolizing the wholeness of France in Europe and abroad, eternalizing the empire by blending its different soils as one.²¹⁹ This was the quintessential exaltation of Barrès' idea of "the earth and the dead," which so dramatically altered the meaning of nationalism in the nineteenth century (see Chapter 3). This was a celebration of the nation for which millions died and tellingly, many of the communes in the metropole and

218. *Le Légionnaire*, August 1942; *Chroniques*, August 1942, 517; 1/tel748, No.4499, Brévié to Decoux, 22 July 1942.

219. Jennings describes this event as Vichy's design to celebrate the assimilation of imperial territory in the blending of the soils in Gergovie. See Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 211-214.

the majority of the colonies chose to send soil from sites symbolic of French military campaigns and nation building. Even soil from Saint Helena, British island of Napoleon's exile, was donated by the Museum of Châteauroux. In Indochina, as in every other colony loyal to Vichy, the Governor General reiterated the Federation's union with the metropole and the empire and its spirit of attachment to France.²²⁰ The mixing of the soils at Gergovie was an elevation of the indestructibility of the French spirit and nation, through union around the Marshal. In Pétain's own words, "French unity has found, thanks to [the *légionnaires*] the power of its symbol."²²¹

For Decoux, this was an ideal event to project a French bloc without fissures, but to the locals, it must not have seemed like more than another ritual involving Frenchmen celebrating an obscure affair to which Indochina had no connection. While the message of the indivisibility of the empire may have been received—though there is no reason to think that it would have been more powerful than any of the other speeches made during these years—the meaning of Gergovie would have been completely lost on the Indochinese peoples, the vast majority of whom would never have heard of the battle before. The collection of soil came at Vichy's request and Decoux could have gone about the ceremony with discretion, since it would have had such little effect on the locals, who again, did not associate Gergovie with anything symbolic. There was even risk that by learning of Vercingétorix's tragic fate and subsequent

220. 1AFFPOL 886/1, Joseph to Monsieur le Directeur de la LFC, 15 September 1942.

221. *Chroniques*, September 1942, 561.

martyrdom, the locals find encouragement in glorifying those fallen in resistance to the empire (the same risk posed in glorifying the Trung Sisters). Decoux nevertheless did choose to make this an affair of great pomp, demonstrating his lack of concern that French symbols of resistance and nation building would be appropriated by the locals, which must have come from a mix of naiveté and delusion regarding the locals' attachment to France. The Admiral seized any occasion to march Frenchmen down the streets to project (even invent) an image of French unity in spite of the tribulations that it knew in the metropole and in its colonies.

Conclusion

During his speech at the 1934 National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) rally in Nuremberg, Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda Joseph Goebbels reminded his audience that “[i]t may be a good thing to possess power that rests on arms. But it is better and more gratifying to win and hold the heart of the people.”²²² The presence of Japanese troops and their efforts to promote an “Asia for Asians” policy meant that Governor General Decoux could not completely break with the colonial heritage of the Third Republic and had to balance the ultraconservative discourse of the National Revolution with the achievements of French colonialism as a whole in order not to discredit the benefits of its tutelage. While the administration geared many of its policies to alter intracolonial relationships and reorganize

222. Quoted in David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 25.

political and economic structures to strengthen the Indochinese Union, it knew that it would achieve little success in winning the loyalty of the Indochinese peoples if it did not publicize these changes by appealing to the public's emotions while suppressing dissenting opinions. This was not a new problem for the colonial authorities as previous Governors General had implemented changes designed to assure the loyalty of the Indochinese peoples by dangling the wonders of Western culture and the promises of better lives if the locals were willing to abandon some of the traditional elements of their societies that held them back. As Chapter 5 examines, Sarraut and Pasquier were particularly eager to reform administrative, educational, and mandarin structures to raise local standards of living. Decoux's reforms were the continuation of associationist efforts of reform, but the means with which he publicized the changes, the propaganda machine he used to pass his message and silence dissent, was more sophisticated than those of his predecessors. Though referring specifically to Laos, Director of Public Education (and at the IPP at the time of his letter) Charles Rochet's belief that "propaganda can do *anything* if well constructed" extended to administrative circles in all countries of the region.²²³

Decoux reorganized and centralized the colonial propaganda apparatus to promote the French colonial *oeuvre* through control of the media, production of materials, and the orchestration of events, all designed to extemporally tie the destinies of France and Indochina.

223. FP 14PA/6, Letter from Rochet to Decoux, 12 July 1944. Italics in original. Note Decoux's handwritten note that Rochet's letter was one of the most interesting he'd received concerning Laos.

Through the IPP, the government ensured that its message was read in newspapers across the region and that no other points of view could flourish legally. Sources show that Decoux was not the mastermind behind propaganda campaigns in the press; rather fervent anti-republicans of both ultraconservative and revolutionary profiles staffed the IPP and ADLOC bureaus, taking broad directives from the GGI and implementing them according to their own agendas. This resulted—particularly in the regime’s later years when the IPP perfected the process—in the difficulty to identify where and when the administration infiltrated stories in newspapers. Yet this absolves no one from responsibility. The GGI was able to be hands off in implementation only because it put trusted men in charge of execution. This nebulosity underscores Vichy’s lack of direct control over the propaganda efforts in Indochina. No matter how propaganda was produced, no matter where the varying degrees of responsibility lay, Vichy did not clone itself in Indochina, though the ideas that underpinned (and therefore predated) Pétainist ideology existed in the colony. In the end, the machinery most likely led to nothing more than extreme cynicism and a distrust of all things printed so the GGI created a secret network of individuals to spread rumors that was not linked to the authorities. While it is difficult to measure this network’s reach or effectiveness, it shows that the GGI understood the need to reach the population in creative ways.

The Admiral’s administration also made use of structures (such as the *Légion*) created by Vichy to advance its policies in Indochina, within both French and local communities. It exercised significant—albeit not

always direct—pressure on civil servants to join the *Légion*, stressing the importance of showing one's allegiance to the government and to the values of the National Revolution. For Decoux, the *Légion's* most important task was to ensure discipline within the French community. Its secondary objective (though it was officially its first) was to inculcate the values of the National Revolution through its propaganda efforts and its commitment to serve while abandoning the behaviors under the Republic Decoux believed were responsible for the debacle of May 1940. Decoux acknowledged by the end of his administration that the *Légion* largely failed in this second objective, admitting that many joined out of fear and failed to make the spiritual shift toward the organization's ideals.²²⁴ He was politically responsible for propagating this fear. It should have come to no surprise that the *Légion* was largely ineffective in widening its base of support. Those who joined immediately upon its creation, including its most zealot members, had certainly already been won over by ultraconservative or nationalist revolutionary causes (see Chapter 2) before the outbreak of war, leaving those who joined later to a mix between those who did so out fear of government reprisals, opportunism, or a herd mentality. The oath Decoux imposed on the *légionnaires* and the propaganda actions the organization undertook were more useful as a spectacle for outsiders than as a process of inculcation of Pétainist values among the population since it is highly likely that many functionaries only pretended to take the oath seriously (see Chapter 5). It is uncertain whether Decoux even privately respected the *Légion* in Indochina, as one

224. RSTNF 6636, Ferlande to RST, 26 May 1944.

witness claimed the Admiral declared several times it was a joke [*trois fois rien*].²²⁵ Decoux counted on the *Légion*, however, to impose discipline and to silence opposition. To create the image of an immovable bloc of united Frenchmen willing—in action if not in spirit—to serve and obey, the Admiral curbed the *Légion*'s anti-Jewish and especially anti-Masonic actions. Silence and displays of loyalty to the regime were more important than ethnicity, religion, or affiliations (see Chapter 5).

Decoux's regime was the first to utilize on a broad scale the cultural heritage of Vietnam (above and beyond the monarchy) to further its ambitions. It strove to establish linkages between French and Vietnamese histories through the triangulation of Pétain-Jeanne d'Arc-Trung Sisters while fusing the wisdom and religious powers of Pétain and Confucius. Decoux's regime tried to canalize French Indochina's existing cultural streams to transcend the racial appeal of Japanese pan-Asianism and create bonds through imaginary common destinies. The daily ceremonies that raised French and regional flags concurrently not only served as a symbolic reminder of French sovereignty in the region, but they attempted to create an emotional base upon which to build the Indochinese Federation, under French leadership. As Chapter 5 examines, the government would have one believe that this French Federation would allow the Indochinese countries to embrace their pasts while joining the community of modern societies. The government pushed on all fronts France's unique ability to guide the region through the glorification of its own humanistic past, which contrasted

225. 3W/158, Chauvet Deposition, 25.

significantly with that of Japan. While this tutelage was promoted through propaganda, the colonial authorities recognized that it had to commit to altering the political and economic structures of the region to demonstrate the benefits of colonial rule. Judging by the events of August 1945, France's propaganda efforts failed to entrench the spirit of a France-led federation within the consciousness of the locals. The ceremonies and rituals did very little to attach anyone to France and the ease with which the Japanese eventually swept away the French in March 1945 rendered in hindsight the raising of the colors and the singing of *la Marseillaise* a pathetic display.

No matter how often postwar testimonies contradict one another in efforts to evade blame, no propaganda initiative could have taken place without Decoux's approval and directives (or conversely a reprimand in case of disapproval). He ultimately held responsibility for all propaganda initiatives. For a regime so intent on building relations with the populations—through tours, associations, personal contacts, or the employment of more polite and respectful pronouns (*vouvoiement*)—it is surprising how entire policies could be based on the presumption that the Indochinese would readily accept that their cultures could exist in parallel with that of the French, creating idols and rituals from nowhere. No matter how close the regime thought it was to the locals, it could not break away from the stigmatization that the locals were unconcerned with politics, which, upon closer look, was at odds with the other conviction that they loved their colonial masters. The events of August 1945 and the two Indochinese wars that followed contradict every

intelligence report produced by the IPP. The Decoux regime's propaganda, like the policies it publicized, was devised without knowing where the streams of which Huxley wrote were located.

Chapter V: Continuing to Create a Federal Consciousness

In its efforts to glorify the French *oeuvre* and tutelage in Indochina, the colonial authorities needed to convince the populations that in spite of recent setbacks, the collaboration that supposedly existed between France and its colony remained promising and fruitful. The government's propaganda, aided by its suffocating censorship, spoke of the incontrovertible rewards this relationship brought to Indochinese societies thanks to the wisdom and magnanimity of the French. Decoux placed significant hopes in the idea of an Indochinese Federation to maintain France's sovereignty in the region, through his irrepressible belief that a federal structure would interlink the Indochinese peoples while France assumed a leadership position from which it could exercise this supposedly beneficial tutelage. As with all other aspects of Decoux's policy-making, France's defeat in Europe and the presence of Japanese troops in the colony forced the government to accelerate its efforts to convince the Indochinese population that France merited their allegiance with promises of a better and more just future. Again, there was no turning back no matter how ineffective were the initiatives.

The paradox of Decoux's administration lies in the Admiral's view of how the colonial authorities should run Indochina, which neither went against his ultraconservative, and Maurrassian influenced, worldview nor represented any significant change from his predecessors' efforts over the previous thirty years. While the National Revolution ambioned the destruction of the Third Republic's values and apparatuses in the metropole, Decoux could not afford to disparage publicly the totality of

French colonialism lest he undermine the confidence—or what the French believed to be confidence—of the Indochinese peoples in French civilization (see Chapter 4). In the realm of the development of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, Decoux's reforms were in many ways the continuation of the policies of the Third Republic, which if anything the Admiral could have criticized for not going far enough. Even the end of elected council bodies was the logical next step in the politics to raise the prestige—though not power—of the notables¹ which began under Governor General Jean-Marie de Lanessan at the end of the nineteenth century.

To an even greater degree than his predecessors, the discourse of Decoux's regime emphasized the need for authority, hierarchy, and tradition—values found in Maurrassism but also reflected in naval culture—but the principal vectors of his administrative reforms were the continuation of ideas formulated under the Third Republic. These vectors can be identified as: 1) the strengthening of the Indochinese Union under the leadership of the French, through reengineered councils, the promotion of solidarity, and a coexistence with local patriotisms; 2) the *politique d'égards* (politics of prestige) towards the Indochinese notables; 3) the increased inclusion of locals within the government process through the opening of the administrative apparatus; and 4) the attempt to direct the locals' daily activities, through sports and youth organizations, in hopes of promoting bonds with one another—on national and federal levels—and create an attachment to France through the infusion of

1. The term notable is used in its broadest context, designating Indochinese persons in leadership positions at all levels of society.

Western culture and practices (the most drastic of Decoux's policies). These initiatives were part of the agendas of every administration for the fifty years preceding Decoux's proconsulship, to greater or lesser extents based on particular Governor Generals. They masked behind a rhetoric of respect for pre-colonial societies and local customs a desire to limit popular dissent, increase control, and keep administrative costs down by relying on local officials as much as possible.² Even under the Popular Front (1936-1937), few questioned the notion of the white man's burden, incarnated by the conviction of the innate superiority of republican values, which paradoxically created more distance between colonizer and local and whose principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity were only imported in Indochina as a motto.³ This chapter examines the four vectors of Decoux's administrative reforms and how they defined the relationship between the French and the locals. It suggests that these were made to minimize threats of the loss of French sovereignty in Indochina through measures designed to create a federal consciousness that ultimately glorified the French *oeuvre*, its history and its potential, in the region. It also looks at how these reforms, and the discourse that surrounded them, while never betraying Decoux's ultraconservative convictions, did not break with the policies begun under the Third Republic.

Developing the Indochinese Federation

2. Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars*, 82-83.

3. For an interesting discussion of the chasm between discourse and action in French republican colonialism, see Conklin.

Indochinese federalism was the natural progression of colonial consolidation that began at the end of the nineteenth century. Christopher Goscha's study *Vietnam or Indochina?* argues that French colonial policies created the Indochinese space and embedded this concept through the development of infrastructure, the writing of schoolbooks, and the drawing of maps. The notion of an Indochinese Union took root fairly early on in the colonization process as a means of pushing the region toward a relative self-sufficiency. In 1887, the same year the Indochinese Union was created as an administrative entity, French diplomat Jules Harmand declared:

Here is the goal: The foundation of a colonial empire, the creation of a *vice state*, an expression that I like because it characterizes well my thought; that is a political organism dependent on the motherland, but capable of surviving on its own, capable of self-sufficiency in times of peace as well as war, and that, far from being for the motherland a source of expenses and weakness, augments on the contrary France's political and military forces, while at the same time offering an outlet to its industries, its commerce, its capital, and each activity of its citizens. To [make this possible] that is to be able to constitute a political organism large enough to live a quasi-independent life, strong enough to find in itself all the resources necessary for the existence and defense of a state, there is only one procedure, that is to associate one with the other the different regions of Annamite and Cambodian Indochina, by making them depend on a single authority, creating, in one word, *Indochinese unity*.⁴

The republican administrators created a geographical construct called Indochina, concretized by cartographers in 1907 when France and Siam

4. Jules Harmand, *L'Indo-Chine française, Politique administrative, conférence faite à l'Association républicaine du centenaire de 1789* (Paris: C. Pariset, 1887), 24-25. Italics in original. Note that Laos was not yet under French control at this point.

finalized the colony's western borders. The French saw in this Indochinese unit, as a geobody,⁵ a means of involving the locals in the defense of their own country (or rather Indochina as an entity), which signified that the authorities had to create the consciousness of a country itself. Led by the French, who positioned themselves as the protector of the region, each *pays* was distinguishable from its neighbors but spiritually and materially tied to them.⁶ Governor General Paul Beau (1902-1908) sparked the efforts to settle Vietnamese peasants to other parts of the colony to ease demographic pressures in Tonkin and increase the colony's production of foodstuffs, but he also had strategic designs to protect western Indochina from Siamese expansionistic threats.⁷ The French considered the Vietnamese racially superior to their Khmer and Lao counterparts, and as such wanted them to serve as the backbone of the nascent construct.⁸ This demographic redistribution was key to interlinking the peoples of Indochina in such a way as to bolster the French administrative apparatus (see below).

For the French, the *raison d'être* of the Indochinese Union (used interchangeably with the term Federation), in whichever nascent form, was both for administrative and strategic necessities, requiring an increased interdependence of both bureaucracy and identity. As an

5. I borrow the term from Thongchai.

6. France initially promised to "protect" each *pays*, from the Siamese or the Vietnamese (in the cases of Cambodia and Laos), yet it required the locals to defend their homeland, a rather bitter irony. As second and equally bitter irony was subsequent French encouragement of large-scale Vietnamese migration into Cambodia and Laos.

7. Ivarsson, 104. Ivarsson uses the plains of the Mekong delta as an example but over the course of French colonialism, emigration was mainly into Cambodia, Laos, and the highlands.

8. Ibid., 101.

administrative apparatus, the Union was established to facilitate the governing of the colony under a Governor General, reporting to the Ministry of Colonies in Paris. Each *pays*, however, existed within distinct juridical contexts. Cochinchina was an incorporated colony, while Luang Prabang, Cambodia, and Annam were protectorates. Tonkin was also a protectorate, but under direct administration. From the onset, Cambodia and Laos (Luang Prabang and the collection of smaller *muangs*, or principalities) were claimed by the French as a buffer against Siam and the colonists understood these territories in relation to their tributary histories with Vietnam, that is, justifying their annexations because of the long-standing Vietnamese suzerainty. By emphasizing such claims, the French saw Cambodia and Laos from the perspective of Vietnam, placing the latter's interests over the former two territories. This is the basis on which the Indochinese administrative apparatus that relied on Vietnamese functionaries across the colony was built, particularly in Laos, which was deemed a hinterland of Vietnam.⁹ Revealingly, then-Governor General Albert Sarraut wrote in 1912, "French Indochina today is Gia Long's empire reconstituted, expanded by us through [the acquisition] of exterior possessions," that is Laos and Cambodia.¹⁰ As Goscha explains, the French tried to construct an Indochinese identity to legitimize—and render more palatable—the dominance of the French through Vietnamese administrators. However, the colonists understood the imperative of maintaining local traditions and underneath the

9. Martin Stuart-Fox, "The French in Laos, 1887-1945." *Modern Asian Studies*, 29, No.1 (Feb 1995), 112-115.

10. Quoted in Goscha, 19.

integration of a synthetic Indochinese identity there was the promise that the French would shield the Lao and the Khmer from the destruction of their own cultures, threatened of extinction because of a long history of decay, which would be accelerated by increased Vietnamese migrations. These promises of protection were the seeds of the local patriotisms that Decoux would later promote.¹¹ Federalism existed as objective (administrative) and subjective concepts. While the French were successful in constructing the former, they were much less so in nurturing the latter.

In 1919, Sarraut called for the formation of an Indochinese Charter to give locals an equitable part in the running of public affairs, a policy that did not always achieve its intended goals.¹² This entity would link each *pays* to one another, facilitating administration, travel, and commerce through bureaucratic and infrastructural projects. Though he was thinking largely in administrative terms, a few Vietnamese intellectuals began imagining an Indochinese entity dominated by the Vietnamese yet led by the French.¹³ This vision was promising for the French and those well-placed locals who aimed to benefit from lucrative

11. Penny Edwards' *Cambodia* retells French endeavors to resurrect what they perceived to be a decaying culture, reviving the glory of Angkor based in their own perceptions of what that glory was.

12. It can be argued that the real impetus behind the opening of public affairs and representations to locals was the creation of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, which stressed self-determination. This pressured France into justifying its presence in Indochina and legitimizing its acts in the name of the Indochinese peoples by according them a certain amount of representation in local bodies. Sarraut's Indochinese Charter was put in place in the different *pays* of Indochina from 1922 to 1923, expanding the local voter base in Cochinchina and creating consultative councils in the protectorates. See Patrice Morlat, "Projets coloniaux et mise en pratique: la politique des 'fils' de Sarraut en Indochine dans les années vingt." *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, No.85 (2001), 5-6.

13. Goscha, 46-47.

opportunities, but it also created the terrain for more acrimonious developments in intra-Indochinese relationships, ones already based on centuries of Vietnamese suzerainty. For the French, opening up Indochina to itself was in the tradition of Western progress, a clear example of how French tutelage would benefit the locals. It marked their belief in the linearity of the development of all civilizations.

The migration of Vietnamese to Laos and Cambodia progressed steadily: the Vietnamese population in Cambodia grew from 79,050 in 1911 to 140,220 in 1921. By 1937, immigration had been so pronounced that 10,200 Vietnamese lived in Vientiane, outnumbering the 9,000 Lao. Many of these immigrants occupied bureaucratic posts, as the French prepared and subsidized Vietnamese civil servants to travel anywhere within the colony.¹⁴ This population flux, encouraged and sustained through new networks of roads, was intended to bind the Indochinese space and peoples together, though it ultimately created disruptions—namely in strengthening and perpetuating the existing anti-Vietnamese sentiments in Cambodia and Laos, which persist to this day—that pushed the French to play up their role as the cohesive force to keep the union together, to the benefit of all. To eternalize France's role as a tutor and underscore the indestructibility of the French *oeuvre*, Governor General Alexandre Varenne announced in 1926 that Indochina could no longer make do without French protection, hinting nothing less than the region would collapse on itself were France no longer able to contribute its knowhow and guns given the changing global economic context and the

14. Ibid., 24-27.

dependency on France the colony had developed.¹⁵ Governor General Pierre Pasquier, Varenne's successor, adopted the same themes and spoke of an overarching Indochinese consciousness. Pasquier arguably did more to push the concept of an Indochinese Federation than any of his predecessors, putting forward in 1928 a 19-point Indochinese Charter that positioned France as the cement that held together the culturally and ethnically diverse Indochinese entity, calling for the creation of a "Federal Unit."¹⁶

Federalism entailed sophisticated constructs allowing the coexistence and preservation of local cultures within a unified entity where France was the keystone. Sarraut was one of the earliest and most significant Governors General to show his appreciation for local traditions and ways of life, and his allocation of funds to renovate Cambodian sovereign Sisowath's palace as an early demonstration of this attitude.¹⁷ Pasquier was an ardent defender of the "Annamite identity," which reflected more the colonizers' idealization of Vietnamese society, with its halcyon past locked in the romantic and paternalistic vision of French orientalists, than how the locals felt their own culture.¹⁸ By evoking the importance of the local tradition and identity of each *pays*, Pasquier hoped to minimize the influence of the newly settled Vietnamese populations outside of

15. Alexandre Varenne, *Discours prononcé le 20 septembre 1926* (Saigon: Imprimerie Commerciale C. Ardin, 1926), 57.

16. Goscha, 53-54. In many ways, this was a continuation of Sarraut's original charter, though it went further because it opened the administration to educated Indochinese and evoked "government by the locals." Recall that Pasquier served in Indochina under Sarraut's administration and was named Superior Resident in Annam in 1921, only two years after the end of Sarraut's second term.

17. Edwards, *Cambodge*, 45; Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars*, 67.

18. Brocheux and Hémery, 111.

Tonkin and Annam, fearing that the rebellions that took place in those two *pays* would spread.¹⁹ He encouraged locals to return to, what he imagined was, the harmony of pre-colonial days, abandoning struggle and letting France bear the burden of guiding Indochina into a more prosper future.²⁰

Decoux's efforts to build an Indochinese Federation was the continuation of the work and discourse initiated under the Third Republic. While Eric Jennings writes that under Decoux "federalism became synonymous with fanciful re-creations of Indochinese cultures" since its peoples were "in fact increasingly segregated [from each other], under the aegis of a traditionalist regime capable of conjuring up a folkloric past," there does not seem to be sufficient evidence to support a break—that is a tendency to segregate rather than interconnect—between Decoux's administration and his predecessors' policies. On the contrary, Decoux promoted solidarity and kinship among the peoples of Indochina (necessitated in part by the economic situation, see Chapter 6). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, "Vichy's folkloric nostalgia" existed more in rhetoric than policy in the metropole and the process of "re-creations of Indochinese cultures" that Jennings describes was already taking place when in 1907 Pasquier (then in the early stages of his colonial career in Indochina) pleaded "Let us conserve in Annam the sweet poetry, the ponds where lotuses die, the subtle images, the songs between girls and boys during summer evenings, the *lettrés* [the intellectual class] with long

19. Ivarsson, 110.

20. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 293.

beards and the mandarins in their archaic and dazzling costumes.”²¹ Indochina’s isolation from the metropole rendered Decoux’s federalist project—based on positioning France as the keystone of a union of *pays* where local patriotisms were encouraged but not at the price of solidarity with each other—more urgent to seduce the indigenous populations. Its evocation of an autonomous Indochina, united and able to exist within its regional environment, though irrevocably attached to the metropole if only in spirit, echoed Jules Harmand’s speech over a half century earlier.

While the Admiral claimed to have given more structure to the Indochinese Federation, he admitted to the continuity of his administration’s reforms with the efforts of the past, based on France as the linchpin that nurtured solidarity among peoples. In his memoirs, the Admiral claimed that the federal principle as a notion had been in the air for quite some time, but without a clear definition or outline, and he took credit for its accelerated implementation, credit that was perhaps merited given the scale of his endeavors. He believed that the federal link, which French sovereignty alone was capable of assuring for the *pays* involved, would augment solidarity amongst the regions of Indochina, through a better understanding of one another.²² France as the cement of the federal system would no longer intervene in the minor affairs of the member *pays*, according them more liberty and autonomy, particularly in cultural domains, providing more room to cultivate local traditions.

21. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 176-177. Pierre Pasquier, *L’Annam d’autrefois: Essai sur la constitution de l’Annam avant l’intervention française* (Paris: Augustin Challamel, 1907), 337-338. Penny Edwards’s book *Cambodge* thoroughly exposes the French colonial administration’s invention of a Cambodian past through their orientalist lenses and the sense of “otherness” this vision created and promoted.

22. Decoux, *A la barre de l’Indochine*, 388.

Regarding political economy, however, the need to manage wartime difficulties meant more centralization rather than more autonomy, though the structures of local power needed to change to accommodate the new forces. Indochina's isolation served as a centripetal force toward the GGI of all matters of importance, ones that affected the destinies of the colony and its peoples. Decoux's administration did not, could not, resist the temptation of political centralization to address the problems of autarky.²³ Interlinking the *pays* of Indochina meant facilitating the authorities' abilities to intervene in local affairs, organizations, and resource allocation. Seeping into all aspects of society, Decoux's regime only allowed locals a greater role in their affairs (following Sarraut's vision) only insofar as they executed policy in greater numbers, but seldom participated in their invention. In this instance, Hanoi followed in Vichy's footsteps: going against the rhetoric of the National Revolution, which advocated increased decentralization, by succumbing to the realities of administration in times of war (see Chapter 2). As in other areas, the implementation of this aspect of Pétain's agenda was not realistic in the metropole and even less so in the colonies.

To accelerate and strengthen the interlinking of peoples, the federalist project had to continue developing an Indochinese consciousness, one that united all the peoples of the region, and the government used its propaganda machine to try to prepare locals for the ineluctability of this change. By tending to the subjectivity of federalism, that is the development of a federal consciousness, Decoux went further than his

23. Devillers, 84.

predecessors who spent more time proposing objective, structural changes. Decoux's administrative reforms (see below) were steps toward concretizing the federal project, but were ultimately unable to transform the consciousness of the locals to accept French tutelage. The colonial administration had to convince locals of something that was nonexistent or at best only nascent and which was effectively contradicted by the reality of French policies.²⁴ Worse, this structure eternalized the colonial relationship, contradicting any justification of tutelage since France was not preparing Indochina for independence in the medium term. In a directive for the IPP that encapsulated French convictions that colonialism brought progress and peace to the colonized, Decoux stressed the need to push the benefits of federalism against the atomizing effects of nationalisms:

All Indochinese who can think must understand that the French federal link alone has the power to maintain the cohesion of Indochina. Without this link, the federation will dissolve fatally. Annamite countries themselves may not keep for long their cohesion, the particularist tendencies of the South taking it on a road of greater or lesser extensive autonomy. What would become of these small *patries* hatefully withdrawn on themselves? It is easy to predict that they would soon be the prey of outside countries, not having enough to survive on their own. Independence would be a short-lived illusion. Any link other than the French link—and there are many quite close—would prove singularly heavier, and certainly less respectful of local patriotisms, in spite of promises or much-talked-about satisfactions.²⁵

24. Pierre-Vincent Guéret, "La Fédération indochinoise de l'Amiral Decoux: Ebauche de politisation d'une réalité administrative en péril," *Outres-Mers* 91, No.342-43 (2004): 21.

25. Untitled box, Decoux to ADLOC, 29 September 1944, 3.

In this view, Indochina as an entity was the evolution of a region touched by Western civilization. Just as France had taken form after centuries of expansion and centralization by royal power, Indochina would come together, leveraging its strengths (such as the superiority and work ethic of the Vietnamese) to develop into a modern, competitive body.²⁶ Though the French feared the disintegration of the Indochinese Federation (namely due to the “wrong kind” of local nationalisms), by the 1940s they no longer questioned the artificiality of this union, no longer asking themselves whether it was justified or sustainable. These subtleties tell the story of a colonizing power convinced of the linear evolution of societies and the positive, in all senses of the word, influence of Western culture. Based on this view, the peoples of the region had to move forward to create a belonging to Indochina as an entity or risk destruction.²⁷ At its roots, however, is the exaggerated conviction that Vietnamese regionalism was stronger than its nationalism²⁸. There was a tendency to underestimate the force to unite all three *pays* of Vietnam, naturally creating a cohesive unit within itself. This of course would turn against the French, who ultimately would have benefitted from some level of

26. It is striking how narrow-sighted this view was of the manner in which France became a nation-state. The 1555 Augsburg Settlement and the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia established the concept of state sovereignty and the principle of a sovereign to decide freely the religion of his people. This was the culmination of the struggle by the central powers in France against the Reformation, and this process served to define France as a nation and, forcibly, an identity. This reality, that nations are defined by their relationship to other nations and the struggles that ensue, could not have escaped the educated Indochinese and fueled independentist desires. Going further back, in 1306, Philippe IV's fiscal and monetary reforms did away with feudal traditions in favor of a centralized state, by imposing taxes on commerce. This led to tremendous discontent, another example of how state building was achieved through conflict.

27. The accuracy of the prediction that another imperial power—the United States—would quickly try to replace the French should be noted, and it took almost three decades for the region to stabilize.

28. It should be remembered that it was the French who divided Vietnam into three *pays* to keep them apart and ostensibly, weakened.

disunity (that is, regionalism) since this could have weakened the Vietnamese independentist movements.

Under Decoux, the press extolled the federalist project and the sentiments of regional harmony and solidarity that France engendered through its *oeuvre*. It positioned Decoux's reforms as the culmination of France's vision of the previous forty years, which began under Paul Doumer's administration, thereby trying to justify the longstanding benefits of French tutelage (see Chapter 4 regarding Decoux's reluctance to disparage the works of the Third Republic).²⁹ Phap Nam wrote

Through the development [*mise en valeur*] of the *pays*' [transportation systems, for which Doumer and Sarraut played critical parts], France has allowed the different parts of Indochina that were isolated and withdrawn for so long to wake up to sentiments of complementary unity insofar as their productions and needs. At the same time, France has created the solidarity or at least the cultural comprehension of the composing civilizations.³⁰

Government propaganda went on an all out campaign to convince that it was through the public services that France managed (that is, all aspects of federal government) that the *pays* of the Union would nurture the solidarity required to face the common needs that they could not meet alone.³¹ Rather than segregation, the authorities sought overarching bonds of Indochinese solidarity, stressing complementarities over isolation.

29. *Indochine*, 30 December 1943.

30. *Indochine*, 27 August 1942, 2.

31. *Indochine*, 16 December 1943, 4.

The government, directly or through its propaganda machine, tried to link the destinies of France and Indochina, imagining a future for the region where France was the force that would transform the region through the transposition of its wisdom and knowhow, a process that had supposedly been taking place for decades. One author believed that the national pride that would emerge from working within an effective federal entity—which he pointed out was a continuation of Pasquier’s vision—would forge “a union between [French and Indochinese] peoples [that would] be intimate, deep, that allow[ed the Indochinese] to look toward the future with confidence. . .in complete fraternal confidence.”³² One newspaper editorial read “Our peasant, who may not appreciate the true worth of the achievements of modern technique, knows well how to concretize in one word this immense *oeuvre*: he knows that he owes France tranquility. . .Nonetheless this French peace does not represent the entirety of the French *oeuvre*. True French imperialism is that of the spirit.”³³ Decoux took the opportunity during King Sihanouk’s coronation to remind the populations that the French brought order and discipline to the administrative, judicial, economic, and social administration of Cambodia, bringing the *pays* into the modern age.³⁴ Again, this belief in the linearity of progress was innate to French colonialism, and the National Revolution justified tutelage through its

32. *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 11 July 1941.

33. *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 10 September 1941.

34. Discours prononcés, 28 October 1941.

ideological emphasis on hierarchy.³⁵ The Republic, on the contrary, was built on spreading liberation and equality, a paradox it never escaped in spite of its own speeches on helping other civilizations since it never intended to bring either to Indochina. Maurrassism lacked this hypocrisy, this contradiction between the values of the Republic and its colonial policies, and Decoux presented himself as the guarantor of this natural order of civilizational tutelage.

Decoux pushed the idea that federalism nurtured the interregional solidarity that was necessary to overcome the economic difficulties. Only through the Union, under French leadership, could works be achieved that were beyond the capabilities of each individual *pays*.³⁶ This was especially true in times when goods were scarce.³⁷ Decoux had to convince the peoples that it was in their interests to assist one another, preparing them for material sacrifice (such as the Cochinchinese sending rice to Tonkin) and at the same time strengthen the idea of the federation as a meaningful, working entity. The press echoed these assertions of increased solidarity despite recent hardships, claiming that “all the *pays* of the Indochinese Federation [were] integrating in the sphere of common prosperity, their destinies linked. . . What before [the war] some considered a utopian conception or myth [was] becoming a living reality.”³⁸ Unlike what Jennings asserts, the Decoux regime never

35. It should be noted that Maurras rejected the idea of a Hegelian spirit, that progress was a constant movement toward perfection. He believed that progress should be stripped of its euphemistic connotations, asserting that with every rise comes a decline, from birth to decay. See Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, 85-92.

36. Discours prononcés, 17 July 1942. Throughout his proconsulship, Decoux used the words “union” and “federation” interchangeably.

37. Discours prononcés, 15 July 1942.

38. *L'Annam Nouveau*, 28 December 1941.

intended to segregate because in doing so it would never have been able to manage affairs in a war time economy. As discussed below, the promotion of local patriotisms was part of an effort to elevate the local elite, but this was not in contradiction with federalism.³⁹

While centralizing real power, Decoux sought to bolster local administrative structures to ensure that his government's policies were implemented. Local bodies were given more responsibility but less independence. By strengthening the authority of these local bodies, Decoux was not moving toward indirect French rule and greater autonomy for the individual *pays*, run by locals, in spite of his claims. He worked through the intermediary of the local authorities to carry out his will, disguising what was in effect more direct rule, in spite of his rhetoric Decoux wanted the French to be involved at every level of administration, though he understood that they could not be seen as doing so.⁴⁰ To achieve this, he needed an even more subservient notable and administrative corps, with more attractive (and addictive) reward structures, while raising the prestige of the sovereigns and notables (see below). The elevation of local traditions and patriotisms was instrumental in this effort. Decoux drew from the elite, including the sovereigns, desirable benefits and actions, by elevating them in the eyes of the peoples—which sometimes meant catering to the hedonism of the elite—while minimizing real power.⁴¹

39. However, one of the unintended consequence of developing the federalist spirit, this idea of interregional solidarity was the possibility of the coordination of efforts of Vietnamese, Lao, and Khmer independentist armies in the two Indochinese Wars, which have been examined in Goscha's *Vietnam or Indochina?*

40. Directives politiques, 27 June 1941.

41. Entretiens et exposés, 23 July 1943, 33-34.

With a quintessentially Maurrassian worldview, Decoux believed this revived respect for the local elites required the extremely delicate and difficult task of encouraging a controlled and non-threatening pride in the nation: only by imagining a glorious past could traditional structures of authority be revered anew, minimizing potential revolutionary forces. It was this tension between “nation” and “*pays*” that threatened the French colonial project in Indochina. The GGI had to stir emotions to revive the past yet channel them away from either independentism or opposition to other *pays*. The solidarity that Decoux often evoked was a concept designed to assuage feelings of resentment of sacrifice (for instance when locally produced foodstuffs were sent to other regions) and to quell nationalist fervor. As such, the government engaged in seemingly contradictory lines of action, vowing to protect local traditions to reinforce the authority of notables and create sentiments of strength and parity of power among the *pays*, while promoting the development of an Indochinese consciousness which facilitated the maintenance of French rule. The policy nonetheless remained consistent: a promotion of local traditions was necessary to elevate the elite, who were necessary to carry out the will of the French and work together with other *pays*’ elites toward the sophistication of the Indochinese Federation. In 1941, Decoux explained:

[This] superior union of diverse *pays* doesn’t imply for any of them the slightest renunciation of their moral and political patrimony. Each one conserves on the contrary its individuality, its culture, its customs, its laws, and pursues its evolution, according to its own merits. Federalism would not negatively affect the prerogatives of the protected sovereigns

or the responsibilities of local Chief administrators, whose authority and prestige must remain intact. Their respective powers keep all their extent. The achieved rapprochement must have for only result the more vigorous development of the creative forces of the whole, through the placing in common of resources and possibilities of the *pays* that make it up.⁴²

A year later he continued:

[Federalism] proposes not to invade and absorb, but to favor the flourishing of sovereignties and local personages. Far from us is the thought of leveling nationalities by weakening the distinctive character of each. We intend, on the contrary, to rely heavily on the protected governments and on collaborating more closely with their natural chiefs the sovereigns, safeguarding the civilizations that [their] ancestors have forged. We also want to regulate the impulsion of the whole, efforts, correlate activities. Our goal is to harmonize all that must and be done so.⁴³

Local elites were the paradoxical key to greater centralization and the promotion of local traditions the vehicle with which to ensure respect for these elites that obeyed the administration.

Decoux understood the risks posed by the promotion of patriotisms, which could easily turn into xenophobic and anti-French nationalism, and sought to utilize the discourse of the National Revolution to channel patriotisms in what he thought were healthy directions. He wrote:

The ideas of the National Revolution must not, like liberal and individualistic doctrines, lead astray patriotic sentiments. These doctrines could only . . . lead to a principle of nationalities and to the theory of the rights of peoples to self rule, thus facing any colonizing action with unsolvable contradictions, from which it was possible to

42. Discours prononcés, 3 December 1941. Sovereign refers to the French term of the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao monarchs.

43. Discours prononcés, 23 July 1943.

extricate it only by associating it with perspectives of untying [*détachement*] and of ineluctable independence vis-à-vis the metropole. . .The National Revolution, on the contrary, through its familial and communitarian doctrine, starting with the grouping of society and individuals in hierarchical families, admits that the existence of a tutelage of certain peoples is a natural law, while the empire and the federation bring to the different *pays* of Indochina this context of natural tutelage in which their patriotism can express itself. . .[The idea is] to destroy through the adroit propagation of the ideas of the National Revolution, federalism, and the empire, the concepts capable of misleading [patriotic] sentiments toward unrealizable aspirations and dangerous illusions.⁴⁴

This circular is key to understanding how the French tried to manage the forces behind the creation of a federal consciousness under French tutelage and the potential to have it backfire and stir xenophobic nationalisms. Decoux was convinced that the values of the National Revolution could channel local energies toward a concrete, positive outcome. Order, hierarchy, and solidarity were values that would engross societies and individuals into embracing the Federation. Confucianism (respect for authority) and Buddhism (detachment from the world), as understood by the French, provided the ideal terrain for Pétainist values and would be reinforced by exalting the “positive” aspects of tradition (hence local patriotisms) while replacing the “negative” with modern European values (through tutelage).

Decoux’s policy was based on convincing the Indochinese peoples of the benefits and the necessity of a union without forcing any individual—and by extension any people—to repudiate his origins and customs, since

44. 3W/152, Decoux to Goucoch, 18 May 1944.

this would erode the authority of elites whose legitimacy derived from tradition. He warned against “the unintelligent nationalisms for small *patries* hatefully withdrawn on themselves and determined to pout rather than live.” Particularly aware of the tensions caused by the Vietnamese immigration in Laos and Cambodia, which Decoux nevertheless believed was necessary for the development of these *pays*, the Admiral sought to avoid the nascence of racial nationalisms, products of longstanding ethnic divisions coupled with European notions of nationhood. Careful to steer sentiments in his direction, he declared “a *patrie* is not constituted of tribes or villages of the same race dispersed over a territory more or less vast; a *patrie*, the *patrie* of all great modern peoples, is before all a land fecundated by the united work and the effort of all the men who inhabit it; . . . that patriotism is above all the love of the land, the collective conscience, and the sense of solidarity.” By emphasizing the path to modernity, the French wanted to infuse European concepts of nationhood into Indochina. Decoux believed that the elite had a pivotal role to play to reverse the racial antipathies of the past. He wrote:

We have carefully to avoid everything that offends and divides—race and racial nationalism—and accentuate all that brings closer and unites—interests and culture—under the common tutelage of France, to whom is given the mission to balance, reconcile, and lead the evolution with order. We must harmonize, in a word, local patriotisms, multiply the contacts between elites, and orient them toward a sentiment of deep solidarity, based on a widespread patriotism.⁴⁵

45. Directives politiques, 4 September 1942; *Indochine*, 20 July 1944, 4.

Decoux saw the rapprochement of the elite of each *pays* as an effective means of raising their prestige while nurturing solidarity amongst peoples. Unlike his predecessors who did not allow Vietnamese emperors to visit Cochinchina, the Governor General encouraged sovereigns to tour other *pays*, as in 1942 when he suggested Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai stop in Saigon and Angkor on his way to visiting Sihanouk. Plans were also drawn to have the King of Cambodia tour some of Cochinchina's industrial and agricultural sites before taking the newly built Route 13 to Luang Prabang to meet with its ruler Sisavang Vong.⁴⁶ The French authorities organized simultaneous training for Vietnamese and Khmer notables at the *Ecole Supérieure d'Education Physique* in Phan Thiêt so that they could “know in common the salutary joys of physical effort.”⁴⁷ The press did not fail to exalt these exchanges, which according to one author, were “manifestations of this ‘team spirit’ that is no less indispensable between collectivities as it is individuals.”⁴⁸

Government pushed the media to exalt the coexistence of local patriotisms, alive through a powerful elite, with an overarching federal consciousness. One article read:

Only federalism can allow Annamite, Cambodian, or Lao *patries* to achieve conjointly the nationhood that they could not achieve alone through lack of space, material wealth, and, if we can say, permeability; only the Indochinese whole possess a national virtuality. . . Let the elite

46. Untitled box, Decoux to ADLOC, 8 July 1942; 1/tel771, No8066-8070, Decoux to Brévié, 30 November 1942. The visit to Cochinchina is particularly interesting because the French always liked to stress that it was no longer part of the royal domain. This was, however, seen as an opportunity to have the sovereigns visit the *Foire de Saigon* and it also coincided with opening of the Government Council meeting, held in Saigon, that Decoux was to preside.

47. Discours prononcés, 15 December 1942.

48. *Indochine*, 11 February 1943.

of each *pays* of the Union understand therefore. . .that it must go beyond its attachment to the village, the city, the local *patrie* to extend its loyalty to the nation in power, the Indochinese Federation. . . Let all recognize that [the Annamite, Cambodian, and Lao *patries*] have convergent interests, that they must lean on one another.⁴⁹

Another made clear parallels between the development of local patriotisms and the greater whole of the federation, asserting “The Cambodian and Lao renaissance. . .demonstrated as much the testimony of the efficiency of [the] federal policy that contribute[d] daily to reinforce moral and spiritual cohesion as the social and economic solidarity of the Indochinese bloc.”⁵⁰ Knowing the various filters through which articles had to pass before publication, it is striking that no one caught on to this demonstration of complete ignorance of the history of the region, not just pre-colonial, but the history of the formation of the colony (the French promised to protect Laos and Cambodia from the Vietnamese!). This reference to imagined attempts to achieve an “Indochinese nationhood” was not a major theme of French propaganda. It does, however, hint at how far French creativity took the rhetoric of Federalism.

Rebuilding the Elite

The Decoux administration’s vision to raise the prestige of the elite to facilitate French rule had little to distinguish itself in theory from the governments that preceded the war, though the degree to which he tried to improve status and his real efforts to redress salary inequities was

49. *Indochine*, 10 December 1942, 2.

50. *Le Nouveau Laos*, 1 April 1943.

much more pronounced. Decoux's GGI was not caught in the paradox and contradictions of its republican predecessors: the republic, a democratic system, relying on local sovereigns regionally and village chiefs locally to sustain the colonial apparatus.⁵¹ The discourse of the National Revolution catered to the Admiral's penchant for social hierarchy and legitimized policies that had always been part of French colonialism but now found a new impetus. During his proconsulship, Decoux adopted measures to recruit notables of certain profiles (young, loyal to France, open to Western values) and make it materially and honorifically worthwhile for local elites to work closely—or at least loyally, that is, with little risk of causing trouble—with the colonial authorities. Decoux's government saw notables as the last cog of the administration, whose duty it was to not only apply administrative acts, but also to explain their purpose to the people, an approach that inscribed itself in the continuity of the Third Republic.⁵² In 1889, shortly after the height of the Can Vuong insurgency led by Vietnamese mandarins against colonial rule, Jean-Marie de Lanessan, who would become Governor General of Indochina two years later, wrote after returning from the colony:

Instead of continuing to follow missionary policies [designed to marginalize the *lettrés* who resisted French religious teachings and to oppose the Nguyen Dynasty which had generally been hostile to Catholicism] that have bore such sad outcomes, we must loyally accept and without restriction the only rule of conduct that is appropriate for a

51. Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars*, 6.

52. RSTNF 6051, "Allocution du Résident de Thai Binh à la conférence des mandarins," 1941.

protectorate, that is to govern Annam and Tonkin by leaning on all the live forces of the *pays*: the king, the court, the secret council, the mandarins, and the *lettrés*. In this way we will gain more surely than through any other means employed to this day the trust and sympathy of the Annamite people and we destroy the forces of rebellion.⁵³

By 1892, most of the mandarinat had abandoned the struggle and Lanessan sought the collaboration of the court and the elite by treating them with greater respect and making certain concessions.⁵⁴

The French needed notables to help them administer the country, yet had to alter the traditional power and reward structures. They realized that direct administration in Tonkin and Annam—which would have entailed abolishing the mandarinat as had been done in Cochinchina—would never be accepted and that they would benefit from drawing on the bureaucratic organization that had functioned for centuries and was adapted to the social and political conventions.⁵⁵ The colonial authorities relied on the elite to overcome their paucity of knowledge on local customs and language. They turned notables into the mere executors of the decisions of the foreign power, rewarding them for their servitude.⁵⁶ In 1898 in Tonkin, the French introduced modifications to the entry examination into the mandarinat, adding French language and quôc-ngu proficiency sections to the traditional test on the Chinese classics.⁵⁷ This

53. Jean-Louis (Jean-Marie) de Lanessan, *L'Indo-Chine française: Etude politique, économique et administrative sur la Cochinchine, le Cambodge, L'Annam et le Tonkin* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1889), 719.

54. Gilles de Gantès, "Protectorate, Association, Reformism: The Roots of Republican Policy Pursued by the Popular Front in Indochina," in Chafer and Sackur, 113.

55. Nguyen The Anh, *Monarchie et fait colonial au Viêt-Nam, 1875-1925* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1992), 222.

56. Brocheux and Hémery, 79; 91.

57. Nguyen, 183.

meant that to be successful, a candidate had to have been exposed to at least some elements of a European-style education and therefore mentalities, though the Franco-Annamite education structure remained in its infancy at this point. Having taken away much of the notables' real power, the French distributed titles, money, and medals, cultivating the desire for a panoply of symbols of power rather than the real thing.⁵⁸

During the 1920s and 1930s, the French continued to rely on the traditional notable institution while simultaneously trying to modernize the recruitment of the notable corps. The administrators blamed the notables' insufficient preparation for their functions and even their vainness for the government's need to increase its powers, though they admitted to the transitory nature of this stage once educational institutions became widespread and sophisticated enough to create an indigenous elite they deemed capable of exercising public functions in relative independence.⁵⁹ Until the mid 1930s, the colonial authorities had preferred to reward docility over competence, but this changed incrementally as more and more graduates came from Western-influenced institutions. In 1934 in Annam, only 28 of 899 mandarins held diplomas from European-type institutions and 193 from education

58. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 67; Edwards, 85.

59. Henri Gourdon, *L'Indochine* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1931), 128. Underscoring French misunderstandings of Vietnamese culture, in 1921, in an attempt to rejuvenate and modernize the mandarinat, the Superior Resident of Tonkin attempted to replace the council of elders with the Council of Tộc Biêu (clan representatives), where members were democratically elected. The experiment only lasted six years and was abandoned after the natural leaders of the villages no longer found it respectable to participate. See GGI 65338, "Redressement des institutions communales," 1-3 and Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 155.

systems with some component of modern, European teaching.⁶⁰ Between 1934 and 1937, 100 mandarins were forcefully retired and replaced by 156 holders of modern diplomas of which 11 came from French universities.⁶¹ Only in Laos were attempts to modernize the elite minimal as the French authorities, too few in numbers to effectively rule directly, relied heavily on Vietnamese administrators to govern the provinces (each of which was headed by a French *Résident* and a provincial chief drawn from the local Lao nobility), or *muang* (though each *muang* was presided by a leading member of the local Lao nobility). This benefited French and Lao nobility alike—though with deleterious consequences for the future—as all local grievances (regarding questions such as high taxes, corruption, or excessive *corvée*, that is labor for the state required by law) focused on the Vietnamese. Nonetheless the French did introduce reform in Laos in 1920 creating an elected Indigenous Consultative Assembly, whose members were restricted to those who had reached higher grades in the civil service or who possessed the requisite level of education.⁶²

Decoux's policies vis-à-vis the elite differed little from those of his predecessors. He sought to raise the prestige of the mandarins (that had steadily deteriorated) and their compensation to allow them a sufficiently high standard of living to act with what Decoux called "integrity and a devotion to the public cause." This in effect continued past policies of rewarding docility and compliance since it followed that a devotion to the

60. Brocheux and Hémery, 206-207.

61. Hémery: 15.

62. Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 31; 42. Note that every *pays* had one of these in some form or another, see footnote 9.

public cause meant obeying government orders without question or risk losing said rewards. The Admiral also sought to inject new blood in the notable corps and replaced those elite he deemed unacceptable (often due to lack of energetic support for the government or a stale disposition) with younger subjects who were promised improved possibilities for advancement should they prove outstanding in their function, that is, with a clear and unquestioning understanding of what it was the authorities expected of them.⁶³ Under Decoux, the administration's entire policy vis-à-vis notables (both village-level officials and higher level mandarins) was to provide a larger place for younger and educated elements of the population based on the idea that results obtained in villages where village chiefs had received a certain European culture had been excellent.⁶⁴ While Hanoi was keen to tap into the traditional authority of the mandarins, the administration wanted to ensure that the corps executed the GGI's orders obediently, cultivating a profile and rewards structure to reinforce this policy. Again, efforts to modernize the notable body sought not to tap a more dynamic, go-getting elite capable of imagining and implementing changes to the administration, but rather to deepen the allegiance of the mandarins by hiring Western-influenced graduates whose compensation and social rank was linked to their performance as executors of the government's will. In this sense, Decoux sought to revive traditional reverence for the elite, but with a less traditional corps.

63. Directives politiques, 15 June 1941; Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 400-401.

64. GGI 65343, Goucoch to Decoux, 2 December 1941, 5.

The Admiral even asked the French to change the way they addressed locals, using the formal French pronoun *vous* over the more informal, and condescending, *tu*. This *politique d'égards* intended to maintain the dignity of what the French called the “evolved Indochinese” and show respect for those who had bought into the European system. Changing the form of address was a means to accept locals, particularly those who had received European educations, not so much as equals, but as humans.⁶⁵ This effort distinguished Decoux from his predecessors and underscored his personal affinity for showing special consideration for an elite that took its rightful place in the social hierarchy. There were also more pragmatic reasons behind this push to use *vous*, namely as a move to endear the local bourgeoisie and aristocracy and accelerate the Franco-Indochinese rapprochement that Decoux judged so important for the future of the colony, particularly if French attitudes were contrasted with those displayed by the Japanese, which they assessed as far from cordial.⁶⁶

Decoux intended to govern the colony through these mandarins (but also local officials), relying on a more pronounced social hierarchy to ensure that the elite’s renewed authority served the interests of France. He reminded the mandarins of Annam that they should be leaders and give themselves entirely to serving their *pays* and its populations. Decoux believed that once the traditional structures of the mandarins were reinforced he could advance his plans for an Indochinese Federation. He

65. 3W/152, Marcel Robbe, “Directive d’ordre général pour la propagande,” 18 March 1943.

66. Directives politiques, 30 July 1942.

called on the mandarins to assume no less than traditional roles of “father and mother of the people” as artisans of the supposed common cause of the Indochinese Union, which would help the peoples of Indochina traverse the difficulties of the time. Decoux openly sought to juxtapose the old and the new—ancestral tradition and a more modern, European way of administration—to build his version of federalism.⁶⁷

Decoux, who “governed Indochina as he would have a ship,”⁶⁸ was obsessed with hierarchy, adding impetus to the French policies of reinforcing mandarins’ authority as means of achieving colonial objectives. By reintroducing direct administration by the locals—who remained under the control of the French—Decoux sought to give mandarins real power and authority to end the debates and discussions within elected councils that Decoux found so distasteful.⁶⁹ Doing away with these bodies was integral to the restoration of authority because it elevated the elite above the people, shielding them from the scrutiny that is intrinsic to democratic debate. While the Admiral anchored his promotion of elite authority in tradition—and the discourse of the National Revolution—he did not believe it should exist outside the context of the imperial project, which again meant serving the interests of France above all else. In a 1943 telegram to Vichy, he wrote “in Indochina as in France the principle of authority [is being rehabilitated] opening possibilities for those who wish to learn and grow conforming to

67. *L’Action*, 9 October 1942; Discours prononcés, 15 July 1942; 18 November 1943.

68. 3W/149, Delsalle deposition.

69. RSTNF 5989, Decoux to ADLOC, 28 March 1941, 3.

the principles of the National Revolution.”⁷⁰ These principles meant subservience to French colonial structures through an administrative apparatus that rested on cultural notions of hierarchy while eliminating elements of tradition that Decoux found objectionable for the carrying out of French policy. More than tradition or modernity, the Admiral sought obedience through a realignment of values to better serve the state, and just as he placed trusted French naval officers in key government positions, he made sure that a new generation of notables was in place to carry out his orders. In his 24 November 1941 speech to fresh graduates of a training course for district chiefs, he told them:

The time is gone when, visiting villages, the mandarin, lying on his palanquin or sat on his horse, only saw bowed heads and joined hands, receiving for only response to his orders or admonishments the respectful approbation of. . .the inhabitants. Yet these ancestral virtues of our Annamite populations have remained intact and among these virtues obedience to representatives of authority. But today, more than the prestige of the function, the prestige of he who exercises it counts, and you will only possess it by demonstrating the best qualities of the man and the chief. . .The state expects from you a devotion without reservation, a perfect dignity of life, an absolute integrity.⁷¹

Throughout the provinces, administrators echoed the idea of reinforcing traditional authority with more flexible, “enlightened” methods modeled on French wisdom. The Resident Superior of Tonkin declared in 1941:

Mandarins are, within villages, the representatives of central power, and all this constitutes an ensemble of tradition and liberty, of organic authority and hierarchy whose harmony is unquestionable. . .France can bring to your traditional institutions the light of its spirit and the warmth

70. 1/tel788, No.4243, Decoux to Bléhaut, 29 September 1943.

71. Discours prononcés, 24 November 1941.

of its heart. From the harmonious fusion of our two cultures a glorious and prosper Annam can be born.⁷²

This meant that the elite had to change their mentalities to keep up with changing times and were told that it was on them that depended the realization of the *oeuvre* that France endeavored in Indochina and that they should conduct in their public and private lives in absolute probity, an essential condition for the moral ascendancy that they would acquire on the population.⁷³

The problem was that the profession of notable remained unattractive for most young graduates. The government's longer term objectives of improving its corps of notables (that is, mid-level officials) ran into its immediate needs to fill vacant positions for the administration to run properly. It decided to open positions to lateral recruitment from elsewhere within the civil service, meaning there were two paths to becoming a notable, both through examination: one reserved for those holding a French university diploma (either from the metropole or through an institution of French educational heritage) and another, temporarily until the first avenue became more reliable, to civil servants from other departments.⁷⁴ Decoux envisaged starting those from the former category at a higher rank than their counterparts coming in laterally, thereby providing them with an immediate advantage and higher compensation.⁷⁵ The Admiral believed that the need for lateral

72. RSTNF 6007, "Discours prononcé par le RST," 13 June 1941.

73. RSTNF 6051, "Allocution du Résident de Thai Binh," 1941.

74. 1/tel788, No.4243, Decoux to Bléhaut, 29 September 1943. This model was more developed in Tonkin and Annam, but Decoux intended to spread this model to other pays.

75. Directives politiques, 19 September 1943.

recruitment in Vietnam would diminish as European education became more widespread.⁷⁶ The authorities understood however that the Vietnamese system was inadequate for Cambodia and Laos as desperately low education levels there meant they could not draw from a large enough pool of potential candidates. One report suggested that of 217 members of the elite in Cambodia, only one had a degree in law and 31 held the baccalaureate.⁷⁷ Furthermore, some circles within the colonial regime believed Cambodian culture was too individualistic for the “collective spirit” of the notable function and thus the role would remain unattractive.⁷⁸ In this view persisted the prejudicial racial hierarchization placing the Vietnamese at the top of the intellectual food chain in Indochina, providing real insight into the faint hopes the French had for Laos and Cambodian development no matter what was said in speeches.

To attract candidates, the administration raised compensation for mandarins, directly improving overall standards of living and consequently, it was hoped, prestige while reducing corruption. Decoux believed that mandarins who represented the authorities, to whom the government gave political responsibilities, and from whom the GGI demanded the most scrupulous integrity, must have a lifestyle worthy of the position.⁷⁹ The administration sought for instance to reduce the overall burden of official travel for the mandarins, which had become a source of unhappiness among the elite and a deterrent for recruitment.⁸⁰

76. Directives politiques, 19 April 1943.

77. GGI 65342, RSC to Decoux, 12 March 1943 and INF 1135, RSC to Decoux.

78. GGI 65342, Note sur la réforme communale au Cambodge.

79. Directives politiques, 15 June 1941.

80. GGI 65343, Decoux to ADLOC, 23 February 1943; RSC to Decoux, 28 May 1942.

It was also put forward that having French administrators visit mandarins (rather than ask the latter to travel to meet their European superiors) would increase prestige and incentivize the elite to assist the government.⁸¹ In the eyes of the GGI, frequent contact was essential to raise the morale of the population, fight “dangerous propaganda,” and clarify certain policies so that the mandarins in turn could explain them to the people in the area.⁸² Unfortunately, the desire to cut down mandarins’ travel juxtaposed with difficulties in recruitment (particularly in remote areas with highly uneducated inhabitants) made it nearly impossible to resolve the problem of mandarins not knowing segments of their populations, especially in the high regions where high fragmentation of racial and cultural diversity existed, thus making it more difficult for the administration to use mandarins (and notables) to explain government policy.⁸³ It is curious how Decoux could have given in to the mandarins’ complaints about travel when he repeatedly stressed the importance of close contact with the population. Similarly, accepting a relatively immobile elite corps did not fit with the image of modernity and energy Decoux was trying to create, particularly given the nationalist threat in the countryside which, albeit significantly weakened after harsh reprisals, also fought for the hearts and minds of the populations.⁸⁴ As

81. GGI 65343, Ginestou, Directeur des douanes et régies de l’Indochine to Subdirectors, 23 May 1942.

82. Directives politiques, 12 January 1943.

83. RSTNF 174, Decoux to RST, 29 October 1940.

84. I have not found any clear rationale in the government documents reconciling this paradox or even acknowledging the contradiction. See GGI 65341, Decoux to ADLOC, 23 February 1942 as an example of Decoux telling his subordinates to reduce mandarins’ travel requirements, pointing to how unattractive they are, forgetting how travels to distant villages is the type of action that would support his other policies of dynamism.

such there resulted a tension between modernization and the need to preserve the traditional authority of the elite that Decoux had to manage carefully.

Ensuring the Loyalty of the Administrators

More than any of his predecessors, Decoux made changes in the way administrators were hired, retained (or dismissed), and compensated. Indochina's isolation meant it was impossible to replace European civil servants who reached the end of their tour of duty, but more troubling for Decoux, it meant the GGI had to keep administrators who had served under the Republic and therefore potentially against Vichy. Decoux's authoritarian character and his preternatural inclinations for hierarchy and discipline exacerbated tensions as he did not tolerate dissent and sanctioned or dismissed any civil servant who spoke or acted against the National Revolution. Decoux opened administrative positions to locals to resolve the problem of lack of personnel and build the Indochinese Federation through a process of indigenization already begun under the Third Republic, accelerating its implementation in order to develop its structures and the federal consciousness that he wanted to be the consequence of greater interdependence of the *pays*.

The process of indigenization of the civil service had gained momentum in the 1920s. In 1897, Governor General Paul Doumer had sought to centralize power in the hands of the French by taking away from the court the collection of all taxes, immediately putting all civil servants on the colonial payroll. He recruited new groups of Frenchmen to administer myriad areas from enforcement of production to issuance

of permits to running post offices.⁸⁵ From that year, the first of Doumer's governorship, to 1911, when Albert Sarraut moved into the governor's residence in Hanoi, the number of European civil servants increased from 2,860 to 5,683.⁸⁶ As part of his "pro-native" policies, Sarraut opened positions in the administration to locals, though never replacing Frenchmen in decision or policy-making positions. In Tonkin, he encouraged the promotion of Francophile values by reserving certain roles to graduates of metropolitan or Franco-indigenous schools. In 1922, Pasquier, then Administrator for Civil Services in Indochina, established the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Annamites* in efforts to continue the process of modernization of the Indochinese administration, contributing to the marginalization of the *lettrés*. Most of the positions remained closed to the Indochinese peoples and the only real way in which a local could access certain echelons was to be naturalized a French citizen.⁸⁷ During the 1920s, Alexandre Varenne extended Sarraut's efforts by creating a lateral administrative cadre that raised compensation for Vietnamese civil servants.⁸⁸ Nonetheless Indochina during this period supported the heaviest functionary structure of Europeans within the French empire with an average of 5,000 civil servants for a population of 21.5 million, compared to 500 officials in French West Africa, whose population was 15 million.⁸⁹

85. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 186.

86. Brocheux and Hémery, 87.

87. Nguyen, 225; 258.

88. Devillers, 44.

89. Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars*, 83.

Decoux recognized the importance of a keeping a strong presence of French administrators in Indochina to maintain France's sovereignty in the colony,⁹⁰ but he saw the *épuration*, or purge, of the civil service as necessary to the implementation of his version of the National Revolution, ridding it of those who voiced their opinions against it.⁹¹ For the Admiral, this action served both pragmatic and propagandistic causes. He invoked the National Revolution as means of reaffirming authority and firing functionaries who were too old (read potential republicans, having served under previous administrations) or incompetent (again, potential republicans). He declared that "a culpable sentimentality [was] no longer warranted. . .and only those functionaries who [were] active, honest, and loved [France]" should be kept, a less than subtle call to replace dissent with Pétainist loyalty. Decoux asked his Heads of ADLOC to work toward the purging of undesirables and the moral recovery of the functionary corps. He demanded that all civil servants, French and local, live exemplary lives, building and promoting the French *oeuvre* of national restoration, following the government on the road it had traced or else be removed.⁹² In an action encapsulating Decoux's thirst for show over substance, on 6 February 1942, the Admiral instructed all higher echelon functionaries to prepare and read texts condemning Gaullism and reaffirming their loyalty to the legal state,

90. Decoux also wanted to curb inefficiencies and end the duplication of roles as means of saving money and resources. Directives politiques, 8 April 1943.

91. 1/tel689, No.2669, Decoux to Platon, 14 October 1940.

92. RSTNF 5989, Decoux to ADLOC, 28 March 1941, 4; 3W/152 Decoux to ADLOC, 13 July 1941; Directives politiques, 16 March 1943; Decoux to Goucoch, 10 September 1943.

which would have to be rewritten if they were deemed “a bit flat.”⁹³ This show also had the benefit of reinforcing Decoux’s image as a good state employee, minimizing the risks of concerns from Vichy and thereby giving himself more leeway for action.

Decoux’s efforts to purge the administration targeted mostly suspected Freemasons, at least early on, and Gaullists. He feared that even passive opponents of the regime, those who voiced their dissent only in private quarters, posed risks of sabotaging the government measures. The Admiral believed former Leftists (supporters of the Popular Front, for instance) or Freemasons could not be trusted to carry out administrative reforms nor see to it that the values and principles of the National Revolution be championed and he was merciless in his hunt for suspected dissidents, which undoubtedly worked in keeping opposing voices silent as fear of career suicide seeped through the ranks. He asked the ADLOC to provide him with lists of and recommended actions for functionaries whose loyalties were questionable.⁹⁴ Decoux also encouraged the *Légion* to work closely with administrative heads to identify troublesome elements.⁹⁵ In spite of aggressive rhetoric, the number of functionaries dismissed was relatively low, pointing not to a corps conquered by Pétainist enthusiasm, but rather a subservience driven by the fear of reprisals, either professional or judiciary. By the end of 1941, after the initial momentum of purging subsided, 150 French

93. 3W/149, Decoux Hearing, 11 June 1948.

94. 3W/152, Decoux to ADLOC, 27 April 1943.

95. Exposés et entretiens, 13 July 1943, 23.

administrators had been fired, with an equivalent number of locals.⁹⁶ The process of indigenization itself was a byproduct of *épuration* in the sense that Decoux needed to replace French civil servants, but the numbers of Frenchmen replaced overall was simply not large enough to drive the process itself. That numbers of functionaries purged was low fit in with Decoux's objective of presenting the image of a united French bloc, for replacing significant portions of his civil servants due to suspected disloyalty would have exposed fissures to outsiders. In the end, lack of alternatives for resistance ensured most functionaries fell in line. By employing harsh rhetoric, Decoux also gave outsiders the impression that there would be no tolerance for dissent and thus, with relatively few convictions, the administration could pretend that it had the support of the functionary corps.

Though the GGI had to adhere, at least in part, to the 3 October 1940 law promulgated in Vichy—known as the First Jewish Statute, which excluded Jews from the civil service—political views that aligned with the GGI trumped exclusionary laws emanating from the metropole whenever Decoux was able to build a case, particularly considering the difficulty in replacing administrators. The postwar tribunal admitted that Decoux often tried to circumvent Vichy's exclusionary laws, keeping as many Jews and Freemasons in the administration (either by reclassifying them to avoid sanctions or pleading their cases directly to Vichy) and helping to find new positions in the private sector for those inevitably affected. Decoux claimed he had to implement the exclusionary policies or risk

96. Discours prononcés, 16 November 1941.

compromising French authority in Indochina, since open dissent would have turned the Japanese against Hanoi, the entire Franco-Japanese relationship resting on the idea that the GGI was loyal to Vichy, as a legal entity.⁹⁷ This justification is hardly plausible since there is no evidence that the Japanese cared one way or another about the fate of the Jews or the Freemasons and the refusal to implement exclusionary laws was hardly grounds for severing ties between colony and metropole. Moreover, Decoux had to comply with regulations, though, as discussed below, he only did so when it fit his political purposes. One witness testified to Decoux's belief that persecutions could only do harm to the French *oeuvre* as it threatened to tear apart the tight colonial community.⁹⁸ Though there may be some evidence to corroborate this statement, it is not so clear cut. If it were, how could the GGI have published a book calling democracy the reign of the "Jewish and *métèques* dynasties, at first hidden, then brought to light?"⁹⁹ The regime's rhetoric, including what it allowed to be published in periodicals, attests to an underlying anti-Semitism that existed alongside pragmatism.

The First Jewish Statute was promulgated in Indochina on 5 November 1940. Though Jennings and Sébastien Verney contend that this rapid implementation demonstrated the "flawless legislative continuity" between Hanoi and Vichy,¹⁰⁰ telegrams show that Decoux rapidly seeking exceptions to the law, pointing to the GGI's inability to

97. For example GG2 171, Requisitoire définitif, "Note pour l'Amiral Decoux," 5.

98. 3W/155, Casamatta memoire.

99. Biros, 14. See Chapter 2 for Maurras' use of the term *métèques*.

100. Eric Jennings and Sébastien Verney, "Vichy aux colonies; L'Exportation des statuts des juifs dans l'empire," *Archives Juives* 1, No.41 (2008): 114.

replace valuable members of the army and administration given Indochina's situation.¹⁰¹ Jennings wonders how Decoux could have so zealously excluded Jews given that he was constantly bemoaning this lack of personnel.¹⁰² It seems, actually, that Decoux continued to telegram Vichy over the course of the war to spare Jews within the administration but, unable to win every battle, nevertheless had to let go 15 functionaries, for whom he even insisted they continue to receive colonial remuneration.¹⁰³ That is not to say that he tried to save all 15—he used the law to rid the administration of “troublesome elements”—but had he had his way, the number would have been lower.

There was some confusion within the administration as to who should be categorized as Jewish and therefore targeted. As examined in Chapter 2, Vichy law looked upon anyone as Jewish who had two Jewish grandparents and was married to a Jew or belonged to the Jewish religion. Since French civil records did not indicate religion (unlike German ones), the government identified anyone who belonged to the “Jewish community” as Jewish by race, though how this community was defined was left unclear, to the frustration of some administrators.¹⁰⁴ Decoux followed Vichy's orders, informing his subordinates that Jews were no longer allowed to hold certain functionary positions as well as some liberal professions. The Admiral, however, made it a point to apply Article 8 of the 3 October law exempting anyone “having provided

101. 1/tel690, No.3412, Decoux to Platon, 2 December 1940.

102. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 145.

103. N.A., *La Révolution Nationale en Indochine* (Saigon: S.I.L.I., 1942), 21; Tully, 366-368; Grandjean, 117.

104. VNNA, RST 79890, Delsalle to Decoux, ? October 1941; Decoux to Delsalle, 7 October 1941.

exceptional services in the literary, scientific, or artistic domains.”¹⁰⁵ It is on this basis that Decoux argued with Vichy for certain Jews to remain in their posts. He also pushed for *certificats d’Aryen* to be delivered to avoid complications posed by the law.¹⁰⁶ Civil servants and military personnel had to give their word that they were not Jewish.¹⁰⁷ This was hardly the most efficient way of implementing the law if one was seeking to cast the net as widely as possible. The 2 June 1941 law called for a census to be taken to count the Jewish population, with Jews needing to declare themselves to the authorities, but here too the administration had trouble establishing origins with absolute certainty.¹⁰⁸ Though Decoux sent circular letters reminding his subordinates of the need to establish lists, the lack of significant follow up indicates this may have been nothing more than lip service.

Though some witnesses claimed that few Jews escaped the GGI’s exclusionary policies,¹⁰⁹ the empirical numbers, backed up by numerous telegrams, simply don’t support this assertion.¹¹⁰ To repeat, only 15 Jews were affected by the law, some of whom Decoux fought unsuccessfully to maintain. It seems, however, that Decoux was influenced more by the ideological orientation of the person in question than by his racial or religious background. This was the determining factor for termination.

105. 3W/155, Chauvet deposition, 18-19.

106. RSC 219, Decoux to Heads of ADLOC, 11 April 1942.

107. Poujade, *L’Indochine*, 50.

108. VNNA RST 79890, Delsalle to Banque d’Indochine, 13 November 1941.

109. 3W/155, Casamatta memoire.

110. The official census, after the implementation of the 2 June 1941 law, counted 140 Jews in Indochina (92 men, 30 women, and 18 children); of course this number most likely does not reflect the real number of Jews as defined by Vichy, given the nature of the census methodology. 1/tel728, No.8080, Decoux to Platon, 22 December 1941

The example of Engineer Kaleski is telling. In 1941, Kaleski was hired by the newly created Importers Federation, drawing complaints from certain elements of the Saigon business community because he was Jewish. Decoux vouched for Kaleski's competence for the job, but Vichy insisted that he be removed from the position because the Federation received 0.3% of the value of the merchandise imported as royalty, thus making it, according to Vichy, a government subsidized entity, and justifying Kaleski's removal. In spite of Decoux's continued protests, the *Commisariat général aux questions juives* (CGQJ) in Vichy maintained that Kaleski should be fired. Even with the support of the Ministry of Colonies, Decoux was unable to reverse orders for Kaleski's termination.¹¹¹

Decoux understood that to maintain the loyalty of his administrators, it was necessary to increase remuneration levels for both French and local civil servants to minimize disgruntlement given soaring inflation, believing the rise in costs of living posed both social and political problems.¹¹² He and the Ministry of Colonies agreed that it was important to keep small low-level local functionaries happy as their direct contact with the population was one of the government's best sources of propaganda.¹¹³ On 9 February 1942, he informed Vichy that he planned to raise local functionary wages by 10% (with 144 and 72 piasters per annum minimum for cadres and subalterns respectively).¹¹⁴ In January

111. Colette Zytnicki, "La Politique antisémite du régime de Vichy dans les colonies," in Cantier and Jennings, 174.

112. 1/tel772, No.235, Decoux to Platon, 9 February 1942.

113. For example 1/tel704, No.1459, Platon to Decoux, 2 April 1941.

114. 1/tel772, No.235, Decoux to Platon, 9 February 1942.

1944, he proposed a further 10% increase for both French and local administrators, though the former benefitted later that year from reclassifications and saw compensation rise from a range of 9,000-12,000 to one of 12,000-70,000 Francs.¹¹⁵ The administration prided itself on the success the measures had on improving the lives of the salaried Indochinese populations, but later on one source from the de Gaulle government in Paris claimed that the loyalty of the functionaries had been “literally bought” through the pay increases, a conclusion that, albeit expressed cynically, was probably not far from Decoux’s original intentions since he had done the same with the mandarins.¹¹⁶ By 1944, inflation was so rampant that these increases in remuneration could not keep up with the rise in cost of living for functionaries on fixed salaries, particularly in Tonkin where they were often two to three times as high as in other parts of the colony (see Chapter 6).¹¹⁷ The inability to keep real wages from falling was inevitable given the disarray of the economy by this time.

Decoux also tried to ensure that local functionaries sought roles based on their competencies rather than compensation by rectifying inequalities of pay amongst Indochinese civil servants occupying the same hierarchical position within the administration. The Admiral identified a loophole, albeit anomalous, where some Indochinese functionaries received the same expatriate (for living outside their home country) or natality (based on the number of children) allowances as their

115. For example *France-Annam*, 7 July 1944; *Indochine*, 9 July 1942.

116. Discours prononcés, 15 December 1942; INF 1210, Situation en Indochine, 6 December 1944.

117. RSTNF 6703, Le Tonkin politique, August (?) 1944, 8

European counterparts, making some lower rank positions more attractive to locals than some of higher rank because they could receive more perquisites. The government realized that local degree holders sometimes preferred to accept employment based on these allowances, even if they could contribute more in another, higher position, threatening the effectiveness of the apparatus as a whole. Of course this was tied to the more serious problem of inequality of base pay for the same position for locals and (sometimes less qualified) Frenchmen. For Decoux, addressing this issue was an important step toward improving the efficiency of the administrative machine and assuage the discontent of those who did not benefit from the system. Decoux rectified the problem, with the 16 November 1942 and 16 March 1943 decrees, by ensuring that all functionaries received the same compensation at the same hierarchical level (revised upward rather than downward), though Frenchmen would continue to benefit from expatriate and natality allowances and their local counterparts would not. Decoux saw this reform as an important step in facilitating access to the higher echelons of the administration to locals, particularly those coming from European-friendly educational institutions.¹¹⁸

Decoux opened up administrative positions to locals that before were reserved for Frenchmen to make up for the retirement or deaths of European functionaries who could not be replaced. This was also a means of appearing more liberal through a willingness to cede some administrative power to the locals, a nice spillover effect. In his memoirs,

118. For example GGI 65296, "Compte-rendu: Questions de personnel," Conseil Fédéral Indochinois Session July 1942.

Decoux condemned the practice of reserving execution-intensive subaltern positions (such as clerical or secretarial jobs) to Frenchmen since locals could have held them with little inconvenience. During his proconsulship, Decoux saw the practice of excluding Indochinese peoples from certain posts as a danger for France's prestige and sovereignty in the region, increasing discontent and betraying the image of France's benevolent *oeuvre* in the region.¹¹⁹ In his view, the creation of local cadres would reevaluate local diplomas and provide the necessary career outlets to mitigate the frustrations of the elite.¹²⁰ This also had the potential to be a huge propaganda *coup*, demonstrating how there were tangible benefits to French tutelage, even though no matter how high the position, locals were excluded from real strategic decision-making. The number of Vietnamese occupying middle or high positions in the administration doubled from 1940 to 1944, which may have provided enough experience for the young Democratic Republic of Vietnam not to collapse in the years immediately following the war.¹²¹ That said, there was no intention of giving locals control.

The indigenization of the administration was not in any sense equivalent to a sharing or transfer of power. Were Indochina not to have been isolated from Europe, and questionable functionaries replaced easily with loyal Pétainists, it is unlikely that Decoux would have been so keen to accelerate the opening of echelons to locals, though he made sure he turned the situation to his advantage through publicity. In early 1941,

119. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 398.

120. 1/te726, No.4285, Decoux to Platon, 6 August 1941.

121. Devillers, 85; Grandjean, 71-72.

Decoux asked Vichy to send young Frenchmen to fill midlevel positions, and given the difficulties already encountered, envisaged using locals as replacements on a trial basis.¹²² Once maritime traffic became unreliable, the Admiral tapped Indochina's "inexhaustible supply of men" to fill the gaps, entrusting positions of management or execution to Indochinese. Though the French had to fill these administrative positions, they remained reluctant to move toward a more indirect administration which would have given the locals too much power and control over the region. Decoux wanted to rely more heavily on locals in the administration, but only insofar as the French government kept its power to act, direct, and above all control, at all levels. Though positions opened up to locals, Decoux wanted to ensure that the government employed "Europeans in positions of *direction* and *control*, [with] all other positions, of *management* and *execution*, being progressively entrusted to Indochinese," meaning that the administration would have to hire more locals as worker bees but seldom if ever as policy-makers. The Admiral warned his immediate subordinates that the authorities would have to proceed with these reforms with caution, but that there was no other choice.¹²³ The impossibility of replacing Europeans played in the locals' favor, though Decoux used this demographic constraint to his political advantage by celebrating the efforts made by the GGI to open up the administration.

122. 1/tel724, No.1280, Decoux to Platon, 16 March, 1941.

123. Entretiens et exposés, 23 July 1943, 36; 44; 45. Emphasis in original.

All in all, from 1940 to 1944, the number of Vietnamese occupying mid and high-level functionary positions doubled.¹²⁴

Decoux positioned these reforms as part of France's efforts and ability to build a better future for the region, proving that recent setbacks during the war were not going to slow the French *oeuvre*.¹²⁵ Decoux claimed that by giving the Indochinese peoples a greater part in the administration, the region's population would progress socially and materially as their exposure to European methods led them to abandon all that was toxic (according to the French) in traditions, rites, and customs, and were obstacles to the necessary evolution of the region.¹²⁶ Again, the French selected what was toxic and what was valuable, or even quaint, based not just on positivist European concepts, but on pragmatic grounds; clearly evolution could never entail equality, social or racial, because that would have gone against imperial structures. Decoux's Maurrassism espoused tradition when it promoted hierarchy and order and colonial interests blended well with this ideology.¹²⁷ Of course the locals could not be counted on to change by themselves and Decoux encouraged his Heads of ADLOC to mentor their Indochinese subordinates, so they in turn could train the functionaries under their orders. In what is a fit encapsulation of the white man's burden, he explained the French had to develop their local employees since the latter

124. Devillers, 85. Most of the administrative positions went to Vietnamese segments rather than Lao or Khmer, who continued to suffer from French perceptions that they were not as competent as their neighbor counterparts.

125. RSTNF 5989, Decoux to ADLOC, 28 March 1941, 1.

126. 72AJ/1904 "Conférence des Chefs d'ADLOC," 25 August 1944, 34-35; Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 389.

127. Unlike his republican predecessors who pretended to come from certain ideological roots yet implemented policies contrary to those roots.

“generally [did] not find, neither in the family nor in the environment in which he live[d], any person able to counsel or guide him and above all encourage him.”¹²⁸ Again, Decoux targeted the youth to accelerate the generational divide that would ensure a future Indochinese Federation that embraced France and its values.

Through its propaganda machine, the authorities made use of the press to salute its own efforts. It commended “the culture that France intend[ed] to give the young Indochinese. . .[helping them] affirm [their] personality [and] work[ing] toward the interpenetration of [the] two civilizations.” They claimed that through “access by the Indochinese to liberal careers and administrative functions. . . little by little cadres [would] develop and collaboration [would] make its way toward total realization.”¹²⁹ The administration’s actions, wrote one author, followed “the notion of reward for those whose loyalty resisted hardships [and] follow[ed] above all the call of Franco-Annamite collaboration for a participation always more confident of the Indochinese elite in the common work.”¹³⁰ This collaboration, the authorities contended, was the basis of the Indochinese Union, and would “reconcile and blend, in the hearth of the common interest, individual antagonisms and local particularisms to give a vigorous personality to the constituted collectivity.”¹³¹ Though the French tried to turn a difficult situation into a

128. Directives politiques, 22 January 1942.

129. *L’Annam Nouveau*, 19 December 1940.

130. *Voix d’Empire*, 26 November 1941.

131. *Indochine*, 6 January 1944, 1-3.

propaganda coup, the ethnic harmony between Europeans and locals they pretended to foster never realized.¹³²

The Federal Council

Before the 8 November 1940 decree suspended elected bodies, Indochinese assemblies in each protectorate *pays* (Tonkin, Annam, Cambodia, and Laos) consisted of a French and an indigenous council, a dual structure created in 1913 by Sarraut. A French Council of Economic and Financial Interests was, depending on the *pays*, composed of nine to 20 members elected by limited suffrage, responsible for providing advice and insights on local budgets. With a permanent commission, these assemblies met annually. The local councils, called Chamber of Representatives of the People, counted 40 to 120 members, some of which were elected by political and business elites, and the rest simply nominated by the authorities. They had similar responsibilities as the French council. Provincial councils existed in Tonkin, Annam, and Cambodia and were responsible for provincial budgets. In Tonkin, they were composed of Frenchmen appointed by the government and Vietnamese mandarins elected by restricted segments of the population. The administration also appointed members of the elite from the ethnic minorities to sit on the council. In Annam, the provincial councils were exclusively composed of Indochinese, partly elected, partly nominated (including those from ethnic minorities). In Cambodia, most of the members were elected. In Cochinchina, the only colony in Indochina, councils were modeled on French structures and predated the other *pays*'

132. This is extensively covered in Goscha's *Vietnam or Indochina?*

councils. The Colonial council, established in 1880, was comprised of 10 Frenchmen (elected through universal suffrage) and 10 locals (elected through limited suffrage). Its public sessions were broader, deliberating on budgets and powerful enough to make taxation and spending decisions. Cochinchina's provincial councils, dating from 1889 and composed of elected Vietnamese and appointed Frenchmen, met twice a year to deliberate on provincial budgets.¹³³

The Indochinese Federal Council (IFC) and later the Grand Federal Council (GFC) were the new formal structures that Decoux felt he needed to develop the Indochinese federal consciousness simultaneously with the elevation of the elite. Rather than a legislative or executive body, the Federal Council in both its forms (FC) was a body constituted of non-elected elites who gave their opinions to the Governor General to assist him in his decision-making, and served as a forum to strengthen the relations between these elites and the authorities. Officially, its role was "to enlighten the Head of the Federation on the aspirations and needs of the inhabitants of Indochina," though Decoux had no obligation to act upon anything that was said during its sessions.¹³⁴ Suspicious of democratic institutions, Decoux leaned on laws passed by Vichy to justify the creation of this consultative corps that deliberated questions submitted by the GGI.¹³⁵ Decoux envisioned the FC as a corporatist body (See Chapter 6 for Decoux's corporatist ambitions in economic spheres),

133. GGI 65296, "Réforme des assemblées - Création de nouveaux conseils," Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, Session July 1942.

134. INF 2762, Note sur la création d'un Conseil Fédéral Indochinois.

135. The Councils had to be consulted for any budgetary or fiduciary questions, but on other matters, seeking their advice was at the GGI's discretion.

nominating its members himself and Ralph Smith suggests that sitting on the FC was no more than a means to reward those who had supported Decoux's policies, which would be consistent with Decoux's policies in other administrative areas.¹³⁶ The road to an Indochinese Federation was paved with material rewards.

The IFC met twice a year until the creation of the GFC and its inaugural session was held on 3 December 1941. Though the IFC and the GFC differed in size and national representation, they were both mere consultative, non-democratic bodies designed to tighten relations between the authorities and the elite, while strengthening ties between French Indochina's elite. The GFC was composed of 25 members—all Indochinese and chosen for their expediency in public affairs and for their loyalty—and was intended to play up the links that existed between the different *pays* of the union. Decoux compared it to Vichy's *Conseil national* insofar as it maintained contact between the government and the intellectual elite. Drawing from the discourse of the National Revolution, the Admiral suspended elected bodies and stressed that the IFC represented the end of parliamentary institutions and its "sterile discussions."¹³⁷ The GFC replaced the IFC in 1943 by introducing 23 French representatives, appointed by the government, from the economy's principal sectors, making it, according to Decoux, more representative of the social and economic activities in Indochinese and more able to concretize the spirit of collaboration that he sought. He

136. Smith: 270; Pedrazzani, 103. More discussion in Guéret, 18.

137. For example INF 2762, "Textes concernant les assemblées locales élues des colonies depuis juin 1940."

added five local members to the total, ensuring that the Indochinese presence outnumbered the European and hoping this would reverse the reluctance of the locals to believe in the genuineness of the politics of collaboration. In addition, he certainly wanted to show the outside world he was making gestures of goodwill toward the Indochinese peoples since he and his entourage were aware of (probably through BBC radio) Roosevelt's public statement that maintaining French sovereignty in Indochina was not a principal objective of the US.¹³⁸ This too fell in line with Decoux's constant hedging, doing just enough to please Vichy, Japan, and the Americans (by addressing their concerns for more local involvement) to make sure that France retained possession of Indochina in the postwar era, and conveniently, not so much that he didn't have room to be exonerated.

Built along corporatist lines, the FC brought together members of the elite based on social or economic activities (hence the justification of bringing in French representatives for the GFC), in numeric proportion to the importance to the colony (for instance, the agricultural sector was most heavily represented).¹³⁹ This was meant to offer "a harmonious and accurate picture of the Federation," particularly within the GFC, which united French and Indochinese elites and, according to Decoux, was the "symbol of Franco-Indochinese collaboration."¹⁴⁰ This corporatism was faithful to Maurrassian principles of social hierarchy and groupings,

138. For example *Entretiens et exposés*, 23 July 1943, 40; and Pedrazzani, 119. Note that until at least March 1942, the US's official position, as understood by Vichy, was a return of all colonial territories to France after the war.

139. GGI 65296, "Reforme des assemblées," Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, Session July 1942, 5.

140. *Discours prononcés*, 16 December 1943.

emphasizing authority over liberal principles (see Chapters 3 and 6). Chairing the council like a true proconsul, Decoux created a mechanism in which opinions were valued not by the number of votes behind them, but the value of the judgements, textbook Maurrassism. Further stamping his authority on the body and expunging any doubt as to its true nature, the Governor General admitted he wanted the social and economic elite to come to a synthesis of expressed viewpoints, not decisions based on a system of votes respective of the divergences of opinion.¹⁴¹ Juxtaposing this systemic squashing of debate with the material rewards gained from serving loyally on the council, the FC's usefulness came from the gratitude of the subservient elite: Decoux must have counted on the members to carry out the work of the administration by influencing their respective constituents out of desire to maintain their prestigious place on the council.

In the Maurrassian tradition of rejecting democracy, Decoux saw the elimination of the voting process—both electoral and decision-making means—as means to reinforce the elite, not through actual but perceived power. Freed from electoral preoccupations, the Admiral claimed, members would be free from dealings and schemes from which some had supposedly benefitted in the past, though this forcibly strengthened their dependence on the whims of the GGI.¹⁴² The FC was supposed to return to the essential principles of strongly organized societies: discipline, authority, responsibility, realizing a Pétainist dictum that could have been

141. For example 1/tel772, No.1330, Decoux to Brévié, 20 December 1942.

142. INF 2762, Telegram No.263/SS, Decoux to Bléhaut, 11 May 1943.

written by Maurras and his royalist counterparts, “a small number counsel, a few command, one Chief governs.”¹⁴³ The Governor General explained that by associating—which does not entail inclusion—the elite with the policy-making process, he would be able to strengthen ties with the diverse elements of the population and reach “just and enlightened” decisions.¹⁴⁴ In addition, he believed that by working together, Indochina’s elite would bolster their own relations, contributing developing the “community of spiritual and material interests” that existed between the five *pays* of the union.¹⁴⁵

The French authorities wanted to create a forum in which Indochina’s elite¹⁴⁶ could collaborate closely with the government and one another to develop the spirit of federal consciousness that Decoux believed was essential to preserving French sovereignty in the region.¹⁴⁷ Doctor Nguyen Van Thinh, a member of the elite whose loyalty to the government was exemplary, summarized Decoux’s intentions when he asserted “Indochina will have to form a bloc and any distinction between [*pays*] will have to be banished from the Indochinese Federal Council. . . . Collaboration between the different *pays* of the Union is proving to be necessary and it is probably toward this goal that the efforts of the [IFC] will be directed.”¹⁴⁸ Of course this or any other member could not have said anything different lest he lose his privileges and this

143. Discours prononcés, 24 January 1942.

144. Discours prononcés, 3 December 1941.

145. Discours prononcés, 16 November 1941.

146. Six from both Tonkin and Cochinchina, five from both Annam and Cambodia, and three from Laos, for a total of 25.

147. 1/tel728, No.7827, Decoux to Platon, 15 December 1942.

148. *Le Journal du Peuple*, 29 August 1941.

subservient relationship must have been looked upon with derision by the locals, perhaps weakening the overall effort to instill this federal consciousness. In addition, the general perception was that the FC had no real power to make policy, and if it represented a structure for the federalism that Decoux intended to foster, it could not have escaped the population that the French authorities were far from magnanimous and perhaps they would be better off if the US did not return the colony to France after the war. This did not stop the Admiral from comparing the FC and the federalism it embodied with the traditional familial spirit respectful of order, age, wisdom, and opposed to individualism (incarnated by democracy), convinced as he was that this approach was bound to succeed in Indochina. With France as the keystone of this union, the Indochinese were told, the colony would transcend the difficulties of the war and, in the typical discourse of the *mission civilisatrice*, take a step forward into modernity thanks to the continued endeavors of the French *oeuvre*. Vu Ngoc Hoanh, the Federal Council's eldest member, encapsulated the spirit that Decoux hoped to imbibe, and which now resonates so hollow given the history that followed, during the opening session of the GFC, in December 1943: "I hope that this union taken in the literal sense will be, under the aegis of noble France, a fecund and fraternal union and that the relations between the French, Annamite, Cambodians, Laotians, will be those of citizens of a same people united by indissoluble ties in hardship as in prosperity."¹⁴⁹

Youth and Sports

149. 1/tel805, No.10,108, Decoux to Bléhaut, 10 January 1944.

While the *Légion* targeted Frenchmen—to indoctrinate at best, to ensure discipline at worst—the GGI also created or refined organizations to glorify the French *oeuvre* within the Indochinese communities. As with everything it endeavored in Indochina, the administration's first goal was to legitimize its continued presence in the eyes of the locals by stressing the benefits of French colonialism and the new ideological direction of the state. Decoux stressed the importance of youth and sports organizations to inculcate the spirit of federalism and allegiance to the Union while exalting French contributions to the region and channeling possible hostile energy toward nonpolitical activities. Given Anne Raffin's contributions to the understanding of youth mobilization and sports under Decoux's regime, this section will focus on how the government wanted to use these organizations to glorify France, nurture the federalist spirit, and win the loyalty of the local peoples.

Youth and sports organizations already existed in Indochina at the outbreak of war, with tens of thousands of members in scouts, Catholic groups, or sports associations. Agathe Larcher-Goscha has written on twentieth century Vietnam's relaxing of the traditional Confucian's disdain for physical exploits and its almost complete emphasis on intellectual achievements. The notion that those seeking physical culture did so only because they were incapable of succeeding as a *lettré* gave way to the consideration that individual athletic performance and care of the body was part of an overall morality seeking the perfection of the self.¹⁵⁰ After the Yen Bai and Nghê Tinh uprisings (1930-1931), Governor

150. Larcher-Goscha, 17.

General Pasquier wanted to steer the youth away from revolutionary temptations by providing them with activities and direction that secured a “proper” moral grounding. The first boy scout sections appeared in Tonkin in 1930, brimming with conservative and traditional values. The scout sub-units were named after the five Confucian virtues and the boys addressed their leader as “mister first notable.”¹⁵¹ Confronted with social skepticism regarding the value of outdoor activities as means to develop character, the French authorities were not as successful as they hoped in rallying members. During the late 1930s scouting expanded to public schools (up until then it had been practiced exclusively in private schools) and the Popular Front continued to promote youth and sports organizations, though its record remained mixed.¹⁵²

Decoux claimed that the lack of inroads in making youth and sports organizations a central part of local lives under the Republic was due to the lack of experience and dynamism within the French leadership, and defeat (with the subsequent advent of Pétainism) allowed the administration to start from scratch. The Admiral was convinced that the principles of the National Revolution would resonate within the Indochinese communities by steering the youth away from selfishness and skepticism toward social groupings and the revival of tradition.¹⁵³ He believed that nothing could cement federal unity better than physical education and sport, which offered the youth a common ideal, the cult of virile effort and human improvement through physical work. To achieve

151. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 80.

152. Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 39-40.

153. INF, Decoux to Bléhaut, 14 February 1944.

this goal, the GGI created the *Commissariat général à l'éducation physique et aux sports*, under the direction of Commander Maurice Ducoroy. The *Commissariat* was responsible for providing formal general physical education, organizing outdoor events and activities, and equipping the population with the means to practice sports, from stadiums and pools to equipment. One of the *Commissariat's* principal objectives was the development of a spirit of unity and discipline, part of which would be fostered through ritualization, including processions, chants, and salutes. Decoux was certain that to overcome “the skeptical smiles of the *blasés*” he needed the strong leadership that did not exist under the previous regime, to guide the Indochinese peoples toward modernity, abandoning those elements of the past that held the cultures back, an encapsulation of his vision for a Federal Indochina and its place on the continuum of progress.¹⁵⁴

The administration pushed sport as the means to uplift the peoples of Indochina by nurturing a taste for teamwork and discipline. It was hoped physical education would create healthy men able to contribute positively to their country, one of the main principles behind Decoux's vision of the National Revolution: “Let us be strong so we can serve” was the dictum.¹⁵⁵ Decoux asked the youth of Indochina to follow him like Pétain had asked the youth of France. The Admiral called on them to have one common soul, to pursue one common goal: the grandeur of

154. GGI 65295, “Education Physique de la Jeunesse,” Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, Session December 1941.

155. GG1 171, Discours prononcés, 20 November 1941.

France and Indochina.¹⁵⁶ The weekly *Sports d'Indochine* printed sayings in both French and Vietnamese glorifying those who committed themselves to the pursuit of strength, unity, and work.¹⁵⁷ The youth took part in processions meant to instill this sense of discipline and order through acts of group participation. By carrying out quotidian orchestrated maneuvers resembling those of armed forces, the French administration wanted to cultivate a spirit of obedience and exaltation of France, its *oeuvre*, and the federalist consciousness that was so vital in the Governor General's eyes to preserving French presence in the region.

Cultivating a morality that fit the political needs of the administration, particularly in its struggle against nationalism, was a defining impetus of the sports and youth movements. Like their counterparts in the metropole, the French administration saw an interdependence of physique and morality, a means to fight rebellious natures.¹⁵⁸ Decoux blamed the previous regime for leaving young generations "defenseless to every propaganda," which is ironic given his desire to reach the youth while its minds were still malleable. Nothing had been done before 1940, he believed, to bring the youth of the colony to the French cause and the Admiral called upon his administration to form their civic consciousness and give them a sense of their social duties, as defined by the French.¹⁵⁹ This consciousness was to be developed through the "sporting spirit," which fostered in turn "the love of

156. Discours prononcés, 21 September 1943.

157. *Sports d'Indochine*, 3 January 1942, 3.

158. *Sources*, January 1942.

159. GG1 171, Untitled Box, Decoux to ADLOC, May 1942.

disinterested effort, that [was] according to the words of Marshal Pétain, 'the essential part of the dignity and the efficacy of man,' [and] also the equality of all, politeness, loyalty, and honor." To these virtues were added social qualities: "the sense of discipline and the submission to the rules of the game."¹⁶⁰ The administration believed that if the youth learned to practice new sports, they would learn to respect its rules, and this appreciation for discipline would lead them to follow the rules of the colonial order. Sport became an alternative to anti-French activities and a tool to supervise the youth by making it more obedient and less susceptible to revolutionary discourses. By changing the locals' daily activities, the GGI sought to channel energies away from political activities and reinforce the culture of rules.

The administration was especially conscious of the importance of rallying young men and women, whose minds they believed to be still malleable (and thus also prey to the Communists), but it made sure to provide the adult Indochinese population with opportunities to learn about and practice physical activities. Decoux wanted to avoid an "immobile," albeit enthusiastic, crowd of spectators and called on everyone to practice sport.¹⁶¹ *Sports d'Indochine* published regular articles explaining the rules of sports and activities such as Basque *pelote* and basketball and provided tips on how to swim the breast stroke or row more effectively. To facilitate the practice of sport for the youth, the government coordinated with teachers in propaganda campaigns,

160. *L'Annam Nouveau*, 14 September 1941.

161. Discours prononcés, 20 November 1941.

provided stipends to exceptional student-athletes, and made school hours more flexible to encourage participation, and it engaged in similar policies with adults, providing work breaks and early dismissals in the public sector to encourage more physical exercise.¹⁶² By maximizing the number of Indochinese participating in team or individual sports, the population would learn, it was hoped, not only docility, but also witness first hand the *oeuvre* of French colonialism every time it competed in a newly constructed stadium or a freshly dug pool. Even the mere act of engaging in a physical activity of Western origin was supposed to promote a shift of consciousness and an attachment to French culture. Decoux hoped to continue to break the traditional Confucian mentalities and thus bring the peoples of Indochina closer to France through their engagement in daily activities. Decoux's approach was no different from that of that of Nazi Germany with the Hitler Youth or late nineteenth-century France with Jules Ferry's universal education: inculcate the regime's values to the youth to create a generational fissure, accelerating certain cultural shifts to supersede the paradigms that preceded it as the parents are displaced physically and professionally by their children. As discussed above, during the twentieth century the French had sought to rejuvenate and modernize the mandarin, notable, and functionary corps by rewarding those who had been exposed to Western-style education (and therefore values). Decoux's promotion of youth organizations and sport was a similar endeavor, widening the net since physical and outdoor

162. Directives politiques, 17 November 1943; Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 196.

activities were at everyone's reach no matter the personal attributes (unlike education which is selective at higher levels).

The GGI believed that promoting outdoor and sporting activities within specifically French organizations was a critical tool in its struggle with the Japanese for the hearts and minds of the locals (see Chapter 4). Defeated on the battlefield in the metropole, coerced into allowing foreign troops station in the colony, all that the French retained, Ducoroy explained, was “a moral force and the glorious past of [their] country.”¹⁶³ Fearing the spread of anti-French propaganda, the administration was keen to attract the youth to its organizations quickly, before the Japanese had a chance to do the same.¹⁶⁴ Youth movements and physical activity were channels through which the French could inculcate their values and nurture the locals' allegiance to the European power. Sport encouraged contact across all social layers between French and Indochinese peoples, helping to forge a collective consciousness that, it was hoped, would unite colonizer and colonized and weaken the Japanese influence.¹⁶⁵ Spectacles drew Frenchmen and locals alike in the celebration of France, its flag, and its culture, while in parallel promoting the local patriotisms upon which the Indochinese Federation was to be built.¹⁶⁶ This was a clear case of trying to get to the locals before the pan-Asianist propaganda of the Japanese had a chance to take root among the population. As discussed

163. Ducoroy, 37. For Japanese propaganda efforts, see Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 44-48.

164. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 381.

165. In some instances, Europeans competed against locals, but even then, competition was supposed to bolster ties. This is most evident in the Tour of Indochina, where imagery and narrative placed cyclists of all origins against one another as to whom would win the race, but together in the experience of the tour, through its pain and joys.

166. Discours prononcés, 16 December 1943.

above, Decoux understood the risks that nurturing local patriotisms posed for the colonists, risks that sentiments turn nationalist and anti-French. The National Revolution—with its stress on order, hierarchy, and tutelage of certain peoples as a natural law—was the vehicle with which to channel any potentially xenophobic sentiments. Sporting events were the celebration of accomplished participants (athletes) in activities in which the government pushed the entire population to participate. The promotion of local patriotisms in sport was not seen as contradictory to French interests because it was done within the context of the National Revolution, reinforcing its values rather than fomenting discord.

The cycling Tour of Indochina and the passage of the Olympic flame were two events that illustrate how youth and sports organizations fit into the federal project, layering Indochinese unity with the promotion of French values and the development of local patriotisms. These tours took events of European origin to the four corners of the colony, encouraging local pride through the media's focus on one city or commune—the focus of the entire colony for a day—while the event progressed on its journey. The first tour of Indochina, modeled after the Tour de France, ran 4,100 kilometers in January 1943, departing from the “Sports Jeunesse” pavilion at the *Foire de Saigon*. Every major publication covered the event, featuring each of the 25 cities in which the cyclists arrived. For instance, readers learned how the imperial couple greeted the cyclists in Hue as the *Marseillaise* resounded and the French and Annamite flags flew alongside. More than a sporting event, Ducoroy wanted it to symbolize the virile qualities of willpower, energy, and perseverance, a demonstration of “the

spirit of teamwork, in mutual friendship, without distinctions of social class, religion, race, the strongest helping the weakest,” a less than subtle allusion to the perception of the federal relationship the administration sought to encourage, one built on social and cultural hierarchies but also solidarity, exalting French tutelage of the Indochinese peoples and even the Vietnamese tutelage of the Khmer and Lao.¹⁶⁷

The travels of the Olympic flame, from the borders of Thailand to Tonkin, equally sought to unite Indochina through European symbols while strengthening national and local identities. Lit by the King of Cambodia on 19 November 1941 in the ruins of Angkor, the flame was carried by young men and women through every provincial capital of Cochinchina and Annam, where sporting events were organized upon its arrival. Two weeks after leaving Angkor, it reached Hanoi with great festivities, under the eye of the Governor General. Not shying from assuming promethean qualities, the French explained they brought the torch to the colony as a representation of energy and faith, even a symbol of youth as the torch passed from one hand to the other, as one generation passes on to another.¹⁶⁸ The flame represented the nascent sporting spirit and along the roads where curious onlookers who witnessed the athletes pass the torch on to one another, French administrative personnel recruited new members into organizations and spoke of the plans to build sporting facilities. Thus the flame was to begin a new era in Indochina, bringing sport to the service of national

167. Ducoroy, 185.

168. *Voix d'Empire*, 19 November 1941.

renovation, by showcasing the power of French organization and construction.¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

Decoux recognized that winning the hearts and minds of the Indochinese populations meant reconciling the past and the future of the French *oeuvre*, building on themes developed under the Republic and looking toward what was assured to be brighter days, so long as the region remained under French tutelage. The Federal project, an idea born at the end of the nineteenth century and developed during the 1920s and 1930s, promised to draw on the strengths of the colony's five *pays*, through solidarity and economic ties, with France as the cement that not only held the union together, but gifted parts of its civilization to bring progress. There is a continuity in the colonial discourse that stretches from Jules Ferry to de Lannesan to Pasquier to Decoux, one that seeks to bring the light of the West to Indochina, importing concepts of modernity to the region in sufficient doses to eradicate the negative aspects of traditions deemed toxic by the Europeans. Decoux's notion of an Indochinese Federation differed little from those of his predecessors, though the presence of Japanese troops in the colony forced the GGI to up the ante to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Union with France as the keystone. Moreover, Indochina's economic isolation forced the Admiral to push themes of solidarity between countries (ones solidified by a colonial federalism), not segregated through the conjuration of folkloric pasts.

169. *Voix d'Empire*, 28 November 1941.

Where Pasquier had evoked “the ponds where lotuses die,” Decoux’s appeal to tradition rested on what the French perceived as the hierarchical characteristics of Indochinese cultures to elevate the prestige of the elite whose loyalty he believed to be crucial to controlling the populations. Republican Governors General since Lanessan had recognized the importance of maintaining a strong elite to administer effectively in spite of emasculated sovereigns and Decoux’s policies signified no break with the pre-Vichy past. The discourse of the National Revolution that sought a return to a lost tradition in France found no real echo in Indochina, whose industrial base was too negligible to spur the “destructive individualism” (with the consequent loss of tradition) that Pétain blamed on capitalist liberalism. Decoux’s appeal to Indochinese tradition made use of the same terms as that of Pétain—social hierarchy, natural groupings, the family—and were consistent with the Maurrassism that influenced him, but the Admiral sought to strengthen an existing system of elites rather than engineer national recovery and renewal. Maurrassism itself was not relevant in the colony for it addressed issues that were typical to France, but Decoux could not escape his common worldview with *Action française*. This led him to utilize the discourse of the National Revolution as the vehicle with which to enact reforms—such as the reinforcement of the structures of the mandarins upon which his government depended to maintain French sovereignty—that he hoped would fulfill his mission to retain Indochina as a French colony. His glorification of tradition was a means to reverse the erosion of the authority of the mandarins and the sovereigns, not a call to overhaul

society and return it to a pre-Revolutionary past as happened, theoretically, under Vichy.

There was no true break between the policies of the Decoux administration and those of the Third Republic, only an acceleration in their implementation, from the preservation of local traditions to the restoration of the elite to the building of roads (and in the case of youth and sports it was a drastic, but not revolutionary, one). Like his republican predecessors, Decoux sought to position France as the keystone of the Union, promising a better future through the continuation of the French *oeuvre* and threatening disaster should locals seek to sever these ties. This meant that the GGI could not fully implement Vichy's exclusionary laws targeting Jews under the risk of increasing racial tensions in the colony (not to mention the impossibility of finding competent replacements). Decoux opened the administration to locals and reengineered the councils for propagandistic and pragmatic reasons. Openly calling for more opportunities and a greater voice for the indigenous peoples, he found ways to compensate for lack of personnel and to forge relationships between locals to strengthen the federal consciousness.

Christopher Goscha's work shows how the colonial authorities had been working toward an Indochinese Federation since the turn of the century, bringing locals into the administration—in particular Vietnamese who also served in Laos and Cambodia. Decoux's regime did not depart from these policies but he publicized the opening of the administration as proof of France's willingness to give locals more control, even though he

intended them to hold positions with no strategic decision-making responsibilities. Similarly, the Federal Council that he created had no real power yet it was positioned as a step forward toward federalism and the elevation of the elite. At all levels of civil service or councils, Decoux ensured loyalty through recruitment criteria that favored those who had received European education and direct nominations were a straightforward way in which to reward obedience. Lastly, Decoux resorted to increases in remunerations to maximize allegiance, often unsuccessfully keeping up with inflation.

The government saw in youth and sports organizations a way to supervise Indochinese boys and girls and channel their energies away from nationalist movements and toward a spirit of solidarity and federalism.¹⁷⁰ Through regimentation, the practice of sport, and the elevation of the cult of virility, the French went against traditional Confucian values and glorified the salvation of the nation: a collective spirit of discipline to be achieved through outdoor activities. Physical education was to be a means through which Indochinese peoples opened themselves to Western values and participated in events, spectacles, and a culture that reinforced the idea behind the Federal Union. Anne Raffin suggests that the regimentalization of these groupings—on which Decoux counted to instill values of loyalty, discipline, and allegiance—contributed to the militaristic and state-building projects of Sihanouk and Ngo Dinh Diem on the one hand, and offered existing and complex networks through which the Viet Minh were able to reach the youths on

170. CAOM, FM, 1/tel703, No.737, Platon to Decoux, 20 February 1941.

the other. Raffin contends that the structures created by the French provided a platform for resistance through the efficiency of the organizations' networks, which, in conjunction with the development of national consciousness, provided a springboard toward independence.¹⁷¹ This may be the most immediate and important consequence of the development of the youth and sports organizations. Any influence the sports and youth organizations had through changes in daily activities on the acceptance of Western values was not such that it strengthened locals' attachments to France. The generational fissure that the National Revolution tried to accelerate did not materialize, not least due to lack of time, but at the basis of Decoux's policy was the belief that locals' energies could be channeled through Pétainist doctrine. Outdoor activities were the physical manifestation of these values, existing symbiotically with the moral regeneration that was promoted through sport and other means. Whatever cultural and spiritual changes occurred, they ultimately did not serve to strengthen bonds with France, pointing to a failure of the Decoux regime.

For Decoux, the development of a federal consciousness was key to winning the hearts and minds of the local populations, but his record—and therefore that of the entire French colonial effort—was mixed at best. After the Japanese *coup de force* of March 1945, there was little lingering sentiment among the Indochinese peoples in the value of the Union and France as the cement that held it together. According to David Marr, the weeks following the overthrow of the French were savored and

171. Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 244-245; 249.

communicated widely among the Vietnamese and the government of Tran Trong Kim, picked as Head of the Royal Cabinet, immediately used the Vietnamese rather than French language in official communication.¹⁷² Even when the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) transformed into the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP), its central committee outlined a common political and economic platform as a basis for a unified Indochinese socialist entity, underscoring a solidarity—or opportunism—with its Lao and Cambodian neighbors, whose “revolutionary development” was seen as lagging. In 1951, the Party still advocated the fusion of the three revolutionary parties into the “Party of a Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian Federation.” Goscha points out how closely the Vietnamese communist discourse on Indochina resembles that of the Indochinese Federations of republican, Vichy, and postwar French colonials, though the desire for association was linked to a tangible Vietnamese military strategy against the French, permitting them to move soldiers and supplies while stretching the European forces.¹⁷³

For the Lao and the Cambodians, years of Vietnamese immigration (and the perceived control of the Vietnamese over their political affairs) turned local nationalisms not against the French, who shared goal of seeking a return of the lands ceded to Thailand, but against the Vietnamese, as evidenced by anti-Annamite demonstrations appearing as early as mid-1945.¹⁷⁴ Unlike in Vietnam, where Bao Dai abdicated on 25 August 1945, Khmer and Lao sovereigns were maintained, which shaped

172. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 109; 122.

173. Goscha, 102-103; 105-106; 129-130.

174. Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 245.

the independence movements. Sihanouk may have been marginalized by Son Ngoc Thanh in October 1945, but he remained the nominal Head of state, effectively chosen by the French. Sisavang Vong of Laos renewed ties with the French as early as 1945, but his cousins Phetsarath and Souphanouvong created the independentist Lao Issara movement. In the end, whatever the successes and failures of the Lao and Cambodian revolutionary parties, their futures were linked to the Viet Minh because they were in no position to defeat their colonial masters alone, but there was never a ubiquitously accepted association with their Vietnamese counterparts, certainly not long-lasting and drenched in a common ideal. France's federal project, so dear to republican and Vichy administrators, never won the hearts and minds of the Indochinese peoples, but rather laid a common experience which continued through thirty years of war.

Chapter VI: The Economic Front

After overcoming the deep economic crisis of the early 1930s, Indochina presented a healthy yet underdeveloped economy when war broke out in Europe, one based almost exclusively on what it could grow from its soil or extract from the earth. The region depended on the export of its agricultural products and mineral resources to fund the import of finished or semifinished goods that its nascent industry could not produce in sufficient quantities. Trade with the metropole made up half of the colony's activity (45% of its exports and 50% of its imports) and a system of protective barriers ensured that the French goods dominated the local market. The armistice of June 1940 cut Indochina off from France (as relations with Great Britain soured and traffic was first hindered and later stopped entirely with the start of the War in the Pacific), forcing it to reorganize its economy based on its geographic situation and seek commercial partners in Asia. The signing on 6 May 1941 of trade agreement between Tokyo and Vichy formalized the inevitable; Japan's military domination of the region meant Hanoi had to turn to the Land of the Rising Sun to provide it with products it could not manufacture locally, in exchange for agricultural goods.

The Franco-Japanese trade agreement theoretically opened a market for Indochinese rice, corn, coal, and minerals while providing the French colony with Japanese finished goods. Indochina continued to trade with Australia and the United States early on, though always under the watchful eye of the Japanese locally and the German occupation authorities back in the metropole. However, these relationships stopped

after the attacks on Pearl Harbor and the situation worsened over the course of the war: while Japan's expansion progressed in Southeast Asia, its need for Indochinese raw materials diminished (leading to fewer exports of finished goods from the French colony) and conversely as the United States reconquered territories occupied by Tokyo, its navy sunk enemy merchant ships so that already by the second half of 1942, Indochinese rice and rubber destined for Japan remained stocked in Saigon for months before they could be loaded on boats.¹ Rice never reached Japan in sufficient quantities to meet the quotas stipulated by the agreement for 1941 and 1942. In 1943 only a small fraction of the 950,000 tons that were earmarked was ever loaded on ships as maritime exchanges with Japan ceased during the second half of that year. Commercial trade was practically nonexistent in 1944 and 1945.²

Disruptions in transport (international and local) led to problems in supply and distribution, while the scarcity of goods meant rationing, inflation, and the rise of the black market. The government intervened in the economy to stimulate the production of goods needed to replace those no longer imported while decreasing activity in sectors whose products were no longer exported or consumed domestically. The end of exports meant the encouragement of Indochinese artisan economy, or *artisanat*, which contributed significantly to the production of goods for consumption as well as for the industrial sector. The government also redirected resources toward the creation of a substitution economy,

1. INF 1150, "Quelques aspects de l'économie Indochinoise."

2. Grandjean, 89; Devillers, 82-83.

critical for the manufacturing process and the day-to-day needs of the population; for instance, the distillation of dehydrated alcohol replaced imported fuel.³ Free from demands to justify expenses to Paris, Decoux's regime undertook infrastructural improvements (*Grands travaux*) on an unprecedented scale: never before had the French built and spent so much on public works, linking the different regions of the colony with roads, bridges, and other projects encouraging exchanges. In Decoux's designs to win the hearts and minds of the populations of Indochina, the *Grands travaux* played an integral part in demonstrating the magnanimity of France and building the federal interdependence of the Union.⁴ In his book *Peasants into Frenchmen*, Eugen Weber discussed how the development of infrastructure in the 1870s and 1880s broke down the autarky and inertia of certain isolated peasant communes in France.⁵ Only a few decades later, the French government implemented similar policies 12,000 kilometers away, and though the Indochinese context may have differed, the works completed in France shaped the mentalities in the colonies.

The GGI effected these changes with corporatist principles in mind based on the economic and social laws passed in Vichy, but adapted to the realities of Indochina. Straying little from the Maurrassian path, Decoux publicly proclaimed professional groupings the antidote for the atomization of society, connecting men and women to each other based

3. N.A., 111-113.

4. Devillers, 85-86.

5. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 203-218.

on the common interests of their trade. During the inaugural session of the Indochinese Economic Council, Decoux called upon corporatist groupings to form in order to replace diversity and the opposition of private interests.⁶ Pragmatically, Decoux saw professional groupings as a means to direct the economy with greater efficiency and while the government realigned its economy based on the metropolitan model (as he was instructed), the Admiral sought semiautonomy from France to make decisions based on the particular context of Indochina, particularly given the region's small industrial base. Decoux understood the need to minimize the proliferation of monopolies and to assuage the potential mistrust of the peasantry, while adding to the narrative of the benefits of French tutelage.⁷

Indochina's isolation posed significant challenges to the GGI's ability to retain some sort of legitimacy in the eyes of the local peoples based on its management of the economy. While defeat in Europe and concessions to the Japanese eroded France's prestige, the authorities had to take necessary action to provide the population with basic goods and food, which meant redeploying resources to face the autarky in which the colony was placed. Intelligence reports repeatedly related the local population's concern with its day to day survival and the Tonkinese famine of the winter of 1944-1945 played a central role in preparing the populace for the Revolution of August 1945. From the beginning of his proconsulship Decoux was aware of the likelihood of food shortages in

6. INF 1129, Bulletin de renseignements No.238, 10 May 1944.

7. GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, "Procès verbal de la séance de la commission des affaires économiques," Session July 1942; Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 422.

some regions and by the end the administration was powerless to grow or transport enough food to meet even minimal demand. Supplying the population with sustenance was more than a humanitarian issue for the colonists, it was a matter on which their continued presence in the region depended.

While the colonial authorities were forced to accept the trade agreement with Japan, during the early months of the war they had unprecedented freedom from the metropole to reorganize the economy to meet demand. The *Grands travaux* so dear to Decoux were designed to move goods across the region, but also manifested the continuation of the French *oeuvre* in the colony and served to further the government's ambitions to build an Indochinese Federation. Since economic policy-making is indissociable from ideology, Decoux's worldview marked his government's efforts in the matter and his implementation of corporatist principles to address the Indochinese conditions often went against Vichy policy. This chapter will examine the colonial authorities' reorganization of the economy to face the challenges of autarky and further entrench the region in federalist structures under French tutelage.

The Japanese Economic Agreements and the Impact of Economic Isolation

With an overwhelmingly large portion of its economy dedicated to the agricultural sector, Indochina relied heavily on trade in the years leading up to the Second World War. In 1939, the last full, normal year of commerce, Indochina's exports reached 4.7 million tons, including 2.1 million tons of rice and corn, 1.8 million tons of coal, and 215,000 tons

of minerals. Conversely, imports attained 587,000 tons (worth 240 million piastres), including over 100,000 tons of fuel, 60,000 tons of chemical products, and 20,000 tons of textiles. One year later, the end of traditional trade relations meant the collapse of prices of Cochinchinese rice and Cambodian corn as well as the reduction of more than half of mining activities in the region.⁸ From June 1940, transportation between Indochina and France became uncertain and on 17 September 1940, Decoux requested special considerations from Vichy to maintain commercial relations with the Japanese, the Americans, and the British, lest the economy be condemned to rapid asphyxiation. Decoux warned Minister of Colonies Charles Platon that the inability to acquire necessary goods would present difficulties given the forging of new relations with Japan, which threatened the notion of French sovereignty.⁹ The British were open to maintaining trade with Decoux's Indochina, even though their relations with Vichy had turned bellicose, because they wanted to protect their shipping lanes in Asia and avoid giving the Japanese any pretext for further military intervention in Indochina which could potentially expand to the rest of Southeast Asia.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the German-led Armistice commission made it difficult for British and Dutch ships to dock in Indochina—given the state of war between the Reich and these countries—which not only threatened imports of goods for consumption in the Indochinese market but also exports, as Great Britain expressed its reluctance to engage in unilateral traffic. The

8. Untitled box, "L'Effort économique de l'Indochine," 2.

9. 1/tel689, No.2405, Decoux to Platon, 17 September 1940.

10. British National Archives, cab/66/17/5, "Measures concerning merchant shipping in the event of war or general hostilities with Vichy," 17 June 1941.

consequences had devastating potential; without the necessary sacks from India, Indochinese rice, the basis of its export economy, could not be packaged for transport.¹¹ In spite of these difficulties, from mid-1940 through the end of 1941 Franco-British relations in the region allowed Indochina to receive thousands of tons of precious goods from Asian ports—particularly Hong Kong, Manila, and Shanghai—and from the metropole. To facilitate the colony's supply of goods and materials, Vichy granted Hanoi customs autonomy from 1 January 1941, ending the preferential status of French goods in place since 1928 and imposing a single tariff on all imports regardless of origin.¹²

Unable to trade in sufficient amounts with its traditional partners, Indochina was forced to turn to Japan for goods it could not yet produce. As early as October 1940, a Japanese mission headed by Ambassador Matsumiya proposed an economic agreement between Tokyo and Hanoi. These negotiations resulted in the 6 May 1941 trade agreement, which was negotiated in Tokyo by a commission headed by members of the Vichy Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vichy, thereby signaling the political rather than economic nature of the agreement.¹³ Renewable after three years, the agreement gave Japan the status of most favored nation, thereby imposing the minimum tariffs on its products. In theory, Japan paid for Indochinese goods in piastres and Indochina paid for Japanese products in yen, allowing Japan to keep its dollars for the international

11. 1/tel690, No.3455, Decoux to Platon, 5 December 1940.

12. 1/tel683, No.658R, Platon to Decoux, 27 October 1940; Huguier, 256. One report warned of the disastrous effects of lifting tariffs given the higher costs of French goods vis-à-vis Japanese. INF 1201, Note pour le ministre, 21 August 1940.

13. 72AJ/1905, Tupinier Interview, 3-5.

market since it did not have to use its deposits on trade with Indochina.¹⁴ French circles sardonically described this policy as “Take everything and pay with monkey money.”¹⁵ In reality however, the imbalance in trade (in favor of exports to Japan) meant that Japan often lacked sufficient piastres and paid for Indochinese goods partly with its own products and partly with gold-backed currencies, at least while shipping lanes were safe.¹⁶ French and Japanese authorities also agreed on lists, reviewable every year, of the type and quantity of goods to be traded between Tokyo and Hanoi. Despite efforts to promote the agreements as amicable, the French were in no position to adopt a tough stance in their negotiation of terms.¹⁷ The situation became all the more difficult because the authorities could not directly blame the imbalance in terms with Japan for the scarcity of resources and yet neither could they assume responsibilities themselves lest they lose prestige and legitimacy.¹⁸ Luckily the Anglo-Americans provided useful scapegoats for Decoux’s propaganda, and as the Allies advanced in the Pacific, his accusations took on greater validity as the disruptions caused by US bombardments did hinder efforts that may have otherwise assuaged suffering.

Import quotas into Indochina agreed upon by the two countries were never met, leading to significant shortages of products for consumption

14. INF 1226, Dardauid to Catroux, 21 December 1940.

15. INF 1145(2), Bulletin de renseignements No.304, “Note du Sous-Lieutenant Loisel sur la situation matérielle et morale des français en Indochine,” 15 June 1943.

16. For a detailed account of payments and the breakdown of monetary exchanges as well as the role of the Banque d’Indochine in the matter, see 72AJ/1907, “L’Armistice Franco-Allemande et les relations Franco-Japonaises.”

17. See Decoux, *A la barre de l’Indochine*, 428.

18. This may point to the ineffectiveness of the *chaînes locales* examined in Chapter 4, in spite of French confidence in the networks.

and the industrial sector. As early as September 1941, the French colony had received almost nothing from Tokyo, in spite of the 530,000 tons of rice and approximately 20,000 tons of rubber that actually reached Japan, leading Decoux to tell a reporter of *Nichi Nichi* “We are having trouble getting what we need from Japan, so we are reserving judgment [on the agreement] until articles promised have arrived.”¹⁹ Decoux may have been disappointed when he gave this comment in 1941, but that was as good as it ever got for the French and he never went public with his discontent, underscoring how unequal the relationship was. The table below shows for each year the quantity of imported goods (in tons) and their value by main category, compared with the Tokyo agreement’s target numbers²⁰:

	Tokyo agreements (per annum)	1942	1943	1944
Textiles	10,700	6,700	4,000	1,500
Paper	4,300	3,700	2,000	1,800
Chemicals	40,000	4,000	6,000	2,600
Machinery	52,360	5,000	2,000	0
Tobacco	2,800	730	2,000	0
Miscellaneous	N/A	16,500	13,000	2,500
Total	N/A	36,600	29,000	8,400
Value in Piastres	N/A	112M	117M	25M

19. Cited in Virginia Thompson, "Japan in Indo-China," *Far Eastern Survey* 10, No.23 (1941): 272-273.

20. Untitled box, “L’Effort économique de l’Indochine,” 6.

Starting in 1942, the GGI turned to its neighbors—particularly Shanghai, Thailand, and Kwangchouwan (Fort Bayard, present-day Zhanjiang in Guangdong Province, a French concession that had traditionally been governed as part of Indochina but ironically remained under Free French authority)—to compensate for the deficiency in exchanges with Japan. Trade with these partners was based on a system of “balanced exchanges,” meaning imports were paid for with exports of similar value.²¹ Imports from countries other than Japan were 35,000 tons in 1942, 23,000 tons in 1943, and 12,800 in 1944 (from only Thailand and Kwangchouwan).²²

The lack of available goods in the French colony led to inflationary pressures, which the government fought through economic intervention including price controls and repression of the black market. The price index in Saigon for wholesale goods, based on 100 for 1925, went from 182 in 1943 to 329 in 1944. The overall cost of living for Europeans rose from 100 in 1925 to 199 in 1943 and 338 by the end of 1944. The same in Hanoi was 356 in 1943 and 740 in December 1944. The situation was even worse for the Indochinese working class. The Saigon index for Vietnamese passed from 236 in 1943 to 437 by the end of 1944 and in Hanoi from 541 to 1,040 over the same period.²³ Price control involved a double strategy of acting on the price of imported goods on the local market (though regulation of the purchase price at the port of entry was impossible) and the maintenance of low prices on domestically produced

21. INF 1267, Rapport du Commissaire Martin au Conseil de l'Indochine, 3 February 1945, 5.

22. Untitled box, “L’Effort économique de l’Indochine,” 7.

23. Untitled box, “L’Effort économique de l’Indochine,” 22.

items. In addition, the authorities threatened severe punishment on any party engaged in surcharging for goods.²⁴ On 1 November 1941, the government created an economic police, named the Commission on the Control and Monitoring of Prices, to ensure that when imported goods were more expensive than locally produced items, the prices for the latter were not increased to match with the imports as means of raising the seller's profits, and the 14 March 1942 law gave the authorities the ability to address issues of stock hoarding.²⁵

Government price control policies had mixed results. Since it was impossible to control the prices of all items on the market, officials were charged with regulating specific goods. The administration decided on acceptable costs of sale, and a coefficient corresponding to authorized profit levels determined sale price, which was verified by the economic police. A special committee, presided by the Director of Economic Services, regulated prices of industrial goods and the Governor General's office fixed prices of agricultural products.²⁶ This system did little to solve the problem as coefficients on acceptable profits were based on cost of sale, encouraging merchants to acquire products at the highest price possible.²⁷ Furthermore, the authorities frequently increased the money supply leading to the regular depreciation of the piastre and a rush on stores to stock goods through fear of further inflation.²⁸ Money in

24. Discours prononcés, 23 January 1943.

25. Discours prononcés, 18 December 1944. The law was promulgated in Indochina on 8 May 1943.

26. INF 1267, Rapport du Commissaire Martin au Conseil de l'Indochine, 3 February 1945, 16.

27. Untitled box, "L'Effort économique de l'Indochine," 19.

28. INF 1201, Vallat Report, "Note sur la situation en Indochine," September 1944, 13.

circulation went from 235 million piastres in January 1940 to 511 million by January 1943 and 1.4 billion in March 1945.²⁹ Furthermore, the political weight of the *Grands travaux* meant that government spending outweighed the economic necessity of controlling prices. Scarcity of goods became an inevitability: the government had to spend to stimulate the economy to increase and diversify production and build the infrastructural networks necessary for commerce which caused inflation. Had it cut back on spending or tried to reduce the money supply to control inflation, it would have potentially faced an even worse shortage of goods.

The lack of goods available in stores also intensified activity on the black market, which was sometimes supplied by the Japanese. To fight illegal sales, Decoux relied heavily on the economic police to impose sanctions.³⁰ Merchants had to account for their stocks of basic goods, including butter, flour, paper, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and fuel.³¹ Success was limited and one report blamed insufficient funds available to reward informers, claiming that the latter wanted a portion of the value of the seized merchandise, something the GGI was unwilling to accord.³² Many of the goods found on the black market came from Japanese trading houses that dumped products in excess of quotas in Indochina.³³ In 1941, the Japanese army seized Chinese merchandise in Haiphong worth 100 million piastres, much of it sold on the black market with a

29. Untitled box, "L'Effort économique de l'Indochine," 22.

30. Directives politiques, 16 March 1943.

31. *Le Nouveau Laos*, 1 April 1943

32. RSTNF 6703, "Notice sur la situation politique au Tonkin (Mai 1943-Mai 1944)."

33. For example Untitled box, "L'Effort économique de l'Indochine," 22.

considerable uptick.³⁴ Given its tense relations with Japan, there was very little the authorities could do to curb this behavior and the Japanese benefited from the chaos that ensued since it eroded French legitimacy. Even with a dedicated police force, there was very little the government could do to end the black market; French intelligence reported locals claiming that one sale on the black market was worth more than an entire year's wages.³⁵ Even if this is more boastful than accurate, the upside was more often than not worth the risk for a population that had to keep up with soaring inflation.

Isolation from international markets was the primary cause of inflation, but the inability to transport goods between different *pays* exacerbated the problem, particularly in the latter years of the war when Allied bombardment destroyed infrastructure and disrupted trade routes. Until these bombardments made transportation nearly impossible, Cochinchinese rice fed Tonkin and Northern Annam and fueled their vehicles while Cambodian cotton supplied Vietnamese factories, leading Decoux to exalt the strengthening of federal ties between the five countries of the Union.³⁶ By March 1944, however, French intelligence reported that railways were almost paralyzed and that the maritime fleet found it increasingly difficult to navigate.³⁷ During the first half of that year, junks replaced railways as means of transport even though the former had higher freight and insurance costs—further contributing to

34. 72AJ/1905, Gannay Interview, 20.

35. RSTNF 6636, Bulletin d'Information, July 1944, 4; 7.

36. GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, Session July 1942, 15 July 1942 opening speech, 4-5.

37. RSTNF 6636, IPP Bulletin d'information, March 1944.

inflation—and trains took an average of 40 days to travel from Cochinchina to Tonkin and junks between 45 and 60 days. Bombardments and minings had rendered the port of Haiphong non-operational by 1943, contributing significantly to the famine of 1944-1945 (see below). No matter the mode of transport, delays led to the loss of 20-25% of the merchandise from spoilage.³⁸ Road circulation fared no better as lack of tires and spare parts threatened to reduce traffic in Tonkin by 60% in 1944.³⁹ The French understood the political dangers accompanying the impossibility of providing for Tonkin's growing population, warning of rising nationalist sentiments brought on by incessant bombardments and the scarcity of affordable food.⁴⁰ Difficulties in transportation had significant human costs and the GGI had no choice but to push Tonkin and North Annam to exist in a closed circuit, that is to improve, to develop their own production as means of survival rather than importing rice from Cochinchina.⁴¹ This was hardly a demonstration of France's ability to provide for its protected peoples.

Developing a Substitution Economy

Indochina's inability to import goods for production or consumption posed problems for the French authorities to legitimize their place as the keystone of the Indochinese federation and boast the benefits of their *mission civilisatrice*. The humanitarian catastrophe constituted one of the nails in the coffin of this mission. Decoux believed that the best way to

38. For example RSTNF 6703, "Transports à destination du Tonkin," Haelewyn to Decoux, 31 May 1944.

39. RSTNF 6703, Situation économique du Tonkin, 1944.

40. RSTNF 6636, Bulletin d'Information, April 1944.

41. Exposés et entretiens, 23 July 1943, 23.

fight inflation was to develop domestic production.⁴² One might have expected him to launch an effective propaganda campaign to explain the inevitability of short and medium term inflation that government spending (for the *Grands travaux* for instance) would cause in its efforts to increase and especially diversify production. Whether this would have attenuated public discontent is uncertain, but it had the potential to clarify the administration's policies. In the end it did not link the two while it reorganized production and reallocated resources to produce locally those goods it had imported before the war. This substitution economy was an integral part of the authorities' politics of prestige and intended to demonstrate how French leadership could harness Indochinese creativity and make use of the natural riches of the region. For Decoux it was critical to find ways to produce essentials that were lacking, using propaganda to make the population understand the motives behind the measures taken, of certain restrictions, or certain delays.⁴³ This may account for why he never publicly admitted that inflation was inevitable: his propaganda machine was focused on explaining that the administration would end the scarcity of goods, which meant government spending. That government spending could lead to inflation (and thus a scarcity of food) had to be left out.

With an eye toward maintaining French sovereignty in Indochina in the postwar period, Decoux stressed that the future of Indochina depended on its inhabitants working together and in total submission to

42. Directives politiques, 22 September 1941.

43. Directives politiques, 10 September 1943.

the directives of the government.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Admiral presented the situation as an opportunity to tighten Franco-Indochinese bonds as both communities worked together to traverse the economic crisis and build a stronger Indochina. According to Decoux, the control economy that would enable the production of substitution goods required the creation of new economic sectors that would serve as a healthy and potent economic base once peace returned, through the creation of new industries and the redirection of internal trade currents.⁴⁵ Of course these promises did little to fill hungry stomachs in the present.

By 1942, ordinary consumers could find very little, if any, of the types of goods imported into Indochina before the war, such as milk, butter, flour, potatoes, medicine, leather, fuel, tires, wool, or bicycles. Through an increased control of the economy, the government pushed the production of substitution goods locally. The Labbe factories in Saigon produced tires for bicycles and the large distilleries made spirits and fruit wines. Flour from rice replaced flour from wheat for baking bread, which one French source qualified as “acceptable.” Cochinchina and Cambodia produced milk—which was sterilized for transport to Tonkin—in quantities sufficient for “pressing needs” and an office of fishery managed the increase in the supply of fish for consumption. The government imposed restrictions to ensure substitution products went

44. 1/tel772, No.1475, Decoux to Brévié, 17 December 1942; *Voix d'Empire*, 5 December 1941.

45. *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 31 August 1942.

where they were most needed: alcohol for vehicles, milk for children, and medicine for the sick.⁴⁶

Fuel and textiles are two product categories that illustrate well the Decoux regime's efforts to build a substitution economy because of their importance for consumers and trade. Gautier described in his memoirs the administration's will to fabricate substitution products as a means to preserve internal stability:

One had to supply Indochina with fuel, lubricants, tires, textiles, smelting materials, quinine, and a hundred other base products that a country with several million inhabitants cannot do without, and Indochina could dispense with these all the less as the maintenance of a certain standard of living for the indigenous peoples was a condition of internal peace. The fabrication of these replacement products mobilized all the available energies and we can affirm that the impulsion given by Admiral Decoux in this enterprise was such that no problem remained unsolvable. We must indicate in passing that the fabrication of these replacement products affected the economic life of Indochina understood as a whole, and not a particular category of the population.⁴⁷

Gautier's assertion that no problem remained unsolvable forgets the human costs of the substitution economy, namely the redirection of certain foodstuffs for the production of fuel. Yet without fuel, the foodstuff could not be transported, highlighting the impossible situation in which the GGI found itself.

46. For example INF 1145(2), Bulletin de renseignements No.304, "Note du Sous-Lieutenant Loisel sur la situation matérielle et morale des français en Indochine," 15 June 1943.

47. Untitled box, "Mémoire établi par M. Georges Gautier," 30 September 1948, 43.

Before the war, Indochina imported 110,000 tons of fuel annually for lighting, vehicles, lubricants, and power stations.⁴⁸ As early as 1941, gas consumption was reduced through increasingly severe restrictions on traffic. Drivers required permits to operate vehicles and were prohibited from traveling on itineraries serviced by public modes of transportation, unless under exceptional circumstances. This reduced the consumption of such fuel from 3,000 to 2,000 tons per month that year.⁴⁹ The government used hydrated alcohol derived from rice to replace petrol-based gasoline and tried with limited success to obtain petrol from rubber. Only a few months after the conflict with Thailand, Decoux asked Vichy to lift the law prohibiting trade with the former enemy in order to acquire more rice, specifying the region's need for fuel, not food.⁵⁰ By 1943, 3,000 vehicles were equipped with gasogenes (devices enabling them to run on wood or charcoal) and fueled with 15 to 20,000 hectoliters of alcohol from Cambodia, Cochinchina, and Tonkin.⁵¹

Fuel oil was replaced by a mixture of fish, copra, and peanut oils and lubricants by products derived from local vegetable oils. The government imposed minimum quotas for oil production to be delivered at set prices and the monopoly of trade, transport, and treatment of oleaginous goods was given to the *Union des coopératives agricoles* in Tonkin and Annam and to the *Comptoir des corps gras* in the South.⁵² Tightly controlled by the

48. INF 1129, Bulletin de renseignements No.239, 10 May 1944, 6.

49. For example GGI 65295, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, Rapport No.6, "Industrialisation de l'Indochine," Session December 1941, 11.

50. 1/tel727, No.5979, Decoux to Platon, 16 October 1941. Admittedly, scarcity of foodstuff was not as pressing a problem in October 1941 as it would be three years later.

51. *Indochine*, 20 July 1944, 10.

52. Untitled box, "L'Effort économique de l'Indochine," 9; INF 1226.

authorities, these monopolies, called *comptoirs*, were private organizations that had exclusive rights to ensure the supply of specific goods and were an essential piece of the economic strategy of the colonial government.⁵³ From 1940 to 1942, the area devoted to the production of peanut oil went from 25,000 to 43,000 hectares and for castor-oil from 6,000 to 10,000 hectares. By the first quarter of 1942, the average monthly production of vegetable- and animal-derived fuel oil reached 640 tons, up from only 12 tons in the second half of 1941, thanks to the completion of factories in Cambodia.⁵⁴ Paddy rice was burned in Cochinchina's electric plants when Tonkinese coal could no longer be transported south.⁵⁵ The decision to reallocate land toward the production of crops used by the industrial sector contributed to the severity of the 1945 famine in Tonkin, though the difficulties in transportation of foodstuffs from Cochinchina and Cambodia to the North during the later years of the conflict (due to the destruction of the infrastructure) would have prevented any additional food from reaching Tonkin anyhow. Moreover, at the time these decisions were made—during the first two years of the war—famine was not an immediate threat and transportation (including the production of fuel) was a significant concern.

Prior to 1940, Indochina imported 20,000 tons of textiles—mostly cotton and silk—destined for Tonkin's large factories and the region's cottage industries. The problem of the sudden drop in imports (8,000 tons in 1942, 6,000 in 1943) was aggravated by the type of material imported,

53. INF 1267, Rapport du Commissaire Martin au Conseil de l'Indochine, 3 February 1945, 7.

54. INF 1129, Bulletin de renseignements No.239, 10 May 1944, 6.

55. Sabattier, 60.

in large part from Japan, which often consisted of expensive materials like rayon, poorly adaptable for indigenous clothing. One thousand tons of cotton were locally produced and jute was practically nonexistent. To grow substitution products in Indochina, the authorities launched propaganda campaigns and local administrators pressured farmers wherever cultivation could take place or increase, at the risk of diverting resources from the production of food crops. The government fixed prices and imposed quotas on regions where land was devoted to cultivation, a parallel policy to incentivize peasants to grow certain crops through remuneration and to coerce them in case they resisted.⁵⁶ In the first example of a system of coerced cash crops in Indochina (whereas the Dutch in East India had practiced it since the nineteenth century), a textile *comptoir* regulated production, collection, and distribution, though it quickly became apparent that the farmers' reluctance to hand over the entirety of their harvest would have political ramifications. To minimize discontent, the administration allowed farmers to keep a portion of their production and in 1944, only 2,500 of a total of 6,500 tons of cotton grown were handed over to the *comptoir*.⁵⁷ While there was never any question of attempting to grow the same quantity of cotton locally to match prewar exports, the area devoted to cotton cultivation went from 7,000 hectares in 1939 to 19,000 by 1942 and 52,000 by 1944, though insects, poor choices of seeds, and improper soil types kept yields lower than expected. Until relations were broken with India, Indochina

56. For example Untitled box, "L'Effort économique de l'Indochine," 10.

57. INF 1267, Rapport du Commissaire Martin au Conseil de l'Indochine, 3 February 1945, 8.

imported 20,000 tons of sacks made from jute, which were necessary for the transportation and export of rice. To compensate for the cessation of trade with the British colony, 12,700 hectares of jute were cultivated by 1942 (up from 500 in 1939), which along with rush plants from Cochinchina, served to make sacks.⁵⁸

Artisanat

One area where Hanoi followed Vichy policy closely was the promotion of artisan crafts, or *artisanat*, though where Vichy had been incompetent and even duplicitous, Hanoi encouraged *artisanat* as an integral part of tradition and saw it as a cornerstone of its efforts for economic survival. As discussed in Chapter 2, Vichy's glorification of the *artisanat* as a return to a more stable past fell short of the reality of its authoritarian and centralizing policies. Inspired by social philosophers such as Gustave Thibon and René Gillouin, Pétainist discourse blamed the fall of France on its departure from the traditional small-scale craft and peasant world that had been its strength only a few years before the war. Charles Maurras, one of the inspirations of the National Revolution's ultraconservative wing, criticized the Third Republic's atomization of society and argued that it was tradition that had allowed civilization to endure, as transmitted capital, and that it must always be greater and more important than the individual; there could be no society without tradition.⁵⁹ Yet by the end of 1942, with the impetus of the National Revolution weakened significantly, the government had resettled

58. For example INF 1129, Bulletin de renseignements No.239, 10 May 1944, 6-7; Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 32.

59. Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 120-121.

a mere 200 artisans in the French provinces.⁶⁰ In contrast to France, the effects of machinery on the fabric of society never reached Indochina, with 95-97% of its population living in rural areas and an almost nonexistent industrial base. *Artisanat* was ubiquitously a way of life for the peasantry who needed to supplement income while waiting for the next harvest. A discourse for the return to traditional ways of production would have been absurd given that production was almost never industrial and therefore, traditional by nature. Rather, Decoux's government tried to direct and coordinate Indochinese *artisanat* to sustain and develop the substitution economy that was borne of the region's isolation.

The colonial authorities under the Third Republic had mostly encouraged the development of Indochinese artistic artisanry (e.g. jewelry, silk, or ivory-work), distinguishable from utilitarian artisanry (e.g. weaving, woodwork, or pottery). This preference stemmed from the colonists' desire to stop the perceived decline of traditional arts, and efforts focused mostly on high end goods targeted at the elite rather than every day consumption. Without officially discouraging production of utilitarian arts and crafts, the French arrival in the region had accelerated its decline by flooding the market with cheap mass-produced goods. Those who made their living from cottage industry could no longer compete. The French placed few restrictions on imports to protect this sector though they did try to preserve the artistic artisanry in efforts ranging from the opening of small museums to the founding of cultural

60. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 215.

institutions to the restoration of Angkor.⁶¹ The fear that national art would disappear was particularly acute in Cambodia, where a 1917 study counted 130 artisans of art out of an estimated population of 1.5 million, most whom found farming more profitable. The republican GGI created the School of Cambodian Arts that year to organize, conserve, and popularize Khmer art in all its forms and in 1924 it established the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine*, which trained artisans of art.⁶² A report published in 1937 insisted that it was France's duty to revive the artistic crafts: "It seems that our role must consist in conserving in that domain of arts, to the people of whom we have taken on the education, the proper character and originality of their national art, and to help them to rediscover the elements they poorly know or have forgotten."⁶³ The emphasis remained on artistic rather than utilitarian artisanry.

The governments of the 1930s became aware of the need to nurture local utilitarian artisanry to fight peasant poverty and minimize the need to industrialize Indochina, two forces they feared could lead to the proletarianization of the population. Industrialization risked hurting factories in the metropole and favoring the "bolshevization" of the workers and the countryside with which many still had relations. Minister of Colonies Marius Moutet announced: "It would be a grave error to rush our colonies toward poorly planned industrialization. We must not create a proletariat that, exploited and unhappy, would rapidly

61. Tully, 216-217.

62. Edwards, 149.

63. *Les Ecoles de l'art d'Indochine*, Report made for the *Exposition internationale des arts et technique de Paris*, 1937, cited in Brocheux and Hémery, 226.

be dangerous for French sovereignty.”⁶⁴ Justin Godart, Senator from Rhône, asked upon his return from Indochina in 1937:

Is it desirable to see the number of workers increase, that is to wish for the development of industry in Indochina? I don't think so. Here is a stable and definitive base for Indochina: small property. We must defend it where it exists; we must create it where there is room. If, along with this agrarian policy we can build an artisan policy, we will bring a new and effective palliative to the current situation.⁶⁵

The authorities sought to reverse rural poverty by accelerating the promotion of utilitarian artisanry, which they hoped would supplement income and increase goods for local consumption. Tonkin had the largest artisan population of the Union, yet less than 7% of the inhabitants drew the majority of its income from this type of production.⁶⁶ Of course these numbers do not reflect the aggregate quantitative output of microcapitalism of a peasantry whose primary activity derived from the land but that often supplemented its income through artisanal production when not harvesting. This production may or may not have been considered “national art” by the colonial authorities, and thus may not have been counted in the statistics, but it remained a critical part of the local economy. Nevertheless, in the years preceding the war the government tried to stimulate utilitarian artisanry through credits permitting the craftsman to purchase tools and raw materials without having to go through usurers. These credits were provided through the intermediary of cooperative societies, which also created a discipline, a

64. Quoted in Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français* (Paris: A. Michel, 2005), 456-457.

65. Cited in Hémery, 25.

66. Brocheux and Hémery, 258-259.

standardization, and a regulation of the quality of production. The government opened workshops to revive lost artisan crafts (such as in Ha Dong) and artisan schools (such as in Bien Hoa) to teach skills and prepare for careers. During the late 1930s the French wanted to give a sense of national artisanry to the Indochinese peoples while at the same time molding tastes. By focusing on artisanry for mass consumption rather than for the elite, utilitarian and artistic artisanry became more closely associated. No longer were national arts reserved for the production of art on grand or intricate scales. Standardization and quality control were critical in developing the sector and commoditizing its production rather than seeing it as an art form. The authorities estimated that during this time, the export of artisan goods contributed three to five million piastres to the balance of trade and the further expansion of the sector could diversify the Indochinese economy, without having to engage in costly, and dangerous, programs of industrialization.⁶⁷ Unfortunately the effects of these measures were negligible, as they were never fully implemented by the time war broke out.⁶⁸

Since the republican authorities had focused on nurturing artisan art and achieved very little to stimulate the production of utilitarian artisanry, Decoux's government inherited a weak sector that required further encouragement and direction to fulfill its potential, be an integral part in the substitution economy, and alleviate rural poverty.⁶⁹ In 1941,

67. INF 1150, *L'Action de la France en Indochine au point de vue économique*, 9-10.

68. FM INF 2749, *Programme d'action sociale et culturelle*, 13.

69. For example INF 1126, *Rapport du médecin commandant Eugène Kernevez*, 20 March 1944.

the GGI reported that artisanry in Indochina, still lacked financial concentration and principles of standardization, as it had developed haphazardly and under the sole impetus of individual need, keeping it, by the quality and quantity of its production, well below its vast potential. It still could not provide a normal means of subsistence to a considerable hunger-stricken mass.⁷⁰ Adults could expect to earn between 0.06 and 0.10 piastres and children 0.02 to 0.10 piastres a day through artisanry, and since they mostly sold to middlemen—who profited greatly from sales—and raw materials were often subject to drastic markups (up to 300% according to government sources), they were squeezed financially. Moreover, selling to middlemen meant that artisans had no direct exposure to fluctuations in demand or tastes.⁷¹ Decoux's regime understood that to increase the daily consumption and wealth of the colony, production ideally needed to increase quantitatively and qualitatively and flood local markets as well as drive exports, which in turn would allow the increased import of goods.⁷² It also counted on a healthy *artisanat* to curb rural-urban migration, which threatened to pull wages down as the number of available workers in cities increased.⁷³ This would leave the administration with the problem of an overpopulated countryside, but the supplemental income from artisanry was supposed to alleviate pressures. Yet these policies were never able to overcome the devastation of the war on the economy, namely isolation and

70. GGI 65295, Conseil Fédéral indochinois, "Rapport No.5: Le Problème démographique; surpopulation et colonisation," Session December 1941, 5.

71. GGI 65295, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, "Rapport No.6: Développement de l'artisanat," Session December 1941, 2-4.

72. INF 2749, "Principes généraux de la future économie Indochinoise," 17.

73. For example Discours prononcés, 6 January 1942.

bombardments, and the populations remained desperately poor and hungry. Decoux rightly recognized artisanry's potential as a provider to the substitution economy that had to emerge to address autarky, but the economy itself could not develop in wartime. Decoux's solutions, no matter how creative, were doomed from the start.

With no alternatives and hoping to ride out the war, Decoux's government tried to direct the Indochinese *artisanat* through the control of its production and its channels of distribution. Though these initiatives sought to address the immediate problems posed by the war, Decoux positioned the reorganization of the economy and the development of substitution products as a long term plan to raise standards of living in the colony. He proposed that the rupture in external communications that had forced Indochina to live in a closed circuit presented an opportunity to make up for important weaknesses in the regions' economic organization. For the *artisanat* to continue to develop once the war was over the Admiral claimed it was indispensable to organize it so it could survive international competition.⁷⁴ He never addressed how the French industrial conglomerates, that had purposefully kept the Indochinese economy dependent on its exports, would react once relations normalized, signaling either his own naiveté or a vulgar attempt to rally support for his ambitions by leaving these issues to his successor. Still, the government took it upon itself to assist, organize, and orient artisanal production.⁷⁵ Decoux had an unprecedented opportunity to implement

74. Discours prononcés, 27 April 1944.

75. GGI 65295, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, "Rapport No.6: Développement de l'artisanat," Session December 1941, 6.

corporatist structures to cure through shock therapy the ails caused by the war. Decoux's administration envisioned an economy organized as a pyramidal structure where large modern industry was at the summit, transformation and extraction industry below, and at its base, "the thousands of small family workshops" that existed in the region, to which the French would give the means to modernize their fabrication and to produce new articles.⁷⁶ Properly directed, the authorities believed, the *artisanat* could provide goods to small industry, which in turn could supply large industry.⁷⁷ The French believed they needed to guide artisanal production away from art and ornamental trinkets to utilitarian products, such as those made of leather, rope, or metal.⁷⁸ The relationship between a developed and directed *artisanat* and heavy industry (however nascent at the time) was symbiotic and it was believed could help the region as a whole after the war, provided workshops improved the quality of their goods.⁷⁹ The policy made sense given wartime conditions but again, did not take into account the reactions of industry in the metropole once these conditions ended.

To build this pyramid and ensure the production of utilitarian goods, Decoux's government sought to organize the *artisanat* at local and regional levels. In August 1941, it created (at the same time as the Council on Industrial Production) the Local Committees of *Artisanat*, which were directed in each *pays* by the ADLOC and attached to the

76. INF 2749, Programme d'action sociale et culturelle, 13.

77. Tournées, 30 April 1943.

78. INF 1129, Bulletin de renseignements No.238, 10 May 1944.

79. For example Discours prononcés, 9 December 1943.

General Inspection of Mines and Industries. These committees were responsible for implementing measures to expand fabrication, while improving quality, perfecting work methods, and facilitating the sale of products.⁸⁰ In each province the authorities established cooperatives for every major artisanal activity, such as weavers (broken down by the materials with which they worked), dyers, basket makers, and varnishers. The Union of Cooperatives (UNICOP) worked with these local cooperatives to ensure that the artisan corps of every *pays* work, according to its capacity and its means, on articles responding exactly to the demand and needs of the customers, minimizing competition between the different artisan groupings.⁸¹ The 27 July 1942 decree creating the Office of Popular Credit continued the formalization of groupings of artisans around cooperative societies. It divided the *pays* of the union into a certain number of zones in which only one cooperative would be allowed for every trade. These cooperatives oversaw the fabrication of specific goods and the equitable distribution of raw materials. By the end of 1943, Indochina counted 14 cooperatives, 13 of which were less than a year old and the government set aside 660,000 piastres to fund cooperatives, up from 140,000 the year before.⁸² Unlike in the metropole, these cooperatives did not have a voice in the political defense of their interests, but their organization into natural groupings,

80. Discours prononcés, 10 March 1943.

81. GGI 65295, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, "Rapport No.6: Développement de l'artisanat," Session December 1941, 9.

82. *Indochine*, 30 December 1943.

based on professional knowledge, was anchored in Maurrassism (see below), though Decoux preferred to allude publicly to Pétain.⁸³

The government expanded schools to train artisans and set standards of production on a scale never before seen in previous administrations, since most had been more concerned with the production of artistic crafts than utilitarian products. These “centers of perfection” were set up in areas with high concentrations of artisanal activity and placed under the supervision of the Artisanal Technical Service, which was responsible for improving quality of goods and orient production toward customer demand.⁸⁴ These centers intended to elevate artisans, and as was written in one newspaper, teach them that their professions “did not consist in producing, according to circumstances, to respond to the vogues of the moment, to sell as much as possible, but also to put out [*sortir*] *finished, cared for* work. . . The dignity of the profession of artisan demands from those who practice it, in addition to professional probity, the search to ameliorate, to perfect, quality.”⁸⁵ This was nothing less than an attempted overhaul of local culture by the French: the French appropriated Indochinese artisanry to run the colony effectively and returned their version of local crafts to the population in a transformed, somehow more elevated form. Under the leadership of the Europeans, these schools sought to correct what was perceived to be the lack of professional consciousness in local craftsmen that characterized the French artisan, a

83. Discours prononcés, 16 December 1943; 27 April 1944.

84. For example Directives politiques, 16 March 1943.

85. *Voix d'Empire*, 26 January 1942.

certain self esteem through which his work somehow reflected his soul.⁸⁶ The French went so far as to push the idea that Indochinese artisanry depended on them to flourish, evoking Charles Crévost, the “father of Tonkinese *artisanat*,” who, working in the Agricultural and Commercial Services of Tonkin under Governor General Paul Beau’s administration (1902-1907), “had for only ambition to guide workers, because the latter needed to be advised, the latter not being sufficiently aware of the tastes and needs of the principally French customers at the time.”⁸⁷ In a paragon of absurdity and paternalism, the French presented the idea that the Indochinese peoples could not produce their own national treasures (that is the culmination of centuries of knowhow of how to fabricate certain goods) without the assistance of the French. Even as the shift occurred away from artistic artisanry toward utilitarian artisanry, the French saw themselves as the saviors of local tradition.

The French authorities organized fairs in Hanoi and Saigon to show the public that Indochinese *artisanat* was thriving, and, with French guidance, played an important part in addressing some of the Union’s socioeconomic problems. While these fairs existed before the war—the last such event had been held in 1938—the region’s isolation led Decoux’s regime to emphasize, for propagandistic purposes, Indochina’s ability to survive through its own resources by adapting them and substituting them to replace goods that were lacking. This was a critical part in building the enthusiasm of the populations behind the government’s efforts to salvage

86. *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 2 February 1942.

87. Tournées, 10 March 1943; *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 21 January 1942.

the economy through redirection. Visitors learned about how the government guided local artisans to find and produce solutions to energy problems using vegetable oils, efforts made in cultivating cotton and jute, or how gazogenes were placed in vehicles.⁸⁸ Decoux used the fairs to promote how French tutelage was necessary to tap the ingeniousness of the locals. He also used the opportunity to emphasize the federal spirit of solidarity calling on visitors to reflect on the importance of common work and the strength of collective ties.⁸⁹ Again, once internal transportation logistics broke down two years later, there was nothing upon which to base these collective ties, culminating in Decoux's call for Tonkin to fend for itself. In 1941, no one appreciated the dangers posed by a change in the Allies' fortunes and one editorialist wrote:

Essentially this Hanoi Fair is symbolic: it attests that the French of Indochina and the Indochinese aren't giving up the fight, that on the contrary it is fascinating to them precisely because it is difficult. They trust, they know that their effort, their inventive spirit, their consistency assures the future, and that Indochina will surmount all the crises, simply because they want it.⁹⁰

The fairs were supposed to feature not only artisanal goods, but the spirit of the Indochinese Union. The government wanted the fairs to display nothing less than Indochina's effort in the struggle for its existence thanks to the solidarity that bound its people to one another and France. The fairs were part of the effort to elevate the *artisanat*, presenting it as a linchpin in the economic transformation that was occurring.⁹¹

88. 1/tel767, No.36, "Decoux to Platon," 3 January 1942.

89. Discours prononcés, 30 November 1941.

90. *Voix d'Empire*, 5 December 1941.

91. Tournées, 30 November 1941.

Brought together, artisans from all parts of the colony could learn from one another, ending what one newspaper called the “lack of cohesion of the different family workshops. . .[which impeded] equally professional development and perfectibility.”⁹² This process of solidarity was part of a moral and commercial education from which technical improvements would surely follow, an undisguised effort to push the idea that France, as the cement that held the Union together, brought peoples together and allowed them to perfect their own national treasures.⁹³ One editorial summarized the intents of the government vis-à-vis the fairs:

The *Foire-Exposition* brings to Indochina proof that its natural resources and the working spirit of its sons allow it to suffice for itself; it establishes a balance sheet of riches until now fairly unknown, and we are talking not only of material riches, but also moral riches. Face to face with a grave situation, Indochina, federation of countries considered until now, rightly or wrongly, weak and minor, acts as one nation, a courageous and coherent nation, distant member and, for now, isolated from a vast and powerful whole that is the French empire.⁹⁴

The fairs attracted large crowds—two million visitors attended the 1943 *Foire-Exposition* of Saigon—and inspired the authorities to open permanent *artisanat* exhibits in Saigon, Ha Dong, and Hanoi.⁹⁵ The government hoped these centers would encourage trading houses to familiarize themselves with the production of family workshops and establish relations between buyers and producers, while informing the latter on customers’ latest tastes and desires and advising them on how to

92. *L’Annam Nouveau*, 26 October 1941.

93. *Indochine*, 10 June 1942, 4.

94. *Indochine*, 18 December 1941, 2.

95. *L’Action*, 11 March 1943.

improve their work methods.⁹⁶ They represented the colonial authorities' continued efforts to promote Indochinese *artisanat*, recognizing it as an essential element in the Indochinese economy but also signaling their complete disconnection with the reality of how the postwar empire would accept these changes, should Indochina remain a part of it. Whatever success the efforts to elevate the *artisanat* would have had was destroyed by the infrastructural collapse of the colony. Locally-produced goods remained locally-consumed and Decoux's vision of an *artisanal* base whose goods were distributed across Indochina, with glimpses of specialization by region toward an economy based on competitive advantage, never came about, nor could it after 1945, during years of conflict toward independence.

Les Grands travaux

The *Grands travaux*, or "Great works," was the name given to the major infrastructural improvements conducted by the colonial authorities in Indochina. Building roads, railways, or hydraulic structures would ameliorate the region's communication, production, and transportation systems, which in turn brought economic benefits, but also served political purposes by contributing to the narrative of France's *oeuvre*. While the governments of the Third Republic had invested in infrastructural improvements early on partly as means of ensuring the effective movement of troops throughout the colony, the nineteenth century construction of routes were at the heart of France's reasons for establishing itself in Southeast Asia; trade with Asian nations. France's

96. For example RSTNF 6419, Fondation d'une maison de l'artisanat à Hanoi.

economic stagnation during 1873-1897 led Paris to seek new outlets for its goods, since exports had plateaued in part due to the protectionist policies of most the country's economic partners. In 1886, future Governor General Jean-Marie de Lanessan wrote

Industry at first worked for the domestic market, toward trade between city and countryside; but soon this market became too small; industry began to produce for export. . . But the same events occurred [in other countries], the same evolution took place in all civilized nations. . . For half a century all the nations of Europe compete with zeal for the creation of the most diverse industries, all try to make do without their neighbors. . . The number of civilized countries lacking industry diminishing every day, it is more and more outside these that manufacturers are forced to go find consumers. We find in these needs of European industry a first explanation for the movement of expansion that since long has pushed Europe toward the regions inhabited by peoples still ignorant of the benefits of civilization.⁹⁷

For French political leaders, the creation of captive consumer markets was the solution to the country's economic difficulties, and infrastructural improvements in Indochina were vital in assuring access to these markets, in particular Yunnan, gateway to China.⁹⁸ France had originally sought to reach China along the Mekong River through Laos, but when that proved unnavigable, it sought to control the Red River to access Yunnan. When in turn this waterway's limitations for efficient navigability were exposed after the completion of colonization in the 1880s, the French turned to railways, the Resident of Tonkin declaring "The route that will offer immediately all the elements necessary for international commerce and

97. Jean-Louis (Jean-Marie) de Lanessan, *L'Expansion coloniale de la France* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1886), xvii-xviii.

98. Brocheux and Hémery, 36; 43; 46.

to European industry, as well as giving France a powerful means of action, civilization, and authority in all of Asia, could consist in the construction of a railway that [would start] in Ha Long Bay. . .make its way north through Yunnan. . .toward the northwest, into Tibet.”⁹⁹

While transport by river continued to represent an important part of commercial traffic, the French authorities accelerated the construction of railways and roads after the turn of the century. Indochina’s railway expansion began with a vast project elaborated between 1891 and 1898 (which came to be called the Doumer program), designed to penetrate China as well as to connect rural areas to regional markets, new poles of industrialization, and external outlets. Most of the railway construction was financed by the publicly owned *Compagnie des chemins de fer de L’Indochine*, though the privately held *Compagnie des chemins de fer du Yunnan*, received 68.5 million francs in subsidies from the French government from 1901 to 1909, demonstrating how the Republic was eager to fund the networks to attract private interests.¹⁰⁰ In 1911 the government launched a program to establish a coherent road network, which intended to unlock Laos and the Vietnamese highlands.¹⁰¹ These new roads also facilitated the migration of Vietnamese laborers from overpopulated Tonkin and Annam (and to a lesser extent Cochinchina) to other parts of the colony, such as Cambodia, where the number of Vietnamese grew from 79,000 in 1911 to over 140,000 by 1921. New

99. Quoted in de Lanessan, *L’Expansion coloniale de la France*, 508-509.

100. Marseille, 152-153. The Transindochinois railway was finally completed in 1936 and stretched 1,730 kilometers.

101. Brocheux and Hémery, 127-128.

roads provided the means with which the authorities were able to expand their administrative structures, allowing them to send Vietnamese public servants having passed the French language civil service examination to all parts of the colony. It was hoped this would strengthen the nascent federalist program, though as discussed above, it created the basis of nationalist tensions in the region given the overwhelming preponderance of Vietnamese administrators charged with helping the French run Cambodia and Laos.¹⁰² The French also saw the construction of road networks as a means to counter the Siamese proximity and facility of access to Laos and integrate the country into the Union. The Route Coloniale 13 (R.C.13) linked Saigon and Luang Prabang through the Mekong Valley and was hailed as bringing Laos definitively within the Indochinese community. Unfortunately, rhetoric did not match reality and large parts of the road were impracticable outside of the dry season and transport between Laos and Siam remained cheaper and quicker than that between Laos and other parts of Indochina.¹⁰³ By 1938, Indochina's transportation network counted 2,908 kilometers of rail (excluding the Yunnan route, up from 1,549 kilometers in 1913) and 27,500 kilometers of roads (19,000 of which were paved, up from 18,600 kilometers and 10,600 kilometers respectively in 1913).¹⁰⁴

102. Goscha, 24-25. Goscha reports that in 1913, 14 of 16 administrators in Phnom Penh were Vietnamese and in Laos during the 1930s, 54% of the posts offered by the administration were occupied by Vietnamese. Note the irony that the French encouraged migration into the pays that it had originally promised to protect from the Vietnamese.

103. Ivarsson, 97-100.

104. INF 1150, *L'Action de la France en Indochine au point de vue économique*, 14.

Northern Vietnam's overpopulation problems pushed the administration in the early 1930s to improve the hydraulic irrigation system of the Red River delta to increase the quantity of rice produced. The 1931 hydraulic program, revised and completed in 1936 and 1937, was financed with 1,370 francs in loans and intended to develop irrigation in the Thai Binh region, the middle delta (Ha Dong-Phu Ly, Nam Dinh, Ké Sat, Hung Yen, Bac Ninh, Day dam), those of Annam (Vinh, Thanh Hoa, Ha Tinh, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai), of Cambodia, and of Laos. Between 1931 and 1940, 41 million piastres were invested in the hydraulic *Grands travaux* and irrigation networks gave water to 200,000 hectares in Tonkin, 124,000 in Annam, and 30,000 in Cambodia. In Cochinchina, they were instrumental in allowing the area devoted to rice culture to expand from 528,000 hectares in 1880 to 2,443,000 in 1930. However, this did little to alleviate rural poverty since most of the land ended up in the hands of big landlords who squeezed the peasants, and though famines were largely avoided, the Indochinese peasantry was unable to rise above its precarious standards of living, marked by continued malnourishment and general underdevelopment.¹⁰⁵

Under Decoux's government, the French continued and expanded the Republic's projects to extend the transportation and hydraulic networks throughout the region. Indochina's isolation, juxtaposed with the stationing of Japanese troops, accentuated the economic and propagandistic need to engage in public works. Cut off from the metropole, Decoux's administration had unprecedented freedom to plan

105. INF 1150, L'Action de la France en Indochine au point de vue économique, 17 and Brocheux and Hémery, 270.

and carry out infrastructural endeavors as the Ministry of Colonies could not scrutinize every minute expense.¹⁰⁶ The *Grands travaux* were necessary to facilitate the development of local production, forced by Indochina's autarky, but Decoux saw them as means of promoting the French *oeuvre* and reinforcing the perception of French sovereignty. He saw them as tangible means of creating emotional linkages with France, demonstrating the colonists' will and power to build: an immediate satisfaction veiling the difficulties in providing long term improvements to standards of living.¹⁰⁷ In his memoirs, Decoux wrote: "It is through the *Grands travaux* of public interest that the politics of prestige that I intended to pursue at the head of Indochina manifested themselves in the most tangible way to the autochthon populations."¹⁰⁸ The *Grands travaux* were as much part of the show as they were solutions to the colony's economic problems.

Decoux's administration unlocked and connected many parts of Indochina thanks to its improvements of the road network. In Laos, the final 440 kilometers of the R.C.13 were completed by 1943, linking Saigon to Luang Prabang and creating liaisons with the three transversal roads that join Laos and Vietnam (R.C.7, 8, and 9). R.C.19 linked Stung Treng to Pleiku over 260 kilometers while R.C.14 joined Cochinchina with the Central Highlands of Annam over 405 kilometers of new roads and R.C.4 took travelers to the border with China from Hanoi and Lao Cai. Other projects aimed to link Upper Tonkin with Upper Laos or cities

106. Devillers, 86.

107. Directives politiques, 23 March 1943.

108. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 451.

to Tonkinese mines as well as provide access to the new developing city of Da Lat. This work must have come at considerable cost of labor and resources as many of the roads were finished in parts of the region where the terrain was most treacherous, the proverbial last mile that the Republic had left until the easier pieces were in place.¹⁰⁹ This was a valuable piece of propaganda for Decoux in his quest to glorify the French *oeuvre* and resolve.

Decoux's regime improved hydraulic infrastructures to increase rice production, particularly important in Tonkin given its overpopulation and the difficulties in transporting foodstuffs from the South. The Ha Dong-Phuly and Thai-Binh lock (affecting areas of 100,000 and 75,000 hectares respectively) were completed in 1943. In Annam, the largest dam in Indochina (26 meters high) was constructed in Nghê An and work was engaged on a larger dam in Liet Son (28 meters high, 170 long, allowing 20 million cubic meters of reserve water), while the Vinh-West and Vinh-South water networks were built. The authorities also built a dam in Ban Cung, Cochinchina to protect 110,000 hectares from foul waters and the Rach Gia-Ha Tien-Chau Doc-Long Xuyen canals (3,750 hectares) were dug where 750 resided newly installed families in the region. Meanwhile, irrigation works permitted the further cultivation of lands in Cambodia in Siem Reap (15,000 hectares) and near Kompong-Cham and Preyveng.¹¹⁰

In his memoirs, Gautier underscored the importance of the *Grands travaux* during this time in maintaining "trust and domestic peace" and

109. FM 1209, "Renseignements sur la situation matérielle de l'Indochine," Pechkoff to Dejean, 2 October 1944 and Huguier, 254.

110. For example Discours prononcés, 16 December 1943.

claimed that never “had one moved so many rocks and earth as during this time when one would have to have a good excuse to let the work sites sleep.”¹¹¹ There is validity in this as no previous administration had built so many roads, bridges, hydraulic systems, or made so many urban improvements.¹¹² Infrastructural works were the physical proof of French dynamism and promise of development linked with colonial tutelage and the colonists had to be ambitious to enhance what they saw as their legitimacy. The government asserted that the public works contributed to the activity of local industry and that the wages paid would raise the purchasing power of those involved who could then afford the foodstuff that were no longer be exported.¹¹³ The reality was that the wages paid, if any were paid at all, were most likely too low to affect consumption, certainly not enough to keep up with inflation. Still, the government needed the *Grands travaux* to be a centerpiece of its propaganda to promote the French *oeuvre* in the region, and often warned, explicitly or not, of the difficulties that would follow were colonial help to disappear. In a form of emotional blackmail, it claimed that the region’s prosperity was dependent on the completion of the infrastructural systems, which ostensibly was impossible without French knowhow and financial backing.¹¹⁴ The Indochinese must have known that even if another power stepped in, it would have meant a simple replacement of masters, a

111. Untitled box, “Memoire établi par M. Georges Gautier,” 30 September 1948, 32.

112. Ivarsson, 158; Grandjean, 96.

113. INF 2749, “Principes généraux de la future économie Indochinoise,” 24.

114. INF 1145(2), Bulletin de renseignements No.128, 6 November 1944.

recognition that may in turn have been a point of entry for the attraction to the internationalist nature of communism.

For now, the *Grands travaux* were to be the source of federal and local pride, guided by the wisdom of the colonial powers, and Decoux's propaganda machine took every opportunity to praise the material and moral prosperity that they would bring. One article exalted the determination of the Indochinese peoples that successfully overcame economic hardships when led by the knowledge of French engineers:

Everything is lacking, but we have learned that will, relentlessness, ingeniousness, can provide instead. There is no more cement, but never have the yards been so numerous. There are no transportation problems that do not seem unsolvable, no more iron or wood to be found, no more workers from afar that don't need to be fed, clothed, cares for with expensive means, but everywhere the works are completed on time, the plans followed, the programs executed—and what programs! . . . [these works] affirm that these difficulties don't matter, that we only need the will to overcome them.¹¹⁵

In another article, which exemplified the French conviction that they were giving locals back their authenticity, the new hydraulic system put in place in Cambodia by the administration was said to be built on the cultural and physical legacy of the Angkor kingdom, bringing not only irrigation for the local population, but reconnecting Cambodia with its Khmer past. The author wrote:

Not much is left of the enormous works of the great Khmer empire; enough, nevertheless, so that one can more or less reconstitute the map, take it with new methods and formulas, and return water and life to a country that was so alive [*animé*], and that today would be covered by

115. *Indochine*, 20 July 1944, 14.

the forest and completely deserted if France did not accomplish its *oeuvre* there.¹¹⁶

The *Grands travaux* were the physical manifestation of what colonizer and local peoples could achieve through collaboration. Writing about Kompong-Cham, a provincial capital in central Cambodia, one author described how the “provincial administration and the inhabitants [were] equally proud of their little capital, which [was] an example of the results a tight collaboration between public powers and the population can achieve.”¹¹⁷ Of course this was a collaboration of tutelage, not equality, and as with every other facet of Decoux’s administration, the French wanted to project the image of benevolent paternalism, an impossible task with the crushing of uprisings (Yen Bay or Nghe Tinh, for instance) still fresh in many minds.

Corporatism

While Indochina’s isolation forced Decoux to reorganize the economy for reasons of pragmatism and prestige, the advent of the National Revolution in France provided the legal framework with which to apply corporatist structures. Decoux used this framework to implement his own version of corporatism, based on the Indochinese context. This sometimes put him at odds with Vichy over how this implementation should take place (see below). Though Decoux’s Maurrassian influences would have made him sensible to a corporatist reorganization of society—one based on professional groupings where workers, owners, and

116. *Indochine*, 20 February 1941, viii. Note that this comment echoes the French assumption that they had rescued Angkor from the jungle as well.

117. *Indochine*, 31 December 1942, iv.

government decide in concert on production and economic objectives—the predominantly agrarian nature of Indochinese society meant that class consciousness was almost nonexistent in the region. As such, the subjective conditions that lead to class warfare, to use Marxist terminology, were never mature enough to create the socioeconomic disorder that corporatism sought to redress. In other words, the corporatism that had been a reaction to the organization of labor in Europe had no reason to exist as an antidote to class warfare in Indochina because labor was never organized on a scale that warranted such a reorganization. Moreover, economic activity outside the primary sector was small, which rendered the emulation of Vichy reorganization difficult, leading to imbalances and inefficiencies. While the authorities had mixed successes in their efforts to implement corporatist structures in Indochina, Decoux's promises that professional groupings would be beneficial were an important part of his campaign to gain hearts and minds of the French and Indochinese peoples, and provided him with the structures through which to better direct economic production.

Corporatism as a theoretical construct was found in Maurrassian ideology that sought to eradicate individualism and democracy. Charles Maurras wrote:

What makes socialism anarchical and revolutionary is not what makes it socialist, it is the democratic poison that always interferes: take out this poison and the organization of work becomes once again an important actual problem that all healthy societies will resolve satisfactorily and

even spontaneously, so long as the political power, being continuous and powerful, is willing to maintain order.¹¹⁸

Founded on a hierarchical notion of society in which natural superiorities should be respected and nurtured, *Action française* believed in the restoration of corporatist cadres, and its program drew inspiration from the traditionalist, aristocratic, and paternalistic branch of social Catholicism.¹¹⁹ Corporatism, according to AF, was a solution to end class conflict and the despotism of capital, “progenitor and father of all democratic power, of all elected power, of all power dependent on opinion.”¹²⁰ Through social and professional bodies led by the state, corporatist structures, Maurrassism affirmed, would end class conflict and protect both the proletariat and the petite bourgeoisie from the concentration of power of large industry.¹²¹ Maurras believed that the “state, perfectly free . . . in some cases intervenes in the conflicts of capital and labor, either in its capacity as judge, or as chief of the national police. To prevent certain ills, to repress them all [are] the two functions of the state.”¹²² Furthermore in a corporatist society, according to Maurras, “the national state invites friendship and unity instead of exciting hate and division as does and must do the democratically elected state.”¹²³

Corporatism rejected syndicalism and capitalist liberalism through the economic organization of the active population (owners, managers,

118. Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie*, 333.

119. Rémond, 173.

120. Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, 161.

121. Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire*, 379.

122. Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie*, 57.

123. Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, lxvii.

and workers) into natural groupings, by branch of industry or profession. The state would play a central role in harmonizing production with society's needs and mediate between capital and labor, thus ending the chaos of the free market and the picket lines. Portuguese President Salazar, whose policies inspired the ultraconservative architects of the National Revolution, wrote:

The greatest political problem of our time will be the need to organize the nation, as much as possible according to its natural plan, that is respecting the spontaneous groupings of men around their interests or their activities in order to frame them within the state, in such a way that [the state] will only be the representation of the nation with the proper organs to achieve collective ends. This is the problem that bestows an utmost political importance to the corporatist organization.¹²⁴

Shortly after the armistice, Pétain's speeches were modeled on both Maurras and Salazar's visions of the corporatist state: "Competition is the law of life and if the interests of the bosses and the workers can sometimes be opposed, the general interest of the profession, that is common to them, must dominate the opposition of their particular interests, and is itself a part of the more general interest of national production." Professional organizations, in the Marshal's view, would

deal with everything that concerns the trade, but [would] limit themselves only to the professional domain. They [would] assure, under the authority of the state, the crafting and the execution of work conventions. They [would] guarantee the dignity of the worker by ameliorating his life conditions, until old age. They [would] also avoid conflicts by the absolute prohibition of 'lock outs' and strikes, by the obligatory judgement of the labor tribunals.¹²⁵

124. Salazar, 25.

125. Pétain, *La France nouvelle*, 63; 81.

Vichy's record on corporatist organization, like many of the disparities between its rhetoric and action, did not reflect these views, and already by February 1941 representatives of heavy industry ran the Ministry of Industrial Production—which was responsible for appointing the members of the Organization Committee that was designed to be the building block of the corporatist structures—effectively preserving the dominance of big business in the economy.¹²⁶ Promulgated in France on 4 October 1941, the *Charte du travail* [Work Charter], prescribed obligatory syndicates for different professional categories, outlawed strikes, and established social committees in every factory. As historian John Sweets describes, it failed to gain the support of the workers and owners did little to encourage state officials to reach its employees directly.¹²⁷

Decoux's willingness to restructure Indochina's economy along corporatist lines derived from a need to direct the economy rather than end class conflict as corporatism promised to do in Europe. Decoux refused to implement the *Charte du travail*, hesitant to evoke its promises in a region where workers had no place sitting at a table with owners and government. Class consciousness in Indochina was simply not as mature as in Europe given its lack of an industrial base, though the strikes held between 1929 and 1931 did show potential in the three *pays* that would constitute Vietnam. The proletarian base remained too small. Decoux rightly treated the ICP as a nationalist threat that appealed to locals'

126. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 216.

127. Sweets, 75-76.

desire for independence rather than their proletarianism. The colony's lack of proletarian or democratic traditions—which according to French ultraconservatives fueled social anarchy and threatened to atomize society—provided a different context for the justification of professional groupings. Much like with *artisanat*, Decoux saw the reorganization of the entire economy based on activity as a means to assure the control, distribution, and sale of certain key products.¹²⁸ Decoux affirmed that the new doctrine must condemn liberalism and socialism and even though the situation in Indochina was different from that of the metropole, the ends were the same. Decoux wanted to create a third path, an economy based on the willingness to serve the community, to make it strong, united, and durable through planning and control. Unlike socialist societies, this one would be based on hierarchy and natural order.¹²⁹

The desire to control the professional groupings was a significant and pragmatic departure from Maurras, who wrote “the direct interventions [of the state] must be as rare as possible”¹³⁰ The realities of Indochina's situation—its isolation, its agrarian economy, and its colonial administration—meant that the government sought greater control, not industrial self-management. Decoux counted on industry leaders to provide him with information to make the necessary decisions on how to intervene in the economy.¹³¹ The hierarchy he envisioned placed him at the top so that this distorted vision of corporatism no longer treated the

128. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine*, 441.

129. Directives politiques, 19 January 1942. My emphasis.

130. Maurras, *Enquête sur la monarchie*, 58.

131. Discours prononcés, 15 December 1942.

business community (much less workers) as a partner, but rather a court to the king. Professional groupings simply streamlined the voices from industry.¹³² He saw a double role for professional groupings, one that resembled little the official doctrine of the National Revolution: to provide the government information on the potential of the different professions in order to allow it to orient, direct, and harmonize their activities; and, through hierarchy and discipline, to allow for the directives of the government to be executed.¹³³

Pétain's denunciation of economic liberalism provided the theoretical framework for the rhetoric surrounding professional grouping as means of building a more just society, even if the government's ultimate intentions were to make Decoux's proconsulship stronger. The authorities understood that they had to spin the measures to the people so that the latter believed they were in the interest of the common good.¹³⁴ This must have been a daunting task in areas such as food and goods requisitions to be transported to more distant parts of the colony and there is little evidence that the authorities were successful in convincing the people of the need for such solidarity. On the contrary, it often bred ill-will and misunderstandings. Irreverent or naive, Decoux, asked the peoples of Indochina to associate themselves, without reserve, to the new economic principles, which he presented as one of justice and understanding with new rules that would be based on the submission to the common good.¹³⁵

132. "Nouveau Conseil Fédéral," 16 December 1943.

133. Directives politiques, 16 March 1943.

134. GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois Session July 1942, "Procès verbal de la séance de la Commission des Affaires Economiques," 3.

135. Discours prononcés, 30 November 1941.

In other words, the strengthening of colonial structures was positioned as a step toward a better society. This was more than a promotion of French tutelage, this was a step toward a command economy. Yet Decoux had no other choice if he wanted to take the steps necessary to maintain a semi-functioning economy.

The 6 December 1940 law that created professional organizations in France extended to Indochina one year later, in December 1941.¹³⁶ The heavy centralization that ensued was a loose application of the metropolitan model. Ruptures in communications provided the GGI with only the broad brushes of the new structures of the French economy and conversely Hanoi could not give a full account of the new conditions in the colony.¹³⁷ For over a year, telegraphic exchanges between Indochina and Vichy tried to resolve the question of exporting the corporatist model of an industrialized state to a predominately agrarian and ethnically heterogenous colony. In 1942, Minister of Colonies Jules Brévié warned Decoux against centralized structures, reminding him that the metropole was going in the opposite direction (at least in theory) to minimize decision-making hurdles.¹³⁸

Decoux repeatedly asked Vichy for more power to localize professional groupings based on Indochinese specificities, as determined by the multiethnic and predominately small land holding and agrarian economy. While the Central Committee in Vichy—which coordinated

136. For details on how Decoux interpreted the law and its applicability to Indochina, see CAOM GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, Session July 1942, “Mesures d’organisation professionnelle en indochine.”

137. Ballard, 28.

138. 1/tel747, No.2597, Brévié to Decoux, 1 May 1942.

professional groupings for the government—instructed him to nominate only Frenchmen to leadership positions in the groupings, Decoux believed it was indispensable to associate the locals to these enterprises and to assure them representation by granting them vice-presidential positions. This was critical to associating, or giving the illusion of association, locals to the efforts and strengthening Franco-Indochinese ties, though the French would never relinquish real power. Decoux ignored orders from the metropole and assigned locals to these posts. He also asked for permission to create an Indochinese Economic Council, where he would have powers of arbitration, fearing that the representatives of large industry in Indochina would act in opposition to what he believed to be the greater interests of the whole, or at least the colonial structures.¹³⁹ This Council was another means of lessening the clout that the industrialists may have had in the past, conversely strengthening the government's ability to control the economy. Vichy denied this request, afraid that the Council Decoux proposed would erode the Central Committee's power (from Vichy) over the colony.¹⁴⁰ Frustrated by the delays in implementation of his program that authorizations from the Central Committee required as well as the latter's lack of knowledge of the Indochinese context, Decoux continued to appoint leaders of the professional groupings and organize them in such a way as he saw fit. In a show of his increasing brazenness, he informed

139. 1/tel772, No.1143, Decoux to Brévié, 3 August 1942.

140. 1/tel749, No.6564, Brévié to Decoux, 24 October 1942 And 1/tel778, No.1388, Brévié to Decoux, 13 March 1943.

Vichy directly that he would continue to disobey orders to ensure the defense of the interests that were entrusted to him.¹⁴¹

While by the end of 1941, groupings in Indochina still did not exist because of the “grave difficulties due in particular to political circumstances” and only the import sector was organized into some form of corporatist structure, by the middle of 1942 Decoux announced plans to reorganize the Indochinese economy based on the metropolitan model. The decision to divide the Indochinese economy into six groupings came from Vichy, in spite of the region’s industrial underdevelopment and the inefficiencies that threatened to ensue. These groupings came under: Agriculture and Forestry, Industry, Mining, Commerce, Transport, and Credit (Vichy excluded family businesses from corporatist structures and therefore *artisanat* since they were in general family-run operations). Decoux followed directives and met with leaders of each sector, no matter how small, but he quietly altered the plans as he saw fit.¹⁴² Critically, after much protest, Decoux officially obeyed Vichy’s instructions to keep family businesses (which included peasants who produced goods in addition to crops, therefore making artisanry their secondary activity and therefore not included in the French artisan classification) outside the groupings, in spite of its importance relative to the economy as a whole.¹⁴³ He managed to circumvent the order not to integrate the *artisanat* by creating the Local Committees of *Artisanat*, which in Decoux’s vision, served as the pyramidal base for the

141. 1/tel787, No.2759, Decoux to Bléhaut, 1 May 1943.

142. 1/tel727, No.6001, Decoux to Platon, 16 October 1941.

143. 1/tel747, No.2734, Brévié to Decoux, 9 May 1942.

Indochinese economy by organizing its members to source materials, determine production, and find markets, policies that were vital to the health of the substitution economy. He believed the inclusion of the *artisanat* within the corporatist structures was indispensable for political reasons vis-à-vis the indigenous masses and because *artisanat* could not be dissociated from industry given its potential to supply it with finished and semifinished goods and he tried to get around Vichy's opposition by redefining what constitutes a family business.¹⁴⁴

In order to gain public approval, the press ran a campaign to describe the benefits and characteristics of an economically organized society. *La Tribune Indochinoise* explained that, as part of a group, the profession was "entirely geared toward socially useful ends, by ends desired by the Marshal," ones that would subordinate individual interests to the common good. They would allow the state, better informed, to make the appropriate decisions to ensure the well-being of all peoples of Indochina.¹⁴⁵ It was suggested that corporatism was part of a long European tradition stretching back almost a thousand years and as such was an integral part of the gift of the French civilization that would help develop Indochina.¹⁴⁶ The weekly *Indochine* was particularly aggressive in its promotion of corporatism through a series of articles describing the symbiotic relationship between society's individual parts when organized along corporatist structures. The magazine did not hesitate to appeal to

144. GGI 65296, Conseil Fédéral Indochinois, Session July 1942, "Mesures d'organisation professionnelle en indochine, 5-6.

145. *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 30 March 1940.

146. *L'Annam Nouveau*, 5 April 1942.

what the French believed to be Indochinese traditionalism, making connections between corporatist structures and the fabric of local society: “No more than the family group, the professional group is not compatible with the proletarian condition. So that a trade is no longer a means to acquire money or a place where man is forced to serve an anonymous state, the ‘relations’ that constitute his reason for being must also be preserved, saved.”¹⁴⁷ Corporatism promised to reconstitute property, against the dehumanization of capitalist accumulation. It was written that under the new system, “property [was] a guarantee of the person. It remain[ed] human and salvageable. It [was] not founded on money but on creative work.”¹⁴⁸ The state would be the “supreme arbiter of generalized social conflicts,” supported by “a deep spiritual, intellectual, and moral reform of the Nation.”¹⁴⁹ The colonial authorities presented corporatism as another means through which French leadership would guide Indochinese peoples into economic development while preserving the traditional bases upon which their societies were built, protecting them from the ravages of international capitalism.

Conclusion

On 9 March 1945, the day the Japanese seized power from the French authorities, Indochina’s economic situation was catastrophic, with the famine of the winter of 1944-1945 as the paroxysm of indigence. Difficulties for the colonists had begun as early as the summer of 1940 when Vichy and London severed relations. While Britain and Decoux’s

147. *Indochine*, 8 April 1943, 2.

148. *Indochine*, 15 April 1943, 2.

149. *Indochine*, 10 June 1943, 2.

government continued to trade to a limited extent until the attack on Pearl Harbor, nothing could compensate for the end of regular maritime communication with France, which had accounted for half of Indochina's commerce before the war. Indochina's negligible industrial base could not furnish the region with the products necessary to maintain local standards of living. The French authorities had no alternative but to turn to Japan for the supply of goods it could not manufacture, in exchange for agricultural and mineral commodities.

The 6 May 1941 trade agreement signed between Vichy and Tokyo gave most favored nation status to Japan and aimed to supply Indochina with the goods it needed while providing the Land of the Rising Sun with the materials (including food) necessary for its war effort. Indochina was to receive machinery, paper, chemicals, and textiles in exchange for rice and rubber. Unfortunately, over the course of almost four years, Japan never met the quotas set by the agreement and by the end of 1943, Hanoi could no longer count on receiving products in any quantity from its partner. It is difficult to determine the degree to which the Japanese were committed to reaching these objectives—even at the outset—but the advance of the American forces in the Pacific led to progressive dominance of the US on the seas, disrupting maritime traffic between Indochina and Japan and thus further complicating matters for the French. Allied supremacy in the region also impeded Indochinese internal trade through the continuous bombardment of the region's railways which prevented goods from circulating internally. Perhaps if the GGI had faced autarky alone it could have reengineered the economy in

such a way as to maintain standards of living to acceptable levels, but the devastation of the war on its infrastructure doomed any attempt. No administration could have succeeded no matter its political persuasion.

Decoux saw in *artisanat* not national moral salvation—though he used Pétainist rhetoric to fetishize small scale production against the dehumanization of large industry—but rather the means to build the substitution economy that would save Indochina from its autarkic penury. He encouraged the formation of local cooperatives to ease cost burdens of small and family businesses while directing the types of goods they should produce for the benefit of the macroeconomy. The *artisanat*, in Decoux's vision, could feed medium industry, which in turn could supply large manufacturing enterprises. The National Revolution provided the context and legitimizing force with which to promote *artisanat* but Indochina, with its primarily agrarian economy, never experienced the industrialization process that swept away the cottage industry. Organizing the *artisanat* was a way of controlling the economy by creating more or less formal bodies that worked with the government, carrying out the latter's directives. Again, whatever successes the GGI achieved were wiped out by the destruction of the economy due to war.

Similarly the reorganization of economic sectors into professional groupings was a means for the government to understand and direct the region's production more effectively. Since the 1920s, the colonial authorities were reluctant to develop a strong industrial base in Indochina precisely because of the negative effects of proletarianization and the risk it could pose to French sovereignty. Even under the Popular Front labor

unions remained illegal. The class conflict that corporatism meant to end was rarely mature in Indochina and it was absurd to imagine the government sitting at a table with both owners and workers. Professional groupings organized the economy, facilitated planning (which was a corporatist objective), and redistributed resources, but it was not meant to reign in the power of capital or labor. The corporatist discourse that Decoux employed in Indochina borrowed phrases from Pétainist speeches, but unlike in the metropole, where corporatism was supposed to lead to decentralization, Decoux tightened government control on the economy. As with *artisanat* cooperatives (that could not officially be grouped professionally based on Vichy directives), the reorganization of the economy based on groupings was a means to facilitate the regime's direction of production plans.

Like the authorities' administrative reforms, the economic reorganization that ensued from the circumstances of isolation was used as a means of promoting the French *oeuvre* in the region. Following a major theme of French colonial rule, whether calling on Franco-Indochinese solidarity, praising the moral purification of artisanal creativity, or building roads that connected remote regions, Decoux's regime wanted to show that France was the only guide that could deliver socioeconomic development for the region through tutelage and through the "gift" of its civilizational achievements. In spite of all the rhetoric of the National Revolution, its theoretical opposition to the Republic, Decoux's regime adhered to the same discourse of his predecessors. The new economic structures were designed for more than minimizing the

hardships of autarky—although this remains a critical point. They aimed to keep Indochina French by salvaging the colonial economic structures and creating the sentiment of Franco-Indochinese symbiosis, one that could overcome any hardship through French creativity and Indochinese sweat. It was part of the colonial discourse that described Indochina as “a veritable harbor of calm and peace in a world singularly troubled.”¹⁵⁰

In spite of its many measures, the government was unable to provide for the entire Indochinese population—though Allied disruptive actions deserve much of the blame—culminating in the famine of 1944-1945 when over a million Tonkinese succumbed to hunger.¹⁵¹ With the Tonkinese population having increased from 8.7 million in 1936 to 10 million by 1944, while paddy output had dropped 20 percent during the previous two decades, the authorities simply could not provide Tonkin and Northern Annam with the quantities of food they needed for sustenance without Cochinchinese rice imports. No one could have thought the GGI’s call for these regions to sustain themselves was a viable solution and the administration was forced to propose a plan that was doomed to fail, exposing its inabilities to provide for the population, thereby eroding its credibility. In 1943, Decoux spoke of the need for Tonkin and North Annam to become self-reliant in terms of rice production, understanding the precarious nature of the colony’s infrastructure. He pointed to the lack of reliability of transportation, but ultimately, in spite of early warnings, he did not—could not—take the

150. RSTNF 6620, Cousseau, Head of IPP Tonkin, to newspaper heads, 6 December 1943.

151. Estimates range from 500,000 to two million, the latter appearing in Communist accounts.

measures necessary to avert famine, a failure which mattered more than these warnings. Natural disasters also did their part toward this tragedy. Drought and insects affected the crops in the spring of 1944 while typhoons in June and floods in November reduced yearly overall output further, magnifying the problems posed by lack of transportation. According to David Marr, Tonkin's 1944 official output of 1.68 million tons of paddy would have provided barely enough for everyone to survive (171 kilograms per capita) until the next harvest in June 1945, even had it been divided equally. Instead both the French and Japanese stockpiled rice for their future use, though local rumors certainly exaggerated the actual quantity located in warehouses. By December 1944, many villagers were reduced to eating ground-up rice husks, tree roots, and bark and the winter's exceptionally cold temperatures put people further at risk.¹⁵² Many survivors were psychologically devastated by the quotidian scenes of emaciated corpses lying in the streets, wailing starving compatriots, and the humiliation many endured to find food. Their ire quickly turned on the French who were seen as letting the famine continue, either through their inability to bring rice to Tonkin or their supposed stockpiling of foodstuffs, or at the very least their inability as the "protecting power" to prevent the Japanese from continuing to enforce starvation-inducing collection quotas. The French *oeuvre* failed them, and the ICP recognized how the famine could lead to the maturation of political consciousness of the people—provided their plight was alleviated just enough—and encouraged peasants to storm granaries with

152. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 97; 101.

the slogan “Destroy the granaries, solve the danger of famine!”¹⁵³ The momentum was building toward the August Revolution.

153. Khánh Kim Huynh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 313.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

French political historian René Rémond wrote, “[i]t is always worth going back to the origins of movements, the source being purer, it still offers an image that is intact.”¹ The key to understanding the implementation of the National Revolution in Indochina is precisely to go back to its ideological sources, recognizing that the influences which shaped played a greater part in the story than the specific measures put in place in Vichy and exported to the colonies. The National Revolution was intended to be the culmination of pent up anti-Republican sentiments, the intellectual legacies of Barrès and Maurras that already were powerful forces during the 1930s. France’s desperate socioeconomic situation under occupation juxtaposed with the politics of those in key positions led a Vichy government incapable—and unwilling—to stand behind the rhetoric of its Head of State, often acting against the very doctrine it officially embraced. The National Revolution lost its momentum only seven months after the 10 July vote that dissolved the Third Republic when François Darlan replaced Flandin as Pétain’s deputy and opened the door to collaboration with Germany, a project that took priority over the programs of the National Revolution. While Darlan’s government maintained and even broadened exclusionary laws, there was little sympathy for the more ultraconservative elements of Pétainist discourse that, influenced by Maurras, aimed to destroy the gains of the Revolution in favor of a return to a more traditional society, based on hierarchy,

1. René Rémond, *La Droite en France; De la première Restauration à la Vème République* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1968), 287.

localisms, and natural groupings. Laval's return to power marked the definitive turn toward pragmatism, and the invigoration of collaborationism. The paradox of Vichy's inability to implement Pétainism is found in this pragmatism, which was fueled by the need to manage the occupying forces and the hope that Germany would allow France to sit alongside it in the New European Order, its position as a world power reestablished thanks to its willingness to fit within the new German-led model.

There thus existed no comprehensive National Revolution in France for Vichy to export—no impetus to transform society in the metropole, much less in colonies where societies in no manner resembled those of Europe—and thus the ultraconservative policies of the Decoux regime in Indochina need to be examined not in terms of Vichy's alleged cloning overseas, as Jennings argues, but rather in the more localized fusion of Decoux's worldview and the geopolitical realities of the colony. More than any political or sociological program of transformation, the GGI's foremost imperative was the maintenance of French sovereignty in Indochina, which was threatened not only by the presence of Japanese troops but also, as became increasingly evident over the course of the war, the tepid commitment from the Allies to return the colonies to France after the war. Like most other naval officers at the time, Decoux was heavily influenced by the discourse of *Action française* and the National Revolution provided the vehicle with which to achieve the safeguard of French sovereignty in the region. To examine the policy-making of the Decoux regime, it is critical to understand the worldview that guided the

Admiral's decisions, the intellectual foundation from which he assessed the situation in Indochina and elaborated a roadmap from which to ensure French sovereignty after the war, which was always the primary objective, far ahead of any aspiration to create a "new man."²

The Pétainist discourse resonated with Decoux's own worldviews because like the latter it also originated in the writings of Maurras and, looking through his ideological lenses, Decoux saw Indochinese cultures anchored in traditionalism, hierarchy, and community, thereby presenting fertile grounds for the implementation of his ultraconservative agenda. France and Indochinese societies were vastly different socioeconomically, but for Decoux there existed commonalities that could bring the civilizations closer, France assuming the role of mentor to harness the underlying characteristics of Indochinese cultures. Decoux was driven by the same European notion of the linearity of the development of societies that inspired the republican *mission civilisatrice*. Decoux brought his own brand of authoritarianism to the colony by adapting his ultraconservatism to an Indochina he believed open to such ideas, and he intended to win the hearts and minds of its inhabitants through the implementation of policies that in his mind tapped the region's particularities while elevating France as a benevolent tutor.

Decoux's administration was not an "unfettered form of Vichy rule"³ because there was no "one Vichy," but more important, it sought to secure French sovereignty by elevating the continuity and resolve of the

2. See Verney.

3. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 228.

French *oeuvre* in the region. The National Revolution, or rather its Maurrassian sources, would provide, Decoux believed, the vehicle through which to promote the benefits of French tutelage through a new kind of administration, with a new culture that promoted natural groupings from which the elite would rise for the benefit of all society, from local villages to the capital of an Indochinese Federation held together by France. This new form of power was all that was left for the French to defend their legitimacy or better yet, convince the Indochinese peoples that the glory of French civilization would accompany them on their path to development—a linearity of social progression proper to European thinking.

In many ways Decoux's regime was more a reflection of Republican colonialism than it was of Vichy politics. The Admiral's policies, it turns out, were most often an extension of the politics of the previous four decades. Yet the National Revolution—and Indochina's isolation—gave Decoux the possibility to take the policies further than his predecessors (who remained constrained by republican ideals and metropolitan bureaucracy), solidifying them in an ultraconservative discourse that would not have been entirely permissible under the Republic. Indochinese federalism had already been pushed by Sarraut and Pasquier, albeit in less sophisticated forms. The elevation of local sovereigns had also been a goal during the 1930s as means of better controlling the population and reversing the perceived weakening of Indochinese rulers. Even the omnipresent and powerful IPP was at best a more complex and effective form of censorship that had already existed under every republican

administration, even though the Popular Front had allowed more dissenting voices.

Decoux was able to go further specifically because the National Revolution provided him with the ideological justifications behind these policies, justifications that were anchored in a certain view of society. Maurrassian discourse legitimized French tutelage over the region as part of a natural order, and the re-hierarchization of society created a basis on which to raise the prestige of the elite to render them more effective and obliging in maintaining French rule. Arguably, the colony's economic reorganization along corporatist lines was primarily attributable to autarkical imperatives and any administration would have had to reorient production in similar ways, including an artisan sector whose resources needed to be diverted to the production of utilitarian rather than artistic goods. In any case, Pétainism and its Maurrassian roots provided the framework for these measures.

Republican and the Decoux regimes were willing to repress local anti-French movements violently to maintain control,⁴ but unlike his predecessors, Decoux punished those within the European community who openly expressed views against his government. This marked a significant break with previous administrations, but none of his predecessors faced the presence of foreign troops on Indochinese soil, undermining French legitimacy and threatening to overturn the administration should it challenge that presence. Still, while these unique wartime conditions played an important part in imposing censorship

4. Though, again, the leftist Popular Front was much more liberal in allowing dissenting voices, even from Communists.

(both in the press and as a matter of individual expression), they do not account for the unprecedented severity of the regime's demands for discipline. Some drew similarities between Decoux the Governor General and Decoux the Admiral. One witness said "Decoux certainly thought of himself as master of Indochina after God, like he was on his ship."⁵ Decoux's very character and naval background abhorred dissent. Just as important, his ultraconservative worldview, based on the virtues of hierarchy, reinforced his intolerance for opposing voices.

Decoux stressed the need for silence specifically because the government could not afford to enforce discipline through punitive means. It needed the French community to cooperate so that the GGI was not forced to enact its own policies, sending large numbers of Frenchmen to prison, which, in Decoux's mind, would have sent the Indochinese peoples a disturbing message about the lack of unity and support among the French for the government. This would have eroded what the French believed to be their legitimacy by damaging the image Decoux wanted to project of a France determined and capable of assuming its role as the colony's natural tutor. Decoux would express later his certainty that had the French community maintained its discipline through the last months of the war, and not been so open about the organization of a local resistance movement, thus provoking the Japanese into seizing power, the GGI would have achieved in its mission to maintain French sovereignty over Indochina.⁶ The Japanese *coup de*

5. 3W/149, Decoux hearing, 11 June 1948.

6. 3W/149, 21 February and 13 March 1948 Hearings; Decoux, *A la Barre de l'Indochine*.

force destroyed the last vestiges of French authority (both administrative and physical) and set in motion the events leading to the Vietnamese August Revolution, and to heightening nationalist sentiments among the Cambodian and the Lao.

As such, the legacy of the Decoux regime cannot best be understood in terms of to the impetus given to independentist forces by the National Revolution's promotion of "national rebirth and authenticity."⁷ The GGI was aware of the risks posed by the promotion of local patriotisms (which it quite rightly feared could turn into anti-French nationalism) important to building the Indochinese federation, but it was not able to contain them, which eventually contributed to its demise. The Federalist spirit that Decoux was so convinced was the key to maintaining French sovereignty in Indochina developed into a distorted creature. Decoux's faith in an Indochinese Union capable of creating bonds of solidarity between the locals and the French (as well as among local *pays*) was either delusional or desperate.

In either case, the "revival of cultural authenticity" is an insufficient reason to explain the momentum of local nationalisms because there already existed a strong sense of national identity in Vietnam, formed through self-definitions in opposition to other societies—perceptions of what was Vietnamese and what was not—and concepts of juridical delineations of states, inherited from its experiences with China. Even if the French did revive authenticity in Cambodia and Laos, as argued by Edwards and Jennings, the Khmer and Lao postwar governments did not

7. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 228.

immediately repudiate French rule, for reasons which will be discussed below. The supposed revival may have aided in the development of a national awareness but it was not its main catalyst. It should also be pointed out that the leadership of the ICP spent much of the war preparing for the eventual revolution with little reference to, or influence from, the propaganda and policies of the Decoux regime. Had the French remained in power until the end of the war, troops would have violently repressed demonstrations, altering the timeline of the independentist movements, but ultimately delaying, not preventing, them. In this sense, we can talk about the futility of Decoux's efforts, the fatal destiny of a French colonialism beyond the Admiral's control.

When Admiral d'Argenlieu assumed the role of High Commissioner (the Fourth Republic's new title for the Head of the French administration in Indochina) in October 1945, he inherited an untenable situation. The Vietnamese were invigorated by the ousting of the French, who, after ruling for 80 years, lost power in 48 hours, and the momentum behind the August declaration of statehood was unstoppable. The Viet Minh's 1941 change in strategy away from class-based struggle in favor of a broad coalition of nationalists had opened up possibilities to rally all Vietnamese antagonized by French and Japanese imperialism. This coalition also extended across ethnicities as the ICP and the Viet Minh started giving attention to the idea of a united Indochina.⁸ This was, however, nothing new and not a consequence of French initiatives to create a spirit of federalism. Goscha explains that the ICP had its own

8. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 169, 180.

vision of an Indochinese Federation, one designed to be a counter-state, against French rule.⁹ While many Lao and Khmer independentists understood that they would need to collaborate with the better armed and organized Viet Minh to be successful, there existed a parallel and oppositional current of anti-Vietnamese sentiments within their societies, ones that, albeit intensified by the migration of Vietnamese into Laos and Cambodia under French rule, pre-dated the arrival of the Europeans, when Siam and Vietnam competed for suzerain domination over these lands.¹⁰ The Cambodian and Lao elites who most strongly held these anti-Vietnamese sentiments were encouraged and even stimulated by the events following 9 March, and they eventually chose to pursue a gradual path to independence which did not involve collaboration with the ICP.

When the French returned to Indochina in late 1945, they were surprised that they were not greeted enthusiastically by the populations. The Fourth Republic's fundamental misunderstanding of Indochinese mentalities and motivations is the continuity of the same misunderstandings of the Decoux regime. Decoux designed policies based on his beliefs of what was necessary to safeguard the sovereignty of France by winning over the Indochinese peoples, but his administration's miscalculations doomed its endeavors.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to reexamine the revolutionary movements in Indochina that followed the Second World War, but this study hopefully provides insights into the mechanisms

9. Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?*, 72, 105.

10. Ironically, the French justified establishing protectorates over Laos and Cambodia as means of shielding them from the Vietnamese.

behind the colonial administration's futile policy-making that was one part of the dialectic behind independence (with the local peoples as the antithesis, of course). During his four and a half years as Governor General, Decoux used the National Revolution as a vehicle to promote his agenda, crafted based on his Maurrassian worldview and designed to maintain French sovereignty in Indochina after the war, but no matter what course the admiral had taken, it was doomed because of exogenous forces (the inevitability of the Japanese *coup* as its fortunes turned) and the endogenous rejection of French colonialism that the fall of France in Europe and Asia accelerated.

In evaluating the record of the Decoux administration, and with hindsight, one must appreciate the eventual futility of his efforts. The colonial authorities were bound to be ousted by the Japanese eventually. Franco-Japanese *rapprochement* could do nothing to stop the advance of the Allied forces in the Pacific and the subsequent suspicion that the US planned to land on the Southeast Asian continent. Had Decoux acted upon his initial impulses to continue the fight from the colonies (as discussed in Chapter 1), the Japanese would have ended French rule much earlier. Instead, he took a course that prolonged French rule in Indochina for four and a half years, in all its agony. By 9 March 1945, French colonialism had already lost the Mandate of Heaven and Decoux's government could do nothing to change that.

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