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French energy imperialism in Vietnam and the conquest of Tonkin (1873-1885)

Abstract

Cet article montre que la conquête française du Vietnam a été entreprise notamment dans l'optique de l'appropriation de ses ressources en charbon, et que l'impérialisme française était dans ce cas un « impérialisme énergétique ». Il défend ainsi l'idée qu'on peut analyser la conquête française du Tonkin et de l'Annam (1873-1885) comme étant notamment le résultat d'une combinaison des impérialismes énergétiques de la Marine, de l'administration coloniale cochinchinoise, des politiciens favorables à la colonisation et des hommes d'affaires. Au travers des archives militaires, diplomatiques et administratives et d'une réinterprétation de l'historiographie existante, il explore la dynamique de l'impérialisme énergétique français au Vietnam durant la phase de conquête.

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"French colonial policy [...] was inspired by [...] the fact that a navy such as ours cannot do without safe harbors, defenses, supply centers on the high seas [...] The conditions of naval warfare have greatly changed [...]. At present, as you know, a warship, however perfect its design, cannot carry more than two weeks' supply of coal; and a vessel without coal is a wreck on the high seas, abandoned to the first occupier. Hence the need to have places of supply, shelters, ports for defense and provisioning [...]. And that is why we needed Tunisia; that is why we needed Saigon and Indochina; that is why we need Madagascar [...] and why we shall never leave them!"¹

Plan of the article

- Introduction
- The "primitive accumulation" of French energo-imperialist intelligence on Tonkin and Annam's coal resources (1873-1876)
- Franco-Chinese energo-imperial rivalries in Tonkin and Annam (1877-1881)
- The climax of French energo-imperial interest for Tonkin and Annam's coal resources (1881-1882)
- The conquest of Tonkin and the colonial appropriation of its coal resources (1883-1885)
- Conclusion

¹ Jules Ferry, "Speech Before the French Chamber of Deputies, July 28, 1885," *Discours et Opinions de Jules Ferry*, Paris, Paul Robiquet, 1897.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This article posits that the French conquest of Tonkin (and Annam to a lesser extent) was undertaken notably to appropriate its coal resources for the energy supply of the French Navy, and that French imperialism was in that case an “energy imperialism”. “Energy imperialism”, here defined as a process of appropriation of energy resources by a foreign body through formal or informal colonization, is a distinct form of imperialism due to its high geo-strategic and economic importance, as shown by former Prime Minister Jules Ferry’s speech before the French Parliament in July 1885. It was a significant aspect of the late French colonial empire, in Gabon as in Algeria,¹ but the conquest of Tonkin and Annam has not been assessed in that light.²
- 2 This article intends to make up for that gap in the existing literature, and to determine the role of energy imperialist forces in the conquest of Tonkin and Annam, casting a new light on the history of the French colonialization of Vietnam.³ Although it has already been argued that “naval imperialism” was the driving force behind the conquest of Vietnam, and that coal played an important role in that conquest,⁴ the role of energy imperialist forces in the conquest of Tonkin and Annam has not been assessed systematically. The case of the conquest of Tonkin and Annam is particularly original and stimulating

as it sheds light on the economic and geo-political rivalries, notably about Tonkin and Annam’s coal resources, between France and China.

The concept of energy imperialism has been 3
mainly applied to cases of “oil imperialism”, from Persia to Saudi Arabia.⁵ However, “coal imperialism” was also an important historical phenomenon from the second half of the 19th century, with the general and progressive transition from sail to steam in several military and merchant navies, up to the transition to fuel of the main military navies from the beginning of the 20th century.⁶ Indeed, the necessity for vessels to be supplied in coal required the construction of coaling stations and bases on a global scale, as in the case of the British Navy in preparation of a potential conflict,⁷ or in the case of the United States Navy in the Pacific at the end of the 19th century.⁸ It also led, in order to secure local coal sources for the British Navy, to the rise of a global British geological imperialism and to the conquest of coal islands such as Labuan, off the coast of Borneo.⁹

Just as the British empire was dependent on the 4
military strength of its Navy and its adequate supply in coal, French imperialism in South-East Asia in the second half of the 19th century was bound to the military might of the French Navy,

¹ Roberto Cantoni, “Energio-Colonialism: The Role of the Oil Industry in Gabon in the Trente Glorieuses” (presented at the Doctoriales, Blois, 2015); Samir Saul, *Intérêts économiques français et décolonisation de l’Afrique du Nord* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2016).

² Jeoung Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine : les charbonnages dans le Vietnam colonial, 1874-1945” (Doctoral Thesis, Université Paris Diderot - Paris 7, 2018) focuses more on the French attempts to appropriate Vietnam’s coal resources than on the role of energy imperialism in the broader colonization process, although it is the most valuable contribution to the literature on that matter to that day. In my PhD research I try to fill that gap more extensively.

³ On the history of French colonialism in Vietnam, see e.g. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 and 33; Jaehyun.

⁵ Marian Kent, *Moguls and Mandarins: Oil, Imperialism, and the Middle East in British Foreign Policy, 1900-1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1993); Robert Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (London: Verso, 2009); Guillemette Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient: le Golfe Persique à l’âge des impérialismes (vers 1800-vers 1914)* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2015).

⁶ Volkan Ş. Ediger and John V. Bowlus, “A Farewell to King Coal: Geopolitics, Energy Security, and the Transition to Oil, 1898-1917”, *The Historical Journal*, 62.2 (2019), 427-49.

⁷ Steven Gray, *Steam Power and Sea Power: Coal, the Royal Navy, and the British Empire, c. 1870-1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁸ Peter A. Shulman, *Coal & Empire: The Birth of Energy Security in Industrial America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

⁹ Robert A. Stafford, *Scientist of Empire: Sir Roderick Murchison, Scientific Exploration and Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Andreas Malm, “Who Lit This Fire? Approaching the History of the Fossil Economy”, *Critical Historical Studies* vol. 3, n° 2, 2016, 215-48.

and thus to its coal supply as it had transitioned from sail to steam since 1846–51.¹⁰ The French navy was not merely a military lobby pushing for its own interests. Without a powerful navy, the expansion of French commerce and geopolitical influence would have been impossible, and so therefore the acquisition of a status of global power.¹¹ And to that great imperial design, the conquest of Tonkin and Annam and their coal mines was crucial. It would allow in theory the French Navy not only to become more independent from British coal infrastructure,¹² but also to have its own source of coal supply.¹³ This led Brocheux and Hémery to argue that “the acquisition of the [coal] mines of Hon Gai [...] was a driving motivation for the conquest of Tonkin”.¹⁴ Similarly, Fichter argued that “the seizure of the mines in Tonkin and Annam were [...] inspired by a desire to have Asian mines under French control” as they “seemed to promise carbon independence and [thus] constituted one of France’s objective in the Sino-French War by which Tonkin was conquered”. Hence, both underlined the crucial role of the French Navy’s energy imperialism in the conquest of Tonkin and Annam. In addition, this “colonization” of Tonkin and Annam was framed as a step towards the conquest of southern China,¹⁵ notably its mineral riches, and the affirmation of French naval power in the Pacific.¹⁶ And indeed, coal was not only a motivation for military conquest, but also what allowed energetically this conquest and an

energy source necessary for further conquests. Coal was fueling French imperialism.

However, Tonkin and Annam’s coals were not only 5
coveted by the French Navy, but also by various private investors with significant connections with pro-colonial politicians, and even by the authorities of French Cochinchina.¹⁷ Therefore, this paper argues that the conquest of Tonkin and Annam can be analyzed as being notably the combined product of French naval, economic and political energy-imperialisms: the Navy sought to supply its vessels with good quality coal from independent sources; businessmen sought to appropriate and exploit coal to produce profit; pro-colonial politicians sought to supply their colonial enterprise with a steady and cheap supply in coal; and colonial administrators sought to secure fiscal revenues for their budget and coal supply for their colony.

These energy-imperial actors, inextricably bound, 6
were more or less predominant depending on the historical context, their strategies were constantly in evolution in order to adapt to the historical conjecture, and their interests could converge as well as diverge partially. Thus, opposing the reductionist views of energy imperialism as a monolithic phenomenon with its impersonal and automatic dynamics, this article argues that energy imperialism is a complex, transforming and combined product of different energy-imperial actors, with their respective aims and strategies. The case of Vietnam particularly sheds lights on this non-monolithical dimension of energy imperialism. It also illustrates the “tensions of empire”,¹⁸ those between political, naval and economic imperialists in a sector – energy – which is often assumed erroneously to be that of complete consensus between public and private actors.¹⁹

¹⁰ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹² On the dependency to British coal infrastructures of the French Navy, see James R. Fichter, “British Infrastructure and French Empire: Anglo-French Steam Interdependency in Asian Waters, c.1852–1870”, *Britain and the World*, 5.2 (2012), 183–203 and James R. Fichter, “Imperial Interdependence on Indochina’s Maritime Periphery: France and Coal in Ceylon, Singapore, and Hong Kong, 1859–1895”, in *British and French Colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Middle East*, ed. by James R. Fichter (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 151–79.

¹³ *Ibid.* and Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵ Brocheux and Hémery, 67.

¹⁶ Patrice Morlat, *Indochine années vingt : le balcon de la France sur le Pacifique* (Paris : Indes savantes, 2001).

¹⁷ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 33–34.

¹⁸ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Gregory Nowell, *Mercantile States and the World Oil Cartel, 1900–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

- 7 Overall, this article analyses energy imperialism as a specific, plural, situated, partly unsuccessful and complex historical phenomenon, different in nature and in importance from other imperialisms due to both its high economic and geo-strategic importance; plural, due to the plurality of actors involved; situated, as French energy imperialism was very different in Vietnam and in Algeria;²⁰ partly unsuccessful, as the promised Eldorado was partly deceptive and finally lost and as companies faced unsolvable workforce problems and labor resistance;²¹ and complex, as the combination of energy imperialisms tends to shift constantly, especially in times of conquest and war.
- 8 Within that framework, this article assesses the history of French energy imperialism in Vietnam from early French energo-imperial interests in Tonkin and Annam's coal resources to the establishment of a French protectorate over Tonkin and Annam. Through military, diplomatic and administrative archives and a reinterpretation of existing literature, it investigates the dynamics of French energy imperialism in Vietnam during the conquest phase.

THE "PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION" OF FRENCH ENERGO-IMPERIALIST INTELLIGENCE ON TONKIN AND ANNAM'S COAL RESOURCES (1873-1876)

- 9 French energo-imperialist intelligence about Tonkin and Annam's coal resources started being collected first through naval and commercial expeditions from China and Cochinchina (southern Vietnam) in the 1860's-1870's. China had been, since the First Opium War (1838-1842) lost against the British Navy, progressively commercially penetrated and politico-militarily weakened, while French Cochinchina had been conquered from the declining Annam Empire

in 1858-66 due to a convergence of commercial, religious, naval and political imperialisms, and was then ruled by the French navy until the 1880's, "which was more important in Indochina than in any other colony".²² French imperialist projects in China and Indochina went hand in hand, as the economic penetration of the former was "the initial goal of the conquest of Indochina".²³ Further, Cochinchina was conquered during the Second Opium War (1856-1860), and this conquest was made possible because of the military weakening of China, Vietnam's traditional "suzerain".²⁴ This connection between French imperial projects in China and Vietnam would continue well after the conquest of Tonkin, with the economic penetration of Yunnan in 1895-1898.²⁵ This informal colonization was notably driven by energo-imperial considerations, with "projects of liaisons between the Yunnan tin, copper, and iron mines and the Tonkin coal mines" emerging from exploratory missions sponsored by the *Comité des forges* (French's main patronal organization);²⁶ the construction of a coaling station on the bay of Guangzhouwan;²⁷ and various imperial projects aiming – in relation with the envisioned railway line between Tonkin and Yunnan – to exploit coal mines in Yunnan.²⁸

The French Navy's Mekong Expedition (1866-1868), which aimed to find a path from French Cochinchina to Yunnan, had already mentioned the existence of coal mines in the South of

²⁰ André Nouschi, *La France et le pétrole* (Paris : Picard, 2000); Saul, *Intérêts économiques français et décolonisation de l'Afrique du Nord*, 2016; Roberto Cantoni, *Oil Exploration, Diplomacy, and Security in the Early Cold War: The Enemy Underground* (London: Routledge, 2017).

²¹ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018.

²² Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 17-27.

²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-27. "Suzereignty" is, however, a partly misleading term to describe Sino-Vietnamese pre-colonial relations: on that issue, see e.g. Charles Fourniau, *Vietnam: domination coloniale et résistance nationale, 1858-1914* (Paris : Indes savantes, 2002).

²⁵ Robert Lee, *France and the Exploitation of China, 1885-1901: A Study in Economic Imperialism* (Hong Kong ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁶ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 67.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer [ANOM], *fonds du Gouvernement général de l'Indochine* [GGI], cote n°24706.

Yunnan.²⁹ Indeed, Yunnan was the object of an imperial race with Great Britain,³⁰ as it was seen as a commercial and mineral Eldorado at least since 1857.³¹ But it was first Dupuis, a French arms trafficker, following an indication made by Francis Garnier (who Dupuis had probably encountered) during the Mekong Expedition, who publicized the existence of coal deposits in Tonkin after his 1873 expedition along the Red River.³²

- 11 Indeed, during his 1873 expedition to explore the Red River as a potential crossing point to Yunnan, Dupuis had encountered pirates who supposedly also exploited several gold and coal mines.³³ This expedition was required by the intensification of his activity as an arms trafficker, which required the acceleration of his arms shipments to his client the Chinese governor Ma Hulong in Yunnan.³⁴ Thanks to the support of the Minister of the Navy and the Colonies and Cochinchina's governor Marie-Jules Dupré, and despite aborted negotiations with Vietnamese authorities (and their opposition to that project), Dupuis and his associate's convoy of steam-ships full of weapons arrived in Yunnan in January 1873 after having taken the Red River path through Tonkin.³⁵ However, on its return to Hanoi in April 1873, its fleet was blocked by Vietnamese authorities, and Cochinchina's colonial governor seized this opportunity to order Garnier to "liberate" Dupuis' fleet – and, more importantly, impose a French presence in Tonkin and Franco-Chinese commerce on the Red River, which according to Dupuis would have included mineral products from Yunnan.³⁶ Having arrived in Hanoi in

October 1873, Garnier decided a month later, and after the failure to obtain satisfaction on these points through negotiations with Vietnamese authorities, to conquer (with Dupuis' assistance) Hanoi and other strategic points in Tonkin, setting out a precedent that would be important in the French decision to conquer Tonkin ten years later. Villemagne even estimates that "the conquest of this territory [Tonkin] was initiated by a merchant, Jean Dupuis, in a purely private initiative",³⁷ echoing the *Petit parisien* who described him as the "inventor of the Tonkin question".³⁸ However, Garnier's killing in December 1873 in an encounter with the Black Flags (probably hired by Vietnamese mandarins),³⁹ the limited number of French soldiers in Tonkin, the mounting anti-Christian revolt and the opposition of the French government to send more troops ultimately forced the French authorities to decide on the evacuation from Tonkin in January 1874.⁴⁰ The French pro-monarchist government decided to put an end to the Garnier expedition due to its hostility to extra-European conquests, its priority given to continental affairs and its fear of an open conflict with China.⁴¹

12 However, this episode had two decisive outcomes: the signing of an unequal treaty of "protection" – although not establishing a formal protectorate – in March 1874 between France and the Vietnamese authorities, which included the acceptance of French consulates (article 13) and of a diplomatic representation in the capital city of the Annam Empire (Hue) – a French legation, with a chargé d'affaires at its head – (article 20), and the confiscation of Dupuis' shipment by the Vietnamese authorities, which resulted in his financial ruin.⁴²

²⁹ Francis Garnier, *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine*, (Paris: Hachette, 1873) 567, 619 and 632.

³⁰ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 28.

³¹ Jean-François Klein, "Une histoire impériale connectée ? Hâi Phòng : jalon d'une stratégie lyonnaise en Asie orientale (1881-1886)", *Moussons*, 13-14, 2009, 55-93.

³² *Ibid.*, 32.

³³ Hippolyte Gautier, *Les Français au Tonkin (1787-1886)*, (Paris: Challamel, 1887), 101.

³⁴ Claire Villemagne, "Du Tonkin des pionniers à la mise en valeur de l'Indochine. Le symbole de « l'affaire Dupuis » (1872-1912)", *Outre-mers* vol. 99, n° 376, 2012, 157-77.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ "Monsieur Dupuis repaît", *Le Petit parisien*, lundi 21 décembre 1885, 1-2.

³⁹ On the Black Flags, see Bradley Camp Davis, *Imperial Bandits: Outlaws and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands, Critical Dialogues in Southeast Asian Studies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017).

⁴⁰ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 29.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴² *Id.*

13 The acceptance of French consulates had short-term consequences, as it would allow French agents to gather more intelligence on Vietnamese coal deposits, of which only little was known.⁴³ Indeed, as early as 1875, the French Consul in Haiphong, conducted an evaluation of a coal sample that had been given to him by some Vietnamese. Although the results were deceptive, the Consul thought it was due to the fact that the sample had been collected on the surface, and hence asked the General Governor of Hai Duong and Quang Yen to dig a small gallery in order to evaluate deep coal deposits, which he believed to be potentially better.⁴⁴ From February to May 1876, an agent of the Consul, Espitalier, eventually undertook a series of coal prospecting in Hongai (20th century major coal producing site in Vietnam), Quang Yen (the largest coal reserve in contemporary Vietnam) and Dong Trieu (20th century second major coal producing site in Vietnam), and found everywhere coal deposits at the surface.⁴⁵ Hence, the French authorities started searching for coal in Tonkin as soon as their consulates had been established, and within a few months they had spotted the major Vietnamese coal deposits. In contrast with the case of Algerian oil and gas, which discovery was only possible through an enormous techno-scientific apparatus,⁴⁶ in Vietnam geologists did not discover coal deposits but rather corrected, deepened, centralized and completed what had been mainly empirical research of local imperial agents.⁴⁷ The very technological “primitive accumulation” of ergo-imperial intelligence in the Algerian case contrasted with the very empirical “primitive accumulation” of ergo-imperial

intelligence in the Tonkin case. However, this disparity was mainly due to the difference between coal and other hydrocarbons, as the Algerian coal was also spotted through empirical research.⁴⁸

The Vietnamese coal deposits also aroused interest at a higher level right after the 1874 Treaty, as the incumbent of the newly created position of chargé d'affaires in Hué mentioned to the General Governor in August 1875 his intention – with his approval – to obtain the authorization of the Annam Empire, in poor financial condition, to prospect coal mining sites and to concede them to the prospectors in case those sites were deemed valuable for both them and the Annam Empire.⁴⁹ The French consul in Haiphong also envisioned that the mineral resources of Tonkin could be exploited profitably, but only if the local administration was under French control, whether due to its leasing to French agents, through the establishment of a protectorate over Tonkin or following its military conquest.⁵⁰ The consul specified later that it was necessary to ensure the suitability of this coal for the engines of steamboats, hence showing that these prospects were undertaken to secure the coal supply of the French Navy, who had been put in difficulty during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 due to the British policy of refusing to supply belligerent steamboats.⁵¹ But according to the consul, the Vietnamese authorities in Tonkin were doing everything to deter French searches despite their apparent goodwill.⁵² Hence, as early as 1876, the “sincere fiction”⁵³ of a coal Eldorado from Yunnan to Hongay that could supply the French Navy

⁴³ Fourniau, *Vietnam : domination coloniale et résistance nationale*, 288.

⁴⁴ ANOM, *Amiraux*, côte n°13122, lettre du Consul de France à Haïphong au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 12 octobre 1875.

⁴⁵ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°13134, lettre du Consul de France à Haïphong au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 9 mai 1876.

⁴⁶ Cantoni, *Oil Exploration, Diplomacy, and Security in the Early Cold War*.

⁴⁷ Archives nationales des mondes du travail [ANMT], *fonds de la Compagnie financière de Suez – Banque de l’Indochine* [CS-BI], côte n°2011 030 5922, Extrait du mémoire de D. Lucas, “Le Bassin Houiller de Hongay”, mémoire de géographie, mai 1949, 6-7.

⁴⁸ ANOM, Gouverneur Général de l’Algérie, Série “Mines et pétrole” [5N], côte n°57, Rapport de l’Ingénieur des T.E du Service des Mines, “Houillère de Kenadsa (Sud-Oranais)”, 3 juillet 1922, 1-2.

⁴⁹ Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 40.

⁵⁰ Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 38.

⁵¹ Fichter, “Imperial Interdependence on Indochina’s Maritime Periphery”, 159–63.

⁵² ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°13134, lettre du Consul de France à Haïphong au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 9 mai 1876.

⁵³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 112.

had started to spread in the French colonial administration, and the Vietnamese authorities were (rightly) seen as the main obstacle to the French potential appropriation of coal deposits.⁵⁴ However, this opposition was mainly motivated by a defense of their interests, as they asked without success patterns of mining concessions to the French authorities,⁵⁵ and as they even envisioned to send to France young literate Vietnamese to receive an engineering (“*génie*”) training – a project that eventually aborted.⁵⁶

15 Meanwhile, due to his financial situation, Dupuis started a lengthy political and juridical fight to obtain financial compensation from the French government, which he accused of being responsible for his ruin. He was helped in that task by pro-colonial politicians, Eugène Etienne (the future leader of the *parti colonial*) and the Gambetta clan, who used this “affaire Dupuis” as a pro-colonial Trojan horse.⁵⁷ With this political support, Dupuis became a notorious and self-proclaimed expert of Tonkin and its mineral resources, publishing his propaganda articles in several journals, writing books and multiplying his interventions in influential places.⁵⁸ Logically, he was accused by the anti-colonial opinion of influencing the government to conquer Tonkin for his own interests:⁵⁹ and truly, as he was one of the main “founders” of “Tonkin” as a powerful colonial myth.⁶⁰ Altogether with other actors such as former missionaries and former colonial

administrators,⁶¹ Dupuis spread the sincere fiction of the “Tonkin-Mines” in various geographic societies – which functioned as imperial think-tanks –, in writings aimed at a large audience and in conversations with pro-colonial politicians.

FRANCO-CHINESE ENERGO-IMPERIAL RIVALRIES IN TONKIN AND ANNAM (1877-1881)

The arrival into power in 1877–79 of the pro-colonial “Opportunist Republicans” led by Ferry and Gambetta put an end to the 1867–1878 “pause” of French colonial expansionism in Vietnam.⁶² This era was marked by the rise of the “colonial idea” in France (and elsewhere), without which the conquest of Tonkin was unconceivable. Colonization started to be perceived by a growing informal “colonial party” – with Gambetta and Ferry at its head – as the best way to restore the power and prestige of France after the trauma of 1870–71, that of the French defeat against Prussia, the Paris Commune, the loss of Alsace-Moselle and the decline of French continental power. It was also assumed to be the only way to soften social conflicts, the agrarian, industrial and commercial crisis of 1873-1897 and the declining social status of the traditional elites and middle classes through the opening of new protected markets.⁶³ Finally, the conquest of new territories would provide, according to the liberal economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and his followers,⁶⁴ new opportunities for capital investments, in an era of stagnating profits and falling industrial prices due to sharp market competition.⁶⁵ Hence, colonization appeared as the best solution to France’s political, social and economic crisis, and Tonkin with its alleged enormous mineral

54 Philippe Devillers, *Français et Annamites, partenaires ou ennemis ? 1856-1902*, Paris, Denoël, 1998.

55 Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 40.

56 ANOM, *Amiriaux*, côte n°12916, Lettre du chef du bureau des relations extérieures et du commerce du royaume du Vietnam au chargé d’affaires de la légation française à Hué, 10 octobre 1880; ANOM, *Amiriaux*, côte n° 12916, Lettre du chargé d’affaires de la légation française à Hué au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 31 octobre 1880.

57 Villemagne, “Du Tonkin des pionniers à la mise en valeur de l’Indochine”.

58 *Id.*

59 *Id.*; “Informations”, *L’Intransigeant*, 27 décembre 1882 et Henri Rochefort, “La Chine et son magot”, *L’Intransigeant*, 20 juin 1883.

60 Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 32.

61 Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 62–63.

62 Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 27.

63 *Ibid.*, 33–42.

64 Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, (2nd éd. revue, corrigée et augmentée), (Paris: Guillaumin, 1882) 528–543.

65 Xavier Lafrance, *The Making of Capitalism in France: Class Structures, Economic Development, the State and the Formation of the French Working Class, 1750-1914* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 228–41.

resources and its proximity to southern China was a choice morsel in that regard.⁶⁶ However, China's restored power opposed France's growing imperial pretensions over Tonkin, leading to mounting tensions eventually culminating in the Sino-French war of 1883-85.⁶⁷

17 These tensions were also about Tonkin and Annam's coal resources. Indeed, in 1880, the chargé d'affaires in Hué sought to oppose the concession of a coal mine in Annam to a Chinese national.⁶⁸ Chinese entrepreneurs, due to their more advanced technology, were granted at that time most of Vietnamese mines against a fixed annual payment to the Royal Treasure.⁶⁹ Chinese expertise and interest in coal mining is to be traced-back more specifically to China's coal-intensive modernization since the 1860's.⁷⁰ This modernization had also been envisioned by Vietnamese reformer *Nguyễn Trường Tộ* at that time, but although coal mines were reported in 1868 following Emperor Tự Đức's orders, coal production remained limited,⁷¹ with coals only used for local and artisanal needs, notably to produce lime (in the case of the Dong Trieu coals)⁷² or to treat zinc.⁷³ However, coal aroused new interest in 1877, as the Court made published a Chinese book dictated by an English on modern

coal extraction methods.⁷⁴ It was prefaced by the pro-modernization General Governor of Hai Duaong and Quang Yen, who had authorized and even encouraged Espitalier to prospect coal regions in 1876 for these reasons,⁷⁵ in addition to the Court's desperate need for new sources of revenue.⁷⁶ This Governor had even declared to the French consul that the Annam Court was disposed to grant concessions,⁷⁷ although the chargé d'affaires in Hue doubted that this was the case for French nationals.⁷⁸ Indeed, in the years 1876-1878, a first coal mine was conceded to a Chinese national, although several demands, notably by French nationals, were rejected.⁷⁹ The Vietnamese authorities may have found it more profitable and in line with traditional practices to grant concessions to Chinese nationals than to French ones, in addition to resisting French colonial penetration.

In face of this attempt by a Chinese entrepreneur 18 to take over a Vietnamese coal mine, the chargé d'affaires proposed to persuade the Vietnamese government to undertake an evaluation of their coal mines by a French engineer and then to divide them equally to Vietnamese and French capital.⁸⁰ The latter proposition might have just been a diplomatic maneuver to outwit Chinese energo-imperial pretensions. Eventually, in the impossibility for the Governor of Cochinchina to send an engineer, the chargé d'affaires was encouraged to concentrate its efforts on blocking the concession to the Chinese entrepreneur, and hence sent a letter to the emperor warning him about the downsides of granting the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-42.

⁶⁷ On this issue, see e.g. Lloyd E Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy, 1880-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁶⁸ ANOM, GGI, côte n°12712, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Hué au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 9 avril 1880.

⁶⁹ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 33.

⁷⁰ Shellen Xiao Wu, *Empires of Coal: Fueling China's Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860-1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

⁷¹ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 34; Mark W. McLeod, "Nguyen Truong To: A Catholic Reformer at Emperor Tu-Duc's Court", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 25.2 (1994), 313-30 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400013527>>; Sinh Vinh, "Nguyen-Truong-To and the Quest for Modernization in Vietnam", *Japan Review* 11, 1999, 55-74.

⁷² ANOM, GGI, côte n°13134, lettre du Consul de France à Haiphong au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 9 mai 1876.

⁷³ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 33.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁶ Thế Anh Nguyễn, *Monarchie et Fait Colonial Au Viêt-Nam, 1875-1925: Le Crépuscule d'un Ordre Traditionnel*, *Collection Recherches Asiatiques* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1992), pp. 21-25.

⁷⁷ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 41.

⁷⁸ ANOM, *Amiraux*, côte 12785, Lettre du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Hué au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 20 janvier 1876.

⁷⁹ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 42.

⁸⁰ ANOM, GGI, côte n°12712, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Hué au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 9 avril 1880.

concession to a foreigner, resulting in the suspension of the concession procedure.⁸¹ However, the Nong Son mine in Annam was finally conceded to a Chinese entrepreneur in March 1881, despite fierce French opposition, although the loss was not so dire as the French Navy had tested its coals on its vessels and had found them low-grade.⁸² This substandard quality of Nong Son coals did not impede a strong reaction to this decision from the French authorities, as it jeopardized both French interests and imperial prestige. However, the mine was still conceded at the time of the French conquest.⁸³

19 Just two months before this setback, the chargé d'affaires had also urged the Governor to oppose the impending concession to a Chinese entrepreneur of the promising Hongai coal basin, despite similar demands by European merchants in Haiphong.⁸⁴ Indeed, the Hongay deposit had been coveted from 1878 by the China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company.⁸⁵ This company, founded in 1872 by the Qing official Li Hongzhang, who was also an important sponsor of the only Chinese "modern" coal mine,⁸⁶ was one of the first modern Chinese corporations.⁸⁷ It was established in Haiphong shortly after the opening of the commerce imposed on

Vietnamese authorities by the 1874 treaty,⁸⁸ while also having several liaison officers in Huê.⁸⁹ This competition revived the French interest for the Hongay coals, as in May 1881, the French Consul in Haiphong deemed them as valuable as the best English ones, and after testing them on a French war vessel, declared that they were readily usable for the supply of French war vessels.⁹⁰ This resulted in the decision of the Governor of Cochinchina to grant 2 000 francs to the Consul in order to extract coal in Hongay.⁹¹ With that money, digs were undertaken in Hongay from November to December 1881, confirming the French Navy's interest in the Tonkinese coal as the commanding officer even evoked a possible large-scale exploitation due to the accessibility of the site to large tonnage boats,⁹² a fact that had also been stressed by the chargé d'affaires a few months before.⁹³

In reaction to the potential concession of the Hongay deposit to Chinese interests, the chargé d'affaires had advocated the establishment of a protectorate in order to attract French capitals to Tonkin.⁹⁴ The strong opposition to this concession and to any concession to non-French nationals soon became widespread amongst diplomats and Navy officers, who depicted these concessions as tools of foreign penetration and as potential obstacles to future French imperial designs in Vietnam.⁹⁵ Indeed, at that time,

⁸¹ ANOM, GGI, côte n°12921, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 13 janvier 1881.

⁸² Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 45. On the Kaining mines, see Tim Wright, *Coal mining in China's economy and society, 1895-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Elsworth C. Carlson, *The Kaiping mines, 1877-1912* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁸³ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 42.

⁸⁴ ANOM, GGI, côte n°12921, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 13 janvier 1881.

⁸⁵ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 21; Fourniau, *Vietnam: domination coloniale et résistance nationale*, 321.

⁸⁶ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 61.

⁸⁷ Chi-Kong Lai, "Li Hung-Chang and Modern Enterprise The China Merchants' Company, 1872-1885", *Chinese Studies in History* vol. 25, n° 1, 1991, 19-51.

⁸⁸ Julia T. Martinez, "The Chinese Traders in French Indochina: Partners or Rivals?", in *Asia Reconstructed: Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference of the ASAA Canberra: Asian Studies Association of Australia* (University of Wollongong, 2006).

⁸⁹ Fourniau, *Vietnam : domination coloniale et résistance nationale*, 321.

⁹⁰ Jaehyun, 38-39

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹² ANOM, GGI, côte n°12712, lettre du capitaine de frégate Escudier au commandant de la Marine à Saïgon, 24 novembre 1881.

⁹³ ANOM, GGI, côte n°12921, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 13 janvier 1881.

⁹⁴ ANOM, GGI, côte n°12921, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 13 janvier 1881.

⁹⁵ ANOM, *Indochine – Ancien fonds* [Indo AF], T41(1), Lettre du capitaine de frégate Escudier au commandant de la Marine à Saïgon, 13 mai 1881; ANOM, *Amiraux*, 13220,

the first Ferry government (1880-1881) was considering annexing Tonkin, and hence opposed any concession of Vietnamese coal mines to a non-French national.⁹⁶ For the first time, coal resources in Vietnam aroused interest at the governmental level, showing that French energy-imperial interest for Tonkin and Annam's coal resources had reached a new level, just as French appetites for Tonkin more broadly.

- 21 Following that governmental decision, the chargé d'affaires finally declared to the Huê government, despite the lack of any legal base, that the French government would not consider valid any mine concession that had not been anteriorly approved by it.⁹⁷ Under the French pressure, the Vietnamese Court was forced to announce that it would not grant any other concession in the near future, but required French technical assistance in exchange.⁹⁸ This forced the chargé d'affaires to request the Governor to make sure that the French government, to give credibility to its declaration, would promptly send mine engineers to study mining regions, evaluate their value and facilitate their future exploitation. Otherwise, the Vietnamese government would pretext that lack of assistance to concede these mines to Chinese companies, in order to earn at least minimal revenues from their concession, concessions that the French government could not legally impede.⁹⁹ The French mine engineers would then have two main functions: to gather more energy-imperial intelligence and, on the pretext of "assistance", exclude Chinese companies from coal concessions. This must have decided the French Government to take action,

Lettre du Consul de France à Haiphong au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 14 mai 1881.

⁹⁶ ANOM, *Indo AF*, T41(1), Télégramme du Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 27 juin 1881.

⁹⁷ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12921, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 18 juillet 1881.

⁹⁸ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12921, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 28 août 1881.

⁹⁹ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12921, télégramme du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 28 août 1881.

as two "imperial engineers"¹⁰⁰ eventually arrived in Vietnam in November 1881.

THE CLIMAX OF FRENCH ENERGO-IMPERIAL INTEREST FOR TONKIN AND ANNAM'S COAL RESOURCES (1881-1882)

The two mine engineers, Fuchs and Saladin, carried out their prospecting campaign from November 1881 to February 1882, despite the hostility of the Vietnamese authorities who had only been informed belatedly. They visited the Nong Son colliery and tested its coals on a war vessel, before heading to Tonkin and surveying the Hongay coal basin, where Saladin was able to collect underground coals to have them tested in Paris at their return, in addition to his mapping of the basin.¹⁰¹ In their report, Fuchs and Saladin claimed that the chemical analyses and test in factory of the Hongay coals indicated their quality and suitability for various industrial purposes, and hence their ability to compete successfully with other coals on the regional markets.¹⁰² Fuchs and Saladin envisioned a large-scale extraction to be launched with several millions of francs, motivated by the estimation of 5 million tons of coal reserve, the profusion of commercial outlets in South-East Asia, Hongay's proximity to the sea – in contrast with the Nong Son mine – and the abundance and cheapness of the workforce.¹⁰³ However, as Hongay was also coveted by Chinese trading firms,¹⁰⁴ and as Vietnamese authorities were deemed to be inherently hostile to any large-scale industry, the report argued for the necessity of a French protectorate on Tonkin to develop its industrial production.¹⁰⁵ This report, which downplayed the difficulties of a large-scale extraction of coal in Tonkin, notably in

¹⁰⁰ Davis, 81.

¹⁰¹ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 51–52.

¹⁰² ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°11899, Rapport de 1882 de Fuchs-Saladin.

¹⁰³ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°11899, Rapport de 1882 de Fuchs-Saladin.

¹⁰⁴ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°11899, Rapport de 1882 de Fuchs-Saladin.

¹⁰⁵ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°11899, Rapport de 1882 de Fuchs-Saladin.

terms of climatic conditions and recruitment of workforce, offered a scientific and economic foundation to French energo-imperial appetites, and was widely publicized in the upper-class press, notably in *Le Temps*, the reference journal of the Third Republic's elites.¹⁰⁶ Fuchs also promoted the instauration of a French protectorate over Tonkin to allow for the exploitation of its mineral resources before the influential French Geographic Society.¹⁰⁷ From the end of 1881 to the beginning of 1883, there was a growing impatience to seize Tonkin in both economic, political, scientific, journalistic and naval circles, materialized in Gambetta's plan in November 1881 to completely occupy militarily Tonkin,¹⁰⁸ followed a month later by an intervention plan of Le Myre de Vilers urging the French government to seize Tonkin.¹⁰⁹ This limited intervention plan implied was finally adopted by the Freycinet government, with the sending of a military detachment commanded by Rivière to Hanoi on the 26 of March 1882.¹¹⁰ Rivière was ordered to use force only in case of absolute necessity, but alike Garnier in 1873, he took the initiative of seizing the Hanoi citadel on the 25th of April 1882.¹¹¹

23 In reaction to these growing French imperial pretensions, reiterated through a demand in December 1881 of exclusive concession to French nationals of several mining zones by the chargé d'affaires in Hué,¹¹² the Annam Court responded that it was only willing to concede to French

nationals the Quang Yen coal deposit, close to Haiphong, pretexting the presence of "pirates"¹¹³ notably in the zone of Hongay to refuse any other demand.¹¹⁴ The Court accused the French authorities of having send the mine engineers without prior notification, perhaps seeing them as energo-imperial spies. Finally, they reaffirmed their sovereignty over Tonkinese coal deposits, informing the French colonial authorities that concessions would be granted only to the best bidders and if there was no risk for the "underground dragon" who supposedly lived under Vietnam.¹¹⁵

Faced with that mounting Vietnamese resistance, 24 the chargé d'affaires claimed that as it would be easy for the Vietnamese government to turn against French demands for the best bidding condition, the only solution was a demonstration of military might, as the presence of two military steam-boats off the Annam coast would force the Vietnamese authorities to cede to French demands.¹¹⁶ The Governor of Cochinchina shared this view, drawing the attention of the French government on this issue in February 1882 and urging it to solve it without delay.¹¹⁷

Admiral Jauréguiberry, the personification of 25 naval imperialism as the Minister of the Navy and the Colonies in 1879–80 and 1882–83, who had proposed in 1879 the first plan for a complete occupation of Tonkin,¹¹⁸ was also getting eager. On the 31st of March 1882, he informed the Governor of Cochinchina that the exclusive concession of coal mines to French nationals by the Annam Empire was a top priority

¹⁰⁶ "Dernières nouvelles", *Le Temps*, 9 novembre 1881, 4; "Dernières nouvelles", *Le Temps*, 5 mars 1882, 4; "Académie des sciences (10 juillet)", *Le Temps*, 12 juillet 1882, 2; "Courrier de l'Indochine", *Le Temps*, 15 août 1882, 2; "Dernières dépêches Havas", *Le Temps*, 21 décembre 1882, 1; "Société de géographie (2 mars)", *Le Temps*, 6 mars 1883, 3; "Société de géographie (2 mars)", *Le Temps*, 6 mars 1883, 3-4.

¹⁰⁷ *Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets*, 5 mars 1883, 1170-1171.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 58.

¹¹⁰ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 42.

¹¹¹ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 58.

¹¹² ANOM, *Amiraux*, côte n°12712 Lettre du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Hué au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 25 décembre 1881.

¹¹³ Julie D'Andurain and Jonathan Krause, "Pirates, Slavers, Brigands and Gangs: The French Terminology of Anticolonial Rebellion, 1880–1920", *French History*, 31.4 (2017), 495–511.

¹¹⁴ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12712, Lettre du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Hué au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 10 février 1882.

¹¹⁵ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12712, Lettre du chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Hué au Gouverneur général de la Cochinchine, 10 février 1882.

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ ANOM, *Amiraux*, côte n°12712, Lettre du Gouverneur de la Cochinchine au Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, 10 février 1882.

¹¹⁸ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 34.

to increase French influence in Tonkin.¹¹⁹ The Minister advocated an exclusive appropriation of those mines. He urged the Governor to study the means to obtain it through the Annam Empire and to define the preconditions to grant concessions to French investors, as if the French State had already established a protectorate over Tonkinese and Annamese coal deposits.¹²⁰ Moreover, in July 1882, three months after the conquest of Hanoi, the Minister ordered the Governor to send twenty barrels of Tonkinese coals to Toulon, the main military base of the French navy, displaying the growing interest of French naval imperialists towards these coals.¹²¹ These coals were compared by the Governor to those of Pennsylvania, the main source of anthracite for the United States Navy, urging their prompt appropriation to supply the French navy in South-East Asia and avoid their seizure by foreign powers.¹²² Finally, in September 1882, “as France ha[d] an overriding interest to seize the coal mines”, the Governor asserted that, in case of Vietnamese refusal to grant coal mines concessions to France, he would “be forced to act directly as a Governor”, implying the recourse to a military action.¹²³ At the same time, Dupuis and Millot established the *Société d'études et d'exploitation du Tonkin*, which aimed to invest French and Hong-Kong capitals in the Tonkinese coalfields.¹²⁴ This demonstrated the growing importance of economic energo-imperial interests, especially as Dupuis and his associate Millot had close links with Freycinet, Ferry and

Gambetta, who led sequentially the French government from 1879 to 1885.¹²⁵ By the end of 1882, French energo-imperial aims were not only to be found amongst French local imperial agents, but had spread to all the scales of the French State, prompting it to take military action.

However, French growing (energo)imperialist impatience and its conquest project faced China's increasing military pressure in Tonkin and threat of war in the case of a general occupation of Tonkin. This situation resulted in the Bourée convention of December 1882, which divided Tonkin into two spheres of influence: the French in the South of the Red River, including Hanoi, and the Chinese in the North.¹²⁶ Rivière criticized the Bourée convention for attributing the northern part of Tonkin, which he called the “Tonkin-mines”, to China, depriving France of its mining resources at the alleged benefit of Chinese, English and German interests.¹²⁷ Similarly, the chargé d'affaires warned vigorously the Governor against an alleged attempt of China's Merchants Company, through its liaison officers in Hue, to be granted a concession over the Hongay basin and as a consequence to put an end to French energo-imperial aims in that region.¹²⁸ Finally, Dupuis, Milot and a top French businessman in Vietnam, Victor Roque, suspected that this convention, negotiated by Bourée with Li Hongzhang, the main shareholder of the China's Merchants Company, intended to deprive France of the Hongay coal basin and to satisfy alleged British energo-imperial interests in Tonkin.¹²⁹ Victor Roque had strong reasons to oppose to the Bourée Convention as his company, the Steamer Shipping Company of Cochinchina (“*Messageries à Vapeur de Cochinchine*”), was in competition

¹¹⁹ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12712, télégramme du Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 31 mars 1882.

¹²⁰ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12712, télégramme du Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 31 mars 1882.

¹²¹ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12712, télégramme du Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies au Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 7 juillet 1882.

¹²² ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12712, télégramme du Gouverneur de la Cochinchine au Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, 16 juillet 1882.

¹²³ ANOM, *GGI*, côte n°12712, télégramme du Gouverneur de la Cochinchine au Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, septembre 1882.

¹²⁴ Andrieux, “Mines et pépites”, *Le Matin*, 8 octobre 1884; “Mines et pépites”, *L'intransigeant*, 10 octobre 1884; Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 33.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-42.

¹²⁶ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy, 1880-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 60.

¹²⁷ Henri Rivière, “Lettre au chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê du 15 janvier 1883”, in André Masson, *Correspondance politique du Commandant Rivière au Tonkin* (Avril 1882-Mai 1883), (Paris: Société de géographie 1933), 175.

¹²⁸ Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 59.

¹²⁹ Fourniau, *Vietnam : domination coloniale et résistance nationale*, 322.

with the China's Merchants Company and needed in particular to supply its steam-boats with coal.¹³⁰ This merchant naval and economic energo-imperialist also advocated the conquest of Tonkin, to which he was materially interested and committed as he supplied Rivière's military detachment in Hanoi.¹³¹

THE CONQUEST OF TONKIN AND THE COLONIAL APPROPRIATION OF ITS COAL RESOURCES (1883-1885)

27 The Ferry government, probably pressured by the business world (notably Dupuis, Millot and Roque) and the French navy, rejected outright the Bourée Convention on the 5th of March 1883. The fact that the Bourée convention granted to China the whole coal mining region, the "Tonkin-mines", might have been a major incentive for such refusal. Eleven days later, the government opted for the total conquest of Tonkin.

28 However, an energo-imperial military initiative at a local level had already been taken in between. On the 9th of March 1883, Rivière decided to conquer the Hongay coal basin, despite the risks posed by such division of already meagre military forces.¹³² Following months of inaction, this operation was the result of a coalition of energo-imperialist forces who had urged Rivière to occupy Hongay to attenuate the effects of the Bourée convention. In reaction to this convention, the chargé d'affaires in Huê had suggested to Rivière to act promptly in order to avoid the concession of Hongay deposit to the *Merchant's Company*, and ultimately its retrocession to an English company.¹³³ On the other hand, Victor Roque, after having been warned by

Admiral Meyer, commander of the French Naval Division in China, that the Bourée convention gave the Hongay coal basin to China, urged the Governor to intervene in Tonkin to prevent an alleged potential British seizure of Hongay and rushed to Hanoi on the 8th of March.¹³⁴ There, he pressed Rivière to take action to impede the alleged imminent concession of the Hongay basin to China's Merchant Company and its retrocession to British interests.¹³⁵ The next day, a French contingent marched on Hongay, successfully conquered the 12th, seizing *au passage* the buildings and stocks of the China's Merchants Company in Haïphong.¹³⁶ The contingent established there a military post which dominated the Halong Bay, a "small Gibraltar" as Rivière coined it.¹³⁷

Rivière's death in battle on May 19th resulted in a series of parliamentary debates. Dupuis had distributed to the deputies maps of Tonkin's supposed mineral resources,¹³⁸ including coal located near the Dong Trieu coalfields in the Quang Yen region.¹³⁹ These maps, despite having been ridiculed by anticolonialist MP George Périn with his comparison to Voltaire's Eldorado,¹⁴⁰ might have contributed decisively to the parliamentary vote of the 26 May 1883, where deputies unanimously attributed significant credits (5,5 millions of francs) for a military expedition

Commandant Rivière au Tonkin (Avril 1882-Mai 1883), (Paris: Société de géographie 1933), 187.

¹³⁴ Fourniau, *Vietnam : domination coloniale et résistance nationale*, 320-22.

¹³⁵ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018, 61.

¹³⁶ Fourniau, *Vietnam : domination coloniale et résistance nationale*, 320-22.

¹³⁷ Henri Rivière, "Lettre au chargé d'affaires de la légation française à Huê du 14 mars 1883", in André Masson, *Correspondance politique du Commandant Rivière au Tonkin (Avril 1882-Mai 1883)*, (Paris: Société de géographie 1933), 192.

¹³⁸ "Monsieur Dupuis reparait", *Le Petit parisien*, lundi 21 décembre 1885, 1-2.

¹³⁹ "Le Tong-Kin et le bassin du Fleuve Rouge d'après les documents de J. Dupuis", *Supplément au journal Le Monde*, samedi 9 juin 1883, 3 (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6783970s/f3.item>).

¹⁴⁰ Edouard Durranc, "La Chambre", *La Justice*, jeudi 17 mai 1883, 1.

¹³⁰ *Id.*

¹³¹ Gilles De Gantès, "Le particularisme des milieux d'affaires cochinchinois (1860-1910) : comment intégrer un comptoir asiatique à un empire colonial protégé", in Hubert Bonin, Catherine Hodeir et Jean-François Klein, *L'esprit économique impérial, 1830-1970: groupes de pression & réseaux du patronat colonial en France & dans l'empire* (Paris: Publications de la SFHOM, 2008).

¹³² Fourniau, *Vietnam : domination coloniale et résistance nationale*, 321.

¹³³ Pierre-Paul Rheinart des Essarts, "Lettre du 9 février 1883", in André Masson, *Correspondance politique du*

to secure the French protectorate in Tonkin.¹⁴¹ Indeed, during the parliamentary debate, a senator argued that Tonkinese coals would be precious resources for the French military and commercial navies, while the MP of Cochinchina wrote in its parliamentary report that the coal deposits next to the Tonkin gulf would allow for the rise of the French merchant navy in that region.¹⁴²

30 More generally, the widespread sincere fiction of Tonkin (and Yunnan) as a mineral and commercial Eldorado,¹⁴³ in addition to a more general pro-imperialist propensity towards the conquest of Tonkin amongst French politicians, and significant pressures from the French navy, the Government of Cochinchina and French merchants and colonists,¹⁴⁴ definitely played a role in this vote. As Brocheux and Hémery argue, although the conquest of Tonkin cannot be attributed “to the actions of a small lobby and speculators aided by a handful of officers and priests”, the pressure of this lobby “should not be underestimated either, especially that of Dupuis and Millot”.¹⁴⁵

31 Due to French military pressure, the Annam Empire was compelled to accept a French protectorate in Tonkin on the 25th of August 1883. The French military successes against China in northern Vietnam then forced its government in May 1884 to recognize the French protectorate in Tonkin, to pull off its army from Tonkin, and to open southern China to French commerce.¹⁴⁶ The French protectorate over Annam and Tonkin was hence enforced on the 6th of June 1884. As it was a protectorate and not an annexation, the French authorities needed to launch coal production a treaty with the Annam Empire that would have granted them full control over

Tonkin’s mineral resources. Hence, the elaboration of a mining regime started right after the signature of the 1884 treaty, with the creation of a commission in September 1884 and the drafting of a mining convention by December 1884.¹⁴⁷ The draft convention, sent in December 1884 to the resident general of France in Hue, dismissed all existing concessions apart from that of Nong Son, specified that mining activities in Annam and Tonkin were to be subject to French-made regulations, and granted the protectorate the revenues of all mining taxes in Tonkin.¹⁴⁸ The Vietnamese government, which retained only the tax revenues of the Annam mines, was eventually forced by the French general resident to sign the mining convention in February 1885, despite its initial opposition to it.¹⁴⁹ The mineral resources of Tonkin were hereafter legally under French control.

Meanwhile, China had been determined not to evacuate militarily Tonkin before a definitive diplomatic resolution of the conflict. Consequently, a new phase of the conflict had started in June 1884, and after a French ultimatum in July 1884 and China’s refusal to pay a 250 million francs indemnity, two coal-mining harbors of Formosa (Taiwan) had been seized by the French Navy in January 1885.¹⁵⁰

Nonetheless, the Sino-Vietnamese counter-offensive in Tonkin, the diplomatic pressure from Great Britain and a political crisis in France eventually forced the French government to renounce its indemnity claim and its military conquests in China. The French government obtained, in exchange, the Chinese recognition of its protectorate over Tonkin, as well as the evacuation of Chinese troops, the commercial opening of Yunnan to French interests and the construction of a railway line from Tonkin to Yunnan. With the March 1885 Sino-French agreement on Tonkin, the protectorate over Tonkin eventually came

¹⁴¹ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 44.

¹⁴² Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 64.

¹⁴³ Villemagne, “Du Tonkin des pionniers à la mise en valeur de l’Indochine”.

¹⁴⁴ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 33-34.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹⁴⁷ Jaehyun, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 67-68.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁵⁰ Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 45-46.

into existence, although Tonkin was not “pacified” until the 1890’s,¹⁵¹ delaying the exploitation of the Dong Trieu coalfields until the 1900’s.¹⁵² Indeed, Victor Roque was granted these coalfields in 1890,¹⁵³ but he was captured by “pirates” during his visit there,¹⁵⁴ putting an end to his dreams of commercializing Dong-Trieu coals as he seemed to have returned to France just after having been liberated. Similarly, the Hongay coal basin was not pacified until 1895.¹⁵⁵

- 34 Overall, the conjunction of naval (stemming from the Minister of the Navy and the Colonies and its local agents), political (that of Cochinchina’s governor, of the chargé d’affaires and of pro-colonial politicians), and economic (of Dupuis, Millot and Roque) ergo-imperialist interests led, amongst other causes, to the conquest of Tonkin and of its coal resources. The bottom-up collection of ergo-imperial intelligence on Tonkin and Annam’s coal resources from the 1870’s resulted in an ever increasing interest of all these imperialist actors for them, and a subsequent pressure on politicians to conquer Tonkin. Of course, the conquest of Tonkin cannot be attributed only to these ergo-imperial interests, as religious, agricultural, commercial, financial and political interests were also at stake,¹⁵⁶ but it had a permanent and important role in that complex and non-teleological process.

CONCLUSION

- 35 The conquest of Tonkin and the establishment of a protectorate over it were not the only conditions to launch a profitable and productive extraction of its coal resources. The mining regime had to be drafted,¹⁵⁷ concessions to be attributed, coal regions to be pacified, capitals to be lifted massively and invested profitably and

workers to be recruited and put at work effectively. However, the establishment of a French protectorate over Tonkin was a decisive step in that process: by 1888, the *Société française des charbonnages du Tonkin* was founded by Bavier-Chauffour with 4 million of capitals, mainly Hong-Kongese;¹⁵⁸ in 1889, under special military protection,¹⁵⁹ it had started extracting coal in Hongay while facing its first strike;¹⁶⁰ and in 1906, it had already a profit rate of 60 % (85 % in 1913).¹⁶¹ This triumph of big business ergo-imperial interests, first in Hongay and then in Dong-Trieu from the 1920’s (although not in Kebao in the 1890’s), led to the rise of coal production in Vietnam up to 250 000 tons in 1901, 500 00 tons in 1910, 1 million in 1923 and 2 million in 1928, its highest point in Vietnam’s colonial history.¹⁶²

Meanwhile, the ergo-imperial interests of the Navy and the colonial administration had also been satisfied. The compromise with Bavier-Chauffour established in 1888 secured for the Navy a steady and cheap supply in coal and for the colonial budget a regular source of revenue, while leaving to private French capitals the task to create productive and profitable businesses which would contribute to the pacification of Tonkin and the growth of the colonial economy.¹⁶³ Dupuis was granted the Kebao island on conditions that were also favorable to the colonial administration.¹⁶⁴ Hence, far from being

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁵³ *Courrier d’Haiphong*, 5 janvier 1890.

¹⁵⁴ “Tonkin”, *Les Tablettes coloniales*, 23 février 1890.

¹⁵⁵ ANOM, *fonds de la Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin – Ancien Fonds* [RST-AF], côte n° 27655; Jaeyung, “Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine”, 2018, 114.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-39.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁸ “La fusion des sociétés charbonnières du Tonkin”, *L’Echo des mines et de la métallurgie*, 24 novembre 1895.

¹⁵⁹ Centre des archives nationales du Vietnam n°1, *Fonds de la Résidence supérieure au Tonkin*, côte n° 37737, “Demande formulée par le Directeur de la Société Française des Charbonnages du Tonkin en vue d’obtenir l’occupation de certains postes à Quang Yen par la garde civile ou par les troupes militaires”, 1889-1892

¹⁶⁰ Centre des archives nationales du Vietnam n°1, *Fonds de la Résidence supérieure au Tonkin*, côte n° 69910, “Grève des ouvriers éclatés à la mine de Ha Tou (Quang Yen)”, 1889

¹⁶¹ Pierre Brocheux, *Une histoire économique du Viet Nam, 1850-2007 : la palanche et le camion* (Paris : Indes savantes, 2009), 101.

¹⁶² Association des mines du Tonkin, *L’industrie minière en Indochine en 1933, Hanoï, Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient*, 60.

¹⁶³ Emile Sarran, *Etudes sur le bassin houiller du Tonkin* (Paris: Challamel, 1888).

¹⁶⁴ ANOM, *Indo AF*, côte n°A60(5), Acte de concession de terrains domaniaux, 4 avril 1888.

a puppet regime of big business energo-imperialism, as shown by its four year of tough negotiations with Bavier-Chauffour,¹⁶⁵ the French colonial administration, in constant coordination with the French government, managed to shape an energo-imperial scheme that fulfilled its energo-imperial objectives and offered a financial and energy justification for the colonization of Tonkin.

37 Colonial Vietnam's energo-imperial scheme would therefore be until its final demise in 1954-55 the product of a settlement between big business, the Navy and the colonial administration energy imperialisms. In that sense, it was different from Algerian energo-imperial scheme regarding coal, which aimed solely to satisfy colonial energy needs at whatever economic cost.¹⁶⁶ In contrast, that of Vietnam also allowed for the profitable exportation of coal on South-East Asia

markets,¹⁶⁷ in concert with the imperial politics of limited industrialization in Vietnam.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the dominant share of its coal production was exported, apart during the early 1920's and the Indochinese war.¹⁶⁹ As in addition, Vietnam's domestic consumption was mostly a colonial one,¹⁷⁰ energo-imperialism in Vietnam resulted in an "unequal ecological exchange"¹⁷¹ between France and Vietnam, in terms of energy, benefits from coal extraction and localization of ecological destruction (water contamination).¹⁷² This unequal ecological exchange, which went with the unequal socio-economic exchange between French capitalists and managers and Vietnamese workers,¹⁷³ is henceforth to be studied altogether with colonial deforestation on the one hand,¹⁷⁴ and plantation capitalism on the other,¹⁷⁵ in order to have a full picture of the lasting impact of French energy and environmental colonialism in Vietnam.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ Association des mines du Tonkin, *L'industrie minière en Indochine en 1933* (Hanoï: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient), 74.

¹⁶⁸ Brocheux and Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, 125.

¹⁶⁹ Association des mines du Tonkin, *L'industrie minière en Indochine en 1933* (Hanoï: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient), 10.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁷¹ Alf Hornborg, *Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange: Fetishism in a Zero-Sum World* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁷² ANOM, *Fonds ministériels, Mission Dimpault (1936-1937)*, 1AFFECTO/104, Rapport Tupinier du 5 mai 1937. The absence of archival sources on pollution and environmental issues is telling much about the colonial disinterest in these issues.

¹⁷³ Jaehyun, "Exploitation minière et exploitation humaine", 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Frédéric Thomas, "Protection des forêts et environnementalisme colonial : Indochine, 1860-1945", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 56-4.4 (2009), 104; Pamela D. McElwee, *Forests Are Gold: Trees, People, and Environmental Rule in Vietnam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

¹⁷⁵ Martin J. Murray, *The Development of Capitalism in Colonial Indochina (1870-1940)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Marianne Boucheret, "Les plantations d'hévéas en Indochine (1897-1954)" (Paris 1, 2008); Xuan Tri Tran, "Les plantations d'hévéa en Cochinchine (1897-1940)" (Aix-Marseille, 2018); Michitake Aso, *Rubber and the Making of Vietnam: An Ecological History, 1897-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

¹⁷⁶ On that issue, see Armel Campagne, "La ecología-mundo del imperio colonial francés", *Relaciones Internacionales*, "Ecología-Mundo, Capitaloceno y Acumulación Global", nos. 46 y 47 (forthcoming, 2021).

¹⁶⁵ ANMT, CS-BI, côte n°2011 030 5922; ANOM, Indo AF, côte n°T41(2); ANOM, Indo AF, côte n°T41(3).

¹⁶⁶ Saul, *Intérêts économiques français et décolonisation de l'Afrique du Nord*, 2016.

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