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## **The French Colonization and Japanese Occupation of Indochina during the Second World War: Encounters of the French, Japanese, and Vietnamese**

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### **Abstract**

This article seeks to clarify the relationships that formed among the French, Japanese, and Vietnamese when they coexisted in Indochina during the Second World War. The French and the Japanese jointly ruled Indochina, due to their respective interests in preserving suzerainty and securing bases for the Pacific War. These two groups maintained constant mutual awareness in this complicated and unstable relationship while avoiding conflict and seeking the support of the Vietnamese population. However, despite efforts of French and Japanese authorities, the contradiction of mutual coexistence between France, as the "missionary of civilization," and Japan, as the "liberator of Asia" from Western colonialism, could not be concealed. Whereas the Japanese government's policy of "maintaining peace" in Indochina ensured that interactions between the Japanese and Vietnamese were limited, the relationship between the French and the Vietnamese shifted during this time, with the effect of stimulating the local population's identity and leading to France laying the groundwork for postwar decolonization. By examining the quotidian facets of the Franco-Japanese rule of Indochina, this article reveals how mutual encounters among the French, Japanese, and Vietnamese undermined French colonization and Japanese occupation.

**Keywords:** Indochina, Japan, Vietnam, French colonization, Japanese empire, Second World War, Pacific War, colonization, decolonization

### **Introduction**

During the Second World War, Indochina experienced the unique situation of being occupied by Japan while remaining a French colony. For four and a half years, the French suzerain, which had wielded colonial power for more than sixty years, coexisted with the Japanese occupation, which brandished the banner of "liberating Asia" from Western colonization.

There exists a great deal of research on Indochina during this period, encompassing a range of perspectives. Murakami's (1981) pioneering research detailing the Japanese

invasion in its entirety deals with the topic from a largely Japanese perspective. Yoshizawa (1986) focuses on the military aspects of the Japanese occupation in 1940 and 1941, Tabuchi (1980; 1981) discusses its economic implications, and numerous studies by Shiraishi and Furuta (1976), Akagi (1984), and others deal with the political intention behind Japan's choice of *seihitsuhoji*, a policy of "preserving peace." Nitz's (1983; 1984) interviews with the Japanese military, diplomats, and civilians who had stayed in Indochina at the time, reveals the association between the intentions of the Japanese and the Vietnamese nationalists. Tachikawa's (2000a) research emphasizes the political, economic, and military "cooperation" between Japan and France, whereas a recent work by Michelin (2019) offers a detailed treatment of Japanese intentions and the negotiation with the French government regarding the process of the Japanese invasions in September 1940 and July 1941. It discusses the implications of the Japanese occupation as a crucial catalyst to the subsequent Pacific War.

*L'Indochine française, 1940–1945* (Brocheux and Isoart 1982) was the first edited collection of articles to describe the Indochina of that era from diverse standpoints. Marr (1995) reveals the importance of this period as a prelude to Vietnamese independence by meticulously discussing the development of the Vietnamese political movement under joint Franco-Japanese rule. Tønnesson (1991) discusses the situation in Indochina during this period from the perspective of international relations, and the work of Turpin (2005) focuses on the involvement of Charles de Gaulle and de Gaulle supporters in Indochina. Freud (2014) contributes to the relative paucity of research that draws on an economic perspective by elucidating the economic efforts of the Indochina authorities to strive toward an Indochina autarky, as they were forced into cutting off relations from the home country and strengthening relations with Japan.

Research by Jennings (2001; 2004) and Verney (2012) discusses the effects of the implementation of the anti-Republican Vichy regime and its policies on Indochina locals. Among these, as Raffin (2012) explores, the youth movements that developed under the auspices of the colonial authorities and their aftereffects continued to be felt after independence. Namba (2012) discusses the complex thrust and parry of Franco-Japanese cultural policies and propaganda.

While not an exhaustive account, this research has illustrated the enormity of the ramifications of the 1940–1945 Franco-Japanese occupation of Indochina from a variety of perspectives. This article brings to the fore the quotidian elements of the colonial encounter to reveal how Franco-Japanese rule intersected with the Vietnamese people, by focusing on how direct and indirect contact among the French, Japanese, and Vietnamese within society affected the consciousness and behavior of each group. How did each react in front of the other during more than four years of contact? How do the societal changes borne from contact between peoples come back to affect the nature of occupational rule? By clarifying the relationships among these three groups during the period of Franco-Japanese coexistence, this article seeks to illuminate how French and Japanese imperialism inhibited each country's plans.

## Historical Context

France was defeated by Germany in June 1940, and the Vichy government was established under Marshal Philippe Pétain the following month. The Vichy government planned to govern Indochina domestically through a national revolution, mobilizing a repressive antirepublican political movement. In the ceasefire agreement with Germany, France's possession of its overseas empire was recognized. However, as the war expanded, Indochina became separated from the metropole due to the insecurity of the 15,000-kilometer maritime routes between the two countries. By mid-1943, the rest of France's colonies had split off from the Vichy government and followed de Gaulle's government-in-exile (Thobie et al. 1990, 311–371). However, Indochina, its most distant colony, remained under Vichy authority throughout the war.

Taking advantage of the German victory over France, Japan stationed troops in northern Indochina in September 1940 to secure a base for the resolution of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). In July 1941, the Japanese Army advanced to the southern part of Indochina to procure a vital jumping-off point for the invasion of Southeast Asia, and a treaty for mutual defense between France and Japan was concluded prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 (Yoshizawa 1986; Michelin 2019). Due to France's occupation by Germany, the expansion of the war, and weak colonial forces in Indochina, France was forced to accede to the stationing of the Japanese Army on its territory. The priority for France was to maintain its suzerainty in Indochina, and its greatest fear was Japan's complete occupation of the territory.

Whereas Western powers were expelled by Japan in other Southeast Asian countries, French sovereignty was retained in Indochina. However, Japan's retention of French suzerainty while occupying Indochina contradicted its policy of a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," which was premised on the expulsion of Western colonial powers from Asia. Japan chose *seihitsuhoji* not just because of the Vichy government's pro-German policy; making use of an existing colonial administrative structure allowed them to secure Indochina as a base for the pursuit of the Pacific War without the need for total occupation. Some people within the Japanese government, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pointed out this contradiction, but they were overruled by the strong urges of the army, which prioritized the successful undertaking of the war. Moreover, there was an entrenched concern that the Pacific War could assume the form of a white versus yellow "race war" (Akagi 1984; Shiraishi and Furuta 1976). For these reasons, Japan and France ended up ruling Indochina jointly until the *futsuinshori* (coup de force) on March 9, 1945, when the Japanese Army abolished French control.

## Fragile Contact between the French and Japanese

With the September 1940 agreement for stationing troops in northern Indochina, the Japanese Army was permitted to garrison up to twenty-five thousand troops in Tonkin; with the occupation of southern Indochina the following year, it was allowed to station

unlimited troops throughout Indochina. The number of Japanese troops positioned in Indochina changed with the preparation, commencement, and continuation of the Pacific War. The sixty thousand Japanese stationed there before the war were drawn down after the breakout of the Pacific War, but because Indochina continued to be a strategically vital stationing area, several units were kept for defense. The billets and barracks for the Japanese Army, established far from urban areas, were provided by the French.

There were approximately thirty-nine thousand French in Indochina—about 0.2 percent of the total population (Jennings 2001, 136)—and they were shocked to learn of the June 1940 surrender to Germany. The French residents not only feared the fate of their distant homeland but also had misgivings about the continuation of French colonial rule in Indochina where they had made their home. Their memoirs reveal these concerns: “In addition to the pain [of defeat], there was one overriding concern. How was this to be explained to the locals? What do they think of us, we who have until now expressed our effortless superiority?... In order not to be losers like ourselves, is it not natural for them to wish to separate from us?” (Bauchar 1946, 32).

Notwithstanding this unease, in a relatively well-resourced Indochina largely unaffected by the war, the majority of the French were able to retain a sense of security and lifestyle similar to that before the war. The tranquility and affluence of the colony surprised French citizens dispatched from a defeated, occupied France:

For myself and those who arrived with me, Indochina appears a paradise. When we left Marseilles at the start of January [1941], France had been under a harsh German occupation since the previous July and was experiencing desperate shortages and a particularly severe winter.... We were finally able to satisfy our hunger, drink Pernod, buy tobacco, ride in taxis, and order clothes, although it's hot.<sup>1</sup>

However, the Japanese threat was growing in Indochina. As of July 1941, the Japanese Army was garrisoned throughout the whole territory. The French colonial authorities and most of the French population sought to somehow remain the legitimate rulers of Indochina until the end of the war, but they knew they could not win against the Japanese by force. The Battle of Lạng Sơn in September 1940 made the inferiority of the French military undeniable; while Japan and France were still negotiating the stationing of Japanese troops in northern Indochina, a Japanese unit stationed by the border in China decided to enter Indochina on its own authority and

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<sup>1</sup> ANOM (Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer: Aix-en-Provence), INF 1131. Note du sous-lieutenant Loisel sur la situation matérielle et morale des français en Indochine, décembre 1942; AN (Archives Nationales: Pierrefitte-sur-Seine), MI 43. Commission interministérielle d'enquête sur l'Indochine, procès-verbaux du 13 octobre 1945.

decisively defeated the French brigade.<sup>2</sup> Due to this incident, the French saw no other alternative than to seek coexistence with Japan.<sup>3</sup>

Under these circumstances, the colonial government tried to limit contact between the French, the Japanese, and the local population in daily life, fearing that any friction or minor disagreements between individuals could escalate into larger conflicts and worsen relations. At the same time, the colonial government sought to prevent the Japanese from having any influence over the local population, an intention that unfolded into a subtle contest between the Japanese and the French. Kept from breaking out into open conflict, the former proclaimed their own presence to appeal to locals and pressured the French, while the latter desperately sought to preserve the existing social structure.

The French colonial authorities requested that the first landing of Japanese troops at Haiphong in September 1940 take place in the middle of the night to avoid the attention of the local population. During the stationing of troops in the south the following July, French colonial forces were prevented from leaving their barracks at many of the landing sites until all Japanese troops had disembarked.<sup>4</sup> In March 1941, the Japanese Army anchored a ship in the Saigon River and dispatched some two hundred soldiers to march under the Japanese flag without authorization. In response, the French authorities immediately sent French troops to march alongside them.<sup>5</sup> This seems to have been an effort to ameliorate the impact that Japan's show of force would have on locals, while avoiding the tremendous amount of friction that would result from interrupting the march of Japanese troops.

Japanese Army billets were established in places distant from urban areas and the bases of French colonial forces.<sup>6</sup> However, Japanese troops were not prevented from leaving their barracks to shop, eat, drink, and seek pleasure in town. They were occasionally reported as attracting the attention of the Vietnamese population by parading through the main streets and congregating in central squares. Therefore, it

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<sup>2</sup> Armed forces organized by the *Việt Nam Phục quốc Đồng minh Hội* (Vietnam National Restoration League, hereafter the *Phục quốc Army*), a Vietnamese nationalist organization seeking independence from France, also participated in this military attack by the Japanese Army. The fighting ended in just two days, as the military leaders ordered them to cease hostilities and withdraw after deciding on the stationing of troops in accordance with the new treaty with France. The *Phục quốc Army* was abandoned by the Japanese Army and dispersed, with soldiers either being captured by the French or fleeing to China (Shiraishi 1982).

<sup>3</sup> France sought to keep this short conflict exposing the fragility of the French Army a secret throughout the war. However, the French used it as an important piece of evidence in the postwar Tokyo trial to make the argument that Japan had invaded Indochina in September 1940 (Namba 2013).

<sup>4</sup> MAE (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères: La Courneuve), *Asie-Océanie 1944–1955, Indochine* 327. Télégramme de Decoux au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 19 août 1941.

<sup>5</sup> ANOM, INF 1198. *La situation politique du Tonkin et de la Cochinchine*, 8 mars 1941.

<sup>6</sup> MAE, *Asie-Océanie 1944–1955, Indochine* 327. Télégramme de Decoux au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 19 août 1941.

was impossible to prevent everyday contact between Japanese troops and the French population, and, in fact, minor conflicts often broke out between them.<sup>7</sup> The exact number of such conflicts is unknown, but about twenty were recorded in Cochinchina for a one-month period from December 1943 to January 1944.<sup>8</sup> Many of these were trivial insults exchanged between drunken soldiers at night. However, as these incidents threatened to break the delicate balance of the Franco-Japanese coexistence, they were dealt with harshly by authorities on both sides. Furthermore, when objections were raised regarding incidents instigated by the French, the Japanese side took advantage of the situation and increased its demands concerning the stationing of its troops. The colonial government requested that the French population remain calm when dealing with the Japanese, advising that it was best to ignore them and avoid contact as much as possible.<sup>9</sup> When incidents did occur, the police and members of the Mission Franco-Japonaise, an organization of French and Japanese authorities created to handle issues relating to the stationing of Japanese troops, immediately rushed to the scene, contained the damage, and investigated the case. Perpetrators of incidents were severely punished. For example, in December 1941, when a Frenchman threw a stone at a Japanese soldier during an argument in a Hue bar, the latter immediately requested that French authorities investigate the incident, and the Frenchman was held in jail for thirty days.<sup>10</sup>

In another incident in Hanoi in June 1944, some Japanese men assaulted an Air France pilot. The pilot did not hesitate to ask for forgiveness, thus containing the incident. However, a later report by the French authorities displayed considerable irritation that the Japanese men attacked a Frenchman in public. It blamed the pilot for not resisting the Japanese and criticized other French people who were with the pilot for merely calling the police and not directly involving themselves in the altercation.<sup>11</sup> Taking such incidents into account, the French and Japanese agreed to attempt to prevent these conflicts. For example, in Dalat, there was a proposal to divide restaurants into those open to the Japanese and those frequented by the French or locals.<sup>12</sup> In Tourane (Danang), there were fixed days when Japanese troops could head into town.<sup>13</sup> Japanese and French authorities even decided that soldiers on both sides should exchange greetings when passing one another, to foster a “friendly atmosphere.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jennings (2011, 214–215) clarifies facts about everyday conflicts between the French and Japanese in Dalat.

<sup>8</sup> ANOM, Cabinet militaire 773. Relations franco-japonaises, incidents.

<sup>9</sup> ANOM, INF 1112. Note sur la situation en Indochine, août 1942.

<sup>10</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 773. Relations franco-japonaises, incidents, 4 janvier 1942.

<sup>11</sup> ANOM, RSTNF 6965. Conflits nippon-indochinois, 1941–1945.

<sup>12</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 773. Rapport de l'adjoint-chef Faucher, commandant du poste de Dalat, sur un incident entre militaires et marins français et militaires japonais, 28 septembre 1943.

<sup>13</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 690. Bulletin d'information sur les activités japonaises, 1941.

<sup>14</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 690. Bulletin d'information sur les activités japonaises, 1941; ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 258. Relevé des incidents du 30 juillet au 28 octobre 1941.

It seems that such measures were relatively successful in giving ordinary French citizens the impression that the day-to-day Japanese presence was “discreet” (Jennings 2011, 212–213). Admittedly, many of the French considered this situation to be “an invasion of a French colony by Japanese troops”<sup>15</sup> and looked upon the Japanese as enemies, but they tended to avoid needless friction with the Japanese due to the strict measures of the colonial government and their desires to retain their relatively peaceful and wealthy situation in Indochina. Therefore, it can be said that the French refrained from interacting with the Japanese as much as possible. The Japanese painter Takanori Ogisu, who was in Indochina during the war, testified that French and Japanese would frequent the same restaurants and hotels, but they would “sit around their respective tables with extreme disinterest” in each other (Ogisu 1944, 27).

The stationing of Japanese troops necessitated that the Japanese and French learn each other’s languages, but there were few French who undertook to teach French to the Japanese. A former student at the Nanyô gakuin (Academy of South Sea)<sup>16</sup> has testified that the French professors there appeared to be “wanderers” without much contact with French society in Indochina.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, since maritime trade with Europe became unstable due to the war, many French speakers, including intellectuals, were sent from Japan to Indochina (which represented France in the Far East), and it seems they enjoyed interacting with the French there.<sup>18</sup>

For the Japanese, too, it was essential to prevent fighting to maintain a secure military base. Many Japanese also considered Indochina “another heaven,” rich and untouched by the war.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the material wealth enjoyed by the French and Japanese alike was a result of forceful exploitation. For example, the colonial government made it compulsory for Vietnamese peasants to sell rice directly to them at a fixed, cheaper-than-market price, resulting in severe poverty for the peasants. It was in the common interest of both the French and Japanese to share the “wealth” of Indochina, and so they ostensibly came to coexist “side by side” (Hara 1998, 22–23).

Further analysis of numerous trivial incidents that occurred over time reveals that many of these conflicts were tied to the presence of the indigenous population. For example, a fight broke out between the Vietnamese and French, and a Japanese man

<sup>15</sup> ANOM, INF 1145. Lettre de Ratiné écrite en mars 1941.

<sup>16</sup> The Nanyô gakuin, a technical college under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was established in Saigon in 1942 for the purpose of training Japanese human resources with good knowledge of the situation in Southeast Asia (Shiraishi 1983).

<sup>17</sup> Tokyô Daigaku Kyôyô gakubu kokusai kannkeiron kenkyûshitsu 1980–1981. *Inntabyû kiroku: Nihon no nanyô kanyo* [Interview records: Japanese involvement in the South], C-2. Interview with Setsurô Tsuchida by Masaya Shiraishi, December 23, 1979.

<sup>18</sup> Representative examples include Kiyoshi Komatsu and Komaki Omi. There were many other French-speaking researchers and educated people dispatched from Japan at the Japanese Cultural Institutes in Hanoi and Saigon.

<sup>19</sup> Most Japanese testified that Indochina at this time was peaceful and relatively materially affluent despite the war. For example, see Tokyô Daigaku 1980–1981. *Inntabyû kiroku*, C-2, 11–12. Interview with Setsurô Tsuchida by Masaya Shiraishi, December 23, 1979.



who happened to be nearby intervened. These incidents shook the generally cooperative relationship maintained by the French and Japanese, revealing the underlying competition between them. Japanese writer Kiyoshi Komatsu, who was in Indochina at the time, witnessed a quarrel between a French officer and a Vietnamese man at a restaurant. He recorded in his notes how the faces of surrounding Vietnamese “appeared to say that only you Japanese would be able to extricate the unfortunate local from the situation” (Komatsu 1941, 272–273).<sup>20</sup>

In another case, a Vietnamese life was lost due to French and Japanese competition. When a Vietnamese woman employed by a Japanese organization suffered a serious injury, a French policeman sought to transport her to a French medical facility, but the Japanese intervened and forcibly took her to a Japanese military hospital. Ultimately, the woman died because of the delay in treatment. The dispute continued even after her death, with the Japanese demanding that they jointly conduct her autopsy, only to be refused by the French.<sup>21</sup> Although this is an extreme case, it indicates the reality of Franco-Japanese coexistence: competition over the rights to rule the local population. This was an issue of who held the legitimate right to protect the Vietnamese in Japanese employment in the French colony. For the Japanese, holding onto their right to protect this woman was more important than her life.

In this way, competition between the French and Japanese often negatively affected the Vietnamese population. For example, when troubles occurred between the two foreign groups in an eating establishment, it was common for the colonial authorities to order its temporary closure.<sup>22</sup> In other cases, tension between Japanese and French troops could result in the soldiers of both armies being forbidden to leave their barracks, a measure that had repercussions for local restaurants and bars.<sup>23</sup> Some documents display the sentiments of the local population caught up in this tense situation. As one local weekly magazine described:

It's a difficult situation for us Vietnamese. If we have social or economic relations with the Japanese, the French consider us traitors or treat us even worse. If we maintain our relations with the French, the Japanese will be suspicious of our hesitation toward them and hold a grudge against us. What are we to do? Can we avoid any contact? We will just be considered cowards. Will we take either side? Either choice is dangerous. Where do our loyalties lie?<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> About the activities and personality of Komatsu, see Vinh (2001).

<sup>21</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 773. Relations franco-japonaises, incidents.

<sup>22</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 773. Note postale du résident-maire de Dalat au résident supérieur en Annam, 21 septembre 1943.

<sup>23</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 773. Rapport de l'adjoint-chef Faucher, commandant du poste de Dalat, sur un incident entre militaires et marins français et militaires japonais, 28 septembre 1943.

<sup>24</sup> *Indochine, hebdomadaire illustré*, no. 97, 9 juillet 1942.

On the one hand, the French police issued threats to the families of Vietnamese students who attended schools taught in Japanese, which were established in various parts of Vietnam, and pressured those working for Japanese institutions to leave their jobs.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Japanese *kempeitai* (military police) summoned and criticized Vietnamese publishers for producing works featuring “excessive Francophilia” or “insufficient zeal toward Japan.”<sup>26</sup> The Vietnamese population thus suffered from the competition between the French and Japanese.

The repercussions of the Franco-Japanese coexistence did not stop there. The economic agreement between Japan and Indochina obliged the latter to regularly export rice to Japan. In turn, the French colonial authorities wanted to strengthen their control of the rice market, imposing a system of compulsory purchase on the Vietnamese. A crop failure brought on by bad weather in northern Indochina between the harvest of fall 1944 and summer 1945 occurred in tandem with the Allied bombing, the severing of transportation between the north and south, the reduction in food production due to the military demand for the cultivation of palm oil and fiber, and confusion stemming from the transfer of political authority to Japan after the *futsuinshori*. This sequence of events led to a severe famine in northern Vietnam in 1945, which, according to one estimate, caused as many as two million deaths (Vấn Tào and Furuta 1995). The Franco-Japanese coexistence, through the system of dual rule, cast a dark shadow over Indochina.

As these numbers suggest, coexistence between the French and Japanese demonstrated latent instability. To partially camouflage this underlying tension and competition, the collaborative relationship between the two was frequently strengthened in various ways. It was necessary to publicly stress that Franco-Japanese collaboration was beneficial for Indochina, rather than merely a practical choice, in order to divert popular attention from the joint rule’s contradictions. In fact, the headquarters of the Mission Franco-Japonaise in major cities flew flags that read “*Service de Collaboration*,” as well as the flags of the two countries.<sup>27</sup>

For nearly five years, the French and the Japanese sought to coexist by finding a balance between cooperation and competition. Both sides considered their rule over the local residents to be of utmost importance for the success of their respective occupation and governance. Although they navigated their coexistence, they each tried to reinforce relations with the indigenous population.

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<sup>25</sup> Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Futsukoku naisei kannkei zassann: Nannnbu futsuinn seijô hôkoku” [Miscellaneous documents relating to the internal governance of French territories: Reports on the political situation in southern French Indochina], June 2, 1943.

<sup>26</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 680. Bulletin de renseignements sur les activités japonaises, 1942.

<sup>27</sup> ANOM, INF 1226. Relations franco-japonaises.

### Indecisive Relations between the Japanese and Vietnamese

Teaching Japanese was an important way for the Japanese to make contact with locals. Despite some reluctance from the French authorities, the Japanese had opened twelve schools in six cities by the end of 1943. The classes made use of existing schools, billets, and temples, and were held largely at night to accommodate working students. By the end of 1943, more than two thousand students had completed Japanese courses at these schools.<sup>28</sup> In July 1944, five hundred students received their diplomas at a grand graduation ceremony held at the Hanoi cinema. The ceremony was attended by Japanese military and government officials. It included the screening of films on the state of education in Japan and the Greater East Asia Conference that had been held in Tokyo the previous year, to which representatives from Indochina had not been invited.<sup>29</sup>

Vietnamese locals attending Japanese schools told their colleagues that they sought to learn the language for their own commercial or practical reasons, not because they felt close to the Japanese.<sup>30</sup> There appear to have been some students who learned Japanese out of anti-French sentiment,<sup>31</sup> but it can be assumed that they went largely for the opportunity to learn a language for relatively low prices and to gain access to more jobs. The radio program that Japan broadcasted in Indochina included messages like “The English and Americans will be chased out of Southeast Asia, and all industry and commerce will be in the hands of the Japanese” and “If you learn Japanese, you will be able to communicate throughout Asia.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the program emphasized the utility of Japanese and the commonalities of *kanji* (Chinese character) culture between Japan and Vietnam.

Some students were aware that attendance at these schools risked drawing the attention of the French colonial government. The Japanese emphasized that all of these schools had been authorized by the French authorities.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the French authorities even provided opportunities to study Japanese; Governor General Decoux thought that “the best means for us to limit Japan’s experiment [to spread Japanese] is for us to also participate,”<sup>34</sup> and he personally took the initiative to open classes for the general public in Saigon and Haiphong.

With troops garrisoned in Indochina, the local population was employed as translators, typists, drivers, and clerks by the Japanese Army, *kempeitai*, embassy,

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<sup>28</sup> National Archives and Records Administration(NARA), RG 165, Entry 77, Tokyo, December 27, 1943.

<sup>29</sup> ANOM, RSTNF 7080. Remise de diplômes de langue japonaise à Hanoi, 4 juillet 1944.

<sup>30</sup> ANOM, RSTNF 7061. Tonkin, Collaboration franco-japonaise, 15 septembre 1942.

<sup>31</sup> Tokyo Daigaku 1980–1981, *Inntabyû kiroku*, C-6, 134. Interview with Rintarô Kiuchi by Masaya Shiraishi, February 13, 1980.

<sup>32</sup> NARA, RG 165, Entry 77, Box 974, April 16, 1943.

<sup>33</sup> ANOM, RSTNF 7061. Tonkin, Collaboration franco-japonaise, 15 septembre 1942.

<sup>34</sup> MAE, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Asie, 279. Télégramme de Decoux du 15 octobre 1942.

consulates, companies, and newspapers. Military intelligence, the embassy, and consulates made use of “unemployed intellectuals” to acquire all sorts of information about Indochina (Nguyễn 1998, 497). However, Japan was unable to employ large numbers of the local population without French permission. In October 1942, when the Japanese Army employed five hundred Vietnamese workers without permission from the colonial authorities, the French immediately opposed this at the Mission Franco-Japonaise and demanded that they go through the formalities of submitting documents and undergoing physical examinations.<sup>35</sup> The French colonial government was sensitive regarding contact between the Japanese and the local population and sought to monitor the Vietnamese hired by the Japanese.

The Japanese Army was not permitted to employ locals as soldiers, but colonial authorities permitted their deployment as auxiliary *heiho* (support troops) without weapons under certain conditions. The real aim was to raise a military force to fight alongside the Japanese Army if the Allies ever landed in Indochina. The Japanese military authorities sought to recruit as many of these *heiho* as possible. However, they never enlisted as many men as they had hoped; only fifteen hundred to two thousand men were recorded prior to the dissolution of the French government in March 1945.<sup>36</sup> The *heiho* seem to have ranged from troops with relatively high levels of education to those who simply hoped for food and housing, so they were assigned to their units after about three months of intensive Japanese-language training.<sup>37</sup>

Japan’s policy of *seihitsuhoji* prioritized its stability in Indochina while appearing to not actively engage with the local independence movement. However, some Japanese Army, embassy, and consular officials as well as civilians were frequently in contact with locals involved in political activities. The army, specifically the *kempeitai*, approached Vietnamese intellectuals and independence activists to bring influential individuals over to the Japanese side, shielding them from French authorities and helping them go into exile overseas (Tachikawa 2000b, 69–80). The *kempeitai* also established ties with the political-religious Caodaist group, suppressed by French authorities because of its anticolonial tendencies. In exchange for Caodaist information and labor, the *kempeitai* supported Caodaist activities and protected the group from the French colonial government (Tran 1996; Takatsu 2013; 2014).

Both officers and soldiers attempted to appeal individually to the local population. To hire workers, one Japanese officer called out to the headmen of four villages and gave speeches stating that taxes would be lowered the following year when Japan

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<sup>35</sup> MAE, Asie-Océanie, 1944–1955, Indochine, 327. Relations entre le Japon et l’Indochine, 1940–1941.

<sup>36</sup> ANOM, HCI, Conspol 226. Mémoires personnels écrits en réponse au questionnaire des autorités françaises de Hue sur les événements survenus en Indochine en mars 1945, par Masayuki Yokoyama.

<sup>37</sup> Tokyô Daigaku 1980–1981, *Inntabyû kiroku*, C-6, 87–88. Interview with Tomomi Yamaguchi by Masaya Shiraishi, November 19–20, 1979.

would take control of all of Indochina.<sup>38</sup> On another occasion in front of some Vietnamese locals at a hotel in Saigon, a Japanese soldier cracked an egg and mixed the yolk and egg white to show that the combined mixture was “yellow” (Franchini 1977, 121). In such ways, the army frequently intimidated Japan’s support for Vietnamese independence in order to gain local backing.

Among diplomats, too, there were those who proactively engaged with the Vietnamese. Situated between the Japanese governmental policy of *seihitsuhoji* and its stated goal of liberating Asia, their maneuverability was restricted. Many of them were fluent in French, allowing them to communicate with Vietnamese intellectuals and activists. One diplomat at the Japanese embassy in Hanoi explained that while he was not involved because it contravened official policy, many of his colleagues were in frequent contact with Vietnamese nationalists and were providing them support (Ishikawa 1996, 47). At the Japanese consulate in Hue, far from the centers of colonial governance in Saigon and Hanoi, the staff was able to have notable contact with the Vietnamese. Vietnamese seeking to acquire information from sources other than official publications and the French colonial government often entered and exited the consulate.<sup>39</sup>

As long as these diplomats’ participation in the independence movement did not cause excessive friction with the French, it was conducted with the connivance of top Japanese officials. However, as shown by the transfer of Minister Shigenori Tashiro, who was deeply involved with members of the pro-Japanese Việt Nam Phục quốc Đồng minh Hội (Nitz 1984, 116), their activities were limited by official policy. In general, top diplomats “did no more than interact superficially with the Vietnamese” (Nasu 1963, 45).

Some civilians also actively engaged with the Vietnamese. Mitsuhiro Matsushita, a representative of the Japanese company Dainan Koosi, and Mitsuichi Yamane, a Japanese industrialist supervising the Indochina Economic Research Institute, sought contact with numerous Vietnamese nationalists and supported their activities. As Matsushita had contacts with Cường Để, a member of the Vietnamese royal family living in Japan, he used his considerable funds to support the Việt Nam Phục quốc Đồng minh Hội and Caodaism. Moreover, he ordered his employees to shelter the independence activist Ngô Đình Diệm from the French police and assist the flight of the well-known intellectual Trần Trọng Kim from the country (Tachikawa 2000b, 74–76; Takeuchi 2017, 45–62). Caodaism, which was based in Tây Ninh in the south, was an organization with especially strong ties to Japan. It faced increasing oppression from French authorities after 1940, when Matsushita approached the religious organization to provide various forms of assistance, as well as act as a go-between with Cường Để. The Japanese Army, noticing Caodaism’s organizational capability, also made connections with the group through Matsushita. The army mobilized as many as three thousand Caodaists to build

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<sup>38</sup> MAE, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Asie, 255. Télégramme de Decoux au Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 12 septembre 1941

<sup>39</sup> ANOM, HCI, Conspol 226. Mémoires personnels de Yokoyama Masayuki.

wooden ships at the Nichinan Docks, the compensation for which became an important source of funds for Caodaism (Takatsu 2014, 53–54).

Kiyoshi Komatsu, who had lived in France for a long time, and the writer Ōmi Komaki were both proficient in French and had contact with many Vietnamese. Both were close to the nationalists of the pro-Japanese Đại Việt Quốc dân đảng (Nationalist Party of Greater Vietnam), and both were involved with the Japanese Cultural Institute at Hanoi and met often with Vietnamese intellectuals who visited there on the pretext of cultural exchange. French authorities were on the lookout for this sort of interaction. The danger placed on locals who consorted with the Japanese is shown in the request of Komatsu's friend that they meet in places not frequented by the French (Komatsu 1941, 122). Indeed, in Hanoi in the autumn of 1943, an incident took place in which Vietnamese perceived to be pro-Japanese were rounded up by French authorities (Shiraishi 1984, 36). Likewise, most Vietnamese with opportunities to talk with the Japanese were careful about including political subjects in their conversations with them.<sup>40</sup>

Stirring up unnecessary trouble with the French also risked impeding the activities of Japanese firms. Therefore, there was a general sense of hesitation among Japanese civilians to become overly involved with Vietnamese activists. At Komaki's urging, the Hanoi bureau chief of the *Nichi-Nichi Shimbun* made three Vietnamese members of the Đại Việt Quốc dân đảng correspondents for the paper. However, one of them was arrested by French authorities. When the bureau chief learned of this, he removed the accreditation of the other two, fearing that problems would arise with the French authorities. The Vietnamese were very disappointed and subsequently severed their connections with Komaki.<sup>41</sup>

Japan's joint rule with France inevitably made relations with the locals seem half-hearted. Vietnamese dissatisfaction toward the attitudes of the Japanese was shown in a letter sent to the Japanese consulate in Saigon: "If the Japanese are to be protectors of us, the Vietnamese, they must take definitive steps in this direction. They must defeat the French who try to arrest those who want to work for the Japanese army and will hinder the attendance of workers at Japanese schools."<sup>42</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the Japanese is also evident in the memoirs of Cao Đài leader Trần Quang Vinh, who had been protected by the Japanese military for providing more than three thousand laborers for Japanese shipyards and cooperating in the construction of wooden vessels:

Seeing the Japanese attitude toward the various pro-Japanese groupings, in all of them, the majority of people became despondent

<sup>40</sup> Tokyo Daigaku 1980–1981, *Inntabyû kiroku*, C-2, 48–79. Interview with Takuji Kashiwagi by Masaya Shiraishi, July 15, 1979; C-6, 72–73. Interview with Tomomi Yamaguchi by Masaya Shiraishi, November 19–20, 1979.

<sup>41</sup> MAE, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Asie, 255. Télégramme de Decoux, 17 octobre 1941.

<sup>42</sup> ANOM, GGI, Cabinet militaire 690. Bulletin d'information sur les activités japonaises, 1941.

and unwilling to take further action for the Japanese. The Japanese made many promises to the Vietnamese, but there was no independence in sight, and whenever the Japanese made a concession to the French, we would see the arrest of the pro-Japanese patriots, which the Japanese proved unable to prevent. (Takatsu 2013, 109)

Vietnamese employed by the *kempeitai* also questioned why the Japanese were so concerned about their relationship with the French (Marr 1995, 86), and this dissatisfaction occasionally boiled over. A Vietnamese doctor recorded the following in June 1944:

In 1942, many Vietnamese intellectuals had become close to the Japanese. They thought this was their duty to protect the interests of the country. However, these individuals soon realized that the Japanese were frauds, concealing their designs for Japanese imperialism beneath the policy liberating the peoples of East Asia.<sup>43</sup>

A letter penned in July 1944 by a Vietnamese employed by the Japanese Army noted how the treatment of the support troops was getting worse as the war situation deteriorated:

The Japanese were friendly toward us at the beginning. They constantly told us that we were working for Greater East Asia and would win independence for our country.... But the situation changed dramatically.... The Japanese failed to supply us with enough food and began to rudely order us about. Besides, the support troops were not numerous; this showed that the Japanese had already lost any concern for us. At the moment, the number of us who remain pro-Japanese is at most around 20 percent.<sup>44</sup>

When the Japanese based their troops in northern Indochina in September 1940, many Vietnamese found hope in their arrival. According to the administrative reports of Chợ Lớn in Saigon, when the locals received information regarding the defeat of France in Europe and the arrival of the Japanese Army, they monitored the situation with great interest while preserving outward calm.<sup>45</sup> Following the defeat of French colonial forces in Lạng Sơn that occurred when a Japanese unit forcibly crossed the border from China, rumors spread through a section of the population and caused excitement, even though

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<sup>43</sup> ANOM, HCI, Conspol 161. Cochinchine, rapport mensuel du 16 juin au 15 juillet 1944.

<sup>44</sup> ANOM, HCI, Conspol 161. Cochinchine, rapport mensuel du 16 juin au 15 juillet 1944.

<sup>45</sup> TTLT2 (Trung tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia 2: Hồ Chí Minh), Goucoch II A. Rapport sur l'état d'esprit de la population indigène écrit le 27 septembre 1940 par le délégué administratif de la région Saigon-Cholon Tran Van Thi.

the French authorities did not broadcast this incident and sought to strictly control the dissemination of information. There is no doubt that many looked forward to big changes with the arrival of the Japanese. However, Japan's plan for *seihitsuhoji* and coexistence with the French continued unaltered until March 1945. With their avoidance of friction with the French colonial authorities, the wavering relations with the local population, and the worsening living standards during the period of Japanese occupation, the locals' distrust of the Japanese gradually increased. At the same time, Japan loudly publicized its granting of independence to the Philippines and Burma in special issues of the magazine *Tân Á*,<sup>46</sup> making the contradiction between the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere and *seihitsuhoji* even more conspicuous.

Whereas the Japanese attempted to approach the Vietnamese nationalists, they were suspicious of the Vietnamese communists, who sought independence in the near future on their own. As Japan and France considered the Viet Minh a common enemy, the two powers collaborated to suppress their activities. For example, in September 1942, the Japanese Army handed over a Viet Minh activist to French authorities, who executed him.<sup>47</sup>

Some Japanese were aware that the Japanese attitude toward Vietnamese was inconsistent and problematic. Hisashi Yamakawa, a researcher at the South Manchurian Railway Company's East Asiatic Economic Investigation Bureau, noted in an August 1943 report that, as a result of Japanese ambiguity toward the Vietnamese population, of which the French took advantage to restrict Japanese influence, many of the indigenous population who had high hopes at the start of the occupation were left bitterly disappointed (Mantetsu Tōa Keizai chōsakyoku 1943).

Some Vietnamese students who attended Japanese schools asked their Japanese teachers when the Japanese government would grant independence to the Vietnamese as it had to the Burmese. The teachers only dodged the question, saying, "Go and ask Governor Decoux or Marshal Pétain. Neither the Japanese government nor I can answer that question." A Japanese officer responded to a similar question, stating, "There is an agreement between our emperor and Pétain... We cannot do anything ourselves."<sup>48</sup> These people were unable to give a convincing explanation as to why the Japanese persisted in coexisting with the French.

### **New Relationships between the French and Vietnamese**

Faced with a situation in which the Japanese had both public and private contact with the Vietnamese population, what sort of relationship with the locals did the French seek? Japan had appealed to the Vietnamese as fellow members of greater East Asia. While restricting and intervening in such efforts, the French colonial authorities were

<sup>46</sup> *Tân Á*, no. 19, 1943; *Tân Á*, no. 24, 1943.

<sup>47</sup> AN, MI43, 1. Audition du commandant Jouan, commissaire adjoint aux relations franco-japonaises, le 28 mars 1946.

<sup>48</sup> ANOM, RSTNF 6963. Rapport sur la situation du Tonkin, 1943.



forced to reexamine their approach toward the indigenous population. The colonial government under the Vichy regime had begun to call for “work, family, fatherland” over “liberty, equality, fraternity” in Indochina as well as in the metropole. In Vietnam, this government emphasized doctrines of Vichy France—hierarchy, order, authority, and a return to the soil—assuming commonalities with the worldview of traditional Confucianism, and thereby sought to attract the attention of the population (Jennings 2001; Verney 2012). An article in the journal *Indochine, hebdomadaire illustré* stated, “Work, family, fatherland. These slogans are not irrelevant to us Vietnamese. On the contrary, these are similar to the four duties of which Confucius spoke—discipline, economy, governance, and tranquility—which have been ours for many years.”<sup>49</sup> Articles making statements like these proliferated, reinforcing an effort to strengthen French control by narrowing the gap between France and its colony, heeding the views of the locals rather than unilaterally imposing and asserting a French view of civilization.

Under the slogan “France and Indochina drawing together,” the colonial government promoted affinity between the French and the local population on many levels, including everyday life. This promotion was in response to the Japanese emphasis on the gap between East and West in comparison to the unity of eastern Asia. In July 1942, the Federal Council of Indochina reported that “on the basis of a valuable and accurate survey conducted recently in Tonkin, it has been confirmed that the most frequent causes for expressions of dissatisfaction among all levels of Vietnamese society are an absence of consideration, an absence of empathy, or simply an absence of interest by Frenchmen in the Indochinese.”<sup>50</sup> Relations with the locals were revised based on such understanding.

This revision extended to the terms used in official discourse. For example, *colony* implied *exploitation* or an “unstable and impermanent relationship,” and its use was therefore avoided in public.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, *indigène* (indigenous), with its scornful overtones, was banned from official use, and the term *Indochinois* (Indochinese) was used instead. Since the early 1930s French officials had been prohibited from using the familiar pronoun “you” (*tu*) when addressing subordinates. Although the ban had been largely ignored, it was reissued under revision.<sup>52</sup>

Rules were issued not just about vocabulary but concerning the general attitude of the French. The governor general notified each of the regional administrations that “given the appalling custom of speaking to Indochinese in an unpleasant tone,” it was

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<sup>49</sup> *Indochine, hebdomadaire illustré*, 21 novembre 1940.

<sup>50</sup> TTLT1 (Trung tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia 1: Hanoi), Gougal 1307. Conseil fédéral indochinois, session de juillet 1942, moyens propres à favoriser le rapprochement franco-indochinois.

<sup>51</sup> TTLT1, Gougal 1304. Organisation locale de la propagande. Circulaire du chef du service de l’IPP aux chefs administratifs locaux, 6 septembre 1941.

<sup>52</sup> ANOM, RSTNF 6174. Direction des Affaires Politiques. Circulaire du gouverneur général au résident supérieur au Tonkin, 24 juillet 1942.

forbidden to “express anger in your daily conduct and duties or use abusive expressions” in order to improve the behavior of the French toward the indigenous population.<sup>53</sup>

In March 1942, the army swimming pool, which had been open only to the French, started to admit locals.<sup>54</sup> To encourage interaction between the French and Vietnamese, various organizations like sports teams and youth clubs were paid to include the French as well as locals in their activities. As the Boy Scouts of the Indochinese Union had three hundred French citizens among its five thousand members, and the Catholic student and youth wing had two hundred and fifty Vietnamese and French members (Raffin 2005, 74), the number of combined organizations appears to have increased between 1940 and 1945. However, in reality, combined activities were relatively rare. According to historian Pierre Brocheux, who spent his youth in Indochina and was a Boy Scout in Saigon, his troop was largely French except for two Vietnamese boys and two children of mixed race. When the troop went to a camp in Danang, they met another troop of Vietnamese children. Although they shared the same campfire, they sat at a distance from each other, and there was little communication between the two groups. According to Brocheux, there was a significant language barrier. Although a few of the Vietnamese children spoke French, they were reluctant to speak with an accent in front of French children their own age (Larcher-Goscha and Denis 2003, 39–42).

The limited nature of the experiment to bring the French and Vietnamese together across a variety of organizations is evident in the case of the *Légion Française des Combattants* (French Legion of Combatants), the largest political organization in Indochina. This was a political Vichy organization that sought to develop the *révolution nationale* (the official ideology of the Vichy government) and encourage the idolization of Pétain. In 1943, it had more than seven thousand members, but all of them were French. Governor Decoux asked the metropole to clarify whether the *Légion* in the *Afrique Occidentale Française* (Algeria) should admit the locals as members. The reply he received stated that although those two colonies did indeed allow for the entry of locals as members, this was a decision to be made by the governor. As a result, Decoux preserved the *Légion* as an organization admitting only French members. Locals were not admitted and could only be designated “Friends of the *Légion*” (Jennings 2001, 149).

Notwithstanding the slogan to bring France and Indochina closer, there was a gap between rhetoric and reality. Throughout the colonial period, most French had enjoyed their privileged status and could not easily change the habits fostered by their colonial lifestyle. Some essential goods began to be rationed around this time, even for the French, who despised queuing with the local population. The Hanoi administration that fielded their complaints expressed concern that “mingling with the indigenous

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<sup>53</sup> TTLT1, Direction des Finances 3443. Circulaire de Decoux aux chefs de l’administration locale, 18 avril 1942.

<sup>54</sup> Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Reports on the Political Situation in Southern French Indochina.” Miscellaneous documents relating to the internal governance of French territories, May 10, 1943.

population was resulting in the French losing their authority”<sup>55</sup> and so experimented with distributing commodities to the French and locals on different days.<sup>56</sup>

Despite such limitations on everyday contact, the new measures launched by the colonial authorities had the effect of stimulating the identity of the Vietnamese population. In particular, the youth movements that unfolded on a large scale during this time resulted in outcomes that the French had not expected. Back in France, youths had mobilized in large numbers to worship Pétain and realize the *révolution nationale*. Through physical and mental discipline, they were actively trained to sustain the future of the Vichy regime, and this youth movement was introduced into Indochina (Raffin 2005). In Indochina, French and Vietnamese youths were required to attend sports matches, Boy Scout meets, physical training, and other activities together to overcome their “ethnic antagonisms.”<sup>57</sup> The idea was that this new activity, mobilizing both their bodies and their spirits, would fire the interest of the indigenous population and cause amicable relations to develop between them and the French (Ducoroy 1949, 39). By February 1944, around about six hundred thousand young people were participating in the youth movement in Indochina (Raffin 2005, 5).

Connected to this youth movement was the popularity of sports events. The colonial authorities were concerned about the Vietnamese competing with the French because they were unsure about the scope of their abilities, but they planned various events in the hope that it would “keep the Indochinese youth away from Japanese propaganda” (Ducoroy 1949, 39). In light of this large-scale youth movement developed by the French, the Japanese asked the French colonial authorities for permission to also compete in certain athletic events, such as swimming and gymnastics, two sports in which the Japanese excelled. However, seeking to monopolize the attention of youth in Indochina, the French refused the request obliquely, permitting Japanese participation only in events like bicycling and pelota, in which they had little experience. Soon thereafter, the French colonial authorities notified their regional administrators to never accept the Japanese demand to participate in sporting events without the permission of the central government, signifying the exclusion of Japan from the youth movement (Ducoroy 1949, 132–133). Some Japanese were personally invited to and participated in the activities of Vietnamese students,<sup>58</sup> but there was no organized participation prior to the *futsuinshori* in March 1945.

All of these new activities for the indigenous youth—the disciplining of the body, the constant group gatherings, the gymnastics and contests, the marching and scouting—encouraged unity and discipline, kindling their political awareness. The lyrics to a song often sung at Boy Scouts activities in Saigon were, “How do you help make the

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<sup>55</sup> TTLT1, Mairie de Hanoi 3612. Rapport sur l'état d'esprit de la population, 24 janvier 1944.

<sup>56</sup> TTLT1, Mairie de Hanoi 3612. Rapport sur l'état d'esprit de la population, 14 février 1945.

<sup>57</sup> MAE, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Asie, 255. Télégramme de Decoux au Ministre des Colonies, 20 octobre 1942.

<sup>58</sup> Tokyo Daigaku 1980–1981, *Inntabyû kiroku*, C-6, 72–73. Interview with Tomomi Yamaguchi by Masaya Shiraishi, November 19–20, 1979.

country strong? If you can think by yourself, then it's easy. If you can't, you will stay perpetual slaves. Weakness or strength, it depends on you. Everyone, reflect on these words."<sup>59</sup>

Maurice Ducoroy, chief administrator for the youth movement, later admitted that he had recognized the effect this movement would have on the Vietnamese but saw no other way of keeping the youths on the French side and away from Japanese influence.<sup>60</sup> After the end of French rule on March 9, 1945, and the subsequent termination of Japanese occupation with Japan's defeat on August 15, the Vietnamese youths active in this movement played an enormous role in disciplining the Viet Minh forces that opposed the restoration of French rule.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

The complex situation discussed in this article concluded with the *futsuinshori* on March 9, 1945. As it became clear in 1943 that the Axis powers were in an unfavorable situation, the possibility of a *futsuinshori* began to be discussed in Tokyo that fall. Although the Japanese military acknowledged the need for a coup, its implementation was postponed to allow for a full focus on the Philippines campaign. When the Allies liberated France in the summer of 1944, and the Vichy government fell, the Japanese became skeptical about the Indochinese colonial authorities' "cooperation with Japan." Moreover, despite the lack of an Allied plan for landing in Indochina, Japan deemed such a landing imminent in light of intensifying aerial bombing in Indochina and finally decided to eliminate French suzerainty by force in January 1945 (Akagi 1984, 46–48; Shiraishi and Furuta 1976, 10–19).

We can trace the meeting between France, Vietnam, and Japan back to the *Đông Du* movement formed by Phan Bội Châu in the early twentieth century. Nearly two hundred Vietnamese youths from this movement saw hope in Japan as the first Asian country to "modernize" and studied there for the sake of future independence. But the movement was dissolved in 1909 by the Japanese government, which prioritized its relationship with France (Shiraishi 1993). This "imperialist complicity" of France and Japan with regard to Indochina took on added complexity when it came into play again during the Second World War.

Although the French and the Japanese in Indochina had minor conflicts at times, they coexisted while minimizing friction as they prioritized their respective interests. They also explored ways to interact with the Vietnamese, because both foreign groups perceived that gaining local support was a key element determining the fate of their

<sup>59</sup> ANOM, HCI, Conspol 161. Cochinchine, rapport mensuel du 16 décembre 1932 au 15 janvier 1944.

<sup>60</sup> AN, MI43 / 1, La Commission du 13 décembre 1945 pour entendre Ducoroy, Capitaine de vaisseau.

<sup>61</sup> ANOM, Fonds privés 14PA54. Direction générale des études et recherches. Bulletin de renseignements, 4 octobre 1945.

rule and occupation. Some Japanese protected and supported Vietnamese nationalists, but such initiatives inevitably ended up being half-hearted due to the national policy of *seihitsuhoji*. Japan had exercised a level of influence over some Vietnamese intellectuals since the beginning of the twentieth century, but the ambition to gain total support from the local population was constantly obstructed by Japan's own imperialist policies. By contrast, the French tried to approach the Vietnamese based on Vichy ideology, and such new policies had the effect of stimulating their national identity. Thus, the relationships among France, Japan, and Vietnam were constrained due to the intrinsic contradictions of Franco-Japanese coexistence, as well as new developments resulting from the stimulating effect they had on each other.

Meanwhile, the Viet Minh steadily expanded the scope of its activities, taking advantage of the turbulent period when Japanese troops were stationed in Indochina, and gained the support of the population, which suffered under the worsening living conditions caused by Franco-Japanese coexistence. The French system of control was terminated with the *futsuinshori* in March 1945, but Japan had little capability to collect information about Viet Minh activities, which allowed the Viet Minh to decisively expand its influence during this power vacuum. The Viet Minh took control after the defeat of Japan and established the Republic of Vietnam in September 1945. France had lost its suzerainty and, in endeavoring to reestablish its rule in Indochina after the war, it sought to restore a Republican France. In doing so, the new French government denied the previous state of coexistence between Vichy France and Japan, emphasizing that the French had resisted Japanese rule during those five years (Namba 2013).

By April 1946, both the British and Chinese militaries had withdrawn from Indochina, and France started a full-scale comeback, dispatching more and more troops. The Viet Minh reacted furiously to the return of France, and as a result, the First Indochinese War broke out at the end of 1946. France failed to reestablish stable control of Indochina and was forced to end the conflict, withdrawing entirely in 1954. As we have seen, therefore, the beginning of the end of French rule can be traced back to this decisive period of Franco-Japanese coexistence during the Second World War.

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