Negotiating Sovereignty on the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier: Late-Qing Foreign Policy and the Mapping of the Chinese Nation

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation analyzes the joint delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border by French and Qing border commissions over the course of 1885-1887, and its associated trade and border treaties. My research demonstrates that during the latter decades of the Qing dynasty, despite the state's best efforts to direct foreign affairs from the capital, the foreign policy apparatus continued to be decentralized, fragmented, and piecemeal. While historians have thought of the creation of the Zongli Yamen, Qing China's main institution charged with handling and overseeing foreign affairs, as representing a critical moment in the development of foreign policy and the centralization of state power, I show that this institution became another institution among many that could influence foreign policy outcomes—just another layer to the decentralized, and fragmented foreign policy apparatus. Influential officials such as Robert Hart and Li Hongzhang played import roles in influencing foreign policy outcomes, but so too did relatively lesser-known figures like Deng Chengxiu and others. However, I also maintain that decentralization allowed for flexibility and for local officials to make strategic decisions that took into account regional peculiarities and local conditions without uncritically carrying out the directives of high officials in the capital.

I also examine the reaction that the Qing state had to the 'loss' of its former tributary state, Vietnam. I demonstrate that the transformation of Vietnam from a tributary state within the Chinese dominated East Asian world order to a nation state within the French colonial system was much more than symbolic; it was a traumatic event that revealed how Qing statesmen viewed the function of tributaries, Qing China's 'extraterritorial' rights and claims to the territories within those tributary states in the context of the asymmetric East Asian world order prior to the imposition of international law and Westphalian style sovereignty, and the nature of the Qing Empire's borders in the last decades before the founding of the Republic of China. The task facing Qing statesmen was not simply to 'confirm' an existing border, but also required a seismic shift in the way space was conceptualized and governed. Hence, the project to delimit borders with former tributary states marked a significant stage in the transformation of interstate relations in East Asia,

from a 'premodern' China-centered and hierarchical East Asian world order in which, at least according to traditional political theory, all land under heaven belonged to the emperor, to a system of bilateral boundary delimitation undertaken by sovereign states on equal footing as demonstrated in the new border treaties.

This study also demonstrates that during the 1880s, a period in which the Qing state is typically portrayed as being largely ineffective at safeguarding the integrity of its national territory from predatory foreign powers, there is substantial evidence to suggest that this was not always the case, and that there were even some noteworthy attempts—in a few cases successful—at Qing territorial *expansion*, usually at the expense of the former tributary states on China's periphery. Finally, this study shows that the late Qing state, despite its military weaknesses and technological limitations in the field of cartography played an equally important role in the competition for territorial control during the period of high imperialism. Not only did it prove to be adept at the negotiation and delimitation of what would more or less become the modern national Chinese geo-body during a time period typically associated with bureaucratic incompetence and inefficiency, but it was also an active participant in the creation of the epistemological ideals that legitimized the territorial imaginaries of the modern nation state in the late nineteenth century, initiating a revolution in Chinese mapmaking and cartography in the process.

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materials held by one of the world's foremost East Asian language libraries. A special thanks also needs to be extended to Robert Bickers who pointed me towards some invaluable sources and offered key insights into the Maritime Customs Service, both through email correspondence and through his excellent published work. I would also like to express my gratitude to Simon Tan and Sophat Horn who provided friendship, counsel, and a home away from home in Southeast Asia.

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Introduction

The June 9th, 1885 Treaty of Tianjin that brought about the conclusion of the Sino-French War stipulated that China must relinquish its claims to suzerainty over Vietnam and delimit the border with Vietnam within six months. Articles Three and Five dealt with the particulars of border delimitation and the establishment of trade zones along the border. The focus of this dissertation will be on the Qing state's efforts to carry out these two articles, the various policy debates surrounding their implementation (Chapter 1), the border delimitation negotiations and border demarcation survey (Chapters 2 and 3) and the accompanying treaties concerning cross-border trade (Chapter 4).

John Fairbank once posited that a key factor leading to the downfall of the Qing was "its institutional backwardness" in the area of foreign affairs.[1] He argued that it was often the officials in the treaty ports and coastal provinces who had the most knowledge of foreign affairs, customs, and global events, and yet had no say in the development of foreign policy. He even went so far as to say that the Qing lacked any coherent foreign policy at all and dealt with foreigners through traditional strategies of defending the frontiers and using barbarians to control barbarians. Frederick Wakeman agreed with Fairbank on this point and added that even after the Opium War Chinese statesmen continued to practice techniques of barbarian management that had evolved over millennia of relations between the central kingdom and other countries. While many scholars since have gone beyond the picture of late-Qing foreign affairs and statecraft presented by Fairbank and Wakeman (including many of their former students), certain fundamental ideas that they proposed decades ago are still persistent among western historians of China. In this study, I argue that in the 1880s the fragmented Qing foreign policy apparatus was not as monolithic and ideologically driven as Fairbank once suggested, and that it could in fact be quite pragmatic, flexible, and even innovative. I also contend that this period marked a significant departure in how the Qing state viewed sovereignty over territory and people on the Empire's peripheries and saw its role in the unification of the Empire into a concrete national geo-body, which was brought about by numerous challenges raised by the Western Powers across multiple frontiers.

In addition, I will demonstrate that although it did sometimes incorporate strategies and approaches that found their precedent in the distant past—such as the idea of creating buffer territories in frontier areas—such strategies were not necessarily at odds with 'modern' systems employed by the Western Powers, and that Qing foreign policy, at least by the mid-1880s, could actually prove to be remarkably flexible and effective, albeit by employing its own logic. Other scholars have added to our understanding of Qing foreign policy in recent years, notably with Pär Cassel and Matthew Mosca's groundbreaking work that has revealed its fragmented and legally pluralistic nature, and this project is an attempt to make a contribution to our understanding of this aspect of late-imperial Chinese history. This study closely examines how the Qing conducted itself in a manner that integrated frontier experience across the empire, shared bureaucratic knowledge across

[1] See Fairbank, J. K. *The Chinese World Order*. Harvard Univ. Pr., 1974; Fairbank, John K. "China: Time for a Policy." *The Atlantic*, April 1957.

regions, intensified internal communications up and down the channel from Beijing to frontier counties, incorporated knowledge of international law (and sought to reconcile it with 'traditional' notions about the China-centered East Asian world order), and found ways to foster the rise of a new generation of statecraft elite fashioned via their interactions with the Zongli yamen.

Between 1885 and 1887 Qing China carried out border delimitation projects across multiple frontiers on an unprecedented scale. This was the same period during which much of the world was being delimited and demarcated by the western colonial regimes from Asia to Africa, reaching its zenith with the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. While the border delimitation projects on China's frontiers between 1885 and 1887 were part of a global moment in which the carving out of national boundaries was taking place on an unparalleled scale and at a rapid pace, largely a biproduct of the colonial rivalries of high imperialism, not all such delimitation projects in East and Southeast Asia during this period were due to territorial incursion by the Western Powers. Although major border delimitation negotiations were carried out with Russia along China's northern frontier, and with the French and British over the borders of Vietnam and Burma in the Southwest, similar delimitation projects were also carried out during this time period on China's border with Korea and in Tibet. While the border disputes with Korea and Russia have received much scholarly attention in recent years, very little has been published in English on the delimitation projects and territorial disputes in southwest China during this period. This study in part seeks to offer a perspective that will allow us to build a synthesis about boundary making in the late Qing period.

In Chapters One and Two I examine the reaction that the Qing state had to the 'loss' of its former tributary state. I demonstrate that the transformation of Vietnam from a tributary state within the Chinese dominated East Asian world order to a nation state within the French colonial system was much more than symbolic; it was a traumatic event that revealed how Qing statesmen viewed the function of tributaries, Qing China's 'extraterritorial' rights and claims to the territories within those tributary states in the context of the asymmetric East Asian world order prior to the imposition of international law and Westphalian style sovereignty, and the nature of the Qing Empire's borders in the last decades before the founding of the Republic of China. After the dissolution of the tributary relationship with the 'buffer states' on its southwest frontier, the Qing state attempted to create 'buffer zones' *within the boundaries of those states* in order to maintain a land barrier between itself and territories that were newly occupied by the western colonial regimes. Although the Qing state's efforts to turn most of northern Tonkin into a buffer zone was ultimately unsuccessful, their reasoning for attempting to do so reveals much about the logic of frontier defense and how late-Qing statesmen viewed China's relationship with its neighbors. The project to delimit borders with former tributary states marked a significant stage in the transformation of interstate relations in East Asia, from a 'premodern' China-centered and hierarchical East Asian world order in which, at least according to traditional political theory, all land under heaven belonged to the emperor, to a system of bilateral boundary delimitation undertaken by sovereign states on equal footing as demonstrated in the new border treaties. Although such bilateral border delimitation projects had been carried out before—at least as far back as the Northern

Song period—the traditional conception of China's place atop the hierarchical East Asian world order persisted for centuries, and while Qing statesmen continued to employ the language of 'unbounded sovereignty' in their attempt to carve out a buffer zone on the empire's southern frontier, the border delimitation projects of the 1880s represented one of its final death knells.[2]

The task facing Qing statesmen was not simply to 'confirm' an existing border, but also required a seismic shift in the way space was conceptualized and governed. In Chapters One and Two I show that while the 1885 Treaty of Tianjin and the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border required formal recognition of the end of the tributary relationship between the two countries, the logic and rhetoric that served as the foundation of that relationship was not easily dissolved or abandoned by Qing statesmen. Relatedly, analysis of the border delimitation negotiations illuminates certain key differences in Qing and French conceptions of sovereignty, territorial rights, and national identity, which is valuable for our understanding of the solidification of national boundaries and the nascent development of nation states in the East Asian context.

The delimitation and demarcation of the Sino-Vietnamese border was not only a significant event in the history of the formation of the Chinese and Vietnamese national geo-bodies but can also be seen as a case study into the form and function of the late-Qing foreign policy apparatus. Foreign policy during the course of the border delimitation project was not simply directed by the Zongli Yamen, Empress Cixi, or the Grand Council in Peking, but rather it was as much informed and influenced by Qing diplomats in London and Paris, Maritime Customs Officials, provincial officials, and even relatively marginal bureaucrats. By the mid-1880s the recent technological innovation of the telegraph system meant that memorials and other governmental communiqué could be transmitted to and from the farthest reaches of the empire, and even officials serving in distant posts as foreign ambassadors—another quite recent institutional innovation—could transmit intel and opinions to the capital almost instantaneously. However, while this meant that information could be transmitted to and from Peking more efficiently than just a few years prior, and while the Zongli Yamen served as the main switchboard and hub of communication for memoranda concerning foreign affairs, this did not necessarily equate to increased centralized control over foreign policy. On the contrary, this meant that more officials than ever had the ability to transmit their frequently opposing views to the capital. Moreover, even at the highest levels of the Qing foreign policy apparatus there were rivalries among the most powerful and influential officials who sought to safeguard their own interests and positions. However, I also maintain that such rivalries between the disjointed appendages of the Qing foreign policy apparatus could sometimes lead to results that were beneficial to the Qing state. At least during the period covered by this study, the mid-1880s, the piecemeal nature of policymaking within the Qing bureaucracy allowed for

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[2] See: Tackett, Nicolas. *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*. Cambridge. 2017. Nicolas Tackett points out that the Song court carried out a delimitation project with the Ly court in the late eleventh century at the same time that it was conducting a bilateral border delimitation project on its northern border. Here, I have also utilized his notion of "unbounded sovereignty" for describing the territorial concept of 'all under heaven.'

a certain amount of flexibility and spontaneity that would perhaps have been difficult, if not impossible, in earlier periods.

In Chapters Two and Three I describe and analyze the acts of resistance and violence carried out against the French border commission over the course of the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border. I argue that none of the incidents under consideration stemmed from nascent anti-colonialist movements such as the 'Cần Vương', or 'Save the King' movement in Vietnam. Rather than being driven by a sense of patriotism or burgeoning nationalism, I contend that the nonviolent forms of resistance such as blocking roads, intercepting messages, and cutting telegraph lines and the violent attacks on the French commission were likely acts of collective resistance that had more to do with safeguarding the economic interests of local powerholders. The clashes between the French border commission and the frontiersmen were indicative of the tensions between two incompatible political economies; the freewheeling and largely unregulated frontier economy that could exist only at the limits of state power and control on one hand, and the regulated capitalist economy of western imperialism on the other. In sum, the interests of the state clashed with the interests of borderlanders and 'local strongmen', and the latter groups reacted violently to preserve and defend those interests and to safeguard their autonomy. Hence, the late 1880s was a moment of state building on both sides of the Sino-French Vietnamese border, with both states expanding their reach into the region by drawing up boundaries, and with a local community of border-crossing interests resisting such developments on either side of the new lines of demarcation.[3]

I also aim to demonstrate that during the 1880s, a period in which the Qing state is typically portrayed as being largely ineffective at safeguarding the integrity of its national territory from predatory foreign powers, there is substantial evidence to suggest that this was not always the case, and that there were even some noteworthy attempts—in a few cases successful—at Qing territorial *expansion*, usually at the expense of the former tributary states on China's periphery. In Chapters Three and Four, I show that several key aspects of the standard narrative of the Qing in decline—the granting of extraterritorial privileges to foreign nationals, and the creation of semi-colonial enclaves on the eastern coast—can be seen in a new light when we consider the precedents of China's own history of extraterritoriality within the borders of neighboring tributary states, examples of its own economic "semi-colonies" in Mainland Southeast Asia, and instances of the Qing empire incorporating territory that had previously been outside of its control. In sum, several of the main arguments of this dissertation seek to challenge certain key aspects of the long-standing narrative of the late-Qing period as being one of stagnation, decline, corruption, and impotency in the face of challenges to China's territorial integrity and sovereignty by the Western Powers. While certain elements of the oft-repeated narrative of the 'Century of Humiliation' are impossible to refute—extraterritoriality, dictation of foreign and domestic

[3] Nicolas Tackett also highlights the phenomenon of "divergent interests between borderlanders and the central government" in *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*. Cambridge. 2017. For more on "local strongmen" see Meskill, *Chinese Pioneer Family*. For Chinese borderlands see Lattimore, "Frontier History."

trade policy by predatory foreign governments, etc.—our long acceptance of this narrative has obscured certain important features of late-Qing governance and diplomacy, and this study in part seeks to correct that.

Finally, this study is also an attempt to situate the Qing border delimitation projects within the broader global context of the mapping and boundary delimitation projects of the period by the imperialist powers. While Peter Perdue and Mark Elliot have contributed much to our understanding of the role that the seventeenth-and-eighteenth-century Qing state played as a competitor in the contest for hegemony on its northwestern and northeastern frontiers, respectively, this study will demonstrate that the late Qing state, despite its military weaknesses and technological limitations in the field of cartography played an equally important role in the competition for territorial control during the period of high imperialism. Not only did it prove to be adept at the negotiation and delimitation of what would more or less become the modern national Chinese geo-body during a time period typically associated with bureaucratic incompetence and inefficiency, but it was also an active participant in the creation of the epistemological ideals that legitimized the territorial imaginaries of the modern nation state in the late nineteenth century, initiating a revolution in Chinese mapmaking and cartography in the process. In Chapter Four I will demonstrate that the resulting transition from 'traditional' cartographic representation to modern maps was spurred on by the transformation of the tributary system, and a concurrent reconceptualization of Qing imperial space.

To be sure, the 1880s marked a crucial stage in China's state building process, and in the formal incorporation of vast frontier zones into the Chinese national geobody through border delimitation, demarcation, and international recognition of Qing territorial claims at the edge of empire. This process is what Peter Sahlins has referred to as "the territorialization of the nation."[4] Hence, this study seeks to enhance our understanding of the process by which national geo-bodies were formed in Asia during the high imperialist period of the late nineteenth century and expand on the work of Thongchai Winichakul and others who have argued that the shapes of the national geo-bodies of modern Asian states were typically formed—and subsequently inherited by later governments—through an arbitrary process of border delimitation carried out and imposed by the Western Powers.[5]

[4] Sahlins, Peter. Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

[5] See: Winichakul, Thongchai. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii, 1994.

Chapter 1
From Tributary Frontier to International Border

Introduction

In this chapter I will a) cover the period following the ratification of the June 9th, 1885 Treaty of Tianjin leading up to the border delimitation negotiations beginning in January 1886 and b) offer an analysis of the policy debate surrounding the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border among various individuals and factions that utilized official communication networks and sought to wield their influence within the Qing foreign policy apparatus. Before delving into an analysis of the development of Qing policymaking in regard to the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border it is first necessary to offer a brief summary of the historical development of the territory in question, and of the events surrounding the signing of the Protocol of Paris and the Treaty of Tianjin that brought about the end of the Sino-French conflict and official recognition of the French Protectorate in Tonkin by the Qing Empire.

Historical Development of the Sino-Vietnamese Border and the Sino-French Crisis of 1882-1885

Most of northern Vietnam from the Red River Valley up to and including modern-day Guangdong province was ruled by various Chinese empires from the first century CE until the tenth century. Called Jiaozhi province (*Giao Chỉ* in Vietnamese), it was reduced to an area approximately the size of present-day northern Vietnam in the fifth century.[6] After the fall of the Tang dynasty the province broke away from Chinese control and remained independent except for a brief period in the fifteenth century during the Ming dynasty.[7] While Ming rule was short lived, lasting roughly two decades, the dynasty left its mark on Dai Viet (as the territory of northern Vietnam was then known), with the latter adopting a Ming bureaucratic structure and system of civil service exams, as well as its advanced military technology.[8] The Le state that arose in the wake of the Ming retreat used these institutional innovations and the idea of a superior and civilizing 'Han' culture to justify their own imperial conquest and colonial expansion into Cham and Khmer lands to the south and reaching as far as present-day Burma to the West.[9] Roughly two centuries before Jiaozhi gained independence from the Middle Kingdom, a powerful neighboring kingdom to the north known as Nanzhao (南詔, succeeded by the Dali Kingdom in 937) had arisen from within the borders of Yunnan province and declared its own independence. While the Mongols brought an end to this polity in the middle of the thirteenth century, much of the region regained a level of de facto autonomy and independence when the tusi system of

[6] Goscha, Christopher E. *Vietnam: A New History*. Basic Books, 2016.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Goscha, p. 30, p. 414.
[9] Goscha, p. 32

indirect rule was revived following the Ming conquest of Yunnan and the Sino-Frontier borderlands would survive well into the twentieth century.[10] Another independent polity, albeit relatively short lived, was the Nung Kingdom established by Nung Tri Cao in the region of present-day Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn provinces.[11] While Nung was ultimately thwarted by Song military forces, he would go on to inspire later state-building projects on the periphery of the Chinese and Vietnamese states.

Prior to the demarcation of the Sino-Vietnamese border in the late nineteenth century, no Chinese state had ever thoroughly demarcated the boundaries between China and the lands to the south.[12] This is reflected, for example, in official maps that predate the 1880s, which often lacked precise cartographic representations of the boundaries of imperial China. However, there were attempts to mark frequently used border crossings that date back as early as the Han Dynasty. The Han general Ma Yuan (14 BC-49 AD) and Tang dynasty regional military governor Ma Cong both erected bronze pillars that marked the Zhennan Pass (today called *Youyiguan*, or "Friendship Pass"), a lively trading post on the border of Guangxi and Vietnam near the towns of Pingxiang and Lạng Sơn. This would perhaps make it one of the oldest known 'border crossings' in history. Ming and early Qing era maps sometimes marked the locations of these pillars, but borderlines were not clearly demarcated. The early Qing state did build walls, trenches, and fences between the hills in some more densely populated areas, which were possibly measures to prevent border crossing, and passes were sometimes marked on early Qing maps with details about the number of soldiers and militiamen stationed at each patrol station, and the roads that connected the passes and villages were usually represented by red dotted lines. While a Yunnan gazetteer contains descriptions of eight border passes, when the Qing state attempted to survey the areas where the border markers had been placed, they were all either missing or deteriorated.[13] This is perhaps some indication of how little attention the court had paid to southern border defense during a time when it was putting many of its already strained resources into maritime defense on the eastern coast, and into securing its borders in the Northwest. Prior to the arrival of the French colonial regime in the nineteenth century, the Sino-Vietnamese land border had remained relatively stable since the tenth century when Vietnam emerged from Chinese control, though more research needs to be undertaken into how the Three Feudatories may have impacted the border region or the extent to which the Qing state managed it after they were dissolved.

In 1802, after decades of civil war, the Nguyễn Empire united most of the area of present-day Vietnam, though their control over many areas of the country continued to be challenged up until the time of French colonial expansion into the region. Originally based

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[10] Goscha, p. 29.

[11] See: Anderson, James. The Rebel Den of Nung Tri Cao: Loyalty and Identity Along the Sino-Vietnamese Border. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.

[12] Nicolas Tackett suggests that efforts to delimit the southern frontier were made during the Northern Song, but there is scant extant evidence to tell us about the nature and extent of those efforts. And, in any event, by the nineteenth century when delimitation of the border was carried out by the Qing state there appears to be no indication that anyone—the Qing border commissioners included—had any knowledge of this earlier precedent.

[13] *Yunnan Tongzhi Gao*, 16th year of the Daoguang reign.

in the south, the Nguyễn state embarked on an unprecedented colonial project to expand into the far south and far north, carried out a system of violent forced assimilation of non-Viet groups, and attempted to directly administer many areas of Tonkin (northern Vietnam) that had historically been outside the control of the imperial state. Harsh assimilationist policies led to widespread resentment and violent resistance from non-Viet peoples, northerners, and non-Viet groups, and the legitimacy of the Nguyễn rulers was far from uncontested at the inauguration of the French colonial project.[14] Many persecuted Catholics, Muslims, and other marginalized groups fled to the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands beginning in the 1830s during the assimilationist campaigns of the second Nguyễn emperor Minh Mang, and there were dozens of rebellions against the imperial government, often led by non-Viet groups from the central and northern highlands. The areas of northern Tonkin, or Bắc Kỳ in Vietnamese, near the Chinese border proved especially difficult to administer, and even during the reign of Minh Mang who was obsessed with assimilation and unification the Nguyễn state was ultimately forced to accept that direct rule over most of this territory was impossible.[15] During the mid-nineteenth century at the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion, tens of thousands of refugees sought safety in the highlands of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier. These included ethnic Tai, Hmong, and Chinese, as well as former Taiping rebels after the revolt had been put down. The borderlands of Tonkin also later provided refuge for anti-colonialists from Phan Đình Phùng to Hồ Chí Minh. Well into the twentieth century the region of Southwest China and Northern Vietnam would continue to be one of contested and overlapping sovereignties (more on this in Chapter Two), with dozens of chiefdoms and confederations vying for autonomy and independence from both Chinese and Vietnamese rule.

While the French had set their eyes on colonial expansion on mainland Southeast Asia since the early nineteenth century, then known in the West as Indochina or the Indochinese Peninsula, efforts to get a foothold in the region started in earnest in the 1850s. In 1862 France signed the Treaty of Saigon with Vietnam, securing trade rights, allowing French missionaries to live and proselytize in Vietnam, and allowing France to take manage all foreign relations for the country. By 1874 the French secured another agreement with the Vietnamese Court that granted France nearly full control of the country. The treaty outlined the 'independence' of Annam (central Vietnam), however the court in Huế continued sending regular tribute missions to Peking and the Qing court refused to acknowledge the validity of the treaty. China's claims to sovereignty over its tributary was far more than symbolic, and the Qing were eventually compelled to go to war to determine the fate of Vietnam. By the Spring of 1882 a French battalion under the command of Henri Rivière had occupied the city of Hanoi, the economic and administrative capital of northern Vietnam, but were unable to advance up the Red River as Liu Yongfu's Black Flag troops controlled most of the surrounding territory.[16]

In November of 1882 as China and France moved closer towards war over the issue, Li Hongzhang commenced negotiations of a treaty that would ultimately end in failure with

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[14] Goscha, Christopher E. *Vietnam: A New History*. Basic Books, 2016.
[15] Goscha, p. 421
[16] *Wright, Stanley F. Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 508.

the French envoy Frédéric Albert Bourée. The original agreement stipulated that France would be permitted to carry out cross-border trade in the town of Lào Cai (then firmly under the control of the Black Flags), that China was to install a customs house there, and that trade would be carried out according to the regulations applicable in the coastal treaty ports.[17] The final clause of the failed treaty also called for the creation of a buffer zone between the lower Red River Valley and the Chinese border. The buffer zone was to be divided into two sections, with the French controlling the southern half and the Chinese controlling the northern half.[18] Even after treaty negotiations broke down, the Qing state would continue to try and institute a buffer territory within the boundary of Tonkin over the next several years.

Jules Ferry, one of the most vocal advocates for colonial expansion in French politics became Prime Minister in February 1883. Within months of the Ferry's rise to power, the French naval officer Henri Rivière was killed by the Black Flags in a battle just outside Hanoi and from then on, the French resolved to take Tonkin by force. Li Hongzhang received orders to proceed to the Sino-Vietnamese frontier to command the Qing forces, but ultimately refused.[19] In June 1884, the second Treaty of Hue acknowledged French control of the whole of Dai Nam (the Vietnamese court's name for Vietnam), including the rights of the protectorate government to handle all foreign affairs, and forced the Vietnamese court to melt down the imperial seal symbolizing tributary relations that had been granted to Gia Long during the Jiaqing reign.[20] This was more than a symbolic act; the dislodging of Vietnam from the asymmetric 'East Asian order', or the 'Chinese world order', would have a profound and immediate impact on the country and its people who were now a part of the nation-state system imposed on the region by the western imperialist powers. However, the Qing government still refused to recognize French claims in Tonkin and relinquish Vietnam's tributary status, and Zeng Jize, then the Qing ambassador to France, and the Zongli Yamen insisted that the 1884 treaty be retracted.[21] Meanwhile, officials associated with the *qingliu* faction (清流當) and the 'war party' began advocating for all-out war with France and a full-scale invasion of northern Vietnam.

Just as the two sides were teetering on the brink of war Empress Cixi carried out a coup d'état in the capital; she removed Prince Gong from his leadership position in the Zongli Yamen and supplanted him with Yi Kuang (soon to be elevated to the rank of Prince, as Prince Qing), a protégé of Prince Chun, thereby weakening that institution, and completely gutted the Grand Council. Zeng Jize was also replaced at his post in Paris by the hardliner Xu Jingcheng, though Zeng retained his post as the Chinese emissary in London. After the negotiations broke down, Deng Chengxiu and his colleagues within the so-called *qingliu* faction advocated for war more fervently than ever, and Li's efforts to negotiate peace became more difficult since he could not appear to give into French demands. As the

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[17] Eastman, Lloyd E. *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy 1880-1885*. p. 60. Harvard U.P., 1967.
[18] Eastman, Throne, p. 60
[19] For a detailed analysis of the Sino-French conflict and Li Hongzhang's part in the negotiations see Eastman, Lloyd. *Throne and Mandarins*.
[20] Goscha, p. 70.
[21] Wright, Stanley F. *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 507.

conflict escalated, negotiations reached a new phase as Li Hongzhang, who had advised the Qing court against going to war over Vietnam, and François Fournier negotiated for peace. One of the main points of contention was that the Black Flags were not to be removed from the region. This remained one of the key stipulations right up until the ending of hostilities after the Black Flag forces were all but completely decimated.[22] It is clear that, if the tributary relationship between Vietnam and China was indeed doomed, Peking planned on supporting Liu Yongfu as the head of a sort of semi-autonomous military zone; it was more desirable to have the unruly warlord and his followers retain control over the frontier, than to allow a predatory western power gain access to Chinese territory and trade in the interior of the southern provinces.[23] Hence, Peking found it preferable to afford Liu some amount of autonomy and influence within the area under his control than remove him and be obliged to share a common border with the French. In other words, Liu's Black Flag fiefdom—presumably more loyal to Peking than Hanoi—would serve as a buffer between China's southern provinces, and French-controlled Vietnam.

On May 11th, 1884 with Gustav Detring as an intermediary, Li Hongzhang negotiated and signed the 'Li-Fournier Convention', which stipulated the immediate withdrawal of Qing troops from Tonkin and made no mention whatsoever of Chinese suzerainty over Vietnam, enraging the 'war party' and those associated with the *qingliu* faction.[24] However, within days of the signing of the protocol, which stipulated that a formal treaty be drafted that would officially put an end to hostilities, the French suffered a humiliating defeat in the Vietnamese border town of Lạng Sơn. The French then took on an even more hardline stance in the negotiations, and demanded a large indemnity of 250,000,000 francs, which they later reduced to 80,0000,000 francs if China agreed to evacuate Tonkin immediately.[25] As far as most voices within the Qing foreign policy apparatus were concerned, an indemnity was out of the question, particularly after a French fleet had destroyed the Qing naval yard in Fuzhou and launched an assault on Keelung in Taiwan. Ultimately, the Throne charged Robert Hart, the Inspector General of the Maritime Customs Service, with covertly carrying out renewed negotiations to broker peace with France. Among other things, Hart had originally hoped to maintain Vietnam's tributary status in the final agreement.[26] Along with Imperial Maritime Customs Service Commissioner James Campbell, Hart carried out the negotiations with Jules Ferry in Paris in secret with the tacit approval of Cixi and the Grand Council.

This study in part seeks to shed light on the nature of Hart's relationship in particular, and the Maritime Customs Service in general, to the formation of foreign policy in the late-Qing period. As I will highlight in greater detail below, Hart would prove to be an influential force in the formation of Qing policy in the period following the Sino-French

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[22] *Qing Guangxu chao Zhong Fa jiaoshe shiliao*, 19:19b, dcmt. 770; Eastman, *Throne*, p. 141.
[23] Eastman explains that Peking had "encouraged Liu Yongfu to attempt the recapture of Hanoi, promising him and his men extraordinary rewards if they succeeded in the undertaking." (Eastman, Throne, p. 88, from Qing Guangxu chao Zhong Fa jiaoshe shiliao, 7:8b, dcmt. 218.)
[24] *Wright, Stanley F. Hart and the Chinese Customs*, pp. 512.
[25] Ibid.
[26] *Zhong Fa Yuenan Jiaoshe dang* Vol. 2, p. 874, dcmt. 434; Zhong Fa Yuenan Jiaoshe dang II, pp. 897-900, dcmt. 451; Eastman, Throne, p. 82.

conflict, and he assigned his younger brother James, at the time his likely successor for the position of Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, for key advisory positions in a number of border delimitation and trade commissions over the next few years. As we will see through an analysis of the border delimitation negotiations, the elder Hart wielded significant influence on policy makers in Peking and he played a not inconsequential role in Qing foreign affairs during this period, perhaps occupying a position of influence almost equal to Li Hongzhang. In fact, Hart and Li were something of rivals; when Hart considered leaving the IG post at the Maritime Customs when he was offered the position of British Ambassador to China, Li hoped to install his protégé Gustav Detring as Hart's successor. The latter feared that this would enable Li to promote his own interests and wield greater influence in Peking—to the detriment of the Customs Service and to the Empire—and ultimately decided that his beloved Maritime Customs Service, and China, was better off if he remained at the helm, which he did until his retirement.[27]

Hart and other high ranking Maritime Customs officials could, and frequently did, memorialize the Throne on a wide variety of issues ranging from foreign and domestic policy, to education, modernization, and the development of China's nascent industries such as railroads and mining. Hart is an often-misunderstood figure; his Customs Service has sometimes even been portrayed—rather inaccurately—as a pillar of the informal British Empire in Asia. While proud of the influence that British subjects wielded within governmental circles, Hart was a dedicated employee of the Qing government and upheld the Customs Service as much more than just an efficient bureaucratic entity responsible for regulating trade and collecting revenue and was determined to make it a beacon of reform and modernity, which he hoped would benefit both the Dynasty and the Chinese people. In Hart's own words: "The Service which I direct is called the Customs Service, but its scope is wide and its aim is to do good work for China in every possible direction: it is indeed a possible nucleus for a reformed administration in all its branches and for improvement in all the industries of the Empire."[28]

Hart also had his finger on the pulse of life in the Legation Quarter, and frequently hosted garden parties and dinner engagements attended by prominent members of the western expatriate diplomatic community in Peking. He held regular 'jam sessions' in his parlor with musically inclined Customs Service employees and foreign diplomats, and it was during such get-togethers that Hart was able to glean the inside scoop so to speak from half-inebriated western envoys and diplomats.[29] Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that not much went on in Peking without Hart knowing about it—from the pettiest gossip, to critical matters of the state, both foreign and domestic. Hence, Hart's unique position between both worlds of Qing officialdom on the one hand, and the Western Powers in China on the other, made him an especially invaluable resource to the Zongli Yamen and the Imperial Court.

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[27] Wright, Stanley F. *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 536; Eastman, *Throne*, p. 94.
[28] Letter 550 [Z/243], The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1, p. 619.
[29] Robert Hart Diaries, April 5th, 1886.

He enjoyed imperial favor with Cixi—who had awarded him with the imperial insignia of the Double Dragon for his handling of the Sino-French dispute of 1884-1885—and he likewise held the Empress Dowager in high esteem. Moreover, despite personal rivalries with other high-ranking officials such as Zeng Jize, Li Hongzhang, and Li's German advisor Gustav Detring (coincidentally, also a Customs Service Officer and, technically, Hart's subordinate), he was respected and well-liked in both Qing officialdom, and among the expatriate diplomatic community in Peking. Although Hart technically reported to the Zongli Yamen on numerous matters, that institution often sought out and implemented his advice and recommendations on various issues related to foreign policy and diplomacy. The Zongli Yamen consulted Hart at length on topics as wide ranging as infrastructure projects, opium regulations, treaty negotiations with the Western Powers, the development of an Empire-wide postal service (which Hart himself had first proposed) and consulted him throughout the border delimitation project and concurrent negotiations that are the central topic of this study. Qing officials frequently visited him in his Peking office—just steps away from the Imperial Palace—to solicit his opinion on current affairs and the Zongli Yamen often relied on him for information concerning the actions of foreign governments. He also offered tutelage to the newly appointed head of the Yamen, Prince Qing, on a wide variety of topics concerning neighboring countries such as Burma, Russia, Vietnam, and Tibet. In addition to advising the Zongli Yamen on numerous foreign and domestic policy issues, Hart sometimes even assumed certain secretarial duties, assisting with translation and correspondence between that institution and various western diplomatic officials. In addition, Hart could—and sometimes did—bypass the Yamen altogether, exercising his privilege of memorializing the Throne directly.

While Hart proved willing to engage in a wide variety of foreign policy issues, he was careful about which responsibilities he agreed to take on. In response to being saddled with handling the British annexation of Burma, for example, Hart told the Yamen that he was worried that he may get his hand hurt "between upper and nether mill stone," to which a Yamen member replied, "your analogy is wrong; you are the axis or pivot on which the wheels turn!"[30] Relatedly, Hart once lamented to James Campbell, the Customs Service representative in Peking and Hart's closest confidant that, "I am so worried with Yamen affairs that I cannot keep up current Customs' work," and complained in another that, "standing on that 'rolling ball' the Yamen, I find it difficult to keep so many 'balls' in the air at the same time."[31]

It is also worth noting that, while Hart saw Li Hongzhang and his advisor Gustav Detring—technically Hart's underling in the Customs Service—as rivals for power and influence, he respected their abilities and their efforts at the modernization of China. Moreover, he much preferred when Li handled important matters of state than when the Yamen was left to its own devices and cowed in by the more conservative elements of the mandarinate and literati. It was the literati who vied for influence in the capital who Hart saw as the greatest threat to the development and modernization of China, and to the vitality of the dynasty. During the Sino-French controversy of 1884, Hart lamented: "The

[30] Robert Hart Diaries, November 13th, 1885.
[31] Letter 544 [Z/237], *The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1*, p. 612; Letter 626 [Z/318], *The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1*, p. 685.

Chi-ye [the Guangxu Emperor's father, Prince Chun] is all for fighting (they say) and his power is so great and so growing that the *Liu-ye* [Prince Gong] has to hold back and keep silent; Prince Gong silent, Li [Hongzhang] and other sensible men have no backers and thus the interests of this big Empire are in the hands of conceited and ignorant literary folk, and to manage them is out of the question. 'To give them rope' is the only way to teach them, but to let them experiment on such an affair [the Sino-French conflict] and at such a juncture may mean terrible disaster for the country at large, and it is doubtful whether the enlightenment of its 'bookworms' would not be paid for too dearly!"[32]

"Bookworms" aside, Hart put much of the blame for the escalation of the Sino-French conflict on his rivals, Li and Detring, who he felt had botched the negotiations, giving France all that it wanted and had put China at a serious disadvantage in future negotiations.[33] Hence, from this point on he was determined to do whatever he could to reach a peace settlement with Ferry that would be acceptable to both sides, and succeeded in convincing the Court to permit him to handle the negotiations surrounding the ratification of the Li-Fournier convention without outside intervention, and to do so in secret, particularly without the knowledge of Detring and Li Hongzhang. While it is apparent that Hart respected Li, he was also evidently jealous of the autonomy and freedom of initiative that he held at his post in Tianjin. Hart also had a special relationship with the Zongli Yamen and felt that it was that body—and not Li—which was the proper channel for conducting foreign affairs, despite its weakened position after the impeachment of Prince Gong.[34] This is likely partially due to his office's physical proximity to the Yamen and the influence that he held over that office. Hart lamented to Campbell during the negotiations that "I am condemned to live in Peking, *where the usual action of the Government is confined to putting its veto on outside proposals*, *where initiative is impossible*, and where—with so many Boards and so many officials personal influence cannot be depended on. Li rather looks on me as one of his critics, and not liking me to be too strong, he plays off my own subordinates against me."[35] Hart, an official ever concerned with order, efficiency, and centralized control—within his own Customs Service, and within the Qing government in general—bemoaned the decentralized nature of the Qing foreign service apparatus, and resented the freedom of initiative in matters of international affairs enjoyed by officials outside of Peking, i.e. outside his own sphere of influence and the control of the Zongli Yamen. Even worse, Hart complained to Campbell, while "responsible men" with official positions conducted their business according to tradition, "irresponsible men" such as scholars and low-ranking officials were permitted to constantly memorialize and criticize decisions made in the capital concerning affairs of state, and it was such men who were to blame for the misunderstandings that had led to the outbreak of war.[36] Likewise, Hart did not feel that diplomats such as Xu Jingcheng or Zeng Jize should have a significant hand in the foreign policy decisions taking place in the capital, so he surely

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[32] Letter 424 [Z/128], *The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1*, p. 474.
[33] Hart to Campbell, April 27th, 1884, Wright, p. 516.
[34] Ibid.
[35] C.A. Hart to Campbell, June 10th, 1884, Wright*.* p. 516.
[36] *Wright,* p. 524)

would have been delighted to learn that during the negotiations over the Li-Fournier convention the Court completely ignored most of Xu's memorials on the matter.

Hence, while many officials outside the capital tried to make their voices heard, the political climate in Peking typically dictated who was being listened to. Notably, the project to build the infrastructure for a national telegraph line was launched in 1882 under the direction of Li Hongzhang, and it was only during the Sino-French conflict that the southern provinces were linked to the capital in order to transmit information from the battlefield.[37] This made it possible for both "responsible men" and "irresponsible men" in the provinces to transmit their opinions on foreign policy matters to the capital in real time. In addition, while the prestige of the Zongli Yamen was significantly reduced following the removal of Prince Gong, it did serve as the central terminus for many foreign affairs-related telegrams.[38] It was within the context of a multitude of voices vying to influence Peking's policies during the Sino-French conflict that Hart attempted to carry out his negotiations with the French envoy in secret.

Hart approached the negotiations with Jules Ferry through his trusted friend and fellow Customs official James Campbell. He first recommended several interpretive articles be added to the Li-Fournier convention, one referring to the term "prestige", which would be clarified to mean that the tribute rendered by the king of Vietnam to Peking be allowed to continue, albeit optionally, and another clarifying "frontier" to mean a line drawn east and west from south of Lạng Sơn to Mong Cai with everything north of the line being ceded to China. However, Ferry found both of these suggestions to be unacceptable.[39] The second suggestion appears to have originated with the secretary of the Chinese consulate in London (more on that below). Ferry finally agreed to waive the previous requirement for an indemnity so long as they were granted some special commercial benefits, and Hart was able to convince him that the commercial prospects from possession of Tonkin and the promise of cross-border trade with China represented just such an advantage. The agreement was finalized on April 4th, 1885, and the accompanying treaty ratified a few months later on June 9th. Li was not happy that the negotiations had not been entrusted to him, but in the end he appeared to be satisfied with the results and was ultimately entrusted with ratifying the convention and working out the rest of the details with the French envoy Patenôtre for what ultimately became the June 9th Treaty of Tianjin. Deng Chengxiu, one of the members of the Zongli Yamen who would later be named the head of the Sino-Vietnamese border delimitation commission, was appointed to assist with the final stage of negotiations in order to ensure that Li did not give in to any last-minute French demands.[40] The treaty stipulated that China must relinquish all claims to sovereignty over Vietnam, that the Qing court must recognize all of the rights granted to France through previous treaties signed by France and the Vietnamese court in Huế, and

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[37] Halsey, Stephen R. *Quest for Power: European Imperialism and the Making of Chinese Statecraft*.
[38] As we will see in Chapters Two and Three, use and control of telegraph lines could have potentially subversive effects on state directives
[39] *Wright, Stanley F. Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 518.
[40] *Zhongfa zhanzheng*, v. 7, p. 418; Eastman, *Throne*, p. 201.

that the border between the two countries should be delimited within a period of six months.

Hart and Campbell's success in negotiating the agreement almost certainly raised their prestige and that of the Customs Service within the upper echelon of Qing foreign affairs policymakers. The diplomatic maneuvering surrounding the peace negotiations during the Sino-French conflict is instructive of the how the Qing foreign affairs apparatus functioned; it was a fractured and disjointed system, fraught with rivalries among dissenting voices, all with their own interests in mind. However, while it was far from a streamlined, centralized organization in the way that Robert Hart had wished it was, it could regardless produce results that were desirable and beneficial to Peking. While the Qing state was ultimately compelled to relinquish its claims of suzerainty over Vietnam with the June 9th treaty, it also kept French expansionist ambitions in check and left the Qing in a favorable position heading into the subsequent border delimitation negotiations.

After the conclusion of the Sino-French conflict there was a pronounced backlash against many of the officials who had advocated for going to war, and a change in the political climate in the capital. Deng Chengxiu, one of the officials who had been elevated from his position as an Imperial Censor to a position within the Zongli Yamen, was 'demoted' so to speak by being dispatched far from the capital on the Qing commission tasked with the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border. And, in a strange turn of events shortly after the details of the peace agreement had been finalized with the French government, the French military was overwhelmed and repelled from their position in Lạng Sơn by Chinese forces, and when it was apparent that more loans would have had to be taken out to continue the war, which the French National Assembly refused to greenlight, Ferry was compelled to resign from his position as the Prime Minister. Because the most vocal advocate for expansion in Tonkin was now no longer at the helm of colonial policy, France's future in the region suddenly became uncertain.

However, as it would turn out, although Ferry's opponents had used the setbacks to France's expansion in Vietnam as a pretext to oust him from power, once at the helm of the Third Republic they proved to be every bit as committed to the colonial endeavor as Ferry's government had been. Of course, at the time, no one—including many observers in France, much less the Qing statesmen who were attempting to calculate France's next moves—could predict what changes the new government in Paris was going to make with regards to Tonkin. Several French newspapers had reported that there was a significant contingent within the French National Assembly that advocated pulling out of Tonkin, and possibly even abandoning the colonial project in Vietnam altogether. Hence, in the months leading up to the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border there was a looming uncertainty among Qing statesmen as to what France's intentions were. This set the stage for another policy debate in China over how to approach the upcoming border delimitation and trade negotiations, and left room for the revival of the idea of instituting a buffer zone and the possibility of redrawing the entire border altogether.

Robert Hart, fresh off his diplomatic success in brokering peace, was one of the voices involved in the policy debate over how to strategize for the upcoming border

delimitation negotiations. Moreover, Hart evidently decided that he needed 'a man on the inside', so to speak, if he was going to safeguard the interests of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, and it is perhaps possible to gauge the level of importance that Hart attached to the forthcoming border delimitation negotiations by the person that he charged with this task: his younger brother James Hart. On September 18th, 1885 Robert Hart wrote in his diary that Deng Chengxiu had sent two Yamen secretaries to meet with him in order to request a "power man" from the Customs Service "who was not a Frenchman but who understood French" in order to assist the Qing border delimitation commission in the upcoming negotiations and their survey work.[41] Hart wrote that, "It is possible Chow [Zhou Derun] will want similar aid for the Yunnan part of the work. Têng [Deng Chengxiu] is a Kwangtung and Chow a Kwangxsi man. Who is there to send? Jem, Jamieson, Brown, Chalmers, Happer, Brazier are about all I have to choose from. They will want him at Canton about the 8th of October, and the work will occupy a month or two."[42] After some deliberation he chose to send "Jem" (his nickname for his younger brother James), and one other Customs Service official, though the assignment would ultimately take over a year to complete rather than two months, and the other official he appointed would leave after only a few months to take a two-year leave. By all accounts the heavy drinking younger Hart, who his older brother referred to as the "evergreen sinner," was well-liked by his western and Chinese colleagues.[43] Just a few months prior to his assignment as attaché to the Qing border commission, James Hart had almost become his older brother's successor as the new Inspector General of the Customs Service. The older Hart had been offered the position of the British ambassador to China, and James Hart, who the Zongli Yamen favored as his replacement, was the natural choice, despite the fact that he was fond of fun and decidedly less single-minded in his commitment to his customs duties. The Zongli Yamen was so hopeful for his succession that they were even preparing to assign the younger Hart a Chinese colleague to oversee his transition into the new role.[44] However, when it became apparent that Li Hongzhang was determined to have his nominee, Gustave Detring, become Hart's successor as the Inspector General, Hart decided that he would not leave the Customs Service after all; he refused to entrust the running of his beloved institution to a man who he felt was "impulsive" and beholden to Li Hongzhang who, seeing Hart as one of his rivals, was eager to see him step down so he could extend his influence into this important Qing institution.[45]

His assignment in the Qing border commission would have long ranging consequences both for the career of James Hart, and for the tenor of an important aspect of foreign affairs over the next few years, the delimitation of the Qing Empire's borders. Rather than going on to be Robert Hart's successor in the I.G. position, the younger sibling

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[41] *Sir Robert Hart Diary: Volume 31: August 1885 - February 1887*. MS.15.1.31.005. Hart Collection of Queen's University of Belfast.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Bruner, Kay. *Unpublished Manuscript*. Special thanks to Robert Bickers at the University of Bristol for sharing an unpublished manuscript by Kay Bruner based on Robert Hart's letters in the possession of the family of B.E. Forster Hall, a former commissioner in the Maritime Customs Service in the early twentieth century who wrote several unpublished histories of the Service.
[44] Bruner, *Unpublished*.
[45] Wright, Stanley F. *Hart*. pp. 516, 520.

would now take on the role of trusted advisor and interpreter to the Qing government and representative of the Qing customs regime in several major border delimitation negotiations over the next few years.[46] And while the younger, more adventurous Hart might not have been thrilled about the new direction of his career—though he may well have been relieved not having to take on the responsibilities and workload of the I.G. position—the assignment seemed to be a good fit for him. He was well liked by his Chinese associates, and Robert likely viewed the prospect of his assignment on the distant frontier as a measure to keep him from the temptations and corrupting influences of the Treaty Ports. As the older Hart put it, "It will not be the sybaritism of the of the Thatched House [James Campbell's London club where the younger Hart spent many nights drinking during his leave] that he'll find in those regions!"[47] Furthermore, since Robert Hart had just come off of his success in brokering peace during the Sino-French conflict, and the Zongli Yamen had subsequently requested that he recommend foreign advisors for the resulting Sino-Vietnamese border delimitation negotiations, who better than his own brother to ensure that the interests of the Customs Service were safeguarded along the new international border with the French Protectorate of Tonkin?[48] Ultimately, the Grand Council approved Robert Hart's decision to send James Hart along with several British and American employees of the Maritime Customs Service to accompany and assist the commission.[49] However, the Hart brothers were not the only officials vying for influence within the Qing foreign policy apparatus.

While Hart and the Zongli Yamen were eager to bring about a beneficial conclusion to the business of border delimitation and an agreeable trade agreement, in Peking they were far removed from the situation on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier. The Yamen had assigned two officials who had been among the most vocal advocates for going to war with France over control of Tonkin, Deng Chengxiu and Zhou Derun, to head up the Qing border delimitation commission. On one hand, the two men likely saw their assignments as a demotion, or even punishment; recall that officials associated with the *qingliu* faction and 'pro-war party' had largely been silenced and/or demoted after the failures of the Qing campaign in Tonkin. However, on the other hand, their militant stance during the conflict would have meant that they had the proper credentials to ensure that they did not give in to potential French territorial demands in the region. Moreover, Deng had already earned a reputation for being incorruptible, if somewhat overzealous, in his previous role as an

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[46] Most notably, he would go on to assist the amban, or Qing imperial resident of Tibet in the negotiations with the British over China's suzerainty of Sikkim in 1889.This is particularly relevant to the current discussion because it reveals the continued fragmented nature of Qing frontier management and foreign affairs at this time. Hart was the only one to take part in the negotiations with any loose affiliation whatsoever to the Zongli Yamen.)

[47] Ibid.

[48] The younger Hart's contribution over the course of the border delimitation negotiations would be valuable enough that he would go on to receive an imperial accommodation from the Qing court, the medal of the second class-civil rank. (Bruner, *Hart Letters*.) Hart would also go on to receive another accommodation for his work in assisting negotiations with the British in Tibet in 1889, the Imperial Order of the Double Dragon Second Division. (ibid.)

[49] September 11, 1885, Grand Council reply to Robert Hart, *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 491-492.

Imperial Censor. While some scholars have portrayed Deng as a careerist[50] (after passing the provincial examinations he had purchased his office), during his tenure in the border delimitation commission he proved to be not only an adept negotiator, but also a man who did not blindly take orders in the hope of advancing his career. On the contrary, he would repeatedly defy Peking's directives throughout the course of the forthcoming negotiations.

In addition to Deng and Zhou, the Governors-General of Guizhou and Yunnan, Cen Yuying, and Guangxi and Guangdong, Zhang Zhidong would also come to play active roles in the behind-the-scenes strategizing during the course of the border delimitation project. Zhang Zhidong, like Deng, was associated with the *qingliu* faction, and both had been vocal advocates for going to war over control of Tonkin. Cen was an ethnic Zhuang who had been dubbed "the Cruel Viceroy" in the West after being implicated in a plot to kill the British explorer Augustus Raymond Margary, a British explorer who had been trying to establish a possible trade route between Burma and Yunnan province, an event that ultimately culminated in the Chefoo Convention. As we will see, both men not only sought to wield considerable influence over Qing foreign policy, but also acted with a large degree of autonomy over the course of the project to delimit the border. And, finally, Zeng Jize and Xu Jingcheng, the Chinese ambassadors to the United Kingdom and France, respectively, also served as intelligence gatherers, attempting to monitor political currents and events in order to ascertain British and French interests in China and Southeast Asia. In the period between the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin, and the arrival of the border delimitation commissions on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, the Qing government closely monitored developments in French politics, and conditions on its southern frontier in order to ascertain how best to approach the forthcoming negotiations to minimize any possible advantages for the French and maximize its own benefits. While the Qing officials involved in the business of border delimitation were often at odds with one another in their approaches, the Qing state proved to be more than adept at meeting the challenge of defending the territorial integrity of the Empire and utilized every possible opportunity in order to gain strategic pieces of territory, both for the purposes of defense and trade. Before analyzing the policy debate, let us first consider the issues underlying the contest and the initial Qing strategy of carving out a buffer zone between the two states.

Factors Complicating the Delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese Border

While France struggled to gain control over its newly acquired protectorate in Tonkin (northern Vietnam, or Bắc Kỳ in Vietnamese) and the occupation forces were ravaged by disease and facing serious financial and logistical constraints, a debate ensued in the French parliament over whether the pacification campaigns and further efforts at colonial expansion in the region were worth the expense. Furthermore, the French were fighting a war in Madagascar and their troops were overextended, a fact that Peking was well aware of.[51] However, one of the major forces within the French colonial lobby, the

[50] For more on the career of Deng Chengxiu, see: Chan, Ying-kit. "The Odyssey of a Guangdong Official: Deng Chengxiu and Late Qing Political Culture." *Journal of Asian History,* vol. 52, no. 2, 2018.
[51] Zongli Yamen to Xu Jingcheng, November 17th, 1885. *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, p.13.

Société des Mines de Tonkin, was gambling on the pacification of the territory in the hopes of profiting from the region's rich natural resources; Tonkin was home to some of the most productive gold and copper mines in Asia (more on this in Chapter 2). As Xu Jingcheng, the recently appointed Qing ambassador to France explained in a telegram to the Zongli Yamen, the French colonial lobby thought that it would be an embarrassment to give up any territory in Tonkin and were eager to reach an agreement in order to quell the dissent within Parliament and maintain the occupation of the territory.[52] However, there were also serious financial barriers to committing to a prolonged military presence in Tonkin. Xu Jingcheng reported that the French government had been fiercely debating whether to raise more funds for the military pacification of region and that there was still strong opposition to this within the French government.[53]

The Qing government was keeping a close eye on the situation and a foreign policy debate ensued with various divergent viewpoints emerging as to how to approach the border delimitation negotiations. A constant stream of telegrams from Li Hongzhang's office in Tianjin, from officials in the southern provinces, and from ambassadors abroad flowed into the capital and arrived daily at the Zongli Yamen, the switchboard for foreign affairs communiqué, all expressing differing opinions concerning how China should approach the border delimitation negotiations. Those seeking to influence foreign policy during the negotiations included Li Hongzhang, the de facto foreign minister, Robert Hart, the Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, Cen Yuying, the Governor-General of Guizhou and Yunnan, Zhang Zhidong, the Governor-General of Guangdong and Guangxi, Deng Chengxiu, the head of the Qing border delimitation commission, and the Qing foreign envoys in London and Paris, Xu Jingcheng and Zeng Jize, among others. Before examining Peking's initial strategy of attempting to carve out a buffer zone in Tonkin and the concurrent policy debate surrounding how to approach the border delimitation negotiations, it is first necessary to consider the challenges to delimiting the border, the political situation in France, and developments in Tonkin since the ratification of the peace treaty that brought an end to formal hostilities between the Qing and the French in the region.

In addition to the question of whether or not France was going to commit to a long-term presence in the Tonkin, the Qing state also faced serious obstacles if it was to assert control over the border region; the harsh climate, ruggedness of the terrain, poorly developed transportation infrastructure, the large expenses involved with building and maintaining forts and military outposts, the unreliability and illegibility of the region's inhabitants, and endemic banditry and smuggling (staple industries of the frontier economy) were all factors. The Zongli Yamen, the Grand Council, and the Throne were all aware of these issues. However, the 'loss' of Vietnam was traumatic and certain elements within the Qing bureaucracy were not willing to give up on the idea of maintaining at least a portion of the former tributary's territory as a buffer against what they felt was an expansionist-minded France that coveted the markets and natural resources of

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[52] Xu Jingcheng to Zongli Yamen, December 9th, 1885. *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 21.
[53] Zhang Zhidong to Zongli Yamen, (quoting a telegram from Xu Jingcheng), December 13th, 1885. *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, vol. 7, p. 23.

Southwestern China. While France had already rejected the idea of the creation of a buffer zone during the earlier negotiations, Peking maintained that the third article of the Treaty of Tianjin, which allowed for certain "alterations" to be made to the present border when it was of mutual benefit to both countries had been written in such a way that it was left open to interpretation and debate.

By August 1885, several months after the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin, the Grand Council and the Zongli Yamen began to be inundated with telegrams and memorials from the aforementioned officials as they made preparations for the forthcoming delimitation of the border. It was not entirely clear whether France was going to make a long-term commitment to maintaining a presence in Tonkin, and to further complicate the situation, the French military in the region was being decimated by disease and facing strong resistance from the remnants of Liu Yongfu's Black Flags, who still controlled strategic frontier areas and border passes throughout the region. Early in the planning stages of border delimitation the Zongli Yamen made it clear to the Grand Council that it was going to be no easy task. In its correspondence from late August, the Yamen explained that, in the first place, the border was going to be particularly difficult to determine due to the ruggedness of the terrain and the difficulty of access.[54] However, regardless of the difficulties, they stressed that the task was of the utmost importance because, now that Vietnam was no longer a tributary, China needed to be very clear in defining its territorial claims over the region so that the French would not attempt to encroach on Qing territory.[55] The Yamen also stressed that, while the commission would be armed with maps from gazetteers, it was imperative for Zhou Derun and Deng Chengxiu to work with local officials and frontier residents who were familiar with the conditions and terrain in order to survey the border, draw up *new* maps, and carefully ascertain what areas, exactly, constituted Qing territory.[56] In other words, the border up to that point, so far as one existed at all, was far from clearly determined, and the officials involved would have to use every resource at their disposal for putting forth Qing territorial claims in the upcoming negotiations.

In addition to the issues of rugged terrain, poor road conditions, and a lack of accurate maps, there were other factors that were going to present significant obstacles to determining the border. For one thing, if determining the 'nationality', so to speak, of frontier territory was going to be difficult, determining the nationality or identities of the people residing there was going to be equally challenging. As Zhang Zhidong explained in a memorial from November 15th, 1885, Tonkin and much of southern China was a region where Chinese, Vietnamese, and various hill tribe people intermingled socially and economically, and often intermarried, a situation that had made both the Qing and Nguyễn courts extremely wary of the area. Zhang Zhidong lamented that the Sino-Vietnamese frontier was an incoherent mix of ethnic hill tribe groups, Chinese, and Vietnamese and that it was often difficult to tell them apart.[57] Zhang noted that ever since the Song and Ming

[54] Zongli Yamen to Grand Council, August 29, 1885, *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, p. 488.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Memorial from Zhang Zhidong, November 15th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 9-11.

periods there had not been a system of border checkpoints (*Guanka* 關卡), which had resulted in an increase in the movement of Vietnamese into Chinese areas and vice-versa, in turn creating a situation in which the frontier had become more mixed and difficult to govern, even to the point of the local authorities losing control of the situation.[58] He went on to explain that while the intermixing of Vietnamese and Chinese had not posed a threat to imperial control when Vietnam was a tributary of China, now that the area had become equivalent to a foreign country such intermixing was sure to become a problem.[59] Therefore, he reasoned, Peking should consider the plight of those who found themselves on the Vietnamese side of the border and had become foreign subjects who were no longer under the benevolent protection of the Qing emperor.[60] Similarly, Zhou Derun from the Qing border commission memorialized that he had investigated the border areas of Yunnan and found that the various ethnic groups were quite mixed and that there was a tense situation among the hill tribes and ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese peoples.[61] He also predicted that ethnic tensions among the frontiersman would inevitably lead to violent conflict after the French established themselves in the region.[62]

Yet another problem that the Qing state had to address was the lack of qualified personnel with adequate cartographic know-how to carry out the survey of the border. In fact, none of the officials assigned to the Qing border delimitation commission had any cartographic training or surveying experience whatsoever. Zhang Zhidong was astounded to discover that France had sent more than twenty cartographers to draft maps of the entirety of the three thousand *li* border.[63] In a memorial from November 15th, he lamented that the Qing commission did not have a sufficient number of personnel trained in the French language or skilled in cartography and that finding adequate talent in the remote border areas would be a significant challenge.[64] Hence, he recommended recruiting translators and cartographers in in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Fujian to assist in the project, and added that Zhou Derun and Cen Yuying had already expended great effort to go to Hong Kong to try to procure the necessary cartographic equipment with little luck.[65] Up to that point, in addition to James Hart, the Guangxi branch of the commission had access to two French translators and twelve cartographers, while the Yunnan team only had one translator and four cartographers.[66] Hence, Zhang arrived at the conclusion that the poor conditions (weather, roads, banditry, local resistance to the French occupation) coupled with a serious lack of personnel would almost certainly mean that it would be impossible to complete the delimitation project within a few months as originally planned.[67] Furthermore, Zhang noted that the two French commissioners heading up the French cartographic team, Tisseyre and Bouinais, were both military men, which he felt was an

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[58] Zhang Zhidong Memorial, January 5th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7 pp. 26-28.
[59] ibid.
[60] ibid.
[61] January 20th, 1886, Zhou Derun memorial to the Grand Council, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 34-35.
[62] ibid.
[63] Memorial from Zhang Zhidong, November 15th, 1885. *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, pp. 9-11.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

indication that the French were investigating possible strategic routes for an attack on Yunnan and Guangxi, and perhaps even a full-scale invasion of southern China. Therefore, he suggested that Peking also send military officials with battle experience and knowledge of the terrain and territory to inspect the forts and routes along the border and recommended close to a dozen military veterans who lived near the border area for the job. He also recommended a full inspection of frontier fortifications and that they examine the credentials of all the military staff in the region. In short, Zhang felt that they were totally unprepared for both the task of border delimitation, and for the threat of a future attack inside China's borders. He memorialized that, "the border that we are drawing today will be the battle line of tomorrow."[68]

The business of border delimitation was also complicated by the issue of resistance to the French pacification of Tonkin by frontierspeople, decommissioned soldiers and former Black Flags throughout the region. If opposition to the French presence in the region was prolonged, some argued, then the French might eventually decide that their efforts were not worth it and pull out of Tonkin altogether. As mentioned above, during the Sino-French conflict Peking had been entertaining the idea of granting Liu Yongfu, the leader of the Black Flag Army, autonomy over a large portion of Tonkin as a reward for his loyal service if he was able to bring about a victory in the Sino-French conflict, but after the Black Flags had been repelled from the lower Red River valley after attempting to take the city of Hanoi, Liu had retreated to the Chinese side of the border to the city of Qinzhou in Guangxi with his most loyal followers. However, remnants of Liu's forces, many of whom had apparently turned to banditry for survival in the wake of the Sino-French conflict, were still putting up strong resistance to the French. Even so, while Liu Yongfu's Black Flags had augmented the Qing forces during the war with France, it was apparent that the Qing state was cautious about his potential loyalties. In mid-November, Xu Jingcheng telegrammed Peking to report that the French were in talks with Liu Yongfu to try to secure his cooperation in aiding them in the pacification of Tonkin.[69] Furthermore, Xu claimed, Liu had expressed a willingness to relinquish control over the Upper Red River area of Tonkin near the city of Lao Cai, which was at that time still controlled by the Black Flags, and to swear allegiance to the French side in exchange for a more fertile area on the Vietnamese side of the Yunnan-Vietnam border and granting him autonomy (to collect taxes, etc.) in the region.[70]

Upon hearing the news of a possible alliance between the French and Liu Yongfu, the Grand Council immediately contacted Zhou Derun of the border delimitation commission, and Li Hongzhang in Tianjin.[71] The Council informed Zhou that Zhang Zhidong had recently reported that Liu had surfaced in Nanning near the border of Tonkin, and instructed them to have their men keep an eye on Liu and report back his movements to the capital.[72] Furthermore, while the Council had heard that Nanning was quiet at the time,

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Zongli Yamen to Xu Jingcheng, November 17th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 14-17.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Grand Council to Zhou Derun, November 17th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, p.12.
[72] Ibid.

since that information had come from the French they should not take their word for it.[73] The Council also informed Li Hongzhang to keep his eyes and ears open for any signs that the French military was attempting to collaborate with Liu and to notify them immediately if he heard anything.[74] As we will see in the next two chapters, the Black Flags would continue to be a factor influencing the tenor of the border delimitation project.

In addition to these problems, there was also the question of the potential benefits to the Qing state when the overland trade zones were opened up in accordance with the fifth article of the Treaty of Tianjin. Li Hongzhang still had yet to work out the details of a comprehensive trade agreement with the French envoy Cogordan in Tianjin, and the border commissions also needed to determine exactly where these zones would be situated. At the same time the Qing state was carrying out research in preparation for the delimitation of the border, officials were also investigating the potential benefits of increased trade between Tonkin and China's southern provinces. On October 9th as the policy debate over how to approach the forthcoming border delimitation project was heating up, Cen Yuying, the Governor-General of Yunnan and Guizhou submitted a memorial in which he described the results of his research into the potential economic significance of a new trade relationship with northern Vietnam. He explained that, as he saw it, Yunnan had been impoverished because it was far from major waterways and was difficult to access, which had inhibited the transportation of trade goods.[75] If a trade route linking Yunnan with Tonkin was opened up, Cen reasoned, it would be easier to transport goods via the Red River to Hanoi and then forward them on to Guangdong, Shanghai, and Tianjin via the sea than it would to transport the products over land. He went on to explain that, "It was not until coming to this post that I realized how beneficial the Red River is to the prosperity of Yunnan. The stimulation of cross-border trade between Yunnan and Tonkin will be of great benefit to the people of the region and to the empire. If we set customs checkpoints along this border, it could potentially generate untold amounts of revenue for the Empire. Therefore, we should not delay in developing trade along the border of Vietnam."[76] It is clear that Cen had realized what the French had known for a long time, namely the potential economic value of connecting Yunnan to maritime trade networks via the Red River.

I will address the trade issue in greater detail below when examining the policy debate, and in chapter four when looking at Li Hongzhang's negotiations with the French envoy in Tianjin, but for now suffice it to say that while many within the Qing state were reluctant to open its southern land border for trade, particularly if the French controlled Tonkin, Xu Jingcheng, Cen Yuying and Robert Hart saw the potential benefits of doing so. However, as long as Peking was clinging to the idea that they might be able to create a buffer territoty separating the two empires, it would be impossible to move forward with any negotiations concerning a new trade agreement with the French or to determine the exact locations of the trade zones. Hence, Peking eventually had to determine whether the

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Grand Council to Li Hongzhang, November 17th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, p.12.
[75] October 9th, 1885 Memorial from Cen Yuying, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, p. 4.
[76] Ibid.

mountainous region of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier was to be a security buffer zone, or a zone for developing and expanding the economies of its southern provinces through increased maritime economic connections. These were the formidable challenges facing the Qing state in the development of a policy in regard to the forthcoming border delimitation project, and in response to this complicated situation, several competing streams of thought emerged. Before analyzing the policy debate in greater detail, I will first turn to the matter of the buffer zone, as this was to become the most contested issue in the forthcoming border negotiations.

The Creation of a Buffer Zone in Tonkin

During the early stages of the negotiations over Tonkin leading up to the Sino-French conflict Robert Hart and Zeng Jize had both favored the idea of opening the lower Red River Valley up to the city of Sơn Tây, approximately 40 kilometers northwest of Hanoi, as a special free trade zone.[77] In order to avoid a clash over the region China was prepared to relinquish all claims over the Red River South of Sơn Tây if the French agreed to the plan. The idea of a free trade zone appears to have originated with Hart who had felt that such a proposal would allow for other countries to have a stake in Tonkin and act as a counterbalance to French power in the region.[78] However, neither the French nor certain elements within the Qing foreign policy apparatus, particularly members of the 'war party', were willing to make such a concession. Ultimately, Hart convinced the ministers of the Zongli Yamen to lay to rest their insistence on the inclusion of Vietnam's tributary status in the agreement, but they insisted that they include a clause allowing for a new line of demarcation within Tonkin and the delineation of a buffer territory, or no-man's land, that French troops could not enter, and that the previous boundary, as far as it could be determined, would remain the same.[79] While the French had opposed the idea from the beginning, as hostilities escalated during the Sino-French conflict a demilitarized buffer zone was proposed yet again, this time with the suggestion that the Vietnamese court administer the area with Liu Yongfu as a proxy.[80] However, Liu's Black Flag forces were significantly diminished, and his reputation seriously tarnished following a failed attempt to take Hanoi at the encouragement of Peking. After suffering defeat on the outskirts of Hanoi, Liu retreated to the Chinese side of the border taking many of his followers with him, though many former Black Flags stayed behind and would continue to carry out guerilla attacks against the French for months after official hostilities had ceased.

While Deng Chengxiu, Zhou Derun and others associated with the *qingliu* faction were among the most vocal advocates for the redrawing of the border and the creation of a buffer zone, the idea of a complete realignment of the border appears to have originated with Halliday Macartney, the English interpreter and secretary to Zeng Jize at the Chinese

[77] Wright, pp. 509-510.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Wright, pp. 521.
[80] Eastman, *Throne*, p. 88.

Legation in London.[81] He had become a secretary at the Chinese legation in London under the newly appointed, and first ever, Chinese Ambassador to the U.K., Guo Songtao, in 1875 on the recommendation of his old friend and patron Li Hongzhang. It appears that, like Li, Robert Hart saw Macartney as something of a rival. Prior to Hart and Campbell taking over during the peace talks, Macartney had submitted a draft proposal together with Zeng Jize suggesting that they might draw a new border running west from Lạng Sơn "to a point on [the] Red River below Laokai (Lào Cai)."[82] However, then as later, the French opposed the proposal on the grounds that they could not cede such a large territory to China that had historically been a part of Tonkin.[83]

However, from late Summer until the end of 1885, the Grand Council and the Throne continued to advocate for the creation of the buffer territory. They reasoned that the provision that certain changes or amendments could be made to the border that was included in the Treaty of Tianjin had left room for negotiating a buffer zone, and that the border delimitation commission should try to have the Vietnamese town of Lạng Sơn, an important city for trade and transport, included in the proposed territory.[84] The Council knew that the French were not going to be eager to relinquish control over Lạng Sơn, the sight of some of the most pitched battles during the Sino-French conflict adjacent to Zhennanguan, possibly the oldest and most symbolic gateway between the two countries. Hence, they instructed the border commission to do their best to argue the point, and also instructed Li Hongzhang to debate the matter with the French envoy in Tianjin.[85] What was the logic underlying the Qing strategy to carve out a buffer zone within a region that had historically been a part of Vietnamese territory? Was the stratagem implemented in anticipation of future conflicts and security threats and to push the line of defense outward?

To be sure, the concept of a buffer territory, in various forms, was a part of the imperial Chinese repertoire of frontier management. Although not employed for the purpose of border defense, the intentional depopulation of Manchuria and the Qing state's prohibition on immigration into the region by both Korean and Chinese agriculturalists and pearl, fur, and ginseng poachers constitutes just one example of the establishment of a buffer territory, but there are more. The creation of a buffer territory along China's frontiers can also be found in earlier dynastic periods. The strategy of utilizing a 'no-man's land' was employed by Ouyang Xiu along various stretches of Song China's northern border

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[81] Wright, Stanley F. *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, pp. 514-515. Macartney would also go on to play a part in the negotiation of the Treaty of St. Petersburg, and the Thibet Convention. (ibid) Macartney was a fascinating character who started out his career as an army surgeon in the British military. A veteran of the Crimean War (1853-1856) he resigned from his post while stationed in China to take the position of Military Secretary under Li Hongzhang during the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion. (Wright, p. 495.)
[82] Wright, p. 515.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Grand Council to Zhou Derun and other Qing Commissioners, November 8th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, p. 6; Emperor to Grand Council (forwarded to Zhou Derun, Deng Chengxiu, Zhang Zhidong, and Cen Yuying, etc.), November 8, 1885, *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbia*n, p. 492.
[85] Grand Council to Li Hongzhang, November 17th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7 p.12.

as early as the eleventh century.[86] Zhou Derun, one of the border delimitation commissioners, memorialized on the historical precedents of creating a buffer territory during his initial investigation of the Vietnamese border. He explained that historically there had been a buffer zone between the Qing Empire and the lands to the south, but in the centuries since Vietnam had gained its independence the territory of Tonkin had become ambiguous.[87] Zhou also pointed out that, according to the *Shiji xiongnu zhuan*, there had likewise been thousands of li of no-man's land on the northern frontier and concluded that the if it was to be effective for defense the proposed buffer zone would need to be at least that large. If the zone covered an area of only a few square kilometers, he argued, then it would not be large enough to give Qing forces time to react and deploy troops to protect the border.[88] Of course, there were a few key differences between the historical examples listed above, and the buffer zone that the Qing regime was attempting to create. First of all, it was not proposed that the buffer territory would be a 'no-man's land' such as those implemented during the Song or the Han. The Qing regime knew that this territory was inhabited, and the sheer size of the region would have precluded any attempts at depopulation even if they had desired to do so. Secondly, the proposed buffer zone was not to be established within Qing territory, or between two national boundaries, but rather it was to be carved out within the boundaries of Vietnamese territory. In short, this would be tantamount to Qing territorial expansion into peninsular Southeast Asia on a massive scale.

The logic behind the Qing state's efforts to create a buffer zone was multifaceted. First and foremost, it was rooted in a strategy of frontier defense against the perceived threat of an expansionist-minded foreign power that some officials felt had territorial ambitions on China's Southwestern provinces, namely Yunnan, which the French public saw as a sort of East Asian 'El Dorado.' Whether France was truly harboring ambitions of territorial expansion into southwest China or was simply interested in cross-border trade as they claimed, the Qing Court clearly wanted to avoid allowing direct access to Yunnan and Guangxi and sought to establish the trade zones stipulated in the Treaty of Tianjin in a buffer territory well away from the existing border crossings with Tonkin. The idea of instituting a buffer zone resonated particularly strongly with the officials associated with the *qingliu* faction who had also been among the most vocal and belligerent advocates for going to war with France over the 'loss' of Vietnam. In short, these officials, while not unanimously anti-Western or staunchly conservative, were not keen about the idea of sharing a territorial border with a predatory and potentially expansionist-minded Western power. Furthermore, in the wake of the Sino-French conflict, and with major border clashes still fresh in the minds of both the Qing and the French negotiators, another practical purpose of the buffer zone was simply to prevent the outbreak of further conflicts between Qing and French forces. Li Hongzhang argued as much in his early negotiations with the French envoy George Cogordan in Tianjin, and Deng Chengxiu, the head of the border delimitation commission took the same position and reasoned that the institution of a

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[86] Tackett, Nicolas. *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*. Cambridge. 2017.
[87] December 15th, Zhou Derun Memorial, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 24-25.
[88] Ibid.

buffer zone was critical for the defense against an invasion from the south. Upon his arrival at the Sino-Vietnamese border, Deng undertook an investigation of the strategic areas for frontier defense. He reported that there were three important entry points into Tonkin in the vicinity of Longzhou, with the most significant point of trade being Zhennanguan (or, "The Gate of China"), which was difficult to defend.[89] He explained that the other two entry points were Pingerguan and Shuikouguan. Together, he felt that these three entry points were akin to "the spine of Longzhou."[90] He added that this area was particularly difficult to defend because of the rugged terrain, which only reinforced the importance of creating a buffer zone encompassing these three strategic locations.[91]

In addition to practical issues related to territorial defense, is also evident that many of the statesmen involved in the policy discussion over the buffer zone held the view that when Vietnam had been a tributary state, the entire territory of the country had operated as a sort of 'buffer zone'. Hence, after being compelled to relinquish claims to suzerainty over Vietnam, the natural thing to do was to create a separate buffer zone between the Qing empire and the portion of Vietnam under French control. During the conflict with France officials associated with the *qingliu* faction had memorialized that if the Qing abandoned claims to suzerainty over Vietnam it would be akin to the Empire tearing down its own gates or fences.[92] Cen Yuying candidly memorialized in October 1885 that all of Vietnam had served the purpose of a buffer zone and a deterrent to invasion from the outside when it was subordinate to China, and argued that at the very least they should amend a section of the border near the Daduzhou River as it had been during the Yongzheng era in order to help fortify the frontier.[93] Likewise, when the Qing commission began the border delimitation negotiations with the French in January 1886, commissioner Wang Zhichun also used the analogy of a fence when attempting to explain the Qing perspective on the necessity of establishing a buffer territory to the French commission: "Suppose two adjoining residences are inhabited by members of the same family, and then later the family transferred ownership of one of the residences to someone from outside of the family. Does this not change the overall situation and bring about the necessity for closing off the adjoining door to the two residences, and erecting a fence in the courtyard to separate them? In the same way, at this time we need a small piece of open space to separate our customs houses, our sentry posts, and our borders."[94] Of course, the "small piece of open space" that he was referring to was actually an area encompassing most of northern Tonkin, from Lạng Sơn to the Bảo Lạc district in Cao Bằng province—altogether covering more than ten thousand square miles.[95]

Qing officials during this period were not the only ones to comment on the potential threat that sharing its southern border with France represented. One contemporary

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[89] Deng Chengxiu memorial, December 11th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 21-22.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] 法約無利有弊亟宜豫籌補救疏 (附披瀝自陳片) (光緒十年) 史料選輯. 清代關係史料特輯 , 道咸同光四朝奏議選輯, pp. 5181-5182.
[93] Memorial from Cen Yuying, October 29th, 1885. *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, p. 5.
[94] Meeting Minutes, January 14th, at Zhennanguan. M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 303.
[95] Ibid.

western observer, R.S. Gundry, commented: "Just as France would consider an aggressive movement by Germany or Belgium a menace to her own safety, or as England would oppose Russian encroachment in Afghanistan, so was China interested in the threatened supersession of Annamese authority on her southern frontier. The substitution of a powerful and militant for a weak and submissive neighbor might, indeed, disturb a less conservative nation; and when, to this consideration was added the avowed object of obtaining control over the course of a river which rises in Chinese territory and constitutes a channel of communication with the sea, it would be strange if Chinese statesmen acquiesced calmly in the change."[96] Gundry was correct, for "acquiesce calmly", they did not.

However, the French opposed the idea of a buffer zone for numerous reasons. Their most pressing objectives were to stabilize the border region in order to eliminate any threats to trade and mining activities, and to secure commercial access to China's southern provinces. As long as the Black Flags and other warlord fiefdoms controlled northern Tonkin, both of these goals would remain unattainable. From the earliest negotiations with Robert Hart and James Campbell, Jules Ferry had opposed the redrawing of the border or the creation of a buffer zone, first and foremost on the grounds that France could not abandon Lào Cai due to its geographic position allowing for navigation of the Red River, and argued that, "to leave Laokai [Lào Cai] to the Black Flags…is to leave the key of a house."[97] However, as previously mentioned, Ferry ultimately agreed to the allowance to rectify the current border once it had been surveyed, and the stipulation that certain changes or rectifications of the border be permitted when it was "of mutual benefit" to both sides was ultimately included in the third article of the Treaty of Tianjin.[98]

In a word, the establishment of a buffer zone was anathema to France's commercial ambitions in the region. First and foremost, a buffer territory would prevent access to direct trade with Yunnan, which, as previously mentioned, the French had imagined to be a 'Chinese El Dorado.'[99] Secondly, the French were certain that as soon as they pulled out of Tonkin, Liu Yongfu and the Black Flags would step back in to fill the power vacuum and would continue to be an obstacle to their economic objectives. Prior to relinquishing his stronghold on Tonkin Liu had held an almost complete monopoly on tariffs levied on goods traveling in and out of Tonkin and most of the upper Red River Valley, and as long as he continued to have influence in the region he would be an impediment to France's trading ambitions with Yunnan and Guangxi.[100] The Black Flags had been the main repellant to French control of Tonkin since the latter's first foray into the region (they had killed Francis Garnier during his ill-conceived effort to invade Hanoi and declare French authority over Tonkin in 1873), and they had led the strongest resistance to the French occupation of

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[96] Gundry, R.S. *China and Her Neighbours: France in Indo-China, Russia and China, India and Thibet*. London: Chapman and Hall, LTD. 1893.
[97] Wright, Stanley F. *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, pp. 522.
[98] For more on the Hart-Campbell-Ferry negotiations see Wright, Stanley F. Hart and the Chinese Customs, pp. 522.
[99] For more on French perceptions of Southwest China see Goscha, Christopher. Vietnam: A New History, p. 64.
[100] Wright, Stanley F. Hart and the Chinese Customs, p. 508.

the region during the Sino-French conflict achieving victories in several key battles. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, the colonial government was well aware of the rich natural resources throughout the region, and the capitalist interests who had helped to bankroll the pacification of Tonkin and which represented a major force within the French colonial lobby—not the least of which was the Société des Mines de Tonkin—were eager to exploit the mineral resources there. The military men who comprised the French border commission were well connected to this lobby; Neiss a former naval officer turned explorer, and the commission's doctor and chronicler was a prominent member of the Société de Géographie, which was ground zero for the colonial lobby, and both of the head cartographers on the French team were military men.[101]

However, despite French opposition, it is certain that the idea of a buffer zone would not have appeared to be a strange or foreign concept to the French. At the same time that France was seeking to verify the border between Vietnam and China they reached an agreement with the British that they would leave Thailand as an independent 'buffer state' in order to avoid going to war over who would incorporate Thailand into their colonial holdings. Similarly, England ceded several provinces on the Burmese frontier to Thailand during the course of border delimitation on the condition that the latter not relinquish control over them to any other power, namely the French, and insisted that this territory be maintained as a buffer zone between British and French territory.[102] Hence, while Qing and French approaches to border delimitation and the governance of territory were informed by different knowledge systems—the hegemonic discourse of international law with the former, and the China-centered East Asian world order on the other—they were not necessarily always wholly incompatible. French objections to the buffer zone were not based on any fundamental contradiction between the 'pre-modern' East Asian tributary order that gave pretext to Qing territorial ambitions in Tonkin, and 'modern' European notions of equal, bilateral interstate relations. Even so, the logic employed by the respective states in defining the possession and governance of land was markedly different. As we will see in greater detail in the following chapters, it proved to be very difficult for Qing statesmen to approach the border delimitation negotiations with a view towards two equal, sovereign nations carrying out a bilateral agreement. The very notion of the buffer zone, in the way the Qing negotiators approached it, was completely logical if viewed through the lens of hierarchical *zongfan* relations; in the eyes of Qing negotiators all of Vietnam had been 'lost' to the French, therefore the creation of a buffer zone within Tonkin was the natural thing to do since it meant the 'return' of land that rightfully belonged to the emperor in accordance with the traditional tributary order (i.e. 'all land under heaven belongs to the emperor', or 普天之下, 莫非王土/皆是王土). The most interesting point here is not necessarily whether Qing statesmen believed in the ideological foundation of the China-dominated tributary order, but how they used the rhetoric surrounding it in making territorial claims and in the border delimitation negotiation process.

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[101] The Société hosted weekly meetings between capitalists, naval men, and geographers, many of whom were former military officers themselves.

[102] Gundry, R.S. China and Her Neighbours: France in Indo-China, Russia and China, India and Thibet. London: Chapman and Hall, LTD. 1893.

While the comprehensive delimitation of the border that was to take place in the following months in some ways marked a significant departure from earlier Qing frontier policy in that the border was defined and delimited to a greater extent than had ever been before, the Qing state also continued to approach the issue of its southern border throughout the delimitation negotiations using the logic of traditional frontier policy; namely, that the empire should ideally have some sort of buffer zone around its southern territorial perimeters, whether that be in the form of a tributary state or through the delimitation of a separate buffer zone or no-man's land, as was sometimes the case in previous periods. Whether or not Peking and the border commissioners believed the rhetoric of 'lost territory', they certainly continued to employ it, and the Court and the Grand Council continued to push for the creation of a buffer territory within Vietnamese territory. However, whether or not the buffer zone could be realized largely depended on what strategy the Qing commission would adopt during the border delimitation negotiations, and this became the issue at the center of a policy debate in the final months of 1885.

The Policy Debate Concerning Tonkin and the Delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese Border

Amidst the discussion of the potential problems related to the delimitation of the border and the uncertainties associated with the French occupation of the region, a policy debate arose as to how to strategize for the forthcoming border negotiations. The Qing ambassadors in London and Paris, Zeng Jize and Xu Jingcheng, were gathering intelligence on European politics and sending reports and policy advice to the capital, while the Governors-General of Guangxi and Yunnan, Zhang Zhidong and Cen Yuying, were carrying out reconnaissance on the situation in Tonkin and arguing for a different strategy, as were Deng Chengxiu and Zhou Derun of the border commission. Meanwhile, the Zongli Yamen was performing the role of intermediary between the aforementioned officials, and the Grand Council and the Throne. As mentioned above, while the Zongli Yamen was acting as the 'switchboard' for official communiqué related to foreign policy at this time, it did not appear to play a significant part in the formation of policy. However, it is evident from the frequent communications between the Yamen and the Maritime Customs Service, that the former helped to keep the latter abreast of policy developments.

In the months leading up to the border negotiations, Cen Yuying and Zhang Zhidong vacillated between renewed aggression towards France in order to come to the defense of their formal vassals in Tonkin and taking a 'wait-and-see' approach to the question of whether the French were going to commit to a long-term commitment in Tonkin or pull out of the region altogether. Meanwhile, Robert Hart, Zeng Jize and Xu Jingcheng, while differing on certain points, advocated for carrying out the border delimitation according to the Treaty of Tianjin as soon as possible so as to normalize trade relations and prevent France from manufacturing a pretext for demanding a more favorable trade deal. Deng Chengxiu was largely silent on the matter until arriving at the border in December, at which time he fell into the "wait-and-see" camp with Zhang, while Zhou Derun felt that they should act as quickly as possible to delimit the border while France was still at a

disadvantage. As we will see in the next few chapters, these two commissioners, particularly Deng, would come to play major roles in the policy discussions in the months to come.

Xu Jingcheng was especially well informed about the political climate in Paris and the influence of the industrialists within the French colonial lobby. After studying the situation he became convinced that France's ambitions were focused on trade and resource extraction above all else, not invasion of Qing territory in the southwest, and that despite resistance against the French occupation forces in Tonkin, the military strain of prolonged occupation of the region, and the significant opposition to the colonial endeavor within the French parliament, the powerful capitalist interests within the colonial lobby would ensure that France maintained a foothold in the region for the foreseeable future.[103] Furthermore, he reasoned that since Yunnan was rich in resources with places like Pu'er that could be developed into profitable marketing areas, Westerners would be eager to live in or gain access to this territory and would naturally have a vested interest in maintaining peaceful relations with China in order to stimulate trade.[104] Xu also reported that there was a faction within the French Parliament that had expressed interest in the possibility of relinquishing control of Tonkin in exchange for favorable trade benefits but that they had not yet reached a decision.[105] He ultimately came to the conclusion that it would be best not to argue too much over territory in Tonkin, otherwise the French would surely use any territorial concessions as a pretext to push for a more favorable trade agreement. Hence, he recommended that Li Hongzhang commence with discussions concerning a trade agreement as soon as possible.[106] By the beginning of December, the French envoy had presented a twenty-four-point trade proposal that was completely unacceptable to Peking and the latter instructed the Qing commission to wait for their instructions on the matter if the French commission brought up the issue of trade.[107]

Zeng Jize took a position similar to Xu Jingcheng; he pointed out that the French had sent a civil commissioner as the head of their border commission who would presumably take trade and other factors into consideration because they feared that if they assigned the task to a military official, they would run the risk of reigniting armed conflict. Zeng read this as a sign that the French government was eager to finalize the pacification of the frontier in order to reduce forces and normalize trade relations.[108] Furthermore, while he felt that, due to the resistance to the French occupation of Tonkin and the costs involved, there was indeed a chance that France would eventually abandon efforts to establish a long-term presence in the region, he also argued that the Qing negotiators should not try to convince them to do this and needed to make it very clear that if they did give up their claims to Tonkin that they could not try to use that as leverage to try to attain a more

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[103] Zongli Yamen to Xu Jingcheng, November 17th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7 pp. 14-17; Xu Jingcheng to Zongli Yamen, December 9th, 1885. *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 21.
[104] Zongli Yamen to Xu Jingcheng, November 17th, 1885, Zhong Fa zhanzheng, Vol. 7, pp. 14-17.
[105] Xu Jingcheng to Zongli Yamen, December 2nd, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 19.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Zongli Yamen to Xu Jingcheng, December 5th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 19.
[108] Zeng Jize to Zongli Yamen, November 8th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 7-9.

favorable trade deal.[109] He also stressed the fact that other western powers, including Germany and England, were waiting to see what happened in Tonkin in order to seize an opportunity to gain new trade deals for themselves. So, if the French were successful in arguing for a more advantageous trade and customs deal on the Vietnamese border, he argued, then the British would surely pressure them to do the same with cross-border trade in Tibet, which would eventually have a negative impact on commerce in the rest of the Empire.[110] Hence, he arrived at the conclusion that they should act quickly to finalize agreements concerning trade and the delimitation of the border so as to avoid any "uncertainties."[111] Finally, he added that, while the trade deal with the French was outside of his jurisdiction, he had felt compelled to intervene in order to safeguard the interests of the Empire.[112]

In summary, both of the Qing ambassadors took a decidedly cautious approach to the forthcoming negotiations and felt that it was important that the Qing negotiators not haggle too intensely over territory in the event that the French try to use it as leverage for gaining an upper hand in the resulting trade negotiations. However, the Qing border commissioners and the provincial Governors-General took a very different stance. After Zhou Derun arrived on the Sino-Vietnamese border and assessed the situation he concluded that they should attempt to put pressure on the French to establish the buffer zone while the French were still at a disadvantage.[113] In mid-December, just weeks before the two border commissions were to commence their negotiations, he reported that he had heard there were still Vietnamese officials and troops opposing the French and that they had retaken several areas that were formerly under French occupation.[114] Due to French difficulties in securing their control over Tonkin, he argued, they should act fast to put forth claims to a buffer zone. Otherwise, he reasoned, if they waited until the French regained control of the territory, it would be too late to convince them and urged the Zongli Yamen to put pressure on them to start the negotiations while they were still at a disadvantage.[115] However, it would be another two weeks before the French commission would arrive at the border to begin the first round of border delimitation negotiations. Initially, the Zongli Yamen had made a similar assessment, but urged the Qing negotiators not to be overly concerned with arguing over the small details of the border if they did not pertain to the overarching objective of establishing the buffer zone.[116] However, while Zeng and the Zongli Yamen were ready to press the issue of the buffer zone even if it meant possibly putting themselves at a disadvantage in the accompanying trade talks, Cen Yuying and Zhang Zhidong took an even more hardline approach.

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[109] Zeng Jize to Zongli Yamen, November 8th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, vol. 7, pp. 7-9; Telegram from Zeng Jize to Zongli Yamen, December 19th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 25.
[110] Zeng Jize to Zongli Yamen, December 19th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 25.
[111] Zeng Jize to Zongli Yamen, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 7-9.
[112] Telegram from Zeng Jize to Zongli Yamen, December 19th, 1885, Zhong Fa zhanzheng, Vol. 7, p. 25.
[113] Zhou Derun Memorial, December 15th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 24-25.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Zongli Yamen telegram to Xu Jingcheng (summarizing its correspondence with the border commission), November 17th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, p. 13.

As early as October, Cen had begun memorializing about the situation on the Vietnamese frontier with Yunnan. He argued that the French would be better off abandoning their claims over the frontier areas of Tonkin until the resistance there died down, which would enable the normalization of trade and would be of mutual benefit to both countries.[117] He added that, while on one hand now that China and France had reached an agreement that determined that the former need not worry about Vietnamese territory any longer, on the other hand if the French persisted in their violent campaigns to pacify the region it would be difficult to come to terms with the fact that they could no longer come to the aid of their former subjects.[118] Hence, he concluded that they should start making preparations for the resumption of hostilities with France because the current situation was matter of life and death for the Vietnamese people, and their fate rested solely with the Qing emperor.[119] In sum, Cen advocated an approach that was essentially the opposite of that which was recommended by Xu Jingcheng and Zeng Jize. While the latter cautiously advised Peking not to haggle over territory or put too much pressure on the French, Cen argued that they should either ask them to pull out of the region altogether or else make preparations to fight to protect their former subjects. It is possible that Cen's memorial was more an act of bravado penned with the objective of portraying himself as a just and high-minded official, however, his actions throughout the remainder of the border delimitation project suggest otherwise (more on this in Chapter Two). In any event, while Peking was in no mood to resume hostilities with the French over the fate of the Vietnamese people or the Chinese residing in Tonkin, it appears that the Grand Council took his other recommendation to heart; in early November the Council sent Li Hongzhang a telegram in Tianjin advising him to consider Cen's proposal to try to convince the French to pull out of Tonkin when he met with the French envoy to commence the trade talks.[120] Hence, for the time being, it appeared that Peking was still set on establishing the buffer zone in Tonkin and were banking on the French pulling out of the region altogether, even if they hoped they could achieve those goals through diplomacy rather than force.

Like Cen Yuying, Zhang Zhidong also took an adversarial approach to the issue. Zhang memorialized that by his estimate, since the French would not be able to pacify the border for at least another year, if at all, it would be difficult if not impossible to carry out the delimitation project.[121] In his correspondence with the Grand Council he pointed out that he had telegrammed several times previously during the Sino-French conflict to argue that Lạng Sơn should be included in Guangdong, but that since the Treaty of Tianjin had been signed, he feared that it would be too late to argue over possession of the city. Hence, in his view, the only expedient thing to do if they had any chance of taking control of the area and instituting the buffer zone would be to show a display of military force in Lạng Sơn in the hopes of intimidating the French.[122] He recommended that a coterie of local frontiersmen who were veterans of the Sino-French conflict be attached to the Qing Commission to offset the military men on the French team, and requested that they

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[117] Memorial from Cen Yuying, October 9th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, Vol. 7, p. 4.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Grand Council to Li Hongzhang, November 3rd, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 6.
[121] Memorial from Zhang Zhidong, November 15th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp.11-12.
[122] Zhang Zhidong to the Grand Council, November 30th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 18-19.

dispatch Feng Zicai to rally his troops and prepare for a display of military power at the border across from Lạng Sơn.[123] However, the Grand Council promptly eschewed his recommendation, arguing that there would be no point in making an empty display of military power and that to do so would run the risk of enflaming resumed hostilities with the French and create other troubles.[124]

After Peking had shot down his suggestion to assemble troops at the border for a show of force, Zhang recommended that they stall the border negotiations altogether. He relayed to the Grand Council that he had heard there was significant opposition to the occupation of Tonkin within the French Parliament, claiming that he had heard that twenty-nine out of thirty-three members wanted France out of the region, and that the French were having difficulties pacifying *youyong* (decommissioned soldiers who were presumably former Black Flags or decommissioned Qing regulars) but that the government could not give up before the trade agreement had been finalized in order to calm the dissent from Parliament.[125] Furthermore, based on his intelligence reports, he estimated that the French occupation forces only had enough food for three months, so if Paris was not able to reach an agreement by that time as to whether to allocate more funds for the pacification campaign then the French would be forced to abandon Tonkin altogether. Hence, he concluded that they should stall the negotiations for at least three months in the hope that the French would pull out of the region, leaving the door open for the Qing to incorporate Lạng Sơn into Guangdong province and to lay claim over the desired buffer territory in the rest of northern Tonkin.[126] While a reply from Peking in regard to Zhang's three month 'wait-and-see' approach was not immediately forthcoming, this was indeed the strategy that Deng Chengxiu, the head of the border delimitation commission, would eventually adopt.

We can see that the policy debate was primarily an issue of a fluid situation with differing opinions concerning French intentions in the region, and varying evaluations of state capacity on the frontier. It is here worth noting that, despite its narrow loss in the Sino-French conflict, the Qing were better informed about the circumstances and possibilities on the ground since the French were relative newcomers to colonial expansion into the region. Moreover, since Qing officials like Cen Yuying and Zhang Zhidong had intimate ties to Liu Yongfu and the black Flags—who had been the de facto rulers of a significant portion of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier and fought on the side of the Qing in the recent conflict—and the latter continued to operate in the region (albeit in a diminished capacity after the Sino-French War), they potentially had access to information on local conditions, topography, etc., that the French simply did not have. Moreover, Liu and the Black Flag remnants also served as a destabilizing force in the region and a future barrier to French pacification and state capacity. In addition to the aforementioned factors, there was also the situation of the French military forces in Vietnam being overextended; while the border delimitation negotiations were getting underway, French forces were largely

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Grand Council reply to Zhang Zhidong, December 2nd, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 19.
[125] Zhang Zhidong to the Grand Council, January 20th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 36.
[126] Ibid.

occupied with the pacification of the Mekong Delta in the south, and with getting a foothold of the Red River Delta, which had historically been much more governable than the highlands of Tonkin. All of these factors would give the Qing side an advantage in the forthcoming border delimitation negotiations as we will see in Chapters Two and Three.

Preparing for the Border Delimitation Negotiations

The two border commissions met for the first time at the beginning of January 1886 just outside the border city of Lạng Sơn. In a sign of things to come, Deng had been so belligerent during their first meeting that the other Qing commissioners had to apologize for his behavior before the two sides could meet again. On January 6th, following their first informal meeting, Deng Chengxiu telegrammed the Zongli Yamen to complain that the French had determined to keep meeting minutes of all the negotiations, which he felt was just a clever way of keeping tabs on everything that the Qing commission said and as a means of restricting Deng so that he could not debate freely.[127] Several days later the Grand Council telegrammed commissioners Deng Chengxiu and Zhou Derun, as well as Cen Yuying to instruct them on how to proceed with the negotiations. At this point, the Council maintained that they should negotiate for the buffer zone and pointed out that they could not find any historical precedent for determining the current border based on a topographical survey as the French were advocating.[128] However, while Peking still hoped to secure the buffer zone inside of Vietnamese territory as a strategy of keeping French troops away from its southern borders, it is clear that the Court and the Grand Council had very little interest in Tonkin, which it saw as rugged and inhospitable, or its inhabitants, which they viewed as impoverished and unreliable. Oddly, there is also no evidence to suggest that Peking had any interest in mining or other valuable resources in the region. Moreover, the Qing budget had already been financially strained after the recent war with France, and now that it appeared that the latter had little interest at colonial expansion into southwest China, trade issues began to outweigh territorial concerns.[129]

The Council urged the commission to approach the negotiations holistically because the border delimitation and the trade negotiations were interrelated and instructed the commission to proceed with the negotiations with the bigger picture in mind and not to argue over territory for its own sake, which might give the French a pretext to use that as leverage to gain favorable trade agreements as Zeng Jize and Xu Jingcheng had warned.[130] They reminded the commission that the third article of the Treaty of Tianjin called for changes to the border when it was "mutually beneficial to both sides", and that this was the

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[127] Deng Chengxiu telegram Zongli Yamen, January 6th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 28.
[128] Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu, January 10th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 29.
[129] Their concern over being compelled to grant more concessions if the commissioners dragged out the border dispute was not unfounded; that is precisely what happened in the case of another dispute several decades later when the Qing state granted railway and mining concessions to the Japanese for recognition of Chinese claims concerning the northeastern border with Korea. For more on this border dispute see Song, Nianshen. "The Journey towards 'No Man's Land': Interpreting the China-Korea Borderland within Imperial and Colonial Contexts." The Journal of Asian Studies Vol. 76, no. 4 (November) 2017.
[130] January 10th Grand Council to Zhou Derun and Cen Yuying, Zhong Fa zhanzheng, Vol. 7, pp. 29-30.

loophole they should utilize when negotiating for the buffer zone (甌脫).[131] Furthermore, since there was still resistance to French control of the region, they should use that to their advantage; the more trouble that the Vietnamese and disbanded soldiers caused for the French the more it would work in China's favor.[132] That same day, Cixi reiterated this message to the border commission and implored them not to negotiate only for the purpose of claiming the line and squabbling over territory thereby giving the French an excuse to exploit the situation in order to gain the upper hand in negotiating a trade deal.[133]

Though he had remained silent during most of the policy debate over how to strategize for the border negotiations, after the first week of meetings between the two commissions Robert Hart telegrammed the Zongli Yamen to express his opinion on the matter. Hart, obviously with the interests of the Maritime Customs Service in mind, and the revenue that new customs houses along the land border had the potential to generate, advocated for a cautious approach to the negotiations. He argued that it was imperative for the Qing commission to abide by the new treaty, particularly as it pertained to the delimitation of the border and negotiation of the trade zones.[134] He maintained that as long as China adhered to the treaty then France would have no choice but to follow suit, but he worried that Deng Chengxiu, Zhou Derun, and Zhang Zhidong might try to undermine the agreement and possibly even provoke the renewal of hostilities between the two countries.[135] Hart was still fresh from his victory in brokering peace during the Sino-French conflict and was not eager to see his hard work undone by a few overzealous border commissioners or the provincial official who had been one of the most vocal advocates for the disastrous war with France in the first place.

Hart pointed out that since negotiating the Treaty of Tianjin there remained a consensus within the Inner Court to move towards a renewal of hostilities with France, and that the two commissioners that Peking had dispatched to handle the border delimitation negotiations, Deng and Zhou, had been among the most enthusiastic proponents for the continuation of the war over Tonkin.[136] He also reported to the Yamen that when Deng and Zhou had met with Hart in Beijing, they had expressed displeasure with the terms of the treaty and indicated that they would attempt to make changes to the agreement after the fact, and that he had recently received information suggesting that when Deng and Zhou had passed through Guangdong on their way to the Sino-Vietnamese border to begin the negotiations, they had conspired with Zhang Zhidong to go against the treaty.[137] However, he also added that it was difficult to ascertain the extent to which this was simply bravado, and that it was also hard to predict how the French would approach the negotiations since the French political situation was still fractured and in disarray.[138] So, he concluded that it

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Cixi to the Grand Council and the Qing Border Commission, January 10, 1886, *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, p. 493.
[134] Robert Hart telegram to the Zongli Yamen, January 13th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 30-31.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

was imperative for China to stick to the agreement outlined in the treaty and to adhere to their original intention when writing the articles of therein, which was to respect the existing border (to the extent that one existed) as much as possible. As for the accompanying trade agreement, which was being negotiated by Li Hongzhang and the French envoy in Tianjin, Georges Cogordan (see Chapter Four), he argued that they must remember that their mutual intention was for the two countries to facilitate trade over the entire length of the border, and not only at the two locations specified in the treaty.[139]

Several days after Hart's telegram had been forwarded to the Grand Council by the Zongli Yamen, Peking made an abrupt about face on the issue of the realignment of the border and the establishment of a buffer zone. On January 17th the Grand Council telegrammed Deng Chengxiu instructing him to abandon efforts to negotiate for the creation of a buffer zone.[140] The Council explained that while there was still a contingent within the French government that wanted to abandon Tonkin altogether, they could not do so because, as Xu Jingcheng had explained, it would be a national embarrassment. If the Qing Border Delimitation Commission continued to argue for something that the French felt was too far outside the bounds of the treaty, namely the buffer zone, then they might use this as an excuse to terminate the negotiations, as Zeng Jize had suggested they might, which would give them more time to pacify Tonkin before the border negotiations. Hence the Council concluded that the border commission should not spend too much time negotiating over territory within Tonkin, but rather carry out the negotiations and confirm the existing border based on the Treaty.

Hence, after a half a year of strategizing for the creation of a buffer zone, Peking abruptly changed course and decided that the most prudent thing to do was to delimit the border and secure a trade agreement as quickly as possible according to the 1885 Treaty of Tianjin. What was the reason for the Court's sudden change of heart? Had they become convinced that France's intention was to establish cross-border trade relations as Xu Jingcheng had suggested, rather than the territorial conquest of Southwest China as Cen and Zhang had warned against? Or, perhaps Robert Hart, at the height of his influence over matters of foreign policy, had convinced Peking to reign in its wildcat commissioners and Governors-General and take a more cautious and conservative approach to the negotiations. While it is difficult to say with certainty what the determining factor was in influencing the Court to abandon the idea of the buffer zone, one thing is clear: although the policy debate had been more or less settled, getting the Qing border commissioners and provincial officials to fall in line with Peking's directives was another matter entirely. Cixi and the Grand Council may have given up on the idea of establishing the buffer zone and the strategy of waiting to see if France would eventually retreat from northern Tonkin, but the officials assigned to carry out the task of delimiting the border had not. As we will see in the following chapter, Deng Chengxiu was willing to test the limits of the Court's patience in order to carry out his own agenda and, in concert with the Governors-general, would continue to defy the directives of the central government throughout the border delimitation project over the course of the following year. Not only would Deng disregard

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu, January 17th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 32.

the Court's directive to abandon the idea of the buffer zone, but he would continue to stall the border survey and push for an even larger territory than Peking had originally envisioned; the buffer territory that he proposed encompassed most of the northern provinces of Tonkin from Lạng Sơn to the Bảo Lạc district in Cao Bằng province. In his view, once they carried out a border survey and confirmed the existing border (to the extent that it was possible to do so), it would be all but impossible to convince the French to make any changes to it, much less convince them of the need for a buffer zone.

When the French envoy in Tianjin received word that the border negotiations had stalled due to the Qing commission's territorial claims over northern Tonkin, he was furious. Li Hongzhang, the consummate mediator, attempted to placate him by explaining that Deng was only concerned about the militaries of the two countries being too close to one another and was simply trying to apportion a demilitarized area large enough to prevent the occurrence of conflict in the future.[141] Li proposed that if France announced that they would not station troops in Lạng Sơn and Cao Bằng then perhaps they could convince Deng to agree to draw the border north of those areas according to the treaty. However, Cogordan argued that would be impossible for the time being since French troops in those areas were still carrying out campaigns against 'bandits', and Li confided in the Council that, in any event, it would be unreasonable to request that the French withdraw all of their troops due to the fact that there were also many Qing troops still stationed in the area.[142] With Deng refusing to carry out Peking's directives, and neither side willing to withdraw their troops from the vicinity of where the border negotiations were taking place at Zhennanguan, a tense stalemate developed, which brought the two sides closer to the renewal of hostilities. In the following chapter I will address how this stalemate was eventually resolved.

Conclusion

There is an abundance of scholarly literature on the nature of the tributary system, and the tributary relationship between imperial China and Vietnam in particular.[143] However, there has been little published work investigating the effects that the severance of tributary relationships with China's neighbors had on Qing foreign policymaking, and the ways in which Qing statesmen understood the territorial scope of the Empire vis-à-vis its neighbors in the period directly following the breakdown of the tributary system and the China-centered East Asian world order. While Qing efforts to carve out a buffer zone in Tonkin as a means of territorial defense were ultimately unsuccessful, the situation sheds much light on official perceptions of the geo-body of the Empire. Investigation of the Qing state's response to 'the loss of Vietnam' and the arrival of the French colonial regime on its southern border reveals the importance and strategic value that Vietnam, as a trusted and reliable vassal state of the Qing empire, had as a defensive barrier from outside aggressors

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[141] Li Hongzhang to the Grand Council, January 19th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 33.
[142] Ibid.
[143] For example, on Vietnamese court envoys and tributary ritual see: Kelley, Liam C. *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

in the eyes of Qing statesmen. As long as it had been a faithful vassal that kept its own subjects under control, the entirety of Vietnam had served as a strategic land barrier or 'buffer territory' protecting China's southern frontier. However, after the French regime compelled the two countries to sever the tributary relationship and Vietnam was no longer able to defend itself, much less defend China's southern border from French territorial expansion, the response of the Qing state was to try and carve out a buffer zone within Vietnamese territory. In other words, if the entirety of Vietnam could no longer serve as a land barrier to the outside world, at least its mountainous northerly extremities could still serve that purpose. The significance of the tributary system during the late Qing period was more than symbolic; it had real world consequences—the Qing state had, after all, been willing to go to war to maintain it—and, likewise, the severing of tributary ties also had tangible effects on how the Qing state conceived, defended, and managed its borders. In the following chapter I will look at how the project to negotiate, survey and delimit the border with Vietnam can further add to our understanding of this topic.

In recent years, there have been some excellent studies on Qing foreign relations and frontier policy. In one such work, Matthew Mosca argued that the creation of the Zongli Yamen in 1861 marked a significant point in the transformation of 'frontier policy' to 'foreign policy', and in the centralization of the Qing foreign policy apparatus.[144] However, as we have seen, while the Zongli Yamen acted as the main 'switchboard' for the messages transmitted to and from Peking during the policy debate, the Yamen ministers themselves were conspicuously silent on the matter. The Zongli Yamen was essentially a bystander throughout most of the policy debate; during the roughly six-month period between the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin and the beginning of the border delimitation talks and made almost no contribution whatsoever to the debate and had no measurable impact on Peking's decision-making process concerning the border negotiation strategy. Interestingly, it was Robert Hart, much more than the Yamen, who from the headquarters of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service had hoped to turn the Qing foreign policy apparatus into a 'modern', centralized system, lamented the fact that officials outside of the capital had a say in foreign affairs at all, and who seemingly had the most influence over Peking's foreign policy decisions during this period. In the following chapters I will explore this issue further by looking at Qing diplomacy during the project to delimit the border with Tonkin and examine extent to which provincial officials and the Qing border commission carried out their duties irrespective of Peking's directives, whether originating from Hart, the Zongli Yamen, the Grand Council, or even the Throne.

[144] Mosca, Matthew W. *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China*. Stanford University Press, 2015.

Chapter 2
The Incorporation of Highland Southeast Asia into the National Geo-bodies of China and Vietnam

Introduction

After months of strategizing, Peking had finally adopted a policy stance concerning the negotiation and delimitation of the border with Tonkin. By the time the commissioners met at the border in early January 1886 to commence talks the Grand Council had instructed the Qing border commission to follow the cautious and efficient approach that Robert Hart and the Qing ambassadors in Paris and London had advocated. However, compelling the Qing border commissioners and provincial officials to fall in line with Peking's policy directives was another matter entirely. Over the course of the following year the latter would continually shirk the Throne's directions and vacillate between stubborn resistance and outright defiance. Despite the increased efficiency in communication between the imperial center and the hinterlands that was made possible by a newly installed telegraph network in China's Southwest, reigning in the activities of unruly officials on the southern frontier was no easy task. Not only did the Qing Border Commission and provincial officials shirk the cautious approach to the negotiations that Peking had advocated for, but the French Border Commission soon began to suspect that their Qing counterparts were complicit in a guerilla resistance against the French presence in Tonkin in cooperation with former Black Flags and frontierspeople. As we will see, the state building project of incorporating highland Southeast Asia into the national geo-bodies of the Qing and French colonial regimes was not simply a matter of surveying and mapping. Ultimately, the outcome of the border delimitation project would be primarily contingent upon how well each side could uphold the fiction of their historical claims to sovereignty in the region, and how well they could navigate, and adapt to, local conditions on the ground. Before examining the boundary delimitation negotiations and the joint effort to survey the border, I will first offer a brief synopsis of the personnel of the French and Qing commissions, followed by a description of the social, economic, and political conditions on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier at the time of their arrival.

Border Delimitation Commission Personnel

Deng Chengxiu, a former Imperial Censor who had briefly held a post in the Zongli Yamen, and Zhou Derun, a former minister in the Board of Rites—both of whom had been among the staunchest advocates for going to war with France and were associated with the *qingliu* faction—were assigned to lead the Qing commission. They were to work closely with the Governors-General of Guangdong and Guangxi, Zhang Zhidong, and Yunnan and Guizhou, Cen Yuying, as well as the governor of Guangxi, Li Bingheng. The Grand Council saw Cen, an ethnic Zhuang who had overseen the suppression of the Miao and Panthay Rebellions, as something of a Tonkin expert and expected him to oversee the border delimitation project. Li Xingrui, the former director of the Shanghai arsenal, and Wang Derun, the former *taotai* of rice for Canton, also served as commissioners, the former often acting as the de facto translator. As discussed in Chapter One, James Hart served as an

additional translator for the Chinese commission and also acted as an intermediary, and he corresponded with Robert Hart regularly via telegram. The French border commission was comprised of several military and civilian officials, and a former naval doctor-turned-explorer; Messrs. Sherzer (the Consul general, chairman of the commission, and interpreter), Bourcier Saint-Chaffray (representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the branch of the French government responsible for administering northern Vietnam at that time), Dr. Paul Neis (the commission's doctor and chronicler of the expedition), Lieutenant-Colonel Tisseyre (representing the Ministry of War), Captain Bouinais (representing the Ministry of the Navy), M. Delenda (a clerk of the chancellery in Port Saïd), and two topographical officers, Lieutenants Verney, and Bohin, as well as a team of several dozen cartographers.[145] Just weeks into expedition Sherzer contracted dysentery, died on the return voyage to France, and was replaced by Saint-Chaffray as the head of the border commission.

It is noteworthy that neither Deng Chengxiu or Bourcier Saint-Chaffray had any experience with borderlands administration, much less any expertise in cartography or any of the requisite skills or training for surveying or reconnoitering. In addition, with the exception of Dr. Neis, who had independently explored areas of Cochinchina's central highlands, none of the commissioners had much knowledge about the geographic or demographic particularities of peninsular Southeast Asia. To further complicate matters, Deng Chengxiu was vehemently opposed to recognition of France's claims of suzerainty over Tonkin in the first place and took an adversarial approach to the negotiations from the outset. When the two commissions convened in Đồng Đăng near Zhennanguan or the Gate of China (just north of the Vietnamese city of Lạng Sơn, and south of Pingxiang in Guangxi) in January of 1886, it took them almost three months of negotiating before they began the survey of the border. The two sides had fundamental differences in their interpretations of the 1885 Treaty of Tianjin, the nature of 'changes' or 'alterations' to the existing border (as stipulated in Article Five of the Treaty) and differed in their fundamental understanding of the form and function of the border. An analysis of the border delimitation negotiations and the way in which the border was ultimately determined can offer insight into the process of the formation of the national geo-bodies of China and Vietnam and also serve as a case study into the nature of the late-Qing foreign policy apparatus. Before delving into the first round of negotiations and the border survey that followed, it is first necessary to provide some background on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier in the period leading up to the border delimitation project. To do so I will draw from several recent studies on the region, as well as from the intelligence reports and memoranda of the French and Qing border commissions. Taken together, these sources indicate that up until the moment of border delimitation, neither the Qing, the French, or the Nguyễn before them had been able to exert state control over this vast frontier region.

Society, Politics, and Economy of the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier

The project to delimit the Sino-Vietnamese border was complicated by the fact that both the Qing and Nguyễn regimes' territorial claims over much of the region in the

[145] Neis, p. 1.

nineteenth century had been tendentious at best. The geographic region comprising the Red River Valley of modern-day Vietnam and extending into Southwestern China had been since the time of the Đông Sơn culture (ca. 1000 BCE-1 BC) a politically diffuse zone of overlapping sovereignties, referred to as 'mandalas' by O.W. Wolters, one of the earliest Western historians of Southeast Asia.[146] Much of Tonkin as well as many areas in the south and the central highlands remained outside of the formal administrative control of the Nguyễn government until Minh Mang's reforms of the 1830s, at which time he renamed his empire Đại Nam (Great South), abolished military colonies throughout most of Vietnam and replaced them with a civil bureaucracy, and divided the country into thirty-one provinces and three administrative regions (Bac Kỳ in the north, Trung Kỳ in Central Vietnam, and Nam Ky in the south).[147] However, despite the Vietnamese Court's best efforts to bring the highlands under their control, by the time of French colonization the Sino-Vietnamese frontier remained a region primarily comprised of autonomous chieftaincies with overlapping sovereignties. Even Minh Mang, who was consumed by the idea of unifying the empire and assimilating non-Viet ethnic groups had to eventually come to terms with the fact that direct rule of Tonkin was impossible.[148] There were dozens of uprisings against Nguyễn control of Tonkin in the nineteenth century, most notably the White Flag Rebellion, and against Qing rule in the borderlands of Yunnan and Guangxi such as the Miao and Panthay Rebellions. Hence, the French project to 'pacify' Tonkin was, in a certain sense, an attempt to carry out the Nguyễn state's unfulfilled colonial ambitions in the region. Moreover, autonomous 'states' situated throughout the lowlands of Upper Tonkin controlled by warlords with official or semi-official imperial titles such as Liu Yongfu and the Black Flags, and Huang Tingjing (黃廷京, Hoàng Đình Kinh in Vietnamese, and referred to in French language literature as Cai Kinh), held more claims to legitimacy within the territories under their control than the court in Huế had ever been able to achieve. As we will see, while Liu had retreated to the Chinese side of the border following the conclusion of the Sino-French conflict, he still maintained considerable power and influence throughout northern Tonkin, and his remaining forces presented a considerable obstacle to France's economic and political ambitions in the region. Meanwhile, Hoàng Đình Kinh and his followers continued to maintain de facto control over most of Lạng Sơn and Cao Bằng.

The socio-political situation in northern Tonkin and southern Guangxi (then administered as part of Guangdong province) and Yunnan was also contingent on the political striations within the surrounding zones of heavy settlement. During the Taiping Rebellion many residents of the densely settled areas of China's southern provinces had sought refuge in Upper Tonkin, as did many former Taiping soldiers after the failed uprising. Likewise, fugitive soldiers that had fought in another anti-Qing uprising known as the Kingdom of Yanling (延陵國, circa 1850s-1860s)—from which the Black Flag Army was largely assembled—also vied for control of territory and resources in the region. This movement of people disrupted the economy of the region for decades and contributed to the milieu that saw Liu Yongfu and other powerholders independent of the imperial

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[146] Wolters, O. W. *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. ACLS History E-Book Project, 2005.
[147] Goscha, p. 52.
[148] Goscha, p. 421.

regimes in Peking and Huế carve out their own spheres of influence. To further complicate matters, there were also dozens of overlapping chieftaincies, or *tus*i, comprised largely of communities of hilltribes people with varying levels of autonomy from both the warlord fiefdoms and the imperial states to their north and south. At the time of the French pacification of Tonkin, one British observer noted: "Although the frontiers of China and Tongking (*sic*) were supposed to be contiguous, there existed, between the limits of the strictly settled districts, a strip of territory inhabited by aboriginal tribes more or less submissive, but partially independent of either. The area of this doubtful borderland and the degree of authority exerted over it by the neighbouring governments depend, no doubt, to some extent upon the measure of tranquility in the adjacent provinces."[149] Indeed, the residents of this "doubtful borderland" would continue to challenge and evade the Chinese and Vietnamese states' attempts at territorial control up until well into the twentieth century.

However, despite the real or imagined administrative divisions of this territory by the Qing and Nguyễn regimes, and the diffuse and overlapping spheres of power that often flouted those divisions, by the nineteenth century southern Yunnan, Guangxi, and Northern Tonkin constituted a coherent and well-integrated market region, or "macro-region" in the Skinnerian sense. Even in the present, Sino-Vietnamese trade is more frequent than domestic trade between northern and southern Vietnam, and as much as 90% of Guangxi's overseas trade occurs on the Sino-Vietnamese border.[150] In the nineteenth century, Chinese merchants controlled much of the largely unregulated commerce of Tonkin, and although technically illegal, the export of rice from Tonkin into Yunnan and Guangxi was a major facet of the regional economy, particularly during periods of disorder and rebellion such as during the Taiping rebellion when Vietnamese rice exports into China helped to offset famine conditions and sold for a fraction of the cost of domestic Chinese rice.[151] Chinese merchants also maintained an official monopoly on the Opium trade up until the time of French arrival in Southeast Asia, and in fact would continue to control the trade—which became one of the most important revenue streams for the colonial government of French Indochina after eventually being officially legalized—well into the twentieth century. Relatedly, taxation of the opium trade, which was legalized in Vietnam in 1865, was a major source of revenue for the semi-autonomous states controlled by the Black Flags and the Cai Kinh in the border areas encompassing Lào Cai and Lạng Sơn, respectively.[152] Human trafficking of women and children was another major industry. Banditry and piracy were also endemic across the littoral frontier, and it is no exaggeration to say that much of the economy of the South China coast and the Sino-Vietnamese frontier was essentially

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[149] Gundry, R.S. *China and Her Neighbours: France in Indo-China, Russia and China, India and Thibet*. London: Chapman and Hall, LTD. 1893.

[150] Li, Tana. "Between Mountains and the Sea." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2012, p. 67. In the wake of China's Belt and Road infrastructural development projects in the region, Yunnan's trade with Southeast Asia increased from several hundred million dollars annually in the 1990s, to over $13 billion a year in 2018. (Strangio, p. 68)

[151] Ibid

[152] For more on the Black Flags and Cai Kinh see Davis, Bradley Camp. Imperial Bandits: Outlaws and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands. University of Washington Press, 2017.

dependent on piratical activities and smuggling, as fishermen, traders, and pirates were often interchangeable depending on the socio-political circumstances.[153]

The French border commission reported that certain areas of Tonkin had thriving economies that were centered on the harvesting and processing of a diverse array of natural resources and that there was a well-developed, though highly uneven, system of taxation for funneling financial resources into the hands of the Vietnamese state.[154] One French report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that the highlands to the east of Lạng Sơn was largely comprised of "natives" with pockets of ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese scattered across the frontier zone.[155] The principle product of the region was the harvesting and processing of star anise, with the native population controlling the former, and the ethnic Chinese controlling the latter. The region also contained an abundance of high quality lumber used in the construction of temples, and as well as bamboo, which was transported to Lạng Sơn via the Qi River (淇江).[156] In addition to the aforementioned products, the highland areas of the Guangxi-Tonkin frontier had many autonomous chieftaincies that were exempt from tax collection and who were, according to the French, often indistinguishable from the ethnic Vietnamese populations that engaged in the cultivation of glutinous rice and other market products.[157] According to French intelligence agents, these chieftaincies also possessed an array of indigenous weapons as well as firearms, which they acquired ammunition for in the markets of Qulü (驅驢), despite a prohibition on the arms trade on both sides of the border.[158]

However, of all the cross-border trades in the nineteenth century, mining was perhaps the largest and most important industry. There were at least 134 mines in operation in Tonkin by the early nineteenth century and some mines employed as many as 100,000 Chinese miners, while Vietnamese workers often transported the raw materials.[159] Autonomous cities with their own defense and police forces, market centers, opera troupes, teahouses, and all manner of entertainment and infrastructure appeared wherever the larger mines were found. While many of these were joint ventures between Chinese merchants and hill tribe chieftains, the Qing state had also directly invested in many of the mining projects in Tonkin.[160] In short, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, large portions of Tonkin had become unofficial mining colonies with intimate ties to officials and merchant elites throughout China's southern provinces. By the late eighteenth century as

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[153] Luân, Vũ Đường, and Cooke, Nola. "Chapter 9 Chinese Merchants and Mariners in Nineteenth-Century Tongking." *The Tongking Gulf Through History*. pp. 152-153.
[154] French intelligence report on the eastern border region Guangxi and Tonkin, M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 109-118 (also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 830-834).
[155] Ibid
[156] Ibid
[157] Ibid
[158] Ibid
[159] Luân, Vũ Đường. "The Politics of Frontier Mining: Local Chieftains, Chinese Miners, and Upland Society in the Nông Văn Vân Uprising in the Sino-Vietnamese Border Area, 1833–1835." *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, no. 11, June 2014, p. 35.
[160] Giersch, C. Patterson. Commerce and Empire in the Borderlands: How do Merchants and Trade Fit into Qing Frontier History?" 2014, 9(3), p. 371.

much as 70% of the coins in circulation in Guangdong and Guangxi were minted in Vietnam.[161] Some mining colonies had become so powerful by the early nineteenth century that they even posed significant threats to the Vietnamese imperial state. One such colony in Bảo Lạc province (保樂), a joint venture between a tribal chieftain and Chinese merchants, staged an uprising against the Vietnamese government when the latter tried to extract taxes from them and almost succeeded in forming their own wholly independent state.[162] The Vietnamese court asked the Qing government for support in putting down the rebellion, but the latter declined.[163]

Here it is worth noting that, with the exception of salt, mining was predominantly carried out and controlled by private enterprises, regulated in varying degrees by the imperial state. It was not until the last decade of the dynasty that the Qing state promulgated new mining regulations and asserted centralized control over resource extraction. Hence, even if Peking was aware of the vast mining resources of Tonkin—and it is likely that it was—there was little state initiative outside the provincial level for utilizing coal and other mineral resources.[164] Li Hongzhang and Zhang Zhidong were notable proponents of coal mining for industrial purposes, but as Shellen Xiao Wu has pointed out, the imperial state continued to see coal mining as being tied more to people's livelihoods than to being a fundamental component of a state's wealth and power.

That being said, provincial authorities in the southwest were well aware of the mineral resources in the region; not only did the economies of Guangxi and Yunnan rely on Tonkin for the minting of coins, but the territory was also vital for the supply of Qing troops throughout the southwestern provinces. French intelligence agents reported that local Chinese officials, including the Governor-General of Yunnan, Cen Yuying, had frequently recruited militiamen from among the Chinese Muslim population in northern Tonkin.[165] They also reported that Chinese farmers monopolized many of the crops in the most fertile areas of northern Tonkin and that the Chinese garrisons in Guangxi were all being supplied by rice from the agriculturally productive areas on the Vietnamese side of the border near Lạng Sơn.[166] Hence, the economies and security regimes of China's southwestern provinces very much relied upon the porousness of the border.

The French were also keenly aware of the fact that there were many mines located along the Yunnan-Tonkin frontier—including the most productive gold mine in Asia—and that a large portion of them had been sealed during the unrest since the outbreak of the Taiping rebellion. The Taiping rebels had recruited many soldiers from among the ranks of

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[161] Luân, Vũ Đường. "The Politics of Frontier Mining: Local Chieftains, Chinese Miners, and Upland Society in the Nông Văn Vân Uprising in the Sino-Vietnamese Border Area, 1833–1835." *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, no. 11, June 2014, p. 38.
[162] Ibid
[163] Ibid
[164] Wu, Empires of Coal, p. 25.
[165] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian, p. 939.
[166](May 6th, 1886 from Hanoi, Full summary report from the French border commission, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* pp. 735-758.

Chinese miners in Tonkin and gold, silver, iron, and copper mines across the region had since been closed up.[167] One French report suggests that most of the metals extracted from mines in Tonkin had been bound for markets in Yunnan and Laos, which also accords with recent studies on the economy of the macro region encompassing Southwestern China and Tonkin published by Li Tana and others.[168] However, while it is clear that the markets of Tonkin were well integrated into the economy of China's southwestern provinces, they were largely cut off from the rest of Vietnam until the middle of the nineteenth century due to the region's geographic inaccessibility. According to the French border commission, most of the routes linking Cao Bằng province to Lào Cai, the main node of trade and transport to the south, had only been opened up around the time of the Taiping rebellion and most of these roads were dangerous narrow trails that cut through the mountains.[169]

Both the French and the Qing commissions saw the opening up of frontier commerce in northern Tonkin as a major economic opportunity. Cen Yuying, the Governor-General of Yunnan and Guizhou provinces memorialized that Yunnan had remained impoverished because it was so far from major waterways and difficult to get to, which had hindered the transportation of its trade goods.[170] Cen reasoned that if they were able to open up a trade route in Yunnan that it would be easier to transport goods via the Red River to Hanoi, and then on to Guangdong, Shanghai, and Tianjin via the ocean than it would to transport the products over land.[171] He went on to explain that it was not until assuming his post in Yunnan that he had realized how beneficial the Red River was to the prosperity of Yunnan. He felt that the stimulation of cross-border trade between Yunnan and Tonkin would be of great benefit to the people of the region and to the Empire as a whole and argued that if they were to set customs checkpoints along the border, it could potentially generate a massive source of revenue for the Qing state; therefore, he argued, the government should not delay in developing trade along the province's border with Tonkin.[172]

Another vexing feature of the region was something it held in common with many other frontier areas: the syncretic nature of borderland culture and ethnic/national identity, as discussed from the Qing perspective in the previous chapter. The French border commission reported extensively on the social and political situation in the border regions of Tỉnh Hưng Hóa (省興化), Tỉnh Cao Bằng (省高平) and other frontier provinces of northern Tonkin. Similar to the picture of the region portrayed by the Qing court, the French border commission complained that the ethnic population was highly mixed, that it was often difficult to distinguish Annamese from tribesmen, and that there was no

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[167] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, p. 941.
[168] See: Li, Tana. "Between Mountains and the Sea." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2012.
[169] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian, pp. 941-942.
[170] *Zhong Fa zhan zheng*, p. 4, October 9th, 1885 Memorial from Cen Yuying.
[171] Ibid
[172] Ibid

standardization or scientific classification of the various tribes and groups.[173] In a report to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs the head of the commission explained that among the various groups inhabiting the region, the largest was the Hmong (*Miao*, 苗), who chiefly inhabited the mountainous areas and typically only came down to the lowlands to trade forest products headed for markets in Yunnan and Laos.[174] Some of the staples of the highland economy included maize, rice, incense, and raw cotton, the latter of which was usually bound for Laos where it was traded in kind for salt, a vital product of considerable scarcity in Tonkin.[175] In addition, the report claimed that the Vietnamese inhabitants of Tonkin rarely traveled between the fertile plains and the mountains and that the only Annamese found in the highlands were a few government functionaries, military units, and small village hamlets. However, the French commission also explained that there were various enclaves on or near the Chinese border where highland tribespeople, Chinese, and Vietnamese mixed freely.[176] To further complicate matters, the Vietnamese bureaucratic system was largely patterned on the Chinese model, and mandarins in the employ of one country were sometimes transferred, or defected to, the other.[177] And it was not just literati and officials who could navigate both worlds; Vietnamese speaking Chinese merchant sojourners controlled a large percentage of the domestic and import-export economy of Vietnam, and many of them spent months—sometimes years—on the Vietnamese side of the border, often taking Vietnamese wives.

The French cartographers assigned to work with the border delimitation commission also acted as intelligence officers and ethnographers. In addition to collecting information about the local economy, the cartographic team also provided ethnographic descriptions of the sartorial, ceremonial, and ritual practices of the native inhabitants of the frontier highlands. Such details included how married and unmarried women styled their hair (and how often they washed it), the types of garments men and women of each tribe wore, and any courting or marriage practices that they observed such as polygamy or polyandry that they found interesting or unusual. It is clear that the French cartographic team's ethnographic work and intelligence collecting duties played a role that was perhaps equally important to their surveying and drafting duties in shaping the French border commission's understanding of the frontier. The cartographers reported that the native population generally despised the ethnic Chinese and frequently "tried to drive them away whenever and wherever they appeared."[178] Based on these reports, the head of the French border commission, Bourcier Saint-Chaffray, formed the opinion that the French had a vital role to play as the 'liberators' of the Vietnamese and Hmong people in Tonkin. In a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs he argued that the delimitation and policing of the border was of the utmost importance for ensuring that the Chinese could no longer bully the

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[173] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 937-942.
[174] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, p. 941
[175] Ibid
[176] ibid
[177] Wright, Stanley F. *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 507.
[178] French intelligence report on the eastern border region Guangxi and Tonkin, M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 109-118 (also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 830-834.

Vietnamese and hill tribe groups in the region and was essential for guaranteeing that the latter could raise their crops and live peacefully without a sense of inferiority or the fear of being made into slaves, and "could finally and for all times sit at the table with their Chinese neighbors as equals."[179]

In addition to the above issues, perhaps the most frustrating feature of the Sino-French frontier in the eyes of the French border commission—and a point that would come to impact the border delimitation negotiations—was the fact that there was no standard system of taxation throughout most of the region. There were certain districts that had sometimes submitted tax payments to China, and at other times had submitted taxes (always in kind) to either the Annamese government, or the government in Luang Prabang, and there were even areas that were sometimes taxed by all three.[180] In a sense then, the head of the French commission argued, "this region could be seen as the meeting point between these three empires, all of which had wrangled for control of it, and which had correspondingly felt the influence of all three."[181] Hence, by the time the French and Qing commissions attempted to delimit the border, Tonkin and the Sino-Vietnamese frontier was a region of multiple, overlapping sovereignties; in addition to the courts in Peking, Huế, and Luang Prabang, there were also mining, military, and merchant/pirate colonies with varying degrees of autonomy scattered throughout the region. These overlapping sovereignties and 'parallel states' had been able to exist in part because neither the Chinese or Vietnamese state had ever been able to exercise hegemonic control over their respective sides of the border, as far as a border existed at all in any real sense of the word.

Despite the imperial states' efforts to exert their control over the region, the French commission admitted that due to the difficult mountainous terrain the inhabitants had been able to preserve a large amount of autonomy and self-governance, and that the territory retained the appearance of having its own political system.[182] Dillon of the French commission observed that in some areas the populace expressed loyalty to the French (and opposed the Chinese), and in other areas they vacillated between being cautious of the French and being hostile towards Westerners.[183] Accordingly, some of the tribal chieftains that the French commission had encountered had been quite friendly and had provided them with information regarding local populations, geography, and political conditions, while others had been outright hostile.[184] Dillon explained that, while Tỉnh Hưng Hóa (省興化) had broken away from Chinese control more than eight hundred years ago, ever since that time the Chinese, Annamese, and Laotian populations in the Northwestern regions of

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[179] May 6th, 1886 from Hanoi, Full summary report from the French border commission, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* p. 758.
[180] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian,* p. 939.
[181] Ibid
[182] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, p. 938.
[183] Ibid
[184] Ibid

Tonkin had expanded and that the border had experienced many fluctuations.[185] His report went on to explain that various wars fought in the border region had been the prime factor in the vicissitudes of Tonkin and that it had long been a place of refuge for bandits and rebels, and for the organization of rebellions.[186] The border to the west of Zhennanguan was particularly ill-defined and when Vietnamese mandarins had attempted to collect taxes in this region the inhabitants protested, stating that their villages were within the boundary of China and, likewise, when they were approached by Chinese officials they claimed to be under the jurisdiction of Vietnamese officials in Lạng Sơn.[187]

Finally, another major feature of frontier society that would come to have a significant impact on the border delimitation negotiations was the presence of 'bandit' or 'pirate' gangs that were ostensibly primarily comprised of disbanded Qing and Black Flag soldiers, and the followers of the 'pirate' Hoàng Đình Kinh (黃廷京, also known as Cai Kinh, a former Qing official-turned-pirate from Canton), usually referred to in Qing communiqué as *youyong* (游勇). In addition to the mining colonies discussed above, prior to the Sino-French conflict there were also several largely independent states controlled and administered Liu and Hoàng. Liu and the Black Flags, while enjoying official recognition by both the Nguyễn and Qing courts, had in reality established parallel states as early as the 1860s that had a monopoly on violence, taxation, and the movement of goods and people on the roads and waterways over a large portion of northern Tonkin.[188] Up until the time that his forces were defeated in several key battles in the Sino-French conflict forcing him to retreat to Qinzhou in Guangxi province, Liu had controlled most of the Upper Red River Valley and had held a monopoly on tariffs collected from goods coming from both sides of the border.[189] So firm was Liu's control over the border region surrounding Lào Cai that the French had apparently even entertained the idea of purchasing the territory outright as an alternative to seizing it through armed conflict.[190] Both Cen Yuying, Governor-General of Yunnan and Guizhou, and Tang Jingsong, had a deep admiration for Liu and had advocated for recruiting him and his Black Flag Army to assist the Qing military during the Sino-French conflict.[191] Subsequently, Liu forged personal relationships with Cen and Tang, both of whom would go on to play important roles in the border delimitation negotiations. While the Black Flags were greatly weakened during the Sino-French War and Liu had reestablished himself in Qinzhou on the Qing side of the border, remnants of his Black Flag forces continued to harass the French occupation forces and the Border Commission.

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[185] Dillon to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 61, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, p. 939.
[186] Ibid
[187] French intelligence report on the eastern border region Guangxi and Tonkin, M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 109-118, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 830-834.
[188] Camp Davis, p. 26.
[189] Wright, Stanley F. *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 508.
[190] Camp Davis, p. 68.
[191] Interestingly, when Tang Jingsong established the Republic of Formosa in 1895, he made Liu his vice president, and Liu briefly became the president shortly before fleeing the island in the wake of the Japanese advance.

By the time the border commissions commenced negotiations in January 1886, a loose conglomeration of decommissioned Black Flag soldiers, Qing regulars, and destitute borderlanders formed a 'bandit' network in Upper Tonkin that dealt in all manner of goods including opium, salt, and rice, and were also involved in human trafficking, predominantly of kidnapped Vietnamese women and children who were smuggled into China. While Liu Yongfu had retreated to Qinzhou on the Chinese side of the border with a number of his most loyal officers and soldiers following the Sino-French conflict, a significant number of former Black Flags—now out of work—remained in northern Tonkin and had since turned to banditry and smuggling to make ends meet. The Sino-French conflict had devastating effects on the border areas; whole villages had been nearly destroyed and abandoned, and the city of Lạng Sơn, a bustling market town just prior to the war was almost a ghost town by the time the two border delimitation commissions arrived in January of 1886. According to reports from the Qing border commission, *youyong* controlled almost the entirety of the border west of Lạng Sơn.[192] It is not clear to what extent Liu was directing their activities from his new base in Qinzhou, but their presence was to become a major factor in the tenor and direction of the border delimitation negotiations and in the efforts of the two commissions to carry out the border survey. The French protectorate continued to see the Black Flags and other '*Pirates Chinois*' as the primary obstacle to achieving their administrative and economic objectives in the region and, as we will see, came to suspect that Chinese officials—Cen Yuying in particular—were using them as a proxy to harass and intimidate the French Commission in the hopes that they would abandon the project altogether.

The reports of the Qing and French officials and border commissioners examined above paint a picture of northern Tonkin and the frontier areas of Yunnan and Guangxi as an area very much outside the control of either government. This massive frontier region, in addition to constituting its own economic macro-region, was also home to various overlapping sovereignties comprised of a patchwork of independent or semiautonomous polities including hilltribes chieftaincies, and mining and warlord colonies. In short, in order to carry out the task of boundary delimitation, the French and Qing border commissions had to uphold the fiction that either side exercised anything resembling hegemonic control over their respective sides of the border when putting their respective claims to territorial sovereignty and had to navigate the social political realities on the ground in order to carry out the task.

The First Round of Border Delimitation Negotiations

The Qing border commission reached Longzhou by way of Canton in late December of 1885 and awaited the arrival of the French commissioners who were delayed for over a month in Hanoi due to 'bandit' activities in Tonkin and difficulties in securing a military escort to the frontier. The leadership of the French occupation forces was wholly opposed to carrying out the border delimitation project at that time because they felt that it would have been futile until the region had been pacified and refused to guarantee the safety of

[192] Deng Chengxiu to the Zongli Yamen, November 28th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, pp. 17-18.

the border commission or provide reinforcements. General Henri Roussel de Courcy, the commander of the Tonkin Expeditionary Corps, was also preoccupied with the pacification of the fertile Mekong Delta and far away northern Tonkin was apparently low on his list of priorities.[193] Bourcier Saint-Chaffray, the head of the French commission, was livid with the military's lack of support for the border delimitation project and believed that a weak military presence in Tonkin gave the appearance that France was incapable of carrying out the articles of the treaty and was a "national humiliation."[194] Moreover, he maintained that this weak position would lead the Qing commission to believe that they had the upper hand in the negotiations. To make matters worse, Saint-Chaffray reported that since French forces had pulled out of the region many Vietnamese villages near the border had come under the control of Qing military and civil administrators, further strengthening the Qing commission's position.[195] 'Bandit gangs' also occupied many regions of the frontier that were not directly controlled by the Qing and whenever they were confronted by pacification troops they could easily flee to the Chinese side of the border, regroup, and simply wait for the French forces to leave before returning to reassert their control.[196]

The French commission was finally able to secure a military escort—a modest detachment of light infantry comprised of thirty African *chasseurs* and several hundred untrained Vietnamese soldiers and laborers—and arrived in Lạng Sơn in the first week of January 1886. The route the French commission took to the Chinese border passed through many areas where battles had taken place just months earlier during the Sino-French conflict. The French commission's chronicler Paul Neis described the sorry state of burned villages and the gruesome sights and odors of the decaying corpses of half-buried soldiers along the sides of the road.[197] When they arrived in Lạng Sơn they found that the city and most of the villages in the surrounding hills had been largely abandoned. Zhennanguan, or the 'Gate of China'—the symbolic gateway between the two countries where tributary envoys from the south would pass through into the Middle Kingdom on their way to offer tribute to the Qing Court, and the location of the forthcoming negotiations—had been destroyed in the last days of the Sino-French conflict in retaliation for a previous Qing victory there.[198]

The first meeting was held on January 12th and each time the two commissions met from then on, they alternated locations between Đồng Đăng and the Zhennan Gate with each commission being escorted by a small detachment of unarmed soldiers. The meetings got off to a slow start, but despite their disagreements regarding even the most fundamental aspects of their mutual assignment, relations between the two commissions remained cordial during the first round of talks after an initial verbal scuffle apparently

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[193] Neis, p. 1.
[194] Full summary report from the French border commission, May 6th, 1886, Hanoi. M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* pp. 735-758.
[195] Ibid
[196] Ibid
[197] Neis, p. 9.
[198] This was actually the second time in less than twenty years that the Zhennan Gate had been destroyed, the first time by the followers of Wu Yazhong during the rebellion by the Kingdom of Yanling. For more on this uprising see Camp Davis, *Imperial Bandits*, p. 37.

instigated a belligerent Deng Chengxiu in their first informal meeting, which was likely little more than diplomatic theatre; this friendly intercourse was likely facilitated by the copious amounts of rice wine and champagne that the commissioners imbibed. The Qing commission also treated their French counterparts to "swallows' nests, sharks' fins, sea cucumbers and other Chinese dishes as much sought after as unimaginable," in the words of Dr. Neis, and the French reciprocated with champagne, cakes, preserved fruits, and cigars.[199]

From the start, there were marked differences in how the two sides viewed the nature of their work. In their first meeting Deng Chengxiu insisted that the French and Chinese versions of Article Three of the June 9th, 1885 Treaty of Tianjin carried a subtle but important difference, namely in the way that they expressed the provision allowing to "correct" or "amend" (改正) the existing border.[200] In Deng's view, since the whole of Vietnam had previously been under the suzerainty of the Qing Empire, the task at hand was to determine and define, or rather to reestablish, the limits of Tonkin's boundaries, and not to change or amend the border of China in any way.[201] He argued that the Qing Empire had only relinquished it claims to sovereignty over Vietnam in order to put an end to the bloodshed of the Sino-French conflict of the previous year to and promote friendship between the two powers, and that the French commission should be willing to approach the negotiations in a spirit of friendship, with the implication that they do so according to the terms set by the Qing commission.[202] In Deng's view, the Qing government had already generously ceded Vietnam in its entirety to the French, so if they hoped to maintain a spirit of goodwill and cooperation then the French commission should not try to further encroach upon Chinese territory or haggle over the details of the boundary line.[203] He argued that France had already taken control of Vietnam, a territory that had been subordinate to China since ancient times, which was of no small benefit to France and, conversely, amounted to *the reduction of Chinese population and territory*.[204] In other words, he felt that the generous act of relinquishing control over its former tributary already represented a significant loss of Qing territory, and while he was willing to admit that the tributary relationship between the two countries had, in fact, been severed, he continued to employ the logic and rhetoric of the tributary system throughout the negotiations by invoking the language of the "loss" of Vietnam (i.e. the loss of Qing territory).

From the perspective of the French commission, the border of Tonkin and the border of China were one and the same, and there was no way to discuss the boundary of Tonkin without discussing the boundary of China.[205] As one member of the French

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[199] Neis, p. 18.
[200] Meeting Minutes, January 12th, in Langson (M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 303.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Throughout the negotiations the Qing commission referred to Vietnam as *Annan,* 安南, the historical Chinese name for Vietnam meaning 'pacified south', and not in reference to the administrative designation for the central part of the country as used by the French Protectorate.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.

commission put it: "A country's boundary line is also their neighboring country's boundary line, so it is impossible to speak of the boundary of Tonkin without referring to the boundary of China."[206] In addition to the problem of how to interpret the provision in the third article of the treaty regarding "corrections" to the border, there was also disagreement over the fifth article that stipulated that the two countries were to establish trading zones where Chinese and French merchants would be free to engage in trade "under the same conditions, and with the same advantages, as in the ports open to foreign trade."[207] The article stated that "two of the said spots shall be marked out on the Chinese Frontier, the one above Lao-kai (Lào Cai), the other beyond Lang-son (Lạng Sơn)."[208] This language was vague enough that it left room for differing interpretations of the clause.

Deng argued that in the past Vietnam had been subordinate to the Qing Empire, so the latter had no need to clearly delimit the boundaries of its frontier for the purpose of carrying out trade. Although the treaty in question now required them to do so, from his perspective the article clearly stated that both of these trade zones were to be located within Tonkin and that everything north of these locations was naturally to be considered Qing territory.[209] And in any event, he reasoned, the district to the north of Lạng Sơn was impoverished and infertile, so it would be no loss to France if they were to cede this territory to China. Of course, the French commission disagreed on this point and argued that the country in question was rich in produce and other natural resources and that, in any case, it was a moot point because the treaty in no way stipulated that the territory in question should be located within Qing territory.[210]

After several days of negotiations, Deng insisted that the mutual task of the commissions was to determine a *new* boundary for Tonkin, rather than to determine the old boundary of China, and that everything north of Lạng Sơn should be included within Qing territory.[211] He also maintained his position that the treaty only mentioned that alterations could be made to the border of Tonkin and did not anywhere mention alterations to the border of China, to the great frustration of the French commission.[212] Furthermore, Deng questioned why his French counterparts were so insistent on haggling over changes to China's border when the Qing had already generously handed over the entirety of Vietnam to the French, and insisted that the task at hand for the latter should be limited to determining the boundaries of its new protectorate. After reaching an impasse during the second day of negotiations, Deng reiterated that, as far as the Qing state was concerned, when all of Vietnam was under China's protection *there had been no need for a border*, much less any cause to alter whatever boundary line had existed between the two countries, but now that Vietnam was under the rule of the French Protectorate that the

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[206] Meeting Minutes, January 12th, in Langson, M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 303.
[207] See Article Five of the Treaty of Tianjin in the appendix.
[208] Ibid.
[209] The clause in question reads: "商處所在中國邊界者應指定兩處一在保勝以上一在諒山以北," or "En tout état de cause, deux de ces points seront désignés sur la frontière chinoise, l'un au-dessus de Lao-Kai, l'autre au-delà de Lang-Son."
[210] Ibid; Meeting Minutes, January 12th, in Langson. M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 303.)
[211] Meeting Minutes, January 14th, at Zhennanguan, M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 303.
[212] Ibid.

situation had completely changed to the point that it was a necessity to alter the border.[213] Wang Zhichun offered further clarification as to the reasoning behind wanting to incorporate such a large band of territory in the peninsular highlands into Qing territory; based on their centuries long tributary relationship, the Chinese viewed the Vietnamese state as being comparable to "family," while they viewed the French as "strangers." Li Xingrui also added that the territory they were requesting was insignificant compared to the territory that the Qing had already relinquished to the French, and that the latter should be less concerned with the minor details of amendments to the border in order to maintain a spirit of goodwill between the two countries.[214] Furthermore, the Qing commission reasoned, the population was sparse and impoverished, the soil was infertile and, in any case, the Bảo Lạc District (*Baole*, 保樂) was under the control of 'bandits' (this was likely in reference to the rogue state established by Cai Kinh).[215] Of course, the French commission disagreed that the territory in question—an area encompassing most of the area of the modern-day provinces of Cao Bằng and Hà Giang totaling more than ten thousand square miles—was insignificant and argued that the Vietnamese court would not think so either.[216]

After several weeks of negotiations, the French disagreed on almost every point that Deng and the other Qing commissioners had raised. Saint-Chaffray insisted that, first of all, the two countries' borders were one and the same since "to speak of one borderline is to speak of another as well. Since the boundaries of two places are side by side, there is no way to amend the borderline of one place without influencing the state of the other."[217] Furthermore, the French commission argued that they should not attempt to alter or redraw the entire course of the border, but rather determine the location of the present border as outlined in the recent treaty and make small corrections or alterations only if the need arose, and only when it was mutually beneficial to both sides.[218] Hence, the French maintained that their primary task as specified in the third article of the treaty was to proceed to the border and carry out survey work in order to ascertain the local situation and determine where the boundary line actually was. Only then, they argued, would they able to actually determine the full extent and scope of their territory and decide on what sections of the border could be amended.[219] Saint-Chaffray argued that from then on, the two commissions should limit their work to the parameters specified in the treaty and insisted that both commissions proceed to the border as soon as possible to carry out the on the spot survey of the existing border, and see where it lay "according to custom and historical precedent" so that they could erect the border markers and clearly demarcate it.[220] And, if over the course of determining the locations of the border markers the two commissions decided that there was a spot that could be altered to the mutual benefit of

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[213] Actually, this was not true; the border had been altered as recently as during the Yongzheng reign when there had been disputes concerning Vietnamese farmers encroaching onto Chinese territory.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Meeting Minutes, January 14th, at Zhennanguan, M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 303.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.

both sides that they would discuss the matter. Then, if they failed to reach an agreement concerning a specific area, they would hand the matter over to their respective governments for consultation.[221] However, they would not agree under any circumstances to a total realignment of the border as the Qing commission was advocating and pointed out that the treaty was clear in its stipulation that the two sides determine the *existing* border and did not mention anything about France ceding land to China as remuneration of the latter's loss of control over Vietnam.[222]

Here it should be noted that at no point during the dispute concerning whether their task was to determine the old border, or to establish a new border, did either side claim to know with certainty where the existing border actually was. This is primarily because in truth both sides lacked adequate maps, tax records and other documentary 'evidence' necessary for establishing the archival authority to back up their territorial claims. For example, while the *Yunnan Tongzhi Gao* contained detailed descriptions of the construction and location of eight border markers (erected to demarcate a section of the border more than 500 miles long!), upon their arrival Qing surveyors found them to be either dilapidated or missing.[223] This being the case, both sides were obliged to comically uphold the fiction that they had any idea where the 'old' border was actually located.

At this point, it appeared that the two sides were already heading towards a stalemate, and several commissioners on both sides started to come down with acute illnesses, which would continue to plague the border delimitation committees and their entourages in the months to come. When the two commissions reconvened on January 17th, it appeared that neither side was willing to compromise. The French commission held firm in their stance that their Chinese counterparts' request to redraw the border violated the Treaty of Tianjin.[224] Moreover, they argued that, on the basis of the Franco-Vietnamese treaty of June 5th, 1884, in which the Vietnamese court in Hue recognized France's claims to the establishment of a protectorate, the latter was obligated to safeguard the territorial integrity of the country. Hence, if they conceded to the Qing commission's request it would be tantamount to breaking their agreement with the court in Huế and would mean that China had also violated the terms outlined in the Treaty of Tianjin.[225] Conversely, Deng Chengxiu felt that the French commission was being too inflexible in their interpretation of the treaty, and suggested that if the French were only willing to follow the Franco-Vietnamese agreement to the letter, then it would leave no room for compromise in making any changes whatsoever to the existing border. Deng and Wang Zhichun also reiterated their desire to carve out a buffer zone to separate the two countries because, in their eyes, China required some territory beyond its strategic border passes that was not controlled by the French in order to give them peace of mind. As Wang put it, the current "protective screen" was too thin and was not sufficient enough to protect the country.[226] Deng expanded on the metaphor by explaining that prior to France's arrival "*the whole of*

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[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] *Green Borderlands*, p. 42.
[224] Meeting Minutes, January 17th, at Zhennanguan (M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 339.
[225] Meeting Minutes, January 17th, at Zhennanguan (M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 339.
[226] Ibid.

Vietnam had been the barrier protecting the courtyard of China's house and had isolated the Qing empire's borders and protected its southern gates."[227] All the Chinese commission was requesting, he argued, was a very small barrier [for the purpose of safeguarding its borders].[228]

The Qing commission also concluded that perhaps the root of the problem was to be found in the subtle distinction between how French and Chinese languages defined the concept of a border in the first place. In the latter language, they argued, the concept of a border was expressed through the word *bianjie* (邊界), and the use of the two characters used in conjunction to form this word did not obstruct or change their individual meanings or usages. The character *bian* (邊), they explained, was equivalent to the French word *côté* and implied "the region near the border," while the character *jie* (界) was equivalent to the French word *limite* and referred to the borderline itself. While their meanings and implications were difficult to infer and understand, it was possible through such etymological analysis to reach the conclusion that the treaty had stipulated that the region *near* the border of Tonkin could be altered, and not actually the present border, because *this* border had already been determined. Otherwise, they reasoned, there would be no point in determining where the border should lay in the first place.[229]

While the negotiations continued to be somewhat cordial, at this point the French commissioners were losing their patience with the semantic gymnastics of their Qing counterparts. Saint-Chaffray argued that the treaty should have already been sufficient to ensure future peace and amity between the two countries, and hence there was no need for the creation of a buffer zone between their respective borders. In addition, as far as the French commission was concerned, Deng's demands exceeded a simple alteration to a section of the border and equated to demanding that the French cede a significant amount of Vietnamese territory to the Qing Empire. As to the issue of the Qing commission's attitude towards the 'loss' of Vietnam, the French commission reasoned that the negotiators of the Treaty of Tianjin had already determined what the standard of fairness was when they ratified the treaty, and that this did not include the ceding of Vietnamese territory to China. The only thing that it specifically granted the commissions the authority to do, they pointed out, was to carry out a survey of the existing border and to erect boundary markers for the purpose of demarcation.[230] Furthermore, as to Deng and Wang's concerns regarding the French and Chinese verbiage, they maintained that the plenipotentiaries who negotiated the treaty would have surely been aware of the language that each side used.

After weeks of negotiations, they could not reconcile their different interpretations of the nature and scope of the alterations to the border as stipulated in the third article of the treaty, or even come to an agreement on how to accurately define their respective terms for a 'border.' The French commission maintained that the demands of the Qing

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.

commission far exceeded the scope of changes to the border as outlined in the treaty and that they should use the existing border (so far as they could identify one) as the route for their survey work, while the Qing commission argued that the changes they had requested were well within the boundaries of the treaty and that they should proceed with drawing up what essentially amounted to a new border in order to accommodate the partition of a buffer zone. In addition, the French side held that changes should be made only after surveying the border, while Deng and the Qing commission felt that the alterations should be decided prior to carrying out a survey and that, in any event, any attempt to survey the border was futile unless the two sides could come to an agreement on the precise definition of a border, or *bianjie* (邊界). Finally, the French side maintained that their work should be of a technological nature, based on a careful survey with precise cartographic measurements of the total area and topography of the region, and that this was their main task, not making territorial concessions. Conversely, Deng felt that they could not concern themselves with carrying out the technical aspects of the border survey until the "alteration question" (*genggai wenti* 更改問題) had been resolved. Having herd that Deng and Wang had planned on pushing for the buffer zone, Robert Hart telegrammed James to advise him to tell Deng that it was "a good but hopeless idea" and to leave it to the two governments to discuss after the existing border had been confirmed.[231] However, Deng continued to be unwavering in his insistence on the matter.

Over the next few weeks, the negotiations stalled as neither side was willing to compromise, and several of the commissioners' illnesses had become increasingly acute, including the two heads of the commissions, resulting in less frequent meetings. By the end of January, the French commission began to suspect—rightly—that Deng was trying to stall the negotiations in the hope that the French government would abandon the colonial project altogether. In a meeting on January 27th, the French commission informed Deng that they had heard that several newspapers had recently published rumors that the French government was considering pulling out of Tonkin altogether and that this was perhaps influencing the stance of the Qing government, and would in turn influence the border commission's work.[232] They argued that these rumors had no basis, and that the French government had no intention reneging on the terms established in the Treaty of Tianjin.[233] In turn, the Qing commission insisted that they were not paying any attention to such news articles and that they would go about carrying out their task according to the instructions of their government. However, the French commission continued to believe that Deng and his colleagues were trying to stall the negotiations and insisted that they proceed with the survey of the border and determine where to erect the boundary markers as soon as possible, and that if there were any disagreements over the location of the markers that the two sides would defer to their respective governments and continue their work. To this Deng then proposed that, rather than carrying out a survey of the entire length of the border, they first attempt to determine the boundary line on the basis of maps and that if they drew up the border to conform to natural topographical boundaries, such as mountain chains and rivers, there would be no need to erect border markers. While

[231] Robert Hart Diaries, December 10th, 1885.
[232] Meeting Minutes, January 27th, at Zhennanguan, M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 381, Comp. p. 797-802.
[233] Ibid.

Saint-Chaffray did not immediately reject the idea of determining the border on the basis of maps, he insisted that the treaty had clearly stated that they were required to erect the boundary markers.[234]

At this point Deng returned to the issue of the buffer zone and told the French commission that he had recently received a telegram from Li Hongzhang in which the latter had informed him that he had recently met with the French envoy Cogordan, and that Li had requested that he notify the head of the French commission that they should yield to their previous demands of setting aside a band of territory along the frontier for the proposed buffer zone. This was, of course, a bluff. Saint-Chaffray called Deng on this and, for his part, insisted that both Cogordan and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris had instructed him to carry out his duties as stipulated in the Treaty of Tianjin. Li Bingheng then interjected that Li and Gogordan had also advised the Qing commission to reduce the scope of their demands, and that the Qing commission was willing to consider a slightly smaller territory than the one they requested during their previous meeting, but Saint-Chaffray outright denied that any such concessions were possible and reiterated that the French government had simply told him to respect and uphold the treaty.[235]

Deng argued that he was equally committed to upholding the treaty and that, as far as he was concerned, the word "*genggai*" found in the treaty could be either a "small alterations" (小更改) or a "large alterations" (大更改) but that, in any event, there would need to be alterations made (to the existing border). Moreover, he argued, while the Qing commission was committed to carrying out the treaty in good faith, they would not back down from their territorial demands, but was willing to consider a smaller territory than originally requested so long as France made a similar gesture. Furthermore, Deng held that his position was well within the terms of the treaty and that the clause that included the stipulation that everything north of Lạng Sơn be included as part of the trade zone on China's border intimated that the scope of the alteration to the border would accordingly encompass a large area. Wang Zhichun echoed this sentiment and insisted that a large-scale alteration of the current border would be absolutely necessary.[236]

Ultimately, while the two sides remained locked in a stalemate over the question of alterations to the existing border and the related issue of the buffer zone, the Qing commission did in the end reluctantly agree to begin planning the general route that the border survey would follow using all of the maps held by both parties, and that they could begin identifying potential locations to erect border markers and areas requiring alterations on the basis of said maps. However, Deng delegated this task to James Hart and the Qing interpreter since this preliminary research phase would be of a non-official nature. The French side agreed to these terms and the next day Hart and the French cartographic officers began a series of informal negotiations that would last more than two weeks before the commissions reconvened.[237]

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[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid.

Back in Peking, Robert Hart and the Yamen were growing increasingly concerned that a breakdown in the negotiations, either in Tianjin with Li and Cogordan, or on the Tonkin Frontier between Deng and the French Border Commission, would possibly lead to a renewal of hostilities between the two countries, undoing his diplomatic achievements of the previous year. Hart lamented in a letter to James Campbell:

> "Deng is insisting on placing Langson on the China side of the frontier line, and negotiations at Tianjin [between Li Hongzhang and the French Envoy, Cogordan] move very slowly. I shall have some trouble in straightening things out, but I hope we shall escape a breakdown: unfortunately, a breakdown is in the cards, for I fear Deng's instructions are of a loose kind—the court having possibly said to him 'Try! But remember: Heads, I win; Tails, you lose!'"[238]

However, while Robert Hart was not eager to see Deng put the armistice at risk by squabbling over land that Peking saw as neither strategically important nor of any fiscal consequence for the customs regime, he was also annoyed by France's obstinance concerning procedural elements of their survey work. He complained that the delay in commencing with the border survey was as much due to Cogordan's "friends on the frontier" (i.e., the French Border Commission) "making absurd difficulties about questions of form" than it was due to Deng's insistence on making "corrections" to the existing border and carving out a buffer zone.[239] Hart maintained that, "France left to herself would probably give up Tonkin," but that "if China, injudiciously stings her by any diplomacy of Chinese unwillingness to execute [the] treaty" then it might lead to the outbreak of renewed conflict.[240] He thus advised the Yamen against giving France any reason to accuse the Qing of breaking the treaty and call off the negotiations.[241] The Yamen agreed and advised Deng accordingly, but Deng was not quick to comply.

During the informal meetings, James Hart continued to discuss the question of Cao Bằng and Bảo Lạc with Lieutenant Tisseyre of the French commission. Hart emphasized that there were already many ethnic Chinese residing in northern Cao Bằng and that they had recently submitted a petition to the Qing commission stating that they hoped for the territory to come under Qing jurisdiction.[242] He also pointed out that the region was rife with bandits who wreaked havoc on the local population, and from the perspective of the Chinese commission it was vital that they incorporate the area into Qing territory for the sake of reigning in their activities. Moreover, he echoed Deng's earlier sentiment that because the local population was so poor this would be no great loss to the French.[243] However, Tisseyre argued that, drawing up a new border was outside of the authority of the two commissions, and that they were well aware of the Chinese presence in Cao Bang.

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[238] Letter 556 [Z, 248], *The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1*, p. 623.
[239] Letter 554 [Z/247, The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1, p. 621.
[240] Robert Hart Diaries, January 8th, 1886.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Tisseyre letter to Saint-Chaffray summarizing meetings between Tisseyre and James Hart, M.D. Asia file, vol. 60, Comp. pp. 704-706.
[243] Ibid.

He also informed Hart that he knew about Chinese merchants who operated in the region, the Chinese who worked in the mining industry there, and that the region had long served as a place of banishment for Chinese criminals from Yunnan and Guangxi. Furthermore, Tisseyre accused Qing officials of informally annexing parts of Tonkin by building military fortifications in locations with a sizeable Chinese population. As for the issue of the brigands operating in the region, the French side maintained that it did not matter where they drew the borderline since, as far as they could tell, the majority of the pirate gangs were assembled on the Chinese side of the border anyways, and that they would not be able to put a stop to piratical activities in the region until the two governments began working together to police the border.[244]

Here it is worth analyzing the main points of the negotiations up to this point, as well as the correspondence taking place between the Qing commission and Peking. Deng and the Qing commission maintained that the Treaty of Tianjin had allowed for corrections to the existing border up to and including a realignment of the border to allow for the creation of the buffer zone and held that any such changes to the border should be agreed upon before undertaking the border survey. Furthermore, as he explained in a telegram to Peking during the second week of negotiations, Deng had argued that any realignment of the border should only be redrawn *within* the boundaries of Tonkin and not the border of China.[245] In other words, by this reasoning the borders of China could only be *expanded* into Tonkin through the course of the border delimitation, and not the other way around. Furthermore, he felt that if they followed the method proposed by the French of determining the existing border then there would be little room left for negotiating.[246] Therefore, Deng reported that he would refuse to back down or compromise on his territorial demands and their original strategy of arguing for the creation of the buffer zone.[247]

Word arrived to Robert Hart in Peking that Cogordan was now threatening to call off the negotiations due to Deng's demands for the creation of a buffer zone and, in the end, the stalemate proved too much for Hart who, while sympathetic to Deng's position, felt that Lạng Sơn and the proposed buffer zone was not worth jeopardizing the fragile peace between the two countries. Furthermore, he felt that Li Hongzhang had not put adequate pressure on Deng and the Qing Border Commission because he did not want to risk implicating himself if a breakdown in the negotiations at the border occurred. In the end, Hart persuaded the Grand Council that it was time to reign Deng in so as not to risk ending the negotiations and seeing the resumption of hostilities. He explained in a letter to James Campbell that, "The Commissioners nearly fell out, but I got a special Edict issued ordering [the] Chinese Commissioner [Deng] to make no difficulties, etc., and the trouble is ended. Had it gone further, the state of war might have found a channel for re-existing!

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[244] Ibid.
[245] January 15th, 1886, Deng Chengxiu to Zongli Yamen, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng,* pp. 31-32.
[246] January 17th, 1886, Deng Chengxiu to the Grand Council, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng,* pp. 32-33.
[247] Ibid.

Fortunately, I was here and able to speak! The great Li [Hongzhang] refused to do what I did—fearful of a breakdown and of personal consequences."[248]

On January 30th the Grand Council sent the edict to Deng Chengxiu and Li Bingheng stating that if they persisted in their current course of action that the negotiations would be terminated, and severe penalties meted out.[249] The Council ordered Deng to carry out the border delimitation immediately, not to argue over territorial claims, and not to follow Zhang Zhidong's "three-month theory" (that France might pull out of Tonkin altogether within three months' time).[250] A week later they reiterated this message and added that his attitude was having a negative impact on the overall situation; he was to commence with the border survey as soon as possible and if any corrections were needed to put the matter off until a later time.[251] The Council concluded by stating that they would no longer consider any of Deng's ideas or recommendations concerning a realignment of the border in order to incorporate Cao Bằng or any other areas of Tonkin into Qing territory, and urged Deng not to be stubborn or cause any more trouble.[252] However, at least for the time being, Peking's rebukes would fall on deaf ears; as much as a month later, Deng continued to advocate for the redrawing of the border and the creation of a buffer zone.[253]

From this point on, Deng took on a more adversarial approach to the negotiations and did everything that he could to forestall the survey of the border, including ignoring or directly defying the Peking's orders and imperial decrees. Ultimately, only the threat of execution was enough to finally convince him to change course. A week after receiving Peking's orders to abandon the idea of turning Cao Bằng and Bảo Lạc into a buffer zone and to proceed with the survey of the border, Deng telegrammed Peking with a list of reasons why they should delay the task of determining the border. First of all, he explained that the people living along the border were frightened of the "cruelty" of the French and that there were tens of thousands of people who did not want to become French subjects.[254] He claimed that when he was in Longzhou prior to the negotiations many people had come to speak with him about their plight, and he worried that if they agreed to confirm the present border then this would lead to conflict and great resistance from the borderlanders residing in Tonkin. To make matters worse, he argued, thousands of *youyong* had already occupied Bảo Lạc and had blocked the roads there, and he was concerned that if these forces attacked the French border commission, then they would attempt to blame the Qing commission and local officials for it.[255] In addition to the aforementioned issues, the existing border was located across a difficult to reach mountain range and perhaps half of it could not be determined at all due to the difficult terrain. Moreover, since it was now approaching the rainy season, carrying out a survey of the border with so many men and

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[248] Letter 559 [Z/251], *The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1*, p. 625.
[249] Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu Li Bingheng, January 30th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 38.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu, February 7th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng,* pp. 40-41.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Meeting Minutes, March 5th, at Zhennanguan, *Zhong Fa Yuenan jiaoshe dang*, Vol. 6, pp. 3422-3430.
[254] Deng Chengxiu to Zongli Yamen, February 14th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 42.
[255] Ibid.

horses would be next to impossible.[256] Finally, Deng argued, if they simply verified the existing border then it would not leave any room to argue for the incorporation of strategic areas that he and Zhang Zhidong had been advocating for. By so easily conceding the "loss" of Tonkin, he argued, they were now welcoming the loss of Guangdong as well, and this was equivalent to "inviting thieves to enter into our backdoor."[257] Robert Hart sided with Deng on putting the survey work off until the fall and wrote to Cogordan asking if he would be willing to recommend the proposal to the French Commission, but a reply was not immediately forthcoming.[258]

Meanwhile, the French Commission was growing more impatient by the day, and hardly a single member of either commission had been spared from bouts of fever, stomach ailments, and other acute maladies. The French maintained that their chief duty was to survey and determine the existing border, and to erect border markers according to the 1885 Treaty of Tianjin. Cogordan, the French envoy in Tianjin responsible for conducting the trade treaty with Li Hongzhang that was to accompany the new border agreement, was furious. When he received word of Deng and the Qing commission's territorial demands, he threatened to call off the negotiations altogether.[259] He complained that what Deng Chengxiu and Li Bingheng were proposing was against the treaty and an insult to France. He also informed Li Hongzhang that, regardless of what they might have heard in the press, that French parliament had recently stated that they had no intention of abandoning the colonial project in Indochina and were willing to defend French interests in Tonkin by force.[260]

The two commissions had hoped that they could work out a compromise, but after several weeks of informal meetings between James Hart and the French cartographic team they were not any closer to agreeing on even the most fundamental issues such as where and when to start the border survey and where to erect the first border markers, or the perimeters for determining the size and scope of the alterations to the existing border. The French commission maintained that as long as Deng persisted in his demands for a large-scale redrawing of the border, that they would not be able to move forward with their work.[261] Deng eventually agreed in principle to surveying the existing border before discussing any changes, but he also stressed the difficulty of carrying out such a project, particularly in light of the unusually early arrival of the malarial season.[262] The French commission maintained that there were perhaps at least six more months of acceptable weather and that they should carry out the survey work until the arrival of the monsoon rains, but Deng insisted that the rains would come much sooner, making the mountainous border areas of Guangxi all but impossible to traverse.[263]

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[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Robert Hart Diaries, February 16th, 1886.
[259] Li Hongzhang to Zongli Yamen, February 6th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng,* pp. 39-40.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Meeting Minutes, February 13th, at Tongdeng, M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 381, Comp. pp. 802-812.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid.

Ultimately, Deng and the Qing commission felt that the only feasible option was to forego the border survey altogether and simply determine the border on the basis of existing maps, but the French team maintained that this would be tantamount to violating the spirit of the treaty. They argued that because not every section of the border was impassible, they should proceed with surveying the sections that were navigable, and if they reached a section that was too difficult to survey then they could consult their maps in order to complete the task.[264] However, Deng still refused to budge on the matter and declared that he would rather risk decapitation as punishment for his disobedience than risk lives by setting out on a suicide mission.[265]

By mid-March, more than six weeks had passed since the Grand Council had ordered Deng to abandon the strategy of arguing for the buffer zone and instructed him to proceed with the border survey, yet he continued to ignore Peking's directives. First, Deng attempted to justify postponing the border survey due to the activity of *youyong* along the western stretch of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier and continued to stress that if they carried out the survey prior to reaching an agreement concerning the changes to the border that it was likely that they would never be able to make the desired amendments.[266] When that line of reasoning failed to sway Peking's position on the matter Deng reported that the border survey would be impossible since the entire Chinese Commission had become seriously ill.[267] Deng complained that his stomach was bloated, his feet were swollen, and that his ailments were compounded by the humidity, foul weather, and poor living conditions.[268] Since there was no medicine in the border area to treat his illness, he requested permission to return to Nanning via Longzhou to seek medical treatment and recommended that they postpone the survey until the end of the monsoon season in late autumn.[269] However, the Grand Council remained unmoved by Deng's appeals.

From this time on, relations between the two commissions were decidedly less cordial. After several months of negotiations, the two sides were not any closer to reaching an agreement as to how to begin carrying out their mutual task than they were when they first convened. At this point, even Deng's own colleagues were becoming impatient with his attitude and lack of flexibility; James Hart grew so disheartened with the stalemate that he refused to act as a middleman until the two sides had at least agreed to the basic principles by which they would carry out their task. Commissioner Wang Zhichun took Hart's place as the lead representative for the Qing commission over the course of several more weeks of informal negotiations with Lieutenant Tisseyre, though Hart begrudgingly served as an interpreter at the meetings. Similarly, Li Xingrui became so disillusioned with Deng's obstinance that he penned several memorials criticizing Deng's behavior, and attempted to distance himself from Deng's decision making in an attempt to extricate himself from any potential punishments that Peking might mete out.

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[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu, March 1st, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 44.
[267] Deng Chengxiu to Zongli Yamen, March 6th, Zhong Fa zhanzheng, pp. 47-48.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.

Deng Chengxiu's Defiance of Peking's Directives

On March 2nd, Li Hongzhang reported to the Zongli Yamen that he had received a telegram from Li Xingrui reporting that the negotiations had stalled, and that Li had become ill and was requesting leave.[270] Li Hongzhang urged him to persevere until the survey of the border had been completed, but Li Xingrui had telegrammed again to report that Deng was not acting in accordance with the emperor's orders and still insisted on stalling the negotiations. Li Xingrui also reported that he and Wang Zhichun had urged Deng to change his stance, but that Deng had accused them of scheming against him. Li also claimed that when he had confronted Deng about the matter and that Deng had insulted him; otherwise, he dramatically argued, he would have insisted on remaining at his post until death. However, despite Li's opposition to Deng's tactics, the two commissioners did agree that they should delay the border survey until autumn. Similarly, Li Bingheng telegrammed the Zongli Yamen a week later and, while he urged Peking to have patience because Deng was very ill, he also stressed that "he would not follow Deng's lead blindly", and that he would never do anything to negatively impact the negotiations.[271] He also lamented the thought of losing strategic regions along the border and insisted that there was still a chance that they could gain the territories that they had originally planned on incorporating into Qing territory.[272] Moreover, he claimed that he was also ill and agreed that they should put off the border survey until the end of the rainy season. Hence, while Li Xingrui and Li Bingheng sought to extricate themselves from any punishment due to Deng's insubordination, neither of them was eager to carry out the border survey as Peking had ordered.

On March 3rd, the Grand Council reprimanded Deng once more and ordered him to carry out the survey of the existing border without further delay, and to put off the issue of making changes to the border a later date.[273] Otherwise, the Council intimated, they would hold him accountable for any negative outcomes of the negotiations.[274] However, the Council's threats were clearly inadequate; several days later they learned that Deng had ignored their instructions and returned to Longzhou to seek medical treatment without the Court's permission.[275] The Grand Council then telegrammed Deng saying that they were shocked at his insubordination and excuses and ordered him to carry out their previous orders immediately, otherwise they would hand out a severe punishment.[276] Four days later, after Deng had failed to respond to the previous edict, the Grand Council sent another more strongly worded message in which they threatened to deal with Deng according to the precedence of Qi Ying and explained that they had referred the case to the Board of

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[270] Li Hongzhang to the Zongli Yamen, March 2nd, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 46.
[271] Li Bingheng to the Zongli Yamen, March 9th, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, pp. 49-50.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Imperial Edict from the Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu, Z March 3rd, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 47.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Imperial Edict from Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 48.
[276] Ibid.

Punishments for consideration.[277] After one last futile plea to forestall the survey until autumn due to illness and weather during the second week in March, Deng finally gave into the pressure being exerted from the capital, though he worked out an agreement with the French commission that neither he or the head of the French commission would need to take part in the border survey.

As Bourcier Saint-Chaffray put it, "Deng would rather be tried for a capital offense than brave the scorching heat, wind and rain, and pirate bands that they were sure to encounter when carrying out the survey of the border."[278] The French side was convinced that Deng's insistence on redrawing the border and his efforts to delay the border survey were primarily due to pressures from Cen Yuying and Zhang Zhidong and also stemmed from Deng's desire to increase his own prestige and prevail over his nemesis, Li Hongzhang.[279] In addition to the two Governors-General, in late March Tang Jingsong arrived in Yunnan from Taiwan in order to assist in the border delimitation negotiations.[280] Tang had led the Yunnan Army and had been instrumental in persuading Liu Yongfu and the Black Flags to fight against the French during the conflict of the previous year, and his presence gave the French commission all the more reason to suspect that the Governors-General and the border commission were plotting with Liu to foment a resistance movement against the French presence in Tonkin.

Soon after Tang's arrival, Deng and the Qing commission finally conceded to proceed with the border survey and the two commissions reconvened for a final meeting before setting off for the task starting in the vicinity of Zhennanguan.[281] While on their way to meet Deng and the other Qing commissioners, Saint-Chaffray and his team encountered a sizeable detachment of militiamen. The soldiers had set up a line of defense between Đồng Đăng and Zhennanguan and erected flags bearing the character for "Li" (李, the surname of Li Bingheng, the governor of Guangxi) atop of the karst ridges along the route connecting the two areas. As was their established custom, the French commission made the journey of several kilometers to Zhennanguan without a military escort and had to travel within firing range of the militiamen. Hence, they were particularly agitated and on edge when they arrived for the meeting with their Chinese counterparts. Saint-Chaffray immediately interrogated Deng and the other commissioners about the militiamen and accused the Qing commission of violating the treaty by dispatching troops to encroach upon Tonkinese territory.[282] Deng and Li argued that the troops were only there to

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[277] Qi Ying(耆英), was a Qing official famously charged with treason for abandoning his post during the peace negotiations during the Second Opium War, and forced to commit suicide as punishment. Grand Council to Deng Chengxiu, Zhong Fa zhanzheng, March 11th, p. 50.
[278] May 6th, 1886 from Hanoi, Full summary report from the French border commission, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* p. 750.
[279] Saint-Chaffray telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 3rd, M.D. Asia file, vol. 61, documents 11-13*, Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 706-707; 1886 from Hanoi, Full summary report from the French border commission, May 6th, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* pp. 735-758.
[280] March 24th, Cen Yuying to Zongli Yamen, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, pp. 65-66.
[281] Meeting Minutes, March 20th, at Zhennanguan (M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, Comp. pp. 109-118.
[282] Ibid.

"welcome "the French commission and mark the beginning of their survey work and to demarcate the initial section of the border. Baffled by this response, Saint-Chaffray responded that, not only was such a welcome wholly unnecessary, but erecting flags for the purpose of demarcating the border before the two commissions had even begun carrying out their joint survey work was tantamount to a unilateral action and was in direct violation of the Treaty of Tianjin.

The incident with the militiamen marked an inauspicious beginning to the border survey, and from this point on, Saint-Chaffray became convinced that Deng was coming under pressure from Li Bingheng, and that it was likely that both of them were following the lead of Cen Yuying and Zhang Zhidong.[283] Just weeks into the border survey he wrote to Hanoi and explained that, "No matter what, the Guangxi authorities will plot to occupy Tonkin and can easily recruit men from among the ranks of the 'pirates' [former Black Flags and decommissioned Qing soldiers from the Sino-French conflict]. The places they want all offer them a strategic advantage and can provide a safe haven for the pirates with whom they collude against us."[284] As we will see, the specter of collusion between Qing authorities and the 'pirates' of Tonkin, and the looming threat of violent resistance to French pacification of the region would come to have a significant impact on the tenor and direction of the border survey and the accompanying negotiations. To make matters worse, the Qing side refused to allow the French Commission to travel on the Qing side of the border, enraging the latter and causing even more suspicion. Robert Hart explained to James Campbell in London that the French were angry "because, prevented by brigands in Tonkin from following the frontier on the Tonkin side from Nanguan to Longzhou, the Chinese refuse to let them conduct the delimitation work on the safer side within the Chinese frontier! Even Cogordan is riled and does not see how foolish the 'protectors' look in even mentioning this to the Empire they have taken away a tributary from!! (Letter 568 [Z/260], The I.G. in Peking, vol. 1, p. 633) As we will see, the concerns of the "protectors" about traversing the Tonkin side of the border during the survey were to be well founded.

The Sino-Vietnamese Border Survey of 1886

After the two commissions began the border survey, meeting minutes, diplomatic correspondence, and other official documents became more sporadic and less detailed due in part to the chronic illnesses of the border delimitation commissioners and the activities of 'pirate' gangs that frequently blocked off roads and cut telegraph lines. As previously mentioned, Dr. Paul Neis kept a journal of chronicling the border delimitation project, but this must be read with an especially critical eye since the only extant version was edited for public consumption in the French press. In addition to Neis's journal there are also intelligence reports from military units and cartographic teams, and the French commission compiled several detailed reports of their survey work for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs—the de facto governing body in Tonkin during the border delimitation

[283] March 8th, Saint-Chaffray to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, M.D. Asia File, vol. 66, pp. 27-34.
[284] May 6th, 1886 from Hanoi, Full summary report from the French border commission, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* p. 751.

project—that provide an interesting, if limited, picture of how the two commissions carried out the task of mapping and delimiting the boundary line.

Due to the dangerous nature of their work and the constant threat of attacks by 'pirates' and insurgents, the French survey team could often only travel as far as the local troops were able to escort them. Many of these troops came from the ranks of recently recruited, poorly trained, and often severely ill local units, many of which were comprised of hill tribesmen.[285] Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the border survey that these documents reveal is the decidedly limited role that cartographic production played in determining where the boundary line would actually fall. Conversely, it is worth noting the extent to which local Vietnamese prefects and village heads were willing to assist the French border commission with the task of border delimitation. Both local Mandarins and civilian leaders provided the commission with a wide range of information on local notables, local history, and the current political and economic situation of their locales, all of which were invaluable for carrying out the survey of the border. For example, one report mentions that almost the entirety of the frontier region between the Red River and Black River was surveyed using maps and other "evidence" provided by prefectural chiefs and village heads.[286] In addition, the French commission was able to recruit a number of Vietnamese frontier residents as Hmong language interpreters, and even acquired the services of several skilled Vietnamese cartographers.[287] As we will see, the Qing and French commissions vied for the support of locals, and the human factor was to become every bit as important as scientific cartographic practices in determining the course of the border.

Despite the fact that most of the members of both commissions were battling illnesses of various sorts, the two sides set out to survey the border in late March. Within days of commencing the border survey, both the French military administration and the Qing civil administrations on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier began a to engage in a demographic competition of sorts. The two sides began relocating thousands of Chinese villagers and Vietnamese Catholics, respectively, to areas of the border that they sought to lay claim to. For example, Cen Yuying reported on March 24th that French forces had burned houses in the area of Longlu before retreating to the vicinity Wenpan. Then, on March 10th the French moved 200 Vietnamese Catholics into the region.[288] Similarly, Zhou Derun reported that when the French occupation forces moved into the vicinity of Baosheng, 300 soldiers with white flags in their hands were followed by as many as 600 Vietnamese Catholics loyal to the protectorate government who they sought to relocate there.[289] Essentially, the French protectorate was carrying out a land redistribution campaign in order to shore up claims over strategic border areas. Zhou Derun also memorialized that the Qing forces should attempt a similar scheme in the strategic river port of Hekou across the Red River from the Vietnamese town of Làò Cai and recommended

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[285] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 912-930.
[286] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 912-930.
[287] Ibid.
[288] March 24th, Cen Yuying to Zongli Yamen, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, pp. 65-66.
[289] April 4th, Zhou Derun Memorial *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 66.

that Cen Yuying occupy the Hekou area and try to convince the "Vietnamese bandits" there to occupy another area.[290] He was most likely referring to the former Black Flags whose ranks were predominantly comprised of ethnic Chinese who had formerly occupied Lào Cai on the Vietnamese side of the border. Likewise, the French commission reported that local Qing officials had begun moving thousands of Chinese into border towns, including into the vicinity of Jiangping, which would become one of the most hotly contested areas over the following year of negotiations (see Chapter Three).

At the same time that the two sides were competing to redistribute land at strategic locations along the border, and when many areas were still under the control of 'pirates' and decommissioned soldiers, Chinese and Western traders had already arrived in the region and were eager to engage in cross-border trade. Zhou Derun memorialized about the chaotic state of affairs and the need to shore up control of any potential locations for trade, raising the stakes of the demographic competition even further.[291] However, back in Tianjin, Li Hongzhang and Cogordan agreed that they would not decide on the location of the trade zones until after the border had been determined and urged the two commissions to complete their survey work as soon as possible.[292]

In addition to forced relocations, each side also competed for the allegiance of local village heads and tribal chieftains, both for the purpose of making claims over the territory under their jurisdictions, and as valuable sources of intelligence on the terrain, land routes, and waterways of Tonkin. These local leaders were invaluable to the border survey, for it became immediately apparent that even with maps both sides were disoriented once they ascended into the mountains. Tisseyre reported that the Qing commission was always quick to take the word of the local Chinese borderlanders as to where the border lay, while he insisted that their testimony was no more reliable, conclusive or of more value than the testimonies of local Vietnamese or hill tribes people who often contested it.[293] He also reported that he had received intelligence suggesting local officials from Pingxiang had threatened village heads on the Vietnamese border so that they would report that their villages belonged to China, even kidnapping and locking up one local village head's family and holding them for ransom until after the two commissions had passed through the area and affirmed the village as being within Qing territory.[294] Ironically, prior to the arrival of the delimitation commissions, the maintenance of multiple allegiances was a strategy that local chieftaincies had employed for safeguarding their autonomy. Now their scattered allegiances posed a threat to their power as well as their lives; French surveyors and cartographers who doubled as intelligence agents also reported a similar circumstance in the city of Móng Cái on the far eastern corner of the frontier, where Qing officials had been pressuring a local tax collector to proclaim allegiance to China. The tax collector in question

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[290] April 4th, Zhou Derun Memorial *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 66.
[291] April 11th, Telegram from Zhou Derun to Zongli Yamen, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 67.
[292] April 24th, Grand Council to Li Hongzhang Imperial Edict, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, p. 69.
[293] Tisseyre to Saint-Chaffray, April 3rd, M.D. Asia File vol. 66, pp. 213-224, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 719-729.
[294] Tisseyre to Saint-Chaffray, April 3rd, M.D. Asia File vol. 66, pp. 213-224, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian*, p. 721.

was murdered during an attack on the city that also claimed the life of one of a French border commission attaché later in the year (see Chapter Three).

In addition to the demographic question, there were many challenges and limitations to mapmaking in a region that was so difficult to traverse. From the start, the French commission complained about the haphazard and imprecise nature of the survey. They reported that when inclement weather and poor road conditions made carrying out an earnest survey of a particular area impossible, they were forced to survey two areas on either side that they could access, and then make an educated guess as to where the boundary line lay in between.[295] Hence, both sides were forced to admit the 'provisional' nature of their work, which helps to explain why it would take several more years to finalize border agreements in certain areas. The French commission also complained that an entourage of local Chinese officials and prominent civilian borderlanders constantly followed the Qing commission during the survey and protested almost every decision the commissions made concerning where the boundary line was to be drawn.[296] However, due to the challenges and limitations mentioned above, Tisseyre also admitted that his own cartographers frequently had to rely on information collected from locals rather than utilizing wholly scientific cartographic methods, and that many of the maps that they drafted were incomplete, having blank spaces for certain sections of the border and were therefore of limited use.

One major point of contention between the two commissions concerned the issue of Chinese property and gravesites located on the Vietnamese side of the border. The Qing commission insisted that any Chinese who had ancestral graves or other family property would surely want these included within their country's national territory, and that they should draw up the border to skirt around any such existing properties or gravesites so as to include them within Qing territory.[297] However, the French commission maintained that this should be irrelevant in drawing up the border and refused to include this clause in their provisional agreements.

Even so, while the Qing commission admitted in its correspondence with Peking that their maps were not always completely reliable, Tisseyre also reluctantly conceded in his reports to Hanoi that there were limitations to the French commission's maps, tax data, and other evidence, and that the testimony of local people was often the only reliable evidence to go on. In addition to local testimony, Neiss reported that the French commission utilized the following types of evidence in determining the border: survey maps drawn up by the French cartographers, maps drafted by the cartographers in the Tonkin occupation forces, maps held by the planning department of the occupation army, information collected by French intelligence officers (including Vietnamese borderlanders and hilltribes people), documents provided by local Vietnamese authorities, Vietnamese maps from Huế, maps from the *Da Qing yitong zhi*, and tax registers from the various

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[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Tisseyre to Saint-Chaffray, April 3rd, M.D. Asia File vol. 66, pp. 213-224, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian*, p. 724.

Vietnamese border provinces.[298] Neiss, who had no expertise in the area of mapmaking, appeared to be more confident in the maps drafted by the survey commission than Tisseyre—a trained cartographer—and argued that, in his estimation, these maps were quite satisfactory and that they should be enough to settle the border question then and in the future.[299] As we will see, Neiss was a bit too optimistic in his belief that cartographic data would able to settle border disputes.

Territorial Disputes During the Border Survey

Over the course of the delimitation project, numerous disputes arose concerning the territorial status of frontier villages. Sometimes these debates stemmed from the fact that both sides recognized the strategic economic or military value of a particular location, as was the case with Jiangping and Bailongwei at the eastern terminus of the border (see Chapter Three). However, they also frequently arose due to local conflicts. A dispute over the territorial status of the village of Xianhui offers a representative example of the latter situation. During the border survey, a village head of Tiênhội (Xianhui, 仙會) wrote the French commission to report that he had recently been approached by Qing authorities from a city called Banzhang (板杖) on the Chinese side of the border saying that the village was henceforth prohibited from taking orders from the local Tonkinese authorities because in their view it was located within Qing territory.[300] In addition, he alleged that the authorities from Banzhang had been trying to force all of the male inhabitants of the village into become laborers and had used the threat of violence to prevent the villagers from notifying the local Tonkinese authorities of the situation.[301] French field officers who relayed the message included a crude map of the area in question, and requested clarification on whether or not Tiênhội was indeed within Tonkinese territory based on maps recently drawn up by the French commission's cartographers.[302] It is not clear whether this matter was resolved, but it reveals some of the local tensions that sprang up over the course of the border delimitation project. The anecdote also demonstrates the ambiguity of the frontier area and the limits of state power in the region and echoes the Grand Council's concerns detailed earlier in this chapter over the difficulties in determining the national and ethnic identities of borderlanders.

From this and other reports we can see that the technical aspects of cartographic production were not always the main factors influencing where the boundary line was ultimately drawn, hence the word *survey* is perhaps not the most accurate terminology for describing the work carried out by the two commissions. While the two sides sought to simplify the process of delimitation whenever possible by identifying the 'existing

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[298] Report from Neiss to Dillon, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, p. 517, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 731-733.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Message from the village head of Tiênhội (仙會) relayed to Saint-Chaffray on February 18th 1886: M.D. Asia File, vol. 65, p. 492.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.

border'—as ambiguous as that often was—and establishing a 'natural boundary' based on rivers and mountain chains, rather than attempting to draw an arbitrary 'line in the sand', the boundary line drawn up by the two commissions was influenced by a multitude of factors that were largely outside the control of the Qing and French regimes. Local conditions and politics, village heads and other local power holders, and the 'pirate' networks of semi-independent 'parallel states' on the frontier all played a significant role in influencing the decision making of the border delimitation commissions and, subsequently, in determining where the boundary line was ultimately drawn.

Under pressure from Deng, Zhou Derun, who was tasked with coordinating the border survey, was determined to keep pushing for a buffer zone in northern Tonkin long after Peking had ordered the commission to drop the matter. Zhou insisted that all of the territory south of Mabaiguan (馬白關) to the Daduzhou River (大賭咒河)—an era covering more than one thousand square kilometers—be drawn up inside Qing territory.[303] However, this time the Qing commission argued that there was a historical precedent for their claim. Zhou asserted that the entire territory had been ceded to the Annamese according to a 1728 treaty during the Qianlong reign. Conversely, the French maintained that not only did the recent Treaty of Tianjin not mention anything about an early eighteenth-century treaty agreement concerning the border, but it clearly stipulated that the two sides were to carry out a survey of the border as it existed in the present—not in the distant past—and that the two sides had already agreed not to discuss any changes until the present border had been clearly determined. Moreover, after researching the Chinese Commission's claims, the French Commission pointed out that according to the gazetteer for Kaihua prefecture the only area that had been ceded to Vietnam in 1728 was a strip of land totaling 16 kilometers in the direct vicinity of Mabaiguan (馬白關).[304] Ultimately, Zhou did not prove to be as tough a negotiator as Deng Chengxiu and the two sides agreed to a temporary compromise on the matter by dividing the border down the center of the Duzhou River, putting the issue of the rest of the disputed territory off until after the conclusion of the survey.[305]

Another area of disagreement involved the basin of the Ming River (明江), with both sides arguing that the entire watershed should belong to their respective countries.[306] While Zhou Derun maintained that the Chinese Gazetteers clearly showed that this area belonged to China, the French commission argued that official maps from the Vietnamese court showed it being located within Tonkin's jurisdiction.[307] The French commission reported that residents inhabiting the left bank of the Ming River had complained that Chinese had been pushing the Vietnamese out of the most fertile areas and commandeering

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[303] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312; also found in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 912-930.
[304] Ibid.
[305] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 922.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.

their property.[308] Furthermore, many of the Chinese borderlanders had supposedly come from the ranks of demobilized Yellow and Black Flag units who had now turned to banditry to survive.[309] To further complicate matters, it soon became clear that the frontier from Gaomabai (高馬白) to the Pumei River (普梅河) had never been previously delimited or administered, with both Vietnamese and Chinese records being extremely limited.[310] Hence, the delimitation of this section of the border was largely a result of creativity and compromise by the respective commissions.

Among the most hotly contested areas was the section of the frontier stretching from the confluence of the Red River and the Longbo River (龍膊河) to the border of Laos, primarily due to the ethnic makeup of the region's inhabitants, and the scarcity of evidence on both sides in support of any historical claims. The Qing commission insisted that Fengsuo (豐梭) and Lai Châu (萊州, also referred to as Menglai, or 猛賴) belonged to China, and based their claims on the official local history of Lin'an Prefecture (臨安府), which stated that the tribal chieftains of these areas had pledged allegiance to the Qing emperor more than a hundred years prior to the negotiations.[311] However, the French commission maintained that based on evidence from official archival records in Huế, Hà Nội, and Hưng Hóa Province, and the testimonies of the region's inhabitants that this entire area was Vietnamese territory.[312] The French commission argued that giving up claims to Fengsuo and Lai Châu provinces would be tantamount to handing a large portion of Tonkin over to brigands and outlaws. As they saw it, this region was a major hub for routes connecting the Red River and the Black River utilized by bandits and rebels traveling to and from China and had the potential to serve as the foremost base of operations for rebel factions in the future.[313] Moreover, they argued that Vietnam had a historic claim to the region and that it would be outside the commission's authority to hand over such an important and strategic region.[314]

The French commission also complained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the governor of Lai Châu Province was a corrupt official who had sold out to the Qing and was directly beholden to the influence of Cen Yuying, the Governor-General of Yunnan and Guizhou.[315] Finally, the commission reported that several local leaders in this area had been trying to curry favor with Cen Yuying and had turned the area under their jurisdictions into their own private kingdoms and were plotting to organize this entire district to oppose the French with Cen's support. In short, the French team was convinced

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[308] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 923.
[309] Ibid.
[310] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 924.
[311] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 925.
[312] Ibid.
[313] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 925.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid.

that Cen Yuying and other Qing officials were carrying out a plot to entice local powerholders with promises of autonomy in exchange for their cooperation in opposing the French presence in the region. As evidenced in Cen Yuying's previous correspondence with Peking, their concerns were not unfounded and it soon became apparent that resistance to French control of the region was either orchestrated or, at the very least, tolerated by Cen and other Qing officials, if not by the Qing border commission.

The territorial disputes discussed above notwithstanding, after a month of survey work it became clear that the French were becoming more and more willing to cede territory that they did not see as militarily or economically significant. In just a single day the French border commission transferred at least four villages within Vietnamese territory over to the Qing in order to expediate the delimitation process.[316] In one report, Saint-Chaffray candidly admitted that his main concern in ceding territory was that it would result in a loss of French prestige among the Vietnamese people in Tonkin, who would in turn be encouraged to cozy up to China (and plot to resist French control of the region).[317] Hence, as the survey progressed, the French appeared more willing to make concessions as long as doing so did not appear to threaten their prestige and upset the local balance of power. Moreover, as the survey cut deeper into the western portion of the Yunnan-Tonkin border, the dangers of the malarial season and the threat of attacks by 'pirates' started to take its toll on the French team. It is to the latter issue that I will now turn.

The 'Pirate' Problem, and the First Attack on the French Border Commission

As discussed above, during the course of the border survey, much of Tonkin was still controlled by local powerholders and military strongmen, which the Qing and French states variously referred to as '*youyong*', 'bandits', or 'pirates', respectively. Therefore, it should be reemphasized that, particularly in certain regions of the border, the reality was that the two sides were contending for territorial claims over a region that neither side had been able to exercise real control over up until that point. Of course, the key difference was that, while the French were newcomers and had to learn to navigate local networks of political power in the region, the Qing state had much more experience in this area. As we saw in chapter one, during the Sino-French conflict Cen Yuying, Tang Jingsong, and other Qing officials attached to the border delimitation project had forged personal relationships with Liu Yongfu, the Black Flags and other frontier powerholders. Hence, the issue of dealing with 'pirates' or 'bandits', who were ostensibly derived from the ranks of decommissioned Black Flags and decommissioned Qing regulars, clearly presented a more clear and present danger to the French commission than to their Qing counterparts.

Even so, Saint-Chaffray maintained that the 'pirate' threat could only be fully eradicated once they determined the routes that they used to traverse the border and with

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[316] Neis to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 8, 1886. *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, vol. 2, p. 734.
[317] May 6th, 1886 from Hanoi, Full summary report from the French border commission, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* p. 749.

the cooperation of the Qing border authorities.[318] The French commission reported to the protectorate authorities that pirates were using caves as hideouts and storehouses for stolen goods, arms, and people headed for China and claimed to have recovered documents suggesting a close relationship between the pirate gangs and Qing officials.[319] Therefore, Saint-Chaffray argued that they should try to cut off the supply route between Guangxi troops, irregulars, and the pirates who were being assisted and supplied by the Guangxi authorities on the Chinese side of the border.[320] While it is difficult to judge with certainty the extent to which the Qing commission, or provincial officials in Guangxi and Yunnan were in direct contact or cooperating with such groups, it is somewhat telling that over the course of the border survey the Qing commission rarely acknowledged the activities of 'pirate' or bandit groups in their communiqué with Peking, while the French team frequently reported encountering the smuggling of goods and people, and other clandestine activities along the frontier. In one such incident, the French commission had a chance encounter with human traffickers while out surveying the border in the hills just outside of Lạng Sơn. Paul Neis, the commission's physician and chronicler described the harrowing event in which they were able to extricate eight Vietnamese women and their children who told them that they had been kidnapped and forced to march towards the Chinese border.[321] After several months of surveying the border and numerous close calls with armed 'irregulars', the threat of an attack on the French commission became imminent.

By August of 1886, most of the goodwill and spirit of cooperation between the two commissions had largely broken down. In addition to the constant threat of pirate attacks, Zhou Derun and the Chinese commission did everything that they could to delay the project and make the route more difficult for the French commission. During the survey of the Yunnan section of the Tonkin border in the vicinity of Lào Cai, Zhou Derun refused the French commission's request that the two parties travel together, failed to meet the French commission at the border at the designated times, and denied French requests to travel on the Qing side of the border even if the route was safer and easier to traverse.[322] By this time, with their military personnel severely depleted by dysentery, malaria, and other illnesses, the French commission's entourage was accompanied by 25 foreign legionnaires and 50 poorly trained aboriginal infantrymen.[323] Their military advisers recommended sending scouts ahead of the commission to carry out reconnaissance but the group's progress in traveling by boat up the Longbo River (龍膊河) was impeded by stiflingly hot weather, rapidly rising water levels due to rain, and constant sickness among the remaining infantrymen. Furthermore, their porters often simply abandoned the entourage

[318] May 6th, 1886 from Hanoi, Full summary report from the French border commission, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* pp. 735-758.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Neis, p. 22.
[322] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 912-930.
[323] Ibid.

due to the harsh conditions and finding replacements who could transport their gear and provisions on the frontier was extremely difficult.[324]

On the evening of August 15th, the French survey team moored on the Chinese side of the Longbo River and was approached by approximately twenty Qing government troops who requested that the commission take up anchor and proceed to the Annamese side of the river.[325] However, the French delegation protested, stating that they had reached an agreement with the Chinese commission that they could lay anchor on the Chinese side of the river if doing so was more convenient. The troop commander replied that he was just concerned about the possibility of a bandit attack, and that they should take preventative measures.[326] It is not clear whether the Qing troops felt that such an attack was more likely on the Qing side of the river, or whether he just did not want to be held responsible for the attack if it happened within his jurisdiction. In any case, although they passed the night without any incidents, the confrontation compounded French apprehensions as they proceeded upriver the next morning.

On August 18th the survey team reached the vicinity of a large Chinese village called Xianfeng (仙峰). According to a summary of the border survey to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hanoi, the Chinese cartographic team was scheduled to meet with the French team that day. However, they claimed that instead of stopping to meet with them, Cen Yuying and his team plied ahead of them in a smaller and quicker boat and kept their distance from the French commission, losing them upriver. As the French team arrived in Xianfeng, they received a cold welcome from the villagers and the local authorities soon arrived to tell them that they were not welcome to lay anchor there.[327] Sensing that the unfriendly welcome was a sign to keep moving they decided to continue further upriver. As dusk was approaching, they noticed a group of small wooden boats approaching from the direction of Xianfeng, from a Vietnamese village called Beisha (北沙) on the Tonkin side of the bank.[328] Suddenly, there appeared a group of around fifty armed local 'irregulars' on the shore of Beisha, which were dressed in the attire of Black Flag soldiers. On the morning of August 19th at approximately nine o'clock a volley of rifle fire rang out from a small channel a few hundred meters from the boat of the French commission, the riflemen protected by the headlands of a tributary. At the same time, one of the boats in their small flotilla caught fire, causing troops and porters to jump into the river to avoid being consumed by the flames, and another volley of rifle fire erupted from the banks of the river.[329] A shootout between the French commissioners and their attackers ensued in which there were numerous fatalities among the French entourage including two lieutenants, Henry and Geil. After the attack, the French survey team quickly determined

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[324] Ibid.
[325] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 916.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.
[328] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 916.
[329] ibid.

that they should terminate the survey of that stretch of the border and to return to Lào Cai immediately.

The French commission reported that, after investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident, while it would be impossible to prove that the Qing commission had been accomplices in the attack, they should at least accept some measure of responsibility for it. According to a detailed report of the affair, Zhou Derun had refused the French team's request that the two commissions travel together, and his colleague Cen Yuying had also insisted that his team was not willing to share the risks with the French commission.[330] Saint-Chaffray also reported that he had learned that prior to the attack Zhou had received a message that if he collaborated with the French commission that he would be punished, although he did not specify who the orders were from or how he had learned about it. Saint-Chaffray also reasoned that if the brigands had not received information from Hekou (where they had last met with the Qing commission before setting off to survey that section of the border) regarding their itinerary and planned route then they would not have been able to plan such a flawless and well devised attack.[331] Furthermore, Saint-Chaffray claimed that the men who had carried out the attack looked quite similar in appearance to the men who had faced down the survey team from the shore of Xianfeng village just a day before.[332] The French commission also deduced that since the site of the attack was located near a small Chinese village that did not have the resources or manpower to stage such an assault, the local inhabitants and officials must have been well aware of the preparations necessary for carrying it out. Finally, the report added, in addition to the aforementioned details, there was the simple fact that when Cen Yuying and his team had passed through the location where the surprise attack happened just a day before they did not encounter the slightest trouble or opposition.[333]

Hence, the French commission became convinced that Cen and the local authorities in Hekou had almost certainly conspired to carry out the ambush and were cooperating with frontier residents and the 'pirates' of that region to impede the border survey by every means possible. French intelligence also suggested that if the provincial authorities in Yunnan and Guangxi were not outfitting and coordinating the resistance forces then they had at least granted their tacit consent to recruit and assemble within their jurisdictions.[334] For the remainder of the French commission's work, borderlanders engaged in a variety of methods to intimidate and harass the French commission. They repeatedly cut the newly installed telegraph wires, cut down telegraph poles, blocked routes in and out of the city of Lào Cai and its surrounding villages, intercepted messages carried by couriers, robbed French troops transporting supplies, and completely encircled the weakly fortified French border posts.[335] The resistance movement even developed elaborate and sophisticated

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[330] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 917.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid.
[334] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 918.
[335] Ibid.

methods of communicating over long distances, utilizing signal fires and reflective devices to coordinate their activities and track the movement of French troops and the border commission.[336]

The French Commission Returns to Lào Cai

Upon their return to Lào Cai, the French commission and a small detachment of infantrymen found themselves in a precarious situation. With their troop numbers severely depleted due to an epidemic of chronic illnesses, and with the city almost completely surrounded by hostile civilian and paramilitary forces, the situation approached a crisis level. Though the commission repeatedly requested for the deployment of more troops in order to fortify the city, it became more apparent as the days went on that it could be months before fresh troops would arrive. To compound the situation, almost every one of the members of the commission, along with their bodyguards and porters were stricken with fever and various types of acute alimentary illnesses, and even transmitting messages to regional troop detachments was a challenge as almost every message they sent was intercepted.[337]

By this point the French commission had become convinced that there was a well-coordinated resistance movement to their occupation of North Tonkin that was being orchestrated from the Chinese side of the border in the city of Hekou.[338] French intelligence officers reported that various local notables in the city had openly declared that they would oppose the border delimitation at any cost and had even offered a bounty on the heads of any of the members of the French Commission or French soldiers stationed across the river in Lào Cai.[339] To add to French suspicions, the Qing commission did not suffer any attacks or encounter any bandit roadblocks during the course of their survey and, according to the French commission, despite the bandit activities in the region did not display any apprehension or anxiety about their presence whatsoever.[340]

Insurgents on both sides of the Red River orchestrated guerrilla-like attacks using signal fires, usually moving in groups of no more than twenty men who would hurl explosives and various types of ordinances at French border posts and troop barracks.[341] In one attack a group of men crossing over from Hekou, said to be organized by one of Liu Yongfu's regiment commanders, set fire to the civilian houses just outside the wall of the city, killing one Chinese resident and injuring four others.[342] The French dispatched small regiments of troops to circle the perimeter of the city and to round up and expel the hostile 'pirate' groups, and soldiers frequently engaged in gunfights with small groups of men, and

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[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.
[339] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312 (also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 919.
[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid.
[342] ibid.

reported that the attackers always fled in the direction of Hekou, and that whenever they killed or detained them they were always Chinese.[343]

By the time autumn arrived, neither the French cartographers nor the intelligence agents attached to the French Border Delimitation Commission were willing to leave the relatively safe confines of the city of Lào Cai. Due to the activity of hostile forces in the outskirts of the city, the poor state of the French troops, and a lack of availability of reinforcements in the near future due to efforts at the pacification of regions closer to Hanoi, the commission was forced to carry out the remainder of the negotiations of the Yunnan-Tonkin border on the basis of comparing maps, tax registers, and other documents. However, while the French commission was reasonably confident in their understanding of the border between Lào Cai and the border of Laos, they reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that their cartographic and administrative evidence concerning the border east of Lào Cai to Guangxi province was far from comprehensive, and that the village heads and local frontierspeople, despite their initial cooperation, increasingly ignored the requests of the civil administrators to submit information on the local geography and history, and other data due to widespread intimidation from 'pirate' gangs.[344] The French commission found it particularly difficult to acquire maps and tax registers for the vast territory falling under the administration of the Tuyên Quang provincial authorities.[345] To further complicate matters, the Sino-Vietnamese place names found on Vietnamese maps of this stretch of the frontier rarely accorded with their names in the local languages and dialects of the hilltribe inhabitants of the region, and village heads and local chieftains were known to change the names of places at their own pleasure.[346]

The Chinese commission maintained that their maps were accurate and precise and that because they had dispatched their team of cartographers to the border earlier in the summer, that they had already successfully completed their own survey of the border, though this would have been highly unlikely due to the challenges discussed above.[347] Commissioner Tang claimed that his team's maps were drawn up based on the synthesis of data gleaned through a detailed survey of the region and the personal testimonies of the inhabitants.[348] However, the French commission argued that the Qing commission's maps were inaccurate and that, in any case, it would have been impossible for competent cartographers to carry out a detailed survey of this vast territory in such a short amount of time.[349] The Qing commission also refused to show the French team the maps that their cartographers had allegedly drawn up, provoking even more suspicion.

Meanwhile, French informants suggested that that another attack on the commission was imminent, and that it was being organized in Hekou, just across the river

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[343] The reports failed to explain how it was that they were able to identify the ethnic identity of the combatants.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid.

from Lào Cai.[350] The French commission could only conclude that since the attacks were being organized under the noses of the Chinese commission and in close vicinity to Cen Yuying's field headquarters, that they must at least be aware of it.[351] Accordingly, they also suspected that if Cen and the Chinese commission had not been complicit in the attack on August 19th then they must have at least been tacitly aware the plot. Even before the ambush outside of Lào Cai the military had reported that they had engaged in a firefight with a group of irregulars on the Black River near the site of the attack on the commission.[352] After detaining several of the men involved, they had supposedly confessed that Cen Yuying had supplied them with the firearms and ammunition.[353] Hence the commission came to believe that as long as Cen Yuying retained his position as the Governor-General of Yunnan and Guizhou that there would be no peace or stability in Tonkin.[354]

If Cen and the Qing commission were indeed organizing an armed resistance in concert with Liu and the remaining Black Flag forces as a means to threaten and intimidate the French commission in the hope that they would abandon the survey project as the latter suspected—and it appears highly plausible that they were—then it certainly had the desired effect. By October the French commission reluctantly reported that due to the fierce opposition that they faced as well as the difficulties of overcoming monsoon rains and malarial conditions, the rest of the border delimitation would most likely needed to be carried out through a comparison of maps, and that they would not likely be able to install the border markers in a timely fashion as stipulated in the treaty.[355] Hence, both sides agreed to defer the question of where to install the border markers to another commission to be assigned to the task at a later time.[356] The two commissions met twice in August and twice in October to exchange maps and ratify the agreement concerning the delimitation of the Yunnan-Tonkin border.[357] In the end, the French commission was forced to conclude that despite their best efforts the task of accurately delimitating the border would likely not be accomplished in full until after the French Protectorate's military was able to establish a firm footing in the region—a feat that would take decades to achieve.[358]

While their work on the frontier with Yunnan was coming to a close, the French commission still had to deal with the threat of another attack, and the issue of how they were going to safely travel to eastern Guangxi (at the time still a part of Guangdong province) for the next round of negotiations. An October report from the French commission to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that, in light of the situation in Lào Cai

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[350] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, p. 928.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid.
[356] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, *also in Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian, pp. 925*.
[357] M.D. Asia file, vol. 70, documents 90-106, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 942-947.
[358] French summary of the border survey: M.D. Asia File, vol. 64, pp. 289-312, *also in Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 924

and the body of evidence implicating the involvement of Cen Yuying and the Qing Commission in the guerilla attacks, that they would most likely employ the same tactics when they met to carry out the delimitation of the Guangxi-Tonkin border in Móng Cái. Whether or not their suspicions about Cen and the Qing commission were justified, their prediction that another attack would take place would prove to be correct. In December, while still awaiting the arrival of a detachment of troops to escort them to Hanoi in preparation for their next round of scheduled meetings, the commission learned that there had been an attack on Móng Cái, a city largely inhabited by Chinese merchants, in which their colleague Haïtce who had arrived weeks earlier in order to assist a team of French cartographers in an initial survey of the city's environs had been killed.

A French missionary overseeing a small community of Vietnamese Catholics in the outskirts of the city relayed the harrowing details of the attack to the French commission after their arrival. The missionary, Father Grandpierre, had observed a large group of Chinese on the outskirts of the city making preparations for some kind of an attack and had warned his followers and the few French residents of the city, including one of the attachés to the French commission, a young interpreter by the name of Haïtce.[359] According to the missionary's account, on the morning of November 24th a group of several hundred Chinese "irregulars" besieged the city of Móng Cái and surrounded Haïtce's residence.[360] A firefight ensued, with a few African *chasseurs* assisting Haïtce in defending their position. The attackers set fire to the home, and Haïtce and his comrades were able to escape during the melee, but the following day the attackers—whose number had increased significantly from the previous night—caught up to Haïtce and his bodyguards, decapitating them and—if we are to believe the fanciful account of Father Grandpierre—consumed their livers, mixed the gall with rice wine, and paraded their severed heads through the streets of Móng Cái.[361]

The attackers then when on a rampage, slaughtering the French residents of the city and its environs, and burning the homes and villages of Vietnamese Catholics as well as any Chinese merchants who they suspected of having commercial relations with Europeans.[362] Neis described the attackers as "Chinese established on Annamese territory" assisted by their neighbors who, "living on piracy and smuggling, had an interest in hindering our establishment and our control of these regions."[363] Interestingly, back in Peking the Yamen told Hart that they had received telegrams from Deng reporting "troubles" in Mong Cai but the correspondence had apparently made no mention of the deaths.[364] From this point on, the French commission believed with certainty in a Chinese plot to coordinate a covert resistance movement against the French presence in Tonkin, in which the Qing

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[359] Neis, p. 159.
[360] Neis, p. 160.
[361] Neis, p. 169.
[362] Neis, pp. 163, 174.
[363] Neis, p. 168. While Dr. Paul Neis, who recounted the events in his journal, which he later published in the French travel magazine *Le Tour du Monde*, may have taken certain liberties in order to regale his reading audience, it is clear from the French commission's reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the attack did indeed take place and that most of the details were corroborated by his colleagues.
[364] Robert Hart Diaries, December 8th, 1886.

commissioners and provincial officials were surely complicit. Whether this was the case or not—and it certainly appears to have been likely—after the attack on Móng Cái the Qing commission maintained the upper hand during the remainder of the negotiations, and survey work was abandoned almost entirely in favor of using maps and other data to determine the border. As we will see in the following chapters, the use of maps as evidence for Qing territorial claims was to have significant effects on the outcome of the delimitation of the border and marked a significant point of departure for late-Qing efforts at the territorial unification of the Empire.

Conclusion

The policy debate of 1885 and the border delimitation negotiations of the following year marked a pivotal moment in the transition from the tributary logic of the Qing state's foreign policy apparatus, to the post-tributary logic of 'modern' interstate relations. However, as we have seen, this paradigm shift was neither smooth nor easy for Qing statesmen to accept and adapt to. While the 1885 Treaty of Tianjin had required the Qing Empire to acknowledge the severance of tributary ties with Vietnam, the logic of foreign policy under the tributary system continued to inform the negotiating strategies of the Qing commission. Throughout the negotiations, Deng Chengxiu and the other Qing commissioners continued to employ the rhetoric of the tributary system—namely, the notion that all of Vietnam had once belonged to Qing China—in the hopes of recovering 'lost territory.' Indeed, the border negotiations highlight the impact that the breakdown of the tributary relationship between China and Vietnam had on Qing statesmen, and how it affected the way they approached the management of interstate relations with neighboring countries.

As we saw in this chapter, Deng Chengxiu and Wang Zhichun sought to carve out a buffer zone to separate the two countries because the French, rather than the Vietnamese court in Huế was now responsible for administering the territory; when Vietnam was a loyal tributary state the entirety of the country had acted as a buffer zone or "protective screen," as Wang put it, and prior to France's arrival "the whole of Vietnam had been the barrier protecting the courtyard of China's house and had isolated the Qing empire's borders and protected its southern gates."[365] Based on their centuries-long tributary relationship, Qing officials compared the Vietnamese state to "family," while they viewed the French as "strangers." And, although the Qing border commission's attempt at carving out a buffer zone was ultimately unsuccessful, the episode offers much insight into the logic behind the utilitarian defense functions of tributary states at the moment that the tributary system collapsed, and the China-centered East Asian world order was challenged.

What is important here is not necessarily whether Deng, Wang, and the others believed in the fiction of the 'loss' of Vietnam and the China-centered East Asian world order and the tributary system, but the fact that they continued to employ the rhetoric of that system during what was supposed to have been a bi-lateral demarcation of a shared

[365] Meeting Minutes, January 17th, at Zhennanguan, M.D. Asia file, vol. 65, p. 339.

border. For their part, the French negotiators struggled with what they viewed as a Chinese attempt to seize territory that was rightfully a part of Vietnam. However, as the preceding negotiations have revealed, the reality of the situation was that both states' territorial claims in the region were tendentious at best. Hence, the border delimitation project also represented a significant stage of state building by the French and Qing colonial regimes and in the transformation of highland peninsular Southeast Asia, from a predominantly autonomous zone largely outside the control of the adjacent imperial powers (referred to by James Scott and others as 'Zomia") to a region that was—all be it precariously—incorporated into the national geo-bodies of its powerful neighbors.

However, as the details surrounding the border survey (if it should even be referred to as such) demonstrated, the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border was not strictly a top-down affair in which the two imperialist regimes drew up the boundary arbitrarily; it was as much influenced by, and contingent upon, the terrain and social and political factors outside of the control of either the Chinese or French regimes as it was based on historically rooted territorial claims or scientific cartographic methods. As we saw in this chapter, even the French Commission, which had dozens of cartographers at the helm, had to largely rely on the cooperation of borderlanders, and was constrained in its efforts to accurately map the region by the limitations presented by weather, terrain, and the preestablished networks of the Black Flags and other powerholders in the region. Even after months of negotiating and survey work Saint-Chaffray admitted that the newly drafted French maps were woefully inadequate and was unable to recommend potential locations for the proposed trade zones with precision.[366] Hence, the French envoy in Tianjin, Cogordan, was forced to negotiate the accompanying trade deal with Li Hongzhang without the advantage of knowing where the most beneficial locations might be (more on this in Chapter Four). In her study of the Sino-Vietnamese border during the Ming period, Kathlene Baldanza similarly observed that "negotiation, rather than aggression or resistance was crucial in the formation of state boundaries."[367]

While neither the Qing or the French (or the Nguyễn state prior to their arrival) exercised a monopoly of power in Tonkin, it is clear that the Qing regime enjoyed a few key advantages in asserting its control over the borderlands and in putting forth its territorial claims. Even as early as the Sino-French conflict the Qing provincial authorities understood that it was crucial to establish a relationship with Liu Yongfu and other local powerholders if they hoped to bring the southern frontier and the unruly borderlanders into their sphere of influence. It is certainly no coincidence that Tang Jingsong, a man that had a close personal relationship with Liu Yongfu since before the outbreak of the Sino-French War was summoned to the southern frontier to assist in the border delimitation project. Likewise, Cen Yuying and Zhang Zhidong were also admirers of Liu and almost certainly maintained contact with him after he had relocated from Lào Cai to Qinzhou on the Chinese side of the border after the conclusion of the conflict. While there is no definitive evidence

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[366] Full summary report from the French border commission, May 6th, 1886, M.D. Asia File, vol. 70, doc. 24, also in *Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian,* p. 752.

[367] Baldanza, Kathlene. *Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia*. New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 7; Yin, Qingfei. From a Line on Paper", p. 3.

that Tang, Cen, and Zhang were working in concert with Liu to use his connections in Tonkin to organize violent resistance to the French presence in the region, it certainly does not appear to be outside the realm of possibility. Both the French and the Qing identified the roaming bands of 'pirates' and 'irregulars' as former Black Flags, including the group who had attacked the French commission just upriver from Lào Cai, the former Black Flag stronghold. It is easy to imagine that these destitute and desperate men would be eager to take revenge on the French, who had killed thousands of their comrades-in-arms during the Sino-French conflict and had been responsible for dislodging them from their power base in Tonkin and expelling their leader to the Qing side of the border.

In any case, while it is impossible to say with certainty whether Qing officials were carrying out a covert insurgency against the French with the former Black Flags as their proxy, it is clear that the French Commission did not face serious resistance in Tonkin at this time outside of areas that had either been formerly controlled and administered by the Black Flags and other paramilitary groups, or that had a significant Chinese merchant population engaged in cross-border trade (see Chapter Three). In short, the instances of violence against the French commission discussed in this chapter do not appear to have stemmed from any sort of nascent Vietnamese anti-colonial or proto-nationalist undertaking such as the 'Cần Vương', or 'Save the King' movement. On the contrary, as we saw above, there was no shortage of Vietnamese village heads or tribal chieftains to offer their assistance during the course of the border survey (though the coercive measures that the French may have used to secure their cooperation are not documented by the French or Qing commissions). As early as November of 1885, Peking was surprised to learn the extent to which the Vietnamese in Tonkin were willingly joining the ranks of the French military.[368] The Zongli Yamen reported that they were amazed at Vietnamese enthusiasm to join the new army that the French were assembling in Tonkin as part of their efforts to reduce the French troop presence there, and remarked that the Vietnamese troops were the most reliable, despite the fact that they received lower wages than French soldiers (one Vietnamese soldier cost only 350 francs annually, while the expenses for a French soldier cost 727 francs).[369] If we consider the measures that the French took to ensure the loyalty of ethnic *Kinh*, or Vietnamese people, such as the redistribution of land after expelling Chinese farmers, or the French commission's pledge to defend the highland tribes from 'predatory' Chinese, then it is not surprising that the French found so many eager collaborators in Tonkin, or that they experienced violent resistance from Chinese borderlanders.

In summary, the documentary evidence analyzed in this study does not indicate that that there was substantial resistance to French 'pacification' of the borderlands outside of areas in which they threatened to upset the status quo of domination by local powerholders or, 'strongmen', whether it was the remnants of the Black Flag state in Lào Cai, or the powerful merchants operating in Móng Cái (see Chapter Three). Moreover, as we will see in the following chapter, appeals to the Qing government made by ethnic Chinese on the Tonkin side of the border were primarily rooted in concerns related to their

[368] Zongli Yamen to Xu Jingcheng, November 17th, 1885, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, pp. 14-17.
[369] Ibid.

livelihoods—their ability to harvest crops, trade goods, and participate in the local economy without French interference; they expressed no ethno-nationalist indignation. Hence, popular resistance to the French on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, at least at this stage, appears to have been predominantly fueled by economic anxieties rather than by patriotic fervor. Of course, in later years the borderlands of Tonkin would come to serve as a refuge for anti-colonialists such as Phan Đình Phùng to Hồ Chí Minh, but it should be noted that neither of these revolutionaries was from Tonkin.

Another way that we might approach the issues of collaboration and resistance is to consider imperial Vietnam's attempts at the colonization of Tonkin prior to France's arrival on the Southeast Asian massif. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Vietnamese colonial expansion into the highlands by the Nguyễn state—who many northerners saw as alien invaders from the south—just a few decades before the launch of France's colonial endeavors in Vietnam had been extremely violent. The Nguyễn regime was itself a relatively recent colonizer of the northern provinces of Tonkin, and the extent to which the Vietnamese imperial government enjoyed widespread legitimacy in this region is questionable at best. With over 400 revolts challenging the Nguyễn state from its founding at the beginning of the century until the 1860s, northern loyalties to the regime remained a major concern at the time of French expansion into the region. In short, the Nguyễn state was itself a colonial regime that had carried out violent pogroms of forced 'Sino-Vietnamese acculturation', the mandating of the Vietnamese language, the persecution of local religious practitioners and the suppression of religious observances, and the imposition of state-sponsored ancestor worship, and harsh taxation on highland populations that they viewed as culturally inferior barbarians.[370]

It does not take a stretch of the imagination to surmise that such policies would not have endeared the regime to the northern inhabitants of Tonkin, both ethnic *Kinh* (Vietnamese) and hill tribe groups alike. On the contrary, it is quite plausible that certain communities that had experienced violent persecution during the Nguyễn period might have even welcomed the arrival of the French, seeing them as potential allies or liberators. Catholics, ethnic Hmong, and other minority groups (of which there were many in Tonkin) were often persecuted or treated as second-class citizens from the time of Emperor Minh Mạng up until the arrival of the French occupation forces. Enmity and resistance to the Nguyễn state's efforts to institute direct rule over former autonomous or semi-autonomous regions of Tonkin is well-documented, and many disaffected northerners likely saw French intervention as representing an opportunity to regain their independence.[371] In addition, many of the Catholic communities in Tonkin were actually relatively recent arrivals who had sought refuge in the highlands from persecution and Nguyễn prohibitions on the faith. In short, whether it was tribal chieftaincies, Catholics, or ethnic *Kinh* Tonkinese who resented rule by alien southerners, Nguyễn legitimacy in northern Vietnam, and across the highland frontier of northern Tonkin, was tenuous at best at the time of French arrival on the scene.

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[370] For more on the Nguyễn colonial expansion and policies see Chapter Two of Cristopher Goscha's *Vietnam: A New History*.
[371] Goscha, p. 62.

Of course, this is not to say that the French conquest and pacification of Tonkin was a peaceful affair; it was not. The Sino-French conflict had devastated areas that saw the heaviest fighting, and the French military had razed whole villages, dispossessing tens of thousands of people. Still, as Christopher Goscha has pointed out, many elites who had been marginalized under Nguyễn rule sought out new opportunities after the arrival of the French, and many non-Viet peoples in the highlands saw an opportunity to assert their independence after decades of efforts at colonization by the Nguyễn.[372] French policy in the early stages of the pacification of Tonkin—including the land redistribution policies outlined in this chapter—demonstrates that the protectorate government was well aware of the preexisting tensions among the various ethnic groups, and the animosity towards both the Nguyễn regime and ethnic Chinese borderlanders by ethnic Kinh and minority groups alike. If the ease with which the protectorate was able to recruit informants, advisers, and military recruits for the new army in Tonkin during the course of the border delimitation project is any indication of the effectiveness of protectorate policies during this period, then said policies can certainly be viewed as an unequivocal success. Situated within this broader context, the impetus for Tonkinese 'collaboration' with the French Commission during the border delimitation survey is brought into relief, as is the nature of anti-French activities in northern Vietnam during this period.

The ambiguity of the Sino-Vietnamese border, so far as a border in the modern sense had existed at all, had been a fundamental aspect of the hierarchical or 'asymmetrical' relationship between the two countries that existed prior to French arrival. Firstly, according to the traditional China-centered East Asian world order, 'all under heaven' had—at least in theory—been considered within the purview of the emperor. Moreover, this was not just a rhetorical device; both the Chinese imperial state and Chinese merchants could, and often did, traverse the ill-defined and porous border freely whenever they found it beneficial to do so. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, China's southern provinces relied greatly on the natural resources of Tonkin for the minting of coins, and to feed and staff their armies, and indeed a large part of the southern Chinese economy had relied on cross-border trade and resource extraction, which was to a great extent facilitated by the ambiguity of the border and legitimated through the rhetoric of the asymmetrical tributary relationship. It is not surprising then that when the French regime threatened to bring an end to the status quo by clearly delineating the border, those that had benefited most from a porous and ambiguous border—Chinese provincial authorities, warlords and their followers, and frontier merchants engaged in cross-border trade—were the very groups who put up the greatest resistance to the French presence in Tonkin.

In addition, we have seen that the two sides differed in their approaches to negotiating the border, each rooted in different bureaucratic cultures, and different communication systems. The French commission emphasized strict adherence to the border treaty, the use of 'scientific' cartographic and survey methods and maintained that the border should be determined according to the 'nationality' of territory rather than the

[372] Goscha, p. 87. Moreover, ethnic Hmong and other hilltribes people would continue to fight on the French side—and subsequently alongside the Americans—during the violent conflicts of the twentieth century.

national identities of the inhabitants of that territory. On the other hand, the Qing commission's approach was rooted in the logic and rhetoric of tributary relations, they sought to adopt a more flexible interpretation of the treaty language and placed more emphasis on the importance of the identities of borderlanders for determining the nationality of a given territory. To be sure, the border delimitation project not only marked an important moment in the post-tributary relationship between the Qing and Vietnamese states, but it also represented a critical development in the loss of independence and autonomy for the highlands of peninsular Southeast Asia, and the incorporation of overlapping sovereignties or highland 'mandalas' into the national geo-bodies of China and Vietnam. However, as we saw in this chapter, both sides ultimately had to adapt to conditions on the ground in order to accomplish the task with which they were charged. Neither side could arbitrarily draw a 'line in the sand' so to speak because the realities of both the terrain and the preexisting socio-political situation prevented them from doing so; they could neither move mountains and change the course of rivers, nor easily overturn the preestablished political economies of the region in order to draw the border where they saw fit. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier had largely eluded imperial control by the powerful states to the north and south, and they would continue to confound and frustrate the various regimes that sought to control them into the twentieth century and beyond, long after the border had been drawn.

Following the delimitation of the border and the resulting cross-border trade agreements, the French embarked on a futile attempt to 'pacify' the northwest region of Tonkin, eventually instituting a system of semi-autonomous chieftaincies to administer the unruly region similar to the system previously carried out by the Nguyễn earlier in the nineteenth century after their failed attempts at formally incorporating the region into their empire. Similarly, the region and its inhabitants would continue to shirk state control well into the twentieth century. Qingfei Yin has demonstrated how even by the mid-twentieth century the strength of the Vietnamese and Chinese states in the border region was extremely limited, and they struggled to curtail smuggling, cross-border farming, and forestry.[373] It would take international cooperative efforts on an unprecedented scale by the two socialist states in the twentieth century in order to gain a modicum of control over cross-border commerce and prevent borderlanders from freely shirking the directives of the state. However, even in the twenty first century, smuggling remains rampant, and the two states still struggle to assert complete control over the border region, as the Nguyễn, French, and Qing regimes did before them.

Finally, we can see in the Qing strategy of moving Han Chinese settlers into contentious border areas, as described in this chapter, yet another approach of governance inherited by subsequent regimes in China. Just as the Qing state sought to shore up tenuous claims to sovereignty over frontier territories by relocating Han Chinese to the border areas, so too did twentieth-century Chinese states use the same methods for exerting control over vast border regions historically populated by ethnic minority groups, and which had only nominally been directly ruled by previous states. Indeed, the modern

[373] Yin, Qingfei. "The Mountain Is High, and the Emperor Is Far Away: States and Smuggling Networks at the Sino-Vietnamese Border", P. 554.

Chinese nation state has not only largely inherited the national geo-body that was carved out and legitimized during the late-Qing period, but the government of the PRC has continued to employ Qing methods of governance and control over its borderlands well into the twenty-first century.

Chapter 3
The Argument for Sovereignty at the Frontier of Empires

Introduction

Before analyzing the events surrounding the second phase of negotiations between the French and Qing Border Delimitation Commissions, the central focus of this chapter, I will briefly make note of the documents that I worked with. Because of the problems with the communications and road networks during the first set of surveys and negotiations by the two commissions ('bandit gangs' composed of some conglomeration of decommissioned Black Flag soldiers and the followers of local warlords repeatedly destroyed telegraph lines in and around Lao Cai, intercepted messages carried by local couriers, and blocked off the roads in all directions), and the frequent illness of members of both the Qing and French commissions, the telegrams and messages sent between the Commissions and their respective governments were often weeks apart. However, Deng Chengxiu, the head of the Qing Border Delimitation Commission, and Paul Neis, the former naval doctor-turned-explorer and geographer who served as the French commission's doctor and chronicler both kept journals on the daily activities of the two Commissions. After Neis became seriously ill following the first set of negotiations he was far less prolific with his journal entries. Deng also stopped writing in his journal in mid-October of 1886. However, the communications systems were much improved once the commissions reached the border town of Móng Cái (芒街) in the northwest corner of the Gulf of Tonkin, particularly after the French military had reestablished a presence in the region. Hence, the documentary record of official communiqué and memoranda between the two commissions and their respective governments is more plentiful during this period. Also, during the second set of negotiations the commissions recorded their meeting minutes more regularly, which were verified and signed by the two commissions and their translators after every meeting, that recount in great detail the intense debate that ensued over the sovereignty of Jiangping and Bailongwei across the bay from Móng Cái. In addition to telegrams, imperial edicts, and meeting minutes, there is also a petition from the local Chinese population of Móng Cái, Dongxing, Jiangping, and the surrounding region that presents a detailed list of grievances against the French concerning their military occupation of the region and the ill-treatment of Chinese inhabitants. This is a particularly intriguing document because it provides another dimension to what a decidedly state-centered narrative otherwise and offers a small window into how the project to delimit and demarcate the Sino-Vietnamese border directly affected frontier inhabitants.

Finally, largely as a consequence of the two attacks on the French commission (see Chapter Two), during the second set of negotiations the commissions relied much more on the comparison of maps in the negotiation process rather than undertaking dangerous field surveys. The foundation of the Qing commission's evidence for their territorial claims over the disputed area encompassing Jiangping and Bailongwei was a map of the region from

the *Da Qing yitong zhi*,[374] an official compendium of geographic information compiled from local gazetteers that covered every region of the Qing empire, while the French commission's cartographers also drafted maps of the disputed area. All of these factors contributed to the creation of a particularly rich and varied assortment of documents that I collected in four archives (two in Paris, one in Aix-en-Provence, and one in Taipei), as well as a half dozen published compilations.[375] These documents provide an important window into late-imperial Chinese statecraft, diplomacy, and communications networks, and early French colonial policy in Southeast Asia and the expansion of French power in the region, as well as the political economies, power structures, and social dynamics of borderland regions and communities.

The Second Phase of Border Delimitation in Context

This section examines the events surrounding the second set of border negotiations between the Qing and French Committees for the Delimitation of the Border of Tonkin and China. The first set of border negotiations and survey work was capped off by an attack on the French Comission near Lào Cai, and an epidemic of malaria and other illnesses that affected almost all of the members of both Commissions, as well as their porters, military attachés, and soldiers (see Chapter Two). While the Chinese commissioners managed to make it out of the area and safely arrive in Dongxing for the next round of negotiations, most of the French team was held back in Lào Cai due to the activities of hostile forces in the area. The chronicler of the French Comission, Dr. Paul Neis, explained that he and his colleagues were surrounded by 'bandit' gangs that were being armed and supplied on the Chinese side of the border by the local bandit leader Liu Yongfu, who was easily able to recruit former Black Flags who were now without employment, and frequently took local traders hostage for ransom.[376] Major Pelletier, the commander of the French garrison in Lào Cai advised against the commissioners returning to Hanoi for a sabbatical until after reinforcements had arrived and could deal with the local 'bandit' problem, thus enabling their safe passage to the east. The French commission also received information that suggested they were the target of "irregular gangs."[377] As discussed in the previous chapter, by this point the French commission was convinced that Chinese officials including Cen Yuying, Zhang Zhidong, and possibly the Qing border commissioners had been coordinating a resistance to the French presence in Tonkin in cooperation with Liu Yongfu

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[374] Wilkinson translates the title of the text as Gazetteer of the Great Qing Unification, though I use the pinyin for the Chinese title (大清一統志, *Da Qing yitong zhi*) throughout this chapter. Wilkinson states that, "Three editions of the Da Qing yitong zhi were compiled. The proposal to begin the first was agreed by the Kangxi emperor in 1672, but it was completed only in 1743 because of the time taken to newly compile the 18 provincial gazetteers upon which it was based." He also notes that the final edition of the text (the version that Deng used during the Jiangping/Bailongwei negotiations) was completed in 1820, though not published until 1842. Wilkinson, Endymion Porter. Chinese History a New Manual. Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2013.

[375] The archives include: Centre des Archives diplomatiques du ministère des Affaires étrangères [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive], Le Service historique de la Défense [Archives of the Ministry of War], Archives nationales d'outre-mer [Colonial Archives], and the archives of the 中央研究院近代史研究所 [Institute of Modern History at Academia Sinica in Taiwan].

[376] Neis, Paul. *The Sino-Vietnamese Border Demarcation: 1885-1887*. p. 135

[377] Neis, p. 137

and the remnants of his Black Flags from the city of Hekou across the Red River from Lào Cai, the former headquarters of the Black Flags.

Troop reinforcements eventually arrived to replenish the ranks of undernourished and extremely ill troops who remained in Lào Cai, and Neis ultimately managed to make it safely to a hospital north of Hanoi to recuperate from his illness, but it was not until the end of November before the rest of the commission was able to set out for the Sino-Vietnamese border for the next round of negotiations. Upon their arrival in Móng Cái they learned that there had just been an attack on the city in which their colleague and interpreter who was scheduled for duty during their next set of discussions had been killed (see Chapter Two). Since all of the other commissioners were either recuperating from illness or held back in Lào Cai, the newly appointed head of the French protectorate Paul Bert had assigned the only member of the delegation who was available to meet with the Chinese ambassadors who were already waiting in Dongxing for the French commission to arrive. Haïtce, the only French commissioner who was proficient in Chinese, arrived ahead of the group to make contact with the Chinese commission, along with one of the cartographers Lieutenant Bohin who began surveying the area in the vicinity of Móng Cái. On November 24th 1887, just days before the rest of the French commissioners were scheduled to arrive to commence the next phase of border negotiations, a vague conglomeration of disbanded soldiers and local townspeople, possibly numbering over one thousand, sacked the city, burning down three Western buildings and several churches, killing two French soldiers, five Vietnamese soldiers, many religious converts, and a Vietnamese tax collector.[378] Haïtce's severed head was recovered in Chinese territory a month later.[379]

The 'bandit problem' and related concerns about another attack on the French Commission influenced the direction of the rest of the negotiations, and the area of the northwest coast of the Bay of Tonkin, the epicenter of piracy in the South China Sea for centuries, became the most hotly contested region in the entire border delimitation project. To better understand the nature of the debate, it is first necessary to examine what kind of place Móng Cái and the littoral frontier of the Gulf of Tonkin was at the time of the Border Demarcation Commissions' arrival in the region.

According to a report by the French Commission to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the total area of the disputed territory centering on Jiangping and Bailongwei was 1705 square kilometers—a sizeable swath of territory—and was inhabited by a mix of Chinese and Vietnamese agriculturalists and frontier families.[380] Like the inland, highland frontier that the commissions surveyed and negotiated during the first phase of their demarcation work, the coastal frontier was both remote and difficult to govern. This region had been one of the central strongholds of piracy and smuggling from as early as the Ming dynasty, but by the mid-nineteenth century the area of Jiangping had become ground zero

[378] *Zhong Yue bianjie Guangxi duan yange shi*, p. 42.
[379] Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris: M.D. Asia file, vol. 70 (*Zhong yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 667-669).
[380] Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris; M.D. Asia file: Volume 70, p. 530.

for piratical activities in the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China coast.[381] Up until the French forces occupied the disputed area in December of 1886 after the attack on Móng Cái that claimed the life of Haïtce, this territory occupied a position at the limits of state power and, as with the highland frontier, both states' claims over the region were tenuous at best.

In the preceding century pirates and seafaring merchants with access to weapons, soldiers, capital, and trade and transportation networks had profited from the limited power and authority of the imperial Chinese and Vietnamese states in this frontier zone, and they proved to be a durable and formidable barrier to the expansion of state power in the region.[382] The Vietnamese court in Huế had invested a local family with the power to collect taxes in the area but, as we will see, these quasi-officials had limited power to say the least. The real power holders in the region, the 'pirates' and merchants, derived their influence and autonomy from the lack of a strong state presence and, paradoxically, found themselves in the employ of both the Chinese and Vietnamese states at various times, utilized as "free-floating resources," as circumstances arose.[383]

This area was also an integral node in the broader piratical economy of coastal North Vietnam and South China. Indeed, a considerable percentage of the economy of the entire region throughout most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries revolved around some form of piracy or smuggling. Raiding and smuggling were activities that were deeply ingrained in the political economy of the northern coast of the Gulf of Tonkin and littoral South China.[384] Wang Wensheng has described some of the details and peculiarities of Jiangping's geography and political economy in the early nineteenth century:

"[Jiangping] was effectively cut off from the continent by nearly impenetrable mountains that rendered it easily defensible against outside attack. This frontier town thus stood not only at the intersections of state borders but also at a topographical choke point and a natural outlet to the sea. All these [factors], together with its cultivable land, had turned Jiangping into an ideal rendezvous and well-sheltered haven for transnational pirates by the late eighteenth century. Taking advantage of its unique topography and non-state nature, both Vietnamese and Chinese sea bandits used this border town as an important hideout and smuggling base." … "Merchants from all over China's Southeastern coast swarmed to Jiangping to trade in pirated booty, making it the hub of a vast network of black markets."[385]

In Wang's view, the trade in pirated goods across the waterways of Móng Cái, Jiangping, and Bailongwei added to the porous and ill-defined nature of this frontier zone and defied the notion of state boundaries. In the eyes of coastal dwellers in this frontier zone, "Guangdong flowed imperceptibly into Vietnam."[386] The pirates of Jiangping sometimes became free agents for hire, or "free-floating resources," finding themselves, at

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[381] Wang, Wensheng. *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates*. p. 94.
[382] Wang, *passim.*
[383] Ibid.
[384] Wang, p. 83
[385] Wang, pp. 94-96
[386] Ibid.

various times, in the employ of both the Chinese and Vietnamese imperial states, as well as working in conjunction with imperial usurpers such as the Tây Sơn Rebels during the final years of the eighteenth century. In his journal, Paul Neis offered the following description of the city of Móng Cái just across the Bay of Tonkin from Jiangping, largely paraphrased from a published account of an English explorer's travels through the region just a few years before the arrival of the Border Delimitation Commissions:[387]

"From the first glance you can see that, while it is on the territory of Tonkin, this is not an Annamese city at all. Annamese villages consist of poor huts covered with lime: Móng Cái is in solid bricks with roofs made of the tiles that are found over the whole Celestial Empire; you are truly struck by the appearance of ease and comfort of the dwellings; it would be difficult to meet a house there which would have no waterspout in the form of a dragon's head on its roof or a veranda covered with flower pots; the gates of the streets are adorned with paintings showing a tree which carries in its branches a banner on which is written a moralizing phrase drawn from the ancient philosophers. The inhabitants are dresses as richly as the great traders on Queen's Road in Hong Kong, in long blue, grey or white silk robes according to the seasons, beautiful brocade shoes and white socks. No Tonkinese other than one or two coolies and the women of the Chinese are encountered there" …"and about every one or two hundred meters one comes to huge warehouses in which has been piled up merchandise stolen and pillaged from everywhere in the Gulf of Tonkin: opium, bales of silk or cotton, rice, salt, groundnut oil, tea, cinnamon, in sum, all the products of the neighboring countries. There they are separated and warehoused together, because they do not engage in retail trading in Mong Cai; it is only with complete cargoes that these traders, allied with pirates and smugglers, work. Here and there one comes across houses for the training of stolen women, for the greater part Annamese; they are given instruction in Chinese, they are taught Chinese customs to increase their value in the markets of Hong Kong, and this regular trade of slaves in one of our crown colonies is a shame to our administration. Opposite Móng Cái, in the territory of Guangdong (present day Guangxi), is the city of Tong-Hin-Kaï (presently called Dongxing), which possesses a watchtower but where one does not meet with either trade or riches."[388]

He goes on to describe the Qing official stationed in Dongxing as "a man bound to both the whims of the Qing provincial authorities, while at the same time being beholden to the rich and powerful traders in Móng Cái, who he frequently visits during trips across the Pak-Lam River (北仑河)."[389] By contrast, his Vietnamese counterpart stationed on the isle of Vanninh, a muddy fishing village consisting of a few dozen huts, lived in abject poverty and occasionally brokered the hiring of coolies from among the ranks of Vietnamese fishermen in the village.[390] Neiss concluded that, "France will be forced to destroy Móng Cái to assure peace in the province of Quan-Yen."[391]

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[387] See: Scott, James George. *France and Tonkin*, London, 1885.
[388] Neis, pp. 142-143
[389] Neis, p. 144
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid.

In addition to 'pirates' and merchants who profited either directly or indirectly from piracy and smuggling, there were also many soldiers from the ranks of the recently disbanded Black Flag Army who remained in the region in the wake of the Sino-French Conflict. As were the pirates of Jiangping, The Black Flag and Yellow Flag armies, originally descended from the ranks of former imperial rebels, were retained as irregular soldiers by both the Chinese and Vietnamese imperial states at various times throughout the 1870s and 1880s and had been in the employ of the imperial government in Huế since as early as the 1873 attack on Hanoi when Commander François Garnier who led the first French incursion into Tonkin was killed. As discussed in previous chapters, Liu Yongfu had led the Black Flags to several successful campaigns during the Sino-French War, and then left Tonkin (as stipulated by a clause in the 1885 Treaty of Tianjin that ended hostilities) with his most loyal followers to the Chinese side of the border and established a residence in Qinzhou. Hence, thousands of Black Flags were disbanded in North Vietnam and formed "bandit gangs" that occupied towns and blocked off roads, like those that harassed and intimidated the French commission in Yunnan and Guangxi. (see Chapter Two) Just as they had done in Lào Cai 350 miles to the west several months earlier, disbanded soldiers assembled on the outskirts of Móng Cái, blocking the roads into the city and inhibiting the next round of Border Commission meetings until French forces were able to occupy the area."[392]

Just days before his demise in Móng Cái, Haïtce sent a telegram to Dillon, the newly appointed head of the French Commission, who was still back in Lào Cai waiting for reinforcements to escort him and the other commissioners to Móng Cái. He described the situation in the region, and informed Dillon that the cartographer Mr. Bohin had recently completed mapping the eastern portion of the border area between Móng Cái and Zhushan (竹山). Haïtce concluded that, "while Zhushan's location is certainly peculiar, based on his survey I can confirm without a doubt that Zhushan is not Chinese territory." …"The Chinese Comission will likely want a body of water adjacent to Zhushan so that their customs and naval vessels can have access to the region, and we know that this situation is bound to complicate the negotiations. We should take precautionary measures such as installing a customs office on the Bailongwei peninsula and patrolling the adjacent coast. However, these measures are likely to bring us into a conflict with the local Qing authorities."[393] He went on to report that, "The boundary line of China should reach its terminus at the sea. All of the adjacent islands such as Lion Island (小獅島) and other small islands at the at the mouth of the Bay are Vietnamese territory. Moreover, it is clear from our cartographer's survey that the boundary line between Móng Cái and Zhushan follows the course of a canal that empties into the ocean at the lower reaches of the river at Zhushan and curves around the coast of Zhushan, but the Chinese commission is sure to dispute this."[394] This latter prediction would prove to be correct, as we will soon see. He concluded his report by describing the details of the local civil administration: "The assistant to the official in charge of the administration of Bailongwei, the area we inappropriately refer to as a Vietnamese "enclave," came to see me in Haining. This official is a local and his family has

[392] *Deng Chengxiu kanjie ziliao huibian*, p. 53.
[393] Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris; M.D. Asia File: Volume 70.
[394] Ibid.

administered this region for generations. He is a part of the system of hereditary chieftains in Vietnam that is similar to the system that China uses to govern its own territory in the region. I found out that someone has been trying to buy him off and I don't know how he is dealing with it. He is in quite a dilemma when confronted by the French or the Chinese. I can even go so far as to say that in his heart he hopes that the area under his jurisdiction will remain a part of Vietnam, even though he says differently when he is in front of the Chinese."[395] Hence, Haïtce described how this local chieftain, charged with collecting taxes in Bailongwei, was coming under pressure from both sides of the impending dispute over the territory that his family had overseen for generations. Within days, he too would become a casualty of the looming struggle over the territory that he had been responsible for governing; he was killed in the same attack on Móng Cái that claimed the life of Haïtce. This local chieftain's precarious situation bears striking similarities to many of the chieftaincies in the inland highland frontier, which were characterized by multiple, overlapping sovereignties and whose allegiances were divided between various regional state powers (see Chapter Two).

In the wake of the attack on Móng Cái, relations between the two border commissions became more strained after the protectorate government of Tonkin dispatched several batallions of troops to the region in retaliation, purportedly to avenge Haïtce and try to rid the region of irregulars and pirates and ensure the safety of the French Border Delimitation Commission. The French deployed a warship and unleashed a barrage of cannon fire in the area in and around Jiangping and Huangzhu, terrifying residents and drawing criticism from Deng Chengxiu and the rest of the Qing Commission.[396] The French infantry, largely comprised of *Chasseurs d'Afrique* (light infantry and cavalry mainly recruited from among the native inhabitants of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) augmented by poorly trained Vietnamese soldiers, wantonly drove out or killed many Chinese residents of the area, confiscated their homes and property and awarded it to local Catholic converts in the name of restitution for attacks on the latter during the Sino-French War and the recent attack on Móng Cái. Soon after the troops arrived in the region, they occupied the villages of Jiangping and Huangzhu across the bay from Móng Cái, leaving a wake of destruction in their path. The troops killed numerous Chinese residents and burned or confiscated their properties and livestock.[397] Hundreds of people sought refuge in Lianzhou prefecture across the river from Móng Cái in Chinese territory.[398]

Sometime between the initial occupation by French troops and the conclusion of the second round of negotiations in which the two commissions fiercely vied for control over the contested area, a petition of unknown origin began to circulate that contained a detailed list of grievances by the local population of Chinese residents of Móng Cái and the

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[395] Ibid.
[396] *Zhongyue bianjie guangxi duan yange shi*, p. 42
[397] Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris: M.D. Asia File: Volume 64, pp. 120-133 (*Zhongyue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 677-680).
[398] Dongxing, despite its proximity to Mong Cai and the disputed region encompassing Jiaping and Bailongwei, was recognized early on by both Commissions as lying within Chinese territory and there are numerous references to the town in Chinese gazetteers.

surrounding region and decried the French occupation of the area.[399] In addition to airing their grievances against the actions of the French troops, the petition claimed that both Móng Cái and Jiangping were a part of China, and urged the Qing state not to hand the territory over to the French. Among other things, the petition declared that the French had driven the local Chinese population from their farmland and confiscated their property, affecting the livelihoods of upwards of 20,000 people, preventing the harvesting of crops, creating famine-like conditions throughout the area, and inhibiting the former tenants from attending to their ancestral graves. The document also accused the French of granting religious converts, presumably Catholics comprised primarily of ethnic Vietnamese or ethnic minority populations, a monopoly over the harvesting of sea salt in the area, and of generally privileging the local Vietnamese population over the interests of the Chinese. The petition also argued for the strategic military and economic importance of Jiangping, presumably to rally official Qing support for their cause; if handed over to the French, the area would be both an important position for defending northern Vietnam from attacks by "irregular troops" and guerilla fighters, and an ideal point to launch a full-scale invasion of Southern China, as well as a potentially important port for trade. The petition speculated that if the French gained control of the port that they would turn it into a foreign-controlled enclave on par with Honk Kong, which would result in a greater influx of foreign goods, in-turn putting Chinese traders and wholesalers out of business, preventing proper levies from being collected, and adversely affecting the economy of the entire region. The text also acknowledged the inevitability of outbreaks of guerilla warfare carried out by "irregular troops" in the region, which would have devastating effects on the civilian population.

Because the document is of unknown provenance, it is unclear whether it was drafted by a local community leader, or if it was a piece of well-crafted propaganda composed by a local Qing official with the intention of projecting the Qing state's territorial claims over the region. The copy of the petition that Dillon sent to the French Foreign Ministry, which is now held in the archives of the *Service historique de la défense* in Paris is in French and is labeled "*traduction*" (translation), suggesting that the original version was penned in Chinese. Unfortunately, as far as I know the original Chinese version of the petition is non-extant. In any case, this document suggests tensions between the central state's efforts to dictate the territorial boundaries of the provinces, and local concerns that were tied into the pre-existing economic and cultural ties of borderlanders. Furthermore, on first glance it appears to offer a glimpse into the grassroots formation of national identity prior to the launch of the modern Chinese and Vietnamese nationalist movements typically associated with figures such as Sun Yat-sen and Phan Bội Châu in the early twentieth century. However, rather than offering evidence that these borderlanders felt some profound sense of patriotism or ethno-nationalism, this document represents an example of an appeal to national identity for the purposes of protecting local interests; the majority of the concerns expressed in the petition were related to protecting the economic interests of Chinese frontierspeople. Peter Sahlins has highlighted a similar phenomenon in

[399] I have included my translation of the complete petition in the Chapter Three Appendix.

his study of the demarcation of the Franco-Spanish border, as did Nicholas Tackett in his study of the border demarcation of the Northern Song border with the Liao.[400]

Whatever the document's origins, the Grand Council was not moved by the inhabitants' grievances or their appeal for Qing aid. However, while Peking did not view the territory as strategically important, the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, along with Dench Chengxiu and Zhang Zhidong, took a different stance on the matter. At the same time, the French commission clearly felt that this area had the potential to become a major point of entry into the markets of South China if it was properly administered and policed and, conversely, that it would remain a center of smuggling activities, piracy, and anti-French resistance in the region if it was recognized as Qing territory. Just as Haïtce had predicted a week before his death in Móng Cái, this area became the focal point of dispute for the remainder of the negotiations.

By the time the French forces arrived in December of 1886, and the French and Chinese commissions soon after, the 'pirates' of Jiangping and Bailongwei as well as many of the Chinese residents of Móng Cái had fled across the border into Lianzhou prefecture in Guangdong province, creating a chaotic situation which soon attracted the attention of local authorities, including the Liangguang Governor-General Zhang Zhidong who telegrammed the Grand Council on December 2nd to inform them about the recent developments.[401] He explained that the French occupation of the area had created a volatile situation in which the local population had become angry because the French were taking advantage of the fact that the border had not been determined yet and were making attacks indiscriminately. Echoing the claims made in the petition, Zhang claimed that the locals associated strongly with China and were rallying against the French, but because there was a mixture of Chinese and Vietnamese people among the populace, if they banded together to oppose the French that it would be complicated to sort out who was who and what was what. Furthermore, he felt that the current situation had the potential to flare up, perhaps resulting in another incident similar to the recent attack on Móng Cái. He also explained that when Wang Zhichun from the Qing Border Delimitation Commission arrived in Lianzhou the 'refugees' from Móng Cái, Jiangping, Bailongwei, and the surrounding area had made numerous offers to host lavish banquets to show their allegiance to the Qing Empire. He argued that if the French continued to break the agreement (The 1885 Treaty of Tianjin) by crossing into Qing territory and staging military operations in border areas that there must be retaliation and requested that the Zongli Yamen urge the French envoy in Peking to recall the troops occupying the area.[402]

The Grand Council replied the next day and informed Zhang that they had assigned Wang Zhichun to handle the matter, and expected him to bring the crisis to an end quickly.[403] As far as the Qing Court was concerned, most of the people claiming to be

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[400] Tackett, Nicolas. *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*. Cambridge University Press, 2017; Sahlins, Peter. *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

[401] Secret telegram from Zhang Zhidong to the Grand Council, Dec. 2, 1887: *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, vol. 7, p. 92.

[402] ibid.

[403] Secret telegram from the Grand Council to Zhang Zhidong, Dec. 2, 1887: *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, vol. 7, p. 93

patriotic militiamen (義民; or "people with a deep sense of justice") were in fact just disbanded [Black Flag] soldiers (游勇), and that these "vagrants" were likely just trying to "sound the drum to protect the country as a pretext to create conflict."[404] Moreover, the Grand Council relayed that the French ambassador had recently been to the Zongli Yamen complaining that the attack on Móng Cái had been orchestrated in Guangdong province (present day Guangxi), and intimated that if the French used the attack as a pretext to retaliate and invade Guangdong, then the Qing Court would place the blame on Zhang. So now, the Council insisted, the Qing strategy was to not get involved in any conflict between the French and the Vietnamese (or Vietnamese *claiming to be Chinese*) and that if people came to complain about the French and offered to host banquets in order to curry favor with Qing officials, that they should be turned away so that they would not think that the Qing government had some obligation to protect them. The Council also instructed Zhang that Qing troops in Guangdong and Guangxi were only to concern themselves with the areas that they were certain were a part of Qing territory. Furthermore, they made it clear to Zhang that they were not interested in this "barren and desolate region", and since they were not certain about the identity of the inhabitants there, they worried that even if they assigned officials to start taxing them that there were likely to be countless troubles. Finally, the council urged Zhang not to pursue the matter out of ego or to "seek an undeserved reputation", and to handle the situation pragmatically, and made it clear that there would be consequences if Zhang did not act according to their directives.[405]

There are several points of significance here worth analyzing. First of all, it is evident that the Qing Court did not want to risk the resumption of armed conflict with the French over an area that it saw as being of little strategic value, a position that was in direct opposition to the stance of Zhang and the Chinese commissioners. Furthermore, the Council was well aware that the loyalties of *youyong*, likely the remnants of Liu Yongfu's Black Flag Army, were questionable at best, and sought to disassociate Qing officials from them, regardless of their recent history of cooperation against the French during the conflict of the previous year. If the people responsible for the attack on the French in Móng Cái did include former Black Flags, they did not want the French to be able to use the incident as a pretext for demanding a favorable deal in the upcoming trade negotiations. Furthermore, uncertainty over the ethnic identity of the region's inhabitants meant that they were all the more 'illegible' and untrustworthy in the eyes of the Qing Court. Additionally, while the Grand Council would have certainly been aware of the region's troubled history as a hotbed for piratical activity, they apparently did not feel that it held enough strategic importance to allocate additional military expenditures, much less risk the resumption of a costly armed conflict with the French.

On the same day that they telegrammed Zhang Zhidong sternly warning him to drop the matter, the Council issued an imperial decree to the public placing the blame for the disorder in Móng Cái and Jiangping on the local Vietnamese population (even though there was no evidence to suggest that Vietnamese villagers had been involved in the attack on Móng Cái, or had joined in with the French military in driving out the local Chinese

[404] ibid.
[405] Ibid.

population), and stating that the Qing government would not intervene so long as the border had not been determined.[406] The decree went on to say that the Vietnamese people were unreliable and would risk anything to oppose the French and that Qing officials should not acknowledge their complaints or take their side. Furthermore, the decree acknowledged, the French ambassador had recently reported that he thought the attack on Móng Cái was orchestrated in Guangdong, but the Zongli Yamen had insisted that this was not true. Finally, the imperial pronouncement affirmed that China would peacefully follow the previous treaty (the June 1885 Treaty of Tianjin), and stay out of the conflict between the Vietnamese and the French.[407] In short, Peking was attempting to shirk Chinese responsibility for the recent attack on Móng Cái and diffuse the 'refugee' crisis in Jiangping by placing the blame for the recent skirmishes on the Vietnamese, who it held responsible for the anti-French violence. However, in truth, there was not any evidence whatsoever that there was an organized Vietnamese resistance to the French occupation of the region.

The following day, Zhang telegrammed the Grand Council again, saying that he was willing to follow their previous instructions, and denied French accusations that he had recently deployed three thousand troops from the Guangdong Navy to Dongxing.[408] He also maintained that French allegations that officials in Guangdong had masterminded the attack on Móng Cái was simply a lie, and doubled down on his insistence that the area under French occupation was part of China, referring to a map that he had previously sent the Grand Council allegedly proving this fact (though he did not mention the map's provenance). Furthermore, he argued that if conflict broke out between the French and the Vietnamese in the area and the Qing military did not intervene, then the question of China's territorial claims over the territory would be a lost cause and that all of their previous efforts would be wasted.[409] If they just let the French and the "Vietnamese"—by which he meant the Chinese militiamen and *youyong*—battle it out in Jiangping and Bailongwei, he reasoned, then the French would be able to claim the line. Zhang then suggested that they send Feng Zicai along with 250 troops to Dongxing in order to demonstrate that the situation was under control and that he was not attempting to stage a covert attack on the French. He concluded the message by adding that he would ensure that Wang Zhichun would not act under impulse and would follow the Grand Council's previous instructions (not to attend the banquets hosted by the borderlanders). However, despite his promise to act according to Grand Council's directives, throughout the remainder of the negotiations Zhang, like Deng, would not back down from his territorial claims to Jiangping and Bailongwei and was willing to risk the outbreak of another armed conflict with France over a piece of territory that Peking saw as neither strategically significant or of any benefit to the Qing Empire or the negotiations with the French whatsoever.

Here, it is worth asking: What, exactly, was Zhang Zhidong's strategy? Was he altruistically sympathetic to the plight of the borderlanders and the anti-French cause, or was he simply trying to "seek an undeserved reputation" (*xuming,* 虛名) as an upright

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[406] Grand Council to Zhang Zhidong Dec. 3, Public Notice*; Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, vol. 7, pp. 93-94
[407] Ibid.
[408] Zhang Zhidong to the Grand Council on Dec. 4, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, vol. 7, p. 94
[409] Ibid.

official, as the Grand Council had intimated? Did Zhang and Deng know something about this far-flung territory that Peking did not? I will withhold any attempt to answer these questions until the conclusion of this chapter, but for now it is enough to consider them as we examine the details of the Jiangping/Bailongwei dispute.

The Bailongwei-Jiangping Territorial Dispute

When all of the members of both commissions had finally arrived in Móng Cái and Dongxing in the first week of January 1887, the two sides met almost daily for the next six weeks with the exception of a week-long break during the Lunar New Year celebration. The negotiations included official meetings with the members of both commissions in attendance and unofficial meetings held between James Hart and the Chinese commission's translators representing the Qing commission, and Lieutenant Tisseyre and Mr. Bohin representing the French commission. Because their translator Haïtce had been killed, the French had to rely on Li and Hart to handle the translation duties in good faith.[410]

Almost as soon as the negotiations began the two sides reached stalemate after presenting the evidence for their territorial claims, with both commissions refusing to recognize the authenticity or legitimacy of the documents that the other side put forth as proof of their respective claims to sovereignty over the disputed region. The Qing commission maintained that the tax registers that the French produced were possible forgeries since they were all written by hand, despite carrying the official seal of the Vietnamese court, while the French criticized the maps from the *Da Qing yitong zhi* as being both inaccurate and insufficient. On one hand, the Qing Comission was neither willing to cede control of the disputed region to the French, nor willing to take responsibility for piratical or anti-French activities in the region. On the other, the French were not willing to pull their troops out of the region until the dispute had been settled through negotiations by representatives of their respective governments in Tianjin or Peking, partly for security against another attack, and partly as a way of legitimizing their claims, and as a way of projecting their power in the region. Accordingly, the French Comission tried to convince Deng and the other commissioners to agree to maintaining the status quo of French military occupation of the region until they carried out the survey of the rest of the border, and to leave the resolution of the dispute to their respective governments. However, Deng would not agree to even include the Bailongwei peninsula as part of the disputed area and maintained the absolute authority of a map from the *Da Qing yitong Zhi*, an official Qing compendium of geographical information of the empire.

As soon as M. Dillon, the newly appointed head of the French Commission, met with the other commissioners on January 3, 1887 in Dongxing, it was evident that the recent attack on Mong Cai had an immediate effect on the negotiating process. The French commissioners were visibly rattled, and quickly acquiesced to the Qing commission's suggestion that they abandon survey work in favor of delimiting the border on the basis of

[410] Meeting Minutes January 6, 1887: M.D. Asia file; Vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).

maps, resorting to a topographical survey only in the event of a stalemate.[411] However, the Qing commission insisted that if any more survey work was required, that they carry out the work by sea, since the most important section of the border to be determined was the maritime boundary, while the French maintained that the starting point of the maritime border could only be determined after they settled the question of the land border west of Jiangping.[412] Additionally, Deng insisted that in the event that they did need to carry out a survey, that the two commissions should travel alone. However, Dillon disagreed with this idea as well, pointing out that the French Commission had come under attack the last time the two commissions had separated during their survey of the Yunnan border, and because Guangdong's border was clearly equally as dangerous, he was not willing to endanger the safety of his colleagues if the Qing commission was not willing to share the risk.[413]

The Qing commission also put pressure on their French colleagues to request that the French troops in the area adjacent to Móng Cái be recalled. They claimed that a French detachment had recently attacked the nearby Chinese village of Si-le (思勒), and had destroyed a residence that was being used by one of the members of the Chinese Commission with a cannon blast. Lieutenant Tisseyre denied having any knowledge of the matter, and argued that, if true, it was all the more reason to reach an expedient agreement concerning the issue of deciding the rest of the border. He also added that if the prates were not able to come and go across the border of Tonkin and China then this sort of thing would not have happened. According to the French military, the local Chinese authorities had not taken any measures to handle the pirate problem and maintained that all of the pirate/bandit gangs were operating from the Chinese side of the border.[414]

In addition, the Chinese Commission suggested that the two sides consider putting off taking action against pirates and disbanded soldiers in the area until after the delimitation of the border had been completed. Lieutenant Tisseyre firmly rejected this proposal, insisting that, it was not the French who brought about this situation, but rather the pirates from China who had attacked the city of Móng Cái and killed their colleague. The Qing commissioners responded that they hoped that the French were able to avenge the death of their colleague, and that Commissioner Wang Zhichun had already given the order to thoroughly investigate the incident. They also stated that they had posted notices requiring the inhabitants of the surrounding area to preserve the peace.[415] Finally, the Qing commissioners insisted that the French Commission notify the military authorities immediately so that another incident like that at the village of *Sile* did not happen again. The French lieutenant then explained that the French Military Department had already instructed the troops to respect China's territory, and that although they had already taken preventative measures to disseminate the order through the ranks of the troops, when groups of pirates did not meet any resistance whatsoever from the local Chinese

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[411] M.D. Asia file, Vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 518-522).
[412] Meeting Minutes January 14, 1887: M.D. Asia File, Vol. 66, pp. 64-73; *Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.
[415] This imperial edict was discussed in detail above.

authorities and were easily able to flee into Chinese territory, that the French authorities had no choice but to pursue them across the Chinese side of the border." [416] Hence, the two sides once again reached an impasse on the issue of the French military occupation of the area.

The two sides reconvened three days later after James Hart's arrival in Dongxing. Deng proposed that the French take out their maps so the Chinese Commission could see where they thought the border should be, but Dillon insisted that the Chinese produce theirs first.[417] It soon became apparent that neither side wanted to reveal their 'bottom line.' After some hesitation, Deng reluctantly produced a map and used his finger to roughly trace the course of the border as he saw it, from the end point of Bailongwei towards the ocean, across the sea curving underneath a few islands, and then through the mouth of the river separating Móng Cái and Dongxing.[418] From the river's mouth, he continued to trace the course of the river as it ran northwest of Dong Xing and linking up with its tributary, stopping at a place on the map called Dongzhong (峒中). Then he said, "This is the existing border as far as I know. Everything north of the line that I traced is Chinese territory. Everything south of the border is Annam."[419] However, Dillon insisted that everything from Bailongwei to Longmen, including Longmen, Jiangping, and Bailongwei were Vietnamese territory. The commissioners would maintain their respective territorial claims for the remainder of the negotiations. Since both sides agreed to determine the remainder of the border based on maps and other evidence in lieu of a border survey, we will now examine the cartographic data and other archival evidence that the two commissions used to back up their respective territorial claims.

Maps and the Question of Archival Authority

The main topics of disagreement during the ensuing negotiations were as follows. First, the Qing side maintained that the *Da Qing yitong zhi* was the ultimate authority in determining their sovereign rights over the disputed territory. Second, the Qing Commission argued that the undecided territory, particularly Bailongwei, was a part of China since "ancient times," that they had only lost control of the region in recent years due to piratical activities and general disorder, and that an opportunistic Vietnamese had convinced the Nguyễn Court in Huế to furnish an official seal granting him the rights to collect taxes in the area. On the other hand, the French commission held that the *Da Qing yitong zhi* was inaccurate and outdated, and refused to take it as the sole piece of evidence in determining territorial claims, and that Vietnamese maps and tax registers from the court in Huế should also be considered. They also contrasted the alleged inadequacies of the *Da Qing yitong zhi* with the precision and accuracy of their own maps and emphasized their technological advantages in surveying and cartography in an ultimately failed attempt to strengthen their claims over the disputed territory. In the following section I will assess

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[416] Ibid.
[417] Meeting Minutes January 6, 1887: M.D. Asia file, Vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid.

each side's claims and discuss how their divergent logic and strategies during the dispute can deepen our understanding of the mechanisms of late-Qing foreign policy and empire building on the one hand, and the French approach to state building in the nascent period of their colonial project in peninsular Southeast Asia on the other. First, let us turn to the argument centering on the Deng Chengxiu's use of the *Da Qing yitong zhi*.

During the negotiations in the first six weeks of 1887, Deng Chengxiu repeatedly insisted that whatever boundary line the two commissions decided on must conform to the maps in the *Da Qing yitong zhi*.[420] While it is not entirely clear why Deng Chengxiu was so determined to hold up the *Da Qing yitong zhi* as the ultimate authority for establishing Qing territorial claims, it is still possible to analyze *how* he used it. It is significant that it was only during the decidedly more intense and protracted dispute in the second phase of the negotiations over Bailongwei and Jiangping that he attempted to use the maps in *Da Qing yitong zhi* as the most authoritative form of official evidence to argue his side. In fact, there is not a single mention of the text in any of the meeting minutes, diplomatic communiqué, or internal memoranda from the first set of negotiations concerning the inland border. This raises two important and interrelated questions. First, why was the border near the Gulf of Tonkin so much more fiercely contested than the inland border in the highlands? One possible answer is that Qing foreign policy and defense was concentrated more on coastal defense by this point. After the re-conquest of Xinjiang, most of the empire's military focus was directed on the coast and, besides, late-imperial statesmen largely viewed the southern land border as fairly pacific, despite a few notable rebellions among China's minority populations in the southern provinces. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Two, the southern highland frontier (including Tonkin and northern Vietnam) was previously thought to have provided a natural buffer zone to external threats, with its challenging topography, undesirable weather, disease-inducing miasma and malarial conditions, and a largely non-Han population who had proven to be fairly manageable and pacified in comparison with the Mongols, for example, in the North and West, (with a few notable exceptions). And, as we saw in the previous chapter, Robert Hart, Deng Chengxiu and others had, in fact, initially hoped to make this 'natural buffer' an officially recognized buffer zone between the two states. Second, why did Deng suddenly decide to raise up the *Da Qing yitong zhi* as the sole authority for legitimizing Qing territorial claims in the region? The following summary and analysis of the discussion centering on this text will suggest a few possible answers.

While Deng held the *Da Qing yitong zhi* to be the ultimate authority, he also provided maps from gazetteers from Lianzhou prefecture (廉州府), and Qinzhou (欽州) from the 1832 (the twelfth year of the Daoguang reign) edition of the *Guangdong tongzhi*. Deng argued that the maps clearly showed that the entire disputed area including Jiangping, Huangzhu, and Bailongwei, was part of China.[421] However, despite Deng's claims to the contrary, the location of the disputed territory is anything but clearly marked; on the

[420] Meeting Minutes January 23, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 151 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 615-623).
[421] Telegram from Deng Chengxiu to Zhang Zhidong on March 7th, 1887, *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 550-553, and *Zhong Fa Yuenan jiaoshe dang*, Vol. 7, pp. 3709-3712, doc. 2126.

contrary, the toponyms for Jiangping and Bailongwei do not even appear on the map of Lianzhou prefecture from the *Daqing yitong zhi*, on the Lianzhou prefectural map, or the Qinzhou map from the Guangdong Provincial gazetteer and, in fact, it appears from the latter that, while unmarked, the territory in question is well within the Vietnamese side of the border (see figures A, B, and C in the Chapter Three Appendix). At the very least, the fact that it is unmarked suggests that the evidence is inconclusive ether way. However, keeping in mind the tendency of Chinese cartographers to avoid including place names of areas outside of the Chinese domain, it is possible that from the perspective of the mapmakers these areas were indeed outside of the Qing imperial realm, at least at the time that the maps were drawn up. Despite the inconclusive nature of the evidence, however, Deng was adamant that these maps should have been enough to prove his case and urged Zhang Zhidong and his other superiors not to yield to the "absurd arguments of scoundrels" (i.e., the French Commission). [422]

Deng also produced two maps of the disputed area of French and British provenance, which, he argued, both accorded with the maps from the *Da Qing Yi Tong Zhi*, and clearly showed Bailongwei as being on the Chinese side of the border. According to Deng's official report, after he presented these maps to Dillon the French commissioner was left "speechless," though this version of events does not comply with the record of meeting minutes, or with Dillon's report to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[423]

Dillon's summary of the dispute was, of course, quite different from Deng's. He laid out the difficulties that he faced during the dispute with Deng in a report to the French Foreign Ministry:

"Our goals and theirs are very different; they are determined to the cause of expanding their border, and we are resolute in not giving in. They rely on illogical arguments, while we rely on logic; they go back on their word, while we remain staunch and forthright. In a word, we base our judgments on the rights accorded by the treaty [of Tianjin], while they disregard it."[424] He also added that, "the Qing Imperial Commissioners first and foremost stress the value of the *Da Qing yitong zh*i. This book was written according to the goals of their government, and it proclaims to be authoritative evidence in relation to dealing with foreign governments, but this is tantamount to saying that one is free to fabricate their own evidence unilaterally."

He does not acknowledge, however, that the French Commission's use of cartographic evidence, specifically the maps drafted by its own cartographers also equated to a unilateral assertion of claims to sovereignty, or that they could, in fact, have been a projection of their own territorial ambitions rather than an objective and wholly "scientific" representation of geographic reality. On the contrary, he sought to contrast the scientific and technological accuracy of his commission's maps with Chinese maps and, implicitly, to

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[422] Telegram from Deng Chengxiu to Zhang Zhidong on March 7th, 1887 *Zhong Fa Yuenan jiaoshe dang*, Vol. 7, pp. 3709-3712, doc. 2126.
[423] *Deng Chengxiu kanjie ziliao huibian,* p. 60.
[424] M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 274 (*Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 554-561).

contrast the professional status of French Protectorate's cartographers with the amateur status of the civilians recruited by the Qing government to draw up the maps used in its gazetteers. He argued that "From a geographical aspect, this book [*The Da Qing yitong zhi*] is riddled with obvious errors. For example, rivers and mountains are drawn haphazardly, and islands like Hainan are drawn up like an archipelago. This book is full of superstitious and childish ways of thinking. It pays no attention to the accuracy of topography, represents topographical features in the shape of animals and gives animal names to places, and even has fanciful images of fish turning into dragons in the middle of the river at Longmen (龍門). The Red River is even drawn in red ink for the color of blood that flows from the wounded fish and dragons that have sustained injuries on the rocks!"… "Every page is filled with laughable legends such as these, making one believe that this book is not a scientific treatise, but rather a book of fables of fairytales."[425]

Furthermore, he argued that the Qing government was completely lacking in knowledge or even awareness of international law and that they held a fundamentally different conception of the scope and nature of territorial waters, and that due to the subordinate status of its former tributary states, China had been able to plunder the Gulf of Tonkin with impunity, and so it was with the case of their attempt to incorporate Bailongwei into the Qing Empire.[426] Because Vietnam was not historically a maritime power, he reasoned, it had not shown concern for its rights on the ocean (in the Gulf of Tonkin), and did not pay attention to the activities of the Chinese in their territorial waters as long as they did not impede the rights of the Vietnamese on land, but because the recent treaties had caused Vietnam to break away from its status of vassalage to China, the situation had completely changed.[427] It is important to note, however, that at no time during the negotiations did Dillon ever attempt to directly challenge Deng's knowledge of international law. I can only speculate as to the reason why, since by this time the Qing government was certainly well accustomed to the invocation of international law during disputes and treaty negotiations with foreign powers.

While Deng Chengxiu disagreed on every point concerning the French commission's territorial claims over Jiangping and Bailongwei, he agreed that the disputed area was a refuge for pirates and all kinds of smuggling and illicit activities. In a telegram to the Zongli Yamen, he argued that it was vital that the disputed area remained Chinese territory for a number of reasons.[428] First and foremost, he reasoned, because Bailongwei was a pirate's lair, if the disputed area were awarded to Vietnam it would be of no practical benefit to China and that, on the contrary, if China regained control of the territory it would be easier to exterminate the pirates who sought refuge there and preyed upon the South China coast.[429] In other words, like the French Commission, he did not trust that the other side would handle the 'pirate problem.' He went on to argue that the region was not only vital for coastal defense, but that "the profits of merchant vessels in the area were not

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[425] Ibid.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Ibid.
[428] *Zhong Fa Yuenan jiaoshe dang*, vol. 6, pp. 3743-3748, doc. 2165.
[429] Ibid.

negligible."[430] Likewise, Zhang Zhidong memorialized that Jiangping and Bailongwei were vital strategic positions and that it was imperative that the Qing authorities established garrisons there for border defense as soon as possible.[431] In fact, the French had received reports as early as April that year that the Qing were already making preparations for the construction of new military fortifications near the border in the vicinity Bailongwei even before the matter was ultimately turned over to the French envoy and Prince Qing for resolution in Peking.[432]

From the first meetings, Deng Chengxiu argued that Qing claims to territorial sovereignty over Jiangping and Bailongwei were backed by their inclusion in official maps from the *Guangdong tongzhi* (*Guangdong Gazetteer*) and the *Da Qing yitong zhi*, with a heavy emphasis on the latter, as well as by real estate deeds held by Chinese borderlanders, and by the numerical majority of Chinese residents in the area.[433] Although there were several editions of the gazetteer published by the time of their meeting, we can be sure that the version of the *Guangdong tongzhi* used by the commission was the most recent edition based on Li Bingheng's remark to the French commission that they please not take offense to the use of the term *manyi* (蠻夷) used in the text, a word that he says is "outdated" due to the fact that the gazetteer was compiled during the thirteenth year of the Dauguang reign (1833). However, despite the archaic terminology, he maintained that the map contained therein was not outdated. It is worth noting that the French requested to borrow the gazetteer, but the Chinese commission refused, stating that it was the property of the Qing government, and that in any case, they could easily acquire their own copy since it was available for purchase by the public.[434] Dillon did, in fact, eventually acquire his own copy of the text, though it was an annotated copy of the original.

After inspecting the maps in the *Guangdong Tongzhi* and the *Da Qing yitong zhi*, Dillon argued that they were flawed and, in any case, that Deng had not been able to point to any part of the provincial gazetteer's text that documented that Jiangping was located within the Qing side of the border.[435] Deng then produced a French map of the disputed territory that marked the national boundary line between Tonkin and China to the west of Mong Cai, Jiangping, and Bailongwei.[436] However, the French commission claimed that the map had been published in a French newspaper by someone who did not have an accurate understanding of the actual border, that the publisher's intent was not geographic accuracy, and that, in any case, it was not produced by the French government and so was not admissible as proof of the actual border and held no authoritativeness.[437] Deng countered this point by stating that, "As far as we are concerned, our *Da Qing yitong zhi* is

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[430] Ibid.
[431] *Dezong shilu*, *juan* 254, pp. 11-15.
[432] M.D. Asia file, vol. 64, pp. 83-85.
[433] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[434] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[435] Meeting Minutes January 14, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[436] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[437] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian, pp. 523-528).

the most authoritative (source of information)."[438] This brings us to the question of what, exactly, were the parameters for ascertaining a cartographic source's status as an 'official' or 'authoritative' form of archival authority in establishing the respective sides' territorial claims?

Technology and Cartography

The main criticisms of the *Da Qing yitong zhi* by the French commission were that its maps were not accurate, did not conform to "technological principles of cartography," were drawn up by untrained civilians who had likely never been to the border to carry out a cartographic survey and that, in any case, because the border with Vietnam had never been completely demarcated, the cartographer who drew up the map could not have accurately depicted the border.[439] Deng countered this by stating that, "We absolutely never said that we had never determined the border, just that we look upon the Vietnamese as our vassals and our friends, so we have never taken the trouble to clearly define it."[440]

Dillon argued that, from a geographic standpoint the *Da Qing yitong zhi* had no value and that there was a large divergence between its maps and the text contained therein, and that there was also a large discrepancy between the *Da Qing yitong zhi* maps and those drawn up by the French cartographers. He also questioned how a map with no indication of scale, and no legend for directional orientation could be considered geographical evidence in upholding the Qing's territorial claims. In his blunt estimation, there was "fundamentally no difference between having a map riddled with errors and having no map at all."[441] He concluded that, not only was the map inaccurate, but it was shocking that Deng was willing to use maps drafted by "untrained civilians." In their meeting on January 14th, he asked Deng:

"Are you willing to acknowledge that unnamed [anonymous] individuals in your country compiled this book, and [that the content therein] is decided by random individuals throughout the Qing Empire, and is indeed is produced by whomever you can find to contribute to it throughout the country? Are you willing to admit that these nameless foot soldiers and their nonsensical understanding of geography are able to threaten the integrity of your national territory? Are you, or are you not willing to admit that due to these unknown individuals, your government's territory is being influenced in in a way that is of no benefit to your side? Our Commission has already produced the tax registers for Quảng Ninh Province. In this document, Jiangping's Vietnamese name, *Luong tri* is used. It has been well known for years that all of the officials in this district are Vietnamese." [442]

The French commission also attempted to contrast what they saw as the deficiencies of the Chinese maps with the precision of French maps and their 'technological' approach

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[438] Ibid
[439] M.D. Asia file, Vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[440] Ibid.
[441] Meeting Minutes January 14, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[442] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).

to delimiting the border. Over the course of several weeks the French commission's cartographers, headed up by M. Bohin, submitted several maps of the disputed area to the Qing commission that indicated that Bailongwei and Jiangping were on the Vietnamese side of the border (see figure D). [443] The Qing commissioners, however, were unimpressed. Deng Chengxiu and Wang Zhichun strongly disagreed that the maps were accurate and saw them more as a *projection* of French ambitions of territorial control than a *reflection* of it.[444] Commissioner Li Bingheng claimed that he had also assigned cartographers to survey the area and that they had verified the Qing commission's position on the matter (see Figure F). [445]

Although the maps drafted by the French survey team were certainly useful in supplying geographic data, there is no indication that they made much of an impact during the controversy or influenced the outcome of the negotiations. Hence, the French commission's use of cartographic technology did not result in any significant advantage in making territorial claims in this instance. However, while the maps they drafted had a limited effect on the negotiations, the cartographers working under the direction of the French commission also served as field agents and intelligence gatherers (see Chapter Two). The Chinese sources provide far fewer details regarding the Qing commission's cartographers, but there are several Chinese maps of the area that are held in the archives of the National Palace Museum in Taipei along with other documents related to the border delimitation project. The map included in the Appendix accords with Li Bingheng's description, and clearly shows the border cutting across the sea (drawn in red) in the way that Deng had argued in the section above. It is labeled "China Survey Map" in the upper right-hand corner ("中國測繪輿圖"; see Figure F). [446]

Deng countered Dillon's criticisms of the Qing commission's sources by insisting that the maps in the *Da Qing yitong zhi* were official and accurate, just that they were not detailed, and many Chinese place names were not listed on the map.[447] He insisted that Dillon produce an official Vietnamese map for comparison, which the latter claimed to have had but never produced, and maintained that the maps drawn up by the French cartographers were not official in nature because they were not printed.[448] When the commissions reconvened after a three day recess Deng refused to discuss the matter further, stating, "As far as we are concerned the *Da Qing yitong zhi* is the ultimate source evidence."[449]

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[443] Meeting Minutes January 14, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528; Meeting Minutes February 6 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 177 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 629-635).
[444] Meeting Minutes February 6 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 177.
[445] Archives of the National Palace Museum in Taipei: 草綠邊地：清季西南邊界條約輿圖. 國立故宮博物院. pp. 100-101. 2016.
[446] Ibid.
[447] M.D. Asia file Vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[448] Ibid.
[449] Meeting Minutes January 18, 1887: *Qingji waijiao shiliao, juan* 90 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 609-615).

Over the course of the next few weeks the commissions remained locked in a stalemate. Meanwhile, the Zongli Yamen continued to pressure Deng to resolve the dispute quickly, while Zhang Zhidong maintained his indignation towards the French Commission and insisted that Deng remain staunch in his opposition to French territorial claims over the region.[450]

On February 6th Deng received an 1881 French naval map acquired by the Zongli Yamen that that showed Bailongwei and Jiangping to the east of the Tonkin border in Qing territory.[451] The two commissions reconvened several days later and Deng—erroneously—informed the French commission that the Zongli Yamen had reproached him for allowing Bailongwei to be included in the disputed territory because they had confirmed that the territory had been a part of the Empire since ancient times, and produced the map for inspection by the French Commission, which he claimed was drafted by the French department of the navy seven years prior (actually, it was six years).[452] Deng argued that, "From this map you can clearly see that Bailongwei is Chinese territory. Recently, I have been very worried like you could never imagine. My smallest requirement is that you help us overcome this predicament."[453] This is clearly in reference to his disagreement with the Peking. Dillon responded by saying that he had a more current naval map from 1883, and that it showed Jiangping and Bailongwei to be in Vietnamese territory (see figure E).[454]

Deng was clearly becoming more concerned about being censured by the Peking for not resolving the dispute according to their directives or, worse yet, chancing the outbreak of an international conflict due to the prolonged French military presence in the contested area, and risking an even harsher consequence. To make matters worse, there was the mounting crisis of Chinese residents of Jiangping and Bailongwei who were pouring into Lianzhou prefecture, a situation that had the possibility of escalating into a full-scale insurrection if it was not addressed promptly. With these issues in mind, Deng made a final appeal to Dillon to relinquish French claims over the territory. He exclaimed, "You have taken the Chinese characters '未定界' ('have not determined the border') to mean '爭議界' ('disputed border'), but you cannot stop the Zongli Yamen from dispatching warships to Bailongwei or in upholding our territorial rights over it. Is Bailongwei really that important you? It is just a long, narrow, overgrown wasteland. You can completely give it up with no loss to you."[455] This was a much different picture of the territory than the one Deng and Zhang presented to the Zongli Yamen in their correspondence, namely that the area was flourishing and heavily populated.

Dillon finally acquired his own copy of the complete *Da Qing yitong zhi*, procured by the French consulate in Guangzhou, but it was apparently an annotated version of the

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[450] *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 93, pp. 103-105.
[451] *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 93, pp. 103-105.
[452] Meeting Minutes February 10 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 180 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 635-643).
[453] Ibid.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Meeting Minutes February 10 in Mong Cai (M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 180 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 635-643).

original 1842 edition.[456] After studying it he discovered an annotated section that that stated that the entire area all the way to Longmen Bay (龍門灣) belonged to Vietnam. Deng refused to accept the validity of the passage since Dillon's was a copy and never confirmed whether the passage was included in his original version.[457] While I was not able to locate Dillon's copy in the archives, he described the passage in great detail in a telegram to France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He wrote that, "In the 124th section of the *Guangdong tongzhi* [included in the *Da Qing yitong zhi*], pages 47-48, we discovered another map, under Longmen, of which the bottom of the map is annotated with the following: 'Longmen district is situated on the border. It only borders China on one side, interlocking with Annam, and the southern area is a frequent arrival point for merchant ships. Hence this is an important place that is well worth researching and observing in person.'" He went on to argue that: "We cannot let go of this phraseology and cannot fail to draw attention to these characters! Certainly on the basis of these characters Longmen is indeed the terminus of China's coast bordering on Vietnamese territory!"[458] Dillon went on to claim that a Vietnamese gazetteer was in agreement with the *Da Qing yitong zhi* that Longmen and Bailongwei belonged to Vietnam, though he did not mention which gazetteer he was referring to.[459] Because the two sides came to an impasse regarding the authoritativeness, accuracy, and content of its maps, the Qing commission argued for the admission of other 'evidence' in putting forth their territorial claims over the disputed region.

Ethnicity, Nationality, and Taxation in the Territorial Dispute

In addition to their claims that the map in the *Da Qing yitong zhi* was the ultimate authority for determining their territorial claims, Deng and the Qing Commission also argued that the numeric supremacy of ethnic Chinese in the area served as further evidence for these claims. Moreover, Deng accused an unnamed Vietnamese civilian of seeking to exploit the Qing's weakened position in order to expand the borders of Vietnam and gain an official position, and of misleading the French by supplying them with false information.[460] Deng also claimed that the tax registers for Quảng Ninh Province that the French produced held no authority because they had been written up by hand, even though they bore the official seal of the court in Huế.[461]

Li Zhoutian, the Qing commission's interpreter expressed the opinion of the Qing commission during an unofficial meeting with James Hart: "The Qing imperial government had never relinquished control of the area but owing to the situation of turmoil and instability of the frontier, the people had entered into an agreement with an opportunistic Vietnamese person that clearly benefited the latter. After they entered into this agreement,

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[456] Dillon apparently had some individual maps from the book during the first stage of delimitation but had lacked a complete copy up until this point.
[457] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[458] M.D. Asia file, vol. 64, p. 274 (*Zhong Yue bianjie ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 554-561); *Da Qing yitong zhi*, juan 124, pp. 47-48.
[459] Ibid.
[460] Meeting Minutes January 6, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[461] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).

while the Vietnamese official had instituted tax levies on the enclave, these actions simply did not weaken or overrule the Qing government's imperial authority in the region." From the Qing commission's point of view this was a temporary situation in which an unscrupulous tax collector was exploiting the local population and should not have been seen as an affront to the Qing Empire's claims to sovereignty over the disputed enclaves.[462] Deng also argued that most of the learned men in the area sat for the imperial examinations in China, which by itself should be enough to consider them Chinese.[463] Therefore, he maintained that because most of the residents of Jiangping and Bailongwei were Chinese, "there is no way it could belong to Vietnam."[464]

For their part, the French commission argued that they should be researching the nationality of the land, and not the question of the nationality of the people—otherwise, Dillon argued, many foreign places that had an abundance of Chinese residents such as Hong Kong or Singapore would be considered Chinese territory.[465] Moreover, the French commission was confident that the tax registers and other documents that they acquired from the Vietnamese court in Huế were enough to prove the legitimacy of the Vietnamese administration and their control of the area. In a meeting on January 14th, Lieutenant Tisseyre argued that they had ample evidence that all the local officials were appointed by Huế, that the Vietnamese judicature had exercised authority there for years, and that Jiangping had been administered by the same magistrate for the past fourteen years.[466] Moreover, while he admitted that perhaps the Chinese in this area go to China to sit for the imperial examinations, he maintained that this was not sufficient grounds for considering Jiangping part of China, and even asked rhetorically, "How can you determine who is a 'Chinese person' anyhow?" [467]

Dillon summarized his views on the matter in a telegram to France's consular general in Beijing. He explained that, as far as the French Border Comission was concerned, the disputed territory clearly belonged to Vietnam and that there would be "serious consequences" if the French gave in to the Qing Commission's demands.[468] He stressed that convincing the Qing government to maintain the status quo of French occupation of the area was the only possible course of action and argued that the French commission had found no evidence of a Qing civil or military presence in the area, and that it was sparsely populated. This last point is in contrast to a telegram that Wang Zhichun sent to the Zongli

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[462] Meeting Minutes January 7, 1887: M.d. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[463] Meeting Minutes January 14, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[464] Meeting Minutes January 23, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 151 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 615-623).
[465] M.D. Asia file, vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528; Meeting Minutes January 23, 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63 p. 151 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 615-623).
[466] Meeting Minutes January 14, 1887: M.D. Asia file, Vol. 66, pp. 64-73 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 523-528).
[467] Ibid.
[468] (Dillon Telegrams the consul general (in Beijing) on February 8: M.D. Asia file, vol. 70, p. 335 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 669-670).

Yamen that described the area as densely populated, with rich and fertile soil.[469] Dillon concluded the message by saying that if there were a few Chinese currently living in Bailongwei that this was a very recent development and that they were probably forcefully relocated to the region by the local Guangdong authorities, namely by Zhang Zhidong. He echoed this sentiment in a telegram to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs a few weeks later, writing that in his estimation, "if there are a few Chinese to be found in Bailongwei and the other disputed areas, this is just a cunning scheme by the Chinese border authorities."[470]

While the two sides competed to establish their sovereignty over the disputed territory, the real powerholders in the region up until that point—the 'pirates' of Jiangping—continued to evade both the Qing and French authorities, seeking refuge in the many karst mountain caves and islands in the surrounding areas. Regardless of which side was to prevail in the territorial dispute, the 'pirate problem' had to be resolved if the two states hoped to exert control over the region and reign in the lawlessness of their shared littoral frontier.

The Pirates and *Youyong* of Jiangping

The 'pirate' or 'bandit' problem, and the issue of military control over the disputed area continued to affect the direction of the negotiations. Tensions swelled as the French military occupation of Jiangping and Bailongwei went on and suspicions of another attack on the French commission increased. French agents also reported that Chinese migrants had been pushing ethnic Vietnamese out of the most fertile regions of the borderlands in collaboration with former Black and Yellow Flag soldiers and Qing officials.[471] The situation neared a boiling point when Commissioner Wang informed the French commission that the Qing navy had begun making preparations to carry out exercises off the coast of Bailongwei.[472] After a month of meetings in Móng Cái and Dongxing, the Qing Comission sought to counter the French military's position in the region by pronouncing historical claims of a Qing military presence in the region. During a meeting on February 6th, Wang Zhichun asserted that, "China's naval fleet comes to Bailongwei two times every year by imperial edict. This is our sacred duty and the documents that we gave you prove this point. Given this fact, it is clear that this region belongs to China."[473] He added that, "We dispatch our naval fleet to Bailongwei every spring, and we must do so within the next few day according to tradition."[474] The Qing commission demanded that Dillon request for the removal of French troops from the area, but the French commission maintained that to withdraw would be tantamount to handing the area back over to the pirates, and accused

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[469] Ibid.
[470] Dillon telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Feb. 19th: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 205.
[471] Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris, M.D., Asia file, vol. 64, 146-159 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*), pp. 677-680).
[472] As far as I know, the Qing navy never actually visited Bailongwei while the area was still under French military occupation.
[473] Meeting Minutes February 6 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 177 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 629-635).
[474] Ibid.

the Chinese Commissioners of attempting to shirk any responsibility for the criminal acts of bandits and pirates seeking refuge in China and encroaching on French territory.[475] Moreover, Dillon argued that, practically speaking, it would be nearly impossible to cede Bailongwei, Huangzhu, and Jiangping to the Chinese since the French troops were already well entrenched and building military fortifications there and that recalling the troops was outside the scope of his powers as the head of the French Border Commission.[476]

The Qing commission maintained that the French were simply using the 'pirate problem' as a pretext for an extended military occupation of the contested territory and that, in any case, as Li Xingrui had argued during a meeting in late January, "So long as the border still has not been determined, then we have no way of knowing whose territory the bandits are coming from."[477] Additionally, he challenged the French allegation that the Qing government was not handling the pirate issue effectively, and suggested that it was the French military that was exacerbating the problem. He contended that, "We punish bandits harshly and, consequentially, our territory does not have many of them. Is it possible that you do not know that we recently executed quite a few pirates? Regardless, the place where the danger originates from is in the clashes that have erupted between your troops and the common people [residing in the area] who have brought a petition against you."[478]

The French commission saw their military occupation of the region as critical for preventing another pirate attack and suspected the Chinese Commission of being complicit in a plot with Zhang Zhidong to stage such an attack. By this point, the Qing commission was well aware that the French held them responsible for the attacks during the delimitation of the Yunnan border and the assault on Móng Cái that claimed the life of their colleague M. Haïtce. Deng told Dillon "You said [to Secretary Hart] that you wish to lay the blame for all of the attacks on our side."[479] To which Dillon responded, "China should stop the pirates in its territory from coming over into our territory. If the Qing government still is not able to handle this then we will not stand for it, and of that I am certain. I never said that the crimes that have been committed people within our territory are not your responsibility, and on the contrary I want you to recognize your responsibility for them."[480] Whether the threat of another attack was real, or if Zhang Zhidong and local officials in Guangdong were organizing it, even the specter of pirates and former Black Flags in the area was enough to influence the direction of the remainder of the negotiations.

On January 27th, the talks were interrupted by a visit from the French naval commander in charge of a fleet in the Sea of Japan. He stopped off in Móng Cái for the

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[475] Meeting Minutes January 18, 1887: 清季外交史料第 90 卷(*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 609-615).
[476] *Deng Chengxiu kanjie ziliao huibian,* pp. 58-59.
[477] Meeting Minutes January 18, 1887: 清季外交史料第 90 卷 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 609-615).
[478] Ibid.
[479] Meeting Minutes January 18, 1887: 清季外交史料第 90 卷 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 609-615).
[480] Ibid.

purpose of exchanging maps, and to deliver a message.[481] He told the two commissions that he had recently met with several high-ranking Qing officials including Li Hongzhang and members of the Zongli Yamen, whom he claimed had exhibited an amicable attitude towards the French government. Furthermore, he said that they blamed the contrarian attitude of the Governor-General of Guangxi for escalating tensions over the disputed enclaves. He also asked the Qing commission why China did not carry out the field survey according to the treaty and take steps to prevent bandits and pirates in their territory from crossing over into Tonkin and warned that if there was another attack on the French commission that the responsibility would fall on the Governor-General. He also added that if such an attack were to occur that he would not hesitate to carry out a naval assault on Guangdong in retaliation.[482] However, this was likely just a bluff to intimidate the Chinese Commission, for neither government was eager to see the resumption of armed conflict in the aftermath of the Sino-French War.

On January 28th the Qing Commission reluctantly agreed to maintain the status quo of French military control over the contested area until they reached a formal resolution, with the stipulation that the French Protectorate government not deploy any more regiments of troops to the disputed area until the two sides had come to an agreement.[483] After taking a break for the Lunar New Year celebrations, the two commissions reconvened, and the French side proposed a new solution. Tisseyre suggested that they divide the disputed territory into two parts, the first part being Bailongwei where the French would maintain a military and civil administration, and the other half consisting Jiangping and the surrounding area.[484] However, Wang Zhichun insisted that while the Chinese commission was anxious to reach an agreement, Zhang Zhidong had explicitly forbidden them to include Bailongwei in the disputed territory.

Several days later, Deng appeared willing to negotiate again and proposed that they divide the administration of the disputed territory in two, with the East side, including Bailongwei, controlled by the Qing forces, and the West, including Jiangping, controlled by the French.[485] The French Comission maintained that they did not have the power to withdraw the troops from the area and insisted on maintaining control of Bailongwei until their respective governments reached an agreement on the disputed territory. Dillon also pointed out that French troops had not encountered any Qing forces or military outposts across the entire disputed area from Bailongwei to Longmen Bay (formerly Longmen Wan, now called Longmen Gang).[486]

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[481] Meeting Minutes January 27 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 163 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 623-627).
[482] Ibid.
[483] Meeting Minutes January 28 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 172 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 627-629).
[484] Meeting Minutes February 6 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 177, *Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 629-635).
[485] Meeting Minutes February 10 in Mong Cai: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 180 (*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*, pp. 635-643).
[486] Ibid.

Despite their claims that the ethnic identity of the inhabitants of the region was not important, after learning that the local authorities in Guangdong had relocated Chinese farmers to Jiangping and Bailongwei prior to the arrival of French forces, the protectorate government attempted the same strategy. By the spring of 1887, French authorities began transporting groups of Vietnamese to Bailongwei on warships and made arrangements for their permanent settlement there.[487] At the same time, the threat of another attack only strengthened Dillon's resolve not to abandon French claims over the disputed territory. He was convinced that Zhang Zhidong was organizing "a group of well-trained and well-equipped bandits" just across the border in preparation for another attack on the French Commission.[488] He was also concerned that the current troop strength was not adequate to repel such an attack and alerted both Hanoi and the Ministry of War, but did not have sufficient evidence to convince the military authorities of the need for a preemptive strike or reinforcements.[489] In any case, the former option was out of the question since both the French military was currently prohibited from crossing over into the undisputed areas of Chinese territory as stipulated in the previous treaty agreement. Sensing that another attack was imminent, he implored the Consul General in Peking to put pressure on the Zongli Yamen to take responsibility for pirate activity on the Chinese side of the border. He also telegrammed the Foreign Ministry, writing that, "They are trying to wrest Bailongwei from our control, and they would rather persist in escalating an international conflict than faithfully carry out their own promises (to control the pirates assembling on the Chinese side of the border). At this time, the Black Flags and pirates are assembling a band of criminals, incited by local Guangdong officials. We have been doing our utmost to exercise restraint, and can only communicate our wishes to Paris, Peking, and Hanoi."[490] At the same time, Deng alerted the Zongli Yamen to the fact French troops had expelled most of the Chinese population from the Bailongwei peninsula and killed four Chinese inhabitants who had resisted the expulsion.

By mid-February, it was clear that the two Commissions were not going to be able to settle the dispute without an appeal to Peking, though the commissioners stayed on in Móng Cái and Dongxing until the early spring. Dillon wrote to the Ministry of Foreign affairs on February 19 to relay the details of the most recent developments. He claimed that Deng, after refusing to carry out any further negotiations, had recently sent a messenger who relayed a thinly veiled threat that if the French Comission did not relinquish their claims over Bailongwei, recall all of the French occupation forces from the area, and take down all of the posted notices that the territory was under the jurisdiction of the Protectorate of Tonkin, that the commission would run the risk of being attacked by pirates. He also claimed that an unnamed high official had told him that "China would rather go to war than give up its territorial rights over Bailongwei."[491] While Peking and Hanoi most likely wanted to avoid the resumption of armed conflict, both commissions were willing to use

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[487] Telegram Correspondence between Dillon and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 20th, 1887, M.D. Asia file, vol. 64, pp. 146-159.
[488] Ibid.
[489] Ibid. There are several telegrams between Dillon and the Foreign Ministry in which they discuss Zhang's "hostile" attitude.
[490] Ibid.
[491] Dillon telegrams the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Feb. 19th: M.D. Asia file, vol. 63, p. 205.

the threat of armed conflict to pressure the other side. Fortunately for both sides, the commissions were soon recalled, and their respective governments resolved the dispute before a full-scale conflict erupted.

Ultimately, with both sides refusing to compromise, and with the refugee situation in Lianzhou prefecture growing more ominous by the day, they had no choice but to turn the matter over to their respective governments for resolution. On February 28, 1887 Deng received a telegram from the Zongli Yamen with instructions to terminate the negotiations over the disputed territory and to determine the remaining area of the border from the Western part of Qinzhou to Guangxi province as quickly as possible.[492] Dillon received a similar telegram from the French envoy in Peking, and the final details of that stretch of the border were approved and signed by both Commissions on March 29, 1887.[493] In the end, the matter of the disputed territories was settled through negotiations between the French envoy in Beijing, Jean Antoine Ernest Constans, and Prince Qing, who had recently been appointed to the Zongli Yamen to replace Prince Gong. On June 26, 1887 the two sides signed the first treaty to finalize the border delimitation project (續議界務專條), which recognized Bailongwei, Jiangping, and Huangzhu as Chinese territory, along with the stipulation that the Qing establish a new Treaty Port at Longzhou (龍州). A telegram from the French Envoy in Peking to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs summed up the outcome of the negotiations concerning the main areas in which the two commissions were unable to reach an agreement. All of the disputed territory east and northeast of Móng Cái, including the so-called enclaves of Jiangping and Bailongwei were ceded to China. All of the islands in the Gulf of Tonkin located to the east of the coordinate 105 degrees 45' (relative to the Paris prime meridian) were to be ceded to China, while all islands west of this point were to be ceded to Vietnam.[494] The new border was marked in red ink (see figure G for the official map that accompanied the treaty).[495] The accompanying map would later come to be one of the most controversial pieces of evidence in the ongoing dispute between the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam over territorial claims in the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea. I will discuss this in greater detail in the Epilogue.

Despite his subsequent victory in the Jiangping/Bailongwei dispute, Deng Chengxiu became so dissatisfied with what he felt were Peking's inadequate efforts to defend the interests of the country during the border negotiations that he promptly retired from officialdom and founded a school in his hometown of Danshui in Guangdong province dedicated to offering instruction in Chinese and Western learning.[496] The task of erecting border markers was put off until November 6th, 1889 in order for the two governments to

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[492] *Deng Chengxiu kanjie ziliao huibian,* pp. 60.
[493] *Jindai Zhong Yue guanxi shi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 499-503.
[494] Note from the French Envoy in Beijing to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, June 6th, 1887: *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, pp. 547-548.
[495] Archives of the National Palace Museum in Taipei; 草綠邊地：清季西南邊界條約輿圖. 國立故宮博物院. pp. 98-99. 2016.
[496] Chan, Ying-kit. "The Odyssey of a Guangdong Official: Deng Chengxiu and Late Qing Political Culture." Journal of Asian History 52.2 (2018), p. 261.

coordinate an offensive against the pirates and disbanded soldiers who remained in the region.

In the last few days before Dillon and the other French commissioners departed for Hanoi, they came to learn the fate of the local Vietnamese magistrate who had been responsible for administering Jiangping and Bailongwei. On March 23rd he informed the French Consular General that, while they had collected ample evidence from the imperial court in Huế that a Vietnamese family had been invested by the court to collect taxes from the small group of inhabitants of Bailongwei, the last descendant of this family had been decapitated during the November attack on Móng Cái.[497] "Our cartographers in the field confirmed this through the testimonies of Chinese and Vietnamese they encountered during their field surveys," he wrote, "and this also matches the intelligence that we collected in Móng Cái.[498] Had Deng Chengxiu and Zhang Zhidong orchestrated the attack as Dillon had suspected, or was it possible that the French had staged the attack as a pretext to invade and occupy an area that Haïtce himself had predicted would be heavily disputed? Or, perhaps the Chinese residents of the area were carrying out an act of retribution for their losses during the Sino-French conflict the year before? Finally, could this collective act of violence, along with the attack on the French commission in Yunnan, have been a reaction to the encroachment of the state into this largely autonomous frontier area? It might be impossible from our current vantage point to determine with certainty who was responsible for orchestrating the attack on Móng Cái that claimed the lives of Haïtce and the Vietnamese official, but the mystery certainly offers intriguing possibilities. Considering the available evidence—including the previous attack on the French Commission in Yunnan—and the history of Jiangping pirates being utilized as free-floating resources by both the Qing and the Nguyen states, it appears highly plausible that Deng Chengxiu, Cen Yuying, Zhang Zhidong, and Tang Jingsong had indeed utilized their connections to local frontier powerholders in order to carry out the attacks with the *youyong* and pirates as proxy in an effort to delay the border delimitation negotiations and perhaps even persuade the French to pull out of the region altogether.

Conclusion

The Jiangping/Bailongwei dispute reveals a great deal about how the two states understood and approached the concept of territorial sovereignty, and what types of evidence that they felt legitimated their territorial claims. As we have seen, the Qing commission relied on the archival authority of its maps and texts, buttressed by the ethnic identity of the disputed region's majority population to advance their territorial claims. For their part, the French felt that maps were only sufficient for legitimating territorial claims if they were created through the use of 'scientific' cartographic methods of a 'technological' nature carried out by professional cartographers and that, in any case, the presence of the

[497] Dillon telegrams the French Consular General, March 23rd 1887: M.D. Asia file, vol. 70, p. 419.
[498] Ibid.

Vietnamese state's tax regime and the French Protectorate's monopoly on violence through the presence of the military was what really mattered. However, while the Qing commission appeared to be at a considerable disadvantage when it came to the use of technology and mapmaking, in the end the technologically based cartographic methods utilized by the French commission's cartographers proved to be no more effective in advancing their claims than the maps contained in the *Da Qing yitong zhi*, or Qing connections with local non-state powerholders. The Qing Empire's logic and their system of foreign relations, negotiations, and mapmaking technologies should not be seen as antiquated in comparison to the 'modern' methods and techniques of the French, but as constituting a different but equally effective means for fulfilling the objectives and desires of the state.

On one hand, the lack of precision in the *Da Qing yitong zhi* maps, and their failure to conform to the modern standards of 'scientific' cartography allowed the French Comission to question their validity and usefulness for defining the boundaries of Qing territory. On the other, the ambiguity of the maps in some ways actually benefitted the Qing state's territorial claims; since the boundaries were not clearly labeled on the map and did establish 'a clear line in the sand,' so to speak, this allowed Deng more flexibility and bargaining power over areas where Qing power was tenuous at best and that were, practically speaking, hitherto beyond the limits of the Qing's administrative capabilities. Both the remoteness of this frontier location, and the sheer size of the coast had limited the Qing state's exertion of power in the region and the impreciseness of the *Da Qing yitong zhi* maps reflected that reality, while paradoxically allowing room for expansion in the future by not clearly defining those limitations. The lack of precision in these maps was itself a direct reflection of 'traditional' cartographic practices prevalent in the era of the tributary system and the China-centered, asymmetrical, East Asian world order.

The fact that both sides in the dispute were only able to produce tenuous evidence for their territorial claims, as well as both states' uncertainties about the identity of the borderlanders residing there, demonstrate the limits of state power in the region. The two empire's efforts to delimit and demarcate the border represented nothing less than the closing in of state power at the expense of the autonomy that had been the basis for the pre-existing political economy of the region for centuries. Of course, while the arrival of the customs and security regimes of the Qing Empire and the French Protectorate in Tonkin presented challenges to the pre-existing political economy of the region it did not necessarily signal its immediate demise; the two states' efforts to exert control and exercise sovereignty over the region paradoxically created more opportunities for the local 'piratical economy' (see Conclusion). What was once simply 'commerce,' became 'smuggling' after the establishment of the customs regimes.

While we may never be able to know with certainty who was behind the attacks against the French commission that were detailed in Chapters Two and Three, even if they were orchestrated or condoned by the likes of Zhang Zhidong and Cen Yuying, it is still possible that these acts of violence were a reaction by local power holders whose livelihoods were threatened by the encroachment of the French state's power in the region. While certain details of the attacks on the French commission remain unclear, these acts of

violent resistance, along with less violent forms of resistance such as blocking off roads, harassing couriers and surveyors, and cutting telegraph lines (see Chapter Two) indicate the limits of state power in the region, and reveal the lengths that local power holders were willing to go, as well as the strategies they used, to prevent the encroachment of the state into their territory. Some Chinese scholars have portrayed the attacks near Lào Cai and in Móng Cái as being organized by former soldiers who cooperated with noble Vietnamese patriots in an attempt to oppose and repel the French, who they saw as posing a threat both to Vietnam and China.[499] However, rather than being an early manifestation of anti-colonial resistance, or a sort of proto-nationalist patriotic movement as certain Western scholars and some nationalist Vietnamese and Chinese historians have argued, I maintain that—whether they were assisted by bellicose Qing officials or not—it is equally plausible that these acts of violence were carried out for the purpose of safeguarding the local interests of frontierspeople-cum-borderlanders. Where appeals to ethnic or 'national' Han identity can be found, such as in the case of the petition, it is evident that such claims were made in order to appeal to the Qing state in the hopes of safeguarding their economic interests rather than for the purpose of patriotically defending the territory of the Qing Empire. Peter Sahlins has detailed a similar phenomenon in his study of the relationship between the construction of national boundaries and the formation of national identity in early modern France. In a Skinnerian sense, the incidents of anti-state violence represent the outcome of the clash between local, regional market hierarchies on the one hand, and "the top-down imposition of politico-military control that hinged on coercive state infrastructure" on the other.[500]

Similarly, if we consider the possibility that local players were acting pragmatically to safeguard their own interests, then the efforts of the frontierspeople to appeal to the Qing Empire by hosting lavish banquets for the Qing commissioners and circulating a petition against the French do not necessarily mean that they were compelled to do so out of some sense of justice, innate patriotism, or sense of ethno-nationalism. If we consider the content of the petition, most of their grievances had to do with their loss of livelihood and maltreatment by the French military. It is understandable that they might have seen the atrocities of the French military occupation of the region as a sign of things to come. Furthermore, the ethnic identity of the region's inhabitants was certainly not clear-cut; recall that both the French and Qing commissions were often confused over the matter of who was ethnically Chinese, Vietnamese, or part of a hilltribes group, and it is reasonable to assume that, regardless of how they might have thought of themselves, their decision to identify as 'Chinese' and to side with the Qing state was likely a pragmatic one.

While I do not believe that the anti-French violence detailed in Chapters Two and Three necessarily represented an early example of anti-colonialism, much less that it was associated with the *Cần Vương* ("save the king") movement, the violent resistance to the border delimitation project did foreshadow later events that would take place in the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands. The autonomy exercised by Liu Yongfu, Zhang Zhidong, and Cen

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[499] *Zhongyue bianjie guangxi duan yange shi*, p. 35.
[500] Wang, Wensheng. *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire*. p. 40. Harvard University Press, 2014. (Wang, paraphrasing Skinner)

Yuying during the border delimitation project also foreshadowed later developments during the 'warlord period' of the early twentieth century. In this vein, the border delimitation project could also be seen as an attempt by the central state to exert control over the provinces by dictating the territorial boundaries of those provinces—an example of the preexisting conflicts between the political center and the provinces that presaged the warlord era. More broadly speaking, the interest of Zhang Zhidong, Cen Yuying and other officials in the commercial development of China's southwestern provinces, as well as the attention given to promoting and safeguarding the business interests of local frontier elites might also be an early manifestation of what Wen-hsin Yeh has identified as the "material turn" in Chinese history around the turn of the century.[501]

Despite both states' best efforts to exert control over their respective sides of the border, this vast frontier zone continued to be difficult to police and govern throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, in fact, still remains a sometimes wild and unruly place today. The Sino-Vietnamese border region would continue to be a place of refuge for later anti-state groups originating from both sides of the border. Phan Bội Châu, Hồ Chí Minh, anti-Qing revolutionaries, and Chinese communist insurgents would all use the Sino-Vietnamese frontier as a sanctuary and a place to evade state authority, just as the Black Flags and Pirates of Jiangping and Bailongwei had done before them, and piracy and smuggling would continue to be endemic well into the twentieth century and beyond (see Conclusion).

The delimitation of China's southern border with Vietnam marked the first internationally recognized border with a former tributary state—the final formal stage in the uneasy transition of relations from that of a superior and vassal to one of parity in accordance with modern interstate relations. Relatedly, another point of significance in the border delimitation project is what it reveals about the mechanisms behind the formation of the geo-bodies of the Chinese and Vietnamese nations. As we have seen, the French commission used documents from the former rulers in Huế as evidence for advancing their own territorial claims as the representatives of the French Protectorate of Tonkin, something that neither they or the Qing commission ever questioned. Likewise, many of the Qing Empire's territorial claims were based on the territorial formations of dynasties that had long since ceased to exist, which had tenuous, if any, connections to the Qing state. In the same way, the current governments in Hanoi and Beijing use the very maps and treaties that came out of the border delimitation project detailed in the present study to advance their own territorial claims, with neither side ever questioning the premise of doing so.

I would like to conclude this chapter by revisiting a question that I posed earlier—namely, why Zhang Zhidong and the Qing Border Commission took a hardline stance during the Jiangping/Bailongwei dispute despite heavy opposition from Peking even at the risk of being censured or demoted. They defied the directives of the Grand Council for months, were willing to risk the resumption of armed conflict, and even used the threat of violence to pressure the French commission, despite Peking's rebukes that they would be

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[501] Yeh, Wen-Hsin. *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949*. Univ. of California Press, 2010.

held accountable and punished accordingly if fighting did break out. In Deng's case, he had been disobeying the directives of the Grand Council and Zongli Yamen for more than a year. It is important to consider that both Zhang Zhidong and Deng Chengxiu were associated with the *qingliu* faction that was among the staunchest advocates for going to war with France during the Sino-French controversy of 1884 and were also part of the complete shake-up of personnel in the Grand Council, the Zongli Yamen, and other Qing institutions following China's defeat in the Sino-Vietnamese War. Deng's staunchly anti-French stance meant that he likely viewed his assignment to the border delimitation commission, and to the Zongli Yamen before that, as a burden or worse. As we saw in the previous chapter, from the very beginning of the border delimitation project he did everything that he could to absolve himself of his duties, asking for sick leave, and defying both the Zongli Yamen and the Grand Council by stalling commission's work at every possible opportunity all the way up to his final defiance of Peking by his insistence to drag out the Jiangping/Bailongwei dispute.

Deng and Zhang, who had attained their positions partly through the mechanisms of inner court politics, and had, in fact, been assigned to their positions at the same time when Cixi's enemies were being purged from positions of influence, had all the more reason to fall in line with the Grand Council. And yet, they did not. I maintain that the fact that Zhang and Deng were willing to drag on the negotiations over the disputed territory for more than two months after the Grand Council ordered them to do otherwise reveals something important about the nature of late-Qing foreign policy—namely that it remained fragmented, decentralized, and piecemeal. As we have seen in this chapter, the formation and implementation of Qing foreign policy during this period was influenced by a myriad of Qing institutions and individual personalities—and both the Grand Council and the Zongli Yamen were constrained by these forces. However, at least in the case of the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border, the decentralized nature of the Qing foreign policy apparatus did not make it any less effective for dealing with outside challenges. The Qing commission was able to successfully negotiate the entire length of the southern border, and to resolve a crisis that could have resulted in the outbreak of more military expenditures and more indemnities without the convenience of the threat of military force, the use of 'scientific' cartographic methods, or any discussion whatsoever of international law as it applied to the question of territorial sovereignty on land or at sea. In short, the Qing commissioners were able to accomplish the task for which they were charged, and they did so largely on their own terms and using their own logic, despite the protestations of their French counterparts or the Qing Court.

In his groundbreaking study *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy*, Matthew Mosca aptly argued that the creation of the Zongli Yamen marked a major milestone in the transformation of China's "frontier policy" during the nineteenth century, which had largely been characterized by a fragmented view of foreign affairs and the divergent interests of Qing institutions in the formation of foreign policy.[502] However, I would add that the foreign policy debate detailed in Chapter One, and the border delimitation negotiations

[502] Mosca, Matthew W. *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: the Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China*. Stanford University Press, 2015.

analyzed in Chapters Two and Three demonstrate that the Zongli Yamen was, in reality, only as powerful and influential in the formation of foreign policy as its constituent members, and could be reduced to just another institution among many, and another layer within the disjointed and decentralized apparatus of Qing foreign affairs.[503] Furthermore, as Lloyd Eastman has shown in his examination of Cixi's rise to supremacy and the influence of *qingliu* and *qingyi* on the policy making decisions of the Qing state, the present study also suggests that the Qing Court's power in the decision making process often called for a practical approach to managing personnel, which required flexibility in order to appease opposing forces, both inside and outside of the central bureaucracy.[504]

Mary Backus Rankin has pointed out that after 1900 when the Qing government attempted in vain to carry out far-reaching reform, it did so primarily through the centralization of state directives that did not allow for flexibility in the lower echelons of the Qing bureaucracy, or for what she refers to as "social initiatives."[505] This centralizing tendency in turn contributed to widespread dissatisfaction among officials and would-be-officials, which ultimately helped to hasten the collapse of the dynasty. On the other hand, as we saw with the case of Deng and the Sino-French border negotiations, when Peking was willing to grant a certain amount of freedom and latitude to capable and dedicated officials such as Deng, Qing diplomacy could prove to be quite potent and effective indeed.

I maintain that Qing frontier policy continued to be decentralized even twenty-five years after the creation of the Zongli Yamen, the central body charged with overseeing Qing foreign affairs. However, the decentralized nature of the Qing foreign policy apparatus allowed for different institutional formations and partnerships to arise to deal with outside challenges in a surprisingly flexible and pragmatic way during a period that is typically associated with institutional stagnation. In this case, provincial officials, Maritime Customs officers, and even fairly insignificant bureaucrats such as Deng Chengxiu could and did challenge the directives of the Zongli Yamen and even the Grand Council in the formation of foreign policy. Despite numerous threats by the Grand Council, Deng and Zhang stayed the course during the Jiangping/Bailongwei dispute, and in the end attained their goal of formally incorporating the region into the empire. Regardless of their motives, and whether they were driven by an altruistic desire to defend the commoners in the borderlands, to strengthen their staunch anti-French credentials, or to "seek an undeserved reputation" as the Qing Court had accused, the fact remains that these two officials could, and did, play as much of a part in foreign affairs as could the highest echelons of power in the capital.

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[503] Meng, S.M. *The Tsungli Yamen: Its Organization and Functions*. East Asian Research Center; Harvard University Press. 1970. (Dissertation)
[504] Eastman, Lloyd. *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy During the Sino-French Controversy 1880-1885*. Harvard University Press. 1967.
[505] Rankin. Mary Backus. "'Public Opinion' and Political Power: Qingyi in Late Nineteenth Century China." Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 41, No. 3 (May 1982), p. 477.

Chapter 4:
The Sino-French Trade and Border Delimitation Treaties of 1886-1887

Introduction

Before the French and Qing teams could finish delimiting the border, and months prior to the first cross-border trade agreement was complete, groups of French and Chinese merchants began arriving on the border eager to engage in trade. In May of 1886, a small group of French traders accompanied by a military officer approached the Qing border delimitation team and presented them with a gift: a Chinese dulcimer (洋琴), ten bottles of wine, and three sets of wine glasses, along with a letter explaining their desire to engage in cross-border trade.[506] Cen Yuying accepted the gifts but told the merchants that he could not permit overland trade until the Qing and French governments had signed an agreement concerning regulations, duties, and border-crossing procedures.[507] He explained in a memorial that he did not reject the gifts so as not to create any friction with the French and offered them tea and cane sugar in return.[508]

This anecdote gives us some indication of the extent to which the French endeavor in Tonkin was driven by the prospects of new opportunities for economic exploitation. While colonial expansion in Southeast Asia had by this time become widely unpopular in France, French officials in Vietnam were hopeful that mining in Tonkin, and trade with Yunnan—which they viewed as an East Asian El Dorado—would fund the colonial endeavor and alleviate the need for financial support from the metropole. As we have seen in previous chapters, Qing diplomats had already developed a fairly sophisticated and nuanced understanding of France's ambitions in the region, and Peking was keeping a close eye on developments in French politics and the consensus of the French Parliament concerning Tonkin. Prior to negotiating the cross-border trade agreement that would accompany the new border delimitation treaty, the Grand Council advised Li Hongzhang that securing a beneficial trade deal was more important than squabbling over pieces of territory that they viewed as remote and insignificant.[509] Hence, Robert Hart, who was eager to expand the reach of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service over the southern land border, had won the day despite the protestations of Zeng Jize, who had argued that granting France a favorable tariff rate on cross-border trade with Tonkin would provoke the British to demand a similar deal for cross-border trade with Burma, which they had recently annexed in 1885 following the Third Anglo-Burmese War. While Robert Hart and Li Hongzhang were rivals, they shared similar views on the importance of developing trade across the Empire's vast frontier.

However, as was the case with Deng Chengxiu's negotiation of the delimitation of the border with Tonkin, Vietnam's prior status as a tributary state influenced how Li

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[506] Cen Yuying Memorial, May 16th, 1886, *Zhong Fa Zhanzheng*, p. 77.
[507] Ibid.
[508] Ibid.
[509] February 27th, 1886 Grand Council to Li Hongzhang, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, pp. 44-45.

approached the trade negotiations in Tianjin with the French plenipotentiary Georges Cogordan, and ultimately had an impact on the outcome of those negotiations. The resulting agreements concerning the land border with Vietnam, as well as similar border delimitation agreements on the frontiers of other former tributary states, proved to be some of the most favorable for the Qing state during the era of the "unequal treaties."[510] The following border delimitation and cross-border trade treaties were not only crucial in solidifying the shape of modern China's national geo-body by establishing regional and international recognition of Qing sovereignty in these contested frontier regions, but also marked a watershed moment for how the modern Chinese state viewed its borders and its relationships with its neighbors, and the role that cartography and maps played in the establishment and projection of its territorial sovereignty. And finally, these agreements also reveal the role that the Qing state played in the broader late-nineteenth century high imperialist endeavor of carving out and demarcating national geo-bodies across the globe.

Negotiation of the Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China (1886 Convention of Tianjin)

In March and April of 1886 while the Qing and French teams were engaged in the border delimitation negotiations, Li Hongzhang and Georges Cogordan, the French envoy and newly appointed plenipotentiary of France, were carrying out the accompanying trade negotiations in Tianjin. Robert Hart, who continued to work behind the scenes with the Qing Border Commission via his brother James and continued to advise the Zongli Yamen on the matter did not envy Li being tasked with carrying out the cross-border trade negotiations with Cogordan. While Hart thought Cogordan to be a reasonable and amicable person, he found France's demands totally unacceptable and knew that Li was in for a fight. Upon hearing of France's initial treaty requirements, Hart complained to his representative in London, James Campbell, that, "The Treaty he [Cogordan] brought out from France contains a lot of things he did not wish to be in it, but which sundry people in Paris thought fit to insert *exploiter la Chine*, and these points being such that the Tianjin Treaty [of 1885] neither contained nor provided for."[511]

As previously mentioned, despite their rivalry, Li and Hart were generally aligned with the Grand Council in the strategy of securing a trade deal on the southern border in order to stimulate trade and commerce in the region and create more sources of revenue for the beleaguered Qing state through the collection of tariffs and other fees imposed on imports and exports. Li and other high-ranking statesmen were well aware of the increasing importance of tariffs and the role of the Qing customs regime in generating revenue for the central state. Hence, securing and policing the borders, and installing customs houses became an imperative not only for national defense, but also for generating more revenue from tariffs, levies, and transit taxes, which accounted for 42.5% of the Qing

[510] Xue Fucheng negotiated similar border delimitation agreements and trade deals along its borders with Burma and Korea from the mid-1880s to mid-1890s.
[511] Hart, Letter 554 [Z/247], *The I.G. in Peking*, vol. 1, p. 621.

court's budget by 1870.[512] Accordingly, the main focus of the Li-Cogordan negotiations was the issue of setting the rates for tariffs on cross-border trade, including the opium trade, the revenues from which represented the largest source of customs duties collected by the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, and hence one of the largest revenue streams for the Qing government (accounting for as much as 15% of the Qing's total budget).[513]

The two sides also had to agree on the locations of the customs houses and consulates, as well as the legal parameters for the governance of the proposed special trade zones along the land border of China and Tonkin, and the extent to which the zones would conform with, or differ from, the precedents established for the governance of the Treaty Ports along China's eastern seaboard. Relatedly, Li and Cogordan negotiated the rights and privileges of French and other Europeans in the trade zones, as well as those of the Vietnamese and other French subjects and *protégés*, the limitations and restrictions for travel outside the zones, and the extradition of criminals. Finally, there was the hotly contested issue of the ambitions of French capitalists to construct a railway linking Hanoi with Yunnan, and to be granted mining and manufacturing rights in China's southwestern provinces. In addition to meeting minutes from his negotiations with Cogordan, Li relayed the details of the meetings in a series of memorials. These documents are important for providing an intimate look into the negotiation of the treaties, Li's approach to diplomacy, and also offer much insight into the nuances of late-Qing foreign policy.

Li met with Cogordan on at least five occasions in April of 1886 and they vigorously debated the key issues outlined above, finally coming up with a draft of the trade agreement by the end of the month.[514] First and foremost, Li felt that it was important to secure a better trade deal than those they had negotiated in the past, however previously ratified treaties had placed severe limitations on the Qing's ability negotiate more favorable deals, particularly the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin that included the most-favored nation clauses. While he was eager to shore up an agreement that would open up the southern land border for trade, he argued that they should establish a clear separation of maritime and land customs rates in order to secure a more favorable deal for the Qing, while also being able to offer a reduced rate on duties for overland trade between Tonkin, Yunnan, and Guangxi from the standard rate enforced in the Treaty Ports in order to stimulate trade in the region and increase customs revenue.[515] Creating a clear separation between maritime and overland trade policy (essentially creating two separate systems) would, Li maintained, offer a way to shirk some of the limitations that earlier treaties had imposed on the Qing's ability to secure more equitable trade deals, and the inevitability of other Western Powers—namely the British—from automatically securing the same rights in other border areas such as Burma and Tibet.[516]

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[512] Thai, Philip. p. 31.
[513] Thai, Philip. p. 37.
[514] April 25th, Li Hongzhang Memorial, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 69-73.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Ibid. The British did eventually demand the same rate as the French for overland trade at the border with Burma when they negotiated a trade deal with Xue Fucheng several years later.

Li also memorialized that one of the reasons that previous trade deals had been so lopsided in favor of the Western Powers was because the Qing had lacked a nuanced view of global politics and international trade. He pointed out that countries "west of Thailand," generally imposed heavier import taxes and lighter export taxes in order to stimulate the marketing of native goods in foreign markets.[517] Conversely, Qing trade policy, Li complained, had tended toward universal and standardized import/export rates [as was imposed by the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin], making it difficult to negotiate more advantageous trade deals. The problem, Li argued, was that historically China had unwittingly negotiated unfavorable trade deals because Qing diplomats did not understand the standards and basic theories of global commerce that undergirded the international trade practices of the Western Powers."[518] Therefore, he reasoned, while it was too late to change the inequitable trade deals of the past that applied to the Treaty Ports, they should take extra care in securing a cross-border trade deal that was beneficial to the livelihoods of the people in the border region, particularly since the frontier economies of Yunnan and Guangxi were so underdeveloped (and could potentially offer a windfall of revenues for the Qing government if developed to their potential).[519]

With this in mind, Li secured a deal with Cogordan in which the standard rate of 5% imposed on all imports and exports in the Treaty Ports would be reduced by 1/3 for Chinese exports and by 1/5 for imports at the border.[520] For all trade goods not specifically mentioned in previous trade agreements with France, they agreed to conform with the standard 5% import-export rate enforced in the Treaty Ports. As for the goods that were to be transported inland for trade or resale, merchants would pay a separate tax which conformed with previous trade agreements. Li was optimistic that this agreement would be satisfactory to both sides, and that it would be a boon for the economies of the underdeveloped frontier regions in Southwest China and advocated holding this agreement up as the new standard of reference when negotiating future trade deals.[521]

With the issue of the tariff rates settled, the two sides had to determine the location of the special trade zones and agree on the regulations concerning the governance, policing, and movement of goods and people in these areas. Li was resolute in differentiating the special trade zones from the coastal Treaty Ports, while Cogordan maintained that they should utilize the same parameters for governing the trade zones that had been applied to the coastal ports. The first issue of contention in this regard centered on the presence of consulates inside the trade zones. Li reasoned that the only reason the Qing had established consulates in the Treaty Ports was for the purpose of monitoring the affairs of Chinese merchants in the foreign enclaves, and that there was no reason to do so in the trade zones because they were to be located within the inland provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi, which placed them under the supervision of provincial authorities.[522]

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[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid.
[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid.
[521] Ibid.
[522] March 12th, 1886 Meeting minutes with Cogordan and Li Hongzhang along with a letter to the Zongli Yamen, *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian,* pp. 51-65.

Furthermore, Li maintained that because the areas where the trade zones were to be situated were remote and underdeveloped that it would be an unnecessary expenditure of time and money to establish Qing consulates or French embassies there.[523] Cogordan reluctantly agreed to these terms, and the two sides determined that two Qing consulates would be situated in the northern Vietnamese cities of Hà Nội and Hải Phòng.[524] This was significant in that it helped to differentiate the border trade zones from the coastal treaty ports, and because these were to become the first Qing consulates to be established in a former tributary state.[525]

The next order of business was to determine the precise locations of the customs houses and how they would be operated. On this point Li maintained that they should use the same system for regulating and taxing exports from China that was in place in the coastal ports. He argued that Chinese merchants exporting goods from China should only be required to deal with officials of the Qing customs regime at the border, and not be required to declare their goods and submit to search and verification by French customs officials who "Chinese merchants neither knew nor trusted."[526] However, Cogordan would not agree to this point since the colonial regime treated goods imported into Tonkin the same way they would as if they were entering into French territory. Once Li begrudgingly agreed that there would be separate customs houses on both sides of the border, the next point was to clarify where they were to be located in relation to one another; Cogordan held that they should be directly adjacent to each other at the border in order to simplify and coordinate customs procedures, while Li argued that they should be located on opposite ends of the cities of Lạng Sơn and Lào Cai (to the north and south, respectively) so as to prevent any potential border clashes between the troops stationed there. Cogordan offered China's northern border with Russia as an example of another country maintaining customs houses directly on the border, but Li Hongzhang reasoned that Tonkin was not comparable to Russia because of how much further the Russians had to travel across Manchuria, which at the time served as a northeastern buffer zone of sorts between the Qing and the Russian Empires. They ultimately agreed to establish the customs houses and trade zones to the north of the Vietnamese cities of Lạng Sơn and Lào Cai but put off the issue of determining their exact locations of until delimitation of the border had been finalized.[527]

Another issue that was of concern to Li Hongzhang was the proximity of the trade zones to "Miao barbarian territories." There were a number of reasons why Li likely

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[523] Memorial from Li Hongzhang, April 25th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 69.
[524] Art. 2, April 25th, 1886 Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China.
[525] Interestingly, the treaty negotiated by Li and Cogordan specifies that the Qing consulates established in in Hanoi and Haiphong were "to be treated in the same manner and have the same rights and privileges as the Consuls of the most favored nation in France." (Art. 2) It is not clear whether this inclusion had any practical purpose or if it was simply a symbolic embellishment.
[526] March 12th, 1886 Meeting minutes with Gogordan from Li Hongzhang along with a letter to the Zongli Yamen, *Zhong Yue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian,* pp. 51-65.
[527] Art. 1, April 5th, 1886 Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China. Lạng Sơn and Lào Cai remain the two most important border crossings between the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam today.

wanted to prevent the French and other foreigners coming into close contact with local tribal peoples. First and foremost, he surely would have wanted to avoid another international incident like the Margary Affair, in which a British explorer seeking possible trade routes between Yunnan and Burma was allegedly killed by local tribesmen, purportedly with the consent of the Governor-General of Guizhou and Yunnan, Cen Yuying. The Margary Affair had served as a pretext for the British to pressure the Qing government for more extraterritorial rights for British subjects in China, and culminated with the signing of the Chefoo Convention, also known as the Treaty of Yantai, which Li himself had negotiated. Li memorialized that he was worried that the foreigners would "cause trouble" in Miao areas and insisted that the forthcoming treaty include a clause expressly stating that the Qing would not have any obligation to protect them if they passed through any areas "occupied by aborigines or savages", and a warning to that effect was also to be written on any passports issued to foreigners entering China via the border with Tonkin.[528] As an extra safeguard against the French or other foreigners wandering into *tusi* territories, he also insisted that they include an additional clause restricting foreigners without passports to travel no more than fifty *li* outside the trade zones (the typical protocol in the coastal ports was to restrict foreigners traveling without documents to within one hundred *li* of the foreign enclaves).[529] Cogordan agreed to include both of these clauses into Article 5 of the forthcoming treaty. Even during the delimitation of the border Zhou Derun had made it clear to the French Border Delimitation Committee that the Qing government would not be held responsible for protecting the French cartographers and other personnel over the course of their survey work and tried to prohibit the French team from traveling into Qing territory whenever possible (see Chapters Two and Three).[530]

The inclusion of this clause reveals something noteworthy about the way that the Qing state conceptualized the notion of territorial sovereignty; specifically, that there was a distinction between Qing notions of sovereignty over territory, and sovereignty over people within a given territory. This was also demonstrated when Deng Chengxiu attempted to lay claim to areas located within Tonkin that were inhabited by a majority ethnic Chinese population during the border delimitation survey (see Chapters 2 and 3). Another somewhat well-known event that demonstrates this is the Mudan Incident of 1871 in which sixty-nine Ryukyuan sailors were shipwrecked on the eastern coast of Taiwan and all except a dozen of the men were massacred by local tribesmen—allegedly the Paiwan, an indigenous people of Formosa—after wandering into the interior of the island. Japan later sought retribution for the killing of Japanese citizens and attempted to use the incident as a pretext for annexing Taiwan.[531] While the Qing claimed control over the island, they argued

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[528] Memorial from Li Hongzhang, April 25th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 69. The complete section from Article 5 of the treaty reads: "In the case of those who have to pass any place occupied by aborigines or savages, it will be mentioned in the passport [granted to Frenchmen, French protégés, and foreigners entering China via the border with Tonkin] that there are no Chinese officials there who can protect them."
[529] Ibid. Fifty *li* is approximately fifteen miles.
[530] Telegram from Zhou Derun to Zongli Yamen, August 2nd, 1886, *Zhong Fa Zhanzheng*, p. 80. An attack eventually did take place just days after Zhou allegedly told the French team that the Qing would not be responsible for ensuring their safety.
[531] Barclay, Paul D. *Outcasts of Empire: Japan's Rule on Taiwan's "Savage Border*," 1874-1945. University of California Press, 2018.

that they were not responsible for the actions of the tribesmen. To the Japanese government, the incident and the Qing state's response to it brought the latter's sovereignty over the island into question. Qing attitudes toward the governance of people can also be demonstrated in the historical tendency towards a system in which foreigners residing in China were encouraged to resolve disputes among themselves.[532] This phenomenon is also relevant to the next set of issues of significance in the Li-Cogordan negotiations involving the adjudication of lawsuits in the trade zones and in the two countries involving foreign nationals, the protocol for the extradition of criminals, and the rights of foreigners to travel and establish residence in the two countries.

Despite Li's best efforts to distinguish the trade zones from the Treaty Ports, after much debate about the issue Li and Cogordan agreed that any lawsuits between French and Chinese citizens that occurred in the special trade zones north of Lào Cai and Lạng Sơn would be arbitrated by a mixed court comprised of Chinese and French officers.[533] This conformed to the protocol for adjudicating legal cases in the Treaty Ports established in the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin. However, the topic that Li argued most intensely was the issue of legal cases involving Qing subjects in Vietnam, and cases involving ethnic Vietnamese in China, which he maintained should be adjudicated by Qing officials according to historical precedent.[534] Li pointed out that during the tributary era, cases involving Vietnamese in China had never been decided by Vietnamese officials, and if Qing subjects were accused of crimes or involved in legal disputes in Vietnam that the protocol was for Vietnamese officials to hand the case over to Qing officials.[535] Similarly, Li argued, since Korea had also been a vassal state of China, whether legal disputes there solely involved Chinese plaintiffs and defendants, or Korean subjects and Chinese, the cases were always to be turned over to Chinese officials for settlement. In short, Li Hongzhang was claiming that Qing subjects had enjoyed extraterritorial rights in neighboring countries under the tributary system, similar to those extended to Europeans in China following treaties such as the Chefoo Convention, which he himself had signed.[536]

Li also took the argument one step further. In their negotiations taking place on March 12th, Li argued that, according to current legal precedents, if the French were

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[532] For a discussion of this phenomenon in the context of Song diplomacy refer to Tackett, Nicolas. The Origins of the Chinese Nation. *Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

[533] Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China, April 25th, 1886, Article 16.
Cases involving Qing subjects and Frenchmen in the special trade zones along the border were to be tried in a Mixed Court by Qing and French officers in accordance with the precedents established in the Treaty Ports.

[534] March 12th, 1886 Copy of meeting minutes with Cogordan from Li Hongzhang along with a letter to the Zongli Yamen pp. 51-65.

[535] Ibid.

[536] Jaymin Kim has shown that, while Chinese 'extraterritoriality' was not written into the Qing or Nguyễn legal codes, there are numerous case records that demonstrate that Qing subjects enjoyed something commensurate with extraterritorial rights within tributary states such as Vietnam and Korea in the seventeenth through nineteenth century. See: Kim, Jaymin. *Asymmetry and Elastic Sovereignty in the Qing Tributary World: Criminals and Refugees in Three Borderlands, 1630s-1840s*. 2018. University of Michigan, PhD Dissertation.

involved in a legal dispute with other French in China, then the case was usually handled by French officials. So, if there was a case in Vietnam involving only Qing subjects, then the French should turn the matter over to a Chinese consulate for arbitration, granting Chinese in Vietnam similar rights that the French enjoyed in China. However, despite the evident hypocrisy of his stance, the French plenipotentiary countered that the French Parliament would never accept this, and maintained that the Chinese consulates in Vietnam should have no more rights to adjudicate cases involving Chinese plaintiffs or defendants in Vietnam than did their consulates in Singapore or San Francisco.[537] However, Li reasoned that although Singapore and San Francisco belonged to Great Britain and America respectively, which were friendly countries, they were not tributary states, so they could not compare territorial rights in Vietnam with those countries. On the other hand, Li argued, since Vietnam had historically been a tributary state, any treaty pertaining to Vietnam should be based on similar agreements with other tributaries such as Korea or Burma. Even though Vietnam was presently under the control of France, Li argued, it was not French soil and China's relationship with Vietnam was fundamentally different than it was with France. In other words, Li was arguing that France's suzerainty over Vietnam should not mean the that the asymmetric relationship between China and Vietnam should be fundamentally altered, or that the extraterritorial rights of Qing subjects in Vietnam should be completely dissolved.[538] A key point here is that Li Hongzhang did not disagree with French demands for extraterritoriality in principal, but, rather, took issue with the lack of French reciprocity in extending extraterritorial rights to Qing subjects in Vietnam.[539] Pär Cassel points out that Chinese statesmen and intellectuals did not begin to widely protest western extraterritorial privileges in China until the early twentieth century and that their objections to it centered primarily on negative outcomes rather than objecting to it in principal.[540] The fact that prominent diplomats such as Li Hongzhang (who negotiated several of the so-called 'unequal treaties') were well aware of the legal precedents that granted Qing subjects 'extraterritorial' privileges in adjacent tributary states certainly helps to add to our understanding of why that was the case. Significantly, when the Qing and British negotiated a border delimitation and trade agreement for Burma several months later—which the British had recently annexed—the two sides agreed on a system of 'dual extraterritoriality' in which British subjects involved in lawsuits or criminal cases in Qing territory or in border trade zones would be tried by the British colonial courts, and criminal cases involving Qing subjects in the trade zones or within Burma would be turned over to the Qing authorities for adjudication; the latter a continuation of a previous precedent of Qing extraterritoriality within its neighboring tributary.[541]

Ultimately, Li Hongzhang—like Deng Chengxiu—was forced to accept the idea that French control of Vietnam meant the end of the tributary relationship between the two

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[537] Ibid.
[538] Ibid.
[539] For insight into Qing political thought regarding extraterritoriality in the context of the Treaty Port system, see Cassel, Pär Kristoffer. *Grounds of Judgment: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth Century China and Japan*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
[540] Ibid.
[541] The British even agreed—at Robert Hart's behest—to allow for the continuation of regular tribute missions from Burma to Peking.

states, and to the Qing's claims to extraterritoriality there. However, possibly as a concession for this loss, the Convention of Tianjin signed by Li and Cogordan granted Qing subjects the right to possess land, erect buildings, operate businesses and commercial warehouses throughout the entirety of Vietnam, and guaranteed them "the same protections as nationals of the most favored European nation." [542] In addition, China was permitted to install consulates in Hanoi and Haiphong.[543] In short, the treaty clearly granted Qing subjects and officials rights that were not extended to the French and other foreigners; they were limited to residing and conducting business in the designated trade zones along the border, France was not permitted to install consulates in Yunnan or Guangxi, travel by French nationals and protégés was restricted to no more than fifty *li* outside the trade zones without a travel permit, and—much to the frustration of Cogordan—France did not secure mining or manufacturing rights in Yunnan.[544] It is to the latter topic that we will now turn.

As previously mentioned, the colonial project in Vietnam was largely propelled by French capitalist interests in developing trade with Yunnan, and in opening up the province to mining and manufacturing, which was hoped would be made possible by a French-built railway linking the province with Hanoi. Throughout the course of their negotiations, Cogordan put pressure on Li to include provisions allowing for French companies to engage in mining, manufacturing, and salt extraction in the province, and told Li in a meeting on March 12th that the French government was pressuring him to at least include manufacturing in the agreement and proposed that they would be willing to allow Chinese firms to establish factories in Vietnam in return. However, Li stood resolute on this issue and pointed out that Chinese had long since enjoyed the right to engage in such endeavors there because Vietnam had been a tributary state.[545] In a last-ditch effort to secure manufacturing rights, Cogordan attempted to base his argument on an issue of semantics. He argued that Article 7 of the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin granted foreigners to right to perform "work" (工作, or *travail*) in China, which should be defined to include any and all work including manufacturing.[546] However, Li Hongzhang pointed out that in the three decades since that treaty had been ratified, no foreign companies had been permitted to open up factories in the interior of China, especially not along the border of Yunnan and Guangdong.[547]

Li memorialized on April 25th that, as to the question of mining, manufacturing, and the extraction and transport of salt, ever since opening up trade with Western countries all of them had fixed a covetous eye on these industries, but that up until that point China had

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[542] Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China, April 25th, 1886, Article 4.
[543] Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China, April 25th, 1886, Article 2.
[544] Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China, April 25th, 1886, Article 5.
[545] March 12th, 1886 Copy of meeting minutes with Cogordan from Li Hongzhang along with a letter to the Zongli Yamen pp. 51-65.
[546] Memorial from Li Hongzhang, April 25th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, p. 69.
[547] Ibid.

not permitted foreign companies to get involved in these sectors.[548] So now, he continued, the French were intent on including these three provisions into the new agreement so as to take over these industries and push Chinese citizens out of their livelihood. However, since this was a matter of China's domestic affairs, Li argued, they must reject these proposals. In the end, Li stood his ground, and because the French were eager to conclude the trade deal and open up more trade zones on the border, they put the issues of mining and manufacturing off until later negotiations with Prince Qing. Interestingly, following the conclusion of the cross-border trade treaty, France subsidized a "syndicate of industrialists" that was sent to China in the hope of securing a railway construction contract in Yunnan. The syndicate did not end up being successful in its mission to secure the contract, but it did reserve the honor of being the first of many similar syndicates of industrialists and engineers from Britain, Germany, and the U.S., and went on to work on several projects including the construction of docks and fortifications at Li's Naval base in Port Arthur.[549]

The next order of business was the issue of the cross-border trade in opium. As previously mentioned, tariffs on opium accounted for a significant portion of total revenues generated through the customs regimes, and in turn accounted for a significant percentage of funding for the central government in Peking. Still, Li was hesitant to agree to repealing the prohibition on the cross-border opium trade, which had up until that time been relegated to the Treaty Ports and regulated by the Imperial Maritime Customs Service. However, he was also wary that the French might try to use the issue as leverage for securing mining, manufacturing, or railway rights in Yunnan.[550] Li carefully considered how the Western powers managed the opium trade, noting that after looking into the matter he had learned that Russia and America had already banned the transport of opium, and the U.K. was currently discussing new regulations regarding the substance.[551] According to his intelligence, the British were already producing it in Burma, and now the French wanted to begin cultivating poppies in Vietnam. In truth, there was already a supply of opium coming into China from Southeast Asia, despite a prohibition on the cross-border trade of the substance. Eventually, Cogordan decided not to press the matter as long as China was willing to discuss the possibility of opening up more trade locations on the border in the near future, so they agreed to extend the prohibition for the time being.[552] Finally, the last three issues, which the two sides readily agreed upon, was a prohibition on the cross-border trade in munitions, the institution of measures to combat smuggling, and the extradition of fugitives, which were all aimed at exterminating the pirate bandit groups and former Black and Yellow Flag that continued to threaten the stability of the frontier and both states' control over their respective sides of the border. However, before many of these regulations could be put in place, the two sides had to negotiate a treaty verifying the newly delimited border and outlining the protocol for the demarcation and joint policing of the border.

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[548] Ibid.
[549] Hart, *The I.G. in Peking*, p. 633.
[550] Memorial from Li Hongzhang, April 25th, 1886, *Zhong Fa zhanzheng*, Vol. 7, pp. 69-73.
[551] Ibid.
[552] Trade Regulations for the Annam Frontier Jointly Determined on by France and China, April 25th, 1886, Article 14.

Overall, Li's handling of the initial cross-border trade agreement was a resounding success. He was able to negotiate for the exclusion of most of France's more outrageous treaty requirements and managed to include several clauses that were decidedly beneficial to the Qing state and Qing subjects in Vietnam. However, despite his success he was not eager to be tasked with carrying out the remainder of the negotiations. At the time he was preoccupied with, among other things, a railroad extension construction project at his Kaiping Mines (known as the Kaiping Colliery Tramway). Likewise, Robert Hart—who had already been tasked with overseeing the negotiations with Britain over the delimitation of China's border with Burma, handling the arbitration of an opium blockade in Hong Kong, expanding the nascent postal system throughout the treaty ports (the initial phase of developing an Empire-wide postal system that he had long advocated for), and carrying out talks with Portugal over the official status of Macau, among other things—despite wanting China to secure a favorable cross-border trade deal, was also was not overenthusiastic about being saddled with carrying out the remainder of the negotiations with the new French Envoy, Jean Antoine Ernest Constans.[553] He was particularly occupied with the upcoming negotiations with the British concerning the status of Burma, and even admitted in his diary to avoiding raising the issue with certain Yamen members so as to keep them from interfering in the matter if given the opportunity.[554]

On March 28th, Hart wrote to James Campbell explaining that Li Hongzhang and his adviser Gustav Detring, after concluding the initial agreement with Cogordan, wanted to put the affair in his hands. He wrote that "they [Li and Detring], had got the credit for bringing it so far," while he was "to get the discredit of its failure" if the trade talks went south. Hence, worried that he would tarnish his previous achievements in the realm of diplomacy, he explained that, "I have said I will not volunteer for anything; but I am ready to do what the Yamen [i.e., Prince Qing, the nominal head of that institution, and Prince Chun, its de facto manager] asks me to do."[555] Clearly Hart knew that he was a capable diplomat and desired to do what he could to enact intelligent foreign policy, but as with Li Hongzhang he was ever mindful not to be implicated if things went wrong. Fortunately for both Li and Hart—but unfortunately for Qing state—the task of carrying out the remainder of the cross-border trade talks was left in less capable hands. This assignment hence fell to Prince Qing (Yikuang), the recently appointed—though nominal—head of the Zongli Yamen, who lacked the level of diplomatic professionalization personified by Li Hongzhang, Robert Hart, Deng Chengxiu, or the Chinese emissaries in France and London.

The Frontier Delimitation Convention of June 26th, 1887

With Li and Hart preoccupied with other matters, Prince Qing was tasked with carrying out the remainder of the negotiations with Jean Antoine Ernest Constans, the ex-Minister of the Interior who was appointed to replace Cogordan, resulting in the ratification of two additional trade agreements on June 23rd and June 26th, 1887, and the

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[553] Hart, Letter 574 [Z/266], *The I.G. in Peking*, vol. 1, p. 638.
[554] Robert Hart Diaries, October 27th, 1885.
[555] Hart, Letter 565 [Z/257], *The I.G. in Peking*, vol. 1, p. 631.

Frontier Delimitation Convention of June 26th, 1887.[556] Prince Qing was far less experienced in diplomacy and negotiations with foreigners than Li was. It is not clear why he was selected to handle the negotiations though it is likely that the assignment was a way of asserting himself since he had not engaged in any diplomacy of significance since assuming the leadership of the Zongli Yamen (replacing the much more experienced Prince Gong shortly after Cixi's coup d'etat). Prince Qing was a prodigy of Prince Chun (Yixuan) who he also assisted in his new post as the Controller of the Admiralty. While Prince Qing was the nominal head of the Zongli Yamen, Cixi had recently decreed that the Grand Council subcommittee refer all matters of importance to the state to Prince Chun, the Guangxu Emperor's father and the new head of the Grand Council. Prince Chun's power at that time was perhaps rivaled only by Cixi herself.

Since these are the first major treaties negotiated by the Yamen since the change in personnel, it is worth noting Robert Hart's assessment of its new leadership. While Robert Hart held Prince Gong (the former head of the Zongli Yamen) in high esteem, he had lofty hopes that the rise of Prince Chun—who he saw as "an ally"—presented an opportunity to push through many of the reforms that he, Li Hongzhang, and other 'modernizers' had been advocating for decades, and believed that the "new team" would do better.[557] In April of 1884 he wrote to James Campbell, the representative of the Customs Service in London, on the matter:

"I think the *Chi-ye* [Prince Chun] will keep a hold on the reins of government, and it is quite possible that China may make a real start ahead. In the hope of this I have a memo in hand, to be launched the moment the French scare is over, advocating some measures which may be perhaps carried: scientific education for diplomatists and military men, working of mines, establishment of railways, employment of foreign engineers to fight inundations, postal service, establishment of National bank and mint, naval military reform, etc., etc., etc. It may bear fruit, it may be dead born; it is, at all events ready—it is wanted—sooner or later, it will be acted upon—and perhaps it may now be a success: but how often have I preached to inattentive ears! If they will not listen this time, I shall not be likely to try for a hearing again, and, if they do act now, I fear I must let another man do the work—I am 'played out'."[558]

It is not clear whether Hart ever attempted to deliver his memo in the form of a memorial or through the Yamen, but it soon became clear that he had been overly optimistic about the possibilities that the change of power in Peking presented. In a sign of things to come, the first test of Prince Qing's and—by proxy—Prince Chun's, diplomatic acumen was not met with the tenacity of Li Hongzhang or the careful strategy of Robert Hart. Prince Qing acquiesced to several of France's key demands and rolled back some of the beneficial points of the agreement that Li Hongzhang had secured for the Qing customs regime.

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[556] Constans would go on to become the first Governor-General of French Indochina.
[557] Hart, Letter 483 [Z/178], *The I.G. in Peking*, vol. 1, p. 550; Letter 517, p. 590.
[558] Hart, Letter 477 [Z/173], *The I.G. in Peking*, vol. 1, p. 543.

Before analyzing the resulting treaties and trade agreements, it is also worth briefly considering the various rivalries among the Qing military and civilian leadership in assessing Prince Qing's takeover of diplomatic responsibilities at this time. As previously mentioned, the rivalry between Robert Hart and Li Hongzhang mainly revolved around asserting and maintaining political influence and autonomy within their respective spheres of influence. However, it is also significant that they each had differing ties to, and alignments with, foreign governments; Li Hongzhang—largely through the influence of his secretary (and Hart's Customs Service colleague) Gustav Detring—was increasingly coming under the influence of German industrialists and military advisers. By this time, Li and Detring had already begun to secure the services of various German military advisors and granted contracts to many engineers for Li's various military and mining projects who were associated with a German syndicate of trained specialists that had first been sent to China in hopes of securing railroad construction projects.[559] Conversely, while Robert Hart had proven to be loyal to the Qing Government and his beloved Customs Service (even turning down an offer to become the British Ambassador to China shortly after his successful resolution of the Sino-French conflict), Hart was still committed to the idea that the British—rather than the Germans, French, or Americans—should maintain a leadership role in advisory positions related to various Qing modernization projects, and vied to maintain British supremacy in foreign influence in Peking. Hence, this also helps to explain his wariness of Li and Detring's power and influence, and, conversely, his alignment with Prince Chun and Prince Qing who, through their positions overseeing Qing Naval affairs, had developed intimate ties to the British admiralty and British military advisors. Subsequently, this is also indicative of rivalries present among the various branches of the Qing military, as well as the tensions between the central state and provincial officials that had developed during and after the Taiping Rebellion.[560] Hence, Prince Qing's assertion of power in the realm of diplomacy at this time—and Li Hongzhang's concurrent retreat from the diplomatic realm—might be better understood in light of these various rivalries.

The main points of the first additional trade agreement were as follows: First, three additional trade zones were established along the border in Longzhou, Mengzi, and Manhao.[561] Second, the customs rates set by the previous treaty negotiated by Li and Cogordan were temporarily lowered in order to help stimulate cross-border trade at the newly established trade zones north of Lào Cai and Lạng Sơn.[562] Third, the treaty lifted the prohibition on the export of Chinese opium into Tonkin at the three additional trade zones but, significantly, did not allow for export of the drug from Tonkin into China across the land border.[563] And, finally, the treaty granted France most favored nation status in the event of any future treaties with other countries concerning the southern or southwestern

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[559] See: See: Wu, Shellen Xiao. *Empires of Coal: Fueling Chinas Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860-1920*. Stanford University Press, 2019.

[560] For more on late Qing military rivalries see: Passman, Joe. *Schools of Violence: Military Academy Students in the Contest for Modern China, 1885-1954* (dissertation, unpublished).

[561] Additional Convention Between France and China, June 23, 1887, Article 2.

[562] Additional Convention Between France and China, June 23, 1887, Article 3. The tariffs were lowered to 70% of the standard rate in the Treaty Ports for imports into Yunnan and Guangxi, and 60% for Qing exports into Tonkin.

[563] Additional Convention Between France and China, June 23, 1887, Article 5.

land border of China.[564] Three days after the signing of the additional trade agreement, Prince Qing and Constans also signed the Frontier Delimitation Convention, which formalized the agreements made between the French and Qing border delimitation committees, ceded all of the disputed territory northeast of the city of Móng Cái to China (see Chapter 3), and clearly delineated the maritime border of Tonkin and China in the South China Sea, which determined the territorial status of the islands located in the region.[565] That same day, they also signed an additional trade agreement that called for a future negotiation regarding the policing of the border, added one additional trade zone in Simao (思矛), granted the French a 50% tariff reduction on trade in the coastal Treaty Ports, gave the French first right of refusal on foreign mining contracts in Yunnan, Guangdong and Guangxi, granted the French the right to extend the planned railway in Tonkin into Qing territory, and granted the French the right to link telegraph lines in Vietnam and Luang Prabang with China's southwestern provinces.[566]

All in all, with the exception of manufacturing rights in China's southern provinces, Prince Qing yielded to most of the French demands previously denied by Li Hongzhang during his negotiations with Cogordan. France was permitted to extend their proposed railway in Tonkin into Chinese territory, was granted the right of first refusal for mining contracts offered to foreign companies (though it fell short of giving the French free reign to mine in Yunnan and Guangxi), and opened up additional trade zones along the border with Tonkin. However, the agreements also granted all of the disputed territories to China, and formally recognized Qing sovereignty over a vast border region—both terrestrial and maritime—which, as the border delimitation negotiations revealed, it had previously exerted only nominal control over. In addition, while the French were relegated to residing and conducting business in the trade zones along the border, Qing subjects could travel freely, conduct business, and own property throughout the entirety of Vietnam, as they had prior to the breakdown of the tributary system. Finally, the agreements lifted the ban on the export of native opium out of China across the land border with Tonkin, while upholding the ban on the importation of the drug into China across the entirety of China's southwestern border. Hence, while the Sino-French trade and border delimitation agreements of 1886-1887 signaled a reassertion of certain extraterritorial rights and privileges for the French that are commonly associated with the "unequal treaties" such as the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin and the 1876 Chefoo Convention, they also marked a major achievement in the assertation of Qing territorial sovereignty over a vast and important frontier, and secured additional rights for Qing subjects in Vietnam that were not extended to the French, Vietnamese or other French 'protégés' in the interior of China. Furthermore, the delimitation project and the agreements that followed also marked the commencement of the modern Chinese state's long and arduous process of asserting its control over the movement of people and goods across its southern border, its political and military

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[564] Additional Convention Between France and China, June 23, 1887, Art. 12.

[565] Frontier Delimitation Convention of June 26th, 1887 (*Convention Relative à la Délimitation de la Frontière Entre la Chine at la Tonkin, Signée à Pékin le 26 Juin 1887*), Article 2. See map accompanying the convention in the Chapter 4 section of the Appendix (Figure A); *Green Borderlands*, pp. 98-99). For more information on the ongoing significance of the delimitation of the maritime border, refer to the Epilogue.

[566] Supplementary Additional Commercial Convention of June 26th, 1887 (Convention Complémentaire de la Convention Additionnelle de Commerce du 26 Juin 1887 Entre la France et la Chine), Articles 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

hegemony across this vast and unwieldy frontier zone, and was a watershed moment for how the modern Chinese state viewed the role that cartography and maps played in legitimizing and affirming its territorial sovereignty on the international stage. It is to these matters that we will now turn.

The Installation of Boundary Markers and Patrol Stations on the Sino-Vietnamese Border, and the 'Refugee Crisis' of 1887-1889

Over the next few years there were another half dozen Sino-Vietnamese border treaties that made minor corrections to the earlier work of the border delimitation commissions, and the task of delimiting the border was finally completed in 1893, though certain border areas continued to be contested well into the twentieth century.[567] Qing and French teams worked together to install more than 300 boundary markers alongside the 1,300-kilometer border beginning in 1890, with at least 207 signposts being installed along the border of Guangxi and Tonkin alone by 1894.[568] In addition to the demarcation of the Sino-Vietnamese border, the Qing and French governments also engaged in a coordinated effort to patrol the border and reign in the activities of smugglers, pirates, and former Black Flag and Yellow Flag soldiers in the region. In 1896 the two governments established a network of *postes militaires doubles*, or joint border patrol posts in the vicinity of important border crossings to police and monitor the border on an unprecedented scale, and by 1897 the Qing had installed at least fourteen border posts along the border of Guangdong and Tonkin alone, while the French had installed thirteen.[569] As indicated on the map, the border patrol posts were located adjacent from one another, though the extent of the cooperation between French and Qing border guards is a topic that warrants further investigation. In addition, in the years following the delimitation and demarcation of the border, Qing and French officials collected extensive ethnographic and census data about the various hill tribes and general population of Sino-Vietnamese frontier areas and for the first time, hundreds of accurate maps of the border region were created and made available to the Qing court. One of the most significant areas of knowledge that these maps provided the state was a comprehensive picture of the locations of native chieftainships within the jurisdictions of Guangxi and Yunnan, making these frontier populations more legible.[570] However, despite increased and coordinated efforts to make frontier populations more governable, and to police and control trading activities and combat smuggling beginning in the 1890s, the sheer scope and topography of the frontier ensured that it was poorly monitored until the latter part of the twentieth century.[571]

The delimitation and demarcation of the border also had immediate effects on frontier populations. Following the border treaties of 1887, the French began a campaign to 'pacify' Tonkin aimed at exterminating the remnants of the Black Flag state and other

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[567] *Green Borderlands*, p. 19.
[568] *Green Borderlands*, p. 131. See Chapter Four Appendix, Figures B and C for drawings of the border markers. *Green Borderlands*, pp. 194-195.
[569] Yin, Qingfei. "From a Line on Paper", p. 8. See Chapter 4 Appendix Figure D, Green Borderlands, pp. 118-119.
[570] *Green Borderlands*, p. 94; *Green Borderlands* p. 156, IBRU, p. 87.
[571] Yin, Qingfei. "From a Line on Paper", p. 8.

'bandit' fiefdoms in the region. Tens of thousands of people followed local warlords fleeing to the Qing side of the border to evade the French military authorities, creating a 'refugee crisis' in southern Yunnan and Guangxi.[572] By 1889, as many as thirty thousand followers of the White Tai leader Đèo Văn Trị (刁文持)—affiliated with the Sip Song Chau Tai confederation of chieftaincies dating back to the seventeenth century—arrived in Mengzi, one of the newly established trade zones in southern Yunnan, and another group also numbering in the thousands following a relatively obscure figure, Nguy Danh Cao, arrived in Hekou, harassing villagers in the hills surrounding the city, and providing "an early test of the borderline policed by China and France."[573] These frontier fiefdoms were eventually brought under the control of Qing and French authorities, but similar independent and autonomous confederations led by warlord strongmen have operated on the frontier of Southwestern China and the states of peninsular Southeast Asia well into the twenty-first century.[574]

The delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border, as well as similar delimitation projects and border negotiations being carried out at the same time on the frontiers of Burma, Korea, and Tibet also had an immediate effect on how the late-Qing state viewed the role that 'scientific' cartographic practice and modern maps played in asserting its territorial claims and in and gaining international recognition of its territorial sovereignty. In 1886, in the midst of Deng Chengxiu's negotiations with the French Border Delimitation Committee and its team of cartographers, and with other border surveys being conducted across multiple frontiers, the central government launched an unprecedented empire-wide project to create accurate maps of every province that conformed with Western standards of scientific cartography. However, before considering their impact, it is important to first consider how the border delimitation, and survey and mapping projects of the late 1880s fit into the broader history of the development of Chinese cartography during the Qing period in order to fully assess their significance.

The Mapping Projects of the 1880s in Context: A Brief Genealogy of Qing Cartography

Prior to the late nineteenth century, surveying and mapping duties were generally handled by the Ministry of War (兵部), renamed the Lujunbu (陸軍部) in 1907. The Fuzhou arsenal began offering classes in modern surveying and mapping as early as 1866, however it was not until the Guangxu reign—in the wake of the border delimitation negotiations on the frontiers of Tonkin, Burma, Korea, and Tibet—that a special department within the Lujunbu was created called the Cediju (测地局), which was further divided into three sections, each dealing respectively with trigonometry, topography, and cartography.[575] Other efforts at professionalizing surveying and cartography during the

[572] Camp Davis. p. 137.
[573] Ibid. p. 138.
[574] For example, the Palaung State Liberation Front, and the Kachin Independence Organization are two such groups among many operating in the Kachin and Shan states of Northern Myanmar. These independent groups rule over frontier populations, are often involved in the cross-border drug trade, and command well organized armies.
[575] *Zhongguo ditu xueshi*, p. 219.

Guangxu period included the creation of a maps department within the Huidianguan (the Huatuchu (畫圖處) in the late 1880s shortly after the conclusion of the border delimitation projects, and the creation of four technical colleges for the training of surveyors and cartographers between 1895 and 1911.[576] And finally, the first training college for surveyors and cartographers was established in Beijing in 1895 (京師陸軍測繪學堂) just a few years after the final Sino-Vietnamese border delimitation treaty had been ratified.

The Kangxi surveys of 1707-1717 constituted the first empire-wide surveying and mapping project in the world, completed roughly thirty years before the first comparable survey in Europe was completed in France—a much smaller landmass—and were the first maps produced in China using triangulation and trigonometric surveying techniques. Almost twenty years after the Qing concluded their first territorial boundary treaty with the Muscovite Empire, Kangxi recognized the need to survey and map the empire in order to obtain a panoptic view of the realm. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the central state would attempt a follow up effort to the Jesuit surveys with a more comprehensive surveying and mapping project utilizing modern methods of scientific cartography that adhered to international standards.[577] One significant feature of the Kangxi era Jesuit mapping project was that the maps produced were confidential; these maps were not published in China until centuries later and access to them was reserved for the Emperor and the Inner Court.[578] The project was so secretive that even the Jesuits that headed up the project were barred from surveying frontier areas (imperial envoys were sent in their place), and even decades later they were not permitted to access maps of the borderlands.[579] Consequently, because of the confidential nature of the Kangxi Jesuit survey maps, the maps had a very limited impact on Chinese cartography or local cartographic practices, and, as James Millward has demonstrated, "Chinese cartographers did not adopt similar principles and methods until the late nineteenth century."[580]

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the work of Lin Zexu, Wei Yuan, and others marked a major contribution to the development of official and elite perceptions of national territory and the Qing Empire's place among other countries. However, although these texts indicate a spatial reconceptualization among some members of the literati elite, by the late 1880s—more than four decades after the publication of Wei Yuan's seminal *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*—there still had not developed a substantial professionalized class of Chinese cartographers trained in scientific surveying and mapmaking. Of course, this lack of technological expertise was not limited to scientific cartography; until the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, many of China's fledgling industries such as mining and railroads suffered from a lack of trained experts.[581]

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[576] Amelung, p. 706.
[577] Amelung, "New Maps," p. 690
[578] Millward, *Coming onto the Map*, p. 68.
[579] Hostetler, "Qing Connections," p. 657.
[580] Ibid. However, while the maps were kept under lock and key in the court in China, they were reprinted in several widely circulated volumes in Europe and were crucial for expanding European knowledge about China's geography.
[581] Wu, *Empires of Coal*, p. 125.

Maps found in the provincial gazetteers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contain little influence of 'scientific' mapping practices or standardization such as directional orientation, latitude and longitude, projection, or uniform symbols. The *Da Qing yitong zhi*, itself being largely based off provincial level gazetteers was no exception. First completed in 1746, and revised several times over the following century, the last updated version of 1842 still shows few signs of being influenced by modes of cartographic representation of the kind found in the Kangxi era Jesuit surveys or of the type that the Qing state attempted to utilize during and directly following the border delimitation projects of the 1880s. As we saw in Chapter Three, the maps found in the *Da Qing yitong zhi* did not include scales or lines of latitude and longitude, nor were they particularly detailed in the border areas (See: Appendix, figures A, B, and C). Significantly, the compilers of the *Da Qing yitong zhi* apparently did have access to Matteo Ricci's maps, as well as the Jesuit survey maps of the Kangxi and Qianlong reigns but largely dismissed these sources as fictitious or unreliable.[582] It is therefore accurate to say that, to a significant degree, the Court's tendency to safeguard the secrecy of precise geographical data stunted the growth of 'scientific' mapmaking practices in China. Hence, it is probably more accurate to speak of the 'trajectory' of Chinese mapmaking rather than an evolution or progression, since no straight line can be drawn between the Kangxi era surveys and the mapping projects carried out in the 1880s.

While there were a few examples of maps with well-delineated boundaries that appeared prior to the late-nineteenth century such as Li Zhaoluo's map of the empire from an atlas that accompanied a dictionary of place names published in 1832 and again in 1842, and Yu Shouyi's Huang Qing dili tu published in 1871, most Chinese maps with the exception of the Kangxi era maps—including those in Qing gazetteers—did not clearly delineate the boundaries of the Qing empire until after the border delimitation projects of the late 1880s. Chinese maps often differed widely in form and quality—partially due to the fact that there was little standardization among amateur cartographers who published their work in gazetteers and other texts, however, the following generalizations can be made about 'traditional' Chinese cartography: there is usually a focus on showing administrative units, and borders—particularly on the frontier of the empire—were not well defined (if they are marked at all), frontier areas were typically sparsely drawn and they rarely depicted foreign geography and territory outside the realm, which was usually left blank (i.e., *terra incognita*), and foreign place names were seldom given unless they were Manchu or Mongolian in origin.[583] As we saw in Chapter Three with the gazetteer maps used as evidence for arguing Qing claims over contested territory, traditional maps were not precise in marking the boundaries of the empire through a linear borderline, but rather, typically indicated the limits of Qing imperial space by noting the locations of strategic 'passes', which had sometimes lost their significance as nodes of trade or transportation routes centuries before. Traditional Chinese cartographic representation of the type found in gazetteers was also often as textual as it was visual, and the tendency was to maintain that maps could not accurately and comprehensively provide all the necessary

[582] Elman, "Geographical Research in the Ming-Ch'ing Period," p. 11.
[583] Perdue, "Boundaries, Maps, and Movement," p. 278.

geographic information of a place without additional text.[584] Finally, the most precise maps were typically secret (such as the maps associated with the Kangxi and Qianlong era Jesuit surveys), while 'public' maps of the variety printed in gazetteers were normally opaquer and more general.

As Cordell Yee has demonstrated, the vast majority of Chinese maps continued to be produced in the traditional manner until the late nineteenth century, and this was certainly the case with the maps used as evidence for arguing the Qing's territorial claims during the border delimitation negotiations covered in previous chapters.[585] As we saw in the border delimitation negotiations detailed in the present study, Qing diplomats utilized maps and other geographic information from gazetteers, which lacked well-defined borders and standardized elements of modern scientific cartography such as directional orientation, grids, indications of scale, or lines of latitude and longitude, and that were produced by amateur cartographers, rather than maps displaying the traits of 'modern' *cartes scientifiques* utilized by the French Border Delimitation Committee.

Xue Fucheng and others involved in the border delimitation projects of the 1880s-1890s repeatedly complained of the Qing's lack of understanding of frontier geography and of the inaccuracy and overall inadequacy of Qing maps such as those contained in gazetteers.[586] In reference to the use—and limitations—of gazetteer maps and other Qing cartographic data Xue Fucheng who had recently overseen several border delimitation projects including a survey on the frontier of Burma complained that "In respect to the subject of geography China is strong in exploring the past and weak in knowing the present. It is exact in depicting the central plains and superficial in representing the areas beyond the frontiers."[587] Hence, the maps produced by Chinese cartographers during the border delimitation projects led by Deng Chengxiu, Xue Fucheng and others represent some of the first official maps employing modern 'scientific' cartographic methods since the Jesuit maps of the Kangxi and Qianlong eras.[588] Furthermore, the maps produced during the Sino-French and Sino-British border delimitation negotiations of the 1880s and 1890s were raised up as templates for future border treaties,[589] supplanting the use of provincial gazetteers in establishing archival authority undergirding Qing territorial claims.

To be sure, the maps included in county and provincial level gazetteers had serious limitations, particularly for asserting the Qing state's territorial claims across the Empire's vast frontiers. While Deng Chengxiu, Xue Fucheng, and others were effective in using geographical data from gazetteers in arguing for Qing sovereignty over contested territory, the border negotiations still exposed the limitations of using 'traditional' Chinese maps in territorial disputes. Not only were gazetteer maps often out of date, inaccurate and imprecise in delineating the borders of frontier zones, but they were produced by scholars

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[584] Vanden Bussche, p. 19.
[585] Yee, "Maps and Mapmaking in China," p. 10.
[586] For more on Xue Fucheng and the delimitation of the Sino-Burmese border, see: Vanden Bussche, Eric. "Mapping Borders and Negotiating Identities: State-Building in the Sino-Burmese Borderlands (1885-1960)."
[587] Amelung, "New Maps," p. 695.
[588] For an example of one such map see: Appendix, Figure F.
[589] Vanden Bussche, p. 29.

whose qualifications and training varied widely.[590] The nature of geographic data of the type found in gazetteers can in some ways be explained by the fact that prior to the 1880s the Qing state did not appear to have viewed maps as tools for defining clearly delineated boundaries of the empire or as comprehensive legal documents for establishing claims to territorial sovereignty. However, in the period coinciding with, and directly following the border delimitation projects the Qing state launched a number of projects to more accurately map out the Empire and created new institutions to train Qing subjects in modern scientific cartography precisely for this purpose. In stark contrast to earlier attempts at 'scientific mapping' such as those carried out by the Jesuits, the maps that accompanied the border delimitation projects of the 1880s —and their accompanying treaties—were produced with the intent of projecting and legitimizing territorial claims vis-à-vis foreign governments and were part of a global circulation of cartographic knowledge. In addition to a massive survey project of the Yellow River, first proposed by Robert Hart, in the midst of border delimitation projects being carried out across multiple frontiers, the Qing state also initiated the first Empire-wide surveying and mapping project since the Jesuit surveys of the Kangxi and Qianlong eras.

The Huidianguan Mapping Project of 1886-1895

In the 1860s during the Tongzhi reign all of the provinces had been directed to submit new provincial maps but were not required to produce them according to any specific standard, so the quality was very uneven.[591] Some were oriented with the north at the bottom, and the south on the top, and many did not include lines of latitude or longitude.[592] Hence, in 1886 amidst the border delimitation negotiations being carried out on its southern frontiers with Vietnam and Burma, in the west on the frontier with Tibet, and in the northeast with Korea in which Qing negotiators had to rely on outdated and imprecise maps from gazetteers—some of which were decades old and of dubious provenance—Peking launched a comprehensive, empire-wide mapping project to be overseen by the *Huidianguan* to be included in the *Da Qing Huidian*, or the *Collected Statutes of the Great Qin*g, a general official compendium containing a wide range of historical, geographic, and bureaucratic information such as the structure of Qing administrative institutions, quotations from imperial edicts, descriptions of astronomical and ritual equipment used by the government, regulations or statutes with a pseudo-legal status, and maps of the empire.[593] This was the first effort to systematically map the entire empire in a standardized way since the Jesuit mapping projects during the Kangxi reign. In addition, in the same year, Peking also launched a massive survey project of the Yellow River.[594] Robert Hart, Zhang Zhidong, and Wu Dacheng—all of whom were involved in overseeing various border delimitation projects in 1886—pushed for the development of technical training in scientific cartography, and the production of more accurate maps of the Empire on par with the standards of Western cartography. Hence, it is certainly no

[590] Wilkinson, p. 211.
[591] *Zhongguo ditu xueshi*, p. 192.
[592] Ibid.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Amelung, "New Maps," p. 711.

coincidence that the Huidianguan mapping project and a comprehensive effort to survey and map the entirety of the Yellow River was also launched that same year.

As we saw in Chapters Two and Three, the Qing Border Delimitation Commission's cartographic team had been woefully understaffed in comparison to the French Commission, and Deng Chengxiu and Zhang Zhidong had faced serious difficulties in finding trained personnel and cartographic instruments and surveying tools. In addition, the maps that the Qing Commission presented for validating its territorial claims—predominantly from local gazetteers and the Da Qing yitong zhi, which was itself based on provincial gazetteers—were in many cases out of date, sometimes of a vague origin, and did not conform to any unified standards of mapmaking, much less Western standards of 'scientific' cartography.

In 1886, amidst border delimitation projects and their accompanying negotiations across multiple frontiers, Peking instructed provincial authorities to provide up-to-date maps of the provinces, but when the Huidianguan received them they realized that none of them adhered to any set methodological standards and, consequently, established a new office called the Huatuchu (畫圖處) in 1891, which issued a second notice to the provinces that was much more specific regarding the standards and methodological requirements to be employed.[595] These new requirements included the standardization of the maps' directional orientation, with the top of the map being orientated toward the north; all maps were required to employ a standardized scale and to incorporate a grid, symbols were standardized, the format of explanations was fixed, and the maps were to be constructed based on measurements of latitude and longitude, as well as topographical measurements, and employing a conical projection.[596] However, there were not enough adequately trained personnel in the provinces to carry out the project, and it was difficult for the provincial authorities to acquire the adequate tools and cartographic instruments necessary to carry out the work according to the new standards. The results were highly uneven, and the provincial maps varied greatly in quality with Fujian's being among the best, likely because of personnel there who had been trained in modern cartography at the province's various naval institutions such as the Fuzhou Arsenal.[597] Almost two decades before the Huidianguan mapping project, the geologist, geographer, and explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen during his geographical and geological surveys of the Qing Empire noted that, while almost anything could be purchased in Hong Kong, the one thing that you could not find was scientific instruments of any kind.[598] Likewise, Zhang Zhidong, who had overseen the border delimitation negotiations on the frontier of Tonkin just a few years prior explained the difficulties that he faced in securing cartographic instruments and trained personnel in order to meet the requirements of the Huidianguan: "In the districts there are

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[595] Amelung, "New Maps," p. 699.
[596] Amelung, "New Maps," p. 700.
[597] *Zhongguo ditu* lishi, p. 192. The Fuzhou arsenal offered classes in modern surveying and mapping as early as 1866, but by the 1880s there was still a shortage in personnel trained in these skills. (Amelung, "New Maps," p. 694.)
[598] See: Wu, Shellen Xiao. Empires of Coal: Fueling Chinas Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860-1920. Stanford University Press, 2019.

very few scholars who are trained in the discipline of cartography (輿地之學). In addition, there are no measuring instruments [to carry out the work]. For these reasons, we cannot complete the task in a timely fashion."[599]

To be sure, the Huidianguan project was a major departure from relying on local gazetteers for official geographic knowledge by the Qing state, and marked the first attempt since the Kangxi-Qianlong era survey projects to systematically, and in a standardized way, map the entire Empire. However, since the provincial level staff charged with carrying out the Huidianguan surveying and mapping project lacked any unified or standardized training, and since they were unable to staff their mapping departments with trained personnel, the project fell far short of its original goals. Still, the fact that the central government made an effort at this time to launch such a project gives some indication of the impact that the border negotiations had on the importance that the state assigned to the creation of accurate, up-to-date maps that met the standards of 'scientific' cartography demanded by the border surveyors and negotiators representing the Western Powers.

Iwo Amelung, Cordell Yee, and Richard Smith have argued that the late nineteenth century marked a transition from 'traditional' Chinese maps and cartographic practices to modern ones. I maintain that the border delimitation projects of the 1880s and 1890s were a crucial component of this transition, and an important element in the development of how Qing statesmen conceived of imperial space. The projects were crucial in raising the awareness of the Qing state of the importance of new modern maps for the purpose of Qing colonial expansion, in establishing international recognition of its territorial claims, and for use in future territorial disputes. The mapping projects brought into sharp focus the need to modernize and standardize cartographic practices across the empire starting at the provincial level and marked a watershed moment for the importance that the modern Chinese state assigned to mapping and border delimitation and demarcation. The years following the border delimitation projects of the late 1880s saw an exponential increase in the number of Western-style maps and translations of works on surveying and mapping, as well as efforts to carry out surveying and mapping projects such as the Yellow River Map of 1889 (first proposed by Robert Hart who had helped coordinate the Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Burmese border delimitations, and initiated by a former border delimitation commissioner, Wu Dacheng), and the Huidianguan survey project of 1886-1895.[600] In addition, there were various efforts at professionalizing surveying and cartography during this period including the creation of four technical colleges for the training of surveyors and cartographers between 1895 and 1911, and the first training college for professional cartographers was established in Beijing in 1895 (京師陸軍測繪學堂), evidence that Peking was making a concerted effort to ameliorate the problem of a lack of personnel trained in the practice of modern cartography.[601] Hence, the border delimitation projects of

[599] Amelung, "New Maps," p. 701; Zhidong, Zhang, 1968, j. 31, pp. 12b-16b, Vol. 1 pp. 602-605.
[600] The Yellow River, which had changed course in 1855, had yet to be mapped along its new course until Wu Dacheng initiated a project to survey and map the entire length of the river in 1889. Hart comments on his proposal to survey and create precise maps of the Yellow River in his diary. See: Robert Hart Diaries, 12/27/85.
[601] Amelung, "New Maps," p. 706.

the 1880s marked a significant stage in the development of traditional Chinese cartographic practices, characterized by the state's reliance on gazetteers that often included outdated, inaccurate, and non-standardized maps of widely varying quality, to a more professionalized 'modern' form of Chinese cartography characterized by standardization, precision, and institutionalization. And, on the whole, cartography developed into an academic specialty for the first time, with the state engaging in broad efforts at providing professional training in the field.[602]

If 'traditional' Chinese style maps of the types found in gazetteers were used to legitimate the Qing state's territorial claims, then those claims were further legitimated through the creation of modern 'scientific' maps, officially acknowledged and confirmed by neighboring states through the treaties that they accompanied. Paradoxically, while the unbounded, imprecise nature of traditional maps had allowed for more flexibility in making territorial claims over areas that had largely been outside the control of the Qing state—as we saw in the case of the Deng-Dillon negotiations—the more 'modern' maps that accompanied the border delimitation treaties allowed for less elasticity of territorial sovereignty in the future by precisely demarcating and solidifying the boundaries of the modern national geo-body. In addition, it is worth noting that while the older maps lacked the accuracy and precision of more 'modern' maps, they were still quite effective in serving the administrative purposes for which they were originally created.

Conclusion

In certain aspects, the treaties examined in this chapter might be included among the "unequal treaties" that constitute the so-called 'Century of Humiliation.' However, this obscures not only the diplomatic acumen and adroitness by which they were negotiated, but also the part that late-Qing diplomats played in the assertion of Qing sovereignty and the solidification of the geo-body of modern China. While the treaties reaffirmed certain extraterritorial privileges already granted by earlier agreements, they also secured rights and privileges for Qing subjects in Vietnam that the French did not enjoy in China such as the ability of Chinese merchants to trade, move about freely, own property, and reside in Vietnam, the authority of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service to regulate cross-border commerce over the entirety of the Sino-Vietnamese land border, and, perhaps most importantly, reaffirmed its control—however tenuous that might have remained in reality—over unwieldy borderlands and gained international recognition of Qing sovereignty over its vast frontiers.

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[602] For more on maps and other geographic information found in gazetteers see Wilkinson, Endymion Porter. *Chinese History: A New Manual*. Endymion Wilkinson, c/o Harvard University Asia Center, 2018. Iwo Amelung points out the general "transition from 'traditional' Chinese cartography to 'modern' surveying and mapping, which took place during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century." See Amelung, Iwo. "New maps for the modernizing state: Western cartographic knowledge and its application in 19th and 20th century China." Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, Vera, et al*. Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China: The Warp and the Weft*. p. 686. Brill, 2007.

The affirmation and consolidation of frontier areas into Qing territory, which were later to be adopted and included in the national geo-body of modern China, was made possible and legitimized in large part by the comprehensive border delimitation and mapping projects of the 1880s and their corresponding treaties—during a period often associated with territorial atrophy and bureaucratic incompetence. Indeed, the *incorporation* of new territory into the Empire is something that Qing diplomats overseeing the border delimitation projects were conscious of. Robert Hart, who was involved one way or another in almost every delimitation project and their accompanying negotiations in the late 1880s frequently wrote in his journal about the incorporation of frontier areas into the formal empire, pondered whether Tibet was (or should be) *Chinese* territory, and summarized conversations with Li Hongzhang about whether or not places like Kashgar may or not "be got";[603] while the Qing militarily occupied the former until the fall of the dynasty, the latter, along with the rest of Turkistan, was formally made into a province in 1884, adding almost 1,700,000 sq kilometers of territory to the Empire—by far the largest province by landmass.

Hence, it is accurate to say that, in terms of total area, the Qing Empire was still expanding during the 1880s, and was consciously doing so during its efforts to delimit and map out its frontiers (though, as we saw with the case of their attempt at the creation of a Qing-controlled buffer zone encompassing most of northern Vietnam, it was not always successful in doing so). The 'scientific' mapping projects of the 1880s were crucial for the integration, consolidation, and legitimation of the empire's border territories—vast frontier areas that the Qing state had previously only exercised tenuous control over at best. The creation of 'modern' maps (modern in the sense that they were created using technological cartographic techniques, and employed standardized indicators of scale, direction, etc.) gave Qing territorial claims increased legitimacy on the international stage, which was at the time dominated by the Western Powers (including Japan) and their "unquestioning acceptance of maps as unproblematic and truthful statements of geographic reality."[604] The maps created during this period marked both a departure from earlier forms of cartographic data—namely, from maps and other geographic information found in gazetteers—and endowed the Qing state with greater cartographic archival authority, and further legitimated its territorial claims internationally (if not necessarily from the viewpoint of the inhabitants of the frontier territories that it claimed to rule).

In the late nineteenth century, the use of cartography became just as essential an ingredient as the extraction of natural resources, industrial development, or the military industrial complex in establishing a country's prestige and recognition on the world stage. Indeed, scientific cartography became a vital tool of imperialist domination, both projecting and legitimizing the claims of the imperialist powers. As such, maps came to be both a visual representation of a state's claims to sovereignty, and the very thing that legitimized those claims. Or, as Shellen Xiao Wu has aptly put it, "Maps also create their own circular logic: Nations come into being, disparate peoples become one by dent of fiat, confirmed by

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[603] Robert Hart Diaries, October 13th, 1885.
[604] Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, pp. 16-17.

maps that show reality as it should be."[605] After the flurry of border delimitation projects in the mid-to-late-1880s (along the northern and western borders with Korea and Tibet, and in the southwest with Vietnam, Laos, and Burma) the Qing state soon became acutely aware of the importance of modern maps as an indispensable tool of imperial expansion and territorial consolidation and asserting its territorial claims on the international stage. And, while the Huidianguan mapping project of the late-nineteenth century fell far short of the state's desired goals, it marked a significant departure from the state's reliance on older forms of geographic representation—such as the maps found in gazetteers—to more 'modern' and 'scientific' forms of cartographic data for establishing the archival authority underpinning its territorial claims.

Moreover, this transition from the use of older forms of geographic data to the state's proactive use of scientific cartography and surveying projects across the empire's vast borders is also indicative of an important if overlooked aspect of late Qing governance; namely, the state's ability safeguard the empire's territorial integrity, and—in some instances—actually expand state power and prestige in border areas where its territorial claims and control over border communities and cross-border trade had previously been precarious at best. While there were certainly setbacks to Qing prestige and claims to sovereignty during this period, the ability of Qing diplomats to safeguard and consolidate the territorial integrity of the empire in the areas where it was most precarious—in the vast multiethnic frontier zones—should not be overlooked. Indeed, the fact that the Qing state managed to retain recognition of its sovereignty and reassert its control over far-flung corners of the empire during the period of its greatest military weakness is nothing short of miraculous.

Although in the case of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier France's colonial expansion into Vietnam and the Southeast Asian massif did not involve ambitions of encroachment into China's Southwestern provinces (though this is only evident with hindsight), Western incursion into former tributary states and the resulting delimitation of China's land borders still represented a significant moment in Qing diplomacy and empire building during a period typically associated with territorial atrophy and bureaucratic incompetence. We saw in Chapter Three how Deng Chengxiu had utilized the border delimitation project as an opportunity for Qing territorial expansion, but he was not the only border commissioner to do so. Following Britain's occupation of Burma, efforts to delimit the border with the Qing also got underway and Xue Fucheng carried out a series of negotiations with the British that continued into the early 1890s. Xue was able to secure a number of concessions from Great Britain, including a handover of frontier areas that had been occupied by British military forces, and as with the border delimitation agreement with France actually ended up incorporating territory that had previously either been contested, or clearly outside the realm of Qing control.[606] Eric Vanden Bussche has shown that Xue not only attempted—successfully—to gain territorial concessions, including a large buffer territory similar to the one that Deng had tried to acquire in Tonkin, but was also explicit in his utilization of the delimitation of the border as an opportunity for Qing colonial expansion into Southeast

[605] Wu, *Empires of Coal*, p. 49.
[606] *Green Borderlands*, p. 228.

Asia, and even as an initial step in wresting Burma from the British in order to make it into a Qing colony (and perhaps eventually a Qing province).[607]

Likewise, Wu Dacheng approached the delimitation of the Korean border in a similar way the same year, pushing the boundaries of the Qing empire eastward all the way to Mount Paektu, the mythical birthplace of the Korean people. Comparably, Deng Chengxiu and the Qing Border Delimitation Committee were able to reassert Qing territorial claims along the Sino-Vietnamese border, and the resulting maps and treaties still serve as the archival authority for Chinese territorial claims in the region up to the present (See Epilogue). Taken together, the border delimitation negotiations and their accompanying treaties suggest that not only was the Qing state adept at safeguarding its territorial sovereignty on the edges of the Empire, but also that Qing colonial expansion continued well into the 'Century of Humiliation.'

[607] Vanden Bussche, p. 8. Significantly, Xue ultimately obtained territorial concessions in exchange for the discontinuance of Burmese tribute missions to Peking, taking an even more practical approach to the issue of tribute than Deng Chengxiu or Li Hongzhang had during their negotiation of the Sino-Vietnamese border.

Conclusion

In the past few decades, Western and Chinese scholars alike have contributed to the now well-established narrative of a 'Century of Humiliation' in part by emphasizing Qing military weakness, the ineptitude of Qing diplomats, and the inability of the Qing foreign policy apparatus to thwart the demands of the Western Powers in the late-nineteenth century. This narrative has subsequently become enshrined within the rhetoric of the party-state in China in order to justify its position concerning its sovereignty over contentious regions from Xinjiang to Hong Kong, and From Taiwan to the South China Sea. However, while certain aspects of the 'China as victim' narrative are impossible to refute, this view obscures some important features of late-Qing diplomacy, and Qing colonial expansion into frontier regions. The diplomatic acumen displayed by the Qing Border Delimitation Commission, and the competence and flexibility of the Qing foreign policy apparatus in the capital, in the provinces, and abroad as demonstrated in the present study, calls some of the fundamental aspects of the above narrative into question. In the late 1880s, Qing China, despite serious limitations presented by a lack of trained surveyors and cartographers, not to mention being militarily hemmed in on all sides by the Western powers, was to a great extent largely successful in defining its boundaries and asserting its territorial sovereignty, frequently at the expense of its former tributary neighbors such as Vietnam, Korea and the semi-autonomous chieftaincies and parallel states that had existed on its peripheries.

The border delimitation projects examined in this study reveal a proactive and capable Qing foreign policy apparatus with an effective coterie of professional diplomats who actively sought to modernize and strengthen the Qing's foreign affairs practices. In this way, this study seeks to add to the work of scholars who have challenged "the prevailing notion that characterizes Qing foreign policy as merely responding [usually inadequately] to external threats."[608] Not only was the Qing foreign policy apparatus successful in safeguarding the territorial integrity of its southern land border with Vietnam in the face of aggressive imperialist powers, albeit often more interested in trade with China than the territorial conquest of its southern provinces, but it was also able to consolidate its territorial claims over previously contentious territories, gain foreign recognition of those claims, and in some cases expand its territory into regions previously claimed by former vassal states or local chieftaincies. Notably, the Qing state's success in carrying out the border delimitations was also made possible in part by the decentralized and flexible nature of its foreign policy apparatus. In any case, even the very notion of empires in 'decline' can be problematic, if not completely without intellectual usefulness. As Charles S. Maier has shown, empires are by their very definition precarious, and are always experiencing "moments of [territorial] expansion, [and] moments of retrenchment", and in

[608] Vanden Bussche, p. 5.

certain aspects the late-1880s was a period that resembled the former rather than the latter.[609]

In addition, much of the scholarly literature on the tributary system has emphasized its symbolic nature or focused on its ceremonial aspects and, as with the narrative of the Qing in decline and the 'Century of Humiliation', this approach—while not without merit—has also obscured certain features of late-imperial diplomacy. As the border and trade negotiations examined in this study have demonstrated, the breakdown of the tributary system was not strictly symbolic but, rather, had immediate effects on Qing foreign policy and how diplomats managed negotiations with the French and other European powers regarding interstate relations with former tributaries now under the yoke of Western imperialism; almost all of the Qing statesmen involved in the border delimitation talks approached them from an understanding of Vietnamese territory and Sino-Vietnamese relations that was informed by the logic and historical precedents of the East-Asian world order defined by the asymmetrical tributary system. We can see this in several chief components of the negotiations, from Deng's failed attempts to carve out a buffer zone between the two states and his successful bid to incorporate the area of Jiangping-Bailongwei with its majority Chinese population into the Empire, to Li Hongzhang's demands for 'extraterritorial' rights for Qing subjects traveling or residing in Vietnam. This is not to say that these diplomats necessarily held an unquestioning belief in the ideological foundations of the tributary system, but simply that they continued to employ the rhetoric and logic of that system even when engaged in negotiations concerning the bilateral delimitation of a shared border.

To be certain, the mapping of China's borderlands in the 1880s also marked a crucial stage in the development of Chinese cartography, from older forms of 'traditional' mapmaking characterized by the types of geographic representation found in gazetteers, to a more standardized, 'technological' and professionalized form of mapmaking. At the same time, it also signaled an important juncture in the territorial consolidation of the modern Chinese geo-body, which not only gave the state greater territorial legitimacy internationally, but also helped to pull the economies in its vast frontier zones into the gravitational pull of the "emergent global capitalist order."[610] However, the mapping of Qing China's borders in the late-nineteenth century should also be situated within the broader context of imperial mapping projects across the globe from the late seventeenth century onward and reaching their apex during the flurry of border treaties of the 'high imperialist' 1880s, which sought to carve up and map the entire globe.

As Laura Hostetler has aptly argued, in the nineteenth century Qing China was an active participant "in the global competition to extend hegemony and fix borders."[611] While Qing territorial expansion reached its zenith in previous centuries during the Kangxi and

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[609] Maier, Charles S. *Once within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. p. 48.

[610] To use Philip Thai's phrase. See: Thai, Philip. p. 26.

[611] Hostetler, Laura. "Qing Connections to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2000, p. 660.

Qianlong reigns, many portions of its territorial boundaries were not 'fixed' and recognized internationally until well into the so-called 'Century of Humiliation' and were delimitated and demarcated concurrently with the high imperialist mapping projects of the 1880s. The process of 'fixing' or solidifying the borders of the modern Chinese geo-body in some ways began with the moment that the Qing and Russian Empires expanded into one another and their boundaries were delimited in the late seventeenth century.[612] In the case of Qing China's southern frontier, it took the expansion of relative imperial latecomers to the region almost two centuries later, the French and the British, to compel the Qing state to clearly delineate and map its southern boundaries. Hence, the process of boundary delimitation in the modern era was carried out in a piecemeal fashion over several centuries whenever other colonial powers pushed up against Qing territory. The fiction of an 'unbounded' empire and the maintenance of an opaque and ill-defined frontier was preferred when and where no such threat to Qing territorial control existed.

Charles S. Maier has observed that, prior to the formation of linear national borders, empires typically existed in a "dyadic relationship", and flourished alongside other empires, often unbounded by rigid demarcation along their peripheries.[613] When these dyadic relationships began to break down, usually due to the conflicting interests of two assertively expanding adjacent empires, the need arose for more rigidly defined boundaries. When this happened, it was frequently at the expense of the frontier societies or smaller empires that lay in between two competing hegemons, as was the case with the extermination of the Zunghar Khanate during the Sino-Russian expansion into Central Asia in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Similarly, when the expansion of the Western Powers into mainland Southeast Asia threatened the "dyadic" relationship between Qing China and the smaller empires along its southern frontier, the resulting delimitation of national borders signaled the destruction of the pre-existing political order of overlapping tribal chieftaincies and 'parallel states' such as the 'bandit' domains of the Black Flags and the Cai Kinh, the corporate mining polities in the highlands of Tonkin, and the pirate kingdom of Jiangping along China and Vietnam's littoral frontier.

By the 1880s, Africa was the last inhabited continent yet to be divided up by the imperialist powers. The 'Scramble for Africa' culminated with the Berlin Conference, in which representatives from thirteen European States, the Ottoman Empire, and the United States congregated to arbitrarily divide up the continent. The British and French signed almost 250 boundary treaties in the period between 1882 and 1905 in West Africa alone.[614] During this same period, the Qing state was an active participant in the imperialist cartographic endeavor to 'extend the line' on a global scale, and the border delimitation projects it carried out across its vast frontiers contributed to the creation of the epistemological ideals that legitimized the territorial imaginaries of the modern nation state. The territorial imaginary it created was subsequently adopted by later regimes in China in the twentieth century in a similar way that the national geo-bodies shaped by the

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[612] Elliott, Mark C. "The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2000, p. 621.
[613] Maier, p. 46.
[614] Maier, p. 23.

western imperialist powers in the colonial world were adopted by anti-colonialists throughout Asia, from India to the Philippines during the same period. Scientific mapping, which arose out of the imperialist obsession with delimiting national territory, was normalized alongside the imposition of international law, but between these two 'technologies of dominance' (to use Philip Kuhn's terminology), the Qing state was quicker to adopt the former than the latter.[615] Just as with other imperialist cartographic undertakings elsewhere during the period, the Qing cartographic projects of the 1880s gave "visible form to sovereign power", and the maps they produced served as a crucial tool for resisting encroachment by the Western Powers, projecting and legitimating its own territorial claims, and gaining international recognition of those claims.[616] However persuading frontierspeople to respect the borders and trade agreements agreed upon by the Qing and the Western Powers was another matter entirely.

Long after the border was established, smugglers and pirates continued to challenge the state's authority along China's coasts and borderlands. As Philip Thai has aptly argued, the efforts of Chinese regimes to tax and police frontier areas within demarcated territorial boundaries was a crucial component of the expansion and centralization of state power in the twentieth century, but the task was an arduous one. Likewise, the French colonial regime found it equally difficult to enforce border regulations, much less administer the vast and rugged frontier areas of Tonkin on even a rudimentary level. As with the Nguyễn regime before it, there was a constant shortage of civil servants, and although it never received an official designation as such, Tonkin's highland regions constituted "a separate French protectorate" due to the difficulties of administering it, and the chieftaincy system was subsequently kept in place in many areas well into the twentieth century.[617] Similarly, later regimes also struggled to assert their authority in the region for many of the same reasons.

Despite coordinated efforts to police the border and extract revenues from duties and tariffs, the communist states of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the People's Republic of China also found it difficult to exert control over the region. Like the Qing and French states before them, they found it tough to ascertain the citizenship of hilltribes people who moved across the border freely, and found that the local economy thrived due to the interdependency of China's southern provinces and Tonkin that was based largely on a porous border and fluid population.[618] Therefore, throughout most of the latter part of the twentieth century, and even to some extent in the present, the two states have been compelled to allow some amount of permeability across the border in order to accommodate the vibrant trade and social networks of frontierspeople, and because, until

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[615] Kuhn, Philip A. *Origins of the Modern Chinese State*. Stanford. Stanford University Press, 2002.
[616] Maier, p. 98.
[617] Goscha, p. 427.
[618] Yin, Qingfei. "The Mountain Is High, and the Emperor Is Far Away: States and Smuggling Networks at the Sino-Vietnamese Border." *Asian Perspective*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2018, p. 556; Yin, Qingfei. "From a Line on Paper to a Line in Physical Reality: Joint state-building at the Chinese-Vietnamese border, 1954–1957." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 6, 2020, p. 37.

recently, neither state has had the resources to develop a strong municipal and security infrastructure in the borderlands.[619]

During several of my visits to the border of China and Vietnam in recent years it was apparent that cross-border trade—both legitimate and illicit—was still vibrant and robust. In the twin cities of Lào Cai and Hekou, for example, goods and people are transported across the Red River without censure within a few kilometers of the official border crossing. However, while the area was relatively quiet compared to most urban centers just a few years ago, the cities have also exploded with growth in recent years; upon my first visit in 2012 Hekou was a sleepy town with few signs of development and outside investment. However, just six years later the city was bursting with signs of growth such as a widened central boulevard, the construction of new high-rise commercial and residential buildings, the appearance of dozens of banks, and a vibrant nightlife with rows of food stalls (operated by Vietnamese vendors from across the border) and Vietnamese sex workers competing to gain the attention of visiting businessmen and tourists.

In more far-flung areas of the border, there are long sections partitioned by barbed wire with landmines in between, remnants of the Sino-Vietnamese border conflict of the late-1970s. In other places just a narrow stretch of river divides the two countries, and locals from both sides of the border swim and recreate freely. However, with the recent rapid growth of China's techno-surveillance state, it remains to be seen to what extent it will continue to make allowances for the porousness and permeability that has historically been a characteristic of this border region.

[619] Yin, Qingfei. "From a Line on Paper to a Line in Physical Reality: Joint state-building at the Chinese-Vietnamese border, 1954–1957." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 6, 2020, p. 38.

Epilogue

After Vietnam gained independence on November 2, 1957, Ho Chi Minh purportedly traveled to the Sino Vietnamese border and delivered one of his first post-independence speeches next to a stone border marker erected by a joint border demarcation commission of the Qing dynasty and France in the late 1890s. The border marker now resides in the Ho Chi Minh Museum in Hanoi, tucked away in a dimly lit corner on the second floor. When I visited the museum in the summer of 2017, the Chinese-speaking tour guide proudly proclaimed that this was the most important exhibit in the museum. He then launched into a narrative about brave Vietnamese heroes and martyrs who had for centuries repelled foreign invaders. Ho Chi Minh was, of course, a part of this long lineage, and had fulfilled the dream of independence and self-determination once and for all. After Ho Chi Minh's historic speech, one of the first diplomatic correspondences with China was a proposal that the two countries "should respect the historical border established by the Sino-French Conventions of 1887 and 1895 and settle any outstanding disputes through negotiations."[620] China responded to the proposal, "thereby indicating an acceptance of international law and the principle that treaties on borders remain valid whatever the changes in administrative circumstances. Despite China's recent history of rejecting the validity of unequal treaties concluded between the Chinese Empire and imperialist states in the Nineteenth Century, it nevertheless recognized the legality of the conventions of 1887 and 1895."[621]

Presently there is an almost compulsive anxiety concerning territorial sovereignty within official discourse in the PRC. Criticisms by foreign governments or the Western media of China's policies concerning sensitive and politically volatile areas such Hong Kong or Tibet often elicit accusations of infringing on China's inalienable and 'indisputable' sovereignty, or of meddling in China's domestic affairs. Such criticisms, say Chinese state media, are reminiscent of the way that imperialist powers interfered in China's domestic affairs during the so-called 'Century of Humiliation.' Similarly, despite its misgivings about China's ambitions in Southeast Asia, it is clear that the current government of Vietnam shares the PRC's obsession with defending its territorial sovereignty. Propaganda posters abound on the streets of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City urging citizens to educate themselves on Vietnam's geography in order to defend the sovereign rights of the nation, and the government even offers free classes on the topic to patriotically minded citizens. There has also been a pronounced uptick in the publication of books defending Vietnam's territorial claims in the South China Sea following China's expansion into the region and the resulting territorial disputes that have arisen. Pride in national territory is also on display at one of the most visited tourist attractions in northern Vietnam. The Lũng Cú Flag Tower—what is possibly the largest national flag in Vietnam—is perched high atop a lookout point along the border in Hà Giang province. It can be seen for miles on the Chinese side of the border and serves as a towering display of Vietnam's territorial sovereignty.

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[620] Nguyen, Hong Thao. "The China-Vietnam Border Delimitation Treaty of 30, December 1999." IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin 2000 (Durham University), p. 87.
[621] Ibid.

Since the mid-1970s after the souring of relations between the two former Communist allies, China and Vietnam have engaged in various disputes over both their shared terrestrial and maritime borders. Vietnam repeatedly expressed discontent with the Sino-French border delimitation agreements of the previous century, charging that France had ceded Vietnamese territory along its northern border to Qing China, and these disputes led to border clashes from the mid-1970s onward.[622] Following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in the late 1970s in which they deposed the Khmer Rouge—a regime backed by the CCP—China launched a full-scale invasion of northern Vietnam, sending over 200,000 troops and leveling many villages and border towns including the city of Lạng Sơn, which had been destroyed during the Sino-French War. There were heavy casualties on both sides, and civilians who had fled during the fighting returned to find their homes and cities completely destroyed. It is estimated that there were roughly 50,000 military casualties, and at least 10,000 deaths among Vietnamese civilians.[623] Vietnamese state media exclaimed that the February 1979 invasion would "go down in history as a severe verdict of the Great Han expansionists' crimes in trying to subdue and annex Vietnam."[624] However, following the normalization of relations between the two states in the 1990s, the Vietnamese government has removed all traces of statues and memorials commemorating the war or Vietnam's soldiers who were killed or injured during the conflict.[625] While the fighting only lasted roughly a month, the impacts of the conflict were felt for years throughout Vietnam's northern provinces. Both sides fortified their borders with a combined total of more than 100 million landmines, and in 1985 alone there were at least seven people killed and twenty-five injured by mines near the border of Lạng Sơn and Pingxiang near *Zhennanguan* (or 'Friendship Pass' as it was later renamed), the site of the border negotiations between the French and Qing Committees almost a century before.[626]

After Sino-Vietnamese negotiations resumed following the border war, the Vietnamese presented a three-point proposal, which included the stipulation that China return all remaining occupied territories and that the two sides once again respect the border as agreed upon by the French and the Qing empire on June 26th, 1887 and the additional Convention on Border Delimitation on June 20th, 1895. These two conventions have served the standard by which to carry out all future discussions concerning the land border. The two sides normalized relations in the early 1990s and pledged to resolve all remaining territorial disputes, though several highly contested areas of the maritime border remain.[627] On December 31st, 1999, the two governments signed the Treaty of Land Border between China and Vietnam. Although Beijing issued a statement claiming that the treaty had settled all ongoing disputes related to the land border with Vietnam, there was a stipulation that the two countries once again carry out a comprehensive border

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[622] Amer, Ramses. "Sino-Vietnamese Relations and Southeast Asian Security." Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol. 14, No 4 (March 1993), p. 317.
[623] Perlez, Jane. July 5, 2014, Page A4 of the New York, "Shadow of Brutal '79 War Darkens Vietnam's View of China Relations."
[624] Strangio, p. 90.
[625] See Strangio.
[626] Yin, Qingfei. "Mountain High", p. 566.
[627] Yin, Qingfei. "Mountain High", p. 567.

demarcation project of the entire land border. The project was finally completed nine years later (seven years longer than the initial demarcation project of the 1880s).[628] The Vietnam News Agency and the Xinhua News Agency issued a joint statement at the conclusion of four days of meetings that followed the completion of the project, which stated that fulfilling "the glorious task assigned by the two countries' leaders" was "an event of great historic significance in Vietnam-China relations." The two countries also erected over 2,000 border markers and agreed to develop a joint tourist area near the Bản Giốc Waterfall on the border of Vietnam's Cao Bằng Province.[629]

While the majority of territorial disputes along the land border were resolved at the close of the twentieth century, in the last decade the maritime border in the Gulf of Tonkin has been one of the major flashpoints of tension between the two countries. Coincidentally, the 1887 border delimitation treaty and its accompanying map (discussed in Chapter Four) have served as the central pieces of archival authority for establishing China's claims over disputed territory including the Paracel and Spratly Islands. In the 1887 agreement the two sides established that the vertical red line beginning south of the Bailongwei Peninsula was to extend southward with all of the islands to the east of this line belonging to China, and all of the islands to the west of this line belonging to Vietnam (see Figure G from the Chapter Three Appendix). However, it is not clear whether this line was to extend to the southern extremity of the Vietnamese landmass, or if it was only to delineate the sovereignty of the islands in the northernmost part of the Gulf of Tonkin.

Some scholars—particularly in China—have argued that the agreement and accompanying map clearly indicate that most of the currently disputed islands are located within Chinese territory. Article 3 of the convention does indeed stipulate that the islands "east of the Paris meridian 105°43'" would belong to China. However, others maintain that the agreement only applies to the area adjacent to Tonkin and the islands located within the Gulf of Tonkin rather than the entire South China Sea. As Bill Hayton has pointed out, "the Paracels and Spratlys lie much further south in what were then the realms of Annam and Cochinchina, not covered by the convention."[630] In addition to the 1887 treaty and its accompanying map, China also released a map in 2009 with the so-called 'nine dash line' (first proposed during the Republican era in the 1930s), a u-shaped boundary encompassing most of the South China Sea and declaring China's sovereignty over islands claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines, and other Southeast Asian nations. In 2016 an international tribunal at The Hague rejected China's claims to historic rights over the territory in question, though China has disputed the decision and claimed that it has no intention of abiding by it. At the same time, Vietnamese scholars claim to have found ample

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[628]http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2792_663578/2793_663580/t16247.shtml (Xinhua, November 15, 2000).

[629] This site has become one of the most popular tourist attractions in northern Vietnam and southern Guangxi.

[630] Hayton, Bill. "The Importance of Evidence: Fact, Fiction, and the South China Sea." *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*, p. 8.

evidence that a Nguyen era Vietnamese explorer erected the Nguyen dynastic flag in the Paracels in the 1850s.[631]

However, despite the ongoing territorial dispute in the South China Sea, the current influence that China wields in the region has prevented Vietnam from taking a more aggressive stance on the issue. China's current role in the development of infrastructure and many important industries including manufacturing, mining and extraction of natural resources throughout Southeast Asia as evidenced by the recent Belt and Road Initiative marks the return of China's ascent to a position of leadership in the region. As Sebastian Strangio has observed, "China's expanding presence in Southeast Asia—from its island fortresses in the South China Sea to the quickening diffusion of its money, people, and ideas throughout the region—represents a resumption, through varied means, of its historical expansion to the south."[632] Moreover, the infrastructure projects of the Belt and Road Initiative in Southeast Asia are in certain ways a realization of France's colonial dreams of linking China with the region via waterways and railways. In short, China is now placing itself to reclaim its historical position in the center of the East Asian world order. As discussed in Chapter Four, the transition from traditional cartographic representation to modern maps coincided with the transformation of the tributary system, and a concurrent reconceptualization of Qing imperial space. However, despite this reconceptualization, traces of the China-centered East Asian world order continue to influence how Beijing views its role in the region today.

[631] Ives, Mike. New York Times Nov. 25, 2017, Page A4 of the New York edition, "In Hanoi, Case for Disputed Sea Is 'Kept in Dark'."
[632] Strangio, p. 32.

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Appendix: Introduction

I first became interested in the Sino-Vietnamese border when I was in China conducting fieldwork for my master's thesis at the University of Michigan. My thesis was a study on Farms for Returned Overseas Chinese, or *Huaqiao nongchang*, primarily established to resettle Chinese Indonesian and Chinese Vietnamese who had 'returned' to China in the 1950s-1970s. During the course of my fieldwork in Yunnan and Guangxi I conducted interviews with many Chinese-Vietnamese returnees and some of the farms were located not far from the Vietnamese border. I decided to travel to the border near the city of Lào Cai (one of the main locations of the border delimitation negotiations of 1885-1887, which is the central topic of this study) and became fascinated with the border and its history. I observed boats smuggling both goods and people across the Red River just a stone's throw from the official border crossing, and I noticed that throughout southern Yunnan and Guangxi there were many buildings that had a distinctively Vietnamese or colonial French style and began wondering how the border had assumed its present form. This is the question that served as the seed for this dissertation project. I further developed an interest in frontiers and borderlands while taking a graduate seminar with Nicolas Tackett in my first year of the PhD program at UC Berkeley. Professor Tackett's unique approach to the topic challenged me to think about frontiers in a new way, and to examine the ways in which borders are related to questions of national and ethnic identity formation and the state building process. Guided readings of Qing documents with Professor Wen-hsin Yeh rekindled my interest in late-imperial China, and our many conversations during her office hours and over coffee were invaluable in helping me to develop and work out the ideas in this dissertation.

The research that I conducted for this project took me to China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and France. The primary sources utilized in this study are mainly comprised of state documents and documents produced by state agents from the archives of the Institute of Modern History at Academia Sinica and the Palace Museum in Taipei, the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign affairs and the Ministry of Defense in Paris, and the Overseas Archives in Aix-en-Provence. These sources include Qing gazetteers, published collections of diplomatic communiqué and memoranda, as well as diaries and travelogues written by commissioners in the border delimitation committees. My fieldwork traversing the Sino-Vietnamese border gave me a crucial understanding of the ecology and political economy of the region, as well as an appreciation for some of the challenges faced by the Chinese and French commissioners who are the central focus of this study. I narrowly escaped being detained by both the Chinese and Vietnamese border authorities who were, for obvious reasons, suspicious of a foreigner milling around small border towns far from major cities or the well-beaten tourist track. Like the commissioners who delimited the border, I contracted a severe stomach illness that had me bedridden for a week in a small border town in southern Yunnan. The heat and rugged terrain that I encountered gave me an understanding of the region that would have been unattainable solely within the airconditioned confines of the archives.

Appendix: Notes on Sources

I have utilized a variety of Chinese and French language sources including treaties, memorials to the throne, diplomatic correspondence, provincial and county gazetteers, newspapers, travel logs, the written records of missionaries, and oral histories. Many of the Chinese language primary sources used in this study are held in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China in Taiwan, and in the collection of the C.V. Starr East Asian Library at the University of California, Berkeley. A significant portion of the Qing era documents related to the Ministry and its predecessor the Zongli Yamen concerning the delimitation of the Sino-Vietnamese border were moved from Mainland China to Taiwan during the latter months of China's Civil War and remained classified until 2007.[633] They have since been incorporated into an electronic database and many of the original documents were subsequently transferred to the storage facilities of the National Palace Museum in Taipei in 2015. Interestingly, Taiwan's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, David Tawei Lee remarked in his forward to *Green Borderlands: Treaties and Maps that Defined the Qing's Southwest Boundaries* published by the National Palace Museum that features many of the key documents from the collection, that Qing international relations during this period were "unstable" and that "the exercise of sovereignty was weak."[634] However, as we will see in the present study, the documents contained within that very collection problematizes this oft-repeated narrative and calls these assumptions into question.

Much of the official French correspondence utilized in this study is housed in the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign affairs and the Ministry of Defense in Paris, and the Overseas archives in Aix-en-Provence. I also utilized the digital archives of the Chinese Maritime Customs Project at the University of Bristol. This database contains a wealth of resources that were valuable for this study including the diary of Robert Hart and correspondence between the Customs Service and the Zongli Yamen.

The affairs of the boundary commissions were chronicled by the French colonial officials and their Qing counterparts who participated in the project to delineate and demarcate the Sino-French border, and meeting minutes were kept for all of the border delimitation negotiations between the two commissions, as well as for the accompanying trade negotiations between Li Hongzhang and various French envoys. Dr. P. Neis, the French border delimitation commission's doctor, kept a journal and meticulously described both the terrain and its inhabitants. The journal first appeared as a serial in *Le Tour de Monde*, one of the first travel magazines, which published maps, descriptions of native inhabitants in places yet to be thoroughly explored by Europeans, and the travelogues of explorers. Such publications shaped French public perceptions about China and the Indochinese Peninsula and dramatized the exploits of the military and civilian adventurers in the French colonial world.

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[633] *Green Borderlands*, p. 19.
[634] *Green Borderlands*, p. 10.

Likewise, the majority of Deng Chengxiu's correspondence with the throne (Deng was the head of the Qing Border Delimitation Commission) was first compiled and published in 1916 by an unknown publisher and re-published through facsimile in Taipei in 1967. There are also numerous first-hand accounts of French explorers and missionaries in the highland areas of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier in the period before and after the border demarcation project that have offered another useful perspective on the region; these include the travelogues of Louis de Carné, Francis Garnier, and other adventurers and colonial officials. These various genres offered different perspectives and were produced for very different political and institutional purposes.

Several multi-volume sets of documents relating to the 1885 Treaty of Tianjin, the resulting border negotiations, the border demarcation project, and Sino-French and Sino-Vietnamese relations more generally, have been published in China and Taiwan. For example, I made much use of a seven-volume compilation of memorials, telegrams, and other official documents related to Sino-French relations, *Zhongfa Yuenan Jiaoshe Dang* published by the Modern History institute at Academia Sinica in Taipei. The documents contained therein that date from the Guangxu reign (volumes six and seven) were particularly useful for this project. Similarly, *Zhongyue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian*, a collection of documents pertaining to the Sino-Vietnamese border during the late imperial period published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was also a valuable resource, as was the collection *Zhongfa Zhanzheng*, which was also utilized by Lloyd Eastman for his seminal work *Throne and Mandarins* on the Sino-French conflict of 1884-1885. In certain key aspects, this study picks up where Eastman left off. In addition to the aforementioned texts, I have utilized maps produced by the French colonial administration, officials and private scholars in late-imperial China, as well as works on the technical aspects of cartography and mapmaking on both sides of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier. This not only added a rich visual element to the present study but was also useful for investigating the technological aspects of knowledge production and nation building, and the relationship between cartography and empire. While the memoranda, communiqué, and cartographic data contributed to the archival foundations of a new French colony and strengthened the archival authority of the Qing state in far-flung border regions where its authority had previously been tenuous, the journals and travelogues of French adventurers and officials promoted the colonial endeavor in the metropole and helped shape the public's imagination about Asia and the French colonial world.

Finally, the collected letters and diaries of Robert Hart held in a special collection at Queen's University Belfast (Hart's alma mater) provided much insight into the Maritime Customs Service and its role within the Qing foreign policy apparatus, as well as Hart's active participation in Qing diplomacy and the formation of foreign policy. Hart and the Customs Service are an important and relatively understudied component of late-Qing diplomacy and this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of this topic. I have only utilized a small portion of this voluminous collection of documents from the period of 1885-1887 (the whole collection spans almost five decades of Hart's career in China), but there is much to offer those who are interested in the inner workings of the Customs Service and the various political rivalries within the upper echelons of Qing officialdom,

and offer an invaluable insider's perspective on late Qing politics and the nineteenth century world of the Western expatriate community in China.

Appendix

Chapter Three Appendix

Figure A: Map of Lianzhou Prefecture from the *Da Qing yitong zhi* (大清一統志廉州府圖)

 163

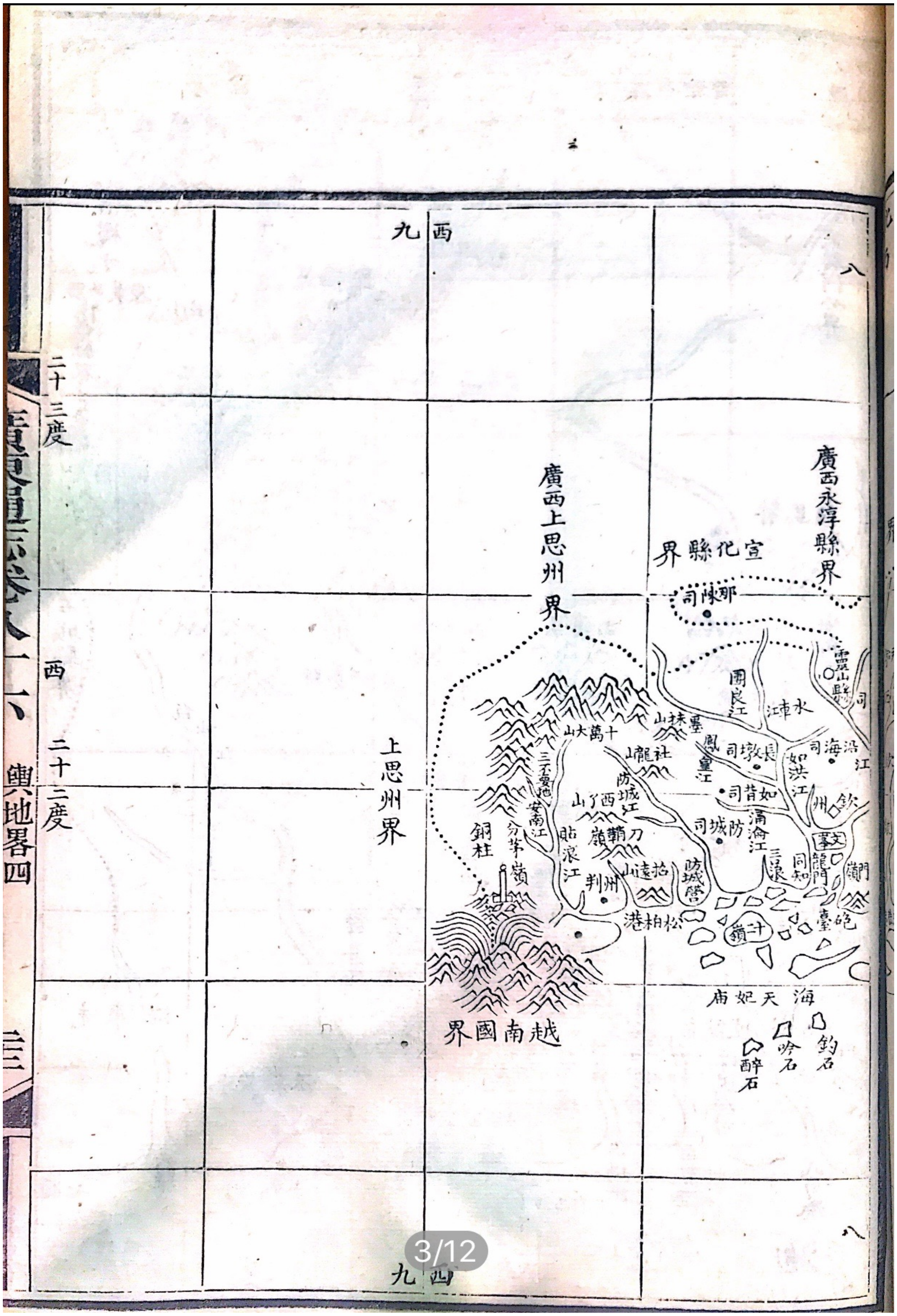

Figure B: Map of Lianzhou Prefecture (West) from the Guangdong Provincial Gazetteer (廣東通志廉州府圖)

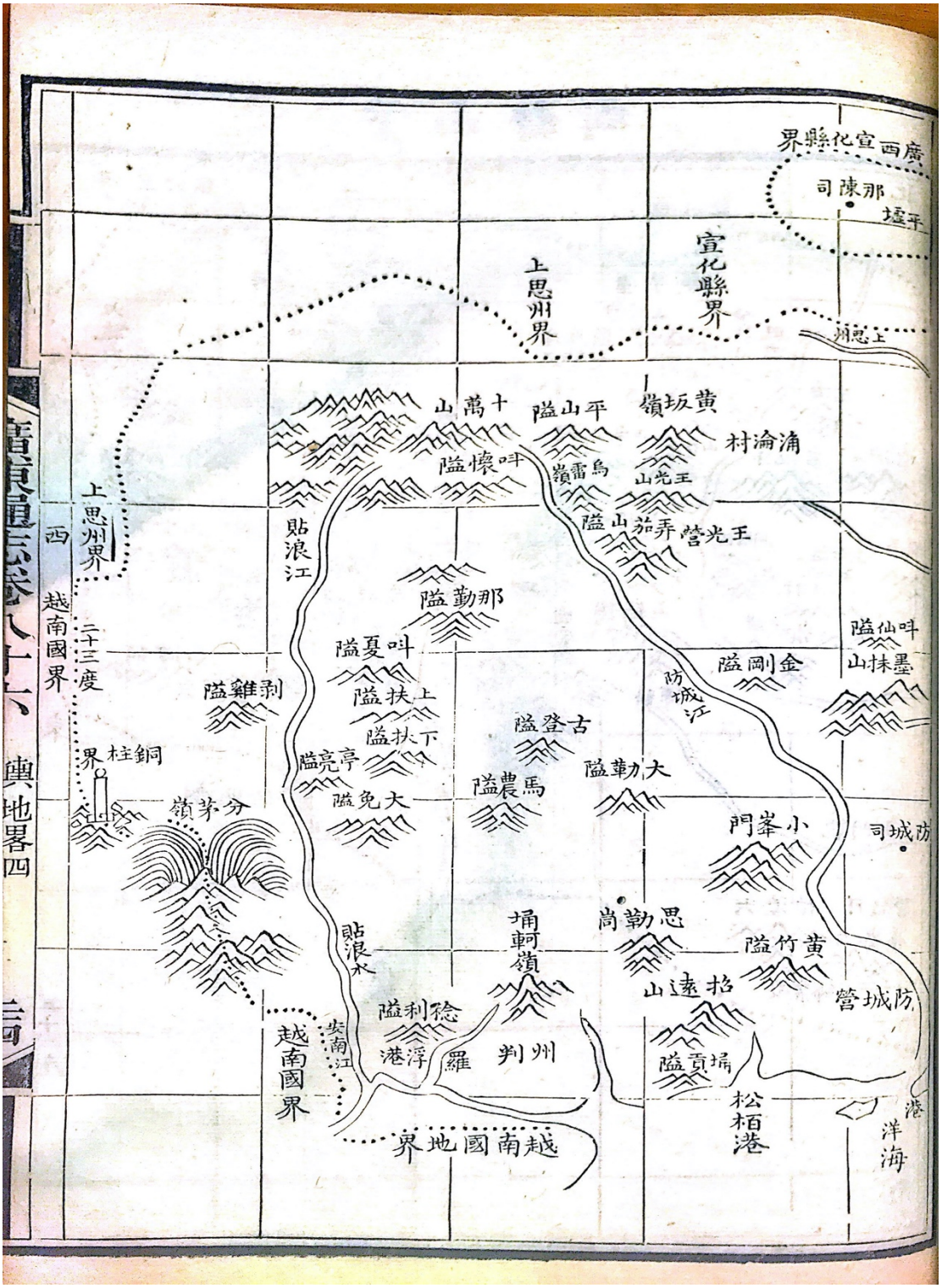

Figure C: Map of Qinzhou (West) from the Guangdong Provincial Gazetteer (廣東通志欽州圖)

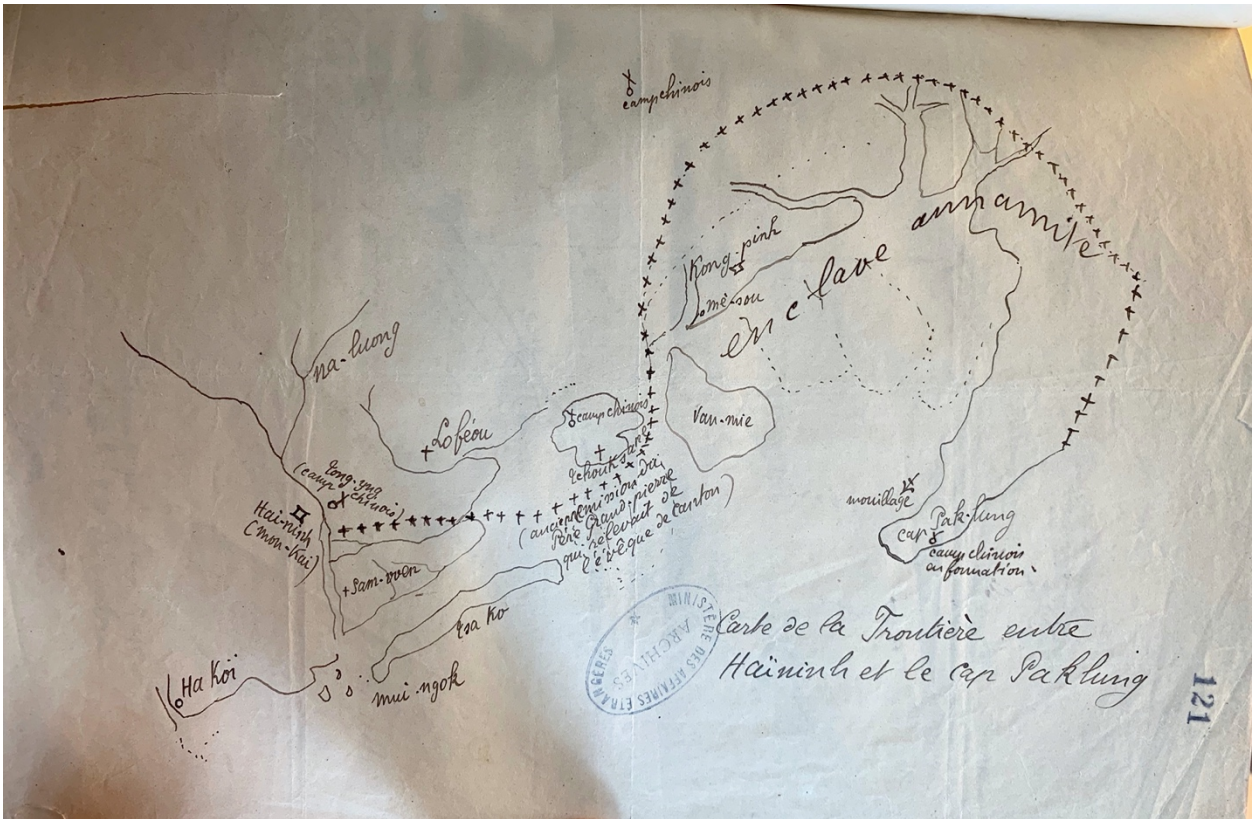

Figure D: Survey map drafted by Mr. Bohin of the French Commission (CADMAE; M.D. 68, Doc. 121)

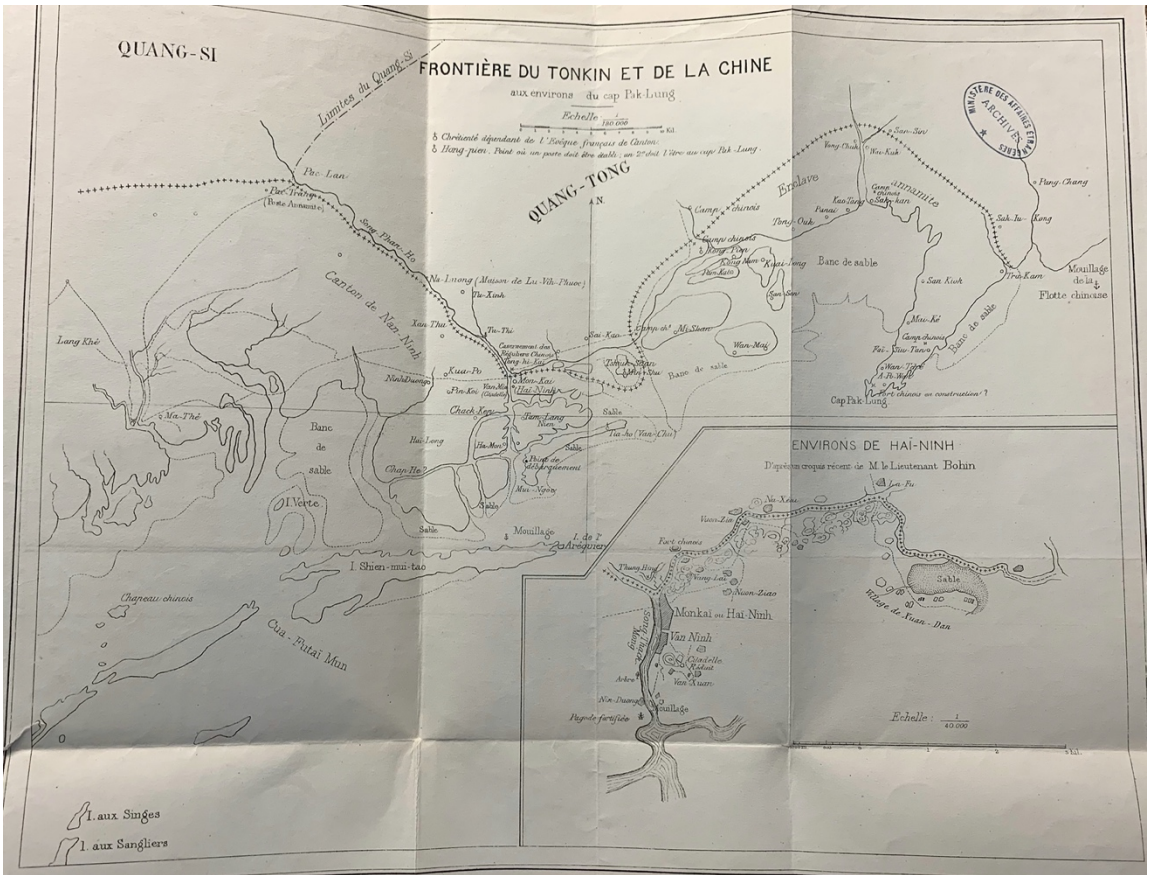

Figure E: Possible French Naval Map from 1883 (unmarked) (CADMAE; M.D. 64, Doc 379) Note that the map marks the locations of Catholic villages under the supervision of the French Bishop of Canton (Chrétienté dépendant de l'Evêque français de Canton).

Figure F: Chinese survey map from around the time of the Jiangping/Bailongwei dispute. Archives of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. 草綠邊地：清季西南邊界條約輿圖. 國立故宮博物院. pp. 100-101. 2016.

Figure G: Official map that accompanied the 1887 treaty that confirmed the disputed region of Jiangping and Bailongwei as a Qing territory. Archives of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. 草綠邊地：清季西南邊界條約輿圖. 國立故宮博物院. pp. 98-99. 2016.

The following is my translation of the Jiangping-Bailongwei petition in its entirety as it appeared as an attachment to a letter that the head of the French Border Comission sent to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

Petition from the Common People of Mong Cai and Jiangping:

Concerning Mong Cai, Jiangping, Wanwei, Ernang, Bailongwei, Chunlan, Shijia, Shanjiao, Dongan, Dajiaoshan, Lizhishan, Hegui, Tanhe, Wantuo, and other places totaling 20,000 *ding* (80,000 hectares):

The farmlands and ancestral burial places stated above have been completely occupied by the French forces. This has caused the total interruption of cultivation and planting, prevented residents from returning to their homes, and inhibited them from making sacrifices at their ancestral tombs. Both young and old have been affected since our people's livelihoods have been completely cut off. The French military has executed by firing squad any of the starving victims of the resulting famine who have attempted to return to their plots to harvest their crops clandestinely, the number killed amounting to roughly 200-300. The corpses of the victims are scattered across the countryside and their surviving kin are still not allowed to bury them. The poverty-stricken survivors are without food or clothing. Their drastic means of survival have compounded their difficulties, there is widespread unrest, and their ranks are filled with grief. Our people have aired their grievances with the local authorities and have explained the brutality and tyranny of their unjust treatment at the hands of the French forces that have forcefully occupied our villages and have sought retribution for the victims. Although the imperial commissioners have answered us, the Border Delimitation Commission lacks the authority to fight back and provoke the outbreak of war (with the French). The people have tried their best to come up with a solution, but there really is no good policy for dealing with

this hardship. Since we don't have the ability to resort to arms, we can only plead our case to the highest authorities, and the gentry and elders among us have advised that we have no choice but to seek out another place to live. The following is a list of ten grievances for submission to the Qing civil and military authorities of the imperial government and a request for the dispatch of imperial troops in order to save the people and deliver them from danger. We will also propagate this document far and wide so that all can know the extent of the injustices that we have suffered, and so that all will know the truth.

List of Ten Great Grievances:

1. The coastal area of Mong Cai is an important point of anchor for the Chinese junks of Jiangping. If the French invade and occupy Mong Cai and Jiangping, the trade of an area covering up to 200 li (100 kilometers) along the coastal areas will be completely cut off and 20,000 people will lose their livelihood.

2. In the area encompassing Mong Cai and Jiangping there are close to 2,000 tracts of cultivated farmland belonging to Chinese farmers, all of who hold official government documentation proving their identities as legal proprietors. Because of the boundary survey, 200 years of prosperity has been swallowed up without cause, generations of ancestral graves have been suddenly abandoned, the spirits of successive generations of our ancestors weep with grief beneath the soil, and the people forced to drag out an ignoble existence can only lament their sorrows.

3. There are 20 li (10 kilometers) of salt fields long the coast that provides a large source of income for the frontier people, all of which has been turned over to the Vietnamese people. After the French established a foothold in the area, only religious converts are able to reap profits from harvesting the sea salt, and do so completely tax-free.

4. Mong Cai is surrounded by mountains and faces the sea. It is of the utmost urgency to establish a large market here with a customs duty post. If the French gain control of this area, this entire place will be like Hong Kong and Macau, with seagoing vessels importing all types of foreign merchandise that fill warehouses, and unscrupulous merchants and profiteers engaged in illicit trade will keep pouring in, and the imported goods will make their way into Chinese markets far and wide where they will be sold at low prices. The profits of the three prefectures of Gao, Lian, and Luo will certainly be embezzled just as easy as taking something from a pocket. When the time comes, the government warehouses will be empty, businesses will become insolvent, and the common people of these three prefectures will be without a livelihood and will soon be without food or clothing.

5. After the French forces occupied Mong Cai and Jiangping, they seized the property and weapons of villagers and granted it to Catholic converts who used them to terrorize the Chinese. The commoners and disbanded soldiers from China have no alternative but to

go into hiding and wait for an opportunity to make a surprise attack on the French. If fighting breaks out again it will be disastrous for the law-abiding villagers.

6. Ever since the Franco-Vietnamese War, the Chinese residents of Mong Cai and Jiangping have been reduced to a position of subordination [to the Vietnamese]. The local Chinese are only traders and merchants and have never engaged in warfare, so from this one can see this overland boundary must truly be the boundary of China. Today the French have already started to encroach on the border and are attempting to nibble away at Chinese territory. Seeing this state of affairs, it is clear that the avarice of the French knows no bounds concerning their torment and persecution of the residents of the Mong Cai and Jiangping region.

7. Today, foreigners have already occupied Macau and Hong Kong, and in former times these waters were savage and wild with no forces to patrol it. In previous time, the foreigners who came to this area did not seize the land and property of the people. But today the French are using the delimitation of the border as a pretext to invade and occupy Chinese territory, establish a foothold in the most prosperous areas, and illegally seize and occupy the farms, fields, and ancestral gravesites of the honest and hardworking villagers, bringing great harm [to these communities]. The French must not be allowed to escape responsibility for these dreadful crimes.

8. Ever since the hostilities began between the French and the Vietnamese, although deceitful and cunning, they suffered a defeat at the hands of the great Liu Yongfu, and then were defeated once again by a force led by Commander Feng [Feng Zicai], both of whom reside in Qinzhou. The French despise and envy these great men and are now launching a deadly scheme to occupy Mong Cai, seize control of Jiangping, and then assemble massive forces in this strategic location, not only for the purpose of preventing invasion by disbanded soldiers, but to provide a base for an easy invasion of Southern Guangdong. In a short time, they have been able to carry out their plan for retaliation [for the previous military losses in the Sino-French conflict], and in the event that this is allowed to happen the whole territory of China will meet with great disaster.

9. The French maintain a position of superiority at naval warfare, so if the Border Chinese Commission grants them this land and does not obstruct their advance into Chinese territory and cedes them this strategic location at sea, the entire situation will change. The Qinzhou region is vast and the current course of action will endanger it and the consequences will be too dreadful to imagine. If Qinzhou is invaded from the sea, there will be no way to rescue it on land. And if the prefectures of Gao, Lian, and Lei are attacked from all sides then they will be unable to defend themselves. It will be as the saying goes: “A single spark can set the prairie ablaze.”

10. Many of the churches constructed by the foreigners were destroyed [during the Sino-French War] but they have received compensation for all of their losses. If a foreigner is

killed an indemnity is required, otherwise they inevitably demand a treaty through the threat of military action to handle the matter and demand more and more rights and concessions. At this time the French are driving out and massacring the Chinese and stealing their property. Can they be allowed to carry out these crimes in the Empire (*Da Qing Guo*) without any reprisal? Will the common people of China (Zhongguo) continue to be harmed without any provisions for reparations?

This document was drafted in the common interest of the common people of Qinzhou."[1]

[1] Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris, M.D., Asia file, vol. 64, 146-159（*Zhong yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian*), pp. 677-680).

Chapter Four Appendix

Figure A: Map accompanying the Frontier Delimitation Convention of June 26th, 1887, signed by Prince Qing and Jean Antoine Ernest Constans. *Green Borderlands*, pp. 98-99.

Figure B: Example of Border Marker/Signpost Text. Green Borderlands, p. 194.

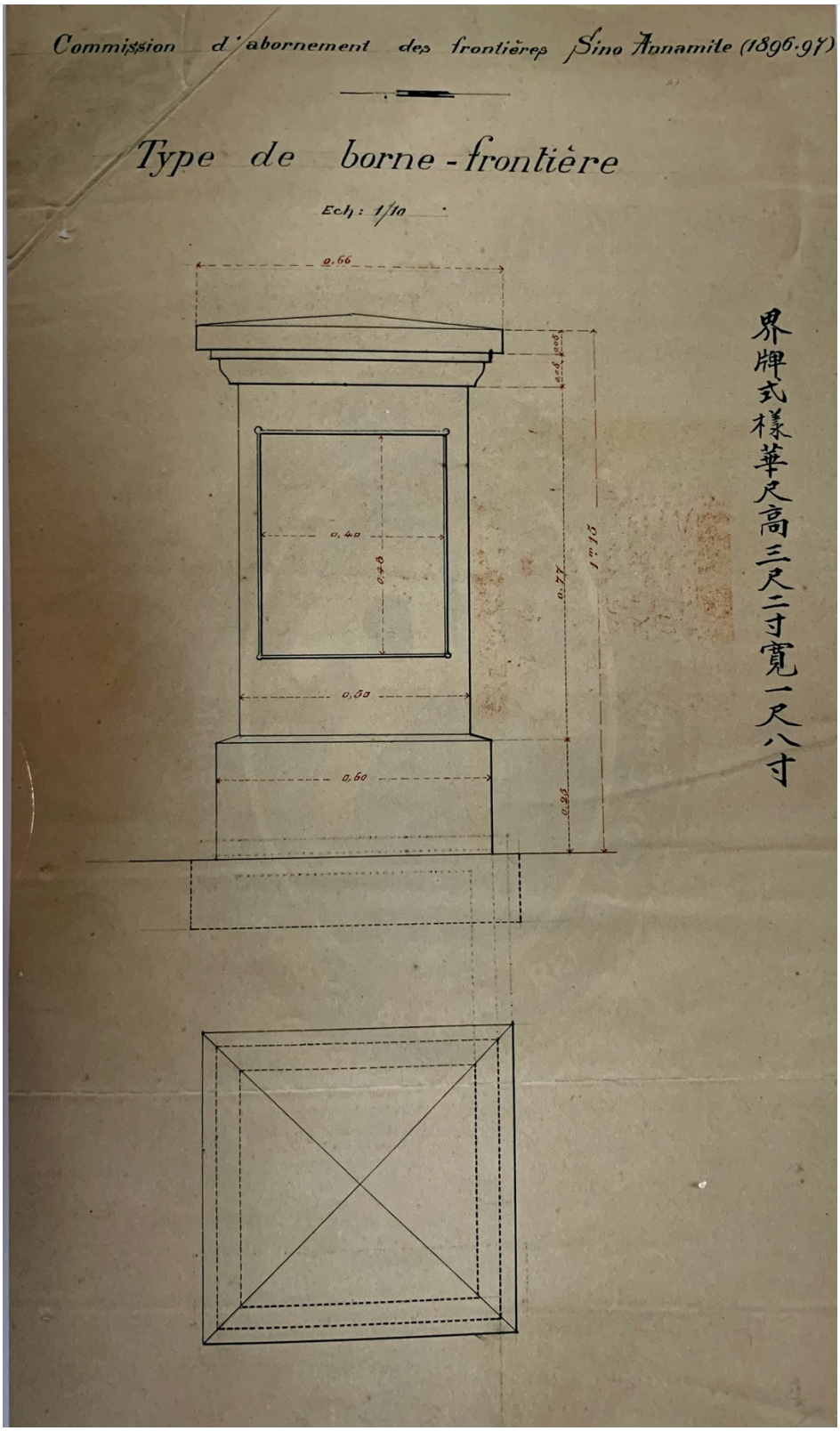

Figure C: Schematic of Border Marker/Signpost Text. Green Borderlands, p. 195.

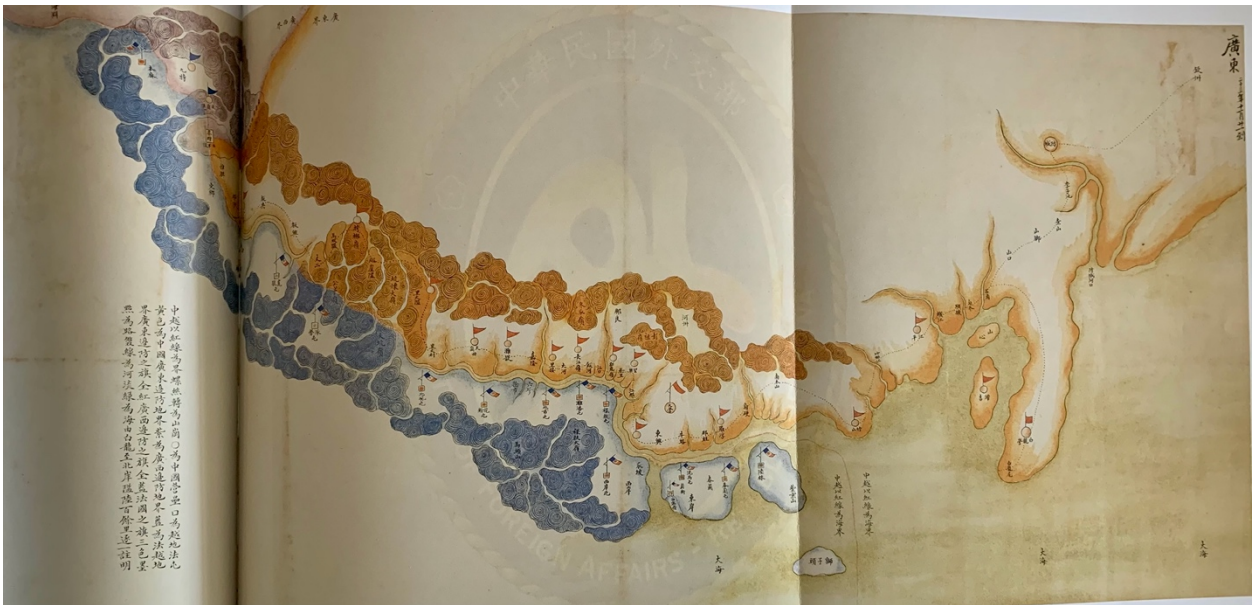

Fig. D: Map of Border Patrol Posts. *Green Borderlands*, pp. 118-119.