

## **Tours of Duty, Cross-Identification and Introjection: The Colonial Administrative Mind in Wartime Indochina**

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**Abstract** Some scholars have explained colonial policies as the outgrowth of the need to provide profits and prestige for the motherland. Others have linked policymaking to the use of colonial space as experimental laboratories of modernity; while others assert that the overseas was a terrain for finding solutions to some of the political, social and aesthetic problems which were affecting France at the time. In contrast, this paper traces how colonial policies can be explained at the level of individual colonial administrators. It does so not only by reference to the social backgrounds of officials, but also their inner "psychic processes." This study addresses the colonial tendency to imagine cross-identification between France and the colony. It presents three case studies of colonial officials in Indochina to investigate how administrators' perceptions of France became projected onto the colonies, and how one of them incorporated within himself some of the attributes of the colonized, an example of introjection. It is argued that these processes had an impact on policymaking. My theoretical goal with this piece was to apply a psycho-analytic approach to the study of the empire.

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### **Introduction**

How can we understand the origins of French colonial policymaking? Some have explained colonial policies as the outgrowth of the need to provide profits and prestige for the motherland. Others have linked policymaking to the use of colonial space as experimental laboratories of modernity. Eric J. Hobsbawm, for instance, stresses the economic origins of empire; Raoul Girardet studies French groups which celebrated the grandeur of colonial expansion in the 1930s; while Gwendolyn Wright asserts that the overseas was a terrain for finding solutions to some of the political, social and aesthetic problems which were affecting France at the time.<sup>1</sup>

This paper traces how the motivation for specific policy initiatives can be explained at the level of individual colonial administrators. It does so not only by reference to the social backgrounds of particular officials, but also their inner "psychic processes." I present case studies of three French colonial officials in Indochina to investigate how individual administrators' perceptions of France became projected onto the local societies of Indochina, and to demonstrate how one such administrator incorporated some of the attributes of the colonized within himself. I argue that colonial

policies were influenced not only by the administrators' learning, but also by their audiences, since these officials had to answer to the expectations of their home authorities and fellow citizens and subjects. These processes, as well, had an impact on the officials' respective policymaking.

The colonial administrators chosen for this study embody different important facets of the Vichy regime in Indochina. Vichy refers to the period following France's military defeat in 1940, when the French Republic's parliamentary regime was replaced by the authority of Marshall Pétain, the Chief of State. Pétain aimed to reform the French nation through his National Revolution, whose ideology of "Work-Family-Motherland" displaced the motto of "Liberty-Equality-Fraternity" of the Republic. The three officials that are the focus of this study helped to transplant elements of this revolution overseas, to French-held Indochina. This colony had been established in 1887 and encompassed Annam, Tonkin, Cochinchina (what is today Vietnam), and the kingdom of Cambodia, with the capital located in Hanoi; Laos was added later on in the nineteenth century. During the era of Vichy government in Indochina from 1940–45, Vietnam was the most important of these holdings, with the biggest and most well-organized French colonial bureaucracy.

The first official, Jean Decoux, arrived from the navy in July 1940 to take up his appointment as Governor-General of Indochina and adapt the Vichy National Revolution to this overseas territory. More precisely, he boosted collaboration between the French and conservative Indochinese elites in order to implement the ideals of the National Revolution via a return to a traditional, rural and hierarchical society. Such a revolution was built mainly around promoting the image and "wisdom" of Marshal Philippe Pétain (Head of State of Vichy France from 1940 to 1944) and what officials perceived to be the local cultures. The second official was Navy Captain Maurice Ducoroy, the General Commissioner for Physical Education, Sports, and Youth, who followed the directive of Vichy France to build a "new man" in Indochina by putting a specific youth policy in place. Finally, there was Jean Rochet, Director of Public Education, who sought to revitalize elements of the traditional culture of Laos which corresponded to the Vichy regime's desire to return to a traditional order.

This paper examines the manifestation of the Vichy Empire through the workings of the respective mindsets of these three administrators. Decoux could be said to possess an *imperial navy mind*, which shaped his policy in Indochina in his desire for display, parades and a sense of duty and discipline aimed at building a "navy nation" in the colony. Ducoroy embodied the *navy-sporting*

*mind*. His love of physical activities from a very young age and his professional pursuit of sport in the navy nourished, over time, his belief in the power of sport in reforming and uniting citizens and subjects behind the French flag. Finally, Jean Rochet was the *empathetic-educator mind*, whose love of Laos and reflective and critical temperament underlay his role that I define as a broker between locals and the higher administration, helping to shape the policy of consolidating a Lao national identity. Despite their different backgrounds, these three colonial officials shared a common goal of cultivating attachment toward imperial France among locals at a time when the métropole was already significantly weakened due to World War II and the Japanese occupation of Indochina. A strange and uneasy situation emerged where the French were in charge of the colonial administration while the Japanese spread their message of "Asia for Asians."

Moving from external to internal influences on policymaking, this study addresses how we can understand the process of cross-identification not only between the colonizer and the colonized, but also the colonial tendency to imagine cross-identification between France and the colony. The approach taken here complements insights of earlier observers such as Frantz Fanon, Octave Mannoni and Albert Memmi, who used psychology as a tool with which to analyze colonialism. While Fanon's work addressed the workings of the black psyche in a white world, I look at the reverse process – to understand the orientation of the colonial European psyche in the colonized world.<sup>2</sup>

Mannoni and Memmi each sought to explain the relational foundations of the colonial psyche in the interdependence between colonizer and colonized. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* published in 1950, presents a psychological account of the causes and effects of colonialism in Madagascar.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, Mannoni was a former colonial administrator in charge of the colony's information service in Madagascar, who wrote about what he observed on this island. He concluded that colonial problems were primarily psychological, stating that "the racist reactions of the white man to the black are the product of elements already present in his psyche." Indeed, he noted that the relation of dependence between the colonizer and the colonized was shaped by their "differently constructed types of personality."<sup>4</sup> To become a colonizer, one must have a Prospero complex, that is, "a grave lack of sociability combined with a pathological urge to dominate."<sup>5</sup> By contrast, he observed, the local Malagasies have an attitude of dependence which emerged from the safety of tribal life and encouraged by the French administration.

Similarly, Memmi, a Jew born in colonial Tunisia, described the relation between the colonizer and the natives as resulting into "the colonized's depersonalization." Indeed, "the colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity ("They are this." "They are all the same."). If a colonized servant does not come in one morning, the colonizer . . . will say, "You can't count on them." He refuses to consider personal, private occurrences in his maid's life; that life in a specific sense does not interest him, and his maid does not exist as an individual. . . . He [the colonized] tends rapidly toward becoming an object."<sup>6</sup>

The current study emphasizes not only the direct relations between colonizer and colonized, but also the more autonomous and subjective elements of colonial administrators' own mental perceptions of who they were and what they were doing.

Recent work by George Steinmetz has stressed the lack of attention to the impact of psychic processes in the creation of colonial regimes, notwithstanding Homi Bhabha's psychoanalytic writings on (post)colonial theory. Looking at three German colonies, Samoa, German Tsingtau (Qingdao) and Southwest Africa (the precursor of today's Namibia), Steinmetz analyzes the role of pre-colonial discourse, social class and the colonial propensity to employ the colonized for imaginary cross-identification. As he observes:

Colonial practice . . . has a dual character, in which the most palpable and conscious level is doubled by a second, unconscious level. The Freudian concepts of projection and transference point to such "doubling," the bleeding of unconscious processes into everyday life. Such cross-identifications are significant for colonial policy because they do not necessarily remain hidden in colonizers' minds but sometimes emerge to engage the colonized as supports in the action out of fantasy scenarios.<sup>7</sup>

My own study also borrows the term "introjection" from psychoanalysis, which describes the process by which a person replicates the behaviors and characteristics of other people inside himself.

This research is based on archival data from colonial newspapers and documents, including reports and descriptions of tours and travels that the three colonial officials undertook of the territories they administrated. Tours were one means by which colonial officials formed their worldview of local societies, and these subsequently affected their policies. The book that each administrator wrote after the war had ended provide another means of gauging their respective mindsets. Decoux and Ducoroy each wrote memoirs to justify their actions in Indochina, while Rochet expressed his views on Laos during World War II through a lightly fictionalized account. As he states in the preface:

I have had to invent nothing. I have seen the people that I evoke. I was a witness to the facts that I report. When I believed that I had to shelter reality under a fictional mask, I restricted myself to changing a few names, to retouching a few situations and to assembling in a manner slightly different the features of some personages.<sup>8</sup>

The characters in Rochet's novel include Maze, a Frenchman who was in charge of a Laotian province and who loved the country; Ludovic Ferrani, a corrupted colonial administrator; and Khan Lit, a Laotian who had studied abroad and was concerned about the future of his country. The two characters who most likely represent Rochet himself include Barjon, the Chief of Education in Laos, and Baudran, who was in charge of the "Lao Movement." This last type of data allows a more subjective approach to the topic, perhaps, but at the same time I am well aware that we have to be careful not to give too much weight to books such as those produced by Decoux and Ducoroy, which are a plea and a defense of their actions in Indochina. Yet, such literary information may offer readers a glimpse of the workings of the colonial mind and how intercultural misunderstandings could fuel tensions between colonizers and the colonized.

Along with a focus on cross-identification, I also examine, when possible, the general social context from which these officials emerged to understand how their earlier family environments and the French educational system influenced their understanding of the world. While my archival sources do not provide information on the personal backgrounds of these protagonists, they do offer some inside on the habitus of each that they acquired and how it affected policymaking. 'Habitus' is understood as tastes and aptitudes acquired through socialization, which lead to certain practices and reflect one's belonging to a specific group and culture. In addition, the habitus gives the practical skills and dispositions required in order to evolve within various 'fields.' For Bourdieu, society is divided into relatively independent fields (education, politics, culture, etc) with their own rules. Within a given field actors fight to control particular forms of power and authority, and through the course of these struggles might modify the field itself. Decoux and Ducoroy had acquired some aspects of their habitus in the field of the navy, such as disciplinary skills, while Rochet possessed other skills, such as an appreciation for local cultures that he gained in the field of education. Our three protagonists were able to transpose some aspects of their respective habitus to another field, the colonial state, where they would define the molding of colonial policies.

In addition, the machinery of the colonial bureaucracy also served to transmit accumulated knowledge of local societies to the administrators of the day, hence the colonial state appears as a

quite autonomous field with its own beliefs and regulations. While Decoux and Ducoroy were not trained at the *Ecole Coloniale* in France, they did share ideas regarding the role of colonial administrators which were propagated through this institution. In this regard, Véronique Dimier's work on the training of colonial administrators in France and Britain helps us to grasp how specific forms of institutional exposure affected colonial officials' perceptions of indigenous societies.<sup>9</sup> Clifford Rosenberg's recent work on the police in Paris during the interwar period suggests some of the ways colonial administrators who returned to Paris drew upon their "local" knowledge (and, more importantly, their prejudices acquired overseas) to make policy. While this is obviously the reverse of the process investigated in this paper, it does provide an approach to the study of the impact of colonial administrators' knowledge on policymaking.<sup>10</sup>

## I. The Navy Nation: Jean Decoux

### A. Understanding the Colonial Mind

Admiral Decoux was a product of the navy subculture, which shaped his outlook on how Indochinese society should be ordered.<sup>11</sup> The navy fashioned his belief in solidarity between the nation and the armed forces. In the same way, he created youth corps to develop solidarity between youngsters and the French empire. For instance, he saw sports and the practice of physical education within such organizations as a tool to "cement" youngsters around the French colonial power by "proposing a common ideal: the cult of virile effort and human improvement through methodical and regular physical work."<sup>12</sup>

In the same vein, the *esprit de corps* that could be found on board a ship was to be applied to the Indochinese population. More precisely, comradeship, enthusiasm and patriotic devotion – traits which are second nature to admirals – were to be cultivated among the subjects. Decoux aimed to build a "navy nation" where discipline, love of the homeland and duty were the ideal, as one of his messages in late 1942 to the Indochinese population underlines: "Indochina . . . needs to redouble its faithful attachment to the wounded homeland and, more tightly assembled than ever around its leaders, to stay confident, silent and disciplined."<sup>13</sup>

The French navy had been instrumental in establishing the colony of Indochina in the nineteenth century, and its members occupied positions of authority as admirals-governor before civilians took over. When Decoux was nominated governor-general of Indochina in 1940, he acknowledged his pride in resuming the

tradition of admiral-governor.<sup>14</sup> Such thinking reflected a navy culture where members felt an affinity for the empire, which gave them a mission to realize.<sup>15</sup>

The navy culture not only shaped Decoux prior to his position as a governor but also continued to influence how he carried out his administrative duties and analyzed realities. As stated in the introduction, administrative tours were crucial in gathering information and often influenced the colonial mind's perceptions of local societies and, subsequently, policymaking. However, these tours were often so highly orchestrated that it would be difficult for Decoux to perceive anything except a positive reception.

Everywhere, during my incessant trips, I had the occasion to realize myself of the excellence of the [sporting] methods followed, of the capital importance of the results obtained on the physique, but even more at the moral level, and even at the political [level]. I will limit myself to only one example of this extraordinary ambience. During the summer of 1943, having to go from Dalat to Tonkin by the "Mandarin Road," I covered almost 1,000 kilometers along the littoral, between a double-line of Annamite youths, cheering on myself, France and its flags.<sup>16</sup>

As a high-ranking navy official, he was used to parades and displays of discipline. This made him equate the locals' enthusiasm over sports and ceremonies with support for the French regime. Indeed, if he were fulfilling his caregiver role – like an admiral taking care of his crew – then why should there be any display of discontentment from those he was taking care of?

Decoux went on administrative tours a few times each month. He admitted to looking forward to these rounds of inspection, which were all arranged along similar lines, as they relieved him of his daily office work. A typical tour might consist of visits to local authorities and notables, a salute to the color and youth parades, and inspections of schools, hospitals and building sites. Such restricted contact with the local population was unlikely to have offered him a complete picture of the natives and the colony he was managing.<sup>17</sup>

Besides tours, conversations with locals were another source of information which could have shaped Decoux's outlook on Indochina, with political ramifications. Reading his account of his mandate in Indochina, published in 1949, one is surprised to find no account of discussions with local intellectuals and the indigenous bourgeoisie, two groups which could have informed him about the mood of the colonies. It shows that his contact with the local population was limited to specific groups and raises the question of how much the Governor-General understood Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians. Indeed, Decoux did not have direct relations with the general population; his main contact was with

the mandarins or other native high-ranking officials who usually benefited from their collaboration with the French. Here, the hierarchical organization of the navy fitted well with the hierarchical nature of the colonial society, and constrained what he could see and what he chose to see. In addition, the navy tried to conserve an aristocratic tradition despite the modern times, and some members displayed contempt toward the ordinary man. Respectful of a traditional order, Decoux often spoke of his personal relations with the French royal family, the Bourbons.<sup>18</sup>

Decoux believed that the majority of the Indochinese supported the French empire. This led him to misjudge the strength of the nationalist movements. As part of the native policy, Decoux promoted the advancement of Indochinese mandarins and other cadres and helped to revive local identities. He liked to think this resulted in greater attachment among the locals toward the French empire and the maintenance of French sovereignty.

It is like this that I [Decoux] could, from one end of my mission to the other, travel in all directions of the federation, to affirm everywhere the French presence, and to show myself in places, before the most instable ones politically, without even the slightest vague impulse of anti-French display or attack against the sovereign authority being detected.<sup>19</sup>

Decoux extrapolated expressions of support for the Vichy regime from public displays of enthusiasm which may have had nothing to do with political legitimacy. Thus, he sometimes described a world quite disconnected from reality. Since the navy was anchored in a chain of command that emphasized authority, duty and obedience, he took any civilian manifestations of such behavior as a sign that society was functioning properly and peacefully.

#### B. Application of the Colonial Mind: Playing to Different Audiences and Creating a "Navy Nation"

The background factors that shaped Decoux's decisions operated at three levels: the personal level, a product of earlier socialization as he entered at a very young age the Naval School in Lanvéoc; the institutional level, the result of his habitus (his cultural dispositions of both the navy and colonial state's subcultures and the structural conditions of governing respectively); and the regional and imperial levels, the outcome of World War II. Indeed, the beginning of Decoux's mandate coincided with a precarious balance of power as the colonial administration faced challenges from Vietnamese revolutionaries, Thai irredentists, and the stationing of Japanese troops in the French colony. For instance, the French had



to compete with the military parades and athletic competitions promoting the military power of Japan organized by the Japanese authorities.

The resulting policies included mass entertainment and the celebration of traditions and heroes; the promotion of youth corps; a call for Franco-Indochinese elite collaboration; and the exaltation of an ideology of three-layered patriotism – that is, love of a people for their colonial country, love for the colonial federation of Indochina, and love for the French empire and the métropole – without advancing an elite-driven nationalist political program aimed at independence from France.<sup>20</sup> The Vichy regime's own expectations, the burgeoning insurgencies and the Japanese occupation created a need for colonial administrators to play to different audiences. The audiences in turn had some effect on the fashioning of policies by these administrators.

Some aspects of youth organization policies were directed at more than one audience. For instance, the policy of grandiose spectacles was a means to captivate the youth, and in so doing, compete with Japan and foreign-backed insurgent nationalist groups.<sup>21</sup> The aim was to enroll youngsters into organizations that would advance and channel patriotic feelings toward France, hence molding faithful imperial subjects. In this case, Decoux was also sending a message to the Japanese that France's ideas would be the ones shaping and directing local subjects, not the "imported" ideology of society offered by the Japanese Co-Prosperity Sphere. Other facets of such policies concerned fulfilling obligations to the home authorities in France by demonstrating that state employees in the colony were loyal servants of Pétain. Pride in service and commitment were ideals that were often found among navy personnel; these, together with careerism, would make them aggressively support such a project.

The celebration of May 1<sup>st</sup> targeted primarily the French community and the French state since it was an important event within the French commemorative tradition. In Indochina, like in Vichy France, it was now known as "the Day of Work and Social Peace" and, according to Decoux, no longer embodied violence and hatred among classes, but rather collaboration, union, and mutual aid.<sup>22</sup> On this occasion, Vichy officials in Indochina, like officials in the métropole, wanted to emphasize the break between the Vichy regime and the Third Republic. Consequently, a key part of Decoux's agenda was to condemn the decay of the Third Republic and reject the legacy of the republican past, calling instead for the need to build a "changed being" in order to renovate the French imperial nation.

Other measures targeted local inhabitants and the French state to prove how well the Governor-General was performing his

mission of transferring the Vichy revolution to the colony. These included the glorification of a return to the soil and the implementation of policies giving pride of place to an agricultural society. For instance, Decoux participated in a symbolic procession at the Vi-khanh temple in Tai-binh, emphasizing the Vichy theme of "Work, Family, Homeland" according to Vietnamese tradition. Four Vietnamese groups symbolizing the spheres of local work – the "well-read," the farmers, the artisans, and the merchants – were on display. A patriarchal family of four generations was also represented to embody the strength and continuity of the institution. Effigies of Pétain and Bao Dai, the emperor of Vietnam, were installed on palanquins as guarantors of this traditional order where the family, not the individual, was the pillar of society. Pétain's rejection of modern urban society and his call to return to the soil were apparent in Cochinchina, where local authorities reintroduced "the feast of agriculture" in every province, and sponsored village feasts and fruit- or animal-rearing competitions.<sup>23</sup>

The French colonial regime had to respond to different audiences and tailor its policies according to these audiences' needs. What were the policies themselves? Tours were not only a means of gathering information but also part of a policy to promote cooperation and encourage different layers of patriotism. For instance, on his tours of duty, Decoux often visited the local monarchs and described Bao Dai as embodying the Franco-Indochinese elite collaboration that he supported:

From our first encounter, I was charmed by the natural ease, by the manners at the same time distinguished and cavalier, of this young prince. Asian by birth, European by adoption, through him the Orient and Occident come together harmoniously, thus disapproving the slogan, a little bit simplistic and disillusioned, launched at the time by Rudyard Kipling.<sup>24</sup>

Yet the historian Bruce Lockhart shows that Bao Dai was not such a model of cooperation. Frustrated that he could not accomplish his political ambitions under the French colonial system, Bao Dai was less disposed to endorse a cooperative role with the French than Norodom Sihanouk, king of Cambodia, for instance. Instead, he withdrew from public life as much as he could.

This conception of Bao Dai's functions was part of the habitus of colonial French administrators, whose presumptions – referred to by Lockhart as an "ideology of monarchy," as defined by early scholarly pieces on Vietnam – still lingered during Decoux's mandate. The emperor was perceived theoretically as an absolute ruler who "reigned but did not rule," while his power was counteracted by a high degree of village autonomy. Such a vision affected

French policymaking in the sense of placing too much emphasis on the spiritual and moral role of the emperor, to the detriment of the political dimension.<sup>25</sup>

Knowledge of indigenous societies that previous colonial officials had accumulated – such as the value of filial piety, for example – was passed down through the colonial bureaucracy. For instance, in response to the communist challenge in Vietnam and its attempt to provoke peasant opposition to the regime in 1930–31, the colonial authorities printed leaflets which denounced the “bad pupil” who joined communist organizations in contrast to the “good pupil,” who took advantage of colonial education and practiced traditional customs such as filial piety, ancestor worship and virtuous morality.<sup>26</sup>

The promotion of this three-layered patriotism was not seen as a risky policy by Decoux, who stated in an interview that “the annamite elites . . . have well understood that, in the actual situation of the world, no other political formula than the French fiat is capable of safeguarding all that they are attached to.”<sup>27</sup> Again he referred only to the conservative local notables, but what about the rest of the population? What privileges did they gain from such an alliance?

Decoux often visited educational institutions to bring support and reality to this three-layered patriotism. It was common for him to receive military honors while the French, Annamite, Cambodian and Laotian flags were hoisted as symbolic embodiments of a multi-layered love for the homeland, like the salute to the colors at the University of Indochina in March 1941, for instance.<sup>28</sup> Governor-general Decoux’s professional ethos was exhibited through his reviewing of the “civil troops” – that is, the youngsters perceived by the Vichy regime as the bearers of a better future and the navy culture of honor.

The politics of grandiose spectacles was another means of fostering complementary patriotisms. Such activities were a display of colonial power where the natives were not just observers but also participants in a make-believe world where strong unity and collaboration existed between the locals and the colonial regime. For instance, in ceremonies commemorating Joan of Arc Day (May 10–11), officials cross-identified French heroine Joan of Arc with the Trung sisters, mythologized for fighting Chinese conquerors during the first century, with propaganda presenting them as embodying the military myth of the soldier dying for the nation. Such cross-identification was elevated through grand state-sponsored demonstrations. The press employed flexibility in interpretation to propagandize the Trung sisters as the “Annamite Joan of Arc.”<sup>29</sup>

Local celebrations of Joan of Arc Day were held in the localities of Hatinh, Nhatrang, Djiring, Kontum, Quang-Tri and Phanthiet, where youth corps enacted various scenes from the lives of Joan of Arc and the Trung sisters. The authorities in Vietnam promoted how these three heroines, "getting out of childhood, became liberator warriors for their homeland in danger."<sup>30</sup> This parallel in the collective memory of the French and the Vietnamese caused Decoux and other colonial administrators to believe in an imaginary shared memory of positive collaboration with the native population, in place of the reality of being another foreign aggressor.<sup>31</sup> Decoux and his government were trying to mold a collective remembering, to decide which specific events to celebrate in material form (theatrical representations). The obverse side of public remembrance was, in this case, the need to forget the oppressive and occupational aspect of colonialism. Indeed, by the 1920s, young Vietnamese intellectuals had nurtured a popular preoccupation with national heroes who had fought not only the Chinese and the Mongols, but also the French.<sup>32</sup>

The colonial administration hoped that the manufacturing of consent through state-sponsored spectacles would mold Indochinese perceptions. For instance, French officials organized grandiose festivities in Phnom Penh for the king's birthday as a tool to advance symbolic connections between the king and colonial officials. Equally important was the demonstration of honor and discipline toward the colonial state when Decoux reviewed 15,000 youngsters dressed in perfect youth uniforms.<sup>33</sup> The Yuvan, a local Cambodian youth group headed by Sihanouk, wore khaki shorts, short-sleeved shirts and forage caps, while the outfit for the cadres of Youth of Empire, a broad umbrella youth group at the Indochinese level, was white shorts and a white top – the color of the navy – which displayed on the front the victory sign in the French tricolors.<sup>34</sup> Order was expressed through dressing.

Decoux's strategic thinking gained through his navy days manifested itself in his policy of counteracting the appeal of anti-French ideology by attracting people through amusements and mass entertainment. At the same time, his government promoted a highly repressive policy toward local nationalists within the Vichy Empire.<sup>35</sup>

Illusions of strong commonalities between France and Vietnam were part of Decoux's thinking in celebrating Pétain:

With his age, his peasant roots, his experience, his victory at Verdun, and also his new slogan, 'Work, Family, Homeland,' which corresponded wonderfully to the deep and traditional desires of the masses, Pétain fitted unexpectedly well with the Confucian ideal, and whether we wanted it or not, immediately attracted the respect of the populations of Indochina . . . I would find the effigy of the Chief of the State all

along my rounds, on the most humble altars for the ancestors, in the most remote pagodas, and in the most modest indigenous schools.<sup>36</sup>

Decoux believed that a strong sense of community and the importance of the family unit and the work ethic in Vietnamese society would facilitate the transfer of Vichy ideals in such an environment.<sup>37</sup> He transposed his support for Pétain on the local population, an example of imaginary cross-identification. The presentation of Pétain as embodying a Confucian sage was based on French belief in the importance of Confucianism in Vietnam. However, K. W. Taylor and Alexander Woodside argued that Confucian practice was at best irregular and superficial. Further, Shawn McHale asserts that insufficient historical evidence exists to support the belief that Confucian teachings had been the main influence on the Vietnamese population for the last 1,000 years. Thus, the idea of Vietnam as a Confucian nation was created mainly by French and Vietnamese historians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>38</sup> The colonial regime stressed an essentialist Confucian past. As Taylor notes, "it was convenient for . . . the colonial regime . . . to have a definition of indigenous culture that enforced difference while at the same time prescribing unity and discipline."<sup>39</sup>

## **II. The Sporting Nation: Maurice Ducoroy**

### **A. Understanding the Colonial Mind**

In his 1949 book, written as a means to justify and defend his actions in Indochina, Navy Captain Ducoroy tells us about his love of sport from a young age, underlining that "only my sporting career interested me." He also mentioned that he grew up in a navy environment, being the son of a navy man. These two experiences shaped his worldview. His background was not unusual since Ronald Hood's study shows that half of the naval officers between the world wars came from naval families, preserving its patrimonial lineage.<sup>40</sup> His early habit of swimming, playing the Spanish game, pelota, and bicycling became sports that he later promoted in Indochina.<sup>41</sup> During his service, the navy took advantage of his "sporting fever" and he was put in charge of developing sports for the crew. His positive experience of sports as a child and in the military made him promote athletic pursuits.

While in the navy, he experienced marine officer Georges Hébert's "natural method," created in 1905, and transplanted it into Indochina. Hébert's conception of physical education was built around the notion of using "the eight classical groups of natural and utilitarian exercises:" walking, running, jumping, climbing,

lifting, throwing, defending and swimming. Such a practice stressed outdoor exercise in everyday life.<sup>42</sup> Writing on Hébert and his method during the war, Ducoroy insisted that it transformed deficient, undernourished youngsters into “healthy and vigorous” people. Indeed, he concluded that France needed strong citizens and subjects, not “useless” ones.<sup>43</sup>

Ducoroy’s love of sport and his navy background explained why he was nominated by Decoux to supervise youth and sport in Indochina. As soon as he was appointed to the position, Ducoroy decided to go on an information gathering tour in order, as he stated, “to see more closely things and people. . . . From beggars of a certain type we demanded, as well, information and opinions regarding the competence of the projects which were maturing in our mind.” Interestingly, he added how his source of information was limited to French and Indochinese administrators, raising again the question of how accurately he understood local societies.<sup>44</sup> Others who provided advice were a member of the *Grand conseil de l’Indochine*, a rich trader, notables, and Cambodian prince Monipong.<sup>45</sup>

Ducoroy believed that his tour gave him a better understanding of the “Indochinese mentality” through spot reporting and second-hand vignettes that he heard and that this information prevented him from making “errors of judgment.”<sup>46</sup> As Elizabeth Kier notes in her study of the French armed forces between the world wars, few institutions set aside as many resources for the assimilation of their members as did the French military. We can wonder if Ducoroy’s need to understand the Indochinese people was not a first step in order to incorporate natives as members of his sport plan and was inspired by the larger French military culture which had shaped his earlier life.<sup>47</sup>

However, these touring vignettes were not deep in their analysis. Rather, they captured a mood and gave Ducoroy a sense of being somewhat familiar with the local culture. For instance, witnessing the death of a woman bitten by a water snake, he evoked the religious beliefs of the local people – Buddha taking the form of a water snake in order to travel the sea – the harshness of their lives and their fatalism. Similarly, he retold stories that he had heard, including one which stressed the “non-evolué” Annamite’s belief in superstitions, to conclude that “faithfulness to traditions, contempt for death, respect for the elderly, these are the important characteristics of the Annamite race.”<sup>48</sup> Other French officials shared these perceptions – part of their habitus relevant to the field of colonial governing – which reinforced their belief that the Vichy ideology would appeal to the peasants by promoting local traditions and the persona of Pétain as a revered sage.

Ducoroy's trip allowed him to probe support for, and the physical feasibility of, the youth project in Indochina and to characterize the subjects according to their suitability for sports. He described Cambodians as "solid, well-built, a little nonchalant, but very friendly. The cross-breeding, frequent between Chinese and Cambodians, results in mixed-blood, handsome specimens who make excellent subjects."<sup>49</sup> In contrast, Annamites were described as shorter and less robust than Cambodians: "The Annamites are provided with short extremities which penalize them in speeding races; they have developed hips almost round [and] a remarkable suppleness when walking. They are short, fast to grab opportunity, very dexterous, they excel in certain sports: basketball, ping-pong, traditional Basque sport."<sup>50</sup> A "physical elite" had to be found in order to participate in competitions and embody the physical materialization of the ideology of strong bodies dedicated to the empire.<sup>51</sup>

#### B. Application of the Colonial Mind: Discipline and Unity through Sport and Spectacles

The navy culture conditioned Ducoroy's approach to his administrative work and influenced his youth and sporting policy based on a common language of discipline, pride, love of the homeland and an *esprit de corps* nurtured through sporting events and ceremonies. When he assumed his role as General Commissioner for Physical Education, Sports, and Youth, he stated that he expected the youth to behave like him, demonstrating "effort in discipline, a love of work well done, loyalty and good humor. Your motto will be 'United and strong to serve, united without distinction of race, origin, fortune, religion, physically and morally strong in order to serve with mutual help and honor.'"<sup>52</sup> These values and behavior were manifested during large sporting events, which also had the political aim of channeling energy toward supporting the Vichy regime. Such a motto went against the colonial practice of hierarchical differences among people, and especially between citizens and subjects. However, equality among the people was limited to their duty toward France, and had nothing to do with equality in rights between citizens and subjects. Ducoroy and Decoux were hoping to transfer to the local youth a navy culture based on pride in service and unquestioned commitment from the subalterns. Hood argues that navy officers often converted their religious values into secular habits. They often spoke of their belief in the necessity of "human suffering, personal sacrifice, authority, strong discipline, and the elimination of individuality."<sup>53</sup>

Ducoroy's belief in "the extraordinary taste of Orientals for big spectacles" resulted in a policy of grandiose sporting spectacles. He

organized state-sponsored sporting events “which for months occupied minds and found considerable success with millions of enthusiastic and often passionate spectators.”<sup>54</sup> As Ducoroy wrote in 1945, the youth project’s “principal goal was to maintain youngsters who were obedient and steeped in a French atmosphere, and to distract them as much as possible from the influence of the Japanese, whose well-orchestrated propaganda and military prestige was posing an immediate threat at this glorious hour to French work in this country.”<sup>55</sup>

Ducoroy perceived these spectacles as a means of getting in touch with the masses and stimulating their feeling of attachment to the imperial motherland. However, the only expression of the masses that he captured was their cheering; otherwise they appeared in his reports and diverse writings as either mute or displaying “too demonstrative” gestures of friendship “for my liking.”<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, Ducoroy appreciated this support and seemed to have wrongly presumed that the widespread appreciation of his sporting policy extended to the whole colonial enterprise.

One of these events was the annual *Tour d'Indochine* bike race covering 3,900 kilometers, which started in 1941. Ducoroy stated how “the Governor General wanted to show the youth of the federation the value of disciplined effort, to give it [the youth] confidence in its possibilities – which are enormous – and, making use of the spectacular aspect [of it], to win over a ‘mass,’ not yet reached, to the sporting idea.”<sup>57</sup> The winner was sent on a lecture tour to promote the “sporting cause” and the values taught through such activities.<sup>58</sup> For Ducoroy, these spectacles were an ethical diversion, a moralizing force and a crowd control device to proclaim the glory of France.

Another type of tour was the cinematic propaganda tour, which aimed to stimulate the sporting spirit and to inspire youngsters to participate in competitive sport with the locals, as portrayed in the movie, “Cyclist tour of Indochina.” The intensive physical training would serve to channel the youths’ energy away from subversive activities, while building strong subjects ready to serve the colonial cause.

Commenting on Sihanouk’s birthday, where 15,000 youngsters took an oath to the king, Ducoroy stressed the “remarkable cohesion” displayed by such a disparate group of Cambodians, French, Annamites, Chinese and Malays, who marched, saluted and sang together. To him the event represented the realization of the Vichy regime’s desire to build a “new man:” the youth had improved their physical endurance; only three youngsters were unable to withstand a few hours’ exposure to the harsh sun. A spirit of mutual help had also grown among the youth, with some of them covering



the city of Phnom Penh at night and rescuing homeless youngsters.<sup>59</sup> The cohesion and the attitude displayed by these youngsters reinforced Ducoroy's belief that collective sports reached a wide cross-section of people and developed camaraderie beyond the divisions of race and class. Playing games created interaction and sociability, the desire to be together, and expressions of feeling.<sup>60</sup>

Ducoroy frequently inaugurated the opening of newly-built stadiums. He often delivered a speech, while youngsters performed physical exercises. Some inaugurations were grandiose spectacles, like the event at Yen Mo in 1942, in the province of Ninh-Binh. Five thousand people attended the ceremonies at the stadium, while 200 youngsters performed physical exercises.<sup>61</sup> Ducoroy argued that the "Orientals" craved fun, music and leisure-oriented activities in their villages, where life was often sterile and harsh. Similarly, 50,000 youngsters from different provinces gathered in Bienhoa in August 1942 to demonstrate physical exercises under the guidance of cadres. Attachment to the motherland was symbolized through the wearing of a forage cap in one of the colors of the tricolors. At the closing ceremony, Ducoroy, accompanied by Decoux, reminded the youth of their motto: "United and Strong in order to Serve."

For Ducoroy, such occasions were necessary in order to teach unity to the youngsters, and to show the recalcitrant ones that the youth program was a reality, not a "fiction."<sup>62</sup> As Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning contended in different contexts, sport is an area where untamed emotions are allowed to be expressed, but only up to a point. The policy in Indochina was to channel youngsters' energy toward inoffensive activities and to organize part of their social life through the institutional management of excitement in society, while teaching them self-control – for Ducoroy, sport "calms and appeases" – and an ideology of unity behind the empire.<sup>63</sup>

The Indochinese people's support for the colonial enterprise stemmed from the "effort of France" in serving Indochina through the building of roads, schools, hospitals and so on. As Ducoroy underlines, such service "proves, in every place, the generosity of our country's colonial work," creating an *esprit de corps* between the colonial nation and its leaders.<sup>64</sup> However, based on a Vietnamese man's personal account, Ducoroy seemed to have been unaware that some Vietnamese writers spoofed the Ducoroy project in village satires performed in the Vietnamese language. The interviewee added that the chief of districts required the village chief to bring youngsters to sports events as a means of maintaining the illusion of wide support.<sup>65</sup> Hence, these mass leisure activities may have succeeded in attracting people due to the use of a mildly

coercive policy rather than through the exercise of free will by the natives.

Methods of mobilization included not only marches and sporting competitions, but also symbolic acts. For instance, 500 Youth Monitors of Indochina gathered together in Hué for the *grand Rassemblement fédéral de la Jeunesse* in order to organize a model camp under the direction of Captain Vaziaga, Director of the Higher School for Youth [male] Cadres in Phanthiet. As the propaganda stated:

Intended to supervise the Youth of Empire, they [cadres] will resume, tomorrow – after coming to re-immense themselves in the fortifying atmosphere of camping life – as head of their respective groups. It is they who educate our Youth, who teach them the lessons of duty and discipline which they have themselves received, they who supervise these activities, recall the examples of abnegation and heroism, foreground the old virtues, and preach the example. Educate healthy souls into bodies full of vitality and prepare thoughtful, disciplined and strong men whom the Empire needs in order to continue the rhythm of its life in the world and maintain a position which will give right [over it] by virtue of its children.<sup>66</sup>

The empire played a very important part in Marshal Pétain's policy of trying to maintain a vision of France as a great power during the German occupation.<sup>67</sup> The colonies were also perceived as bargaining tools to use in the event of a strong postwar Germany dominating Europe; thus, the need to have strong and disciplined subjects embodying the vitality of a great nation. Again the military ethos was propagated with an insistence on "abnegation" and "heroism" in the service of the imperial nation.

National sentiments regarding the French region of Alsace-Lorraine were transposed onto the Cambodian province of Battambang. More precisely, the loss of the provinces of Battambang and most of Siem Reap to Thailand following a conflict from September 1940 to March 1941 (the French managed to retain Angkor) pushed Ducoroy to identify the loss of Battambang with the loss of a well-known French region to Germany: "The question of Battambang became [to Cambodia] a comparable question to the one of Alsace Lorraine for us French."<sup>68</sup> Self-reference to historical French events perpetuated a general worldview which had an impact on policymaking, such as promoting similar repertoires of patriotic commemoration in France and Cambodia, where soil from the lost territories was mixed with earth from every region of the country. For instance, at the departure of the "race of the torch" (*la course au flambeau*), a foot race from Angkor to Hanoi in the fall of 1941, Prince Sihanouk lit the torch while 500 monks handed him an urn containing soil gathered from the provinces lost to Thailand.<sup>69</sup> Such cross-identification indicates how the earlier

socialization and cultural exposure of Ducoroy were precursors to policy-oriented symbolic ceremonies.

### III. The Lao Nation: Jean Rochet

#### A. Understanding the Colonial Mind

Rochet's earlier experience as a French pupil, and later on as a staff member of the French educational most likely affected his comprehension of Laos, and also some of the later policies that he encouraged in the country, especially that of reinforcing and nurturing ties between the greater fatherland (the French empire) and the small one (Laos).

Indeed, as Jean-François Chanet's work has demonstrated, from 1789 to 1940, the republican school in France served as a tool to reconcile regional and national patriotisms in the construction of a united national entity, through a discourse of love of the *grande patrie*, or greater fatherland, and the *petite patrie*, or small fatherland. National feeling was still weak in France during the nineteenth century, and school teachers had the responsibility of teaching pupils a national identity. The teachers did not fully obliterate local patriotisms, but used them to interpret the nation, portraying the latter as an organism made of many local regions.<sup>70</sup>

As a product of the republican school and an admirer of Laos, Rochet sought to advance and elevate Laos' contribution to the federation of Indochina and the French imperial state. Acknowledging the positive role of the local (Laos) to the formation of the modern French imperial state was a means of developing Laotians' feelings of attachment toward the empire.

Rochet, a civil state employee, came to Laos in the early 1930s as Director of Public Education and developed a sincere affection for the country and its people, and bitterness over French neglect of Laos.<sup>71</sup> He feared that Laos would be swallowed up by either Thailand or Vietnam. France had failed to fulfill its civilizing mission by developing local talent, preferring to bring the Vietnamese in to run the Lao administration. Similar views were expressed through the Rochet-like character Barjon, the Chief of Education in Laos, in Rochet's book, *Pays Lao*:

Not only did these [Laotian] people not have cadres to administer it [Laos] and to defend it, but it also lacked the most elementary notions, the most useful knowledge. And, beyond its borders, two redoubtable ethnic blocks were adapting themselves rapidly to modern life. Laos was dozing in blissful ignorance, but its neighbors, prolific, active and studious, were becoming more intrusive each day. How could these people resist?<sup>72</sup>

Rochet's anxiety over Vietnamese immigration and Thai expansionism led him to stress the revitalization of Laotian cultural life as one

of the foundations of Indochinese identity. Playing on the multiple facets of the Indochinese identity, Rochet, through his Barjon personage, described Laos as a nation full of poets, as opposed to a contrasting and essentialist vision of the Vietnamese bureaucrat as "impeccable," who "radiate[d] order and neatness . . . methodical, tidy and even meticulous."<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, the Rochet-like character Barjon asserted that Laotians were not very different from Frenchmen. This view challenged the general colonial perception of Laotians as the most "backward" of the native Indochinese, which in turn led to a colonial policy of staffing the local French bureaucracy with Vietnamese rather than Laotians. For example, Barjon observed that due to their good nature, gaiety, sense of poetry, music, frankness and facility in speaking French, Laotians, among the Indochinese, were closest to the French. For Barjon, this situation decreased the boundary that divided the two groups and made the prospect of fruitful collaboration between them possible.<sup>74</sup> At odds with the majority of his own administration, Rochet believed that the colonial administration should intervene on behalf of the Laotians rather than considering the territory as an annex of Vietnam.

Rochet's tendency to claim a Laotian identity and present himself as "quite Laotian" in his tastes was a form of introjection. He even displayed what could be called a "Laotian sense of poetry" and myth-telling in his book. For instance, one of his characters explained that the presumed main feature of the Laotians was their "resignation" – a characterization supported by Rochet.<sup>75</sup> What he does not tell us is that the explanation was part of local folklore. The source of such characterization took place at the beginning of the world, when god created seven men of different races and decided that they would all receive the same amount of virtues and vices. Unfortunately, the distribution was not done fairly due to fighting among some of the men. The Lao man, arriving late, received what was left of the virtues and vices: seven portions of "resignation" after receiving an enormous serving of "naivety" and "piety", a double share of "gentleness" and a triple part of "kindness."<sup>76</sup> However, despite the fact that Rochet felt almost like a full-fledged Laotian, his description of Lao subjects was very much anchored within the French stereotyping of such natives, and explained his belief in the need to rescue Laotians from extinction. Such gentle people squeezed between two expansionist nations needed to nurture a Lao nationalism under French protection. His assumptions about Laotians affected how he justified France's intervention in the country in its mission to uplift the Lao population.

In Rochet's book, a character named Khan Lit linked such resignation to Buddhism and insisted that while this religion in Laos

was “good natured,” the fact that the Laotians were completely devoted to their faith, which pervaded every aspect of their life, only nurtured within them “gentleness and resignation.” According to Rochet, such qualities were dangerous since a fight had to be orchestrated against Vietnam’s and Thailand’s influence. Thus, the duty, according to the other Rochet-like character, Baudran, the leader of the Lao Movement, to “drag [them] out of their sleep, to shake them, to instruct them, to show them the danger and to teach them new ways of living so as a race they continue to live, and not to die off.”<sup>77</sup>

Yet he sometimes characterized Lao territory as a garden of delight. For instance, in his semi-fictional account of Laos during World War II, Rochet presented not only a certain ambivalence toward the issue of the conservation of society versus evolution (economic and educational development), but even embraced a contemplative tone when Barjon had a discussion with Baudran about the prospect of Laos after the war. Barjon observed that there was no point in speculating about Laos’ future and that such an attitude was “the secret of Buddha.”<sup>78</sup>

#### B. Application of the Colonial Mind: Brokering

The fact that Rochet was a product of the French educational system affected his development as a broker for Lao culture in his dealings with Decoux to strengthen, through cultural events and education, a centralized Lao identity independent of Thailand and based on larger Laotian political participation. This political role of broker was part of the repertoire of activities of French teachers in the métropole, who emphasized the key role of the *petite patrie* in the renewal of the *grande patrie*.

Decoux decided to boost Lao nationalism and modernize and integrate the country more fully into the Indochinese federation in order to counteract a pan-Thai movement aimed at uniting all the Thai people of Siam, Burma and Indochina, as well as Japan’s obvious compliance toward Thai expansionism in Laos. Rochet had a strong influence in shaping such a policy through the *Lao Nhay* or Lao Renovation Movement, launched in 1941 as a means of awakening Lao patriotism. The main task of this movement was to promote a common culture to nurture a national identity in a country divided into regional identities, and to differentiate it clearly from Thailand, which contained part of the ethnic Lao population.

Rochet derived his power as a broker on behalf of a segment of Laos’ culture from the fact that Governor-General Decoux appreciated his input on Laos. As Decoux wrote in the margins of one of

the letters he received from Rochet: "The interesting letters that I receive come from Rochet."<sup>79</sup> Returning in February 1943 from a two-month tour of central and southern Laos, Rochet wrote that during such expeditions he was in touch "continuously with Laotians from all ranks and all backgrounds." Such tours nourished his belief that Laos was "a country that I believe I understand and to which I am deeply attached."<sup>80</sup>

As a means of awakening a Lao ethnic identity within the population, Rochet chose to follow the "conquest of the hearts" approach of the previous colonial administrator, Auguste Pavie.<sup>81</sup> Pavie was a French explorer who traveled through Laos in the 1880s and 1890s in search of trade routes and alliances with tribes and other groups. Through hard political bargains he prevented Thai control over Laos and turned the region into a French colony thanks to different political alliances with the Lao royal courts and highland tribal groups. Later, as a governor, Pavie perceived himself as the father of Laos and referred to Laotians as "my dear children" – pleasant but incapable, thus needing France to guide them. While both Rochet and Pavie had French and Laotian interests at heart, Rochet wanted to give some power to the locals. While Pavie taught his subjects to think of themselves as French, Rochet reminded them that they were Laotian.<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, reflecting on the *Lao Nhay* movement, Rochet put "this dawn of Lao patriotism" in continuity with the work of Pavie.<sup>83</sup> Rochet believed that in "materializ[ing] this Lao idea," "we have sowed [this Lao idea] in their hearts and minds." More precisely, he suggested creating a Lao Congress where Lao representatives would meet to talk over social issues ranging from hygiene and education to training the elite. Through these gatherings, members would acquire a propensity to "speak of Laos as a communal homeland" and encourage demonstrations of Lao loyalty toward France.<sup>84</sup>

As a gesture to make the *Lao Nhay* movement of renovation more Laotian, Rochet resigned in July 1944, telling Decoux he was no longer in charge of it because he wanted to reduce the "Rochet" character of the movement. He added:

It is necessary today that the work asserts itself publicly as independent from its creator. This is in its interest and the interest of the French administration. My support remains, and it will be entirely dedicated to it, but it will be from the outside.<sup>85</sup>

For Rochet, not only did the Laotians have a duty toward the French, but the colonial administration also had a duty toward Laos in developing education and building a strong Lao identity as

a means to counteract the Thai and Vietnamese menace of domination over the country. In his mind, Laotian subjects were entitled to expect the colonial power to govern in their interests as part of the civilizing ideology. Rochet would criticize "the Hanoi government" for making decisions unfavorable to the Laotians. For instance, through the character Maze, chief of a province, Rochet complained about the federal policy of building stadiums and especially "colonial roads" in Laos, which did not help Laotians in their everyday lives; on the contrary, it inflicted long hours of free labor on a sparse population.<sup>86</sup>

As Director of Public Education, Rochet was sensitive not only to the question of education but also its quality. Part of the modernization project included the opening of more village schools. While Rochet noted how satisfied he was with the rapid expansion of schooling, he underlined how the demand for schools from villagers outweighed the supply. Thus, he deplored the lack of school teachers, which led to "makeshift devices . . . which certainly won't result in high pedagogy." Unlike the educator's mind, Decoux, of a more pragmatic bent and more concerned with the propaganda aspects of schooling, underlined the words "high pedagogy" in Rochet's letter and wrote next to it: "I don't give a damn."<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the colonial government in Hanoi had limited expectations of Laotians, as an administrative report at the time underlined that primary education in rural Laos should cost little money and teach basic writing, reading and counting skills aimed at training future peasants or workers.<sup>88</sup>

While we cannot question Rochet's attachment to Laos, we can dispute some of his perceptions of the country, especially when Rochet himself pointed out how "meager his Laotian vocabulary" was.<sup>89</sup> For instance, in a letter to Decoux, he stated that the Lao Renovation, started two years ago, succeeded in "turn[ing] the eyes of our Laotians away from Thailand . . . toward the 'Lao homeland.'"<sup>90</sup> Yet such a statement was incorrect since some of the elite still regarded Thailand as a political ally in helping to attain independence from France, and the people of Southern Laos had always had a tendency to look across the river to Siam rather than to Vientiane.<sup>91</sup> Pro-Thai nationalist elements existed within the local elite. In addition, the building of an Indochinese identity frightened some of them, as they were anxious about "internal" Vietnamese colonialism.

In fact, Rochet did not take into consideration regional variations when it came to boosting a Lao identity. Instead of brokering between the different segments of Laos, Rochet embraced a cultural imagination of Laos built around the ethnic-Lao population, dismissing the culture of the ethnic tribes of the highland area, for

instance, which would have to assimilate into this specific Lao identity. This undifferentiated Laos consolidated and united around the Lao ethnic culture echoes the construction of a French nation from 1789 to 1940. Thus, Rochet was transposing in Laos a French centralized administrative mind which managed a métropole made of "territories [which were] conquered, annexed, and integrated in a political and administrative whole" and assimilated into the French culture.<sup>92</sup>

### III. Conclusion

As this analysis demonstrates, these three colonial officials' views of the local societies and their perceptions of the proper conduct of their mission had an impact on policymaking in Indochina during World War II. Admiral Decoux appears as a navy mind directed primarily toward the administration and accomplishment of his mission rather than toward the people. What he noted and magnified about the locals were allegiance to the regime, order, discipline and patriotic rituals which would create an *esprit de corps* among the nation akin to that in the navy.

Ducoroy also shared a navy mind in addition to his love of sports. He analyzed local societies through their suitability for sports, often only noticing their enthusiasm for sporting activities or exotic vignettes of life that supported his assumptions about these societies, such as their presupposed contempt for life, for instance. Ducoroy tried to transfer this *esprit de corps* and discipline to the locals through sporting parades, games and the pursuit of different sports as one means of building a navy nation that obeyed its leaders unconditionally.<sup>93</sup>

While Decoux and Ducoroy were regional administrators, Rochet, a local official, offered a more specific case in relation to Laos. Rochet belonged to the category of colonial officers who admired and were seduced by the local society in which they lived and who tried to understand them better. He was not a scholar-administrator as his understanding of Laos was sometimes superficial and erroneous, but his strong love for the country made him believe that he was almost a Laotian. Still, some of his knowledge of Laotians was old stereotyping, such as the natives' inborn taste for feasts, their resignation and carefree personalities. While he was attracted to the simple Laotian way of life – "I doubt that we could find another place on the planet where living was so gentle"<sup>94</sup> – the survival of Laos was at stake and demanded proper guidance to turn Laotians into strong patriots who could assist the French in the political project of consolidating Laos as an entity in itself. His outlook and attitude of guardianship toward Laos made him fight



for the preservation of a certain Laos and for the right of Laotians to rule their country in tandem with the French, rather than relying on the Vietnamese.

All the three administrators inherited knowledge of indigenous people from previous colonial officers and as transmitted through the bureaucracy as part of their habitus. Such information also affected policymaking. However, the knowledge that each gained regarding Indochina was constrained by their backgrounds and the way they perceived their functions. This is evident in the preconceptions and generalizations that each had of their respective administrative territory. Decoux believed in the vital importance of Confucianism in Vietnam; Ducoroy perceived the Indochinese as having a "taste . . . for big spectacles;" and Rochet dismissed the cultural diversity of Laos.

These three individuals had different orientations as administrators, and were part of a larger pattern in the French empire. Decoux embodied the administrator whose political preference for the Vichy regime suited his autocratic tendencies and who set for himself a mission to maintain French grandeur abroad, facing the challenge of nourishing a common sense of purpose among diverse populations, and mobilizing tradition in defense of authority.<sup>95</sup>

Ducoroy was the bureaucrat who obeyed orders and orchestrated stage productions of sporting events which were not just pure entertainment, but were supposed to transcend differences and unify disparate groups behind the Vichy regime. He was part of what Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal describe as the French navy during World War II: "a tightly knit and homogeneous group of dedicated officers and men" obeying without question the demands of their superiors.<sup>96</sup> In addition, Indochina was a space where he could also test the positive effects of sport on the population.

Finally, Rochet was the colonial officer in love with a colony, who replicated attributes belonging to the Laotians in himself and tried to save them from different predators by influencing policymaking. However, his identification was only with the ethnic Lao, while silencing the voices of other ethnic groups through his *Lao Nhay* movement of renovation. Despite believing that he had the interests of Laotians at heart, his consolidation of a Lao identity meant assimilating and constraining the minority members of the Laotian population. Rochet carried two tendencies within himself: his desire to preserve the native culture, and at the same time elevate it in order to coincide with France's self-image as a country with a strong and centralized identity.

Through these three examples, we can discern Decoux and Ducoroy displaying more of an "administrative sensibility" comfortable with power, whereas Rochet, evolving at the local stage,

seemed to be able to make space for more emotion and self-selection. For Rochet, the grand “tensions of Empire” so carefully explicated by Cooper and Stoler in their seminal work were in this case within himself, as he vacillated between different conceptions of the colonial vision.<sup>97</sup> Despite their differences, the policies of these three men encapsulate what the Vichy period stood for in Indochina, and the impact of psychic processes on policymaking. The interplay of the three colonial minds that have been the subject of this study in turn illuminate more general issues regarding prototypes of administrators within the empire, and how their classification and transposition of knowledge had repercussions on administrative procedures and rules.

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### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, London: Methuen & CO. LTD, 1956.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban*, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Memmi, *The colonizer and the colonized*, New York: The Orion Press, 1965 (1957), pp. 84–86.

<sup>7</sup> George Steinmetz, “The Devil’s Handwriting’: Precolonial Discourse, Ethnographic Acuity, and Cross-Identification in German Colonialism,” *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, 2003, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Rochet, *Pays Lao: Le Laos dans la Tourmente 1939–1945*, Paris: Jean Vigneau, 1946, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Véronique Dimier, “Direct or Indirect Rule: Propaganda around a Scientific Controversy,” in Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 168–183.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control Between the Wars*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Claude Abzac-Epezy, *La Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Report no. 9, "Youth-sports," in "Conseil Fédéral Indochinois 1941," GGI, référence 65295, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France [hereafter CAOM].

<sup>13</sup> "Adresse du Vice-Amiral d'Escadre Decoux," *La Tribune d'Indochine*, 22 July 1940.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> John Steward Ambler, *The French Army in Politics, 1945–1962*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Decoux, "Preface," in Maurice Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, Paris: Les Editions Inter-Nationales, 1949, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Decoux, *A la Barre de l'Indochine: histoire de mon gouvernement général 1940–1945*, Paris: Plon, 1949, p. 378.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Chalmers III Hood, *Royal Republicans: The French Naval Dynasties between the World Wars*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1985, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Decoux, *A la Barre de l'Indochine*, p. 206.

<sup>20</sup> Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925–1945*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, pp. 26–34; Telegram no. 783, agence FOM, box 272, file 451. CAOM. Such youth organizations gained more than a million members over the war period, while the governor-general of Indochina reported 600,000 members in February 1944 alone. Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940–1955: Viet Nam and the French Experience*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>22</sup> Amiral Decoux, "Message de l'Amiral Decoux," *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 4 May 1941.

<sup>23</sup> "Au pays de la grande paix," *Indochine*, n. 168, November 18, 1943, p. 17. Decoux perceived rightly the importance of the family and filial piety, which was at the center of the Vietnamese ethical system, and ancestor worship, which was a very important activity of the male heir. However, Confucian familism started to erode by the early thirties, with the individual becoming more independent of his elders and relatives. The incapacity of the colonial power or Vietnamese nationalists to turn Confucianism into a suitable national doctrine and the search for a means of unifying the Vietnamese would help the communist ideology to expand. David Joel Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985, p. 307; Alexander B. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976, p. 160.

<sup>24</sup> Decoux, *A la Barre de l'Indochine*, pp. 271–72.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce McFarland Lockhart, *The End of the Vietnamese Monarchy*, New Haven: Council of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993, chapter 10; Decoux, *A la Barre de l'Indochine*, p. 274.

<sup>26</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial 1920–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, pp. 86–87.

<sup>27</sup> "Après quatre ans: Une interview de l'Amiral Decoux," *Indochine*, n. 203, 20 July 1944, pp. 2–4.

<sup>28</sup> "Le salut aux Drapeaux à l'Université," *Indochine*, n. 29, 20 March 1941, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ton-That-Binh, "Patrie Française et Patrie Annamite," *Indochine*, 2 August 1941, pp. 4–6.

- <sup>30</sup> "La fête de Jeanne d'Arc en province (suite)," *France-Annam*, 20 May 1943, p. 2; "La fête de Jeanne d'Arc en province (suite)," *France-Annam*, 21 May 1943, p. 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, p. 71.
- <sup>32</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, pp. 74–75, 252.
- <sup>33</sup> No title, *Indochine*, n. 223, 7 December 1944.
- <sup>34</sup> Circular no. 373–CGB, 9 March 1942, CAOM; Maurice Ducoroy, "Jeunesse d'Empire Français," *Sports-Jeunesse d'Indochine*, 12 March 1942, p. 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Martin Thomas, *The French Empire at War 1940–1945*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 196.
- <sup>36</sup> Decoux, *A la Barre de l'Indochine*, p. 360.
- <sup>37</sup> "Paroles de l'Amiral DECOUX à la Jeunesse Indochinoise," *Indochine*, n. 47, 28 July 1941, pp. 9–11.
- <sup>38</sup> K. W. Taylor, "Vietnamese Confucian Narratives," pp. 337–69; Alexander Woodside, "Classical Primordialism and the Historical Agendas of Vietnamese Confucianism," pp. 116–43; Shawn McHale, "Mapping a Vietnamese Past and its Transition to Modernity," pp. 397–430; all in Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan and Herman Ooms, eds., *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Korea, and Vietnam*, Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002.
- <sup>39</sup> Taylor, "Vietnamese Confucian Narratives," p. 363.
- <sup>40</sup> Hood, *Royal Republicans*, p. 32.
- <sup>41</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, pp. 26–29.
- <sup>42</sup> Pierre Giolitto, *Histoire de la jeunesse sous Vichy*, Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1991, pp. 196–97.
- <sup>43</sup> Maurice Ducoroy, "Hébert et la Méthode Naturelle," *Indochine*, 26 June 1943; Capitaine de Frégate Ducoroy, "La Leçon Hébert d'éducation physique," *Indochine*, 17 July 1941, pp. 8–11.
- <sup>44</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, p. 43.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 61, 70, 77.
- <sup>46</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, p. 47.
- <sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars," *International Security*, vol. 19, n. 4, Spring 1995, p. 69.
- <sup>48</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, pp. 47–56.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- <sup>50</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, pp. 165–166.
- <sup>51</sup> Report no. 9, "Youth-sports," in "Conseil Fédéral Indochinois 1941," GGI, reference 65295, CAOM.
- <sup>52</sup> "Appel du Commandant Ducoroy," *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 22 December 1941.
- <sup>53</sup> Hood, *Royal Republicans*, p. 87.
- <sup>54</sup> Rapport du capitaine de Vaisseau Ducoroy, Saigon, 21 September 1945, in "pièces annexes," HCI, conspol 247, CAOM.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, pp. 94, 134.
- <sup>57</sup> M. Ducoroy, "Tour de France – Tour d'Indochine," *Indochine*, March 11, 1943, n. 132, pp. IX–XI.
- <sup>58</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, p. 189.
- <sup>59</sup> Ducoroy, "Le chef vous parle," *Sport Jeunesse d'Indochine*, southern edition, n. 67, 18 November 1943, p. 3.
- <sup>60</sup> Ducoroy, "Paroles de Chef," *La Tribune Indochinoise*, 17 April 1942; Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, p. 30.

<sup>61</sup> "Inauguration du stade de Yen-Mo à Ninh-Binh," *L'Annam Nouveau*, 19 April 1942, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> "Premier rassemblement interprovincial des jeunes," *Sport Jeunesse d'Indochine*, southern edition, n. 1, August 1942, p. 9; Ducoroy, "Le chef vous parle," *Sport Jeunesse d'Indochine*, southern edition, n. 3, August 1942, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement in the Civilizing Process*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986; Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, p. 30.

<sup>64</sup> Ducoroy, *Ma Trahison en Indochine*, p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Trung Dac Vy, Hanoi, May 10, 1999.

<sup>66</sup> R. B. "Le Grand Rassemblement Fédérale de la Jeunesse Indochinoise à Hué," *Indochine*, n. 177, 20 January 1944.

<sup>67</sup> Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de la France Coloniale 1914-1990*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1990, pp. 318-19.

<sup>68</sup> Rapport du capitaine de Vaisseau Ducoroy, Saigon, 21 September 1945, in "pièces annexes," HCI, conspol 247, CAOM.

<sup>69</sup> "La course du flambeau," *Indochine*, 18 December 1941, p. 18. See Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, chapter 8 for a discussion of this repertoire. Robert Hervet, *Les Compagnons de France*, Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1965, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Jean-François Chanut, *l'Ecole républicaine et les petites patries*, Paris: Aubier, 1996.

<sup>71</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1945," in Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy, eds., *Laos: War and Revolution*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970, p. 94; Nguyễn Thê, "La place du Laos dans la littérature coloniale," *Viet Nam infos*, p. 5 at <http://www.infos.com/selection/histoire/Place%20Laos.html>

<sup>72</sup> Rochet, *Pays Lao*, p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Rochet, *Pays Lao*, p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> Jean Rochet, "Une soirée imprévue," *Indochine*, n. 142, 19 June 1941, pp. 9-12.

<sup>76</sup> Rochet, *Pays Lao*, pp. 50-53.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-35, 42.

<sup>78</sup> Rochet, *Pays Lao*, p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> Lettre de Rochet à Jean Decoux, Vientiane, 12 July 1944, 14 PA 6, CAOM.

<sup>80</sup> Lettre de Rochet à Jean Decoux, Vientiane, 23 February 1943, 14 PA 6, CAOM.

<sup>81</sup> Jean Rochet, "La légion au Laos," *Indochine*, n. 51, 21 August 1941, pp. 13-14.

<sup>82</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1945," in Adams and McCoy, *Laos: War and Revolution*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>83</sup> Jean Rochet, "Une soirée imprévue," *Indochine*, n. 142, 19 June 1941, pp. 9-12.

<sup>84</sup> Lettre de Charles Rochet à Jean Decoux, Vientiane, 23 February 1943, 14PA6, CAOM, emphasis in original.

<sup>85</sup> Lettre de Rochet à Jean Decoux, Vientiane, 4 April 1944, 14 PA 6, CAOM.

<sup>86</sup> Rochet, *Pays Lao*, pp. 54-61.

<sup>87</sup> Lettre de Rochet à Jean Decoux, Vientiane, 12 July 1944, 14 PA 6, CAOM.

<sup>88</sup> Report no. 11 "Diffusion d'un enseignement . . .," in "Conseil Fédéral Indochinois 1941," GGI, reference 65295, CAOM.

<sup>89</sup> Jean Rochet, "Une soirée imprévue," *Indochine*, n. 142, 19 June 1941, pp. 9–12.

<sup>90</sup> Lettre de Rochet à Jean Decoux, Vientiane, 23 February 1943, 14 PA 6, CAOM.

<sup>91</sup> Soren Ivarsson, "Bringing Laos into Existence: Laos between Indochina and Siam, 1860–1945," Ph.D dissertation, University of Copenhagen, 1999, p. 97.

<sup>92</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen, The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*, Stanford University Press, 1976, p. 485.

<sup>93</sup> While some scholars might feel that this "navy mind" may merely be a product of the kind of conservative militarism and physicality embodied by Marshal Pétain's National Revolution, I would argue that Pétain himself reflected a prototypical "army mind," whose values and norms were quite close to those of the navy; or that he belongs to what Bourdieu calls an autonomous field – in this case the army – which has its own rules, forms of authority, and culture of success.

<sup>94</sup> Rochet, "Preface," *Pays Lao*, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> John E. Dreifort, *Myopic Grandeur: The Ambivalence of French Foreign Policy toward the Far East, 1919–1945*, Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1991, p. 238.

<sup>96</sup> Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II*, Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1959, pp. 17–18.

<sup>97</sup> In this classic work, the authors underline the tensions among the different groups which constituted the colonial world. See Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world*, Berkeley: California University Press, 1997.