

*The*  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF  
FRENCH INDO-CHINA

*By*  
CHARLES ROBEQUAIN

*Translation By Isabel A. Ward*

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*Supplement*  
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INDO-CHINA: 1939-1943

*By*  
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*Issued under the auspices of the International Secretariat,  
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**THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF  
FRENCH INDO-CHINA**

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## FOREWORD

This translation of Professor Robequain's valuable study is of special importance today. It makes generally available for the first time to readers outside France what is probably the most authoritative and up-to-date economic analysis of a territory which is bound to be of unusual significance in any Far Eastern peace settlement. The French edition of the book was published in 1939, but unfortunately only a few copies were distributed outside France before the German occupation and it has, therefore, been impossible to obtain ready access to copies though they have been much in demand by Government departments and research organizations. It is hoped that the present English edition will serve to meet the increasing public interest which is likely to be expressed in the future development of this colony.

An attempt has been made in a supplementary chapter to sketch some of the principal economic developments in Indo-China since the French edition appeared. The evidence on what is happening under Japanese occupation is, of course, fragmentary and not always too reliable but a special effort has been made to consult the most trustworthy sources of information both documentary and personal. It should be emphasized that Professor Robequain, who has not been able to leave Paris and has thus not been consulted on this English edition of his book, is in no way responsible either for the translation or for the supplementary chapter. It has been fortunately possible to consult some of his colleagues in the *Centre d'Études de Politique Étrangère* which sponsored the publication of the French edition and their advice has been greatly appreciated, although they too are not to be held responsible for the text of the English edition. The International Secretariat of the Institute of Pacific Relations, which contributed financial assistance for the original study, has made all the arrangements for the present English edition.

Special thanks are due to Mrs. Isabel A. Ward who under-

took the tedious work of translating almost all of the text and to Miss Katrine R. C. Greene who gave assistance in the completion of this task and also in the preparation of the supplementary chapter. Miss Virginia Thompson and Dr. J. R. Andrus also contributed substantially to the supplementary chapter and M. Pierre Laurin and several other members of the French Committee of Liberation have contributed valuable information or advice. For the editing and proof-reading of the book, thanks are due to the following present or former staff members of the Institute of Pacific Relations: Miss Hilda Austern, Miss Katrine Parsons, Miss Frances Friedman, Mr. Philip E. Lilienthal.

It should be noted that Professor Robequain's work was undertaken in close cooperation with Professor Pierre Gourou whose book *L'Utilisation du Sol en Indochine Française* was also published under the same auspices in 1939. Plans are now being made for an English edition of this basic work on the economic geography and agriculture of Indo-China to appear under the auspices of the Institute of Pacific Relations.

W. L. HOLLAND

*Research Secretary*

*New York*

*February 1944*

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

A glance at the table of contents will immediately reveal to the reader the plan and the limited purposes of this work. My wish has been to show the changes effected in the economy of Indo-China as a result of the French occupation. M. Guy Lacam has been good enough to accept responsibility for writing the chapter on "Capital." The traditional activities have not been described as fully as they merit, if one considers the preponderant place which they take, in spite of recent developments, in the life of the country and in the value of its production and its trade. These activities are, however, the subject of another work also published by the *Centre d'Études de Politique Étrangère* and written by M. Pierre Gourou, *Land Utilization in French Indo-China*. We have worked together and our two books are complementary.

I began the writing of this book in the course of a recent journey in Indo-China, a journey permitted thanks to the cooperation of the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of the Colonies and of the Government-General of Indo-China. I extend my thanks to all of those—and they were many—whose competence and friendliness have facilitated my investigations. I can show them no better evidence of my gratitude than by striving for impartiality.

*Paris, May 25, 1939*

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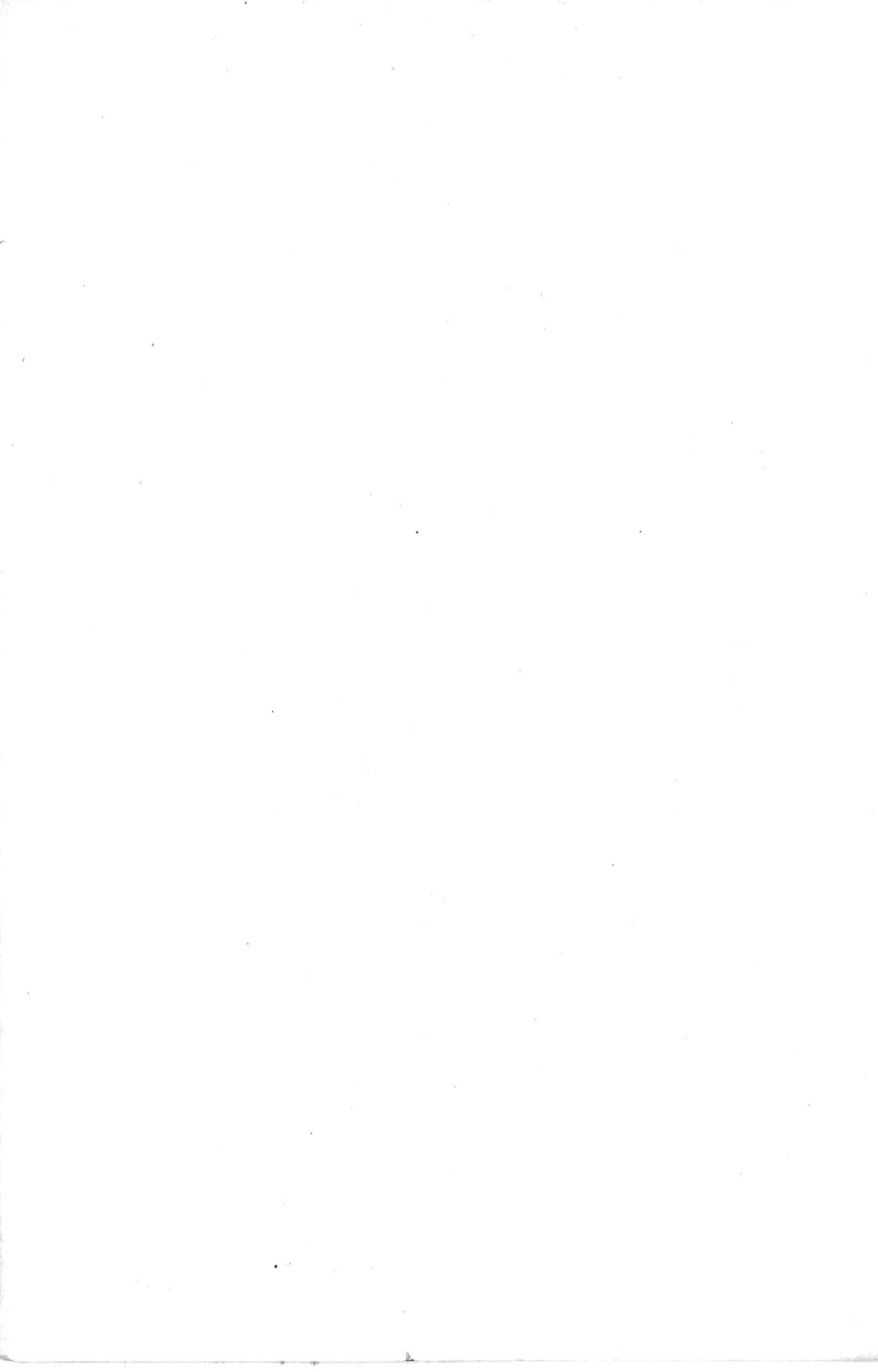
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**THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF  
FRENCH INDO-CHINA**



## INTRODUCTION

### POLITICAL FORMATION AND GEOGRAPHIC POSITION

French Indo-China was established during the second half of the last century. It is not necessary here to retrace the history of the countries it comprises, but only to recall the principal steps of the French occupation which brought with it sweeping renovations in the territory's economy.

#### FRENCH IN INDO-CHINA

Christian missionary zeal led the first Frenchmen to eastern Indo-China. The most famous was Father Alexandre de Rhodes of the Society of Jesus. Born at Avignon in 1591, he arrived in Tonkin in 1627 and remained among the Annamites for many years; until the 19th century his works were one of the most reliable sources of information about the Annamites and the countries they inhabit. The negotiations which he undertook in Rome resulted in the establishment of the Society of Foreign Missions which had a preponderant role in the development of Christianity in Indo-China.

Then traders arrived. In the 18th century the French East India Company, wishing to spread its field of action to the Far East, sent specialists to Indo-China to survey the country's resources and to draw up plans for their development. Pierre Poivre of Lyons is the best known of these envoys whose reports, by the way, failed to stimulate any official action.

At the end of the 18th century Pigneau de Béhaine, apostolic vicar of Cochin China and bishop of Adran, came very near to playing a decisive role in the history of relations with French Indo-China. The French bishop supported the cause of the Annamite prince, Nguyễn Anh, who was driven from his capital by the revolt of the Tây Sơn. He secured the conclusion of the treaty of Versailles on November 28, 1787, the first of its kind between France and Annam, which provided

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that, in return for the support given the prince against the rebels, France was to acquire Tourane, the main port on the coast of Annam, and the island of Poulo Condore, off the Cochin China coast.

However, the French revolution and its consequences made it impossible to carry out the treaty's provisions. It was only from 1840 onward that the Opium War and European designs on the Chinese Empire again turned the French government's attention toward eastern Indo-China. The Annamite emperors were then persecuting white missionaries, and France and Spain decided upon energetic intervention. After a fruitless attack on Huê, the Annamite capital, the Franco-Spanish expedition turned south and captured Saigon in February 1859. By the treaty of June 5, 1862, the Emperor Tu Duc ceded the three eastern provinces of Cochin China, Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh and My Tho, and the island of Poulo Condore to France. Western Cochin China having become a hotbed of plots dangerous to French interests, the other three provinces, Vinh Long, Chan Doc and Ha Tien, came under French tutelage in 1867, and thus the colony of Cochin China was established. In the meantime, menaced by the competitive expansion of both Annam and Siam, Cambodia accepted French protection in 1863, but it was not until 1884 that an agreement drew the broad outlines of the political and administrative law which was to govern this country.

In this way the French became firmly intrenched in the Mekong delta. The occupation of the great northern plain of Tonkin, however, was a slower and more difficult task. Here were cradled the Annamite people, and thence they spread gradually down the shore of the South China Sea to conquer the countries of the South. From their point of view Cochin China was merely a recently acquired colony where Annamite expansion did not really begin until the 17th century. In earlier times the name Cochin China referred only to the deltas of central and southern Annam.

It was chiefly the desire to open a good road into China which brought the French to Tonkin. After Doudart de Lagrée's expedition in 1867-1868 had proved the difficulty of reaching Yunnan through the Mekong valley, the Red River

valley seemed to offer the easiest gateway to that province and one through which French influence hoped to spread to the Yangtze valley and especially to the rich Szechwan basin.

A merchant, Jean Dupuis, was one of the main instigators of French intervention in Tonkin, which coincided with the beginning of the white man's great race for colonies which dominated world history from 1875 to 1914. It was only with great reluctance, however, that the French government followed up the initiative taken by its citizens. The rapid conquest of the Tonkin delta by the naval lieutenant, Francis Garnier (1873), was disavowed; and although the treaty of 1874 acknowledged France's right of protectorate over all the Annamite countries, its terms were rather ambiguous and there was no provision for its implementation. In 1882 when the Emperor Tu Duc, in alliance with China, began to make trouble for the French, the latter engaged in military activity (this time with stronger forces than in the past) which led to the treaties of 1884 and 1885. These finally and definitely established the French protectorate over Annam and Tonkin.

Laos was the last great country to become part of French Indo-China. French influence there had spread gradually, coming first from Cambodia and then from Tonkin and Annam. This peaceful expansion is forever connected with the name of Pavie, the explorer who set out "to conquer hearts." Nevertheless, there were clashes with Siam which was eager to acquire all the countries where Thai dialects were spoken. The French protectorate over Laos was not established until the Franco-Siamese treaty of October 3, 1893, under which Siam renounced all claims to territory on the left bank of the Mekong.

The western frontiers of French Indo-China were finally fixed in their present form by further treaties and agreements, the most important of which are the Franco-Siamese treaty of February 13, 1904, by which Siam renounced all the sovereignty which it still retained in Laos over Bassac and that part of the kingdom of Luang Prabang located on the right bank of the Mekong; and the Franco-Siamese treaty of March 23, 1907, by which Siam ceded to France the Cambodian regions of Battambang, Siemreap and Sisophon, the

latter including the ruins of the ancient Khmer capital, Angkor Thom. Thus, French tutelage was widened to include the entire Great Lake basin and reached right up to the Siamese threshold at Wadhana.

Today, French Indo-China is entirely pacified. Undoubtedly, in the high plains and mountains of southern Annam there remain a few patches of insubordination. In Ngoc Linh and Ataouat, between Kontum and Tourane, as well as in the loop of the Dong Nai west of Djiring, groups of Moi still evade French administration and taxation, and practically forbid the white man's encroachment upon the region. During the World War these areas spread somewhat but today, hemmed in by French outposts, they include only a few thousand inhabitants. A generous desire to tame these backward groups, to spare them the all too brutal and fateful impact of a higher civilization, permits them to remain almost unknown, but a few miles from our great highways, and to live in savage independence.

#### THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

As even a small scale map will show, Indo-China does not form a geographic unit. Right across it, from northwest to southeast runs, not the single narrow mountain chain implied by the commonly used name, Annamite Cordillera, but a high rampart, varying in width and especially broad and high in the north. Between the Red River delta in Lower Tonkin and the Mekong valley in Upper Laos rise a series of plateaus and wild mountain chains reaching their greatest altitude in the northwest, near the Chinese frontier (Fan Si Pan, 3,142 meters elevation). Winding rivers, their course often strangled and broken by rapids, offer no easy way through this barrier.

Near latitude 18° north the Mekong flows less than 200 kilometers from the Annamite coast. Here, if anywhere, the Annamite Cordillera deserves its name. Relatively low passes (Mu Gia at 418 meters and Ai Lao at 410 meters) permit rather easy transit from Annam into Lower Laos. Old foot paths, ox cart roads and new automobile highways cut through the picturesque limestone formations, twist among

the sandstone hills covered with light, monotonous forests and quickly bring the traveller to the majestic reaches of the Mekong between Vientiane and Savannakhet.

South of latitude  $16^{\circ}$  north none of the ranges is higher than 2,600 meters. While the road leading from Qui Nhon on the east coast to the plateaus of Kontum and Pleiku climbs about 800 meters to Mang Giang Pass, the one leading from Ninh Hoa to Darlac on the way to Ban Me Thuot never has to go higher than 600 meters. Toward the south, between the Mekong and the coast of Annam the plateaus broaden out, towering over the surrounding country with steep cliffs. Especially toward the east, these have been devastated by violent erosion and are covered with thick forests, very difficult to cross. Thus the two slopes of Indo-China—Tonkin and Annam, facing east, and Laos, Cambodia and Cochin China, facing south along the Mekong—are quite isolated from each other.

The unity which structure and surface denied to the country was not attained by its inhabitants. The whole history, at least the modern history, of the Indo-Chinese peninsula is dominated by the expansion of a few ethnic groups from north to south. On the eastern slope of the region which was to become French Indo-China the Annamites had an unusual fate. From the 10th century on they have pushed into the country south of Porte d'Annam. Driving back or assimilating the Cham who borrowed the leading characteristics of their civilization from India, they reached the delta of the Mekong six centuries later. There the French found them, in the middle of the 19th century, expanding at the expense of the Khmer, another people imbued with Indian culture. The present border which meanders across the plain separating Cochin China and Cambodia is nothing more nor less than the ethnic frontier resulting from that southward push.

An ethno-linguistic map of the Indo-Chinese populations (see for instance, the *Atlas* published by the Service Géographique de l'Indochine) indicates a great medley of races. Especially striking is the way in which the Annamites, stretching the whole length of Indo-China from north to south, always remain close to the seaboard. This calls forth the classic

simile of the two big sacks of rice hanging from both ends of the carrying pole or native "ganh." This parallel, however, is too simple and rather misleading. Far from being as monotonous as this picture suggests, Annam has a great variety of scenery and resources. Nevertheless it is true that, between the two great plains of Lower Tonkin and Cochin China, the Annamite settlements are broken into small fragments centering around the little deltas which dot the coastline and are isolated from one another by the big, wild barriers of nearby mountains. The Annamite emperors took great pains to assure easy communications between Tonkin and Cochin China. Today both the mandarin road and the trans-Indo-Chinese railroad testify that the French administration has inherited their concern with this problem. Nevertheless, a certain dualism, based on interest and sentiment, still exists between Tonkin and Cochin China. The Governor General's annual change of residence from Hanoi to Saigon shows that this latter has not been willing to renounce entirely its claim to be the capital of Indo-China and reflects the effects of the country's geographic structure and of the coastal location of the Annamite settlements.

The great majority of the population of French Indo-China, about 72 per cent, are Annamites. Nearly all live in Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China, their settlements being concentrated in the maritime plains and deltas. The Khmers or Cambodians are the only people other than the Annamites who have access to the sea,—and this only on a short, inconvenient coast line. Next to their conquerors, they are the most compact group in French Indo-China (about three millions) and, like them, though to a somewhat lesser extent, they inhabit low plains.

Mountains and plateaus, however, cover a much greater area in Indo-China than do the plains. Roughly speaking, the highlands include all of Laos and the greater part of Tonkin, Annam, Cambodia and eastern Cochin China. A great variety of peoples live there, official statistics listing especially the Thai, Muongs, Indonesians, Mans and Meos. These differentiations are mainly linguistic, most of the groups being divided into numerous tribes and never having achieved political unity. Some, like the Thai, and among them Laotians in par-



ticular, have a marked preference for the valleys. Others, like the Indonesians, Mans and Meos, prefer the plateaus or the higher mountain slopes up to 1,500 meters elevation; these are the real highlanders of Indo-China.

#### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The political framework of Indo-China illustrates a very interesting attempt to take geographic conditions into account. Until 1887, Annam and Tonkin were jointly subordinate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Cochin China and Cambodia were under the authority of the Ministry of Colonies while remaining independent of each other. Thanks to the perseverance and initiative of Paul Bert in particular (who died at Hanoi at the end of 1886) the constitution of French Indo-China, or of the Indo-Chinese Union as it is still called, was enacted by decree on November 11, 1887. The four countries, soon to be joined by Laos, became a political unit administered exclusively by the Ministry of Colonies and under the direct authority of a Governor General.

It is not easy to define briefly the prerogatives of the Governor General for they are great and varied. It may be said, however, that in Indo-China he is the only authorized representative of the French government and that, for that government, he is the representative of the general interests of all the territories with whose welfare he is entrusted.

The establishment of the Indo-Chinese Union, following no historical precedent, was an act of major importance. Its effects began to appear as soon as the Governor General could make available powerful means for action. In this respect the work of Governor General Doumer (1897-1902) was decisive. He succeeded in setting up a general budget to be maintained from local resources (especially from customs, indirect taxes, excise taxes, registry dues and stamp duties). This budget, which was to be of growing importance, permitted the creation and improvement of the main technical services and centralizing organizations such as the Departments of Public Works, Agriculture, Mines and Industry, etc., which were to play a great role in the development and unification of Indo-China.