VIETNAM:
A POLITICAL HISTORY

JOSEPH BUTTINGER

FREDERICK A. PRAEGER, Publishers
New York • Washington

Drawing by Tran Tan Thanh (after an illustration by L. Ruffier in La Dépêche Coloniale, Paris, 1909)
peasant rebellion were stronger than those of upper-class political ambition.

But even though despair drove him to rebellion, the peasant was never able to develop political aims of his own. If he raised any demand at all, it was for the return of the land that he had owned or rightfully used. He was leaderless. And though his rebellions led nowhere, hardly a year went by in either the South or the North without at least one peasant insurrection. Vietnam was the home of people who, in the words of a French historian, "had nothing and were ready for everything."

But the day was approaching when this cycle of hopelessness would be interrupted. By the middle of the eighteenth century, on the eve of the American and French revolutions, new social forces, albeit feeble, were beginning to appear on the Vietnamese scene. One local rebellion, at first not very different from all the others before, spread until it took on the dimensions of a national uprising. Starting in the South in 1772, it was led by three brothers, named after their native village, Tay Son.

Both French and dynastic Vietnamese historians have tried to cast the Tay Son brothers in the part of bandit leaders. But more important than the personal motives of these three men were the social forces that brought their movement national success. Not only did the Tay Son brothers enlist the support of the masses of landless, miserable peasants, they also gained the financial support of the small, emerging merchant class.

The Tay Son rebellion brought to an end the rule of the Nguyen in the South. They fell in 1777. But the Trinh, who had tried to exploit the problems of the Nguyen and invaded the South in 1774, were also marked for doom. No sooner were the Tay Son in control of the South than they decided to march into the Red River Valley. In 1786, Hanoi fell to the South; Vietnam at last was reunited. A year later, the Tay Son also got rid of the moribund Le monarchy.

The rule of the Tay Son was brief—the last of their rulers was overthrown in 1802—but the unity of the country survived.

IV

Missionaries, Merchants, and Conquerors

I

In the sixteenth century, Portuguese explorers and conquerors, prodded by merchants and missionaries, became the pioneers of Western imperialism in the Far East.

The Portuguese arrived in Vietnam in 1535. However, long before Columbus' accidental discovery of America, the Portuguese had sailed down the west coast of Africa in the hope of reaching the Indies by sea and of breaking the trade monopoly of the Venetians and Arabs, the intermediaries in the trade between the Far East and the West.

When Vasco da Gama succeeded in reaching India in 1498 after sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, he opened up a direct route to the Asian world for the West. The Portuguese immediately began to settle portions of the Indian coast and to fight the Arabs for control of the neighboring waters. They suc-
ceeded in cutting the old trade route from the East (via Alexandria to Venice) by blocking access to the Red Sea. Five years after da Cama first landed in India, European merchants could buy pepper in Lisbon at a fraction of its cost in Venice. Lisbon became the main European outlet for Oriental products.

From India, the Portuguese under the leadership of Admiral Albuquerque penetrated farther east. In 1519, Goa became the first Portuguese stronghold in Asia and the capital of all its Indian possessions. Malacca, the center of a budding Mohammedan empire on the west coast of Malaya, was conquered and turned into a Portuguese stronghold in 1511. This gave Albuquerque control of the routes leading into the Gulf of Siam, the South China Sea, and the waters of the vast Indonesian Archipelago. Thereupon the Portuguese pushed on toward Siam and China and down into the Java Sea. They swarmed over Asia, convinced that the worlds they had discovered were there for only one purpose: to make Portugal strong and rich.

From the very outset, the Portuguese had been reaching out toward the spice treasures of the distant Ceram and Molucca Islands. The Javanese shippers of these spices to Malacca were attacked as fiercely as was Arab navigation between Malacca and the Red Sea. The Portuguese also fought the Spanish, who had begun to intrude into the Moluccas after Magellan's first voyage. Portugal's methods were such that "even their own historians were ashamed of their crimes in the Moluccas." According to St. Francis Xavier, who came to Ambon in 1546, Portuguese learning was restricted to the conjugations of the verb "rapar," in which they showed "an amazing capacity for inventing new tenses and participles." Such talents naturally limited the effectiveness of the missionaries eager to stem the conversion of Indonesia to the Moslem faith. But the unhappy union of Christian zeal and naked greed was to become the model for the colonial behavior of a number of other nations as well.

Their efforts on behalf of the spice islands did not prevent the Portuguese from sailing all over East Asia, from Malaya to Japan. In one tremendous push they opened the doors of most Eastern capitals for contact with the West. The first European to come to Ayuthia, the capital of Siam, was a Portuguese, and the first Westerner to see the spectacular ruins of Angkor also most likely was Portuguese. Soon after Malacca fell into their hands, the Portuguese secured trading concessions in both Thailand and Burma. They landed on the Chinese coast near Canton in 1513 and reached Japan in 1542. However, a regular trading base between these more remote countries and the West was not established until 1557, when the first Portuguese settled in Macao.

Albuquerque's lieutenants had long been attracted by the inlets and harbors of the east coast of Indochina. One of his captains, Antonio da Faria, who entered the Bay of Tourane in 1535, had no trouble finding and taking what he was looking for—a suitable site, less than 15 miles south of Tourane. He decided on Faifo as another possible center of Portuguese trade and shipping. Although he did not succeed in making Faifo into a stronghold similar to Goa or Malacca, by 1540 it had become the main port of entry for foreign goods into "Cochinchina," the name given by the Portuguese to Vietnam.

During the sixteenth century, the Portuguese effectively controlled all Western trade with Vietnam. From their strongholds, they dominated Asian waters and held off all competitors. This was the time of Portuguese maritime greatness.

The first signs of Portugal's decline began to appear toward the end of the sixteenth century. Holland and England, at war with Portugal and Spain, were barred from access to the Lisbon market. Angry and envious, the Dutch and English began to treat Portugal as Portugal had treated the Arabs and Venetians, and they began to sail the seas in search of new trade routes and new worlds. Moreover, the Dutch were eager to best Philip II of Spain, who had ascended the Portuguese throne in 1580.

Although the cutting down of Portuguese power in Asia was the common aim of the English and Dutch, their European alliance against Portugal and Spain never developed into joint action in the Far East. As it turned out, England's rise to colonial supremacy was still a century away. The seventeenth century in Asia
was the century of the Dutch. They were wealthier than the English and more experienced navigators and traders. They became the heirs of the Portuguese chiefly by concentrating their efforts on Southeast Asia.

The English founded their East India Company in 1600, two years before the Dutch, but for ten years they made no headway in India itself. Only after defeating a Portuguese fleet in Indian waters in 1612 were they able to acquire their first trading concession on Indian soil. By that time, however, their trading stations in Southeast Asia were already under heavy attack by the aggressive Dutch.

When the Dutch founded their East India Company, they amalgamated a number of existing companies that had been operating for years on a small scale. The capitalization of the Dutch company was almost ten times that of the English. By 1605, the Dutch had visited every major port in Southeast Asia and set up their trading posts throughout the archipelago, from Malaya to New Guinea.

From the outset, the Dutch made things difficult for the English wherever they could. They tried to prevent them from entering any place they considered theirs by virtue of having gotten there first. Political considerations connected with their position in Europe forced the Dutch to tolerate the English in Asia, but they did all in their power to prevent them from gaining a foothold in Eastern trade. By 1615, the Dutch traders had become convinced that they could no longer tolerate the English. Their profits were declining, they said, because they had not pursued a sufficiently aggressive policy toward the English. And they contended that the Dutch company was bound to fail unless it secured a trade monopoly in Asia.

The Dutch succeeded in replacing the Portuguese as the dominant colonial power in Asia. By 1668, the Portuguese were definitely defeated. They were able to hang on to Goa and Diu in India and to Macao, but they lost their possessions between India and China and their control of Far Eastern navigation. The Dutch had the Cape of Good Hope, and they controlled the coasts of Malabar and Coromandel as well as Ceylon. They also had won Malacca from Portugal in 1641. Dutch power in the archipelago was supreme. They had wiped out every single independent state in the spice islands of eastern Indonesia. They were also the only ones permitted to trade with Japan after Japan expelled all Westerners in 1641.

The Dutch made their appearance in Vietnam exactly one hundred years after the Portuguese. They established their first trading post in 1636 in the southern half of the country. When the government at Hanoi a year later permitted them to set up a post in Pho Hien, the Dutch immediately switched the bulk of their trading activities to the North, the richer half of the country.

The Trinh, eager for support against the Nguyen, allowed the Dutch to establish themselves in the capital, who in turn supported the Trinh so strongly that they incurred the enmity of the Nguyen. Portuguese intrigues helped to nourish this hostility, and in 1654 the Dutch were forced to leave the South.

In keeping with the pattern of Western penetration in the East, the English were the next to appear at the gates of Vietnam. But their days of glory in Asia had not yet come. They had failed in India and Indonesia, and they were not too successful in Vietnam. An early English attempt to enter Faifo met with disaster. Later efforts to gain a foothold in either the South or the North were blocked by the Portuguese and the Dutch. Not until 1672 were the English able to open an office in Pho Hien, which they later moved to Hanoi, hoping that the trade thus gained would justify their efforts.

In the meantime another power, France, had made its appearance. The French had founded their East India Company in 1664, more than sixty years after the English and the Dutch. In 1676, they acquired the site of Pondicherry, on the east coast of India. They also managed to set up a post at Bantam, on the western tip of Java. Although a French ship had sailed up the Red River in 1669, the first regular French trading office in Vietnam was not opened until 1680 in Pho Hien, the starting point of both the English and Dutch. Portuguese merchants had al-
readily been in Vietnam for well over a hundred years when the French came to Pho Hien, ignoring the warnings of their already established Western competitors. Trade with Vietnam, they were told, was bad and getting worse. The French came to Vietnam at the risk of having their ships sunk by Dutch saboteurs, their representatives murdered by Portuguese conspirators, and their reputations slandered by the English. But they were ready to fight back.

However, when the French arrived on the scene, trade with Vietnam was in fact becoming unprofitable. Soon some pessimists were heard to complain that they had boarded a sinking ship. When the Dutch in the wake of their conquests on Java drove the French and English out of Bantam, the isolated French trading position in Vietnam was doomed. The only comfort the French could derive was that their more powerful rivals suffered a similar fate. The English closed their Hanoi post in 1697; the Dutch, in 1700. Only the Portuguese were able to continue their traffic between Macao and Vietnam, though on a reduced scale.

When the English East India Company tried to re-enter Vietnam in 1822, after a century of troubles on the Indian subcontinent, it warned its agents against a repetition of the errors committed by Europeans, which they held responsible for the failure of previous Vietnamese ventures. The counsel was no doubt wise, but the prognosis only partially correct. If after 1672, the year the English started to trade with Vietnam, business began to decline, it was due largely to the fact that the long war between North and South had come to an end that year. Vietnam no longer needed military equipment from the West. Vietnamese domestic peace did more to ruin Dutch and Portuguese trade with Vietnam than European abuses or English and French competition. And peace in Vietnam was followed by a series of long European wars which had a detrimental effect on intercontinental traffic and trade.

However, other and more fundamental reasons were responsible for the West's failure to turn trade with Vietnam into as profitable an undertaking as with other parts of Asia. In Vietnam, the West could not engage in the same piracy and plunder as elsewhere, for both the South and the North had strong governments, effective armies, and even naval forces with which to defend themselves.

Vietnam's educated upper class was experienced in war and in administration and determined to remain in control of the country's wealth. As long as the blood and the sweat of the peasants were at their disposal, the rulers of Vietnam were able to handle all outside threats.

If they wished to add Vietnam to their profit-making Asian ventures, the seafaring nations of Europe had to forgo their usual methods of brute force. For the time being, trade was the key to whatever treasures the country held. The English and French efforts were probably made at considerable cost to themselves. They were slow to realize that the trade was disappointing. Vietnam, though potentially rich, was not yet ready for large-scale trade. Only the government and a handful of wealthy people were able to purchase European goods. In short, Vietnam was not yet ripe for exploitation.

4

Mercantile penetration had failed and conquest by force seemed patently ill-advised. The year 1700 might therefore have marked the end of contacts with Europe and of Western influence in Vietnam were it not for an entirely different kind of Western activity in Asia: the missionary work of the Catholic Church. After the last European traders left Vietnam in 1700, Holland and England were definitely out of the picture. Portugal and France, however, retained representation, for most of the missionaries in Vietnam were either Portuguese or French.

The beginnings of Catholic proselytization in Asia are inextricably linked with the history of Portuguese trade and expansion. When Pope Alexander VI, in 1493, for the purpose of spiritual and territorial conquest divided the world between Portugal and Spain, the Portuguese managed to seize Asia as their spiritual domain. Missionaries to Asia had to leave from Lisbon and be "cleared" by the Portuguese in Goa. They worked under Portuguese supervision, political as well as ecclesiastic. The Portuguese guarded their exclusive right to oversee the transformation of the heathen Asians into Christians so jealously that it outlived their trading monopoly for more than half a century.
The history of Catholic missionary work in Asia is one of hopeful beginnings and astonishing recoveries from near fatal blows, but compared with the results in Central and South America it must be regarded as a failure. This is true also of Vietnam, although there the Catholic Church was more successful than in any other part of Asia except the Philippines.

Very little is known about the beginnings of missionary work in Vietnam. According to Vietnamese annals, one Ignatius came to Vietnam and preached in the province of Nam Dinh in 1533. A little more is known about a Spanish Dominican by name of Diego Adverte, who arrived in Vietnam in 1596. For a while he was allowed to preach, but the appearance of Spanish warships soon after his arrival aroused suspicion, and the authorities literally chased him on board one of those unwelcome ships.

Organized religious propaganda began twenty years later, after Portuguese merchants in Faifo invited a group of Jesuits from Macao. Two missionaries—one an Italian, the other a Portuguese—left the Jesuit academy at Macao for work in Vietnam, arriving in Toupane in January, 1615. Among the many who hurried to join the mission they founded at Faifo was Cristoforo Borri, the first European to write about Vietnam and the Vietnamese people and to praise their "natural kindness and hospitality" to the skies. Borri thought the Vietnamese superior to the Chinese both in intelligence and courage, and to all other Asian peoples in friendliness, good manners, and their thirst for knowledge.

Soon afterward, a gifted, strong, dedicated Frenchman, Monsignor Alexander of Rhodes, a native of Avignon, came to Vietnam. Within six months he had mastered the language and begun to preach in Vietnamese. He wrote the first catechism in the Vietnamese language and published a Vietnamese-Latin-Portuguese dictionary. Moreover, these were the first works to be printed in Quoc Ngu, the name by which the transliteration of Vietnamese sounds into Latin script is known.

In 1627, Rhodes was sent to Hanoi. He was well received by the court and gained the affection of the people. Rhodes then was thirty-seven years old. He lived for another thirty years, and remained active throughout.

Rhodes' life mirrored the turbulent history of the Vietnamese missions. He was expelled from the North in 1630, and at about that time the South also began to be apprehensive about the effects of this new religion. Throughout the duration of the civil war, both the North and the South were lenient in the enforcement of their anti-Catholic measures, lest the foreign ships bearing their precious cargoes of war materials failed to return—a frankly voiced Jesuit threat. Rhodes was permitted to return to Vietnam, but in 1645 both the Nguyen and the Trinh barred him from the country.

Exasperated by the lack of vigor of his Portuguese superiors, Rhodes in 1649 went to Rome to agitate for support of the struggling Vietnamese missions free from Portuguese control. He submitted a training program for indigenous priests. The Vatican bureaucracy, fearing a conflict with Portugal, did not act, whereupon Rhodes turned to France for support, a power whose passion for influence in Asia he was aware of and was determined to exploit. The Vietnamese, he wrote, were wealthy because their soil was fertile. They had gold mines and great quantities of pepper, and they were so rich in silk that they used it for fishing lines and cords.

Rhodes succeeded in enlisting French priests for work in Vietnam and in gaining the support of the French Church. In addition, the aristocracy and circles interested for a share in Asian trade contributed money for his projected training of an indigenous clergy. In the midst of his efforts, however, Rome sent Rhodes to a mission in Persia, where he died four years later, far away from the people whom he had hoped to bring into the arms of the Church. But he died knowing that Rome had at last recognized the merits of his project. His plan for Vietnam received official sanction in 1658, despite Portuguese opposition to two Frenchmen who were appointed to head the Vietnamese mission.

The evangelization of Indochina was to become the prerogative of a special French-directed organization, the Society of Foreign Missions, which was founded in Paris in 1664. It owed its existence
to the same impulses, even the same people, who that very year had founded the official French East India Company—merchants and missionaries from Paris and Rouen.

This union of religious and mercantile interests, a memorable chapter in the history of Western colonialism, was forged around 1650. The French had opened a house in Hanoi ostensibly to organize Franco-Vietnamese trade, but its residents were in fact missionaries disguised as French merchants. Some trade was conducted, but it served mainly as a cover for clandestine proselytizing.

The meeting of two different lines of action originally quite unrelated to each other created a curious state of affairs. Both churchmen and traders realized that in the struggle for a share of Asia their intimate cooperation was a condition for success. A maritime trading company provided for the free transportation, provisioning, and establishment of missionaries and their helpers in exchange for clearly specified trade services by the missionaries. François Pallu, one of the two apostolic vicars to Vietnam, was even more blunt than the merchants who provided for his voyage to the East. In a report submitted in 1667, he assured the directors of the French company that they would have as many promoters of trade as there will be bishops, priests, and believers.

Immediately after his appointment as head of the Tongking mission in 1658, Pallu stated that although the voyages were undertaken for the glory of God, their practical aspects ought not to be neglected. Once the French started to compete with the Portuguese, English, and Dutch, no Frenchman proved more knowledgeable about the prospects of Western trade than the Apostolic Vicar François Pallu.

Pallu and his colleague, Monsieur Lambert de la Motte, tried to resume the work that Rhodes and his colleagues had been forced to abandon, and the obstacles the two Vietnamese governments erected only served to strengthen the churchmen’s alliance with business. Because missionaries were barred from entering the country, Pallu and de la Motte smuggled them in disguised as merchants and used them to promote trade. But when trade with the West declined, the fate of the missions depended on the degree of acceptance of their religious activities by the Vietnamese.

Monsignor Rhodes’ impressive statistics and claims notwithstanding, the educated, wealthy elite was not readily converted. The early converts came from among the poor and downtrodden.

The conflict between the Vietnamese governments and the Catholic missions was not so much religious as political. The Vietnamese, convinced that most of the Westerners pursuing spiritual goals were allied with the agents of worldly conquest, treated the missionaries as members of a fifth column and the Catholic communities as part of a political movement in the service of foreign powers. These Vietnamese fears and suspicions were strengthened by a combination of religious, political, and military moves through which France tried to conquer the kingdom of Siam in 1685. Pallu in particular was a political schemer who went far beyond his instructions. He might be called the inventor of the colonial practice of shaping policy in Paris by the method of the fait accompli.

Another factor in Vietnamese opposition to the activities of the Church were the conflicting Christian and Confucianist views on the relation of the individual to the state, and the fact that some Christian doctrines which sought to govern individual behavior beyond the private sphere would, it was feared, destroy the moral foundations of a Confucianist society. From the mandarins’ point of view, the missionaries’ influence on individual conduct was bound to affect the principles of Confucianist society. The Church’s attack on polygamy was of little consequence per se, but actions according to one’s private conscience in violation of the principles on which society rested were immoral. Moreover, the Confucianist mandarins maintained, the conscience of a Vietnamese Christian was shaped by the doctrines of an institution taking its orders from abroad. Therefore, they maintained, being a Christian was not only immoral but also subversive.

For these reasons the Vietnamese governments did not permit the Catholic Church to function freely, frequently jailed its native leaders, and deported its missionaries. In the course of their two hundred years of illegality, missionaries and native Catholics paid
for their beliefs with their lives. But in spite of occasional violent outbursts instigated from above, the Catholic communities of Vietnam were never in danger of extinction. As a matter of fact, two hundred years after the expulsion of Rhodes, they had become important and influential enough to provide France with a pretext for military intervention.

As the eighteenth century unfolded, it became apparent that Western penetration of Vietnam was suffering reverses. The volume of trade between Vietnam and the West diminished. What foreign trade there was was carried on largely by a Chinese colony at Fai foi. In the eyes of some forward-looking Western colonialists, this state of affairs was regrettable more from a Vietnamese than a European point of view. They believed that if Vietnam remained closed to European trade and shipping, the country inevitably would one day have to be opened by force. The only question was which of two contending powers, England or France, would undertake such military intervention.

It was this Anglo-French rivalry, however, and England’s determination to destroy the positions of the Portuguese and Dutch in India, that gave Vietnam its long respite from European interference. England’s attention was turned on India, which forced France to concentrate her efforts on the defense of her Indian position.

It was only after England’s decisive victory over her European rivals in India, and the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris, by which France ceded most of her Indian possessions, that French traders and missionaries began again to advocate the conquest of Cochinchina, as compensation for the Indian holdings and also to prevent the English from getting there first. Their campaign led nowhere. Conditions in Vietnam after the Tay Son rebellion in 1772 seemed to invite European interference, but the financial difficulties of France, the Seven Years’ War, and the American Revolution helped to save Vietnam at that critical juncture. Later, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars absorbed both the military and political energies of the Western nations.

However, it was in this period that another French churchman, Pigneau de Béhaine, Bishop of Adran, almost succeeded in securing Vietnam for France’s future colonial empire, sixty years before her costly Indochinese venture.

French policy toward Indochina during the eighteenth century, although essentially negative, nonetheless constitutes an important chapter in the history of French colonialism. It was in the eighteenth century that some of the basic features of French colonialism in Indochina emerged more clearly than at any time in the future. Thus it was made obvious that the conquest of Vietnam was not an undertaking demanded by the French people, or even by the government. French intervention grew out of the initiative of private persons and the unauthorized actions of military men and colonial officials in India and the Mascarene Islands who combined service to their country with the promotion of their private interests. The story of French intervention in Indochina thus is largely the story of the efforts of individuals to engage the power, wealth, and prestige of their country to promote their private schemes. The missionaries sided with the vocal advocates of intervention, though until the Bishop of Adran joined the forceful advocates of the cause, their voices seemed timid besides those of the traders, officers, and officials.

One of the most outstanding of these advocates of force was Joseph François Dupleix, France’s first great colonial statesman-soldier. From his position in India he tried repeatedly to open the ports of Vietnam to French commercial vessels and to trick the Vietnamese rulers into letting him establish a military base along the eastern coast of Indochina.

The Vietnamese rulers, although alert to the dangers of Western infiltration, were generally ready to talk and trade. In spite of this readiness, the efforts of Dupleix and the others came to naught mainly because they lacked official French support. Premature and ineffective though it was, the early colonial propaganda was nevertheless marked by a concreteness and candor not found in any later French statements about Indochina. Words like “civilization,” “cultural mission,” “French honor,” even “religion,” were not then part of the colonial vocabulary.
One agent of the French East India Company wrote in 1755 that the acquisition of the island of Condore not only would give France a flourishing Asian trade, but would put her in a position to destroy English and Dutch trade. And one enthusiastic churchman, the Abbé de Saint-Phalle, exclaimed: "They have gold in their mines and rivers, even in the excrement of their ducks; there is hardly a country in Asia where labor is cheaper than in Cochin-china."

But the French Government and the East India Company frankly told the churchmen, traders, and officials that it could not raise the funds for ships and soldiers, that France could not risk widening its conflict with England and Holland, and that the defense of its holdings in India were more important than dissipating its strength in a distant, comparatively unknown land.

The work of Pierre Poivre, a pioneer of French Indochina, vividly demonstrates the futility of the efforts to overcome the then existing French resistance to action. Poivre began his career in 1720 as a missionary, but while in Asia he switched to his father's business, the silk trade. After two years in Canton, he returned to France, where he tried to promote trade with Vietnam. He then went to Cochinchina on behalf of the East India Company, bringing with him goods and rich presents for the Nguyen king. But while he had no trouble getting rid of his presents, he found it more difficult to dispose of his goods, and though he could see that the poverty of the people was one reason for his commercial failure, he put the blame on the dishonesty of the mandarins. He thereupon decided that his country should come to the rescue of its trade. He failed.

Poivre and his compatriots in Vietnam were completely blind to the effects of two hundred years of European actions in Asia. All Europeans were regarded as thieves who would stop at nothing, including murder, to gain their objectives. To cheat them was not considered dishonest behavior. The value of the mandarins, many of whom were probably as dishonest as Poivre claimed, was a response not only to the white man's past actions, but also to what they believed his future intentions to be. The mandarins proved to be correct.

In 1758, one Count d'Estaing, a French naval captain, conceived an elaborate plan for invading Hue and robbing the imperial palace of all its treasures. d'Estaing's project received the official approval of Governor Lally-Tollandal of French India. The expedition got under way in October, 1759, but the Count's uncontrollable desire to follow his piratical bent by attacking English trading posts on the west coast of Sumatra ruined his scheme. He lost many of his men in battle and through disease and missed the monsoon that was to carry his ships to Hue.

Nine years later, in 1768, the Count, now "matured and hardened," proposed that three thousand soldiers under the leadership of Pierre Poivre land in Tonkine, fortify the port, and make it the base of a vast commercial and political operation. But if France had had the money for such an expedition, she would have sent the men to protect her possessions in India, whose fate overshadowed all of France's colonial aspirations and stopped her from acting in any other Asian area.

Missionaries, Merchants, Conquerors

This was the moment when Pigneau de Béhaine appeared on the Vietnamese scene. He was not quite twenty-five years old when the Society of Foreign Missions sent him to the Far East. He arrived at the province of Hatien in southwestern Vietnam in March, 1767. There for two and a half years Pigneau headed a seminary, until its destruction in the wake of a Siamese invasion. After two months in a Hatien jail, Pigneau fled Vietnam together with some of his pupils. They reached Malacca on a Chinese junk.

In 1770, the seminary was reopened in French India and its twenty-nine-year-old head appointed Bishop of Adran. In 1775, Pigneau was back in Hatien. A twenty-year-old ban against the Christian religion had been lifted by the last of the Nguyen kings shortly before the Tay Son rebellion put an end to the Nguyens. The king's sixteen-year-old nephew, Nguyen Anh, escaped the royal massacre, and the Bishop of Adran saved the young man's life by hiding him from his pursuers and helping him to an island in the Gulf of Siam—an act of Christian charity and at the same time a well-thought-out political step.

Pigneau—churchman, educator, and scholar—discovered his
true vocation—politics—after his encounter with Nguyen Anh. From the first day he met the young Nguyen Anh, Pigneau turned into a passionate politician. The Bishop of Adran was destined to become one of the greatest statesmen and military leaders in the history of Vietnam.

Pigneau probably did not give any thought to what extent he was interfering with the destiny of Vietnam when he rescued a young prince in 1777. Twenty-five years later, Nguyen Anh had conquered the whole of Vietnam, exterminated all members of the Tay Son family, and founded the last dynasty of his reunited country.

In order to secure their possessions against the Trinh in the North, the Tay Son, after subduing the South, moved the bulk of their armies to central Vietnam. No sooner had they done so when the sixteen-year-old Nguyen Anh reappeared in the country, rallied the followers of the old regime, hired Cambodian mercenaries and Chinese pirates, and in a series of lightning campaigns conquered several provinces and the city of Saigon, from where he ruled as the "King of Cochinchina" for four years. In 1782, the Tay Son attacked him by sea and shattered his army and his young administration. Another attempt by Anh, for which the King of Siam had provided an army of twenty thousand, also ended in disaster. The end of 1784 found Anh a refugee in Siam, pondering the problem of whether to reverse the tide with European military help. Pigneau, who had rejoined the young Nguyen Anh in Saigon in 1778, had been advising him to seek such help, and to seek it from France. Nguyen Anh in fact had been considering asking the English, the Dutch, and the Portuguese for assistance. He had even tried to enter into negotiations with Spain. But the French were the only ones with a permanent advocate on the spot, and moreover one whom the young man liked and admired. In November, 1784, Nguyen Anh asked Pigneau to negotiate the price for which France would be willing to support his aspirations to the Vietnamese throne.

When the Bishop arrived in Pondicherry in February, 1785, he came there as the authorized ambassador of the "King of Cochinchina" to negotiate the terms for France’s military assistance. The French authorities in Pondicherry, however, were impressed neither by Pigneau’s credentials nor by his audacious plans.

For fifteen months Pigneau fought to overcome the resistance of the French officials in India. In despair, he entered into talks with the Portuguese. But while the Portuguese were considering the matter, Pigneau reconsidered his step and decided to submit his project directly to Paris. He left Pondicherry for France in June, 1786, taking with him Nguyen Anh’s five-year-old son.

The month of June, 1786, was a crucial one in the history of Vietnam for another reason as well. The Trinh rulers, who had taken advantage of the Tay Son uprising to invade the South in 1774, were driven out of Hue and their armies chased back to the Red River Valley. In a brilliant, brief campaign, the youngest of the Tay Son brothers marched from Hue to Hanoi, thus simultaneously bringing to an end Trinh rule and the division of Vietnam. The Tay Son were in unchallenged control from the Gulf of Siam to the borders of Yunnan and Kwangsi.

Pigneau’s arrival in France six months later spelled the beginning of another battle for Vietnam, this one waged in Paris in the salons of the aristocracy, in the ministries, and in the royal palace. In this fight, which lasted from February to November, 1787, Pigneau proved himself an inspired public-relations man. The boy prince he had brought with him charmed the ladies, and he himself impressed the military and the custodians of the public purse. By November he had vanquished all opposition and apparently achieved his objective. His persuasiveness induced a reluctant government and king to sign an agreement they were unable to keep. He arrived at Pondicherry in May, 1788, as Royal Commissioner of France for Cochinchina with a treaty of alliance between the King of France and the “King of Cochinchina.” However, four days after the signing of his precious treaty, the agreement was virtually annulled by the instructions the French Minister of Foreign Affairs sent to Governor Conway in Pondicherry. Conway, who was to provide the ships and troops for Pigneau’s expedition, was known as an opponent of further French expansion in Asia. He was secretly told by Paris that it was up to
him to decide whether Pigneau's expedition against Cochin China should begin immediately, at a later date, or not at all. Conway reached no decision whatever, but permitted the difficulties of the project to delay all action indefinitely.

Unaware of his government's duplicity, Pigneau fought a furious personal battle against Conway, who apparently was a lover of intrigue as well as a tower of weakness. Although the Royal Council decided in October, 1788, to approve Conway's refusal to act, Paris did not inform Pigneau that the "expedition could not take place" until April, 1789.

This was the moment for the Bishop of Adran to show the full power of his determination. "I shall make the revolution in Cochin China alone," he is reported to have said. Rejecting an offer by the English to do for him what his own country had refused, Pigneau raised money from French merchants in the Mascarene Islands and India, bought two ships, weapons, and ammunition, hired volunteers and deserters from the French Navy, and left Pondicherry at the head of his private expedition on June 19, 1789—four weeks before the storming of the Bastille set off the French Revolution.

Pigneau sailed directly to Vietnam because his royal protégé was back in Saigon. Nguyen Anh had returned to Hanoi in 1787, where he soon afterward relighted the fires of war that were to burn in Vietnam for another fifteen years. When Pigneau joined him at the end of July, 1789, Saigon and the southern provinces of Cochin China had been in Anh's hands for almost a year.

While Pigneau was fighting his political battles in Pondicherry and Paris, the Tay Son movement was beginning to lose ground. It had not fulfilled the hopes of the people, the earlier spirit of reform was dying; the social impulses that were the secret of its initial success had wrought no change in the country's social structure. The Tay Son had been unable to arouse the people against a foreign invader, but the people had no stake in a war against Nguyen Anh. The peasants wanted peace, and they began to side with Nguyen Anh when he showed signs of being able to defeat his opponents.

For Pigneau's men, the war was a slow and disappointing business. Most of them were young adventurers who had joined Pigneau in the hopes of quick wealth. Only a handful stuck it out. Pigneau himself was ready to drop the venture. Nguyen Anh refused to take any unnecessary risks. Because he was in no hurry, his French advisers thought him timid, unenergetic, and perhaps incapable of victory. It took more than a dozen campaigns before Nguyen Anh succeeded in landing his troops near Hue. But in 1802, Hue fell, and once Hue had fallen Hanoi also fell, and with this the Tay Son lost the war. Nguyen Anh proclaimed himself Emperor of Vietnam, taking the name of Gia Long.

Pigneau's real aim in Vietnam had been the advancement of his religion. He had planned and fought not to give France an Asian empire but to give Vietnam a Catholic ruler in the person of his beloved pupil, the young Prince Canh, son of Nguyen Anh. But even if Pigneau had succeeded in converting the boy, he would have failed in his goal: the young prince died twenty years before his father. When Pigneau died, in 1799, Cochin China probably had fewer than 30,000 Christians.

Missionaries, Merchants, Conquerors • 73

Vietnam turned against the West in Gia Long's lifetime, who, although he respected and honored his French helpers, did not trust any European power. His alleged friendship for France, a major tenet of French colonial propaganda, was never put to the test. During the Napoleonic wars and the early years of the Restoration, France made no serious political or mercantile efforts to exploit Gia Long's reputed good will. The last of Pigneau's sides left the court of Hue a few years after Gia Long's death, and Vietnamese-French relations were again restricted to contacts between the people and the missionaries.

The hostility of Gia Long's successors toward the West was the result largely of the new tide of European aggression sweeping over India into Malaya and Burma and up along the Chinese coast. Gia Long himself foresaw this and appointed as his successor a man hostile to the West. Five years after his death, the missionaries were again treated as agents of a subversive movement. An imperial edict of 1825 charged the "perverse religion of the European" with "corrupting the hearts of men." Between
1833 and 1838, seven missionaries were sentenced to death and executed. The lifework of Pigneau was being undone.

In the meantime, the forces of Western imperialist aggression were steadily growing stronger. The threat to Vietnam's independence became apparent under Gia Long's immediate successor, Minh Mang, who ruled from 1820 to 1841, and it increased during the brief rule of Thieu Tri, one of Minh Mang's forty-nine sons. The final clash came under Tu Duc, the last emperor of an independent Vietnam.

Tu Duc ruled over his unfortunate country from 1847 to 1883. The first year of his rule also was the year of the first French attack on Tourane. When Tu Duc died, the northern and central parts of his country were about to become the two French protectorates of Tongking and Annam. The South, which the French had already wrested from Vietnam, had become the French colony of Cochin-China.

Vietnam's nine hundred years of independence had come to an end.

The Conquest of French Indochina

France had reappeared on the Far Eastern scene in 1817; exactly forty years later, in July, 1857, the French Government decided to organize a military expedition against Vietnam. In these forty years, French policy toward Vietnam went through three distinct phases. In the first of these, which lasted from 1817 to 1831, France tried through diplomatic efforts to obtain trading privileges and to persuade Vietnam to forge closer political bonds with Paris. Both these efforts were unsuccessful, and after a series of setbacks the French abandoned their attempts to gain a foothold in Vietnam by diplomatic and peaceful means.

In the second phase, which lasted about ten years, France showed little interest in Vietnam and in fact pursued no policy whatever. Aside from the missionaries, no Frenchmen had any contacts, either official or private, with any Vietnamese. Yet