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French Military Ethnography in Colonial Upper Tonkin (Northern Vietnam), 1897–1904

*“We will need to change the economic mores of the native man, force him to renounce the ‘aurea mediocritas’ where he revels rightly perhaps, but for which the conquering people looking to get from him all that he can give cannot settle.”*¹

Among the historical documents that offer a glimpse into the colonial ethnography of upland Tonkin, a certain little-known monograph, never reprinted or translated, has been considered by a handful of enthusiasts to be of great interest. The volume, *Ethnographie du Tonkin septentrional* [Ethnography of Northern Tonkin], was penned by commander Étienne-Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière and published in 1906 in Paris. At the time, it offered a bounty of original ethnographic data on the then little-known tribes [*peuplades*] dwelling by the hundreds of thousands in the Sino-Tonkinese borderlands.² Yet, aside from this early excitement, the volume has remained in relative obscurity ever since. A few dozen copies are still held in select libraries around the world, but few authors have referred to it and of those, most are published in French.³ As fascinating as this manuscript might be, it is only an edited version, meant for public distribution, of an even rarer internal 270-page military report of 1904 also penned by Lunet de Lajonquière, titled *Ethnographie des territoires militaires* [Ethnography of the Military Territories].⁴

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Despite how competently these twin volumes were produced, they pale in significance to the first-hand material Commander Lunet de Lajonquière—who had not participated in the field research—had been provided to feed his prose. Both *Ethnographies* were just the tip of an iceberg of four thousand handwritten pages of field reports produced in situ by seventy different authors. These originals were long thought to have disappeared or to have been scattered in the turmoil of a war-torn twentieth century. Yet, it turns out that copies of nearly the entire venture had been tucked away in archive vaults, where I stumbled upon them. Together with a few connected administrative archival documents, they tell the story of a remarkable venture in the colonial ethnography of upland Tonkin from the unlikely cultural perspective of the military.

This article proposes a narration of that forgotten endeavor conducted a little over a century ago in the borderland mountains of today's northern Vietnam.⁵ First, I consider the logic of the militarization of the northern borderlands at the end of the nineteenth century, a strategic policy that triggered the launch of two surveys in 1897 and 1903. I then examine the methods used in the drafting of these surveys and, building upon material from the original documents, I comment on the mindset of the officers who performed this task.

Digging up new ethnography from the past matters for a number of reasons. Most of the highland population covered by these surveys did not develop endogenous scripts, and thus, did not produce archives. Archeological research in their locale is still in its infancy and has not yet yielded operational results. To further complicate the matter, most of these societies never conferred great significance to personal or collective memory beyond a couple of generations, which makes mining their oral history much less promising than one might hope. Researchers are thus left with only sparse and fragmented material written by outside witnesses. Even then, as historian Bradley Davis recently showed, usable Vietnamese sources on the northern highlands are meager.⁶ As a consequence, and by default as it were, early French colonial sources become priceless.⁷

This is not to suggest that such military ethnography produced by inexperienced observers embedded in a rigid colonial institution should automatically be labeled ethnography in the modern, professional sense of the

word. What might its true value be then? Let us reserve judgment until the last part of this journey.

Military Rule in Upland Tonkin

In 1885, China, Vietnam's longtime overlord, transferred suzerainty over the imperial north by treaty to the new French colonial rulers.⁸ For the freshly debarked governor general of Indochina [*gouverneur général de l'Indochine*], the top commissioner in French Indochina, controlling the vast territory along the Chinese border figured on the list of priorities. Through numerous violent military operations euphemistically titled "pacification missions" [*missions de pacification*], France took steady action during the rest of the 1880s and most of the 1890s to occupy first the Red River Delta, then its peripheral catchment and principal adjacent valleys, and finally the mountains. Opponents were repressed and submissive populations rewarded, the latter being far more numerous as local peasants were generally relieved to see a new power instilling some order in these precarious highlands plagued for decades by "bandit rule."⁹

The French military's penetration of the uplands over the 1880s was strongly influenced by an ideology best represented by diplomat Auguste Pavie and Colonel Théophile Pennequin.¹⁰ This involved negotiations with adversaries to begin with, and more belligerent action when diplomatic means failed. In the years before the frontier was secured, parties of brigands from the north and east constantly roamed the mountain paths.¹¹ To cement its power in the region, France made alliances with some of the stronger local highland parties and worked with them to curb banditry and run the region.¹² It took until 1896 to finalize the bilateral demarcation of the border with China.¹³

Up to that point, French knowledge of Chinese borderland occupants was slim. Before 1890, the only information that had been collected about non-Kinh and non-Han uplanders had come from moderately dependable reports occasionally filed by a handful of explorers venturing across mountains.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the military command had made certain operational assumptions. French historian Nguyễn Thế Anh documented that in the minds of the general staff in Hà Nội, the northern mountains sheltered three types of unwanted populations: rebels hostile to the French occupation; groups of loosely-organized looters harassing the local peasants; and massive



FIGURE 1: “Tonkin: pirates en jugement” [Tonkin: Trial of Pirates], by Doctor Hocquart, 1885. SOURCE: École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO).

groups of organized, exogenous bandits involved in large-scale looting and trafficking that were able to pose a threat to places as well-guarded as Luang Phrabang and Hà Nội.¹⁵ With this picture in mind, the French decided in 1891 to divide Tonkin into three broad zones corresponding to the various modes of organization and grouping of bands: 1) the central delta zone with Annamite [Kinh] bands only (around two hundred and fifty); 2) the delta’s outskirts with mixed Annamite and Chinese bands; 3) the Highlands zone with permanent Chinese bands or occasional raiding Chinese pirates.¹⁶ As this suggests, at the end of the nineteenth century the French chiefly acknowledged Kinh Vietnamese (*Annamites*) and Han Chinese (*Chinois*) as explicit ethnicities in upland Tonkin. Peasant “natives” were known to be in these highlands but were not yet taken into account—a sketchy picture.

MILITARIZING THE BORDERLANDS

As spelled out in the 1891 order signed by the Governor General of Indochina Jean de Lanessan (1891–1894), the colonial administration judged that the numerous bands of entrenched bandits had to be dislodged from



FIGURE 2: Tonkin: Military Territories in the Early 1890s, Scale 1:3,000,000.

SOURCE: Pierre-Paul Famin, *Au Tonkin et sur la frontière du Kwang-Si* [In Tonkin and on the Kwang-Si Border] (Paris: A. Challamel, 1895).

the mountains.¹⁷ The administration concluded that successful occupation of the high frontier could not be achieved without civil and military powers being united. Thus, the Military Territories [Territoires Militaires], were created on August 6, 1891. From the little information he had to base his decisions on, Governor de Lanessan sensed that the native population was so diverse that a standard provincial centralization mirroring the lowlands was unworkable. In any case, this upland population was also so sparse compared to the delta that the meager taxes they might yield would not be enough to support a regular civilian administration. To avoid what civil and military authorities pronounced “a possible political contamination” from the highlands into the lowlands—a sign that they feared not merely “pirates,” but also political opponents to the colonial project—they drew a demarcation line to separate the border region from the Red River Delta.¹⁸ With the line equipped with blockhouses and permanent troops, it was hoped that this would be “strong enough to constitute a definitive obstacle to the movements of bandit bands [. . . and] resist the pressure of the inexhaustible reservoir of pirates that is China.”¹⁹

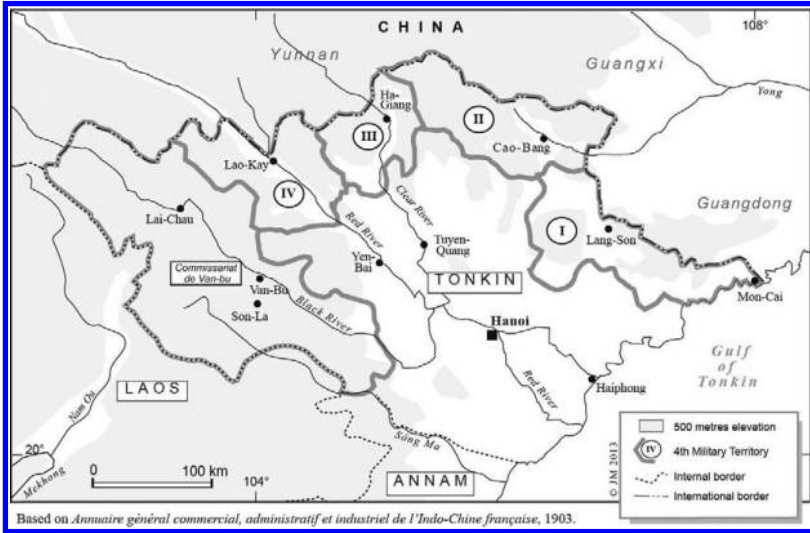


FIGURE 3: Tonkin: Military Territories in 1903. SOURCE: J. Michaud.

The High Region [La Haute-Région], as it was routinely called, was thus divided into four military territories with a commander for each.²⁰ This *commandant* bore responsibility for guarding the frontier and maintaining peace. He was tasked with generating money to help support the local administration, essentially by supervising the flow and taxation of people and goods. His commission included building and maintaining infrastructure and services, administering the population, and perpetuating justice. In other words, he was empowered with all the administrative and judicial attributes of a civilian provincial resident [*résident*], plus military authority and powers. He was to report directly to the top military man in Indochina, the senior commanding general [*général commandant supérieur*], for military affairs and to the resident superior in Tonkin [*résident supérieur au Tonkin*] for civilian ones. Each military territory was then subdivided into two to three circles [*cercles*], with one commanding officer each, generally with the rank of captain. Each circle was further subdivided into up to ten sectors [*secteurs*], with a subaltern officer in charge, normally a lieutenant.²¹ The territories of each sector often conveniently matched the old *châu* administrative divisions that the imperial administration applied to the frontier.²²

At ground level, this whole process was summed up by an officer in a 1903 sector report:

The French administration is represented in the area by the captain commanding the post of Trùng Khánh Phủ and the sector of the same name, assisted by the officers and noncommissioned officers in charge of posts. These, however, have only a policing and monitoring duty, all administrative action being concentrated in the sector head town. The sector commander sees especially to collect taxes on behalf of the protectorate, thus preventing to a large extent any abuse by the indigenous authorities. He ensures the implementation of all the requirements of the French administrative authority in the territory, represented by the military authority. . . . Facing the French administration is the native administration, completely subjected to the former, for which it is the executing agent. This native administration is modeled on the administration in the delta imposed by the court of Huế.²³

French influence spread outward from scattered outposts and garrison towns (Figure 2). The French organized parties of local *montagnards* (mountain people, as the French generically labeled highland dwellers) into partisans and counter-guerillas (Figure 5). In this regard, Colonel Joseph Galliéni, among the most influential military figures to be posted in French Indochina, left a mark on the military administration in Tonkin that endured long after his stay from 1892–1896.²⁴ Galliéni integrated the armament of local groups in a global occupation program of the military territories with the aim of “constituting, along the border, a military zone solidly watched over sufficiently to make impossible the stay or the transit of any band.”²⁵ Galliéni was mindful of the human factor in his equation. As demonstrated by Henri Eckert, Galliéni’s program focused on obtaining support from the population.²⁶ Building trust, erasing the fresh terror of the conquest, and taming the ubiquitous and dreaded roaming bandits became the primary objectives of the colonial occupying force. The next step was to become strategically acquainted with the various ethnic groups inhabiting the highlands, understand their chain of command, learn about their customs, and gain influence over them.²⁷

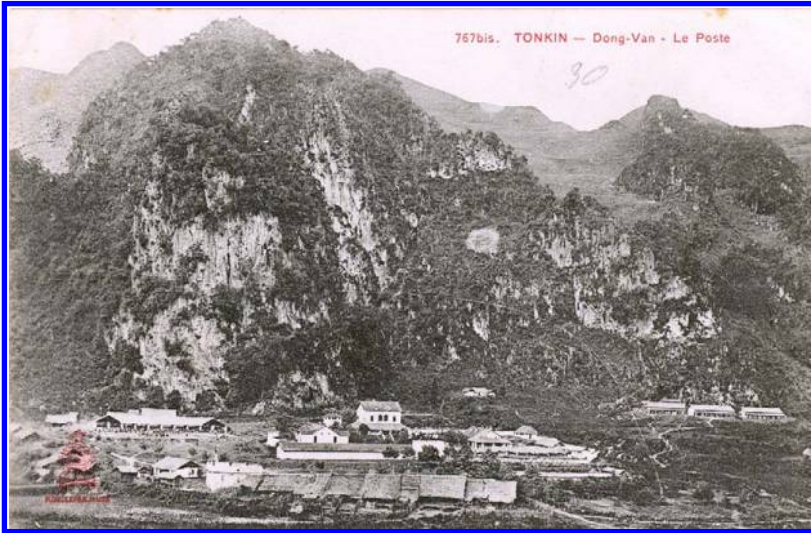


FIGURE 4: “Tonkin - Dong van – Le poste” [Tonkin - Đồng Văn – The Post].

SOURCE: Postcard by Dieulefils, undated, circa 1905.

The Story Behind Our Two Seminal Surveys

By the late 1890s, security issues had largely subsided and a degree of tranquility was established on the Chinese frontier. The goal of the region’s day-to-day administration then turned to the fullest possible exploitation of the uplands’ economic potential, or *mise en valeur*, as the French obliquely called the operation; hence, a need to learn more about the local peoples.²⁸ The French recognized the importance of “winning the hearts” of local populations in anticipation of achieving “the superior political control that comes from better understanding [them].”²⁹ However, they faced a lack of documentation; if something was to be learned about highland border indigenous peoples, someone would have to design and conduct surveys.³⁰ This effort was handled in two somewhat disjointed steps, in 1897 and 1903.

GOVERNOR DOUMER’S SURVEY, 1897–1898: PACING THE ESTATE

The first thrust in this process came from the highest level. Governor General Paul Doumer (1897–1898 and 1899–1902), who would briefly become President of France, was an energetic and authoritarian bureaucrat who left



FIGURE 5: “Tonkin - Yen thê – Le groupe de partisans Mans, appartenant au chef Pham Que Thang du Yu Nhai” [Tonkin Yên Thê – Group of Man (Dao/Yao) Partisans Belonging to Chief Pham Que Thang from Yu Nhai]. SOURCE: Postcard by Dieulefils, undated, circa 1905.

a lasting mark on French Indochina, notably by reforming finances and initiating major architectural and infrastructural works. Doumer also nurtured the creation of the *École française d’Extrême-Orient* [French School of Asian Studies (EFEO)], displaying his support for the study of Indochina and its population’s past and present. This particular preoccupation triggered the launch of an investigation into upper Tonkin and its peoples. Less than a year since the final settlement with China on the Sino-Tonkinese borderline, Doumer’s enterprise aimed explicitly at sizing up the northern borderlands. He wanted to take stock of its resources, assess the state of its economic development and trade, and measure its economic potential for the colonial economy—all this in a fashion characteristic of a conscientious landlord pacing a newly purchased estate and appraising its promises.

Once conceived, Doumer passed his request to his commander in chief for the Indochina Troops, Division General A.E.J. Bichot (1889, 1896–1899), who circulated a note on March 5, 1897 ordering commanders in each of the four military territories to use all available resources to conduct the necessary research at the sector level.³¹ The research was to cover the physiology

and economic potential of the territories, and in an ancillary way, the history and mores of the populations inhabiting them. General Bichot's order to the commanders, for which the exact inspiration remains unidentified, itemizes the fields that the sector officers' inquiries should cover:

Chapter I: Physical description

- 1- Orography
- 2- Hydrography, regime of rivers
- 3- Main characteristics of the region
 - 1- Climatology, seasons, thermometric and barometric observation
 - 2- Salubrity: diseases, hygiene

Chapter II: History of the conquest

- 1- Preliminaries
- 2- Occupation column
- 3- Movements of pirate bands since occupation

Chapter III: Social, political and administrative organization

- 1- Races (Origin, mores, customs, language, religion): Family and village organization, nature of ownership
- 2- French and indigenous administration: hierarchy, distribution of power, indigenous administrative divisions, their correlation with French administrative divisions
- 3- Taxation
- 4- Justice
- 5- Public works
- 6- Brief survey of the administrative and political organization of the adjacent Chinese region

Chapter IV: Economic situation

- 1- Agriculture, nature of the soil, cultures, forests, concessions, land available
- 2- Industry, mines, local industries, concessions
- 3- Commerce, markets, market price list, products, currencies, trade routes, transportation
- 4- Trade with China

Chapter V: Military organization

- 1- Role of military posts in the region, Linh-cô, partisans, optical posts, armed villages, piracy. Military organization of the Chinese region

Chapter VI: Conclusions, probable future for the region, desiderata

Appendices:

- 1- List of villages in the sector: name in Quốc Ngữ and Chinese characters, races, number of families, population, registered inhabitants
- 2- Essential word lists in various vernacular languages³²

This was a vast program, a functional task, mining local knowledge on issues that mattered to the colonial project plus the general picture of each group, where they lived and in what numbers, their land use, trade, and military activities as well as patterns of ownership and customary leadership.

Supposing that all reports had been saved from that year's survey (with no certainty as to exactly how many sectors existed in 1897). The archives of the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer [National Center for Overseas Archives (ANOM)] hold thirty-five sector reports plus one summary report per military territory (barring the 3rd). The breakdown is ten sector reports from the 1st military territory, nine each from the 2nd and 3rd, and seven from the 4th, for a total of just over three thousand manuscript pages.

GOVERNOR BEAU'S SURVEY, 1903: FILLING IN THE GAPS

Taking over from Doumer, Jean-Baptiste Paul Beau, a career diplomat previously based in China, was appointed governor general of Indochina (GGI) in October 1902 (1902–1906, 1907–1908). Division General Pierre Coronat, an old hand active in Indochina since 1869, had himself been appointed commander in chief of the Indochina Troops (1902–1904) the previous week. Beau's term of nearly six years would allow him to associate his name with several lasting undertakings, including the final stage of the railway line from Lào Cai to Kunming on the Yunnan-Tonkin rail link project initiated a decade earlier. He signed an important Franco-Siamese treaty on Cambodia, reformed indigenous education, and set up the first modern university of Indochina. Much less publicized was the new governor general's initiative to conduct a thorough ethnological survey of the peoples of Indochina. In June 1903, only six years after Doumer's own survey, Beau commissioned a new survey, broader in scope and yet more focused.³³ Beau's original intention was ambitious: that every civilian province and military territory of Indochina immediately produce a report on the state of their population.³⁴ This time, the emphasis was exclusively on social and cultural characteristics.

A combination of factors justified the launch of this second survey so soon after the first. The 1897 survey had only covered the military territories in Tonkin, accounting for a very small portion of the colony's population; Beau wanted more. Concurrently, between 1897 and 1903, the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* had been launched, and with it, a new emphasis was

placed on research regarding the history, philology, archeology, and ethnology of French Indochina. Louis Finot, EFEO's first director (1900–1904), became actively involved in the governor's project (which explains why this survey's reports are found today in the EFEO's archives instead of the GGI collection at the ANOM).³⁵ The top brass's decision on which officer would be in charge of producing the final report for the northern borderland was influenced by Finot. He recommended his colleague and friend, Commander Étienne-Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière, who had been his travel companion on the ship from France and then, upon their arrival in Sài Gòn, his collaborator on the *Mission archéologique en Indochine* [Archeological Mission in Indochina], a grand archeological reconnaissance of the coastal area of Indochina conducted in 1899–1900 that laid the foundations of the EFEO.

The first years of the EFEO saw the establishment of ties between this new school and outside scholars, including young Marcel Mauss, a former student of Finot's at the *École pratique des Hautes-Études* [Practical School for Higher Studies] at Sorbonne in Paris who had recently been appointed to a teaching position there. Finot, knowing Mauss to be interested in the origins and methods of ethnography, asked him to contribute to the drafting of ethnographic questionnaires intended for field workers involved in ethnological research.³⁶ One tangible outcome was Mauss' 1900 booklet "Instruction pour les collaborateurs de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient" [Instruction For the Collaborators of the French School of Asian Studies], a short manual on methods devoted primarily to language and glossaries, but also containing recommendations on archeology and ethnography. On the latter, the booklet proposed a concise model questionnaire:

- I. General. – Location of the group. Nature of its habitat (plain, mountain, etc.). Limits. Physical characteristics. Mental and physiological state. Name it gives itself. Names given to it by other peoples. Mores in general.
- II. Housing. – The village: location, disposition, closing. The house: form, construction, organization. Furniture.
- III. Garment. – Costumes of both sexes for ordinary days and holidays. Hairstyle. Ornaments. Personal hygiene articles.
- IV. Feeding. – Food, beverages, tobacco, opium, betel, etc. Utensils for their preparation and their use.

- V. Hunting and fishing. – Gear and catches.
- VI. Transportation. – Vehicles, boats.
- VII. Agriculture. – Method of cultivation of the land; instruments and produce. Domestic animals. Animal husbandry, sericulture, apiculture.
- VIII. Trade. – Shops, bazaars, markets, commodities. Weights and measures. Currencies.
- IX. Industry. – Fabrication of salt, metals, carpentry, pottery, basketry, spinning, weaving, dyeing, etc. Industrial arts.
- X. War. – Arms, warrior attributes.
- XI. Society. – The family: kinship, adoption, marriage, parental authority, inheritance, status of women, education of children. - The commune and tribe. - Civil law. Property - criminal law. Trial court. Crime.
- XII. Art. – Drawings, painting, sculpture, music, theater and dance. Various games. Writing. Literature: poems, stories and folksongs.
- XIII. Religion – The gods, their nature their relationship with man. Image of the gods. Fetishes. Temples, domestic altars, furniture of the temple. Prayers - rituals, rites of birth, of puberty, of death, graves. Religious festivals, sacrifices, prayers. Agrarian cults, feast of the vegetation. Rites of house building. Magic rites, witchcraft and medicine. Animal worship: totemism. Ritual prohibitions: taboo. Myths, beliefs and legends. Myth about the origin of the world, of man, of the tribe. Beliefs about the soul, survival, the outer world. Various legends.³⁷

Clearly, this scholarly structure for a field survey was an improvement on Doumer's 1897 model, exhibiting a more sophisticated awareness of the intricacies of societies and cultures. But it was also designed to avoid exceeding a point in sophistication that would render it unworkable by non-scholars. Most information sought by these instructions was of a fairly immediate nature and did not require skills other than common sense. Section XIII, however, dealing with religion, jumped up several notches in difficulty and would have been hard for non-professionals to tackle. One can also note the absence of any question about history, an odd oversight. But what mattered was that this EFEO questionnaire of 1900 was a new tool available to local, one-time ethnographers, and one to be reckoned with. Oddly, as I discovered to my surprise, Governor Beau ignored it entirely.

Beau used both civilian and military channels to convey his demand for a survey to the administrative hierarchies. The civilian channel went through the normal administrative chain, from the governor general to each of the

resident superiors, then down the ladder to each provincial resident, on to local administrators.³⁸ On the military side, in a two-page note issued on June 7, 1903, Governor Beau gave orders to his commander in chief, General Coronnat:

The gradual extension of administrative action to populations who until now remained outside the influence of our civilization has highlighted the government's new need for a more precise body of information concerning the aboriginal races in the Peninsula than the one it holds at the moment. In consequence, I honorably request you, dear General, to give instructions to the commanders of Military Territories to undertake this work in every Sector.³⁹

The governor and his staff were aware that critical factual information—topography, hydrography, patterns of roads and trails, location and number of partisans, and so forth—had been gathered during the 1897–1898 survey. They aimed to complement that survey with what it lacked most, social and cultural data supported by what the governor called “ethnic statistics”:

The time has come to conduct a first attempt at ethnic statistics in Indochina. It should be anticipated that the mere collection of the information available today will not suffice to put together exact and complete statistics; however it will provide its first elements and will usefully condense what is known, highlighting more precisely what remains to be known.

Eager to see his initiative succeed, Beau insisted that the task should be performed with diligence and care:

I put serious interest in this survey, which will undoubtedly facilitate the progress of our authority in every part of the country. I am sure the officers in charge of administering the Military Territories will enthusiastically seize this opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge they have gained of the populations in their care.

The advancement of colonial influence was explicitly at stake. In each of the forty-seven sectors included in the military territories by 1902, officers were specifically asked to produce one ethnic map and a monograph.⁴⁰ The map had to be drawn at a 1:100,000 scale to match the scale of the ordinance survey maps produced by the Geographical Service of the General Staff. It was expected to be color-coded to indicate the distribution of the different ethnic groups (see Figure 6).⁴¹

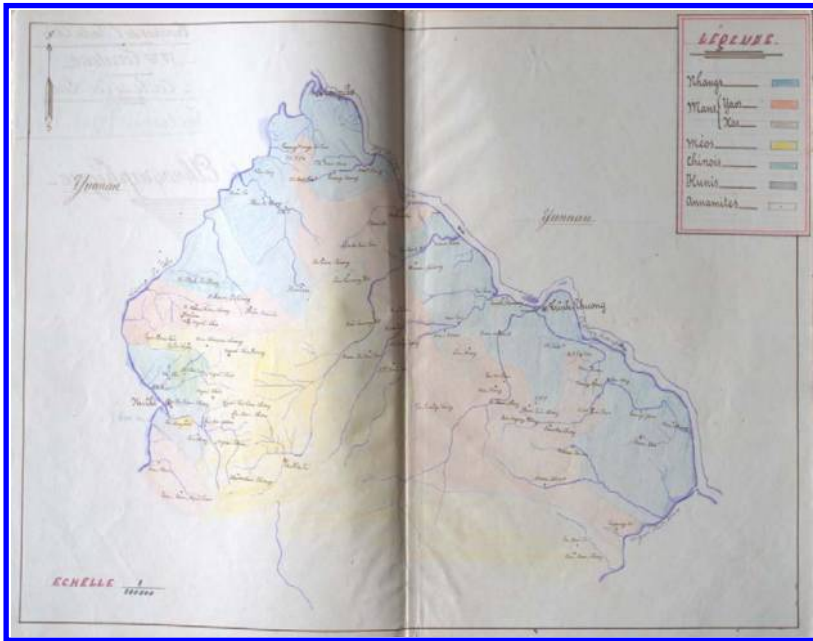


FIGURE 6: Ethnic Mapping at 1:100,000, Sector of Trinh-Thuong (Bát Xát), 1903.
SOURCE: Sector Report, File No: 334, MSS.EUR, EFEO.

As for the monographs, it was required that they cover all of the different “races” present in each sector, each officer being told to follow the same structure per race:⁴²

- 1- Name of the group: a) the name they use for themselves; b) the name given to them by other natives.
- 2- Location. Approximate number. List of villages.
- 3- Physical characteristics.
- 4- Language. List of common words (sky, sun, moon, star, earth, water, fire, parts of the body, animals, plants, etc., etc.). Writing system.
- 5- Houses. Clothes.
- 6- Social state: Organization of the village and of the family.
- 7- Economic state: Agriculture, industry, commerce.
- 8- Intellectual state: religious and other beliefs.
- 9- Customs relating to birth, marriage, death, and all circumstances of social life.⁴³

As noted earlier, this structure bears no recognizable resemblance to the more elaborate guidelines proposed in EFEO's 1900 *Instruction* booklet. I have found nothing in the archives to help understand why. It is almost unthinkable that Beau had not been made aware of the existence of the EFEO proposal. As the simplest explanation is frequently the most likely one, common sense suggests that Beau (and/or General Coronnat) might have wanted to keep things straightforward, possibly worrying that the EFEO questionnaire would be too intellectually demanding or unnecessarily time consuming for their already overstretched officers in the field. The governor had explicitly requested that the information be with him no later than December 31, 1903—short notice of little over six months during what officers on the frontier judged to be the busiest part of the year. From the point of view of those who had to carry out the orders, this chunk of time must have appeared hardly sufficient for the multiple tasks involved: communicate the request down the chain of command, push aside many current priorities to make room for this one, allocate material and human resources, mobilize interpreters and transport, conduct the survey as such, draft up reports and maps, have them checked by superior officers and possibly sent back for amendments, and finally produce a clean version, make copies of it, and return it up the hierarchy, all of which was an extra burden for an occupation force on the frontier.

Addressing a crucial methodological issue overlooked in the 1897 instructions, Governor Beau also added that: "One shall carefully specify the nature of the information provided: whether it is first- or second-hand; whether it is certain, probable, or doubtful." Beau made a closing request that "in the future, it would be advisable to summarize data newly collected in a global report to be sent to me at the end of each year."⁴⁴ But judging by the absence of archives testifying to their existence, it is possible that no subsequent reports were ever produced.

We can gather from the sector reports that the general plan was for these reports to be written, copied at sector level, and sent to the territory's headquarters to be copied and filed. The originals were to then be passed on to the general staff, approved, and handed over to Commander Lunet de Lajonquière, who was in charge of the overall summary. His final cut was submitted on September 18, 1904, eight and a half months after the

December 31, 1903 deadline. *Ethnographie des territoires militaires*, published by F. H. Schneider in Hà Nội, contained a monograph plus a synthesis color map at 1:500,000 of the entire region surveyed.⁴⁵ The book credits Lunet de Lajonquière as the main author, with mention of “the works of Lieutenant-Colonel Diguët, Commander Bonifacy, Commander Révérony, Captain Fesch, etc., etc.”

At EFEO’s archives in Paris, there are now thirty-six sector reports for 1903 out of roughly forty-seven sectors (Appendix 1). These include nine reports from the 1st military territory, ten from the 2nd, seven from the 3rd, and ten from the 4th, amounting to 435 manuscript pages, though some sector reports curiously yielded a mere four or five pages. To this were added a few summary reports on specific ethnic groups or linguistics, written by higher or better-informed officers, adding about five hundred pages to the initial tally. This yielded a grand total of 935 pages of field based material for the 1903 survey—considerably less than the three-thousand-plus pages for the 1897–1898 survey. However, the material for the second survey is entirely devoted to ethnography.

The Field Reports

THE 1897–1898 REPORTS: STRATEGIC ESSENTIALS AND EUROCENTRIC OVERTONES

We now examine in more detail how the request from “on high” materialized in the field and how the authors’ positionality played out. First we need to consider briefly how the reports were produced. Officers heading individual sectors were put in charge of the field surveys. The only local language likely to be spoken by the average field-based French officer in the upper region was a basic form of Vietnamese. Typically arriving from other colonies for their two- or three-year posting, these officers had little opportunity to develop language proficiency. They used interpreters, with literate local assistants writing field notes and transcriptions. Each officer signed the report he produced, or, if someone else had performed the task, countersigned it. The reports therefore leave little doubt as to their authorship.⁴⁶ For example, during the first survey, the Hoang-thu-bi (today Hoàng Su Phì, Hà Giang Province) report in the 3rd military territory

was first signed by Lieutenant Pauvif on April 2, 1898, while data was reported to have been collected by Pauvif and Captain Lapouble. Once completed, the report was countersigned by the sector commander on April 3, 1898—which, just twenty-four hours after it was signed by the authors, suggests mere rubberstamping.

The reports do not mention the language(s) used during interviews and do not provide the identities or profiles of the informants; the commission did not request these details. From the 1903–1904 reports, we can deduce that information likely came from local leaders and elders as well as “natives” living in and around posts or coming to visit the periodic markets. There is no evidence of fieldwork in village sites; however, regular patrols outside the immediate vicinity of the posts must have enabled discussions in situ with local elders and leaders.

There is evidence in the reports from this first survey that authors understood that their surveying duties were contributing to the colonial project. For instance, Commander Ecorse of Lao-kay [Lào Cai] concluded his account with these words:

We can work in confidence thanks to the establishment of land communication, the encouragement given to the natives and their cultures, the diffusion of French education, a prudent and wise administration, [and] a consistent vigilance aimed at stopping incursions by border marauders. We can pave the way to colonization and fulfill with dignity the avant-garde mission of civilization reserved for the military administration.⁴⁷

One can also sense that a good proportion of the authors of the 1897–1898 reports had only modest respect for the highlanders and their customs. Some bought into the myth of the “lazy native.”⁴⁸ Eurocentric infantry officers mostly belonged to the newly-arrived occupation force that had been in Indochina for only a short time. With a typically middle- to upper-class European take on economic behavior, they demonstrated a severe misunderstanding of peasant pragmatism. One example out of many: “Before this region can achieve great prosperity, we will first have to triumph over the natural apathy of its inhabitants. This population is improvident and lazy. In their view, harvest should only provide for one year.”⁴⁹ For this officer, the taxation of agricultural produce could solve this problem and “oblige the

natives to produce beyond their immediate needs . . . an interesting task for any officer concerned with the future of the region he administers.”⁵⁰

Other, less numerous but usually more seasoned officers took a softer stance: “[The Tai are a] strong, sober, intelligent, and honest race . . . We are not facing here the same population as in the Delta, which has been enslaved for centuries, ever ready to obey as long as one shows sufficient force.”⁵¹ And again: “Essentially hardworking, the races of Upper-Tonkin have nothing in common with the Chinese and Annamite races, particularly regarding the loose morals of the latter two.”⁵² In a note added at the end of the 164-page manuscript, the author of this last quote, Lieutenant Probst, was praised by a superior officer declaring that the lieutenant’s long stay in the upland region had allowed him to produce a fine document. Probst’s report appears to exemplify the higher standards achieved by the more dedicated military ethnographers during the 1897–1898 survey. In the opening section of his report’s third chapter, entitled “Ethnologie,” to which he devotes fifteen pages, Probst took the initiative of elaborating the cultural information in a way his superiors did not require. The enthusiast shows a good understanding of the ethnic variety in his sector: “The Méo [Mèo (Hmong)] race subdivides in several varieties, two of which are to be found in the Sector: the Black [Hmong Leng] and the White Méos . . . The White Thai can only be found around Lai-chau [Lai Châu].”⁵³ Probst also refers explicitly to populations and places outside the Ba-xat [Bát Xát] sector, evidence that he had an understanding that went beyond the narrow boundaries of his posting. Reference to past events—a Pou-la [Phù Lá] migration to Tonkin in the fifteenth century; an ancient invasion of the Thai from the Menam (Chao Phraya) and Mekong valleys; the violent migrations of the Mèo, Man [Dao] and Hu-nhi [Hà Nhì] from Yunnan four decades earlier—further suggest that the author must have had access to documents providing some historical and ethnographic background, or that he was able to communicate with someone conversant in such documents.

One would expect the agency and positionality of the authors of the 1897–1898 sector reports to be most obvious in the conclusions, especially the “Desiderata” segment where authors were expected to voice their opinions. Most officers, however, limited their personal contributions to administrative matters, essentially stressing the economic potential of the

region and asking for more infrastructure work to be done in their sector if its potential was to be realized. In the rest of the conclusions, all the officers share a vision of local economic development stimulated by the colonization of the highlands by Kinh and European lowland migrants. Captain Pentel in Ban-lao [Bản Lầu], for instance, starts his final remarks on a cheerful note: “This region offers all the desirable resources for the European colonists who might want to come to live here.” He also warns that colonists would have to do without luxury and worldly distractions and live a modest and laborious life. To prepare the settlement for such European colonists, he suggests an avant-garde migration composed of Vietnamese laborers, craftsmen, and peasants paving the way.⁵⁴ Some authors’ views on how to achieve this immigration while managing the local population efficiently are tainted with preconceptions and social evolutionism, as Sub-Lieutenant Maury in Pho-lu [Phố Lu] exemplifies:

1- The Man population should settle down and cultivate the numerous rice fields existing in the plains; 2- Fighting their natural apathy, the Tai should succeed in performing two harvests per year, which is not impossible; 3- The serious and hardworking Annamite agriculturalists should migrate here to offer a model to the indigenes and force them to produce more than they actually do; 4- All these races should undertake animal breeding, oxen especially, and horses; 5- They should be supported in their efforts, [and] we should know how to help them fight the climate, which is unhealthy even for those who have been living here for a long time; 6- New European colonists should set up sawmills and breeding farms in order to keep the poor natives usefully busy.⁵⁵

Others, such as Captain Moraine, differ: “The Tai man is not as malleable [as the Kinh]. That man is a self-styled epicurean and seems happy this way. Why should we disturb his peace of mind?”⁵⁶ In the rest of his conclusion, however, Moraine reveals a biased agenda promoting the expansion of agriculture for his sector, suggesting that his initial open-mindedness towards the Tai’s low productivity might have also been a roundabout way to sideline them from future economic development.

Despite an assortment of views and commentaries, we nonetheless have here an overall case of the institutional production of knowledge reflecting foreign ideologies. This knowledge was centrally planned and structured, using a dominant power position to extract information. The result was an

authoritative, yet warped, text. The hand of the colonial state is visible at every stage in the production of these reports, from the conception of the survey to the final counter-signature by the top officers, not to mention the secrecy in which the documents were kept. We know that the 1897–1898 sector reports were collected by the General Government of Indochina, hence their cataloguing and conservation in the GGI series. However, there is no evidence that a synthesis or combination of the data has ever been performed. There is no known publication stemming from this survey, and no reference is made to it as a centrally planned venture in subsequent publications.⁵⁷ Together, these clues suggest that the military nature of the survey sufficed to keep the results away from the eyes of scholars and the general public.

THE 1903 REPORTS: ETHNOGRAPHY AT LAST

All field authors diligently followed the structure and timetable that Governor Beau demanded for the sector-level reports. A tight calendar and military pragmatism did, however, drive several authors to save time and effort by recycling sections of the 1898 reports in their “Généralités” sections, as exemplified by this quote:

The information given in the first part of this work are: 1) A summary of the [1898 report]; 2) A summary of a geological report by the engineer [name missing]; 3) A table of altitudes collated in 1895 by Lieutenant Delahaye; 4) A summary of a few notes found in archives that have been checked.⁵⁸

Beau’s structure for this survey exhibited a focus on cultural dimensions in many fields of ethnological knowledge. Some questions went far beyond what “achieving the superior political control that comes from the better understanding” required, showing interest above and beyond immediate administrative concerns. For instance, the first item in this questionnaire expresses an expected interest in exonyms, but also in autonyms, a refreshing sign of awareness. Item four, on language, points to a linguistic and classificatory agenda better suited to an academic survey than a military one. Clothes (item 5), religious beliefs (item 8), and customs relating to “all circumstances of social life” (item 9) follow a similar pattern. The final cautionary note regarding “the nature of the information provided” expresses

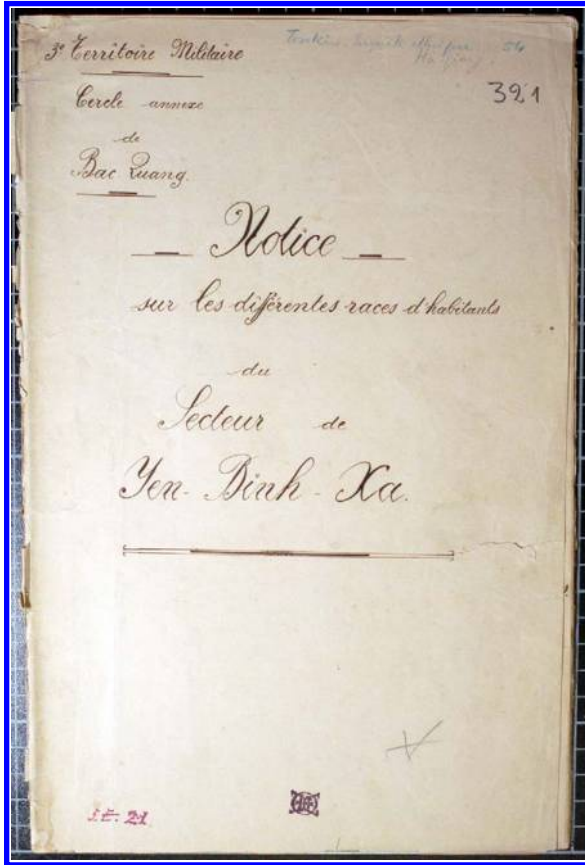


FIGURE 7: Cover Page of a Sector Report, 1903. SOURCE: Sector Report on the Sector of Yen-Binh-Xa, 3rd Military Territory, File No: 321, MSS.EUR, EFEO.

a level of critical reflexivity that was altogether absent from the 1897–1898 survey.

Most reports for 1903 point to indigenous leaders as the main informants, as stated precisely in the Ba-xat report:⁵⁹

The information given in the second part [the catalogue of “races”] has been collected: 1) For the Chinese, directly by the Sector’s Commander from a Chinaman in Ba-xat who can speak French; 2) For the Thais, directly by the Sector’s Commander from the Tia-Tian of Van-xéou, the Ly-truong of Muong Hum serving as the interpreter; 3) For the Nhangs,

directly by the Sector's Commander from the Ly-truong of Ba-xat, who can speak some French.⁶⁰

Sometimes, additional comments by superior officers corroborated the reports, such as those from the sector's commander for the Hoang-thu-bi report, who wrote: "All information contained in this report was provided by indigenous leaders or is the result of observation made directly by the officers of the sector. It can therefore be regarded as almost certain."⁶¹ Indeed, as in the earlier survey, each sector report was signed by its author and then countersigned by an immediate superior, often with a short commentary. For instance, report 305 on the sector of Ca Lung, 2nd military territory, wraps up with: "Work done entirely by Captain Fesch" (emphasis in original). At one hundred and seventy pages—including original photographs, detailed demographics, prices of produce sold on the market over three years, an extensive multilingual lexicon, and competent use of Vietnamese diacritics and numerous Chinese ideograms, all delivered by November 10, 1903, nearly two months early—Fesch's report was a remarkable accomplishment.⁶²

Here are three more extensive quotes representative of the writing style and the range of subjects covered in the 1903 reports:

The course of the Sang Bang Giang is the major trade route. Navigable from Ha Xat north of Cao Bang, it passes through Cao Binh and Cao Bang, two very important markets, Lao Binh, Phuc Hoa, Ta Lung, three marketplaces inside the Sector, and the Chinese markets of Thuy Can, Ha Dong, and Long Tchéon. Sampans sailing up from Long Tchéon bring Chinese goods to all these markets at low cost.⁶³

The Man, who are great hunters and who fish too, have the equipment necessary to engage in these kinds of exercises. We see these hanging in a corner of their homes: first a primitive crossbow, then a fork to spear the fish, and finally this strange gun that the Man Méo Tam make themselves from scratch, a matchlock with elongated barrel and without a stock, which can't be shouldered and that one simply places against the cheek to aim . . . They use these guns to hunt the predators and other animals that come prowling around their homes or cause damage to their crops.⁶⁴

When the funeral is decided, the coffin, covered with a small house in white paper with a bamboo frame, is led to the location chosen by the sorcerer. Upon



Famille des Thoo.

VI. État social - Organisation du village et de la famille.

L'éparpillement est la caractéristique de la commune tho. Il n'y a pas sans le pays de village sans le sens propre du mot mais plutôt agglomération de hameaux souvent situés les uns les autres de plusieurs heures de marche. Ces hameaux se trouvent tous dans les vallées et leur importance est en rapport direct avec l'étendue et la fertilité de dite vallées. Cette dissémination est une conséquence de la configuration du pays qui ne permet pas au village de se constituer en un groupe compact comme en pays annamite où les terres cultivables sont toutes situées dans un rayon très rapproché, mais

FIGURE 8: Page from the Định Hóa Sector Report, 2nd Military Territory, 1903.
SOURCE: File No: 341, MSS.EUR, EFEO.

exiting the funeral house, the coffin must go over the backs of children, who bow to this effect, paying the deceased a final mark of respect. This is followed by the burial. As soon as the coffin is covered with dirt, the little paper house is burned and the banquet begins on the very grave of the deceased and continues inside the funeral house.⁶⁵

It is plain from such quotes that compared to the 1897–1898 survey, the 1903–1904 survey bears the mark of an academic formalization that went beyond the immediate needs of the colony's management. But it also stops short of having fully transformed into a uniquely ethnological survey, at least when the situation is considered from a non-French point of view.⁶⁶ In the British colonies and among Amerindians in the United States at the time, similar surveys were diligently following the precepts of the influential *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* handbook, which, despite having already been through two editions by the turn of the twentieth century, does not seem to have had the least influence on the French surveys in Indochina.⁶⁷ In the French context, where the gathering of data was still firmly separated from its intellectualization, fieldwork was still handed over to cursorily briefed non-specialists, and it was to remain so for a while more.⁶⁸

Altogether less palpably instrumental than the 1897–1898 investigation, the 1903–1904 survey yielded background texts expressing a lower degree of subjectivity and, by contrast, appear practically devoid of authors' personal views regarding civilizational gaps and how best to run the borderlands and their "primitive" populations. Instead, the 1903–1904 survey produced a vast register of comparatively objective linguistic, social, and cultural data through which the disposition of each author crops up only inadvertently, if at all.

Another noteworthy ingenuity in the second survey was the production of a two-hundred-page ethnic summary report covering the 3rd military territory. This had not been completed at the territory level for the 1897–1898 survey, nor for that matter in the second survey, save for this particular territory. This impromptu initiative had to do with the presence of Captain Auguste Bonifacy (1856–1931), a gifted autodidact linguist and ethnologist.⁶⁹ Commander of a sector and then a circle in the 3rd military territory in 1903–1904, and later the territory's commander, Bonifacy produced a hefty race-by-race summary report covering the whole of the 3rd military

territory, signed December 24, 1903.⁷⁰ Was this a personal initiative when human resources were scarce? More likely, it was a request coming from Commander Lunet de Lajonquière, who needed a capable subaltern to harmonize data across reports and provide a summary of the material for the final published volume.⁷¹

Captain Bonifacy interestingly began his report with two pages of musings explaining his intentions and commenting on the global process of sector-level report production. Bonifacy was not alone in this. Others had also explicitly pointed to the dilemma: “Unfortunately, the lack of sufficiently trained interpreters and the relatively short time left to produce this report due to other significant work have made it that some issues remained in obscurity while others could not be given the full extent they deserved.”⁷² Bonifacy’s comments encapsulate the predicaments the whole process faced. He wrote:

It is as an attempt to fill . . . gaps that this report is followed by a monograph for each race, summarizing our personal observation. These monographs deal primarily with questions that sector commanders could only touch upon. They are written along a single model for clarity, including: name - language - writing - social organization - property - slavery - intellectual and moral state - religion - myths - afterlife - rites of birth, marriage, death - will - law and justice.⁷³

But Bonifacy did not merely summarize the sector reports from the 3rd military territory as suggested by Lunet de Lajonquière in the note above, he also complemented them significantly, devoting much space in particular to matters of “religion - myths - afterlife - rites of birth, marriage, death - will - law and justice,” which he rightly assessed were largely missing from the sector reports.⁷⁴ With ten years of experience in Tonkin under his belt—he had landed in Indochina in 1894 at age 39, already a captain with twenty-one years of experience in the military—and a few scholarly articles published in good outlets, he went on:⁷⁵

The work of the sector commanders shows on the part of these officers a sizeable effort, and useful information is abundant. It should be considered, however, that an officer ignoring the language of the country, forced to use an interpreter who often poorly understands what is at stake, can only provide a work lacking in precision. One must already know the habits of the natives

to be able to ask specific questions, while some officers have only been in the area for a short time.⁷⁶

The consequences of this quandary, he judged, and in particular the systematic use of interpreters, were extensive:

Data relating to psychological life is often wrong. [Ethnic Vietnamese] interpreters habitually cannot admit that the natives may think differently, and consider certain of their customs as immoral and simply do not translate the information relating to these.⁷⁷

Bonifacy also bluntly assessed the intellectual state of his colleagues with regard to the discipline of ethnology:

In addition, the officers conversant in ethnography and ethnology and owning books on these matters are very rare. As a consequence, the details given are sometimes worthless, while the facts pertaining to customs that have great importance for an ethnographic perspective are ignored.⁷⁸

Having himself learned enough about ethnology to understand the value of some of its most classic yet elusive features, Bonifacy was able to point at the shortcomings of the reports:

In most reports, the question of religion, of myths, is only touched upon. . . . Regarding family life, authors often differ from one another. Let's not forget that every race is divided into tribes, each tribe itself is sometimes divided into sub-tribes. . . . It will be necessary later to distinguish between these various groups that have different customs and dialects. In addition, some remains of primitive customs—group marriage, levirate, endogamy, exogamy, etc.—have not been researched, the officers not knowledgeable in ethnology generally ignoring these customs. Same with what belongs to the social life; the types of property, the formation of clans, rules relating to justice: ordeals, judicial evidence, have generally not been treated, sociology still being a little-known science.⁷⁹

Such thoughtful remarks are in tune with today's understandings of fieldwork complications in colonial settings at the turn of the twentieth century.⁸⁰ Aptly, in the 1904 version of *Ethnographie*, Lunet de Lajonquière explicitly acknowledged the substance of Bonifacy's comments, adding that these critiques could be applied to the work completed in the whole of the four territories.⁸¹ However, from a pragmatic point of view, he also suggested

that in the absence of other reliable sources on the ethnography of the border region's population, this material remained of great value.

Outcomes and Aftermath

Higher authorities' expectation that there would be follow-up studies or updates to these two initial surveys seem not to have been met. Though Lunet de Lajonquière stated that the statistical information from the sector reports, upon which colonial taxation came to be based, was updated yearly, there remains no trace of further survey activity.⁸²

As I have mentioned, no summary, digest, outline or otherwise has ever been published from the 1897–1898 survey. The unique value of those field reports is thus patent. As for the work of 1903–1904, there exist only Lunet de Lajonquière's two books, the two hundred and seventy-page *Ethnographie des territoires militaires*, written in 1904 for the general staff with sketches, tables, and a summary color-coded map covering only the military territories (Figure 9), and the three hundred and ninety-page public version written two years later, *Ethnographie du Tonkin septentrional* [Ethnography of Northern Tonkin], with a comparative lexicon in standard Romanized script, tables, an index, a color-coded ethnic map of the whole of Tonkin at 1:1,000,000 (Figure 10), plus sixty-one original photographs. Both books adopt the structure we are now familiar with: generalities at the beginning followed by a catalogue of "races" and their descriptions under parallel headings whenever enough material was available to fill these in. From such a large on-ground effort to describe as-yet-unknown populations, one is bound to question this relative paucity of tangible outputs. What from the original reports was left out of the two books is in a way more attractive than what was cropped. The discarded data goes far beyond the needs for a mere synopsis and covers a variety of valuable data ranging from meticulous original ethnological maps and drawings, sector-level demographics, comparative lexicons with diacritics and ideograms, and descriptions of rituals and ceremonies, to precise market price lists, accurate topographical description with the layout of rivers, roads, tracks with travel time, and original photographs. In other words, Lunet de Lajonquière, who did not himself participate in the production of the field reports, was never posted in the highlands, had not published on these societies, and who was requested



FIGURE 9: “Carte ethnographique des territoires militaires du Tonkin” [Ethnographic Map of the Military Territories in Tonkin], Scale 1:500,000, by Lieutenant-Colonel Friquegnon. SOURCE: Étienne Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière, *Ethnographie des Territoires Militaires* [Ethnography of the Military Territories] (Hà Nội: F.H. Schneider, 1904), unpaginated.

by the high command to bring into being a self-contained précis, took several steps back from field level, retaining what his analytical mind found valuable, ultimately focusing on shared characteristics and downplaying dissimilarity or distinctiveness. As Marcel Mauss rightly remarked in a review of the 1906 opus: “This book has all the virtues, all the faults also of such work imposed by a hierarchy concerned with something other than science.”⁸³ Reading the original field reports usefully restores the details and nuances.

In addition to Lunet de Lajonquière’s volumes, a handful of curious or perhaps simply enlightened military officers independently endeavored to circulate their own publications, helping to supplement the overall portrait. The best of these additional volumes and articles are worth mentioning as they show evidence of their author’s exposure to earlier and contemporary relevant literature on the topic both in European languages and in Vietnamese. Unsurprisingly the first publication, or more precisely, stream of publications, belongs to the prolific Auguste Bonifacy. During his military work and well into his retirement in Hà Nội, he published unremittingly from

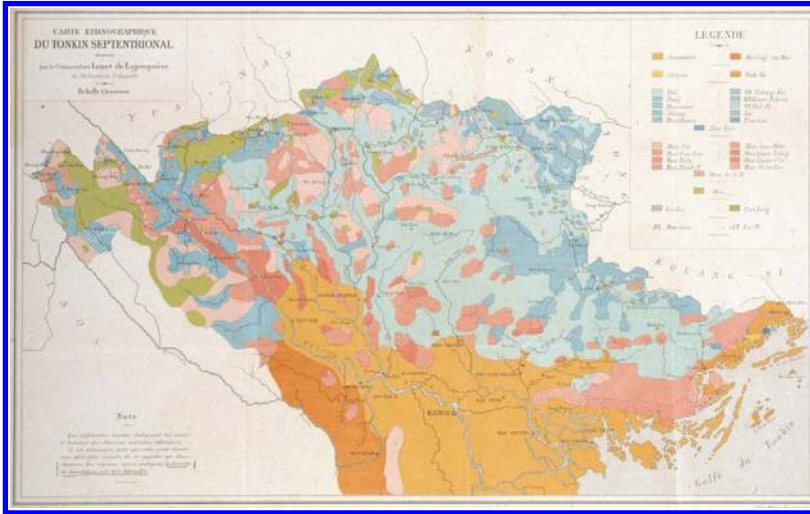


FIGURE 10: “Carte ethnographique du Tonkin septentrional” [Ethnographic Map of Northern Tonkin], Scale 1:1,000,000. SOURCE: Étienne-Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière, *Ethnographie du Tonkin septentrional*, Rédigé sur l'ordre de M. P. Beau, Gouverneur Général de l'Indo-Chine Française, d'après les études des administrateurs civils et militaires des provinces septentrionales [Ethnography of Northern Tonkin, Written on the Order of Mr. P. Beau, Governor General of French Indochina, Based on Studies of Civil and Military Administrators of the Northern Provinces] (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1906), unpaginated.

1902 to 1930, always in the form of articles, most of them appearing in two scholarly journals, *Revue Indo-Chinoise* [The Indochinese Review], and *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* [Bulletin of the French School of Asian Studies] (hereafter *BEFEO*). Bonifacy's output as a self-taught scholar is impressive, with over thirty-five serious pieces, not including numerous contributions to local newsletters and newspapers.⁸⁴ Of these, the majority concern highland societies, his favorite being the Man (known today as Dao/Yao, Mien, or Mun), with his publications in the years immediately after 1904 showing undeniable links to his work for the 1903–1904 survey.⁸⁵ But without a single authored book to carry the flag of his scholarship, his work, never translated, still awaits recognition beyond passing references.⁸⁶ Yet, compared to his fellow colleagues in the field, Bonifacy's work shows

a deeper commitment, superior intellectual agility, and a better scientific method that met the academic standards of the time. He became, over a period of thirty years, the participant in the two surveys who most credibly engaged with the study of highland societies and with the discipline of ethnology.

Alongside Bonifacy, the first and possibly most significant book on highland ethnography was published in 1908: *Les Montagnards du Tonkin* [Highlanders in Tonkin]. It was authored by the newly promoted Colonel Édouard Diguët (1861–1921), former commanding officer of the 2nd military territory (1902–1905) whose direct experience in these mountains stretched back to 1884. Named as one of the tributary contributors in Lunet de Lajonquière's 1904 volume, Diguët had been a central actor in the 1903 survey. Indeed, he had the necessary credentials, since in 1895, when in charge of the neighboring Black River region, he had published a hefty 192-page study on Tai language also featuring an ethnological introduction. His one hundred and sixty-page *Les Montagnards du Tonkin* in 1908, prefaced by Auguste Pavie, reveals the part Diguët played in the survey. It is written in a style and form similar to Lunet de Lajonquière's 1904 *Ethnographie*, although it follows more precisely the structure used by Bonifacy in the EFEO MSS.EUR report number 313, suggesting that some collaboration might have taken place between the two officers posted in adjoining military territories. As such, Diguët's book constitutes a rich addendum to the 1903 survey but, unlike Bonifacy, Diguët's scholarly contribution to the ethnography of highland Tonkin practically stopped there.

Over the next two decades, more military officers took up the highland ethnographic challenge, encouraged by the example set by these predecessors. Some made ad hoc contributions during spare time at their postings, writing notes that led to the occasional ethnological paper. A good example of this tendency is Captain Silvestre's 1918 *Les Thai blancs de Phong-Tho* [The White Thai of Phong Thổ], a fifty-five-page article written after his posting in the Lai Châu region and published in *BEFEO*.⁸⁷ More substantially, three other officers are also worthy of mention. The first is Colonel Maurice Abadie, with a few articles and his book *Les races du Haut Tonkin de Phong-Tho à Lang-Son* [Races of Upper Tonkin from Phong Thổ to Lạng Sơn], published in Paris in 1924.⁸⁸ Abadie banked on his three years' experience in the uplands,

contextualizing previously published and unpublished material that he explicitly acknowledged and enriched. This noteworthy 195-page work also contains 122 excellent original photographs of daily life in the highland region. Then, in 1930, battalion leader G. Aymé published a two-hundred-page general report on the 5th military territory (today's northeastern Laos along the Chinese border) for the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris. Based on a dozen field reports filed by officers posted locally, this monograph was light on ethnography while focusing on summarizing publications by others; it resembles the functional reports of the 1897–1898 survey without much change or originality—thirty-two years later.⁸⁹

Finally, Colonel Henri Roux published his 1954 *Quelques minorités ethniques du Nord-Indochine* [A Few Ethnic Minorities of Northern Indochina], boasting two hundred and eighty pages of detailed ethnography in a double issue of the journal *France-Asie* [France-Asia]. Roux's work has been abundantly cited in English, mainly because its publication coincided with the early phase of the American involvement in Indochina. However, *Quelques minorités* was based on the author's memory and field notes from occasional investigations conducted thirty years earlier, in the 1920s, when he commanded the (then) 4th and 5th military territories.⁹⁰ Though rich in ethnography, the work showed little sign of awareness of the progress in the discipline over the half century that had passed until *Quelques minorités* appeared in 1954.

After the 1920s, the military ethnographic vein thins out dramatically. It does so for lack of functional need and because colonial politics had become more concerned with rebellious nationalism in the lowlands than with the borderlands.⁹¹ The policy of the military territories also came to an end, and the military domain gradually returned to civilian administration. Military tradition had been reshaped, as well, with officers seeking less public recognition through scholarship. Academic production was now more firmly in the hands of professionalized disciplines and formal institutions.⁹²

Significance

In his preface to Maurice Abadie's 1924 *Les races du Haut-Tonkin*, influential French sinologist Paul Pelliot wrote:

You belong to the lineage of Diguët, Lunet de Lajonquière, Bonifacy, and so many officers in the Military Territories whose names were never cited, but whose conscientious investigations, humbly transmitted through the hierarchy, have helped to build our ethnographic knowledge of Upper Tonkin on a solid foundation.⁹³

And still, the archival data discussed here must also be expected to display the flaws inherent to ethnographies produced in the colonial context.⁹⁴ Yet, this material may be rich enough to yield a plausible image of a complex, ancient, multilayered social constellation in the early stage of a transition towards modernity. Lowland imperial powers initiated this transition, which was catalyzed by European colonial occupation and further promoted by increasing market integration. Even with reality perceived incompletely and expressed through Eurocentric biases, this archival data still holds the potential to paint a manifold picture of practices, beliefs, representations, compliance, opportunism, and defiance among and between endogenous and exogenous societies, dominant and dominated groups, regions, valleys, hamlets, and kin.

Clearly, such one-off surveys, conducted speedily by inexperienced external agents embedded in a rigid military ideology, risk displaying a tainted mindset conditioned by subjectivities or, as anthropology would have it in our day, positionality, of a rather extreme sort. Officers can only report what they see, hear, or are told; they can only write what they grasp and what is acceptable to their hierarchy; they might simply leave out the rest. As such, the ultimate historical, anthropological, and linguistic significance of these two very imperfect yet precious surveys of 1897 and 1903 lie in the raw, frontline texts of the sector reports, penned in the field in a consistent way by direct eyewitnesses, supported by unaltered and abundant demographic tables, glossaries, maps, and photographs. It is this material's well-integrated horizontality that marks its worth.⁹⁵ These fine-grained archives from upland Tonkin represent, for scholars but also for the heirs of the subjects themselves, an unexpected milestone. These texts can become the foundation for a more reliable reading of social and cultural behavior through time and possibly for reiterating social complexity and cultural uniqueness from a past that, arguably, still plays a significant role in today's identity negotiations and political struggles.

In spite of the strategic orientation and top-down nature of its production, the very short timelines, and, for most authors, a near-total lack of prior knowledge of the populations they were about to bear witness to, I believe we can still confer legitimacy to this frontline ethnographic material. We can argue for or against the view that the officers who contributed to these surveys can be branded “ethnographers.” But in my mind, the texts they produced are without a doubt of an ethnographic nature, albeit incidental ethnography. It is the rigorous enforcement of military discipline and norms that places these texts in a different category from contemporary missionary accounts and oft-embellished diaries by travelers and explorers. The unity of time, place (covered exhaustively), and methods, constitutes a rare signature, with all the accounts cemented by mindset and educational as well as cultural background shared by all the (male) authors.

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ABSTRACT

This article narrates a remarkable endeavor, a venture into the colonial ethnography of borderland mountain societies of today's northern Vietnam, then upland Tonkin, from the unlikely cultural perspective of the military. This venture, commissioned by Governors General Paul Doumer and Paul Beau, was conducted a little over a century ago, yielding over four thousand manuscript pages penned by seventy different authors. First, I consider the logic of the militarization of the northern borderlands at the end of the nineteenth century, a strategic policy that triggered the launch of two surveys

in 1897 and 1903. I then examine the methods used in the performance of these surveys and, building upon material from the original documents, I comment on the mindset of the officers who performed this task and on the strength of this material for anthropological research today.

KEYWORDS: *Military ethnography, French colonial history, highland Tonkin, China-Vietnam borderlands*

Appendix 1

List of Military Territories, Circles, and Sectors as of July 31st, 1902

Source: File No: 66071, 1902, GGI, ANOM (Transcribed without diacritics as in original)⁹⁶

1ST MILITARY TERRITORY, HEAD TOWN LANG-SON [LẠNG SƠN]

- Circle of Lang-Son [Lạng Sơn], including the sectors of Lang-Son; Bi-Nhi; That-Khé; Na-Cham; Dong-Dang; Ban-Danh; Loc-Binh; Than-Moi;
- Circle of Moncay [Móng Cái], including the sectors of Moncay; Than-Loung; Hacoï; Tien-Yen; Binh-Lieu; Dinh-Lap
- Circle of Van-Linh, including the sectors of Van-Linh; Pho-Binh-Gia

2ND MILITARY TERRITORY, HEAD TOWN CAO-BANG [CAO BẰNG]

- Circle of Cao-Bang [Cao Bằng], including the sectors of Cao-Bang; Nuoc-Hai; Dong-Khé; Ca-Lung; Trung-Khan-Phu; Ha-Lang; Loc-Giang; Quang-Uyen; Nguyen-Binh
- Circle of Bao-Lac [Bảo Lạc], including the sectors of Bao-Lac; Bac-Mé; Dong-Van; Yen-Minh; Cho-Ra

3RD MILITARY TERRITORY, HEAD TOWN HAGIANG [HÀ GIANG]

- Circle of Hagiang [Hà Giang], including the sectors of Hagiang; Than-Thuy; Quan-Ba; Coc-Rau
- Circle of Bac-Quang [Bắc Quang], including the sectors of Bac-Quang; Yen-Binh-Xa; Hoang-Tu-Bi

4TH MILITARY TERRITORY, HEAD TOWN LAO-KAY [LÀO CAI]

- Circle of Lao-Kay [Lào Cai], including the sectors of Lao-kay; Thai-Nien; Ban-Lao; Ba-Xat; Muong-Khuong; Pa-Kha; Phong-Tho; Trinh-Thuong
- Circle of Bao-Ha [Bao Hà], including the sectors of Bao-Ha; Luc-an-Chau

Archival Sources

1897–1898 Documents: Centre des Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en Provence, France.

- Series ‘Gouvernement Général de l’Indochine’ (GGI)
 - Reports from the 1st Military Territory: GGI 66102
 - Reports from the 2nd Military Territory: GGI 66103
 - Reports from the 3rd Military Territory: GGI 66104
 - Reports from the 4th Military Territory: GGI 66105

1903–1904 documents: Archives de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient, Maison de l’Asie, Paris, France.

- Series ‘Manuscrits en langues européennes’ (MSS.EUR.)

Notes

1. Sector Report from Circle of Cao-Bang, Sector of Quang Uyen, 1903, File No: 304, Manuscrits en langues européennes (hereafter MSS.EUR), École française d’Extrême-Orient (hereafter EFEO).
2. Roughly three hundred forty thousand according to Étienne-Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière, *Ethnographie du Tonkin septentrional, Rédigé sur l’ordre de M. P. Beau, Gouverneur Général de l’Indo-Chine Française, d’après les études des administrateurs civils et militaires des provinces septentrionales* [Ethnography of Northern Tonkin, Written on the Order of Mr. P. Beau, Governor General of French Indochina, Based on Studies of Civil and Military Administrators of the Northern Provinces] (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1906), 40.
3. For reviews of this book, see Marcel Mauss, “Recension de Ethnographie du Tonkin septentrional par E. Lunet de Lajonquière” [Review of Ethnography of Northern Tonkin by E. Lunet de Lajonquiere], *L’Année Sociologique* [The Sociological Year], 10e Année [Tenth Year] (1906): 241–243; Antoine Cabaton, “Review of Ethnographie du Tonkin Septentrional by E. Lunet de Lajonquière,” *Anthropos* 2, no. 2 (1907): 336–339; and S.W.B [sic], “Notice of

Book: *Ethnographie du Tonkin Septentrional*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (New Series)* 39, no. 1 (January 1907): 198–200. A Google Scholar search (August 16, 2013) generated by combining the author’s name with the book title yielded forty hits. Of these, only fourteen were published after the 1950s in a language other than French—five of which I was involved with. Of particular note is Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CN: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), in which Lunet de Lajonquière’s work, along with Maurice Abadie, *Les races du Haut Tonkin de Phong-Tho à Lang-Son* [Races of Upper Tonkin from Phong Thổ to Lang Son] (Paris: Société d’Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1924), 195, and Édouard Diguët *Les Montagnards du Tonkin* [Highlanders of Tonkin] (Paris: Librairie Maritime et Coloniale, Augustin Challamel, 1908) are declared to be the most reliable sources available on the early ethnography of upland Tonkin.

4. See Caude E. Maître, “Recension de Lunet de Lajonquière, ‘Ethnographie des territoires militaires,’” *BEFEO* 5 (1905): 199–207 for a review of this volume, about which another Google Scholar search yields eighteen hits, half of them written in the colonial era, with six of the remaining ones stemming from my work.
5. I do not set out here to provide a substantial analysis of what these documents contain, my point being first to investigate the structure, details, and context of the production of these reports. I intend to explore in more details the analytical potential of these archives in subsequent publications in an attempt to shed new light on a variety of economic and cultural phenomena unfolding in these highlands today.
6. With the exception of Phạm Thiện Duật’s 1856 “descriptive geography” of the northwest highlands, the *Hưng Hoá Địa Chí* (興化地誌) [Descriptive Geography of Hưng Hóa]. See Bradley C. Davis, “A Vietnamese Ethnographer in Black Tai Territory: Phạm Thiện Duật and the Limits of Empire,” presented at the workshop *Frontier Frictions: Cultural Encounters, Exchange, and Emergence in Asian Uplands* (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany, November 14–15, 2013).
7. Jean Michaud “*Incidental*” *Ethnographers: French Catholic Missions on the Frontier of Tonkin and Yunnan, 1880–1930* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007).
8. Gabriel Devéria, *La frontière sino-annamite, description géographique et ethnographique d’après les documents officiels chinois* [The Sino-Annamite Border, Geographic and Ethnographic Description From the Chinese Official Documents] (Paris: Publications de l’École des Langues Orientales, 1888); Lloyd E. Eastman *Throne and Mandarins: China’s Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy 1880–1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

9. Bradley C. Davis, *States of Banditry: The Nguyen Government, Bandit Rule, and the Culture of Power in the post-Taiping China-Vietnam Borderlands* (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2008).
10. This was the time when the Pavie Mission explored northern Laos and northwestern Tonkin in the company of colonial troops under the command of Pennequin, a central figure in the crushing of Chinese banditry and the pacification of the upper region. See P. Chabrol, *Opérations militaires au Tonkin, 1885-1895* [Military Operations in Tonkin, 1885-1895] (Paris: Henri Charles-Lavauzelle, 1896), 341.
11. Bradley C. Davis, "Black Flag Rumors and the Black River Basin: Powerbrokers and the State in the Tonkin-China Borderlands," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 16-41; Christian C. Lentz, "Making the Northwest Vietnamese," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 68-105; Henry McAleavy, *Black Flags in Vietnam: The Story of a Chinese Intervention* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1968).
12. Philippe Le Failler, "The Đèo Family of Lai Châu: Traditional Power and Unconventional Practices," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 42-67.
13. Pierre-Paul Famin, *Au Tonkin et sur la frontière du Kwang-Si* [In Tonkin and on the Kwang-Si Border] (Paris: A. Challamel, 1895), 373; Pierre-Bernard Lafont, ed., *Les frontières du Vietnam. Histoire des frontières de la Péninsule indochinoise* [The Borders of Vietnam: History of Borders of the Indochinese Peninsula] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989).
14. Cabaton, "Review of Ethnographie du Tonkin Septentrional."
15. Nguyễn Thế Anh, "L'image de la piraterie tonkinoise dans la littérature coloniale" [The Image of Tonkin Piracy in Colonial Literature], in *Rêver l'Asie. Exotisme et littérature coloniale aux Indes, en Indochine et en Insulinde* [Dreaming Asia: Exoticism and Colonial Literature in India, Indochina and the East Indies], ed. Denys Lombard (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1993), 182.
16. Henri-Nicolas Frey, *Pirates et rebelles au Tonkin. Nos soldats au Yen-thé* [Pirates and Rebels: Our Troops in Yên Thế] (Paris: Hachette, 1892), 41. See Figure 1.
17. File No: 26163, 1891, Section: Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine (hereafter GGI), Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (hereafter ANOM). See also Files No: 57177, and 57179, GGI, ANOM; and Jean-Marie-Antoine De Lanessan, *La colonisation française en Indo-Chine* [French Colonization in Indochina] (Paris: Alcan, 1895). The governor general of Indochina [*gouverneur général de l'Indochine*] was the highest authority for the whole of French Indochina. Under him stood one resident superior [*résident supérieur*] for each of the five parts of the colonial polity (Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia and Laos), and under these stood one resident [*résident*] per province.

18. In archives and public documents, the French applied the term “pirates” to all types of rebels and bandits that they were to fight inland as much as on the coast.
19. Louis De Grandmaison, *L’expansion française au Tonkin. En territoire militaire* [French Expansion in Tonkin: In the Military Territories] (Paris: Plon, 1898), 89, 272.
20. The powers and responsibilities of officers administering the military territories are detailed in “Instructions aux commandants de territoires militaires,” 1903, File No: 66106, GGI, ANOM.
21. Archives illustrate how impermanent these colonial territorial divisions turned out to be. Figures 2 and 3 here show the dramatic shrinking of the militarized zone in the short period between 1894 and 1903 as territorial integration spread from the delta. While the number of military territories remained unchanged, their exact locations were altered considerably.
22. Jean Michaud, “The Montagnards in Northern Vietnam from 1802 to 1975: A Historical Overview from Exogenous Sources,” *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 333–368; Davis, “Black Flag Rumors and the Black River Basin”; Lentz, “Making the Northwest Vietnamese.”
23. Sector Report from Circle of Cao-bang, Sector of Trung-Khanh-Phu, 1903, File No: 306, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
24. Marc Michel, *Galliéni* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).
25. Joseph-Simon Galliéni, *Galliéni au Tonkin (1892–96), par lui-même* [Galliéni in Tonkin (1892–96), by Himself] (Paris: Berger-Levrault, [1913] 1941), 225–236.
26. Henri Eckert, *Les militaires indochinois au service de la France (1859–1939)* [Indochinese Soldiers in the Service of France (1859–1939)] (PhD dissertation, Université de Paris IV, 1998), 65.
27. Or, as put by another officer: “Serious and in-depth knowledge of the populations, of their aspirations and mutual antipathies, the rational study of the region, its resources and its needs, and finally its administration as such.” See Sector Report from Sector of Hoang-thu-bi, 1898, File No: 66104, GGI, ANOM. See also Raoul Girardet, *L’idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* [The Colonial Idea of France from 1871 to 1962] (Paris: Hachette, 2005); Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).
28. Albert Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* [The Development of French Colonies] (Paris: Payot et Cie, 1923).
29. Auguste Pavie, *A la conquête des cœurs* [Winning Hearts] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947); Stuart Plattner, ed., *Economic Anthropology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 5.
30. Of the little that existed at the time in terms of military publications on the upland region and its populations, we can cite: Commander Pierre Paul Famin,

- Au Tonkin et sur la frontière du Kwang-Si* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1895); Commander P. Chabrol, *Opérations militaires au Tonkin, 1885–1895* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1896); Captain Louis de Grandmaison, *L'expansion française au Tonkin. En territoire militaire* (Paris: E. Plon, 1898); and Colonel Joseph-Simon Galliéni, *Trois colonnes au Tonkin (1894–1895)* [Three Columns in Tonkin, 1894–1895] (Paris: Chapelot, 1899), 164. Other works worthy of mention, though published later, include diplomat Pierre Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Voyage dans le Haut-Laos et sur les frontières de Chine et de Birmanie* [Journey in Upper Laos and on the Borders of China and Burma], in *Mission Pavie Indo-Chine 1879–1895* [The Pavie Mission in Indochina 1879–1895], Introduction by Auguste Pavie, Vol. 5 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1902), “Géographie et voyages” [Geography and Travel] section; and Captain E. Bernard, *Une campagne dans le Haut-Tonkin (Janvier–mai 1896)* [A Campaign in Upper Tonkin (January–May 1896)] (Paris: Charles Lavauzelle, 1906), 179.
31. “Lettre-circulaire no 2974 du 5 mars 1897 de Monsieur le Général de Division, Commandant en Chef des Troupes de l’Indo-Chine,” Ensemble du cercle de Cao-Bang, p.1, 1898, File No: 66103, GGI, ANOM, mentioned here among other places.
 32. I have not found a copy of the original commission by Bichot. However, all field reports of 1897–1898 contain a similar table of contents that, it can safely be assumed, reflects the commission itself. Since slight differences nevertheless exist, the wording reproduced here is a blend of representative reports from the Sector of Ban-lao, Circle of Lao-kay, 4th Military Territory, and the Sectors of Hoang-thu-bi and Bang-Hanh, Circle of Bac-quang, 3rd Military Territory (See Files No: 66105 and 66104, GGI, ANOM).
 33. Lettre-circulaire no. 736 du 7 juin 1903 pour Monsieur le Général, commandant supérieur des troupes de l’Indochine, du Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine Paul Beau, File No: B221 11, GGI, ANOM.
 34. How far Beau’s voice carried remains unclear judging from archives. I found around twenty reports from civilian provinces in the EFEO’s archives, while Lunet de Lajonquière, *Ethnographie du Tonkin septentrional*, 364, mentions having used reports from nine civilian provinces in Tonkin to complete his coverage of the highlands for his 1906 volume. He stated that he was lent these copies by the *gouvernement général* (idem., 2), pointing to the GGI series.
 35. Maître, “Recension de Lunet de Lajonquière,” 201; Cabaton, “Review of Ethnographie du Tonkin Septentrional,” 338; Collective, “Ethnographie indochinoise,” synthèse collective à l’occasion du 20ème anniversaire du B.É.F.E. O. [Ethnography in Indochina, Collective Synthesis to Mark the 20th Anniversary of B.É.F.E.O.], *BEFEO* 21 (1921): 167–196 (180).
 36. Cf. his texts from 1900–1903, in Marcel Mauss, *Œuvres* [Works], 3 volumes (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), 359–374; as well as Marcel Mauss,

“L’ethnographie en France et à l’étranger” [Ethnography in France and Abroad]. *La Revue de Paris* [The Paris Review] 20 (1913): 537–560 and 815–837. See also Marcel Mauss, “Essai d’une instruction pour l’étude sociologique des sociétés indo-chinoises” [Trial For an Instruction to the Sociological Study of Indochinese Societies], in *Premier Congrès International des Etudes sur l’Extrême-Orient, 1902* [First International Congress of Studies on the Far East, 1902] (Hà Nội: Schneider, 1903), 92–93; Marcel Mauss and Auguste Bonifacy, *Questionnaire de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* [Questionnaire of the French School of Asian Studies] (Hà Nội: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1903).

Regrettably, I could not locate this latter document, which is not part of the three-volume publication of the Mauss papers. See Jean-François Bert, “De l’utilité des recherches de sociologie descriptive dans l’Indochine française: un manuscrit inédit de Marcel Mauss (1902)” [The Usefulness of Research in Descriptive Sociology in French Indochina: An Unpublished Manuscript of Marcel Mauss (1902)], *Genèses* [Genesis] 3, no. 84 (September 2011): 143–159. Bert conducted extensive research into Mauss’ archives and suspects it might have been a starting point for Bonifacy’s 1919 *Cours d’ethnographie indochinoise* [Course of Indochinese Ethnography] (Bert, “De l’utilité des recherches de sociologie,” 146). Nor does it seem to have left any trace in the EFEO archives or at the Service Historique de la Défense, the French military archives in Vincennes. Reference to it, or its shadow as it were, exists in a few contemporaneous colonial documents and more recent publications, such as Oscar Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam’s Central Highlanders* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 74–79. See Bert, “De l’utilité des recherches de sociologie,” for more on the role of Mauss in sociological research in Indochina.

37. Marcel Mauss, *Instruction pour les collaborateurs de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* [Instruction For the Collaborators of the French School of Asian Studies] (Sài Gòn: Imprimerie Ménard et Legros, 1900), 73; as well as in File No: 454, MSS.EUR, EFEO. The booklet is divided between archeology (1.5 pages, mentioning “monuments,” “sculptures,” “inscriptions,” and “coins and other artefacts”); linguistics (sixty-four pages, half of them blank to write down notes); and ethnography (1.5 pages).
38. This information is detailed in civilian reports, such as in the opening lines of Province of Nam Định, 1903, File No: 340, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
39. Beau 1903, File No: 211 11, GGI, ANOM. Consequently, Coronnat sent “Note de service no. 483” [Memo no. 483] to his military territory commanders.
40. This otherwise fluctuating figure stems from Sector Report, July 31, 1902, File No: 66071, GGI, ANOM. See Appendix 1, which is the closest in time I could find to the moment the 1903 survey was launched. In July, the monthly report on the state of the military territories noted that the total

number of circles [*cercles*] in the four military zones was nine, while sectors totaled forty-seven. As mentioned earlier, the number, names, and size of sectors varied greatly over time due to alterations, reinterpretation of topography, security issues, population movements, infrastructure development, and availability of personnel. With these constraints, subsidiary posts were sometimes promoted to the rank of sector head towns; other sectors were at times merged with neighboring ones and head towns demoted to the rank of posts, or simply gradually dispatched to the civilian administration and incorporated into adjacent provinces—for instance, the circles of Tuyen Quang [Tuyên Quang] and Bac Kan [Bắc Kạn] passed to civilian administration between 1897 and 1903. In addition, due to uneven knowledge of the Vietnamese language and variations in handwriting style, the misspelling of place names occurs frequently among the officers who authored reports, adding another layer to the confusion.

41. For more than half the sector reports located in the course of this research, either no maps were produced or the maps were separated from the reports.
42. The summary reports from civilian provinces I could examine seem to have also followed this structure, though generally with more lax and significantly less dedication in digging up the information. No reports seem to have been produced at a more local level within civilian provinces.
43. Beau 1903, File No: 211 11, GGI, ANOM.
44. Ibid.
45. This suggests that all sector reports did indeed include maps originally.
46. With the proviso that about half the signatures are barely decipherable. There does not seem to have been a list of contributors published concurrently with the surveys, leaving several authors' names in doubt.
47. Sector of Lao Kay, July 1898, File No: 66105, GGI, ANOM.
48. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).
49. Sector of Quan-ba, File No: 66104, GGI, ANOM.
50. Ibid. These same sentences are also found in the Hoang-thu-bi report under the pen of Pauvif, suggesting that some officers shared their thoughts, if not their text, with colleagues prior to wrapping up their reports. It is also possible that the first reports to be completed might have been used as models by authors lagging behind, providing them with inspiration.
51. Sector Report from Sector of Coc-rau, 1898, File No: 66104, GGI, ANOM.
52. Sector Report from Sector of Ba-xat, 1898, File No: 66105, GGI, ANOM.
53. Ibid.
54. Sector Report from Sector of Ban-lao, 1898, File No: 66105, GGI, ANOM.
55. Sector Report from Sector of Pho-lu, 1898, File No: 66105, GGI, ANOM.
56. Sector Report from Sector of Coc-rau, 1898, File No: 66104, GGI, ANOM.

57. However, a handful of French speaking scholars such as Jacques Lemoine or Christian Culas have occasionally referred to one report or the other after looking them up in ANOM archives.
58. Sector Report from Ba-xat, 1903, File No: 331, MSS.EUR, EFEO (not signed).
In this roundabout way, we could say that some of the 1897–1898 field material has effectively reached the public eye through their inclusion in the 1903–1904 reports and, in turn, the publication of Lunet de Lajonquière, *Ethnographie des territoires militaires*.
59. Figures 7 and 8 are examples of the general appearance of these.
60. Sector Report from Ba-xat, 1903, File No: 31, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
61. Sector Report from Hoang-thi-bi, 1903, File No: 317, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
62. Though the fact that Fesch's report does not explicitly use the structures proposed by the governor or the EFEO but instead appears to find its inspiration in the 1897 survey might help explain this swiftness.
63. Sector Report from Sector of Ta-Lung, 1903, File No: 205, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
64. Sector Report from Sector of Dong-Khe, 1903, File No: 301, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
65. Sector Report from Sector of Trung-Khanh-Phu, 1903, File No: 306, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
66. Han F. Vermeulen and A. A. Roldán, eds., *Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1995).
67. British Association for the Advancement of Science, ed., *Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the Use of Travelers and Residents in Uncivilized Lands* (London: Edward Stanford, 1874), 143; J. G. Garson and C. H. Read, eds., *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, 2nd edition (London: The Anthropological Institute, 1892), 235; J. G. Garson and C. H. Read, eds., *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, 3rd edition (London: The Anthropological Institute, 1899), 240. Between 1874 and 1899, *Notes and Queries* expanded from 143 to two hundred and forty pages, making the governor's one-page instructions look decidedly lightweight.
68. Arnold van Gennep, "Contributions à l'histoire de la méthode ethnographique" [Contributions to the History of the Ethnographic Method], *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* [Journal of the History of Religions] LXVII [67] (1913): 321–338. The situation remained this way roughly until the publication of Marcel Mauss, *Manuel d'ethnographie* [Ethnography Handbook] (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, [1947] 1967).
69. Antoine Brebion, *Dictionnaire de bio-bibliographie générale, ancienne et moderne, de l'Indochine française* [Dictionary of General Biobibliography, Ancient and Modern, of French Indochina], *Annales de l'Académie des Sciences Coloniales* [Annals of the Academy of Colonial Sciences] Vol. 8 (Paris: Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1935), 37–39; Laurent

- Grisoni, *Le lieutenant-colonel Auguste Bonifacy (1856–1931): Portrait et réhabilitation d'un savant-officier-tonkinophile* [Lieutenant Colonel Augustus Bonifacy (1856–1931): Portrait and Rehabilitation of a Scientist-Officer-Tonkinophile] (master's thesis in Contemporary History, Université d'Aix-Marseille, 1987).
70. Military Territory Summary Report, 1903, File No: 313, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
A draft of this document with handwritten comments and editing also survives as File No: 363, MSS.EUR, EFEO. Earlier drafts for the Man had been written by Bonifacy in 1901, grouped in another three-hundred-page document: 1901, File No: 134, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
71. A good indication is found in Lunet de Lajonquière's 1904 *Ethnographie des territoires militaires*, where he states on page twenty-two: "Commander Bonifacy, to whom the reports from the 3rd Military Territory have been confided to draft a summary . . ." Another clue lays in the fact that a dozen individual draft reports by Bonifacy, one for each ethnic group, the bulk in Files No: 322 and 330, MSS.EUR, EFEO, are all dated mid-January 1904, two weeks after the sector reports had been handed in. See also Brebion, *Dictionnaire de bio-bibliographie générale*, 37. Let us remember that Bonifacy had recently collaborated with Marcel Mauss and the EFEO to prepare the EFEO *Instruction*. He also signed his report 313, "Chef de Bataillon au 4^e Tonkinois. Correspondant de l'École française d'Extrême Orient" [Battalion Chief 4th Tonkinese. Correspondent to the French School of Asian Studies].
72. 1903, File No: 307, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
73. 1903, File No: 313, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
74. And predictably, in his 1904 *Ethnographie des territoires militaires*, Lunet de Lajonquière retained much of the material Bonifacy passed on, which otherwise would have been sorely missing in an official publication on "primitive" cultures.
75. Grisoni, *Le lieutenant-colonel Auguste Bonifacy*, 37. Bonifacy's publishing credits included: Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, "Contes populaires des Mans du Tonkin" [Folktales of the Man in Tonkin], *BEFEO* 2 (1902): 268–279; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, "Contes populaires des Mans du Tonkin," *Revue Indo-Chinoise* [Indochinese Review] nos. 211 and 212 (November 1902): 1022–1024 and 1054–1057, respectively; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, "Études sur les chants et la poésie populaire des Mans du Tonkin" [Studies on the Songs and Popular Poetry of the Man in Tonkin] (Hà Nội: 1^{er} Congrès International des Études d'Extrême-Orient, 1902), 5–89; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, "Généralités sur les Mans" [General Information on the Man], *Revue Indo-Chinoise* no. 221 (September 1903): 868–869.
76. 1903, File No: 313, MSS.EUR, EFEO.
77. *Ibid.*

78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. George W. Stocking Jr., ed., *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Conceptualisation of Ethnographic Knowledge*, History of Anthropology Series, Vol. 7 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Vermeulen and Roldán, *Fieldwork and Footnotes*; Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, eds., *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).
81. Lunet de Lajonquière, *Ethnographie des territoires militaires*, 23–25.
82. Ibid., 24–35.
83. Mauss, “Recension de Ethnographie du Tonkin Septentrional.”
84. In the most exhaustive survey conducted on Bonifacy’s publications, Laurent Grisoni (*Le lieutenant-colonel Auguste Bonifacy*) lists 159 entries for all categories.
85. For instance, six pieces for the year 2005 alone: Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, “Étude sur les langues parlées par les populations de la Haute Rivière Claire” [Study of the Languages Spoken by the People of the High Clear River], *BEFEO* 5 (July–December 1905): 306–323; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, “Contes thô recueillis sur les bords de la Rivière Claire” [Thổ Tales Collected on the Banks of the Clear River], *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (March 15, 1905): 306–310; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, “La légende de Tsun d’après les Mans Quan-coc” [The Legend of Tsun According to the Man Quan-Coc], *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (December 30, 1905): 1776–1782; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, “Monographie des Man Quan-coc” [Monograph of the Man Quan-Coc], *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (January 30, 1906): 138–148; and 1696–1711, respectively; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, “Monographie des Mans Cao-lan” [Monograph of the Man Cao-Lan], *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (July 15, 1905): 899–928; Auguste Louis-M. Bonifacy, “Monographie des Mans Quan-trang” [Monograph of the Man Quan-Trang], *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (November 30, 1905): 1597–1613.
86. The eminent French anthropologist of Indochina Georges Condominas (1921–2011) had developed an interest in Bonifacy and was planning to publish on his legacy (personal communication, 1999). He sadly passed away before being able to do so.
87. Captain Silvestre, “Les Thai blancs de Phong-Tho” [The White Thai of Phong Thố], *BEFEO* 18, no. 4 (1918): 1–56.
88. This book was hastily translated in 2001 by White Lotus and altered from the original, starting with the title: “Minorities of the Sino-Vietnamese Borderland with Special Reference to Thai Tribes.”
89. I have not been able to find any of these reports in French archives. See G. Aymé, *Monographie du Vème territoire militaire (préface du Lt-Col. Bonifacy)*, *Ouvrage*

- de la section "Indochine française" pour l'Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris, 1931* [Monograph of the Fifth Military Territory (Preface by Lt. Col. Bonifacy), Volume of the "French Indochina" Section for the International Colonial Exhibition in Paris, 1931] (Hà Nội: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1930), 205.
90. Henri Roux, "Quelques minorités ethniques du Nord-Indochine, par le colonel Henri Roux avec la collaboration de Tran-Van-Chu" [Some Ethnic Minorities in North Indochina by Colonel Henri Roux in Collaboration with Tran Van Chu], *France-Asie* 10, nos. 92–93 (1954): 135–419. Moreover, Roux explains on page 412 that at the time of publication he was blind following injuries he suffered when fighting the Japanese troops in 1945. He had to rely on his Vietnamese assistant Tran Van Chu to read back to him his own field notes and write the manuscript under dictation.
 91. Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
 92. A fine example of this being Collective, *Ethnographie indochinoise*.
 93. Paul Pelliot, "Lettre-préface" [Preface] in Maurice Abadie, *Les races du Haut Tonkin de Phong-Tho à Lang-Son* [Races of Upper Tonkin from Phong Thổ to Lạng Sơn] (Paris: Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1924), 5.
 94. See John Kleinen, "Ethnographic Praxis and the Colonial State in Vietnam," in *Việt Nam, Sources et approches* [Vietnam, Sources and Approaches], eds. Philippe Lefailler and Jean-Marie Mancini (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1995); George W. Stocking Jr., ed., *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Conceptualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*, History of Anthropology Series, Vol. 7 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Mary Des Chene, "Military Ethnology In British India," *South Asia Research* 19, no. 2 (1999): 121–135; Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, eds., *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).
 95. Like a talkative ghost back from the grave to recount forgotten feats and tales, and not unlike the function played today by the seventeenth-century Jesuits' Relations for North American Huron and Iroquois Amerindians—though I readily acknowledge that that material belongs to a class of its own. See R. G. Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 volumes (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Co., 1896–1901).
 96. For tentative diacritics, the names at circle level are sufficiently safe to insert their current names in brackets (except for Van-Linh, which remains to be checked). Names at sector level are more difficult to pin. Many place names simply changed over time, with tempting lookalikes elsewhere that could send further researchers on the wrong track. I opted not to make any suggestion here.