

## JAPAN'S SOUTHERN ADVANCE: THE INDOCHINA PHASE

STEPHEN UHALLEY, JR.

A FULL QUARTER CENTURY HAS PASSED SINCE JAPAN ENCROACHED upon what was at that time the French colonial possession of Indochina. An affrighted world, already dazed by the impact of the German *blitzkrieg*, became acutely sensitized to the beginning of Japan's "southern advance." Events moved swiftly in a world made of shifting sands. Only months later, in a startling moment of history, Japan established mastery over the wide expanses of the southern regions. In one fell swoop she had supplanted the effectual Asian presence of the four major colonial powers. A confused world was angered at the audacity, amazed at the intrepidity and awed by the extraordinary planning and policy execution of the Japanese. A shaken world observed what it believed to be the latest stage in the implementation of a grand premeditated scheme of conquest of several years vintage. Indeed, this assumption appeared to be irrefutably accurate against a background of steady territorial expansion since the Manchurian Incident of 1931, given the undeniable militaristic bent of the Japanese Government, and through the boastful declarations of aspiration by many Japanese speakers and writers. It is one of the fundamental assumptions which provided the justification for the war crimes trials. To a greater or lesser extent, an implicit acceptance of this proposition has colored almost every Western interpretation of Japan's role in World War II.

This writer, however, wishes to raise a serious objection to the application to every phase of Japanese expansion of the premeditated planning theme. There is a strong tendency for the dramatic and spectacular character of the achievement, to blind us to the real nature of the steps that led to it. One logically presupposes that a grandiose, unerring scheme preceded so vast and impressive an accomplishment. And when there is already evidence of a general line of seemingly conscious development prior to what appears to be a final consummation, it is only too easy to assume that all phases of the development were organically linked, that the events represented the unfolding of a master plan. But such an assumption contains all the pitfalls of any over-simplification. It does not allow for the indeterminable factors which are inevitably present in the historical process. It ascribes an unbelievable superhuman foresight to a group of militarists who time and again demonstrated the lack of even average pre-vision, and whose ultimate fate irrefutably confirms such a deficiency.

This paper explores the interpretation that Japan probably harbored no substantial plans for territorial aggrandizement in Southeast Asia prior to World War II. The southern advance, rather than being the conscious implementing of a plan to conquer Southeast Asia, if not the world, was initially something quite different. The few declarations of aspiration relating to the area envisaged only improved economic relationships.

When war broke out in Europe, an economic and political vacuum was created in Southeast Asia. The Japanese, rather than swiftly implementing a long developing plan of conquest, moved cautiously into Indochina primarily for a very limited military purpose. Rather than move boldly on the firm ground of carefully considered plans, the Japanese were merely opportunistic, and made but short-term improvisations as they proceeded into a series of military moves which were no longer within their capability to control. On the heels of military advancement, there mushroomed into being a rationalized ideal of a new dispensation in which Japan's leadership qualities might have been utilized best for the general well-being of all Asians. Nowhere was the unpremeditated, undeliberative character of the Japanese program more clearly manifested than in the contradictions inherent between this improvised theoretical justification and Japanese practice. Nowhere was the contradiction more clearly exhibited than in the Japanese policy toward Indochina.

#### Pre-War Penetration

Those who argue that Japan's twentieth century territorial ambitions in Southeast Asia antedate the fall of Holland and France in 1940, find it difficult to support their contention with concrete evidence.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the Japanese navy is seen as the protagonist of the expansion of Japanese interests in the South Seas. But to draw a parallel between naval national aspirations and those of the army operating on the continent, can too easily lead one to unsupportable conclusions.

It appears to be naval personnel who made the earliest relevant allusions to the South Seas. Captain Gumpei Sekine (one time head of the Navy Department's Press Bureau) wrote in the August 1935 issue of *Dai Asia Shugi*, that Japan must not neglect the necessity for maritime advancement because of continental expansion. The most aggressive point he made was that Japan occasionally dispatch warships "for the purpose of protecting our national's overseas enterprises." Such moves "will encourage our emigrants and make them feel significant among the foreign peoples, with the result that they will exert all their energies in their professions."<sup>2</sup> In 1936, Admiral Sankichi Takahashi—then Commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet—reportedly told a group of Osaka industrialists: "Japan's economic advance must be directed southward, with either Formosa or the South Sea Island Mandates as a foothold."<sup>3</sup> The point of this advice was that the advance be economic, not military. There was even a proposal in the Diet that Japan seek out the possibility of purchasing a lease to the unexploited island of New Guinea.<sup>4</sup> Thus with few exceptions,<sup>5</sup> the activities of expansionists with respect to Southeast Asia were limited to extension of commerce. These activities, in turn, seem to

<sup>1</sup> We must acknowledge, however, that several late nineteenth century Japanese nationalist-activists had had an eye to the south, particularly upon the Philippines. See J. M. Saniel, "Four Japanese: Their Plans for the Expansion of Japan to the Philippines," *Journal Southeast Asian History*, IV, No. 2 (September, 1963), 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Chamberlin, *Japan Over Asia* (Boston, 1937), 168.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> One exception is Lieutenant Commander Tota Ishimaru's book *Japan Must Fight Britain* which even envisioned the acquisition of Australia and New Zealand by the Japanese Empire. *Ibid.*, 159-170.

have been limited to the declaration of aspiration, rather than even the drafting of serious programs. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere announced in 1938, was exceedingly vague and ill-defined toward Southeast Asia, though the ultimate objective—again of an undefined hegemony—was implied.<sup>6</sup>

There were compelling reasons for limited Japanese interest in Southeast Asia prior to the outbreak of the European war, which easily out-balanced the attractions which the area held. Territorial ambitions were checked by the possibilities of becoming involved in a war with Great Britain, Holland, France, the United States or any combination of these nations. After the involvement in the China war in July 1937, the Japanese were all the more anxious to avoid such a possibility. A second reason for lack of real immediate interest in the area was the large-scale economic programming to which Japan was committed in Manchoukuo.

If the intensifying commercial activity in which Japan engaged in Southeast Asia was supposed to forbode a more tangible form of Japanese expansion, the pattern of trading activity was a curious one. In 1939, there was an unfavorable trade imbalance with the Philippines, Malaya and French Indochina. Only in Thailand had Japanese economic penetration made substantial progress.<sup>7</sup> The South Seas area as a whole comprised but nine per cent of Japan's total trade, as compared to twenty-seven per cent for North America and thirty-seven per cent for the Continental Area (Manchoukuo, China, and the Soviet Far East).<sup>8</sup> Of course, these percentages do not necessarily indicate a relative lack of Japanese interest in the South Seas, for the colonial powers purposely maintained artificial commercial barriers to impede the importation of a greater amount of cheap Japanese commodities into their protected colonial markets. These circumstances call attention to the restricted avenue in which Japan was forced to operate in Southeast Asia prior to the outbreak of European hostilities.

Had Japan made serious plans for territorial acquisition in Southeast Asia, the most important country which she would have had to take into account was Indochina. That country occupies a strategic position as stepping-stone to the rest of the area. To by-pass Indochina in the occupation of the East Indies, for example, would be to leave Japan's flank seriously exposed. Clearly, any carefully considered plan for the subjugation of any part of Southeast Asia had to be predicated upon the prior submission of Indochina, either by persuasion or force. We have noted that there was little likelihood of such an eventuality in Japanese calculations before the fall of France. But a nation which was planning on such a move at any time in the future, would be expected to at least engage in some degree of undercover preparatory work. Thus, it will be profitable to review briefly the history of Japanese penetration in Indochina.

---

<sup>6</sup> W. H. Elsbee, *Japan's Role in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements, 1940 to 1945* (Cambridge, 1953), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Hiroshi Sato, "Japan's Economic Relations in the Pacific Area," *The Nippon Hyoron* (August, 1940), extracts in *Contemporary Japan*, IX (September, 1940), 1194.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1196.

In the century before the Shimabara Rebellion, the Japanese had made their presence clearly felt in Indochina. Tokugawa Shogunate "red seal" vessels called regularly in large numbers at the ports of Indochina where the Japanese population was quite large. There was a Japanese town in Cambodia, a country where no single Japanese was to be found in early 1940. Japanese were found even in responsible local government posts.<sup>9</sup> Japanese activities in Indochina were, however, ended by the long years of enforced isolation policy of the shogunate.

During the Meiji period, many Japanese again expressed interest in Indochina. The formation of the Japanese Asian Revival Society—coinciding with the intensification of French activities in Indochina—caused one of its members to argue for Japan to extend aid to the Annamese who were fighting the French.<sup>10</sup> However, Japan was not ready to challenge the rising Western hegemony in such areas as Indochina. Her efforts were turned instead to the realization of a long-range domestic industrialization program. For a time, following her victory of 1905, Japan was the focal point of greatly stimulated Asian nationalistic activity. But Japan's really significant direct contribution to this activity in Indochina (which had been encouraged by the Black Dragon Society<sup>11</sup>) was relatively short-lived. By 1910, under French pressure, Japan undertook the extradition of Vietnamese who had gone there to study.<sup>12</sup>

Information regarding subsequent Japanese activities in Indochina until the eve of World War II, is extremely difficult to find. But there appear to be some grounds for believing that a degree of penetration was attempted through at least three groups: the miniscule Japanese business community; the Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi), and the Cao Dai religious sect.<sup>13</sup>

The degree of penetration seems to have been minimal in all of these groups, but it was least effectual by means of the first—the business community. Due to the artificial barriers imposed by the French—the most impenetrable of any with which Japan was confronted in Southeast Asia—commercial activity between Indochina and Japan was slight. In 1939, there was a 25 million yen unfavorable balance for Japan in the trade between the two countries.<sup>14</sup> Commercial relations had actually been diminishing since a trade agreement was consummated in 1932.<sup>15</sup> The Japanese population, allowed to live only in Hanoi, Haiphong and Saigon, numbered approximately three hun-

<sup>9</sup> Seiichi Iwao, "Early Japanese Activities in Indo-China," *Contemporary Japan*, X (May, 1941), 619-620.

<sup>10</sup> A former Japanese naval officer, Sone Toshitora. The organization was founded by Watanabi Koki and Miyajima Seichiro. J. Kallgren, "Asian Influence on Indochinese Nationalism," unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Political Science, University of California at Berkeley, 1955, 17, citing Kokuryukai Editorial Staff, *To-a Genkaku Shishi Kiden* (Biographies and Records of Pioneer East Asian Patriots) (Tokyo, 1935), 816-823.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> J. Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam* (New York, 1958), 428.

<sup>13</sup> Kallgren, *op. cit.*, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Hiroshi Sato, *op. cit.*, 1194.

<sup>15</sup> C. Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*, trans. by Isobel A. Ward (London, 1944), 329.

dred.<sup>16</sup> Thus the efficient French police had no problem keeping the well-known, relatively few Japanese nationals under surveillance. The French could hamper the operations of suspected Japanese businessmen by preventing their re-entry into Indochina through various pretexts.<sup>17</sup> Whether as a consequence of this or not, Japanese commercial agents did not engage in large scale penetration activities,<sup>18</sup> but were used, if at all, for intelligence purposes of an extremely narrow purview. If the Japanese were interested in making substantial inroads into Indochina, they would have had to utilize more covert means.

The Vietnam Restoration League afforded one of the best vehicles for clandestine Japanese operations. This nationalist organization had a tradition of limited ties with Japan.<sup>19</sup> But it cannot be determined (on the basis of available information) to what extent the group was oriented favorably toward Japan, nor what its relationship with Japan was in the period immediately prior to World War II. It is surmised that there was some connection because of the League's participation in the revolt in southern Indochina which simultaneously took place with the Japanese entry into the north. There are indications that the rebels expected Japanese aid; when this was not forthcoming, their venture was soon suppressed by the French. The disappointed rebels fled to China. Members of the League who had not participated in the revolt, later constituted an important element in the principal pro-Japanese party of the subsequent occupation period.<sup>20</sup>

The Cao Daist sect—the third means by which Japanese penetration may have been effected—had received its greatest impetus as an organization, from a wealthy Cochinchinese woman who reportedly had lived in Japan for some time. Grounds for believing that the sect had undercover relations with the Japanese are based on three factors. The first is the unexplained source of the sect's considerable funds. The implication is that Japan may have provided some of this financial support. The second factor is that the French were ostensibly aware of the Cao Dai pope's underground political activities and deported him to Madagascar when it became clear that the Japanese were going to enter Indochina. Finally, the Cao Daists are believed to have had definite connections with the unsuccessful Vietnamese revolt which had been geared to Japan's entry into Tongking.<sup>21</sup>

It is to be noted that none of these groups contributed notably to the Japanese venture into Indochina, nor for that matter, were they of appreciable use to the Japanese during the period of occupation. The main point of this review of Japanese activities in pre-World War II Indochina—particularly those which might be interpreted as evidence of penetration for ulterior pur-

<sup>16</sup> Seiichi Iwao, *op. cit.*, 619.

<sup>17</sup> One prominent writer refers to the case of Mitsuhiro Matsushita, "an honest and well-known" Saigon merchant member of the Japanese firm, Dainan Kohshi, who was prevented from returning without apparent cause—Kyujiro Hayashi, "Glimpse of the South Seas Region," *Contemporary Japan*, IX (October, 1940), 1296.

<sup>18</sup> Kallgren, *op. cit.*, 105, citing *Some Methods of Japanese Penetration in French Indochina Previous to the War*, August 31, 1943, private source.

<sup>19</sup> Pham Boi Chau, who founded the organization in 1912, spent several years in Japan. Kallgren, *op. cit.*, 17-21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106.

poses—has been to show that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to support the contention that Japan had a conscious plan of expansion, in any form, toward Indochina prior to World War II. In part, it is true, Japanese exclusion from Indochina was due to a determinedly restrictive French policy. On the other hand, there is little evidence which would indicate that Japan was even interested in subverting the French or had any substantive designs in Indochina before the cataclysmic political and economic upheavals engendered by the war in Europe. The relative absence of information regarding Japanese penetration, only tends to confirm this interpretation of a general lack of interest by Japan. It is of the utmost significance that even the French prosecutor at the Tokyo war crimes trial, did not attempt to discuss Japanese subversive penetration of Indochina prior to 1940.<sup>22</sup>

If there had been a grand design on the part of the militarists, who so greatly influenced Japanese Government decisions, then it is one that lacked appreciable historic roots. Such a design for all intents and purposes, must have originated with the changing world situation of 1939 and 1940. Next, we might briefly review and analyze the motivations, actions and circumstances that led to the entrance of Japanese military personnel into Indochina.

#### Entrance Into Indochina

There is little, if any, doubt that the war in Europe—with the attendant disruption of world trade patterns and the fall of Holland and France—gave Japan cause to make corresponding recalculations in her aspirations and foreign policy toward Southeast Asia. Japan's aspirations were immediately inflated with respect to the role she might play in that area. It may even safely be conceded that Japan anticipated some of the transformations in the political configuration of the globe and gave forewarnings of a new direction evolving in Japanese policy. This may be gleaned from the declarations of certain significant agencies and personalities in the months preceding the key changes in Europe. On November 9, 1939, the Japanese Institute of the Pacific published in its organ, *The Pacific*, the claim that Japan had a preferential position in the South Seas because of her preponderant military strength. Consequently, the Institute asserted, "Japanese traders should receive improved treatment in Burma, the Dutch Indies and China."<sup>23</sup> Following the German invasion of Norway, Foreign Minister Arita, on April 15, 1940, served notice (it seems to this writer) to Germany as well as to the rest of the world, that Japan was bound to the South Seas region by "an intimate relationship of mutuality in ministering to one another's needs," and that Japan would be "deeply concerned" at any change in the *status quo* of the Dutch Indies.<sup>24</sup> On May 11, 1940, the day after the German plunged into the Netherlands, Foreign Minister Arita informed the Powers of Japan's increased concern over the area of Southeast Asia.<sup>25</sup> On May 29, 1940, General Koizo, Minister of Over-

<sup>22</sup> That part of the prosecution's case entitled "preparatory period" begins with the Japanese invasion of Hainan Island, it encompasses but two pages of the lengthy indictment. Robert Oneto, *International Military Tribunal Far East, Proceedings*, 6,710-2.

<sup>23</sup> The Institute was, at that time, held to represent the views of the Japanese Government. *The New York Times*, November 10, 1939.

<sup>24</sup> "Documentary Material," *Contemporary Japan*, IX (May, 1940), 656-7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, IX (June, 1940), 778.

seas Affairs, declared: "The South Seas regions are very important in conjunction with the further expansion of Japan's economic strength. . . . In the light of the progress of the China affair and the increasingly tense international situation caused by the second European war, careful and appropriate measures are required for the execution of Japan's South Seas development policy."<sup>26</sup>

The assumption that Japan immediately capitalized on the European situation to acquire territory in the south, is highlighted by its failure to give due recognition to several crucial factors. The first and foremost of these was the prevailing situation in China. In order for Japan to have been able to move militarily into Southeast Asia, she would have had to be relatively free from major commitments in China. Yet in the year 1940, the year in which the first Japanese military personnel entered Indochina, the reverse was manifestly the case. Which ever way one wishes to measure the extent of Japan's military commitment in China in 1940, one can hardly avoid conceding that this period was certainly anything but conducive to serious planning for opening another front elsewhere. In terms of personnel alone, Japan employed at least thirty-five divisions in China in 1940—numbering from 1,120,000<sup>27</sup> to 1,350,000<sup>28</sup> men. Against this considerable portion of Japan's military resources, there was a Chinese force of 5,700,000, three million of which were front line effectives.<sup>29</sup> In 1940, the conflict in China was not static. It was one of the war's most turbulent years. Though it is difficult to obtain statistics broken down into convenient periods, we may detect the sharp upward trend in the intensity of the conflict, from the following sets of figures. In the period from November 1938 to February 1940, there were four important battles, 163 major engagements, 5,349 minor engagements, and 4,143 guerilla engagements. From March 1940 to November 1941, the figures rise appreciably. In this period, there were five important battles, 333 major engagements, 6,704 minor engagements, and 5,142 guerilla engagements. The critical character of the latter period is attested further by noting the military activity for the duration of the war, a much longer period of time. Subsequent to November 1941 there were seven important battles, 136 major engagements, 9,329 minor engagements and 4,692 guerilla engagements.<sup>30</sup> Particularly bitter were the clashes between the Chinese Communist forces and the Japanese during 1940. In the period from June 1939 to May 1940 there were, according to Communist sources, almost 7,000 engagements between the Eighth Route Army alone and the Japanese, more than triple that of the previous year.<sup>31</sup> This turbulence is reflected in the number of casualties sustained by

<sup>26</sup> NYT, May 12, 1940.

<sup>27</sup> Figure of the Nationalist Government of Military Operations—China Handbook 1937-1945 (New York, 1947), 300.

<sup>28</sup> Figure given in F. F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China 1924-1949* (Princeton, 1956), 205, citing Hattori, *Daitoa Senso Zenshi* (Tokyo, 1953), 314.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>30</sup> *China Handbook*, 1937-1945, 301.

<sup>31</sup> Yeh Chien-ying, *Report on the General Military Situation of the Chinese Communist Party in the War of Resistance* (September, 1944), 21. Statistics for the New Fourth Army are undifferentiated for the first three years of the war, but the period from May 1938 to May 1941 saw, on the whole, heavier fighting than the subsequent three years, 22.

both sides as a whole. In 1940, there were 114,426 Japanese killed and 229,191 wounded. These figures are a bit lower than the toll for each of the two previous years, but higher than the following two years.<sup>32</sup> The number of casualties inflicted by the Eight Route Army was 64,355, the second greatest number of any year during the war.<sup>33</sup>

It should be apparent from the briefest consideration of relevant statistics that the Japanese had their hands full in China during 1940. There is corroboration for this view of the situation by a number of reputable Western scholars, one of whom, in alluding to one of the most crucial theaters of action in China, remarked: "... early in 1940 the Japanese Armies were already beginning to lose such control of the Hopei plain as they had achieved in 1939. By 1940 Chinese control was sweeping back to the railway."<sup>34</sup> Another noted scholar perceived that the Japanese military were beginning to become wary of a "tedious and burdensome war of attrition" which might well "arouse such popular ill-will in Japan as to jeopardize the prestige and political power which the Army had secured since 1931."<sup>35</sup> A third, writing in late 1940, declared that "the prolonged test of strength with China has deprived Japan of the economic margin necessary to cover a large-scale conflict with a third power."<sup>36</sup>

It is with this situation and attitude in mind that we turn our attention to French Indochina—the role it played in the war, and the reason Japan decided to enter that country. With the China "incident" growing worse rather than approaching a solution, with Chiang K'ai-shek's continuing "intransigence," the Japanese determined to utilize every measure to bring the war militarily to a close. To accomplish this end, the Japanese began moving to seal off the area held by the "unregenerate" Nationalist government. Thus, a series of moves were initiated in south China calculated to redouble the pressure on the Nationalists and to blockade supplies to them from the remaining Chinese ports. The achievement of this objective served to highlight the traffic which continued to benefit the enemy, through neutral French Indochina and Burma.

The Japanese had not been insensitive to the French Indochina-Nationalist China reciprocal trading activities before their seizure of all the Chinese ports of entry. I have yet to come across a really objective Western account of the history of Japanese efforts to induce the French to delimit the supplies sent to Chungking. Even the most objective coverages of the subject seem unconsciously to reveal a pro-French sympathy. This is most clearly manifested in the tendency of most writers to emphasize the occasional Japanese bombings of the Yunnan railway, yet to completely ignore the Japanese apologies and attempts at compensation in instances when they were obviously at fault. The Japanese were fully aware of the legal prerogative of the French to engage in the trade. The French had such a right due to the fact that since a war had

<sup>32</sup> *China Handbook* 1937-1945, 300.

<sup>33</sup> Yeh, *op. cit.*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> G. E. Taylor, *The Struggle for North China* (New York, 1940), 169.

<sup>35</sup> F. C. Jones, *Japan's New Order in East Asia 1937-1945* (London, 1954), 1940.

<sup>36</sup> T. A. Bisson, "Indo-China, Spearhead of Japan's Southward Drive," *Foreign Policy Reports* (October 1, 1940), 176.

not formally been declared in China, the French were not violating the rules a neutral nation must heed. Yet the proportions of the Indochina trade made it a matter of vital strategic concern to the Japanese,<sup>37</sup> compelling them to exert every possible effort to persuade or pressure the French to recognize the "grave situation" in China and cooperatively to desist from further aggravating it.<sup>38</sup> On the eve of Japan's taking direct action in the matter, it was estimated that the war supplies transported over the Yunnan railway, totaled 17,000 tons per month. This figure represented some seventy per cent of the total munitions transported over all other routes to Free China.<sup>39</sup>

The surrender of France to Germany provided the propitious moment for taking concrete steps toward sealing off this extremely crucial supply line. Indeed the French, in anticipation of the Japanese moves in this direction, voluntarily began suspending the shipment of certain war material, two days before the first Japanese request.<sup>40</sup> In order to avoid unnecessary prolixity, this paper will make no attempt to retrace the tortuously intricate and detailed procedure whereby the Japanese pressured the Vichy regime into compliance with their increasing demands. There is readily available, at least, one good account of the machinations employed by the Japanese to achieve their objective of penetration into Indochina.<sup>41</sup> In brief, the story goes much like this. In order to suspend further military shipments to Nationalist China through Indochina, the Japanese resorted to a variety of military and diplomatic stratagems. Militarily, these included the brandishment of a crack division in Kwangtung poised on the Tongking border, occasional bombings of the Yunnan railway, and the occupation of strategically located islands which rendered Indochina acutely vulnerable. Diplomatically, the Japanese persistently sought to apply pressure on Vichy, through the German Foreign Ministry. The moment for utilizing this latter means was never more propitious than in the couple of months preceding the consummation of the Tripartite Pact. Conversely, the German Foreign Ministry shrewdly deferred serving as an instrument of Japanese policy in this matter, hoping to promote the unseating of the uncooperative Yonai cabinet in Tokyo by virtue of its hesitation.<sup>42</sup> The Germans were successful in this tactic. The Japanese Army took the cue and replaced Premier Yonai with Prince Konoye, and Foreign Minister Arita with Yosuke Matsuoka.<sup>43</sup> The resultant German cooperation in bringing pres-

<sup>37</sup> K. Bloch, "China's Lifeline... Indochina Frontier," *Far Eastern Survey* (February 14, 1940), 47-48.

<sup>38</sup> The Japanese case in the issue is well-presented, and is especially credible due to its restrained and relatively objective consideration of French arguments, in the "Business Report of 1939 Published by the Board of South Seas," IMTFE, Exhibit No. 616A, 1-8; the fullest exposition of the issue as viewed by a pro-French observer is Andrew Roth, *Japan Strikes South* (New York, 1941).

<sup>39</sup> Cabinet Information Bureau, "French Indo-China and the Chungking Regime," *Tokyo Gazette*, IV (August, 1940), 67.

<sup>40</sup> The French suspended not only shipments of arms and ammunition, but also of trucks and gasoline on June 17, 1940—"Excerpts from 'Business Report of South Seas Section in 1940,'" IMTFE, Exhibit No. 618A, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, *Japan's New Order*. This work is recommended reading for viewing the full context of which Japan's activities in Indochina were but a part.

<sup>42</sup> IMTFE, *Proceedings*, 6164-5.

<sup>43</sup> H. Fcis, *The Road to Pearl Harbor* (Princeton, 1950), 79.

sure upon Vichy, in response to Japanese requests, marked the clearest of Foreign Minister Matsuoka's few diplomatic achievements.

As one might expect, the successive concessions which Japan forced from Vichy in Indochina, have been made to appear as yet further progressions in the unfolding of Japan's alleged ambitious program of conquest. But just as this paper has attempted to present a different interpretation of the motivation for entry, so it must explore a different reading of the early developments of actual Japanese penetration into Indochina. The popular conception of the Japanese southern advance, usually dates from the surprise occupation on February 10, 1939, of Hainan Island, strategically located off the south coast of Kwangtung and due east of Tongking.<sup>44</sup> The French, claiming territorial rights over the island, protested loudly. Japan sharply rejoined that there were no such legal restraints to the direct action she had taken.<sup>45</sup> Six weeks later, Japan occupied the Spratley Islands, still further south.<sup>46</sup> French Indochina was now clearly out-flanked. It is to be noted, however, that during 1939 and early 1940, Japan's attentions were fixed upon the supply route as it entered Yunnan. Occasional errors were made by Japanese pilots, as seems inevitable in such situations, and the Indochina side was bombed. The Japanese readily admitted such errors and offered compensation.<sup>47</sup>

The diplomatic and military pressures brought by Japan in June 1940, are generally considered further developments of this acquisitive program. And the entry of a team of Japanese military observers on June 29, 1940<sup>48</sup> to inspect the traffic between Hanoi and Kunming, is taken as the first concrete manifestation of a Japanese invasion of Indochina proper, by intimidation and guile. To be sure, less than a month later, the Japanese were serving new demands upon the French. This time, for airfields in Indochina and transit rights for Japanese troops.<sup>49</sup> One reason for this additionally desired military deployment by the Japanese, was the knowledge made public by the Japanese that critical war supplies continued to be smuggled into Yunnan through the mountains, a piece of intelligence not to be found in French accounts of the situation.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> It is of interest to note that a generally well-regarded Chinese military historian has made a significant mistake in causal relationships with respect to the Hainan invasion. F. F. Liu incorrectly asserts: "War broke out in Europe in September 1939 and, the following February, Japan took advantage of the French crisis and seized Hainan Island." Liu then writes off the painstaking Japanese efforts to penetrate Indochina by saying that "subsequently the French forces in Indochina were defeated...." Resting upon these faulty observations in his conclusion that Japan was attempting to isolate China, "in preparation for her long-contemplated southward push...." F. F. Liu, *A Military History*, 207.

<sup>45</sup> Publicity Bureau, Navy Department, "The Hainan Campaign," *Tokyo Gazette* (March, 1939), 17.

<sup>46</sup> On March 31, 1939. IMTFE, *Proceedings*, 6,710.

<sup>47</sup> IMTFE, Exhibit No. 616A, 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Exhibit No. 618A, 4.

<sup>49</sup> "The Circumstances Surrounding the Conclusion of Agreement Between Japan and France Concerning the Advancement of the Japanese Army into French Indo-China, July-September 1940," IMTFE, Exhibit No. 620, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly*, VI (July 18, 1940), 415. See also IMTFE, Exhibit No. 618A, 3, on Chinese smuggling activities.

Whatever their motivation may have been in making further demands, once the Japanese had already acquired a foothold in Indochina, they were extremely careful in keeping a pretense of legality in their negotiations with the French. The latter, in a desperate situation, to be sure, played the game of diplomacy to the hilt. Having few stakes with which to bargain, the French alternately procrastinated and made bold counter demands. On several important points, French Ambassador to Japan Arsene-Henry actually persuaded the Japanese to relent. The most crucial of these was that the Japanese were not to have a "blank check" in Indochina, the receipt of which Henry feared had been the intention of Matsuoka.<sup>51</sup> The Henry-Matsuoka agreement also guaranteed French sovereignty over Indochina and that colony's territorial integrity. The most general concession the French were required to make was the recognition of Japanese economic and political predominance in the Far East. Because of this, the French agreed to concede privileges to Japanese trading interests in Indochina, superior to third Powers. Of the military concessions, the Japanese gave assurances that they were to be limited and temporary only. It was understood that the sole purpose of such concessions was to facilitate the ending of the Sino-Japanese conflict. The agreement further stipulated that the French were not to be involved in any expenditures, and, in the eventuality of the war's spreading to Indochina as a result of the military concessions, the French were to be compensated.<sup>52</sup> The settlement of specific provisions was left to Generals Nishihara and Martin in Hanoi, who signed a general agreement on September 4, 1940 and began working on particulars.<sup>53</sup> In doing so the French resorted to a number of evasive tactics, hoping, at the time, for aid from the United States. It might be noted that the procrastinating behavior of the French at this time was probably based, in part, on an underestimation of Japanese military capabilities, judged on the basis of the current Japanese commitment and difficulties in China.<sup>54</sup>

In order to compel the French authorities to reach an accord on the details of the September 4 agreement, the Japanese found it necessary to resort to extreme measures. The impatient South China Army—reacting to the continued delaying tactics of the French erupted into Tongking—administering a blistering defeat to the French forces at Langson.<sup>55</sup> But it is wrong to hold that this particular military operation was part of Japanese policy to force French acquiescence. It is true that the Japanese delivered an ultimatum to the French to reach an agreement by September 23, 1940 or suffer the incursion of the Japanese Army.<sup>56</sup> The French reached the necessary agreement on September 22 aboard the Japanese warship *Kawachi*.<sup>57</sup> The invasion of Indochina by the South China Army occurred three days later (on the 25th) without, therefore, any foreign policy objective. The French had already as-

<sup>51</sup> IMTFE, Exhibit No. 620, 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-14.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> In January 1940, the French had even held maneuvers in Tongking reportedly in order to "pressure" the Japanese. Roth, *op. cit.*, 43.

<sup>55</sup> IMTFE, *Proceedings*, 6,717.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Exhibit No. 620, 41.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

sent to the immediate Japanese demands. It can only be concluded that this purposeless assault was a spontaneous gesture on the part of the aggressive young officers in the South China Army. But whatever else, it was clearly an unjustified attack and the Japanese Government readily admitted as much. The Emperor issued a personal order for the invading force to desist at once. The Japanese Government apologized for the incident, released the French prisoners, and returned Langson to the French. The general in command of the army and his staff were removed and many of the subordinate officers were court-martialed.<sup>58</sup> Even General Nishihara, in Indochina, was replaced by General Sumita,<sup>59</sup> as the Japanese Government anxiously sought to erase any semblance of official responsibility for the affray. Although it is probably true that this incident was not a conscious part of Japanese policy, it may well have had a beneficial effect on later Japanese efforts in Indochina. At least, it corrected the French estimation of Japanese military capabilities.

The military agreement finally reached on September 22, 1940 permitted the Japanese to garrison a maximum of 6,000 men in Indochina and to establish three Japanese airfields in Tongking. Permission was also given for 25,000 Japanese troops to pass through Tongking to Yunnan.<sup>60</sup> The Japanese objectives in Indochina had been satisfied. The supply route to Free China was effectively blocked, and Japanese military presence in northern Indochina was established on a legal basis, so that the great potentialities of the area might thus be utilized to end the dragging conflict in China. The prospects of an early end to that war were at no time brighter. Simultaneously with the successes in Indochina, was the three-month halt of supplies to Chungking by means of the Burma Road—a concession extracted from the British, then engaged in the all-important Battle of Britain.<sup>61</sup> There was in the wind even the possibility that the war might be ended without further military moves, through some adroit horse-trading in which Tongking might be given to Chiang K'ai-shek as part of a peace settlement.<sup>62</sup>

Economic negotiations between Japan and the French in Indochina began in October<sup>63</sup> and continued until the following May.<sup>64</sup> Of course, by the time they were completed, the Japanese obtained pretty much what they wished, for the negotiations spanned the time period during which Japan's general southward policy became much bolder. But economic gains for Japan were to

<sup>58</sup> IMTFE, *Proceedings*, 36203-4.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, 231.

<sup>60</sup> IMTFE, Exhibit No. 620, 10.

<sup>61</sup> "The Burma Route Question: Documentary Material," *Contemporary Japan*, IX (August, 1940), 1078-1079.

<sup>62</sup> This plan was included in an unsigned memorandum of September 28, 1940, found in the Japanese Foreign Ministry Archives; reproduced in IMTFE, *Proceedings*, 6977-8; also in *ibid.*, "Japanese Foreign Policy," Exhibit No. 628.

<sup>63</sup> The first meeting between Hajime Matsumiya and Governor-General Jean Decoux was held on October 22, 1940. *Contemporary Japan*, IX (December, 1940), 1599.

<sup>64</sup> Board of Information, "Concerning the Conclusion of the Japanese-French Indochina Economic Negotiations May 6, 1941," *Tokyo Gazette*, IV (June, 1941), 539.

have been expected in any event.<sup>65</sup> The political vacuum in the area fell far short in terms of immediate effect as did the economic vacuum created by disrupted world trade patterns. It is not difficult to understand how the French reconciled themselves to Japan as an alternative trading partner. The disadvantages of the new pattern were certainly less painful than no trading, no profit-making at all.

### Southward Ambitions

The bright prospects soon vanished, in reality, much sooner than in the visionary calculations of Japanese decision-makers. Had the potential of Indochina been utilized for the purpose for which it was brought under Japanese control, there is a strong possibility that events may have taken a far different turn. Instead, the ease with which Japanese authority had been asserted in northern Indochina produced a phenomenal transformation in Japanese psychology. Japan had approached Indochina with all the cautiousness of a seasoned militarist, fully aware of the limited resources at her command and of the many dangers involved. Once entry had been effected, however, caution soon dissipated as the Japanese found themselves comfortably ensconced in a position that strategically looked out upon an inviting world to conquer, in a rare moment of history in which it was feasible to make the attempt. The initial caution had been dictated mostly by the uncertainty of the degree of French resistance. But rather than meeting resistance, the Japanese found that they had gained territory without even an accompanying sacrifice of men to administrative or police positions. The compliant French obviated such necessity by continuing to assume the administration of northern Indochina, as well as the responsibility that went with it. For the first time, the Japanese militarist could conceive of the logistical possibilities of a southward expansion. A tactical adventure thus became transformed into the first step of an ambitious, but improvising opportunistic grand strategy.

The improvised character of the new turn in policy was clothed in a quickly rationalized ideology. The Japanese divine mission—heretofore applicable, in the main, to Northeast Asia—was now proclaimed to include most of non-Caucasian Asia. Japanese political theorists hammered out a new theme that conformed to the surging fortunes of war. Most typical and significant were the ideas advanced by Iwao F. Ayusawa, who—stimulated by the recent successes—became intrigued with a concept of dynamism which Japanese action seemed to typify. Life itself was something dynamic,<sup>66</sup> reasoned this theorist, thus making it illusory for nations to hope for an idyllic “static” peace. Instead, he advocated a principle of “dynamic” peace<sup>67</sup> in which the world would be carved into frankly ingeniously conceived mutually inter-

<sup>65</sup> V. Thompson foretold Indochina's economic fate months before negotiations began: "...Regardless of the form control over her will take, Indo-China is already, and will be perforce increasingly, integrated into an almost exclusively Far Eastern economy."—"Indo-China in Suspended Animation," *Far Eastern Survey*, IX (August 14, 1940), 198. See also J. R. Andrus and K. R. C. Greene, "Recent Developments in Indo-China 1939-43," supplement in *Robequain*; and, Katsusaburo Sasaki, "The Economic Pact with French Indo-China," *Contemporary Japan*, X (June, 1941), 758-67.

<sup>66</sup> Iwao F. Ayusawa, "The New World: A Japanese View," *Contemporary Japan*, IX (July, 1940), 808.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 807.

dependent regional systems.<sup>68</sup> Within each of these regions, however, "the controlling power" was to "rest with those who possess the qualifications to take responsibility in political, economic and cultural affairs only to the extent that the qualifications are tangibly demonstrated."<sup>69</sup> There is no difficulty in discerning which came first here: practice or theory. But such distinctions were quite irrelevant to a nation riding the crest of a success-fed ultranationalistic wave. Opportunity appeared to be knocking for Japan; the people as well as their leaders, in an intoxicated mood, prepared themselves to take advantage of it.<sup>70</sup>

The economic and political benefits which would accrue to the "enlightened" participants of the new order were now extended to the rest of East Asia. Japanese newspapers and magazines focused attention on the promising lands of Southeast Asia, musing quite suggestively on their incorporation into the suddenly mushrooming conception of empire.<sup>71</sup>

Just when Japanese policy definitely turned toward southward ambitions is difficult to ascertain precisely. We discern the changing Japanese psychology toward wider horizons as a consequence of the successes in Indochina and certainly, in part, due to the spectacular *blitzkrieg* triumphs in Europe. The Tripartite Pact may be considered as representing formally the shift in policy especially due to its reference to the South Seas and its implicit settlement of that area's disposition.<sup>72</sup> But even yet, one cannot point to definite developments in the Southeast Asian arena as Japanese machinations designed to make further inroads. The flash of Thai irridentism,<sup>73</sup> which sought to capitalize on French misfortunes and which has been often alluded to as an instance of calculated Japanese agitation, actually was only an embarrassment to the Japanese in September 1940.<sup>74</sup> At that time, the Japanese were anxious to reach a military settlement with the French and were not at all desirous of provoking unnecessary French resentment by aiding and abetting Thai ambitions.

In November 1940, however, there was a distinct change in Japanese policy. By now, Japanese ambitions had become encouraged enough to begin a conscious, but still cautious, probing into the newly opening southern re-

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 806.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 808.

<sup>70</sup> See D. M. Brown's authoritative description and analysis of this ultranationalistic period—chapter 10, "Ultrationalism," *Nationalism in Japan: An Introductory Historical Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955), 200-237.

<sup>71</sup> An example is "Let's Look at Indo-China," *The Japan Times Weekly*, VI (July 18, 1940), 415. This newspaper article contains an interesting expression of intention, but one which, considering the time at which it was made, must not be thought of as representative of the current decision-makers' views, at least, not their public ones: "Although Japan's immediate interest in Indo-China arises out of its belief that it has been utilized by Chiang K'ai-shek as a supply base and route, there is, of course, a much deeper concern associated with general Far Eastern strategy, the redistribution of Far Eastern foreign possessions and the southern expansionism advocated by a considerable body of public opinion in Japan..." 415.

<sup>72</sup> "The Three-Power Pact Between Japan, Germany and Italy," *Contemporary Japan*, IX (November, 1940), 1493.

<sup>73</sup> See V. Thompson, "Thailand Irredenta—Internal and External," *Far Eastern Survey*, IX (October 23, 1940), 243-50.

<sup>74</sup> IMTFE, Proceedings, 6871.

gions. On November 28, 1940, Foreign Minister Matsuoka proposed peaceful arbitration of the Siam-Indochina border dispute.<sup>75</sup> The French, fully conscious of a Japanese accord with Siam, flatly refused. The cautious Japanese waited a full two months before renewing the proposal. On January 21, 1941, Japan again offered mediation. This time, the French acceded, under considerable pressure from both Japan and Germany.<sup>76</sup> This pressure was maintained throughout the subsequent negotiations. On March 11, 1941, an agreement was reached and signed.<sup>77</sup> As a price for her "good offices" Japan incorporated French Indochina into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and extracted crucial commitments from Thailand as well.<sup>78</sup>

One sees in this pattern of development an initially hesitant and indecisive Japan, becoming bolder and more aggressive and acquisitive within the course of six months. A roughly similar pattern was unfolding with respect to the Netherlands East Indies.<sup>79</sup> There, the Japanese failed to gain substantial satisfaction prior to the war. But in the initial stages of probing in this direction, the Japanese revealed again the undecided and improvised character of their developing policy. On October 16, 1940, Japanese special envoy to the Netherlands East Indies (Ichiro Kobayashi) had even concurred, granted reluctantly, to a joint statement disclaiming Japanese hegemony over the East Indies.

#### External and Internal Compromises

We must now take into account factors other than the weight of the China commitment and the logistical feasibility of further expansion which influenced Japanese decision-making in these critical months. The considerations which had beset Japan on forcing the issue in Indochina, over and above the possibility of heavy French resistance, had been the possible reactions of Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. As regards the first, in spite of the fierce and preoccupying Battle of Britain, the Japanese were aware that the remaining British forces—centered at Singapore—were a risk, given the other uncertainties in the situation. The United States had already served notice of its desire of a *status quo* in the East Indies.<sup>80</sup> And with the move into Indochina, Japan effected its first great compromise with destiny. The ease of entrance and the cooperation of the French administration, evoked such immediate dreams of expansion in Japan as to blind her to the

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 6874; Board of Information, "Concerning the Mediation of the Border Dispute between Thailand and French Indo-China," *Tokyo Gazette*, IV (March 1941), 383.

<sup>76</sup> Once again the German Foreign Ministry put pressure on Vichy to comply with the Japanese demands. An account of these backstage negotiations is to be found in IMTFE, *Proceedings*, 6444-7.

<sup>77</sup> "Letters between Matsuoka and Henry on Mediation, 11 March 1941," IMTFE, Exhibit No. 633.

<sup>78</sup> Board of Information, "Thai-French Indo-China Border Dispute and Japanese Mediation: An Historical Review of the Affair," *Tokyo Gazette*, IV (May, 1941), 429-443.

<sup>79</sup> H. J. van Mook, *The Netherlands Indies and Japan* (New York, 1944), 44-45.

<sup>80</sup> Secretary of State Cordell Hull's April 17, 1940 response to Foreign Minister Arita's statement of April 15. J. C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan* (New York, 1944), 318.

continuing necessity, not only of settling the China conflict but also of maintaining an understanding with the United States.<sup>81</sup>

The initial Japanese penetration into Indochina itself had brought about quick United States counter-action in the embargo on scrap iron and steel.<sup>82</sup> While it is true that the United States' action had a sobering effect on subsequent Japanese moves<sup>83</sup> and, as such, constituted a real compromising of Japanese action, yet there is still another dimension to the act. In addition to being a prohibitive warning as to the adverse consciousness of the United States, the very act of depriving Japan of a vital resource at will, dramatically symbolized to the Japanese their actual dependent status. Such an awareness, coming at the height of the current wave of ultranationalism permeating Japan, resulted not only in a positive sobering, but in a profound negative bitterness as well. This state of mind naturally led to the beginning of serious strategic consideration of the southern regions for their resource potential. Thus, paradoxically, the action of the United States served not only as a warning against, but as a stimulus to, further imperialistic ambition. The die was cast between Japan and the United States.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, while a source of apprehension for Japan in mid-1940, was to come to a mutually profitable understanding with Japan before another year had passed.<sup>84</sup> This anxiety-relieving understanding gave sufficient buoyancy to Japanese confidence in mid-1941 to lead to the precipitate moves, again in Indochina, that brought about the irrevocable conditions which found their fulfillment in the Pacific War. The Japanese decision to station troops in southern Indochina in July 1941—whether prompted by real or contrived fears of the so-called ABCD encirclement and the intrigues of Kuomintang spies in the area<sup>85</sup>—provoked the most extreme of measures short of open belligerency by the United States such as the freezing of Japanese assets in that country.<sup>86</sup> Indochina served as the first step to a greatly

---

<sup>81</sup> Prince Saionji indicated Japanese initial apprehensions by revealing that Japan had hesitated to make proposals to the French Government because "America's attitude on this matter was not known and therefore Japan had been reserved." Saionji-Harada *Memoirs*, chapter 367, June 28, 1940, 2853.

<sup>82</sup> Feis, *op. cit.*, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Grew, *op. cit.*, 335-336.

<sup>84</sup> W. L. Langer (ed.), *An Encyclopedia of World History* (Boston, 1948), 1150. Mutual Non-Agression Pact signed April 13, 1942.

<sup>85</sup> Foreign Minister Toyada claimed that the chief reason for occupying southern Indochina was to facilitate carrying out the China war, a reason which was somewhat anachronistic by July 1942. More plausible was South Seas Bureau Chief Saito's statement that the move was in response to recent Anglo-American efforts to impede Japan's progress, and also to suppress De Gaullist activities in the south—"Proceedings of the Privy Council re Protocol between France and Japan and re Military Cooperation, July 28, 1941," IMTFE, Exhibit No. 649, 4; even more revealing but of uncertain value is the secret information imparted through military channels two weeks earlier: "The immediate objective of our occupation of French Indo-China will be [sic] achieve our purpose there. Secondly, its purpose is, when the international situation is suitable, to launch therefrom a rapid attack... this venture we will carry out in spite of any difficulties which might arise." "14 July 1941 Secret Information from Military Officials to Attaches," IMTFE, Exhibit No. 641, 1; see also Board of Information, "Joint Defense of French Indo-China," *Tokyo Gazette*, V (September, 1941), 122-8.

<sup>86</sup> Grew, *op. cit.*, 408.

expanded empire, but it was a compromised step, for it elicited a gravely unfavorable reaction from major interested world powers.

If Japanese activities in Indochina involved a grievous external compromise with destiny, it was matched by an internal compromise of no less significance and importance. This internal compromise was one of principle, brought about by the method whereby Japan was enabled to achieve a position in Indochina that permitted her to consider further southward expansion. In short, it was a compromise effected by pure military expediency. The broadened restatements of Japan's divine mission, which figured so prominently in the newly evolving ideology accompanying Japanese successes in Indochina, trumpeted the theme of terminating the white man's exploitation of Asians. In planning upon this theme, the Japanese seemingly proved themselves acutely sensitive to the dynamism of an emergent Asian aspiration. However, if the Japanese were aware of the latent Asian political consciousness, they certainly pitifully misgauged the dimensions of it. Consequently, when they heralded a theme which harmonized with the ripening Asian desire for independence, they were ill-prepared, not only to cultivate it properly or keep it within bounds but also to keep their own practices within the confines established by the improvised ideology.

When the Japanese retained the French as sole administrators of Indochina and openly declared their cooperation with, and support of, the most widely despised White imperialists, their ideological program lost something of its appeal elsewhere in Asia, as well. Of course, other Asian nationalists would seek to work with the Japanese irrespective of this basic contradiction between Japanese principle and practice. The nationalists were understandably opportunistic. But they were not unmindful of the experience of the Indochinese nationalists. This continuing experience provided food for doubt wherever the Japanese extended their domination during World War II. Nowhere was the hastily devised character of the new Japanese ideology more manifest than in this unresolved contradiction. Certainly the Japanese were aware of it, but they were unable or unwilling to employ the measures to correct it. Instead, they impotently tried to make the best of the situation through empty platitudinous declarations in a futile attempt to please everyone. This is illustrated in the course of single article by one prominent writer who, on one page, asserted that "as far as French Indochina is concerned Japan should settle matters amicably with the French Government."<sup>87</sup> Yet, on the very next page, he declared: "The great need is to win and consolidate the confidence of the 120 million natives of the South Seas region in such a way that they will welcome us Japanese."<sup>88</sup>

The reason for this contradiction can be traced back to the initially indecisive policy with which the Japanese approached Indochina. We have already noted that there was an insignificant amount of interest by Japan in Indochina, prior to the outbreak of the European war. What little interest there was, had probably been manifested through some support of certain nationalist movements. We have noted too, that there is some reason to believe

---

<sup>87</sup> Hayashi, 1302.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 1303.

that a nationalist uprising in southern Indochina was coordinated with the Japanese entrance into northern Indochina—the nationalists being hopeful of further support by the Japanese. For their part, the Japanese clearly discerned the logistical advantages of retaining the French administration, at least, for the time being.<sup>89</sup> As it was, “the time being” lasted for almost five years.

The *modus vivendi* between the French and the Japanese worked sufficiently well to preclude the necessity of preparing Indochinese nationalists to take over the reins of government. Thus, the nationalists received extremely little support or encouragement from the Japanese throughout the period of Japanese occupation. There is reason to suspect that some clandestine support was directed through a Japanese businessman known only as Matsushita, and through the *Kempeitai*.<sup>90</sup> The Japanese utilized the Cao Dai in anti-Western movements and protected them when the French attempted to suppress their demonstrations.<sup>91</sup> The single noticeable overt effort of the Japanese to aid a distinctly nationalist group ended in failure when it was crushed by the French, and Japanese arms and uniforms were confiscated. After this event (which was kept quiet), the Japanese no longer openly aided the nationalists. “The failure to pursue an anti-French policy led,” one writer has noted, “to disillusionment on the part of the interested native element.”<sup>92</sup>

It is perhaps ironic that the greatest contribution to the nationalist cause was the result of a by-product of the Japanese occupation. In order to counter the Japanese use of the Cao Dai sect and secretive support of nationalists, the French resorted to a number of stratagems—the most relevant being the creation of a mass youth movement. In a couple of years, by 1944, the movement had grown so large that the Governor-General created a Consultative Federal Commission for Sports and Youth to coordinate its development throughout the country.<sup>93</sup> This movement proved successful in its immediate purpose of counteracting the Japanese “divide and rule” concept by substituting a viable ideology which strengthened the unity and federalist concepts of the French. On the other hand, the entire mechanism of the movement was all too conducive to nationalist activity and in due time became a vehicle for Vietnamese revolutionists.<sup>94</sup>

When the grant of independence finally came on March 9, 1945,<sup>95</sup> Indochinese nationalists had little reason to be grateful to Japan. Despite the pro-

---

<sup>89</sup> To be sure the Japanese had alternative plans. One such plan prepared in the War Ministry on October 4, 1940, counselled a maneuvering of an independence movement and then the compelling of France to renounce its sovereign rights over Indochina. This was to have been put into effect if England had been invaded by the Germans. IMTFE, Exhibit No. 628, 4-5. It must be pointed out, however, that such a plan does not necessarily reflect the intentions of the top decision-makers.

<sup>90</sup> Kallgren, *op. cit.*, 120, citing *The Degree of Japanese Control Over the French Administration of Indochina*, private source.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 121, citing Summary of Conditions in Indochina Late 1944, December 15, 1944, private source.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>95</sup> “The Disposition of French Indo-China,” IMTFE, Exhibit No. 663.

pagandistic reading of the affair given by official Japanese news sources,<sup>96</sup> the Japanese gesture was too obviously a desperate rearguard tactic. With the ending of World War II, some Japanese fled to the hills and joined nationalist units. Japanese also sold arms and ammunition to nationalists.<sup>97</sup> But there is no indication that either of these activities was the result of a conscious Japanese policy. When the Japanese left Indochina, the legacy they left behind was an empty one. The improvised ideology, lacking internal consistency, had gone up in smoke. The improvised strategy, based, at best, on gross miscalculations had logically precipitated its own destruction.

---

<sup>96</sup> According to Radio Tokyo, Wu Wen-an, an "influential leader" of the independence movement on March 11, 1945, declared: "We have long awaited this day, ever since the Japanese forces entered Indochina. We would like to return home as soon as possible and lend every cooperation to the Japanese forces, both spiritually and materially." On February 8, several young Indochinese, according to the same source, presented a letter in blood to Premier Koiso, requesting permission to join the Japanese forces. U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, *Programs of Japan in Indo-China with Index to Biographical Data* (Honolulu, August 10, 1945), 79.

<sup>97</sup> Kallgren, *op. cit.*, 129.