

WHAT THE TASTE TEST SHOWED: ALCOHOL AND POLITICS IN FRENCH VIETNAM

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During most of the colonial period, the French government in Vietnam derived a substantial portion of its budget from a monopoly on the rice alcohol which the Vietnamese used daily in religious rituals and convivial social activities. As the government became dependent on this indirect tax for more and more of its resources, it began substituting a cheaper, “purified” alcohol in place of the traditional product. This article investigates the reaction to French factory alcohol in southern Vietnam, by analyzing responses to an unusual taste test run in 1913. This comparison between the different forms of rice alcohol was set up by the French government to determine Vietnamese taste preferences in a “scientific” manner. I argue that on its own terms, the taste test was a failure, but that it can nevertheless tell us a great deal about the struggles to control alcohol production and consumption in the French colony. This article demonstrates that the Chinese and Vietnamese inhabitants of southern Vietnam managed over decades to force significant concessions from the French government, at the expense of the major French distilling company in Vietnam, the *Société Française des Distilleries de l’Indochine* (SFDI).

As in Vietnam, European administrations in many modern colonies had difficulty formulating a coherent, consistent alcohol policy. Most of the literature on this phenomenon focuses on Africa, where strong temperance movements and racist paternalism conflicted with the perpetual need for tax revenues.¹

Alcohol debates in Africa centered on European imports: settlers argued that these potent beverages were dangerous for Africans and should be restricted to the white community. Africans were encouraged to substitute beer or other mild beverages for hard alcohol.² In Vietnam, in contrast, conflict arose primarily over French industrialization of the traditional process of rice wine production. Despite these differences in context, the question of taxation provides a common thread in most work on colonial alcohol regimes. In many colonies bootlegging was primarily perceived by both the colonized and the colonizers as a question of tax avoidance.³ As this article will show, however, the Vietnamese developed a rhetoric of consumer preference to explain their refusal to drink European factory-produced alcohol. I argue that this rhetorical strategy may have helped lead to the relative success of their campaign.

In the south of Vietnam, the region the French called Cochinchina, rice alcohol was already imbedded in a sophisticated network of production and distribution when the French arrived in the 1860s. Influential Chinese distillers produced most of the rice alcohol in southern Vietnam and distributed it through networks of Chinese and Vietnamese traders to marketplaces across the region. Since the seventeenth century, Chinese immigrants living in southern Vietnam had built trade networks to China and throughout Southeast Asia. Their extensive trade networks and their reliable access to capital meant that these Chinese played a major role in Vietnam's commerce and industry, and alcohol production was one of the areas they controlled. Understanding the economic importance of this industry as well as its potential as a tax base, the French colonizers tried to force out Chinese distillers and replace them with French-run factories. Working hand-in-hand, the colonial government and the SFDI coordinated the development of distilling technologies and an overarching state monopoly in order to facilitate repression as well as efficiencies of production. In response, the colonized boycotted the French factory alcohol, relying on a rhetoric of consumer

preference to justify their rejection of the official product. The strong Chinese distilling community, along with the determined Vietnamese consumers, eventually forced the French state to allow relative freedom in the alcohol trade, abandoning the SFDI monopoly in Cochinchina.

Although it did not generally accompany meals, rice alcohol formed a regular part of the diet of most Vietnamese people. It also played a significant role in the frequent ceremonies that composed village life: on many occasions during the year, families, lineages, or whole villages would gather for marriages, funerals, agricultural festivals, etc. Vietnamese people shared rice alcohol with each other during these celebrations, and spilled some on the ground to share the moment with their ancestors.⁴ Rice alcohol symbolized generosity, community, continuity, abundance—it was not simply a consumer good, although it did play a significant role in the marketplace. The French colonial state, in need of a stable, reliable taxation base, saw alcohol as an ideal target: rice alcohol formed an necessary part of every Vietnamese family's daily life, yet French administrators could nonetheless assert that they were taxing a luxury product, or even a vice. Moreover, the pre-colonial centralization of alcohol production facilitated the colonial state's early efforts to monitor and tax that production.

In 1862, soon after conquering Cochinchina, the French imposed an indirect tax on all alcohol in their new colony, including both imported European alcohol and locally produced rice alcohol. Rice alcohol was made for the most part in proto-factories that had both Chinese owners and Chinese laborers. During the first twenty years of colonization, the tax remained low enough to avoid controversy. Pleased with the profits, the French did not try to alter how the alcohol was made or distributed.⁵ The French administration simply farmed out alcohol revenue collecting to whichever of the established Chinese alcohol producers offered to pay the highest annual fee, and that producer then subcontracted with the other Chinese owners of alcohol manufactories. In 1881, the Chinese manufactory owners realized

their strength, organized together, and all at once offered much lower bids for control of the alcohol revenues. At that point, the French administration tried to encourage various French and Vietnamese interests to build distilleries that would compete with the Chinese.⁶ Lack of experience and lack of distribution networks to bypass the Chinese put an quick end to that hope, however, and the French government soon found itself negotiating with the Chinese producers and accepting their terms.

In 1893, Governor-General Lanessan put in a new system of surveillance and control of distilleries, as part of the newly proclaimed *Régie de l'Alcool*, or official state alcohol monopoly (part of the new Customs and Monopolies administration, the *Douanes et Régies*). Distilleries now needed a license, and in order to get a license, they needed to upgrade their structures and build a sturdy enclosure. This would allow the French to monitor production so as to tax it accurately and by the liter. The new regulations concerning the structures of the distilleries had the stated goal of decreasing the risks of fire, of fraud and of bad hygiene. But the regulations also raised capital expenses, presumably in the hopes of driving out Chinese producers and encouraging well-capitalized European companies to get into the business.⁷ If that was the French hope, however, it did not succeed, because many Chinese businessmen could afford to spend at least as much money as French investors did.

What the French were unable to achieve with hygiene regulations, they achieved through technology. In 1902 Dr. Albert Calmette, a student of Pasteur, developed a new technique for purifying rice alcohol during the distillation process. The efficient new process not only drastically reduced the *cost* of producing the alcohol, but also, crucially, altered the *form* of the alcohol in a consistent, recognizable manner. Dr. Calmette granted exclusive use of his patent in Indochina to the company run by Lucien and A.R. Fontaine, the SFDI, in which Dr. Calmette held stock. From that point on, the French government gave distinct preferences to the SFDI, leading up to a 1905 decree giving the French company a

legal monopoly of alcohol production in Cochinchina. In return the company promised the French government higher revenues from the alcohol tax and easier enforcement methods.⁸ The legitimate alcohol now had an identifiably different form from the alcohol produced by older methods, which could not attain the same degree of alcohol purity. Thus inspectors could simply use an alcoholometer to prove the provenance of unmarked containers of alcohol. With the SFDI monopoly, three-quarters of the Chinese distilleries in the south were pushed out of the industry. These supposedly free-market buy-outs were often forced on the Chinese, and those who did not comply quickly met with increased pressure both from the Fontaine brothers and from the French government.⁹ After 1905, only fourteen out of forty-seven Chinese distilleries were still functioning, using lawsuits and negotiations with the French government in their attempts to remain in business.¹⁰

The colonial government and the French industrialists assured each other that the alcohol monopoly fulfilled the ideals of the civilizing mission. When the French administration encouraged the Fontaine brothers to expand their Cholon alcohol factory in Cochinchina, for instance, the goal was to have “indigenous alcohol consumption assured by an industry that was both scientific and French, rather than by the primitive and unhygienic Chinese procedures.”¹¹ French journalists in the colony also presented the monopoly in a favorable light. In an article entitled “French Alcohol and Chinese Alcohol,” a journalist decried the Chinese factories as primitive and unhygienic, and relegated them to a purportedly less civilized past:

Which of us never visited a distillery of rice alcohol at least once during the period when the Chinese controlled that industry? An enormous shack made of straw, lop-sided and rickety. Inside a double row of crudely constructed stills; a bamboo tube led the alcohol vapors from the chamber of each still to the condensers lined up in a trough, where dirty greenish-brown water stagnated,

nauseating, covered with a layer of scum. Nearby, in stifling little lean-tos, the rice fermented in jars sitting right on the ground [...] Chinese men, almost naked, bustled around; and thousands of flies covered the fermenting substances and simmered in the stills.¹²

In vivid contrast, he explained that the new French alcohol factories were set up with “all the care and perfection that modern industry brings these days to the least of its factories.” He described the interior of a French alcohol factory: “well-lit and clean, cheerful and well-arranged, with machines and instruments that are spotless and glisten from being scoured every day.” He noted that the alcohol produced was as pure as possible, much purer than the alcohol provided by the Chinese to their customers—and, finally, “it costs significantly less. Nonetheless... it doesn’t sell!”

Indeed, the French could hardly help noticing that the volume of alcohol sold dropped dramatically with the SFDI control of the alcohol monopoly. The number of liters sold stayed far below expectations, with the result that the tax revenues from alcohol stayed far below the government’s expectations as well. From a high point of five and a half million liters of rice alcohol sold in 1903, sales dropped as the administration began pushing the SFDI alcohol. Annual sales dropped to only two and a half million liters for 1906, the first year after the monopoly officially took hold.¹³ Over the same period, arrests for contraband rice alcohol (made by the same processes used by the Chinese distillers) rose from 622 in 1903 to 1287 in 1906.

At first, the French factory owners insisted that the low sales were due entirely to the wiles of the Chinese distillers in the south. And, for a while, it seemed as if they might be right—the Chinese, in control of distribution networks, refused to handle the SFDI alcohol and declared an overt boycott.¹⁴ The French who supported the SFDI monopoly declared that those former distillers intimidated any distributors who tried to sell the French-made alcohol. According to a French-managed, mixed-language

newspaper, the Chinese also targeted consumers, by spreading rumors that the French-made alcohol made drinkers sick or crazy, due to poor quality raw materials such as bran and rotting sugar cane.¹⁵ Sales of SFĐI alcohol in Cochinchina plummeted.¹⁶ After trying and failing to bypass the sales network of Chinese former distillers, in late 1906 the colonial government granted these Chinese businessmen control of alcohol distribution, with liberal profits, as long they agreed to encourage sales of the French-made alcohol.¹⁷ A few months later, however, one bureaucrat noted that the concession did not in fact cause revenues to rise: “The Asian [Chinese] distillers have now submitted and seek to cooperate with the Administration, and yet sales have not increased.”¹⁸ Unable to blame the problem of low sales completely on the Chinese, the French government cast about for other explanations.

The Fontaine brothers never admitted that the alcohol produced in their factories could in any way be inferior to the non-industrial alcohol, but *Douanes & Régies* administrators noted that consumers seemed to dislike the taste of the French-made alcohol. The efficiency of the French techniques meant that French factories could produce rice alcohol at a much higher degree, but the Vietnamese would not drink it at that high degree. The French used water to cut the percentage of alcohol per liter, leading to a tasteless product. Additionally, the Fontaine brothers substituted cheap rice for the high-quality *nêp* rice used by the Chinese, and at times the factories even used other food products, such as corn and sugar cane, in place of rice in their alcohol production.¹⁹ As early as 1904, French administrators encouraged the Fontaine brothers to mix some of the Chinese-made alcohol into the factory product to increase the appeal of the SFĐI alcohol to Vietnamese consumers (often in ratios as high as one-third).²⁰ At first, officials suggested the Fontaine brothers gradually reduce levels of mixing, in order to accustom the Vietnamese to the new taste of the factory product over an extended period of time. But in fact whenever the industrialists did reduce the percentage of

Chinese-made alcohol, sales dropped further, and the colonial administration had to ask them to restore the higher levels.²¹

It is interesting to ponder the state's mixing of alcohols to achieve a palatable compromise between the Vietnamese consumer's preferences and a powerful French company's desire for dominance. The mixing resonates with other colonial phenomena that have been much discussed by historians: pidgin languages, syncretized religion, miscegenation, etc.²² Here pragmatism (and the persistence of the Vietnamese and Chinese) persuaded the French state to enforce the manufacture of a product imagined as hybrid. When it mixed Fontaine's alcohol with the proto-industrial Chinese alcohol, the *Douanes et Régies* was combining forms which the people in the colony perceived as essentially different. This mixed product embodied the *Douanes et Régies*' acknowledgement that the purified French factory alcohol was imperfect. In fact, this dilution undercut the very quality promoted by the Fontaine brothers—the homogeneity and consistency of the factory alcohol as compared to the 'impure' alcohol they hoped to replace.

The archives of the *Douanes & Régies* administration reveal the bureaucrats' obsession with the dispiriting (to the French) fact that for many years the Vietnamese refused to buy the factory alcohol, purchasing contraband instead, even at greater expense and with the added danger of attracting reprisals from the enforcers who worked for the monopoly. In 1913 the Director of the *Douanes et Régies* noted that contrabanders were able to charge 10 to 20 cents *more* than the official price: "Why would the population agree to pay this higher price [...], and also run the risks of arrest – and certainly, the Régie is not gentle – if there were not a fundamental question which overshadowed all others: that of taste?"²³ French officials were perturbed by the idea that the Vietnamese refused to buy the French-made alcohol because they preferred the taste of the alcohol produced through "unscientific" means. Science had to mean progress and improvement, otherwise what did the French have to offer as justification for the

heavy-handedness of colonialism? For those most closely involved in the SFDI alcohol monopoly, it was aggravating to think that the Vietnamese simply preferred the flavor of the less purified alcohol. Yet that claim arose repeatedly in complaints presented by the Vietnamese. At a session of the Conseil Colonial in April 1907, the Vietnamese representatives at the council spoke one after another in the same terms: “The alcohol of the French distilling company is repugnant to the taste of the population;” “you are forcing the natives to drink an alcohol which is not to their taste, which lacks the aroma of the alcohol made by Asian methods.”²⁴ Vietnamese theater productions also depicted the factory alcohol as noxious, showing sickly drinkers of the French-made alcohol who could only be revived by a few drops of the more traditional product.²⁵

For years, the French resisted such appeals, blaming them on resistance to paying the tax. In 1905 the Director General of the *Douanes et Régies* insisted “this question of taste is just a matter of habit.”²⁶ Another French administrator declared that the taste issue simply did not exist. He claimed that in northern Vietnam villagers had no objection to the factory alcohol once they got used to it. And if the SFDI were to gradually increase the proportions of factory alcohol in the product sold in the south, “the same will be true in Cochinchina [...] we will be able to show objectors that for six months they have been drinking alcohol from the [SFDI] factory without noticing.”²⁷ This writer thought fraudulent practices were unobjectionable, if they could help demonstrate to the Vietnamese that their taste preferences had no substance. In late 1906, an administrator of the *Douanes et Régies* claimed that: “as for the difference of taste, I have already noted that the most knowledgeable people frequently get it wrong.”²⁸ A report by the Governor of Cochinchina from 1912 agreed with that conclusion, asking rhetorically: “how does one explain the repeated tasting errors committed by natives with reputations for being alcohol connoisseurs?”²⁹ Up through 1912 discussions of taste had centered on such anecdotal evidence, positing that the Vietnamese were simply boasting when they said they could tell the difference by

taste alone, and implying that “natives” had only a fraudulent claim to the French term “connoisseur.” And yet, in letters to the SFDI, the administration kept reminding them to maintain the levels of Chinese-made alcohol in their product, lest revenues drop even further.

Tired of these contradictory evaluations, in late 1913 Governor General Sarraut delegated A. Kircher, the Director of the *Douanes et Régies*, to conduct a more scientific experiment. The process and results of Kircher’s investigation are worth citing at length for the assumptions they demonstrate:

I asked the population [of Cochinchina] to enlighten me; I turned to notables, peasants, soldiers, unskilled laborers, even prisoners, well-known drunks and occasional drinkers, all encountered randomly in the street. I offered them the three types of alcohol, that is, the native alcohol, which, for clarity, I will call Chinese alcohol because of its current manufacturers, the alcohol from Fontaine’s factory [...], which I will call European alcohol [...] and finally the mixture of these two alcohols in the proportions currently in use: 30% [Chinese] and 70% [European]. [...] Invited *one by one* to taste the three alcohols, which had, of course, no external signs to indicate the nature of the product, the majority of those surveyed declared that they preferred the pure Chinese alcohol; a few preferred the mixture; they all ranked last the pure European alcohol, sometimes even adding that that alcohol was bad. Only once was I told that the pure European alcohol was the best, but that opinion came from a [Vietnamese] agent of the *Douanes et Régies* and from four soldiers he had recruited (and indoctrinated a bit) *on his own*. I regard the *too-uniform* testimony of these five drinkers as eminently suspect, because the European alcohol, *the official favorite of the Administration*, was easily recognizable by its limpidity.³⁰

Having eliminated what he considered to be the biased answers, Kircher declared that the Vietnamese in Cochinchina had

conclusively demonstrated their taste preference in his “impartial experiment,” and he suggested that this meant that the French should respect that preference. Yet he completely ignored the glaring fact that if those who sought to favor the official favorite could tell the difference between alcohols by the relative clarity of the liquids, then the other tasters must also have been able to tell the difference visually and could thus manipulate his results at will. Kircher’s experiment failed according to his own standards of scientific objectivity.

Far from making the experiment useless, however, Kircher’s failure can still teach the historian a great deal. He demonstrated that the French bureaucrats defined taste exclusively as a sense-perception, experienced within the mouth and isolated from intellectual assessments. The French government could only accept and respect the preference of the Vietnamese for the more traditional alcohol if that preference had a physical manifestation; other evidence, such as purchasing decisions and vocal pleas, just did not count. Given what we know of the alcohol content levels of the “European” factory alcohol and the “Chinese” proto-industrial alcohol, it seems clear that the Vietnamese respondents would have been able to identify the different alcohols by physical sensation alone. If they then chose to allow their answer to be swayed by their knowledge of the different social ramifications of each alcohol production system, they could do so. Kircher may not even have bothered to explain to the tasters that such outside knowledge was not supposed to come into play, and, even if he did, it is doubtful whether these various peasants, soldiers, prisoners, and drunks would have cared about Kircher’s wishes. The messiness of the measurement means that Kircher’s experiment cannot answer the question it purported to ask. Nevertheless, his experiment demonstrates either that his Vietnamese respondents actually preferred the taste of the “Chinese” alcohol, or that they deliberately chose to vote against the French government’s official alcohol, or both. His Vietnamese respondents may have seized this priceless opportunity to speak

back to the French colonial state, to insult the French alcohol, and proudly defend their chosen drink, newly imagined as national.

To understand the background for this experiment, it helps to know that plans for scientific experimentation on the taste question had apparently been discussed for years, but the Fontaine brothers always maneuvered to obstruct them. In his report to Sarraut, Kircher explained the pattern:

In 1913, just as in 1906, Fontaine has only one fear, that is to see us consult the population, that is, to give the consumer the freedom to buy the alcohol he prefers, even at a higher price. As soon as we talk of a referendum, as soon as we propose competition between the two rival alcohols, even just as a test, Fontaine gets agitated, Fontaine threatens, because Fontaine is scared.³¹

In May 1912 Sarraut had proposed an experiment which would have factored in cost as well, to see how much more customers would pay for the alcohol which they liked.³² But the SFDI company had blocked Sarraut's attempt to determine the true relationships among Vietnamese people's taste in alcohol, their pocketbooks, and their distaste for the French colonial bureaucracy.

After Kircher's experiment in 1913, the *Douanes et Régies* officials acknowledged their inability to impose the pure factory alcohol on the population in Cochinchina, due both to the Chinese distillers' absolute refusal to be eliminated from the process and to the Vietnamese consumers' turn to contraband. Administrators had already found over the years since instating the monopoly that they had to mix the SFDI alcohol with Chinese alcohol to create a palatable product which the consumers would buy. Unlike in other colonies, the French administration in Vietnam could not dismiss contraband as simply tax avoidance, since the Vietnamese went to great lengths to demonstrate that they cared about the taste of their alcohol. On the one hand, Vietnamese consumers paid a premium for bootlegged alcohol, thus showing that price was not driving their decision. And on the other hand, the

Vietnamese expressed their preference for Chinese-made alcohol over French-made alcohol—even though the Vietnamese often resented Chinese predominance in Vietnam’s economy, and generally had no political or social reason to want to direct their business to the Chinese.³³

In 1913, Sarraut finally convinced himself that taste mattered to the population in the south and that the best way of ensuring that they got the product they wanted was to eliminate the state monopoly and reinstate a quasi-free market for alcohol.³⁴ Alcohol was still taxed heavily and prices stayed high, but sales had doubled (returning to the pre-monopoly levels) by 1915.³⁵ Over the years, Vietnamese consumers and Chinese producers of rice alcohol in Cochinchina combined their forces to resist French pressures. Despite the great power of the SFDI, the Vietnamese and Chinese managed to convince the French government to reduce its favoritism for the French industrialists and to adapt colonial policies to take into consideration the preferences of the colonized.

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NOTES

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1. In a bibliographic essay, David M. Fahey discussed the lack of works on the history of alcohol in non-African colonies. See “‘I’ll Drink to That!’: The Social History of Alcohol,” *CHOICE: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries* 38:4 (December 2000), 643.

2. Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), chs. 3-4; Ayodeji Olukoju, “Prohibition and Paternalism: The State and the Clandestine Liquor Traffic in Northern Nigeria, c. 1898-1918,” *International Journal of African*

Historical Studies 24:2 (1991), 351-354; Michael O. West, "Liquor and Libido: 'Joint Drinking' and the Politics of Sexual Control in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1920s-1950s," *Journal of Social History* 30:3 (1997), 650.

3. Justin Willis, "Soured Wine: The Development and Suppression of the Palm Wine Economy, c. 1850-1960," *Kenya Past and Present* (1998), 35-39; Patrick Peebles, "Arrack Renting," *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon*, (New Delhi: Navrang, 1995), 148-157; William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 47-57. Charles Ambler presents a nuanced perspective on bootlegging in Northern Rhodesia, showing not only that consumers minded the high taxes but also that they objected to the taste and quality of the beer served in officially licensed beerhalls, and resented the dismantling of "traditional patterns of social drinking." See "Alcohol, Racial Segregation and Popular Politics in Northern Rhodesia," *Journal of African History* 31:2 (1990), 302-303. On alcohol tax policies in Vietnam, see Ngô Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants Under the French* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 64-67; Gilles de Gantès, "Coloniaux, gouverneurs et ministres: l'influence des Français du Viet-Nam sur l'évolution du pays à l'époque coloniale, 1902-1914." Thèse de Doctorat, Académie de Paris (Université de Paris VII, 1994) 370-373; 449-454.

4. Bernard-Marcel Peyrouton, *Etude sur les monopoles en Indochine* (Thèse de doctorat, Paris, 1913), 216. See also "L'Utilisation de l'alcool au point de vue indigène" (1913), as well as several nineteenth-century poems collected in Nguyen Khac Vien and Huu Ngoc, eds., *Anthologie*.

5. Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence (hereafter CAOM), Agence Economique de la France d'Outre-Mer (hereafter AgEcFOM) Carton 208, dossier 192: April 1923 report on the "Régime des Alcools en Indochine."

6. CAOM, Papiers d'Agents Series 9, Carton 16, dossier 2 (hereafter 9PA/16 doss. 2), 15 February 1908 report by Inspector Bougourd on "Alcools Indigènes en Cochinchine."

7. René Monier, "Le question du monopole de l'alcool dans Tonkin et le Nord-Annam." Thèse, Sciences politiques et économiques, Université de Paris, 1913, 45.

8. CAOM, AgEcFOM Carton 208 dossier 192.

9. See, for example, a court case concerning a Chinese distiller who was framed by the colonial police to make it look as if he had been smuggling alcohol out of his distillery to avoid taxes. *Le Petit Temps* (Paris) 1 March 1906: “Un procès retentissant à Saïgon.” Article clipped in CAOM, Indo-NF, Carton 465 dossier 4035.

10. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 6 May 1907 report on alcohol situation in Cochinchina by a *Douanes et Régies* inspector.

11. CAOM, AgEcFOM Carton 208, dossier 192: Note, dated 1921, giving history of the Fontaines’ enterprise.

12. *Moniteur des Provinces* (Saïgon), 21 June 1906, p. 1.

13. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: year by year chart of sales, included in 6 September 1912 letter from the Governor of Cochinchina to Governor General Sarraut. See also CAOM, Archives of the Governor General of Indochina (hereafter GGI), dossier 1361: 16 September 1910 report by M. Boundal, Assistant Director of the *Douanes et Régies* for Cochinchina.

14. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 8 December 1906 letter from Morel, Director of *Douanes et Régies*, to the Fontaine company. During 1906 the Chinese openly refused to buy sfdi alcohol from the factories or sell it to their customers

15. *Moniteur des Provinces* (Saïgon), 21 June 1906, p. 1. The article blames the rumors on the Chinese and on Vietnamese gullibility.

16. CAOM, GGI 1361: 16 September 1910 report by M. Boundal, Assistant Director of *Douanes et Régies* for Cochinchina.

17. CAOM, AgEcFOM Carton 208 dossier 192: Note entitled “Fontaine,” from 1921.

18. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 28 November 1906 letter from D. Buresi, the assistant director of the monopoly of native alcohols in Cochinchina, to the Director of the *Douanes et Régies*. See also a 25 May 1907 report by the *Douanes et Régies* (GGI 8897).

19. CAOM, 9PA/16 doss. 1: Undated, unsigned report (circa 1912) regarding Fontaine’s contract with the government. Also, see CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 18 September 1904 statement by a representative of the sfdi in Cholon. And see CAOM, AgEcFOM Carton 208 dossier 192: April 1923 report on the alcohol

policies. And: GGI 8457 21/3/1903, letter from the Minister of Colonies to the Governor General.

20. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss 2.: 18 September 1904 statement by a representative of the sfdi in Cholon.

21. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 29 June 1906, 3 December 1906, and 8 December 1906 letters from administrators of the *Douanes et Régies* to a representative of the sfdi

22. For a helpful discussion of the history of hybridity as a colonial category, see Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Young discusses the necessary hybridity of the term ‘hybridity’ itself, the doubleness as each usage vacillates between an “organic,” “hegemonizing” mode which assumes “the prior existence of pure, fixed and separate antecedents” and, on the other hand, a more “intentional” and subversive mode (Young, 25).

23. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 4 October 1913 letter to Sarraut. See also 28 November 1906 letter from D. Buresi, the assistant director of the monopoly of native alcohols in Cochinchina, to the Director of the *Douanes et Régies*.

24. CAOM, GGI 8456: Cited in Lauret, 92-93.

25. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 6 May 1907 report by a French alcohol inspector in Cochinchina.

26. CAOM, GGI 8916: 14 January 1905 report from Crayssac to the Governor General.

27. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 15 February 1905 letter from F. Guillot, *Régisseur Général* of the alcohol monopoly in Cochinchina, to the Director of the *Douanes et Régies*.

28. CAOM, GGI 8895: 20 August 1906 report.

29. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 6 September 1912 report by the Governor of Cochinchina.

30. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 4 October 1913 report by Kircher, Director of the *Douanes et Régies*, to Governor General Sarraut. (Emphasis in original.)

31. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 4 October 1913 report by Kircher to Sarraut.
32. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: 22 May 1912 letter from Sarraut to the Governor of Cochinchina.
33. On the strained relations between the Vietnamese and the Chinese living in Vietnam, see Alain G. Marsot, *The Chinese Community in Vietnam Under the French* (San Francisco: EM Press, 1993).
34. CAOM, 9PA/15 doss. 2: See in particular Sarraut's comments on an undated draft letter to the Minister of Colonies (May 1913).
35. CAOM, AgEcFOM Carton 208 dossier 192: April 1923 report.