

*Maintenir l'ordre aux confins de l'Empire: Pirates, trafiquants et rebelles entre Chine et Viêt Nam, 1895–1940*

By JOHANN GRÉMONT

Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2018. Pp. 336. Maps, Illustrations, Bibliography, Sources, Appendices, Glossary, Index.

doi:10.1017/S002246341900016X

This new study in French, *Maintenir l'ordre aux confins de l'Empire: Pirates, trafiquants et rebelles entre Chine et Viêt Nam, 1895–1940* (Maintaining order on the edges of the Empire: Pirates, smugglers, and rebels on the Sino–Vietnamese border, 1895–1940), offers a fresh view into criminal activity, and the efforts to control it, in the regions along the Sino–Vietnamese border in what was then the French protectorate of Tonkin. The period covered is that of the four-and-a-half decades between the signing of the Sino–French Convention of 1895 and the beginning of the Japanese occupation of Vietnam in 1940.

Given weaknesses in the statistical data and the fact that the colonial records do not provide a complete list of the crimes committed, but rather just those considered to be of sufficient interest to merit reporting, a general study of the evolution of criminal activity was deemed unfeasible. For this reason, Johann Grémont focuses on the maintenance of order by the colonial troops who were posted along the border. After establishing the historical context, Grémont explains why colonial authorities found the borderlands so difficult to guard and control against bandits, traffickers, and rebels, and he details the types of crime in which they engaged. These ranged from theft of property — livestock as well as goods — to attacks on dwellings.

A chapter on the material and human cost of the crimes examines not only the types of goods and property stolen, but also who the victims were, and the nature of the attacks made upon them. Additional chapters address the general approach that the French colonial authorities used to crack down on crime, as well as the specific methods they employed. They also examine both the effectiveness and the shortcomings of these methods, and why they proved largely inadequate in the border region.

Grémont's book contains a wealth of supplementary material that will be particularly helpful to the reader. In addition to two full-colour maps, there are also two valuable concordance tables of place names. The first table lists names of places in Vietnam as they were written by the colonial authorities (who, regrettably, omitted diacritical marks and accents), and provides their equivalent in *quốc ngữ* (Vietnamese). The second table provides a list of Chinese place names in Chinese characters (漢字/汉字/*hanzi*) as well as in three systems of romanisation: that used by the French colonial administration, that in use today, and pinyin. Also of interest are two appendices (including the regulations of 7 May 1896, which provided for both a French and a Chinese police superintendent); a brief glossary of terms in Vietnamese and French; and an index.

The unpublished sources come primarily from the Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve (the French diplomatic archives) near Paris, and from the Archives nationales d'outre-mer (French national overseas archives) in Aix-en-Provence. Types of material utilised include, to name just a few, correspondence; bulletins of the criminal police; reports and statistical yearbooks from the French Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine; monthly reports from the frontier police and also from the territories into which the borderland regions were divided; and accounts of incidents and of seizures of contraband. The great majority of sources are in French (some of the secondary sources are in English).

For newcomers to the French experience in Vietnam as well as for those with greater familiarity, *Maintenir l'ordre aux confins de l'Empire* offers a fascinating treatment and an abundance of information on one of that history's lesser-known aspects.

SUSAN E. SCHOPP

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