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**Anne Raffin**, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and its Legacies, 1940-1970*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005. v + 273 pp. \$70.00 US (hb) ISBN 0-7391-1146-9.

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Anne Raffin's *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and its Legacies, 1940-1970* is a detailed investigation of a relatively uncharted aspect of the history of twentieth-century colonial Southeast Asia. This crucial wartime experience is often "glossed over," as Raffin notes in her introduction, simply as "Vietnam's Japanese period." But Japan's intervention in French colonial territory in Southeast Asia was unique. In Singapore and the Strait Settlements, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies and elsewhere, Japan's military juggernaut encountered opposition from European colonial authorities, even if the military efforts of the Western imperialist powers tended to be chaotic and ill-prepared.[1] In Indochina, however, the predatory Japanese Army could assume control without any resistance of French colonial troops. Because the newly constructed Vichy regime in metropolitan France was compelled to accommodate the demands of the Nazi German victors after June 22, 1940, Marshall Henri-Philippe Pétain had no other option but to instruct his subordinates in the colonial civil service in Indochina to comply with Imperial Japan's draconian demands.

Aside from Eric Jennings's *Vichy in the Tropics* and his recently edited collection of essays, *L'Empire colonial sous Vichy*, the actual socio-political impact of Vichy policies on the burgeoning nationalist movement in Indochina during World War II remains a fertile terrain for further exploration.[2] David Marr's *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*, Stein Tonnesson's *The Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War*, and William Duiker's biography *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* devoted appropriate attention to the Franco-Japanese wartime collaboration, but their focus was primarily on the other side of the political equation; their main concern was to chronicle the internal dynamics of the Vietnamese nationalist movement and the role of its protagonists.[3] Members of a younger generation of Vietnamese historians, such as Peter Zinoman and Shawn McHale, have also written books in which they privilege domestic developments within Vietnam.[4] In addition, Mark Bradley's award-winning *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Post-Colonial Vietnam*, has explored the process of mutual if hierarchical and antagonistic self-fashioning that forged the imagined communities of Vietnam and America and culminated in the U.S. military involvement in the North-South Vietnamese conflict during the Cold War era.[5]

Obviously, the direct or indirect contributions of the Vichy regime to the evolution of nationalism in Indochina deserves historians' attention because it was the only colonial territory in Southeast Asia whose European population was not killed or confined to Japanese prisons and internment camps. Vichy France's "marriage of convenience" in 1940-1945 to Imperial Japan as Nazi Germany's Axis ally in Asia compelled Admiral Jean Decoux, the French Governor General of Indochina, and the colonial civil servants at his disposal to participate as "sub-contractors" in a brutal Japanese occupation. With "unseemly haste" and no apparent qualms, French colonial administrators provided food, shelter, and indigenous labor forces to Japanese Army units. This Franco-Japanese "double yoke" lasted until March 9, 1945, when Japanese troops attacked their French partners and the "Japanese fascist hyena" finally devoured the "French imperialist wolf," as Ho Chi Minh described it.[6] Killing more than two thousand French Army officers and a larger number of French and native soldiers while imprisoning about 15000 troops of the Indochinese Armed Forces, The Japanese occupiers left French officials and

civilians basically unharmed, although the Japanese demanded the continued complicity of the middle ranks of the colonial civil service during the spring of 1945. The end of the Franco-Japanese alliance also coincided with an urgent food shortage that caused approximately two million Indochinese to die of starvation due to “the starving policy of the French who seized and stored to rotteness [sic] all available rice,” as Ho Chi Minh later wrote to U.S. President Harry Truman on November 2, 1945.[7]

Until the spring of 1945, however, the Vichy government’s ideological emphasis on *Travail, Famille et Patrie*—self-consciously replacing the tripartite motto of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* constitutionally embedded in the Third Republic—had inserted itself into the volatile political mixture of French-Japanese collaboration and a Vietnamese nationalist movement that became streamlined and better organized during World War II. Because this range of interesting questions about the interaction between French-Japanese fascism and Vietnamese anti-colonial and/or communist forces still begs for specific answers, Anne Raffin’s book is a welcome addition to the field. She has offered an insightful analysis of the ways in which the Vichy government’s deliberate program of nurturing French patriotism and nationalism migrated from metropolitan France to Indochina, translating and adapting the critical tenets of Henri-Philippe Pétain’s “National Revolution” to the specific political, social and cultural conditions of Indochina’s five *pays*.

Having conducted research in no less than seven archival holdings located in Europe and Southeast Asia, and relying on hundreds of primary and secondary sources, Raffin provides a thorough investigation of the transnational policies of mobilizing youthful fervour with patriotic overtones in France (*Jeunesse de France*) and Indochina (*Jeunesse d’Empire Français*). After concluding the humiliating Armistice with Hitler’s Third Reich in June 1940, Pétain’s government attempted not only to arouse and rejuvenate a defeated society at home but also to breathe new life into a dispirited empire. In the case of Indochina, a series of state-sponsored youth programs constituted a core element of the ideological attempt to incite popular enthusiasm and to foster the allegiance of colonized subjects to a reinvigorated Greater France with its vast network of overseas possessions. By trying to inculcate in Indochina’s French subjects a patriotic identification with both Metropolitan France as well as its Empire in Southeast Asia, the Vichy regime hoped to provide an antidote to the presence of Japan’s occupying forces and their appealing anti-colonial “Asia for Asians” propaganda. To a lesser extent, the Pétain government’s political efforts were aimed at placating Vietnamese communist revolutionaries as well as Thai irredentists with claims on parts of Laos and Cambodia.

Raffin describes and interprets the Vichy regime’s youth policies during World War II in great detail, showing the ways in which state-sanctioned mobilization of youngsters through sports and the politicization and militarization of youth activities were refracted into the different regions of French Indochina. Ironically, these organizations, grounded in newfangled Vichy-French notions of “authenticity,” also nurtured a new sense of regional patriotism as one of its unintended consequences. Encouraged by colonial authorities, the newly sponsored physical education corps and Boy Scout activities were designed to embrace “all French and Indochinese without distinction of race, religion, social class,” as Captain Maurice Durocroy articulated it. Heading the Indochinese youth and sport initiative during World War II, Durocroy noted that a comprehensive program of physical education was designed to “help one another, in order to overcome these rough years of ordeal [sic], while respecting tradition and loving the French tricolor” (p. 67). The newly created sports and scouting associations, however, began to serve as strategic outlets for indigenous groups to advance their own particular brand of nationalism.

Raffin divides her book into seven chapters. The introductory sections deal with a number of key concepts such as nationalism, patriotism, and militarism. Avoiding arbitrary distinctions between western and non-western nationalism, the author emphasizes that in her case study, patriotic movements in the West (Vichy France) elicited direct responses in the Southeast Asian colony of Indochina. In fact, Raffin pursues what she calls a transnational analysis by underscoring that patriotism

and nationalism through a military mobilization of the younger segments of the metropolitan and colonial populations were interdependent phenomena. This is the main thread running through the book. The author does so by consistently linking domestic political concerns in Vichy France to the crucial compensatory role of the French empire as a source of pride and prestige for Pétain's embattled National Revolutionary regime. Stripped of its military honor and autonomy due to the easy German victory in 1940, the Vichy government pursued two complementary goals: a "civilianization" of the armed forces, which henceforth assumed propaganda and pedagogical functions, and a "militarization" of civil society as means to cope with the repressive occupation by a foreign power, whether Germany or Japan.

In these transnationally connected settings, youth organizations were instrumental in trying to anchor in the population of France, as well as Indochina, all sorts of new patriotic sentiments by instilling military values such as discipline, leadership, and personal sacrifice. Viewing the collective agency of young people as an engine of national recovery, Vichy officials in both the European heartland and colonial Southeast Asia mobilized physically fit young men to emerge as "United and Strong in order to Serve" (p. 11). In Indochina, Vichy's retainers did so through a deliberate effort to revive Confucian values, a project that functioned, according to the Vietnamese historian Nguyen Khac Vien, as nothing but a "reactionary charade" (p. 112).

Hence, in her middle chapters, Raffin charts the transfer of youth programs from Metropolitan France to Indochina and she details the specific measures taken to adjust such policy initiatives to local circumstances. Vichy officials wished to promote a multi-layered patriotism that was appropriate not only to the regional *pays* and the federation of Indochina but could be useful to the *métropole* as well. They also actively sought the cooperation and intercession of local elites by encouraging them to remind women of their "Confucian" duties as mothers and homemakers. In addition, Vichy French officials employed sport and scouting organizations to promote their idea of Indochinese federalism, based on the *petites patries* of Laos, Cambodia and the three parts of Vietnam united around a French political core, in order to counteract Japan's grandiose visions of the "Greater Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere" and, to a lesser extent, to mitigate the threat of Thai expansionism.

As Raffin points out, in seeking to encourage indigenous participation in Vichy's program of political renewal, the colonial government hitched its own plans to what it perceived as pre-existing religious and cultural conventions at the regional level. Patriotism was promoted by emphasizing the shared collective memory of a heroic past through joint celebrations, for instance, of Joan of Arc and the Trung sisters, who had fought the Chinese invaders during the first century C.E. French colonial rulers had seized upon and highlighted this spurious historical analogy during the 1920s, but Vichy officials carried the public celebration of shared memories to greater rhetorical heights. Ironically, Vichy's ideas about authenticity, hierarchy and tradition offered Indochinese political constituencies a golden opportunity to borrow and appropriate them in order to further their own agendas. Governor-general Jean Decoux's wartime efforts to resuscitate Confucianism's hierarchical view of society grounded in obedience, filial piety and kindness toward others also served, subversively, as a strategy to muster support for the Vietnamese nationalist cause.

In a similar fashion, Vichy's retainers promoted Buddhism as an authentic value of Indochinese society. In Cambodia, King Sihanouk emerged as the personification of the patriotic feelings of the Khmer people whose glorious history was architecturally and culturally embodied in the monumental temple of Angkor Wat. Sihanouk himself was appointed leader of the Yuvan youth organization, which the French had nurtured into existence. Moreover, in response to Thai irredentism in Laos, the colonial state targeted elite youngsters in an effort to cultivate patriotic zeal through the *Lao Nhay* or Lao Renovation Movement. The religious and ethnic differences between the diverse *pays* of French Indochina, however, disrupted the project of stirring up a collective historical memory. Indeed, the dividing lines between patriotism and nationalism were fragile and permeable. Once the cultural revival

movement in Indochina gathered momentum, it soon proved difficult to contain the nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments that functioned as spontaneous side-effects of the revitalization of cultural pride at the local and regional level.

In her final chapters, Raffin furnishes interesting insights into the role of both the military establishment and the Catholic Church in transferring political ideology from France to the colonies and from adults to young people. The French Army, dishonoured by the lightning German defeat in 1940, and the French Catholic Church actively supported the colonial project of the Vichy regime to inculcate new moral values through sports and scouting organizations. By buttressing physical health and self-discipline and by encouraging the reliance on leadership, the expectation was that new forms of civic and national dignity could be generated both at home and in the Empire. However, the post-war legacies of the Vichy regime's youth projects were unanticipated. As revolution broke out in August 1945, many Vichy-sponsored sports and scouting groups immediately joined the ranks of the Viet Minh youth organization, which had already charted its own revolutionary course through shrewd political organizing and cadre-training during the war. While Pétain's ultra-conservative and Nazi-stained regime was quickly rejected by the French voters in elections that took place after the Allied D-Day invasion in 1944, in faraway Indochina Vichy's youth programs and methods continued to have an impact on the political arena.

This lingering influence resurfaced not only in the immediate successes of the Viet Minh, but also in the nation-building schemes of South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem and Cambodia's Norodom Sihanouk during the 1950s and 1960s. Diem's "Republican Youth" found its origins in Vichy's sports and recreational projects, only to emerge as a huge paramilitary organization designed to undermine the National Liberation Front's insurgency in rural areas of South Vietnam. It was an integral part of the Diem regime's efforts to propagate its political philosophy of "personalism"--the brainchild of his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. Applying Emmanuel Mounier's ideas about a communitarian society based on the respect for the "person" and the spiritual inclinations of each human being, personalism became a social-engineering tool to advocate a nationalist alternative to both capitalism and communism. In Cambodia, while ostensibly conducting a "neutral" foreign policy to prevent the military turmoil in Vietnam from spilling over into his nation, domestically Sihanouk built up the Royal Khmer Socialist Youth (RKSJ), modelled on Vichy's wartime youth programs, in order to consolidate his autocratic rule through his "Buddhist Socialism" project. In Laos, where Theravada Buddhism played a paramount role in everyday life, competing forces tried to politicize the *sangha* monks to advance their political causes by indirectly reverting to Vichy organizational structures introduced during the period 1940-1945.

Raffin's work offers valuable insights into the Pétain government's understanding of patriotism and its efforts to root it in France and Indochina through a series of transnational and interdependent processes. In the final analysis, however, the Vichy regime's project of a multi-layered patriotism for French Indochina was bound to crumble because it failed to take account of realities on the ground. Colonial propaganda during World War II, designed to encourage symbiotic patriotic sentiments in both France and its overseas empire, was easily subverted by Indochinese proponents of national liberation who had long since infiltrated the Vichy-sponsored youth organizations. However, one of the significant and enduring legacies of the World War II era was a culture of youth mobilization which would play a central role in the nation-building projects of the former states of Indochina during the Cold War era.

It is too bad that Raffin's rewarding book contains too many English translations of French texts that are either awkward or grammatically unsound. As one example among others, a quote such as "they do not any more obey neither their fathers nor the notables" (p. 109) spoils the flow of the narrative. The book also contains a number of Vietnamese words and place names that are incorrectly spelled, even if it is likely that the mistakes are reproduced from French sources. Some of the author's descriptions of traditional political institutions of the Nguyen Dynasty are also flawed. Despite these caveats, Anne

Raffin's exhaustively documented study fills a major gap in our knowledge about the institutional legacy of Vichy's fascist intrusions in France's Southeast Asian colony during World War II. Thanks to her work, historians should no longer nonchalantly describe Indochina during 1940-1945 as merely the "Japanese period." As she has shown convincingly, the Vichy regime's active interventions shaped the political experience of the region during the years following World War II to a much greater extent than has been assumed. After all, French colonial rule in Indochina continued into the early 1950s with the political and technological support of the United States which gradually degenerated, in turn, into America's painful experience of the Vietnam War during the following decades.

## NOTES

[1] For a short comparative discussion of the different experience of the nationalist movements in Indochina and the Dutch East Indies in 1945, see Frances Gouda with Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia: US Foreign Policy and Indonesian Nationalism* (Amsterdam/Chicago: Amsterdam University Press/University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 47-52.

[2] Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Jacques Cantier and Eric Jennings, eds., *L'Empire colonial sous Vichy* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004).

[3] David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Stein Tonnesson, *The Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War* (London: Sage Publications, 1991); William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000).

[4] Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

[5] Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Post-Colonial Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[6] The quotes are from Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, pp. 5, 16-18, and Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 296.

[7] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 427-427.

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