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Introduction by Mark P. Bradley

**Eric T. Jennings. *Imperial Heights. Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina.***  
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Introduction by Mark P. Bradley, University of Chicago

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Over the last decade or so the field of French history has rediscovered the colonies, producing a rich outpouring of works like those by J.P. Daughton, Julia Clancy-Smith, Alice Conklin, Gary Wilder, and Todd Shepard that have transformed the historiography of the French colonial experience in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and its aftermath.<sup>1</sup> These works have been especially attentive to the interplay between the metropole and colony, to the constructed and sometimes fragile qualities of imperial power, to the necessity of according disaggregated agency to the colonizers and colonized, to questions of race and gender and to the impact of what increasingly appears to be a slow fade of colonial rule in the era of decolonization on postcolonial politics and society in France itself and its former colonies. Eric Jennings' prize-winning first book, *Vichy in the Tropics*, was a major intervention in this new French colonial history, exploring the Vichy regime's colonial policy in Madagascar, Guadeloupe and Indochina.<sup>2</sup> In *Imperial Heights*, Jennings has turned from a broader comparative canvass to the micro history of a singular colonial space through which he skillfully and often quite beautifully explores the contradictions and contestations of the French presence in Indochina across the twentieth century.

As all the reviewers note, irony was hard wired into Dalat. The city was conceived in the tradition of European colonial hill stations in part to provide a favorable climate that would hasten the recovery of *colons* from tropical disease. But it was built near mosquito-infested lakes that contemporary scientists were beginning to believe were a major cause of the diseases to which French officials intended Dalat to be the cure. Jennings also carefully traces the terrible human cost to those Vietnamese and minority peoples who were compelled to build the city and lay its broader infrastructure, a useful reminder of the harsh brutality of colonial power that can sometimes go missing in studies more focused on cultural politics. But what is perhaps most striking about *Imperial Heights* is the range of the archive Jennings has assembled to consider the myriad political, economic, social and cultural meanings of Dalat. Pierre Brocheux rightly draws attention to Jennings' pioneering use of the archives of the *Résidence supérieure de l'Annam*, but these materials are also interwoven with an exhaustive and wide-ranging set of public and private French archival sources, newspapers, journals, novels, memoirs, architectural plans, photographs, postcards, and even the luggage tags from the Dalat Palace Hotel, the French version of such grand Orientalist edifices as the Raffles Hotel in Singapore and the Strand in Burma.

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<sup>1</sup> J.P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterranean: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Petain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

And as Stein Tønnesson suggests, these more visual sources are far from being simple decoration. Jennings “reads” them in especially revealing ways to advance key dimensions of his argument.

While Laurent Cesari’s largely positive review claims that *Imperial Heights* “does not provide new information” about French colonial rule in Indochina, in fact the reach of Jennings’ primary source base allows him to use Dalat to offer a series of deft and original portraits of colonial society. Indeed one of the great strengths of *Imperial Heights* is the way in which it thickens our understanding of what Jennings aptly terms “the practices, accommodations and compromises” that underlay French colonialism in Indochina at its “zenith” and in its “afterlife” (4). He directs welcome attention to gender, race and class in his analysis of education and religion at Dalat and is nicely attentive to the global context of his narrative, offering an account of Dalat’s built environment that places it not only within a colonial context but also an emergent dialectic between modernism and regionalism that animated debates over urban design in France and elsewhere in Europe. Significantly, as Tønnesson notes, Jennings takes the history of Dalat beyond the colonial period, revealing the porous contours of the colonial/postcolonial divide through a focus on how a real and imagined Dalat played a central role for the French and some Vietnamese like the emperor Bao Dai in the uneasy cohabitation between the French and the Japanese during World War II and in the early years of the first Indochina war.

There is some division among the reviewers about whether *Imperial History* is as successful an intervention into twentieth century Vietnamese history as it is into French colonial history. The concern here is whether the Vietnamese and the minority groups who inhabit the land surrounding Dalat are reduced to bystanders in a narrative more concerned with French colonial thought and practice. Martin Thomas suggests that Jennings is “sensitive to these problems of interpretation” and “works hard to place Dalat in its local contexts both within colonial Vietnam and, more locally still, amidst Annam’s highland minority communities.” Stein Tønnesson is less sure, offering a sustained critique of the ethnic terminology Jennings employs and chastising him for his failure to explore the triangular relationships between “French, Viet and Highlanders” more deeply. He suggests the “French are overwhelmingly present in the book, but Indochina is not.” It is a difficult balance, and Tønnesson is right to draw our attention to the larger analytical significance of his concerns. But my own sense, one it appears is shared by the other reviewers, is that they are misplaced in this case. Jennings, of course, is primarily a French historian yet what is unusual about *Imperial Heights* is the extent to which it draws attention to Vietnamese and minority presences in and around Dalat through Jennings’ deep familiarity with the relevant secondary literature and his own insightful analysis of Vietnamese materials. Especially novel and valuable are Jennings’ efforts to get at the understudied dimensions of middle-class Vietnamese life under French colonialism, including a supple reading of Vietnamese visual sources to explore shifting patterns of Vietnamese travel and leisure.

“Good books,” Martin Thomas writes here, “challenge as well as inform.” *Imperial Heights* is part of a remarkable series of books from the University of California Press edited by Fredrik Logevall and Christopher Goscha that are collectively re-making the colonial and postcolonial histories of Vietnam. It is a marvelously textured work that vividly brings to

life Dalat's past and present while making palpable the full complexities of the lived experience and enduring legacies of French colonialism.

### Participants:

**Eric T. Jennings** is a professor of history at the University of Toronto, and a fellow at Victoria College. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1998. He is currently working on a study of French Equatorial Africa under Free French rule. Titled *La France libre fut africaine*, it considers the centrality of Africa for the early Free French movement, paying special attention to issues of legitimacy and coercion. His *Dalat, the Making and Undoing of France in Indochina* (University of California Press, 2011) is a multi-angled study of a French colonial hill station in Southeast Asia. Its focus lies on place, power, and colonial fault lines. *Curing the Colonizers* (Duke UP, 2006, translated into French as *A la cure, les coloniaux!*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011) was situated at the crossroads of the histories of colonialism, medicine, culture, leisure, and tourism. In 2001, Jennings published *Vichy in the Tropics* (Stanford UP translated into French with Grasset in 2004 under the title *Vichy sous les tropiques*), a book that explored the ultra-conservative and authoritarian Vichy regime's colonial politics, and the formation of new colonial identities in the French Caribbean, Indochina, and the island of Madagascar. His other publications include an edited volume with Jacques Cantier, *L'Empire colonial sous Vichy* (Odile Jacob, 2004), as well as many articles straddling the histories of France, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, Africa, and the Caribbean. In 2011 he was named Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes académiques.

**Mark Philip Bradley** is Professor of History at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *Vietnam at War* (2009) and *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (2000); co-editor of *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives* (2008) and *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights* (2002); and currently completing a book-length study of the place of the United States in making of the twentieth century global human rights imagination.

**Pierre Brocheux** is Professor of Contemporary History Emeritus at the University Paris-Diderot. Recent publications include *Histoire contemporaine du Viet Nam. La nation résiliente*, Paris (Fayard, 2011); *Indochina. An ambiguous colonization. 1858-1954* (University Press of California, 2010); *Une Histoire économique du Viet Nam*, Paris, les Indes savantes, 2009; *The Mekong Delta. Ecology, Economy and Revolution. 1860-1960* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); *Ho Chi Minh. A Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

**Laurent Cesari** specializes on U.S. and French foreign policies in the cold war, mostly in Eastern Asia. His publications include: *L'Indochine en guerres, 1945-1993 (Indochina at War, 1945-1993* (Paris: Belin, 1995); *Les grandes puissances et le Laos, 1954-1964 (The Great Powers and Laos, 1954-1964* (Arras: Artois Université Presses, 2007); *Le problème diplomatique de l'Indochine, 1945-1957 (The Diplomatic Problem of Indochina, 1945-1957* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, forthcoming). He has edited *Les relations franco-chinoises au vingtième siècle et leurs antécédents (Sino-French Relations in the Twentieth-Century and their Origins* (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2003), and 'La politique économique

extérieure des E'tats-Unis au vingtième siècle' ('U. S. Foreign Economic Policy in the Twentieth Century, special issue, *Histoire, Economie & Société* 23:1 (2003).

**Martin Thomas** is Professor of Colonial History and a Director of the Centre for the Study of War, State, and Society at the University of Exeter. He has written extensively on French international policy and colonial politics. His most recent book is *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Control after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). He has just completed a comparative study of colonial policing and labour control to be published with Cambridge University Press as *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers, and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-1940*.

**Stein Tønnesson** is a Research Professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and an adjunct professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, where he leads a research programme 2011-2016 on the East Asian peace since 1979. His publications include 'The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945, London, SAGE, 1991; 'Hanoi's Long Century,' in R. Buzzanco and M. B. Young, eds, *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, London, Blackwell, 2002, 1-16; 'National divisions in Indochina's decolonization,' in Prasenjit Duara, ed., *Decolonization*, London, Routledge, 2004, 253-277; 'Franklin Roosevelt, Trusteeship, and Indochina: A Reassessment,' in M. A. Lawrence & F. Logevall, eds, *The First Vietnam War*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2007, 56-73; 'The South China Sea in the Age of European Decline,' *Modern Asian Studies* 40(1), 2006, 1-57; 'The Class route to nationhood: China, Vietnam, Norway, Cyprus - and France,' *Nations and Nationalism* 15(3), 2009, 375-395; and *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began*, Berkeley CA, California University Press, 2010.

**V***ichy in the Tropics* was the first breakthrough of Eric Jennings in French colonial history comparable to Robert Paxton's work on Vichy France. With this new book, Jennings takes us out of the classic areas of Viet Nam history; far from the deltas and the ancient capitals, he drives us uphill to explore a new epicentre of modern Vietnam History. And with him we reach the Langbian plateau where the French conquerors built a hill station that they called Dalat, similar to British Simla and Cameron Highlands as well as Dutch Bogor. Far enough from the difficult tropical climate for Europeans and at the same time those places separated the colonial masters from the indigenous populace.

But early on, the sanatorium was accompanied by sporting activities (hunting, golf, tennis...), agriculture, and cattle breeding. At the same time, rehabilitation of physical health and strengthening bodies fit in with bringing up children, so Dalat attracted many educational establishments. Besides, the 'pagan' population suggested the desirability of evangelization by Catholic missionaries.

1941-1945 was the 'Golden age of Dalat': all links with France were broken and colonials could no longer enjoy rest and rehabilitation in Vichy thermal spas or the Côte d'Azur. But the Japanese were also present at that time, according to conventions signed by the two governments of Vichy and Tokyo; the cohabitation lasted till 9 March 1945. Therefore, Dalat had a political importance. Governor General Decoux could, from time to time, take refuge there by leaving Hanoi where he was under constant pressure of Japanese requirements. Besides, Emperor Bao Dai preferred to stay in an airy and sporting area rather than in the Huê royal palace with its antiquated etiquette and grim atmosphere. In 1944 and 1945, when Allied bombings became more and more frequent, a minority of high school students from Hanoi and Saigon were sent to Dalat which was more secure.

What happened during that period certainly suggested to French authorities that Dalat would be an ideal place to establish the capital of the so-called *Fédération indochinoise* whose name already replaced that of *Union indochinoise*. Immediately after the return of the French Army in 1945-1946, the French High Commissioner Thierry d'Argenlieu chose Dalat as the center of gravity of the five Indochinese countries as a counterweight to the newly-born Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (September 1945).

The destiny of Dalat was accomplished when the Republic of Viet Nam (1955-1975) was established southwards of the 17th parallel, when the Military Academy, the nuclear reactor for non-military applications (medicine and agriculture) and the Catholic university were established. Post-1975, the Doi Moi era has boosted the development of tourism based on Dalat's natural beauties as well its hôtel and sport amenities.

Thus the colonized gradually took possession of what never was a complete patch of France whatever might have been the intention of some colonials. The Vietnamisation process did not profit the sole élite. The expansion of truck farming and handicrafts were early and almost exclusively managed by Vietnamese people. The Viet population increased

rapidly between 1930 and 1945 and was enhanced by the wave of refugees fleeing North Viet Nam (1954-1955) and who were resettled upon the central High Plateaux. That phenomenon illustrates the demographic dynamism and vitality of the Kinh people. Nevertheless, the colonial past is always present in the architectural, urban, apparel, and culinary hybridization. What the French designed to copy the home country to harbour French colonials is therefore today indigenized, even its cultural myths.

Dalat is the mirror of colonial time. Violence was present in many sequences before the creation: exploration and pacification (affaire Debay); building and managing access (forced labor). But Dalat was also the application of many fields of the sciences, of hygienic and medical techniques in Tropics. Besides, Dalat was the theater of contradictory policies and its township history is full of confrontations and disputes between doctors, bureaucrats, settlers, architects and engineers.

This summary is too brief to render the richness of the book. Jennings has written a thoughtful monograph with lively descriptions, sound analysis, and sound interpretations. An historian does not exist without sources, and here they are first-hand and plentiful. If chance has certainly favoured him, nonetheless Jennings has the tenacity and the good nose of a talented detective to discover archives in the right places, in France, and in Canada. He also –and this is his trump card –discovered the archives of Dalat township and of the *Résidence supérieure de l'Annam*, in Dalat itself, both of which have only recently been made accessible to researchers.

If one cannot help but admire the professionalism of Jennings as investigator, one must also stress the insightfulness of his analysis and relevance of his interpretations. He does not approach French colonial domination as if its initial projects were fully programed from the start. Jennings analyses them over time and through contradictory human actions. Then, he explicitly writes that Dalat in the 1940's was not the same as in the 1930's. Thus Jennings avoids repeating clichés conveyed by so many testimonies, iconographic and literary materials that are often literally accepted as truth or reality.

I have only one main criticism. Jennings writes that Dalat was conceived of as a place for “frenchifying métis youngsters” (178). His main evidence is the existence of the *École des enfants de troupe eurasiens*. It is more accurate to say that the army, vocational schools, and orphanages were the institutions for Frenchifying the Eurasians. The *École* was opened in 1939 as a transfer of Cap Saint Jacques (Vung Tâu) school but in October 1944, it moved to Kompong Chnang (Cambodia) ; it returned to Dalat in 1953 and then General De Lattre de Tassigny ordered suppression of the word ‘Eurasien.’ Meanwhile, far more Eurasians were educated in Hanoi, Saigon, and Huê, than in Dalat. Saigon always kept its *École des mécaniciens de la Marine nationale* to train Eurasian youngsters. Jennings cites a “Eurasian college of Cholon” (188). This may reflect confusion with a boarding house (*pensionnat*) of the *Fédération des œuvres de l'Enfance indochinoise*.

Cool hill stations are common in most European colonies, and Eric Jennings has already published a general study about this topic of urban history. His new monograph on Dalat, which is extremely well edited and designed by University of California Press, adds to our knowledge because of the specific geographical position and political significance of this station in Indochina.

The creation of a hill station made sense from a medical point of view, since the hot and humid climate of coastal Vietnam brought malaria, yellow fever, hepatitis, and dysentery. According to nineteenth-century medical science, such diseases were caused by miasma and could be cured by escaping the tropical climate. In 1894, for instance, 19.6 percent of French foot soldiers had to be repatriated. It was therefore logical for Governor Paul Doumer to look for a suitable location to open a sanatorium in Indochina that would save travel expenses. The first sanatorium, conceived as the nucleus of the station, opened at Dalat in 1897. Following the examples of Darjeeling or Simla in British India, Doumer aimed at transforming Dalat into 'the Switzerland of Indochina'.

Yet, as Eric Jennings rightly points out at the turn of the century, the miasmatic origin of diseases had already been disproved, and it was known that malaria, for instance, was transmitted by mosquitoes. Indeed, since Dalat is surrounded by artificial lakes, the station is a breeding ground for mosquitoes. But Dalat, situated on the hills of Annam, some 100 miles north-west of Saigon, provided Frenchmen with a cool, comfortable place, surrounded by pine forests, which reminded them of metropolitan France.

The book aims to show that at Dalat all the features of French colonialism in Indochina were magnified in extreme proportions. One of the explorers on whom Doumer relied to find a proper site, the Army officer Victor Debay, used to beat his (unpaid) coolies to death for mere trifles. Since his accusers were all natives, military judges simply assigned him to inactive duty for two years. He was awarded the Legion of Honor before retirement. The construction of the paved road and the railway from Saigon to Dalat took an enormous toll in human lives, mostly due to malaria. 20,000 workers had already died building the road by 1908, and the railway was not completed before 1932. Both were built by forced labor. Such practices, which were reproduced in other parts of the French empire -- for instance, the construction of the Cong-Ocean railroad in West Africa -- buttress the argument that prison and imprisonment provide a good metaphor for colonial rule.

After the First World War, which made travel to France impossible, Dalat became a fashionable resort for wealthy Frenchmen and Vietnamese. Urban zoning, strictly enforced, separated residential areas around the lake from the congested Vietnamese part of town, where small shopkeepers and house servants congregated. As it was to be expected, the hill station attracted numerous boarding schools, both public and private, which catered to Frenchmen and the Vietnamese bourgeoisie. Since many of them were run by religious congregations, Dalat became in fact the capital city of Vietnamese Catholicism. (French authorities did not welcome Protestant ministers, whom they suspected of political



loyalties to English-speaking countries.) The architecture of the central areas was strictly French: villas were patterned after French regional styles, and the railway station looked like the one at Deauville, a seaside resort in Normandy. Altitude made it possible to grow French vegetables, produced by Vietnamese migrant workers.

The location of Dalat in an area inhabited by non-Vietnamese minorities gave the station a political significance. Applying 'divide and rule' tactics, French authorities opposed the 'noble' Kha 'savages' to Vietnamese 'upstarts'. In 1916, the province of Lang Bian (Dalat and surroundings), was carved out as an 'autonomous' (French-ruled) province within the Annam protectorate. From the time of the creation of the station, French authorities had aimed at making Dalat the 'summer capital town' of Indochina. Conversely, in 1949, in another move to 'divide and rule' –this time against the Vietminh-, France granted Bao Dai (a regular patron of the station), authority over the "hill countries of South Indochina", centered around Dalat. Jennings remarks, rightly, that from 1949 to 1955, Bao Dai was the nominal head of the Vietnamese state, but the effective ruler of non-Vietnamese minorities in Annam.

I have no objections to the argument of this remarkable book, which is impeccably researched. But I regret that comparisons with other hill stations in other countries are entirely lacking. Eric Jennings points out that British resorts in India provided an example to French planners. Being a specialist of that type of town, he might have compared Dalat with other resorts in other colonies, not only in terms of architecture, but also urban zoning, relations between 'Europeans' and local people, etc. A reference to the status of France as the official protector of Catholics in nineteenth-century China might also have explained the suspicions of French authorities against Protestantism in Indochina.

Lastly, I think a *caveat* is in order. What makes the book a success is not so much its description of Dalat itself, although that is interesting in itself, but the fact that it shows how the city epitomized French rule in colonial Indochina. It does not provide new information about the characteristics of this rule. Therefore, I hope that *Imperial Heights* will not start a new cottage industry of similar monographs about less exceptional Vietnamese hill stations or seaside resorts.

What was Dalat? Who was it for? More important, why was it? A rest-cure for tired colonials constructed in a malarial zone. A site of leisure and spiritual renewal built by forced labour. A putative imperial capital that, for most of its colonial-era existence, was barely more than an ersatz Alpine village, inaccessible and unrealized. Dalat, it seems, begs questions. A Shangri-La nestling in the south-central Vietnamese highlands, were Dalat's intended European visitors to be convalescent women and children or soldiers, sailors and bureaucrats? Assuredly, they would be whites. But who would be the permanent inhabitants, the richest and most influential of France's colonizers? Elite residents appropriate to a grand imperial showpiece? Or perhaps a less prestigious, more workaday agglomeration of builders, hotel staff, and traders needed to lend reality to the federal capital's abstract design, which for decades remained little more than a series of competing plans and sketches. Where, if at all, would the local highland minority population fit in? And would the lowland Vietnamese be permitted to join them? At the centre of it all stood the Governor-General's Palace, partially inhabited, an administrative white elephant, and a reminder in stone of the inflated ambitions of Dalat's colonial sponsors.

It is easy to be dismissive about Dalat, its pretensions, the blind presumptuousness of its sponsors. And yet, as Eric Jennings convincingly demonstrates in this wonderful study there are many reasons to take the place more seriously. For Indochina's premier hill station retreat exemplified the gulf between the self-image and the lived experience of French rule in Vietnam. It was the cultural exclusions, cruel injustices, and unachieved imperialist dreams of French colonialism in Southeast Asia set in concrete, timber, and tile. More than anything, Dalat was a signifier. Conceived in the late nineteenth-century as a furlough destination for administrators and military personnel exhausted by tropical heat and fever, Dalat symbolized reinvigoration, not just of ailing colonial bodies, but, at its most ambitious, of the French imperial project in the Indochinese Peninsula as well.

Its basic rationale was remarkably simple. To keep the wheels of colonial administration grinding, Indochina's French government needed a cheaper alternative to the costly repatriation of sick bureaucrats and some means to diminish the chronic mortality and morbidity rates among those who remained in post in Saigon and elsewhere. As was so often the case, British India provided the model in this 'race for altitude'. The Raj summer capital of Simla in the Himalayan foothills was much admired and sorely envied by successive Governors of Indochina as a haven of clean air and bucolic calm, a panacea remote from the hazards and heat of lowland colonial cities. With Paul Doumer, Indochina's turn-of-the-century Governor lending strong administrative backing to the hill station scheme, it was only a matter of time before exploratory missions ventured forth and plans were devised to find an equivalent location within striking distance of Saigon.

Here, Jennings encounters the first of Dalat's many contradictions. Annam's Lang-Bian plateau, identified by some (although, by no means all) explorers and planners as an ideal highland space for Indochina's flagship hill station, was also favoured by environmental

hygienists as a safe, suitable locale for Europeans. But discussions about Dalat's potential and the initial commitment to proceed occurred at the very moment that breakthroughs in bacteriology revealed the true source of Vietnam's most prodigious killer of sickly whites – malaria. Dalat, in other words, was chosen on dubious, outdated health grounds. Its highland breezes and fertile soils were no safeguard against the mosquitoes that infested its lovingly-tended recreational lakes. Then there was the sheer human misery involved in building the place. Paradise came at high human cost. However speciously evaluated, the health requirements of Europeans (for which we should, in this context, read 'the French') overshadowed the physical damage and cultural ruination inflicted on the labourers and local inhabitants who were coerced, first into clearing the path, then into building the road and rail links that made white habitation of Dalat a feasible proposition. Jennings' statistics speak for themselves; colonial sources listing the death of up to 20,000 coolies working to clear the access routes to the Lang-Bian. Herein, another contradiction: the bitter irony was that many of those compelled to perform *corvée* labor came from highland minority communities whose 'protection' against domination by lowland Vietnamese was repeatedly cited as cultural justification for Dalat's construction. Jennings's narrative confronts these absurdities and cruelties, never losing sight of the remarkable capacity for delusion among Dalat's strongest official backers who, time and again, persuaded themselves that the project was not only worthwhile, but was self-evidently so. Dalat, in other words, was imperialist grandeur removed from abstraction to the realm of town planning.

The perception of a French-designed and French-executed project carefully nurtured by successive colonial governments in Saigon and Hanoi is, of course, misleading. Dalat was opened up, built, and serviced by *Montagnard* (Highlander) groups and Vietnamese who provided its labour, its transport, and its commerce. Yet, far from promoting inter-ethnic interaction in a setting hitherto more or less untouched by colonial intrusion, by the 1920s Dalat was becoming a space in which social segregation and racial hierarchies crept into everything from food provision to leisure activities. For many of Dalat's earliest elite visitors, physical exclusion of the Vietnamese was central to Dalat's attraction. Escaping the tropics, Saigon's summer humidity especially, was also a short-hand for escaping the Vietnamese. 'Getting away from it all' typically meant getting away from the majority population. Even so, as Jennings clarifies, strict segregation, although aspired to, was not always rigidly enforced. Critically, Dalat's most desired and desirable spaces were reserved for a French population that, for much of the time, was not so much transient as virtually non-existent. Thus, inescapably, we're returned to the fundamental ludicrousness of the entire Dalat project.

These tensions between ambition and achievement, between exclusivity and inclusiveness, between Dalat as imperial summer capital and Dalat as Vietnamese-built oddity, are, of course, central to the wider conclusions that Professor Jennings begs us to draw from *Imperial Heights*. By tracking the hill station's slow progress from architectural plan to highland town, he traces the vicissitudes of the late colonial state. Short of finance and wary of internal dissent, senior administrators were ever-anxious to conceal the racial underpinnings of their fiscal exactions, labour regimes and resource allocation. In this sense, Dalat was just another aspect of colonial policy-making. Wrongly imagined as a

*tabula rasa*, ultimately French-conceived Dalat was beholden to forces that it could not control. Some of these were indigenous: Vietnamese encroachment onto Dalat's reserved spaces or Dalat's precariousness during the Indochina War, for instance. Others were endogenous: Japan's wartime dominance in Indochina or the prophylactic and technological advances that conserved health and made long-distance travel easier, rendering locally-available retreats commensurately less important.

For all that, Jennings is clearly fascinated by Dalat and eager to examine it on its own terms. He treads a fine line here – successfully in my view. The attraction is that Dalat's colonial story is allowed to unfold over the entire colonial period. The danger is that telling that story becomes an end in itself. Another risk inherent in studying French-drawn schemes for a French-reserved hill station is that the Vietnamese who made it and, to a considerable degree populated it as well, are reduced to the role of bystanders. Commanded to do French bidding in constructing and servicing Dalat, local populations might seem to be classic colonial victims and no more. The danger of analytical slippage is an obvious one – namely, that the diversity of indigenous responses to Dalat and Vietnamese appropriation of the site, whether as tourist destination or as commercial opportunity, are lost. Jennings is sensitive to these problems of interpretation and he works hard to place Dalat in its local contexts both within colonial Vietnam and, more locally still, amidst Annam's highland minority communities.

Still, perhaps, the question should be asked: was Dalat something specifically French, Vietnamese, or colonial? Clinical separation of these categories is perhaps impossible. Clearly, however, the French visitors drawn to Dalat expended considerable effort trying to persuade themselves that Dalat was anything but what and where it was – a dull artifice in the heart of Vietnam. Alpine trees, apple orchards, green beans, and garden flowers might evoke the comforts of home. Big game hunting offered the classic performative rituals of male imperial dominance. Yet somehow the place still failed to convince. Only in the World War II years of Admiral Jean Decoux's pro-Vichy administration, an Alice-in-Wonderland exercise in reactionary authoritarianism that set itself against the seismic socio-political changes under way across Southeast Asia, did Dalat really take off as the administrative centre it was always supposed to become. Dalat, in other words, was not just unconvincing, it was incomplete. And if this particular *imperial height* was indeed a symbol of colonial power, an idea to which Jennings returns at several points in the book and which may be readily understood in a French context, can we be equally confident that it was viewed this way in colonial Vietnamese society as well? Good books always challenge as well as inform. So the questions I'm left with evince the quality of this remarkable study. Cruel, banal and vaguely ridiculous, Dalat deserves the serious treatment that Jennings provides it.

The highland resort city of Dalat is a French construct from the 1890s-1900s, which aimed to provide a refreshing climate for European colonisers in need of recovery or respite from the unhealthy climate of the Indochinese lowlands. By the 1930s the aim had become more ambitious. Influential French decision makers wanted Dalat to take over from Hanoi as the capital of French Indochina. Dalat's advantage over the three most likely candidates for capital status (Hanoi, Saigon, and Hue) was not just its cool and presumably healthy climate, but also its location in an ethnically 'neutral' area in the southern part of the central Indochinese highlands, where most of the native population belonged to a number of different ethnic groups, often referred to in French as '*Montagnards*' (Highlanders). Dalat was thought to provide French administrators with a detached, impartial outlook, so they could take care of the larger interests of all of Indochina (and France), avoid distraction and undue influence from any of the three dominant ethnic groups in the lowlands, the Viet, Khmer, and Lao, as well as from the interests of the commercially narrow-minded French '*colons*' in Saigon.

The history of Dalat is full of paradoxes. One concerns health: the Lang-Bian area, where it is located, was not very healthy. Dalat was thus built on a false pretence. Another concerns ethnic control: the historical effect of Dalat's construction was to provide a vehicle for Viet immigration and economic, political and cultural control of Indochina's central highlands while the French intention behind the city's development had been to build a place where French administrators could stay aloof from the majority Viet. The first of these two paradoxes is much accentuated in Eric Jennings' impressive narrative. The second has to some extent to be inferred from what he tells.

Dalat belongs with Simla, Darjeeling, Bandung, and Cameron Highlands to a class of colonial hill stations constructed in order to provide relaxation and recovery for European colonisers, who suffered under the hot climate and population pressures of the lowlands. Cold air, long walks, hunting and sports would reinvigorate them so they could continue to carry the white man's burden.

Pierre Brocheux is right to characterise Jennings' book (in a blurb on the jacket) as a "model of global history." Jennings incorporates economic, social, gender, architectural, institutional and political history into a satisfying whole by telling, as he says "quite different stories through a single site" (4). He does this within a framework of frequent references to comparable developments in other parts of the world. Jennings is well qualified. His earlier book *Vichy in the Tropics* drew on French colonial history on three continents.<sup>1</sup> He is widely travelled and has worked in many historical archives. Jennings is in no way a myopic Vietnamologue. He tells his richly documented story in a succession of fourteen short chapters and an Epilogue, each focusing on one aspect of Dalat's history,

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Petain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2004).

with gradual movement forward in time from when the idea was put forward by the physician and bacteriologist Alexandre Yersin in 1893 to build a hill station in Lang-Bian to the flower festival where the first 'Miss Ethnic Vietnam' was selected in 2007. The account is not strictly chronological but moves frequently back and forth in time so as to better tell each of the book's many stories.

I find the first few chapters particularly successful. The first and the third are on disease and health, the second on violence. The death rate among French troops in Indochina in the nineteenth century was astounding, and the great killers were not Viet resistant fighters but disease. In 1861, 11.5 percent of French military personnel perished from illness in Cochinchina (today's south Vietnam) (7). A major issue in colonial planning was to provide for repatriation of sick Frenchmen to France or recreation in Yokohama if they were unlikely to survive the long travel to Europe. Yersin aimed to find a local solution instead.

The realisation of Yersin's project depended on the assumption that the pleasant coolness of Lang-Bian was also healthy. It was not. Malaria was a much bigger problem in Indochina's forested highlands than in the lowlands. Lang-Bian was by no means sufficiently cool to keep away the *Anopheles minimus* mosquito. A costly draining of the area was therefore needed before the danger of infection could be reduced. New roads and a railway were furthermore required to transport Europeans quickly back and forth between Saigon, Phan Rang, Nha Trang and Dalat. These works required massive amounts of cheap labour, and the local Highlanders could only be made porters by force. Hence there was massive violence. Jennings tells the story of the particularly brutal fashion by which Yersin's main competitor, a captain Victor Adrien Debay, who wanted to set up a rival hill station further north, sought to realise his project. We understand that the construction of Dalat itself was also immensely violent: a 1908 colonial source estimated that some twenty thousand indigenous coolies had perished in the building of access routes to Lang-Bian (62). Jennings also relates how Dalat's police chief Henri Jumeau in 1951 executed twenty local prisoners in a revenge killing for the murder of a French police agent. This was the same Jumeau who had played a lead role in instigating the incident leading to the major French massacre in Haiphong in November 1946.<sup>2</sup> Jennings' story of racist violence and of how lenient the French courts were in their treatment of the worst of the French racist criminals is reminiscent of the similar stories told in Louise Barnett's recent book about American misdeeds in the Philippines.<sup>3</sup>

Although forced (corvée) labour only ended in 1952 (104), it was supplemented early on by the import of lowly paid Viet construction and plantation workers from the densely populated lowlands. In the footsteps of the workers followed Viet merchants as well, and

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<sup>2</sup> Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Viêt-Nam de 1940 à 1952* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1952), 332; Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2010), 123.

<sup>3</sup> Louise Barnett, *Atrocity and American Military Justice in Southeast Asia: Trial by Army* (New York, Routledge, 2010).

this formed the nucleus of a rapidly expanding Viet population in Dalat. They soon dominated the city numerically.

Jennings deals convincingly with the story of the competition between the architects Ernest Hébrard who wanted a consistent Dalat style and Louis-Georges Pineau, who encouraged more stylistic diversity, of how pastimes such as hunting drew rich visitors of both sexes to the new hill resort, of how the imposing and expensive Lang-Bian Palace Hotel could never make a profit, and of how Dalat became a centre of convents and other Catholic institutions. Jennings chronicles the city's expansion over time, and the many conflicts it was involved in. The chapter on the war period 1940-45, when the Japanese and French imperial powers cohabited at the expense of the local population so the communists would speak of a 'double yoke,' is an essential story in itself since Dalat at that time actually was a de facto capital for Admiral Jean Decoux's French government. When entering the period when the French returned after half a year of Japanese incarceration, Jennings provides a lucid analysis of the two Dalat conferences in 1946, organised under the auspices of French High Commissioner Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu. Jennings rightly considers the second to have been the most interesting from a Dalat perspective, although it has been largely ignored in the literature except as a factor disturbing the ongoing Franco-Vietnamese negotiations in Fontainebleau south of Paris. The purpose of this second Dalat conference in August 1946 was to set up a French-led Indochinese Federation with representative institutions for all its constituent units. In this Federation, which did not survive for long, Dalat was destined to become the capital (231).

I could easily expand on the book's many qualities, but shall instead - in a reviewer's normal fashion - try to develop some criticism. Focus will be on Jennings' anachronistic ethnic vocabulary, his limited footnoting, and his decision to refrain from recapitulating the findings of some of the most relevant existing research.

I will note that this criticism in no way detracts from the high quality of the book under review. These criticisms could also be made against many other scholars, and they are based upon my own research interests. I should not fault Jennings for not writing the book that I would have most wanted to read; I simply offer below, in the spirit of academic debate, a discussion of a few questions that he might have addressed, and some additional information he might have provided.

Dalat's colonial era history is characterised by a triangular relationship between three main groups of people: French, Viet, and Highlanders. In the French sources, of which Jennings has read a colossal amount, the three groups are generally referred to as 'Français,' 'Annamites' and 'Montagnards.' The latter were also often referred to as 'Moi' ('môi' is the Vietnamese term for 'savage'). When the French said 'Annamites,' they did not just mean the 'Annamese,' i.e., the inhabitants of the country they called Annam (today's central Vietnam), but all ethnic Viet (Việt). The Viet were present in all five parts of French Indochina: Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Laos and Cambodia. They formed a majority in Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin, which the French sometimes called 'les pays Annamites,' but were a minority in Cambodia (dominated by Khmer) and Laos (dominated by Lao). The French would also sometimes use the word 'Indochinois' or 'indigènes' (natives) for the

people in Indochina who were not European, Chinese or Indian. The terms ‘Montagnards,’ ‘Moi’ or ‘indigènes’ were sometimes used for all of Indochina’s Highlanders, sometimes for those in specific regions, such as the Central Highlands. Each of the groups living in the Central Highlands, who speak radically different languages, are also of course named, and their names have shifted over time. Today the six main groups in the Central Highlands are generally referred to as Jarai, Rhade, Bahnar, Koho, Mnong, and Steng. Exile spokesmen for the struggle against the Vietnamese state refer to all these groups taken together as ‘Degar’. The official Vietnamese term is ‘Người dân tộc thiểu số’ (minority people), but this term may also include the lowland minority groups Cham, Khmer and Hoa (ethnic Chinese).

Jennings, “to avoid confusion” as he says, has chosen to use today’s predominant terms even when he writes about the past, although he acknowledges that this “carries with it the risk of anachronism” (268-269). It certainly does. It is not of course a problem to translate ‘Français’ with ‘French.’ These two words mean exactly the same. The problem arises with Jennings’ terms for Viet and Highlanders. When he speaks of “ethnic Vietnamese” it is reasonably clear that he refers to what the French called ‘Annamites.’ However, he mostly omits the qualifier ‘ethnic’ and says just “Vietnamese,” on one occasion even in a direct quote from a French source (121). In another place, where he speaks about 1946, he uses the post-1976 name “Vietnamese Communist Party” for the party that was known at the time as the ‘Indochinese Communist Party’ - at least to those who refused to believe that it had been dissolved on 11 November of the previous year (232). In other translated quotes he vacillates between “Annamites,” “Annamese” and “ethnic Vietnamese.”

Jennings’ anachronistic use of ethnic terms is unfortunate for two reasons. First, because it makes it impossible to distinguish between Vietnamese nationality and ethnicity. While the term ‘Vietnamese’ is meant to include all citizens of the nation-state Vietnam, the terms ‘ethnic Vietnamese,’ ‘Viet’ and ‘Kinh’ refer to that country’s ethnic majority group, which also includes a diaspora with many different nationalities. It is preferable to distinguish between Viet and Vietnamese in the same way as Khmer/Cambodian, Lao/Laotian, Burman/Burmese, and Han/Chinese. If we want to make the distinction even clearer we may call the Viet ‘Kinh’ but then we confuse those who don’t know that Kinh are Vietnam’s ethnic majority group.<sup>4</sup>

The other reason why Jennings’ terminology is unfortunate is that it prevents us from grasping an important part of Dalat’s Indochinese history: the notional transitions that happened in conjunction with the formation of the modern nation states. Dalat was the intended future capital of an entity called Indochina, which was planned by the French as a multi-ethnic Union or Federation of five states, with France as a neutral arbiter watching over a system of checks and balances, with the key aim to prevent domination by any single group. The only candidate for such domination was of course the Viet (‘Annamite’) ethnic group. Its domination could only be prevented by maintaining a system with at least five constituent units. Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin had to be separate units, not a united

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<sup>4</sup> For the same argument, see Andrew Hardy, *Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam* (Copenhagen, NIAS Press, 2003), 7 (asterisk note).



nation. Thus the French did not recognise any country called 'Viet Nam' until they were forced to do it by the Chinese occupation forces in northern Indochina on 6 March 1946, and again by former emperor Bao Dai in 1949. Bao Dai made it a condition for returning to Indochina as head of a new French-backed State of Vietnam that France recognise it as a unified nation with sovereignty to all of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. Bao Dai received strong backing for making this demand from the United Kingdom and the USA in the period leading up to their recognition of his government in early 1950.

Back in the 1930s, the historical term 'Viet Nam' was mainly a nationalist slogan, used above all by the party Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (VNQDDĐ). Ho Chi Minh had also flirted with it back in 1930 when the Indochinese Communist Party was formed, but went along with the internationalist strand in the Comintern in adopting the less nationalist term Indochina (Dong Duong) instead. Ho Chi Minh went back to the term 'Viet Nam' in 1941 when he assumed leadership of the Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh (Việt Minh). At that time nationalism was encouraged within the worldwide communist movement since it helped mobilise popular sentiments against fascism and Japanese militarism. The first time 'Viet Nam' was used as a name for a modern state was when Bao Dai, at Japan's instigation, proclaimed the end of the French protectorate of Annam and the creation of a new independent State of Vietnam on 11 March 1945. 'Viet Nam' was kept in the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), when it was proclaimed by Ho Chi Minh on 2 September 1945, after Bao Dai had abdicated in the 'August Revolution.'

Only after 1945 did the French and English terms 'Vietnamien' and 'Vietnamese' emerge as indicators of nationality, and it took several years before they were familiar terms. Franklin D. Roosevelt for example, in spite of his keen interest in the emancipation of the oppressed Indochinese peoples from France, never saw or heard the term 'Vietnamese.' A historian must see the names 'Vietnam' and 'Vietnamese' as parts of several competing nation-building projects, in direct conflict with the federal Indochina project, in which Dalat would have an essential role. Although he provides the main ingredients of this story, Jennings still misses out on it. The reason is his confusing wish to avoid ethno-national confusion. The reader is even further confused when reaching Jennings' Epilogue where he tells about the "Miss Ethnic Vietnam Beauty Contest" that was initiated in connection with Dalat's flower festival in 2007. In this context, although the term 'Ethnic Vietnam' in principle includes the Viet it must actually be understood to include only those Vietnamese who are not Viet. 157 women from 33 ethnic groups were selected for the semi-finals in 2011, of whom 60 went to the finals, where a Nung woman won the 100 million VND prize. Although the Viet are recognised as one of Vietnam's ethnic groups, it seems unlikely that any Viet woman will win this particular prize. Beautiful Viet women are more likely to aim for the more prestigious 'Miss Vietnam' prize, which of course, at least in principle, is open to 'Ethnic Vietnam' women as well.

The terms Jennings uses for the Highlanders are no less unfortunate than his use of "Vietnamese" for the Viet. He adopts the vocabulary of the present day Vietnamese nation state by calling them "highland minorities" or "ethnic minorities" without even discussing in relation to whom they are a minority. At the time when Dalat was built with their forced labour, the Highlanders, if counted together, were not a minority in the highlands. They

were turned into a minority only later as a consequence of Viet immigration. Today they constitute about one third of the population in the Central Highlands. Jennings puts forward the interesting and rather convincing proposition that the process of unifying the (Central) Highlanders under a single “Montagnard” identity “began in Dalat in the 1920s” (108). He also tells how the French sought to stimulate and provide institutional frameworks for various Highlander autonomies in the 1930s-40s (109-110, 226). However, Jennings’ consistent use of the term “minority” prevents him from telling the story of how a majority became a minority. Jennings’ treatment of ethnicity in the chapter entitled “Situating the ‘Montagnards’” (94-111), his analysis of the architectural zoning of Dalat in European and “indigenous” quarters (pp. 117-125), and his chapter “Vietnamese Dalat” (158-177) are in my view less accomplished than his opening chapters, and also less informed by global comparisons. The process of subjugating upland populations into delta- and valley-based nation states has been happening throughout Southeast Asia. Comparisons are being called for.<sup>5</sup> The chapter on “Vietnamese Dalat” tells much about Viet-French relations, but does not have much to say about the crucial relationship between the Viet and the Highlanders. It does not even reflect on a revelatory piece of information: spear-bearing “Moi” escorted French-recruited strike breakers when the local Viet went on strike (165).

Jennings’ lack of attention to the notional aspects of the contested history of ethnicity and nationhood draws his attention away from the topic announced in the book’s subtitle: “the Making and Undoing of French Indochina.” The French are overwhelmingly present in the book, but Indochina is not. It is mixed up with Vietnam. Although Jennings remarks quite perceptively that the colonial state had rooted itself through the construction of Dalat into “what one could argue was previously a ‘non-state space,’” (111), and although he aptly characterises the 1946 plan to make Dalat the capital of an Indochinese Federation as “an alternative conception of Indochinese space,” (238) his terminology defeats these insights by conveying the overall impression that the French had colonised a country called Vietnam of which the central highlands formed an obvious integral part.

This leads me to my complaint about the footnotes. The book is written in English while most of the sources are in French and some in Vietnamese. Whenever Jennings quotes directly from a source he conveys it in his own English translation. If a critical reader should want to read the original French or Vietnamese sources the only way to find them is to locate the original text in a library or archive, using the book’s printed footnotes as a guide (269-326). While this used to be an acceptable procedure in the past for anyone wanting to check a colleague’s translation or interpretation of sources, and while I have no complaints concerning the quality of Jennings’ translations this, in my view, should no longer be acceptable in the age of the Internet. A printed scholarly volume should nowadays be accompanied by a website with an extended set of footnotes, where readers

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<sup>5</sup> For a bold attempt at such comparison, with heavy emphasis on the Burmese experience, see James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

can find excerpts or even full copies of the original sources. This should be a requirement when sources are quoted in translation.

My third complaint concerns Jennings' under-utilisation of some of the most relevant earlier scholarship. No specific chapter is dedicated to the crucial story of how Dalat and its surrounding areas were "Vietnamised." This story must therefore be pieced together from information Jennings provides here and there, as well as from the work of other scholars. The story of how the Central Highlands were integrated in a Viet-dominated nation-state has the following ingredients: The French use of Viet construction and plantation labour, which led to permanent settlement and drew in merchants as well (160-162); the employment of Viet officials in Dalat's administrative services; the central position of Dalat in the French-sponsored State of Vietnam under former Emperor Bao Dai (148); aggressive state-driven Viet colonisation of the highlands during Ngo Dinh Diem's nation-building project 1955-63 (253-257); the strategic importance of the Central Highlands in the Indochina wars and the rivalry between the French, the Americans, the Indochinese communists, and South Vietnam for the allegiance and loyalty of the Highlanders; the holding of the 24th plenum of the Vietnam Communist Party Central Committee in Dalat 1975 to discuss the merger of North and South Vietnam (259); government-induced migration to development zones in the highlands over the following years; the cutting down of forests for timber exports and firewood; and finally a wave of commercially-driven Viet migration to the uplands from the late 1980s onward. This latest wave of migrants transformed the region around Dalat into a central location for the industrial cultivation of coffee, cashew nuts, tea and other exports, as well as for Vietnamese tourism. The standard of living grew in the region as the Viet proportion of the population rose. The Highlanders surely also benefited from these developments. Yet they were marginalised in a country that some of them with some reason felt should belong to them. This had religious and political consequences. Rapid economic modernisation undid most of what French and American missionaries, strategists and intelligence services had been endeavouring to achieve over the years in terms of stimulating highland autonomy. At any rate the Viet-Highlander fault line still remains contentious in the Central Highlands. Serious incidents occurred as late as 2004.

Why does not Jennings tell this central story more explicitly? Is it too well known? Or is it because he is inhibited by his anachronistic ethno-national vocabulary? One other reason is that he skips the period 1975-1990, and returns to Dalat in the 1990s-2000s - in his fascinating Epilogue. Yet another reason is that he never allows the Highlanders much agency. And he refrains from making full use of existing anthropological works on the highlands and Viet migration.

For an original researcher like Jennings, who works with previously unexploited archives, it is tempting to concentrate fully on new findings and refrain from wasting space and time on recapitulating what other scholars have published. Although this is understandable, it entails a risk of losing key aspects of one's topic. It seems best therefore to provide succinct summaries of existing scholarship along with one's own findings and draw them together in a comprehensive analysis. Jennings does this quite frequently, such as in a short synthesis of Bruce Lockhart's findings concerning Bao Dai's attachment to Dalat (148). The

book makes some use also of essential works on ethnicity and migration. Yet it might have benefitted from doing this even more, particularly with the work of Gerald Hickey and Oscar Salemink.<sup>6</sup> Jennings says that ‘rather than revisit these fine works,’ he will explore some more neglected themes, such as power dynamics, spaces, representations, practices and administrative realities (94). This results in treatment of the Highlanders solely as objects of other people’s actions, not as agents themselves. Jennings looks at them from the (mostly French) outside, and does not even try to gauge how the Highlanders viewed the French Indochinese and Vietnamese colonisation of their lands. Even when Jennings discusses religious conversion and the rivalries between Protestants and Catholics, he treats conversion as a one-way process: European or American missionaries converted “ethnic minorities” (195, 204-205). One might suggest, at least as a hypothesis, that the many fresh Protestant conversions in 1948-1950 was to some extent due to a change in the outlook of the Highlanders themselves at a time when Bao Dai took up residence in Dalat as head of a new French-supported State of Vietnam claiming historical rights to the same lands that the French had granted autonomy in 1946 in an attempt to protect loyal Highlanders from interference by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The analysis of the interaction of Europeans, Viet and Highlanders in Dalat and its surrounding villages would have benefitted from some recapitulation of Hickey and Salemink’s work. There would be little risk of pure repetition. The Highlanders are present in the book as victims of the French use of forced labour. The same Highlanders were used both by the French and the subsequent Vietnamese regimes to promote Dalat as an exotic abode with picturesque and lightly clad natives in the surrounding countryside. This comes out even more clearly in the iconography of Jennings’ work than in the text itself. The book’s cover depicts an idyllic poster from the Diem period.

Jennings could also have made more ample use of Andrew Hardy’s brilliant analysis of Viet migration patterns.<sup>7</sup> Hardy, who did fieldwork in the northern highlands and also in Dak Lak province (with Ban Me Thuot as capital) of the central highlands, did not study Lam Dong province (with Dalat as capital), and has nothing explicit to say about Dalat. Yet he provides interesting perspectives of direct relevance to Jennings’ book. Jennings is fully aware of Hardy’s work and refers to it in several places (159). Yet he refrains from recapitulating Hardy’s main findings: The precolonial Viet culture was much less village-bound and more mobile than we have been led to believe. There was frequent interaction between the lowlands and highlands. Colonial roads and buses considerably increased the means of mobility under the French. Yet people became more attached to their villages than before, because of new French registration and taxation systems. Military

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<sup>6</sup> Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands, 1954-1976* (New Haven MA, Yale University Press, 1982). Oscar Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam’s Central Highlands* (Honolulu HI, University of Hawaii Press, 2003). Jennings makes more elaborate use of a third essential contribution: Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954* (Copenhagen, NIAS Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Hardy, *Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam* (Copenhagen, NIAS Press, 2003).

transportation and operations during the Indochina Wars 1945-1975 familiarised many Viet soldiers, on both sides, with the uplands and their inhabitants. This helped shape an idea of the nation as a union of many peoples. The state-driven mobilisation of Viet migrants to establish 'new economic zones' in the years 1954-1989 further contributed to integrating the highlands in a Viet-dominated national economy, but the really massive migration to the uplands only came about when export opportunities drastically expanded the plantation economy from the 1990s. Free migrants now took over from mobilised settlers, and highland cities grew dramatically in size. One basic difference between this new wave of free migration and the migration that was common in precolonial times is that the historical migrants tended to adopt local customs and take up local languages, while the migrants in the last few decades have brought their own culture with them lock stock and barrel, and assume that local people will adopt their modern ways.<sup>8</sup> There can be no doubt that the construction of cities such as Dalat in the highlands paved the way for these developments that are analysed so well by Hardy.

These critical remarks are by no means fundamental. Jennings has decided to tell mainly other stories than the ethno-national one. I may deplore it, but I must respect his choice. I should not demand that Jennings fully share my own fascination with the history of ethnicity and nationalism. And I admire his alternative stories for shedding light on many important aspects of colonial and post-colonial history: health, violence, infrastructure, religion, architecture, pastimes, gender, children, schooling, tourism, war - and also for contributing many pieces to the ethno-national puzzle.

Let me add my admiration for Jennings' iconography. The book includes a fabulous selection of photographs, posters, maps and cartoons, many of which are from the author's own collection. They do not just serve as illustrations but form an essential part of the book's many stories.

This is an eye-opening, eminently readable, highly impressive work. Eric Jennings provides a vivid image of the historical tribulations of a "singular, unexpected, almost incoherent place" (1), a European-style mountain resort with Chamonix-like villas among pine trees and artificial lakes in the middle of a land that is no longer Indochinese, but Vietnamese.

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<sup>8</sup> Hardy, p. 229.

Author's Response by Eric T. Jennings, University of Toronto

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I wish to thank Laurent Césari, Martin Thomas, Pierre Brocheux, and Stein Tønnesson for their many insights into *Imperial Heights*, which are enriched by their multiple vantage points. I am quite pleased to see historians of international relations, peace and conflict studies, Vietnam, and French imperialism finding resonance in this book.

Laurent Césari offers an engaged discussion of *Imperial Heights*. He rightly emphasizes Dalat's distortive impact, which is to say its capacity at magnifying some of colonialism's contradictions, vulnerabilities, and fractures. I find it interesting that he sees relatively few comparisons with other hill stations, because the book's genesis was actually comparative. It was when I realized that Dalat's "dry" hill station function did not quite fit with the group of colonial hydromineral spas I analyzed in *Curing the Colonizers*<sup>1</sup> (in Madagascar, Tunisia, Réunion Island, Guadeloupe and mainland France), that I decided to undertake a stand-alone study of Indochina's main hill station. In the process, the comparative apparatus was undoubtedly shed. Césari offers some very fruitful additional avenues for comparison, most notably by suggesting a link between French colonial violence in Indochina and the legendary brutality deployed in central and equatorial Africa during the construction of the *Chemin de Fer Congo-Océan*. That said, *Imperial Heights* does repeatedly establish parallels with Simla, Baguio, Petropolis and even Davos, Paris, and Chambery. The sections on disease and colonial readings of it underscore the dialogue between French, British and German scientists in the colonies. Chapter one provides examples of emissaries and specialists being dispatched to Dutch and British hill stations on fact-finding missions. Chapter five includes a comparative Franco-British framework for understanding colonial hunting. Chapter seven is concerned in large part with international trends in architecture and city planning, from Detroit to Bandung by way of Pointe-Noire. In short, although I certainly intended to craft a microhistory around Dalat, I feel that it is one that draws from a global context. Ultimately, I would contend that my decision to focus on a single site in this book is precisely what allowed me to consider the *longue-durée*, to delve into a host of elements that underpinned French colonialism in Indochina (climate fears, competing yet incompatible paradigms, colonial insecurities, comforts of home, nostalgia, fractures and rifts), and most importantly to compare the genesis of what was intended as a colonial utopia with the material form that the project eventually assumed.

Martin Thomas' careful reading highlights both Dalat's dystopian dimension and its emblematic functions. He underscores the ironies that lurk beneath the hill station's surface: its resting on dated miasmatic logic, the counterproductive role of its artificial lakes in spreading malaria, the use of terrifying violence to carve out a site of colonial leisure and power, the tragic impact of Dalat on the very populations French colonial officials claimed to "save." Thomas also seizes some of the nuance that I sought to introduce into discussions of segregation, race and class in Indochina under French rule. His reflections

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<sup>1</sup> *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas*, Duke University Press, 2006.

on issues of authenticity and identity are crucially important, though his question concerning alternate Vietnamese readings of Dalat is of course impossible to answer fully. Dalat, as I suggest throughout the book, meant something quite different for a 1930s elite Vietnamese tennis pro than it did for a porter at the time of the hill station's creation, the emperor of Vietnam, or a Saigon tourist on a weekend tryst. Indeed, if Dalat was "cruel, banal and vaguely ridiculous" as Thomas eloquently suggests, then a large part of this particular colonial project-- aimed at perpetuating colonial rule by cloning the metropole overseas, could be described in this same vein.

Pierre Brocheux views *Imperial Heights* as restoring a texture to the colonial era: at Dalat, brutal violence and hygiene went hand in hand; the colonial state was anything but monolithic or hegemonic in this highland retreat; the innumerable rows between administrative branches underscore how dysfunction and utopianism were inseparable in creating what its founders imagined as a kind of colonial Olympus. I am pleased to see Brocheux suggest that my study displays chronological sensitivity. Indeed, he rightly stresses the rupture marked by the Second World War, and the Japanese "occupation," of French Indochina, to which *Imperial Heights* devotes a chapter. Brocheux is correct in pointing out that Hanoi and Saigon featured more institutions devoted to Eurasians than did Dalat, including the headquarters of such institutions. I do believe, however, as Emmanuelle Saada and I have both contended, that Dalat was conceived quite early on as a *métis* site, in large part precisely because it was imagined as a slice of France in Indochina. The important numbers of Eurasian children in Dalat's private and public schools, and of course at the *Ecole des enfants de troupe*, do seem to point in that direction. I understand his point that it was the institutions themselves that made it their mission to "Frenchify" young Eurasian, and not Dalat per se. Nevertheless, the sheer density of such establishments at Dalat was no coincidence. It was tributary in part to Dalat's milk farm, its alpine allure, its visual and olfactory cues, its ratio of "Europeans" to "Indochinese," in short to its reputation as being a "little piece of France" in Southeast Asia.

The first half of Stein Tønnesson commentary overlaps well with most of the other reviews. Like the three others, he remarks on the variety and on the layers of sources I consulted for this project. He engages with my discussion of health, power, architecture, violence, gender, and control. The second half of his review, conversely, identifies several points of contention. One of them involves categories and terminologies. I confess that this line of questioning surprised me. When I project the term "Vietnamese" onto pre-1945 Vietnam, I did so for several reasons, beyond mere "convenience" (indeed, as Tønnesson notes, I discuss the use of the term in a long disclaimer). One reason is that a great many studies that claim to examine "Indochina" as a whole actually focus largely on the areas that would become the constituent parts of modern-day Vietnam, at the expense of Laos and Cambodia. In this sense, consciously projecting the term "Vietnamese" backwards constitutes a shorthand in sections of the book where I want to avoid the situation of excluding Laos and Cambodia while claiming to examine "Indochina." Moreover, my book aims in part at deconstructing, or at the very least, interrogating some of the myths of French Indochina. Reifying Indochina was therefore out of the question. Furthermore, as I stress in my disclaimer, alternatives seem equally problematic. Most obviously, "Annam/ese" could refer to a kingdom or an ethnicity: the French called inhabitants of

Tonkin, Cochinchina, and Annam “Annamites” interchangeably, but were also keenly aware of the judicial, administrative and legal nuances between Annam and the rest of Indochina. Indeed, I posit in *Imperial Heights* that Dalat itself lay at the heart of such overlapping and contentious typologies and nomenclatures, for French colonial officials gallingly and willfully extracted the Lang-Bian region from Annam. As for the terms “Kinh” and “Viet” that Tønnesson advocates that I use, they too present a risk of anachronism. I also remember once being told at a conference that “Viet” was unacceptable because it could be read as an echo of the Vietnam War and its epithets. Yes, one person’s minority is certainly another’s majority. Yet I fail to see how this impacts my discussion of the Dalat conferences of 1946, for instance, where I carefully contrast competing federal and nationalist projects and shifting spatial conceptions across what used to be “Indochina.” In short, to me at least, the terminological points that Tønnesson spells out simply do not carry the analytical weight he attributes to them.

This question of terminology is in some ways an intractable problem, although I would argue, not a particularly rewarding line of inquiry. Indeed, given what we know about the historical uses of the terms “Vietnam” and “Indochina” thanks to the work of Christopher Goscha, I would think that historians should be able to utilize these terms while recognizing their different valences across time and space. “Colonial Vietnam,” an anachronism that I employ repeatedly, is in point of fact very widely accepted within the scholarly community. Indeed I would venture to describe it as the dominant terminology. A quick internet search on an academic search engine will yield scores of uses of the term, in such journals as *The Journal of Vietnamese Studies* and *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. I could cite countless other cases of historians projecting current ethnonyms or other markers onto the past, running against the grain of their sources (“Black” in lieu of “Negro” is one obvious example). The cultural authenticity Tønnesson seeks will almost always prove historically elusive, it seems to me. At its core, this may be in part a divergence over vantage points. I am a French colonial historian, not a Vietnam specialist, though I like to think that I can navigate the field. However, the difference of views may also rest on purposes and agendas. My intention was to analyze French colonialism and its afterlives through Dalat. That undoubtedly involved, as I believe I have done, a deep historical analysis of the triangulations of power between upland groups, French, and ethnic Vietnamese. My focus is decidedly not on topics like the “Degar” movement that Tønnesson raises, rather puzzlingly, and which strikes me as a complex construction in its own right. Nor am I involved in championing a “Degar” cause, or in remedying what Tønnesson describes as a history of “subjugation.” Lastly on this point, I fail to see how one could do justice to the topic of highland identities and experiences in a book dealing with an explicitly different topic.

Tønnesson’s opinion that I engage insufficiently with the work of Oscar Salemink, Gerald Hickey and Andrew Hardy left me equally bewildered. I count sixteen references to Salemink’s work in my footnotes, and another sixteen to Hickey’s. Tønnesson’s suggestion that scholars follow his own lead in creating a website containing full-length original vernacular quotations as they appear in their sources is a good one, although it has hardly become common practice at this point. Those intent on reading the French quotations in



*Imperial Heights* in the original should be able to do so in a few years' time, for I am pleased to report that a French language edition of *Imperial Heights* is now under contract.

In the end, Stein Tønnesson is probably right that I do not share his "fascination with the history of ethnicity and nationalism." I agree that the multiple prisms I utilize to consider Dalat, from the vantage points of medicine to architecture, cultural practices, leisure, tourism, hunting, education, to segregation (and its limits), end up telling a different story from the one Tønnesson would have liked me to stake out, one centering on state making and subjugation in the highlands of what is now Vietnam.

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