

# The impact of the french colonisation of vietnam essay sample

[Countries](#), [Vietnam](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## Introduction

There were both positive and negative effects of the French colonisation of Vietnam. Before elaborating the impact of French rule on Vietnam, it is important to understand what life was like before, during and after colonisation. However, it is difficult to fully assess the period immediately after French colonisation due to the influence of American intervention in 1961, starting the Vietnam War, which ended in 1975. The reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976 and its evolution until today is a result not only of the role of the French but also that of the Americans. It is important to highlight that the French period of colonisation was for more than 90 years during a time of peace while the period of American intervention was for only 15 years under difficult war conditions. To be able to isolate the impact of French rule, this essay will limit its extent to civil administration, which was largely unaffected by the presence of the American military.

How was the country colonised?

In the nineteenth century, the French wanted to extend its influence into the Asian territories. There was a possibility that they thought that the Mekong river delta was a gateway to China's huge market.

This strategy commenced with the military action of the attack on Tourane (Da Nang, Central Vietnam) in 1858 by Rigault de Genouilly, a French naval commander. By 1859 the French forces had moved south and taken Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City).

By signing the peace treaty of Saigon in 1862, the Vietnamese acknowledged the presence of French rule in Cochinchina. This key event marks the start of French colonial rule in Vietnam until self-proclaimed Independence in 1945. During the period there were different forms of resistance particularly in 1930 there was a rebellion led by Ho Chi Minh against the French authorities. Only in 1954, when the French were defeated in the battle of Dien Bien Phu did the French renounce their rule. The independence of Vietnam was officially recognised by France only in 1956 (Geneva Agreement). Nevertheless, after gaining its independence Vietnam split into two countries: a communist North Vietnam and a non-communist South Vietnam.

What was life like under colonial rule?

In 1897, the monarchy lost the support of the common people and was abolished. This may be because during the period of the foreign invasion, the common people saw an opportunity to get rid of the feudal system. At the same time there were floods, famines, locust infestations, droughts etc and Emperor Tu Duc was not able to manage the situation. During his reign, Catholics were repressed. The Vietnamese Catholics then decided to collaborate with the French and were often rewarded with land. French settlers also received large amounts of land. This soon created a French and Vietnamese high class who owned most of the land.

Under French rule, by 1939, 80 % of a population of 20 million was illiterate and only 15 % of the children received any schooling. Vietnam had only one university with 700 students.

Medical care was not well organised and there were only 2 physicians for every 100, 000 Vietnamese. The Vietnamese had no freedom and were not allowed to travel outside their districts without identification papers. They were not allowed to publish any books without French censorship.

Vietnamese were also excluded from participating in industry and trade.

Did life improve or get worse for the people living under colonial rule?

### Civil Administration and Infrastructure

In 1897, 40 years after the first invasion, Paul Doumer, the Governor General of French Indochina, imposed French rule directly at all levels of administration. There were about 5000 French administrators ruling the Indochinese Union (included Laos and Cambodia) of 30 million inhabitants. The major part of French policies impoverished the people of Indochina. Like any other colony colonised by a European power, the Vietnamese were neglected while the French gained wealth from all the natural resources the country had to offer. The French also established salt, opium and alcohol monopolies to raise revenues but any economic gain only benefited the French and a few wealthy Vietnamese families who favoured the French.

The peasants were heavily taxed, sometimes up to 60% of their income. However with the tax revenue, the French built a railway from Hanoi to Saigon, ports, irrigation and drainage systems, research institutes and other public services. This infrastructure is a legacy left behind by the French that the Vietnamese people continue to benefit from.

## Education

The literacy rate in Vietnam was decreasing during the first 30 years of the colonial period. From 1906 onwards, “Quoc Ngu”, the Vietnamese romanisation of the previously used Chinese pictograms was taught as an ‘elective language’, along with French, in private schools. In 1908, to raise literacy amongst the general population, the Royal Court in Hue created the Ministry of Education to implement “Quoc Ngu” in public schools. Despite all this, it was only in 1919 that “Quoc Ngu” officially became the national written language.

The number of elementary schools was gradually rising but even in 1925, it was estimated that only one in ten children was going to school. The French did not focus on improving the education system.

By 1870, some 90 Vietnamese from the upper class families were sent to France to study.

Back in Vietnam, there were only three ‘lycées’ (secondary schools) in the country that were opened in the early 1900’s. French language was the medium of instruction in these three schools, which meant that only the French settlers and elite educated families could send their children there.

Despite the fact that the French contributed to the infrastructure of the country, the lives of the Vietnamese did not get better. The majority of school-aged children did not go to school and there was a widening gap between the high class and the peasants especially in terms of education.

What were the benefits and costs of colonial rule (for the Vietnamese)?

Benefits:

- \* Infrastructure – irrigation systems, public railways etc
- \* Civil Administration – more structured
- \* Monarchy abolished – feudal system no longer in effect

Costs:

- \* Benefits/profits from natural resources went to the French
- \* Inadequate schools, school systems – low literacy rate
- \* No civil liberties – need of identification papers etc
- \* Deprived from participation in industry & trade
- \* Redistribution of land to French settlers

In addition to all these costs, there is another indefinable cost of any country being occupied by a foreign country, which can never replace the benefit of self-government.

This essay pointed out both the positive and the negative effects of the French rule in Vietnam. It was not easy to distinguish which of the differences of ways of life before, during and after the colonisation period were the results of the French rule. After distinguishing these impacts and

weighing them out, the French colonisation proved to give more costs than benefits to the Vietnamese population.

## Bibliography

### Websites

Brigham, Robert K. " A Brief History." PBS. 6 Sept. 2007 < [http://www. pbs. org/battlefieldvietnam/history/index. html](http://www.pbs.org/battlefieldvietnam/history/index.html) >.

Nguyen, Sonny. " Modern Written Vietnamese." 23 Sept. 2007 .

" Vietnam." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007. Encyclopdia Britannica Online. 5 Sept. 2007

.

" Vietnam." L'Internaute. 20 Sept. 2007 .

" Vietnam Colonial Administration." 6 Sept. 2007

" Vietnam Overview of Economy." Encyclopedia of the Nations. 6 Sept. 2007

### Books

Clayton, Anthony. The Wars of French Decolonization. Longman, 1994.

Mason, Florence. Lonely Planet Vietnam. 6th ed. Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2001.