

¶The French Empire near the Philippines.

## INDO-CHINA TEMPTING TO JAPAN

FRANCE'S Colonial Empire covers a total area of 4,000,000 square miles, compared with the more than 14,000,000 square miles of the British Empire. Of this, 2,500,000 square miles are almost uninhabitable regions in the centre of Africa.

She has, however, one most valuable possession, for whose safety she is now much concerned on account of the war in China. This is the colony of French Indo-China, extending over more than 20,000 square miles, and liable to be caught in the grip of the pincers if Japan makes much greater progress in her operations against China and in her friendship with Siam.

Indo-China forms a great bulwark between the East and the Far East. It controls the China Sea, which forms the only approach to China and Japan, as well as being in command of the gateway to Hong Kong and Shanghai. Recently Siam, which now forms a barrier between Japan and India, and almost encircles French Indo-China, has become dominated by Japanese influence, and there are fears that she may shortly form a close alliance with her Eastern neighbour.

Only a few miles separate China from Siam, and it is this narrow strip of Indo-China which the Japanese will have to cross to complete their conquest.

France, too, is worried by the Japanese occupation of the island of Hainan, which lies off the coast of Indo-China, and would form an admirable base for any attack which she decided to launch on the French Colony.

Japan not unnaturally has had covetous eyes on Indo-China for very many years. The territory is rich in all those natural products of which Japan herself is so short. For instance, Japan has little timber, except of the more delicate kind, which she uses in the manufacture of so many of the fancy articles which she exports. Hardwoods, such as oak, mahogany and teak, are unknown on the Japanese islands. In Indo-China they abound.

There are most extensive forests of all the trees which grow in the woodlands of Europe. In fact, it has been truly said that anything which will grow either in European temperate zones or in the tropics will flourish in Indo-China.

It has a most obliging soil and the most obliging climate. Cotton flourishes as successfully as it does in India; rubber is exploited with as much success as in the Malay Peninsula; tea, coffee and cocoa grow to perfection, while every variety of fruit and nuts seems indigenous to the colony. The rivers are exceedingly rich in the choicest fish, while animals of all kinds, both wild and domestic are plentiful.

Only one plant has refused to take kindly to Indo-China, and that is the grape vine. In spite of the most careful experiments of French vine growers, they have never been able to grow the vine to their satisfaction, although such fruits as lemons, oranges, grape fruit and pineapples have proved exceedingly productive. Needless to say, rice, the greatest of all products of the East, grows to perfection in the colony. Every one of these articles would be of the utmost value to Japan to feed her rapidly-developing population.

Moreover, French Indo-China would prove admirable ground as an outlet for her surplus population. Japan has today something like 350 people to every square mile of her islands, whereas in the French Colony there are only seven persons to the square mile. The invasion of a few million from

Japan would cause no great disturbance. The area of the French Colony is almost the same as that of the Japanese islands, but its population is less than one-fortieth of Japan's.

The country has been invaded by so many tribes that it would be difficult to say who are really the natives, though five-sixths of the population are now classed as Annamese, a distinctive though peculiar tribe. They are of strange appearance, the majority being short and ungainly, flat of face, and round-headed, with small noses. Both sexes wear silk trousers and tunics, with their hair curled into knots and surmounted by turbans or palm-leaf hats. They have formed the peculiar habit of blackening their teeth with varnish, which gives them a most forbidding appearance. At the same time, they are exceedingly proud and industrious, but inveterate gamblers, making bets on such everyday events as the weather and the state of the crops.

France has had an interest in Indo-China for almost exactly 150 years. In 1787, a great French missionary, Pigneau de Behaine, exercised such a sway over the natives that he persuaded the then "King" of Cochin-China to sign a treaty giving King Louis XVI extensive rights in the country. British interests in India opposed the

French spread of power, and it was subsequently delayed by the French Revolution. But France had not lost interest. In the early part of the nineteenth century, France again made overtures to the native King, who was only too willing to place himself under French protection rather than run the risk of domination by China.

So long as France concerned herself only with the political control of the country, the natives acquiesced, but the minute she began to interfere in religious matters difficulties arose. A large number of missionaries were despatched, of whom more than fifty were murdered in the course of a few years. The natives did not restrict their atrocities to the French; they murdered many thousands of their own people who had embraced the Christian religion.

France, with the aid of Spain, who had provided many of the murdered priests, decided in 1861 that this reign of terror could be stopped only by armed force. Large numbers of soldiers were despatched to Indo-China, and the hostilities were particularly severe, owing to the fact that the natives secured Chinese assistance in dealing with the French invaders. It was not until 1884 that the French troops were successful, after de-

feating the Chinese at Foochow and Son-Tay. Treaties were signed between French and Indo-China, under which French ownership was recognized.

France immediately began to reorganize the country by establishing a new form of government, which was an exceedingly difficult matter because of the varied nature of the population and their conflicting codes of law. It was not until 1927 that final agreement was reached, under which a new Council of Government was created, composed of 35 Frenchmen and 25 natives. France appointed M. Pasquier as Governor-General with extensive powers, though she still recognizes the local Emperor, Bao Dai, a man of sixty-three years of age, whom the French Government had educated in Paris.

Recent events in the Far East have convinced the natives that they must take a greater share in the protection of their own country. France is now assisting Indo-China to raise a native army of at least 50,000 men and to build munition factories. It is a bold step, being the first occasion on which France has decentralized her military activities, but the circumstances plainly justify the move.  
—*Frank Longworth, condensed from The Australian Digest of World Reading.*