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Hill Stations in Vietnam During the French Colonial Period: The Case Study of Tam Dao¹

Abstract. In the process of colonial conquest, beside political and economic strategies, Western powers continually sought to establish hill stations as “sanctuaries from the death in the tropics”. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, French colonialism in Vietnam intensified their exploration and search for places in the midlands and mountainous areas to establish hill stations. These stations served as retreats for vacationing, recuperation, and cure during summers, eliminating the need for travel to distant lands. This article aims to answer the question of the reasons and conditions that led the colonial authorities to choose locations for establishing these mountain resorts. It elucidates the process of formation and development of Tam Dao (Vinh Yen province), in comparison with Da Lat (Central Highlands) and Sapa (Northwest region). The article contributes to sparking further research on this intriguing topic in the modern history of Vietnam, particularly in Vinh Yen.

Keywords: Hill station, Tam Dao, Vinh Yen province, French colonial period.

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Горные станции во Вьетнаме в период французского господства: исследование в Тамдао¹

Аннотация. В процессе колониального завоевания западные державы стремились создать горные станции как «убежища от смерти в тропиках». К концу XIX — началу XX в. французские колонизаторы во Вьетнаме усилили свои исследования и поиски мест в центральных и горных районах для создания горных станций. Эти станции служили убежищами для отдыха, восстановления сил и лечения летом, устраняя необходимость поездок в далекие страны. Цель данной статьи — показать причины и условия выбора колониальными властями места для создания этих горных курортов. Она освещает процесс формирования и развития Тамдао (провинция Виньен) в сравнении с Далатом (плато Тэйнгуен) и Сапа (северо-западный регион). Статья способствует дальнейшему исследованию этой интересной темы в современной истории Вьетнама.

Ключевые слова: горная станция, Тамдао, провинция Виньен, французский колониальный период.

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Introduction

In the 19th century, the French colonialists began their campaign of conquest and gradually subdued Vietnam. In the course of this conspiracy, the French faced numerous difficulties. These were not only due to the staunch resistance of the local people but also because of the region's natural conditions, adversely impacting the health and quality of life of both soldiers and French civilians. Statistics show that in 1861, 11.5 % of the French military forces in Southern Vietnam perished due to diseases, with the main hospital in Saigon admitting 2774 patients, including 170 deaths and 371 emergency repatriations [Jennings 2022: 21]. This scenario remained into the 1880s and 1890s.

The researchers identified the harsh climate of Indochina, particularly Cochinchina, and frequent cholera outbreaks as the causes of this situation. It was realized that the depletion in the health of the French in Vietnam was also due to malaria caused by the Anopheles mosquitoes. Considering this situation, the French sought solutions to “escape the death in the tropics”. The options were either to return to France or to visit famous holiday resorts abroad — places with a milder climate than

¹ Эта статья написана при содействии профессора, доктора Нгуен Ван Ханя (Университет общественных и гуманитарных наук, Ханойский государственный университет). Автор выражает искреннюю благодарность профессору за рецензирование, комментарии и редактирование рукописи.

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Vietnam, to recuperate after enduring the tropical monsoon climate heavily influenced by the sea. Whichever solution is selected, it resulted in considerable harm to the nation's budget. Therefore, the urgent need to find a location for the French, especially officials and soldiers, to rest and recuperate arose. In July 1897, the Governor-General of French Indochina, Paul Doumer, directed research into suitable locations for “a mountain sanatorium, where officials and settlers could regain their strength, whereas currently, they are forced to return to France at a great cost to our budget and their work” [Jennings 2022: 32]. By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Da Lat¹ (in Annam), Tam Dao², and Sapa³ (in Tonkin) were chosen for this purpose.

Understanding the process of establishment and development of French hill stations contributes significantly to the study of the history of tourism in Vietnam, and to the general history of Vietnam. Meanwhile, at present, there are not many published research on this subject, apart from some writings related to Da Lat and Sapa by both Vietnamese and foreign scholars, such as: In-depth Studies on Da Lat in the Historical and Geographical Journal [Tập san sử địa 1971]; Imperial Heights: Dalat and The Making and Undoing of French Indochina [Jennings 2022: 21]; Railways, Tourism, and Mountain Urbanization: The Case of Sapa [Nguyễn Văn Chính 2016]; Tourism in Vietnam in the Early 20th Century [Trần Viết Nghĩa 2010]; Tourism Development and Amenity Migration in Hill Stations: The Case Study of Sapa in Vietnam [Vu Nam, Makoto Sato 2010], etc. These works somewhat help readers visualize Da Lat and Sapa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, in these studies, aspects regarding the natural conditions for establishing hill stations have not been fully clarified. Regarding Tam Dao, most of the relevant information is published on entertainment news websites with low scientific content; or some miscellaneous notes by the French in *L'Éveil économique de l'Indochine*, *Bulletin Administratif du Tonkin* before 1945. Only after 1945 was there a relatively detailed study on the process of road construction to Tam Dao in the early 20th century [Trần Xuân Hùng 2023].

By employing a combination of historical, logical, analytical, and comparative methods, and based on original documents stored at the National Archives Center I, Vinh Phuc Provincial Library, and online databases, this article focuses on clarifying the reasons why colonial authorities established these hill stations. The documents used in this article include administrative texts issued during the French rule of Vietnam, focusing on two archives: *Fond du Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine* and *Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin*. In *Fond du Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine*, the article explores documents in series L “Trade — Industry — Tourism”; series H “Public Works”; and series J “Railways — Road Transport and Aviation”. In *Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin*, the writer focuses on documents related to trade — industry — tourism, agriculture — forestry, finance, commerce — taxation, post office, railways — road transport, public works, etc. Additionally, to supplement and complete this study, the author also refers to research on the economic situation in Indochina,

¹ Currently, Da Lat, located in Lam Dong Province, is 307km north of Ho Chi Minh City.

² Currently, Tam Dao is located in Vinh Phuc Province, 73 kilometers from Hanoi.

³ Currently, Sapa is located in Lao Cai Province, 313 kilometers from Hanoi.

Tonkin, and Vinh Yen published in specialized journals and magazines, mainly in the *Economic Journal of Indochina* (before 1945), the *Journal of Historical Studies*, the *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, etc.

Preconditions and conditions for the establishment of hill stations

French colonialists examined hilly areas from North to South to create hill stations that could “coexist” with the tropical environment in Vietnam. Based on criteria concerning geographical location, terrain, and climate at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, they believed that only three regions — Da Lat, Tam Dao, and Sapa — met the conditions to build hill stations.

One of the colonial government's requirements when selecting a location for building hill stations for soldiers, and leisure spots for the elite and officials, was that these places should not be too far from Hanoi and Saigon. Additionally, the selected locations should be accessible via main transportation routes, without significant difficulties in establishing a road to the area. Da Lat, Tam Dao, and Sapa fully met these criteria. Consequently, on December 25, 1898, the French National Assembly approved the Indochinese Federation's issue of a 200,000,000 francs loan for establishing railway lines in Vietnam, including the Sai Gon — Nha Trang — Da Lat line and the Hai Phong — Hanoi — Lao Cai line¹, connecting to Yunnan (China). The emergence of these railway and new road routes connecting the central region with the hill stations increased the persuasiveness to authorities that the journey to these mountain resorts was no longer arduous and perilous. Simultaneously, it also allowed tourists to easily travel to these hill stations using the modern means of transportation available at that time.

Da Lat, Tam Dao, and Sapa are situated on high and medium-altitude mountains. The chosen locations for building the hill stations are halfway up the mountains, at an altitude of around 1,000 meters, depending on the site. To reach these mountains, one must navigate steep cliffs, rugged peaks, magnificent caves, and exquisite waterfalls, surrounded by tropical forests rich in diverse flora and fauna. This was suitable for developing ecotourism, leisure tourism, as well as adventure tourism.

Besides the beautiful scenery, the primary objective in establishing hill stations was to restore the health of Europeans suffering from the climate and diseases of the tropics. Therefore, during the survey process, many locations were excluded from the list for failing to meet the health requirements. In a letter to Alexandre Yersin's mother,² the Lang-Bian mountain range was described by Yersin (where Da Lat is located) as: “There is a vast, desolate plain of about 400 square kilometers with a mountain rising in the middle... I believe this place is good for health because it is wild” [Jennings 2022: 38]. In the quest to find a location for a hill stations in Northern Vietnam, French colonialists surveyed Tam Dao, Ba Vi, and Lang Son. Ultimately, Tam Dao was chosen due to its

¹ On this railway, travelers can stop at Vinh Yen and Lao Cai stations to respectively proceed to Tam Dao and Sapa.

² Dr. A. Yersin, the discoverer of the Lang Biang Highlands (Da Lat) in Central Việt Nam, at the end of the 19th century.

proximity to Hanoi, only 85 km away, and because researchers at the time did not find any traces of malaria there [Notice sur le Tam Dao].

Vietnam, lying entirely within the tropics, has a tropical monsoon climate, profoundly influenced by the sea. The weather is usually hot and humid, with a relatively high average annual temperature and a significant temperature range. Therefore, hill stations, with their moderate altitudes, have a climate similar to temperate regions, making them the top choice for the ruling class (fig. 1).

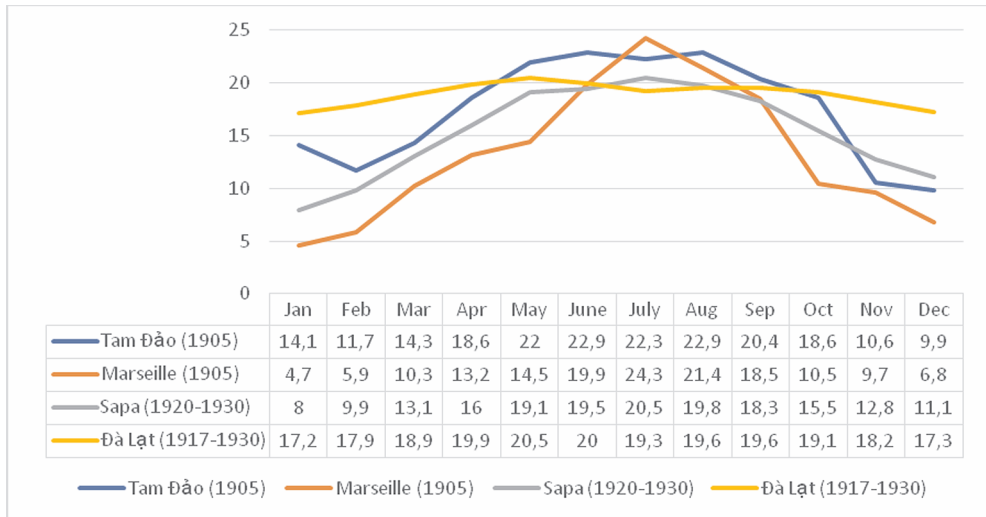


Fig. 1. Temperature in Marseille, Tam Dao, Da Lat, and Sapa during some years in the early 20th century (Unit: °C). *Source:* [Brochier 1906: 23; République Française 1907: 2; Fond du Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine 1932: 7, 13].

The chart indicates that in the early years of the 20th century, the average temperatures in Marseille (France) and Tam Dao, Da Lat, and Sapa (French Indochina) did not show significant differences, especially from June to September. Especially, in July, the temperature in Tam Dao was 22.3 °C, Da Lat was 20.5 °C, Sapa was 19.3 °C, while Marseille had a higher average temperature of 24.3 °C. The similarity in climate and weather was a crucial factor for the French in choosing these areas to establish hill stations to serve Europeans middle and upper classes who were accustomed to the cooler weather of temperate regions.

Tam Dao hill stations: Formation and operation

The process of road construction and development of Tam Dao

Although the French discovered Tam Dao in 1902, but the establishment of a road from Vinh Yen to Tam Dao did not begin until 1904¹. In that year, the Resident Superior of Tonkin requested the establishment of several observation stations in Tam Dao to

¹ The French named Tam Dao as “Thac Bạc” (La Cascade d’Argent).

facilitate the construction of the hill station. Shortly after, an official document from the Governor-General's Office mandated the Public Works Department to establish a road for vehicles connecting Vinh Yen with the area known as “đèo” (situated at an altitude of 300–400m), and to build a bridge over the Thac Bac and improve the path from “đèo” to Tam Dao [Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin 1904–1914a].

After two years of finding a route to Tam Dao, a basic road gradually emerged. However, the Vinh Yen — Tam Dao route, built without thorough research, was only suitable for pedestrians or horseback [Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin 1906]. This situation underscored the urgent need to construct and improve the Vinh Yen — Tam Dao road to promote the development of the hill station. The section from Vinh Yen province to the foot of Tam Dao mountain (the plains road) was gradually reconstructed, meeting the requirements for vehicle travel. However, the road from the mountain base to the hill station (at an altitude of 900m) was still unimproved, making it difficult for vehicles. In response, in January 1906, the Resident Superior of Tonkin requested the Public Works engineers to survey for improving the road leading to Tam Dao to facilitate vehicular travel.

On January 31, 1908, a report on the mountain road along the Vinh Yen — Tam Dao route was submitted to the Resident Superior of Tonkin, assessing the current state of the road and proposing solutions and plans for its improvement. According to this report, the old road was deemed “bad” due to lack of thorough research, and the total reconstruction was considered difficult due to high costs. To find a solution for the road from the mountain base to the hill station, the Chief Engineer proposed to renovate most of the route, completely removing the last 6 km of the old track, and selecting a new route that passed through the villages at the mountain's base, with technical specifications of the road adjusted to better suit the actual conditions. This proposal was approved by the Governor-General of French Indochina and was swiftly implemented under the direction of Resident Tournois.

A letter dated May 20, 1914, from Resident Superior Destenay to the Chairman of the Tam Dao Tourism Syndicate (Le Président au Syndicat d'initiative du Tamdao) provided some clarity on the Vinh Yen — Tam Dao road more than a decade after the establishment of the observation stations. The Public Works Department conducted a survey of the road and concluded that the route from Vinh Yen to the 400m high pass was essentially accessible to automobiles. However, from the 400m pass to the hill station, travelers had to use alternative means of transportation, such as horses, pulled carts, palanquins, or walking [Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin 1904–1914b]. Thus, the Vinh Yen — Tam Dao road was relatively well-constructed, with only about 5km of road from the 400m high area to the hill station remaining quite dangerous and not safe for travelers. In the next time, this road continued to be maintained, upgraded, and perfected, with maintenance costs included in the Tonkin budget (fig. 2).

In the first years of the 20th century, the first road connections from delta areas (Hanoi, Saigon) to the hill stations in Vietnam were established. Reaching these areas requires a combination of both road and rail transportation. Despite a period of stagnation due to the lack of attention from the Indochinese government after Paul Doumer, the period between 1903 and 1914 saw several delegations sent to Da Lat to research the establishment of a route to Da Lat, with construction activities carried out

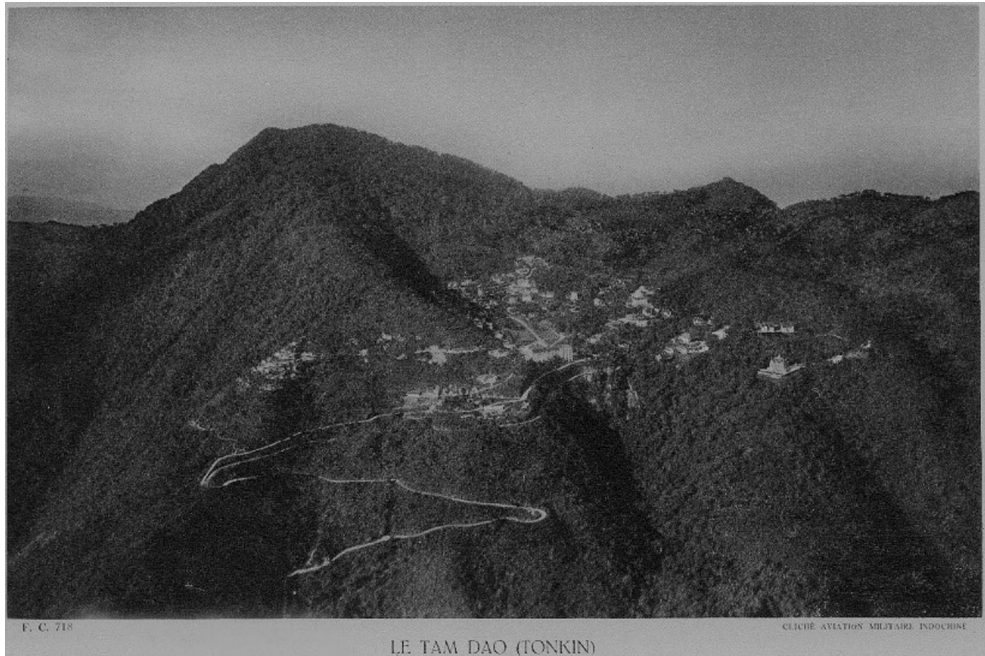


Fig. 2. Photo taken of Tam Dao from above in the early 20th century.

Source: [Demangeon et al. 1934: 28].

on a limited scale. By 1915, from Saigon, one could travel to Da Lat via two routes: by train from Saigon, Ma Lam, or Phan Rang, and then from these locations by road to Da Lat. Although Sapa was chosen as a hill station location later (in 1909), by 1912, a new road connecting Lao Cai to Sapa had been opened, allowing travelers to easily travel from Hanoi to Lao Cai via the Hai Phong — Yunnan railway line, and then another 35km to the hill station. A common feature of these newly opened roads was that in the early days, travelers had to travel by packhorse or horseback. Around the 1920s, these routes were upgraded and expanded to allow automobile travel.

The appearance of Tam Dao hill station

Management

Tam Dao was built to serve as a healthcare and recuperation area for soldiers and a segment of the French population. However, during its construction and exploitation, the purpose of the hill station evolved into a summer retreat for the middle and upper-class Europeans. Strict regulations were implemented to ensure order and maintain the landscape of the area, which fell under the management of three levels of government: The Union of Indochina, the Resident Superior of Tonkin, and the local authority of Vinh Yen Province.

The French conducted thorough surveys and research of the geographical features of Tam Dao mountain and the selected hill station site, leading to a comprehensive planning and accompanying regulations regarding building heights, plot sizes, area of

structures in each plot, building materials, spacing, etc. The decree of September 1, 1923, by the Resident Superior of Tonkin, amended Article II, stating: “Within the Tam Dao hill station, no one is allowed to construct a house or its annexes, undertake restoration, modification, arrangement, or demolition of existing structures without the permission of the authorities”, violators would be subject to penalties [Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin 1923]. The uniformity in planning was a common feature of hill stations in Vietnam during the French colonial period. The initial urban planning of Da Lat was executed following the design of architect Hébrand, who divided Da Lat into three areas: the residential area around Grand Lac (which is Xuan Huong Lake in the present time), the military zone, and the Government Center area (though the establishment of the Government Center was later abandoned). In Sapa, villas were required to face the Hoang Lien Son mountain range, and the military sanatoriums were also uniformly designed as part of an integrated spatial scheme in harmony with the surrounding environment (fig. 3).

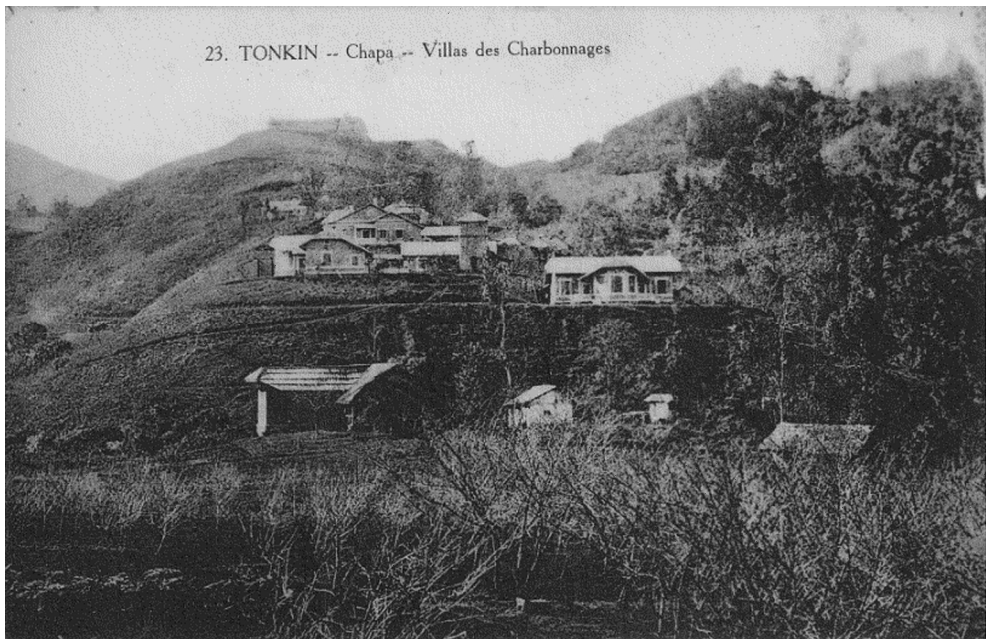


Fig. 3. Villa Charbonnages in Sapa in the 20th century.
Source: [Les entreprises coloniales françaises 2014a].

To ensure aesthetic appeal at the hill station, the authorities paid considerable attention to sanitation and landscape regulations. On June 10, 1917, the Resident Superior of Tonkin issued a decision enacting the Sanitation Regulation in Tam Dao, which strictly governed matters related to pets, waste disposal, etc. Specifically, each morning, homeowners or tenants were required to place one or more garbage bins outside their houses; the design of the bins, the time they were to be left outside, and the types of waste allowed in the bins were also precisely defined. Daily sweeping from

walkways, courtyards, gardens, etc., up to the middle of the street was mandatory. Pouring water onto the street was prohibited. Additionally, the authorities decreed that dogs and cats that could disturb the neighborhood were not to be kept in homes; it was forbidden to let hens and other domestic animals stray into public or private areas; dogs in public areas had to be leashed or muzzled, etc. Anyone violating these regulations faced fines or imprisonment depending on the severity of the infraction [Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin 1914–1925].

Furthermore, the issues of food hygiene and water supply also received attention from the authorities. Most food supplies for the hill station were transported directly from Vinh Yen or other provinces via the Vinh Yen station and then taken up to Tam Dao. In a letter dated November 3, 1919, Resident Bouchet emphasized that Tam Dao needed to ensure the provision of food and groceries to guests independently of Hanoi, with the quality of the food guaranteed fresh and sanitary. Slaughterhouses could be built near the hill station, but livestock had to be kept far from the hill station to prevent diseases [Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin 1919]. The water used in Tam Dao was also strictly controlled by the Pasteur Institute of Microbiology. The institute's staff collected water samples weekly throughout the summer and analyzed them for safety.

At hill stations like Tam Dao, colonial authorities prioritized serving the upper class and military men, ensuring a high quality of life. The stringent controls on planning, architecture, cleanliness, and so on provided guests with a nice vacation experience while simultaneously preserving the area's natural nature. These approaches maximized the benefits of the location while preventing the degradation of the natural environment.

Activities at the hill station

Accommodation facilities. Many villas and hotels have been built atop Tam Dao mountain to provide relaxation, health recovery, and relief from summer heat. As a whole, villas at Tam Dao were divided into two main categories: public and private villas. Statistics on the number of villas in Tam Dao during the French colonial period are conflicting. According to some writings, there were over 100 villas. However, information from the Belleindochine website indicates that by 1935, there were about 60 villas in Tam Dao [La station d'altitude du Tam Dao]. The book *Notice sur le Tam Dao* mentions a figure of 67 [Notice sur le Tam Dao], including both public and private villas. Compared to Da Lat and Sapa, the number of villas in Tam Dao had fewer villas. By 1938, Da Lat had 398 villas, which quickly increased to 427 by 1939 [Hân Nguyễn 1971: 285]. In Sapa, although the number was slightly fewer, there were roughly 200 villas by 1943 [Nguyễn Văn Chính 2016: 499].

In addition to individual accommodation facilities, in 1913, the Thác Bạc Hotel (Hôtel de la Cascade d'Argent) in Tam Dao was inaugurated and opened for use. This was a grand construction, fully equipped with amenities to cater to the leisure and entertainment needs of tourists. Initially, the hotel had 16 rooms, which were later expanded. By 1923, it had 42 rooms [Cucherousset 1923: 1], and by the early 1930s, the number had increased to over 50 rooms. Inside the hotel, there was a large hall that was converted into a dance and bar room, a restaurant, two large garages in the basement, a screening room, etc. In contrast to Tam Dao, which had only one hotel, the tourism



Fig. 4. The Hôtel du Langbian Palace in early 20th century.

Source: [Les entreprises coloniales françaises 2014b].

services in Da Lat and Sapa were much more developed with numerous hotels being built: in Sapa, there were Hôtel du Domaine de Chapa, l'Hôtel Métropole, Central Hotel, etc.; in Da Lat, there were Hôtel du Lac, Hôtel du Langbian Palace (fig. 4), Hôtel du Parc, etc. It can be said that the Hôtel du Langbian Palace was the most luxurious and well-equipped hotel in Indochina at that time. Constructed on a plot exceeding 4 hectares in 1916 and completed in 1922, the hotel featured three above-ground floors and a basement, housing around 40 guest rooms along with numerous amenities such as a tennis court, meeting rooms, a restaurant, a dance hall, a cinema, and more. From the hotel, guests could easily enjoy views of the Lang Biang mountain range or stroll around Xuan Huong Lake. This place could supremely satisfy all leisure and relaxation needs. In 1929, the first luxury hotel in Sapa — l'Hôtel Métropole (a part of the Métropole group) was built with 50 rooms. This difference was largely due to Tam Dao's significantly smaller land area compared to the other two destinations, which presented a challenge for the colonial authorities in enhancing Tam Dao's tourism appeal. Private hotel ownership is also widespread in the two locations mentioned above. Even a Vietnamese guy could operate a 32-bedroom hotel in Sapa in 1937, that's why there were numerous hotels under French ownership.

Basic amenities. To provide utility services for the middle and upper classes, the colonial authorities installed electrical and telephone lines in Tam Dao, and also established a post office operating from May to October. However, due to limitations in infrastructure and geographical and topographical challenges, these facilities were not yet fully operational by the late 1920s. Additionally, the Union of Indochina established

a medical station in Tam Dao, primarily operational during the vacation season. To meet healthcare needs during the summer, several skilled doctors from the delta were dispatched to Tam Dao to treat the upper-class individuals; the costs for their travel and accommodation were covered by the Tonkin budget [Bulletin Administratif du Tonkin 1942: 542—543]. Similar to Tam Dao, Da Lat and Sapa progressively gained access to basic amenities. As a result, beginning in 1925, the French developed a hydroelectric plant in Sapa, a clean water delivery system, and a landline telephone network that connected Sapa and Hanoi. The Union of Indochina carefully researched and built hydroelectric plants in Da Lat, taking advantage of the region's huge waterfalls.

Religious facilities. In 1906, the Union of Indochina built a small wooden church with a thatched roof, mainly to serve the worship needs of Western Christian tourists on weekends. Then in 1937, a new Gothic-style stone church was constructed in Tam Dao, which still exists to this day. From 1931 to 1942, the Da Lat Cathedral (St. Nicholas of Bari Cathedral), also known today as the Chicken Church, was constructed in the Romanesque architectural style. The main entrance of the cathedral faces the Lang Biang mountain range, and it was the Bishop of Saigon, Mossart, who chose the location for this edifice. The French also built a church in Sapa in the Gothic architectural style, primarily using stone, with Ham Rong mountain located behind the church.

Cultural and Recreational Activities. To address public entertainment demands while also protecting and developing the region's natural resources, a park was built in a strategic location within the hill station. The park included safe swings, seesaws, and other play places for the guests' children. Additionally, a nursery garden was established in the northern part of the park, used for experimenting with new plant species suitable for Tam Dao's climate. Moreover, during the vacation season, a tourism company under the direction of the Resident of Vinh Yen organized two festivals annually on July 14 and August 15. A variety of competitions were arranged such as boat racing, swimming, dancing, tennis, etc. Children often participated in dance contests or costume dress-up.

Outdoor Sports Activities. With its advantageous location and terrain, guests in Tam Dao could undertake various hiking and picnic excursions, such as routes to the northern mountain peak, Thai Nguyen province pass, the southern mountain peak, etc. Additionally, the winding roads attracted enthusiasts of racing and speed. In Tam Dao, numerous car and bicycle races, permitted by the Union of Indochina, were held, attracting a large audience. The car races, particularly frequent from the 1920s, mainly from the Linh bridge to the hill station. In Sapa, the development of tourism activities based on natural conditions was emphasized. Several travel companies designed tours from the central resort area to nearby attractions such as the O Quy Ho pass, Muong Hoa valley, Cat Cat village, and others.

Alongside sports activities utilizing the natural terrain, the French colonialism established two tennis courts in Tam Dao, one of which was located next to Thac Bac Hotel. During the summer, these courts often hosted tennis matches that attracted large audiences. Two outdoor swimming pools were also constructed in 1920 and 1934, including one specifically for children. The swimming pool was regularly changed to ensure clarity, cleanliness, and freshness.

Conclusion

The French colonial government established hill stations in Vietnam, including Tam Dao, as part of their attempt to capitalise on the country's natural resources. Although these hill stations did not generate considerable economic returns, they contributed to the development of other economic sectors and served as a “decoy” to entice French investors to Vietnam [Trần Viết Nghĩa 2010: 172]. This made it easier to present the world with a sumptuous colonial image, highlighting the country's economic and technical capabilities, as well as its architectural achievements.

The presence of these hill stations in colonial Vietnam primarily served the interests of a segment of society — the European upper class living and doing business in the colony. They also catered to the Western culture of exploration and adventure. However, the Vietnamese people, who were the actual builders of these hill stations, did not enjoy the fruits of their labor. Inequalities in cultural enjoyment between Vietnamese and French, as well as among Vietnamese themselves, led to increased social conflict.

Although the tourism industry was not fully developed in Vinh Yen and Vietnam during the first half of the 20th century, the emergence of hill stations significantly altered the province's economic structure. Alongside other economic sectors such as plantation agriculture, industry, and banking, tourism activities influenced Vietnam's traditional economy, gradually forming a new economic sector — colonial tourism.

Through this economic transformation, French cultural elements gradually emerged and impacted the cultural and social life of Vinh Yen in particular, and Vietnam in general. This included the introduction of material and spiritual cultural elements such as electrical and telephone lines, clean water supply systems, Western-style villas, and the habit of praying in Christian churches, which gradually appeared in the mountainous areas. However, these cultural elements were gradually modified to align with local culture, demonstrating a process of acculturation in the midland and mountainous regions with hill stations in Northern and Central Vietnam during the colonial era.

The appearance of hill stations in Vietnam during the French Colonial Period laid an important foundation for the birth and development of Vietnam's modern tourism industry. More than a century after their discovery and construction, Tam Dao remains an attractive tourist destination, drawing numerous domestic and international visitors. Alongside the establishment of hill stations in Tonkin and Annam, the colonial authorities also built a relatively comprehensive infrastructure system (electricity, roads, communication, hotels, etc.), creating conditions for future economic and social development in Vietnam.

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