

Reviving French Military Archives: A Study of Ethnic Minority Depictions in Northern Colonial Vietnamese Borderlands

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Abstract

Officials claim that there are 53 national ethnic minority groups living within the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the majority of them living in the northern highlands. Considering that most of these groups do not possess any written texts recounting their history and origins, colonial archival documents containing information that pertains to those populations often represent valuable texts from an academic standpoint. In this thesis, I critically analyze the production of French military archives containing ethnographic information on highland ethnic minorities in Tonkin, Indochina. Investigating the French colonial understandings of upland minorities in northern Vietnam, I undertake a critical discourse analysis of a set of military archives written in 1903 by several French officers. Additionally, thanks to interviews conducted with scholars, I interpret the usefulness of colonial archives for current social science researchers who study topics related to ethnic minority groups in Indochina.

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