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Hubert Bonin, Catherine Hodeir, and Jean-François Klein, eds., *L'Esprit Économique Impérial (1830 – 1970): Groupes de pression & réseaux du patronat colonial en France & dans l'empire* (Paris: Publications de la SFHOM, 2008), 844+ii pp., 70€.

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How much influence did economic lobbies have on the evolution of France's imperial activities? In the 1980s, this question, hotly discussed and perhaps sometimes exaggerated by the neo-Marxist French school of colonial and overseas economic history, was slowly losing importance. However, while broad discussions of this theme became less prominent, there has still been an enormous amount of more individualized research in continuation. Given the scarcity of broader approaches over the last twenty years, the edited volume to be discussed here is an equally enormous response to the need of new conceptualizations.

A first part of this book analyses broader, governmental or ministerial strategies over the nineteenth century. Francis Démier traces the victory of protectionism against tendencies to more liberal economic practices in the French territories under the Restoration (p. 47). The example of Algeria under the two Ministries for Algeria and the Colonies under the Second Empire, discussed by Eric Anceau, shows another opposition: between a rather economically liberal course concentrated on one colony, as exemplified by the Prince Napoleon (p. 57), and a protectionist course focusing on the economic cohesion of the empire, as by his successor, Prosper de Chasseloup (p. 59). Nicole Tixier, for the case of French engagement in China, discusses quite tangibly the evolution of an administration entirely based on consuls and trade agents, towards political goals and objectives of territorial control (pp. 73–75).

This brings us slowly to the 'critical phase' between 1871 and 1914, in which the 'Parti Colonial', as interest group in the National Assembly, had importance in steering France's imperial policy. However, as Julie d'Andurain convincingly demonstrates through the careers and programmes of conservative nobleman Auguste d'Arenberg and liberal Lyon merchant Eugène Etienne, while there was collusion between economic interest and the pro-colonial networks, there is little proof that economic goals eclipsed diplomatic engagement and the wish for *political* expansion (p. 99). Jean Vavasseur-Desperrier indicates the same for Charles Jouart, another key figure in the promotion of colonial expansion. Even with his responsibilities in three different companies, sitting on or leading their boards, Jouart apparently was, above all, an 'homme politique' (p. 133). Xavier Daumalin's analysis of a fourth protagonist, Paul Leroy Beaulieu, makes a case for the flexibility of doctrines within the pro-colonial movement. Leroy-Beaulieu changed from supporter of settlement projects in Algeria to the protection of local cultures, from a liberal economic position to insistence in the necessity of protected colonial markets (p. 109).

Somewhat detached from the interest of the 'parti colonial' is the missionary activity, as discussed by Claude Prudhomme in a broad overview. While the author shows that in some specific cases there was a connection between missionaries and economic engagement, as in Lebanon from 1860, and that missionaries could become economic informants, it is difficult to measure their impact in the local

economies. Their own attempts at the creation of large export plantations, and their eventual contribution to creating an African entrepreneur spirit through preaching the necessity of hard work, might have been influential in particular contexts (pp. 159–160).

Pierre Singaravélou's characterization of the attitudes of economists towards colonial expansion notes them as an originally hesitant group, which was not at all in their majority favourably disposed towards colonial expansion, and stuck to the principle of free trade. However, from 1850 this gradually changed, and this alteration of positions started to spread towards the universities, where preparation courses in colonial economy were given. The latter can be found both at the levels of prestigious universities, including the Sorbonne, and in merchant education, and they helped in modest pro-colonial propaganda (p. 143). The same can be said for the colonial institutes which, starting with Marseille and Bordeaux, appeared in most of the urban centres of metropolitan France. While these centres offered a (tentative) panorama and knowledge about the empire, including in some cases language training, Laurent Morando holds that with the exception of Marseille, the propaganda of these institutions did not really reach the broader public, and that there was a clear lack of co-ordination between the individual institutes (p. 217).

A good part of the book –its third major section –shows the institutions of mobilisation in the metropole, particularly the *instituts coloniaux*. In Bordeaux, the importance of overseas investment was quite strong, especially through the activities of merchant company Maurel & Prom. Their presence in West Africa during the late nineteenth century had an impact and was promoted by different governors and high-level administrators. However, according to Yves Péhaut, the case of Maurel & Prom's Senegalese activities shows that even a privileged company ran into conflict with the colonial administration over questions of tariffs (p. 235). Back at the Gironde, Hubert Bonin concedes the existence of an 'imperial spirit' among the Bordeaux elites, dominant families involved in the overseas trades, and who invested in the infrastructure of the colonies. Given the considerable percentage that the overseas trade had in the overall trade pattern of the city's elites, there was satisfaction with the existence of the imperial structures, although Bordeaux merchants concentrated particularly on Morocco. Bonin insists, nevertheless, that the overseas trade remained always second to the wine trade, and that the weight of Bordeaux mercantile interest towards the political class is rather questionable (pp. 262–264).

Guy Durand confirms similar patterns for Marseille, for which he sees the importance of the colonial trade at only one fourth of the whole trade volume in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, Durand describes the Marseille elites as cut off from the centres of parliamentary decision over colonial questions, where they could only introduce their own proposals under particular circumstances. In the case of the *ville phocéenne*, there was no contradiction between a vote for free trade from the 1870s (that changed former, protectionist attitudes) and support for colonial expansion (p. 318). Xavier Daumalin demonstrates for the 1930s that these attitudes continued among the olive oil producers and the trade companies based in Marseille, particularly as these suffered from the preferential policies decreed by the French government, which were to save the colonial production schemes. The trade companies, like the Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale, had to adapt to the new wave of protectionism – their directors did this quite reluctantly (pp. 295–296). Apparently, indeed, in the interwar period, there was no strong Marseille lobby to redirect French policies. On the other hand, in the nineteenth century, it was the strong hand of the state that promoted the position of the city through tariff exemptions. Competitors like Toulon had no real possibility to stand against these advantages, as Ivan Kharaba indicates (p. 323).

The companies of France's north did their best to secure themselves some colonial markets, as Jean-François Eck discusses. A geographical society, associations, and study voyages to sub-Saharan Africa were to help the business, and there was a certain interest, particularly after the export of cotton threads to overseas territories had established itself. The patrons of northern companies attempted to build up a

common front in order to lobby politicians, but this failed over internal fissures, including between local chambers of commerce, such as those of Lille and Tourcoing (p. 340). More successful were apparently the merchants of Le Havre, as Claude Malon makes clear. With a strong chamber of commerce and a colonial institute founded in 1929, they obviously managed to create a rather efficient network. They operated with a clear position against protectionism, and an energetic demand for access to the colonial markets that excluded any industrialization of the colonies, particularly in Indochina (pp. 384–385).

Lyon was an old overseas trading city, due to the silk trade. For the larger part of the nineteenth century, its elites did not favour any colonization measures. However, the support of local entrepreneur and politician Edouard Aynard for Guy Thiers's colonialist liberals changed these attitudes. The Lyonnais transformed from a lobby regarding colonial expansion as a necessary evil, to convinced adherents of the imperialist programme (p. 377). Even so, as Jean-François Klein emphasizes, they remained obliged to free trade, and to co-operation with other colonial powers whenever similar behaviour was economically advantageous, such as with British merchants (p. 372). Mulhouse finally, as the capital of a major exporting region of cotton products, had a curious relation to the empire, interrupted by its cession to the German Empire in 1871. In the 1920s, as pointed out by Nicolas Stoskopf, the overseas export trade in cotton products departed again from zero, but after the Second World War, it was in full bloom, and even survived the independences (p. 405).

Finally, there was corporatist initiative in the capital, through the yet under-researched Chamber of Commerce of Paris. Philippe Lacombrade shows that this institution had close contacts with politicians and officials— but it remains questionable how far this favoured France's imperial policy. While French consuls were strong among the members of the chamber, very few were actively involved in colonial ventures; while the institution subsidized economic activities, the colonies remained marginal in these activities at least before 1900. After 1900, the interest of the Paris Chamber of Commerce in colonial economies became stronger, but its members were notably opposed to the official political line with regard to common tariffs, which was regarded as nefarious. All in all, the members of the chamber acquiesced in France's imperial policy, without ever having a strong influence in any part of it (pp. 419–420).

Broadening the picture, the *Comité de Forges* must not be omitted in this metropolitan panorama, as it was reputed to be a particularly active lobby group to promote colonial expansion and administrative regulations, in favour of the interest of metal producers. According to Jean-Marie Moine, the reality appears to have been more complex. While individual companies, such as Schneider & Co. —basically through the *Compagnie marocaine*—and the *Fondéries de Pont-à-Moussan* in Tunisia and Algeria, and Wendel as investor in Tonkin, had some impact, the lobby group itself was a rather weak actor. It was not overwhelmingly represented in the French parliament, in spite of the presence of Florent Guillaïn and some others, and activities targeting industrial development in North Africa or in Indochina came late and had little success (pp. 488, 512). The same marginal role can be pointed out for the Chinese market, and for the Trans-Sahara Railway, on which there was such abundant debate among the French public (p. 516).

Hubert Bonin also questions the role of the French banks, and of their corporatist institutions. The *Comptoir National d'Escompte de Paris* (CNEP) had its links to French colonial policy through some of its presidents, Emile Mercet and Ernest Denormandie, far later in the decolonization phase by Henri Bizot, but its impact as a pressure group appears to have remained small. With regard to metropolitan banks with overseas engagement, it is often difficult to identify the role of “imperial bankers”, as Bonin calls them. For the *Haute Banque*, as proprietor of the *Banque de l'Union Parisienne*, the existence of a “specialised group” seems to be difficult to show (pp. 448–450). For Paribas, this is also complicated, but the *Banque Industrielle de Chine* was an important asset for this metropolitan bank, and the administrative council of Paribas also showed clearer objectives with respect to the *Banque d'Etat de Maroc*, which they wished to take over, and with regard to interest in Lebanon and Madagascar. The

Banque d'Indochine also exemplifies the importance of "imperial bankers". Even so, Bonin regards the potential of the CNEP and the individual banks to exert pressure on French governments as relative, while the state intervened increasingly in the banking sector from the Great Depression of the 1930s.

More curious still are the attempts of several protagonists in French industry to formulate joint initiatives with German industrial forces, exemplified through the activities of the Comité Franco-Allemand d'Information, the Commission Economique Franco-Allemande, or joint participation in the Chambre de Commerce Internationale. French economic leaders and politicians, in these contexts, were quite open to respond positively to German demands for the restitution of colonies, for tariff unions or multinational colonial exploitation that allowed for German participation. Following Anne Lacroix-Riz, this might well imply that a part of France's economic elites was detached enough from national goals to further the interest of their companies even if this meant losing territorial ground to the archenemy (p. 533).

Somewhat disconnected from most other contributions stands André Nouschi's account on the activity of the state-owned petrol and gas company, ELF-ERAP, after 1966. While it is interesting, as a potential late and neocolonial example of economic imperialism, to see the transformation of the old Bureau de Recherches de Pétroles founded under the first de Gaulle government, into ELF under the de Gaulle government of the 1960s, this account is rather descriptive and does not offer deep insights, due to a lack of sources. Nonetheless, with ELF being a successor to earlier ventures, it also shows a type of economic activity in which state actors employ economic engagement to reach political goals, in a mixture of public and private (p. 557).

The fourth part of the book finally leads us more closely to another key question, namely the levers accessible to local economic actors that would make politicians represent their interest.

The islands of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean often had a particular exportable resource that conditioned their exploitation by colonial firms. Yann Bencivengo's contribution on the company Nickel in New Caledonia, controlled by the Rothschild Group, shows that engineers and advocates of the society entered into colonial institutions. Even more, in Paris, the administrator of the company was able to make the then Secretary of the Colonies, Etienne, a supporter of the company's attempts to secure prisoners as a workforce for the mines (p. 438).

On Reunion, to the contrary, political interventions often resulted in weakening leading economic actors. As Félix Torres analyses, the Kervéguen family, which dominated the production of sugar cane in the nineteenth century, was severely hit by a process started by the colonial authorities, who attacked the illegal introduction of foreign currency by the owners of the business (p. 676). In the interwar period, following a slump and a relative boom of sugar cane, Léonus Bénard, great concession holder but supporter of production limits, only managed to stay in a leading position because his rival, René Payet, was brought down after the Second World War as a Vichy sympathizer (pp. 680–681). Ironically, European Economic Community quotas saved Reunion's sugar and allowed a modernization which the colonial system had rather stalled than promoted (p. 684).

In Indochina, the chances for strong collusion between local French owners and the colonial state were quite promising, as becomes clear from Gilles de Gantès's contribution on Cochinchina. Here, the French merchants were initially marginal within an international group of traders, which—even under the French protectorate—married into Indochinese families. With the new civil colonial government from the 1870s, new players emerged, such as the bankers Kohn & Reinach, who, in co-operation with the governors and officials, advocated colonial expansion and introduced metropolitan capital (p. 743).

Altogether, however, this process, as a trend between 1850 and 1954, remained limited, even though the interwar period brought a new impact of transforming the colony into a showpiece. This trend was

supported by a shift of capital investment into the Indochinese market, where companies in the export agriculture sector were now financed by the Banque d'Indochine, the Banque Industrielle de Chine (later bought by Paribas), the Banque de l'Union Parisienne, and others. While the banks, from 1928, became increasingly powerful within the agricultural companies, there was never a common front that could have exerted power as a lobby. Patrice Morlat demonstrates that, instead, there was a constant antagonism between alliances of banks against their competitors (p. 628). Rubber, as a particularly important agricultural trade good, attracted a number of big players on Indochinese territory. The Banque d'Indochine financed local concession companies, as did the Société Française Financière et Coloniale. While there were some colonial officials sitting on the boards of these local rubber companies, we do not seem to find unconditional support for their ventures, as pointed out by Marianne Boucheret. To the contrary, the then Governor-General of Indochina, Albert Sarraut, and other colonial administrators were negative about permanent and large concessions, and led a policy of limiting these concessions in scope and duration. The Syndicat des Planteurs, a lobby organisation of the French planters in Indochina, only saved a compromise that spared them the worst, and negotiated the creation of a compensation fund during the Great Depression (p. 725). Even so, the success of the colonial pressure group was limited, as is confirmed on the level of commerce by Claire Villemagne, in her article on the Chambre de Commerce de Tonkin. She emphasises the heightened level of tension between European merchants in Indochina and the local colonial administration. The former led a vigorous campaign against imperial tariffs and the introduction of monopoly general stores, and feared the issue to be manipulated by metropolitan producers, namely from Rouen (p. 711).

During the war of independence in Southeast Asia, there was the question of adapting currency politics, about which companies operating on the ground were quite concerned. The devaluation of the *piaster*, as colonial currency, was opposed by the representatives of these companies, but there is no indication that they attempted to sabotage the process, as Daniel Leplat points out. If anything, the currency politics of the 1950s make obvious that the administration dominated over private economic interest (pp. 183–184). This view is seconded by Hugues Tertrais, who shows that while the war in itself was interesting to companies involved in arms production, many other groups and companies remained in a 'passive role' (190).

Colette Dubois's analysis of the activities of Charles Michel-Côte in Djibouti exemplifies another facet of entrepreneurial choices within the French empire: personal attachment and its consequences. Michel-Côte, veteran of the French expansionist campaigns in Northeast Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, then banker of different metropolitan institutes, rediscovered Djibouti as a principal outlet for his activities. Through maritime and railway engagement, his company, dependent on the Banque d'Indochine, was central in local economic life, and metropolitan interest dominated important infrastructural decisions, such as the construction of a new deepwater port. After the Second World War, economic conditions in Djibouti were influenced by the personal rivalry between Michel-Côte and Antonin Besse, the latter attempting in vain to supplant French Djibouti as principal harbour for import and export ventures towards Ethiopia, by the Eritrean port of Assab (p. 576).

The analysis of Mohamed Lazhar Garbi focuses more strongly on the broader financial situation of an individual territory –Tunisia –pointing out that the particular status of the protectorates, treated according to a 1918 law in financial terms as foreign territories, did not attract a clear initiative of the main private economic players. Infrastructure projects rarely found the direct interest of the latter, with participation being shown, mainly, by smaller banks and companies from Lyon and Marseille, and by investors from the Eastern Algerian département of Constantine (pp. 569–570). Catherine Hodeir takes up the vision of company owners with regard to another critical period, after the Second World War and with growing fears of revolt, in Tunisia and Morocco. Up to 1954, protagonists such as Edmond Giscard d'Estaing did not believe into a nationalist uprising, and most French businessmen stood against demands that they saw as Communist propaganda. Nevertheless, from 1954, they actively sought a 'realistic position', which meant colonial retreat linked to guarantees from new autonomous (or

independent) governments in both protectorates (p. 603). Leading businessmen would indeed be quite content with the conditions maintained for them in the early years after decolonization. The interaction of the French business community with colonial administrators during the transition process demonstrates, furthermore, that while some high officials, such as Gilbert Grandval in Morocco, were interested in co-operation with the *patronat* and eager to protect the latter's interests, many were not; the impact of the lobbies was relative (p. 613).

Reflections on the 'imperial spirit' in overseas regions that knew French political engagement but not a proper colonial presence, are important in order to contrast these experiences with those of colonial territories. Egypt is an interesting case for showing the slow nationalisation of French business ventures around and after independence. While the French companies in this semi-colonial territory under British control were initially typically colonial in their structure, in co-operation with Christian and Jewish minorities in Egypt's urban centres, there was a certain take-off of the activity of Egyptian elites with their participation in the Société Khédivale in 1922, where they first represented roughly 25% of the members. Followed by the Fédération des Industries d'Égypte, the Egyptian role became more prominent in the 1930s, and was increasingly combined, first with anti-'Syrian', i.e., anti-Lebanese agitation, and, later, a political campaign which from 1947 led into a phase of European retreat, as Caroline Piquet makes clear (pp. 643–644).

Rang Ri Park-Barjot analyses the investment made by the Régie Générale de Chemins de Fer and the Société de Construction de Batignolles, which both promoted projects for railway construction in Yunnan, in Southern China. The Service de Travaux Publics supported the steps made within this infrastructure project, which was judged to be of strategic importance by the French Colonial Ministry. Even so, the consortium that included representatives of both companies remained underfunded. The lip-service paid by colonial politicians did not reflect itself in more engaged public investment (p. 667).

To be certain, *L'Esprit Economique Impérial* is a vital book. Its articles are generally of a good standard, and they give manifold inspirations to readers who wish to become familiar with economic ventures in France's colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The reader obtains denser information about a number of areas of research, for example on typical Third Republic careers of politicians linked to economic interest, and on the regional impact of pro-colonial economic institutions of different regions of France (including, for instance, the *Comité des Forges* or the attitudes of French economists as a professional group). It also gives information on new research on other regions, although in the form of particular cases, which do not always link up easily to the more general trend. Much of the research present here is nonetheless quite important, and will need to be referred to in any future activities of research on economic processes in the French colonial empire.

This book is nevertheless difficult to handle. Catherine Hodeir, in her final chapter, attempts to press the very diverse results presented by the authors into a stream of argumentation, but one may ask if the coherence of the articles could not have been greater, had the authors all responded to the same guiding questions. This can also be seen in Jean-Francois Klein's concluding remarks, which—while giving an inspiring picture of the networks of economic actors towards the colonial state, described here as *linocratie*—normally refer to only a small and very selective part of the results given in the articles. It is also regrettable that Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Jacques Marseille do not point out more clearly and in more detail, if and how the new results of this book might give views to influence the historiography of French colonial economy with regard to their own interpretations from the 1970s and 1980s. It is interesting to have their voices as *grands témoins*—but their own voices could have given stimulating remarks on the more concrete results of the research discussed, which is barely the case.

This being said, *L'Esprit Economique Impérial* is a huge undertaking, and one that is inspiring and fertile. In spite of all difficulties in getting through to the common research agenda of its contributors, the book will be indispensable for any specialist in French colonial history, and in the history of colonial

economies, and interesting for students of the French economy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It will hopefully stimulate the publication of future monographs, which will then present a more compact revision of France's imperial economic structure.

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