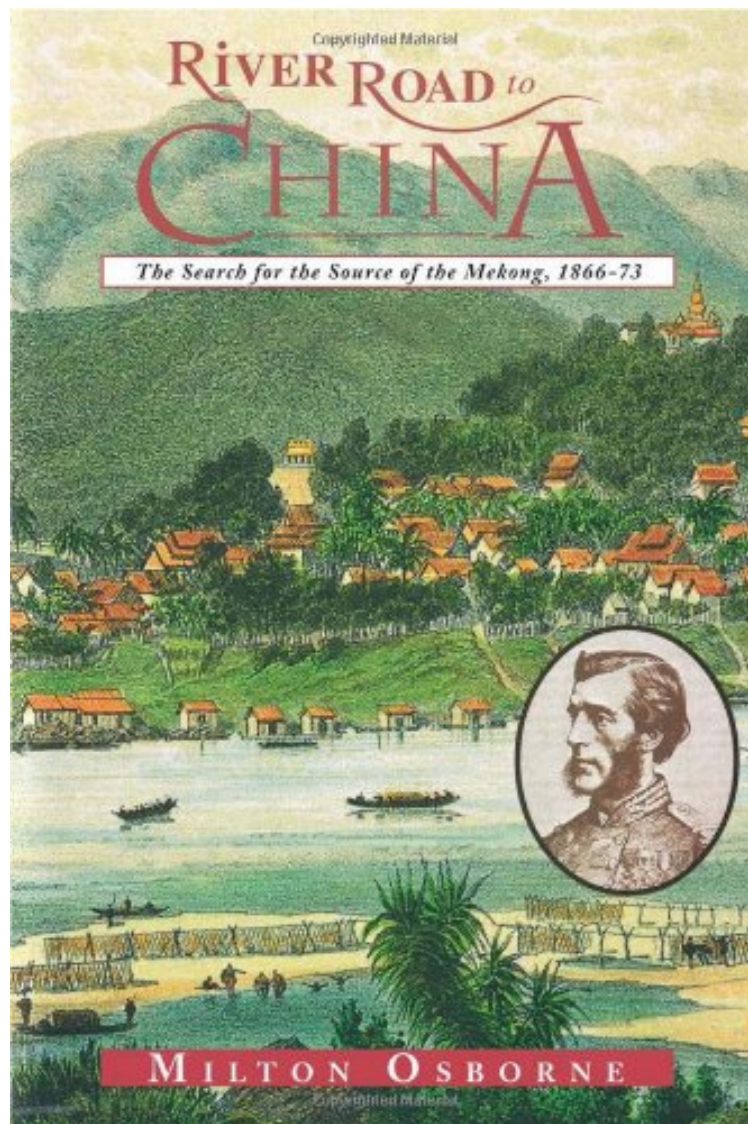


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River Road to China: The Search for the Source of the Mekong, 1866-73 (Search for the Sources of the Mekong, 1866-73)

Milton Osborne

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Milton Osborne : River Road to China: The Search for the Source of the Mekong, 1866-73 (Search for the Sources of the Mekong, 1866-73) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised River Road to China: The Search for the Source of the Mekong, 1866-73 (Search for the Sources of the Mekong, 1866-73):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Journey to the source...By John P. Jones IIIChina is ascendant again; Milton Osborne's book is a valuable contribution on a time, 150 years ago, when the West also looked to China, and its perceived riches, as well as the "markets" of all those people. Professor Osborne is Australian, with an academic background which he complemented with years of "hands-on" experience in South East Asia. He has written a solid, workmen-like account of the French expedition, which commenced in 1866, to explore the course of the Mekong River, the world's 6th largest river in terms of volume, to its source in China. The fundamental objective was to determine if the river was navigable by commercial ships all the way to those fabled riches of China. The book was originally published in 1974, before the end of the American debacle in Indochina, and thus there is some hesitancy in the account as to its impact on present circumstances, which was addressed to some extent in the author's postscript of 1996. In 1866 only "Cochin-China," the lower fourth of present day Vietnam was a French colony, although others were attempting to extend French influence into the other regions of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and certainly the commissioning of the expedition was viewed as a vehicle to extend this influence. The expedition was led by Doudart de Lagree, who was to die of fever in China (and not in Cambodia, to correct the posted review), and seconded by Francis Garnier, along with four other principal Frenchmen, and a supporting "cast" of around 15 others. Osborne does a good job depicting the personalities of the trip's leadership, and their inevitable conflicts, some of which reverberate today via their descendants. It was unknown at the time that drinking water should be boiled to prevent various intestinal diseases, and those, coupled with malaria, as well as the leaches, would be a constant companion on the journey. Two rather astonishing events occurred early in the expedition. First, it was commenced without proper visas to enter China - it was anticipated that they would be forwarded by messenger, but since they didn't arrive, it meant that Garnier walked virtually the entire way back, from there resting spot in southern Laos. Secondly, around the same area, it was apparent that the Mekong had significant rapids that would have precluded its use by commercial ships and there would be no easy "fix." So why continue? The explanation was much the same as why one climbs Everest: "Because it is there." It took almost 2 years for the remnants of the expedition to make their way back to Saigon, via the Yangtze River to the Pacific Ocean. The last 40 or so pages describes the exploration of the Red River - yet another possible means of reaching China (as well as extending French influence) which was undertaken by Garnier in 1873, in a "semi-official" capacities. Again there were colliding egos, in particular with Jean Dupuis, one of the hustlers and con-men that inhabit the edges of aspiring Empires. Garnier was to die on this expedition, in a foolish military action against those "natives" who could easily be beaten by Western military might. Hum. One of the earliest casualties of the Indochina Wars. The book is also accompanied by some excellent drawings and color pictures, primarily done by expedition member, and "resident" artist, Delaporte. The one on epiphytic orchids in Laos is particularly arresting. Overall, a solid, well-researched 5-star history of this fascinating expedition, which makes these French explorers, the equivalent of Livingston or Burton, accessible to the English-speaking world. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must for Mekong River travelers By Connie Comfort Milton Osborn's account of the French explorers setting out from Viet Nam to explore the upper reaches of the Mekong River is both engrossing and sad. In the 19th Century, it appears, there was a mad scramble to explore every nook and cranny of the earth for commercial exploitation and for glory. The explorers in this book never achieved either but their story is well told by Osborn who has a detailed knowledge of the cultures of South East Asia as well as an understanding of the period. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. what can i say? needed it for school By Bai xin for school purposes

In 1866, six Frenchmen set out on a dangerous mission to seek a trade route up the Mekong. During the two years that followed, they would journey through more than four thousand miles of unmapped territory, from the tropical heat of the swamps of Vietnam and Cambodia to the bitter cold of the mountain ranges of southwestern China. Their historic expedition is the dramatic subject of *River Road to China* by world-renowned Southeast Asia expert Milton Osborne. Selected by *The New York Times* as one of the best books of 1975 when it was originally published, this edition has been updated to include a new postscript by the author and more than thirty full-color illustrations by the expedition's artist.

.com In the mid-19th century, the major powers of Europe descended on East Asia, determined to forge empires. The French, who came to what is now Vietnam and Cambodia, sought to join their holdings there to the scattered French colonies farther north in China, but they were faced with a problem: the Mekong River, which laces through Indochina, was not mapped. In the dry season, little more than a wide stream, but in the monsoon season "an uncontrollable torrent, spilling over its banks to turn hundreds of square miles of dry land into a massive patchwork of temporary lakes," the Mekong was a formidable obstacle. In 1866 a party of six French explorers, led by a young officer named Doudart de Lagre and his lieutenant, Francis Garnier, set out to travel the river to its unknown source. Though de Lagre died of fever in Cambodia, the remaining French explorers, led by Garnier, ventured onward into the mountains of southwestern China. Garnier and his men traveled across more than 4,000 miles of uncharted territory in their two-year journey, but never reached the Mekong's source, which remained unknown until just recently. Turning defeat to advantage, however, they mapped major portions of the then-unknown Red River, opening it to French trade.

First published in 1975, Milton Osborne's adventure-filled narrative of their dangerous journey is a fine contribution to the history of exploration, and makes for enjoyable reading. --Gregory McNamee
From the Back Cover
A New York Times Notable Book of the Year
In the mid-nineteenth century, no one in the Western world knew the full course-or indeed the source-of the great Mekong River in Southeast Asia. In 1866 six Frenchmen set out on a dangerous mission to seek a trade route up the Mekong. During the two years that followed, they would journey through more than four thousand miles of unmapped territory, from the tropical heat of the swamps of Vietnam and Cambodia to the bitter cold of the mountain ranges of southwestern China. Their historic expedition is the dramatic subject of world-renowned Southeast Asia expert Milton Osborne's *River Road to China*. This updated edition includes a new postscript by the author and more than thirty full-color illustrations by the expedition's artist. Osborne's book is not only a stirring narrative account of one of the most celebrated expeditions in a great age of exploration-it is a story of the courage, endurance, and determination of six men in the face of unpredictable dangers and near-insurmountable odds. "A compelling, finely researched account of an adventure that was hailed as one of the grandest explorations of the nineteenth century." -The Washington Post "[The] party's advance up on the Mekong is the highest of high adventure. . . . [Osborne's] documentation is flawless."-The New Yorker "As exciting as it is historically illuminating . . . A tale of heroism that has seldom been duplicated, spurred by the continuing, fatal attraction of the 'Great River.'" -The New Republic "With personalities writ large and exploits gruesome enough to satisfy the most jaded tourist . . . Osborne introduces us to a party of French explorers whose attempt to follow the Mekong to its source should rank them with Livingston and Burton."-The New York Times Book
Milton Osborne is the author of seven books on Southeast Asia, including *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* and *Southeast Asia: An Illustrated Introductory History*. A former academic, diplomat, and United Nations adviser, he has been a full-time writer and Southeast Asia consultant since 1993.