

# GIS Approaches to Early Vietnamese Christianity

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# Scope of Project

- “Spiritual history” of early Vietnamese Christian community, 1615-1665
- Who were the Vietnamese Christians? Where did they live?
- How did they understand Christian doctrine? How did Christianity affect their approach to living?
- How did Christians interact with non-Christians? With the government?

# Brief Chronology

- 17<sup>th</sup> century: Vietnam divided into Tonkin (North) & Cochinchina (South)
- 1615: Jesuits arrive in Cochinchina – eventually convert 50,000+
- 1626: Jesuits arrive in Tonkin – current figures place eventual conversions at 350,000+
- 1665: Jesuits expelled from both regions & later replaced by French missionary society (MEP)

# GIS-Applicable Areas of Inquiry

- At what rate & in what numbers did the Christian population(s) grow, as an aggregate by kingdom & specifically by locality?
- How many missionaries were preaching in each kingdom/locality at a given time? Effect on conversion statistics?
- What proportion of the population converted?
- How many churches were built? When and where?
- When and where did official repressions of Christianity occur? Effect on conversions?
- Effect of warfare on conversions? Of natural disasters?

# Methods & Challenges of Applying GIS

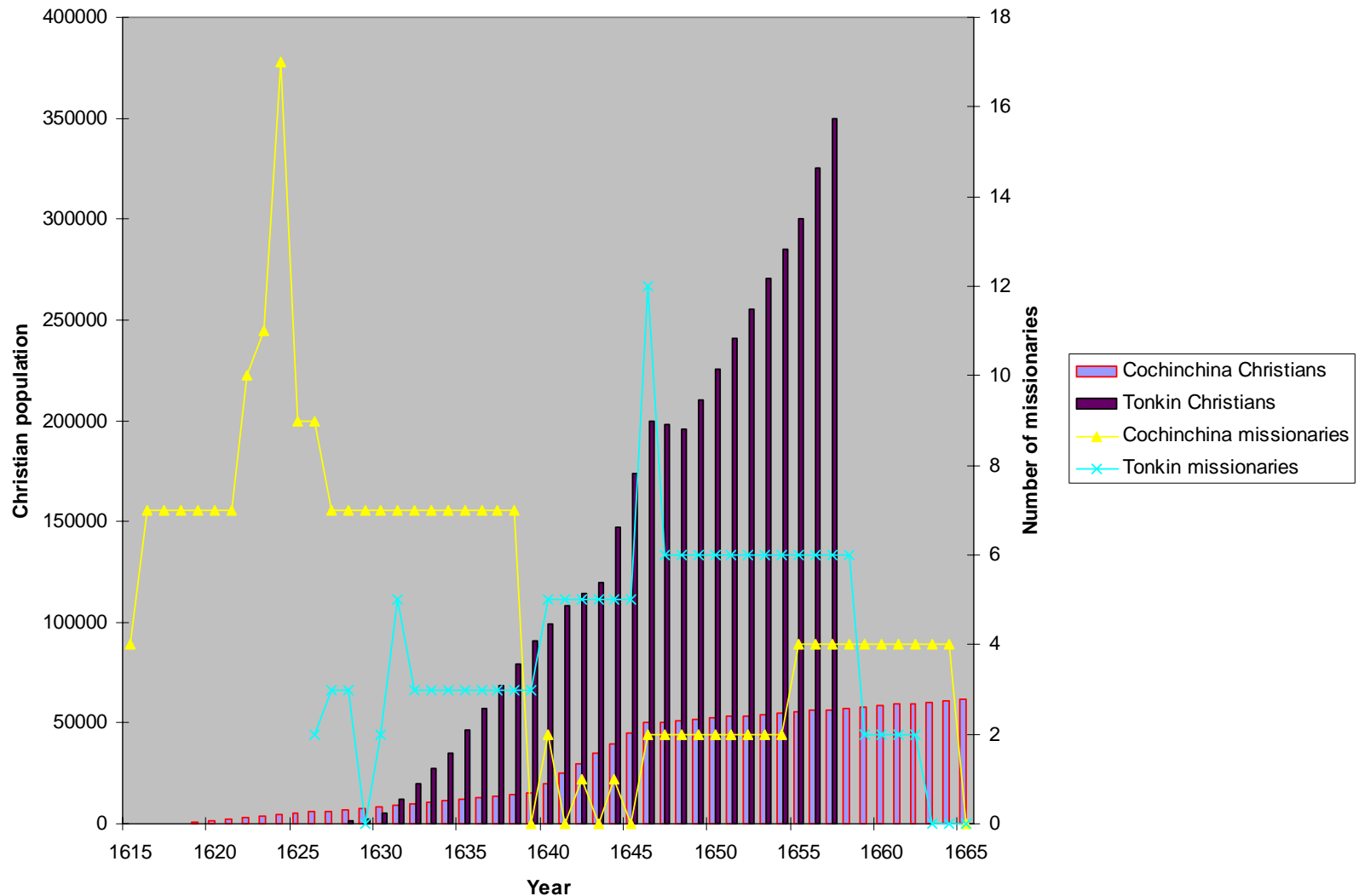
- Nature of missionary conversion reporting lends hard data only for aggregate numbers
  - 2 large polygons
  - Little sense of local variation or areas of Christian concentration
  - Data gaps
  - Possibility of estimating local numbers by dividing extra conversions proportionally based on known figures?
  - One Tonkin or 50?

# Challenges 2

- Where to show missionaries & churches without cluttering map?
  - Were they all equal?
  - How to reflect ephemerality of churches & movements of missionaries?
- Repressions, wars, etc. as flashes and/or callout boxes
- Is GIS superior to traditional graphs & charts in this case?

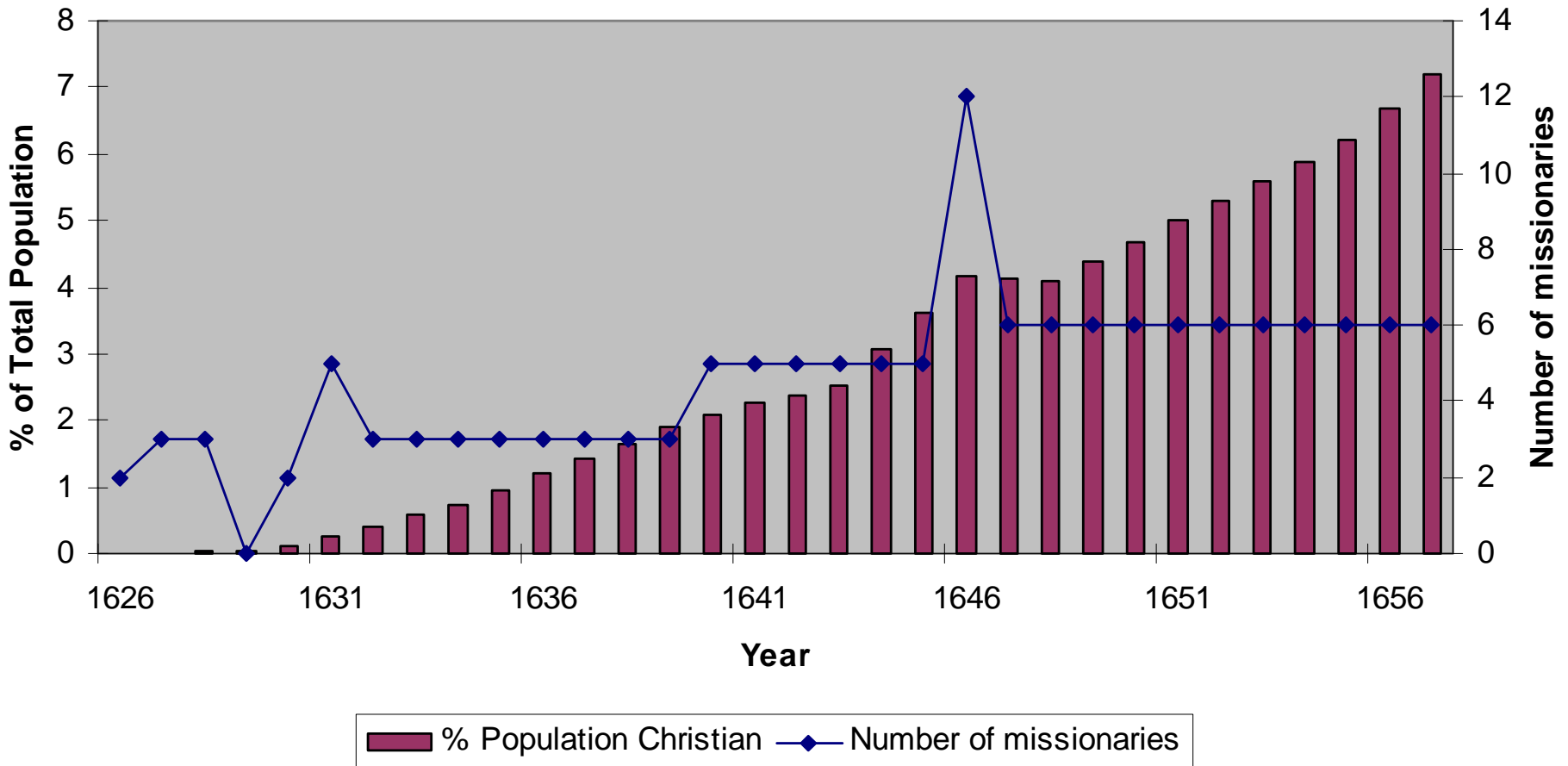
# Traditional Chart Ex. 1

## Viet Christian Population vs Missionary Presence



# Traditional Chart Ex. 2

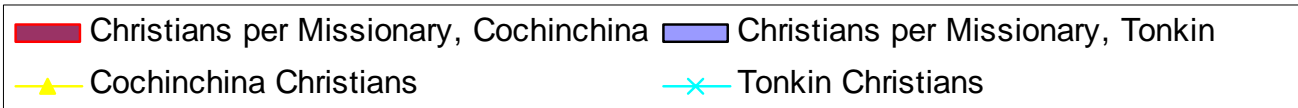
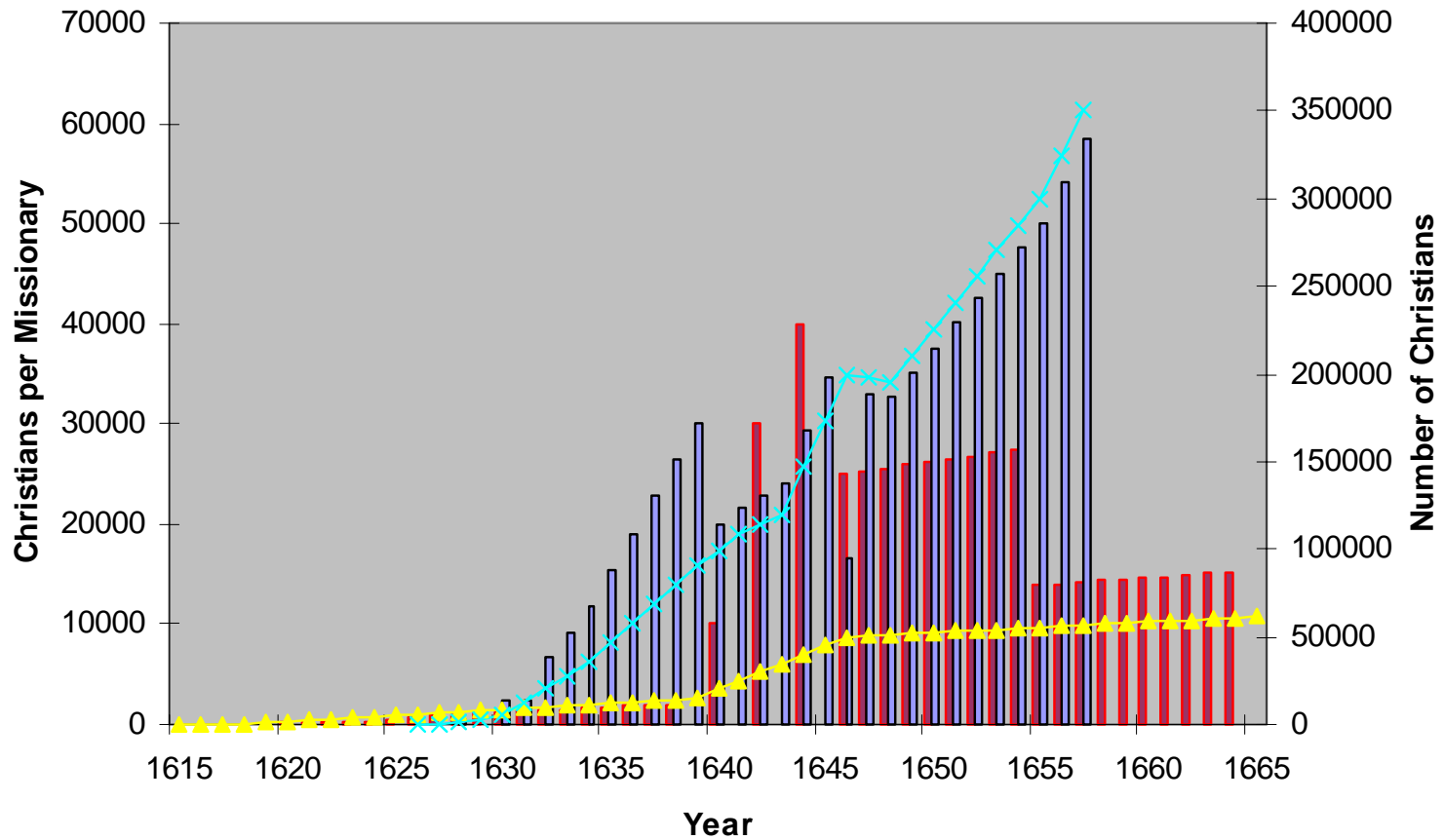
## Christians as Percentage of Tonkin Population





# Traditional Chart Ex. 3

## Christian populations vs Christian-Missionary Ratios



# Further (Interactive) GIS Possibilities

- Hyperlink to known Christian texts
  - Problems of computerized “n«m” script
  - OCR issues
- Hyperlink to images of Christian artifacts now being catalogued
- Hyperlink to biographies of missionaries
- How useful would it be?

# Interim Conclusions

- One tool to locate & quantify Christian populations
- Helps to concretize information about a subject that tends toward the nebulous & impressionistic
- Suggests areas of textual inquiry & improves historian's ability to weigh & analyze historical texts
  - Highlights information gaps
  - Forces question of answerable vs. unanswerable areas of inquiry
- May make clear causal relationships between external variables & conversion patterns
  - Need for collaboration to avoid duplication of work
- Can validate and call into question individual historical actors' claims

# Engaging Related Viet Studies Discussions

- Suggests further area of external influence in 17<sup>th</sup> century Viet society & culture
- Questions stereotypical images of Tonkin as conservative & isolated vs. more cosmopolitan Cochinchina
  - Martial atmosphere?
  - Cham influence?
- Adds foreign voices to period perceptions of kingdom boundaries & locations