

## A Preliminary Inquiry into the Wartime Material Losses of Chinese in Vietnam, 1941–1947

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### Abstract:

This article investigates the damage inflicted on Chinese society in Vietnam by World War II (1941–1945) and the independence war that followed (1945–1954). It is based on information in the diplomatic archives of the Republic of China held in the National Archives of Taiwan. During World War II, Chinese were not only immigrants subject to French colonial law, but also Japanese economic hostages. The Japanese were also able to profitably exploit the political division between the anti-Japanese government of Chiang Kai-Shek (蔣介石) in Chungking and the pro-Japanese Nanking government of Wang Jing-Wei (汪精衛) to manipulate the Chinese in Vietnam. In the First Indochinese War Chinese became targets of both antagonists, in the south especially. This article considers Chinese relations with the Vietnamese, Japanese, and French, and makes a preliminary inventory of Chinese material losses in these two conflicts.

### Keywords:

Overseas Chinese in colonial Vietnam; Japanese occupation of French Indochina; war damage in Vietnam; World War II in Vietnam; First Indochinese War

### Introduction

The study of Chinese people in Vietnam has been mostly limited to their economic achievements and to descriptions of their positive activities. If we take the World War II period as an example, previous studies have reported on the generous donations from Chinese in Vietnam, their return to China to join volunteers' corps, or their brave acts of defiance as guerrillas against the Japanese occupiers.<sup>1</sup> Few have focused on what Chinese living in Vietnam suffered during the war. Even though the Japanese only occupied all of Vietnam in March 1945, they had subjugated Bắc Kỳ in September 1940 and Nam Kỳ in July of the following year; while the French colonial administration was restricted by the Japanese, it still continued to function. This meant that Chinese living there throughout the war were faced with the difficult prospect of having to survive under two colonial masters during a wartime economy. Then soon after the world war ended, the anti-French war of independence flared up and local Chinese were swept into the conflict between the Vietminh (League for the Independence of Vietnam) and the French. As a result, they suffered more terrible losses, both material and otherwise.

Through documentary research in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), we can begin to understand more of this little studied facet of Chinese wartime experience here. This article contributes to our better understanding of Chinese experience in those hard times by quantifying the losses they sustained as a consequence of wartime events beyond their control.

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1. Examples include 楊建成編,《南洋華僑抗日救國運動始末(1937-1945)》[ed. Yang Jian-Cheng, *The Complete Story of the Anti-Japanese Movement and the National Salvation of Chinese in Southeast Asia*], (臺北:中華學術院南洋研究所, 1983) 227 頁。鄭國華、林謙、陳宗焯編,《鐵血雄風:泰國華僑抗日實錄》[ed. Zheng Guo-Hua, Lin Qian, Chen Zong-Zhuo, *Veritable Record of the Anti-Japanese Movement of the Chinese of Thailand*], (泰國:黃埔校友會, 1991) 514 頁。華僑協會總會編,《華僑與抗日戰爭論文集》[*Proceedings on Overseas Chinese and the Anti-Japanese War*], (臺北市:華僑協會總會發行, 1999) 2 冊。陳劍,《馬來亞華人的抗日運動》[Chen Jian, *The Anti-Japanese Movement of Chinese in Malaya*], (馬來西亞:策略資訊研究中心, 2004) 66 頁。李盈慧,《抗日與附日—華僑、國民政府、汪政權》[Li, Ying-Hui, *Anti-Japanese or Pro-Japanese—Overseas Chinese, Nationalist Government, and the Wang Jing-Wei Regime.*], (台北:水牛出版社, 2003 年), 352 頁。

### The Chinese Population of Vietnam Before and After World War II

According to 1931 French colonial statistics, there were roughly 52,000 Chinese in the north (Bắc Kỳ or Tongking), 10,000 Chinese in the centre (Trung Kỳ or Annam), and 205,000 Chinese in the south (Nam Kỳ or Cochinchina), giving a total of about 267,000 Chinese in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> The figures for 1936 show a marked decrease to 217,000 Chinese in all, with 35,000 in Bắc Kỳ, 11,000 in Trung Kỳ and 171,000 in Nam Kỳ.<sup>3</sup> Between 1931 and 1936, the global economic downturn had caused more local Chinese to return to China than had migrated to Vietnam. In addition, the French colonial administration enforced a policy of greater homogenization in those years: after 1 August 1933, all new born children of a Chinese father were to be considered Vietnamese, thus further decreasing the apparent size of the Chinese community in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> Later in the 1930s, however, numbers rose once more. From 1937 to 1939, Chinese numbers in south Vietnam jumped by 100,000, mostly people fleeing the war in their homeland. According to statistics of 1943, there were 495,900 Chinese in Vietnam—397,000 in Cochinchina, 30,900 in the Central Highlands plateau, 15,000 in Annam, and 53,000 in Tonkin.<sup>5</sup> These figures show the Chinese population in Vietnam had surged by 278,900 people in ten years. In 1940, the Pacific War began to affect Chinese arrivals, with both immigration and emigration numbers greatly reduced, as the official Saigon immigration control figures in Table 1 show.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1. Chinese Transiting Saigon Port, 1937–1948**

Year	Departure	Entrance	Difference
1937	17,800	51,400	+33,600
1938	15,400	63,400	+48,000
1939	13,400	40,200	+26,800
1940	12,300	11,800	-500
1941	9,700	5,400	-4,300
1942	2,900	1,900	-1,000
1943	4,578	3,096	-1,482
1944	2,942	1,838	-1,104
1945	837	859	32
1946	11,512	2,251	-,261
1947	-	32,489	-
1948	-	47,100	-

At the end of 1946, Hồ Chí Minh's "Declaration to Chinese compatriots" stated there were 500,000 Chinese in Vietnam.<sup>7</sup>

2. *Annuaire Statistique de l'Indochine*, (Hanoi: Impr. d'Extrême-Orient, 1931), vol. 3 (1930-1931), p. 53.

3. Charles Robequain, *L'évolution économique de l'Indochine française* (Paris : Centre d'études de politique étrangère, 1939), p. 42.

4. According to the decree of the French President of 24 August 1933, any Asian child born in Vietnam was to be considered Vietnamese, no matter the nationality of the parents. Before this decree a Sino-Vietnamese child could be considered Chinese if registered by the father in a Chinese congregation. 陳鴻瑜,《中華民國與東南亞各國外交關係史》[Chen Hung Yu, *Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of China and Southeast Asian Nations: 1912–2000*] (台北：鼎文書局，2004)，頁 155。

5. *Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam* (Saigon: National Institute of Statistics, 1959), vol. 7, p. 17. Thomas Engelbert says a trustworthy French population census of 1943 gave 396,000 Chinese and 119,000 Minh-huong (people of mixed Chinese and Vietnamese parentage) in Vietnam. See "Vietnamese-Chinese Relations in Southern Vietnam during the First Indochina Conflict," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3 (2008): 191–230.

6. Tsai Maw-Kue, *Les Chinois au Sud-Vietnam* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1968), p. 40.

7. 胡志明,〈告華僑同胞書〉,收入黃國安等編,《近代中越關係史資料選編》,(南寧:人民出版社,1988),下冊,頁 1019-1020。(Ho Chi-Minh, "Declaration to Chinese compatriots," in *A Compilation of Selected documents on Sino-Vietnamese Relations*, ed. Huang Guo-An (Nanning: Peoples Publishing, 1988), pp.1019–1020. The figure given by Hồ Chí Minh is not precise but not far from reality.

According to a 1948 Saigon–Chợ Lớn survey, most Chinese in Vietnam came from Canton, with the second largest group being Teochiu from southern Fujian. The distribution of Chinese dialect speakers there in 1948 appears in Table 2.<sup>8</sup>

Table 2. Chinese Dialectic Groups in Saigon–Chợ Lớn, 1948

Group	Dialects	Population	%
Quangdong	Cantonese	128,030	41.3
Teochiu	Teochiu	114,390	36.9
Fujian	Fujian	24,180	7.8
Hakka	Hakka	32,860	10.6
Hainan	Hainan	10,540	3.4

### The Chinese Community in Vietnam under Japanese Control

From the start of the Sino–Japanese War in mid-July 1937, the Chinese national government began increasing its procurement of weapons. Hong Kong and Vietnam became important distribution centres as mainland Chinese seaports began to fall, one after the other. Hải Phòng was particularly significant because its rail link with Yunnan enabled goods to be transported directly to Kunming or Nanning. Many military officials were posted in the region and the business community profited from the situation. However, the Japanese began to pressure the French colonial administration to put an end to the distribution of military materiel via its territory, seeking to cut this supply route to Chiang Kai-Shek.

Then on 18 December 1938, the principal chair of the National Defence Committee, Wang Jing-Wei, secretly left Chungking and appeared in Hanoi two days later. On 29 December, he sent a telegram to the Japanese expressing his desire to enter into negotiations with them. The words of the telegram echoed those in a statement by Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe that had urged the two countries to be “friendly neighbours [who would] jointly combat communism and prosper together.” Although initially shocked by Wang Jing-Wei’s actions, Chinese people thereafter began to split between the two camps, supporting either Wang or Chiang. After Wang’s secretary and the secretary’s wife were murdered by Chiang Kai-Shek’s agents, and the unsavoury circumstances of the crime became known, a lot of Chinese in colonial Vietnam despised the methods of the Chinese national government. As a result, they lent their support to Wang. This new rift further enabled the Japanese to manipulate internal Chinese divisions, to ensure their loyalty and recognition remained split between Chungking’s anti-Japanese government and Wang’s pro-Japanese government in Nanking.

As early as 25 June 1940, the Japanese dispatched observers to Hanoi and Hải Phòng to inspect Chinese warehouses; anything they considered of military use was impounded. Governor General Georges Catroux stated he would protect the interests of the Chinese in Vietnam, but these actions left the Chinese community fearful and in disarray. Nevertheless, despite Japanese pressure, the French administration continued to accept existing contracts as legally binding and to allow the Chinese nationalists’ military and civilian supplies to transit through northern Vietnam to China. It was only after 22 September 1940, when Tokyo signed a military agreement with the French Vichy government, that the Japanese were finally able to cut the Hải Phòng–Yunnan supply route. A huge but unknown amount of Chinese nationalists’ goods were impounded in Hải Phòng port to the benefit of the Japanese. The Kunming Chamber of Commerce claimed losses totalling 18,628,743 USD from this action alone.<sup>9</sup> As for the losses sustained by Chinese within Vietnam, no complete figures are

8. Tsai Maw-Kue, *Les Chinois au Sud-Vietnam*, p. 85.

9. Academia Historica (國史館 henceforth AH) · Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部檔案 abr. as MOFA below) · no.030.8, file :〈我國在越損失物資價值一覽表〉[ Tables of the value of Chinese material losses in Vietnam ] 。

available but we do know that the Yuan-Tai-Lin Company (源泰琳號) claimed the Japanese had expropriated goods worth 30,511,395 USD from their Hải Phòng warehouse. Their loss obliterated the life's work of the business magnate Pan Ching-Tai (潘慶泰).<sup>10</sup>

The next important milestone came on 29 July 1941, when the Japanese reached another joint defence agreement with the French by which they were allowed to station their troops in Nam Kỳ. By August 1941, the Japanese thus enjoyed de facto control over the whole of French Indochina.<sup>11</sup>

Wang Jing-Wei's government soon tried to take advantage of this situation. It dispatched a commercial representative to Indochina, Lin Chia-Min (林伽珉), who tried to make Chinese businessmen there believe that he could negotiate with the Japanese and thus help avoid material losses. In this way he corralled the support of Chinese business circles. Further to this, Chang Yong-Fu (張永福), a leader of the local Chinese community, accepted office in Wang's government and went to Vietnam to help win the Chinese community over to its side. The head of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Cochinchina, Chang Chen-Fan (張振帆), also lent his support to the pro-Japanese government.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, several leading local Chinese, including Quan Zi-Heng (關熾亨), Chu Chi-Shing (朱繼興), and He Luo (何羅), all publicly expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Japanese.<sup>13</sup>

Theirs were influential voices. Chang Chen-Fan was the president of the ten Chinese congregations of Saigon-Chợ Lớn, and leader of the Fujian congregation and of the Cereals Association as well as head of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. As he had previously been a member of Chungking's National Congress (國民參政會), he was extremely prominent in the region. Quan Zi-Heng was Hanoi's Cantonese congregation leader, while Chu Ji-Xing was Saigon-Chợ Lớn's Teochiu congregation leader and the previous head of the Cochinchinese Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Finally, He Luo was head of the General Chinese Chamber of Commerce. These very well-known people were the public face of the Chinese community in Vietnam and their support for the Japanese naturally had an effect.

After 1942, as the territories of the South Pacific fell into Japanese hands, Chinese anxieties increased in Vietnam. Saving oneself became the leitmotif of local Chinese communities. Chinese who supported the Japanese were allowed to run their businesses openly and to make a profit; those who opposed the Japanese were forced underground. In addition, the French colonial administration harshly suppressed the local Chinese community, restricting any political activity on their part. Arrests, extortion, and interference in commercial activities were common. Chinese who joined Japanese organisations, however, were left undisturbed.<sup>14</sup> In 1944, the rumour was spread that the Japanese emperor had ordered his local commander not to harass the Vietnamese populace and to maintain good relations with Chinese communities. The foregoing all testifies to the "carrot-and-stick" methods the Japanese employed to win the goodwill and support of the Chinese in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> As a result, Chinese from Canton and Fujian came to support the Japanese. Those who wanted to continue making a living, to return to their homeland, or to keep goods flowing without interruption supported Wang Jing-Wei's government and did not oppose the Japanese.

10. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file :〈越南華僑財產損失〉[Losses of Chinese properties in Vietnam]。

11. 許文堂，〈第二次大戰時期中、日、法在越南的衝突與交涉〉，《中央研究院近代史研究所集刊》，期 44 (2004.06)，頁 63-101。〔Shiu Wen-Tang, "Negotiations and conflicts over Vietnam among China, France, and Japan during the Second World War," *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica* 44 (2004): 63-101.〕

12. Archives of Kuomintang (國民黨黨史館 henceforth AKMT) , Special Archives of Vietnam (特種檔，越南 henceforth SAV below), no.30-257，〈張逆永福擬遊說僑領朱繼興張振帆案〉[Case of intentional lobbying of Chu Chi-Shing and Chang Chen-Fan by the traitor Chang Yong-Fu.]。

13. AKMT, SAV, no.11/7, 邢森洲報告〈越南現勢〉[Xing Shen-Chou's report on the current situation in Vietnam]。

14. Ibid.

15. AKMT, SAV, no.11.11.8，〈越南時事日誌〉(1944年9月份)[Daily events of Vietnam, Sept. 1944]。

As far as Chinese diplomats was concerned, there were no grounds for obfuscation. On 25 September 1941, Japanese troops entered the Chinese consulate-general in Hanoi to arrest the staff inside. On 8 December, the first day of the wider Pacific War, Japanese troops broke into Saigon's consulate-general to search its papers and take captive the two remaining staff members, Guo Chang (郭強) and Wang Wen-Tze (王文澤). Consul General Yin Feng-Tsao (尹鳳藻) and nineteen other staff members, plus their families, had already fled to the newly opened consulate in Đà Lạt. On 10 December, they were forced to flee once again to Kon Tum and later would be held under house arrest by the French for three years and nine months.<sup>16</sup>

In January 1941, the French colonial government gave the Japanese the control of cereal production throughout all Indochina. Henceforth Vietnamese rice was earmarked to supply Japan, Manchuria, and Japanese troops and people stationed in China, and could not be exported to a third country.<sup>17</sup> Chinese who had formerly controlled the cereal market now had to cooperate with Japanese businesses. French and Japanese authorities ensured that Chinese businesses sold their rice to the Mitsui Bussan Company (三井物產) by denying them any other export market. Many Chinese businessmen ended up as errand runners for the Japanese, buying their military necessities and thereby managing to save their families' lives and to make a wartime profit.

**Table 3. Chinese Material Losses in Vietnam, January to June 1942**

Material	Quantities	value ( piastres )	remarks
cash		40,400,000	Capital confiscated from Shanghai Standard & Chartered Bank
goods in cash		2,750,000	Goods confiscated from San-Ta Co. in Hải Phòng and Hanoi
immovable property		18,000,000	Properties confiscated from the English, Americans, and Jews of Vietnam
rice	5,785,000 tons	66,060,000	
paddy	902,000 sacks	2,930,000	
cereals	300,000 tons	7,500,000	
groceries	6,700,000 tons	49,000,000	Goods confiscated from the English, Americans, and Jews of Saigon
wheat flour	1,300,000 tons	10,000,000	
metal	4,000,000 tons	49,000,000	
Cash Extorted		150,000	Blackmail extorted from Overseas Chinese for military pay
coal	10,000 tons		

Note: these figures exclude materials taken by force

Most Chinese were concentrated in Saigon–Chợ Lớn and, after Japanese occupation, they profited by changing their previous resistance to the entry of Japanese

16. 洪根松,《外交官歷難記》,台北:作者自印,1981。[ Hong Gen-Song, The Diplomat's Calamitous Adventures, Taipei: published by author, 1981. ]

17. 陳碧純,《日本對越南米穀控制之研究,(1940-1945)》(埔里:暨南國際大學東南亞研究所碩士論文,2002),頁 84。[ Chen Bi-Chun, "Japan's Control of Paddy in Vietnam, 1940-1945," dissertation, Graduate School of Southeast Asia, National Chi-Nan University, 2002. ]

goods. In any case, they had little option: Japanese military police constantly pressured Chinese shop owners, who could not help but cave in to Japanese demands. With commercial interests at heart, they resigned themselves to constant Japanese monitoring and material demands. Such demands were not limited to rice, as any products of military value could be controlled or appropriated by the Japanese. Kuomintang statistics (see Table 3 above) covering the period from January to June 1942 calculate that Chinese losses in Vietnam immediately after the Japanese take-over amounted to more than 245,690,000 piastres, in addition to 10,000 tons of coal.<sup>18</sup>

The archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs further show that during this period the Chinese in Hải Phòng and Lạng Sơn claimed losses totalling 4,601,423 in USD, 95,710 in pounds sterling, 4,427,601 in piastres, 79,100 in Chinese dollars, and 985 in Hong Kong dollars.<sup>19</sup>

From the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war the Kuomintang had begun to organise activities in Indochina to counter the Japanese and an organisation called the "Overseas Chinese Federation of Salvation" (越南華僑救國總會) was formed in Vietnam. It was divided into thirty-five branches and claimed 100,000 members.<sup>20</sup> At the end of 1939, Governor General Catroux, under Japanese pressure, ordered this organisation to cease all activities, but the Kuomintang continued its activities undeterred in Vietnam. Special envoy Xing Shen-Chou (邢森洲) was posted to the representative's office in Vietnam to encourage young Chinese to return to the motherland, to join the military or the Chinese volunteer teams waging guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. From the limited statistics available, by the end of 1944 we know that three volunteer teams were formed. A core group of ninety persons, with an additional 215 members, formed the youth volunteer team in northern Vietnam led by Wang Ching (王清). The second, led by Su Min (蘇民), contained a core group of 150, with an additional 125 members. The third, led by Pan Han-Po (潘漢波), comprised a core group of seventy persons, with an additional 140 members.<sup>21</sup> Their effectiveness against the Japanese, however, was limited.

Apart from trying to suppress the Kuomintang's underground activities, the Japanese also established several pro-Japanese institutions designed to gain the favour of the local Chinese community. The "Commercial Office in Vietnam" (駐越通商代表辦事處), established by the Wang Jing-Wei government and led by Lin Chia-Min and Chien Tao-Yong (簡道鏞), was one. The "Special Agency of Yuan Jun" in Saigon had 1,300 members, while the "Alliance for Anti-Communism and Salvation" (反共救國大同盟) led by Chen Tie-Neng (陳鐵冷) and Lien Tong-Ping (連東平) contained 600 registered members. A famous club of rich merchants in Southeast Asia, the "Nam-Chiao" (南僑俱樂部), united eighty big Chinese companies and was led by Chang Chen-Fan and He Luo. The "Society for Co-Prosperity in French Indochina" (佛印共榮會) also had sixty members led by Feng Chuo-Yu (馮綽餘). Other pro-Japanese associations included the "Association of Pro-Japanese Chinese in Vietnam" (越南華僑親日會) led by Lin Jian (林健), the "Confederation of Chinese in Vietnam", and the "Security Group of Chinese" in Hải Phòng.<sup>22</sup> Even an organisation calling itself the "Support Group for the Anti-Japanese War in Hải Phòng" (華僑參戰後援會) aligned itself with the Wang government,<sup>23</sup> while there were about 300 members of the pro-Wang

18. AKMT, SAV, no.11/7, 〈邢森洲報告越南現勢〉[Xing Shen-Chou's report on the actual situation of Vietnam]。

19. AH, MOFA, no.030.8·file:〈我國在越損失物資價值一覽表〉[Tables of the values of Chinese material losses in Vietnam]。

20. 華僑志編纂委員會,《越南華僑志》[Chinese in Vietnam],頁 200-201。李白茵,《越南華僑與華人》[Overseas Chinese and Hoa of Vietnam](桂林:廣西師範大學,1990),頁 153-154。

21. AKMT, SAV, no.011/21-4, 〈邢森洲致吳鐵城秘書長〉[Xing Shen-Chou to General Secretary Wu Tie-Cheng], 1945.4.5。

22. AKMT, SAV, no.011/7, 〈有關越南情報〉[Information about Vietnam]。

23. AKMT, SAV, no.11.11.8, 〈越南時事日誌〉(1944年9月份)[Daily events of Vietnam, Sept. 1944]。

KMT section in Hanoi under Quan Zi-Heng.

After World War II ended, the Kuomintang's United Overseas Chinese Association built a memorial in honour of those who gave their lives fighting the Japanese. In northern Vietnam, the bodies of seventy-two martyrs were gathered up and a memorial service was held on 29 March 1946.<sup>24</sup> In Nam Kỳ, the Chinese community in Saigon-Chợ Lớn built a monument consecrating seventeen martyrs there.<sup>25</sup> Naturally the number of Overseas Chinese who sacrificed themselves in the war cannot, by itself, define the loyalties nor the nationalism nor the sense of national identity among Chinese in Vietnam generally. To accuse the entire Chinese community in Vietnam, mired in war and ruled by both French and Japanese colonial masters, of treason because most members chose to survive would be overly harsh, particularly given that opinion in China itself was divided between the Chungking and Nanking governments.

### From the End of World War II to the First Indochina War

At the end of the war, General Chiang Kai-Shek was made responsible for Vietnamese lands north of latitude 16 degrees, while the area south of that line came under British responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Chiang dispatched General Lu Han (盧漢) and his troops to accept the Japanese surrender. The Chinese of Vietnam now became part of the victorious side, but at the same time they became targets for the French and the Vietminh. In this situation, China saw a chance to leave its imprint on Vietnamese politics and to extend its sphere of influence there, something contrary to the interests of the French military and of the independence-seeking Vietminh alike.

In the north, the cost of maintaining an 180,000 strong Chinese army was high, and its lack of military discipline, combined with the opportunism shown by Chinese merchants in controlling the distribution of goods and the exchange rate, caused the local Vietnamese population to resent the Chinese presence. Nevertheless, it was in the British southern zone that the local Chinese community would suffer the most, trapped as they were between the armed Vietminh independence movement, the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo militias, and British and French military actions against the guerrillas. Not only did they suffer material losses but they were also the victims of rape, injury, disappearance, and death.<sup>27</sup> According to a report by General Lu Han to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from 3 September 1945 to 11 January 1946 the Chinese community of Saigon-Chợ Lớn had suffered twenty-two people killed, 312 injured, nine arrests, and eight disappearances, plus the loss of goods valued at 10,693,351 piastres, along with 167,197 piastres in cash.<sup>28</sup> Another report, this time of November 1945 by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Nam Kỳ, listed Chinese losses due to the Franco-Vietnamese conflict between 23 September and 4 November alone as 351 casualties, including eighty-one dead and 205 injured, eighteen reported rapes by the Indochina army, and 13,069,573 piastres worth of property loss. According to the first report in Kuomintang headquarters in Vietnam, property losses totalled 4,000,000 piastres, while the second one reported a loss worth 1,590,000 piastres.<sup>29</sup>

When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the French government of the situation, senior French officials in Vietnam issued orders to protect the Chinese community during French military actions against the Vietminh. Although the French

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24. 越南華僑文化事業公司編，《越南敵後工作殉國烈士暨義僑史略》〔Short story about the martyrs and patriotic compatriots who worked behind enemy lines〕，（河內：1949）。

25. Ibid.

26. Shiu Wen-Tang, "The Chinese Military Occupation of French Indochina Post World War II," *Asia-Pacific Forum*, 45 (2009): 153–203.

27. AKMT, SAV, no.11.5.16，〈越盟非法濫捕僑民轉請設法解救〉〔Request to help compatriots arrested illegally by the Vietminh〕。11.7.2，〈西貢華僑遭受法軍慘害事件〉〔Chinese killed by the French Army in Saigon〕。

11.48，〈法軍搶劫案並應報總部及顧問團商決〉〔Robbery by the French Army should be reported to the Headquarters and Advisory Group〕。

28. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file：〈越南僑損〉〔Losses of Chinese in Vietnam〕。

29. AH, MOFA, no.063.2, file：〈南越華僑被越盟殺害及損失〉〔Losses and deaths of Chinese caused by the Vietminh in South Vietnam〕。

administration accepted no responsibility, putting the blame for Chinese losses squarely on the Vietminh or on the unexpected events of war, as the local government responsible for civil peace the French did attempt to avoid further misunderstandings with resident Chinese. Chinese in French-held territories were granted the right of assembly, so if unforeseen events caused a Chinese request for assembly to be rejected, officers in Nam Kỳ would alert the Saigon consulate-general to act appropriately. Where transportation and lodging problems arose, the French and the Saigon consulate-general took certain measures to identify Chinese properties. The consulate-general ordered local congregation (幫) heads to set up district relief associations which, after approval from municipal and military administrators, were to be responsible for overseeing population surveys of Chinese in local areas. Once determined, local Chinese numbers were to be immediately reported to headquarters, and town or village headmen were to ensure Chinese living quarters had the words "Overseas Chinese lodging" displayed on them in French and Chinese, and in Cambodian when necessary, along with a Chinese flag.<sup>30</sup> Although the aim of these measures was to avoid confusing the Chinese with the Vietminh, in reality the notices made it easier to target the Chinese.

In December 1945, French troops murdered Chinese in Saigon, enraging their fellows in Hanoi and elsewhere in Vietnam. The Kuomintang and various industry associations headed by the Hanoi Chinese formed the "Association to Support Nam Kỳ Chinese Compatriots." It telegraphed the central committee of the Kuomintang, the Allied Nations, and Chinese communities around the world to inform them of the bloody event. The association also demonstrated in the streets, in memory of the tragic deaths. These events caused Franco-Chinese relations in Vietnam to deteriorate. Then after 28 February 1946, when a Sino-French agreement was signed, Vietnamese attitudes towards the Chinese hardened appreciably. The Vietnamese viewed the Sino-French agreement in a similar way to which many Chinese had considered the Yalta Conference and Sino-Soviet treaty of friendship and alliance: they felt betrayed and were determined to fight on to the bloody end. The peoples of Indochina refused to accept a treaty concerning their lands, made without any reference to them. Trenchant newspaper editorials were backed by ordinary people determined to make their feelings known—even the cyclos in Hanoi rejected Chinese customers. Chinese soldiers who went out alone risked being kidnapped and killed.<sup>31</sup>

On 6 March 1946, an incident in Hải Phòng between French and Chinese troops left local Chinese dead and their property destroyed, causing tensions to surge even higher. The remaining Chinese in Hải Phòng called on the Chinese central government for more effective protection.<sup>32</sup> There were even appeals to arm local Chinese communities or to send Chinese troops to Hải Phòng to defend compatriots there.<sup>33</sup> However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs preferred diplomatic means.<sup>34</sup> The Chinese government position was that "on 6 March this year, a preliminary agreement was completed between the French and the Vietnamese, and only recently a temporary agreement was signed between the two on 15 September, thus approaching the objective of Vietnamese independence." It seems as though they believed that once Vietnam achieved independence, there would no longer be an Overseas Chinese problem there. This in turn reflected the overly optimistic attitude of the Chinese government towards the situation of Chinese in Vietnam.

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30. AH, MOFA, no.063.1 · file : 〈越南中南圻華僑損失〉 [Material losses of Chinese in Annam and Cochinchina] · 〈關於維護華僑安全之措施〉 [Security measures to protect Overseas Chinese] 。

31. AH, MOFA, no.012.8 · file : 〈「三六」海防事件我官民損失〉 [Government and private losses in the Hải Phòng Incident of 6 March] 。

32. AKMT, SAV, no.11.2.101 〈海防法越發生衝突乞迅予有效護僑措施〉 [Measures to be taken for the protection of Chinese in Hải Phòng during the conflict between French and Vietminh] 。

33. AKMT, SAV, no.11.7.11 〈商討保護越南華僑案〉 [Discussion on the protection of Chinese in Vietnam] 。

34. AKMT, SAV, no.6.2/7.5 〈會議記錄〉 (法越衝突當地華僑生命財產損失請予賠償一案) [Request to compensate for Chinese losses of during the conflict between the French and the Vietminh] 。

On 20 November of that year, ongoing fighting erupted between the French and Vietminh at Hải Phòng. The Chinese commercial district was occupied by the Vietminh, turning it into a battlefield during eight days of intense conflict. Surveys after the battle showed that more than 500 Chinese had been killed, with a further 3,000 missing, while another 600 had been arrested by the Vietminh. The Chinese section of the city was a scorched wasteland, with property losses estimated at over 200 million piastres.<sup>35</sup> Chinese in Hải Phòng and Hanoi set up relief associations to assist the victims of the battle.

According to the seventh investigative report by the Hải Phòng relief association, eighty-one overseas Chinese houses had been completely razed and another 176 partially destroyed. Excluding ten homes which were not assessed, the value of homeowner losses alone amounted to 13,763,225 piastres. The total losses were much greater: they included 58,671,398 piastres worth of property, 1,500 HK dollars, 61,861,506 Chinese dollars, and 62,550,000 Chinese dollars' worth of maritime customs bonds. The human toll was 625 Chinese missing, 236 arrested, and seventy-six dead from a total of only 937 people.<sup>36</sup> Even so, these numbers do not tell the whole story as the investigation was hampered by the lack of readily available data sources.

In October 1947, the Chinese congregations of Hải Phòng released the consulate-general's statistics (see Table 4) showing that Chinese losses in Vietnam still continued.<sup>37</sup>

**Table 4. Damage Suffered by Overseas Chinese in the Hải Phòng and An Dương Areas**

Hải Phòng	656 forms				
Property losses caused by	French	18,540,624 piastres			
	Viets	3,565,085 piastres			
	unknown	23,312,478 piastres			
total : 45,418,187 piastres					
Loss of life caused by	death	Viets	9	total	16
		French	7		
	injury	Viets	3		12
		French	9		
	arrested	Viets	47		47
		French	none		
missing		61		61	
An Dương	38 forms				
Property losses	French	7,765,820 piastre			
	Viets	23,000 piastre			
	total	7,788,820 piastre			
Loss of life	death	French	11 persons	Viets	3
	injury	French	3		

Note: Chinese living in An Dương sought an indemnity of 2,120,000 piastres.

A report on Chinese losses in Nam Kỳ (see Table 5 over page) showed that from the start of the Franco-Vietnamese conflict in December 1946, 266 local Chinese had either been killed or gone missing, and twenty-five had been injured, while 163,128,060

35. AKMT, SAV, no.11.2.105 (爲法越衝突殃及華僑請即救濟並進行護僑) [For immediate Chinese relief and protection during the conflict between the French and Vietminh].

36. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file : (越南海防華僑損失) [Losses of Chinese in Hải Phòng, Vietnam].

37. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file : (越南華僑因法軍不法行爲所受損失統計) [Statistics of Chinese losses in Vietnam caused by illegal actions of the French Army].

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piastres' worth of property had been lost.<sup>38</sup>

**Table 5. Chinese Losses in Northern Vietnam (19 December 1946 to 30 November 1947)**

Province	Property loss	death	injury	missing	remarks
Hanoi	130,261,467	37	16	196	696 forms ( HN 1~ 696 )
Huế	7,610,120	--	--	--	107 forms ( Hue 1~107 )
Phủ Lý	2,056,750	--	--	--	16 forms ( Phu 1~16 )
Lạng Sơn	109,200	1	--	--	3 forms ( Lang 1~3 )
Nam Định	12,932,226	21	7	1	139 forms ( Nam 1~139 )
Hải Dương	571,470	--	--	--	6 forms ( Hai 1~6 )
Hà Đông	1,184,450	--	--	2	10 forms ( Ha 1~10 )
Bắc Ninh	2,049,526	--	--	--	13 forms ( Bac 1~13 )
Đà Nẵng	5,469,850	5	2	3	114 forms ( Da 1~114 )
Hoa Bình	883,000	--	--	--	2 forms ( Hoa 1 and 2 )
Total :	163,128,060	64	25	202	

The second report on the losses suffered by the Chinese in northern Vietnam did not detail casualty numbers but instead focused on apportioning blame for the damage so that responsibility for reparations could be identified more easily. The total losses amounted to 2,287,368,250 piastres.<sup>39</sup> There is no archival information about why Bắc Giang suffered so much more than elsewhere (see Table 6).<sup>40</sup>

**Table 6. Those Responsible for Chinese Wartime Losses in Tonkin**

	French	Vietnamese	Unknown	Total
Hanoi	25,936,000	3,549,000	355,813,000	385,298,000
Bắc Giang	7,031,000	1,145,393,000	16,270,000	1,168,694,000
Bắc Ninh	9,580,000	155,300,000	295,595,000	460,475,000
Bắc Kan	19,480,000			19,480,000
Hải Dương	16,150,000	27,030,000	57,100,000	100,280,000
Hà Đông	4,050,000	11,685,000		15,735,000
Na Sầm		64,053,000		64,053,000
Tuyên Quang	663,750	53,800,000	18,889,500	37,753,250
Total	82,890,750	1,460,810,000	743,667,500	2,287,368,250

In regard to the situation of Chinese in southern Vietnam, Saigon Consul Yin Feng-Tsao reported on the period from 27 November 1946 to 14 January 1947. In Bến Tre French and Vietnamese troops plundered Chinese homes on five separate occasions, killing seven people and causing 925,916 piastres in losses or damages. In nearby Trà Vinh, another case of bloodshed involving Franco-Khmer troops resulted in two deaths, while 500 people were made refugees in Sóc Trăng. Upriver in Vĩnh Long, four more cases involving French troops caused two deaths, made 300 homeless, and

38. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file : 〈越南北圻華僑損失〉 [ Losses of Chinese in Bắc Kỳ, Vietnam ]

39. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file : 〈越南老街華僑損失〉 [ Losses of Chinese in Lao Kai ] , 〈越北華僑遭受財產損害第二批分類表〉 [ Second classification of Chinese losses in North Vietnam ] .

40. It reminds us of the Hải Phòng Incident in August 1927. During this anti-Chinese riot there were at least 6 Chinese killed and 125 injured. Bắc Giang and Bắc Ninh were both provinces near Hanoi and Hải Phòng, and damages there might have been exacerbated by the Chinese Army occupation after WWII. In some areas of Lục Ngạn, Sơn Động, and Hữu Lũng in Bắc Giang Province, expatriate Chinese were harshly eliminated because of their activities after the retreat of Chinese troops. *Lịch sử Đảng bộ tỉnh Bắc Giang, (1926-1975)* [History of the party in Bắc Giang (1926-1975)], vol. 1 (Hanoi : Chính trị Quốc gia, 2003), p. 119.

created property loss or damage worth up to 843,080 piastres. In neighbouring Châu Đốc, Franco–Khmer troops and Cambodians ransacked Chinese communities five times, killing thirteen, kidnapping one, and causing losses or damage worth 903,200 piastres. In Bà Rịa, three incidents resulted in property losses of 615,400 piastres.<sup>41</sup> In a follow-up report by the consulate-general in February 1947, 385 tables quantified the suffering of the Chinese community in Nam Kỳ: 426 people had been slightly injured, 295 badly injured, 19 underage youths had gone missing, 98 adults had vanished, 156 young people had been killed, 512 adults had been killed, 8 had been raped, 963 arrested, and 47,680,099,668 piastres' worth of property had been damaged or lost. A subsequent statistical report of March covering the Chinese in Nam Kỳ, southern Trung Kỳ, and Cambodia provided a new total, showing that 430 had been lightly injured, 296 badly injured, 19 young people had disappeared, 98 adults had disappeared, 156 young people had been killed, 516 adults had been killed, 8 had been raped, 963 arrested, and property worth 48,720,283,768 piastres either damaged or lost.<sup>42</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs compiled all these reports so that reparations' demands could be lodged with the French.

However, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs countered by seeking reparations from China. In May 1947, the ministry informed the Chinese ambassador, Chien Tai (錢泰) that, during the Chinese occupation of northern Vietnam, public and private French goods worth 2,020,000 piastres had been lost through theft, unpaid rents and payrolls, enforced currency exchange into Chinese yuan, or the exchange of obsolete currency, the appropriation of cash, the destruction of tools and of real estate, goods, bridges, and so forth. The French also even requested compensation for the French soldiers lost in the clashes in Hải Phòng on 6 March and 21 April 1946.<sup>43</sup> On this “tit-for-tat” accounting, the resulting sums demanded in reparations from either side hardly differed.

In June 1947, the Overseas Department of the Kuomintang informed the Chinese in Vietnam that the French had agreed to create a Sino–French Commission to investigate reparations claims. The Overseas Chinese Commission of the Executive Yuan further informed Chinese in northern Vietnam in August 1947 that losses incurred in the Franco–Vietnamese conflict would be resolved according to the law.<sup>44</sup> Civil war in China and the nationalists' defeat in 1949, however, meant there was no outcome from the Sino–French Commission nor from any other legal means. Six years later the Chinese in Vietnam were still calling for a swift resolution to pending reparation cases.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

From the foregoing data, we can see that the losses suffered by the Chinese community during the Japanese occupation of French Indochina were less than those suffered during the ensuing Franco–Vietnamese conflict. The Japanese had researched the Chinese economic role in Indochina before their occupation and had decided to adopt a softer approach towards governing the region.<sup>46</sup> If we placed overseas Chinese experience in South East Asia on a continuum during the war, the situation of Chinese who abetted the Japanese in Thailand was much better than that of the Chinese in Vietnam, who were probably in turn better off than most others elsewhere, even though, economically and materially, the Chinese in Vietnam had aided the Japanese more than

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41. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file : 〈越南中南圻華僑損失〉〔Chinese losses in Annam and Cochinchina〕。

42. Ibid. It is important to note that the second document did not say whether its figures simply added Chinese losses in central Vietnam and Cambodia to the existing tally for Nam Kỳ. The similarity of many totals between the 2 sources, however, does suggest that this might have been the case.

43. AH, MOFA, no. 020000000732A, 〈越北受降期間法方損失〉〔French Losses in North Vietnam during the surrender period〕, pp.18–19 〈外交部收電第 6277 號〉〔MOFA Telegram received no 6277〕。

44. AH, MOFA, no.063.1, file : 〈越南華僑財產損失〉〔Chinese property losses in Vietnam〕。

45. Ibid.

46. 中島宗一, 佛領印度支那に於ける華僑〔The Chinese in French Indo-China〕, (東京市: 滿鐵東亞經濟調查局, 昭和 14, 1939) This is a representative example of this kind of study.

their compatriots in Thailand.<sup>47</sup> This was partly due to the fact that the Japanese and the Vichy governments had concluded both military and economic agreements which meant, after 1941, Vietnamese rice could only be exported to Japan and its territories. Although the establishment of Wang Jing-Wei's government had attracted more Chinese to support the Japanese, the determining issue for Chinese support or opposition to the Japanese was whether or not their country of residence was involved in the war.

After World War II ended, the Chinese in Vietnam were trapped between the contending French and Vietminh, suffering great losses as a consequence. The disintegrating internal situation in China meant the Chinese central government was unable to look to the interests of overseas Chinese communities. The nationalist government that had compiled the reparations data to enable the Far Eastern Commission to pursue compensation from Japan could not participate in the San Francisco Conference of September 1951 and thus was unable to pursue the issue. Similarly, because the nationalist government was exiled to Taipei, the Sino-French Commission in charge of reparation claims was unable to perform its task.

The total losses suffered by the overseas Chinese community in Vietnam in these years remains hard to estimate with any precision. The figures in this study, based on the limited data available for material losses, can only provide part of the picture. From what the figures do show, however, the totality of losses suffered by the local Chinese community in these years must have been enormous.

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47 李盈慧,《抗日與附日——華僑、國民政府、汪政權》(Li Ying-Hui, *Anti-Japanese or Pro-Japanese—Overseas Chinese, Nationalist Government and the Wang Jing-Wei Regime.*) (台北: 水牛出版社, 2003年), 頁 276。