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The Great Vietnamese Famine of 1944-45 Revisited

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The deaths stemming from the great famine of 1944-45, which reached its zenith in March-April 1945 in Japanese-occupied northern Vietnam, eclipsed in scale all human tragedies of the modern period in that country up until that time. The demographics vary from French estimates of 600,000-700,000 dead, to official Vietnamese numbers of 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 victims.[1] Food security is an age-old problem, and dearth, famine, and disease have long been a scourge of mankind across the broad Eurasian landmass and beyond. While more recent understandings[2] recognize that famines are mostly man-made, it is also true that in ecologically vulnerable zones, alongside natural disasters, war and conflict often tilts the balance between sustainability and human disaster.[3] Allowing the contingency of natural cause as a predisposing factor for mass famine, this article revisits the Vietnam famine of 1944-45 in light of flaws in human agency (alongside willful or even deliberate neglect) as well as destabilization stemming from war and conflict. While I avoid the issue of impacts of the famine in favor of seeking cause - the human suffering of the famine has not been effaced by time. It was recorded in Hanoi newspapers at the time. It survives in local memory and in fiction by Vietnamese writers.[4]

The great famine was never construed as a war crime by the Allies, yet the question of blame, alongside agency or lack of it, was an issue between the French and the Viet Minh in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese surrender and entered into propaganda recriminations. Indeed, as written into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) declaration of independence, both Japan and France were jointly blamed for the disaster. South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam) also raised the famine issue in postwar reparation negotiations with Japan. While such charged issues as the Nanjing Massacre, the comfort women, forced labor and unit 731 have long been the subject of intense debate in the historical memory wars, in textbook controversies and museum exhibits, the Vietnamese famine, and Japan's role in creating it, appear to have disappeared from Japanese war memory and commemoration whether in textbooks or museum representations.

It may nevertheless be asked, why is it important now to apportion blame? I would argue that the great Vietnam famine of 1944-45 is at least one of the underwritten tragedies stemming from the Pacific War. Outside of Vietnam, very few articles or studies have sought to contextualize this event, whether from the side of Vietnamese history, or from the perspective of Japanese and/or French and American responsibility. No doubt a court of law would seek to distinguish between deliberate policy, benign neglect, and/or the unanticipated consequences of social action. But, rather than pinning blame as with a court of law or a war crimes trial, what I seek here is closer to a truth commission-style investigation that precisely seeks to uncover a number of thinly veiled truths that could possibly stimulate further research, not only on war and memory issues related to the famine, but also in the field of famine prevention.

Background to the Famine

The background to the great famine in northern Vietnam is the increasing scale and character of Japanese military intervention in Indochina from 1940 down to surrender in September-October 1945. While the Vichy French regime in Indochina and Japan existed in a tense albeit unequal cohabitation with Japanese forces, matters changed absolutely on 9 March 1945, when Japan mounted a coup de force, militarily attacked and interned all French military personal who did not escape to the mountains, and sequestered all French civilians.

The Japanese military took over full administrative responsibility alongside local puppet regimes as with the Tran Trong Kim cabinet in Annam, under a pliant Emperor Bao Dai. Economically, Japan had used Indochina under the Vichy administration as a source of industrial and food procurement, from coal to rubber, to a range of industrial crops and, especially rice from the surplus-producing Mekong delta region. Though notionally under French administration, Japanese military requisitions profoundly distorted the colonial political economy, shattered the import-export system, and eroded many bonds across communities and classes, sowing the seeds of disasters to come. Even with French administrative services continuing, including dike repair, the monitoring of agricultural activities, and the collection of taxes, the rural population, increasingly bereft of cash as market mechanisms collapsed, was obliged to cope in a situation of virtual economic autarky just as Indochina came to be subordinated within Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.[5]

Towards the end of the war, US bombing raids, mounted from India and Yunnan in China as well as the Philippines, and from carrier-based aircraft, also took a toll on infrastructure, targeting the TransIndochinois rail line, linking north and south Vietnam, as well as

mining harbors and launching submarine raids on Japanese and local coastal shipping. With all but a few French administrators behind bars, administrative services deteriorated, both central (run from Hanoi) and local, whether run from Hanoi, Saigon or Hue. In this environment, customary rural statistical surveys were rarely conducted. Japanese military authorities, moreover, paid scant attention to local needs across Vietnam, not to mention traditionally rice-deficit Laos, and even rice surplus Cambodia, which was also ruthlessly exploited of its rice resources. The priority was fulfilling Imperial imperatives designed to feed Japan's own on the battlefronts and at home.

Colonial Famine Protection

From time immemorial coastal Vietnam had suffered frequent droughts, floods, and typhoons, inflicting misery and suffering. According to Nguyen dynasty chronicles as interpreted by Ngo Vinh Long, destructive floods occurred on average every three years, usually around the seventh or eighth months, but sometimes in the forth and fifth months as well. Prolonged droughts proved even more disastrous to crops. Added to that were crop failures due to locusts and other insects.[6] In official French discourse, protection of the population against threats of famine was a constant preoccupation of the administration. The colonial administration did not neglect the new and expanding modern communication links to re-supply afflicted regions. The need to diversify crop production was not ignored given understandings of the risks of monoculture in situations of crisis and food insufficiency, and close monitoring of agricultural production and human needs became a finely honed bureaucratic procedure at the local, regional and federal (Indochinese) levels. Nevertheless, the colonial economy was above all geared for export of rice, especially from the rice surplus Mekong River delta area of southern Vietnam.

Writing half a century prior to the great disaster, Governor General Jean Baptiste Paul Beau (October 1902-February 1908) reflected that there was no unique solution to the famine problem. One speaks of irrigation works as a solution, he opined, but Tonkin or northern Vietnam had not generally suffered drought over a ten-year period commencing in 1896. On the contrary, it had suffered an excess of water over this period, whether caused by heavy rainfall or floods. Irrigation systems, he argued, did not have incontestable value and could only be viewed as a partial solution to the famine problem. As well understood, several regions in Annam, the central region of Vietnam with its capital in Hue, supported excessive population densities. Prone to famine, it was not then possible to render assistance to these remote areas by either land or sea. At the time of Beau's writing, only northern Annam remained outside of access to the new colonial railway system. But thanks to the extension of the rail head to this area, timely rice assistance provided by the Hue government had helped the population of Thanh-Hoa, then suffering famine. Similarly, in Annam wherever the rail head reached, relief could be speedily arranged. Alongside new transportation routes, the old system of rice stores that the imperial government hosted in each of the provinces was deemed a less practical solution, even though some individuals demanded their restoration. High population density in parts of Tonkin likewise aggravated the effects of famine. Alongside experiments in relocating emigrants from Tonkin to western Cochinchina – as the French called their colony in the south - incentives were also offered by the administration to peasant cultivators to move away from rice monoculture.[7]

Throughout the colonial period, a large number of irrigation works were created in northern and central Vietnam, in particular, using conscript labor and drawing upon local budgets with both flood control and expanded cultivation as objectives.[8] Nevertheless, famine did occur in the central provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh in 1930-1931. Combined with falling rice prices and a constant tax burden, the result was to ignite mass peasant protest along with communist-inspired attacks on the administration.[9] It is true that the French introduced a range of plantation or export crops, as with rubber, tobacco, coffee, etc., but neither, as demonstrated below, did colonial economic managers ignore the need to maintain a basket of food crops to tide over emergencies, such as fitting long-established peasant cultivator practice.[10] Generally, the paix Français in Indochina was marked by its managerial response to famine and hunger, even as large numbers of people, particularly mountain-dwellers and those in more marginal settings, barely survived in the natural economy.

Managing the Food Crisis of 1937

Recovering from a low of 960,000 tonnes of rice, unhusked paddy, and rice derivatives exported from the port of Saigon during 1931, a depression year, the figure for 1934 rose to 1,505,493 tonnes. Major export markets were, in rank order, metropolitan France, other French colonies, Hong Kong, and China-Shanghai. A certain quantity of rice also reached Japan (60,000 tonnes in 1931-32), although still a new and irregular market. Cochinchina and Cambodia combined provided the overwhelming bulk of rice exports from Indochina and rice represented 27 percent of total tonnage exported, contributing up to 36 percent of total value of exports.[11]

By 1937, rice exports from Indochina had fallen, owing to a generalized drought caused by a delay in the arrival of the monsoon rains which affected a wide swathe of territory from southern Tonkin, to northern Annam, north and central Laos, and even the northeast of Siam. As a remedial measure, the colonial administration, now under the socialist Popular Front government of Léon Blum, imposed a total ban on the export of rice from Laos (including rice surplus Bassac in the south), while seeking to reserve all quantities of rice for local consumption. With northern Annam suffering a marked lack of precipitation, especially in Vinh and Than-Hoa provinces, 50,000 piasters was earmarked for distribution of rice to victims. In order to prevent speculation on existing stocks of rice, the administration opened a 40,000-piaster line of credit with the official small loan institution, Credit Agricole Mutual, a measure seen as helping to regulate the price of rice. Answering to the Minister of Colonies in France, the Indochina government reported monitoring the situation with "extreme caution,"[12] and this is borne out by the facts.

In early 1937, a number of locales in Thanh Hoa were drastically affected by poor harvests leading to a certain "malaise" (read, major discontent) on the part of the affected population. No doubt with memories of 1931-32 in mind, the authorities did not stand idly by. A series of public works projects, roads especially, were created offering indigent peasant farmers a stipend to cover their needs. This was not a small investment but translated into 192,000 paid workdays. Roads and bridges in the view of the authorities would open new markets, thus satisfying demand on the part of the population. More than that, the extra income earned would enable peasant-workers to purchase rice-seeds ready for planting in the next season. In the words of an official rapporteur, "Misery was banished owing to the generous support of the government and the agricultural rhythm reestablished in the best conditions while allowing even the most disinherited to receive support."[13]

Pressed by Paris and the Governor General, the French Resident Superior in Hanoi scrambled to take stock of food reserves in Tonkin by conducting a province-level investigation. As the top French official concluded, the *soudure* or gap between the intervening harvests was not at a critical level in Tonkin. His investigation disclosed that 566,217 tonnes of rice were held in reserve (stockpiled), amounting to some 56,000 tonnes in excess of (annual) consumption needs of 510,310 tonnes. To this was added approximately 22,500 tonnes of maize, along with a reserve of secondary items of everyday consumption, including potatoes, soy beans, manioc, and taro, "which also makes up an appreciable part of the diet of the indigenous population," albeit an amount difficult to accurately calculate owing to the small-scale or household character of its production.[14]

From October 1938, however, the price of rice began to fall. Between September and December 1938, the price of rice on the Saigon market fell 30 percent with paddy diminishing 40 percent in value. Although the fall in price was less accentuated in the Haiphong marketplace, it also fell by 15 percent. The reasons given for this alarming state of affairs was, paradoxically, the arrival in Saigon-Cholon of an abundant new harvest at a time when France and the major global cereal producers also experienced a good harvest, combined with a fall in demand in China owing to the war. Simultaneously, the cost of living index continued to increase in the fourth quarter of 1938, affecting Europeans and middle class locals alike, and with an even deeper impact on the working class. Linked with a major devaluation of the piaster in September 1936, the average cost of living in Hanoi during this period increased a steep 44 percent with an even more alarming 60 percent increase for the working class.[15]

But with the worst of the 1937 crisis behind it, total rice production in Indochina (including exports, reserves, and rice for local consumption) rose to 1,650,000 tonnes in 1939, declining to 1,500,000 tonnes in 1940. The year 1940 also marked a disruption of traditional markets. Owing to the wars in China and Europe, the China-Shanghai and Hong Kong market was lost. Shipping linking France and its colonies to Vietnam simply disappeared. In 1940, Japan stepped into this market in a big way, shipping 500,000 tonnes of rice on its own ships to homeland or Japanese-controlled territories.[16] Japan also benefited from the March 1941 annexation by Thailand of the rich rice producing province of Battambang in Cambodia, depriving Indochina of around 500,000 tons of paddy between 1941-46, not to mention rice consumed or requisitioned by arriving Japanese occupation forces.[17] Further, on 6 May 1941, having entered a commercial agreement with the Vichy administration, Japan contracted delivery of over one million tonnes of Indochinese rice a year.[18] This figure would increase as the war progressed, just as rice came to be extracted under duress including forced or compulsory deliveries outside of market conditions or consideration for local needs.

According to the first Vichy Governor of Cochinchina, René Veber (1940-42) (writing from Vichy in France and signing himself as Governor of Colonies), considerable effort had been made in 1940 to create rice producer cooperatives, notably the collective purchase of selected seeds of the same variety in order to produce a degree of homogeneity in production, while adding value to the crop. In Veber's words, "peasant producers, proprietors and merchants would be rewarded with more homogenous rice of better appreciated varieties." While Veber also acknowledged that such measures flew in the face of Vietnamese peasant "individuality"

(meaning resistance to cooperation), he also believed that, with tact, they could be persuaded.[19] Given that Japan now commanded the lion's share of Indochinese rice exports, we can only speculate as to who was calling the shots as to rice type, but it appears likely that the Japanese market was already pushing the Vichy French in the direction of standardization. Neither can we discount the importance of risk averse strategies typically adopted by peasant producers in avoiding the unknown, such as taking on an untested rice strains that could expose the harvest to new vulnerabilities from pests and disease.

More generally, though, it is fair to conclude from the handling of the 1937 crisis that the French adopted a strict managerial approach to food sufficiency across Indochina, backed by the regular collation of province level statistics. The French not only kept and calculated rice reserves, but they also established a finely detailed picture of food needs across vast territory. Timely food relief and work-for-pay schemes was another feature of colonial policy under the Popular Front government. Vulnerable in the extreme to externalities or international factors, the French also vainly sought to micro-manage the macro-economy. Obviously, for the French, the threatening events of 1930-32 had to be avoided at all costs, just as they wished to lubricate the export economy of which rice constituted an important share. Still, even with peace, the cost of living was skyrocketing and the returns from rice production were diminishing. It would only take a few additional shocks, natural and man-made, to upset this state of equilibrium which, at least until the Japanese period, had cushioned the rural population and averted the worst effects of mass famine. But the disappearance of traditional markets linked with aggressive Japanese rice procurement outside of international free market mechanisms was already an ominous sign for rice producers, proprietors, and middlemen alike.

Origins of the Great Famine of 1944-45

According to Pham Cao Duong,[20] a standard interpretation is that the origins of the famine of 1945 lie with the crop failures of 1943-45; this was compounded by lack of dike maintenance following US bombing of the north and the catastrophic rainfall of August-September 1944 causing flooding and loss of rice plants. There are merits in a multi-cause approach to the famine. In the following few paragraphs I reassess some of the dominant arguments.

For Nguyen Khac Vien, a generally reliable source from the Hanoi-side,[21] the heaviest burden on the people under Japanese rule was the compulsory sale of rice to the state. Even Tonkin, where food was tragically scarce, had to supply 130,305 tonnes in 1943; and 186,130 tonnes in 1944. Whether the crop was good or bad, each region had to supply a quantity of rice in proportion to the tilled acreage at the derisory price of 19 piasters a quintal, a small fraction of the market price. In lean years, people had to buy rice on the market at 54 piasters to meet that obligation. To provide gunny bags for the Japanese economy, people were obliged to uproot rice and plant jute. In 1944 when US bombing cut off northern supplies of coal to Saigon, the French and Japanese used rice and maize as fuel for power stations. They vied with each other to store rice. During that time dams and dikes were neglected. The slightest natural calamity caused food shortages. Starting in 1943, famine began. It became more serious from 1944 onward.

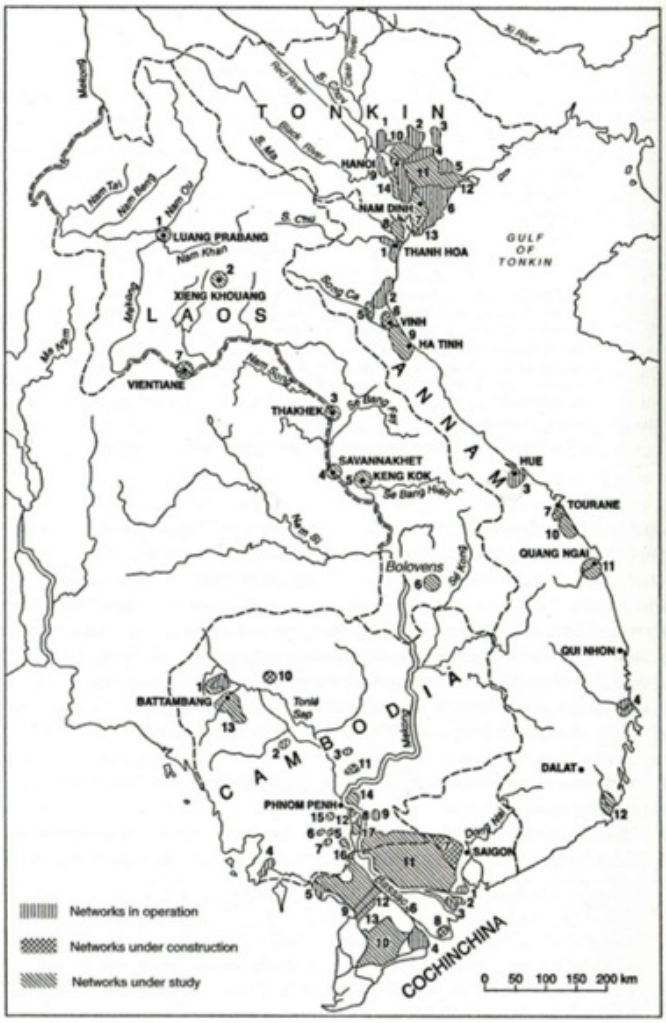
Historian of Vietnam, David Marr,[22] contends that the prospect of dearth in Tonkin had been creeping up for some years prior to the climax. He asserts that paddy output had been slipping over two decades owing to gradual reductions in acreage and a failure to introduce new cultivation methods. In addition, a still small percentage of land had been given over to the production of industrial crops. Meanwhile, the northern population had increased by 36 percent, forcing increased dependence on imports of Cochinchina rice. Drought and insects reduced the 1944 harvest by 19 percent over the previous year, with typhoons damaging the autumn crop. Farmers across northern Vietnam realized by October that they could not fulfill tax obligations, including obligatory deliveries to the government, and feed their families. While peasants started taking customary evasive actions, and while hoarders and black marketers thrived in this environment, the French and Japanese continued stockpiling rice, with General Tsuchibashi Yuichi, commander-in-chief of the occupation army in Indochina and pro-governor general after March 1945, planning 6 months (or 3 years) stockpiling ahead of an anticipated Allied invasion.

Without citing sources, although offering statistics, Pham Cao Duong[23] argues that the decrease in crop yield during these crisis years was not drastic and there was still sufficient rice to avoid starvation. Rather, he sees the cause of the shortage as stemming from the practice of converting rice to alcohol used as a substitute for gasoline; illegal exports of rice by Chinese merchants and coastal traders; and US interdiction of north-south communication routes cutting off the north from rice imports from Cochinchina (estimated at 100,000 tonnes a year). Added to that, Vichy French Governor General Jean Decoux ordered the stockpiling of rice (500,000 barrels), a necessary measure in the circumstances, while the Japanese collected rice. But it was the human factor, he claims, namely intensified speculation, inflation and scarcity, which drove up the price of rice. "The more the price of rice rose, the more the grain became scarce because of stockpiling." In 1944, traditional mechanisms of reciprocity linking large landowners to tenant farmers broke down. As Duong asserts, in 1944, all large landowners were obliged to deliver the bulk of their supplies to the French administration, while all paddy on the market was monopolized by Vietnamese and Chinese merchants.

According to Ngo Vinh Long, "beginning in late 1942, largely because of the Japanese demand for rice, the French colonial administration imposed upon the population "the forced sale of given quotas of rice, depending upon the area of land cultivated." In 1943, this amount reached three-fourths of income for many, even exceeding the amount that some peasants could harvest, forcing purchase on the market to resell to the administration. While the procurement price was minimal, the black market price spiraled upwards. Long asserts that there was coastal junk navigation available but the French either discouraged this transport or taxed it heavily as a disincentive to operators. With Pham Cao Duong, he holds that the use of rice to make alcohol to run machines was "one of the major causes of death from starvation." Another was the French storage of rice and export to Japan (including the export of 300,000 tonnes of maize from 1942 to early 1945), along with Japanese demands to plant industrial crops.[24]

For Brocheux and Hémery,[25] two close students of Vietnam's social and political landscape, the background to the crisis was essentially demographic (they assert that the mishandling was Japanese). Public

health programs and vaccination campaigns did control mortality stemming from terrible cholera epidemics and, after 1927, there were no longer any catastrophic ruptures of dikes in Tonkin, at least until the dramatic flooding of August 1945 when 230,000 hectares were submerged, the most serious flooding of the century. But, in the course of a century of French contact, the population of Vietnam had increased by a factor of six, and cultivated surface by two. The balance of population and grain production therefore became extremely uncertain and the peasants were periodically wracked by agro-ecological crisis. Starting before 1930, vast areas of rural misery expanded in the regions where the ratio of population to cereal production was most strained, namely the Red River, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, and Quang Ngai. In 1937, there were from 2-3 million agricultural day laborers and more than a million unemployed in the Red River Delta. There was also extreme parcelization of land ownership, and a rising class of Chinese-style big landlords. Taken together, they argue, the situation approximated that of "agricultural involution" such as described by Clifford Geertz in his study of late colonial-early postwar rural Java.



MAP 6.1. Agricultural hydraulics in Indochina, 1945 *(key on facing page)*.

Source: Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*.

Failure

What went wrong? American bombing, and resistance activities in the mountains by Free French and Viet Minh guerillas aside, the Red River delta region and northern Annam was not a major conflict zone. David Marr[26] contends that the only way that mass famine could have been averted would have been to arrange supplies of 60,000 tonnes relief from Cochinchina by October 1944. Citing a French source, he demonstrates that, owing to American submarine operations, air patrols and harbor mining exercises, the amount of rice shipped from south to north dropped from 126, 670 tonnes in 1942 to 29,700 in 1943, to 6,830 in 1944. Given hazardous junk transport and the need for porterage between unbroken sections of the rail link, the challenge was formidable. The knowledge and capacity were there but, he asserts, neither the French nor the Japanese had the will to achieve this goal. Both remained preoccupied with military logistics. Following the 9 March 1945 takeover, the Japanese ignored famine warnings for at least two weeks. By Tet (March) of 1945, thousands, especially rural Vietnamese were dying. The Japanese did release some grain from captured French depots to urban people, in part to discredit the French. After much hand wringing and remonstrations, suggesting administrative malfeasance, relief started to be organized. Eventually, in late June, junks from Cochinchina bearing rice for Tonkin arrived, but by this time the worst of the crisis was over.

Having asserted the dual role of the French and Japanese in stockpiling rice, Marr makes no attempt to disentangle French and Japanese motives. In contrast to the Japanese motive of preparing for future battles and securing supplies for their armed forces, French stockpiling could not have had a primarily military intent. Surely the Japanese would not have allowed French military stockpiling when they were calling the shots. A case could equally be made that the French stockpiling of rice, at least while they were in charge, was an administrative response to a looming crisis and, indeed, a reversion to traditional practice. (As noted, the French, in the early decades of the 20th century, had done away with the traditional practice of the imperial Vietnamese authorities in

hosting rice stores in all provinces, suggesting that the Vichy French revival of this practice had some logic.) It also has to be said that French agricultural organization excelled precisely in monitoring deficits and surpluses across Indochina through regular and intensive statistical surveys, dike control, and the development of rapid communications. Space precludes analysis, but French colonial administrative prowess in this area was no less than say, the British in Malaya or, indeed, the Japanese in Taiwan.

In fact, French and Japanese motives and actions were entirely at variance. According to a Free French intelligence report of September 1944 (derived from an anonymous American informant), on top of an economic agreement contracting 1,200,000 tonnes of rice, the Japanese demanded an additional 400,000 tonnes for military provisions. Undoubtedly sensitive to the intolerable pressures that this would impose upon Vietnamese producers, the Vichy administration under Admiral Decoux balked. The Japanese answered with an ultimatum. In a highly exceptional display of autonomy, the Vichy administration sardonically replied that, if the Japanese wanted the rice then they would have to take it and bear full responsibility for the consequences.[27]

All elements of Pham Cao Duong's argument are cogent and convincing, as the paradox of food availability and unaffordability still haunts international relief agencies confronting analogous situations to the present day. (For instance, overproduction of grain can translate into famine as in Ethiopia in 2003.) Nevertheless, Duong is reluctant to attribute primary cause of the famine cause to Japanese policies, which shattered the market mechanisms that the French had superimposed on traditional practices, albeit these were made more efficient by Indochina-wide stocktaking, stockpiling, and modern transport. Behind Decoux of course it was the Japanese military that had siphoned off rice surpluses and it was Japanese orders that forced Vietnamese farmers to plant industrial crops and convert paddy to biofuels. In general, Decoux was obliged to follow Japanese orders on rice requisition, whatever the consequences, although the Japanese correctly assumed that the Vichy French were also subverting their orders towards the end.

A full accounting would also have to examine the specific stages in the development of the famine in northern Vietnam, from the first crop failures of 1943-44 to the abrupt transition from Vichy French administration to Japanese military rule in March 1945, to the period of social breakdown (August-October 1945), to the complex transition to Viet Minh rule, as well as partial French administrative responsibility (March-November 1946), coinciding with the re-entry of French forces into the Red River delta area following Japan's defeat. The issue of who controlled the keys to the rice stockpiles is also important. If, as Brocheux and Hémery[28] assert, the Japanese lacked the shipping capacity after 1943 to send rice north owing to losses incurred due to US air raids and submarine attacks, then it does seem likely that rice stocks were accruing in the south rather than declining. Even so, Japan was still leaching food out of Indochina, overland via Cambodia or, via the sea route, notwithstanding the American submarine risk.

American Bombing

Although the bombing of strategic Japanese targets in northern Vietnam started in 1942, first by the American Volunteer Group (AVG), better known as the "Flying Tigers," the tempo increased under the Yunnan-based China Air Task Force (CATF) of the Tenth Air Force, and later by the Fourteenth Air Force, as with the bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area in April 1944. Additional attacks were made by B-29s of the XX Bomb Group flying out of India and by Liberators, Mitchells, and Lightnings belonging to the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces operating from bases in the Philippines. Beginning in December 1944, attacks on Japanese targets in southern Vietnam were made by the U.S. Navy Seventh Fleet's Catalinas, B-24s, and Privateers as well as by carrier aircraft from Admiral William Halsey's Third Fleet.[29]

Beginning in April 1944, US India-based B-29's targeted the Saigon Naval Yard and Arsenal. Cap St. Jacques (Vung Tau) also became a bombing target with 5-7 Japanese ships sunk in a raid of 15 April 1944, just as American submarines began to take their toll on both Japanese and French shipping (delivered by Decoux to the Japanese, notwithstanding the resistance of French crews). For example, on 29 April 1944, two French ships heading north were sunk by submarines off the coast of Vietnam, one a French destroyer lost with all hands, the other a merchant vessel which, according to Allied intelligence, was "carrying badly needed rice to Tonkin and Annam." This is an important revelation - or admission - as the Allies would have known something of the human consequences of their actions beyond the mere sinking of ships. Notably, on 12 January 1945, US T-38 aircraft attacked four large enemy convoys off the Vietnam coast sinking 25 vessels and severely damaging 13. Among the losses was the French light cruiser, *Lamotte-Picquet*. Shipping losses along the coast were reported as heavy, just as port arrivals in Saigon-Vung Tau began to trend downwards. The French announced their losses while the Japanese remained silent.[30]

The above leads to the question of what kind of shipping was entering Indochinese ports, for what purpose and to what destination? Saigon and its ocean-going port of St. Jacques/Vung Tau were the most important for Japanese shipping between Taiwan and Singapore with shipping movements in 1943-44 averaging between five (Saigon) and 13 (Cap St. Jacques) ship visits a day. As the assembly point for Japanese convoys plying between the South Seas and Japan, during the same approximate period up to 33 ships a day sometimes anchored off Cap St. Jacques. Allied intelligence offers highly detailed weekly summaries of shipping movements into and out of these ports. In April-June 1944, a large number of Japanese troop-carrying vessels reportedly arrived in the Saigon River and immediately reloaded with rice from barges floated down from Mekong delta rice fields. Summarizing from a single day's maritime activity out of Saigon in early August 1944, Allied intelligence stated that the Japanese were shipping considerable rice from Saigon to occupied Java, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai as well as Japan. In August 1944, Macau Governor Gabriel Teixeira gained Japanese agreement to send a vessel (the *SS Portugal*) to northern Vietnam to load coal and beans for shipment to Macau at a time when the Japanese choke on Portuguese-controlled Macau had reduced sections of the population to cannibalism.[31] The picture that emerges through 1944-early 1945, besides intense Japanese naval activity in and around Saigon port, is one of near total command of rice produced in rice-surplus Cochinchina and Cambodia and its export under Japanese military auspices to virtually all parts of the Japanese empire.[32]

But with US interdiction of Japanese shipping taking its toll, the deployment of shipping also added to the problem of servicing the coastal trade. Dated 19 July (1944), an unreliable Allied intelligence source stated that at Saigon, "there are 300,000 tons of rice awaiting shipment, part of which is rotting on the quays. Even if the figure covers all Japanese-held rice in Saigon including quantities earmarked for local Japanese consumption and production of alcohol," the account continued, "the accumulation during the first six months of 1944 amounts to over a quarter of the total tonnage scheduled for shipping this year."[33] With a superabundance of rice rotting in the harbor, we may ask, why wasn't even a proportion of this food surplus freighted north to cover the then apparent rice deficit in northern Annam and the lower Tonkin delta?

Another measure undertaken to alleviate the shortage of shipping was a concerted attempt by the Japanese authorities in Saigon to construct some 200 wooden ships of 500-ton capacity, an enterprise involving over 1,000 local Chinese and Vietnamese craftsmen. Mitsubishi even set up an engine plant while other engines arrived by freighter from Hong Kong. But rather than deploy these vessels in the coastal trade, the first four were dispatched to Singapore carrying a total of 900 tons of rice. One foundered and two others returned to port badly leaking. Other motor-driven wooden ships were directed towards Thailand and the Khra Isthmus. On 2 September 1944, the Japanese commandeered four Chinese-owned steamships to carry military personnel and supplies between Phnom Penh and Saigon. Although we lack parallel data for Haiphong port, the point is that almost all of this maritime activity was geared to meet Japan's greater strategic needs, while coastal navigation such as would connect up the south, center and north of

Vietnam, apparently still undertaken by the French, was neglected, fatally as it turned out.[34]

Nevertheless, the main transport conduit for the domestic movement of rice was the rail system. Rail transport was the more reliable north-south communication link especially during the typhoon season (July-October), when all maritime activity was hazardous. The Saigon-Hanoi TransIndochinois was single track, meter-gauge, with double track at all stations. The steepest gradient was 1: 100. Normally - or before the bombing started to interrupt the timetable - a journey from Saigon to Hanoi took 42 hours, at an average of 42 km per hour with somewhat lower speed on newly opened track between Nha Trang and Quang Ngai. The capacity of the line was six trains in each direction every 24 hours. According to an Allied intelligence report of 1944, express trains ran daily between the two centers.[35]

Obviously with such an efficient transport system in place there should have been no technical obstacle to moving food from surplus to deficit areas. But, decisions about use of the line also needs to be considered. According to an unconfirmed Chinese intelligence report of late 1944, owing to the movement north of 50,000 Japanese troops from Saigon to Hanoi, all civilian traffic on the line was suspended through 7 September 1944.[36] Whatever the veracity of that report, it does fit generalized accounts contending that the Japanese military subordinated use of the line to military needs, both before and after the 9 March 1945 *coup de force*. Undoubtedly, the Allies were also acting upon this kind of assessment, in targeting the TransIndochinois line.

There is also some conflict in Allied intelligence reporting. A report from September 1944 indicates that American bombing and strafing attacks destroyed or damaged several bridges on the Saigon-Hanoi line resulting in dislocation of transport services. The tenor of this account is confirmed by a 10 October 1944 report citing the "poor condition" of the line, making possible a maximum of 4,000 tons of cargo monthly with possibilities of repair "negligible." But, we know that different sectors of the line were not subject to irreparable damage (Saigon-Danang-Ninh Binh), and that repair and porterage were also ways to minimize the problem. According to an intelligence assessment of January 1945, the Japanese army had demanded of the French (still technically in charge of the line), that six pairs of trains per week should run between Saigon and Tourane (Danang), with one train a day running in both directions from Vietri (northwest of Hanoi) to Laokay (at the Vietnam terminus of the Haiphong-Kunming line).[37] This assessment suggests that there was no breakdown in the rail transportation system at this stage, and there is no reason why rice could not have been entering this traffic if there had been the will.

By 29 November 1944, however, traffic over the railway bridge at Ninh Binh (in the lower southwestern Red River delta) had been stopped by aerial bombing, two railway cars destroyed. On 30 November 1944, the railway was also damaged at Phu Ly (mid-way between Ninh Binh and Hanoi in the mid-lower delta). If these two sections of the line had not been speedily repaired, traffic in and out of the southern Red River delta would have been drastically interrupted. Much of course would also have depended upon non-rail transport from Phi Lu to local markets and the administration and distribution of rice within the deficit zones. Summarizing, we can state, with the famine crisis beginning to bite, rail traffic was still reaching Ninh Binh from Danang via Hue, Vinh, Dong Hoi, and Thanh Hoa, without major interruption.[38]

In mid-April 1945, precisely at the peak of the famine, Australian commandos landing by American submarine inside Danang Bay sabotaged a train or, at least, a locomotive (one of two trains observed heading north). Their mission was directed at northbound trains. As observed, the first two carriages of this 10-18-carriage train held passengers with – as surmised - the remaining covered carriages reserved for troops. While the Australian commandos reckoned they only immobilized the line for 24 hours, the picture they offer of Danang (lights blazing) and rail activity at full spate was one of near normalcy. They also observed an extremely well maintained track. The view from the submarine periscope was one of active and organized offshore night fishing activity by multi-sailed boats all along the coast from Saigon to Danang Bay (200-300 fishing vessels, all numbered as if part of a fishing cooperative exercise). This suggests some degree of food self-sufficiency along the coastal literal of Vietnam, but that would also depend upon distribution networks, markets, and many other factors.[39]

US bombing of the rail line may not have been the critical factor in starving the north of southern rice, especially as it appears that north-south communication was not completely ruptured in the run-up to March-April the peak of the northern famine. But, combined with attacks on coastal shipping, it impeded Japanese and French authorities efforts to deal with transport and food issues. As Mickelson explains in a rare study of Allied bombing of Vietnam during the Pacific War, Americans did not control the skies over Vietnam. Facing down both Vichy anti-aircraft batteries and Japanese fighters the Americans suffered 414 casualties in the course of these missions, alongside a host of downed fliers. For instance, in late 1943, three B-24 Liberators were shot down in a single raid over Haiphong by 35 or more Japanese fighters. For a time, Mickelson also argues, the Americans were diverted from the main mission by acts of "vengeance" against the Vichy French who betrayed the downed American aviators, just as a turn-around in attitude by Admiral Decoux was one of the leading reasons behind the Japanese decision to carry out the March 1945 coup and assume direct military rule.[40]

A Contrarian View

Against the view that the French and Japanese, and perhaps even the Americans, all shared responsibility for the tragedy which is found in a number of official Vietnamese and other writings, a contrarian view suggests a high degree of Japanese responsibility. Bui Ming Dung[41] argues - and I agree - that the Japanese exacted rice not only for their local use or exports to Japan, but for other parts of the empire, even at the height of the starvation. At the heart of Dung's analysis is a refutation of certain of the more enduring explanations of the famine. First, he dismisses the argument that Tonkin (as opposed to Annam) suffered a subsistence crisis (Tonkin rice production exceeded that of Annam, while population increase was greater in Annam than Tonkin). Second, he refutes the arguments of certain Japanese interlocutors (General Tsuchibashi Yuichi included), who assert that bad weather or typhoons were decisive: the big floods actually occurred in August after, not before, the famine. Third, inflation, he argues, hit urban rather than rural dwellers harder. Fourth, to the extent that the French were active under Japanese duress, that of course ceased abruptly after 9 March with Japanese seizure of direct power. Nor does he find the French complicit in the making of the famine. To the extent that the French implemented policy changes, they were ordered to meet Japanese not indigenous demands. Fifth, notwithstanding American bombing, the transport system did not entirely collapse. It was simply reoriented to Japanese military use (rice transport took less volume than other commodities). Sixth, the Japanese forcibly introduced not only jute, but cotton, vegetable oil plants and other industrial crops in northern Vietnam at the expense of maize, rice and other food crops. Maize also began to supplant rice in exports to Japan and the Philippines in 1945, although rice was also exported to other places during this year. Seventh, the Japanese stockpiled rice in Laos right up to the point of their surrender. Finally, overarching all considerations, the export of Indochinese rice to Japan and the empire appears to have been a Japanese policy throughout.

Apportioning Blame

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, according to Marr,[42] famine survivors most readily blamed the French, who were still in charge until March 1945, and were less inclined to blame the Japanese. According to Marr, no blame was attributed to the Allied

forces in destroying infrastructure or the Viet Minh who were supporting Allied actions. Also, as mentioned in the DRV Declaration of Independence of 2 September 1945, both the French and the Japanese were targeted. From 1940, it asserts, "Our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that from the end of last year to the beginning of this year from Quang Tri province to the north of Vietnam, more than two million of our fellow citizens died from starvation."[43]

While responsibility for the famine remains controversial, there is no question that the Viet Minh derived maximum propaganda advantage from the tragedy. In an undated memorandum addressing a Viet Minh allegation that it was the French who were to blame for the famine of 1944-45, French intelligence responded that, to the contrary, owing to the fact that the harvest of the 10th month of 1944 had resulted in a shortfall, the French administration had built up reserve stocks in each province. However, the Japanese had distributed most of these stocks. Moreover, the Japanese had reduced rice production and area under cultivation owing to a switch to industrial crops to service their own requirements. In defeat, according to French intelligence, the Japanese had removed rice stocks and thrown them into the Mekong River at Thakek and Paksane in southern Laos. This vandalism condemned thousands of Indochinese people to die of famine. The harvest of the 10th month of 1945 revealed another compromise owing to the floods which ravaged the rice fields of the Red River delta causing major losses of life. While the postwar French administration in central and south Vietnam exercised protective measures, by provoking or encouraging "disorder and pillage," the "provisional government," namely the Hanoi authorities, "also hampered French government assistance in these regions. It is they who should be held responsible for launching the famine as much for its aggravation and continuing disorders."[44]

After the Revolution

The Viet Minh August revolution of 1945 in the north, leading to the DRV proclamation of the following month, was not exactly propitious from the point of view of food security and we wonder how the Viet Minh coped with the situation. King C. Chen[45] confirms that the food situation was on the verge of disaster. According to Viet Minh estimates, the 1945 autumn harvest was poor and hardly sufficed to feed eight million persons for three months. To avoid nation-wide starvation, the Viet Minh government launched an All-out Campaign Against Famine. The entry of 152,000 Nationalist Chinese army personnel in northern Indochina to accept the Japanese surrender increased the difficulty of food supply. The problem was only gradually alleviated with the arrival of supplies from Saigon though, as Chen contends, the French also tried to delay shipments to the north.

Gabriel Kolko[46] is one who has appreciated the political importance of the famine in preparing the ground for the revolution that followed. He notes that the communists broke open the rice stores to avert famine. Nguyen Khac Vien[47] affirms that it was the Viet Minh who took the lead in calling upon the peasants to resist orders to plant jute and led opposition to the forced sale of rice, terming this a joint French-Japanese oppression. This view is not contradicted by the head of the American OSS delegation in Hanoi, Archimedes Patti, who argues that the unplanned effects of Viet Minh seizures of paddy stocks had the effect of providing relief from the famine as the price of rice fell; identification of the Japanese and French as the common enemy; encouraging people to organize for self-defense; highlighting the importance of organized resistance, and recruiting for the Viet Minh.[48] But, as Brocheux and Hémery hedge, the famine in the north provided an ideal basis for denouncing the deficiencies of the colonial regime, and even a supposed Franco-Japanese collusion at physically liquidating the Vietnamese population. The Viet Minh not only used the famine as a propaganda weapon, but also mobilized the population to seize stocks, which had been stored by the French and were in Japanese hands after March 1945.[49]

Remembrance

At least until, 1975, the DRV did not have a monopoly on official Vietnamese remembrance of the famine. Indeed, the question of Japanese war reparations was contested between the north and the south. Yet another version of the famine was replayed postwar by the President of the Republic of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem (October 1955- November 1963), in discussions with the Japanese ambassador in Saigon, Konogaya Yutaka. Ambassador Konogaya informed Australian diplomats on 15 February 1957 that, in claiming war reparations Diem made the argument that, towards the end of the war, the Japanese army requisitioned enormous quantities of rice from the north and the south, apparently with the intention of building up large stocks in the mountains to enable it to continue fighting. This requisition led to the disastrous famine in the north and the death of more than one million Vietnamese. Dismissively, Konogaya asserted, aside from the figure of one million dead, the Vietnamese had supplied no statistics to support its claims for exaggerated amounts of reparations and that, in fact, "no statistics exist." Setting aside the question of reparation claims (eventually paid to the Republic of South Vietnam after protracted negotiations and bitter recriminations), Diem voiced a popular perception held in south Vietnamese elite circles, at least, of the causes of the famine.[50]

As Bui Ming Dung[51] remarks, the Japanese have little remembered or reflected on the tragedy in Vietnam. Rather, it is often argued there that "the Vietnamese starvation was the result of confused 'war time conditions.'" Undoubtedly, the pro-Saigon business lobby, eager to pick up where they left off in 1945, and which the combative Ambassador Konogaya seemed to represent, helped to consolidate this view. At the helm of this group stood the Japan-Vietnam Friendship Society, inaugurated at a meeting in Nihonbashi in 1955 although, 55 years on, it is now appropriately pro-Hanoi. Present was Tsukamoto Takeshi, former Japanese consul general in Hanoi, and Shigemitsu Mamoru (1887-1957), Japanese foreign minister at the end of the war and, after release from internment in Sugamo prison on war crimes charges, postwar foreign minister (1954-56).

Conclusions

Although Hanoi, together with a number of independent researchers, remains equivocal in apportioning blame to both French and Japanese, it should be noted that French and Japanese motives in stockpiling rice differed in fundamentals. It also must be said that, even if Tonkin had become increasingly dependent upon imports of Cochinchina rice over the previous two decades, France can hardly be blamed for the demographic increase in the north. Assessing responsibility for the famine is further complicated by the US recourse to bombing in Indochina that often did not discriminate between civilian and military targets. In fact, the Americans were warned by the French of the consequences of destroying dikes in the north.[52] Finally, there remains the difficulty in interpreting the willful destruction of rice stocks at war end by the Japanese military.

It is nevertheless clear that continued heavy rice requisitions demanded by the Japanese and implemented by the Vichy French in a situation of administrative breakdown and even semi-anarchy after the Japanese coup, magnified the impact of the disaster. Human failure and agency combined to betray the people of northern and north-central Vietnam. Affirming perhaps the more general thrust of Amartya Sen's arguments about the causes of famines, food distribution mechanisms broke down not in a situation of absolute scarcity as in some conflict situations but in an environment in which all signs pointed to the urgent need for surplus rice to be moved north from the Mekong delta. More than that, more rational and humane policies directed at northern Vietnam would have seen more land under rice cultivation, less rice diverted to industrial alcohol, etc., corn and other crops planted and reserved as a backup, reduction of rice exports under shortage conditions, fewer forced deliveries, greater availability of food crops in the marketplace, and the rational and humane use of stockpiled rice.

Finally, I am in agreement with Bui Ming Dung who argues that "the Japanese occupation of Vietnam was the direct cause, in the final analysis, of several other factors, in turn affecting the famine, but their military efforts together with their economic policy for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere per se seem to have systematically played a role considerably greater than any other factors in the Vietnamese starvation." Even if the statistics are wanting as Ambassador Konogaya insisted – especially as we lack knowledge of provincial and county level dynamics in the crucial months of 1945 – the basic facts surrounding the great starvation of 1944-45 are still persuasive of the general truths we have outlined here.

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Notes

[1] From a range of official and other sources, David Marr concludes that the death toll probably reached one million or ten percent of the population of the affected area perishing in a five-month period. See David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, p. 104. Ngo Vinh Long asserts that two million people died in Tonkin alone during the few months from the end of 1944 to the early part of 1945. See *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants under the French, Columbia University Press*, 1991, p.129. Bui Ming Dung, who sampled a range of sources, also estimates between one and two million victims. Bui Ming Dung, "Japan's Role in the Vietnamese Starvation of 1944-45," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no.3, July, 1995, pp.575-76.

[2] Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981. In this seminal text on food security, Sen broadly demonstrates that famine occurs not only or primarily from an insufficiency of food but from inequalities built into mechanisms for distributing food. See also, Sugata Bose, "Starvation amidst Plenty: The Making of Famine in Bengal, Honan, and Tonkin, 1942-44" (*Modern Asian Studies*, 24, no.4, 1990: 699-727), "a study which puts into bold relief, the role played by the state, fluctuations in wider economic systems, and various social structures in the translation of chronic hunger into dramatic famine and the uneven social distribution of its costs. It also highlights the role of famine in undermining the legitimacy of the state and the pre-existing social structures." (pp. 726-27).

[3] My intuitive understanding of this linkage also stems from working with statisticians seeking to calibrate the number of conflict-linked deaths in East Timor versus mortality stemming from famine linked with forced relocation and political manipulation of relief aid.

[4] Personal accounts of the famine have been collected as in Van Tao and Furuta Mota (eds), *Nan doi Nam 1945 o Viet Nam: Nhung Chung tich lich su* (Hanoi, 1995). Ngo Ving Long, Before the Revolution; Pham Cao Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants under French Domination, 1861-1945*, Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph 25, University of California, Berkeley, Ca, 1985; and David Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, p.104, have offered partial translations or word pictures of the scope of the famine. According to Marr, the worst affected provinces were Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Hai Duong, and Khien An, with particular districts even more affected. Neither was Hanoi spared the famine, though obviously certain classes were differentially affected. Notwithstanding these accounts and studies, it appears to me that the actual impact of the famine and its geographical impact is the least well-researched aspect.

[5] Undoubtedly the first detailed accounting in English language of these events owes to John R. Andrus and Katrine R.C. Greene, "Recent Developments in Indo-China: 1939-43," in Charles Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina* (Oxford University Press, London, 1944), pp.351-89.

[6] See Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution*, p.32.

[7] Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (AOM) Indo/NF/ Situation de l'Indochine française durée 1902-1907, Rapport par Beau, Gouverneur General.

[8] On irrigation, dike construction, and agricultural improvements in Tonkin and Annam, see Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*, (pp.222-25), the classic colonial-era account in English of French agriculture practices in Indochina.

[9] See, for example, James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976; Ngo Vinh Long, "The Indochinese Communist Party and Peasant Rebellion in Central Vietnam, 1930-1931," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol.10, no. 4, (1978), pp. 15-35.

[10] See Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*, p. 238, who also noted the need for or the wisdom of stressing agricultural diversification away from crops other than rice.

[11] AOM Indo/NF/104/1004 Gouverneur de la Cochinchine Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine, Saigon, no.734, 25 Dec. 1934; *Bulletin Economique de l'Indochine*, Dec. 1938. For a statistical analysis of the dramatic shift in trade from traditional markets (France, etc.) to Japan, see Andrus and Greene, "Recent Developments in Indo-China: 1939-43," in Robequain, pp.363-64. As they note, much of the rice shipped to Hong Kong and other Chinese ports was probably shipped to Japan or used to feed Japanese troops in China.

[12] AOM Indo/NF/48/578-583, Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine M. le Ministre des Colonies, Paris.

[13] AOM Indo/NF/104/1004 Indochine et Pacifique, p.7, 17 Mai 1939.

[14] AOM Résident Supérieur, Tonkin Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine, Hanoi, 10 Avril 1937.

[15] *Bulletin Economique de l'Indochine*, Decembre 1938.

[16] AOM Indo NF/330/2664, "Rapport Gouverneur Veber," Vichy, 23 Avril 1941. According to Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*, (p.329), rice exports to Japan were never important and shrinking. Averaging 109,000 tons annually in 1913-1928, they dropped to 36 tons in 1929-32 and barely 2 tons in 1933-37.

[17] Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2010,

p.439 note 33.

[18] See, Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State (Welles) Regarding A Conversation With the Japanese Ambassador (Nomura), 23 July 1941, who stated that Japan was now importing a million tons of rice a year from Indochina. As Wells replied, "any agreement which Japan might have reached with the Vichy Government could only have been reached as a result of pressure brought to bear upon the Vichy Government by Berlin." U.S., Department of State, *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941* (Washington, D.C.: U.S., Government Printing Office, 1943), 1983, pp. 692-96.

[19] AOM Indo NF/330/2664, "Rapport Gouverneur Veber," Vichy, 23 Avril 1941. Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*, (p. 238), also contended that the biggest defect of Indochinese rice (compared to Burma) entering the market was its heterogeneous character; different color, size, and hardness all mixed up from various fields with no indication of origin. There were then more than 2,000 varieties of rice cultivated in Indochina, well adapted to local conditions but, "too many" and selection was required.

[20] Pham Cao Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants under French Domination, 1861-1945*, Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph 25, University of California, Berkeley, Ca, 1985, pp. 181-82.

[21] Nguyen Khac Vien, *The Long Resistance* (1858-1975), Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1975, pp.92-95.

[22] Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, p.99.

[23] Pham Cao Duong, *Vietnamese Peasants under French Domination, 1861-1945*, pp.181-82.

[24] Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants under the French*, Columbia University Press, 1991, pp.129-31.

[25] Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, pp: 262-65. Geertz's classic study of the problem is *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (University of California Press, 1970). Writing in 1944, Andrus and Greene, "Recent Developments in Indo-China: 1939-43," in Robequain, p. 385, noted that there had been numerous reports of food shortages in Tonkin. Citing the research of French agronomist Pierre Gourou, population pressure was of the order of 3,500 persons per square mile. They also noted that the Japanese appeared to have been shipping northerners south but that such internal migration was unlikely to keep ahead of the birthrate.

[26] Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, pp.99-100.

[27] "Controle Japonais sur l'Administration Français en Indochine," *Bulletin de Renseignement*, No.323/BO, DGER, 14 Sept. 1944. For details of the January 1941 rice agreement between the Vichy authorities with Japan, see Andrus and Greene, "Recent Developments in Indo-China: 1939-43," in Robequain, pp.367-78. According to these authors, "In addition to the rice guaranteed to Japan, that country was to receive any unused portion of the 200,000 ton quota allotted to France and other colonies, plus any export surplus of white rice beyond a total of 1,020,000 tons." (p.369).

[28] Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, p.90. Specifically, when a 1945 agreement on rice delivery to Japan was signed in March, the Japanese had more than 100,000 tons in stock that they had been unable to transport (p.346). In September 1945, when arriving British forces inventoried the rice supply in Cholon, they estimated that 69,000 tons remained in Mitsui Company warehouses, 66,000 in stores of the Vichy-created Comité des céreales (grain), and with Japanese stocks in Cochinchina. Cambodia, and northern Annam amounting to 25,000 tons (p.348).

[29] See Martin L. Mickelsen, "A mission of vengeance: Vichy French in Indochina in World War II," *Air Power History*. FindArticles.com. 17 Dec. 2010.

[30] National Archives of Australia (NAA) A 3269 G5/4 [South China Sea, South China, French Indochina and North] SHARK. In this operation, Vice Adm John S. McCain operating in the South China Sea hit Japanese shipping, airfields, and other shore installations in southeastern French Indochina. For this and other detailed logs of Japanese shipping losses inflicted by US sea and, with less detail, air power, see Robert J. Cressman, The Official Chronology of the U.S. Navy in World War II

[31] See Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Encountering Macau: A Portuguese City State on the Periphery of China, 1557-1999*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1996, p.126.

[32] NAA A 3269 G5/4 [South China Sea, South China, French Indochina and North] SHARK.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid. On the Japanese wooden ships, also see Andrus and Greene, "Recent Developments in Indo-China: 1939-43," in Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*. p. 385.

[35] This was not a disinterested report, but offered four optimum target sites for submarine-based landing parties where the line was at its closest point to the sea, from Thanh Hoa in the north to Quang Nan-Danang in the south. NAA A3269 E3/4 Lower South China Sea, Singapore OPTICIAN copy [South China Sea].

[36] NAA A 3269 G5/4 [South China Sea, South China, French Indochina and North] SHARK.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid. On 1 July a bridge and railway line at Phu Lang Thuong (now known as Bac Giang) was hit. Although a strategic line connecting with Lang Son, this was not in the delta region.

[39] NAA A 3269 E7/A [Lower South China Sea, Singapore, POLITICIAN project copy [Tourane Bay, Indo-China] Dubbed the Politician project, a first attempt to blow up the track south of Danang was mounted on 5-6 April 1945 but foiled by an armed maintenance group. Part of a series of operations mounted out of Western Australia involving American submarines and Australian commandos, other missions included raids on railroads in Java, a successful and celebrated raid on Japanese shipping in Singapore, operations in Malaya, attempts to create bases in the Paracels and Natuna Islands, and even a planned raid on Japanese shipping in Nagasaki and Sasebo.

[40] According to Mickelsen, "A mission of vengeance," the commander in chief of the French army in Vietnam, General Eugene Mordant, was convinced that the Fourteenth Air Force had deliberately bombed Hanoi in December 1943, and again in April 1944 in retaliation for Decoux's policy of surrendering downed American fliers to the Japanese. Notably, on 10 and 12 December 1943, Hanoi (and not the usual target of the nearby Japanese airfield at Gia Lam) had been attacked for the first time, causing 1,232 casualties and 500 deaths. On 8 April 1944, Hanoi was hit again by the 308th Bomb Group (H) when the Yersin hospital complex was targeted, leaving 46 civilians dead with 141 wounded in Vietnamese and Chinese residential areas. Mordant's fears were reinforced by a warning from Fourteenth Air Force commander, Claire Chennault that all the major towns in Tonkin would be bombed if similar incidents occurred in the future.

[41] Bui Ming Dung, "Japan's Role in the Vietnamese Starvation of 1944-45," pp.573-618.

[42] Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, p.109.

[43] See King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China 1938-54*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1969, Append II, p.337.

[44] AOM Indo NF 134/1219 Direction d'Information, "Les Japonais et leurs collaborateurs sont responsible de la famine," nd.

[45] Chen, *Vietnam and China 1938-54*, p.133.

[46] Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of War: Vietnam, the United States and Modern Historical Experience*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985, p.36. Also see Stein Tönnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2010, p.201.

[47] Nguyen Khac Vien, *The Long Resistance* (1858-1975), pp.92-95.

[48] Archimedes Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, p.133.

[49] Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, p.34.

[50] NAA A1838 3014/11/89 Part I, Vietnam Foreign Policy Relations with Japan, Australian Legation, Saigon, to External Affairs, Canberra, 11 Feb. 1957. As Australian diplomatic sources reveal, Diem felt nothing but contempt for the Japanese in general, and read back history accordingly. The last of the Southeast Asian countries to receive Japanese reparations under the terms of the San Francisco Treaty of 1951, in May 1969 the Republic of Vietnam accepted US$39 million over a period of five years, an outcome bitterly opposed by the DRV. Cambodia and Laos accepted "free technical aid" rather than formal reparations.

[51] Bui Ming Dung, "Japan's Role in the Vietnamese Starvation of 1944-45," pp. 576-77. We recognize that some Japanese academic writing has acknowledged the DRV claims as to the number of victims and general attribution as to cause.

[52] Bui Ming Dung, "Japan's Role in the Vietnamese Starvation of 1944-45," p. 618. Fortunately, more sober minds prevailed in consideration of US bombing of the northern delta. On 6 August 1945, Joseph C. Crew, Acting Secretary of State, communicated to the Secretary of State that military operations in Tonkin and the prospect of serial bombardment of the dikes in the Red River Delta - as evidently contemplated by military planners - would cause "formidable danger to the population of this area." This was no understatement. At risk were the lives of eight million people in densely populated land crosscut by dikes built up over the centuries. The gravity of the situation had been conveyed initially by the French Military Mission in Kunming to the Commander of the US Fourteenth Air Force. See *State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee* (SWNCC) 35 Crew to Secretary of State, 6 August 1945, SR. The question of bombing the dikes was raised again by Pentagon planners in the 1960s, just as nuclear options were being weighed in some quarters in Washington.