

# A Study of the Overseas Chinese Community in French-Indochina during World War Two

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## Introduction

The Japanese army began to be stationed in Indochina in September 1940. Instead of establishing a military administration, it allowed French colonial rule to continue within the framework of a “dual colonialism” until the March 1945 *coup de force*. The Japanese army entered Indochina for two main purposes: 1) to cut off the supply route from the West to the Chiang Kai Shek forces and 2) to maintain a sufficient supply of strategic resources, especially rice to be exported to Japan. To these ends, the Japanese needed to cooperate with the French Indochinese administration. In addition, they were faced with a serious problem: how to deal with the Overseas Chinese residing in Vietnam who controlled the rice circulation and trade. This paper examines this issue, with special attention to the attitude of the Overseas Chinese *vis-à-vis* the dual colonialism in Indochina.

## 1. Overview of the Overseas Chinese Society in Vietnam before the Outbreak of the Second World War

Vietnam borders China geo-politically and was dominated by China for 1000 years beginning in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Therefore, in ancient times there were already a large number of Chinese immigrants in Vietnam. However, the first big wave of Chinese migration into Vietnam was during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Since then, many other waves have taken place. Especially from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as with other parts in Southeast Asia, Vietnam witnessed an increasing number of Chinese immigrants. According to a survey by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in 1934, the total number of Overseas Chinese in the world was 7,786,171, including 6,009,013 in Southeast Asia, and in Indochina approximately 380,000 Chinese were present.<sup>2</sup> This means that the Overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia accounted for 77% of the total number in the world, while those in Indochina accounted for 6.3% of the total in Southeast Asia and 4.8% of those worldwide, ranking fourth in Southeast Asia, following Siam, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview see Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) and Ky Luong Nhi, “The Chinese in Vietnam: A Study of Vietnamese-Chinese Relations with Special Attention to the Period 1862–1961,” Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> 北澤有勝「南方圏に於ける華僑」『単行図書資料 第 60 巻』, 竜溪書舎, 2002.

Beginning in the end of the 1930s, as the Sino-Japanese War was spreading from the northern to the southern part of the continent, the number of Chinese immigrants in Indochina began to grow. Most of them were war refugees from southern China such as Hong Kong and especially Guangdong and Fujian.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1.** Overseas Chinese leaving and entering Indochina<sup>4</sup>

Year	Saigon			Indochina		
	Leaving	Entering	Net Change	Leaving	Entering	Net Change
1937	51,400	17,800	33,600	70,731	35,926	34,805
1938	63,400	15,400	48,000	91,510	38,210	53,300
1939	40,200	13,400	26,800	132,530	92,830	39,700
1940	11,800	12,300	-500	58,200	72,640	-14,440
1941	5,400	9,700	-4,300	11,980	16,220	-4240
1942	1,900	2,900	-1,000	6,900	6,400	500
1943	3,096	4,578	-1,482	---	---	---
1944	1,838	2,942	-1,104	---	---	---
1945	859	837	32	---	---	---

To manage the increasing number of Overseas Chinese, the Cochinchina Governor had previously issued an instruction in 1906 which ordered the formation of congregations (*bang*) for Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, and Hakka. Any Chinese immigrant in Indochina was obliged to register as a subject of one of these congregations based on his/her main language and place of origin. The congregations enjoyed their status as legal entities and were allowed to own the real estate necessary for their development. In each congregation, a collective autonomous system was established with a president and deputy president. In principle, the congregation was permitted to establish a branch in each province of Cochinchina. A congregation recruiting a sufficient number of members was allowed to form a sub-congregation.

In Indochina, beside the congregations, there were other types of Overseas Chinese organisations. They can be categorized into professional, political and other forms of organisations. The two most prominent professional organisations were the Chinese General Association of Commerce in Vietnam (越南中華總商會) and the Chinese General Federation of Trade Unions in Vietnam (越南華僑總工會). The Chinese General Association of Commerce in Vietnam was established in January 1900 in Chợ Lớn and initially called General Trade Association of Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina (南圻華僑商務總會).<sup>5</sup> This organisation was composed of several public associations—the Association of Rice Traders, Association of Printing, Association of Western Goods Traders, Association of Western Cloth Traders, Association of Tea Producers, Association of Wine Producers, Association of Merchants, Association of Trust Agreement, Association of Clothing—which were charged with protecting the interests and managing the movements of Overseas Chinese. The Chinese General Association of

<sup>3</sup> 藤村是清「厦門・汕頭・瓊州と香港の出入国者数の個別的合計（1855-1940年）—蘭印・北米西海岸，検証，帰国率，太平洋移民運航，隔地季節変動—」神奈川大学，『人間科学研究年報』，第3巻，2009。

<sup>4</sup> Statistics for Saigon are from Tsai Maw-Kuey, *Les Chinois au Sud-Vietnam* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1968), p. 40; figures for Indochina are from Ky, "Chinese in Vietnam," p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> 華僑志編纂委員會『越南華僑志』（台北，1957），p. 139.

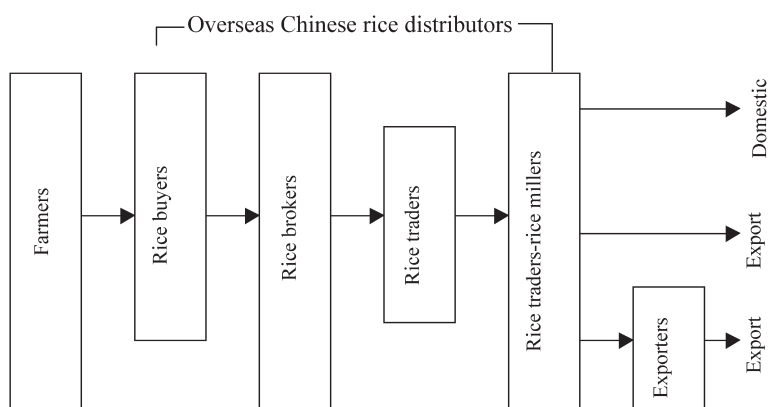
Commerce in Vietnam was originally tasked with regulating market prices and distributing goods in Saigon and Chợ Lớn. However after spreading its scope of activities across the Cochinchina, in 1925, it became a huge network with 3368 companies and 12000 member shops.<sup>6</sup>

The Chinese General Federation of Trade Unions in Vietnam was founded in 1924 in Chợ Lớn.<sup>7</sup> It consisted of different labor unions such as the Association of Rice Milling, the Association of Mechanics, the Association of Construction. Apart from these two large organisations there was the Association of Overseas Chinese Journalists in Vietnam (旅越報道記者公会) whose members were Chinese.

Apart from these economic and professional organisations, there were political organisations such as the cells of the Guomindang. In 1922, a Guomindang cell was established in Chợ Lớn by party members from Guangdong, gaining considerable support from Chinese workers. In 1924, the number of Guomindang members in Cochinchina was believed to have reached 14,000.<sup>8</sup>

In Indochina, among various economic activities by Overseas Chinese, the most influential was the rice trade. Those involved in this activity can be divided in principle into four sub-groups: rice traders-rice millers, paddy traders, paddy brokers, and paddy buyers. Rice traders and millers owned mills where they husked rice and pounded it into flour and sold the final product to rice exporters. Many rice millers were also involved in rice exporting. Most were based in Chợ Lớn, the largest town where the rice from the Mekong Delta provinces was gathered and exported abroad. According to a newspaper article in 1941, Overseas Chinese owned 63 rice mills in Chợ Lớn, eight in other parts of Cochinchina, six in Tonkin and one in Tourane (present-day Đà Nẵng).<sup>9</sup> Only three mills in Chợ Lớn were owned by the French.

**Chart 1.** Rice Distribution Flow in Indochina before the 1940s<sup>10</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Tsai Maw-Kuey, *Les Chinois*, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> 華僑志編纂委員会『越南華僑志』, p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Engelbert, "Chinese Politics in Colonial Saigon (1919–1936): The Case of the Goumindang," *Chinese Southern Dispora Studies*, 4 (2010): p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, August 14, 1941.

<sup>10</sup> 田淵幸親「日本の対インドシナ「植民地」化プランとその実態」東南アジア史学会『東南アジア—歴史と文化—』9 (1980), p. 119.

The rice trade in Indochina was dominated by Overseas Chinese traders, due to their effective distribution network and collective management and cooperation systems. Therefore, Vietnamese rice traders could not compete with the Chinese, and in actuality, their business was limited to specific areas designated for them by the Chinese.

When the second stage of the Sino-Japanese War broke out on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1937, the Cochinchina General Association of Overseas Chinese for National Salvation (越南南圻華僑救國總會) was founded in Chợ Lớn. This organization was established by influential Overseas Chinese groups such as the Annam [i.e., Vietnamese] Cell of the Guomindang (國民黨安南支部), the Chinese General Association of Commerce in Vietnam and The Union of Seven Congregations (七府公所). It formed 35 sub-divisions charged with directing the anti-Japanese movement of Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina. Its affiliated organisations included 77 organisations and 75 companies- and banks. Its President was Zhang Zhenfan (張振帆), its executive member was Zhu Jixing (朱繼興) (then Chairman of the Chinese General Association of Commerce in Vietnam), along with Yan Zijun (顏子俊).<sup>11</sup>

The Association's stated objectives were: 1) to direct the Overseas Chinese in their national protection; 2) to mobilize Overseas Chinese to support their motherland; 3) to collect bonds to support national salvation, national consolidation and war victims; 4) to rally financial, material, human and intellectual resources to support the motherland; 5) to promote the boycotting of Japanese commodities; 6) to track down Chinese traitors; 7) to expand propaganda for national salvation; and 8) to train cadres for the anti-Japanese movement for national salvation.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the 1930s, the subordinate organs of Chiang Kai Shek's Chongqing government in Indochina included the General Consulate in Hanoi, General Consulate in Saigon (founded in 1935) and the centrally-affiliated Annam Cell of the Guomindang. However in reality there was no single headquarters directing the anti-Japanese struggle of Overseas Chinese, and each local area had its respective command center.<sup>13</sup> In Tonkin there was the Hải Phòng Food Supply Association for National Salvation of Overseas Chinese (海防華僑縮食救國會), in Hué the Vietnam Association of Overseas Chinese in Hué for National Salvation (越南京都順化華僑救濟會), in Phnom Penh the Cambodia Charity and Relief Association of Overseas Chinese (高棉華僑救濟祖國災民慈善會), and in Saigon the Cochinchina General Association of Overseas Chinese for National Salvation, which worked under the instruction of the Annam Cell of Guomindang and the Chinese General Consulate in Saigon. Among these groups, the Cochinchina General Association of Overseas Chinese for National Salvation was central in the anti-Japanese movement in Vietnam.

In Hanoi and Hải Phòng, the anti-Japanese movement did not become visible until 1937 and was primarily focused on covert activities such as boycotting Japanese goods, financial sanctions and the expulsion of Overseas Chinese collaborators. Other activities included persecution of Overseas

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<sup>11</sup> 東亞研究所,『第三調査委員会報告書—南洋華僑抗日救國運動の研究—』,資料甲三十三号 B, 1945, p. 241.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

Chinese working for the Japanese and the prevention of Japan's economic penetration.<sup>14</sup> In 1938, under the directions of the Chinese General Consulate in Hanoi and the Hải Phòng and Hanoi Cells of the Guomindang, the Union of Inspectors was founded in Hải Phòng, and the Overseas Chinese Association for the Boycott of Disloyal Party Members was established in Hanoi. The Cochinchina General Association of Overseas Chinese for National Salvation was in charge of the Chinese General Association of Commerce in Vietnam, the Chinese General Federation of Trade Unions in Vietnam, and Association of Overseas Chinese Journalists in Vietnam, and the Overseas Chinese schools began their boycott movement against Japanese goods. In addition to monitoring the stores, they also supervised trading activities and provided sanctions or rewards to encourage the secret exposure of stores that sold Japanese goods. Thus the boycott of Japanese goods developed radically, as Overseas Chinese culprits were targeted as traitors and violating stores were severely fined. For example, in Hanoi, the fines were regularly kept at four times as much as the prices of smuggling goods.<sup>15</sup> The Annam Cell of the Guomindang was considered the main unit in Indochina charged with collecting fines to support the Chiang Kai Shek government through national bonds and donations, advocating the boycott of Japanese goods, and identifying Overseas Chinese traders who were exchanging Japanese goods. As for those targeted, their families in China were warned or they had their properties confiscated. However, despite these resolute measures, many Chinese in Vietnam managed to import Japanese goods to Hong Kong under the disguise of Chinese or French goods and imported them to Vietnam through Singapore.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Changes in the Overseas Chinese Community in Indochina during the Japanese–French Dual Domination

After the Japanese army entered Indochina, the French colony became virtually a warehouse of military equipment and resources for the army. According to the Japan–Indochina Economic Agreement in May 1941, Indochinese rice exports were restricted to the Japanese forces in Japan, Manchuria and China without any exception. Moreover, only through Mitsui Bussan Company could rice be exported. In addition, the Japanese demanded that Overseas Chinese transfer their rice stocks in the Port of Saigon<sup>17</sup> Previously, these stocks belonged to the Chinese merchants, so this transfer meant that they must give up their rice export network to Japan and place themselves under Japanese control. The Chinese in Vietnam also faced pressures from the French colonial administration which attempted to maintain sufficient rice supply for the Japanese. The French colonial authorities cooperated with the Japanese to pressure the Chinese, retaining a strict supervision over rice production and export.

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<sup>14</sup> *Shina Zasshi*, October 1937.

<sup>15</sup> 東亜研究所, 『第三調査委員会報告書』, p. 347.

<sup>16</sup> 菊池一隆 『抗日戦争時期における重慶国民政府, 南京傀儡政権, 華僑の三極構造の研究』, 平成 10 年度～平成 12 年度科学研究費補助金 (基盤研究 (C) (2)) 研究成果報告書, 1999, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup> Vietnam National Archives (VNA) Center No. 2, GOUCOCH, L47-173, "Régularisation situation des riz entreposés par la Mitsui Bussan Kaisha."

Therefore, the Overseas Chinese under French-Japan dual domination were deprived of their rights in rice circulation, and their interests were also directly affected. Thus, the key issue for economic survival was to overcome these business obstacles rather than to support their Motherland. In this light, they sought to strengthen their organizational cohesion in response to this dual pressure. In 1941, the Association of Overseas Chinese Exporters in Cochinchina created a new statute. Article 2 exemplified four purposes of this Association as follows: to request their members to adhere to the laws and regulations set by the Indochina Governor-General concerning grain purchasing and exporting in Cochinchina; to grant licenses for members; to distribute exported rice to members; and to settle disputes among its members and disagreements between them and external companies.<sup>18</sup>

In 1937-1938, Fujian and Guangdong, the native provinces of the most of the Overseas Chinese, were occupied by the Japanese. In March 1940 the Nanjing Government of Wang Jingwei was established, in June 1940 France surrendered to Germany, and in September 1940 the Japanese army entered Tonkin. This series of events gradually demoralized the anti-Japanese movement of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam. In May 1940, the Cochinchina General Association of Overseas Chinese for National Salvation was disbanded following a regulation on the management of corporate activities issued by the French authorities.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, the Overseas Chinese in Vietnam were slowly disconnecting themselves from the Chongqing government. The *Osaka Asahi Shimbun* reported that not a few Overseas Chinese had lost their interest in funding the Nationalist regime and instead turned to Wang Jingwei.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in February 1941, Chen Jiageng (陳嘉庚), who held an important role in the funding movement of Chiang's regime and acted as president of the China Union of Charity and Relief Committee (中國救濟資金委員會連合會), after considering the situation in China, was "taken aback by the downright degradation of the Chongqing government" and declared his departure from the anti-Japanese movement. This caused a huge shock among the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.<sup>21</sup> As a result, a proportion of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam began to approach the Nanjing government of Wang Jingwei.

After the Japanese army expanded southward to Cochinchina, the Chinese in Vietnam, especially in Chợ Lớn, were put under the army's supervision and forced to respond to its demands. Following the conclusion of the Japan-Indochina Economic Agreement, a few influential Overseas Chinese such as Zhang Zhenfan, Zhu Jixing, Guan Chiheng (關熾亨) and He Luo (何羅) turned away from the Nanjing Guomindang government and offered to cooperate with the Japanese. They were the leaders of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam who were able to persuade this community and thus had considerable impact on the already volatile Chinese society. Therefore, many Chinese in the colony shifted their affiliation to the Japanese as they considered it a safeguard for their family. Not a few recognized the turbulent wartime circumstances as a chance to gain more profit. Grain traders who were well aware of

<sup>18</sup> VNA, GOUCOCH, L61-135 "Hiệp hội các nhà buôn gạo Hoa kiều 1940-1941."

<sup>19</sup> *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 9 Nov. 1940.

<sup>20</sup> *Osaka Asahi Shimbun*, 13 Nov. 1940.

<sup>21</sup> *Taiwan Nichinichi Shinpo*, 5 Nov. 1941.

the rice distribution network in Vietnam gathered paddy from different provinces as instructed by the Indochina Governor General, brought it to the rice mills in Chợ Lớn and sold it to exporting companies, as a way to prove their goodwill towards the Japanese. Other Chinese traders who approached the Japanese received a special permit called “goyotatsu” (御用達), allowing them to open prioritized stores for the Japanese, provide military equipment to the Japanese army, and run inns and gambling houses on behalf of the Japanese.

On the other hand, anti-Japanese campaigns also continued among part of the Chinese community in Vietnam. The Annam cell of the Guomindang which belonged to the Chongqing government reformed itself to track down the Wang Jingwei-affiliated members of Guomindang, while maintaining close correspondence with Chongqing. In addition, this organization set out four main objectives: accumulate materials and funds to support the Chongqing government; deploy their reporters to write for Overseas Chinese newspapers, focusing on propaganda activities against the Japanese and in support of Chiang Kai Shek; raise funds to aid the refugees; instruct the United Force of Youth (童子軍) and other youth organisations; among these the accumulation of funds was most important.<sup>22</sup>

Although the Cochinchina General Association of Overseas Chinese for National Salvation dissolved in May 1940, their cadres hid themselves in local areas and continued anti-Japanese activities. Even after the Japanese army entered Tonkin and the supply route to the Nationalists was cut off, they continued relief activities in Cochinchina on Chongqing's behalf.<sup>23</sup> However, after the Japanese troops entered Cochinchina in July 1941, the Chinese in Saigon-Chợ Lớn faced more direct danger. Chongqing's General Consulate in Saigon was afraid that the presence of the Japanese would encourage influential Chinese to build ties to them. Yin Fengcao (尹鳳操), Consul and leader of the anti-Japanese movement in Chợ Lớn, sent an ultimatum to powerful community leaders demanding that they refrain from dealing with the Japanese. In this document, he stated that “the ultimate victory of our anti-Japanese war is just ahead, on behalf of our nation, let me warn those who used to harbor wrong ambitions in the past: if you make any foolish decision to side with the Japanese, you will later regret.”<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after that, on September 25, 1941, it was said that Yin Fengcao and Chief of the Saigon-Chợ Lớn Cell, He Gousui (何国歳), fled Saigon for Hong Kong. But another source said that Yin still “hid in Cochinchina, attempting to get in touch with the British-American forces and taking the lead in anti-Japanese activities.”<sup>25</sup> His group continued sending messages to Overseas Chinese not to approach the Japanese. It also warned those who cooperated with the Japanese, spreading rumors that “the deployed Japanese troops would plunder your properties.”<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, after the establishment of the Wang Jingwei government in Nanjing, the Overseas

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<sup>22</sup> JACAR (アジア歴史資料センター), Ref.C04123126800, 陸軍省大日記／陸支機密・密・普大日記／陸支密大日記／陸支密大日記「仏印華僑の工作に関する件(1)」, 1941年(防衛省防衛研究所).

<sup>23</sup> *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, 21 Nov. 1940.

<sup>24</sup> *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun*, 9 Sept. 1941.

<sup>25</sup> *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun*, 9 Sept. 1941.

<sup>26</sup> Nanyo Kyokai, *Nanyo Zasshi*, 9, 1941.



Chinese community in Southeast Asia including Vietnam, lost its unity and split into pro-war and anti-war camps. According to Japanese sources, since the first half of 1941, the political sentiment of Chinese in Vietnam began to change rapidly. For instance, on March 30, 1941, around 100 Overseas Chinese in Hanoi and Hải Phòng attended the funeral ceremony of Wang Jingwei's secretary Ceng Zhongming (曾仲鳴) who had been murdered in Hanoi on March 21, 1939 during an assassination attempt against Wang, and requested the Japanese to oppose the French policy to search their houses for contraband.

On April 16, 1941, 16 prominent Chinese in Tonkin invited the representative of the Japanese Society to a banquet at a restaurant in Hanoi.<sup>27</sup> On December 8, when the Asia-Pacific War broke out, eight representatives of the Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina "visited Envoy Uchiyama at his Legation, expressed their wish to end hostility and began all-sided cooperation with the Japanese." Nine days later, in Chợ Lớn, "more than ten loyal members including their congregation Presidents visited the chief information officer Sato at the Japanese Embassy, and promised to cooperate with the Japanese."<sup>28</sup> A Japanese newspaper article reported that many Overseas Chinese in Indochina claimed that "they would break their connections to the Chongqing government, purchase and more Japanese goods. Other Overseas Chinese will learn of it and also buy more Japanese goods." The reporter wrote that their presence was "favorable for the Japanese."<sup>29</sup>

In December 1941, after the outbreak of war, the Japanese Army quickly occupied most of Southeast Asia. Some researchers consider that this initial "victory" by the Japanese was one of the most important reasons that led the Overseas Chinese in Vietnam to seek closer ties with the Japanese at least on the surface.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the Guomindang officials' corruption and their engagement with Chinese Communists provoked indignation among Overseas Chinese. This was another reason why they stopped anti-Japanese campaigns, and opted for the Japanese and the Nanjing government.

On December 21, 1941, a decision made by the Overseas Chinese residing in Saigon-Chợ Lớn showed their will to "remove the Chongqing government and support the Nanjing Government." The military flag of the Nanjing Government for "Peace and national salvation" as well as the portraits of Wang Jingwei (and Sun Yat Sen) were seen in many places.<sup>31</sup> In a speech made at a casual banquet in a Chợ Lớn restaurant on January 3, 1941, Sakakibara Masaharu, a high-ranking military officer responsible for propaganda activities in the Command of the South Army, declared that the Overseas Chinese vowed not to cooperate with the Chongqing government. He cited Wang Jingwei's declaration in 1938 calling for the establishment of a new Nationalist government and for Sino-Japanese cooperation.<sup>32</sup>

Zhang Zhenfan was a typical Chinese in Vietnam, who made a shift in political stance from being

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<sup>27</sup> Nanyo Kyokai, *Nanyo Zasshi*, 5, 1941.

<sup>28</sup> *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 11 Dec. 1941.

<sup>29</sup> *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 9 Dec. 1940.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, 市川健二郎「日中戦争と東南アジア華僑」『国際政治』47号, 1972, p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, 4 Jan. 1942.

<sup>32</sup> 榊原政春『一中尉の東南アジア軍政日記』, 草思社, 1998, p. 34.



pro-Chongqing to being pro-Nanjing. Zhang Zhenfan<sup>33</sup> was born in Indochina in 1882 and an influential figure in Chợ Lớn. He was the President of the Hokkien Congregation in Chợ Lớn and President of the Union of Seven Congregations (which held the leadership of Overseas Chinese Congregations). Moreover, in 1938–9, he was Chairman of the Chinese General Association of Commerce in Vietnam, President of the Association of Rice Transaction Departments of that Association, and President of the Association of Overseas Chinese Rice Merchants (米穀商公会). He had considerable influence among the rice distributors. After the anti-Japanese movement erupted in China and on the occasion of the first Japanese military expedition to Shandong, Zhang supported Chiang Kai Shek with 500,000 *yuan*. Chiang praised Zhang: “An honest donation from a trader results from his heartfelt patriotism when the country faces difficulties. How joyful! How grateful!”<sup>34</sup> After the Sino-Japanese war broke out, Zhang became the president of the Cochinchina General Association of Overseas Chinese for National Salvation which was established on August 1, 1937, and from 1938–9 he served as a member of Guomindang Conference of Political Consultants (国民参政會議) of the Chongqing government.

Just prior to the Japanese entry into Cochinchina, in the middle of May 1941, Zhang Zhenfan and two other influential Overseas Chinese, President of the Teochew Congregation Zhu Jixing<sup>35</sup> and President of the Cantonese congregation Liu Zeng (劉增)<sup>36</sup> left Indochina for Hong Kong. The fact that these three left Indochina before the arrival of the Japanese army suggests that they refused cooperation with the Japanese.<sup>37</sup> However, Liu may have started leaning toward the Nanjing regime and the Japanese before his departure from Indochina. Shortly after his arrival in Hong Kong, he traveled to Tianjin and Shanghai which were under the control of the Japanese army and the Nanjing administration. In the meanwhile, Zhang Yongfu (張永福),<sup>38</sup> the Secret Envoy of the Nanjing Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, sent letters to Zhu Jixing and Zhang Zhenfan in Guangzhou to persuade them to return to Indochina, while promising to protect their families and properties.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, Zhu Jixing, Zhang Zhenfan and Liu Zeng, “being aware of the changing situation and appreciating the true intent of the Japanese, decided to contact them and one by one came back to Indochina in the spring of 1942.”<sup>40</sup> Zhang was appointed General Secretary of the Committee of Associa-

<sup>33</sup> [重庆市政协文史资料研究委员会中共重庆市委党校 1987].

<sup>34</sup> 黄警颺 (左山貞雄訳) 『華僑問題と世界』 大同書房, 1941, p. 165.

<sup>35</sup> He came from Guangdong and was the President of the Teochew Congregation in Chợ Lớn. From 1940 to 1941, he was the Chairman of the Chinese General Association of Commerce in Vietnam, and a permanent Member of the Cochinchina General Association of the Overseas Chinese for National Salvation.

<sup>36</sup> President of the Guangdong Congregation in Chợ Lớn, President of Coalition of Overseas Chinese Rice Traders, usually referred to as Liu Jing (劉景).

<sup>37</sup> According to *Asahi Tokyo Shimbun*, on September 17, 1942, the Japanese Army, backed by French authorities in Indochina, launched a series of campaign to repress pro-British and pro-American elements, supporters of de Gaulle in the French government in Indochina, anti-Japanese organisations of Overseas Chinese and other groups loyal to the Chongqing government. Consequently, around two to three months before the Japanese army entered Cochinchina, Zhu, Zhang and Liu fled to Hong Kong.

<sup>38</sup> Zhang Yongfu (1872–1959) was a trader in British Malaya, and a powerful figure in the Indonesian Overseas Chinese Committee who was close to Sun Yat Sen [*Tairiku Shinpo*, 4 Dec. 1941].

<sup>39</sup> 李盈慧 『汪政權與亞洲華僑 (1940–1945)』, 財団法人交流協会日台交流センター日台研究支援事業報告書, 2007, p. 12; as the Japanese occupied Hong Kong on December 25, 1941, Zhang Yongfu must have sent the letter before that date.

<sup>40</sup> *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, 17 Sept. 1942.

tion of Paddy Merchants in Cochinchina.<sup>41</sup> On January 17, 1943, on his initiative the Association of Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina to Support the National Government during War was founded. Zhang himself was selected to be the President. In addition to him, other influential Overseas Chinese, such as He Lou (President of General Association of Overseas Chinese Trade in Vietnam), Ong Tich, and Ma Vinh, also joined the Association.<sup>42</sup>

At the beginning of 1942, He Luo and Zhang Zhenfan sent a telegram to the Chongqing government in which they wrote that “we are now belatedly cooperating with the Japanese army to establish a Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. We hope to put an end to the foolish decisions made by the Japanese hypocritical convictions and to bring China out of the frying pan.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, on June 2, upon leaving Indochina, Zhang as the President of the Union of Seven Congregation made a goodbye visit to the French officials in Indochina and the Cochinchina Governor, and appealed to the Japanese Consulate and Commander-in-chief with the hope of improving their relations. He emphasized that the Overseas Chinese had to adhere to the law, reform their education, and if necessary, open free-of-charge schools that taught Chinese and Japanese.

The August 18, 1942 issue of the “Taiwan Daily News” published a statement by Zhang Zhenfan as follows:

My resolution to side with Wang’s government was made at an early time but due to the difficulties I had to spend some time in Macau to observe developments. As the Japanese army entered Indochina without being disturbed by any anti-Japanese Overseas Chinese, the French authorities themselves changed their attitude towards the Chinese. I used to be a Political Consultant but in reality I never participated in the political affairs of Chongqing, and my reputation was merely ceremonial. In December last year, when the Greater East Asia war started, I learned that the Japanese had done many good things in Vietnam, and so I knew that the time was ripe. I expressed my support through a telegram on behalf of 500,000 Overseas Chinese in Vietnam. With regard to the current Nationalist government, due to the lack of information I am unable to donate or send my money but I hope to get in contact with and support it as soon as possible. I am lucky to own three rice mills and also engage in commercial activities. I hope that maritime routes are recovered as soon as possible so that trade with Japan and the new China can be commenced.

What we currently yearn for the most is that the French government and French authorities in Indochina will soon recognize the [Wang] government. We have supported the government for a long time, but because the French authorities refuse to recognize it, there is hardly any chance for us to launch a formidable movement.

However, in response to the recent declaration, they seemed to show no opposition and even hinted

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<sup>41</sup> VNA, GOUCOCH, D62-455, “Hiệp hội những người Hoa kiều buôn lúa tại Nam Kỳ năm 1937-1943.”

<sup>42</sup> VNA, GOUCOCH, D62-254, “Status de l’Association des Residents Chinois en Cochinchine pour le soutien du Gouvernement National dans ses efforts de guerre”; the Chinese characters for the last two names are unknown.

<sup>43</sup> *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, 4 Jan. 1942.

some compromise. I have not rallied the Chinese in Vietnam, but I believe that the day when they befriend the Japanese and resolutely stand up for President Wang's government is not so far off.<sup>44</sup>

Judging from the above statement, it can be said that Zhang Zhenfan demanded the French to recognize the Nanjing Government; he supported that regime rather than the Japanese. However, at that time, the shift in political stance made by politically and economically powerful Chinese such as Zhang was extremely important to the Japanese.

A Japanese agronomist Mori Tokuhisa reported in his memoir about the frank and friendly attitude of influential Chinese in Vietnam. Mori visited there from December 26, 1941 to April 6, 1942 to conduct his research with the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>45</sup> He visited influential figures in Chợ Lớn, such as Lu Shangxian (呂尚賢), an extraordinary Member of the Indochina Committee for Rice Management, and He Luo, President of the Overseas Chinese General Association Trade in Cochinchina, and asked about rice production and procurement, currency, and processing industries in Cochinchina. The interviewees frankly talked about the behavior of Japanese managers.<sup>46</sup> In addition, on February 28 and March 1, he also met in Chợ Lớn with He Luo; Chen Peishou (陳培壽, its General Secretary); Jian Daoyong (簡道庸, Saigon representative of the Taiwan–Vietnam Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam), Qiu Aoshan (邱奧山) and Wu Huaguo (吳華國). They “discussed with no issues” rice milling and rice procurement network.”<sup>47</sup>

By 1943, appeared various pro-Japanese groups had appeared in Indochina. A French report reported the activities of the Association of Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina to Support the National Government during War from January 1943 to August 1944. On January 17, 1943 about 2000 Overseas met at a cinema to send the donation to the Nanjing Government. At the meeting, they formed the Association of War-supporting Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina. Its leader was Zhang Zhenfan. The new association initially placed its headquarters in the office of General Trade Association of Overseas Chinese and later moved it to the house where the Consulate of the Chongqing government had been located. The statutes of the new Association declared its objective: “to lead and mobilize the Chinese materially and spiritually to contribute to the magnificent Greater East Asia war towards gaining the final victory.” It was officially put under the protection of the Japanese Embassy and the Cochinchina Office of the Nanjing Guomindang Government.<sup>48</sup>

After its establishment, twice in a week the association placed up panels at public places to support the Nanjing government and inserted propaganda leaflets into newspapers such as *Greater Asia News* and *L'Information chinoise*. On February 15, 1943, to celebrate the first anniversary of the Japanese

<sup>44</sup> *Taiwan Nichinichi Shinpo*, 18 Aug. 1942.

<sup>45</sup> Mori Tokuhisa came to Vietnam from Japan, after having examined the tea gardens along the Yunnan railway, the bamboo forests, water rice fields and brickyards; he came to Huế, Đà Nẵng and Saigon. Mori conducted surveys in Saigon and many rural areas in the Mekong Delta such as Mỹ Tho, Bến Tre, Sa Đéc and Vĩnh Long.

<sup>46</sup> 森徳久, 「仏印の農業経済」, 東洋経済新報社, 1943, p. 223.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231–2.

<sup>48</sup> “Status de l'Association des Residents Chinois en Cochinchine.”

victory in Singapore, it co-hosted a ceremony with the Japanese Embassy. Prior to this, it distributed posters to Chinese schools, sidewalk restaurants, and cafés. It also showed Japanese movies at cinemas and Chinese schools, and launched a one-week propaganda campaign by deploying motorcyclist teams on major streets. In addition, from February 13 to 15, 1943, it hosted a Saigon Radio program, in which the representatives of three Overseas Chinese organizations had a discussion: the General Association of Overseas Chinese Trade, the Association of Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina for Educational Invigoration, and The Representative office of the Nanjing government.<sup>49</sup>

Shortly after that, Zhang Zhenfan requested the Japanese Consulate in Saigon to strengthen their ties and formulate a common agenda between the Japanese and the Nanjing government. The agenda would be used as propaganda for both Japanese and Chinese. Again, at the end of February 1943, Zhang initiated a survey of Chinese and their organizations: including the number of Chinese residents and organizations, their educational and professional careers, business status, emigration and immigration, and so forth.<sup>50</sup>

To promote its activities, the Association of War-supporting Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina asked Suzuki Rokuro (Minister of the Japanese Consulate) and Zhang Yongfu (Representative of the Saigon office and special envoy of the Nanjing government) to act as Supreme Consultants.<sup>51</sup> The Japanese Consulate and the Nanjing Government welcomed this initiative. At the beginning of April 1943, Suzuki met with the Presidents of the various congregations at the Overseas Chinese Trade Office, requesting them to donate to the Association of War-supporting Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina who Support the War, while he promised to make a request that the French administration reduce the tariff imposed on each Overseas Chinese.<sup>52</sup>

On April 20, 1943, on the initiative of Zhang Yongfu, the Association of Overseas Chinese Women was founded whose key members were in Saigon-Chợ Lớn and whose task was to take care of injured Japanese soldiers at the hospitals in Cochinchina. The new women's association received 250,000 piastres from the War Relief Association, to buy flowers, towels and sweets and to send letters of good wishes to the wounded soldiers. In September 1943, the Association of War-supporting Overseas Chinese in Cochinchina issued "Principles of the Overseas Chinese voluntary defense army," based on which military drills would be introduced to the Chinese students above 18 years of age in Saigon-Chợ Lớn. The students would be instructed by Japanese and Nanjing military officers over a period of three months.<sup>53</sup>

In February 1942, to further promote relations between the Overseas Chinese and the Japanese, the Japan-China Friendship Circle (*Le Cercle Amical Nippo-Chinois*) was established. At the inauguration,

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> From July 30, 1943, Yuan Jun (袁均), head of the propaganda office of the Office for Overseas Affairs of the Japanese Embassy in Indochina was its consultant.

<sup>52</sup> "Status de l'Association des Residents Chinois en Cochinchine."

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Murakami Takematsu, president of the association of Japanese in Saigon and director of the Dainan Koosi, and four Chinese who were born in Guangdong named Phung Du, Trieu Tuong, Sa Sanh Vung, and Truong Long contributed 70,000 piastres altogether. The club would set up gambling and meeting places, and invite male Chinese as members.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, on April 14, 1942, the Club of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam was established, with the support of Minister Uchiyama, the Association of Japanese in Saigon, the President of General Trade Association in Chợ Lớn, and the Members of the Guomindang Committee for Overseas Affairs. This club was led and chaired by Chen Qingjiang (陳清江), the most influential rice trader in Chợ Lớn. Eighty Overseas Chinese became members and were given the privilege of trading Japanese products and goods. The club's main activities were to enhance friendly relations among members, organize cultural exchanges and help to develop the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

The paper has examined various aspects of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam during the Japanese–French dual domination. In the early years of the Sino–Japanese War, the Chinese in Vietnam were generally sympathetic to the anti-Japanese forces in mainland China. However, as the war in China escalated and especially after the Wang Jingwei government was established in Nanjing and Japanese troops arrived in Indochina, they were placed in a difficult position. Many of them, including influential community leaders, gradually shifted their political stance to support the Nanjing government and the Japanese.

This paper has not discussed about the differences among the various types of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam. Generally speaking the Overseas Chinese community in Vietnam (whose population was about 600,000) consisted of three groups as follows. The first was the group of new migrants, many of whom originated from Guangdong and Fujian. They fell into a panic, when the Japanese occupied those provinces in China. They worried, for instance, that their ancestors' tombs would be ruined. They were more concerned about the changing situation in mainland China, such as the escalation of the Sino–Japanese War and the establishment of the Nanjing government. The second was the group of those who had been born outside China (including Vietnam itself) called *Kiêu Sinh* (僑生); and the third was the group of the descendants of ancient migrants called *Minh Hương* (明鄉). It was said that these second and third groups were generally not concerned so much about the current situation in China. They tended to follow French laws and they attached more importance to the protection of their personal interests and properties in Vietnam.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> VNA, GOUCOCH, D62-106, "Note No. 884-S Renseignements transmis pour information provenant de S.I.S Saigon Cercle Amical Nippon-Chinois," 6 February 1942.

<sup>55</sup> According to *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 15 Apr. 1942; *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, 15 Apr. and 19 Sept. 1942; see Shiu Wentang, "A Preliminary Inquiry into the Wartime Material Losses of Chinese in Vietnam, 1941–1947," *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies*, 4 (2010): 117–28.

<sup>56</sup> This information is from JACAR (アジア歴史資料センター), Ref.A03032309800, 返還文書 (旧陸海軍関係), 返還文書 9 「仏印華僑工作案」(国立公文書館).