Between Colony and Metropole: Repatriation of Vietnamese Workers from Post-war France

Entre colonie et métropole : le rapatriement après-guerre des travailleurs vietnamiens

Chizuru Namba

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/4430
DOI: 10.4000/moussons.4430
ISSN: 2262-8363

Publisher
Presses Universitaires de Provence

Printed version
Date of publication: 29 November 2018
Number of pages: 109-132
ISSN: 1620-3224

Electronic reference
Chizuru Namba, « Between Colony and Metropole: Repatriation of Vietnamese Workers from Post-war France », Moussons [Online], 32 | 2018, Online since 20 November 2018, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/4430 ; DOI : 10.4000/moussons.4430

Les contenus de la revue Moussons sont mis à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.
Between Colony and Metropole
Repatriation of Vietnamese Workers from Post-war France

Chizuru Namba *
Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, historians of French colonialism have shown how the development of the republican nation-state based on principles of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” occurred in tandem with colonial control and expansion—actions that might be considered incompatible (Conclin 1997, 1998; Bancel et al. 2003). It has been argued that colonialism did not deviate from republicanism but was necessary to establish and reinforce the identity of the republican nation-state. Here, universality and disparity as well as liberalism and racialism joined hands to support colonial rule. This notion that imperial expansion and nation-state development are complementary has produced rich research achievements revealing the complex, multi-layered character of colonisation. Most research, however, has focused on the process of colonial extension, paying little attention to the coexistence of two contradictory ideologies, which was gradually revealed toward the end of colonisation. Thus, the present study focuses on the circumstances surrounding colonial subjects who crossed boundaries for the sake of war—namely, Vietnamese workers who travelled between colony and metropole, experiencing

*Doctor in History, University Lumière Lyon II, Associate Professor, Keio University (Tokyo). Fields of research: History of colonisation in French Indochina.
both the republican and colonial spheres. In this way, this paper aims to show how the consequences of wartime colonial policies destabilised French control in both colony and metropole, contrary to French authorities’ expectations.

People who traverse boundaries can become acutely aware of the defects and contradictions of the systems in which they exist. For rulers, such people threaten colonial stability (Dornel 2013: 6), even though the structures of empires necessarily create them. Moreover, the two world wars produced huge numbers of colonised people who crossed such boundaries. These wars required the large-scale mobilisation of colonies’ residents to the colonising countries as soldiers or workers. Workers in particular lived in French society and came into contact with not only French but also people from other colonies and worked for the war effort with their French “colleagues”—not as “citizens” but as “subjects”. Their presence would have various effects on both French society and their home countries after returning.

During WWI, approximately 250,000 colonial subjects had been mobilised to France as workers. Research has shown that this mobilisation across the empire afforded French people their first opportunity to meet the “native people”, while making the colonies visible in France and stimulating awareness of the colonies among the French (Stovall 1993; Frémeaux 2006; Briano 2008). Though their freedom was somewhat limited, colonial workers did come into contact with French society and its “modernity”, which strongly affected them. Workers became aware of the value of labour and workers’ power as they experienced the labour movement. Vu-Hill (2011) and Le Van Ho (2014) have both shown that some soldiers and workers who returned to Indochina from France participated in the political and economic modernisation of the 1920s. Those returnees also became dissatisfied with colonial authority and got involved in the labour and anti-France movements that intensified in the 1930s (Vu-Hill 2011: 135-146; Le Van Ho 2014: 169-220). In this sense, WWI presaged the beginning of decolonisation. Post-war France, however, fearing that colonial subjects who had paid the “blood tax” would escalate their demand for rights, further strengthened its repressive control (Cooper 2013: 392). In short, while in some colonies mobilising migrant workers for the war effort engendered local resistance, the French empire controlled such opposition using both carrot and stick. During WWI, France had come to recognise the colonial empire’s economic potential and its value as a storehouse of human resources, thus bolstering the justifications for continued colonial rule. Nonetheless, despite efforts by the government and the parti colonial to raise the colonial spirit during the interwar period, the empire was not received as a convincingly realistic concept for most of the French public (Ageron 1990a: 311).

WWII made France further recognise the importance of the colonies, albeit within a different context. To assuage French citizens defeated by Germany, Vichy France deployed imperial propaganda to heal wounded pride and guarantee France’s position as a great power. For de Gaulle, colonies secured people and land in place of the occupied metropole, and resistance from the outside and continuation of the French Republic became possible through its empire.
Five hundred thousand colonised people joined the liberation effort, enabling France to secure victory. The *raison d’être* of its vast empire was affirmed to a maximum degree during this period (Ageron 1990a: 319-354, 1990b: 355-356).

Hidden behind the colonial empire’s “glorious” contributions, the presence of colonised people who came to France before the war, especially labourers, tended to be forgotten. The French government, which had successfully mobilised colonial subjects during WWI, planned to quickly mobilise a labour force of 500,000 workers. However, hostilities ended with the German victory shortly after the war started, which resulted in people being mobilised on a small-scale, thus attracting little interest from historians. However, the process by which maintaining French colonial rule became increasingly difficult can be illuminated through the experiences of colonial subjects who, after a period of confusion in France, were returned to their native countries as anti-colonial movements emerged across the world.

This study examines Vietnamese who were mobilised to France as workers during WWII and then forced to live in France until the end of the war. Immediately before WWII, about 20,000 Vietnamese were brought to France as workers. They witnessed the collapse and restoration of the republic—defeat, occupation, liberation—and were then returned home. For these workers—who saw the weakness and universality of republicanism, and experienced freedom amid the chaos caused by rapid systemic change—France’s *mission civilisatrice*, which now aimed its weapons at their home countries, was no longer persuasive.

There are only a handful of studies on migrant workers from Indochina. These studies have clarified French mobilisation policies for Vietnamese workers, their working and living conditions and their political activities in France (Angeli 1946; Stora 1983; Le Huu Khoa 1985; Le Huu Tho 1997; Daum 2009; Nguyen 2012; Luguern 2007, 2011, 2014). Of particular importance is the doctoral dissertation of Luguern (2014), with its comprehensive investigation of archives and collection of historical evidence from elderly workers living in France and Vietnam. She also discussed the fate of workers after their repatriation to Vietnam based on their testimonies, however, these previous works mainly shed light on the workers’ lives in France. My paper, on the other hand, focuses on the process of their return to Indochina, in order to consider their significance for the metropole and the colony during the Indochina War, and also to contextualise the chaotic situation France faced in the process of re-establishing control in Indochina. How did the French authorities in the metropole and in the colony resolve their remaining wartime issues? After nearly a decade in France, how did the workers act when they had returned home, again facing colonial rule in a significantly changed situation?

Though these workers came to France in response to a strong request, they were ultimately ostracised by both their metropole and colonial home, and France agonised over their treatment. Examining the “border” between France and the colony, and the people who crossed that border, will reveal the essential nature of colonial control.

I primarily made use of administrative materials from the Archives nationales d’Outre-mer (ANOM) and the Archives départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône.
(ADBR). These include reports and letters written by organisations that held jurisdiction over the workers, such as the domestic French Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of the Colonies, the Ministry of Overseas France, and the province administrations in which many Vietnamese workers stayed. They also include records left by the Haut-Commissariat de France en Indochine (HCl), French administrative organisations in regional areas in Indochina, the Vietnamese state (État du Vietnam), and regional Vietnamese authorities under French control. Carefully parsing these texts will clarify differences in perceptions of the repatriation of Vietnamese workers between different organisations, as well as the choices and actions of the workers themselves.

The Vietnamese were mobilised as labourers not only to the metropole, nor were they only employed during times of war. From the end of the 19th century, Vietnamese people were employed as volunteer workers engaged in mining and agricultural work in New Caledonia. In 1939, close to 4,000 Vietnamese were stationed there. Bougerol (2000) and Mohamed-Gaillard (2014) revealed the actual situation of Vietnamese workers in this French colony; their fates strongly influenced by the respective conditions in their homeland and their place of residence. Their existence, which involved being moved from one colony to another colony, makes it possible to understand, over a broader range of time and space, the ways in which colonised people were put to use in the empire, as well as the attendant consequences.

Vietnamese workers forced to remain in France after the Armistice should have been able to return home with the war’s end. However, the complicated situation in Indochina problematised their return. After Japan’s occupation of Indochina ended in August 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was created, led by Ho Chi Minh. France, which had lost suzerainty following the Japanese coup of March 1945, attempted to re-establish control. Tensions arose between France and the Ho Chi Minh government, resulting in the outbreak of the Indochina War at the end of 1946. In early 1947, France seized principal cities in Indochina and by late 1949 had suppressed many important agricultural regions. However, many farming villages and interior areas remained under Viet Minh control. Thus, territories were divided into zones controlled by France and by the Viet Minh, though the boundaries were vague and constantly changing (Dalloz 1987: 140-145).

France built an administrative organisation consisting of anti-Viet Minh Vietnamese to fight the Viet Minh. To conceal the conflict’s colonialist nature, France tried to turn the Indochina War into a conflict among the Vietnamese people rather than a war between France and the Viet Minh (Devillers 1998: 330-343, Goscha 2011: 101). Thus, a provisional interim government (gouvernement central provisoire du Vietnam) was created in June 1948 with Nguyen Van Xuan as president. This ended shortly after its initiation, and in June 1949, the State of Vietnam (État du Vietnam) was established with Bao Dai returning as head of state. Governors were appointed for the northern, central, and southern regions, and administration systems were established with Vietnamese staff. Nevertheless, power in these areas was actually held by the French federal institutions.
Between Colony and Metropole. Repatriation of Vietnamese Workers.

Vietnamese workers who arrived in France soon encountered the end of the Republic and the rapid transition to a new regime that renounced republicanism. This experience raises questions about how workers responded to this period of confusion, which saw the easy collapse of the republicanism that had justified colonial rule during the French Third Republic, the repressive Vichy regime, four years of German occupation, the ensuing revival of republicanism, and finally the French invasion of Indochina.

Vietnamese workers were placed under the administration of the Ministry of Labour’s Service de la main-d’œuvre indigène (MOI). They were divided into 73 companies and deployed to gunpowder manufacturing factories and other war industries. However, following Germany’s occupation, they became “unemployed” and were mostly interned in camps in southern and south-western France. There, they engaged in various jobs, including agriculture, rice farming, salt manufacturing, and factory labour. For some, their employer was the occupying German army (Angeli 1946: 46).

A total of 12,080 workers remained in France at the end of the war, excluding those who had been repatriated to Indochina, had changed from worker to tirailleur, or had died. They were not the same as when they had arrived five years earlier. French authorities viewed them warily as people who “were in contact with the French working class for a long period of time and exposed especially to active political propaganda by the communists while witnessing German occupation, the resistance, and French liberation”.

After France’s liberation, the MOI was in turmoil with staff being replaced. In June 1945, the MOI became the Direction des travailleurs indochinois (DTI), now under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Colonies. The DTI’s authority gradually weakened, and workers eventually stopped following orders from French officials. Their distrust of authority likely increased as they witnessed rapid changes in the regime and the purge of Vichy supporters. Workers did not simply accept life in the camps but demanded improvements. For example, a camp in Marseille responded to protests over food by changing suppliers and incorporating workers’ demands into the menu. In some camps, DTI control became increasingly difficult, and workers would keep French staff from performing their duties, sometimes even locking them out of the camp. To avoid friction with workers, the DTI would refrain from intervention. In one camp, the French commander started to pay visits only at night. Moreover, French staff who grew tired of their duties started to quit. Staff could not be replaced due to budget deficits, with one DTI official lamenting that those who remained were the “incompetent ones and those who either follow orders or silently approve demands by the workers”.

The workers’ activities extended into the political field. Along with ethnic Vietnamese who had lived in France since before the war, they held rallies and hunger strikes to protest France’s return to Indochina. Vietnamese residents, especially politicised intellectuals, tried to mobilise the newly arrived in the struggle for
national independence. Vietnamese students, intellectuals, soldiers, and workers showed solidarity for Vietnamese independence during this period despite class differences, which had not always been the case in the past. In this manner, some mobilised workers became deeply involved in anti-colonial movements in post-war France. However, they were not all radically anti-Français; many had no involvement in such activities, some even participating in the battles for French liberation (Angeli 1946: 51-52). Anti-French behaviour was facilitated in part by the presence of cohorts. Protest movements among Vietnamese workers were led by delegates (délégués), who were chosen from each unit and had great influence over the workers (Termime & Deguigné 2001: 36). The official role of the delegates, who could speak French, was to facilitate communication between Vietnamese workers and DTI officials. Unofficially, they raised funds to support worker activities, gave lists of demands to the DTI, and identified workers too sympathetic to France.

There seemed to be a gap between the mind-sets of ordinary workers and delegates (Luguern 2011: 215). Many delegates were hired as interpreters or supervisors, and they had better salaries than workers. However, workers’ attitudes were often influenced by delegates, whom the workers “listened to, feared, and followed” because they were anxious about being labelled “French sympathisers”.

Retaining these workers whose presence had become “troublesome” was a major burden for the French government, even on the financial front. The post-war financial situation was serious for both the French government, working on politics and economic rebuilding after liberation from four years of German occupation, and for the colonial authorities in Indochina, battling the Viet Minh after four and a half years of Japanese military presence and the loss of suzerainty through the Japanese coup de force. The cost of the Indochina War continued to increase, especially after 1948, eventually occupying over 10% of France’s national budget. Some of the war cost started to be taken from the Federation of Indochina’s budget. In 1949, military expenses had increased 13 times over the previous year (Tertrais 2002: 43). As such, costs related to maintaining and repatriating Vietnamese workers were deemed unnecessary and burdensome. France, therefore, tried to get rid of these workers, causing friction even with Vietnamese administrators cooperative with France.

For workers staying in France, the government provided an allowance of 1–20 francs per day, with an unemployment benefit of 10 francs and a sickness allowance of 11 francs. Altogether, France spent 175 francs a day per worker. French authorities wanted to reduce this spending on the grounds that “despite the fact that this major financial burden will not be paid back in any way to the French economy, it is being borne by the French taxpayer”. The budget committee of the French Parliament also stressed that workers should be repatriated as quickly as possible.

However, as tensions with the Viet Minh increased in Indochina, the repatriation of workers could not progress smoothly, and they were forced to remain in France. To manage workers who were potentially “dangerous elements”, France aimed to engage them in productive activities and incorporate them into society.
During WWI, 47,000 workers had been mobilised from Indochina to France, and employers had praised their adaptability and assiduity (Vu-Hill 2011: 99). However, French attempts to utilise them again as workers during WWII were far less successful.

Following the liberation of France, unemployment increased among Vietnamese workers, though the military did temporarily employ some of them for construction work. While waiting for repatriation, most had “idle” passed the time (Le Huu Tho 1997: 159). The authorities believed work would improve their attitudes—with less free time on their hands, they would be less likely to participate in political activities. Furthermore, by working they would contribute to the French economy until soldiers were demobilised and prisoners of war returned.

The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of the Interior both stressed the need to utilise Vietnamese workers, believing it was preferable to introducing foreign labour. However, despite efforts to promote employment, only 3,873 workers had received jobs as of January 1946; 6,087 remained unemployed, and 724 were classified as ill. This was partly because the French economy had yet to recover from the war. Moreover, the delegates had specified that workers should not help produce goods that France might use for military operations in Indochina. Furthermore, those who had already lived in exile for six years in France were unwilling to be transferred again to an unfamiliar place for work (Angeli 1946: 140) The large number of people judged unfit for work due to illness demonstrates the poor environment they lived in as well as the low level of motivation among the workers themselves.

French authorities appealed to various industries and agricultural unions to employ repatriated workers. The Vaucluse department worried about the “serious inconvenience” created by “idle” workers in the region and appealed to companies to employ them. By late 1946, approximately 200 workers had been deployed to various worksites in this division, including the cannery, packaging materials factory, and paper mill. However, these measures did not provide stable employment. A plan to have Vietnamese workers dredge waterways was considered, but they were deemed unsuitable for this type of hard labour. Some workers were appreciated in certain places and satisfied with the tasks they received. However, businesses were generally unenthusiastic about employing Vietnamese on a large scale because of their reputation as “capricious workers”.

Authorities also stressed the importance of providing training so workers could contribute to Indochinese industry after repatriation. They tried to motivate workers to train by distributing leaflets that said, “[Indochina’s] railways, businesses, and agriculture truly need specialists”. The Ministry of the Colonies cooperated with the Ministry of Labour, and administrators conducted assessments in camps across France. Workers were subsequently divided into seven categories: workers unsuitable for training (4,660), regular agricultural workers (639), upper-level agricultural workers (148), industrial and manual workers suitable for demanding manual labour (536), industrial or manual workers suitable for somewhat active labour (1,804), workers suitable for sedentary industries or manual work (529),
Among those deemed “suitable for work training”, authorities decided to train 3,500 workers in fields such as mechanical parts finishing, lathe work, agriculture, plasterwork, electricity, carpentry, and mining, all in support of Indochina’s economic needs. However, after conducting tests, the number of workers sent to training was less than half the initial target: only 1,676 workers had completed their training as of August 1946. Although some workers were eager to train, there was a limited number of instructors and training centres immediately after the war (Angeli 1946: 140). Furthermore, the number of people judged “unsuitable for training” is outstanding. Despite taking the time to categorise workers, attempts to provide job training had already failed at this point.

**Conflict over Repatriation**

Immediately before the war, people were swiftly mobilised from the colonies to France in a planned manner. However, “post-processing”, which occurred once the workers were no longer needed, was a difficult and time-consuming task for France. With the war over, there was no reason for mobilised Vietnamese workers to remain in France. While repatriation was the natural option for both the workers and the French, this was not obvious to both parties. This section discusses how, as the France–Viet Minh conflict intensified and the Indochina War erupted at the end of 1946, the intricate situations surrounding the French authorities, colonial authorities, and workers themselves served to complicate repatriation.

While most workers wished to return home, some who had a job or a partner wished to remain in France. Timing was also an issue (Luguern 2011: 158, 201). The first large-scale repatriation was planned for July 1946, but some workers resisted this plan. Negotiations over Vietnamese independence were scheduled to take place in France in July 1946 between Ho Chi Minh delegates and the French government. Workers protested that repatriation was convenient for the French side, considering the influence a large-scale Vietnamese presence in France would have on the negotiations and public opinion. As a result, the planned repatriation of 1,000 workers was cancelled.

Some were concerned that if they did return, their compatriots would label them “collaborators with the French”, or that the colonial authorities would subject them to repressive treatment. In September 1948, officials planned to repatriate 350 workers from the Sorgues camp, but only 66 were willing to return home. Most were dubious about returning during the Indochina War, demanding that upon repatriation, French authorities would not intern them but allow them to return to their homes immediately. Such concerns were valid, as we will see later.

Letters workers sent to their families reveal their complex feelings about repatriation. These writings show both a sense of indebtedness for being in a “safe” place amid intensifying battles between the French and the Viet Minh and a sense of guilt for not being with friends and family during a time of crisis.
I’m doing very well in this foreign land but feel ashamed in regards to my fellow countrymen. This is because while you resist the invaders, we are unable to arm ourselves to exterminate the enemy, just crossing our arms instead.\textsuperscript{27}

Meanwhile, some workers who had adapted to French society wanted to stay (Luguern 2011: 158, 201). One worker said he wished to remain in France where “workers are free and happy, labour is controlled, and workers can eat well and dress well”.\textsuperscript{28}

Repatriation discussions also occurred on the French side, showing differences between the French government and colonial authorities. France wanted to prioritise profits and get rid of the workers. Colonial authorities, meanwhile, were concerned about the impact of repatriating a large number of workers in an already unstable situation. The conseiller aux Affaires sociales of the HCI stated:

Workers from the Viet Minh controlled zones must remain in France. There is absolutely nothing to be gained from sending them to Indochina. [...] These workers were mobilised from Indochina solely for the benefit of the metropole.\textsuperscript{29}

French administrators and citizens in Indochina were also concerned that repatriating workers could increase social turmoil and complicate pacification.\textsuperscript{30}

Meanwhile, the French government formed an agreement to repatriate Vietnamese workers as quickly as possible. As discussed earlier, a major reason for this decision was that maintaining workers placed financial stress on France. Further, given the severe living conditions in post-war France, authorities feared that discontent might spread among French citizens over government support for Vietnamese workers “for free”.\textsuperscript{31} In addition, there was increased media interest in the labourers, who had come to symbolise “the victims of colonialism”, and the authorities were concerned about the spread of anti-colonialist sentiment.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, while repatriating workers might cause problems in Indochina, it was viewed as better than keeping them in France.\textsuperscript{33}

However, as tensions with the Viet Minh increased, France had to transport more troops to Indochina. To this end, France mobilised as many ships as possible, whether military, merchant, or private (Bodin 1996: 16-17). Because of the shortage of vessels and the escalation of conflict, repatriation could not progress smoothly.

Initially, the pace of repatriation was set at 600–700 people per month, with a preferred interval of 20 days between each vessel.\textsuperscript{34} In 1946, 5,000 workers were scheduled to be repatriated,\textsuperscript{35} but the actual number was around 1,000. After the outbreak of the Indochina War, Viet Minh forces occupied central cities in Tonkin and Annam. France regained these areas within three months, deploying more than 100,000 soldiers by September 1947 (Dalloz 1987: 132). With the intensification of conflict in Tonkin and Annam, where most workers were from, practically no workers were repatriated during this period, though repatriation efforts resumed in early 1948.

Repatriation was conducted on a per company basis, prioritising sick workers in the following order: 1) those from Cochinchina and the French-controlled parts of Annam and Tonkin, 2) those from parts of Annam and Tonkin outside of French
control but not necessarily anti-French, and 3) those who clearly displayed anti-French sentiments. Colonial authorities especially feared the homecoming of workers from Viet Minh–controlled territories. However, some French officials wanted to first repatriate “provocateurs” to separate them from other workers. Therefore, the order was not fully observed in practice, and repatriation sometimes occurred without notice and by force (Luguern 2011: 166, 183, 195-196, 207, 225-226). Colonial authorities would sometimes ask their metropole counterparts to temporarily suspend repatriation, especially when many workers in “poor mental condition” were interned at CSJ for long periods. In the end, repatriation efforts continued for over four years.

As such, repatriation was a tense and confused process, though the authorities implemented measures to make it as smooth as possible. A mission was sent to France from Indochina to facilitate repatriation. This involved several French people fluent in Vietnamese as well as Vietnamese staff who had helped mobilise workers before the war. Considering workers’ animosity toward the DTI (or MOI), this operation emphasised the Federation of Indochina coming to “take them back home” rather than the French government trying to get rid of them. One goal of the mission was to soften anti-colonial sentiments among workers and distance “dangerous” workers from those who were harmless.40

As we will see now, Vietnamese workers who had repatriated to the homeland, again faced the colonialist situation after nearly 10 years’ absence. This involved repressive controls and patriarchal protection, which had assumed a different character during the war and frequently caused tension.

Ships carrying workers would arrive at the port of Cape Saint Jacques (CSJ), 130 km southeast of Saigon. By April 1946, the CSJ base had been constructed around the military barracks. Here, workers were temporarily interned before returning to their homes to complete various clerical procedures. Two internment camps with a combined capacity of 2,500 internees were established inside the base to keep certain groups from coming into contact. To prevent illegal meetings, rooms were partitioned into private spaces for approximately 10 people. They could not leave the camps without permission. However, the camp perimeters were initially fenced with bamboo only 1.5 m high so as “not to give the impression of a prison or an internment camp”. Observation towers were set up, but the grounds were expansive, and without strong night lights, the guards had difficulty monitoring the base.

Colonial authorities inspected workers’ luggage when repatriation vessels docked and would confiscate potential weapons. Medicine was also confiscated and used at the camps to keep it from being appropriated by the Viet Minh. Some workers brought large items such as bicycles, sewing machines, and typewriters. The French feared such items could also be appropriated by the Viet Minh, or sold on the black market, so they were eventually prohibited as well.44 Such repressive controls frequently caused friction between workers and administrators.

To avoid escalating dissatisfaction, workers were given comparatively generous meal rations. A main meal for one person weighed 500 grams per day, each served
with either meat or fish. Even at the base, some workers engaged in protests, including hunger strikes, to demand better living conditions.

The greatest concern for authorities was support for the Viet Minh among the returnees. As repatriation proceeded in full swing from 1948 onward, surveillance became more severe. In March 1948, the commandant instructed the army to add 1,000 rolls of barbed wire and undertake additional security measures to meet the arrival of “dangerous provocateurs”.

Subject to strict controls and roll calls twice a day, some workers felt ‘insulted and imprisoned’. One worker stated:

In France, we were supported and understood by the majority of workers, to some extent enjoying the freedom to hold meetings and communicate. But at the CSJ base, we were placed under the surveillance of the barbarous Moroccans.

Indeed, guards at the base included North African soldiers. Sending “coloured” soldiers from other colonies into Indochina was initially avoided due to concerns over shocking the local people. However, Sub-Saharan and North African soldiers were mobilised to FTEO (Forces Terrestres en Extrême-Orient) from 1948 onward due to soldier shortages, and their numbers increased over time (Bodin 1996: 36-49). They primarily served as watchmen outside the CSJ base to minimise contact with workers, but workers were irritated by the presence of a different race. During WWI, friction was observed between Indochinese and Senegalese workers mobilised in France, accompanied by intense violence. Migration within the empire brought contact not only with the French but also with people from other colonies, which sharpened their awareness of race (Vu-Hill 2011: 107-108; Le Van Ho 2014: 77-78). In the same way, during WWII, Vietnamese workers came into contact with other colonised people, which might have developed ethnic boundaries through the recognition of racial difference.

Authorities recognised the danger of keeping a large group of workers in an internment centre for a long time. By April 1948, 650 workers had been interned at CSJ for 15 months. When large-scale repatriation began, it became important to reduce the duration of internment. While workers from Annam and Tonkin were transported from CSJ to other regional habitation centres under French control (as discussed later), some remained there for long periods due to shortages of ships and other factors. The average duration of internment at CSJ was 12 days for workers from Cochinchina, 18 days for those from southern Annam, and 33 days for those from central and northern Annam. Fearing increasing discontent, authorities tried to prevent long-term internees from contacting new arrivals. In particular, they wanted to avoid creating the impression that internment might last indefinitely.

As such, there was tension on the CSJ base, and internees were conscious of being monitored by not just colonial authorities but also other workers. One worker noted in a letter to a friend in France that “[at the CSJ base], we can’t drink alcohol or play cards as such behaviour would be considered a dishonour to our people.” As demonstrated here, workers’ behaviours were influenced by the group. Colonial authorities were aware of this situation and feared that, because of
communal life at the CSJ base, even workers lacking strong anti-France tendencies would support the Viet Minh for fear of being criticised by their compatriots.\textsuperscript{58}

In summary, French and colonial authorities proceeded carefully, but sometimes with repressive overtones, with the endeavour to repatriate migrant workers. It was a tremendously laborious effort for the French authorities and a process through which the workers themselves could not help but recognise that they were once again subjects under colonial rule.

**COMING TO THE HOMELAND**

After eight years away, returnees became strongly aware of overwhelming disparities between Indochina and France. Workers who, despite occasional discrimination, had laboured equally alongside French workers under severe circumstances in France had to again face a colonial situation. In a letter to a friend in France, one Vietnamese writes of “hungry young children with dry skin lying on the floor in half-falling shacks with straw thatched-roofs, lined up on both sides on the road”, noting that

\[\text{…}\] once we know that children in France attend schools until they are fourteen and see that children not even ten years old take care of buffaloes and carry hay that weighs four or five times their weight on their shoulders back in our home country, it will be hard for us not to think about it.\textsuperscript{59}

In this way, repatriated workers viewed the conditions of their home country under colonial rule with a changed perspective.

For workers, the greatest means of resistance against the French was to support the Viet Minh. The authorities believed the Viet Minh would view them as potentially useful recruits, possessing modern and technological knowledge acquired in France. Moreover, they were concerned that the money labourers had earned in France or received as allowances would be used to fund the Viet Minh.\textsuperscript{60} While it is not known how the Viet Minh viewed repatriated workers, they did hire people for important roles regardless of their career as long as they were able talents, and it is plausible that they contacted workers and accepted them into the organisation (Goscha 2011: 100).

In fact, some workers interned at the CSJ base attempted to contact the Viet Minh while others escaped to join. Of the 2,137 workers interned until October 1948, 34 escaped.\textsuperscript{61} Returnees deemed “dangerous” were strictly monitored, and even after release, they had to report regularly to the Sûreté fédérale, which was responsible for public security. However, the commissaire de la République in Cochinchina considered this measure “ineffective” in preventing such elements from expanding their resistance.\textsuperscript{62}

Support for the Viet Minh was also observed in regional internment centres. Besides the CSJ base in Cochinchina, habitation centres were established in French-controlled areas in Tonkin and Annam to temporarily accept workers before their return to their hometowns.\textsuperscript{63} Some workers from Tonkin and Annam
were directly transported to regional centres. Compared to the CSJ base, which was directly administered by the *Haut commissariat de France en l’Indochine*, monitoring was lax at habitation centres controlled by regional Vietnamese governments. Of the 168 workers who arrived at Nha Trang on 28 March 1948, 56 escaped within three days to join the Viet Minh. In July 1948, 25 workers who had been transported from Nha Trang to an internment centre at Hue disappeared. Then, in September, another 46 left the camp to join the Viet Minh. After these escapes, France demanded that the regions monitor workers more carefully.

While some workers tried to join the resistance, others stayed silent, afraid the Viet Minh would accuse them of being “collaborators” during their stay in France (Luguern 2011: 163-164). As discussed later, colonial authorities tried to socially integrate workers in various ways, but the repatriated workers could have been viewed as “dissenters” in Vietnamese society and were regarded with suspicion. Newspapers of the time reported on the CSJ base, noting that “repatriated workers have a great amount of assets”, providing a glimpse into how locals viewed the repatriates. In reality, however, quite a lot of workers did not collect the allowance they were supposed to receive upon their arrival in Indochina (Luguern 2014: 880-881).

While the utilisation of workers ended incomplete in France, the colonial authorities in post-repatriation Indochina faced different challenges when attempting to integrate migrant workers into society through labour. They feared that workers “who had slept on soft mattresses and had eaten French food for the last eight years” would become discontent elements who were “angry or dropping out from society”. To promote their economic participation, colonial authorities appealed to companies and related institutions to proactively employ them in agriculture, commerce, and industry, as well as in government administration. Employment committees were created in French-controlled regions to assign workers to positions that reflected their skills and dispositions. In Cochinchina, they received preferential employment when their abilities equaled those of other applicants.

Employing repatriated workers was also intended to alleviate labour shortages in Indochina. The labour shortage was a problem during the post-war period in industries important to colonial rulers, such as plantations and coalmines. Such attempts, however, proved difficult. In early 1947, French colonial authorities attempted to procure labourers from the CSJ base for rubber plantations, where there was a serious lack of labour; rubber plantations were considered a symbol of French capital and colonial exploitation, and the Viet Minh often attacked them (Boucheret 2008: 526-531). A French official fluent in Vietnamese had tried to persuade them to work on the plantation instead of returning home, explaining they could send for their families later. Many indicated interest, but the delegates did not approve of the offer and made sure the official could not speak directly to the workers henceforth.

Colonial authorities were initially optimistic about attempts to utilise workers for economic activities. One *conseiller* of the HCI said:
[Finding employment for workers], whether skilled or unskilled, should be comparatively easy due to the shortage of labour. The majority of the workers worked in France [...] and have acquired skills. Through these kinds of specialist skills, they should have employment opportunities in industries that are growing, such as mining companies in Tonkin, cement companies in Haiphong, and cotton spinning companies in Nam Dinh.\textsuperscript{71}

Some repatriated workers were able to use their experience working in France to get employment. Many, however, had not acquired skills in France, contrary to expectations, and did not accept work offered to them without resistance. In June 1947, authorities attempted to employ workers at the Haiphong port, but many rejected the offer. Moreover, the overall physical conditions of the labourers were deemed so poor the plan was abandoned.\textsuperscript{72} When colonial authorities tried recruiting workers for the Hongai mine, no one wanted to work there.\textsuperscript{73} In Saigon’s Cholon district, workers were offered various jobs (as sentries, park guards, painters, etc.), but many refused, expressing dissatisfaction with the salaries.\textsuperscript{74} Similarly, in Haiphong, the regional government tried to find jobs for internees but had difficulty because of their lack of skills, illnesses, and high wage demands.\textsuperscript{75} Faced with this situation, Haiphong’s Vietnamese mayor commented, “The returnees from France refrain from even the lightest of labour because of health reasons. Yet they insist that they have the right to be fed for free”.\textsuperscript{76}

Workers’ health conditions also impeded their employment. They had adapted to the French climate, and the long sea voyage left some with tuberculosis, among other health problems. In early 1947, to alleviate overcrowding at the CSJ Base, the army forcibly transported 269 workers to Tourane to employ them in army transportation work without prior physical examinations. Upon arrival, most were deemed unsuitable for physical labour, and only 41 were retained.\textsuperscript{77} This attempt by military authorities failed and even generated opposition from workers. Meanwhile, since workers in poor health were likely unfit for military activity, authorities were unconcerned that they might go home to Viet Minh areas.\textsuperscript{78}

As such, returnees from France were perceived as difficult, even compared to Vietnamese repatriated from New Caledonia and New Hebrides. By mid-1948, 1,276 of the workers, who had been away more than 10 years, had returned to Indochina. They had a reputation for “behaving correctly” and smoothly re-integrating into society. This suggests it was not a question of the amount of time workers repatriated from France had spent away from home but of the experiences they had had there.\textsuperscript{79}

Managing workers posed financial problems. As in the metropole, even after their return to Indochina, their living costs remained a source of major financial burden. An allowance of 60 francs a day during the sea voyage and 10 francs a day for the first 45 days after arrival in Indochina was stipulated to be paid from the French national budget. After this period, the daily 10-franc allowance had to be paid from the Federation of Indochina’s budget.\textsuperscript{80} Furthermore, at the CSJ base, the total requirement per worker was 7.95 piasters per day, of which 7.2
would come from the Federation of Indochina and 0.75 from the French national budget. The cost of running the CSJ base rose from 675,000 piasters in 1946 to 2,900,000 in 1948 when repatriation was in full swing. The general inspector of the Ministry of Overseas France was dispatched to audit expenditures in Indochina, where he criticised Commandant Debarge of the CSJ base. Describing the base as a “lethargic resort”, the inspector disapproved of the camp’s expansion, increased personnel, and wasteful management, and even demanded Debarge’s resignation. In February 1950, due to a lack of funds, CSJ could not afford food costs, demobilisation allowances, or staff salaries.

As discussed earlier, workers from Tonkin and Annam were transferred to regional internment centres to mitigate congestion at CSJ. They were placed under the administration of Vietnamese regional governments, and France ceased to be responsible for them. France had transferred control of Indochina’s regional finances to regional Vietnamese authorities, gradually establishing decentralisation (Tertrais 2002: 232). Thus, sending workers to regional areas meant reducing the financial burden of French authorities. Workers could stay at the regional centres for three months, and regional governments had to cover the costs. Under-funded, these facilities were in extremely poor condition. In Haiphong, a rice mill on the city’s outskirts was used to reduce expenditures.

Internment dragged on at the regional centres as well. The repatriation of workers from the Viet Minh zones posed a major problem since returning them would mean sending potential combatants into enemy territory. Although workers from Viet Minh areas had the option to remain, find work, and settle in a controlled zone, most wanted to go home. Of the 168 workers from Viet Minh territories who arrived at Nha Trang in March 1948, only 30 wanted to remain. Authorities could not force those who wanted to return home to stay. Some French administrators were optimistic about their return, saying that “most workers would return to their families under the moderate monitoring of prominent persons in the village and become harmless”.

However, repatriation to Viet Minh areas was not easy. While the major cities were under French control, the Viet Minh used guerrilla tactics in regional areas and villages (Goscha 2011: 98). The army would transport returnees overland to a border near the Viet Minh zone. If their hometowns were near the coast, patrol boats would take them partway; they would then be transferred to a small sailboat within Viet Minh territory. Some workers, however, had to return home by themselves on foot. One spent a month walking through forests with fellow workers from Hue before arriving at his village (Luguern 2011: 195).

For Vietnamese authorities cooperating with France and fighting the Viet Minh, receiving workers from Viet Minh–controlled areas was costly and problematic. Haiphong’s mayor complained to French authorities about budget, facility, and personnel shortages. He demanded that centres in other cities be expanded and objected to paying internment costs, arguing that France should pay all expenses until workers were returned. France rejected these complaints. The Vietnamese governor of North Vietnam also thought France should pay all internee-related
expenses and opposed repatriating workers from Viet Minh zones. Likewise, the governor of central Vietnam wrote to the commissaire de la République in Central Annam, “Our budget had not anticipated this much spending”.

Facing such opposition, the commissaire de la République pointed out to the HCI that Vietnamese authorities were transporting workers to Viet Minh zones by land and proposed that France pay to return them by sea, which was safer. The HCI responded that the French government would pay 10 days of travel costs, but would not pay any additional costs. Meanwhile, the HCI asked Vietnamese regional authorities to keep workers from Viet Minh zones in the controlled areas as long as possible. The Vietnamese side reacted against the French, who demanded further charges but rejected paying additional expenditures. In June 1950, after a dispute over the scheduled landing of 23 workers in Nha Trang, the governor of the region demanded that they be transported directly from the CSJ base to coastal areas close to their homes without interning them in Nha Trang.

Thus, conflicts arose between French and Vietnamese authorities over the cost of sustaining workers. Even some French officials thought France should pay all the costs, but the HCI did not change its policy. In this way, facing the increasing costs of the Indochina War, France refused to incur “unnecessary” expenses to manage repatriated workers. In September 1950, France decided to close the CSJ base, even though 1,500 workers still remained in France. The final large-scale repatriation took place in August 1950. France would only pay the repatriation costs of voluntary returnees for two years after the closure of the base. Again, French authorities stressed that “no more could be demanded from the French national budget”, refusing to bear further costs following the base’s closure.

As the war intensified, France no longer had the capacity to be mindful of the social integration of repatriated workers. After the shutdown, worker-related documents were no longer managed or stored since the affair was deemed “too complicated”. To obtain employment in the French zones, workers from Viet Minh areas who could not return home needed documents certifying the ir mobilisation to France. Therefore, in some ways, French authorities themselves prevented returning workers from finding gainful employment.

**Conclusion**

Aided by strong opposition among European *colons* to mobilisation in Algeria, it was Indochina, with its record of contribution during WWI, that became the main supplier of migrant labour to the metropole during WWII. With the war’s early end, however, workers did not play their originally intended roles. As they moved from colony to metropole and back, they experienced the Janus-faced nature of republicanism as well as the reality of colonial subjugation in both France and Indochina. Throughout the dismissal of republicanism under the Vichy regime, its vibrant resurgence in a liberated France, and finally repatriation to a homeland besieged by the French military in the name of republicanism, Vietnamese workers faced continual colonial rule. Through these experiences, they came face to face
with the complementary relationship between republicanism and colonial rule, as well as the violent nature of their formal coexistence.

Since the empire’s existence was maximally justified by both Vichy France and De Gaulle, and public awareness of the imperial project had reached its peak by WWII, France insisted on continuing colonial rule and entered the Indochina War, despite an international trend toward decolonisation. In this context, Vietnamese workers mobilised to help France before the war became “good-for-nothings” who spurred anti-colonial movements in France while supporting enemy forces and increasing financial burdens in Indochina.

In their more than eight-year stay in France, workers found ways to express their will through action. Workers organised, but they were not a monolithic presence since they varied depending on place of origin, time of repatriation, class, employment status, and degree of integration into French society. They developed their own identity as mobilised and repatriated workers while subjected to influences and restrictions from their peers. France controlled workers by making them participate in economic activities to address labour shortages. However, by coming into contact with French society, workers recognised the power and rights of workers, and they did not always accept the work offered to them. Some refused to work for France, and some even joined the Viet Minh after repatriation.

The fact that authorities emphasised repatriating workers into their societies signalled that workers were viewed in a special way as a result of their long stay in France while also being a centre of attention among the Viet Minh. While the colonial government tried to treat workers carefully, this treatment nonetheless became increasingly repressive in the face of escalating Viet Minh attacks. Eventually, facing heavy military expenses, France abandoned responsibility for managing workers, offloading such duties to regional Vietnamese authorities. This produced a storm of criticism, even from French partners on the Vietnamese side, who were fighting the Viet Minh.

The metropole mobilised colonial people as a strategy to strengthen the unity of the empire. After the war, however, France had to expend a great deal of effort to settle the debt created by this policy. The migrant workers who had been mobilised to aid their coloniser ended up destabilising the re-establishment of French colonial rule. France had found new and powerful ways to justify maintaining its vast empire during WWII, but the story of mobilised colonial subjects did not simply conclude along with the war; rather, it persisted throughout a long wave of unintended consequences.

Notes

1. A total of 6,900 people were from Tonkin, 10,650 from Annam, and 1,800 from Cochinchina.
2. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Rapport de Goupy, administrateur-adjoint des services civils de l’Indochine, 18 avr. 1946.
3. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Lettre du commissaire de la République en Cochinchine au HCI, 16 févr. 1946.
4. ADBR, 148W188, Rapport d’ensemble sur les milieux indochinois du service départemental des renseignements généraux, Marseille, 23 nov. 1946.
5. ADBR, 4W9489, Note d’information, Région Sud-Est, Camp de Sorgue, 28 avr. 1947.
6. ADBR, 4W9489, Note d’information au Préfet de Vaucluse, 1er août 1949.
8. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Note du chargé du bureau politique de la DTI à l’attention de Mesmer.
9. In January 1929, it was recorded that approximately 5,000 Vietnamese people resided in France, of which 1,700 were students. In the 1920s, students and workers rarely took part in activities together, but from the end of the ‘20s, they gradually came to work cooperatively for their political movements. However, friction and differences of opinion sometimes arose within their communities (Hémeri 1975: 22-34; Peters 2007).
10. ADBR, 4W9489, Note d’information, Région Sud-Est, Camp de Sorgue, 17 janv. 1948.
11. An elderly worker described this situation as “An insect makes rotten the whole pot of soup” (Lugueron 2011: 215).
13. ANOM, HCI, CS8, Note du conseiller aux Affaires sociales pour HCI, 6 août, 1947.
14. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Lettre de l’inspecteur général des Colonies, Bagot, au ministre de la FOM, 22 mars 1946.
15. ANOM, INF1594, Lettre du commissaire aux Affaires sociales au commissaire aux Colonies, 5 août 1944.
17. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Lettre de l’inspecteur général des Colonies, Bagot, au ministre de la France d’Outre-mer, 22 mars 1946.
18. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Rapport de Goupy, 18 avr. 1946.
19. ADBR, 4W9489, Lettre du préfet de Vaucluse à l’inspecteur départemental du Travail, 9 déc. 1946.
20. ADBR, 4W9489, Lettre de l’ingénieur en chef du génie rural au préfet de Vaucluse, 12 déc. 1946.
21. ANOM, HCI, Conspol 166, Rapport de Goupy, 18 avr. 1946.
22. ANOM, HCI, CS5, Lettre du directeur de l’Administration générale et de l’action sociale au HCI, 31 août 1946.
23. ANOM, INF1267, Rapport sur la formation professionnelle des travailleurs indochinois, date unknown.
24. ANOM, HCI, CS5, Lettre du commissaire fédéral aux Affaires économiques aux présidents des syndicats industriels Nord et Sud, 3 mai 1946.
25. ADBR, 14W188, Rapport d’ensemble sur les milieux indochinois, transmis du Commissaire, Chef de la 5e section, au commissaire principale, chef du service départemental des Renseignements généraux, 23 nov. 1946.
Between Colony and Metropole. Repatriation of Vietnamese Workers...

27. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Lettre saisie écrite par un Vietnamien, 30 sept. 1946.
28. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Lettre saisie écrite par un Vietnamien, 10 juill. 1946.
29. ANOM, HCI, CS8, Note du conseiller aux Affaires sociales pour HCI, 6 août 1947.
31. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Note du chargé du bureau politique de la DTI à Mesmer, date unknown.
32. ANOM, INF1384, Télégramme du Comité de l’Indochine au HCI, 9 mars 1946.
33. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Note de Pignon pour l’amiral d’Argenlieu, 20 oct. 1946.
34. ANOM, HCI, CS25, Lettre de Debarge à l’inspecteur général du Travail des travailleurs indochnois, 16 janv. 1950.
35. ANOM, HCI, CS8, Note de Guiriec, conseiller aux Affaires sociales pour le HCI, 6 août 1947.
36. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Lettre du conseiller aux Affaires sociales à HCI, 20 févr. 1948.
37. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre de l’administrateur des services civils chargé de l’expédition des affaires courantes des services du conseiller aux Affaires sociales, 20 août 1948.
38. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Lettre du commissaire de la République en Cochinchine à HCI, 31 déc. 1946.
40. ANOM, HCI, CS5, Compte rendu de la réunion sur la coordination des mesures à prendre en vue des prochains rapatriements d’ONS et de tirailleurs indochnois, 22 juill.1946.
41. ANOM, HCI, CS8, Lettre du conseiller aux Affaires sociales au HCI, 31 juil. 1947.
42. ANOM, HCI, CS4, Lettre de Debarge à l’administrateur-maire de la province du CSJ, 17 juil. 1947.
43. Le Populaire d’Indochine, 8 août 1948.
44. ANOM, HCL, CS1, Lettre de Debarge au conseiller aux Affaires sociales, 2 oct. 1948.
45. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Extrait de la lettre d’un Vietnamien au CSJ à Georgette Nau à Angers, 5 sept. 1948.
46. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre de Debarge au conseiller aux Affaires sociales, 2 oct. 1948.
47. ANOM, HCI, CS7, Déclaration de Tran Cao Thanh, date unknown.
48. ANOM, HCL, CS1, Lettre de Debarge au commandant supérieur des troupes française d’Extrême-Orient, 17 mars 1948.
49. ANOM, HCL, CS2, Extrait de la lettre de Doan Huy Cho au CSJ à Nguyen Nhan du camp des travailleurs indochnois à Mazargue, 8 sept. 1948.
50. ANOM, HCL, CS1, Lettre du chef de bataillon Arbey au colonel adjoint au général commandant les T.F.C.A à Hue, 3 sept. 1948.
51. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du lt-colonel Debarge au HCI, conseiller aux Affaires sociales, 2 oct. 1948.
52. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Extrait de la lettre d’un Vietnamien au CSJ à Georgette Nau à Angers, 5 sept. 1948.
53. A total of 1,663 Vietnamese and Senegalese worked across seven facilities for the chemical company AFC (Compagnie Alais,Forges et Camargue) (Vigna 2012: 145).
54. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Rapport de Debarge, 3 avr. 1948.
55. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Télégramme du HCI au ministère de la FOM, 22 févr. 1949.
56. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Lettre du conseiller de la République du HCI aux commissaires de la République française pour le Tonkin, pour le Centre Annam et pour le Sud Annam, 10 mars 1948.
57. ANOM, HCL, CS2, Extrait de la lettre de Doan Huy Cho au CSJ à Nguyen Nhan du camp des travailleurs indochinois à Mazargue, 8 sept. 1948.
59. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Extrait de la lettre d’un Vietnamiens au CSJ à Georgette Nau à Angers, 5 sept. 1948.
60. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Télégramme du HCI au ministre de la FOM, 28 sept. 1948.
61. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du général de corps d’armée, Blaizot, au ministre de la FOM, 19 oct. 1948.
62. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du général de Latour au général de corps d’armée Blaizo et au HCI, 24 août 1948.
63. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du général de corps d’armée Blaizot au ministre de la FOM, 19 oct. 1948.
64. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Lettre du commissaire de la République pour le Sud-Annam au conseiller de la République, HCI, 9 avr. 1948.
67. ANOM, HCI, CS8, Lettre de Debarge au conseiller aux Affaires sociales, 8 mai 1948.
68. ANOM, HCI, Consol 166, Lettre du commissaire de la République en Cochinchine au HCI, 16 févr. 1946.
69. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Arrêté du 4 novembre 1946 instituant à Saigon le comité pour le reclassement des Cochinchinois rapatriés de France.
71. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du conseiller de la République du HCI, au commissaire de la République pour le Tonkin, 22 sept. 1948.
72. SHD, 10H336, Lettre du conseiller de la République du HCI, au commandant provisoire des forces terrestre d’EO, 16 août 1947.
73. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Lettres du conseiller aux Affaires sociales au directeur général de la Société française de charbonnages du Tonkin à Hongai, 10 déc. 1947.
74. ANOM, HCI, CS5, Procès-verbal de la réunion du comité régional de réception des travailleurs ONS rapatriés, 28 sept. 1948.
75. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du maire de la ville Haiphong au conseiller pour la ville de Haiphong, 25 août 1948.
76. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du général de corps d’armée Blaizot au ministre de la FOM, 19 oct. 1948.
77. ANOM, HCI, CS3, Note du commissaire fédéral aux Affaires politiques pour le HCI, 20 avril 1947.
78. ANOM, HCI, CS8, Lettre du général de division Valluy, commandant supérieur des troupes françaises en EO au HCI, 17 février 1947.
79. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du général de corps d’Armée Blaizot au ministre de la FOM, 19 octobre 1948.
80. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Lettre du conseiller aux Affaires sociales au conseiller financier, 17 juillet 1947. The typical salary of a worker in Saigon in 1949 was 12 piasters and 14 piasters for those with specialist skills.
81. ANOM, HCI, CS8, Note du conseiller aux Affaires sociales pour le HCI, 6 août 1947.
82. ANOM, HCI, CS9, Lettre de l’inspecteur général des Colonies, Gayet, au président du Conseil, état-major de la Défense nationale et au ministre de la FOM, 31 juillet 1949.
83. ANOM, HCI, CS75, Lettre de Debange au HCI, 23 février 1950.
84. ANOM, HCI, SPCE73, Lettre du Délégué à Haiphong du chef de la police et de la Sûreté fédérale pour le Tonkin et le Nord Annam au chef de la police et de la Sûreté fédérale pour le Tonkin et le Nord Annam, 26 août 1948.
85. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du commissaire de la République pour l’Annam au HCI, 15 février 1949.
86. ANOM, HCI, CS2, Lettre du commissaire de la République pour le Sud-Annam au conseiller de la République du HCI, 29 mars 1948.
87. SHD, 10H336, Rapport au sujet du fonctionnement de la base de débarquement des travailleurs indochinois au CSJ, HCI, état-major particulier, 27 juillet 1947.
88. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Télégramme du commissaire de la République pour le Tonkin au HCI, 20 février 1949.
89. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du conseiller de la République du HCI au commissaire de la République pour le Tonkin, 22 septembre 1948.
90. ANOM, HCI, CS1, Lettre du gouverneur du Nord Vietnam au commissaire de la République au Tonkin, 27 août 1948.
91. ANOM, HCI, CS75, Lettre du gouverneur du Centre Vietnam au commissaire de la République pour le Centre Vietnam, 13 janvier 1950.
92. ANOM, HCI, CS75, Lettre du président du gouvernement vietnamien au HCI, 30 juin 1950.
93. ANOM, HCI, CS9, Lettre du chef de la province Khanh Hoa au Délégué pour le Sud du commissariat de la République dans le Centre Vietnam, 22 juin 1950.
94. ANOM, HCI, CS75, Lettre du HCI au président du conseil des ministres du gouvernement vietnamien, 1 septembre 1950.
95. ANOM, HCI, CS75, Lettre du chef du service central d’Action sociale au directeur de cabinet du HCI, 3 janvier 1951.

References


Between Colony and Metropole. Repatriation of Vietnamese Workers.


Abstract: Immediately before World War II, approximately 20,000 people were sent from Indochina to France as workers. Once the war had ended, the repatriation of these workers was an obligation for the new French government and an earnest desire for the majority of workers. When France made clear its confrontational stance towards the Viet Minh government, many workers revolted against the French policy that hindered the independence of their home country. Managing these “contending” workers within France subsequently became a complex issue for France. The financial burden was also a problem, and the French government, anxious about workers expanding their anticolonial movements, sought for their swift repatriation. However, following the onset and escalation of the Indochina War, smooth execution of such plans proved difficult to achieve. The repatriation of workers from Viet Minh–controlled zones posed significant problems in particular. France feared that once returned, these people would assist the Viet Minh and join the resistance against France. The colonial authorities were concerned about this issue, and disagreements occasionally erupted between the French domestic government, who hoped to merely “offload” the workers, and the colonial authorities, who wished to actually control the effects of worker repatriation in Indochina. Yet, after the repatriation, colonial authorities, seeking to lessen the
burden of handling workers, “offloaded” them in turn by forcing this responsibility onto the local Vietnamese governments under French control. Friction arose between the two sides: the Vietnamese frequently opposed the French, who would make many demands, especially to control workers from Viet Minh zones, but refuse to take any further financial responsibility. During the war, mobilisation of local citizens in a colony was a policy employed by the metropole to strengthen the unity of the empire. After the war however, France was required to spend a great amount of effort in order to settle the debt created by this policy.

**Entre colonie et métropole : le rapatriement après-guerre des travailleurs vietnamiens**

**Résumé:** Immédiatement avant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, environ 20 000 Vietnamiens ont été envoyés d’Indochine en France en tant que travailleurs. Une fois la guerre terminée, le rapatriement de ces expatriés était une obligation immédiate imposée par le nouveau gouvernement français et un désir sincère pour la majorité d’entre eux. Pour la France, la gestion de ces travailleurs était un sujet délicat et difficile ; le gouvernement craignait le développement de mouvements anticoloniaux au sein et au-delà de leur communauté en France, et également l’accumulation de fardeaux financiers imposés au budget national. Cependant, à la suite du déclenchement et de l’escalade de la guerre d’Indochine, le rapatriement sans heurt s’est avéré difficile à réaliser. C’est en particulier celui des travailleurs des zones contrôlées par le Viet Minh qui a posé le plus de problèmes. La France craignait qu’ils assistent le Viet Minh et rejoignent la résistance. Des désaccords à propos de cette question éclataient occasionnellement entre le gouvernement français, qui espérait se débarrasser des travailleurs, et les autorités coloniales qui accordaient la priorité au maintien de l’ordre dans la société coloniale. Pourtant, après le rapatriement, les autorités coloniales, cherchant à alléger la gestion des travailleurs, ont essayé d’imposer cette tâche aux gouvernements locaux vietnamiens dans les zones contrôlées par la France. Les autorités locales vietnamiennes s’opposaient fréquemment à cette politique française qui refusait de prendre toute autre responsabilité financière. La mobilisation des habitants locaux des colonies était une politique exercée par la métropole pour renforcer « l’unité de l’empire » en temps de guerre. Cependant, la France d’après-guerre a dû faire beaucoup d’efforts pour régler la dette engendrée par cette politique qui a eu pour conséquence première de rendre davantage instable la poursuite de la colonisation.

**Keywords:** Indochina, Vietnam, France, worker, World War II, repatriation, Indochina war.

**Mots-clés :** Indochine, Vietnam, France, travailleur, Deuxième guerre mondiale, rapatriement, guerre d’Indochine.