
Part Three: Economic and Cultural Issues

Japanese Agricultural Policy toward Vietnam during World War II: Nature and Consequences

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Introduction

The world economic crisis during 1929–1933 seriously damaged the Japanese economy, and prompted the Japanese capitalists to adopt a more aggressive policy toward their neighboring countries in Asia. Japan's first target was mainland China. In 1931, Japan began its invasion into the northeastern part of China. In the following years, Japan escalated the war in the Chinese continent. It occupied Beijing in July 1937, Nanjing in December 1938, Guangzhou in October 1938, Hainan Island in February 1939, and the Paracel Islands in March 1939.

Shortly thereafter, Japan deployed its military to North Vietnam in September 1940. President Hồ Chí Minh later confirmed that: “The truth is that from the autumn of 1940, our country was a colony of Japan, rather than a French colony” (Hồ Chí Minh Complete Works 2000: 3).

This paper does not go into the details of the invasion process and the political control by Japanese fascists, but rather focuses on the agricultural policy of the Japanese government toward Vietnam and its implications for the Vietnamese society during World War II.

1. Confiscatory policy of rice, corn and cereals

On September 22, 1940, Japanese troops entered Vietnam to occupy it and thoroughly implement the policy of “using war to feed war, to despoil extremely human and material resources of our people on all socio-economic activities” (Culture and Information Service, Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in Hồ Chí Minh City 2001: 357). Accordingly, on September 25, 1940, in order to satisfy Japanese demands to feed their troops, the French colonialists had to transport rice immediately from Hanoi to Lạng Sơn. Thereafter, the French had to sign documents one by one in order to provide rice and other necessary materials to the Japanese troops.

On January 20, 1941, the French signed an agreement to provide Japan with 700,000 tons of white rice, which was transported from Saigon (Đương Trung Quốc 2000: 325). Also in January 1941, the Japanese requested Governor General Decoux to sign an agreement on the exportation of 100 tons of rice from Saigon to Japan and the transportation of a million tons of rice for the Japanese military in one year, including the amount of rice to provide for ten thousand Japanese troops stationed in Indochina” (Nguyễn Phan Quang 1998: 178).

From 1941 onwards, Cochinchina became a strategic base for the Japanese to conquer Southeast Asia. In order to support the conquest, they forced the French colonialists to provide food to feed the Japanese troops in Indochina and at the same time export to Japan. A portion of the rice was also used to produce alcohol, so as to offset the fuel shortage in Japan.

“The most important resource that Japan expected from Indochina was rice. The import of rice from Indochina occupied 25.9% out of the total rice import of Japan in 1940, 25.2% in 1941, 37% in 1942, and 56.3% in 1943. [...]. Indochinese rice was also distributed to the Japanese troops deployed in various parts of Southeast Asia where there was a shortage of food” (Văn Tạo, Furuta Motoo 2011: 117).

On May 6, 1941, Japan and France signed an economic treaty, aimed at strengthening the cooperation between the colonial government and Japan. This treaty gave Japan many important benefits in Indochina, especially in the field of supplying rice. Thanks to this treaty, Japan could distribute food rations among the people and soldiers in Japan who suffered from bad harvest. In the following years, the Japanese government forced the French colonialists in Indochina to sign a new treaty to submit huge volumes of rice to Japan.

For Tonkin starting from 1942, the French–Japanese government thoroughly implemented its scheme to collect rice for exporting to Japan and at the same time serving the growing local needs of the French–Japanese army. Besides the organizations which were established under the Decree dated on December 30, 1941, the French–Japanese government also established monopoly organizations that took control over the collecting, transporting and processing of rice, and contemporaries called this company, federation or “*comptoir du riz* [rice factory].”¹

On July 18, 1942, Japan forced France to sign another French–Japanese Treaty. Based on this treaty, Indochina had to produce; or rather had to transport to Japan 1,050,000 tons of rice and broken rice before October 31 and 45,000 tons of rice flour before December 31, 1942 (Dương Trung Quốc 2000: 355).

The above data shows that, rice from Indochina in general and Vietnam in particular occupied a very important role in the invasion policy and territorial expansion of Japan. Not only did Vietnam’s rice supply the army but also provided for the daily food requirements in Japan. However, this was a large quantity of rice compared with what Indochina produced normally and in particular Vietnam at the time.

Here is a table that lists the quantity of rice produced in Indochina, mainly the ones Vietnam sold to Mitsui Bussan Kaisha Company in Japan in the years 1940–1945:

¹ Under the provisions of the colonial government, only a small number of dealers were entitled to participate in the federation.

Table 1. The quantity of rice that Vietnam sold to Mitsui Bussan Kaisha Company (1940–1945)

Year	The quantity of rice as requested (Unit: tons)	The quantity of rice exported (Unit: tons)
1940	Unknown	408,000 tons
1941	700,000 tons	585,000 tons
1942	1,074,000 tons	973,000 tons
1943	1,125,000 tons	1,023,471 tons
1944	900,000 tons	498,525 tons
1945	Unknown	44,807 tons ²

We can compare this to the quantity of rice which was imported from Asian countries to Japan in the years 1940–1945 in order to see more clearly the role of Indochina in general and Vietnam in particular in the “Strategy for food supply” of Japan.

Table 2. The situation of rice imports of Japan from Asian countries (Unit: tons, %)

	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Taiwan	385,000 (22.7%)	272,000 (12.2%)	262,000 (10%)	207,000 (18.2%)	150,000 (19.2%)	9,000 (6%)
North Korea	60,000 (3.5%)	520,000 (23.3%)	840,000 (32%)	72,000 (6.3%)	560,000 (71.5%)	142,000 (94%)
Indochina	439,000 (25.9%)	563,000 (25.2%)	973,000 (37%)	662,000 (58.3%)	38,000 (4.9%)	—
Myanmar	421,000 (24.9%)	438,000 (19.6%)	47,000 (1.8%)	18,000 (1.6%)	—	—
Thailand	284,000 (16.8%)	435,000 (19.5%)	508,000 (19.3%)	177,000 (15.6%)	36,000 (4.6%)	—
Other countries	105,000 (6.2%)	5,000 (0.2%)	—	—	—	—

Figures in Table 2 clearly show that Indochina was the largest rice exporter to Japan throughout the war period (Phan Ngọc Liên 2003: 276).

In terms of rice allocation, Vietnam’s rice production was concentrated in the South, so it was imperative that rice could be transported to other areas, namely through the railway. One point should be considered however: from late 1942 onwards, the North–South railroad was requisitioned by the Japanese army to transport troops and weapons to the battlefields in the South and back again to help return wounded soldiers and wealth to the country. This railroad should have been used to transport rice from the rice-rich South to the rice-deficit areas of the country. Further exacerbating the situation, Allied aircraft frequently flew along the railroads, bombing or bombarding bridges and trains, disrupting the transportation of rice from the South to the Center and North. Likewise, coal could not be transported from the North to the South to run the factories. To solve the problem of securing coal, the capitalist owners used “burning rice rather than coal” to run the machines. Another problem was also found in Annam and Tonkin where the narrow coastal regions could not produce enough rice every

² Extracted from the Culture and Information Service, Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in Hồ Chí Minh City 2001: 359.

year to support its large population. Thus to augment the supply, it needed help from the South, but because rice could not be transported from here, the shortages were even more serious.

Along with rice, corn was also an important food source that was requisitioned by the Japanese fascists and forced to be exported to Japan. The quantity of corn exported from Vietnam was as follows: In 1941, the exported amount was 124,923 tons; in 1942, 98,700 tons was exported (accounting for 46% of total corn production in Vietnam); in 1944, 18,263 tons (45%) was exported and in 1945, 12,134 tons (9%) was exported (Culture and Information Service, Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in Hồ Chí Minh City 2001: 360).

Besides rice and corn, Japan also requisitioned cereals, although most people in Vietnam still ate corn, potatoes, and beans as their main staple.

In the years 1940–1945, Indochina exported to Japan the following quantity of cereals: In 1940, 149,000 tons was exported (accounting for 55.4% of total cereal imports to Japan); in 1941, 135,000 tons (50.6%); in 1942, 125,000 tons (15.2%); in 1943, 634,000 tons (84.5%) and in 1944, 335,000 tons (70.0%) (Culture and Information Service, Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in Hồ Chí Minh City 2001: 379).

Being in a position that depended on the protection from Japanese troops, the French government in Vietnam at the time had established many agencies dedicated to mining, trading, transportation, and provisions of the purchasing prices of rice, corn and cereals to satisfy the increasing demand of the Japanese fascists. Those were the “Interdisciplinary Committee of Rice,” “Advisory Committee on Rice Cultivation,” “Advisory Committee on the Transportation of Cereals,” etc. and in particular the “Federation of Rice” and the “Federation of Rice and Corn.” At the same time, the French colonialists launched a series of policies and measures that were extremely harsh. These involved the requisitioning of rice and corn from the population and ended up squeezing the farmers out of their crops.

From the above data, it can be seen that Indochina in general and Vietnam in particular was a major supplier of food to Japan in the years 1940–1945. This clearly reveals that the purpose of Japan when they invaded Indochina, was not as the Japanese government argued it to be which was “to cut supply lines to Chiang Kai-shek through Indochina” (Culture and Information Service, Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in Hồ Chí Minh City 2001: 380). Rather, it confirmed existing suspicions that the Japanese government took over Vietnam and Indochina with the main intention to implement the “Strategy for food supply” so as to meet the demands of war. This ultimately resulted in the economic plunder of the region.

2. Policy of the forced planting of jute, castor and peanuts instead of rice and other staple crops

One of the activities of the Japanese army in the years 1940–1945 that resulted in heavy and enduring consequences for Vietnamese people was “to force the Vietnamese people to remove rice and farm-produced crops to plant jute, castor, etc. in order to make the material to manufacture bags to

hold rice and oil which were lacking in the war” (Trần Huy Liệu, Nguyễn Lương Bích, Nguyễn Khắc Đàm 1957: 82).

According to Minami Yoshizawa in “Asian War in Our Subconscious,” the reason why the Japanese army forced the Vietnamese people to plant jute was because “jute bags in Indochina were previously provided by India, but now they were not imported from India anymore, so the development of the jute industry here was an urgent problem that needed to be addressed.

“Jute bags which were used to transport materials in the ‘East Asian Commonwealth’ were becoming practical problems. Therefore, our country (*Japan*) needed more supplies from Indochina in order to reach its/her quota of 30 thousand tons of jute. Indochina, at that time, had an output of 500 tons. We (*the Japanese*) needed to put up 30 thousand tons in the 5-year plan. Meanwhile in Taiwan, production of jute was 12 thousand tons. We also had plans to increase production to 30 thousand tons in the 5-year plan. Thus, it was understandable that there was great hope for Indochina.

Therefore, the expectations for the current Indochina authorities came to meet minimum requests and must organize a special mining company (called Indochina Jute Company). This was a joint stock company held by representatives of influential people in society, who were given legal status by the Government of Japan. It had monopoly power in the production of jute, including encouraging cultivation, purchasing, processing, import and export of jute material and providing distribution within Indochina under the management of the Government” (Văn Tạo, Furuta Motoo 2011: 610–611).

Concerning the organization of the forced planting of jute, the Dainan Koshi was responsible for jute planting in Bắc Ninh Province. 10 Japanese companies had an exclusive right to plant jute in other provinces for purchasing. The agency assigned to monitor the forced planting and purchasing of jute from these companies was the Economic Commission of the Japanese Embassy in Hanoi. It was responsible for supplying cash to pay each farmer, and at the same time issue notices and directives. However, the money paid to the farmers was not something they could expect to redeem at its full value because as the war approached its end, the value of Indochinese silver progressively decreased. To maintain the military and Japanese rule, the Japanese army stationed in Indochina pressured the French government to force Indochina banks to issue more banknotes, which escalated the value of materials, and caused serious inflation.

The situation of the farmers being forced to remove rice and farm-produced crops to sow jute is described and assessed in the *Vietnam Independence* newspaper (*Việt Nam Độc lập*).³ “In Bắc Ninh Province, more than 300 Acreage of potatoes were forced to be destroyed by the Japanese to sow jute.” When the farming season came, the jute was not yet ready to be cut. This placed the farmers in a dilemma. By keeping the jute, the farmers would have to give up on the rice season, but if they cut it down to plant rice, the farmers could be imprisoned by the Western and Japanese authorities and be

³ Vietnam Independence League is the propaganda agency of the Việt Minh Front. Its first issue was published on August 1, 1941 in Cao Bằng Province.

levied with a fine that amounted to the price of 300 Acreage of jute” (*Việt Nam Độc lập*, 11 October 1942). At the same time, “in Thái Bình province, people did not have enough rice so they had to abandon jute to plant rice. The Western authorities forced farmers to remove the rice and sow jute again. Anyone who did not follow orders would be arrested” (*Việt Nam Độc lập*, 11 August 1942). With regards to the contents of this issue, Indochinese Communist Party’s General Secretary—Trùng Chinh said: “Since the Japanese occupied us, our compatriots were not surprised at their robbery trick like growing jute instead of rice (in Northern Vietnam) or growing nuts instead of cotton (in Northern and Central Vietnam)... In short, the Japanese army was still loyal to the policy of so-called “feeding war by war” and the Pacific War of the Japanese was clearly a large-scale robbery” (Ngôn Cờ Giải Phóng: 189). The Acreage and yields of jute in Vietnam increased without pause from 1941 to 1944.

Table 3. The Acreage and yield of jute in Vietnam (from 1941 to 1944)

	Year	1941	1942	1943	1944
Tonkin	Acreage	893 ha	300 ha	14,200 ha	12,900 ha
	Yield	970 tons	2,400 tons	6,950 tons	6,300 tons
Annam	Acreage	—	200 ha	422 ha	670 ha
	Yield	—	150 tons	250 tons	100 tons
Cochinchina	Acreage	—	200 ha	617 ha	3,332 ha
	Yield	—	150 tons	380 tons	950 tons

Source: *Annuaire statistique de l’union française*: F77

On January 22, 1945, the French protectorate of Cochinchina sent a classified memorandum to the leaders of Cần Thơ, Châu Đốc, Long Xuyên, and Sa Đéc Provinces, stating that: “the Diplomatic mission of Japan requires the General Government of Indochina to allow Menka KK and Mitsui Bussan Kaisha to get contractors for jute cultivation in Southern Indochina. For Southern Vietnam, the Japanese required that 1.400 ha of jute cultivation be assigned to the following companies:

- Tokyo Menka KK: 700 ha in Châu Đốc.
- Mitsui Bussan Kaisha: 300 ha in Xuyên; 300 ha in Sa Đéc; 100 ha in Cần Thơ” (Nguyễn Phan Quang 1998: 199).

Besides decreasing the land set aside for growing rice and staple crops to make room for growing jute, Japanese fascists also forced the Vietnamese farmers to grow castor. Acreages and yields of castor in Indochina (mostly in Việt Nam) from 1940 to 1944 are listed in the table below:

Table 4. Acreage and yield of castor in Indochina (mostly in Việt Nam) (1940–1944)

Years	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
Acreage	3,600 ha	5,500 ha	10,000 ha	19,700 ha	30,600 ha
Yield	1,800 tons	2,200 tons	3,000 tons	4,700 tons	12,000 tons ⁴

Source: *Annuaire statistique de l’union française*: F76

The table above shows that the total Acreage of land for growing jute and castor in place of rice and staple crops were rapidly growing during the war.

It was not only jute and castor that were forcefully planted. Under the order of Japanese fascists, French colonials also forced farmers to grow “peanuts.” Since jute was not a staple crop, it was not as devastating to the farmer when the total harvest was collected. However in the case of peanuts, since they constituted the main staple food, being forced to sell them to the Japanese army had grave consequences for the farmer. They were some farmers who sold peanuts secretly in the markets but upon discovery, they were confiscated. In the past, if there was not enough rice, farmers could grow potatoes, maize or cassava instead but lands now were used to grow jute, castor, and peanuts. Staple food was in serious shortage and people’s lives were becoming increasingly difficult.

The Japanese government’s policy of decreasing land available for growing rice and staple crops met with anger and many protests emerged throughout the country. In response to these actions of the people, *National Salvation* newspaper not only gave approval but also encouraged people not to supply rice to the Japanese military (Báo Cứu Quốc, 1943).

Yet, these Japanese activities were not only assisted by the French government, but also by the Trần Trọng Kim government. As we all know, on March 9, 1945, the Japanese assumed direct control over Vietnam by deposing the French in a coup and created the Trần Trọng Kim government to serve the occupation of the Japanese army. After the formation, the government negotiated with the Japanese fascists not to collect rice from the people, but in fact, this was a deceptive ploy to try to improve their standing with the people: “the Japanese abandoned the rice collection policy in Central Vietnam because it was not a rice-growing region. As a result, due to this policy elimination, the Japanese not only did not suffer any loss, but it also helped the reputation of the Trần Trọng Kim puppet government and our people ended up being fooled” (Trần Huy Liệu, Nguyễn Khắc Đạm 1957: 62). Along with that, the Government of Trần Trọng Kim also organized the transport of rice from the South to the North, but on July 1, 1945, “the people in the North upon seeing no rice from the South; likened the situation to a crying child waiting for a mother’s return from the market to provide her with milk, but is instead told lies.” (Trần Huy Liệu, Nguyễn Lương Bích, Nguyễn Khắc Đạm 1957: 65).

In addition, the Trần Trọng Kim government also negotiated with the Japanese fascists to provide tax relief for the people, but it did not lighten their burden because “based on the communal land law in Vietnam at that time, a person with a few feet of land for a living was also classified as belonging to the proprietary class. Therefore, the number of people that were classified as the working class and were duty-free was trivial. Even in Northern Vietnam, there were only 50,000 people that were entitled to a duty-free status. In Central Vietnam, only a few working class people were entitled to the new tax relief (Trần Huy Liệu, Nguyễn Khắc Đạm 1957: 165). Moreover, this tax relief also distinguished between people in the North and those in Central Vietnam. Tax reduction actually meant a tax increase. This was the nature of the policy of the so-called “Empire of Vietnam.” As a result, 4-months into its existence, from April 18 to August 19, 1945, the Trần Trọng Kim government was trying hard but still

⁴ Total Acreage of castor in the year 1944 jumped by 27,000 ha compared to the year 1940.

struggling to bring the Vietnamese people “bogus independence” (Trần Huy Liệu, Nguyễn Lương Bích, Nguyễn Khắc Đạm 1957: 66).

Based on that, the study “*The Trần Trọng Kim’s Cabinet: Nature, Role and Historic Position*” said: “In fact, there is no evidence to prove that during the Trần Trọng Kim’s administration, his cabinet implemented plans or orders made by the Japanese. The allegations of some researchers that this cabinet continued forcing people to plant jute instead of rice, collect rice for the Japanese fascists, etc. are unfounded. In contrast, those policies had ended with the Japan–France coup, simultaneously, Trần Trọng Kim cabinet was the one who requested the Japanese to remove the rice collection policy and propose tax reduction” (Phạm Hồng Tung: 348). However, from an objective viewpoint, the Trần Trọng Kim cabinet was more or less responsible for the implementation of agricultural policy of Japan in Vietnam, including policies to abandon the cultivation of rice and staple crops to grow jute to serve the war effort.

3. Consequences from Japanese agricultural policies in Vietnam

Firstly, it changed the agricultural system and severely reduced food crops production

Vietnam is an agricultural country. The main crops that are produced throughout the seasons are rice and staple crops. These foods have sustained the lives of Vietnamese people for thousands of years. However, since the Japanese invaded and implemented policies to force the Vietnamese people to grow capital intensive crops such as jute, castor and peanuts instead of rice and staple crops to support their war effort and for export to Japan, the agricultural structure changed people’s lives, making them more and more difficult.

Alongside the change in the agricultural structure, Japanese agricultural policies had a debilitating effect on food crop production. *Trung Bắc Chủ Nhật* [North Central Sunday Journal] issue 172, dated on August 28, 1943 described: “In many places, the quality of lands were so bad, that every year except for the reserved grain that was used as food until the next season, farmers did not have enough grain to submit, so they had to buy more grain to eat after selling grain to the government” (*Trung Bắc Chủ Nhật* 28 August 1943). By the end of 1944, unprecedented flooding occurred, which reduced rice production from 1.0887 million tons to only 1,000,000 of this year. Of this, 125,000 tons were collected by the French (selling 35,000 tons to people in the city, 90,000 tons remaining were stored in France–Japanese warehouses). 910,000 tons of rice left, minus 55,000 tons of rice seeds, people in the North could only use 855,000 tons which was just enough to feed 6 million 700 thousand people. The other 3 million 30 thousand people had to eat maize, potatoes, cassava, etc. But the North only gained a small amount of these foods, about 147,000 tons, equivalent to 133,100 tons of rice, and crop production was only 80,000 tons, feeding about 60 thousand people over 7 months (Tạ Thị Thúy 2014: 64–565).

“The decline in food production has made millions of farmers suffer from hunger, and even starve to death because there was no food to eat. One of the most typical cases is the famine in the North in early 1945” (Tạ Thị Thúy 2014).

Secondly, the decline of agricultural production has created spiraling inflation in Vietnam

During Japan's occupation of Vietnam, prices for some of the necessity goods skyrocketed. In 1940, the price of a quintal of rice in Hanoi was only 10.1 đồng. In 1943, the official price was 31 đồng, but the price in the black market reached 57 đồng. In 1944, the official price was 40 đồng while the price in the black market went up to seven times more than the previous year's prices at 350 đồng. Finally in 1945, the official price was set at 53 đồng, black market prices soared from 700 to 800, which was doubling hundreds of times from the initial period of the war (Nguyễn Phúc Lộc: 184).

By mid-May 1942, in Cochinchina, the price of food and other essential goods increased on average from 10% to 30%, sometimes up to 70%. According to reports from leaders of Sa Đéc (5.1942), the provincial food prices compared to the same period in 1941 increased by at least 11% and as high as 77%: dried fish increased by 11%, vegetables increased by 35%, goods consumption increased by 47%, and poultry increased by 77%. Meanwhile, prices in Long Xuyên in the same period (May 1942) also increased significantly as rice increased by 20%, vegetables up to 30%, and ice increased by 60% (Dương Trung Quốc 2000: 235-254).

Overall, the rapid increase in prices for essential food items had a huge impact on the lives of people in Vietnam. This situation became worse for crop production in 1944-1945. The cost of living in Saigon increased by 450%; in Hanoi, the cost of living increased by 200% (Marr, David G. 1980: 135).

Thirdly, a rice collection policy based on buying cheaply from the farmers directly caused famine in Vietnam

In the process of implementing its/her agricultural policy, Japan purchased a large quantity of food from Vietnamese people. Although it was known to be sold to Japan, in actual practice, the compulsory sale of rice was blatant robbery. Rice prices were specified for each year as follows: in 1942 the price was 12.20 đồng/kg (*Trung Bắc Chủ Nhật* No 121), in 1943 it was 13.45 đồng/quintal while rice prices in Northern markets was 57 đồng/kg (Trần Huy Liệu, Nguyễn Lương Bích, Nguyễn Khắc Đạm 1957), in 1945 the price was 14.68 đồng/quintal while the market price was 800 đồng/kg (Nguyễn Phúc Lộc).

It can be said that the rice collection policy of the Japanese government in which rice was sold for very cheap prices was the "perpetrator of the terrible famine in Vietnam 1945" (Văn Tạo, Furuta Motoo 2011: 675).

In regards to this problem, in the *Declaration of Independence*, President Hồ Chí Minh affirmed: "In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists violated Indochina's territory to establish new bases in their fight against the Allies, the French imperialists went down on their bended knees and handed over our country to them. Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that, from the end of last year to the beginning of this year, from Quảng Trị Province to Tonkin, more than two million of our fellow citizens died from starvation" (Hồ Chí Minh Completed Works, 2).

In addition, in the work "*Mây Trắng Đường Trường Chinh*" by Văn Khuê, a historical witness and a farmer himself, who had gone through and witnessed the horrible famine genocide of the people in

Tonkin, caused by policies implemented by French colonialists and Japanese fascists has said: “Right in Hanoi, many peasants in the vicinity dragged themselves to the city. They gathered around the markets, restaurants, temples, churches, and recreational grounds, and lived without stability on the roadside while being forced to become beggars. Everyone was very weak, hovering like ghosts, their arms and legs were very scraggy, and black like a burnt rail. Faces were gaunt, leaving only two eye sockets and two protruding teeth on the skinny face. Unfortunately, that year was very cold, which chapped the arms and legs, and made them cold to the bone. So how could people who were so poor, hungry, thirsty, homeless, exposed to the wind and dew, and without blankets or mats stand it...” (Văn Khuê 1997: 22).

Particularly, this remarkable famine has been reconstructed by authors Văn Tạo and Furuta Motoo in their study *The 1945 Famine of Vietnam: Historical Records and Evidences*, which gives a detailed description on the tragedy: In Hanoi, “abandoned children or whose parents were dead had to drag themselves on the streets and stuff leaves, phloem, and rubbish into their mouth. Dead people were scattered in the markets and alleys, lying on mats or sacks; common green bottle flies landed all over their faces. The atmosphere was heavy and depressing. The ox carts collected the dead bodies and those who were barely alive in the cart, had lime poured on them, and were carried to Giáp Bát and Cầu Giấy to be thrown into large pits dug out for them. People were hired to collect dead bodies in order to get money to eat, until they themselves died and were picked up by others. Hungry dogs in the neighborhood dragged limbs of starving children to eat. It was macabre and tragic as hell. The humiliation and suffering was unbearable.” In Hải Phòng, “the terrible famine–catastrophic consequences due to exploitative policies of the Japanese–French has caused thousands of people to starve in the district. There were half starving villages, many families had no one left in An Thọ, Bách Phương, An Tiên. In Hà Tây, “during the famine in 1945, about 80 thousand people (almost 10% of the population in the province) died from starvation; many villages became dead, especially in areas where the craft had stagnated. In the village of La Ca (Hoài Đức district), there were 2,093 people who starved to death out of a total of 4,893 people, and of which 147 families had no one left in them. La Khê village (Hoài Đức district) had 2,100 people, in which 1,200 people died from starvation, accounting for 57% of the population.” In Hưng Yên, “Liễu Trung village (Mỹ Văn) had so many dead people that there was no time to bury them. Five families had no one left. All had died because of starvation.” In Thái Bình province, “many villages had 50 to 80% of the population dying because of starvation. Sơn Thọ village (Thụy Anh) has lost 1,025 people of which 965 people died of starvation (79% of the population); Thành Nê village (Kiến Xương) had 4,164 people, of which 1,854 people died of starvation. In just five months, the number of people who died of starvation in the province amounted to 280,000 people (about 25% of the population).” In Nghệ An, in less than three months, from the end of 1944 to the beginning of 1945, 42,630 people died of hunger. Of the 16,358 families that had family members die, 2,250 families had no one left. In Hà Tĩnh, only Nghi Xuân district had 8,161 people dead. Xuân Viên village had 1,165 people dead” (Văn Tạo, Furuta Motoo 2011: 642–660).

Two million people died of hunger in this tragic event with disastrous consequences. The number of people who starved to death accounted for a quarter of the North's population, a tenth of the country's population at that time, and 10 times higher than the number of Japanese victims who died from the two US atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in World War II.

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In summary, during the invasion and occupation of Vietnam that spanned a five-year period, the Japanese military government implemented reactionary policies against the Vietnamese people, especially policies in the agricultural sector. These policies focused on purchasing and collecting rice, corn and grains from the Vietnamese people while forcing them to grow jute, castor and peanut instead of rice and staple crops aimed at serving Japanese fascists.

Such brutal policies by the French–Japanese administrators resulted in serious consequences for agricultural production as well as the land situation in Vietnam after the Revolution. The outcome of the rice collection policies, together with national disasters, diseases, crop failures and war not only made the agricultural economy of Vietnam face a period of severe crisis, deforming the agricultural economic structure, including change in the plant structure that led to a significant fall in food production, and price escalation, but also directly caused the terrible famine in Vietnam in early 1945.

In response to the rice collection policies, resentment and hostility by the Vietnamese people toward Japanese fascists increased tremendously. It became one of the most direct and important factors that enabled the Indochinese Communist Party and the Việt Minh Front to recruit and mobilize people to conduct raids on Japanese granaries and rice storage facilities from April 1945. Soon after, they launched the general insurrection against the Franco–Japanese government. Their efforts placed in careful and long term planning finally bore fruit when they were able to regain their national independence and freedom in the August Revolution of 1945.

References

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