

Dark Side of the Mines: Illicit acts and crimes at Tonkinese coal mines

Thuy Linh Nguyen

Assistant Professor of History
Mount Saint Mary College

The coal mines of northern Tonkin are often portrayed as the economic engine for French Indochina. Coal mining also goes into the historiography of modern Vietnam as one of the most exploitative industries whose brutal treatment of its workers turned itself into the breeding ground for nationalist and communist movements. But there was another side of the coal industry that few people notice- its underground world of illicit acts and criminal activities that was thriving under the radar of both the French repressive regime of surveillance and the Vietnamese labor movement. Drawing from business and police reports located at different colonial archives including those of the *Société française de charbonnages du Tonkin* (S.F.C.T)- the largest French coal mining company in Indochina, this paper seeks to reveal a complex and intersected world of illicit activities ranging from the individual and opportunistic acts of wildcat stoppage, foot-dragging and cheating to the more serious crime of smuggling and trafficking of explosives. An investigation into these crimes' perpetrators, their motives and relationships exposes the dynamic and plural power structure within the mines that transcended the racial, professional and social boundaries at the time. Their stories also contribute to a fuller understanding of a fluid frontier mining landscape where its inhabitants sought creative ways to beat the system and where a collective of illicit acts could engender political and economic changes.

Thuy Linh Nguyen is an Assistant Professor of History at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, NY. She received her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, and is the author of a new book *Childbirth, Maternity and Medical Pluralism in French Colonial Vietnam, 1880-1945* (University of Rochester Press, 2016). She is currently working on a project on the transnational history of coal mining and revolution in northern Vietnam. This project explores the French discovery and exploitation of coal mines in Tonkin and the impact of the coal industry on the local communities and environment, labor, the economy and the larger revolutionary movements in Vietnam.

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Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue