Keith Stevens writes that Brian Fawcett in his article on THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS IN FRANCE quoted a figure of 30,000 Chinese who returned to and remained in France, from China, after World War I. He added that the figure appears excessive. In fact, the total of all the Chinese labourers recruited by the French for the French Chinese labour Corps during World War I did not exceed 50,000.

The French began their recruitment of Chinese in 1916, some six months before the British did. The scheme was initiated following preliminary discussions on the practicalities of recruiting Chinese labourers to be shipped to France to work in munitions factories to release Frenchmen to serve in the trenches, with the initial idea being to recruit Chinese from the area around the French treaty port of Guangzhouwan in Guangdong in southern China. This, however, was rejected and Jiangsu province - a northern province where the Chinese were harder and used to northern climes - was selected, particularly in view of the wide French missionary influence in that province. A French Army major was despatched from French Indo-China (now Vietnam) to Shanghai where he was based in the French Concession ostensibly as a French civil servant, to avoid embarrassing the Chinese, to report on the practicality of the proposal. His report was favourable and accepted, and recruitment of Chinese volunteer labourers was started in Jiangsu province, in the vicinity of Shanghai in July 1916.

The labourers were transported by sea from Shanghai to Marseilles, where the main French CLC was situated, and Le Havre, and trained and worked in munitions factories across France such as Bergerac in the Dordogne, or in private concerns such as the Schneider factory at Le Creusot. Such employment was not possible in Britain due to the objections raised by British trade unions. French Chinese labourers were often billeted in French homes, and an unknown but comparatively large number married French women, some of whom accompanied their husbands back to China. The few labourers who died in France were buried at French civil cemeteries. Their records were maintained at the Headquarters in Lyons.
