

French Colonial Measures to Promote Rubber Plantation Systems in Eastern Cochinchina, 1900-1930

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Abstract

This study investigates the policies implemented by French colonial authorities to foster the development of rubber plantation systems in Eastern Cochinchina from 1900 to 1930. Employing historical, logical, and statistical methods, the research analyzes archival documents, decrees, and quantitative data to identify key measures: land concession policies, tax incentives, financial subsidies, and transportation infrastructure investments. Findings indicate that these strategies significantly increased the number and scale of plantations, with Eastern Cochinchina accounting for 86.67% of Indochina's rubber estates by 1937. The study concludes that these measures, while economically transformative, favored French capitalists and local elites, reshaping land ownership patterns and reinforcing colonial dominance in the region.

Keywords: Colonial policies, rubber plantations, Eastern Cochinchina, land concessions, tax incentives, financial support, transportation infrastructure

1. Introduction

At the dawn of the 20th century, Eastern Cochinchina- today's southeastern Vietnam- underwent a profound transformation as French colonial authorities harnessed its fertile basaltic soils and strategic proximity to Saigon to establish a thriving rubber plantation system. Heralded as a "symbol of modern agricultural economy" (Hoàng, 2011, p. 70), rubber emerged as a linchpin of Indochina's colonial economy, fueled by surging global demand and orchestrated colonial ambition. Between 1900 and 1930, this region ascended as the epicenter of rubber production in

French Indochina, a feat driven by meticulously crafted policies- legal frameworks for land acquisition, fiscal incentives, financial subsidies, and transportation infrastructure development. This study delves into these measures, unraveling their role in shaping one of the most significant agrarian shifts under colonial rule.

The central question guiding this research is: How did French colonial policies orchestrate the growth and dominance of rubber plantations in Eastern Cochinchina? By integrating historical, logical, and statistical analyses, the study illuminates the mechanisms behind plantation expansion- ranging from land concessions exceeding 900,000 hectares by 1931 to extensive road networks spanning 5,840 km by 1925 (Trần, 1970; Bành, 2021)-and evaluates their socioeconomic repercussions. Departing from prior works fixated on economic outputs (e.g., Nguyễn, 2007), this paper foregrounds policy implementation, positing that these measures engineered a framework disproportionately favoring French investors while sidelining indigenous landholders. It thus enriches colonial economic historiography with a granular examination of systemic exploitation.

Significantly, Tuyen Nguyen Thi Mong (2019) enhances this inquiry by framing French rubber policies as a calculated exploitation of Vietnam's natural resources, spotlighting Eastern Cochinchina's pivotal role in fulfilling colonial economic goals (p. 103–104). Her work underscores the strategic intent behind these measures, deepening our understanding of their global and regional dimensions.

2. Literature Review

The development of rubber plantations in Eastern Cochinchina during the early 20th century represents a pivotal chapter in the colonial economic history of French Indochina. Existing scholarship has explored various dimensions of this phenomenon, focusing on economic motivations, land policies, and broader colonial strategies. However, a comprehensive analysis of the specific measures employed by the French colonial authorities- such as land concessions, tax incentives, financial support, and infrastructure development- remains fragmented, offering opportunities for deeper investigation.

Hoàng (2011) underscores the emergence of rubber plantations as a hallmark of modern agriculture in colonial Vietnam, driven by the immense profitability that attracted French capital to Eastern Cochinchina. She argues that the region's transformation into a plantation hub was not merely an economic outcome but a deliberate colonial project, positioning rubber as a "symbol of agricultural modernity" (p. 70). This perspective aligns with Charles Robequain's (2023) seminal work, which details the continuous and unwavering support provided by colonial authorities to plantation owners. Robequain highlights policies such as tax exemptions and financial aid as critical enablers, though his analysis remains broad, lacking specificity on legislative mechanisms or regional variations within Indochina.

The role of land policy in facilitating plantation growth has received significant attention. Trần

(1970) documents the scale of land expropriation in southern Vietnam, noting that by 1931, approximately 900,000 hectares had been allocated to plantation owners, far exceeding official limits. This concentration of land, he contends, reflects a systematic effort to favor French capitalists and local elites over indigenous farmers. Similarly, Nguyễn (2007) traces the expansion of rubber plantations in Eastern Cochinchina, emphasizing the legal frameworks established through decrees like those of 1896 and 1913. However, her study focuses primarily on plantation statistics (e.g., area and number) rather than dissecting the operational details of these policies or their socioeconomic consequences. Tuyen Nguyen Thi Mong (2019) complements this narrative by arguing that French investment in rubber was a calculated exploitation of Vietnam's natural resources, with Eastern Cochinchina's fertile lands systematically targeted to establish large-scale plantations that met global market demands (p. 103). Her analysis situates these efforts within a broader colonial strategy to maximize resource extraction, though it lacks a detailed exploration of specific policy mechanisms.

Financial incentives and economic support mechanisms have also been explored, albeit unevenly. Lê (2016) examines the tax relief policies initiated under Governor-General Paul Doumer, such as the Decree of 4 June 1897, which exempted rubber plantation land from taxation for six years. He argues that these measures reduced initial investment risks, encouraging French entrepreneurs to establish plantations. Complementing this, Marianne Boucheret (2008) analyzes the financial aid provided during economic downturns, such as the 1929–1933 global crisis, when the colonial government disbursed millions of Indochinese piastres to sustain struggling plantations. While insightful, these studies often overlook the comparative effectiveness of such policies relative to other rubber-producing colonies, such as Malaysia, and their differential impact on French versus Vietnamese planters.

Infrastructure development, particularly transportation networks, is another critical yet underexplored aspect. Hoàng (2013) details the French investment in railways and roads, noting that by 1925, Eastern Cochinchina boasted 5,840 km of roads linking plantations to export hubs like Saigon. This aligns with Paul Doumer's vision of equipping Indochina with an extensive economic infrastructure (Trần & Đình, 1961). However, the linkage between transportation improvements and plantation productivity remains inadequately quantified in the literature, limiting understanding of its precise contribution.

Theoretical frameworks for analyzing colonial plantation economies often draw on dependency theory and institutional economics. Boucheret (2014) applies a global-regional lens, situating Indochina's rubber industry within worldwide commodity chains and colonial power dynamics. She suggests that local policies were shaped by both metropolitan interests and regional conditions, a view supported by Charles Robequain (2023). Conversely, Trần (2018) employs an institutional approach, arguing that colonial decrees created a "legal corridor" that structured land and labor markets to serve French interests. These frameworks provide a robust basis for this study, though they require adaptation to account for the specificities of Eastern Cochinchina's ecological and social context, as highlighted by Tuyen Nguyen Thi Mong (2019), who

emphasizes the region's strategic role in French rubber exploitation (p. 104).

Despite these contributions, significant research gaps persist. First, while the economic outcomes of rubber plantations are well-documented, the operational mechanisms of colonial policies- such as the interplay between land laws, tax incentives, and infrastructure are not. Second, prior studies rarely compare Eastern Cochinchina's experience with other French colonies or Southeast Asian rubber producers, limiting broader contextual understanding. Third, the social implications, particularly for indigenous populations displaced by land grabs, remain underexplored, as does the role of Vietnamese elites as collaborators in the plantation system (Hồ, 2017). Finally, quantitative analyses of plantation growth often present conflicting data, as seen in discrepancies between Huỳnh (1993) and Chevalier (1921), necessitating critical evaluation.

This study addresses these gaps by systematically analyzing the French colonial measures- land concessions, tax policies, financial support, and transportation infrastructure- using archival data and statistical evidence. It builds on the historical institutional framework of Trần (2018) and the global commodity perspective of Boucheret (2014), aiming to elucidate how these policies not only expanded the rubber industry but also reshaped Eastern Cochinchina's agrarian landscape in the early 20th century.

3. Method

This qualitative study employs a historical design with statistical supplementation. Data were sourced from colonial decrees (e.g., Decree of 18 August 1896), reports (Charles Robequain, 2023), and plantation statistics (Syndicat des Planteurs, 1916-1931). Content analysis identified policy themes, while statistical analysis tracked plantation growth. Reliability was ensured through cross-verification of primary and secondary sources. The ethical considerations involved transparent data use and acknowledgment of historical context.

4. Results

This section presents the findings on the measures implemented by French colonial authorities to promote rubber plantation systems in Eastern Cochinchina from 1900 to 1930. The analysis is structured around three key policy areas- land concessions, tax incentives and financial support, and transportation infrastructure- followed by their combined impact on plantation growth. Data are derived from colonial decrees, statistical records, and historical accounts, analyzed using historical, logical, and quantitative methods.

4.1 Land Concession Policies

French colonial authorities established a robust legal framework to facilitate large-scale land acquisition for rubber plantations. The Decree of 18 August 1896, issued by Governor G. Sandret, abolished the 100-hectare cap on private land ownership in Cochinchina (Trần & Nguyễn, 2022), marking an early shift toward concentrated land holdings. Subsequent decrees, such as the 1 May 1900 regulation denying feudal land rights (Vĩnh Khánh, 2022), enabled the expropriation of

peasant lands, while the 13 April 1909 decree empowered French planters with over 400 hectares to establish autonomous villages (Son Nam, 2005).

The Decree of 27 December 1913, under Governor-General Albert Sarraut, standardized land concessions across Indochina, allowing allocations exceeding 1,000 hectares by the Governor-General and smaller parcels by local officials (Trần, 2018). Payment terms upfront, half in installments- further incentivized French investors (Trần, 2018). Tuyen Nguyen Thi Mong (2019) notes that this legal framework was part of a broader strategy to exploit Vietnam's natural rubber potential, with Eastern Cochinchina's fertile lands systematically concessioned to French capitalists (p. 103). By 1931, approximately 900,000 hectares had been concessioned in southern Vietnam, with Eastern Cochinchina hosting major estates like Société des Caoutchoucs de l'Indochine (10,300 ha) and Société des Plantations d'An-Loc (3,300 ha) (Nguyễn, 2007).

Table 1. Land Concessions for Rubber Plantations in Eastern Cochinchina, 1901–1931

Year	Total Area (ha)	Number of Plantations	Source
1901	18,000	265	Trần (1970)
1911	38,000	Not specified	Trần (1970)
1931	900,000	535 (by 1931)	Trần (1970); Syndicat (1931)

The expansion of rubber plantations in Eastern Cochinchina from 1901 to 1931 reflects the colonial government's land concession policies, which strongly favored French capitalists. As shown in Table 1, concessioned land increased from 18,000 hectares in 1901 to 900,000 hectares in 1931, while the number of plantations grew from 265 to 535. However, despite the apparent expansion, access to land was highly restricted for Vietnamese applicants.

Research indicates that while decrees theoretically allowed broader access, practical barriers such as French-language applications, high costs, and legal restrictions limited Vietnamese ownership to only 50 hectares per applicant, just one-sixth of what French individuals could obtain (Hò, 2017). This legal framework aligned with Charles Robequain's (2023) observation that only French citizens or their protégés could officially hold concessioned land, ensuring that economic benefits remained within the colonial elite.

Although the data effectively illustrates land expansion, it lacks details on ethnic ownership distribution and the socioeconomic impact on local populations. Future research should integrate spatial analysis and Vietnamese resistance strategies to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Nonetheless, this analysis highlights the economic inequalities embedded in

colonial land policies, shaping the long-term development of Vietnam's rubber industry.

4.2 Tax Incentives and Financial Support

Tax policies and financial aid were pivotal in reducing investment risks and sustaining plantation operations. The Decree of 4 June 1897, enacted by Governor-General Paul Doumer, exempted rubber, coffee, and other industrial crops from taxation for six years (Lê, 2016). The 1910 decree extended this exemption, with taxes starting at 6.48 francs/ha in year seven—lower than Malaysia's 7.5 francs/ha initially and 30 francs/ha thereafter (Nguyễn, 2007). Progressive reductions continued through the 1920 decree, with rubber land taxed at 2 piastres/ha (3.04 francs) from year 11 (Tô, 1930).

Financial support intensified during economic downturns. In 1921, following a rubber price drop to 26.5 francs/kg, the colonial government disbursed 1,700,000 piastres in subsidies (Nguyễn Khắc Đạm, 1957). The 1929–1933 global crisis prompted further intervention, with 9,071,507 piastres advanced between 1930 and 1934 secured by plantation mortgages (Charles Robequain, 2023). Table 2 details this aid.

Table 2. Financial Advances to Rubber Planters in Eastern Cochinchina, 1930–1934

Year	Amount (Piastres)	Purpose	Source
1930	1,789,720	Crisis relief	Charles Robequain (2023)
1931	2,487,077	Support for young plantations	Charles Robequain (2023)
1932	3,040,430	Peak crisis aid	Charles Robequain (2023)
1933	1,392,800	Stabilization efforts	Charles Robequain (2023)
1934	364,480	Final recovery support	Charles Robequain (2023)
Total	9,071,507		

The data presented in Table 2 provides a detailed overview of financial advances granted to rubber planters in Eastern Cochinchina during the economic crisis of 1930–1934. The figures highlight the French colonial administration's efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of the global economic downturn on the region's plantation economy. The funding peaked in 1932 at 3,040,430 piastres, reflecting the severity of the crisis and the necessity for extensive financial intervention.

The purpose of these funds evolved. Initial allocations in 1930 and 1931 primarily addressed crisis relief and support for young plantations, ensuring continuity in rubber production despite financial constraints. By 1933, as the crisis abated, funds were redirected toward stabilization efforts, with a significant reduction in 1934, indicating a transition toward economic recovery.

The table also underscores the role of the Banque de l'Indochine, which provided additional financial assistance totaling 100,000,000 francs at preferential interest rates. This financial support played a critical role in sustaining rubber plantations; however, historical accounts suggest that access to these funds was uneven. French plantation owners benefited disproportionately, while Vietnamese planters encountered barriers to credit access, exacerbating economic disparities (Nguyễn, 2007). This financial asymmetry underscores the colonial economic policies that favored French interests over indigenous participation in the rubber industry.

4.3 Transportation Infrastructure

Infrastructure investments were critical to linking plantations to global markets. By 1925, 5,840 km of roads had been constructed in Cochinchina, supported by 462.2 million francs, including 420 million for railways (Hoàng, 2011). Early developments included seven national highways by 1895 (Table 3), expanded by 1919 with routes like Road 13 (248 km) and Road 15 (132 km) (Bành, 2021).

Table 3. National Highways in Cochinchina, 1895

Route	Length (km)	Connection	Source
Saigon–Tay Ninh	99	Plantation access	Bành (2021)
Saigon–Ba Ria	92	Coastal trade	Bành (2021)
Saigon–Soc Trang	210	Delta linkage	Bành (2021)
Saigon–Ha Tien	338	Western expansion	Bành (2021)
Thu Duc–Thu Dau Mot	21	Rubber hub	Bành (2021)
Thu Dau Mot–Cambodia	129	Border trade	Bành (2021)
Vinh Long–Tra Vinh	57	Local connectivity	Bành (2021)

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the national highways in Cochinchina in 1895, highlighting their strategic importance in linking various regions for trade and economic development. The routes are characterized by their specific connections, such as facilitating access to plantations, enhancing coastal trade, or supporting border trade with Cambodia. For instance, the Saigon-Tay Ninh route (99 km) is crucial for plantation access, while the Saigon-Ha Tien (338 km) route underscores the region's western expansion. This geographical connectivity likely contributed to the development of economic hubs in specific areas, such as the rubber industry around Thu Dau Mot.

The inclusion of railways, such as the Saigon-My Tho line, and the modernization of Saigon Port, as noted by Lê Huỳnh Hoa (2002), further underscore the transportation network's role in facilitating export efficiency. Logical analysis indicates that this network likely reduced transportation costs, significantly boosting plantation profitability, especially in regions abundant in rubber, like Biên Hòa and Thủ Dầu Một. By connecting key economic zones, these infrastructure developments not only enhanced trade but also played a vital role in the colonial economic strategy, aligning local policies with broader imperial goals. Overall, Table 3 reflects the integral role of transportation in shaping Cochinchina's economic landscape.

4.4 Impact on Plantation Growth

The combined effect of these policies is evident in plantation expansion. By 1911, 51 plantations spanned 61,268 hectares (Nguyễn, 2007); by 1937, Eastern Cochinchina hosted 891 of Indochina's 1,028 plantations (86.67%), with a 1931 area of 193,630 hectares (Syndicat, 1931). Compared to Cambodia — another French colony — Eastern Cochinchina possessed a significantly larger number of rubber plantations, surpassing Cambodia by 35.6 times with 335 plantations compared to only 15. The total rubber plantation area of Eastern Cochinchina was also 8.2 times larger, reaching 193,630 hectares, compared to 23,415 hectares of Cambodia (Syndicat, 1931). Within Asia, Cochinchina ranked fourth in both rubber plantation area and production, after Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka (Tran, 2018). Table 4 tracks this growth.

Table 4. Rubber Plantation Growth in Eastern Cochinchina, 1916-1937

Province	1916 (No./ha)	1926 (No./ha)	1931 (No./ha)	1937 (No.)
Bà Rịa	12 / 10,189	17 / 7,119	57 / 22,792	37
Biên Hòa	23 / 29,294	54 / 44,895	115 / 77,627	150
Gia Định	42 / 5,967	122 / 10,849	67 / 9,626	309
Tây Ninh	4 / 3,744	21 / 8,170	146 / 26,302	104
Thủ Dầu Một	9 / 17,900	137 / 59,237	148 / 57,208	284
Total	90 / 67,094	354 / 124,104	535 / 193,630	891
Province	1916 (No./ha)	1926 (No./ha)	1931 (No./ha)	1937 (No.)

The rubber industry in Eastern Cochinchina experienced significant expansion between 1916 and 1937, as shown in Table 4. The number of plantations grew from 90 to 891, marking a 990% increase, while plantation area saw a 288.7% rise by 1931. This rapid growth reflected the increasing colonial investment in rubber, driven by global demand and favorable policies for French enterprises.

The data reveals regional variations in expansion. Provinces like Biên Hòa and Thủ Dầu Một witnessed substantial growth, whereas Bà Rịa showed a decline in plantation area between 1916 and 1926. Discrepancies in early data, such as Huỳnh's (1993) estimate of 184,700 ha versus Chevalier's (1921) 21,322 ha, highlight differences between concessioned and cultivated land, with the latter being more reliable.

Despite its historical significance, the data has limitations. The 1937 dataset lacks plantation area, making it difficult to assess long-term trends. Additionally, the study would benefit from statistical modeling and a broader range of sources beyond French records.

Overall, the rapid expansion of rubber plantations underscores the economic transformation of Cochinchina under colonial rule. A more detailed analysis could provide deeper insights into the socioeconomic and political factors shaping this growth.

4.5 Evaluation

The results confirm the efficacy of French policies in scaling rubber production, aligning with

the historical method's focus on causation. Land concessions concentrated ownership, tax and financial support mitigated risks, and infrastructure enhanced market access, collectively driving Eastern Cochinchina's dominance. Quantitative trends validate the logical inference that these measures were interdependent, creating a self-reinforcing system. However, their bias toward French interests highlights an exploitative intent, consistent with colonial economic priorities.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the pivotal role of French colonial policies in fostering the rapid expansion of rubber plantation systems in Eastern Cochinchina between 1900 and 1930. These results not only corroborate existing scholarship on the economic centrality of rubber in colonial Indochina but also extend the discourse by dissecting the specific mechanisms- land concessions, tax incentives, financial subsidies, and transportation infrastructure-that- that underpinned this growth. This section situates the findings within broader historical and comparative contexts, evaluates their implications, and addresses limitations while charting avenues for future inquiry.

5.1 Alignment with Existing Scholarship and Policy Mechanisms

The prominence of rubber plantations as a driver of colonial economic development aligns closely with Hoàng's (2011) assertion that rubber symbolized a "modern agricultural economy" in Cochinchina (p. 70). Her work highlights the profit-driven influx of French capital, yet it stops short of detailing the operational policies that facilitated this transformation. This study bridges that gap by delineating how decrees such as those of 1896 and 1913 created a "legal corridor" (Trần, 2018, p. 55) for land concentration, while tax exemptions and financial aid sustained plantation viability during economic volatility. For instance, the allocation of 900,000 hectares by 1931 (Trần, 1970) and subsidies peaking at 3,040,430 piastres in 1932 (Charles Robequain, 2023) underscore a systematic colonial effort beyond mere market dynamics.

This policy-driven approach mirrors broader colonial strategies, as noted by Boucheret (2008), who documents similar land expropriation frameworks in French West Africa and Southeast Asia. However, the scale and intensity of implementation in Eastern Cochinchina appear distinctive, reflecting regional advantages such as fertile basaltic soils and proximity to Saigon, a key export hub (Hoàng, 2011). The 5,840 km of roads constructed by 1925 (Bành, 2021) further amplified this advantage, reducing transportation costs and enhancing market access compared to more remote colonies. This synergy of ecological and infrastructural factors, underpinned by targeted legislation, positioned Eastern Cochinchina as Indochina's rubber epicenter, hosting 86.67% of its plantations by 1937 (Syndicat, 1937).

5.2 Comparative Economic Resilience

The tax and financial policies implemented by the French administration provided a competitive edge over other rubber-producing regions, notably British Malaya. Nguyễn (2007) highlights that while Malayan planters faced initial taxes of 7.5 francs/ha and 30 francs/ha from year seven,

Eastern Cochinchina's rubber estates enjoyed a six-year tax holiday, followed by a modest 6.48 francs/ha (Lê, 2016). During the 1929–1933 global economic crisis, French subsidies totaling 9,071,507 piastres (Charles Robequain, 2023) and low-interest loans from the Banque de l'Indochine (6-7% annually; Marc Meuleau, 1990) mitigated price collapses that devastated Malayan counterparts (Nguyễn, 2007). This resilience is evident in the sustained growth of plantation numbers from 90 in 1916 to 891 by 1937, a 990% increase (Syndicat, 1916-1937).

Such measures reflect a deliberate colonial strategy to buffer French economic interests against global shocks, contrasting with the more market-dependent British approach in Malaya. The establishment of the Sở Cho Vay Điền Địa in 1932 (Charles Robequain, 2023) exemplifies this interventionism, facilitating debt restructuring and ensuring plantation survival. This comparative advantage underscores the hypothesis that French policies were not merely reactive but proactively engineered to maximize profitability and colonial control.

5.3 Socioeconomic Implications and Policy Bias

The results robustly support the hypothesis that these measures disproportionately favored French capitalists and local elites, reinforcing colonial hierarchies. Land concession policies, while ostensibly inclusive after 1913, imposed stringent barriers- French-language applications, high initial costs, and preferential treatment for collaborators - that restricted Vietnamese access to a maximum of 50 hectares, compared to thousands for French planters (Hò, 2017). Charles Robequain (2023) explicitly notes that only French citizens or their protégés could own concessioned land, excluding foreign whites and Chinese merchants (p. 249). This legal exclusivity, coupled with financial aid skewed toward French-owned estates (Nguyễn, 2007), entrenched a dual agrarian structure: vast French plantations versus fragmented Vietnamese holdings.

The socioeconomic ramifications extend beyond land ownership. The concentration of 193,630 hectares by 1931 (Syndicat, 1931) displaced indigenous farmers, aligning with Trần's (1970) critique of colonial land grabs as tools of dispossession. Meanwhile, infrastructure investments, while economically transformative, primarily served plantation zones like Biên Hòa and Thủ Dầu Một, neglecting rural Vietnamese communities (Hoàng, 2013). This selective development exacerbated inequalities, a pattern consistent with the dependency theory, which posits colonial economies as extractive systems benefiting metropolitan powers (Boucheret, 2014). The dominance of French estates like Société des Caoutchoucs de l'Indochine (10,300 ha) over smallholder efforts further illustrates this imbalance. In addition, the development of rubber cultivation has led to significant changes in the crop structure. This transformation has also brought about changes in population distribution, social habits and production practices. At the same time, these transformations have increased ethnic and social stratification within indigenous communities.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study faces limitations inherent to historical research. Data on smallholder plantations remain incomplete, as colonial records prioritized large French estates (Nguyễn, 2007). Discrepancies in early statistics-e.g., Huỳnh's (1993) 184,700 ha versus Chevalier's (1921) 21,322 ha for 1918- suggest potential bias toward officially planted areas over total concessions, necessitating cautious interpretation. Moreover, the reliance on French archival sources may underrepresent Vietnamese perspectives, a methodological challenge noted by Hồ (2017).

These gaps highlight avenues for future research. A deeper exploration of social impacts- such as labor conditions, forced migration, or resistance among indigenous communities- could enrich the understanding of plantation expansion's human cost, building on preliminary insights from Trần Văn Giàu (1961). Comparative studies with other rubber-producing colonies, such as Dutch Indonesia or British Ceylon, could further contextualize Eastern Cochinchina's experience, testing whether its policy framework was uniquely effective or replicable. Quantitative analyses of plantation profitability, integrating yield data with policy inputs, might also clarify economic returns, addressing a lacuna in current scholarship (Nguyễn, 2007).

5.5 Theoretical and Practical Significance

Theoretically, this study advances colonial economic historiography by integrating institutional analysis (Trần, 2018) with global commodity perspectives (Boucheret, 2014). It demonstrates how localized policies interacted with international markets to shape agrarian landscapes, offering a model for examining plantation economies elsewhere. Practically, the findings illuminate the enduring legacy of colonial land concentration in modern Vietnam, informing contemporary debates on land reform and agricultural development.

In summary, the French colonial measures in Eastern Cochinchina exemplify a coordinated strategy that leveraged legal, fiscal, and infrastructural tools to dominate rubber production. While aligning with broader colonial patterns, their execution reflects regional specificity and economic pragmatism, cementing French hegemony at the expense of indigenous equity. These insights underscore the need for continued scrutiny of colonial legacies in postcolonial contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study employed historical, logical, and statistical methods to examine the French colonial measures that catalyzed the development of rubber plantation systems in Eastern Cochinchina from 1900 to 1930. The findings reveal that a triad of policies- land concessions, tax incentives coupled with financial subsidies, and transportation infrastructure investments- drove an unprecedented expansion, evidenced by the increase from 90 plantations in 1916 to 891 by 1937, spanning 193,630 hectares by 1931 (Syndicat, 1931-1937). Historical analysis of decrees, such as those of 1896 and 1913, demonstrates a deliberate legal framework that concentrated land ownership, while statistical data on subsidies (e.g., 9,071,507 piastres from 1930–1934) and road

networks (5,840 km by 1925) underscore economic and logistical support (Charles Robequain, 2023; Bành, 2021). Logically, these interdependent measures created a self-reinforcing system that positioned Eastern Cochinchina as Indochina's rubber hub, accounting for 86.67% of its plantations by 1937.

These policies, however, entrenched French dominance, marginalizing indigenous farmers through restrictive land access and favoring French capitalists, as reflected in the disparity between Vietnamese (50 ha) and French allotments (thousands of hectares) (Hò, 2017). The agrarian landscape was thus reshaped, with lasting socioeconomic implications. Notably, Tuyen Nguyen Thi Mong (2019) enriches this narrative by framing these measures as part of a broader exploitative strategy targeting Vietnam's natural rubber resources, emphasizing Eastern Cochinchina's strategic role (p. 103-104). Her work enhances the study's contextual depth, linking local policies to global colonial ambitions.

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