

**THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY  
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**COLONIAL ROUTE SYSTEM  
IN NORTHEAST VIETNAM  
FROM 1897 TO 1945**

**Speciality: Vietnamese History  
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## **PREFACE**

### **1. Reason for choosing the topic**

Transport is an important element of infrastructure, including both production infrastructure and social infrastructure. Roads are likened to the lifeblood of the country's economic organization. Transport is not only important for the development of economic sectors such as industry, agriculture, commerce but also plays a great role in politics, culture, society and national defense.

The history of Vietnam underwent many times of invasions by foreign invaders. In order to serve the purpose of exploitation, traffic works were surveyed, designed and built, especially the road system during the French invasion and exploitation of Vietnam. In this route system, the national highways in the colonies are of equal importance to the national roads of France, representing the common interest of the whole Federation either due to economic needs or political needs. However, the research on this topic has been an open "gap" so far. Therefore, we choose this topic based on scientific and practical significance.

Regarding science aspect, in the process of study, we see more clearly the nature, plots and tricks of the French colonial empire in the process of invading, ruling and exploiting Vietnam; systematically explain the policy, process of building and exploiting the colonial road traffic system in the northern upland provinces of Tonkin; at the same time, it also contributes as a source of data about the history of traffic, Vietnam's economy in general and the history of traffic and economy of the upland provinces of Tonkin in particular.

In practical terms, the thesis is a reference for students of the Faculty of History, social science research at colleges, universities and history teachers in the provinces of Cao Bang, Bac Kan, and Lang. Son, Thai Nguyen, Tuyen Quang, Ha Giang. In addition to that meaning, the study of this issue also allows us to draw some lessons about the construction, development, management and exploitation of the road transport system in the region in this period. As transportation is a special material production industry, the industry's

product is the transport of goods and passengers. It has an important position and has a great impact on socio-economic development. It is also an important criterion for assessing the level of socio-economic development of a country. Through the study of the topic, we can also see the labor contributions of the Tonkin people to the construction of these works.

Due to the awareness of scientific and practical significance as above, I decided to choose the topic "*Colonial route system in Northeast Vietnam from 1897 to 1945*" as my doctoral thesis.

## **2. Research purposes and research tasks**

### ***Research purposes:***

To reproduce in a comprehensive, objective and scientific way the policy, progress of building and exploiting the colonial route system in the Northeast Vietnam from 1897 to 1945 in order to contribute to the correct recognition of the historical heritage of the colonial period; better understand our socio-economic starting point over 100 years; at the same time, supplement important sources of documents to better understand the nature, identify tricks, explain the role, assess the dual impact of the colonial policies of invasion, exploitation and exploitation. France vs Vietnam. Therefore, the thesis contributes to help policy makers have a reasonable way to continue to improve and develop this road system.

### ***Research tasks:***

- Clarify the colonial exploitation policy in general and specific policies associated with the development of the colonial road system of the French colonialists in the Northeastern region of Vietnam (1897-1945).

- Reflect the process of formation and development of the colonial route system in Northeast Vietnam through state management, construction investment and exploitation activities.

- Objectively identify and evaluate the role and impact of the colonial route system in the northern upstream provinces of Tonkin.

- Draw lessons for the development of route system today.

### 3. Object and scope of research

- **Research object:** The formation and operation of national road transport system in the northeastern provinces of Vietnam from 1897 to 1945.

- **Research scope:**

*In terms of space:* In a limited time and capacity, we chose to study the colonial routes (national highways) in the Northeastern region of Vietnam as the research area. The Northeast is understood in many different ways, which can be cultural - historical, geographical - historical, ethnic and institutional areas. Therefore, the concept of the Northeast region here must be an open concept, not necessarily the concept of the Northeastern region framed in some localities of the present. Within the scope of this thesis, the Northeast region is defined as geo-historical space, taking Hanoi capital as a point of view to determine the coordinates for the "northeast" azimuth as well as the starting point of the colonial roads, taking the range of provinces with national highways 1, 2, 3, 4 passing through as a common space for research. The scope of the provinces during the French colonial period: Bac Giang, Lang Son, Bac Kan, Cao Bang, Thai Nguyen, Ha Giang, Quang Yen, Hai Ninh, Son Tay, Phu Tho, Tuyen Quang. The exploitation and use of data by the provinces is due to the approach and nature and objectives of the research and use.

*In terms of time:* The main research time scope of the thesis is from 1897 to 1945. In 1897, the French colonialist period, after pacifying the uprising movements of our people, started the colonial exploitation in Indochina in general and in Vietnam in particular on a large scale, both in terms of capital as well as investment in the Indochinese economy, especially in the road transport system. In the above context, through historical periods, road traffic in Indochina in general and the Northeast in particular had "prosperous" changes. The year 1945 was a successful event of the August Revolution in Vietnam - opening a major turning point in the nation's history: The working people took power and owned the country. However, in

order to ensure the historical and logical nature of the research problem, to the extent that the thesis has extended the time before 1897 for comparison.

In the thesis, we divided into two periods:

Period of 1897 - 1918: This is the period after the process of pacifying the uprisings of our people, the French colonialists implemented the first colonial exploitation program. On that basis, the traffic in general and the road system in particular were formed and developed to serve mainly for military requirements, exploitation of resources and transportation of goods to the country.

Period of 1919 - 1945: After the end of World War I, the French colonialists conducted the Second Colonial Exploitation Program (1919 - 1929) until the August Revolution in 1945 became a success to abolish the French colonial rulings over 80 years in Vietnam.

In terms of the content: Research on the road transport system has a very broad content. Therefore, in the limited time and capacity, we only limit the research content of the topic, which is mainly related to the colonial road system in the Northeast area. As for the inter-provincial roads, we only mentioned them in the research.

#### **4. Methodology of dissertation**

The thesis is carried out on the basis of the dialectical and historical materialism methodology of Marxism - Leninism, as the basis of the methodology for studying the colonial road traffic system in Tonkin from 1897 to 1945. Accordingly, the thesis adheres to dialectical, objective, comprehensive, historical - specific perspectives to deploy research ideas. The issue of *"The colonial road system in the Northeast of Vietnam from 1897 to 1945"* is studied in the specific historical context of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author of the thesis places the research object in the movement of Tonkin history and society at the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore, when researching, there should be a relationship between the historical and social context with the introduction of new

traffic factors, the formation and development of modern transport in Tonkin. We also put the formation and development of the transport system in the Northeast in our approach to the relationship between colonialism and colonial people, specifically here in Vietnam. From there, we could see and evaluate what this transport system has brought to the people of Vietnam or rather, what Vietnamese people have benefited from the transport system.

The thesis mainly uses the historical method and the logical method. We use historical methods to analyze and reconstruct the construction and operation of the colonial road traffic system in the northeastern provinces of Vietnam by the French colonialists in a comprehensive and specific way according to the development process of the event, the starting point, the ending milestone, the evolution of this process. On the basis of the obtained research results, it will contribute to restoring a part of the history of Tonkin in the period of 1897 - 1945.

Logical methods are used to find out the relationship between the actual dynamics of the road transport system and related issues such as the context, the colonial policies of the French colonial government, the policies in the field of traffic as well as clarifying the nature and conspiracy of the French colonialists in the development of the transport system in general and the colonial road traffic in particular in the study area; the role and impact of that transport system with France and Vietnam.

## **5. Source of material**

- *Archives*: These are the original files of the Governor General of Tonkin, the Governor General of Indochina, the Tonkin Public Works Department, the Indochina Public Works Inspectorate, the Indochina Finance Department, and the Eastern Geography Department. Positive; Articles in the Indochina Gazette, the Indochina Yearbook, the Tonkin Administrative Gazette (These documents are written in French and are currently archived at the National Archives Center I).

- *Monographs*: This is a rich source of material in both Vietnamese and French, presented in various forms such as books, research papers, articles, memoirs, photo books, and movies.

- *Field documents*: Surveying on former national highways, collecting information through eyewitness accounts of road workers, relatives of road workers and local leaders.

## **6. Contribution of the dissertation**

- *In terms of perception*: The thesis shapes a new research direction on the history of road traffic in the Northeastern region of Vietnam in the modern period, initially scientifically analyzing the construction investment policy, clarifying the administrative and financial management measures of the colonial government over road traffic problems, the construction and operation of roads in the colonial road traffic system in the northeastern provinces in Vietnam in the period of 1897 – 1945.

Through the research, the author draws some comments on the characteristics, scientific interpretation, double-sided impact assessment, the role and position of the colonial road traffic system in the northeastern provinces of Vietnam for both France and Vietnam; thereby contributing to the study of the socio-economic form of Vietnam in the modern period.

- *In terms of practice*:

The study of the topic allows us to draw some lessons from experience, which are meaningful for reference in providing more scientific arguments and suggesting some thoughts that can be applied to the practice of traffic policy making such as investing, building, managing and exploiting the road transport system in the current socio-economic renovation in Vietnam. The research results of the thesis reflect a dialectical view, laying the basis for the study of Vietnam's traffic history during the French colonial period, which is the key to explaining a number of economic, social - security and culture in the Northeast at that time. This is really a reference for



students, teachers, and lecturers who teach research on local history and modern Vietnamese history.

- *In terms of documents:* The thesis contributes to systematizing and providing new sources of documents in French and Vietnamese related to the colonial route system in the Northeastern provinces of Vietnam in particular and the Vietnamese route system in general during the colonial period.

## **7. Dissertation layout**

In addition to the introduction, conclusion, list of references and appendixes, the thesis is structured including:

Chapter 1: Overview of the research works related to the thesis.

Chapter 2: Formation and development of the colonial route system in Northeast Vietnam in the period of 1897 - 1918.

Chapter 3: Colonial route system in Northeast Vietnam in the period of 1919 - 1945.

Chapter 4: Characteristics and impacts of the colonial route system in Northeast Vietnam in the period of 1897 - 1945.

## Chapter 1

### OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH WORKS RELATED TO THE THESIS

#### 1.1. Research works related to the thesis

##### 1.1.1. Group of research works on French policy in Indochina

**Research works by foreign authors:** Typically, there are works “A travers l’Indochine (Through Indochina) (1900); Memoirs *"L'Indo Chine française (souvenirs)"* (1905) by Governor-General Paul Doumer. Author Henri Brenier with the work *Essai d'atlas statistique de l'Indochine française* (Preliminary statistical map of French Indochina) (1914); Ch.Robequain with the work *L'évolution économique de l'Indochine française* (Economic progress of French Indochina). Author J. Chesneaux with the work *Contribution à l'histoire de la nation Vietnamienne* (contribution to the history of the Vietnamese nation) (1953). The doctoral thesis *“La présence financière et économique française en Indochine (1859-1939)”* by Jean-Pierre Aumiphin (1981) ...Research works on French policy in Indochina with many angles. This is the foundation that helps us get an overview of Indochina in general and the Northeastern region of Tonkin in particular during the French colonial period.

**Research works by domestic authors:** Nguyen Khac Dam with the book *"The exploitative tricks of French capital in Vietnam"* (1958); *“French imperialism and industrial situation in Vietnam under French rule”* (1959) by Pham Dinh Tan; *“Vietnam under French domination”* (1972) by Nguyen The Anh; Duong Kinh Quoc with the work of the administrative apparatus of the colonial government in Vietnam before the August Revolution, 1945 (1991); The economic history of Vietnam (2002) by Dang Phong... has generalized the effects of French colonial rule on Vietnam during this period.

##### 1.1.2. Group of research works on Tonkin

**Research works by foreign authors:** Henri Cucherousset's book *"L'Indochine d'hier et d'aujourd'hui"* (1924) briefly presented the situation in Tonkin at the beginning of the twentieth century. The work *"Une histoire économique du Viet Nam"*, 1850-2007 La

palanche et le camion" by P. Brocheux helps the thesis to have an overview of the traffic situation in the socio-economic picture of Tonkin.

**Research works by domestic authors:** Book of Hoang Viet "*Unification of Chi geographical location*" (1806), Thesis "*The internal trade of Tonkin period 1919 - 1939*"; "*The book Tax regime of the French colonialists in Tonkin from 1897 to 1945*" (2004), author Ho Tuan Dung... In general, the research works on Tonkin by authors during the French colonial period provided a full information about the geography, soil, population and social life of the new land. Information from these studies has historical value to help understand the natural conditions of the region that the French colonialists took advantage of establishing the route system in Northeast Vietnam.

### ***1.1.3. Group of research works on road traffic in Tonkin during the French colonial period***

**Studies by foreign authors:** In 1926, the Inspector General of Public Justice in Indochina AA. Pouyanne published the work "*General situation of Indochina - Public transport works in Indochina*" (Inventaire général de). l'Indochine - Les travaux publics de l'Indochine). In 1949, Julien Gauthier - chief engineer in charge of public transport works in Indochina published the book "*Works in Indochina during the French peace period*" (L'Indochine au travail dans la paix française). Ryan S. Mayfield's work "*The Road Less Traveled Automobiles in French Colonial Indochina*" (2003). Although the works only refer to road traffic in Indochina in general and Vietnam in particular from a general perspective, they have presented the characteristics, development situation, influencing factors and changes Road traffic through the ages.

**Research works by domestic authors:** The article "*Traffic and transport problems*", author Vu Dinh Hoe commented on the current situation of Vietnam's traffic in the years of World War II. Author Nguyen Thieu Lau with the article "*Traffic problems in our country*" has presented an overview of our country's transportation system in the modern era, including roads, roads, waterways and sea routes. The book "*Transportation in Vietnam 1858 - 1957*" by Phan Van

Lien outlined the changes in traffic in Vietnam during the French colonial period. The book "History of Vietnam's transportation" presents the formation and development of Vietnam's traffic from the primitive days to the year 2000 including road, river, sea and air. The work *"Vietnam's transportation history from the 10th century to 1884"* (2020), edited by author Nguyen Duc Nhue, has an overview of Vietnam's transportation through historical periods: Before the World 10<sup>th</sup> century, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1884). Author Nguyen Van Nhat, editor of the book *"The history of Vietnam's transportation from 1954 to 1975"*, presented the development process of Vietnam's transport in both the South and the North under two main regimes with different values and economies. In the above works, the process of forming the transport system in the Northeastern region of Vietnam in modern times is sparsely recorded in the form of chronological order, interwoven with other historical events.

### **1.2. Evaluations on the research situation and raised issues**

These works are mainly individual studies on each locality, each issue, each road... However, from the research perspective of the topic, the aforementioned studies are the source of important references, inherited by us when conducting our research.

The thesis identifies the goals and tasks of continuing to research the following issues: Analyzing the historical context, clarifying the policies and administrative and financial measures of the colonial government on transportation development, specifically for French roads in the Northeastern region of Vietnam about the purpose and agency/individual in charge of implementation, how to do it. From there, the nature, plots and tricks of the French colonialists towards Vietnam were analyzed. The thesis needs to comprehensively study the process of forming a colonial road traffic system in the Northeastern region of Vietnam: Investment capital (capital sources, specific data through periods); labor (method of recruitment, working mode of workers, struggle of the labor force); plans, projects, designs of routes; statistics of road construction activities according to work items and time progress; condition of roads.

## **Chapter 2**

### **FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE COLONIAL ROUTE SYSTEM IN NORTHEAST VIETNAM IN THE PERIOD OF 1897 - 1918**

#### **2.1. Historical context and factors affecting the process of building the colonial route system in Northeast Vietnam**

##### ***2.1.1. International and regional context***

*International context:* The nineteenth century was the century of capitalism developing at a rapid pace. In the pivotal years of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, capitalist countries all wanted to expand their influence in Southeast Asia, so conflicts between empires became acute.

*Regional context:* The nineteenth-century was a conservative and stagnant feudal East. The Eastern economy is still basically a natural, self-sufficient economy built on the foundation of smallholder farming closely combined with family handicrafts. Therefore, it soon became the object of invasion of imperialist countries.

##### ***2.1.2. France's situation***

At the end of the nineteenth century, France turned to imperialism. The scale of French capitalist economy required seeking to expand markets and colonies. Therefore, the French empire also enthusiastically raced to invade the colony in Indochina. At the outbreak of the World War I, France was drawn into the war as an Allied country. In Indochina, the French mobilized all their human and material strength to serve the country in the war.

##### ***2.1.3. Characteristics of the Northeastern region in Vietnam at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century***

###### ***Geographical and natural conditions:***

During the colonial period, the Northeast belonged to Tonkin. The Northeast region not only has a strategic military position, but also an economic "golden forest, silver sea", favorable natural conditions and abundant resources. Therefore, the Western invaders all harbored the ambition to invade. Tonkin in general and the Northeast in particular

became the target of French colonialism's invasion, focusing on investment and construction.

***Demographic - social characteristics and economic status***

Excluding a few localities in the lowland and midland areas with a large population, the remaining mountainous areas have a sparse population, less than 10 people/km<sup>2</sup>. Low population density causes difficulties in human resources for traffic and road construction in particular. The inhabitants lived mainly by agricultural production, which is close to the land.

***Political situation and policies of French colonial rule:***

After the period of war of aggression and pacification (1858 - 1896), the French colonialists embarked on establishing the ruling apparatus and implementing the exploitation policies belonging to the French colonialists.

**2.2. The process of formation and development of the colonial road transport system in the Northeast region of Vietnam**

***2.2.1. Policy and purpose of construction***

After the conquest, the French considered exploiting the colony. To exploit effectively, it is necessary to modernize Indochina. Therefore, in order to prepare for the policy of colonial exploitation, the colonial government decided to implement important policies as soon as possible, including key activities of forming and building a new traffic system in Tonkin.

***2.2.2. Financial and administrative measures***

During this period, the amount of investment in the mining and transportation sectors accounted for more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  (77%), in which investment capital for transport accounted for more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  (26%) of the total capital. From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, with the policy of considering traffic as one of the areas connecting with indigenous people, serving the first colonial exploitation, the French colonial government in turn proposed administrative measures to organize road construction and management.

***2.2.3. Construction technique***

The road construction in Tonkin focuses on the following works: Road improvement (widening and paving stones); Build bridges over rivers and streams.

#### **2.2.4. Construction workers**

The road construction workforce consisted of prisoners, coolies and commoners. The construction of the road through the delta is going smoothly, so there is no need to gather a large number of employees and workers at the same time. However, in mountainous areas, recruiting workers is very difficult.

#### **2.2.5. The process of construction and maintenance**

Construction of Colonial Road No.1

Construction of Colonial Road No.2

Construction of Colonial Road No.3

Construction of Colonial Road No.4

### **2.3. Operation and use of roads**

Along with the railway, waterway and road systems, the road system helps to go deep into the planned exploitation areas and at the same time transport the manufactured products to the ports for export. Each completed road section in the territory of Tonkin was immediately transferred to the company for management and exploitation. However, in the initial stage, when the route is not smooth, all activities are sporadic and mainly serve to build the rest of the road. Management and exploitation only had great improvements in 1910.

### **Sub-conclusion of chapter 2**

In 1897, after basically pacifying Vietnam, the French colonialists embarked on the first colonial exploitation. The construction of the colonial road system in the Northeast of Vietnam is mainly to serve the policy of ruling and exploiting them in the most beneficial and effective way. In the period of 1897 - 1918, in the road transport system, the colonial road was the largest and longest road and the main transport route connecting the provinces and countries. The formation of the colonial road traffic system in the Northeast went through many stages. Before 1912, the road system was not appreciated because the government focused more on railways. The

development of this road was promoted under Governor General Albert Saraut. After affirming their role as the most important road system, colonial roads were continuously renovated and upgraded. As a result, the colonial road system of Vietnam during the French colonial period was completely built in the early years after the First World War.

In an objective view, along with the railway and waterway system, the newly built roads have initially become a tool to speed up the transportation of goods and meet the travel needs of the people. On the other hand, they also play the role in linking regions together, creating conditions for all the localities they pass through to join in the general movement of the Tonkin economic system. The economy of Tonkin has changed from a feudal production to a semi-feudal colonial economy with the initial appearance of a commodity economy.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **COLONIAL ROUTE SYSTEM IN NORTHEAST VIETNAM IN THE PERIOD OF 1919 – 1945**

##### **3.1. Historical context and factors affecting the colonial route system in the Northeast Vietnam (1919 - 1945)**

###### ***3.1.1. International and regional context***

***International situation:*** Over the period of more than ten years after World War I, in the world and in East Asia and Southeast Asia, many complex historical events and processes took place, which directly or indirectly affected the historical process of Vietnam. In the entire development history of capitalism until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world economic crisis from 1929 to 1933 left severe consequences. Then, during World War II (1939 - 1945), capitalist countries mobilized and plundered a large amount of human and material resources in the colonies to serve the war.

***Regional situation:*** After World War I, under the influence of the October Revolution in East Asia, the nationalist movement was increasingly inclined to enter the orbit of the proletarian revolution. When the Great World Economic Crisis broke out in North America



and Western Europe from the end of October 1929, but until the end of 1930, its impact and influence on the economy of the Southeast Asian colony had not yet occurred. However, another danger appeared, as early as 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria and gradually penetrated into Indochina. This brutal exploitation by the French and Japanese militarists was one of the main reasons for the halt in infrastructure construction during this period, including transportation construction.

### ***3.1.2. France's situation***

France came out of the First World War (1914 - 1918) as the winner of the battle but suffered heavy losses. After the First World War, the French colonists began the second colonial exploitation in Indochina.

### ***3.1.3. Vietnam's situation***

From 1919, the French colonialists carried out the second colonization in Vietnam in order to quickly restore the national economy. In the period of 1929 - 1933, Vietnam was affected by the economic crisis, followed by the consequences of the Second World War. Politically, during the 1920s, the French colonialists carried out a number of reforms to cope with the ongoing upheavals in Vietnamese society. A remarkable point in the political situation in Vietnam is that after the war, the national liberation movement had new changes, especially the proletarian revolutionary movement.

## **3.2. The development step of the colonial road system in the Northeast of Vietnam (1919 - 1945)**

### ***3.2.1. The policy and purpose of traffic development of the French colonialists***

To compensate for the damage caused by participating in the First World War, the French therefore advocated the development of public works, created infrastructure for the activities of other economic sectors, and focused on exploiting the colonial products needed for the country. During this period, the French colonialists had a policy of building a road network in Tonkin connecting with Indochina. The newly built and upgraded road system will connect with river ports, seaports and railways, connecting localities with the

center of Hanoi in order to stimulate the exploitation of minerals and rice on a large scale.

### ***3.2.2. Management agency and investment capital***

The Inspector General of Public Works manages the staff of the sector, inspects public parks, approves quarterly plans and inspects the management of budget expenditures for public works, supervises capital implementation projects within budget. There is one chief engineer and one chief architect assisting the Inspector General of Public Works. The Indochinese public sector was organized into local public parks and special public zones, including the Tonkin public sector.

In terms of capital, in this second colonial exploitation, investment in transportation is at the lowest level. However, that capital was unevenly distributed among the countries of the Federation.

### ***3.2.3. Construction techniques and construction workers***

From 1920 onwards, road paving was still carried out. Due to the increasing number of cars, the road surface was seriously damaged. Stone laying work must be done regularly. People began to apply asphalt on the road surface.

Regarding construction workers, in addition to supervisory and managerial levels, construction workers mainly include the following two types: permanent workers and temporary workers. But after 1918, despite the large population in Tonkin, recruiting workers for road construction continued to face many difficulties.

### ***3.2.4. Situation of construction and maintenance of the colonial road traffic system***

Construction of Colonial Road No.1

Construction of Colonial Road No.2

Construction of Colonial Road No.3

Construction of Colonial Road No.4

## **3.4. Operation and use of routes**

Traditional means of transport: This type of vehicle only uses traction and human-powered transport such as hand-drawn carts (pousse), bicycles, cyclos, and horse-drawn rickshaws to transport

guests, carts of buffaloes and oxen to transport goods. One of the most obvious forms in the development of road transport in Tonkin during this period was the appearance of the automobile (omnibus automobile). The quality of vehicles, transport equipment and the quality of passenger transport services are also concerned by the government.

### ***Sub-conclusion of chapter 3***

At the end of World War I, although France won the battle, it suffered heavy economic and financial losses. In addition to the crisis of the domestic economy, France also has foreign debts. Facing this difficult situation, the French government simultaneously implemented two policies: a tough domestic policy by intensifying the exploitation of the domestic laborers and the policy of exploiting the colony of Indochina on a large scale by focusing on transportation.

During this period, the traffic works established and built from the first colonial exploitation were continued to be deployed and upgraded by the French colonialists during the second colonial exploitation and the years in the second world war. As a result, from the center of Hanoi, the road transport system spreads like a fan across the Northeast, becoming the lifeblood of traffic in the region. However, the French colonialists did not build new, large-scale traffic works that required a lot of investment capital and high technology such as railways or bridges to the provinces. The government mainly focuses on expanding and upgrading the existing road system to develop new, modern, high-capacity means of transport (cars).

The presence of this road system has given the economic life in the Northeast a new appearance, changing the quality of traffic and transportation activities. At the same time, this is also a new factor marking the shift towards economic modernization in the Northeast of Vietnam during this period.

## **Chapter 4**

### **CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPACTS OF THE COLONIAL ROUTE SYSTEM IN NORTHEAST VIETNAM IN THE PERIOD OF 1897 - 1945**

#### **4.1. Characteristics of the colonial route system in Northeast Vietnam**

Firstly, the colonial road traffic system in Northeast Vietnam from 1897 to 1945 mainly served the purpose of colonial exploitation of

the French colonialists. Secondly, the colonial road traffic system in the Northeast during the French colonial period was expanded in scope, which was uneven and dependent. Thirdly, the colonial road transport system in the Northeast region creates the position of intra - regional linkages, linking with the whole territory of Vietnam and the Indochinese Federation. Fourthly, within the Northeast Tonkin region, compared with waterways and railways, the colonial road transport system has little economic value. Finally, along with the development of the road system, means of transport are also modern.

### **4.3. Impact of colonial road traffic system in the Northeast region on Tonkin**

#### **4.2.1. Positive effects**

*Economic aspect:* Firstly, it creates an important transformation of the transport system towards modernity. Secondly, it contributes effectively to the development of other economic sectors. Finally, the development of traffic has inter-regional significance, leading to an increasing dependence among regions.

*Socio-cultural aspect:* The establishment of colonial roads had a great impact in planning the provincial scale, establishing new provinces and different levels of cities. Changes in population structure also took place within each region with the appearance of construction workers, businessmen and transport contractors. The existence and operation of transport routes have contributed to promoting the exchange and assimilation of Vietnamese culture through the introduction of new cultural products from abroad.

*Political – military aspect:* The growth of the working class in both quantity and class consciousness has been an important factor, making the struggle movement of the people in the Northeast region turn towards the direction of "proletarianization".

#### **4.2.2. Negative effects**

In terms of economic aspect: First of all, the transportation system, serving the purpose of colonial exploitation. The modernization of the routes according to the standards was beyond the subjective will of the French and was essentially just a means to exploit Tonkin as well as Indochina in the most effective way.

In terms of socio-cultural aspect: The process of urbanization in the Northeast region is an "implantation" of a socio-economic entity into a pre-colonial traditional socio-economic body. As a result, this urbanization has been "scattered, stagnant and incomplete". The development of traffic to exploit Vietnam has thoroughly impoverished the lives of Vietnamese people.

In terms of political – military aspect: In order to be able to mobilize troops, transport food and weapons to quickly suppress uprising rebellions of Vietnamese people, the French colonialists were required to invest a large amount of quite large capital to develop traffic and open roads.

#### ***Sub-conclusion of chapter 4***

Road traffic system in the Northeast of Vietnam in the period 1897 - 1945 went through many stages of formation with many changes and adjustments. That process creates a transport system with new appearances and properties, bringing both positive and negative effects. Despite not bringing about high transportation efficiency, colonial road traffic system clearly has contributed to opening the road and expanding the "economic horizon" of Tonkin. In fact, the real benefits of these works to the socio-economic life in Tonkin is something that should be properly recognized and evaluated. Road transport is the most practical service for the immediate task of colonial exploitation needs. It mainly supports to meet the requirements of economic development to exploit and dominate the colony of French capital. The development of the transport system was only intended to serve the immediate beneficial industries for the colonial government such as mining minerals, collecting goods and materials for export to France, transporting many consumer goods for consumption as well as materials imported from France and transported to serve the needs of Europeans and the urban elite.

However, it would be unobjective and one-sided to completely deny the important impacts on the development of the nation's history in the field of transport brought about by colonial exploitation, if

temporarily set aside from its motive and its purpose. Traffic in the Northeast region has developed a step up. People here have initially become familiar with new means of transporting a large volume of goods such as cars and vans. The development of traffic also leads to the development of new production, business and service activities. That led to the birth of commercial centers, creating the basis for the formation of cities and urban centers later, as well as creating links for socio-cultural exchanges. However, in all aspects, the negative consequences are caused by the extremely heavy plundering and exploitation policy of the French colonial capital. The study of the construction and operation of the colonial road transport system in the Northeast region of Vietnam is evidence for that conclusion.

## CONCLUSION

From the objectives and research results of the thesis, we draw some basic conclusions as follows:

1. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, capitalism changed from free competition to a monopoly that required a lot of capital, raw materials and new markets. To meet this need, Western capitalist countries turned to Eastern countries and started their invasion. As a large land area, rich in natural resources with an important geographical position, the upper Northeast region of Tonkin became the object of invasion by colonial empires, including the French military. In order to effectively realize the purpose of colonial exploitation and domination in Indochina, the establishment and development of the transport system in Tonkin plays an important role as the "key", the "motivation" and the driving force. Therefore, when the uprisings were pacified, the first thing the French colonialists did in Tonkin was to build a new transportation system, including all of the factors: modern technology, capable transportation and high economic efficiency, advanced form of organization and management as being applied in France and Europe.
2. The process of building the road system in the Northeast of Vietnam under the French colonial period has undergone a historical process with many different stages, closely associated with the

development of the colonial regime that the colonizers France built in Vietnam. After completing the invasion process, the first job was to renovate and upgrade the roads built by feudal dynasties before, ensuring uninterrupted traffic. The French carried out concurrently the improvement of roadbeds and pavements and new construction, maintenance and repair. In the period of 1897 - 1918, the construction of infrastructure was only carried out in the initial steps. Although the investment capital for transport is the second largest in the investment structure of French capital, due to difficulties in natural conditions and labor recruitment, these roads are newly built at a low level to serve the colonial government for army forces and some French capitalists present at the settlements. Since the First World War, the French colonialists have deployed the second colonial exploitation with the initiative of Governor General Albert Saraut so that they have increased investment in colonial exploitation. Despite being subject to this colonial exploitation, transportation is the field attracting the least investment of French capital. In contrast, the construction and expansion of road traffic in the Northeast region has taken one step further. The traffic system is gradually planned, upgraded and renovated towards modernization. The total length of the road is paved and paved in Tonkin, ranking second after Cochinchina. When the Japanese fascists invaded Indochina, the French-Japanese collusion to exploit Vietnam caused the renovation and expansion of the transport system to be stagnant. However, by 1945, colonial road system in the Northeast of Vietnam had basically formed the following routes:

Colonial Road No.1 from Hanoi to Lang Son has been completed with a length of 156km running through Bac Giang, Bac Ninh and connecting Hanoi - Hue - Saigon - Phnom Penh.

Colonial Road No.2 from Hanoi to Phu Lo (28km), Phuc Yen (43km), Vinh Yen (61km), Viet Tri, Phu Doan (130km), Tuyen Quang (163km), Bac Muc (209km), Vinh Thuy (246km), Bac Quang (282km).

Colonial Road No.3 from Hanoi to Phu Lo (28km), Thai Nguyen (76km), Cho Moi (122km), Bac Kan (165km), Phu Thong Hoa



(185km), Ngan Son (236km) to Cao Bang. 293km.

Colonial Road No.4: Running along the border of China, from Tien Yen (Hai Ninh) to Lang Son, through Dong Dang (14km), Na Sam (31km), That Khe (70km), Dong Khe (94km), Cao Bang (139km) to Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Lai Chau, Luang Prabang.

3. In the economic relations of the Federation in general and the system of public works, roads are classified into the second category. These are buildings that play an essential role in the economic development of the Union, but which provide indirect benefits. However, the existence and operation of the colonial road transport system in the Northeast region has brought about great changes in the economic and cultural life of the people of the Northeast in particular and Vietnam in particular. In terms of economic development and "constructiveness" as C. Marx said, it can be said that the French colonialists built a fairly complete road traffic system with the nature of a modern transport system, capable of fast transportation and exploiting natural factors and geo-political position. The new transport system has contributed to the connection of the region: the plain with the mountains, the Northeast and the Northwest, connecting with the whole territory of Vietnam and the Indochinese Federation. Thanks to that connection, during this period, the strategic location and potential of the Northeast provinces were discovered and effectively exploited. At the same time, the colonial road system created a driving force to promote a number of new economic sectors with "commodity" character, breaking the "seclusion" of the previous feudal economy. The prosperity of the colonial road system during the French colonial period also indirectly created and developed new productive forces and classes, contributing to the creation of the colonial social class structure. Those are the positive "unintended" contributions of the road transport system to the development of Vietnam's economy and culture during this time.

4. However, the above positive impacts are not within the guidelines and goals of the colonial government. The above changes do not change the essence of colonialism, as from the very beginning,

the construction of road transport infrastructure was mainly and mainly to serve the needs of colonial exploitation and exploitation. The road system was the tool of the colonization process that the French deployed in Indochina to exploit resources to serve the country, serve the government, military apparatus, rulers and minions to reach any part of the Northeast that they have conquered. Basically, the profits from the development of the road transport system in the Northeastern region of Tonkin belong to the French colonialists, while the colonized people are still exploited and deceived about the mission, namely the "Civilization" mission of "mother country". It is a consequence of the ruling of an imperialist - capitalist country over a feudal-colonial country.

5. Studying the development of the road traffic system in the Northeast during the French colonial period helps us draw some lessons that can be applied to our country today. Firstly, it is necessary to have a policy to develop synchronous transport connecting regions. Poor transport infrastructure is one of the reasons why trade in and out of the region cannot be developed. Therefore, in order to strongly develop socio-economic in the Northeast provinces today, first of all, it is necessary to properly determine the role of technical infrastructure in which the transport system is the key and driving force behind the development of the country. Second, investment must be made in the construction of a traffic and transportation system. Transport must be one step ahead, on that basis, new policies for socio-economic development should be set out. From past experiences, it can be seen that the form of investment cooperation between the state and the private sector has achieved certain effects, so it can be continued in the coming time. Third, the exploitation of natural elements in the Northeast to form a road transport system has contributed to Tonkin's important economic and political position. Therefore, it is necessary to exploit the natural factors to develop the transport system, which is a factor of sustainable development for the Northeast today. In the construction planning, the national road system in the Northeast region was built by the French in an open space, limiting the clustering of roads, even

integrating into regional roads. The French made a distinction between the main national transport systems, which are the systems serving urban concentration areas, the flows of goods, the hubs connecting to international transport networks and public facilities, but separate from each other. In the future, we need to find a way to do it perfectly. Fourth, it is necessary to associate traffic development with ensuring national security and defense. This is one of the important purposes of the French when building colonial roads. The Northeast region is an area with an important strategic position in terms of socio-economic development and national defense security, especially this is a region with four provinces of Cao Bang, Ha Giang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh bordering the Republic of Vietnam. People's democracy of China should be an area associated with maintaining security and sovereignty over Vietnam's territory. This is an extremely important and inseparable strategic task in the process of building socialism and defending the Socialist Vietnamese Fatherland. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to build and develop road transport projects associated with socio-economic development programs in remote, isolated and border areas towards industrialization and modernization to serve the needs of the community and protect national defense - security, creating a continuity in defense work. In particular, it is necessary to attach importance to linking national defense and security with the construction and development of traffic to the border-gate economic zones of Dong Dang (Lang Son), Ta Lung, Tra Linh (Cao Bang), Thanh Thuy (Ha Giang), Mong Cai (Quang Ninh) and border markets, creating favorable conditions for the exchange of goods and cultural exchanges between people on both sides of the border, actively contributing to stabilizing the border security to get better and better.

From such geographical and economic information, successful plans and activities of building a transport system in Tonkin by the French colonialists during the French colonial period, the above-mentioned very valuable experiences will be a precious source for planning the development of the Northeast in the present and in the

future.

The colonial road traffic system in the Northeast of Vietnam contained the great ambitions of the French colonialists. To realize those ambitions, the blood and sweat of the Vietnamese working people poured down. This is a big issue that requires a more in-depth study, which we would like not to discuss in depth within the framework of this thesis. With a journey of a century, these routes have become an organic part of people's lives; it is not regarded as a means of transport but also deeply rooted in people's emotional life. Moreover, given the important roles and positions of the roads in the construction and development of the country and the expansion of international exchanges, it is necessary to have comprehensive studies on this route in various areas: economy, politics, culture, tourism to give it its rightful place in history as well as affirm its position in bringing Vietnam deeper and wider integration into the regional and global economy.

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