

## The Economy of Inland Rejang Bengkulu in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji wilayah dataran tinggi Rejang yang menjadi pusat perekonomian baru di Bengkulu pada awal abad ke-20. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian historis meliputi heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan ekonomi, teknik pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini melalui kajian literatur seperti penelusuran arsip laporan tahunan pemerintah kolonial serta studi pustaka. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan wilayah Rejang menjadi pusat ekonomi di Bengkulu karena dipilihnya wilayah Rejang menjadi lokasi pembukaan perusahaan-perusahaan swasta yang bergerak pada bidang perkebunan dan pertambangan. Adapun dipilihnya Rejang sebagai lokasi perusahaan swasta di Bengkulu karena memiliki potensi terutama faktor geografis yang menguntungkan. Beroperasinya perusahaan swasta di Rejang berdampak pada pembangunan jalan yang semakin masif dari wilayah pedalaman menuju ke kota Bengkulu. Pembangunan jalan di Rejang telah membuka peluang ekonomi baru bagi masyarakat seperti; terbentuknya pasar atau kota kecil serta munculnya lapangan pekerjaan.

**Kata Kunci:** *rejang, bengkulu, ekonomi, perusahaan.*

### Abstract

*This study aims to examine the Rejang plateau region which became a new economic center in Bengkulu in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This research is a historical research including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. This research uses an economic approach, data collection techniques in this research through literature studies such as tracing archives of colonial government annual reports and literature studies. The results of this study show that the Rejang region became the economic center in Bengkulu because the Rejang region was chosen as the location for the opening of private companies engaged in plantations and mining. Rejang was chosen as the location of private companies in Bengkulu because it has potential, especially favorable geographical factors. The operation of private companies in Rejang had an impact on the construction of increasingly massive roads from the interior region to the city of Bengkulu. Road construction in Rejang has opened up new economic opportunities for the community, such as the formation of markets or small towns and the emergence of new employment opportunities.*

**Keywords:** *rejang, bengkulu, economy, company.*

### INTRODUCTION

Bengkulu is a region located on the west coast of Sumatra. The Bengkulu region has a topography of mountains and lowlands with a long coastline. Initially, Bengkulu's economic activities focused on the coastal area because Bengkulu is a region that directly faces the Indian Ocean. The

Bengkulu region, which has many bays on the coast, makes Bengkulu have natural ports such as Teluk Pulau, better known as Silebar Bay (Agus Setiyanto, 2015).

The coast of Bengkulu, which has a bay, was the port and entrance for foreign ships that landed in Bengkulu. According to P. Wink's notes in the 1624 Dagbregister

Gehouden Int Casteel Batavia, many ships sailed back and forth in Silebar Bay. One of the ships that sailed was a Dutch ship that carried out pepper buying and selling activities (Agus Setiyanto, 2010). The existence of P. Wink's note provides an illustration as well as a clue that Bengkulu had the potential to become a trading city with the center of economic activity located in the coastal area.

As a trading city, Bengkulu has superior commodities and is the target of traders. These commodities were owned by the local rulers of Bengkulu. The local ruler in Bengkulu in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the King or Sultan. The kingdoms of Bengkulu in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were tribal kingdoms and were a combination of several tribes around Bengkulu. These kingdoms were classified as maritime kingdoms or Coastal State because the capital was located at the mouth of the river. Some of the most famous kingdoms in the Bengkulu region are the Sultanate of Muko-muko, Silebar Kingdom, Sungai Lemau Kingdom, Sungai Serut Kingdom, and Sungai Itam Kingdom. These kingdoms were originally independent kingdoms before coming under the influence of the Sultanate of Banten. Banten noted that Bengkulu was a region rich in pepper agricultural products due to Banten's strong influence in Bengkulu in the pepper trade (Abdullah Siddik, 1996).

Silebar Bay in the Bengkulu region became the entrance and unloading point

for the pepper trade. Silebar Bay became the central location for buying and selling Bengkulu pepper with Banten and foreign merchants, as well as the entrance to the pepper trade from the interior of Bengkulu. Silebar Bay has a strategic location on the pepper trade route and is adjacent to the river mouth. The river at that time was one of the main transportation routes for the pepper trade in Bengkulu. Silebar Bay has an important role in connecting the pepper trade from the interior to the coast (Abdullah Siddik, 1996).

Over time the pepper trade in Bengkulu has shifted. The pepper trade was not entirely with Banten, Arabs and Chinese. The Bengkulu pepper trade began to expand with the arrival of Europeans, especially the British (East India Company). The British entered and anchored Bengkulu on June 24, 1685, and opened trade contacts in the Bengkulu region and made agreements with local rulers (Abdullah Siddik, 1996).

The dynamics of the development of the pepper trade in Bengkulu during the British colonial period continued to change starting with the entry of the British into Bengkulu in 1685 until 1825. The pepper crop in Bengkulu was rivaled by new commodities such as coffee, nutmeg and cloves. Before the Dutch fully controlled the entire Bengkulu region, economic activity was still focused on the coastal areas (Abdullah Siddik, 1996).

After the 1824 Treaty of London, colonial power in Bengkulu passed from British to Dutch hands. Since the Dutch began to control Bengkulu, the economic sector began to develop not only in the coastal areas. However, the Dutch East Indies government began to expand its attention to the inland areas of Bengkulu. This was because Bengkulu's interior was seen as suitable for planting export crops to replace pepper, whose demand had begun to diminish in the European market (Lindayanti, 2007).

During the liberal economic era, the interior of Bengkulu was opened up as a mining and plantation center. Thus the Bengkulu region began to become a major concern for developing these commodities. The Dutch East Indies colonial government began to focus its policies on the hinterland marked by the issuance of the 1870 agrarian law as part of the liberal economic policy. Some of the inland areas that became development destinations were the Rejang and Lebong regions (Koloniaal Verslag, 1893).

It was during this period that many government and private companies came to Bengkulu to invest and explore the interior of Bengkulu. This research aims to describe the economic picture of the Bengkulu hinterland as a new economic area of the Dutch East Indies government. In this case, to see how the implementation of the agrarian law and

Bengkulu's economic activities and the impacts arising from these activities.

## **METHOD**

This research is a historical research. Historical research is a set of systematic rules established to collect historical sources effectively, assess critically and present the results achieved in written form (Gilbert J. Garraghan, 1957). The steps of this research consist of: heuristic, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Abd Rahman and Muhammad Salah Majid, 2015). First, heuristics The author searches for written sources in the form of periodical archives in the form of travel notes, annual reports of the Koloniaal Verslag government, *Memorie van Overgave*, besides that, he also uses electronic documents accessed through KITLV.NL. Second, source criticism, a stage to test the authenticity and credibility of sources both from the physical aspect and the content of the source. The author conducts external and internal criticism and compares with several sources obtained from archival searches. Third, interpretation, the stage of looking for meaningful connections between historical facts so that they are more meaningful. The author does this so as not to experience errors in interpretation. Fourth, historiography, is the stage of writing history that contains the delivery of synthesis in the form of historical works (Kuntowijoyo, 1996). This

research uses an economic approach. The economic approach in historical studies is closely related to tracking the economic conditions of a region, especially changes in the economic system, trade patterns, financial institutions, commercial policies, and economic concepts. In addition, the economic approach also includes the problem of price increases, conjuncture of agrarian production, and trade expansion (Sartono Kartodirdjo, 1992). The economic approach is used to look at economic changes in Rejang, especially after the entry of private companies in Rejang at the end of the 19th century.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Geography of Bengkulu and Rejang**

Bengkulu is a region located in the western part of Sumatra Island, Bengkulu has a diverse topography in the form of highlands, lowlands, and swamps. In general, Bengkulu's upland areas have relatively more fertile soil compared to coastal or lowland areas. The Bengkulu region was once famous as a spice-producing region, especially pepper. The Bengkulu region basically has a river flowing from upstream to downstream so as to make the Bengkulu region increasingly a fertile area due to the sedimentation of river soil. The type of river flow in Bengkulu is not too long, besides that the river flow is a means of transportation for the community,

especially from the inland area to the coastal area (Agus Setiyanto, 2015).

Bengkulu's natural boundaries also divide the Bengkulu region from other Residencies on the island of Sumatra. Bengkulu's natural boundaries include the north bordering Indrapura (West Coast Prefecture of Sumatra) Serampai and Kerinci, the east bordering the Palembang Prefecture with natural borders in the form of bukit barisan and mountains including several mountains including Mount Pandan 2.168 masl, Mount Sebelat 2.383 masl, Mount Bukitrunan 2.221 masl, Bukit Daun 2.457 masl, Mount Dempo, Mount Patah 2.818 masl, Mount Bukit Garang-Garang, and Mount Pasagi 2.323 masl. The south is bordered by the District of Lampung with natural boundaries bordered by Semangko Bay whose water flows from Pematang Gigur at an altitude of 1.800 meters above sea level, and the west of Bengkulu is bordered by the Indian Ocean (Encyclopaedie Nederlandch Indie, 1917).

The soil conditions in Bengkulu are basically suitable for developing agricultural commodity crops and plantations, this is based on the level of soil fertility in Bengkulu which has different qualifications in each area. Bengkulu's most fertile natural conditions are mountainous or highland areas and areas around the river, these areas are very suitable in developing plantation and agricultural commodities. In addition,

factors affecting soil fertility are also influenced by climate because Bengkulu is located in an area around the equator with a tropical climate, this advantage for example is due to stable weather conditions, stable heat, coastal winds that blow every day and valley winds that blow from the mountains, making the Bengkulu region a cool climate every day (Memorie van Overgave Onderafdeling Redjang, 1913).

The Rejang plateau is the most fertile region in Bengkulu. In addition, the Rejang area is the coolest region in Bengkulu because it is located at the foot of Mount Kaba. The Rejang area is geographically located between the hills of the barisan and lebong areas, namely with natural boundaries in the form of the Sebelat hill area which stretches southeast to Bukit Sulup with an altitude of 1.999 meters above sea level, then southeast from cold water to Bukit Daun with an altitude of 1.620 meters above sea level and separated by the Ketahun River and the Musi river. Besides having a fertile soil type with diluvial tuff, the Rejang area is also rich in water sources (Memorie van Overgave Onderafdeling Rejang 1913).

In addition, the Bengkulu region is an area rich in rain. The rainy season is basically the most awaited season by the people of Bengkulu because the rainy season is a sign that agrarian activities have begun. The amount of rain in Bengkulu, especially in the coastal areas,

has a range of 3.000 - 4.000 mm per year while in the Rejang highlands or inland areas the rainfall ranges from 5.000 to 7.000 mm per year (William Marsden, 2014).

The amount of rainfall shows that the Bengkulu and Rejang regions are very favorable for developing plantation and agricultural commodities. Not only rain but the air temperature in Bengkulu in the interior is relatively lower and cooler than the coastal areas, which is around 40 degrees fahrenheit (William Marsden, 2014).

The geography of Bengkulu's interior is very suitable and very favorable for the development of export commodity crops that sell well in international markets. In addition to having a favorable geography, Bengkulu has an indigenous population, especially in the highlands, called the Rejang tribe. The Rejang tribe is the majority ethnic group that inhabits the Bengkulu region, especially those located in the highlands. In British records written by John Marsden, a British Resident in Lais in 1775-1779. Marsden in his report explained that the Rejang tribe had inhabited the Lebong region which was divided into several *Marga*, including; Jurukalang, Bermani, Selupu, and Tubai (Abdullah Siddik, 1980). This ethnic group inhabits the Bengkulu highland region, especially in the Edalama region, which is settled in the valleys of the Bukit Barisan hills.

The Rejang community in the social structure adheres to the system of descent from the father and likewise in the leadership system where the Rejang community will be led by men. This ethnic group is an ethnic group that lives by making a living as a farmer and opening fields. However, before the 20th century, it was explained that the Rejang community in the inland area was still quite disadvantaged compared to the coastal communities in Bengkulu (Abdullah Siddik, 1980).

The geographical conditions in Bengkulu, especially in the interior of Bengkulu, have advantages and the large amount of land that has not been opened by the local population then provides an attraction for foreign investors or financiers to open their businesses in Rejang. The first sign of the development of private companies entering the Rejang region was the introduction of the liberal economy and the enactment of the 1870 agrarian law.

#### **History of the Entry of Private Companies into the Inland Bengkulu**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the beginning of economic growth in the Netherlands. In the Dutch mother country, the development of the industrial phase along with capital investment was intensified. This situation gave rise to people with liberal ideology. The emergence of liberals has had an impact on the colonies.

The liberals became the key to the enactment of colonial policies, namely liberal economic policies, which were marked by the agrarian law of 1870 (Sartono Kartodirdjo and Djoko Suryo, 1991). This situation has made private investors compete to open their economic opportunities in the Dutch East Indies by opening companies such as plantations and mining.

In addition, the entry of private plantation and mining companies was driven by the main factor, namely related to the provision of land, where in the agrarian law the rules for leasing land had a long period of up to 75 years (Dirman, 1952).

The law had made it easier for European private investors to develop their business in the Dutch East Indies. In the 19th century, private European companies began to develop their wings in the Dutch East Indies, including on the island of Sumatra, especially in the Bengkulu region, precisely in the interior of Rejang. In Rejang, the company's exploitation was mainly to open plantations and was fully owned by private investors to lease land to develop export commodities (Koloniaal Verslag, 1893).

The entry of private investors into Rejang began with the leasing of land in the form of *erfpacht perceel* by Chinese and Europeans. The leased land parcels were used for land clearing and plantations as well as for the exploration

of mining products. The Rejang plateau became an area of interest for investors to develop their businesses. The Rejang plateau region was then very suitable for planting such plantation commodities as the, robusta coffee, and tobacco. In 1874 the population of the Rejang area was still very sparse, where Kepahiang was the capital center of the Rejang Onderafdeling and there were only about 10-15 houses, some of which were Rejang people's agricultural land (Firdaus Burhan, 1988).

Plantation companies in Rejang continued to grow rapidly where at the end of the 19th century there were many requests for land to be used as plantation land, as of 1892 plantation companies that had operated in the Rejang area were at the foot of Mount Kaba such as Onderneming Soeban Ajam (1891), Onderneming Warong Djealatan (1892), Onderneming Dataran (1893), and Onderneming Kepahiang (1893), (Koloniaal Verslag, 1893).

Plantations in the Rejang region developed quite rapidly, recorded until 1928 in the Rejang region there were ten large plantations. These plantations included: Pematang Danau Onderneming, Soeban Ajam Onderneming, Ajer Simpang Onderneming, Sindang Dataran Onderneming, Hecco Onderneming, Ajer Dingin Onderneming, Bukit Daun Onderneming, Kaba Wetan, Onderneming West Kust, and Onderneming Benko where the average crop grown in the Rejang

plantation area is robusta coffee (Memorie van Overgave onderafdeling Redjang, 1928).

These private plantations have opened up many economic opportunities in Bengkulu and in this case have increased regional income. The plantations in Rejang have opened up new economic opportunities in the interior with the value of coffee exports being quite encouraging. In addition to the plantation products that are quite promising investors. The plantation also opens other access that can benefit investors to open their businesses in Bengkulu, one of which is mining.

The interior of Bengkulu has enormous potential in the field of mineral resources. The exploration of mining in the interior of Bengkulu cannot be separated from the administrators of private plantations. Private mining in Bengkulu began to be explored in 1896, namely an administrator named Eugene Cassel from the Soeban Ajam plantation company. The exploration location was in the lebong region and found gold potential where previously the local population had known about the history of gold in the region. For this exploration, the Rejang Lebong mining company syndicate was finally formed in 1897 (Indische Gids, 1911).

Table 1. Plantation Companies in Rejang

Company Name	Planted land area (small unit/bau)	Type of plant
Pematang Danau	1.436	Coffee, Quinine
Aer Simpang	934	Coffee, Quinine, tea
Soeban Ayam	1.500	Tea
Dataran	595	Coffee
Hecco	160	Coffee
Aer Dingin	564	Coffee
Bukit Daun	-	Tea
Kaba Wetan	1.050	Coffee, Tea
West Kust	745	Coffee, Rubber
Benko	330	Coffee

(Memorie van Overgave onderafdeling Redjang, 1928)

Table 2. Coffee Exports in Bengkulu

Years	Total (kg)	Value (gulden)
1919	6.307.812	-
1920	4.898.646	-
1921	4.535.622	-
1922	5.756.149	-
1923	5.157.000	3.154.000
1924	8.731.000	5.845.000
1925	7.051.000	6.244.000
1926	9.262.000	8.395.000
1927	13.111.000	10.920.000
1928	17.598.000	11.493.000
1929	13.887.000	10.410.000

(Memorie van Overgave Residentie Benkoelen 1929)

Table 3. Production of Mining Company Rejang Lebong, Simau and Sawah (Gram)

Years	Rejang lebong		Simau		Sawah	
	Gold	Silver	Gold	Silver	Gold	Silver
1923	912.443	5.092.563	1.392.947	18.816.476	145.970	5.278.306
1924	1.050.818	5.274.275	1.367.059	18.217.699	319.833	19.299.760
1925	1.282.625	7.797.982	1.413.140	15.439.367	330.100	27.257.600
1926	1.093.089	6.743.722	1.374.227	17.453.486	332.400	26.408.100
1927	989.919	5.807.365	1.409.711	19.493.288	336.300	25.539.300
1928	882.028	5.386.349	1.367.232	17.620.462	345.142	23.368.651
1929	887.332	5.618.913	1.507.090	21.565.357	312.405	21.777.871
1930	884.873	5.399.443	1.701.424	23.377.142	312.845	23.287.953

(J.W.J. Wellan, 1932)

Mining companies in the interior of Rejang produce more silver than gold. These mining companies account for most of the economic revenue in Bengkulu. The companies opened up economic opportunities in the vicinity with the formation of new economic centers in the

mines. Mining and plantation products located in the interior will then be transported to Bengkulu city via land transportation. The data shows that the economic impact began to be felt in the hinterland in the early 20th century when plantation and mining companies began

exporting their products. In addition, plantation and mining companies also had an impact on the surrounding areas and residents around Rejang with the opening of access to the hinterland and the back and forth transportation of mining and plantation products.

#### **Establishment of Road Networks and Markets in the Interior of Bengkulu**

Roads in the hinterland in 1868 had previously been built by the Dutch colonial government. However, the road network was not yet connected to the coastal areas of Bengkulu. Roads in the interior connected Curup, Taba Penanjung and surrounding areas and were connected to the Palembang Residency. Road construction in the interior continued after private companies entered the Rejang interior. The road network was then rebuilt for the benefit of companies exporting plantation and mining products to the coastal areas of Bengkulu.

In the early 20th century, the road from the hinterland to the city area of Bengkulu became the busiest road in the regency with transportation going back and forth across the hills to the plantations.

The construction of roads in the plantation area in Rejang has opened up new economic opportunities and has become a trigger for the Rejang region by opening up economic space, especially the emergence of markets. Where the market

is the center of economic activity, there is a financial turnover with buying and selling activities. This is mainly related to the living conditions and needs of the community and company workers in Rejang. In addition, Rejang residents also built hamlets located along the road. The establishment of the road network has opened up opportunities, especially new jobs for the community. Before the company entered the interior, Rejang people generally made a living as farmers or cultivators. The establishment of the plantation has had an impact on the expansion of new professions and livelihoods for the population, for example the development of a transportation service business. The transportation services carried out by the Rejang population included buffalo carts, prahoto, as well as cars owned by the Dutch or the government (Memorie van Overgave Onderafdeling Redjang, 1913).

The growth of plantation and mining companies in the hinterland was of concern to the government, which was also involved in road development. The development of the road from Bengkulu city to Rejang can not only be used by carts but also by cars. The development of the road can save time and speed up the distance traveled. For example, using a gerobak service to transport goods from the interior of Lebong to Bengkulu took 6 hours at a cost of f 40-50 per person and f 8 for goods per pikul, then for

transportation using car services, the journey from Lebong to Bengkulu city was only 2 days at a cost of f 6.50 per person and f 5 per pikul of goods (Memorie van Overgave Onderafdeling Redjang, 1913).

The existence of this cart service has benefited local residents because the cost of using this cart service is relatively cheaper than using a car. Meanwhile, the surrounding community is also helped by the existence of cart transportation services to transport their natural products to the city. The development of transportation in this rural area is growing rapidly as the process of transporting goods and export commodities from the company develops.

In addition, the livelihood profession in the hinterland also developed with the artisan profession. The new professions in Rejang include carpenter, ironworker, and mason. The artisan profession developed due to the demand and development of the population in Rejang due to economic activities in the region. Professions in inland areas were not only limited to farmers but developed into other professions which showed that the area had economic opportunities, especially related to livelihoods (Memorie van Overgave Onderafdeling Redjang, 1913).

Villages transformed into market centers in the Rejang region due to the impact of plantation life. One of the hamlets that transformed into markets in the Rejang region are Kepahiang, Curup,

Padang Ulak Tanding and Muaraaman. Before the opening of the plantation in 1874 the area was a hamlet or kampong of the Rejang people with only 10-15 houses, the Curup area also had only 10-15 houses and Muaraaman was a very small hamlet (Hazairin, 1936).

In addition, the Rejang hinterland shows a population that continues to increase from year to year due to the mobility of people who settle in the Rejang area. The economic openness of the area has attracted people to settle in the area as traders, artisans or laborers on plantations. This shows that the Rejang hinterland became a market with a diverse population living there (Memorie van Overgave onderafdeling Redjang, 1939).

The first habitation or settlement pattern of Bengkulu society is in the form of *dusun* (*dusun* or *Kampong*), after several *dusun* or *Kampong* appear around certain areas, especially in certain geographical proximities such as rivers or around valleys, it will give rise to a larger association or association called Marga (Village), as well as denser settlements with buying and selling activities in a clan called pasar or pekan. This habitation pattern applies in the interior of Rejang. Hamlet or kampong in Rejang transforms into a market due to economic activity.

The formation of hamlets into markets in the Rejang region such as Kepahiang Market. Kepahiang became a

market because Kepahiang served as the capital of the Rejang onderafdeling since the Rejang region was incorporated into the Bengkulu administrative system. In addition, economic activity began to move in Kepahiang, especially since private plantations experienced quite encouraging developments, this is because the Kepahiang area is close to the plantation company. This economic activity developed with the presence of shops in the Kepahiang area. Curup Market is the most strategic area in the transportation network in the Rejang region. Curup developed into a market because it is located in a connecting area in Rejang, which is a transit location from the Rejang region. In addition, Curup city has become a shopping center in the Rejang region when compared to Bengkulu city. Since the opening of Rejang from isolation and the development of private companies in Rejang. Curup became the most highly mobilized market in Rejang, while the transaction mobility of Curup market reached f. 6,000 (Memorie van Overgave Residentie Benkoelen, 1932).

Padang Ulak Tanding market is located around the Soeban Ajam coffee plantation. The existence of plantation activities has triggered this area to become an economic center. Initially, this area was triggered by a company-owned shop to provide the daily needs of the workers. However, this area will be crowded and become a market after

weekends or holidays. The market activities in this area only provide the daily needs of workers or the community. The market is an option for the community and workers to get goods because the prices offered will be more affordable than the prices in company-owned stores. In addition, there were also transactions carried out by local residents with workers such as buying and selling basic needs of rice (Memorie van Overgave Onderafdeling Rejang, 1913).

The development of these three areas into centers of economic activity in Rejang can be seen from the number of shops that reached 170 shops and can be seen from the composition of the heterogeneous population in Rejang which shows the existence of economic activity (Kolonial Verslag, 1906).

Muaraaman as a mining town. Mining companies in Lebong (Bengkulu's interior) have opened up the region from isolation, especially opening up the interior to the coastal areas of Bengkulu. Road construction that has been built in the Lebong region has opened economic access. Muaraaman is an area that is visited by many immigrants because Muaraaman is located in the middle of the mining company center. The distance between mining companies and Muaraaman is relatively closer, 12 km from the sawah mining company, and 2 km from the Lebong Donok Company. In addition, Muara Aman is the

administrative city of the government center of the lebong onderafdeling and there is a kontrolir who has an office in the area (Abdullah Siddik, 1996).

Muaraaman as a market center in the middle of a mining company makes an attraction for people to come to try their luck in Muaraaman while the immigrant population comes from Java and China. Economic activity became more heterogeneous with mining activities in the Muaraaman area, making many hamlets more prosperous (Hazairin, 1936).

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bengkulu's economic center was no longer centered on the coastal region. However, at the end of the 19th century, especially after the enactment of the 1870 agrarian law, the interior of Bengkulu, especially the Rejang plateau region, became the most targeted area by foreign investors, especially in developing plantation and mining businesses. Western private companies in the Rejang highlands opened coffee plantations and mines. The existence of private companies that entered the interior of Rejang, this area began to be considered by building a road network, especially for transportation facilities used for transporting company products. The opening of roads in the interior of Rejang to the coastal areas made the Rejang region the highest economic activity in the Bengkulu regency

with economic activity around the company. Roads built for the benefit of companies open up new economic opportunities in the Rejang region, such as the emergence of new settlements around the road network, in addition to the livelihood activities of local residents not only in agricultural activities and trade but become more varied. The development of private companies in Rejang opens up employment opportunities in the region such as the availability of transportation services, the availability of handyman and labor services. In addition, the hamlets around the plantations are also transformed into markets, with buying and selling activities around the plantations and mines. The hamlets that transformed into markets in the Rejang hinterland are Curup market, Kepahiang market, Ulak Tanding market, and muaraman. The market is a buffer and center of economic activity in the Rejang region, as evidenced by the heterogeneous population.

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