

Conference Paper

Wages of Child Labor in Tobacco Plantations in Afdeeling Klaten, 1870–1930

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Abstract

The paper aims at history knowledge of the use of child's power as child labor in the tobacco plantations in *afdeeling* Klaten in 1870–1930 to be shown, it is related to the unequal wages which was being received by the adult labor (men and women) compare to the child labor. The research method which is being used in the paper is the history method. *Afdeeling* Klaten was famous as a fertile land had become a chosen place for the foreign capitalist to open a tobacco plantation. For the local labor, working in the tobacco plantation was more favorable because besides the length of working time did not take too long, it was also able to recruit all of the member of the family, one of them was the child. Poverty was the main reason of the appearance of child labor; that was the main reason of the society in *afdeeling* Klaten in the colonial period. For the lack of the salary which was taken home by the fathers of the family in the colonial domination period forced the wives and the children must take the part to gain more income. The use of child labor would be easier to be happened when the society surrounding the child was even more supported it and the government seemed to not concern of the child destiny.

Keywords: Afdeeling Klaten, Child Labor, Family Labor, Poverty, Tobacco, Wages

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1. Introduction

Java in 19th century was a period of agrarian exploitation. The abolition of The Cultivation System (*Cultuur Stelsel*) and the existence of Agrarian Law in 1870 became the main principle of private plantation development in The Netherlands Indies. The foreign capitalist seemed to compete in opening plantation which planted some type of cash crop, one of it was tobacco.

Vorstenlanden was not prevailed The Cultivation System (*Cultuur Stelsel*), however the plantation farm developed by the system of renting the land of *apanage* owned by

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the monarch. It was because in Vorstenlanden was prevailed that all land was belonging to the king, therefore the people only had a right to use it only (Java: *anggaduh*). The practice of renting the land in Vorstenlanden had happened before the Diponegoro War [1], but the renting in a big area of land then had appeared after in the middle of 19th century. The rented land then was managed by the farm and regulated by modern management, which was completed by traditional logistics means [2]. It continued by dominating the land and labor by the farm plantation [3].

It was estimated that tobacco plant was firstly brought by the Portuguese to The Netherlands Indies in 16th century and the use of tobacco had become famous in all around The Netherlands Indies in 1650. Among the areas of tobacco producers were mainly well known three best areas; those were Klaten (Vorstenlanden area), Besuki (East Java) and Deli (East Sumatra) [4].

Klaten was one region in Kasunanan Surakarta which widely chosen by the private plantation capitalist because of the land was fertile. In the area was spread out lowland which was wide and rich of spring water (*water bronnen*); so it was suitable as a plantation. In 1858, tobacco produced by *afdeeling* Klaten exported for the first time to the international market. It was carried out for the first time by a Dutch named Mendes Da Costa who lived in a village named Jetis, Kawedanan Gondangwinangun, *afdeeling* Klaten. In the following year, the experiment was continued in the villages in the lowland, those were in Birit, Kebonarum, Pandansimping, Trutjuk, Demangan, Wedi and Temulus [5]. However, afterwards, G.L. Dorrepaal who was the owner of tobacco plantation in Wedi, was mentioned as a figure that put the basic foundation to the development of a strong tobacco corporation in *afdeeling* Klaten, by the efficiently effort the tobacco so it as was as tobacco from Deli and Besuki in the international market.

The product delivery of tobacco plantation from the plantations areas in *afdeeling* Klaten to the international market had been expediting by the built of railway that passed through Klaten in 1870s. One of the attraction owned by *afdeeling* Klaten in the capitalist views was the biggest population in this area compare with another area in Kasunanan Surakarta. In 1836 the population of the district was 109 850, while in 1867 it was 219 000. In 1920 the population of the district was 476 364, while based on the demographic census in 1930 it was 574 788. The numbers showed that the district had the biggest population among other districts in Kasunanan Surakarta region. By the *apanage* system prevailed in the monarch land, the owner found it easily to get the labor, one of it was in the area of *afdeeling* Klaten. However, it was not enough yet. It could be seen from the existence of female and child labor. Child labor are children

who do the job routine to help their parents or for others which a large amount of time are being needed, whether receive some wages or not [6].

The existence of child labor was estimated since the expansion of the plantation to the areas of villages. The demand of labor then, were forcing to using not only male labor but also female as so child labor. Especially in 1885, when farming crisis occurred in Java, it made more female and children to becoming labor, where their presence were broadly welcome as labor with low wages whom could be threatened as it wished [7].

The paper would like to present three issues which would be discussed. Those are: first, how was the comparison of the wages which was received by between the adult and child labor; second, what kind work which was being given to the child labor; third, how was the view of colonial government toward child labor.

2. Anak Jembrengan

The impact of the extension of plantation in the middle of nineteen century in Vorstenlanden area was the increase in the demand for labors in processing the plantation products for international market in addition to the increasingly fierce competition among existing plantation enterprises. The increase in the demand for the labors resulted from the condition of the plantation in Dutch East Indies with the majority of its process that was carried out manually that it required huge number of human labors. Especially, the condition of the plantation in The Netherlands Indies which was still undergo manually, that it made needing a lot of labor to process it. There are some kind of cash crops which planted in Vorstenlanden area such as, Coffee, Sugar, Nila and Tobacco.

Tobacco plantation had its own attraction to the labor family compare to other employments because its working period is not as long as those in sugar cane plantation, as it could involve all members of the labor family. The tobacco plantation had the working period of nine months and other family members both males and females and old and young might also work in the tobacco plantation. There were 27 000 males working in the tobacco plantation, while during the sorting process of the harvested tobacco leaves there were about 13 000 males and females absorbed in the employment. Therefore, it increased the family income of the labor from the wages received by each member of the family. After the tobacco leaves had harvested and brought to the warehouse to be hanging on to, 'the community self helping' (*gotong royong*) had just begun. Usually the female worker would bring their children to help.

The process of tobacco leaves start from the harvesting to be ready in the shipping ports was still undergone manually which human preserve needed.

The increase in the number of the tobacco plantation enterprises that organized business extension in Netherland Indies in the period of 1890 to 1910 resulted in the increasingly fierce competition among them. The competition for loyal labors became one of the important obstacles because the big number of the population did not warrant the fulfillment of the demand for the labors in the plantations in the district. In such condition of fierce competition among the plantation enterprises in the Dutch East Indies, they kept implementing tightening policy in investing capital, for example, by paying both permanent and temporary labors and also foremen low wage in factory plantation and in several plantations. It was also the case of the labors of daily and batch basis wages. In the long term the decrease in the wage had negative impact. Workers received very low wages that the family's needs are not fulfilled. The Surakarta area is a poor area. Most of people who lived there already did not have enough money to buy their needs, while the prices of food and clothing was very expensive [3]

The lack of labor in the plantation had become the entrance way for female and children to become labor, even though they had received lower wage compare to the male labor. Female and children were in a group of the second class labor, who had received less-wages than the male labor. However, if we compared to the female labor wages, than the wages for the child labor were lower. Generally, female labor had half wages of the male one and the children had one third of the male one [8]. The unequal wage for the children was not only found in the tobacco plantation, but also in various kinds of employment because the children were considered as the labors who did not have the same strength and skill as adult labors. However, they actually gave significant contribution. The willingness of the children to work for lower wage than adult labors was exploited both by the employers and by their own family. For the owner of plantation, the rising productivity of labor by involving member of the family was the benefit without the increasing of the cost labor. Poverty was indeed one of the first reasons for the condition to prevail. The Surakarta area is a poor area. Most of people who lived there already did not have enough money to buy their needs, while the prices of food and clothing was very expensive [3].

Employing the children seemed to be also supported by the condition of the society in the plantation itself which accustomed the children to work in their early age. In the colonial period, most of the children in Netherlands Indies had not access to study at school [9]. The chance to study at school could be enjoyed only for the children from

the noble descent family or whom of the European society. Meanwhile the children whom of other rank society had only dreamt the chance.

Before many schools at the village had built, therefore the education system which had received by the children was more likely to the working practically in the real life. The education had not taken place in the school building, but through live education. Since the children had considered able to work, then they would be trained by their own parents to do any kind of jobs. It had begun with helping the job done at home. If it is a girl, she will be trained to do the households such as cooking, cleaning the house and taking care of the younger siblings. Meanwhile, if it is a boy, he will be trained to do the job outside the house such as helping in the paddy field or taking care of the cattle. The children had asked to involve in the activity in agriculture (agriculture in both small and big scale), crop processes, home industry and small industry both as additional helping for the family or as the child labor [8].

Actually, by trained the children to work in their early age, it would bring a positive value. The children were trained to be able to do many things without depending on others. The children would be well trained to live by themselves in the mature life later. However, the effort of training would put the children into a danger if the child labor were being misused by other people. Both the children's future and health care were rarely to be thoughtful. Even though the condition of child labor in tobacco plantation in *afdeeling* Klaten were not as worst as the condition of many children who had worked in the Western countries factories, but then it would not be let it being happened.

Those were not all of the jobs in the plantation had involved to the child labor. The types of job which were being given to the child labor were generally jobs which did need neither special skill nor strength as appropriate to the ability of a child. It could be seen here that actually the ability of labor children were very limited. It could be seen here that actually the ability of child labor were very limited; and the children were yet considered as labor.

In the tobacco plantation, there were many kinds of jobs offered to the child labor, such as searching leaves caterpillar, sweeps the warehouse, taking the pile of tobacco leaves to sorting the leaves. The children labored mainly were helping to smooth the tobacco leaves and helping the pile labor to take the tobacco leaves [10]. That had happened in the tobacco plantation in *afdeeling* Klaten. Besides, the ware house of sorted tobacco leaves, every female worker would bring two or three children, usually under the age of 12 yr to help them; those children were being called as '*anak jembrengan*'.

The female labor who were sorting the leaves, consciously preferred to use '*anak jembregan*' to earn more than to smooth the leaves. The sorting labor could earn more by sorting than by doing the '*jembregan*' only; or by doing the sorting and '*jembregan*' at the same time; and if she wanted to earn as much as before, so she had to work longer and more intensive than when she still working with some small girls [10]. The female labor preferred to get help from the small children than from the teenagers because children did not demand a lot of wages and they more obedience.

The wage had given by the plantation corporation to the female labor in the sorted tobacco leaves were actually given to smoothen and sorted the tobacco leaves, with certain amount of wages according to the result of the work. However, if both jobs had done by the female labor herself, the wages was not as much as if it were helped by a '*jembregan*'. That was the reason why many female labor had asked children or teenager to help the as '*jembregan*'. The children who were asked to work with were usually have family relation or living in the nearby house.

Related to the use of child labor, many plantation owners had seemed neither not to care about it too much nor forbidden it as long as it given the plantation benefit. For the owners of the plantation themselves, the existence of child labor were considered labor investment in future. They were not only helping to ease and fasten the jobs of the sorted female labor, but they were became the next generation labor of whom they learnt from [10].

According to the research had done by De Kat Angelino, there were the difference wages had received by between the children under 12 yr. with the teenage labor by the age of 12 yr to 16 yr. Those small girls used to receive 2.5 cents to 4 cents in a day, while the teenage girls used to receive 8 cents per 100 bounds from 20 cents which was received by the adult female labor after sorting. So, the girls had received 8 cents and the adult female had received 12 cents. Besides had received the wages from the female labor whom they worked with, those little girls still had received some more little money as same as 2.5 cents from the plantation corporation to buy some snacks. The little money was intended to attract the small girls to work in the ware house of the plantation. It had arisen the jealousy from the teenage labor to the child labor [10].

In 19th century it had begun the intervention to prevent the used of child labor in any sectional industry by various countries (in Europe and in North US) by the aim to protect the children from many access of industry which was very dangerous at the time [11]. As the consequences of being a member of UN, as the main organizations of ILO, The Netherlands therefore signed one of the first ILO's convention in Geneva, which was related to prohibition in the use of child labor and prohibition of the night

shift to the female labor in industry [12]. Nonetheless have not seen the seriousness of the Dutch colonial government to run the contents of the convention.

As the pressure from Geneva, therefore in 1924 The Netherlands Indies Government by Labor Office (*Kantoor van Arbeid*) held a survey study as a preparation to apply the convention in The Netherlands Indies. The result of the survey study appeared an objection from the owner of tea and tobacco plantation in Vorstenlanden. Similarly happened in *afdeeling* Klaten. The tobacco plantation owners only agree if the legislation can be applied for child labor who worked as 'helper' for the women beneficiaries and measuring of tobacco, tobacco overlay duty of the heap, sweeping the floor, piled and turned tobacco and help current tobacco accumulate. But these rules can not be applied to child labor who worked for quality sorting, color sorting and *jembreng* tobacco because it can make a seriously harm the tobacco companies. As it was written in *Volksraadstukken* 1925, the plantation had an argument that prohibiting the children labor would cost the production and caused suffer financial lost to the local people [13].

As the objection appeared, the Netherlands colonial government had researched on the use of child labor in the tobacco plantation in *afdeeling* Klaten. The research had done in 1929 obligated to Inspector Labor Office, P. de Kat Angelino accompanied by Supervisor Java Labor, Raden Iskandar. The result of the research which had done by P.de Kat Angelino was that the objection of the tobacco owner plantation in Vorstenlanden to the plant of the law implementation on forbidden child labor could be discussed. One of the way was by re-defining to the content of the law by changing the minimum child labor age to become 12 yr. (although in The Netherlands, in the new labor law, it had just raised up the minimum age of child labor into 14 yr), decreased the definition of "night shift" which was time to break was for 11 h into only for 7 h, that was from 10 p.m. at night to 5 a.m. in the morning, without trying to involve child labor to the sector of agricultural [13].

So, the colonial government effort to limit the use of children labor was not as successful as it willing to when it had to face with the objection of employer, especially from the plantation industry. The government considered more on the side of the plantation owners than the destiny of the local labor especially the child labor. This is not surprising given that the plantation owner is a major supporter of the group expansive colonial policies. Besides motivated by an attempt to maintain the status quo of their economic activity, most of the plantation owner is the former colonial government officials and their families [14].

The consequences of the used of child labor and the un-successful implementation of the law of child labor minimum age caused the stuck on the qualified human investment, so it had created the permanently economic migrant in Java. As ILO declaimed that society with high intensity of child labor would easily trapped in low level equilibrium, where relatively un-skilled labor would produce low quality stuffs and in low level of productivity as well [15]. As long as the children are being labored, there will not be created the educated society, there would be only low economic migrant.

The results of the implementation of the rules on the restriction of working age were not unable to put and end to children as workers. On the contrary, the presence of regulations provide a minimum age limit of 12 yr created groups of child labor aged from 12 yr who are working legally.

3. Conclusions

The child labor in the tobacco plantation in *afdeeling* Klaten could be represented by the existence of *anak jembregan*. *Anak jembregan* was a called named for the children who had worked to help the female labor who had signed to smoothen the tobacco leaves and sorted them out. The female labor aimed to get more wages then they had asked *anak jembregan* to work with them. They preferred the children under the age of 12 because the children could be paid cheaper and they were more obedient.

The existence of the children were then being used by the owner of the plantations as the next generation labor from whom the children learnt from, so that the corporation would not find the difficulties in finding labor and trained them from the beginning. It could be saying that this was the framework of trained labor which could thrift the cost; it was favored by the owner of the tobacco plantation. Something that we could regret was the mental attitude of the colonial government which more take-side on the owner of plantation than to the child labor. It could be easily seen from the final decision of the impose of the 1925 law, which legalized the use of children labor that lowering the minimal age of child labor that initialed by ILO, from 14 became 12 yr.

Child labor who was in the tobacco plantation in *afdeeling* Klaten was the impact of the poverty of family labor in the Netherlands Indies. The poverty impacted widely to both the live of the men and also the children. The condition was being worst by the minimal education facilities for the children from the second class society. The children were trained only to survive by working with any wages. Considering that children are the next generation of a nation, so bad or good quality children life will effected directly on the quality of the children and then ended up in the quality of the nation itself. The

children who were conditioned as certain child labor will have different quality with the children who were brought with the wholesome education.

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