

Conference Paper

Rice Policy in Java from Traditional Kingdoms to Dutch Colonial Time

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Abstract

Rice is main food for Indonesian people nowadays. Rice is consumed by all people in Indonesian society and planted in several places in Indonesia. Based on the historical data, rice was dominantly planted in Java, Due to the importance of rice, any political ruler in Indonesia paid attention to rice to stabilize his authority. This article will conduct historical analysis about the policy of rice from traditional ruler in Java Dutch Colonial. For analyzed it used historical method by using historical sources which searched from National Library Jakarta, National archive Jakarta, and KITL collection from Leiden University Library, and Mangkunegaran Palace Library. The research finding show that rice was the main food from Traditional Javanese kingdom to Dutch Colonial time. The Ruler take special policy to made rice availability for people prosperity.

Keywords: rice, prosperity, traditional, historical sources, ruler, availability

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1. Introduction

Recently, rice become main food that consumed by most of Indonesian people. It is long process to be internalized from Javanese and Malay food culture to all Indonesian people. Since rice is main food, the issue of rice has become the main attention of the ruler from classical to modern ages. The kings in the ages of the Hindu, Buddha, Islam, Dutch Colonialism, up to post-independence government give big attention on the rice stockpile for their people. The scarcity of rice can be political burden and obstacle for their authority legitimation. Based on that, Indonesian known as agrarian country. (Wasino, 2017 b).

Rice culturally influenced by Indian tradition of food. Java was the most be influenced Island by Indian culture in long history, then tis island tradition of rice cultivation and consumed has long story. The success story in Java, rice be spread in several places in archipelago as the main food too, and change the main food of several ethnic in Indonesia as Corn in Madura, Sagu in Ambon, Cassava in the upper land of Java, and soon.

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The domination of rice as main food in Indonesia are caused several factors. *Firstly*, rice was viewed as good food and better than another food. Rice mostly consumed by Indonesian elite, in Java there was special rice for nobles family namely “Raja lele rice”. For the second level of people can consumed the mass rice as “Cempo”, “Menthik”, “PB”, and “IR”. Until now the gradation of rice still take place, namely “lower” and medium “rice”. The people whom consumed main food non rice in Indonesia was viewed lower class than people whom consumed rice. *Secondly*, the government policy made rice was be main food from the Ethical policy to Suharto era. Especially by building irrigation for watering paddy plantation. *Thirdly*, spreading Javanese people in some places in outer island especially by transmigration programs that was made spreading rice plantation tradition in Sumatera, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua Islands.

The important of rice as main food for the people had correlation the government policy. Every ruler in Indonesia (especially Java) always take attention to the availability of rice. How strategy and policy of the rulers from time to time will be analyzed in this article.

2. Research Method

This article based on several research activities. *Firstly* researched was done at 1996 in cooperation between Gadjah Mada University and Leiden University. *Secondly* research was done 2010 in cooperation with Direktorat Jenderal Sejarah dan Purbakala, Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Indonesia. *Thirdly* research in 2017 in cooperation with Semarang State University Research Institution. Historical method were used following several steps, search for historical sources, critical analysis of historical evidence, interpretation of historical facts, and historiography. (Wasino, 2006; Tosh, 2007). The historical sources was search for from National Library and National Indonesian Archive in Jakarta, KITLV Collection in Leiden University, and *Rekso Pustaka*, Mangkunegaran Palace Library.

3. From Mythology to Traditional Kingdoms of Java Policy

Rice is regarded having sacred value for the ruler and its people. It is related to the myth of Dewi Sri (Shri devi) as the representation of the Goddess of Rice and Fertility. The tale of Dewi Sri is the story told from generation to generation for Indonesian people, especially in Java which is the most populous in Indonesia. The myth of Dewi Sri consists of various story versions in Indonesia. The oldest myth version states that

Dewi Sri is the wife of Dewa Wisnu (Sri Visnu), the God of World Preserver (Gelpke in Sajogyo and Collier, 1986:1-20). In another version, Dewi Sri is related to Raden Sadana, both are the creature of God derived on earth to bring the seed from heaven in the form of apple (kuldi fruit). Dewi Sri and Raden Sadana often exist in the farmers' houses and give the farmers seed from kuldi fruit in form of rice to replace corn and cassava that are used to grow by the people (Suyami, 2001).

The myth related to Dewi Sri has ingrained in Indonesian people and culture. Rice is regarded as better grow than any other crops (palawija) planted by the farmers and consumed by Indonesian. Even in several places in Java in 1960s, rice is adequate staple food for Indonesian people, therefore it symbolize the prosperity of Indonesian people.

Because of rice was related to religious value- refer to prosperity symbol of the country, then the Javanese kingdoms tried to made availability of rice. At the Mataram Hindhu Kingdom, *Rakai Layang, Dyah Tulodhong* at September 921 M made decision that Bhagawanta Bari area in Culanggi as *Sima* (free tax area). It was as honor to the local ruler which made irrigation dam in Harinjing river for paddy plantation Poesponegoro,1990:151). In Mataram Islam, several century later Raja Amangkurat I (1645-1677), made special policy by prohibition in import of rice (1655), because of the rising the rice price until 300 cent. (Timmer,1981:33). Also Adipati Mangkunegara VII in Surakarta made special budged for building irrigation dam di the dry area, Wonogiri regency from 1916-1930 (Wasino,2014).

Strategy for made availability of rice also be supported by cultural symbols. At the palace levels there was ceremonial for honor tom paddy as symbol of prosperity. At was happened in *Sekaten* ceremonial (ceremonial for Mohammad Prophet births day) every 12 Maulud, the Javanese Callender. At the village levels there were "Bersih Desa" ceremonial that held post paddy harvest. At that ceremonial usually held Wayang performance (Javenese shadow) by the of story "Sri Mulih" (the return of Dewi Sri), the return of paddy, as symbol of prosperity.

4. Dutch Colonial Policy

Since the Dutch East Indies formed in the early twentieth century, attention to rice is insufficient. Instead, the rice fields belonging to farmers were reduced for commercial cultivation, especially sugar cane. This commercial plant must scramble with rice crop for the land from farmers. An alternating pattern (rotation) of a rice field belong to farmers for planting sugar cane and rice has shown the Dutch colonists' attention since Cultivation

System (1830-1870) to the Liberal Colonial Politics (1870-1900) was unfavorable (Wasino, 2017:260). The Indonesian farmers was defeated on competition in the dualism economy between western capitalism and indigenous economy (Boeke, 1953; Burger, 1983). As a result, there was a lot of poverty among farmers that Geertz mention as a shared poverty in (Geertz, 1963).

The decline in farmers' prosperity in rural Java evoked criticism among the Dutch themselves. The strongest criticism was from Brooshoft, a mulatto Indo Dutch journalist who worked at the *de Locomotief* newspaper in Semarang. In his review stated that the people around the Semarang Residency, especially in the Demak and Grobogan Districts, there were many poors and consequently experienced hunger and death. (Sri Hartatik, 2002). Brooshoft criticism pattern is similar to criticisms made by Multatuli in *Lebak Banten* as outlined in his novel, published in 1860 entitled *Max Havelaar*. He criticized the colonial Dutch people enjoyed the benefits of the Cultivation while the people of Banten experienced oppression and poverty. Peak criticism of colonial policy towards rural farmers of the Dutch East Indies came from van de Venter. He said that the Dutch had a lot to benefit from the colonies but did not pay attention to the colonized people. This kind of politics is seen as the sin of colonialism (*een eireschuld*) from religious perspective. This criticism was written in the magazine "de Gids" which is a magazine that is widely read among members of the Dutch Parliament (Ricklefs, 1992: 228; Ge'Prince, 1989;; Wasino,1997:2).

Van de Venter proposed a way out to overcome poverty in the Dutch East Indies. The idea is known as van de Venter Trilogy, which suggested intervention in the development of people prosperity of Dutch East Indies to the government in the form of three policies, namely: education, irrigation, and emigration. Education is aimed at educating the East Indies people by building the education institutions for the people. Irrigation is aimed at increasing rice production so that the people's prosperity and buying power increases. Emigration is intended to equalize the densed population in Java. While other islands such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and many other had less densed population.

To ensure the people welfare decline in the colonies, it needs to set up a commission that investigated these problems. In 1902, a committee was formed headed by Resident H.E. Steinmetz. Its job was to investigate the causes of welfare declining. The results were published in 35 volumes of the report summarized in Hasselman (1914). Van de Venter, Kielstra, and Fock each were ordered to make an investigation and submit the report within a short time. Although in retrospection, it was not clear that the "welfare decline" can be fixed for the period around 1900, in the formulation of "prosperity policy",

the declining standard of living is regarded as a fact. The result of the study provided good reason for the Dutch Colonial Government to implement welfare policy within the framework of the Ethical Politics in the Dutch East Indies (Wasino, 2017:93).

For the sake of plant development of both staple food crops and export crops, especially in Java, the Dutch East Indies government took policies to improve food production. The policies were taken apart from policies which were pro industry plantation crops to be exported. These policies include: the development and irrigation repair management, agricultural research, agricultural field expansion, agricultural education, credit for rural people, land renting, and budget provision for agriculture development (S. Margono, 2010: 62-63; Wasino, 2017 b).

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