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Subordinate Peasants in Mid-19th Century Java

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I. Introduction

Recent noteworthy research concerning the Javanese rural economy during the period of *Cultivation System* in the mid-19th century will be discussed first, and an analysis of the main points of this research will determine the scope of the topic dealt with in this paper.

An examination of the direction of recent research reveals three distinct trends. Researches aimed at overcoming the traditional and ideal theory of Javanese rural society as exemplified by the researches of Onghokham [10] and Breman [4] represent the first trend. Extensive criticisms of the Geertz [8] theory embodied in the researches of Elson [5], Alexanders [3], Knight [9], Fernando [7], and White [11] characterize the second trend. The third trend is typified by the research works of Fasseur [6] which show a preference for the advancement of a positive analysis of *Cultivation System*. These three research trends are closely connected and they complement each other. These trends, however, will be classified into three groups to facilitate the recapitulation of the main arguments for each representative research.

Onghokham and Breman both attempt to dislodge the primacy of the traditional and ideal theory of Javanese rural society. In the traditional theory, numerous highly self-sufficient, closed and homogeneous village communities exist in the shape of a small cosmos.

Onghokham, taking Madiun rural society as an example, analyzed the change of class relations in the process of transition from the Mataram Kingdom to a colonial state in his doctoral dissertation. He stressed the existence of class relations in Javanese rural society since the Mataram period by examining the continuity and change of the local chiefdom. He reckoned that Dutch authorities cooperated with the indigenous chiefs until the end of the period of *Cultivation System*. These indigenous chiefs called *Bupati* had strong power: they levied taxes in kind and demanded corvee from the direct producers. Dutch authorities therefore allowed *Bupati* to fortify his power in order to expand *Herendienst* for *Cultivation System*. Onghokham also showed that there was class differentiation among the peasants in his analysis of the peasantry. He pointed out two distinct peasant classes: the landholding peasants called *Sikep* and the subordinate peasants. The subordinate peasants cultivated their master's land and their labor substituted

for the master's corvee. When the burden of corvee for landholding peasants was increased by the colonial regime, land was communalized to increase the number of landholding peasants capable of paying the corvee. Likewise, Onghokham noted some changes in the relationship between the landholding and subordinate peasants. He also concluded that all peasants were strongly dependent on the colonial state.

On the other hand, Breman analyzed Cirebon rural society. In his paper on the pre-colonial and early colonial period, Breman asserted that the vertical relationship between the local chief or landlord and the peasantry was primarily more important than the territorial bondage of village communities. Even in the colonial stage, the local chiefs still wielded strong power: the colonial authorities had to make use of the local chiefs to procure laborers for *Cultivation System*. The territorial bondage of village communities was strengthened with colonization because the village communities were made into tax units. Breman also emphasized the two peasant strata: landholding and landless peasants. He contended that the assimilation of these two groups was limited and that this social stratification continued to exist even in the period of *Cultivation System*.

The second trend of recent research is criticism of the Geertz theory. Discussion of the theory of "involution", which was suggested by Geertz in 1963, has been the predominant subject of recent advances in research on the economic history of Indonesia. Critical appraisal of the Geertz theory seemingly has become the mainstream of both theoretical and analytical analyses. Elson, Alexanders, Knight, Fernando, White and others criticized the Geertz theory by analyzing sugar cultivation areas in the period of *Cultivation System* in the mid-19th century. The ideas they criticized were the theory of "ecological coexistence" and "shared poverty". While Geertz emphasized the interdependent relationship between export-oriented agricultural production and indigenous self-supporting production, the critics pointed out their competing relationship. Geertz explained the labor-intensive reaction of indigenous agriculture through the concept of "involution" and proposed the theory of "shared poverty" based on the assumption of the maintenance of highly social and economic homogeneity among the peasant classes. The critics totally denied this image of a homogeneous rural society from the viewpoint of rural stratification.

Elson, Knight, and Fernando emphasized the development of rural diversification from the beginning of the 19th century to the period of *Cultivation System*. They believed that land-holding peasants shifted their burden on their subordinate peasants even in the area of *Cultivation System*. The communalization of land to increase the number of farmers capable of paying corvee was brought about by the partial increase of nuclear farmers. Elson and Knight insisted that this was not equal to the distribution of land to all the peasantry. Furthermore, they pointed out that at the end of *Cultivation System* lower class peasants constantly became seasonal free laborers. These lower class peasants could not depend on agriculture

alone because of the reduction of rice production, the difficulty of *Sawah* expansion, and the decrease in secondary crop production. Elson, Knight, and Fernando also highlighted an important weakness of the Geertz image of a homogeneous rural society by acknowledging the existence of and paying close attention to landless peasants called *Menumpang*. The examination of subordinate peasants is one significant contribution resulting from a discussion of the Geertz theory.

The third trend is the positive and detailed research of *Cultivation System* by Fasseur. He clarified the total structure of *Cultivation System* by using a number of non-published primary sources. In addition, Fasseur examined the direction the Dutch parliament took with regard to the colonial problem at that time, the activities of private enterprises, and the relation between the rise of the liberal party and the change of colonial policy in the 1860's. Fasseur, however, did not deal with the controversial Geertz theory.

Taking these three research trends into account, this paper will analyze the labor formation of sugar production regions in the mid-19th century, especially paying attention to the labor force of subordinate peasants.

The land system and the forms of existence of landholding peasants who were directly involved in production were previously studied using *Eindresume* [2]. Since this summary contains the results of an actual investigation made by the colonial government office, the existing conditions of land ownership by peasants, the authority and obligatory responsibilities concomitant with land ownership, and regional differences, are believed to have been clarified to some extent. The limitations of these historical materials, however, has resulted in a lack of analysis of the different forms of peasant classes. Although the forms of existence of landholding peasants have been clearly delineated in *Eindresume*, many aspects concerning the other classes of peasants remain indistinct. This research attempts to study these other classes by first focusing on the analysis of landless subordinate peasants.

The main primary source in this paper is Umbgrove monographs [1]. A part of this primary source has already been made use of by Fasseur, Elson, Fernando and Knight for the purpose of conducting each specific regional study. In this paper I have tried to obtain the total image of sugar producing rural areas by using all of the Umbgrove monographs.

II. Subordinate Peasants during the Forced Cultivation Period

1. Identification of the social status and forms of existence for subordinate peasants

An enumeration of the various names used to refer to subordinate peasants in different regions is shown in table 1. Generally, the names used to refer to both landholding and landless subordinate peasants differ depending on the region. One particular observation is that even if the names used were the same, the forms of existence differed depending on the region. *Menumpang*, a widely used appellation for subordinate peasants, was used in Priangan to refer to subordinate peasants with houses and live-in subordinate peasants with families. The same name was used in Banyumas to refer to subordinate peasants with houses, and in Japara and Surabaya

Table 1. Names of Landholding and Subordinate Peasants

Residency	Landholding Peasant	Subordinate Peasant	
		having own house	living in the master's house
Cirebon	Sikep	Menumpang	Bujang
Priangan	Cacah Baku	Menumpang	Menumpang Bujang (bachelor)
Tegal	Janggol	Pondok karang	Pondok Bujang (bachelor)
Pekalongan	Sikep		Mondok Menumpang
Japara	Orang kuwat	Orang duwung	Menumpang
Banyumas	Kuli	Menumpang	Rayat
Bagelen	Kuli	Pondok tempel Menumpang	Rayat
Kedu	Kuli baku	Tempel Menumpang	Menumpang Rayat
Surabaya	Gogol	Anguran	Karangkopek (kin) Sinoman (kin: bachelor)
Madiun	Kuli kuwat		Menumpang
Kediri	Samahan		Menumpang
Pasuruan	Gogol		Kempitan Joko (kin: bachelor) Mondok (non-kin)
Probolinggo	kenceng		Menumpang Magang

Source: *Rapport Commissie Umbgrove, Monografieën van Suikerfabrieken.*

to refer to subordinate peasants living in the master's house. Another remarkable observation is that in the case of live-in subordinate peasants in regions like Priangan and Tegal, a distinction was made between those with families and those who live alone. This classification also differed depending on the region. In Surabaya and Pasuruan, classification of live-in subordinate peasants was based on blood relations. In some cases, the name used for a blood relative was different from the name used for one who was not kin.

Differences in the way subordinate peasants were called reveal their status, based on the degree of subordination of the peasant to his master. A distinction was not only made between those subordinate peasants with houses and those who live-in with their master, but a distinction based on blood relation was also made even among those of the same class. For example, live-in peasants who are blood relatives of the householder were ranked higher than those who were not kinsmen. Of the many intriguing aspects of this social ranking, one point that merits particular attention was the existence of a clear classification of personal qualifications which is exemplified by the distinction based on blood relations practiced in the Surabaya region. Generally speaking, the subordinate peasant was not barred from attaining recognition as a landholding peasant. The subordinate peasant can gain social advancement if the village council, composed of landholding peasants, deems that he has an ability to fulfill various obligatory responsibilities. Accordingly, a subordinate peasant from a different indigenous group may achieve the same status as those of the group he lives with. In Surabaya, however, *Menumpang*, which was used in this region to refer to a live-in subordinate peasant who was not a blood relative, was not allowed to change his social status. This was a situation definitely different from other subordinate peasant classes. In this case, the degree of subordination of the peasant to the master was extremely strong.

On the other hand, the degree of personal dependence of the peasant to the master shows some laxity. In Cirebon, for instance, *Bujang* was a peasant whose subordination was restricted to a period of time, which may be a harvest period or a year depending on the contract he made with his master. *Bujang* lived in his master's house and was involved in various tasks. We can possibly refer to *Bujang* as an apprentice. The majority of *Kempitan*, live-in subordinate peasants of the Pasuruan region, leased their master's land; therefore, they can be considered as profit-sharing tenants. If we assume that *Kempitan* was engaged by the master as a profit-sharing tenant, we can conclude that *Kempitan* attained some independence in the management of his land and that his degree of dependence on his master was not strong.

The existence of regional differences calls for a detailed examination of its causes. The socio-economic background for these differences, however, is difficult to find because of the limitation of historical material. One general characteristic

of the regional structure, however, can be pointed out. In regions with a long agricultural history, regions like the central areas of the Mataram Kingdom and the northeastern seaside plains (Bagelen, Kedu, and Surabaya) where there were vast stretches of fertile paddy fields, the organization and social ranking of subordinate peasants were inclined to be more complicated. On the other hand, in newly developed regions populated by migrants like Probolinggo and Besuki and their surrounding areas, the degree of independence of subordinate peasants was conspicuously high.

2. Composition of Subordinate Peasant Classes

The primary sources do not explicitly treat the composition of subordinate peasant classes. Therefore they were studied by region or by sugar-factory area.

According to the Umbgrove Investigation, depiction of the subordinate peasant class composition in Tegal is relatively clear compared to other rural areas. A summary of the results of the investigation of seven factory areas, or 35,376 house-

Table 2. Class Composition in Tegal (Seven factory areas)

	Total number	Percent (%)
1. Privileged class		
a. Nobility, Local Chief, Government Officials	188	0.5
b. Religious Leaders	562	1.6
c. Village Officials	1,898	5.4
d. Others	2,089	5.9
	(4,737)	(13.4)
2. Landholding Peasants (<i>Janggol</i>)		
a. <i>Cultuurdienst</i>	8,900	25.2
b. <i>Herendienst</i>	2,446	6.9
c. Others	174	0.5
	(11,520)	(32.6)
3. Non-landholding household		
a. Merchants, Craftsmen	414	1.2
b. Laborer	426	1.2
c. Others	2,134	6.0
	(2,974)	(8.4)
4. Subordinate Peasants (Orang mondok)		
a. <i>Pondok Karang</i>	6,677	18.9
b. <i>Pondok</i>	3,679	10.4
c. <i>Bujang</i>	5,789	16.4
	(16,145)	(45.6)
Total	35,145	100

Source: *Monografieën van SuikerFabrieken in de Residentie Tegal*.

holds classified by class is enumerated in table 2. Based on this table, we can note that in Tegal, *Janggol* (land-holding peasant) comprised 32.6% of the total, or around 11,520 households. Among the subordinate peasants collectively called *Orang Mondok*, those with houses (*Pondok Karang*) made up 18.9% or 6,677 households, those live-in subordinate peasants with families (*Pondok*) comprised 10.4% or 3,679 households, and those live-in peasants who were single (*Bujang*) constituted 16.4% or around 5,789 persons. The number of subordinate peasants constituted around 45.6% of the total number of peasants; therefore, their share exceeded that of the landholding peasants.

The percentage composition of peasant classes in the Kaliebogor factory area of the Banyumas region is shown in table 3. Based on the total gathered for 34 villages, *Kuli* (landholding peasant) constituted around 51.3% or 1,347 persons, while *Rayat* (live-in subordinate peasants) comprised 48.7% or 1,278 persons. The percentage composition in the Purwadadi factory area is shown in table 4. *Kuli-kuwat* (landholding peasant) made up 41.5% of the total number of peasants; *Menumpang* (live-in subordinate peasant) comprised around 14.7% of the total. The percentage composition of *Paroan* (profit-sharing tenants) in five factory areas of Besuki is shown in table 5. As previously mentioned, a majority of *Paroan* comes from the subordinate peasant class. Of the 82.4% landholding peasants in Besuki, 12.2%

Table 3. *Kuli* and *Rayat* in Kaliebogor

Village number	Kuli	Rayat	Village number	Kuli	Rayat
1	113	144	19	25	17
2	121	177	20	39	34
3	95	174	21	106	80
4	56	24	22	21	11
5	77	66	23	32	20
6	11	1	24	36	26
7	13	15	25	18	18
8	49	35	26	29	24
9	37	19	27	25	11
10	38	17	28	17	16
11	79	58	29	9	9
12	86	59	30	10	4
13	27	28	31	17	4
14	9	13	32	6	6
15	19	12	33	21	10
16	27	28	34	18	15
17	27	25	Total	1,347	1,278
18	34	30	%	51.3	48.7

Source: *Monografie van Kaliebogor*

Table 4. Class Composition in Purwadadi

	Total number	Percent (%)
1. Local chiefs	230	6.3
2. Village officials	396	10.3
3. Religious leaders	113	3.1
4. Craftsmen	340	9.2
5. <i>Kuli kuwat</i>	1,529	41.5
6. <i>Menumpang</i>	541	14.7
7. Others	531	14.4
Total	3,680	100

Source: *Monografie van Purwadadi*.

Table 5. Peasant Classes in Besuki (five factory areas)

Factory	Landholding peasants	Paroan	Seasonal laborers	Total
1. Wringin Anom	2,024	224	250	2,498
2. Olean	972	189	150	1,311
3. Pnjie	1,785	582	250	2,617
4. Buduar	2,266	522	50	2,838
5. De Maas	3,951	117	20	4,088
Total	10,998	1,634	720	13,352
Percent (%)	82.4	12.2	5.4	100

Source: *Monografieen van Suikerfabrieken in de Residentie Besuki*.

Table 6. Composition of Households in 96 Factory Areas

1. Total number of households	374,230	
2. Landholding households	241,273	64.5%
3. Non-landholding households	125,820	33.6%
4. Labor-forced households		
a. <i>Cultuurdienst</i>	226,988	60.7%
b. <i>Herendienst</i>	276,954	74.0%

Source: *Rapport Commissie Umbgrove, Monografieen van Suikerfabrieken*.

were *Paroan*.

The aforementioned examples of the class composition of peasants in various regions were based on limited historical records. Thus an attempt was made to estimate the percentage composition of subordinate peasants based on the investigation of the composition of households in all regions contained in the Umbgrove

material. The results are shown in table 6. In this table, landholding households include those in the privileged class who were exempted from forced labor like the old nobility, the upper class leaders of the region, government officials, and religious leaders. Excluding this landholding household group, 60.7% of the total number of households were those households assigned to cultivate the land, a class which closely resembles the landholding household. On the other hand, landless households in this table refer to merchants and craftsmen whose responsibilities did not include land cultivation. This non-agricultural class possibly comprised around 10% of the total number of households. One can set an upper limit of around 20% for this class, and thus the percentage composition of the subordinate peasants is estimated to be around 20-30% of the total number of households. From the various examples, we can note that there were regional differences in the percentage composition of subordinate peasant households. Unfortunately, a socio-economic background to this phenomenon is difficult to find. Analysis of the percentage composition of the subordinate peasants, however, definitely reveals that the subordinate peasant classes constituted a definite portion of the total number of households in any of the regions.

3. Obligatory Responsibilities of Subordinate Peasants

As previously mentioned, landless subordinate peasants were not regarded as a fixed class. In the Mataram period, it was common for subordinate peasants to be exempted from forced labor except when the state temporarily required them to do so in case of a disaster. The historical sources, however, show some cases where the obligatory responsibilities of the subordinate peasants changed with the expansion of *Cultivation System*. In Surabaya, *Anguran* (subordinate peasants with houses) and *Karangkopek* (live-in subordinate peasants who were relatives of the master) were assigned to small plots of land, the area of which was around one-half to one-fourth of the usual land owned by landholding peasants, and were required to cultivate the assigned land. *Anguran* was not only forced to cultivate the area, but was also required to render service in a factory. The expansion of *Cultivation System* is believed to have led to the adoption of measures aimed at increasing the number of forced laborers. In Surabaya, a number of subordinate peasants bore the responsibilities of forced laborers in their desire to have their own land to cultivate. As confirmed by other regional historical records, this situation can also be observed in other regions. The following are some examples:

(1) *Ajek* (subordinate peasants) of the Tegal region, had usually been required to render service only in special cases like disasters or famine, or when asked to escort a top government official. Around one-half to one-fourth of the subordinate peasants, however, were given to the village chief's land and were made to work on the area. A situation like this resulted from private contract between the village chief

and the subordinate peasant.

(2) *Dunun* (subordinate peasants with houses) and *Mondok* (live-in subordinate peasants) of Japara were also given a parcel of the village land and were required to cultivate it.

(3) *Kenceng Tebu* (landless peasants) of Probolinggo were given their own sugar-cane field and were required to work on it. In return, *Kenceng Tebu* received an income commensurate with the responsibilities they had undertaken.

(4) *Kuli setengah kuwat* of Madiun received one-half to one-fourth of the land appropriated to *Kuli*. These subordinate peasants were also required to render a proportionate amount of work on the given land.

In the above cases, the obligatory responsibilities of the subordinate peasants called *Ajek* and *Dunun* seem to have changed. The subordinate peasants referred to as *Kenceng tebu* and *Kuli setengah kuwat* represent a special class of subordinate peasants who were treated differently from other subordinate peasant classes and were given a fixed area of land.

Aside from the previously mentioned descriptions of the subordinate peasants work, regional reports show that subordinate peasants undertook other forms of responsibility. The Banyumas report points out that while the subordinate peasants were mandated to cultivate the land of the village chief or a government official, most of them were also required to cultivate the master's land. Records also reveal that the subordinate peasants of Tegal did not only do household chores at their master's house, but they also cultivated land, rendered service to the state, and helped in planting crops. Landholding peasants who concurrently served as village chief and village civil servant were observed to have mobilized subordinate peasants for forced labor and agricultural activities.

III. Conclusion

The above findings have clarified the fact that although the degree of their subordination to the masters was rather different depending on each region, subordinate peasants constituted a definite portion of the total number of households in any of the regions.

Furthermore, the status of the subordinate peasants underwent a transformation during *Cultivation System*. The subordinate peasants were considered by the colonial authorities as the source of an additional supply of labor. The colonial authorities made them shoulder the burden of acting as a reserve labor force to maintain a steady supply of labor. Thus the social stratification system of indigenous society did not collapse under the colonial regime, but rather the system underwent synthetic rearrangement.

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