

# Labor Transformation in Javanese Society in the 19<sup>th</sup> – Century

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**Abstract:** The economic history of Indonesia in the 19th - century along with the social transformations that follow it, is important to be studied carefully. The expansion of the colonial government with the monetary economy and the arrival of private entrepreneurs have an impact on economic development. The emerging trend of the situation is the strengthening of interdependence between industrial and raw material producing countries; first party political domination over the second party; the subsystem colonized country from the economy of the colonial state. The studies regarding the history of labor development are still scarce, especially related to the issue of free labor around the 19th - century. The research problem is generally formulated in the form of question “how free labor developed within the economic structure of Java in the 19th - century”. The conclusion is that the understanding of Javanese society in the 19th - century on the status of free labor has changed gradually; the accumulation of occupation and the arrival of private entrepreneurs in the 19th - century strengthened the emerge of the free labor group; dualistic on Javanese's economy in the 19th - century had an effect on the position of free labor in society; the change on the political economy policy of the colonial government in the 19th - century, regarding the labouring system did not make a significant contribution to improving the welfare of free labor.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The scarcity of studies on labor issues in Java in the 19th – century, is one of the driving factors to undertake a more in-depth study. The focused study is more on the development of free labor in Java. Western penetration into Indonesian people life, especially the island of Java in the 19th – century, has increased along with the implementation of the economic policy of the colonial government. The tendency of colonial economic relations pattern is colored by the interdependence between the industrial and the *raw material producing countries*, the political domination of the colonizing parties over their colonies, and the growth of the colonial economic system into the economic subsystem of the colonies (Sartono, 1992:137). This condition affects people's lives including in Java.

During the 19th – century, along with the deepening influence of the West, new contracting organizations and social forms of money-based households have been established. If the labor in the feudal Javanese society before the 19th – century had no commercial economic value and was more viewed as the completeness of devotion system, then with the

intense penetration of the Western economy after the enactment of Agrarian Law 1870, labor gradually entered into a market economy that has an economic bargaining position.

The main problem of this study is “How did free labor develop in the economic structure of Javanese society in the 19th – century?” which described in several research questions as follows: (1) How is the development of the employment of Javanese society in 19th - century? (2) How is the development of labor in a liberal political-economic era in the 19th - century?

## 2 RESEARCH METHODS

This research focuses on the imaginative reconstruction of the historical phenomena of the economic development of Javanese society in the 19th - century, in particular, the issue of free labor critically and analytically based on historical sources and using the historical method. The design developed in six stages as follows: (1) Select a topic, (2) Investigate all relevant evidence; (3) Make a note; (4) Evaluate critically all evidences (source

criticism); (5) Construct the results of research into a correct and meaningful pattern; (6) Presents in a way that can attract attention and communicate it to the readers (Wood Gray in Sjamsuddin, 2007, p. 89). Data collection techniques, in the form of document study, while the instruments being used is the researcher itself. Data analysis techniques using internal and external criticism as the basis of historiography.

### **3 LABOR IN A SOCIAL-ECONOMICS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF JAVANESE SOCIETY IN THE 19TH CENTURY**

In general, relations in colonial society are based on a class system and racial distinctions (Sartono, 1990). The structure of Javanese society before Western penetration can be distinguished on four levels, namely: kings, heads of regions (regent), village chiefs and ordinary people consists of villagers (Burger, 1983: 11). The colonial politics that undertaken during the 19th - century have made the social structure of Javanese society change from four to two layers, the first is the white class and the second is the colored group.

In the 19th - century, Java island gradually began to enter the stage of the forming process of a market society that serves the economy of the colonial country. Western capitalism which relatively modern, young and aggressive - specially built in the big cities - coexists with pre - capitalist traditions which are old, wise and rooted in the villages. If the Western perspective sees work as being paid for wages, it is not so with feudal Javanese society. The Javanese peasant's society perspective in the 19th - century regarding "work" was more influenced by social rather than economic aspects. The system of devotion in this feudalist-despotic society is the meaning of work, that manifested as part of devotion to its master. So the measure of well-being is not measured by how much income, but how much satisfaction their masters have for their devotion, other than that working for wages is seen as a dishonorable activity (Boeke, 1983). On that perspective condition, it is obvious that a wage labor is a less honorable position.

The economic structure of Javanese society, in 1800 to 1900, was marked by the increasing penetration of Western economies based on the modern economic joints on the economy of the population based on traditional economic patterns.

According to Boeke (1983: 11) and affirmed by Sartono (1992), such economies are called dualistic economies. The features of dualistic economy include: (a) The small mobility of production factors in the lower layers (the mass of indigenous peasants) that manifests itself in the limping equation between prices and wages at the same time; (b) The difference between city and village; (c) Penetration of household money to household goods. The necessity of indigenous people for money have been significantly encouraged by taxation policies that established by the colonial government; (d) The gradual disappearance of village household authorities and replaced by the centralization of the governing economic policies of the government; (e) The development of a mechanical life principle coexisting with the organic life principle (often identified inappropriately with adolescence, fatalism and laziness). This process gradually diminishes meaning and even destructs the organic life principle that has diminished the meaning of the "sideline" company of indigenous people.

The labor structure in Java until the first quarter of the 19th - century could not be separated from the land ownership pattern. Everything concerning employment appears to be more clearly oriented towards compulsory submission forms for both land and labor, as a result of an agreement with local rulers. Correlation of labor and land can be seen from the way of labor mobilization by utilizing the easiness of use rights on land and corvee labor to be used for public and private interests of the rulers. Formal arrangement of employment in Java started in 1818, in the form of a prohibition of slave trade, followed by 10 years later, in 1829 the government issued a regulation on the freedom of the indigenous people to grow export crops that can be sold in the international market. Through the policy, indigenous people have an income and will eventually increase the power to purchase goods imported from Europe (Sartono K, 1987: 332). The concept is similar to Raffles point of view, that with the increases in people's purchasing power, the demand for imported goods from Europe will rise as well. However, the regulation did not take place clearly, because of the arrival of new Governor-General Van Den Bosch with the concept of *cultuurstelsel* (Cultivation System).

The growing phenomenon of labor issues between 1830 and 1870 is characterized by an imbalance between the availability of land for compulsory planting and the availability of labor. This conditions is especially felt in the cultivation of sugarcane plantations and the establishment of sugar factories that require more labor than other plants. To

overcome these difficulties, a compulsory labor system is implemented, and only a small portion of the work is completed by wage labor. The establishment of sugar cane processing factories and the transport of plants from fields to factories can no longer be carried out by forced labor, because of compulsory workloads are already burdensome. Kartodirdjo (1987) asserted that if the “*gugur gunung*” or mutual cooperation of road construction work was built, then the planting and processing was done by compulsory labor, thus making it impossible for them to carry out transportation and processing work at the factory. On such circumstances, the wage labor is known, even with relatively small wage rates. In subsequent years, the production is increasing and the demand for wage labor is higher. The composition of the compulsory labor begins to be displaced by the position of the wage labor who is working with a mutually agreed wage system. The number of compulsory labor or forced work gradually diminished, and was finally banned along with the gradual implementation of the Cultivation System at the pressure of the Humanist group in the Netherlands. According to Burger (1954), the abolition of Cultivation System became the beginning of the de-feudalization process in Javanese the social life of Javanese society, and after 1870 there was a condition in which people were dragged into the capitalist mode of production by the power mechanism over labor and land.

If Cultivation System has utilized the traditional or feudal system, and it is strongly disliked by liberals, then to build a new political economic policy, it is necessary to establish a system that gives constitutional authority to private entrepreneurs to develop their investment in Indonesia. The growing power of Dutch private entrepreneurs and industrialization led to the growth of financial capitalism that focused on the necessity of the colonial state as an investment region. So since 1870, the need for capital investment to seek distribution in Indonesia directed to plantation companies. For these specifics of interest the Agrarian Law was issued in 1870 (Kartodirdjo and Surjo, 1991:80).

The enactment of the Agrarian Law 1870 means that land liberalization as the main factor of production and the policy has an impact on other equally important factors of production namely labor. The private plantation system has encouraged the increasing demand for labor and land, as well as an increase in the need for money so that indirectly began to develop habits in society providing compensation for any work in the form of money. Thus, according to Heilbroner (1994:6), the condition

becomes an indicator of optimizing the mobilization of labor as a dynamite factor in the forming of market society, in other words, the emergence of free wage labor, according to Sartono (1987) is a logical consequence of the forming process of market society. The complete abolition of compulsory labor after 1882, there is no alternative for plantation entrepreneurs to look for wage labor in the free labor market.

At first, labor issue is not formally regulated because there is a presumption that in Java with higher population density than other regions in Indonesia, the assurance of labor availability will be fulfilled by itself. A labor policy since 1830-1870 contained in the rules of implementing Cultivation System which is often identified with the exploitation of labor in Java (Mubyarto, 1992:107). The government policy on labor after 1870 is more an anticipation of various issues that arise from capital penetration of private plantation entrepreneurs. In 1872 the government reintroduced the Police Punishment Regulations that impose sanctions on termination of labor contracts (Kartodirdjo, 87: 332). Another rule was issued in 1880 known as “*Koeli Ordonantie*”, which was followed by gradual changes in 1889, 1911 and 1915 (Tauchid, 1952:93).

The emergence of free wage labor in Java actually began to grow since the implementation of Cultivation System. This circumstance is more due to the government's inability to manage the transportation and production sector in sugar factories. And to overcome these issues, the government has no choice but to employ the wage labor provision (Bremen, 1983). So as with the increase in export production, that would also increase the need for wage labor until the end of Cultivation System implementation. Likewise, the needs of private plantations in Java and in the newly opened East Sumatra also experienced difficulties in the provision of the work force, and for that reason, they recruited wage labor which largely from Java (Day, 1972).

The free labor group that worked with wage system in Java in the 19th - century, in sociologically-historically can not be separated from the pattern of social life of the society at that time. The reason to become free wage labor is certainly not a generalizable reason, because of the social conditions of society that also different. However, it can generally be categorized into wage labor groups as forced by circumstances, and volunteer wage labor groups.

The free labor group that forced by circumstances, come from landowners who are inadequate because

part of the land is sold or leased to the planters. According to Kohlberg in his book published in 1909, the income of landowners from rent or sale of land is often not sufficient for life, take into account of the lifestyle of some of them that likes to waste money on non-productive activities, so to cultivate their own land they do not have the medium, either agricultural tools and animal for towing. Therefore they reluctantly become wage labors on plantations. This group is called *gogol* (Kohlbrugge in Breman, 1987).

The second group, voluntary free wage labor that is more liberal in scope, they will move to the area that needs them, from densely populated areas to less populated plantations. The plantation for the smoothness of the production process required moonson labor which is free to roam with the daily wage system (*dagloon*). They are the so-called traveler's people or can be called Javanese gypsies that remain the people without a home and nomadic from one village to another, even from one plantation to another. They live unattached to any village, nor do they cling to any habits and often commit fraud (Haselman, 1962:31-32). They originally came from landless peasants, who later formed a community in centralizing the barracks of settlements and uprooted from the life of their village societies. Usually, these groups are not permanent peasants, the coolie barracks who are responsible for transporting, typically employing such people. Millard in 1862 found that it was from this group that most European entrepreneurs actually meet their needs for labor. Of course, it must be understood if they are often absent and screw up on their works (Breman, 1987).

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The government's economic policy between 1830 and 1870 forced the socio-economic structure of the village to open itself wider to the development money economy and the capitalization of land and labor became more apparent and the increasing power of the European bureaucracy supported by the village bureaucracy. Javanese economy in 19th - century had a dualistic characteristic that characterized by the socio-political structure of traditional and semi-feudal society, alongside with new economic principles which built on the more open and free socio-political structure of society. The development of a private plantation economy under the enactment of Agrarian Act 1870 has gradually created free labor market and a decrease in the use of compulsory labor. Complete abolition of compulsory labor after 1882

forced entrepreneurs to seek wage labor in the free labor market.

The term of free labor in Javanese society during the 19th - century underwent changing process from the placement as a less respectable profession within the old tradition, significantly changing into a developing promising profession. Nevertheless, what has not changed significantly is not in the view point of the term free labor as a profession, but in the aspect of motivation or encouragement to become free labor. Until the end of the 19th – century, the urge to become free labor was more motivated by the helplessness of the labors in choosing and determining work. The emergence of moonson labor provides big opportunity for the growth of free wage labor. The increasing of opportunity to become free labor did not run parallel with the increase of Javanese peasant's welfare. Yet, this study has proved that the growth of free labor from 1800 to 1900 shows a significant development in the economic development of Javanese society.

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