

Tracking State Involvement in Rice Trade: The Case of Parepare Port in the Makassar Strait Area, 1933–1942

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ABSTRACT

The global economic depression of the 1930s prompted the state to intervene in various aspects of the economy in the Dutch East Indies, including the rice trade. The fall in international rice prices made domestic production rice even more incapable of competing with imported rice. This situation inspired further involvement of the colonial government in the rice trade in the Dutch East Indies during the 1930s. This article discusses the state's involvement in rice trade during the depression of the 1930s with a focus on the Port of Parepare in the Makassar Strait area. By using historical methods, this study relies on sources, such as official reports of colonial officials, journals, newspapers, and magazines. The findings of the study show that the involvement of the colonial government had a significant effect on the rice trade at the Port of Parepare. State intervention not only changed the rice trading system but also had a positive impact on the dynamics of the Port of Parepare. This article also shows that the dynamics of a port is entirely dependent on the presence of the state in trading activities, in addition to its strategic position and support for the hinterland region.

Keywords: state, rice trade, Parepare port, Makassar Strait

1. INTRODUCTION

Rice is an essential element in understanding Indonesia's economic history. In the colonial era, the rice issue involved various parties, especially the state. State intervention is seen not only in terms of production but also in terms of rice trade. The global economic depression of the 1930s became the primary basis for the Dutch colonial government to become further involved in the rice trade, as reflected in various interventions on the rice market. Although rice imports continued during the 1930s, state interference contributed to the achievement of the Dutch East Indies as a self-sufficient area for rice in 1941. Besides, the rice cargo that dominated inter-island trade during the 1930s was also closely related to state control, mostly the problem of transporting rice at that time. It implied that sea routes were a fundamental issue regarding the distribution of rice in the Dutch East Indies, as well as land routes. Thus, the port became the ideal point in understanding the colonial government policies related to rice trading practices in the Dutch East Indies.

This study discusses the involvement of the colonial government in the rice trade in the Dutch East Indies with a focus on the Port of Parepare in the Makassar Strait area. The choice of the Port of Parepare based on its

location in South Sulawesi, where this area had an essential position in the rice trade during the colonial period [1]. The questions asked are; What were the forms of colonial government policies at that time and what were the implications for the rice trade at the Port of Parepare.

Previous studies have examined the problem of rice and government involvement in the colonial era [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]. However, various studies that have been conducted still focus on the Dutch East Indies in general. Other studies reveal the involvement of the state in the rice trade and its impact on the socio-economic conditions of society [7], [8]. The relationship between state intervention in rice trade and port dynamics is a topic that has not received the attention of scholars. In the context of South Sulawesi, Nahdia Nur [9] reviewed the rice trade, which focuses on the port of Makassar. Meanwhile, Abd. Rahman Hamid [10] did not reveal the relationship between the involvement of the colonial government and the emergence of Parepare as the rice base for the Mandar maritime network. Therefore, this study explores the involvement of the colonial government in the rice trade at the Parepare port.

This study argues that the state's involvement in the rice trade at the Port of Parepare during the 1930s had a

significant influence, both in the rice trading system and on the dynamics of ports in the Makassar Strait area. The article's description begins with the issue of rice and state involvement in the Dutch East Indies during the first two decades of the 20th century. The next part is the forms of state involvement and their implications for the rice trade at the Port of Parepare.

2. METHOD

This study uses the historical method, which consists of several stages, namely heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The historical method is used to critically examine and analyze historical records and relics [11]. This study relies on primary sources, such as official reports of colonial government officials, journals, newspapers, and magazines. These sources were obtained through the National Archives, the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia and the Deplher.nl website. Meanwhile, secondary sources include various study results related to research topics.

For the discussion to be more focused, the spatial scope of the study includes the Port of Parepare and its buffer areas. Meanwhile, temporally, this study took the time range 1933-1942. The 1933 election referred to the colonial government's first policy regarding the rice trade at the Port of Parepare. The political transition period, which marked the end of the Dutch colonial government in 1942 is the final frontier of this study. Considering the temporality that intersects with the global economic crisis in the 1930s, this study aims to reveal how the country faced food problems during times of crisis from the perspective of the Port of Parepare.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Rice Problems and the Involvement of the Colonial Government from the Early 20th Century to the 1920s

Rice was one of the aspects that received significant attention from the Dutch colonial government, along with the adoption of ethical politics in 1901. In the policy that emphasized welfare of colonies, the importance of rice was seen from formatting the Ministry of Agriculture in 1905. As stated in the action plan at the beginning of its establishment, the objective it is "planning precisely the actions to be taken that will ensure satisfactory long-term yields for the farm of the peasants" [4]. Looking at the condition of rice in the Dutch East Indies at that time, the establishment of the department is quite reasonable.

In various historiographies, the Dutch East Indies was often depicted with an unstable rice situation between demand and domestic rice production. It caused the Dutch East Indies, especially Java, to have long been dependent on imports of rice. At least rice imports have intensified since the 1860s. At that time, dependence on rice imports was not only about the threat of crop failure and the poor understanding of farmers in Java regarding

profitable rice processing techniques but also related to developments in transportation technology, particularly the introduction of steamships. As a result, transportation costs are getting cheaper [5], [6]. Rice has long been a staple food for most people in the archipelago. In some regions, such as Sulawesi and Timor, maize is another essential staple food besides rice. Meanwhile, sago is the staple food in Madura, Irian Jaya and Maluku [1].

The supply of rice for the Netherlands Indies mainly came from mainland Southeast Asia, namely Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar. Agricultural land in these three areas is supported by three major rivers of mainland Southeast Asia, including the Mekong River (Vietnam), the Irrawady River (Myanmar) and the Chao Phraya River (Thailand). Regarding rice imports, for example, in 1874 and 1875, the average annual rice import value was at f 7,783,000 or as much as 6.8% of the total import value of the Netherlands Indies. Although there was a decline in the number of rice imports between 1886 and 1890, during 1896-1900 the full cost of rice imports continued to increase, namely as much as f 15,325,000 or 8.4% of the total import value at that time [12]. Based on these data, the average cost of rice imports in 1896-1900 has almost doubled compared to the number of rice imports in 1874.

Under these conditions, it does not surprise the attitude of the colonial government towards a form of interference has been going on for a long time. E. De Vries's work [13] entitled *De Rijstpolitiek op Java in vroeger jaren* should be mentioned here. Since the VOC period, he said, the Company had attempted to promote and prohibit rice exports. The aim was to keep the cost of living in Batavia low to ensure the satisfaction of the citizens of the city. In contrast to the VOC period, during the second half of the 19th century, the colonial government imposed a tax on rice imports which began in 1815 and only abandoned in 1863. In 1887, rice produced in the Java region was also designated as the only source of food needs for government employees and tin mining area in the Dutch East Indies [13]. This rule contradicts the liberal economic policies implemented since 1870. However, during the second half of the 19th century, various actions by the colonial government primarily aimed at stabilizing rice prices, rather than reducing dependence on rice imports.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the issue of rice had to clash with developments in international politics. Until before World War I, the number of irrigated rice fields in Java had increased to 1 million hectares or 30% of the total number of existing rice fields. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that in 1911 the colonial government had pushed up rice exports to China and Japan. However, due to the estimated rice stock that was no longer sufficient for domestic needs, the colonial government then implemented a ban on rice exports on September 25, 1911. This regulation put the rice trade under tight control [4], [14].

In 1914, the outbreak of World War I caused food and clothing prices to increase. In particular for rice, the price rose to f 11 per *pikul*¹ in February 1918, from previously around f 6 per *pikul* in 1916 [15]. Rice imports also encountered obstacles. Apart from banning rice exports from rice exporting countries, barriers to rice imports also stem from the scarcity of shipping vessels and the closure of ports. Learning from the uncertain situation during World War I, the colonial government then established the Central Distribution Service in 1918. It aims to send rice supplies to areas experiencing a rice deficit. In the same year, apart from encouraging the community to increase agricultural production, plantation companies in the Dutch East Indies were also advised to set aside a portion of land for rice cultivation as conditions for rice in the international rice market improved, regulations which restrictions and prohibitions on rice exports were officially abandoned since 1921. However, dependence on rice imports continued until the late 1920s. It is mainly due to the increasing number of workers. This increase is inseparable from the rapid development of the plantation industry, especially in areas outside Java such as East Sumatra, which has around 540,000 workers and the petroleum industry [1], [4], [12].

3.2 Rice Trade Under the Shadow of the Economic Depression of the 1930s: State Involvement at the Port of Parepare

Starting with the crisis on Wall Street in 1929, the global economic depression has affected various aspects of the Dutch East Indies economy. This effect was evident from the drop in prices for raw goods, particularly sugar, rubber and tin, which at that time were the mainstay export commodities of the Dutch East Indies. Even so, the equally important problem is that the downward trend in prices seems to be seeping into the international rice market. The abundance of rice production in mainland Southeast Asia and restrictions on rice imports from rice importing countries have resulted in rice prices falling faster than export commodity prices in the Dutch East Indies [1], [2], [5].

The Dutch colonial government, in turn, faced a severe rice problem during times of crisis. On the one hand, the price reduction did have a positive impact on the consideration that rice was accessible to all levels of society, which in 1930 had reached 60 million people compared to only 40 million in 1900 [14]. However, on the other hand, rice with low prices from mainland Southeast Asia is a threat to domestic rice production, especially for indigenous people in rice surplus areas. It, of course, also affects the ability of the community to pay taxes.

In this situation, the state seems to have decided to reduce dependence on rice imports and stabilize domestic rice prices. It is known from the attitude of the colonial government that protected local markets by abandoning

traditional laissez-faire policies since 1931 [2]. As a first step, the colonial government issued a regulation banning rice imports, which was in effect for four months from March 1933. A permanent law replaced this rule through *Rijst invoer-Ordonantie* in July 1933. In essence, this regulation limited rice imports through a special permit issued by the Director of Agriculture, Industry and Trade. Apart from imposing taxes, the rule also requires that the name of the port as the point of exit and destination of the rice is included in the license [16]. Since then, the rice trading activities in the Dutch East Indies were no longer under the free market. During its development, this regulation provided "fresh air" for rice surplus areas in the Dutch East Indies, including South Sulawesi.

Geographical factors were the main foundation of South Sulawesi as one of the rice barns in the Dutch East Indies at that time. In addition to fertile soil conditions suitable for agricultural cultivation, the mainland of South Sulawesi is divided by mountain ranges that stretch from north to south, with a small basin in the center. As a result, the mountain range split the peninsula into two parts; the west coast and the east coast. Besides having an impact on rainfall, this situation also affects the rice harvest period. If the east coast usually enters the harvest period in June and July, the west coast area takes place in October and November [17]. Thus, rice fields can be planted alternately throughout the year. Meanwhile, Makassar and Parepare are the two main rice exits on the west coast of South Sulawesi, next to Palima port on the east coast. However, as the state intervened since 1933, Parepare developed as the only important rice outlet in South Sulawesi and the Makassar Strait area.

The colonial government managed the Port of Parepare since March 1905, which was previously under the control of the Kingdom of Sidenreng. Based on the administrative arrangement of *Celebes en Onderhoorigheden* in 1906, the Port of Parepare is included in the Afdeeling Parepare administrative area. On the west coast of South Sulawesi, Parepare is located in a small bay, namely Parepare Bay, with a headland right in front of the port. Under these conditions, Parepare is also known as a safe, natural harbor in all seasons [18]. The river conditions around the port are generally challenging to navigate far into the interior. Therefore, commodity traffic from ports to inland areas or vice versa is highly dependent on land access.

The hinterland is a crucial role for the port of Parepare. This area is an area inhabited by Bugis tribes, such as Sidenreng, Rappang, Pinrang, Barru, Pangkajene, Wajo, and Soppeng. The site is in the central part of the mainland of South Sulawesi today. These plains were the "main suppliers" of South Sulawesi's rice surplus, particularly in the 1930s. In addition, two large lakes also support the hinterland area, namely Lake Tempe and Lake Sidenreng. As for other commodities supplied from

¹ 1 *pikul* is equal to 61.76 Kilograms

the interior, namely copra, candlenut, corn, kapok, tobacco, bananas and coffee [19], [20].

The intensification of agriculture in the Parepare buffer zone significantly determined the role of ports during the 1930s. In the early 20th century, rice fields in South Sulawesi were generally rainfed. As a result, crop yields depend on rainfall and unpredictable climatic conditions. Meanwhile, during the 1910s, rice production in the Parepare buffer zone could be said to be in a conjunctive phase. Between 1911 and 1914, for example, crop failures occurred because of drought. Crop failure also often comes from the threat of plague, for example, an epidemic of rats. On the other hand, during the following three years (1915-1917), the interior areas produced a surplus of rice, namely 20,000, 41,000 and 85,000 *pikul*, respectively [21].

The situation slowly underwent a decisive change. This condition began when an agricultural consultant was assigned to Afdeeling Parepare in 1921 [9]. This step was followed by efforts to build irrigation in the afdeeling area during the 1920s. Until 1933, with a total of 89,840 bau rice fields, there were at least eight irrigation facilities in Afdeeling Parepare. In 1931, agricultural consultant Parepare was also successful in an experiment to control rat plague by using pork poison [22], [23]. In summary, by the early 1930s, the Parepare buffer zone had become a vital rice surplus area in South Sulawesi.

Although the trend of increasing rice production in the Parepare buffer zone had been seen throughout the 1920s, rice trading activity at the ports did not show any significant progress until state intervention in 1933. There were at least two main obstacles at that time. First, rice from Parepare is of lower quality than imported rice, for example, Saigon rice. This problem mainly comes from the rice milling process that has not been managed optimally. Second, the lack of transportation to ship rice to rice deficit areas, especially to Manado and the surrounding areas [24].

The first step of the colonial government was to map the deficit and surplus areas of rice in the Dutch East Indies. Rice deficit areas, such as South and East Kalimantan, North Sulawesi and Maluku were designated as disposal areas for rice surplus from South Sulawesi [25]. The appointment was followed by an effort to consult with local colonial government officials. It was evident when on July 27, 1933, A. Luytjens, the head of the agricultural economy, visited Makassar to hold a conference with L.J.J. Caron, the Governor of *Celebes en Onderhoorigheden* at that time. In addition to discussing rice import regulations, he also reviewed the state of rice in South Sulawesi at that time, which a year earlier had exported around 17,000 tons of rice [26].

The issue of the quality of Parepare rice is the next main task. It concerns the tastes of the people in North Sulawesi, who previously had almost entirely relied on Saigon rice. Besides, the level of fracture of rice from rice mills is still high. This problem was the focus at that time. Ir. Tan Sin Houw, an industrial consultant at the Ministry

of Agriculture, was then assigned to inspect and inform the owners of rice mills in Parepare and Makassar on August 9, 1933 [27]. Besides, for approximately three months at the end of 1933, the consultant also lived in Parepare and Makassar. That way, efforts to help and provide technical information to rice mill owners can run optimally. Two years later, the consultant took the same action, primarily to oversee the implementation of the technical advice of the previous assignment [28]–[30]. Apart from being successful in reducing the level of rice fracture, the various efforts of the consultant showed the seriousness of the state to control the rice trade in Parepare.

Before World War II, the state issued a regulation regarding improving the quality of rice in Parepare. It is related to the formation of *Voedingsmiddelenfonds* (VMF), a semi-governmental institution that aims to buy, sell and supply foodstuffs [5], [25]. The establishment of VMF requires the rice to last longer and not be damaged. The problem is that the rice in Parepare can not last long because the factories often grind unhulled rice in less dry conditions. On that basis, Assistant Resident Celebes, C.H. Ter Laag, then issued the Grain Regulation in 1939. This regulation requires that grain to be ground first is ensured to be as dry as possible. This rule was applied initially only in *Afdeeling* Parepare and Bone and then gradually throughout South Sulawesi [31].

The colonial government also set a maximum price for rice in 1933. Governor Celebes decided the price decision after consulting with the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade in Batavia. In November 1933, for example, the maximum announced price of rice was f 3.50 per *pikul*. A year later, the maximum price for *ludah* rice also began to be determined. This price-fixing benefited farmers, who had previously been disadvantaged by price manipulation by rice mill owners [32], [33].

Another form of state involvement is the problem of rice packaging. In South Sulawesi, rice is generally traded in sack packages made from pineapple leaves or in local terms it is called *balasse*. At the port of Parepare, rice in this *balasse* is transported by boat to the export destination when the eastern season is in progress. However, since 1933 the colonial government introduced new packaging [9], [34]. This original packaging is known as gunny sack (*dubbelzak*). In contrast to rice in *balasse* sacks which were sent directly to the destination after the sailors received rice from rice mills, rice in gunny sacks was usually stored in warehouses before being transported by ship *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij* (KPM) [35].

The problem of transporting rice is also an essential part of state control. Due to the efforts of Department of Economic Affairs, transportation premiums for KPM ships began to be applied at the Port of Parepare since 1934. In 1935, for example, the transportation premium was f 0.50 for every 100 kg of rice [20], [36]. Besides, the KPM also diverted the schedule of ship arrivals at

Parepare port. It is known from the plan for the departure of KPM ships from Makassar port, which has been changed from every Friday morning to Thursday afternoon for lines 19 and 20. One of the goals is that the ship can arrive at Parepare port on Friday morning. That way, trading activities, including loading rice, can run smoothly [37].

3.3 The Blessing Behind State Involvement: Becoming Rijst Haven

Since 1933, the involvement of the state has had a significant influence on rice trade at the Port of Parepare. As described, the massive intensification of agriculture in rural areas carried out in the 1920s was also supported various regulations along with the involvement of the state. At the Parepare port, the country regulates not only the quality of rice but also issues of rice price, packaging and transportation. Thus, the involvement of the state has fundamentally changed the rice trading system at the Port of Parepare.

The most important thing is that the state has provided the stage for Parepare to emerge as the main rice port in South Sulawesi and even in the Makassar Strait area. It is evident from the amount of rice shipped via Parepare. Regarding this situation, it can be seen from the following table;

Table 1. South Sulawesi Rice Exports in 1938 (in tons)

No.	Destination Area	Parepare	Makassar	Palima
1	South Sulawesi	3.653	-	10.600
2	Maluku	3.841	6.595	-
3	Kalimantan	18.002	1.725	-
4	Manado	23.478	3.456	-
5	Timor, Java and other areas	3.360	1.191	506
Total		52.334	12.967	11.106

Source: *Handelsvereniging-Exporteursvereniging Makassar Jaarverslag over 1938.*

The table above describes the rice trade network in South Sulawesi. In Parepare, rice is not only transported to the South Sulawesi and Kalimantan regions but also Maluku, Timor and Java. The table also shows that rice from Parepare was mainly destined for Manado, which was 45% of the 52,334 tons of rice in 1938. Also, from 76,407 tons of South Sulawesi rice exported in 1938, 52,334 tons or 68% of total exports has been issued through the port of Parepare. It explains the importance of Parepare as a gateway for rice in South Sulawesi and even in the Makassar Strait. Therefore, with the intervention of the state, Parepare has developed into a *Rijst Haven* (rice port).

The presence of the state certainly has a significant influence on the dynamics of the Parepare port in the Makassar Strait area. This situation is known from the

increase in back and forth of ships and boats in the harbor. In 1932, for example, 165 ships and 1,461 boats called at the Port of Parepare. In 1934, the numbers were later increased to 192 ships and 1,698 boats. Until the end of the 1930s, boat arrivals in Parepare continued to grow. In 1939, for example, the number of vessels increased to 2,196 boats, although the number of ship visits had decreased, 154 ships. Regarding the decline in ships, it can be understood from the increase in motorboat visits, which in 1939 totalled 47 motor ships with a total tonnage of 66,860 m3 or almost equivalent to the total tonnage of boats, which is 68,073 m3 [38].

Between January and September 1937, the cargo of rice shipped from Java to Outer Java had reached 159,090 tons. Meanwhile, from South Sulawesi as many as 28,427 tons and Bali and Lombok, namely 7,103 tons. The total imports of Dutch Indies rice during that period were 91,676 tons [39]. This figure explains the importance of South Sulawesi in supporting the country's efforts to reduce dependence on rice imports during the 1930s. However, this role is, of course, inseparable from the position of the port and the buffer zone of Parepare as the primary support for South Sulawesi regarding food supply, especially in most of the *Groote Oost* area.

4. CONCLUSION

The global economic depression of the 1930s marked the country's further step forward in the rice trade in the Dutch East Indies. Reducing dependence on rice imports and stabilizing domestic rice prices were the main driving factors for the involvement of the colonial government, especially the rice trade in rice surplus areas. At the Port of Parepare, state interference is reflected in various things, such as improvements in quality, price, packaging and even rice transportation problems.

The country's involvement has improved the rice trading system at the Port of Parepare. Fundamental problems, such as the low quality of rice and the lack of transportation for transporting rice, are no longer the main obstacles. Most importantly, the presence of the state has provided the stage for the port of Parepare to emerge as the primary outlet for rice in South Sulawesi and the Makassar Strait. Therefore, a strategic location and rich hinterland do not mean much to the dynamics of a port without the state's interference in commerce, as seen in the Parepare case.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Syafaat Rahman Musyaqqat and Didik Pradjoko. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Syafaat Rahman Musyaqqat and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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