



The Existence of Boats and Luang People - Maluku - Indonesia

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Abstract. This paper is a narrative of the results of the initial exploration of Luang Island, which is one of the small outermost islands in Maluku, Indonesia. The purpose of this study is to describe the existence of the boats and the Luang people in their lives. This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. The technique used in data collection is through interviews and direct observation in the field. According to Miles and Huberman, the data analysis technique uses data analysis technique, which consists of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusions. The knowledge of Luang people informs them that boats play an important role in their life and culture. In other words, as a coastal community, they see boats as the essence of life and culture. This paper contributes to Indonesia's maritime culture and history of Indonesia as one of the archipelagic countries in the world, especially in the coastal and outermost areas.

Keywords: Existence, Boats, Luang People

1 Introduction

This paper is a development of our poster presentation at a seminar held by the Ethnography, Culture and Anthropology Program at the University of Debrecen in Hungary on October 2022. What is the difference between the previous poster and this paper? This paper applied different methods and approaches, so the results are different from the posters that have been made. The content of this paper is more emphasized on important of the boat in Luang island as transportation and at the same time is one of the results of the wisdom of human hands in the field of art and tradisonal technology [1], [2]. The potential of the sea as a source of people's livelihood requires local wisdom and human hands. The local wisdom referred in this study is the art and technology that can improve the welfare of humankind life, now and in the future.

The history of boats as transportation in Maluku is inseparable from the history of transportation and maritime affairs in Indonesia. Indonesia as an archipelagic country[3]–[7] has diverse cultures and ethnic groups, including the transportation used by

coastal communities [8]–[10]. Thus there are various types of boats that are in accordance with the customs and traditions of each regional shipping technology in Indonesia [11]. Traces of sea transportation in Indonesian maritime history can be found in the reliefs of the walls of the Borobudur temple. Fig. 1 shown the boat symbol on the Borobudur temple.



Fig. 1. The boat symbol on the Borobudur temple

Identification of the use of boats as a transportation can be seen through the migration of people in Indonesia, such as expeditions from Java to Sumatera. The expedition often called a Malayan expedition, which was carried out during the time of King Kertajaya. Furthermore, in the story of a Balinese group who came by their boats (*kora-kora*). Another story is Raden Saleh of the Madura Island, who came with his people to Nusa-laut. In Maluku, there are also oral traditions that describe the migration of people from one island to another. For example, the inhabitants of the islands of Enu and Karang Island who migrated to various places in the Aru archipelago using *belang*, the migration of people from the island of Sink Bersabi to the Tanimbar Islands and the surrounding islands, including the southwest (Babar Island). The other stories is about the arrival of a group of people from Seram Island to Saparua Island by using a small boat (*Sampan*). It is not surprising that the name of Saparua comes from the word *Sampano Lua/Rua*, which means two boats (Two canoes), because it refers to the myth of the arrival of the ancestors of the people of Saparua Island.

The myth about the destruction of the islands in Southwest Maluku, including Luang Island, began with a pair of brothers going to East Timor by boat and take part in a competition there, which ended in the destruction of the islands in Southwest Maluku. The story from Leti Island (Nuwewang) is that they migrated from one big island to Nuwewang village. In historical records, boats are also used as transportation in war. This can be found in Central Maluku. It can be found in various historical sources regarding the existence of the *kora-kora* boat used in carrying out the *hong*i voyage [12], [13]. In the western part of Indonesia, it can be found Pati Ketir in the city of Hilir as one of the Javanese rulers who used 92 boats operated by 12,000 people to attack the Portuguese in Malacca [10]. In addition, based on research by archaeologists, there are

traces of boat use in the world, especially in Southeast Asia [14]–[18] and also in Maluku can be seen on the walls of the cave.

2 Research Methods

To answer the research question "how do boats and Luang people exist?" a qualitative research method with a narrative approach is used. Data was obtained through literature study and interviews in the field. The population in this study is the entire population of Luang Island. The informant collection technique used is based on the type of snowball sampling or chain sampling. The selection of informants is based on information from the first, second, and third informants, and so on, so they roll like a snowball. This type of selecting the informants is very good for the use of in-depth interviews related to how important boats are in the Luang Island community in depth and makes it easier for this study to get informants in the field. [19], [20]. The data were analyzed using interactive analysis, which consisted of four stages, namely data collection and data reduction. In this analysis, the activities in qualitative data analysis were carried out interactively and continued continuously until complete so that the data was saturated. The measure of data saturation in this research on boats and the Luang people is indicated by the absence of new data or information [21]–[23].

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Geography and Ecosystem of Luang Island

Only for some readers who do not know, that the Bajo people are well-known in Indonesia as sea people [28]–[30]. As we know that Indonesia is one of the largest archipelagic countries in the world. It is certain that apart from the Bajo people, there must also be other sea people who inhabit coastal areas with different characteristics of the sea identity. There are still many communities scattered in the outermost small islands of Indonesia that have not been exposed to and received less attention from researchers who are also referred to as "sea people". One of them is the Luang people. This paper is the author's initial description of the existence of boats on Luang Island. But in the future, the author will reveal more deeply about how the identity of the Luang people as Laut people with their characteristics and culture are different from other regions in Indonesia. Luang Island is one of the outermost islands in Maluku Province. Administratively, it is included in the Southwest Maluku Regency, Mdonu Hyera District (Fig. 2).

Luang Island is adjacent to Timor Leste in the west and has sea borders with Australia in the south and have geographic coordinate base points connecting the archipelagic sea baselines in accordance with the law international and national [24]–[27]. Luang Island consists of two villages namely West Luang village and East Luang village. Each village is led by a village head. The entire population of the island of Luang are Protestant Christians. Luang Island residents are located on the coast, no wonder if their lives all depend on the sea.

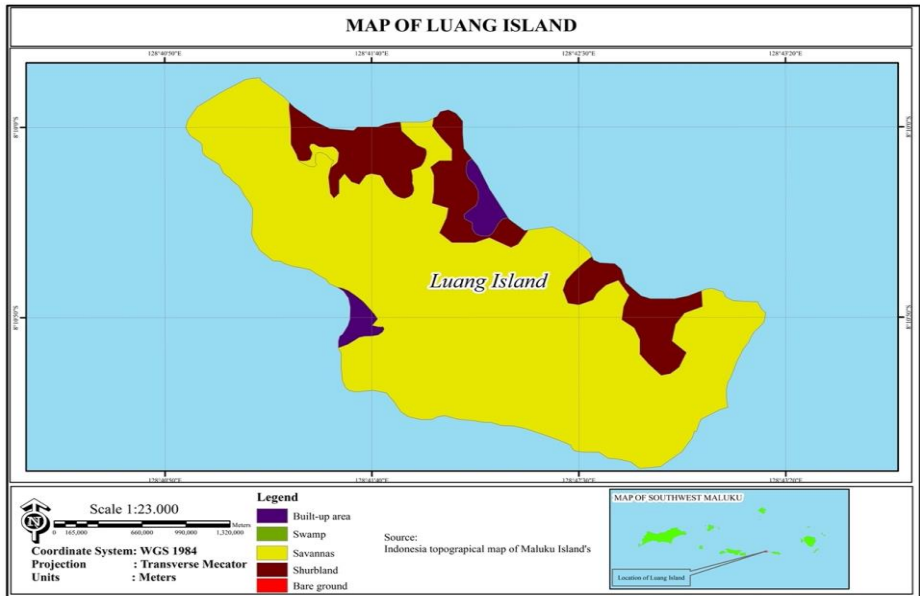


Fig. 2. Map of Luang Island

Discuss about the existence of boats on Luang Island is, of course, inseparable from its natural conditions, both on land and at sea. Both the sea and land are seen as a unified whole rather than separating one another. The sea does not separate the land, and the land does not separate the sea. The two are interconnected and form a single ecosystem that is suitable for the growth of the Luang Island civilization. Understanding the unity of the island ecosystem is the main capital in choosing the right adaptation. Furthermore, adapting suitably is not an ability and knowledge that can be acquired easily and quickly by the people of Luang. It goes through a long historical process through the accumulation of experiences of success and failure. Throughout history, they were able to adapt to their natural environment and develop their culture.

From a distance it looks brownish and gray, and some are blackish, maybe because of the color of the rocks around the mountain body that separates the two villages, Luang Timur and Luang Barat Villages. On the rocky rock and dry soil grow stands of trees, some are stunted, some are half as tall, and some are very tall. Some of these stands have no leaves, some we can count, and some have almost no leaves at all. Many Koli trees grow proudly against the heat of the sun and the strong sea breeze while smiling looking at the firmament whose boundaries are barely visible as if to say, "We are here and still standing". The cactus tree kindly and shyly shows that it can stand in the cracks of large rocks, brown grass is dancing, and other tree stands that usually grow in arid areas while greeting the wind that blows. They grow and develop as if without complaint and submit to the sovereignty of the creator. Date palms thrive in the village of East Luang; a picture like this brings our thoughts to the Middle East region, which is the centre of date palm growth (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). You can see that at the foot

of the mountain, houses are lined up on stilts above the sea on the coast. The boats are usually placed on the beach close to their yard (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3. Potreit of Land Luang Island



Fig. 4. Palm Three and Fruit



Fig. 5. The houses line up in the coast

How can people on Luang Island survive cold land conditions? Far from the city centre, very difficult transportation, and minimal infrastructure. Maybe for the visitor, this situation is a problem, but for natives, it is just normal. Nature shaped them how to survive and manage the environment around them to form local knowledge, traditions and culture that they hold to this day. The Luang people are a group of people who live on the coast and depend on the sea for their lives [24], [31]. Because the land conditions are dry and rocky, they cannot carry out farming activities; the Luang Island sea is abundant with resources of high economic value, such as seaweed, seashell, sea cucumbers, grouper fish and others. Their marine ecosystem is in a healthy condition according to the results of a study by an environmental organization in Indonesia whose centre is based in Germany [32]–[35].

Due to their mobility at sea, the only means of transportation used on Luang Island is a boat. The existence of a boat on Luang Island is not a coincidence but is indeed very vital and supports their daily life until now, becoming a symbol of village spatial planning and a symbol of messenger.

3.2 The Existence of Boats on Luang Island

To understand the social and cultural dynamics of a society, it is necessary to focus into their historical journey [36]. There is hardly any experience or knowledge that is not historical. In the course of this history there have been processes of assimilation and acculturation both intentionally and unintentionally. It's not that we can't escape the past, but the past is the foundation for how to analyze the life of a society [37], [38].

Luang Island has a long history in the discourse of maritime history in Indonesia. Luang Island is the center for the spread of language and culture for almost the entire Southwest Maluku region, even to the Kei Islands. Culture in Luang is influenced by Austronesian culture. The Luang people are known as the people of the sea, they sail by boat to the surrounding islands and even to the island of Java (Surabaya) and often sail to East Timor before they (East Timor) earn the independence from Indonesia. As explained above, their land or soil is dry and rocky. Their goal of sailing out of Luang Island was to buy or barter with neighboring islands. Luang Island has abundant wealth of marine resources and high economic value. They sail by using a sailboat carrying marine products such as dried fish (*nkerna*), dried octopus, dried *bia*, *bakasang* (made from fish), which has been dried in exchange for garden products such as cassava, corn, bananas, sweet potato, vegetables, rice, corn, granulated sugar, spices and other necessities of life that are not available on Luang Island. In this voyage, of course they have knowledge in shipping, indeed the knowledge of sailing they have is simple. They can read and see the position of the moon, the types of stars, the wind, the color of the sky and the state of the oceans. The Luang people are known as brave people in crossing the sea. They are not afraid to sail in a stormy sea (Fig. 6). This type of boat is used by the Luang people in making voyages between islands in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, small boats are used to catch fish in the sea, both in shallow water (*Meti*) and deep-water areas (Fig. 7). There are also boats that are small in the shape of a dimple or that do not have an outrigger. This boat is very rare to find in Luang Island. Furthermore, only a few fruits were seen on the coast in the island. This boat is also

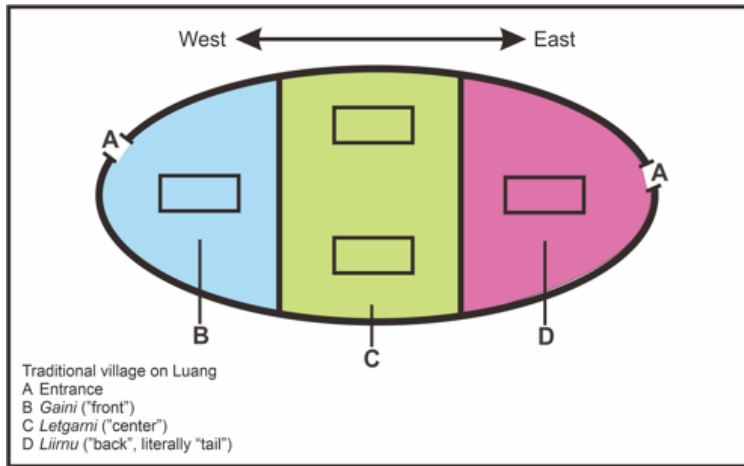


Fig. 10. The Village on Luang Island is Likened to a *Bero*

The existence of a boat on Luang Island, besides what has been explained above, is also a symbol of messenger. Here the boat gives a message that the Luang people are sea people who are brave, diligent and patient in facing life's challenges. In every arid span of the land and every roll of the waves there is a breath of gratitude within them. Land and sea teach them to treat the environment in which they live with respect.

4 Conclusion

A boat is not just a display placed in a cupboard or on a table that is used as decoration or display as accessories to beautify a room. Boats have more meaning and significance than that. In this regard, boats and Luang people are like two sides of a coin that cannot be separated. Boats are not only a means of transportation for the Luang people but also have meaning and significance in the culture of the Luang people. The representation of boats in the culture of the Luang people is a guide in organizing the living environment on Luang Island based on the cardinal directions and the seating position of each family member in the boat. This study recognizes that there are shortcomings, especially not being able to show in detail which clans have positions in the boat and the attributes and meanings of boat ornaments.

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