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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**CHINESE MERCHANTS ROLE OF JAVA TRADE IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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**Abstract**

Chinese arrival in Java was encouraged with significant factors both internal and external. Chinese in Java eventually brought shifting in economical, social, and political aspect of Java under Dutch realm. In 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese in Java were differed into two clusters, known as *peranakan* and *totok*. These two terms possessed different language, culture, economical conditions. This study aimed to determine the role of Chinese merchants of Java during 19<sup>th</sup> century. The study engaged literature study which includes planning, selection, extraction, and excution. Literature review tries to review several books, scholarly articles, and other relevant sources which focused on particular area. Under Dutch realm, Chinese in Java portrayed many different roles, such as moneylenders, middlemen, kapitan, opium traders, and etec. Chinese were considered active in and around Java as the settled in Netherland Indies trade with coastal shipping. Chinese possess privilege spot under Dutch colonial policy, as their advance skill in business and their independency of local rulers. In term of trade, the Chinese were everywhere and significant, since who those obtained desire to perform trade had to work with Chinese. Chinese male who were born in Java and Javanese women they wedded or related were mostly active in participating towards economy.

**Keywords :** Chinese; Java; Merchant; trade; 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## INTRODUCTION

Trade was one of those ancient activities that could be found in any world history and civilization. It seems as a basic instinct of human to fulfill the needs by doing exchange. The trade pattern somehow always evolved and transformed into more complicated ones as time to time. This basic behavior then not only providing benefits in terms of money, but also cultural and ideas. However, trade as an activity has been considered casual activity derived from human beings to do exchange as well as obtain profit (Surya, 2020).

Trade has become distinctive characteristics within Indonesian history (Ricklefs, 2001; Claver 2014). Long distance trade had begun since the age of Srivijaya in Sumatera which flourished at 7th century is the remark how trade has been involved into society ever since in the archipelago (Tarling, 2008; Hall, 2011). Srivijaya also successfully secured the Southeast Asian region of international trade from piracy (Hall, 2011). Indonesia was blessed with both natural resources and precious that produced much wealth. Within the archipelago, many merchants had to cope with massive products, namely pepper, rice, as well as gold, and etc. Java itself were noticed as 'hidraulic society' means the backbone of economy was wet-rice cultivation (Ricklefs, 2001).

Those facts then attracted many Europeans traders, and finally *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) appeared to attempt strength and force in order to monopolize the economy activity. In 19th century marks the new era of Indonesian history, in which VOC collapsed and the power shifting to English (Claver, 2014: 3). Java in other hand, held its peculiarity spot of Indonesian history. It obtained volcanoes and many parts of the regions were fertile soil that suitable for agriculture (Ricklefs, 2005; Tarling, 2008; Claver, 2014).

The prosperity of trade as well as sources offered in archipelago attracted not only European traders, but also Asian traders which visited frequently. As early as 5th century, the record had been written in Chinese chronics relating their visit, along with the areas terms they used to call the certain areas. This is undoubtedly true, since Chinese dynasties had long developed seafaring technique, specifically under the Song realm. Since earlier centuries, Chinese had established themselves as sea explorer and skilled merchants. They adapted to changes and in one way or another would settle in certain place.

Considering Chinese diaspora, it should be noted that Chinese massive migration towards Nanyang (Southern Ocean) was due to significant geographic expansion of Qing Dynasty. From 1680 to 1780, Chinese society experienced unprecedented events regarding

population growth and economy. This result in enthusiasm of Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia supported by Chinese official policy in 1684 (Claver, 2014). As time passed, Chinese minority ethnic was spread out through regions and set themselves as part of significant trade.

Chinese had been long established themselves as middlemen towards European traders, along with Arabs and Japanese. From top to bottom, Chinese were marked as commerce. Chinese acted as shippers, warehousemen, labors, and furniture makers. Middlemen means, Chinese also were suppliers to many products towards town and country (Rush, 1991; Claver, 2014). However, Chinese were considered dominant due to cultural background and ethnic minority position that tended to favored their business skill. They also obtained extensive family and business contacts that led them towards single access upon archipelago trade networks (Claver, 2014).

The time of 19th century was marked as vibrant stage, in which a number of traditional aspects within society, economy, and technology shifted upon significant pace. This modification initially began in north-west of Europe and north-east of the USA then spread out all over the world. Eventually, the influence reached China and Southeast Asia mid 19th century and deep significant effect towards the region. This was encouraged by industrial revolution ranification in Europe reached the region and gained significant changes in many aspects (Oostwouder, 2012).

The relation between China and the outside world had changed dramatically during 19th century that was the results of domestic changes of Qing, external influences, as well as intermediate obstacles for traders. In early 19th century, China's trade balance started to stumble due to population growth and high demand of rice which led to export activities towards Southeast Asia (Oostwouder, 2012). One of the suppliers was Java island that considered hydraulic society according to Ricklefs. This island obtained stable position as well as numerous trading posts and settlements across archipelago.

Revealing Chinese existence in Java during 19th century is a complicated matter. Mostly we knew Chinese were merchants or traders, as well as middlemen. However, we simply cannot deny how they built such a role within Javanese society nor how they integrated themselves into Javanese culture. This paper attempts to reveal the role of Chinese merchants towards Java trade in 19th century using economical and sociological approach.

## METHOD

This research engaged literature review. Literature review tries to review several books, scholarly articles,

and other relevant sources which focused on a particular area. This approach is designed to provide an overview field has been explored while investigating a topic. This approach concerns on a particular subject of interest and including a critical analysis within varied works (Galvan, 2006). The literature review method engaged during this research employing several stages, namely;

1. Planning (formulating the goals of literature review)
2. Selection (selecting the appropriate literature)
3. Extraction (assessment of quality and data acquisition)
4. Execution (results analysis and formulating the conclusion).

## DISCUSSION

### Chinese Diaspora

Chinese term refers to language, ethnic, as well as culture. Chinese ethnic existence had been long integrated towards Southeast Asian history. Great leaders such Corazon Cojuangco, Philippines' President, Kukrit Pramoj, Thailand Prime Minister to Indonesian's former president Abdurrahman Wahid have acknowledge their Chinese descendant. Furthermore, Chinese Lunar Year is officially celebrated in Indonesia since 2000 (Hau, 2012). Sinicization or resinification term has been engaged towards devalued, occluded, restrain the "Chineseness"; it indicated the shifting era which China played as model of both socialism and propagation of Communist Chinese Party revolution into Southeast Asia region in 20th century. Hence, Chinese then was considered prominent in term of economic and culturally distinctive. These illustration the non-linear, defeasible and empowering the Sinicization features (Hau, 2012).

Chinese diaspora is significantly different compared to Europeans. They were not considered neither by religious nor cultural exclusiveness, but being subjects of a powerful kingdom. Chinese preferred in claiming themselves as people of Han, Tang, Ming, as well as Qing. When the first Chinese migrations occurred, China was one of the largest and most powerful empire, they were sailing across nation without showing the Chinese flag towards foreign ports or shores (Flynn & Arturo, 2008). Nevertheless, Chinese Empire paid little interest in sea voyage. This lack of consideration had caused Chinese migrants a vulnerable people living their own social and technical capital, and encouraging themselves helpful towards local rulers. Those who moved out of the country mostly were considered marginal upon Imperial of China. First, they were speaking southern dialect that was different to capital. The majority migrants were coming from Fujian and Guangdong and spoke one of

the very distinct languages of hilly area. Fujian province since 17th century was recognized as the major region in which most Chinese immigrants came across towards Southeast Asia. They migrated from both Fujian and Guangdong provinces encouraged by overpopulation, economical issues, political disruption as well as opportunities offered in Southeast Asia (Widodo, 1997; Claver, 2014).

Secondly, most migrants were sailors, or at least dwellers of coastal area that relied on sea. The Chinese then performed their devotion both to the Emperor, parents, and ancestors, whose grave they should be obeyed to give honour in regular ceremonies (Flynn & Arturo, 2008). Chinese diaspora community internally establishes a complex matter of identity with several elements, namely regional identity in which was more proper than explaining them as Chinese (Zou, 2016).

Diaspora is a noun indicates a vivid unit of geographically scattered people which related in term of sentiment, culture, and history. Diaspora term brings a recognition which means that diasporic insight could generate a required element towards country-oriented history, that in the same time admits that the historical making of diaspora needs to be investigated (McKeown, 1999). Some shift that occurred within Southeast Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia in 19th century established the emergence of "modern" Chinese diaspora that formed upon capitalism, nationalism, and modernist ideologies (Skinner, 1961; McKeown, 1999).

Most Chinese merchants have been actively participate in trading network within Southeast Asia region from early centuries. They arrived in the region both by sea or land and spread out into wide stretches in the region (Tagliacozzo & Chang, 2011). As Reid's states in his book titled Southeast Asia in the Age Commerce, trade had become the prominent feature that brought shifts towards political, social, and economic aspects the region (Wade, 2009; Surya, 2020). Both Western and Chinese had already acknowledged Southeast Asia as a distinctive region with amount of exotic goods (Surya, 2020).

Chinese based trading to Southeast Asia firstly turned into major during the Southern Song and continued by Manchu Dynasty who introduced naval expedition against Java and Japan. Then there was Ming Dynasty that sent expeditions under Zheng He admiral to Southeast Asia and Indian Ocean between 1403-1433. The huge number of Chinese soldiers whether defeated or captured due to this expedition. Some were plotted as certain forces in some area, such Palembang and Brunei (Lockard, 2010; Flynn & Arturo, 2008). According to Reid, this expedition fascinated people of Southeast Asians upon China's trade and realm, as well as promoting



sea trade and enhance exchange goods activities Chinese and Southeast Asians merchants, thus supporting the age of Commerce (Lockard, 2010). Chinese communities overseas performed their peculiarities features in term of cultural manners and preserve significant independent and self-autonomy under Dutch colonial supervision.

The early Chinese maritime diaspora according to several circumstances is considered between 15th and mid-1850's. Considering the geographical and geopolitical aspects were quite dominant in establishing Sino-foreign contact (An, 2015). Lockard's (2010), Chinese merchants and sailors, mostly from Fujian province in Southern China moved towards Southeast Asia to trade between around 1400 and 1750 with or without Chinese official support. Hence, they performed "trade diaspora," an interrelated net of trade community based on same ethnic group that established a trade network. These diaspora was connected by similarity elements namely language, manner, and culture that promoting economical aspect since pre modern times.

Ports and or entrepôts played vital part in long-distance trade network, which is a peculiar pattern of Southeast Asian cities. Those cities became meeting points for foreign traders, such Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Japanese, Malays, Minangkabau, Javanese, Cham, and Luzon, and Pegu (An, 2015). According to McKeown (2010), there is about 20 million Chinese migrated overseas from 1840 to 1940, which 90% or 18 million Chinese moved to Southeast Asia.

Nineteenth century migration then continued by pattern of traders and labour upon Southeast Asia that had been simulated earlier (McKeown, 2010; Flynn & Arturo, 2008). This statement suits towards Reid's which refers that earlier migration of Chinese had occurred since 10th century, despite migration in 19th and 20th century are assumed to be significant towards global scale (Nugteren, 2016). This ended up with approximately 4-5 million went to Netherland East Indies, due to the opening of colonial market for private entrepreneurs and agricultural ownership upon applying Agrarian Law installation in 1870 onward (Nugteren: 2016). From this point onward, Chinese ethnic minority has created their own path of history stages in the nation from time to time.

### **Chinese in Java 19th Century**

Java is an island that called as "the finest tropical island in the world" by British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace that visited in 1861. This claim was made as he witnessed good roads connecting the country end

to end, congenial governance in which Europeans and native rulers work together for the commonwealth (Rush, 2007). However, this admiration is rather late as Chinese had mentioned the island prosperity as Fahien in the year of 414 visited Java. He recorded Java as "Java-di". Despite, the record is rather vague, it provides us point that Chinese itself had acknowledge Java long ago. The Chinese records mentioning Java had appeared since Tang Dynasty and onward (Groenveldt, 2018).

Chinese migration to Dutch East Indies during 19th century was encouraged by colonial policy that related to Agrarian Law. Several commodities that supported the European Industrialization such rubber and tobacco were intensified. In the other hand, new plantations were introduced to Java, mainly outer islands. The shortages of labours due to the rising trade due to Southeast-Chinese Treaty Ports had encouraged many workers of Chinese to move into East Sumatera, Riau, as well as Java. Chinese workers were attracted to economic opportunities that available in potential cities of Java namely Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang. They worked as shopkeepers, merchants, or porters (Nugteren, 2016). The Staatsblad 1872 policy was an open policy in welcoming Chinese migrants in Dutch East Indies. This regulation only required administrative procedure, proper means of existence, and spotless of criminal records (Nugteren, 2016).

The Dutch colonial regulation brought groups division in the sense of racial differences in which interrupted assimilation process. The small number of Chinese given them privilege status as well as power upon their role in the colonial economy, hence took them elusive alienated from native inhabitants (Widodo, 1997). Dutch political control under divide et empera was extended to regulate the dress code for each group to wear, while Chinese were forbidden to dress neither like Europeans nor native Javanese. Chinese men wore a long braid till their back. Chinese official wore Mandarin style gown and otherwise indicated men wearing pajama like fabric of loose shirts and robes over wide pants. There was also thick-soled shoes featuring Chinese (Rush, 1991: 16). This regulation had made Dutch to identify Chinese in term of dress, location, and other features be more convenient (Onghokham, 1989).

During 18th century in Java, there was a large number of Chinese established a cultural system that had been adapted from China to Java. The Chinese independence and stability could be achieved due to unique cultural background and distinctive Fujian culture. Chinese feature was not derived in Java, but rather portable set of notions and habit which they bring

along the way in history path. Fujianese obtained history of maritime exploration resulted in practices and beliefs significant upon their spiritual identity.

According to Dutch record, there was nearly two hundred thousands Chinese stayed in Java in 1878. They were concentrated in Batavia and north coast areas such Cirebon, Rembang, Surabaya, and Semarang, while Semarang held the second highest number with thirteen thousand after Batavia. Semarang was the entreport towards both Central and East Java. Commonly, Chinese community had tendency to settle nearby the north coast and other centers of trade (Rush, 1991).

Java had obtained quite long history with Chinese immigrants, long before the Dutch arrival. Under the Dutch realm, the Chinese minority inclined. Chinese under Dutch policy was regarding as Foreign Asiatics, hence put them in rather exclusive position upon their economic success. Among the Javanese, a distinction occurred in 19th century between *peranakan* and *totok* Chinese. The two groups of Chinese were the results of ethnic, cultural, and religious aspects combination (Skinner, 1961; Oostwouder, 2012).

In Java, Chinese settlements occupied all along the northern coast of the island (*pesisir*). Some ports as Banten, Batavia, Cirebon, Semarang, and Surabaya, but also smaller areas such as Jepara, Pekalongan, Rembang, and Tuban. Despite, the early immigrants had married local women, succeeding generation attempted to preserve their original culture. The arrival of Chinese migrants in Java in 19th century resulted in a rift within Chinese community on Java. *Totok* (Chinese-born immigrant) and *Peranakan* (local-born Chinese) did not share the same language, history, cultural adequacy, as well as economic condition (Claver, 2014).

Chinese society in 19th century in Java was continuation of the Chinese generation in Dutch East Indies. Most Chinese in Java had born there, spoke one or another using Indonesian languages as mother tongue and performed several customs or rituals which roots were coming from Indonesia culture (Skinner, 1961). Furthermore, many Chinese immigrants in 19th century married to whether local-born Chinese or native women. Hence, it resulted in the derivation of a unique term *peranakan* culture, since Chinese female immigrants were considered rare (Widodo, 1997). "Peranakan" refers to majority Chinese ethnic that settled in Java during 19th century (Skinner, 1961; Onghokham, 1989). *Peranakan* is an Indonesian term appoints to those who were born to local-born Chinese who no longer speak Chinese and considered Java as their homeland. Slowly,

the term *peranakan* has been engaged particularly to Java-born Chinese (Dobbin, 1989; Onghokham, 1989).

A unique form of Chinese culture established in Java known as *peranakan*, derived both from Hokkien and Javanese elements. In order to control the realm, particularly within north coast ports and Batavia, the Dutch established the Chinese Officer System whereby Java's leading Chinese could monitor the Chinese population and prevent the order. Mostly it was well-to-do merchants who were picked by Chinese Officers, those who were already affiliated towards Dutch enterprise in some way. Once Chinese role was institutionalized, the opium system in 19th century had turned to leading outcome of *peranakan* and affected Java as well (Dobbin, 1989).

The establishment of *Peranakan* in Java was encouraged under several factors. One of which is the disappearance of elite groups. Furthermore, Dutch colonial policy which isolated some groups with *kampong* system for different races as well as pass to do travel. The disappearance of elites groups had Chinese to make themselves as close as much towards the Dutch, since Dutch was the one ruling the country. *Peranakan* attempted to *gelijkgesteld* with Dutch by naturalization and took Dutch nicknames, such as Jan, Piet or changed their origin names similar to Dutch, namely The Wan Soei written WS The (Onghokham, 2017).

Even Chinese *peranakan* had lived in generations in Java did not make them 100% resemble towards native Javanese, they still acted as a minor community and unmingled. This due to social and political history of Java. These situations which significantly affected the probability of groups being blended. Chinese lived in *Pecinan*. According to the Valentijn, 18th historian that Chinese in Batavia settled in whether in nice houses or nice position. Due to massacre of Chinese in 1740, in order to watched them carefully, Chinese had to put in an isolated *kampong*, called *Pecinan*. These *Pecinan* primarily located in Glodok (Onghokham, 2017).

Java in 19th century had a kind of integration among elite Chinese, Javanese, and Dutch interests as part of institutional character of Java plural society. Java's colonial court performed the ambivalence typical of nearly all institutions in 19th century of Java (Rush, 2007-108). This ambivalence spread out from the Dutch attempt to gain political and economical force upon Java, while at the same time maintaining the interest balance and relationships that their realm had come to rest. The Dutch tried to give concern towards Javanese as well as Chinese, the courts were essentially act as means for European administration (Rush, 2007).

### **Chinese Merchant Role Towards Java during 19th Century**

Trade relation between Chinese and Javanese had been long journey, and possible date back to Christian arrival. During the time of Majapahit realm in the East Java in 14th century, the local elites happened to get used to do import of luxuries goods of Chinese, such as silk, porcelain, and varnish. Along the length to north coast of Java, Chinese merchants communities had already settled themselves, as well as intermarriage occurred with local people. Throughout the following centuries, the Chinese communities continued to play significant part within economic and social life within Javanese state. Trade across north coast ports distributed a vital part of revenue in 17th century for Mataram kingdom, and Chinese happened to dominate the profound export trade of rice and teak timber (Carey, 1984).

Since 18th century, the characteristics of VOC trade changed. The Dutch company at least controlled four main ports in Java, namely Batavia, Cirebon, and Semarang, with each port sometimes handled several sub-ports. Among of four, Batavia was considered major, it played as intra-Asian and Euro-Asian trade. Despite the realm of the Dutch, Batavia was considered an entreport for both Western and native Asian sea merchants, namely Chinese, Arabs, and Javanese. Referring to Leonard Blussé, Chinese junks called at Batavia from Xiamen (Amoy) and other regions at China southern province of The junks also transported Chinese immigrants who worked as manual laborers in the city, plantation, sugar mills within Batavia suburban areas (Shimada, 2013).

The compradoc tradition of Chinese in Indonesian economy fitted the Dutch properly, since Chinese were not included upon the domestic institutions. They were very dynamic and vulnerable at the same time; the features most suitable for compradorship in a society which the most dominant economy factor namely VOC encouraging monopoly. Even, J. P. Coen made attempts to proclaim that Chinese were better (Kemasang, 1982).

The Chinese displayed crucial role upon colony's economic sphere since the establishment of Batavia which significantly dependent on its population, revenue, as well as services. It was clear that the Dutch dominated large-scale importing and exporting as well as several activities which industrial sense of privilege access towards government claim provided them an edge, such as railroad building. However, while considering economy, Chinese were omnipresent and vital. Most everyone had business in Java supposed to deal with Chinese in one way or another. From every stage of trading was marking by Chinese, they were shippers, warehousemen, labor contractors, leather tanners, and

furniture makers. Eventually, most Java's Chinese men were active within money economy (Rush, 1991).

In the sense of modern Indonesian history after Java War (1825-1830), Chinese mostly were trustee, opium retailers, and moneylenders under cultivation system (1830-1870), in which later on appeared as major competitors of native Javanese (Carey, 1984). The commercial worlds in Java both under British and Dutch was marked by significant role played by middlemen minorities group, one of which was Chinese. Chinese were proficient in obtaining the economic opportunities offered within colonialization realm. They had cultural adaptation and business skill developed so differently from what appear superficially to have been common beginnings. The intermediary commercial services presented by Chinese in Java were significant to Dutch East Indies enterprises company.

Opium commodity was a monopoly consent for selling opium. In 19th century in Java, Chinese merchants obtained the privilege and invested huge sums of revenue to the island's Dutch administration. Java was the only one among many Dutch possessions within Indonesian archipelago where opium commodity was sold under government monopoly. Opium was also imported towards others European colonies in many regions, while also offered Asian commodity to Britain, France and Spain using arrangements, commonly a revenue farm performed by local Chinese (Rush, 2007).

Since early ages at Batavia, there was lack of confidence of Javanese, in other hand J. P. Coen encouraged Chinese to provide services to the city in term of craftsmen, shopkeepers, fisherman and pleasant. Batavia was also relying upon Chinese junk trade, and eventually the Chinese preoccupied themselves the so-called "distributive and collecting intermediate trade", serving as middlemen between native Javanese and VOC. VOC fallen in 1799 resulted in little shifting upon Chinese circumstance. During 19th century, Chinese role as intermediaries between European entrepreneurs and Javanese become institutionalised (Dobbin, 1989). The original abilities of Hokkien Chinese in Java was plotted using VOC policy which controlled these capacities. The Chinese Kapitan of Batavia strongly engaged their private cultural capital as a valuable resources for a functional Chinese judiciary system. The collapse of Opium Farm system between 1897 and 1907 driven Chinese to shift into textile industry in Java, which started from Batik industry and sarong weaving industry. In Semarang, Chinese gradually gained solid position with purchasing, lending money, as well as renting villages which made both farmers and noble were relying on them.



For the rice trade, Europeans trading firms played significant role in export of rice, while local rice trade in Java was primarily under Chinese authority. The Dutch played no part and thought regarding this trade. There were completely no recorded data found in business transaction or quantities of rice being traded, as well as the movement taking place. This fact showed us that Chinese in Java not only played vital part in opium, but rice commodity as well (Hugenholtz, 1986).

## CONCLUSION

The years of 19th century is marked with large transformation of the merchants features. It was considered as vibrant era which many traditional elements of society, economy, and technology moved into incredible pace. A transfer of trading zone that Chinese traders mostly from Southern China operated. They migrated to Southeast Asia region. Eventually, the migration result in at least Two hundred thousands Chinese people in Java in 19th century displayed many significant roles upon economy flow. During 19th century in Java also appeared new terms for Chinese, known as *peranakan* and *totok*, that could be distinguished from language, culture, and economical aspect. Under Dutch realm, Chinese in Java portrayed many different roles, but mostly as moneylenders, middlemen, *kapitan*, opium traders, and etc. Chinese were considered active in and around Java as they occupied Netherlands Indies trade with coastal shipping. Chinese possess privilege spot under Dutch colonial policy, due to their advance skill in business and their independency of local rulers. In term of trade, the Chinese were ubiquitous and essential, since everyone committed trade in Java had to do business with Chinese. Java's Chinese men and unknown number of *peranakan* and native Javanese women whom they married or related were almost all participated in the money economy.

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