

COMPLETION REPORT

Cultivating An Indies' Frontier: Japanese Rubber Plantations in Western Kalimantan and Their Contributions to Local economy, 1910s-1930s

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Until the end of nineteenth century, Kalimantan, the Netherlands Indies' part of Borneo Islands was still a vast political-economic frontier. The Dutch colonial government focused its political-economic interests on the coastal areas and mining sectors, leaving a room for local and private initiatives to explore the rich-resources of Borneo's heartland rainforest. Rubber was one of the rising commodities introduced to the area since the early twentieth century and planted initially by local population. Things changed when rubber emerged as a rising world market commodity; and the commodity was cultivated in larger scale through a capitalist mode production by foreign capitalist-industries surpassing native-small scale rubber 'plantation'. Their expansion to these areas was stipulated partly by political economic developments in the Netherlands Indies, particularly the introduction of liberal policies that stipulated the influx of Dutch and Chinese private investments to help the expansion of economic exploration in the outer Java islands, notably Sumatra and Kalimantan. From a regional perspective, the Japanese rubber investments to Kalimantan was also stimulated by the Japan's southward advance policy in one hand but also on the other hand the British Malay's policy to restrict the foreign investments on rubber, including those from Japan. Consequently, Japanese rubber entrepreneurs shifted their focus activities to the Netherlands Indies, notably to Sumatra and Kalimantan, where rubber plantation emerged as a growing important commercial commodity.

From colonial archives, we find that Japanese investors started their business ventures in Kalimantan, particularly in Western and Southeastern part of the island since the end of 1910s. The N.V. Nomura East Indies was the first Japanese enterprise to run a rubber plantation in southeast Kalimantan in 1908 by buying Danau Salak plantation from a German planter. In the next twenty years, this company developed its venture not only in this area but also extended to western part of Kalimantan. By 1932, it had controlled more than 10,000 hectares of rubber plantation, and up until 1938 the company claimed almost 50% of the total estate production in this region – mostly through concession from local Dutch authority; which made it the largest Japanese rubber company operated in this island. In western Kalimantan, there were about tens other Japanese companies operating smaller-scale of rubber plantations; but also purchased rubber from native cultivators. Some of these plantations were mentioned in colonial archives under the following names: T. Watanabe, O. Sato, M. Sato, Tsuneo Iseki, Kenzo Joshida, Rumaichi Isikane, Ukichi Nishiwaki, Isaburo Nagaishi, Sakutaro Motoshima, and Tomehiko Kato. In total these companies operated about 5,000 hectares of rubber plantation. In 1930, these plantations produced around 25,000 tons of rubber, which most of them was shipped directly to Japan or to USA through their own firms or other Japanese shipping companies. In addition to that production, these Japanese entrepreneurs purchased rubber from native-cultivators via Banjarese and Chinese middlemen traders and processed it in their re-milling factories. This strategy was adopted to

respond the scarcity of labor supply from local people and to get direct access to local production of native (dayak) rubber planters in the hinterlands. By combining such business strategies, the Japanese rubber plantation was able to compete but even surpassed the Dutch, Chinese and Malay rubber companies operated in west and southeast Kalimantan.

Altogether, this study confirms that these Japanese rubber plantations had given a substantial contribution to rubber production of Kalimantan and the Netherlands Indies in general. In 1930, for example a study has calculated that total rubber export from west and southeast Kalimantan was reported around 15,000 tons which valued at about 7,500 guilders. Unfortunately, Dutch archives provided no detailed information about the share of the Japanese rubber plantations in the export volume. Yet, it can safely be argued that these Japanese rubber estates created ‘additional’ market demand to native-rubber cultivators as alternative for that of the Dutch, the Chinese, and the Malay rubber businesses. Furthermore, this also means that the Japanese rubber plantations had stimulated rubber production among local small rubber holdings, introduced new method of rubber exploitation, set a new standard quality for local rubber product, and integrated local small rubber holders into wider regional as well as international market.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

1. “The Japanese rubber plantation in West Kalimantan, 1910-1942: A Preliminary Survey”, verbal presentation at the FIB Weekly Forum, Faculty of Art, Universitas Gadjah Mada Yogyakarta, 6 December 2015
2. “*Exploiting Borneo’s Frontier: Japanese Rubber Plantation in West Kalimantan, 1910-1942*”, presented at the Internal Discussion Forum, Centre for Regional Resources Studies, Indonesian Institute of Science, Jakarta, 15 February 2016
3. “*Cultivating An Indies’ Frontier: Japanese Rubber Plantation in Western Kalimantan, 1910-1940*”, accepted abstract to be presented at the International Convention of Asian Studies (ICAS) 10, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 20-23 July 2017.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

“*Cultivating An Indies’ Frontier: Japanese Rubber Plantation in Kalimantan, 1910-1940*”, paper draft to be submitted to the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (NUS, Cambridge UP)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

Abdul Wahid, *Perkebunan Karet Jepang Pada Masa Kolonial Akhir, 1910-1940* (Yogyakarta: Mata Padi, on printing process expected to be published in February 2017).