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Peasant Political Consciousness in West Sumatra : A Reanalysis of the Communist Uprising of 1927

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The Dynamics of Subsistence Economy in West Sumatra

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Historians of South East Asia are generally aware of the importance of understanding the consciousness which peasants have of their social environment, since peasants constitute the most significant part of the population in the region. At the same time, historians also have to face the difficulty of tracing that consciousness, since peasants seldom express their thoughts in writing. One way of solving this dilemma may be to interpret the meaning of political, economic, social and cultural reactions of peasants both to the village and the world outside. Of various directions of consciousness, too much emphasis seems to have been put on non-economic, particularly political aspects. However, I consider that economic consciousness is also significant and deserves to be studied in its own right. Furthermore, it enables us to understand non-economic consciousness as well. This paper is directed at two themes in the study of peasant society, taking West Sumatra during the colonial period (1900-40) as an example. The primary purpose is to reinterpret in more dynamic ways the prevalent notion of static peasant economy and also static peasant consciousness. This theme is important because so far there has been no persuasive explanation of the sharp contrast between the supposedly static economic nature of peasant society and such dynamic political actions as peasant revolts and wars. The secondary purpose is to examine socio-political implications of peasant subsistence economy, focusing on the autonomy of the village and the nature of traditional authority in peasant society. By means of the investigation of these two themes, it is shown that peasant economy can be dynamic given certain favourable conditions, and that village politics are centred on the issue of village autonomy from outside political authorities and challenges to traditional village authority, which is based on a subsistence economy, particularly on control of communal land. [PEASANT ECONOMY, SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY, PEASANT CONSCIOUSNESS, SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY, WEST SUMATRA]

INTRODUCTION

In studies of pre-capitalist societies there is a sharp contrast between the supposedly static nature of their economies on the one hand, and the dynamic nature of their social and political sphere as exemplified by peasant revolts and peasant wars. The static image of the economies seems to derive from the general assumption that

pre-capitalist economy is essentially a peasant subsistence economy. There is no denying that most pre-capitalist economies are characterized by a subsistence orientation and are static in the sense that they are often unable consistently to produce surplus beyond subsistence needs. This paper intends primarily to reinterpret the concept of subsistence economy in a more dynamic context, namely by showing that subsistence economy is not inherently static but can be dynamic under certain conditions. Secondly, some socio-political implications of subsistence economy will be discussed.

West Sumatra during the colonial period was undoubtedly a peasant society and its economy was a peasant economy in an empirical sense. However, there does not exist a uniform usage of these terms. Some use the term peasant in a socio-political and cultural context, defining it as 'part-societies with part-cultures', a subset of the more complex greater society, namely the pre-industrial market and administrative city [ORTIZ 1971: 322-323; DALTON 1972 cited in HOWARD 1980: 64; MIGDAL 1974: 22]. Others use the term with more emphasis on economic aspects, as well as on those given above. Wolf [1966 cited in ORTIZ 1971: 322] defines peasants as farmers who grow crops and raise livestock in rural areas, but who, unlike commercial American farmers, are more concerned with satisfying the needs of the household than with obtaining a profit. In another place he defines peasants as 'populations that are existentially involved in cultivation and make autonomous decisions regarding the processes of cultivation' [WOLF 1969: xviii]. In Wolf's definition such non-agriculturalists as artisans, itinerant merchants, and fishermen are excluded from the peasant category [WOLF 1969: xiii-xiv]. So far as the term peasant is concerned, there is no objection to Wolf's definition. However, this paper is more interested in peasant economies than simply in peasants.

With regard to the concept of peasant economy, Thorner's definition [THORNER 1971: 202-208] is more useful, explaining the concept as the predominance of agriculture, both in total production and among the working population, with the characteristic unit of production being the peasant family household. Within the village, of which the household is the basic component, there is a double orientation: towards the subsistence of the household itself, and towards exchange with the greater world beyond the village. In addition, the household may engage in other activities including handicrafts, processing, or petty trade. This concept of peasant economy most appropriately defines the economy of West Sumatra during the colonial period (see Table 1). In fact it is difficult to imagine a pure merchant or craftsman in West Sumatra, with some exceptions in big towns, since the majority of such non-agriculturalist households depended on agriculture to varying degrees for their livelihood. More significantly, this definition is crucial when trying to find sources of dynamism in peasant economy; and it is in this broad sense that the term peasant economy is used in the following study.

Table 1. Income and Expenditure in West Sumatra: 1926 (in %)

Income sources		Expenditure items	
Agriculture	89.8	Rice	50.5
Salary from the government	5.2	Vegetables and fruit	4.6
Commerce	2.2	Tobacco	6.3
Wages from native business	1.2	Transport	1.5
Others*	1.6	Pilgrimage to Mecca	3.0
		Salted fish	3.8
		Taxes (direct and indirect)	7.4
		Imported goods	20.5
		Others**	2.4
Total	100.0		100.0

Source: GINKEL *et al.* [1928: 13, 17, 25].

The figures have been recalculated by the present writer.

* 'Others' includes: fishing, cattle breeding, non-agricultural export, handicraft etc.

** 'Others' includes: coconuts, coffee, meat, fresh fish, salt etc.

THE MEANING OF SUBSISTENCE IN PEASANT ECONOMY

One of the most remarkable characteristics of peasant economy is its subsistence nature. As a result, peasant economy is often considered as being equivalent to subsistence economy, in which the achievement of subsistence needs is the primary goal. However, the implications of subsistence economy are not altogether clear in the work of those who use the term. For moral economists, subsistence is not merely a state of economy but involves moral implications such as 'safety first', 'risk aversion', 'reciprocity', 'work sharing', 'the right to subsist', 'the communal nature of the economy', all of which constitute what Scott [1976: 2] calls the 'subsistence ethic'. This characterization of peasant economy enables us to have a deeper insight into what has been happening in peasant societies, in the same manner as Max Weber's analysis of capitalism in terms of its 'capitalist ethic'. Because the concept of subsistence economy is so significant in this paper, we need to examine the concept carefully and in two dimensions: a general and overall dimension (a West Sumatra dimension), and village dimension or context, within which moral sanctions work more conspicuously. Though these two dimensions overlap in many aspects, the distinction seems necessary, since, for example, the manner of achieving subsistence is not always the same between the regional and the village levels. Furthermore, subsistence needs, and hence the rules and mechanisms of subsistence, are different in the two dimensions in West Sumatra.

Subsistence Economy: The General Dimension

Among the numerous issues involved in the concept of subsistence economy, the present investigation limits itself to the following questions as applied to West Sumatra. What was the general outlook of the subsistence economy; how is the

level of subsistence to be determined; and to what extent is the notion of a 'subsistence ethic' valid?

GENERAL OUTLOOK OF THE SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

It should be remembered that not all subsistence needs can be satisfied within a given society, and that as a consequence subsistence economy does not necessarily mean self-sufficiency. Most societies are obliged to obtain what is lacking through exchange. Such was the case with West Sumatra before and after Dutch colonization. The West Sumatran economy can be called a subsistence economy throughout the colonial period in the sense that the achievement of subsistence needs was the primary goal for the majority of the people. However, this generalization needs further historical explanation, since there were times when the economy was dynamic and produced beyond a subsistence level.

About the time when the Dutch occupied the whole of West Sumatra in the late 1830s, the region was exporting rice, gold, pepper, coffee, camphor, and other commodities, in exchange for raw cotton, cotton piece goods, earthenware, iron bars, and other goods, in order to satisfy subsistence needs in general. At the same time, a number of daily necessities and exchange goods were produced within West Sumatra including textiles, mats, paper, ink, agricultural implements, iron bars, and even firearms [MARSDEN 1789: 187-188; BURGER 1836: 215; ANONYMOUS 1851: 215]. Of note here is the case of iron manufacturing in which a village specialized in the smelting of iron ore, obtained from a nearby village, and in the production of iron bars which were exchanged with blacksmiths in other parts of West Sumatra. This is a typical case of how the people of West Sumatra satisfied subsistence needs through specialization on a regional level [HORNER 1860: 322-373]. A similar situation existed for other handicraft commodities. Trade was also carried out extensively beyond the region, not only at ports on the west coast but also through riverways flowing towards the Strait of Malacca (see Figure 1).

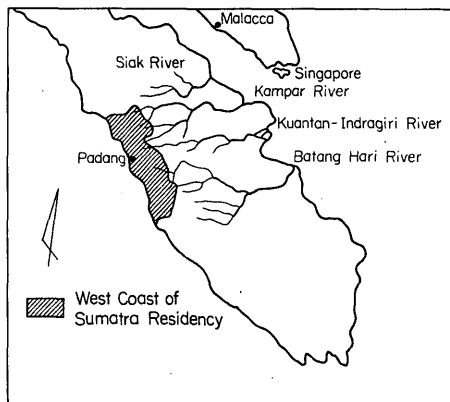


Figure 1. Location of West Coast of Sumatra Residency.

The means of satisfying subsistence needs in West Sumatra changed drastically after the Dutch pacification following the *padri* war (which originally started as a social reform movement by radical Islamic reformists) in 1837. Dutch mercantile power then began to dominate the West Sumatran economy. Although the Dutch controlled the trade of West Sumatra through ports on the west coast before the pacification, people of the region were still able to continue trade with the Strait of Malacca via riverways. However, the latter trade subsequently became very difficult because the Dutch gradually strengthened their control over the riverways. As far as manufactured goods and raw materials were concerned, their imports were put in the hands of the Dutch. At the same time, many kinds of indigenous industry disappeared (for example iron smelting) or dwindled during the nineteenth century to a fraction of what they had been. Although trade with the Strait of Malacca continued to some extent, exports were largely controlled by the Dutch. The involvement of West Sumatra in the world market, which had previously been voluntary, now became a forced involvement under Dutch colonial rule.

During the Cultivation System (for West Sumatra effectively 1847–1908), the peasants were forced to cultivate coffee and deliver the produce at low fixed prices, varying from one-third to one quarter or less of the market prices in Padang, the major port in West Sumatra. In addition to coffee growing, peasants had to provide free labour for road and railway construction, and also for transportation of coffee, at the expense of rice cultivation for their own subsistence. Under this system there was little room for peasants to produce surplus beyond subsistence requirements until the late nineteenth century. Because of this unprofitable mechanism, peasants began to ignore coffee growing in the late nineteenth century, in spite of Dutch pressure. The Cultivation System in West Sumatra can be characterized as a form of colonial exploitation which takes away as much surplus beyond subsistence as possible, and limits involvement in the monetary economy to the lowest level.

With the introduction of monetary taxes in 1908, the population was urged to obtain cash. The economy of West Sumatra developed most dynamically between 1910 and 1929, centring on expanded cultivation of export crops, mainly coffee, rubber, and coconuts. Although there were recessions during this period, namely in 1914–18 and 1921–3, a substantial proportion of the people enjoyed high incomes which were enough not only for their subsistence but also for raising their living standard. This was the period in which we see many signs of economic activities which do not comply with the 'subsistence ethic'. However, the Great Crisis of 1929, and the economic depression in the 1930s, drew the economy of West Sumatra back to a subsistence economy. Due to the sharp drop in prices of export crops, the average income of the population dropped to about half that of the 1920s. The achievement of subsistence needs once again became the most important goal of economic activity.

THE LEVEL OF SUBSISTENCE

According to Scott [1976: 9], the level of subsistence or minimum income is determined not only by physiological necessities but also by socio-cultural needs to

satisfy ceremonial and social obligations. This definition is persuasive to some extent, since we often observe seemingly extravagant expenditures for ceremonial occasions in peasant societies. One problem with such a definition is that the level of subsistence appears to be static, unless at the same time dynamic changes or fluctuations in social and cultural requirements are specified. Moreover, we must also take account of the fact that peasants strive to improve their traditional standard of living, thereby changing the level of subsistence needs [POPKIN 1979: 27]. For instance, the ceremony for the installation of a new lineage chief (*panghulu*) was one of the most significant, in both social and cultural terms, and required enormous expenditure of money. In one case, a *panghulu* candidate had to slaughter at least one buffalo, contribute 100 *gantangs* (1 *gantang* is approximately 3.1 kg) of rice to the village treasury, prepare all costs for the formal ceremony in the village council hall, and provide food and drink for feasts which lasted three to seven days. Thus the total cost of the installation sometimes exceeded 1,000 guilders before the depression. Some idea of the magnitude of this amount may be gained from the fact that the average annual income per head was about 80 guilders in the most prosperous years (1925–6) in West Sumatra [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 12, 17]. The costs had previously been met from the private income of *panghulu* candidates, who might possess cash crop gardens and cattle, or who might pawn ancestral land (*harta pusaka*), mostly wet rice fields (*sawah*). There were also contributions from members of the same matrilineage. However, such contributions had to be refunded as early as possible. Economic difficulties during the depression of the 1930s changed circumstances substantially, and the fulfilment of traditional obligations became very difficult. As a result, a high proportion of *panghulu* positions were vacant during the 1930s. Under these difficult conditions, villages sometimes set a fixed amount in place of traditional requirements, for instance 100 guilders in one village and 30 guilders in another [OKI 1977: 192–193]. Even if we think of a subsistence ‘zone’ rather than a ‘line’, the flexibility shown in the costs of installation is too wide to regard it as still falling within the same zone.

The living standard of peasants in West Sumatra also changed drastically. The consumption of imported goods permeated steadily into daily life through the colonial period, especially after the beginning of the twentieth century. Dutch reports frequently mention increases in the import of luxury goods, which reached a peak of 20% of the total value of imports [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 13] (see Table 1). Reports of the central office of the Minangkabau People’s Bank show that more than 50% of total loans were intended to cover costs of imported luxury commodities or were for other consumption purposes [*Vereeniging Volksbank Minangkabau* 1926–1930: Appendix 9 of each annual report]. Among the major imported commodities were textiles, furniture of various kinds, earthenware, porcelain, automobiles, and tobacco. The most striking case is that of automobiles. Though there is no mention of the number of automobiles, a statistic notes an increase in imports of automobiles in 1926 of 50% over the previous year [*Verslag Padang* 1927: 20–23]. In Korinci (a very prosperous area, with a population of 70,000), 700 persons left for the pilgrim-

age to Mecca in 1926, despite the cost of about 1,000 guilders for one person; and in the same year there were 100 cars owned by people in the area [SCHRIEKE 1960: 269 note 14]. Clearly socio-economic differentiation was advanced in the area, and of course not all were equally involved in the new patterns of consumption. But higher living standards were experienced by all strata. It may therefore be more appropriate to say that subsistence levels can change according to economic conditions.

THE 'SUBSISTENCE ETHIC'

Even those who stress a strong peasant inclination towards 'risk aversion' and the 'safety first principle would not deny the possibility of investment and innovation by peasants within the framework of their subsistence economy. What is stressed by those who advocate these concepts is that there is a defensive perimeter around subsistence routines within which risks are avoided as potentially catastrophic, and outside which a more bourgeois calculus of profit prevails [SCOTT 1976: 24]. Thus, investment and innovation can occur when peasants anticipate that their subsistence will not be endangered [ORTIZ 1971: 334]. I agree with the importance of these views of peasants in a subsistence economy for an explanation of much of peasant economic behaviour. The majority of peasants live under conditions in which any miscalculation or sudden crisis could result in their tragically sinking below subsistence levels, at times to actual starvation [MIGDAL 1974: 30]. As a result, peasants generally *appear* to be devoid of profit motivation at the risk of subsistence [SHANIN 1971: 241]. It is, therefore, true that even when there is an obvious increase in total production, peasants tend to be suspicious and distrustful of innovation. This should, however, not be interpreted as an inherent inclination of peasants, but rather that they are concerned with achieving gains commensurate with their effort, an indication that they are making calculations on their own account [POPKIN 1979: 66-67]. In view of this, Boeke [1953] may be too extreme in his underestimation of the dynamism of peasants.

Looking at the economy of colonial Indonesia, Boeke characterized the nature of economies in 'the East' in the following manner: social needs are limited; the fulfilment of social needs is the most important motivation for economic activity; the farmer does not aim primarily at profit making but at satisfying personal needs determined by his social standing; what is important is not the exchange value but the producer's use value with no thought of cost and profit accounts; and, therefore, no need is felt for a business account. Whereas he admits the possibility of profit seeking in 'the East', profits in his view are speculative or a gamble, not the fruits of labour. Boeke thus argued that economies in 'the East', exemplified by Indonesia, are inherently static [BOEKE 1953: 39-41]. However, my study of West Sumatra runs diametrically counter to Boeke's assertions and suggests that peasants do invest, even, at times, at the risk of subsistence, as the following examples show.

THE CASE OF SIKAT UNITED ESTATES (SARIKAT KEBOEN SIKAT)

A Minangkabau (the name of the ethnic group settled in West Sumatra) entre-

preneur lived in Malaya and managed a rubber plantation there. He returned to his home village in 1915 to persuade villagers to enter the rubber business, explaining how prosperous it was in Malaya. At that time rubber growing was little practised by peasants in West Sumatra. In spite of the considerable uncertainty and risks involved in this new venture, four villagers joined the entrepreneur. After searching for suitable land, they obtained three pieces of land in another village (Lubuk Basung) for only 1.5 guilders per '*surat*' (literally a letter, perhaps meaning a certificate of permission). It should be noted here that the purchase of land by outsiders was most strongly restricted in the Minangkabau village (*nagari*). Thus, the amount of 1.5 guilders should be considered a kind of permission fee to use land. On this occasion each member put up 30 guilders as initial capital. In 1916 the first rubber trees were brought over from Malaya and planted. Each contributed 12 guilders per month as working capital. At this stage all the work was done by the five members. Further joint entrepreneurs were invited in 1918, as capital requirements increased. The total membership increased from 5 to 36 by 1918, and to 50 by 1920. Almost all of the new members were recruited from the original village. The new members were each required to contribute 30 guilders per month. It must be noted that by 1920 no income or profit had yet been obtained; that each member contributed as much as 30 guilders capital; and that there was no security for their investment.

The first income, of 1,940 guilders, came from bananas and nuts which had been planted between the young rubber trees. In 1921 the total value of the gardens was estimated by Dutch officials at 10,000 guilders, which soon rose to 15,000 guilders. Although it is not clear at what stage this producer's co-operative began transactions with the Minangkabau People's Bank (the Volksbank Minangkabau set up by the colonial government), by 1921 it had already received loans from the bank. Because of the increased value of the gardens and perhaps the loans, the members stopped contributing working capital, and in 1921 decided to invite further members. Rubber was first tapped in 1922, providing an income of 411.68 guilders; also a gross profit of 41.61 guilders was obtained from other crops. These incomes were not distributed but were invested in tapping implements and in the maintenance of the gardens. Rubber tapping was stopped after June that year because of the drop in the price of rubber.

A fundamental change in organization took place when hundreds of trees were burnt by a fire. The bulk of the members lost confidence in the business and left the gardens. The co-operative decided to issue shares so that the members who left the gardens would not lose their rights in previous investments. The members were given shares worth 50 guilders, each of which had a market value of 150 guilders at that time, the number of shares perhaps depending on previous contributions. When a shareholder tapped, he was to receive wages. After the fire only three shareholders remained in the gardens. In 1925 the price of rubber suddenly rose from 91 to 225 guilders per pikul (1 pikul=61.7 kg). The golden period of rubber began. The managing board of the enterprise was organized in that year. From this time onward, the enterprise came to have its own employees, such as labourers for garden work, a

secretary, clerks, and so on. The first dividend of 125 guilders per share was paid in 1925: 243% for original shareholders and 81% for shareholders who had bought shares at the market price of 150 guilders. The enterprise then became a kind of limited liability company.

As the price of rubber kept rising, the market value of the shares rose rapidly to as high as 400 guilders per share in 1926. A new regulation for the distribution of the net profit was made in that year: 25% to be reserved for future investment, 3% to be paid to the managing board as a bonus, and 72% to be paid out as dividends. Sale of shares became limited to members of the enterprise. In the following year the upper limit of shareholding per person was fixed at seven. In that year 21 regular labourers, apart from the shareholders, were working in the enterprise and the total wages paid amounted to 6,262 guilders. The gardens were so well looked after that the rubber enjoyed a reputation for high quality. The product was transported and sold directly by employees of the enterprise so that no middlemen were involved. The example of Sarikat Keboen Sikat was copied in several places [ANONYMOUS 1928: 636–640].

The case of Sarikat Keboen Sikat is very suggestive in explaining the dynamics of peasant economy and in relation to Boeke's assertions. In this instance, peasants were certainly motivated by profit seeking, and they certainly felt the necessity of profit and loss accounts, paying due attention to costs and risks. The profits of the rubber enterprise were neither speculative ones nor the result of gambling. This also contradicts Boeke's 'backward sloping curve' thesis which states that cultivators supply less produce as prices rise and that labour supply falls as wages rise [BOEKE 1953: 40; HIGGINS 1956: 100–101]. In addition, the peasants involved in the business did pursue exchange value instead of producer's use value. Apart from contradicting Boeke's assertions, what implications does this case have for the principles of 'risk aversion' and 'safety first'?

First of all, we must take account of the facts that the business was initiated in the middle of the recession following the First World War; that rubber cultivation was little known in West Sumatra at that time; and that it took seven years until the first income came from rubber, though the gross income for the first year was only about 8 guilders for each member, thus negligible in comparison with their investment and labour. Even if we suppose that the participants were equipped with sufficient capital to invest without endangering their subsistence, the timing and duration of the delay before profits were generated were too unfavourable to explain their behaviour unless we suppose a high profit seeking motive, perhaps even at the risk of subsistence. Furthermore, we must remember that they borrowed money from banks, which might have endangered their subsistence in case of failure of the business. Should the case of Sarikat Keboen Sikat, and other enterprises modelled on it, be considered simply as exceptions? I do not think so. This now remains to be explained from other historical evidence.

GAMBIR PRODUCTION AND THE MINANGKABAU PEOPLE'S BANK

Sarikat Keboen Sikat is only one example of what was happening in West Sumatra in the 1910s and 1920s. We can find substantial evidence to prove a profit seeking and risk taking attitude among peasants, even at the risk of endangering their subsistence needs. The development of gambir cultivation in the Upper Kampar area (fringe districts of the Highlands) is another good example (gambir is a resinous substance used as an astringent and tonic, and in tanning). With the rise in the price of gambir at the beginning of the twentieth century, peasants in the area requested loans from the government, since they strongly desired to expand gambir cultivation. Gambir cultivation in Upper Kampar was organized in a capitalistic way. It took about 250–270 days to open a gambir garden from the clearing of forest to planting. This work was normally done by paid labourers. Processing was also done by hired labourers: one specialist and two assistants. Employees were paid wages in advance in food and clothing as well as some cash. Once a garden was established, harvesting was possible for eight years or so. Initial capital was a vital factor in opening new gardens and processing facilities (a hut, a large iron pot to boil gambir leaves, a place for chemical treatment, and coagulates). In response to the strong demand, the government granted loans to the amount of 20,000 guilders in 1909–10. In 1910 peasants requested further loans to establish banks. This request was again accepted, and two banks were set up at the end of the year with government loans of 7,500 guilders and an initial basic capital of 10 guilders each, which was collected by the peasants themselves. In their first ten months these two banks loaned 10,185 guilders at 4% interest. Of the total loaned, about 80% was used for gambir cultivation. A few years after the first loan, rapid expansion of gambir cultivation was noticed. Deforestation also took place because of the clearing of gardens and the cutting of firewood for processing. It was unfortunate for the peasants that the recession following the First World War struck just when production was beginning to expand. Nevertheless we can clearly see the profit seeking attitude of the peasants: that they invested beyond their existing capital power by borrowing money from the government and banks. It could be argued that the subjective probability of loss was small in the peasants' view, and therefore that the thesis of the 'safety first' and the 'risk aversion' principles are not damaged at all by this example. However, the peasants' activity certainly exceeded the 'safety' line with the debts incurred from the banks. Though we cannot find sources to show what happened to these peasants during the First World War, many of them may have endangered their subsistence. We need further investigation into the peasants' ethics in terms of debts, and into their motives.

The Dutch policy for establishing the People's Bank was first implemented in 1912. With the strong enthusiasm of the population, the number of village banks (the most significant type of bank operation of the People's Bank) increased by leaps and bounds from 33 in 1912 to 543 in 1915, covering almost all villages in West Sumatra. This number was six times the number in Java at that time, relative to population. In 1915 various types of People's Bank were unified by the central

organization Volksbank Minangkabau (Minangkabau People's Bank). In that year the total value of loans from the banks in West Sumatra was only 152,000 guilders, which increased to an average of 300,000 guilders between 1916 and 1919, during the recession of the First World War. A remarkable upsurge in loans occurred in 1920. Of the total value of loans, 1,435,616 guilders in that year, about 90% was used for agriculture, commerce, and industry, obviously stimulated by the short post-war boom of 1919–20. Despite continuing post-war recession between 1921 and 1924, the average value of loans in this period continued to be about 0.9 million guilders a year. It is significant that the largest scale investment in colonial West Sumatra took place before the export boom of 1925, despite the bitter experiences of peasants during the recession years 1914–18 and 1921–2 [OKI 1977: 46–53]. If the peasants of West Sumatra were really imbued with the 'risk aversion' and 'safety first' principles, the dynamic loans described above would not have been incurred, since to have loans was very risky, threatening peasants' subsistence.

RICE CULTIVATION AND RESPONSIVENESS TO EXPORT CROP PRODUCTION

Throughout the history of colonial West Sumatra, we find a comparable dynamism among peasants. At the turn of the nineteenth century, when the price of coffee and demand for coffee both rose considerably, peasants of the Highlands who had been concentrating on rice and other crops quickly began to cultivate coffee. As a result, by the early nineteenth century, coffee became by far the most important export crop [DOBBIN 1977: 23–24] taking the place of pepper, the price of which had been falling [STUERS 1850: 177–178; KIELSTRA 1887: 21–22; GRAVES 1971: 192]. During the Cultivation System, coffee production dropped sharply after the 1870s [LULOF 1904: 1658–1661]. An investigation into the causes of this decline revealed that peasants were expanding the cultivation of export crops other than coffee [BOSSE 1895]. Obviously, peasants retreated from coffee cultivation because of the low fixed prices of the forced delivery system, as mentioned above. Indeed, this type of dynamic shift to cultivation of more lucrative crops may be considered as being still within the framework of the 'subsistence ethic', as an attempt to secure peasants' subsistence. The case of rice cultivation in West Sumatra, however, touches on a more critical question of investment at the risk of subsistence.

West Sumatra was a rice surplus, rice exporting region until the late nineteenth century. However, the export capacity of this region decreased towards the end of the nineteenth century due to coffee cultivation and forced unpaid labour for the government. At the end of the nineteenth century this region changed from being a rice exporting to a rice importing region [MR 1923/1332]. The situation changed suddenly when disastrous rice crop failures occurred in 1911/12 throughout Indonesia. Peasants in West Sumatra immediately increased production, changing the region once again into a rice exporting region by 1913 [JOUSTR 1923: 181]. In fact, in about 1922 West Sumatra was one of the most important rice exporting regions [GEERTZ 1974: 120–121]. In the wake of the expansion of the cultivation for export of coffee, rubber, and coconuts, however, rice production had drastically decreased

by the Great Crisis of 1929. By 1927 West Sumatra had come to depend on imported rice. But during the depression in the 1930s peasants yet again returned to rice cultivation at the expense of export crop cultivation.

How should we interpret these movements in rice cultivation? It was rational for the peasants to increase rice cultivation before 1925, since rice was almost the only commodity which could be sold during recession years to regions of rice shortage. The import of large quantities of rice between 1925 and 1929 suggests that the peasants expanded, and invested money and labour in export crop cultivation at the expense of rice, namely the very base of subsistence. The history of rice cultivation outlined above tells not only of a quick response to economic opportunities by West Sumatran peasants, but also of their willingness to risk subsistence in so far as they could subjectively perceive success.

Subsistence Economy: The Village Context

As mentioned earlier, the working of the economy differs as between the region and the village. It is within the village that land is distributed among peasants, a variety of obligations including communal labour incurred, and sanctions applied. What are often referred to as characteristics of peasant economies can in many cases be better understood within the context of the village community.

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND

A vital question to ask is how land is distributed and controlled in a village, in order not only to characterize the nature of its economy but also to understand the society in general, since land, together with labour, constitute the principal means of production for subsistence in peasant societies. At the same time the distribution and control of land and labour have many social and political implications. In the case of West Sumatra, three points require special attention. First, village land was originally divided among constituent clans (*suku* in Minangkabau, a matrilineal kin group within which marriage is prohibited) as clan land (*tanah suku*) over which clan members exercised rights superior to non-clan members. This form of land distribution had its origin in the process of village formation. According to a number of village oral histories (*tambo nagari*), a village was formed, from a territorial point of view, by a conglomeration of sub-communities, each of which had its own territory and each of which consisted of one clan. With an increase of population, sub-clans became independent, separate clans with their own clan land.

During the colonial period, the boundaries of clan land became very ambiguous. For the discussion here, it will suffice to divide the village land into two sorts: village communal land, and cultivated land. The former consisted of land allocated for village use, and uncultivated land. Over uncultivated land, villagers had communal rights to cultivate, graze cattle, collect forest products, and so forth. Cultivated land can be further divided into ancestral land, and private land (*tanah pencarian*). Ancestral land was in principle inherited by the matrilineage (*paruik* or *payung*), under the control of the lineage as a whole, but was in practice allocated to the sub-

lineages for their use. In this sense no member of a Minangkabau family could become landless. Permanent alienation of ancestral land was prohibited, and its pawning was allowed only in emergency situations stipulated by customary law (*adat*). Private land was obtained through individual efforts, by purchasing land and hiring labourers with money personally accumulated. A man could use the land freely during his lifetime, but it would be incorporated into the ancestral land on his death and would be inherited by his sisters' children (*kemanakan*), instead of his own children. If a landowner wished to pass land to his own children, he could do this only with the agreement of the sisters' children (a procedure called the *hibah* under Islamic law). These rules for the acquisition and inheritance of property were applied to immovable property as well. The village community, however, exercised ultimate rights over all types of land. Generally speaking, the village strongly restricted the penetration of outsiders into land matters [OKI 1977: 12-16].

The original form of land tenure system of the *nagari* seems to have been very similar to that found in tribal societies, in which a tribe or kin group exercised communal control over land, and private ownership in the strict sense was lacking, as, for example, described by Howard [1980: 64-65] speaking of colonial Ghana. The nature of ownership was a 'dependent land tenure', that is, land was acquired through social relationships, particularly lineage affiliation, and thus was not a market commodity [DALTON 1971: 222-223]. In societies which have tribal elements, private ownership of land may develop with the appearance of cash crop cultivation. However, it is not known when and how private ownership emerged in West Sumatra. In any case, the land system in the *nagari* was oriented towards the subsistence of villagers by restricting the disposal of ancestral land, particularly to outsiders. However, this does not mean that the village as a communal whole looked after the welfare of individual households within the village by means of distribution of land. Furthermore, there is no indication of periodical redistribution of land among villagers in order to assure a minimum income as can often be found in peasant societies [SCOTT 1976: 5, 7; NASH 1971: 175]. In the colonial era, pawning, even sale, of ancestral lands occurred frequently simply for consumption purposes, in the wake of general rises in the living standard and the penetration of new commodities into village life. This was often at variance with the stipulation of *adat* [SCHRIEKE 1960: 115-117]. This also stimulated a weakening of customary mechanisms to assure minimum subsistence.

SUBSISTENCE MECHANISMS AND SUBSISTENCE ETHIC

Apart from the land system, what types of subsistence mechanism were encountered in the villages? Since villages (*nagari*) traditionally retained a high degree of autonomy in many respects, which we shall discuss further below, they were obliged to solve problems by themselves in order to maintain subsistence. Some problems could be solved by the household concerned, but there were cases in which the village as a whole had to tackle problems such as the construction of irrigation facilities and defence against natural disasters. For these purposes a *nagari* had a financial base

which consisted of a number of customary taxes. The taxes, as recorded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were levied on numerous occasions: clearing forest land for cultivation, collection of forest products, sale of commodities, transit tolls on trade and river navigation, import and export duties along the coast, salt making, and other economic activities; there were also taxes on adoption to avoid the extinction of a family, fines for illegal marriages, and on the restitution of memberships of which an individual had been judicially deprived, taxes on acquiring a new house, marriage tax, and so on. In addition, villagers were required to provide occasional labour services to their respective *panghulus* on such occasions as a marriage in a *panghulu's* family. There was also a kind of irregular poll tax for whatever was necessary in the general interest of the *nagari*. These taxes were paid in the first place to the *panghulus*, who in turn allocated a portion of what they received to the village treasury. In reality, quite a large proportion seems to have been appropriated by the *panghulus*. The use of these financial resources would be decided by a village council, with the *panghulus* as its core members.

In addition, there existed Islamic taxes collected by officials of the village mosque and stored in a treasury at the mosque. The most important tax in this category was the *zakat*. According to a Dutch account of the 1830s, when the harvest of rice of a household exceeded a certain fixed quantity, a proportion, say 10%, was to be set aside to pay this tax. Of the treasury resources, one-third was allocated as payment to mosque officials, one-third went to the village treasury, and the rest was stored in the mosque treasury for emergency use [OKI 1977: 19–23].

So far as I can discern from the historical evidence, there were two occasions on which the village treasury was actually used for the general economic interest of the villagers. One was the occasion on which the treasury was used to set up the village banks during the 1910s; and the other was when peasants made irrigation channels in order to increase rice production during the 1930s [OKI 1977: 50, 163]. The nature of the village treasury underwent substantial change in 1915, when the government put the management of the treasury under government control, and abolished many of the customary taxes. However, there was always a chance for village leaders, particularly *panghulus*, to divert the treasury for personal profit, as happened in colonial Vietnam [POPKIN 1979: 55–56]. Nevertheless, the village treasury system in West Sumatra can be regarded as an indigenous mechanism for securing subsistence. However, we cannot generalize this conclusion to Indonesia as a whole. In fact a village treasury system comparable to that of West Sumatra existed only on Bali during the colonial period [ADAM 1924: 85].

Communal labour for public works and agriculture is also a means of ensuring subsistence within the village. Notwithstanding the claims of many authors that communal labour is an outstanding characteristic of peasant societies [SWIFT 1957: 335; MIGDAL 1974: 174; POPKIN 1979: 24–25], this was not commonly the case in West Sumatra. This was in part because large-scale work was undertaken by the colonial administration instead of by the village itself. It is also possible that mutual assistance within a lineage group reduced the necessity of communal labour during

peak periods in the agricultural cycle (namely planting and harvesting), which is most commonly mentioned as a reason for communal labour [NASH 1971: 63–65]. Another possibility may be that peasants in West Sumatra planted and harvested rice at different times on different plots of land. It was only in the 1930s that simultaneous planting of rice was introduced by the Dutch, in order to avoid crop damage from rats [OKI 1977: 164]. Even now it is common to find a rice field ready for harvest, bordering a field on which rice has just been planted. Such *ad hoc* planting methods might be an insurance scheme at the household level to spread the risk of total crop failure. Whatever the case, when talking about communal labour as a mechanism for ensuring subsistence, we must be careful to consider two questions: whether the burden is distributed equally in proportion to villagers' capacity, and whether the fruits of communal labour benefit villagers equally [POPKIN 1979: 46–47, 49]. In so far as West Sumatra during the colonial period is concerned, it is more likely that villagers secured subsistence at the household level by dividing fields: some for subsistence crops, mainly rice, and others for cash crops, as, for example, in one village in Northern Thailand [MOERMAN 1968 cited in SCOTT 1976: 23].

Finally, we will examine the so-called 'village egalitarianism' or 'levelling ethic'. Based on studies of Middle America, Nash [1971: 163–165, 172–173] propounded the theory of the 'democracy of poverty', referring to a levelling mechanism which operated to drain the accumulated resources of the community for non-economic ends, and to keep the various households, at least over generations, fairly equal in wealth. Those who were skilled or lucky and accumulated wealth, were the objects of pressures to share their wealth with the needy. Another account notes that in both Meso-America and Central Java, the community prompted the expenditure of surplus beyond subsistence needs on the maintenance of communal religious cults and allied religious activities [MIGDAL 1974: 68–69]. Such motivations might exist when the total output of the village is barely enough for the subsistence of the village, and when accumulation of wealth by one person endangers the subsistence of others. However, there are possible cases, such as the accumulation of wealth through trade outside the village, where accumulation of wealth by some villagers would not endanger the subsistence of other villagers. It remains unproven whether equality really is an overriding cultural value of peasant villages or whether a criticism of the accumulation of wealth beyond subsistence needs derives from personal envy [ORTIZ 1971: 328–329]. In West Sumatra, villagers competed with each other to accumulate wealth, and there is no evidence that villagers were criticized simply because they accumulated wealth. Although we cannot deny that there is some inclination towards egalitarianism in the peasant village, egalitarianism in this case should not be understood as a claim that all should be equal, but rather that at least all should have a place, a right to life [SCOTT 1976: 40]. However, it should be remembered that a village may try to solve problems of subsistence when the subsistence of the village as a whole is endangered, but that it might not help resolve the economic difficulties of individual households. For instance, village leaders in Pariaman, a coastal region of West Sumatra, made an effort to secure the subsistence of the villagers in the face

of serious crop failures in 1937/8, by requesting financial support from the government on the one hand, and by encouraging the planting of second crops on the other [OKI 1977: 167-168]. However, no evidence can be found of insurance on a village level for the difficulties of individual villagers.

SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

From the first military campaign of the Dutch into Highland areas of West Sumatra in the early nineteenth century, the region experienced many rebellions, and social and political movements. Of many possible approaches to these rebellions and movements, the present study analyses them by focusing on two major themes: village autonomy and traditional authority within the village. Both village autonomy and traditional authority, I believe, elucidate much of peasant politics in West Sumatra.

Village Autonomy

The *nagari* before Indonesia's independence, owing to its autonomous nature, can be characterized as a village republic [SCHRIEKE 1960: 95]. Many studies of West Sumatra mention the high degree of village autonomy. One study contrasts the *nagari* as an independent entity with the Javanese village (*desa*) which is nothing more than a tax paying body [BEEUWKES 1916: 561-562]. Another study notes that the *nagari* is an autonomous society *par excellence*, more perfect than any other type of village in Indonesia [ADAM 1924: 2]. This characterization of the *nagari* obviously derives from the historical fact that, about the time the Dutch conquered West Sumatra in the late 1830s, the *nagari* was the highest political body in this region. Although there had existed the so-called 'Minangkabau kingdom', which is believed to have been founded in the late fourteenth century, its collapse in the early 1820s left no political authority higher than the village level. The *nagari* exercised strong control over village territory, maintained a tight kinship organization, and elaborated a village financial system in order to strengthen its autonomous position. Economically speaking, the *nagari*, as a peasant village, also enjoyed autonomy in terms of food. However, the term 'economic autonomy' must be understood here in a relative sense, because we can hardly imagine a village which was entirely self-sufficient, producing all subsistence needs. Consequently, villages were to some extent obliged to exchange goods. However, the point here is whether or not this exchange was carried out under the political control of higher authorities. As we have seen before, the economic autonomy of West Sumatra became seriously damaged after the defeat of the *padri* war in 1837. Economic dependence was not complete, however. It did not lead to the total and immediate destruction of village autonomy. Peasants could still produce food by themselves. We can see how village autonomy functioned within the framework of colonial rule through a notable example: the anti-tax rebellion in 1908.

The Anti-Tax Rebellion of 1908

For the implementation of the Cultivation System, the Dutch deliberately used existing social and political organizations. Rather than imposing the cultivation and delivery of coffee on the household, they ordered the imposition on the village. This contributed to the continuation of village autonomy to a large extent. However, the Dutch decision to introduce an individual income tax and slaughter tax in 1908 suddenly threatened village autonomy. As feared by the Dutch beforehand, the new taxation system was implemented only after bloody fights throughout West Sumatra. This was the largest rebellion in West Sumatra during the colonial period since the *padri* war, resulting in hundreds of casualties on the side of the rebels, and some on the side of the Dutch. Although we see many tax rebellions in colonial Indonesia, they occurred mostly, not at the time of introduction of new taxes, but later due to the consequent economic hardships experienced by the people. Why did the introduction of monetary taxes cause such a broad and vehement resistance? Economic conditions were not particularly bad around 1908. The taxation burden, a 2% income tax or a one guilder minimum for incomes below 120 guilders per year, was likewise not especially heavy. It was often much lower for West Sumatra than for other regions. The average income tax in West Sumatra was estimated at about 2.5 guilders per man of working age, while in Palembang, for instance, about 6–7 guilders per man were actually collected at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although we cannot explain the causes of the 1908 anti-tax rebellion from a single factor, I propose here to analyse it in terms of village autonomy [OKI 1977: 79–80].

One striking characteristic of the rebellion was the fact that resistance was organized in each village. As a result, the Dutch were forced to overcome resistance village by village. This suggests that the village was the last or only resort for the majority of peasants to combat colonial forces. In other words, the strong autonomy of the *nagari* made the rebellion much stronger than in other regions. From the villagers' point of view, the imposition of monetary taxes, especially income tax, was considered a serious infringement of village autonomy. As early as 1824, a Minangkabau chief had told a Dutch official that Minangkabau chiefs had no right to dispose of people's production, and that the Dutch had therefore no right to levy taxes other than duties on trade goods [NAHUIJS 1824: 148–149]. A Minangkabau who participated in the rebellion later gave as the reason for his resistance that he could not understand why the Minangkabau had to pay income tax to the Dutch [*Warta Hindia* 1919]. This statement gives us an indication of how villagers viewed their autonomy in relation to the colonial power. Such sentiments may have been quite common during the rebellion.

The failure of the anti-tax rebellion made it clear that the *nagari* could no longer function as a reliable source of resistance. After 1915 the Dutch introduced a series of village organization policies. These policies further accelerated the disappearance of village political autonomy. Nevertheless, village political autonomy was recurrently sought by the people of West Sumatra after 1908. For one thing, the Dutch failed to change the land system of the village. This left the village a strong base of

socio-economic autonomy. Thus, communist propaganda during the first half of the 1920s deliberately focused on violation by the Dutch of communal village land rights, namely by the exploitation of timber from forests under the control of the village [*Tjaja Soematra* 1926]. Even if the substance of village autonomy was constantly weakening, it was nonetheless used as an ideological weapon whenever the people of West Sumatra tried to resist government policies.

Traditional Authority

The traditional authority of the *nagari* was most conspicuously personified by the *panghulu*. The nature of the authority of such lineage chiefs has often been considered *primus inter pares* in tribal societies. However, such a characterization seems not to fit the Minangkabau case. The *panghulu* was in principle a descendent of the village founders' family. His household or matrilineal family was often wealthier than the average household because it had inherited more and better land from the ancestors. The *panghulu* was the most significant person in decision making in the village council. He represented first of all his own lineage, but also represented the village, in council with other *panghulus*. His power manifested itself in the right to give permission to use land and to receive many village taxes, which can be considered as a kind of tribute. In case of economic difficulties, the *panghulu* was expected to help fellow lineage members. This formed an important base for a patron-client relationship between him and his fellow lineage members. However, the relationship was not always favourable to the lineage members. When the government was trying to raise the loan ceiling for village banks, *panghulus* of some areas strongly opposed this on the grounds that it was the *panghulu* who should be responsible for the financial difficulties of his fellow lineage members. However, it has been shown that these *panghulus* opposed the raising of the loan ceiling in order to prevent fellow lineage members from being able to redeem rice fields and fish ponds which had been pawned to the *panghulus* [SCHRIEKE 1960: 120-211]. Although land transactions within lineages are not well documented, such bond relations must have been very prevalent in West Sumatra considering the relative wealth of *panghulus* in general, and their position as supervisors of ancestral land. In short, the traditional authority of the *panghulu* was based on wealth, the supervision of land, and decision making power in the village council, all legitimated by *adat*.

From the point of view of the *panghulu*, authority could be threatened either by an increase of outside influence—from political parties, the Dutch administration, or external ideologies beyond the control of the *adat*—or by a rise in the economic position of lineage members relative to the *panghulu*. Ideal strategies for the maintenance of authority were: to monopolize external relations, and to keep the economy of lineage members, and villagers in general, dependent on ancestral land, that is on rice cultivation for subsistence purposes. In fact *panghulus* tried to prevent villagers from having external contacts, as well as urging them to focus on rice cultivation. For instance, traditional leaders, having seen the poverty of Javanese peasants who had leased land for sugar plantations, warned villagers not to lease land to outsiders,

especially Dutch companies, and to concentrate on rice cultivation, thereby upholding *adat* [Oetoesan Melajoe 1919]. These strategies directed peasant politics in West Sumatra. This can be demonstrated from historical evidence for the communist uprising of 1926–7, and the nationalist movement of the 1930s. Here I concentrate only on the aspect of traditional authority.

The Communist Uprising of 1926–1927 and Traditional Authority

The authority of the *panghulus* had been threatened since the beginning of the nineteenth century by radical Islamic reformists, native officials, political parties, and by the Dutch. *Panghulus* also saw as potential challengers to their authority: wealthy merchants, educated villagers, intellectuals, modernists, those who had wide relations with outsiders, and similar persons who were beyond the control of *adat* norms and sanctions which had force only within the village. In addition, poor villagers gradually came to threaten *panghulu* authority, because they also tended to establish ties with outside institutions. Of the outside authorities, the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) was the newest in the early 1920s.

With the rapid development of the communist movement in the early 1920s, *panghulus* felt their authority to be seriously threatened. In an effort to divert villagers from communist influence, they organized meetings and denounced Marxist ideas as contradicting both *adat* and Islam. They had some success, thus showing that *adat* remained a strong ideological support for traditional authority, and was still a persuasive ideology for some villagers. However, the situation was quite different in the case of poor people. There were reasons for poor people to establish ties with the Communist Party. In the course of the development of a money economy, economic polarization had taken place. In 1919, for instance, about 55% of men of working age earned less than 120 guilders, below the subsistence margin, while only a few earned more than 600 guilders. This polarization increased towards the time of the export boom around 1925 [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 38]. Many people were unable to pay taxes. The Dutch punished harshly those who did not pay taxes, forcing them to collect gravel for road construction. Also many people were arrested and imprisoned. These facts clearly indicate that *panghulus* did not function as protectors of fellow lineage members when the latter were in economic difficulties; if they had done, people would not have been so frequently punished and arrested. As a result, those who could not pay taxes became increasingly sympathetic to communist propaganda, especially its 'free from taxes' slogan [OKI 1977: 92, 95]. It is notable that the communist movement was particularly active in the poorest areas of West Sumatra, where land for rice cultivation was in short supply. We can draw two conclusions. First, *panghulus* were often unable financially to support more than a few poor people, which therefore reduced their influence in preventing the participation of villagers in the communist movement. Secondly, because the authority of *panghulus* was ultimately based on the control of ancestral lands, they wielded less influence in these areas of land shortage.

In connection with taxation issues, it is interesting to know what people thought

about taxation by the Dutch. In an interrogation, one member of the PKI explained how he persuaded people to become communist members at meetings:

I talked about communism in Russia. And I also told them that the Netherlands East India government has done many illegal things. If we have a pig, we have to pay 0.4 guilder a year and 1 guilder for selling its meat. If we slaughter a buffalo, we have to pay 6 guilders. If the buffalo is over 4 years old, we have to pay 7.4 guilders. If our *sawah* [rice fields] produce 300 *gantang* [approximately 900 kg] of paddy, we have to pay at least 4 guilders.....If we are communist members, we pay only 0.83 guilder each [MR 1927/107x].

This statement clearly shows a strong hatred of taxation by the people. Moreover, it should be noted that the taxation itself was regarded as 'illegal' by the PKI member. By implication, those who co-operated with the Dutch to collect taxes, including the *panghulus*, were considered to have done 'illegal' things. It is also of note that the PKI member talked about exemption from all government taxes on payment of 0.83 guilder (presumably a reference to a PKI membership fee). However unrealistic his words might sound, this form of expression was one by which PKI leaders could recruit members and sympathizers, and by which peasants were attracted to join the movement.

The Nationalist Movement and Traditional Authority

The communist uprising politicized many of the population and made them critical of traditional authorities. An ex-communist who returned from exile to his home village told the village head, in front of other villagers:

I had been exiled to Digul on the charge of being a communist. I was innocent. All of you may think that I was in hell. However, you still know nothing. So I'll put you right. It was hoped that we should overthrow our oppression.....

I am the *raja adat* [a chief by virtue of customary law] and you are the *raja perintah* [village head appointed by the government]. You have no brains [MR 1940/434x: 2].

As is shown in the above, the village head was openly and bluntly criticized by the communist. By referring to '*raja adat*', he suggested that he was the real village head supported by the villagers, while the existing village head was nothing but a government appointee, and thus an illegitimate head. Similar confrontations are likely to have occurred in many places in West Sumatra in the 1930s.

In Indonesian historiography, the 1930s have often been described in terms of the development of the nationalist movement. As a result we may have the impression that the struggle between traditional authorities and their challengers (including nationalists) ended with the one-sided victory of the latter. Indeed this was true to some extent for West Sumatra, but the reality was more complex than it might seem. Studies of the nationalist movement have paid great attention to power politics and to the ideology of prominent leaders, but little attention to what was happening at the village level. In West Sumatra the influence of the *panghulus* revived during the

1930s, at a time when the nationalist movement was also gaining strength. The 1930s were a period when the majority of people were struggling to meet subsistence needs. Those who had been earning high incomes from export crop cultivation were forced to secure subsistence through rice cultivation on ancestral lands. Many Minangkabau returned from other regions to their home villages, where they had to rely for their livelihood on the harvest from ancestral lands. In short, at no other time during the colonial period were ancestral lands so significant for the subsistence needs of the population than in the 1930s. This was the time when *panghulus* took the initiative to increase rice cultivation.

Against this background of increased economic influence, the *panghulus* tried to take the initiative in political fields as well. After 1931, the *panghulus* began to set up *adat* associations, both at the village and supra-village level, to confront the growing influence of secular and Islamic nationalists. Indeed, there was a mushrooming of *adat* associations everywhere in West Sumatra. Unlike the case of the communist movement during the 1920s, *panghulus* could effectively block the penetration of the nationalist influence, at least at the village level in areas which had extensive rice cultivation [OKI 1977: 183–190]. We should, of course, not forget that the revival of traditional authority was made possible not simply by the increased initiative of *panghulus* in the economic sphere, but to a great extent by the intensive suppression of the nationalist movement by the colonial government. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the socio-political implications of the economic role played by the traditional leaders, the *panghulus*.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that peasant economy is not inherently static but can be dynamic given appropriate incentives. The dynamic economic expansion in the latter half of the 1910s and the 1920s amply verifies this. For a dynamic understanding of peasant economy we may tentatively formulate three necessary assumptions and then a set of necessary historical conditions.

The first assumption is that there is a double orientation of the peasants' economic activities: on the one hand for their own consumption, and on the other for exchange. Exchange is significant even in economies which aim primarily at meeting subsistence needs and which have limited or only occasional surplus, since peasant economy is not necessarily equivalent to self-sufficient economy in the strict sense.

The second assumption is that the peasant economy of the villages cannot be separated from a wider economy. If we look at the nature of peasant economy taking only a few villages as examples, we may tend to perceive it as being a static economy, because a given village is likely to be able to produce surplus for exchange only occasionally. Seen at a broader, for example regional level, however, we can find quite dynamic and extensive exchange with the outside world. This was the case with the West Sumatran economy even before European involvement in the region. We must not forget the fact that even limited and occasional surpluses for exchange

in individual villages may amount to substantial quantities when taken all together. The third assumption is that peasants are motivated to produce surplus. This also assumes, of course, that peasants do not exist in a vacuum, but that they interact with the outside world, and thus have access to new commodities and new information.

These three assumptions indicate sources for potential dynamism in a peasant economy. However, this raises the question why one peasant economy should be dynamic while others are static. In order to answer this we need to specify determining historical conditions. For theoretical purposes I will put these in general terms. First, we need to specify the extent to which higher political authorities impede or encourage a peasant economy, not only economically but also politically and socially, at certain historical conjunctures. Secondly, we need to specify the conditions, favourable or unfavourable, for peasants to produce more commodities for exchange, in terms of prices, accessibility to market, and the availability of commodities they want in exchange for their own produce. If, in a given economy, these incentives do not exist, it can be expected that peasants will not try to produce above subsistence levels. Also, in circumstances in which the peasants' surplus beyond subsistence levels is appropriated by higher authorities, then the peasants' motivation to increase production is thereby reduced. In such a case, the economy concerned should be called not simply a 'subsistence economy' but a 'forced subsistence economy', that is to say it is not a natural state of affairs. This was the case in many Indonesian regions under the 'Forced Cultivation System' of the colonial Dutch government, including West Sumatra between 1847 and 1908.

When we talk about a subsistence orientation or a 'subsistence ethic', we ought to consider the economic conditions under which this ethic plays a significant role. As far as I can judge from the evidence of West Sumatran history, such an ethic became strong when people were struggling to meet subsistence needs, for example in the 1930s, when food from ancestral land was provided to those who returned to their home villages from other regions. We must also consider the possibility that the subsistence ethic was adopted by villagers under strong pressure from higher authorities, who might appropriate whatever surplus could be produced. Future discussion might more fruitfully ask why certain societies are subsistence economies, rather than continue to ask what are the characteristics of a subsistence economy.

The concept of village autonomy has a double implication. When invoked by villagers, it implies that the villagers are using the concept as an ideological weapon against pressure from higher political authorities. In the language of policy and administration of higher authorities, however, the concept is likely to be used to impose communal responsibility. This double implication may also be discerned in the concept of tradition, *adat* in Indonesia. However, there is an additional implication in this term. When the concept was used by traditional authorities in addressing fellow villagers, they were attempting to control those who might challenge their authority. In the case of West Sumatra, the appeal to *adat* by the *panghulus* was strongest during the 1930s, when subsistence production was being severely undermined. It is also very suggestive that *panghulus* warned villagers not to become

involved in land lease to outsiders, and appealed to *adat* to justify a return to rice cultivation. We have here the clearest manifestation of traditional authority, an authority based on the controlling power over ancestral land, land which was primarily used for the cultivation of rice, the most fundamental means of subsistence.

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