

The Study of Indonesian Maritime History: Problems and Challenges in Theory and Methodology Perspective

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The writing of maritime history in Indonesia has become an interesting study for scholars. Maritime history cannot be separated from the history of Indonesia since Indonesian territory developed eavily from the maritime sectors. The aim of this paper is to examines the development of maritime historiography in Indonesia from both theoretical and methodological perspectives, which are then linked up with issues that evolve in methodological aspects. Literature studies show that current maritime historiography in Indonesia is still far behind compared to other historical writings which are various in methodologies. Based on the study conducted, several facts are found. Firstly, there is a lack of local historians who wrote maritime history after the great work of maritime historian Indonesia, AB Lopian in 1987. Secondly, limited local sources and dominant colonial sources also influenced the interpretation results in the maritime history which tended to be colonial-centric so that override local sources. Lastly, the study of contemporary sociocultural aspects especially cultural (anthropology) approach in Indonesian maritime historiography is also rarely done, resulting social aspects in the maritime world tends to be opaque and more dominated on economic aspects, trades, politics, etc. These problems are certainly a challenge for scholars to provide the development of maritime history in Indonesia, especially reconstructing historical facts, re-analyzing historical sources, and enriching the Indonesian maritime historiography among the other historical writings.

Keywords: maritime history, theory and methodology, historiography, Indonesian maritime history

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Introduction: Maritime History as An Important Part of Indonesian History

The problem raised in this paper is about the problem of maritime historiography in Indonesia in the methodological perspective in the 20th century. The analysis is done by using qualitative method which produces descriptive data obtained from literature study about Indonesian maritime history researchers. Research on the maritime history desperately needs to be developed because maritime history has a deep meaning for Indonesian history, since Indonesia is mainly developed from the maritime sector. The vast majority of maritime kingdoms in Indonesia show that their ancestral lives were heavily dependent on maritime sectors, in terms of inter-island shipping, the utilization of marine natural resources, to marine trade with traders from other regions as well as international traders. From various parts of Indonesia spread many large ports. Also many cultural relics depicting the prowess of Indonesian ancestors as sailors. History has also mentioned that the unity of Indonesia is due to the greatness of the maritime fleet.

Since the 9th century AD, with a rugged boat, Indonesian has sailed away for a voyage. The increases in commodity trading on the sea are encouraging the emergence of maritime-dominated kingdoms such as Kutai, Sriwijaya, Tarumanegara, etc. History also noted that the nautical life of the Indonesian nation was born long before. This is shown by the findings of prehistoric sites and history. Not many sources can be extracted to show the history of Indonesian shipping in prehistoric times. Few sources in oral and reliefs depicted on the temples of both Hindu and Buddhist temples as well as some writings and news from the Chinese traders, Arabs, Indians who had sailed to Indonesia in his day.

When discussion about the world of the sea and maritime, one should not only talk about the world of shipping and trading alone. The subject of maritime history as a whole may include broader things such as fishing activities, hunting, international maritime law, naval history, ship history, ship design, shipbuilding, navigation history, history of maritime-related science, marine exploration, trade and maritime economics, sailing, seafront activities, lighthouse history, maritime-themed literature, maritime-themed art, social history of sailors, pirates and passengers and sea-related communities.

Abdul Rahman Hamid¹ in the book of *Sejarah Maritim Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Maritime) explained that maritime history includes not only common description in regards to the sea and dealing with sea shipping and trading. As introduced by Lopian, a deeper elaboration was conducted by some researchers on this field by some foreign historians on the maritime world of Southeast Asia whose scope of study includes trading, shipping, and pirating. Abdul's approach to describing the maritime history includes the study of people interaction in the past which deals with aspects of maritime, especially sailing and trade which includes social, economic, political and even cultural aspects.

Furthermore, Suhartono² added that maritime history is one of the essential categories of Indonesian history. Given that Indonesia is an archipelagic country, it is

¹ Abd Rahman Hamid, *Sejarah Maritim Indonesia*, (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2013), p 11.

² Suhartono W Pranoto, *Teori dan Metodologi Sejarah*, (Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu, 2014), p 108-109.

unfortunate not to explore Indonesian maritime history. Since the time of old Asian trading, the kingdom of Srivijaya has reached its glory due to commerce and voyages. Similarly, when Majapahit kingdom developed, social-political relations spread across Nusantara islands, especially when almost all of the kingdoms has a port. Moreover, the mainland kingdom also connected with river traffic to the ocean port. In the Dutch colonial era, conquering expeditions were carried out on the sea. The conquest of the dispersed kingdoms across Indonesia was conducted within the framework of *Pax Neerlandica*,³ although only in the early 20th century the kingdoms of Indonesia were under colonial political hegemony in 1824.

In regards to the trading and shipping across the islands in terms of maritime history, one should observed the trading method for maritime history research such as how many items transported, where to go, who sends the issues, the competition with other merchants, and how long the voyage and tax breaks become a problem in maritime history. Firmly with maritime history, fisherman's history, fisheries, piracy is part of this history but has not been widely published.

Some Problems and Methodological Analysis of Maritime Historiography in Indonesia

A. The Dominance of Colonial Sources And Its Impact On Indonesian Maritime History Interpretation

Sources in history can be oral and written sources, photos, videos, and more. The source of history could be divided into three categories⁴, such as

- a. Written sources
Information in the form of a written report that contains the historical facts. These sources can be found in stone, wood, paper, cave walls.
- b. Oral sources
Statements that were spoken by the perpetrator or witness events that occurred in the past. This source is the first source that humans use to inherit historical events, but their actual content is insufficient because it depends on the impressions, memories, and interpretations of the narrator.
- c. Material sources
Any information which is obtained from the cultural heritage of material objects or commonly called ancient or ancient objects. This source can be found in objects made of stone, metal, wood, soil.

Historical sources also could be divided into primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the testimony of a witness who saw historical events with his own eyes or the five senses or other mechanical devices present at the event (eyewitnesses, e.g., cameras, typewriters, stationery, etc.). The primary source should exist in the same era with the events told. Secondly, secondary sources are the testimonies of people who are not eyewitnesses, i.e., someone who is not on occasion. For example,

³ *Pax neerlandica* is a colonial politics that is referred to as the unity of the Indonesian archipelago under the Dutch colonial power, which has the meaning of unification.

⁴ Sulasman. *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah*. (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2014), p 95.

newspaper coverage could be a secondary source since it may not be a direct product produced by an event, but more likely is the journalist that is reporting the actual incident happened.⁵

Rahayu S, Hidayat⁶ stated that in the historiography of Indonesia, there is a period known as a “period of colonization”, When the Indonesian history is documented in the context of colonial expansion and interest, it could be seen that Indonesia became part of *Nederlandsch-Indies*. Historical documentation was conducted by Dutch historians in the context of colonial power. Since that is the case, one could observe that the majority of the documents focused on the emerging local kingdoms that come into contact with VOC and the Dutch East Indies government. The fact that Indonesian historiography from the period before the twentieth century was heavily written by the Dutch authors is mainly due to the inaccessibility of local people as the primary source of the period. This condition also added with the limitations of the local archives that could be found.

Rahayu added that the archive collected in the Netherlands are in fact insufficient to provide the expected data to enable a careful analysis the content to the actual conditions of the regions in Indonesia. It is obvious that the documents submitted by the government in the Netherlands Indies to the colonies are emphasizing Netherland’s policy-related affair, whilst the particular issues most likely kept in the office of the *Algemeene Secretarie*⁷ itself or in a regional archive collection as a reference to the governor-general on that time.⁸

Some studies of maritime history has been done by historians of both Indonesian historians and foreign historians interested in writing Indonesian. However, is still widely used colonial documents as its source. One example of the most famous writings in maritime history is the dissertation of AB Lopian in 1987 entitled "*Orang Laut - Bajak Laut - Raja Laut: Sejarah Kawasan Laut Sulawesi Abad XIX*" ", translated as “People of the Ocean - Pirates – Ocean Conquerer: The History of the Sulawesi Maritime Region on the 19th Century” is considered to have opened a new chapter in the writing of maritime history and the history of the region in Indonesia.

On his writing, AB Lopian talks a lot about the condition of the sea in Sulawesi in the nineteenth century. AB Lopian uses a social and cultural approach in explaining and dividing the typology of society in the Sulawesi sea region. He told that the maritime community was divided into sea people, pirates, and rulers. AB Lopian also describes in detail the climatic, topographical, and maritime language and cultural systems that used at that time. He also narrated the interactions between ethnic groups and immigrants entering the Sulawesi Sea until the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish.⁹

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Rahayu S Hidayat, dkk, *Sumber Sejarah dan Penelitian Sejarah*. (Depok: UI Pres, 1998), p 4.

⁷ *Algemeene Secretarie* was an important institution in the time of the Netherland Indies tasked with collecting, processing and producing information in the Netherland Indies. This institution is a liaison institution between the Netherland Indies rulers and the Dutch central government in Hague (Den Haag)

⁸ Rahayu S Hidayat, dkk, *Sumber Sejarah dan Penelitian Sejarah*. (Depok: UI Pres, 1998), p 4.

⁹ Lopian, A.B. 2009. *Orang Laut, Bajak Laut, Raja Laut : Sejarah Kawasan Laut Sulawesi Abad XIX*. Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu.

Some problems appear when writing maritime history. For example, many researchers complained about minimal issues and difficulty in obtaining historical sources. In the introduction to his writings, AB Lopian stated that the temporal range was limited in the nineteenth century because the source of history was more abundant than the previous era. Indigenous sources on the issues highlighted are found to be minimal, especially the primary sources. With the limited sources provided on his book, resulting the primary document was based on colonial documentation which obviously have an impact on his interpretation.

In an attempt to provide historical explanations, historians often forget that they are bound by the logic that has been accepted by all sciences in giving an authentic interpretation. The ability to collect resources should be accompanied by the capabilities to explain the situation. Errors do not distinguish reasons, causes, conditions, and motivations. This difference between the four is closeness to events.¹⁰ Sulasman added that the various interpretations of the historians of the same event are not technically contradictory, but dependent on the original notion (the absolute cause of the same event) which is absolute-in this case not universally shared. From here, it appears that in thinking, the subjective element becomes functional and this factor limits or alters the nature of objectivity that the historian expects to believe.¹¹

In describing pirates, AB Lopian uses more colonial notion in explaining the concept of pirates. Pirates are defined as people who live by taking the goods from the ships they plowed. Among the famous pirates in Southeast Asia, especially in Sulawesi ocean, are Sulu pirates, Mangindanao, and Balangingi. Pirates are often said to be a crime because to get everything, they use violent means and are often accompanied by murder. In every action they always take prisoners in the ship they plow to land and sell the crew to people in need of labor to work on their land. They are employed in fields belonging to rich peasants who own vast lands. To make the voyage to a distant place to find slaves to sell, these pirates need the services of a person who knows the situation of the sea. Therefore they should be related to the sea people who have more knowledge with the condition on the sea. In this case, there is a mutual relationship between sea people and pirates in a sense that they could also get protection from pirates to external threats. On the other hand, pirates could obtain skilled manpower from sea people as a navigator.

Since the early 19th century, the influences of pirates in Indonesia began to diminish as they were hunted down by the colonial government who regarded them as a criminal. This conditions also added to the movement of foreign pirates started to roam across the Indonesian archipelago. At first they were still able to face the pressure given by foreign pirates, but eventually, they got cornered, especially with the policy made by the colonial government to stop the pirates and considers them criminals at sea. In this case, the colonial government began to hunt against pirates, and those found guilty and commit crimes in the sea will be sentenced to death. Pirates in the sense of the colonial government can be divided into two types, first called pirates as pirates who engage in illegal marine activities, and contrary to applicable law. Then the second is a korsario, or a legal pirate issued by the

¹⁰ Kuntowijoyo. 2013. *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah*. Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana. Pp. 139

¹¹ Sulasman. 2014. *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah*. Bandung: Pustaka Setia. Pp 115

government to catch the other pirates. They also aim to hijack or capture ships sailing on the territorial sea of the colonial government.¹²

From the explanation presented by AB Lopian above it is clear that the concept of pirates is a given term from the colonial side who feel disturbed interests in the Sulawesi Sea region. The idea of piracy has a meaning derived from colonial culture of people who commit acts of violence and violence in the sea without being authorized by the ruling government. Besides, in addition to economic motives, if it connected with war, the pirate phenomenon gets a new dimension that is the political motive as the driving factor.

In another context, the notion of pirates when associated with conditions outside colonial perception would have other meanings. One of them is based on the writings of Ota Atsushi¹³ entitled "Pirates or Entrepreneurs? The Migration and Trade of Sea People in the Southwest of Kalimantan, circa 1770-1820" provides an explanation of the general fact that West Kalimantan has experienced an economic decline in its time needs to be reconstructed. In fact, the presence of sea people and pirates in Pontianak sea region actually improve the socio-economic life of Borneo at that time especially in the field of trade. It seems that Ota is trying to reconstruct historical facts and to re-analyze the sources of colonial history because it involves the interests of the rulers of their time.

Another study comes from Gusti Asnan's writings in his book with his original title; *Dunia Maritim Pantai Barat Sumatera* or Maritime World in West Coast of Sumatra. In his writings, Asnan much discussed aspects of shipping and trade on the West Coast of Sumatra. From a methodological perspective, Asnan explains the dynamics of trade and shipping of the West coast of Sumatra within the framework of economic politics of the Dutch Colonial Government covering various colonial economic policies. In addition, Asnan also sees the involvement of Indies non-governmental groups in the following trade and trade activities with cooperation and competitiveness among fellow economic actors involved in the region.¹⁴

Asnan explained that in 1814 as the realization of the London Agreement, the British were forced to return Indonesia to the Netherlands and because the VOC had disbanded, the west coast of Sumatera (including West Sumatra) was automatically controlled by Netherland Indies government on May 22, 1819. When there were local upheavals (Padri War, 1824) led by Tuanku Imam Bonjol, to strengthen his power the Dutch East Indies government also launched a strategy of *divide et impera*, or roughly translated as political bring into conflict. The Dutch East Indies government stirred up and engaged in local Padri conflict by providing assistance to traditional leaders who were almost defeated by the Padri movement.¹⁵

¹² A.B Lopian, *Orang Laut, Bajak Laut, Raja Laut : Sejarah Kawasan Laut Sulawesi Abad XIX*, (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2009)

¹³ Ota Atsushi, "Pirates or Entrepreneurs? The Migration and Trade of Sea People in Southwest Kalimantan, C 1770-1820. 2010", No. 90, *Southeast Asia Program Publications at Cornell University*, 2010.

¹⁴ Gusti Asnan, *Dunia Maritim Pantai Barat Sumatera*, (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2007).

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p 68-75

On the other hand, even though the Dutch have created *rust en orde*, which is controlling the Padri Movement, it does not mean that the coastal waters of Sumatera are clean from disturbance. Disturbances also come from the pirates who allegedly came from Aceh. In the war of Padri, there is also a presence of pirates Sidi Mara as a figure of the hero who helped the Padri movement. Sidi Mara is an intermediary merchant who trades liaison between Acehnese and Padrians. He supplied the Padrians with goods such as weapons, clothing, salt, fish, and others which he bought from Acehnese.

Gusti Asnan also mentioned the share of pirates known as Sidi Mara is also involved in the fight against the Dutch. The presence of Sidi Mara pirates helped Padrians to besiege the Dutch around the coast. The pirate activity on the western coast of Sumatra in the 19th century was to against the sailing merchant vessels, the settlements of the people who cooperated with the Dutch and also because of political motives. Sidi Mara pirates, according to a Dutch report, usually raiding villages on the beach that had fallen into the hands of the Dutch. Typically, the ships that sail around the waters of Sumatra will be safe from pirates when flying the flag of Aceh. In addition, the ship that often got the hunk is a ship or boat that is sailing towards the territory of the Dutch East Indies government. It means that the ships are considered as an enemy to the pirates for recognizing the existence of the Dutch East Indies government.

Dien Majid also explained that during the Padri war, a man named Sidi Mara mustered the power to expel the Dutch before touching Aceh.¹⁶ The Padrians who moved north of Pasaman succeeded in occupying the waters of Bangis, while the sea guard was assisted by the boats of Aceh under the leadership of Sidi Mara.¹⁷ To defeat it, the Dutch East Indies Government established security posts in several coastal cities and also sent military expeditions.

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that the naming of the term pirate as a rebel is a term born from the eye of colonial that considers them an enemy that can disrupt the course of power. On the other hand, pirates precisely as 'comrades' who helped the resistance drive out colonial influences especially in the Padsri movement in West Sumatra. These small narratives should receive further attention in Indonesian historiography, especially in the maritime field. As a historian, one must be keen to analyze colonial sources as this will have an impact in providing historical interpretation and explanation.

In terms of the selection of sources of history originating from local sources, it seems that Irawan Djoko Nugroho's research in his book; *Majapahit Peradaban Maritim, Ketika Nusantara Menjadi Pengendali Pelabuhan Dunia*, translated as "Civilization of Majapahit Maritime, When the Archipelago Becomes a Controller of the Naval World", it has given an additional color in the writing of Indonesian maritime history. The author uses local sources of Nagarakartagama, Kidung, and other inscriptions to get a more detailed picture of the history of Majapahit. Evidently, with the use of local sources, this result is very different from the history of Majapahit known during

¹⁶ Dien Majid, *Catatan Pinggir Sejarah Aceh, Perdagangan, Diplomasi, dan Perjuangan Rakyat*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor, 2014), Pp 170-171.

¹⁷ Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro, and Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia IV*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2008), p 205.

this much written by foreign historians who are fixated on colonial references. But that does not mean that Irawan disregard the colonial archives as a comparison material. He tried to rectify the history of Majapahit that had been known.¹⁸

Similar to Linda Smith's view in her book; *Decolonizing Methodologies*, she is firmly opposed to the source and style of historical writing born out of the thinking the colonial (west). The colonial view of the colonized peoples is considered as a primitive nation, away from the intellectual world and unable to spawn an idea for the sake of civilization, even found not a whole person. When history is written on the basis of Western interpretation, colonized peoples will be marginalized from the writing of the history of their own people. Historical literature in the hands of the West according to Linda has been designed to dominate the interests of their own power so that the paper was inseparable from the story that the West was successful in bringing change for the colonized peoples.¹⁹ This is the reason why in her book Linda always insisted that the colonized peoples should open their eyes, reconstruct the history and criticize the history of the Western view.

Bambang Purwanto in his book; *"Gagalnya Historiografi Indonesiansentris"*, translated as "The Unsuccessful of the Historiography Indonesian centric" states that Indonesian centric in historiography could be interpreted as a written history, making the people of Indonesia as its primary focus, and viewed from the perspective of the nation. Theoretically and philosophically, within the Indonesian tradition, Indonesian history is understood from within that is oriented towards Indonesian society as a whole of the nation.²⁰ This is the problem of Indonesian history writing. Not many historians write about Indonesia as an identity. Many of Indonesia's historical literature are dominated by colonial sources and Western mindsets that seem to represent Indonesia was born from the touch of the west. Although it is realized that Indonesia is not separated from the stains of the colonists 'thinking', but what needs to be emphasized here is when Indonesia's offer to write Indonesia as a national identity that has been rooted long before the intervention of the west.

B. Blurred Anthropological Cultural Approach in Maritime Studies.

The study of Indonesia's maritime history is still rare in the realm of Indonesian historical tradition. This shortage also causes the study of maritime history is still far behind from other histories such as rural history, political history, economic history, and so forth. Some examples of such maritime history literature, such as AB Lopian and Gusti Asnan discuss maritime history by focusing on the material, demographic and socio-economic and political conditions of the shipping economy. So far, studies on sociocultural aspects, especially cultural approaches or anthropological approaches in Indonesian maritime history are still rare done. Abd Rahman Hamid explained that maritime history is a study of human activity in the past related to aspects of maritime, especially sailing and trading which includes social, economic, political and even cultural issues. The study of maritime history directed towards culture or

¹⁸ Irawan Djoko Nugroho, *Majapahit Peradaban Maritim Ketika Nusantara Menjadi Pengendali Pelabuhan Dunia*, (Jakarta: Suluh Nuswantara Bakti, 2010)

¹⁹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, (Yogyakarta: Insist, 2005)

²⁰ Bambang Purwanto, *Gagalnya Historiografi Indonesiasentris*, (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2006), p 11.

anthropological approach (cross-cultural) could be a formula to overcome the problems of the Indonesian nation today especially in the integration of the nation.²¹

Research on maritime history is dominated by economic aspects of trade, politics, shipping, etc. However, at least some maritime historical research with methodological using cultural approach has been done as in the book: "*Arus Balik Memori Rempah dan Bahari Nusantara Kolonial Postkolonial*", translated as "Flow back Memory of Spice and Maritime Archipelago Post-colonial Archipelago has made a valuable contribution. Methodologically", this book uses various social science approaches in looking at the maritime history of the Indonesian archipelago. This book stretched from the past when maritime civilization became an inseparable part of civilization until its weak moments under the control of the colonialists. The process of colonialism is not limited to the substantial period at war but incarnate in a contemporary form of capital control and the means of production in the field of marine.²²

Conclusion

Based on the discussion on this paper, it can be concluded that the study of maritime history in Indonesia and the involvement of local authors by methodological approach are still relatively small. In addition, the literature often found covering familiar aspects such as trade, economics, politics. The discussion topics focusing on socio-cultural studies on the maritime history as a culture is found to be rare. In regards to the historical sources, the lack of local resources and the dominance of colonial literatures seen to be affecting the interpretation result. The study that has been conducted by the author, in this case, could be a description of a situation should one wants to conduct a further research on the topic of maritime history in Indonesia. Given that the maritime world is an aspect that cannot be separated in the history of Indonesia, one could hope that historical maritime not only seen as a narration of the greatness of Indonesian ancestor on their time with their trading, sailing, sea politics, and other things that happened in the past. Furthermore, maritime history with a cultural perspective should be seen as the medium to deeply understanding the integrity of nationality in the current era of modern Indonesia so that maritime history can be more developed in terms of theory and methodology to catch up with other topic of histories.

Acknowledgement

This paper is fully funded by LPDP (Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education) and I would like to thanks LPDP for the opportunity and financial support to improve my academic ability. I would also like to extend my thanks to the people who helps this paper; my lecturer, friends and my family who always motivate me.

²¹ Abd Rahman Hamid, *Sejarah Maritim Indonesia*, (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2013), p 11.

²² Dorothea Rosa Herliany, dkk, *Arus Balik: Memori Rempah dan Bahari Nusantara Kolonial dan Poskolonial*, (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2006)

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