

*Between Sovereign Domain and Servile Tenure: The Development of Rights to Land in Java, 1789–1870.* By Peter Boomgaard. Comparative Asian Studies no. 4. Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1989. Pp. 55.

This mini-monograph is a useful contribution to our understanding of land rights in colonial Java. Beginning early in the nineteenth century, British and Dutch administrators positioned themselves with specific views on the nature of land tenure on Java. The fundamental issue was whether rights to land were vested in the sovereign, in village communities, or with cultivators. The evidence of private property, communal property, and rulers' allocations of lands as apanage were variously cited to support the introduction of successive revenue systems that, in turn, influenced land tenure patterns. The Raffles' Land-Rent System (1813–14), the Dutch modifications of this system (1818–19), Van den Bosch's Cultivation System (1830), Constitutional Regulations (1836, 1854), and the Agrarian Law (1870) were landmark statutes in this progressive definition and delimitation of Javanese land tenure.

In 1867, in an attempt to clarify the considerable remaining uncertainties about land tenure on Java and Madura, the Dutch colonial government embarked on a major investigation of land rights, the results of which were published in three large volumes, generally referred to as the *Eindresumé*. Rather than resolve uncertainties, however, the publication of this massive new body of evidence contributed substantially to a further academic debate among Dutch scholars that continued through the 1930s.

Dr Boomgaard's concern in this monograph is not to analyse the development of government perceptions and policies but to survey "local reports" on the developing nature of land rights. He does this by distinguishing four regions within Java: (1) Pasundan (West Java), (2) Pasisir (North-Central Java as far as Surabaya), (3) Easthook (East Java from Pasuruan eastward), and (4) Kajawen (South-Central Java from Kedu to Kediri). Boomgaard's summary examination of these archival reports, chronologically arranged by region, is a reasoned attempt to present available evidence on land tenure in a comparable and coherent fashion. The problem is that the evidence presented is neither suf-

ficient to resolve fundamental uncertainties nor consistent enough from report to report to be entirely convincing. Most reports on local land tenure patterns were written by Dutch officials who held "positions", both ideological and administrative, with regard to particular government policies. Their reports must therefore be interpreted accordingly. Moreover, the scatter of diverse reports over the period to 1870 provides no more than a shot-gun's burst in the direction of the problem.

The value of this work does not lie in a simple resolution of the problems that it sets out to consider. (One could hardly expect this in a mere 55 pages!) Rather, its value lies in the way it reorients discussion to focus on local regional variation on Java in its historical context. Too often, previous discussions have tended to generalize from specific local evidence to some hypothetical system for the whole of Java. The recognition of the critical importance of the considerable variation that exists within Java is necessary in understanding issues of land rights.

From this perspective, however, it is questionable whether a division of Java into merely four regions is sufficient to characterize variations in land rights. Boomgaard argues that his division into four regions is "based on ethno-linguistic and historical considerations" (p. 9) but the evidence he cites in discussing these regions suggests the possibility of finer discriminations and perhaps different boundaries between his four regions.

In Boomgaard's classification, both Banten and Cirebon, as partial Javanese enclaves, sit rather uncomfortably in the Pasundan region as does Pasuruan, for other reasons, in Boomgaard's Easthook region. Moreover, as Boomgaard himself indicates, the Kajawen region can be usefully distinguished into its three locally recognized areas: (1) the crown lands (*bumi narasuwita Dalem*), (2) state apauage areas (*Nagara-gung*), and (3) the outlying areas (*Mancanagara*). Koentjaraningrat's ethno-historical categorization of the regional diversity of Javanese culture makes many of these discriminations (1985, pp. 21-25). He, for example, distinguishes Banten from Sunda and includes a portion of Cirebon within the Pasisir, which he divides into eastern and western halves. For central Java, he distinguishes the *Negaragung* from Banyu-

mas and Bagelan, each of which he describes as separate cultural areas, and from the eastern Mancanegara, which he extends well into Pasuruan. Finally, he categorizes the rest of Boomgaard's Easthook as Tanah Sabrang Wetan except for the pockets of Tengger and Blambangan. Although more nuanced discriminations of cultural regions on Java are possible (Hatley 1984), even within the broad regions that Boomgaard has defined, he continues to refer to specific locations.

On the basis of all this, Boomgaard's conclusions are careful and cautious, referring to specific locations in particular periods. He concludes that in addition to private ownership, communal land tenure also existed in Java before 1800: it was predominantly a North-Central Java phenomenon and was less developed in South-Central Java. Communal tenure was especially elaborated in relation to *corvée* labour. The Land-Revenue System after 1813 stimulated communalization in a number of Residencies in the Pasisir and the Cultivation System after 1830 prompted the equalization of holdings and the conversion of hereditary private holdings into communal *sawah*.

Boomgaard's study unfortunately covers only the period to 1870, rather than the whole of the nineteenth century. One of his final conclusions is that after 1850 "the drive to communalize arable land slackened in many areas and newly reclaimed fields remained private tenure" (p. 45). This conclusion seems questionable. By 1850 the foundations for communal land tenure were established in the Pasisir and Kajawen regions. Although the right to private land may have been recognized in these two regions, wherever irrigation was improved to allow new land to be added to existing *sawah*, especially in the sugar-growing villages, communal land tenure continued to be implemented. In the end, Boomgaard's study is concerned with the origins of land tenure systems in Java and not with their continuation as systems of control. He is also not interested in the forms of representation used in the materials he presents. One of the most interesting of recent studies to deal with the Dutch literature on communal land tenure in Java is a study by the late Taro Goh (forthcoming) who examines this literature as a special "authoritative" form of European colonial discourse on the East.

## REFERENCES

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