

Gemeente Tanjung Balai: City of Port and International Trade for Fish and Gambir Exporting Ports

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Abstract

The transformation of an area into a municipality is a manifestation of regional autonomy that has existed since the colonial era. This occurs as a sort of freedom granted to regions to govern themselves based on their own needs within the context of liberal democratization. A form of colonial decentralization was the Gemeente, an autonomous municipality that later became what we know today as a city. The Dutch East Indies administration, of course, determined Gemeente by taking into account the potential and needs of the people living in the region. Tanjung Balai had its own distinct characters and possibilities. Tanjung Balai Gemeente was well-known for its international trade and port, which is directly connected to Malacca. This area was formed not only as a result of the development of its plantations, but also to become a direct connection for trade with other countries, specifically in the heart of international trade in the Strait of Malacca. This paper will explore the circumstances that occurred prior to Tanjung Balai becoming a gemeente. Furthermore, this paper will discuss the influence of the implementation of decentralization (regional autonomy) policies on population demography and port facility development. Up until now, Tanjung Balai is still a city with significant marine resources, as well as a port that connects Indonesia to Malaysia and Singapore.

Keywords: *Regional Autonomy, Gemeente, Tanjung Balai, Port.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The shortage of resources to support the necessities of human life on a global scale has

become an urgent issue today. The resource allocation thus promotes economic actors to expand their trade networks, not only regionally, but also globally (Cui et al., 2023).

Trade (export and import), investment, loans, aid, and international collaboration are all forms of international economic interactions (Maksum et al., 2021 and Binh et al., 2022). The government, the business sector, and international organizations are among the actors responsible for a country's international economic connections with other countries.

The main purpose of international trade is to accelerate the economic growth of a region or even a country (Muda and Dharsuky, 2021). It also aims to obtain goods that cannot be produced or have not been produced yet in its own territory. Trading with other countries allows a country to benefit from specialization, meaning that it makes a profit by purchasing goods at a lower price and selling a commodity abroad at a relatively higher price. In this context, international trade often occurs due to differences in the prices of goods in various countries. Prices of goods are usually largely determined by production costs, which consist of wages, costs, capital, raw material costs, and efficiency in the production process (Chacoliades 1981).

International trade with other countries will expand the market and raise revenues, as will the transfer of new technology, such as facilities and infrastructure technologies, which will improve the community's production efficiency (Zufrizal and Muda., 2022). These conveniences would encourage an area to become a center of activity and increase interaction between communities both inside and outside the region. The Dutch East Indies government had implemented this for a long time in its colony, the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and then formed the centers of their respective economic activities. Tanjung Balai was one of the areas in East Sumatra which was appointed by the Dutch East Indies government as the economic center of Afdeeling Asahan,

reflected in the revenues from international trade in the early 20th century. (Sasamoto, 1991).

Tanjung Balai's development into a Gemeente, or what we now call a city, began in the center and subsequently spread to neighboring regions in Asahan as the population grew. There were interactions related to land use and humans, both in terms of economic, social, or political. The Dutch colonialization of Tanjung Balai indirectly made the area important and well-known to this day. (Sibarani et al., 2021. Sibarani et al., 2021b, 2021c, 2021)

The management of resources and the development of international trade still require further research, not only from an economic standpoint, but also from a historical background of the region (Sibarani et al., 2021. Sibarani et al., 2021a and Li et al., 2023 and Liu et al., 2023). There were causes that encouraged Dutch colonialism to provide an area the freedom to determine its own policies, which had a significant impact on the changes and developments of its colonies, especially Tanjung Balai.

2. Methods

The research was conducted by collecting primary and secondary data. Data were also obtained by conducting an observation in Tanjung Balai as the research object area. Supporting data were collected from competent institutions including the North Sumatra University Library, the Regional Library of North Sumatra, the Tengku Luckman Sinar Reading Park and Library, and the Department of Library and Archival of Tanjung Balai City, in order to collect archives, books, and other forms of publications relevant to the research. Lastly, interviews with local communities and government agencies were also conducted. The

collected data were verified and interpreted into a written form.

3. Result and Discussion

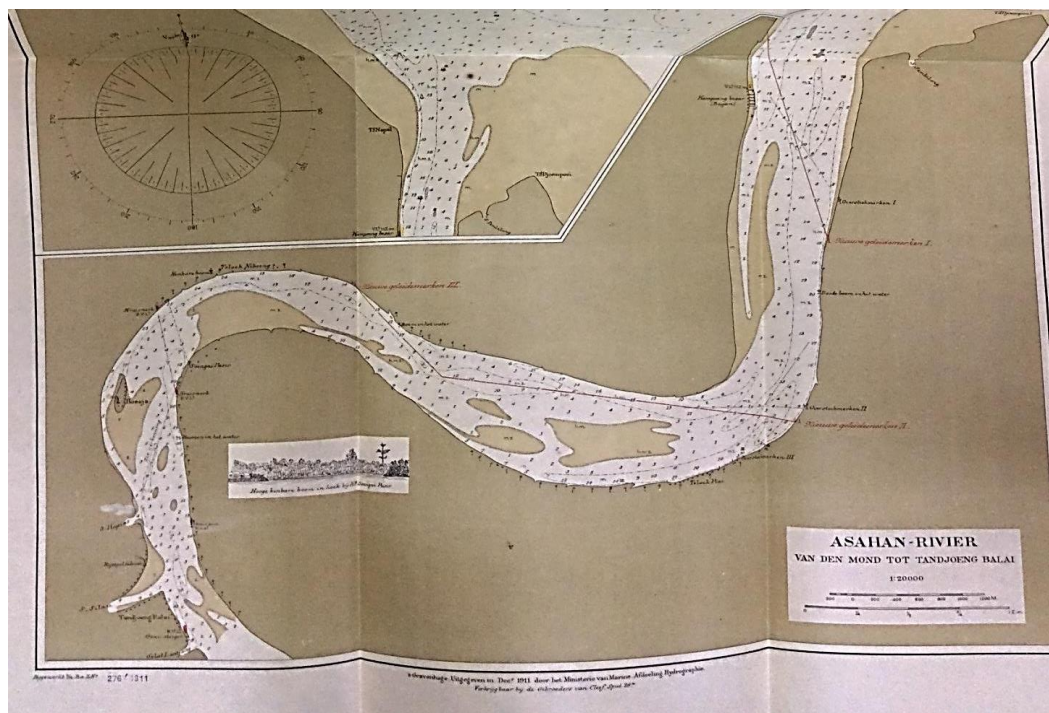
3.1. A General Description of Tanjung Balai

Tanjung Balai is a maritime area that is directly adjacent to the Strait of Malacca. According to John Anderson's travel notes in "Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra in 1823," this region was originally just a village called Kampung Balei. The name "Tanjung Balai" name is inseparable from the establishment of the Asahan Sultanate. The coronation of Sultan Abdul Jalil in Tanjung village by the vizier of Aceh in 1620

marked the establishment of the Asahan Sultanate. Sultan Abdul Jalil then created a gathering place known as Balei, which developed to become the Asahan sultanate's center of activity (Anderson, 1971).

Geographically, Tanjung Balai is located between two river mouths, namely the Asahan River and the Silau River, which upstreams are in Lake Toba and lead to the Malacca Strait. These two rivers are the largest rivers flowing in the Asahan area and become a means of transportation that connects the community with outside areas. There are also small rivers which are tributaries of the Asahan and Silau rivers. (Figure 1)

Picture 1 : Map of the Asahan River



Source : Cartography Collection of ANRI (The National Archives of Indonesia)

Picture 2 : Aerial Photograph of Tanjung Balai 1908

The Tanjung Balai area is generally a coastal area in the northern area with a width of 20-25 km, and extends to the south for 100 km. Rivers in East Sumatra basically experience very fast sedimentation so that the surrounding soil, especially Tanjung Balai, is a new alluvial soil type and is often muddy. Furthermore, there are many connecting tributaries and marsh that are always flooded at high tide, making it impossible for people to walk and causing the river to become the primary means of transportation. The constructed wooden path can only connect one hut to another (Margolang, 2019).

The location of Tanjung Balai which is directly adjacent to the Malacca Strait is an advantage for this area and other areas in Asahan. Tanjung Balai became an important trading center and port on the East Coast of Sumatra. Furthermore, until 1834 the Sultan made this area the center of the government of the Asahan sultanate, causing this area to be more crowded and the export-import trade to increase. This area was already connected with outside traders

such as Chinese traders before the entry of Dutch colonialism in East Sumatra.

Tanjung Balai's population are mostly Malay Indonesians (Melayu), with some Toba people who have converted to Islam or become Malay Indonesians by leaving their clans (marga). Most of the people live along the two sides of the river and cultivate various types of crops such as rice, tobacco, nuts, sugar cane, bananas, sugar palm, kapok, fruits and so on (Silaban, 2020 & 2021). This condition was very common because the centers of indigenous kingdoms were generally located along the rivers or estuaries which were also centers of trade and traditional ports. These rivers also connect coastal and inland areas that have long established economic relations, such as markets, although only modestly (Sumarno, 2006).

Tanjung Balai's international trade development is due to the presence of two international transit ports in Penang and Singapore. The British government's policies in the Malay Peninsula had a significant impact on

Tanjung Balai's economic development. This is due to the fact that the people residing in the upstreams, who formerly traded at the West Coast of Sumatra, switched to the East Coast, primarily through Tanjung Balai (Handoko, 2014).

3.2. Tanjung Balai as a Port City

The Dutch East Indies' annexation of East Sumatra was based on its interest on the Deli Tobacco profits and only succeeded in 1865. It is undeniable that the development of the regions in East Sumatra was most influenced by the expansion of tobacco plantations which was followed by rubber plantations in the early 20th century. These plantations boosted the development of Tanjung Balai Asahan since the Tanjung Balai Asahan Port provided the export and import activities for plantation produces.

Even though the tobacco produce in Asahan had less quality compared to Deli, the Dutch East Indies saw the advantages in the region as the center of international trade and port. This advantage was combined with a decline in trading and shipping activities on Sumatra's West Coast, allowing the inland residents to maintain trade relations in the Asahan, Panai, and Bilah regions. In the next year, the value of trade in these three locations increased from f 10,000-, (guilders) to f 15,000, while the value of exports and imports doubled, even tripled on the routes through Asahan (Asnan., 2007).

With the subjugation of territories in East Sumatra by the Dutch East Indies government, the Asahan Sultanate's sovereignty was immediately redirected to the Dutch East Indies government. The Dutch East Indies Government was in charge of all concerns concerning politics, economy, trade, and other matters, whereas the Sultan could only deal

with customary matters. Tanjung Balai Asahan Port was automatically taken over by the Dutch East Indies Government, which was previously led by a Harbormaster appointed by the Sultan.

In addition, the massive liberalization of the colonial economy and the increasingly bustling shipping and trade activities in the Dutch East Indies caused the opening of public ports for export and import as well as shipping routes to become a necessity. The private sector began to ask for easy access in return for the intensive investment they provided. In 1872 the Minister of Colonial Affairs, Fransen van de Putte, urged the government to disburse a fund of f 24,632 to open a new route service, namely the NISM route in Riau, East Sumatra. The idea is to provide direct access rather than via Penang. The new route is Riau – Bengkalis – Panai – Asahan – Coal – Deli – Langkat – Tamiang (Campo, 1992).

Tanjung Balai port, as a point of entrance and exit for commodities, earned revenues from taxes or excise on goods that go in and out of the port. The Departement van Financien (Departement of Finance) earned a variety of revenues from port operations controlled by the Douane or Tolkantoor of Tanjung Balai Asahan Port. These revenues came from shipping, trading, and other activities. The revenue consisted of various taxes, such as import taxes, export taxes, sales taxes, excise duties, export statistics, import statistics, seals or stamps for statistics, incoming goods fees, outgoing goods fees, incoming goods seals, outgoing goods seals, warehouse rentals, and other fees. Excise duty on these traded goods had been applied since 1875 (Cremer, 1881). Excise duty was imposed on regions in East Sumatra that were Dutch East Indies colonies. The list of excise and duties that applied in East Sumatra in 1875 was also applied in Tanjung Balai Asahan Port.

Table 1. Excise and Taxes in East Sumatra in 1875.

No.	Commodity	Per	
		Volume (KG and Stuk)	Value (guilders)
1	Leather	—	0,10
2	Indigo	1	8
3	Sugar	100	0,30
4	Tobacco	100	1
5	Tea	100	1
6	Tin	100	3,5
7	Birds	—	6
8	Resin	100	6
9	Red Tree Sap	100	6
10	Agarwood	—	5
11	Sap	100	8
12	Copra	100	5
13	Cinnamon	100	1
14	Cotton	—	1
15	Dipped Wood	—	0,80
16	Rhino Horn	—	5
17	Horse	1 Stuk	5
18	White Pepper	100	5
19	Pepper	100	2
20	Rice	100	0,80
21	Paddy	100	0,40
22	Rattan	100	5
23	Onderneming Tobacco	100	2
24	Honey	100	8
25	Peanut	100	2
26	Areca Nut	100	0,40

Source: J.T. Cremer, *De Toekomst van Deli: Eenige Opmerkingen*, Leiden: Gualth Kolff, 1881, p. 9-10

Basically, commodities income in East Sumatra varied. Unofficial goods or commodities such as opium and others brought in a lot of revenue at Tanjung Balai Port. The opium trade generated the most tax revenue at

Tanjung Balai Asahan Port, although it was not included on the government's official list (Cremer, 1881) The following is a list of the tax revenues collected in Tanjung Balai Asahan Port in 1879:

Table 2. Tax revenue at Tanjung Balai Asahan Port in 1879

No	Tax	Value (Guilders)
1	Opium Tax	561,6
2	Permit Taxes	178,24
3	Alcohol Tax	107,04
4	Pork Tax	5,35
5	Pawnshop Tax	4,302

6	Import Tax	117,955
7	Export Tax	75,402
8	Excise, Warehouse Rental and Other Taxes	25,4
Jumlah		1.075,289

Source: J.T. Cremer, *De Toekomst van Deli: Eenige Opmerkingen*, Leiden: Gualth Kolff, 1881, p. 35

In 1908, Tanjung Balai Asahan Port which is located close to Singapore and Penang became a transit port for ships sailing to Penang and Singapore. Tax revenues on goods imported through this port came from rice, crude oil, salt, and manufactured goods, meanwhile export tax revenues came from tobacco, coffee, gambier, copra, areca nut, forest products and fish.

There was a significant difference between 1879 and 1908, in terms of the type of goods and their value (in guilders). In 1879 imported goods included alcoholic goods (liquor), pork and opium, meanwhile in 1908 imported goods included crude oil, salt, rice and manufactured goods. Tobacco and other forest products were taxed as export commodities in 1879, while plantation items such as copra, gambier, areca nut, coffee, tobacco and forest products, as well as fish, were taxed as export goods in 1908.

The difference in value (in guilders) demonstrates a fairly considerable increase; for example, in 1879, income from taxes was roughly f 1,075,289, whereas it grew to around f 161,691.72 in 1908. This means that in a period of approximately 30 years there has been a very large increase in tax revenues. This increase resulted from the Open-door Policy causing the East Sumatra region to be a plantation-based economic area, including the Asahan area.

This considerable income was not backed up by sufficient infrastructure. Tanjung Balai was still in a disordered and disorganized state. This caused the Dutch East Indies government to develop a better urban planning system,

resulting in the city's physical condition being more orderly and organized. The Dutch government eventually established an autonomous municipality at Tanjung Balai, which implemented a self-government system controlled by the sultans or their subordinates, with a district system subject to Dutch authorization.

The authority held by the Dutch government caused Tanjung Balai to be designated as a gemeente or municipality in 1917. The designation of Tanjung Balai as gemeente was based on a decree by the Dutch East Indies Government through the *Besluit Gubernur Generaal* dated 27 June 1917 with *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch Indie* 1917 No. 284. Based on the decree, starting on July 1, 1917 Tanjung Balai was set to become a gemeente (*Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indie*, 1917).

3.3. Export-Import International Trade in Gemeente Tanjung Balai

Tanjung Balai Asahan Port served multiple routes with various origins and destinations as a port that functioned as a means of export and import activities for plantations. Routes to and from Singapore and Penang dominated the cruises via the Tanjung Balai Asahan Port. This is due to the fact that these two locations served as transit points for ships sailing around the world. However, direct shipping from Tanjung Balai Asahan Port to export and import destination countries was available.

Through the Port of Tanjung Balai Asahan, plantation commodities such as rubber were exported to countries in which they are

demand. From the port, rubber was exported to various countries in Asia, Europe, and America. The destinations include countries all around the world, such as the Netherlands, England, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Japan, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Belgium, Luxembourg, Penang, and other countries.

Palm oil was also exported through the Port of Tanjung Balai Asahan to destinations such as the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, England, and Denmark. Other commodities include tea, copra, coffee, areca nuts, and processed fish products. The export destinations for these commodities are the Netherlands, England, Australia, Singapore, Penang, France, Norway, Germany, Italy, Denmark, China, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Japan (Begroting Gemeente Tandjoeng Balai jaar 1917)

Not all of these were direct shipments. Several cruise ships had to make transit stops in Penang, Singapore, and Malacca. The transits were intended for safety reasons and water and fuel refilling. However, for gambier export, a direct shipping from Tanjung Balai Asahan Port the destination country of Switzerland was available.

Daily essentials, such as food and manufactured products, dominated the items imported into Tanjung Balai Asahan Port. Rice from Siam (Thailand), Myanmar, and Vietnam, as well as some imported rice from Java, were among the imported commodities at Tanjung Balai Asahan Port. Apart from rice, other commodities come from the Netherlands, Penang, England, and China.

Plantation and agricultural supplies and equipment imported to Tanjung Balai Asahan Port came from the Netherlands, Germany, England, Japan, Belgium, Luxembourg, Canada and France. In addition daily essentials

and plantations supplies, government operational necessities were also sent to the Tanjung Balai Asahan Port directly from the Netherlands or through Batavia as the center of the Dutch Colonial government. Other supporting needs included luxury needs such as cars, motorbikes and their accessories, as well as alcoholic liquor and matches. These goods were shipped from countries such as Sweden, Penang, Singapore, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada, as well as Switzerland, Spain, and Portugal. Just like exported commodities, most of the imported commodities sent to Tanjung Balai Asahan Port had to make transit at important ports such as Penang, Malacca, and Singapore first.

In 1907 and 1908, there was another increase in the quantity of rice exports, but specifically for brown rice and glutinous rice. The total export of rice in 1907 reached 2300 kg for brown rice and 44,352 kg for glutinous rice and both had a value of f 150,000. Then, in 1908, glutinous rice exports totaled 56,700 kg, while brown rice exports totaled 6,210 kg. Aside from rice, other export volumes increased, including copra, which reached 968000 kg in 1907 and 1,682,090 kg in 1908. The next commodity was areca nuts, with an export quantity reaching 113,910 kg in 1907 and 1,528,720 kg in 1908. Meanwhile, tobacco only contributed to as much as 26,000 piculs and coffee to as much as 456,000 kg. This is understandable considering that the land in Asahan is not suitable for tobacco cultivation. This indicates that although the quantity of rice exports decreased, the quantity of forest products remained stable (Anonymous, 1911).

Other export commodities in 1908 were processed fish products and gambier. Processed fish products contributed to the export quantity of 21636 kg for salted or dried fish, 5760 kg of

terasi (prawn sauce), 8706 kg of fins and 15,852 kg of stingrays. Meanwhile, gambier contributed to the export quantity of 3,384,064 kg. Tanjung Balai Asahan Port, as a port that primarily exported plantation commodity

items, shipped a variety of plantation commodities such as rubber, copra, palm oil, gambier, tea, and other plantation commodities. The commodities exported through Tanjung Balai Asahan Port are listed below:

Table 3. Commodities Exported Through Tanjung Balai Asahan Port in 1937-1940 (in guilders)

Commodity	Value in guilders			
	1937	1938	1939	1940
Latex	468	113	-	-
Rubber	11.383	5.746	5.930	12.630
<i>Coprakoecken</i>	43	38	58	32
Copra	1.188	591	265	70
<i>Palmpitten</i>	336	285	213	77
Palm Oil	1.550	1.025	939	580
Gambier	791	597	1.063	708
Tea	288	317	314	202
Others	109	106	94	74
Total	16.156	8.818	8.876	14.373

Source: Verslag van de Handelsvereniging te Medan over het jaar 1940, p. 316.

The world situation during World War II prompted a major reduction in 1938, resulting in a 50 percent decrease in the number and prices of global exports and imports. This situation persisted until 1939. The decline in the number of guilders was roughly 50%, which was not equivalent to the decrease in volume quantity from the previous year, which was 52,706 to 47,042. The situation began to improve in 1940, but the circumstances of the Dutch East Indies, which began to be pressured by the Japanese, impacted the volume and value of exports. Tanjung Balai Asahan Port exported quality commodities such as rubber and palm oil in quantities of 1,100 tons and 250 tons, respectively, toward the end of 1941 (Algemeene Secretarie van Nederlands, 1941).

4. Conclusion

The decentralization practiced by the Dutch East Indies government in its colonial practice had a significant impact on the economy and development of a region, particularly Tanjung

Balai, which developed to be a center of Asahan's economic activity, as well as the largest port and international trade in East Sumatra. Tanjung Balai existed as a region with maritime resources and ports as a result of colonialism's history, which has resulted in the emergence of new cities. The survival of the Tanjung Balai Asahan Port is due to a number of factors, including its strategic location near world shipping routes, the construction of transportation facilities to transport plantation produce that was then sent to the port, the role of the government, the existence of government policies that enabled Tanjung Balai Port Asahan to survive, and the establishment of Tanjung Balai Asahan Port as a port guided by Belawan Port. Tanjung Balai Asahan Port has been able to endure and become the largest and most important port in East Sumatra even today as a result of all of these factors.

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