

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH-EAST ASIAN STUDIES

FIRST CONFERENCE

LEIDEN, THE NETHERLANDS

29 JUNE - 1 JULY 1995

SHORT- AND LONG-TERM CYCLES IN THE SOUTH-EAST ASIAN ECONOMY:
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

*ERAS AND AREAS: EXPORT CROPS AND SUBSISTENCE IN MINAHASA,
1817-1985*

Mieke Schouten
[Universidade da Beira Interior,
Covilha, Portugal]

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Maria Johanna Schouten (1995)

Eras and areas: export crops and subsistence in Minahasa, 1817-1985, *First Conference of the European Association for South-East Asian Studies*. Panel: Short- and long-term cycles in the Southeast Asian economy: Historical perspectives. University of Leiden. 28/6-1/07/1995

ERAS AND AREAS: EXPORT CROPS AND SUBSISTENCE IN MINAHASA, 1817-1985¹

1. Introduction

In this paper, the focus is on the economic history of Minahasa, a small and rather peripheral region in the huge Southeast Asian world. Smallness, however, does not necessarily imply homogeneity, and indeed various areas² within Minahasa each have their own distinct story of growing and declining prosperity. These economic conditions were to a large degree influenced by the cultivation and marketing of commercial crops.

The very uniqueness and richness of its history warrants attention for Minahasa. Besides, some knowledge of its economic history can be of use when examining other, or more encompassing, regions. In fact, in the past the study of the economic history of Indonesia has mainly focused on another, not exactly large part of this country: the island of Java. Reasons for this ample attention are obvious, such as the high population, the relative abundance of documentation, and the long-standing and intensive contacts with the west.

Indeed, colonial rule reached Java at an early stage. However, long before Dutch domination was universal in the archipelago, some regions besides Java and Madura had already undergone transformations under the influence of Dutch rule. The Central Moluccas are the earliest and most striking example.³ Not far from

¹ This paper is based on archival and literature research, as well as on anthropological fieldwork in Minahasa, in the period 1981-1983. Research was financed by the Dutch-Indonesian project for the promotion of Indonesian Studies.

² "Area" is the term used for (geographical) parts within Minahasa. The latter, in its turn, is referred to as a "region".

³ See Knaap 1987.

the Moluccas (seen from Java's viewpoint at least), there is Minahasa, which (after almost three centuries of contacts with European seafaring powers) formed, after 1817, part of the colonial state. In this respect, nineteenth-century Java and Minahasa⁴ had much in common. Both were subject to the tendencies and whims of the same colonial policy, which, for example, imposed the so-called Cultivation System during several decades, and proclaimed the Agrarian Law in 1870. The two regions were also absorbed into another large context, related to the colonial state: the world market.

Regarding Java (insofar as this can be considered as a whole), several attempts have been made to divide the economic history into periods.⁵ A recent essay is that by Svensson,⁶ concerning the period since 1830. In its title, "contractions and expansions", the idea of the alternation of meagre and fat periods transpires. It is obvious from the article, if only from the question marks after the headings of sections discussing an era, that the author does not consider the debate as closed. And certainly it is not. When going ahead with that debate, a comparison with other regions within Indonesia, such as Minahasa, might be helpful. However, in addition to the referred resemblances in exterior influences, there were ample differences between the two regions regarding society, culture and geography.⁷ These dissimilarities affected the way and results of (economic) interference of the colonial state in nineteenth-century society, and also the developments in the twentieth century.

Alluring though it may seem, an explicit comparison between Minahasa and Java will not be made below. I am not competent for such a task, but perhaps the work in this panel may result in some tentative conclusions, or in comparisons with regions elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

The principal aim of this paper is to periodize Minahasa's economic history from 1817 to 1985,⁸ to characterize these eras, and to consider whether these can be styled as "cycles". Few (if any) authors until now have ventured to mark periods for Minahasan economic history, and my attempt is only exploratory. My basic criterium for the division into periods is the prevalence of a certain commercial crop: coffee, copra and clove, successively.

⁴ West Sumatra had after 1838, the end of the Padri Wars, the same type of experience.

⁵ For example, Burger 1975; Boomgaard 1993.

⁶ Svensson 1991. This author also shows clearly the regional heterogeneity of Java.

⁷ For example, in contrast to Java, Minahasa has not been directly subject to princely rule, and influences from Hinduism and Islam were minimal.

⁸ 1817 was the year in which Minahasa was integrated into the colonial state; data available to me are sufficiently reliable and extensive up to 1985.

However, it is not just these commodities in themselves which are of interest, nor the trends in world and domestic market and in economic policy related to them, but principally their relations with living standards.

In this respect, we should be aware of variation according to geographical area. As stated by Lindblad, "[r]ecent historiography about Java is increasingly becoming aware of the vast variety of patterns in Java [.....] The time is ripe to realize that extreme variety characterizes the situation outside Java as well."⁹ And, I would add, presumably there is even considerable diversity within each of the various regions of the Outer Islands. At least, for Minahasa, barely 5,000 km² in area, this is the case. Each of the market products mentioned thrived only in certain areas, and these, therefore, each witnessed their own stories of economic ups and downs. When discussing Minahasa's economic history, it is thus necessary to pay attention to its main "economic areas".¹⁰

In the following, after the presentation of some basic data on Minahasa and its early history, the three "crop periods" will be discussed, highlighting the history of each of those products, the effects on the population, and regional variations. The first era, the one dominated by coffee, is the most extensively discussed, because it was then that the population started to contact a monetary economy, and, moreover, the differences between the areas became more apparent.

A last remark concerns the periodization. In a paper which deals explicitly with eras it might be expected that explicit years are mentioned in the headings to indicate the beginnings and ends of these periods. However, the very nature of the history of the export commodities under discussion made more accuracy impossible, as will be shown below. They all had a slow start, and all (except one) retained some importance after their heyday was over.

II Preludes to penetration

In precolonial Minahasa, the only well-populated area was the highland to the west of Lake Tondano, where there are some plains and where the climate is agreeable.¹¹ Furthermore, along rivers, pockets of swiddens could be found. The ruggedness of many mountains and hills, and also the hot climate on the coast, put people off inhabiting and cultivating those zones in a period in which land was still plenty compared to population numbers. However, most parts of

⁹ Lindblad 1994: 110.

¹⁰ I have not been exhaustive but referred only to the most striking cases, which are also areas in the most densely populated part of the land. I have also left out the small southern areas of Tonsawang and Ratahan, since I have not yet fully worked out my data for a purpose such as this paper's.

¹¹ Smits 1909.

Minahasa are well-suited for practicing agriculture, due to the volcanic, relatively thick soil and the usually copious rainfall.

The basic pattern of this population spread has persisted until the present day, apart from recent developments such as the growth of the cities of Manado and Bitung, and the exploration of parts of Southern Minahasa (see map T**b**-c)

The first reports by European visitors¹² about this region - at the time (17th century) not yet styled "Minahasa"¹³ - refer to its inhabitants as shifting cultivators, using a very simple technology. The basic crop, rice, was grown on dry fields, while there were also some naturally-flooded fields near the lake shores. Maize was introduced most probably at the end of the 16th century. Pig and chicken raising seem to have been ancient pursuits, while the natural environment offered ample opportunities for freshwater fishing, hunting and collecting. Society was stateless and violent, while interpersonal and intergroup relations were characterized by rivalry. This life-style and the related worldview were basically the same among the eight ethnic groups which together constituted the "Minahasans".¹⁴

The rice produced in Minahasa lay at the root of the region's first encounter with the world market. In the early 16th century, Portuguese had set sail to the Moluccas, the heartland of spices. They and other Europeans contacted the Minahasa coast and later also the inland dwellers.¹⁵ Although Minahasa at the time produced no spices, it was going to play a role in their trade. Through its supplies of rice, it contributed to the subsistence of the people working for the European traders.

It was in view of the prospects of rich rice deliveries that in 1655 the VOC (United East India Company) started the construction of a fortress in Manado, in this way showing its supremacy or at least its ambitions. In the contracts (the first in 1679, with several renewals later on) with representatives of the Minahasans, the latter agreed to provide the Company regularly with rice and timber, while the VOC formally committed itself to a protective role. The rice supplies didn't turn out to be as fabulous as expected, but even so Minahasa would obtain the epithet of "breadbasket of the Moluccas".¹⁶ Contacts overseas also led to the introduction of some

¹² Colin 1900; Padtbrugge 1866, 1867; reports included in Godée Molsbergen 1928.

¹³ This name, meaning "unity", was used in 1789 for the first time, by VOC-officials (Godée Molsbergen 1928: 137).

¹⁴ More details about pre-colonial Minahasa in Schouten 1993: 11-37; Tauchmann 1968.

¹⁵ Godée Molsbergen 1928: 8-10; Riedel 1869: 514.

¹⁶ Literally "broodkamer der Molukken", an expression used i.a. by the Governors Jacob Christiaan Pielat in 1731 and Jacob van Schoonderwoerd about 1765 (Godée Molsbergen 1928: 105-106, 127). "Ricebarn" would, of course, have been more apt.

new or formerly rare commodities: textile, iron, firearms. Of the new agricultural products, maize and Spanish pepper were of most importance.

The nationalization of the VOC in 1800 marked the start of a period in which the State of the Netherlands and Britain changed places a couple of times as formal sovereigns of Minahasa. This was a repercussion of the Napoleonic Wars on the other side of the world. After these, in 1817, the Dutch State became the sovereign; the start of a period of not only long-lasting, but also very intrusive colonial rule.

III The coffee era, c. 1817-1900

Like other regions in the archipelago under Dutch control, Minahasa was, in the 19th century, subject to the so-called Cultivation System. Whereas in Java there was a great regional variety in this "interlocking set of local accommodations",¹⁷ Minahasa showed other variants again, on the same basic principle: the local population was forced to grow a commercial crop, and to deliver this to the government at prices that were maintained at an artificially low level.

The crop central to the Minahasan version of the Cultivation System was coffee. Experiments with other crops were short-lived and almost all ill-fated, for reasons related to agriculture, labour and the market. But this was compensated for by the coffee shrub, which delivered a product which gained an excellent reputation on the world market. The product was also exclusive, because rare: Manado shipped on average about 20,000 pikul¹⁸ per year, which was a minuscule amount in comparison with the two other coffee-producing regions, West Sumatra and Java.¹⁹

In the early 19th century, shortly after the introduction of coffee into Minahasa, its free growth seems to have enjoyed some popularity among smallholders.²⁰ Already in the 1820s, however, government officials, foreseeing a great future for the coffee, imposed compulsory cultivation and delivery. Minahasa's government monopoly came into effect, thus, before the proclamation of the Cultivation System for the Indies by Johannes van den Bosch in the

¹⁷ Van Niel 1992: 69.

¹⁸ 1 pikul = c. 62.5 kg.

¹⁹ West Sumatra reached in 1857 the top with 191,000 pikul; Java had a production often close to 1 million pikul (Creutzberg 1975: 46-50).

²⁰ Edeling 1919: 60.

early 1830s.²¹ Moreover, it outlived 1870, when the Agrarian Law was promulgated. Usually this year is marked as the end of the Cultivation System, but in fact a "piecemeal dismantling"²² of this had already been going on since 1862, the order of abolishment of the compulsory delivery of crops being inspired by their respective profitability. Colonial policy was related to the market, and anyway the Cultivation System had never been very systematic. Coffee, being the most profitable of all crops, was the last to be subject to compulsion. In Minahasa, the government monopoly was officially abrogated in 1899, and so it was still ahead of West Sumatra, where it existed until 1908,²³ and some areas of Java where the abolition took even longer.²⁴ The amounts of Manado-coffee delivered to the government varied highly, but over the 19th century an overall trend is distinguishable. After the initial years, coffee production remained during about two decades (1834-1853) at about the same level. The decades of 1850 and 1860 showed the highest production; after that, a period of decrease set in,²⁵ with some incidental peaks (see graph).

After 1890, the story of Manado-coffee petered out. The population had no interest in continuing the growth in a free system.²⁶ Before long, only the names of innumerable plots of land in inland Minahasa would still carry reminders of the time when the coffee shrub ruled the panorama there. So, the production of coffee, a hundred years after its promising start, virtually returned to point zero.

Did the material conditions of the population (insofar as these were related to coffee production), show similar ups and downs? When attempting to answer this question, it should first be made clear that, although the coffee monopoly poured money into Minahasa, it brought no prosperity. People earned little with the hard work in the plantations. The official price for one pikul of coffee delivered at the government warehouse was most of the time about f 10. Most households, however, produced less than one pikul

²¹ In the period 1822-1832, government policy regarding coffee in Minahasa was unequivocal (see Francis 1859, III: 355; Wessels 1891: 53-56; Riedel 1872: 566-567; ARA, Coll. De Vriese 20, p. 41).

²² Ricklefs 1981: 118.

²³ Young 1990: 90.

²⁴ Ricklefs 1981: 118; Clarence-Smith 1994: 245.

²⁵ Reasons given by the various officials were crop diseases, the fact that suitable virgin soils became depleted, and the lack of zeal among the population.

²⁶ Probably caused by i.a. the deteriorating world market (in the mid-1890s there was a collapse in the coffee market, see Clarence-Smith 1994: 249), and the long-standing aversion among the population. Compare for a similar attitude in West Sumatra, Lindblad 1994: 98.

yearly.²⁷ A considerable part of their income was used for the payment of the head tax, introduced in 1851, at a yearly minimum of f 5.-.

Households often spent more than 100 days a year in the coffee gardens,²⁸ which were not uncommonly situated at several hours' walking distance from the settlements.²⁹ According to regulations, intensive care had to be lavished on constructing and maintaining the coffee plantations,³⁰ and the picking and processing of the beans.³¹ There were peaks in the yearly cycle of coffee (which often happened to co-incide with the busiest periods in the cycle of food crops), but in fact it required constant (wo)manpower.³² A lot of labour was wasted; due to erroneous instructions by unexpert officials, several coffee gardens were laid out and maintained for years without bearing a single fruit.

One basic reason for the low profits of coffee for most people was the common practice (at least, until about the middle of the century) of native headmen retaining part of the remuneration, instead of distributing it among the producers.³³ Intimately connected with the government monopoly on coffee was the system of *corvée* labour, in which Minahasans (men, women, and children) had to build roads and bridges, whose aim was essentially to facilitate coffee transport and crop inspections. That the government monopoly's effects were predominantly negative for the Minahasan

²⁷ This can be calculated from statistical data in, for example, Koffiekultuur 1866.

²⁸ Stakman (1894: 445-446) mentions 85 days on average, Edeling (1877: 862-863) 120 days per year.

²⁹ ARA, Coll. De Vriese 20, p. 50; even later in the century, plantations were sometimes at more than 6 paal (= 9 km) from the village (Wessels 1891: 137). Such a situation also prevailed in Cirebon (Fernando and O'Malley 1990: 179).

³⁰ See for the 1840s, letter by Governor De Serière, 15-10-1844, in ANRI Manado, 55; for the 1870s, the instructions by commissioner D. Ples (ARA MvK MR 692/1881).

³¹ The laborious processing work was generally carried out by the women in the houseyards. See Francis 1859, III: 360; Teysmann 1861: 349; Graafland 1898, I: 185; Jansen 1861: 229-230; Cultuurverslag 1853 in ANRI Manado, 54.

³² Jansen 1861: 226; Van der Crab 1862: 358; ARA, Coll. De Vriese 180, section 14; Geertz 1963: 101.

³³ See, for example, Ten Siethoff 1845: 69-70; Douwes Dekker 1956: 213.

population.³⁴ is corroborated by the virtual unanimity of observers that poverty in the non-coffee planting villages was less than elsewhere.³⁵

Government measures, thus, lay at the root of much of the hardship which the Minahasan population had to put up with in the 19th century. However, that same government provided, directly or indirectly, some outlets. Job opportunities for indigenous men in the state bureaucracy expanded. Also Christian missions (encouraged by the government), and, related to that, an extensive school system, provided people with (limited) possibilities for a rather comfortable and prestigious life outside agriculture. This was also a main reason for the popularity of recruitment into the Netherlands Indies Army.

Not all inhabitants of Minahasa suffered to the same degree from the Cultivation System, and there were also those who benefited from it. Much depended on social category and geographical area. We have already hinted at the profits for native leaders. Although their misappropriation of coffee revenues was curbed after the mid-19th century, they retained rights to commissions on the amount of coffee delivered by the people of their jurisdiction. As to the common people, there were also disparities in standards of living, partly depending on where they lived. Under the government coffee monopoly, at first sight, residents of two types of geographical zones were better-off, for opposite reasons. On the one hand, there were the zones where conditions practically ruled out coffee growth; on the other hand, those where conditions were extremely favourable, so that the households in theory could obtain a relatively high income. In addition, there was an unfortunate third zone, which involved the areas where coffee growth took a lot of labour from the subsistence sector but where the modest production implied only a low remuneration.

We will now take a more extensive look at each of these types of areas, beginning with Tonsea and the coastal zones, where the low altitude was in the first decades no reason for the government to exempt the population from forced cultivation. This meant a heavy plight, as the shrubs did not give any yield. The situation changed when in the second half of the century, most of the villages were exempted from coffee cultivation.³⁶ The missionary H.J. Tendeloo

³⁴ The missionary Simon van de Velde van Capellen, working in Southern Minahasa, even called coffee a "curse", adding that he was ashamed of being a Dutchman (Van de Velde van Capellen, July 1856, in ASZC, 19.1.B.)

³⁵ De Lange 1897: 682, 692; Wilken, 30-1-1856 (ASZC, 34.6); Bleeker 1863: 7-8; Edeling 1919: 85; Van Kerckhoff, cited in Stakman 1893: 128.

³⁶ Letter Resident R. Scherius, 14-9-1849, in ANRI Manado, 55; Wilken, 30-1-1856, in ASZC, 34.6; De Lange 1897: 672; Stakman 1894: 440. About the official decree of 1864, stating a minimum altitude of 1,000 feet, and its later cancellation on the advice of D. Ples, see Wessels 1891: 136, 138.

states, in his picture of the daily life of the people (particularly the women) in Tonsea, around 1870, that the life of the latter is easier than that of contemporary European peasant women. He even reports on "luxurious" clothing at festive occasions. But, he mentions rightly the for Minahasa atypical conditions in Tonsea: the absence of coffee plantations, and the less heavy work on the roads in *corvée* labour.³⁷ The low population pressure permitted a relatively high production of food agriculture.³⁸ All in all it seems that Tonsea could recuperate from its hard time. At the end of the 19th century even a relative prosperity was reached, but that was due to copra production which is a main subject of discussion in the next section.

In the second type of area, essentially the zone in proximity to Lake Tondano, the coffee was first introduced, and I surmise that it was here that people profited from its free cultivation before 1822. In this area, the production per coffee tree was the highest.³⁹ Nevertheless, reports suggest that the population lived there after the introduction of the compulsory system in unfavourable conditions due to the coercion they were subject to, and the high pressure on food-crops producing land. This was, however, relieved in the second half of the century, when, at the instigation of the government, wet-rice fields were constructed. The increased amount of rice served as a consumption and as an exchange product. Some people, who could market their rice surplus and who profited from the coffee production, could even be called well-off. Edeling, who carried out his survey in the 1870s, considered Tondano the most thriving area in Minahasa, thanks to its high rice productivity.⁴⁰ Thus, after the succession to a (probably) fat period by a lean one, there was again some prosperity. However, the new sawahs (whose area could not be greatly expanded) did not offer a lasting solution for the rapidly increasing population, and the problems would be especially noticeable in the 20th century.⁴¹

In the more westerly zones of the highlands, the coffee tree yielded somewhat less, and provided, therefore, the people with only a little income, for the same amount of working hours. Food agriculture was also hard in this period of growing population pressure. The technology prevailing in the nineteenth century did

³⁷ Tendeloo 1873. In other areas of Minahasa, women and children working on e.g. road construction had been no exception.

³⁸ Edeling 1919: 81-85.

³⁹ Bleeker 1856: 111; Van der Crab 1862, app. 5.

⁴⁰ Edeling 1919: 74-75, 85-87; see also Stakman 1894: 452.

⁴¹ Population in Minahasa increased from about 73,000 in 1825 to over 180,000 in 1900 (see data in Henley 1994: 13). Though not as great as in Java during the same period, this increase was significant and suggests a link with the colonial regime. It is, however, not easy to point out the nature of this relationship. See for some hypotheses, Schouten 1993: 65-69.

not at that time permit the building of irrigated ricefields in the heavily mountainous landscape. The same dry land was being cultivated afresh at ever diminishing intervals; expansion was hardly feasible because most of the suitable land nearby was allotted for coffee growth. Especially the inland zone of Sonder is repeatedly mentioned in the sources as an example of soil exhaustion. During the 1860s, the rice sown there only yielded half to one-third of that in Tonsea.⁴² Throughout the whole of the 19th century, Sonder was considered to be poverty-stricken and backward.⁴³

So, a situation of stability, of being "stuck at the bottom", seems to have prevailed here. No upward movements in the 19th-century history of the conditions of common Sonder people are noticeable. I have the impression that the same applies to other zones of the western highlands, although Sonder is perhaps the most noticeable case, because of its rugged landscape and also the severe character of its native leadership.⁴⁴

IV The copra era, c. 1850-1942

Despite the evidence that the delivery of coffee didn't on balance leave much money for the common people, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the steady development of money circulation. Not only the marketing of agrarian commodities but also the expansion of non-agricultural types of labour, such as that by craftsmen, native civil servants and teachers lay at the root of this development.

The economic liberalization, an aspect of the late-nineteenth century government policy, encouraged the establishment of European private enterprises. Also indigenous smallholders who could afford so, responded aptly to market conditions. They started producing nutmeg, tobacco, and in particular copra. Regarding coffee, the increasing disparity between official prices and market prices (and people's growing awareness of their being disfavoured) led to the apparently frequent (and, if caught, heavily penalized) practice of

⁴² Report of H.J. van den Broek, Controleur of Amurang, June 1867, in ANRI Manado, 40. See also Graafland 1864: 18-22; Graafland 1898, I: 391; Edeling 1919: 82.

⁴³ It is striking that two observers at an interval of half a century used exactly the same words to earmark the population of Sonder: "very poor". The first was a government official, most probably Eduard Douwes Dekker, alias Multatuli, who was around 1850 Secretary of the Residency Manado (Korte aanteekeningen c. 1852: 6). The second was J.A.T. Schwarz, who by then had worked for over thirty years as a missionary in Sonder (Schwarz 1895: 362).

⁴⁴ Schouten 1993: 78-103, 146-152.

"smuggling".⁴⁵

Although statements in the sources about the interest of Minahasans in money are contradictory,⁴⁶ it is beyond doubt that towards the end of the century money was a familiar and even important item. The use of cash had also penetrated into ancient customs such as the rotating work groups or mapalus, and bridewealth.

Much money was to find its way into Minahasa due to its coconut production. The coconut palm is a native to the region, and it seems that for many centuries there has been some trade in its products, mainly coconut oil.⁴⁷ The deliberate planting of these trees on a large scale, however, started in the early 1850s by orders of the government.⁴⁸

The profitability of coconut oil was limited, but later in the century the planting of the palms turned out to have been a lucky move: the expanding soap and margarine industries in Europe and North America gave an enormous impetus to the demand for copra, the dried meat of the coconut. This was to the advantage of its producers, but their narrow link to the world market was later to show also its negative side. The Depression of 1929, with, in its wake, the collapse of world copra trade, made formerly affluent copra producers lapse into poverty and even famine. While at the beginning of the twentieth century a pikul of copra fetched an average price of f 20 to f 30 (against a cost price of f 5, mainly for wages), by 1931 it brought only f 5, a price which dropped even further to f 1.25 in 1934.⁴⁹

Later in the thirties the price level for copra improved somewhat, but internal debt relations and the vicissitudes of copra trade meant that coconut growing was still hardly profitable. Before government relief measures⁵⁰ could be effective, the Japanese occupation of the archipelago gave a new turn to history.

Thus, the large-scale cultivation of coconut had started in the

⁴⁵ See, for example, cases in file "Vervoer koffie 1878-1879" in ANRI Manado, 50; Algemeen Verslag 1877 in ANRI Manado, 49; Koloniaal Verslag 1877: 218; Matthes 1882; Report in Tjahaja Sijang 1881-22, p. 4. See also Wattendorf 1883.

⁴⁶ Compare Algemeen Verslag 1877 (ANRI Manado 53) with Graafland 1879.

⁴⁷ Henley 1993: 14. Compare Heersink 1992.

⁴⁸ Van der Crab 1862: 367; Korte aantekeningen c. 1852: 1-2.

⁴⁹ De markt 1932: 645; Copra 1932: 712, 762, 764. Van Rhijn 1941: 106. According to Wellenstein (1933: 2-3), Manado was in a more favourable position than Java, due to its direct sea traffic with the Western coast of the United States.

⁵⁰ Such as the 1939 Copra Contracten Ordonnantie and the 1940 Coprafonds (De Groot 1941; Van Rhijn 1941: 99, 108-114; Reyne 1946: 519).

mid-nineteenth century with low profits but soon passed through a flourishing period, which abruptly ended. Unlike coffee cultivation, coconut growing has until today continued in Minahasa.⁵¹ We will, however, not yet discuss the modern period and first dwell on some of the effects of the pre-war coconut boom on the population.

The preceding passages can be misleading to the extent that they might suggest that all Minahasa was and is coconut country. Thus, it would confirm an erroneous but widely accepted image of the twentieth-century economy of Minahasa (and, in a broader sense, North Sulawesi), which derives from certain authors (especially Geertz⁵²) and spectacular episodes (such as, in the era of independence, the Permesta⁵³). The reality is somewhat different: only in the low-lying coastal areas and, in particular, Tonsea, do coconuts grow with a fat content high enough to make copra production remunerative. That same low altitude had also caused the withdrawal of compulsory coffee cultivation in Tonsea after the 1840s, which, in its turn, meant that a great deal of labour and land could be expended on the palms. Tonsea was a clearly defined coconut zone long before the end of the century. Although the marketing of the copra was usually done by outsiders (in particular Chinese), Tonsea people could attain a relative wealth, which was reflected in consumption patterns. Foreign products such as wine, gin, and canned milk and butter could be bought even in small village shops,⁵⁴ while in the early twentieth century the number of car owners was significant.⁵⁵ For their subsistence products, especially rice, Tonsea peasants turned to the market. However, during the Depression, they proved to be not fully "captured",⁵⁶ absorbed into the world market system. They managed to keep afloat by committing themselves again to the cultivation of crops for their own consumption: rice, and sometimes maize and tubers.⁵⁷ This in itself, however, was proof enough that the era of wealth was over.

The other areas in Minahasa were able, in the heyday of copra,

⁵¹ At the level of the province of North Sulawesi (which includes Minahasa, Bolaang Mongondow, Gorontalo and Sangir Talaud), in 1983 for 40% of the households coconut production was the main source of income (Sondakh 1984: 6; see also Sondakh and Jones 1989: 367-368).

⁵² See Geertz 1963: 122.

⁵³ The rebellion (1958-1961) which was largely inspired by disagreement between the central government in Jakarta and North Sulawesi high officers about the copra trade and the appropriation of its profits.

⁵⁴ Tendeloo 1889: 70.

⁵⁵ Marchand 1922: 562, 579; Horsting 1929: 111.

⁵⁶ For this term, see Hyden 1980.

⁵⁷ De markt 1932: 646.

to receive some benefit from Tonsea's relative affluence in several ways, especially by offering their labour. Tonsea farmers left the work of coconut picking and processing to hired labourers from elsewhere in North Sulawesi, such as Gorontalo and Sangir, and from Minahasa's less favoured areas, especially around Lake Tondano. Here poverty and contrasts in living standards increased.⁵⁸ The wet-rice fields were too few, unequally divided, and inefficiently managed. Agreements on sharecropping, pawning of sawahs, rotative use, and advances on the products (*ijon*) worked to the advantage of the well-to-do.⁵⁹ One strategy was migration. Thousands of Minahasans left their homeland, usually in order to occupy jobs in the army, civil service, and other new institutions such as school and church. Besides this, however, another type of migration took place, more important for the present discussion. That was the pushing back of the Minahasan frontier, predominantly by the "poorest of the poor" of the Tondano area.⁶⁰

This happened, for example, in the sparsely-populated lowlands where newcomers began to plant coconut trees. But the biggest migration started in the 1920s, towards southern Minahasa, the hardly accessible borderland with Bolaang Mongondow. The opening up of this zone was stimulated and to an extent supported by the government and governmental bodies. After a difficult start, the people benefited from their leap into the wilderness. The kolonisasi area developed into one of the more prosperous zones of Minahasa, due to its suitability for a great variety of crops.

In the western highlands, from the end of the nineteenth century on, improved technology permitted the construction of some wet-rice fields. The wealth and high social status of the owners of these fields, however, contrasted sharply with the lot of the others, for whom the end of compulsory coffee deliveries had not turned out to be the start of prosperity. They had to cope with little, and more and more exhausted, land. Money was not yet very common, but nevertheless necessary. Many men, therefore, attempted to work elsewhere, in or linked to the market sector. Already in the early days of economic liberalization, natives of the western highlands, especially from Sonder, formed a considerable part of the wage-labourers, in European or Eurasian households as well as in private businesses anywhere in Minahasa.⁶¹ Some used their earnings to establish a business of their own. Sonderese became engaged especially in small-scale trading, in an appropriate reaction to the wider circulation of money. Being a travelling merchant (pasar ron)

⁵⁸ See about the distress in the Tondano area the report by the medical researcher A. Kündig (Kündig 1934: 188-189).

⁵⁹ Van Doorn 1926: 177-178; Van Rhijn 1941:24. The inexistence of land tax in colonial Minahasa prevents an accurate assessment of land tenure relations.

⁶⁰ Brouwer 1936: 60.

⁶¹ Schwarz 1881: 248; Pintu 1897.

was a risky undertaking, but these people had little to lose and some in fact managed to gain a lot.

Economic life in the highlands was also intimately related to the copra business. Many young men were employed in the coconut plantations of Tonsea, and, besides, the traders and craftsmen from Sonder were to a high degree dependent on the spending power of other Minahasans, especially coconut farmers. The drop in copra prices in the 1930s had, therefore, negative consequences for the traders. For these, too, agriculture became a more important source of income again.

The Depression mitigated, in certain respects, the contrasts within the population. Those Minahasans who depended on the market suffered a backlash. These were in the first place the wealthy: the coconut growers and traders, and the (travelling) merchants. They came on almost equal terms with the "small peasants", who had maintained their subsistence farming and had also contracted far fewer loans.⁶² But the poorest were also victims of the changes in the world economy because of the drop in demand for labour, especially in the coconut plantations.

It appears that this "levelling-out effect" of the World Depression also took place in other parts of the archipelago, which had undergone commercialization. Hüsken⁶³ describes how in North Central Java, after the advance of the market sector, in the 1930s the village economy changed in character again, with diminishing inequalities between big and small peasants. Elson gives a similar account for Pasuruan.⁶⁴

V The clove era, c. 1890 - 1985

In the sixteenth century, when clove was one of the main assets which attracted the Europeans to the Southeast Asian archipelago, Minahasa produced none. This contrasts with the second half of the present century when during several decades Minahasa-grown clove was, in its abundance, a sort of goldmine for its producers and especially for its merchants.

Markets and reasons for the demand for Indonesian clove in the twentieth century are different from those in earlier days. From the nineteenth century on, the use of cloves in European and American kitchens and industries dropped. On the other hand, the demand within the archipelago increased. The *kretek* cigarette, which derives its flavour from the cloves added to it, rapidly won ground, especially among the Javanese.⁶⁵ The Java-based cigarette factories'

⁶² As was already noted by Van Doorn (1926: 169).

⁶³ Hüsken 1989: 93-100, 102-104.

⁶⁴ Elson as cited in Svensson 1991: 170.

⁶⁵ As Reid (1985) has pointed out, this cigarette has gradually ousted the betel as a stimulant. See also Castles 1965.

interest in Indonesian cloves grew especially in the early 1950s, (shortly after Indonesia's independence), when in Zanzibar, from which until then big cargoes of cloves had been shipped to Java, a plant disease had broken out.⁶⁶

Tiny Minahasa had in 1953 no less than 25% of the national clove production. The cultivation of clove had started there in the nineteenth century, and continued especially in the area of Sonder, and, to a lesser degree, Kombi, east of Lake Tondano,⁶⁷ where soil composition and altitude are ideal, and the steep slopes favour the necessary dry environment for the roots. At the time, planting was carried out predominantly at the instigation of the government, without much zeal from the population. It is said⁶⁸ that there were many cases of sabotage, such as deliberately letting clove flowers wither, just as sometimes happened in the nineteenth century with coffee beans. This attitude changed, of course, at the outbreak of the clove boom in the 1950s. Then, Minahasans blessed their long-standing familiarity with this product. As it takes several years before a clove tree reaches its full growth, the people who had planted before the 1940s were able to take immediate advantage of the favourable market conditions.

In the 1960s and 1970s, "clove" was a magic word, and new plantings began on a large scale. Many who were involved in clove growing and, even more, in marketing, achieved prosperity. But there were also dark sides to this. A drawback of the clove industry is the erratic production, with only once in three or four years a great harvest. Furthermore, most of the clove cultivators were smallholders⁶⁹ and little more than vulnerable parts of a huge trade network; real profits went to inter-island and intermediary traders. Many peasants became involved in ijon contracts, selling the clove in advance at a price far below market level.⁷⁰

The fairy tale took a vicious turn in the 1980s. Elsewhere in Indonesia, clove planting had also expanded since the beginning of the boom, thus multiplying the national production and eventually causing a pricefall. Lampung and East Java surpassed North Sulawesi as the major clove-producing provinces. The latter was at a disadvantage because of its greater distance from the kretek factories. In the past ten years, more and more Minahasans have abandoned clove growing (causing the emergence of hutan cengkeh, clove forests). They looked for a new market product - in particular ginger, vanilla and rattan (gumutu) have been looking promising for

⁶⁶ Castles 1965: 51-52.

⁶⁷ Of the cloves produced in Minahasa in 1952, 57% originated from Sonder, and 30% from Kombi (Ekonomi 1953: 169).

⁶⁸ In various interviews carried out during my fieldwork.

⁶⁹ Half of these owned in the 1980s less than one hectare (cf. Rondonuwu 1983). See also Charras 1987: 52.

⁷⁰ See Pajow et al. 1982.

some time - and/or turned again to food agriculture.⁷¹

An industrial crop with an initial low profitability, then a boom, and subsequent decay of the market: Isn't this a sort of repetitive story? Patterns similar to those of especially the copra era are, in this respect, striking, but there is also another pattern which deserves attention: intra-regional differentiation and integration.

In the lowland zones, cloves did not prosper, and so these areas (in particular Tonsea) had to cede the favourable position they had during the coffee and copra periods to areas which were formerly at a disadvantage. The production of copra has continued, with only small profits. A problem was, besides the steadily falling copra prices,⁷² the failure to rejuvenate the existing, already poorly productive, trees.

Tondano has remained a sawah era with high population pressure. Like before, there is no question of "shared poverty" but inequality, no "involution" but expulsion of superfluous labour.

The western highlands broke up into poor and prosperous zones. Of the latter, in particular Sonder converted its role of labour exporter into that of labour importer during the clove boom.

(Wo)manpower was necessary for the sawahs, and for the short but intensive clove harvest. People flew to these areas not only from elsewhere in Minahasa, but from all North Sulawesi, and beyond; temporary labourers from Ujung Pandang were no exception.

On the other hand, there is that part of the western highlands which is not really suitable for clove, nor for copra or sawahs. Villagers usually work elsewhere as badly-paid labourers in ladangs, in stone pits or in wood chopping. This zone, which had never benefited from any of the booms, contains some remarkable villages: gudang sarjana they are called, warehouses of graduates. In the absence of a prospect of a good life in agriculture in their home village, the strategy of these people has been to invest in education for their children.

The former frontier area, South Minahasa around Tompaso Baru, has had, since its exploration, a rather stable existence. Clove, coconut, and ricefields: for each of these there are suitable environments, while the climate also permits the cultivation of all sorts of vegetables. In this diversified pattern, southern Minahasa resembles the region around Tomohon (northwest of Lake Tondano), with, however, a great difference in population pressure, and in distance from the major cities where the demand for their products is highest.

⁷¹ Sondakh 1985: 14-15; Goraka 1984; Obor Pancasila 7-12-1983, p. 1; 13-2-1984, p. 1, 8.

⁷² Rogi 1983; Obor Pancasila 2-4-1982.

VI Sawahs and clove gardens - subsistence and market

Having, thus, exposed the diverse vicissitudes of three crops, and of different areas, we turn to an aspect which has been latent in much of the story until now: that of the relationship between food crops and export commodities.

It might be illustrated in the light of the recent encounter between rice and clove (but for copra a basically similar story can be told⁷³). Cloves increasingly appeared on sites which previously showed food crops. Even wet-rice fields, formerly such a source of pride and wealth for their owners (especially in the western highlands), were sometimes drained in favour of clove planting. The latter was, in its turn, often a threat for the sawahs, as ill-considered clove planting on deforested, steep slopes upset the water supply.⁷⁴

Wet-rice fields involve high labour needs and relatively heavy costs. Frequently a sawah-owner lets his or her fields to others, who in their turn are likely to contract seasonal labourers. Work in sawahs is low-status, especially that of the women who do the planting and transplanting. During the clove boom, the inhabitants of the clove villages preferred work in dry gardens, in particular in clove plantations. Wage-labourers on the sawahs were, thus, usually outsiders to those villages. Due to their skill and low demands, there was a preference for workers from the "genuine" sawah-zones, in particular those to the Southwest of Lake Tondano, but also from the poorer parts of the western highlands.

Despite the recurrent suggestions by sawah-owners that their fields are a millstone around their necks, ambivalent feelings were involved here. Ownership of sawahs was also a source of pride, and people who earned from clove trade made it a point of honour to acquire a plot. Rice is, besides a highly appreciated food, a trade commodity. Risks of crop failures on sawahs are low.⁷⁵ Moreover, wet fields can also be used to raise, in ponds, the costly golden carp, which every self-respecting host should serve his guests at a party. Some sawah-owners nowadays use a small part of their land, for a limited period, for the profitable cultivation of bibit, clove seedlings.

⁷³ See for the 1920s and 1930s, Van Rhijn 1941: 43; for the 1980s, Obor Pancasila 4-12-1981, p. 6. A difference between the two crops is that coconut palms (as opposed to clove trees) are not incompatible with sawahs.

⁷⁴ Clove-provoked erosion often resulted in landslides as well. One with fatal consequences was in wealthy Rerer, in the Kombi area, on Good Friday 1981; another in the perhaps still richer Sulu'un (31-12-1983), when four houses were destroyed. Earlier in 1983, elsewhere in Sulu'un a landslide almost swirled off the balai desa (village hall) under construction, funded out of clove money and boasting to be one of the most expensive of Indonesia (Obor Pancasila 28-12-1983, p. 1; 6-1-1984, p. 1.)

⁷⁵ See also Boomgaard 1989: 104-105.

Thus, it is the multifunctional wet-rice field with its high production of an appreciated subsistence crop which offers most security.⁷⁶ Very few peasants with only dry land planted only clove trees,⁷⁷ but usually devoted a part of it to growing with maize, ubi or rice. This risk-spreading strategy apparently showed its worth in the period of the declining profitability of clove. It appeared that the "domestic mode of production", which is associated with food crops cultivation,⁷⁸ had retained a certain resilience.

VII Cycles or eras - patterns and processes

In the foregoing, we have outlined the stories of the three main commercial crops of the past two centuries. When the success story of the one was coming to an end, the roots for that of the next were already developing.

Can we, then, speak of a "cyclical movement"? This term suggests a return to the point of departure, and then the starting anew of a similar process. In our case, the patterns of the stories of export products may have converged, but the substance of the patterns changed. Each story featured a different crop, and, due to Minahasa's geographical diversity, therefore also a different area. This means that Minahasans have experienced the cycles (if the use of that term is after all permitted) in distinct ways, depending (in part) on their area of residence.

There was also considerable change during these two centuries. Conditions such as political context altered, and crops diverged in their profitability for the population. Of coffee, in a regime of forced cultivation and deliveries, this was minimal, and mostly restricted to the category of native state-officials. However, the smallholders' growth of copra and clove brought most of the population of the producing areas a relative prosperity (though in both cases those who gained most were the intermediate traders and wholesale buyers).

⁷⁶ Compare, for instance, the situation in West Sumatra in the early 19th century. When the free cultivation of coffee was possible, this crop was only grown in villages with sawahs, since these would have counterbalanced the risks (Dobbin 1983: 40-41).

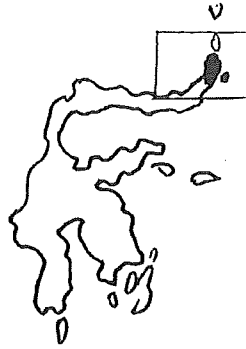
⁷⁷ Sondakh 1984: 23.

⁷⁸ However, this has also been "modernized" and influenced by government bodies. Regarding rice, high-yielding varieties have been introduced (although Minahasans in the 1980s still preferred the taste of their "own" rice). Also the area and production of maize increased from the 1970s on, but especially after the start in 1982 of the government-led Operasi Mandiri. The yield was partly exported to Java, Singapore, Kucing and Penan. But even so, a glut hit the maize cultivators, and many of these directed their attention to rice growing again, in 1984 and 1985. (Obor Pancasila 14-5-1983, p. 1; 14-1-1984, p. 1; 28-3-1984, p. 6; 11-5-1984, p.1).

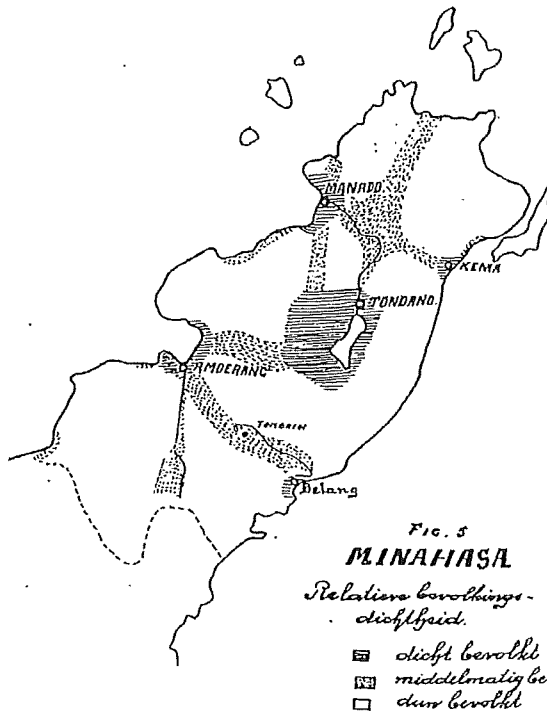
Other convergences between the coconut and clove "stories" are related to the mobility of the labour force. Regional economic variation became more pronounced in the course of the nineteenth century, and this process continued thereafter. For coconut and clove cultivation alike, a supplement of the labour force was partly provided by people from Minahasa's less favoured areas. For these, the wealth of Tonsea and Sonder respectively (to mention the most striking examples) provided an additional, usually necessary, source of livelihood. Thus, different but in basic pattern similar processes led to more specialization of, and at the same time (much in the spirit of Durkheim's organic solidarity) interdependence between the various areas.

Even though I feel tempted to style these three periods as "cycles", I believe there was all the time another, continuing, economic process with cyclical features, and perhaps this was even the only true cycle. The growing of food crops, in particular rice, was the constant factor in the background. In areas and eras of cash crops-induced prosperity, rice was sometimes the object of (feigned) despise, but in times of distress, it gained in importance. That held for the coffee period, when the Tondano area, during some decades, thanks to its newly-laid sawahs, was considered as having less hardship (or, if you like, more prosperity), in contrast to the western highlands, where such rice growing was hardly feasible.⁷⁹ And also in the decay days of copra, coconut cultivators recurred again to their subsistence agriculture. As for the clove's declining years, we have suggested that the strategy of non-commitment to monoculture has probably saved many a clove farmer from a total collapse. Export commodities have caused peaks of prosperity, but on the other hand, food crops have offered stability. The latter's value (both moral and material) increased when the commercial products' profitability went downhill.

⁷⁹ According to Edeling "[t]he ownership of sawahs is here [...] the real cause of progress and prosperity, not coffee cultivation." He also observed that the poverty in the heartland of coffee cultivation, Remboken, was due to the scarcity of arable land (Edeling 1919: 85-87).

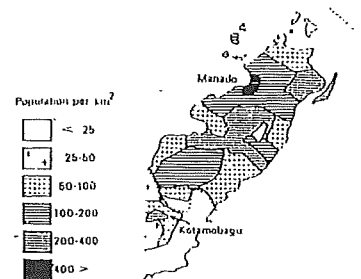


Map Ia Sulawesi and Minahasa



Map Ib Minahasa, population density in the 1930s (map in Tammes 1940: 190)

Map Ic Minahasa, population density 1971, based on 1971 census (part of map in Jones 1977: 53)



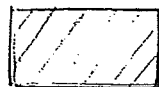
Map II : Minahasa, areas and towns



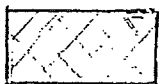
towns

- 1 Manado
- 2 Bitung
- 3 Tondano
- 4 Tomohon
- 5 Remboken
- 6 Sonder
- 7 Sulu'un
- 8 Amurang
- 9 Kombi
- 10 Tombatu
- 11 Ratahan
- 12 Tompaso Baru

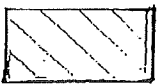
areas



Tonsea / lowlands



Tondano zone



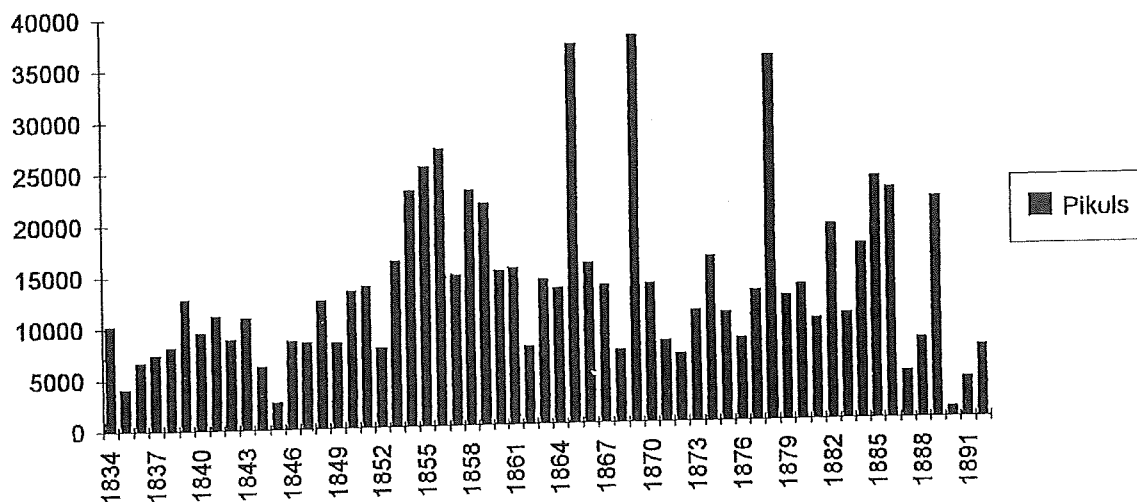
western highlands



kolonisasi

Graph

Coffee deliveries from Minahasa, 1834-1892



sources: for the period 1834-1853, Quarles van Ufford 1856: 30; for the period 1853-1892, Koloniale Verslagen.

abbreviations and glossary

ASZC	Archief van de Samenwerkende Zendingsooperaties (Archives of the Cooperating Missionary Societies), Oegstgeest
ANRI	Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, (National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia), Jakarta
ARA	Algemeen Rijksarchief, (General State Archives), The Hague
Coll.	Collection
<u>kretek</u>	cigarette flavoured with clove
<u>ladang</u>	dry field
MR	Mail Report
MvK	Collection Ministry of Colonial Affairs
<u>pikul</u>	c. 62.5 kg.
<u>sawah</u>	irrigated rice field
<u>ubi</u>	tuber
VOC	Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (United East Indian Company)

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