

Mason C. Hoadley: *Towards a Feudal Mode of Production: West Java, 1680-1800*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [in cooperation with the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies], 1994. x, 241 pp.

Mason Hoadley may be regarded as one of the very few specialists on Cirebon, West Java, between 1600 and 1800. He might even be the only one. Cirebon, a sultanate in Hoadley's period, which from the late 17th century was under the suzerainty of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Batavia, is not an area to which historians will turn readily. There are not many sources - in Malay, Javanese or Dutch - available for this region and those that are available are often difficult to understand, owing to a set of rather peculiar circumstances. From the late 17th century onward, there were normally two, three, or even four "princes" in charge of affairs as co-rulers, whose conflicting claims to income and status gave rise to a veritable maze of regulations. The territory comprised a relatively densely settled, flat coastal area, where the town of Cirebon with its court(s), harbour, and Dutch traders and officials constituted a dynamic element, and a much more sparsely populated, mountainous hinterland. The dividing line between these two areas roughly coincided with the border between the Javanese and Sundanese cultures and institutions.

Moreover, the Dutch sources are often extremely difficult to understand, even for a native Dutch speaker, and the reader is often left in doubt whether the writers themselves fully understood the situations they had to deal with.

As if these difficulties were not sufficiently challenging, Hoadley has complicated matters even further by including the adjacent Priangan area in his study. In his opinion, the Cirebon-Priangan region could be regarded as "a distinctive geo-political unit [...] united by a set of shared socio-economic institutions" (p. 8). One cannot but admire the courage shown by the author in undertaking such a large-scale study.

The title of the book - "Towards a Feudal Mode of Production" - reflects the main thrust of Hoadley's argument. He argues that, due to VOC policy, a situation of open access to land and a poll-tax as the only fiscal obligation of the peasantry was "replaced by directed cultivation of commodities on terraces controlled/owned by the administrative élite or public work in exchange for access to *sawah*

fields to carry out necessary production of rice," in a period of slightly over a century. The author uses the term "feudal mode of production" for the latter kind of situation. The shift described was, in Hoadley's view, accompanied by a process of social differentiation and replacement of local potentates by European officials (pp. 183-184).

I have several problems with this book and its main findings. In the first place, the evidence upon which Hoadley's conclusions are based is rather flimsy, and its presentation leaves much to be desired. For instance, the structure of his line of reasoning regarding the so-called *cacah somah* and *cacah kawula* - units of population and/or taxation - is obscure and unconvincing (pp. 37 ff). Instead of familiarizing the reader with the fairly extensive body of recent literature on the *cacah* phenomenon in Java in general, the author plunges right in with his own interpretation of this very complicated material. The uninitiated reader is unable to judge the merits of Hoadley's views, therefore. Specialists will find much here that is highly controversial, to say the least.

Hoadley's interpretation of the *cacah* list of Cirebon, dated 1699, may serve as an example. According to the author, the "men" (*manschappen*) enumerated here were in debt-bondage (p. 42). However, in his transcription and translation of this list (pp. 204-211), or in a copy of an earlier Dutch original of the same list, kept in the Indonesian National Archives, that is in my possession, there is nothing to suggest this. The fact that he translates "144 *manschappen*," in the same list, with "144 villages" (p. 38) suggests that he is a rather careless translator, or that his comprehension of even the less complicated aspects of this source is limited. Accuracy is not his strong suit anyway, as witness the author's cavalier treatment of the spelling of Dutch words. As the interpretation of sources as complicated as the ones dealt with here often hinges upon an accurate reading, this bodes little good.

Similar criticism could be levelled against Hoadley's interpretations of the nature of taxation and of land tenure at the beginning and the end of his period. He does not refer to recent literature on his topics and his reading of the sources is at best rather one-sided. Small wonder that his list of references is shockingly brief and out of date.

Moreover, his arguments for treating the Cirebon-Priangan area as a "distinctive geo-political unit" (p. 8) are very meagre indeed. Even

the Cirebon area itself was neither culturally nor economically homogeneous.

Finally, it is highly irritating that in a book bearing the term "feudal" in its title, the author does not explain what he means by "feudal" until page 181, and even then only in a note! Here it transpires that he uses the term in rather a general neo-Marxist way, as was fashionable in the 1970s. Most historians, Marxists - such as Perry Anderson - and non-Marxists alike, would probably disagree with Hoadley's choice of terminology, but that is largely beside the point. What does matter is that either he is not aware of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s regarding the use of the term feudalism outside Europe, or he could not be bothered to explain his position in this debate to his readers.

Of course, Hoadley cannot be held answerable for the paucity and the lack of clarity of his sources. He is responsible, though, for the awkward presentation of the data, the avoidance of confrontations with relevant recent publications, and the lack of attention to detail. His as yet unsubstantiated hypotheses are the stuff provocative articles are made of. For a book - even a book that looks as nice as this one - this is just not good enough.

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