

TIME RECONCILIATION ON FORT MARLBOROUGH'S DESIGN AND FUNCTIONS

*(PENYESUAIAN MASA MENGENAI REKA BENTUK DAN FUNGSI
KUBU MARLBOROUGH)*

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Abstract

Fort Marlborough is one of the tourism objects in Bengkulu. It has withstood for more than 300 years. During its time, it has gone through many things. As a vital asset for Bengkulu province, a special attention is needed in developing and preserving this site. In some cases, there are many historical heritage buildings were gone or in purpose changed. This article tried to discuss Fort Marlborough from time reconciliation point of view. To get better comprehension and understanding about it, an interdisciplinary study is needed. Socio-cultural and historical theories are applied to reach its goals. In conclusion, it was found that Fort Marlborough experienced good and bad time in its life. There were also changes in its design and function. The design was not changed much, but the great changes were found in its functions.

Keywords: Fort Marlborough, Bengkulu, Bencoolen, British Heritage,

Abstrak

Kubu Marlborough adalah salah satu objek pelancongan di Bengkulu. Ia telah bertahan lebih dari 300 tahun. Sepanjang masa itu, ia telah melalui banyak perkara. Sebagai aset penting bagi wilayah Bengkulu, perhatian khusus diperlukan dalam membangun dan memelihara tapak ini. Dalam sesetengah kes, terdapat banyak bangunan warisan sejarah yang telah hilang atau dalam keadaan berubah. Artikel ini cuba membincangkan kubu Marlborough daripada sudut pandangan rekonsiliasi masa. Kajian interdisiplin diperlukan untuk mendapatkan pengertian dan pemahaman yang lebih baik mengenainya. Teori sosio-kultural dan sejarah digunakan untuk mencapai matlamatnya. Kesimpulannya, didapati bahawa Kubu Marlborough mengalami masa yang baik dan buruk. Terdapat juga perubahan dalam reka bentuk dan fungsinya. Reka bentuk ini tidak banyak berubah, tetapi perubahan besar telah ditemui dalam fungsinya.

Kata Kunci: *Kubu Marlborough, Bengkulu, Bencoolen, Warisan British*

INTRODUCTION

Bengkulu province is located in southern part of Sumatra Island. It has its own cultural and historical background. These things had developed since prehistoric era and those are different from other provinces in Sumatra Island, Indonesia. Indriastuti proved it by the finding of prehistoric legacy such as the “menhir” from megaliths era in some parts of Bengkulu, for example

in south Bengkulu, Rejang Lebong, and North Bengkulu (2004: 14–28). Although it shares some similarities with other cultures in Sumatra or Malay tradition ckumps. Bengkulu culture has its own uniqueness and distinctive characteristics, for example, Tabot festival. This kind of festival is also found in Sumatra Barat, but in some extends, they are different and they have their own uniqueness. In other hand, the literature about Bengkulu's culture in primordial and classic time is not found much. Therefore, it is hard to be traced down. The next development of Bengkulu can be known from the Nusantara kingdoms' notation, British and Dutch's notes.

From all of those notes, it is known that there were some kingdoms in Bengkulu such as Sungai Serut kingdom, Selebar kingdom, Sungai Lemau kingdom, Pat Petulai kingdom, and so on. In 1685, British East India Company was established in Bengkulu as the center for pepper trading. As time goes by, Bengkulu was handed over to Dutch in exchange with Malacca as stated in Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824. The actual wording that concerned this agreement read:

“... The Factory of Fort Marlborough, and all the English Possessions on the island of Sumatra, are hereby ceded to His Netherlands Majesty; and his Britannic Majesty further engages that no British settlement shall be formed on that Island, nor any Treaty concluded by British Authority, with any Native Prince, Chief or State therein ...” (Harfield 1995: 490-491). In other words, the treaty that was signed in 1824 between “His Britannic Majesty and the King of the Netherlands respecting territory and commerce in the East Indies” managed all rights to colonization on the island of Sumatra from British and in exchange the settlement of Malacca. Bengkulu, explicitly, had become attractive and promising land for its agricultural products, such as clove, pepper, and coffee since the past time. As explained by Siddik in his book, he states that majority of the pepper sold in Bantam to the foreign traders (British, Dutch, and Portuguese) was from Silebar, Bengkulu. It also made the British, under Ralph Ord Commisioner, to sign the agreement with Pangeran Raja Muda from Sungai Lemau kingdom and King from Sungai Itam in 1685. The content of the contract was the permission to stay and do trading in the area (70-72). Then, in around XIX until XX century, gold was found in Lebong regency that made this place as the gold mining. After that, in 1930s, Bengkulu became the isolation place for some nationalist who were fighting for Indonesia's independence, for instance the founding father of Indonesia, Soekarno was isolated in Bengkulu. After the independence, Bengkulu was a part of Palembang, and in November 18th, 1968 it became the 26th province of Indonesia.

Bengkulu is attributed with various culture, art, nature, religious and historical tourism objects, for instances: Kejai Dance, Andei-andei, Pantai Panjang, 7 colours lake, Rafflesia flower habitate, and Fort Marlborough.

In this paper, writers are going to discuss on Fort Marlborough (see Photo 1); one of the most popular tourism objects in Bengkulu, Indonesia. It is known as the British legacy in Bengkulu. This Fort was established by East India Company (EIC) during 1713 – 1719 under the governor Joseph Collet. It was as a defense Fort, and it is the British's strongest Fort in the East after St. George Fort in Madras, India. The problem that authors bring forward in this paper is about the time reconciliation on Fort Marlborough's design and functions. The socio-cultural approach and historical approach were applied in the analysis to get a better picture of this historical site since it has gone through many things and withstood for more than 3 centuries. The reason to bring it up was because I got so many suggestions from many related groups and people concerned with Bengkulu's heritages; one of them is Bengkulu Heritage Society (BHS). It is hard to find clear and reliable sources of the history of many heritages in Bengkulu including Fort Marlborough. Besides, there are many problems faced related to Fort Marlborough nowadays. Therefore, authors bring it up today to trigger all of people who concern about Bengkulu heritage (government, NGO, scholars, and so on) to wake up and take actions. Furthermore, it is time for us to start providing clear data and history about this site for the benefits of our future generation.



Photo 1. Fort Marlborough in Bengkulu
Source: Bengkulu today.com

DISCUSSION

The bird eyes' view of Fort Marlborough

Fort Marlborough is British's legacy in Bengkulu. It is the strongest Fort built by the British in South East Asia. This Fort was built by East India Company (EIC) in 1713 – 1719. At that time, Mr. Joseph Collet was in charge in Bengkulu. At first, this Fort was used as a defense Fort. It witnessed many good and bad things happened between the indigenous and the foreign comers in Bengkulu. One of those tragedies was the death of Thomas Parr. To remember this murder, a monument was built near to Fort Marlborough in remembering him.

In fact, the Fortification of this Fort cannot be separated from the existence of the Fort York that has been built before it. This fort was built because of the number of problems arisen in the Fort York, such as the infectious disease. The British needed a new location for a new Fort as a replacement. Thus, a new location was given where the Fort now. This Fort was built in stages for many reasons. The lack of man power and the material became the two main problems. Thus, the new fortification continued over a number of years (Harfield 1995: 65) and the fort was named after British military commander, John Churchill. He is known as The First Duke of Marlborough.

In general, there are 3 notable stages of Fort Marlborough. These stages are (1) the era of British, Dutch East Indies and Japan or the colonialism era; (2) the era after the independence of Indonesia, this site became the police and army headquarter; and (3) in 1977, this Fort was handed over to ministry of education and culture. Then, it became the cultural heritage building.

In an age that has reached 300 years, Fort Marlborough is certainly more than just a historic building. This Fort has become the inscription that records the interaction of two or more different nations. It is also like a monument which unties sweet and bitter memories among the nations in the past.

Past Fort Marlborough's design and functions

It is important to discuss about the past of Fort Marlborough because it will give us the guide about it. Lipsitz states that the past helps us to see the unfulfilled hopes and aspirations of the past, because it will both enable and inhibit the work we do now, yet determine about our prospects for the future (Rowe 2010:154). In other words, it can be stated that to get a comprehensive

understanding about the time reconciliation, in this paper which is about Fort Marlborough's design and functions, we have to embrace the past, present, and future.

Built in 1713, Fort Marlborough initially was not a military defense, but it was for trading function; pepper trading and the Malacca strait shipment. Thus, in the past time, Fort Marlborough's functions were two, military defense and center of British trading and government office.

The Fort was built on the top of a hill faced the Bengkulu city and backed the Indian Ocean. There were some tragedies happened, as mentioned in the previous part, concerning to Fort Marlborough in the past. It was burned by Bengkulu people and made the residences to be evacuated to Madras. The reason behind this tragedy was the Joseph Collet's vanity. He thought that the local kings as inferior and he tried to make intervention in the local power especially about law problem. It triggered the distantly relationship between British and the local kingdoms. In 1719, there was a war between British and the locals lead by Lembak tribe under the command of the son of Jenggalu prince. They invade into the Fort and burned it down. This resistance was also helped by Bugis soldiers who were trusted by British (Wells 1977: 35-39). Then, they came back in 1724 after the treaty with the local kingdom signed, but in 1793, there were chaos again and Robert Hamilton was died at that time. It was also followed by the death of Thomas Parr in 1807. These series of tragedy showed that the relation between the locals and new settlers was not stable. For the British, it is such a big threat, but for the locals, it is maybe called as resistance of the indigenous toward the comers. For instance, the death of Thomas Pars is regarded as the peak of the revolt from the locals to fraud and injustice during their time in Bengkulu while implementing the business or other cases.

Another important time that worth noted is the time when British were under the French threat. At that time, British were preparing themselves to face the French's attack. Finally, British gave up the power to French. In this period, there was one thing worth remembering, British insured the Fort. British or Mr. Charter who served as governor of Fort Marlborough took insurance to protect the Fort from being taken by foreign enemy. This contract law case was known as Carter v Boehm. It was the insurance agreement between Mr. Carter and Mr. Boehm. At that time, Captain Tryon, a witness, testified that Mr. Carter was aware that this Fort was built to resist attack from locals, not European enemies. French attacked and Mr. Boehm refused to fulfill the insurance claim.

The design of Fort Marlborough in the past is not rigorously recorded and it makes it is hard to find the literature or note describing about its design in the past. Some illustrations or pictures of Fort Marlborough can be seen in Fort Marlborough document dated February 27th, 1712. That document shows the original plan of this fort. It already had 4 bastions and some rooms. These rooms were planned for some purposes, such as the great house, guard room, store house, powder store, and so on (Harfield 1995: 73). The other ones were illustration showing the South East view of Fort Marlborough with its palisade and the observation tower engraved by Joseph. C. Stadler; and a drawing dated 1794-1798 by Samuel Andrew picturing the south front of Fort Marlborough with its gate, wall, and the tower. These two paintings, now, belong to The British Library - Oriental and India Office Collection (ibid: 295). In addition, there are some paintings, collection of Jakarta Museum since 1973, picturing the Fort in the past. In these paintings, it is known that the turtle like design was already shaped from the past. The form of head and 4 legs of the turtle were formed by soil mounds covered by stones structures. From the painting, there was a carillon in the front part of the Fort, building with flat roof in the back and a building outside of the Fort. Besides, those painting also pictures the dried trench and two layer wooden fences (Paulina 1991 89:). On the other hand, it can be said that this fort had some changes and improvements in its design depending on the era and its main function.

Furthermore, we can specify the functions of some parts of the Fort out of its main function as defense Fort based on its design such as follow:

- a. The bastion – it is a part of the Fort that is overhanging at each corner of the Fort. The function of it is to attack enemies invisibly.
- b. The prison – the main function of this part is to hold the custodies.
- c. The tower – in its early times, this Fort had a tower. It is used to watch or observe the circumstances in the surrounding area.
- d. The Raveline – it is a building on the trenches and has three angles. It is connected by a bridge and placed from the salient angle of the east bastion to the swamp and from the raveline south face to the swamp to prevent an enemy from lodging in the interspersing space (ibid: 348).

In addition, the functions of Fort Marlborough in the past were not only based on its design but also based on social and economical aspect. It has been explained that another function of this Fort is serving as government office. Moreover, this Fort also served socially since it was used as a place for religious activities such as christening and wedding. As documented by the Sumatra's Westkust website, there were many wedding and christening ceremony held in Fort Marlborough. For instances, the marriage between Shopia Alexander and Christian Lanton in 1802; and Elizabeth Francish and Charles Wasmus in 24 June 1792; the christening of William Henry, son of Thomas William and Elizabeth in 4 August 1811; the christening of Charlotte, daughter of James Brown in 29 July 1799. Besides, it is also clear that the function of this fort economically was as the office of East India Company.

From all the data, it can be concluded that this Fort had served various functions for the British and society in Bengkulu.

Present Fort Marlborough's design and functions

The design of Fort Marlborough is unique. As Atmadi states that the architecture is influenced by many things such as geographical location, geological condition, climate, social life, and belief (1988:52). Since there is a great difference of Europe and Indonesia climate, the design or the architecture of Fort Marlborough did not fully adopted European architecture and style. It was done to match with the Indonesian natural and climate condition.

Nowadays, the Fort Marlborough is administratively located in Barukoto sub-district and around 300 meters from the seashore. Public settlement is in the surrounding area of this Fort, in northern side is Indonesian sea, in eastern side is public settlement called Kebun Keling, in southern side is a market, and in western side is China Town. To be specific, it is located in Jl. Ahmad Yani and the shape of this Fort still has the square form with four bastions covered with solid wall and a raveline (a three sided building, generally, located in front part connected by bridge). There is no tower as in the picture in the past.

The building near to the south gate is the original building of the Fort. This Fort has three rooms in the left side. These rooms are used to show the things related to the Fort and the history of the Fort. In the past, these rooms were used as the army room and gun store house.

Today, Fort Marlborough's mainly function is as the tourism object. It becomes one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Bengkulu. As an historical building, it offers many interesting things related to the history happened here. For example, when we are going inside the Fort, the pictures or the infographics will tell us about the Fort, its functions and real picture of the condition in the past. In one room, we can see the sketch made by the prisoner in the wall telling about life condition at that time.

It is the icon of Bengkulu. Some say that "When you come to Bengkulu, it is incomplete if you do not visit Fort Marlborough." This Fort becomes unique since it is preserved in its original form and design. This aspect becomes the special or distinctive reason for visitor to come. Moreover, the special thing offered by this site is not only the Fort itself but also the scenery around the Fort, a vast and beautiful view of the sea and some other historical buildings.

Nowadays, the design of Fort Marlborough is just the same as in the past since there is regulation from the government to keep and maintain the original form of historical building as stated in Indonesian's Undang Undang No. 11, 2010 regulating the cultural heritage. Even though there were some renovations done in Fort Marlborough, it still keeps its originality and does not change its design regarding the function of the Fort Marlborough today as the tourism object. There is another function that is still the same as in the past; its religious function. Almidianto as the one who is responsible for the Fort says that the people in and around the Fort area usually do the prayer in the Fort especially in Idul Fitri and Idul Adha prayer that are done once a year.

All in all, it can be stated that the physical appearance of the Fort today was not changed much, but the function did. All of these changes, especially the function based on the design, happened because it is, now, not a defense Fort anymore but a tourism object. In other words, the function of this Fort is limited now and not as various as in the past. One thing that still remains is the religious function.

Future Dreams of Fort Marlborough

This is the last part of the time reconciliation of Fort Marlborough's design and functions. Months ago the authors conducted a small independent research using questioner asking people about their hopes toward Fort Marlborough. There were 50 respondents taken with random sampling. The respondents were from various backgrounds. It was done to get a general hope from all people such as lecturer, travel consultant, tourist, and so on. From the questioner, all the respondents conveyed their expectation about the Fort Marlborough's design and function. In general, they expect the original form of the Fort must be kept. As stated by Risnawati, a lecturer, "*Lestarikan dan pertabankan keaslian bentuk fisik/design bangunan Fort Marlborough sebagai salah satu peninggalan sejarah dikota Bengkulu.*" (Keep and preserve the original design of Fort Marlborough as one of the cultural heritage building in Bengkulu city). The similar statement also stated by Andri Saputra, a tour guide. He said that, "*harapanku terhadap fisik dan bangunan Fort Marlborough bisa dijaga sesuai dengan bentuk aslinya yang mengandung nilai sejarah*". (My hope is the physical form of Fort Marlborough can be preserved as its original form that contains historical value). In other words, it can be summed up that the society wants it to be kept in its original form.

Another question in the questioner asked the respondent about their expectation toward Fort Marlborough's function. In this section the writer got vary expectation but in general it can be categorized as two main hopes. Firstly, majority of the respondent think that it will be better if this site becomes education and research center especially about the history. Krishna Gamawan, a travel consultant, says that, "*Harapan saya kedepannya Fort Marlborough dapat menjadi pusat pendidikan dan penelitian sejarah bangsa Indonesia dan Inggris. Dengan menjadikan Fort Marlborough menjadi pusat pendidikan dan sejarah (perpustakaan modern dan museum) maka akan mendatangkan banyak kunjungan wisatawan/peneliti ke Bengkulu dan akan meningkatkan kesejahteraan masyarakat Bengkulu*". (My future hope is that Fort Marlborough can be Indonesia and British education and historical research center. Transforming the function of this Fort into education and historical research center (modern library and museum) can attract more tourists and researchers. Consequently, the welfare of Bengkulu people will increase). Secondly, some respondents propose that this Fort become a delightful and educative place for socializing especially for adolescence. Akhmad Fadli, a university student, expresses that, "Beside as the historical tourism object, I hope that the government can facilitate this Fort to be a cool place for young people or community to gather and do positive things". A comparable expectation is also expressed by Agustina Indah Bahari, a teenager. She says that, "*Saya berharap kedepannya benteng Marlborough tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai salah satu objek wisata sejarah, tetapi juga dapat berfungsi sebagai tempat nongkrong untuk pemuda Bengkulu*". (I hope that in the future Fort Marlborough is not only functionated as historical tourism object but also as a place to hangout for Bengkulu young adult). In a few word, the respondent hoped that this Fort to be more valuable if its function can be maximized into education and research center. Moreover, it is also expected that this place can be a good place to gather and do good and positive activities for the teenagers and others.

Beside the hopes that come from the society about Fort Marlborough, the writer also wants to propose some hopes. We can learn good things from the past. Since it is a site that provides the information about Bengkulu and Indonesia in general even some foreign countries, it will be better if the regulator or the government make it become an education center. It can be done by providing some supporting facilities that can attract and provide information to the visitor especially the students. In addition, we can also put hope to the local government to learn from the past. Bengkulu was an attractive and promising land. It is a fertile area and rich in natural resources. Bengkulu can be major supplier of the agricultural product nationally and internationally in the past. It will be very good for Bengkulu if we can regain this golden era for the benefit of Bengkulu and its people. Another thing that the writer proposes based on the past experience and it is possible to be done is about the pleasant and beautiful city, friendly and green city. As illustration of this condition, the writer would like to cite the letter wrote by Raffles (served as governor in Bengkulu during 1818 – 1824) in which he picturing Bengkulu as follow:

“... population and industry are increasing; the inland merchants begin to bring down the gold and cassia from the interior...”

Foreign settlers, both Chinese and Europeans, were encouraged and protected. Sixty Germans were at one time sent from Europe and settled in the neighborhood of Bencoolen. Sugar was extensively cultivated and a considerable trade centered in port.”
... the spice gardens, of which there were now many in the neighborhood of Bencoolen, added greatly to its interest and beauty; Sir Stamford’s residence in the country was twelve miles from the town”.

There were various country houses on the road to Permatan Balam (his country-house), all of them were surrounded by plantations. The cloves trees as an avenue to a residence are perhaps unrivalled, their noble height, and above all the spicy fragrance with which they perfume the air, produce, in driving through a long line of them, a degree of exquisite pleasure only to be enjoyed in the clear light atmosphere of these latitudes”.

This letter is quoted by Siddik in *Hukum Adat Rejang* from Memoir of the Life and Public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles by his widow. In short, from this letter we can imagine the golden era of Bengkulu. Plantations and trading were growing rapidly. Besides, the infrastructures such as wide streets dotted with trees in both side were also built to support the advancement of Bengkulu.

CONCLUSSION AND SUGGESTION

From all the discussion above, it can be concluded that Fort Marlborough is not only just a historical building. It has become a symbol of sweet and bitter of relationship among the nations. The design and functions of Fort Marlborough changed time over time but the design was not changed much from its original form. The grand and wonderful architecture of Fort Marlborough picture the acculturation of the European and Indonesian culture. In the functions aspect, great changed happened following or depending on the era. Furthermore, from the discussion, we can propose some positive suggestions regarding Fort Marlborough, for example maximizing the function of Fort Marlborough now. It can be a worth visiting place and it can be used an education and research center. In addition, the good thing from the past related to the Fort Marlborough and Bengkulu in general can be a based for the current government to develop or regain the golden era of Bengkulu.

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