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Port of Tuapeijat in the Mentawai Islands Regency (1999-2023)

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Abstrak

Pelabuhan Tuapeijat merupakan pelabuhan utama di Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai yang memiliki posisi strategis sebagai pintu gerbang mobilitas orang dan barang di wilayah kepulauan Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan perkembangan Pelabuhan Tuapeijat sejak pemekaran Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai tahun 1999 hingga 2023, menganalisis lalu lintas orang dan barang, struktur pengelolaan pelabuhan, serta kontribusinya terhadap pembangunan wilayah. Penelitian menggunakan metode sejarah melalui tahapan heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Sumber penelitian diperoleh dari arsip pelabuhan, dokumen pemerintah, data statistik, serta wawancara dengan pengelola pelabuhan dan masyarakat sekitar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Pelabuhan Tuapeijat berkembang dari pelabuhan pengangkutan kayu menjadi pelabuhan utama di Kepulauan Mentawai. Perubahan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh penetapan Tuapeijat sebagai ibu kota Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai tahun 1999. Pelabuhan ini berperan penting dalam distribusi logistik, peningkatan aktivitas ekonomi, pengembangan infrastruktur transportasi, dan sektor pariwisata. Keberadaan pelabuhan juga mendorong transformasi sosial masyarakat serta mempercepat modernisasi wilayah kepulauan. Dengan demikian, Pelabuhan Tuapeijat tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana transportasi laut, tetapi juga sebagai pusat pertumbuhan ekonomi dan pembangunan wilayah Kepulauan Mentawai.

Kata kunci: pelabuhan tuapeijat, sejarah maritim, transportasi laut.

Abstract

The Port of Tuapeijat is the principal port in the Mentawai Islands Regency and serves a strategic role as the main gateway for the movement of people and goods within the archipelagic region. This study aims to examine the development of the Port of Tuapeijat from the establishment of the Mentawai Islands Regency in 1999 until 2023, analyze the flow of passengers and cargo, investigate the port management structure, and assess its contribution to regional development. The research employs the historical method, consisting of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Primary sources include port archives, government documents, statistical data, and interviews with port officials and local communities. Secondary sources comprise books, journal articles, theses, and other scholarly works related to maritime history and port studies. The findings reveal that the Port of Tuapeijat evolved from a timber transportation port into the main maritime hub of the Mentawai Islands. This transformation was significantly influenced by the designation of Tuapeijat as the capital of the Mentawai Islands Regency in 1999. The port has played a crucial role in logistics distribution, economic growth, transportation infrastructure development, and tourism expansion. Furthermore, it has facilitated social transformation and accelerated modernization within the archipelagic community. Therefore, the Port of Tuapeijat functions not only as a maritime transportation facility but also as a catalyst for economic growth and regional development in the Mentawai Islands.

***Keywords**: port of tuapeijat, maritime history, sea transportation.*

INTRODUCTION

Ports are essential infrastructures within maritime transportation systems, serving as nodes for the movement of people and goods through waterways. In archipelagic regions, ports play a strategic role as the

primary link connecting territories separated by the sea. Ports function not only as locations where vessels berth but also as centers of economic activity, trade, and logistics distribution (Amin, et al, 2023).

The Mentawai Islands Regency, an archipelagic region located off the western coast of Sumatra, relies heavily on maritime transportation. In this context, the Port of Tuapeijat serves as the main gateway to the Mentawai Islands. Located in Tuapeijat Village, North Sipora District, the port experienced significant growth following the establishment of the Mentawai Islands Regency through Law No. 49 of 1999.

The designation of Tuapeijat as the regency capital led to a substantial increase in port activities. Consequently, the Port of Tuapeijat developed into the primary center for transportation, governance, and economic activities in the Mentawai Islands. The port has also played a vital role in supporting regional development, infrastructure expansion, and tourism growth.

Studies on port history in the Mentawai Islands remain relatively limited. Most maritime research concerning the west coast of Sumatra focuses on larger ports such as Padang and Sibolga. Therefore, examining the history of the Port of Tuapeijat is important for understanding regional development from the perspective of maritime history and archipelagic studies (Mandasari et.al, 2021).

This article discusses the development of the Port of Tuapeijat from 1999 to 2023, focusing on port transformation, passenger and cargo traffic, port management, and its contribution to regional development.

METHODS

This study employs the historical research method, which consists of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage involved collecting primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were obtained from port archives, transportation agency records, statistical reports, and interviews with port administrators and local residents. Secondary sources included books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and other scholarly materials related to maritime history and port development. The source criticism stage was conducted to assess the authenticity and credibility of the collected data. Subsequently, interpretation was undertaken to analyze historical facts and understand the development of the Port of Tuapeijat comprehensively. Finally, historiography was employed to present the findings in a systematic historical narrative (Siallagan, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Background of the Port of Tuapeijat

Mentawai Islands Regency in West Sumatra covers an area of 6.033.76 km^2 with a 1.402.66 km coastline, comprising 4 main islands (Siberut, Sipora, North Pagai, South Pagai) and 93 small islets. Due to its island geography, maritime transportation is vital for population mobility, commodity distribution, and governance. Expanded from 4 to 10 districts in 2013, its largest district is West Siberut (1.163.64 km^2), while North Sipora is the smallest (272.40 km^2). The capital, Tuapeijat, is located in North Sipora on Sipora Island, approximately 153 km from Padang. The population consists of indigenous Mentawai people along with Minangkabau, Batak, and Nias migrants. The regency's population grew from 11.090 in 1855 to 63.436 in 2001, reaching 89.401 by 2022 after a notable leap during the 2010 census. Local economic activities revolve around farming (taro and sweet potatoes), fishing, livestock, trading, and public administration (Marwan, 2020).

Tuapeijat Port was initially built in 1971 by timber concessionaire PT Bhara Union as a simple wooden jetty for loading logs. Early passenger ships docked offshore and transferred passengers via small boats. A major turning point occurred in 1999 when Tuapeijat was designated as the administrative capital of the newly created Mentawai Islands Regency following its separation from Padang Pariaman Regency. This status shift transformed the port from an industrial resource-extraction site into a public transportation and logistical lifeline. Situated in Siburu Bay and naturally sheltered by three off-coast islets (Siburu, Simakakkang, Pototoga), the port enjoys calm waters without needing a breakwater

The development of the Port of Tuapeijat can be traced back to the establishment of PT Bhara Union's timber-processing operations on Sipora Island in 1971. Initially, the port served primarily as a facility for transporting timber products and supporting the company's logistical activities. Over time, however, its function expanded to serve the broader needs of local communities.

The name "Tuapeijat" originates from the Mentawai language, where tuapei means "to stop over" and jat means "place." Thus, Tuapeijat literally means "a stopping place." Historically, the area had long served as a transit point for inter-island travelers within the Mentawai archipelago (Yance, 2025).

The most significant phase of development occurred after Tuapeijat was designated as the capital of the Mentawai Islands Regency in 1999. This administrative change increased population mobility and governmental activities, transforming the Port of Tuapeijat into the region's principal

transportation hub. During the early years of regional autonomy, the port warehouse was even used temporarily as a government office.

In addition to administrative factors, Tuapeijat's strategic geographical location contributed to its development. Situated in northern Sipora Island and facing directly toward the Indian Ocean, the port provides convenient maritime access between Padang and the Mentawai Islands.

Infrastructure expanded gradually over time. In 1996, a 35m x 8m concrete pier replaced the wooden jetty, alongside a 300 m^2 warehouse and passenger terminal. Notably, following the 1999 regional expansion, the port warehouse served as the temporary government office for all municipal agencies until dedicated administrative buildings were constructed in 2002. Facilities were further upgraded in 2012 by extending the pier to 70 meters and paving parking areas to accommodate larger vessels, including the Mentawai Fast high-speed ferry introduced in 2014.

Hinterland Potential and Regional Commodities

Tuapeijat Port's hinterland encompasses North and South Sipora districts. Local agriculture relies on traditional, non-destructive farming plots called Tinungglu governed historically by Arat Sabulungan cultural principles. Key economic drivers include:

Agricultural Yields: Coconut is the single largest commodity, growing from 3.308 tons in 2017 to over 18.133 tons in 2022. Other commodities include cloves, nutmeg, cocoa, and patchouli (nilam) oil. However, local farmers face economic exploitation by middlemen (tengkulak) due to limited local processing infrastructure and irregular ship schedules.

Tourism and Growth: As a global surfing destination, Tuapeijat Port drives local hospitality, creates employment, and supports ongoing infrastructure expansion, including government offices and the Mentawai Airport (Zaryaningsih, 2022).

Traffic of People and Goods at Tuapeijat Port

Tuapeijat Port serves as the primary maritime gateway and critical logistics hub for the Mentawai Islands Regency, West Sumatra. Situated at Kilometer Zero (KM 0) of the 77 kilometer Trans-Mentawai road on Sipora Island, it links the region's hinterland to outside markets and integrates local socio-economic activities. Historically dependent on water transport and small motorized boats (pompong or motorboats) for inland river navigation, the Mentawai community relies heavily on Tuapeijat Port to guarantee food security, support public administration, and foster regional connectivity.

The Port of Tuapeijat accommodates various types of vessels, including passenger ships, cargo vessels, pioneer vessels, and inter-island ferries. Ships such as KM Sabuk Nusantara, Mentawai Fast, and vessels operated by ASDP constitute the primary means of transportation for local residents.

The port accommodates diverse vessels, ranging from timber transport. barges and oil tankers to commercial fast boats and government pioneer ships:

Government-Owned Fleet, Vessels owned by the Regency Government (e.g., KM Beriloga, KM Mentawai Express, KM Pulau Simasin, KM Simatalu, and KLM Nade 220) face severe operational deficits. Most are non-operational or unserviceable due to mechanical failures or lack of maintenance, leaving only limited vessels (such as KM Nade and KM Simatalu) active for inter-island routes. This shortage causes frequent overcapacity and weekly scheduling constraints.

Commercial and Pioneer Ships

KMP Sumber Rezeki Baru (Private Wooden Ship): Operates the Padang–Sioban–Tuapeijat route with a capacity of 175 passengers and 30 tons of cargo.

KM Sabuk Nusantara 37 & 68 (State-Subsidized Pioneer Ships): Run by the Ministry of Transportation, providing low-cost passenger and cargo transport across inter-provincial (Sumatra–Mentawai–Nias–Sibolga) and intra-provincial routes.

MV Mentawai Fast (Fast Ferries): Managed by PT Mentawai Anugerah Sejahtera, delivering rapid connections between Padang and Mentawai, as well as scheduled inter-island routes (Siberut and Sikakap).

KMP Ambu-Ambu & KMP Gambolo (ASDP Ferries): Connect Teluk Bungus (Padang) to North and South Mentawai. Industrial & Bulk Fleet: Self-Propelled Oil Barges (SPOB) operated by PT Asimi supply liquid fuel (BBM) and LPG cylinders to power local electricity, transportation, and fisheries. Tugboats and barges (e.g., TB Prima Bahari/TK Prima Bahari) regularly transport log timber to Java (Gresik).

Cargo activities at the port have increased alongside population growth and rising regional demand. Essential commodities, construction materials, fuel, fishery products, and agricultural commodities represent the major goods transported through the port.

In addition to logistics distribution, the port functions as a key center for human mobility. The maritime route connecting Padang and Tuapeijat serves as the principal transportation corridor linking the Mentawai Islands with mainland West Sumatra. Passenger traffic has increased significantly, particularly following the growth of surfing tourism in the Mentawai Islands.

Shipping lines at Tuapeijat operate across four structural categories: inter-provincial pioneer, intra-provincial pioneer, inter-island, and ferry routes. In the regional port system, Tuapeijat functions as a Regional Feeder Port alongside Sioban, Pokai, and Maileppet, feeding into Sikakap (the main Collector Port) and connecting to various Local Feeder Ports (e.g., Pasapuat, Labuan Bajau, Mabukkuk).

Port Management and Administration

The Port of Tuapeijat is administered by the Port Administration Unit (Unit Penyelenggara Pelabuhan—UPP) under the authority of the Ministry of Transportation of the Republic of Indonesia. Port operations involve various stakeholders, including local government agencies, shipping operators, stevedoring workers, and maritime security institutions.

Port management encompasses vessel services, maritime traffic regulation, cargo handling, and passenger services. Continuous modernization efforts have been undertaken through the construction of new piers, passenger terminals, warehouses, and supporting facilities.

Nevertheless, port administration faces several challenges, including extreme weather conditions in the Indian Ocean, limitations in supporting transportation infrastructure, and the high cost of logistics distribution within the archipelagic region.

Contribution to Regional Development

The Port of Tuapeijat has made substantial contributions to the development of the Mentawai Islands Regency. Economically, the port functions as the principal center for trade and logistics distribution, stimulating business growth and commercial activities. The surrounding area has experienced rapid development, evidenced by the emergence of retail businesses, transportation services, and various commercial enterprises.

In terms of infrastructure, the port has encouraged the construction of roads, bridges, and other transportation facilities on Sipora Island. Furthermore, it supports air transportation development by enhancing connectivity with Mentawai Airport.

The port has also played a significant role in tourism development. The Mentawai Islands are internationally recognized as one of the world's premier surfing destinations. As the primary entry point for visitors, the Port of Tuapeijat facilitates tourism flows and supports related economic activities.

From a social perspective, the development of the port has transformed the structure of the Tuapeijat community. What was once a small transit settlement has evolved into a bustling administrative

and port town. This transformation illustrates the critical role of the port in the modernization of island societies.

Economic Driver & Local Growth, Direct Trade Integration. Enabled local farmers to bypass predatory middlemen (tengkulak) and market plantation yields at scale to external regions.

Local Business Ecosystem, Spurred ancillary businesses around the port area, including local inns (e.g., Bintang, Kristine, Geutsemani at IDR 150k–300k/night), eateries, and retail shops.

Labor Union (TKBM): Employs 39 organized stevedores under equal profit-sharing models to handle cargo offloading via motorized rickshaws (becak), pickups, and trucks.

Multimodal Transportation, Trans-Mentawai Highway Serves as Kilometer Zero (KM 0) for the 77 km highway across Sipora Island (completed in 2023), connecting Tuapeijat to Rokot Airport, Sioban Port, and Katiet.

DAMRI Land Transit: Introduced in Jan 2022 and expanded in 2023, providing affordable ground transit along the Tuapeijat–Sioban route, heavily benefiting students and daily commuters.

Mentawai Airport Synergies, Connects marine passengers from outer islands (Siberut/Sikakap) via Tuapeijat Port to the newly expanded Mentawai Airport (1.600 m runway, replacing the vulnerable 850 m Rokot airfield). International Gateway, Key transit hub for incoming surfing tourists bound for Sipora's world-class wave breaks (18 spots in North Sipora and 4 in South Sipora, including Lance's Right and Telescope). Tourism Retribution, Local tourism levies surged from IDR 1.000.000 (foreign)/IDR 100.000 (domestic) in 2016 up to IDR 2.000.000 (foreign) and IDR 500.000 (domestic) per surfer visit under the 2023 regional regulation.

CONCLUSION

The Port of Tuapeijat experienced significant development following the establishment of the Mentawai Islands Regency as an autonomous region in 1999. Originally serving as a supporting facility for timber-industry operations, the port evolved into the principal maritime gateway for passenger and cargo transportation within the Mentawai Islands.

The port has contributed substantially to regional development in the fields of economy, transportation, infrastructure, and tourism. As a center of connectivity linking the Mentawai Islands with external regions, it has accelerated social transformation and regional modernization.

Therefore, the Port of Tuapeijat should be understood not merely as a maritime transportation facility but also as a key driver of economic growth and regional development in the Mentawai Islands Regency.

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