

Rahman et al., 2018

Volume 3 Issue 3, pp. 1455-1465

Date of Publication: 6th February, 2018

DOI-<https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2018.33.14551465>

This paper can be cited as: Rahman, B, Sujadmi, & Febriani, L. (2018). Involution in Indonesian Civilization (A Historical Review of the Social and Political Behavior of the Indonesian Society since Independen). PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, 3(3), 1455-1465

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INVOLUTION IN INDONESIAN CIVILIZATION (A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR OF THE INDONESIAN SOCIETY SINCE INDEPENDEN)

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Abstract

This paper begins with crucial inquiries about the process of Indonesian civilization growth: Why is the Indonesian self-identity different from those of its neighboring nations? Is there anything amiss in its process of self-making? How exactly did this nation come into being in relation with the roles of the actors involved in that process? The questions above will be responded with hypothetical answers through a historical review of the social and political behavior of the Indonesian society since its independence. Indonesia's self-making process will be reviewed back from the period of its independence to see how its civilization grew in comparison to other nations around it. Is it true that the revolution of independence had

disjointed this nation's civilization growth process, or is there any other cause? In comparison with those of its neighboring nations, the Indonesia's civilization growth is rather involutive than evaluative, and this may not change at least for the foreseeable future. This paper aims to analyze it in a hypothetical review. The implication of this paper is the suggestion for Indonesian nation to be alert of the potential continuation of conflicts that may perpetuate the involution process, which can hamper Indonesia's civilization growth.

Keywords

Civilization, Evolution, Involution, Social & Political Behavior, Self-Identity, Self-Making

1. Introduction

There has been an important inquiry in classrooms, seminars and other public settings of why the growth and development process of the Indonesian nation seems to be different from that of its surrounding nations. In a more concrete and simpler statement, how come other nations in the Western part of the world, or nearby countries such as Singapore and Malaysia have experienced a far better growth and development in terms of social civilization, with more orderly and disciplined society, and more qualified law enforcement process? On the other hand, the growth and development process of Indonesia has not shifted from the phenomena of social disorder, maladjustment, and social distortion. In a 'more academic' sense, these inquiries shall be: Why is the Indonesian self-identity different from those of other particular nations? Is there anything amiss in its process of self-making? How exactly did this nation come into being in relation with the roles of the actors involved in that process? The analysis below will aim to respond to these inquiries.

2. Self-Making Process of the Indonesian Nation

The self-making of any nation in the world will always undergo their each historical process of civilization growth. Civilization itself has standard elements that have long been shown in world-class social studies, such as values built from various aspects such as economy, politics, religion, culture, science, technology, and arts. This also that differentiate between human and other animals as Rotimi (2000: 62) stated. These continuously evolving values have their own law of dynamics and mechanism, so that at one time (with very qualitative limitations) will embody a civilization with characters common to every nation from the typology of different social and cultural systems. According to the theory of functionalism, the

system formed from such process will reflect the characters of the general system, which are: interdependence, orderliness, and durability. From such theoretical viewpoint, has the social system or the social structure of the Indonesian nation been embodied, or is it still developing under a 'well-established' or 'settled' social system and the 'proper' process? Or on the contrary, is the social system of this nation in the 'wrong' path? The answers to these fundamental and crucial questions must be sought immediately.

The Indonesian civilization as a nation within the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia is still very young. When we look back, regardless of its political geography, Indonesia in its cultural sense has a very young civilization. Especially when compared to civilizations from other parts of the world which are today known as Africa, Europe (Eurasia), India, Egypt, China, Korea, Greece, and Persia which date back from 3000-500 BC. (To learn more about *'The Old World and the New World'* civilizations, we can take references from books including: *Crane Brinton*, 1984; *Guy Ankerl*, 2000; *Jane Chrisholm and Anne Millard*, 1991; *Felipe Armesto Fernandez*, 2000; *Andrey Korotayev*, 2004; and *A. Nuri Yurdusev*, 2003). In such a young age, one can argue that the questionable Indonesian civilization is only natural, such as the lack of discipline, the weak law enforcement, and often falling into dilemmas. Consequently, deviations from values are common, such as loss of direction and self-control. An anomia occurs due to the gap between the social actions at individual levels and the values developed within the social system. In a social system whose values are deemed unclear by the actors (not only because its written rules are unclear, but also because its implementations are also unclear), the actors tend to be unable to distinguish between the appropriate and inappropriate norms.

However, we cannot argue that the young civilization is the reason of why the nation is stumbling in its effort of developing its civilization process. Historical evidence indicates that other young nations (in their geographical, political, and cultural sense) such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam are able to develop their civilizations in the same directions as those of other older nations. This raises the question of why such dynamics does not occur in Indonesia? This paper does not seek to blame this nation and its culture, as that will not answer the actual problems. This analysis will first review the past of Indonesia in its effort to liberate itself from colonialism the historical sociology analysis and insight on this part will be particularly useful to reveal the answers to the above inquiries.

3. Disjointed Civilization

The Indonesian nation in its cultural sense (before its independence and the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia), and in its political geography sense (after its independence and the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia), has undergone 'critical moments' for too many times in its history. Those critical and dangerous moments occurred during the struggle for independence as well as during post-independence, and until today. It is undeniable that these 'critical moments' had become a chronic disease during the era of early kingdoms and among tribal groups in the nusantara or the archipelago: inter and intra-kingdom wars, tribal wars, the wars between the tribes and kingdoms, the wars between the kingdoms and insurgences, etc. Subsequent to that era, Indonesia in its form as nusantara had to confront the European colonialism under the Portuguese, the British, the Dutch, and the Japanese from East Asia. The most crucial critical moment at the end of this era was the revolutionary independence war which significantly influenced the subsequent civilization process of the Indonesia.

The independence war as a social and political revolution was the most crucial moment. For countries that liberated themselves from colonialism, independence is the most exalted moment for they are able to constitute new nations with new idealisms and ideologies. The political liberation is evidently a process of self-liberation from old ideologies and values which the colonialist tried to instill within the Indonesia for hundreds of years. In other words, the values of old civilization introduced by the colonialists through centuries of colonization had been instantly released and removed through such a great resistance. In such situation, old values were abandoned, and new values were being reassembled into principles of high value to serve as the legal and ethical basis of a state.

The abandonment of the old values which were initially applied in the Dutch colonial government administration (*beamsendstadt*) and the effort to replace them by applying entirely new values, are still overlooked in the social and political studies of this nation. In fact, this moment is crucial to describe why the Indonesian civilization process is different from those of its surrounding nations. This hypothesis states that the disjointment of the civilization process in 1945 from the root of European civilization represented by the Dutch people has made this nation lost its context to the European civilization, since the Dutch people were a part of the nation who culturally represented 'the old world' civilization. It needs to be emphasized that regardless of the sentiments or romanticism of nationalism, the European civilization has in

fact been able to indicate some aspects of excellence in terms of civilization achievements. Advancements in science and technology, the level of discipline, legal obedience, achievement of economic prosperity, political stability and security, are some impressive aspects in the attainment of their excellent level of civilization. Certainly, an objective view cannot be dialectically disengaged from subjective point of view when one sees the dark side of the Western civilization for example in moral sphere. Excess of freedom and openness in the eyes of moral forecasters may bring about the darkness and destruction of the West in the days to come.

Regardless of that, let us concentrate on the aforementioned hypothesis. The disjointment of civilization due to the 'critical moment' of the revolutionary war of independence implied the abandonment of the old world values and replacing them with new civilization values which caused a disjointment in the chain of civilization. In fact, a civilization is the endless continuum of a process of social progress. Although in fact, no one would forbid a nation from throwing away old civilization values and replacing them with the new ones, as no one could guarantee that a nation would be able to maintain their civilization forever. There are moments where a nation is obliged to take actions, otherwise their existence will be endangered. Pride, self-esteem, nationalism, and liberation are the basic rights of a nation. Yet, those are not the main contexts of this study. The main context is that in 1945 there was a disjointment in the chain of civilization, whose social, cultural, and political implications were unimaginable and immeasurable.

4. Cases of Neighboring Countries

In the case of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam who experienced European colonization under the British rule, and the Japanese as well for a much shorter period of time (*Wikipedia*, 2008; *Infoplease*, 2008), we are able to see different symptoms. Their civilization growth is more stable, and their developed civilization values are also obviously a continuous sequence of a continuum of European civilization which has been ingrained for centuries. There is a question here, whether the different growth of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam were caused by the difference of colonial 'style' between the British and the Dutch. Allegedly, the British were more accommodating whereas the Dutch were more exploitative. This question is somewhat 'romantic' and unjustified, as all colonialism in this world during the 18th-19th centuries cannot be separated from its exploitative nature. Each

colonialist may display a softer stance, yet that is merely 'ethical politics' which may never erase the extortionist nature of colonialism.

Therefore, this hypothesis puts the Dutch and the British on the same class and variable weight in leaving the influences of European civilization to Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam respectively. Another nation that needs to be taken into account in this study as an example of a nation who underwent a disjointment from the European civilization is Vietnam, who was disjointed from the European civilization (French), and a much less significant influence from the US (*Infoplease*, 2008). The pattern of their civilization growth is almost the same with that of Indonesia. Meanwhile, Thailand only experienced a little of the European civilization, as they were never subjected to any colonialism, except in terms of culture, science, and technology (*Wikipedia*, 2008). We need a further explanation. First, how does the influence of the colonial civilization against the colonized nation compare to the influence of the colonizing nations against the relatively non-colonized nation? The similarity of the two is that their process of civilizations are evolutive, as shown by Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam (in the case of colonized nations), and Thailand (in the case of non-colonized nation). Second, how do the influences of the colonial civilizations against the colonized nations with relatively minimum resistance (such as in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam) compare to those of the colonized nations with high levels of resistance (such as in Indonesia and Vietnam)?

The second question will be answered hypothetically below. In the case of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam, minimum resistance towards the colonialists were indicated by the level of acceptance to the civilization values of the colonizing nation. These nations were enabled to be more adaptive and accommodative to the civilization values of their ex-colonialists, nurture them, and at least allowing them to flourish. Such an attitude will tend to strengthen the sustainability of the civilization values in a continuum that has been built since the beginning of colonialism. In other words, the civilization process will proceed evolutively without any significant obstacles. Nations with this typology will show particular characteristics in their self-identity which are almost similar to those of their colonizing nations. We will find the facts that these nations have a more powerful mentality to uphold discipline, to uphold and to obey the rules, and to understand their rights and obligations. Such

statement may be sufficient and moderate to avoid the terms *clean nation* or *clean governance*, and other similar terms, as perfection will never be achieved in the reality of history.

5. Involutive Growth of Civilization

The above-mentioned characteristics of national identity are almost difficult to find in the Indonesian people. On the contrary, what we encountered seemed to be unusual characteristics. These characters would appear as 'deviations', particularly to other nations, and obviously this condition is apprehensive. In terms of economic prosperity, Indonesia also seems to be having difficulties to 'take off' immediately. Its civilization process is not in a continuum line and fully evolutive. It may be hard to say that the growth of the Indonesian civilization is more 'involutive' rather than evolutive. Alexander Goldenwiser was the first person to introduce the concept of involution, which was later borrowed by *Clifford Geertz* to describe the agricultural involution in Java (*Rahman, 2007; Rahman dan Yuswadi, 2005*). Goldenwiser drew a pattern of culture, which had achieved its established form, but unable to stabilize it or evolve it into a new pattern, which continued to grow and develop inward, making it even more complicated. Goldenwiser took an example of the decorative arts of the Maori people, which are known for its complexity, its meticulousness with fine lines and overcrowded decorative shapes. However, when further analyzed, the elements of this pattern are only a few; even in some examples, it is obvious that the complex patterns are repetitions of spatial arrangement of the patterned unit.

The decoration only shows the same patterns being patched together. The pattern does not require the use of other units, yet it does not oppose the processes within each unit. Inevitably, the result is such a complexity which is increasingly 'crazy' over time. Goldenwiser referred to this pattern as diversity in uniformity, an artistic skill in monotony. According to Geertz, the general characteristics of involution put forward by Goldenwiser in describing the aesthetic phenomenon was also the characteristics of the development of rice field system in Java during approximately the middle of the 20th century, for example: the increasingly complex basic pattern; the thorough and meticulous internal cultivation; technical and cultural explorations; and endless technical skills. The characters from the Late Gothic period in agricultural land were increasingly pervasive throughout the rural economy: proprietary system was getting more complicated; land leasing relationships were getting more intricate; and work

arrangements became more complex. Those were attempts to provide a niche for everyone within the entire system, however narrow the niche would be.

When a patch of rice field rationally could only provide a decent livelihood for a family of five, it has to be 'loaded' with as much people as possible, since there was no solution other than working on the only available niche. Creativities were growing, but unfortunately in the form of reactivity that moves inward, centripetal, curled up, and clumped like tangled threads. Each person would think of how to maintain his increasingly squeezed position in the narrow niche without any creativity due to helplessness. This is a form of defensive reactivity to merely survive from extinction. As Geertz borrowed the involution concept to describe the agricultural situation in Java, here the writer will borrow the concept to describe the social process in the context of the Indonesian civilization process. Perhaps in macro analysis, the two cases are incomparable, but what is needed here is the analogical perspective. Obviously the growth of the specific Late Gothic architecture is incomparable to the process of a nation's civilization growth. Furthermore, repetitions in works of art cannot always be perceived as the actual perception of its creator. The higher the taste of an artwork, the more limited the number of people who would be able to enjoy it in the way 'demanded' by the artist. On the other hand, a work of art with the theme of beauty and aesthetic may also be more appreciated due to its meticulous details. However, once again this analysis will be very useful in describing the ongoing civilization process in Indonesia.

Unlike most nations who experienced an evolutive civilization process, the Indonesian civilization process tends to be involutive. This situation is not easy to identify or to perceive, since nothing seems to be changing in our daily lives. Our daily activities proceed as usual. Even what was once considered as extraordinary will gradually become a common thing. What was once considered as being negative may gradually be accepted as something 'positive' in a particular environment (habitual learning). The establishment of a social system will undergo a similar process. It will be even worse if our way of thinking also experience involution, since social system is strongly influenced by the way of thinking. The structuration theory developed by Anthony Giddens (1984) can be used to analyze this.

According to Giddens, there is a mutual dependency between the social agents or actors and their social system. The social agents or actors in their daily lives are intensely involved in the production of actions which materialize from their system of thinking. Social system will

also produce means and resources as outcomes of the actions taken by these agents or actors. There is a continuous discourse between the agents or actors and the system, like a relentless struggle. This is the crucial point, as once the structuration revolves, the process within a 'positive' discourse will result in a 'positive' outcome. Conversely, the process within a 'negative' discourse will result in 'negative' outcome. A 'positive' agent or actor with a 'positive' discourse will result in a 'positive' system as well. And conversely, a 'negative' agent or actor with 'negative' discourse will result in a 'negative' system. What is worse is when most agents or actors are aware that what they are doing is 'negative', yet, they continue to do it. As stated by Giddens (1984): “*All human beings are knowledgeable agents. That is to say, all social actors know a great deal about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day to day life*” (to explore Giddens' structuration theory further than this statement: *Social Theories of Modern Societies* (1989); *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1993); (1989); *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990); *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991); and *The Constitution of Society* (1984), as well as numerous excerpts on structuration theory by Gauntlet (2001).

6. Conclusion : The Importance of Establishing an Evolutionary Process

It has been explained theoretically of how unfavorable it is for a nation to be caught up in a vortex of involutive civilization process. The revolution in 1945 was a 'critical point' in the disjointment from the European civilization in Indonesia. The Indonesian nation during this period were experiencing social and political crises as well as entering the involution of its new civilization that was still under construction. The nation gradually moved forward by building the foundation of new values to replace the centuries old social system of the European civilization structure. At particular times during the post-independence era, the moments of disjointment from the civilization chain emerged one by one. Some that are recorded in history include: The Madiun Affairs, the Free Aceh Movement, *Dewan Banteng* (the Bull Council) and *Dewan Garuda* (the Garuda Council) in Central Sumatra, and PRRI Permesta (the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Universal Struggle Movement). All of the above events are moments in the social and political history whose long-term implications on the Indonesian civilization process might not have been intellectually realized by their perpetrators, because unknowingly, the nation had started to 'knit' tangled threads upon itself.

The Soekarno's government was characterized by such social and political moments which were ultimately terminated by the anti-regime revolution in 1966. This event is the second disjointment or 'crucial point' after the revolution of independence in 1945. The New Order regime under Soeharto's rule applied a harsh political coercivity which was different from the previous regime. Political stability can be achieved by supporting economic growth. However, since political coercivity was not in line with the principles of democracy and openness, early in 1998, the civilization process was once again shaken by revolution, and the Reformation regime replaced the New Order regime. This moment was the next disjointment of the civilization chain. Each time a disjointment occurred to a civilization chain that is still under construction, a sudden change is bound to happen in the civilization process. The recurring events will destroy the system being established by the Indonesian nation. Theoretically, it is conclusive that the Indonesian civilization process will tend to be involutive. If the same event is continuously recurring, it will be difficult for this nation to be able to rise and uphold its supposedly evolutive civilization.

It is crucial to uphold the evolution process to establish the future civilization of this nation. Some prerequisites which must be considered include: a) the nonexistence of continuous conflict in the society must be assured; b) the stability of social, political, and economic condition must be ensured; c) the political system which tends to be liberal needs to be reviewed in order to adapt with the current social, political, and economic conditions; and d) it takes a strong and wise leadership to understand the past and current situations, as the leaders will encounter political situations which tend to move toward conflicts.

7. Acknowledgement

Thank you very much to Bangka Belitung University who funded this publication process through Bangka Belitung University budget. We express thanks also to my department in facilitating the administration process.

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