



Ethnic Diversities as Development Capital in Southeast Asia Region

Julang Aryowiloto

Department of International Relations

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya

E-mail: aryowiloto.julang@gmail.com

Abstract

Each country development policy in Southeast Asia region still prefers to economics dimension orientation. However, social and cultural considerations are also important in development policy, such as ethnic diversities. Southeast Asia as a region full of ethnic diversities needs to utilize this advantage as capital in order to regional development. This paper addressed to analyze the importance of ethnic diversities as consideration of development policy in the Southeast Asia region. At first, by elaborate development approach which socio-cultural oriented especially ethnicity namely ethnodevelopment include its criticisms. Then, this paper elaborates about the ethnic diversities in Southeast Asia and how much its potential can utilize as region development capital. Finally, this paper provides a conclusion that every single policymaker in every country around Southeast Asia strongly need to concern and consider ethnic diversities start from the process until implementation of the development policy which ends up to dynamic equilibrium and advancement of Southeast Asia region development.

Keywords: *development, ethnic diversity, ethnodevelopment.*



Introduction

The tendency of development policy derived from the mere consideration of economic dimension is not relevant to the fact that the socio-cultural aspect is an essential thing to consider. The ethnic diversity should be perceived as a substantial issue to be considered in making the development policy since it is the basis for the community's life. It is the cause of why the needs of ethnicity are different from another one. Disregarding the issue in the policy-making will cause a one-fits-all policy that leads to more problems and imbalances. A development should improve the economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental aspects as stated by Sen (2009) that development is a state of freedom, a freedom from poverty, tyranny, lack of economic opportunity, social deprivation, lack of public facilities, and intolerance. Having ethnic diversities requires the Southeast Asian countries to run a development model that focuses on more than a mere economic consideration. As the social foundation, the cultural values, including the development policy, of the Southeast Asian communities have been held through generations. This is in line with what stated by Kymlicka (1995) that generally, it is difficult to break the bond between Southeast Asian and their cultural values, even though the happening global dynamics is affecting their socio-cultural dynamics by offering them the chance of living a cosmopolitan life. Therefore, the main argument of this essay is that the ethnic diversity of the Southeast Asian community is essential in regional development.

In development, it is important to consider the ethnic diversity as part of the socio-cultural dimension since there is a social evolution in the dynamics of community diversity. Quoting the viewpoint of Durkheim in Willis (2005), for the sake of maintaining the harmony and balance in the West European community, there was a transition from traditionalism in which the individuals were tightly bonded to their community (family or clan) to modernism in which the individualism is stronger due to the work classification. Parsons (1966) supported this notion by stating that the community has experienced evolution from traditionalism to modernism in which the individual's status in the traditional community is determined by kinship, ethnicity, and gender, while in the modern



community, the status gained by an individual correlates the with education level and salary.

Ethnodevelopment

Ethnodevelopment is a perspective of development referring to the substantiality of ethnic diversity in development (Stavenhagen 1986). Stavenhagen (1996) stated that in a national-scale development, all forms of diversity in the community should be considered. By that logic, on a bigger scale, there would be more considerable diversities to be concerned.

Hettne (1995 & 1996) described four main aspects of ethnodevelopment, they are: (1) territorialism, where a decision regarding the development policy in a particular territory is made based on its resource; (2) internal self-determination, where certain ethnic groups have the power to control their goals in the context of nation-state; (3) cultural pluralism, where the ethnic diversity exists in a community yet the tolerance is still maintained; and (4) ecological sustainability, where the development is supposed to avoid environmental damage that will be harmful to the future.

The term ethnodevelopment has also been used in the 1982 UNESCO conference in Africa regarding the development discourse. It referred to the effort of improving the government's policy and development strategy that threatened the ethnic identity and individual freedom. Based on the conference, the basic principles of ethnodevelopment are: first, the procedure should be devised based on the cultural diversity to guarantee a holistic community development; and second, the establishment of the original cultural spaces should refer to the knowledge of the relevant cultural heritage and the need of preserving it. These principles are essential for the creative process that is free from ideology centralization and standardization (Chernela 2011).

Moreover, from the conference, there are three methods for implementing the ethnodevelopment approach in the development policy, i.e.: (1) the assignment of priority objectives designed to ensure adequate conditions for the expression, promotion, and recognition of specific cultural identities, rather than



fostering a common culture; (2) an inventory, in respect of each cultural space, of potentialities and achievements in order to assess the creative force and thus be in a position to ensure its development; and (3) the adoption of measures to ensure that the possibilities of each cultural space are coordinated with the overall development endeavor of the country concerned. Hence, the active role of a country is crucial as an essential instrument in promoting ethnodevelopment by identifying and ensuring the preservation of cultural diversity as the community's foundation (UNESCO 1982).

Furthermore, according to van Nieuwkoop and Uquillas (2000), the central point in ethnodevelopment policy is the indigenous people, or in other words, the social capital. Davis (2000) mentioned that the problems in development could be overcome by ethnodevelopment that involves strong indigenous people as social capital. Even though the ethnodevelopment serves rationalities that support the importance of ethnicity consideration as part of the socio-cultural dimension of development, criticisms emerged from the Marxist and the adherents of modernization theory. In Willis (2005), in modernization theory, the social dimension is perceived as an obstacle for the development since it represents irrationality, collectivism, traditionalism and supports capitalistic and individual development. Meanwhile, for the Marxists, putting the socio-cultural dimension such as ethnicity into consideration is a form of modernity regression (pre-modern) and causes a barrier to the development since it is too ethnic-oriented instead of class-oriented.

Ethnic Diversity in Southeast Asia

As stated earlier, ethnicity in development policy is highly significant. However, the primary requirement to consider the ethnicity in development policy is the existence of ethnic diversity. Southeast Asia comprises 11 countries they are Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Brunei Darussalam, and Timor Leste. Excluding the last one, all the other ten countries are the members of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN). All 11 countries have many ethnicities. According to Warnaen



(2002), in total there are 205 different ethnicities in Indonesia with Java, Sunda, Bugis, Tapanuli, Minangkabau, Madura, and Dayak as the majorities.

According to Montesino (2005), Malaysia, which is known as ‘Asia in a Microcosm’ or ‘Little Asia’ has a relative fewer diversity from Brunei Darussalam with 57% of Malay ethnicity, 27% Chinese ethnicity, 9% Indian ethnicity, and 7% of other ethnicities such as Eurasian, the Indigenous People in Malay Peninsula, Sabah, Sarawak, etc. According to the Singapore Board Diversity Report (2014), the ethnic diversity in Singapore comprised 85,7% of Chinese, 7,3% of Caucasian, 3,5% of Malay, 2,8% Indian, and 0,7% population of other ethnicities. As identified by Bose (2016), the Philippines had many ethnicities such as Visayans, Tagalog, Ilocano, Bicolano, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, and Moro. Moreover, there are several indigenous ethnicities such as Badjao, Igorot, Ilongots, Lumad, Mangyan, Negrito, and Palawan.

Thailand also has ethnic diversity. Buergin (2000) identified 10 Thailand ethnicities; they are Karen, Hmong, Yao, Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Law, Kamu, Mlabri, and H'tin. Like the majority, Karen ethnicity dominates with a population of 402.095 in 1996 and followed by the Hmong ethnicity with a population of 126.147 (McCaskill and Kampe 1997).

Smith and Allsebrook (1994) mentioned that Myanmar, previously known as Burma, is one of the countries with the greatest ethnic diversity in the world based on its history. The change of the name from Burma to Myanmar was purposed to make the non-Burmese identifies themselves as part of Myanmar. Myanmar comprises ethnicities such as Burma, Chin/Zomi, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Naga, Shan, Rakhine, and Rohingya. The last one recently becomes the international spotlight due to the discrimination by the government since 1978 (Zawacki n.d.). The discrimination is faced by the ethnicity that occupies the Arakan area due to the 1974 Burmese government's decree of not admitting the nationality of the Rohingyas (Nemoto, 2004).

According to the Cambodia Research Network (2007), several ethnicities are inhabiting the country, such as Khmer Keh, North Khmer, Kraol, Kuy, Lao, Mel, Stieng, Tampuan, T'moan, and Cham. The last one is the descendant of



Champa Kingdom of Vietnam brought by the French colony in 1863. While in Vietnam, based on the report released by the World Bank via the Social Development Unit (2009), there are approximately 54 ethnicities that dominated by the Kinh. The other ethnicities are Cham, Tay, Nung, Thai, Muong, Khmer, O Du, Kadai, Brau, and many more.

Laos has a considerable ethnic diversity compared to the number of the population that only reached approximately 7 million. According to the National board of Laos, in 2005 the country has 49 ethnicities with more than 100 sub-ethnicities. However, according to several researchers, the number of ethnic diversities in the countries is approximately more than 200 ethnicities (Baird 2009). Meanwhile, according to King and Van de Walle (2010), the ethnic diversity of Laos is divided into four linguistic groups, they are: Lao-Tai that takes 67% of the total population, Mon-Khmer with 21% of population, Hmung-Lu Mien with 8% of Population, and Chinese-Tibetan with 3% of Population.

Meanwhile, Brunei Darussalam has seven ethnicities they are Belait, Bisaya, Brunei Malays, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut, and Tutong (Haji-Othman 2005). Lastly, as the 'youngest' county in Southeast Asia and the only one that is not the member of ASEAN, Timor Leste has Tetum, Mambae, Tokodede, Galoli, Kemak, Baikeno, Bunak, Fataluku, and Makasae (Neupert and Lopes 2006).

Regional Development and Ethnic Diversity

After identifying the ethnic diversities in Southeast Asia, the next step is putting the diversities into the consideration for the making of development policy in each country, since a country's development requires diversities (Stavenhagen 1986). This is crucial to prevent discrimination upon certain ethnicities due to social jealousy as the consequence of uneven development.

Another possible circumstance is the lack of nationalism, which by Ernest Renan in Brubaker (2004) called it, the will to unite and to have a nation. In a development, neglecting an ethnicity can tarnish nationalism and thus ends with rebellion, or further, separatism. For example, the separatist group Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) tried to dissociate themselves from Indonesia due to the



discrimination in the structural, functional, strategic, and operational positions outside Papua (Yoman, 2000).

Another example is the Philippines Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). It was formed by the Moros who are the natives of Mindanao Island in the southern Philippines as a reaction upon the discrimination by the Philippines government who has never accommodate their need in various development policy, such as the provision of Mosque, Islamic schools, hospitals, and other infrastructures. Instead, the government focused on the massive transmigration of the Christians from the North Philippines to Mindanao Island (East, 2006).

Besides the issue of social jealousy and the tarnishing nationalism that lead to separatism acts, a development that ignores the existence of ethnic diversity and does not accommodate an ethnicity can cause imbalance. Soeharto's regime can be a relevant example. Alkatri (2013) stated that in the regime, the massive development only focused on the macroeconomic indicators in Java Island and thus the non-Javanese ethnicities such as Tapanuli, Minangkabau, Bugis, and the others were neglected. This brought an imbalance between ethnicities because of that time, and the Chinese dominated the economy in the island (Chai, 1999).

Another problem that can occur due to negligence is the impacts on the indigenous people. According to the United Nations in Holder and Corntasel (2002), the indigenous people are different from the minority or the national group due to their original occupation upon the traditional homeland, historical continuity, unique cultural practices, non-domination, and the public awareness. A development that ignores certain ethnicities, in this case, the indigenous people as the 'initial occupants' of a country will trigger a problem, such as the loss of the rich-in-historical-value entities of the indigenous people.

Therefore, a development approach that can accommodate the ethnic entities such as the ethnodevelopment needs to be adopted. By using the approach, the rights of the indigenous people will still be accommodated, and the existence will be maintained since the ethnodevelopment, as stated by Chernela (2011), comprises the procedures that focus on the cultural diversities to ensure that all



community will benefit from the development and will preserve the culture. The indigenous people are the important social capital in the development (van Nieuwkoop and Uquillas 2000) since they can overcome various issues of development (Davis, 2000).

The ethnodevelopment approach can be a solution for the issues of the negligence on certain ethnicities, resource, ethnic conflicts, and environment. As stated by Hettne (1995 & 1996), there are four aspects in the ethnodevelopment approach, they are: territorialism, that a development in a particular territory is based on the available resource to minimize the impact of environmental degradation due to unnecessary exploitation; internal self-determination and cultural pluralism, that to prevent inter-ethnicities conflict in order to maintain the unity of the nation-state and the mutual respect; and ecological sustainability, that a development should focus on the environmental preservation for the life of the future generations. An ideal development, especially a sustainable development, should put a balance consideration between the economic, social, and environmental impacts (Azis et al. 2010).

Applying the ethnodevelopment approach in the making of development policy is not a complicated task. Through UNESCO (1982), the United Nations has provided the guidelines regarding the suitable method. Firstly, the assignment of priority objectives designed to ensure adequate conditions for the expression, promotion, and recognition of specific cultural identities, rather than fostering a common culture. Through this method, the Southeast Asian countries only have to set the development priority, and as a suggestion, to lower the economic priority, since the output will eventually impact on the economy. After setting the priority, for example, in the case of the Moros in the Philippines, the next step is ensuring effective condition for the recognition and the interests of the ethnicity.

Then in the second, what needs to be done is to identify the potential, excellence, and things that need to be done by the Philippines government towards Moro ethnic groups in Mindanao to ensure its development, in this case reducing the potential for conflicts and enhancing peacebuilding efforts. So that in the third, executed by determining what steps need to be applied to ensure that the



possibility of coordinating with the Moro ethnic group in Mindanao can be carried out. For example, by accommodating the interests of Moro ethnic groups for infrastructure needs such as houses of worship (mosques, since Islam community), schools, hospitals, and so on.

Therefore, the active role of the government is crucial for promoting ethnodevelopment by focusing on ethnic diversities as part of the socio-cultural dimension. If each of the Southeast Asian countries can successfully implement the ethnodevelopment approach, it can overcome the obstacles during the development. Furthermore, this will bring positive effects on the development of Southeast Asia. However, the implementation may be challenging, even for a mere change of mindset regarding the development that focuses on economic consideration. It is essential to consider the socio-cultural dimension as part of the development initially.

On the other hand, this essay emphasizes that development should focus on the combination between the economic dimension, ethnic diversities, and the other socio-cultural dimensions that is relevant to the needs and condition of each country in developing Southeast Asia. This essay only focuses on the lack of consideration upon the socio-cultural dimension, especially the cultural diversity, in Southeast Asia. Ideally, with careful consideration upon the dimension, Southeast Asia could be the most developed region in the world.

Conclusion

Eventually, in order to achieve the main objective of the development of the Southeast Asia region, awareness of the importance of an economic dimension that is equivalent to the socio-cultural dimension in this case ethnic diversity needs to be increased by each country in Southeast Asia, given the primary capital to carry out regional development owned namely ethnic diversity itself. The active role of the governments of each ASEAN country utilizing ethnic, cultural diversity capital combined with consideration of economic dimensions and other dimensions, achieving successful development by each country will become the pillars of the success of regional development. Dynamic equilibrium, namely the



depletion of inequality between ASEAN countries but developing simultaneously requires a solution-oriented development approach and also the synergy of roles between countries and various ethnic groups in their sovereignty territory is very necessary.

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