

THE EXISTENCE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY TOWARD

*The Shift of Indonesian Urban Cultural Values
and Societies*

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Introduction

Democracy interests a lot of people with its challenges and hopes. Some people even consider democracy as a new religion. Most people admire it and wish very much that it will improve their lives. It is like a fresh cake taken from the oven. People have smelled the aroma as they know from media that democracy gives peace and prosperity. But smelling is not enough. They want to get a piece of the cake and taste it.

Among models of democracy, seemingly liberal Democracy *ala* America is often used as a reference in running a government. Absolutely, it is highly an interesting issue to be discussed in details. How can liberal democracy be the only model for the developing countries? This paper only highlights on the cultural values like individualism as the cornerstone of liberal democracy in the United States and its impacts toward the changing of social and cultural values in urban society.

Social change could be meant as simply the process of being difference in any sense. But the changes of society could involve many aspects of life such as social values, pattern of organization behavior, structure of social organization, strata, power and authority social interaction. For Indonesia, these changes affect Indonesian people in their livelihood, lifestyle, and system in government, education and demand for freedom.

The impacts of the existence of American liberal democracy have also resulted in a large-scale urbanization. People in rural areas will keep coming to urban areas or big cities. Economic growth and Indonesian economic crisis, structural change and globalization are increasingly linked to urban expansion and people migration from villages to cities, and more people will live in urban settlements than in rural areas. Metropolitan cities like Jakarta can offer the lure of better employment, education, health care.

However, rapid urban expansion is often associated with poverty, clean water supply and housing problems, environmental degradation, crime, urban slum, etc. (Tambunan, 2011). In short, the implications of rapid urban growth include increasing unemployment, environmental degradation, lack of urban services, overburdening of existing infrastructure and lack of access to land, finance and adequate shelter.

Cities play a major role not only as providers of employment, shelter and services but also as centers of culture, learning and technological development, portals to the rest of the world, industrial centers for the processing of agricultural produce and manufacturing, and places to generate income. Hence it is like an 'American' dream for many European immigrants who came to the New World at the time.

This paper only highlights on the cultural value of American individualism in shaping Indonesian cultural traits. And how can Indonesian comprehend the deep meaning of American individualism? By contrasting and comparing with Indonesian traditions, it can bring someone to travel across the world on how to give the deep meaning of individualism.

Among American cultural traits, one of them is individualism can be traced from the historical background of the America journey as super power country. According to Gary Althen (2003: xxvii) that Americans see themselves as individuals who are different from all other individuals, American or foreign. The arrival of immigrants from Europe to the New World (before America) is greatly influenced by liberty. American dreams are as a reflection of individualism in pursuing life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In Indonesian context, dream is always related to the accumulation of earnings. Minimally, they can give much money toward their families.

Individualism lies at the very core of American culture. Hence the most important thing to understand about Americans is probably their devotion to individualism. The stereotypic images associated with American individuality are not only abundant but abundantly well known the world over. The American cowboy counts among the most powerful and proliferated of these images. He is most frequently depicted as the only human in a vast landscape. He is a loner, a free soul, a man who finds his strength in the solitude of vast stretches of uninhabited countryside.

In some cowboy films, his rugged individualism and go-it-alone approach allows them to overcome the odds and not only survive but triumph. His victory is portrayed not only as a personal one but also as a practical and moral victory for all of society and ideals such justice and humanity.

In relation to the above issue, so what does the American theme of individualism mean in the Indonesian context? How is it perceived? How is it received? Some people, mainly, Indonesian still assumes that individualism is very dangerous toward the existence of Indonesian cultural traits. They believe that it is not suitable with their cultural backgrounds. It denotes negative impacts toward their lives. It is a Western product, or even an American product. As long as we are trapped from this false consciousness, we will lack of motivation to pursue our dreams because of extreme dislike.

American and Indonesian Cultural Traits of Individualism in Urban Society

Culture is a way of life for any society in where they create ideas, institutions, languages, tools, and services (Ashley, 1962). Culture consists of three manifestations as follows: cultural knowledge, cultural behavior, and cultural artifact. A product of culture begins with the existence of idea in the mind of humans then it is followed by any work to produce it. The final product is acquired after completing the process of the cultural work.

Every society produces different cultural artifacts based on its historical and cultural background. The other factors are such as the spirit of era and the experiences from their countries. Those factors give great influences the type of culture in any nation. Therefore, America is very

different with others. As simply, culture is away of life for any society totally (Rosman and Rubel, 1989).

Culture is also explained as the material, social, and intellectual setting in which we live. The culture itself has two forms: material and non-materials form. Both material and non-material have its own characteristic. The material is referred to the physical environment, and the non-material is referred to unphysical environment, such as family life, democratic government, capitalism, and so forth (Barness and Ruedi, 1971: 4).

Culture is found everywhere in the human world and can be contrasted with nature, in the sense of the world untouched by humans. People transform the natural world into a cultural world where they can dominate and feel at home. Culture ranges from language to clothes, from ritual to technology. It encompasses all the ways that people shape nature, relate to each other, and from their social lives. It does not refer to individual and private life so much as to shared life. It is essential to understand that all human beings live within cultures and also have the capacity to create culture (Khol, 1992: 127).

America has also introduced the term of free trade and globalization since the president of Ronald Reagan administration. It means that the existence of globalization itself is a product of American culture. Nowadays, globalization is continuing process which could not be avoided by every nation in this world where the globalization trends contribute big impact toward society life and toward the cultural life.

The impact of globalization toward society can be seen on the changing in several aspects such as economic, politic and legal, social and culture, and technology as well. Meanwhile the globalization impact toward the cultural life can be seen the changing of cultural thought as reflected in their activities. Globalization has changed the political and legal role in its society, in which the government reduced its control over the economics. The integration of economic and the Free Trade Organization are the main reasons behind the situation (Pena, 1999).

The changes in the economic dimension lead the society enter the world or global economy. Perhaps the most fundamental change is the emergence of global markets, global competitor, and the integration of the economic. Those fundamental changes bring the reality of the world economy; they are the

increasing of volume of capital movements, the concerns of the relationship between productivity and unemployment, and the emergence of the world economy as the dominant economic unit (Keegan, 2002).

Moreover, globalization also transforms the social and culture in the society into the cultural universals, which means that a universal mode of behavior existing in all cultures. The cultures of the people in the society begin to disperse and begin to absorb the cultural universal. Mooij (1998) described the global culture as the expression of culture, the symbols, converging eating habits, and global heroes, particularly those who appeal to young. The core values of culture are stable and often what is presented as a new trends or global trends is a newly packaged core value.

Anthony Giddens (1999), an distinguished author on globalization issues, depicted that the main points of the typology of society in correlation with Indonesian as follows; the first point is society put communication and information as the important things at the level of the world society and at the level of personal life as well (Wiering, 1999). Information plays an important role in Indonesian society especially in the urban areas; people use the internet, read the newspaper or magazine, and watch news and talk show at television in order to gain the information that they are needed in their daily activities, work and life.

The second point is the tradition and custom are no longer have the role that they used to have and they are replaced by the reason and argument. Indonesian society and many others society in the eastern countries tend to retain the tradition and custom as the fundamental values and norms in their life and behavior. However the young and well educated generation in Indonesian society is become more open to that change than the old and traditional generation.

The third point is people in the global society more concern about their environment and nature. This concern is established since the children have started their first formal education in the school but on the contrary many Indonesian people especially in the rural and sub urban area only put that concern just as knowledge and didn't implement it on their daily life. Throwing garbage on the river or gutter and burning the trash is the simple example on that condition.

Meanwhile the American cultural traits dealing with individualism, recently, the term of individualism is associated with some issues considered as representative of individualism itself in America. Those are: *first*, individual freedom. In America, each individual has freedom to take a part in his life. He is free to decide what to do now and in the future. American government or constitution guarantees its people without interference. They are free to speak, to get material wealth, and to profess a religion.

Second, self-reliance. It is a nineteenth-century term, popularized by Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous essay of that title '*Self-Reliance*' Americans believe that individuals must learn to rely on them or risk losing freedom.

Third, equality of opportunity. Everyone has the same chance to get a certain status. It is important to understand what Americans mean when they say they believe in equality of opportunity. They do mean that each individual should have an equal chance for success.

Fourth, competition. It may take the form of rivalry between individuals within a group, of competitive effort of social groups to gain their objectives, of racial rivalries, or of a contest of culture and institutions for pre-eminence. Competitive effort may be expended to achieve sheer existence and survival, or it may be devoted to a struggle for prestige. And competition is seen by most Americans as encouraging hard work.

Fifth, material Wealth. Material wealth becomes a value to American people. The phrase "going from rags to riches" becomes a slogan for the great American dream. The main reason is that material wealth is the most widely accepted measure of social status in the United States. Because Americans reject the European system of hereditary aristocracy and titles of nobility, they have to find a substitute for judging social status

Sixth, hard work. It is a price of material wealth. American people claim that material wealth can be obtained through hard work only. To get it, they try to expand from one place to another place. In early twentieth, American people expanded to the Northland. The North American continent was rich natural resources when the first settlers arrived, but all these resources were underdeveloped. Only hard work could these resources be converted into material possessions and comfortable standard of living.

Hard work has been both necessary and rewarding for the most Americans throughout their history. Because of this, they have come to see material possessions as the natural reward for their hard work. Most Americans believe that if a person works hard, it is possible to have a good standard of living. It is possible to say that hard work is also an ethic in American life.

Struggles for gender, ethnic, and racial equality are battles over cultural and social hegemony, and for that reason, critical analyses of the nature of hegemonic relationships in democracies are central to current thinking in our society. And the concept of cultural imperialism and neo-liberalism are also very interesting. Cultural imperialism is the practice of promoting the culture of one nation in another. Cultural influence can be seen by the receiving culture as either a threat or enrichment of its cultural identity. Meanwhile Neo-liberalism is the practice of promoting the political economy philosophy that rejects government intervention in the economy.

Era of modernism is also shaping the cultural trait for any society. In the process of modernization, Western societies became more individualistic. Modernism is broadly applied term for currents of artistic, literary, and political thought and sensibility attached to modernity; encompasses such political currents as liberalism, human rights, socialist utopianism, Marxism, history as progress, and belief in reason and science (Magill, 1996). Ever since there is having been that this development will create an unlivable society. At the individual level is involved both greater awareness of one's own preferences and greater ability to act independently.

The main problem of urban culture is that people around environment are not ready to take new values. Some people still keep their cultural values based on their cultural families. In facing this new situation, most parents found the difficulties to implant their cultural values toward their children who grew up in modern era. There is any cultural shock for some people living among modern society.

C o n c l u s i o n

Some factors can give great influences in shaping cultural trait in any society, mainly urban society. They are the historical background, unforgettable

experiences, and the spirit of era and the development of technology. America is to be a super power country because of the great history of the South and the North. Indonesia tends to the historical background of kingdom that refers to trigger conflicts potentially. America can learn from British to make a new governmental system of presidency with two big parties. American policies stresses on both realism and idealism in which individualism is to be a center policy. It is as reflected in American economical system of capitalism and American political system of liberal democracy.

Indonesia is closer to idealism influenced by Hegelian after it got its independence from Dutch. It also gives great influences toward cultural behaviors for many Indonesians. The changes of era absolutely bring different spirit in which it born. After reform era, Indonesia is getting closer to the meaning of individual freedom with its consequences.

The emerging of connecting technologies is also the main of the globalization trends. This trend changed the macro dimension of the society such as economic, political and legal, social and culture, and technology. This changing led the society into the global world where the global culture becomes more popular within the society. And urban society is very easily to accept the existence of popular culture, mainly for the young generations.

I am sure Indonesia still should (must) keep learning. After comparing and contrasting with Individualism ala America in a deep meaning, we can learn such as individual freedom, competition, self-reliance, equality of opportunity, and hard work. If we only still hate extremely other cultures because of the differences, we can lack motivation to competitive with them. By studying American culture, It means we are not the same with American. But we are only like to them. We don't drink beer and eat pigs. We just wear jeans and drink coffee.

In getting the meaning of individualism for urban society, mainly in big cities, Most of Indonesian still assumes that individualism is eager to looking for freedom of individual. It contrasts with individualism ala America which focuses on responsibility by you. In relation to the existence of American individualism in our home, absolutely those values contribute for positive and negative impacts toward Indonesian culture.

Shortly, we must be selective. But if we claim that our culture itself is the absolute truth, it will potentially trigger conflicts. American individualism can motivate us to be more competitive than before. See competitiveness with opportunity oriented not risk oriented. We must be proud of our culture but we do not want to be any alien in our home. We are like fish in aquarium, the foreigners can see our activities from outside but we cannot see them well. Being selective of other culture is one way to keep our culture alive.

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