# Japan's Role in the Forthcoming World Order

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## After the Deluge:
## In Search of New Directions in Indonesia-Japan Cooperation

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**Outline**

## 1. The Deluge

The word "deluge" in the title of this presentation refers to a number of circumstances that I believe to be indicative of the conditions of civil society in Indonesia today.

To begin with, it obviously refers to the tragic earthquake and tsunami disaster that hit Indonesia and other Indian Ocean rim countries.

Secondly, it relates to—and this probably is more relevant to today's topic—the unprecedented level of social solidarity expressed by various civil society organizations, private citizens as well as international organizations and foreign governments in the relief effort extended to the victims of the disaster. The unparalleled surge of social solidarity in the wake of the worst natural disaster was undoubtedly a sign of vibrant civil society at work in this country.

Thirdly, the word "deluge" implies the fact that since the collapse of Suharto regime in 1998, Indonesian society has been "deluged" by the emergence of innumerable agents of democratization such as political parties, mass media, NGOs, and the like.

And finally, it pertains to the abundance of the Japanese government's Official Development Assistance (ODA) and of Japan's private investment in Indonesia, which are now somehow declining as a result of the burst of the so-called "bubble economy" and the initiation of radical administrative reform in Japan.

All this, along with the multitude of political and legal-constitutional reforms put into motion since the demise of the authoritarian regime—the establishment of the bicameral legislative body, direct presidential elections, direct provincial, district and municipal governor elections, as well as the creation of the constitutional court etc—are commendable signs of growing democracy and self-reliance on the part of Indonesia,

but when one is concerned with the study of civil society as such, there seem to be a number of newly emerging features that have to be taken into consideration.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that if one wishes to adequately understand the dynamic of civil society in today's Indonesia, that is, the Indonesia after the deluge of natural disasters and democratization processes, then probably new approaches emphasizing the cultural dimension of civil society are in order. As a consequence, the heretofore extremely vibrant and intimate bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Japan may also need to adjust to these new challenges facing Indonesian civil society.

## 2. Civil Society Discourse in Indonesia

The earliest development of the discourse on civil society in Indonesia should be traced back to the early 1980s, i.e. when the severe restrictions on political activity imposed by the Suharto regime had driven many to look to religious and non-religious NGOs as an alternative political arena to promote democratic causes.

Under such circumstances, it was understandable that the concept of civil society embraced by many was the one emphasizing its effectiveness in staging resistance to the authoritarian regime. In such conceptualization, civil society is largely seen as an intermediate sphere between the state and local communities, where the discourse on and the practice of civic interests can be effectively articulated without being co-opted by the state power or bogged down in communal conflicts.

A number of theoretical approaches lend support to the conceptualization, but probably the most popular was the Gramscian one, which views the state as being constituted by the political society and civil society, in which the former is seen as the sphere of domination, whereas the latter the sphere of persuasion. In this view, the state cannot simply rely on force and coercion for maintaining its dominance; instead, it must establish a hegemony—a moral and value system that can elicit a spontaneous consent from the populace—within civil society. Civil Society, therefore, is seen as a strategic arena where negotiations and compromises between the state and various social groups can be worked out. In fact, various social movements in the world, not only the ones that received much publicity such as the Solidarity movement in Poland, but also less publicized ones in Indonesia, found an invaluable inspiration in it.

Be that as it may, now that the formal democratic systems, at least in their elementary forms, have been established in Indonesia, a theoretical approach that merely emphasizes civil society's capability to oppose an authoritarian regime seems distinctly deficient.

Quite a few alternative approaches therefore have come to our attention. Among them, Robert Putnam's argument (Putnam et al 1994; Putnam 2000) that the associational life as represented by the membership in horizontally ordered groups can contribute to effective democratic governance is probably most influential. The present situation of Indonesia, however, where there has emerged the abundance of civil society movement but prolonged social problems—abject poverty, rampant corruptions, communal tensions—are far from diminishing, one cannot help but beginning to search for more adequate models of civil society.

## 3. Critical Theory: Civil Society as part of the Lifeworld

Jurgen Habermas, one of the pioneers of critical theory, is undoubtedly the foremost theorist of civil society and public sphere to date, but somehow his influence in Indonesia has been limited, most likely because of the complexity of his argument. In a nutshell, however, Habermas's theory of civil society is based upon his view that society consists of two levels of reality, i.e. the lifeworld and the system (Habermas 1996; Cohen & Arato 1992; Chambers 2002). The lifeworld refers to the sphere of social life concerned with the communication between human beings, where actions are coordinated by information. The system refers to the sphere of social life concerned with the material maintenance of the species and its survival, consisting of two subsystems, i.e. polity and economy. Polity is a subsystem where actions are coordinated by power, and economy by money.

Civil society, within this grand design, is seen as the sociological dimension of the lifeworld, involving both the public sphere, i.e. a comprehensive network of voluntary associations, as well as the private sphere, i.e. family. As such, Habermas's theory looks like just another liberal model of civil society, but there are significant differences. To begin with, if political parties and private companies are seen as part of civil society in many liberal theories, critical theory analytically excludes them from civil society on the ground that they belong to polity and economy rather than to the lifeworld.

Abundantly evident in this exclusion is Habermas's critical stance toward the capitalist economic relations (hence the designation "critical theory"). Unlike liberal theories, which see the state as the most prominent potential threat to the freedom of civil society, critical theory argues that capitalist economic relations can also be harmfully intrusive to civil society.

The main argument behind this view, which shows the theory's characteristic critique of neoliberal economy, is that as modern capitalist societies have evolved, polity and economy tend to dominate and encroach into the lifeworld by transforming its medium of coordination from information into power and money. This peculiar process allegedly taking place in the modern capitalist societies is described by Habermas as "the colonization of the lifeworld." When such colonization happens, he argues, the public sphere of civil society will be severely deformed, thereby losing its dynamic and vigor. As a result, civil society can no longer serve as the counterweight to polity and economy, therefore the disintegration of society and the alienation of individuals will ensue.

## 4. Strengthening the Public Sphere: Culture of Civil Society?

So how can we prevent the colonization of the lifeworld? Habermas proposes that in order to survive, modern civil society must develop communicatively coordinated, reflexive forms of association, publicity, solidarity and identity. In other words, vibrant public sphere must be restored by employing discursive practices (or "communicative actions," to use Habermas's terminology) characterized by the principles of symmetry, reciprocity and reflexivity.

In Habermas's view, therefore, not all the actors in civil society (or CSOs: Civil Society Organizations, to use NGO activists' jargon) are conducive for revitalizing civil society. He cautions that "the actors who support the public sphere are distinguished by

the dual orientation of their political engagement: with their programs, they directly influence the political system, but at the same time they are also reflexively concerned with the revitalizing and enlarging of civil society" (Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 1996: 370). Without such reflexivity, therefore, a CSO cannot contribute to the strengthening of civil society.

From a more "anthropological" point of view, however, such reflexivity can be seen as a distinctive hallmark of what I'd like to call "the culture of civil society." This is a culture, I'd like to propose, consisting of the discourse and practice contributing to the creation and endorsement of genuine pluralism of ideas and interests. Anthropological approaches to the study of civil society, therefore, may be designed as an investigation of the emergence and the vicissitude of the culture of civil society within a historically specific arena of public sphere.

## 5.  New Avenues of Inquiry: The Case of Indonesia

If one is to inquire into such culture of civil society in Indonesia, a number of strategic case studies may be of use. Probably first and foremost is a case study of our society's attitudes toward the so-called former political prisoners. Under the Suharto regime, around 70,000 people were accused of being the members or sympathizers of now defunct communist party and arrested as political prisoners. They were eventually released in the late 1970s, but were continued to be stigmatized by the society and their fundamental civil rights, such as the rights to vote and run for public office, were stripped.

After the fall of the regime, however, their civil rights began to be restored, and eventually in February 2004 the Constitutional Court decided that all the regulations banning former political prisoners from voting and holding public office is unconstitutional.

But a survey results published by Kompas daily in 2004 revealed that more than 60% of the respondents were opposed to the possibility of former political prisoners holding public office, and more than 70% disapproved of their founding a political party. Such survey results have demonstrated that despite the government's effort to restore former political prisoners' civil rights, the popular prejudice against them is very much alive in Indonesia.

Whether or not, and how such prejudice will change in Indonesia seems to provide one of the strategic points to assess the development of the culture of civil society.

Another possible avenue of inquiry is to study people's attitude toward ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. This is in fact an area where great strides have been made in the last few years. Under the Suharto regime, ethnic Chinese who make up less than 4% of total population were subjected to various discriminations ranging from the ban of using Chinese characters in print media and billboards to the Government's requirement to change their Chinese names to more Indonesian sounding names. After the fall of the regime, the government has decided to abolish all the regulations discriminating against them, therefore the Chinese New Year has been recognized as a public holiday, and TV news programs as well as magazines and newspapers in Chinese began to reappear. How these changes could be initiated in such a short period of time and whether or not these changes actually represent the real changes in perceptions, along with the study of other ethnic minorities, seem to provide a feasible starting point for the study of the

culture of civil society.

Finally, the apparently unceasing suicide bombings taking place in Indonesia in the last five years do raise serious questions as to why growing democracy and civic freedom in Indonesia have not been able to effectively counterweight the dissemination of the fundamentalist discourse. The investigation of the propagation of such discourse as well as the emergence of its nemesis, radically liberal Islamic discourse, seems to have an immediate bearing on the study of the cultural aspect of civil society.

## 6. Japan's Assistance for Enhancing Democracy

This brings us, at long last, to Japan, or more accurately, Japan's assistance for enhancing the democratic system in Indonesia, especially the implementation of fair and open elections.

When the first democratic legislative elections since 1955 were held in 1999, Japan extended roughly US$30 million to UNDP's trust fund for assisting Indonesian elections. In addition, they dispatched technical experts to Electoral Commission (KPU), and sent an election observation team.

Last year, Japan's assistance for general elections consisted of two elements, i.e. assistance for legislative elections, and that for presidential elections. For legislative elections, Japan's financial assistance amounts to US$22 million for the procurement of electoral equipment (ballot boxes and polling booths), while other programs involve dispatch of 17 experts to central and local KPUs, voter education projects through NGOs such as LP3ES, LSI, etc. amounting to around US$270,000.

For presidential elections, their assistance involves dispatch of five experts to central KPU, dispatch of election observation team, and voter education programs with NGOs amounting to roughly US$190,000.

Among all the electoral support Japan has offered, probably the most notable was their assistance to LSI (Indonesian Survey Institute).

Founded in 2003 after the model of Social Weather Stations of the Philippines, private and non-partisan survey institute LSI has become the very first of its kind capable of conducting national level opinion polls involving reasonably large number of respondents with the demographic characteristics comparable to those of a national census. LSI's survey results, which have been made public every three months, have in fact become a reliable means to sound out the people's political choices in this country. The fact that the Japanese government's assistance could help nurture such an organization is testimony to the soundness of their ODA (Official Development Assistance) philosophy.

Having said that, however, it should be immediately pointed out that LSI's survey activities have not been entirely free from criticisms. In fact, as LSI's survey results have always placed Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono as the presidential election front-runner in its polls, the organization has been frequently accused of its partiality to the retired general. As a result, in a number of occasions LSI's representatives had to issue strong denials of any partiality, adding that the institute was funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), with one of the requirements being that the survey's findings should be made public.

Japan's increasing emphasis on the assistance to strengthen the democratic system has been highly appreciated by the Indonesian public, but given the present situation, where the democratic system is beginning to take root but chronic social

problems are far from diminishing, probably more cooperation is needed in the area of civil society, aiming at the strengthening of the discourse and practice—rather than the system as such—aiming to create and endorse genuine pluralism of ideas and interests.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

The foregoing discussion merely outlines very preliminary attempts to search for viable new directions in the heretofore excellent bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Japan. Needless to say, the feasibility of such directions will eventually depend on the results of further investigation into the aforementioned strategic areas. However, as the colonization of civil society as well as the parochialization of CSOs seem to pose potential danger to the survival vibrant public sphere, such a program seems well worth attwempting to effect.

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