

Stop and Revert Westernization of Asian Diet¹

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When we talk about ASEAN there must be a frame of thought we use, especially when we deal with local wisdom as our topic of discussion. For example: Why should we discuss local wisdom when everybody is talking that the world has already been globalized or the world has flattened already. What are the boundaries that define an issue as local or not local ? I think it is not an easy task. We observed that what now is global, it used to be local in the past. Greek philosophies, for example, used to be local philosophies but now are studied all over the world. The same thing with palm oil plantations, palm oil used to be grown in West Africa (local) and now are mostly grown in Indonesia and Malaysia and other parts of the globe. So, there is a continuum between local and global issues. It depends on time and place. Furthermore, a concept of wisdom is even more difficult to grasp. In this article what I mean by local wisdom is a unique cultural product that can be identified as a production of a specific region that its boundary is also culturally defined. This product, on the other hand, might have similarities with other products that is produced in other identified regions. For example, kecap i suling or beluk are local products of Sundanese culture that may have similarities with other types of performing arts in other culture.

In responding to Friedman's book: *The World Is Flat*³, I said that Friedman's book fits only to the developed countries culture⁴. For us, the world is not only still steep but also harsh. The arguments are, amongst others, most of the developing countries citizens are still poor and lacks of access to what we call the world's progress through globalization.

We experienced at the end of 20th Century, nations in the third world, especially in East and South East Asia, showed a tremendous change in their economic development. The developed nations called such positive trend the "Asian Miracle". It was showed that what had been reached by East and South East Asian countries was only a miracle, namely the economic progress that was achieved was not a result of intelligence and hard work but was the result of a power beyond human's capabilities.

In a global terminology, the world knows what is called Asian values. The consistent high economic growth experienced by China in the period of the past 40 years, is no longer viewed as a miracle but as a result of China's strategy in coping with the globalization process. The world societies predict that the raise of Asia will take place in the near future. Asian values are local within the global context. The sub set of Asian values are our values such as values being hold by varieties of sub-sub ethnics in Asia. Some of them are ours.

If we view the basic foundations of socio-economic development is societal or cultural values then we will be able to see that there are some truth in the positive aspects of Asian values that may have their roots in Chinese and other cultures of Asian societies.

We are not talking about cultural superiority. What I mean here is that a strategy of economic development should be seen as a cultural strategy, namely the strategy that takes benefits from people'

ways of thinking, feeling and believing. The basic argument is that what people can be or can do is rooted in what they believe, feel and think. This is part of the culture.

We have our own ways of believing, feeling and thinking but through our colonial history we have been "educated" to think that our culture, our ways of thinking, feeling and believing are inferior. We have been told and taught that the right way to develop our welfare or nation is to follow what has been experienced by Western nations.

As a result, we cannot know which one is suitable for us and which one is not. So our minds are confused. We think that changing from rice to wheat is better to do and by doing that we feel we are becoming a part of the modern nations⁵. From Fabiosa's study we learned that "Indonesia will see a major shift in the growth of grain consumption from rice to wheat products". How large the shift of food demand will be and what are the implications of such new trend?

According to Fabiosa's study, for any income increased by one percent, the demand for wheat-based products, will increase in the range of 0.44 to 0.84, with 26% to 34% of this response coming from the impact of income on the probability of consumption for non-consuming households and the remaining impact coming from the response on the level of consumption for households currently consuming wheat products.

Furthermore, urban location of households also contributes an increase of 0.11% to 0.13% to consumption. We faced rural-agricultural problem if we considered that elasticities in rice showed a negative impact of income and urbanization. It means that there will be a relative decline of demand for rice which is produced by our economy. The high growth of income could generate a negative feed back to our economy if any one percent of income increased is transferred to foreign economy.

So what? We face a very hard problem. It is not only economic problem but it is deeper than that: we face a very deep cultural problem!

Why do I say that we face a very hard cultural problem? The internalization of new food that is called by Fabiosa as "*Westernization of the Asian Diets*", meant that the basic food of Indonesia is the same with the basic food of European or American countries. One of the basic elements of culture is food. You are what you eat is a statement of culture⁶. Can we sense that our blood and life becoming determined by other nations? What kind of wisdom do we have to take?

The fact is our food has been changed to western food, it is an important evidence that the statement of The World Is Flat of Friedman is true. It means that all the space on this globe has been conquered by the developed nations. Or, it means that globalization has made the whole world belong to the developed nations. In other words, the developed nations have been successful in making a one-world culture - the global way of thinking, feeling and believing that is dictated by the developed nations—including food that forms our blood and our bone. It is a realization of what Isaiah Berlin said, that freedom for the pike is death for the minnow.

If we receive information that our situation, including what we eat, has been becoming foreign food, where is the location of Local Wisdom? If our food culture has been taken, do we still have room for the expanding and growing of local wisdom?

Let us start to learn what have been inherited to us as the result of cultivation of local wisdom in the past where our founding fathers erected our nation. Hopefully this result of identification will stimulate our

mind power to find a way to solve our problem.

1. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika or United in Diversity is our explicit and formal statement of our national-cultural perspectives. It means, we by itself, accept that local wisdom is not a smaller part of national wisdom. But, we have our minds that say that our nation is in fact a representation of our cultural diversities that exist and live in all of our culture. So, we are rich in culture—rich in the way of thinking, feeling and believing.

The question is whether or not we can create added values from our cultural diversity. Let me take some figures in economic activities that show that cultural endowments have given added values relative to finance or other service sector activities. Trend of Balance of the Service Account (1990-2000) showed that the only positive income in this account were that in travel/tourism and remittance income. In 1990 travel sector provided US\$ 1.54 billion and in 2000 increased to US\$ 1.75 billion; in addition, remittance by workers increased from US\$ 130 million in 1990 to US\$ 1.16 billion in 2000. On the contrary, the total service account of Indonesia amounted to a negative income as much as -US\$ 9.19 billion in 1990 and -US\$ 17.05 in 2000⁷. Furthermore, almost all exported goods from Indonesia, except mining products, are product of our culture, mostly in agriculture and its derivatives. We see how strong our local culture is to adapt and to contribute to the world culture. The roots of tourism, agriculture and our workers seeking their lives abroad are showing the strength of our local culture or local wisdom that are usually hidden by the glammers of what is perceived in the word of “modernization”.

The above figures are a proof that our most important capital is cultural capital under the umbrella of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.

2. Bahasa Indonesia

One of the most important the world invention, under the auspice of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, is the creation of Bahasa Indonesia. I always admire our founders of Indonesia that had been successful to create a very basic human civilization that is our national language, namely Bahasa Indonesia. I also always give respect to our ancestors that accept Bahasa Indonesia that was originated from a spoken minority culture as their formal language. In terms of Asean or World affairs, the creation of Bahasa Indonesia is the result of the greatness of local wisdom that not only accept other part of culture in the richness of Indonesian cultural diversity but also in sustaining and promoting Bahasa Indonesia to grow and to develop. We see local wisdom is the root for the existence and sustainability of Indonesia through invention of, among others, Bahasa Indonesia.

3. Local genius product

I used a term local to illustrate a situation or a condition that enable us to identify an area that produce a unique of goods or services. For example, local genius in Sundanese culture has produced varieties of arts and cultural products such as kecapi suling, beluk, wayang golek or pencak silat. In terms of herbal medicine, we realize that jamu is one of our important exported products. If we learn from China, we can take lessons such as how Chinese acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicines, and Chinese kung fu movies have been accepted as a part of global culture. Those are examples of how local genuine products go global and win the important position.

How far our products of local genius or local wisdom have been incorporated as global culture due to its

competitive advantage relative to other culture? We have no complete quantitative empirical data. But, we have already indicated by Fabiosa study result, namely our food tends to be westernized. This fact is sufficient to tell us that if we cannot stop or revert this trend, there are no other ways to grow and to develop our local wisdom.

Our founding fathers had given us lesson that something unimaginable they had created such as Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and Bahasa Indonesia. Our government has created ASEAN as our regional organization. Why have our foods become westernized, where we are now as an independent country? Do we think or feel that food is only a matter of calorie intake to maintain our life and health, or, do we think that food is our legitimation of freedom? I think there will be no local-to-go global products if there is no support of local community's world class culture. For example, kecapi suling performance should be packaged as good as a world class violin or piano performance if we want to see an acceptance of our culture in the world cultural market performance. The same argument is also applied to the case of herbal, jamu or martial arts, for example. But, the first step we must do is that we have to stop and to revert the westernization of Asian diet such as indicated by Fabiosa study.

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³T. Friedman, 2005. *The World Is Flat- A brief history of the globalized world in the 21st Century*. Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London.

⁴Agus Pakpahan, 2007. "The 3rd world choice of teak or oak", *The Jakarta Post*, Jakarta | Thu, 08/02/2007

⁵J.F. Fabiosa, 2006," Westernization of the Asian Diet: The Case of Rising Wheat Consumption in Indonesia". Working Paper 06-WP 422, April 2006. Center for Agricultural and Rural Development Iowa State University Ames, Iowa.

⁶I have been able to stop eating rice as my staple food since 2003 and now I am able to eat cassava and other tubers for my food staple.

⁷H. Kano, 2008. *Indonesian Exports, Peasant Agriculture and the World Economy 1850-2000*. NUS Press Singapore.