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Local Civilization and Political Decency: Equilibrium and the Position of the Sultanate in Java

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*Good men will not consent to govern for cash or honors. They do not want to be called mercenary for exacting a cash payment for the work of government, or thieves for making money on the side; and they will not work for honors, for they are not ambitious.*¹

Democracy is a widely accepted and prevalent political system in the world today. It is evidently based on the election of leaders according to the will of the majority. Accordingly, a government composed of either directly or indirectly chosen representatives of the people would be regarded as democratic and politically decent. The idea of democracy was the subject of debate in the city-states in ancient Greece, such as Athens, and influenced the course of both the French and American revolutions.

In the 18th century, various thinkers in the West further developed the idea of democracy, and their ideas contributed to the establishment of nation states. In the modern era, democracy has come to enshrine one of the ideals of Western civilization. The contemporary scholar, Francis Fukuyama, is one of many who advocate liberal democracy.² At the end of the 20th century, he stated:

The triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism....What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.³

Fukuyama might be right as democratic ideas in the West have admittedly played an important role in liberating humans and have contributed to the development of a freer world.⁴ Apart from this Western-oriented political system, however, it is still possible to

¹ Plato, *The Republic*, London, 2007, p. 29.

² See, F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 1992, New York.

³ Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest*, Summer 1989, pp. 3-4.

⁴ For example, the Japanese post-war constitution has been influenced by the authority of the U.S., and contains democratic and liberal principles, which show a clear contrast to the previous undemocratic Japanese Imperial Constitution.

identify traditional alternatives in governance which do not rely on any electoral system in the appointment of top political leaders.

The Indonesian island of Java has been known for its distinctive civilization. While its civilizational influence might be domestic and geographically limited, this local civilization seems to offer a unique alternative characterized by a different relationship between the ruler and his subjects. At the end of 2010, Yogyakarta in Central Java, which has preserved the very essence of Javanese civilization with its deep-rooted philosophy and has been ruled by a sultan, was thrown into political turmoil. Yogyakarta's traditional governance is that the sultan is automatically appointed as the governor of the specially designated province of Yogyakarta, or *Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta* (DIY).

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, popularly known as SBY, recently expressed the view that a gubernatorial nomination in Yogyakarta was incompatible with the idea of democracy and that there should be a direct election for the governorship. The people in Yogyakarta angrily expressed their strong opposition to the view of this two-time popularly-elected president. On 13 December 2010, when the provincial council decided to support the current system of having the sultan as governor, tens of thousands people took to the streets to show their disagreement with the country's president.⁵ Some of the banners read: "SBY is the origin of disasters in Yogyakarta," blaming the president for the earthquakes and volcanic eruptions which the province has experienced recently.

Regardless of age, ethnicity, or gender, people expressed their support for the sultan and showed their heartfelt attachment to him on that day.⁶ One survey conducted by newspapers indicates that 93.3% of people in Yogyakarta were in favor of their traditional automatic appointment of the sultan as governor.⁷ Interviews conducted by the author on the streets of Yogyakarta also confirmed the support shown by an overwhelming majority of people for the *status quo*.⁸

What does this local phenomenon mean? Would the people of Yogyakarta not like to have a more democratic system? Does the reaction of the people of Yogyakarta to the

⁵ 45 out of 55 council members supported the current system. One faction with 10 council members, a party created by SBY, abstained from expressing their opinion, while other 5 factions unanimously voted for the maintenance of the current system. *KOMPAS* 14 December.

⁶ There were also non-Javanese, including Papua New Guineans, who joined the demonstration and gathering. The Council building was surrounded by as many as 20,000 people.

⁷ *KOMPAS*, 14 December.

⁸ Between 10 December 2010 and 17 December 2010, the author conducted informal interviews with fourteen commoners, and thirteen of them are clearly opposed to the idea of SBY. Only one woman (food seller at her 50s) does not mind having a gubernatorial election because she believes that the sultan will surely be elected.

idea of SBY come merely from their traditional belief system? Or are there any civilizational principles that lead them to be part of the movement to support the sultan?

Various Means of Governance

Although liberal democracy is one of the most efficient systems of reflecting the will of the people, it is not without problems. The adequacy of a direct voting system, for example, would be seriously challenged where voters fail to maintain a certain level of education, political motivation, and awareness.⁹ The problem is that the masses tend to favor entertainment rather than participate in serious debate. Such voters could thus be manipulated, a phenomenon Gordon Tullock called “rent-seeking.”¹⁰ It is obvious that these problems are by no means a deficiency of the system of liberal democracy itself, but they are the consequence of the implementation of the system.

The theories of both John Stuart Mill and Gordon Tullock would suggest that political education, together with nurturing the morality of constituency, should be vital elements for preserving the virtue of liberal democracy. At the same time, ethical awareness among the elected is also important in ensuring the intended outcomes of liberal democracy.

The caliphate was a unique Islamic system of governance that integrated religion and politics. In fact, the caliph was a chief executive of the community whose major duties were: “enforcement of the law and defense and expansion of the realm of Islam, distribution of funds (booty and alms), and the general supervision of the government.”¹¹ One of the major duties of the caliph was to ensure the implementation of *Sharia* (Islamic law), and the sanctioning of his political practice by religious authorities. Religion and politics are coupled in the life of Muslims.

In Sunni tradition, the caliph was elected by the community, and a candidate to be caliph should fulfill certain criteria as a leader, such as appropriate knowledge and physical fitness.¹² Some Muslims insist that because the caliph was prone to erroneous practice, there needed to be a system to remove the caliph from his position.¹³ However, historically, the only way to remove a caliph was through assassination, a frequent

⁹ For example, J.S. Mill states: The dangers incident to a representative democracy are of two kinds: danger of a low grade of intelligence in the representative body, and in the popular opinion which controls it; and danger of class legislation on the part of the numerical majority, these being all composed the same class. J.S. Mill, “Of True and False Democracy; Representation of All, and Representation of the Majority Only”, in J.M. Robson (ed.), *Essays of Politics and Society*, Toronto, 1977, p. 488, cited in *Agama dan Peradaban*, H. Kato, Jakarta, 2002, p. 42. (translated from doctoral thesis: H. Kato, *Religion and its Functions in Society*, 1999 Sydney University.

¹⁰ See G.Tullock, *The Rent-Seeking Society*, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 2005.

¹¹ The *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol.1, p. 239.

¹² Ibid. p. 240.

¹³ I. Yusanto, “Caliphate, Sharia and the Future of Umat”, in *The Clash of Itihad Fundamentalist versus Liberal Muslims*, H. Kato (ed.), 2011, pp.131-132.

occurrence in Islamic history. Caliphs had the potential to be “erratic, imperial, fair and just, despotic and tyrannical, dynastic or individual.”¹⁴ Few of these characteristics are democratic.

In Shi’a tradition, imams (recognized Islamic scholars) never assumed political power. They also rejected the caliphs recognized by the Sunnis because they believed that only a direct descendant of the Prophet should be the caliph. Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran, however, violated Shiite rules by seizing total political power and having the authority to pick candidates for so-called popular elections. Democracy has not done well under this system.

The pre-war Japanese monarchy was another type of governance in modern history. This institution was dictatorial and tyrannical and it lasted until the end of World War II; there was no mechanism for electing the emperor nor was there one to dethrone him. Unlike the secular character of the caliph, the Emperor of Japan was regarded as a living God of Shinto. Succession was based on lineage, and there was no room for the discussion on the suitability of the successor as leader of the country. Because the Emperor was essentially a religious symbol, actual political rule was usurped by a dictatorial and fascist military dictatorship. The Emperor was out of the loop.

As a result of this dictatorship, the civilians, “subjects” of the emperor in pre-war Japan, suffered from the suppression of their basic human rights such as the freedom of press, speech, and religion. Totalitarianism prevailed in Japan not only before but also during World War II. The institution had led Japan to imperialism, and in turn to the suffering and agony of Asian countries as a result of attempts at invasion and occupation by the imperial army of Japan. This historical fact shows that autocracy has the potential to create political indecency.

It is also important to remember that although many might believe that the Japanese monarch has always maintained his political influence and has always been respected by the people throughout history, the authority of the Emperor was eclipsed and his position disregarded by the public during different periods of time. National Shinto was in fact created in order to justify the divinity of the Emperor in the time of the Meiji Restoration in the 19th century.¹⁵ Although the modern Japanese monarchy recognizes the historic continuity of the Emperor, power resides in a democratic government.

Both the Islamic caliphate and Japanese monarchy suffered from a serious shortcoming in that neither system offered a mechanism to take into account the wishes of the people. Liberal democracy, on the other hand, theoretically advocates the rights of the constituency and reflects the will of the people. Yet, it is worth reiterating that the political awareness and morality of the people are vital to maintaining the decency of

¹⁴ B. Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Fundamentalism since 1945*, Oxon, 2005, p.14.

¹⁵ K. Inoue, *Japanese History* (Vol. 2), p. 136.

liberal democracy. Yogyakarta, however, seems to demonstrate an interesting political apparatus consistent with the preservation of their civilizational tradition.

Historical Background of Yogyakarta

Indonesia is a center of Islam in Southeast Asia, with more than 80% of a population of 240 million being Muslims. Notwithstanding the demographics, the political system still remains secular. A multi-party election and a direct presidential election are conducted every five years. In this sense, Indonesia is no alien to the Western style of liberal democracy. There are 33 provinces, and each of them is represented by a governor who is chosen through direct election, except for Yogyakarta.

A rather extraordinary political arrangement was made for Yogyakarta at the time of the formation of Republic after independence, formally recognised by the international community for the first time in 1949. The declaration of independence was actually made by Indonesia itself at the conclusion of World War II on 17 August 1945.¹⁶ Between 1945 and 1949, Indonesia had to struggle for full independence from the Dutch. During this time, Yogyakarta was the capital of Indonesia; it had been ruled by the family of its sultan since the middle of the 18th century.¹⁷

Although the kingdom of Yogyakarta -- ruled by the sultan -- predates the Republic of Indonesia, Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX chose to have his territory remain a part of the Republic when independence was first declared. The sultan, together with other national leaders, such as Sukarno, contributed to the liberation of Indonesia from the Netherlands. Because of the significant contributions made by the sultan, the early government of the Republic of Indonesia granted a special status to Yogyakarta, and the sultan became the governor of the province for life.¹⁸

Ever since, it has become a tradition that the Sultan of Yogyakarta and Paku Alam, who is a ruler of a smaller territory in the district of Yogyakarta, have been granted the highest and second highest gubernatorial positions, respectively. Currently, Hamengku Buwono X holds the position of governor of Yogyakarta, while Paku Alam IX is vice-governor. The Indonesian Constitution also recognises the special status of the province with respect to traditional customs.¹⁹

¹⁶ R. Cribb and C. Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History Since 1945*, London, 1995, p.16.

¹⁷ In the vicinity of Yogyakarta, there had existed a kingdom called Mataram since the eighth century. It was at the time of the official establishment of the kingdom of Yogyakarta in 1755 that Mataram was divided into two kingdoms, i.e., Yogyakarta and Surakarta. See, Ricklefs, M.C., *A History of Indonesia Since c.1200*, Stanford, 2008, pp.119-121.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁹ *Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945*, p. 19.

Fury and Demonstrations in Yogyakarta

At noon on 13 December 2010, the citizens of Yogyakarta demonstrated. In fact, a main street of the city was virtually occupied by demonstrators opposed to the idea of a direct election for the post of governor. In front of the council building, the demonstrators criticised and mocked SBY. It was obvious that the people of Yogyakarta respected “their” sultan more than they respected the elected head of the state. A young student majoring in literature at Gajah Mada University, one of the most prestigious universities in Southeast Asia, ardently expressed his devotion and trust for “his” sultan:

His (the sultan’s) governance is a better system (than the other system). He does good things for the people (of Yogyakarta). But many politicians do not do any good for the people. (We should not forget) Yogyakarta has existed long before the Republic and the sultan of Yogyakarta is a treasure of this country. The kingdom of Yogyakarta still functions. I am very proud of being Javanese.²⁰

It seems that his views are shared by many other people in Yogyakarta. For example, when asked, young shop clerks at a modern shopping mall in the city also passionately rejected the direct election of the governor. They explain that although they do not work at the sultan’s palace (*kraton*) physically, they are in fact working for the sultan as *abdi dalem* or servants of the sultan.²¹ Even high school students who joined the demonstration expressed their opposition to the plan, saying that an election of governor would cause social conflict and would be insulting.²²

At almost every street corner, people set up banners to articulate their discontent with their president and to show the highest degree of attachment to the sultan. A younger brother of the sultan, Prabukusumo, also appeared in front of the crowd during the protest rallies, and people cheered. In his address, he said that: “those who still have a conscience, those who don’t forget history, let’s give our support to the ‘special status.’”²³ The atmosphere of the rallies was eminently amicable, and the hand-written placards also conveyed the sentiments of the people in Yogyakarta.²⁴

The provincial council that day officially made the decision to support the current system, on 13 December 2010. The decision emphasized four key points: support for the special status of the province; support for an appointment mechanism; endorsement of the current governor and vice-governor, and reaffirmation of the special status. This popular political pronouncement was sent to SBY. As of December 2011, no decision

²⁰ Interview conducted by the author in Yogyakarta, 13 December, 2010.

²¹ Interview conducted by the author in Yogyakarta, 15 December, 2010

²² 14 December, *KOMPAS*

²³ Recorded by the author and confirmed by the article of Jakarta Post and other newspapers thereafter.

²⁴ For example, “My Yogyakarta, YES, My Sultan 100%”, “Sultan, my King, Sultan my governor, Appointment of Sultan My Choice, Nothing else”, “SBY what do you want?” are among typical statements observed during the rallies.

has been made for the modification of the traditional process of gubernatorial appointment in Yogyakarta.

Do all these feelings and reactions of people merely originate in the fact that Yogyakarta has a longer history than the Republic of Indonesia? Is the attachment to the sultan based merely on nostalgia? Besides historical and sentimental reasons, there are more convincing explanations of why the people of Yogyakarta refuse to accept a Western means of choosing their leader. These are profoundly connected with specific civilizational notions which not only define their political position but also define the basis of life itself.

The Position of the Sultan

Ever since acceding to the throne as sultan in 1989, Hamengku Buwono X has been the governor of the special district of Yogyakarta as an administrator. It would be inexact to believe that this gubernatorial position was granted to him merely on the basis of the great contributions made by his ancestors to independence of Indonesia. A more fundamental reason lies in the unique mythological position of the sultan in Javanese cosmology. It should be noted that the sultan of Yogyakarta is regarded not only as an administrator but also as an entity with supernatural power. Although the sultanate in Yogyakarta to some extent has been colored by Islam, traditional Javanese custom and rituals constitute much of its essence.

In the Javanese worldview, the most sacred place is volcanic Mount Merapi north of Yogyakarta. This holy mountain is regarded as the domicile of God or *parahyangan*. Conversely, the south of Yogyakarta, which is the sea, is believed to be a place for waste or *palemahan*. In mythology, there are palaces or *kraton* in each area, and there live some spirits or *roh* in the palaces. Between the south and the north, the sultan of Yogyakarta resides in his own *kraton*. This *kraton* is a place of humans or *pawongan*, who are headed by the sultan. In some villages in the province of Yogyakarta, people believe that these three *kratons* are deeply interconnected and have frequent communication with each other. It is also said that *roh* of the south and the north will provide assistance to the sultan of Yogyakarta when he faces physical dangers, including socio-cultural crises.²⁵

The sultan is the only person who is able to bring the revelation of God or *wahyu*. Directional positioning of Mount Merapi and the *kraton* of Yogyakarta, which symbolize the sacred and secular worlds respectively, affirms the spiritual assignment of the sultan. The throne of the sultan in the *kraton* faces Mount Merapi directly, and the sultan sits and sees Mount Merapi in the court ceremonies. Petrus, one of the organizers of the 13 December protest rallies, explained that their spiritual tie with the sultan is so strong that they are never able to be parted, and the sultan is an important leader with

²⁵ Lucas Sasongko Triyoga, *Merapi dan Orang Jawa*, Jakarta, 2010, p.62.

the ability of *wahyu*.²⁶ The rationale of the sultan's dual role, then, can be understood from two perspectives, namely the secular and the sacred.

The Sultan's Attributes and Secular Role

According to Javanese philosophy, belief in the afterlife is important and practiced with religious tolerance. This is epitomised by the arrangement of tombs in graveyards. In Java, especially in Yogyakarta, tombs are arranged regardless of one's religion. A Catholic and a Muslim, for example, are often buried alongside each other whereas in other areas of Indonesia, graveyards are strictly divided according to religion. One of the valued qualities of the sultan is this sort of tolerance. Non-Javanese such as Papua New Guineans lie happily and safely in Yogyakarta.

It is the sultan's duty to protect people, both Javanese and non-Javanese. Part of the sultan's name, *Hamengku*, means "bundle" in Javanese. *Songsong*, the umbrella that the sultan uses in the procession, symbolises his role in society. A large *songsong* signifies in no uncertain terms his great power and strength. At the same time, the umbrella that blocks sunlight and heat implies the capacity of sheltering people under it. The sultan provides spiritual and physical protection for the people, and people in turn are supposed to dedicate themselves to him. They offered crops to the sultan in the past for this reason. This mutual protection is called *ayom mengayomi*.

While *ayom mengayomi* is certainly a legacy of the feudal era, the sultan still plays his role as king of Yogyakarta in that he offers his land or *mager sari* for public use. That includes Gajah Mada University, Yogyakarta International Airport, the Yogyakarta railway station, and other vast areas in the vicinity of Yogyakarta. This is one example of the common Javanese practice *dono driyah*, where the affluent offer financial support to the less fortunate. The sultan, as a role model, takes the lead in this practice.

Man-powered tricycles called *becak* are gradually being phased out in the larger cities in Indonesia including Jakarta. Consequently, the riders of *becak* have been losing their jobs around the country, contributing to an increase of unemployment in Indonesia. However, *becak* in Yogyakarta are still operating freely as it is the sultan's policy to secure the means of livelihood of the drivers. Therefore, the drivers of *becak* in Yogyakarta came out in vigorous opposition to the idea of SBY. It was their task to perform *ayom mengayomi*. They flew an Indonesian flag at half-mast on the day of the protest rallies, showing their anger and sadness for president's incomprehension of their feelings towards the sultan.

The sultan's protection and compassion towards people is also symbolically shown in court rituals. For example, at the coronation, or *penobatan*, ducks, chickens, dwarfs, and albinos joined the procession together with the sultan as it moved toward the *kraton*.

²⁶ Interview conducted by the author in Tembi, 14 December, 2010.

Each group denotes specific characters of humans: being fond of blathering; belligerence; being weak, and being a minority. Participation of these in *penobatan* demonstrated one of the sultan's qualities: appreciation for all humans and protection of them.

In the modern world, the law of the jungle is applied to the life of humans. Politicians, who are supposed to protect citizens, are busily engaged in securing victory in the next election; they are not able to devote themselves to the genuine betterment of people's lives. A self-centred mentality also creates a less compassionate society, and little attention is paid to marginalized people. However, regardless of his actual achievement, political integrity or personality, the sultan of Yogyakarta, is regarded by the Javanese people as an important and trustworthy savior in this desolate world, and it is he who protects and cares for his "subjects."

The Sultan's Attributes and Sacred Roles

Although the sultan is a human, he is supposed to possess an extraordinary qualification to connect the sacred and secular worlds. In other words, the sultan is a symbolic figure uniting God and humans.

By being united with God, humans are for the first time able to reach a perfect existence or *budi luhur*. There are three stages in this process: *nang* or a calm state of mind; *ning* or a silent state of mind; and *nung* or unification with God. At the stage of *ning*, humans try to close nine orifices of the body, which are eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth, anus and the genitals. This is a transitional moment when humans move from the secular world to the sacred one. The sultan, who connects the two worlds, is a symbol of the process of becoming *budi luhur* for the Javanese.

The traditional concept *memayu hayuning bawana* (realization of world peace) is often verbalised and appreciated by Javanese people, including the sultan. This ideal state of society is not possible without three important factors: *selaras* (suitability), *seimbang* (balance) and *serasi* (harmony). The sultan possesses his own "suitable" (*selaras*) enabling him to execute his duties in order to contribute to the realization of *memayu hayuning bawana*.

The Javanese perceive that this world consists of opposing elements, such as hot and cold, dark and bright, dirty and clean. Both balance and harmony are very much valued in Javanese society, and it is Sultan's sacred duty to maintain and nurture these virtues with his tolerance and compassion. The devoted preservation of opposing elements is symbolized in the direction and location of *kraton* and in the arrangement of other objects in Yogyakarta.

The sultan's *Kraton* itself stands facing Mount Merapi. Between the two, there is a tower called *Tugu*. There is an imaginary line from the *kraton*, to Merapi, which

validates the relationship between the sultan and God. To the north of the *kraton* there is a field known as *alun-alun* where people gather in the time of court ceremonies. From the direction of Merapi, the right side of *alun-alun* is regarded as a sacred world, while the left side is seen as a secular one. Each world is represented by a tree and by a symbol, namely, a mosque on the right and a market on the left. Between the two worlds is the Sultan's throne, the position of which is a metaphor for the sultan's sacred duty to maintain the balance between the two conflicting worlds.

Therefore, it is more accurate to say that the sultan is destined to deal with secular issues, including politics. If the sultan fails to do so, the society will be chaotic and unstable, a prospect that people do not welcome in the very least (*ogah ribut*).

Traditional Governance and its Problems

It is plausible to believe that behind the calls by SBY to remove the special status of the sultan of Yogyakarta is the desire to avoid having the international community brand Indonesia as undemocratic. There is no doubt that liberal democracy, with its system of the election of representatives, is a genuine means of reflecting the voices of the people. The election of representatives by the people ensures the sovereignty of the citizens.

Many, including Fukuyama, believe that Western liberal and representative democracy is universally valid, and other systems are obsolete and contradictory to the essence of democracy. As Jean Jacques Rousseau pointed out, "the idea of representation is a modern one."²⁷

According to such a view, Yogyakarta would be regarded as remaining primitive and traditional. The people of Yogyakarta are unwilling to abandon their long-lived civilizational relationship with the sultan. This localism is labelled by Hastangka, an academic based in Yogyakarta, as *Pancasilaist* democracy.²⁸

The essential elements in this local governance are consensus, tolerance, humanism, and politeness. Hastangka also insists that local factors, such as culture, history, and societal condition, should not be ignored in building democracy.²⁹ In the case of Yogyakarta, these surely are contained in the complex philosophy underlying the Javanese worldview, the characteristics of the sultan, and the spirituality of the people.

Petrus, an enthusiastic supporter of the sultan, thinks that the current system in Yogyakarta does not contradict the idea of democracy as a vast majority of the people in the province have already expressed their wish that the sultan be the governor.³⁰ He is

²⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, London, 2004, p.113.

²⁸ *Pancasila* is a national ideology which consists of five principles: the belief in One God; humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democracy guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation; and social justice.

²⁹ Hastangka, "Democrat, Keraton dan Istana", in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* 14 December, 2010.

³⁰ Interview conducted by the author in Tembi, 14 December 2010.

convinced that the sultan will never deviate from the right path as a leader because the sultan possesses extraordinary character and abilities, including *wahyu*.³¹

There is a Javanese tradition of avoiding the popular vote known as *kerajkatan*. This concept emphasizes the totality of the local community, and is based on a decision-making system known as *musyawarah* (deliberation) and *mufakat* (unanimity).³² As Petrus explained in relation to the Javanese, the communal unity and consensus resulting from these traditional concepts are democratic, in spite of the existence of the sultan as an absolute leader. These local civilizational concepts are undeniably at variance with the supposedly universally-accepted principles of Western democratic theory.

Yet, as has been observed, this alternate form of democracy seems to be supported by the majority of Yogyakartaans. It is also crucial for us to note that this local practice could result in the emergence of a tyrannical ruler. The political mechanism in Yogyakarta is vulnerable to the development of a dictatorship as there is no system that can dethrone the sultan in accordance with the will of the people. In this sense, the current system in Yogyakarta is far from perfect, and there should be more development in the time to come.

Conclusions

Western liberal democracy might function well in many parts of the world, and the will of the people is reflected in policies of governments formed within this system. However, it is a fact that universally some people are reluctant to accept this modern system. Such is the case with the people in Yogyakarta, people who believe that Western liberal democracy would not be the most preferred alternative in their locality.

The author does not intend to pass a judgement on which system is better. Rather, what should be accentuated here is that political behaviour of Yogyakartaans is based on the long-standing civilizational notion of equilibrium with a great emphasis on the sultan. Tadao Umesao, a noted Japanese anthropologist, defines civilization and culture as:

... civilization as the entire system of daily life, as a system which includes various devices and institutions. Culture, on the other hand, would designate the system of values held by those living within the whole system of civilization.³³

For Yogyakartaans, the sultan is a civilizational system inseparable from their lives. The appreciation of equilibrium is a Javanese cultural expression substantiated by their civilization. What we observe in Yogyakarta is not a personality cult surrounding

³¹ Interview conducted by the author in Tembi, 14 December 2010.

³² N. Mulder, *Mysticism in Java*, Amsterdam, 1998, p.63.

³³ T. Umesao, *Kindaibunmei ni okeru Nihon Bunmei* (Japanese civilisation in modern civilisation, Tokyo, 2000, p.22. The English translation is available at: http://ir.minpaku.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10502/447/1/SES16_002.pdf

Hamengku Buwono X. Rather, it is the appreciation of Javanese civilization and culture, which could differentiate it from the Japanese monarchy.

This political system of Yogyakarta cannot be labelled a “democracy” as many Yogyakartaans insist; it is obviously a form of monarchy established around the sultanate. However, this does not automatically mean that the current system in Yogyakarta could only bring about corruption. Political decency should be possible as long as the sultan maintains the integrity associated with the sultanate. As Plato said, should the chosen leader become a true philosopher,³⁴ he might be able to do so. However, the problem is that there is no guarantee of this outcome.

Plato also pointed out that “the form of the good” is an essential qualification for a rational man, which needless to say includes a ruler or king. Bambang Pudjasworo, an expert of Javanese philosophy, shares the view of Plato, saying that there is an urgent need to establish a system of choosing a “right person” as the sultan or of replacing the sultan if the sultan lacks support for his concept of the good.³⁵

The possibility of tyrannical rule does not preclude that of political decency. However, it is the wish of many that Javanese philosophy, which defines the quality and the role of the sultan, will promote decency over tyranny.

It might be possible that the leadership in Yogyakarta creates a society of peace that promotes the welfare of the people. However, the most crucial factors for the realization of this are the political and ethical awareness of the sultan himself, on the one hand, and the system that verifies the appositeness of the present and future sultans on the other hand. If these two issues are not properly addressed, the society of Yogyakarta might fall prey some day to dictatorship and tyranny, and a traditional society based on local civilization might vanish. The case of Yogyakarta is, thus, a great test of whether humans have already come to the end of history.

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³⁴ The society we have described can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states.... till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands...for it is not easy to see that there is no other road to real happiness either for society or the individuals. Plato, op.cit., pp.191-192.

³⁵ Interview conducted by the author in Yogyakarta, 15 December 2010.

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