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**INDONESIA AND CENTRAL ASIA:  
ROMANTICIZING AUTHORITARIAN REGIME IN THE PAST?**

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**Abstract**

Even though countries in Central Asia and Indonesia seem to be unrelated, both actually have experienced authoritarian regime and implemented decentralization system after that regime collapsed. Nevertheless, decentralization along with non-authoritarian regime does not automatically bring the desired good result since a new authoritarian regime based on decentralization appears. As a result, the citizens long for the welfare of the centralism system. Before talking further about the comparison of both regions, it is better to have a good understanding of each region.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, Central Asia, Identity, globalization

**Introduction**

The term *Central Asia*, in fact, has just emerged after 1991. The emergence of this term cannot be separated from the collapse of Soviet Union that once ruled the countries in Central Asia. There is one particular characteristic of countries in Central Asia while facing the collapse of communism. While the member countries of Soviet Union in Europe such as Lithuania SSR, Estonia SSR, and Ukraine SSR were against the central authoritarian of Soviet Union since *glasnost i perestroika* was applied in 1987 congress, those in Central Asia seemed to be obedient and followed any decision made by Soviet Union (Fachrurudji, 2007). *Glasnost, perestroika* and *demokratiya* were the programs made by Gorbachov to reorganize the system in Soviet Union. Those programs included the welcoming of new stuffs, restructuring the main outline of the party, reducing centralism of Russia resulting in the emergence of ethnic roles that had been Russianized, and reviewing the democratization in Soviet Union (Elfira, 2002). There was also a strong relation between countries in Central Asia and the centralism of Moscow shown by the fact that those countries proclaimed their independences after the collapse of Soviet; meanwhile, Ukraine SSR and three Baltic countries proclaimed before Soviet was officially dispersed.

Although the term *Central Asia* was created by those countries themselves, it creates its own conflict for the region. For instance, geographically, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan are located in Asia, yet they join European competition according to FIFA World Cup qualification. Meanwhile, Mongolia which abuts upon China never considers itself as the part of Central Asia.

There are so many definitions of Central Asia and the countries included in it, but I personally agree with Edward Schatz who determines only Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as Central Asia. Schatz divides Central Asia specifically the authoritarian system applied in these countries into two categories: soft

authoritarian and hard authoritarian. According to him, these five countries still maintain their authoritarian system; although it once was softened, the authoritarian characteristics cannot be eliminated; the system, in fact, becomes so much similar to that of Soviet's in the past (Schatz, 2006).

According to Anna Matveeva, the decision to choose these five countries is also based on the effect of *perestroika* upon them. Political conflicts in Tajikistan are always solved at the point of sword (military command). Meanwhile, Turkmenistan implements political system without any opposition and applies imprisonment for those against the government. The interesting fact is that democratization in Central Asia has been considered good based on Western system since the main requirement is the national stability (Matveeva, 1999). Given the fact that the Western invades Afghanistan, the stability of Central Asia is surely needed in order to prevent pro-Afghanistan to build their militants there which are the closest countries to Afghanistan (Jones Luong, Weinthal, 2002).

Schatz and Matveeva also put concern toward the reason related to national stability. They believe that national stability will prevent social conflict due to ethnic, tribal, or nationalism issues and civil war such as that of in Balkan after disintegration of Yugoslavia. Besides, security reason also mainly connects countries in Central Asia to come up with this term, *Central Asia* (Allison, 2004). Security becomes concern because the five countries in Central Asia became vulnerable after Soviet collapsed and ex-Soviet countries emerged (*Содружество Независимых Государств, СНГ / Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimyykh Gosudarstv, SNG*) or in Western media are commonly known as Russian Commonwealth. They were no longer under the protection of Moscow, and their locations are close to conflicted area, Afghanistan. Allison names these countries periphery area not only viewed from Moscow but also NATO. It is because they had tried to run their own government since 1992, while ex-East bloc countries (Poland, Lithuania, Estonia) joined NATO, and Belarus joined Russia protected zone. However, it did not take much time for them to realize that it was difficult to stand on their own. As a result, they decided to take Russia's side though those countries did not do it at the same time – during 1996, 1999 and around 2000 (Allison, 2004).

Paul Kubicek in his article *Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or Cure?* further explains the impacts of the continuous implementation of the authoritarian system in Central Asia. Kubicek points out that Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan only omit the SSR in their name. It was assumed that without SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic), these five countries have implemented democratic rules. Nevertheless, the leaders of these countries used to become the heads of local communist party. Kubicek (1998) sees the trial of being democratic by having presidential election, yet the candidates are the members of the politburo party (high rank members who have power to influence policy-making in the country). Kubicek specifically views Kazakhstan as a country which never really tried to change its centralized system because Nuzurbayev who used to be the head of Kazakhstan Communist Party became the first president in 1992 and stated his support towards Moscow along with Moscow's policy. In my opinion, this is the implementation of a faithful vow which was always internalized towards the members of Pacta Warsawa. Even though the Pacta had been dispersed, it was sort of unofficial formal acknowledgment.

### **The Search of Identity**

The authoritarian system which is implemented by the five countries in Central Asia is a vivid impact of Soviet Union's decentralization resulting in the formation of new states. The three scholars, I mention above, explain that these countries have tried to redefine their own culture in the beginning of their independence such as by using their regional languages as the official language to replace Russian, showing their specific regional culture as national culture, and implementing economy privatization. As time went by, the regional language of each country could not unite the citizens as Russian did. Also, the citizens showed resistance towards the specific regional culture. Razia Sultanova in *Music and Identity in Central Asia* states that the strong internalization of the Soviet ideology leads the Central Asian to question their identity by asking "who are we?" when they are faced with decentralization. The successful revitalization is only shown in Uzbekistan through the Uzbek marriage ceremony which unfortunately uses Russian language. Uzbekistan also once tried to implement the education system in which Russian language was omitted since Uzbek language was used. However, it proved to be ineffective as the citizens still used Russian in their daily life. As the influence of Russia in Central Asia grows stronger, Uzbekistan finally re-allows Russian language to be used during school time.

Sultanova also states that Central Asians experienced emotional conflict when they had to present themselves, for instance Tajik people. The Tajik refuse to name their music as Tajik music because it is assumed that Tajik music has Persian root (Iran). Although the five Central Asian countries did have historical relation with Iran, they refuse to be said as Iran descents due to political tension. It is the question regarding their identity that leads them to prefer their Russian characteristics to Persian. This choice can be seen as the impact of authoritarian system which lasted long enough in Central Asia as part of Soviet Union. A composer from Uzbekistan also prefers to play Russian songs mixed with Uzbek characteristics in order to show his relation with Russia, not a Persian descent (Sultanova, 2005).

As a result of identity searching, another scholar named T. Jeremy Gunn argues that the unique characteristic of Central Asia is its implementation of Islamic teachings which are different from those in general. Under Soviet Union, the mosques in Central Asia were transformed into factories or museums. Thus, the institutional spread of Islamic teaching disappeared and the Islam became unique in its own way. It is true that the mosques were revitalized after the independence, and the functions have been returned to its religious functions. However, the Islamic teachings are implemented based on Central Asians' way. The Central Asian Moslems still drink vodka containing high alcoholic substance as daily consumption even though Quran, Moslems' holy book, forbids that.

Gunn's statement is supported by Rashid in *The Fires of Faith in Central Asia* arguing that the revitalization of Islam in Central Asia will be a difficult task due to the impact of Soviet authoritarian system. The culture of drinking vodka was actually the influence of Soviet; as the authoritarian institution, Soviet instructed them to replace the main beverage which was tea into vodka, for they had the same function to warm the body. Also, by drinking vodka, they show their refusal to be related to Persian descents who are obedient followers of Islam. Thus, they insist on keeping their Islam and vodka as the unique characteristic of Islam in Central Asia and other ex-Soviet countries. Another unique characteristic is that though the mosques have been revitalized, the institutional spread of the

religion is still prohibited. It is because such action will result in the act of glorifying certain individuals (in the past, Soviet used to propagate the act of glorifying certain individuals through mosques). Countries in Central Asia obliged their citizens to glorify their leader figures who held the same position as Lenin; for example Turkmenistan people glorified Saparmurat Niyazov or Uzbekistan people glorified Islam Karimov.

### **Globalization and Moscow's Influence**

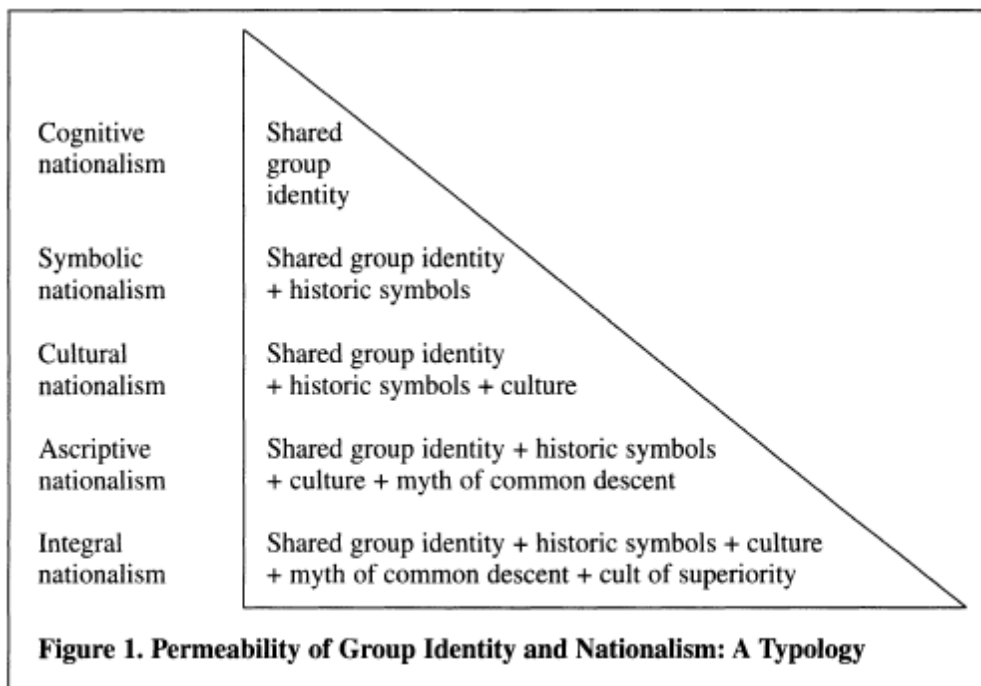
The identity search cannot be separated from the previous authoritarian system, yet it cannot be separated from the position of Central Asia during the globalization as well - as Martin Spechler states in *Central Asia on the Edge of Globalization*. Different from the previous scholars, Spechler (2004) includes Azerbaijan as Central Asia beside the five mentioned earlier. The globalization in Central Asia once opened an opportunity for Central Asian countries to be democratic. It was seen from the success of free market system in Central Asia. Unfortunately, the diaspora of Central Asians reaching West Europe/United States of America did not return to Central Asia after the authoritarian collapsed (Spechler, 2004). According to Spechler (2004), this is why Central Asians do not have connections with non-authoritarian society. Moreover, Central Asians who have the chance to continue their education will go to Moscow. Therefore, the graduates from Moscow who held prominent positions during disintegration would create new authoritarian countries similar to Moscow. This similarity is one of the factors that causes the Central Asians countries depend on Moscow to imitate the authoritarian system.

The other significant factor is the poverty faced by Central Asian countries. Because of the poverty, the countries in Central Asia seek assistance to Russia related to the policy-making. Spechler (2004) includes Azerbaijan in Central Asia because this country asks for Russia's help regarding its fuel policy since it used to be centralized to Moscow. This is because human resources in Azerbaijan cannot handle its abundant natural resources and the crude oil. The other five countries do the same thing such as Kazakhstan with its Baikomour area, Tajikistan with its fuel and Russian military base, or Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan with its free custom duties for Russia. These free custom duties are known as Custom Union which not only covers custom duties but also security policy among the countries (Bohr, 2004).

The policies that refer back to Russia's policies were made after Central Asian countries had tried decentralization. This becomes turning points for each country since they start implementing authoritarian system again. According to Carney and Moran in *Imagining Communities in Central Asia: Nationalism and Interstate Affect in the Post Soviet Era*, the cause of this action is the *Interstate effect*. The tendency of Moscow centralization can be seen since 1996. Though new policies were implemented during 1992-1996, Carney and Moran's survey reveals that the people like pro-Russian policy better.

The nation in Central Asia, according to Carney and Moran, is a society consisting of different identity groups that are controlled by only one identity group. This problem occurred because during Soviet regime the countries in Central Asia were not comprised of only one ethnic; for instance, Kazakhstan was not only comprised by the Kazaks and so were Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Kazaks, Turkmens, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks have been integrated with other member countries of Soviet Union such as Russia, Ukraine, Mongol, and even people from Baltik (Lithuan, Estonian, Latvian). When

Central Asian countries gained independence, these countries apply identity policy as Soviet Union did; for instance, the Kyrgyzstan elevate the Kirgiz as Soviet Union elevated Russian (Carney, Morgan, 2000). The problem is that Kyrgyzstan is comprised of Russian, Tajik, Turkmen, and Kazak who do not speak and write Kazak language but Russia or their own languages. This happens in all Central Asian countries that try to revive their own national identity. Matteo Fumagalli in his research *Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilization in Central Asia: The Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan* shows clearly that the use of Kyrgyz and Tajik languages in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan created difficulty for the Uzbek. Interestingly, this difficulty is also faced by the Kyrgyz and Tajik. This is because of the authoritarian system during Soviet regime forced the use of Russian (reducing the use of Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek significantly) so that they could not communicate properly when the local language was revitalized. As a result, Russian is used among the ethnics. The first who came up with this idea is Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan president, with his harmonization policy. Not long after, other countries in Central Asia followed Nazarbayev though the implementation took different year. The impact of this policy is shown by the diagram below:



I will try to apply the theory in the above table to Central Asians. The highest position is the place for similar cognitive identity such as the Turkmen, Tajik, Uzbek, or the use of Kazak, Tajik, Kyrgyz languages in daily life. In this stage, *russification* (the process of becoming similar to Russia) during Soviet Union did not give influence because the nationalism was built based on the same ethnic or language. When it enters symbolic nationalism and cultural nationalism, the Russian characteristics began to influence Central Asians. The historical symbol that tends to be out of Central Asian characteristic is the similarity of being under communist symbols, or it can also be said as the area under Russian colonization. The similar historical symbol under communism cannot be separated from the communist culture, in this case Russian Marxism-Leninism. Thus, the different ethnical

characteristics in the highest position began to lean to clearer spot, Russia. In the below position, myth of the common descent becomes important. However, the myth of Central Asian had disappeared because of the Soviet authoritarian system. The last stage is quite crucial because there is superiority cult in it. They lost the past fame during the integration with Russia, and they gained new identity in 1992. If they called themselves the Turkmen, or the Kazakh, or Tajik, they would be part of 'common' nation or not-famous nation. Thus, if they referred back to Soviet nation – related to Russia-Moscow – then they would be the superior nation, for it is acknowledged as the world bipolar power.

This unconscious state of the Central Asians leads the emergence of romanticism – the longing for the welfare during Soviet authoritarian system. The policies that refer to Russia's remind them of the centralized era during Soviet regime. The romanticism towards centralized era is the significant issue that has been left out by the scholars mentioned earlier and the issue that I want to examine further. For example, I want to analyze the reason why the Kazakh rebuilt Vladimir Lenin statue or the reason why Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Russia created a new union along with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as the observer countries or the official use of Russian language in Central Asia. Such things trigger my curiosity towards the tendency of leaning back to previous authoritarian system that also happens in Indonesia nowadays.

## **Indonesia**

New Order Era officially ended when Soeharto, Indonesian second president, retired on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1998 and gave his position to B.J. Habibie. After New Order Era applying centralized military system ended, a new era named Reformation Era emerged in Indonesia. This new era, in contrast, applies decentralization system in which each region has full control of its own area. This system is known as local autonomy. The development patterns before and after 1998 are quite different. This difference is the result of law no.2 year 1999 regarding government and government regulation no.129 regarding the requirements and the formation of new local autonomy as well as the dismissal and unification of local autonomy that change how the government is run.

Since local autonomy is applied, the central government is not as powerful as it used to be in New Order Era. The local government now can issue the policies that used to depend on central government such as the policies related to the exploration of natural resources, the appointment of local civil servants, or the possibility of the dismissal of one area. This local autonomy aims to improve the welfare of the local society and equal development throughout Indonesia. It also is expected that each region is triggered to develop and be more independent so that they can compete with other nations in this globalization era (Harmantyo, 2011).

This local autonomy is similar to that of Central Asian countries. The decentralization creates new policies that point out the specific characteristics of each region. In the term of language, for instance, there is a policy to use Sundanese, a local language, on Wednesdays particularly in government institutions in West Java in order to point out the language characteristic of West Java (West Java regional policy no.5). However, the implementation does not yield the expected result as only some use Sundanese in daily life while others use Indonesian in general. It is an inevitable result of New Order's policy that emphasized on Indonesian use while removing Sundanese as compulsory subject in schools – although other

regions still kept their local language subjects in their curricula such as Javanese language in Central Java or East Java. The same situation happens in Aceh. Even though Aceh language is used widely in formal situation, the governor still uses Indonesian in his speech. It is because Aceh is comprised of some different ethnics using different languages, so they use Indonesian among them – similar to the case in Central Asia.

Both regions share similarity not only in term of language but also the unequal development such as less developed local areas compared to the central areas and the emergence of small kings. For instance, the capital city of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, did not undergo significant changes from 1992 to 2000 compared to Moscow. Similarly, Banda Aceh as the main city in the region did not develop as significantly as Jakarta as the capital city of Indonesia. The emergence of small kings in Indonesia can be seen from ‘the politics of dynasty’ spread widely Indonesia such as Banten Province which is controlled by Ratu Atut family. This politics of dynasty refers to the ultimate power of certain family over an area so that such family rules the area over generations. Similarly, Karimov in Uzbekistan and Nuzuebayev in Kasakhstan have the countries under their control since the collapse of Soviet regime.

According to James Rupert in *Dateline Tashkent: Post-Soviet Central Asia*, the backwardness faced by Central Asian countries was caused by the Islamic Revival movement – a movement holding high Islamic characteristics to replace communism in Central Asia. However, it did not last long. Since the end of 1999, they have refused to be connected with Iran and Turk, they have rebuild their relation with Moscow due to economic and security reasons as Vladimir Putin was chosen to replace Boris Yeltsin (Menon, Spruyt, 1999). By rebuilding the relation with Moscow, the Islamic Revival movement was replaced by the romanticism of Soviet welfare in the past.

The same happens in Indonesia, particularly the Islamic revival that is seen vividly in daily life. For instance, Aceh implements Islamic law some of which are against the 1945 Basic Law which is based on Pancasila in Indonesia. Then, the emergence of radical organizations under the name of Islam leads the citizens to long for the romanticism in New Order era. It is because Islam in New Order Era seemed to be more tolerant for the people. The factors that I have mentioned such as local language, small kings, radical Moslems are those causing romanticism in both Central Asia and Indonesia. Below are the pictures showing the romanticism of the authoritarian regime in these two regions:





Left: Suharto's picture (<http://nasional.news.viva.co.id/news/read/410964-nasdem-jawab--iklan-soeharto---jamanku-luweh-penak>, accessed on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013 09.00 WIB)

Right: Lenin's picture: <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/09/08/kazakhstan-lenin-more-alive-than-all-the-living/>, accessed on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013 09.00 WIB)

The two pictures above reflect the authoritarian regime in Central Asia and Indonesia: Vladimir Lenin along with his Soviet Union and Soeharto along with his New Order Era. These pictures are taken from virtual edition of daily newspaper bringing up the romanticism in both regions. Interestingly, the news regarding Lenin is written in English. If we take a look at Kazakhstan official news (Xa6ap), it will be easy to find Lenin's information along with communism. However, the English edition from non-government news shows that the romanticism of Lenin's figure has been vivid. I name it romanticism towards the authoritarian regime. The same happens in Indonesian news nowadays particularly *Kompas* daily newspaper from December 2<sup>nd</sup> to December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Some news depicts government policies that return to be centralized such as the appointment of local leaders should be done as it was before and the appointment of teachers should be done by central government. Specifically, a headline on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013 states *Pemekaran Dapat Picu Perpecahan* (Enlargement Triggers Disintegration) which I implicitly interpret as a refusal movement towards local autonomy.

Such issues above are those interest me to analyze further, to what extend I can compare the romanticism of authoritarian policies and romanticism of symbols reflecting authoritarian regime in Central Asia and Indonesia. During the research, I would like to pick once of Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan to be compared to Indonesia. This comparison will cover the centralized romanticism, government policy, language policy, and power relation and periphery position. I will take one issue as a central analysis such as the Indonesian language among the ethnics, while the other issues such as economics or politics are the complements. The analysis will be done one by one, from Kazakhstan – Indonesia, Tajikistan – Indonesia, Uzbekistan – Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan – Indonesia, Turkmenistan – Indonesia based on the authoritarian issues on both sides. This will result in detail analysis compared to just Central Asia-Indonesia analysis which only gives the outline. Also, I would like to see power relations among capital city and other cities such as Moscow with Baku, Tashkent, Almaty, Dushanbe compared to Jakarta – Aceh, Jakarta – Bandung or Jakarta – Jayapura. The result of the research will be used to gain basic understanding while picturing romanticism of authoritarian system in Central Asia and Indonesia. This will give great contribution in the field of cultural studies of Central Asia and Indonesia.

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