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Comparing Symmetric-Asymmetric Decentralization for Reducing Regional Tension: Indonesia and Thailand Experience

Abstract

In recent years, the growing number of public administration literature has concerned the effectiveness of decentralization to deal with ethnic conflicts. This issue is rising up due to the several failure reports of decentralization to manage the social conflicts and regional tension that possibly evolve into secessionism. This paper intended to explore the performance of symmetric and asymmetric decentralization to manage social conflicts that occurred in Indonesia and Thailand. This descriptive study was conducted through a qualitative approach and strengthened by analytical thinking exposure. Papua province, Indonesia, and some provinces in southern Thailand had been selected as the case study due to their political decision for implementing asymmetric and symmetric decentralization to manage ethnic conflict in each region. The result shows that either symmetric or asymmetric decentralization might be thought of as one of the viable solutions to managing social conflicts. However, both of these decentralization configurations may generate pros and cons impact. It is suggested that policy makers recognize the consequence of each implementation to consider appropriate decision-making. The analysis of this paper shows that symmetric decentralization tends to promote effectiveness and efficiency while asymmetric decentralization will be closer to tolerance and equality.

Keywords:

regional tensions; asymmetric decentralization; symmetric decentralization

Introduction

History has noted that it is nearly impossible for a country to avoid ethnic conflict, which is emanating a major threat to peace as well as national

stability (Brancati, 2009). Even in a modern age with massive development of information and technology that offers various ways of communication, ethnic controversy seems to be a latent

problem for many governments around the world. During the last decade, there are at least more than 18 conflicts that occurred around the world and some of them have brought devastating impacts on humanity, such as Rohingya genocide, Central African Republic conflict, or Communal conflicts in Nigeria (Global R2P, 2019).

In many cases, the small-sized ethnic conflicts will tend to evolve to be a separatist movements and lead to secessionism (Tyungu and Koko, 2018). It is then frequently recognized as regional tension, which is referring to conflict or differences between different regions within a country. In most cases, regional tension might commonly occur due to several reasons including economic inequalities, religious conflicts, political or other social issues. Furthermore, some external factors such as foreign power or global political climate also possibly fueled the regional tension and turned them into a larger scale of conflict. Under this circumstance, they will become a threat to the national economy and political stabilization. Thus, given these serious consequences of secessionism, either in the economic or political sector, many researchers have attempted to discover a viable tool to prevent and minimize further conflict on a larger scale.

Decentralization has been assumed as one of the effective tools for minimizing ethnic conflict by using its political features (Tranchant, 2007). Indeed, from a normative point of view, the existence of decentralization will be expected to minimize the conflict by the local representative delivering the local aspiration from the minority groups (Keil and Anderson, 2018; Yusoff, Sarjoon, and Hassan, 2016; or Cakin, 2017). However, from a practical point, the story is told differently. Under the democratic mechanism, the political decision is commonly decided by the number of votes from the House of Representatives at the national level. At this point, the local representative from the majority group will tend to outweigh the minority ones (Soesmith, Franklin, and Hidayat, 2020).

Therefore, the existence of local representatives from the minority group seems to be pointless.

The asymmetric decentralization, then offers a solution to put special features for minority regions considering their specific needs in local representatives. Fiorillo, Giuranno, and Sacchi (2021) in their work argue the special features carried by asymmetric decentralization provide a trade-off to the minority group for their imbalance position. Furthermore, the research conducted by Abdurahman & Dewansyah (2019), Utama (2019), and Muluk (2021) has underlined the perception that the features of asymmetric decentralization might reduce the social tension within minority regions. However beyond these findings from asymmetric decentralization supporters, numerous critiques also emerged, particularly from the side of symmetric decentralization supporters such as Bermeo (2002) or Lustik et al (2004). Narang (1995) in his study found that the decision to apply asymmetric decentralization for certain regions will lead to contradictory principles such as norms, values, or regulations with the other surrounding regions. Furthermore, the special feature embedded in asymmetric decentralization in certain regions may become the trigger for social enviousness from other regions (Penn, 2008). Therefore, the early purpose of the central government to reduce social tension may likely have failed due to the turbulence within local society.

In some countries, the phenomenon of asymmetric decentralization has been commonly criticized by other representatives from outside of minority regions. Consequently, the central government has no other choice but to implement symmetric decentralization or deliver a similar feature for other regions. Even in Indonesia, the implementation of asymmetric decentralization has also attracted critiques, for instance, Lele (2019) reveals that the implementation of asymmetric decentralization in Indonesia has generated problems in governance. In addition

to this matter, the debate between symmetric and asymmetric decentralization reflects an everlasting debate since both of these notions are frequently confusing for policymakers.

Given the importance to explore a wider exposure regarding the role of symmetric and asymmetric decentralization to minimize social conflicts, this paper is intended to reveal the complexities among them by using qualitative research. This study was undertaken in two regions as a comparative object of this research. The first region is Papua Islands, one of the regions with high intensity of social conflicts over a few decades. It covers two provinces, namely Papua Province and Papua Barat Province. Furthermore, the second object is located in the southern part of Thailand that is covering four provinces including Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, and Pattani, which are also recognized as vulnerable to regional tension.

Both regions have been selected as the case study due to their suitability to illustrate the phenomenon of social conflicts motorized by religion, ethnic, race, as well as welfare inequalities. Yet, both governments have decided to conduct different approaches, highlighting the Indonesian government with asymmetric decentralization and the Thai Royal government embracing under symmetric decentralization scheme. In this study, we intend to explore a comparative analysis between symmetric and asymmetric decentralization to manage social conflicts by relying on a specific focus written in the methodological section.

To do so, the first section of this paper will provide semantic background explaining the history of social conflict and regional tension as well as the role of decentralization to manage them. Furthermore, in the second part, the literature review section will illustrate an exposure of decentralization to manage social conflict, including the configuration of symmetric and asymmetric implementation. The third and fourth parts will respectively continue the

explanation about methodology and results of inquiry underlining early portraits, the pattern of conflicts, and decentralization policy in both regions. The discussion is then followed by analyzing the political will and the preference of policymakers to determine symmetric or asymmetric decentralization as a tool to minimize social conflicts and regional tension.

Literature overview

Decentralization: a motion, option, or solution?

Under the growing trend of a democratic world, the demand for a balanced governing system is continuously rising over time, flowing from developed to developing countries (Wignaraja, 2013). On this occasion, it is nearly impossible to deliver the policy through the central government only. In addition, Widodo (2004) in his work adds 'the government will only be able to maximize its performance if closer to society'. In this regard, the decentralization concept has been developed to become an associative tool to maintain the authority and control given by the central government to the local government (Grindle, 2007).

However, the implementation of decentralization may leave a challenge in some countries (Wardhana, 2019). In developed countries, where the economic and social conditions are commonly stable, the decentralization scheme might frequently perform its function properly. The situation is slightly different when economic and social turbulence become the barrier to the transfer of authority from the central to the local level (Sutiyo, 2014). Under this circumstance, the process to transfer authority will become a vulnerable point due to a lack of trust in the central government and mismanagement of authority at the local level (Smoke, 2015). In many cases, the given authority may develop to a greater scale and lead to chaotic situations before the demand for secessionism emerges. Conversely, it may also be shrunk by the rigid control from the central government, and commonly, it will lead to

dissatisfaction with central government decisions. At this point, there is a chance of dissatisfaction turning to be a secessionist movement.

The uncertain impact of decentralization is sometimes raising a dilemma for policymakers, whether decentralization is a real solution or merely an option to manage regional tension. Brancati (2009), in his research, questioned: 'Is decentralization fueling the fire or dampening the flames into the social conflicts?'. The findings of the research then conclude that decentralization actually carried some features to minimize the conflict, but in some ways, the feature may have a side effect. One of the prominent examples illustrating this assertion is when the central government provides a privilege for the minority ethnic through asymmetric decentralization. On one hand, the given privilege may become fair compensation for the minority, but on the other hand, it may trigger social envy from the majority ethnicity.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Kwori (2022) confirms that the contribution of decentralization to reduce social conflicts in Juba County (South Sudan) is marginal. This minimum impact of decentralization has occurred due to several reasons including failure to plan and imperfect implementation. This phenomenon can be seen based on a high number of corruption, tribalism, nepotism, and unbalanced development. However, in this case, at least the implementation of decentralization has generated a direct impact on enhancing the responsiveness of local authority and consequently lead to inter-ethnic unity. Yet, completing the series of these literatures, Flamand and Hunter (2019) reveal that decentralization may be an effective tool to prevent secession, but there is always a range of effective degrees that is compatible to preserve national unity. The discourse of this literature concise that decentralization might be thought of as a motion with minor impact, an option with any possible outcomes, or even a solution to manage regional tensions effectively, but the general concept of

decentralization will require specific adjustments to meet desired purposes.

Toward Symmetric and Asymmetric Decentralization

Decentralization reforms are often designed and implemented uniformly or using a symmetrical approach. In symmetrical decentralization, local governments are given autonomy and treated equally in executing various roles and functions that have been decentralized regardless of their differences in physical, ethnic or cultural (Allain-Dupré et al., 2020). Symmetrical decentralization lies in the purpose to reflect and reproduce national government institutions at the subnational or regional level by placing lower units as if the regions were a microcosm of the central government (Katorobo, 2007). Promoting the successful implementation of symmetrical decentralization is often requiring strong equity mechanisms and is not demanding the possibility of implementing structural administrative reforms such as city mergers (Allain-Dupré et al, 2020).

In addition, a number of countries are widely known to adopt asymmetrical decentralization systems that differ from symmetric decentralization. The symmetrical decentralization pattern is characterized by "the level of conformity and commonality in the relations of each separate political unit of the system to both the system as a whole and to the other component units" (Tarlton, 1965). The symmetrical relationship between each state/region and the central government is based on the amount and weight of the same authority. Meanwhile, in an asymmetric decentralization pattern, one or more local government units are characterized by "possessed of varying degrees of autonomy and power" (Tarlton, 1965). The different level of autonomy and authority is marked by the non-uniform arrangement of the authority content that forms a different level of relationship between asymmetrical states/

regions and other political/government units both horizontally (symmetrical states/regions) and vertically (national).

Asymmetrical decentralization is often seen as a central characteristic in federal states while symmetrical decentralization is generally seen as a central principle in unitary states. However, in its development, asymmetric decentralization has also become more common in unitary states due to the need to reform metropolitan governance (Allain-Dupré et al 2020). The asymmetric decentralization adoption can occur for various reasons, for example, due to the fact that communities have different preferences at the local level (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). The reason for implementing asymmetric decentralization differs between unitary states and federal states, either in terms of political (historical, cultural, and ethnic), or administrative (capacity, efficiency, and learning issues), or fiscal.

Asymmetrical decentralization in countries with unitary, federal, and confederal political systems has gained more attention over the past decade (Bagnoli & Watts, 2000). There are several benefits and challenges that may be encountered in asymmetric decentralization enforcement. The challenges are often related to the costs of coordinating complex systems that may be unclear to citizens and pose accountability challenges, especially at the metropolitan level. Another challenge is related to the increasing disparities

in capacity between regions, and yet in extreme cases, the chance of threatening national unity may be even higher (Allain-Dupré, et al (2020).

This description above illustrates that despite some challenges that arise in its implementation, the benefits provided by decentralization are more numerous. In general, asymmetric decentralization favors experimentation, learning by doing, and innovation in policy-making which is ultimately a continuation of location-based policies. The experience of different countries in generating the results of asymmetric decentralization shows that asymmetric arrangements in decentralized architectures are more frequent and, in some cases, more accommodating, durable, and practical, as well as more flexible and effective in managing and preventing conflicts between governments (MacGarry, 2001; Coakley, 2004; Conversi, 2007).

Methods

This study is a descriptive research that has been performed through a qualitative approach. It was conducted by doing a comparative analysis that is intended to evaluate two different mechanisms to manage similar problems. This method was chosen to understand the problems as complex, dynamic, and probabilistic, so it may need more than a single option as a viable solution (Eriyatno, 1999). In this study, the primary data collection has been gathered from semi-structured interviews with several key informants

Table 1.
Benefits and Challenge of Asymmetric Decentralization

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accommodate diverse preferences for autonomy across regions ▪ Adapting the institutional and fiscal frameworks to the capacities of subnational governments ▪ Advanced form of place-based policies ▪ Experimenting ▪ Sequencing decentralization ▪ Providing the enabling institutional environment to design territorial development strategies more targeted to local needs ▪ Tailoring solutions for special challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of accountability and transparency ▪ Complexity and coordination costs ▪ Lack of clarity for citizens ▪ Potential risks of increased disparities (in capacities) ▪ Secession and autonomy

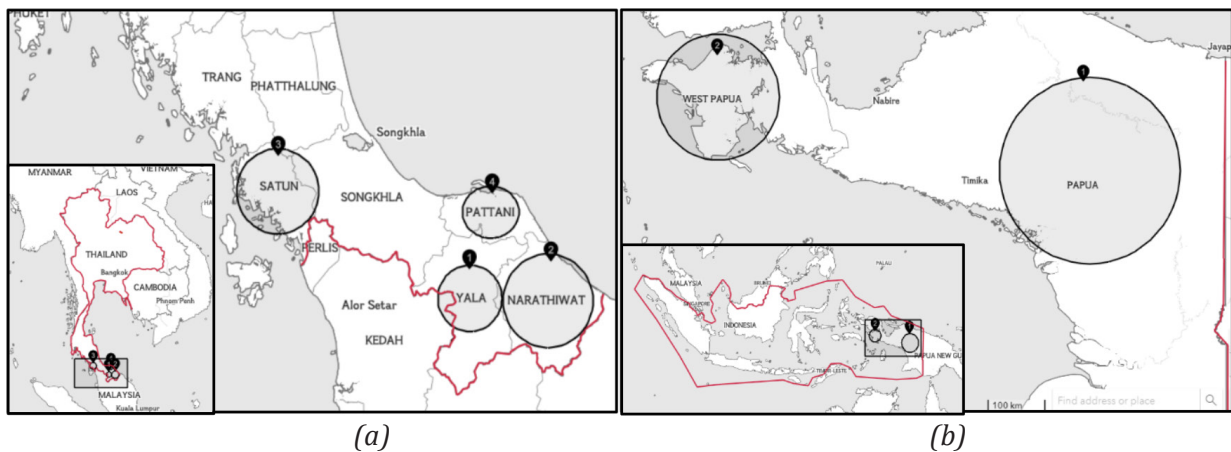
Source: Allain-Dupre, et al (2020)

Table 2.
Detailed information of Key Informants

No	Key informant's initial of name*	Origins Country	Position	Expertise/ Expected Information
1	Mr. JBR	Indonesia	Papua's local Councillor	Contextual understanding of asymmetric decentralization in Papua and West Papua Province
2	Mr. MA, Mr. LCH, Mr. AG, and Mrs. JPA	Indonesia	Bureaucrats and policy maker (in province and local level)	Implementation of asymmetric decentralization in Papua and West Papua Province
3	Mr. AS, and Mr. PAP	Indonesia	Academician	Theoretical Argumentation regarding the social conflict phenomenon in Papua and the practical implication of Asymmetric Decentralization
4	Mr. TAH, Mr. KS, and Mr. DTG	Indonesia	Local ethnic-based NGOs and former member of the separatist organization	The origins, trajectory, and content of social conflicts that occurred in Papua and West Papua Province
5	Mrs. SPC, and Mr. AS	Thailand	Academician	Contextual understanding of symmetric decentralization in Thailand
6	Mr. CJ, and Mr. AR	Thailand	Military Officer & Bureaucrats	Implementation of symmetric decentralization from practical view
7	Mr. T, Mr. BW, and Mr. CA	Thailand	Local Civilians	The origins, trajectory, and content of social conflicts occurred in Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, and Pattani Province of Thailand.

*Most informants are not willing to expose their identity due to some sensitive information they provided.
Source: Author (2022)

Figure 1.
Study location of Southern Thailand (a) and Papua Island, Indonesia (b)



Source: Author

who are comprised of military officers, professors, and students from both Indonesia and Thailand. The following table will describe the detailed information regarding the background of each of our key informants.

Aside from the qualitative data, this research is also strengthened by the information from a secondary database, which consists of official documents, publications, as well as academic papers related to both cases. The information collected in this inquiry had been broken down

into smaller parts to determine where the elements are made from and how they are interconnected by identifying causes, making conclusions, and finding evidence to support generalizations (Montaku et al, 2012).

This inquiry was conducted in four provinces located in the Southern part of Thailand (Province Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, and Pattani) and two provinces in Papua island, Indonesia (Province Papua and West Papua) as seen in the following Figure 1.

Both of the countries have been selected as case studies due to their suitability to illustrate how different approaches were undertaken to manage similar cases of social conflicts. In Thailand, the royal government manages to apply symmetrical decentralization while in Indonesia the national government would rather decide the asymmetrical one. Both of these decentralization concepts have different features and mechanisms, therefore it might be difficult to assess them in standardized variables or measurement. Accordingly, this research will perform the evaluation not by assessing through certain variables but by seeking "how" and "why" the different models of decentralization manage the social conflicts and regional tension in both countries.

This research lies on three major focuses; first, the early portraits of conflicts and regional tension that occurred in each region; second, the pattern of social conflicts occurred in each region; and finally, how decentralization policy features generate the impact to minimize existing social conflict and regional tension. Furthermore, the analysis conducted in this research is adopting an interactive data analysis as performed by Miles, Hubberman, and Saldana (2014). In a more detailed look, the analysis process will be directed to address the performance of each model of decentralization in reducing social conflicts and regional tension. It commenced by exploring the motive or political will behind the decision over the decentralization model, and followed by the preference of decentralization feature, whether it is symmetric or asymmetric. Thus by exploring both of these components, this paper is expected to be able to illustrate the decision-making and implementation phase comprehensively.

Results

The result of this study underlined several important topics correlated to symmetric and asymmetric decentralization in two provinces

of Papua Island, Indonesia, as well as four provinces in Southern Thailand. Derived from the research focuses aforementioned in the previous section, the description of this section will comprise an early portrait of the conflicts, social conflict's pattern, and the decentralization policy undertaken by each government.

Early Portraits of social conflicts and regional tension

Historically, both social conflicts and regional tension in Papua Island, Indonesia, and some of the provinces in the Southern part of Thailand have long chronological events. In the case of Papua Island, this research has found at least there are four major motives. First, the marginalized citizen which refers to the difference in culture and physical characteristics of indigenous people in Papua. Second, the failure of development reflects the gap between some regions in the western part of Indonesia and the eastern part of Indonesia. In economic measurement, the development in the western part of Indonesia tends to grow faster than that in the eastern part. This phenomenon has generated socio-economic disparity between the western part and the eastern part of Indonesia where Papua Island is located. In addition, the third motive is the failure of social integrity to minimize the difference between Javanese culture as the majority culture and Papua culture. Finally, the old history of military behavior and race discrimination in the past has become one of the reasons for secession in the current age.

The interview from Mr. JBR as a member of Papua's Local Council results in an actual confirmation regarding this phenomenon, he says;

"...if we want to talk about the social problems which have currently occurred here (in Papua), they are inseparable from some factors, for example racial discrimination in the past which makes the people around here feel different from the majority citizens of Indonesia. Besides, in the past, the

national development has been focused on Javanese and Sumatra islands for a long time, thus it creates a socio-economic disparity between western and eastern..." (interview result from Mr. JBR in 07 Mar, 2020)

The information from Mr. JBR has also been confirmed by the other key informants, for instance, the interview result from Mr. KS who lived in West Papua province for more than 50 years, he argues;

"...When I was young, people around us always had a concern regarding the tragedy of Irian Barat, and then while issues of Timor Leste independence, some of the local civilians were also inspired, and as a consequence, they had to face the military force. This moment sometimes creates a traumatic event and is the seed of rebellion in some regions around here. The rebellion in the past had also been motorized by the force to make us obey to national law, in which at that time many of our people preferred to abide by our local tribe leader. I think this fact has been considered as the primary reason why the negotiation process with the central government seems quite difficult..." (interview result from Mr. KS in 07 Mar, 2020)

Both of the Information conveyed by Mr. JBR and Mr. KS illustrate plenty of reasons why the Indonesian government manages to put in additional features of decentralization for Papua Islands.

Meanwhile, in the southern part of Thailand, the primary reason for ethnic conflict emerged in 1902 as the result of chaotic situations from political and cultural matters. According to the information from Mr. BW, one of our key informants '*...the religion and culture have become the vulnerable thing to trigger the ethnic conflict in southern Thailand...*' he then explains if '*...in past the cultural diversity in some province such as Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat was reflecting*

different exposure with the majority culture. Thus, in this case, the stigma of minority existed...' In Thailand, some small rebellions might have occurred, caused by ethnicity matters, and there is domination of the state in the southern part of Thailand, and restrictions on various cultural and religious practices.

Aside from the aforementioned information, the interview with Mr. SPC even provides a deeper explanation; he conveys:

"...The social issues are very sensitive in Southern-part of Thailand; we believe it correlates with geographical proximity with neighboring countries such as Malaysia where most of the ethnicity in southern Thailand is quite resemblance. As we can see, in some provinces with direct borders to Malaysia such as Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, social conflicts were more frequently occurring, which is usually triggered by religious matters. Then we can compare to Satun province, which tends to have a lower number of social conflicts even though Muslims are quite dominant in that region..." (interview result from Mr. SPC in 26, Nov 2019)

The statement from Mr. SPC highlights the influence of external effects on the tension of social conflicts. It sometimes becomes a primary trigger to raise negative stigma over certain developing issues, so that the local society becomes more sensitive over some cultural matters. In a further inquiry, some other key informants believe that the high number of social conflicts in southern Thailand led to a slowing of economic growth, which is in fact most of them are less developed than the rest of the country.

From the series of interviews with Indonesian and Thailand informants, it can be inferred that both of them have similar attributes in different situations as seen in the following table 3.

In Table 3, it can be seen that ethnicity and religion are still becoming cultural issues, which is

Table 3.
Comparative Illustration of Social conflicts characteristics, Socio-Economic Disparity and Territorial Issues in Papua and in Southern Thailand

No	General Attributes	Detailed	Indonesia	Thailand
1	Social Conflicts characteristics	Majority and Minority in ethnics Majority and Minority in religion Cultural Diversity Potential to secessionism Specific organization supporting the secessionism	- Javanese and other ethnic with similar physical characteristics as Malay (majority), and Indigenous Papua tribes who predominantly Australoid physical characteristics (minority) - Muslims (majority) and Christians (minority) - Yes - High (with continuous attempts in chaotic situations) - Yes, with high-intensity of efforts.	- Siamese, Lao, Yuan and other ethnic with oriental physical characteristics (majority), and Malay tribe (minority) - Buddhist (majority), and Muslims (minority) - Yes - Moderate - No, although in certain situations the minority group may establish the small community defending their interests.
2	Socio-Economic Disparity	Diversity on Resources Allocation Employment	- Yes, Papua province has additional financial resources that are allocated through special autonomy grant. - Yes, with high disparity on employment sector	- No, the central government of Thailand manage to give extra resources allocation for all region with special economic necessary (The horizontal issues often not included as the primary consideration) - Yes, with moderate rate of disparity on employment sector
3	Territorial Issues	Metropolis Problems Geographical characteristics	- No, The metropolis problems has not involved in ethnic conflict in Papua. However, several issues of social welfare also become a primary trigger to the conflicts. Separated by the coast (island).	- Yes, some of the metropolis problems have become the triggers of conflicts like crime, social conflicts, and ethnic sentiment. Separated by land (inland).

Source: Author (Retrieved from research output)

reflecting the difference in physical characteristics and folkways. However, both of these social issues underwent a different trajectory to secessionism in which in Papua, the potential of secessionism, is considerably higher than in southern Thailand. This higher potential of secessionism in Papua is stimulated by the existence of strong influence of separatist organizations, with their effort to establish chaotic situations in some areas. In contrast, the Thailand case indicates a weaker influence of separatist organization involvement demanding certain cultural interests (not for secessionism). Furthermore, regarding the socio-economic disparity, both of these regions with minority groups of citizens have undergone

similar disparity problems compared to the other region with less number of social conflicts.

The Pattern of Conflicts

The finding of this research reveals that there are slight differences between the pattern of conflicts in Papua and some provinces in Thailand. In Papua, the conflicts likely occurred continuously. It means, there are explicit organizations supporting secessionism such as Free Papua Movement also known as '*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*' or locally known as '*OPM*' (1961-current). Since there is this kind of explicit organization, the national government of Indonesia has actually never accomplished

total control of the ethnic conflict in Papua. Furthermore, the geographical situation that is dominated by tropical rain forests also becomes another problem for the national government to stop the activity of OPM.

The OPM continued to carry out the rebellion due to several factors. One of them is motivated by the dissatisfaction with Papua being part of Indonesia. Until now, the OPM conflict has not found a settlement point and continues to voice its interest in filing a lawsuit against the Government of Indonesia. As long as the OPM does not comply with its demands, the organization will threaten that the war between the OPM and the Government of Indonesia will not end.

In Thailand, the pattern of conflicts occurred in certain times for years. Unlike the ethnic conflict that occurred in Papua, which is motorized by specific organizations, in Thailand there are only small communities of certain ethnic groups that motorized the separatist movement. So, the conflict has not occurred continuously. However, the illustration of ethnic conflict in southern Thailand seems to be the fire in a husk. It means it may occur at any time when the trigger has been moved. Like in the 1980s, it heated up again and received serious attention in 2004 when the number and scale of violent events increased rapidly (Burke, et al., 2013), not much different from Indonesia. There is the emergence of various separatist organizations in Thailand such as BNPP (Barisan Nasional Liberation Pattani), BRN (Barisan Revolutionary National), and PULO (Pattani United Liberation Organization) (Liow and Pathan, 2010), although this did not occur continuously. However, this separatist movement can reappear when there is support from stakeholders who can provide financial assistance, training, and even refuge that invites sympathy.

Decentralization Policy

In a common structure, the decentralization policy in Indonesia and Thailand have been settled to maintain authoritative transfer from

central to local government level. Furthermore, likewise in many other developing countries, the social conflicts are commonly occurred due to the settlement process of sharing authority from central government entities to the lower ones. One of our respondents from Indonesia confirms:

"...Actually, the process of transferring authority from central to local level will possibly lead to equality by ensuring the function of equal political and administrative power, especially in terms of managing available resources. However, the problems are sometimes tended to be more complex than that. In this case, some of the cultural and ethnical differences may generate a social conflict even beyond the economic matters..." (interview result from Mr. MA in 22, oct 2020)

In this regard, some marginalized citizens might consider their position to be minor compared to the majority ones. Furthermore, they were sometimes considering looking for another similar culture and tribes beyond countries, and this might become an embryo of secessionist movement.

The decentralization policies in both countries have actually facilitated the minimizing of these kinds of social conflicts. However, there are fundamental differences between them in the implementation phase. In Indonesia, the central government uses asymmetric decentralization by providing special features for Papua province. This special feature performed as the local autonomy to manage their region correlated to the local culture. Furthermore, another feature given by the central government is additional fiscal support. This financial support is expected to minimize the development gap between Papua and West Papua Province with the average rate of national development.

Aside from Papua and West Papua provinces, the central government of Indonesia also provides another scheme of asymmetric decentralization for Aceh, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta Province

(Although these 3 provinces are beyond our scope of study). Each of them has different features of asymmetric decentralization; for example, in Aceh province, the central government has decided to permit the region to adopt several principles of Islam in Aceh. While in Yogyakarta, the special feature of asymmetric decentralization is correlated to the law of the Yogyakarta kingdom. Finally, in Jakarta, asymmetric decentralization has enabled the governor to appoint the best candidate for local mayor. This phenomenon is different compared to the mechanism in other regions, which is that normally the local mayor should be elected through a ballot system in local elections.

Moving the discussion from the Indonesian case, the decentralization policy in Thailand is managed by the central government under the monarch constitutional system. In Thailand, the central government tends to use symmetric decentralization which means equality for all regions including some regions with a high potential for ethnic conflict. All the provinces in the southern part of Thailand like the province of Yala, Satun, Narathiwat, and Pattani have similar features of decentralization with other surrounding regions. This research found that by

far the mediating process has become one of the most effective ways to minimize the ethnic conflict in Thailand. The interview with one of our key informants from Thailand reveals:

"...Our government by far conducting the mediating process to manage social conflicts that frequently occurred in those provinces. As a bureaucrat's member, I consider this to be one of the effective ways that has proven good results in Satun province. However, for Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani province, the phenomenon of social conflicts was like a fire in a husk in which may potentially emerge during sensitive agenda and times..." (interview result from Mr. AS in 9 Oct, 2019)

Based on this information, it can be seen that the option to take symmetric decentralization for the areas with marginalized citizens is quite logical and reasonable. However, as a trade-off, the perspective of minority ethnic was still existed and social tension in those regions were likely to emerge in certain circumstances.

Although the central government of Thailand has decided to apply symmetric decentralization to manage the ethnic conflicts, they have also implemented an asymmetric feature for economic development. Under this circumstance, the city

Table 4.
The different characteristics of Government Policy of Indonesia and Thailand to manage social conflicts

No	General Attributes	Detailed	Indonesia	Thailand
1.	Government Policy	Political Cultural Diversity	- Yes, the central government provides an accommodation for local regulation to be implemented for indigenous people	- No, the central government considers the universal political mechanism for all province
		Need for Effectiveness and Efficiency	- No, the asymmetric decentralization given by the central government has managed to provide extra resources, financial support, and authority which is contradict to effectiveness and efficiency principle.	- Yes, the central government of Thailand administered a similar feature, either for the region with high-intensity of ethnic conflicts or the other region
		Amendment of Constitution	- Yes, there are several changes affecting the authoritative terms for Papua	- No, there are significant changes in the national constitution correlated to minority regions in Thailand
		Reformation impact on minority region	- Yes, special autonomy is given to Papua province.	- No, there are no significant impacts for minority regions.

Source: Author (Retrieved from the Research findings)

of Pattaya and Bangkok have received several privileges to maximize tourism and gain local revenue. In short, the disposition of policy makers in Thailand considers asymmetric decentralization for economic growth rather than social stability. Yet, the following table tries to illustrate the difference between the situation in Indonesia and Thailand that might become the reason for different perspectives of policy makers in each country.

The effort of government to manage social conflicts and regional tension in Indonesia and Thailand resulted in a different impact, either with or without special features given to the minority region. In Indonesia, the central government's effort to manage social conflicts through negotiation seems to meet its failure since the separatist organization neglects to obey the national control, so that the central government decides to apply asymmetric decentralization by considering political cultural diversity features. However in Thailand, the Royal Thai government seems reluctant to give extra decentralization features to some southern Thai provinces for the need for effective and efficient budgeting allocation.

Discussion

The Political Will of Decentralization

The result of this study has underlined that both countries have applied decentralization to maximize society's welfare. It explains that either Indonesia or Thailand agreed that authority transfer is one of the essential processes to maintain the best form of government. Furthermore, it has proven that decentralization is more than a motion written on blank paper. However, both pieces of evidence reveal that the implementation of decentralization should be following the natural characteristic of a nation. It is the preference of every nation to implement decentralization according to their best-desired goals. This phenomenon is relevant to the statement of

Widodo (2004) and Grindle (2007) underlining that decentralization might become the viable solution to accomplish good governance.

Then, the further question correlated with this statement is, could decentralization become a solution for all mechanisms of authority transfer? The answer to this question is closely related to the government's performance to adjust the features of political decentralization itself. The finding in the Indonesian case which tends to use asymmetric decentralization and comparing the Thailand case with their symmetric decentralization explain the right political will for the right situation. It can be illustrated if the Indonesian central government chooses different ways which refer to symmetric decentralization as it was before the amendment, then the result will be a huge gap of socio-economic disparity, and in a further projection, it possibly increases the support of separatist organizations from local society.

Conversely, in Thailand, the feature of asymmetric decentralization is difficult to implement due to several reasons; first, the geographical location of the province Yala, Pattani, Satun, and Narathiwat have inland access with other provinces. It will increase the chance of information transfer, including social envies from other ethnicity, especially when the central government provides special political benefits over the other provinces. Second, the special feature of asymmetric decentralization given to the minority region will enhance the authority conflict with surrounding regions and may stimulate larger conflicts. Finally, at the H of representative level, all provinces in Thailand have a similar quota to vote for the decision. Thus, the decision number from the majority will still outweigh the minority and the existence of asymmetric aspects will only result in a lack of efficiency in the decision-making process.

These reasons have theoretically supported the statement of Tranchant (2007) who

supports decentralization as an effective tool to minimize ethnic conflict. It also neglects the assertion of Penn (2008) about the side effects of asymmetric decentralization. In this case, the social enviousness as the side effect of asymmetric decentralization can be managed by appropriate decisions. Either in Indonesia or Thailand, both governments have undertaken the decentralization principle and implemented them in different ways. This phenomenon also answers the question of Brancati (2009) regarding whether decentralization is fueling or dampening social conflicts. In short, the findings of this research clarify if decentralization may become an effective tool to minimize ethnic conflict through the right decision. In other ways, there should be good political will within the implementation process.

The Preference under Symmetric and Asymmetric Decentralization

In this section, the discussion will be focused on exploring the complexities between symmetric and asymmetric decentralization, particularly on why both of them cannot be implemented interchangeably to minimize ethnic conflict. The concept of symmetric decentralization deals with the actual proportion of given authority, promoting the effectiveness and efficiency of all local governments. Conversely, asymmetric decentralization focused on different ways. It mainly talks about tolerance, stability, and other equality benefits as described by Allain-Dupré, et al (2020). Therefore, it can be inferred in a primary decision that it is more efficient to apply symmetric decentralization rather than asymmetric decentralization, as long as the central government can control the ethnic conflict through a win-win solution.

Of course, this statement is promoted in the context of the region with the ethnic conflicts and has no correlation for symmetric and asymmetric decentralization beyond them such as in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, which are intended for

administrative purposes or in the city of Pattaya and Bangkok, which are expected to the economic purposes. However, when the ethnic conflict has failed to be solved by a win-win solution and tends to grow to be a separatist movement or secessionism, then asymmetric decentralization can be a viable option.

Some critiques toward asymmetric decentralization, such as contradictory principles with the surrounding region, as conveyed by Lustik et al (2004) or Narang (1995), have not been proven in this research. In the case of Papua, the contradictory regulation has not been found in the surrounding region, although at some representative level, the issues of ethnic conflict still become a vulnerable topic. The author of this paper argues that this situation may be different if Papua has an inland territorial border with other provinces with majority ethnic. The flow of information can spread easily and the negative stigma of difference can quickly become contradictory values, norms, or regulations.

The right degree between applying symmetric and asymmetric decentralization lies in the need of efficiency and effectiveness or democracy and equality. This different orientation between symmetric and asymmetric decentralization has become the primary reason why it is difficult to implement them interchangeably. The central government needs to consider the overall impact to apply one of the mechanisms to solve the ethnic conflict in certain regions.

Conclusions

This study investigated the comparative analysis between symmetric and asymmetric decentralization to manage social conflicts in Indonesia and Thailand. The result of this study confirms that there was a different pattern of conflicts between these two regions where the continuous tensions have occurred in Papua, Indonesia, while the people in Thailand have experienced conflicts at certain times in a year.

To resolve the ethnic conflicts, the Indonesian government has implemented asymmetric decentralization while the Thailand government has performed symmetric decentralization. These two systems cannot be implemented interchangeably because symmetric decentralization mainly promotes an efficient and effective process while asymmetric decentralization lies in the idea of democracy and equality.

This study presents the results for researchers to have clearer concepts of the complexities that arise when implementing decentralization in diminishing conflicts. Despite the contribution of this study, several limitations should be mentioned. First, this study was limited to the two countries in Southeast Asia. Second, the analysis relied on the primary and secondary data. Third, the social conflicts were only available in the evaluation, while the vertical conflicts were not considered. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the government in strengthening concrete public governance to overhaul the tensions between the population in each region by considering the overall impact.

Yet, at the community level, the local civilian should also totally realize the potential of social conflict that might occur among them. Accordingly, they will accommodate the preparedness aspect to manage the social conflict that may emerge during the implementation of symmetric or asymmetric decentralization. Finally, it is suggested for future research to explore the implementation of symmetric and asymmetric decentralization in other countries with different governance attributes and characteristics. This future research is expected to be able to fill the gap by providing various kinds of information with their points of novelty.

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