

Contemporary History of Indonesia between Historical Truth and Group Purpose

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Received: May 28, 2015 Accepted: October 13, 2015 Online Published: November 24, 2015

doi:10.5539/res.v7n12p179

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/res.v7n12p179>

Abstract

Contemporary history is the very latest history at which the historic event traces are close and still encountered by us at the present day. As a just away event which seems still exists, it becomes controversial about when the historical event is actually called contemporary. Characteristic of contemporary history genre is complexity of an event and its interpretation. For cases in Indonesia, contemporary history usually begins from 1945. It is so because not only all documents, files and other primary sources have not been uncovered and learned by public yet where historical reconstruction can be made in a whole, but also a fact that some historical figures and persons are still alive. This last point summons protracted historical debate when there are some collective or personal memories and political consideration and present power. The historical facts are often provided to please one side, while disagreeable fact is often hidden from other side. The article aims to discuss some subject matter of contemporary history in Indonesia as they are printed in history textbook for school, along with varies issues. The article will make correction about context of some issues that they actually used as discussion topic among teachers of history. In the last part of this article, it will outline on how we respond to contemporary history of Indonesia. Conclusion is made that in context of contemporary history in Indonesia, it found two interests, i.e. for historical truth and group purpose.

Keywords: contemporary history between historical truth and group purpose

1. Introduction

It is interesting for an analysis topic that debate issues on contemporary history of Indonesia just appeared during the New Order (1966-1998). As a military regime involved intensively in revolution and post-revolution struggle in Indonesia (since 1945), the New Order government believes they have right to get “shares of revolution” whose role is recorded in historiography of Indonesia (Marwati et al., 1984). Meanwhile, image of the New Order’s political power, which is about to shine since 1966, also has an interest to dim the Old Order’s political power which has just replaced. In this context, it becomes clear why choices of subject matter in Indonesian contemporary history in the New Order, as printed in history textbook distributed to schools, only discusses the following topics: the anniversary and the founder of the Pancasila; General Offensive of 1 March 1949; the 30th of September 1965 Movement; Supersemar (Order of March 1966 the Eleventh), and the integration of East Timor into Indonesia in 1976 (Kuntowijoyo, 1994, p. 24; Abdullah, 1992, pp. 54-55).

2. The Anniversary and the Founder of the Pancasila

Such historical subject matter in school becoming bustling public debate appears in 1980s when Nugroho Notosusanto (a military historian), who became the Minister of Education and Culture in the New Order, wrote a book concerning on *the Formulating Process of Pancasila, National Principle*. The book states that the right and authentic formulation of the Pancasila is what is written in the preamble of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia and legitimized by Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence as legislative branch of government at the beginning of Indonesian revolution on 18 August 1945. It also states that Soekarno is not the first and only person who formulates the Pancasila (Nugroho, 1981).

Since the beginning, it is obviously seen that the book is full of political nuance (Idayu, 1981, p. 9). Distinctive aim of it is to move de-soekarnoisation in one side (for example, it is irrelevant if 1 June 1945 is commemorated

as the Birth of the Pancasila, and it is untrue that Soekarno is the only one founder of the Pancasila, so it aims to hand over a strong legitimation to the man in power of the New Order). On the other side, President Soeharto in this context makes an impression that the relevant date shall be 1 October 1965 as the Pancasila Sanctity Day, and that it is Soeharto who save the Pancasila.

3. The General Offensive of 1 March 1949

An event which was known as General Offensive at that time is not different from other important events during Indonesian revolution. For the New Order, however, it is very crucial, especially to obtrude role of Lieutenant-Colonel Soeharto who claim himself as primary agent in the General Offensive of 1 March 1949 (the Army Staff and Command College, 1989, pp. 194-247). Hereafter, controversial history begins. It is questioned, who is actually the idea-man and notable agent in the General Offensive of 1 March 1949? The military party themselves, as explained by T. B Simatupang, Vice Chief of Staff of Armed Forces during the age of revolution, states that General Sudirman, General of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and Lieutenant-General A. H. Nasution, Chief of Java Command Headquarters, have crucial role on the happening of the event (Simatupang, 1960). For civil society, there arises public opinion when the people consider that a role played by Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, as the ruler of Yogyakarta during the age of revolution, is more important than the others (Suwarno, 1994, pp. 246-247). Nevertheless in 1980s, almost 40 years after the event happened when President Soeharto was on top of his reign, it is said that the idea-man and primary agent for the General Offensive of 1 March 1949 is Lieutenant-Colonel Soeharto who afterward became the President of the Republic of Indonesia (Soeharto, 1989, pp. 56-64).

4. The 30th of September 1965 Movement

It is the most controversial historical fact in the contemporary history of Indonesia. The 30th of September 1965 Movement is so complex that incurs varied version, analysis, and interpretation and also becomes an interesting topic for analysis (Suwarta, 2000, pp. 43-49). Complexity of the fact draws controversial debate, especially what relates to the following things: “what is happening?”, “why does it happen?”, “how could it be?”, and “who is actually masterminding the happening of the bloodiest tragedy in Indonesian history?” (Brian, 1978; Mulder, 2000).

For the New Order government, they are concerned on the 30th of September 1965 Movement and try to explain it in simple by giving one interpretation that the historical fact was masterminded by the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI). Such explanation is logical and later on they named the tragedy as “the Rebellions or the Treachery of G30S/PKI 1965” (Nugroho et al., 1990; State Secretariat, 1994). What the New Order government wants to put forward by making interpretation on G30S/PKI is to show the crucial role played by Lieutenant-General Soeharto who afterwards became the President of the Republic of Indonesia by collapsing the power of the Communist Party of Indonesia and rescuing Indonesian Nation in respect to the Pancasila through national development program (Soedjono, 1984, pp. 23-40).

5. Supersemar (Order of March 1966 the Eleventh)

For some matters, it is not less controversial than tragedy of G30S/PKI in 1965. The controversy is discerned by not only on the issue where the document is, authenticity of the Supersemar document, and how the order is come out-if it is issued by coercion or persuasion, for example, but also it relates to the difference on interpretation and implementation between who gave the order (President Soekarno) and to whom the order were given (Lt. Gen. Soeharto), especially in the way of interpreting “to take whatever measures he deemed necessary”.

In the context on how Supersemar is issued shall also be considered by the time when it happened in October, 1965 to March, 1966. For six months in full during social disturbance and chaotic situation, there was Indonesian killings to those who were labeled as the member of PKI, especially in Java and Bali Islands (Cribb, 1990). Likewise, there was demonstration held by college students in big cities of Java Island showing their criticism over the government (Soe Hok Gie, 1993, pp. 159-209).

As a wise “father of the nation” who shall take care of his sons, President Soekarno was so restless and grieved about the social disturbance and chaotic situation. Therefore, President Soekarno immediately commanded Lt. Gen. Soeharto (as the Commander of the Army Strategic Command and the Minister of the Army Commander) to “take whatever measures he deemed necessary” to restore order to the government’ stability and authority (D. Legge, 1985, pp. 443-470). After accepting the Supersemar, Lieutenant General Soeharto, however, made different interpretation and took different action. He immediately liquidated PKI (essential power in politics of Soekarno’s NASAKOM/nationalism-religion-communism), arrested ministers (assistants of President and

confidants of Soekarno), and modified Soekarno's politics orientation and direction in steps (confrontation with Malaysia was ceased and economic development by receiving West Countries is stirred up). By handling the supernatural Supersemar document, the image of Soekarno's political power was fading out, while foundation of the birth of New Order under Soeharto's power was about to grow (Sudirjo, 1978).

6. The Integration of East Timor into Indonesian in 1976

This historical fact becomes controversial among public society after East Timor liberated from Indonesia in 1999. The problem is when public society gets lack of right and proportional information from the government about this East Timor. For 20 years during the New Order government, public was only provided by three information: *First*, the people of East Timor are intended to integrate into Indonesia. *Second*, situation in East Timor is safe and under controlled. *Third*, Fretelin in East Timor is a small, communist, and evil party.

The discourse provided by the New Order government, during the following development, begun to be criticized. From some unofficial reports and witnesses living in the region state that the area is still chaotic and has problem, even there are continuous separatist actions (Ajidarma, 1999). On the other side, based on the studies carried out by some research organizations and NGOs who have relative objective findings on the process of East Timor integration into Indonesia, they found some engineering and anomaly. For example, on the "*Balibo Declaration*" in 1975 when the people of East Timor declared their independence and desired to be integrated into Indonesia, the declaration is viewed by public society as the "*Bali Bo(hong) Declaration*" (bohong means lied). It is seen that the declaration seems to be planned and engineered by Indonesian intelligence agency in Bali Island, while the content tells a lie at all. So does infiltration acts of Indonesian volunteers to help Apodeti party in one side, and fight for Fretelin on the other side. In fact, those are not "just any volunteers" but elite armed forces like forces from the Special Force Command, the Army Strategic Command and marine forces (Schwarz, 1994, pp. 194-229).

In the further development, inability of the Indonesian National Army to extinguish the power of Fretelin in East Timor and ineffectiveness of Indonesian government staffs to win over the people of East Timor in a wise way indicates that problem happening in East Timor would become a blunder for Indonesia (Horta, 1998). It is just right when a polling was made in East Timor at President B. J. Habibie period. Under the influence of international insistence to choose whether keep integrating into Indonesia or being independent, most of the people of East Timor demand their liberty.

7. Why Controversies in History Are Made Available in Curriculum?

Controversy emerges due to differences in argument and judgment, or differences in interpretation on historical event. Controversy in history makes some version. It is controversial when two or more argument with their own judgment have firm foundation based on each writer (Ahmad, 2008b, pp. 2-8).

There will always be controversial issue in history. It is brought by keep running human history, and history never stops that it has a tendency from which new facts and interpretation on particular historical event are created (Kochhar, 2008). Therefore, controversies in history are generated by differences in theory or approach used by historian in writing history. According to Adam (2007), controversial history is generally caused by inaccuracy and incomplete facts and interpretation made by historian. It frequently occurs when a historian reveals historical event in an article or scientific conference between historian. It could also be triggered by lost primary source, like the doer of the history or eyewitness, that historian plays key role in historiography.

Other causes also make an opportunity in generating controversial history because subjectivity in contemporary history is much larger when the doer of the history or the eyewitness is still alive and has an implication on a portion of people at the present day (Ahmad, 2007b, p. 3). Other problem arises when there is possibility in generating a strong construction of thought among people on historical understanding, even if the understanding they believe in does not always right. Soon after discovering new fact about historical event in contradiction to current society understanding, there should arise controversy in history.

Other than methodological issue, what makes contemporary history controversial is a presence of particular party interest that fool around with history. The interest may come from a party involved in historical event or party who takes advantage of it for certain aim, for example General Offensive March 1st 1949, the 30th of September 1965 Movement, Supersemar (Order of March 1966 the Eleventh), and the integration of East Timor into Indonesia (Adam, 2007, p. 14). Moreover, Kochhar (2008, p. 453) states that there are two types of controversial issues arising in history: (1) controversy in historical facts, and (2) controversy in significance, relevance, and interpretation on historical facts. Controversial issue type one refers to historical facts which are lack of data or illogical historical discovery. Concerning on this issue, arising question is about "what", "who", and "where".

Controversial issue type 2 usually emerges in historiography as it is caused by differences in interpretation. It may also be caused by unscientific, bias, and group prejudice approach used by historian. In general, interpretation is concerned with “why”, and “how could it happen”. Controversy may also arise when historical fact is learnt in closeness that, sometimes, interpretation on the historical event made by historian may be wrong resulting in controversial.

Controversies in history are also generated by political intervention from the authorities who make history subject as nation self image creator. It aims to strengthen and secure executive power from the ruling regime (Widja, 1996). From different editing, Suryomihardjo (1996) states that since the colonial period of Dutch East Indies and Japanese and since Independence Day up to the present time, history education as subject in school cannot be separated from dominant political view at particular period. For example, under the domination of the New Order regime, there was only one historical version that must be learnt at school, i.e. a version arranged by the New Order government and distributed by Department of National Education. There must not be any other version which is not in accordance with the one arranged by government. Therefore, history textbook used at school was censored textbook referring to standard book determined by the government.

Implication of dominant government intervention to the history subject material arrangement makes historical curriculum in Indonesia bureaucratic political product, and it is not a pure academic product. Simply word, controversies in history are caused by many facts that do not affirm historical events. Therefrom, many academic criticism arise from historian (Adam, 2009). Indeed, the New Order regime did not make a problem of historical material as it was authoritative regime when there was no freedom of speech.

The book National History of Indonesia year 1975 consisting of 6 volumes edited by Nugroho Notosusanto was used as primary reference for history textbook at school from junior to senior high school. At that time, criticism was spoken by a historian from Gajah Mada University, Sartono Kartodiharjo, but it ends in resignation of himself from the composing team for book of National History of Indonesia. So does in 1984, a book entitled “Pejuang dan Prajurit” was released and it is edited by Nugroho Notosusanto. Within the book, face of the first president Mr. Soekarno reading the text of the proclamation of Independence Day August 17th, 1945 was blurred. A historian, Abdurrahman Suryomihardjo, protested by making a call to Sinar Harapan publisher. After the protest was sent, second book release in 1986 has the face of Mr. Soekarno clearly (Suryomihardjo, 1966).

According to explanation above, it is clear that history education curriculum in Indonesia has more politic consideration than academic. One case, for example, it was when Minister of National Education Mr. Bambang Sudibyo made a request to Attorney General’s office to investigate Chief of Curriculum for Department of National Education. He made the request concerned on publication of history textbook for Junior and Senior High School based on the Curriculum 2004. The textbook contains a topic on the Rebellions of G 30 S in 1965 that does not mention PKI. This book is considered in contradiction to government’s determination. That is why, he said that the book is potential to make public order in trouble. The question, then, arises if the writers are wrong when they omit word “PKI” that the textbook must be withdrawn from public based on the Decision of Attorney General’s Office No. 19/A-JA/10/2007 on March 5th, 2007. Has the book publication really made public order in trouble? It is problematic that there were many history textbooks published in accordance with Curriculum 2004 without word PKI therein. Further, one of indicators for basic competence that students should have an understanding on it is comparison between argument about the Rebellions of G 30 S. One of history subject published in Jakarta for the third grade and arranged by following Curriculum 2004 has quoted some different argument and different version each other in revealing G 30 S event. Scientifically, the book is objective enough as it is written by inserting more than one opinion, not a single argument (Alfian, 2007; Anggara, 2007; Purwanto, 2009).

Meanwhile, Hasan (1988) states that history subject at school is no longer a pure history. There will be always an objective to establish nation’s attitude and mentality. For example, according to the government, PKI party has been involved in the Rebellions of G 30 S, 1965. What the matter is, the history has an objective to prevent hatred and past trauma as it occurs over time and the past is considered as an enemy. When the Old Order falls, Soekarno is eliminated from his reign, and everything in relation with the Old Order is avoided. Ketika Orde Baru jatuh, Soeharto tersingkir, dan semua yang terkait dengan Orde Baru juga dihindari. History stories could be black and painful, or sparkling era. Indeed, that is why we shall learn history, to be a wise man and put an event into its own time, not to avoid or fight for it. Whoever found guilty shall not be permanently raked up, or worse, if it is bequeathed to the successor generation. It is just vigilance and carefulness we shall pay attention to.

It does not matter to discuss controversial issues in national history with student at classroom activity. By such

way, students will have critical thinking and historical insights that allow them to compare one argument with the others. This method aims to let students be able to make proper conclusion from a series of historical events they learn about.

As an output of learning process, history learning shall prioritize achievement for intrinsic value as “*learning capacity*”. It is a logical reasoning development foundation since history as learning process is meant to be intellectual, critical and rational lecture, not a tale or speech about the past. It is felt like history subject at school is so plain and boring. Accordingly, it requires a new paradigm in history learning guided by “*critical pedagogy*”. Up to now, history learning has been dominated by dominant party, like the ruling regime, elite group, that it ignores students’ role as the doer of history in their age (Anggara, 2007, p. 101).

8. What Should a History Teacher Behave?

To be a history teacher means to show appreciation for student’s critical thinking. The teacher shall establish historical insights that allow student to show his criticism about the events in the learning subject in history textbook. The old history version must not be used anymore as it tends to use single interpretation and argument on historical event. Therefore, history textbook used as learning curriculum at school shall involve history teacher in history textbook arrangement. It aims to make history textbook pure from regime indoctrination as stated by Kochhar (2008), a good textbook shall be clean from indoctrination, present a fair point of view from various types of ideas it conveys about. Textbook shall not contain a bunch of narrow ideas, too much nationalism (national sentiment) that puts students in chains or limit their freedom of thought and speech.

Likewise, history teacher may convey historical criticism about the published textbook. Simply, the teacher may present a critical statement where the textbook shall not contain bias point of view or group prejudice as what s/he reads from history textbook pages. More important, his statement shall not intend to arouse emotions. History textbook used by students needs to present the truth. No more lie, nothing more but the truth.

What makes our history events in Indonesia controversial is a fact that history textbook used is only one version that leads to limitation to think free. It leaves an impression that history events occurred in the past are same as what the textbook says. Therefore, history teacher shall have lots of references in teaching history. He shall not depend on one textbook distributed by the government. Such learning method will allow student to compare and harmonize different points of view (Kochhar, 2008, p. 175).

Moreover, the teacher cannot be a “bureaucratic history teacher” who would always obey what the supervisor commands for. He shall be a professional history teacher who designs a creative, critical and contextual learning. This learning methodology will hopefully give more meaning in establishing historical awareness, i.e. learning the lessons of the past to build a better future. History is not identical to the past. Learning history at the present day dimension means to bring real life nearer to pupil’s experience.

9. Conclusion

What has been outlined above opens our eyes that subject matter on contemporary history in Indonesia, as written in the history textbook distributed to schools, contains controversial material. The issue is not only on the choices of historical subject matter having tendency to political nuance, but also on the explanation of history that is presented in simple, monolithic, and does not build critical awareness to the history. Consequently, it could not discover historical truth as expected in historical learning. It is generally known that history for educational purpose in school cannot loosen from political policy of the government. Thus, there will always be two fighting power in contemporary historiography in Indonesia: historical truth and group purpose.

Then, it becomes problem of teacher of history at school on how to explain events of contemporary history happened in Indonesia which most of them are colored by political purpose. Teacher shall make them be understood, analyzed, and explained in fair, proportional and scientific, but they are still interesting on student’s side. In essential, teacher of history shall read a lot and has broader historical insights than the student. History teacher shall not refer to one and only textbook from the government as it often contains more political factors than academic. Consequently, teacher has to have many references as learning material. Critical thinking is another must-have-foundation for history teacher in orientation to critical pedagogical paradigm.

If it is not, teacher of history will be labeled by his student as “the one who knows a bit about history and out-of-date”.

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