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## NOTIONS OF CRITICAL THINKING IN JAVANESE, BATAK TOBA AND MINANGKABAU CULTURE

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Studies from researchers with Western academic background (e.g., Blanchard & Clanchy, 1984; Freedman, 1994) show that Asian students, including Indonesians, have difficulties to think critically, i.e., to argue and to develop one's own opinion. Despite our limited knowledge on the processes and mechanisms underlying thinking in general (Riding & Powell, 1993), the term critical thinking refers to "... *an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all available information and that can therefore be convincingly justified*" (Kurfiss, 1988, p. 2). Critical thinking can also be seen as "... *the careful and deliberate determination of whether to accept, reject, or suspend judgment about a claim*" (Moore & Parker, 1986, p.72) and as "... *thinking that facilitates judgment because it relies on criteria, is self-correcting, and is sensitive to context*" (Lipman, 1991, p. 116). Adam and Hamm (1994) associate critical thinking with skills in focusing, information gathering, remembering, organizing, analyzing, generating, integrating, and evaluating. According to Brookfield (1987), critical thinking can be interpreted in a variety of ways: logical reasoning abilities, reflective judgment, assumption hunting, the creation, use and testing of meaning, etc. In short, critical thinking is regarded as a higher-order thinking that includes complex processes. As other types of thinking, critical thinking is assumed to have four components (French & Rhoder, 1992), i.e., skill, strategy, content, and product which correlate with each other. It is also understood that critical thinking is not only limited to cognitive abilities but also refers to a dispositional dimension seen as the underlying factor. Therefore, rather than calling someone as a critical thinker, Siegel (1988) prefers to call him or her a person having a critical attitude or a critical spirit.

The difficulties to develop one's own opinion, often mentioned in research with Asian students, should not be associated simply with the

incapability of using a foreign language because similar phenomena could also be observed among Indonesian students studying in Indonesian universities. From daily experiences in teaching Indonesian university students, my colleagues and I (as reported in Chandra, 1993) found that very few of them are able and daring enough to ask questions and/or to argue. While one can always find the number of participants per classroom, which often can exceed 100, as one factor to blame, a similar phenomenon also appears in one-to-one interaction of lecturer-student relationships. Here we could point to the importance of the dispositional dimension.

During the last few years, depressing phenomena have occurred around Indonesia. News about conflicts between members of different cultural groups (e.g., in Kalimantan provinces), between believers of different religions (e.g., in Ambon, North Maluku and Poso), as well as between members of different local groups appears regularly in Indonesian mass media. It seems that people are easily persuaded to go against other people of different opinions, ethnicities, or religions without any prior interpersonal conflicts. One important characteristic that distinguishes a good thinker from the poor one is that the former really enjoys thinking while being open to various options, including tolerance with people of different opinions (Glatthorn & Baron, 1985).

As a nation, Indonesia has a motto established by its founding fathers, i.e. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* which means unity in diversity. Their forethought was that the building of one nation consisting of hundreds of cultural groups and spoken languages, not to mention the different religions and beliefs, is arduous. The national motto was expected to develop tolerance and sensitivity among the people, and lead them to treat one another equal despite cultural, religious and hereditary distinction. However, in day to day living, this is not observed. To defend the group of the same culture, religion, beliefs, etc. regardless of their misdeeds, and to attack those who are alien to them is a natural tendency that often leads to communal violence.

This raises a basic issue: Are Indonesian people able to think critically, to judge things and to distinguish the good from the bad? What is the role of culture in the development of critical thinking of Indonesian people?

In a study by Setiadi (1986) on the ideal qualities of Indonesian people, obedience to moral and religious standards are the first character-

istics desired from anyone, while being independent and having the ability to develop one's own opinion are not perceived as important at all. These findings are in line with the characteristics of collectivistic cultures as opposed to those of individualistic cultures (Rueda & Dembo, 1995). Unfortunately, living together with other individuals of different cultural backgrounds, religions, and values requires abilities to adjust, to evaluate one's own cultural influence fairly, as well as to appreciate and to understand the strengths and weaknesses of those from different cultures or groups. In other words, living in a society of diverse culture requires a thorough judgment of good and bad, regardless of the standards set by the culture where one comes from. When individuals are not prepared to live in a diverse community, disagreements can easily turn into conflicts. Those having the ability of critical thinking, however, are able to suspend judgments until proofs and evidences are collected; therefore, they are more tolerant towards ambiguities (Presseisen, 1985).

### **The Aim of the Study**

This study aims to find out how cultures in Indonesia influence the development of critical thinking ability as seen from the perspectives of the Indonesian people themselves. Out of hundreds of cultural groups that Indonesia has, three particular groups are selected as target samples, i.e., Javanese, Batak Toba, and Minangkabaus (originally from geographical areas in Central Java, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra, respectively). These are among six cultural groups that have often been observed (Setiadi, 1986). In comparison to other cultural groups, there are a greater number of people from these three cultural backgrounds who are holding positions in most levels of the governmental hierarchy all around Indonesian provinces (Partokusumo, 1998). Each of these cultural groups is unique in its respective ways. Javanese culture emphasizes obedience to elderly and/or authoritative figures including leaders (Magnis-Suseno, 1993; Mulder, 1984). Batak Toba culture emphasizes the importance of education (Purba & Purba, 1997), while Minangkabau culture is considered as the most democratic culture in Indonesia (Navis, 1984). Therefore, critical thinking is assumed to be perceived and thus being developed differently in each of these cultures. Informants from these three cultures were asked to identify which practices in their respective culture facilitate and/or inhibit the de-

velopment of critical thinking ability of their people. As no objective measurement on the critical thinking ability was conducted, the results of this study will only reflect the informants' opinion regarding the roles their respective cultures have on such development and not the actual level of the critical thinking development in their people. Nevertheless, the information will be helpful to develop programs on securing the Indonesian national identity including interventions for solving interpersonal and inter-group conflicts.

Table 1 portrays literature reviews on values regarded as important by each of these cultural groups. The values are numbered according to their importance as indicated in the literature. Since space does not permit for a detailed description, interested readers can read Geertz (1989), Hardjowirogo (1984), Magnis-Suseno (1993), Mulder (1984; 1996) and Wiwoho, Basri and Jatnika (1998) for Javanese culture; Harahap and Siahaan (1987), Marpaung and Pasaribu (2000), Purba and Purba (1997), and Siahaan (1982) for Batak Toba culture; and Amir (2001), Hakimy (1997), Navis (1984), and Pelly (1994) for Minangkabau culture. Literature on Batak Toba and the Minangkabaus is less extensive than on Javanese culture and people.

This study has two more specific aims. First, it is expected that the results of this study could confirm the uniqueness of each of these cultures as portrayed in Table 1. The daily experiences that the informants report should serve as valuable information to validate the conceptions the literature conveys. Second, as the informants are imparted with the background of this study, it is expected that they understand the need to develop Indonesia as a nation rather than as a collection of cultural parts. In other words, the informants are expected to be critical towards their own cultural values, norms, and practices. Asking the informants to define for themselves what critical thinking means, what the characteristics of a critical thinker are, and how they perceive the influence of their culture toward the development of the ability to think critically are derived from Kim and Berry's (1993) suggestion for following the indigenous psychology approach. Thus, the informants are requested to organize and interpret their own understanding about themselves and their world where "themselves" is interpreted as their own cultural understandings and "their world" as the nation of Indonesia.

Table 1

*Values Regarded as Important*

Javanese Culture	Batak Toba Culture	Minangkabau Culture
1. <i>Rukun</i> principle: live in harmony, having <i>tenggang rasa</i> (being tolerant), avoid inter-personal conflict.	1. Communal; togetherness among groups related by blood and/or marriages.	1. Unity of cultural norms and the Islamic teaching.
2. Communal; group is more important than oneself.	2. To live is to struggle in order to survive.	2. Communal; togetherness among people related matrilineally.
3. Respect principle: maintain the hierarchical order, show respect to those in high positions, and protect those in lower positions.	3. Respect others: consider what is one's own position among others'; the position is relative depending on what familial relationships one has in a certain celebration.	3. Equality principle: human is just one among others (land, earth, home, ethnic, region/ <i>nagari</i> ).
4. Feudal: in favor of highclass people.	4. Act according to rights and responsibilities.	4. Learn from anything, even from nature ( <i>alam terkembang jadi guru</i> ).
5. Be content.	5. Go abroad for a better living, prove that an individual can become someone.	5. Go abroad for reasons such as: to get a better living, to avoid being together with people of different opinion.
6. Life is a series of events full of miseries; just bear them.	6. Goals in life: a. Have many children and descendants ( <i>bagabeon</i> ); b. Get rich ( <i>bamaraon</i> ); c. Be respected ( <i>basangapon</i> ); d. Be advanced ( <i>bama-juon</i> ).	
7. <i>Andap asor</i> : be in service toward people of higher status.	7. Education is important to advance and to get a better life.	
8. Low profile: never regard yourself as high, not good to be different.		
9. Fatalistic, nothing can be done to change one's life.		
10. Perception of time: now and the past.		

## Method

### Sample

From a pool of 156 individuals recommended by reputable institutions and/or prominent individuals, ninety-four were willing to participate in this study. Javanese culture was represented by university lecturers, educational practitioners, educational specialists, and *dalangs* (puppeteers). Batak Toba culture was represented by university lecturers, educational practitioners, educational specialists, and cultural and/or religious elders, while Minangkabau culture was represented by cultural elders, university lecturers, and educational practitioners. The university lecturers came from

Table 2

### Groupings of Informants

Groups of informants	Javanese culture	Batak Toba culture	Minangkabau culture
Cultural elder and/or religious elder	None	13 males (age range 51-81 yrs. old)	8 males (age range 49-71 yrs. old), 4 live in Jakarta
<i>Dalang</i> (Javanese puppeteers)	3 males, 1 female (age varies from 37-59 yrs. old), all live in Jakarta	None	None
University lecturer	8 males, 1 female (age range 43-68 yrs. old)	7 males (age range 37-65 yrs. old)	7 males, 1 female (age range 35-71 yrs. old), 2 live in Jakarta
Educational practitioner	11 males, 5 females (age range 41-60 yrs. old), 6 live in Jakarta	8 males, 2 females (age range 42-56 yrs. old), 7 live in Jakarta	7 males (age range 35-47 yrs. old), 4 live in Jakarta
Educational specialist	4 males, 1 female (age range 45-59 yrs. old), all live in Jakarta	6 males, 1 female (Age range 43-72 yrs. old), all live in Jakarta	None
Total number of informants	34 (26 males, 8 females)	37 (34 males, 3 females)	23 (22 males, 1 female)

a variety of disciplines: engineering, physical science, social science, economics, psychology, literature, and education. Women are underrepresented in this study; only 12 participated. Forty informants had lived in Jakarta for at least 15 years, thus it is assumed that they have been influenced by other cultures as well. Table 2 below shows the groupings of the informants according to their cultural and professional backgrounds.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Information for this study was collected in two phases. In the first phase, the instrument used was a questionnaire with open-ended questions as the following:

1. *How do you define "critical thinking"? How did you get this definition and/or understanding? What do you think are the characteristics of a person who is able to think critically?* These questions are targeted to find out about the informants' ideas of critical thinking.
2. *Do you agree that Indonesians are trained to think critically? Whether you answer 'yes' or 'no' to this question, please provide the reasons and some strategies to apply this into practice.* This question gives some opportunities for the informants to express their opinion regarding the relevance and the significance of thinking critically in Indonesian context.
3. *Do you think that your culture gives opportunities to its people to think critically? Please provide examples to support your opinion.* With this question, the informants are challenged to evaluate the influences of their respective cultures toward the development of critical thinking.

After a content analysis of the information collected through the questionnaires, the results were categorized for each cultural group. Then these were distributed to the same informants to identify whether or not they agree with each statement. This procedure constituted the second phase. This was done either within respondents' own group in a focus group discussion format, or individually through face-to-face interviews. Only statements were conclusively considered as research results on which there was agreement by every informant of an ethnic group. Thus, the validity of the statements was established among people having similar ethnical background. On the other hand, statements that drew conflicting comments were discussed and each informant was invited to express his or her



opinion. This approach was successful in giving a better and more holistic understanding of matters even though no conclusive result was gained. In addition, the informants were also given features of critical thinking from Western literature as a comparison. This was done only after personal comments were expressed; so that the Western literature would not affect the way the informants evaluated their cultural influence.

Altogether, 13 researchers acted as field workers and/or group facilitators.

## Results

No difference was found between the information collected from informants living within the cultural circle and those from outside; therefore, the combined results were treated as coming from one group. The results are given below according to the order of the problem statements.

### *Conceptions of Critical Thinking*

Informants' conceptions of critical thinking are featured in Table 3 below. While they reveal some similarities with conceptions of critical thinking as promoted in Western societies, they also indicate some unique characteristics of each cultural group. Javanese culture encourages reflective thinking; other people may not realize how deep a Javanese person is involved in his or her own thinking since there is no marked external expression. In Western societies, interacting with others and arguing with others, in oral or written form, is one decisive characteristic of critical thinkers and any program on critical thinking should make sure that this is portrayed as one of the curriculum goals (Kennedy, Fisher, & Ennis, in Idol & Jones, 1991). Compared to Javanese people, those coming from Batak Toba or Minangkabau cultural background are marked as more expressive; they dare to argue and base their arguments on logical principles. For the Minangkabau people, logical principles used should not be contradictory to Islamic teachings since for them Islamic laws are higher than any human-made laws and norms. For Batak Toba people, the confidence in oneself becomes the foundation to argue. However, when contradictory facts can be provided, they can change their opinion on a debatable issue without having their feelings hurt. Therefore, argumentation is carried openly and any party invited is welcomed to share his or her opinion.

Table 3

*Conceptions of Critical Thinking*

Javanese	Batak Toba	Minangkabau
<p>To think critically is to think reflectively in finding the truth.</p> <p>Main characteristics of a critical person:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be objective in perceiving anything; when needed can retain a distance emotionally from the persons/objects/ being evaluated or criticized.</li> <li>Daring, bold, yet flexible in expressing opinion differently from the majority.</li> <li>Use some standards in evaluating.</li> <li>Take time to think, no need to be in a hurry.</li> <li>Inhibited, delaying response.</li> <li>Have no need to express thoughts openly or outwardly.</li> </ol> <p>For outsiders, Javanese people can be mistakenly regarded as unable to think; too much time is taken to think.</p>	<p>To think critically is to think logically, systematically, rationally.</p> <p>Main characteristics of a critical person:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confident of oneself.</li> <li>Dare to be different from others.</li> <li>Obstinate.</li> <li>Able to control one's own emotion.</li> <li>Great curiosity expressed in asking questions inwardly and outwardly.</li> </ol> <p>For outsiders, Batak Toba people can be mistakenly regarded as attracting attention: too many questions being asked.</p>	<p>To think critically is to think logically, according to cultural norms and Islamic teachings.</p> <p>Main characteristics of a critical person:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Honest.</li> <li>Dare to be different from others.</li> <li>Able to argue.</li> <li>Be democratic, open to others' idea/opinion.</li> </ol>

The differences among these three cultural groups can be noticed more clearly when we take a closer look on how each culture considers how a critique should be addressed. Table 4 shows the differences among the three cultural groups.

Table 4  
*How to Criticize*

Javanese	Batak Toba	Minangkabau
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider first whether it is appropriate to address a critique to the targeted person: the place, the time, the words, the tone, the sender's status compared to the targeted person's.</li> <li>2. No need to express it openly.</li> <li>3. Express it indirectly: use of jokes, teasing.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Express it openly, so that the receiver(s) can know and understand.</li> <li>2. Through argumentation, differences are settled; so no more hurt feelings between conflicting parties.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Express it openly, so that the receiver(s) can know and understand.</li> <li>2. <i>Lapau</i> culture: males discuss anything in coffee houses, no need to result in intended changes.</li> </ol>

For Javanese people, the appropriate consideration taken before one criticizes usually results in reserving the critical opinion to oneself. In other words, the targeted person might mistakenly perceive the non-critical behavior of the sender as fully supportive while in fact the sender might have already planned some opposing actions. In addition, critiques are also insinuated in jokes, dramas, short stories, etc., where a certain character is portrayed as authoritarian who wants to receive only positive comments from others. However, toward the end, the character is surprised by a sarcastic opinion others hold about him or her. The conclusion almost always pictures the character's positive change in behavior or at least a vow to do so.

On the other hand, for Batak Toba conflicts are seen as essential parts of life. The *adat* (cultural) meetings, which take place several times before special events, i.e., marriages and funerals of elderly people, are charac-

terized with oral arguments among participants. No wonder if each meeting runs for several hours. The final decisions are taken only after every disagreement has been resolved. But once decided, everyone should give his or her full support so that the entire activity is run according to the agreed upon scheme.

Minangkabau men have advantages over women for having *lapau*s as places to discuss anything. Once they enter the *lapau*, they have the freedom to express their opinions toward a ruling party without bothering whether their opinions will affect the future action of the ruling party. In *adat* meetings, every invited party (usually males) can express his opinion freely. (Though Minangkabau culture is regarded matrilineal, only males can attend *adat* meetings). Criticisms can be addressed openly to a *pengbulu*, a top leader of a *nagari* (district), so that the *pengbulu* can accommodate everyone's opinion before making decisions. Basically an individual can give any comment to anyone including elderly people; however, to someone older and higher in status, the comments should be addressed respectfully.

### ***The Necessity of Having Critical Thinking Ability***

All informants agreed that Indonesian people should be educated to enable them to think critically. They referred to the dictatorial ruling of Suharto for 32 years when all the opposing parties were silenced to maintain eternal power. To prevent this in the future, Indonesian people should learn how to be critical. More details of strategies to develop critical thinking are given in the following section.

### ***Strategies to Develop the Ability to Think Critically***

No difference is found among the informants representing those three cultural groups regarding the strategies to develop the ability to think critically. Basically three different basic strategies are offered. The first strategy is to develop a democratic parent-child relationship where the child is given chances to express what he or she wants. However, the Javanese informants agree that this is quite difficult to put into practice, since a one-way communication usually characterizes the parent-child relationships. All but one informant who is above 50 years of age admitted that they would regard their young children impolite if the latter were talking to them or bringing up an issue without being asked to. The impact

is seen nowadays when the children grow older: the parent-child relationships are still formal; there is no open discussion and parents are ignorant of the children's mind. The Batak Toba people, on the other hand, give the opportunity to children to express what they want from their parents, and to put forward their grievances toward their parents. This usually takes place at New Year's Eve when the family gathers around the dining table and prays together before the meal. Parents are regarded as good parents if they listen to and understand their children's hopes and dreams. Parents are expected to adjust their advice and guidance to the needs of their children individually. Unfortunately, due to some technical problem, no information could be collected from the Minangkabau informants regarding their own experiences in child-rearing practices.

The second strategy is to be applied in academic settings where open interaction between teachers or lecturers and their students is needed. The university lecturers and educational practitioner informants from the three cultural groups admitted that they have difficulties in encouraging their students to ask questions. Some of them tried to develop a conducive atmosphere where every one is given some opportunities to share. The use of student group discussion was regarded as helpful since questions and personal opinions arose. The difficulties thus do not lie merely in the students' ability to think, but more in the lacking of courage to argue with persons more authoritative than themselves. As far as the authoritative persons set the 'democratic atmosphere' by giving encouragements and supports, the students are able to express their personal views.

The third strategy is to involve people from grass-root level to give input to the ruling party and the Indonesian government. Mass media should not be seen as the governmental tools to influence people, but instead become the channel for people to express their opinions on injustice and untruthfulness prevailing in their environment. Informants both from Batak Toba and Minangkabau cultural backgrounds noted that most Indonesians have a yes-man, non-critical attitude and this in some ways is reflecting the strong influence of Javanese culture on many aspects of Indonesian way of life. The Batak Toba and Minangkabau informants perceive that the reformation era after Suharto was subverted as a good momentum to contribute more toward the building of a democratic society where every group and culture is regarded as equal. Some good strategies that can be applied are to increase the educational level of Indonesian

Table 5

*Cultural Norms that Facilitate the Exercising of Critical Thinking*

Javanese	Batak Toba	Minangkabau
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The use of a variety of cultural arts and artifacts to express one's opinion differently from the majority.</li> <li>2. The use of open discussion to find solutions: everyone is invited to express one's own opinion. The final decision is the one approved by the majority.</li> <li>3. The practice of being tolerant toward those who are different.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The use of cultural norms and practices as guidance for everyday living: as a shelter that protects one's rights.</li> <li>2. The use of open discussion in every meeting where everyone is invited to express one's own opinion; open discussion is also used to resolve conflicts.</li> <li>3. <i>Daliban Na tolu</i> democratic principle where everyone should always regard one's self relatively to others, no one is in dominating status all the time.</li> <li>4. Phrases that emphasize the need to think through before deciding, speaking or acting.</li> <li>5. The emphasis on education for children, even though parents must save every single rupiah they have to finance the children's education.</li> <li>6. <i>Leaving home</i> as one way to get a better living: parents encourage their children to have a better life compared to that of the parents.</li> <li>7. The practice of addressing criticisms and feedbacks to leaders.</li> <li>8. The practice of being open to those outside the Batak Toba background.</li> <li>9. The practice of being persistent, resistant in reserving one's opinion, no need to fear opposing parties.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Democratic and egalitarian atmosphere: everyone is of equal status.</li> <li>2. Group consensus before a decision is taken; everyone is invited to express one's own opinion. The final decision is the one approved by the majority.</li> <li>3. Phrases that emphasize the need to think through, the need to have good plans, the use of cultural norms as standards of acceptance.</li> <li>4. <i>Lapau</i> culture: A <i>lapau</i> as a place to express opinions differently from the majority.</li> <li>5. The use of <i>surau</i> as places for men to learn about cultural norms and practices, religion, and cultural art.</li> <li>6. The practice of <i>leaving home</i> as a way to enlarge one's perspective as well as to avoid living together with a conflicting party.</li> <li>7. The emphasis on spirit and moral, mind and knowledge, faith and religious beliefs as the ideals of every Minangkabau person.</li> </ol>

people by giving wider and easier opportunity to enter schools and to train the students to develop a habit of reading as a way to develop a critical mind.

### ***Cultural Norms that Facilitate the Exercising of Critical Thinking***

Table 5 shows cultural norms from these three cultural groups that facilitate the exercising of critical thinking of the people.

All informants from the three cultural groups agreed that some of their cultural practices are facilitating the development of critical thinking. In making use of open discussion as one way to make group decision, the Batak Toba and Minangkabau offer more opportunities to express differences than the Javanese culture.

### ***Cultural Norms that Inhibit the Exercising of Critical Thinking***

Table 6 shows cultural norms from these three cultural groups that inhibit the exercising of critical thinking of the people.

Table 6

#### ***Cultural Norms that Inhibit the Exercising of Critical Thinking***

<b>Javanese</b>	<b>Batak Toba</b>	<b>Minangkabau</b>
1. Overly obedient to authority figures: they are always right, no need to ask questions nor argue. 2. Gender discrimination: men over women	1. Elders are always to be honored and respected. 2. Cultural norms above others. 3. Gender discrimination: women do not easily get chance to speak in public	—

All but one of the Minangkabau informants perceived the cultural influences on critical thinking as positive; every aspect of their culture gives way to think and rethink, especially since every decision should be based on logical principles. This one informant who "deviates" from the majority regards leaving one's home area as a good and respectful way to escape from the elderly where one is not given opportunity to express

opinions differently; the individual usually only returns home if he regards himself as successful, mostly in financial terms. On the other hand, all Javanese informants admitted that Javanese cultural influence of punishing critical actions is far outweighing the facilitating influence. In other words, Javanese culture is not conducive for the development of critical thinking ability. A Javanese individual might take too much time building the courage to put him- or herself against the authoritative figures. This should infrequently happen in Batak Toba circles since from childhood they are encouraged to express different views. Authoritative figures can change their views without their feelings getting hurt when enough facts and evidences are provided.

### Discussion

The results of this study not only validate the ideas conveyed in the literature, but also help to understand why personal opinion is difficult to develop. In addition to the emphasis on paying respect to authority figures which constitutes the norm for Javanese and Batak Toba and is perceived as inhibiting critical thinking, it is interesting to note that the use of open discussion or group consensus in all these cultures is regarded as one way to facilitate critical thinking. How far this really has a facilitating effect is not easily known, since those whose opinion is rejected are encouraged to use cultural arts and artifacts (in Javanese culture), or to comply with the cultural norms (in Batak Toba culture), or to go to a *lapau* or even leave (in Minangkabau culture). More information regarding actual group decision making would be helpful. Despite the limitations of this study, the results are relevant in at least three different areas:

First, Javanese, Batak Toba, and Minangkabau culture each influences critical thinking ability of the people differently. Batak Toba and Minangkabau cultures may be more conducive than Javanese culture to developing critical thinking ability. Since Javanese cultural influence is quite dominant in Indonesian bureaucracies (Magnis-Suseno, 1993), it is understandable that policies made by Indonesian bureaucrats also reflect the restriction to execute critical thinking.

Second, similar studies on other Indonesian cultural groups need to be undertaken. For instance, some knowledge about the cultural influence on critical thinking of those with Betawi (taken from Batavia, former name



of Jakarta) cultural background will be helpful since Jakarta is the Indonesian capital city. In addition, it is also interesting to find out how the Betawi people adapt culturally to outside influences.

Third, when dealing with Indonesian people, the cultural background should always be taken into consideration. Each informant in this study regards himself or herself more as a Javanese, Batak Toba, or Minangkabau than as an Indonesian. It means that cultural identity comes before the national one. If this type of thinking appeared in informants of this study who are graduates of at least senior high schools, it stands to reason that a similar type of thinking also prevails in other Indonesians. As a consequence, it is quite difficult to build a national identity that according to Fukuyama (1999) is one of social capitals needed by a nation.

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