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**Balancing Decentralization and Deconcentration:
Emerging Need for Asymmetric Decentralization
in the Unitary States**

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1. Introduction

The study of decentralization is one of the most venerable issues in the field of public administration. It is also one of the most vigorous policy choices in creating a more democratic and responsible government. In spite of its impacts and benefits so far¹, there is almost no contention among countries in promoting decentralization. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a large and growing theoretical literature on decentralization (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983 and 2007; Turner and Hulme 1997; World Bank 1999; Bardan 2002, etc).

As broadly understood, decentralization materializes into four types, i.e. political, administrative, fiscal, and market decentralization.² According to Rondinelli (1999), administrative decentralization seeks to redistribute authority, responsibility and financial resources in providing public services among different levels of government. It consists of three major forms, i.e. deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Deconcentration, however, is often considered to be the weakest form of decentralization, since it does not involve any transfer of real power to local governments. Delegation is somewhat perceived as a more extensive form of decentralization, while devolution represents administrative decentralization that underlies most political decentralization.³

¹ Decentralization wave around the world has offered many positive results such as combating corruption (Arikan 2004; Fjeldstad 2004; Fisman 2002), reduction in poverty (Braathen 2008; Crook 2001; UNDP 2000; Moore and Putzel 1999), improving service delivery (WB 2001; Kolehmainen-Aitken 1999; McLean 1999, Dillinger 1994), fortifying accountability (WB 2000), preventing conflicts (Sasaoka 2007, Siegle and O'Mahony), empowering community (Brinkerhoff 2006). Also see: Ribot (2004: 7). On the other hand, decentralization may lead to soft-budget constraints, macro-economic instability, clientelism, and enlargement of bureaucracies (Cornelius 1999; Fox and Aranda 1996; Rodden 2000; Rodden and Wibbels 2002; Stein 1998, quoted from Falletti 2004: 3). "Decentralization may therefore a two-edged of sword", says Brillantes Jr. (2004: 39).

² There has been multiple definition and understanding of decentralization actually. Different point of view, for instance, is given by Falletti (2004). She excludes market from the category of decentralization. She argues that decentralization is a set of *state reforms*. As such, decentralization does not include transfers of authority to non-state actors (as in the case of privatization reforms). Collins and Green (1994) also contend that decentralization involves the transfer of authority, functions, and/or resources from the centre to the periphery, while privatization involves a transfer from the public sector to the private sector, they are different concepts. Similarly, Sherwood (1969) argues that *devolution* is a concept quite separate from decentralization. He argue that decentralization and devolution are different phenomena: they use "decentralization" to describe an intra-organizational pattern of power relationships while devolution describes an inter-organizational pattern. Finally, Fesler (1968) believes that deconcentration is not a type of decentralization at all. In his view, deconcentration does not require any decentralization of power since it usually does not provide the opportunity to exercise substantial local discretion in decision-making. Therefore, he argues it should not be regarded as a form of decentralization (See: Bankauskaite and Saltman 2007: 10).

³ Different typology of decentralization has been developed by Smith (2001) and Ribot (2004: 10). Smith divides decentralization into five basic forms, i.e. deconcentration, delegation, devolution, partnership, and privatization. Meanwhile, Ribot separates decentralization from not-decentralization. Decentralization includes democratic decentralization and deconcentration, whereas not-decentralization comprises privatization and non-privatization.

In the discourse of central – local government relation, the use of decentralization term largely refers to administrative decentralization, and more specifically devolution.⁴ In fact, deconcentration is relatively and widely applied in many developed and developing states as well, although the type and degree varied among individual countries. Unfortunately, many scholars seem to have trivial attention on this issue. It is probably the reason why there are insufficient academic sources regarding solemn study on deconcentration. The studies of deconcentration, in short, are far lacking behind those of decentralization.

The imbalances of literature supply tend to bring about the imbalance in empirical implementation of such concepts. Although deconcentration is used most frequently in unitary states (Rondinelli 1999), but decentralization framework is actually much more observable.⁵ Indeed, there is no strict correlation between unitary states and certain degree of deconcentration, but deconcentration is essentially a nature of unitary state. With specific reference to Francophone West Africa, which is mostly unitary states, Pinto (2004: 263) gently admits that deconcentration has a better chance of being implemented than decentralization. Either decentralization or deconcentration, therefore, is indubitably central government's tools to manage its territorial. This connects with Smith's (1985) statement as follows:

“... it is important to reject a romantic view of decentralization. It is not an absolute good in its own right. Decentralized administration and local government may be used for a variety of ends, just as central government can be. How decentralization is evaluated should depend on the purpose for which it is employed. Centralization may be a preferable strategy if it leads to territorial justice or redistribution of wealth” (Smith 1985: 191; quoted from Jemadu).

This paper notices that decentralization (in this case: devolution) and deconcentration is not a matter of dichotomy, it is rather a continuum.⁶ As depicted by Cheema and Rondinelli (2007), the relationship between devolution and deconcentration / delegation should not be seen as a dichotomy or as mutually exclusive, but rather can

⁴ It is a bit difficult to make a clear delineation of forms of decentralization implemented among countries, since they are likely to have their own elements of devolution, delegation and deconcentration. The meaning of decentralization in this paper, for practical purpose, would be subsequently associated with devolution. The association of decentralization and devolution can also be found in many literature and studies, such as Forje (2002). Work (2002: 11) even affirms that devolution is considered *true* decentralization, while UNDP (1999: 6) asserts devolution to be the most common understanding of *genuine* decentralization.

⁵ In the case of Indonesia as a unitary state, there are eight decentralization laws have been implemented (Decentralization Wet 1903, Law 1/1945, Law 22/1948, Law 1/1957, Law 18/1965, Law 5/1974, Law 22/1999, and Law 32/2004). Ironically, there has been no single law concerning deconcentration. It's rather examined as a complementary component. Up to now, there are only two government regulations (GR) on deconcentration, i.e. GR 39/2001 and GR 7/2008.

⁶ A good analogue is proposed by Work (2001, cited on Gera 2008) who mentions that decentralization is not an alternative to centralization. It implies that in any country, a certain degree or extent of decentralization and deconcentration are concurrently and simultaneously deployed in managing governmental affairs between central and local government. When the pendulum goes to the left side then it reflects a more centralized state, whereas decentralized state tends to occur when the pendulum moves to the right side. For a more detail about decentralization and deconcentration continuum, see: Britantes Jr. (2004: 39); Fritzen and Lim (2006: 3).

best be understood as a matrix of relationships. Likewise, FAO in its publication (2006: 31) underlines that deconcentration and decentralization are far from replacing each other; they have always been considered as complimentary by political decision makers. Although deconcentration and decentralization can not be separately thought, however, there are still some distinctions among the two, as elaborated in the following table.

Table 1. Definition of decentralization / devolution and deconcentration

Source	Decentralization / Devolutin	Deconcentration
World Bank (1999, found in many internet sources)	is the <i>transfer of authority and responsibility</i> for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and/or private sector.	is the weakest form of decentralization – redistributes <i>decision making authority and financial responsibilities</i> among different levels of the national government.
UNDP (1999: 6-7)	Concerned with the <i>political</i> as well as the <i>economic</i> (and <i>administrative</i>) arguments.	Concerned mainly with the <i>administrative</i> rationale and to some extent with the <i>economic</i> arguments.
Hellmut Wollman (2007: 2-3)	Powers and functions (as well as resources) are assigned to <i>sub-national bodies and actors</i> that possess some political autonomy in their own right. It also known as <i>full municipalisation</i>	Administrative functions being done through the establishment of <i>regional or local “field offices”</i> (also known as <i>limited municipalisation</i>).
Robertson Work (2002: 6)	Refers to the <i>full transfer of responsibility, decision-making, resources and revenue generation</i> to a local level public authority that is autonomous and fully independent of the devolving authority.	Can be seen as the <i>first step in a newly decentralizing government</i> to improve service delivery.
Hutchcroft (2001: 30)	Involves a much more <i>extensive transfer</i> of decision-making authority and responsibility <i>to local government units</i> (commonly regions, provinces, and/or municipalities).	Involves an <i>intra-organizational transfer</i> of particular functions and workloads from the central government <i>to its regional or local offices</i> .

The aim of this paper, therefore, does not to opposing the two concepts; instead it tries to constructing a stronger conceptual framework on decentralization - deconcentration debate. It is desirable that this paper would be able to finding out a more acceptable point along decentralization - deconcentration continuum for unitary state. It also intends to propose alternative options to deal with unitary state as well as to design a better way how central government intervene sub-national government in the unitary states.

In the following section, I would like to elaborate the basic concept and nature of unitary state, which undeniably would be corresponded to federal system. The next section scrutinizes the debate on centralization versus decentralization in the unitary

states, continued by probing the prospective correlation between the two concepts. The last part of this paper would see the way unitary states deal with relationship among level of government.

2. Concept and nature of unitary and federal state

Generally speaking, there are two types of states in the modern world, i.e. unitary and federal states. There is an identical definition of unitary state as a state or country that is governed constitutionally as one single unit, with one created constitutionally legislature. The political power of government in such states may well be transferred to lower levels, to regionally or locally elected assemblies, governors and mayors, but the central government retains the principal right to recall such delegated power.⁷ According to Lijphart (1984, in Ansell and Gingrich 2003: 141) lower-level governments in unitary states derive their statutory frameworks from parliamentary legislation or an executive order rather than from constitutional authority, and lower-level governments are not directly represented in national legislatures.

Quoting some resources, Hoessein (no year) provides comprehensive criteria on unitary state as follows:

- a) Organized under and by central government (Strong 1951).
- b) Constitutional government power embedded at national level (Baradat 1979).
- c) Sub-national governments do not have *pouvoir constituant* (Kranenburg 1955).
- d) Sub-national governments are created by central government with authorities written in the regulation.
- e) Relationship between central and sub-national government represents subordination mechanism (K.C.Wheare 1951).

In a unitary state, therefore, any sub-national government units can be created or abolished, and have their authorities, all decided by the central government. The central can also broaden and narrow the functions of such devolved authorities without agreement from the affected bodies. In other words, decentralization is unambiguously promising to be applied to empower sub-national government, but it has to be treated within the framework of unitary state. At this point, decentralization of functions to regions may be done through deconcentration, devolution and delegation from the central authority.

As a concept, unitary state is commonly differentiated from federal state, also known as federation. It is a type of sovereign state characterized by a union of partially self-governing states or regions united by a central (federal) government. In a federation, the self-governing status of the component states is constitutionally entrenched and may not be altered by a unilateral decision of the central government. Federalism is the creation of two layers of government, the federal government and the constituent states, which equally share the legal sovereignty of a country. Each tier of government has its own particular functions. In other words, lower levels of government in a federal system have a constitutional guarantee of sovereignty over specific matters. Under a federal system, both central and state governments are free to tax, regulate and each has prime

⁷ Such definition is broadly swollen in many internet sources. See samples on <http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/unitary-state/>; <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Unitary:state.htm>; and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_state

position in any of its areas of responsibility. According to SDC Decentralization Team (2001: 7), the member States in a federation enjoy "original" autonomy, where they need not report to national authorities in their areas of autonomy which are ensured by constitutional law and with regard to their own organization.

In federal states, therefore, no level of government can subordinate the other; none can concentrate or disperse power unilaterally. Federalism as an institutional principle reveals itself as antithetical to "centralism", and its essence becomes that of "non-centralism". Federalism denies the existence of just one "center" able to centralize or decentralize power, and it develops, instead, a multi-centered and non-centralized structure of government, where each center is given a guaranteed portion of power which can not be removed by the others (Baldi 1999: 4).

By such definition, the degree of decentralization in federal states is commonly seen as bigger than that in unitary states. As a result, there is a growing spurious view that unitary states are likely to be more centralized. The view has been expressed that in unitary or centralized regimes, government may suffer from a lack of sophisticated means (such as communications infrastructure) of governing large territories, thus resulting in "ineffective, corrupt, or even merely nominal" government (Olson 1987: 91, in Azfar 1999: 8). Such problems, it has been argued, might be lessened if governance functions were fragmented into many smaller units, whether independent or within a larger constitutional framework (Meagher 1999, in Azfar 1999: 8). Beside, central controls in a centralized regime may create more problems than they solve, including delays, frustrations, additional costs and perverse behavior. In Kenya, for example, central approval of budgets can take many months, and in some cases is not given until after the end of the financial year to which the budget relates (Devas 2005: 5).

In fact, there is no clear correlation between degree of decentralization or centralization with political type of the state. In this case, Lijphart (1984) affirms that federalism is not a necessary condition for decentralization nor is decentralization a sufficient condition for federalism. We can have decentralization in absence of federalism, and federations, like unitary systems, can be classified as more or less decentralized (and even centralized). As pointed out by King (1982: 126), "there is no observed degree of centralization/decentralization which commonly and distinctly marks off federations from so-called unitary states."

Smith (1985, in Azfar 1999: 8) supports such an idea and reveals that federal state is not necessarily more decentralized than a unitary government. For example, in federal systems, the national government is given some power over sub national governments, while unitary system can devolve substantial powers to provincial governments so that a quasi-federal arrangement exists.

The above arguments lead to an understanding that neither unitary states correspond to centralization, nor federal system corresponds to decentralization. They have equal opportunity to choose and implement either decentralization or centralization principle. A federal system does not always facilitate decentralization better than that in a unitary system. In other words, as Work (2002) claims, the line between decentralization, federalism, unitary states and centralized systems becomes blurred. There is no broad-based generalisation that can be made about the correlation of federal/unitary states and decentralisation. In short, federalism is not the logical next step for decentralizing unitary systems.

In the discourse of decentralization, consequently, the political structure of states is not so imperative. In fact, there is not enough academic evidence supporting idea that unitary system could be completely differentiated to federal system. In this case, Basta (no year) avows that there is no completely unitary state. Every state is at least composed of municipalities as decentralized units. Accordingly, the major question arises as to how to differentiate among a unitary state practicing deconcentration, a decentralized unitary state and a federal state. Similarly, Prasojo (2008) makes an elucidation by saying that it is impossible to find any country which is absolutely unitarian, or totally federalist. The relationship between central and local government in both countries reflects a poly-centric movement instead of mono-centric. It dynamically moves from unitary continuum to federalist continuum, and the other way round.⁸

To sum up the above discussion, Work (2002: 11) provides an interesting conclusion about the correlation between federal or unitary states with the degree of decentralization (and deconcentration), as follows:

“There is no broad-based generalization that can be made about the correlation of federal/unitary states and decentralization. Some federal states are highly centralized - such as Malaysia, while some unitary states have a high degree of decentralization such as China. According to a study of fiscal decentralization (based on sub-national governments' expenditure share) of 31 decentralized countries, 18 are unitary governments and 13 are federal. According to Robert Ebel, the average sub-national share of expenditures is 38% for federal countries and 22% for unitary countries. While this may give a sense that federal countries are more decentralized one should keep in mind that these measures do not reflect sub-national government capacity, quality of service provision, and citizen participation.”

⁸ Just like in decentralization – deconcentration continuum, unitary and federal states reflect analogous continuum line. Buchanan (1995: 24) is one of authors who build a continuum model of unitary and federal states. According to him, the most effective federal structure maybe located somewhere near the middle of the continuum, between the regime of fully autonomous (on the left side) and the regime of fully centralized authority (on the right side). His model suggests that constitutional reform aimed toward the competitive federal structure must be characterized by *some increase in centralization*, if the starting point is on the left, and by *some decrease in centralization*, if the starting point is on the right. Buchanan named the equilibrium point between unitary and federal states as *competitive federalism*. In this case, Wagner (2001) defines competitive federalism as: “...an intellectual construction that locates governance within an openly competitive approach to processes of social organization. This construction stands in contrast to that of dual federalism, which envisions different levels of government as possessing sole, monopolistic authority in their assigned areas. Competitive federalism allows for different levels of government to compete to provide services, maximizing the number of people whose preferences are met.”

Likewise, Boeckenfoerde (2007: 9-11) provides a concrete example of the increase and decrease in centralization, or the moving element of federalism and unitary forces. In the first time of its establishment in 1776, USA was a confederation, but in 1787 it became federalism. After the Civil War from 1861-1865, there was a revision of “dual-sovereignty”. Then, during 1980s, Reagan administration moved to define a “New Federalism”. The main point is that political system and structure in any single country never stop at the same point for a long period. It is sort of never-ending process of finding ideal form of government administration system.

3. Centralism and decentralism debate

As described earlier, decentralization has become global trends to improve the quality of governance. Yet many developing countries have resisted decentralization and maintained the powerful role of central government. It indicates that unitary states or federal state could be either centralized or decentralized.

In this case, centralism and decentralism are two different paradigms having shared objective, i.e. promoting good and democratic governance. According to the first paradigm, good government arises (within a democratic framework) wherever power is effectively centralized in the hands of a single party, thus establishing a system of effective accountability at all levels of government. On the contrary, according to the second paradigm, good government arises from institutions that are diffuse and decentralized, where multiple veto points check the accrual of power in any single source (Gerring, Thacker, and Moreno, 2004: 3).

Centralization, by definition, is the concentration of administrative power in the hands of a central authority, to which all inferior departments and local branches are directly responsible; while decentralization the weakening of the central authority and distribution of its functions among the branches or local administrative bodies. Total decentralization would require the withering away of the state, whereas total centralization would imperil the state's capacity to perform its functions (Cummings 1995: 103, Hutchcroft 2001: 31, Gerring, Thacker & Moreno 2004: 4-11).

A crucial question occurs in the context of centralization and decentralization discourse: where is the position of deconcentration, and how do we explain the relationship between centralization, decentralization, and deconcentration?

In some articles written by Dickovick (2003), Hutchcroft (2001), and Cummings (1995), decentralization has been analyzed from the reverse view of centralization. In this case, centralization has two major variants, i.e. concentration and deconcentration (FAO 2006: 31).⁹ Since deconcentration is one of centralization variants, then people starts to identify deconcentration as an expression of centralization. As a result, deconcentration is frequently thought as a contradictory concept to decentralization.

The next question would be: is decentralization and deconcentration really a dichotomy, or are they moving along the same continuum? In the dichotomy principle, decentralization and deconcentration is replacing or overwhelming each other. There is only one choice available, either decentralization or centralization (deconcentration). Meanwhile, in the continuum principle, decentralization is complement to deconcentration. In addressing such dilemma, UNDP (1999: 3) concludes that decentralization is not an alternative to centralization; both are needed. Similarly, Cummings (1995: 109) also alleges that the question of centralization or decentralization is simply a matter of proportion; it is a matter of finding the optimum degree for the particular concern.

The most important thing in managing relationship between central and local government in a certain country, therefore, is creating a sustainable equilibrium between

⁹ FAO (2006: 31-32) explicitly reports as follows: Centralization assumes the existence of a united administrative center and is made up of two variants: concentration and deconcentration. Meanwhile, decentralization necessitates four interrelated preconditions: the existence of a legal body, recognition of own interest, existence of own organs, and existence of an a posteriori administrative control of legality.

centralizing and decentralizing forces. According to Kauzya (no year: 9), in every country there are always centripetal forces tending towards centralization and centrifugal forces tending towards the periphery. All countries, centralized or decentralized, always seek to find an appropriate mix of these types, the central question always concerning how much decision making power to transfer to local governments. Decentralization is undoubtedly essential to promote good and democratic governance, but decentralization succeeds best in situations where there is a strong central government in terms of legitimacy and capacity (Kauzya, *ibid*).

The interplay between centripetal and centrifugal forces can lead to either total unity (strong centralized, unitary state) or total disintegration. But, it can also lead to a mid-point equilibrium of decentralized governance with shared exercise of power. The following figure illustrates the interchange between centripetal forces (centralization) and centrifugal forces (decentralization), and efforts to achieve optimum degree of equilibrium.

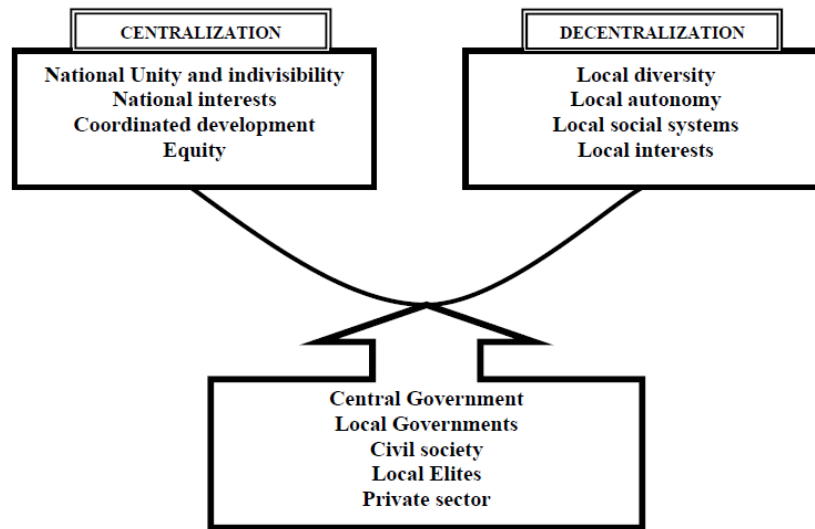


Figure 1: Equilibrium of centralization and decentralization forces (Kauzya)

There are other factors why centralization and decentralization need to be rewardingly combined. It is rather impossible for decentralization or centralization to run in an independent way. Beside, they also need certain circumstances to be effectively applied. FAO (2006: 42) deems that centralization works best only when the following prerequisites are met: strong state presence, concentration of the capacities at central level and there is only intervention as a type of negotiation at the central level. The establishment of centralization, therefore, will highly rely on favorable conditions such as homogeneous political system, or possibility to use quick intervention during emergency cases.

Accordingly, decentralization will occur at its best when supported by functioning democracy, good technical capacity of local government, and vivid civil society organizations. In addition, decentralization also needs the following favorable contexts to be effectively implemented: when there are contrast needs or characteristics among regions, and when local actor mobilization is a decisive factor in setting policies (FAO 2006: 41-42; see Table 1 and 2).

Table 1. Prerequisites for centralization and decentralization

In terms of:	Centralization	Decentralization
Functioning of representative institutions	Strong State presence	Functioning democracy necessary
Capacities	Concentration of the capacities at central level	Required local technical capability
Civil Society Organizations	Only intervene as a type of negotiation at the central level	Civil Society Organizations well implanted at all different levels

Table 2. The favorable context for the establishment of centralization and decentralization

a centralized approach is preferable;	a decentralized approach is preferable;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If the policies put in place are homogeneous and applicable as they are ■ If it is necessary to face emergencies requiring a quick and coordinated intervention at the central level (situation of war, natural disaster) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If the needs at the local level are specific to the context of each territory, requiring a differentiation of the support policies, ■ If local actor mobilization is a decisive factor for success of the set-up policies

The above explanation implies that either centralization or decentralization has its own advantages and disadvantages (FAO 2006: 42; see Table 3). The precise and proper combination between the two is believed as an ideal manner in achieving balanced roles and responsibilities among levels of government.

Table 3. The advantages and disadvantages of centralization and decentralization

In terms of:	Centralization	Decentralization
Implementation of development policies	Adapted to the implementation of non-differentiated policies Example: policies of agriculture intensification	Possibility of implementation of differentiated policies Examples: environmental policies, the struggle against unemployment and social exclusion, reconciliation programs etc.
Mobilization of the demand for local energies	Can lead to a certain "sclerosis" of local initiatives	Effects of mobilization at the local level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ interest raising ■ creation of partnerships and social cohesion ■ gaining of expertise and establishment technical teams at local level
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More rigidity ■ More time required 	More flexibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ in decision-making ■ in management
Control of the use of public funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In general only documentary control ■ Centralized control sometimes allows for economies of scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Direct physical control at the local level in addition to the documentary control

As Cummings (1995: 109-110) clarifies, the centralization versus decentralization debate is a question of balance, but the ideal balance between centralization and decentralization changes, driven by changing environmental circumstances. It is assumed that while an optimum may not exist in practice, but there does exist a theoretical balance point towards which workable techniques for satisfying can be aimed. Due to the dynamic of organizational environment, the level of this point (satisfying point between centralization and decentralization) depends on environmental circumstances, and will need reviewing throughout time as these circumstances change. As a result, the “blend (of centralization/decentralization) may not be constant. Like the ribbon in the middle of the tug-of-war rope, it moves to and fro according to the strength of competing influences.”¹⁰

In the reality, countries practicing centralization (to some extent deconcentration) and decentralization are also varied. In this case, FAO’s publication (2006: 92) identifies five categories of countries: 1) countries with weak decentralization and participation, includes Guinea Bissau and Chad; 2) countries with weak decentralization and average participation, includes Morocco and Mauritania; 3) countries with average decentralization and weak participation, such as Algeria; 4) countries with strong decentralization and participation, covers Burkina Faso and Senegal; and 5) countries with average decentralization and participation, covers Togo, Benin, Guinea, Niger, and Cape Verde (see Figure 2).

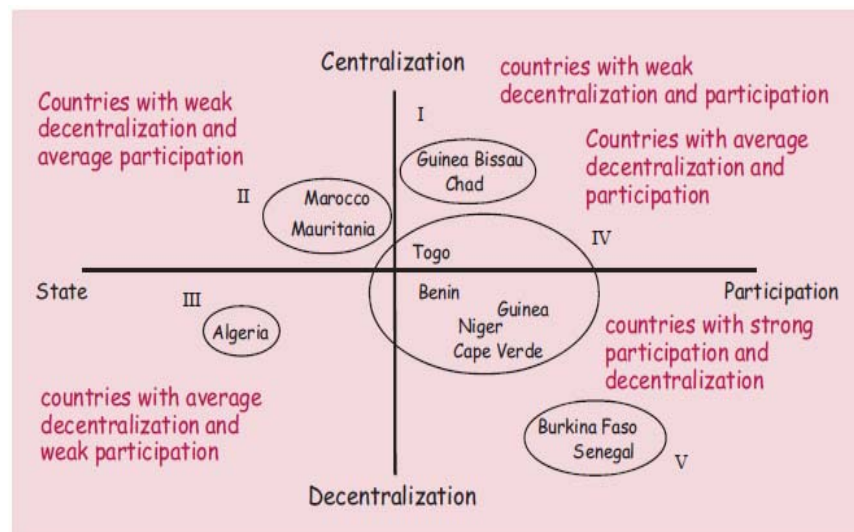


Figure 2. Centralization and decentralization in African countries

In a similar way, Hutchcroft (2001: 39) analyzes the complexities of centralization and decentralization in both administration and politics. After developing

¹⁰ Cummings leans his outlook mainly on the previous works by Cuthbert, “Fayol and the Principles of Organization”. In: Tilet, A., Kempner, T. and Wills, G. (Eds), *Management Thinkers* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970); Carnall, C. A., *Managing Change in Organizations* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1990); Goldsmith, W. and Clutterbuck, D., *The Winning Streak Workout Book* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985); and Henry Fayol, *General and Industrial Management* (London: Pitman & Sons, 1949).

two distinct continuum of administrative and political centralization/decentralization, he combines them in a single matrix to highlight the wide range of strategies and outcomes that emerge from the complex interplay of the two spheres. As a result, he produced four quadrants of country typology: 1) administratively and politically more decentralized country, such as Philippines and Somalia; 2) politically more decentralized but administratively more centralized country, includes Brazil and Thailand; 3) politically more centralized but administratively more decentralized country, like China; and 4) politically and administratively more centralized country, comprises Indonesia and Britain under Thatcher (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Huthcroft’s model on centralization – decentralization from the perspective of politics and administration

Again, both Huthcroft’s and FAO’s model indirectly reflects that a sound mix between centralization and decentralization degree may differ among countries, and therefore, should be carefully scrutinized based on specific demands and characteristics of individual countries. In short, even though decentralization is becoming much more preferable trend in the global political reform, extreme decentralization may generate a hazard, especially when local authorities are relatively incapable of managing and executing the functions devolved.

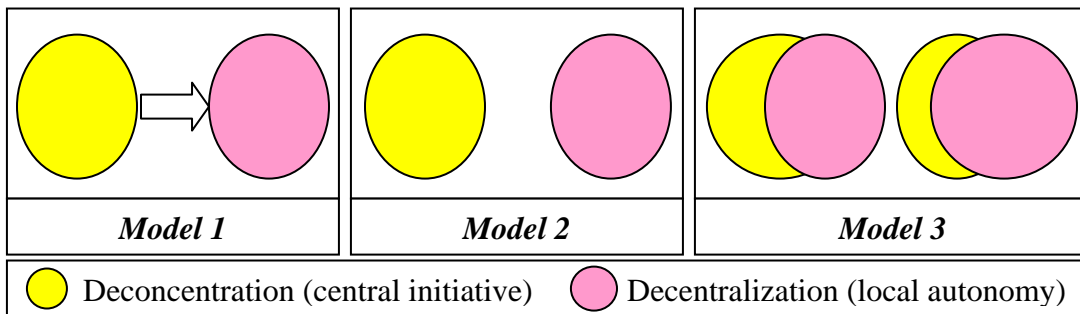
4. The prospective model of centralization – decentralization interface and its future trend

Although centralization and decentralization interacts each other to apprehend a balance; and although deconcentration and decentralization tend to find an equilibrium point, there are still some prospective models of deconcentration – decentralization interference might be proposed to be implemented, as the following:

- *Model 1: Deconcentration comes before decentralization.* In this model, certain degree of decentralization will only be given when local government has suitable

capacity. If LGUs are still lacking of capacity, central government will takeover all of authorities and responsibilities. Incapable LGUs turn automatically into central government agencies. Whenever LGSs' capacities grow significantly, they can be promoted as autonomous decentralized local governments.

- *Model 2: Deconcentration is accomplished alongside decentralization on its own field of authority.* In this model, central government may propose and execute any project in the local level other than local government's authority. Division of central – local authorities is a prerequisite to prevent from any redundant, blurred, or overlapped possibility.
- *Model 3: Deconcentration and decentralization is simultaneously run with varied degree on each side.* In this model, portion of decentralization could be bigger or smaller than deconcentration, depends on government needs and expected objectives. Deconcentration programs are basically designed to meet national standards public services provided by local government units (see Figure 4).



Source: Author's conceptualization

Figure 4. The Model of Decentralization – Centralization Interface

Figure 4 might be interpreted into two different ways. Firstly, each model describes the situation that stands alone and has no relation with each other. A country can implement the model in accordance with certain preferences. Secondly, the model is a sequential logic, meaning that the first model is the earliest stage in the relationship set up central and local. Along with the increased ability of local administrators and governance complexity, the second model can be applied to reduce the central government's workloads as well as to meet the demands from below. Furthermore, as local government's capacity growing, the third model might be promoted as a good option to build more effective and efficient governance.

The above model is proposed simply to make our understanding on the practice of decentralization/centralization in a certain country much easier. However, since the ideal balance between centralization and decentralization may not exist; there must be a more desirable option. In such a situation, decentralization tends to be more preferable than centralization. There are some reasons why decentralization appears to be the most appropriate policy of today. According to FAO (2006: 42), there are at least five factors contributing to the increasing interest of decentralization, i.e. state withdrawal calls for alternative solutions, the advancement of democracy opens new doors, civil society is better prepared, the challenges of development are more complex, and technological development broadens new perspectives.

Similarly, Fleurke and Hulst (2006: 39) decentralization option tend to be more popular due to disadvantages of centralized administrative system. In the case of Europe with specific reference to the Netherlands, there are five disadvantages of centralized system as follows: 1) central government had reached the limits of its capacity to process the growing streams of information on increasingly complex policy issues and to react in an adequate way to demands from an ever more dynamic society; 2) local government had to deal with a highly fragmented central government that hindered an integrated approach to complex policy issues; 3) the lack of discretion caused by the detailed central rules connected with specific grants impeded local government to customize public service delivery to local circumstances and needs of individual citizens; 4) the widely spread phenomenon of centrally regulated specific grants frustrated the efficient allocation of resources by local government; and 5) the vitality of local democracy was threatened because centralization changed the character of local government.

From historical perspective, the demand for a stronger decentralization is also quite obvious. Cummings (1995: 113) considers that decentralization first appeared in 1846 “*An irresistible power of decentralization*”, continued till 1859 “*What you want is to decentralize your government*”. He also quotes some sources favor to decentralization as follows:

Decentralization was described as part of a “new wave” in which “new political parties, new philosophies, and new management techniques sprung up and explicitly attacked the centralist premises of the previous ruling paradigm” (Toffler, 1981, p. 268). Things were on the move, and they were moving along a linear groove towards decentralization. Naisbitt (1982), for example, entitles his chapter on the “megatrend” decentralization “Centralization~Decentralization”. This path was re-confirmed and perpetuated by textbooks emphasizing that “The clear trend today is toward more decentralization” (Stoner and Freeman, 1989, p. 323). Probably the most thorough account of the relationship between centralization and autonomy suggested that “beliefs will swing towards decentralization unless this is discredited by a series of disasters” (Brooke, 1984, p. 340).

Again, the passage implicitly explains that there is not any ideal balance between centralization and decentralization or between deconcentration and decentralization. It leads to a rough conclusion about the centralization – decentralization debate in the contemporary governance, that is, both centralization and deconcentration has tended to be weakening, whereas decentralization has been more widely and strongly developed. Consequently, the role of central government has tended to decelerate, while local participation, initiative, and capacity should be continuously strengthened.

5. General description on cross-country deconcentration and decentralization experiences

As elaborated before, either unitary or federal states may apply decentralized or centralized system, though the pendulum tends to move to the decentralized side. Among unitary or federal states, centralization practices are more easily observed in the first

type.¹¹ Because, the process of state formation in this type is not preceded by any agreement between the small states that already exist.

Myanmar is a good example as one of the world's most centralized unitary states in Asia. But recently, officials in Myanmar have expressed the need for reforms involving a degree of decentralization. In this deep-rooted conflicting country, decentralization has been applauded for its supposed potential to improve levels of public participation, bureaucratic accountability, administrative efficiency, and responsiveness to local needs, among other goals (Fritzen & Lim 2006: 1).

From Latin America region, centralized unitary state is represented by Costa Rica. Ryan (2004: 82) conveys that centralist tradition in that country is among the strongest in Latin America. Efforts to move away from this tradition over the past 25 years can be almost uniformly characterized as tepid, disjointed, and ultimately unsuccessful. The decentralization discourse was characterized primarily by ambiguity, as quoted from Rivera:

“...on the one hand, in their verbal and written statements [central political leaders] would affirm their support for decentralization and strengthening municipal government while in institutional practice they acted to strengthen the classical centralist model.... One is left with the impression that [these leaders] are in agreement with decentralization in any form that does not touch centralism.”

Comparable picture can be observed in the European countries. According to Jeffery and Wincott, 2006: 3), United Kingdom has a reputation as one of the more centralized regime in contemporary Europe. The United Kingdom is in many respects a highly centralized political system, with power formally concentrated in a famously—or notoriously—strong and putatively sovereign parliament. Goldsmith and Newton (1983: 216) also note that central government has always been powerful in Britain, which, with France, is one of the most highly centralized, unitary states in the western world, but in the last few years the centre has further consolidated its power by increasing its legal, political, and financial control over local authorities.

Other apparent centralized state can be scrutinized among Middle East and North African (MENA) countries. Overall, local government systems in the MENA region can be characterized as a form of deconcentration rather than one of devolved local self-government. In general, the public administration system is highly centralized, equipped with an elaborate system of deconcentrated field offices of line agencies. Decisions for the most part, especially service delivery decisions, are made by the central government and the role of subnational authorities is largely confined to carrying these out. In the region, the general trend is to have two distinct types of local government units: deconcentrated and decentralized (municipal) units. The operations of these two types of local governments are subject to totally different rules. In all countries, the deconcentrated units of the central government provide a big chunk of public services, including health and education, under strict guidance of the central government. Whereas, decentralized units (generally municipalities) perform limited number of functions such

¹¹ Centralization might be transformed into two different variants, concentrated centralization and deconcentrated centralization. Such variation leads, in turn, to a misleading conception that deconcentration have been perceived as, more or less, identical to centralization.

as street paving and maintenance, construction of local roads, street lighting, garbage collection, library and park services, and issuing permits for constructions (Tosun 2008: 7).

Vietnam and Cambodia are two countries in South-East Asian region experiencing similar situation as occurred among MENA's countries. Smoke (2005: 26, 28) notes that Vietnam, which became a centrally planned communist state after the Vietnam War, has increasingly formalized the sub-national government framework since the mid-1990s. As in China, economic reforms in Vietnam (*doi moi*) spurred initial progress on intergovernmental reform. The center still exerts substantial control, but sub-national governments have some discretion. Provinces have greater powers, including considerable authority over lower levels. Popular participation and grassroots demand for political voice have grown, but Vietnam remains a one-party state and a fairly centrally driven system. The country has moved forward with its decentralization framework and conducted some successful policy experiments, but implementation is uneven and additional reforms are required. Vietnam has seen legal or de facto deconcentration of functions to subnational entities that remain substantially accountable to the center, though elements of delegation and devolution have emerged. Additional notes are given by Smoke as follows:

“In Vietnam, decentralization policy blends a deconcentration of service responsibilities with an allocation of rights that resembles devolution. The latter, however, is much less developed than the former, although provinces have considerably more power and autonomy than sub-provincial entities. Even provinces are subject to minimum expenditure requirements in some sectors, and the central government still sets rates on major sources of revenue.” (Smoke 2005: 29)

Meanwhile, Cambodia's decentralization is relatively unique. Following elections brokered by the United Nations (UN) in 1993, the center reclaimed power from provincial governors—who had previously ruled with a free hand—in order to impose discipline on the intergovernmental system. Reforms adopted in 2001 led to the election of commune councils and provided them small intergovernmental transfers without formal service responsibilities or own-source revenues. This approach focuses on meeting immediate community needs and developing trust between citizens and the government as a first step in decentralization. Provincial reforms have been limited (2005: 27).

Indonesia is also good example of centralized state moving to a more decentralized one. Until the passage of the 1999 reforms, the practice in Indonesia has been largely one of deconcentration, not decentralization. In the highly centralized multi-tiered unitary state that has existed since the 1950s, with provinces and then local governments as the tiers under the central government, many government functions have been performed by deconcentrated central government agencies in provinces and districts (Alm, Aten and Bahl, 2001: 84).¹² Ahmad and Mansoor (2002: 4) mentions that Indonesia under Soeharto regime was a model of deconcentration than of decentralization,

¹² Starting from 2001, when new decentralization laws of 1999 came into effect, Alm et.al. (2001: *ibid*) believe that there will be several fundamental changes in Indonesia.

with the central government exercising significant control over the appointment of local officials and uses of funds by these officials. Rohdewohld (1995: 84) also concludes that Indonesian decentralization based on previous law of 1974 was more akin to administrative delegation than to political devolution. Even Lewis (2002: 138) categorized Indonesia as one of the most centralized state. He says: *"throughout most of its history, Indonesia's public sector has been counted among the most centralized in the world."*

Decentralization in Indonesia became more of a political imperative in the late 1990s, which is based upon the two new laws drafted in 1999, known as *big-bang decentralization*.¹³ The two laws drastically altered the national-subnational relations by transferring powers, taxes, funds, and personnel to the regions. The authority of the central government has been devolved to subnational governments except for defense, diplomatic, judicial, fiscal, and religious policies. The hierarchical relationship between the province (the first-level subnational government) and the district/municipality (the second-level subnational government) has been abolished (Ito 2006: 139).¹⁴ In addition, regional heads (provincial governors and district heads) are no longer appointed by the central government, but are elected by and accountable to regional parliaments (at the respective level).

As a result of such massive decentralization, the deconcentrated agencies of central government have, for the most part, been abolished, but provinces continue to represent the center in certain instances. It means that governor is the head of provincial autonomous region, which is decentralization, and agent of the central government, which is deconcentration, simultaneously. The governor is responsible for implementing minimum standard of service and doing supervision to local government (district and city/municipal) on behalf of central government.

As decentralization is getting more developed, deconcentration turns into diverse side. Tambunan (2000: 54) notifies that deconcentration in Indonesia is still blurred though his following statement: *"... the two laws, which are theoretically meant to complement each other, still leave the specific areas of deconcentration unclear, and have not specified the regional/local agents in the delegation process. In short, there is still uncertainty in defining decentralization in Indonesia."*

Since decentralization and deconcentration is an inter-connected concept, obscurity of deconcentration policy design, for sure, will affect the implementation of decentralization packages. It implies that strengthening of decentralization should be

¹³ Koichi (2004: 2) bravely states: "decentralization taken by Indonesia is notable for its scale and speed. It was a Big Bang." Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006, ed.) underscores: "Some of these countries witnessed an unprecedented "big bang" shift toward comprehensive political and economic decentralization: Bolivia in 1995 and Indonesia after the fall of Suharto in 1998." Also World Bank (internet site) confidently pronounces: "Indonesia's decentralization has been a "Big Bang" indeed. Regional spending rose, central civil servants were re-assigned; over 16,000 public service facilities were handed over to the regions; and a brand new intergovernmental fiscal system was put in place all of this without major disruption in government services. Over time, Indonesia becomes one of the most decentralized countries in the world and much more decentralized than would be expected on the basis of the country's structural characteristics."

¹⁴ Under the new decentralization law of 2004, the relationship between province and district/municipality government has been slightly amended, by which governor is given new tasks of coordination, guidance and supervision over district/municipality government (article 38 Law 32/2004).

simultaneously accomplished with refurbishment of deconcentration design. This is sort of homework for future decentralized Indonesia.

Finally, France is indubitably an outstanding example of unitary state practicing deconcentration principle. France is a typical unitary state having long-rooted history that makes it essential as a reference in the study of deconcentration and decentralization.

In the political organization of France the so-called 'Jacobean logic' plays an important role. The logic is best summarized by the expression '*L'une et indivisible République*' (the one and indivisible Republic) which stands for a tendency towards centralization and uniformity (Edwards and Hupe 2000: 1). France is also known as a type of the 'Napoleonic state', which integrates the nation through a single territorial administrative structure. Sub-national units (e.g. 'departments') represent subdivisions of the national administration and are governed by a 'prefect' who is an agent of the central government. From the administrative point of view, the vertically integrated structure of the Napoleonic state makes it an archetype of a unitary state (Ansell and Gingrich 2003: 142).¹⁵

There has been significant decentralization across several of the Napoleonic states, including France, Italy, and Belgium. In France, there were no major decentralization reforms until 1982. The 1982 reforms created a regional level of government composed of multiple departments and a new tier of elected government. This act also restricted multiple office-holding among sub-national officials and reduced the power of the prefect (Ansell and Gingrich 2003: 147). Likewise, OECD (1997: 18) notes that the 1982 decentralisation plan gave full independence to the regions and the *départements* in a range of areas such as education, economic support measures, and local transport. It also gave responsibility for the construction and maintenance of primary schools to the municipalities, while retaining responsibility for most other education policy at the central level.

Before 1982, however, administrative districts (*circonscriptions administratives*) have no legal embodiment or autonomy as opposed to sub-national governments. The administrative districts are run by state officials who are hierarchically subordinate to the Prime Minister and the ministers in Paris. In that period, hence, the distinction between sub-national governments and administrative districts is relevant (Edwards and Hupe 2000: 2).

Then in 1982 there is significant progress on decentralization policy in France, marked by the enactment of *Law on the Rights and Liberties of Communes, Departments and Regions*, also known as *Loi Deferre*. Knapp dan Wright (2000: 357) assertively pronounces 1982 appears as a turning point in central-local government relations in France, since they really were transformed, in legal terms, by the flurry of decentralization legislation. Nevertheless, it is important to notify that even though the French system of government has gone through many major changes, the underlying culture has remained the same. This culture entails a broad consensus on France being a centralized nation, as laid down in the Constitution's 20th Article; the central government

¹⁵ In the Napoleonic countries such as France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Greece and Turkey, there is a tradition of distrust between levels of government, so that separation of the blocks of tasks assigned to each level is felt to be necessary. This separation is also seen as a guarantee of efficiency. Even in systems which are now regional, central government tries to maintain a certain degree of involvement (OECD 1997: 26).

decides and directs the nation's policy. This central dominance affects the position of sub-national governments, which are considered subordinate to the centre. More in general, it affects the relations between the state and society (Edwards and Hupe 2000: 1).

In 2003-2004, 20 years after the great reform of 1982, a new impetus was given to decentralization, still in the same spirit of consolidation and a search for balance between central and local powers. Therefore, France is experiencing a *dual delegation of power*: on the one hand to local elected officials, which is decentralization, and on the other to the appointed representative in the region, which is deconcentration. From the perspective of deconcentration function, the Prefect is the *agent of the state's authority* and the delegate of the prime minister and of each minister in the territory, and responsible for national interests, administrative control and respect of the law.

French's experience shows a general drift that the reform of public administration is still running to find the best composition on the role of central and local government. This means that decentralization and deconcentration is seen as a reciprocal relationship, instead of a contradictory approach.

6. Asymmetrical decentralization: an emerging need for unitary states

Cross country experiences indicates that there is no single model of decentralization or deconcentration, even in countries with the same political structure, i.e. unitary or federal system. A more common condition is that while there are some variations of decentralization, they apply decentralization and deconcentration in a concurrent way.

In the case of unitary states, although they politically have similar system, but still there are some diversity in terms of cultural and historical aspects among regions in any single state. To many extents, the economic advancement, the dynamic of local politics, and the natural setting and resources are also diverse. That is why, political, administrative, and financial policy treatment should be delivered to any region differently, based on its objective conditions and goals. As there is no completely unitary state, and as there is no observed correlation between centralization/decentralization with federations/unitary states, asymmetric decentralization which means different design of decentralization for different region, would be a reasonable demand.

The concept of asymmetric decentralization itself evolved from the concept of asymmetric federation introduced by Charles Tarlton in 1965 (Tillin 2006: 48). According to Tillin, there are two types of asymmetric federation, i.e. *de facto* and *de jure* asymmetry. The first refers to the type of asymmetry that is a feature of all federations to some degree, namely differences between subunits in terms of size and wealth, culture or language, and those differences in autonomy, representation and influence in the wider federation that result from such attributes. De jure asymmetry, on the other hand, is the product of conscious constitutional design. It refers to the allocation of different amounts or types of powers, or autonomy in certain policy areas, to some subunits of a federation but not others.

Asymmetric decentralization is more likely to occur in the unitary states, while federal states tend to implement full autonomy for their sub-national governments. There are some possible types of decentralization applied in the unitary states i.e. extended

autonomy, limited autonomy, and special autonomy.¹⁶ When two or more types of decentralization is about to be implemented in the same time for different regions, then asymmetric decentralization is already taken place.

Asymmetric decentralization is not a digression from the basic idea of decentralization, but may even reinforce the purpose of decentralization in creating effectiveness and efficiency of the government affairs, as well as strengthening the democratic institutions at local level. In this case, democratic local governance might be fortified more vigorously by admitting every difference in terms of characteristics, potency, needs, and historical background of each region into the national policy system. Additionally, given that each region in a single country has dissimilar political, social, and cultural anatomy; asymmetric decentralization would be a deliberate policy to avoid the frustration of a certain region of the national government. That is the reason why, both federal and unitary state in the contemporary politics use decentralization as not only political strategy to transfer government powers, or economic strategy to balance fiscal structure, but also cultural strategy to realize the principles of “diversity in unity” or “unity in diversity”.

To endorse such strategies, the format or variations of decentralization (including deconcentration) become less important. The most important thing is how to achieve the essence of decentralization, i.e. to generate equilibrium of roles and responsibilities between central and local governments. This new balance could be realized by reducing the intervention level of center government and expanding the autonomy of local administration.

In the current situation, fortunately, asymmetric decentralization is already practiced by many of unitary states such as Indonesia, China, France, and Japan.

In Indonesia, special autonomy laws were given for Aceh and Papua. The Law No. 18/1999 for Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam province provides legal rights for the most eastern province to implement Islamic law (Syariah), address local election, generate revenue sharing, and allow for a display of Aceh identity (flag). At the same time, the provincial government was given new powers and received a large increase in the provincial governmental budget. The Special Autonomy in the form of Law No. 21/1999 in Papua guarantees the privilege of drafting the proposal themselves (groups of Papuan political elite). The Special Autonomy Law identified more than 250 ethno-linguistic groups in Papua and affirms that the indigenous people of Papua as part of the Melanesian race with their own cultures, histories and Adat (cultural) law (Basuki 2006: 11).¹⁷

Indonesia shares similar experience with China. China is a unitary state with long tradition of limited decentralization. Among other Asian countries, China has the weakest

¹⁶ Indonesia is probably a good case of asymmetric decentralization. Kabupaten / kota (district and city) governments are granted extended autonomy, while limited autonomy is to be implemented in the provincial level. Due to social, political and economic reasons, two provinces, Aceh and Papua, are stipulated as a special autonomous region. Yet some provinces such as Yogyakarta, Bali, and Riau Islands are still in the way of struggling through parliament’s legislation of becoming special autonomous region. Therefore, asymmetric decentralization in Indonesia is an ongoing process.

¹⁷ Other than that, special autonomy is also given to Jakarta as a capital city of Indonesia (article 5 Law No. 29/2007). It is granted specific duties, rights, obligations, and responsibilities of a government due to its position as representatives of foreign countries, and as central of international organizations.

formal basis for decentralization, because intergovernmental changes in China have occurred mostly through economic reform (Smoke 2005: 25, 31). But during the last two decades China has transitioned from a largely deconcentrated system to one that incorporates elements of delegation and devolution. Subnational governments have become more responsible for financing their expanding functions from their own revenue, both formal and informal, giving them more autonomy except in sectors with mandated service standards (Smoke 2005: 28-29).

China's constitution specifically encourages central government to establish special administrative regions when necessary. A special administrative region is a local administrative area directly under the Central Government. At present, China is divided into two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau), 23 provinces (*sheng*), five autonomous regions (*zizhiqu*), and four municipalities directly under the Central Government (*zhixiashi*). These units contain counties (*xian*) and cities (*shi*), and sometimes prefectures (*diqu*) which are units of more than county; they consists townships (*xiang*) or districts (*xingzhen cun*) (Beh 2007: 7).

Implementing the spirit of constitution, decentralization of authority in China is reflected with the creation of special economic zones, open coastal cities and development zones. Four special economic zones were created in 1978 (Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen in Hainan province). Provinces Guangdong and Fujian were given extensive independence and autonomy to develop their own region economically (authority to approve foreign investment projects up to \$30 million). Furthermore in 1984 fourteen coastal open cities were created and certain inland cities (those along the Yangtze River and bordering with Russia) are delegated powers like those of the special economic zones (Basuki 2006: 12).

In terms of asymmetric decentralization, China and Indonesia is alike. As pointed out by Basuki (2006: 20), China and Indonesia are similar in that decentralization is not uniform throughout the country but there is a large degree of variation in the autonomy government in different regions. China with its 'coastal open cities', 'special economic zones', and Special Autonomous Regions in Tibet and Xinjiang¹⁸ and Indonesia has Special Autonomous Regions in Aceh and Papua with district level decentralization throughout the country. But in the continuum of political decentralization China is still leaning towards a centralized side while Indonesia is on the decentralized side.

France, unsurprisingly, treats its sub-national governments asymmetrically as well. Among 22 regions in France, Corsica obtains greater authorities but for the most part its status is quite similar.¹⁹ Historical background of Corsica clearly shows that this region

¹⁸ Xinjiang, China's western border province comprising eighteen percent of the country's entire land area, is a region beset by change, and increasingly, confrontation between two very distinct peoples – the more recently arrived Han Chinese and the indigenous Uyghur Turkish Muslims. The confrontation revolves primarily around a struggle for domination over the province and a Uyghur quest for autonomy or even independence from Beijing's rule (Fuller and Starr, no year: 4). In order to reduce such kind of conflict, recently, China's government launched a new big campaign for development in the West or in the inner part of China, as the disparity in income and development has widened too much. In addition, central government is cautious about any possible dangerous tendency towards separatism among the Muslim population influenced by external factors (Shimizu 2001: abstract).

¹⁹ Corsica is the fourth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea after Sicily, Sardinia, and Cyprus. It is located west of Italy and southeast of the French mainland. Corsica is separated from the continental mainland by the Ligurian Sea, and is much closer to the Italian than to the French mainland. Politically,

has different setting from the mainland of France, and that is the reason why Corsica deserves an exceptional treatment from French government. As a matter of fact, such kind of special autonomy is fearfully provoked other regions to sue a wider autonomy, or even promoted separatist movements.²⁰ But in case of France, such anxiety is not reasonable enough. There is a growing believe among French people that a genuine measure of autonomy tends to put outright separatists out of business, rather than spur them on. Moreover, most citizens do not believe that their country would break up by going federal (Lawday 2000: 2).

The cases of asymmetric decentralization in Indonesia, China and France can be best described as *de facto* asymmetry. It means that factual conditions such as historical backgrounds (Corsica, Xinjiang), cultural and ethnic dimension (Xinjiang, Papua), political and religious conviction (Xinjiang, Aceh), and economic activities and natural resources (Papua, coastal regions in Eastern China) are the basic considerations in awarding special autonomy or greater authorities for the regions/provinces. Meanwhile, asymmetrical decentralization in Japan might be more clearly seen as *de jure* asymmetry. As elaborated further below, “unequal” decentralization in Japan is not mainly driven by objective factors and genuine demands from the regions; it is rather endorsed by political will and policy from the central.

Japan is typically a unitary rather than federal system of government. Therefore, local governments have been authorized powers and status based upon national rather than sub-national statutes. In Japan, local government is two-tiered: prefectures serving wider areas, and municipalities providing local services. The number of each tier is usually directly related to such factors as geographical conditions, population levels, the nature of local administration and the corresponding level of centralization.²¹

Since the early post-war period, local government’s authority in Japan has increased substantially, despite little structural change (Michihiro 2007: 1). At that time,

Corsica was once briefly an independent Corsican Republic, until being incorporated into France in 1768. After a brief colonization by the ancient Greeks, it was preempted by the Roman Republic and became a province of the Roman Empire. After the fall of the empire it was invaded by a number of short-lived powers before being rescued by the March of Tuscany. As a medieval state speaking a Romance language it became an object of contention between the Republic of Pisa and the Republic of Genoa. The Genoese took possession of the island in 1347, and governed it until 1729 - interrupted only by a brief intervention of the French in 1553. In 1729 the Corsican revolution for independence began. After 26 years of struggle the independent Corsican Republic was formed in 1755. The first Corsican Constitution was written in Italian (the language of culture in Corsica until the end of the 19th century) by Paoli. He proclaimed that Italian was the official language of Corsica. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corsica>

²⁰ As in Indonesian case, asymmetric decentralization in France is an ongoing process, too. Some prefects or provinces such as Brittany (Bretagne), Provence (Provence-Alpes-Cote d’Azur), Savoy, and Basque are demanding for higher autonomy.

²¹ The number of prefectures has remained unchanged since the system was adopted during the Meiji Period (1868-1912). On the other hand, the number of municipalities has steadily decreased. This is mainly to improve their local economy by widening their fiscal base. During Great Meiji Consolidation, the number of village and town decreased from 71,314 to 15,820; but 39 new cities created. Subsequently, during Great Showa Consolidation, the number of village and town decreased from 9,582 to 2,916; while cities increased from 286 to 556. Finally, during Great Heisei Consolidation, the number of village and town decreased from 2,558 to 1,044; and cities increased from 671 to 777. The figures indicate that Japan has changed from a rural to an industrial urbanized society.

central government had granted special authority to Japan's "Big Six" cities: Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Yokohama, Kyoto, and Kobe (Jacobs 2003: 603).

Local autonomy, therefore, is not equivalent in Japan, but rather, varies based upon a jurisdiction's population size and economic base. Large cities, important employment centers, and heavily populated prefectures have greater authority and influence than do smaller, less affluent communities. For example, large cities and those with strong manufacturing bases have had greater administrative discretion and financial flexibility to implement their own local policies than have smaller, more rural communities (Jacobs 2003: 601). Jacob's analysis leads to conclusion that prefectural autonomy can be classified into five categories as follows:

- a) *Tokyo is nearly a twice the size of any other prefecture in both population and employment.*
- b) *After Tokyo come the large urban prefectures, Osaka, Kanagawa, Aichi, Saitama, Chiba, Hokkaido, Hyogo, and Fukuoka, all of which have (1) populations of greater than five million, (2) Designated Cities, (3) large industrial/employment bases, and (4) fiscal flexibility.*
- c) *Prefectures such as Shizuoka, Ibaraki, Hiroshima, Kyoto, Niigata, and Miyagi, with somewhere between two-and-a-half and four million people, rank next.*
- d) *These areas are followed by prefectures with between one and two million inhabitants*
- e) *Rural prefectures with less than one million. This last group, generally have the least amount of budget flexibility, and thereby, local autonomy.*

The relationship between central and local government in Japan is, indeed, a unique pattern. On the one hand, control of the center to the region is relatively strong, but on the other hand, local governments have adequate flexibility to set their own policy. Muramatsu (in Sato 2001: 1) describes the situation as a combination between *perpendicular administrative control model* and *horizontal political competition model*. In such a combination, the autonomy and flexibility are expected to spur competition among regions, but offset by the nation-wide guidelines provided by the central government.

7. Roles of central government in a decentralized unitary states

The process of decentralizing government powers and resources, particularly in unitary states, always require vital role from the central government. Decentralization may only be an anecdote when central government does not have any desire to decentralize. In other words, the central government has a strong role to play in all systems, decentralizing or not.

In order to make decentralization works effectively, some basic roles need to be addressed. The foremost important role would be balancing decentralization and deconcentration policy.²² Transfer of authorities to local level does not mean that the

²² The balance of decentralization and deconcentration is not identical with the concept of "decentralization within the framework of centralization" as easily investigated in many developing countries. The first tries to attain proportional roles and responsibility between central and local government, supported by a

central has lost all of its power. Not only recognizing and fulfilling local needs, central government has also to make sure that the pattern of relationship between different levels of government is not weakening after decentralization. In this case, decentralization should be regarded as a strategy of strengthening nation building. In the context of balancing roles of central and local government as well as promoting decentralization as nation-building strategy, the following conditions need to be met.

Firstly, central government is required to provide overall policy direction concerning local government responsibilities and sub-national performance measurement. At the same time, the central should also define the minimum standards of service delivery, transfers technical and fiscal resources to assist local governments,²³ and guards against local overspending. Aside from these, the central government should also support information sharing among different local governments and encourage competition among regions.²⁴

Secondly, central government is obliged to ensure the meaningful cooperation and links between the various levels of governmental organization. Decentralization does not require the central government to withdraw completely from an area of responsibility. For purposes of good governance the central government should decentralize responsibilities and resources in situations where it serves the optimal fulfillment of governmental tasks. On the other hand it should retain those tasks in its own responsibility which can be performed better and more effectively by state institutions. There are two types of coordination should be considered, i.e. coordination among level of government, and coordination among local governments.²⁵ If the central government fails to build a fruitful coordination mechanism, then decentralization may produced “selfish local government” and disintegrated local development. Balancing decentralization and deconcentration, in short, is a matter of putting central and local

clear mechanism for coordination. Meanwhile, the later assumes that decentralization is complement to centralization and, therefore, may not reduce central government powers over local governments.

²³ Decentralized governance requires proper capacity to take over devolved functions from the central, to recognize local citizens’ needs and accommodate it in the development planning documents, and to mobilize local resources to support the new tasks of local governments. The stronger the capacity they have, the higher their possibility to become developmental local governance. Without adequate capacity, decentralization may cause the failures of development processes in the grass root level. Here, central government plays a crucial role to promote capacity building programs for local administrations.

²⁴ Fritzen and Lim (2006: 7) provide good example of competition mechanism among local governments in the Philippines. Competition could be done through recognition of exemplary local governments (an example of which is the ‘Gawad Galing Pook’ awards annually given to innovative local governments in the Philippines), the articulation of minimum service standards, and support of local government associations, among many other alternatives. These functions are crucial in mitigating some of the problems associated with decentralization.

Similar mechanism can be observed in current Indonesian public administration system. The central government (in this case Ministry of Administrative Reform) awarding “Piala Citra” for any institution showing best performance in delivering public services. The competition is conducted every two years, and resulted in the improvement of people’s satisfaction index in certain district and province.

²⁵ In doing cross-region coordination, central government needs to fortify the role of governor as deconcentration agent. Provincial government should have a broader range of authority for the coordination mechanism among sub-province governments. Development planning of local government, for example, should be set in the wider context (province-wide or nation-wide planning).

governments into a proper coordinative mechanism in order to accomplish their respective authorities, synergistically.

8. Concluding remarks

Decentralization has multiple meaning, interpretation, and implementation in different country and different context. But there is common essence of decentralization, i.e. strengthening local authorities through transfer of power and resources from the central government. Nevertheless, decentralization should not be seen as a win-loose or one-sided relation. Expansion of local authorities should not be perceived as the deteriorating of state's capacity. The most important thing to be remembered is that the purpose of decentralization is not to reinforce local powers or to preserve central power but basically and exclusively to ensure the best service to the citizen, service that is closer, more comprehensible and less costly.

Since the main objective is to improve the quality of public service for the people, contrasting unitary and federal states, or contrasting decentralization and deconcentration, is no longer relevant. The more important thing to be noticed is that both unitary and federal states have equal opportunity to promote *asymmetrical decentralization*.

Asymmetrical decentralization itself constitutes a win-win solution to resolve any conflict between Unitarian supporters and separatist movement. As already been shown in the previous section, many unitary states are practicing asymmetrical decentralization such as France, China, Japan and Indonesia. In those countries, asymmetrical decentralization constitutes policy priority in dealing with increasing demands for greater decentralization. By applying asymmetrical decentralization, the basic political structure of unitary states is not necessarily changed into federalism.

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