ASIA AT THE NEXUS: THE THIRD SECTOR AND EMERGING DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Maria Gwenetha Pusta

University of Santo Tomas, City of Manila, Philippines

Global configurations have placed Asia as the emerging pole of the grand tripolar structure of Europe and the United States of America. The poles themselves are in the process of transformation and East Asia is at the nexus of development. Withstanding the absence of a formal structure, Asia has been engaged in crafting trans-Pacific relations with the establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989 and the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) - the embryo of East Asian regional organization. Today, market driven politics dominates nations across the globe (Leys, 2001).

However, the impact of global restructuring does not necessarily and directly produce social development. Institutional and cultural factors are therefore recognized for their direct impact upon individuals and actors in producing better ways of social interaction and in reducing collective action dilemmas (Skocpol, Theda 1979, Social Revolutions, pp xvii 407; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, Evelyne and John D, 1992 Capitalist Development and Democracy).

Institutions as well as the social system are key elements in solving the problem of access to economic benefits and their distribution. It is fundamental to consider local development – one that is integrated in the market and a product of social relationships rooted in conflict, competition, cooperation and reciprocity. This social relationship puts together actors and interests in a social, political and cultural nature not mutually exclusive of the market system.

A number of researches that deal with development have revealed that weak or perverse institutions are the roots of underdevelopment. Statistically significant correlations between institutional variables and growth, along with cross-country regressions demonstrate an index of institutional trade as an explanation for growth (Rodrik, et al, 2000).

Cognizant of the fact that economic growth is an essential variable although not enough to produce local development. Considered as pluridimensional (Bartoli, Henri, 1999), a historical path (Sachs, Ignasy, 1993) and project (Perroux, Francois, 1961), local development is wisely marked by the culture of the context in which it evolves. Thus, it can be considered as a set of cultural, economic, political and social activities from an intersectional and micro/meso/macro-scale perspective that participates in a project of conscious transformation of the local reality.

This study provided an analysis of some challenges faced in building a more balanced globalization by theorizing on the dynamics of social change. A departure from Karl Polanyi’s ‘The Great Transformation’, which advocates Socialism as an alternative to the self-regulating market, Third Sector’s “local cooperative economy” became the driver of social change in the Philippine experience.

The central question that guided the investigation was: What is the social change dynamics employed by select localities in the Philippines in response to neo-liberal globalization? Adopting a “top bottom approach” in the longitudinal framework disclosed that globalization is not a neutral process and showed how neo-liberal policies have exacerbated poverty especially within already marginalized communities benefiting transnational capital
and wealthier nations. Historical research of Philippine development from 1997-2006 drew an in-depth understanding of the macro-economic variables to development.

Findings in phenomenological hermeneutics were drawn from two levels: first from a macro economic and social level of the longitudinal study with the second level of hermeneutics was undertaken at a micro economic, empirical level of the cross-sectional study.

At a macro level, to theorize on social change dynamics meant grounding abstract ideas of structure and agency as espoused by Sewell, Giddens or Bourdieu by embedding them in key action areas of Networks, Markets and Institutions. The emergent Vertical Theory of Social Change Dynamics intimately linked these variables to meanings in culture [state-society engagements, strategies and new structures of representation]. These attributes were evident in local development efforts from examined Third sector communities where a “cooperative” economy in the trajectories of agriculture, industry and services forge alliances in order to balance market forces. This was made doable through ‘associative networks’ with regular and repeated rules for social action/interaction [institutions] resting ultimately in the distribution of peoples and places.

The Community Organizing Model of Social Change revealed that select Third Sector localities in the Philippines responded to the challenges of globalization by redesigning culture and technology where culture became but a technique and technology its’ by-product. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews clearly delineated investments in social relations through mobilized efforts and norms rooted in cooperation, competition, conflict and reciprocity These enabled members of communities to gain access to embedded resources resultantly enhancing returns of instrumental or expressive actions [individual change and emergent structures of representation].

Key Words: local development, globalization, social change, social capital and entrepreneurship.

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