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*Beyond technocratic policy analysis: considering how and why norms
and local knowledge influence public policy in Asia*

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Beyond technocratic policy analysis: considering how and why norms and local knowledge influence public policy in Asia

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Abstract

This paper attempts to bring us back to policy epistemological debates regarding the modes of rationality behind the policy world. It argues that value-free ontology and expert knowledge do not always determine policy rationality particular in the Global South, where modern and pre-modern conditions are co-existed. This entry point is worth considering making a better understanding of policy inquiry in the real-world beyond the technocratic approach. By exploring public policies in Asia in overview, this paper examines that Asian values are really existed and make an impact to policy making in different Asian contexts. Social norms and local knowledge embedded in such Asian values are diverse and shape the particular policy in specific context. By using critical lens in analysing these policy phenomena, the reason explaining why norms and local knowledge are still matter in Asian policy worlds are that existing norms and local knowledge create or activate the existing discourse coalition and policy epistemic advocating for promoting or sustaining such norms and knowledge. The acceptable policy is not only the one that achieves in justifying its rationality through empirical evidences of its benefits, but also the one that fits into the particular contexts and existing social systems. Such policy phenomena also occur as a result of the fact that the social norms and local knowledge usually support the nationalist ideology, keep the commons, proclaim the identity of either the state or the local community, enhance collaboration, and resolve disputes.

Keywords: Social Norms, Local Knowledge, Critical Policy Studies, Public Policy, Asia

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Introduction

This paper aims to understand public policy epistemology in the Asian context. It seems to be the impossible project, but this inquiry requires at least an attempt to shed light on. The entry point is, to argue that public policy in Asia is always based on technocratic approach is simply false and misleads. Value-free ontology and expert knowledge do not always determine policy rationality particular in this context as in many settings modern and pre-modern conditions are co-existed. Thus, policy analysis in the Asian context, more or less, is interpretive and critical in its spirits as social norms and local knowledge are abundant and embedded in Asian policy culture by both intentionally and unintentionally. To analyse a policy in Asia, therefore, requires contextual considerations no less than technical efficiency, and to dig deeper to this point is to make a better understanding of policy inquiry in the real-world beyond the technocratic approach.

What is Asia? Of course, it cannot be simply classify Asia from geo-politics particularly in the version of the division of global zones by Western perspective. It does not make sense as well to try capturing one Asia as it is diverse and complex. As discussed by Noor (2017), Asian identity is not really clearly defined. For Southeast Asia, it was introduced by colonial powers that emanated from Europe, and were imposed by force during the colonial era. She mentions that "the treaties that were signed by the Western colonial powers, such as the Anglo-Dutch Treaty, effectively imposed boundaries and hindrances upon Southeast Asians who had previously travelled freely in their own region, and did not necessarily see themselves as distinct nations that were exclusive and different from others." Noor (Ibid) also notices that some parts of Asia were initially put together by their governments as a means to ensure that they would not be dragged into the conflict of the Cold War, and that they were

never intended to become a supra-state entity that compromises the sovereignty of its member-states in any way; and that there was no intention to create anything that resembled a common market with a common currency, or a common citizenship for all the people who live in the region. Thus, this paper carefully refers to Asia in the sense that something is shared there both intentionally and unintentionally. Asia in this sense is the way Asian people look at themselves - not from the static geographical determination. By this mean, the boundary of this study is not clear by intention. The paper mostly refers to Southeast Asia, China, India, Japan and South Korea. The highlight goes to the countries where their top leaders mentioned about Asian values including China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Japan (De Bary 1998; Okakura 2002).

The next elaboration is, what are norms? The discussion about the concept of norms in the existing literature is extensive and has generated contrasting conceptualisations. To adopt Ostrom's view, this paper perceives shared norms as shared informal rules in the specific context (Ostrom, 1994, pp.211, 530-31). Norms are framed by cultures and represent shared common sets of social values which develop a common understanding. Also, they are themselves beyond an aggregation of individual interests and engage to particular moral obligation and reciprocity of the society. Thus, norms reflect a shared conviction or strong belief, which functions as a background consensus of the people in the same lifeworld.

Regarding local knowledge, it is based on cultural rationality as it is embedded in a cultural system which becomes common sense for people who share a communal sensibility (Geertz, 1983, pp.12-14). Yanow (2003, pp.234-245) explains that local knowledge is context-specific, and a knowledge in sense making. It is a spirit of passionate humility which combines the logics of description and prescription. This knowledge was commonly described in the past as

traditional or indigenous knowledge in particular contexts. It remains inherently associated with, and interpreted within, the specific culture in which it is produced (Fischer, 2000, p.195). Local knowledge is also socially constructed, multiple and constituted in the form of claims, open to contestation and recognition (Rydin, 2007, pp.52-68). As argued by Habermas (2007), apart from professional and reliable knowledge (including natural-scientific or empirical knowledge), we can also distinguish hermeneutic knowledge, practically effective, pragmatic and everyday knowledge, which can be referred to as 'local knowledge' in more general terms. In contrast to expert knowledge, local knowledge is not always valid in economic and scientific justification. In this sense, sacred knowledge can be included as a form of local knowledge. Habermas and the others (2010, pp.15-23) explain that sacred knowledge rests on normative foundations and faith seeking understanding. He mentions that 'mythos' and 'logos' should not be ignored in seeking for a practical reason. A naïve faith in science on its monopolised production of knowledge is many times misleading, while recognition of secular reason makes us sensitive to cultural differences and prevents us from over-generalising context-dependent judgments.

As for the relations between norms and local knowledge, Fischer (2003, p.32) argues that norms can frame the way we know and a shared norm can be a collective reason. On the other hand, local knowledge is sensitive to social norms as they are developed from intersubjective concerns and normative understandings. This link makes local knowledge different from expert knowledge as the latter is developed from technical control over objectified processes and generated within the framework of instrumental rationality which takes on an external existence as a productive force (Habermas, 2007, p.36). This form of knowledge is also mainly based on economic and scientific modes of rationality which tend to ignore socio-cultural contexts (Yanow 2003, p.234).

This paper attempts to shed light on these aspects by making basic questions how and why norms and local knowledge influence public policy in Asia. The paper will start with theoretical debates on the role of norms and local knowledge in public policy. Then, it will address how norms and local knowledge influence public policy in Asia. Next, the paper will discuss why norms and local knowledge matter in policy making before ending with concluding remarks. However, it should be noted at the beginning that this version is the starting attempt and surely it is not the last version. To understand the whole points might need to build the discussion first and this paper wants to contribute to this by putting it in the conference panel engaged by Asian scholars to open the floor for possible articulated discussions.

Theoretical debates on the role of norms and local knowledge in public policy

This paper would bring the long standing debates of communitarians and libertarians into account. Of course, their dichotomy is not clear now as the responsive communitarians approach was emerged by compromising with some libertarians' standing points, but their main point is still different that is to weigh the importance of individual rights or the collective good over each other (Etzioni 1998). To make it clear from the beginning, this paper stands alongside with the assumption of responsive communitarians. By examining though communitarian principles, this paper is convinced that, unlike Western contexts, Asian countries have their cultural roots that determine individual decisions. Shared moral commitments are embedded in such cultural roots as a result of the socialisation process and devote collective good for long-term collective benefits rather than short-term self-interests.

In this sense, apart from self-interested individuals, there are moral beings obliged to others by committing themselves to a course of action (incurring an obligation). Moral obligation is a collectively regulated interaction which has left behind the egocentric perspective of rational choice because it is a moral recognition which cannot be justified by an appeal to each individual's interests. In other words, moral obligation is a force of principle based on normative expectations (Warren, 1999, p.349). According to Habermas (1998a, p.4-7), obligation presupposes the intersubjective recognition of moral norms. Punishment by externally imposed sanctions (by rule) is not more effective than punishment by internalised sanctions, such as our own feelings of guilt or shame. Such moral judgement is a normative order of internalised feelings of disapprobation and moral feelings of sympathy and rejection (Habermas, 1998a, pp.15-6).

Linking to the aforementioned, social norms and local knowledge embedded in cultural roots can be perceived as the forms of the collective good. Generally, the study of norms and local knowledge (including sacred knowledge) is common found in anthropologist researches (e.g. Geertz 1983). In the field of public policy, an approach of interpretive policy analysis is outstanding in recognising norms and local knowledge as a valuable source in analysing policy (Yanow 2003, pp.234-245). Through communitarian view in complement with interpretive policy analysis approach, the states particularly the conservative states usually conserve and promote such social norms and local knowledge through their policy interventions. Thus, the role of norms and local knowledge in public policy can be possibly various. By engaging to policy literature, one of possible roles is to formulate a 'discourse coalition', which is a constellation of policy actors who have a similar view on a given topic (Hajer, 1995). Hajer (ibid) explains that a discourse coalition commonly hold the same set of beliefs. Some narrative story lines are held together and they affect the interpretation of events

or course of action in a specific context. Public policy framed by the discourse coalition that recognises specific norms and local knowledge, thus, can be shaped spontaneously by such norms and knowledge.

Another policy related role played by norms and local knowledge is to develop a ‘policy epistemic’. According to Fischer (2003, pp.230-2), a policy epistemic is a group (a policy network or even a policy community) in which its members share knowledge of specialisation (expertise) and become knowledge partnerships that advocate for the particular public policy. The members of a policy epistemic are not always policy actors. They can be the counsellor team, the advisory board, the think tank or the pressured group that influence public policy as outsiders. In the next section, these theoretical assumptions will be examined through the cases of public policy in Asia.

How norms and local knowledge influence public policy in Asia?

I would start with a discussion on the notion of Asian values throughout the communitarian lens. This notion was introduced in the Bangkok Declaration of 1993. Such values included the preference for social harmony, the concern with socio-economic prosperity and the collective well-being of the community, the loyalty and respect towards figures of authority, and the reference for collectivism and communitarianism (Cauquelin et al. 2014). However, Asian values were brought to serious discussion after Asia faced the dramatic economic crisis in 1997. At that time, Asian countries reviewed seriously their mistakes and realised that one of them was to conform and depend too much on Western pathway including approaches, technologies and knowledge. On the one hand, this notion is a political rhetoric made by leading Asian politicians namely Mahathir Mohamad, the ex-prime minister of Malaysia, and

Lee Kuan Yew, the ex-prime minister of Singapore. They attempted to recall or create an Asian identity to stimulate Asian countries particularly in Southeast and East Asia to move forward by making different from the Western as well as developing the mechanism to strengthen their regional coherence to deal with the crisis together (De Bary 1998).

On the other hand, Asian values represent some existing senses that Asian people, more or less, have really shared. They compound with particular norms and contextual sensitive knowledge. Such norms and knowledge are not a single and coherent sources. They are rather diverse and complex (Cauquelin et al. 2014). However, under cultural and historical diversity there is a common ground that is the principle of collectivism, which has a different focus from the principle of individual rights emphasised by the Western. De Bary (1998) calls this a Confucian communitarian that is influenced by Confucianism. This philosophy promotes the attribute of filial piety or the loyalty towards the family, corporation, and nation. Such wisdom also advocates that each person would forgo their personal freedom for the sake of society's stability and prosperity as well as developing a strong work ethic together with thrift (Ibid, p.4).

Of course, this cannot be simply generalise that all Asian people share these senses and it is true that new generations usually critique that such values are negative to human rights. Some of them also blame that a virtue of respect for one's parents, elders, and ancestors constrains the social progress and tend to be an authoritarian support. As argued by Amartya (1999), democracy should be a universal value and we need to cope with Asia's anti-democratic values. This argument is developed from the point made by Fukuyama (1992) that the universalisation of Western liberal democracy should be the final form of government for all nations. He calls this as the end of history as there can be no progression from liberal

democracy to an alternative system. However, it seems clear some governments in the region assimilate Asian values in their cultural politics and promote them through their policies (Bar, 2004). For this paper, whether Asian values are good or bad, we need to understand how they are operationalised in policy world here first.

To analyse how Asian values influences public policy in Asia, this paper frames a particular analysis to norms and local knowledge embedded in such grand values. In overview, the outstanding example is the role of the family care in shaping public policies. In most of Asian countries, family is expected by the state both in the central and local scales to take care of its members. Human capital development policy of those countries, thus, is based on the family role. To be more specific, it can be seen that this family-oriented norm is clearly embedded in elderly care policy, childhood learning policy, policy on disable citizens, and drug and crime prevention policy. For some Asian countries, community and neighbourhood roles are also promoted in the form of community-based policy and development, such as policies coping with disasters in Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand (Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre 2006). In Malaysia and Singapore, the norm of collectivism (communal or mutual aid) is promoted in term of the policy encouraging carpooling and other policies promoting sharing economy. Also, the option of Manila transportation, Philippines, is the open-air car sharing taxi system, while Indonesia has ‘three-in-one’ traffic restriction policy regulating that cars travelling through Jakarta’s main roads had to have at least three passengers (Wei 2017).

Aside from that, norms related to religious beliefs deeply influence public policy in this region. Theravada Buddhism, for example, still influence ethical and moral control policies in South East and South Asian countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Sri Lanka. In particular, Buddhist norms influence the policy promoting World Bank's good

governance in Thailand as the state translates this notion by using Buddhist words and interprets it by focusing the morality aspect (Boossabong 2017). Also, Buddhist norms influence wide-range policies in Laos as the government assimilates them to its socialist governmental traditions and calls this paradox mechanism as Buddhist Marxism (Evans 1998). Besides, Confucian thoughts still make some impacts on policy worlds in China, Taiwan, and Singapore particularly the cultural policy that promotes people to respect their seniors and social policy that attempts to glue social solidarity. In a similar way, Zen makes an impact to the art of policy analysis in Japan particular in education, culture promotion, sustainable development, climate change adaptation, disaster relief, and post-disaster recovery policies (Guillot 2017; McLaughlin 2011). Man Ha (2015) also points this by showing that religious beliefs in South Korea make an impact to disaster management policy of the country. He mentions that the Ministry of Public Safety and Security, local governments, and other government institutions in South Korea attempted to play roles in incorporating religion in disaster management.

As regards the role of local (some cases would be call 'sacred') knowledge, the policy review found widely that many Asian countries developed their policies based upon their local knowledge linked to particular Asian wisdom and ways of life especially in the areas of environmental conservation policy, cultural policy, education policy, sustainable development promotion policy, alternative healthcare policy, organic farming policy, food security policy, and tourist policy. It was also found that to promote the local economy within Asian countries was made through the promotion of local products that were made by local knowledge and skill, such as in Japan and Thailand. To promote happiness within Asia as the new goal of the 21st century is also made through policies that aim to bring Asian people back to their roots of the simple life and the wisdom of inner development.

In the case of China, it can assume from Li and He (2016) that before 1990s many China policies both in national and local levels might be framed, more or less, by traditional knowledge (including the knowledge that emerges from Confucianism and Maoism as the state philosophy), because policy sciences were just introduced into China at that period and the country just launched the first school of public administration and public policy in 2000. According to the report of Asia Research Institute (2013), it is not true that no religious knowledge in China and other socialist states and it is wrong that they refuse the role of religious organisations in public action as a result of a negative socialist perspective on religions. In fact, the wisdom of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam are there. In the post-Mao China clearly since 1980s, the state have realised the advantage of allowing religious groups and their wisdom in engaging in social service provision. Because, religious groups helped the state mobilising volunteers and provided financial support in public services through religious philanthropy (monetary donations). Thus, the government conveys religious knowledge by activating State's philanthropy-friendly policy (Asia Research Institute 2013).

In Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, religious knowledge, policy and politics have clearer links than those of China. Actually, it can be seen that religious wisdom makes social and political impacts rather than humanistic impact in at least these three countries. Famous monks here can mobilise financial support through philanthropy a lot and many of them works with policy makers in making policy by using such money, such as in building hospitals, schools and even new roads. In particular case of Thailand, the government and people usually pay respect to these monks and their wisdom and call them "developmental monks" (*Pha Nug Pattana*). They usually also become the "spiritual advisor" for both national and local politicians. Many politicians, on the other hand, use these famous monks as their political campaign strategies.

They expect that the monks would promote them to secular citizens, while to be close with the monks would support their moral image. On the other hand, some monks in Thailand, Laos and Myanmar play a direct and leading role in political and policy worlds, such as to be a leader of political movements and to advocate for a particular policy by themselves.

The paradox roles of norms and local knowledge, nevertheless, can be seen in an education policy. It is clear that each Asian country put their traditional norms in their education system, but transfers mostly Western knowledge to the education curriculum. Local knowledge in this policy area has a very small room. It can be a complement appeared in the subjects related to national and local histories, ancient heritage, and the traditional wisdom that represents the national and local identities. In Malaysia, there is an attempt to assimilate different sub-cultures through education policy. This case shows that the government succeeds in balancing modern norms and knowledge to their religious norms and knowledge. In doing so, they focus on learning how-to-do-something knowledge from the Western, while they keep protecting their Islamic way of life in which particular norms and mindful knowledge still function (UNESCO 2013).

Why norms and local knowledge matter in policy making?

The first reason why norms and local knowledge matter in policy making is that they formulates a discourse coalition as mentioned in the second section which this coalition plays a role as a guardian activating and protecting them. Within this discourse coalition, its members are key political leaders, mostly conservatives, who commonly hold the same set of beliefs that social norms and local knowledge are valuable. Public policy framed by this discourse coalition, thus, can be shaped by the social norms and local knowledge both

intentionally and unintentionally. For the last decade, it can be noticed that this discourse coalition has gained political power widely in the region. In overview, most political leaders from Asian countries agree with the idea of regional community development embedded with the sense of collectivism, such as ASEAN community, and agree upon the discourse of Asian bond.

In particular, China political elites, as a discourse coalition, maintain norms and local knowledge related to Confucianism to justify its essential to maintain highly centralised regime. In Thailand, the discourse coalition that promotes Thai convention is very strong. It compounds with the monarchical networks and the strict Buddhist politicians. The coalition maintains its political construction of Thai-ness, such as through policies that promote simple life of Thai people and that protect traditional values (called 'twelve values policy') (Boossabong 2017). In Japan, there is a discourse coalition of political leaders that promotes Shintoism. Of course, it is not a traditional form, but rather it is a Shinto-inspired policy that intends to promote national integration, unity, and loyalty. The last example is Indonesia, where there are some leading politicians as the discourse coalition who adopt 'Subud' philosophy and link it to public policy. The outstanding one is a policy promoting spiritual tourism in Indonesia. The coalition promotes Magelang as an Indonesian spiritual destination. It uses a folk tale and a Javanese folklore legend representing spiritualism of peace and harmony regardless race, culture and religious differences. It brings back traditional Javanese folklore through the support of Javanese cultural performances (Dongmiao 2017).

Moving on, as guided by the theoretical assumption, the second reason is that the norms and local knowledge influence public policy by developing a 'policy epistemic' or an epistemic community in which its members share local knowledge and become knowledge partnerships

that advocate for the particular public policy. The members of such policy epistemic are not always policy actors. They can be the counsellor team, the advisory board, the think tank or the pressured group that make an impact to public policy as outsiders. For example, an epistemic community of Indian scholars works with the Indian government in setting up the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library to collect traditional Indian medical knowledge and Yoga postures. The policy epistemic succeeds in stimulating the government to get benefits from using existing local knowledge. Then, India has signed agreements with the European Patent Office, United Kingdom Intellectual Property Office and the United States Patent and Trademark Office to prevent the grant of invalid patents by giving patent examiners at International Patent Offices access to the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library database for patent search and examination (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. 2017).

Also, agricultural scientists and environmentalists in South Korea as an epistemic community push the government to realise the value of local farming knowledge. They argue that technology-based farming knowledge forces farmers to be under the control of food corporations who produce and monopoly through such knowledge. They claim that to promote local knowledge is to empower farmers and encourage them to continue working on farm. Farmers will reduce their cost on farming as well by producing their own fertilisers and depending less on heavy machinery. They also stimulate the government to think that sustainability could not meet through a neglect of local knowledge (Jeong Kim 2013). Another case is Thailand, where right wing's public intellectuals in Thailand have a loud voice in recalling norms and local knowledge to be recognised in policy world in this country as think tanks and advisory boards. Medical professors, for example, make an influence in health care policy of the country. They adopt social norms to nudge a behavioural change through policy, such as to make a campaign that to drink alcohol is a sin (Boossabong 2017).

Beyond the confirmation of aforementioned theoretical assumptions, this study found that norms and local knowledge can influence public policy in the process of public hearing or policy deliberation. As laypeople usually hold particular norms and local knowledge, they address them out aiming to be relevant to the policy world. In the view of the policy makers, they realise that the acceptable policy is not only the one that achieves in justifying its rationality through empirical evidences of its benefits, but also the one that fits into the particular contexts and existing social systems. Aside from that, to recognise norms and local knowledge held by the majority is possibly the way to claim political legitimacy and to gain political support. Thus, policy makers usually avoid ignoring citizens' norms and knowledge.

In Thailand, for example, there was a deliberation in developing the flood warning system. The deliberative facilitators gathered and made available different forms of knowledge pertaining to flood levels from the City Water Draining Agency and local communities. The agency claimed that it opened the floodgate for two meters, but different local communities felt that the water level might be higher or lower than that. They could not provide a specific number, but prepared comparison related body height and housing dimensions. Some said that it was the same level of their shoulders and some said it was higher than their first floor window. This demonstrated that to open the floodgate by two meters led to different water levels in different areas. The translation of different forms of knowledge from one target to another, then, led to the creation of the warning system based on the justifications of both its scientific rationale and its fits to the context and existing social system (Boossabong 2017).

Furthermore, the study found that norms and local knowledge matter in public policy making as a consequence of the fact that such norms and local knowledge usually support the

nationalist ideology, keep the commons, and proclaim the identity of either the state or the local community. The increase of their intention is at the time that the state requires a recall of national dignity, a recovery of solidarity or the safety net from external threats. In such circumstances norms and knowledge that are required the most can be shared moral norms, norms of altruistic trust, norms of reciprocity and practical local knowledge that stimulates existing national values and provides normative justification. The extreme case is Bumiputra policy in Malaysia (under New Economic Policy). This policy brings back national roots and attempts to build nationalism. Although it was ended long time ago, it illustrates that the cosmopolitan state is hard to be taken place in the Asia context as it is seen as a threat and thus tradition would fight back to maintain some core values. The similar phenomenon emerges in Singapore, where the government brings back the country to the point that national identity can be still defined by promoting existing norms and traditional knowledge. Language policy in Lee Kuan Yew's period, for instance, was endorsed by Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. This policy promoted indigenous languages of Singapore to exist alongside English after most new generations speak only the latter (Dixon 2005).

Apart from that, norms and local knowledge are supported in term of public policy as they are capable to enhance collaboration and resolve disputes. Collaboration enhancement and conflict resolution can be a consequence of the reach of an agreement and mutual understanding, which can be facilitated by shared existing norms and knowledge that activate moral judgements and public spiritedness. According to Li (2017), China government attempts to re-imbed the Confucian thinking into people's mind and hoping it could help to build a new set of values. Thus, the government uses traditional wisdom to motivate their citizens to place the central authority and the nation first when facing policy disputes in the society. Another case is Singapore, where the government attempts to enhance collaboration

and reduce conflicts in neighbourhood renewal programme by allowing stakeholders to bring their various norms and local knowledge to engage in policy decisions. There is a greater local consultation on the design proposal and facilities to be provided through public forums such as town hall meetings, surveys and dialogue sessions where residents are able to voice their views and also hear the concerns of their fellow residents framed by different norms and local knowledge. According to the regulation, neighbourhood renewal programme will proceed only if at least 75% of the eligible flat owners in the neighbourhood indicate their support for it at the consensus gathering exercise (Housing and Development Board 2017).

Concluding remarks

This paper addresses the basic questions how and why norms and local knowledge influence public policy in Asia. It walks through the on-going process of the development of an understanding of the role of norms and local knowledge in public policy in the Asian context. It has not reached the end yet and still has needed intensive discussions to bridge existing gaps. This study shapes its task as to be assembling the jigsaw puzzle to see an imperfect picture. In other words, it is recognised at the beginning that this project is impossible, but to do this is to aim to see something, at some point, which is better than seeing nothing. To put this paper in the panel engaged by a variety of Asian policy scholars is another strategy to gathering and checking jigsaw pieces.

To sum up, this paper claims that Asian values are really existed and make an impact to policy making in different Asian contexts. Social norms and local knowledge embedded in such Asian values are diverse and shape the particular policy in specific context. The reason explaining why norms and local knowledge are still matter in Asian policy worlds are that

existing norms and local knowledge create or activate the existing discourse coalition and policy epistemic advocating for promoting or sustaining such norms and knowledge. The acceptable policy is not only the one that achieves in justifying its rationality through empirical evidences of its benefits, but also the one that fits into the particular contexts and existing social systems. Such policy phenomena also occur as a result of the fact that the social norms and local knowledge usually support the nationalist ideology, keep the commons, proclaim the identity of either the state or the local community, enhance collaboration, and resolve disputes.

This attempt contributes to critical policy studies in many senses. As argued by Fischer, to recognise norms and local knowledge is to go beyond positivist tradition. To explore the different policy world influenced by existing norms and local knowledge offers a different policy epistemology to make sense. Fischer puts norms and local knowledge in referring to cultural rationality, which contrasts with the technical (scientific) rationality. This paper, thus, paves the way to provide the analytical insights into how and why cultural rationality operates or even is embedded in public policy in the real-world. Again, as this paper has still not finished. It is both a starting point to go deeper and an encouragement for other Asian policy scholars to bring this point and its overview to examine in their specific context.

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