Social Science Research in Southeast Asia: Challenges in Studying Parliamentary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces challenges in studying parliamentary institutions in Southeast Asia. My focus of research is in three countries' institutions: national parliaments of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. In Southeast Asia, it was widely known that studying issues of politics and institutions would have faced more challenges, rather than on cultural issues. This view is arguably no longer valid, however with certain qualification. The comparison of parliamentary tradition between 3 countries – based on observation of the plenary session - reveals that the effectiveness of the parliamentary works are related to the parliamentary procedure, even to culture of work in the countries. Parliamentary structure, procedure and their political culture matters. Therefore, acknowledging these factors will give more research opportunities, if a researcher plans to study the political institution at other countries in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Social Science Research, Southeast Asia, Parliament, Procedure, Political Culture, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore

Introduction

With the coming of democratization wave to Southeast Asian countries in the mid-1980s, researches on political institutions increase (Rüland, 2006, p. 92). Accordingly, study on parliamentary institutions is blooming recently. As known widely, in Southeast Asia, studying issues that considered politically sensitive including the political institution would have been faced more challenges, rather studying cultural issues. During the 1990s, the political studies of Southeast Asian region were usually descriptive and event-chronological (Rüland, 2006, p. 86), implicitly agreeing to what the highly-censored government dictated. The government preferred the publication about development and modernisation in the country (Halib and Huxley, 1996, p. 6). In Southeast Asia, usually before entering the year of 2000, the parliaments were notoriously known as rubber-stamp bodies, following the government in the region that was attributed to authoritarianism, compared to the Western-style liberal democracy. After the Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998, studies about democratization and parliament started to rise. Ziegenhain (2008) had found out that the role of (Indonesian) parliament actually was greater during democratic transition. However, Aspinall (2014) viewed that patronage politics still marked the parliaments, especially during election time. Such contrasting views are interesting to explore. Whether or not the role of parliaments in Southeast has indeed progressing or regressing, the role of other actors or agents apart from executive government, such as parliament and civil society are worth to study in Southeast Asia region too.

Furthermore, with the increasing discussion of global governance and international organization imposes the importance of global agenda, which emphasizing the involvement as many actors as possible, the parliament's participation is required even more by the constituents and public. My research topic which studying the role of (Southeast Asian) parliaments in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is related to this new trend, at least in Europe where I am affiliated with. Thus, in Summer (June-August) 2018, I conducted a research visit and went to the parliaments of three countries in Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, to observe their plenary sessions and to find out more about parliamentary legislations on SDG. While this research on parliament and SDG are still on-going, I find it interesting to share challenges of researching these institutions, as the main purpose of this book volume. Networking and affiliation indeed influence the researcher's

access to these bureaucratic offices. But knowledge of parliamentary working organs will be helpful for smooth arrangement. Acknowledging these factors will give more research opportunities – and not only challenges -, if a researcher plans to study similar parliaments in Southeast Asia, apart from these countries. Moreover, based on my observation, I find out that the institutional structure and procedure of these parliaments shape their works heavily, which is influenced by the country's political culture. The general view that the Southeast Asian politics are shaped heavily by their executive governments (elites and leaders) are confirmed too, endorsing the view of William Case (2002, 2009) and Rüland (2012) on the role of elite constellation in the region.

This paper thus introduces challenges in studying parliamentary institutions and typology of parliaments in Southeast Asia, based on observation in collecting data in these three national parliaments of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. To present this, this paper is organized into, first, discussing the literature research on the background of social research challenges over time, and how I managed to research on parliamentary institutions (my research topic). Secondly, I introduce the method that I use for my social research: parliamentary ethnography, and how it helps me to observe and pay attention to parliaments that I study. The third part will explain in detail of the works of three parliaments and how the parliaments' structure and procedure explain the lack or sufficient arrangement of the institutions, and analyse these arrangements in comparison. This will show the argument on the influence of institutional structure and procedure with the parliamentary work and tradition, and highlighting the elite's role in parliament, as stated above. The last part is the conclusion of the study.

Southeast Asian parliaments are weak?
During 1990s, parliaments in Southeast Asia was considered weak as the executive government had more spotlight. The emphasis on the countries' leaders and Asian Values were likely to be the cause. The names of Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), Lee Kuan Yew (Singapore), Norodom Sihanouk (Cambodia), Ferdinand Marcos (the Philippines), Ne Win (Myanmar), Sukarno and Suharto (Indonesia) and Mahathir Muhamad (Malaysia) are well-known leaders in the region and famous for the citizens even until today. The Asian Values apparently also contributed due to the executive hegemony. The importance of communitarianism and collectivism, compared to individual freedom, entail of respects and loyalties to the leaders of authority are known in this region. No wonder, "clientelistic" system and "patronage" politics were, and somewhat still are, common in Southeast Asia. The parliament during "authoritarian regime" then served as legitimation of the executive's policy. Today, apart from the parliamentary government system, like Malaysia and Singapore, where the executive is part and elected as parliamentary members, usually parliaments are periphery to their executive counterparts.

Furthermore, democratization came a bit late to the regions. It started only when the Asian Financial crisis 1997/1998 reached Southeast Asia, at least Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand needed to adjust their political arrangement. Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahathir Muhammad survived his seat after the adjustment of the Malaysian economic policy. However, the fall of Indonesia's President Suharto after three decades in reign and the rise of Thailand populist leader Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra – even only for a short time - offered the hope that democracy had finally arrived in Southeast Asia, but not for rich countries as Brunei and Singapore. During this time, parliament also influenced the democratization, like in the case of Indonesian parliament. Nevertheless, the executive government – usually the president or prime minister –has always have central spot in Southeast Asian's politics.
Take the example of Singapore. The country is considered as semi-democratic country. It has regular election, but only one party – People's Action Party (PAP) established in 1959 - always

dominates the politics since its independence in 1965. This one-party government is strong and controls the media and freedom of speech. Yet, Singapore is the most developed country in Southeast Asia with around 320 million USD Gross Domestic Product/GDP. With such big economic power, its citizens do not mind with authoritative government as long as people's access to basic needs are covered and fulfilled. Singaporean "competitive authoritarian" style is likely to be accepted by the people as long as the country remains stable and prosperous.

In the democratization era, amidst the executive government hegemony, research on parliaments in the Southeast Asia is increasing (Rüland, 2006, p. 93). Parliaments are not rubber-stamp institutions anymore, however, without drastic structural change in parliamentary institution like in South Korea, parliament will remain the same as in previous era. For example in Indonesia, by the continual usage of similar parliamentary procedure, the parliamentary research will report only legislative chronology (see Adiputri, 2015).

Asian Values or also called 'Asian model of democracy' (Neher, 1994) with the characteristics of superior-inferior relationship, personal characteristics, and hierarchical [which] form the basis of the political and social structure of Southeast Asia (Neher, 1994, p. 950) is obviously seen in the parliament. The three parliaments studied here – Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore – still show the tendency of appreciating the executive position better and the parliamentary positions (leaders). Leadership position is indeed prestigious, with many access and opportunity. Leaders may guide to certain agenda (bills) and to certain discussion; determine legislative priority, even determine whether the parliamentary discussion is considered close or open meeting. This then shows the existence of hierarchy, seniority over 'ordinary members' and unequal power relationship among members of parliament (MP).

What is so-called "Asian Values" and any certain pattern or procedural frameworks within the parliament are the *products* of social relationship of the country. This is what social sciences aim to address, that is the explanation of something come up from causal relationship between social phenomena. How could we explain the phenomenon that when the democratization came to the Southeast Asian region, the parliament still suffer from corruption activities (in the case of Indonesia and Malaysia) and is ruled by one hegemonic political party (Singapore)? I realize that changes do not come overnight, and require timely process, however what I found out – at least from studying the Indonesian parliament – when the parliamentary procedure remains the same as before the democratic regime started, the tendency to exercise the similar un-democratic ways persist (Adiputri, 2015).

Despite different parliamentary structure, it must share certain requirements. The parliamentary members are selected by regular election; the members are *representatives* of people from certain constituents, exercising the role of parliament: legislating, overseeing and budgeting. The MP also need to convene at certain time and period throughout the year. There also the task of *speaking* or debate – which why sometimes parliament is called as "speaking government" (Palonen, 2014); and the elected members will work based on the program of his/her political parties but still need to address the constituents' interests in legislation.

In studying the parliaments of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, I use the institution theory, especially the historical institutionalism. The theory contends that 'institutions have the ability to influence and determine political strategies and political outcomes…[meaning] that institutions matter due to their ability to shape the strategies and goals of actors, mediate cooperation and conflict and structure political situations' (Allison, 2015, p. 126, quoted from Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth, 1992). Specifically, for the historical institutionalism, the

focus of study is 'the construction, maintenance, and adaptation of institutions' (Sanders, 2006, p. 42). Therefore, in the discussion section below, I will briefly inform the historical background of the parliament and how this history evolve inside the institution, before presenting the observation of these parliaments' plenary sessions.

Apart from the (historical) Institutional theory, the parliamentary procedure is also important. The procedure in parliamentary manner sets up and distinguishes the parliament from other institution (Adiputri, 2015, p. 37). The British Parliamentary Procedure, in which Malaysia and Singapore adopt for their parliaments as their colonial legacy, for example, derived its procedure from *A Treatise upon the Law, Privileges, Proceedings, and Usage of Parliament,* written by Thomas Erskine May in 1844, and the newest version is Blackburn and Kennon's (2003) *Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedures.* These procedures highlight the parliament's main job, that is *speaking.* The "speaking" part distinguish the work of Malaysian and Singaporean parliaments, compared to Indonesia's one. Their ritual agenda, like the questions to the minister in the first hour of plenary session, and laying out of the Plenum for speaking/debating and is divided into government and opposition sides have shown clearly the debate characteristics. This differs from the Indonesian one – which emphasize on the "legislature" work, as seen with the podium for political groups or faction (*fraksi*) to deliver overview/speeches for the bills, and the lay-out is design for listening, rather than speaking.

Thus, theoretically, in order to study the parliamentary institution, a researcher must acknowledge such background of the studied institutions, such as the history and procedure. The theories of historical institution and parliamentary procedure are useful to study the parliament's and its ceremonial and routine activities too. The next section will discuss the method to study the parliament and the challenges that I found when observing the parliaments.

Parliamentary Ethnography
To study the parliamentary institutions in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, I use parliamentary ethnography. I follow the Anthropologist Emma Crewe (2016) who used this (methodological and theoretical) approach to study the House of Lords (1998-2000) and in the House of Commons (2011-2013). According to Crewe, parliamentary ethnography is doing ethnography in parliament. Ethnography itself is a research technique to engage with people 'to find out how they act, think, talk and relate to each other', added with the ethnographers' reflection as part of the research, rather than attempting to remove their influence from the research findings' (Crewe, 2016). The reflection on social interaction between the ethnographer and informant is important on perception and interpretation in the research (*ibid*). It is useful to use in the parliament, because the politicians have different roles of representation, from the constituents, from political party, from their peers in the committees etc. thus using straightforward data (like interview, reports, minutes) are not enough. Beside, only a small portion of information can be dig out by asking. I agree with Crewe that studying 'people's claims and statements alongside or as part of their culture practices, rituals and conversations' – one of ethnography's specialties - is important. However, it is also important to include the contradiction of the politicians' role and background – the whole process within the parliament – (by informal discussion with secretariat workers and even to MPs themselves, the parliament literature etc.) and the researcher's observation and reflection for the study, especially the study of parliamentary institutions that I am doing. Parliamentary ethnography in the three parliamentary institutions, combined with interviews and discussion with secretariats and my own experience as former officer within the parliament secretariat provide the whole understanding why things happen as they are, and such is related to the country's political culture in general.

In my previous study of the Indonesian parliament (Adiputri, 2015) – similar to Crewe-, I found out that politics is entangled with social and cultural life of the country. Relationship, power and culture can be seen from the ritual procedure of the parliament, and paying attention to details like this, which often seen as not important actually implies structural foundation of the institution. Before going further for the discussion, I need to explain my current research topic, working background and the process during my data collection. Altogether, these allowed me to exercise challenges (and opportunity) to study parliaments in Southeast Asia.

My current post-doctoral research is studying the role of parliamentary organization in the Sustainable Development Agenda/SDG, by focusing Southeast Asian's parliamentary institutions at the different level: *national* parliaments in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore), *regional* ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), the Asian Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) and *global* Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). While the project is expected to discuss the role of parliament in global agreement such as SDG, it also discusses the issue of multi-parliamentary governance (globally, regionally, nationally and locally) and the Europe-Southeast Asian relations through parliament. This is an upgraded from my previous doctoral project discussing the political culture of Indonesian parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* or DPR), studying the minutes of the DPR from 1999-2009.

Studying parliamentary institution has been relatively easy for me as I used to work in the secretariat of Indonesian parliament for a decade (2000-2009). I worked as a government officer in the secretariat of *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*/MPR (the People's Consultative Assembly), one of semi-parliament state body in the country. The members of MPR were (and still are) derived from DPR members. I was involved in the discussion of Constitutional Amendment 2000-2003, which resulted to the another semi-parliamentary body, a new state body called *Dewan Perwakilan Daerah*/DPD (The Regional Representative Council), and the discussion of bills and laws related to parliaments and its reform and local parliaments (e.g. UU *Susduk/MD3* and Local Governance) discussed in the DPR. Thus, I am familiar with legislative process, parliamentary procedure (standing orders, minutes storage etc.) also the compound (including the location of meeting rooms), and most importantly the connection with the members of parliament and the secretariat workers. The network and connection that I had were useful when I was looking for parliamentary minutes and arranging meetings with DPR members for my previous doctoral research. Access to meetings, interviews and data-collection was relatively quick to be arranged.

For my current post-doc research, my connection was even expanding both from academician and parliamentary networks, through e.g. conference meetings. In Indonesia, when my former working colleagues at the secretariats have reached higher bureaucrat position, usually being heads of section or bureau, my access also enlarges to these colleagues' staffs and connection. Moreover, my colleagues inside the Indonesian parliamentary secretariats also know MPs sitting at the leadership seats and colleagues sitting at the similar position from other parliaments in Southeast Asia. They are also usually comfortable to share the contacts with me, knowing that I will use such connection for academic/research purposes. It eases and simplifies the bureaucratic process, as I did not have much time to deal with lengthy arrangement. These colleagues would introduce me to the MPs and informed me a better time for interviews. When I have connected to the senior MPs, they will open easier access to meet new MPs and staffs in a specific committee that I study. Thus, contacts and network within the institution are extremely valuable.

Moreover, my affiliation with the European university (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) have added another chance for easy access. This is important to mention as MPs and secretariat personnel seem more welcomed me, instead of the researchers from domestic/local universities. My situation is also valid for foreign researchers. They tend to have easier access compared with the domestic researcher, native Indonesian who study in the Indonesian universities. The "colonial-mentality" – a term that researchers use to describe Indonesians (either MPs or secretariat personnel) who tend to appreciate highly of foreign institutions – does still exist in the Indonesia parliament, and to some extent also to the Malaysian parliament. The affiliation from Western/European university is much more appreciated. Moreover in Malaysia, having the "doctoral" title also boost the credibility. I did not realize this until a colleague whom used to work in the Malaysian university warned me to use my doctoral title in my business cards before my departure to Malaysia. As common knowledge among Southeast Asians, there is always love-hate relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia and being an Indonesian citizen and coming to Malaysia where many Indonesians serve as maids to Malaysian families, I need a credibility to be taken seriously that can be in the academic title, such as doctoral degree or professorship. When I followed this advice, adding doctoral title before my name and introducing myself using the degree, people that I met are likely to offer more respects. They called my doctoral title, instead of my name though. In Malaysia, most people indeed are called by their titles, like professor, doctor, *makcik* (auntie) *tuan* (Sir), *puan* (Ma'am) etc – and not only names - which show respects toward the called persons, but also highlight the importance of status and hierarchy in the society. Thus, when I was introduced to the Malay MPs with the use of doctoral title, the MP somehow showed more respects and formal attitude to me, and proceed with more open attitude toward my activity.

My background as a former officer at the parliament secretariat also gives me valuable knowledge to comprehend how parliament works empirically and also it offers a relatively easy access to gather data within that political institution, which would have required an excessive amount of time given I would not have had contacts who could assist me in such bureaucratic arrangement. At the same time, the experience as a parliament officer opens doors for new understanding of the workings of the (Indonesian) parliament through researcher perspective and allows me, as a native scholar, to become an emissary 'explicate lived realities and understanding of normative social sciences concept' (Beng-Lan, 2011, p. 15) of the (Southeast Asian) parliament to outsiders. I have double advantages as a former parliamentary worker and a researcher from Western university to boost my credibility to research in Southeast Asian parliaments. Such advantages are important to open new connection and network, at least for me when visiting the Malaysian and Singaporean parliaments.

By sharing this story, I assure that studying parliaments – or any political institutions in Southeast Asia – *connection* and *networks* are really important. Finding research connection is hard and time-consuming, but once we have it will be worth. In the meantime of building connection, equipped ourselves with current knowledge of the system and structure or organization of the studied parliaments will be helpful to understand the situation. While the affiliation and highly perception toward Western university cannot be easily changed – especially for domestic/local academic institution -, the researcher may start to build self-*credibility*, like writing popular books or opinions in the national-wide newspaper, for example. This credibility will help to being known.

Apart for challenges stated above (although served as opportunities for me), I also must admit to face the challenges of knowing the subject *too well*. People that I met and interviewed within the parliament also had high expectation. It was a bit intimidating to be seen as having a strong background with the parliament, the informants may not give full information, and allow me

to guess what was going on. During interview, for example, there was many moments of hesitation to answer. Perhaps the interviewees were to some extent reluctant to explain further, sensing that I must already know more on the subjects being discussed. Here, the observation and confirmation from the secretariat are more useful. In brief, I find that parliamentary ethnography is also suitable for my research method as I can reflect myself as a researcher and a former worker in the parliament, bringing both insider and outsider (academic) views to my research.

Comparison of three parliaments: Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore
With the background above, I study the three parliamentary institution. Before my research visit, I have already read the literatures about the parliaments of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, their policy reports, debates and hansard papers, what have been discussed about ratifying SDG's agreement in 2016. I contacted these parliaments before my arrival, thus I am satisfied with my visits as plenary observations and discussion/interviews run according to my plans. Observing the plenary sessions and on-site visits in these parliaments certainly brought a new nuance from the literature that I read.

Indonesian Parliament
The Indonesian Parliament, the DPR after the 2014 election consists of 560 members of parliament (MP) from 10 factions/political groupings. The DPR is chaired by 1 speaker and 5 vice speakers, elected among members in the beginning of the session in 2014. While Indonesia has semi-parliamentary bodies like MPR whose members derives from members of DPR and DPD (DPD is a national high state body which tasks to submit and enact bills with the DPR related to regions) with the task related to the state constitution, the DPR stands the sole parliamentary body in the country. Thus, Indonesia has unicameral parliament, the DPR.
In order to smooth the parliamentary working, the DPR has working organs (*alat kelengkapan*) within its institution (http://www.dpr.go.id/alatkelengkapan). They are:
1. DPR Leadership (*Pimpinan DPR*)
2. Steering Committee (*Badan Musyawarah/Bamus*)
3. Commission (*Komisi*) that divided into 11 according to ministerial issues
4. Legislation Council (*Badan Legislasi*)
5. Budget Council (*Badan Anggaran*)
6. House Affairs Council (*Badan Urusan Rumah Tangga/BURT*)
7. Council for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation/(*Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen/BKSAP*)
8. Council for State Financial Accountability (*Badan Akuntabilitas Keuangan Negara/BAKN*)
9. Council for Honorary Court (*Mahkamah Kehormatan Dewan/MKD*)
10. Special Committe (*Panitia Khusus*)

Each MP must be a member of a Commission (from 11 commissions in point 3 above) and a council/committee above (around 7 councils) from the list, and one council or committee has members around 10% from total number, which is around 55 members. Therefore, it would be a struggle for faction with limited members, as they need to come to many meetings compared to members of big factions. During Suharto's time, these work organs were filled with 3 political parties and 1 military faction. Nowadays with around 14 political parties, it is quite challenges to address view diversity ranging from different issue, especially by using the old parliamentary procedure.

It is important to list these working organs here because while it look like comprehensive structure, it actually does not change much from the DPR during the Suharto time, when the DPR was considered as a rubber-stamp institution. The main roles of parliament: legislation and budgeting (even overseeing/controlling) are "balkanized" in the forms of smaller chamber

of committee. This means that <u>only</u> members of these councils may contribute to the discussions, and only members of certain commission/council are updated for the works. Instead of exercising in the Plenary Session where all members can access and give their opinions on the issues, the matter brought to the Plenum – usually legislation - only for bills that are ready to be enacted. There is no more discussion as within the smaller committee/commission, all parties – factions and government – have delivered their 'mini overview' which basically agree that the bills are ready and can be delivered to the Plenary Session for enactment. Meanwhile the legislative-drafting in the DPR is quite tiring as MP must scrutinize every articles, including the wording usage.

With this "balkanized" arrangement, non-members outside the certain commission/council must actively seek information – if they want to - either from factions or by him/herself and it is an extra work especially when the MP could not choose his/her own interest to be a member of certain council/commission. The *faction* or political party grouping inside the DPR selects the commission/council's membership, which mostly mismatch with the MP's wish. All the works, of course, are delivered to the Plenary Session, but once the bill is scheduled there, it also means that there is no more discussion. The plenum only reports the result reached from the smaller committee then all members only legitimized the discussion based on yes-no questioned by the Speaker, or by voting. The Plenary Session then is seen as a ceremonial venue instead for MPs to debate or to deliver his/her opinion for public/constituents on certain issue. The core of parliament to 'speak' (*parler*) is not available through plenum. Speaking is more exercised in a mini venue of commission/council which is rarely aired publicly.

Thanks to easy access and personal contacts to the Indonesian parliament, I interviewed around 25 parliamentarians during my research visit. When I asked about the sustainable development topic to these MPs, I also had a chance to update about the DPR's working mechanism today. As most MPs are new, they did not realize the problems of "balkanized" arrangement that was the legacy of the previous regime. They did not see problems of procedure. When asked about the lack of speaking time, most MPs responded lightly that they did not find any problems with it, and did not think speaking is important. Ideally it is the tasks of faction to update the MPs. For the SDG discussion, Indonesia is quite advance, even hosted two world parliamentary forums on sustainable issue, which IPU. The parliamentarization of SDG issue will be discussed at different paper.

During the research visit, I also had a chance to observe the DPR Plenum and I think that not only the old tradition did not change much, it went worse. It was on 26 July 2018 when I observed the DPR Plenary Session with the agenda of Ministry Accountability Report for the use of state budget in 2017. The official DPR website did not state that it was a plenary meeting, only looked like a regular meeting of a committee. The plenum was supposed to start at 9.00 in the morning, but – as predicted (I have been warned) - it started only two hours later. Late is a bad habit in Indonesia. During the session, I was sitting on the open balcony facing down the back of MPs' seats. The place was packed many noisy MPs' assistants and journalists. Financial Minister, Ms. Sri Mulyani Indrayati was scheduled to deliver a speech about previous year budget. Since it was indeed a parliamentary work – and minister was treated as a guest, she was only "allowed" to enter the Plenum only when requested. When the minister and her team went in to the room, they were flooded with applause by MPs. It was such a dramatic entrance. I found it interesting that if the minister was treated highly, does she popular? Or does the executive government have special place, like the position of the executive is considered more important than legislature? After asking confirmation about this entrance, most MPs said that for Plenum, guests- like ministers – indeed only entering the room when

allowed, but applause sometimes happened that could be interpreted differently. However, I can see that being selected as the government minister would be appreciated for most MPs, meaning that the executive position is better than the legislative one.

When finishing her accountability speech, the Financial Minister stepped down from the podium and went to the Speakers' seats, handing down the papers she read earlier to the parliamentary Speaker. The exchanging documents or shaking hands was paused for allowing time to the media and press to take their pictures. The shaking-hands moment is likely to be important to be documented in many Indonesian events and ceremonies. Then, the follow-up agenda was the factions delivered opinion regarding the accountability report. The title of agenda seems to report what factions or MPs found publicly regarding the use of state budget, or reaction to speech that the Minister just delivered. This was also the time for the MPs to speak up and questions – although through the DPR's procedure, the parliamentary speaking time is represented by the factions. Only 1 MP will read (speeches of) overview from every group, meaning around 9 factions. Then came the worst situation when the Speaker said, "In order to save time, each faction does not need to read their speeches, but give their speech documents to the Speaker." I was stunned hearing this. This is bad for two reasons: (1) the role of parliament to speak publicly in the plenary session was not exercised for the reasons of time-saving. Public and constituents did not hear how their representatives reacts to the view of executive government, (2) nobody knows what happen to the collection of speeches to the Speakers. Why do the document send to the speakers? Was then there would be follow-up meeting to discuss the speeches or the speeches were just collected? Does this confirm that the position of the Speaker is higher than the ordinary MPs? When I ask such procedure, even to the Speaker of the plenum himself, Mr. Deputy Speaker Fadhli Zon (in another occasion), he justly lightly reacted that it was indeed to save time (from "listening to boring speeches!"). I did not get my whole questions answered, but this showed that parliamentary speaking and constituents unfortunately are not the MPs' priorities. I did not get the answer for the reasons to collect factions' papers to the Speakers either, which was probably handled by the plenary team (*Bagian Sidang Paripurna*) but it is likely that there is no follow-up events afterwards, meaning that the documents will be left untouched.

To worsen this fact, after the agenda of collecting the factions' speeches – with also picture-taking in front of the Speakers' seats – the Minister was allowed to deliver another speech to react based on the factions' speeches (which was never been read). How the minister could deliver a speech when she did not even hear the factions' speeches remained puzzling. It just showed that the DPR's Plenary Session was indeed purely a ceremonial event. After the agenda with the Financial Minister was over, the Minister and her team were allowed to leave the Plenum, with another dramatic departure.

After that, the agenda continued with the inauguration of new judges and the DPR's Speaker's closing speech to end the working term of DPR 2017-2018, resulting only enacting 5 new laws within that term. The new term would be opened on 16 August 2018, a day before the country's Independence Day as a ritual in the DPR, when the President will deliver the budget overview of the upcoming year, 2019, also marking the opening of DPR official term 2018-2019. This tradition of opening DPR session a day before the Independence Day and Plenary rituals are maintained and continue to run although the patrimonial president, Suharto, had long gone.

For me this is interesting and puzzling at the same time. Interesting that the tradition of an old regime is kept running although many civil society organizations also some MPs have stated that the DPR procedure is ineffective, at least as seen in the low number of enacted laws, no

one cares to change the situation. The journalists also do not see that such particular plenary session was a problem. The session must be a public view of representatives' people to say something regarding policy and the MPs did not have a chance to speak up. Newspaper on the following day – or online news after the Plenary was reported only the closing speech of the DPR Speaker, the calculation number of how many MPs attended the plenum and how low the number of laws enacted on this official term. None reported on the proceeding. It is puzzling that when the ineffective exercise – that MPs know the ceremonial status of plenary session is and how the laws that DPR enacts annually has always been low – continues, there is no efforts to amend the situation, or no one point out the ineffective of the parliamentary procedure for DPR. Only (democratic) leaders may have an opportunity to change this situation, but it is likely to take longer time.

Malaysian Parliament
Differ from Indonesia, Malaysia exercised Westminster parliamentary system, the executive government is also members of parliament (MPs). The parliament thus is more updated with both the works of executive and legislative, especially when the executive government presents the bill or answer MPs' questions during plenary session. The Malaysian Parliament, *Parlimen Malaysia*, has two institution: the Senate or *Dewan Negara* and the House of Representatives or *Dewan Rakyat*. The Senate consists of 70 senators, whom are elected (26) and appointed (44) by the King, *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*; while the House consists of 222 members of parliaments elected every five years. My research focuses on the work of *Dewan Rakyat* or Lower House, thus, Malaysian parliament here refers to *Dewan Rakyat*.

Malaysia just has a new government this year after the May 2018 election. For more than four decades, Malaysia had groomed only one single-party dominant system, United Malays National Organization/UMNO, and had an electoral authoritarian regime, a legacy of racialized government from the British colonialism. Populations has been divided over ethnicity – Chinese, Indian, and Malays, with Malay always enjoys the privilege of hegemony. However, in the parliament, UMNO successfully received the majority seats with supports from the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and Malaysian Chinese Associations (MCA) grouping in the coalition of *Barisan Nasional*/BN or National Alliance. This coalition brought the sense that all ethnic group in the country were represented in BN during elections and within parliament. Despite contesting with other parties, like the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP, later become PAS), a group that broke from the UMNO in 1951 (Case, 2002, p. 104) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP), successor to the Singaporean Party, People's Action Party after seceding from Malaysia in 1965, the BN coalition were successfully maintained the hegemony in the government. Being in UMNO apparatus means grounding the elite statutes, similar to top position in the state bureaucracy and business conglomerates, which will ensure access to state position and business opportunities too. The hierarchy of Malaysian government has always been paralleled with the country business and economy (Case, 2002, p. 112) thus associated with UMNO, one would have opportunities of the patronage network. The hegemony of one party and patronage, added with gerrymandering during election and controlling civil liberty through many acts, labelled the Malaysia's political system as semi-democracy.

When the Asian crises of 1998 came and succeeded in toppling the Indonesian president, Suharto, Malaysia successfully maneuvered from the political crisis too but with strain inside the UMNO. Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister (1981-2003) at that time did not need to ask for help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – like Indonesia and Thailand – other than adjusted its economic policy. This was not supported by Mahathir's protégé, his Deputy,

Anwar Ibrahim, whom had his own charisma among youngster and Islamic groups whose connection ranged throughout Southeast Asia. Mahathir then imposed public humiliation towards Anwar Ibrahim, ousted Anwar from elite circle, first from government position then also from UMNO party. Anwar mobilized crowds of protesters claiming for *reformasi* – a term borrowed from Indonesian movement – claiming the step-down of Prime Minister, which the government responded by jailing Anwar for 6 years for charging against misconduct and corruption, starting in April 1999 (Case, 2002, p. 134). With the sense of injustice against Anwar by, public grew resentment toward the government, claiming for more civil liberty and good governance. This momentum also allowed Anwar's wife to establish a social movement, *Adil* (social justice), claiming good governance in Malaysia, together with PAS and largely Chinese DAP parties. This *Adil* movement and other NGOs became the *Parti Keadilan Nasional/PKR* (National Justice Party), led by Wan Azizah (Anwar's wife). Unfortunately, this party did not attrack many supporters, and UMNO/*Barisan* won again in the 1999 election, ensuring its hegemony in the parliament. However, PKR became an opposition amidst the small numbers of MPs.

During 2009-2018, Malaysia was led by the Prime Minister Najib Razak, whom was Mahathir protégé. At that time, Mahathir supported Najib, when the position of his successor Abdullah Badawi (2003-2008) was weakened. However, Prime Minister Najib Razak had been suspected with corruption since 2015 and his power enabled him to escape from further investigation. Finally, when the country's investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) was alleged to transfer billions of money to Najib's personal account and his associates, Mahathir claimed to be fed up by Najib's "kleptocracy" and needed to "restore democracy".

Since 2016, Mahathir resigned from UMNO and together with former UMNO members established their own party Malaysian United Indigenous Party (*Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia*) and later with aligned with the *reformasi* parties PKR, the Chinese DAP, and *Parti Amanah*. a break-up faction of Islamic party PAS. They gathered to topple down UMNO/BN by establishing a coalition *Pakatan Harapan* or PH (Alliance of Hope). The PH Alliance agreed in July 2017 for the collation Mahathir Mohamad stood as the chairman (and Prime Minister candidate), and Wan Azizah – Anwar's wife as the deputy president. Later after 2 years the prime ministership will be transferred to Anwar Ibrahim. The declaration of Mahathir Mohamad as prime ministerial candidate offered a direct challenge towards the UMNO's Najib. The 2008 election had shaken a bit the hegemonic UMNO with the increasing numbers for opposition. But only this year, May 2018 with the winning of the coalition PH, has successfully toppled down the six-decade rule of the UMNO/BN coalition. With the winning of his alliance, in the 14th election, May 2018, Mahathir is successfully claimed his former seat as prime minister in his 93 years of age, making him the oldest leader in the world. It was a historic moment for Malaysia to move from semi-authoritarian rule, although many still suspected Mahathir for being democratic, especially after tension with Anwar years ago.

With this background, I came to observe the very first day parliamentary plenary session after the inauguration of the new parliamentary speaker in July 2018. It was so exciting to see the spirited new MPs and the new hope atmosphere inside the parliament. Most MPs were ready to work for the new democracy. These new young MPs relatively do not have experience from their senior counterparts of UMNO, which now become opposition. During the Minister's Question Time, when PH MPs stated about the corrupt former government, the senior experienced MPs from UMNO tried to obstruct the discussion by stating about speaking time, basically quoting the articles of Standing Order. This was considered as "bullying" the plenum, including the former deputy speaker – Ismail Mohamed Said from Kuala-Krau-Pahang

constituency -, whom claimed that plenary procedure was not exercised well enough, by referring to inexperience Speaker and several articles stated in standing order about speaking order and time. It was a clever movement, as the Speaker in charge has not yet comprehend the standing order. Therefore, it is important for the new 14th Malaysian parliament MPs to acknowledge themselves with the parliamentary procedure, or better amend to procedure to a more democratic one, cutting away from the old procedure practiced by the previous regime.

The newness of parliament then understandably does not yet focus on SDG issue. The parliamentary secretariat officers during my one-week-visit even said that they are now preparing to establish better parliamentary committee (even asked me to share the committee divisions from the Indonesian and Finnish parliaments). Therefore, the working organs in the House - Committee of Selection, Public Accounts Committee, Standing Orders Committee, House Committee, and Committee of Privileges (http://www.parlimen.gov.my/jawatankuasa-dr.html?uweb=dr&&view=51) – will probably be updated soon.

Singaporean Parliament
Similar to Malaysia, Singapore continued the legacy of the British colonialism, forming the parliamentary government with the Westminster style. This means that the government ministers are members of parliaments elected through election and representing certain region of constituency. Singapore was part of Malaysia before and seceded in 1965. This country is also stated to be a semi-democratic country, having regular election but limiting the voice of civil society. With only 1 significant party, People's Action Party (PAP) that has always won majority votes, Singapore needs to appoint members from the opposition in the parliament to boost the credibility for including all people from different background. The PAP which establishes the country's elites is also known to be disciplined and successfully creates entrepreneurial bureaucracy and with only 5 million citizens, the city state island, Singapore tends to have easier shape of socioeconomic development (Case, 2002, p. 166). Probably due to its small size country, Singapore's elites are able to blur 'the lines between their ruling party, the state bureaucracy, and the commanding heights of the financial sector' which make the country efficient (Case, 2002, p. 168).

Thus, with the semi-democratic style and the Westminster parliament type, the parliament makes the law, and the government (which is also MPs) executes the tasks according to the laws. In Singapore, Prime Minister leads the government and the President is the head of state. The members of parliament today (the 13th parliament) after 2015 election has 100 MPs, consisting 88 elected MPs, 3 Non-Constituency MPs appointed from the opposition parties which did not have votes from the election, and 9 Nominated MPs appointed by the President from the wider community to contribute independent and non-partisan views within parliament. These appointed members indeed show the semi-democratic of one-party government, which wants more legitimacy among people or perhaps from the world.
In the Westminster-type of parliament, the parliamentary procedure is quite simple. This type refers to both Malaysia and Singapore. The parliament usually has three steps of legislative Readings (see Adiputri, 2015). First Reading is the first legislative stage after the bill is introduced. In this stage, a summary of the bill is provided and MPs might debate the general principle of the bill. If it is agreed that the bill will be accepted for further discussion, the bill will be moved to the Second Reading, usually to a committee related to the issue of the bill. The bill will be thoroughly debated in this stage and the wording of article might be amended. As the general principle had been agreed on, the focus at this stage is the contents of the bill. Amendments are possible. After the Second Reading, the bill will be sent to one or several committees. Experts can be invited to be heard and questioned in the committee, but the

members of the committee are the ones who are responsible for the political decisions. If the committees revise the bill, it is sent back to the plenary in the Report Stage of the bill. To avoid the debate at this stage being a repetition of the second reading, it is advised that proposed motions should be in written format and members of parliaments/MPs are encouraged to work with colleagues to bring similar views together. Other MPs who are not members of the committee might have an opportunity to review the bill in this Report Stage of the bill. If there are no significant changes from the Report Stage, the bill is proposed for a Third Reading, the final stage of legislation usually in the Plenary Chamber, the (lower) chamber of parliament, attended by all MPs. There is debate again at this stage if necessary, but the debate will be limited to the passing of the bill, to a yes or no vote. The deliberation process and the report stage are acknowledged by all parliamentary members, and if the government is the majority, as the Singaporean case (and to some extend to the Malaysian in the previous section), the bill is usually passed in this final Reading (or sent to the upper house). The committee in Singaporean parliament consists of 7 Standing Select Committee (https://www.parliament.gov.sg/about-us/structure/select-committees)

1. Committee of Selection
2. Committee of Privileges
3. Estimates Committee
4. House Committee
5. Public Accounts Committee
6. Public Petitions Committee
7. Standing Orders Committee

Parliament is also allowed to established a new ad hoc select committee if needed. When I observed the Singaporean Parliament in July 2018. I attended the Plenary Sessions for the straight 3 days of that week: 9-11 July. I was impressed how effective the parliament was. The secretariat person that I contacted was really helpful. She showed me around the tiny room of public visitors and informed me how to stay connected with the parliament. All the documents that I need for my research – like contacts of MPs, policy Hansard papers, and public announcement regarding bills and date of plenary are available through the updated website of the Singaporean parliament. This effectiveness was also shown with handling the visitors who wanted to see the parliamentary sitting. The requirement for attending – like preparing identity cards or passport, and keeping the bags and mobile phones in the lockers – are easily spotted in the wall and in the website, so I was able to prepare coins for locker storage. I only brought a small book of note to the viewer balcony, and left my belongings in the locker before entering the door. The viewers were sitting in the quiet upper part of the Plenary Room, so we looked down the MPs and the scenery of the Plenum down below. No wonder there was no mobile phone or camera allowed, even a small tiny click sound was heard in the balcony. There were also some people attended, and students sat in public visitors.

Another effectiveness was also shown from the plenary. The meeting started at 12, and indeed it convened on time, opening with small ceremonial session, with the mace was brought in together with the entering of Speakers, followed with half-an-hour dedicated for Oral Questions. Then, there was a ceremony of passing the bills, with the mace was changing back and forth. There were 6 bills to be passed on that day and also a debate about the bills to be introduced. There was a half-an-hour break between 15.15 to 16.45 during this meeting in which the Speaker remained sitting in his chair for the whole time. When the plenum re-adjourned at 16.45, chaired by the deputy, the meeting last until 19.00. Thus, with such an extensive long hours of meeting, it was no wonder that so much can be accomplished within the parliament. I also heard that working hours in Singapore informally last for 10 hour per day. Such long hours meeting last for the consecutive 3 days, only the last day, the plenum

ended at 17.00. I can find most of the parliamentary documents from the website, but visiting the parliamentary plenum gave different experience and knowledge, knowing the atmosphere of how the bill is pass and recognized the MPs' faces in real situation.

Challenges to study political institutions in Southeast Asia
From studying these three parliaments, the institutions indeed reflect heavily on the country's political culture, and confirming more the role of leaders: the key position holders and decision makers (Case, 2002, p. 20). In fact in Malaysia's case, "the personalization of the political scene" between three figures: Mahathir, Najib and Anwar, is so obvious (Lemière, 2018, p. 115) and I think in Southeast Asian in general, the political events with their continuities and changes depend on these leaders and elites. From the proceeding in the parliamentary discussion above, the procedure, structure and tradition, which derived from the historical legacies and cultural orientations are clearly seen in the public views. It depends on the role of national leaders and elites who may lead their regime to be more democratic or not, a view that already been discussed by William Case (2002, p. ix). The (in)efficient practices were also seen from leaders.

As stated above, networking and connection matters for researching the parliamentary institutions. It is relevant to Indonesia and Malaysia, which appreciate "clientelist" relations, and known to have long bureaucratic arrangement for visiting the parliament or observing the plenary. People appreciate more if you have connections. It is not happen in Singapore, due to its effectiveness and more ready to receive (public) guests to visit the parliament. Singapore has series of security process before entering the plenum, processing the identity card and that kind of process. I needed to pass at least four check-up points before I reached my seat in the plenum balcony, but at least I could enter and see the plenum. I was not sure if I could visit the plenary of Indonesia and Malaysian parliaments without the help of insiders. Such lack or efficient arrangement is a reflection of society.

Once inside the plenum, all the institutions' structure, procedure and ceremony are seen alive, and this is when the institutional theory and parliamentary ethnography are suitable. During the break or in formal chat, I can see how higher position is always appreciated. In these three countries, certain attention will be given to senior MPs: speakers or leaders of committee. The journalists will run to follow these elites to ask for statements. In Malaysia, even the elites UMNO MPs still had a place, even when they are now sitting in the opposition seats. In Indonesia, the speaker can decide on certain matter, including to omit the speaking time of MPs. The important role of the elites is probably one of features in Asian model of democracy.

The adoption of Westminster parliamentary style of government, in both Malaysia and Singapore, also show that these parliaments are "speaking government". From the Speaker's seat, the government party (including the ministries) is sitting on the right side, while the Opposition sits on the left side. The lay- out of their Plenary Rooms are design to speak and debate. In Malaysia, the room is surrounded by camera so anyone who speaks can be seen on the screen up front before the public. Besides, they are known from their constituent names. In Singapore, the balcony viewers where public seat can see everything down below the MPs, so the MPs who speak are seen clearly, and the map will show who is sitting on such particular seat (and from which constituent stated in the Hansard paper). This is different from Indonesia, whose parliamentary plenum is set to listen to speeches, with the podium in the front, next to the speakers' seats. It is not designed for debating at all. When there is a question from an MP, it is not clear who is speaking (from which faction nor constituent). Only the Speaker will know who is talking from the light of the microphone. It is likely referring to many numbers of MPs

too, but it is clear that from the Indonesia's plenary meeting, constituents and speaking are the least priority. It emphasizes more on the ritual series of events (for example, the minister's speech and inauguration) and passing the legislation (if any), but not accountability before the public.

This section summarizes that as a researcher studying the political institutions as parliament in Southeast Asia, one needs to have credible affiliation and good connection or network from the inside the institution. This likely to happen in other parliaments too in Southeast Asia. This study also confirms the importance of elites (leaders and decision makers) and the importance of parliamentary structure (and procedure), such as the emphasize on "legislative" work (Indonesia) or "representative" or speaking institutions (as Malaysia and Singapore show).

Conclusion

This paper shows challenges in studying the parliamentary institutions in Southeast Asia. Using the Institutionalism theory and applying parliamentary ethnography research method, I enlist how connection and our research profile also affiliation are needed to help get through the layers of bureaucracies, which usually consume time. Once such bureaucratic preparation are overcome, the art of observing of events are needed to get data that we need for our research. Based on the three national parliaments that I study: Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the institution's structure and procedure explain the lack or good arrangement of the institutions. Leaders or key position of decision makers play a great role in guiding the outcome or legislative results. It is important that these leaders as parliamentary members – people's representatives – realize their roles as the channel of people's voice and sound the grievance of people publicly, rather than re-iterate the works on the executive government solely. Understanding the role as parliamentarians, including the game of procedure within the institution, is a state of art that needs to be comprehended by most parliaments. Hopefully this will also applicable for other parliaments in Southeast Asia.

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