Corruption in Asian States And Its Social Roots: Geo-Cultural Approach

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Introduction:

As a social phenomenon, "corruption" is a very common concept. It has various general and specific definitions. The definition of the World Bank (2015) is taken as a basis by almost all academic studies. According to this definition, corruption is "the use of public power for individual interests". Even the World Bank needed to renew its own definition in the course of time. Thus, today it is frequently mentioned that corruption is not limited with public sector, thereby the definition should be widened in the manner that it involves private sector, as well.

in Turkey, corruption is mostly associated with the state. Since the state has significant cultural importance, "corruption" brings mind the irregularities in relations, duties and missions in the public sphere. The situation is similar in most of the Asian societies where private sector is underdeveloped or ever-developing.

Corruption is an ancient phenomenon. According to the claim, it is as old as state. Thus, Kautilya, who was Indian King two thousand years ago, wrote a book on corruption named as Arthashastra (Tanzi, 2015; 111). It can be derived that the subject extends back a long time considering that it became significant enough to prompt a king to write a book. It can be said that, with regards to progress of mankind, corruption can be mentioned and can get a foothold in every level of social organization that has transference of representation and authority.

The phenomenon of corruption can be examined within the scope of three basic field of science in terms of factors paving the way for it. This scientific fields are Economics, Management Sciences and Sociology. From the point of the first one, it can be argued that corruption occurs due to a series of economic factors such as low income rate, inequality in income sharing and economic inefficiency.
in terms of management sciences, it is claimed that in countries and societies that have authoritarian, oppressive and anti-democratic governance, corruption can easily get a foothold and become an administrative problem.

As it can also be understood from the title, the study aims to determine probable reasons of corruption phenomenon from the viewpoint of Sociology. in particular, the situation in Asian societies will be examined in terms of social and cultural reasons in comparison with Europe where corruption is rarely seen.

Corruption in Asian Societies

The data of Transparency International, which is a Germany centered organization that has been carrying out evaluations on corruption since 1995, shows very important information about corruptions. According to the data of the year 2014, the top ten countries which are in a good condition on corruption respectively are Denmark, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Singapore, Netherlands, Luxemburg and Canada. As it is seen, Singapore is the only Asian country in the top ten by the year 2014. However, being a small island and city state, the representative authority of Singapore in Asia is very limited.

in the same ranking, the top ten countries which are in the worst condition on corruption respectively are Somali, North Korea, Sudan, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Iraq, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Libya and Eritrea. As it is seen, among the top ten countries in the worst condition, five countries are from Asia (Transparency International, 2014). Due to inclusion of 167 countries in 2015 list, ranking changed a little bit, but North Korea, Afghanistan and Iraq kept their seats (Transparency International, 2015).

When examining the rank of major central Asian countries as China, India and Russia in world corruption ranking at years 1995, 2000 and 2014, the rank of China is respectively 38, 63, 100; the rank of India is 33, 69, 85 and the rank of Russia is -, 82, 136. Considering that first data includes 39 countries, second data includes 90 countries and third data includes 174 countries, it can be easily understood that Asia is in the worst position in regional ranking with regard to its three central countries (Transparency International, 2014, Aktan, 2001). in 2015 ranking, the rank of China, Russia and India is respectively 83, 119 and 76.

When examining the rank of Turkish countries and countries of Turkish origin at years 2014 and 2015, the rank of Azerbaijan is respectively 126,119; Bashkortostan is 136, 119; Kazakhstan is 126,123; Kyrgzstan is 136, 123; Uzbekistan is 166, 153, Tatarstan is 136, 119, Turkey is 64, 66 and Turkmenistan is 169, 154 (Transparency International, 2014-2015).

This data points out that corruption is a common phenomenon in Asian societies. It is also understood that the situation in the past was similar as well. As it was mentioned earlier, the reason that prompts the Indian king to write a book on corruption was the extensiveness of corruption in Indian society. Hence, according to the sources, bribe was almost a "global" phenomenon in Mongolian India and an acculturation occurred regarding this problem within time (Moore, 2011; 384, 391).

First of all, sacralizing the state and seeing the immanent state and its ruler as transcendent make it easy for the ruler and subordinates to violate the rules, and then this is put into practice. There are also significant data on the fact that in Ottoman, which was one of the greatest imperials of Asia and Turks, corruption, especially in the form of accepting a "bribe" under the name of a present, was a widespread practice (Akdağ, 1975; Mumcu, 1985).

When examining the situation of todays Asian societies in terms of four categories on corruption (the top ten countries which have the least corruption, the top ten countries which have the most corruption, Central major Asian countries, Asian countries of Turkish origin), it is seen that Asian societies are in similar situations. Likewise, past and present situations of Asian societies show similarities on corruption. This brings in mind existence and role of some further fundamental determinants regarding Asian societies. Although generalizations, theories and formal approaches disregard and push aside partial, individual and the self, they are still worth to be taken into consideration in terms of offering a perspective.

Sociological Generalizations On Asian Societies and Probable Connections With Corruption

in sociological literature, there are some widely known generalizations and theories. First one is Montesquieu's notion that correlates these societies with "despotism". Afterwards, this notion was published into a book by Karl A. Wittfogel named as Oriental Despotism (Wittfogel, 1957). This approach attributes Eastern societies a despotic character as Asian societies are being at the center. It is claimed that there is a despotic approach from individual to group, from community to society and to state organization.

The second widely known generalization about Asian societies is AMP theory. This theory which is named as Asiatic Mode of Production belongs to Karl Marx. However, his Asian followers did not embrace the theory as much as Karl Marx, and also it was found extremely meaningful that Stalin did not mention about this concept in his work *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (Chesneaux vd., 1970; 92). The generalization of Marx on Asian societies was mentioned earlier and in more general terms in A. Smith's book *The Richness of Nations*. Accordingly, James Mill mentions in his writings about "an Asiatic form of government" and John Stuart Mill uses in his writings a naming as "Eastern society" (Chesneaux vd., 1970; 112-113).

Marx explains his AMP theory in principle with the absence of private property. in particular, the presence of a central and powerful state is prominently there in terms of regulating major community affairs with irrigation works in the first instance, controlling production through a powerful and widespread bureaucratic caste and disseising the large part of the product. All of the ancient China, Egypt, Mesopotamia and India centered states are considered as examples of this theory (Sezer, ts.; 56). Therefore, "primitive society and state power" are seen as two primary features in AMP (Chesneaux

vd., 1970; 138). According to Marx, arbitrariness and arbitrary regime are inevitable in places where this form of society exists (Turner, 1997; 42).

The last widely known approach in sociological literature which makes generalization about Asian societies is Weber's typology of "Patrimonial Society". According to Weber, Patrimonialism is inconsistent with a coherent landowner aristocracy, a strong bourgeoisie, city organization and independent formal law. "Nepotism" is a characteristic feature of this society. Weber says that patrimonialism needs an "arbitrary legal system" to exist. Another need is the recruitment of mercenary slave soldiers in the army. The eligible ones from these soldiers can be promoted to vizier or other court positions. Weber describes patrimonial society and feudal society as two continues extremes of traditional society. Whereas patrimonial ruler presents himself as a caring father who deals with the problems of his people; patrimonial society is voluntary and willing to see the ruler as a "Father" as well (Turner, 1997; 147, 148-151, 192, 217, 237, 238).

All of these three briefly summarized approaches attentively differentiate Feudal organization in Europe from Asiatic typologies. Reinhard Bendix describes this differentiation as "Feudalism is the domination of some few people who are skilful on war; Patrimonialism is the dominance of one person who needs officials to perform his authority ". A patrimonial ruler is in one sense dependant to his subjects' affirmative wills. Patrimonialism addresses the masses rather than privileged status groups; the valid ideal is "good king", "father of his people" rather than a warrior hero (Turner, 1997). in Turks of Asian societies, state is perceived as a father and is described as "Father State" (Doğan, 1977). Although the expression of "Father" mostly connotates a "mafia leader" in Europe, considering the ruler as "Father" is a source of prestige.

Political, Cultural and Geographic Factors Effecting Economic Behavior

Although behaviors related to corruption are not directly and totally associated with economic, they are mostly intertwined. in this regard, it can be claimed that from the nearest to the farthest corruption behavior is related to individual and social ethics, economic situation, legislation, culture, politics and geographical conditions.

It can be said that corruption behavior is affected concretely and directly by economic income, legislation and administrative practices, whereas it is affected discretely and indirectly by ethics, culture and geography. However, concrete and abstract is intertwined in human life. Such a precise distinction may not be entirely true. Thus, factors such as ethics, psychology and culture can be evaluated as abstract but geographic factors can be effective on human life by means of influencing these factors.

Accordingly, family structure, form of social organization, gender, mode of production, social stratification, individual's social position and its importance have significant role in societies. There are thinkers and philosophers who similarly think that geographical factors stand behind all of these situations (Kizilcelik, 2006; Alptekin, 2013).

For example, whereas the regime of agriculturist Rome in the first centuries was Emperorship, the regime of trade-based Rome in the next eras became as Republic (Aydin, 2014).

Again in a similar vein, consanguineous societies such as clan and tribe, which are organized around a chief and have patriarchal family system, adopt a public based social-political order and are based on the ground of centralization? On the other hand, societies which have individualistic family system encourage decentralization in political life (Aydin, 2014).

Consequently, there are nonignorable connections between family system and politics, mode of production and regime, nature and religious belief, geography and culture. Sometimes minor relationships can lead to major consequences. Because a relationship which is seen minor can represent a strong cultural vein by coming together in a long time. Developmental psychology shows us how these environmental conditions occur in personal character and appear in external world by becoming concrete (Inanc, Bilgin ve Atici, 2008).

Not only the corruption ranking but also geographies of Asia and Europe are very different from each other. First of all, despite smallness of Europe, Asia has an enormous size and immense continental depth. Second, although every part of Europe can be described as nautical, inwards of Asia

continent become inland and expand to rural, steppe and desert-like regions. Third, the altitude of Europe is low, whereas Asia's is very high. Forth, Europe has a mild climate and Asia has a cold and harsh climate. Fifth, natural borders between European societies are rivers rather than mountains, whereas in Asia these borders are totally high and block mountains.

Especially, this lastly mentioned geographical difference is worth-stressing. By a simple analogy, mountains as borders are like walls which have totally covering, concealing, hiding, isolating features. On the other hand, although rivers, especially the ones in Europe which have a low flow rate and which enable water transfer are exact borders, they are like glass walls that separate but do not disrupt, hide and blind the vision. The definite separation of societies by mountains is very different from a separation such as only being kept apart. It is more likely for societies which are separated by rivers to pursue and follow each other and concordantly to continue the interaction. However, this is impossible for societies which are separated from each other by mountains.

Mountains entirely hide, blind, conceal, isolate and leave in the lurch. The social impacts of both in the long term are different. Rivers develop toleration, respect for diversity and the ability not to muscle in on something. For people and societies living in the two sides of the river, the extraordinary other becomes daily, in sight and routine.

On the other hand, mountains develop independency, self-centeredness, irresponsibility, ability to be apart from the others and to survive, marginalization of human and humanitarian values, solidarity with counterparts, ignorance or at least uncaring of the divergents' rights, being in a quandary against divergency and a possible natural response of suppressing them.

Both border instruments deeply impact the character of individual and the identity of society in the long term. These impacts lead acculturation by becoming a pattern and turn into a stable human behavior in time. These long-term impacts effect our daily life by enabling the development of a specific world view and social reflection.

Consequently, societies separated by rivers have an inherent respect and rational norms on the others' rights and remedies, whereas societies separated from each other by mountains can possess, occupy and invade the others' rights and remedies.

Social Details About Corruption in Asia

Asian societies are agrarian. Three of the four oldest agricultural regions are in Asia. in line with the mode of production, its family style is patrimonial, social perception is collectivist and political perception is from top to bottom. With regard to these features, it is also the place in which the first state and monarchy have emerged.

Accordingly, Asian societies encourage traditionalism versus innovativeness, covertness and/or privacy versus transparency and obedience versus questioning. Asian societies are mostly agrarian village societies. Generally they live away from city life. The community structuring is strong and mechanical solidarity is high. Daily life continues under the guidance of traditions, religion and taboo rather than wisdom.

Being an agrarian society generates fatalism, fatalism generates religiousness and religiousness degenerates into fundamentalism in Asian societies. Religiousness is characterized as religion's becoming the instrument of local and traditional relationships. Its most powerful impact on social life is its power of legitimization. The legitimization mechanism is constructed by religion's alteration from transcendent to immanent. Weber (1999; 98) clarifies this with his own typologies. According to him, sincere religionist acts as an instrument of God. However, the follower of a religion who becomes the tool of traditional relationships sees himself as God's vessel rather than God's instrument. Seeing himself as owner and possessor of God's message easily leads abuse and violation of religious rules. Examples of legitimization process for irregularities by turning transcendent into immanent can be observed in every aspect of daily life. The situation of an average Asian merchant can be an example for this. Asian religious person can easily abuse and violate the rules by using his position or power. He will easily construct the legitimization mechanism required for this. For example, a merchant can handily stock the goods and sell them with a high profit if he finds a chance. He won't feel quilt for his customers in this process. Because according to him if his customer is not religious, everything is

permissible. If his customer is religious, it is also permissible because he already works for "religion". He takes on this "charity" task for his customer and performs a second holy mission.

Due to the combination of all these features, Asian societies can easily perform behaviors in their daily life with a shared wisdom such as irregularity and nepotism, which can be considered as "corruption".

Conclusion:

in social sciences, among approaches on Asian societies, both Eastern despotism, AMP and Patrimonial society concepts are relevant; they point out the reality to a certain extent and show the hints about some characteristics under sediments. Definitely, these generalizations cannot be entirely true and accurate. However, they constitute academic literature and background for further examinations.

By the help of all these theories and the contemporary hermeneutic approaches, it can be claimed that Asian societies have a sound historical and social background that can be reflected as "corruption" in daily life.

Although Africa's being in the first place on "corruption" can be explained by colonization phenomenon, dependency and centre-periphery theories, Asia doesn't have a similar excuse for being in a corresponding position. Thus, these historical and social backgrounds stand out as the reason of corruption in Asia.

Features that generate in a long time such as patrimonial family style, collectivist society perception, continuation of mechanical solidarity, traditions favoring conquest, being opportunist, caring about privacy, avoiding transparency and questioning, expecting a social change from top to bottom, favoring hierarchy, ignoring the individual and rationality, aggrandizing religion, mythology and taboo, ability of legitimization, ability on turning transcendent into immanent or vice versa can evolve into forms of "corruption" in daily life.

Not only "Eastern despotism", AMP and "patrimonial societies" theories, but also geo-cultural analyses in terms of acculturative impacts of geography show that Asian societies are characterized by features such as arbitrariness, irregularity, self-centeredness, legitimization, being prone to violence and opportunism which have deep-rooted reasons. The "corruption" phenomenon with its all variations is a natural consequence of all these features.

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